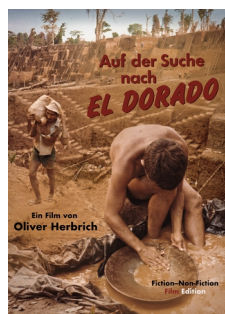


## Reviews of films by Oliver Herbrich



It's nineteen year-old Oliver Herbrich's first film: **Mathias Kneißl**. Stephan Becker plays Kneißl, reminiscent of a Bresson character, not as an imitation of the historic figure, but as a present-day person. Just as the whole film does not strive for some unattainable authenticity, but rather, in its accomplished sections, creates images as imagined events and not reconstructed illustrations. *(Norbert Jochum, Die Zeit)*

Herbrich is a highly gifted composer of visual concentration exercises. Long, quiet takes. Two figures at a table, in the dark, a burning candle, nothing else. Landscape, peasants, soldiers: Like the silhouettes of a tightly knit play. The dialogue boiled down to core sentences: signals, experiences, words as border fences. *(Ponkie, Abendzeitung)*



**Searching for El Dorado** tells of a peculiar paradox: Gold diggers in the Brazilian jungle who are devoted solely to making money – while growing more and more impoverished. For the big profit everyone is hoping for doesn't pan out. And the few grams of precious metal that are gained, and that just barely sustain motivation, are splurged in the surrounding shanty towns. *(Andreas Friedemann, Münchner Merkur)*

Nothing has really changed since 1830: Everyone works, many don't know what for; some go crazy. And **Wodzeck** is no exception. Sure, the story is familiar. But Herbrich has given it an excellent, in fact perfect, update. Local color is captured, from the outside (factory chimney) and inside (company festivity), without comment. One feels sympathy, anger, grief. That comes very close to Büchner's intention. The acting performances are award-worthy, especially Detlef Kügow in the title role. *Wodzeck* reveals that the Ruhr area is the Bronx of Germany and thus an ideal shooting location – proof given by a 23-year-old Munich filmmaker. *(Döll, Ruhr Nachrichten)*



Whereas Theo Berger's countless break-ins and breakouts gained him a certain recent crime-history celebrity and ambivalent yellow-press popularity, Oliver Herbrich's documentary **The Bavarian Al Capone** strips away his legendary gangster myth. The laconic soberness with which Berger narrates his own biography constitutes the actual quality of this document. *(Hans Günther Pflaum, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

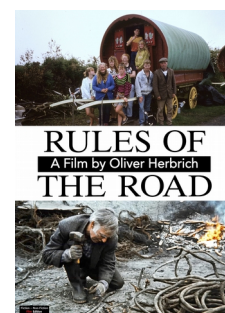


The incredible story of this region, of its incomparable suffering caused by nuclear mania, is told by Oliver Herbrich, who has earned a reputation as both a documentarist and a feature film director. Rare archive footage tells the story of the nuclear testing, as well as the downright cynical treatment of the population. The narrative of **Bikini – mon amour** is centered around the lives of the islanders. Herbrich shows the inevitable decay of a once paradisiacal civilization. *(Rainer Brückner-Heinze, Frankfurter Rundschau)*

Cinema most inspiringly does what it is meant to do – to be a place of imagination – when it does not reproduce reality, but rather, like the psychiatric patient in Oliver Herbrich's **Earthbound**, takes off from reality, naturally without losing sight of it. *(Hans-Dieter Seidel, FAZ)*



**Priests of the Condemned** is a bulletin from a vale of tears that can be found in almost every Third World country. The images are not easy to erase. They affect us as they are, without instrumentalizing the horror. Oliver Herbrich focuses – as in his last two documentaries – on the people; he seeks to analyse their Genesis and their environment. Thus, despite the distance, a closeness evolves that is the first approach to dealing with a taboo. Herbrich is right: These deformed people make visible to us the borderline between 'normal' and 'outcast'. *(Heiko Küftner, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*



In **Rules of the Road**, Oliver Herbrich presents a nomadic people threatened with extinction. German documentary filmmaker tracked down this ethnic group not in the Amazon region or on a remote archipelago, but on the outskirts of London, on the roads of Wales and Ireland. The audience realizes that misery never disappeared from Europe. It was merely pushed, toward the end of the twentieth century to the inhospitable fringes of civilization. In the midst of our artificial paradises, the Irish Travellers hire themselves out, collecting scrap iron, melting lead from cables, or draining acid from old car batteries into the sewer. *(Christian Gloyer, Berliner Tagesspiegel)*

# THE PROUD AND SAD LIFE OF MATHIAS KNEISSL

film reviews

It's nineteen year-old Oliver Herbrich's first film: *Mathias Kneissl*. Stephan Becker plays Kneissl, reminiscent of a Bresson character, not as an imitation of the historic figure, but as a present-day person. Just as the whole film does not strive for some unattainable authenticity, but rather, in its accomplished sections, creates images as imagined events and not reconstructed illustrations.

(Norbert Jochum, *Die Zeit*)

The film, Herbrich's feature film debut, is somewhat intentionally tuned to proud melancholy. What makes it interesting is the author's skill and precision in reducing images to a minimum of external drama – while achieving a maximum amount of content. Herbrich is a highly gifted composer of visual concentration exercises. Long, quiet takes. Two figures at a table, in the dark, a burning candle, nothing else. Landscape, peasants, soldiers: Like the silhouettes of a tightly knit play. The dialogue boiled down to core sentences: signals, experiences, words as border fences.

(Ponkie, *Abendzeitung*)

After a very deft exposition using woodcut illustrations from Marlene Reidel's book *Der Räuber Kneissl* (The Robber Kneissl), the young author-director dives straight into Mathias's hopeless actions. He is set on escaping poverty and the fin de siècle petty-bourgeois contempt for a former convict by emigrating to America. The film's contemplative concept, condensing images to pure content, is already evident here: When Kneissl robs rich farmers, to pay for the ship passage for him and his bride Mathilde. The loot is never enough though to realize the illusory dream of freedom "overseas". In the end, Kneissl's rebellion proves to be the self-destructive illusion of a loner. The villagers' admiration of his cat-and-mouse game with the gendarmes, though he is of course unable to change anything on his own, merely drives him deeper and deeper into a hopeless confrontation with the hated authorities. With sensitively photographed shots (cinematography: Ludolph Weyer), through the concentration and precision of the visuals, the director succeeds in evoking in the viewer a sense of topicality and history.

(Hans-Jürgen Weber, *Filmecho*)

This remarkable debut film forms the sad life of Mathias Kneissl as a robber into into a pessimistic view of the world, atmospherically apt in its visual and story design, that is worth watching and discussing. Despite some rough edges, this tragic, personal film offers definite hope for the cinema.

*(Wolfgang J. Fuchs, Filmbeobachter)*

He deserves admiration just for pulling off *The proud and sad life of Mathias Kneissl* in the first place, while even managing to develop his own tonality. This is not just the result of lack of funds and inexperience, but also this is created by the persistently sustained atmosphere of the images. And Herbrich pleasantly pursues his own interest in the figure of Mathias Kneissl, using it neither as an object of historical reconstruction nor as a vehicle for socio-political propositions.

*(Hans Günter Pflaum, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

His film feels refreshing and is imbued with an honesty not yet worn out by routine. Herbrich's Kneissl is no hero who gives the authorities the runaround. He is a loser, his path is predetermined, his rebellion brings only deferment until his final downfall is sealed. This makes the execution a hidden suicide. Once stamped a criminal, a man no longer has a chance in life. With sharp, unpretentious clarity – and several woodcuts appearing after the title sequence to set the “agenda” – Herbrich draws a very personal picture of the robber beheaded in Augsburg in 1902. All the while, he is not concerned with authenticity, but achieves an almost parable-like portrayal. With his dreams, which remain unfulfilled, Kneissl could easily be a person of today.

*(Ulrich Kleber, Mittelbayrische Zeitung)*

The landscape and nature play a large role in Herbrich's film. It is ally and enemy of the hunted. It offers him shelter and a hideout in the summer and, in the winter, forces him to give up. Due not only to the coldness, but also the loneliness that is in it. In the forest, Mathias dreams of America, a land where nobody knows him. Though one occasionally notices the debut nature of Herbrich's film, his feeling for the cinematic medium is clearly evident. He has not just illustrated a story, but has created genuinely original moments as well. Such as the slaughter of a pig in the stable of Farmer Merkl, as a foreshadowing of Mathias's end – an oppressive moment, speechlessly articulate.

*(Martina Borger, City)*

# SEARCHING FOR EL DORADO

## film reviews

Hard facts are the focus of this multiple award-winning documentary by Oliver Herbrich. From bloody sides of beef or a pig being stabbed alive, to the vaudeville dancer performing her act with obviously suggestive movements – this reportage hasn't avoided taboos. The film vividly depicts the hard, murderous everyday life of gold prospectors in the Amazon jungle of Brazil. And describes the labor-intensive and time-consuming process of gold extraction, in its various stages. Herbrich has exposed the inhuman conditions in the Brazilian gold digger settlement: Completely inadequate hygienic conditions, a terrible housing situation, and no doctor, for 5,000 people. By declaring the whole site a military restricted area, the Brazilian state has put it under the control of government officials – while drawing profits from these conditions, considerable profits. The film does not hesitate to give the political evils a critical view.

*(Birgit Loy, Programmbeirat DFS)*

An impressive reportage on gold prospectors in the Amazon region, which allowed viewers to form their own opinion, without a constant stream of commentary. The images of misery alongside the gold are disturbing; as are the statements of the masters and servants, of the beneficiaries and victims of this poverty.

*(Thomas Metzger, Bild und Funk)*

The gold prospectors in the Amazon dig the dirt, die of malaria or syphilis; while, on the fringes, child prostitution and violence are rampant. Oliver Herbrich's documentary confirms a fortune-hunter's slogan: "Money made people poor".

*(hai, Hör zu)*

His award-winning documentary shows how the gold rush works: Despite an extreme climate, the risk of malaria, and the obligation to sell to the state, at a low price, the men toil, while the nearby night-clubs thrive on their earnings.

*(gef, Abendzeitung)*

He leaves talking and lamenting about the plight of German cinema to others; he'd rather get to work. Most of his six films were made with maximum personal sacrifice: An attitude that leaves no doubt that Herbrich is serious and that, as his success shows, ultimately pays off. German public broadcaster ARD presents Herbrich's 1984 documentary on Sunday evening at prime time. *Searching for El Dorado* tells of a peculiar paradox: Gold diggers in the Brazilian jungle who are devoted solely to making money – while growing more and more impoverished. For the big profit everyone is hoping for doesn't pan out. And the few grams of precious metal that are gained, and that just barely sustain motivation, are splurged in the surrounding shanty towns.

*(Andreas Friedemann, Münchner Merkur)*

At the festival of ethnological film "Cinema du Réel", at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, young director Oliver Herbrich was awarded the first prize of the French television broadcaster Antenne 2, for his film *Searching for El Dorado*. Antenne 2 awarded this prize for the first time this year, which included a sum of money for the director and the acquisition of the French television rights. The film will be shown in the "itineraires" series in early June.

*(Dietrich Schubert, Blickpunkt Film)*

This visually and textually convincing and informative film describes how a camp is built overnight, which soon becomes a small town with several thousand inhabitants. It shows how people live, work, earn, and lose money, how people organize themselves in their hopes for a better future. In a sympathetic, non-sensational way the director succeeds in placing this gold digger story in a larger ecological, historical, and social context. He unobtrusively draws the lessons for the whole from the individual case. The evaluation committee honors this result with the highest rating.

*(Hans Borgelt, FBW)*



Young Oliver Herbrich's impressive adaptation of the play *Woyzeck* has clearly tragic dimensions. Herbrich transposes Büchner's drama of the poor soldier to the modern day Ruhr region. His *Wodzeck* works in a metal factory; his Maleen is a saleswoman in a department store. With exceptional images and a sophisticated color design, he successfully creates a convincing connection between the classical text and his modern jealousy drama. Rarely has one seen a literary film adaptation this convincing.

*(Peter Paul Huth, Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung)*

*Wodzeck* lives on the fringe of prosperity, right on the verge of misery. We see those who have already hit bottom: At dawn, figures staggering through town, screaming their loneliness into anonymity. *Wodzeck* kills Maleen; it is the end of jealousy. Afterwards, his feeling of fear, his desire is gone. He freezes up. The medical specialist reads his evaluation to his students like a verdict. According to his medical finding, *Wodzeck* confuses the subjective with the objective. In the film, the subjective and the objective are identical. *Wodzeck* is part of a world that is slowly disintegrating. Accordingly, his horrific visions are frighteningly real. When he knocks on the floor, it actually does sound hollow. His words are like a prophecy.

*(Anette Ascher, Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung)*

Herbrich's *Wodzeck* is a very personal and – despite its pessimistic basic attitude – beautiful, intense study of a man who sees no way of escaping his dependencies and influences. Whereas, the classic drama shows *Woyzeck* still largely influenced and oppressed by people around him, Herbrich justifies the fate of his protagonist with images of the confining and oppressive landscape. These semi-documentary scenes seek to challenge the audience to make comparisons with their own environment. To experience what *Wodzeck* himself experiences: normal, everyday madness. The result is distressing and makes Herbrich's adaptation an impressive film, most definitely worth seeing.

*(Albert Baer, Bremer Blatt)*

Herbrich creates grimly realistic images of the coal-mining district, of a dismal environment. Its inhabitants' socio-economic pessimism corresponds to Büchner's classic novel, on which Herbrich's *Wodzeck* is based. Nothing has really changed since 1830: Everyone works, many don't know what for; some go crazy. And *Wodzeck* is no exception. Sure, the story is familiar. But Herbrich has given it an excellent, in fact perfect, update. Local color is captured, from the outside (factory chimney) and inside (company festivity), without comment. One feels sympathy, anger, grief. That comes very close to Büchner's intention. The acting performances are award-worthy, especially Detlef Kügow in the title role. *Wodzeck* reveals that the Ruhr area is the Bronx of Germany and thus an ideal shooting location – proof given by a 23-year-old Munich filmmaker.

*(Döll, Ruhr Nachrichten)*

With a cinematography that over long stretches is impressive, Herbrich does not simply use the Ruhr region as a new background for his Büchner-based tragedy. Rather, he strives to convincingly illuminate the factors stemming from Ruhr-region conditions that inevitably bring about the fate of his *Wodzeck*. The dreariness of the landscape, workplace, and home is recorded conclusively as a breeding ground for existential pessimism and fantasies of happiness. Thus, this *Wodzeck* paints a coherent portrait of the modern working human, unable to articulate his frustration and fatalism in his own life and sphere of activity, let alone cope with it.

*(Günther Bastian, film-dienst)*

Herzog's film adaptation was largely true to the original novel. So Herbrich had to go a step further, transferring the story to the present day. Franz *Wodzeck* – an unskilled worker born in 1956 into a broken family, people-shy but haunted by inner voices – meets Maleen. His dream of a shared future fails, the woman has a better match in mind. The doctors are unable to identify the causes of *Wodzeck*'s growing psychosis – almost inevitably, he murders the woman.

Herbrich's Ruhr "rustbelt" *Wodzeck* fails due both to the coldness of the work-ethic society and to his own mental condition. The factory world appears as a place of inescapable emotional destruction, for which his fragile utopias, revolving around bourgeois idylls, are no match.

*(Hans Günther Pflaum, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

## THE BAVARIAN AL CAPONE

## film reviews

Already a legend in his own lifetime: Theo Berger is not the hero, but the main character in Oliver Herbrich's film. The Munich director wrote the script together with Berger, so as to keep this cinematic portrait of the ace burglar and escape artist as close as possible to reality. So criticism of the justice system is inevitable. Relying on the power and magic of his authentic images and characters, he achieves nearly thriller-like suspense.

*(Frauke Hank, TZ)*

Another brilliant young prospect is Oliver Herbrich, who shot *The Proud and Sad Life of Mathias Kneissl* (Hof Film Festival, 1980) at age eighteen. He has now examined the subject of the criminal as a folk hero, in his documentary film *The Bavarian Al Capone*. This intense portrait of ace burglar and escape artist Theo Berger was conceived in close collaboration with Berger himself. (Berger would soon wind up back in prison.) His German lawyer needed an interpreter to communicate with him (in the film Berger is subtitled in High German). The true-blue Bavarian faces the camera on his parents' farm to tell of his youthful criminal offences. The result is a universally valid depiction of the conflict between a hothead, offended by society, and a justice system that makes little attempt to understand.

*(Stephen Locke, epd Film)*

Among the German films I have seen, there were three that were able to satisfy my curiosity: ... *The Bavarian Al Capone* by Oliver Herbrich, a documentary about an ace burglar and escape artist feared by the police and secretly revered by the common people; a tragic comedy, also the story of a legal scandal.

*(Robert Fischer, zitty)*

... Oliver Herbrich, whose documentary film *The Bavarian Al Capone* was screened in a marginal festival slot, yet garnered a lot of applause. It is the story of the robber Theo Berger (a political commune in Berlin once named itself after him), whose ties to his Bavarian home were so strong he committed his first bank robbery a mere five hundred



meters from his parents's farm. It is a film about Southern German provincial stubbornness, about desperado romance, but also about the tragic fate of a "fossil" trapped in the machinery of the modern justice and correctional system. ...

*(Alfred Holighaus, TIP)*

The Hof Film Festival audience was presented a film that takes the myth out of the "Theo Berger phenomenon". *The Bavarian Al Capone* neither glorifies its protagonist nor demonizes him as an unwavering, brutal criminal. Director Oliver Herbrich draws the picture of a man whose life could take almost no other course. As Theo Berger sits in his parents' Ludwigsmoos home, talking about his childhood and youth, the audience can understand much of what made peasant boy Theo become one of West Germany's most wanted criminals.

*(Cornel Faltin, Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung)*

Whereas Theo Berger's countless break-ins and breakouts gained him a certain recent crime-history celebrity and ambivalent yellow-press popularity, Oliver Herbrich's documentary *The Bavarian Al Capone* strips away his legendary gangster myth. The laconic soberness with which Berger narrates his own biography constitutes the actual quality of this document.

*(Hans Günther Pflaum, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

So there he sits beside his daughter, yet unable to hold her in his arms, because twenty-two years in prison have taken it out of him; because he no longer has the strength. Yet he has instinctively preserved his caliber and dignity. You don't often see that in German films. No one ventures that much reality today.

*(Michael Althen, Münchner Stadtzeitung)*

The court should have watched this film before it started to evaluate the defendant's character. Not that Herbrich transfigures Berger into some martyr, for whose crimes society is to be held responsible. Herbrich refrains from such banal assignment of guilt. Aside from the fact that a man like Theo Berger wouldn't stand for any of that, as hard and self-critical as he is toward himself.

*(Andreas Friedmann, Münchner Merkur)*

Palms, white sand, and a turquoise-colored sea: images of a South Sea idyll – that's how the film by young Munich fiction and documentary film director Oliver Herbrich (26) begins. But the idyll is no more, since the Americans conquered the islands of the Bikini Atoll in 1944, during the Asia-Pacific War, and began their nuclear weapons tests there.

*(Luitgard Koch, Die Tageszeitung)*

In his film, young Munich director Oliver Herbrich documents the fate of the islanders, who – robbed of their homeland by the madness of nuclear armament – still suffer from the long term effects of radiation. He confronts the cynical, naïve US propaganda of the time with a sobering present reality: concrete-covered islets, globally isolated scrap heaps of an almighty military industry, desolate palm paradises, embittered and contaminated people who became aware of their disaster only much later. Herbrich lets his images and the victims of this silent tragedy speak for themselves – with brief commentary passages spoken by movie director Werner Herzog.

*(Harald Pauli, LUI)*

*Bikini - mon amour* captivates with its insistency, due to the realism of the interviews, which oppressively reflect the events. Director Herbrich intentionally leaves the original English-language voice-over of the US Army archive footage, to preserve their authenticity. (...) The documentary quality is maintained. It is the unvarnished realism that leaves the viewer deeply disturbed and empathetic.

*(Thomas Nixdorf, Neue Presse)*

The incredible story of this region, of its incomparable suffering caused by nuclear mania, is told by Oliver Herbrich, who has earned a reputation as both a documentarist and a feature film director. Rare archive footage tells the story of the nuclear testing, as well as the downright cynical treatment of the population. The narrative of *Bikini – mon amour* is centered around the lives of the islanders. Herbrich shows the inevitable decay of a once paradisiacal civilization.

*(Rainer Bruckner-Heinze, Frankfurter Rundschau)*

Those expecting a sensational film will be disappointed by *Bikini – mon amour*. Rather, it is a quiet indictment of the cynicism with which global nuclear powers abused thousands of innocent people. A matter-of-fact description that is deeply disturbing.

*(vt, Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung)*

A woman trying to describe what she gave birth to: a "something" without arms and legs. A woman telling of her son. They took him, suffering from leukemia, to America. "Finally, they sent him back – in a box. In the box was his coffin." The second part of the film even tops this horror. After multiple evacuations, to and fro, they now live on Ebeye, an island of 1.5 square kilometers – 10,000 people, crowded together on their South Sea island, contaminated and ruined.

*(Ilona Jergers, Welt und Medien)*

The natives see their role as that of guinea pigs; their fates fill secret studies. Against this backdrop, America's environmental remediation efforts seem a farce. Documentary footage shows the decontamination work on Enewetak: soil is removed, dumped in a bomb crater and covered with concrete. The measure is only cosmetic, as the radiation obviously remains, yet this too reveals the cynicism with which man celebrates his victory over nature. Oliver Herbrich has created an intelligently conceived and edited film.

*(Hans Messias, FUNK Korrespondenz)*

Herbrich's film is a symbol of the nuclear perils. He depicts the gruesome long-term effects of atomic bomb testing, forced resettlement, cancer fatalities, and rising numbers of stillbirths and miscarriages. (...) This grief and powerlessness over what has happened triggers anxiety. At the same time, it debunks the progress credo and scientific euphoria voiced by the politicians' and military officials in the US archive footage that Herbrich has intercut with his interviews and descriptions of living conditions.

*(Detlev Pieper, epd Kirche und Rundfunk)*

# EARTHBOUND

## film reviews

Here mankind's ancient dream of flying is retold – brought to life, with eccentric charm, through the outstanding acting performance of Hannes Thanheiser as Franz Seeliger. Above all, however, the film is inspired by the juxtaposition of the desirability of motorless flight with his full awareness of its impossibility. He fulfills his dream in the circus, where he "can fly in the audience laughter", as he is assured by the "glass-bone" man – portrayed by disabled actor Peter Radtke.

*(Christine Baier, Augsburger Allgemeine)*

Though its German title means "earthbound", Oliver Herbrich's film is anything but that. This story of eighty year old Franz Seeliger – with a fascinating Johannes Thanheiser in the role – who, though silenced by psychiatry, has preserved his dream of flying, is delightfully told.

*(Bernd Jetschin/Kay Hoffmann, Filmecho)*

The story of Franz Seeliger, imprisoned in a mental hospital, whose fondest desire is to one day overcome the earth's gravity by his own power and take to the skies. His dream of flying and his steely determination to construct a flying machine put him at odds with his environment, and he is ostracized, as a "madman". A sensitively directed film that champions the realization of dreams, even if this takes a hard fight.

*(film-dienst)*

The cast holds a promise of sustained success: Vera Tschechowa, Rüdiger Vogler, and Hark Bohm form the clinical setting of the earthbound flying machine inventor. For a director like Oliver Herbrich, every new opus is a new manifesto: *Wodzeck*, his 1984 film based on Büchner's classic, "dealt with our fears". Now, in *Earthbound*, he has turned to "our hopes". In the end, our protagonist is pushing pedals. And indeed: He takes off.

*(Andreas Osterhaus, Westfalenpost)*

This gem of a first feature by 28 year-old Oliver Herbrich bodes well for the future. Picture has wit, charm and substance. German TV execs in search of directing talent will be looking his way. Herbrich seems in strong control of his cast. Vera Tschechowa is tops as the mental institution director who is going crazy being stuck with crazy people all the time.

Hannes Thanheiser is a delight as the octogenarian who is convinced he can fly, and who helps the frau doctor loosen the fetters which keep her earthbound.

*(Variety)*

Herbrich's most beautiful film to date, *Earthbound*, again deals with the borderline between the normal and the insane. At its center is a man who has spent decades of his life locked up in an institution.

At its core, the film revolves around the phenomenon of human creativity. Seeliger's flight dreams materialize in artistic forms, in the grandiose installations of his art objects and in his construction plan portfolios. "You can only fly by yourself," he says. Fly with groundedness, naturally – for only imagination can truly override gravity.

*(Hans Günther Pflaum, SZ)*

In *Earthbound*, Herbrich creates moments of quirky lightness, because his psychiatric patient Seeliger (Johannes Thanheiser), who as a constructor of astonishing flying objects defeats not only his isolation but also the earth's gravity, is a true geriatric marvel.

*(Angie Dullinger, AZ)*

This is an amiably directed story about a fantasist and the people around him. The film succeeds in winning over the audience. It's not the old man who so stubbornly managed to preserve his hopes and dreams that is crazy, but the earth heavy materialists. They crash, while the old man, in a vigorously applauded final scene, actually takes off from the earth.

*(Carla Rhode, Tagesspiegel)*

Herbrich's film about flight obsessed Franz Seeliger – put into an asylum by the Nazis and later treated as a psychiatric case – impressed us with the filmmaker's affinity to his exceptional male lead Johannes Thanheiser and several convincing directing ideas.

*(Alfred Holighaus, TIP)*

Cinema most inspiringly does what it is meant to do – to be a place of imagination – when it does not reproduce reality, but rather, like the psychiatric patient in Oliver Herbrich's *Earthbound*, takes off from reality, naturally without losing sight of it.

*(Hans-Dieter Seidel, FAZ)*



# PRIESTS OF THE CONDEMNED

## film reviews

Oliver Herbrich is one of the few German directors who manages to regularly realizing projects. Without appealing to a broad audience, without significant financial support, the thirty-one year old from Munich has made such committed, personal films as *Wodzeck* or *Bikini – mon amour*. These films are a pleasant contrast to American – and of course, German – commercial movies. In his most recent work, the documentary *Priests of the Condemned*, Herbrich portrays life in the leper colonies in the shadow of the Himalayas. Meanwhile, the filmmaker is particularly interested in the thin borderline separating the "normal" from the "outcast".

*(Gebhard Hölzl, Münchner Stadtmagazin)*

Oliver Herbrich unsparingly shows the terrible face of leprosy: People with rotten limbs and scabby skin; the misery in the Khokhana Leper Colony, which gave the film its title; the beggars on the streets. But the horror evoked by these images does not dead-end in short-lived compassion. Behind the exterior of the damaged body, Herbrich discovers the lovable and respect-worthy human being. "This is a good life," says a patient who contracted leprosy as a teenager already and was ostracized. For her, the Sewa Kendra has become her village community. Broadcast on Nepalese television too, Herbrich's film was able to contribute to local educational efforts about the disease.

*(Heike Kruschinski, Ruhr Nachrichten)*

For nine weeks in 1991, he and his small team toured hard-to-reach part of the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. Here, lepers are still expelled from their village community for fear of infection and due to religious dogma. Even after healing, they are not allowed to return and are permanently ostracized with their children from their caste. Despite many sad impressions, Herbrich's film is no spotlight on misery. An unobtrusive camera allows people their dignity; the unusually open narratives grant them personal names, faces, and stories. His subdued

images accompany the outcasts to the leper station Sewa Kendra on the outskirts of Kathmandu. He shows how the uprooted beggars become living human beings again, within the almost village-like community. This joie de vivre in the face of disability is what makes the film a convincing demonstration of this form of helping people to help themselves.

*(Peter Wille, Dortmunder Zeitung)*

Herbrich lets the "untouchables" tell the story of their lives with leprosy – as one does not die of the disease. An immune deficiency is the requirement for infection and two to fifteen years can pass until it breaks out. Then the nerve cells lose their sensitivity, and the victims injure themselves without noticing. This leads to infections and the tissue dies. Finally, the leper rots alive. In the two sole medical centers in Nepal, set up by two Germans, the film director follows the invalids going about their lives: How they work, eat, laugh, how they hope, with all their deformities, to at least be cured. For leprosy, considered incurable 20 years ago, can now be cured. In the state-run leprosy camp at the end of the Kathmandu Valley there is no such hope. Here the lepers are abandoned to themselves and their illness. (...)

*Priests of the Condemned* is a bulletin from a vale of tears that can be found in almost every Third World country. The images are not easy to erase. They affect us as they are, without instrumentalizing the horror. Oliver Herbrich focuses – as in his last two documentaries – on the people; he seeks to analyse their Genesis and their environment. In the film it is evident that, this time, an odd uncertainty has gripped him. He deals with this topic seriously, but with a pleasant absence of routine. Thus, despite the distance, a closeness evolves that is the first approach to dealing with a taboo.

*(Heiko Küftner, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

## RULES OF THE ROAD

## film reviews

In *Rules of the Road*, Oliver Herbrich presents a nomadic people threatened with extinction. German documentary filmmaker tracked down this ethnic group not in the Amazon region or on a remote archipelago, but on the outskirts of London, on the roads of Wales and Ireland. The audience realizes that misery never disappeared from Europe. It was merely pushed, toward the end of the twentieth century to the inhospitable fringes of civilization. In the midst of our artificial paradises, the Irish Travellers hire themselves out, collecting scrap iron, melting lead from cables, or draining acid from old car batteries into the sewer.

*(Christian Gloyer, Berliner Tagesspiegel)*

They can be found on the desolate outskirts of cities, in the industrial wastelands, as Herbrich describes them. There where nuclear power plants, sewage works, flight routes, freeways, and railroads meet. Sometimes a true apocalyptic mood sets in, when the camera pans over garbage dumps where men clamber about, collecting recyclable waste. Herbrich lets many travellers have their say in his film, but also lays his own commentary over the images. He manages to create the peculiar atmosphere that approximates the mood of the Irish Travellers. Although the viewer is confronted with garbage, dirt, and poverty everywhere, he is conveyed understanding for the Travellers. They want to be free, even if freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose.

*(Alexander Glasl, Süddeutsche Zeitung)*

Life on the roads has always been poor: The double-digit number of kids alone makes life difficult for these religious Catholics. Only five percent of the adults are aged over fifty. Nevertheless, the realization that they are the last generation on the road makes the elders feel sad. The younger ones are domesticated by the welfare state and housed in ugly skyscrapers on the outskirts of the city. Culture and identity are no concern of the police or social workers. The methods of Irish law enforcement have become more radical. The Travellers are woken up at night and forced to move on, while their stopping sites are blocked with huge boulders. Thus their journey ends cyclically on the British Isles, this time in Swansea, Wales, where many Irish travellers seek refuge. Here a cynical symbiosis with industry

arises. Barrels full of poison are left unattended, until a few Travellers dump their contents into the rivers at night. The next day the grateful owners pay for the returned empties. Oliver Herbrich describes the exodus in a compassionate but undramatic way.

*(Andre Simonviescz, TIP)*

A special variety of road movie: Oliver Herbrich's documentary film about the itinerant people of Ireland, the Travellers. The Irish Travellers have always been poor, but were able to make a living as tinkers, scissors grinders, etc., offering their services and goods across the country. Now industrialization has made them redundant, and the police drive them off their campsites. Tens of thousands have emigrated to England to scratch a living recycling scraps on rubbish dumps. Herbrich paints a sensitive picture of the Travellers, of the demise of their unique culture, which comes with their loss of identity.

*(Berliner Zeitung)*

For months Herbrich accompanied them with a camera on their increasingly desperate journeys through England. He has documented a turning point: Environmental laws, the Criminal Justice Bill, and the recession are cramping their freedom of movement. They are denied access to the rubbish tips. As soon as they stop somewhere, the police chase them away – if boulders haven't already been rolled into road turnoffs, blocking their access. Herbrich acts as an ethnologist, guiding through this unknown world, revealing its extinction almost in fast motion.

*(Jörg Häntzschel, Die Tageszeitung)*

"Putting me in a house is like locking a bird up in a cage," says an old man. Another man won money betting on horses, and the sudden wealth made him so afraid he burned the banknotes. The two old men are convinced: Money makes you unfree, whereas setting out on a life of wandering makes you free. They are members of the Irish Travellers. In sensitive images, Oliver Herbrich's documentary film *Rules of the Road* describes the history of these last nomads of the industrial age. The film comes alive mainly through the people themselves, whom the film lets have their say. The road is their home, but now the Traveller's journey is nearing its end. At least this film preserves them.

*(AF, Zitty)*