The Wave/ Die Welle

“Fascism rocks and young minds roll in “The Wave,” a fist-pumping political allegory” The New York Times

# The Wave, Die Welle, 2008, true story, drama, Dennis Gansel, Ron Jones,  social experiment, The Third Wave, Jürgen Voge… | The wave, Jürgen vogel,  Tim oliver schultzThe True Story Behind 'The Wave' .

 In the first week of April 1967 Ron Jones was fired from his job as a History teacher from Cubberly High School in Palo Alto, California. His crime? He taught his students about the evils of fascism. A rather straightforward idea one would think. However, for five days in April, Mr Jones turned his classroom into his own totalitarian state without the children under his care realising. The most frightening lesson is that he was able to do it with surprising ease following the examples from some of the ‘greatest’ dictators from history. The Wave translates Ron Jones’s experiment to a suburban Germanic town during the students’ enrichment week, where they are forced to take classes on various political systems and they learn cinema's most terrifying lesson.

# Synopsis

Germany today. During project week, high school teacher Rainer Wenger comes up with an experiment in order to explain to his students how totalitarian governments work. A role-playing game with tragic results begins. Within a few days, what began with harmless notions like discipline and community builds into a real movement: THE WAVE. By the third day, the students start ostracizing and threatening others.
When the conflict finally erupts into violence at a water polo game, the teacher decides to break off the experiment. But it's too late. THE WAVE is out of control…

# Plot

A school teacher of history, Rainer Wenger, is forced to teach a class on autocracy, despite being an anarchist. When his students, third generation after the Second World War, do not believe that a dictatorship could be established in modern Germany, he starts an experiment to demonstrate how easily the masses can be manipulated. He begins by demanding that all students address him as "Herr Wenger"[leader], as opposed to Rainer, and places students with poor grades beside students with good grades — purportedly so they can learn from one another and become better as a whole. When speaking, they must stand and give short, direct answers. Wenger shows his students the effect of marching together in the same rhythm, motivating them by suggesting that they could really annoy the anarchy class, which is below them. Wenger suggests a uniform, to remove class distinction and further unite the group. Mona argues it will remove individuality, as well. Karo shows up to class without the uniform and is ostracized. The students decide among themselves they need a name, deciding on "Die Welle" (The Wave).

The group is shown to grow closer and the bullies Sinan and Bomber are shown to reform, protecting Tim, the class outcast, from a pair of anarchists. Sinan also creates a distinctive logo for the group, while Bomber creates a salute. Tim becomes very attached to the group, having finally become an accepted member of a social group. He burns his brand clothes, after a discussion about how large corporations do not take responsibility for their actions. Karo and Mona protest the actions of the group, and Mona, disgusted with how her classmates are embracing fascism, leaves the project group. The other classmates do not see her departure as a connection with fascism and continue attending. The members of The Wave begin spray-painting their logo around town at night, having parties where only Wave members are allowed to attend, and ostracizing and tormenting anyone not in their group…

Strength through Discipline, Community and Action

Rainer Wenger leads the movement through three main principles: strength through discipline, strength through community and strength through action. [“ Now when I talk about discipline, I ́m talking about power,” he said, “And I ́m talking about success. Success through discipline.” “Strength through community. I want to break up your usual cliques. You all have your friends and groups. That ́s important. You can ́t get your life all by yourself. But together, we are much, much stronger.” “Strength through action. What ́s the point of great ideas if we don ́t actually do something? I want everyone to contribute to The Wave, for everyone ́s sake.”]

Freedom of Speech

It can be said that it is the central theme of The Wave. Freedom of speech hovers over characters within the novel and often leads to conflicts between The Wave supporters and critical voices against the movement. Thus, freedom of expression is of enormous importance for the entire film.

Acceptance

The Wave has finally given the school ́s outsiders the attention and recognition they longed for. All the characters make a considerable change as the members of The Wave. From a forever-loser status and being avoided by their classmates, they blossom into the active members of the group and are suddenly accepted and even appreciated unconditionally by all members.

# Authoritarian Movements

History Repeats Itself

The starting idea of The Wave moment begins with the question “Is it possible that fascism happens again?”

One way to look at the students’ rapid acceptance of The Wave is to understand crowd psychology. In crowd psychology, ordinary people can typically gain direct power by acting collectively. The psychology of the crowd differs significantly from the psychology of those individuals within it. But while crowd psychology is a likely factor in the students’ behavior, the key element for the students in the film is Rainer Wenger—the authority figure. The 20th century saw two major, and ultimately destructive, authoritarian, autocratic movements—each founded and led by a charismatic individual who not only understood crowd psychology, they understood the human need to belong. These were the Fascists in Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, and the Nazis in Germany, led by Adolf Hitler.

# The Wave /analysis

Without the movement, the students were constantly in search of recognition, popularity and success. They were trying to find a sense of identity within their high school, where there was no sense of unity and a small clique of popular students decided who was accepted and who was rejected or mocked. This resulted in invisible, but no less real, divisions between the in-crowd and the rest of the students.

With The Wave, these divisions disappeared and were replaced by a sense of total equality and a desire to make progress together.

The character of Rainer Wenger understood this need in teenagers, and the rapid spread of The Wave was due in great part to their vulnerability to the most attractive aspects of Fascism and Nazism: belonging to a group that is special in itself, not in its individuals, and that enhances its prestige through excluding—and punishing—those who do not accept the value of the group and the authority of its leader. Manipulating people’s emotions effectively lessens the power of rational analysis. Strengthening that emotional bond to the group through defining it with badges, uniforms, slogans, and pride removes the moral consequences of the group’s actions—both because it’s the group that’s performing them, and the actions fulfill the will of the authoritative leader.

Ultimately, students and their leader have to admit that the feeling of power has led them too far. To put it more simply, they have let themselves to be seduced by the power and they have suppressed their individuality. The grandstanding teacher realises only too late that the beast he’s unleashed certainly stands out.: ““You thought you were so special! You traded your freedom for what you said was equality. But you turned your equality into superiority over non-Wave members. You accepted the group’s will over your own convictions, no matter who you had to hurt to do it...Yes, you all would have made good Nazis,” he told them. “You would have put on the uniforms, turned your heads, and allowed your friends and neighbours to be persecuted and destroyed. You say it could never happen again, but look how close you came.”

The Wave proves that embracing fascism is an uncomfortable possibility in our present and future society, instead of being a relic of the past that we have grown beyond. Human nature and frailty[ weakness] keep it possible.

Group think

The idea that the causes for why these authoritarian systems appeared in history are still present is a scary thought. We think that Mr. Wenger underestimated human nature, and to see how powerful the impression of power is, as the well as group think. People have a tendency to join groups so they have a sense of belonging. As a person goes through life, he or she will make the decision to follow certain social groups based on what they believe in. However, the film demonstrated how when put together, the personal ideas of an individual can change due to the strong influence of ‘groupthink’ and the social force to conform. We saw how easily all the students were captivated by the Wave from the start with the formation of a uniform, logo, and hand signal. This was alarming because most of the students didn’t see any of it as a big deal until things got out of hand and other students began spreading the motiveless fascist movement to the rest of their peers; they would belong to the new, “cool” group. Many of the students that fell into the group had problems with their family or felt excluded in the school environment; they had a void to fill. Those who didn’t join were excluded and considered inferior to the Wave members. Ask yourself this: would you have joined The Wave?

The Wave /novel

The Wave is a young adult novel by Todd Strasser, originally published in 1981. The book depicts a classroom experiment in which a teacher uses indoctrination [πολιτική κατήχηση/ δογματισμός/ ριζοσπαστικοποίηση] to show his students how the Third Reich achieved dominance in 1930s Germany. The Wave is a fictionalized account of the real social experiment conducted in a California high school in 1967; like many of Strasser's works, it deals with controversial themes including bullying and corruption. The novel won the 1981 Massachusetts Book Award for Young Adult literature.

Comprehension Questions for The Wave

1. When and where did this experiment occur?

2. What was the teacher's motive for the experiment?

3. What were the effects on the class?

4. What were the three key words or concepts of the movement?

5. What made the teacher realize that he must bring the experiment to an end?

6. What lessons can be learned from this film?