RULES OF THE ROAD

A film by Oliver Herbrich
RULES OF THE ROAD

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 in-scrutable. The cultural heritage of the Travellers

GESETZEN DER STRASSE


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 Besichtigung von Sondermüll. Zufall oder nicht, viele Giffässer stehen solange frei zugänglich herum, bis ein paar beherzte Alteisensammel die in den nächsten Fluß kippen, um sie dann als Leergut an die Eigentümer zurückverkaufen. 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 Seßhaftigkeit aufzwinge, 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.

Road to Nowhere

Freedom is just another word for nothing left to loose.

Rules of the Road is a contemporary road movie forgoing 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


Die Fahrrenden 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 Tooley, Kitty Delaney, Molly Collins, Geraldine, Nancy, Winifred Hartey, John & Jane McDonagh, Chrissy Ward, Davey Collins, Chrissy Joyce, Jemma & Justin, Mike McDonagh, Mike McCarty • Narration: Dominik Graf (Glenn Rossiter), Melanie Werber (Chrissy Ward) • Poems by Chrissy Ward • Camera: Jan Betke • Editor: Uwe Klimeck • Sound: Oliver Herbrich • Production manager: Paul Moody • Tour manager: Reiner Herzog • Location manager: Mike Collins • Driver: David Roberts • Songs by Mary Donovan, Larry & John Donvan, Johnny Collins, Mike McCarty • Stills: Derek Speirs • Archives: University College Dublin, George Gmelich, New York, ITM Dublin • Video: Father Paddy • Dubbing editor: Claudia Schumann • Re-recording mixer: Anton Vetter • Production accountants: Isolde Herbrich, Harald Kassling • Production assistant: Monika Bobziem • 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. Geissendörfer • sponsored by Filmstiftung NW

Thanks to: Irish Traveller Movement, Sr Patricia Lahiffe, Father Paddy; Yola Grimm, Claus Strieg, Petra Vonhausen, LICHT & TON • dedicated to the people at Dunsink Lane.
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 televi-
sion 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.

("Oid" John McDonagh)