

RULES OF THE ROAD



A film by Oliver Herbrich

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Travellers have wandered the Irish countryside for centuries. They were tinsmiths, harvesters and migrant labourers, fortune and story tellers, horsetraders and peddlers, knife-grinders and scrap dealers - always performing a welcome chore for the settled population. As the centuries went by the so-called Tinkers adjusted their life-styles to the changing conditions. Today, however, the traditional life on the road is coming to an end.

The Travellers' origin is a matter of speculation. Often the crop failures of the 19th century are blamed for pushing thousands of farmers from their homes. Only a few, however, joined those already living on the road. The wanderers gradually evolved their identity as Travellers. The road became their home.

The family is the basic economic and social unit. To assure marriages within the clan, the wedding matches used to be made by parents when the daughters are 14. Catholic in faith, the women give birth to an average of 12 children. Every ninth Traveller child never sees the first birthday. Still, one-third of the children die before the age of 15. At the same time, only five percent of the adults are

older than 50. The cause for this low life expectancy is poverty.

Since the sixties the Travellers have migrated to the cities to work a new niche: they live on scrapyards from other peoples rubbish. A symbiotic relationship between industries and Travellers is said to lead to involuntary cooperation regarding hazardous waste disposal: Drums containing poisonous substances simply stand unattended. Coincidence? Sooner or later a few plucky scrap men turn up, dump the poison, and then are paid their refunds for returning the empties to the owners.

Today the government forces the Travellers to take up sedentary life-styles. Only few still travel - the majority cannot afford to move. The welfare state simply defined them as a problem, as outcasts requiring assimilation. This destroys their culture and identity as the industrial age's last surviving nomads.

The Irish Travellers developed a language of their own called Gammon or Cant. Today only 150 words remain in circulation - just enough to mix up English sentences and make them inscrutable. The cultural heritage of the Travellers



GESETZE DER STRASSE

Jahrhundertelang bereisten Landfahrer das bäuerliche Irland. Als Kesselflicker, Erntee und Wanderarbeiter, Wahrsager und Geschichtenerzähler, Pferdehändler und Haußer, Scherenschleifer oder Altwarensammler leisteten sie der seßhaften Bevölkerung willkommene Dienste. Jahrhunderte lang haben sich die Tinker so wechselnden Lebensbedingungen angepaßt. Doch mit der jetzigen Generation geht ihre Reise endgültig zu Ende.

Um die Herkunft der Fahrenden ranken sich verschiedene Gerüchte. Angeblich seien die vielen Mißernten des 19. Jahrhunderts schuld daran gewesen, daß die Kleinstbauern und Häusler ins Elend gestürzt und von ihren Parzellen getrieben wurden. Zu Tausenden landeten sie auf der Straße, doch nur wenige schlossen sich tatsächlich den Landfahrern an. Allmählich wurden sie eine eigene Ethnie und entwickelten ihre Identität als Fahrende. Die Straße wurde ihr Zuhause. Die Familie bildet die wirtschaftliche und soziale Einheit. Um eine Heirat innerhalb des Clans sicherzustellen, werden die Ehen von

den Eltern beschlossen, sobald die Töchter 14 sind. Als gläubige Katholikinnen bringen sie dann im Schnitt 12 Kinder zur Welt. Doch jedes neunte Traveller-Kind stirbt, bevor es ein Jahr alt wird. Heute noch erreicht ein Drittel das 15. Lebensjahr nicht. Auch nur fünf Prozent der Erwachsenen sind älter als 50. Jeder weiß, daß Armut die Ursache dieser niedrigen Lebenserwartung ist.

Seit den Sechzigern kommen die Traveller an die Peripherien der Städte, wo sie sich auf Schrottplätzen eine neue Nische erschließen und vom Abfall der anderen leben. Zwischen Industrie und Travellern soll es dabei zu höchstbrisanten Symbiosen kommen, etwa bei der Be-

seitigung von Sondermüll. Zufall oder nicht, viele Giftfässer stehen solange frei zugänglich herum, bis ein paar beherzte Alteisensammler sie in den nächsten Fluß kippen, um sie dann als Leergut an die Eigentümer zurückzuverkaufen. Inzwischen versucht die Regierung, die Traveller seßhaft zu machen. Heute sind nur noch wenige auf Achse, die Mehrzahl kann sich Mobilität nicht leisten und sitzt fest. So werden sie vom Sozialstaat als Problem definiert, als Randgruppe, der man die Kultur der Seßhaften aufzwingt, um aus ihnen "anständige" Bürger zu machen. Darüber geht die Kultur und die Identität der letzten Nomaden des Industriezeitalters zugrunde.

is no longer passed on. Their's is a knowledge transmitted by oral tradition. As the elders die off, so too disappears their cultural legacy.



Früher hatten die Tinker ihre eigene Sprache, das Gammon oder Cant, verächtlich mit "Gauersprache" übersetzt. Heute gibt es nur noch 150 Wörter, gerade genug, um englische Sätze zu entstellen und unverständlich zu machen. Die Kultur der irischen Landfahrer beruht allein auf mündlicher Überlieferung. Schon bald wird das kollektive Gedächtnis nicht mehr weitergegeben. Denn mit den alten Leuten stirbt auch ihr Vermächtnis.



Road to Nowhere

Freedom is just another word for nothing left to loose.

Rules of the Road is a contemporary road movie foregoing the familiar cliché of romantic escape. Instead it focuses on travellers who not only herald a sweeping economic migration, but are also the living exponents of an odyssey. An odyssey reflecting the state of mind of an absolute industrial society.

The Travellers are left no place to go. And they never knew a place where they could stay.
(Oliver Herbrich)



Straße ins Nichts

Rules of the Road ist ein zeitgenössisches Roadmovie, das Reise einmal nicht als Ausflucht zeigt. Vielmehr geht es um Fahrende, die vom Beginn einer ökonomischen Völkerwanderung künden. Und von einer Odyssee, die den geistig kulturellen Zustand einer Industriegesellschaft ohne Grenzen widerspiegelt.

Die Fahrenden haben keinen Bewegungsraum mehr. Platz zum Bleiben hatten sie noch nie.
(Oliver Herbrich)



Credits

available in German or English version, 35mm Color or BETACAM SP (French subtitled version also available)

with: Sam Power, Nelly McInerney, Mr & Mrs McDonagh, Johnny Collins, Frank Toohey, Kitty Delaney, Molly Collins, Geraldine, Nancy, Winifred Hartey, John & Jane McDonagh, Chrissy Ward, Davey Collins, Chrissy Joyce, Jemma & Justin, Mike McDonagh, Mikeen McCarty • **Narration:** Dominik Graf (Glenn Rossiter), Melania Werber (Chrissy Ward) • **Poems by** Chrissy Ward • **Camera:** Jan Betke • **Editor:** Uwe Klimmeck • **Sound:** Oliver Herbrich • **Production manager:** Paul Moody • **Tour manager:** Reiner Herzog • **Location manager:** Mikel Collins • **Driver:** David Roberts • **Songs by** Mary Donovan, Larry & John Donovan, Johnny Collins, Mikeen McCarty • **Stills:** Derek Speirs • **Archives:** University College Dublin, George Gmelch New York, ITM Dublin • **Video:** Father Paddy • **Dubbing editor:** Claudia Schumann • **Re-recording mixer:** Anton Vetter • **Production accountants:** Isolde Herbrich, Harald Kissling • **Production assistant:** Monika Bobzien • **Translators:** Craig Reishus, Peter Herbrich • **TV editors:** Urs Aebersold (BR), Knut Fischer (WDR), Klaus Wenger (ARTE) • **written and directed by** Oliver Herbrich • **produced by** Oliver Herbrich Filmproduction Munich • **in association with** Hans W. Geissendorfer • **sponsored by** Filmstiftung NW • **Thanks to:** Irish Traveller Movement, Sr Patricia Lahiffe, Father Paddy; Yola Grimm, Claus Striegl, Petra Vonhausen, LICHT & TON • **dedicated to** the people at Dunsink Lane.

There's a lot of them gone very young and I thought if they had more human rights would they live longer? And because the people didn't care for them, they didn't care for themselves, so life was short. – So this is a poem about all of our souls. When people ask me: "Where were you born?"

WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

Where were you born?

It doesn't matter I'm sure

Born to a mother

On the side of a road

She gave birth to a baby

In winter wind

In a camp back road

They moved her wagon

with nowhere to go

Packing her extra bundle

Just a day old

Walking the road

In winter rain

In her body so much pain

Ireland never worried

Only the Lord

Another little bundle

With sadness in the heart

Where were you born?

It doesn't matter I'm sure

When you are a traveller

On the side of the road

The trouble you get

When you belong to a clan

A traveller-tinker

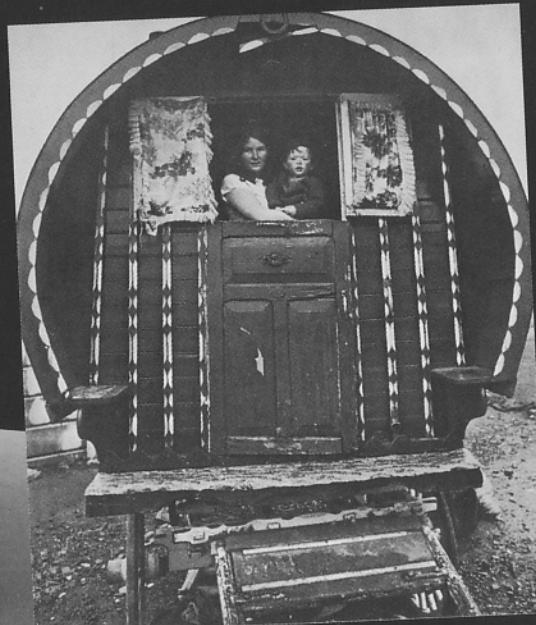
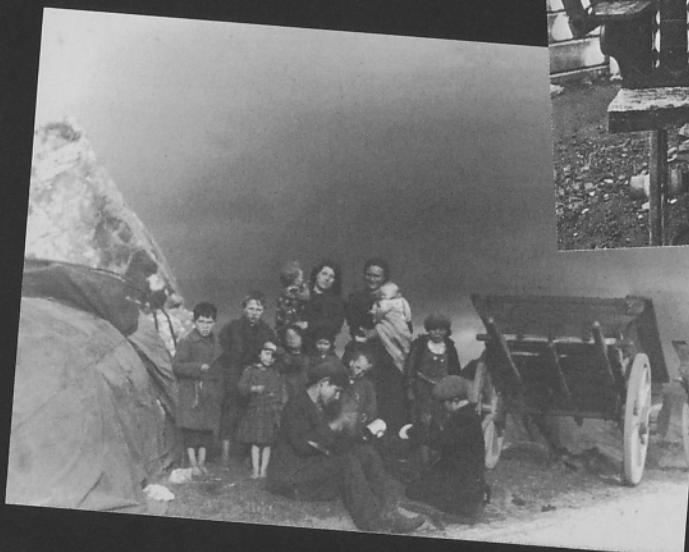
With stars in the heart

Moving around with a jolly sound

Blocking the pain away

From your heart

(Chrissy Ward)



Years ago, when the Travellers were around, we used to pull into what we call a camp and we'd stay there as long as we had to stay there – so we'd do all the work in the area. Then we'd move maybe twenty or thirty miles and we'd do the same. We'd always got work. Until the plastic came in and killed the trade off altogether – nobody was buying of us so we were wasting our time making the cans or buckets.

(Johnny Collins)

When I got married in 1953, it was hard times but I thought I was going into luxury because my husband had a green cover over the tent and I thought that was very good to have. But still I had to beg the day that I got married.

(Molly Collins)

We struggled through life. We came on to have a big family. 19, four dead and 15 alive. Nine boys and six girls. Any time I ever had a child it was the very same as if I never had one. You'd just have your baby – you'd come out – you'd wash and clean and look after the rest of them. You weren't thinking about yourself at all – you were thinking about the family at that time.

(Kitty Delaney)

We used to have our fires lighting outside and we'd all have our playing accordions and our fiddles and step dancing. I was a story teller and a folk singer. We used to freely enjoy life. That's all finished with now - the television took over - and if you're caught lighting a fire outside the fire brigade will come out and quench you.

(Mikeen McCarty)

It's like taking a bird of a tree and putting him in a cage. What do you do with him? You put him in jail. Well to put me in a house you do that. Here is my life and here is my living. Here I will live and here I'll die. That's my story and that's it. Now, I hope you accept that.

("Cider" John McDonagh)