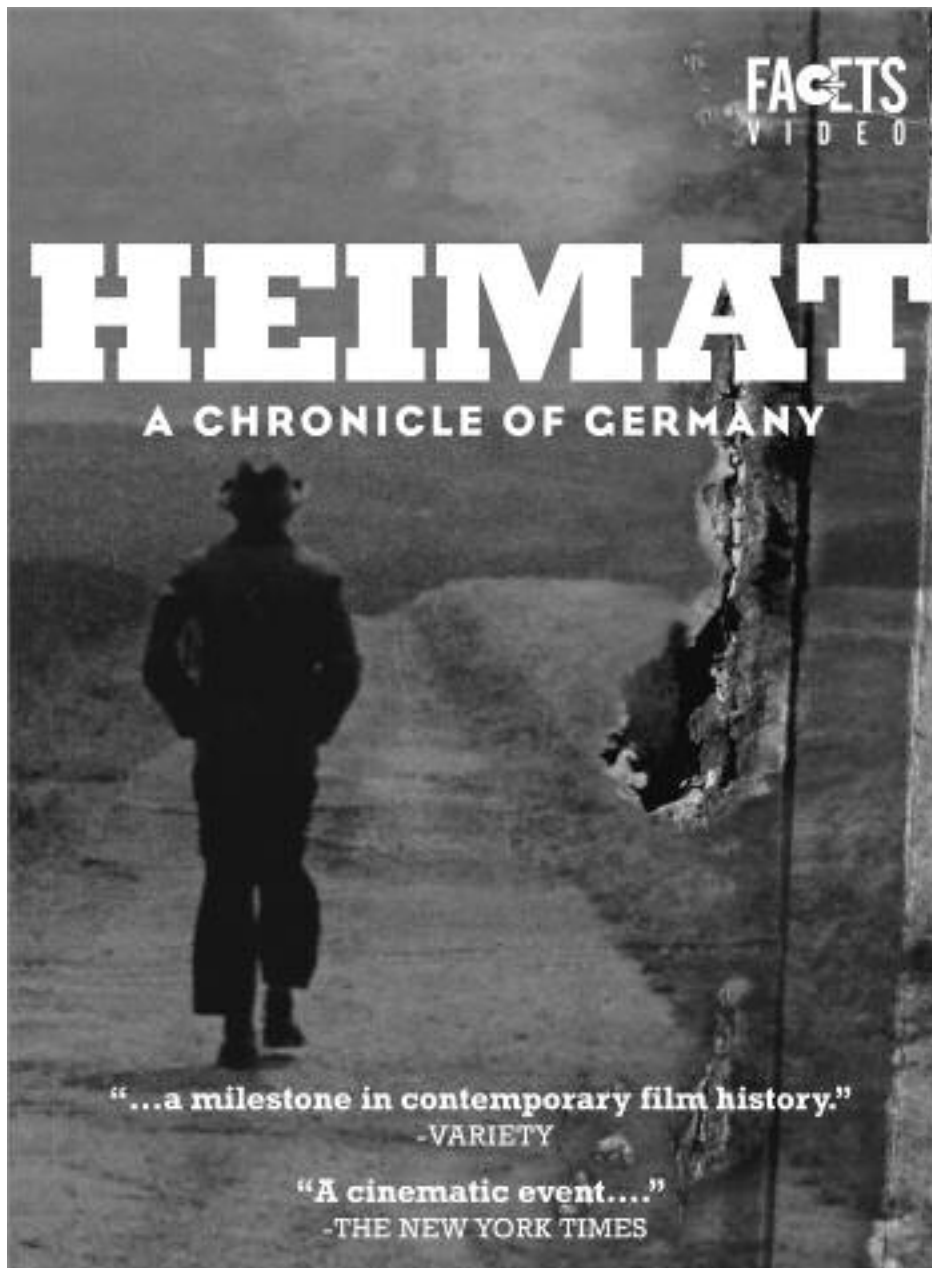


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# NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 14, 2005

## **FACETS VIDEO ANNOUNCES RELEASE OF HEIMAT: A CHRONICLE OF GERMANY**

### **Landmark 15-hour German epic makes its DVD debut on August 30 “a milestone in contemporary film history”—Variety**

(Chicago, IL) Facets Video is proud to announce the DVD release of **HEIMAT: A CHRONICLE OF GERMANY**, Edgar Reitz's monumental 11-part series. Hailed as “a watershed in European cinema,” by The Guardian, and “a milestone in contemporary film history,” by Variety, **Heimat** took five years to conceive and two years to shoot. Told with stylized naturalism and fluid action, **Heimat** covers German history from 1919 to 1982, focusing on the fictional village of Schabbach and the Simon family that lives there. Like the rest of the German people, the Simon family has to endure the hard times after WWI, struggle with the rise and fall of Nazism and WWII, and then prosper with the rebuilding of the country after the war. Premiering on German television in 1984 and then released theatrically around the world, **Heimat** is now available for the first time on DVD as a six-disc box set, with a total running time of **925 mins.**, will be released on **August 30, 2005**, and retails for **\$99.95**.

Edgar Reitz, with Alexander Kluge, conceived the Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962, which led to state funding for film and a New German Cinema that supported the careers of such great German directors as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog. Ironically, the manifesto started as an uprising against the “Heimat-film,” a distinctive German film genre that celebrates a glorified sentimental attachment to home, a genre relatively unknown outside of Germany and debased since Hitler. It became Reitz's ambition to reclaim this genre, declaring “in German culture, there is no more ambivalent feeling, hardly a worse mixture of happiness and brutality, than the experience embedded in the word ‘Heimat.’”

After watching the American television miniseries Holocaust, Reitz saw that “German history was reduced to the level of fiction” and “how [Holocaust] was taken seriously and how the question of guilt in German history was being discussed on the basis of this travesty. I watched the horrible crocodile tears of our nation.” Disgusted yet inspired, he embarked on the largest co-production in German television history. Using his entire savings and receiving backing from German television companies WDR and Berlin SFB, Reitz was able to create “one of the most important—and importantly controversial—films produced in Germany since World War II” (Cineaste). Shot in five villages with 3683 extras, 32 leading actors, 159 speaking parts, and 52 crew members, **Heimat** is a unique German endeavor, hugely collaborative, yet intimate and personal. Reitz's intention was to bring attention to the longing for roots all people feel. Yet, Reitz states, “the drama lies in the fact that one can never return. And I think that is really the problem of this century.”

Drawing comparisons with *Gone With the Wind* and Fassbinder's Berlin Alexanderplatz, **Heimat** is “history seen from ground level—vividly acted by a huge cast” (The New York Times). As the matriarch of the Simon family, and the centerpiece role of **Heimat**, Marita Breuer goes from 19 to 82, though she was only 30 when filming began. Cineaste calls her performance “one of the finest performances of postwar German cinema.”

Newsday declares that “[**Heimat**] transforms the commonplaces of domestic drama into a saga of the human condition.” Using film stock that alternates between black and white, monochrome and full color, sometimes within the same scene, **Heimat** is an ambitious work and “by far the most revolutionary work of cinema of [the eighties]” (Film Comment). The DVD includes a Facets Cine-Notes™ booklet with an introduction from noted **Heimat** expert Marc Silberman of the University of Wisconsin, a timeline of German history and plot summaries of each episode. **Heimat** has a total running time of **925 minutes**, is in color and black and white and is in German with English subtitles.

**Facets Multi-Media, Inc.** licenses and distributes world and independent cinema on its own DVD label and exclusively distributes DVD product for other labels including Cinemateca, Accent Cinema, Arte Video, Life Size Entertainment, Polart, Ron Knight Media, Transflux Films, and Other Cinema DVD. The over 400 works on the Facets Video label include Krzysztof Kieslowski’s epic film *The Decalogue*, Lars von Trier’s *Medea*, *The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob*, Luis Bunuel’s *Un Chien Andalou*, William Klein’s *Muhammad Ali the Greatest* and a comprehensive retrospective of the works of Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr. The complete **Facets Video** Catalog is available online at [www.facets.org](http://www.facets.org) or by calling 1-800-331-6197. The catalog includes more than 60,000 DVD and video titles from over 1,200 distributors.



# REVIEWS

# CINEASTE

Sep 1996, Vol. 22 Issue 3

## **Heimat: A Chronicle of Germany**

by Stuart Liebman

"In German culture," observed the director Edgar Reitz in 1979, "there is no more ambivalent feeling, hardly a worse mixture of happiness and brutality, than the experience embedded in the word 'Heimat.'" There could be, therefore, few more ambitious challenges for this veteran of New German Cinema and cosignatory of the famous Oberhausen Manifesto of 1962 than to confront this paradoxical, deeply problematic, and quintessentially German concept. The result is an eleven-part, nearly sixteen-hour-long series, *Heimat*, that was originally released on television in 1984 to overwhelming popular acclaim and rave critical reviews in Germany as well as abroad. Now available in a well-produced boxed set of nine cassettes with enhanced, easy to read subtitles, *Heimat* remains one of the most important--and importantly controversial--films produced in Germany since World War II.

German commentators have often remarked that it is difficult to convey the scope and significance of the concept of 'Heimat.' Literally translated it means 'homeland,' but for Germans it bears a host of additional, nearly untranslatable connotations: emotional associations of origins and roots in the particular soil, flora, fauna, landscape, dialect, and customs of a rural region in Germany. On the whole, feelings about 'Heimat' are positive, possessing some of the resonance a 'home town' has for many Americans. Beneath the surface, however, lurk far darker undercurrents: small-minded provinciality, isolation, claustrophobia, even the implicit threat of violence. Although an intense personal devotion to localities survived Bismarck's engineering of the German Reich a century ago, the catastrophic wars, political ruptures, and ongoing encroachments of modern technology have substantially reduced its potency during the twentieth century. Today, a cosmopolitan German's affections for his or her 'Heimat' are more a compound of nostalgia, commodification, and marketing savvy than a profound existential commitment. And yet 'Heimatgefühle' still exert a strange hold on German imaginations. They encompass a desired return to an alleged innocence prior to the complications and compromises of modern life, a wish accompanied, however, by the awareness that such an innocence never really existed. The psychological dynamic might be characterized by a famous Freudian formula: 'I know very well but...!' It is not far-fetched to say that the concept today operates as a kind of fetish of the German Imaginary in what Roland Barthes would call a 'Myth.'

As his film's subtitle suggests, Reitz attempts nothing less than a "chronicle" of the fate of his native Heimat, the Hunsrück region of the West German Rhineland, during the twentieth century. His narrative begins in 1919 when Paul, the son of Katharina and Matthias Simon, trudges home to the fictional Dorf of Schabbach after military service for the Kaiser in the First World War. They and the extended Simon family, as well as a wide cast of other characters, are representative of the 'little people' in Germany during a time of unprecedented and often catastrophic change. Until Reitz's saga, their experience had for the most part been portrayed in caricatured terms in the degraded xenophobic genre of the 'Heimat-film,' arguably the most distinctive--though outside Germany, the least known--genre of German cinema. The plots glorified sentimental attachment to a specific locale and archly highlighted the conflict between a stable, wholesome 'Heimat' and threatening outside forces, the 'Fremde.'

The recovery of these forgotten Germans' more authentic experience in a film thus became the general inspiration for Reitz and his coscriptwriter Peter Steinbach. The more immediate motivation, however, was Reitz's response to

what he regarded as a concerted attack on the dignity of ordinary Germans by Hollywood's media machine. He decided to embark on the largest coproduction ever attempted with a German regional television station only after the American television series Holocaust was screened--to loud acclaim and much public soul-searching--in Germany in 1978. Holocaust, of course, was a melodrama about a German-Jewish family during the Nazi era. Its contrived and manipulative story featured innocent Jewish victims and predictably demonized Germans. Condemned by Jewish as well as German intellectuals for its oversimplifications, Holocaust, seen by millions of ordinary people, nevertheless brought home the fact of German responsibility for the extermination of the Jews as never before. Reitz was incensed, at both the insulting caricatures and the abundant "crocodile tears" shed by his countrymen. "Memory is impoverished when we are ashamed," he wrote in an angry article published in 1979.

And now we are ashamed to remember just because we have been morally bull-dozed by a television series. There are thousands of stories among our people that are worth being filmed, that are based on irritatingly detailed experiences which apparently do not contribute to judging or explaining history but whose sum total would actually fill this gap. We may no longer forbid ourselves to take our personal lives seriously ... The most serious act of expropriation occurs when people are deprived of their history. With Holocaust, the Americans have taken away our history.

Work on Heimat commenced shortly after publication and lasted for five years. The "irritatingly detailed experiences" on which his film would be based would serve as an antidote to the false 'memories' imposed on Germans by foreigners in the bland but insidious stylistic idiom of Hollywood.

Reitz's project is rooted in an effort to recover for history the exemplary, if not model, everyday lives of some of his otherwise anonymous countrymen. That accounts for the film's close, almost anthropological, attention to the characters' gestures at work and at leisure (hammering at the forge, driving horses in the fields, singing at a sewing circle, etc.), and the subtle depiction of the spaces in which they live and the domestic objects they use. German-speakers will also delight in the exuberant play of regional dialects: from the flat ellipses of 'Hunsruckerplatt' (the language, Schabbachers say, spoken in

heaven) through the characteristic sibilant Ss of Hamburger Hochdeutsch to the Ys substituting for Gs in the Berlinerisch of the ex-madam who marries into the Simon family. Punctuating the episodes are handsome, 'typical' images of the seasons as they cycle through the picturesque forests, hills, and fields surrounding Schabbach.

Paul Simon is the first of several characters who are lured away by foreign horizons beyond the Hunsruck. He is a Weggeher, one who has left home and becomes emotionally incapable of returning to the confines of his Heimat. After ten years of marriage, complete with a model German wife, Maria, and two young children, he is unable any longer to suppress his ambitions to become a radio technician. He simply disappears at the end of Part 1, not to be heard from again until much later in the story. For Reitz, Paul is clearly a lost soul, but, to his credit, he also shows that there is a seamier underside to the all too easily idealized small town. The conservative, hierarchical society Reitz portrays forces some of its brightest figures--preeminently Maria's youngest son Hermann, who becomes an avant-garde composer--to depart. And it expels any who are perceived to be different, including Paul's first love, Apollonia, who has the misfortune of being dark-haired, single, and sexually active, characteristics sufficient to define her as a suspect "gypsy."

The central ten hours of the massive narrative revolve around Maria, the wife Paul abandoned. The daughter of the town's wealthiest (and meanest) farmer, Maria stoically accepts her quite unusual fate as a single mother. During the next fifty years of her life, which coincides with the most tumultuous era of German history, she eventually assumes her mother-in-law Katharina's role as the key figure in the tight-knit Simon household. She supervises the education of her two oldest sons (Anton and Ernst), quietly resists the intrusions of the Nazis, falls in love and has a child (Hermann) out of wedlock with Otto, a (half-Jewish) construction engineer, experiences the agony of not knowing her children's fate as prisoners of war, and admirably rejects the renewed attentions of Paul when he returns in the wake of the American military occupation force transformed into a rich, 'ugly American.' Finally, she retreats, unhappy but wrapped in her characteristic quiet

dignity, to her familiar domestic routines in the increasingly empty home while the economic miracle unfolds during the 1950s and 1960s.

Defined by her nurturing maternal warmth, Maria is a model of rectitude and fortitude, distantly related to the female characters--Brecht's *Mother Courage* comes immediately to mind--that German writers have so often used to represent Germany. But Reitz insures that she does not lapse into a cliché by highlighting her occasional, all too human, moral misjudgments. She drives her lover Otto away when her prodigal husband first announces his (ultimately unsuccessful) return on the eve of World War II. Even more telling, an unacknowledged Oedipal passion coupled with a traditional prejudice against seductive older women leads her to break up Hermann's love affair with Klarchen, a woman eleven years older than he. Above all, Maria is redeemed from banality by the extraordinary efforts of the young German actress Marita Breuer. Barely thirty years old when the film was made, Breuer transforms herself over the course of the film from a litesome, naive girl to a kindly, if rather neglected, dowager without missing a beat. It is one of the finest performances of postwar German cinema.

Maria's sentimental education develops against the backdrop of the population of Schabbach, played with distinction by an ensemble of professional and nonprofessional performers. Katharina Simon is Maria's plain-spoken, brave mother-in-law, and Marie-Goot is the stock gossipy neighbor, the mother of Glassich Karl, the village idiot. Paul's brother Edward marries a Berlin madam, the conniving but charming Lucie, and becomes the Nazi mayor of the town, while his sister Pauline thrives as the wife of a jeweler until he is killed during the war. Maria's miserly, chauvinistic father and her vicious brother Wilfried, a future SSman, are the principal villains. Their individual stories fade in and out over the course of the leisurely narrative, stronger, perhaps, on atmosphere than plot, which is skillfully tied together by an intricate network of imagistic echoes (people seen from behind walking into the distance), parallel episodes (the stories of Apollonia and Klarchen), and thematic leitmotifs (the many airplanes that land and depart).

At the beginning of episodes two through nine, Glasich serves as the saga's narrator to assist those who find it difficult to remember what happened in prior episodes. The oversexed and often drunk Glasich might have provided some antic leavening to the narrational process, but he remains on his best behavior, functioning more like a traditional omniscient epic bard than a reflexive Brechtian barker. He shuffles through stacks of photographs ostensibly taken by the manic photographic enthusiast Edward and, by injecting motives and causality into the mute images, he clarifies relationships and pushes the plot forward. Bringing emphatic closure to each story is a marked feature of his effort as he duly informs us of each major and minor character's fate, whether they became successful manufacturers of precision lenses or cynical home remodelers (Maria's sons Anton and Ernst, respectively), or simply found their assigned place in the tidy, ancient village cemetery.

In the age-old rhythm of communal living and dying, Reitz attempts to find a bridge across the murderous aporia between the pre- and post-Nazi eras. In this he is only partly successful, in large measure because of a conspicuous evasiveness about the Hunsrucker's knowledge of and response to the murder of the Jews, the horrifying obverse of the mostly innocuous daily life under fascism he depicts. To be sure, there are token acknowledgments of the Jews' fate. Robert, Paul's brother-in-law, happily buys the apartment of a Jewish neighbor, smugly remarking that "Things are not going so well now for the Jews." Lucie shrewdly schemes to build her villa in full knowledge that her Jewish bankers will have conveniently disappeared by the time she must pay back the loan. More ominously, Maria's brother, the SS man Wilfried Wiegand, announces at a party in 1943 that the Jews are being sent "up the chimney" and (echoing an infamous speech by Himmler) remarks at how greatly his comrades suffer from this unpleasant task. Even the presence of a concentration camp in the immediate vicinity provokes no reaction or comment among the stolid Schabbachers, few of whom are rabid Nazis, though many obligingly send loved ones to serve the fatherland.

Are such depictions accurate reflections of the banality of daily life under Nazi evil, or do they only reproduce the alibi--'We did not know'--most Germans clung to after the war? It is entirely possible, of course, that Jews played a marginal role in the life of the Hunsruckers, but there will be (indeed, there have been) many critics who regard the few incidents acknowledging the persecution Reitz includes as inadequate tokens of the grotesque larger truth he desperately wishes to bury. On the other hand, in these fleeting references does Reitz not admit something much more damning: to the extent ordinary Germans knew of the Jews' fate--and they knew quite a lot--they simply did not care. Their own travails during the war and mourning their own victims preoccupied them for years. They quickly shed their Nazi uniforms, grudgingly mouthed expressions of remorse, and opportunistically became democratic (and wealthy) under American tutelage during the Cold War. Loyal son of the Hunsruck that he is, Reitz does not condemn them for their self-absorption.

The episodes sketching the central postwar period--what one of the titles calls "The Proud Years" and "Hermannchen," a thinly disguised, quasiautobiographical portrait of the artist as a young Hunsrucker--are the least interesting. Too often, the dramaturgy, which usually successfully (if just barely) skirts soap opera, slips into bathos. Nor do Reitz's criticisms of the hardworking but self-righteous Burgers ever rise to the ironic sharpness of Fassbinder's many evocations of Wirtschaftswunder Deutschland. Yet, whatever their legitimate artistic reservations, audiences stay involved in the lives of characters who by this point have become familiar friends, accepted despite moral flaws, occasionally crude delineation, and overdrawn dramatic conflicts. Reitz insures a spectator's ongoing engagement by using strategies derived from the very classical Hollywood style he protested so much. Gernot Roll's camera work, particularly the subtly constructed, ambiguous camera movements that oscillate between subjective and objective modes, complement the familiar, but still effectively varied, use of shot/countershot to articulate most dialog scenes. The subject positions we are led to assume in turn echo the theme of partial perspectives woven into the film. The windows and doors that shape the characters' visions anticipate the even more powerful occlusions and framings of modern technological devices--camera, radio, telephone, film, tape recording--that increasingly intrude from outside to structure the characters' lives. The acute awareness of the complicity of his own medium in the dissolution of the 'Heimat,' which reaches a highpoint in Anton's long-distance marriage by telephone during the war, adds a sophisticated, reflexive note to the elegiac thrust of Reitz's masterwork.



# The New York Times

## 'HEIMAT,' AN EPIC ON GERMAN LIFE by Vincent Canby

Dateline: September 5, 1986

"Heimat" was shown as part of the 1985 New Directors/New Films Festival. Following are excerpts from Vincent Canby's review, which appeared in The New York Times April 6, 1985. The film opens today at the Public, 425 Lafayette Avenue, and will be shown over four weekends. EDGAR REITZ'S "HEIMAT" is a cinematic event, if not quite a masterpiece. It's a massive, nearly 16-hour chronicle of life in Germany, from 1919 to 1982, as reflected in the fluctuating fortunes of the members of one family, initially peasant-farmers, in the fictitious village of Schabbach in the Rhineland. As literature, "Heimat" bears the same relationship to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's magnificent, equally long adaptation of Alfred Doblin's "Berlin Alexanderplatz" that Herman Wouk's "Winds of War" bears to Thomas Mann's "Buddenbrooks."

In spite of its length, "Heimat" is immensely, easily watchable, a succession of mostly ordinary events and characters - history seen from ground level - vividly acted by a huge cast. It is, most of the time, a work of imagination and feeling, a real achievement for Mr. Reitz, who conceived the project, wrote it, with Peter Steinbach, and then directed it, with the backing of German television interests. Though Mr. Reitz insists on describing "Heimat" as a feature film and not a mini-series, it was most widely seen in Germany as a segmented television presentation.

"Heimat," which is most commonly translated as "native place" or "homeland," never strays very long from Schabbach, the ancestral village of the Simon family, whose matriarch, Katharina, more or less presides over the first quarter of the film. It is Katharina who voices one of the film's most frequently heard themes. That is that the availability of credit, which allows her children to prosper between the wars, will one day come back to haunt them, as it does with the collapse of the Nazi regime at the end of World War II and later, in the 1970's, when the economic miracle begins to fade. Credit, Katharina knows, involves consequences, sometimes terrible ones.

The film's central figure is Katharina's daughter-in-law, Maria, played by a fine new actress named Marita Breuer, who, in the course of the narrative, goes from 19 to 82 with remarkably little dependency on makeup. At the beginning of "Heimat" in 1919, Maria marries Katharina's younger son, Paul, recently returned from the war, by whom she has three children, Anton, Ernst and Pauline. After 10 years of a seemingly happy marriage, Paul one day simply wanders away from Schabbach, not to be heard from again until the eve of World War II.

In the course of "Heimat," the members of the Simon family, their in-laws and the other citizens of Schabbach, each in his own way, become a part of contemporary German history. Some embrace Hitler, while others are simple opportunists. Anton and Ernst each survives World War II to become a part of the economic miracle of the 1950's, while Maria's third child, Hermann, fathered by an engineer billeted in Schabbach during the construction of a nearby autobahn in 1938-39, is the figure who brings "Heimat" into the 1980's.

The convoluted narrative of "Heimat" is not difficult to follow and, in the way of movie serials, there are occasionally little segments that might be labeled "the story thus far." What rivets the attention for such an extended period of time is not what happens next, but who does what and how. Among the dozens of subsidiary characters who fill the screen with life is Lucie, the brassy Berlin madam who marries Katharina's elder son, Eduard, and, with the

American occupation, effortlessly shifts her allegiance from the Nazis to the Americans who, she says with conviction at one point, "will see us through this mess."

"Heimat" is no "Holocaust." It's not about guilt, but neither does it excuse anybody. One is always aware of the increasing persecution of the Jews during the 1930's. Pauline and her husband happily look forward to moving into a larger apartment, soon to be vacated by a Jewish family -with no explanations offered.

Maria's lover loses his job as an engineer because his mother was Jewish, but he's not so tainted that he isn't immediately hired to head a bomb squad. In one sequence, a little boy follows some newly installed telephone poles and discovers what we recognize - though he doesn't - as a concentration camp. Only old Katharina senses what's happening, seeing in the "animalism" of the new society one of the consequences of what everyone else takes to be affluence.

As the stoicism and peasant manners of the people of Schabbach give way to the easier expression of emotions and even to a kind of middle-class sophistication, the style of the film becomes more complex. "Heimat" never looks like a television movie. It is beautifully photographed by Gernott Roll. Unlike television films, it does not place the most important information at the center of the image, in tight close-up. "Heimat" looks big.

Mr. Reitz switches back and forth between images in black and white, or monochrome, and images in full color. Sometimes he will print a scene entirely in black and white with only isolated objects - in one case, the brilliant red of the Nazi banners -seen in color. Occasionally, this is quite marvelous - it has the esthetic effect of physical movement. At other times, though, it seems to be redundant or just self-conscious, which is also the case with some of the references to Great Moments of History.

There are other problems. A number of sequences desperately need editing, including a more or less heavenly finale, not quite as flamboyant as Mr. Fassbinder's two-hour, very camp windup of "Berlin Alexanderplatz," but still not entirely necessary. Several actors play their roles from beginning to end. Other characters, especially those who grow up on screen, are played by two or three different actors, not all of whom look particularly alike or are equally talented, though most of the performances are excellent.

Mr. Reitz is not a firm, original stylist like Mr. Fassbinder, whose films - even "Berlin Alexanderplatz" - are breathtakingly concise. On the evidence of "Heimat," Mr. Reitz is a looser sort of film maker, but he is certainly an organizer, and "Heimat" has a broad vision and a leisurely manner rarely seen in anybody else's movies.

HEIMAT, directed and produced by Edgar Reitz; written by Mr. Reitz and Peter Steinbach; director of photography, Gernot Roll; edited by Heidi Handorf; music by Nikos Mamangakis; an Edgar Reitz Filmproduktion/WDR/SFB. At the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street. Running time: 940 minutes. This film has no rating.

Mathias Simon...Willi Burger; Katharina Simon...Gertrud Bredel; Eduard Simon...Rudiger Weigang; Lucie Simon...Karin Rasenack; Paul Simon...Dieter Schaad; Maria Simon...Marita Breuer; Pauline Krober...Eva Maria Bayerwaltes; Robert Krober...Arno Lang; Anton Simon...Mathias Kniesbeck; Martha Simon...Sabine Wagner; Ernst Simon...Michael Kausch.



## **Heimat**

(Homeland)

(W. GERMAN - B&W/COLOR)

Dateline: Venice, Sept. 3, 1984; published September 12, 1984

Edgar Reitz' "Heimat" (Homeland) is not only the fulfillment of all the hope of New German Cinema over the past two decade, but should also go down as a milestone in contemporary film history. Truly, as the vast majority of critics attending the Venice fest attest, there has never been anything like it before. By comparison, there's Erich von Stroheim's aborted nine-hour-long "Greed" and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's acclaimed 15 1/2-hour "Berlin Alexanderplatz," but there were both literary adaptations and could be viewed as running chapters in a book. "Heimat" is something quite different.

This is a family chronicle, set in a Hunsrück village (named Schabbach). It was the key film event at the Munich film fest last June, where it was viewed in its original 35m version, and it will be aired shortly in 11 parts as a tv serial in September-October, produced by WDR Cologne (Joachim von Mengershausen) and SFB Berlin (Hans Quiet). It took Edgar Reitz five years and four months to complete the roughly 16-hour (including "bridges" between the parts) version.

The team of helmer Edgar Reitz, screenwriter Peter Steinbach, and cameraman Gernot Roll collaborated previously on the making of the tv-film "Stunde Null" (1976), a similar portrait of postwar Germany set in a village near Leipzig as the American and Soviet troops converge on the same spot.

"Heimat" is a semi-autobiographical portrait of Reitz' own childhood in this hilly region between Frankfurt in Hessen and Saarbrücken in the Saarland (bordering Luxembourg), taken from newspaper accounts, word-of-mouth stories, and village chronicles of every sort.

Herewith the chronological breakdown of the story: (1) The Call of Far Away Places, 1919-1928; (2) The Center of the World, 1928-1933; (3) The Best Christmas Ever, 1935; (4) The Highway, 1938; (5) Up and Away and Back, 1938-39; (6) The Home Front, 1943; (7) Soldiers and Love, 1944; (8) The Americans, 1945-1947; (9) Little Hermann, 1955-1956; (10) The Proud Years, 1967-1969; (11) The Feast of the Living and the Dead, 1982 (which also serves as an epilog).

As the chronicle indicates, the early years are rather tightly strung together, while those in the postwar era are marked by giant leaps up to the present. Indeed, one has grown to know each member of the Simon family so well that the final quantum jumps are generally welcomed, for as in reading "the Forsyte Saga" or "Buddenbrooks" or "The Magnificent Ambersons," one fairly aches to see how everything will turn out in the end.

Maria is the central figure, played with disarming charm by Marita Breuer from a 19-year-old girl ready to embark on marriage to her death and burial at the end at the age of 82.

Maria, daughter of an established landowner in the area falls in love with the son of the village blacksmith, Paul (returning home dazed from the Great War), and marries him. They have two children, but Paul is restless and one day inexplicably leaves for America to try his fortune as an inventive radio technician. Maria can't explain his disappearance to herself but keeps faith all the same.

Next comes the period under the Third Reich, and the drama shifts momentarily to the fortunes of Paul's brother Eduard and sister Pauline, the former marrying a house madame from Berlin and rising to become village mayor, the latter marrying a well-to-do jewelry shopowner and settling down to a welcomed but brief prosperity. Reitz and Stenbach in the sections set in the 1930s offer a remarkably accurate sketch of the times. It's during this period that Maria meets a new love, Otto, who is building a new highway through the Hunsruck, and she becomes pregnant with a third son, Hermann, who then joins his older brothers, Anton and Ernst, as key figures in the later postwar episodes of the film.

Several important characters join in the story; Glasisch, the village original who is also the narrator; Lucie, Eduard's wife, who joins her husband as a comic interest in the early episodes; the grandmother of the Simon clan, Katharina, whose spiritual strength is absorbed by her daughter-in-law Martha (who at the end of the film stands as the third and final Earth Mother pillar of the Simon family tree).

The trio of performances by Gertrud Bredel as Katharina, Marita Breuer as Maria, and Sabine Wagner as Martha are outstanding, indeed, emotionally moving and credible down to the last detail in word and gesture, and should wipe out in a single stroke much of the usage of clichéd stereotypes customary in current German tv productions. For that matter, the these performances are the major plus all the way through "Heimat."

No one at Venice expected "Heimat" to take off in the critics' and public's to take off in the critics' and public's estimation as rapidly and convincingly as it did; immediate sales to British and Italian television, bookings at festivals in London, New Delhi, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. One jury member frankly admitted he would have liked to see it judged in the competition.

This is the one superb example of how cinema and television can be wedded as complementary media. The shifts of black-and-white to color as just one prominent example: the tv version allows for "blending" the colors in such a way that, on one occasion, the passing of a bouquet of roses to Martha's hands at her wedding fairly illuminates in flowing contrasts a drab and dreary winter landscape.

Since Reitz had complete access to all the seasons over his many months of shooting, he could deal as he wished with both the film and video potentialities of the material. So he and ace lenser Gernot Roll have, when all's said and done, made two different, contrasting versions of the same project. Try to see both.

"Heimat" was unanimously voted the FIPRESCKI critics' prize at Venice.—Holl.

# People's Weekly World

## Heimat

by Jeff Jarvis

HEIMAT PBS (Sat., Oct. 3, 9 p.m. ET) The American miniseries, like the American car, just grew too big -- too flashy, too heavy, too extravagant to survive. So, as we did with cars, it's time we look to smaller, sleeker imported models in miniseries. Heimat is long -- 16 hours over eight weeks. It is set in a time and place that inspires dramatic excess -- Germany before and after World War II. But this miniseries, made in West Germany in 1984, finds its drama in the small, mundane moments in the life of one village, one family and one woman, Maria (beautifully played by the lovely Marita Breuer). The mini follows their stories from the end of World War I to the present. Because Heimat doesn't promise to dazzle us every hour for a dozen hours with gigantic battles, searing romances and shocking scandals, it does not disappoint. Heimat (which means homeland) only tries to give us captivating characters and stories --and it succeeds magnificently.

Grade: A

## NEW YORK

Excerpted from **"Looking Backward"**  
by David Denby

March 25, 1985

Though it is conventional in form, Heimat, the fifteen-and-a-half-hour television series broadcast last year in West Germany, was remarkably courageous work--an epic narrative set in a single fictional village, Schabbach, in the Hursruck area (in the Rhineland) from 1919 to 1982. Heimat is an attempt not to heal but to reestablish memory as normal process.

At the beginning of the first episode, Paul Simon, a young man of the village, returns from a French prison camp in 1919, relieve himself on his own straw in the courtyard of his house, and sighs in satisfaction. The central themes of Heimat might be called the longing for roots and the tendency of modern life to send people whirling into empty spaces. (Heimat is an untranslatable word that roughly means "homeland.") The way this theme is worked out is often surprising and abrupt. Paul, it turns out, is not really at home. A self-absorbed electronics nut, he marries a woman in the village and has two children, but one day he just walks away and doesn't stop until he gets to America. Heimat is composed of many such small, idiosyncratic incidents--it poses the "ordinary" happenings of the village at odd angles to the catastrophes of modern German history. Its central character, the abandoned wife of Paul, never leaves town, but here life is ruled by strong echoes of far-off events.

Reitz is so close to these characters that he can be both affectionate and darkly satirical--German stupidity is one of his favorite themes. Eduard, Paul's elder brother, marries Lucie, a Berlin prostitute who builds a pretentious villa in Schabbach with money borrowed from a Jew--money she has no intention of returning. Her ultimate social ambitions

are fulfilled when three big Nazis (Frick, Ley, and Rosenberg) stop for dinner in this house just before Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland—but then she and Eduard are forced to stay in their own kitchen, forbidden to lay eyes on the three eminences. Much in *Heimat* is controversial: In setting up the peasants as naturally resistant to Nazism and the bourgeoisie as opportunists easily suckered by it, Reitz may be creating a new myth of his own. In any case, *Heimat* is immensely entertaining—in the eight hours I saw, there wasn't one banal moment. Its critical and ironic treatment of German history, like the response of the young audience to the sophistries of Harlan and Kramer, was a sign of health in a country that may have grown tired of sickness.

## **Sight&Sound**

### **Heimat: Edgar Reitz at Venice (excerpt) by Don Ranvaud**

*Heimat*., the history of Germany in the twentieth century as reflected in the lives of three families from a Rhineland village, has been praised from all European quarters... Here Don Ranvaud questions the director Edgar Reitz.

One fine day, Paul Simon, a blacksmith from the village of Schabbach in the Hunsruck district of the Rhineland, dons his Sunday best and tells his wife he's off to the pub for a quick one. Eighteen years later he returns, briefly, in a chauffeur driven limousine, acquired from the profits of a factory he has meanwhile set up in Detroit.

The first scene comes at the end of episode one (1919-28); the second near the beginning of episode eight (1945-47). The film is *Heimat*.; it tells the interweaving stories of three families in an imaginary German village between 1919 and 1982 and runs for a total of fifteen hours, forty minutes and ten seconds. Its director, a stickler for factual detail, is Edgar Reitz, the most underrated member of the New German Cinema, and his adventure in making this film is not unlike that of his character Paul. We met on a suitably austere Venetian terrace while he was still savouring the runaway success accorded to *Heimat*: at the 1984 Film Festival.

“When we started filming, I thought the panic and chaos around the whole operation was just the normal state of affairs for a difficult film. At the end of the allotted time we had seen only a tenth of the story. . . It was real shock for us all, but we decided to carry on regardless. We even started to reshoot scenes we weren't completely satisfied with. It was all suddenly calm and serene: Either we were going to finish the project as we wanted or we were all going under, once and for all.”

The gamble—a scenario which Herzog would have been proud to have written—turned into a shrewd, if unconventional, calculation. The film has already become a legend, not just in terms of artistic achievement but also in the way it has been sold and shown. Although the two main backers are television networks (WDR and SFB), Reitz is adamant that what he has made is a film and should be treated as such. But *Heimat*: has also been sold for television consumption to almost every European country. In Britain the BBC, unusually swift and daring on this occasion, pipped Channel 4 to the post of the bidding stakes and will release it in the not too distant future as a cross between an intelligent European answer to *Dallas* and a *Forsyte Saga* for the 1980s.



## **“HEIMAT: A GERMAN CHRONICLE”**

The epic saga of a remote German village, from post WWI to the early 1980s, concentrating on the Nazi era. Its vital and consuming dramatic question is: how did these good people succumb to Nazism?

When Edgar Reitz's epic saga of family life in a German village between 1919 and 1982 was first shown in the UK in the 1980s, critics summed it up pithily but dismissively as "The Archers with Nazis". But for the huge German audience it attracted, it was far more than just a fascist soap opera. It served a profound purpose in their effort to understand how they and their country succumbed to the evils of Nazism and its aftermath, and helped them to reclaim their history from Hitler and the terrible events of the 1930s and 1940s.

That said, *Heimat* was not designed by its director to be simply yet another tortured examination of German war guilt. For a start the story stretches, in its 11 episodes and 16 hours, way beyond the Nazi era, from WWI to the "economic miracle" of the country's postwar reconstruction. And Reitz is unequivocal, and controversial, about the vexed question of Nazism: he simply doesn't understand it. "To me it remains a mystery how Hitler's Germany could have come about; all that murderous brutality on a political level and at the same time the feeling and warmth and wellbeing in the privacy of one's own home," he says.

That's the incongruity that fuels *Heimat*: terror abroad, but warm hearts and warm hearths at home; the Nazis an aberrant minority rather than the bringers of mass psychosis. The characters, who live in Schabbach, a village in the bucolic Rhineland backwater of the Hunsrück, are insulated by their geographical remoteness and also by an inherent humanity. For all its epic scope, *Heimat* is also an exercise in minimalism: personal predicaments take dramatic precedence over the calamities of history.

Some might find this revisionist, sentimental scenario hard to swallow. The terrible, tumultuous events of the Nazis' rise take place offcamera. While war rages, the inhabitants of Hunsrück survive and sometimes prosper, mainly untouched by the horrors taking place in Germany and abroad. This creates a different type of drama. When the story was first released, one critic pointed out, "The leisurely pace, the idyllic moments are not the preludes to dramatic scenes of cathartic violence; they are the drama. The good things in life are undermined not by the dramatic intrusion of political events or even the war, but by the scars that small sins leave on relationships."

The story begins in 1919 when Paul Simon (Lesch) returns from a French POW camp to Schabbach, where his family have been blacksmiths for generations. While we learn of the injustice of the Treaty of Versailles, and the problems of Weimar hyperinflation, Paul is more concerned with escaping the family forge to hammer out a career in electronics. We meet the key players: Paul; Maria (Breuer), the woman he marries but does not love; their sons, Anton (Kniesbeck) and Ernst (Kausch), who will suffer and prosper through the war years and beyond; Katharina (Bredel), Paul's mother; Wilfried (Schatz), Maria's brother, who will join the SS and murder a British airman; Eduard (Weigang), Paul's diffident amateur photographer brother, who will join the Nazis mainly as a means of social advancement; his wife, Lucie (Rasenack), a brothel madam turned social climber. At the end of Episode 1, Paul simply disappears, sowing the seeds of a mystery that will hold fast for 20 years why did he abandon his wife and children, and where did he go?

It's impossible to précis a tale that takes in 60 years and over 30 gradually emerging protagonists. And, ironically, to attempt to tell the story makes events seem less engaging than they actually are because Reitz avoids any attempt at climax or story arc. Nevertheless, there is plenty of incident: Anton's 5,000 mile trek across Turkey and Austria after escaping a Soviet POW camp; the US Army invasion of 1945; Ernst strafing the village with red roses thrown from the cockpit of his Focke Wulf 190 fighter plane; Otto (Hube), Maria's lover, being blown up while defusing a bomb the day after learning he has a son, Hermann, by her. Hermann (Richter), in turn, grows up to be a ladykiller and a talented, charismatic musician who composes avantgarde pieces for choirs to sing in caves!

All human life is here, and it's impossible not to feel for the characters despite their ultimately flawed circumstances. It's also a story satisfyingly free of soapopera melodrama: there are no cliff hangers, no terrible injustices to be avenged, no hokey coincidences or grandstanding speeches. This is quotidian life told in convincing, moving and compelling detail: and it adds up to something remarkable.

Explaining why he made *Heimat*, Reitz said: "Even 40 years after the war we are still troubled by the weight of moral judgements, still afraid that our little personal stories could recall our Nazi past and remind us of our mass participation in the Third Reich." *Heimat* attempts to reclaim these stories, and, by extension, to rescue the German people and their national character from the dark deeds and days of Nazism. That's quite an ambition for any filmmaker. But *Heimat* had an amazing impact on its first release in Germany. Fifteen million viewers watched, and as one critic put it: "People who have suppressed their participation in German history now see it in terms closer to their memory of the experience."

Reitz accomplished what he set out to do. And that, when you consider the vast scale and the complexity of his undertaking, makes *Heimat* quite a brilliant achievement.



# **EPISODE INDEX**

EPISODE 1: CALL OF FARAWAY PLACES (1919-1928)

EPISODE 2: THE CENTER OF THE WORLD (1928-1933)

EPISODE 3: THE BEST CHRISTMAS EVER (1935)

EPISODE 4: THE NEW ROAD (1938)

EPISODE 5: UP AND AWAY AND BACK (1939)

EPISODE 6: THE HOME FRONT (1943)

EPISODE 7: SOLDIERS AND LOVE (1944)

EPISODE 8: THE AMERICAN (1945-47)

EPISODE 9: LITTLE HERMANN (1955-56)

EPISODE 10: THE PROUD YEARS (1967-69)

EPISODE 11: FEAST OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD (1982)

# THE PRESS PAGE

“A watershed in European cinema.”

– **Derek Malcolm, THE GUARDIAN**

“A milestone in contemporary film history.”

– **Ron Holloway, VARIETY**

“A cinematic event.”

– **Vincent Canby, THE NEW YORK TIMES**

“One of the most important—and importantly controversial—films produced in Germany since World War II.”

– **Stuart Liebman, CINEASTE**

“Immensely entertaining...there wasn't one banal moment.”

– **David Denby, NEW YORK**

“Heimat is by far the most revolutionary work of cinema of this decade.”

– **Gideon Bachman, FILM COMMENT**

“[Heimat] transforms the commonplaces of domestic drama into a saga of the human condition.”

– **Joseph Gelmis, NEWSDAY**

“A German ‘Gone With the Wind’—you won't want to miss a single episode.”

–**FRANCE-SOIR**