

Document Citation

Title	Can't buy love moral of "I only want"
Author(s)	Stephen Holden
Source	<i>Oakland Tribune</i>
Date	1994 Dec 09
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Ich will doch nur, dass ihr mich liebt (I only want you to love me), Fassbinder, Rainer Werner, 1976

CUE TO MOVIES

Can't buy love moral of 'I Only Want'

By Stephen Holden
NEW YORK TIMES

PETER (Vitus Zeplichal), a fanatically hard-working construction worker who bows and scrapes his way through Rainer Werner Fassbinder's sadly compelling "I Only Want You to Love Me," is one of the more poignant social casualties to be examined in the films of the great German director.

A caricature of a dutiful son and model employee, he regards the world with frightened rabbit eyes that plead for a love he is incapable of demanding out loud.

Instead of verbalizing his needs, Peter tries to buy with gifts the love he craves so desperately but doesn't believe he deserves. In one scene after another, he is shown standing on a doorstep, a silent supplicant holding a wrapped bouquet of flowers.

The film was made in the mid-1970s but not released in the United States until now because of legal problems.

Based on a true story from a German anthology called "Life Sentence," it offers a merciless view of bourgeois German society in the feverish grip of capitalism. The cost of West Germany's postwar economic miracle, it suggests, was emotionally and spiritually devastating.

The world it portrays is an environment in which the value of everything can be measured in monetary credit. Especially in the scenes of Peter's shopping sprees, the clerks have the look and body language of well-dressed mannequins guarding precious goods that have the glow of sacred icons. The credit agreements that Peter signs assume an almost religious significance.

So much of the movie is devoted to detailing the financial plight of a couple living beyond their means

REVIEW

► "I Only Want You to Love Me"

► Starring Vitus Zeplichal and Elke Aberle

► Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder

► In German with English subtitles

► At the Red Vic in San Francisco

► Unrated

► ★★★ (Sadly compelling)

that it might as easily have been called "Tragedy on the Installment Plan" or "Time Payment Madness."

At the same time, the story is a typically blunt and bitter Fassbinder parable of a misfit ground down by the relentless social machinery. Without delving deeply into the psychological whys and wherefores, it presents Peter as an eager, uncomplaining slave to the needs of his cold, imperious parents.

The movie's opening scenes show him single-handedly building a house for them and then receiving only scant gratitude. A flashback of the young Peter being spanked suggests that the parents always confused administering discipline with giving love.

Peter shyly courts a neighbor, Erika (Elke Aberle), and then marries her in a ceremony at which the parents wear expressions of grim disapproval. After deciding to seek his fortune in Munich, which he is warned is the most expensive city in Germany, Peter takes a job on a construction site and rents a small two-room apartment.

Once he has settled in with his wife, he is as desperate to please her as he was his parents. Not only does he furnish the apartment lavishly, but he also showers Erika



Vitus Zeplichal and Elke Aberle are featured in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's compelling "I Only Want You to Love Me."

with expensive gifts that he can't afford, going ever more deeply into debt.

The situation spins out of control when Erika becomes pregnant, and Peter is forced to buy maternity items on credit. The turning point of the drama comes when Erika insists Peter ask his parents for money, and he cannot bring himself to do it because it would be a sign of his failure.

With no escape from his problems, Peter cracks up and commits an act of senseless violence against a man who resembles his father.

"I Only Want You to Love Me" looks at Peter from three distinct perspectives. The bulk of the film sees the world through his eyes. It is

a cold, scary place in which everybody — employers, store clerks, patrons in a bar — exudes an ominous authoritarian aura, and he is the only person in the world who is unsure of his place.

Periodically, the story is interrupted by documentary-style snatches of an interview with Peter by a prison psychiatrist, in which the prisoner seems merely bewildered. Now and then, the director intrudes with printed commentary expressing outrage at Peter's plight.

"I Only Want You to Love Me" is a grim Germanic variation on a classic theme that can never bear too much repeating: Can't buy me love.