Zvi Efrat l
The Jewish State

I. Utopia

Indeed, the Jewish state was established thanks to Der Judenstaat.

– Menachem Begin[1]

To begin with *utopia* is to place architecture in-between words and things; to cling to a dual sign of absence and fullness; to invoke, once again, the story of the creation of the state from the text, the Jewish State from *Der Judenstaat*.

Utopia is the effective pulp fiction of the *Zionist enterprise*. Utopia furnishes it with a narrative frame combining messianism and romanticism, philanthropy and misanthropy, Eros and civilization (according to Herbert Marcuse, utopia is the most explicit form of the return of the repressed), entertainment and education, bible and Jules Verne, a plump Arcadia and a Promethean Sodom, a proletarian brotherhood and a bourgeois taste, an old promise and a last journey.

This fictiveness does not undermine the concrete casts of the nation-building (*Binyan Ha'aretz*) undertaking; it does not rewrite the chronicles of the "Jewish Problem," and certainly does not provide a meta-historical explanation for the emergence of the Israeli nation-state. On the contrary, it anchors the Zionist movement within the rich history of *topological fantasies*, tying it, backward, to Judeo-Christian eschatology which fostered Jerusalem, the celestial city of

origin, and forward, to the modern national movements which formed around the intersection of language and map; with the movements of economic and social reform which sought to reorganize the space of production and consumption; and with the revolutionary architectural movements which secured the hygienic models of the cities, and mainly the suburbs, of tomorrow.

In order to define the existence and uniqueness of Zionism *within* history, philosopher Martin Buber introduced the notion of *topism*. This linguistic distortion strives to describe the dialectical incarnation of the imaginary into the worldly, namely—to reinforce the relationship between the Zionist projection and the Israeli project. At the same time, however, it also implies (and this is indeed a far-reaching interpretation) a certain loss involved in the process of national realization; a reduction to which Zionism condemns itself in its eagerness to stop the wandering in time and space; in omitting the (a-)local dimension; in relinquishing the coefficient of abstraction; in becoming excessively geographical.

Another, even more speculative shortcut in diagnosing the affinities between Zion and Israel, between the textual and the textural, between the virtual (virtue possessing) and the real (dimension possessing) may be sought in the notion of heterotopia—yet another linguistic bastard threatening the innocence of utopia,

proposed by philosopher Michel Foucault in his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." Generally speaking, according to Foucault, the transition from the 19th to the 20th century was also a transition from an obsessive engagement with time (history, genealogy, evolution and degeneration, accumulation and cyclicality) to a spatial mentality (simultaneity, networking, proximity and distance, centralization and dispersion). Space—and herein lies a possible elementary description of Zionism—is always a cultural structure, a social institution, an invention of distance, of refuge, of *another place*, whether real (heterotopian) or unreal (utopian), located or not, built-up or projected, mundane or exemplary, erotic or exotic.

But why should we, today, revert to digging into utopias and continue to confound ourselves in theories? The elusive journeys and political novels of the early 20th century, let us bear in mind, were, at best, granted the status of horoscope-like prophecies in relation to the official narrative of practical Zionism; in fact, they have never been included in the literary canon, the educational curriculum, and the Israeli political discourse.

Two good reasons come to mind: first, it is a safe way to escape reality, to console oneself with a legend, and reactivate the imagination which set "the angel of history" in motion. Second, it is an apt way to finally part with utopia, lament it,

and examine the chaos it has wrought. Without reading anew the transcripts which kindled historical hope, invoked national passion, and sketched a political horizon, it is pointless to try to depict a mass movement of immigration and settlement, violent acts of occupation and deportation, a decisive policy of population dispersal and construction of new towns, monumental enterprises of swamp drainage, paving, planting, diversion, and mining, or any other initiative which left its imprint on the Israeli landscape.

At the same time, without indicating (at least indicating) the utopian catch, the *dystopian* fate concealed in it, the political mechanism (for everything begins and ends with the political) embodying a lofty aspiration for solidarity and social harmony in a centralist, patronizing, dogmatic apparatus which strives to enforce itself on all areas of life to the point of unity between society and state (or society and the political party)—how are we to account for the radical processes of disintegration and polarization taking place in present-day Israel? As for the nation-building enterprise, how shall we interpret the swift, sudden transition from architecture of strictness, restraint, and obsessive order in the first decades of the State, to an architecture of caprice, spectacle, and accumulation in recent decades?

Zionist utopist literature is symbolically exemplified here via two paragraphs written

by Herzl. The first was extracted from an 1895 document composed as an "Address to the Rothschilds" and published a year later as a book entitled *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State). The second was extracted from his novel *Altneuland* (Old-New Land) published in 1902, five years after the opening of the first Zionist congress in Basel. Rather than imaginary exaggerations typical of the genre, these are the most reflexive moments of utopist writing; "constructions" or "combinations," as Herzl demanded, letting the reader in, first, on his attempts to repel the temptations of "the non-obliging entertainment novel," to empty it of "phantasy" and increase its reality effect, and once again—having already become "king of the Jews," after the state he invented on paper had immediately made him a spokesman, a diplomat, the authoritative leader of a movement of national awakening—in his attempts to return to utopia, to find refuge in the ideal non-place of the writer, to entirely blur distinctions between words and deeds.

In the first paragraph, Herzl for the first time introduces the idea of establishing the Jewish State, declaring:

> *I wish to be clearly understood from the outset that no portion of my argument is based on a new discovery. I have discovered neither the historic condition of the Jews nor the means to improve it. In fact, every man will see for himself that the materials*

of the structure I am designing are not only in existence, but actually already in hand. If, therefore, the attempt to solve the Jewish Question is to be designated by a single word, let it be said to be the result of an inescapable conclusion rather than that of a flighty imagination.[2]

In the second paragraph he already speaks via a recorded voice (!), that of the invisible Joe Levy, who recounts how he hired a fancy, modern ship christened the Futuro, and invited world leading intellectuals for a spring cruise in the Mediterranean:

> *On board the 'Futuro' were gathered poets and philosophers, inventors, explorers, investigators and artists of every type, political economists, statesmen, publicists, journalists. Ample physical and intellectual recreation was provided. All the comforts known to tourist agencies were to be found on board, for our guests were to enjoy six weeks without a cloud. … the celebrated 'Table Talks,' which were later referred to as the New Platonic Dialogues, appeared there from day to day. … I shall mention only a few of the topics they discussed, such as the establishment of a truly modern commonwealth, education through art, land reform, charity organization, social welfare for workingmen, the role of women in civilized society, the progress of applied science, and many other topics. … It was as if*

the spirit of the times were speaking to the Jewish people from the 'Futuro' at the very moment when we were about to re-establish ourselves as a nation. … The Ship of the Wise sailed along our coast. The passengers traveled about the country in large groups or small as they preferred. … There is a story, which I do not vouch for, that one accomplished writer never left the ship for a moment, declaring, 'This ship is Zion!'.[3]

The Futuro moors briefly, only to sail out of Herzl's novel and out of the Zionist narrative. In *Altneuland* it is but a spectral option, the option of absolute utopia, of eternal wandering, of exile as an ideal; it is a perfectly satisfactory "Zion substitute" for at least one passenger; it is the spiritual alternative for settling Zionism, the anathema of the "New Village" whose establishment is addressed in *Altneuland*; it is the platonic dialogue with the "Israeli Project" the circumstances of whose planning and realization de facto are described below.

II. Dystopia

Everything must be systematically settled beforehand. I merely indicate this scheme: our keenest thinkers will combine in elaborating it. Every social and technical achievement of our age and of the more advanced age which will be reached before the slow execution of my plan is accomplished must be employed for this object. Every valuable invention which exists now, or lies in the future, must be used. By these means a country can be occupied and a State founded in a manner as yet unknown to history, and with possibilities of success such as never occurred.[4]

As it is—crowded, heaped up, and frenzied at the center, diffused, detached, and monotonous at the margins—the built-up Israeli space is a means by which "a country can be occupied and a State founded in a manner as yet unknown to history, and with possibilities of success such as never occurred." Neither a careless improvisation during the foundation laying phase, nor the absence of a professional culture or speculative entrepreneurship, certainly not an organic or spontaneous development have spawned it, but rather profound intension and excessive success to put into practice one of the most comprehensive, controlled, and efficient architectural experiments in the modern era.

Indeed, this is Israel's uniqueness among states: it was "systematically worked out in advance." It was formulated a-priori by means of arithmetic, planimetric, and demographical formulae; it was drafted in pencil, ink, and watercolor by planning experts from various disciplines who were called upon to literally realize Ben Gurion's command "to transform the land, the nation, our entire ways of life"—or, to use more technical jargon—to engineer and re-design (no less) the country's geographic, ecological,

and agronomic matrix; the urbanization, socialization, and employment patterns of its citizens; the national systems of production and service; the nature of its public life and even the values of domesticity in the new Israeli state. Such total planning ambition is not self-evident even in the context of its respective period—a period which admired the "planning sciences" and regarded mega-architects, infra-engineers, macro-economists, and omni-sociologists as the omnipotent agents of progress. Its roots lie in the revolutionary imagination and practice of the Zionist movement. This calls for certain elaboration to elucidate the background for the plan's drafting immediately upon the "outbreak" of the State.

The very concept of the "Zionist Enterprise" conceals the institutionalized, administrative, explicitly synthetic, ever-so modernistic character of the appropriation (or re-appropriation) of the land by the Jews in the 20th century. Any attempt to "normalize" Zionism by accentuating aspects of spontaneous immigration, organic settlement, or speculative development, misses the point: the artificial basis of Zionism, its rhetorical reliance on notions such as "negation," "inversion," "synthesis," or "combination"; its self-definition as a forced, corrective—messianic, as Ben Gurion would later defy—intervention in the historical time and geographical space. In this context, planning (centralist, it should be stressed) is the most important thing: it is the Zionist

spirit blowing through fictitious literature, ideological manifestos, and programmatic protocols; it is the blueprint binding words and things; it is the apparatus for disregarding (or deporting) the indigenous population and the eradication of vernacular construction; it is the vehicle for preventing patterns of settlement and construction incongruent with the goals of the "movement" (namely, with the beliefs and needs of its hegemonic currents).

The most conspicuous use of planning is manifested by the persistent attempt to shift the settlement and political weight from the city to the countryside and from the center to the periphery. As a rule, one may say that the Zionist movement, in its first fifty years, invented and developed pioneering models of agricultural settlement underlain by elaborate logistics of production, organization, and marketing—but never imagined, planned, or actually built a city. Worse still: the city, especially the metropolis, was presented in the official propaganda as anathema to the "Yishuv" (Jewish community), as a parasitical growth interfering with the policy of land redemption, undermining the moral foundations of the new Hebrew society. A revolutionary program, controlled planning, and combined action have, thus, characterized the "Zionist enterprise" from the very outset—but the land's final "transformation" was made possible only after the obtaining of political sovereignty.

The end of the British Mandate, the 1948 War and the destruction it brought, the dizzying process of population exchange during and after the war, the confiscation and nationalization of approximately 90% of the country's land, the emergency measures (the majority of which are still in force today), and the austerity decrees, the Mapai (Israel Labor Party) leadership's near-absolute control over all the apparatuses of the State and the Histadrut (Labor Federation), the moral and material support offered by the superpowers to the new state (and specifically, the separate development budget, which equaled the overall national budget)—all these provided ostensible legitimization and an opportunity to pave the way for a project of construction (and effacement) more daring than any of its literary precedents.

Only several weeks after the proclamation of the state during the war, and as a complementary move, Arieh Sharon, one of the leading architects of the Israeli Labor Movement, was called upon to establish the Governmental Planning Department.[5] This task resulted in Israel's national master plan—aka the Sharon Plan—furnishing the political leadership with an unprecedented tool to cast an official mold of the land and shape the future state according to Mapai's theory of relations and ancestry. In the opening session of the "Government Zoning Committee" (6 Dec. 1948) Sharon presented not only his own view as an arch-architect who has literally chanced upon a state to plan, but mainly the spatial perception of his patron, Ben Gurion, and, in fact, the very essence of the Zionist rhetoric:

> I am pleased to present some of our work to you, and discuss the problems and difficulties we have encountered. Over the course of many years those engaging in planning have felt the central and nation-wide lack of planning, a factor which hinders our operation and ties our hands on our way to build the nation. … We are told that various wealthy countries have managed to exist for many years without central planning institutions. To this argument one might reply and stress that it is precisely rich countries that can afford experimentation and lack of planning. At the same time, one should indicate the serious ailments in the big cities of these countries, which are irremediable.

> Clearly, we will not be able to withstand such ailments. If such monstrosities as the big cities with their harsh conditions emerge here, we will not have room to rectify the situation. The health of the nation dwelling in these creatures will decrease, until entrepreneurs will no longer have the power to create and construct. We see that after one generation, two at the most, of nation-building, the results of unplanned construction are already highly oppressive. We live in apartments from whose windows

we see our neighbors or, at best, a hot narrow street. We do not have peaceful open green expanses before our houses.

The new ownership of the land thus enabled the introduction of order, reorganization of space, ensuring the physical and mental health of the nation by means of central planning. The "Old World" (which, for the sake of the argument, includes not only Europe, but also the immigration countries of the New World), is already degenerate, ailing, spawning urban monstrosities. Here there is an opportunity for a fresh start, a clean slate, as it were. Here, as opposed to there, there is not enough space, no room for uncontrolled developments, no room for degeneration.

The urgent national task assigned to Sharon and his team of planners was to provide temporary housing solutions for the new immigrants and to settle the country's borderlands in order to stabilize the 1948 borders, prevent territorial concessions, and hinder the return of the Palestinian refugees. Its solution was found in the construction of a network of camps, transit camps, outpost settlements, work villages, immigrant agricultural settlements, and new kibbutzim, and the housing of immigrants in deserted Arab villages and neighborhoods. Simultaneously, a long-term task was defined: to prepare a plan for the "intense and comprehensive development of the country, which will reach every nook and cranny."

Only a year after its processing began, the first version of the Sharon Plan was presented. It was targeted at a local population of 2,650,000 residents (a goal reached in 1966), to be dispersed throughout the country, thereby rectifying the "anomaly" or "colonialist pattern," as the planners dubbed the development of the Jewish community in the country ("Yishuv") during the British Mandate period (upon the establishment of the state, two thirds of the Jewish community concentrated in the three large cities: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa. 82% lived along the coast. The "Sharon Plan" determined that only 45% of the urban population would inhabit the big cities, and the remaining 55% will be housed in new medium-sized and small towns).

The Plan was divided into five categories: agriculture, industry, transportation, forestry and parks, and new towns. Agricultural settlement was perceived as the major factor in development and ensuring of economic independence. Accordingly, a target of 600,000 farmers was set, who were to live on 120,000 farms, in units of 20-25 dunam (5-6 acres) per family, and were to provide 75% of the overall population's food. An irrigation network would carry water from the country's north and coastal plain to the northern Negev and the Judean Mountains, thus making settling of the Negev possible. Structurally, the Sharon Plan sketched a hierarchy comprised of a rural unit, a rural center, a rural-urban center, a medium-sized

town, a big city. It should be stressed that unlike the majority of modern reform movements, which conceptually progressed from the city or suburb to the countryside, the Zionist spatial conception always progressed from the country to the city; it always perceived the rural as the building block for construction of the nation. This reversal is not merely semantic; it acquires "scientific" authorization by a (diabolical) plan mentioned below, implemented some decade before the Sharon Plan.

The location of industrial zones in the Sharon Plan was based on utopist, romantic, and ecological inclinations prevalent in the Industrial Revolution countries from the mid-18th century, holding that apt geographical dispersion of factories will facilitate the city's existence and improve the workers' quality of life. Obviously, no Industrial Revolution ever took place in Palestine, and its urban side-effects were thus never felt. Only the reaction to the dense, industrialized Western city was set in motion here: "The medium-sized, more efficiently organized town will facilitate the life of the industry workers, put cheap convenient residential quarters and convenient transportation to their work places at their disposal, along with green areas for recreation."[6] A nation-wide transportation network was also planned, including an additional port, two airports (southern and northern), railroad tracks (few, mainly for freight trains), and a ramified road network, which

would provide access to the array of villages and mid-sized towns, and beltways around the big cities. In terms of landscaping, the vision of the Sharon Plan included comprehensive forestation, in fact covering all the land found unsuitable for agricultural use or construction, and the definition of areas of unique landscape or archaeological value as nature reserves or national parks.

Professionally speaking, the Sharon Plan is not original. It contains neither innovations nor inventions. It is a compilation of models, theories, and de facto experiments, some of which were developed in the late Mandatory period, mainly by the members of the Society for Settlement Reform. Another part was imported readymade from Europe and was Hebraized speedily. The only conceptual originality introduced by the Sharon Plan lies in its being a single plan, a single formative gaze, thought on a single scale (1:20,000). One may say that it is matter-of-fact, rational, operative, progressive; or alternatively—fantastical, ideological, ritualistic, and reactionary. Either way, it was implemented almost in full, almost verbatim, at times while skipping customary planning phases, always by reproduction and displacement of construction patterns and methods. Although it was devoid of legal status (or precisely because it did not have to undergo legislative processes),[7] the Sharon Plan transformed abruptly, within a decade, from a document of principles to a mega-project spanning dozens of towns and

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hundreds of villages *ex machina*; extensive forest areas, national parks, and nature reserves *ex fabrica*; electricity, water, and road systems, ports, and factories *ex nihilo*. Despite their complete faith in centralist planning, and although they fully identified with the party ideology and the national strategy, Arieh Sharon and his planning team soon realized that they had equipped the leaders with a simple and all-too efficient tool, and therefore tried to slow down and refine the planning procedures. But the situation had already gotten out of hand. The architectural code they devised in the laboratory had already been disseminated, and had "proved" its durability and fertility outside, even under the harshest conditions.[8]

Controlled population dispersion or centralist decentralization—in the spirit of the pioneering redemption-of-the-land ethos and based on the strategic perception adhering to use of civil settlements as military posts, in theory or in practice (a perception, obviously developed before the establishment of the State, yet one which has remained valid to date)—were an uncontested sanctified cause, which dictated the progression of the nation-wide plan, even if sometimes it was contradictory to the professional discretion, even if it totally failed the test of economic logic, even if it contradicted the aggressive "melting pot" rhetoric and created acute social segregation.

The mass immigration was both the problem and the solution. Problem, since the immigrants' bents as to choosing their dwelling place were known in advance. Thorough research carried out by the planning teams about settling patterns of immigrant communities in "New World" countries indicated that in Israel too, without decisive intervention from above, the first generation of immigrants will choose to crowd into the coastal cities, further exacerbating the Mandatory "anomaly." Solution, since had it not been for these newcomers, without this statistical body, the historical opportunity to reinvent the Israeli space would not have come to be. Indeed, considerable propagandist efforts were invested in an attempt to entice the long-time citizens away from the center, but both the leaders and the planners realized that the Sharon Plan could not be implemented by voluntary settlement. Eliezer Brutzkus, a leading architect of the Sharon Plan, described, in retrospect, its achievements in comparison to the relevant model—the construction of the new workers' cities in the Stalinist Soviet Union:

> Truth be told, we also achieved these results against the free will of the settling subjects, namely the immigrants, by means of the 'off-the-ship-to-development-areas' method. One must bear in mind the basic fact that the creation of new towns and the populating of remote areas were obtained primarily by guiding the immigrants; and only to a

limited extent by drawing the 'long-time population.[9]

The Soviet project, as efficient as it may have been in construction and forced settling of hundreds of new edge cities, was not the only model to which the planners of the Israeli Project looked.[10] The post-World War II European project of rehabilitation and settling, and especially the construction of new satellite towns around London by the British Labour government, was carefully studied by Sharon and his team. In the Israeli laboratory—and this is the secret of its proletarian charm—a calculated match was conceived between a suburban Garden City in a Western welfare state and that of an industrial town in the periphery throughout the Soviet Empire. This match embodies the two constitutive paradoxes underlying the Sharon Plan: the invention of a centralist, "scientific" mechanism for quasi-historical, "regionalist," "organic" dispersal, and the creation of anti-urban urbanization (as many towns as possible, as little urban as possible).

The means proposed by the Plan for obtaining these goals was the country's re-division into 24 districts, each containing an equal number of inhabitants. These districts were determined according to geographical characteristics, and were planned as an array of agricultural settlements grouped around rural centers and served by a district town. Size, degree, or quantity (of population, employment, area)

were perceived as purely-professional, rational criteria for obtaining the desired interrelations between center and periphery, city and country, industry and agriculture. Over 400 agricultural settlements were established during the first decade of the State according to the guidelines in the Plan, but its masterpiece was the district town, the so-called "development town," whose optimal size was the subject of ongoing debates among the planners, decreed in favor of those who preferred the model of an intimate town (a folklorist-diasporal model still imprinted, *mutatis mutandis*, in memory) with 20 to 50 thousand residents, ostensibly exempt of the alienation and negative side-effects generated by the metropolitan city.

In order to prevent the development of colonization and socialization patterns typifying New World countries at all costs, the Sharon Plan chose to imitate the European settlement distribution pattern, whereby the majority of the population lives in small and medium-sized towns incorporated into the agricultural hinterland, and only the minority lives in the big cities. The origins of this "balanced" hierarchical pattern lie in pre-industrial agrarian culture; it is the product of centuries of organic growth. The country's planners tried to reduce this process into a single heroic decade, exerting themselves to support their work with intricate quasi-scientific theories which analyzed the link between settlement patterns and endurance during times of crisis. They deemed especially

authoritarian the "Theory of Central Places" proposed by German geographer, Walter Christaller, in his 1939 doctoral dissertation. Christaller introduced a mathematical model accounting for the dispersal of population in Europe, carefully analyzing the distances between centers. According to his theory, the experience of the Great Depression which struck Europe and the United States in 1929-1933 indicated that the big cities and distinctive agricultural areas suffered economic devastation and unemployment, whereas the small and medium-sized towns located in rural areas, sustaining a mixed economy of agriculture, industry and craft, maintained relative social and economic stability due to the mobility of employment.

These theoretical rudiments of the Israeli national plan were likely imported in good faith, professionally and academically speaking, but today one must say, with hesitation and great caution, that the time may have come to confront the especially uncanny link created here, a macabre joke of history, so to speak: Jews who hailed from Poland—survivors of Christaller's spatial theory—became, within a single decade, the subjects and executors of the Sharon Plan.

The first to take interest in Christaller were the Nazis, and especially Heinrich Himmler. The latter was put in charge of "preserving the German national characteristics" on behalf of Hitler, who appointed him chief planner of the "Eastern provinces"—parts of Poland annexed to Germany. The "Eastern provinces," Wartheland and Danzig (Gdańsk), were not only the operation site for the "ethnographic reorganization," as demanded by Hitler in his 1939 speech to the Reichstag, but also the main laboratory for the development of comprehensive territorial plans which were given the generic title *Raumplanung* (spatial planning) and were based on ideological perceptions of spatial order (*Raumordenung*). These plans were implemented in Poland; they were also intended for implementation in Germany itself, but due to the outcome of the war, were not completed. Their first phase— transfer of local populations of Poles, ethnic "cleansing" of Jews and Gypsies, confiscation of property and land, elimination of existing parceling and zoning laws to allow for full reorganization—concluded with the deportation of over half a million citizens and their concentration in the Lodz ghetto. The second phase—the area's re-settlement by Germans— met with difficulties, and was realized only partially.

In his essay, "The Nazi Garden City," Gerhard Fehl maintained that the major source of inspiration for the Nazi planners was the diagram of "The Social City"—a humanist utopia proposed by Ebenezer Howard, the progenitor of the English Garden City movement, which articulated his approach to regional

development based on the Garden-City model.[11] According to Fehl, despite the ostensible contradiction between a democratic reform and a totalitarian mega-plan, the *Raumordnung* was, in fact, a neutralization of the social-reformist contents of the Garden City, and implementation of the concept of regional hierarchy throughout the entire space. The rhetoric behind this move focused on Germany's shortage of living space (*lebensraum*) resulting from the fact that Germany—in contradistinction to the colonial empires which dominated "a world of empty space," was a "country without space."

With the annexation of Poland, Christaller was entrusted with drafting a spatial reorganization plan for the province of Wartheland based on his doctoral research. The plan, developed during 1940-42, proposed administrative subdivisions into districts, construction of new towns, and a hierarchical system of settlement units: village, rural center, district town, capital city.

Beyond the direct theoretical link between the Christaller Plan and the Sharon Plan, one may certainly identify similarities between the Nazi and the Zionist spatial ideology and spatial strategy, despite the fact that the very introduction of such an analogy is unbearable. This similarity lies primarily in the aspiration to prevent or channel (obviously with different degrees of power and authority) spontaneous movements of internal migration,

settlement, urban and suburban growth, in order to reorganize society "organically" and to tighten the links between nation and land in an artificial, accelerated manner. The Nazis condemned the big city, too, the source for the degeneration of the Aryan race; they too perceived the village as the "building block" of "spatial order" (and curated propaganda exhibitions under the title "From the City to the Country"); they too called it "the Anglo-Saxon model of decentralization"; they too "nationalized" the landscape by extensive acts of forestation.

This similarity should be put in print to teach us a lesson and increase our suspicion regarding the ambitions of super-planners, politicians, and architects. At the same time, the reader must not conclude that the Sharon Plan in particular, or the Zionist perception of settlement in general, embedded an aspiration for "racial order," "ethnic cleansing," mass deportation, or genocide.

The ambiguity of centralist regionalism or the pioneering "Old World," constituting the Sharon Plan, is ingrained not only in the dispersion of towns and settlements on the map, but also in the attempt to build the cities themselves based on a conceptual cross between mechanistic planning conceptions striving to make the traditional city efficient and adapt it to mass dwelling and fast motor traffic, and "informal" picturesque perceptions striving to moderate

the city by deconstructing it into small, autonomous communities, engulfed by pastoral surroundings and protected from street life and the productive sectors of the city. The planners believed that via critical study of urban history they had succeeded in developing an innovative method for ideal urban planning, as could be construed from Arieh Sharon's confident assertions:

> The structure of the New Towns was determined by their division into neighboring units. This method differs from conservative city planning methods still prevalent in the Old Cities in Europe as well as in Israel. These cities are built as a monotonous sequence of houses, streets, and residential neighborhoods, continuing endlessly and making the lives of their residents unbearable. [The author goes on to explain the architectural advantages of Ofakim, Kiryat Shmona, and Ashdod over such cities as Paris, Berlin, or Vienna; Z.E.].[12]

The "neighboring units" (or "eggs" as they are called in professional lingo) are the organizing structural principle of the New Towns. A "neighboring unit" is an autonomous model supposed to contain a limited range of housing types, and be self-sufficient in terms of commerce, education, and leisure services. The town is a cluster of neighboring-units, assembled around a civic center containing the municipal government institutions. The

evolving town adds modular units to the cluster, thereby preserving its neighborly character. The size of each unit is determined in relation to the estimated capacity of the school and kindergartens, the optimal dimensions of the shopping center, and the desirable length of sidewalks and paths in the neighborhood. The goal was to prevent vehicular traffic within the neighborhood, and enable pedestrians access to all the necessary daily services at a walking distance of up to 250 meters without having to cross streets. The picturesque contours of the neighboring units (devoid of right angles), the abundance of open spaces, the location of educational institutions and recreation facilities at the heart of the neighborhood, adjacent to public gardens, the zoning of industrial areas outside town, in close proximity to the nation-wide transportation network, and their separation by means of a "green belt"—all these convey an illusion of a new, safer and healthier tomorrow.

In effect, the new Israeli town was planned as a large-scale kibbutz with a relatively homogenous, egalitarian basis, without private capital or speculative parceling, to prevent real-estate profiteering and unbalanced development generated under conditions of free enterprise. Unlike the kibbutz or the Workers' Cooperative Housing in the established cities, however, which were designed for and by members of a settlemental and social avant-garde movement, the New Town was

the result of professional and bureaucratic decisions for a demographic population forced into being a passive partner in expansion of the pioneering movement experiment into a national project.

Once these first towns were founded, it became clear that the generous, ever-so "ecological" planning, based on the most advanced principles of dispersion, decentralization, and zoning, simply did not work. The remote, thinly populated town was a disproportionate burden on the national budget due to the extensive infrastructure it required. The creation of sources of employment *ex nihilo* demanded entrepreneurship and capital both public and private, which lagged behind the pace of immigrant channeling to the New Towns (in Kiryat Shmona, for one, the first factory was built only a decade after the town was founded, and in Shlomi 85% of the breadwinners during the first decade were employed in public works). The veteran urban population remained in the established cities. The long-time agrarian community, which was already organized in nation-wide marketing networks all its own (e.g. "Tnuva," "Hamashbir"), did not use the services of the district towns, thus disrupting the planners' regionalist vision (the case of Kiryat Gat is an exception in this sense, since its district, the Lakhish Region, was comprised mainly of immigrant "moshavim" [cooperative farming villages] rather than kibbutzim). The open

expanses colored green on paper (Sharon quotes Ben Gurion who said that these were the most beautiful watercolors he had ever seen) were incongruent with the local climatic conditions, water resources, and maintenance capacities, and therefore, in reality, became dead areas, interrupting the urban fabric. The separation of motor and pedestrian traffic and the self-sufficient, always inward-oriented design of the neighboring units prevented the development of street life. The "alienation, degeneration, and poor quality of life "in the big city, denounced by the official propaganda, were replaced by homogenous, sequestered, hopeless deprivation.

The planners' exciting vision was replaced by acute professional criticism. In a retrospective discussion about the New Towns' planning, architect Yitzhak Yashar maintained that:

> *There was an industrial world. There were vast cities. They sought dispersal. The center of London, which you can neither enter nor exit, where traffic and noise are overwhelming, where there is neither sunlight nor vegetation—this was where the concept was spawned. The very same idea— in its quantitative and not only qualitative sense, in its formal sense—was shifted to Beer Sheva. And in Beer Sheva, where one seeks movement, where one yearns for social gathering—there, at the heart of the desert, they solved London's problem [...] Obviously, however, what works for five or eight or ten*

million people, is disastrous when you have only ten thousand in the desert.[13]

Fifty years after its official publication (in the Government Almanac, 1950), the Sharon Plan remains valid. The visionary project of colonization and modernization it set in motion has been largely implemented. The country has developed at an unprecedented pace. The traces of Mapai's utopia are gradually dissolving. The factories shift from hardware to software (thereby bringing closer Herzl's redemption vision as described in *Der Judenstaat*). The country's center becomes gradually more crowded, already reaching world record rates. The roads are heaped up and the interchanges become ever more bifurcated. A real train is still nowhere to be found. The JNF forests largely planted on the ruins of Arab villages are occasionally set on fire, with natural growth replacing them. The New Towns, an educated crossbreeding of imported urban theories and local physiocratic ideologies—still remain more or less as originally planned: devoid of past, devoid of context, undifferentiated; discarded towns still struggling to preserve their status as tax-exempt development areas. Just as they fulfilled their historic role in realizing the logistic "reversal" of the 1950s, they prompted the political turnabout of the 1970s and the "cultural revolution" of the 1990s. With every new metamorphosis their status as periphery, their distance from the country's "center,"

increased. Time, however, changes all, calling for a real-estate speculation: one moment after the resettling of the "uprooted" Jewish settlers within the "Green Line" begins, one moment after the great sale of State-owned land in the established kibbutzim and moshavim ends, the development towns (and immigrant moshavim) of the 1950s and 1960s will become the most coveted land reserves of the "Jewish State," a last opportunity for suburban "quality of life" in yesterday's Garden Cities.

The question of the Israeli town turns out to be a broad and highly crucial issue: The question of Israel as a big city, a built-up continuum, a megapolis. An accelerated process of urban sprawl paves the entire shoreline, from Nahariya to Gaza, spreading east all the way to Beer Sheva, Jerusalem, and Jenin. No walls, fences, whether bypassing or surrounding, can help. A metropolis of 10, 15, 20 million citizens is evolving between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. Its financial center, Ayalon City, has already been determined, and so has its main traffic artery, Route 6. We are quick to criticize the malignant expansion of the built-up Israeli space and mourn our crowding records, but perhaps this is not necessarily about a horror scenario of "urbanization without urbanism," as Rem Koolhaas described the wild growth in Third World cities and towns. Perhaps, in our context, an optimistic scenario emerges whereby the inevitable development

of an Israeli-Palestinian city-state will at long last dissolve the Gordian knot between nationalism and territoriality, and, against all odds, will bring about a heterogeneous, civic space which embraces ethnic, religious, and national differences. What does this scenario hold for the new-old towns of the 20th century, those built before 1967 within the Green Line and those built thereafter, outside the Line? Will they remain as islands dissociated in space, strategic settlements, threatening and threatened gated communities, or will they perhaps return to the future, to Herzl's utopia, and become the neighborhoods and suburbs of the Levantine city-state?

Notes

Translation: Daria Kassovsky

1 "Introduction," in Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Aharonoth, 1978). [Hebrew].

2 Theodor Herzl, "Preface," *The Jewish State*, trans. Jacob M. Alkow (New York: Dover, 1988), p. 69.

3 Theodor Herzl, *Old-New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1960), pp. 223-225.

4 Herzl, *The Jewish State*, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 143.

5 The Planning Department initially operated within the Ministry of Labor and Construction, but Ben Gurion shifted it to the Prime Minister's Office to enable its direct operation with the planners. Subsequently, it moved to the Ministry of the Interior, and later was the basis for the establishment of the Ministry of Construction and Housing, although its authorities were distributed among the various government offices. The great significance attributed by Ben Gurion to nation-wide planning may be gathered from the fact that he devoted 12

weekly hours to this matter in comparison to the 11 weekly hours devoted to security matters.

6 Arieh Sharon, *Physical Planning in Israel* (Jerusalem: The Government Printer, 1951) [Hebrew].

7 The "Planning and Construction Law" was only implemented in 1965.

8 A fascinating example of second thoughts among the establishment architects is found in assertions made by A. Neuman of the Planning Department: "Obviously we have long lost the innocent belief in automatic regulation of the economic and social process. We think that the belief in a single planning theory, capable of furnishing happiness to all, is likewise innocent. … We know that planning has a component which strangles life because a heavy planning mechanism tends to *oppress* the individual" [emphasis in the original]; from *The Engineers and Architects Association Newsletter* (January 1953) [Hebrew].

9 Eliezer Brutzkus, "Transformations in the Network of Urban Centers in Israel," *Engineering and Architecture* 3 (1964), p. 43 [Hebrew].

10 Arieh Sharon himself, following graduation of the Bauhaus in 1929 and two years of work in Berlin, was invited by his ex-teachers, Hannes Meyer and Mart Stam to the USSR, to participate in the planning of the industrial city of Magnitogorsk. Sharon decided to return to Palestine, where he launched his glorious career by winning competitions for the design of the Workers' Cooperative Housing in Tel Aviv.

11 Gerhard Fehl, "The Nazi Garden City," in Stephan Ward (ed.), *The Garden City: Past, Present, and Future* (E&FN Spon, 1992), pp. 88-103. The discussion of the Nazi spatial perceptions is based on Fehl.

12 Sharon, op. cit. (n. 6).

13 "A Discussion on New Towns," *Engineering and Architecture* 3 (1964), p. 15 [Hebrew].