

## Preserving the Recent and the Most Recent Memories of Tel Aviv

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Since 2004 the website “Tel Aviv White-City” has been discussing the Modern Heritage of Tel Aviv, the built form of its identity. It is the result of a process that dates back to the 1970s, when artistical media began to deal with The White City as a memory device. This process testimonies how artistical media have been realizing *die Sorge* (Care) and, then, the preservation of the city, according to Heidegger’s philosophical language. It has given birth to the restructuration of city’s life and identity, and takes inspiration from the re-telling of local recent history. The latest results of this cultural mediatization of the city are the Conservation Plan, the new Master Plan and the Strategic Plan, determining a new urban development trend, the main theme of which is the reconstruction of the *telavivi* identity.

This trend is the rejuvenation of a former one, that happened in the early beginnings of city’s life, when artistical representations of the young Tel Aviv were nourishing the sense of place and, then, the cultural dimension of its development. In this light, Soskin’s photographs and Gutman’s drawings might be considered expressions of preserving the ensemble of the most recent memories of the city.

## Preserving the recent and the most recent memories of Tel Aviv

My approach:  
 City and  
 Urbanscape  
 as Phenomena and  
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 Urbanscape as  
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Micha Kirschner 1999: *I saw Tel Aviv from the  
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Heritage as memory and identity device.. (F2)



Urban-  
 scape  
 as text,  
 Archi-  
 te(x)ct-  
 ures  
 its  
 lexicon  
 (3)



Public Space Exhibition (Tel Aviv, 2003): visualizing Tel Aviv as a mediatization of local memory (F3)

F5

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Taking Care of Recent Past memories : rejuvenation of an earlier trend (5)

F6



Pastels of  
 a mythical present



GUTMAN:  
 I have seen

F7



Taking Care of the most recent memories.  
 Two mediatizations of the beginnings of Tel Aviv:  
 Soskin's photos, grasping the historical present,  
 Gutman's drawings, creating a mythical present (6)

**Figure 1.** Micha Kirschner, 1999, Raiti le-Tel Aviv mi-Migdal Shalom. I have chosen this installation to represent my approach. It shows part of Tel Aviv urbanscape at the current time with a layered on photo of the Migdal Shalom, an architectural element of the contemporary urbanscape (on the right), and with a picture of Rothschild Boulevard with the Gymnasia Herzliya at the end by Gutman (1959), and a design of the

Gymnasia façade (elements of the past Tel Aviv urbanscape). The handwritten text says: “I saw Tel Aviv from Migdal Shalom”. Shifting his gaze from the present epoch, the artist has reached the true essence of Tel Aviv: the Gymnasia Herzliya, demolished in 1963 in order to build the Migdal Shalom.

**Source:** Omer, M. (ed.) 1999, *The 90th Anniversary of Tel Aviv-Yafo. Contemporary Cityscapes. Israeli and American Artists*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, p. 192.

**Figure 2:** Gutman’s mosaic detail

The photo shows a detail of Gutman’s mosaic, placed in the Migdal Shalom.

In Gutman’s mediatization of Tel Aviv the city is a memory device, represented by its current architectural bodies, among which he put the Gymnasia Herzliya image, encapsulated in an out of time bubble: though it is a disappeared body, it is still nourishing Tel Aviv’s identity and protecting the city.

**Source:** Photo by A. Lamberti 2003.

**Figure 3:** The *Public Space* exhibition

The sequence shows how the exhibition *Public Space* interpreted Tel Aviv with respect to its past memories and its multi-language representations, displayed in a room of the Helen Rubinstein Museum in 2003. Tel Aviv has been mediatized by its name, maps of Geddes’ plan area, a satellite photo on the floor, films of an every day urban scene and the urbanscape in the 30s, a young woman, a song.

**Source:** Photos by A. Lamberti 2003.

**Figure 4:** Tel Aviv the memory of Tel Aviv-Yafo

The cartogram is composed by a scaled down reproduction of Geddes’s plan (1938) and a photo by Kluger (1948), both layed on a map of Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality. It shows the position of Geddes’ plan area, i.e. Tel Aviv, inside the area of Tel Aviv-Yafo and represents its relationship with the whole Municipality.

**Source:** Elaboration by A. Lamberti 2005.

**Figure 5:** Tel Aviv White City

**Source:** *Tel Aviv White-City*, [www.white-city.co.il](http://www.white-city.co.il).

**Figure 6:** Soskin: I am seeing

**Source:** Raz, G. (ed.) 2003, *Soskin: a retrospective. Photographs, 1905-1945*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv.

**Figure 7:** Gutman: I have seen

**Source:** Dagon, Y. (ed.) 1999, *Gutman’s Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv’s Gutman*, Gutman Museum, Tel Aviv.

## (1) Tel Aviv and the mediatization of memories

Tel Aviv is not yet one hundred years old. It is still a young city but one of the most important aspects of its mediatization regards its relationship with the memory of its past. In the light of a cultural analysis aiming to point out the most peculiar aspects of Telavivi experience, Tel Aviv might be defined “the city of memories” and “the memory of the city”.

My approach to cultural analysis of city and its mediatization is grounded on an epistemological trinomial: the city (as phenomenon) – the city (as heuristic instrument) – and Cultural Heritage.

As a phenomenon a city is always a specific urban situation, that cannot respond to a pattern or be understood and communicated according to the inflexible syntax of a theoretical urban design. A city is a living entity, a kind of cultural life, where and through which society expresses itself.

But a city is also a complex instrument for deciphering territorial living and everyday issues. Analysing territories through the city-heuristic instrument permits us to recognize unusual aspects, that often cannot be seen. A city is an instrument-subject of *katanarrative* that reveals the multiplicity of territorial narratives. Its essence lies in its nature of territorial fragments, since it expresses the cultural and political positionality of local subjectivities, which a researcher can articulate if he/she makes his/her will of investigating synchronous with his/her research subjects' rhythm of life (Lamberti 2005).

My urban geography perspective leads me to consider *urbanscape* as a research field. The urbanscape is a phenomenon to be investigated but also a surface of visualization, where urban events appear, juxtaposed or layered, depending on the trajectory of observing subject's eye and his/her position in respect to the city. As the urbanscape is a visual synthesis of the city, it can also be considered as a heuristic instrument. This permits us to realize a methodological practice that allows us overcome the inflexibility of chronological and linear frameworks of research, giving us instead the possibility of connecting the interrogation of both past and present, moving unceasingly between them, observing their co-presence embedded in the urbanscapes. Besides the temporal meaning of urbanscape there is also a territorial one. The urbanscape is not only the skyline, the profile of the city, seen from afar, that often alludes to its rapid transformation into metaphor and the visualization of a bird's-eye view perspective just like in the maps, belonging to the huge and varied pre-Enlightenment cartographical corpus.

Urbanscape can also be seen *flâneuristically*, according to an inside-the-urban-territory perspective: this is a condition in which the observing subject is completely immersed in the city, that he/[she] experiences with all his/[her] body, with all his/[her] senses (Benjamin 1939).

In this light, urbanscape can be regarded as a complex visual system, constituted by people, animals, vegetable forms of life, or inert natural elements that compose the soil where the city arises from, architectural bodies, places. The *flâneur/euse*' eye projects itself from the interior of the city and, at a human height, turns to different bodies, that compose it, keeping an equal relationship with it. The act of seeing-while-walking permits the *flâneur/euse* to re-define the urbanscape in the form of a text, which he/she belongs to and 'writes' while he/she is travelling all over and experiencing the city. The urbanscape is the visual configuration of urban-territorial plots or narratives. The visual nature of urbanscape, rendered explicit by *scape*, the linguistic component coming from the Ancient Greek verb σκοπέω [scopeo] I observe, leads us to discuss the visual aspects of the remembering act in respect to the city: linking the city to memory is a complex issue of History or better of Hi(d)story(a). The word History includes one of the roots of the Ancient Greek verb ὀράω [orao] I see: I am referring to the root of the perfect tense οἶδα [oida], that means I know since I have seen.

The word History means that the awareness of knowledge is inseparably linked to the experience of seeing. So, the cultural identity of an urban society, as the identity which can be considered as the awareness of “the self”, which might be built and defined through a visual dialectical process with the city and through the re-narration and visualization of its memories, becomes an act of Hi(d)[see]story[-telling].

The city is a memory and identity device (Boyer 1994). Urban Heritage, as an expression of city’s History-histories and memories, can be considered an instrument for critical processes of remembering, that may involve the preservation, or the deconstruction or the reformulation of different cultural layers of the city (Chambers 2001). The city as a phenomenon is an ensemble of its own memories that the city sets up on the basis of a spatial syntax. Through this spatial syntax the city holds, gathers and displays urban memories in the form of an archive to be lived in.

Hence the city is the active performance of a territorial body (Mazzoleni 1993) made of /built with its memories/Heritage (Poulot 1998). In the light of the process of visualization of urban identity, Cultural Heritage can be re-considered as a multiform system of memories embedded in buildings and places inside the city’s territory. This system of traces assumes the meaning of Cultural Heritage when, and if, its cultural contents, which the spatial configurations of urban territories and bodies performed in the past, come to the surface of the present epoch or have been preserved along the course of time thanks to systems of transference (from the latin verb *trans-fero* I bring through); that is through *media* in the etymological sense of means or devices.

## (2) Tel Aviv and memory

Since I am aware of Said’s lesson (1992) that theory cannot remain pure or be confined in the Dustless Regions of Thought, but it needs to hybridize itself with phenomena and places, which it deals with and where it comes from, I bring with my approach to Tel Aviv and urban memory the sense with which the *Telavivim* build, elaborate, discuss their city as a “memory device”, in order to excavate the particular meanings that memory assumes in Tel Aviv. This means investigating not only the relationship between memory and the city but also the relationship between Tel Aviv, memory in general and Tel Aviv’s memory in particular: between Tel Aviv and the meanings of the Modern Heritage (Lamberti 2006b), between memory and its historical context. I am referring to the issue of the peculiarity of the Recent Past and the Recent Memory. To excavate the issue of memory in Tel Aviv permits me to focus on themes of the cultural and identity value of the Youth of Memory and the manner of freezing its freshness in the attempt to move from a phenomenal investigation towards a further and future hybrid conceptualization. The young memory theme is an important aspect in urban cultural studies and in urban development studies context because it regards the relationship between memory and current life of the city, and, this permits me to focus on the vitality of memory and on how it is included in current territorial and social plots (Lamberti 2006a). In Tel Aviv what is going on with regard to the process of mediatization of the city expresses not only the specific relationship that Tel Aviv has with its earlier 50 years of ex-istant memory, but also with the attempt to freeze that memory, visualizing (in the literature mediatization too, particularly in Yoram Kaniuk’s and Yaakov Shabtai’s novels) the aspect of places inside Tel Aviv and their sense, before that memory, whose witnesses are often still alive, becomes simply a banal memory locked in the past. This trend of preserving recent memory, sustaining the memory of an epoch lived by the city and its architectural and artistical representations, is a means of inhabiting that memory in order to re-generate the memory of a way of being, in a period when the *Telavivim* and their city have been moulded: it secures the ongoing sense of place in/of Tel Aviv to an awareness of its identity. At the end of the 80s *Ariel*, one of the most interesting journal of Israeli art and literature, dedicated a special

issue to Tel Aviv, confronting the rediscovery of its own identity, and celebrated the topical aspect of its past with short-stories, poems, articles about specific aspects of the Telavivi past, that describes the city as the cultural capital of Israel (Ariel 1989). Tel Aviv has been identified with the process of its Recent Memory-Past preservation, whose meaning lies in what Martin Heidegger defined *die Sorge*, or Care.

Heidegger's philosophical thought explores, commencing from the philological reconstruction of a lexicon, the sense of inhabiting, which he links to the acts of building and preserving:

We do not inhabit since we have built; but we build and have built because we inhabit, i.e. because we are because we are the inhabitants (*die Wohnenden*). But what does the essence of inhabiting lie in? The main aspect of inhabiting is to take care. It permeates the inhabiting in every single part. (Heidegger 1951a, p. 98).

Quoting Hölderlin Heidegger shows another aspect of inhabiting: «Voll Verdienst, doch dichtersich, wohnt Der Mensch auf dieser Erde (Worthfully, but poetically Man inhabits the Earth)» (Heidegger 1951b, p. 127). The adverb “poetically” refers to poetry, a form of Art and, therefore, according to Heidegger means *medium* to realize the *συνβάλλειν* [sumballein], to bring together and to communicate different level of meanings, to mediatize. Poetry comes from the Ancient Greek word *ποίησις*, which refers to the act of bringing-outside-from, disclosing what is hidden «in this way what is hidden and the hiding are not put aside, but cherished and protected» (Heidegger 1964, p. 39).

In Heidegger's philosophical language “To Poetry” expresses his own trust in a kind of pre-scientific knowledge and interpretation, in which he searches for the true and deep meaning of ‘to think’ in *What does to think mean?*. In this work, the act of thinking is reinterpreted as a series of equations, which reveal that to think and to know how to think are linked to the acts of remembering- taking care of-cherishing-preserving (Heidegger 1954).

Inhabiting-Building include the Remembering-Preserving places: they all mean to produce a sense of place while producing and experiencing it physically. Dealing with cities and places within them, this complex of Inhabiting-Building-Remembering-Preserving might be considered as the cultural dimension of urban development.

### (3) “The memory of the city” and the Architectural Heritage

An aspect of taking care of Tel Aviv's memory expresses itself in the identification of the architectural Heritage of The White City, in the heart of the city, the materialization-mediatisation of the Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo's memory, which the city has to start from, in order to begin a process of re-development.

This process of re-telling local recent history, through the built environment of the city centre's urban places, dates back to the 1970s, when literature, and later paintings, architecture, cinema, and contemporary art installations began to deal with The White City of Tel Aviv, the built memories of its beginnings, representing it as the location of the happiest years of Tel Aviv life in contrast with the identity crisis, that the city was experiencing. The White City and its Modern Heritage are the architectural mediatization of the European origin of the main ethnic group of Tel Aviv founders and contemporary citizens, but currently they represent a transethnic identity device, which identify the “Telavivi tribe”. Furthermore, the International Style aesthetics mediatizes the particular relationship, characterized by an equal and intense dialogue, that linked the Telavivi urban society and the Jewish Diaspora (Lamberti 2004). It has given birth to the restructuring of the city's life and identity, through the preservation of the Telavivi Modern Heritage. The results of this cultural mediatization of the city are the Conservation Plan (1997), the new Master Plan (2003) and the Strategic Plan (running since 2000, and currently in its third stage). These plans focus on the preservation of The

White City, determining a new urban development trend, whose main theme is the reconstruction of the sense of place, the sense of belonging to Tel Aviv and the awareness of the Telavivi identity. The latest result is the website “Tel Aviv White-City” ([white-city.co.il](http://white-city.co.il)), that since 2004 has been discussing the Modern Heritage of Tel Aviv, the treasure and the built form of its identity.

The process of regenerating the Modern Architectural Heritage assumes a cultural peculiarity in the respect with this Heritage nature as medium of recent past memories. The Modern Heritage of Tel Aviv is the mediatization of a special history because not completed in the past but still alive. Modern Architectural Heritage is the ensemble of traces from a kind of past that more than other kind of past comes to our eyes as a place, inspiring new research and methodological trends, calling for an interdisciplinary approach, conjoining anthropological, geographical and historical insights (Lamberti 2006b). Architectures, “lieux de mémoires” (Nora 1992), hold eyes of social milieux, who built and inhabited them, and, furthermore, they mirror eyes of social and political milieux who are currently looking at them and taking them into consideration.

In Tel Aviv Modern Movement buildings, urban bodies, hold and transmit contents of a special History as it is local and recent. Their preservation allows the city to prolong its “recentness” and rejuvenate itself through regenerating its young memories.

The mediatization of this process happens in the term of *urbanscape-ing*. The website invites to experience the urbanscaping in a virtual manner, giving information about every single buildings, their designers, their locations on urban territory, and every events regarding the rediscovery of this Heritage.

On the other hand *The Discover Tel Aviv Centre* realizes its mediatization in a *flâneurist* manner. Established around 20 years ago, *The Discover Tel Aviv Centre* is a non-profit organization that puts into practice this need for History and memory: it communicates the living history of Tel Aviv to people interested in and curious of it, through strongly subjective story-telling that highlights the “dream city” character of Tel Aviv, demolishing the cliché of a city ugly and too young to have a History behind.

Each volunteer of the centre, for the most part retired teachers, realizes a research about an aspect of urban space, that will be the theme of the visit in the urban places constituting the research fields. The centre offers a dense schedule of visits with a Hebrew speaking guide and a less dense one with an English speaking guide, addressed not only to tourists but also to recent immigrants, who cannot understand Modern Hebrew yet.

The tours constitute an opportunity to discover the meanings of urban space, perceived as banal and experienced in every day life without paying attention. They give information about the transformations the city has gone through, and let the people imagine how the city looked like in the past, walking around the streets of the Geddes’ plan area.

This tours are the product of the eye of old generation of the *Telavivim* searching for the traces of a no longer immediately visible Tel Aviv (Lamberti 2005).

Like the Conservation Plan and the Master Plan, which refers to the spatial logic of The White City, the *Discover Tel Aviv Centre* tours are projectual devices and cultural practices to inhabit the memory and rejuvenate it.

#### (4) “The city of memories”: preserving the most recent memories

During the early beginnings of the city’s life, artistical representations of the young and small Tel Aviv were nourishing the sense of place and, subsequently, the cultural dimension of its development. In this light, Avraham Soskin’s photographs (Raz 2003) and Nahum Gutman’s paintings and drawings (Dagon 1999) might be considered as expressions of preserving the ensemble of the most recent memories/histories of the city.

### ***Soskin's mediatization approach: I am seeing***

The narrative of the city, realized by Avraham Soskin, is a live historiography, thanks to the photographic medium, assuring the immediacy of information indexation, endowing the source with the character of truthfulness, derived from the visual quality of the historical finds.

Soskin's narrative logic can be synthesized as I am seeing, and, as a consequence, I take photos of the *Telavivim*'s stories and Tel Aviv's History for the next generations. Photography permits us to participate physically and emotionally in the hi(d)storiographical tale but, above all, permits to realize a very detailed narration.

The photographic corpus, produced by Soskin, constitutes a multi-historiographical narrative visual archive about Tel Aviv, concerning memory, stories and History.

Memory has to be considered as the past Soskin personally experienced. This act of memory expresses Soskin's intimist and subjective eye, who participated in the exceptional everyday life of the city as he was one of the *Telavivim* and not only as a hi(d)storiological witness. Stories refers to the micro-historical tale of the events experienced by the *Telavivim* as they were founding, building and developing their city; they vary depending on the social, cultural, ethnic and gender typologies of the subjectivities who experienced and narrated them.

History concerns the value ascribed to the ensemble of the events scientifically documented by Soskin as Photographing-Subject, who recognized the exceptionality of Tel Aviv in the History of Jewish People and of Zionism.

Soskin had a remarkable historiographical awareness of his work. In 1909 Soskin began to record his activity regularly in his diaries, where he wrote:

One day, it was in 1909, I was roaming with the camera in one hand and the tripod on my arm, on my way for a walk through the sand dunes of what is today Tel Aviv toward Jaffa.

Where the Herzliya High School once stood I saw a group of people who had assembled for the housing plot lottery. Although I was the only photographer in the area, the organizers hadn't seen fit to invite me, and it was only by chance that this historic event was immortalized for the next generations. (Raz 2003, p. 6).

Yet the act of seeing is not neutral and does not come down to its physiologic dynamics, as it is strongly influenced by culture. Regarding the photography *The lottery of Achuzat Bait*, Soskin seems to perceive the dunes as empty, as pure space: he cannot perceive the territorializing acts, that other people realized on them. In the empty space of the dunes he saw only a group of *Eretz-Israeli* Jews Tel Aviv's citizens-to-be.

Soskin's photographic eye froze this very starting moment of endogenization process of exogenous people (Lamberti 2005), who was going to transform that space in the Telavivi territory. Being part of the Jewish society of Jaffa and informed of the project to found the first Jewish city, Soskin selected with his eye just one narrative belonging to the space/place of the dunes at the North of Jaffa. In that photography there are no dunes but just the mediatization of a city-to-be, of an urbanity project.

Soskin entrusts the exceptionality of this Tel Aviv's History-(hi)stories-memories to a historiographical and archival methodology, which gives birth to a visual language, characterized by a hierarchical syntax and an intimate lexicon.

The syntactical elements of Soskin's photographic language are people, considered as bodies of the *Telavivim* subjectivities either remarkable or not, pictured singularly or staying as different group formations, alluding to their role in the Telavivi society, showing its composition and articulation as a demographic document. People are at the top of the hierarchical syntax marking Soskin's language, followed by architectures (other kinds of urban bodies), events in the urban space, factories and things. The urban space of Tel Aviv, which houses all



of these syntactical elements-subjects, is conceived as a θέατρον [theatron] : the place for gazing, from the Ancient Greek verb θέαομαι [theaomai] I gaze, another word for I see.

Soskin's hi(d)-storio-photo-graphical experience consists of immortalizing the theatricality of Tel Aviv, a place where to attend this unfolding project.

### ***Gutman's mediatization approach: I have seen***

The logic of mediatization of city memory, revealed in Gutman's works, consists in the re-presentation/transmission of his own personal memories, and it can be synthesized as I have seen. But it is characterized by a particular attitude: using a naïve and infantile graphical language, Gutman addressed to the youngest Telavivi generations, and he began to do it when the city was still living the most recent stage of its history, in the 30s.

The painting, ink and pastel on paper (1934), illustrating the poem *On the beach*, constitutes the manifesto of Gutman's approach: here Tel Aviv, a young city, is symbolized by two little children, a boy and a girl playing on the beach, from where the *Telavivim* have taken out the raw material to build the city (sand to make the concrete). Tel Aviv is mediatized as a real and vital presence, completely emancipated from Jaffa, that is evoked as a metaphor of Tel Aviv's oriental backdrop through the skyline in the up-left corner of the painting and in the shape of a castle of sand, the two children have made for fun.

Gutman presents his narrative of Tel Aviv History as a *corpus* of subjective memories of a child, who lived the years of its birth and the very first development. The transmission of these very recent memories assume the value of παιδεία [paideia] that sets and tells to the infancy in the city the tale of a mythical and founding present, which has its origin in the infancy of the city: a mythical present that has to run forever. The visual tale aims to stimulate an emotional participation in what was going on in that foundation moment of Telavivi identity, constituted by both ordinary and exceptional events.

The Telavivi identity seems to be tightly related to the freshness of Tel Aviv's memories, that are preserved from the wear of the time and transformed in metaphor: Tel Aviv will keep its identity until it will be able to keep its past recent.

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