

Fluid Boundaries. 57th New York Film Festival 2019

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The best experimental essay-film screened at the NY 2019 Film Festival was *Home (Heimat) is a Space in Time* (3 hours and 39 minutes) by Thomas Heise, a German filmmaker born in 1955 and from East Berlin. Heise reads the story of his family in voice-over, while he relies on a variety of sources: letters from relatives, resumes' drafts, diary entries, surveillance reports from the Cold War period, newspaper articles, private photographs, newsreel footage from contemporary Germany, with an alternation of natural landscapes and city-scenes. Long and detailed, this film occasionally becomes hard to keep up with, because the viewer is asked to grasp Heise's intricate family tree.

In the 30s Thomas grandfather, Wilhelm, an academic, was obliged to retire because his wife, Edith, was Jewish. In the 60s, Thomas' father, the philosopher Wolfgang Heise, was fired by the University of East Berlin due to its lukewarm support of the local Communist Party. Heise also reads private letters describing the Nazi soldiers rounding up some of his relatives in Vienna.

Heise's film stands out for the ways in which he allows the primary written documents to tell the story, as if they were mute objects capable of speaking a language of their own. The result is a compelling weave of

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private and public memories that brings to mind Nicole Vedrez's archival compilation of found footage *Paris 1900* (1947).

Despite the filmmaker's subjective inscription through his monotone voice-over, the spectators of this film can sense the objectifying impact of the camera lens. The latter thrives on differences concerning size, scale, texture, calligraphy, punctuation, addresses, and paragraphs. This approach makes sense as soon as one realizes that Heise was originally trained in printing and graphic design.

He uses only two major kinds of camera movement: the vertical and the horizontal tracking shots, whereas his editing technique is minimalist, sequential and even flattening. As a result, the horizontal tracking shots underline intimacy, while the vertical ones speak of loss. The tension between horizontal and vertical tracking shots combined with the juxtaposition of written words and visual sources turns genealogy into archeology, while it blurs the line between historical records and social documents.