Tel Aviv's Rothschild: When a Boulevard Becomes a Monument

Barbara Mann

> The name of a city's streets and squares, the gaps in its very plan and physical form, its local monuments and celebrations, remain as traces and ruins of their former selves. They are tokens or hieroglyphs from the past to be literally reread, reanalyzed, and reworked over time. Images that arise from particular historic circumstances come to define our sense of tradition; they literally manage our knowledge of the historic.
>
> —M. Christine Boyer,
> *The City of Collective Memory*[1]

The accuracy of M. Christine Boyer's observation regarding the way historical tradition is imprinted upon urban space depends, to a large degree, on the experience of the city's residents. Beyond the more explicitly historical sites such as museums, monuments, or specially designated municipal sites, the inscription of history on the plane of the city is neither self-evident nor predictable. Even the reception of these civically sanctioned sites is subject to multiple interpretation. At a minimum, we can say that an individual's memories may be linked more or less strongly to specific sites—a street, a park, a café. Certain kinds of larger, more collective memories may be associated with the unique geographic features of any given city—a

river or the seashore, for example—or with constructed sites also particular to that city—a central public park, a landmark building, even a main thoroughfare. New York's Hudson River or Berlin's Unter den Linden are examples of loosely regulated public sites that have become thoroughly enmeshed in the main themes of their cities' pasts, and they are featured as such in cultural representations of the city.

A text seeking to describe the city may draw on depictions of these sites as part of a larger reservoir of images that seem mythic in their ability to encapsulate the city's essence. The repeated evocation of such a site, whether in literature, fine arts, or even touristic depictions of the city, furthers the site's monumental character, often without any relation to the site's actual history or to its contemporary significance within the city. These texts, however, should be examined as critically as the "tokens and hieroglyphs" in the city's streets; a careful reading of canonical images of the site, as well as the site itself vis-à-vis the evolving plane of the city, will reveal the process through which the site and its significance have become instantiated in the city's collective memory.

Details at the level of the street are one of the ways in which urban space is produced and experienced.[2] Against the background of major movements and events, of landmarks and loud voices, quotidian detail determines the pattern of the everyday and thus constitutes a kind of history, in the sense described by Roland Barthes in his critique of the *Blue Guide*, the classic guide to French landscape. Barthes notes that "to select only monuments suppresses at one stroke the reality of the land, and that of its people, it accounts for nothing of the present, that is, nothing historical."[3] In this article, I seek to inject some aspect of the "historical" into a reading of Tel Aviv's pre-urban nucleus, the neighborhood of Ahuzat Bayit, especially the central thoroughfare of Rothschild Boulevard. By "historical" I mean a sense of argument and competing visions of the boulevard as a foundational site in the city's past. The concepts of "boulevard" and "monument" provide poles around which I construct a provisional descriptive poetics of the city—the monument referring to the grand narrative of Tel Aviv's origins, the boulevard referring to the revelation of difference and quotidian detail.

Urban landscape historian Dolores Hayden argues that "the production of spaces begins as soon as indigenous residents locate themselves in a particular landscape and begin the search for subsistence."[4] I would add that the production of stories explaining these spaces begins just as quickly. As the "first Hebrew city," Tel Aviv was portrayed by writers, painters, photographers, and city planners as new, clean, and

modern—everything the crowded neighborhoods of Jaffa were not—a city sprung from the sands.[5] Avraham Soskin's famous photograph of the land lottery, where a group of new "shareholders" stands huddled together in the sands, is a carefully staged portrait (Fig. 1). The angle and perspective of the photo set the horizon on the dunes. There is no sign of the city of Jaffa to the immediate south, nor of the Jewish neighborhoods of Neveh Tsedek and Neveh Shalom (founded in the 1880s), nor of the Templar settlement Sharona or the extensive Arab agriculture in the form of orchards just to the east. The city is formed—*yesh me-ayin*—despite the protest of the lone figure at the top of the photo who, as legend has it, yelled out "*meshugaim, eyn kan mayim!*" (You're crazy, there's no water here!). In one later reproduction of the photo, the figure has been erased, his dissenting presence removed, perhaps by the photographer; he no longer disturbs the unified ring of "pioneers."[6]

Given the technical difficulties and limitations of the trade, as well as the often harsh physical conditions, one can hardly expect smiling touristic snapshots of early Tel Aviv. However, critics have recently begun to argue for a more contextual approach to these photographs, one that would examine both the photographers themselves and their now-famous images within the political and social circumstances in which they were produced.[7] The depiction of landscape generally has been critiqued for its hyper-aestheticism and complicity in colonial expansion.[8] Landscape photography of modern Jewish settlement in Palestine used a variety of iconographic motifs[9] and often stressed the idealistic quality of human figures in a barren landscape, framed and dwarfed by the sands, usually associated with a set of tools, a trade, or building materials. Their postures also accentuate material contrasts between East and West, a mix of European and Mediterranean dress: the children often wear Arab-style headpieces while the adults are in suits and dresses. In one photograph from 1910, children play in the sand surrounding Tel Aviv's first kiosk, a circular hut with a cap-like, pointed roof topped by a weathervane (Fig. 2). Although kiosk-style structures were common in European cities by the nineteenth century, they originated in Islamic and Turkish architecture; Soskin's photograph frames the kiosk with the construction of more Western-style structures, including what became a ubiquitous feature of the landscape of Zionist settlements—the water tower. The miniature size of the kiosk, with its fanciful, ornamented roof, resembles the proportions of Reuven's paintings from this period, where the houses resemble toys. Tel Aviv, the images suggest, is as new, pure, and spontaneous as child's play.

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Tel Aviv's Rothschild

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Fig. 1. Establishment of Tel Aviv—Land Lottery, April 11, 1909. (Soskin Archive, The Historical Museum of Tel Aviv–Jaffa.)

Fig. 2. The kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard, 1910. (Soskin Archive, The Historical Museum of Tel Aviv–Jaffa.)

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At the very moment of its founding, then, Tel Aviv began to construct for itself a coherent narrative describing and explaining the meaning of its origins to its citizens. As time passed, this narrative gained an explanatory power in and of itself, a process typical to the development of any new city or place that will naturally create for itself a satisfactory and coherent story about its own foundations. In Tel Aviv, the desire for authoritative roots coincided with the somewhat contradictory desire to emphasize the city's newness, modernity, and epistemological distance from the Diaspora. Tel Aviv's narrative of its founding and development, as evidenced in a variety of cultural representations of the city, thus shared with other Zionist "master commemorative narratives"[10] both an explicit rejection of the *golah* (exile) as well as an ideologically driven selectivity concerning representation and interpretation of the past.

The vision of early Tel Aviv depicted in Soskin's photographs was profoundly felt in early writing about the city. Novels set in Tel Aviv regularly mingled the actual streets of Ahuzat Bayit with fictional circumstance. As early as Brenner's *Mi-kan umi-khan* (1911), writing about the city combined purely fictional characters with famous historical figures and wove details of historical events into an otherwise invented narrative,[11] creating a hybrid genre that reached epic proportions in Agnon's *Tmol shilshom* (1945). The problem of representing Tel Aviv was part of a larger debate concerning Hebrew literature's obligation to depict "the truth from Erets Yisrael," in Ahad Ha-am's famous phrasing. Y. Ch. Brenner's influential essay "The Erets Yisreeli Genre," while not mentioning Tel Aviv by name, questioned the very ability of literature to authentically depict the essence of such a dynamic and newly forming society.[12]

Israeli novelists, however, inherited a powerful set of vividly imagined tropes, anecdotes, and images concerning the city. Many were also born and raised in Tel Aviv, and their fictional writing about the city's "childhood" has a distinctly memoiristic dimension. In *The Great Aunt Shlomtsiyon*, Yoram Kaniuk's novel memorializing pre-state Tel Aviv, the narrator describes a meeting between Aunt Shlomtsiyon, a figure of almost mythical beauty and difficulty, and her husband-to-be, Nehemiah. It happened on Herzl Street, a place that, he says, "in the eyes of Tel Aviv's residents [was] something singular in Jewish history, a crossroads where 2,000 years of exile met up with the essence of ancient Israel." It was, he continues, a "meta-historical intersection."[13] Like Kaniuk's fictional characters, popular versions of the city's past have, for the most part, treated Herzl Street—its intersection with Rothschild Boulevard, and the kiosk at the corner—as this "meta-his-

torical intersection," a symbol of social and cultural achievement, and not merely as a street along which people strolled and talked and watched others do the same.

The meta-historical narrative of Tel Aviv's simpler past has been over-represented in art and literature about the city. One measure of its acceptance is the recent installation of an enormous mural in Rabin Square, facing the Tel Aviv Municipality, in honor of the city's ninetieth anniversary. In Nachum Gutman's "At the Beach," Tel Aviv is built out of the sands by a pair of children who seem themselves to be part of the land (Fig. 3). Behind them the sea is a playful wash of blue, and Jaffa is a mere sketch on the horizon. The two are wholly absorbed in their work, blessed by the rising sun, oblivious to the approach of a serene camel at the scene's right edge. They actually seem to be fashioning a replica of Jaffa, an activity in keeping with Gutman's own express vision of the city's architectonic space, his desire to "lean less on function for its own sake, and focus more on a longing for the East, on getting closer to the nature of the region."[14] The central location of the mural underscores the degree to which Gutman's "naive" drawings and stories about his Tel Aviv childhood have come to constitute a mythology of the city's origins—so much so that the catalog accompanying the recent exhibit matched Gutman's drawings with photographs from the period, concluding that the artist's "stories of the beginnings of the neighborhood of Ahuzat Bayit correspond with the reality and historical events of those days."[15]

Gutman's work, especially the images form his 1959 memoir, *A Little Town with Few People in It*, has become a virtual substitute for a genuine and more complicated sense of Tel Aviv's history. "The Beginnings of Ahuzat Bayit" contains a number of key iconic elements of Gutman's Tel Aviv work: dotted lines indicating the imprint of new paths and footprints, a giant sycamore, a dripping water faucet, Dr. Chaim Hissin on his donkey, the water tower, and the Gymnasium straddling the end of Herzl Street (Fig. 4). With the exception of the more polemical tone of its final section, the memoir is gently nostalgic; episodes are related through the impressionable eyes of a young child, and the incidents and characters described regarding the city's founding are both unique and emblematic. On the one hand, the author seems to recall in associative fashion the formative scenes of his childhood, which is implicitly understood as Tel Aviv's "childhood" as well. On the other hand, specific episodes and characters are fleshed out, primarily for their paradigmatic value—the first house, the wheelbarrow brigade, the builders, the Arabs—but also because they are what the artist happens to remember.

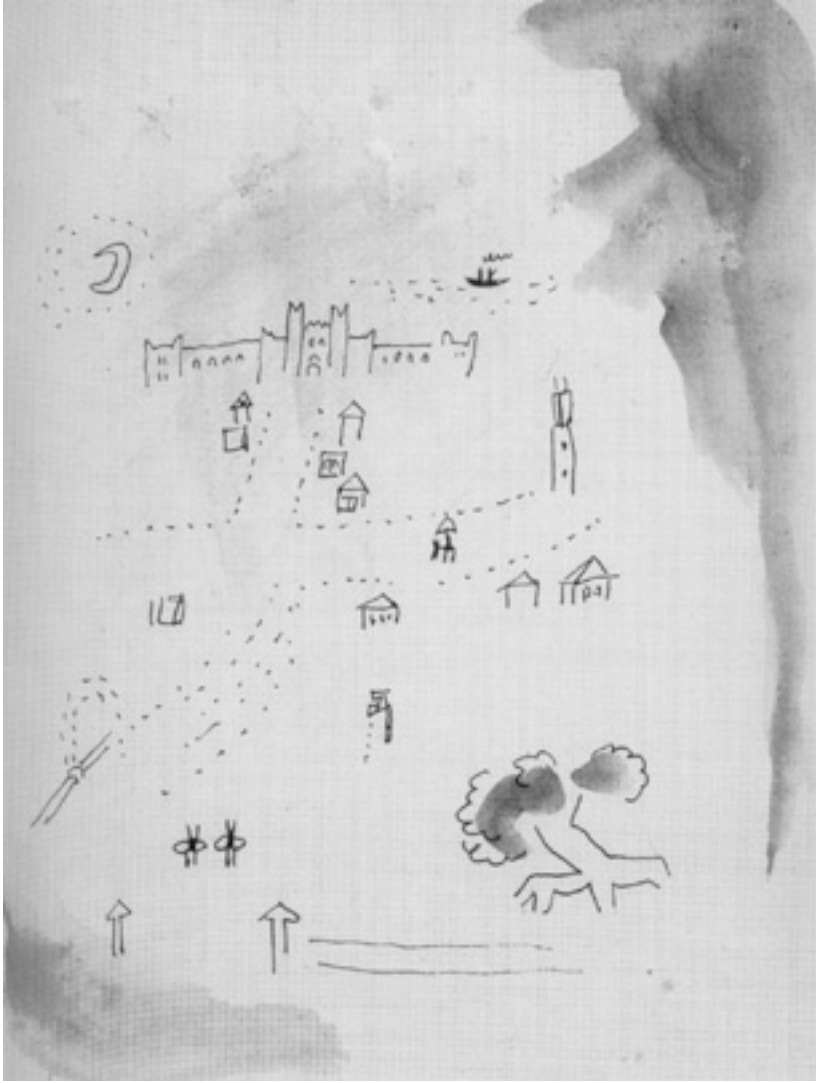Fig. 3. Nachum Gutman Installation in Rabin Square in honor of the ninetieth anniversary of Tel Aviv's founding, December 1999. (Photo by author.)

Fig. 4. Nachum Gutman, "The Beginnings of Ahuzat Bayit" (ca. 1959).
(The Nachum Gutman Museum.)

Given this weave of personal memory as exemplary episode, Gutman's memoirs do not read as, nor should they be considered, "history." Neither do they pretend to an exclusive or authoritative tone; in the words of Asher Barash's disclaimer preceding his novel about Tel Aviv during World War I, *Like a Besieged City*, he

> does not intend to depict people and incidents that truly existed, but to paint a general picture of the suburb of Tel Aviv and its mood . . . as the picture was stored in the vision of my memory. Readers who were witness to those and other days are requested not to measure things by their veracity. Their truth is in the degree to which they are poetry. The above remarks are made also by the book's illustrator [Gutman].[16]

Gutman himself makes the point even more explicitly in what amounts to a manifesto for the importance of illustration, published in 1928, a year before the disturbances of 1929, which provoked some of his most openly political drawings. In "On Illustration," Gutman outlines the place of the illustrator, and illustration, within the literary work:

> Illustration is not meant merely as a decorative adornment. The illustrator is a partner in the literary work, bone of its bone. . . . Illustration is an organic part of the printed book. Not simply a picture but an integral part of the content. Like the accompaniment to music, illustration is the accompaniment to the literary content. Its role is to supplement what isn't said or only hinted at as a *leitmotif,* it joins passages together, emphasizes moments, determines the frame and creates the atmosphere of a work. It also brings the book's content closer to life, by giving it a garment and purchase in the reader's imagination. A purchase in fantasy and not hammering it with nails. Because if illustration is exact it will stunt the reader's imagination, the freedom of his thought, its freshness and all of his individual taste will slacken as a result.[17]

The illustration, working with the text, opens a space for the reader in which his or her imagination is free to experience the work according to "individual taste." Illustration that is overly exact limits the play of fantasy; instead, the images should work more subtly, contributing to the work's atmosphere and accentuating its leitmotifs. Illustration is not meant to duplicate life but to bring the work closer to it. It is up to the individual reader to supply the final connection, to judge the work by its truth as "poetry" and not for its historical accuracy or veracity.

In spite of these remarks describing their limitations as objective historical documents, Gutman's drawings have come to dominate public discourse about the city's history. Their prominence is an indication

of what occurs as urban topography changes, and actual memories of a city's streets and public spaces fade and scatter: "the many voices of the vernacular in particular are stilled as an officially recreated history takes form."[18] Such an officially recreated history is organized repeatedly in popular histories and guidebooks about Tel Aviv, manuals of civic pride for the resident visiting that other country called the past. One book states: "It is their civic duty to know their city and its history":

> The visitor to a city wishing to see its sights without the aid of a guide [book] is like someone in a restaurant ordering a meal without a menu. Both instances involve the danger that the guest is likely to miss the best and most noteworthy.[19]

These texts of internal tourism in Tel Aviv regularly feature Gutman's illustrations. For example, the *Midrakhon ha-tapuz* or "orange guide," published by the Historical Museum of Tel Aviv–Jaffa, tells a story "from Ahuzat Bayit to Little Tel Aviv." It leads the visitor on the "path of the orange," back to "those good old days" (which even it has the good sense to put in quotes). It stops alongside still-existing structures and explains their former function, and it substitutes Gutman's drawings for places that no longer exist, such as the train that ran on Herzl Street. This staple approach follows the path of the orange groves that also no longer exist, back to a circumscribed, iconic vision of Tel Aviv's past.

We cannot overestimate the importance of these guidebooks in an immigrant-dense country like Israel, where most of its residents were initially as ignorant as tourists. Whereas in cities like Paris, where "the ties that bound the city . . . to its history were revealed to the spectator through its architecture . . . [and] 'history' so embodied in the fabric of the city represented an ordering structure enabling each spectator to understand its heroic and virtuous lessons,"[20] Tel Avivians apparently needed help in understanding and appreciating the meaning of their own more modest surroundings and monuments of civic pride. The city was thus presented as a kind of artifact to be studied and explored by its residents, in the same way that *moledet* (homeland) lessons in school emphasized the importance of *yediat ha-arets* (knowledge or love of the land) through first-hand encounters with the landscape.[21]

In the near-seamless triumphal narrative of "building and being built"—the motto on the city's crest, taken from Jeremiah—there is an occasional ripple. One example is *The Book of Tel Aviv Street Names*, published in 1944 as a primer for residents who did not know the origins of the names of the city's streets: "There is almost no major

personality in Israel that doesn't have a street in Tel Aviv named after them; and there's almost no community which symbolizes something in the life of the Hebrew people that doesn't have a street named for it in Tel Aviv."[22] Initially, the streets in Ahuzat Bayit were not given official names but were called various names by early residents. Eventually, however, street names became another way of marking the city as "Hebrew," and the names were often drawn from Jewish history or important figures in contemporary Jewish life.

An informational booklet published by the Tel Aviv city police chief in 1925 lists the following streets: Ahad Ha-am, Allenby, Bugrashov, Bialik, Balfour, Bezalel, Grzenberg, Herzl, Hess, Rambam, Ha-Shahar, Yehuda Ha-Levi, Lilienblum, Montefiore, Mohilewer, Meshutaf, Nahalat Binyamin, Pines, Kalischer, Rothschild, and Sheinken.[23] By 1944, however, the city had expanded well beyond Ahuzat Bayit, containing over 500 streets, and had also acquired another explanatory force for their naming: the epigraph of *The Book of Tel Aviv Street Names*, a chilling variation on Psalms—"Im eshkahekh golah tishkah yemini" (If I forget thee o golah, may my right hand lose its cunning)—demonstrates the importance of a connection to the Diaspora even as the idea of Exile was ostensibly rejected. The book promotes the triumphal narrative of Tel Aviv as "the first Hebrew city" but simultaneously anchors Tel Aviv in the past—in this case, a specifically Jewish, diasporic past. The book, written in the shadow of the war, offers this delineation of what the city could offer its newest citizens, who might have had reservations about its appeal:[24]

> Tel Aviv is the only corner in the world where a person from the nation of Israel can walk in complete security. The Jew knows this natural freedom in no other place in the world, including more enlightened places. Even within the most praiseworthy of metropolises in the golah, the Jew cannot acquire his freedom, except at the cost of minimizing his Jewish image.[25]

An enlarged volume on Tel Aviv streets appeared in 1967 and demonstrated the degree to which the grid of the city, whose population included a high percentage of survivors, had indeed become a kind of quotidian memorial: the book contains the names of 20 new streets beginning with the word *kehilat* (community of) in memory of important Jewish communities in the Diaspora, including Odessa, Budapest, Bialystok, Brisk, Vienna, Venetsia, Warsaw, Zhitomir, Czernovitz, Lvov, Lodz, Saloniki, Sofia, Poszna, Kovna, Kishniev, Krakow, and Riga.[26]

The role of the Diaspora accorded to the city in *The Book of Tel Aviv Street Names* counters somewhat the triumphal narrative of the city's

origins, and it complicates the nostalgic version of the city suggested in the use of Gutman's work. This challenge occurs at the microlevel of the street, street names being one way in which a city manifests its sense of self. Street names continue to be an indication of Tel Aviv's relation to the Diaspora. The distance the city has apparently traveled from its one-time promise to commemorate the golah is evidenced in the recent street-sign shuffle on Frug Street. Solomon Frug was a poet who wrote mainly in Russian and Yiddish. On the Tel Aviv street named in his honor, new signs bore the name "Prug," misspelled in accordance with modern Hebrew rules of pronunciation. (Local residents, including members of a Yiddish organization on an adjacent street, complained, and most of the signs have been changed.)[27]

The privileging of the street, and street life, as especially indicative of Tel Aviv's identity is noted in Nachum Sokolov's 1934 observation: "The street . . . is the visual image and embodiment of the soul of the people living in the land, and emphasizes the essence of their character."[28] An ad hoc effort was behind the first suggestion to name a street in honor of the Baron Edmund Rothschild, who had sponsored the early establishment of Jewish settlements in Palestine. In 1910, a group of residents wrote to the Town Committee (precursor to the municipality), requesting that their street be named after Rothschild: "We dare believe this act would help bring the Baron and the Zionist movement into closer relation." (Their street became, in fact, Lilienblum.)

Rothschild Boulevard itself was initially called Rehov Ha-am (The People/Nation Street)[29] and was designed explicitly as a public space, with trees, benches, a kiosk, and an open central area for strolling, a place where its residents could see and be seen (Fig. 5). "The boulevard" (as it was called in Hebrew) was one of Ahuzat Bayit's earliest streets and is featured in numerous photographs from the period as an example of the city's modernity and self-consciousness as an evolving urban space. The neighborhood had originally been planned as a quiet, affluent suburb of Jaffa, with one- and two-story single family homes surrounded by private gardens. This plan, and the landowners' subsequent brief flirtation with Patrick Geddes's Garden City model, eventually gave way in the face of an increased demand for housing and commercial development. Urban planning and architectural style reflected the desire to build a city that was both European and the antithesis of Jewish life in the Diaspora, as well as somehow local. The boulevard eventually became the site of the city's earliest examples of International Style architecture, which from the 1930s came to dominate building in Tel Aviv, and later in Israel as a whole.[30]
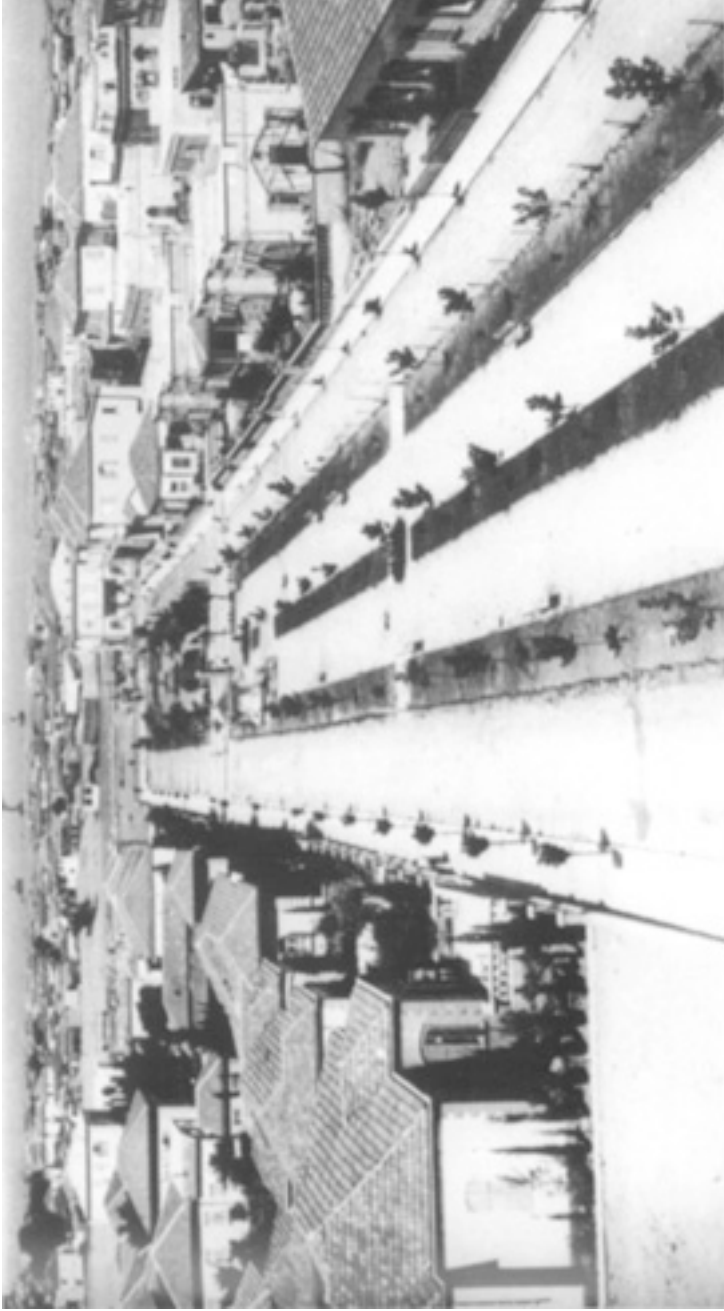
Fig. 5. Rothschild Boulevard, view toward the sea, 1913. (Soskin Archive, The Historical Museum of Tel Aviv–Jaffa.)

From the start, the appearance and utility of the city's public spaces—including the boulevard—were hotly debated. By public space I mean those arenas officially designated to fulfill some civic or municipal function, sites that constitute the public sphere through daily use (streets, sidewalks, squares, or parks), and semi-public areas surrounding private homes such as gardens, balconies, and external facades. Despite financial and other practical limitations, Tel Aviv's external aspects were a point of civic pride and were meant to reflect its modern sensibility. A typical observation, published in 1922 in the daily *Doar ha-yom*, drew on the stereotype of Jews as essentially incapable of aesthetic appreciation:

> In our Hebrew city, there is a large flaw, obvious to any foreign visitor or anyone with an aesthetic sense, and this is the lack of gardens around the houses. Beautiful, large houses stand naked and exposed with no surrounding trees or vegetation. And these houses bring in a reasonable rent to their owners, who then become wealthy; these same gentlemen, however, are stingy when it comes to fencing and planting a garden; this lack casts a shadow on the residents of Tel Aviv vis-à-vis outsiders. . . . [A]nyone who sees the city says "the Jews build great, beautiful houses for the rent income, and not out of a sense of beauty planted within them."[31]

In retrospect, Rothschild Boulevard has become an icon of the city's history, a kind of virtual memorial appearing in innumerable literary and pseudo-historical descriptions. S. Yizhar recalls his childhood on Montefiore Street, near the boulevard,

> with its small trees that had difficulty growing because of the thinness of the loose, clean sand, that were planted there precisely because of the thinness of this loose and clean sand, because in that place there had been a large valley before there was Tel Aviv, and the pioneers with their famous wheelbarrows were called for, and they brought sand from the golden sand dunes into that valley and filled it up until the homeowners were afraid to build there because the house that they had built with what remained of their money might sink into the loose sands, and they decided to plant trees to bind the flying sand to the solid earth.[32]

The boulevard in Yizhar's memoir is an arena for a mock heroic battle against Tel Aviv's natural elements, the sands that threaten the houses of its residents as well as their efforts to tame them. Even with its limited landscaping,[33] the sandy and eventually shaded central passage became the site of Tel Aviv's first "Hyde Park," known as "the parliament of

Rothschild," a place of talk—of argument, news, and conversation. In
Natan Alterman's vivid description:

> Rothschild Boulevard, as is well known, is a meeting place for people who
> don't have a penny in their pocket. Unemployed workers, members of the
> "middle class," looking for some kind of class, even less than middle;
> loafers, gossips, prattlers, the news-thirsty and spreaders-of-lies, those
> dying of curiosity and just plain old Jews—all these happen upon Roth-
> schild, a few steps away from the flow of the street, like having a "picnic"
> by the banks of a noisy river. Near a tree that was called in the glory days
> of the place the "tree of knowledge," the words of fools and wisemen could
> be leisurely heard. . . .
>
> Subject mingled with subject, as did interruption upon interruption.
> Rhythmic, gnashing Bessarabian Yiddish; wide, sonorous Polish Yiddish;
> and Lithuanian Yiddish with its large *ahs* and expansive *ays*.[34]

Alterman's Rothschild resembles several places: the poet's East Euro-
pean native landscape, where large cities were often bisected by a
"noisy river"; the biblical Garden of Eden; and a kind of open-air Jewish
market, where barter is conducted in vibrant, egalitarian fashion in the
lingua franca of Yiddish.

Paintings of the boulevard from the 1930s depict the boulevard's
central portion, including the kiosk, and they accentuate the rows of
trees lining both sides and the respite the boulevard could offer from
busy city streets. The colors are dull, autumn-like; as a group, they
resemble Parisian streets more than anything in Tel Aviv.[35] The boule-
vard and its adjacent streets were also featured in many early photo-
graphs of the city, particularly in the enormous catalog of work by
Avraham Soskin. As suggested in the above discussion of Soskin's "land
lottery" photo, the use of these photographs as historical documents is
problematic. However, the images do display a kind of historical con-
sciousness, inasmuch as they often suggest an awareness—on the part
of both Soskin and his subjects—of the potential historical value of the
photograph's site and moment. Soskin himself published a "then-and-
now" edition of his Tel Aviv photographs, contrasting photos of the
same sites taken in 1910 and in 1926.[36] The photographs have a staged
quality to them, and the gravity of taking a photograph creates a sense
of "making history": the subjects usually stare seriously into the camera,
into the future. In the words of Aunt Shlomtsiyon's cynical and prop-
erty-speculating father, the Ashkenazim "love to have their pictures
taken by Soskin, posing pushing wheelbarrows."[37]

Soskin's image from the early 1920s of the Hotel Ben Nahum at the
corner of Allenby and Rothschild is a classic example of a photograph

of Tel Aviv's historical landscape (Fig. 6). The building is framed so that its centrally defining column and cap, flanked by wings of arched or protruding balconies, are displayed to best advantage. Surrounded by a band of white sidewalk and the well-trampled sand of the still unpaved streets, the structure resembles those of other Soskin photos from this period: mirage-like and fantastical. The scene is otherwise deserted, save for a blurred figure in the foreground and the silhouette of a child waiting at the *gazoz* (soda) cart in the lower right corner. The photograph stresses the newness of human forms and of human construction in this particular landscape.

A picture taken two decades later by an anonymous photographer from the same position and angle treats the hotel itself as backdrop, its outlines overexposed and barely visible through the ficus and jacaranda branches (Fig. 7). The intervening years have produced a vibrant street life—small businesses, pedestrians, bicycles, an overloaded truck. Center stage in this later photo is the idea of image-making itself: the photographer and his portable equipment (a tripod and camera with black sleeve, a chair with screen backdrop). The photo captures a moment before the image was taken: the photographer fiddles with the screen, the client prepares himself by placing his hands on his thighs and looking into the camera, while a passerby, dressed in a curious combination of jacket and shorts, examines photographs pasted up alongside the camera.

This stretch of Rothschild, west of Allenby, was filled with photographers and their clients, who took advantage of the shade of the boulevard's relatively considerable foliage. Perhaps the anonymous photographer from 1946 even had Soskin's photograph in mind, so ubiquitous were Soskin's monumental images of early Tel Aviv. The landscape in the later photograph is dehistoricized to the extent that it purports to record an ostensibly ordinary and repeatable moment. Nonetheless, examining the two photographs together demonstrates the degree to which unregulated public spaces may become monumental—that is, "primary elements of the city persisting through time," including "built forms such as the trace of an original street plan, the impression of a city's pre-urban nucleus, or the material evidence of its neighborhoods, streets, brides, arcades." In explaining the architect Aldo Rossi's conception of these monumental forms in the city, Boyer argues that their "mental images impressed themselves on the spectator's or architect's mind; they formed both the memory of each city and created a formal unity out of all its parts. They were the past we still experience in the present, and they enabled us to read the city in a contiguous manner."[38] These forms may be read in both texts and

Fig. 6. Hotel Ben Nahum, Rothschild Boulevard and Allenby Street, 1920s. (Soskin Archive, The Historical Museum of Tel Aviv–Jaffa.)

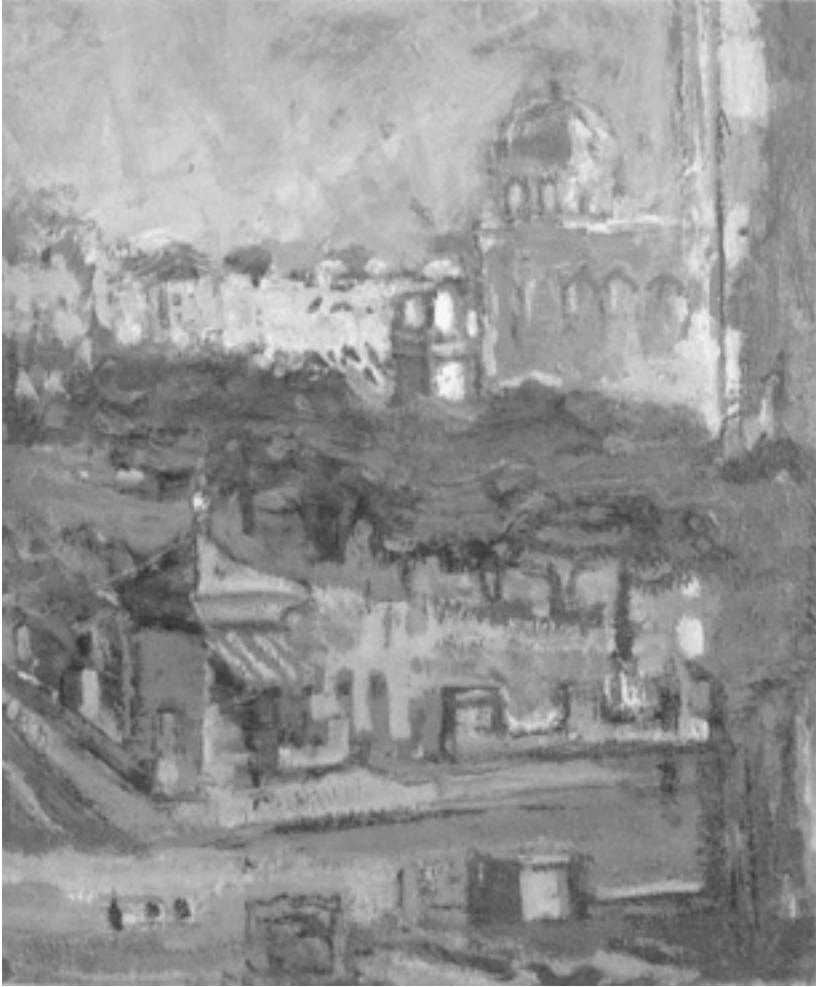*Tel Aviv's
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Fig. 7. Corner of Rothschild Boulevard and Allenby Street, 1946. Photographer unknown. (Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, Keren Ha-yesod Collection.)

images that document the evolution of urban space as well as in their physical traces in the city itself.

The street corner depicted in the two photographs—Rothschild and Allenby—is a central public site where history reveals how the production of cultural identity has been represented in Tel Aviv's physical plane. Today the intersection is one of the city's busiest, and many pass through it without noticing the surrounding buildings and landmarks. However, traces of an ostensibly minor but revealing historical episode are still observable. In 1922, at Rothschild 32, the Pension Ginosar or Hotel Ben Nahum opened. The building was designed in the "eclectic style" by Yehuda Megidovitch, at the time City Engineer. Eclecticism, the dominant architectural style in Tel Aviv in the 1920s, was more a search for a style than an actual school; it brought together elements of ostensibly disparate styles in order to fashion an architectural language appropriate to a particular building in a specific site. Gilead Duvshani describes two contradictory pulls of eclecticism in Megidovitch's work—the rational and the romantic—and roots them in the architect's early training and professional experience in Odessa.[39]

Eclecticism's duality seems almost perfectly suited to the construction of the city's first hotel, a building simultaneously public and private, and appropriately located at the intersection of a public promenade (Rothschild) and a primarily residential street (Allenby). The building's "public" facade consists of arches facing Rothschild's gardens; the openings in its "private" facade resemble that of the neighboring residential buildings on Allenby.[40] These two aspects are joined at the corner by stairs, crowned by a dome. The dome itself also represents these two styles—the dense rationalism of the columns topped by the floating dome's romantic whimsy.[41] The hotel is a ubiquitous element of representations of the boulevard throughout Tel Aviv's early years, including Yehezkel Streichman's "The Kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard" (1937; also known as "Rubennko's Kiosk"), which features the dome atop blooming poinciana trees and the smaller cap of the kiosk (Fig. 8).[42]

The hotel was considered enough of a Tel Aviv landmark to be included in a series of postcards dating from the early 1920s and printed by the German firm Artsenu. The production of city-scene postcards was one way in which nineteenth-century metropolises defined themselves to the world at large; they typically spotlighted the city's signature spaces and structures but were either entirely devoid of human figures or featured human forms in secondary fashion.[43] The first postcards of Tel Aviv were ordered by the Town Committee in

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Fig. 8. "The Kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard" (1937), oil on canvas,
by Yehezkel Streichman. (Courtesy of Tsila Streichman.)

1912; they featured Soskin's photographs and were printed in copious quantities, enough for the city's small population to write several times over to family and friends abroad.[44]

One card bearing a photograph of the hotel, dated June 26, 1924, was mailed to Berlin from Tel Aviv by the architect Alexander Levy to Davis Treitsche, a leading figure in the German Zionist movement.[45] The card is a dense artifact illustrating not only Tel Aviv's evolving self-image but also the strong relation between the new city and European society. The significance of postcards generally lies in their play of text and image, and this card contains a particularly interesting mix of codes. Levy's terse message concerning metal wire samples probably pertains to the building of the "Pagoda," under construction at the time; his German scrawl is bracketed by two lines of printed Hebrew— the Berlin address of Artsenu, and the ideological imperative to write in Hebrew: "Yehudi ktav ivrit!" (Write in Hebrew, Jew!). Alongside the printed spine dividing the message and address space are written the words "Alexander Levy, Tel Aviv, Palestine." A postal stamp and postmark, in English and Arabic, further complements the card's dizzying semiotic trajectory: printed in Hebrew in Berlin, handwritten in German in Tel Aviv, and mailed back to Berlin from British mandatory Palestine.

The Hotel Ben Nahum featured panoramic views of the sea and the Judean hills as well as modern conveniences such as electricity and phone service.[46] Its opening was marked by the unveiling of a large statue over its entrance by the American sculptor Y. D. Gordon. Three figures—a rabbi and two students—were surrounded by figures of animals, including dolphins and an eagle with outstretched wings. The statue provoked an immediate response from Tel Aviv's religious leaders, who called it a "statue in the Greek spirit," attacking it for its violation of the Second Commandment prohibition of representation of the human body. The statue was viewed as a potential threat to the development of local Jewish art, and a public letter called on the Town Committee to enact a citywide prohibition on statues with human form. It was seen as particularly offensive in light of the fact that the city's new synagogue was under construction a short distance away, on Allenby Street. In fact, the cornerstone had been laid the previous fall.[47] Religious leaders also expressed concern as to what visitors to the city would think: "Here the Jews have statues on their homes just like the other nations."[48]

The statue's unveiling, which had been announced in the papers, provoked this alternative reaction in *Doar ha-yom*: the paper commended the impulse behind the sculpture—to beautify Tel Aviv's

public spaces. It did not, however, appreciate the aesthetic value of this particular piece.[49] The rabbinate appealed directly to the Town Committee, which refused to interfere, replying that it was a private matter.[50] This same reasoning undergirded the committee's responses to many complaints about various physical aspects of the public sphere, including illegal construction and maintenance, as well as its response to a 1913 complaint about piano playing on the Sabbath: the Town Committee maintained it would not interfere in religious matters concerning private behavior in the home.[51] The sculpture was eventually removed after, it seems, the religious community put some sort of ban on the hotel.

Across the street at number 29, we find another example of art with its face toward the public sphere: the home of Yitzhak Lederberg, built in 1925 by the architect Yosef Berlin, who designed 10 other homes in this stretch of the boulevard between Allenby and Balfour[52] (Fig. 9). Its facade is adorned with ceramic plaques by Yaakov Eisenberg, from drawings by Zeev Raban, both under the tutelage of Boris Shatz, the founder of Jerusalem's Bezalel Academy. Shatz's involvement in the creation of Tel Aviv's public face is a brief but particularly interesting chapter in the city's history. With the influx of Polish, largely petite bourgeoisie immigrants in 1924, building in Tel Aviv was booming.[53] Shatz personally appealed to Meir Dizengoff to commission Bezalel to produce ceramic signs for Tel Aviv's buildings and streets, but his influence was most famously felt in the design of the Gymnasia Herzlyia, whose exterior ornamentation reflected Shatz's commitment to a local, Jewish style that drew on ancient Mediterranean motifs. Shatz found a receptive audience in Tel Aviv's most influential citizens, including Dizengoff, who had praised the "Hebrew style" of Shatz's solo exhibit at the Gymnasia in 1922.[54]
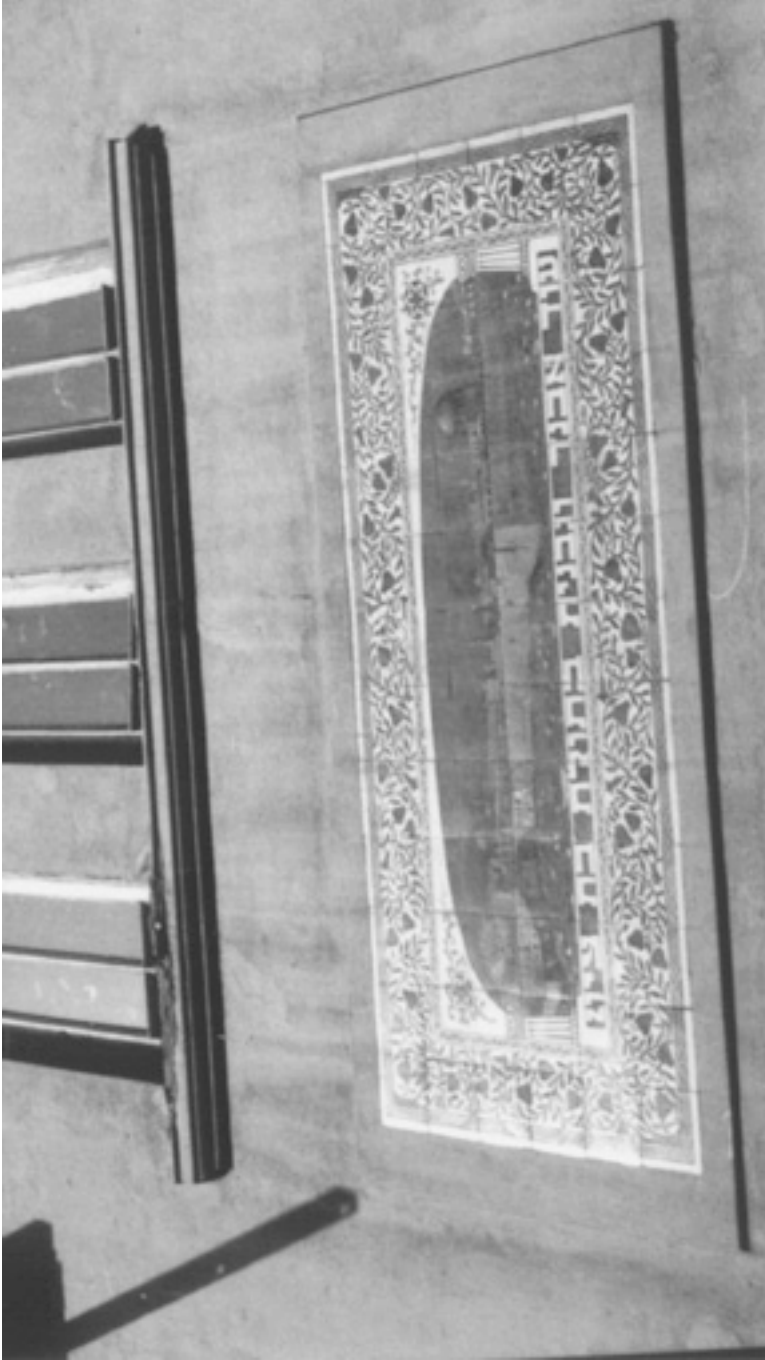
The plaque over the entrance to Lederberg House bears a large scene of Jerusalem containing the quote "Od evnekh ve-nivnet betulat bat tsiyon" (Again I will build you, and you shall be built, virgin daughter of Zion) (Fig. 10). (The same quote was chosen by S. Ben-Zion as a motto for the city crest of Tel Aviv, which was designed by his son, Nachum Gutman.)[55] The other ceramics depict scenes of biblical agricultural activities and are an integral part of the building's architecture, fitting in snugly between porches and windows. The scenes were chosen to illustrate the importance of working the land; they are particularly ironic given that the owners of this particular house were not physical laborers. The keyhole shape of the scenes further thematizes the owners' desire to be perceived as participating in this central aspect of national renewal.

Fig. 9. Lederberg House, corner of Rothschild Boulevard and Allenby Street, 1999.
(Photo by author.)

Fig. 10. Eisenberg's ceramic plaque over the entrance to the Lederberg House. (Photo by author.)

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Tel Aviv's Rothschild

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Both the iconoclastic incident involving Gordon's statue and the Lederberg ceramics provide an interesting context in which to examine public expressions of cultural and religious affinity in the city as well as the degree to which the public sphere was expected to reflect elements of the populace's collective identity and heritage. In fact, they are evidence of the competing visions of Tel Aviv. Both Gordon's statue and Shatz's ceramics adorned private buildings yet were perceived as a reflection of cultural identity in the public sphere. They may, in a sense, be considered Tel Aviv's first public works of art. One raised controversy, the other did not. One was seen as "Greek"—an all-purpose word for foreign influence that retained a sense of paganism and idol-worship—and the other was praised for its "Hebrew" use of ancient and privileged, local, Jewish tropes. Gordon's statue was eventually removed, apparently to satisfy a community that does not usually receive great play in histories of Tel Aviv—its religious leaders. Given the overwhelmingly secular march of modernity that Tel Aviv is meant to embody, it is perhaps not surprising that this incident receives scant coverage in histories of the city.[56] The ceramics, however, are still in place and are considered an essential part of the city's architectural identity.[57]

Photographs from the 1920s show that, in the middle of the boulevard, between the Hotel Ben Nahum and Lederberg House, was a third mediating building—a curious structure with Byzantine columns underneath what looks like the minaret of a mosque. It was one of the city's first electric generators and was designed by Alex Barveld (whose drawings served as the basis for the Great Synagogue in Tel Aviv, with its enormous dome, and who also designed the Technion in Haifa). The cap reflected a desire to utilize "Eastern" or "Oriental" elements and was meant to resemble the top of a sheik's tomb. Barveld eventually erased the eclectic localism from his work, in favor of the cleaner lines of International Style in the 1930s, a trend followed by many architects during this period.

Together with Barveld's mosque-style generator, the corner's evolution demonstrates how cultural identity is negotiated in the public sphere. It contains a compact rendering of the spectrum of cultural influences and directions possible in a formative decade in the city's development. Select elements of this decade have been preserved or emphasized; for example, the incident involving Gordon's statue is perceived as a minor episode in histories of the city. Within the context of Ahuzat Bayit as a whole, however, it allows us to examine the public expression of cultural and religious affinity: what *should* the public sphere reflect? What should public art look like? Should it be Jewish,

or "Hebrew," or something else? How was Tel Aviv to compete with the weight of Jerusalem's historical claims? What is the relation between the public and the private spheres, and what responsibility does the latter bear toward the former in matters of national and cultural identity? Finally, how does a modernist city (which prides itself on newness) create a sense of an authoritative cultural tradition?

In recent years, Rothschild Boulevard has become the site of numerous public sculptures, often designed as part of the renovation or preservation of its historic buildings. Some of these sculptures explicitly address their historical surroundings; some are merely whimsical. For example, the three plastic figures on the balcony of Rothschild 96—"Introduction: Prologue" by Ofra Tsimblista—seemed to be fixed in mid-song; their postures also suggest a declamation of some sort, recalling the nature of the boulevard as an arena for public discussion. As in the example of the objections to Gordon's statue, despite Tel Aviv's proclaimed modern and modernist intentions, the production of public space was tied to more traditional ideas about visuality in Jewish culture. The Second Commandment is again implied as a standard in a brief discussion of the proper Hebrew term for "memorial" that appeared in the official municipality bulletin from 1950. The authors favored the use of *yad* over that of *andartah* because the latter is related to the "Greek word *andreyus*, derived from *anor*, which means "a human being." According to the article, given that the statues in Tel Aviv are not of human figures, the term *andartah* is not appropriate; instead, they should be called "commemorative statues," or *yad*.[58]

Although monuments encourage an appreciation of the past, as the city develops around them they are likely to be observed in isolation and only "tenuously linked" to the city as a whole.[59] The Founders' Monument was erected in 1951 at the corner of Rothschild and Nahalat Binyamin, in the place where the water tower had been. Its three levels depict foundational periods in the city's history: the "leveling of the sands" with workers living in tents surrounded by animals; followed by "Tel Aviv's beginnings," the building of the Gymnasia, the water tower, and Dizengoff's house; and, finally, Dizengoff Square with its fountain and the construction of Bialik's House and the National Theater. On the back of the monument are the names of the 60 original "shareholders" of Ahuzat Bayit.

Micha Ulman's "Yesod" (Foundation) from 1989 is located at the other end of the boulevard, close to the National Theater (Fig. 11). Ulman's topic is not the human agents of history ("the Founders") but the process of history itself. The piece is less interested in assessing or delineating origins, or personalities, than in meditating on the often

Fig. 11. "Foundation" (1989) by Micha Ulman, Rothschild Boulevard. (Photo by author.)

intangible yet powerful by-products of historical change. Like the Founders' Monument, however, Ulman's "Foundation" also addresses the question of roots, the process through with they are formed, and the relation between what is observable on the surface and what remains buried underneath. Ulman's materials are concrete and soil. The site's play of empty space and filled-in holes is barely visible as you approach it and does not seem to be noticed by people walking by and over it. According to Ulman, it is either a place in which a home is built or the remains of one; either "the tip of the iceberg, the edge of some subterranean structure which cannot be seen in its entirety, or the "archaeological remains of a structure which has been destroyed."[60] It resembles a house after an earthquake that has been filled with dirt (like Ulman's "Sand Day" [1997], in which the artist filled an entire gallery with sand) or the remains of a sunken relic. Ulman himself says "I'm a man who digs."[61] He has dug holes in Arab villages, in Jerusalem, and in Berlin, compelling visitors to interact with the work by stepping on or over it. His work engages structural notions of surface and depth, thereby probing the relation between artifact and trace. Ulman's interest in digging and holes grew out of the possibility of whether a hole can be a sculpture, or "what is the meaning of lack and absence?"[62]

One might also ask what it means to dig in a place like Tel Aviv, which has relatively few layers of topsoil. Perhaps Ulman's work will serve as an archaeological trace for generations to come who wish to recover and recollect fin-de-siècle Tel Aviv.[63] Together the two pieces demonstrate the evolution of Rothschild Boulevard as a symbol of the city's history. Both the Founders' Monument and "Foundation" reflect on the question of roots, and they suggest an archaeological model for a future understanding or appreciation of the past. Yet they organize for the visitor/viewer different versions of Tel Aviv's past: the Founders' Monument offers a neatly segmented and progressive vision of the city developing organically, almost like the fish and plant life at its base, out of Jonah's Jaffa; Ulman's "Foundation" places Tel Aviv's relatively shallow roots at the center of his project, a notion that is a part of the daily life of Tel Avivians, whether they choose to notice it or not, to walk over it, or to pause and reflect.

My description of Rothschild Boulevard has borrowed, metaphorically, Ulman's archaeological model. By locating artifacts, traces, and representations of the past and placing them in their respective historical contexts and in dialogue with one another, I have tried to approximate some idea of the city's "sense of self." This potentially slippery term suggests a problematic erasure of human agency; who creates a city's identity if not the citizens, artists, and bureaucrats who inhabit,

represent, and regulate it? Yet the cumulative effect of these multiple imprints and impressions—the often inchoate whole that is any city—is best described by a model that admits its necessarily limited, subjective scope, offering not a panoramic or comprehensive history of agents and sources but instead specific spatial and temporal slices of the city, chosen for their seemingly paradigmatic quality as well as their instability, their tendency to trouble or question their very exemplariness and, indeed, the possibility of any single coherent rendition of the city. With Ulman, I am ultimately less interested in historical agents and sources than with the palpable effects of history—or its absence—on the contemporary plane of the city.

The kind of activity provoked by Ulman's "Foundation" is eerily anticipated in Yaakov Shabtai's *Past Continuous* (*Zikhron dvarim* [1977]), an epic novel of a crumbling, mid-1970s Tel Aviv.[64] The novel depicts an area adjacent to Rothschild Boulevard, the poor and somewhat make-shift neighborhood of Nordia. Toward the end of the novel, Goldman walks through the remains of this neighborhood of his youth:

> Goldman plodded through the sand and passed the place where the big shack, which had disappeared without a trace, had once stood, skirted the mulberry tree and arrived at the place which had once been the garden in front of Shmuel and Bracha and Grandfather Baruch Chaim and Grandmother Hava's shack, which had been demolished like most of the others, but of which the concrete blocks forming the foundation had miraculously remained standing, tracing the floor plan of the shack on the sand. . . . The sand, which had been hidden underneath the floorboard, was now exposed, full of broken glass and china and dead leaves and stems and pieces of coal and scraps of paper borne by the wind, and Goldman bent down and picked up a piece of china and played with it as he went into the second room, which had once held the big iron bed on which Grandmother Hava had slept with Grandfather Baruch Chaim and on which they had laid his body covered with a white sheet, and also a clumsy armchair and a heavy sideboard bearing a few secular and sacred books. . . . [T]he room was almost unbearably stuffy and overcrowded, was always full of the smell of mattresses and down cushions and valerian drops, and although the walls and ceilings were painted a harsh white, like the front room, it was never properly lit, but now everything was wide open and dazzlingly bright—the broad summer sky stretched above Goldman's head with its yellow sun, and the castor oil plant, which used to grow up the side of the shack, penetrated the room with its large leaves, a fresh purplish green—and Goldman, who stood looking around him for one more minute, walked through the wall and went on walking until he came to Dizengoff Street, on the other side of which a giant bulldozer was busy excavating.

From one day to the next, over the space of a few years, the city was rapidly and relentlessly changing its face, and right in front of his eyes it was engulfing the sand lots and the virgin fields, the vineyards and citrus groves and little woods and Arab villages, and afterwards the changes began invading the streets of the older parts of town, which were dotted here and there with simple one-storied houses surrounded by gardens with a few shrubs and flower beds, and sometimes vegetables and strawberries, and also cypress trees and lemon and orange and mandarin trees, or buildings which attempted to imitate the architectural beauties and splendours of Europe, in the style of Paris or Vienna or Berlin, or even of castles and palaces, but all these buildings no longer had any future because they were old and ill adapted to modern tastes and lifestyles . . . and Goldman, who was attached to these streets and houses because they, together with the sand dunes and virgin fields, were the landscape in which he had been born and grown up, knew that this process of destruction was inevitable, and perhaps even necessary, as inevitable as the change in the population of the town, which in the course of a few years had been filled with tens of thousands of new people, who in Goldman's eyes were invading outsiders who had turned him into a stranger in his own city.[65]

Nordia's small streets and their one-story homes, the surrounding sands and fields, the eclectic-style castles of Ahuzat Bayit—none of these were of any use in the face of rampant land speculation and rising property values. The novel is filled with descriptions of the city crumbling, being chipped away or bulldozed over; Tel Aviv's growth, "like a crazy creature over the sand dunes and the vineyards and the melon patches" (183) causes its inhabitants to feel like strangers in their own town.[66] Shabtai himself claimed to have felt like a refugee in his own hometown,[67] and the resultant anomie is palpable in the novel's extended series of interlocking physical and discursive *flânerie*: the male protagonists wander throughout the streets, cafés, and apartments of contemporary Tel Aviv, observing the traffic, the crowds along the beachfront and in commercial areas, and the intimate interactions in restaurants, in front of private homes, in living rooms. Walking the streets offers an escape from the heat and potential release from dark and depressing interiors; the outdoors seems to offer the possibility of human connection. However, their wandering also remind them of disintegration—both the city's and their own:

The sense of shame and sin continued to oppress him as he walked along the street, glancing from time to time at the girls standing with their little handbags on the corners or in the doorways of the gloomy old buildings, abandoned to neglect and the indifferent process of decay, with their

arched windows and doors and the rusty iron grilles with their pretty patterns embellishing the balconies, most of which were in darkness so that they looked as if nobody lived in them and all they contained were broken bits of furniture and dust and cobwebs and evil spirits. (162)

As the characters move through the city streets, they sense elements of the past behind the concrete forms of the present; the novel observes the city and their childhood through these memories as well as those of their extended family. Disparate temporal and spatial situations are woven together in near-seamless fashion, swinging in a single sentence between ostensibly discrete times and spaces and turning on a whim from the past to the present, in a manner not unlike the flâneur's aimless wandering along the city's streets. Just as the flâneur seems unattached and uninvolved—the ultimate observer, committed to neither a past result nor a future consequence of his actions—the narrative attempts to move in a perpetual present tense, recording the lives of the protagonists, who themselves continually stumble across elements of their past. Their attempts to find comfort in relations in the present are doomed by these old patterns; even after death, Goldman ruminates, "something of the other person remained behind as part of your being forever, and for years afterward the surface of the great ocean of oblivion would be disturbed by various troublesome memories (74–75). Like the bits of china and glass he encounters in the ruins of Yoel and Zippora's house, there is no explicit attempt to give meaning to these material bits of the past—they are simply there to be bumped into and counted.

Dan Miron argues that, more than any specific set of memories, the novel is driven by the "idea of memory"—a metaphysical concept, organizing individual sets of memories into a collective memory, which is attached to a particular landscape in a specific time period.[68] However, the workings of memory in the novel are ultimately much less tidy. Memory operates in almost anti-modernist fashion, if by modernist we mean the redolence of Proust's Madeleine, which is soaked in the past and provides comfort to the adult Marcel. There is no comparable moment of grace or transcendence in Shabtai's novel, no instance that even comes close. This absence is painfully obvious in the scene in which Goldman goes through his father's papers:

Goldman opened the cupboard, which no one had dared to approach as long as his father was alive.

The cupboard was very clean and neat and tidy. Next to the stamp collection and photograph albums, in which old pictures of fresh young

people and a happy family were preserved, there were empty checkbooks from Zerubavel Cooperative, Anglo-Palestine, and Barclay banks, and documents and payments dating back thirty and forty years for all kinds of donations and payments to institutions which for the most part had ceased to exist long ago. Goldman stood looking uneasily at the open cupboard for a moment with remembered fear and at the same time a strange feeling of proprietorship—all of a sudden everything was in his hands—and then he bent down slightly and rummaged carefully among the papers and documents and found the bank book and the insurance policy and savings certificates and government bonds, and also an old photograph of his sister's and his father's will. (173)

In another kind of novel, one more enchanted with the lasting value of images, the photo of his sister could have symbolized the recuperation of some painful memory of a private event—the death of a sibling—and even offered some insight into his father's experience as well.[69] Instead, Goldman simply flips through this element of his past along with the other documents. Side by side, in the same untouched chest, items marking a connection to the public sphere—checkbooks and receipts—are stored with what appears to be a register of similarly arbitrary barter-and-exchange in the domestic realm—younger, fresher, happier families.

Given that the literal meaning of the book's Hebrew title is "memory of things," these are the "things" that must be re-membered, a process that also entails recycling and reusing: Goldman's Aunt Zippora washed "the old clothes which were handed down from child to child, and cut the toes out of shoes grown too small for their owners, and turned old dresses into blouses and pants into jackets and tablecloths into dresses" (297). Her actions mark a relation between past and present of inter-changeability, of wearing through. Yet the novel's title also means "a memorandum of agreement," or protocol marking a formal, legal relationship. One of the novel's chief preoccupations concerns the relation between these two realms suggested in its title—the private and the public. Just as the "success"—or even desirability or feasibil-ity—of separating past from present remains an open question in the novel, the individual or private realm is repeatedly examined through the frame of the collective and is subject to the institutions and events of the public sphere. Ultimately, the novel questions the very possibility of describing a private life in a society that is so collectively structured. What constitutes a private life in a society and culture so undergirded by a commitment to collective ideals and experience? If there is no "true" flânerie in the city of one's birth—no escape from familiarity—

then in what kinds of spaces, through what sort of behavior, can an individual locate and lead a private life?

In the passage cited above, part of an extended section exploring the cohesion between past and present, Goldman walks back over the remaining block foundations of Uncle Shmuel and Aunt Bracha's home, observing the traces of family life left within: "the sand, which had been hidden beneath the floorboards, was uncovered and mixed with fragments of glass and china and with dried leaves and buds and bits of coal and paper that the wind had brought in." Goldman attempts, in vain, to give meaning to the remaining bits of past by naming them, noting them, walking over them. According to Tamar Berger, Goldman is ultimately a "failed" flâneur:

> Shabtai goes in the wake of these markers in the hope of turning them into signs, of granting them meaning, to resuscitate them and turn them into experience, to give them back their halo—their authenticity and individuality, to stitch them together into a single story. However, the "things" remain autonomous. Crumbling, disconnected.[70]

Goldman's flânerie, and that of the other characters in the novel, is even more fundamentally flawed: there is little anonymity to their walking. Though feeling themselves estranged, they cannot truly "get lost" in the city of their birth. Goldman's passage through the sand in which he stumbles physically over pieces of the past and tries to describe them, sieve-like, in the net of his present, is an allegory of the narrative's attempt as a whole to remember, to catch the past in the net of the present tense.

The handling of the past in this passage is both archaeological and curatorial—a discovery and an uncovering, as well as an attempt to arrange, align, describe, and explain. Yet the novel as a whole is as much a paean to memory as an exercise in its failure. What the novel does offer us is the boulevard itself, a prosaic antidote to Kaniuk's "meta-historical intersection." Its obsessive, repetitive circling through the streets and along the beachfront deflates the city's monumental narrative of self, exposing the decay, the dirt and debris, and the flimsy arbitrariness of architectural forms as well as the pettiness and the randomness that make up the lives of its citizens. It is these ordinary and often depressing, even cruel details that remain embedded in the memories of the characters and in the city's topsoil. Shabtai makes something enduring, compelling, and beautiful of these details. Rothschild Boulevard has indeed become a monument. If, however, like Ulman we dig a bit, we can find competing ideas regarding its charac-

ter; literary memoirs such as *Past Continuous* further unravel the street's symbolic aspect. The boulevard today makes room for expressions of Tel Aviv's official history as well as its own homegrown ambivalence toward the past.

Notes

1 M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 322.

2 See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley, 1984), 91–130.

3 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London, 1993 [1957]), 76.

4 Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 20.

5 See Mark LeVine, "A Nation from the Sands," *National Identities* 1, no. 1 (1999): 15–37.

6 Anecdotal details about the "convert" from Jaffa may be found in Shlomo Shva, *Ho ir, ho em* (Tel Aviv, 1977). The altered photo appears in Dr. E. Mechner, ed., *The New Palestine in Pictures: Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1937), 2.

7 See Vivienne Silver-Brody, *Documentors of the Dream: Pioneer Jewish Photographers in the Land of Israel, 1890–1933* (Jerusalem, 1998), and Guy Raz, *Enayim she-rau et Soskin, 1909–1933* (exhibition catalogue) (Tel Aviv, 1999).

8 See the essays in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago, 1994).

9 See Ruth Oren, "Havnayat makom: Taamulah u-merhav utopi be-tsilum ha-nof ha-tsiyoni, 1898–1948," *Dvarim ahadim* 2 (Fall 1997): 13–30.

10 Yael Zerubavel uses this term regarding founding myths of Israeli national consciousness in her *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995).

11 For a survey of literary texts about Tel Aviv, see Ehud Ben-Ezer, "Tel Aviv be-reshitah

bi-rei ha-sifrut," in *Tel Aviv be-reshitah, 1909–1934,* Mordechai Naor, ed. (Jerusalem, 1984): 122–42.

12 Y. Ch. Brenner, "Ha-gener ha-erets yisraeli va-avizrayhu," *Writings,* vol. 3 (Tel Aviv, 1985), 569–78; originally appeared in *Ha-poel ha-tsair* in 1911.

13 Yoram Kaniuk, *Ha-sipur al dodah shlomtsiyon ha-gdola* (Tel Aviv, 1975), 89.

14 Nachum Gutman, "Harpatkah tsivonit ba-mizrah," *Ha-aretz,* Oct. 8, 1965.

15 Batia Carmiel, "Reshitah shel Tel Aviv be-teuro shel Nachum Gutman," *Gutman's Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv's Gutman,* bilingual ed. (Tel Aviv, 1999), 19.

16 Asher Barash, *Ke-ir netsurah* (Tel Aviv, 1969), 1.

17 Nachum Gutman, "Al ilustratsyot," *Ktuvim,* May 28, 1928, p. 2.

18 Boyer, *City of Collective Memory,* 322.

19 Matetyahu Kalir, *Tel Aviv-Jaffa* (Tel Aviv, 1955), 7–8.

20 Boyer, *City of Collective Memory,* 14–15.

21 On the importance of hiking, leaders, and guidebooks, see Shaul Katz, "The Israeli Teacher Guide: The Emergence and Perpetuation of a Role," *Annals of Tourism Research* 12 (1985): 49–72.

22 Benjamin Mintz and Eliezer Steinman, eds., *Sefer ha-shemot shel rehovot Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1944), 8.

23 *Tel Aviv u-vinyaneha* (Tel Aviv, 1925). The names were mainly chosen by the Town Committee (an unelected body, predeces-sor to the Town Council), but there is also some evidence of a more grassroots approach: the Tel Aviv–Jaffa Municipality archives contain a number of examples of letters written by residents asking that their street be given a particular name.

24 Documentary and propaganda films about Tel Aviv from the 1930s repeatedly feature the city's more ostensibly European aspects—its outdoor cafés, promenades, and banks—in their bid to make the Middle Eastern city appear a secure and familiar haven for European Jews.

25 Mintz and Steinman, eds., *Tel Aviv Street Names,* 167.

26 Yitzhak Anavi, *Da et irkha* (Tel Aviv, n.d. [1967?]).

27 A glance at English-language maps of Tel Aviv published in Israel reveals a plethora of mis-spelled street names, despite the fact that many of these names originated in Latinate languages. Thus the original Polish or German spelling has been superseded by a disfig-ured phonetic rendering of the Hebraicized versions.

28 Nachum Sokolov, "Nishmat Tel Aviv," *Tel Aviv: Mikraah historit-sifrutit, 1909–1959* (Tel Aviv, 1959 [1934]), 290–91.

29 See Yoram Bar-Gal, "Shemot li-rehovot be-Tel Aviv: Perek be-historyah tarbutit ironit (1909–1933)," *Katedra* 47 (Mar. 1988): 118–31, here 119. On the Baron's 1914 visit to Tel Aviv, see Yehoash, *Fun Nu York biz rehovot un tsurik,* vol. 1 (New York, 1917), 143–50.

30 Nitza Smok, *Batim min ha-hol: Adrikhalut ha-sisnan ha-benleumit be-Tel Aviv* (Jerusalem, 1993).

31 Abu Yosef, "Tel Aviv," *Doar ha-yom*, July 17, 1922, p. 5.

32 S. Yizhar, *Mikdamot* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 107–8.

33 The trees have been repeatedly threatened with uprooting and remain the subject of battles between local residents and the muncipality. See "Ha-shikmim bi-sderot Rothschild," *Ariel* (special issue on Tel Aviv, eds. Gideon Birger and Eli Shiller) (1987): 151.

34 Natan Alterman, "Mi-saviv la-ets ha-daat," *Tel Aviv ha-ktana* (Tel Aviv, 1979 [1940s]), 21.

35 See Shlomo Shva, "Tel Aviv ha-metsuyeret," in Naor, ed., *Tel Aviv be-reshitah*, 107–21.

36 Avraham Soskin, *Tel Aviv Views* (Berlin, 1926).

37 Kaniuk, *Dodah shlomtsiyon ha-gdolah*, 79.

38 Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, 187.

39 Gilead Duvshani, *Yehuda Megidovitch* (Jerusalem, 1993).

40 Ibid., 84–85.

41 Ibid., 88.

42 I am grateful to Tsila Streichman for making this painting available to me. See also Avraham Naton's "The Kiosk on Rothschild Boulevard" (1930s) and other paintings included in *Tel Aviv at 80* (Tel Aviv, 1989).

43 See Naomi Schor, "*Cartes Postales*: Representing Paris 1900," *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 1992): 188–241.

44 Twelve of Soskin's photographs from 1912 were reproduced on 30,000 postcards. After the war, many were printed over with English captions in Egypt, and they became a favorite of British troops. See "Tel Aviv, 1912," *Postcards of Palestine*, no. 31 (special issue, July 1990), and Batia Carmiel, ed., *Tel Aviv ba-tatslumim: He-asor ha-rishon, 1909–1918* (Tel Aviv, 1990), 11.

45 Postcard from collection at Central Zionist Archives, Tel Aviv Photographs #070568.

46 Advertisement included in *Ha-aretz*, June 20, 1922, p. 1.

47 Adina Meir-Meril, "Bet ha-kneset ha-gadol be-Tel Aviv u-trumato shel Alex Barveld le-hakamato," *Katedra* 57 (Sept. 1990): 105–19, here 116.

48 *Ir be-modaot Tel Aviv–Jaffa, 1900–1935*, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv, 1988), 446.

49 Shach, "Ha-omanut be-Tel Aviv," *Doar ha-yom*, July 19, 1922.

50 See *Ha-aretz*, July 16, 1922. For the opinion of the *Vaad ha-poel*, see Tel Aviv–Jaffa Municipality Archives, Protocols of *Vaad ha-poel*, File 19-01-003, meeting 18, July 12, 1922.

51 Ilan Shchori, *Halom she-hafakh li-krakh* (Tel Aviv, 1990), 54.

52 Ofer Regev and Shula Vidrich, eds., *Bulvard: Sderot Rothschild be-Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1999), 79.

53 For details on the influence of the "Grabski" wave of immigration on Tel Aviv, see Amir Ben-Porat, *Hekhan hem ha-burganim ha-hem: Toldot ha-burganut ha-yisreelit* (Jerusalem, 1999), 77–87.

54 Batia Carmiel, *Arihim meatrim ir: Bezalel be-vatei Tel Aviv* (Tel Aviv, 1996), 63.

55 Ilan Shchori, "The Son Designed the Crest and the Father Chose the Slogan," *Etmol* (Oct. 1990): 12–13.

56 Gordon himself was not seen as a major sculptor. He went on to design a statue of Trumpeldor for Tel Hai that he later destroyed after he could not find a purchaser for it. In Tel Aviv, his work can still be seen in the lion at the end of Simta Plonit. See Natan Harpaz, "Mi-batei halomit le-vatei kufsaot: Ha-mahapakh ha-adrikhali shel shnot ha-shloshim be-Tel Aviv," in Naor, ed., *Tel Aviv be-reshitah*, 101–2.

57 See Carmiel, *Arihim meatrim ir.*

58 *Yediot Tel Aviv-Yafo* 21, nos. 1–2 (Sept. 1950): 23.

59 Boyer, *City of Collective Memory*, 187.

60 "Bor she-hu pesel," interview with Micha Ulman, *Mishkafayim* 31 (1997): 39.

61 Dalia Karpel, "Hafarperet omanutit," *Musaf ha-aretz*, Mar. 22, 1996, p. 80.

62 "Bor she-hu pesel."

63 This was one option suggested by the artist, according to Udi Rosenwein, "Outdoor Sculpture on Rothschild Boulevard," in Regev and Vidrich, eds., *Boule-vard*, 136.

64 Tamar Berger also links Ulman's work with Shabtai's novel in her study *Dyonises ba-senter* (Tel Aviv, 1998), 89–99.

65 Yaakov Shabtai, *Zikhron dvarim* (Tel Aviv, 1977), 195–96, published in English as *Past Continuous*, trans. Dalya Bilu (New York, 1985), 267–68. Hereafter, page numbers of references to the English edition are given in the text.

66 For two different readings of the role of Tel Aviv in Shabtai's work, see Edna Shabtai, "Tel Aviv ba-prozah shel Shabtai," *Moznayim* 65 (Sept. 1988): 54–78, and Chana Soker-Shvayger, "Ha-tanakh hu lo tokhnit partselatsyah al erets-yisrael: Ha-hevrati veha-politi be-*Zikron dvarim*," *Teoryah u-vikoret* 8 (Summer 1996): 181–97.

67 Yaakov Shabtai, "Interview with Ilana Zuckerman," *Yediot aharonot*, Aug. 2, 1991, originally broadcast in the summer of 1981, shortly before the writer's death.

68 Dan Miron, "Ha-zikaron ke-ideah," *Yediot aharonot*, Apr. 27, 1978.

69 Photographs are more generally represented in the novel as transient and exploitative, through the character of Cesar, whose apartment/studio is also the site of his repeated trysts.

70 Berger, *Dyonises ba-senter*, 96.