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Aufdermauer
(WEST GERMAN-B&W)

Variety
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A Munich Film & Television Academy Production, in coproduction with Second German Television (ZDF), Mainz; Eckhart Stein, tv-producer. Features entire cast. Written and directed by Lutz Konermann. Camera (b&w), Toni Sulzbeck; editing, Konermann. Reviewed at Saarbruecken Film Fest (Max Ophuls Prize), Jan. 19, '83, running time: 100 MINS.

Cast: Klaus Abramowsky (Albert Aufdermauer), Klaus Gruenberg, Susann B. Winter, Lutz Konermann, Barbara Bertram, Thiemo Bauch.

Lutz Konermann's "Aufdermauer" refers in the title to a prison case; Albert Aufdermauer, who spent 30 years behind bars for manslaughter and experiences a week of freedom on his own by breaking parole on his first one-day pass. It's a very fine diploma film at the Munich Film Academy that flowered into a fortunate coproduction in 35m with Second German TV due to the interest taken in the project by tv producer Eckhart Stein of "Das kleine Fernsehspiel." Pic turned out to be a sleeper at the Max Ophuls competition in Saarbruecken.

Lensed in black and white, this frank and probing portrait of a lifer draws heavily upon an actual happening two years ago, an unusual occurrence that attracted the attention of the press and was reported upon in "Stern" (the German-style "Life" magazine). Konermann, in turn, did his own research into the details of the case, and came up with a human-interest portrait of a man who sees the world anew with inquisitive, questioning eyes in and around the city of Bielefeld in the Westphalian section of Northrhine-Westphalia. One might say this is docu-fiction in the best sense of the term.

Albert Aufdermauer, a sensitive and intelligent man, apparently made one fatal mistake in life — he took part in a robbery, injured his victim who later died of the injuries, and was convicted of manslaughter. The case normally calls for eventual parole, but other circumstances led to the longer duration of the sentence. It's this factor that makes the story interesting, for the prisoner is badly treated by fellow inmates behind bars — thus winning the sympathy of the viewing public. On the other hand, the inquiring reporter (symbolic of the mass media) takes an interest in the case more or less to further his own career. This leads to a release of the prisoner for a one-day outing in the hands of the reporter. He thereupon runs away.

Now begins the drama, one of minute observation both of the outsider on the loose and the people he meets. Aufdermauer sleeps in haystacks, in abandoned factories, wherever he can. He tramps along country roads, his elation at experiencing freedom underscored by pop hits of bygone days on the soundtrack. He observes a group of young people on motorcycles, for he was at this age when he was arrested and convicted of a crime he has since long regretted. A young girl, in particular, catches his attention. With a pocketful of change given to him for work in prison, he manages to hold out for a week's time while on the run in the immediate neighborhood.

Meanwhile, the reporter is so messed up that he goes on a drunken spree, nearly loses his job, and comes slowly around to recognizing the error of his ways in the Aufdermauer case. But when the runaway runs out of money and is ready to return peacefully to prison, he phones the reporter to request his help and apologize at the same time for the inconvenience he has caused. They arrange a meeting to

turn the lifer in at a nearby prison; but because it's after working hours, he is picked up by the police as an escaped fugitive instead. Thus the chance of ever returning to society is possibly denied forever.

A remarkable diploma film, "Aufdermauer" well deserves a fest slot and marks Lutz Konermann (23 years old) as a director to watch in the future. —Holl.