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Das Andere Laecheln
(The Other Smile)
(WEST GERMAN-COLOR)

Berlin, May 31.

A Robert Van Ackeren Film, Berlin, in coproduction with Bavaria Atelier, Munich. Peter Maerthesheimer, producer; released by Luxmeta. Features entire cast. Directed by Robert Van Ackeren. Screenplay, Van Ackeren, Joy Markert, Peter Stripp; camera (color), Janken Janssen; editing, Hannes Nikel. Reviewed at Arsenal-Kino, Berlin, May 30, '78. Running time: 115 MINS.

Irma Katja Rupe
Ellen Elisabeth Trissenaar
Paul Heinz Ehrenfreund
Carola Anja Muessiggang

Robert Van Ackeren's past reputation centered on the amazing success of "Harlis" (1973), which exposed the tender underbelly of the Berlin erotic scene in a style that recalled Ufa's weaker moments. Another interesting pic was the adaptation of Heinrich Mann's "Belcanto," starring Berlin transvestite Romy Haag and indirectly highlighting the city's gay scene. Now he's made "The Other Smile," an intimate study of women and sexual relations that signals a mature talent on the rise.

"The Other Smile" works on several levels. As a narrative story, it's about a housewife with a daughter who invites a girlfriend to live at home because of time on her hands. The husband, a liquor salesman, has put her in a pumpkin shell and prefers his ambitions and order. Gradually she and the girlfriend unconsciously, or perhaps consciously, change roles, the latter even duplicating the other's appearances and manners — until the husband accepts the girlfriend, now a carbon copy of his wife but more malleable and submissive, to be his partner instead of the resisting woman, who can't stand conformity and is now dissolving into madness.

The other level is the so-called "vampire theme," which Carl Th. Dreyer and F.W. Murnau exploited to perfection rising out of Swedish Naturalism and German Expressionism in the silent film. The only difference is that Van Ackeren is fascinated by the social consequences that result from a society that allows such extreme forms of personality suppression and absurd role-playing for the sake of an image or a position — in short, social standing.

In one probable interpretation, the wife refuses to conform to the hubby's picture of her as a model housewife and mother, as in cigaret and kitchen ads; instead, she recedes into herself and eventually seems to be living peacefully in a passive world where she is "completely happy."

The girlfriend, a druggist apprentice, becomes more and more the dominant figure in the household, taking on some of the traits of the wife but also adhering completely to the husband's standards of life and living.

The husband, for his part, doesn't even seem to notice the change in the two, which is an amazing feat of directing to watch — two opposites, at the beginning, gradually converge on each other heading in different, bypassing directions. This changing in roles, in fact, is what makes the film so unusual.

She also rejects the "stranger" in the household who eventually takes over mother's image and position. In fact, she looks upon the transference as a sham, a horrifying distortion in society that not even the principal characters are aware of.

This is an intelligent statement on "emancipation;" and "self-consciousness" (terms too often heard in film circles today), in addition to providing a classic case for sociologists and psychologists, behaviorists and psychiatrists, as well

as making an entertaining film.

Thesp performances are tops, lensing is by one of the ace cameramen in New German Cinema (Juergen Juerges), and Van Ackeren will be a NGC helmer to watch after this. Some possibilities for the art houses provided pic is handled properly. —Holl.