

CONCLUSION

Following our distant reading of the production history of Ibsen's play, are we any closer to understanding the global success of *Et dukkehjem*? Have new ways of looking produced fresh answers to this question?

The premise underlying this study has been that patterns in our distant visions are shaped by forces constraining the artistic diversity and complexity of *Et dukkehjem*, and our analyses have concentrated on the ways in which artists (and their audiences) comply with, contest, and oppose these forces. By following this premise and examining forces at work in the cultural transmission and adaptation of *Et dukkehjem*, we have arrived at new insights into the global success of Ibsen's play.

In Part I, we concentrated on forces that have encouraged artists to produce and adapt *Et dukkehjem*, thereby increasing the value of the play as a 'stake in the game', while simultaneously limiting the diversity of the repertoire of world theatre. The European women's movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were social forces that created a sympathetic context for the first global dissemination of the play, as Chapter 2 outlined. These movements changed the personal and professional expectations of women and created the conditions necessary for the emergence of actress-managers as important figures in global commercial theatre markets. A significant number of these artists were attracted to *Et dukkehjem* and Nora became a major role in their personal repertoires, as well as a positive fictional character to justify their unconventional life

choices. These early Noras marketed the play to audiences interested in contemporary debates about changes in the social organisation of gender. The first global transmission of *Et dukkehjem* managed by these actresses has been largely overlooked; Ibsen's early success has been attributed to his connections with the late nineteenth-century avant-garde of European theatre. Although there have been numerous accounts of early Ibsen productions outside of Europe, they have been framed as isolated studies. By mapping major touring productions across five continents, we have been able to connect these discrete histories of the play in different theatre cultures, to highlight the importance of the influence of the actress-managers in the world theatre markets, and to make the connection between the European women's rights movements and the first global cultural transmission of *Et dukkehjem*.

In Chapter 3, we considered the combined force of the Norwegian institutions that have 'peddled' the play. We uncovered the beginnings of an *Et dukkehjem* performance tradition in the Nordic region, and followed its consolidation in Norway and subsequent international dissemination. We traced artistic networks linking Nordic productions of *Et dukkehjem* from the Copenhagen premiere of 1879 to the present day, and explored their connections with Norwegian theatrical families. The existence of these networks highlights the importance of the rehearsal room as a site for transmission of the accumulated knowledge of generations regarding the performance of this canonical work. Finally, by following the funding trail associated with festivals, awards, and cultural aid, we concluded that Norway had become the engine driving the global distribution and production of the play in the twenty-first century.

In Part II, we traced the forces at work inside the creative process producing *Et dukkehjem*. The comparison of dramaturgical structures, character manipulations, and narrative substitutions alerted us to a range of social and aesthetic forces that have general applicability to theatrical adaptation, in particular constraints of time and place. We found that the materiality of performance spaces influenced the choice of genres in adaptations, and that cultural contestations were being played out in the parallel temporal structures of narrative time and performance time. We also charted the impact of cultural forces on the representation of social organisation and the depiction of symbolic power structures. We were surprised by the flexibility with which the dramaturgical structure of *Et dukkehjem* could be moulded to represent social dynamics in so many cultural contexts. It suggested that the skeletal structure of hierarchical relations of power together

with horizontal relations between social groups could be used to reflect a wide variety of social models. This inherent malleability may be a contributing factor to the success of *Et dukkehjem*, but to establish whether this is the case will require comparative studies of other global dramas.

The analysis of dramaturgical structures highlighted a strong force that was specific to *Et dukkehjem*, concerning the representation of the female characters in multiple cultures. It was to be expected that the play would trigger taboos over representations of motherhood and the breaking of the mother–child dyad, particularly given Ibsen’s own ‘barbaric violence to the play’ in which Nora looks at her children and says: ‘Oh, this is a sin against myself; but I cannot forsake them. (*half sinks down by the door*)’ (Ibsen 1880c, 27). Less expected were the widespread negative connotations associated with representations of a female agency dependent on sexual manipulation, which led to these aspects in Ibsen’s characters being cut. We were intrigued by the fact that Ibsen’s female characters had such a long history as contested sites in the adaptation process. Did this have any bearing on the success of the play? Did the challenge of combatting constraints over the depiction of female characters hold an attraction for adaptors? We looked in more detail at how these representational forces were being negotiated or deliberately confronted by artists.

The metatheatrical possibilities embedded in the tarantella rehearsal, the focus of Chapter 5, made this scene the obvious choice for an in-depth comparative study into constraints governing representations of Ibsen’s character of Nora. We selected images of the scene from 150 adaptations and arranged them in a tree structure; the branches and sub-branches reflected different interpretative strategies shaped through cultural, aesthetic, and ideological forces. We found that taboos over the exhibition of the female performing body were present in a range of cultures, all stemming from an implied association between female display and prostitution. Where taboos over the display of the female body were not enforced, the obligation to provide visual pleasure for audiences was difficult to escape. This insistence that the female performing body please the eye was indulged, critiqued, and overdetermined in the adaptations. Yet when artists attempted to break through this constraint and create a transgressive female body, their interpretations relied on physical displays of madness, regression, or altered states of consciousness. When other dancing bodies began to rehearse the tarantella, the transgressive potential of the scene was more readily achieved. Viewed at a distance, the tree with all its branches highlights the limitations imposed on female performing bodies in the representational systems of many cultures. For artists to break

through these limitations was problematic, but the challenge to do so may have had some bearing on the numbers of artists selecting *Et dukkehjem* for adaptation.

The analytical model we have developed to interrogate 3787 records of productions of a single play has yielded significant results. We have identified major forces at work in *Et dukkehjem* that have contributed to its success as a world drama: social movements and national interests have attached commercial and cultural value to Ibsen's play and contributed to its worldwide distribution; the signifying system has proved sufficiently flexible to adopt multiple forms through the dynamic interactions between ever-increasing artistic innovation and constraints imposed by culturally diverse representational systems. This summarises our research findings, but there are many more patterns in the distant visions of *Et dukkehjem* that need to be investigated. For this reason, readers are invited to conduct their own interpretations of the *Et dukkehjem* data set at IbsenStage: <https://ibsenstage.hf.uio.no/pages/project/100>.

DISTANT VISIONS AS A METHODOLOGY

Applying the McShea and Brandon model of evolution to *Et dukkehjem* enabled us to comprehend the production history of the play. Rather than searching for elusive memes replicating themselves within the creative process, or explaining the diversity of adaptation through metaphors of natural selection, we argued that increasing diversity is the background condition of *Et dukkehjem* and therefore needs no explanation. Our efforts have been directed towards investigating the forces of constraint responsible for promoting the play within global theatre markets, and the forces of representational constraint at work in the adaptation process. Patterns in the distant visions defined the direction of this research. Previous studies of the play have selected sites for close analysis according to regional, temporal, or aesthetic criteria. We let the patterns determine the selection of sites and found that they were so varied that our close analyses relied on different traditions of theatre research: biography and artist interviews, close readings of performances, analyses of commercial touring and subsidised festival circuits, tracing theatrical families and artistic networks, studies of the performing body and gestural transmission, processes of adaptation, and the gathering and analysing of visual traces. Beyond our approaches to reading *Et dukkehjem* 'up close', an overarching visual logic of looking from a distance ordered the chapters. We began at the point furthest away

in time and space, viewing the global trajectories of artists and productions of the play in the late nineteenth century; then focused on the Nordic region, still travelling through time to examine the changing relationship between *Et dukkehjem* and the nation state of Norway; a perspective shift took us inside the adaptation process where patterns in a sample of dramaturgical structures were compared with other performances from the production history of the play; and finally we isolated a single moment from Ibsen's play-script to look at a range of interpretative strategies used by artists in the staging of the tarantella rehearsal to negotiate representational constraints over depictions of sexuality and gender.

Perhaps one of the most startling realisations to emerge from this research methodology is its tendency to highlight contradictions. Not only has the evidence in each chapter contradicted assumptions about the play and its production history, the research findings also contain internal contradictions. The analysis of the Nordic network of artists uncovered a dominant performance tradition of interpreting *Et dukkehjem*, but when the last custodians of that tradition were interviewed, they were unaware of this theatrical heritage. The character of Nora is synonymous with *Et dukkehjem*, but adaptations have had a strong tendency to reduce the agency of this character within the dramatic action. The actress-managers who toured the world with *Et dukkehjem* were influential artists and business women, but their on-stage success as Nora was not matched by an equivalent off-stage success in combining a career with a marriage of equality and motherhood. We can only assume that this tendency towards internal contradiction is a product of letting the patterns in the distant visions determine the sites for close analysis rather than selecting them according to pre-existing criteria.

Maps and artistic networks were used to trace the cultural transmission of *Et dukkehjem*, and visual trees, character networks, and graphs were used to compare adaptations. The maps of *Et dukkehjem* provoked numerous questions; it was an unusual touring pattern of performances in Malawi that triggered our research into Norwegian soft diplomacy. Although we concentrated on touring productions, there are many more patterns to explore in the *Et dukkehjem* maps. We touched on the connections between post-colonial productions and the first global wave of touring from Europe, but more production records need to be gathered before this pattern will have the detail necessary for an in-depth analysis. Further work within Ibsen scholarship will involve comparative analyses on cultural transmission across the whole of the Ibsen repertoire. Doctoral research has begun on analysing both the early German and North American reception of all Ibsen's plays.

The greatest revelations regarding theatre historiography came from the network analyses that traced artistic links between productions. We were astounded to find such an extraordinary degree of interconnection between artists working on a single play, including unbroken lines of cultural transmission from the premiere in Copenhagen in 1879 to performances in 2014. We traced the major artistic network in the Nordic cluster, but the German cluster and many smaller clusters still await investigation. The next stage will be to interrogate IbsenStage to uncover the artistic networks that link productions of all Ibsen's plays. If the patterns we have found in *Et dukkehjem* are duplicated elsewhere, the importance of the transmission of production knowledge on interpretative traditions within the entire Ibsen repertoire will need to be addressed. We found that the dominant tradition of *Et dukkehjem* performance was being transmitted as embodied knowledge rather than rehearsal-room anecdotes; this suggests the need for further research into the body as the site of transmission for past performance knowledge in the staging of modern dramas. We can envisage a new strain of theatre historiography based on tracing artistic networks in twentieth-century theatres of modernity. These studies have the potential to destabilise assumptions about distinctions between theatres of modernity, which rely on professional structures of employment and training, and traditional theatre forms, with their systems of cultural inheritance based on biological or adopted theatrical families.

A study of so many productions of a single play is unprecedented in the historiography of modern drama, and the techniques of data analysis and visualisation that we used have far-reaching possibilities for the field. Plans to digitise the production records of the plays of Samuel Beckett and Federico García Lorca are already in motion to facilitate comparative analyses of the production histories of canonical playwrights. There are many directions that this research can take, from increasing our understanding of the dissemination of a European cultural heritage, to charting the importance of nation states in the creation and maintenance of the world theatre canon, to a deeper understanding of the transmission of aesthetic knowledge across cultures and between generations of artists, while comparative analyses of the production histories of significant global dramas will inevitably enrich our understanding of theatrical adaptation.

AFTERWORD

In the Introduction we mentioned two strains of Ibsen scholarship regarding the interpretation of Ibsen's character of Nora: on the one hand she is seen as a representation of female subjectivity struggling for emancipation,

on the other as a character that embodies a universal striving for subjective freedom. These interpretations are based on close readings of Ibsen's play-script, and scholars engaging in debates about the relative merits of these interpretations are apt to cite Ibsen's speech at the dinner held in his honour by the Norwegian Women's Rights League in Christiania, on 26 May 1898.

I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. Whatever I have [created has not been based on a conscious tendency or wish to propagate]. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I thank you for the toast, but must disclaim the honor of having consciously worked for the women's [cause]. I am not even quite clear as to what women's [cause] really is. [I have perceived it as a human cause]. And if you read my books carefully you will understand this. True enough, [it] is desirable to solve the women's [issue, beside] others; but that has not been the whole purpose. My task has been the description of human [beings]. (Ibsen [1898] 1910, 65–66)

Ibsen appeared in the Introduction, and so by rights he should appear in the conclusion, but his intentions have played no part in our analyses. Whatever was said at that dinner in 1898, *Et dukkehjem* has been *used* to represent sexual vectors of social change within the theatre. These vectors are not univocal: they encapsulate diverse sexual expressions and reorganisations of gendered paradigms. While the social changes associated with the women's emancipation movement are important in the early production history of the play, the social changes for men provoked by the second wave of the European women's rights movement are visible in the productions of the 1970s, and today it is normative heterosexuality that is being critiqued in cross-dressed, transgendered, and transsexual adaptations. Again a contradiction confronts us: the forces of cultural transmission link the play to changes in the social organisation of gender and sexuality, most significantly the influence of the actress-managers in the global theatre market and the Nora's Sisters programme of the Norwegian government, but within the adaptation process it has been the forces of theatrical conventions constraining representations of gender and sexuality that have confronted artists. As a consequence, the play has strong associations with struggles for change in both the social and representational worlds.

In the final words of any book there is a desire for closure, but we have avoided the ubiquitous sound of the *Et dukkehjem* slamming door throughout this study and will continue to do so. We prefer to leave the door wide open for future scholars to join our collaborative venture of rethinking Ibsen scholarship through interrogation of the many thousands of production records that are held in IbsenStage.

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INDEX¹

A

Aalberg, Ida, 35, 66n7, 73–7, 105n4, 176
Aarseth, Asbjørn, 9
Abbey Theatre, New York, 41
Academy of the Arts in Berlin, 13
Achurch, Janet, 32, 34–42, 44, 47–9, 52–3, 56, 58, 62, 66n17, 67n18, 67n22, 67n24, 68n30, 68n32, 150n2, 176
actress-managers, 26, 28, 32, 33, 39, 47–9, 54, 57, 63, 64, 65n4, 72, 73, 94, 97, 197, 198, 201, 203
Adaptation and Appropriation. See Sanders, Julie
Adrianou, Kyveli, 34, 35, 39, 66n15, 67n25
Amakhosi Theatre, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 101, 109n34, 138, 139, 152n17, 153n20
Antoine, André
Théâtre Libre, 11, 31, 131, 162

Archer, William, 4, 23n3, 23n5, 31, 36, 38, 41, 52, 67n21, 145, 158, 161–4, 166, 167, 191n4
Armand, Gisken, vi, 93, 107n21, 108n25
Art Theatre (Geijutsuka). See Geijutsuka
Association of Literature and Arts at Bungei Kyokai Shenjyo in Waseda, 46
A Theory of Adaptation. See Hutcheon, Linda
AusStage, v, vi, 23n10
Australasia. See Australia
Australia, v, vi, 13, 29, 31, 34–7, 41, 47, 52, 56, 58, 67n20, 70n152, 97, 99, 108n29, 138, 152n16, 152n18, 154n29, 164, 166, 191n5

B

Bang, Elisabeth, 86, 91, 92, 107n18
Bauer, Torsten, 188
Bay-Cheng, Sarah, 6

¹Note: Page numbers with “n” denote notes.

- Beijing Dongdan Theatre, Beijing, 191n5
- Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 108n29, 142, 152n16, 154n29
- Bergman, Ingmar, 150n2
- Berg, Marit Synnøve, vi, 87, 107n20, 108n25
- Berlin. *See* Germany
- Bernhardt, Sarah, 31, 45, 66n5
- Betty Nansen Teatret, Denmark, 194n26
- Bloom, Claire, 153n21, 172, 173, 193n20
- Bluestockings, 33, 46
- Bohurupee, Calcutta, 150n2, 167, 191n9
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 4, 32, 64, 144
cultural field, 27
- Brahm, Otto, 31
- Brandon, Robert. *See* Zero-Force
Evolutionary Law
- Brazil, vii, 44–6, 69n38, 69n42, 124, 173–4, 195n41
São Paulo, 45, 124, 151n4, 193n23
- Brecht, Bertolt, 8, 105, 169
- Breuer, Lee, 99, 187, 196n46
- Brun, Johannes, 75, 77, 106n13, 108n23
- Budde, Antje, 12
- Bullough, Enrichetta, 54, 55, 59
- Bungei Kyokai Engeki Kenkyuko. *See*
Theatre Institute of the Literary
Society
- Buzalka, Nora, 188
- Bærum Studiescene, Norway, 83, 86, 107n18
- Calmeyer, Joachim, vi, 93, 108n25
- Cameron, Beatrice, 40–4, 48, 68n29
- Candida*. *See* Shaw, George Bernard
- Carlson, Marvin, 20, 196n46
- Casanova, Pascale, 31, 72
- Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT), 12, 99
- Centre for Ibsen Studies, v, vii, 13, 14, 110n40
- Cesare Rossi Theatre, 54
- Charrington, Charles, 35–9, 52, 56, 58, 59, 62, 67n19, 67n20
- Chekhova, Olga, 49, 54, 56, 60, 61, 63, 144, 154n34
- Chilala, Cheela, vi, 147
- Chile, vi, 13, 119, 127, 141, 151n2, 153n22, 161, 184, 185, 195n42, 195n43
- China, vi, 10, 12–14, 47, 56, 75, 96, 100, 109n32, 119, 123, 125, 132–6, 141, 150n2, 153n24, 161, 165, 183, 191n5, 195n40
- China National Experimental Theatre, Beijing, 141, 153n24
- Christensen, Gyda, 85, 92, 107n16, 107n21
- Christensen, Halfdan, 85, 86, 92, 106n13, 191n5
- Christiania Theatre, 72, 73, 75–80, 108n23, 162
Nationaltheatret, Oslo, 72, 77, 78, 80, 83, 85, 90, 92, 93, 96–7, 106n12, 106n14, 106n15, 107n21, 110n40, 142, 166, 191n5
- Christinson, Helen, 152n18
- Cinema Asmara, Asmara, Eritrea, 192n12
- Colella, Sandra, 190n1
- Colombo. *See* Sri Lanka
- Conejero, Laura, 178, 194n34
- Copenhagen. *See* Denmark
- C**
- Cairo. *See* Egypt
- Calcutta. *See* India

Corinthian Theatre, Calcutta, 67n23
 Cracknell, Carrie, 153n23, 154n28
 Crawford, Joan, 150n2
 Croatia, 170–1
 Zagreb, 193n19
 Croatian National Theatre, Zagreb
 Hrvatsko Narodno Kazalište U
 Zagrebu, 170–1, 193n19
 cultural field
 Bourdieu, Pierre
 Cultural Palaces' Sidi Gaber Creativity
 Centre, Alexandria, 152n12,
 192n16

D

Daly's Theatre, New York, 68n35
 Dante Alighieri, 179–80
 Darwin, Charles, 112–13
 The Descent of Man, 113
 Dawkins, Richard
 meme theory, 112–13
 Debray, Régis, 28, 71, 86, 87, 93
 Denmark, 32, 73, 77, 78, 83, 105n1,
 114, 130–1, 161
 Copenhagen, 1, 22n1, 72, 73, 75,
 77, 80, 82, 86–9, 107n22,
 108n23, 114n2, 130–1, 151n8,
 165, 174, 191n5, 198, 202
 Den Nationale Scene, Bergen, 75,
 106n12
Descent of Man, The. See Darwin, Charles
 Després, Suzanne, 34, 35, 40, 46, 59,
 66n14, 66n16, 69n42, 70n50
 Det Kongelige Teater, Copenhagen,
 22n1, 89, 107n22, 108n23,
 151n8, 165, 191n5
 Det Norske Teatret, Oslo, 79, 83, 90,
 106n10, 106n14
 Deutsches Nationaltheater, Germany,
 155n38
 Deutsches Theater, New York, 42,
 68n33
 Diantong Film Company, 60

Dierickx, Wine, 178, 179, 194n33
Distant Reading. See Moretti, Franco
 Doré, Gustave, 179, 180
 Duse, Eleonora, 34, 35, 42, 44, 49,
 54–9, 59, 69n38, 69n41, 70n50,
 166, 167, 191n6, 191n7
 Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus,
 Germany, 80, 106n12
 Dutt, Utpal, 38
 Dybwad, Johanne, 34, 73, 74, 77, 78,
 83, 85, 92, 97, 105n5, 105n8,
 106n15

E

Egypt, vii, 12, 31, 35, 39, 67n25, 79,
 95, 96, 100, 109n31, 143, 169,
 192n16
 Cairo, 34, 38, 39, 143
 Empire Theatre, New York, 39, 67n27
 Eritrea, vi, 100, 168, 192n12
 Eveleigh, Melissa, vi, 103, 110n38,
 150n2, 177, 194n31

F

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. See *Global Ibsen:
 Performing Multiple Modernities*
 Fiske, Minnie Maddern, 39, 40, 42,
 48, 67n27
Forget-Me-Not, 36, 41
 France, 14, 31, 32, 44, 73, 83, 94,
 153n21, 175
 Paris, 28, 31, 46, 52, 59, 66n14,
 78, 79, 83, 103, 131, 162,
 174, 179

G

Garrick Theatre, 41
 Geijutsuka (Art Theatre), 60
 Germany, 1, 12, 14, 23n3, 27, 31, 32,
 35, 39, 42, 48, 70n48, 73,
 77–81, 83, 94, 97, 106n12, 111,

Germany (*cont.*)

- 114, 119, 122, 124, 127, 132–3,
134, 140, 143, 144, 150n2,
151n5, 153n19, 154n34,
155n37, 173, 177, 193n22,
194n32, 201, 202
- Berlin, 31, 42, 56, 60, 77, 111
- Gisle, Anna, 87
- Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple
Modernities*, 13
- Globe Theatre, Boston, 68n29
- Goldman, Emma, 10, 23n6, 50
- Gramatica, Emma, 34, 35
- Grand Theatre, Tianjin, 109n32
- Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models
for a Literary History*. See Moretti,
Franco
- Greece, 31, 32, 35, 39, 78, 94,
194n33
- Grein, Jacob, 31
- Grosz, Elizabeth, 113

H

- Habermas, Jürgen, 10
- Hålogaland Teater, Tromsø, 108n26,
181, 182, 195n38
- Hanssen, Jens-Morten, v, 14
- Hansson, Olaf Mørch, 77, 92,
106n13, 106n15
- Hansson, Thora, 106n15
- Hedda Gabler*, 44, 50, 66n5, 69n41,
108n29, 161
- Hegel, Frederik, 5
- Helland, Frode, v, 13, 23n5, 114n1,
156n44, 174, 196n46
- Hennings, Betty, 22n1, 34, 35, 73–7,
105n2, 107n22, 131, 151n8,
165, 166, 190n1, 191n5
- Herrnstein Smith, Barbara, 9
- Hitler, Adolf, 60, 61, 63
- Holledge, Julie, v, 9, 10, 13, 15,
69n46, 146, 154n33, 156n44

- Hoyt's Theatre, New York, 41, 42,
68n32
- Hutcheon, Linda, 112, 115n4
A Theory of Adaptation, 112

I

- Ibsen Awards Scholarships, vi, 96, 98,
100, 109n33
- Ibsen Between Cultures*, vi, 13
- Ibsen Centenary, The, 95, 99–101
- Ibsenhuset, Norway, 109n33
- Ibsen in Practice*. See Helland, Frode
- Ibsen International, 99, 100, 110n40
- Ibsen, Lillebil, 85, 107n17
- IbsenStage, vi, 2, 3, 6, 13–17, 19,
23n9, 25, 26, 29, 34, 40, 74, 81,
82, 84, 95, 98, 111, 119, 159,
160, 200, 202, 203
- Ibsen Studies*, 12
- Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, 52
- India, vi, 12–14, 35, 38, 67n23, 94,
119, 121, 134, 137, 168, 169
Calcutta, 34, 37, 38, 47, 67n23,
141, 147, 150n2, 191n9
- International Ibsen Bibliography
(Nasjonalbiblioteket)*, 6
- International Ibsen Conference, 13
- International Ibsen Stage Festival, 93,
96–100
- Irving, Henry, 31, 67n18
- Istanbul. See Turkey
- Italy, 14, 32, 35, 44, 56, 73, 78,
151n3, 190n1

J

- Japan, 13, 30–3, 46–9, 52, 60, 69n44,
75, 83, 94, 96, 97, 99, 107n21,
119, 122, 125, 127–8, 130,
133–5, 137, 150n2, 151n7, 183,
194n33
- Tokyo, 13, 46, 47, 52, 69n43, 127

Ji, Shuping, 165, 166, 191n5
 Jiang Qing. *See* Lan Ping
 Jin Xing, 100, 109n32, 150n2, 183,
 184, 186, 195n40
 Johannesen, Adelaide, 73–6, 105n3,
 106n15
 Johnson, Nils, 182
 Juell, Johanne, 75–7, 86, 105n7

K
 Kean, Charles, 31
 Khanh, Lê, 175, 193n24, 193n25
 Khedivial Theatre, Cairo, 38
 Klinkhammer, Thessa, 34, 35, 66n9
 Kollontai, Alexandra, 10, 23n6
 Komissarzhevskaya, Vera, 12, 23n8,
 34, 40, 43, 44, 68n35, 166, 167,
 191n6
 Kristiania. *See* Oslo
 Kuhl, Manja, 151n5, 153n19,
 155n40, 188

L
 La Boite Theatre Company, Brisbane,
 138, 152n18
 Lange, Wilhelm, 31, 39, 111
 Lan Ping. *See* Jiang Qing
 London. *See* United Kingdom
 Lorandou, Eleonora, 35, 66n16
 Lorenci, Daria, 171, 193n19
 Lugné-Poë, Aurélien-Marie, 11, 36,
 46, 59
 Lusaka Playhouse, Lusaka, Zambia,
 152n16, 156n46
 Luther College, Iowa, 39
 Lux Radio Theatre, Los Angeles, 126,
 150n2
 Lyric Hammersmith, London,
 152n15

M
 Mabou Mines, 94, 99, 109n31, 187,
 196n46
 Macauleys Theatre, Louisville, US,
 67n26
 Maiello, Teth, vii, 151n4, 171, 174,
 193n23
 Malawi, vi, 94, 95, 100, 103, 110n38,
 119, 123, 126, 129–30, 132, 139,
 143, 150n2, 177, 194n31, 201
 Mansfield, Richard, 41, 68n29
 Mariani, Teresa. *See* Zampieri, Teresa
 Mariani
 Market Theatre, Baxter Studio,
 Johannesburg, 100, 109n34,
 152n15
 Marx, Eleanor, 10, 23n6, 49, 52–3,
 56, 58, 62, 70n49
 Matsui Sumako, 47, 49, 51, 52, 56,
 60, 63, 69n43
 McShea, Daniel, 18, 20, 21, 113, 200,
 215. *See* Zero-Force Evolutionary
 Law
 McVicker's Theatre, Chicago, 42, 68n34
 Mehrjui, Dariush, 146, 152n11, 168
 meme theory. *See* Dawkins, Richard
 Meyer, Henry, 198
 Mitchell, Maude, vi, 187, 189,
 196n46
 Mitra, Sambhu, 38, 150n2, 167,
 191n9, 192n11
 Modjeska, Helena, 39, 42, 44, 67n26
 Moi, Toril, 9, 11
 Morahan, Hattie, 153n23
 Moretti, Franco, 6, 8, 18, 132
Distant Reading, 8
*Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models
 for a Literary History*, 8
 Mori, Mitsuya, vii, 13, 127, 128,
 150n2
 Mozambique, vi, 98–100, 108n27

N

Nanzikambe Theatre, Malawi, 103,
110n38, 150n2, 194n31
National Library of Norway, v, vi, 14,
108n26, 153n21, 193n20
Nationaltheatret, Oslo. *See* Christiania
Theatre
nation-state, 13, 72, 105
national imaginary, 28, 102, 104
Nazimova, Alla, 40, 43–4, 49–52, 57,
59, 60, 62, 68n36
Nazimova's, on 39th Street Theatre, 59
New Horizons Theatre, Harare, 100
New Play Group, Shanghai, 47
Newton, Richard, vi, 150n2, 185–6,
196n45
New Zealand, 34–7, 48, 69n45, 118,
176
Nhà Hát Tuổi Trẻ, Hanoi, 193n24
Nigeria, 12, 119, 146, 150n2
Nilu, Kamaluddin, vi, 12, 13, 151n10,
192n16
Nora's Sisters, 98, 101–3, 203
Nordic countries, 14, 72, 73, 78,
105n1
Northam, John, 9, 161
Norway, 14, 21, 27, 28, 31, 32, 48,
71–110, 114n2, 153n21,
154n30, 161, 164, 183, 191n5,
193n20, 194n33, 195n38, 198,
201
Norwegian Ministry of Culture, 96
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, 95, 98, 101, 110n40
Novelty Theatre, London, 36, 41, 42,
67n19, 150n2
No.22 Wangfujing Street, Beijing,
109n32, 150n2, 195n40
NRK, 83, 106n14

O

Onafhankelijk Toneel, Rotterdam,
192n15
Oslo, 23n6, 65, 73, 79, 83, 85, 94,
96, 97, 99, 100
Kristiania, 72, 75–7, 87, 106n15,
108n23, 155n41
Ostermeier, Thomas, 99, 108n29,
144, 153n26, 173
Otto, Miranda, 165, 166, 191n5

P

Painted Bird Theatre, Turkey, 109n33,
156n47
Pakistan, vi, 95, 97, 109n31, 119,
123, 127, 132–4, 137, 139, 141,
150n2, 169, 192n17
Paris. *See* France
Petri, Lilli, 34, 35, 66n12
Pioneer Players, Kenya, 100
Pokharel, Sunil, vi, 13
Portugal, 32, 44, 45, 179, 194n33
Poulsen, Emil, 88, 89
Prahl, Lita, 87
Prasch-Grevenberg,
Auguste, 34, 35, 66n11
Princess Theatre,
Melbourne, 67n20
Princess Theatre, New York, 68n36
Prozor, Moritz, 31, 44–5, 143
Puccini, Giacomo, 168, 192n12

R

Raheny, Rahe, 87
Reijn, Halina, 154n31, 178, 195n35
Réjane, Gabrielle, 11, 40–2, 44, 45,
68n28

- Riksteatret, Norway, 79, 83, 106n10, 106n14
- Ring, Gerda, 86, 106n13, 108n23, 166
- Robins, Elizabeth, 32–3, 161
- Roger, Edith, vi, 93, 108n25
- Rosmersholm*, 44, 66n5, 69n38
- Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, 75, 130, 131
- Russia, 11, 14, 31–3, 35, 39, 43, 50, 54, 56, 60, 62, 73, 83, 94, 96, 97
- S**
- Salvini, Tomasso, 31
- Salzburger Landestheater, Salzburg, 194n27
- Sanders, Julie, 115n4
Adaptation and Appropriation, 112, 113
- Santelmann, Tobias, 182, 195n38
- São Paulo. *See* Brazil
- Sarkiss, Jürgen, 188
- Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Germany, 94, 99, 141, 153n26, 154n36, 173, 193n22
- Schreiner, Olive, 10, 23n6
- Segelcke, Tore, 73, 74, 78, 85–8, 90, 92, 97, 105n6, 106n9, 165, 166, 191n5
- Seito*, 33, 48
- Senelick, Laurence, 12
- Shanghai Amateur Drama Association, 53
- Shaw, George Bernard, 31, 32, 36, 41, 52, 176
Candida, 41
- Shawkat Osman Memorial Auditorium Public Library, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 151n10, 192n16
- Shepherd-Barr, Kirsten, 11, 155n42
- Simões, Lucília, 45, 46, 48, 69n40
- Simões, Lucinda, 34, 40, 45, 69n40
- Skjønberg, Espen, vi, 86, 93, 108n25
- Skjønberg, Pål, 86, 92
- Sogn og Fjordane Teater, Norway, 89, 90, 93, 106n14, 107n23
- Sorma, Agnes, 34, 35, 40, 42, 44, 66n8, 66n13, 68n33, 68n34
- Sri Lanka, 96
Colombo, 34
- Staatstheater Stuttgart, Germany, 155n37
- Stadttheater Solothurn, Switzerland, 175, 194n28
- Stanford Arts Lab, 132
- St Ann's Warehouse, New York, 196n46
- Statoil, 104
- Støre, Jonas Gahr, 95, 109n35, 110n36
- Strømsted, Liv, 87, 107n20, 108n23
- Sunde, Vivi, vi, 87, 93, 107n20, 108n25
- Suomen Kansallisteatteri, Helsinki, 176, 194n30
- Sydney Theatre Company, 165, 166
- T**
- Tagore, Rabindranath, 167
- Tandberg, Monna, vi, 86–8, 90–2, 97, 107n19, 108n25
- Teater Ibsen, 100
- Teatre Nacional De Catalunya, Barcelona, 178, 195n34
- Teatret Vårt, Norway, 79, 106n10, 106n14
- Teatrino Clandestino, “124, 151n3
- Teatro de Narradores, São Paulo, 124, 151n4, 171, 173, 193n23

- Teatro La María, Santiago, 151n2, 153n22, 184, 195n43
- Teatro La Memoria, 184, 195n42
- Teatro Leblon, Rio de Janeiro, 195n41
- Teatro Lírico, Rio de Janeiro, 69n38
- Te'atron ha-Kameri shel Tel-Aviv, 152n15
- Teatro Solís, Montevideo, Uruguay, 69n39, 69n40
- Teatrul Odeon, Bucharest, 109n33
- Teatr Wielki, Warsaw, 67n26
- Tehrik-e-Niswan, Lahore, Pakistan, 109n31, 150n2, 169, 192n17
- Teigen, Noraly, 88, 89
- Telenor, 96
- Templeton, Joan, 9
- tg STAN, 178
- Thalia Theater, Hamburg, Germany, 80, 106n12, 155n39
- Theater Oberhausen, Germany, 94, 124, 139, 151n5, 153n19, 155n40, 187, 188
- Theatre Delicatessen, London, 181, 195n39
- Theatre Institute of the Literary Society
Bungei Kyokai Engeki Kenkyuko, 52
- Théâtre Libre. *See* Antoine, André
- Theatre Variete, Istanbul, 66n16
- Theatro Alampra, Alexandria, 67n25
- Theatro Mnimatakion, Istanbul, 66n14, 66n15
- The Relevance of A Doll's House—
Translation and Adaptation*, 12
- Thorkildsen, Inga Marte, 101, 102
- Tismer, Anne, 153n26, 173, 193n22
- Tompkins, Joanne, v, 9, 10, 15, 69n46, 146
- Toneelgroep ADODVS, 134, 142, 152n13, 178, 180, 195n37
- Toneelgroep Amsterdam, 154n31, 195n35
- Triesch, Irene, 34, 35, 66n10
- Trøndelag Teater, Norway, 106n14
- Turkey, 109n33, 156n47
Istanbul, 31, 35, 66n13, 66n14, 66n15, 66n16
- U**
- Ullmann, Liv, 86–8, 90, 107n19
- Umewaka Nohgaku Gakuin Kaikan
Theater, Tokyo, 127–8, 150n2
- UNESCO, 28, 177
- United Kingdom
England, 38, 150n2
London, 28, 31, 36, 38, 41, 42, 44, 50–3, 58, 67n19, 68n30, 68n31, 109n33, 115n2, 138, 142, 150n1, 150n2, 152n15, 153n23, 153n25, 154n28, 161, 195n39
- University Auditorium, Nnamdi
Azikiwe University, Awaka,
Nigeria, 150n2, 156n45
- University of Oslo, v–vii, 14, 100, 110n40
- University of Wisconsin, 39
- Uthaug, Gro Ann, vi, 88, 90, 92, 93, 107n23, 108n25
- Utah-Ezeajugh, Tracie Chimo, 146, 156n45
- V**
- Vardund, Ingerid, 86–7, 107n19, 107n21
- vimbusa*, 177
- von Hummel, Alexandra, vi, 151n2, 153n22, 184–5, 195n43
- von Ribbentrop, Joachim, 61

W

- Walentin, Arne, 87
 Wapping Project London,
 The, 150n1
 W3 Gallery, London, 109n33
 Wharf 1 Theatre, Sydney, 191n5
 Wicklund, Beret, 190n1
 Wille, Marie Louise, 175, 194n26
 Williamson, Garner, and Musgrove, 36
 Winge, Stein, 96, 97
 Wolff, Susanne, 155n39, 177, 194n32
 Wright, Jules, 150n1

Y

- Yakout, Gamal, vii, 143, 152n12,
 192n16
 Young Vic, London, 142, 153n23,
 154n28
 Ystad, Vigdis, 9

Z

- Zagreb. *See* Croatia
 Zampieri, Teresa Mariani, 34, 40, 44,
 46, 69n39
 Zapolska, Gabriela, 33–4, 49, 51,
 53–4, 58, 62, 66n6, 70n50
 Zedong, Mao, 61–3
 Zero-force Evolutionary Law
 McShea and Brandon schema/Law/
 model, 18
 memory, 20
 persistence, 20
 variation, 20
 Zetterling, Mac, 138, 152n15

Ø

- Østbye, Marit, vi, 87, 91–2, 107n20,
 108n25
 Østerud, Erik, 162, 190n1