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Bickels [Socialism]

Heinz Emigholz

Producer Heinz Emigholz, Galia Bar Or. **Production companies** Heinz Emigholz Filmproduktion (Berlin, Germany), Mishkan Museum of Art (Ein Harod, Israel). **Written and directed by** Heinz Emigholz. **Director of photography** Heinz Emigholz, Till Beckmann. **Editor** Heinz Emigholz, Till Beckmann. **Sound design** Christian Obermaier. **Sound** Till Beckmann.

Colour. 92 min. English.

Premiere February 12, 2017, Berlinale Forum

The Casa do Povo cultural centre in São Paulo, an icon of the secular Jewish workers' movement: a crumbling theatre flanked by staircases, entryways and corridors. Construction noise drones away in the background, clinking crockery, a broom sweeping over tiled floors, an expressive façade of countless adjustable panes of glass covered by a patina. It's October 2016 and a group of young people are preparing a preview of *Bickels [Socialism]*. The venue is to form a prologue to the completed film, which tours 22 buildings in Israel designed by Samuel Bickels, most of which for kibbutzim. Dining halls, children's houses, agricultural buildings, bright structures inserted into the Mediterranean landscape with great ingenuity. An architecture with a sell-by date: That many are now empty or have been repurposed at best is linked to the decline of the socialist ideals they embody.

Paintings by Jewish artist Meir Axelrod from the Crimea in the 1930s form the epilogue. It tells the tragic story of the Vio Nova kibbutz, which first founded under the British Mandate in Palestine and later fell victim to Stalinism, before being liquidated entirely under the German occupation.

Christoph Terhechte

22 buildings by the Kibbutz architect Samuel Bickels, filmed in Israel in 2015.

As prologue, the Casa do Povo in São Paulo, as appendix, The Story of Vio Nova.

Shooting on the film Bickels [Socialism] took place in Israel from 14 to 28 May 2015 and on 2 January 2016, and in São Paulo from 30 October to 1 November 2016.

The film shows the following buildings:

Prologue (São Paulo):

Casa do Povo (1953) – Jewish Community Centre built by Ernst Mange,

Theatre by Jorge Wilhelm

Bauten von Samuel Bickels in Israel:

Mishkan Museum of Art (1948), Ein Harod

Barn (1948), Ein Hashofet

Trumpeldor House (1949), Tel Yoseph

Ghetto Fighters' House Museum (1953), Lochamei Hagetaot

Sport House (1955), Beit Hashita

Sport House (1955), Sarid

Borocho House (1957), Mishmar Hanegev

Positioning of Residence Houses (1957), Revivim

Dining Hall (1958), Ein Harod

Bendori House (1959), Givat Hashlosha

Cultural House (1961), Mashabe Sade

Dining Hall (1961), Sde Nachum

Kolin House (1962), Neve Eitan

Members' Club (1965), Beit Oren

Guest House Dining Hall (1965), Beit Oren

Brand House (1965), Efal

Bnei Brit House (1966), Moledet

The Sons' House (1966), Shfayim

Beit Ziesling (1969), Ein Harod Meuhad

Miriam House Museum (1969), Palmachim

Dining Hall (1970), Efal

Beit Golomb (1957), Golda Center (1976), Revivim

Appendix (Ein Harod)

The Story of Vio Nova – With paintings by Meir Axelrod

About Samuel Bickels

Samuel Bickels was born in Lwów (Lemberg) in Galicia in 1909. He completed his studies in architecture and engineering at the Polytechnic in Lwów (1928–1931), and then set out for Paris for six months of courses that did not include formal studies. In 1933 he married Clara Project, who was studying for a Physics master's degree, and emigrated with her to Eretz-Israel. His parents, his brothers and most of his family perished in the Holocaust. He was a member of Kibbutz Tel Yoseph from the late 1930s, and from 1951 until his death in 1975 he was a member of Kibbutz Beit HaShita.

From the 1950s on he worked in a team with his wife Clara, who assisted him in planning and engaged in drawing plans until her death in 1969. Bickels devoted his energies to planning, and expressed his artistic sensitivity in the emphases of the planning:

in the acoustic quality in the concert halls and in the appropriate display space (proportions and lighting) in the museum building. It is only in recent years that Bickels' extensive and distinctive architectural work has gained recognition among the professional architectural circles in Israel. Bickels was systematically absent from discussions at the Technion [Israel Institute of Technology, -Ed.] on kibbutz architecture. He did not participate, for example, in the symposium on 'The Planning of a Kibbutz Point' conducted by the Technion Department of Training and Further Studies in 1958. The architect Abba Elhanani, who was a lecturer at the Technion and the editor of the periodical *Tvai*, does not mention Bickels in his book *The Struggle for the Independence of Israeli Architecture in the 20th Century* (1998). Bickels' name is also absent from the index of this comprehensive book, which includes scores of Israeli architects.

It would seem that this ignoring of Samuel Bickels in the Israeli architectural discourse attests more than anything to an ignoring of the connection between architecture and a cultural-social agenda. Throughout his life Bickels engaged in this connection and toiled to materialise his conception of it in his master plans, his planning of social, cultural and farming institutions.

Galia Bar Or

Social architecture

Heinz Emigholz's film deals with sediments of the 20th century – Samuel Bickels' buildings of culture and education, and communal dining-halls are the heart of an idea, the heart of an interaction, social and cultural. It seems that this architecture reflects a will to create a civilisation. These buildings are embedded in a physical-geographical and human environment, each one is a variation, each one is particular, not a prototype, some are still functioning and some are ruins, but one feels the involvement with the community (...) This is not an architecture of the 'big vision', utopian or dystopian, even though it has its pathos, but that is not from a standpoint of the hegemonic but of the peripheral culture, minor culture, the periphery of the movement of modernism – displacement and immigration brought these seeds of social architecture – to Israel, to Brazil.

The film deals with architecture that engages with the texture of life, it is organic in its process of duration and adaptation, it gets old in a particular way. So the film follows the traces of time, it traces the buildings in present time, their story – for this is their story. The film does not attempt to reconstruct what may have been there in the past. It is the accumulation of time that these buildings are carrying, the dust, the violence, things that happened and left their traces (...)

What is our response to the cultural and social forms that these buildings represent? We inherited these buildings, these stories, this past; these are the sediments of the 20th century: dreams, horrors, achievements, failures. The film takes us on a tour and via its time and sounds of the present, it enables us to contemplate the past, which is always also a way of thinking about the future.

Galia Bar Or

Casa do Povo

Casa do Povo, in the Brazilian city of São Paulo, was conceived by Holocaust survivors as a Jewish cultural centre, and built by Ernst Mange in 1953. The theatre was designed by Jorge Wilhelm. A product of socialist ideals, Casa do Povo became a centre for

resistance to the dictatorial Brazilian regime. The building is currently being renovated by a group of young creative artists, who intend to turn it into a cultural centre once again. By doing so, they hope to make Casa do Povo a place to keep alive the memory of the country's political history, and for innovative cultural activities.

Galia Bar Or

The story of Vio Nova

Kibbutz Tel Yoseph was the leading centre of the Labour Battalion organisation, a widespread commune of Jewish workers in Palestine based on cooperation and equality. In the late 1920s, about one hundred members left the Labour Battalion and returned to Russia. The first group left secretly in 1927, with a truck and a tractor, and the last group left in 1929. Palestine was under the 'capitalist' British mandate; the economic situation was harsh and they felt that their comrades were not communist enough.

Stalin, who oppressed Zionism, promised them a place in the Crimea, and they left in hopes of building a better world there. Since Hebrew was forbidden in Russia, the new kibbutz in the Crimea was named Vio Nova ('a new way' in Esperanto). They continued to speak Hebrew and conducted their life the same as they had in Palestine with a communal dining hall, children's houses, etc.

For a few years the kibbutz was successful. Stalin sent journalists and painters as part of a propaganda effort aimed mostly at Jews, proclaiming the failure of Zionism and the success of Soviet Russia. Four painters visited Vio Nova in 1930 and 1931.

The paintings shown in the film that belong to the Ein Harod Museum were painted at that time by Meir Axelrod, and were donated to the museum by his grandson, who immigrated to Israel in the 1990s.

Vio Nova was too independent and changes in Stalin's policy marked its fate. In 1932 the members were forced to accept as members Stalin's informers. In 1934 the kibbutz was forced to turn into a kolkhoz – not a commune anymore, but a place where every family was on its own. The kolkhoz was named Drojba Nádorov, or 'The Nation's Fraternity'.

In the second half of the 1930s, many of the former Labour Battalion members left for Moscow and other places in Russia, and according to estimates, thirty to forty of them were arrested, many never to be seen again. In 1944 when the Germans invaded, one of the 'new' inhabitants pointed out the last remaining members of Vio Nova, two women and five children. They were drowned in the old 'Nation's Fraternity' well.

Galia Bar Or



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Heinz Emigholz was born in 1948 in Achim, near Bremen. Since 1973, he has worked as a freelance filmmaker, artist, writer, cinematographer, producer, and journalist. In 1974, he began an encyclopaedic series of drawings, *Die Basis des Make-Up*, which was the subject of a major exhibition at Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof museum in 2007/08. In 1978, he founded his own production company, Pym Films. In 1984, he began a film series called *Photographie und jenseits/Photography and Beyond*. From 1993 to 2013, he held a professorship in experimental filmmaking at the Berlin University of the Arts, where he is a co-founder of the Institute for Time-Based Media and the university's art and media course. Since 2012 he has been a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. His publications include *Krieg der Augen, Kreuz der Sinne; Seit Freud gesagt hat, der Künstler heile seine Neurose selbst, heilen die Künstler ihre Neurosen selbst; Normalsatz – Siebzehn Filme* and *Das schwarze Schamquadrat* (all four published by Martin Schmitz); *Die Basis des Make-Up (I) und (II); Der Begnadete Meier; Kleine Enzyklopädie der Photographie; Die Basis des Make-Up (III)* and *Sense of Architecture*.

Films (selection)

1973: *Schenec-Tady I* (27 min., Berlinale Forum 1975). 1974: *Arrowplane* (24 min., Berlinale Forum 1974), *Tide* (33 min., Berlinale Forum 1976). 1976: *Hotel* (27 min., Berlinale Forum 1976). 1981: *Normalsatz* (105 min., Berlinale Forum 1982). 1985: *Die Basis des Make-Up* (85 min.). 1987: *Die Wiese der Sachen/The Meadow of Things* (87 min., Berlinale Panorama 1988). 1999: *Maillarts Brücken (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 3)/Maillart's Bridges* (24 min., Berlinale Forum 2001). 2003: *Goff in der Wüste (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 7)/Goff in the Desert* (110 min., Berlinale Forum 2003). 2005: *D'Annunzios Höhle (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 8)/D'Annunzio's Cave* (60 min., Berlinale Forum 2005). 2008: *Loos ornamental (Photographie und jenseits – Teil 13)* (72 min., Berlinale Forum 2008). 2012: *Parabeton – Pier Luigi Nervi und römischer Beton/Parabeton – Pier Luigi Nervi and Roman Concrete* (100 min., Berlinale Forum 2012), *Perret in Frankreich and Algerien/Perret in France and Algeria* (110 min.). 2014: *The Airstrip – Aufbruch der Moderne, Teil III/The Airstrip – Decampment of Modernism, Part III* (108 min., Berlinale Forum 2014). 2015: *Le Corbusier [IIIIII] Asger Jorn [Relief]* (29 min., Berlinale Forum Expanded 2016). 2017: *2+2=22 [The Alphabet], Bickels [Socialism], Streetscapes [Dialogue], Dieste [Uruguay]*.