



## Place, Space, and Michal Govrin's *Snapshots*

*Place, space, chronotope* have again become a focus of interest after having been relegated to the status of background or setting in the heyday of classical narratology<sup>1</sup>. In the framework of this resurgence, my paper is an attempt to draw attention to a configuration that, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet been discussed. Transposing the ambiguity, though not the literal meaning, of the title of Irigaray's pathbreaking feminist book (*This Sex Which Is Not One*), I call this configuration "a place which is not one."<sup>2</sup> My concern is with a place that is both "not one," i.e. not unique but multiple, and "not one," i.e. not fully a place, in a sense that will emerge from the analysis. Place itself is provisional shorthand for an unorthodox combination of the three opening notions.

My hypothesis is that "a place which is not one" is a basic structure (dare I say "deep structure"?) that can have different manifestations in different periods/genres/texts. I have been led to this hypothesis by my engagement with the recent novel *Snapshots* by Israeli author Michal Govrin (2002; English translation 2007), a narrative text that implicitly theorizes the relation between place and space. *Snapshots* both integrates and problematizes Jewish religious traditions, secular ideals of the early twentieth century settlers in Israel, present-day political views concerning issues of territory, and contemporary West European (mainly French) thinking about location.<sup>3</sup> I shall first show how the work of Michel de Certeau sheds light on Govrin's conceptualizations of place. This will be followed by a close analysis of ways in which the novel goes beyond de Certeau and other theorists by its concrete representations of the dual meaning of "a place which is

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan is Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She published *The Concept of Ambiguity—the Example of James; Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*; and *A Glance beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity*, as well as numerous articles on narrative theory, literature and psychoanalysis, illness narratives, and specific works of fiction and non-fiction. At present she is working on the issue of space in narrative.

not one." Finally, I shall explicitly bring time back into the discussion by foregrounding a relation between Govrin's novel and Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope.

### THEORIZING PLACE AND SPACE: DE CERTEAU AND GOVRIN

A brief presentation of *Snapshots* is necessary before relating it to de Certeau's theory. The novel starts after the death of the protagonist, Ilana (Lana) Tsurriel, a left-wing Israeli architect living in Paris, in a car crash on the way to Munich where she is planning to deliver a lecture. Lana's estranged husband, Alain, gives a close ex-Israeli friend of hers notes and diary entries written in Hebrew, together with maps and photos he found in Lana's handbag. The book we read consists of these fragmentary notes, addressed to her dead father. Before her death, Lana was frantically planning an anti-monument to peace to be set up in the outskirts of Jerusalem, on a hill Lana re-names Mount Sabbatical. Suffice it to say at this point that in the Bible, a Sabbatical Year (*shmita*) is one in which all agricultural work ceases and financial debts are suspended, a year of temporarily letting go of property. Reinforcing these connotations is the architecture of the planned anti-monument: a settlement of huts (*sukkot*), similar to those in which religious Jews dwell during the Feast of Tabernacles. Central among the huts' many connotations, to be analyzed later, are transitoriness and non-ownership. To celebrate the inauguration of the anti-monument, Lana was working with a Palestinian troupe on a joint theatrical production, and at the same time having a love affair with its director, Sayyid.

Lana's project, as well as other aspects of *Snapshots*, maintains a striking affinity with de Certeau's ideas.<sup>4</sup> In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau proposes a distinction between *place* and *space*—one that has not been unanimously adopted, but is particularly illuminating in the present context. The distinction emerges not as a binary opposition but as a relationship of potentiality and realization, similar to that between de Saussure's *langue* or Chomsky's *competence*, and the former's *parole* or the latter's *performance*—concepts that are often evoked in de Certeau's book. While *place* is "objectively there," the constructed cultural given, *space* is what the subject makes of *place* in order to inhabit it. In this sense, "space is a practiced place" (130). *Place* is governed by "the law of the proper" (xxi). Its owners, proprietors, regulate its operation (36). *Space*, on the other hand, is compared to "a rented apartment" (xxi), not owned by the subject residing in it temporarily. This is uncannily similar to the Biblical idea of the *sukkah* which, far from being owned, is rebuilt every year and lived in, "rented," for seven days. Appropriately, *place* is static and stable, while *space*, created by the subject's movement in changing contexts, is forever mobile, dynamic (117). Its very instability expropriates it from the law of ownership. Moreover, while *place* can be looked at from an external perspective, *space* is not perceived from the outside but experienced from within (119). This again is very close to Lana's anti-monument, conceived as "the kind you don't look at but one you build and live in" (107).

De Certeau develops his idea further by juxtaposing a *map* to a *trajectory* or an *itinerary*. A map is structured from the outside by given laws of order and proportion. A trajectory, or itinerary, on the other hand, consists of walking, wandering, inside (think of instructions like “you enter, you go across” etc.) (xviii, 119). An appendix at the end of *Snapshots* displays maps of the monument’s site, sketched by Lana (though in Govrin’s handwriting). However, Lana transforms the map into an itinerary when, during her stay in Israel in the Gulf War period, she drives to the not-yet-built site, despite the ominous atmosphere, and walks in and around it (167–71). Every few meters, the landscape changes completely (168), emphasizing the instability and freedom of wandering. Walking, for de Certeau, has the potential of endowing place with both meaning and directionality—the two connotations of *sens* in French. For this to happen a void has to be created, “a crack in the system that saturates places with signification and indeed so reduces them to this signification that it is ‘impossible to breathe in them’” (106). Surely Jerusalem is such a saturated place, and the void necessary for inhabiting it is clearly akin to Lana’s notion of letting go, opening one’s hand, *shmita*.<sup>5</sup> True, the Sabbatical year is an injunction in the legal system of the Bible, and in that sense perhaps not quite the free crack or void de Certeau has in mind. However, it is part of the novelty of Lana’s vision that what was a law becomes an act of choice and what applied to every seventh year becomes a metaphor for an existential state of mind.

Another concept, common to both de Certeau and Govrin, is boundary-crossing. Place, according to de Certeau, is defined by its boundaries (116). The subject’s space-creating movement, on the other hand, transgresses boundaries (de Certeau speaks of “poaching” [xix]), transforming them into bridges, thresholds (127). “This is the paradox of the frontier,” he says, “created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. Conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them” (127). “The door that closes is precisely what may be opened” (128). The site of the planned anti-monument in *Snapshots* bridges religious, ethnic, and national territories, and the Sabbatical year involves a removal of boundaries around agricultural lots, rendering the crop that remains from previous years no one’s and everyone’s possession. The planned performance of the Palestinian troupe at the inaugural event, as well as the love affair between Lana and the troupe’s director, Sayyid, are concretizations of the hoped for transformation of boundaries into thresholds. However, the attempt to open the door fails in the novel. In a phone conversation during the “mother of all wars,” Sayyid says to Lana: “the performance is now a war, not a monument to peace” (181). The anti-monument does not get constructed, nor does the Palestinian troupe appear in Jerusalem. After the end of the war, Lana and her children go back to Paris, planning to visit Israel once a year.

“Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice,” says de Certeau (115). What he means, I think (and I use his own previously quoted expressions in order to explain him), is that stories turn maps into itineraries, transform place into space by creating a clearing that enables free play. The act of writing (or narrating) is a performative: “It produces effects, not objects” (79). “It does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It *makes* it. One understands it, then, if one enters into this move-

ment oneself" (81, emphasis original). By entering into the movement of *Snapshots*, one discovers at least a double journey: that of the characters (in fact, multiple journeys of quite a few characters) and that of the writing. Lana's writing of "verbal snapshots" to her dead father accompanies every stage of the action. These verbal snapshots *are* the text we read, and they constantly cross boundaries between events of the present and memories of the past—both Lana's own and those of other characters—quotations from her father's memoirs<sup>6</sup>, Lana's innermost thoughts, etc.

Boundary-crossings, as well as being on the road, also characterize the act of reading, according to de Certeau: "Readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write" (174). Readers enter a world made by somebody else, but invest it with something personal, thereby making it an inhabitable space for themselves (169, 173). The reader thus "deterritorializes himself, oscillating in a nowhere between what he invents and what changes him" (173).<sup>7</sup> Lana is such a creative reader—of her father's writings, of the Bible and the Talmud, of the verbal and musical text of *Don Giovanni*. One can only hope to be able to read *her* text in a similarly creative way.

Is every story a travel story, or is every spatial trajectory a story for de Certeau? Analogously, is spatial practice *like* the act of enunciation, or the act of enunciation *like* a spatializing of place? Is the difference between place and space *like* that between *langue* and *parole*, or the other way round? There is a certain circularity in de Certeau's analogies between binary pairs, a circularity which defies our capacity to tell which of the components is literal and which metaphorical, or—to use old-fashioned terminology—which is the tenor and which is the vehicle. The circularity, I think, is intended. They are all "practices," de Certeau would contend, and in that sense (to quote another theoretician of the same period) "there is no metalanguage" (Lacan 11). As an ex-structuralist, I may have a residue of difficulty with this position, but it is admirably suitable for a reading of *Snapshots*, where events are often conceived of as "stories" or "narratives."

If for de Certeau space is a liberation from place, for Govrin place is "always already" permeated by qualities the French thinker attributes to space. Indeed, as I shall now try to show, *Snapshots* goes beyond de Certeau in its subversive representation of "a place which is not one." The double meaning of this expression manifests itself in Govrin's text as an oscillation between wandering, moving from one place to another, and temporary dwelling. Wandering is correlated with 'not one' while temporary dwelling, an aspect of Lana's anti-monument, corresponds to 'not one'. Together, they inform the characters' life stories, the relations among them, the action's trajectory, the novel's complex ideology and its poetics.

### A PLACE WHICH IS NOT ONE

Wandering is sometimes a liberating movement in Govrin's novel, opening a place up to multiple spaces (in this sense "a place that is not one"), sometimes a forced escape. For Lana wandering is a chosen life style, a crossing of boundaries that enables her to experience the other from his/her position. Her initial emigration

from Israel was a reaction against her father and his pioneering generation: “Everything just to get as far away as possible from your story, Father” (18). As a radical left-wing Israeli, she objected to the Zionist possessive attitude to the land, choosing instead to divide her time between New Jersey and Paris, where she lives with (but often also without) her husband, who is busy with his own version of wandering. She constantly runs projects or gives lectures in many other cities: New York, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Like the plurality of places, their impersonality also gives Lana a feeling of freedom. Here is what her notes say about the New Jersey Turnpike: “On the road again, Father. Apparently need the conglomeration of New Jersey roads, the ‘nowhere’ of the ‘American dream’ to tell you what I never dared” (16). Many events in *Snapshots* take place in what we regularly consider transit-areas: airports, planes, train and bus stations (the Port Authority in particular), the Parisian metro, taxis, and private cars. However, these are not experienced as non-places. A lot of libidinal energy is invested in them: think, for example, of three love scenes between Lana and Sayyid—in cabs in Manhattan and Paris, in her car in Jerusalem; or her constant scribbling to her dead father (another erotic mode) in airports, on buses, and the like. However, the freedom associated with wandering sometimes gives way to a suspicion that it may merely be a repetition of the very story from which Lana wanted to escape: “Father, how to tell you that what you bequeathed me, in a genetic mutation of generations—beyond the Zionist interim, beyond the thin layer of connection to the Land of Israel—is that passion for wandering” (26). At one point she ironically sees herself as having imposed on her children the Jewish fate of wandering: “the little wanderer I had raised, Father. A second generation? A third? A tenth?” (283).

The freedom Lana associates with a place that is not one is drastically restricted once she comes to Jerusalem for the duration of the Gulf War. She spends much of her time with her children in the closed space of her rented apartment and—within it—in the sealed room, an illusion of protection against SCUDS. The main opening onto the world inside the flat is the TV, where war casualties are quickly translated into their commercial effects on the stock market (243). Lana turns off that channel of contact with the outside. Interestingly, the confinement to the house also breeds a neighborly community in the area of the staircase, habitually just a passageway. The empathy and mutual support leads to the children being invited to play at other homes, creating a network of care almost absent in the cosmopolitan but impersonal world in which Lana’s ordinary life moves.

The care, empathy, and mutual help are a crucial boon for a single parent in a war situation in what used to be her homeland—‘single parent’ because Alain has not only objected to this trip to Israel but also continued his own journeys. Alain, a “professional wandering Jew” (45) is committed to the quest for documents left by Jews who, during the Nazi period, were forced to leave their homes and wander in Europe or, alternatively, brutally driven to concentration camps and exterminated. As an adult and a historian of the Holocaust, he follows in their footsteps, constantly traveling to libraries and newly opened archives to study manuscripts that might otherwise have faded into oblivion. The libraries and archives he travels to function *in place* of erased places.

With all his Jewish fervor, Alain is an anti-Zionist. He speaks in the name of the Diaspora, the multiplicity of places, and against Israel as the 'one place': "The Zionist lunacy of gathering all the Jews in one place, preparing the conditions for an easy final extermination! What blindness! That madness of destroying the Diaspora. That's the only reason the Jews survive, because they could move, find temporary shelter in another place every time!" (41. See also 128).

Both Alain's profession and his ideology can be explained by his childhood as a wanderer. Born in Czernowitz, he was four years old when the war broke out. When the Nazis came to their apartment, he was six, and his mother persuaded him to run away. Until the age of ten he wandered among peasants, as well as in forests, and was then brought to Mme Heller's orphanage at Montmorency by some American soldiers who picked him up in the forest in their jeep (36–38). "A withdrawn child, escaping from place to place, surviving alone" (36).

If wandering is the Jewish fate, it has also come to be that of the Palestinians, as Alain comments with his characteristic sarcasm: "Another one of the 'twin brothers' the Jews are experts at creating and that afterward rise up to kill them . . . Ishmael, Esau, the Christians, and now the Palestinians" (92). Indeed, at one point, Sayyid teases Lana: "Now we're the real Jews," and they both laugh when she replies: "That much jealousy?" (98). And just as the effaced places motivate Alain's travels, so in Sayyid's head "there's a map that's erased" every time he sits on the bus to Tel Aviv: "I pass Lod, Ramle, Beit Lid, and my heart is cut with pain" (48). Sayyid, of course, is another wanderer. Born in Silwan, near Jerusalem, he is based in Amsterdam, and travels to Paris, New York, Tunis, Beirut, Jerusalem. During the Gulf War, Lana is in Jerusalem, but not Sayyid. He is, she thinks, "wandering around somewhere in Tunis or Libya—we're cut off, each one engulfed in his story" (252).

The Palestinian group to which Sayyid belongs puts on a play about the Nakkbah, the expulsion of Palestinians from their homelands by Jews during and after the Israeli War of Independence. Lana watches the play in New York in a *closed* auditorium, with very mixed feelings. The play suggests an analogy between the Palestinians who were forced into wandering and the Jews in Europe. Another mirroring effect is created when the play mentions names of places from which the Palestinians were expelled (Giudid, Mror, Mozza, Tsubah, Harat, Deir Ayub, Bayt Surikh, Bayt Mahsir)—names that echo in Lana's father's narrative as particularly hostile Arab villages during the riots of 1929 and 1936.

The Father's "generation of Titans," then, are at least partly the cause of the Palestinian wandering, of the rupture of their connectedness with the land (*tsumud*). But that generation too consists of victims of persecution. By uprooting themselves from their families and the countries with which they have identified culturally, they make *aliya* (literally, ascent) to the land they hope to turn into a stable, lasting, home. "We threw everything away behind us," Lana's father tells her in an apologetic tone, "we were drunk, Ilanka" (33). Perhaps the main difference between the Father's generation (or, at least, some of its members) and the Palestinians in the play is the former's self-criticism and willingness to let go. Thus Uncle Yehiel, a fervent Zionist who has lost a son in one of Israel's wars, tells Lana of the haunting memory he has of having participated in Campaign Danny, the operation that expelled the Arabs

from Lod and Ramle, two cities included in Sayyid's "erased map" (259). In her father's documents, among notes marked "not to be published," Lana finds one that says: "And that problem we haven't yet fathomed about the sabbatical year and the abandonment of the Land" (250). Thus, without Lana's knowledge, her Zionist father, committed to Israel as the ultimate place, has anticipated her own thoughts about relaxing hold on the Land. The idea of letting go underlies Lana's planned anti-monument, and it is to her utopian vision that I turn now.

### A PLACE WHICH IS NOT ONE

Jerusalem has been the heart of conflicts throughout the ages: between Jews, Moslems, and Christians; Israelis and Palestinians; religious and secular adherents; and Zionists and their opponents. It is, in the anthropomorphic and gendered description in *Snapshots*, the "object of desire of Gods, prophets, believers . . . Jerusalem the woman. Loyal, unfaithful, saint and whore, the city of God's lust, the city that maddens all those who yearn to own her, to demand an exclusive claim to her" (114).<sup>8</sup>

At the edge of this city, on the Hill of Evil Counsel, Lana is planning to build her anti-monument. The Hill of Evil Counsel is the highest point around Jerusalem, at the verge of the desert and of what used to be the political border with Jordan before the 1967 war. It carries rich associations in the three major religions of the area. According to the Jewish tradition, this is where Abraham left the young men on his way to sacrificing Isaac on Mount Moriah. Faith has it that this is also where Celestial Jerusalem was shown to the prophet Ezekiel by the angel. According to the Christian tradition, this was the location of the house of the high priest Caiaphas when the rulers of the Jews resolved to hand Jesus over to the Romans. And according to the Moslem tradition, this is where one of Saladin's officers boasted that he could conquer Jerusalem easily, riding on a bull.<sup>9</sup> Geographically, from this bare site with 360 degrees of open landscape around, one sees the Old City, the ancient Jewish cemetery, the steeples of churches, and the minarets of mosques. On the very top of the hill is located the "Governor's House," a relic from the British Mandate. In this junction of religions, Lana is planning to put up a settlement of huts (*sukkot*) in an area of six hundred and seventy meters, "crossing borders of ethnic, national, political territories" (42). The huts, to be built every time anew by those who will inhabit them for a while, will be connected by a path with a kitchen, a library, and discussion rooms—all with thatched roofs, open to the sky. Around the site, water—with its distinctly female connotations as well as the apocalyptic associations of fertility in a city on the edge of the desert—will be made to flow in old dry streams. An addition to the Second Temple aqueduct "will renew the flow into the walls of Jerusalem, to the holy places" (187). People from all over the world, without visa requirements, will come to stay in the huts for seven days of study, dialogue, and reflection—a limited, carnivalesque-like period.

The inspiration for this "anti-monument," as I have already noted earlier, comes from two concepts in the Bible and the Talmud: the Sabbatical Year (*shmita*) in

which all agricultural work ceases and financial debts are suspended; and the *sukkah*, a temporary, rickety structure in which religious Jews dwell for seven days during the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast commemorates the huts that were set up by the Jews during their wandering in the period of Exodus.<sup>10</sup> Originally, this was a result of necessity, since the Jews had no homes in this liminal space and had to keep moving. One of the innovations of Lana's vision is the transformation of this necessary form of temporary habitation into a metaphor of a world view and a life-long form of being. What was a necessity will become a subversive act of choice, and what was later limited to a seven-day Feast will become a lasting temporariness—an oxymoron suitable for the conception of place advocated by the protagonist of this novel.

In what sense is Lana's project an *anti-monument*, and what notions of place does it challenge? Monuments are erected in memory of the past, often in memory of the dead. The word comes from the Latin *memere*, to remind, conveying an intention to honor the past in the future. Appropriately, when they first meet in his place, Alain shows Lana a map of the places in Europe where he visits ruins and retrieves old documents in newly opened archives: "It's not exactly a map of future plans," he says to her. "I deal with the architecture of the past: Places buried in fields, forests" (49). Lana, by contrast, is very much an architect of the present-future: architecture is a place-shaping profession, and Lana is involved in planning "Lodgings of Life" in Marseilles, where a commune of students and workers build what will become their home (17, 40). Paradoxically, her Jerusalem anti-monument, intended to be built in a history-laden location (the Hill of Evil Counsel), is mainly a projection onto a future: it is an anti-monument to the evanescent, perhaps unrealizable hope for peace. Indeed, Lana interprets the past against the grain of mainstream understandings, in order to give rise to a future that will transcend past conflicts rather than dwell on them. Unfortunately, this gesture to a future peace does not materialize within the confines of the novel or in the external reality of the Middle East to this day.

Lana's project is a utopia, a place that is not a place, as the Greek origin suggests. At one point, she explains to the Al-Quds Palestinian troupe with whom she collaborates on the opening event of the site: "A place that really isn't a place . . . like the name of God in Hebrew. Ha-Makom. He who is a place Who doesn't have a place in the world" (95).<sup>11</sup> Place and God are thus intimately related by a negation. At another juncture, she presents her vision to her university friend, Yaron: "I'm trying to influence another layer of time and place here . . . by finding a way of saying, for example, this place belongs and doesn't belong to me, and of just living that way" (172).<sup>12</sup>

The latter quotation already slips from the etymological meaning of "utopia" as a place which is *not* one to a specific dimension of Lana's vision, challenging one of the main characteristics of places: ownership. The anti-monument is a concretization of a place that cannot be owned. Like the Sabbatical Year, in which the fences around plots of land are removed, making the remaining vegetables available to everyone (nothing new is planted during the Sabbatical Year), like the *sukkah* that is built and destroyed every year, so Lana's site—following the radical reformulation of the relationship between nation and land she extrapolates from the Talmud—will be "a place

with no possibility of owning it. As it says in the wonderful chapter of Leviticus, ‘for the land is mine’. Mine—God’s—not man’s. The land doesn’t belong to anybody! It was given as a promise to the nation that came to it from far away, and the promise is ‘on condition’” (73, see also 135).<sup>13</sup>

The dispossession characterizing the anti-monument applies equally to the city in which it will be located: Jerusalem, the place everyone wishes to own. “I’m at a stage of one step beyond the symmetry of hatred, of mutual victimhood, or of guilt feelings,” says Lana to Yaron. “I’m at a stage of opening a new reality, with dimensions of letting go of the hold on this blood soaked place. I want to show that the place par excellence of envy ownership can exist beyond the hold of human beings—as the Bible says ‘then shall the land keep Sabbath’” (172). What Lana says to her Israeli friend, she also tells her Palestinian lover: “I tried to explain to Sayyid that it’s not us or you. It’s beyond ownership, robbery, argument about who was there first, who expelled whom. . . . If there’s any meaning at all to the return of the Jews to their land—that aberration in history—it’s to make a new revolution in the concept of nationalism, reformulate the connection between nation and land, give up the passion to conquer, to own” (76).

Just as the owning of Jerusalem was characterized by sexual metaphors, so the place that cannot be owned is likened to a woman: “I’m trying here the possibility of not holding . . . a land or a woman who doesn’t belong to anybody . . . the ability to let go, an open hand” (95). Lana herself is precisely a woman whom nobody can claim exclusively: married to Alain, she nevertheless has love affairs with other men, predominantly with Sayyid, but also Claude with whom for years she has a relationship of being “on the roads together”: “Always only loyalty of a journey, in a disconnected sequence (*more lasting than all*) of furtive meetings, between other relationships” (68 my emphasis). The analogy between Jerusalem and a female body that resist possession—central in the Jewish tradition—could be developed further, but at this point I prefer to remain with the anti-monument and evoke Lana’s use of the hut as a metaphor for cognate predicaments.<sup>14</sup> The image of the hut helps her understand the tension she experiences between holding on to her children and letting go of them (135–36). It also opens up an understanding of her need to come back to Israel around the anniversary of her father’s death to bring that heavily erotic relationship to a close: “Maybe I can call that the need to enter the Hut myself, or to let go . . . I’ve got to renew some connection. Maybe so I can let go” (136–37). It is not without irony that Sayyid adopts Lana’s terminology to explain why, in his society, a man can have several women but a woman can only have one man: “But a wife of everyone, that you let go of, ‘sabbatical’, ‘shmuta’” (157).<sup>15</sup>

Letting go, resisting ownership, is a central characteristic of the “anti” of Lana’s monument. Two other subversive features of this site are its non-touristic nature and its temporariness. This is Lana’s explanation to her dying father: “The term ‘monument’ means ‘remembering structure’, a ‘structure of memory’. Hence the question, how to remember. . . . My plan is not a ‘monumental’ monument that rules over the landscape and to which tourists are brought in buses, have their picture taken, and go on . . . My site is based on the sukkah, the hut, a completely different kind of ‘monument’, the kind you don’t look at, but one you build and live in, as a special way of

remembering . . . And, moreover, it is a temporary structure. Think what a statement there is here about memory, which is built and destroyed, that has to be rebuilt every year" (107, see also 75, 134).<sup>16</sup> The anti-monument is a place that defies stability; it is—as Lana explains to Claude—"close to what we had always looked for . . . an architecture of nomads" (73). "An architecture of nomads" is a quasi-oxymoron, appropriate for Lana's attempt to construct a non-construction, a place that is *not* one.

It is such a quality that Lana hopes to lend to her lecture in Munich: "While driving, I spread the presentation out in my head. Hoping it won't be 'built' either, but will exemplify in its moves a model of temporariness. . . . I'll start by talking about the holy place that is never whole, incomplete by definition . . . and then I'll mention the other open holy forms: the tabernacle, the Sabbatical, the Sabbath" (300). Like the anti-monument, like the planned lecture, *Snapshots* is open, even fragmentary, with sharp shifts between levels of time and consciousness, marked by changes of font. Chronologically narrated snapshots from Lana's life in the present—Paris, New Jersey, Israel during the Gulf War, Paris once again, the fatal trip to Munich—are interrupted by past memories that are neither narrated chronologically nor limited to her own past. In addition to the oscillation between present and past and between Lana's past and that of other characters, intimate reflections, Lana's unspoken conversations with herself, erupt into the events of the present in a particularly small font. Early in the novel, Lana writes to her dead father: "Collecting 'snapshots' for you, Father, whispered breaths from the river of roads, / Otherwise, how to tell? How to hold the fragments of our torn story?" (15). How to tell? Perhaps by relaxing the impulse toward unity and letting the fragments be? Letting the fragments be is a way of creating the kind of crack or void de Certeau valorizes, thus not only spatializing (in his sense) the places represented in the text but also opening up the space of the text itself.

### ENTER 'CHRONOTOPE'

So far, my analysis has emphasized place and space by way of compensating for the privileging of time in classical narratology. In retrospect, however, the mutual connection between time and place/space both in Govrin's novel and in principle emerges as inescapable. Wandering, of course, occurs in time, and all movement is spatio-temporal. Moreover, as I have shown, *Snapshots* dramatizes the wandering of different characters in different periods. Similarly, following Govrin, I have characterized the *sukkah* as a "temporary habitation," an expression whose relevance to the point I am making here speaks for itself. The Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the original huts set up by the Jews in the period of Exodus, is—like all carnivals—a limited hiatus in the routine unfolding of time, a repetitive ritual of temporariness. And the original *shmita* takes place every seven years (note, by the way, that "takes place" means "happens in time"). The novel's metaphoric extension of the Biblical concepts of *sukkah* and *shmita* to convey a call for releasing hold on the land also combines time and place, in an oxymoron of a "lasting temporariness" which will hopefully define the relation between nation and location. Lana's vision itself, con-

cretized in the anti-monument, is not only a site but also a temporal condition: a gesture toward stopping the arguments about past ownership and guilt and starting to shape the future in a different direction. "I'm at a stage of opening a *new* reality," as Lana puts it (12 my emphasis).

Given the pairing of time and space, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope seems to impose itself. Although Bakhtin's notion of space does not carry the valorizing connotations it has for de Certeau<sup>17</sup>, the latter's description of the transformation of place into space by movement, directionality, instability—all involving time—could, I think, qualify as a chronotope. "We will give the name *chronotope* (literally 'time-space')," says Bakhtin in an oft-quoted paragraph, "to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of relativity . . . we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as a fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature" (84).

The oscillation between wandering and temporary dwelling informing Govrin's novel can now be identified as its constitutive chronotope. Interestingly, it not only organizes the space-time of this narrative but also introduces the dimension of historical time dear to Bakhtin.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the underlying oscillation can be conceived of as a contemporary reformulation of the recurrent Biblical phrase describing the Jewish tribes' transitional forty years in the desert on the way from Egypt to Israel: "*Vay-isu vayakhanu*" (and they journeyed . . . and encamped) (e.g., Exodus 13:20).<sup>19</sup> The forty years of wandering are a preparation for the great conquest of the land of Israel by the Biblical Joshua.

Wouldn't the people of Israel have been better off had they remained in the pre-conquest period? And wouldn't contemporary Israel be better off had it remained before the 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territories? Perhaps even, as Govrin's Alain insists, without a state? Answered in the positive, these issues invite a reading of *Snapshots* as a post-zionist novel—which would endear it to many intellectual circles in Israel, the U.S. and Europe. However, Lana's view seems to me more complex. It does condemn the harm the occupation caused to both Palestinians and Israelis. At the same time, it describes the first generation of pioneering settlers as heroes. Similarly, her utopia—not accidentally situated at the edge of the border of Jerusalem—is a way of "remind[ing] [you] that to live in the land you've got to let go" (109). However, it also reminds us that letting go is a sacrifice, a liberating sacrifice, but nevertheless a painful one. The site planned by the woman who originally left Israel as a reaction against her father's generation also echoes the father's words upon listening to her conception: "You need love, Ilanka . . . love . . . Love . . . only what you love can you let go . . . love of Jews . . . of Zion . . . of Jerusalem" (109). The novel, to my mind, is not post-zionist; rather, it invites a rethinking of Zionism and an integration of a moderate direction that existed in it from the beginning—as well as in parts of the Bible—emphasizing the beneficial aspects of both exile and letting go.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Lana's friend, Yaron, criticizes her vision as "another beautify-

ing metamorphosis of Zionism" (209), while to her it is a radical rethinking, advocating a double attitude: "this place belongs and doesn't belong to me" (172).

Topical political dimensions are not foreign to Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope', although no discussion of political issues of his day was publishable in the Russia in which he wrote.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, according to Bakhtin, a governing chronotope yields "the image of man" dominant in the text/genre/period which it organizes (85).

The "image of man" includes the political but is not limited to it. I would therefore like to conclude by highlighting what I take to be the main features of the condition of modern man (and woman) emerging from *Snapshots* and its manifestations in the novel's plot. The twentieth century is an era of persecution and wandering, of searches for home but also repudiations of home, of cosmopolitanism with its freedom and discontents. Against this background, Govrin's Lana offers a vision in which an oscillation between wandering and temporary dwelling is not only part of the problem, but also part of the hoped for solution. It is on the road, however, that this woman who can't be owned and who preaches renunciation of ownership dies in a car-crash. When she dies, Lana is pregnant, not knowing whether the father is Alain or Sayyid, and—at the same time—fantasizing about her own father as the 'real' parent. The hybrid Jewish-Israeli-Palestinian fetus in the womb of the deceased fantasizer perhaps hints at the fragility of the utopia of peace. Nevertheless, Lana dies with a sense of fullness, reflecting the text's yearning for co-existence, for the transformation of boundaries into thresholds, for a place which is not one, in both senses of the expression.

## ENDNOTES

I am grateful to my constant readers, Ruth Ginsburg and Bill Daleski for their illuminating comments. Ruth Ginsburg was so involved in every phase of the thinking, structuring, and restructuring of this paper that I would almost call her a co-author. She has also contributed a central idea concerning the chronotope, acknowledged separately in note 18. I also thank Jim Phelan for suggestions about restructuring the essay. A few conversations with author Govrin provided important background information. It was a pleasure to work with Matthew Bolton as copy-editor.

1. The narratological privileging of time over space has been recently interrogated by David Herman (*Story Logic*), Susan Stanford Friedman ("Spatialization"; "Spatial Poetics"), and Ruth Ginsburg ("Scraps and Traces"). Earlier seminal studies have already shown the generative role of space in narrative and its inseparability from time (e.g. Bakhtin's "Forms of Time and the Chronotope," Lotman's *Structure of the Artistic Text*, and Uspensky's *Poetics of Composition*). Nevertheless, classical narratology has continued by and large to privilege time. Today, in what Herman calls postclassical narratology ("Introduction"), this is no longer the case.
2. Irigaray's book is called in French *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. It was translated into English as *This Sex Which Is Not One* by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Feminism is not the focus of my paper, but I find the ambiguity of "one" in her title helpful in putting my thoughts about place and space in a nutshell.
3. When the book came out in Hebrew, reviews emphasized the three first aspects (see Meltser, Oppenheimer, and Levitan). However, as I intend to show, the novel is also permeated by European thinking which both broadens its scope and reinforces its vision of a possible solution to a seemingly insoluble political-ideological-mythical conflict.

4. I am not trying to claim an influence. I know (from personal communication) that Govrin has not read de Certeau. The affinity may be explained by something fairly vague like the zeitgeist, or by authors both Govrin and de Certeau read. The latter often mentions Derrida, for example, and Govrin's "Acknowledgements" start with: "The writing of *Snapshots* began in a conversation with Jacques Derrida" (321). Similarly, Jean-Pierre Vernant had an important impact on de Certeau's thinking, and his chapter on the colossus in *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* has helped Govrin define what she sees as a major difference between Greek and Jewish culture: whereas the former is based on links between heaven and earth (and the colossi are mediators of such a link), the latter believes that the sky is for the Gods, while the earth was given to people. A manifestation of this difference, relevant to *Snapshots*, are the Talmudic rules concerning the *sukkah*, and I'll give only one example: a *sukkah* is not allowed to be higher than twenty *ama* (i.e. close to ten meters), so as not to reach the sky.
5. In a poem entitled "Sanctum," the American-Israeli poet, Shirley Kaufman, says: "To live in Jerusalem is to feel / the weight of stones . . . / *Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city / whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries*, Sometimes I need to be nowhere. A place / without history" (Kaufman 130. The underlined sentence is a quotation from Thoreau's *Walden*, chapter 14)
6. Throughout this paper, I refrain from analyzing Lana's oedipal relations with her father, because they are not strictly relevant to the subject of place and space.
7. De Certeau refers to the reader in the masculine (French practice before the feminist revolution).
8. Note that Paris is also described in this novel as a woman, "an aging Madame" (130).
9. This mountain was later confused with the Mount of Olives and called in Arabic "*Jabl atour*," literally "mountain of the bull" (Taurus in astrology).
10. Note that the Hill of Evil Counsel is also at the edge of a desert, though a different one.
11. The expression comes from *Genesis Rabbah* 68:9. *Bereshit Rabbah* is a collection of exegetical narratives and reflections about the Biblical book of *Genesis*. These interpretations flourished in the third century A.D.—some orally, some in written form. It is difficult to ascertain the exact date of the editing of *Bereshit Rabbah*, but tradition attributes it to the fifth century A.D. It was first published in modern book form in 1545.
12. Lana's being both architect and lecturer is a realistic motivation, "justifying" the many presentations of her ideology to various characters in changing situations.
13. For an interesting discussion of the relations between nation and land in this novel, see Shemtov.
14. For the analogy between Jerusalem and a woman, see DeKoven-Ezrahi.
15. *Shmuta* is a passive form of *lishmot* (to let go) in Hebrew. Sayyid also puns here on the Arabic *sharmuta*, i.e. a whore.
16. Had the construction of this quasi-monument materialized, it would probably have become a place that tourists *would* visit, precisely to see its subversive qualities. It thus subverts not only the concept of "monument" but also (unwittingly?) itself.
17. A separate study is needed to analyze the various ways in which different thinkers define or characterize place and space.
18. I am extremely grateful to Ruth Ginsburg for this point as well as for the Biblical allusion that follows.
19. The formulation varies from one occurrence to another in the Masoretic translation of the Bible, although it is unchanged in the Hebrew original.
20. Such, for example, were the views of H.N. Bialik, the national Israeli poet of the time, in his essay "Jewish Dualism" and (quite surprisingly) also of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook whose son became the ideologue of the religious and right-wing settlers in the Occupied Territories. On the ambivalence of

Jewish culture toward Israel as “the place” throughout the ages, see the very interesting book by Zali Gurevitch, *On Israeli and Jewish Place* (in Hebrew). Gurevitch, an anthropologist, has also published on these issues in English in “The Land of Israel.”

21. Most of the essay on the chronotope was written in 1937–38; its last chapter was written in 1973, about thirty-five years after the rest.

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