**Approaches to understanding and using Katie Mitchell’s Events technique in professional and pedagogical contexts**

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**Abstract**: This article discusses Katie Mitchell’s Events technique. I locate the technique within the Stanislavskian tradition and identify the ways in which it differs from the approach of other practitioners, analysing the advantages and disadvantages of Mitchell’s approach. Katie Mitchell’s significance as a pedagogue of directors and actors in addition to her role as one of Britain’s leading theatre directors is established. Different approaches to identifying and naming Events from practitioners such as Mike Alfreds, Tatiana Olear, Bella Merlin, Elen Bowman, Sam Kogan and Stanislavski himself are considered. I argue for an approach that allows different characters to have Events at different times and that involves giving Events subjective names. I then discuss some practical approaches that I have developed in my professional and pedagogical practice to applying Events in the rehearsal room and the university classroom.

**Keywords**: Katie Mitchell, events, Stanislavski, acting pedagogy, Mike Alfreds, Tatiana Olear, Bella Merlin, Sam Kogan, Elen Bowman

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***Introduction***

My long-standing interest in and use of Events began when I learned about them from British director Katie Mitchell during a two-week workshop for directors held in London in 2006 and organised by Living Pictures Productions. Since then I have used them as a cornerstone of my work as a professional director and as a core element of my pedagogy in my teaching work. I believe that they are one of the key ways in which acting can be made both believable and clear. In 2014 I became module leader for London South Bank University’s Acting a role module which introduces our first year undergraduates to Stanislavski and I introduced the teaching of Events to that module. Shortly after this they were adopted as a core technique that students would use in every module of their acting pathway.

Events are one of the foundational elements of acting technique that our students learn and apply again and again, along with Objectives, Actions, pictures of place and pictures of what you are talking and thinking about. A significant proportion of feedback we give students about their work focuses on experiencing Events and making them clear. In classes that are focussed on practical acting work and faced with a lot to cover in limited contact hours, I tend to say that the Events process that we will learn and use comes from Katie Mitchell and that she learned it from Russian practitioners trained in the Stanislavskian tradition. Neither of these statements is exactly true, however. What I teach is not exactly what Katie Mitchell taught me and what she does is different from what she was taught. This is a natural part of the evolution of the teaching of acting, which is rooted as much or arguably more in the oral history of the rehearsal room or classroom than in textual accounts. However, this process of evolution involves choices, additions and erasures and it is valuable to analyse what these were and the effects that they have, which I attempt to do in this article. I will begin by examining whether Katie Mitchell did simply learn Events from Russian practitioners trained in the Stanislavskian tradition.

# *Locating Katie Mitchell in the Stanislavskian tradition*

Katie Mitchell is widely recognised as one of Britain’s greatest living theatre directors. *The Guardian* newspaper has called her “the closest thing British theatre has to a genuine auteur.”[[1]](#endnote-1)Lisa Peck summarises her career clearly and succinctly:

From 1990 to 1993 she directed her company, Classics on a Shoestring, and in the decade that followed she was appointed as an Associate Director to the Royal Court, the RSC and the National Theatre. Over the last decade Mitchell has made more work in Germany, Austria and France, countries that champion experimental work.[[2]](#endnote-2)

With Mike Alfreds, Mitchell is one of the only established British theatre directors who explicitly, publicly and consciously position themselves as directing with a Stanislavskian methodology. As David Shirley writes, Mitchell is “renowned for her rigorous application of a Stanislavskian approach” and “unequivocal in her endorsement of and commitment to the methods he developed.” [[3]](#endnote-3) As Emma Cole puts it, “Mitchell’s directorial approach is explicitly based upon the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Mitchell is keen, however, to distance herself from Stanislavski’s early period when emotion memory played an important role and from Lee Strasberg’s American Method:

Everything comes directly from late Stanislavski. But not early Stan (sic): not the ‘emotional memory’ section, more the ‘physical actions’ section, which he discovered later on, so not the Method.[[5]](#endnote-5)

In her book *The Director’s Craft* Mitchell writes that the techniques she uses were developed through reading Stanislavski’s writings, through observation of Lev Dodin’s rehearsal process and through classes that she undertook with Tatiana Olear and with Elen Bowman. Jonathan Pitches traces the Russian lineages of these practitioners - a line from Stanislavski to Maria Knebel to Sam Kogan to Elen Bowman and a line from Stanislavski to Boris Zon to Lev Dodin to Tatiana Olear.[[6]](#endnote-6) While the techniques that Mitchell describes in her book are rooted in what she learned from these people, I would argue that her techniques and the ways in which she defines and applies them are distinctively her own. In 2011 she said “We are quite close to Stanislavski, a few generations … I do pure Tatiana and Tatiana does pure Dodin and Dodin does pure Stanislavski, I mean there will be little modifications.”[[7]](#endnote-7) This slippage from “pure” to “little modifications” is revealing. I would argue that these “little modifications” are significant and worthy of study. As Shirley writes, “there is no sense in which Mitchell could be described as a Stanislavskian fundamentalist. Indeed, rather than simply replicate his approach, she has consistently sought to refine and adapt his work.”[[8]](#endnote-8) I would argue that one of Mitchell’s most significant “little modifications” is around Events. Understanding these modifications and the impact that they have is important not merely because of their effects on Mitchell’s own significant oeuvre but because, in her role as pedagogue she has influenced a whole generation of British directors and actors.

***Katie Mitchell as pedagogue***

Mitchell’s very particular take on the Stanislavski System was adopted or partially adopted by a number of British professional directors, partly because of her book but more, I believe, because of the series of two-week workshops that she ran with emerging professional directors in London in the 2000s, both at the National Theatre Studio and in a series of workshops organised by Living Pictures Productions, for whom I was working at the time. Directors who took part in these workshops include many who have gone on to make significant work in their own right, including Michael Longhurst, Lyndsey Turner, Christopher Haydon, Amy Hodge, Jon Spooner, Elgiva Field and Zoe Svendsen, to name only a few. I myself took part in two of these two-week workshops and the understanding I outline here draws on my journals from those workshops as well as from Katie Mitchell’s book and from published interviews with her.

Lisa Peck has usefully written the first detailed examination of Mitchell as a pedagogue, though she emphasises Mitchell’s role as a pedagogue of actors (those who appear in her plays) rather than of directors. She does acknowledge that “Mitchell’s commitment to developing pedagogy also extends to directors” and claims that “her guide to directing, *The Director’s Craft,* makes a significant contribution to the pedagogy of directing”[[9]](#endnote-9) – but directors do not form the focus of her study. I would argue that Mitchell’s emphasis on Events in her rehearsal process and her role as a pedagogue of both directors and actors means that Events have come to occupy an important place in British professional and pedagogical practice and are therefore worthy of deeper consideration. Let us turn, therefore, to how Mitchell understands and defines Events.

***Mitchell’s understanding of Events***

In *The Director’s Craft*, Mitchell defines Events as “the moments in an act or scene when something changes.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Further to this, she explains that Events are the moments when the character’s intention changes. Intention is Mitchell’s word for what others call Objectives or Tasks. She defines Intentions as “what one character wants to do to or change in another character”[[11]](#endnote-11)

While this paper is not focused on Intentions, they are intimately connected with Events and it is noteworthy that it is very important to Mitchell that an Intention is always directed towards another character. This is also true of Mike Alfreds, who writes that “a scene objective is what a character wants and is trying to obtain from the other characters throughout a specific portion of text.”[[12]](#endnote-12) This is not the case, however, with Bella Merlin, who gives examples of objectives such as “I want to live in a bigger house” and “I want to star in a major role in that movie.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Sam Kogan also discusses purposes that are not explicitly directed at another character, such as “to go to your living room and make a phone call to your bank manager”[[14]](#endnote-14) Stanislavski himself stipulates that Tasks need to be active and cannot be expressed with nouns[[15]](#endnote-15) but includes examples both of Tasks that are directed to another character (e.g. “I want to bring him back to life”) but also those which are not, at least in any explicit way (e.g. “I want to appear business-like”)[[16]](#endnote-16)

Mitchell then goes on to clarify that “intentions only change at Events.”[[17]](#endnote-17) As she puts it: “We regularly find ourselves trying to achieve one thing when something happens which changes what we want to achieve.”[[18]](#endnote-18) This “something” that happens is what Mitchell would call an Event.

For Mitchell, identifying Events is an important element of the director’s preparation before rehearsals start[[19]](#endnote-19) and then a key part of her work in the rehearsal room with actors. Events are part of how she teaches her process to the actors with whom she is working in the rehearsal room through improvisations from actors’ own past experiences. She will ask actors to prepare improvisations of things that happened to them in real life that relate to the themes of the play and then afterwards, as well as discussing themes, she encourages the company to identify where the main Events were and speculate about what the intentions of the different people involved might have been.[[20]](#endnote-20) Events then form part of the table work of script analysis and are then a crucial element of scene rehearsals.

Mitchell’s process of rehearsing scenes is influenced by Stanislavski’s Active Analysis, filtered through Maria Knebel and Tatiana Olear. It involves improvising a chunk of a scene between one Event and the next, ensuring that actors are playing their Intentions clearly and accurately connecting to the time and place of a scene, without necessarily using the words that the playwright wrote for the scene. Much of her feedback to actors revolves around these four key concepts (Intentions, Events, Time, Place). The process of reading and then getting up and improvising is similar to how Bella Merlin discusses Active Analysis, although Merlin describes doing this process for a scene rather than for the chunk of a scene between one Event and the next.[[21]](#endnote-21) Maria Knebel has a more flexible approach to the length of section that one should take for an étude in Active Analysis:

For a start, we take a fragment, and with this fragment, the actor goes on stage to make an étude. The size of the fragment can vary. It depends on the complexity of the play, the complexity of the episode, and whether the actors do not understand something or, on the other hand, whether they have easily and productively mastered the material[[22]](#endnote-22)

Like Mitchell, however, Knebel does emphasise the importance of connecting to time and place during études: “In what conditions does the action take place? Summer or winter, cold or hot? What time of day?”[[23]](#endnote-23)

It is perhaps significant that Mitchell as a director was particularly interested in Events because it is through these moments of change that an audience can see a story unfold. While a range (or all) of Stanislavski’s techniques might be useful for the actor, a director might be most interested in the techniques that most enable clear storytelling. As Mitchell says when discussing Events, “The change is visible because the characters alter what they are doing.”[[24]](#endnote-24) This is perhaps particularly true for directors working in the British context of relatively short rehearsal periods (typically 3 to 6 weeks). Mitchell also works with the design team to bring out Events in a performance. She describes an example from her production of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* at London’s National Theatre:

“At the same time as the event occurred, the lighting designer Paule Constable subtly altered the lighting state, and the room darkened ever so slightly as if a cloud was just passing across the sun. The sound designer, Gareth Fry, added a barely perceptible low bass rumble to underscore the actions in the aftermath of the event.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

The most controversial element of Mitchell’s definition of Events is that she believes that an Event needs to affect all characters on stage at the same time. She writes: “an Event is the moment in the action when a change occurs *and this change affects everyone present.*”[[26]](#endnote-26)We will return to this later but before then it would be helpful to consider where Mitchell’s concept of Events comes from and how it is different from earlier approaches.

# *Other approaches to Events*

Mitchell credits Tatiana Olear with her understanding of Events. She said “The thing that [Olear] showed me, which radically changed my whole structure of thinking about plays, is that a play is a series of changes that we watch. You can call them events.”[[27]](#endnote-27) I will here attempt to trace the lineage of this idea and analyse some of the other ways in which the word Event has been used in discussions of Stanislavski-based rehearsal processes.

In Sharon Marie Carnicke’s *Stanislavski in Focus* she outlines how Stanislavski used the word Event (*Sobytie*) in his literary theory, evidenced most clearly in his work on *Tartuffe*. It would seem that the word had a wider meaning for Stanislavski than the narrow way in which Mitchell defines it. Carnicke writes:

Stanislavski locates the basic structural element of drama in the ‘event’ (*sobytie*). The play begins with ‘an inciting event’ (*iskhodnoe sobytie*) and its ‘story’ (*fabula*) is told through a sequence of events, each of which involves conflict. The various events can be prioritized by the actors and director as ‘main’ or ‘incidental’, depending upon their relative importance to the story. The ‘contradictory tasks’ of the various characters produce the conflicts to be performed. As Kedrov taught, the play is ‘structured as an uninterrupted chain of events, infused with conflict.’[[28]](#endnote-28)

This suggests that Stanislavski understood an Event as a happening that occurs over a period of time rather than a specific moment or period of change as Mitchell most commonly defines it. For Stanislavski, they are a series of happenings rather than a series of changes. Maria Knebel also seems to describe Events as happenings in the story, referring to: “the important events of the story that form the basis of the plot.”[[29]](#endnote-29) This view is supported by Bella Merlin who defines an Event as “a happening without which the scene cannot unfurl.”[[30]](#endnote-30) For her, it is essentially the major happening or incident in a scene and can either “be a split-second MOMENT OF DECISION…or it can take months to burgeon.” [[31]](#endnote-31)

Sam Kogan has his own concept of Events, which are much less concerned with external visibility than Mitchell’s and instead understands Events as internal changes. In his book *The Science of Acting* he writes that “An Event is anything which intensifies our thinking”[[32]](#endnote-32) and goes on to claim that an Event is “intensified thinking itself” and is differentiated from a Happening which is “a change in the physical world.”[[33]](#endnote-33) He explains this using the very same example of a brick flying through a window that Mitchell uses to explain Events, but whereas Mitchell claims this is an Event, Kogan argues that it is not. He writes that “it’s not the flying brick that’s the Event, it’s the thinking about it that is.”[[34]](#endnote-34) In other words: “The Event is the intensified thinking about the Happening.”[[35]](#endnote-35) Kogan’s arguments can sometimes seem counterintuitive, but the case he makes for the fundamental subjectivity of Events is useful, as is the focus this brings to what happens inside us at a moment of change. This focus on the internal process of the actor can be very beneficial for both the actor in training and the actor in rehearsal.

We may now return to the question of whether an Event needs to affect all characters on stage at the same time. As mentioned above, Mitchell cites the origin of her understanding of events as Tatiana Olear, saying “it was only when Tatiana Olear taught me about events that I suddenly realised how to divide up the text using events as bookends of each section…When Tatiana introduced me to them in 2000, it was a complete revelation and my ability to structure and shape my work improved hugely.”[[36]](#endnote-36) However, when friends of mine attended a workshop with Olear in London, they asked her about this issue and she said that different characters could of course have Events at different times.

Often in a play it makes sense for all the characters in a scene to have an Event at the same time - when a character makes a major revelation or when a new character enters, for example. However, I would argue that insisting that this is always the case (as Mitchell does) can lead one to depart from a playwright’s intentions for reasons that might arguably result from directorial dogma rather than directorial choice. Mitchell’s desire to ensure that Events happen for all characters on stage at the same time leads her into some strange directorial choices such as in the first scene of *The Seagull* :“Masha informs Medvedenko that she does not love him” which needs to be an Event for Yakov and the workmen too.[[37]](#endnote-37) More significantly, in her production of *The Seagull* at the National Theatre in London it also meant that in the final moments of the play Dorn had to announce Konstantin’s death loudly to all present rather than quietly saying it only to Arkadina.

The other effect of this principle is that it can sometimes deprive scenes of dramatic irony. For example, a powerful dramatic moment can be achieved in a play by a character casually mentioning something that has a huge impact on another character, unbeknownst to them. There is a moment in Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* when Jim mentions that he is engaged and Laura, who had thought that they were on a date, has to conceal her reaction. In such moments, one character’s life can change irrevocably while the other character does not even notice that anything has changed. It can be interesting and poignant for audiences to see one character change while another remains oblivious but within Mitchell’s rules about Events, this is not possible. Other practitioners who describe their process as rooted in Stanislavski do allow for the objectives of different characters to change at different times, including Mike Alfreds.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Drawing on Mitchell’s notion that Intentions change at Events, we teach our students at London South Bank University that an Event can be caused by three different things:

1. The character achieves their Objective
2. The character gives up on their Objective
3. Something happens that changes what the character wants. This, which is probably the most frequent cause of Events, can relate to something another character does, a revelation that they make or the entry or exit of a character.

These are principles that I have developed through my professional practice and pedagogy and draw on Mitchell’s idea that the Event is the moment where a character’s Objective changes.

Mitchell clearly states that one should “be careful you do not mistake a subject change for an event.” Bella Merlin echoes this, writing “it’s not very helpful to have too many divisions. While your urge may be to mark every single change in the subject-matter, these changes may simply be little diversions in a larger current which is surging the action forward, rather than a complete break in the flow of a scene.”[[39]](#endnote-39) This is a point that we need to reiterate frequently to our students. I sometimes resort to proposing principles such as that there are unlikely to be more than three events in two pages of dialogue. There are clearly exceptions to this principle: there is a scene in Act Four of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* between Hedda and Tesman where the Events come thick and fast, for example. However, this principle can help the students avoid the temptation to put too many Events in. When they do, it can make a scene feel somewhat jittery and detract from the Events that are really important and which should be the focus of the scene. We have discussed identifying Events; let us now turn to the process of naming them.

# *Naming Events and Bits*

There are arguably two main approaches to naming events: the neutral approach and the subjective approach. Mitchell is firmly in the neutral camp. She writes: “Once you have identified an event give it a simple and clean name, like: “Masha informs Medvedenko that she does not love him.”[[40]](#endnote-40) This approach is probably linked to the principle that all characters on stage must have an Event at the same time. Each character will have a different reaction to the Event so giving it a neutral name is appropriate. If she were to name Events more subjectively, this could seem to be privileging one character over another. Though it would be possible for each actor to name the same Event from their own character’s perspective, this could lead to confusion in practical discussions, for example when the director proposes rehearsing the section of Act Four from Event A to Event B. If one abandons the principle that all Events must affect every character on stage, this allows one the option of naming Events more subjectively. As we have seen, Kogan understands Events in a much more subjective way, defining them as “intensified thinking itself” and differentiates them from Happenings, which are “a change in the physical world.”[[41]](#endnote-41) Elen Bowman, who taught Mitchell[[42]](#endnote-42) and was taught by Kogan taught me to give things subjective names, to help the actor connect with them.

My own approach to naming Events, which I use in my pedagogy at London South Bank University and also used in a series of productions with my company fanSHEN[[43]](#endnote-43) is to give them a short, punchy, emotive title – essentially something that a character might think to themselves at the moment where something changes for them. Some examples of Event names that I discuss with students include: “snog”, “it worked!”, “Tom drops a bomb”, “I’m so selfish”. In this way, Events are connected to the idea of the inner monologue. According to Bella Merlin the inner monologue is:

exactly what it says it is: a silent INNER MONOLOGUE to yourself, expanding, justifying, debating, deflecting whatever’s going on externally…Just as we do in everyday life, we should be listening to our performance partners and mentally arguing or agreeing with what’s being said.[[44]](#endnote-44)

We find Stanislavski himself explaining the technique in *Stanislavski Directs* by Nikolai Gorchakov:

“Let’s do an étude. You two begin the scene again. Sophia Nikolaevna will keep to her text, but you, Angelina Osipovna, speak not only your text but also all the thoughts that come into your mind during the scene.”[[45]](#endnote-45)

Obviously, the inner monologue is continuous whereas Events are sporadic but I find it a useful principle when naming Events to ask what the character might be thinking at the moment of the Event and make this the name of the Event. A positive side effect of this in my pedagogy is that I teach Events before inner monologue so when we reach inner monologue, the idea of putting the character’s inner thoughts into words does not seem alien.

To give a concrete example of what I mean, here is an example of one interpretation of the first scene of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*:

Semyon Objective 1: I want you to give me an answer to my proposal

Masha Objective 1: I want you to talk about anything apart from your proposal

Event: (neutrally phrased) Masha informs Semyon she does not love him (Subjectively phrased) for him – “rejected”, for her - “it’s done” or “it’s over with”

Semyon Objective 2: I want you to think I’m not affected by the rejection

Masha Objective 2: I want you to feel better

Obviously, there are multiple ways in which one could phrase these Objectives and Events, the suggestions above are merely examples to illustrate what I mean about the difference between neutral and subjective names for Events.

Because the Objective arises from the Event, this leaves us with a question of what the first Objective of the scene arises from. As the source of the first Objective isn’t exactly a moment of change, I follow Elen Bowman’s lead and call it the Opening Circumstance, but I name it in the same sort of way that I would name an Event. Mitchell refers to this as the trigger event of the scene and tends to improvise this before proceeding to work on the scene.

As far as I have been able to discover from reading his works and words that have been translated into English, Stanislavski does not seem to have named Events. He did, however, consider it important to name Bits or Episodes. It seems from reading Benedetti’s translation of *An Actor’s Work*, that Stanislavski uses the two terms (Bits and Episodes) interchangeably, for example when he says: ‘Let’s take the first two Bits, two episodes.”[[46]](#endnote-46) In the text, Stanislavski writes:

Important questions came next, namely, how to derive Tasks from Bits. The psychotechnique of this process consists of devising an appropriate name for the Bit under examination, preferably one which characterizes its meaning.[[47]](#endnote-47)

It would appear, therefore, that for Stanislavski the naming process is a key part of the process of arriving at the Task, or Objective. When he gives some examples of these names later in *An Actor’s Work*, he seems to be in the neutral naming camp, with Mitchell:

In another exercise, Tortsov split up the story of the ‘goodly person’ into a series of episodes, which had to be highlighted and clearly outlined:

Episode One: The goodly person arrives.

Episode Two: He learns why he can’t see the person he wants.

Episode Three: He is upset and wonders whether to wait or leave.

Episode Four: He takes offence, decides to leave and never come back[[48]](#endnote-48)

Mike Alfreds in his book *Different Every Night* also tends to name episodes in quite a neutral way e.g. “Lopakhin and Dunyasha confirm that Ranyevskaya has arrived.”[[49]](#endnote-49)

Elen Bowman, by contrast, seeks out emotive names that give actors a sense of the emotional feel of the episode. One of the examples of episode names that she gave in one of the workshops I attended was “the pressure cooker.” Bella Merlin takes a flexible approach, mixing objective and subjective approaches:

I’ve found that the name you give to a BIT can be anything that helps you in any way. It can be a noun, a catch-phrase, a complete sentence. Here are some that I’ve used at various times: ‘The Catalyst’, ‘Setting the Record Straight’, “His Last Chance’, ‘Casing the Joint’, Her Burgeoning Love’, ‘Going their Separate Ways’, ‘Her Perspective’ and ‘His Perspective’. In labelling a BIT, you can use absolutely anything as long as it engages your feelings, as well as your analytical thoughts.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Because of the focus on Events in my pedagogy, I tend not to ask students to name Episodes as well as it can sometimes feel like too much analysis when they are straining at the leash and keen to get up and embody the Events and Objectives through action. My feeling is also that if the students have found a good name for the Event and they find a good Objective, that tends to be enough to carry them through to the next Event (combined with all the other elements of Stanislavski’s System that they have been taught and use).

# *Events in the context of (the pedagogy of) Scene Analysis*

In our pedagogy of actor training at London South Bank University we teach students from the first term onwards to do a form of scene analysis using columns. They take a notebook, photocopy their scripts and stick the pages of the script on the left-hand side and on the right-hand side they draw a series of columns. This is an approach that we have adapted from Drama Centre London, where my colleague Jon Lee used to teach. At Drama Centre they have 4 columns which are: Activities, Actions (Drama Centre’s term for Objectives), Obstacles, Characteristics. At London South Bank University we have added Events into these and adapted them somewhat so that our columns in the first term, are: Actions, Events, Objectives, Inner Obstacles. And then in the second term we add in a fifth, so it becomes: Actions, Events, Objectives, Inner Obstacles, Laban Efforts.

We start teaching this approach to scene analysis using Actions, Events, Objectives and Inner Obstacles in the first term of the first year and they continue during all of the acting modules. As well as doing this scene analysis, which is often done as independent preparation outside of class time, we also have a process of applying them “on your feet” in rehearsal, which I developed over a range of professional productions that I directed for my company fanSHEN (now called Fast Familiar) and then adapted further for a pedagogical context.

Having analysed the scene, named the Events and written the Objectives, students then do what I call “saying and playing.” They hold their notebooks with their scripts and columns and read a scene or a chunk of a scene. When they get to the point in the scene where they have an Event, they say “Change” and then they say the Event out loud and try to connect emotionally with it or “live through it a little” as I often put it as they say it. They then say the Objective out loud, making eye contact with the character it relates to and again attempting to connect emotionally with it and then they continue with their scene, attempting to fully play and inhabit the Objective at every moment until they reach their next Event. The aim is to connect yourself with the situation of the character – if you are just saying words then nothing will happen. This is why I do not name Events in a “cool, clean” way but instead in a more emotive way. Students do this sitting down initially and then standing and moving in the space. After a few runs of the scene in this way, they then stop saying the Events and Objectives aloud. By this point, hopefully they are living through the Events and inhabiting the Objectives sufficiently that they do not need to say them out loud. This forms part of the process of transitioning between using acting tools very consciously in rehearsal to them being present without the actor having to consciously think about them: conscious means to unconscious ends.

There are also some practical tips that I give my students about playing Events. These are things that tend to happen naturally if the actor is fully inhabiting the situation and character but can sometimes be helpful. These particularly help with Mitchell’s aims of making the change visible to the audience and draw from what I learned during workshops with Mitchell when we would perform and then analyse improvisations of moments in our own lives that relate to the themes of the play. These are:

* Do not rush over Events, take the time to absorb them, especially in early rehearsals but even in performance as the character probably cannot absorb new information and decide what to do about them instantly.
* Consider pausing at Events
* Consider changing the tempo-rhythm of your speech or movement (or both) after an Event (Stanislavski implies this in his chapter on Tempo Rhythm but never directly states it).
* If you have been moving, consider becoming still after an Event, if you have been still, consider moving after an Event.

These are all things that often happen naturally when an Event happens to someone in real life. Adding them into a scene can help make an Event read more believably to an audience. By physically behaving in a believable way, this can also support the actor’s internal feeling of belief and the sense of truth. As Stanislavski writes, “the secret of my method is clear. It’s not a matter of the physical actions as such, but the truth and belief these actions help us to arouse and feel”[[51]](#endnote-51)

***Conclusion***

Katie Mitchell’s concept of Events are in a Stanislavskian tradition but a unique adaptation or evolution of them. The idea of the Event as the moment where the character’s Objective changes is a useful one. More problematic is the rule that an Event must happen for every character on stage at the same time. This can lead to some strange directorial choices that can jar with a playwright’s text – sometimes in harmful rather than productive ways. There are a range of approaches to naming Events; some people take the objective approach, whereas others prefer the subjective approach. I personally fall into the latter camp and use this approach in my professional practice and pedagogy because I believe that the Event can then form part of the character’s inner monologue and can help the actor connect emotionally with the situation of the character at a moment of change. In the pedagogy that I have developed at London South Bank University, I have found that a focus on limiting the number of Events in a scene can be helpful. Also helpful is the idea that an Event might be caused by either the character achieving their Objective, the character giving up on their Objective or something happening that changes what the character wants. In scene Analysis, the practice of using columns with Actions, Events, Objectives and Inner Obstacles opposite a page of dialogue can be helpful. A useful rehearsal approach to rehearsing with Events can be to speak the Event out loud at the moment when it occurs, connecting with it with the imagination and emotion and then speaking the Objective out loud, before continuing the scene. Some practical tips when rehearsing with Events (which may not be necessary if the actor is immersed in the given circumstances of the scene) are to avoid rushing over Events, to consider pausing at Events, to consider changing the tempo-rhythm of your speech or movement (or both) after an Event and to consider moving if you have been still or becoming still if you have been moving at an Event. Overall, this article has taken seriously Stanislavski’s exhortation to “create your own system” but in an informed and rigourous way, by exploring different practitioners’ approaches to Stanislavski’s techniques, weighing up their advantages and disadvantages and then choosing an approach that works for you, rather than merely adopting the approach that you were taught or that is most familiar to you.

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1. Oltermann, *Katie Mitchell, British theatre's true auteur, on being embraced by Europe* (no page number) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Peck, 2 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Shirley, *Stanislavski and Contemporary Directing Practice*, 127 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cole, *The method behind the madness,* 401 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Mitchell, *Directors Give Instructions*, 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Pitches, *Russians in Britain*, 203 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Peck, *Katie Mitchell: Feminist Director as pedagogue*, 235 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Shirley, 127 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Peck, 235 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 234 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 171 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Alfreds, *Different Every Night*, 49 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*, 75 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Kogan, *The Science of* Acting, 73 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work,* 149 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 150 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 171 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, 55 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid, 55-62 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Peck, 240 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Merlin, 197 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Thomas, *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis: Including the Formative Essay on Active Analysis by Maria Knebel*, 108-109 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 234 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, 76 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 55 (my italics) [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Mitchell, *Directors Give Instructions*, 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 159-160 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Thomas, 100 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Merlin, 205 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid, 203, capitalisation original [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Kogan, 45 [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid, 46 [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, 46 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid, 46 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 46 [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 58 [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Alfreds, 52-55 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Merlin, 72 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 58 [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Kogan, 46 [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Mitchell, *The Director’s Craft,* 230 [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. E.g. *Cheese* by Nikki Schreiber (site specific, 2013), *Same Same* by Shireen Mula (Ovalhouse, 2011), *Fixer* by Lydia Adetunji (Ovalhouse, 2011) [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Merlin, 237 (capitalisation original) [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Gorchakov, Nikolai M. *Stanislavsky Directs*, Nabu Press, 2011 [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Stanislavski*,*148 [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 147 [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid, 431 [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Alfreds, 125 [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Merlin, 74 (capitalisation original) [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Stanislavski, 162-3 [↑](#endnote-ref-51)