



Then somebody told them that  
there was a house near Jerusalem

## Heim: An Archival Film of the Moravian Church

### Sala-Manca

Heim (Home), an archival film of the Moravian Church in Germany, documents the lives of patients living at the leprosarium in the early twentieth century. The 15-minute film was translated by Adi Kaplan and Shahar Carmel who also made it available to the public.

Heim is an unusual document about the daily life at the leprosarium and the lives of some of the dominant figures there, both nurses and patients. Using segments of various texts, most of which were taken from reports penned by the nursing staff, and historical photographs of other places (Jerusalem and Istanbul) and leprosaria (from films about Hansen's disease), the film tells a narratively coherent story. The nurses' reports, part of Moravian mission publications in 1889-1929, were originally published in English, then shortened, reworked, translated into Hebrew, and rewritten by Kaplan and Carmel. Actors lent their voices to the characters telling their stories in German, Swedish, and English.

Kaplan and Carmel's adapted texts contain no less historical truth than the nurses' narratives in their reports, or, more accurately, a different historical truth. "We took stories that were, for the most part, told only in separate reports," say the artists, "and paid no attention to their chronology. When watching the film, it's impossible to tell the order in which the stories occurred. But all the stories happened and were described in the reports. Of course, we had to shorten and cut a lot of material, but we didn't invent anything."

Kaplan and Carmel's statements reflect an effort to highlight the story's authenticity, supported by the use of archival materials perceived as original. The adaptation allows the artists to create a believable, coherent, and interesting narrative in the absence of any other documentary film about the hospital.

The actors' and editors' lack of professionalism—the logos appearing in the archival footage are not fully erased—exposes the fact that the film is not original, but paradoxically and inversely makes it into one of the only authentic documents about the hospital. The power of this authenticity was evident in the Hansen House management's desire to buy the film and screen it as part of the permanent exhibition about the former leper house, after having acquired the permission of Ruth Wexler, in charge of the historical exhibition, who is aware of the film's fictional and reflexive nature, to do so.

Heim as it sincerely reveals its fictional sources, it exposes its own insincerity. Its approach to history and the place it describes is poetic rather than scientific. The artists did not study the institution's history from an objective perspective, but rather they connected to the characters documented emotionally. In this historiographic interpretation, they create a film telling their own interpretation, one of the possible stories of personal histories that occurred at the hospital. In this sense, Heim is an original film and an authentic construct based on historical truths. The film leaves the traces of its making and editing evident to the viewers' eyes, nonetheless succeeding to present itself as a true and one of the most moving stories of the historiography of the place. In their decision to include this film as part of their historical exhibition, the Hansen House directors and the curator of the historical exhibition gave the film its imprimatur of authenticity. The film's presentation next to "original" artefacts undoubtedly helped lend it its sense of authenticity that visitors expect to encounter at the site.



▲ Heim. Stills from Film, Created by: Adi Kaplan, Shahar Carmel / Editor: Itai Onik / Mix: Nir Matreso. Voices: Selina Bador, Paulina Fogel, Simon Hofman, Gregory John, Mary Tatzlaf / Music: Paulina Fogel, single channel, sound, 15 min., 2014.