

THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

Friday Film Fest Series



Black Box BRD

Credits:

Director: Andres Veiel
Script: Andres Veiel
Producer: Thomas Kufus
Cinematography: Jörg Jeshel
Editing: Katja Dringenberg
Music: Jan Tilmann Schade
Length: 102 minutes
Individuals Appearing: Traudl Herrhausen (wife); Rainer Grams (brother);
Werner Grams (father); Ruth Grams (mother); Thomas Fischer, Hjalmar Kopper, Rolf Breuer, Helmut Kohl (colleagues of Herrhausen); Albert Eisenach, Matthias Dittmer, Jurgen Schneider (friends of Grams)

Doing Well and Doing Good – Allen Krumm

Alfred Herrhausen wanted to do well. Rising quickly, while still a young man, he began to do very well. After doing well for many years, Herrhausen began to wonder if doing well had anything to do with doing good. After much contemplation, it seems he saw that there was a relationship, and decided that he was obligated to find a way to make doing well a means of also doing some good.

Wolfgang Grams wanted to do good. Considering his talents, he probably could have done quite well but such a goal was apparently never a major concern. Going slowly, he took many detours. But Grams contemplated long and hard about what it meant to do good, and after concluding that it had nothing at all to do with doing well, eventually threw in his lot with those who believed that it was sometimes necessary to do bad to do good.

Herrhausen was born in 1930, his childhood corresponding to the lifespan of the Third Reich. He was one of the young go-getters who participated in the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the fifties. He was driven, a Vince Lombardi of the German corporate world, who shared the great coach's convictions about winning. He was a disciplined pragmatist. By the age of 30 he was a director of VEW (*Vereinigte Elektrizitätswerke Westfalen AG*).

Wolfgang Grams was born in 1953. He was one of the many young dreamers of the generation that came of age in the late sixties and early seventies, when the radical movement had already begun to splinter into those who believed you had to work from within the system and those who believed the system had to be destroyed. He was a convinced idealist and somewhat of a purist. By the age of thirty-one he had allegedly joined the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion, a.k.a the Bader-Meinhof Gang*).

Andres Veiel's documentary, **Black Box BRD**, is a stark and straightforward examination of the trajectories of the lives of these men, and the social, political and economic dynamics that led to their deaths. Both of these men

were able, and each was willing to live out the meaning of their respective philosophies. Each man might be seen as a protagonist, each might be seen as an antagonist, all depending on one's perspective.

Early in the film we are given images that symbolize the respective worlds of each man: Herrhausen, elegant and intent, always traveling in the mini caravan of three armored Mercedes, moving among power brokers ensconced in towers of glass and steel; Grams, bearded and bedraggled, playing Frisbee barefoot in the sand on the beach, moving among the powerless, dwelling in communes. Two worlds with no perceptible *Anknüpfungspunkt* and no ability to comprehend one another.

If the interrogative that characterized Herrhausen and his *Weltanschauung* was "how" (how can the problem be solved, how can the goal be achieved, how can we succeed), the interrogative that characterized the *Weltanschauung* of Grams and his world was "why" (why are things this way, why can't things be changed for the better, why can't we be different).

There is no commentary in this film, no voiceovers, no interpretation provided for the viewer. We see only the faces and hear only the voices of those whose lives were closely intertwined in one way or another with these men - wives, lovers, parents, children, colleagues, comrades and friends. Here are the reminiscences of those who knew them, loved them, admired them, worked with them, shared visions with them and in some cases, feared them.

Etched in the faces and distilled in the voices of the family members is the pain and helpless melancholy that is always the final fruit of violent loss. The sometimes pensive, sometimes animated conversations of the colleagues and comrades of both men reveal a shared sense that someone unique had been taken from their midst. Sometimes an unspoken contemplation of what might have been dances in their eyes, always quickly extinguished by the finality of what was and is.

Herrhausen became a managing director of Deutsche Bank at the age of 40; epitomizing what Grams and his fellow radicals in Germany in the seventies felt was wrong with society. It was the system, controlled by an elite few, the power brokers of the "fascist capital structure" that made life unbearable for the many.

Perhaps taking a cue from Trotsky, but without consulting any further the relevant texts in Gandhi, Norman Thomas or St. Paul, the radicals transformed their philosophy into "armed doctrine." They began killing people. They were quite good at it, even when it extended to killing themselves. Although none of these radicals were doing well, none of them cared, because they had become quite good at doing bad in the hope that good might come. Once the good had prevailed, it would not be necessary to do well anymore.

In 1989, at the peak of his power, having determined that it was time to do some good, Herrhausen was poised to do it on a grand scale. He had become a proponent of debt relief for the third world. The 68ers who had chosen the path of working within the system gave him their enthusiastic support. But not all of Herrhausen's colleagues agreed with his plan to do good. They apparently feared it might interfere with their ability to do well.

At this juncture, the world of Herrhausen and the world of Grams might have achieved an *Anknüpfungspunkt*. The two men might have, if they had spoken, been able to forge a link between doing well and doing good. But a rapprochement, a fusion of these disparate horizons, was not to be. Before Alfred Herrhausen had a chance to implement his plan, the adherents of "armed doctrine" scored a debating point.

They blew Alfred Herrhausen up. The assassination was a marvel of technological precision; Herrhausen would have admired the discipline and planning which allowed the assassins to pull it off. To this day, it is not certain if Grams participated in the plot. Later, it appears that

some policemen who also believed in “armed doctrine” killed Grams in order to do even more good.

Herrhausen and Grams were two more casualties at the dangerous intersection of doing well and doing good. It is a very old address, paved with good intentions, but there are no lights or signs there, only people transporting their passions and problems. Some of those passing through have been led to believe they always have the right of way. Others approach the intersection blinded by ideological glare. And sometimes even those who are willing to yield or change direction are overrun by those who are following close behind, assuming traffic will keep moving as it always has.

Biography of Andres Veiel

Andres Veiel was born in 1959 in Stuttgart and studied Psychology in Berlin from 1982-1988. He then attended seminars in Directing and Dramaturgy at the Artist House Bethanien in Berlin from 1985-1989. Since then, he has been actively writing film and theater scripts as well as lectures at the Free University in Berlin.

Selected Filmography of Andres Veiel

Winternachtstraum 1992

Balagan 1993

Die Überlebenden 1996

Bibliography and suggested reading

Alfred Herrhausen: Macht, Politik und Moral by Dieter Balkhausen

Düsseldorf 1991.

Democracy and Its Discontents 1963 – 1991 by Dennis L. Bark
Oxford 1989