

URBAN ABSENCE: EVERYDAY LIFE VERSUS TRAUMA IN RABIN SQUARE, TEL AVIV

Tali Hatuka

The paper discusses specific tensions derived from collective trauma and the effect of this trauma on the production of space. It examines the case of Rabin Square in Tel Aviv and the impact of the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995 on the spatial practices occurring since then. It details the ongoing conflicts over the design of the Square and analyzes how a proposal for new underground parking facilities exacerbates the discrepancies between the temporality and everyday life of the Square (as advocated by the council and citizens), on the one hand, and its role as a democratic and national memorial space (as advocated by other groups), on the other. Specifically, the paper discusses various approaches to a planned change in the place-making process after the trauma. Indications are that, although the national discourse dominates the production of space after the trauma, the design practices of the space deconstruct what in this paper is termed urban absence. Analysis of this conflict suggests that a civic square becomes a democratic locus that rejects national symbolism and challenges the urban absence.

INTRODUCTION

Rabin Square is definitely a symbol for the Israeli nation. This is where a Prime Minister was murdered. People come to this place from all over the world. I certainly think that, just as the Knesset [the Israeli Parliament] passed a law to establish the Rabin Israel Research Center and another to commemorate the anniversary of the Prime Minister's assassination, it is appropriate to legislate another law to preserve the Square as it was on the day of the murder, for everyone.
(Israeli Knesset Interior and Environment Committee, 2001:16)

These words of Yoram Meuhas, head of the Rabin Center, to Israel's Interior and Environment Committee embody the resistance to the development plan of Rabin Square, initiated by Tel Aviv's city council. Meuhas proposed legislation that would help to establish the relationship between the space (the Square) and the collective trauma, representing one perspective among the many that arose immediately after the assassination. At the same time as the name of the Square was changed, a memorial was constructed and memorial gatherings took place, all of which affected the Square's physical features and cultural associations. The new plan and the debate that followed only aroused further and deeper questions about the relationship between the collective trauma, the place, and its users. Who is the collective? Who is included? Who is left out? Who participates in making decisions about the place, and what is the role of architecture in this process?

The political meaning of place and its relationship to architectural practice has recently been discussed, both internationally and in the Israeli context (Hayden, 1997; Jarzombek, 2001; Kallus, 2004; Massey and Jess, 1995; Merrifield, 1993; Nizan-Shifan, 1996; Rowe and Sarkis, 1998; Segal and Weizman, 2003; Yacobi, 2004). These texts analyze processes of rehabilitation and reconstruction focusing on the built space as a cultural artifact located within intricate economic, political, and social contexts. Recent studies (post-September 11, 2001) explore the meaning of place through processes of contested commemorations (Haskins and DeRose, 2003; Sorkin and Zukin, 2002). This paper sheds light on the competing forces in the struggle over the meaning of a place by addressing the relationships between groups, values, and a traumatic event in the process of place making. It argues that this struggle is needed to challenge what is defined as *urban absence* — the suspended status of a place after a traumatic event, triggering an endless search for unity of community and place. Four conceptual approaches emerge in the struggle over the meaning of place and the process of place making: the pragmatic, the symbolic, the sacred, and the contextual.

The case of Rabin Square is one example of how a traumatic event is evaluated by different groups urging different plans of action. In contested urban situations, where population concentration is incremental and both war and conflict play a role in shaping the environment, traumatic events affect the daily lives of people in cities all over the world. The spatial practices in Rabin Square since the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin on November 4, 1995, and the plan initiated by Tel Aviv's city council both support the argument of this paper. Although the production of posttraumatic space tends to be enlisted by national discourse, it is also challenged by design practices that confront the trauma by defining a new place that symbolizes a natural process of change, as well as by recognizing that chaos exists in the everyday.

URBAN ABSENCE

During the last decade, trauma discourse has developed concerning the genealogy, history, and theoretical elucidation of the phenomenon (Carruth, 1996; Kristeva, 1982; LaCapra, 2001; Leys, 2000; Radden, 2000). The focus has essentially been on concepts derived from psychoanalysis and the work of Freud (1957). Recently, writers have also stressed the difference between victims of traumatic historical events and others who have not directly experienced trauma, but manipulate the trauma and the memory of it for political reasons (Butler, 2004; Edkins, 2003). This discourse can, however, be relevant to architecture and planning if it extends our understanding of trauma from individual experience to ongoing collective social practices of forgetting and remembering a place. In this fashion, the focus is on the implications of how trauma is encoded in the production of space and contributes to the phenomenon of urban absence.

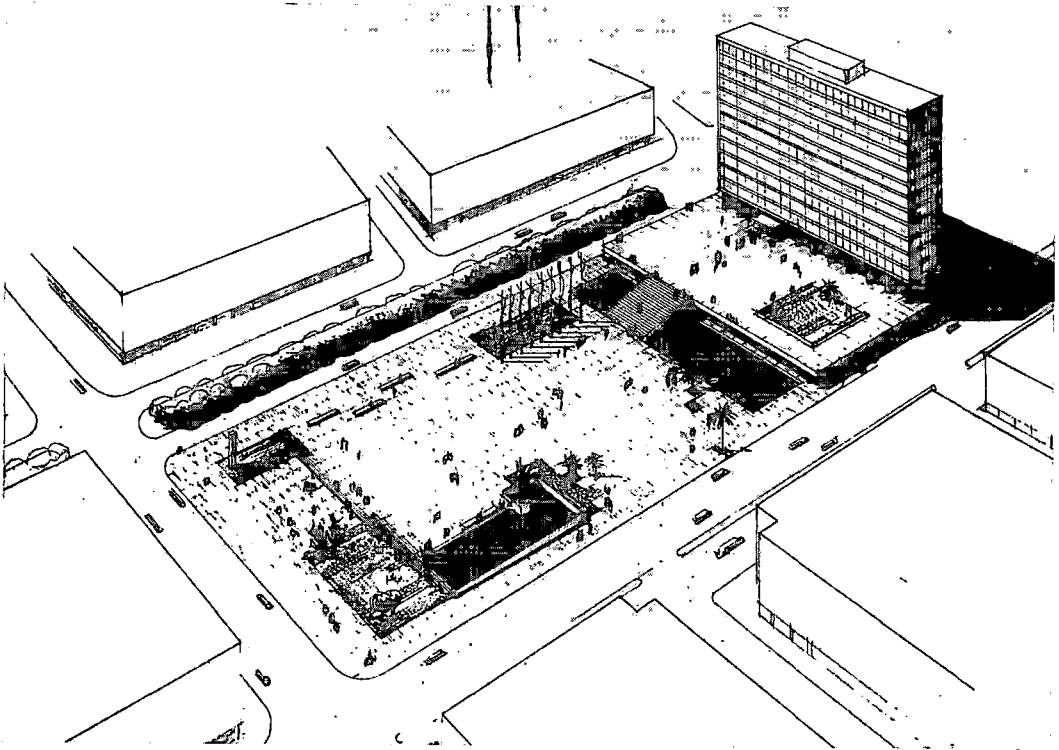


FIGURE 1. Malchei Israel Square, perspective, 1966, by Abraham Yaski and Shlomo Pozner, both of whom won a 1951 competition focusing on the plaza. The perspective details the design of greenery, topography, and symbols in the plaza. On the upper right of the perspective is City Hall, designed by architect Menahem Cohen, who won the 1957 competition.

Source: Tel Aviv Council Historical Archive.

To further define urban absence, it is necessary to differentiate between loss and absence. Loss is particular and immediate, relating to a specific time and event, whereas absence is trans-historical and mythical, intensifying over time (LaCapra, 2001:49).¹ When a trauma is accepted as loss, the urban context (as in postwar environments) can be dealt with in various ways, such as improving basic structural-social city conditions. If the trauma is perceived as absence, urbanity becomes a sociopolitical problem, an endless search by inhabitants for a return to a sense of unity of both place and community. This situation trivializes and, at times, eliminates everyday practices at the trauma site and thus simplifies the place's past and ongoing history.² This elimination suspends the past (history of place), the present (everyday practices), and the future (interventions or plans to modify space), merging the moment (of trauma) with the meaning of the place. This suspension is an urban absence.

Urban absence, maintained by the community, plays a central role in the production of symbolic representations of the event and the place. These practices are *acting out* practices that transform the trauma from loss to absence. Acting out, in this instance, refers to the work of LaCapra (2001:65-70) that distinguishes, in nonbinary terms, between acting out and working through an interrelated response to loss or historic trauma. Referring to Freud's (1957) "Mourning and Melancholia," LaCapra argues that mourning can be seen as a form of *working through*, and melancholia as a form of acting out. Freud viewed melancholia as characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed patient, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past and still identifies with the lost object, whereas mourning offers the possibility of engaging trauma in a way that allows one to begin anew. Historical losses necessitate mourning and possibly critical and transformative socio-political practices as well. When absence is the cause of mourning, the mourning may become impossible, returning one continually to endless melancholy. However, the key problem with acting out the urban absence is that it contradicts the basic principle of democracy, which must allow for differences, antagonism, and conflicted voices. These ideas will be further detailed in the context of Rabin Square in Tel Aviv and the spatial practices occurring there since the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin.



FIGURE 2. Prime Minister Golda Meir, 1975. The image illustrates the typified relationships between the speaker and the audience in the Square. Golda Meir stands with her back to the city council building on level one, where the crowd is facing her but stands on the ground level where the pool functions as a barrier. In the background, the residential building defines the boundaries of the plaza.

Source: Milner Moshe, National Photographic Collection (November, 13, 1975).

THE PLACE: MALCHEI ISRAEL SQUARE

Malchei Israel Square was constructed in the 1960s³ as a void surrounded and defined by six-story buildings. The dimensions of the Square are approximately 260 meters from north to south and about 160 meters from east to west (see Figure 1). On the northern edge of the Square stands City Hall, 12 stories high. Designs for the Square were presented over two decades and three different competitions.⁴ The winning design created physical and social relationships between the municipal building and the open plaza. Although this was a joint effort by three different architectural offices, the space projects unity of design. According to its architect, Abraham Yaski, the design of the Square did not aim at beauty or special features. As he said, the meaning of the Square goes beyond aesthetics — it is intended as an urban-social instrument (Goldberg, 2001).

Four features characterize this urban space: the continuous repeated elevations, unique among Tel Aviv's urban fabric of detached buildings; the comparatively large-scale in relation to others in Tel Aviv and in Israel in general; the unique relationship between City Hall and the Square, connecting the civic institution with its citizens; and controlled zoning that prevents construction of buildings that would restrict public access to the Square. In 1966, new regulations for use of the space (City Spokesman, 1996:1) banished all commercial advertising and prohibited commerce at the site.

One obvious problem is that these four features have created an open public space that is deserted for most of the year, while its borders bustle with activity. Day and night, the neighboring arcades are filled with people sitting in the coffee shops, visiting shops and kiosks, and waiting at bus stops. The empty plaza

creates a tension between the lived space around it and the plaza itself. At the same time, the need for a civic arena endowed the Square with status as an ideological focus at both local and national levels. Locally, this was due to the vice-mayor's suggestion of installing facilities for the national elections and allowing lectures and debates on controversial subjects (Arzi, 1977). Nationally, after the occupation of the territories in 1967, disputes raged over Israel's collective identity (Horowitz and Lissak, 1990), and the disputes in the Square transformed it into an arena of public protest (Figure 2). The political upheaval between the two major competing parties of 1977 further contributed to use of the Square by polarized factions, competing for the parties' ideologies and political power (*ibid.*).

A famous rally in the Square that contributed to the role of the space and is strongly impressed in the collective memory is the "Protest of the 400,000"⁵ on September 25, 1982. It demanded a national investigation of the Sabra and Shatila massacres,⁶ withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, and the resignation of the government. The protest, organized by the Labor party and the "Peace Now" movement, alerted citizens to their role in democratic decision making and their right to refuse to participate in policies that went against their consciences. This, along with many other events, has contributed to the collective representation of the Square's central role as a forum for displaying various groups' power and ideology. They also contributed to the framing of a national collective space and a view of the Israeli society within it. As Kim Dovey (1999:1) says, the term "framing" means both "picture and mirror." This concept of picture-mirror was also developed in Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which, like the Square, "has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other" (Foucault, 1997:354). Yet, the plaza also functions as a meeting place for events such as protests and/or celebrations (*e.g.*, after winning the European basketball championship in 1978 and 2001 and the Eurovision Song Contest in 1999). Above all, the Square has become an arena for demonstrations of identity (Dekel, 2000) in orderly negotiations that represent various power hierarchies (national, communal, and private).

This social order was challenged on November 4, 1995, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated during the "Yes to Peace, No to Violence" rally in support of the Oslo Accords.⁷ Thousands of youngsters in the Square waved banners, calling for peace in Hebrew and Arabic. The organizers constantly updated the crowd about the masses that were still pouring in to the event. After the assembly, the Prime Minister went down the service stairs and was shot in the back by a young religious Jew. He was rushed to the hospital. At 11:14 p.m., his death was announced.

Every written and unwritten Jewish code regarding mutual support had been violated. Moreover, the assassination by a Jew totally disrupted the internal order. Suddenly, the constructed separation between the Israelis (internal, protected) and the Palestinians and the rest of the world (external, violators) collapsed. Immediately after the assassination, all efforts were concentrated on acting out the myth of a democratic, unified community.

TRAUMA PRACTICES IN RABIN SQUARE: STITCHING TOGETHER THE MYTH

As a culmination of social and political dispute, Yitzhak Rabin's assassination evoked posttraumatic practices nationwide, thus contributing to the production of a space that embodied reflective relationships between the assassination, the Square, and the collective — a stitching together of a perceived spatial dimension. The first action was the spontaneous response of the "candle children" (Azaryahu, 1996), young people who gathered in the Square in the days immediately after the assassination, weeping, singing, lighting memorial candles, transforming the space into a temporary national graveyard, and reemphasizing the Square's boundaries (Figure 3). Throngs of mourners replaced the mass of demonstrators. Flags became candles, and songs replaced slogans. Thus, the mourners' actions did not challenge the local narrative or create spatial change but rather created a collective identification that is reaffirmed annually in memorial ceremonies similar in size and content to the rally on the night of the assassination (Vinizki-Sarusi, 2000:27).

Apart from these practices, some long-term changes have also followed, such as changing the name to Rabin Square and the erection of a memorial (Figure 4). Located on the site of the assassination near the side staircase leading to City Hall, the monument has become a tourist attraction. The memorial as a manifesta-

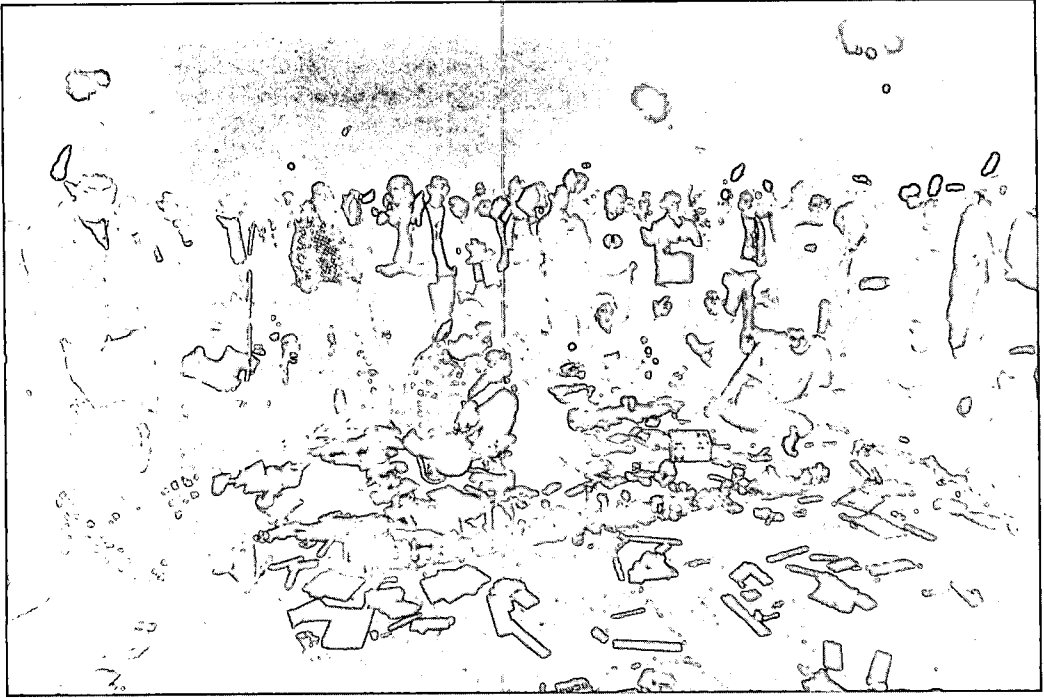


FIGURE 3. An image taken immediately after the assassination, when people spontaneously came to the Square, lit candles, and expressed grief. Spatially, people gather in small groups throughout the space, creating a sense of intimacy.

Source: Israeli Zvika, National Photographic Collection.

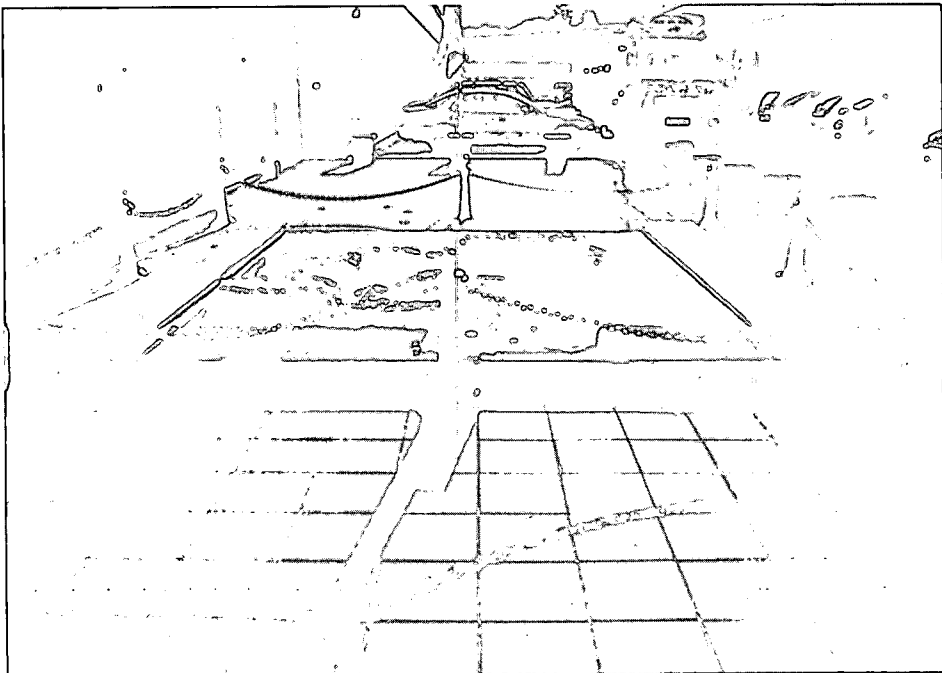


FIGURE 4. Memorial for Yitzhak Rabin, 2003. Basalt stone memorial designed by architect Claude Grunman-Brightman was installed on November 1, 1996, near the service stairs where Prime Minister Rabin was shot. Its location on the pavement along one of the main routes in the city (Eben Gvirol St.) makes the memorial part of inhabitants' everyday lives.

TABLE 1. Approaches toward a planned change in place after a trauma.

	Pragmatic	Symbolic	Sacred	Contextual
Conceptualization of the event	As part of the on-going history of the place.	As a discrete event, representing universal quest for peace.	As a deep wound, associated with this particular tragedy.	As one of the key political events within the collective memory of national society.
Conceptualization of the place	<i>Everyday</i> The place is one zone in the city, not defined by the trauma.	<i>Idealistic</i> The place becomes a symbolic idea generated by the event.	<i>Static</i> The place merges with the event, no longer susceptible to outside influences.	<i>Proportional</i> The place is compared to other spaces with similar uses in the state.
Conceptualization of users	Focus includes everyone, especially local inhabitants.	Focus is on national as well as international users.	Focus is on national users as one unified collective.	Focus is on national users only.
Key value/multiple concern	Identifies with the human scale and everyday activities.	Identifies with the universal symbol associated with the event.	Identifies with the preservation of human legacy associated with the traumatic event.	Identifies with spatial representations from the past.
Attitude toward spatial change	<i>Concrete</i> Advocates the primacy of the lived experience.	<i>Symbolic</i> Advocates a world-wide transference of the symbol.	<i>Institutional</i> Advocates ritual practices in memory of the event.	<i>Contextual</i> Advocates relative change according to use and context.

tion of the moment is an act of magnification — a symbol that has imbued the space with sanctity. In this context, the Tel Aviv City Council decided to erase graffiti from the wall next to the staircase (inscribed immediately after the assassination), though a small section of the graffiti has been retained behind a glass frame (Engler, 1999). The erasure and the framing both convey the conflict and announce that this is a sterile zone (Dotan, 2000). Although at first glance the Rabin memorial looks homogeneous, it is in fact a divided, disputed site embodying different memories. Removing the graffiti and the erection of the headstone nearby were attempts to freeze the trauma — inadvertently contributing to the construction of absence.

All these efforts were intended to heal and repair the deep divisions in Israeli society and recreate an illusion of order, *i.e.*, to strengthen the heterotopian status of the space as a national archive. Since the assassination, hardly any critical questions regarding space have been asked: What are the connections between the physical dimensions of the site and the nature of the gatherings? What is the relationship between the mass gatherings and the spatial geometry of the space? The subordination of the space to the trauma focuses exclusively on the memory of the assassination and on the victim (Feige, 2000; Grinberg, 2000; Yona, 2000), thereby ignoring the space itself. Hence, the Tel Aviv City Council's idea of constructing a parking lot beneath the Square was perceived as blasphemous and totally inappropriate to the contemporary collective discourse (see Figures 5 and 6). Resistance to the planned parking lot represents the wish to maintain urban absence.

URBAN ABSENCE VERSUS LIVED SPACE

On March 3, 2002, the Tel Aviv City Council called for an open forum concerning future plans for Rabin Square. The following discussion outlines different approaches to the plan and to the role of the Square (Table 1). These approaches — the *pragmatic*, *symbolic*, *sacred*, and *contextual* — were defined based on the speakers' conceptualization of the event, place, users, and values, and their attitudes toward change in the space. It is important to note that these approaches are not definite categories, but rather tools relating both to concrete and discursive space for place making after a traumatic event.

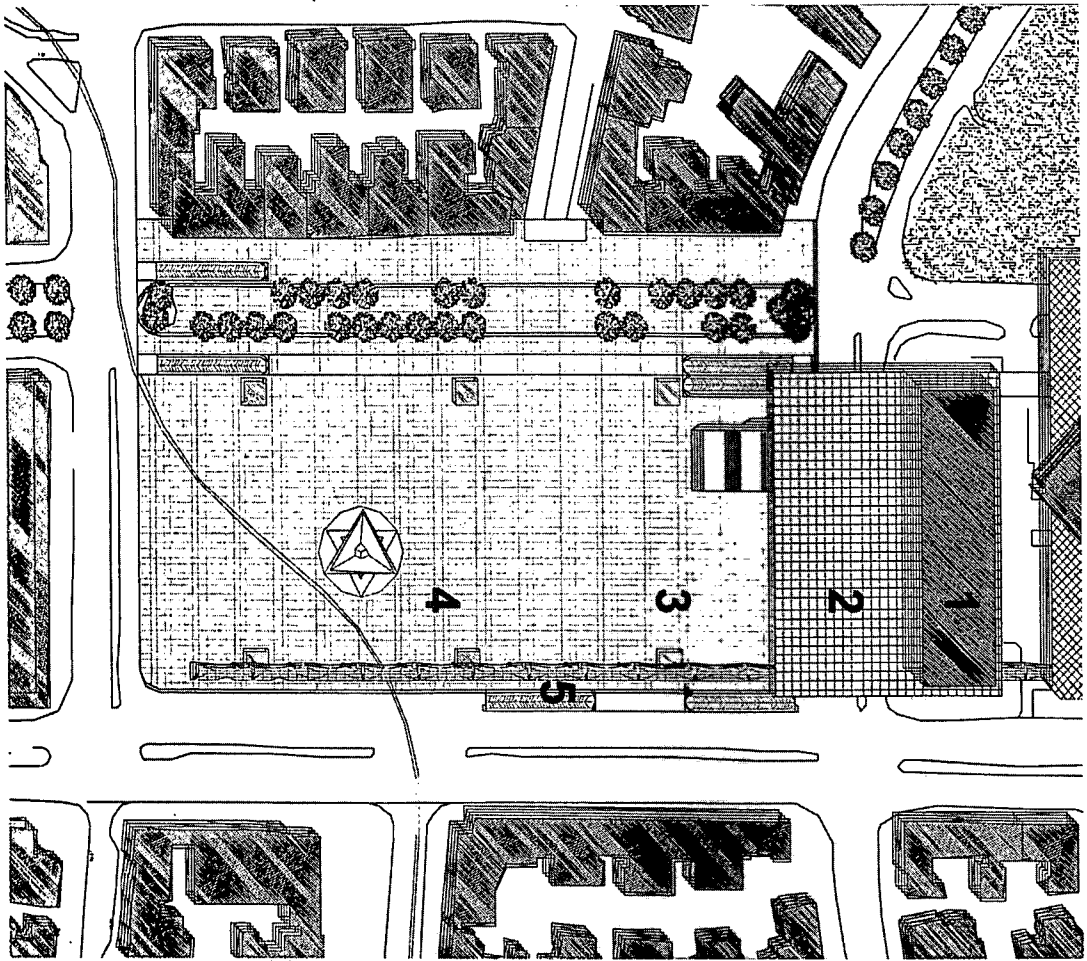


FIGURE 5. Suggested plan.
Presentation A — prepared for the Local Committee (March 28, 2001), Farhi-Zafir Architects.
Source: Tel Aviv Historical Archive.

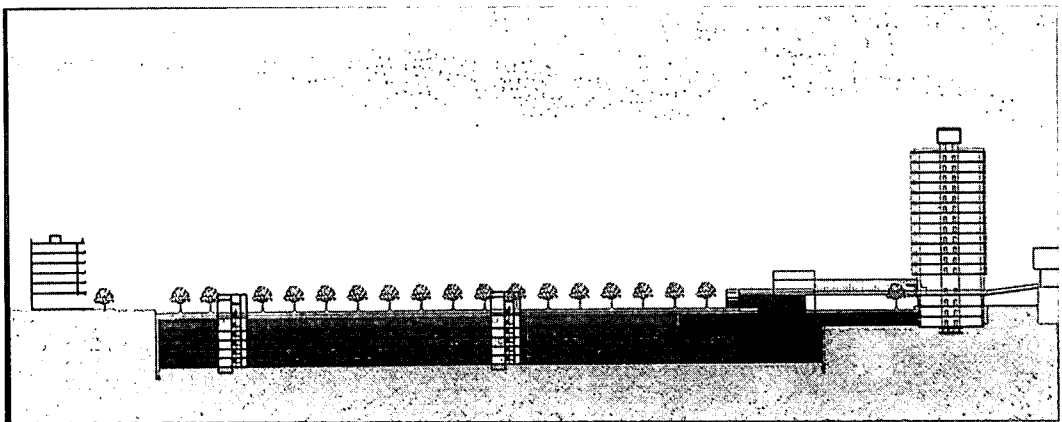


FIGURE 6. Suggested section.
Presentation A — prepared for the Local Committee (March 28, 2001), Farhi-Zafir Architects.
Source: Tel Aviv Historical Archive.

The forum opened with the City Engineer's plan, presenting the Square from two perspectives, as a space catering to needs of the local community and as a national monument. His presentation took a pragmatic approach towards the space as part of the larger process of urban redevelopment in the area. He perceived the Square as a unique national monument and, at the same time, as a significant presence in the urban fabric, which permitted examination of the Square's multiple roles and identities. As the City Engineer (Council Forum, 2002:44) noted,

When we speak of the activities in the Square, of its character ... the nation's Square, where national events take place: there are at least three important functions that the Square serves. It is the Square of the City Hall, serving Tel Aviv's citizens. We also see the Square as the largest open space in the area, and there is the actual urban void, a space with meaning and a unique character, a pause in the urban fabric and a significant urban unit.

Representing the Council, the engineer viewed the assassination as a moment in a series of events that regularly occur at the site. In essence, the proposal to construct a parking lot beneath the Square would necessitate reevaluation of its everyday use. This approach opposed the Square's geometry (i.e., the relationship between City Hall and the plaza), which should also be seen in the context of the ongoing post-modernist urban discourse that began in the 1960s.⁸ As Zafrir (2003), one of the architects involved in the project, said,

When we established the state, the intimate meanings of the city were irrelevant for us. We were occupied with modern design ... Local architecture was irrelevant because it was created by others (i.e. the Palestinians). That was also a period when design gave the "proper" solution to traffic problems. Plans of the time created urban axes 30 and 40 meters wide at the most sensitive points in the city, to allow free flow of traffic. This is an approach that, I hope, has now been sidelined.

The concept of the Square as an everyday place legitimizes the construction of the parking lot, advocated not only by the City Engineer but also by the citizens. The main difference between the citizens' and the engineer's perspective is how they each perceived the space. The citizens viewed the plaza itself as the space, suggesting changes, as Shimshi says, "to create some kind of layout ... that will encourage people to come every day, all day, even when no dramatic events occur" (Council Forum 2002:52). This approach was also expressed by the journalist Doron Rosenblum (2000:2), who wrote,

Grow up from the "Square rituals" that ultimately cause more harm than use ... We must detach ourselves not only from the rituals, but also from the Square itself ... we need to plough up — yes, plough up — this brutal Square, open like a place hit by a meteorite ... to construct an underground parking lot, to relate to the human dimension and not to the demonstrations of the masses. It is time to stop demonstrating normalcy and to start acting normal.

As opposed to the pragmatic approach of those who advocate the lived experience, there are others who wish to conserve the absence. One dominant opinion proposes a *symbolic* approach, suggesting reinforcement of the Square's presence as an international symbol. This approach was conspicuous in the competition organized by the Engineers' and Architects' Association, the Rabin Square International Forum for Peace. The competition, open to all architects and planners, created an identification between peace, the Square, and trauma. In addition, by opening up the competition to the world, the Association reaffirmed the site's universal importance and meaning. The competition results, published on many architectural Internet sites, were released on the memorial day of Rabin's assassination. The Association also initiated a petition protesting against the council's intentions to construct the parking lot without an open public discussion. The petition included the following statements:

Rabin Square is a public and historical asset, a place where an important national event occurred. Since the Prime Minister's assassination, the Square has become an international center for all peace lovers. To our amazement, the City Council and the planning department intend to destroy the Square and commercialize it.

(Engineers' and Architects' Association, 2001:9)

All this led to intervention by Cabinet members and discussions in the Interior Committee of the Knesset about exposing the municipality's plan for the Square. The plaza, as proposed by those who favor the symbolic approach, is conceived as a forum for public and national events, reducing the Square to an everyday meeting place and thereby establishing it as a national/international symbol. This would also

remove the Square from municipal jurisdiction and transform it into a trans-historical symbol. To quote Kabel, "The Square, to my mind, was expropriated long ago from the Tel Aviv Council . . . [I]t is a symbol . . . because it is where the prime minister was assassinated" (Israeli Knesset Interior and Environment Committee, 2001:12). It should be emphasized that supporters of this attitude do not reject the option of architectural intervention in the space as long as the urban absence is magnified and/or sustained. The main difficulty of the approach is its disregard of criticism by citizens who view the Square as a permanent symbol.

Another group, the Rabin Heritage Center Representatives' Group, advocates leaving the place in its current state. Yoram Meuhas, Director of the Rabin Center, demands that the Square be conserved. As he says,

In the Rabin Heritage Center, we want the square to be preserved in its current character and to function as a place for pilgrimage and mass participants' commemorative ceremonies to Yitzhak Rabin's memory, and under no circumstances should it change the character of the place by adding buildings, cafes or stands. As for transforming the square into a parking lot, we fear it will damage the character of the plaza and would prevent us from performing annual ceremonies.
(Council Forum, 2002:64)

Unlike the pragmatic approach of the City Engineer, the Rabin Center group views the murder as a social act that creates total identification between event and place, maintaining the character of the plaza as a place for commemorative assemblies. The supporters of this approach criticize the erasure of the graffiti, regarding them as sacred expressions of mourning. Painting over the graffiti or changing the plaza character would erase the traumatic event, and "place" would be profaned.

The contextual approach views the assassination as a moment in the ongoing narrative of the plaza and the national history as a whole. The moment is not seen as a singular event but is rather linked to other events and places. As a city councilor stated, "this Square is important . . . because it is in the heart of the city . . . We all remember Rabin's assassination, but I also remember the discussions about peace" (Council Forum, 2002:33). Advocators of this approach value the place according to its unique expansive physical scale in Israel, the political significance of the events taking place, its contribution to the practice of civil participation in Israel, and its emotional value. For the speakers of this approach, these meanings are interrelated and have implications on the national level. As council member Michael Roza (Council Forum, 2002:33) said, referring to the national value of the space,

For me, Rabin Square is the democratic Square of the state of Israel . . . the heart of the Israeli state and society . . . A tragedy occurred in Malchei Israel Square. A Prime Minister was murdered there. This event can only strengthen participation in democratic acts and in the need to defend democracy.

Again, for those who support the contextual approach, the scale of the Square as unique must be viewed in relation to Israeli society as a whole rather than to a particular political group. Because of this, the building of a parking lot in the space threatens democracy, even though the proposal does not modify the physical dimensions of the Square or alter the activities within it. As Nissim Calderon (Council Forum, 2002:55) noted,

If the Square is ruined, I must say that this would modify the culture of protest, because there is no other place . . . like it, neither in Haifa nor in Jerusalem. Protest is extremely important, a valuable asset. That is why . . . I personally support plans for rehabilitation, for dealing with problems and dilemmas . . . but I am not for perpetuating exciting places or holy stones.

Thus, the supporters of this approach do not object to architectural intervention in the Square but are cautious about broader changes that will modify its national status.

URBAN ABSENCE AND THE FUTURE OF THE SQUARE

The case of Rabin Square shows that diverse approaches to place making can emerge from collective awareness of a traumatic event. Supporters of the pragmatic approach regard the moment as a productive

opportunity. The plaza is identified, not with the murder, but with an ongoing process of events (both human and physical). This sensitivity to and awareness of the traumatic moment maintains routines and calls on the citizens to re-normalize. Conversely, the supporters of the symbolic approach see the plaza as an international symbol of efforts to achieve peace, a symbol whose meaning transcends place, thus transforming the place of the moment into an idealistic space. This is an ideology that distances its citizens from the everyday and views the site as an urban locus for moments, memorials, and slogans.

Supporters of the sacred approach emphasize the distortion created by the moment and comprehend it as a trauma that cannot be grasped beyond its location. They do not distinguish the place from the narrative (*i.e.*, the location of the assassination) or include its immediate environment. Both place and narrative are perceived as frames that cannot be changed or negotiated. This approach supports such practices as collective mourning and memorial ceremonies.

The contextual approach regards the moment as connected to other events and places rather than as autonomous. Accordingly, the meaning of the assassination is derived from its social context. Although they differ, there is a strong resemblance here between the sacred and symbolic approaches, both of which advocate urban absence by recreating a single memory for the place. Those who favor the contextual approach see a threat to democracy if the plan is implemented. However, they do not ask whose democracy. Speakers for the municipality discuss the non-participation of certain groups (*e.g.*, Israeli Arabs, Palestinians, foreign workers). This aspect of the debate arouses doubts concerning the integrity of a system that does not allow critical challenges to the current perception of the Square, but only reinforces the existing order by perceiving the Square as the gathering place for the Jewish collective. Thus, although the expressions “the democratic square” and “the people’s place” are frequently heard, not all of “the people” are included. It is also important to admit, as Butler says, that the public sphere is “constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors” (Butler, 2004:17). In other words, opening up the discursive boundaries of the Square and promoting free and unrestricted public debate are crucial to Israeli democracy. (For an additional example of controversy over public space in Tel Aviv, see also Hatuka and Kallus, 2007:31-32.)

EPILOGUE: EVERYDAY LIFE, TRAUMA PRACTICES AND ARCHITECTURE

The concept of the everyday focuses on the here and now rather than on modernist projections of a future utopia.⁹ Lefebvre’s theory (1984, 1991) concerning the relationship between everyday life and modernity discusses the ability of the everyday “spontaneous conscience” to resist the oppressions of quotidian existence. Ignoring the monotonies and tyrannies of daily living, De Certeau (1984) stressed the individual’s capacity to manipulate situations and create realms of autonomous action as “networks of anti-discipline.” Giddens (1984, 1991) perceived everyday activities as a potential challenge to the modern nation-state. Accordingly, skilled manipulators daily construct a liberating social order through originality and creativity. Personal action is thus perceived as a means for cultural and social redefinition and for effecting change.

This potential of everyday practices to challenge the modern nation-state via the lived space is questionable in cases of collective trauma, when both the social order and personal action become incomplete and insecure (Edkins, 2003). This psychoanalytic theory assumes that both the state and its subjects merely pretend to be secure. An event can be described as traumatic if it exposes or challenges this pretense (Edkins, 2003:11). However, traumatic events, though overwhelming, can also be revealing. They challenge the commonly accepted norms by which we lead our lives, and this awareness often presents opportunities for change and social revision. In other words, trauma is also a revisionist in that it often gives rise to change or re-visualization of a specific element. The phenomenon of changing direction and/or revision immediately after a crisis makes the individual reinterpret reality in light of a social order (Garfinkel, 1967). This social order helps to normalize and organize the interpretation, evaluation, and encoding of sensory stimuli, however chaotic or accidental an event may be. Seen thus, the conflict over memory and posttraumatic practices contributes to organizing traumatic moments into a cognitive reality, a bounded security. However, when the locus is a public urban space that accommodates contradictory practices, a conflict occurs, thus evoking the struggle over absence.

What is the role of architecture in these processes? Architectural production in a posttraumatic situation accentuates the power differences between groups. By planning for the future, it challenges contemporary everyday life infected by trauma and calls for transformation. This analysis of the pragmatic, symbolic, sacred, and contextual approaches is not concerned merely with the concrete construction of place but also with how it is integral to the cultural, national, and political discourse of space. These complex relations between the place, architecture, and nation-state are infinitely repetitive and reversible. Furthermore, the concept of revision through architecture/planning practices is inherent in the production of the cultural space. This aspect of professional practice makes it the mediator in contested arenas, integrating spatial production with political discourse. This role is often ignored by professionals who are not fully aware of their contribution in the process of place making and their influence on the interrelationships between traumatic event and place. Though we do not know whether the parking lot in Rabin Square will be constructed, the process of place making has challenged urban absence, and some of the monolithic national perceptions of the Square have been reduced accordingly.

NOTES

1. LaCapra (2001:195) argues that the mythical belief in a past that has been lost may be combined with an apocalyptic, often blind utopian quest to regain that lost wholeness in a desired future. Sometimes this occurs through violence directed against outsiders who have purportedly destroyed or contaminated the wholeness.
2. For the role of symbolizing differences and conflict in cities, see Fincher and Jacobs (1998). For the discussion on the everyday practices, see Lefebvre (1991) and De Certeau (1984). For a discussion of contested public history of a place, see Hayden (1997).
3. Constructed on the former Portalis orchard in the Arab village of Summeil, the Square was initially defined in Geddes' 1927 plan. The original plan called for the construction of a city hospital, but the site was used instead as a public garden and a zoo until the 1950s.
4. The first competition, in 1947, was for constructing the streets and the Square (Yediot Tel Aviv Council, 1947). Competitors were asked to suggest continuous facades to define both the Square and the private development at the site. Four years later, in 1951, a competition focusing on the plaza itself was announced. Abraham Yaski and Shlomo Pozner won. In 1957, architect Menahem Cohen won the third competition for the City Hall building.
5. So called because of the estimated number of participants (Michaeli, 2001).
6. On September 16, 1982, a group of Lebanese Christian Falangists entered the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila (near Beirut). They massacred between 800 (official Israeli figure) and 3,500 (according to the Israeli journalist Kapeliouk) people, including women and children. On the previous day, the Israeli army had entered this area of the city and sealed the camps from the outside world, after which they passively observed the events of September 16-18.
7. The 1993 Oslo Accords were agreements between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), representing the Palestinians as part of a peace process, officially called the Declaration of Principles. The negotiations were undertaken in total secrecy, and breakthrough agreements were signed on August 20, 1993. A public ceremony was held in Washington, D.C., on September 13, 1993, with Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin. Despite the high hopes expressed in the Oslo Accords and in subsequent agreements, the problems have yet to be resolved.
8. This discursive change relates to post-modernist development and the corpus of urban design theory, developed after World War II and culminating in the 1960s. It opposes enlightened ideas in architecture and their implications for perceptions of time and space. The loss of a political, economic, social, and symbolic urban center due to physical disintegration of the urban fabric required challenging the positivist, modernist, and functional worldviews. This has led to a search for alternative modes of operation in the city, by emphasizing the physical space, existing circumstances, and the local historical context.
9. First developed with regard to anthropology and ethnology, this interest in ordinary lived experience attempts to understand culture as deriving from commonly shared values and how these values are translated into the norms and rules that regulate society (Williams, 1958).

REFERENCES

- Arzi Y (1977) *To the council members*. Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 25, Folder 2532.
- Azaryahu M (1996) The spontaneous formation of memorial space. *Area* 28(4):501-513.

- Butler J (2004) *Precarious life: The power of mourning and violence*. London and New York: Verso.
- Carruth C (1996) *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- City Spokesman (1996) *Malchei Israel Square*. Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 25, Folder 2532.
- Council Forum (2002) Protocol 15. Unpublished forum, City of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, Israel.
- De Certeau M (1984) *The practice of the everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dekel I (2000) *The enclave of collectivity, cultural analysis of the peace and democracy guardians November 4, 1995 in Rabin Square*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University.
- Dotan E (2000) An end to the trauma: Sterilization and obliteration in memory representation. *Theory and Criticism* 17:27-34.
- Dovey K (1999) *Framing places, mediating power in built form*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Edkins J (2003) *Trauma and the memory of politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engineers' and Architects' Association (2001) *The fight over Rabin Square*. Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 14, Folder 263.
- Engler M (1999) A living memorial: Commemorating Yitzhak Rabin in the Tel Aviv Square. *Places* 12(2): 1-4.
- Feige M (2000) Yitzhak Rabin: His perpetuation and the perpetuation of his perpetuation. In L Grinberg (Ed.), *Contested memory — myth, nation and democracy, thoughts after Rabin's assassination*. Beer-Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research, pp. 39-64.
- Fincher R, Jacobs J (1998) *Cities of difference*. New York: Guildford Press.
- Foucault M (1997) Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias. In N Leach (Ed.), *Rethinking architecture*. London: Routledge, pp. 350-356.
- Freud S (1957) Mourning and melancholia. In J Strachey (Ed.), *Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 243-58.
- Garfinkel H (1967) *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Geddes P (1927) *Town planning scheme*. Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 14, Folder 263.
- Giddens A (1984) *The constitution of society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens A (1991) *Modernity and self-identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldberg M (Writer) (2001) *Hazira* (The arena). Directed by Moyshe Goldberg. Eran Riklis Productions, Ltd.
- Grinberg L (Ed.) (2000) *Contested memory — myth, nation and democracy, thoughts after Rabin's assassination*. Beer-Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research.
- Haskins E, DeRose J (2003) Memory, visibility, and public space: Reflections on commemoration(s) of 9/11. *Space and Culture* 6:377-393.

- Hatuka T, Kallus R (2007) Mediation between state, city, and citizens: Architecture along the Tel Aviv shoreline. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 24(1):23-41.
- Hayden D (1997) *The power of place: Urban landscapes as public history*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Horowitz D, Lissak M (1990) *Trouble in utopia: The overburdened polity of Israel*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved.
- Israeli Knesset Interior and Environment Committee (2001) *Proposed legislation for Rabin Square*. Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 14, Folder 263.
- Jarzombek M (2001) *Urban heterology: Dresden and the dialectics of post-traumatic history*. Lund: Lund University Press.
- Kallus R (2004) The political role of the everyday. *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 8(3):34-361.
- Kristeva J (1982) *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- LaCapra D (2001) *Writing history, writing trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lefebvre H (1984) *Everyday life in the modern world*. London: Transaction Publishers.
- Lefebvre H (1991) *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Leys R (2000) *Trauma, a genealogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Massey D, Jess P (1995) *A place in the world? Places, cultures and globalization*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Merrifield A (1993) Place and space: A Lefebvrian reconciliation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 18(4):516-531.
- Michaeli M (2001) The state square. *Tel Aviv Weekly Newspaper* 26 October:42-48.
- Nizan-Shifan A (1996) Contested Zionism — alternative modernism: Erich Mendelson and the Tel Aviv Group in mandate Palestine. *Architectural History* 39:147-180.
- Radden J (2000) *The nature of melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosenblum D (2000) A modest suggestion. *Haaretz Daily Newspaper Israel* 5 November:2.
- Rowe P, Sarkis H (1998) *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the construction and reconstruction of a modern city*. Munich: Prestel.
- Segal R, Weizman E (2003) *A civilian occupation: The politics of Israeli architecture*. New York: Verso.
- Sorkin M, Zukin S (2002) *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City*. New York: Routledge.
- Vinizki-Sarusi V (2000) Between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: The perpetuation of Rabin and national identity discourse in Israel. In L Grinberg (Ed.), *Contested memory — myth, nation and democracy, thoughts after Rabin's assassination*. Beer-Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research, pp. 19-38.
- Williams R (1958) *Culture and society 1780-1950*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Yacobi H (2004) In-between surveillance and spatial protest: The production of space in the mixed city of Lod. *Surveillance and Society* 2(1):55-77.

Yediot Tel Aviv Council (1947) *How will Malchei Israel Square be constructed?* Tel Aviv Historical Archive, File 14, Folder 263.

Yona Y (2000) Israel after Rabin's assassination: Jewish state or all citizens' state? In L. Grinberg (Ed.), *Contested memory — myth, nation and democracy, thoughts after Rabin's assassination*. Beer-Sheva: Humphrey Institute for Social Research, pp. 109-122.

Zafirir D (2003) Interview. May.

Additional information may be obtained by writing directly to Dr. Tali Hatuka at the Department of Geography and Human Environment, Tel Aviv University, P.O. Box 39040, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel; email: hatuka@post.tau.ac.il.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was generously supported by the European Community's Marie Curie OIF (FP6) Fellowship.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dr. Tali Hatuka is an architect, urban designer, and author. She is currently based in the Department of Geography and Human Environment at Tel Aviv University. Hatuka works primarily on social, planning, and architectural issues, focusing on the relationships between urban renewal, violence, and life in contemporary society. Her recent book, *Revisioning Moments: Violent Acts and Urban Space in Contemporary Tel Aviv*, is forthcoming from the University of Texas Press (English). She is currently writing a book, *Urban Design and Civil Protests: A Contemporary Mediation*, as part of a large urban sociology project funded by the European Community. In 2008-2009, her work was exhibited at an interactive multimedia exhibition, entitled "Urban Design and Civil Protest," at the Compton Gallery at MIT Museum. Please visit <http://www.urbandesign-civilprotest.com> for more information.

Manuscript revisions completed 13 April 2009.



COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

TITLE: Urban Absence: Everyday Life Versus Trauma in Rabin Square, Tel Aviv

SOURCE: J Archit Plann Res 26 no3 Aut 2009

The magazine publisher is the copyright holder of this article and it is reproduced with permission. Further reproduction of this article in violation of the copyright is prohibited. To contact the publisher:
<http://taz.tamu.edu/Press/japr2.html>