

The Resilient City

Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance

**Public Colloquium,
Spring 2002**

Participant Abstracts

Colloquium Co-Directors

Thomas J. Campanella

September 11th and the City

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote "The test of civilization is the power of drawing the most benefit out of cities." The test of terrorism, then, may well be the power to inflict the greatest harm to those same centers of culture, commerce, and exchange. This is something that the Sept. 11 terrorists well understood. Mohamed Atta was a man well acquainted with the power and majesty of cities--and presumably their durability and resilience. He was trained as an engineer, architect and urban planner. Yet, warped by fundamentalism, Atta became the "perverted dreamer" that E. B. White imagined decades ago in *Here is New York*, a man who would "loose the lightning" on Manhattan and attempt to destroy it, symbolically and literally. And even as the rubble of the World Trade Center smoldered in the days and weeks following Sept. 11, pundits in the United States, too, foretold of the death of downtown and the end of the city as we know it. But cities have endured trauma and violence for millennia, much of it far worse than that unleashed by Mohamed Atta on Sept 11. Any study of the city in history will reveal that human settlements possess an essential ability to resurrect themselves in the wake of devastation, a point that the Resilient City colloquium hopes to reaffirm.

Lawrence J. Vale

Urban Trauma and the Resilience of Cities

This paper examines the near-ubiquity of urban resilience by analyzing the concepts of trauma, recovery, and remembrance. It questions the definition of "resilience," by exploring the relationship between recovery of the built environment and other ways that a "return to normalcy" may be measured. Urban trauma, like urban resilience, takes many forms, and can be categorized in many ways. First, there is the scale of destruction-which may range from a small single precinct to an entire city (or, potentially, an even larger area). Second, one may rank these traumas in terms of their human toll, as measured by deaths and disruption of lives. Third, one may organize these destructive acts according to their presumed cause-some result from the largely-uncontrollable forces of nature, such as earthquakes and floods; others are hybrids of natural forces and human action, such as fires; while still others result more wholly from

deliberate human will, whether executed by conquering armies, aerial bombardment, or terrorist strikes. It is not enough to ask general questions about urban recovery; we must ask who recovers which aspects of the city, and by what mechanisms. The process of post-disaster recovery is a window into the power structure of the society that has been stricken. Similarly, to ask about remembrance is to inquire how what is remembered gets constructed, when, and by whom.

Other Colloquium Participants

Max Page

Creatively Destroying New York: Fantasies, Premonitions, and Realities in the Provisional City

This paper seeks to place the attack on the World Trade Center in the context of New York's history as a place seemingly destined to be destroyed and rebuilt with stunning regularity. It explores three ways of looking at a central experience, and cultural trope, about New York City: that it is a city of creative destruction, regularly destroying and rebuilding itself. I will begin with a discussion of extraordinary moments of destruction, both natural and human-made (from fires and blizzards, to acts of terrorism). But then I will argue that it is the "regular" processes of creative destruction -- through private real estate development and government urban renewal -- which are far more important in shaping both New York's physical organization as well as its cultural image. Finally, I will argue that the imagination of New York's destruction -- in art, literature, and cinema -- is at the heart not only of New York life but of American culture more generally.

Kevin Rozario

Spectacular Reconstructions: Ways of Seeing and the Politics of Recovery in American Urban Disasters

This paper explores connections between how Americans have rebuilt their cities with mortar and bricks and rebuilt their cultural environments with words and images in the aftermath of great urban disasters -- a double process that expresses itself neatly in the twin meanings of the word "reconstruction" as rebuilding and as retelling. The two most devastating urban catastrophes in American history (in terms of property destruction) are the Chicago fire of 1871 and the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. The extraordinary recovery of each city from sudden ruination remains compelling and inspiring. In each case, industrialization (an expansive capitalist economy, technological innovation, communications advances) laid the foundations for restoration. But quite as important was the cultural response, in particular a new "narrative imagination" that supplanted traditional providential religious outlooks in the 19th century, decisively shaping modern ways of seeing calamity. Disaster narratives (newspaper accounts, political speeches, books) were at once therapeutic (helping victims to cope with the trauma of disaster) and performative (reassuring most Americans that each disaster would have a happy ending, and thus inspiring the hard work and capital commitment that ensured the building of a new and improved urban environment). But these narratives deserve scrutiny. For they tended to serve a narrowly bourgeois vision of order (equating the poor, immigrants, and non-whites with chaos) while also arousing a

growing preoccupation with thrilling spectacles of destruction -- foreshadowing the sensationalistic fascination with disasters that defines our own mass consumer culture, and which, in crucial ways, has shaped political and economic responses to the September 11 attacks.

Brian Ladd

Double Restoration: Berlin after 1945

The reconstruction of Berlin, after the massive destruction it suffered in the Second World War, was complicated in two fundamental ways. First was the question of historical continuity. On the one hand, there was a desire to reconstruct: to repair a damaged but extant city or, more broadly, to continue its best traditions in architectural style, social policy, and economic development. On the other hand, everyone in charge was determined to break demonstratively with the immediate past, that is, with the Third Reich; but they did not agree about which cultural, architectural, or urbanistic traditions were the Nazi ones. The second complication arose from the fact that the city was soon divided between two ideologically opposed regimes in east and west, each determined to claim the legacy of pre-Nazi Berlin, to display the clearer break with Hitler, and to prove its cultural and political superiority. Under these complicated circumstances, the rebuilding of Berlin became one of the most visible venues of the early Cold War, even as it remained a matter of basic comfort and prosperity for ordinary Berliners.

Diane E. Davis

Reverberations: Mexico City's 1985 Earthquake and the Transformation of the Capital

This paper examines the impact of Mexico City's 1985 disastrous earthquake on the social, spatial, and political character of Mexico's capital city. Taking as its point of departure the earthquake's implications for social movement organization, the character of land use and property ownership, and the legitimacy of the capital city's political leaders and their major construction contractors, this paper argues that unqualified physical disasters can sometimes hold unanticipated and greatly beneficial effects. In addition to empowering urban citizens to organize on their own behalf to challenge a corrupt and highly bureaucratized local government, thereby accelerating the urban democratic transition, Mexico City's earthquake also helped expose the political biases of government authorities and weakened the strong hold of street vendors and the informal sector on the local economy and land use. As a result, Mexico City now is governed by a democratic and more socially responsible government committed to fostering citizen participation, building new low-income housing projects, and "rescuing" Mexico City's historic cultural heritage with the aim of recapturing the social and symbolic centrality of downtown areas, where the earthquake produced most damage. While the downside is that the capital city now faces new pressures for gentrifying and upscaling local property markets to a greater extent than in the past, the upside is that the character and use of downtown areas is now a key item on the broader public agenda for the first time in decades.

Hashim Sarkis

Beirut, Beirut

Through a series of cases in the history of the reconstruction of Beirut (from 1990 to the present), this paper aims to illustrate a number of points and characteristics about Beirut's resilience. The type of resilience that Beirut exhibits is shaped to a great extent by its disproportionate scale in the economy and politics of the country. It is more "Beirut, Beirut" than "Beirut, Lebanon." Reconstruction is more time consuming than destruction, and by the time we get to the reconstruction of buildings, their place in both memory and in space usually shifts. There is also considerable tension between architecture and infrastructure when it comes to reconstruction, and infrastructure usually wins. The historical burden of preservation overwhelms the first phases of reconstruction and tends to dim innovative design thinking in the later stages. Different approaches (restoration, renovation, rehabilitation) and mechanisms (private, public, collaborative) coexist in a competitive manner. There is a lag effect between the planned and the unplanned aspects of reconstruction, a dynamic that is often stronger than either one. Places hold a strong character that survives destruction, but character is not always expressed in physical form. While the marks on destruction appear strongest in architecture, the expressions of continuity, reconciliation, and resilience are stronger (and more effective) in other media such as novels (e.g. *Beirut, Beirut; The Water Ploughman*) and films (e.g.: *Beirut ya Beirut; West Beirut*).

Anthony S. Pitch

Patriotism and Reconstruction: Washington, DC after Conquest and Arson during the War of 1812

The 24-hour occupation of the nation's capital by British forces during the War of 1812 was arguably the lowest point in American history. The President fled to Virginia hours before the invaders torched the White House, Capitol, State and War Departments, and the Treasury. The colossal buildings that represented the hopes and aspirations of the young Republic were now wizened and hollow in what was nothing more than a 14-year-old glorified village, with 8,000 residents. It should have doomed the infant capital to instant oblivion, with many claiming the moment was opportune to relocate to Philadelphia or elsewhere to save the cost of rebuilding. But a surge of patriotism followed the heroic defense of Fort Mchenry, the birth of the anthem, and a monumental victory over the British at New Orleans. It reinvigorated those in Congress invoking the memory of George Washington, who had personally selected the site for a capital and marked the locations of its major public buildings. Local businessmen overcame Congressional critics citing post-war depleted Treasury coffers, by proffering bank loans to fund the costly estimates. Yet even though Washington won the vital reprieve as America's capital, rebuilding would be halting and arduous, slowed and marred by squabbling over designs, construction material, a paucity of creative artists, and financial restraints. But the monumental buildings would rise again, with legislators reconvening in even more splendid comfort, due in no small measure to a President who micromanaged, keenly aware that a rebuilt White House and Capitol would be symbolic of national resilience and unity.

William Fulton

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TO COME

More than any other American city, Los Angeles sits on the edge of disaster every day -- and therefore has to demonstrate lots of resilience. This paper will discuss how peril and disaster is a part of everyday life in one of the world's great metropolis, and how the city and its residents fear, ignore, marginalize, and confront these disasters.

Edward T. Linenthal

'The Predicament of Aftermath': Reflections on 9-11 and Oklahoma City

This paper will focus on similarities and differences in cultural reactions to the events of September 11, 2001, with the aftermath of the Oklahoma City terrorist bombing of April 19, 1995. It explores the co-construction of narrative and memorial process.

Carola Hein

Fires, Earthquakes, Modernization and Air Strikes: The Destruction and Revival of Japan's Cities.

Natural disasters, fires, taifuns, and earthquakes, destroyed Japan's cities in whole or in part on numerous occasions over the last centuries. Human intervention, political change, modernization, and the air raids of the Second World War brought about further destruction and promoted the transformation of the Japanese city in the 19th and 20th centuries. This paper argues that the traditional patchwork character of Japanese cities allowed for flexibility in their transformation, and that many traditional features of Japanese urbanism survived in spite of the obvious changes. It furthermore demonstrates that the reconstruction of Japanese cities was generally left to private initiative and comprehensive centralized planning intervention, and only occurred when and where the cities had to be adapted to political, economic, social and cultural changes.

Japanese cities have been rebuilt numerous times over the last centuries. Only when it coincided with political or economic change, or when motivated by the need for disaster prevention, did Japanese planners propose major changes. They only succeeded when these transformations were in tune with the necessities of Japanese society and in areas that were necessary for the country's modernization. Although reconstruction of destroyed land is different from the continuous reconstruction of the cities, the form of destruction and its scale seem less important than the context in which they occur.

Reconstruction following upon disasters or sudden political change has not led to planning innovations, but has rather helped to establish an urban planning approach that is adapted to Japan and, while promoting modernization, has helped to reinforce the character of Japanese cities.

William J. Mitchell

Anthony M. Townsen, Co-Author

Trauma and Rebuilding in the Digital Electronic Era

When cities have suffered major destruction in the past, through fire, earthquake, bombing, and so on, the physical rebuilding task has involved (1) recreating network infrastructure -- transportation networks, water supply, etc., and (2) replacing residential, commercial, industrial, and other floor space supported by that infrastructure. The task of reconstructing Lower Manhattan after the September 11 attacks obviously has these aspects, but there are some additional ones as well. First, the reconstruction of digital telecommunications networks is now a critically important infrastructure issue -- particularly given the nature of the enterprises that were displaced. This reconstruction began to unfold almost instantly, since such networks -- particularly the Internet -- are increasingly designed to be self-repairing, and to route automatically around damage. Secondly, at least some of the dispersal of enterprises that followed September 11 may turn out to be irreversible; to reduce future vulnerability, displaced enterprises may choose greater dispersal and facility redundancy, supported by sophisticated electronic telecommunications, rather than return to place all their eggs in one basket. In this paper I will explore the new conditions and strategies of urban rebuilding in the digital electronic era, examine what has actually happened in Manhattan so far, and make some suggestions about achieving high levels of urban resilience in the future.

Julian Beinart

Cities and Resurrection: Jerusalem and Us

TO COME