

Fallout

This article was originally published (in Hebrew) in *Ma'ayan 2* (Winter 2005-2006), pp. 1-12.

Zvi Elhyani

Translated by Ram Chopra

The Rabin Center in Ramat Aviv, as conceived by the architect Moshe Safdie, is the constructed expression of the political flattery towards the Israeli political Center- Right wing since the assassination of Y. Rabin. In the late 60s Safdie suggested digging up the Western Wall, down to the Herodian era, in order to reveal an additional nine meters of stone. In Ramat Aviv he followed up this initiative.

"So do not build a memorial site for me and don't sanctify me. Rituals are far from me, are foreign to me, so don't you turn me into a Saint" (Assassinated Yitzhak Rabin's satirical character in 'Ha'Charzufim', Israeli version of "Spitting Image")

"If Right and Left exist in terms of building, then popular construction is Left wing and that of the architect-artist is the Right wing building¹" (Moshe Safdie, 1973)

The building of the Rabin Center for the Study of Israel, whose name was changed prior to its inauguration, on Rabin's Tenth Memorial Day, to the Rabin Center, is situated above the Rokach Boulevard and the Yarkon Park in northern Tel Aviv. The building, built on the ruins of a large bunker dating from the 50s, is the main element of the Rabin Memorial Site. The front of the new building, with huge fiberglass blocks weighing tens of tons decorating both sides, was fused with the front of the bunker which, following the plan became revealed in the course of the construction. The rear of the site borders on the IDF Orchestra base and on either side are the Eretz Israel Museum and the ISA (Israel Security Agency, "Shin-Bet") base; it is not far from the Palmach Military Museum.

The inauguration of the Rabin Memorial Site and the plan to transfer the IDF Museum to the bunker on its premises, turn the Ramat Aviv area (former Sheikh Muanis) into the new National Hill of Tel Aviv-Jaffa and Israel, in a pretentious, aggressive and archaic language, all precisely those characteristics which the National Square built during the 50s and 60s around Givat Ram (Sheikh Bader) in Jerusalem tried to avoid.

The Rabin Center planned by the world famous architect Moshe Safdie (together with architect Tzachi Halberstadt) is a monumental building, in memory of an un-monumental man, situated in an un-monumental city. The construction of the site lasted 5 years and it is one of the largest memorial sites in Israel. It spreads out over 40 dunams and includes an educational department, a multi-purpose hall ("Great Hall"), an auditorium, archives, a library, classrooms, a cafeteria, offices, parking lots, gardens, and a Museum for the history of society and democracy in Israel. The built area was increased from 8,000 square meters in the original plan to 12,000 square meters today, the size of the huge bunker below it. The exact cost of building the site is a well-guarded secret, none of the members of the management is willing to state the sums received from donors in Israel and abroad to erect it.

The northern Tel Aviv lot, with its enormously variegated building content, presented a challenging ecological and contemporary architectural opportunity to recycle and revive an attractive, mysterious and abandoned, semi military, semi industrial space. The dimensions and grandiosity of this project were not new to the natural building aspirations of Moshe Safdie.

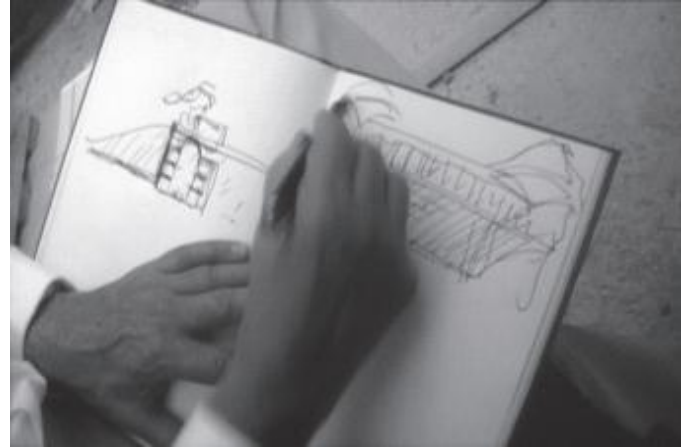
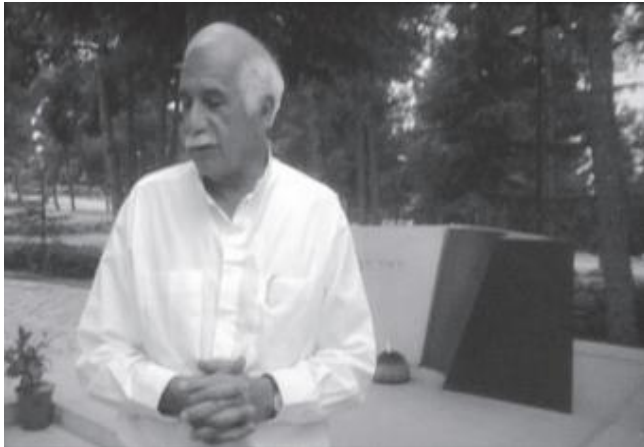
In the context of the memorial site for the Oslo Accords architect, Yitzhak Rabin, one could hope, if not expect, that an architect with the experience of Moshe Safdie (who, after all, is a worldwide star in the architectural world) would direct the project towards a less bombastic solution, one that would make use of the impressive structure of the existing bunker, or parts of it, and refrain, as much as possible, from new building, and be satisfied with a modest addition over the bunker (resembling the balcony of the current center built at the height of its roof) to offer both a dramatic observation point of the spectacular view as well as becoming an urban mark of the new-old structure.

Such a decision could not only have taught Israeli architecture, in its present sore state, a lesson in architectural recycling, budgetary restraint, in going back to the early sane commemoration culture; it would also have been more in the spirit of the Rabin family and their poor cultural taste in addition it would have enriched the building and lessened Safdie's ongoing dispute with his critics. However, it is not Safdie's wont to refer to immediate material contexts he prefers the spiritual pompous one, if it has to be invented. Though he had received an enormous existing building, why should he not build another one on top of it, seeing that he was hired to create a "warning signal" Safdie, who managed to turn the new shopping area in the Ben Gurion Airport into a memorial hall and who went as far as using the holocaust memorial site at Yad Vashem to demonstrate his special effects, could not let the opportunity to build the ultimate memorial site for the most commemorated man in Israel pass. To some extent, the building is also Safdie's own effigy.

The Tombstone

In July 2005 as part of the International Film Festival in Jerusalem, the film: "Moshe Safdie: the Power of Architecture"² was screened at Mercaz Shimshon, Beit Shmuel. The audience that came to watch this totally unsophisticated image product which had somehow found its way into the film festival disguised as a documentary was most likely unaware of the fact that they were sitting in a hall within a building which is part of an entire complex planned by the very subject of the film. They were actually in the heart of "Safdie land", at the foot of the old city walls, surrounded by circles of endless amounts of stone with which Safdie, from his nearby office, had been covering the Mamilla area since the 70's backed up by Teddy Kolek Following the film several colleagues came on stage to further praise Safdie's sense of scale, his sketches and his "good hand"; Moshe the mentor and friend, the sensitive success, a victim of "much shallow press"; the architect and classic urbanist whose facades are like Bach cantatas; one of the scenes in the film shows Safdie, who after guiding, megaphone in hand, a tour of the new historic museum he designed for Yad Vashem, visits the grave of his friend Yitzhak Rabin at the nearby Mount Herzl cemetery. Wearing his architect outfit, a collared Chinese shirt, competing in whiteness with his

moustache, the world renowned most successful Israeli architect pays tribute to the burial site of Yitzhak and Leah Rabin in the Nation Leaders burial plot. Safdie had met the Rabins several years prior to the assassination during an official visit to Canada where he gave them a private tour of the National Gallery of Canada That he planned in Ottawa. Following the assassination, Ms. Rabin asked Safdie, in name of their friendship, craft the tombstone. Several years later she too passed away.



From the Movie: *Moshe Safdie: The Power of Architecture*, Donald Winkler (dir.), Canada 2005

Despite the modest, uniform standard of the Nation's Leaders tombstones, Ms. Rabin wanted her husband's to be different and the Ministers Commission of Symbols and Ceremonies approved the exception. Safdie said it had not been easy for him to stray from the accepted restraint, but just as in Mamilla, in Yad Vashem, in Modiin, in Pi Gllilot, in Western Jerusalem, and at the Ben Gurion Terminal, as always- Safdie overcame the difficulty with ease. "When the death is unconventional, we may be allowed to commemorate somewhat differently"³, he explained, thus offering an additional aspect of grief for the unconventional death of Yitzhak Rabin.

As in his lyric exhibits at Yad Vashem ("Children's Memorial" or "Cattle Car Memorial")⁴, Safdie put aside the plethora of his Jerusalemite shapes in favor of minimalism. The Rabin headstone is made of

two smooth, almost touching marble stones, one black the other white. They create the shape of an upturned cone based on a half circle- forming a stone candlestick. It takes a genius indeed to do so little creating such an effect!

In a reverse parallelism which connects the tombstones to each other and both to a mythical infinity, it is the black tombstone which symbolizes the white dove Yitzhak, whereas the white stands for the black widow Leah, who since the assassination more than ever embraced the image of Lilith - in dress, makeup and hair style. The collection of dark sunglasses hiding the tears of the various generations of the Rabin family during the mourning period indicated the emerging of a new style of aristocracy of pain. Year after year a black and red-haired look chic from the Ramat Aviv Mall filled the Nation's Leaders Burial site and Safdie's tombstone was the perfect accessory to match. To some extent, The tombstone was also a symbol for this grandiose of all rabin's monuments which turned like a boomerang to Ramat Aviv.

The Bunker

The Mount Herzl tombstone and the monument at the assassination site on Rabin Square, the charred "Earthquake" fenced off by "Home Center"⁵ style shackles and pillars, served as architectural forerunners of the 'over-commemoration of Rabin' syndrome. In addition to the dozens of commemoration initiatives (tours, conferences, contests and prizes) without mentioning straightforward monuments (portraits, plaques, memorial corners), the Rabin architectural commemoration project spans a wide range of architecture, both in Israel and abroad: roads, highways, interchanges, streets, parks, observation points, gardens, army camps, pre-army study programs, government complexes, sport complexes, education complexes, schools, synagogues, guest houses, medical centers, trauma rooms, theatres, squares, boulevards, community and shopping centers, neighborhoods, power plants, a youth hostel, a promenade, trees, a falafel store, are all named after Rabin.⁶

The Yitzhak Rabin Center for the Study of Israel founding committee, comprising of some seventy Jewish men, seven women and one Druze member, was called into being shortly after the assassination with the aim of serving as a large research center commemorating Rabin. For this purpose the committee initiated special legislation compelling the government to allocate land and a regular budget for the Center. The Center for the Commemoration of Rabin Law was passed in the Knesset in January 1997, and six months later the Rabin Memorial Day law was passed⁷. Like Safdie's tombstone, this law which was an addition to the already existing one regarding the commemoration of National Leaders, and came into being due to the unique tragic circumstances of the assassination. The Center began operating temporarily from an office in the former Oil Institute building on Haim Levanon Street in Ramat Aviv.

The committee's founding chairman, former Tel Aviv-Jaffa mayor and IDF Major-General Shlomo "Chich" Lahat, was determined that the building should be located in Tel Aviv, "where Rabin lived and was assassinated", and as someone familiar with every lot in the city he knew where it was to be located. In a debate about the law in the Knesset Education Committee, he said in the clear cut tone of a

major general: "the center has to be built in Tel Aviv, on Rokach Blvd. as you enter from the north are the tennis courts, then Reading C station... which is not operating these days ... there are about 40 dunams of unused public property... this is the wish and request of the family".⁸ This plot, one of the most expensive land reserves in Tel Aviv, not far from the University train station, (in joint ownership of the city and the ILA – Israel Land Administration), had stood desolate since the late 80s.

In 1949, following the annexation of Jaffa and the preparation of the plans for Greater Tel Aviv, David Ben Gurion ordered several strategic planning measures to be taken in the grounds to the north of the Yarkon river. These plots had been vacated by Palestinian refugees who fled the Sheikh Muanis, Jarisha and Jamsin villages. These plans also included the development of a National Orchard on the banks of the Yarkon (to become the Yarkon Park). It is not clear whether these were intended as a park, or rather as a separation area between Tel Aviv, which was rapidly developing to the North, and another plan Ben Gurion had in mind for the area, of having a secret power plant constructed on the slopes of Sheikh Muanis, near the archeological excavations at Tel Kasilla which started in 1949.⁹ The plant was intended to supply the power for Tel Aviv's vital industries in case of an attack on the existing, visible plants in the city. The massive structure was projected to serve as a bunker for the state's senior leadership during emergency situations and although meant to be kept a security secret, the plan was publicly well known.

The structure never served its original purpose and until the late 80s was used as the Electricity Company's Reading C power plant, since that closed down the area has been desolate most of the time. The bunker was designed in the early 50s by the German AEG Corporation and built by the Histadrut Solel Boneh construction company. This was one of a number of large building projects the state carried out that decade; it was funded by the reparation money the German government paid Israel; it was completed in 1956, just before the Sinai Operation. The bunker comprises four huge halls separated by walls made of stone and reinforced concrete. These walls are between 2 to 7.5 meters thick, the ceiling consists of a 2 meter thick arched concrete. The bunker is 100 meters long, 80 meters wide and is 40 meters high. The overall space, the various levels, cover 12,000 square meters. The Rabin Center above it is approximately the same size. The new building leaned on the enormous construction of the bunker it incorporated.

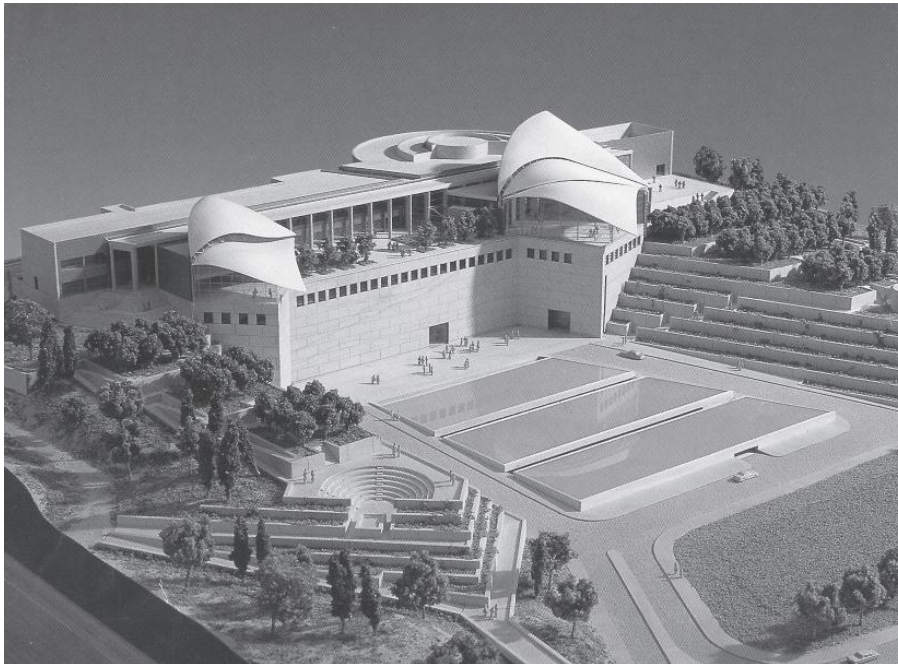
In October 2004, a year before the inauguration of the building, while the construction work was still underway, *Ha'aretz* newspaper released a story on its front page reporting that the dusty IDF Museum, housed, as of the late 50s, in a plot on the Tel Aviv Jaffa border, worth 50 million dollars, was about to be relocated to the bunker in Ramat Aviv¹⁰. The responsibility for the huge collection of IDF weapons used throughout the years, was given to the Rabin Center and Dalya Rabin, the Chairman of the Center told reporters that she was greatly in favor of the proximity of the two institutes. The collection includes weapons dating to the time of the British Mandate, armored vehicles used during the War of Independence, canons, mortars, tanks, bridges, planes and thousands of pistols and rifles. Presumably, soldiers serving at the IDF Museum would be recruited to work at the future Rabin Museum.

Safdie, who had already planned over 20 museums around the world, accepted the commission to transform the bunker into the national arms cache. As early as 1997, while he was drawing up the

preliminary plans for the building, he hinted at his intention to incorporate the bunker into the activity of the Center in the future and at his objective to renovate it side by side with the new building. In his grandiose urban vision, he did not leave it at the bunker but nationalized Rokach Blvd. as well as the Ayalon highway into the project. On the eve of the inauguration of the building Safdie said that he visualized the area becoming the "Israeli Smithsonian complex, where visitors would be able to walk through green parks from one National Museum to another, passing the portraits of the nation's leaders".¹¹

The Model

In March 1997, two months after Mayor Lahat had recommended the site, the cornerstone for the permanent building was laid in a ceremony attended by the Rabin family. According to the Tender Law, the organization was not required to choose the architect by a tender but was requested to examine at least a number of reasonable projects. After Safdie had planned the Mount Herzl tombstone for Leah Rabin, it was only natural that she approached him again, this time to design the building and he was the only architect asked to submit a price quote and sketches¹².



The Rabin Center (with the courtesy of architect Ztahi Hellbershtat)

Safdie's preliminary plan was announced during the cornerstone ceremony, it included a central building, spread out over 8,000 square meters, its dominant symbolic feature being the multi-purpose hall on the western side. The hall was to be built out of transparent glass and shaped as an open triangular prism above which there would be a movable kinetic metal roof, as Safdie put it. The roof would be directed to move into position by light and weather conditions (the movement of the sun, seasons, and temperature) by means of a system of weights. In the project description as published in the media it said: "on clear and hot days, the metal roof will cover the glass roof and when the weather is cloudy it will elevate above it like a

large triangular wing"¹³. Safdie was quoted as saying that the symbolic parts of the project were the emotionally exciting part of his creation: "I see the opened triangle as the way in which Rabin's life ended, a perfect shape that was cut open [...] there is also something symbolic in the fact that the Center will be built over the power plant [...] but perhaps these explanations are too verbal".

The administrative and ideological turmoil the Rabin Center was going through at the end of the 90s was also expressed in some dramatic changes made in the design and the architectural exterior of the building. We notice changes in the design of the structure in the pictures which were sent to the media from Safdie's office in Boston on the eve of the fifth commemoration of Rabin's assassination and before the actual start of the construction work. The cut glass turret and the low pergola originally in the upper part of the façade had disappeared from the updated photographs. In their place Safdie positioned a double row of bare concrete columns three stories high. On both sides of these columns Safdie installed abstract representations of pigeons gliding westward towards the sunset. Their wings that replaced the winged roof appearing in the original model shaded the transparent part of the structure holding the library and the auditorium in the West and an additional transparent hall (the Great Hall) in the East. As the construction progressed, Safdie enhanced the "verbal explanations" and phrased the allegory that by now is well known to initiators, journalists and film directors: "below there is an enormous bunker and above wings moving up to the sky. This is how I conceive of Rabin's personality". The Center has adopted this phrase now used with great pride.

Even the critical articles which were published when Safdie's plan was revealed were fooled by the fictitious gap between the pure image of "Rabin's Legacy", disconnected, as it were, from the man's violent history and the brutal architectural language of the planned building.

In an article in *Ha'aretz* following the disclosure of the model of the site, the Ramat Avivian architect and writer Nili Portugali pointed out the resemblance between Safdie's plan and the Vittorio Emmanuel II Monument site in Piazza Venezia in Rome. According to Portugali the model was: "a memorial site representing a totalitarian ideology, in which rulers commemorate themselves or are commemorated in mausoleums or belligerent monuments"¹⁴. A few months later, *Ha'aretz'* architectural critic Esther Zandberg, wrote about the image of the planned building that: "unfortunately has absolutely nothing to do with the cultural and personal legacy it is meant to commemorate [...] Rabin's legacy [...] is far from the lavish, neo-archaic, overdone and kitschy hall of fame being built in his memory. Rabin's legacy is not stone coated walls and columned vestibules¹⁵ in a pretentious Greek-Roman style. Rabin was 'a man whose eyes and heart were humble', as President Katsav eulogized him at the fifth memorial ceremony".

On the 15th of November 2000, Solel Bone bulldozers started preparing the grounds for the building of the Center, of Rabin's definitive memorial site, regarded by its planners and directors as 'warning signal' and "a living monument". On that same day, Leah Rabin, who passed away several days after the fifth Memorial Day, was buried at Mount Herzl, under the tombstone she had ordered from Safdie. The start of the construction of the Center replaced the multi faceted and active woman, who herself had

been "a living monument"¹⁶ and the driving force behind the character and scale of her husband's massive commemoration enterprise.

The Wall

Almost every text on Moshe Safdie, one way or other, takes the form of a heroic biography. He was born in Haifa in the 30s; his family emigrated to Canada when he was 15. He studied architecture at McGill University and became famous overnight when he was not yet 30, as a result of his Habitat residential project presented at the Expo international exhibition in Montreal, in April 1967¹⁷. Though Safdie never succeeded in recapturing the innovation of Habitat in his architectural work after 1967, he is still one of the most sought after architects in the world, dividing his time between his offices in Boston, Toronto and Jerusalem.

Despite the harsh criticism of Safdie's work in Israel, his reputation, as well as that of his clients, remains spotless. In Israel, where he grew up and whose buildings and landscape deeply influenced him, Safdie's name has been synonymous with controversial architectonic projects since the 70s, due to their political-scenic position (the Western Wall Plaza, the Jewish Quarter, The Old City Basin in Jerusalem) as well as their social-environmental position (the plan for the development of western Jerusalem, Modiin, Pi Glilot), their national-historical position (Yad Vashem, the Lod Airport Terminal); their often bombastic, monumental design, has been diagnosed by many critics as a disturbing mixture of the Jerusalem Syndrome and a scale disorder.

The tension between "Jerusalem" and "Tel Aviv" in Israeli society is also apparent in several initial architectonic chapters in Israeli architectural history. This distinction between "Jerusalemite" and "Tel Avivian" architecture has been one of the central issues in the history of Israeli architecture since 1967 and onwards. Categorically, Jerusalemite architecture refers to the materialistic aspects of construction, specifically the use of stone and stone covering, as well as certain aspects of form such as the planning of a series of buildings surrounding a shared inner courtyard (inspired by the old city of Jerusalem, or the first neighborhoods built outside the walls). Another aspect is the overuse of pseudo-Jerusalemite architectural themes, taken from 19th century Muslim architecture in Palestine. These themes became a central element in creating a new local Jewish architectural identity, first in Jerusalem and then throughout the country. As against this Tel Avivian architecture is more identified with the ideological formalistic themes of the 20th century modernist movement. This, by nature, anti-contextual architecture, did not accept the discussion of the "Genius Loci" and preferred the autonomic architectural object over the materialistic, landscape, traditional context. In the last decade the clear cut distinction between these two types of architecture has been questioned by the rise of the Jerusalemite-Jewish trend in contemporary Israeli architecture¹⁸.

The architectonic disputes in the 50s and 60s referred in the main to the stylistic character of the new government Institutes (the Knesset, the Government Complex, Israel Museum, the Hebrew University Campus of Givat Ram); they touched upon the difference between monumentality and the prosaic, between ceremonial and the pretentious representation as against a neutral, secular, practical architecture. In the end

it was Jerusalem, which after the British Mandate (which demanded the city's stone character by legislation, still in practice today) received the Tel-Aviv-features of international style. Most of the public as well as private construction in Jerusalem in the 50s and 60s was influenced by this style.

The architectural approach typified as "Jerusalemite", not only did not spread outside the city of Jerusalem, it was not really put into practice in the city itself until the 70s. The return of Israelis to old Jerusalem and the international return to old architectural styles gave preference to Jerusalem. What started out in the massive building around Jerusalem after 1967, continued in large scale public projects built in the city in the 70s, 80s and 90s; this style was of major influence on both private and public architecture and on landscape shaping, in popular and in elite projects.¹⁹ Whereas for many years stone buildings were hardly seen outside Jerusalem, today such constructions are taking over in most of Israel. In this regard the Rabin Center is a landmark and an official precursor that the Jerusalem style has reached Tel Aviv. After a trial attempt of the different materials between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, at the Ben Gurion Airport Terminal 2000 (abundant in stone walls, temple columns, domes and arcs), the founding father of postmodern Jerusalem architecture built his first meaningful project in the secular modernistic capital of Israel (and one of the world capitals of the modern movement).

Even in flat Tel Aviv, a city almost entirely free of archeological levels, Safdie was given a dramatic setting for his creation. The artificial mound of the Sheikh Muanis ridge provided a mountain like topography, while the powerful mass of the huge concrete relic buried beneath the project added to the dramatic image and façade of the new building. In addition to the large scale building he erected on the mound and the bunker on which it is based, Safdie's plan also included a further architectural element that gave the Center its grandiose appearance. Similar to his plan from the late 60s for the redesign of the Western Wall Plaza, when Safdie suggested enhancing the effect of the wall by digging an additional nine meters all the way to the Herodian level²⁰, in Ramat Aviv he chose to reveal the bunker's façade down to its Ben Gurion level by removing tons of soil and covering it with red Jordanian stone. The stone steps of the "Grand Theatre" from the unused Western Wall project, were transformed in Ramat Aviv into terraced gardens.

David Ben Gurion, who, immediately following the 1967 war, suggested tearing down the Old City walls in Jerusalem, would never have imagined that the bunker he built in Tel Aviv, on the banks of the Yarkon, would, one day, become a Western Wall. Safdie presented Tel Aviv with a Northern replica of the Western Wall towering over it; he gave it Zion's architectonic icon, *par excellence*, and the pinnacle of thousands of stone walls which sprang up in Israel during the last decade²¹.



From the top: chief of general staff, lieutenant general Yitzhak Rabin and lieutenant general Moshe Dayan, the defense minister, on their way to the Western Wall, June 1967 (in *Sheshet Ha'yanim Album*, the Ministry of Defense Press); Moshe Safdie, Habitat Israel, Jerusalem 1969-1970, a model; Moshe Safdie, a suggestion of planning the Western Wall Plaza, 1972-1975, a model.

The Spiral

The symbolism stuck to the main façade of the building is further supported in the general setting of the site. Both the early as well as the later models and perspectives of the building, included terrace gardens on either side of the building facing Rokach Blvd. The eastern garden was named after Jordan's

late King Hussein (and a designated spot was saved for a pavilion to be built "in cooperation with Jordanian artists"); the western garden is named after former US President Bill ("Shalom Haver") Clinton. The planned terraces, nationalized into Israeli landscape architecture from Palestinian agriculture, disappeared from the gardens built on the site (apparently due to budget restraints) and were flattened to deceptively sharp slopes and became the slippery slopes of the Yitzhak Fort.

According to the planners, the gardens are a green extension of the Yarkon Park and will be connected to it by means of a pedestrian bridge spanned over Rokach Blvd. in the future. The flora is "Israeli" - Palm and Citrus trees, Ficus, Eucalyptus and Pine trees and large areas of bristles. A large number of the inevitable old olive trees were planted on the northern side of the site, between the chimney preserved from the power plant that operated in the bunker and the huge staircase leading to the back entrance of the building. The North-South route of the edifice (the Cardo according to the planners) continues from the security guard's position at the top of the staircase, the route crosses the East-West colonnade (the "Decumanus").

From the entrance hall in the crossing (near the Great Hall) a second large staircase leads to the top floor of the Rabin's Museum for the history of society and democracy in Israel, the opening of which is being delayed. The museum is planned to offer a descending spiral tour representing "the story of the Israeli society, intertwined with that of Rabin's life."²² The entrance room of the museum will recreate the Malche Israel Square rally - on the night of the murder - on big screens and the Song of Peace that ended the rally. Here begins the central route of the spiral presenting Rabin's life chronologically. The exhibit rooms along the route are to present major historic chapters, conflicts and events that influenced the identity of Israeli society. One of the rooms will recreate Rabin's study, brought from his home in Ramat Aviv. The Cadillac that drove Rabin to the hospital after he was shot is already parked in the Center's parking lot.

As expected, the spiral tour ends with the three shots being fired. The current bare state of the museum, before the permanent exhibits are put in place, offers some insight ~~to~~ into the way architects plan the assassination of a Prime Minister. The spiral is an all purpose cliché for any architectural typology which demands experiencing; thus there are shopping centers, art museums, amusement parks, memorial sites - but in the Rabin museum, the association is that of a lethal and fast (3,500 meters a second) spiral movement of a bullet fired from a gun.

Towards the end of the main spiral (and the end of Rabin's life) the hate banners against Rabin will be exhibited on the "Wall of Incite". The direction of the spiral leads us to an additional smaller spiral, moving in the opposite direction. The small spiral ~~is~~ forms a small commemoration room closing in towards its center while creating round rails for sitting and private commemoration; a water element ("eternity") will be placed in the center of the floor of the room, at the utmost end of the spiral. The path leading out of the mausoleum passes the "Youth Lighting Candles Wall" several holes have been prepared in the concrete floor for flashing lights. Upon leaving the dark room, visitors are blinded by sunlight.

Searching for shade, eyes fall on the walls of the new building now being built on the site of the ISA Headquarters.

The Mausoleum

The inauguration of the Rabin Center was the main event marking the tenth anniversary of the the assassination. The towering presence of the building above Rokach Blvd. seemed to progress in direct relation to the growing criticism against it. A series of media investigations revealing the scandalous administrative and ideological operation of the center were published as were academic and publicist texts questioning the range of interpretation of the evasive term "Rabin's Legacy" and the very ability to pass it on²³.





The Rabin Center (under construction), October 2005 (photographs: Zvi Elhyani)





The purpose of the Center, as it was defined by the law, was "to commemorate the work and personality of the late Yitzhak Rabin in order to study the lessons Israeli society should learn from the assassination, its circumstances and its repercussions"²⁴. It now seems that the Center has given up on the original aspiration to be the "Rabin Center for the Study of Israel", an academic research institute: it is not by chance that in the booklet published towards the inauguration of the building, its name became the "Yitzhak Rabin Center". In recent years the Rabin Center has funded more and more placatory activities and projects aimed at mending the ruptures in Israeli society and the Center's Educational Department holds discussions using slogans such as "from disagreement to discourse", "on a crossroad", or "the basis for solidarity in Israeli society". These workshops are booked "till the end of time", says Colonel Yossi Lahmani, temporarily brought from the IDF to act as Founding Head of the Institute.

The apologetic tones of the Center's leaders on the eve of the inauguration when defending its size and façade (such as "is the front wall scary? That's the bunker, not the Center"; or "the Building is a symbol, it needs to be seen ") or on the subject matter of the issues the Center is dealing with ("This is not a mausoleum for Rabin- if we had just built a monument we would have missed the point"). All these reveal the vague program of the Center, the institute and the building.

The dimensions of the site and the building have been blown up out of any proportion and as it stands, it is nothing but a mausoleum and a sculpture. The "educational activity" could have easily been carried out from several classrooms and offices in an existing modest site (and mainly in activities in "the field") and the astronomic cost of the construction could have easily funded its activity for many years to come. The same goes for the argument regarding the building being a warning signal. No structure can prevent the next political assassination and no architecture, except maybe Auschwitz, can act as a symbol or a living monument.

Despite the attempts to describe the new building constructed above the bunker as representing "Rabin the peacemaker", the general appearance of the place clearly evinces to the Government, the family and those who planned the site commemorating "Rabin the Military Leader", rather than "Rabin the Statesman". The Center's political flattery of the Right, as well as Safdie's right wing architecture led, almost naturally, to the IDF Museum to be located in the bunker and thus the 'Center against Violence' operates above a frightful collection of weapons.

The Rabin Center is an architectonic violation of the memory of Rabin the man. The building will continue to overlook Tel Aviv for years after the musical based on the life of Rabin will be taken off the stage to become no more than an anecdote. Rabin, who at the later stage of his life dreamt of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, could never have imagined that the building bearing his name would become a monument to ~~of~~ his hawkish past, reconstructing his moment of glory as a young officer marching to the Western Wall in June 1967, the very days Safdie was conquering Montreal with his Habitat.

¹ The quote is taken from Safdie's speech at the Third International Engineers and Architects Congress in Israel, Tel Aviv December 17th-24th 1973. The complete speech was published in the April 1973 issue of Alef Alef, the Monthly Journal of the Architects Association and the Engineers and Architects Union in Israel, pp. 5-8.

² Donald Winkler, "Moshe Safdie: The Power of Architecture", Canada 2005, 91d. See Esther Zandberg's review of the film, "Adon Haaretz", *Ha'aretz*, 14/7/2005 [Hebrew].

³ Esther Zandberg, "the world did not elect Safdie to be president", *Ha'aretz*, 17/10/1996 [Hebrew].

⁴ On Safdie's work at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem See Zvi Elhyani, "The Terrible Genre", *Studio* 151 (2004), pp. 60-65 [Hebrew].

⁵ The monument at the assassination site was designed by sculptor Yael Artzi and architect Claude Grundman.

⁶ On the eve of the tenth memorial day, it was reported that Prime Minister Sharon, Minister of Housing Yitzhak Herzog and Minister of Interior Ofir Pines agreed on establishing the first town in Israel that will bear Rabin's name. The town, Zur Yitzhak, will be a community settlement with 2300 residential units. It will be established in the Sharon area, near the Arab city of Taibe and the Jewish Zur Natan town. For more on the over commemoration of Rabin, see also Gideon Levi, "The Rabin state", *Ha'aretz*, October 2nd 2005. This phenomenon is also expressed from a completely different perspective by Amitai Amir, in Pitchon Pe, the Amir family official website www.yigalimir.co.il.

⁷ This law signed by Prime Minister Netanyahu, was passed six months before the "Rabin Memorial Day Law 1997", passed in the Knesset in July 1997 and set for the 12th of the Hebrew month Heshvan, the day of the assassination. Sociologist Lev Grinberg wrote: "November 4th is the day a Prime Minister was assassinated in Israel and the 11th of Heshvan is the day Yitzhak Rabin died, the day engraved on his tombstone. Israel has not succeeded in defusing the tension between the will to commemorate the danger revealed in the assassination and the honest and natural will to remember Rabin, the man and his legacy". Lev Grinberg (ed.), *Disputed Memory: Myth, Nationalism and Democracy- Essays following the Rabin assassination*, Beer Sheva 2000 [Hebrew].

⁸ Ronen Bergman, "This is the will of the family", *Ha'aretz*, 7/8/1998 [Hebrew].

⁹ Tel Kasilla is today is within the Eretz Israel Museum compound. In excavations carried out

¹⁰ Amnon Barzilai, "Ben Gurion's nuclear bunker will become the IDF Museum", *Ha'aretz*, 24/10/2004 [Hebrew]. According to Barzilai, Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai demanded that the Defense Ministry vacate the IDF Museum opened by Ben Gurion from South Tel Aviv, he claimed that the Museum was delaying the development of the train route from Tel Aviv to Jaffa. Huldai recommended transferring the Museum content to the bunker beneath the future Rabin Center. Despite the recommendation of a Senior Committee appointed not to transfer the collection to the bunker and to examine other alternatives- the CEO of the Defense Ministry, Amos Yaron, and Defense Minister Mofaz decided to transfer the Museum collection to the bunker.

¹¹ Aviv Ron, "Wings above Rokack Blvd.", Iton Tel Aviv, 12/8/2005 [Hebrew].

¹² When Leah Rabin was questioned about this, she again referred to Safdie's reputation: "It is our honor and privilege that an Israeli architect with such a worldwide name agreed, as a result of the love he had for Yitzhak Rabin, to plan the Rabin Center. I certainly recommended that Safdie should be the one to plan the building. All members of the management, the public committee and the council were pleased with this important decision" (Rabin's response is brought in Bergman's article (see note 8 above).

¹³ Esther Zandberg, "A certain amount of power and a certain amount of simplicity", *Ha'aretz*, 13/3/1997 [Hebrew].

¹⁴ Nili Portugali, "The needless Rabin Fort", *Ha'aretz*, 30/7/2000 [Hebrew].

¹⁵ Esther Zandberg, "the complete opposite of Rabin's legacy", *Ha'aretz*, 9/11/2000 [Hebrew].

¹⁶ On Leah Rabin as a living monument, see Yoram Peri, *Brothers at War: Rabin's assassination and the Cultural War in Israel (Yad Is Beahiv)*, Tel Aviv 2005, pp. 206-210 [Hebrew]. Peri quotes mainly from R. Efron's seminar paper, "The death of a Living Monument- the Media and the death of Leah Rabin: A Woman as a memorial site", Hebrew University 2000.

¹⁷ Habitat, a stack of 158 industrialized concrete apartments, organized in an artificial pseudo organic order inspired by "architecture without architects" and the Arab village, was intended as a prototype for cheap residential housing. Like other avant-garde manifests, Habitat didn't solve the world's housing problem but did in fact become a popular complex of high priced housing, a visiting site for architects and an icon in any canonic history of 20th century architecture.

¹⁸ For more on the rise of this trend, see Zvi Elhyani's article "Judaica Architecture", *Studio* 162 (October-November 2005), pp 14-19 [Hebrew].

¹⁹ The most outstanding examples being the Supreme Court building planned by Ram Carmi and Ada Carmi Melamed, or the Sherover Promenade planned by Shlomo Aharonson.

²⁰ Safdie's design of the Western Wall Plaza (1972-1975) included a plaza surrounded by terraces, creating a huge amphitheatre around which religious institutes and national secular buildings were to be built. See Meir Ben Dov, Mordechai Naor and Zeev Anar, "The Safdie plan for the design of the Western Wall Plaza- a plan is born", *The Western Wall*, Ministry of Defense 1981, pp 174-179[Hebrew], and Zvi Efrat "Hurva", in *The Israeli Project, Building and Architecture 1948-1973*, Tel Aviv Museum 2004, pp 489-490 [Hebrew].

²¹ For more on the Wall syndrome in Israeli architecture, see "A Wall here and a Wall there", *Ha'aretz*, Esther Zandberg, 5/4/1999 [Hebrew]. The image of the Western Wall in the Rabin Center is not the first in Tel Aviv. In Sharon Rotberd's book on architect Avraham Yaski, he compares the architectural composition of the Malchei Israel Square (later to be changed to the Rabin Square) built following the Six Day War and the grid façade of the Tel Aviv Municipality building to the Western Wall and the Plaza in front of it.

²² See www.rabincenter.org.il

²³ *Ha'aretz* newspaper published several extensive studies on the bad governance of the center in its first years: "The will of the family:", by Ronen Bergman, 7/8/1998 [Hebrew]; irregularities in the establishment of the center; "Shalom Haver" by Uriah Shavit, 13/4/2001 [Hebrew], on the employment of Rabbi Yaacov Meidan, who accused Rabin of being a traitor; "The forgetfulness Conspiracy" by Vered Levi Barzilai, 15/11/2002 [Hebrew], following the resignation of Prof. Yuli Tamir from her position as the Head of the Center at the end of 2002, in light of her frustration with the sharp Right turn the Rabin Center took.

²⁴ *The Yitzhak Rabin Center for the Study of Israel*, a booklet published by The Yitzhak Rabin Center for the Study of Israel founding committee, Tel Aviv, no year stated [Hebrew].