

## **Interview with co-author Thomas Brussig**

Original German at end of page <http://www.heimat3.de/texte.html>

Translation drafted by Angela Skrimshire and edited by Wolfgang Floitgraf.

### **What does the concept “Heimat” mean for you?”**

It’s seriously ambivalent. Let me start with just a superficial response: “Heimat” is the film I have been working on with Edgar Reitz since 1997. Of course that way I’m evading the question. “Heimat” is at the same time an overworked word, abused by the entertainment industry on the one hand, (think: “Heimatfilm”, where Heimat becomes a kitsch idyll), but also by ideologies, including the one under which I grew up. Anyone using the word today runs the risk of being thought to have lost his marbles. “Heimat” is a word that I resist, and that at the same time I can’t resist. There’s just that one kitchen table of my Grandmother’s, there are just those few ruins in which I crawled around as an eleven year old. I think a lot of people feel this aversion to “Heimat”, and then one escapes it by identifying one’s “contemporaries” with the time when with many others one watched this or that TV series, or listened to this or that pop-song. The East Berlin in which I grew up and where at one time I knew my way around rather well, doesn’t exist any more. It would be ridiculous to bewail it as “loss of Heimat”, because my aversion to what “Heimat” stood for was already by then far too big and wouldn’t have allowed me to be happy. But all the same I knew my way around, and that’s something that I don’t underestimate. For me, Edgar Reitz’ great achievement for the “health of society” lies in the fact that he gives our concept of “Heimat” an ambivalence: Edgar Reitz’ theme is that “Heimat” stands at the same time for both grounding and pain, that it is something that we must first come to terms with, without ever being able to get rid of it.

### **How did co-operation with Edgar Reitz come about, and what was it like, working together?**

We met for the first time during a DZH weekend at the Potsdam Film Museum. Along with a fellow student, I wanted to invite Edgar Reitz to a workshop at the Film School. I think to this day that it was helpful to him that we film students reacted to DZH in a completely different way from, the general run of German film criticism. When Edgar approached me he intended me as co-author, not initially for all the episodes, but for just one of them. There was no doubt that I wanted to do it – I was a fan of Heimat and DZH – the question was, whether I would be able to do it, as it was something entirely different from everything that I had been doing up till then. It was indeed to Edgar’s credit that I was able to become useful to this project, “Heimat 2000” as it was called at first. In February 1997 I didn’t have much to bring along that qualified me for a job like that.

In summer 1997 he fundamentally revised his existing concept – and I suddenly became co-author in all the episodes. What was it like, working together? Well, we mutually ignored the fact that we were each sometimes having to deal with a difficult person. We were absolutely committed to making this film and knew that we were working on something that has no parallel in the history of film. Therefore it would be futile to expect a mood of “sweetness and light”. There were never any real crises in our relationship, although we were sometimes hunkered down together all week long, from early to late. I am putting the problematic aspect first, because that’s anyway the only thing that interests people. For me, the most important thing is how inspiring it was working with Edgar, how fulfilling the sense of freedom, unparalleled for a scriptwriter, that I found in this work, how intensely, like detectives, we tracked down the truths of life, the relentless ambition with which Edgar infected me. His independence and his pride in the face of all the ups and downs. The marathon strength of his character. His alert, sensitive judgement, his multi-faceted vocabulary. His knowledge. His pioneering spirit. I wish everyone the good fortune to

work with a genius some time. And I wish everyone the good fortune to be able to see it through to the end. I had both.

**Was it hard for you now, after the Heimat and DZH cycles, to get into the narrative structure of Heimat 3?**

No, there were models that I found thoroughly convincing. The earlier films were ones of which I thought while watching them: Man, you'd love to make something like that too, but sadly you don't know how it's done. And it was to learn more about that "How it's done" that we wanted to get Herr Reitz for that workshop in the Film School. The only difficult thing about Heimat and DZH as models was that they inspired so much awe that I could hardly imagine I could prove myself worthy of them.

**What was important for you to show or to tell in working on the filmscript – a certain view of the world (or of the West) from the perspective of people from the East, a certain feeling, ....?**

I soon realised that working on Heimat is in a way like working on novels: the hike goes into the unknown, and fixed ideas don't come along in the luggage. I very much like starting off in that way, and it doesn't frighten me to begin something in which almost everything is open. Because of that, a lot of things are possible, and I love having to extend myself as a narrator. Edgar once introduced the idea of the "innocent narrative". We explored the time between Reunification and the turn of the century [zwischen Wende und Wende], by feeling our way blindfold into the period and salvaging stories. We discarded many, and I'm sure there were a few we overlooked. But Heimat 3 is an honest, unquestionably artistic exploration of life through an evolving narrative work. Like every good novel, Heimat 3 is not the simple fulfilment of a prior intent.