Tel Aviv after 100: Notes toward a New Cultural History

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Abstract

In the wake of Tel Aviv's centennial in 2009, it seems an appropriate moment to attempt to tell not simply the story of the city but the story of its story—its historiography. In the past decade or so, academic scholarship and popular writing about Tel Aviv, including fiction and memoir, have been particularly concerned with questions of space and place. In this article, I address this spatial preoccupation in light of contemporary critical theory and a comprehensive review of recent cultural scholarship about the city.

Key words: Tel Aviv, space, place, literature, cultural history

"These neighborhoods in the north of town, four stories with a garden in front that nobody uses and that silly arch they cut in the hedge at the entrance, and a backyard full of weeds and thorns and garbage bins. All that may have been appropriate for the old days of the British Mandate, when they decided that Tel Aviv was going to be a garden city and laid down that style of building for everyone. But today when there's such a terrible parking problem, and people come home from work and there's nowhere for them to park their cars—who needs those silly gardens? Instead of the gardens in the backyards there could be proper parking for the residents' cars. And why shouldn't people build fifth and sixth stories on their roofs, and find a place to put in an elevator? And who needs all those storerooms and basements? Why shouldn't people live there? Believe me, if it's done in an orderly and aesthetic way this city will be much better adapted to our times and it will be a far more pleasant place to live in."[1] Thus speaks Ilan, a pragmatic and somewhat opportunistic real

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estate agent in a moderately busy office in central Tel Aviv, as depicted in Yehoshua Kenaz's novel *Returning Lost Loves*. Ilan has rented a flat to a wealthy businessman in just such a building in north Tel Aviv, the very same building where Aviram, Ilan's business partner, lives. They both suspect the apartment has been rented solely for the purpose of mid-afternoon trysts between the executive and his secretary, and the oddity of the apartment's infrequent occupancy has also drawn the attention of Schwartz, the ever-threatening-to-retire head of the building's Tenant Association and one of the building's original apartment owners. The novel's narrative moves in and out of the apartments and workplaces of the building's tenants: Aviram, the bachelor; Schwartz and his wife; the secretary waiting impatiently for her lover; an elderly and unnamed stroke victim who is cared for by a Filipino caretaker and her increasingly violent boyfriend. The building's newest tenants are a couple who have purchased the basement and with it, apparently, the rights to build in the backyard. They begin to turn the space into living quarters and to turn the backyard into their own private patio:

> "Get inside your storeroom, if it's yours, and stay there as long as you like," yells an enraged Mr. Schwartz. "But what business do you have digging here? The yard is the common property of the whole building; it isn't yours!" . . . "What's the matter?" yells the woman [in response]. "Why are you talking to us like that? Aren't we Jews? What harm are we doing you?"[2]

> Schwartz frets to Aviram: "You want people like that here? You want to turn this place into a slum like Hatikva? For them to sit outside all night, on their terrace, and talk in shouts, with the radio playing Arab music full blast? For them to barbecue their meat under our windows." Later, the altercations escalate: "What's the matter? Why don't you want us here? What are we, Arabs?"[3]

And, finally:

> [We'll] "make their lives hell until they wish they were back in Poland!"[4]

The struggle between the Ashkenazi Schwartz and the Mizrahi "invaders," trying literally to get in through the basement, emblematizes a larger societal shift in which veterans (*vatikim*) are threatened by the presence—in this case represented quite literally, spatially—of newcomers, marked by ethnic and socioeconomic difference. A larger, arguably more intractable issue regarding power and space—the conflict

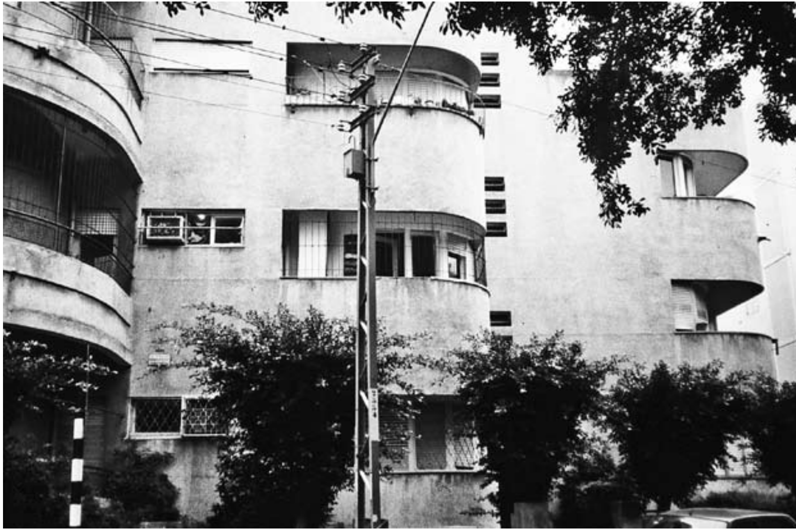

Figure 1. Bauhaus in downtown Tel Aviv, 1990s. Photo by author.

between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs—is addressed here in almost incidental fashion, a way of marking the historically ambivalent social position of Mizrahim in Israeli society. This is certainly not the first example of fictional attention to the arrival of "newcomers," of "strangers" to the city, who disrupt the "natives'" sense of entitlement and belonging in their hometown. (Yaakov Shabtai's work, especially his 1977 novel *Zikhron dvarim* [Past Continuous], is replete with a suspicion of Tel Aviv's new population as well as physical evidence of the city's change.) In Kenaz's novel, the city's current citizens, embodied in the pragmatic voice of Ilan, seem to have little patience with Tel Aviv's founding vision and instead are moved and motivated as are urbanites most everywhere by amenities, comfort, and utility.

Returning Lost Loves capitalizes on a familiar spatial icon—the Bauhaus cube—to describe a certain version of Israeli history, particularly of Tel Aviv's history (see Figure 1). A cultural history of Tel Aviv, using Kenaz's apartment house as a model, would describe the contents of each flat, note where the furnishings came from, what languages were spoken, what foods eaten, who lived on which floor (that is, who arrived "first"), and who moved out (and to where) or in (and from where). Such a model might allow for a full and relatively orderly depiction of the acculturation of different immigrant groups (or "waves," as they are often referred to in histories of the period), each group defined in largely ethnic or national terms relating to

their country of origin, and each "wave" possessing its own unique set of experiences—why they left, what remained behind, and their particular relationship to the new state and to the other native and immigrant populations.

Indeed, most histories of Tel Aviv have adopted just such an approach, treating the city's development in relatively linear terms, chapter by chapter, describing the gradual "filling up" of the rational and contained space of the Bauhaus apartment house. There is certainly much to be learned from this sort of history, which allows for a depiction of various power relationships as well as the evolution of shifting demographics. But as a *spatial* practice, I would like to consider what might be missing from this picture. As we observe Tel Aviv's centennial, can we think of other ways in which the city's history might be related? In this article, I will first propose another kind of model, one in which space is equally paramount but treated quite differently. Following that discussion, I offer a brief critical evaluation of the "spatial turn" in the academy. I then describe Tel Aviv's historiography in light of these recent theories of space and place, up to and including writing of the past several years.

Nurit Gertz's recent memoir of the writer Amos Kenan, her partner of over four decades, *Unrepentant,* relates four traumatic periods in his life, intertwining bits from Kenan's own fiction to create a fascinating rendering of an individual life as embedded in the historical fabric of its time.[5] The book's first chapter concerns Kenan's childhood in Tel Aviv,[6] especially his difficult life at home with an idealistic and mentally unstable father (who was perpetually disappointed with his own physical shortcomings and the failure of the Yishuv to develop along his envisioned ideological lines), a long-suffering mother, and the young Amos's own resulting social difficulties and emotional hardship. The book opens, however, in the present, as the 79-year-old Kenan wanders through contemporary Tel Aviv. His body moves through the hot city streets, but his mind is brutally buffeted, pulled here and there, to another time and another place:

> An old man climbs. Breathing heavily, pushing through to the top of the mountain. The road is still long. The summit, far. Will he make it? People are looking. Someone pauses for a moment, hesitantly: "Can I help?" But he doesn't see, driving forward, as if paddling through the still air, the hot Israeli summer air. And the summit is still far. Will he make it? But it's not a sloping mountaintop here, or a summit. Just the slight incline of Bar Kochba Street, which winds a bit on its way from Trumpeldor Street to Bogroshov Street. Here he is, at last. On one side, Vincent's barbershop, and on the other, the shoe store. Really, what is

> he doing here? He doesn't know. *He doesn't remember what he was looking for, simply doesn't remember.* And so, he hesitates for a moment, and then turns right onto Tchernichovski Street, continuing on past King George and up Ben Tsion Boulevard. Now he only wants to get home. *But where is home? He doesn't know.* At the end of Ben Tsion Boulevard is Ahad Ha-am Street, and he turns onto it and continues searching until he finds a familiar yard, but maybe not, maybe unfamiliar, and another yard, and a door. If this door opens, maybe it will be his home. But no. The door opens. It's not his home. A strange woman looks at him, trying to figure out what he wants, sees that he doesn't know. And then, suddenly, recognizing: "You're Amos Kenan, aren't you?"
>
> His face brightens. "You know me? From where?"
>
> "Everyone knows you. I was once a regular reader of yours. What happened?"
>
> And to this strange woman, who recognized him, he is ready to admit: "I lost my way home."
>
> She lets him in, sits him down, gives him a glass of water which he gulps down thirstily, and through a detailed interrogation tries to figure out where he lives and what he is doing on Ahad Ha-am Street. And because he doesn't know what to answer, she cannot know that here, on Ahad Ha-am Street, number 134, was the house of his childhood.[7]

She tries to help him remember where he lives now: "'Maybe Melchet? Maybe King George? Maybe Bogroshov?' She won't give up and goes street by street, until at last she gets to Bar Kochba. And then he remembers: 'Yes, Bar Kochba 10. I think I live at Bar Kochba 10.'" When she finally gets him back, and they ask him, full of worry, where he has been, he answers simply, "I was at home."[8]

Gertz's narrative deliberately confuses the pastoral—a mountain path—with the urban, as Kenan searches for his home. His search also emblematizes the book's larger methodological principles. The narrative weaves toward its conclusion, exploring key episodes in Kenan's life through a combination of narrative nonfiction, quotations from Kenan's novels, stories, satirical columns, letters and journals, and personal interviews with the author and people he has known. The book is a hybrid—something between traditional biography and memoir—although written at a remove, because Gertz herself was not present at any of the events she describes, except at the very end. Perhaps we may read this powerful opening passage as a metaphor for Kenan's desire to escape the demands of the present and to return to a more naïve time, to get back home, to one's childhood, only to discover that that period, *too,* was not so innocent. (Just such a rude awakening has characterized much recent popular and scholarly discourse about Israel's historical past.)[9] Kenan searches for and eventually finds his way home, but it is

no longer his. This retreat to an earlier historical moment is characterized by profound vertigo and disillusionment.

The passage traces the route home via the familiar landmarks of specific shops and street names. This is not the aimless wandering of Shabtai's disillusioned and nihilistic protagonists, those "native sons" I mentioned above who have lost their sense of belonging in a city that has "changed its face." It is also distinct from the more self-consciously artful wanderings of S. Yizhar within the terrain of his mother's memories in his evocative 1992 memoir *Mikdamot* (Preliminaries). Kenan's episode itself suggests the degree to which Amos will become increasingly alienated from the disturbing, violent space of his home, the hallway in which his father paces and cries for his fallen comrades.[10] We learn much about Tel Aviv during the interwar period, especially from young Amos's long walks within the city's more forbidding spaces. In one scene, he imagines his weekly wanderings: "He traced the map for his walk: the Yarkon, Wadi Musrara, the Arab village of Jumaison, the fishermen's nets, the burnt smell from bonfires at the foot of Sheikh Munis and bells swaying on camels' necks up until Ras el Ayin."[11] Indeed, the labyrinthine workings of memory are more subjective and associative, allowing for those pastoral sites that were central to the region's geographic and cultural contours yet marginalized from the Zionist imagination.

But there is more. This passage, coming as it does in the book's opening paragraphs, also offers the example of wandering as a metaphor for memory and for the writing of history. Taking the Benjaminian imperative[12] of getting lost in one's hometown to an almost pathological extreme, Kenan's wanderings possess both the persistent lucidity of a GPS device and the equally persistent spontaneity and unruliness of memory. Indeed, they recall Michel de Certeau's assertion that "history is created by footsteps."[13] Space, then, is not a static form that is filled with different populations—the four-by-four apartment dwelling of Kenaz's north Tel Aviv neighborhood. Rather, space is shaped and defined by movement and by the activities and behaviors that typify it. The history that is written about this space must be similarly attuned to these movements. *This, too, is a kind of history.*

Kenaz and Gertz thus offer us two ways of thinking about space, which in turn might provide us with two distinct spatial models for thinking about history. What is gained through each, and what is effaced? Certainly both suggest a certain view of what *constitutes* history. In Kenaz, we find the voice of Ilan, firmly anchored in the present albeit describing the past. This viewpoint shapes his understanding of the space and allows for his critique ("All that may have been appro-

priate for the old days. . . . But today . . . "). The Gertz text, however, disturbs the fundamental distinction between past and present; she is going for something more palimpsestic, more elastic, and the view of the past that emerges is not of "another country" (as cultural historian David Lowenthal would have it) but of a neighborhood nearby. Whereas the Kenaz model sees space as something that can—and maybe even should—be contained and described in discrete units and that possesses a definitive relation to the material world of the neighborhood, the Gertz model is more porous, relational, shifting over time, and subject to memory and to revision in the present.

What is to be gained by drawing on a spatial model for history? To answer this I will briefly consider the ascendance of space as a critical category in the academy and, more recently, in Jewish Studies.[14] Interest in space within Jewish Studies was preceded by a period of vigorous debate about Jewish historiography, most famously between Yosef Yerushalmi and Amos Funkenstein. At stake was the relation between modes of historical discourse and the long-standing but problematic notion of memory. In what sorts of vehicles did Jewish memory reside? What were the parameters and meaning, even the purpose, of the Jewish historical imagination in its specific discursive modes (biblical narrative, medieval annales, and modern memory books, to name just a few)? Do memory and history work together, or is their relation one of mutual antagonism? How did the relatively new discipline of historiography compare with the rich diversity of Jewish historical forms from the past? What, in fact, as historian Moshe Rosman has posed in the title of a recent book, is "Jewish about Jewish history"?[15] These questions and more drove scholarly discourse among Jewish historians in the 1980s, a discourse that was itself related to similar debates among historians more broadly. Trends in the writing of history had been shifting as early as the 1960s, especially in relation to the radical politics of that era. In France, the Annales school and social history emerged in relation to Marxist theory and practice. In America, a similar trend may be identified in the way in which women's studies grew out of the feminist movement. Cultural history more broadly construed was influenced by post-structuralism and early postmodern thinkers such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, who stressed the degree to which all human experience is mediated by textuality ("discourse"). Later trends, including Germany's "Historians' Debate," targeted the meaning of the postwar past in relation to conceptions of history, collective memory, and nationhood. In Israel, a similar historiographical school is represented in the diverse work of the "New Historians," whose reevaluation of the 1948 war has spurred new understandings of both

Zionism and statehood.[16] More recently, subaltern studies have stressed the importance of empire and colonial power in the writing of history. This rise of alternative forms of historical inquiry occasioned a kind of splintering within the discipline. Ironically, the explosion of historical work seems to have precipitated a sense of the exhaustion or inadequacy of history as a critical category. Out of this notion of the limits of historicism, space has emerged as an essential critical category.[17]

What exactly could "history" no longer describe? In broad terms, perhaps the incipient and ongoing effects of what is now called "globalization," the world-wide disruption of what were previously understood as stable, even organic, ties between people and place and the breakdown of the historical nation-state and its territorial borders, especially the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Eastern bloc. As part of this widely studied phenomenon, we may also consider the mass migrations of diverse populations from various parts of the globe for both political and economic reasons. The development of new technology and information networks is another example of how relations among different kinds of spaces and different kinds of communities—both real and virtual—have become a defining feature of "the postmodern condition."

An important example linking this passage from history to space in critical theory may be found in the work of Pierre Nora, whose influential conception of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory) represents an ambitious attempt to theorize all of these ideas—history and memory, place and space—at once. The immense popularity and indeed functionality of Nora's ideas point both to the enthusiasm with which ideas about space were embraced by American and European scholars and to the degree to which they were not entirely ready to let go of history. Broadly construed, this process has been referred to as the "spatial turn," as famously parsed by Michel Foucault: "The great obsession of the nineteenth century . . . was history. . . . [T]he present . . . will be above all the epoch of space."[18]

Historically, geography had been the academy's "natural home" for discussion of space and place, and geography itself has expanded in ways that have brought the discipline quite far from its empirically minded beginnings. Critical theorists of space have largely followed two paths: social constructivism and philosophy. The work of Henri Lefebvre, with its view of space as produced through the interrelation of economic networks, physical infrastructure, and aesthetic depiction, is a representative example of the former group. The notion of "topophilia," defined by Yi-Fu Tuan as an "affective bond between people and place," is a good example of the latter.[19] One way of combining

these two concepts might be to think of space as abstract, transcendental, divine, a priori and of place as particular, concrete, local, intimate, familiar, invented, named. Space is constituted as place via social construction—that is, place is *manufactured*—even if only for a community of one, but more often for a group, whose common identity rests in part on its ability to agree on which places are important and their meaning. Recent theoretical work considering "place" as location and "space" as performance is, I believe, suggestive of the possible tenor of future studies.[20] In the wake of the influence of theorists such as Lefebvre, Tuan, and Certeau, all scholars have become—to paraphrase Edward Soja—geographers just as surely as they are historians.[21]

Yet thinking about Tel Aviv as somehow "caught" between space and place, between notions of transcendence and the facts of locality, has certain practical and ideological limits. Even after places are created, they are experienced differently by different people. Here is where space emerges again, newly defined. For if space is, ultimately, supremely social, then it must also be created in an ongoing fashion by those human behaviors, customs, and habits that typify both private and collective or national settings. All of this should constitute the description of the place in historical as well as in contemporary narratives, especially given our growing appreciation for Tel Aviv as a mixed and heterogeneous site; all cities are, inevitably, "the natural home of difference."[22]

One current challenge to canonical narratives of Tel Aviv as Jewish urban space can be found in the rapidly growing population of guest workers from Thailand, the Philippines, the sub-Saharan continent, and portions of the former Eastern bloc. Certainly Tel Aviv has always been a cosmopolitan city in some sense, and the polyphonic nature of its cultural and social life—despite its moniker as the "first Hebrew city"—has reflected the diverse ethnic and national origins of its citizens, who spoke Polish, Romanian, Russian, German, Yiddish, Arabic, Ladino, French, Greek, English, Persian, Bukharan, and Bulgarian. Tel Aviv's cosmopolitanism did not, I should add, historically speaking, have the same valence as the term did for Jerusalem, or even for Jaffa in the beginning of the twentieth century, where the term referred more broadly to different *religious* groups as well—specifically to Muslim and Christian Arabs and to Jews.

Today, Tel Aviv's cosmopolitanism might refer to the growing presence of the city's non-Jewish population. It is still early, I think, to know how this population, largely concentrated in the crowded living quarters in the city's southern neighborhoods, will figure in histories of the city.[23] Current studies are mainly devoted to keeping track of their growth—

Figure 2. Butcher shop that sells pork in the Carmel Market, Tel Aviv, 2008. Used by permission of the photographer, Yael Ben Dov.

about 300,000 is the official government estimate—and their legal status, the slipperiness of which is indicated through the various names by which they are called: some are "illegal workers" who have slipped across the border from Egypt to find work; others are "temporary" or "guest workers" who have time-limited visas (and may or may not then remain illegally afterward); more recently, still others are refugees, fleeing from Darfur and under the auspices of the United Nations. Arguably, their presence creates a different sort of Tel Aviv, one that connects the city to other global metropolitan centers with employment opportunities in both service and construction industries (with different types of work for men and women). So, if we extend the idea of lived space, of space that is created by the activities and behaviors that shape it and occur within it, these new groups have created a different Tel Aviv. For example, an "African-initiated Christian space" was found in the churches that flourished near Tel Aviv's Old Central Bus Station from 1999 to 2003,[24] and Filipinos (as well as more than a few Israeli Jews) frequent a butcher in the Carmel Market who sells pork (see Figure 2).

* * *

How does all of this help us think about the city and, to paraphrase Raymond Carver, what we write about when we write about Tel Aviv?

The "granddaddy" of Tel Aviv histories has to be Alter Druyanov's *Sefer Tel Aviv* (The book of Tel Aviv; 1936). Although I make no claim here for direct influence, given the historical paucity of written material about Tel Aviv, most books have relied in some fashion on Druyanov, essentially a "Founders" document that draws largely on first-person accounts, many collected expressly for this volume. It includes numerous details about the city's foundational years, and these events are documented in a series of now-canonical illustrations by Nachum Gutman. This is, it seems to me, one of the book's salient features: the fact that Gutman's drawings are treated like historical documents, alongside the minutes, journalistic accounts, memoirs of founders, and maps—history as mixed genre. Druyanov died in 1938, and the projected second volume was never completed.

In the general spirit of Druyanov—celebratory yet detailed—we may also consider a cluster of guidebooks and anthologies produced mainly by the municipality in honor of milestones in the city's history. Books such as Aharon Vardi's *City of Miracles* (1928), issued with the city's twentieth anniversary; Zeev Vilnai's 1941 guidebook; a 1959 anthology of historical, cultural essays published as part of the city's jubilee celebration; and the highly impressionistic and anecdotal account offered in Shlomo Shva's *Tel Aviv: A Great City* (1977) have all entered the canon of historiographic material about the city.[25]

Real histories about the city began to appear in the mid-1990s. By "real histories" I mean rigorous scholarship with some attention to archival documentation combined with a critical appreciation for the particulars of Tel Aviv as an actual place, not primarily as an extension—for better or for worse—of the national enterprise. I have written elsewhere about the meaning of the relative paucity and belatedness of historical writing about the city.[26] Here I will simply note that, when scholars did finally turn to Tel Aviv as a topic of academic study, they did so from a number of methodological and critical viewpoints, modes of inquiry that may be loosely understood within the parameters of "space" and "place" that I have begun to sketch in this article.[27]

For example, studies such as Ilan Shchori's *Dream Turned into Metropolis* (1990) and Yaakov Shavit and Gideon Biger's multi-volume history of Tel Aviv (the first volume of which appeared in 2001) provide normative accounts of the city, treating its historical development in linear fashion, detailing the way in which space becomes "place"—that is, how Tel Aviv acquired the characteristics and traits of home for successive groups of ethnically and socially diverse migrants.[28] These histories make a compelling case for the distinctive conditions occasioning the city's growth from an idea to a private cor-

poration to a small neighborhood and eventually to a large metropolis. A collection edited by Mordechai Naor, *Tel Aviv's Beginnings: 1909–1934* (1984), brings together work by architectural historians, urban planners, geographers, and literary and art historians; Ilan Troen's *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (2003) augments this view by providing a reflexive contextualization of Tel Aviv within the Yishuv's broader context as a settler society.[29] All of these books rely heavily on archival material from various Israeli institutions and lay an indispensable groundwork for further study of the city.

Other studies have begun to probe the kinds of approaches to space that are emblematized in the "walking presence" of Kenan's biography. These projects explore the realms of memory and the imagination, and they demonstrate a more critical appreciation of how the city has been imagined in literature and visualized in the fine arts, drawing heavily on what Lefebvre refers to as the "imagined space" of the city. Joachim Schlor's *From Dream to City* (1996) explored Tel Aviv's early years from the point of view of its German Jewish immigrants, who often sought to make themselves at home by recreating their "homelandscape" of Berlin and European cosmopolitan culture. In *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City* (2005), the cultural geographer Maoz Azaryahu traces the various myths or stories that Tel Aviv has told about itself—from the idea of a city "born from the sands" to the Bauhaus-inspired "white city" to the more recent "city that never sleeps." Anat Helman's *Urban Culture in 1920s and 1930s Tel Aviv* (2007) and Tami Razi's *Forsaken Children: The Backyard of Mandate Tel Aviv* (2009) both provide comprehensive accounts of the city "from underneath," examining habits of consumption (Helman) and absorption and treatment of abandoned children (Razi) in the Yishuv.[30] Helman's book demonstrates the degree to which the city aspired to replicate cultural and civic norms common to European cities and how this desire was complicated by the progressive rhetoric of the city's liberal Zionist leadership. Razi's focus on the city's social "underbelly" is unusual in historiographic treatments of the city, most of which have treated the city's elite classes, and it broadens our sense of what "normalcy" might have meant in the pre-war period.

Other recent books on Tel Aviv (which I discuss below) are further distinguished by their approach to space, specifically their express recognition of the paramount role of space in narrating the city's history. Though different in other substantive ways, these books are acutely attuned to how space has been produced in Tel Aviv and how different people use, and thus fashion, the same spaces in quite diverse ways.

Their production and publication are related to the increasingly high-profile and contentious nature of the struggle over space in Israel—both between Israelis and Palestinians and within Israel itself, among different interest groups, religiously, economically, and ethnically defined. Yehouda Shenhav has described this "new discourse" of space, pointing to how the language of newspaper real estate sections has seeped into the public sphere, contributing to a kind of "demystification" of discourse about land. It is as if, Shenhav notes, "homeland" had become "real estate" (*moledet hafakh le-karka*).[31] One should not, however, confuse this ostensible diminution of space's transcendental value with a decline in the political struggle over its parameters. Recent volumes about Tel Aviv's history written under the sign of the "spatial turn" are sensitive to the land's material history—its transformation from "homeland" to "real estate." They are also aware of the necessary partiality of historical writing and approach this potential incompleteness in a compelling and innovative fashion.

Tamar Berger's *Dionysus at the Center* (1998) combines philosophical meditation and scrupulous archival work to describe the same plot of land from the point of view of three different groups: the original Arab landowners; a generation of Jewish immigrants who were tenants in the neighborhood of Nordia; and the developers and planners of Dizengoff Center, at the time the tallest building in Tel Aviv. Her study "repopulates" this downtown neighborhood with the ghosts of residents past. In its movement back and forth within space and time, the book is itself a critical derivative of Shabtai's novel *Zikhron dvarim*, and it demonstrates how historical study may be indebted to literary models.[32] Shabtai's native sons restlessly prowl the city's streets, anxious to "take back" their hometown from the newcomers, to unearth the fragments of their parents' dreams, and—in one of the book's better known images—to put together the broken "service," or set of teacups, now just shards in the sand. This is a utopian desire for wholeness that is, of course, unattainable. It is, I suggest, also implicitly the task in Gertz's biography of Kenan.

Two other volumes—Sharon Rotberd's *White City, Black City* (2005) and Mark LeVine's *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880–1948* (2005)—bring the planning and construction of Tel Aviv in dialectical argument with that of its doppelgänger to the south, Jaffa—the city out of which Tel Aviv emerged as a neighborhood in 1909.[33] Rotberd challenges readers to confront how intertwined the fates of the two cities have been, combining research, anecdote, and critical analysis with original maps, photographs, and facsimiles of important documents, the sum of which creates a powerful argument on

its own: Tel Aviv has been planned and built as much by its architects and engineers as by those photographers and writers who have represented it. In *Overthrowing Geography*, LeVine offers a detailed and engrossing depiction of Zionist land acquisition in the Ottoman period, revealing how purchase of those lands that eventually became Tel Aviv capitalized on conflicting categories of Islamic land law and the desire of the Ottoman state to extract as much tax revenue as it could from both the land and its inhabitants. His book also demonstrates how Ottoman and Arab concerns over Jewish settlement in the area were paradoxically coupled with an interest in selling lands to Jewish purchasers, whose intentions became increasingly clear as the years passed.[34] LeVine's main achievement, however, is to ask us to consider Tel Aviv and Jaffa *together*, consequent with the development of both Jewish and Arab nationalism, and to link this development with the distinctly modern spatial practices of urban planning and architecture.

Deborah Bernstein's social history *Women on the Margins: Gender and Nationalism in Mandate Tel Aviv* (2008) cuts across categories of class and gender to bring us a complex rendering of life on the city's social and geographic margins.[35] Tracing the influence of European, maskilic ideas about the "new woman" on Zionist thought, Bernstein's inspired reading of archival sources offers us a revelatory depiction of interwar life in Tel Aviv. She follows the movement of women in the public sphere, from coffee houses to the beach and the markets, and her cast of characters includes immigrants, pioneers, prostitutes (and their Jewish, Arab, and British clients), suicides, and women who have been abandoned by their husbands and therefore cannot, under Jewish law, remarry.

In addition to examining the production of space, both Berger's *Dionysus at the Center* and my own *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (2006) deploy space as an organizing principle within the books themselves. In Berger's case, each section reviews the same space from a different viewpoint. In my book, each chapter is devoted to a thick description of a particular site—for example, Rothschild Boulevard or the Old Cemetery—or to some essential feature of space: center versus margins, public versus private. Both books are also devoted to the treatment of literature as a space and indeed to those spatial models offered in Hebrew literary sources. Both are thus highly interdisciplinary in conception and execution, weaving literary accounts with archival documentation and critical analysis of public spaces. I was particularly interested in exploring the development of the city's physical plane as an indicator of memory, in relation to the city itself, and especially in relation to the

diasporic pasts of Tel Aviv's citizenry. In this sense, my work seeks to describe the evolution of space within Jewish urban culture more broadly construed, and it may be considered in relation to recent trends in scholarship about Jewish urban experience.[36]

I have sketched above a way of "reading" the historiography of Tel Aviv in relation to a series of distinctions between space and place. But this is only one possible configuration. For example, if we were to take these same books and ask about the degree to which they treat competing notions of space, and especially how Jewish space has been created in relation to and often at the expense of the Palestinian landscape, we would get a slightly different story. In my own book, for example, the Palestinian presence exists as a continuous thread through the chapters; in addition to Jaffa, I examine the remains of the village of Summayl in relation to Rabin Square. But the book's focus, as I have suggested, is primarily on an internal dialectic of Jewish space. However, the works of Berger, Rotberd, and LeVine—and, in a certain sense, that of Bernstein—all insist on the intimate and formative relation of Jewish and Palestinian space, in each and every location, from the bureaucratic domain of urban planning to the spontaneous interactions of the street. More recent studies, such as Tali Hatuka's *Revisionist Moments: Violent Acts and Urban Space in Tel Aviv* (2008), further expand our sense of how the city has served as an arena for those ethnic and political conflicts that continue to dominate the production of Israeli space.[37]

Finally, space is critical for Tel Aviv's historiography in even more far-reaching ways. I am referring simply to the rise of Tel Aviv as an object of scholarly and popular interest. Although Jerusalem has, historically, been the archetype and focus of religious and scholarly preoccupations with Jewish urban forms, this new interest in Tel Aviv signals the presence of increasingly diverse attitudes toward Israel, and it marks the ever-evolving relation between Israel and the diaspora. Local sources from within the city's normative boundaries have described the power of the city's "mythological" narrative of origins, but voices from without have delineated the limits of this myth. Different scholarly communities have related to the city and to space more broadly, in large measure drawing on their own "native" sense of space. So, for example, a recent volume entitled *Jewish Topographies*, produced by a group of young scholars working out of Potsdam in Germany who called their project "Makom," view the development of Tel Aviv in light of their own experience growing up in a world firmly divided between East and West.[38] Israeli scholars, as we have seen, are increasingly sensitive to how Tel Aviv's urban space evolved in relation to social, ethnic, and national others.

In conclusion, I want to return briefly to those spatial models that I began with: the ostensibly discrete, self-contained image of Kenaz's Bauhaus structure; and the more open-ended and impressionable model of footsteps we found in Gertz. I have suggested that each represents a certain kind of history: the one, linear, authoritative, in control; the other, more alive to the idiosyncratic whims of memory. We might say that both forms of history are necessary, inevitable, even complementary. That is, they may be antagonistic in some ways, and that might be a good thing. Yet perhaps the seeming aloofness of the Bauhaus to the landscape, which I have read as a need to control history, is itself a fiction. After all, Engel House, the city's first structure built on pilotis (columns or *amudim*) may well have been built in isolation, but it has evolved in relation to a particular street and is thus potentially open to the voices and movements of the street.

One final spatial model for Tel Aviv's history is, I would argue, the cliché of the balcony—that staple of Tel Aviv's architectural imaginary which has emblematized the city's dynamic interplay of public and private space. Perhaps, however, we can re-conceive the balcony, viewing it as a space from which to envision the past anew.

Notes

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1 Yehoshua Kenaz, *Returning Lost Loves*, trans. Dalya Bilu (South Royalton, Vt., 2001), 161; this novel was originally published in Hebrew: *Mahazir ahavot kodmot* (Tel Aviv, 1997). Quotations in the text are from the English edition.
2 Ibid., 25.
3 Ibid., 33.
4 Ibid., 221.
5 Nurit Gertz, *Al daat atsmo: Arbaah pirkei hayim shel Amos Kenan* (Tel Aviv, 2008).
6 The persona and style linking the author's childhood with the youth of the city, and their shared naïveté that is ultimately shattered by circumstance and history, seem indebted to S. Yizhar's *Mikdamot* (Tel Aviv, 1992).

7 Gertz, *Al daat atsmo*, 13–14; emphasis added. All translations from this work are my own.
8 Ibid., 14.
9 See, e.g., the recent historical novels by Gabriella Avigur-Rotem, Amir Gutfruend, and Shulamit Lapid.
10 Gertz, *Al daat atsmo*, 17.
11 Ibid., 31.
12 Walter Benjamin, "Tiergarten," *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (1938; translation, Cambridge, Mass., 2006), 153.
13 Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Certeau Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford, 2000); originally published in "L'Invention du quotidien" (1980).
14 See the special issue on space of *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 11, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2005).
15 Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?* (Oxford, Engl., 2007).
16 See especially the widely read special issue of *History & Memory* in 1995, edited by Saul Friedlander, including articles by Anita Shapira, Uri Ram, and Ilan Pappe.
17 I am grateful to Derek Penslar for helping unpack the strands of these relationships and their consequence for the spatial turn.
18 See, e.g., Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Le Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24, and Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 22 (1986). The history of this turn to space has been delineated in both abstract and concrete terms by the critical work of geographer Edward Soja.
19 See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1977).
20 See *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Hampshire, Engl., 2008), and the review essay by Charlotte Fonrobert, "The New Spatial Turn in Jewish Studies," *AJS Review* 33, no. 1 (Apr. 2009): 155–64.
21 Edward Soja, "Taking Space Personally," in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York, 2009), 24.
22 Richard Sennet, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York, 1996), 78.
23 For an important introduction, see the essays on Tel Aviv in Sarah S. Willen, ed., *Transnational Migration to Israel in Global Comparative Context* (Lanham, Md., 2007).
24 Galia Sabar, "The Rise and Fall of African Migrant Churches: Transformations in African Religious Discourse and Practice in Tel Aviv," in Willen, *Transnational Migration*, 191.
25 Aharon Vardi, *Ir ha-plaot* (Tel Aviv, 1928); Zeev Vilnai, *Madrikh Erets-Yisrael: Tel Aviv, ha-Sharon vha-Shfelah* (Palestine, 1941); Yosef Aricha, ed., *Tel Aviv: Mikraah historit-sifrutit* (Tel Aviv, 1959); Shlomo Shva, *Ho ir ho em* (Tel Aviv, 1977). For novels that have influenced our appreciation of Tel

Aviv's history, see S. Y. Agnon, *Temol shilshom* (1945; Jerusalem, 1979), and Yaakov Shabtai, *Zikhron dvarim* (Tel Aviv, 1977). Tamar Berger's *Diyonisus ba-center* (Tel Aviv, 1998) has especially relied on the latter text to shape her sense of the city's history. See also Hannah Soker-Schwager, "A Godless City: Shabtai's Tel Aviv and the Secular Zionist Project," *Prooftexts* 26, nos. 1–2 (Win/Spr 2006): 240–61.

26 See my *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford, 2006), chap. 1.

27 See the recent special issue of *Israel Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2009).

28 Ilan Shchori, *Halom she-hafakh li-khrakh* (Tel Aviv, 1990); Yaakov Shavit and Gideon Biger, *Historia shel Tel Aviv*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv, 2001–07).

29 Mordechai Naor, ed., *Reyshita shel Tel Aviv: 1909–1934* (Jerusalem, 1984); Ilan Troen, *Imagining Zion: Dreams, Designs and Realities in a Century of Jewish Settlement* (New Haven, Conn., 2003).

30 Joachim Schlor, *From Dream to City* (London, 1996); Maoz Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv: Mythography of a City* (Syracuse, N.Y., 2005); Anat Helman, *Or ve-yam hikifuha: Tarbut tel avivit bi-tekufat ha-mandat* (Haifa, 2007), published in English as *Young Tel Aviv: A Tale of Two Cities* (Lebanon, N.H., 2010); Tami Razi, *Yaldei ha-hefker: He-hatser ha-ahorit shel Tel Aviv ha-mandatorit* (Tel Aviv, 2009). Razi's book bears the special imprint and logo of the municipality celebrations for the city.

31 Yehouda Shenhav, "Space, Land, Home: On the Normalization of a 'New Discourse,'" *Teoryah u-vikoret* 16 (Spring 2000): 3–13.

32 Berger, *Diyonisus ba-center.* For a sensitive appreciation of Berger's achievement in relation to Israeli historical writing more generally, see Michael Feige, "The Names of the Place: New Historiography in Tamar Berger's *Dionysus at the Center*," *Israel Studies: The Review of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies* 19, no. 2 (2004): 54–74.

33 Sharon Rotberd, *Ir levanah, ir shehorah* (Tel Aviv, 2005); Mark LeVine, *Overthrowing Geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and the Struggle for Palestine, 1880–1948* (Berkeley, 2005).

34 Victims of these transactions, involving both local and absentee landowners, included legitimate tenants and squatters.

35 Deborah Bernstein, *Nashim ba-shulayim: Migdar u-leumiyut be-Tel Aviv ha-mandatorit* (Jerusalem, 2008).

36 The field has grown in recent years. For an introductory sampling, see the essays collected in Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: People of the City: Jews and the Urban Challenge*, vol. 15 (Jerusalem, 1999); *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (2005); *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 11, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2005); and *Prooftexts: Literary Mappings of the Jewish City* 26, nos. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 2006).

37 Tali Hatuka, *Revisionist Moments: Violent Acts and Urban Space in Tel Aviv* (Austin, Tex., 2008).

38 See Brauch et al., *Jewish Topographies.*

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