

**Studio Sergison**  
Autumn Semester 2010

Modernism as a contemporary vernacular



## Contents

5	Introduction
6	Theme: Modernism as a contemporary vernacular
10	History
18	First exercise: An urban strategy
20	Second exercise: Survey
22	Project
24	Programme: Autumn Semester 2010
26	Reading list
28	Contacts

Aerial photograph of Tel Aviv



## Introduction

Over the course of this year we will investigate the possibility that Modernism can be understood as a contemporary vernacular. Tel Aviv has been chosen as the location for this study in the Autumn Semester.

Tel Aviv recently celebrated the centenary of its foundation and, as an extension of Jaffa - the World's oldest port- it contains some remarkable buildings from the 1920s and 30s. These are sited within the framework of a very rich urban plan produced by Patrick Geddes, the Scottish city theorist.

This semester we will attend to the question of how it is possible and appropriate to add to the existing urban fabric of a city so strongly made by the idiom of the modern movement. A number of sites have been chosen to enable students to test this question and programmes for projects will privilege the normative above the speculative, in line with the established tradition of the studio.

A visit to Tel Aviv is planned towards the mid point of the semester for students to visit project sites and throughout the semester qualified experts will be invited to contribute their knowledge and expertise in support of the studio's work.

Typical view of Tel Aviv, showing the layers of transformation that have occurred over time



## Theme: Modernism as a contemporary vernacular

The history of 20th century architecture charts the evolution of Modernism. This can in part be understood as a reaction to the perceived limitations of classical architecture. The pioneers of modern architecture argued for an expression of newness and universality of application out of a socio-political impulse. A rejection of the past, utilitarian expression and universal application are fundamental aspects in our understanding of the canon of International Modernism.

In the 1920s and 30s this radical departure from the past was developed by a few extraordinary architects who developed a new approach as an evolution of their own classical training. Their impulse was to be 'modern' (contemporary). In their book 'The Heroic Period of Modern Architecture' the English architects Alison and Peter Smithson catalogue and record chronologically the evolution of this world changing movement in architecture. Many of the examples they illustrate should be familiar, as they represent the seminal buildings of the first half of the 20th century.

This semester we are interested in exploring not so much the high architecture of this period, but the manner in which Modernism was interpreted by lesser figures. Tel Aviv offers an exceptional setting for this study. While there are a number of significant individual buildings, it is the general embracing of the new, the 'modern' in architecture that makes for a powerful urban condition.

It should be remembered that as a city, Tel Aviv is barely 100 years old and that it is the second largest settlement in a state that was founded in 1948.

Our work will be in part one of review and critical appraisal, the result of which will be a proposal for a possible course of action. How can a contemporary architecture relate to one that is almost 100 years old and, in its time, advocated a *tabula rasa* attitude to the existing city? Paradoxically, should the architecture of the 1920s and '30s now be treated as a form of cultural heritage?



1



2, 3



1  
Tel Aviv as a garden city

2  
A generous balcony, a typical modernist feature

4  
The impact of traffic in contemporary Tel Aviv

How do we work with an urban plan that, despite dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, has resulted in a guiding structure for a very humane and appropriate urbanism?

The issues are more complex than they may at first appear, and the projects proposed will need to engage with their implications.



1  
Signs of neglect



1  
A city in the Middle East  
2  
The enclosing of balcony space  
3  
A city on the Mediterranean





## History

The city of Tel Aviv was founded on 11th April 1909. Today the inner city occupies an area of 51.8km<sup>2</sup>, the urban area extends to 176km<sup>2</sup>, the metropolitan area to 1,516km<sup>2</sup>. The city's population is 394,000 with a density of 7,606/km<sup>2</sup>.

Tel Aviv was founded on the outskirts of the ancient port city of Jaffa, which is at least 4,000 years old. Its name derives from the Hebrew for 'spring mount'.

During the 1880s Ashkenazi Jews (those of Eastern European ancestry) began to settle in an area of sand dunes to the north of Jaffa. The beginning of modern-day Tel Aviv is marked by the construction of Neve Tzedek, built by secular Jews and Zionists between 1887 and 1896.

The next wave of expansion began in 1906 with the goal of building an urban centre in a healthy environment, planned according to the principles of modern hygiene. Influenced by the garden city movement these ambitions encapsulate the character of the city that was established over the next 50 years or so.

In 1925 (during the period of the British Mandate), Patrick Geddes, the Scottish urban thinker, was invited to prepare a masterplan for Tel Aviv, which was then adopted by the city council led by Meir Dizengoff. The city grew steadily from this period until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

In the 1930s, many central European Jews who had trained at the Bauhaus and other modernist schools of architecture came to Palestine, fleeing Nazi persecution. With them came a modernist experience and ambition, which have resulted in the largest collection of International Style buildings in the world.

In 2004 Tel Aviv's White City was granted the status of 'world heritage site' by UNESCO.

1, 2, 3  
Historical images of Tel Aviv

Page 12, 13  
A historical record of the drawing  
of lots among the sand dunes



1



2



3



First exercise: An urban strategy

During the first weeks of the semester (before our planned trip to Israel) the studio will develop a strategy plan for the city. A model should be made at 1:500 collectively as a means to understand the existing physical character of the city. It will also allow proposals for any of the sites chosen for projects to be analysed in future.

A record should also be made of the manner in which contemporary Tel Aviv has deviated from the urban plan devised by Sir Patrick Geddes in 1928.

We are interested in exploring how it is possible to work remotely from the object of study. It is important, however, that the experience of visiting Tel Aviv allows for reflection and reconsideration of earlier assumptions and for revision where appropriate.



A plan showing the evolution of the Geddes plan



## Second exercise: Survey

On our site visit to Tel Aviv you should undertake a study of a building that could be understood as an example of a 'type'. A number of exemplary buildings have been selected for this study.

This exercise should be undertaken precisely and rigorously. Drawings should be produced at a scale of 1:20 and record the elevations of the building and its relationship to its neighbours. The work should be careful to document the manner in which transformations have occurred and how weathering has affected these buildings.

This exercise should help us to understand Tel Aviv as a city made of building types. In your design work you will then be able to react to known examples.



**1**  
Beit Hannah  
75 boulevard Ben Gurion  
Jacob Pinkerfeld, 1934

**2**  
Cohen Zadek House  
Bnei Brak  
Heinz Rau, 1938

**3**  
Maison Gabrielovitch  
27 route Menahem Begin  
Yossef Kaashdan and Elisha Hashimshony, 1936

**4**  
Children's house at Kibbutz  
Mishmar Haemek  
Josef Neufeld, 1932

**5**  
Maison Gasser  
12, rue Gottlieb  
Haim and Yossef Kashdan, 1937

**6**  
Maison Hütt  
108 rue Dizengoff  
Pinchas Hütt, 1933

**7**  
Maison Max Liebling  
29 rue Idelson  
Dov Karmi, 1936

**8**  
Nimatchov House  
3 rue Nachmani  
Max Zarnitzky, 1935

**9**  
Residence G  
rue Reines and Spinoza  
Josef Neufeld, Israel Dicker, Arie Sharon and Carl Rubin, 1936

## Project

Project work will be undertaken in pairs. The site or location of your work will be chosen for you, much in the same way that, as an architect, you are generally not able to select your site.

Your project should propose a carefully argued urban building or buildings, whose programme should be based on an understanding of the specific character and pressures that exist in and around a site. While these will vary, the expectation is that the majority of buildings will support residential use.

After the site visit, your proposed urban concept will most likely need some degree of adjustment. This should be represented at a scale of 1:500 on the model referred to earlier, although other material can be produced to support this aspect of the project. A review will be held at this stage in the semester.

The next stage will involve developing the project to a 1:100 scale and producing a model showing your design in its context and demonstrating the organization of the building's programme. Again this work would be subjected to an interim review.

All of the above work will be presented at the final critique, together with a 1:100 set of drawings including plans, sections and elevations and an additional 1:50 scale model representing the material character of your project.

Location of projects





## Programme 2010

Date	Activity	Event	Assignment
20 August	Announcement of project		
20-30 August			Time for students to confirm participation in studio and book tickets to Tel Aviv
23 September	Introduction to semester	Jonathan Sergison (JS) presents studio and autumn semester	Start work on group site model, allocation of sites
24 September			Start work on group site model,
30 September	Review of group model		1:500 group model
01 October			
7 / 8 October	Review of first massing models	Lecture by JS: 'Modernism as a contemporary vernacular'	1:500 massing model
14 / 15 October	Review of first exercise	Lecture by JS: 'How to make a survey of a building'	Allocation of buildings to be surveyed 1:500 model (and earlier study models)
20 - 24 October	Field trip to Tel Aviv	Separate detailed programme to be issued	Survey of housing projects and site visits
28 / 29 November	Review of second exercise		Survey drawings of housing projects at 1:50
04 / 05 November	Intermediate review	Invited critic	1:100 models exploring project and programme
11 / 12 November		Tutorials	1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model

Date	Activity	Event	Assignment
18 / 19 November		Tutorials	1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model
25 / 26 November		Tutorials	1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model
2 / 3 December	Reviews		1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model
09 / 10 December		Tutorials	1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model
16 / 17 December		Tutorials	1:100 plans, section and elevation drawings and 1:100 model
22 / 23 December	Final review	Invited critics	1:500 model 1:100 plans 1:100 elevations 1:50 section 1:50 model Powerpoint presentation Digital files to be submitted

## Reading list

### Tel Aviv

Joachim Schlor, University of Chicago Press, 1999

### Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation

Eyal Weizman, Verso, 2007

### Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture

Adrien Forty, Thames and Hudson, 1986

### Dwelling on the Dunes: Tel Aviv, Modern Movement and Bauhaus Ideals

Nitza Metzger-Szmuk, Editions de l'Eclat, 2004

### The heroic period of modern architecture

Alison and Peter Smithson, Architectural Design, vol XXXV, 1965

### Architecture and the city

Aldo Rossi, Ristampa 2007



## Contacts

### Professor

Jonathan Sergison  
jonathan.sergison@usi.ch

### Assistants

Marina Aldrovandi  
marina.aldrovandi@usi.ch  
t +44 (0)20 7255 1564

Sarah Maunder  
sarah.maunder@usi.ch  
t +41 (0)76 542 35 32

Georg Nickisch  
georgnickisch@usi.ch  
t +41 (0)76 4323531

### Studio

3rd floor  
Palazzo Canaveé

### Office

T 1.05  
Palazzo Turconi