

The New York Times

This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, please [click here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytreprints.com for samples and additional information. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#) »



May 26, 2011

MOVIE REVIEW | 'THE WAVE'

The Siren Song of Groupthink

By JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

Fascism rocks and young minds roll in "[The Wave](#)," a fist-pumping political allegory delivered with more conviction than subtlety.

Based on an infamous 1967 teaching experiment in California conducted by [Ron Jones](#) (who served as a consultant on the film), this didactic drama transplants the action to modern-day Germany, where Rainer (Jürgen Vogel), a hip high school teacher, is trying to convey the finer points of autocracy.

As telegraphed by his Ramones T-shirt, Rainer is not a by-the-book kind of guy. (He really wanted the anarchy class.) To spice things up, he transforms his classroom into a mini-dictatorship, complete with calisthenics, uniforms, a snazzy logo and a vaguely sleazy salute.

To Rainer's surprise, his previously ruffled, disaffected students — the familiar mix of jocks, nerds and glee clubbers — respond to his "unity is power" message with indecent alacrity. Their new shirts are white instead of brown, but their hive mentality is disturbingly familiar.

Before you can say "Heil, Rainer!," the weeklong experiment has expanded outside the classroom, and the kids — aside from a few rapidly ostracized holdouts — are recruiting new members and flattening local punks. Rainer, meanwhile, is beginning to enjoy the adulation, and Mr. Vogel is particularly strong when simulating the tug of war between ego and conscience. Unwavering respect and mindless obedience are tough to resist.

Directed by Dennis Gansel (who previously examined the forging of young fascists in "[Before the Fall](#)" and whose grandfather was an officer in the Third Reich), "The Wave" feels overdetermined and ploddingly dramatized. Even at its most rigid, however, it allows the siren song of groupthink to soar.

THE WAVE

Opens on Friday in Brooklyn.

Directed by Dennis Gansel; written by Mr. Gansel and Peter Thorwarth, based on a short story by

William Ron Jones and "[The Wave](#)" teleplay by Johnny Dawkins and Ron Birnbach; director of photography, Torsten Breuer; edited by Ueli Christen; production design by Knut Loewe; costumes by Ivana Milos; produced by Christian Becker; released by IFC Films. At the reRun Gastropub Theater, 147 Front Street, Dumbo, Brooklyn. In German, with English subtitles. Running time: 1 hour 47 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Jürgen Vogel (Rainer Wenger), Frederick Lau (Tim), Max Riemelt (Marco), Jennifer Ulrich (Karo), Christiane Paul (Anke Wenger), Elyas M'Barek (Sinan) and Cristina Do Rego (Lisa).

[Copyright 2014 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#)
| [Back to Top](#)