Discusses the lessons that could be learned about coping with disaster in several cities. Contributions of Marquês de Pombal to the redevelopment of Lisbon, Portugal after the earthquake of 1755; Trends in real estate business following the Great Fire in Chicago, Illinois; Description of the rebuilding of Hiroshima, Japan after its bombing during World War II.

Cities coping with disaster offer lessons for rebuilding New York's World Trade Center site

Last spring, as the nation continued to reel from the events of the preceding September, and as the mountain of rubble and remains continued to be cleared at the World Trade Center site in Manhattan—widely referred to as "ground zero"—many New Yorkers found themselves torn between a sense of the tragedy's ineffability and an increasingly clamorous debate (not least engaging the architectural community) about how to rebuild. It seemed useful to try to put the situation into a broader historical and cultural perspective. Presumably there were lessons to be derived from the example of other cities and the way they coped with similar cataclysms.

Indeed, while each of the instances of "urban reinvention" under examination in Out of Ground Zero is unique, it offers a suggestive way of thinking about the situation in New York. It may be cold comfort to realize that the magnitude of suffering in Manhattan is no greater than that endured in other places and times. Yet the spectrum of responses offers not just a set of variations on the theme of urban destruction, but a sense of the manifold meanings of urban experience. For the most part, these responses confirm the perennial resilience of cities in the face of drastic events; a couple, however, also offer more cautionary tales.

LISBON

The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was a truly world-shaking event. As Kenneth Maxwell, a scholar of Portuguese history, relates, it is estimated to have registered 9.0 on the Richter scale. The quake and its aftershocks were felt as far east as Venice, where Casanova, imprisoned in the Ducal Palace in Piazza San Marco, seized the opportunity to escape from his cell. In Lisbon, the epicenter, as many as 15,000 people were killed and about one-third of the city was destroyed. But what is distinctive about the case of Lisbon is the emergence of what Hegel would call a "world-historical individual." Stepping in for a weak and fearful monarch, the Marquês de Pombal lost no time in taking charge of the situation.
Pombal was one of those visionary—and ruthless—personalities through whose agency an entire urban fabric was transformed, a figure comparable to a Baron Haussmann or Robert Moses. Under his oversight, Lisbon went from being an aristocratic, Jesuit outpost with a jumbled medieval plan to become a modern bourgeois and commercial city embodying Enlightenment values and boasting functional planning and a fireproof, sanitary system of construction. Almost 250 years later—as a comparison between the drawings signed by Pombal and contemporary photographs reveals—his intervention remains legible in the neo-Palladian architecture of the city's principal squares and streets.

CHICAGO
Chicago presents the opposite scenario. In the heartland of America, pragmatic opportunism reigned supreme after Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern in 1871. Historian Ross Miller describes the enormous real-estate boom that followed the Great Fire and the frenzy of rebuilding, almost all of it shoddy and undistinguished. Meanwhile, a peculiarly American mix of dooms-day prophecy and thinly veiled capitalist celebration combined to give the city a new founding myth as a dynamic, tabula rasa metropolis. Just two years later, a national economic depression put a halt to the derricks and further conspired to keep Chicago from erecting any significant buildings.

Fascinatingly, however, it was this negative experience of post-fire rebuilding rather than the fire itself that, by the early 1880s, engendered the city's great period of architectural modernism. Architects like John Wellborn Root, Daniel Burnham, and Louis Sullivan witnessed the effects of speculation-driven design and construction at a formative moment in their careers, and they were inspired to design a different sort of building: high-rise frame structures in the solid, fireproof, and commercial but civic-minded style that would become Chicago's seminal contribution to world architecture.

HIROSHIMA
If the havoc wreaked by natural and accidental disasters like earthquakes and fires ultimately tends to be received with a sense of apocalyptic acceptance, that caused by war and human instrumentality elicits a rather different range of emotions. These emotions are further inflected by the historical outcome: whether the city is on the side of the winners or losers. Not surprisingly, a myth of victimhood coalesced in Japan after World War II around the fact that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the first cities on which an atomic bomb was dropped.

Hiroshima was not a very well known city prior to the attack in August 1945 by the American airplane Enola Gay, which was responsible for the deaths of upward of 180,000 people as the radiation continues to work its long-term effects even today. Afterward, however, the Japanese ground zero became a universal symbol of this horrific and unprecedented form of modern warfare and the focus, both nationally and internationally, of an important project of memorialization.

As architectural historian Carola Hein points out, Hiroshima's rebuilding and the role played by a visionary young architect, Kenzo Tange, were exceptional in the Japanese context. In a country that still has little tradition of monumental or comprehensive urban planning, typically resorting to pragmatic forms of "readjustment" in the wake of frequent fires, earthquakes, and floods, Tange's solution to the competition brief for a "peace city" melded Western concepts of modernism with Eastern (specifically Shinto) forms of commemoration. While the full scope of his ambitious master plan went unrealized—and while the rest of Hiroshima has been developed in the intervening years like most other postwar Japanese cities—Tange's architectural centerpiece still resonates with poetic dignity.

ROTTERDAM
Rotterdam, which lost 11,000 buildings to Nazi bombs in 1940, offers another story, as urban planner Han Meyer recounts. Here, forward-tacking planners, businessmen, and politicians soon welcomed the extensive damage as an opportunity to rebuild the antiquated and dense port city—in fact, this had been the objective of many well before the war. In 1944, the compact urbanism favored by Rotterdam's first reconstruction architect, W. G. Witteveen, was jettisoned in favor of the more modernist and "American" ideas of his successor, C. van Traa, who embraced the functionalist zoning of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) and the type of open, "democratic" space in the city center called for by Sigfried Giedion and others in the name of a "new monumentality."

Among the most innovative and celebrated projects to come out of the postwar building program was the Lijnbaan shopping center by the architects Van den Broek and Bakema, hailed as a model of progressive planning. In subsequent years, however, particularly as postmodernist revisionism set in during the 1960s, Rotterdam's citizens took a dimmer view of the new commercial development.

In recent decades, a succession of strategies has been adopted to reconstruct the city along more traditional European or Dutch lines.

PLYMOUTH
In Plymouth, England, the reconstruction undertaken after the air raids of 1941 was an object of disdain almost from the start. Here, under the engineer James Paton Watson, the mayor Waldorf Astor, and the elderly London planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie, an idealistic but neotraditionalist plan was adopted. Largely reflecting Abercrombie's thinking, as architectural historian Alan Powers relates, the plan was a loose amalgam of the regionalist ideas of Patrick Geddes, the formality of the American City Beautiful movement, and the Garden City philosophy of Lewis Mumford.
Implemented over the next two decades, the reconstruction suffered from poor-quality execution, compromises with respect to some of its basic features, and a general shift in British taste away from Abercrombie's penchant for the grand axial vista toward the picturesque English aesthetic of "townscape."

Despite efforts to remedy some of the scheme's defects in subsequent decades, the honorific city center has succumbed over the years to banal development. Abercrombie's emphasis on integrating the plan with the surrounding region finds an interesting echo, however, in some of the more audacious discussions that took place early on with respect to the World Trade Center site, and constitutes the plan's chief contribution to urban thought.

**BERLIN**

Berlin is another city whose fate was decisively changed by World War II, but whose full-blown transformation—the hyperaccelerated redevelopment it is currently experiencing—had to await the city's reunification in 1989 at the end of the Cold War. German filmmaker Hubertus Siegert's 2001 film "Berlin Babylon" offers a vision of a city in the throes of reinventing itself. As architectural historian Ralph Stern points out, Siegert's interpretation defies the usual "city film" genres. Neither ct documentary nor a celebration of architectural achievement as such, it rather captures in vivid and poetic imagery the arbitrary, brutal, and frequently banal process of city building. In this process the urban construction worker figures at least as heroically as the municipal planner and architect (a role perhaps similar to that played by fire fighters and policemen in New York City). Siegert's view of urban processes and protagonists, more curious than cynical, is personified by Walter Benjamin's angel of history—evoked in a voice-over in the film—who is helplessly blown backward into the future. The film's central metaphor of Babel/Babylon further dramatizes the mythic dimensions of the city's reconstruction and its architectural hubris.

**THE BALKANS**

The violence carried out in cities in the Balkans has different implications for New York, from the perspective of another eyewitness to recent historic events, the Belgrade architect, educator, and dissident Milan Prodanovic, who uses the term "urbicide" (coined by his compatriot Bogdan Bogdanovic) to characterize a widespread and festering hostility to cities and civic culture in the Balkans. Harbored by the region's multifarious ethnic groups, this hostility was stoked over the last decade with murderous consequences by corrupt "postmodern dictatorships" armed with a lethal mixture of conventional weapons and modern media technology (in particular, television).

Whether one speaks of the assault on the cosmopolitan life of Sarajevo by local warlords goaded by Serbian commanders, or the destruction of architectural patrimony (including a renowned sixteenth-century bridge) in the former Herzogovinian capital of Mostar by Croats, the perpetrators shared a hatred of urban and democratic values and a fundamentalist belief in the primacy of ethnic heritage. In Prodanovic's view, the only chance of overcoming these entrenched prejudices and constructing an open, civil society in the Balkans lies in basic educational reform and a rapprochement between local culture and the new forces of globalization.

**JERUSALEM**

Another desperate urban situation today is contemporary Jerusalem, an intensely symbolic and just as intensely contested place where the potential for tragedy remains ever present. Iraqi-born political writer and former architect Kanan Makiya offers a rather different form of response to the question of urban reinvention in his recent novel, The Rock, a historical fiction about the building of the Dome of the Rock. Makiya views this monument, located on a site in Jerusalem sacred to three religions since ancient times, as "a lightning rod for complete and total disaster in the Middle East"—and as such, a place comparable to the World Trade Center.

In Makiya's telling, the monument's construction reveals a complicity and connectedness between ancient Islam and Judaism as it also refutes the absolute claims of either side to ownership. In the face of intransigence and despair, Makiya thereby gives expression to a hope for coexistence and conciliation as if, through an act of utopian imagination, it might be possible to anticipate and avert historical destiny.

**NEW YORK CITY**

In New York City, too, the aesthetic imagination has been deployed to sublimate an unsettling reality, as urban historian Max Page reminds us: New York has long been the subject of premonitions and fantasies of destruction. From serious literature and art to science-fiction films and commercial advertisements, these nightmare visions and exceptionalist interpretations have served to capture and manage the experience at living in a paradigmatically provisional city.

New York's collective unconscious has also given its residents a certain sense of inevitability with respect to urban transformations and even-like their fellow Chicagoans—caused them to embrace crises and calamities as opportunities for "creative destruction," that is, for new economic and architectural development. Yet, previous disasters in the city's history like fires and epidemics have had far less impact on New York's history than longer-term shifts, Page argues.

From a broader perspective, political theorist Benjamin R. Barber offers a critical and historical overview of the relationship between cities and democracy, tracing the ideas and norms of "democratic space" that have evolved from the Athenian polis through the mercantile town to the capital city and industrial metropolis. With respect to this trajectory, he sees the contemporary processes of suburbanization and globalization as constituting a radical rupture. Asking how any notion of citizenship can be sustained in a culture where identity is principally conferred by consumer choices and where public space is confined to gated precincts and sanitized theme parks, he delivers a
scathing indictment of the "republic of goods."

While slightly more sanguine about the potential of cyberspace to serve as a portal for new forms of democratic interchange, Barber nonetheless laments that the Internet has rapidly turned into another shopping mall.

As the forgoing suggests, there are provocative and sometimes surprising resonances among the diverse cities examined in Out of Ground Zero. It is striking, for example, that Barber and Prodanovic, coming from opposite worlds, share so many at the same concerns—issues of democracy and place, cosmopolitanism and identity, urban and global "citizenship." Their convergent critiques underscore the fatally interdependent dialectic of "jihad vs. McWorld," as Barber has elsewhere called it, which played itself out with such dire consequences in September 2001. Other major themes the respective roles of human agency and chance in the shaping of the city, the relativity of short- and long-term consequences, the interplay of idealism and pragmatism, ideology and lived experience, urban and antiurban mindsets, physical and mythic construction—open up fertile avenues of thought. All of them lead, however obliquely, back to New York's ground zero, which, has finally been cleared, an empty center awaiting reinvention.

The essays written for Out of Ground Zero: Case Studies in Urban Reinvention published this month by Prestel Publishing (www.prestel.com), originated as lectures given in the spring of 2002 at the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University, New York City. This essay is adapted from the introduction by Joan Ockman, editor of the volume.

PHOTOS (BLACK & WHITE): In 1755, a major earthquake in Lisbon (above, left) led to its becoming a modern commercial city. Shoddy rebuilding after the Great Fire of 1871 (top right) later inspired Chicago's great period of modernism. Rebuilding in Hiroshima, Japan (above, right) would marry Western modernism with Eastern forms of commemoration.

PHOTOS (BLACK & WHITE): After Nazi bombing raids, planners and civic leaders took the opportunity to rebuild Rotterdam (above, right), a goal that preceded World War II. In Plymouth, England (above, left), on the other hand, there was little public enthusiasm for any phase of the reconstruction. The case of Berlin (top left), was one of a long-postponed reinvention that started in 1989.

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By Joan Ockman

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