

# National Theatre

Practitioners in Practice series conceived  
by Katie Mitchell with the National Theatre



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*Fraulein Julie*, Schaubühne, Berlin, 2010.

## Practitioners in Practice

*Katie Mitchell*

Education pack  
Lesson plans & student resources

Co-written by Katie Mitchell and Olivia Gillman in collaboration with the National Theatre.

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# Katie Mitchell

## biography

With her signature style of **naturalism**, **Live Cinema** (**multimedia**), and focus on the **female experience**, Katie Mitchell is a feminist British theatre director who has directed new plays, operas, classical texts, and adaptations of novels across a 30-year career. ‘You could put me in a theatre and ask me, “Who has done this?”, and I would immediately say, “Katie Mitchell”, states Ivo van Hove, the Dutch theatre director.

She lists her favourite playwrights as Alice Birch and Sarah Kane. Her key influences are the German choreographer, Pina Bausch, and the American theatre company, The Wooster Group.

\*feminist  
director



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naturalism

### 1989–2006: Establishing Naturalistic Practice

Katie Mitchell attended Oxford University, where she read English Literature and was president of The Oxford University Drama Society. Following a period of travel and exploratory self-led training in **naturalism**, Mitchell staged classics in the British mainstream from 1989 to 2011.

In 1989, aged 25, Mitchell travelled to Russia, Georgia, Lithuania and Poland to study how directors were trained in these different cultural contexts. Here, Mitchell was exposed to the legacy of Konstantin Stanislavski through contemporary Eastern European directors, a legacy which she then integrated into her own work in the UK. Mitchell’s own theatre company ‘Classics on a Shoestring’ saw her direct *Arden of Faversham* (1990), *Vassa Zheleznova* (1990), *Women of Troy* (1991) and *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1992).

Working with a range of theatres, from 1993 to 2005, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Court, The National Theatre and Donmar Warehouse, Mitchell specialised in plays by ‘classic’ writers such as Strindberg, Chekhov and Euripides. However, she also worked on new plays with modern playwrights such as Simon Stephens and Martin Crimp.

Mitchell is often most popularly associated with her direction of plays by ground-breaking female and non-binary writers, including Sarah Kane, Alice Birch and Chris Bush. Mitchell makes work for all genders but is often noted for platforming the **female experience** in her innovations.

From 2006 to 2008, Mitchell pivoted into her experimental **Live Cinema** phase. This was also the time in which she began identifying as a **feminist** practitioner and wrote her seminal text *The Director’s Craft* (2009), creating her system for **naturalism**.



## 2006–2008: The Invention of Live Cinema

In 2006, Mitchell's adaptations of *The Seagull* (Chekhov) and *Waves* (from Virginia Woolf's novel) debuted at the National Theatre. These productions established her lastingly progressive impact and controversy on the British theatre circuit with equal force. Her adaptation of Chekhov's *The Seagull* prompted debate about how far theatre directors can go when changing classical texts to make them relevant for contemporary audiences. Within the *Guardian* alone, Susannah Clapp reviewed Mitchell's staging as 'an intelligent new look at Chekhov's trickiest play', whilst Michael Billington railed it was '*mise en scene*...substituted for meaning'. *Waves* pushed technological boundaries instead, using, as Benjamin Fowler describes, 'video cameras and live produced sound effects to bring audiences closer to characters and their dramatic situations', creating a new type of theatre that came to be known as **Live Cinema**.

## 2008: Branching into Europe

In 2008, Mitchell began making work in mainland Europe, where, at the time, she found funding structures more conducive to the level of technical complexity she likes to work with, alongside a critical reception more open minded to innovation compared with the traditionally patriarchal structures of the conventional British theatre landscape.

The Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, for example, provided budgets that allowed for **Live Cinema** sets to be fully built in rehearsal rooms, which is not standard practice in British theatre. In the UK, the set is provided only in the final rehearsals on stage ahead of its first public performance. This European model suits the often-intricate aesthetic of her work, both in **Live Cinema** and **naturalism**. Mitchell's **naturalistic** productions in Europe include plays by Beckett and Strindberg, such as *Happy Days* and *Miss Julie*. Her **Live Cinema** work in Europe includes adaptations of novels, like Woolf's *Orlando*, Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Jelinek's *Schatten (Eurydike sagt)*.

Mitchell's European work has led to her productions straddling mainland Europe and British theatre territory. For example, Mitchell's staging of Alice Birch's *Anatomy of a Suicide* (2017) played at both the Royal Court and – in a German language version – at Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg (2019), whilst *The Forbidden Zone* (2014) played at the Barbican, the Salzburg Festival and the Schaubühne Berlin. Capturing a recent re-embrace of Mitchell's work in London, Dan Rebellato remembers meeting Rufus Norris (then Director of the National Theatre) ahead of the programming of his first season in 2015 and him saying 'I have to find a way to get Katie Mitchell back working in this building.' Her production of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (2016) featured in his first season and she remains creatively in dialogue with the theatre. As her long-time collaborator designer Vicki Mortimer (2017) insisted: 'Mitchell doesn't need to hold a place either side of the channel, she's her own country.'

## 2024: Ecofeminism in a New Age

In post-pandemic 2024, it is increasingly clear that concerns of ecological crisis and climate change are taking precedence in Mitchell's creative output and capturing public imagination. Mitchell has been known for several years, for example, to travel by train rather than fly to reduce her carbon footprint – and has a long-held interest in science's intersection with theatre. Where **women's lived experience** has previously dominated Mitchell's **Live Cinema** output, considerations of nature's lived experience are taking precedence.

In 2021, Mitchell directed Miranda Rose Hall's *A Play for the Living in a Time of Extinction* first in Europe (produced by Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne) and then in the UK, where Lydia West starred in the main role (produced by the Barbican and Headlong). This bike-powered production sits within Mitchell's new touring model where no people or materials move between venues: working with different local actors and directors in each city the production 'tours' to. It contains examples of intersectional **ecofeminism**, relating to the interconnectedness of race, gender, class and nature - with a focus on womanhood and its relationship to nature.

# 1

Mitchell's production at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg of *The Cherry Orchard* (2022), told from the perspective of the trees, was credited by Catherine Love (*Guardian*) for treating 'nature as the star'.

Where Mitchell may have polarised British audiences and critics previously, from the early 2020s, shifting tastes, alongside globalised politics mean that audiences are seeing previously overlooked or misunderstood colours in her work as welcome illuminations of a planet in crisis.

*Mitchell is a committed educator, currently Professor of Theatre Directing at Royal Holloway University with current and previous posts additionally held at Columbia and Oxford universities amongst others. Her output in opera and children's theatre has been significant across the last three decades. This includes moves to expand children's theatre (such as in **Dr Seuss' The Cat in the Hat** at the National Theatre, 2009) and her prolific body of work in opera (such as *Handel's Theodora* at the Royal Opera House, 2022).*



*The Seagull*, National Theatre 2006.



*Schatten (Eurydike sagt)*, Schaubühne, Berlin, 2016.

**1989 - 2006**  
Establishing Naturalistic Practice

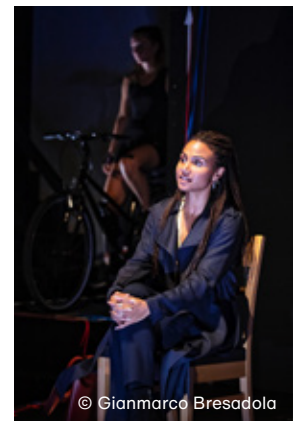
**2008 - 2023**  
Branching into Europe

**2006- 2008**  
The Invention of Live Cinema

**2023 -**  
Ecofeminism in a New Age



*The Waves*, National Theatre.



*Not the end of the world*, Schaubühne, Berlin 2021.

## 2

# Mitchell's Practice, Naturalism and Live Cinema (Multimedia)

*in her own words*

### Practice



*Anatomy of a Suicide*, Royal Court Theatre, 2017

I am a feminist, and my practice is focused on female experience. My work mainly foregrounds the experience of cisgender females, such as in Beckett's *Happy Days* or in Alice Birch's *Ophelias Zimmer*. However, I am also drawn to depictions of gender fluid identity: such as in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, where the protagonist's gender is not fixed, or in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*, where cisgender Grace is – at the play's end – given a penis. I mainly direct new plays by radical female writers like Alice Birch, adaptations of novels and traditional texts by male writers where I re-centre marginalised female characters.

*\* Weaponise naturalism for your own radical purposes*

### Naturalism



*Fraulein Julie*, Schaubühne, Berlin, 2010

When I started my work on **naturalism**, I built the worlds for the plays I directed through travel and historical research. For example, for Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1991) I went to Norway, taking photographs and recording the sounds of nature to reconstruct a precise world for the play. At this point I did not examine or challenge the nineteenth-century gender roles in the text, nor did I question Ibsen's traditional use of a **naturalistic** form. Instead, I used research to reconstruct the nineteenth-century world, presenting the characters as being formed by heredity or environment just as the author intended.

Now I use my form of **naturalism** as a rebellion against mainstream text-based male models of theatre-making.

# 2

I replace what I see as a conventional mode of default realism with a **feminist** use of **naturalism** to re-centre **female experience**. For example, I select marginalised female characters from traditional texts, position them at the centre of the performance and use **naturalism** to articulate their lived experience of oppression in a patriarchal environment. Examples of this are Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and Alice Birch's *Ophelias Zimmer*, a reworking of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which you can read about in Sections 6 & 7. In doing this, I have become more interested in delivering a **feminist interpretation** of a text than adhering strictly to the author's intentions. As this shift in my relationship to **naturalism** has happened, I have stopped doing in-depth historical research and now I only use research sparingly. I invite young people into a more radical approach to theatre-making – letting them know that they can weaponise **naturalism** for their own radical purposes.

*I replace what I see as a conventional mode of default realism with a feminist use of naturalism to re-centre female experience*

The techniques I use for generating **naturalistic** acting have evolved since I wrote *The Director's Craft* and I have now distilled my practice to focus mainly on the six layers of **character biography, place, time, immediate circumstances, event** and **intentions**. These six layers are explained in detail in Sections 3 and 4. I continue to use the organising tool of **'Facts & Questions'** but with some refinements explained below in Section 7.

## Live Cinema and Multimedia



*The Yellow Wallpaper*, Schaubuhne Theatre, Berlin, 2013

The term **multimedia** is one I did not originally choose to apply to my own work but has – for the last ten years – been ascribed to my practice in educational settings. **Multimedia** describes live performance that combines a variety of different media such as: text, sound, film and animation. The **multimedia** work I direct – **Live Cinema** – sits at the intersection between theatre, film and radio and was described at its inception as an entirely new art form. **Live Cinema** is a **feminist** tool, allowing me to foreground and amplify the **female experience** on stage. **Live Cinema** is not only a combination of different media but is also a form where making and showing are integrated. Audiences can see a perceived dramatic reality on screen alongside the reality of how it is made on stage. For the purposes of this resource the phrase **Live Cinema** will be used to describe the work I do which sits under the broader heading of **multimedia**. The building blocks of my **Live Cinema** work can be isolated and applied in classroom or studio settings (see pages 39-42).

*Live Cinema is a feminist tool, allowing me to foreground and amplify the female experience on stage*



# 2

## Non-naturalism (or symbolism)



*Ophelias Zimmer*, Schaubühne Theatre, Berlin, 2015.



*Anatomy of a Suicide*, Royal Court Theatre, 2017.

Traditionally, drama schools and A Level teaching acknowledge **naturalism** as the main feature of my practice (one syllabus, for example, summarises me as '**naturalism** and **multimedia**'). However, I would also like to invite you to observe the lesser-studied non-naturalism, simultaneous scenes, slow-motion and surreal sequences, that have been punctuating my **naturalistic** work with more regularity since 2008. These techniques are designed to interrupt the flow of life-like **psychological realism** and highlight a significant event in a scene, or to invite the audience into the subjective experience of a female character at a specific moment.

You can see an example in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 11:06 where slow motion is used to create a dream sequence in *Cleansed*. Here Grace joins the embrace of Rod and Carl (thereby revealing her desire for love). Or in *Ophelias Zimmer* at 11:45–12:28, where you can see how Ophelia's bedroom is flooded with water to show her mental state in which she sees things, such as water, that are not there in reality. These **non-naturalistic** sequences allow me to move between objective and subjective stage realities.

non-naturalistic sequences  
allow me to move between  
objective and subjective  
stage realities

### Key Tip

In Section 13 on page 55 there is a suggestion for how to work on simultaneous scenes for those wishing to explore Mitchell's non-naturalistic work.



# 3

## Mitchell's Naturalism: *Overview handout*



© Ivan Kyncl

*Iphigenia at Aulis*, National Theatre, 2004.

This overview information sheet can be used as a handout in conjunction with the *Practitioners in Practice* film (1:35–7:14).

Mitchell is a practitioner known for her **naturalism** and focus on the **female experience**.

Mitchell's use of **naturalism** is embedded in her productions equally in her work with actors and her work with set, costume, lighting, sound design and music. She uses all these elements to build **naturalistic** worlds which are almost filmic in their attention to visual and aural details, and where the audience is invited to forget they are in a theatre.

Mitchell has developed – and continues to develop – a system for generating **naturalistic** acting that is often applied in UK rehearsal rooms, universities, and drama schools. The achievement of **psychological realism** in performance, depth of textual analysis, accuracy of detail and clarity of communication are all key features of Mitchell's work with actors on **naturalism**.

Mitchell's system for **naturalistic** acting is originally inspired by Stanislavski but develops a contemporary framework, focussing on close textual analysis alongside deconstructing **naturalism** into **six layers**: **character biography**, **place**, **time**, **immediate circumstances**, **event** and **intentions**.

# 3

These six layers create a simple system that any actor or director can use to construct a believable on-stage scene. In rehearsals, Mitchell works on each layer with the actors until all six layers are being played simultaneously. This technique can be used to work on a text, to structure **improvisations** or to devise scenes. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film (7:20 – 11:03), Mitchell shows how she works with an actor adding each layer one after the other until all six are being played together. Once the six layers are confirmed for each scene in rehearsals, they will provide six fixed and agreed elements that the actors will play for all the performances. Using the six layers is common to her work in both her **naturalism** and **Live Cinema** styles.

Mitchell structures **improvisations** by giving actors clear information about the six layers before the **improvisation** commences. In this sense, **improvisations** are like mini scenes where the dialogue is invented inside the psychological scaffolding of the six layers. **Improvisations** are used particularly to help the actors build pictures of the past (for their **character biography**) and pictures of incidents in the **immediate circumstances**.

Additionally, Mitchell is concerned with the quality of actor **visualisation**. **Visualisation** is the ability of an actor to imagine memories (pictures of past incidents or what has happened before the scene starts) and images (of a place or a season) so clearly that their physicality and behaviour are visibly altered in response to those imagined pictures.

For plays set inside, the actors must have a clear picture of what is on the ‘fourth wall’ between the stage and the audience. For plays set outside, Mitchell requires the actor to have a picture of the natural or urban environment surrounding them.

Mitchell approaches blocking in two stages: first she asks the actors to run the scene a couple of times employing the six layers. The actors use the stage as if it were a real place, moving as though they are not being watched by an audience. Then she makes a few alterations to the actors’ moves so that the audience can see everything, but without the actors turning out to the audience. From this point onwards the blocking is fixed. The signature of her blocking style is actors with their backs to the audience and the use of the full width of the stage.

For directors, Mitchell is concerned that feedback is given with clarity, rather than telling actors that their acting in a scene is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Directors, Mitchell believes, should function on a notion that the actors are ‘clear’ or ‘unclear’ in their **naturalistic** acting, to maintain balance, objectivity and professionalism in working relationships. She defines her main function as making everything that is seen and heard in a scene clear for the audience.

Directors, Mitchell believes,  
should function on a  
notion that the actors  
are ‘clear’ or ‘unclear’

# 4

## Mitchell's Naturalism:

*In breakdown*

In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you can see examples of Mitchell's use of each layer in her productions (2.40–7:18) and you can also watch her working with an actor to add each of the six layers, one after the other until all six are being played together (7:20–11.03). The content of the six layers used in the *Practitioners in Practice* film where Mitchell works with an actor have been invented by Mitchell and are not based on an existing play text.

*For use with the  
Practitioners in  
Practice film.*

The six layers are:

- |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | <b>Character biography:</b> The incidents in a character's past which create their behaviour in the present. | 4 | <b>Immediate circumstances:</b> The incidents that happen in the 24 hours before the scene starts that affect the character's mood and behaviour. |
| 2 | <b>Place:</b> The location where the action of the scene happens.  | 5 | <b>Events:</b> The changes in the scene that affect the thoughts, feelings or actions of all the characters.                                      |
| 3 | <b>Time:</b> The year, season, day of the week and time of day the scene takes place in.                     | 6 | <b>Intentions:</b> What the character wants the other character(s) to do, feel or say.  |

Use the descriptions below to understand each layer in more detail.



# 4

## 1 Character Biography

*The incidents in a character's past which create their behaviour in the present.*



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*Anatomy of a Suicide*, Royal Court, 2017.

In real life, we are shaped by things that happen to us in our past – from the recent to the distant past – and these incidents determine how we behave in the present. For example, someone experiencing a recent bereavement may exhibit depressed behaviour in the present or someone who was bullied as a child may behave in a defensive way years later as an adult. In working with actors, Mitchell is interested in how specific incidents in a character's past generate their characteristics in the action of the play. A **character biography** lists key incidents in the character's past from when they were born until the 24 hours before the action of the scene starts. The incidents are listed in the form of a chronological timeline. In Mitchell's system, the **character biography** collects all the socio-political information about the society the character is formed by and living in.

When working with actors on **character biography**, Mitchell guides them to create a timeline of the main incidents in their biography. Then Mitchell encourages the actors to flesh out the gaps in the timeline by adding more information. Once completed, actors are given time to read their timeline, **visualising** the incidents in it and reflecting on how these incidents will shape how they act the scene or **improvisation**. Mitchell will look at how the actors' physicality, voice and emotions indicate these past incidents and determine how the relationships are played out in the scene.

For example, a character who has been regularly bullied at work might have a tense posture, a fast nervous gait as they enter their office, and a quiet tone of voice as they greet their colleagues. That same character may easily burst into tears at a small event like a broken coffee machine, or struggle to stay calm when talking to a colleague who makes them uncomfortable.

## 2 Place

*The location where the action of the scene happens.*



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*Pains of Youth*, National Theatre, 2009.

In real life, our behaviour and feelings are affected by the **place** we are in. For example, we move and talk much more quietly in a hospital corridor when we're feeling sad compared to how we move and shout in a noisy nightclub when feeling happy. In working with actors, Mitchell is similarly interested in how different places change a character's behaviour, evidenced particularly in changes in their physicality, including their gait, stance, and posture. For example, if an actor is playing a character walking through a busy train station, then their movement will be fast and their posture a little hunched forwards compared to when they are walking on a beach where they will have slower movements and an upright, open posture.

When working with actors on **place**, Mitchell guides them to draw maps or plans of the **place** where the scene or **improvisation** occurs. Mitchell then asks the actors to add in the environment immediately adjoining the scene location, such as a bedroom above them, a hallway, or a lake. Even though these adjoining **places** will not be visible to the audience



# 4

watching the scene, the characters will need to have a clear picture of them in their heads to be able to act the scene. Then by using marking tape on the floor she asks the actors to mark up the actual size and shape of the **place** where the scene occurs and as many of the adjoining **places** that they can fit into the rehearsal room. She then asks them to **visualise** these **places**, on their own or in pairs. She is keen that they are clear about what is on the fourth wall in the **place** where the scene occurs, asking the actors to clarify whether it is an actual wall, or a window with a view beyond. For exterior settings she asks the actor to be able to turn 360 degrees and visualise the environment surrounding them.

Once the process of **visualisation** is complete, Mitchell will ask the actors to act the scene, keeping the pictures of **place** in their mind. Then she will give them feedback about whether their physicality and behaviour match the place their character is in. Mitchell does not want the actors to move and talk as if they were on a stage being watched by an audience. Instead, she wants them to imagine **place** so fully that they move and talk in a scene just like they would in a real-life environment.

## 3 Time

*The year, season, day of the week and time of day the scene takes place in.*



*The Seagull*, National Theatre 2006.

In real life, variations in **time** impact our behaviour, emotions and physicality in the same way that variations of **place** and **character biography** do.

Mitchell carries these observations about **time** from life over into her work with actors. For example, a middle-class woman would walk down the street in 1860 very differently to today. The posture of the middle-class woman in 1860 would be more upright than today, affected by the clothing she wears and the oppressive patriarchal society in which she is living. This woman would also have a slower walk as she would be wearing a long, hooped dress compared to a woman today walking down a street in jeans. Alternatively, the weather conditions today, on a sunny Saturday in spring, would result in an upright posture and relaxed gait compared to a rainy Friday in winter when we would walk with a more hunched-over posture and faster pace.

Once the year, season, day of the week and time of day are decided for a specific scene, Mitchell will then give the actors feedback on how clearly these elements are being played physically.

## 4 Immediate Circumstances

*The incidents that happen in the 24 hours before the scene starts that affect the character's mood and behaviour.*



*Happy Days*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus, 2014.

In every situation we enter in real life, our mood and behaviour are affected by what has happened immediately beforehand. For example, someone will be sluggish and slow at school in the morning if they have been up revising late the night before, or another person will be upbeat and energised if they have just chatted with someone they fancy.



# 4

In working with actors, Mitchell is interested in how the **immediate circumstances** generate characteristics, affecting the mood, behaviour and physicality of characters in scenes.

In the same way that she works on **character biography**, Mitchell guides the actors to create an **immediate circumstances** timeline for their characters listing the main incidents in the twenty-four hours before the scene starts. Mitchell then encourages the actors to flesh out the gaps in the timeline by adding more information. Once completed, the actors are given time to read their timeline, **visualising** the incidents in it and reflecting on the way those incidents will shape how they act the scene or **improvisation**. Watching the scene, Mitchell will look at how an actor's physicality and mood reflect their character's **immediate circumstances**. For example, a character who had just been running through a war-torn city would be breathing hard, sweaty, with a tense posture and looking visibly afraid in the scene or **improvisation**.

## 5 Events

*The changes in the scene that affect the thoughts, feelings, or actions of all the characters.*



*Theodora*, Royal Opera House, 2022.

In real life, our days and nights are punctuated by **events** that change us in different ways. For example, a group might be talking in a communal room at a university, but then a stranger passes

through that room which may alter the atmosphere of the room and the group's behaviour. **Events** can be small everyday moments, such as blowing out candles on a birthday cake, or more significant moments like when a partner says 'I love you' for the first time, or life-changing moments, like when an armed gunman enters a train station. These **events** affect what we think, feel and do – often generating physical changes in our bodies, such as an increase in heart rate, sweating, or feeling exhausted. For example, when someone says 'I love you' it can make us feel suddenly excited, hot and our heart beats faster.

When working with actors, Mitchell structures scenes or **improvisations** by identifying where the **events** occur. She notates **events** by writing down a simple sentence, like 'Alan informs Tanika that he is in love with her' or 'An armed gunman arrives in the train station'. She always uses clear language: plain nouns and verbs without adjectival detail.

Mitchell is particularly interested in the way that **events** change the tempo (or speed) of a scene, for example, how bad news can slow down what happens next or a sudden arrival of someone powerful in a room can speed up what people do. **Events** are the main tool she uses to adjust the pace of a scene. And for Mitchell, the **events** affect all the characters in the scene to a lesser or greater degree. For example, if a group of friends are having lunch together at a restaurant and two of them get into an argument, the rest of the group will be affected by the argument but not as intensely as the two friends who are shouting at each other.

Mitchell will assess how the actors play **events** by looking at visible changes in their thought processes, mood, and physicality, paying particular attention to tempo changes in how they say or do things after the **events**. These physical and mood changes demonstrate the actor is playing the **events**. Once identified, Mitchell will expect the actors to repeat the **events** precisely in every performance.

# 4

## 6 Intentions

*What the character wants the other character(s) to do, feel or say*



*Cleansed*, National Theatre, 2016.

In real life, everything we say or do has a motive, either a conscious or unconscious one. For example, when we say 'I love you' to someone we want the person to be happy or when we slam the door on someone as we leave a room, we may want that person to realise how angry we are.

For Mitchell, **intentions** are generated by **events** and there is only ever one **intention** per character running between two **events** – like strings connecting beads on a necklace. When working with actors, Mitchell will identify the **intentions** between each **event** and notate them in a simple sentence. 'To get' or 'to make' are the best sentence starters to use to create a Mitchell **intention**. The **intention** also needs to include the other people in the scene, either by name if the scene is a two-hander or using words like 'everyone' in a larger scene. Then the sentence needs to end with a desired concrete outcome. The **intention**, therefore, is scaffolded by the idea that Character A wants an outcome from Character B. Mitchell also starts the sentence to describe the **intention** with the character's name followed by a colon. For example, she would notate Eve's **intentions** in the *Practitioners in Practice* film like this: 'Anna: to convince your friend you are OK'.

If the actor is performing a monologue or any form of direct audience address, Mitchell would invent an imaginary receiving character(s) sitting or standing where the actual audience are. Then she would create **intentions** being played by the speaking character to this imaginary recipient(s). For example, in directing a Greek chorus, she would ask the chorus to **visualise** a group of people, such as soldiers, in front of them that they address with an **intention** like: 'Chorus: to get the soldiers to calm down.'

If a line is played with an **intention**, then an actor's delivery will be impacted by the application of this motivation and subtext. Playing an **intention** enables the actor's voice and physicality to follow the subtext of the scene, where their stance, posture, gait, eye contact and character dynamics might all be impacted to embody the attempt to achieve a desired outcome.

Mitchell encourages actors to explore different ways of achieving their **intentions**. For example, an actor could play the **intention** 'Iman: to get Jayden to calm down' using a kind, calm tone and gentle gestures, or the actor could play the same **intention** using a tougher tone and firm gestures. Both ways of playing the **intention** achieve the same outcome of calming Jayden down. In this way, it may help students to understand that there is a difference between *what* the **intention** is and *how* they can play it. Once agreed, Mitchell will expect the actor to perform the agreed **intention** for every performance, varying *how* they play it.

*In real life, everything  
we say or do has a motive,  
either a conscious  
or unconscious one.*

# 5

## Lesson Plans: Mitchell's naturalism

*applied practically*



*For use with the  
Practitioners in  
Practice film.*

Below are three consecutive lessons which can be used separately.

The tasks are designed to introduce the six layers using simple exercises and short, structured **improvisations**. Several of the exercises are based directly on Mitchell's **improvisations** with Eve in the *Practitioners in Practice* film (7:20 – 11:03).

In all the tasks, the students should be free to change the gender identity of the characters they play. For example, the female character of Anna (that the actor Eve plays in the film) can also be played by male or non-binary or trans students. The students can either change the character's name or their **character biography** accordingly.

The lessons are designed to allow students to explore both directing and acting, encouraging an understanding and exploration of the relationship between the two roles.

The student director can use the worksheet on page 89 to jot down their observations about the six layers when watching the student actor in any of the steps below.



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*Not the end of the world*, Schaubühne, Berlin 2021.

## 5 (i)

# Lesson Plan: Character Biography and Place



**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to apply the layers of **character biography** and **place** to any scene or **improvisation**.

**Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film
- \* Classroom or drama studio
- \* Tables and chairs
- \* Floor marking tape

**Starter:** Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film Focus on the section about **naturalism** and the six layers (1:35–11:03).

**Step one: Discuss the film.** Invite students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on Mitchell's application of the layers of **character biography** and **place**.

**Step two: Hand out the Mitchell's Naturalism In Breakdown sheets on pages 12–16 and focus on **character biography** and **place**.**

These can be read individually or as a class, before beginning the tasks below.

# 5 (i)

## Task one:

### Character biography

#### 1 Writing a timeline for a character biography.

The thumbnail **character biography** Mitchell gives Eve to play in the *Practitioners in Practice* film – ‘You are 18 years old, studying for your A Levels and suffering from anxiety’ - can be turned into the following timeline. In this timeline you will notice how Mitchell gives the character the name, Anna.

- \* **2020 May: During her GCSEs Anna first experiences anxiety.**
- \* **2021 November: Anna’s 18th birthday.**
- \* **2022 January: Anna starts revising for her A Level mock examination.**

Divide the students into pairs and ask them to discuss the character and then to construct three further dates and details, predating 2020, that could illuminate Anna’s lived experience. For example, they might conceive where and when she was born or at what age she had her first partner. Ask the students to write down the new dates and details they have invented, adding them to the existing timeline.

#### 2 Visualising incidents in the **character biography** timeline.

In pairs, ask students to apply **improvisation** and hot seat each other to explore and **visualise** the **character biography** they have just put together. For example, a student might take on the director’s role and use incidents in the timeline to frame a question to the student in the hot seat like, ‘Can you describe your 18th birthday?’ or ‘Can you describe what your first GCSE exam was like?’. **Visualising** these incidents will help the student in the hot seat develop the character’s behaviour.

#### 3 Reflecting on the exercises on **character biography**.

Ask the students to discuss how steps one and two helped deepen their understanding of the layer of **character biography** and how the two steps shaped the character’s mood and physicality.



# 5 (i)

## Task two: Place

### Drawing a plan of place.

Remind the students that the **place** where Mitchell set the **improvisations** in the *Practitioners in Practice* film was a hospital waiting room. Ask them in groups to draw a sketch ground plan of a small hospital waiting room and to add in the adjoining locations, like the doctor's consulting room and the corridor between the waiting room and the hospital reception. Drawing a sketch ground plan like this will enable students to clarify in their imaginations where the character is, where they have come from and what is around them. You can see a sketch ground plan in Section 19 on pages 87 and 88.

### 1 Visualising place.

A further extension of this task might see students mark up the ground plan on the floor scaled to a small waiting room in a hospital. They could use floor marking tape to do this. Then, in pairs, they can take turns to give each other a tour of the hospital ground plan they have marked on the floor, as an estate agent might a prospective tenant, pointing out key invented details to help their partner **visualise** the hospital. Students might think about visual detail alongside temperature and smell. **Visualising** the hospital like this will fill in all the details of **place** helping to immerse the actor in the imaginary location.

### 2 Reflecting on the exercises on place.

Ask the students to discuss how steps one and two helped deepen their understanding of **place**.

## Task three: A short improvisation to layer character biography and place

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 7:20-11.03. Split the class into pairs. In each pair there is one director and one actor. Ask the students to layer their work on **character biography** and **place** as follows:

- 1 The director reminds the actor of the **character biography** they created in task one and then the actor walks to their chair and sits on it playing that **character biography**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 2 The director reminds the actor of **place** – the map of the hospital waiting room from task two – and then the actor walks to their chair and sits on it playing both layers of **character biography** and **place**. The director gives the actor feedback.

These two short **improvisations** will help the students to understand how Mitchell adds these two layers together in practice. If time allows, the students can swap roles so that each of them has a turn at exploring the roles of actor and director.

**Plenary:** Reflect with students on how conducive they found the three tasks to creating believable **naturalism** in their work on the layers of **character biography** and **place**.

## 5 (ii)

# Lesson Plan: Time and Immediate Circumstances



**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to apply the layers of **time** and **immediate circumstances** to any scene or improvisation.

**Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film
- \* Classroom or drama studio
- \* Tables and chairs.

**Starter:** Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film focussing on the section about naturalism and the six layers (1:35–11.03).

**Step one: Discuss the film** inviting students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on Mitchell's application of the layers of **time** and **immediate circumstances**.

**Step two: Hand out the Mitchell's Naturalism In Breakdown information sheets on pages 12–16 and focus on **time** and **immediate circumstances**.** These can be read individually or as a class before beginning the tasks below.

# 5 (ii)

## Task one: Time

Remind the students that **time** divides into four components: year, season, day of the week and time of day.

### 1 Improvising **time**: year and season.

Split the group into pairs and in each pair, ensure there is a director and actor. Ask them to set up two chairs side by side to represent a bus stop (**place**). Students can use their actual school bags or coats in the **improvisation**. The actor (playing themselves) will **improvise** the same simple action of walking to the bus stop, sitting and waiting for a bus. The director will vary the time coordinates, through three different short **improvisations**, as follows:

- \* The year is now, and it is winter.
- \* The year is 1950 and it is summer.
- \* The year is 1850 and it is spring.

### 2 Improvising **time**: day of the week and time of day.

Ask the students to repeat the same set up used in step one of two chairs side by side to represent a bus stop (**place**). Then the actor (playing themselves) will **improvise** the same simple action of walking to a bus stop, sitting and waiting for the bus three times. The director will vary the day of the week and time of day as follows:

- \* It is Monday at 8am
- \* It is Friday at 6pm
- \* It is Saturday at 12 noon

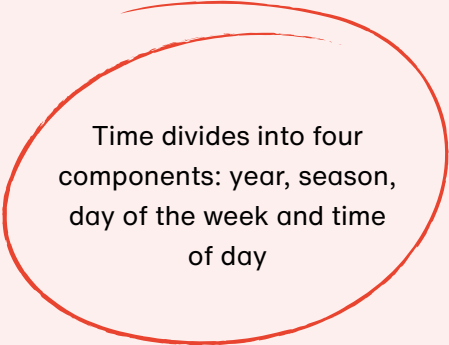
At the end, the students could choose four layers of **time** of their choice (year, season, day of the week or time of day) to play all together, like 'It is now, summer, Monday, 9am'.

After each **improvisation** described in the two steps, the director will give the actor feedback on how they played **time**, paying attention to how their movements changed. Students could also repeat the task, swapping roles so that each of them takes a turn at exploring the roles of actor and director.

### 3 Reflecting on the exercise about **time**.

Ask the students to discuss how these **improvisations** helped deepen their understanding of the four layers of **time**.

You might discuss how different time periods affect the physicality of characters or how the seasons alter the speed or type of movement or mood.



Time divides into four components: year, season, day of the week and time of day

# 5 (ii)

## Task two:

### Immediate circumstances

#### 1 Writing a timeline for **immediate circumstances**.

The thumbnail **immediate circumstances** Mitchell gives Eve to play in the *Practitioners in Practice* film – ‘You woke up late, your train was late, and you were ten minutes late for the appointment’ - can be turned into the following timeline:

**2022, 23 January**

**6:30am:** Anna wakes up late.

**7:00am:** Anna arrives at the station and her train is delayed.

**8:10am:** Anna arrives at the hospital ten minutes late for the appointment.

Divide the students into pairs and ask them to construct two more incidents taking place in the twenty-four hours between 8.10am on 22nd January and 8.10am on 23<sup>rd</sup> January (when the scene begins) to add into the **immediate circumstances** timeline. For example, they might add that she got a detention the day before or had an argument with her parents the night before. Building the timeline like this will help them develop the character’s behaviour, informed by what has just happened to them.

#### 2 Visualising incidents in the **immediate circumstances**:

In pairs, ask the students to apply **improvisation** and hot seat each other to explore and **visualise** the **immediate circumstances** they have just put together. For example, a student might take on the director’s role and using incidents in the timeline, could frame a question to the student in the hot seat such as, ‘Can you describe what it was like when you woke up this morning?’ or ‘Can you describe waiting for the train at the station at 7am?’. **Visualising** these incidents will help the student in the hot seat develop the character’s behaviour.

#### 3 Reflecting on the exercises on **immediate circumstances**:

Ask the students to discuss how steps one and two helped deepen their understanding of the layer of **immediate circumstances**.

## 5 (ii)

### Task three:

A short set of improvisations to add the layers of **time** and **immediate circumstances** to the layers of **character biography** and **place**

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the film at 7:20–11.03.

Split the class into pairs. In each pair there is one director and one actor. Ask the students to layer their work as follows:

- 1 The director reminds the actor of the layer of **character biography** (the timeline from the first lesson) and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing that **character biography**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 2 The director reminds the actor of **place** (the hospital waiting room from the first lesson) and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing both layers of **character biography** and **place**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 3 The director introduces the third layer of **time** (2022, winter, Monday, 8.10am) and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing **character biography**, **place** and **time**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 4 The director introduces the fourth layer of **immediate circumstances** (using the timeline generated in this lesson) and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**. The director gives the actor feedback.

These four short **improvisations** will help the students to understand how Mitchell adds these four layers together in practice. If time allows, the students can swap roles so that each of them has a turn at exploring the roles of actor and director.

To explore a simplified version of this final task, isolating only **time** and **immediate circumstances**, teachers might like to ask students to explore activities three and four above without the layers of **character biography** and **place**. Exploring all four layers together (building from Lesson 5 (i)) will optimise learning for high ability learners.

**Plenary:** Reflect with students on how conducive they found the three tasks to creating believable **naturalism** in their work on the two layers of **time** and **immediate circumstances**, and – secondarily – the combined four layers of **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**.



## 5 (iii)

# Lesson Plan: Events and Intentions



**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to apply the layers of **events** and **intentions** to any scene or **improvisation**.

**Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film
- \* Classroom or drama studio
- \* Tables and chairs.

**Starter:** Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film focussing on the section about naturalism and the six layers (1:35- 11.03).

**Step one: Discuss the film.** Invite students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on **events** and **intentions**. If relevant, ask them to clarify how Mitchell's use of **events** and **intentions** differs from other systems for **naturalism** (like Stanislavski's original system), which may use similar terms (like objective, super objective, and action).

**Hand out the Mitchell's Naturalism In Breakdown information sheets on pages 12-16 and focus on **events** and **intentions**.** These can be read individually or as a class before beginning the tasks below. It may be useful to reinforce that, once identified, **events** and **intentions** are as fixed as the text or the blocking for the scene or production.

# 5 (iii)

## Task one: Improvising **events**

Choose two students to play the characters A and B and ask the rest of the class to observe the **improvisations**.

- 1 Set up a table and two chairs to represent the seating in the school canteen (**place**). Ask the two students to invent two quick thumbnail **character biographies** and a brief description of the **immediate circumstances** for their characters. In the biography they invent it is important that character A finds character B attractive. The students can **improvise** dialogue.

The facilitator will act as director asking the students to do the **improvisations**, focusing on the **events** with the following instructions:

- \* It is lunchtime in the canteen, character A is sitting on their own and they notice someone they find attractive – character B – entering the canteen (**event one**). Character B pauses, looks around and then comes and sits down opposite character A at the table (**event two**).

- 2 Now ask the student playing character B to imagine that they are a close friend of character A. Ask the two students to invent two new quick thumbnail **character biographies** and a brief description of the **immediate circumstances** for their characters. Both will **improvise** a second scene with the following instructions:

- \* It is lunchtime in the canteen, character A is sitting with their close friend and suddenly the close friend says, 'I really like you' (**event one**) and then the close friend takes a bite out of their sandwich and says, 'I was only joking' (**event two**).

Encourage the students to notice how these specific **events** affect what the characters think, feel, and do after the **event** has occurred. Guide them to notice how **events** generate changes in physicality – how their bodies, heartbeats or thoughts are altered.

You could swap in two students to repeat the exercise or divide the group into pairs to try the two **improvisations** themselves.

- 3 **Reflecting on the exercises using events.**  
Ask students to discuss how task one helped them deepen their understanding of the layer of **events**, particularly how **events** generate changes in physicality.

# 5 (iii)

## Task two: Improvising intentions

Choose two students to play the characters and ask the rest of the class to observe the **improvisations**.

- 1 The actors will play the same events (as in task one) but they will now add the layer of **intentions**. As before, the students can **improvise** the dialogue (and remind them to play the thumbnail **character biographies** and **immediate circumstances** from task one). The facilitator will act as the director, asking the students to **improvise** the scene twice with the following instructions.

When giving instructions about **intentions**, it's useful to give the actors time to absorb the **events** and **intentions** before they start the **improvisation**. Students should **improvise** the dialogue:

- \* It is lunchtime in the canteen, character A is sitting on their own and they notice someone they find attractive – character B - entering the canteen (**event** one). Character A plays the **intention**: To convince character B you haven't noticed them. Character B pauses, looks around whilst playing the **intention**: To convince everyone in the canteen of how cool they are. Then character B comes and sits down opposite character A (**event** two). Character A then plays the **intention**: to get character B to ask them out on a date and character B plays the **intention**: to get character A to lend them some money.

- 2 Now ask the student playing character B to imagine that they are a close friend of character A. Both will **improvise** a second scene with the following instructions:

- \* It is lunchtime in the canteen, character A is sitting with a close friend (character B) and suddenly the close friend says, 'I really like you' (**event** one) with the **intention**: To convince character A they are in love with them. Character A then plays the **intention**: To get their friend to stop messing around. Then character B takes a bite out of their sandwich and says, 'I was only joking' (**event** two) with the **intention**: to make character A realise how gullible they are. Character A plays the **intention**: to convince character B they didn't believe them in the first place.

Encourage the students to notice how it is useful to have clear outcomes for each **intention** and for them to see the link between the **event** and the **intention**.

You could swap in two students to repeat the exercise or divide the group into pairs to try the **improvisations** themselves.

- 3 **Reflecting on the exercises on events and intentions.**

Ask the students to discuss how tasks one and two helped them deepen their understanding of the way **intentions** work with **events**, particularly how the physical, emotional, or mental change of the **event** generates the new **intention**.

## 5 (iii)

### Task three:

A short set of improvisations to add the layers of **events** and **intentions** to the layers of **time**, **immediate circumstances**, **character biography** and **place**

Split the class into pairs. In each pair there is one director and one actor. Ask the students to follow Mitchell's steps in the *Practitioners in Practice* film verbatim at (7:20-11.03). These are the steps Mitchell follows in the film which the students will copy:

- 1 The director reminds the actor of the layer of **character biography** (the character is 18, studying for her A Levels and suffering from anxiety), and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing that **character biography**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 2 The director reminds the actor of **place** (a hospital waiting room) and then the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing both layers of **character biography** and **place**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 3 The director introduces the third layer of **time** (2022, winter, Monday, 8am), and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing **character biography**, **place** and **time**. The director gives the actor feedback.
- 4 The director introduces the fourth layer of **immediate circumstances** (the character woke up late, their train was late and they are ten minutes late for the hospital appointment) and the actor walks to their chair and sits on it, playing **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**. The director gives the actor feedback.

- 5 The director introduces the fifth layer of **events** (they receive a text message from a friend wishing them luck with their appointment).
- 6 The director introduces the sixth layer of **intentions** (to convince their friend they are OK).

These six short **improvisations** will help the students to understand how Mitchell adds these layers together in practice. If time allows, the students can swap roles so that each of them takes turns at exploring the roles of actor and director.

To explore a simplified version of this final task, isolating only **events** and **intentions**, facilitators might ask students to explore activities five and six without the other four layers. Exploring all six layers together, building from Lessons 5 (i) and 5 (ii) will optimise learning for high ability learners.

**Plenary:** Reflect with students on how conducive they found the final three tasks to creating believable **naturalism** in their work on all the six layers, with special attention to the nuances or challenges that the layers of **events** and **intentions** generate. You might invite students to note how they can observe their own challenges and use these as target areas to focus on when they next practise applying these layers to their acting.



# 6

## Mitchell's Naturalism: Play Text *selection guide*

In Mitchell's **naturalism**, she always stages plays in a proscenium arch or end-on stage configuration and the action most often takes place in one room or interior location, in a specific domestic or industrial building.

The most appropriate Mitchell play selection in further education contexts focuses on female, otherwise overlooked or marginalised characters. This may be a contemporary play with such a character at its centre, or it may be a play by a traditional writer like Chekhov or Ibsen. With plays by a traditional writer, students should shift the focus on to the experience of an othered, non-binary or female character, thereby 're-centering' this person.

*shift the focus on to the  
experience of an othered,  
non-binary or female character,  
thereby 're-centering' this person*



© Gianmarco Bresadola

*Not the end of the world*, Schaubühne Berlin 2021.

# 6

Here is a list of contemporary or traditional plays you may want to explore when selecting a text to work on in the Mitchell style:

## CONTEMPORARY PLAYS

**Annie Baker**

**The Flick**

**Alice Birch**

**Little Light**

**Caryl Churchill**

**Far Away**

**Inua Ellams**

**Barber Shop Chronicles**

**Sarah Kane**

**4.48 Psychosis**

**Cleansed**

**Blasted**

**Lucy Kirkwood**

*The Children.*

*The Welkin*

**Jasmine Lee-Jones**

*Seven Methods of*

*Killing Kylie Jenner*

**Lyn Nottage**

*Sweat*

**Winsome Pinnock**

*Leave Taking*

**Lucy Prebble**

*The Effect*

**Lulu Raczka**

*Women, Beware the*

*Devil*

**Nina Segal**

*In the Night Time*  
*(Before the Sun Rises)*

**debbie tucker green**

*hang*

**Laura Wade**

*Posh*

## TRADITIONAL PLAYS

**Samuel Beckett**

*Happy Days*

**Chekhov**

*The Seagull*

*The Cherry Orchard*

**Jean Genet**

*The Maids*

**Henrik Ibsen**

*Hedda Gabler*

*A Doll's House*

**August Wilson**

*Ma Rainey's Black*  
*Bottom*

**Lorraine Hansberry**

*A Raisin in the Sun*

Mitchell is bold in her use of plays by traditional writers and will regularly cut or make radical changes to a traditional text in the process of re-centering the marginalised, female, or non-binary character. For example, in *Ophelias Zimmer* she worked with writer Alice Birch to tell the story of *Hamlet* from the point of view of Ophelia.

The scenes of *Hamlet* were not staged and instead the audience saw what happened to Ophelia in her bedroom during the timespan of the play. This staging interpretation led to her cutting most of the actual text of Shakespeare's original play (see Section 13 on pages 53-55)



*Ophelias Zimmer*, Schaubuhne Theatre, Berlin 2015.

# 7

## Mitchell's Naturalism *applied practically to a play text*



© Stephen Cummiskey

Mitchell working with actors in Germany in 2006.

The information in this section is particularly useful for facilitators wishing to study the more complicated areas of Mitchell's tools with high ability learners. All the tasks described in the following sections are designed for working with smaller groups and are not designed for a full classroom lesson.

## 7 (i)

# Using ‘Facts & Questions’ to work on character biography, place, time and immediate circumstances in a play text

As we have explored in the previous section, acting, and directing Mitchell’s **naturalism** requires you to identify the six layers of **character biography**, **place**, **time**, **immediate circumstances**, **events**, and **intentions**. It is possible to deepen your understanding of the first four layers by exploring them in a play text. The play text used in this section is the first scene of Caryl Churchill’s play, *Far Away*.

### Introducing ‘Facts & Questions’

‘Facts & Questions’ is a three-step organising tool. It helps differentiate between the information in the text which is indisputable (**facts**), the information which is disputable (**questions**) – and then it offers strategies for resolving the disputable information (**answers**). This organising tool helps us challenge our assumptions about aspects of the character or the situation we are working on by making sure we build our choices on a clear understanding of the information in – and impressions of – the text. By using ‘Facts & Questions’ we ensure that we are interrogating the text thoroughly and creating clarity for the audience.

### Applying ‘Facts & Questions’ practically

In text work, it is recommended that students approach Mitchell’s tools in this order: **place**, **time**, **character biography**. It helps to know what **place** the play text is set in and what **time** it is in before the **character biography** is built.

#### Definitions:

**Fact:** An indisputable piece of information. For example, a character who is definitely a brother to another character, or two characters who are definitely married. By establishing concrete facts, you can be clear about the undisputed coordinates of whichever four layers you are investigating.

**Questions:** A method of interrogating what is disputable. For example, how two characters met or when they got married. Once the disputable information is located, it is jotted down in the form of a question, like ‘When did Hamlet first meet Ophelia?’ or ‘When did Gertrude and Hamlet’s father get married?’

**Answers:** A system of answering the questions based on the simplest impression the text suggests or by making the simplest guess. By answering questions, you address the query and make simple decisions about the world of the text.

### ‘Facts & Questions’: Homework and Extension tasks

The below is suggested as a homework or extension task for those who wish to explore Mitchell beyond the **improvisation** work in lesson plans or structure their study of play texts through Mitchell’s system.

# 7 (i)

## Task one: Apply the organising tool of 'Facts & Questions' to **place**

### 1 Select the scene.

First, ask the students to identify a scene from a monologue, duologue, or other play text that they are currently working on.

### 2 Write a list of facts and questions.

Ask the students to create lists of facts and questions as below, focusing on **place** only. In this exercise the students are only looking for information about **place** up until *just before* the action of the scene begins (and not what happens to the place during the action of the scene). Here is an example based on Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* of the way to write the list:

#### Facts

**There is a bed.**  
**There is a cupboard with extra blankets.**  
**There are no streetlights.**  
**There is a door.**  
**There is a window.**  
**There is a roof and a tree.**

Where possible, use verbatim information from the text to provide facts, taking all the details across onto the list. For example, as you can see in the list above if a character says, 'There's extra blankets in the cupboard' you will put that down as a fact (There is a cupboard with extra blankets).

### Questions

Remember to leave a space where you can write your answer to the question. Here is an example of how to write the list:

**Where is the bed?**

**Where is the cupboard with extra blankets in it?**

**As there are no streetlights, is it in the countryside?**

**Where is the door?**

**Where is the window?**

**Where is the roof and the tree?**

It is normal that the list of questions is longer than the list of facts.

### 3 Answer the questions about **place**.

Students should then focus on adding the answers to the questions. Guide them to cross reference with the text for any simple impression that might provide an answer or guide them to make a simple guess. Keep the answers as simple and straightforward as possible:

**Where is the bed?**

***The bed is in the spare bedroom upstairs.***

**Where is the cupboard with extra blankets in it?**

***In the spare bedroom.***

**As there are no streetlights, is it the countryside?**

***Yes.***

**Where is the door?**

***At the front of the house.***

**Where is the window?**

***In the spare bedroom.***

**Where is the roof and the tree?**

***The roof is a flat roof underneath the spare bedroom window and the tree adjoins the roof.***





# 7 (i)

## 4 Draw plans and maps of **place**.

When all the questions have been answered, ask the students to use all the information on their list of facts and answered questions to draw a simple plan of the **place** in which the action occurs and a map of the environment immediately adjoining that **place**, such as a road or a lake or the next room. A map or plan of **place** is distinctly different to a set design ground plan, which would only show what the audience sees on stage. You can see an example of a plan of **place** for *Far Away* in section 19 on page 92.

With a focus on playing scenes in a life-like way, these plans and maps will help actors know the precise **place** where the action is set plus the adjoining interior rooms or surrounding external environments. The actors should always have a 360° view of the **place** their character is in.

## Task two: Apply the organising tool of 'Facts & Questions' to **time**

### 1 Write a list of facts and questions about **time** and then answer the questions.

Ask the students to repeat steps 2 and 3 from task one for **time**, writing a list of facts and questions and then answering the questions. Remind them that the layer of **time** includes the year, season, day of the week and time of day for their scene, so there must be facts or questions to cover these four areas.

### 2 Write down their conclusion about **time** on the first page of the scene.

Ask the students to jot down the facts and answered questions information about **time** at the top of the page of the scene they are working on so it's there as a point of reference for rehearsals. For example, for *Far Away* they may write:

**2030**

**Spring**

**Saturday**

**2:00am**

# 7 (i)

## Task three:

### Apply the organising tool of 'Facts & Questions' to **character biography** and **immediate circumstances**

- 1 Write a list of facts and questions about **character biography** and **immediate circumstances**.

Ask the students to write a list of facts and questions and then answer the questions for **character biography** and then **immediate circumstances**.

- 2 Make a sketch timeline for the **character biography** and **immediate circumstances**.

Ask the students to use the facts and answered questions about **character biography** to create a sketch timeline for their **character biography** (from the day the character was born up until 24 hours before the action takes place). Then ask them to do the same with **immediate circumstances**, making a sketch timeline for the 24 hours leading up to the split second before the scene begins. There will be lots of gaps in both timelines, but that's fine.

When using **immediate circumstances** like this with a full play text, Mitchell will work on the **immediate circumstances** for every scene.

If more than 24 hours pass between any scene, she will put together a second sketch timeline. For example, if three years pass between a scene, she will draw up a three-year timeline and a 24-hour **immediate circumstances** timeline.

#### Guidance on answering any questions requiring research.

Some of the questions across all four layers may require the student to do research into a particular historical or socio-political issue referenced in the text. The best way to be efficient with this and stick to the task in hand, is only to do the research necessary to answer the original research question.



*Theodora*, Royal Opera House, 2022.

## 7 (ii)

# Using events and intentions with a play text

### Task one: Locating **events**

- 1 Ask the student to prepare their script so that the text is printed on the right-hand half of an A4 page leaving the left-hand half available for the students to write in their **events** and **intentions**. (See worksheets, in section 19 on page 87 for an exemplar style model).
- 2 Read the present action of the scene and look for the key moments of change or **events**. Once identified, draw a box around the relevant line of text or stage direction that indicates the **event**. All entrances and exits are **events**.
- 3 Write down a simple sentence (on the blank left-hand side of the script) to describe each **event** using clear language: plain nouns and verbs without adjectival detail. Mitchell often numbers the **events** sequentially as an efficient way to orientate the actor to a precise **event**.

### Task two: Notating **intentions**

- 1 Ask the students to work out what the **intentions** are for all the characters between each **event**. There is only one **intention** per character between each **event**. Remind the students that the definition of an **intention** is what the character wants the other characters in the scene to do, feel or say. Then, they will need to put the **intention** into this template sentence: 'Character A: to get character B to [outcome required]'. An **intention** for *Far Away* might include a sentence like: 'Harper: To get Joan to go to bed.' Or 'Joan: To get Harper to tell her what's happening in the shed.'

When working on **intentions** remind the students that some **intentions** are played consciously by a character and others are played unconsciously. In a play, as in life, we are not always conscious of how we are affecting people by what we say or do. The process of identifying **intentions** is a process where all our motives are made conscious so that the actor can play them.

You might like to offer to students that the precision of Mitchell's **naturalism** creates a framework for durable theatre where, if a cast learns the two layers of **events** and **intentions**, it is possible for them to perform exactly the same **events** and **intentions** night after night.

# 8

## Mitchell's Live Cinema

### Overview handout



© Stephen Cummiskey

Travelling On One Leg, Hamburg, 2014.

This overview information sheet can be used as a handout in conjunction with the *Practitioners in Practice* film (12:33- 13:56).

Mitchell developed **Live Cinema** as an extension of her interest in **psychological realism** and she sees it as a **feminist** tool, deployed, to frame and amplify the **female experience** on stage. Mitchell says: 'The unconscious habit of audiences is to look for psychological meaning in the male characters. Using the camera allows me to amplify the experience of the female characters thereby insisting that the audience looks for meaning in female interiority. This helps me strengthen my feminist interpretation of texts.' In choosing how to film the female characters Mitchell draws on the film theory of 'the female gaze' where women are filmed through the eyes of another woman and not by men.

Mitchell's technique for making **Live Cinema** productions breaks down into eight building blocks: **film script**, **action**, **voice-over**, **foley**, **camera**, **sound/music**, **editing** and **motion**.

The central character's story in **Live Cinema** is carried mainly by visual elements. This means that there may be very little, or no dialogue. Instead, the text is written as a **film script** describing the character's **actions** with **voice-overs** conveying their internal thoughts.

In **Live Cinema** the onstage scenes are filmed by **cameras** (manipulated by camera operators), **edited** live and then projected onto the screen above. It is as if the audience are watching a film shoot (on the stage level) at the same time as watching the finished movie in a cinema (on the screen above the staged action).

Mitchell also uses **foley** sound effects, a technique where sound effects are added to a film in post-production in a sound studio to distinguish noise around human and animal movement (like footsteps on gravel, the swish of clothing as someone runs or impact sounds during a fight). In **Live Cinema** Mitchell uses **foley** to bring the audience closer to the subjective experience of the central character and Mitchell's sound designers have modified the film **foley** technique so that it can be performed live

alongside the live filming. **Sound** and **music** are used in the same way as in films mixing **naturalistic** and abstract functions.

In Mitchell's **Live Cinema**, unlike in her **naturalism**, the scenes in the story can occur in several places, often including moving locations such as cars, aeroplanes, or trains. You can see how **Live Cinema** explores **motion** in the car chase clip from *Schatten (Eurydike sagt)* in the *Practitioners in Practice* film (18:06- 18:44), in the airplane scene in *Orlando* (1.22 – 1.26) and in the subway train sequences in *Forbidden Zone* (13:23- 13:42). The audience, like in her **naturalism**, is seated in a proscenium arch or end-on stage format.

During Mitchell's **Live Cinema** productions, the technicians can be seen visibly on stage alongside the actors, manipulating lights, operating **cameras**, or performing **foley**.

When working with actors in **Live Cinema** productions, Mitchell uses some elements of the six-layer technique from her **naturalism** work combined with theories of film acting. For the purposes of this guide, we focus on Mitchell's use of her acting tools for **naturalism** in **Live Cinema**. The actors are always asked to act for the **camera** and not for the theatre audience and they only need to act inside the frame of the **camera** shot.

For example, a **close-up** of a character's face, will not require the actor to show the whole-body physicality of the character as this will not be projected on the screen. Furthermore, often several actors create different aspects of one character - for example, one acts the character's face and shoulders (in a **mid-shot**), another acts the character's hands (in a **close-up**), a third does the character's thoughts (in a **voice-over**) and a fourth does the sound the character makes (using **foley** sound effects).

Nearly all the projected film footage in the **Live Cinema** productions is filmed live on stage, but in some instances, Mitchell combines live footage with short, pre-recorded film sequences. For example, the opening of *Waves* begun with pre-recorded footage of the waves crashing on a beach at dawn. Furthermore, in her **ecofeminist** production of *The Cherry Orchard (Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg, 2022)*, pre-recorded footage of an orchard filmed across a year was used.

Mitchell's use of **Live Cinema** is influenced by her passion for films - in particular the work of Michael Haneke, Jane Campion, and Chantal Akerman - and her long-term fascination with **multimedia** practice in theatre, for example companies like The Wooster Group, 1927 and the video work of the Canadian theatre director, Robert Lepage.

In pioneering this particular use of film in theatre, Mitchell worked initially with the video designer, Leo Warner (59 Productions) and she now works regularly with the filmmaker, Grant Gee.

#### Live Cinema Terminology Tips:

**Mid-shot:** a shot of a character from above the waist to just above the top of the head.

**Close-up:** a shot of a character's face or hands which is very tight, so you might only see the actual face (with no background) or just the hand (and top of the sleeve) filling the entire frame.

**Editing:** the decision-making process about when to cut from a shot on one camera to a shot on another camera. The word 'cut' describes the edit point.



# Mitchell's live cinema

*In breakdown*

Mitchell's **Live Cinema** can operate at a low-tech level (such as examples shown in the photo below from *Waves*) and in high-tech setups, such as in her German productions of *Orlando* (16:10- 16:44) and *The Yellow Wallpaper* (17:10- 18:00). This breakdown is based on a low-tech production like *Waves*, and it describes the simple steps of the process of putting together a **Live Cinema** scene using the eight building blocks:

*For use with the  
Practitioners in  
Practice film.*

- 1 **Film script:** A written description of the action and text in the finished film.
- 2 **Action:** The non-verbal activities the actors do with the filming in mind.
- 3 **Voice-over:** The thoughts inside the character's head.
- 4 **Foley:** The sound effects that create the noises made by the character's clothing, actions, or objects they handle.
- 5 **Camera:** The tool to bring the audience closer to the female or marginalised character's lived experience.
- 6 **Sound/music:** The mechanism to create the naturalistic and psychological atmosphere of the scene.
- 7 **Editing:** The technique of cutting from one filmed shot to another.
- 8 **Motion:** The use of lights, scenery, and sound to emulate a moving location.



*The Waves*, Cologne Schauspielhaus, 2011.

In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you can see examples of Mitchell's use of each building block in her productions (13:56- 18:44) and you can also watch her working with A Level students to add the building blocks, one after another (18:45- 27:03). Mitchell asks the A Level students to **improvise** a scene instead of using a **film script**.



## 1 Film Script

*A written description of the action and text in the finished film.*



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*Schatten (Euridike sagt), Schaubuhne, Berlin 2016.*

A novel, short story or play text is selected, and the central female, marginalised or non-binary character decided upon. Then the text is written (either by Mitchell or a playwright) in the form of a **film script** centralising the female or marginalised character and describing the character's **actions** with accompanying **voice-overs**. Sometimes the **voice-overs** are selected from the original play text or story and at other times, they are taken from poetry. There may be minimal dialogue.

## 2 Action

*The non-verbal activities the actors do with the filming in mind.*



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*The Yellow Wallpaper, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2013.*

The **character biographies** and a clear image of **place** and **time** are shared with everyone working on the scene. Then the relevant scene in the **film script** is read. Next, the director stages the **action** of the scene with the 'body' actor (who plays the **actions** of the character in all the shots that include the character's face). The director and 'body' actor will only focus on the **action** inside the selected **camera** frame, like a wide or **mid-shot**.

## 3 Voice-Over

*The thoughts inside the character's head.*



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*The Forbidden Zone, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2014.*

Next, the **voice-over** actor is given the **voice-over** text for the scene. Then the 'body' actor repeats the **actions** whilst the **voice-over** actor reads the **voice-over** text. The **voice-overs** are not acted like speaking text on stage but are delivered closer to how thoughts sound in our own heads. They are read live, and they provide a non-diegetic layer of sound for the scene. Sometimes the content of the **voice-over** is very close to the **action** of the scene and sometimes not. Mitchell often gives the actor a simple **intention** for how the **voice-over** is to be delivered. It is as if the thoughts of the character are talking to the body of the character, and the **intention** is phrased like this: 'Character A: To get yourself to calm down'.

# 9

## 4 Foley

*The sound effects that create the noises made by the character's clothing, actions, or objects they handle.*



*The Yellow Wallpaper, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2013.*

Once the character's **actions** and **voice-over** are determined, then the **foley** actor is added, positioned at a table with a microphone. On the table in front of them are a variety of household objects used to make the sounds relating to the scene being staged. For example, the **foley** actor may use the sound of clicking the end of a biro to match the **action** of an earring being clipped onto an ear, or rub the sleeves of a jacket together to make the sound of a coat being put on. Or they might rifle their hand around in a rucksack to emulate the sound of the character looking for their eyeliner in a crowded make-up pouch. The object used to make the sound does not always need to be an authentic replication of the object or activity played out in the **action**. For example, in a real **foley** studio a pair of cleaning gloves can be flapped in the air to create the sound of realistic bird wings. Celery could be twisted and snapped to imply bone breaks or corn starch inside a leather pouch might produce the crunching sound of walking on snow. The actor doing **foley** often has to experiment with lots of different objects to find the one that matches the **action** in the scene. Once the objects have been decided upon, the scene is run again with the 'body' actor doing the character's **actions**, the **voice-over** actor speaking their thoughts and the **foley** actor doing the sounds of the **actions**.

## 5 Camera

*The tool to bring the audience closer to the female or marginalised character's lived experience.*



*Orlando, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2019.*

*The following conveys a professional system where cameras are linked to a media server. In the lesson plans in Section 11 there is a description of how a video messaging software can be used to connect smartphone cameras to a projector.*

Above the activity on stage there is normally a suspended screen, and this is where the images from the live **cameras** are projected. In a low-tech **Live Cinema** production Mitchell will use two **cameras** and the feeds from the **cameras** are connected to a media server which in turn is connected to a projector. The camera operator's job is to frame the size of the shot and if there is a tripod, to set the right height for each shot. They are also tasked with moving the **cameras** into all the different positions for the shots of all the scenes.

The camera operator positions the **camera** in front of the 'body' actor doing the character's **actions** and frames up the shot, for example a **mid-shot**. On the screen above, we see a **mid-shot** of the character projected. The whole scene is run again with the 'body' actor (doing the **actions**), the **voice-over** actor (doing the thoughts) and the **foley** actor (doing the sounds), but this time we see the moving image of the character on the screen above as well.



# 9

## 6 Sound/music

*The mechanism to create the **naturalistic** and **psychological atmosphere** of the scene.*

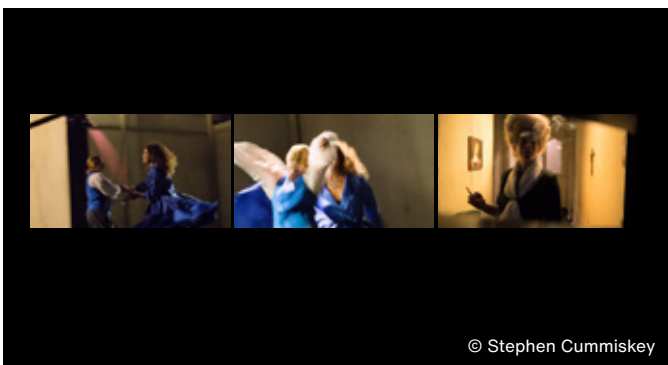


Wunchkonzert, Schauspielhaus Köln, 2006.

Next the composer and/or sound designer adds layers of **naturalistic** and abstract **sound** or **music** to create the atmosphere or mood of the scene. The scene is run again exactly as in building block 5, but this time with an added layer of **sound** or **music**. In **Live Cinema** the speakers are not on a stage level as in a theatre production; they are mounted next to or behind the projection screen to replicate the way **sound** is used in a cinema.

## 7 Editing

*The technique of cutting from one filmed shot to another.*



Orlando, Schaubühne, Berlin, 2019.

*The following conveys a professional editing set-up. In Section 10 there is a description of how to set up an edit system to cut between shots on smartphones in a classroom setting.*

Another actor plays the hands of the main character in a **close-up** shot. This 'hand' actor is seated next to the 'body' actor and the two of them will synchronise the timing of their **actions**. A second camera operator frames a **close-up** shot on the hands. Both the 'body' and the 'hand' actors then run the sequence (with the two camera operators) and the **editor** decides on the moments to cut between the two live **cameras**. Usually, the **edit** points occur at a moment of **action**, like a hand movement or a head turn.

## 8 Motion

*The use of lights, scenery, and sound to emulate a moving location.*



Schatten (Eurydike sagt), Schaubühne, Berlin, 2016.

**Live Cinema** productions often happen in moving locations and the impression of **motion** is generated by a combination of lighting, scenic elements, and **sound/music**. For example, as in the Practitioners in Practice film at (25:66- 26:55), in a low-tech production of a scene where a character is driving a car, the set designer will set up a transparent surface to represent the car window in between the **camera** and the 'body' actor. Then the lighting designer will use a stationery practical light outside the transparent surface and move their hand (or a small piece of cardboard) across the light to emulate the movement of streetlights whizzing past the moving car. Then the sound designer will play the **sound** of the interior of a moving car. So, even though nothing is moving on stage, on the screen it will look and sound as if someone is driving a car through the city at night.

# 10

## Mitchell's in-classroom live cinema: Tech guide for camera and editing

How to set up a simple system to link two smartphones to a projector and **edit** between them. This description can be watched alongside the *Practitioners in Practice* film where a digital producer shows how the system is set up (19:00–20:30).

### Materials needed:

- \* One laptop (controlled by the **editor**).
- \* Two smartphones (controlled by the camera operators).
- \* One projector.
- \* A projection screen or a white wall.

### Setting up the system:

**Step one:** Set up a meeting on Zoom. If you don't have Zoom, you can use another online meeting platform. Send the meeting link to both camera operators so that both smartphones are participants in the meeting.

**Step two:** The laptop is connected to the projector via a HDMI cable. The host of the meeting will need to choose the setting to 'Remove Self-View'.

There are two options for how the **editor** can display the **camera** images:

#### Option 1:

You can show both **camera** images side by side on the screen at the same time. This is a split screen option which requires the Zoom meeting to be set to 'Gallery View'.

#### Option 2:

You can alternate between the two **camera** images just like in a real film **edit**. This is a little more complex to achieve and you can do it in two different ways. Either the **editor** will need to switch between the images by pinning and unpinning the participants. Or the **editor** will need to set the meeting to 'Speaker View' and the two camera operators can mute and unmute the participants to switch between images.



# Lesson Plans: Mitchell's Live Cinema

*Applied practically*

These tasks are designed to introduce the eight building blocks of a **Live Cinema** production using short, structured **improvisations**.

All the tasks below are designed to follow on one after another, starting with relatively simple exercises and, task by task, adding more building blocks.

Initially the technical aspects of some of the tasks may appear a little daunting but if there are not the technical resources, don't worry because all the tasks can be done without. What matters is that the students get a sense of how all the elements of **Live Cinema** fit together so that they can deploy elements or the full spectrum of tools in their own work.

*Please note, not every classroom will have all the resources available needed for professional level **Live Cinema**. However, you might choose elements of these lessons that work with the resources your education environment is able to provide.*

*If, for example, you are not able to project images, in workshop context you can ask the students watching the exercises to imagine the cinema-scale image of the character's face above the action. Students might, for example, pretend to use microphones.*

*For use with the  
Practitioners in  
Practice film.*

# 11 (i)

## Lesson Plan: Action, Voice-Over and Foley



**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to combine the elements of **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley** in staging a **Live Cinema** scene.

*This lesson is best suited to a minimum of 3 students. To complete all three lessons in this **Live Cinema** Section, 8 students are required.*

**Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film.
- \* Classroom, or drama studio.
- \* Three chairs and two microphones (if possible).

**Starter:** Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film focusing on the section about **Live Cinema** and its eight building blocks at 12:33 - 27:03. As they watch, ask the students to take notes on **action**, **voice-over** and **foley**.

**Step one: Discuss the film.** Invite students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on Mitchell's application of **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley**.

**Step two: Hand out Mitchell's Live Cinema In Breakdown** on pages 39-42 and focus on **action**, **voice-over** and **foley**. This can be read individually or as a class, before beginning the tasks below.

## Task one:

### Action, voice-over and foley

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 20:59–22:14.

The steps in this task are designed to build one upon the other, showing how the building blocks of **Live Cinema** are put together.

- 1 **Stage the action.** Set up three chairs about a metre apart and seat one student on the middle chair with their bag. This student will play the 'body' actor doing the character's **actions** and it's important that they remain seated. Ask them to prepare to do an **improvisation**, such as getting ready for a party, playing themselves. They will be in their bedroom (**place**), on a Friday night at 8pm in winter (**time**).
- 2 **Add the voice-over.** Now seat a second student on the stage right chair next to the 'body' actor (playing the character's **actions**). This second student will be the **voice-over** actor and should have a microphone if possible. If not, ask the students to imagine the **voice-over** is being spoken through a microphone. Now, ask the 'body' actor playing the character's **actions** to do the **improvisation** (of getting ready for a party) and ask the **voice-over** actor to **improvise a voice-over**. The **voice-over** will play the **intention**: to convince yourself the party will be OK. It will help if the **voice-over** actor uses the word 'you' in sentences like, 'Listen, don't worry, you'll be alright; you know the party's going to be nice...' etc. But 'I' can also be used. Remind the student that the **voice-over** is not acted like speaking text on stage but should be delivered closer to how our thoughts sound in our own heads. To achieve this, the **voice-over** actor might experiment with variations in intonation, pitch, tone, and pace of speaking.

- 3 **Add the foley sound effects.** Ask a third student to sit on the third chair (with their own bag) and to be the **foley** actor. The **foley** actor will use objects in their bag to generate the sound effects to match the character's **actions**. This task can be optimised with the use of a microphone, or amplification mechanism, to boost the sound of the **foley** tasks. However, it can also be practised without, asking the students to imagine the **foley** sound effects being amplified. If you have a microphone, it can be mounted on a stand, or another student can hold it. The microphone should be pointing downwards towards the lap of the student.

The three students may need to run the **improvisation** of the scene a couple of times to find the best synchronization of **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley**. It will be important that the **foley** sound effects are precise. If they need to run the scene multiple times, they could change the **intention** of the **voice-over** (to: To convince yourself the party will be awful) or the **time** (to: Summer 2021). Remind the student to use the **foley** sound to make the audience feel closer to the character's **actions**.

*For further ideas on how the student might achieve **foley** they should closely read the information about **foley** in Section 9 on page 41 and the **Live Cinema** paragraphs of Section 18 on pages 84 and 86.*



# 11 (i)

**Plenary:** Reflect on the **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley** exercises. Ask the students to discuss how these **improvisations** helped deepen their understanding of the use of **action**, **voice-over** and **foley** in **Live Cinema** and to reflect on the way in which one character is constructed by three performers.

## Extensions

Once the students are confident with these three steps, they could select their own scenes to stage using these tools. These scenes can be taken from existing play texts, novels or simply be **improvised** scenes, and students can use the six layers to work on the **naturalistic** behaviour in the scenes.



*The 'body' actor  
improvises the action*

## 11 (ii)

# Lesson Plan: Camera and Sound/Music



(added to Action,  
Voice-Over and Foley).

**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to use **cameras** and **sound/music** (together with **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley**) in staging a **Live Cinema** scene. *This lesson is best suited to a minimum of 5 – 6 students. To complete all 3 lessons in this **Live Cinema** Section 7 – 8 students are required.*

**Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film.
- \* Classroom or drama studio.
- \* Two microphones (if possible).
- \* One smartphone plus Bluetooth speaker (if possible) or studio/theatre sound system.
- \* One DSLR or smartphone camera (students can use their own smartphones).  
As described on page 43 the camera is logged on to a video meeting platform and linked to a projector. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you will see how to set this all up (19:00–20:30).

- \* A flat white projection surface (such as white screen, cyclorama, white wall, or white bed sheet), ideally suspended above the action. You could also use a TV screen positioned to the side.

**Starter: Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film focusing on the section about Live Cinema and its eight building blocks at 12:33 to 27:03. As they watch, ask the students to take notes on **camera** and **sound/music**.**

**Step one: Discuss the film.** Invite students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on Mitchell's application of **camera** and **sound/music** in **Live Cinema**.

**Step two: Hand out Mitchell's Live Cinema In Breakdown** on pages 39–42 and focus on **camera** and **sound/music**. This can be read individually or as a class, before beginning the tasks below.



# 11 (ii)

## Task One:

### Camera and sound/music (added to **action**, **voice-over** and **foley**)

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 22:15 – 23:37.

- 1 Set up the **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley** actors.** Place five chairs in the space and with reference to lesson 11(i), seat three students on the middle three chairs - one on stage right (to do the character's thoughts in **voice-over**), one in the central seat (to do the character's **actions**) and one on stage left (to do the **foley** sound effects).
- 2 Integrate the use of a live **camera**.** Now add a fourth student who will be a camera operator. This might, usefully, be the role of a design student. This student will frame up a **mid-shot** of the student playing the **actions** of the character. ill frame the character from just above the top of the bag (in their lap) to the top of their head.
- 3 Set up the zoom system and turn the projector on.** Now add a fifth student to be the **editor** seated on the chair to the right of the **voice-over** student. (The **editor** can also be seated wherever the laptop is plugged in in the classroom or workshop setting). The **editor** will connect the camera operator's **camera** to the computer and projector so that an image from the student's **camera** can be projected onto a screen above. If there is no screen, ask the students to imagine a large **mid-shot** image of the character projected on an imaginary screen above (like in the cinema).
- 4 Improvise the scene with a projected image on the screen.** Now ask the three students doing the character's **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley** sound effects to **improvise** the getting ready for the party scene once again. This time, the live **camera** will project the **mid-shot** of the student playing the character's **actions** on the screen.
- 5 Add the **music**.** Now invite a sixth student (ideally a sound design student) to sit on the fifth chair next to the **foley** actor. The sixth student will operate the **sound** and **music** using their smartphone (and if possible, a Bluetooth speaker). This student will select some contemporary pop **music** to play as the soundtrack for the **improvisation** of getting ready for the party. The **music** can be a track that the character is literally playing in their bedroom (diegetic) or the **music** soundtrack for the film (non-diegetic) that the character can't hear. Once the track is selected, ask the four students (doing **actions**, **voice-over**, **camera**, and **foley**) to repeat the party preparation **improvisation**. When the scene has been run-through once underscored by **music**, then ask the students watching to suggest other tracks of **music** to try. Then run the scene a few more times, trialling how the playing of a different piece of **music** (including and diegetic and non-diegetic choices) can enhance or change the mood or atmosphere of the scene. A **naturalistic sound** effect could also be explored, either on its own or added to the **music**. **Sound/music** might also be played on a school's theatre sound system.

**Plenary:** Reflect on the exercises demonstrating adding **camera** and **sound/music** to the **action**, **voice-over** and **foley**. Ask the students to discuss how these **improvisations** helped them deepen their understanding of the use of **cameras** and **sound/music** in **Live Cinema** and to reflect on the way in which one character's experience is constructed by using all these techniques at the same time.

# 11 (iii)

## Lesson Plan: Editing and Motion



(added to Action,  
Voice-over,  
Foley, Camera and  
Sound/music)



**Lesson goal:** Students should take away a clear understanding of how to **edit** between shots and create **motion** (together with techniques for **action**, **voice-over**, **foley**, **camera** and **sound/music**) in staging a **Live Cinema** scene.

*This lesson is best suited to a minimum of 7 – 8 students.*

### **Materials and settings needed in preparation:**

- \* The *Practitioners in Practice* film.
- \* Classroom or drama studio.
- \* Six chairs and two microphones (if possible).
- \* One smartphone plus Bluetooth speaker (if possible) or sound system.
- \* Two DSLR or smartphone **cameras** (students can use their own). As described on page 43 the **cameras** are logged on to a video meeting platform and linked to a projector. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you will see how to set this all up (19:00–20:30)

\* A flat white projection surface (such as white screen, cyclorama, white wall, or white bed sheet), ideally suspended above the action. You could also use a TV screen positioned to the side.

\* In the *Practitioners in Practice* film the students are using elements of costume, scenery, and lighting but it is not necessary to integrate all these elements into your classroom setting.

**Starter:** Watch the *Practitioners in Practice* film with your students. As they watch, ask them to take notes on **editing** and **motion** in **Live Cinema**.

**Step one: Discuss the film.** Invite students to share their thoughts about the film and focus the discussion on Mitchell's application of the **editing** and **motion** in **Live Cinema**.

**Step two: Hand out Mitchell's Live Cinema In Breakdown** on pages 39–42 and focus on **editing** and **motion**. This can be read individually or as a class, before beginning the tasks below.

# 11 (iii)

## Task one:

**Editing** (added to **action**, **voice-over**, **foley**, **camera**, and **sound/music**)

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 23:38–25:56.

- 1 **Add a close-up shot.** Ask the six students to position themselves as in the final exercise in 11(ii) (5. **Add the music**) to do **voice-over**, **action**, **foley**, **editing**, **camera**, and **sound/music**. Now add a sixth chair in between the seats of the **action** and **foley** students. Then ask a seventh student to sit on that chair (with their school bag) to be the 'hand' actor and do the **close-up action** of the character's hands. An eighth student (ideally a design student) will then position a second **camera** to frame up the **close-up** of the character's hands.
- 2 **Edit between two cameras.** Now ask everyone to run the **improvised** party preparation scene, but this time with the addition of the 'hand' actor doing the **close-up** of the character's hands. A new pop **music** track can be selected by the student doing the **music**. The 'hand' actor doing the **close-up action** of the character's hands will copy exactly what the 'body' actor does in the **mid-shot**. As everyone does the **improvisation**, the **editor** will cut between the two live **cameras** (or the two camera operators can press 'mute' and 'unmute' to **edit** between the two **cameras**).
- 3 The **improvisation** may need to be repeated a couple of times to ensure that the **mid-shot** actor and the **close-up** actor can synchronise their actions. Also, the **edit** points will need to be confirmed and practised either by the **editor** or the camera operators (depending on the **edit** system decided upon). Different diegetic or non-diegetic **music** can be explored when the scenes are repeated.

## Task Two:

**Motion** (added to **action**, **voice-over**, **foley**, **camera**, and **sound/music**)

This task is fully demonstrated by Mitchell in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 25:57–26:59.

- 1 **Frame up a profile shot in a car.** Ask the six students to position themselves as in the final exercise in 11(ii) (5. **Add the music**) to do **voice-over**, **action**, **foley**, **editing**, **camera**, and **sound/music**. Now ask the student 'body' actor to turn their chair sideways to a profile position (in relationship to the **camera**). Then ask them to raise their hands as if they were holding the steering wheel of a car they are driving. Next ask the camera operator to frame a **mid-shot** of the 'body' actor as if they were filming someone driving a car (but focusing on the character's face and framing the shot so that we don't see the absence of the steering wheel in frame).
- 2 **Create a scene in a moving car.** Ask the 'body' actor student to **improvise** driving to a party, playing themselves. The **voice-over** actor plays the same **intention**: to convince yourself the party will be OK. It will help if the 'body' actor can gently rock to emulate the movement of being in a car. The student doing **sound/music** could find a moving car sound effect to add to the sequence, either on their phone (and played via the Bluetooth speaker) or played over the sound system. Or they could add some **music** that is being played inside the car by the character (diegetic) or **music** as a soundtrack to create the atmosphere of the drive (non-diegetic).

**Plenary:** Reflect on the **editing** and **motion** exercises. Ask the students to discuss how this **improvisation** helped them deepen their understanding of the use of **editing** and **motion** in **Live Cinema** and to reflect on the way in which one character's lived experience and environment is created by all these elements.

# Mitchell's Live Cinema:

## Play Text Selection

When staging Mitchell's **Live Cinema** using a text, students might like to use the playwrights they looked at when considering Mitchell's **naturalism**, like Birch, Churchill, and Ibsen. They could pick a scene from a contemporary play that focuses on a female, marginalised or non-binary character. The short play *Request Programme* (or *Wunchkonzert*) by Franz Xaver Kroetz provides an example of this (and this was a text used for one of Mitchell's early **Live Cinema** productions in Germany). Alternatively, students could use the **Live Cinema** technique to explore a scene from different character perspectives in a play by a traditional writer like Chekhov or Ibsen. For example, when Mitchell directed Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, she used the **Live Cinema** technique to show the action of the original play exclusively from the point of view of the least important female character, Christine the cook. In the film you can see a clip of *Miss Julie* where Christine watches the beheading of a bird at the climactic scene of the play (15:32–16:06).

In selecting the text for **Live Cinema**, remember that the central character's story is carried mainly by visual and sound elements with very little or no dialogue, and using mainly **voice-overs**. In working on a traditional text for **Live Cinema** students are encouraged to cut a play text and explore writing

the **voice-overs** themselves or to find other material, like poetry, to provide the text for the **voice-overs**. For example, with Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, Mitchell cut long sections of the original play script, adding **voice-over** text to represent the inner thoughts of Christine the cook. Mitchell used the poetry of a contemporary Danish poet, Inger Christensen, to provide the text for Christine's **voice-overs**.

Once you have chosen a scene, you will need to re-imagine the scene in the form of a **film script**. A **film script** lays out the action and text for films and television in a form to indicate how the scenes will be filmed, including divisions between exterior and interior shots, and a layout separating out the spoken text from the **voice-overs**.

If working with play texts for a module that only allows use of a pre-existing printed text, students will need to keep the original author's text intact and be playful instead with the use of **voice-overs**.

In Section 13 below (**Devising in the Mitchell Style**) there is a list of possible texts you might like to look at if you want to do a devised **Live Cinema** scene.

# 13

## Devising in the Mitchell Style

*Case study handout.*

### Focus: *Ophelias Zimmer*

Katie Mitchell has rarely devised work. However, a process she underwent with the playwright Alice Birch on the creation of *Ophelias Zimmer* (or *Ophelia's Room* in English) sheds light on her approach to the theatre-making style that can be applicable in further education syllabuses where devising is often required. *Ophelias Zimmer* takes inspiration from Shakespeare, dismantling and remoulding his classic text *Hamlet* to give a fresh, newly positioned angle presenting the play only through the lens of Ophelia's room. We might read this in dialogue with, for example, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, which centres, with patriarchal focus, the experiences of Hamlet's childhood friends. Before beginning the devising process, Mitchell advises a newly formed group of student theatre-makers to develop clear structures for the process: a timetable and clearly defined roles, making decisions in the first rehearsal about who will act, write, and direct the piece. Mitchell and Birch went through the following processes to make *Ophelias Zimmer*. You could borrow these processes in your devising rehearsal room:



© Gianmarco Bresadola

*Ophelias Zimmer*, Schaubuhne Theatre, 2015.



**1 The theatre-maker reads a classic text and searches for a gap missing in the full story.**

Mitchell, having read *Hamlet*, conceived the concept of a devised production that shows the action of *Hamlet* told exclusively from the point of view of what happens in Ophelia's bedroom. She created this concept to fill in the gaps in Ophelia's story, in particular her descent into madness

**2 The theatre-maker identifies who will write the text.** Mitchell approached playwright Alice Birch to write the text for her concept.

**3 Research and development with actors using improvisation.** Before Birch set to work on the play text, Mitchell rehearsed with a group of actors. Choosing to set the action today, Mitchell worked with the actors to create a **character biography** for Ophelia and to identify the **place, time, and immediate circumstances** for every scene in the original play *Hamlet*. She and the actors also worked out how much time passed between the scenes. She did all this work using her organising tool of **'Facts & Questions'** as a foundation (but changing some information in the original play to relocate the action to a contemporary setting). The actors then **improvised** what Ophelia would be doing in her bedroom during each scene that she does not appear in *Hamlet* and how she would get ready in her bedroom for those scenes she does appear in. Birch then watched the **improvisations** in the rehearsal room and went away to write the text based on the **improvised** scenes.

**4 Design and non-naturalism.** Mitchell asked the set designer, Chloe Lamford, to create a set design where the room could be flooded with water for a non-naturalistic sequence showing the collapse of Ophelia's mental health.

### Retaining elements of classical stimuli

Mitchell identified that in the original play, Hamlet sends Ophelia letters. In Mitchell and Birch's production, Ophelia receives and listens to tapes instead (a contemporary interpretation of the letters from Hamlet) so she, and the audience, can listen to what has happened in the unseen relationship between the two characters.

### Character invention and creating structure

Mitchell and Birch invented two new characters: Ophelia's maid and a doctor, and Lamford, suggested a way to reconfigure the five-act structure of *Hamlet* by naming the five acts of *Ophelias Zimmer* after the five stages of drowning.

*Ophelias Zimmer* was produced in 2016 by the Royal Court and the Schaubühne Theatre, Berlin



© Stephen Cummiskey

*Ophelias Zimmer*, Schaubühne, Berlin 2016.

### Devising Tips:

#### Simultaneous Scenes and Psychological Realism

Staging simultaneous scenes (or ‘simultaneity’) is about running two **naturalistic** scenes simultaneously to build a complex psychological effect, using a split stage. Guide students to explore relevant instances of this technique. For example, two women in two different realistic rooms side by side might do different actions and speak different texts. The action and texts might be interwoven carefully to show a relationship between different women’s experience of a subject like motherhood or domestic violence. The students could then use this technique when devising original scenes, to intensify the themes that they themselves were exploring. As a textual reference point, the students might want to read Alice Birch’s *Anatomy of a Suicide* where three scenes run at the same time. A scene from Mitchell’s production of this play can be found in the *Practitioner in Practice* film at (00:48-1:15).

#### Devising Live Cinema

If devising their own texts, students might generate scenes which highlight aspects of marginalised people’s existence such as domestic abuse, discrimination in the workplace, or unpaid work. The students would generate the non-verbal actions for the character/s they invent and then write the character’s **voice-overs** or internal monologues. The technique of **Live Cinema** works best as a ‘deep dive’ exploration of short scenes, rather than an illustration of wordy or long texts. For **Live Cinema** devising please see a list here of suggested novels students could adapt: Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman Other*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, Rachel Cusk’s *The Outline Trilogy*, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, Eimear McBride’s *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, Rebecca Watson’s *little scratch*, Natasha Brown’s *Assembly* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.



*Anatomy of a Suicide*, Royal Court Theatre, 2017.

For ideas on devising **Live Cinema**, explore the guide to **Live Cinema** in Section 9 on pages 39–42.

# 14

## Introduction to set, costume, lighting and sound design

Directing is often understood as a job which is about working with actors and writers; in reality, the success of most directors' work is hugely dependent on the talent and skill of that director's creative team. The creative team (or production team) is the umbrella term for the practitioners the theatre director works with to deliver a production and does not include the actors who are described by the word 'cast'. This team normally includes: a set designer, costume designer, lighting designer and sound designer. These are the skilled individuals who will be present at the earliest meetings with directors as they conceive their production. They then work alongside the director throughout the process of making the production.

In a professional setting, the practitioners in a creative team operate alongside the director to shape the interpretation of the text embodied in the visual and aural components of the production. The creative team members then communicate their artistic requirements to technicians, like lighting or sound programmers/operators, or set builders or costume makers.



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*Schatten (Eurydike sagt)*, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2016

### Working with a creative team

Often a director will change creative teams from production to production, but Mitchell's creative teams comprise long-term collaborations with practitioners sometimes lasting decades. For example, Mitchell has worked with the set designer, Vicki Mortimer, for over 30 years, since they were at university. These enduring working relationships have allowed Mitchell to build up an artistic shorthand with certain practitioners over time, enabling her to be more experimental and take more risks in her work.

Creative teams also can include video designers, composers, movement directors or choreographers (especially if it is a musical), fight directors (to help with any fights or violent scenes), voice coaches (to help with vocal projection and accents) and more recently intimacy directors (the person responsible for ensuring any intimate scenes are rehearsed in a safe and respectful manner). For certain productions, specialists like puppeteers or magicians join the creative team, either being present for the whole rehearsal period or dropping in to do isolated sessions.

Those students wishing to find out more about intimacy directors can research the work of Ita O'Brien, the intimacy director Mitchell works with. If they want to research movement directors, they could explore the work of Shelley Maxwell.

You will notice that there are more roles in the creative team than the four regularly studied in schools, but these additional roles could be integrated into the students' work on the key four design roles. For example, music scored by a composer could be integrated into sound design, or an exploration of the role of the movement director or intimacy director could be explored as part of directing and acting. Alternatively, video design could be positioned inside work on lighting or set design or at the intersection between the two.

When students approach making or using things for their productions, Mitchell advises that they should consider being as sustainable as possible using, for example, second hand clothing and props. For those students wishing to explore sustainable practice in theatre generally she suggests they read the *Theatre Green Book*, which is the theatre industry's leading book about sustainability. The students' exploration of sustainability could be integrated into their work on set or costume design.

All the tasks described in the following four sections are designed for working with smaller groups or with students who have a specific interest in any of the design areas. The tasks are not designed for a full classroom lesson.



© Stephen Cummiskey

The creative team at work on a production of *The Cherry Orchard* at The Young Vic Theatre, 2014.



# 15

## Set design in Mitchell's work



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*Cleansed*, National Theatre, 2016

### Part one: Set design for Mitchell's naturalism

#### Key set design features of Mitchell's naturalism

Always working within the proscenium arch (or end-on stage) format for her **naturalistic** productions, Mitchell will work with sets that are realistic: very detailed and lifelike. This extends to the props and the furniture. The action often takes place in interiors of decayed industrial buildings or domestic rooms with windows on to the world beyond. A painted set may, for example, show scuff marks or peeling paint to create the appearance of a lived-in location. Damp stains and cracks in the wallpaper can, for example, be seen in Alex Eales' set for *Cleansed* in the photograph above and the *Practitioners in Practice* film (1:48 - 2:03).

Mitchell is generally interested in a muted colour palette for the scenery, often favouring pale or faded colours, allowing her to define the marginalised, female, or non-binary characters more sharply by using contrasting colours in costumes, like reds. Furthermore, Mitchell is very influenced by the visual arts, in particular the photographers Francesca Woodman and Nan Goldin, and artists like Vilhelm Hammershøi and Louise Bourgeois. In fact, Mitchell has often said that she ended up being a director because she couldn't paint, and the visual elements of a production are central to her thinking about theatre-making.



## How Mitchell works with a set designer

When working with a set designer, Mitchell will communicate her interpretation of the play and information about her analysis of **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances** (generated using 'Facts & Questions' as explained on pages 32-35). The set designer and Mitchell will then discuss anything the scenery needs to do during the action of the play, for example in *Cleansed*, flowers needed to appear suddenly out of the ground.

The set designer then translates all these discussed elements into a visual language in the form of images (a mood board) and a series of model boxes. A mood board is a collection of printed or photocopied images or photographs that give a sense of the atmosphere, colours and textures of the scenic world. The model box is a scaled-down version of the set design, resembling a small doll's house. There are two types of model box, the early white card model (a rough mock up made of white card) and the finished model (a very detailed rendering of a miniature version of what the audience will see with all the colours, textures and finishes). Construction drawings are then made, based on the finished model box, which are used by set builders to create the finished set on stage viewed by audiences. In these images you can see how the design for *Cleansed* evolved from the initial white card model to the finished model and finally to a set on stage.



White card model:



Finished model:



Set on stage:



Cleansed, National Theatre, 2016

# Mitchell's set design features for naturalism

*applied practically*

## Task one: Making mood boards

First, students should put together information for the scene they are doing regarding the three layers of **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**. They should either invent the layers with an actor (if devising) or use 'Facts & Questions' (if they are working with a play text). Secondly, they should list any key scenic changes that need to happen during the scene. Finally, they should create a mood board synthesising all this information and including samples of the colour palette or distressed paint work they have in mind for a fully realised set design.

## Task two: Working on worn or distressed props and furniture

If a full set is not practical, then student set designers looking to emulate a Mitchell style might obtain props and furniture for the scene that are used and worn objects. Alternatively, they could distress modern props and furniture to make them look more lived in and life-like, for example by adding stains, scuffs or re-painting objects. In either case, students should be encouraged to make sure that the decisions about **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances** are embodied in their choices. Wherever possible students should use pale or muted colours, thinking forwards to the way in which the colours of the costumes will interact with and contrast with the colour of the props, furniture, or any scenic elements.

### Task three: Exploring non-naturalistic scenic elements

Mitchell's sets are predominately **naturalistic** but do sometimes contain some non-naturalistic features or symbolism. These non-naturalistic moments often present extremities of **psychological realism**. For example, in Section 19 on page 90, you can see Chloe Lamford's set design for *Ophelias Zimmer* where the bedroom is flooded with water to represent Ophelia's state of mind. Recreating a flooded room in a classroom or studio setting might be challenging. Facilitators can consider how nods to design features like this can be made.



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*Dream Play*, National Theatre, 2005.

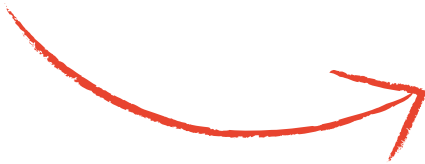


# 15

## Part two: Set design for Mitchell's live cinema

### Key set design features of Mitchell's Live Cinema

The sets for **Live Cinema** are designed entirely with the filming process in mind, where the set design provides the background for a series of filmed shots. The set designs are built to resemble a film set as closely as possible, and the screen suspended above the stage is a key part of the whole design. As with the **naturalistic** work, the overall aesthetic (sets, furniture and props) is incredibly detailed and life-like. Scenery also often includes scenic reconstructions of moving locations, like cars, trains, or aeroplanes.



Below is a photograph of the *Waves*' set which provides several accessible examples of the features of a low-tech **Live Cinema** set:



© Stephen Cummiskey

*Fraulein Julie*, Schaubühne, Berlin, 2010.



© Stephen Cummiskey

*The Waves*, National Theatre, 2006.

On the back wall of the stage, there is a black screen used for projecting live footage and pre-recorded sequences. Downstage left (DSL) and downstage right (DSR) there are small, shallow **foley** boxes filled with substances like gravel, sand or grass with floor mounted microphones next to them. These boxes are used by the actors to create the sound effect of characters in the film walking on different surfaces, like a gravel drive or sandy beach. There are two microphones on stands at either side of the stage used for **voice-overs** and three **cameras** which are moved around to film and amplify the faces and **action** of the characters. In the centre of the stage are two long tables which provide the surface for short tablecloths and props to be laid out and used to film **mid-shots** and **close-ups** of characters in different locations. In the image on the right you can see an actor holding a rectangular piece of cardboard with a slice of wallpaper on it, providing the backdrop for a **mid-shot** of a character sitting at the table.

*Waves* used about 50 of these hand-held cardboard backdrops to provide the background for the locations where all the scenes are set. The hand-held cardboard backdrops were stored on stage in a rack where they could be taken from, used, and then put back when they were needed during the action of the production.

### **How Mitchell works with a set designer on Live Cinema**

Mitchell works with her set designers on a **Live Cinema** production in just the same way that she works with them on her **naturalistic** productions, except the set designer has the filming process at the forefront of their mind in all their decision making; thinking more about what the film on the screen will look like than the scenery on stage.



© Stephen Cummiskey

*The Waves*, National Theatre, 2006.



© Stephen Cummiskey

*The Waves*, National Theatre, 2006.



# Mitchell's set design features for Live Cinema

*applied practically*

All these tasks require the student exploring set design to work with the camera operators and the actor playing the character's **actions** to ensure that the backdrops or any scenic elements work for the framing or look of the film shot. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you can see how the three tasks below work together with actors and camera operators (24:00–26:38).

## Task one: Make a hand-held cardboard backdrop for a mid-shot of a character

The hand-held cardboard backdrops used in *Waves* can be made in a school setting, using the sides of old cardboard boxes which are either painted or have a section of wallpaper glued onto them. The backdrops are approximately 100cm x 70cm (although they can be larger) and the students need to ensure that they can be held by one person with their arms outstretched. These backdrops are made for **mid-shots** of characters. You can see a backdrop in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 24:00–26:56. Before making the backdrop, ask the students to put together information for the scene they are doing using the three layers of **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**, either inventing it with an actor (if devising) or using **'Facts & Questions'** (if they are working with a play text). Next ask the students to decide what the walls are

like in the **place** the character is in and then they can cut out the cardboard and paint or wallpaper it.

They need to make sure that the paintwork or wallpaper added to the cardboard is made to look worn or distressed in line with Mitchell's **naturalistic** aesthetic. Once the backdrop is made, students will then need to work with a camera operator, the 'body' actor and a student holding the backdrop to ensure the frame of the **mid-shot** of the character doesn't go outside the backdrop. You can see this process of framing up a shot with a backdrop in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 24:20–24:30.

## Task two: Make or find a transparent hand-held surface to act as a window

Building on task one, students could find some plastic, Perspex, or any transparent surface to provide a hand-held plane through which a **mid-shot** of a character's face looking out of the window is filmed. One of the hand-held cardboard backdrops from task one can be held behind the actor and the transparent surface in front of them. The **camera** should be positioned in front of the transparent surface pointing at the actor's face. A tiny piece of material can also be added at the side to represent a bit of curtain. You can see a similar set up in the photograph below from *Waves*

Students could also try running tiny streams of water down the transparent surface to emulate rain falling outside the window (ensuring they set up some way of catching the water!). You can see a similar effect being used in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 26:19–26:32 when a straw is used to move rain across the window of a moving car. There you'll notice a plastic container beneath the transparent surface to catch the water.



© Stephen Cummiskey

*The Waves*, National Theatre, 2006.

### Task three: Use the transparent surface to emulate a car window

Keep the same set up (of hand-held backdrop, actor, transparent surface and **camera**) as in task two, but this time use the other side of the handheld cardboard backdrop painted black. Using the sequence in the *Practitioners in Practice* film (25:55–26:10) as a guide, ask the actor to turn sideways to a profile position (in relationship to the **camera**) and with the lights lowered, the actor could then gently rock – emulating the movement of being in a car. The students doing set design could think how about how to emulate rain hitting the window of a moving car. They could, for example, blow water out of straws horizontally across the window to look like rain drops moving across a moving car window. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film (26:19–26:32) you can see how a straw and hairdryer are used to move the rain across a transparent surface and emulate how rain whizzes across the window of a moving car.

### Key Tip

In **Live Cinema** any scenic choices will have to work hand in glove with lighting, so guide students working on set design to cross reference with the lighting design section below where they will find tips on how to use lighting to develop their work described here on set design.

Set designers who Mitchell works with regularly are Vicki Mortimer, Alex Eales and Chloe Lamford. Vicki Mortimer shaped the aesthetic for Mitchell's work on **naturalism** and Alex Eales has designed the bulk of the **Live Cinema** productions. See the set design worksheet on page 90 to explore set design further.

# Costume design in Mitchell's work



© Stephen Cummiskey

*Cleansed*, National Theatre, 2016

## Part one: Costume design for Mitchell's naturalism

### Key costume design features of Mitchell's naturalism

To create Mitchell-appropriate costumes, student costume designers should focus on the life-like and lived in. Clothing in Mitchell's productions are designed, like her **naturalistic** sets, to look used and worn rather than being obviously theatrical. Actors wear very minimal make-up – enough to accurately represent a true likeness of their character but not to add any theatrical make-up tropes, like heavy foundation or eyeliner. There are no wigs or hairpieces. As mentioned in the section on set design, Mitchell likes to foreground the

marginalised, female, or non-binary character in a different, bolder, colour and/or texture to the darker and duller colour palette worn by the rest of the cast. Mitchell's choices are influenced by the costume designer, Marion Cito, who works with the German choreographer Pina Bausch. As mentioned in the introduction to design section (Section 14), wherever possible, the student costume designers should use or adapt found or charity shop clothing to be sustainable.



### How Mitchell works with a costume designer

When working with a costume designer, Mitchell will communicate her interpretation of the play and information about her analysis of **character biography**, **immediate circumstances** and **time** – in particular the season which is a big factor in determining what characters wear. Mitchell will also discuss how the **immediate circumstances** could have affected the costume, for example, if the character has just come inside from a walk in the rain, their clothing could be wet, and they could have mud marks on their shoes. All these details are then integrated by the costume designer into a mood board and then the final costume designs. The colour of the costume is an important feature in Mitchell's work. In *Cleansed* for example, the costume designer, Juhlin-Wallén chose the colour red for the central female character so that the dress would stand out against the paler set walls and contrast with the black suits worn by the rest of the characters. This is in keeping with how Mitchell uses costumes to foreground marginalised, female, or non-binary characters.

Juhlin-Wallén's red costume design was then given to the National Theatre's Costume department and colour swatches (small samples of fabric) of the correct silk fabric found. Then a spreadsheet was made, breaking down different elements of the costume to be sourced. The material, price, measurement and source of this costume item was noted in the spreadsheet. Once these decisions had been reached, a pattern was made and the costume cut, sewn and fitted. The National Theatre's Costume Hire department is also available to Mitchell's costume designers when she makes a show at the theatre and this resource is accessible to all educational departments, by appointment, in the UK.



© Ivan Kyncl

*Iphigenia at Aulis*, National Theatre, 2004.



# Mitchell's costume design features for naturalism

*applied practically*

The three tasks below are designed to be done in consecutive order, following the three steps that a costume designer would take to make a costume: mood board, pattern, fitting.

## **Task one:** **Make a mood board for a character**

Students can choose a character to work on and then organise the information from the scene regarding the three layers of **character biography**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**, either inventing it with the actor (if devising) or using 'Facts & Questions' (if you are working with a play text). Students can create a mood board with images from the internet, fashion magazines or art books to show their ideas for the character's costume based on these three layers. They can also think about the colour of the costume in relationship to the scenery being used or to the actual colour of the classroom or studio setting where they are performing. Mitchell favours costumes that stand out in contrast to the colours of the set design. Students can add colour swatches to the mood board using a stapler.

## **Task two:** **Draw the costume design for the character**

Students can draw the costume design for the character based on the elements of **character biography**, **immediate circumstances** and **time** explored in the mood board in task one. They can then choose some material swatches for the costume, which they can staple to the costume drawing. Next, they can take the measurements or size information from the actor for whom they are designing the costume and jot this information down on the costume drawing.



### **Task three: Find and fit the costume**

Using the costume design in task two as a starting point, students can look at existing clothes (either in people's own wardrobes or at a charity shop) and select the clothing that most closely resembles their designs. Next, they can do a fitting with the actor concerned and note any adjustments they may need to make. For example, they may want to shorten a sleeve, hem a skirt or take in a waistline. Costume designers often share photographs of costume fittings with directors, so with the actor's permission, they could photograph those fittings and the finished costume used in performance. This task will allow them to chart and evidence the process of decision-making and choices about the costume(s) they use. To continue making sustainable theatre, students can return the costumes used to a charity shop after the performance.

# 16

## Part two: Costume design for Mitchell's Live Cinema

### Key costume design features of Mitchell's Live Cinema

As with the **naturalistic** work, the overall aesthetic for the costumes in **Live Cinema** is incredibly detailed, life-like and lived in. Similarly, the colour of the central character's costume often contrasts with the scenery, wallpaper or paint finish on the hand-held cardboard backdrop or scenery. Mitchell works with the costume designer on her **Live Cinema** productions as she does with her **naturalistic** productions, sharing her interpretation and her work on **character biography**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**.

*Wunchkonzert*, Schauspielhaus Köln, 2008.



Mid-shot  
actor

Close up  
actor

The main difference between the costume designs for **Live Cinema** and **naturalism** is that often two actors play different body parts of a single character. When creating the costumes, the costume designer needs to ensure there is visual continuity between the costumes in both shots. In the *Practitioners in Practice* film you can see two identical denim jackets being put on the actors playing the body and hands of the same character (23:47–23:59). In the photograph on the left you can see how the white sleeves of the actor doing the **close-up** of the character (holding the clock) matches the white night dress of the actor playing the **mid-shot** of the same character (sitting on the bed behind).

Here is the mood board for the costumes for *Orlando* put together by Sussie Juhlin-Wallen:



# Mitchell's costume design features for Live Cinema

*applied practically*

## Task one: Prepare a mood board for a character

Students can choose a character to work on and to organise the information in the scene about the three layers of **character biography**, **time** and **immediate circumstances**. They can either invent this information with the actor (if devising) or using 'Facts & Questions' (if they are working with a play text). They can use this information to prepare a mood board and colour swatches. Students can be encouraged to reflect on the difference between the colour or textures of the costume on stage and how the costume may look on screen after the film has been graded (the process by which the live camera feed is processed before it is projected). They could, for example, make a mood board documenting the colours used for the onstage costumes if the film on the screen were to be black and white or graded with sepia or a desaturated quality. The mood board could combine images for the look of the on-stage costumes with images for the look of the filmed costumes on screen.

## Task two: Draw the costume designs for a character to be played by two actors

Students can draw the costume design for the character based on **character biography**, **immediate circumstances** and **time** explored in the mood board in task one. They can choose some material swatches and staple them to the drawing. Because any character may be played by two actors (the 'body' actor in a **mid-shot** and the 'hand' actor in a **close-up**) costume students should take the relevant measurements or size information from the two actors who are playing the different body parts of the character and jot this information down on the costume drawing. For the costume drawing of the 'hand' actor (playing the character's hands in the **close-up**) students may want to think about the state of the character's nails or whether they are wearing any significant rings.

### Task three: Find and fit the costumes for the two actors playing one character

Using the costume design in task two as a starting point, students can look at existing clothes (either in people's own wardrobes or from a charity shop) and select clothing that most closely resembles their designs (for both actors playing one character). If, for example, they have assigned a shirt and jacket for the character, they would first need to find a shirt and jacket to costume the body actor playing the **mid-shot** of the face and shoulders of the character. Next, they would need to find a matching jacket for the 'hand' actor (who is playing the character's arms and hands in the **close-up**) to wear.

Mitchell works predominately with the costume designer Sussie Juhlin-Wallén, for both her **naturalistic** and **Live Cinema** work.



© Stephen Cummiskey

*The Idiot*, National Theatre 2006.



# Lighting design in Mitchell's work

*Health and safety note: When working with practical lights in the Mitchell style, be sure to use PAT tested electronics that are sanctioned by your school or colleges health and safety legislation. Students should be careful handling hot lights. They may need to use heat resistant gloves to manipulate the hot shade of practical lights and film lights.*

## Part one: Lighting Design For Mitchell's naturalism



© Stephen Cummiskey  
*Women of Troy*, National Theatre, 2007

### Key lighting design features of Mitchell's naturalism

For **naturalistic** productions, Mitchell uses lighting in a life-like way, combining natural light through windows and/or doors with light from practical lighting (either industrial or domestic) such as pendant ceiling lights, desk lights, standard lights etc.

'Practical lighting' or 'practicals' is the term used to describe the lights that are seen on the set design (differentiating them from the overhead rig of theatre lights). In the *Practitioners in Practice* film, you can see practical lights being used in *Cleansed* in the form of industrial pendants and wall-mounted lights (1:47–2:03).

Like *Cleansed*, most of Mitchell's set designs have ceilings meaning that it is not possible to use the normal overhead theatre lighting rig; instead, Mitchell works with her lighting designers to add lights from the side, the auditorium or from tiny strips of LED lighting embedded in the set. These lights are added subtly so that the audience does not see their source and they fill in the parts of the faces of the actors that the practical lights (or the lights through the windows) do not light. If, for example, a character is standing next to a window with sunlight pouring in, the side of their face nearest the window will be brightly lit by the sunlight, but the other side of their face may be in shadow. Mitchell's lighting designer would use lights to gently add a little light on the shaded side of the actor's face, without losing the contrast between the brightly lit side and the less lit side, as you can see in the photograph of *Women of Troy* on the left. In this way, her approach to lighting is very painterly and students may want to look at the use of lighting by the photographer Gregory Crewdson or artists like Caravaggio or Hopper.

Mitchell is also interested in how lighting can be used to create what she calls a '**psychological atmosphere**.' Students may want to reflect on the way in which different times of day affect us emotionally, like the different feelings you get sitting by a candle late at night compared to the feelings associated with the first flicker of sunrise.

Subsequently, Mitchell uses lights **naturalistically** to indicate **time** and **place**, and abstractly to create different feelings or **psychological atmospheres**. Generally, the lighting levels in Mitchell's productions are lower than in conventional theatre shows because she uses very life-like lighting to invite the audience to forget they are watching a play in a theatre. You can see examples of low lighting levels in *Cleansed* and *Women of Troy* in the *Practitioners in Practice* film (1:47–02:38).

## How Mitchell works with a lighting designer

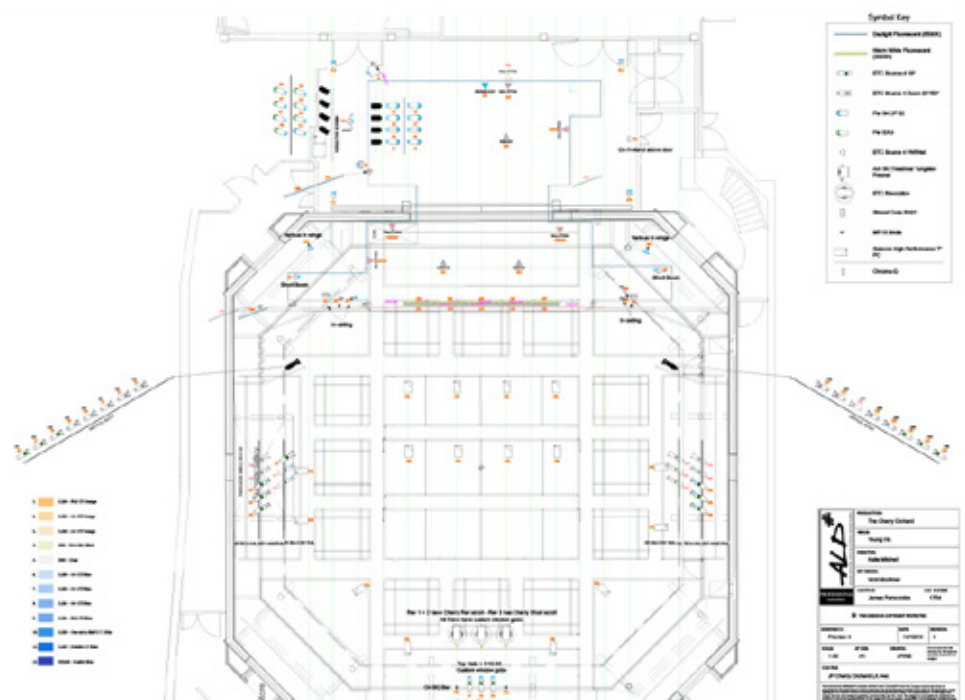
When working with a lighting designer Mitchell will communicate her interpretation of the play and information about her analysis of **place** and **time** (generated using **'Facts & Questions'** as explained in section 7 (i)). The season and time of day are the most important elements of **time** for the lighting designer to know, as lighting varies enormously across different seasons or times of day.

Mitchell may also discuss the **immediate circumstances** of a scene in case they affect **time** and **place**, for example a room with glazed skylights in daytime will look very different if it has just started raining compared to if the sun

has just come out. After establishing these three layers, Mitchell and the lighting designer will discuss where the practical lights in the scene will be positioned and whether there are any windows or other sources of natural light.

Once this **naturalistic** layer is confirmed, they will discuss the **psychological atmosphere** for each scene. The **psychological atmosphere** could be spooky or sad or funny and upbeat. Finally, Mitchell discusses any key **event** or lighting changes that need to happen in the scene/s. Mitchell will often add a subliminal and subtle lighting change at the key **event** in a scene to support the psychological choices the actors are playing.

After discussing all these aspects of the lighting, the lighting designer will work out how to achieve all the effects Mitchell wants. They will then draw up a lighting plan which is a document informing the lighting technicians where all the lights should be hung. Once the lights are hung in the right position on the lighting rig or stands (in accordance with the lighting plan), the lighting designer will then focus the lights, making sure they point in the right direction. Here is a picture of a lighting plan for *The Cherry Orchard* (Young Vic Theatre, 2014):



# Mitchell's lighting design features for naturalism

*applied practically*

## Task one: Explore the use of practical lights

The simplest ways to achieve a Mitchell lighting style is to use **practical lights** as the main light source for a scene. Before they work on any scene, students could work with one desk lamp and an actor to explore the range of effects (**naturalistic** and abstract) they can generate. For example, students could explore putting a light behind the actor's head, or to their side, or angling a desk lamp so that light is thrown up onto the face of the actor or down onto the top of their head.

This task would be enhanced if the students could achieve a blackout. Warn the students to be careful when moving lights, especially desk lights, as the shades can get very hot, and they may need heat-resistant gloves.

## Task two: Explore the naturalistic function of lighting in a scene

Students can decide on the **place** and **time** for their scene, either inventing it with an actor (if devising) or using '**Facts & Questions**' (if they are working with a play text). Students should pay particular attention to the season and time of day. Next, they can think about how the overhead lighting rig (if the school has one) can give the impression of natural light coming through windows or doors to capture day and season, and how practical lights, such as standard lamps and desk lights, can be used within the action of the scene to the same effect. Drawing a plan of the performance area (and beyond if relevant) and marking the different positions of the lights (on the overhead rig and practical lights on stage) on the plan and the direction they are pointing in is a useful process. Students could also create a mood board of photographs or images to describe the lighting ideas they are aiming for.

### **Task three:** **Explore the abstract function of lighting in a scene**

Students can determine the **psychological atmosphere** of the scene, either inventing it with actor/s (if devising) or reading the scene and reflecting on how they want to interpret it. Thinking about how they can use the lights on the overhead lighting rig (if the school has one) or practical lights on stage to shape this atmosphere is a useful process. Together with the student actor/s, they can explore the different way the overhead lighting rig and/or practical lights are positioned or angled to affect the **psychological atmosphere**.

They can then go through the key **events** in the scene and think about how changes in the overall use of lights can highlight these **events**. They might, for example, try switching a practical light on or off at a critical **event** in the scene. Or if it is possible to fade any of the theatre lights on the overhead lighting rig with a fading desk, they might want to gently fade or increase the intensity of the lighting during or after an **event**. Students could also create a mood board of photographs or images to describe the lighting ideas they are aiming for.

## Part two: Lighting design for Mitchell's Live Cinema



*The Waves*, National Theatre, 2006.

### Key lighting design features for Live Cinema

The overall aesthetic of the lighting for **Live Cinema** is the same as in the **naturalistic** work, where Mitchell uses lighting in a literal way, to communicate **time, place** and **immediate circumstances**, and in an abstract way, to create **psychological atmospheres**. In **Live Cinema** there is the same combination of natural light through doorways and windows with suspended or wall-mounted practical lighting (domestic or industrial).

The practical lights are often seen in the shot, like when we see a character writing at night at their desk next to a desk lamp. Furthermore, in **Live Cinema** the overhead lighting rig is barely used at all. Instead, the technique requires the use of film lighting approaches to light the actors in the shots, including small portable lights on stands (called Dedolights), light bouncers (which throw light on to the performers' faces), or a light boom (a tiny spotlight mounted on a stick to light the face of the actor, held by a lighting technician).

In her low-tech early **Live Cinema** productions, Mitchell also used practical lights in lieu of film lights to light the faces of the characters for the shots, but these **practical lights** were not visible in the actual shot.

### How Mitchell works with a lighting designer on Live Cinema

Mitchell works with her set designers on a **Live Cinema** production in just the same way that she works with them on her **naturalistic** productions, except she uses film lighting techniques instead of theatre lighting and the effect on the screen determines the decision-making about lighting, not the live action on stage.



*The Forbidden Zone*, Salzburg Festival, 2014.



# Mitchell's lighting design features for Live Cinema

*applied practically*

The three tasks described below develop the three **Live Cinema** set design tasks described on pages 64–66 so guide the students working on the lighting design to explore working together with the student set designers on these tasks.

## Task one: Lighting a mid-shot of a character with two practical lights

Students should work with the set designer and actor to determine the **time** and **place** the scene occurs in. As described on pages 64–66 the set designer will then make a hand-held cardboard backdrop for a **mid-shot** of the character sitting in the chosen **place**. Once the backdrop is complete, position the 'body' actor on a chair in front of a desk or table with the backdrop held up behind them and the camera operator in front of them framing up a **mid-shot** of the character's head and shoulders. Now put one practical light on the table visible inside the frame of the **mid-shot**. Then use a second practical light as a film light to light the side of the actor's face that is not lit by the first practical light in the frame. This second practical light will not be visible inside the frame of the **mid-shot**.

## Task two: Lighting a mid-shot of a character looking out of a window

As described in task two of the **Live Cinema** set design section on page 65, students can now add to the set-up in task one a hand-held transparent surface in between the face of the character and the **camera**. As in task one above, put the first practical light on the table visible inside the frame of the **mid-shot**. Next, use the second practical light as a film light to see if you can light the raindrops falling down the window. The second light shouldn't be visible in the **mid-shot** of the character looking out of the window.

### Task three: Lighting a mid-shot of a character in a moving car

As described in task three of the **Live Cinema** set design section on page 66, now the backdrop will be spun round and painted black, and the actor will move into a profile position in between the backdrop and the transparent surface. This time, the **mid-shot** will be of a character sitting in a moving car driving through a city at night-time. You can see how to do this set-up by looking at the *Practitioners in Practice* film at (25:55–26:10). Once the camera operator has framed up the **mid-shot**, use the first practical light to light the face of the character in the car. Remember we shouldn't see this practical light in frame.

Using the *Practitioners in Practice* film (26.00–26:59) as a guide, position the second practical light (pointing onto the transparent surface) and explore how you can move your hand (or a small piece of cardboard) across the light source to emulate the movement of streetlights whizzing past the moving car the character is in. Again, this light should not be visible in the frame.

Mitchell worked originally with lighting designer Paule Constable. She now works regularly with the lighting designers James Farncombe and Bethany Gupwell on her **naturalistic** work and the lighting designer Anthony Doran on her **Live Cinema** productions.

# 18

## Sound design in Mitchell's work



© Robert Day

*little scratch*, Hampstead Theatre, 2021

### Part one: Sound design for Mitchell's naturalism

#### Key sound design features of Mitchell's naturalism

Students can be encouraged to listen to the sound clip, from the start of *Cleansed*, in the *Practitioners in Practice* film (1:46–2:03). In this clip, we hear the diegetic sound of the clunking of chains and the non-diegetic abstract soundtrack of a void-like white noise, a beating heart, and a piercing university bell alarm. The effect is to plunge the audience into the frightening world of the play through layers of sound

combining **naturalistic** sounds like alarms with abstract sounds like a beating heart and a void-like white noise. This soundtrack will continue under the whole performance combining its abstract and **naturalistic** layers and changing at the key **events** in the scenes

The **naturalistic** layer includes **place**, **time** and perspective. Perspective describes the relationship between the sound and the character, for example, a fast car driving along a road will be heard differently by a character standing at the side of the road compared to a character sitting in a house adjoining the road. As with lighting design, the abstract layer of the soundscape creates a **psychological atmosphere** (like tension or relaxation) and emotion (like happiness or sadness). Mitchell always uses both the **naturalistic** and abstract layers, blending sound design with music. The soundtrack for *Cleansed* was created by a sound designer and composer working closely together to weave sound and music into a soundscape strongly influenced by how film uses both. Indeed, Mitchell is so interested in the power of this multi-layered soundscape to affect audiences that she now uses radio mics to amplify the actors' spoken word and thereby create a better balance between the words spoken and the soundscape. (Radio mics are tiny microphones hidden from the audience's view in the actors' hairline. The microphones are attached by a thin cable to a transmitter pack hidden on the actor's body which converts the audio from the microphone into radio waves which then connect to an audio mixer).

### How Mitchell works with a sound designer

When working with a sound designer, Mitchell will communicate her interpretation of the play and will also share information about **place** and **time** (generated using 'Facts & Questions' as explained in Section 7 (i) on page 32). For example, if the scene is set inside a building, Mitchell and her sound designer will discuss the sounds immediately present in the interior space, like the noise of a fridge or central heating. Then they will discuss possible sounds from outside heard through the walls or an open window in the room, like the sound of passing traffic, a distant police siren or an owl. Next, she will discuss the **psychological atmosphere** of the scene and the general abstract underscore she wants. Then she will discuss any key **event** in the action

of the scene or play where she wants a strong shift in the abstract sound underscore. In fact, Mitchell will change the abstract underscore at most **events** with subtle subliminal shifts, thereby supporting the psychological changes that occur as the actors play the **event**.

After their discussion with Mitchell, the sound designer will go away and create some sound and music sketches which they will send to Mitchell in the form of a demo recording. These short sound sketches will be developed in conversation with Mitchell and will then be integrated into rehearsals (where Mitchell always has a sound system and operator present). Using the soundscape in rehearsals allows Mitchell to blend **naturalistic** and abstract sound and music very subtly with the work she does with the actors on the six layers, particularly **events**. In the rehearsal room, the sound is played through two simple speakers but when the technical rehearsals start in the theatre, the sound designer will add more speakers on stage and sometimes in the auditorium.

Often, Mitchell works with both a sound designer and a composer. The music composed normally doesn't have any lyrics. The style and type of music is decided upon in a conversation between Mitchell and the composer in response to the interpretation or the desired **psychological atmosphere**. If Mitchell wants the production to have the atmosphere of a thriller, the composer may decide to use tense strings. If it is sci-fi, then the composer may use futuristic electronic music. Once the style of music is decided, the composer will write the music and then record it either with live musicians, or by working on a recording app (this is the same technology that songwriters and beatmakers use). The composer and sound designer will weave the strands of sound and music so tightly together that sometimes it will be difficult to distinguish between the separate strands.



# Mitchell's sound design features for naturalism

*applied practically*

## Task one:

### Put together a naturalistic soundscape for a scene

Students can establish the **time**, **place** and **immediate circumstances** of the scene they are working on, either inventing it with the actor (if devising) or using 'Facts & Questions' in 7 (i) (if they are working with a play text). Students can be reminded to think about the sound perspective (or the relationship between the character and any sound effects being created). Then students can find or record sounds for these three layers. When the scene is being acted, the sound design student can play the soundscape in the background through a laptop, smartphone, or sound system to enhance the scene's **naturalism**. Ambient night-time noises such as owls or crickets, for example, might take a **naturalistic** performance of the opening scene of Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (set in a remote countryside location) from a quiet flatness to full life.

## Task two:

### Put together an abstract soundscape for a scene

Students can decide on the **psychological atmosphere** of the scene they worked on in task one and create a low-level abstract (non-diegetic) soundscape to express that atmosphere. Next, ask them to identify the key **events** in the scene and together with the actors, explore shifting the volume or quality of the abstract soundscape at these **events**. Allow the actors to practice doing the scene with the abstract soundscape a few times so they are comfortable with the volume. If there is a microphone available in the school setting, student actors may want to explore speaking the text into the microphone with the sound designer trying out different volumes for the abstract soundscape.

### **Task three: Blend the naturalistic (diegetic) and abstract (non-diegetic) sound layers**

Students can blend the **naturalistic** soundscape from task one with the abstract soundscape from task two. The simplest way to blend these two layers is to attach a smartphone or laptop to a sound system. Ideally there would be two smartphones or laptops which could play back sound alternately, and the sound design student would fade between the two smartphones or laptops using mixing desk faders, the same as a DJ would fade between tracks. Students could as easily fade manually between the two smartphones without a mixing desk. Once a system for blending the two layers is set up, the students can practice the scene again with the actors to ensure the sound is working with the spoken text and/or action of the scene.

## Part two: Sound design for Mitchell's Live Cinema



*Fraulein Julie*, Schaubühne, Berlin 2010.

### Key sound design features for Live Cinema

Mitchell also uses a combination of **naturalistic** and abstract soundscapes (suggesting **psychological atmosphere** and emotion) in her **Live Cinema** productions. But unlike the **naturalistic** work where the speakers are mostly placed on the stage level, in **Live Cinema** the speakers are mounted behind the projection screen so that the **sound** is delivered in the same way it is in a cinema.

The **sound** from the live action on stage (both the spoken dialogue and the sound of movement, like a character scratching or opening a tin) is recorded by microphones hidden above the actors' hairlines or mounted on hand-held booms. Hand-held booms are used when making films – a boom is a pole with a microphone mounted at the end of it. On a film set, the boom operator holds the boom high above the actors' heads (out of frame) to catch the dialogue and **sound** in a scene being filmed. You can see a boom operator on stage, following the action in Mitchell's **Live Cinema** production of *Orlando* in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 16:13–16:43. You will notice that the person holding the boom is standing close to the actors and is visible to the audience.

The **voice-overs** for **Live Cinema** shows are mostly delivered in a sound-sealed glass box where the actor reads the **voice-overs** into a microphone synchronizing the text to the images projected on the screen above the stage action. You can see a sound sealed-glass box with a voice-over actor inside it in the *Practitioners in Practice* film at 14:28–14:51.

In the **Live Cinema** productions, Mitchell's sound designers have adapted the **foley** film technique to create the sound effects to match the live **action**. The sound effects are amplified on speakers behind the screen, making them the same volume and quality as in the cinema. Originally the actors doing **foley** in Mitchell's **Live Cinema** were just working at a table with a microphone (as you can see in *Fraulein Julie* at 15:31–16:07) or using boxes full of different textures, like gravel or sand to do footsteps (as you can see in the photograph of *Waves* on page 62). Later Mitchell's sound designers positioned the **foley** actors in a sound-sealed glazed box to improve the quality of the **sound** (as you can see in the left of the frame in *The Yellow Wallpaper* at 17:07–18:00).

### How Mitchell works with a sound designer on Live Cinema

Mitchell's work with sound designers on **Live Cinema** uses elements of her work on **naturalism** but focuses much more on film **sound** techniques to bring the audience closer to the lived subjective experience of the character on the screen. The work with the composer in **Live Cinema** is the same as with **naturalistic** productions. However, in some **Live Cinema** shows, the **music** is played live by an orchestra (for example, with **Live Cinema** opera productions) or by a small band in a sound-sealed box (see page 42). And in some cases, existing **music** is used to denote a particular historical period, or because a character is listening to something on a radio or smartphone.

# Mitchell's sound design features for Live Cinema

*applied practically*

## Task one: Exploring **voice-overs**.

Students can decide on the **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances** for their scene. They can invent it with the student actors (if devising) or use 'Facts & Questions' 7 (i) if they are working with a play text. As in the Lesson Plan 11 (i) (section 2. **Add the voice-over**) on pages 48-49, seat the **voice-over** actor (with microphone) and the 'body' actor doing the character's **actions** side by side with the sound design student watching to give feedback. The 'body' actor can repeat a simple action like sending a text message or reading a book. Then the **voice-over** actor can **improvise** various **voice-overs** to see how different **voice-overs** change the way the audience understand the character. For example, the **voice-over** could just describe the process of texting someone on a smartphone, like 'I wonder what my friend Ciaran will think of the blog post I made...' and so on. Or the **voice-over** could be saying something miles from the action, like 'When I get home, I am going to light some candles and meditate...'

Remind them that the **voice-over** should not be acted like speaking text on stage but should be closer to how thoughts sound inside our heads. Working together with the student doing the sound design, the **voice-over** actor could explore different volumes, pitches and intonation when speaking the text, to make the **voice-over** sound like thoughts. If there is a mixing desk, adjustments to the quality of the voice could also be explored to make the **voice-over** sound more like thoughts. If they do not have a microphone, the students can simply imagine there is one.

## Task two: Exploring **foley** (with **voice-overs**)

Following on from task one, students can add in another person to do the **foley** sound effects alongside the sound designer and the **action** and **voice-over** actors. They can use the same layers of **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances** to structure an **improvisation**. Just as in Lesson Plan 11 (i) (in Section 3. **Add the foley sound effects**) on page 46, the students can explore the use of **foley** sound effects whilst the 'body' actor **improvises** a simple **action** like taking off a coat and sitting down to paint. The **foley** actor and the sound designer can listen to the **sound** of the coat coming off or the brush moving across the canvas, and then find objects to create the **foley** effects to match those **sounds**. For a coat coming off they could just rub another piece of fabric together, or for the brush and paint, they may use a small mop in water. The sound made through **foley** will amplify the minute **naturalistic** detail. Once the **foley** is decided on, the **voice-over** can be re-integrated into the scene and if there is a mixing desk, the sound student can explore different balances between **voice-over** and **foley**. Sound design students may find it useful to reference a range of professional **foley** artists on social media who lead tutorials in the practice.

## Task three: Exploring **sound/music** (with **voice-over** and **foley**)

Following on from task two, the sound design student can explore adding **music** and **sound** to the **improvisations** with the students doing **action**, **voice-over**, and **foley**. They can use the same layers of **character biography**, **place**, **time** and **immediate circumstances** to structure an **improvisation**. Just as in Lesson Plan 11 (ii) (section 5. **Adding music**) on page 49, the sound designer, together with the **action**, **voice-over** and **foley** actors, can explore the use of **naturalistic sound** (like a car engine or birdsong), diegetic **sounds** (like someone playing a song on a speaker) and non-diegetic soundtracks. This will allow them to see how the different use of **music** and **sound** effects the meaning of the scene they are **improvising**.

Mitchell worked originally with sound designer, Gareth Fry. She now works regularly with the sound designers Donato Wharton and composers, Melanie Wilson and Paul Clark. Paul Clark has put together a very useful resource about how to write music called Ear Opener, which may be of interest to any students interested in this aspect of theatre-making: [earopener.co.uk](http://earopener.co.uk)



# Student Resources

A page of a playscript with hand-written **events** and **intentions**

Event ⑧

E ⑧

*Joan starts shivering*

*Harper: to make Joan feel better*  
*Joan: to convince Harper she is ok*

HARPER Come here a minute. You're shivering. Are you hot?  
JOAN No, I'm alright.  
HARPER You're over-tired.

Event ⑨

E ⑨

*Harper tells Joan to go to bed*

Go to bed.

*Harper: to get Joan to go to bed*  
*Joan: to make Harper realise she has a problem*

I'm going to bed myself.

Event ⑩

E ⑩

*Joan tells Harper she went out just now*

HARPER I went out.  
JOAN When? Just now?  
HARPER Just now.

*Harper: to make Joan feel better*  
*Joan: to make Harper realise this place is different to her home.*

HARPER No wonder you're cold.  
It's hot in the daytime here but it's cold at night.  
JOAN The stars are brighter here than at home.  
HARPER It's because there's no streetlights.  
JOAN I couldn't see much.  
HARPER I don't expect you could.

Event ⑪

E ⑪

*Harper asks Joan how she got out*

How did you get out?

## Vocabulary

Mitchell Key Vocabulary List	Naturalism Terms	Live Cinema Terms
Naturalism/naturalistic	Character biography	Film script
Multimedia	Place	Action
Live Cinema	Time	Voice-over
Female experience/women's lived experience	Immediate circumstances	Foley
Feminism	Events	Camera
Psychological realism	Intentions	Sound/music
Psychological atmosphere		Editing
Visualisation/visualising/visualise		Motion
Improvisation/improvising/improvise		
Ecofeminist		
Mid-shot		
Close-up		

## Katie Mitchell Key Vocabulary Quiz

- 1 Which Mitchell term refers to acting onstage in a believable, solid reality?
- 2 What is the term from Mitchell's Live Cinema that might be applied to presenting a scene with a moving car?
- 3 Which 'ism' does Mitchell commonly relate her practice to?
- 4 What is the name of Mitchell's invention that combines film and stage work?
- 5 If I am exploring the season in a scene, which element of Mitchell's system for naturalism am I using?
- 6 Rather than telling an actor they are 'good' or 'bad,' which abstract noun does Mitchell look for in scene acting?

### Answers:

1 Naturalism 2 Motion 3 Feminism 4 Live Cinema 5 Time 6 Clarity

Mitchell Notes Organisation Grid

Character Biography	Place	Time
Immediate Circumstances	Events	Intentions

# 19

## Set design worksheet

Below you can see images from three productions:

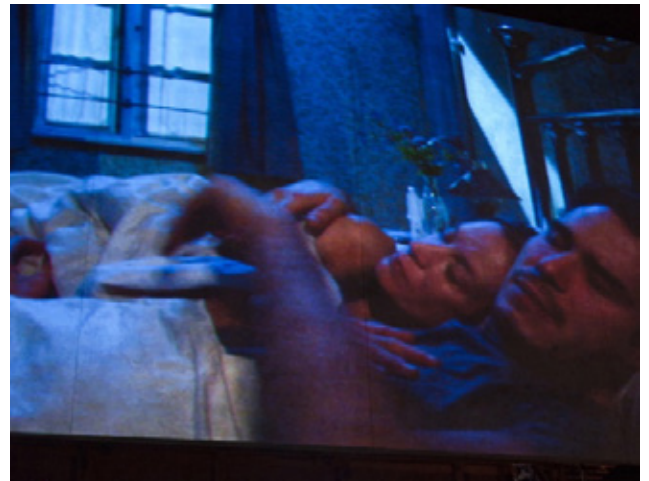
- 1 Chloe Lamford's *Ophelias Zimmer*
- 2 Alex Eales's *The Rest Will Be Familiar to You From Cinema*
- 3 Giles's Cadle's *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Using this (non-exhaustive) vocabulary list below as starting point, annotate the images with set design vocabulary:

**worn, camera, naturalistic, non-naturalistic, colour, texture and shape.**

*The Rest Will Be Familiar to You from Cinema*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, 2013

*The Yellow Wallpaper*, Schaubuhne, Berlin, 2013

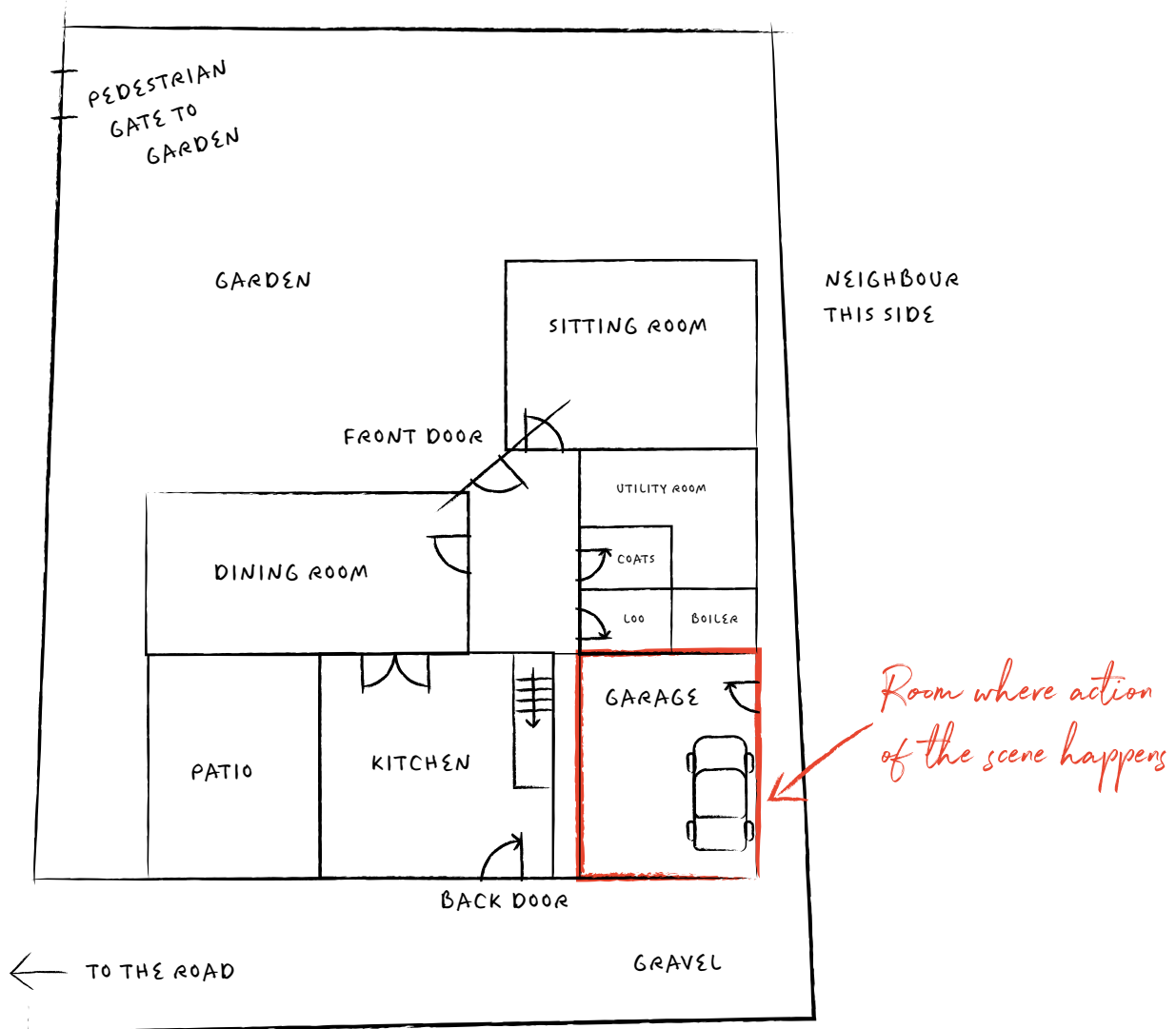


*Ophelia's Zimmer*, Schaubuhne, Berlin 2015



# 19

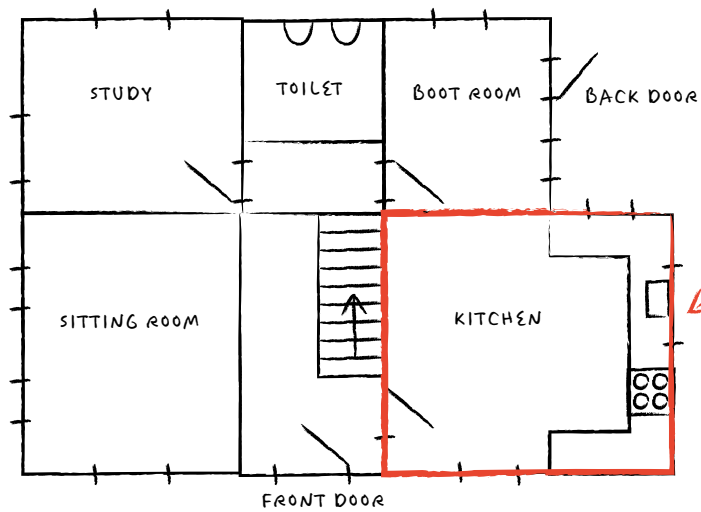
## Ground plan for *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* by Martin Crimp, National Theatre, 2019



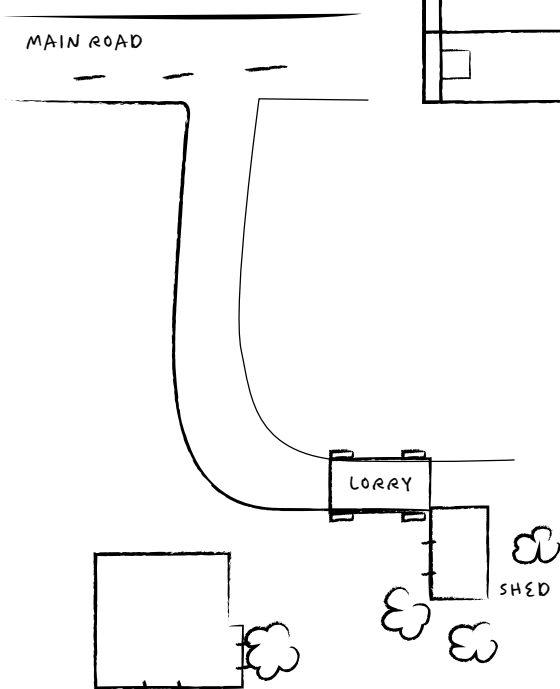
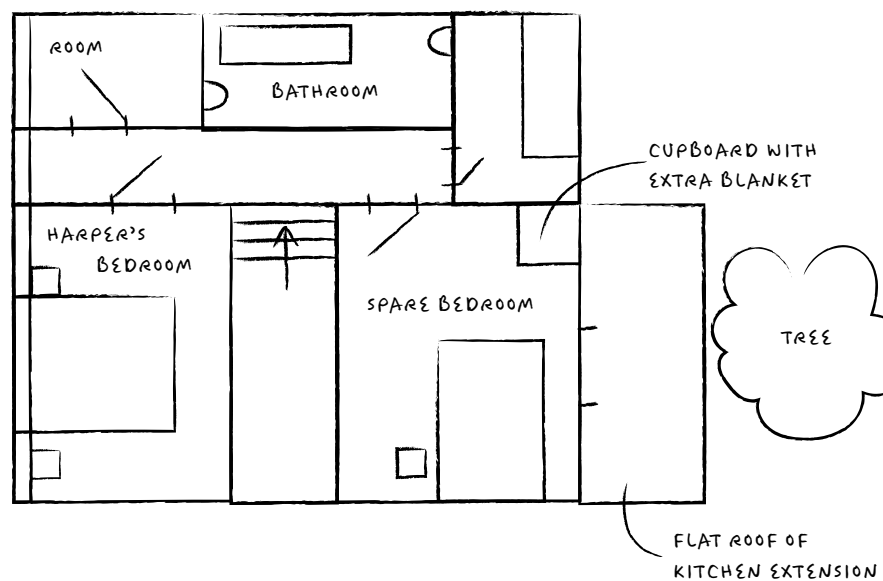


Ground Plan For *Far Away*

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



## Useful Links

### Practitioners in Practice film:

[www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources/practitioners-in-practice-katie-mitchell-film](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources/practitioners-in-practice-katie-mitchell-film)

### Naturalism

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#### *Cleansed:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7Z\\_5JhnkTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7Z_5JhnkTA)

#### *Beauty and the Beast:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=joYZE0f4Eyo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joYZE0f4Eyo)

#### *Ophelias Zimmer:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=iGUTiCr3Snk&t=67s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGUTiCr3Snk&t=67s)

#### *Anatomy of a Suicide:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=TmjikCg2yfY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmjikCg2yfY)  
[youtube.com/watch?v=B2cfZ2yyU\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2cfZ2yyU_o)

### Live Cinema

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#### Overview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miNHkzTTZjk> (2.12- 5.02)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GokvM33fJAc>

#### *Some trace of her:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=QrBiblhUQHY&t=12s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrBiblhUQHY&t=12s)

#### *Orlando:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=J1HOsi-rlfw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1HOsi-rlfw)

#### *Waves:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=XqJxl3SNFlc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqJxl3SNFlc)

#### *The Forbidden Zone:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=jSj7cnwY-sg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSj7cnwY-sg)  
[youtube.com/watch?v=NOdzJWssnjK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOdzJWssnjK)

#### *Maladie de la Mort:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_bKUz7kNTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_bKUz7kNTA)

### Conversations

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#### With Dan Rebellato:

[youtube.com/watch?v=42Z1xgqY0mM&t=113s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42Z1xgqY0mM&t=113s)

#### With Ariane Mnouckine:

[youtube.com/watch?v=9TGjvifcxAY&t=3573s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TGjvifcxAY&t=3573s)

#### With Ben Whishaw:

[youtube.com/watch?v=NmqjN\\_tf8g0&t=678s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmqjN_tf8g0&t=678s)

### Children's theatre

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#### *Beauty and the Beast:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf3GW-tcySg>

#### *Hansel and Gretel:*

[youtube.com/watch?v=AkF8JKh8tvY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkF8JKh8tvY)

**This Education Pack has been co-written by  
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**To explore more educational resources from  
National Theatre Learning, please visit:  
[www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore)**

