

Risen from the Archives

Reitz' "Heimat" Fragments

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"There is a time for sewing up and a time for tearing apart. That's an old proverb of my mother's". The wise little saying is nothing less than a piece of "Heimat". Or not really, since the words of a young woman from the Hunsrück, working as a tour guide in Munich even though she can't tell the Frauenkirche from the Stadtmuseum, fell victim to the scissors. For Edgar Reitz the time for sewing together has begun again. Eight hours left over from the Heimats have turned up again, the montage film "*Heimat – Fragmente*" arising from them lasts 146 minutes and had its premiere last weekend at the Venice Biennale.

The more work you turn on the lathe, the more shavings you get, and it's not surprising that they are of good wood. They will be of interest to cinema lovers all over the world, who rightly venerate the mammoth work as a classic. Who wouldn't treasure an encore to his favourite film. The wistfulness that many of these images kindle, not only reminds us, as Reitz says, of the youth and altruism of the actors. It calls to mind a mixture of technical craftsmanship and artistic experiment, that has disappeared from German television and is rarely seen even in the cinema. How rarely, is shown sadly by the kind of editing, to use the hateful word, that is in fact current these days. Processing should be left to the nuclear industry. Leftover film should be allowed to shine quietly on its own.

The beauty of Reitz' work consists precisely in the freedom of the montage, that lets black and white film follow straight after colour, or confronts the viewer with sudden discontinuities in time, which is nowadays all polished away in the digital mill. Clearly the master has a son who is familiar with newfangled tools: light effects, fading and all kinds of inter-linking titles are used, and a framework plot on video. Lulu, Hermannchen's daughter, travels pensively to the old locations or browses through the archive. In this way she tries to get to grips with the strange phenomenon of memory. But her sometimes very moving monologues do not let us forget what she is there for – in the first place as presenter of the text.

"Everyone has become his own memorial," says Lulu then, "and wanders around unsteadily in the countryside having to wonder what the world would look like without him". We are not far from the script of a long afternoon of canned children's television. "When you mix up art and life with each other, that's the most brutal form of kitsch", says Hermann, the up and coming composer, once to his poor Helga. A dark but nonetheless human side speaks in this small cut scene. A mixture of envy, Neutöner¹-dogmatism and maybe the paternalism peculiar to a late '68-er. In fact, Reitz in the first two *Heimats* succeeded in mixing art and life with each other in a wonderful way. His work for a brief moment reconciled German authors' cinema (cinema des auteurs), long decried as elitist, with its audience. Maybe Fassbinder found rather more viewers with his working class series *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag*, maybe Geißendörffer's *Lindenstraße* was the first really to reach the masses, but nonetheless *Heimat* was no soap opera, but an uncompromising work for cinema and television.

Another master of independent film, the New Yorker Jonas Mekas, made a similar film several years ago. His compendium of reused leftovers is called: *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*. Unsimulated and raw as the moment created them, the snippets run past one after the other like a patchwork rug many hours long. The form of these *Heimat-Fragmente* could have been just like that: no form. There need have been no Lulu to open the cans of film like Pandora, and to say at the end: "What I have found here and what gave birth to me, that was the Hunsrück". Words, I'm sorry, that could have come from a bad Heimat film.

¹ A „Neutöner“ is a representative of modern music, trying to use new harmonies which are different from the classic ones (e. g. the "Zwölfton-Musik" by Arnold Schönberg).