

Urban Events as Places of Social and Cultural Negotiation

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'Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (Foucault, 1993).

'Instead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as a discursive device, which represents difference as unity or identity' (Hall, 1992).

IDENTITY, SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SPACE

The question of identity is a complex one and it concerns both the self and the social, and refers to innumerable discussions of subjectivity (Butler, 1987), as well as cultural identity (Hall, 1992, 1996), in particular those revolving around the western 'regime of the self' (Foucault, 1980). Fuelled by political struggles, as well as by philosophical and linguistic concerns, identity as a concept emerged through the politics of feminism (Nicholson, 1990, 1995; Weedon, 1997), of ethnicity (Gilroy, 1993; Hooks, 1990), and of sexual orientation (Chodorow, 1989; Foucault, 1979; Kristeva, 1986). These were intimately related to the politics of identity and to the struggle for and around it (Hall, 1992, 1996).

Identity is totally cultural in character and does not exist outside of its representation in the cultural discourse (Hall, 1996). It is not a fixed notion but one which is constantly evolving. Identity may be understood as a regulatory discourse that guides our identification and our emotional investment, by which we produce new metaphors to describe ourselves and to expand our repertoire of alternative descriptions (Rotry, 1991). The self, according to Hall (1992), may be understood as composed not of one but of several, sometimes contradictory, identities.

In so far as this applies to individuals, it also applies to social formations. Social change becomes possible through rethinking the articulation of the elements of 'societies' and through re-describing the social order and the possibilities for the future (Hall, 1992). Social change occurs through the instability of language, the constitution by multiple, and through the proliferation of social relationships and sites of activity. These influence the human agency as socially constructed but still enable human capabilities to act in the social urban sphere. The concept of agency, as Foucault (1979, 1980) and others (Giddens, 1991; Rotry 1989), describe it, is the socially constructed capacity to act. Acts are determined by social forces that lie beyond individual subjects. Nevertheless, agency is a culturally intelligible way of understanding the self with its existential experience of facing and making choices. Although the existence of social structures is a pre-condition, it enables action, so that neither human freedom nor human action can consist of an escape from social determinants.

When discussing social forces in relation to space, Foucault (1986) and Massey (1994) argue that social structures and space are irreducible. Space is not an absolute but is relationally defined, since at least two

particles are required for space to occur. Further, time is constituted by the movement of these particles, and this movement in turn simultaneously establishes both time and space. Thus, the time-space relationship is relationally formed through interrelations of objects. It follows that social space is also relationally constituted out of the simultaneous co-existence of social relations and interactions (Foucault: 1986, 1993). Influenced by Foucault, Massey (1994) proposed that space is a social construct which is spatially constructed. The social space is not static but dynamic, constituted by changing social relations. In addition, space is implicated in questions of power symbolism, that is, the 'power-geometry' of space (Massey, 1994; Zukin, 1991, 1996). According to Massey (1994), social space implies "a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism".

SPACE AND URBAN EVENTS

Following these definitions and in contrast to the rational city that stresses the importance of financial investment, transportation links, class antagonism, the city's identity is discussed here as encounters of social desires (Deleuze & Guattari: 1988), which construct the environment and its narrative (De Certeau, 1993; King, 1996; Westwood & Williams, 1997). These social desires often take place in what is defined in this paper as 'urban events'.

Events are usually seen as entities that resemble collisions or speeches rather than objects, such as planets and people (Craig, 1998). Events represent changes or the process of change; that is, although they can be instantaneous and thus lack identity over time, they nonetheless include a temporal component. In line with this definition, the difference between objects and events, whether these represent a change or not, may be that objects keep a constant identity over time, whereas events do not. Note, though, that the notion of an event as consisting of an unstable temporal identity has been treated differently in the varied disciplines.

In architecture, Tschumi (1994) suggests that the relationships between the formal elaboration of spaces and the invention of programs, as well as between the abstraction of architectural thought and the representation of events must be explored. According to Tschumi, architecture confronts spaces and actions and within its boundaries space contains movement and events, which are ultimately independent (Tschumi, 1994).

While architects tend to explore the relationships between an event and space, anthropologists explore the relationships between events and narratives (e.g. Turner 1978, 1986; Bauman, 1986). Turner (1978) refers to events as part of the cultural ritual symbol system, often used for communication with unseen powers. Bauman (1986) discusses the notion of event as a narrative, the verbal depiction of the actual

occurrence. This view makes it necessary to determine the nature of the relationship between the narrative and the event, the extent of their similarity, and the means by which this relationship is achieved.

However, in recent years an alternative view that refers to events as abstracted from the narrative has gained increasing recognition (Bauman, 1986). According to this view, the materials of the event (including its participants) construct a set of cultural-social relationships. The event is not a frozen predetermined mode of performance, but a social frame in which structures and conventions may provide precedents and guidelines for a range of possibilities (Bauman, 1986).

In light of the above, I propose to discuss a city's identity as encounters of social desires, using the term event to denote a happening in specific temporal time-space occurrence that takes place when the social and spatial characteristics of a place combine to create a change or a shift. This change has broader implications and it touches the fundamental values-symbols of the urban society. Thus, the event is wider than the mere textual narrative, or the everyday occurrence, and instead it is a performance with physical-social implications in space. The performance - or the agency - is conceptualized as a vital mode of production in space. These implications often create mental, social, or physical transformations in space by re-negotiating the identity of a place.

The idea of urban event allows us to investigate the overlap between the text and the space. It allows to define specific moments of production (Lefebvre, 1984), that involve meaning which linked with the next moment without determining what meanings will be taken up or produced at that level (Hall, 1997). However, there are some moments that are being stabilized and transformed into cultural signs. This notion of urban events makes it possible to explore their circumstances and implications in three major directions: their materiality, representation, and conceptualization. Firstly, the analysis of materiality includes an investigation of the events that occur in a city, and the way in which these events influence the city's urbanity and its inhabitants (De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1984, 1991). Secondly, representation is discussed through an exploration of the way in which social diversities are reflected in the built environment that influences and stimulates urban processes (Hall, 1997; Zukin, 1991, 1996). Representation refers also to the cultural discourse of a city (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973). In particular, representation can be studied through examination of the media. The media constructs social knowledge and social imagery through which we reconstruct reality into some intelligible 'world of the whole' (Hall, 1977). Finally, conceptualization refers to the comprehension of an event as an abstract notion in a broader context, as an echo of global processes, such as capitalist industrialization, consumerism, the shift toward multicultural communities, immigration patterns, the population shift to the suburbs (Featherstone, 1991; Hannerz, 1996; King, 1995).

THE CITY OF TEL AVIV

When reflecting on the identity of the city of Tel Aviv, it is necessary to look both at social and physical processes that have characterized the city for several decades. Socially, the city's population has changed dramatically, as new groups of residents have entered the city in the last ten years and have shifted the hegemonic identity discourse of the 1930s into a fragmented and multiple-identity scheme (Alterman, 1995; Bartram, 1998; Ram, 1998). Physically, the city skyline has transformed enormously and this transformation was influenced by market forces, which have fragmented the regulated fabric of the last 20 years. These processes contrast with the declaration of the city's founding fathers to fight fragmentation and to create a unified identity as planned by Geddes (i.e. town planner, 1925 -1927), that consisted of white buildings influenced by the international style. Within this physical frame, the city had constructed itself as a western capitalist city, a trend that was further encouraged by the government of the new state of Israel.

These fragmenting processes, evoked a discussion regarding the acknowledgment of the social-political complexity and fragmentation on the one hand, and the historic narrative of the city's founders on the other hand (Nitzan-Shifan, 2000). This tension is enhanced by the co-existence of the "white city", and the "new city". The "white city" is promoted through the restoration of buildings, publications of books (Levin 1984; Nerdinger, 1994), exhibitions (i.e. White City, 1984), international conferences, and other events (i.e. named as Bauhaus events, 1994). The "new city" is influenced by capitalism and consumerism (Ram, 1998), by the building of high risers and entrance of new populations (Kemp, 2000). In addition to this conflict, the city's location, facing west but located in the east (i.e. in the Middle East), defines a schizophrenic identity for its inhabitants. This tension is also represented through events, places of conflict in the city, which are parts of the social processes that affect the city.

Event number 1: Rabin Square, pauses in the everyday movement.

The formal set for moments of agency and performance in the city of Tel Aviv is Rabin Square, which functions as a gathering political place (see figure 1). This square was constructed in the 1950s as a void defined by four-story buildings. On the north edge of the square stands the City Council building, which is a modern cubist box of fifteen floors. The square is a rigid place and most of the year it is practically deserted. In contrast to the hollowness of the space, the square's boundaries are busy with daily activities. Day and night the neighboring arcades are bustling with people, who sit in coffee shops, visit shops and kiosks, wait in bus stops, and keep the buzz of everyday urban life going. This well-defined, regulated urban space exemplifies the way in which cultural definitions reflect unwritten codes of behavior. It also raises questions regarding the relationships between private and public, subjective agency, identity, cultural boundaries, and the appropriation of space for cultural consumption.



Fig. 1. Rabin square, 2000.

Therefore, this space could be understood only through its social definition, as a performance stage both for everydayness and for large-scale events. Both types of events are "what we are given every day (or what is willed to us), what presses us, even oppresses us, because there does exist an oppression of the present" (De Certeau, 1984).

Although this square had played a role in numerous events, it has become a symbol of the power to act, to react, and to influence, in two cardinal moments; when 400,000 people protested there against the war in Lebanon in 1982, and when Prime Minister Yizhak Rabin was assassinated there in 1995 and later spontaneously mourned by the

public. These events and their representations in the media have become ritual symbols of the place. Although this square is tightly connected to large institutions (i.e. the City Council building), the materiality and the social order of the place activate flexibility, and invite visitors to renegotiate the question of identity. In this context the identity of the event is often unified with the identity of the place and redefines the event as a collective sign. This was the case with the monumental demonstration of 1982 but more so when the square received its current name after the assassination in 1995. Both the unprecedented number of people participating in the 1982 protest and the graveness of the assassination granted the square its special status in the city.

Ritual moments, such as those described above, involve participants who use the space to act their agency. Although Rabin Square also serves in events that represent the struggle of minorities (i.e. the gay parade begins in there), it does not serve all minority sub-groups in the city (i.e. the foreign workers or the Arab community). The populations who make use of this space are populations that also act their rights of citizenship and use it as a cultural sign. However, other populations may need contested spaces to perform and express themselves in.

Event number 2: The “new comers”.

At the beginning of the 1990s a curfew was put on Palestinian territories by the Israeli government, in response to the Palestinian uprising, and the flow of Palestinian workers into the Israeli labor market was stopped. Foreign workers from different countries began working in Israel in 1993. The set to this event is the south part of Tel Aviv, around the old central bus station. This area is constantly on the move: as a junction that coordinates the movement of people from the entire country, it contributes to the lack of stability of the bordering neighborhoods.

This event has contributed to a creation of a non-Israeli ethnic enclave which does not have clear boundaries. One can sense its borders only by contextual signs and marks left in the environment. For example, the area contains different billboards, different advertisements, and shops whose names appear in foreign languages (see figure 2, 3).



Fig. 2. Money exchange shop for foreign workers, south Tel Aviv, 2000.



Fig. 3. Redesigning the building facade, south Tel Aviv, 2000.

Many of the foreign workers do not have legal status in Israel, and this fact also affects the way they use space in their neighborhoods. A recent research conducted Schnell (2000) found that the foreign workers in Tel Aviv tend to divide their everyday life spaces into four major sub-spaces: residential, communal, labor, and telecommunicative. Schnell also argues that the neighborhood plays only a marginal role in the life of the residents of the enclave. Since many of the workers are illegal, they tend to stay in their homes rather than go out to public places in the neighborhood, in which they can be approached by the authorities. Despite their avoidance of the neighborhood, many immigrants prefer living in an enclave since such a location creates an environment that helps in adjusting to the new place, providing a proper milieu with some sense of security (Schnell, 2000).

Notice that the “new comers” do not consist of a unified group, but rather of a combination of many small communities that reclaimed the abandoned space of the old central station by exposing and adding new layers to the urban fabric. This process often happens in times of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence in cities (Young, 1990), allowing the constant change of residents in neighborhoods to leave marks on the environment by creating “the vernacular of the powerless” (Zukin, 1991, 1996).

In terms of representation, for many years the image most frequently invoked to epitomize the very worst of Tel Aviv has been the central bus station in the south of the city, although it was replaced by a new functional center a few years ago (i.e. the new central station that opened in 1992). The old bus station was noisy and crowded, combining elements of Jaffa and Tel Aviv, east and west, as well as the ultimate cross-section of the Israeli society crossing it in its travel. This area contrasts very strongly with the white hegemonic western identity. The old central bus station is a reminder that despite the symphony-hall, the art galleries, and the hopes for a European sensibility, Tel Aviv is nevertheless situated in the Middle East, where the bazaar is more natural than the shopping mall.

Originally, the southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv were built in the 1920s as dense working class areas with mixed functions. The aim was to create a buffer zone between the Jewish city of Tel Aviv and the Arab city of Jaffa. Since the 1950s this part of the city has suffered from continuous decline. At the end of the 1980s less than half of the residential units in the area were occupied by actual households, with the rest either serving for business purposes or being abandoned. In 1992, a new central bus station opened in the south part of the neighborhood. The mega-structure of the new station does not fit easily in the low scale urban fabric, providing a bizarre combination of a large mall and a massive junction of buses.

This area raises questions of identity and cultural boundaries which are complicated in terms of the self, social, and physical context, especially since the judicial problem of the foreign workers living there remains to be resolved. Therefore to ask 'whose city' is this?, as Zukin (1996) has asked, is to ask not only a simple legal-political question but also a question of the right to inhabit the dominant image of the city, since different social groups often battle over access to the center of the city and over symbolic representations in the center (Zukin, 1996).

Event number 3: Azrieli Towers and the landscape of consumerism.

On the shoulders of the Ayalon Highway many new commercial buildings have been built in the past decade and this area is still under massive development (see figure 4). At the beginning of the 1990s, with the peace process under way, Israel was going to be part of the 'new Middle East' and developers planned to build a center that would cater to the needs of foreign companies that would come from all over the world to do business in the region. In this political climate the Azrieli Towers were conceived, carrying with them political, social, and environmental importance. The towers consist of three high rise buildings (one of them is still being built), which can be reached by foot from the nearby train station, located along the Ayalon Highway. On the lower floors of the towers there is a bustling shopping mall.



Fig. 4. Azrieli Towers, On the shoulders of the Ayalon Highway, East Tel Aviv, 2000.

Simultaneously to the constantly changing political images in the region, other changes in the Israeli society have influenced the building of this project, namely class fragmentation and the rising of consumerism. Similar to the suburban sprawl seen in other western countries, during the 1960s and 1970s the majority of the working class moved to cities in the ring that surrounds Tel Aviv. Since Tel Aviv is still the financial center of all its neighboring cities, most of the work force arrives to the city from other places, using the Ayalon Highway. Thus, the Azrieli Towers are more than just a mall that offers a space of consumption, and instead they function as a huge landmark that can be seen from a distance by both workers and visitors. The towers are not located on a plot in a typical street layout (i.e. Geddes plan), but rather it creates a visual event along a street that faces the Ayalon Highway on one side and a busy motorway on the other side. The shiny towers reflect the sky and with it the desirable values of the period, modern technology, money, power, and a particular lifestyle.

What do these buildings represent and to whom? Located in the east part of the city, the Azrieli Towers embody different aspirations from those that constituted the construction of the city in the 1930s, staging the city at an important junction in the Middle East. These

towers present a physical sign to the national discourse regarding the Israeli-Arab dispute (Kimmerling, 1983; Peri, 1988). Another shift relates to the changes in consumption habits that the towers embody as flag to visitors and citizens. The consumption in that sense is also a tool which blurs the boundaries between social groups and classes. The consumption allows everyone to purchase signs for the creation of one own lifestyle (Featherstone, 1991).

Event number 4: The Promenade and the idea of diversity.

Building the promenade in the western boundary of city, parallel to the Mediterranean, connecting Jaffa and Tel Aviv in a linear line, was more than a symbolic act. This physical and political decision opened a new leisure area to varied groups of resident that populate the city (see figure 5). The physical layout of the promenade along a busy route is not unique but this area in one of the busiest areas of Tel Aviv. Coffee shops and restaurants are located along the promenade and on the shore, inviting temporary events. Today, most of the groups in the city, including middle class families, youngsters, Arab citizens, foreign workers, tourists, and groups from the cities in the ring surrounding Tel Aviv enjoy the promenade on a regular basis.



Fig. 5. The south part of the Promenade, view form south to north, Tel - Aviv, 2000.

A short stroll along the promenade, from south to north, exemplifies the multiple identities of the city and of its inhabitants. Walking from the Jaffa harbor, one can meet Arab families along the south part of the shore, who share the lawn right by the promenade with Jewish families, all engaging in similar activities. The smell of food and the sound of children fill the space most of the day, especially on weekends. Further north along the promenade, the foreign workers have established football teams, playing every Saturday in an improvised temporary football field, which they built themselves. The beach next to this field is occupied by Israeli youngsters, who celebrate their own events, parties, congregation, etc. Tourists and older residents of the city and visitors from the nearest cities occupy the northern beaches and orthodox Jews have separate defined spaces there as well. Each part of the promenade is identified with a group and with a special activity. What makes the promenade so successful? How come this place suits all? Does it suit all? Is it one promenade or many promenades, connected along one long linear strip? Is it the particular place, or the notion that some assets (i.e. the sea horizon), belong to all?

It is impossible to lay out in this paper the political representations of this linear line connecting Jaffa and Tel Aviv. However, it is important to note that there is a noticeable shift in the last decade in the presentation of groups along this line. It is not a space of utopia, but it is free, safe, not identified with a specific group, not privatized and not excluding any

group, allowing all diversities to act together in relative harmony despite of the contradictions and juxtapositions and the diversity of opposing voices.

FINAL COMMENTS

The urban events presented here relate to a massive discursive shift of that has occurred over the last decade in the city. They help us understand the meaning of current urban changes and reveal the movement from the vision of the 1930s to the present complex and fragmented society. So, Tel Aviv is not a White City anymore, as its founding fathers wanted it to be, or perhaps not just white. The hegemony of whiteness, both the physical and the social, is cracking gradually. It is not one unified city, but a Bricolage of districts, events, and desires, which redefine it not as one city but as a group of cities that generate a metropolis, exposing the movement of agency, of thought, of lifestyle, of leisure, and of cultures. From this perspective, modern life in Tel Aviv appears as a series of proliferating choices/desires to be made without traditional foundations. It encourages the city's inhabitants to reflect on their own situation, and this reflectivity enables increased possibilities for the playful self-construction of multiple identities and pluralism which can be seen in the most optimistic space in Tel Aviv, namely in the promenade.

Finally, this paper suggests that in order to comprehend the city's identity, we need to read contextual structures through 'urban events'. In this way new images will be revealed, exposing the movement of everyday processes, as well as that of global processes, such as capitalism, immigration, or the move into suburbia. This paper also proposes a way to reflect on the relationships between political processes that produce meaning and memory on the one hand and the physical environment on the other hand. It addresses several questions: How do the physical setting of the environment and the cultural conditions influence the urban space? What is the connection between the physical environment and the way in which the community is using and organizing the space? How are different groups represented in the space? What are the relationships between all these variables?

The term urban event is used here as a critical interpretive tool that defines different units according to their values on various scales pertaining to the environment. It enables us to investigate the overlap between the text and the space transformation, and in this way it shifts the discussion from the analysis of space types to the analysis of the multiple aspects of the built environment.

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