

Documentary "Up to the Moment of Truth"
Heimat 2. Documentary of the years 1985 to 1988
Edgar Reitz during the preparation of his film "Die Zweite Heimat",
observed by Robert Busch.

Edgar Reitz' voice-over commentary and some of the conversations in the clips, in amateur English translation by Angela Skrimshire, with most valuable help from Thomas Hönemann, published on www.heimat123.de, March 2007.

(With Robert Busch by the Ammersee,)

(ER's commentary:) September, '85: We met somewhere in town, and I told you about the new idea, which was actually called "Men and Women". The original idea was to tell love stories, love stories from many decades. I had already collected material. There were these little stories in literary form, when we took ourselves off to the Ammersee, to this little house, on the bank of the lake, a small log cabin. We walked up and down all day, looked out of the window onto the lake, and moved around in unbroken discussion, going for walks and so on.

(Brief clip...)

The success of Heimat haunted me. There was no day when there weren't invitations, phone calls to answer, lectures, press conferences and the like, and we let it happen. Being anywhere else was where all that wasn't there. All the same I remember that this success was a terror, an inner terror, namely the fear of undertaking something now that would have to compete with that success. Even today, that still hasn't gone away.

Then came the memorable day, I think it was the beginning of October, when the idea was born of making something under the title "Die Zweite Heimat". I drew the title with ballpoint and red pencil on a piece of typing paper and wrote the date on it, and we pinned it somewhere on the wall. That was the beginning.

(Clip of ER at the typewriter, playing with names for characters, eg:

"... Finkenbein (Finchbone) ... Finkenbein is good too, it sounds quite aristocratic, doesn't it? ... Drosselbein (thrushbone) – one doesn't get such a clear image of that. ... Entenbein (duckbone) is still the best, it's really rather unkind, ducks waddle so much, chickens sound somehow much more upright than ducks. If they're called 'Entenbein' they have to be forcefed and fattened ... 'Finkenbein' are graceful, they're graceful ... but I'd like to get away from them being the children of an apothecary, or anyway, it just suddenly seems that they could only be children of an apothecary ... that's the bad thing about past experience, it's quite bad, one clings to one's preconceptions ... so what other creatures are there like chickens? ".....

Wachtelbein (quailbone), ... immediately sounds too refined for the Hunsrück – you get quails in Italy. ... Kükenbein (chickenbone)... Hähnchenbein (pullet's bone)... Hinkelbein!... that's a Hunsrücker name! ...")

(...)

(ER's commentary continues:) To start with we had this fictional story: Hermann, the character from "Heimat", or Hermännchen, leaves the Hunsrück village and

takes himself off to Munich to study. He has just passed the Abitur, and is beginning his studies in 1960. That is how we settled on the year 1960, on account of the logic of the character's story, and also on account of a logic stemming from "Heimat", and only on second thoughts did it become evident that the sixties too had their own story to tell. The sixties for our generation are an extremely important period, but at that point we had not developed our path so far as to ask ourselves whether we were right or wrong, rather we were asking ourselves: How are we going to narrate the whole thing, are we able to intermingle imagination with memories, and still say we can speak of this as the truth? And that was only made possible by the distance in time.

Of course it's already a costume film, we are telling stories set in our own lifetime, but we have to stage it as an historical film, just as if it were set in the eighteenth century. All the clothing that the characters wear has to be specially produced by the costume department, and created by them, the hairstyles have to be created to match, the cars have to be right, and all the traffic on the streets, the interiors, furniture, it never stops, all the things in daily use. It gives rise to an intense awareness, when one suddenly asks oneself if things that one has in one's hand would have been like that in 1960, or not yet. It starts with something as banal as a light switch or a pair of spectacles: for that moment it is of the time when the action is set, but now suddenly, considered as an historical film, things like that acquire the force of a statement, and have to be passed through a process of critical assessment before they can be realised on screen. This is quite another kind of film making, to the point that it gives rise to a stance whereby one first has to completely clear the pavement, one first has to move all the people away, so that they can come back again and bring it to life. One only brings a scene to life by staging it, one doesn't just find it there, living. Only in the memory, only in the imagination – there the whole thing is alive.

(Clips:)

(Murmured conversation, while looking at still photos of Munich streets in the archive of the Süddeutsche Zeitung, showing students clashing with police in the sixties (the Schwabinger riots).)

(Discussion of authentic props and vehicles from the sixties:

Banknotes and coins, to be obtained from collectors, and photocopied - a 5 Mark coin of 1974 has an "ugly eagle" on the back, whereas the earlier ones "looked much nicer".

Furniture: in a "modernist style... and all of it uncomfortable"... Plastic chairs..... always each one a different colour.

Trams: built between 1899 and 1930, but still running after the war, the damaged coaches somewhat modernised and the construction improved.)

(Robert Busch in discussion about casting, eg of the rich student harpist)

(On screen: In the garden of Edgar Reitz' house in Munich, ER emerges from a pool with Mengershausen, while members of his own family, Daniel Smith and other actors, etc, are playing, working and making music.)

(ER's commentary continues:) Joachim von Mengershausen is our editor at WDR. I worked with Mengershausen for the first time in 1969, I think, and since then we have made a whole series of films together. We know each other so well that we can talk to each other at the first moment of creating something, when a project is still so insecurely and merely intuitively within oneself that one can't yet

say anything unguardedly about it. But with Mengershausen, I can. I can present the project to him before it has even begun to take shape. For example at the time when 'Heimat' was showing on release and there was talk of a new project, he knew about every stage of its conceptual development, from that original "Men and Women" theme up to the present form of the project today. We have always stood out for the organisational and financial preconditions for creating a free production. By a free production I understand that during the work we ourselves can be changed, so that everything we become as people and as expert professionals through the work can continue to play a role.

(Clip: ER reads through a WDR press note dealing with a basic decision of the Rundfunkrat on financing DZH, and discusses it quietly with Mengershausen, coming to the conclusion not to give any further information (e.g. about co-financing, co-authoring, contents etc.) to the press, because the project is still at a very early stage.)

(ER's commentary continues:) It's always such a remarkable thing, one writes, and thinks that one has the characters clearly before one's eyes. While writing, I live with the characters as though they exist. But as soon as I look for an actor for the casting, I realise that is all an illusion. The written characters have only quite vague faces. One doesn't know, when there is no particular ground for knowing, whether their eyes are blue, green or brown, or about their hair colour or the features of their faces. Those quite concrete things, details of their clothes and the way they move, everything that distinguishes a person as an individual, there is still no hint of these in the written characters. In the moment before you get to know an actor who inspires you in some way, the imagination starts to transform the character into the actor. In the process I meet the character for the second time, quite differently from how I do when I am writing, in a way that is unmistakably individual and personal. It is even an interesting conceptual model of how the work of casting amounts to imagining casting this way or that way, and then feeling through the consequences – it is feeling rather than thinking – the consequences that something like that would have on the whole ensemble, on the expressive power of a scene, and so on. So the moment in which such decisions fall, about which actor plays which role, has to be one of the most inspiring and finest moments. Above all, there beckons to us in this moment that living adventure of realising the film together with these people. Only then does it become concrete, and the whole thing starts to become work, in the sense of production.

(Clips:)

(An actress studying her lines: "everyone from the house here running around freely, and we in Italy where it's warm is that so bad that your mother is in the town? ... good, then let's go back into the house...")

(Christian Reitz on the filming schedule: "Screen tests in the Imhofstraße, 18th of July 1987 ..")

(ER rehearsing actors: ... OK .. you realise you are pretty well worn out the whole time, you've been slaving away madly here, with the ladder that was so heavy standing behind there, in through the window, clearing the things out, the whole carry-on, and now he's here and it comes as a relief. You've got the last cardboard box down - then: "I love you" ... and the agitation, the tension disappears, and then a lovely moment, you simply let your head fall and lay it there, you see:

Boy: "But I love you ..."

Girl: "I've always wanted us to wake up together – but not here..."

ER: Yes that's nice – then free yourself again – "but not here, not here ..."
it needs a new shot - "but not here". He's let go of you ... If you'd just get back in that position ... try it once again ... from bending your head ...

(they repeat it)

ER: Yes, and look at him properly ...

(they repeat it again)

ER: ... you don't really know what to do with your hand ... that's just the embarrassment, lay your head down, and then you can – with your hand too – with the car key, that doesn't matter, the house key, keep it still in your hand, and then in the normal way just hold him like that ...)

(ER's commentary continues. On screen: meeting of the actors (Henry Arnold, Salome Kammer, Laszlo I. Kish, Frank Röth, Anke Sevenich, Daniel Smith, Peter Weiß et. al. in Edgar Reitz' house:) There are actors whom one expects to be able to produce a one to one performance spontaneously. The role is spot on, and we can say everything is somehow right, and what we see here at the first moment is the result, and it will play back during the filming, so that there will be a continual recurrence of this initial input. There are always actors in whom there is an inner mystery. The character is in a mysterious way miscast, and in the actor there lives a mysterious kind of opposition to the whole thing, or an endless depth of undeclared or undeclarable motives. And to guess at that and to work with it is truly beautiful.

(Clips):

(ER allocates their parts to the assembled cast – most are recognisable, but one or two are not the same as in the final film, e. g. the actress given the part of Helga, and Henry Arnold getting Jean-Marie. Casting is not complete as there are a couple more to come tomorrow. Then he says:

"After this workshop, after at least six weeks, I'm going to go away and write. And from this meeting here I would very much like to pull together all the criteria that, from your interests here and also from the perspective of the roles, will now be relevant for working on the current filmscript.")

(ER dictating an audio-letter to Nikos Mamangakis:

"For Nikos Mamangakis, my good friend and composer in Athens – because my dear friend Nikos can't read German so well, but he needs to know the mood for the music:

'Greetings, my dear friend Nikos. The fifth episode which has just been finished, has the title 'Couples'. The plot' "

(ER's commentary continues:) Dialogue, while being written, has often been critically worked through and formulated, right up to stops and commas, to correspond with the character of the part that the situations describe. And where in addition one finds a poetic quality, a quality of language, in the dialogues, that scene then becomes more alive.

(Clip: Nikos Mamangakis working with Salome Kammer)

(ER's commentary continues:) I worked with Nikos Mamangakis for the first time in the mid-sixties, we got to know each other at the beginning of the sixties. Back in the sixties I was very much involved with the developing 'New Music', I was friends with a number of young composers of the time, I was a constant fre-

quenter of experimental concerts. I worked with composers too, because I considered their ways of working and thinking were very similar to ours, so film performances were integrated with music, and conversely musical performances entered into film work. Our friendship arose from these encounters.

(On screen, ER with Franz Bauer inspects an apartment for a location.)

The tendency now is to go back to the studios. When I started making films, it was the other way round: there were new discoveries outside the studios, lighter equipment had been invented, the appliances and the mobility favoured natural locations. And the stories that one mostly had to tell were often told in the locations where they had taken place. I still, as before, adhere to this idea. There are a whole number of reasons for that: the most important reason is that in these natural locations we keep encountering things, encountering circumstances that I have to get to grips with, that don't just correspond completely to my imagination, that were not made for the film, but have had some existence in real life beforehand, and we find these circumstances, over which we squabble and fight, are nonetheless often completely original and inspiring. So again and again I have seen a scene start entirely afresh the moment before filming begins.

(Clips:)

(ER with Gernot Roll discussing the view from a window across a street in Munich)

(ER with Gernot Roll and a third man in the street, discussing the location for Kohlen Joseph's coal store. ER imagines how it will be, but the other two tell him how it actually is. GR sketches the layout on the road, showing the direction of entrance to the room and then the little door through the wall to the coal store. He traces a twisting passage up steps to a narrow room, and they explain how the yard relates to the house.)

(They enter the yard which is to be the location. ER is struck by the atmosphere: "He lives up there? ... here – Joseph with all his coal cellars ... it's full of atmosphere ... it's the war damage... this atmosphere, it comes in by the entrance, the way in ... it's always in the background, where one has reached")

(ER's commentary continues:) Of course it's when I emerge from such encounters that a scene has developed of which people will often say later that if we had been in a studio we could have done it the best possible way, we could have found an even better camera position, placed the light even better, we could have had the actors on the whole moving more perfectly – but we still have to remember that we would never have had the idea at all in a studio, what's the point of a studio if one has ideal conditions but no idea?

You enter a room, you have for example to duck your head to get through the door, you would never have done it otherwise, it suddenly becomes a game or ritual. Or in the film script one has imagined the man had two dogs, instead of which he has a swimming pool, and a small toy-boat on it. What people are really concerned with is often quite surprising compared to what one thinks one knows about their lives and has written in the script. So I have drawn a whole lot of inspiration from that.

(Clips:)

(ER and Franz Bauer inspecting another apartment, encounter an elderly resident from a flat upstairs, who first thinks they have broken in. They explain, and then manage to visit him in his flat – Karl Schulze, he is 87 years old, controller in a big store (Kaufhof), tells of his experiences in life and reports his world records in "Dauerkraftsport", e. g. 500 knee-bends continuously, cocking a rifle 600 times in the Wehrmacht, doing press-ups from a chair 6000 times, saying he had challenged Max Schmeling, Bubi Scholz and Muhammed Ali to a duel, but they had refused, and showing trophies and medals - ... ER asks if he would like to play a small role in the film, and he replies "if the part is suitable, why not?" ...)

(The office of ERFilm, a secretary receiving a call from an enquiring actor, saying many of the roles of the first three films have been cast but perhaps one or two remain)

(Robert Busch on the phone, talking through an actor's filming schedule up to May 1989)

(On screen: ER, Robert Busch and Franz Bauer in team meeting)

(ER's commentary continues:) I have produced all my films myself, from the beginning onwards since I've been making feature films, and I have naturally experienced this conflict over and over again. When I dream something at night – and during the filming one dreams every night about the work – and I go to work in the morning wanting to preserve something from the dream to transfer it into the work, of course I don't think of it as money any more, and then often enough it seems that I want to do something that makes every producer mad. I make things difficult for myself, and with every film I have brought financial adventures upon myself, in the interests of artistic flexibility.

(Clips:)

(Meeting continues, team talking about the filming schedule)

(An assistant checking a delivery of camera lenses)

(ER and Christian with camera and lenses)

(Costumes: staff sorting a handbag, shoes, underwear. Bille Brassers, costume designer, produces Clarissa's boots: "He said ... 'this is real fur, real fur, it's really good stuff, I must get 10 marks for it'"... Salome Kammer trying on costumes, the boots, gloves, a long scarf "Would you like to knit one yourself?" – momentary surprise turns to laughter ... Salome modeling clothes for "Clarissa in 1972".)

(Salome Kammer playing the cello, ER lying on a couch:

ER: ... "I'm thinking, not as you think asleep I was just imagining a musician who is also an actress for example, she has this tight dress on and has to play like that for the first time before an audience, and is worried that people are looking up her skirt, and there sits Hermann in the front row and he's grinning and has noticed her problem. They exchange a glance, then she plunges furiously into her playing and ignores the problem. One could do that with the Schumann piece ...")

(An advertisement: "Extras Required" ... an administrator tells applicants to come to Agnesstraße 14 any weekday. The office is full of applicants. Taking details and photos of prospective extras.)

(On screen: Henry Arnold in his apartment at the piano, practising)

(Henry Arnold's voiceover commentary:) This is overwhelming now, I've read the scripts, to get my head round the role which is quite terrifying, clearly. I've just got to keep going, it's a role that reveals itself if one simply does it piece by piece, one after the other. I'd like to think over the task, think of the size of the task, so I might build up boundaries for it ... we are not shooting the scripts word for word ... Hermann is definitely not an unambiguous character. There is no single interpretation to be drawn of him. And as for that the role is influenced a lot by my own personality .

(Clips:)

(HA being coached in Hunsrücker Platt, practising the poem "Geheischnis" by Elfriede Karsch)

(HA with Mamangakis and conductor, and young orchestra. ER being asked for a press photograph and information. Conductor rehearses HA for Hermann's Abitur concert: ER asks HA: "Can you do it without glasses? ... Later? ...". Sound studio. Rehearsal continues ...)

(ER's commentary continues:) You can't sit down at a piano unless you can play the piano, and to get a proper sound from a stringed instrument you have to practise it, you can't do it just by striking attitudes. Anyone can caricature a musician, because playing a flute or a violin often looks funny, but in that way one can't produce any decent sound. I'd find it much more plausible as a character, if I had to depict a film maker, than if I didn't know how to separate this activity from all the humbug that usually accompanies it. So the seriousness and consistency with which artistic work is performed is nowhere more clearly recognisable than in music.

(Clip: Rehearsal continues – school choir sings "Hermann's" piece...)

(On screen: equipment being loaded into vehicles.)

(ER's commentary continues:) That stirs the memory so much, it was immediately reawakened, I immediately felt so much at home, in this feeling that I must wait, that one must have patience, that everything happens slowly, and on the other hand doing the directing – the directing isn't done during the filming – that's always the mistake that a director makes during filming when he says "Ton ab! ("Sound!"). Not me, because by the moment it's said it's superfluous, it should then run free, which means all the work has been done beforehand, up to the moment of filming, and the essential work months before. It's not the case that I am an author for months on end and now suddenly the director, I don't experience it like that at all, I'm the director all the time, I've written a screen play as a director, and not as a script writer. In all this preparatory work I include searching for locations and the work of casting, for months, isn't that already directing? And now there are only just these little things still needing to be done at the moment, namely to familiarise the actors with the location in detail, to stage the scene in detail, and then to say "Ton ab!"

(Clip: setting up the scene for Hermann's Abitur concert.)

(ER's commentary continues:) For the whole day before the first day of shooting, and on the first day itself, I had a strange feeling: "I hope nothing slips out of control, I hope I can keep my head together". Every time there was a pause, having to wait, I tried to think over how it would be when it started to run, what could still have been forgotten, what might be done better, and above all how to make contact, how to bring relationships to life, the team members, the actors, the many extras, as on that day we had a lot of extras, it was terribly hard to keep those people happy, they had to sit still for so many hours when it was being lit and set up, that their faces had set quite hard and then they suddenly had to express a mood in the picture. That was my worry, what should I do with 150 people so that they don't fall asleep or get sick or bored.

(Clip: ER directing the extras for Hermann's Abitur concert:

"For this concert we need you all to be present, the camera will keep changing its position on the stage, you should give the impression of listening to the concert deeply everytime, which will get harder as the day goes on, of course, when listening to it for the sixth or the tenth time, but that's film, that's the only way to do it really well. The procedure means it's important to keep the same seats, the same position every time, it will get hard ...")

(ER's commentary continues:) But it was a familiar feeling, altogether a very familiar feeling. A few weeks later Marita Breuer visited us on our location here in Munich, and she stood in the background, and when the shooting was over she told me that when she heard my voice say "Ton ab!", or call for quiet, then for her it was like being in a trance, suddenly back in the whole atmosphere. And I feel exactly the same, that is the same with me in this situation too. At that moment when everything is ready, the clapper is chalked up and held by the camera, and I've checked once more that the camera's in the right place, and I say "Ton ab!", I fall into a trance and I'm dead to the world ...

(Clip: ER: ... "Ton ab!" ... clap!..)