

Lectures: Resilient City: Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance (MIT, Cambridge, Spring 2002)

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Remembrance (MIT, Cambridge, Spring 2002)

Date: 24 Oct 2001

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Public Lecture Series and Colloquium - Spring 2002

The Resilient City: Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance

MIT School of Architecture and Planning

The Joint Program in City Design and Development

The Resilient City project was conceived in response to the terrorist attacks which destroyed New York's World Trade Center on September 11, and is intended to be both a scholarly and therapeutic exercise.

The project will examine critically how cities in the past have prevailed over trauma and devastation, seeking to understand the forces—economic, artistic, political, and social—that have enabled cities to rebuild and recover. By studying how cities in history have emerged from catastrophe, we may better understand the challenges we face in rebuilding lower Manhattan.

Cities have been subjected to periodic destruction throughout history. They have been shaken, sacked, burned, bombed, flooded, and irradiated. Yet, in almost every case, they have been rebuilt.

Usually, they are rebuilt as inhabited places, although sometimes—in cities such as Pompeii or Timgad—they become sites for tourism, education, or even myth. Whether reconstructed to accommodate and restore city life or rebuilt to serve as sites for mourning and remembrance, no major city has been truly or permanently lost.

The central intellectual challenge of The Resilient City is to develop a framework for understanding both the commonalities and the significant differences inherent in the vast array of post-traumatic urbanism. Doing so will require investigating diverse examples of urban trauma and recovery. These will include London's reconstruction following the fire of 1666; the regeneration of

Chicago in the 1870s; Hiroshima after the atomic bomb; Dresden and Berlin in the wake of World War II; and the rebuilding of Beirut following civil war.

The Resilient City will bring together urbanists and historians from around the world to examine these and other examples. They will be asked to extract the pressing questions asked in the past as cities and their citizens struggled to rebuild. In the process, we hope to explore the full richness of the design and planning politics entailed by the reconstruction process.

This politics of reconstruction takes two intertwined forms: a politics of symbolic succession, and a politics of institutional processes. How has the symbolic power of the built environment been used as both a magnet for attack and as a signal of recovery? What does each particular process of recovery reveal about the balance of power in the society seeking to rebuild? Whose vision for the future gets built, and why? These and other questions will shape the Colloquium's broad-ranging inquiry into urban resilience and recovery.

The Colloquium will take place at MIT on Monday evenings beginning on February 11, 2002.

For more information about The Resilient City, please contact co-organizers Lawrence J. Vale (ljvale@mit.edu) or Thomas J. Campanella (tomcamp@mit.edu)

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Reference:

ANN: Lectures: Resilient City: Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance (MIT, Cambridge, Spring 2002). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 24, 2001 (accessed May 9, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/24655>>.