
8. Trauma, Aesthetic Treatment, and Intermediality

Das Haus der Lüge (Lupu Pick, Rex-Film, 1926)

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The main influence of Henrik Ibsen on film history may lie beyond traditional and announced adaptations of his plays in ways that remain to be explored. One intriguing example can be found in the celebrated German *Kammerspielfilm* – a genre that merged the chamber play aesthetics of theatre director Max Reinhardt with groundbreaking cinematographic devices in the early 1920s. This resulted in a small number of films with sparse use of intertitles: anti-spectacles of everyday life that, in the words of Siegfried Kracauer, anticipated “truly cinematic narration” in their obsession with objects and rejection of the written word (2004, 104). The canon includes Lupu Pick’s *Scherben* (*Shattered* 1921) and *Sylvester* (*New Year’s Eve* 1923), Leopold Jessner’s *Hintertreppe* (*Backstairs* 1921) and *Erdegeist* (*Earth Spirit* 1923), Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Michael* (1924), and F. W. Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh* 1924). Screenwriter Carl Mayer masterminded the genre by providing scripts and key input on cinematography.¹ The brash introduction of Ibsen as integral to the *Kammerspielfilm* is admittedly in need of justification: the Norwegian dramatist is barely

1 Only two of these *Kammerspielfilme* are adaptations of literary works: *Michael* (1924) is based on the novel *Mikaël* (1904) by Herman Bang and is the only film listed here not penned by Carl Mayer, whereas *Erdegeist* is based on Frank Wedekind’s *Lulu* play from 1895.

discussed in the scholarly research on the genre and none of the above-mentioned films are based on any of his dramas.²

This chapter explores Lupu Pick's *Das Haus der Lüge* (*The House of Lies* 1926), based on Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (*Vildanden* 1884), as a missing piece in the canonical story of the Kammerspielfilm.³ As the first step towards understanding the interconnections between Ibsen and this genre, intermedial exchanges are discussed along three inter-connected lines: historically, in the film per se, and in the historical moment of the adaptation. I argue that *Das Haus der Lüge* punctuates illusions of wholeness promoted by still photography and the ideology of the bourgeois family. The film thus responds to widespread familial tensions and anxieties in the wake of World War I. Its warning against mistaking pictorial surfaces for realities, moreover, comments on the explosion of images in the Weimar Republic (1918–33) in ways that resonate with today's digital and social media.

Das Haus der Lüge tells the story of the nuclear family Ekdal, which is exposed to past and present pressures from the broken family Werle. The time span represented is merely four days, in which the film focuses on the mundane life and marriage of Gina (Lucie Höflich) and “photographer” Hjalmar Ekdal (Werner Krauß), a naïve man with a fragile ego who lives under the illusion that Hedwig (Mary Johnson) is his daughter and that he will revolutionise photography by inventing an underwater camera. Readers of Ibsen will note a high degree of fidelity to the source text; the bourgeois families are depicted as equally farcical and falsified. The film adaptation, however, comes with a change of dramaturgy which sees the dinner party of Act 1 give way to an exposition with significant changes to the backstory of *The Wild Duck*. Arguably the most significant change is that Gregers Werle (Walter Janssen) returns home disabled and rejects not only the offer to succeed his

2 There are several insightful studies on the German Kammerspielfilm [see Eisner 1969, 177–221; Kracauer 2004, 96–106; Schectman 2012, 148–152; Vonderau 2012, 105–110; Kaes 2013, 152–153; and Thompson and Bordwell 2019, 95–96].

3 Thanks to Ellen Rees, Mark Sandberg, Anton Kaes, the editors, and one anonymous peer reviewer for their most useful comments on earlier drafts.

father, Jan Werle (Albert Steinrück), as business owner but also the dinner party thrown in his honour in the play. The film also makes it abundantly clear that the powerful merchant is the father of Hedwig.

Hjalmar's illusions are partly the construct of his friend, neighbour, and frequent visitor Dr Relling (Eduard von Winterstein), who bolsters Ekdal's self-image by asserting that he is a true artist and that "nearly all great men have simple wives", while the film ironically and obsessively shows Gina running both the household and the Ekdal atelier.⁴ As indicated by communication devices (a telephone), the spelling of Ekdal's atelier (Fotografisk atelier), and a dinner menu, the action takes place in a Norwegian town around the turn of the century. The harmony of the Ekdal family is haunted by the parental issue soon to be revealed. Subsequent to the exposure of Hedwig's parentage, Gregers leads his half-sister to sacrifice what she holds most dear in order to restore the happiness of Hjalmar: Hedwig commits suicide rather than killing the treasured wild duck that lives in the loft of the Ekdal apartment. The film's coda shows Hjalmar and Gina Ekdal on the anniversary of Hedwig's death, preparing to lay a wreath upon on her grave in the company of Dr Relling.

Intermedial Frameworks

In this 1926 Ibsen adaptation, the narrative proper is literally framed by Gina Ekdal photographing an extended family and a bridal couple in the opening sequence and the added coda, respectively. In between these acts of photographing, static shots from a myriad of angles display a plethora of photographs, paintings, and sculptures. Christine Geraghty's claim (2009) that adaptations tend to come with a proliferation of medialities is thus driven to the extreme in *Das Haus der Lüge*. By inserting a number of intertitles – many of them quotes from Ibsen's play – *Das Haus der Lüge* also makes a radical break with the conventions of the Kammerspielfilm in ways that trigger questions of intermediality.



4 "Fast alle grossen Männer hatten einfache Frauen." All translations are by the author of this chapter unless otherwise noted.

Ibsen scholars have discussed *The Wild Duck* within the context of the photographic realism of the late 1800s and issues of what is seen and what is hidden (see for instance Østerud 1996). In the film adaptation, the additional layer of moving images allows for a more complex treatment of still photography than in Ibsen's play. The film, I suggest, calls for a theoretical framework sensitive to differentiating intermedial layers along diachronic and synchronic points of departure. This chapter draws inspiration from intermediality scholar Irina O. Rajewski and the method proposed by Jørgen Bruhn and Anne Gjelsvik in *Cinema Between Media* (2018). The diachronic perspective allows me to chart how Ibsen is embedded in intersections between literature, theatre, and Weimar cinema – intermedial relations considered fundamental to the *Kammerspielfilm* (Vonderau 2012; Kaes 2013). The synchronic perspective revolves around three sub-categories that highlight different levels of exchange in the filmic text and its cultural and sociopolitical context: medial transposition, media combination, and intermedial reference (Rajewsky 2005, 52–54; Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018, 20–22).

In Rajewsky's terminology, medial transposition concerns exchange from one media to another, in this case how dialogue, setting, and characters are transposed from Ibsen's text to Pick's film. Bruhn and Gjelsvik use "transformation" for similar processes, stressing the temporal aspect of the adaptation process (2018, 20). The credits of *Das Haus der Lüge* inform audiences that the film is "based on the immortal drama by Henrik Ibsen".⁵ I suggest, however, that it is more productive to focus on infidelity in order to identify and discuss ideological implications. This entails approaching the film as a composite that draws on other intertexts and medialities than Ibsen's social play exclusively.

Media combination occurs simply when distinct forms of media are present in the same cultural product. Besides the photographing in the Ekdal atelier, the film conspicuously draws on a pictorial acting style that would bring to the minds of contemporary audiences the



5 "Nach unsterblichen Drama des Henrik Ibsens."

theatre or films of the previous decade (see also Yalgin and Sandberg in this volume for further discussion of acting styles). The critic in *Der Kinematograph*, for instance, saw “shadows of the Brahm era at the Lessing Theatre” in this adaptation of *The Wild Duck* (1926, 23).⁶ Consequently, it would be more accurate to describe *Das Haus der Lüge* as an intermedial composite than a one-way adaptation of Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*.

Finally, and most importantly, intermedial reference concerns how a film “thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means” (Rajewsky 2005, 53). Bruhn and Gjelsvik stress how features often refer to other films in both intended and unintended ways that also qualify as intermedial reference (2018, 22). I employ this category as an analytical tool when discussing how *Das Haus der Lüge* self-reflexively positions itself in relation to other arts, most notably still photography and cinema.

I loosely follow Bruhn and Gjelsvik’s three-step model on how to analyse filmic composites “by cataloguing, structuring and contextualizing medialities” (2018, 25). The authors approach intermediality as a motif that produces different layers of meaning and demonstrate how contextualisation often holds the key to a fuller understanding of the intermedial issues at stake in individual films. To read *Das Haus der Lüge* in its historical moment, then, means to frame it within the visual turn of the Weimar Republic, when an explosion of images challenged literature, theatre, and traditional newspapers in ways that have been discussed as no less than an alteration of perception (Weitz 2007, 207–50).

The opening sequence introduces Gina and Hedwig Ekdal photographing an extended family on the occasion of the matriarch’s ninetyeth birthday. The fabricated nature of the portrait is underscored by how Gina meticulously choreographs a boy’s posture and how the arrangement is endangered by a restless toddler playing with a doll. Hedwig successfully directs the toddler as her mother seeks the perfect

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6 “Bei diesem Film...stiegen die Schatten der Brahm-Epoche im Lessing-theater auf.”



Fig. 1. Gina Ekdal (Lucie Höflich) seeking the perfect photographic moment in *Das Haus der Lüge* (1926). Courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek. Fig. 2. Gregers Werle (Walter Janssen) returning back home as a disabled “soldier” in *Das Haus der Lüge* (1926). Courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek.

photographic moment. The film self-reflexively hints at the collaborative effort of filmmaking by explicitly positioning the framing of the camera within the cinematic frame. The stilted tableau apes traditional family portraits in art history, with support from a background that resembles Roman landscape painting. In the words of Brigitte Peucker, “tableau vivant moments in film set up tension between the two- and three-dimensional, between stasis and movement, between the ‘death’ of the human body in painting and its ‘life’ in cinema” (2007, 26). Lupu Pick thus addresses the relation between cinema, literature, still photography, and painting in a tripartite *mise-en-abyme*, with Pick’s adaptation framed within Ibsen’s “immortal drama”, Gina Ekdal’s family photograph framed within the cinematic frame, and the family portrait framed within the painted background (see Fig. 1). The opening sequence of *Das Haus der Lüge* consequently triggers intermedial reflections, destabilises notions of authorship, and questions issues of reality and representation.

The War Comes Home

After the introduction of the Ekdals, the film cuts to an outdoor scene with Gregers Werle returning home in a horse-drawn carriage after a long absence. A vignetted close-up of his shoes highlights that one sole is significantly higher than the other (see Fig. 2); the film cuts to a back shot which reveals a limp. The deformation may bring to mind limping, Lucifer-like characters such as Mephistopheles in Goethe’s *Faust* (1808), or how Relling identifies him as “the devil” in the play (Ibsen 2019, 106). The close-up, moreover, suggests a prosthesis or a serious injury that resonates in the aftermath of the lost war. As Deborah Cohen asserts, “[M]ore than any other group, disabled veterans symbolized the First World War’s burdens” (2001, 2). The critic in *Die Filmwoche* linked the disability of Gregers with “a conspicuous mitigation of this character’s fanaticism” (1926, 204).⁷

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7 The actor “hat allerdings das Fanatische dieses Charakters wesentlich gemildert, wie auch sein körperliches Gebrechen...das vielleicht unmittelbar Ursache zu seinem Fanatismus ist”.

Gregers rejects the dinner invitation and refrains from any meta-physical quest or absolutes in the film; the burning idealist of Ibsen's play is thus transformed into a disabled and aloof character in Pick's film. The return of physically or psychologically damaged characters, moreover, was a common motif in Weimar cinema. In Leopold Jessner's *Backstairs*, for instance, the plot revolves around the return of an injured fiancé without mentioning the war once – there was simply no need to do so for audiences in Germany in the early 1920s (Kaes 2009, 117–18).

By the time *Das Haus der Lüge* premiered in Germany, illegitimate children conceived during World War I were approaching Hedwig's age. This social context may explain why the filmmakers removed any ambiguity over the paternity issue, making the film ask more direct questions about the destinies of illegitimate children in the context of postwar Germany. As Hedwig receives the wild duck as a gift from old Ekdal (Paul Henckels), the film cuts to a medium shot of Hjalmar and Gina as the latter serves her husband a meal. "See how happy she can be," Hjalmar exclaims to his wife. "Isn't it horrible to think that she will lose her sight!"⁸ Gina grabs her husband abruptly by the arm when the topic is brought up. The camera cuts to Gina in a vignettted medium close-up; her facial expression changes swiftly from surprise to sadness, and her chest heaves heavily as she looks towards her daughter off-screen for ten seconds of running time. The camera cuts back to a medium shot which highlights the difference between husband and worried wife. Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs have explored how such pictorial acting transferred from theatre to cinema in the first decades of the twentieth century, arguing that:

pictorial effects convey to the audience which of the many objects and people visible to them are significant for the development of the action, while changes on the stage picture overall, and in the attitudes of the actors, indicate new centres of attention and changes in the situation. Shot-based accounts of the cinema assign these functions largely to fram-

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8 "Sieh nur, wie sie sich freuen kann! ... Ist es nicht schrecklich zu wissen, dass sie das Augenlicht verlieren wird!"

ings that isolate the significant element—hence the importance in such accounts of the emergence of the close-up—and to the shot changes that shift the attention from component to component of a scene. (1997, 13)

As the viewer has already been informed of old Werle's declining eyesight at this point, the pictorial acting and the close-up remove any doubt about the paternity issue. This is a significant departure from *The Wild Duck* where, in the words of Ibsen scholar Toril Moi, "the question of paternity is surrounded by doubt" (2006, 248). The film adaptation provides no background on the relationship between Jan Werle and Gina, which suggests an act of unfaithfulness rather than the sexual abuse of the former housemaid that is implied in the play.

Das Haus der Lüge dramatises the fate of an innocent child and the hidden secrets of her parentage in ways that adhere to contemporary debates on illegitimate children, as documented by Sybille Buske in *Fräulein Mutter und ihr Bastard* (2004). Sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld described World War I as "the greatest sexual disaster in the civilized history of mankind" and understood the dramatically increasing divorce rates in Germany as indicators of "a bankruptcy of marriage and sexual ethics" (1966, 437). A number of feature films gave aesthetic responses to the dissolution of families and issues of illegitimate children towards the end or in the aftermath of the war, as we see in, for example, *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (*Diary of a Lost Woman* 1918) and *Fräulein Mutter* (*Maiden Mother* 1919). *Das Haus der Lüge* can also be seen in continuation of Pick's two-part *Aus den Erinnerungen eines Frauenarztes* (*From the Memoirs of a Gynecologist* 1922), which was conceived as a protest against the heavily debated law criminalising abortion in Germany.

The weight of the past in Ibsen's *Wild Duck* only intensifies within the context of mid-1920s Germany – a society in which lies, deceit, death, disability, and (hereditary) disease were lurking beneath the façade of bourgeois family portraits. "If we wanted to write a social history of mistrust in Germany, then above all the Weimar Republic would draw attention to itself. Fraud and expectations of being defrauded became epidemic in it," writes Peter Sloterdijk. "In those

years, it proved to be an omnipresent risk of existence that from behind all solid illusions, the untenable and chaotic emerged” (1987, 483). The mostly static camera in *Das Haus der Lüge* ensures that the atmosphere is truly claustrophobic, in the spirit of the *Kammerspielfilm*. It shows no landscapes and barely strays beyond the Ekdal and Werle homes (with the exception of two outdoor shots in the opening sequence and the painted cityscape outside the windows of the apartment building). Instead, the camera investigates the interior of the Ekdal household from multiple angles, like a spy in constant motion, in ways that suggest confinement and constraint.

By transforming Hedwig and Gregers into wounded half-siblings, *Das Haus der Lüge* morphs into post-traumatic cinema; it is a film that supports Anton Kaes’ suggestion that a number of Weimar films “translate military aggression and defeat into domestic tableaux of crime and horror” (2009, 3). The adaptation reads as a dissection of bourgeois life from the perspective of someone who has experienced the war. Key concepts from Ibsen’s play, such as lies and sacrifice, take on additional meanings from this perspective. Having fought a war propagated to defend German *Kultur* against foreign *Zivilisation*, many veterans were alienated by the *Heimat* they returned to. For what kind of Germany had millions of soldiers sacrificed their lives and health? In *The Wild Duck*, Gregers’ pathological quest for truth is partly motivated by his mother’s suspicion before her death that Werle and Gina Ekdal had an affair. In *Das Haus der Lüge*, any mention of Gregers’ mother or Gina as a housemaid is removed from the storyline. Seen as a disabled veteran, Gregers’ quest for truth is instead motivated by a desire to clean house in a homeland permeated by lies. This reading is further supported by Pick having changed the title from *The Wild Duck* to *Das Haus der Lüge*, downplaying the symbolism of the play and its wounded animal in the process.

Production Notes and Critical Reception

Das Haus der Lüge was made by Pick’s production company, Rex-Film, under the wings of Ufa (Universum Film AG). To replace his former scriptwriter Carl Mayer, the director turned to Fanny Carlsen to

co-write the script based on Ibsen's play. The term *Kammerspielfilm* alludes to the theatre constructed by Max Reinhardt that was referred to as *Kammerspiele* – a section of the *Deutsches Theater* built specifically for intimate theatre and inaugurated with a staging of Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) in 1906. At least four of the actors in *Das Haus der Lüge* had been trained by Reinhardt and performed in this famous version of *Ghosts* in the early 1900s: Werner Krauß, Lucie Höflich, Eduard von Winterstein, and Albert Steinrück (*IbsenStage*). Cinematographer Carl Drews had worked with Karl Freund, the celebrated innovator of the “unchained camera” (*entfesselte Kamera*) who worked on *Der letzte Mann* (filmportal.de). The set designer was the renowned occultist Albin Grau, best known for his work on Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). The esteemed film composer Giuseppe Becce composed the musical score for the premiere in Berlin on 22 January 1926.⁹

Das Haus der Lüge was officially rated as *Volksbildend* (educative of the people) and the immense praise it received upon its release resembled the critical reception of *Der letzte Mann*. *Deutsche Filmwoche* called it one of “the best German works”¹⁰ (Ludwigg 1926, 10) and *Filmtechnik* found it “one of the most artful film creations in recent years”¹¹ (A.K. 1926, 101). Several writers framed Pick's Ibsen adaptation as a *Kammerspielfilm* along the lines of *Scherben* and *Sylvester*. *8-Uhr-Abendblatt* referred to it as a “chamber play” (*Kammerspiel*) (1926, n.p.), whereas *Der Film* elaborated on this, calling it “a vintage chamber play”¹² (W. 1926, 23). Critics saw the film as proof that cinema was capable of producing true works of art. With thinly veiled pride, some hailed *Das Haus der Lüge* as film art superior to US pro-



9 The version of *Das Haus der Lüge* explored here is a digital restoration by the National Library of Norway in cooperation with Deutsche Kinemathek, which plays at eighteen frames per second and has a running time of 111 minutes. The print was made available as recently as 2019. For further information, see www.filmportal.de/node/9417/stock#sichtungskopie.

10 “Zusammen mit seinen Schaispielern errang [Lupu Pick] eine geschlossene Leistung, die diesen Film zu den besten deutschen Arbeiten macht.”

11 “Eine der kunstwahrsten Filmschöpfungen der letzten Jahre.”

12 “Ein erlesenenes Kammerspiel.”

ductions and as a new apotheosis for German cinema (A.K. 1926, 100; *Die Filmwoche* 1926, 204; –s. 1926, 176). Both the director's cinematic treatment of Ibsen's play and the acting were singled out for special praise. *Die Filmwoche* considered that Pick deserved the same fame as F.W. Murnau (ibid.), whereas Heinz Ludwigg dubbed Swedish actor Mary Johnson (Hedwig) the German Mary Pickford (1926, 10). The reviews write themselves into discourses on intermediality, Hollywood hegemony, and the German star culture of the mid-1920s.

Intermedial Tensions

I suggest that the mixed mediality of *Das Haus der Lüge* serves at least three different functions: it positions the film in the contemporary and competitive media market, it bridges the opposites in the so-called *Kino-Debatte* (debate about cinema), and it serves a crucial role in the film's function as a trauma narrative.

Firstly, Pick's film differs in nature from the rapid editing of Hollywood productions in the tradition of D.W. Griffith and from more recent developments in Weimar cinema, such as the unchained camera of *Der letzte Mann* and the star-studded ensemble of *Die freudlose Gasse* (*Joyless Street*, 1925), with Greta Garbo in the lead role. Thomas Elsaesser has remarked that:

many of Weimar cinema's classics are films about filmmaking itself, that is, self-referential. Such "reflexivity" is, however, in this case due less to the directors belonging to a specific aesthetic avant-garde and pursuing a modernist agenda. Instead, I see it as evidence of a historical conjuncture in which a prominent segment of the Weimar film community (counting next to producers, directors and screenwriters also set designers and cameramen) found itself in an intense dialogue or even struggle on at least two fronts: domestically, they had to compete with other, more established arts and their social institutions, and internationally, with the permanent threat of Hollywood hegemony, both on the German market and in the rest of Europe. (2000, 5)

Within these cultural coordinates, *Das Haus der Lüge* harks back to the intersection between earlier *Kammerspielfilme* and German theatre. Conceived and received as a film that distances itself from Hollywood,

the film pleased critics eager to promote the superiority of German *Kultur* over the alleged superficial arts of America. In *Filmtechnik*, for instance, the writer could not see how “this film will find any buyers in the US” (A.K. 1926, 101).¹³

Secondly, the *Kino-Debatte* of the 1920s polarised literature and theatre against their new rival, cinema (Kaes 1987; Walk 2007). A number of critics saw film as a threat to nothing less than German *Kultur* itself. Murnau, taking the opposite position in the debate, called for cinema to free itself from the weighty tradition of theatre (Walk 2007, 177). Pick saw theatre and film as non-competitive forms of expression, stressing how cinema differs in its capacity to transmit affect. “My love belongs to the cinema. I do not see the medium as a threat to theatre,” Pick explained in 1928. “To me, cinema is an art of intensity [...]. The lifeless, moving shadows on the big screen can make us cry and laugh. What in the end decides the value of a film, however, is always the personality behind these shadows” (as cited in Treuner 1928, n.p.).¹⁴ The *Kammerspielfilme* of Pick, Jessner, and Murnau can be described as intermedial transpositions and combinations that undercut the fierce fronts of the *Kino-Debatte* in terms of their forms. As Kaes states, “[T]he *Kammerspiel*film imbued the photographic medium of film with theatrical gravity” (2013, 152). *Kammerspielfilme* share a number of generic markers with the plays of Ibsen and Strindberg: situated in small settings and offering intimate portraits of few characters over a short period of time, they emphasise character psychology by means of their slow tempo and telling acting, in films that are more naturalistic in character than expressionist films (Thompson and Bordwell 2019, 94). The mixture of frail masculine egos and claustrophobic atmospheres more often than not results in death as the out-

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13 “Wir glauben nicht, daß dieser Film Käufer in U.S.A. finden kann.”

14 “Meine Liebe gehört dem Film. Ich sehe in ihm auch keine Konkurrenz für das Theater. Film spielen und Filme stellen bedeutet für mich eine Kunst der Intensität.... Die an sich leblosen, beweglichen Schatten auf der weißen Wand können uns weinen und lachen machen. Entscheidend für den Wert oder Unwert wird letzten Endes immer die Persönlichkeit sein, die hinter diesen Schatten steht.”

come of the narrative. The interconnections between Ibsen and this genre are perhaps most obvious in *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*, which are both plays aligned with naturalism that stretch beyond the bourgeois spheres of his other social dramas.

Thirdly, the intermediality of *Das Haus der Lüge* can be discussed as a mode of address. Considering that the film attacks bourgeois corruption, it is significant that it premiered at Berlin's Mozartsaal – a theatre that screened literary adaptations and drew bourgeois audiences. Many of these viewers saw themselves as guardians of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated middle-class) and were inclined to encounter the film with a thorough knowledge of Ibsen's play and the theatre traditions on which it draws. Not even the intimate theatre of Max Reinhardt could show facial expressions and body language to such striking effect as the close-ups in the film; the pictorial effects of *Das Haus der Lüge* pierce the thin veneer of bourgeois role-playing and hold it up for audiences to see.

Time and Trauma

Das Haus der Lüge stays close to the issues of knowing and not knowing that Sigmund Freud identified as central to traumatic experience and which Cathy Caruth (1996) has explored as hallmarks of trauma narratives. Despite the Norwegian historical setting and the dated pictorial acting, the film only seems to depict a space detached from the war experience. The setting and the linear narrative of the film are disrupted by the historical moment in which it was produced and seen, in ways that reflect spatial and temporal ruptures of traumatic experience. As Richard J. Evans puts it, “[W]hen Germans referred to ‘peacetime’ after 1918, it was not to the era in which they were actually living, but to the period before the Great War had begun. Germany failed to make the transition from wartime back to peacetime after 1918” (2004, 72). For viewers familiar with Ibsen's play or Pick's previous *Kammerspielfilme*, moreover, the coming death and disaster are already known to have happened. In this light, the Norwegian setting functions both as a utopian space of pre-traumatic innocence and the displaced double of the Weimar Republic.



Figs. 3a–d. The pictorial acting highlights the obliviousness of Hjalmar and the terror of Gina Ekdal (Werner Krauß and Lucie Höflich) in *Das Haus der Lüge* (1926). Courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek.

Pick transforms Ibsen’s play about destructive idealism into a trauma narrative that negotiates two contrasting positions: what we may call the pre-traumatic stress syndrome of Gina Ekdal and the sheer obliviousness of Hjalmar. As the husband accepts Gregers’ request to stay with the Ekdals for a period of time, the camera cuts to Gina, who is coming in through the double door to the loft. She reacts with terror at the sight of the young Werle. The film then cuts back to Hjalmar and Gregers staring back at her in a medium shot. A reverse eye-level shot shows Gina panic-stricken (see Figs. 3a–d). As Hjalmar introduces the intruder to his wife, her chest heaves heavily and rapidly in a medium close-up. “This is my wife Gina, the mother of our beloved daughter Hedwig,” Hjalmar says, which only emphasises his ignorance of what Gina, Gregers, and the audience already know.¹⁵ As Hjalmar leads

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15 “Das ist meine Frau Gina, die Mutter meinen lieben Tochter Hedwig.”

Gregers to the Ekdals' guest room, an over-the-shoulder shot shows Gina closed-fisted and frozen, apart from her rapidly heaving chest, in a pose that is held for more than 20 seconds of running time. The pictorial effect of this scene guides the viewer's attention towards Gina's awareness of the disaster about to unfold, whereas Hjalmar is caught completely off-guard. The film thus negotiates trauma so as to also warn the audience and prepare it for coming disasters in the turbulent Weimar Republic.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1925), published in the same year that *Das Haus der Lüge* was produced, Sigmund Freud pays attention to how psychological wounds sharpen one's capacity for anticipating danger:

In the case of the ordinary traumatic neuroses two characteristics emerge prominently: first, that the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright; and secondly, that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule against the development of a neurosis. 'Fright', 'fear' and 'anxiety' are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definite object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise. (1955, 12)

In light of Freud's remarks, Gina's pre-traumatic awareness develops from anxiety into fear with the arrival of Gregers, whereas Hjalmar's obliviousness heightens his vulnerability.

Intermedial Combinations

The trauma narrative of *Das Haus der Lüge* comes with intermedial combinations and references that shed light on how the film was formed and how it functioned as a cultural text. Ibsen's plays are intertwined in the genealogy of the Kammerspielfilm in ways that go well

beyond Pick's adaptation.¹⁶ To gain a fuller understanding of these interconnections one would do well to start with Leopold Jessner, a director who took part in both Carl Heine's and Gustav Lindemann's Ibsen theatres before becoming one of the Norwegian dramatist's best-known directors on the German stage of the 1910s (Hanssen 2018, 173ff.). F.W. Murnau was an avid reader of Ibsen in his formative years (Eisner 1969, 15). In a remark that describes the Kammerspielfilm well, Elsaesser pointed out that "Murnau's debt to Scandinavian masters consisted in his ability to adopt their naturalism and heighten it further in the direction of ordinary actions and simple gestures suffused with an atmosphere at once lyrical and uncanny, ethereal and mysterious" (2000, 228). It is also a curious fact that Carl Mayer in the early 1920s was contracted to write the script for an adaptation of Ibsen's *Doll's House*, a project that appears to have been scrapped (Kasten 1994, 28). Pick played Rørlund in a performance of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* (1877) at the Schiller Theatre in Hamburg in November 1911 (IbsenStage). He also co-wrote the infamous *Aufklärungsfilm* (sexual education film) *Es werde Licht* (*Let There Be Light* 1917) with Richard Oswald, who produced and oversaw the two-part film adaptation *Peer Gynt* (1919; see also Rees in this volume).

The neglect of Ibsen in discussions of the Kammerspielfilm may be traced to Lotte Eisner's seminal *The Haunted Screen* (1969). Eisner's omission is remarkable, considering Ibsen's formidable influence on the legendary theatre director. Reinhardt worked on no fewer than forty Ibsen events between 1894 and 1920 (Hanssen 2018, 210). Somewhat paradoxically, *The Haunted Screen* provides anecdotes that imply that Ibsen, both via Reinhardt and more directly, had a more significant influence on Weimar cinema than hitherto acknowledged. "Max Reinhardt had realized what power there was behind that kind of shadow which fuses decoration and enigma into symbol," Eisner observes. "In his first production at the Kammerspiele in 1906—

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16 Anton Kaes' comment that Leopold Jessner's *Backstairs* is a Kammerspielfilm "in the tradition of an Ibsen play" is suggestive here (2009, 118).

Ibsen's *Ghosts*—in the scene in which the panic-stricken mother runs after her delirious son, Reinhardt got them to pass in front of a light-source, and immense shadows shot around the walls of the stage like a pack of demons” (1969, 130). Reinhardt's *Ghosts*, in other words, anticipated Nosferatu's shadows.

Even more suggestive is Eisner's anecdote about a disagreement between Pick and Mayer putting an end to their planned trilogy of *Kammerspielfilme* (1969, 207). The rift is described by film historian Carl Vincent as follows:

[Their collaboration] lasted until a dispute over the characterization of the porter in *The Last Laugh* [*Der letzte Mann*] separated them. This film was planned as the third part of a trilogy that started with *Scherben* and continued with *Sylvester*. Lupu Pick was not only to bring the manuscript to life, but also embody its pitiful hero. This conflict caused Murnau to take over directing the film and he gave the role of the porter to [Emil] Jannings. (1939, 149)¹⁷

In F.W. Murnau's *Der letzte Mann*, we meet an ageing porter who has been relegated to cleaning the gentlemen's lavatories and forced to relinquish the uniform that represents his whole identity. Desperate to not let the humiliation become publicly known, he steals the uniform back and carries it with pride back and forth to the luxurious hotel. Murnau and Mayer's plot thus circles around an Ibsenesque “life-lie” couched in tragicomedy (Ibsen 2019, 202). Old Ekdal in *The Wild Duck*, who also clings to his old uniform to keep going after being humiliated, may come to mind as a literary predecessor. Pick, in other words, left *Der letzte Mann* and went on to complete the trilogy with an adaptation of Ibsen.

Das Haus der Lüge adheres closely to the formula established by Mayer, except for its use of intertitles. This break led to a complaint

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17 “Elle dura jusqu’au jour où un différend, au sujet du caractère à donner au portier du Dernier des Hommes, les sépara. A l’origine, ce film devait constituer la troisième partie d’une trilogie commencée avec *Le Rail* et poursuivie avec *La Nuit de la Saint-Sylvestre*. Lupu Pick devait non seulement donner vie au scénario mais encore incarner son pitoyable héros. Ce différend fit que Murnau reprit la mise en scène et confia à Jannings le rôle du portier.”

from the critic in *Filmtechnik*, who in an otherwise panegyric review lamented that “many intertitles could have been spared, since these reiterations emphasize the intellectual elements of the play and testify to an exaggerated worship of authority irrelevant for the film” (A.K. 1926, 101).¹⁸ I suggest that the intertitles in *Das Haus der Lüge* can be interrogated in two ways. Firstly, the film acknowledges the literary roots of the genre hitherto clouded by Mayer’s scripts. Secondly, the intertitles are essential to the film’s thematisation of itself in relation to Ibsen’s play and are thus a crucial semiotic component of the film as a whole.

Intermedial References

It is striking how *Das Haus der Lüge* displays photographic frames within cinematographic frames combined with pictorial effects of anxiety. The harmonic surfaces of still photography are thus contrasted with the looming disharmony beneath the veneer of the film’s bourgeois families. As old Werle seeks out his son in the Ekdal apartment, a panic-stricken Gina Ekdal pretends to be cleaning photographs in the hallway as she eavesdrops on their conversation, in which Gregers stresses the need to reveal the parentage of Hedwig. The stasis of the family portrait contrasts with the tremor of the lived moment; the film pits the staged harmony of pictures against the danger of truth and spoken words.

Pick’s *Scherben* is framed with still images of shattered glass that reflect the broken lives in the narrative (Kaes 2013, 152). As Gregers is about to reveal the unpleasant truth, viewers familiar with Pick’s first Kammerspielfilm would have recognised this motif in *Das Haus der Lüge*: it is certainly no coincidence that the symbolic destiny inscribed in broken glass is repeated when he enters the Ekdal household on Hedwig’s birthday. The reference to *Scherben* implies a parallel in how an intruder can destroy a family. Gina Ekdal is seen cleaning the family photos from the opening sequence as Gregers enters the living room.

18 “Viele Titel hätte man sich ersparen können, da das wiederholte Unterstreichen der gedanklichen Elemente des Ursprungstückes nur eine für den Film gesetzwidrige, übertriebene Autoritätenverehrung überflüssig bezeugt.”



Fig. 4. Hedwig (Mary Johnson) framing the wild duck; as Gregers Werle enters, the frame shatters.
Fig 5. The shattered glass of the photographic frame, caused by Gregers Werle's entrance.
Courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek.

The mother's facial expression suddenly changes, from focused to fearful, and once more her rapidly heaving chest signifies inner distress in a drawn-out medium shot. Upon his entrance, Hedwig loses her grip on the frame she uses to envision the perfect picture of the wild duck; the camera cuts rapidly to a close-up of the shattered glass and back again to signal unexpected violence (see Figs.4–5). An intertitle states that Gregers wishes Hedwig “great happiness” on her birthday, which contrasts with the tragic foreboding.¹⁹ The frail veneer of the Ekdal family is juxtaposed with the fixed portrait of the extended family: bourgeois families can transform into broken existences in an instant.

Peucker refers to such constellations as “intermedial layering” and argues that it allows film to enter a dialogue with other art forms and make the spectator aware of ontological differences between media (2007, 14, 26). One way of exploring frames within the cinematic frames of *Das Haus der Lüge*, then, is to approach them as a series of *mise-en-abyme* compositions that pit photography and film against each other in a battle over the meaning of modernity. The rise of photography had already led to debates on whether pictures captured reality better than other media (Weitz 2007, 212). From this perspective, *Das Haus der Lüge* exhibits its hybridity and questions the “realism” of still photography by exhibiting it as artificial and staged events – a motif that is repeated in the coda of the film.

Das Haus der Lüge depicts the perspective of Gregers Werle as radically different from that of the circle around the Ekdal family. The intruder's counterpart is Relling, who is described as “a doctor with little experience, excessive thirst, and a warm, good heart”.²⁰ Gregers Werle and Dr Relling – highly ambivalent characters in Ibsen's play – function as Manichean opposites of realism and illusionism respectively in the film adaptation.

Upon entering the Ekdal household, the perspective of the intruder is marked by a string of eye-level shots: Hjalmar and old Ekdal



19 “Ein grosses, reines Glück.”

20 “Ein Arzt mit wenig Praxis, viel Durst und einem warmen, gütigen Herzen.”

with a dead rabbit in their hands after hunting in the artificial woods of the loft; the terror in the eyes of Gina Ekdal; and a ragged student of theology lecturing Gregers' half-sister. It is amidst such bourgeois deceit and role-playing that the doctor tells Gregers, "I hope I won't catch you here too with such silly ideas."²¹ The warning is preceded by a medium close-up that shows Dr Relling ensuring that Hedwig does not listen; the intertitle and the camera imply that the doctor will be keeping her parentage a secret. The polarisation of Gregers Werle and Dr Relling leads our attention to a number of opposites that structure the conflict in the film: nuclear family and broken family, home and away, rich and poor, life and death, truth and lies, and reality and illusion. These opposites are already there in Ibsen's play; what is new, however, is the heightened intermediality within which these opposites are framed and the sociopolitical pressures of postwar Germany.

The verse about the Tower of Babel that introduces Mayer's *Sylvester* script would be perfectly apt here as well: "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). Siegfried Kracauer aptly comments that "this motto clearly indicates Mayer's design to continue in *New Year's Eve* what he had begun in *Shattered*: the representation of social chaos by two social spheres separated by an abysmal gulf" (2004, 98). Pick continues to explore the danger of spoken words in *Das Haus der Lüge* by inserting intertitles that amplify this message. The postwar context is further signalled by the more military rhetoric that catalyses the main tragedy of the film. In Ibsen's play, Gregers encourages Hedwig to sacrifice her most sacred belonging, the wild duck, to restore the harmony of the family. In *Das Haus der Lüge*, Gregers Werle gives the following answer to Hedwig's question of how to prove her love for someone: "By fighting for him...or suffering for him...or to make sacrifices for him."²² Many veterans described how World War I continued to live in and through them. In light of the postwar context, the



21 "Ich hoffe, ich ertappe Sie nicht auch hier auf solchen Flausen."

22 "Indem man für ihn kämpft ... oder um ihn leidet ... oder Opfer für ihn bringt ..."

disabled Gregers Werle brings the war with him into the Ekdal household, with revelatory and tragic consequences as the piercing perspective of the disabled veteran collides with the illusions of the bourgeois family. By means of intermedial references, *Das Haus der Lüge* updates Ibsen's play for German audiences and ties in with a number of *Kammerspielfilme* in its negotiation of the social turbulence that played out in the postwar years.

The Moral Occult

Peter Brooks has taught us that the absence of a moral order linked to the sacred led melodrama to strive towards a “moral occult”, defined as “the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality” (1976, 5). I argue that *Das Haus der Lüge* promotes a “moral occult” in the form of a love doctrine that promotes freedom from the hypocrisy of the most central institution of bourgeois culture, the family, which was ill-prepared to deal with the aftermath of the war.

This moral message is conveyed in the close-up of a neck ring with the inscription “I belong to Hedwig” in the hands of Hedwig; it is a birthday gift from Dr Relling intended as a symbol of ownership and love to be worn by the wild duck. Strikingly, the close-up is repeated after the death of Hedwig and the end of Ibsen's plot. This second appearance brings the narrative to a halt and marks a rupture in space, time, and causality. On the one hand, one may read the re-introduction of the ring as a flashback, which has been discussed as the one device allowed to disrupt temporal continuity in mainstream cinema. However, at least two aspects of the duplicated appearance complicate this reading. When the ring appears for the first time, it is seen from the perspective of Hedwig or Dr Relling. The second appearance, however, is not coherent with the film's presentation of events in the narrative chain and introduces a rupture regardless of perspective. The ring reappears after Hjalmar and Gina weep over the dead child, and this reappearance is followed by Gregers Werle leaving the apartment accompanied by a double shadow and a panning camera. Adding to this rupture, the second appearance of the ring comes with a different

language, which further obscures its place in the filmic narrative: “I belong to Hedwig” in English changes into “Jeg tilhör Hedwig”, which is a mixture of Norwegian and Swedish (see Figs. 6a–b). One possible reason for this change of language is that the restored version is a composite print; another concerns the filmmakers ensuring that the moral message of the film reached an international audience. A third way of reading the mysterious ring is that it exhibits what Kristin Thompson discusses as “excess”, a break with classical narrative cinema that exceeds the linear narrative and punctuates the “realism” of the story (1977, 54–64). In this light, the ring presents audiences with a deviant structure of temporality and showcases a counter-cinematic practice that draws the spectators’ attention to the fact they are watching a film.

The ring functions as the opposite of bourgeois corruption and egotism in the film. As Hedwig protests upon receiving it from Dr Relling: “Isn’t that like putting a shackle around the foot? She shall not feel that she is a free bird anymore.”²³ If the ideology of love and marriage involves a ring as a symbol of “ownership”, Hedwig is having none of it. Keeping the ring to herself, she denies the role-playing of the bourgeois family and stresses freedom from such constraints. The reappearance of the ring, which lingers strikingly in strong chiaroscuro for almost a minute, thus functions as an authorial comment and as an antidote to bourgeois corruption – a brief cinema of attraction amid the otherwise linear narrative structure.

Hungarian film critic Béla Balázs, who wrote the script for a film produced by Pick titled *Das Mädchen mit den fünf Nullen* (*The Girl with the Five Zeros* 1927), declared in 1924 that “at present a new discovery, a new machine, is at work to turn the attention of men back to a visual culture and give them new faces” (as cited in Gunning 1997, 1). As Tom Gunning puts it, “For theorists such as Balázs, the motion picture camera had the ability not only to capture reality, but to penetrate it as a new instrument of the visible which had a revelatory mis-

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23 “Ist es nicht, wie wenn wir ihr eine Fessel um den Fuss legen; sie soll doch nicht fühlen, dass sie kein freier Vogel mehr ist.”



Fig. 6a. The ring presented as a birthday gift to Hedwig from Dr. Relling, with the inscription in English. Fig 6b. The ring in the hands of Hedwig, subsequent to her death, with the inscription in Swedish/Norwegian. Courtesy of Deutsche Kinemathek.

sion” (ibid.). In this light, *Das Haus der Lüge* arguably promotes a love doctrine that exceeds classical narration, literature, and still photography; the antidote to illusions, in other words, is expressed visually in cinematographic close-ups.

Coda and Crises

It is telling that the last dialogue in the narrative proper is a direct quote from Ibsen’s play, in which Gina Ekdal exclaims: “Now I believe that she belongs to us both, half and half.”²⁴ The film thus tricks the viewer familiar with Ibsen’s play into believing that the narrative is nearing the end, whereas the added coda makes for a surprising twist, one that inserts authorial power and intention on the part of the filmmakers. The importance of the love doctrine extends to the unexpected coda, an added sequence which begins with the intertitle “Life went on... Only little Hedwig was no longer there...”²⁵ The coda is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, it allows audiences to envision a new and better future. On the other hand, it puts forth a sustained critique of bourgeois façades with still photography as its emblematic medium: the Ekdals cash in on portrait photography and continue to perform their social roles despite the death of their child. Nothing has changed – except that Hedwig is no longer there.

This was the first time Pick had included a reconciling ending in a Kammerspielfilm. Spectators could recall the inserted (and ironic) happy ending of Murnau’s *Der letzte Mann* as another intermedial reference and thus read the ending of *Das Haus der Lüge* as a comment on the psychosocial function of the Kammerspielfilm. The intermedial layering of the opening sequence is repeated in the coda when Gina Ekdal agrees to take a picture of a bridal couple that arrives unexpectedly. Where Murnau and Mayer flirted with Hollywood conventions

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24 “Jetzt meine ich, gehört sie doch uns beiden. Dir zur Hälfte und mir zur Hälfte.” The English translation in *The Wild Duck* says, “[N]ow at least she is ours half and half” (Ibsen 2019, 105). In the original Norwegian version: “Den ene får hjælpe den anden. For nu er vi da halvt om hende, ved jeg” (Ibsen 2009, 232).

25 “Das Leben aber ging seinen Gang weiter... Nur die kleine Hedwig war nicht mehr dabei...”

in their happy ending, *Das Haus der Lüge* insists on work and rituals as life goes on. In this light, the film promotes the struggles of everyday life rather than the sensationalism of Hollywood endings.

Literary scholar Peter Szondi situated Ibsen in opposition to Renaissance drama, which was based on dialogue and thematised interpersonal relationships in the present. Szondi observed that “the past dominates instead of the present” in Ibsen and stressed that “the past itself and not a past event is thematized; it is remembered and still active internally” (1987, 45). *Das Haus der Lüge* performs a radical temporal reorientation of Ibsen’s play: rather than depicting characters infected by a past they cannot get rid of, the coda allows the Ekdals and, by extension, audiences to envision a future free of past guilt and complexities. The more freely moving camera and the not so wrought acting in the coda suggest newfound freedom, as if the “house of lies” has been cleansed of a toxic past. *Das Haus der Lüge* works through familial tensions and traumas and advocates leaving the ghosts of the past behind; as post-traumatic cinema, the reconciling ending takes on an alleviating function for German cinemagoers in the aftermath of World War I.

In this light, the family portraits in *Das Haus der Lüge*, if not the whole business of still photography, point towards a desire for wholeness and harmony, however illusory. The critic Felix Hanseleit espoused this reading in *Reichsfilmblatt*, hailing *Das Haus der Lüge* as a “praise song for the illusion” (Preislied für die Illusion) (1926, 11). *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*, a programme accompanying the film, also followed such melodramatic logic and informed cinemagoers that “Hedwig died because there are foolish and overbearing human beings who forget that souls do not need truth and enlightenment at all, but only love – love – love” (1926, 5).²⁶

A closer reading, however, indicates that still photography is just as deceitful as the veneer of the bourgeois family itself. Whereas in

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26 “Hedwig starb, weil es törichte und...anmaßende Menschen gibt, die da vergessen, daß die Seele überhaupt nicht Wahrheit braucht und Aufklärung, sondern nur Liebe --- Liebe --- Liebe.”

Ibsen's play there is a cacophony of voices talking past each other, the film adaptation extends the question of referentiality to photographic media itself. The coda begins with the camera panning from the bedroom of the dead child to Hjalmar in a deep-focus shot in the Ekdal bedroom. One function of the panorama shot is to show that photographs have been removed from the walls in the hallway and the bedroom, which indicates that Gina and Hjalmar see photography differently after Hedwig dies.

Upon the arrival of the couple who want to have their wedding portrait taken in the Ekdal atelier, Gina rolls down a backdrop with cupids. The painted background points to the artificiality of the wedding portrait and the ideology of marriage per se. Pictures are surfaces that say little about the stories behind them. *Das Haus der Lüge* thematises photography to show that the medium is capable of producing only illusions of indexical reality; beneath the surface of the family portraits in the Ekdal atelier are radically different stories, of which the tragedy of the Ekdal family is only one. The film insists on "the drama of ordinary people" that Pick referred to as the mission of his filmmaking career and dramatises the struggles behind photographs and beyond Hollywood endings (Bock 1984, n.p.).²⁷ In the words of the critic in *Die Filmwoche*, "[W]e can only be grateful to people like Pick, when they do what they can to destroy America's stupid myth of happy endings" (–s. 1926, 8).²⁸ As Germany debated in the mid-1920s whether pictures capture reality better than other media, *Das Haus der Lüge* responds by linking still photography to the thin veneer of the bourgeois family. The reciprocity of photography and family ideology is further illuminated



27 "I try to overcome the expressionistic delirium in my films in order to be more inspired by the mundaneness of everyday life. The technology or the decoration only interests me up until a certain point; the drama of ordinary people, however, interests me more than anything else." (Ich versuche in meinen Filmen, das expressionistische Delirium zu überwinden und mich mehr von der Alltäglichkeit des Lebens inspirieren zu lassen. Die Technik beschäftigt mich bis zu einem gewissen Grade, wie auch die Dekoration; was mich aber vor allem interessiert, ist das Drama der kleinen Leute.)

28 "Wir können uns nur wieder und immer wieder bei Menschen vom Schlage Picks bedanken, wenn sie das Ihrige tun, um die alberne happy-end-Legende Amerikas zu zerstören..."

by how Gina's portrait of the wedding couple suggests the commercial aspect of the business of photography. The very last frame of the film mirrors still photography. As the Ekdals and Dr Relling leave the room, the cinematic frame shows an empty stage that points to still photography as the basis of cinema. The warning against being duped by pictorial surfaces thus extends to the cinematic medium per se: *Das Haus der Lüge* warns against photographic media as a potential source of commercial speculation and ideological manipulation.

Concluding Remarks

Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* has been discussed as the apotheosis of a genre that lost relevance after 1924 (Thompson and Bordwell 2019, 95). Read as a coda to the Kammerspielfilm, *Das Haus der Lüge* reveals the inherent intermediality of the genre and positions itself in opposition to Hollywood and recent Weimar films; consequently, the adaptation emphasises Bruhn and Gjelsvik's premise that films are "mixed constellations" that inflect the text with meaning in various ways (2018, 12). Pick's Ibsen film warns against the manipulative potential of the cinematographic apparatus by means of its intermedial references to photography and Hollywood endings. It is a film conscious of its own history, prey to and in competition with other media practices, film cultures, and technologies.

The contrast between moments of textual fidelity and infidelity highlights the creative licence of the filmmakers to create something new from the written text. One should not underestimate the way that Pick drew on theatre traditions to address bourgeois audiences, and several contexts are important with regard to why photography is a dominant theme in the film. *Das Haus der Lüge* belies the opposition between literature and film in the *Kino-Debatte*, updates Ibsen's play to thematise the illusions that came with a plethora of magazines and illustrated newspapers in the 1920s, and pinpoints how family portraits and bourgeois families are equally illusory. Germany was haunted by a past that threatened the façade of the family. From the perspective of Gregers as a war veteran, the Ekdal family, and by extension Germany, is marked by what Kracauer called a "general retreat into a shell"

removed from sociopolitical realities (2004, 87). By dramatising the chaos behind “solid illusions”, the film promotes the love doctrine of Hedwig in the face of bourgeois family ideals.

Weimar Germany, claims historian Eric D. Weitz, saw the most radical media transformations since Gutenberg and the invention of the printing press. Within this media context, *Das Haus der Lüge* opposes the voices of those who saw the camera as the most capable means of capturing reality. Lupu Pick’s third Kammerspielfilm comments on the gulf between photography and reality and sides with critic Joseph Roth and his warning against photographs as essentially untrustworthy. “People who had completely ordinary eyes, all of a sudden obtain a look,” Roth observed three years later. “The indifferent become thoughtful, the harmless full of humor, the simpleminded become goal oriented, the common strollers look like pilots, secretaries like demons, directors like Caesars” (as cited in Weitz 2007, 248). Moreover, *Das Haus der Lüge* arguably resonates strongly in our own times – dominated as it is by (social) media and the unforeseen avalanche of images susceptible to manipulation online. Read within our own contemporary media context, the 1926 Ibsen adaptation serves as a warning against “fake news”, misleading commercials, and social media built on the inherent ease of manipulating photographic media.

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