

Interview with Edgar Reitz about 'Heimat-Fragmente'

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In 40 scenes Edgar Reitz sketches the lives and dreams of women in the past century. Lulu, the 35-year old daughter of the musician Hermann who stands at the heart of Reitz' "Heimat" Trilogy, visits Schabbach and other places from the past. Out of this comes the film "Heimat-Fragmente" (see the review in this issue), which Reitz thinks of as his final farewell to "Heimat" and the Simon family.

You really wanted to draw a line under it, after "Heimat 3". So are these "Fragments" now something like "Heimat 4"?

Reitz: The notion "Heimat 4" needs to be understood in inverted commas. It was put around by the Cultural Institute in Mainz, which funded the project. The title "Heimat-Fragments" says really everything that matters: two thirds of the film consist of unconnected fragments, hitherto unpublished scenes and sequences from "Heimat" 1, 2 and 3, linked by a newly filmed framework plot. Along with the protagonist, we experience a reversal of the time perspective.

What does that mean?

Reitz: basically it means relating to our past as an onlooker. The film tells how remembering works; we put our lives together again, as it were, out of the fragments that are roaming around in our memory. It is characteristic of reminiscence, that one starts from the consciousness that I am here and now, today. Memory always goes against the tide of time.

Why just look at the women?

Reitz: I had to find a point of view from which to make choices, as the voluminous, still unused material would have stretched to three or four such films. If you look at "Heimat", the big figures in it are all women. The twentieth century was the century of women, of new beginnings and change in the shape of their lives and in their social roles, in all areas. In contrast, the life stories of men are straightforwardly single-track. They set out to do something, set themselves a goal, and if they don't reach it they are devastated, and then quite pragmatically announce the next goal. But in the life stories of most women you can discern an unbelievable flexibility. They keep starting all over again to forge their way through life. I always find women's biographies much more exciting.

Are you glad in retrospect to have persisted with the title that in the eighties was so laden with ideology?

Reitz: It wasn't easy to get this title past ARD. We considered Heimat a taboo subject, that we only slowly came round to. The word resonates with the longing for something lost, for security and protection. Since then we have become bet-

ter able to cope with it, and this at a time when stability is showing cracks, and loss is an everyday occurrence in all areas of life.

Do you get a little tear in your eye when you think back over "Heimat"?

Reitz: "Heimat-Fragmente" are my little tears. After 25 years one can't just stop without anything more, there are problems of separation, a kind of grief at parting. For my fans and friends of "Heimat" too, all over the world, it is important to be able to look back through the whole of it and take their leave of the little world that over decades has come into being.

Does this film presuppose a knowledge of the Trilogy?

Reitz: It's very difficult for me to answer that. I took a lot of trouble over the conception of the Fragments and over the cutting, and tried to find a form that was self-explanatory. But of course spectators who know the other three parts can gain deeper access to it. To other people it will no doubt look as if it is meant for cinema enthusiasts, when they encounter this very idiosyncratic montage work. They could be interested and understand it in principle, but inner participation really only arises for connoisseurs.

Are you working as a family enterprise? Your son Christian wields the camera, takes care of special effects and the cutting, and is co-producer.

Reitz: He began on "Heimat 1" as assistant to Gernot Roll, then became cameraman, collaborated on the second "Heimat" as cameraman and filmed the major part of "Heimat 3". So it was a parallel development. What is interesting is not that my son is working with me, but that I am working with my son. He has at his disposal a huge advance in digital technology. I was able to learn so much about that. We filmed "Heimat-Fragmente" with digital cameras, in high-definition technique, and made exhaustive use of all the capabilities of a computer. I am quite euphoric about the new freedom, especially in editing.

You produced the film without co-financing from television?

Reitz: The filmscript consisted of one and a half pages. You can't go to a television company with that. I also didn't want to tender the material, or to have any long arguments and discussions. But I wanted for once in my life to afford myself the luxury of realising a film with my own savings and not having to ask anyone else.

Taking leave also means setting out for new shores. What comes next?

Reitz: At the moment my son and I are developing filmscripts for three feature films, three love stories in different periods, that inwardly are loosely connected with each other, but can also stand alone. We are trying to discover a new way of producing, so that these three films can be produced in one piece with digital technology. For that we are working together with the former WDR editor, Joachim von Mengershausen. This is turning into a co-production.