

West German Review of the Film *Anders als du und ich* (November 6, 1957)

Abstract

The 1957 film *Anders als du und ich* [*Different from You and Me*] was conceptualized by Hans Giese, a renowned sex researcher who was gay himself, as a way to begin a discussion around Section 175 of the German Criminal Code. He aimed to convey the message that gay men were different but were not criminals. The aim of the film, in Giese's view, was to shift public opinion on homosexuality and liberalize Section 175. Veit Harlan, a controversial director who had directed propaganda films in Nazi Germany, took on the project in hopes of rehabilitating his image. The central idea of the film, that a mother "saves" her son from homosexuality, only to be caught and prosecuted herself for procuring, was meant to challenge not only German attitudes about homosexuality, but also the German law against procuring that many considered to be outmoded. Ultimately, as is clear in this article from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a West German newspaper, the aim and message of the film backfired badly. Harlan was accused of making a film that was as homophobic as *Jud Süß*, the infamous propaganda film he directed in Nazi Germany, was antisemitic. Harlan's attempt to make a film that challenged archaic laws aimed at curbing "vice" was ultimately unsuccessful, though some of the criticism that the film faced was shot through with homophobic undertones.

Source

A Superfluous Film

Different from You and Me (aka *Bewildered Youth*)

Let's wash our hands after watching. We have seen something unappetizing and completely superfluous as well. The subject is Section 175 of the penal code. At the entrance to the movie theater, we are told that the film is being put "up for discussion." But that is not the case. Homosexuality is in the dock. You don't have to be a prude or indifferent or even well disposed towards homoerotic activities to ask yourself whether there are not limits to what films should address. Whether this recourse to the utterly useless "moral and sex education films" does not penetrate realms inappropriate for the pictures, like artificial insemination or baby-making, however "artistically" they may be produced. Homosexuality is as old as the hills and apparently impossible to stamp out. Its excesses should be contained by the criminal law in Germany. Whether film can help here is certainly doubtful.

The misfortune has already occurred, though. You can't accuse Veit Harlan of shying away from tricky topics, and he took one up here, and made a picture based on Felix Lützkendorf's screenplay. It is the story of an inexperienced, unstable young man who stumbles into homoerotic circles without quite realizing it. His distressed mother therefore brings him together with the affectionate au pair, and, in the course of scheming encounters between her respectable banking family and the homosexual seducer, she herself is accused of procuring. Because of the special circumstances, she gets off lightly.

This doesn't just sound like cheap sensationalism, it is. One has to put it baldly, despite or precisely because of the serious hardship parents can suffer when they have to look on as their sons go astray in this manner.

What is so awful about this film, however—and there is no excusing it—is something else altogether. What is awful and evil is the identification of homosexuality with modern art that Harlan and Lützkendorf

present here: In the end, we don't know whether Harlan is advocating Section 175 and its strict application or just using it as a vehicle to propose a new exhibition of "Degenerate Art." The Socratic seducer is an art dealer, his hustlers play electronic music, paint abstractly and write modern poetry. Everyone else looks normal, industrious, virtuous and well-behaved. But let's leave that aside. In Harlan's film the "homos" are naturally an international clique; they are influential and ubiquitous, including on newspaper editorial boards, but never to be found in banks, company boards of directors, factories or office buildings. "Homos" make up the fifth column of art and intellect, and Mr. Harlan, an intelligent man, should have no need to slander them. His film is rooted in cultural resentments against intellectuals. That is how it begins.

And that is also how it ends. After all, should we mention the good fortune of finally seeing Paula Wessely in a picture again, and a gifted young talent, Christian Wolff, who was the only memorable character in "Precocious Youth"? Harlan has enough practice and occasionally also skill to direct actors deftly. But that he of all people has to come along and unload his resentments against modern art in this way is unacceptable. S.-F.

Source of original German text: S.-F., "Ein überflüssiger Film: 'Anders als du und ich'," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 6, 1957, p. 12.

Translation: Pam Selwyn

Recommended Citation: West German Review of the Film *Anders als du und ich* (November 6, 1957), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/occupation-and-the-emergence-of-two-states-1945-1961/ghdi:document-5257>> [July 16, 2025].