

Foreword /

Samuel Bickels, a modern architect, a Zionist, *and* a socialist: this iconic trinity, this “and” inheres a great difficulty. Their story is the story of the Museum building.

Under the “executive branch” of an ostensibly Herzlian Zionism, under the brave agency of the “tabula rasa” people, a problematic stain evolves: a movement of a return to history was conceived in Europe in an arch-bourgeois head, and materialized in an Israeli “new world,” so different, so utterly different. Bickels perceives the dimensions of the stain, and has a story to tell about it. This is the Mishkan: an echo of a Herzlian utopism grafted to the heart of the kibbutz.

The writer sets out to pinpoint and fathom Bickels’s perception of modernism through a web of anomalies and radical formal deliberations which she identifies in the structure widely considered an epitome of stylistic-ideological solidity. In her essay, Bickels – a kibbutz member his entire life, one who regarded the collective creation of the kibbutz as the greatest architectural enterprise of the 20th century – is revealed as a bourgeois European individualist, an aesthete experiencing a deep inner conflict with the Zionist-socialist set of revival values of his time, and equally so – with what would, in retrospect, be fixed in the consciousness of many as the favored contents (and symbols) of contemporary Israeli secularism.

The first part of the essay, “The Religious Axis and the Profane Axis,” discusses the nature and empirical impression of Bickels’s conflict, perceiving his academist withdrawal from the sacred modernist norm of the “free plan” as the establishment of his critical space-light perception, the manifestation of his deep distaste for the symbols and rhetoric of the settlement movement, and his alienation from the fundamentalist element of the “land building” (*Binyan Ha’aretz*) project in which he took an active part throughout his life.

The contingency of modernist radicalism in the transition from a European to a Middle-Eastern and Israeli-Palestinian cultural fabric, becomes manifest through the presentation of the problematic nature of a “kibbutz museum,” which involves the views of history and the historical. These are addressed in the second part of the essay. Here too, the writer juxtaposes Bickels’s “negative-eclectic,” conservative-modernist architectural utopism with the progressive-modern, positive-purist utopism embedded in the kibbutz ideal. She identifies, in his explicit conservatism, the advantage of critical daring, a more acute cultural-political sensitivity than that of the (kibbutz’) leftist “avant-garde,” and a more profound radical idealism in the context of a broader insight into the fate of the modern models within the Zionist enterprise. (Sarah Breitberg-Semel)

Caught Between Utopias: On Samuel Bickels, Architect of Mishkan Le’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod

Tamar Getter (Published in *Studio 98*, November 1998, pp. 50-58 [Hebrew])

Data (approx.) /

15 exhibition halls, 2000 sq. m altogether | 2 sculpture courtyards | library | workshop | storerooms | restoration space | cafeteria | 65% exhibition space | 13% public areas | 22% technical space | Collection includes: Over 1000 paintings | 8000 drawings and prints | 300 sculptures | 1000 Judaica items

General Information /

Samuel Bickels was born in 1909 in Lvov, Poland, where he graduated from the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering at the Polytechnic School. He completed his architecture studies in Paris, and in 1933 went to Palestine, a British colony at the time. All his built-up architecture was executed in Israel, where he died in 1975 in Kibbutz Beit Ha’shita. He was a member of the leftist Kibbutz movement, among the founders of its Planning Department, and one of its major and most prolific architects. Among his many projects are the ground plans for Kibbutz Mishmar Ha’negev; the dining hall, library and cultural center of Kibbutz Revivim; Zisling House; Joseph Trumpeldor House; Efal Study Center; the Print Museum in Safed; Golomb House, and numerous guest houses, schools, dining halls, culture and sports clubs. Bickels is also known for his original fortifications and defense network planning for the kibbutzim. His most important, original, prominent achievements are The Ghetto Fighters’ Museum in Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot, and Mishkan La’Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod. The latter is the topic of this paper.

The Museum’s first wing was completed in 1948, the year in which the State of Israel was established. The other wings were completed in 1955, with considerable changes from the original plans. Bickels’s 1947 extension plans, integral to his vision of the Museum, were never realized.

Approximately two hours from both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the Ein Harod Museum is located in a valley in the country’s north – the periphery, in Israeli terms. A kibbutz hotel is located nearby, enabling weekend conferences, long term visits of local and international artists, art critics, and scholars who can work in situ.

My thoughts about Bickels’s building and about architecture in general evolve from my own work and its needs. Good understanding of a built space occurs via daily encounter, when one lives in it, works in it, or works on it. With the Museum of Art, Ein Harod, I was lucky to experience all three. My thoughts took form gradually (in 1994-1995) in the course of several months of work on two painting installations commissioned by the Museum.



The Sacred Axis and the Profane Axis /

Bickels's Museum of Art (*Mishkan Le'Omanut*), Ein Harod, has been, and is more forcefully nowadays, awarded with the spirit no longer asserted in present-day Israeli cultural and political life, yet one so deeply lamented and yearned for. Over the years, the Ein Harod Museum has become an emblem of Israeli secular modern culture, a token of the lost modesty and decency associated with the socialist beginnings of the state. The building's austere beauty, its simplicity, has been adored and glorified by many visitors, but little, if anything, has ever been said about its form, which I find somewhat peculiar, even incoherent to some extent. In the following paragraphs I will set out to describe what I perceive as the building's formal oddities, and consider their explanation.

I peruse the Museum's fifth level – the Column Hall. Like any *classical* entrance built on a large scale, it is located in the center of the building. It is, however, a strange entrance, for in order to get to the vast exhibition spaces on levels four, six, and seven, where most of the modern exhibitions are held, the visitor must use independent stairways, each with its own supplemented entry space. It is not a corridor either, since it leads to no particular place. In pure Bau-Kunst terms, not much praise can be attributed to such an obvious redundancy; but it could, and ought to be reconsidered, if we assume "meaning" to be an inherent aspect of form and function.

A stroll through the Column Hall, followed by reconsideration of Bickels's plans, reveals some ambivalence towards a possible association with the old European type of *galerie*. Such a *galerie* often took the form of a Column Hall. Its classical decor (often hunting scenes), its all-over Arcadian lineament and shrine ambience, implied more than the function of an entrance to a building. A perfect architectural symmetry enhanced the lavish decor system, its grand linearity and splendid scale all served a distinct temporal statement. In such a rich entrance hall the notion of the Arcadian materializes in the form of a spectacle in which culture is endowed with a classical *beginning*, where the West separates itself from the East, where the *Grecian* is naturalized and Christianized.

Bickels, a socialist close to Marxism *and* a Zionist, felt – whether consciously or not is of little relevance – the immense difficulty so innocently embodied by the conjunctive *and*. It is

the story of this "*and*" that may account for his admiration of the old *galerie*, as well as the reservation he felt toward the model nonetheless employed at the very core of his building.

Like the historical *galerie*, the Ein Harod Column Hall is modeled on a basilica principle. In the latter, however, the two series of columns provide a lateral movement, leaving the center open for ceremonial and assembly purposes. Bickels ignored this. He shifted his columns so close to the walls, that the *basilica's* function was eliminated, only a remote trace remained, indeed reduced to the status of a symbol. In addition, his columns are exceptionally thin; construction-wise, there are too many of them. Rather than the vigor they gain in a basilica, here they seem to suggest the transience of a tent or a hut. The evocation of a basilica together with its diametric "other" – the nomadic, non-architecture of the tent, appears to me bizarrely daring, possibly humorous too. If such an architectural caprice had been realized nowadays, a subversive discourse would have assuredly been assumed, insupportably so, considering the norms, practice, and the spirit of Israeli architecture of the 1940s and 1950s. To suspect rather that Bickels was ambivalent and hesitant about the hall, seems to me truer.

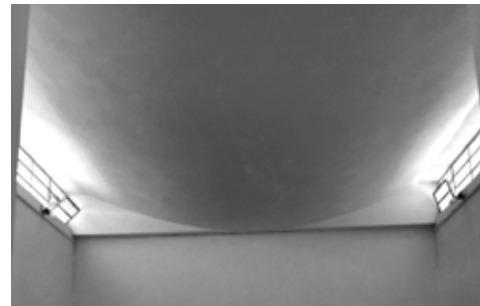
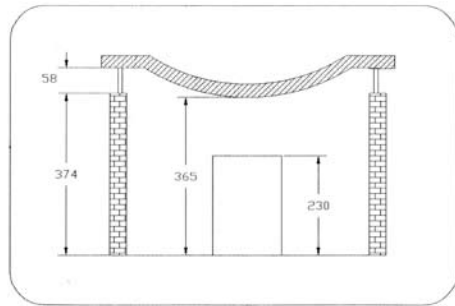
Why the evocation of a tent? Among the biblical God's many conditions and demands, two in particular pertain to Bickels: God prohibited monarchy and forbade the erection of a temple. He preferred His abode in the modest nomad's tent – the *Ohel* or *Mishkan*. The idea of God's provisional residence, The *Mishkan*, which is also the name of the Ein Harod Museum, embodies one of the most profound moral principles of Judaism. It tells of God's rare descents to the Earth, and of a religion that needs no houses for its practice. The body-less God that fills no space, lacking worldly possessions, underscores the opposite human condition, indicating property as a source of sin and estrangement from the divine.

Where is an architect, a confirmed kibbutz-man, an atheist, and a socialist to position himself when he erects a *Mishkan*, let alone *Mishkan L'Omanut* (Museum of Art), in the kibbutz? Bickels was highly sensitive with regard to "occupation" of space, building a museum; an expensive mansion with storage rooms of expensive objects within a kibbutz, where all property is shared collectively and no money is in daily use. *Kibbutz* and *Museum* are mutually exclusive concepts by their very essence. He does the job, plans a museum, but its form is ambiguous; a *basilica* and a tent, architecture and non-architecture.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to assume that Bickels wanted to avoid the solemn aura of a solid, stabile abode. To the contrary. He liked it immensely. This is strongly felt as one ascends from one plane to the next, along the main axis, all the long way from the entrance door, up to the bizarre "apse" at the far end of the Column Hall. Solemnly flanked by two redundant heavy podiums, the final staircase, however, leads to a superfluous flat dark corner, a dead-end. In a sense, it is but a technical termination of the building's vertical axis. By no means can this corner be deemed an architectural response to the majesty built up by the very deep perspective leading to it. Function? It serves as an extra, minor, rear staircase, which links two rooms of an industrial aspect along the horizontal axis of the building. This tiny space is the

“empty,” “deaf” Ein Harod “altar.”

Three narrow steps lead down, right of the “altar,” to the children’s workshop, and three steps, to the left, lead up to a white exhibition room, perhaps the most original in the entire museum. For this space, Bickels chose an industrial idiom reminiscent of the German Werkbund style. Indeed, recalling an olden sweatshop more than an exhibition space, it has two rows of small windows fixed – surprisingly – under a concave, low arched ceiling.



This white overturned half barrel is a simple element, yet it is overwhelming in the way in which it extends overhead; heavy like the belly of a white whale, light and milky like a virgin breast, and yet inorganic, mechanical, technological, futuristic. The space is compact, its scale – modest; the construction was achieved by manual plastering over mesh, as was the prevalent practice in Israel in austerity years.

A new, very deep perspective, climbing softly from plane to plane right in the middle of the space, symmetrical all along and well lit, reveals itself to the spectator standing at the extreme rear of the children’s workshop. In a single glance one captures the entire workshop, the industrial hall with its swollen “belly,” and an extra hall located on a higher plane behind it. Despite the industrial quality, the new axis is so solemn in its unpretentiousness that I find it obliging to think of the two, the horizontal profane axis and the vertical, sacred *basilica* axis, in terms of value clash.

And the “altar,” what status does it acquire in the newly formed perspective? From the aforementioned angle, it disappears, becoming optically annulled. One cannot pass from the workshop to the industrial hall without crossing that annulled “altar”; passing there, one cannot fail to observe, and even rediscovers, the extensive basilica exposed to the left, so that physically



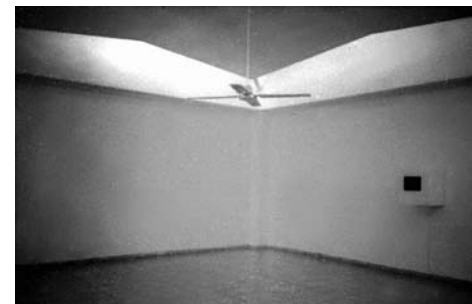
one finds himself in the place of an altar, and also, as I have experienced it, in its place.

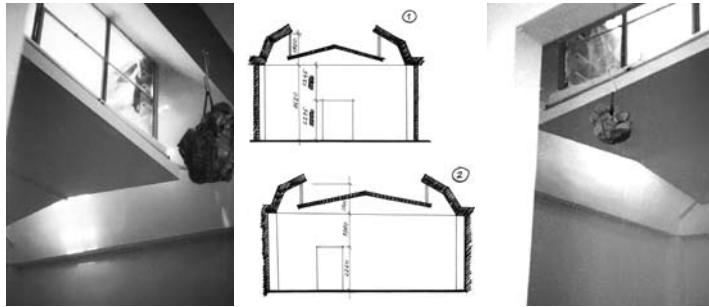
I could go on describing other intriguing relationships manifested in Bickels’s building; I could show, for instance, the oddity of the correspondence between the “basilica” and its neighboring lower hall, or the peculiar link between these and the Judaica rooms, but the partial story of the main clash may suffice, invoking several issues to which my line of argumentation has been leading. Within Israeli ideology, where the Kibbutz previously embodied the very notion of the Jewish *Mondo Nuovo*, the absent-present basilica marks a cultural dilemma. Where was religion to be placed in this modernistic innovative society? Was there any need for religion? The extent to which one may speculate about Bickels’s ambivalence over these topics remains open. Pointing out the formal incoherence of the building is necessarily a target in itself. While it is evidently unfair to be too suggestive about Bickels’s priorities, of his being an aesthete, a Jew, or a socialist, I still feel – and this is not intended as a provocation – that the state of things in Israel of his day begs the question. Bickels had his sensitivities and intuition. Doubtless he wanted his building to please the kibbutz members. Nevertheless, Bickels had the reputation of a very quarrelsome person. Such matters are worth remembering.

“*Binyan Ha’aretz*” (The Building of Eretz-Israel): Bickels as an Estranged Modernist /

The next issue concerns Bickels’s type of Modernism. I would like to re-examine the Column Hall in this context.

The modernist “Free Plan” provided a column grid meant to set the façade wall free of its old function as a roof support. The invention, modernistic par excellence, celebrated the massive invasion of daylight and the entire environment into the building, as was masterly exemplified by the works of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier. No architect worth his salt could let himself ignore that invention. Bickels was an updated architect, yet he chose to ignore *The* dictate of his time: his columns do not carry the roof; his ceiling is prosthetic, and his walls – opaque, indifferent to both the valley view and the kibbutz. Even from within the museum itself, no view is obtained of the sculpture patio, or of the courtyard with its herbal garden. A modernist ready to swallow Bickels’s bizarre need for classical attributes, and to consider some “literary” aspects, would still find it difficult to fathom his stubborn refusal of the obvious advantages introduced by the Free Plan. Was Bickels merely a sleepy, mediocre architect? I believe not.





As paradoxical as it may sound to any adherent of the Free Plan, daylight was Bickels's greatest passion. Moreover, it was the sole concern of his entire planning: for each hall he conceived a different device to suspend his prosthesis ceilings. The columns are one variation of such simulated support. Indeed, daylight was worshiped by any modernist, but for Bickels it was not a generic term. What kind of light, then, did Bickels seek for his museum, and why was he so persistent about shutting all its halls (far beyond the need to supply walls for art objects) and the museum as a whole from their surroundings? (Even the garden and the patio are such autonomous compositions, two different objects of light). I think mere daylight was not enough; it was to be filtered from above as required in museums, but beyond that function, it was to be held as far as possible from certain religious connotations. The mundane as such mattered; the factual, the prosaic. It is the *image* of rationality, one could say, and of the revolution. In this sense, the *basilica-tent* can be read as a monument to secularism.



My thoughts object to the Israeli consensual admiration of Bickels's success at creating "temple light." The denial of sanctification of any kind is, to my mind, the key for the appreciation of this building. The *Mishkan* is there to obstruct the silly cults of the "unique" "Israeli light," the soil, the worship of "place," of the "holy land" – of all these nationalized items. The small, flat, low, shut and isolated building claims no special uniqueness, no power, no expansionist idea, no spectacle of any kind; it is so alienated within the frame of ideas and sentiments permeating the rhetoric of the colonial movement of Bickels's day, a time in which the difficult "and" – *and* Marxist, *and* Zionist, *and* Jewish, *and* Nationalist – was blurred in the course of the crude existential struggles. Thus and otherwise: Bickels was not an articulated moralist, nor a critic, and cannot be presented as an ambitious architect. More than anything, he was one of the many participants in the "land's construction" (*Binyan Ha'aretz*) project that welded the notions of land (soil) and the biblical Patria. It was the mandatory demand of the period that individuals should identify their innermost life with the needs of the collective. Bickels was a part of all this. And yet, nowadays the building seems to be striking in its silent incongruity with the slogans of its time. The term "*Binyan*" – denoting both a "building" and the verbal "to build" – marked a down-to-earth, practical aspect; the verbal reverberated the desperate hour of Jewish refugees seeking their future, but the voice of ideology masked it with a theological and eschatological load. Bickels was an atheist, but after World War II it was difficult to think of an atheist, a socialist, a Marxist, or a Jew, who did not believe in the absolute necessity of this enterprise. The entire democratic world believed in it. In any event, Bickels sensed the fundamentalist component latent in this project, and what he had inscribed in his building, is significant today.



Remembering and reminding the 1948 deserted Palestinian village on the border of kibbutz Ein Harod, it is still justified, to my mind, to discuss Bickels's non-expansionist architectural values. Obvious objections may be raised against my reading; in order to insist that Bickels was but a yes-man, however, one would have to repudiate most of the Israeli built sites, and present every architect and mason as active participants in land confiscation and robbery. While this is possible, certainly from the point of view of the Palestinian "Nakba" (1948 Catastrophe), such a discourse would disqualify, exclude in fact, any legitimate analysis of the ideological complexities of the State's first years. In view of this option, the very notion of complexity would be held unacceptable, cynical, or apologetic. One could obviously argue about the nature of the historical bargains: which lands did the JNF (Jewish National Fund) actually purchase from the Arabs, and which lands were robbed by force. The Ein Harod lands were purchased. The museum stands on "kosher" land. But this is not the

point. I think it is valuable to recognize Bickels's ambiguities and his unique stand in both aesthetical and political terms, within the "land building" project.



An Individual in a Kibbutz /

Since 1967, as the monstrous mutations of the old cult of the land spread throughout Israel – in the new West Bank settlements, in the hysterical mass erection of watchtowers above Palestinian villages, in the extensive housing projects on Palestinian land all around Jerusalem, and in the kibbutzim, now exchanging their old creed for simple greed – a new meaning is attached to Bickels's secular definition of light. It has acquired a warning, prophetic value.

But the dilemmas captured in the *Mishkan* reach beyond Israel's internal affairs. I find them constructive to the reading of a post-USSR world, in its new set of crazy capitalism and collapsing democracies. They embody real conflicts for anybody willing to question the universal application of modernistic modules, and study their particular histories in today's world. Bickels's building is a real case of architectural utopianism. Today, more than in his time, it attests to the tensions of emigration, of schizoid identities, and of fundamentalism.

The Ein Harod Museum started as an "art corner" in a small wooden shack, which served as the studio of painter Chaim Atar (1902-1953). Atar was the visionary, Bickels, his friend, was the mason. Artist Moshe Kupferman was the scaffold worker. When I studied the Museum protocols, I was impressed by the dimensions of their vision. They shared a concern about the Kibbutz's shortness of breath, foreseeing its imminent failure to house conscientious socialists. The "bourgeois" cultivation of *Kultur*, freedom of thought, criticism, were the only antidote for the oppressive ideological collectivism that had taken over, along with the unimaginable narrow-mindedness that rapidly spread in the Kibbutz Movement. Moshe Kupferman told me a few years ago: "For me, to be a Jew is to keep questioning everything, to doubt: never to sanctify a thing. That is what my painting is all about." This was also the spirit of Atar and Bickels. The Museum was to restore the Kibbutz, so to speak. The social utopianism that had given rise to the Kibbutz idea seemed in the late 1940s like an overly agrarian program, too purist in its naïve egalitarianism, too boring in its optimism, too positive to deal with grief, loss... Atar and Bickels shared a deep feeling for the last two; Atar's tragic Jewish portraits are often on view

at the Museum. Less known are Bickels's compassionate drawings of the Ghetto Jews, figures featured with none of the mighty kibbutz-man physique.

And when all Marxists started to wear the prominent Stalin moustache, the Kibbutz seemed to have lost its charm altogether. Bickels and Atar cried out for a Modern Art Museum – the sooner the better – including a Judaica wing! There was no synagogue in Ein Harod until the early 1960s, burials were secular, and pagan symbolism was introduced to all holidays of the Jewish calendar.

It is noteworthy that the "and" *Judaica* came from leftist modern artists. Many may disagree with me, but I believe that Atar and Bickels shook the fundamentals of many kibbutz members' concepts of History and tradition. Most Kibbutz people today tend to deny that the idea of *Blank Page* was fathomed at the time as their *raison d'être*. Bickels and Atar exposed that monstrosity. Nevertheless, the fact that the kibbutz was resourceful enough to agree and support the expensive project, and bothered to provide an entire staff to run it, should not be underrated.



More Thoughts about Bickels's Introspection /

Even though Bickels was a modernist architect, unsympathetic to historicity and historicism, his building embodies a tangled web of historical, architectural, and broad cultural allusions. How is one to comprehend his modernism? The general composition of the Ein Harod Museum is akin to the early 20th-century building type prevalent in Elementarism, and is quite reminiscent of public buildings designed by French Academy member and architect, Julien Gaudet. Much like Gaudet, Bickels also set his building on an axial structure, devising a rational link of pre-defined spaces. In a conversation, architect and scholar Ada Karmi-Melamede spoke with little regard for the conformist axial structure, and with even less regard for Bickels's success in applying it to his altogether non-rational plan. She implied that Bickels's building, as opposed to its claimed reputation, was never a modernist jewel. This assertion may emphasize the issue raised earlier with regard to Bickels's refusal of the free plan. The building, however, is not altogether Elementarist; it displays a conspicuous English influence, mainly through Hermann Muthesius with whose work Bickels must have been familiar through the German Werkbund. Generally speaking, Elementarism was largely an academic stream. The revolutionary forces of that historical moment worked outside the Academy. Nevertheless, historian Reyner Banham

has pointed to the fact that Elementarism pursued and promoted functionalism and rationalism long before the modern movement did. What I find of interest at this point concerns the relation to History: Elementarism did not deny History in the manner which was to be fixated later in the manifestoes of the Modern Movement and among its architects.

Does that answer why the introvert, skeptical Bickels preferred the early phase of modernism, or why his building acquired its neo-classical looks? Should I follow the story of the “sleepy” architect, and think of Bickels as one of many architects for whom the passage from Europe to Palestine was professionally disastrous, a banishment from the fertile dynamic polemics taking place in the European capitals? Is this the answer?

The 1940s in Israel: Students of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier were working in Haifa, in Jerusalem. The kibbutzim were, to a great extent, Bauhaus projects. Tel Aviv, the small city erected on the sand dunes, was to be recognized as the “biggest” Bauhaus city in the world. By the late 1940s, the Jewish population in Palestine stood at a mere half a million. All the architects knew each other. And yet, Bickels chose to erect his – well – temple-like, Elementarist, neo-classical building in the kibbutz of all places, the last place to host such an object. If this is not to be considered a clear cultural-political stand, it is at least a very peculiar document which, to my mind, exposes several gaps, or cracks, that many Israeli modernists were reluctant to acknowledge: for instance, that Zionism and Modernism were not the natural pair they were so fiercely believed to be.

Possibly, this is but my private response to the narrow perspective that dominated my upbringing. Nevertheless, I find it significant: the story told in the 1960s, in kindergartens, elementary schools, the still-breathing socialist youth movements, on family picnics, in the neighborhood, was one: it introduced Zionism as the avant-garde movement par excellence. We were told, indeed, that it was a late product of the Enlightenment, albeit a radical offspring of Viennese liberalism, and that the Kibbutz was its peerless socialist raised arm. We all wanted to either join a kibbutz or build a new one, because it was the ultimate rational program for a brave new world. Religion, tradition, History – all these belonged to the kind of Jews we were not meant to be.

But the movement that Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) had in mind was, ironically enough, a back-to-history movement, namely, a-modernistic, to begin with, or at least a movement that had great difficulties with the *blank page* rationale, and criticized it harshly. Moreover, it was not socialistic, and its attitude to religion and tradition was emphatically alien to that of socialism. The wish expressed in the post-rational Herzlian politics was not necessarily “new” or “modern”; it was all about how to transplant a European metropolis into a new geography. As is well-known, after the Dreyfus Affair, Herzl lost his faith in the political realism of the European liberals, a doctrine blind to the socio-political reality of marginal groups. He preferred to it what Carl E. Schorske in his book *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* calls “the politics of fantasy and the irrational.”

Schorske writes: “In his eruptive conversion experience, Herzl rejected a positivistic conception of historical progress in favor of sheer psychic energy as the motive force in history.” In a passage defining both the weight of social reality and the analogous gravity of political style that made the liberals powerless to alter it, Herzl set forth the dynamic of his politics of fantasy:

Great things need no firm foundation. An apple must be placed on the table to keep it from falling. The earth hovers in the air. Thus I can perhaps found and secure the Jewish state without any firm anchorage. The secret lies in movement. Hence I believe that somewhere a guidable aircraft will be discovered. Gravity overcome through movement.

[Herzl, *Tagebücher*, I, 398-9]

Zionism would accordingly be not a party, said Herzl, not a part of a defined whole, but a movement – ‘The Jewish people on the move (*Unterwegs*).’”¹

According to Herzl’s plan, Zion was to reconstruct the European liberal culture as best as possible. Among Jews – he may have thought – the modernity of that liberalism may be possible... Of the future Israeli cannibalist pursuit of “roots” he could not have thought; his Zion is furnished rather by the Viennese upper class and aristocrat bourgeois urban life, inhabited by sportive Anglophile gentlemen playing cricket and tennis. In point of fact, nothing in his Jewish state was Jewish; not even the Hebrew language. And the Yiddish was to be forbidden altogether. Herzl abhorred that German dialect. It reminded him of oppression and segregation only. *Hoch Deutsch*, among other respectable languages, suited much better the Zion fit for his vision of linguistic federalism. One of the concerns with which Herzl engaged was the art academy. It was possibly the most non-Jewish institute of his fancy. This topic was discussed in depth by Sarah Breitberg-Semel in a recent panel discussion held in Vienna. The Academy takes an enormous space in *Altneuland* compared to the attention given to other public institutions vital for the new state.

This, then, was the handsome Theodor H., the expert on fine furs and women’s lingerie, a bookworm and an opera lover, the Vienna-Paris dandy for whom Zion was to become a cosmopolitan mansion for private educated people like him.

The main point about that paradise was to let Jews not be bothered with the question of their Judaism, neither by themselves nor by others.

And the clergy? “While honored, it would be confined to their temples like the army to the barracks, lest they cause trouble...”

Consequently, Herzl was indifferent to the location of that future Zion; the biblical fatherland did not concern him in the least. As far as he was concerned, it could be anywhere.

The paradox, henceforth, is apparent: a back-to-history movement, conceived in Europe, was to emerge in an Israeli socialistic Mondo Novo so inherently different from anything Herzl

had in mind. Bickels, who deemed the Kibbutz a creation greater than any art or architecture work, places the schizoid order of his sentiments towards Herzl's utopianism at the heart of Kibbutz Ein Harod.

Back to Vienna and its architecture: The thoughts that had motivated the liberal, modernist architects of the time are exemplified by those of Otto Wagner, for whom the solid foundation for modern urbanism was synonymous with the word "change." It advocated rationality, dynamism, linearity, functionality, technology, as well as grid, mathematics, and anonymity. All these were to contradict History which was another name for regression. But for Wagner's contemporary and arch-conservative rival, the historicist architect Camillo Sitte, "change" expressed only the heedless, socially blind wishes of the mandarin class, whereas in reality the ideology of the straight line led to the devastation of small industry and handcraft workers swallowed by the big trusts. For better or for worse: Who could have conceived today of the post-modern restoration project in New York's Battery Park City, for instance, without Sitte's flexible theorization of public space, community life, etc.? On the other hand, strolling through present day Vienna reveals Wagner's urban solutions to have had deeper foresight, newly winning their merit when reflected together with the aggressive formula devised by Rem Koolhaas for the Chinese delta, for instance.

Within a very short period, the words "Modernist" and "radical" seem to have come to designate quite different things. These altering perspectives may assist in seeing through the labyrinth in which people like Herzl, and Bickels after him, were caught. It seems natural that Herzl would anchor his ideas in a moderate, more conservative version of modernity, interpreting functionalism via a psychological and historical key.

The concern for "otherness" and "difference" within a conservative context is almost incomprehensible today, but this was Sitte's case as well as that of the aesthete Herzl, whose famous Junker complex was resolved forever after the Dreyfus trial. The narcissist intelligentsia of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna had shaped a specific neurotic type, always ready to exchange an objective analysis of the world for a subjective culture of feelings. The literary heroes of the period are often aristocrats who lost touch with reality, or aesthetes who could no longer grasp it. Such was also Herzl's life, and he disliked it. The cult of the self was the last resort in a world so shattered; it had to lead to the forms linking together the bits and pieces of life. It was from here that Herzl arrived at his Jewish identity. And only through his own excessive aestheticism could Bickels, later, glorify the Kibbutz above all art works, and express his admiration in such a lofty puffed up sentiment.

To acknowledge this is to understand the other side of what I find political in his shut museum structure: the museum turns its back to the kibbutz in order to make room for a culture of feelings, not of principles.

In affinity with Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Robert Musil, Herzl also sought the confirmation of the instincts as a rescue for aesthetical life. "The Jewish people on the move" therefore, can

be seen less as the fathering frontier thesis it had, in effect, become, and more as a hallucination of a chance for the beloved Vienna, doomed to decadence, to be redeemed. There, in the new state, will be a new fresh start for the Viennese culture of sentiment. Like Ulrich in Musil's The Man Without Qualities, Herzl also sought an exit from his own finesse, in social activism. But it may be true to say that the pre- and post-Dreyfus Affair Herzl still adhered to the belief that moral life sprang wholly from the emotional equilibrium of individuals. Rather than assuming a reality filled by essential moral options or by absolute moral contrasts, he was looking for practical, rather than pure combinations. It is from such a perspective, one could argue, a perspective whereby the source of morality is rooted in the "self" and not in society, that he dreamt the option of a Jewish state.

In a sense, a similar *self* is hidden in the socialist Bickels: the museum was urgent for the Kibbutz just as the art academy was for Herzl's Zion.

In conclusion: I find Herzl's conservatism, with or without inverted commas, close to the neo-classical, academic modernism of the Ein Harod Art *Mishkan*. Two architects, two utopists, Herzl and Bickels; two atheists of a Jewish origin; two struggling men seeking their own path within the complex ideology of modernity – a pattern never easily deciphered. There was no room for the cult of the land in their understanding of History. Their idea of a Jewish home is alien to both the Kibbutz and the later, fundamentalist colonization of the Israeli Right.

Reiner Banham, in his quest for a classification fit to capture the kind of Modernism proclaimed by Elementarism, calls Julien Gaudet a "negative eclectic." That final stroke may complete Bickels's portrait. He, too, was a man in love with the modern freedom of invention, equally loathing the idea of historical progress.

Bickels's Museum of Art is a document of entangled desires never imprinted in any subsequent "land construction" projects or discernible in the life style, manners or language of the Israeli environment and culture in later years. It cannot be registered as Leftist or Rightist.

For contemporary Israeli architects, Bickels represents the closest thing to an Israeli vernacular. His rows of tiny windows are often quoted; his delicate interplay of shadows is admired and imitated. Giant, acute conflicts have become toys for the rich; his spirit – not there.

1. Carl E. Schorske, Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture (New York: Vintage, 1981), p. 164.