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Ibsen's Phenomenology of Kindness:

Self and Other in *The Wild Duck*

In one of the most notable adaptations of Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, director Simon Stone's 2011 production at Sydney's Belvoir St Theatre abolished many of the stage properties and naturalistic signifiers of place specified in the text, in favour of a box with transparent plastic separating the audience from the performers. This created a scenic expression of inner psychological space emphasising anxiety, horror and social tragedy. Ralph Myers' set for the adaptation resembled a glass laboratory allowing the audience to observe the behaviours of Ibsen's characters with clinical detail while also drawing attention to the increasing social isolation of our time. But by transporting the action to an abstract space in this production, Ibsen's fictional "world" was largely missing, perhaps highlighting a certain modern "unavailability" of "Being" and an absence of social connection. By drawing upon philosophical phenomenology in this article, I offer a thematic consideration of "kindness" in *The Wild Duck* to explore the rich, complex, physical and intersubjective world in which these characters find themselves. Ibsen explores kindness by showing where apparent acts of virtue can fall short, thereby challenging the audience to reflect on the nature of authentic kindness.

The central image in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (*Vildanden*) is the duck itself, symbolising the object of both senseless destruction and existential salvation. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear which character is represented by the injured creature rescued through several acts of kindness and it has been argued that the animal is "over-symbolised" (Durbach 1974, 105). As the plot unfolds, we discover that Haakon Werle (an industrialist) had shot the bird but not killed it because of his bad sight and that the bird was then retrieved from the water by his hunting dog (Ibsen 1960, 168-169). Old Ekdal (a retired lieutenant) acquired the duck from Petterson (Werle's assistant) and nursed it back to health in his animal menagerie in the loft of the apartment. The captive bird is a rare wild specimen that has now been more or less

domesticated, dependent in this environment, and with only a degree of autonomy and freedom.

Gregers Werle (Haakon's son) claims that his old friend Hjalmar Ekdal (Old Ekdal's son) is like the duck (and identifies himself with the hunting dog that dived into the water to rescue it when it was trying to escape to the bottom of the water). The fact that Gregers notes a parallel between his friend and the bird indicates his own wish or need to find someone of pure spirit to believe in and is spurred on by a desire to rescue his friend. At the same time, Gregers himself says, "I hope I too shall be like the wild duck", although he also says he wishes he could be a clever dog (1960, 171). However, other characters are captured and rescued with apparent kindness like the duck too. Gina's situation also bears similarities to the game fowl, having been preyed upon by Haakon when she was a servant in his household and saved by her marriage to Hjalmar. In a similar way, Old Ekdal has been released from his misfortunes and criminal liability for illegal business affairs at the timber works by the elder Werle (although we subsequently find out that it was Haakon who had allowed him to take the blame for cutting down trees on government land – resulting in a prison sentence). Werle offers Old Ekdal copying work in a seemingly beneficent act. Yet in the end, Hedvig carries out what she hopes will be an act of redemption for both families, by taking her own life in place of the duck, for the sake of her parents' relationship. She comes to believe that destroying the thing *she* values most (i.e., the wild duck) will not bring about redemption and therefore "stands in" as a sacrifice. The young girl on the cusp of womanhood discovers that she is not Hjalmar's biological daughter and comes to believe that she must demonstrate her love for her father (all at the suggestion of Gregers).

Each individual aspires to kindness but falls short because of various forms of metaphorical blindness that hinder their authentic engagement with others in their world. In each of these cases, various acts of apparent kindness perform a saving or preserving function but also serve self-interest. Although each character gives a degree of assistance and support to one another, the underlying intentions behind each apparent kindness is uncertain. Misguided help, mistaken beliefs and omissions of action can have damaging effects, as Ibsen reveals, when we are unable to transcend our own sense of self.

The Wild Duck therefore stages the tension between slavishly following an abstract ideal and empathetic comportment towards others with a keen perception of circumstances surrounding the other. The world of the play opens up a phenomenology of kindness (specifically in relation to objects, place and time) by pointing towards authentic "seeing" and "listening". The phenomenon of kindness captures such a relationship between internal motivation (i.e., that one cares for others not for instrumental means) and external action (i.e., that one acts in the interests of another being). In this sense, kindness is different from "beneficence" (objectively doing good for another regardless of intention). This definition of kindness diverges from Immanuel Kant's (1998) "categorical imperative" (the requirement to follow a moral rule as though it were universal law that must be obeyed, which is arguably the position that Gregers takes on with respect to truth-telling and honesty). Instead, true kindness takes the contextual circumstances of the other into account when deciding how to respond accordingly with empathy, compassion, and truly making oneself available to the other. For the most part, the Ekdals and Werles fail to "see" one another because they are guided by abstract ethical rules,

guilt and shame for past actions, and idle distraction rather than responding to the needs of others. The Nietzschean Dr Relling (a downstairs neighbour) diagnoses self-interest in apparent acts of kindness to reveal complex psychological motivations and fears in his neighbours (Ibsen 1960, 224-227). He is also willing for a “lie” to be believed by others in order to let them cope with their existential circumstances thereby offering false kindness devoid of truth.

Yet an exploration of kindness in the practical process of rehearsal and production rests not only in the craft of the actor and experience of the individual, however, but also the broader creative team, the *mise-en-scène* and entire performance apparatus in the theatre event:

The dramatist's language of space and time, his artful selection and modulation of setting, can hardly be overestimated in its distinctive contribution to the world of an Ibsen play. Through a shift of scene, a change of light, a momentary accent on an object or an item of furniture conferred by a gesture or a passing remark, the inanimate speaks, becomes histrionic, enters into a running commentary on the dialogue and the gathering meaning of the action (Fjelde 1978, 388).

In other words, the full theatrical apparatus operating in Ibsen's work emphasises the interconnectedness of Being-in-the-world in a phenomenological sense (Heidegger 1962; Johnston 2011, 73ff). Just as the ability to “see” objects, place and time is essential to understanding “Being-with” others in the context of kindness for the audience and performers, so too is the ability crucial to achieving what might be called “deep kindness” more generally in human existence. Rather than strip back a production in his adaptation of the text as Stone did, a close attention to detailed fictional “worldhood” can reveal kindness in concrete given circumstances of the human encounter with the other. Before exploring further, however, it is worth reviewing some recent critical literature interpreting the text.

Self and Others in *The Wild Duck*

In a recent study of *The Wild Duck*, Lisbeth Waerp (2020) considers the moral and philosophical “struggle for existence” in the natural world as a major theme of the text while noting Ibsen's indebtedness to Charles Darwin in its central symbol and the domestication of wild animals. She argues that Ibsen does not portray domestication in terms of degeneration but rather as survival and notes that the interconnected world of all the animals in the loft rather than the duck on its own are important to the play. In this sense, the loft itself stands in for the struggle for existence between the conflict between the Ekdals and Werles. Olivia Noble Gun examines Hedvig's parallel to the duck as “the romantic child, an icon of idealized life and innocence” together with questioning the unequivocal redemptive value of art with respect to the normative values of the adult world (2013, 47). Boon Young Han emphasises the central motif of photography in *The Wild Duck* and that the “entire action of the play is caught in suspended exposure time in front of an imaginary camera” (2015, 173). The loft represents a kind of darkroom for photographic development in a private tableau of this bounded world, as opposed to the public tableaux of the action outside. Bjørn Killingmo (1994) positions his discussion around the dispute in the literature over why Hedvig shoots herself rather than the duck in Act V. It could be that she hears

the conversation between Gregers and Hjalmar thus forming a tipping point in her decision, or that she arrives at the conclusion that she needs to sacrifice herself independently at the level of unconscious fantasy in the “darkest depths of the sea” that the loft represents. Killingmo suggests that there is a confusion between subject and object relations for Hedvig in psychoanalytic terms (self-representation and identification) as she internalises the troubled world around her. In *The Drama of History: Ibsen, Hegel, Nietzsche*, Kristin Gjesdal (2021) traces the philosophical influences and reverberations in Ibsen’s work more broadly by investigating drama as an artwork for the modern age emerging in the late nineteenth century. Rather than claiming Ibsen’s works were directly influenced by theoretical arguments of the time, she examines how he goes beyond the philosophical milieu in which history is seen as the formative condition of modern life by staging grand ideas in a concrete manner in his drama (2021, 3-4).

By way of contrast, I suggest that kindness (as authentic being-with one another) is a central thematic concern of *The Wild Duck* and by extension authentic existence beyond dramatic representation. Rather than a psychoanalytic approach to self and others as Killingmo (1994) explores, I propose that a phenomenological lens can yield practical benefits for the actor approaching a role in this work because of its interconnected exposition of internal and external action in relation to others. The fundamental inability for authentic “seeing” others as they are and a failure to “listen” and “hear”, prevents the characters in the text from being genuinely kind to one another because they do not share empathetically in the other’s experience of the world. In this sense, the motif of photography stands in for a mistaken sense of completeness as Han (2015, 176) notes. Although Ibsen does not present an explicit philosophical argument, as A.F. Machiraju (1992) suggests, his text opens up a space for practical and embodied philosophical investigation through the actor’s process into performance. As an entry-point into Ibsen’s text, therefore, I suggest taking kindness as a start-point to examine the self-other relationship key to *The Wild Duck* by turning to philosophy.

A Phenomenology of Kindness

As a philosophical approach, phenomenology focuses on lived experience and the way that the world presents itself to consciousness. Rather than understand humans as isolated subjects, phenomenology emphasises relational and intersubjective experience as essential to Being-in-the-world. In a nutshell, phenomenology calls for a return to the things themselves instead of blindly accepting unfounded metaphysical assumptions as the basis of philosophy. More specifically it is philosophy as *letting* things show themselves in the way that they show themselves *from* themselves. Phenomenology investigates the way the world shows itself to conscious experience through an approach founded by Edmund Husserl. Rather than describe mere appearances, it attempts to get at the “mode of givenness” and essence of experience. This can be explored in an approach to *The Wild Duck*, by exposing failures of kindness in the fictional world and revealing parallel failures in our world today manifested in a deficit of kindness in the isolated modern “subject.”

In previous reflections on “theatre phenomenology”, I have contended that the performance process can be seen as a philosophical exploration in itself, capable of revealing elements of Being-in-the-world and of Being itself (Johnston 2019). The approach begins with

phenomenological themes that arise in the play text and explores different theatrical representations of the meaning of Being revealed in the work. The text itself can fold back on theatrical process and rehearsal preparations by taking the philosophical ideas explored in the play to guide the rehearsal or workshop. By connecting with the lifeworld of the audience and drawing on lived experience, the actor-in-the-part can perform a moment of truth-revelation in the theatrical event (Johnston 2017; also see Zarrilli 2020).

From a phenomenological perspective, kindness is predicated upon empathy for other beings “there” with us in the world (not necessarily human others, as we see in the play itself and the concern that the Ekdals give to the injured duck). Rather than following a universal ethical rule (as Gregers seems to do), acts of kindness are contextually specific and attend to the emotional location of others over and above any general law. As I will demonstrate, this is a key concern for Ibsen in his work: rather than cling to abstract principles, human kindness listens and attends to others there in the world and observes the specific circumstances of one’s encounter with them.

Kindness is also related to the fundamental characteristic of “care” (*Sorge*) in human “Being There” (*Dasein*) as Martin Heidegger describes (1962, 83-84). The world “matters” to us as we go about our everyday business, as we interact with objects in our environment and others who share in our world. But unlike the way in which tools in our environment “matter” as a means to an end, kindness is caring for “others” there in our world independently of their utility. This entails treating others not as mere objects but witnessing their presence as entities with the same kind of being as our own. In this way, the phenomenon reveals that care for others is also an essential part of *Dasein*. Authenticity in a phenomenological sense involves avoiding preconceived values and interpretations of the world and reducing others to mere “things” (Heidegger 1962, 312-348). Authentic *Dasein* acknowledges the limits of its own existence truthfully and chooses its own-most possibilities from those available in the circumstances. As we will see, Ibsen’s characters fall short of such authenticity because of various deficiencies in seeing, listening and acting with true empathy towards one another.

William Hamrick (1985) provides a useful analysis of kindness by following the phenomenological method. He notes that the word in its modern usage is a relatively recent addition to the English language dating roughly from the Renaissance, referring previously to things of the same natural type and qualities of nature. Hamrick brackets off whether kindness is always good, whether it is synonymous with beneficence, whether kindness is the same as virtue or quality of character or temperament, and so on. In search of its essence, he observes that the phenomenon appears in different ways depending upon whether one encounters a person being kind to others or if one is the recipient of the act, as well as being a quality of individuals known to act with kindness. According to Hamrick, kindness is a display of empathy for another human being by taking action to care for the other, sometimes sacrificing something of one’s own. It is not simply rule-following action in accordance with a universal ethical law, but rather perceived behaviour with a particular kind of motive in the interests of another. Kindness also operates on a spectrum from small gestures such as opening a door for someone to greater acts and investment from the giver such as consoling suicide survivors or spending time with a chronically lonely elderly person. Acts of kindness manifest a caring relationship in

that the giver is making a free and deliberate choice following the basic pattern of allowing the other to grow. At the same time, there is a sense of humility in the giver in so far as they avoid dominating and controlling the other. Notably, kind acts are not always primarily doing what is objectively good for another (as in the example of lending a match to a reformed smoker wanting to light up a cigarette or avoiding hurting someone's feelings who has cooked you a meal that is really not appetising).

The phenomenon of kindness (especially in its intersubjective grounding) is further revealed through Gabriel Marcel's concept of "*disponibilité*" (1980). The term picks out the way in which we are genuinely and authentically "available" to or "at the disposal" of those there with us in the world. Such a disposition also entails offering a material, emotional, intellectual and spiritual response to those relationships. "*Indisponibilité*", on the other hand, is to be unavailable, treating others as mere functional objects rather than individual humans. This attitude can also have the alienating effect on one's view of self in the same way. It is not simply enough to give resources to the other; one must actively communicate one's own availability to the other through authentic listening, which is in itself a way of giving (Marcel 1980). In this way, *disponibilité* enacts a "witness of presence" for the other, not just by doing the right thing, but genuinely being present and available to them.

By witnessing presence, one must also have the ability to apprehend what it is like to experience the world and circumstances of the other. Edith Stein is well known for her phenomenological exposition of empathy at the heart of such an intentional state—our experience of another's experience (Borden 2003, 27). Stein was Husserl's assistant before Heidegger. However, she avoided the idea of individual isolated experience of the world implicit in Husserl's "transcendental ego", in favour of emphasising a collective encounter with the world intertwined with others there with us. Just as one might remember the content of an experience from the past through an intentional act, so too can one conceive and share in the experience of another. Stein suggests that we don't merely interpret signals of the emotional experiences of others, but rather have genuine first-hand experience of the inner life of the other through empathy. In this way, empathy is truly our "own" experience, but announces that which is not our own as "the foreign". Through empathy, we share in the experience of others. Conversely, for Stein, we cannot truly know ourselves unless we can recognise our relationship to others, while also apprehending others as a fundamental part of our own being. Empathy also impacts on our own personal growth in so far as observing the acts of others helps us to see the possibilities of what we ourselves might become. In this way, what I would call "deep kindness" has the potential to develop into a loving relationship as it demonstrates care, responsibility, respect, attentiveness towards the other, togetherness, and not simply a sense of ethical fairness. Deep kindness in this sense is a sustained availability of the caregiver rather than a fleeting act of care and models a reciprocal generosity.

In summary from a phenomenological perspective, kindness is characterised by caring for another person as they *are*, not merely fulfilling one's moral obligations in general or respecting rights for external reasons. Kindness entails genuinely understanding and responding to the present needs of the other as a person. In the remainder of this article, I investigate "empathy" and "availability" as requisite to judging an action's kindness in the "given circumstances" of the

world of *The Wild Duck*, not merely in terms of sharing the experience of the other but of recognising the nuances of world that give rise to those circumstances. The audience might interpret the actions of characters in their specific context in terms of material objects, place and time – even though each character fails to do so in various ways.

Kindness and the World of the Wild Duck

As I have suggested, each character in *The Wild Duck* falls short of kindness in some way (with the exception of Hedvig who is not fully incorporated into the norms, troubles and restraints of society). Each is lost in their own world and variously unavailable to the other, thereby leading to a lack of self-knowledge as evident in the recurring themes of appearance versus reality, perceiving versus seeing, and hearing versus listening. Yet, Ibsen's mastery as a playwright is demonstrated in his psychologically complex characters who are never *wholly* closed off or blind as they achieve moments of clarity only to be drawn back into their own concerns.

Objects in the dramatic text reveal "affordances" in the world potentially depicted onstage (the possible things that one might do with objects in the environment) (Gibson 1977, 67-82). These affordances reveal different social worlds in which the characters exist and move between. Of course, Ibsen carefully selects the objects that inhabit the world created in each scene replete with symbolic meaning in the context of the plot. From a phenomenological point of view, one feature of material objects encountered in the everyday world is that they most often fade into the background in our everyday activities. We fail to "see" the world most of the time because we are involved in it. This in turn can lead to a shortfall in empathy and *disponibilité* because we fail to perceive and respond authentically to the "there" in which we exist. Ibsen emphasises the central theme of "vision" in *The Wild Duck* through references to light and seeing. In the opening scene we see this literally with the lamps on the mantelpiece and sumptuous candles in the grand room off to the back. The skylight in the roof above lets the light through at various times of day bringing an atmosphere or mood to each act, while also letting the natural external world in. The importance of seeing is both a metaphor for authentically perceiving those others there in the world as they really are (and caring for them as living souls rather than remain blindly self-involved in the world of things) and also the hereditary clue that links Haakon and Hedvig in their deteriorating sight. But as highlighted below in Stein (1989) and Hamrick's (1985) phenomenology, being able to see others as they are is a precondition for empathy and responding authentically to others there in the world.

Part of one's ability to respond to others "there" in the world is being able to recognise the social world that one shares with others grounded in materiality and its affordances. Many objects mentioned in Ibsen's text have overtones of class and social status: Hjalmar's borrowed dress coat, various glasses and cocktail accoutrements, simple bread and butter in the Ekdal house (as opposed to the opulent menu at the Werles'), and Old Ekdal's military uniform, hat and threadbare coat. Each of these represents or reminds us of the (ill-gotten) privilege for Haakon's family and the context for his aid given to Hjalmar and his family. The superficial social world of merriment in Act I is in contrast to the intimate family world of the other acts where Hjalmar does not need to perform for the amusement of guests. It is particularly important that Hjalmar forgets to bring something home for Hedvig as he has previously promised (presumably some

food from the feast), thereby bringing harsh disappointment to his daughter in Act II. Throughout the action, Hjalmar fails to be present to his family, to listen to them authentically and to see their emotional needs. He becomes annoyed that he should have to remember such things and gives the poor substitute of a menu for the dinner to his daughter. Yet by contrast, Hjalmar's flute brings with it a familial love and musical joy, creating an effect in performance that is difficult to discern upon the page. A careful production might highlight this complexity – as for example, the American Association of Performing Artists' 1967 production and rehearsal demonstration explored (Havinga et al., 2008). Just as the conflict between characters propels the tragedy, so too does the humour and love evident contrast with the horrific inevitability unfolding. Ibsen does not create one-sided, unchanging characters.

Another aspect of the social world is fulfilling one's role according to expectations and obligations. Again, indications in the text denote specific roles in the world through objects and spaces. For example, Gina's sewing denotes a gendered social role of wife. The role is reinforced by the food she prepares for the male characters, the bib and brush that she uses for cleaning, and the stove at the back of the apartment. One interpretation is that she has deliberately put herself in a position of servitude as a means of atonement for her secret affair in the past. At the same time, we come to realise that Gina is the true driving force behind the photographic business with the developing equipment (with some help from Hedvig) evident in objects, bottles, jars, brushes for retouching, photographic paper and so on. The text indicates that it was actually Haakon's idea that Hjalmar should go into photography (knowing that Gina already had a rudimentary knowledge of its process). She takes on this breadwinner role in order to let her husband spend time on his "invention"—a mysterious fantasy of creation that preoccupies him in the hope for a brighter future and escape from the present—rather than have to photograph everyday people.

In a sense, Hjalmar hopes to escape into a world of ideas by abrogating his fatherly attention to Hedvig, Gina and Old Ekdal. We never actually see "the invention" itself, which is left to the imagination of the audience. In Gabriel Marcel's terms, Hjalmar withholds "availability" from the other because of his distraction and fleeing. In Act V, we discover that the very idea of trying to invent something was suggested to Hjalmar by Relling (perhaps as a deliberate escape from the present or soothing remedy for the unbearable pains of reality). Signifying more than a mechanical and technological innovation, the invention functions as a metaphor for creativity more generally and the autonomy and achievement for Hjalmar for having made something himself. Of course, Hjalmar's effort and attention spent on the invention come at a cost to his neglected daily tasks and business. In the final Act, he is set about gathering all of his important things into a portmanteau, including clothes, scientific papers and so on. It is not without irony that he asks Gina to do this for him and takes the food and coffee she has prepared for him, forgetting a vow not to do so. Hjalmar is singularly incapable of practicalities and yet hypocritically judgmental of those around him.

A key catalyst of action in Ibsen's text is the deed of gift that Mrs Sörby leaves for Hedvig, which becomes a reminder of Hjalmar's refusal to rely on the kindness of others. The father lacks the humility to receive kindness in addition to the capacity to see his family in their plight. In tearing up the deed, he also deprives those that he loves (Old Ekdal and Hedvig) of the financial

independence that he is not able to provide himself. A key moment in the dramatic climax is Hjalmar's rejection (and subsequent late acceptance) of the deed of gift that Mrs Sörby delivers while overlooking the security and wellbeing of those closest to him. Part of this acceptance is acknowledging one's gratitude, debt, and reliance upon others for one's own freedom and existence. In other words, Ibsen reveals the paradoxical truth that accepting one's connectedness and indebtedness to others is what produces freedom. On the other hand, it is possible that the deed of gift is a means of atonement for both Mrs Sörby and Haakon in order to rectify the latter's interference with Gina while his own wife was dying. When he discovers the truth, Gregers also seeks to put things right by revealing to his old friend Hjalmar the truth about his father's affair. Their long walk and conversations occur off-stage between acts and intensifies the alienation of Hjalmar from his family.

Conversely, the pistol that Hedvig takes into the loft and uses to shoot herself is endowed with a sense of familial destiny (since we discover that both Halmar and Old Ekdal had considered using it to avoid their own social downfall). Gina stumbles over the word "pistol" itself demonstrating a distance and unfamiliarity with the world it brings forth. Yet this object of death and destruction is transformed into the tool of redemption (at least in so far as the young girl sees it). Nobody sees the potential disaster in the weapon. Hedvig's self-destruction is meant to clear the way for others to see what they have done and remove any obstacle that might hold them back in genuine kindness. By the same token, the duck stands in for the self-other relationship and becomes a metaphor for self-destruction, rescue, accepting help, and being transplanted to a domestic environment. In Edith Stein's terms, the duck is emblematic of "the foreign" requiring empathy and kindness in response.

Witness of Presence

In addition to specific objects in the *mise-en-scène*, the location and locale of each character affects both their actions and sense of self in relation to others, which I suggest is related to the "witness of presence" in Marcel's phenomenological terms. In order to enact kindness, one needs to be "with" the other in an authentic way. In *The Wild Duck*, there is a spectrum of locales ranging from public to private places conveying meaning in the text—from the parlour at the Werle's house in Act I to the living room and studio of the Ekdal's in the following acts. Whereas public displays of *disponibilité* might seem to cast each character as kind, we find that in the more private and intimate moments, a clearer relationship to the inner world is revealed. One of the best examples here is how Hjalmar refuses to "perform" for his dinner while at the Werle's party (Ibsen 1960, 142), but entertains his own family with his flute at home in an intimate exchange (1960, 161). In this sense, kindness is connected with intimacy, hospitality and vulnerability—all deeply intertwined with one's experience of place. As discussed above, while Hjalmar is at home, perhaps he is "really" off thinking about his invention. Old Ekdal may be physically present, but "really" off in the forest hunting in the way that he used to in the old days. Hedvig yearns to be with her father while she seeks his affection and attention, although she too is off in a fantasy world in the books she reads or immersed in the photograph that she is retouching.

In dramaturgical terms, the space of the *mise-en-scène* itself stands in for these family relationships. For example, at the beginning of Act I, the audience discovers the comfortably furnished study with bookcases and upholstered furniture. There is a writing table with paper and ledgers in the centre and lamps with green shades, representing a certain upper middle-class opulence. At the back there is an elegant room with plenty of lighting and branched candlesticks from which music and merriment emanates throughout the act. On the one side is a door to an office and the other, a fireplace with glowing coals and further out, a dining room. The spectator is introduced to the world of the play through the servants' conversation and the relatively public space of the study in this context. The ballroom at the back as also mentioned is a place of opulence, affluence and performance. In contrast to this public social space, with the servants having left, the fireplace invites a conversation that we witness between Gregers and Hjalmar whereby they rekindle an old friendship (1960, 135). The space is changed once again as Haakon and Mrs Sörby return with their guests. It is not insignificant that Old Ekdal is discouraged from using this door into the office where he will collect his copying papers as the prohibition indicates his current social status (1960, 141). The scene is not dissimilar to Peter's disavowal of Jesus after his arrest, Hjalmar even claims not to recognise his father when questioned by another guest before he slips out unobserved himself. Hjalmar fails to be kind to his father in public.

In the remaining acts, the Ekdal apartment is a family space with threats and shifting circumstances intruding from the outside world. As described in the stage directions at the opening of Act II, we see the studio at the top of a house. The relative lavishness of this space (or rather its absence) is significant, as Hjalmar notes: "What though we have to pinch and scrape in this place, Gina! It's still our home" (1960, 43). There is an iron stove at the back giving a domesticity and the room is plainly but comfortably furnished with a sofa and armchair—again which function as spaces for intimate conversations. For example, Hjalmar invites Gregers, "Here on the sofa. Make yourself comfortable" (1960, 162). Around the room is photographic equipment, boxes, chemicals, camel-hair brushes for developing, paper, and so on, signalling a place of work. For this reason, when Gregers arrives in Act III, he mistakenly thinks that there are workmen in the house, whereas actually Hjalmar and his father are shuffling around in the loft (1960, 179). In contrast, the kitchen in the apartment is a feminine space where Gina and Hedvig fetch simple food and even beer, which seems to be a splurge. At various points, Gina tidies the space, while at the beginning she engages in sewing as Hedvig is shading her eyes and reading a book (1960, 151). Throughout the action, various characters pose a threat to the stability of the family from the outside, including Haakon Werle, Mrs Sörby, Relling and Molvik—and perhaps most of all, Gregers who rents a room in the house.

The photographic studio in the apartment is a nodal point between the public and the private world, as clients come in and out of the space. In fact, we only ever hear the clients' footsteps going down the stairs as Gina closes the door—a kind of aural-theatrical after-effect at the beginning of Act IV (1960, 199). After hearing muffled farewells offstage, we discover that it was Gina saying goodbye to the customers (presumably young lovers) and promising them their first dozen photographs by Monday. The fact that the family is not able to have an entirely separate space for work also signifies their reduced circumstances. In a way, the motif of photography stands in for the notion of carefully constructed tableaux: external appearance versus the

troubled inner world that each character experiences. The photographic image denotes a public representation of kindness and happiness betraying a deeper reality indiscernible in such an exterior representation. Earlier in Act I, Gregers accuses his father of constructing a tableau of father and son for the sake of Mrs Sörby (1960, 149). It is no mistake that leaves of photographic albums appear both in the study depicted in Act I and in the studio of the remaining acts: the former consumes images and the latter produces them, for example as Hedvig does (Ibsen 1960, 174).

As a metaphor drawing multiple temporalities together, photography constitutes an artistic image of *The Wild Duck*, as rewriting the past and capturing the present (a notion explored by Barthes 1981). The beginning of Act IV serves as a good example. We discover that a photograph has just been taken: a moment captured in time and separated from its context to appear as an image. One might notice that the camera has a clock over it, reminding the spectator of the passing of time and the characters of their daily duties in time. The equipment is set out, inviting the affordances of work and also of art. It is not clear which this is. It is also not without significance that it is afternoon and growing darker later. The night of the soul is coming in an existential sense with the events that are about to ensue. The photograph captures a moment in time, but also presents a skewed sense of completion and perhaps even an exterior facade of happiness over and above the fluid, incomplete nature of daily existence. The representation of “what has been” cuts the image off from the complexities of the given circumstances. In the text Ibsen implies a distinction between photography as an art and as a consumable product: one notes that Hjalmar does not simply want to take photographs of “any old person” but hopes to elevate the profession to an art whereas Gina keeps the income flowing through commercial service of the business. The guests at Mrs Sörby’s dinner party emphasise the latter, claiming that it is “good for digestion to look at pictures” (1960, 139). Such a “witnessing of presence” is merely superficial rather than encountering the other authentically.

The complex and interconnected world revealed by objects in Ibsen’s text bring forth relationships of power, status, autonomy, control, family relationships and guilt in the fictional locales of the play. As a paradigm of this connectedness in contrast to mere images in photography, the loft is strewn with paraphernalia to care for the animals there—including complex contraptions designed by Hjalmar for the purpose. In a way, this is a training ground for care and responsibility. Yet Old Ekdal also goes “hunting” there, as the animals become prey and ultimately food for the thrifty family. The attic or loft glimpsed off-stage functions as a “dreamspace” and psychological inner space to which various characters including Old Ekdal, Hedvig and Hjalmar retreat. The door which opens up reveals a refuge from the real world and reflects a lost world deep in the ocean floor (as Hedvig describes it because of the artefacts left in there by a sea captain who used to own the apartment) (1960, 180-182). Hedvig calls this the ocean depths or “briny deep” (bringing to mind the bottom of the lake where the wild duck had attempted to drown itself after it was shot). In contrast to the stifling prison-like quality of the rest of the house, the loft stands as a liminal space of imagination and care. Gregers dismays as to how he could survive in this enclosed space, cut off from “the sight of sea and sky” in the midst of these choked up walls (1960, 170). Yet the loft also serves as a hunting ground where Old Ekdal shoots at rabbits and other animals—a substitute for his old adventures into the forest. The external environment has an uncanny ability to shift the mood in this room, as we

see in the moonlight that floods the space (1960, 167). This makes the attic somewhat of a dream-space certainly for Old Ekdal, but also for Hedvig where the mood changes according to the elements outside. At the same time, the different animals and elements in this room seem to have their own “natural space” including the pigeon-houses under the eaves and the hutches for rabbits down low.

There are also a range of other off-stage spaces mentioned in the text that add to the exterior world impinging on the Ekdals. Downstairs we learn about Molvik and Relling as “those two living underneath”, who go out drinking and consorting until all hours of the night (1960, 170). We discover that it is just as well Old Ekdal has copying work to do so that he doesn’t spend all of his time at Mrs Eriksen’s restaurant (1960, 153). We learn about the forest where Ekdal felled government trees (1960, 22) and the Höidal Works out of town where Gregers resides (1960, 131). It is no mistake that the Werles are in the business of tearing down the environment for profit. More broadly, the exterior world stands in bitter openness to the comforts of home as we see in the hat and overcoats that the characters put on and take off. Highlighting the hostility of the external world and the protection that the home affords, Hjalmar grabs his hat and topcoat to go out for a walk (1960, 198). Similarly, Molvik (the fallen priest who has apparently left his vocation) seeks refuge and forgetting when he goes out to drink with Relling. There is no possibility of salvation in religion in this case. Yet as on an ethical mission, Gregers sees his duty to intervene in the lives of others as he discovers information about Hjalmar and Gina without taking the time to consider their current situation.

Deep Kindness and Temporal Repetition

In addition to objects and places, time is also key to any investigation of kindness and self-interest in the text. As I argue, “deep kindness” is only possible through the sustained availability through time towards the other rather than a fleeting or superficial positive gesture or encounter. At the very end of the play, the hope is that Hjalmar will be changed in a permanent and sustained way through his grief, bringing the stark reality of others around him into view. Relling is pessimistic in thinking that he will fall back into his old ways while Gregers remains hopeful that his friend has changed. The hope is that he has discovered the deep kindness of a relationship built on truth and trust through sustained presence, listening to the needs of others empathetically and responding with care. In the context of family, deep kindness is the basis of love and support. For others outside of one’s own circle, it is a genuine concern for one’s fellow beings, although Gregers ominously casts himself as the outsider, “thirteenth at table”.

The structure of each act in *The Wild Duck* is carefully crafted around time as the action of the play takes place over the course of two days (presumably in winter with wet snow falling in the final act). Time and its related concepts are mentioned frequently in the text, together with clocks and other temporal imagery. In this sense, the action tests continued kindness and how each character responds to a change in their circumstances: time will tell. Such events include the sentencing of the judge in sending Old Ekdal to jail, the affair and break-up of Gina and Haakon, the death of Gregers’ mother and period leading up to that moment, or the period of

military service for Old Ekdal and the way that he was treated with esteem by the institution before his subsequent downfall.

A sense of temporal repetition in the text propels the action forward. This can be seen in the image of the pistol, which was the particular implement that Old Ekdal, Hjalmar and then Hedvig hold while contemplating self-obliteration (1960, 187-188). By way of contrast, the wild duck's loft seems to be outside of time, atemporal, or at the very least, a moment frozen in time. Gregers comments, "I suppose that's a world of itself" and "So time stands still in there... beside the wild duck" (1960, 181). The room is filled with books and a clock that no longer works, gesturing to the dream world of imagination. The experience of times past which are inwardly oriented obstruct any focus on the present in relation to others for each of the characters. The game of "blind man's buff" at the end of Act I extends the image. Similarly, gaps in time also play a part: we learn that it has been sixteen or seventeen years since Gregers and Hjalmar had last seen each other, signifying a void in the past requiring repair (1960, 134). So much has happened in this time as the ensuing conversation covers. Gregers notes that "Father seems to have been a sort of Providence to you" in discovering these acts of kindness towards Hjalmar. This sets up the theme of inevitability in the play—that ultimately leads to Hedvig's death. Such an image of destiny is manifest in the copy of Harryson's History of London which has a picture of Death, an hourglass, and a young girl (1960, 181). Something is needed to break the repetition of the past.

In Simon Stone's 2011 production, a real duck roamed the stage bringing unpredictability and "reality" to the action on stage and perhaps heightening the fear that this creature would lose its life (an example of States' 1985 exploration of the danger and indeterminacy of animals on stage). Arguably, the fact that we never see the duck onstage in Ibsen's text emphasises the realm of the imaginary, while Hedvig's death comes as a shock. But by stripping back the "world" of the *mise-en-scène* as Stone and Meyers did, Ibsen's text is reduced to the psychological realm, to the exclusion of the rich tapestry of objects, places, times and people. The absence of set took the action "outside of time".

From a phenomenological point of view, *The Wild Duck* explores the idea that relinquishing self-reliance and standing by one's commitments through empathy and *disponibilitè* produces freedom and existence when one faces the past and chooses the future resolutely. This is lost in the absence of world. Gregers' meddling causes more harm than good because he tries to take the decision away from others around him. Similarly, by meddling in the lives and offering psychological coping mechanisms of those around him, Relling diagnoses various means of escape from existential angst felt by each character. We come to realise that each character has a diversion from reality: alcohol for Molvik, an escape from reality in the loft for Old Ekdal, a devotion to the ideal and need for a hero to worship for Gregers, service and devotion as a wife for Gina and his invention for Hjalmar. Each diversion gets in the way of empathy as the experience of "the foreign" in Edith Stein's terms.

The metaphor of the wild duck itself as a paradigm of "the foreign" applies to many of the characters in the play, yet it is Hedvig who acts outside of any rational structure of the adult social world offering her family the possibility of redemption. In this sense, there is no definitive answer to Killingmo's (1994) question about Hedvig's motivation and whether she was able to

hear Gregers and Hjalmar speaking outside the loft. Her act of kindness transcends the social world of representation, metaphysics, and ethical ideals – beyond which the characters of this world around her cannot see. Her action is emblematic of “deep kindness”. Relling’s prediction at the end of the text is left in the air as to whether this will be the jolt that Hjalmar needed to grasp his own life authentically, genuinely see the world, and enact kindness towards others. The question is left open for the audience in their own existence in terms of openness to feeling and availability to others through kindness in their own world too. Each character now needs to face the past truthfully while reaching forward to the future with consideration of others there in the world – not just their own fears and desires.

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