

**Student notes for those Theatre Studies students attending a performance of, “I Take Your Hand In Mine” by Carol Rocamora, whose focus is on the interpretation of the play script in performance. Analyse and evaluate ways in which a written play script is interpreted in its production.**

“I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged. Yet when we talk about theatre this is not quite what we mean. Red curtains, spotlights, blank verse, laughter, darkness, these are all confusedly superimposed in a messy image covered by one all purpose word.” Peter Brook “The Empty Space” - The Deadly Theatre.

Of late we could also add to this list multi-media effects and technological gadgetry prompting this response from Kate Herbert in her review of theatre in Melbourne in 2010;

“...I’m sick of indulgent, navel-gazing and attempts to shock us with grotesque, violent, blokey bulldust. Can anyone create unpretentious theatre? It seems that companies either program the most commercial work or the ugliest, most unpleasant work and nothing in between – except extreme technology.

Much as I love a spectacular show, I got tired of theatre looking like cinema. Technology dominated new work this year. I was so busy trying to work out how the digital set design worked in Hairspray that I forgot to watch the actors. The Blue Dragon, by Canadian Robert Lepage, overlaid its very thin narrative and dialogue with elaborate film and technology. Stiftes Dinges (Melbourne Festival) was so obsessed with technology that there were no humans on stage at all. Even many of the small, low budget shows in Melbourne spent more time, money and energy on video, lighting and soundscapes.” (Herald Sun newspaper December 2010):

Kate informs me that this article has triggered many discussions amongst theatre folk, but I leave it to Kate to tell us what she does yearn to see,

“What moves me to go to the theatre week after week, year after year is the hope that I may see actors transforming before my eyes, peopling an empty stage with characters, creating a soundscape with nothing but their voices and transporting an audience to other places and times with nothing but their imaginations”

As producer (and actor) on this show I have constantly asked Ariette to add “production values,” a big set or amazing lighting plot but she refused. Why? Well she is always outside the piece, watching it, gently nudging it forward in the direction the play is telling her to go. Finally for the purposes of these notes, I asked her to put down some of her thoughts about the piece and why she made the decisions she has made and this is some of what she said.

“So the audiences of I TAKE YOUR HAND IN MINE get a deep understanding of the intimacy between two very public artists, from their hand-written letters meant only for each other. Then, with startling realization come to understand how Chekhov used their words in the texts of his, now classic play scripts. This realization comes, while the audience is attending a performance

by two actors playing the author and the actress, while re-reading the actual words of these once living people. Sounds complex... and it is!

But that is the most interesting part of I TAKE YOUR HAND IN MINE. As a director, I feel it is important not to obscure the core of this work by costumes, set and sound effects. Instead, we perform the work in the same setting, , where the first meeting of Anton and Olga took place: a play-reading. but a contemporary version of it.

Staging the work in this cool and industrial atmosphere, the audience has the freedom to shift between the various realities.

Listen well and enjoy!"

Ariette Taylor – Taradale Feb 2011.

So if a production is so minimal as to just scrape into the definition of theatre, how will it have to be riveting. The five audiences we have played to so far have said that this show is. I wondered why, and so went to theatre guru Peter Brook and to the two books of David Mamet that I have enjoyed reading recently to see if their comments and experiences can shed any light on the subject.

So Ariette says that she is looking,

“for a similar space and setting, a similar feel to the original meeting between Olga and Anton, but with a contemporary relevance”

This approach is welcomed by David Mamet in his book “Theatre”

“We come to the theatre to enjoy ourselves. We should not come, whether as workers or audience, to practice or share a "technique". There is no such thing as a "Stanislavsky actor" or a "Meisner actor" or a "method actor". There are actors (of varying abilities) and non actors. The job of the actor is to perform the play such that his performance is more enjoyable - to the audience - than a mere reading of the text.

Similarly, the job of the designers of costumes, sets, and lights, is to increase the audiences enjoyment of the play past that which might be expected in a performance done in street clothes, on a bare stage, under work lights.

This is a very difficult task indeed, for most plays are better enjoyed under such circumstances, as anyone who has ever seen a great rehearsal in a rehearsal hall can attest.

Why is this great rehearsal more enjoyable than the vast bulk of designed productions? It allows the audience to use its imagination, which is the purpose of coming to the theatre in the first place.” From Introduction.

So it is the leaving of the detail to the audiences imagination. Not to do all the work for them. Interesting that Mamet believes this is why people come to the theatre in the first place to use their imaginations. Also note that this is the reason Kate Herbert gives too.

Peter Brook lists a whole series of questions he addresses every time he starts a new project. These are the ones he asks purely regarding costume, (and if you want a thorough knowledge of how he follows this through read his essay on “The Tempest” called “The Quality of Mercy”)

“For us, every time we start a new production we are compelled to reopen this question as though for the first time. What can the actors wear? Is there a period implied in the action? What is a period? What is its reality? Are the aspects given to us by documents real? Or is it some flight of fancy and inspiration more real? What is the dramatic purpose? What needs clothing? What needs staging? What, physically, does the actor require? What does the eye of the spectator demand? Should this demand of the spectator be met harmoniously or opposed, dramatically? What can colour and texture heighten? What might they blur?” from Immediate Theatre.

Maybe then we go about theatre generally in completely the wrong way. We don't ask these questions usually. Certainly at the flag ship Melbourne companies the demands of big budgets, balancing the books, subscriber audiences seem to work against this process. The director usually has to come up with the “vision” first and then deliver on that without even meeting the cast, the designer etc. How can this work?

So we (Australian Classical Theatre) set about slowly working and developing the “style” of this piece. The only vision was an idea to present a theatre piece with three separate couples that can play anywhere, to any audience, at any time. (Theatre that is driven by a desire to please an audience is mentioned later as opposed to box office figures or subscriber driven theatre.) So this was the original vision and as I said Ariette is out there watching it, grappling with it as she observes it unfold and slowly, deliberately makes her decisions and one of the most admirable things about the way Ariette works is her instinct, her intuition. Now this takes enormous courage for a director, as Brook here warns.

“When I hear a director speak glibly of serving the author, of letting the play speak for itself, my suspicions are aroused, because this is the hardest job of all. If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you want is for the play to be heard, then you must conjure its sound from it. This demands many deliberate actions and the result may have great simplicity. However, setting out to be “simple” can be quite negative, an easy evasion of the exacting steps to the simple answer.

It is a strange role that of the director: she does not ask to be God and yet her role implies it. She wants to be fallible, and yet an instinctive conspiracy of the actors is to make her the arbiter, because an arbiter is so desperately wanted all the time. In a sense the director is always an imposter, a guide at night who does not know the territory, and yet has no choice – she must guide, learning the route as she goes.” Page 43

I love that line “If what you want is for the play to be heard, then you must CONJURE its sound from it”.

So we produce theatre for an audience to come and use their imagination according to Mamet and Herbert and the director endeavours to let the play speak, but we are still back at the same question namely - what is the most basic thing we need to create an act of theatre? Mamet again

“If we assume that all plays need an intellectual director and a tricked-out set, we are blind to the actual operation of the theatrical transaction.

If we assume that they do not, that the play and the actors can "fly themselves", as it were, and observe that interaction with the audience, we may learn something about how the mechanism (the play and the theatrical interchange) actually operates..... We see plays without a director, self-directed by the amateur, summer stock, school, backyard group, doing just fine. What use, then, were the dramaturges, whatever they may do; the directors, the teachers, the interpreters, and the intellectuals who wish, through manipulation of the set, lights, or text to impart "meaning" to that which, they would have us believe, would have no meaning prior to their shenanigans? Of little or no use at all. The play will fly by itself.....

....The seduction, proposal, proposition, family fight, resignation, plea for a raise - these are all dramas, with protagonists (ourselves) and antagonists (the other). They contain beginnings, closings, set pieces, and are steeped in our love of comedy and tragedy, the grand, often misunderstood nonetheless noble drama of our own grand and tragic lives.

What do we need to put those on the stage? A text and some actors.

Will success attract directors, producers, critics, dramaturges, professors, teachers, and so on? Of course. California in 1849 attracted goldbugs. But we should note that those who came were looking for the gold, they did not (as do our contemporaries listed above) pretend to be alchemists.” From “ The Fatal Spin” chapter.

So it's a text and some actors. Well we have that in this show. So Brook says a space, an actor and an audience. Mamet says a text, actors and an audience. But what then is the job of the actor? Again Mamet states it clearly and simply,

“The actor is onstage to communicate the play to the audience. That is the beginning and the end of his and her job. To do so the actor needs a strong voice, superb diction, a supple, well proportioned body and a rudimentary understanding of the play.

The actor does not need to “become” the character. The phrase, in fact, has no meaning. There is no character there are only lines upon a page. They are lines of dialogue meant to be said, by the actor. When he or she says them simply, in an attempt to achieve an object more or less like that suggested by the author, the audience sees an ‘illusion’ of a character upon the stage....It is the juxtaposition in the mind of the audience between the spoken word of the author and the simple directed – but- uninflected action of the actor which creates the ineluctable idea of the character in the mind of the audience.

Stanislavski said that the person one is is a thousand times more interesting than the best actor one could become. And when the actor picks up her cue, then speaks out though uncertain, the audience sees that interesting person. They see true courage, not a portrayal of courage, but true courage. The individual on stage speaks out because she is called upon to speak – when she has nothing to support her except her self respect.

When the actual courage of the actor is coupled with the lines of the playwright, the illusion of character is created. When the audience sees the steadfastness of the actress playing Joan coupled with the words of Shaw, they see majesty.....The method got it wrong. Yes, the actor is undergoing something onstage, but it is beside the point to have him or her undergo the supposed trials of the character upon the stage....The actor in learning to be true and simple, in learning to speak to the point despite being frightened, and with no certainty of being understood, creates his won character; he forges character in himself. Onstage. And it is this character which he brings to the audience, and by which the audience is truly moved.”

I let you make up your own mind on whether you agree or disagree with this and turn to the question of the acting. Once more we turn to Mamet now full throttle,

“The job of the actor is to perform the play such that his performance is more enjoyable - to the audience - than a mere reading of the text.

Similarly, the job of the designers of costumes, sets, and lights, is to increase the audiences enjoyment of the play past that which might be expected in a performance done in street clothes, on a bare stage, under work lights.”

So we have put before you a production that has no set design, no lighting design, that takes place on someone else’ set, no costume and that is mostly read. Is it more interesting than a mere reading of the play? You will have to answer that for yourselves and if so why and if not why?

If we take what has been written by all four commentators thus far all have agreed that the actor is at the centre of the plays ability to work or not. It must be the actors then that have made it a success. How have they done it? What have they done? I asked them to write their reaction and experience of the play and these are their responses.

Paul English

Thoughts on *I Take Your Hand in Mine*. 20/2/11

My first reaction on hearing of this script was “What a strange idea for a *theatre* show. Letters? Surely they’re not *dramatic* enough?” I was wrong. It’s just different. How? That’s not so easy to say.

In my childhood, and in fact right up until my thirties, letter writing was essential in keeping real, intimate contact with friends and people you loved. Paper, pen, envelopes, stamps, red postboxes – the art is truly dead (yet the boxes still stand almost unused in suburban streets). So, in a time of email, texting and tweeting, the form of this show immediately interested me. In Chekhov’s lifetime the letter was the way to keep contact over distances. A letter needs time to write - requiring effort, concentration, thought, meditation even; so much more than email. It needs time to be delivered (a few days, sometimes a week), and because of this is more precious. When received, it has acquired such value; and is often read more than once, thought about and analysed. All this feeds into the mix of this show. The crucial thing about these letters is that they try to bridge the distance between people who care deeply for each other – Chekhov, so sick with TB, needed to stay most of the time in the warmth of Yalta on the Black Sea, while Olga had to continue her career, forever touring. An essential part of all drama, in my opinion, is conflict

and tension (in all its various forms). Their separation creates this – and is given a powerful twist in this reading by the fact that we sit at the same table, quite close to each other.

Chekhov is renowned for capturing the essence of “life lived” in his stories and plays. With a few strokes of his pen he could give an audience a vivid and true sense of a character; and with a few more the world in which they lived. He had an extraordinary understanding of the pleasure, pain and suffering of human relationships – particularly romantic ones. Chekhov’s is not a comforting, optimistic view of the world (to say the least!). Things almost always end badly. But it has such a persuasive ring of truth to it that we are compelled to see things through his eyes. I was therefore delighted to find that, ironically, Chekhov’s own love life in his last 6 years with Olga, although having its difficult moments, was surprisingly positive, strong and lasting! The letters give a picture of Chekhov’s character that may be surprising to those with the stereotyped, clichéd image of the brooding, solitary writer. He was very social and generous, loved entertaining his friends, and had a great sense of fun. He was a perfectionist and worked hard, despite his debilitating illness. He loved the natural world (“all earthly offerings” as Olga says) and was down-to-earth; not at all precious, or affected by his fame. He seemed to understand and have empathy for all sorts of people, from all levels of society – for instance, he gives equal validity and focus to the lives of the servants in his plays as he does to the landowners themselves.

As well as the story of Chekhov and Olga’s life together, we are given, in this clever selection of letters, a window into the process of writing itself. We see that the plays came from his observation of what surrounded him; the people he met, the places he visited – they were made from real life, not plucked out of thin air. But we also see how difficult a process writing can be – that to be “creative” is not easy, or just a matter of waiting for “inspiration”, but requires a great deal of observation, thought and plain hard work.

I particularly enjoy how the theatre world is brought to life. Olga’s stories are richly detailed – we witness the sheer pace of it, touring and doing play after play, and realize what a dedicated artist she was. We see how Chekhov valued her incredible energy and capacity for life. He both loved and hated that world - messy, uncertain, joyous, sometimes infuriating. Trying to get a play up and running, and doing it well, is not an easy task.

As an actor I respond to the intimacy of this piece – and enjoy sharing this within an intimate theatre space. In fact, drawing the audience in, making direct contact with them, is essential for it to work. There are wonderful sections where Chekhov, lonely and aching to see Olga, gives exquisite descriptions of the sort of day he’s had, both moving and funny. I find some difficulties in performing the piece – this comes from its form. There’s a very fine balance between “acting” the part and “presenting” it (just bearing witness to the words and ideas). For example, how much should one let his sickness impinge at the end. We have the script with us, the audience always aware they’re witnessing a reading. As actors we must try not to see this as a barrier between us and the audience – in fact we must “use it” (a common heckle in the theatre rehearsal room). These are pretty standard acting problems to solve. Despite all this, when they are together for his final weeks at the end of the piece, I find those brief exchanges beautiful and illuminating – the struggle to accept death. The way he approached his last moments is an inspiration.

Anastasia Malinoff

When I first read 'I take your hand in mind' it didn't jump off the page for me straight away. I found it difficult to read through and wondered how it could dramatically hold an audience.

Our first reading was informal, just to hear it read out aloud without an audience. There were only 4 of us present and we all responded much the same way and were blown away by the piece. It proved to be an extraordinarily vibrant and surprising read through. The play just seemed to take us on a journey. It was all very spontaneous and emotionally rich and vibrant. It was as though the play in being read aloud had its own volition and force which carried us the actors and the two others listening. It was like we were merely the vessels for which these amazing people could exist and be heard. My fear and false judgement when I had read it alone and internally was that it may be somewhat sentimental. This was dispelled immediately by hearing it read out aloud.

Our next stage was to rehearse the piece together and discover its energy and subtleties. Here the hard work sets in. Once the pulling apart of the text begins a distance occurs from all the spontaneity that was experienced in that virgin read. However it was imperative to gain knowledge of Anton and Olga's relationship. The history and the art these people were living. It was as though they were living art and we had to work out how they created themselves unwittingly through these letters.

I found the rehearsal work both satisfying and frustrating. As an actor you want the piece's inherent energy to carry you along so that your mind doesn't have to think too much. Once your mind starts thinking you become like a coal bearer on a steam train. Hot, hard work, and exhausting. One would rather be sitting in a comfortable carriage being taken on a journey.

Ariette would talk to us and pose questions of Chekhov and Olga in third person.' They must have felt this', or 'what would she be thinking there'. Never addressing it to me as though I was Olga in the rehearsal room as some directors would. This always reminded us that these were letters from real people that we are reading, not a theatre piece where we adopt a character, their voice and mannerisms and pretending to be an 'other'. This really kept it grounded in storytelling and sharing with the audience.

I recall feeling extremely nervous for the first few readings. Because Ariette kept it so focused and tight at the table it felt as though the audience were observing us through a microscope. All our energies were focused right onto the letters. No hiding as actors in any physical blocking or staging. Everything was on view.

It still felt so volatile and raw. We were discovering the emotional journey each time we read it in front of an audience. This is what usually what happens in the rehearsal room without an audience present, and then harnessed, refined and polished. Here we were still reading what is a play but letters, or a play of letters and the lives of these people we were still discovering. However that is how Ariette wanted to keep it. They are still letters, real letters and we weren't to pretend otherwise. But somehow we would become transported into these lives through the reading and sharing that with the audience. It was a very special and a rich experience to come

so close to the piece and learn about such amazing human lives. I felt extremely honoured to have been part of the whole process.

Notice how many times audience is mentioned in their accounts and the quality of the writing comes up again and again. There is also a sense of Chekhov and Olga being fascinating people and the actors being “vessels” through which their words pass. It’s a beautiful process.

I also here include the rest of Ariette’s notes and some more quotes from my reading regarding the characters and abilities of Anton Chekhov and Constantin Stanislavski. But in signing off I would like you to consider as students of theatre and possibly the future of theatre practice in this country this statement from Brook as a way of moving forward in theatre;

This is our only possibility; to look at the affirmations of Artaud, Meyerhold, Stanislavski, Grotowski, Brecht, then compare them with the life of the particular place in which we work. What is our purpose, now, in relation to the people we meet every day? Do we need liberation? From what? In what way? Page 96 (Rough Theatre)

So how do we merge the high tech computer driven work place world of today with the practitioners of the past? What do you think we need liberating from? Do you agree with Kate Herbert that it is technology? Could we have done this show with the characters communicating on Facebook? Twitter? Would it have worked? What might have been lost?

That’s the beauty of theatre the possibilities are endless but unfortunately they don’t all work. And we all continue to explore that illusive recipe for what makes a production work. One thing all are on agreement on is that it has to work for the audience, we write, act, direct, compose, light, costume, design for the audience or we cheat both them and ourselves. For without an audience we have no Art and with no art there is no “Business”.

Stewart Morrill

Actor/producer “I Take Your hand In Mine” -Artistic director of Australian Classical Theatre. Melbourne 2011.

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Notes from Ariette Taylor

I TAKE YOUR HAND IN MINE is a play based on the many letters Anton Chekhov, the playwright and the actress Olga Knipper wrote to each other during the last 6 years of Chekhov's life; first as friends then as lovers and in the end as husband and wife. Anton died of consumption when he was 41 and Olga continued acting for another 50 years. She wrote her memoirs in her later years and some of these texts are also used in this play.

Chekhov was much older than Olga, about 15 years, and a very famous writer when they first met. That kind of fame for a playwright, we cannot comprehend in Australian culture in 2011.

(Compere with a rock singer or a Roger Federer).

The theatre at the turn of the eighteenth century, was the only dramatic entertainment people saw. Newspapers and books were the only written story telling at that time. Chekhov wrote for them all and the people loved his stories, they were funny as well as deeply human, not at all highbrow. He wrote for the people and about them. Chekhov was also a doctor, a family doctor, so he knew a lot about people; he loved women and they adored him. He was the perfect bachelor:

handsome, clever, funny and famous and he wrote brilliantly.

To be able to write well was as necessary then, as using a computer is now, it was an essential skill for every educated person. So writing was understood and writing well, was greatly admired. People wrote letters to each other constantly and these letters were often the only communication over long periods. Specially in Russia with its huge distances, but also in the cities, just a couple of blocks away, people would write to each other in well formed sentences, with humour and care and by hand, in beautifully curved and clear handwriting.

Imagine the young actress Olga, cast in a play-reading, written by this very famous, gorgeous man and he is present in the empty, dark audience of their theatre. She knows he is hearing her speak, she feels electrified speaking his lines. Later, he asks for her name and is introduced to her, he visits her family, and they start their first light hearted correspondence. At first, she is too much in awe of him to think of love and the work is all involving. He is amused and interested and admires her obvious talent and quick humour. They keep their letters, these were later stored and edited before opening them up to the public, then translated in many languages and soon, you will hear them.

You will hear how their interest in each other grew into love, always intertwined with their work.

Chekhov wrote for the Moscow Art Theatre, Olga was his main interpreter, the main actress in his plays. She spoke his words. If you know Chekhov's work, his 5 main plays, you might recognise in their letters some now famous lines. Sentences and thoughts, written before the play, in which they were later used, was created. Also names of people close to Anton and Olga come back as characters in his plays.

Mamet and Brook: On Stanislavsky

Peter Brook

I have seen Shakespearean productions in Russia so conventional in approach that two full years of discussion and study of archives give no better a result than scratch companies get in three weeks... On the other hand, productions of Russian plays rehearsed in the Stanislavski manner over years still reach a level of performance of which we can only dream.

Peter Brook

In America, in powerful waves, comes a recognition of the deadly, and a strong reaction against it. Years ago, the Actors Studio came into being to give faith and continuity to those unhappy artists who were being so rapidly thrown in and out of work. Basing a very serious and systematic study on a portion of Stanislavski's teaching, the Actors studio developed a very remarkable school of acting that corresponded perfectly to the needs of the playwright and the public of the time. Actors still had to give results in three weeks, but they were sustained by the schools tradition and they did not come empty handed to the first rehearsal. This background of teaching gave a strength and integrity to their work. The method actor was trained to reject cliché imitations of reality and to search for something more real in himself. He then has to present this through the living of it, and so acting became a deeply naturalistic study. "Reality" is a word with many meanings, but here it is understood to be that slice of the real that reflected the people and the problems around the actor, and it coincided with the slices of existence that the writers of the day, Miller, Tennessee Williams, Inge, were trying to define. In much the same way Stanislavski's theatre drew its strength from the fact that it corresponded to the needs of the best Russian classics, all of which were cast in a naturalistic form. For a number of years in Russia the school, the public and the play had made a coherent whole.

David Mamet - Theatre

The Stanislavski "method" and the technique of the schools derived from it, is nonsense. It is not a technique out of the practice of which one develops a skill – it is a cult. The organic demands made on the actor are much more compelling, and the potential accomplishments of the actor much more important – the life and work, and if i may say so, much more heroic – than anything prescribed or forseen by this or any other "method" of acting.

David Mamet – Theatre Ancestor worship

Stanislavski was essentially an amateur, he was a member of a very wealthy merchant family, and he came to the theatre as a rich man. ...the busker, the gypsy ,the mountebank came to the theatre to support themselves. As their support depends directly upon the favour of the audience, they study to attain that favour.

From chapter "Emotion" page 18/19

I believe that Stanislavski may not have been a genius, but that he was both lucky and wise. He was lucky in the appearance of Anton Chekhov, whose plays sparked Stanislavski's inspiration that acting need not be formalistic: and he was wise in his recognition, and in his restraint, in getting out of the actors way.

How do I know he did so? Because the Chekhov plays were successful. For most of us, performances of Chekhov's plays are lugubrious and dreadful. This is the result of actors and directors "ootzing" them, which is to say, adding their "good ideas" to plays that do not require them...

..Stanislavski's theoretical books are a lot of trash. They are unimplementable and, thus, useless for the actor.

His great gift was his recognition of Chekhov. And it was Chekhov's plays that transformed acting.

It is no accident that our current understanding of the interchange between the actor and the audience was born in a totalitarian regime.

Stanislavski lived and flourished under the dictatorship, first of the tzar and then of the Bolsheviks.

His ability to stage works of actual content - that is works addressing the underpinnings of human life; loss, desire, fear, greed, and their consequences - was limited by both the acts of the censor and by concern about the possibility of such acts.

On Chekhov

Peter Brook Page 38

It is woefully difficult to write a play. A playwright is required by the very nature of drama to enter into the spirit of opposing characters. He is not a judge he is a creator – and even if his first attempt at drama concerns only two people, whatever the style he is still required to live fully with them both. The job of shifting oneself totally from one character to another – a principle on which all of Shakespeare and all of Chekhov is built – is a superhuman task at any time.

Page 89 The Rough Theatre

It is an easy mistake to consider Chekhov as a naturalistic writer, and in fact many of the sloppiest and thinnest plays of recent years called “slice of life” fondly think of themselves as Chekhovian. Chekhov never just made a slice of life – he was a doctor who with infinite gentleness and care took thousands and thousands of fine layers off life. These he cultured, and then arranged them in an exquisitely cunning, completely artificial and meaningful order in which part of the cunning lay in so disguising the artifice that the result looked like the keyhole view it never had been. Any page of ‘The Three Sisters’ gives the impression of life unfolding as though a tape-recorder has been left running. If examined carefully it will be seen to be built of coincidences as great as in Feydeau – the vase of flowers that overturns, the fire-engine that passes at just the right moment; the word, the interruption, the distant music, the sound in the wings, the entrance, the farewell – touch by touch, they create through the language of illusions an overall illusion of a slice of life.

Reserch activities

1. Google Carol Rocamora – what else has she written? published?
2. Google Peter Brooks production – what did he do with the show?
3. Read David Mamet books “Theatre” and “True and False” for a very modern take on the method and Stanislavski’ and Chekhov’s legacy.
4. Try to find an ABC Radio National program called “By design” about Chekhov’s house.

Questions for research

5. What was style of theater before the method/
6. Why did it change?
7. What was happening in the rest of Russia socio-politically at this time?
8. How much of what Chekhov wrote was because of or inspired by his illness? Would he have just been a doctor if he had been well.