

Distinguished Professors Public Lecture Series

Ibsen and Acting: Reading Subjective Interiority through the Performing Body



In this public lecture, the speaker will use an analysis of the physical scores in Ibsen's dramaturgy, together with recollections from early Ibsenites, to argue that actors developed new techniques of embodiment in the process of rehearsing and performing Ibsen's characters.

Professor Julie Holledge

Professor Emeritus, Flinders University, Australia

Professor Emeritus Julie Holledge, Flinders University, is an internationally recognised award-winning academic and theatre director. Author of 3 scholarly books, 4 edited books, and numerous other publications, she has directed 22 professional theatre productions in the UK and Australia. She pioneered research in feminist theatre historiography and in digital technologies in global theatre research. She has received grants from the ARC and Australian and British Councils for the Arts, and research funding from Norway, Korea, and Japan. She made a major contribution to the discipline as the lead CI of AusStage and won a Carrick award for her teaching.



Date: 28 November 2017 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:00 — 5:00 p.m.
Venue: C0712, 7/F, Ho Man Tin Campus,
The Open University of Hong Kong
30 Good Shepherd Street, Homantin, Kowloon

Enquiry: Ms Agnes Lam
Email: ridch@ouhk.edu.hk
Tel: 3120 2782

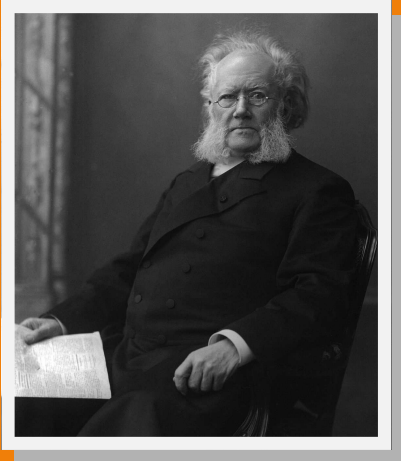
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Abstract



Ibsen created female characters that provided new representational models for modern drama. One of his theatrical innovations was to write subjective interiorities for these female characters in the language of the body. This paper uses an analysis of the physical scores in Ibsen's dramaturgy, together with recollections from early Ibsenites, to argue that actors developed new techniques of embodiment in the process of rehearsing and performing Ibsen's characters.

Traditionally, the arrangement of actors on mid-nineteenth century stages reflected lighting technologies and the dynamics of theatre architecture: the more important the actor, the better the placing on the stage. The physical scores embedded in Ibsen's social dramas broke this convention. Through stage directions and the body cues within the spoken text, Ibsen created complex physical scores to control the movements of his characters in their bourgeois domestic settings.

Ibsen's body writing extended beyond stage movement or 'blocking'. His retrospective dramaturgy demanded that actors use their bodies to communicate unspoken memories and socially repressed feelings. Ibsen described this writing technique as the creation of 'seemingly easy but concealing/overlaying [overdekkende] conversations' (to Schrøder 2.1.87). To successfully perform Ibsen's female roles, actors learnt to express the 'inner truth' of a character's thoughts through supposedly unconscious changes in posture, gesture, and body rhythm, thus making visible the life lying behind the spoken text. The result was a double message for the audience: one expressed openly through the dialogue, the other via the performing body animated by unspoken thoughts.

Ibsen's dramaturgical innovations in writing body-texts, particularly for his female characters, pointed the way towards the psychologically realist acting techniques that were to become ubiquitous in twentieth century world theatre.

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