Preface

> How long has it been since the Jews have built a city? Somewhere between two thousand and three thousand years. And during that period the task of building and administering a city has become, to speak mildly, more complicated.
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> —Ludwig Lewisohn, "Letter from Abroad: A City Unlike New York," 1925

> Over the years, a recurring demand has been that the land "must be made to speak." But in the end someone must speak for it.
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> —Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*

All cities are unique and each city is unique in a different way. Tel Aviv's uniqueness stems from the complex set of historical factors that occasioned its founding and development—from a utopian garden city suburb in 1909 to a sprawling, cosmopolitan metropolis. This book examines how the creation of Tel Aviv has both shaped and reflected collective identity. Initially viewed as an exemplary "Jewish" space, Tel Aviv was later seen as the paradigmatic Israeli city, a site that turned its back on diasporic Jewish life to embody Zionism's secular ethos of self-determined productivity. However, although a utopian vision of Jewish urban space led to the creation of a vibrant metropolis, any claims to the "Jewishness" of this space were destabilized and eventually subverted by both the vision's own inner contradictions and the material conditions of twentieth-century Palestine.

The establishment of Tel Aviv in 1909 was part of a fundamental revolution in modern Jewish culture regarding notions of space and place. Broadly speaking, many forms of cultural and political expression in European Jewish life sought to critique the normative notion of Jews as "rootless" and a "people of time."[1] These forms of expression included the movement for national, territorial autonomy (political Zionism), a call to settle the land and train as physical laborers (workers' movements), and new aesthetic forms (literary and artistic modernism). The establishment of Tel Aviv as "the first Hebrew city" was the most complex and sustained example of this desire to instantiate the Jews as a "people of space," to give them a place in history. As Michel Foucault has reminded us, whereas our present era is "the epoch of space," the nineteenth century was obsessed with history.[2] Tel Aviv is very much a product of the cusp of these two eras, proof that an obsession with one is inextricably intertwined with a preoccupation with the other. This necessary relation between space and history provides the organizing principle of this book; each chapter is organized around a specific site or abstract notion of space integral to Tel Aviv's urban identity. However, identity, especially in its collective form, is necessarily a by-product of time, "subject to the play of history."[3] Therefore, although not a historical study per se, this book moves in roughly chronological fashion, from Tel Aviv's "pre-history" in European Jewish life and thought, through the city's formative early decades, and into the first years of statehood. The concluding chapter revolves around the temporal axis of the years immediately following the Rabin assassination in 1995, an event that dramatically changed the city's relation to history.

Tel Aviv is a city founded primarily by immigrants and refugees. Coming from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds, they arrived with vastly disparate material possessions. More importantly, though, immigrants who voluntarily settled in a new land out of an ideological belief in Jewish political autonomy, and refugees who fled an oppressive regime, had radically different attitudes toward the meaning of Tel Aviv as their new home. One of the ways these disparities were ostensibly dissolved was through the conception of Tel Aviv as a "Jewish" city. What exactly this meant, and how ideas of Jewishness shaped Tel

Aviv's emerging urban fabric, cannot, of course, be entirely understood in isolation from the ethnic and social context of the Mediterranean landscape within which Tel Aviv developed. Though identity is not static, but a process observed over time, it is also necessarily a product of interaction with difference. Attitudes toward "the other"—whether concerning internal Jewish differences of gender, religiosity, ethnicity or social/economic status, or vis-à-vis the local Arab population—therefore played an important role in the city's self-perception, and the urban space that evolved in concert with this image. While recognizing the merit of historiographical work that situates analysis of Israel within the wider nexus of the modern Middle East, this book primarily is an examination of the "internal Jewish factors which have shaped Israeli collective consciousness and national-cultural identity during the past 100 years—in all their pluralism, ambivalence and contradictions."[4] This kind of analysis of Israeli culture and history does not myopically isolate Jewish life from the full diversity of its historical settings; rather, distinguishing the internal "contrasting narratives"[5] that comprise Tel Aviv's early self-image is a necessary step toward understanding how the city fits into its Mediterranean surroundings. Moreover, examining Tel Aviv's self-proclaimed status as a modernist city par excellence sheds light on the more general nexus of nation-building, modernism, and urban identity.

The city's modernist birthright is grounded in the historical timing of its establishment, both in fact and in fancy. As the following chapters will demonstrate, Tel Aviv's actual existence on the ground paralleled its aesthetic invention. Both "Tel Aviv constructed" and "Tel Aviv imagined" were shaped during the decades when international modernism flourished, as both a powerful architectural vision and a cluster of aesthetic movements. An urban center created wholly from scratch, the city embodied the ideals and contradictions of the paradigmatic modernist architects such as Le Corbusier. Literary modernism's valorization of exile and newness found its most problematic treatment in the representation of Jewish urban space in Tel Aviv. On the one hand, Tel Aviv's public sphere reflected the ostensibly revolutionary aspirations of its citizenry. On the other hand, public and private space inevitably bore traces of its founders' diasporic origins. Although the

promise of newness implied a future-oriented enterprise with no past to remember, this new home also came to be seen as a form of exile for many of its citizens. These inner tensions between public and private, history and the present, home and exile, manifested themselves repeatedly in literary and artistic depictions of the city. This study draws on representations of Tel Aviv and reads the city itself as a text in order to demonstrate how its relatively shallow roots—its ostensible lack of memory—has shaped both imagined versions of the city and its physical plane. Memory is Tel Aviv's constitutive principle as well as its nemesis.

A brief examination of the recent history of two buildings in Tel Aviv sheds light on the significance of modernism and memory in this study. The first building is a high-rise apartment smack in the city center, named for the building to which it stands adjacent—Beyt Hana (Chana House). Dating from the city's "golden years" of Bauhaus-inspired construction, the structure was originally an agricultural school for women, named after its founder, Chana Chizik. The site thus neatly fuses two of the city's founding myths—the pristine qualities of its pastoral beginnings and the International Style. An enormous billboard advertising the newly constructed luxury apartments tries to trade on the site's historical cachet, using the slogan *lagur betel aviv shel pa'am, lichyot betel aviv shel hayom* (Dwell in Tel Aviv of once upon a time, live in Tel Aviv of today). The phrase contains two different verbs for "live," the first a limited, even temporary, condition (akin to "reside"), the second a more generalized and expansive notion. The advertisement seamlessly links Tel Aviv's idealistic, idyllic, and simpler past with the material comforts of the present, promising the best of both. For current Tel Avivians, however, the site is also inextricably linked with a terrorist incident that killed three women there in the 1990s, when Chana House's ground floor contained a café called Apropos. A small memorial structure with details of the attack can be found across the street in the middle of the boulevard.

Several miles north and slightly east of Chana House, another building has recently come under public scrutiny. Located within the Tel Aviv University complex in the suburb of Ramat Aviv, it is the university's Marcelle Gordon Faculty Club, known colloquially as Habayit

ha-yarok, the Green House. The original structure dates back to the late nineteenth century and was part of the Arab village of Sheikh Munis, a site "abandoned" in 1948. Jewish immigrants lived for a time in the village, as was the case in many such sites during the state's early years. The building was eventually purchased by the university and restored in 1991 according to plans chosen by architectural competition. The Green House's highly ornamental style in fact bears little resemblance to the original structure. The building has been landmarked by the Israeli group Zochrot (Remembers [fem. pl.]), an organization dedicated to raising awareness of Palestinian life in Israel prior to 1948. Among its activities is the placing of signs, in Arabic and Hebrew, marking demolished Palestinian structures. An official plaque placed by the university at the entrance names the Italian architect responsible for the renovation, but contains no mention of Sheikh Munis or the building's history.[6]

Despite their different functions and histories, both Chana House and the Green House typify Tel Aviv's official, and unofficial, memorial practices, and illustrate the difficult pasts faced by the city. In good modernist fashion, both buildings recycle the appeal of the old with the solid facts of the new. Yet this process has begun to unravel, even implode; the erasure of the past has been undone by the pressures of the present, forces that are themselves unpredictable and selective. Chana House aspires to ground its top-of-the-line amenities in the ostensibly austere, pioneering lifestyle of Tel Aviv's early citizenry. This combination of sophistication and simplicity is inevitably marred by the Israeli-Palestinian political conflict as it has erupted in Tel Aviv's streets. The Green House has been renovated in a style intended to convey a sense of authentic "Oriental" nativeness. However, the rooted indigenousness of Sheikh Munis's displaced inhabitants inevitably comes back to haunt, a "return of the repressed" on the urban grid. This book investigates the historical dilemmas posed by structures such as Chana House and the Green House, dilemmas that possess an ongoing and immutable relevance within the city's historical and contemporary landscapes.

The field of urban studies has burgeoned in recent years in terms of both geography and theoretical approach. Studies of urban cultures

had traditionally focused on the European "big three"—London, Berlin, and Paris. American studies widened the arena slightly, with efforts devoted mostly to New York. More recently, cities such as Los Angeles, Brasilia, and Hong Kong have attracted debate and discussion, with their potent mix of motivated planning, financial and cultural capital, and enormous physical expansion. The field is now as large as the globe is wide, and has acquired a less utopian, more postmodern edge, as well as its own section in many bookstores, with titles reflecting a diverse range of urban cultures on every continent.[7] This book introduces Tel Aviv to this ongoing and ever-expanding study of cities, citizens, and city life.

Though this study engages Tel Aviv's history, it is less concerned with the past per se than with its cultural and aesthetic construction. Each chapter seeks to create a "thick description" of a particular site or set of sites in the city. By locating artifacts, traces, and representations of the past, and placing them both in their respective historical contexts and in dialogue with one another, it tries to approximate some idea of the city's "sense of self." This potentially slippery term suggests a problematic erasure of human agency; what 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. This synchronic approach does not aspire to a panoramic or comprehensive history of agents and sources, but instead offers specific spatial and temporal slices of the city, chosen for their seemingly paradigmatic quality, as well as their instability and their tendency to trouble or question their very exemplariness and indeed the possibility of any single coherent rendition of the city. I am ultimately less interested in historical agents and sources than in the palpable effects of history—or its absence—on the contemporary plane of the city.

Walking through the city does not necessarily and always entail a history lesson for each and every pedestrian, nor is Tel Aviv's history somehow an immanent presence in its streets. Ultimately, as Brian Ladd notes above regarding Berlin, someone must speak for the land. Just as the politics of space is largely related to position and perspective, so my own

location as an author necessarily guides my approach. This book was initially conceived when I lived in Tel Aviv during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time during which the Palestinian question became a matter of everyday public discourse. This historic period was punctuated by two important events—the beginnings of the first Intifada in 1987 and the election of Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister in 1992. To the limited extent that this book explores the heretofore buried presence of Arab life in and around Tel Aviv, it owes this impulse to the atmosphere of turmoil and possibility during those years. Finally, this book is part of a general trend in Israeli scholarship that undertakes to critique certain normative notions of Israeli history and identity—in this case, the story of the establishment of Tel Aviv.

Any description of Tel Aviv that I offer, then, in the following pages grows out of two concurrent dialogues: this dialogue between me and the place, and a second dialogue between the place and the terms of its description. My primary source material consists of literary and journalistic accounts of the city. Tel Aviv's growth as a Jewish urban center is inseparable from the creation of a vernacular Hebrew literature, both in logistical and ideological terms. The city provides the backdrop for innumerable works of fiction and poetry, and served as the material center of Hebrew literary life from the early part of the twentieth century. One of the crucial tasks faced by early Hebrew writing in Palestine was the depiction of space, often before it existed in physical, concrete form, a situation that created a unique set of problems and challenges. Though many writers saw their work as expressly contributing to the creation of a new secular Jewish culture, it was often the case that literature served as a site of critique and opposition. In this study, therefore, literature operates as a kind of longitudinal space spanning the length of the book, within which Hebrew writing's heavily intertextual tradition thrives.

Tel Aviv's evolving centrality to modern Jewish life coincided with another important element of the spatial revolution in Jewish culture, that is the burgeoning of fine arts and photography by Jewish practitioners. What began in the early 1920s as a trickle with the photographic work of Avraham Soskin and the painting of the Tel Aviv school, became in the late thirties a torrent of visual records, particularly after the immigration

of many German photographers, who brought with them an awareness of the "New Objectivity." Tel Aviv was understood as the site where normative notions regarding Jewish antipathy to image making would come to an end. This enthusiasm for visuality also typified Hebrew modernist writing about the city, work that expressly exploited the word's figurative potential. Thus ideas about the significance of imagery generally, and visual images in particular, are integral to the book's core argument regarding the transformation of Jewish culture. This material includes different photographic genres (street scenes, studio portraits, and historical landscapes), paintings, postcards, guidebooks, and images of public art and architecture. Indeed, the inseparability of identity and representation is most evident within these examples of material culture that seek to portray the dynamism of an evolving society.

Chapter 1 outlines Jewish culture's particular and ambivalent relation toward space, and contextualizes materials concerning modern Jewish life within the general frame of urban studies. It surveys attitudes toward Jewish urban experience and Zionist visions of urban space, including Theodor Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland* (1902), in light of theoretical models regarding the production of space and urban experience and its representation. This general discussion lays the groundwork for the following two chapters, which are "case studies" of specific sites integral to the city's early history. Tel Aviv is virtually unique among cities in that its first cemetery preceded the establishment of the city itself. Chapter 2 examines the Old Cemetery's place in the city's collective memory. Though generally ignored in general civic consciousness, the cemetery, an example of what Anthony Vidler calls the "architectural uncanny," represents an important link with the diasporic landscapes from which Tel Aviv's founders hailed.[8] Chapter 3 turns to the central thoroughfare of Rothschild Boulevard, one of Tel Aviv's first public spaces. The boulevard's evolving depiction in literature and photography may be understood as an indication of the city's attempts to create a sense of rootedness and history for its citizens.

Chapters 4 and 5 turn away from these more site-specific encounters with the city to examine broader, more abstract notions of urban space and their evolution. Early visions of the city called for an intertwined relation between public and private space, where customs traditionally

associated with the private sphere became idealized in the public realm as a new urban collective identity. This vision is both manifest in the city's International Style architecture and serves as the focus of early writing about its spatial character. Chapter 4 discusses these ideas about public and private space in Tel Aviv through the dualistic image of the balcony. Chapter 5 moves out of the city and presents a more "macro" level view of Tel Aviv vis-à-vis its immediate environs. Even while still a small neighborhood, Tel Aviv imagined itself as the center of modern Jewish life in Palestine, a center with distinct, though shifting, boundaries. This chapter demonstrates how Tel Aviv's imagined geographical borders—including the surrounding settlements, the Arab city of Jaffa, and the Mediterranean—have signified aspects of the city's evolving social, cultural, and political identity. Together these two chapters describe how abstract notions of space, ideas that in fact undergird the establishment of any city, were informed by ideas of a specifically Jewish, Hebrew urban space. Ostensibly intrinsic characteristics of these spaces were themselves construed in relation to Jewish urban experience in the Diaspora, normative notions of modern urban planning, and the reality of the local Middle Eastern landscape.

Chapter 6 returns the book's focus to a specific site, Rabin Square—the public plaza where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995. The square, a site saturated with memory, is essentially the antipode to the Old Cemetery, an all-but-forgotten site that is the subject of Chapter 2. Chapter 6 demonstrates how, with the memorial practices in the years following Rabin's death, Tel Aviv has entered into a radically new relationship to history. It concludes with a discussion of the relatively unknown site of Summayl, an Arab village adjacent to the square, whose inhabitants fled in 1947. Adopting Michel de Certeau's suggestion that urban space is produced by footsteps, as people walk among the city's revealed and hidden structures, the chapter reads Rabin Square and Summayl together as exemplifying Tel Aviv's problematic and ongoing negotiation with its past.[9]