

12 A Time of many Words, Stefan 1968/69

**From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>
Sent: Friday, October 29, 2004 8:06 AM +0100**

AN INTRODUCTION TO

DIE ZWEITE HEIMAT PART 12: A TIME OF MANY WORDS; STEFAN, 1968/69.

In a way, this episode seeks to come to terms with that period of “hippy” freedom of the late 60s which it portrays with shuddering and stunning accuracy, when the zeitgeist was almost totally left-wing and the background was fuelled by drugs and popular music. Reitz is looking back some 20 years, just as Shakespeare looked back some 100 years when writing his history plays. This enables Reitz to find a distance and a perspective with which to view events in his own life. I believe that what happens to Stefan in Berlin almost exactly parallels developments in Reitz’s own career as a film maker.

All the absurdities and contradictions of the revolutionary students are shown. The episode begins with Stefan and Olga travelling together to Berlin by car. We see them arrive at the checkpoint to the DDR, where they are met by stony-faced officials and a corrupt policeman who stops them and extorts a 100 DM fine. The camera just glances at an unmended pot-hole in the surface of the autobahn. Things are not what they appear. Later when left-wing squatters have torched the building in which they had run a kindergarten a female member of the crowd that has gathered to watch the firemen yells “Why don’t they go over the Wall to the Communists?” but we know why they don’t; the Communist utopia is no utopia at all. A reporter corners Helga and she is forced to admit, “There are always contradictions”, and there are questions about violence she cannot answer. We see absurdities, such as the doors having been removed from the lavatory cubicles, and the naked Kathrin telling Hermann, who has got up in the night for a pee, that one must be prepared to shit in front of ones’ comrades and that they must put an end to “petty, bourgeois coyness”. We see the failure of members of the commune to look after Helga’s child. We see the criminality of Sigi and Trixi, as they steal cars and ransack Hermann’s apartment. We see drug overdosing!

And yet, and yet! Reitz shows us the genuine idealistic side. Just as Stefan is about to pull the plug on the film he is supposedly directing, Reitz gives Ulla these words: But it was good, these dreams of freedom and participation. They raised our hopes.” There was much anti-Americanism at this time because of the Vietnam war, but Reitz is careful to give Hermann a speech of praise for the Americans, for their love of liberty and hatred of militarism. It has the air of a rather planted peroration but it is forcefully there. “They smelled good and they loved freedom”. Schnüsschen, in some ways a very naïve character and an irritating one, does develop and progress through the ideas of female emancipation current at the time. The young are attempting to break down old barriers and divisions; perhaps to

heal urban alienation through collective thinking and acting. But in the end it does not work. No filming is done because of endless discussion.

Despite the political focus it was the personal stories and the development of characters that really held my interest. For instance, we have the ending, if that is what it is, of Hermann and Schnüsschen's marriage. A blazing row takes place in the kitchen which ends with each of them hurling their wedding rings over the balcony and into the gardens. It is all quite impulsive, not calculated. Schnüsschen is completely without discrimination in her choice of friends and those she leaves in the apartment. There have been two hash-smoking, leather clad biking types from Berlin whom the police have come and arrested. There has been a character called Manni, with a skull tattooed on his chest, who threatens Hermann with violence. We know, of course that Hermann has been unfaithful and when Kathrin makes a sexually explicit invitation over the phone to him, one sees Hermann's eyes light up. He accuses his wife of using her studies as a means of working out her complexes and after the ring throwing he walks out and significantly flies to Berlin where Kathrin awaits. In his voice-over he describes this as a "silly row" but I suspect he deceives himself. It does not take long for Schnüsschen to regret what has happened and that night she goes searching for the rings with her little girl. We later see her in distress in Renate's night-club and goes in search of her husband to Consul Handschuh's. After his Berlin episode Hermann returns home only to find his wife has gone leaving a message in exactly the same words that the Consul has used. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander or the other way round.

It is interesting to see how Reitz has made Hermann very sexually orientated. Whilst the other students are making revolutionary statements to camera, Hermann and Kathrin are copulating on a giant four-poster bed [a film prop], hidden behind screens. A workman, brought in by Stephan, discovers them at play. Quite a comic moment! Later on the Kurfurstendamm one sees Hermann gazing erotically at Kathrin's long legs and taking her hand. Even when he is making his speech about the Americans he is trying to touch her hand. I loved these little details. Talking about sex, now might be a good time to say a few words about the orgiastic scene in the commune. I thought Reitz got this scene so right as a depiction of its time.

It is shot in soft focus through green and yellow filters to suggest the miasma of drug taking. One unnamed couple is having intercourse on the floor throughout and their orgasmic sounds and cries intermingle with the hypnotic Jimi Hendrix music. We see Hermann and Kathrin chewing cannabis cake. Kalle mimes to the music using a tennis racquet as a simulated machine gun/guitar until he eventually hallucinates. Heiner, who bears a striking resemblance to Jim Morrison of The Doors, mimics a female strip tease, strips to a loincloth and works himself into a state of arousal. Hermann and Kathrin start love-making and Heiner appears to join in. He appears to mount Hermann and then something seems to snap in Hermann's mind. Either he does not appreciate being ravaged by another male or he is offended in his own maleness by the fact that Kathrin is sexually enjoying the experience regardless of who her male lover actually is. None of this is presented pornographically, as it so easily could have been, and the viewer is caught by this depiction of trance-like states interrupted by sudden bursts and

crescendos of noise. As Hermann leaves, perhaps having come to his senses and rejecting the influence of drugs....remember his wife had called him "chicken" for not being prepared to take any...motor bikes roar in.

What of Clarissa? She is increasingly seen as self-centred. I noticed that when Volker departs for Baden-Baden and says that he will think of her and the child, she replies, "I'll think of me, too." Her relationship with the American woman certainly seems to have something of the lesbian about it. She turns to another woman not her husband for comfort, solace, and maybe even sex. It seemed to be hinted at. Reitz makes some parallels between the two couples, I think. Both Schnüsschen [sociology studies] and Clarissa [jazz singing] make new departures and are happy in their new roles. Both Hermann [electronic studio and freedom, both artistically and financially] and Volker [commission from Sudwestfunk Radio Orchestra] are successful. Both marriages are in trouble! Both men are good fathers to their children, better than the mothers! At one point Schnüsschen has forgotten all about her child and runs out of Clarissa's apartment desperately searching for a taxi.

This leads me naturally to what I regard as the best scene in the whole episode and the only scene which moved me deeply, very deeply! It is the final scene and it beautifully depicts the bond between father and daughter, between Hermann and Lulu. It works through the images, as good cinema always does. Father and daughter are in a cable car alone together. I was not sure of the location. Was the water below a lake or the Rhine? Perhaps Hermann has driven back towards the Hunsrück in the Citroen he buys, because his daughter likes it? They are shown with the setting sun lighting up their faces. Hermann is reading an article, by Kathrin or about her, in Stern magazine. Some of her words could apply to Hermann [e.g. "The mother smothers the child with love, the child flees."] but her finishing words are wrong and the scene signifies this without words at all. She writes, "We speak this truth. Nothing is as it was." But there, staring at us in the dying rays of the sun, are two faces, in warm colour. One is the face of a happy and trusting child, the other the face of a happy and protective father. Kathrin is wrong. This is one of the eternal verities. It was and it will be! That is what Reitz is telling us, I think. The sunlight reflects on the water and the credits roll. My heart missed a beat!

Ivan Mansley.

P.S.1. I am now going downstairs to root out my old Jimi Hendrix and Woodstock records and put some flowers in my hair and fly off in my imagination to San Francisco!

P.S.2. How well I remember the eternal debates of "A Time of Many Words"! In the school where I worked in the late 60s and early 70s we had endless staff meetings about the lack of discipline amongst the pupils where everyone, but everyone, had to have their say at length, while the children ran riot and then we had to analyse that. The Headmaster was not as decisive as Stefan!

From: "Susan Biedron" <Susan jsbiedron.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 04, 2004 7:09 PM -0500

Ivan and all,

this is my least favorite episode of DZH. Everyone seems to be frustrated and the so-called revolutionaries are running amuck. There is much empty idealistic talk.

What would Reinhard think if he were alive and saw what happened with the production of his film? Does Stefan give Helga and her revolutionary friends jobs because he still loves her? Here we learn that Stefan is definitely not the father of her child. Stefan is a wuss.

As Ivan writes, Reitz shows us many contradictions. Trixi and her friends who live in the west and seem to have everything are stealing and taking drugs. At the same time there is the grim realities of socialist life in the DDR - not exactly a utopia.

Hermann has finally achieved success - he has money and artistic freedom. But his personal life is a disaster. When he returns home he finds a cluttered apartment with Schnusschen's hippie friends. I like it when he asks them if they had ever heard of work. It reminds me of a Heimat episode where Hermann and his school friends are practicing music in someone's cellar. The owner asks them to leave because she doesn't approve of their music.

Hermann also expects Schnusschen to follow a different set of rules than he does. Hermann has an affair with his coworker and stays out late - but complains to his wife that their apartment is a mess and there is no food in the fridge. I do understand his anger at finding a strange girl passed out in his bed. I like Schnusschen's character, but in this instance she behaves like an idiot when she tells Hermann to sleep in Lulu's room.

We also see the rivalry between Volker and Hermann again. Hermann brags to Volker about his studio, Volker brags about his radio contract.

Volker also comes home to an unexpected scene of women singers that Clarissa has invited to stay in their apartment. - Clarissa is obviously happy and the harmony of voices is very pleasant. Jean, who accompanies Volker, is enchanted. A big contrast to the scenes Hermann finds in his home. Yet Volker can see Clarissa is pulling away from him and their son. (I am looking forward to seeing the grown up Arnold in Heimat 3 - how did this kid turn out?)

Ivan wrote:

>>It is interesting to see how Reitz has made Hermann very sexually orientated.<<

I wonder about how this fits into the story - is it autobiographical or is it to show that Hermann is searching for something?

I totally dislike the hippy drug scene when Hermann is with Kathrin and the others - this shows one of the worst aspects of this era. Sorry Ivan - as far as I'm concerned the only good part of this era was the music. Yes, when I was a student I identified with many alternative ideas of the time. But I was eventually soured by all the looney ideas and thoughts that came out of this era, including a very close childhood friend who went to the University of Colorado at Boulder and came home a very different and anti social person.

I do agree about the scene showing the love between Hermann and Lulu - it's super.

Susan

**From: "Thomas Hönemann" <th.hoenemann freenet.de>
Sent: Saturday, November 06, 2004 9:30 PM +0200**

Dear Ivan,

thank you again for this enlightening introduction.

Let me tell you first, that I deeply agree with your analysis of the last sequence of the film and what Reitz is going to say us through that. Your conclusion is very sensitive and moving, and very true - regarding the background of that time. By the way: The cable-car is climbing the Zugspitze, germanies highest mountain, located in the bavarian Alps. (This cable car will reappear in HEIMAT 3, part 1.)

After having watched this episode two days ago there were two things still keeping my mind occupied. The first is the stereotye most people have about the 68-generation wich is confirmed in the way Reitz shows them. And even the title of the episode fits: The time of many words - many words, sometimes too much words are spoken, lots of things are discussed, but nothing is sayd. Words and meanings, maybe even life and its meaning, are sometimes lost in the way people behave. (a funny detail: Schnüsschen is nearly quoting this title after having explained to Hermann what sense all the people and books in their home would make. - Of course this quotation is ironically meant, Reitz is wanting to point us on a lack of really clear and explaining, senseful words.)

First at all Stefans attempt to direct a film, based on Reinhard plot. All his struggeling is condemned by discussions. Discussions about the political aims and justification (!!) of the film and so on. What irony of destiny, that of all things the americans, the capitalists, achieve to turn around his frustration, giving him money to stop the whole project and helping him to find a way out of the situation this way.

And then all those discussions at the university. Sometimes it seems that of all they are saying is is more improtant to use scientific and political words than giving any sense to what they are saying. When listening to that discussions it was almost hard for me to stay calm, because this is what I sometimes experience in my job: Discussing without any end and without

leading it on an constructive way of going on, of doing something concrete. And then even Schnüsschen with her naive and helpful mind: she indeed is, like you pointed out, disregarding Herman and Lulu, and I really can understand that the situation escalates in the end. But even Herman shows a lack of responsibility for his family, it seems everybody is trying to live his own revolution, but maybe without any goal at all.

In my eyes the part dealing with Clarissa and her american friend is really well and affectively done. It is so easy and even self-evident to feel with her. In the one scene at night, when she leaves her marriage-bed to attend her friend, her loneliness is really tangible. I don't think that she shows even a slice of lesbian behaviour or ambitions, but in my eyes her behaviour towards the other girl shows a very very deep longing for security and emotional warmth.

Two sequences reminded me of other films from that time wich show parallels to the content.

The first refers to the behaviour of the film-team. It reminded me - even if this film is based on a slightly different storry - of Rainer Werner Fassbinder "Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte" (1971) (1(Beware of a holy whore), see <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067962/>). Even this film is about a film team meating at the set but being not able to start workinig, beeing captured in discussions and sexual desire.

The second film I was reminded of by watching is Bambule (1970) (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0065449/>) written by Ulrike Meinhof who later was one of the most wanted terrorists in Germany (leader of the Baader-Meinhof gang, see http://www.crimelibrary.com/terrorists_spies/terrorists/meinhof/1.html).

Bambule deals with questions of failed education in a children's home. I see there a concrete parallel to Helga and her "Kinderladen".

Yes, and in the end, Hermann is characterised as a searcher, but for what is he searching? Definitely not for the economical secure of making money with electronic music for commercials (did you know that Edgar Reitz created more than 50 tv-commercials when working for the Insel-Film in the early 60s?). And even not for adventure, the free way of live, wich becomes clear for him after his experience at the "Kommune". Thinking about family will raise mixed feelings to him: he wants to be a good family-father, is searching for emotional security, but his love to Schnüsschen is decreasing more and more, and this happens even faster as she breaks the intimacy of their litle home wich is no home, no "Heimat" for him anymore. Indeed, at the end of this episode there are more questions than answers left, and this sentiment will eben be dominating the last part.

All this points me again to a key-scene of HEIMAT 3 where Hermann and Ernst are sitting, drinking a glas of really good red whine: "Everything we believed in ..." says Hermann, and Ernst cuts him of: "... made us sad." Life is not made to think and discuss endlessly, but to act and live it.

Best regards to you all, have a very nice sunday,
Thomas

<http://home.t-online.de/home/th.hoenemann/heimat/index.htm>

From: "Ivan Mansley" <ivanman dsl.pipex.com>
Sent: Thursday, November 11, 2004 9:04 PM +0100

We have only had 2 posts on this episode, both thought-provoking in my view. I feel it necessary to disagree or at least clarify what I wrote in my introduction.

Susan wrote:< I totally dislike the hippy drug scene when Hermann is with Kathrin and the others - this shows one of the worst aspects of this era. Sorry Ivan - as far as I'm concerned the only good part of this era was the music. Yes, when I was a student I identified with many alternative ideas of the time. But I was eventually soured by all the looney ideas and thoughts that came out of this era, including a very close childhood friend who went to the University of Colorado at Boulder and came home a very different and anti social person.>

I have looked again at what I wrote. There is nothing there that implies approval or disapproval of what we witness in the scene of orgy in the commune. All I was saying was that the scene is a striking one full of hallucinatory images which suggest the drug-induced states of the participants. It is a good piece of cinema. In fact, Hermann is our representative as it were and he leaves! Thus Edgar Reitz exposes the follies of the age. The excesses of the 60's speak for themselves. For instance, the development of Helga into an urban terrorist is a consequence of the currency of fashionable revolutionary ideas of the time and the writings of fashionable philosophers and thinkers of this period, some of whom are mentioned in Schnusschen's book-buying spree. I don't doubt at all the facts you mention in your final sentence, Susan.

Thomas wrote:< In my eyes the part dealing with Clarissa and her american friend is really well and affectively done. It is so easy and even self-evident to feel with her. In the one scene at night, when she leaves her marriage-bed to attend her friend, her loneliness is really tangible. I don't think that she shows even a slice of lesbian behaviour or ambitions, but in my eyes her behaviour towards the other girl shows a very very deep longing for security and emotional warmth.>

I still cling to my notion of a lesbian element or tendency here. I thoroughly agree with your first 3 sentences, Thomas. Mind you, her loneliness is partly self-induced, isn't it? She has pushed her husband further and further away. Even if he wasn't her lover he could have been her friend. I agree she is looking for <security and emotional warmth> but that was what Volker was looking for when he approached Schnusschen. His wife chooses another female! I do not mean there is anything sexually explicit only a tendency. Also see in my Intro to Part 13 Clarissa and her bevy of "witches" at the Press Conference and her refusal to sleep on the bed

[marriage bed in the Hotel Acacia].

Tomorrow, November 12th will see my last introduction. Shall we have the usual 2 week period for discussion and then from say 25th November to December 2nd for attempts at overviews of DZH? Favourite episodes, scenes, characters, actors and actresses. The nature of Edgar Reitz's achievement and so on. Or you could combine a review of Part 13 with an overview. Is that OK for everyone? And let's have plenty of contributions in order to end with a bang not a whimper!

Ivan.