2001-03

SEPTEMBER 11, 8:46 a.m. American Flight 11 from Boston crashes into the North Tower at the World Trade Center.

9:03 a.m. United Flight 175 from Boston crashes into the South Tower at the WTC.

9:45 a.m. American Flight 77 crashes into The Pentagon.

10:05 a.m. The WTC South Tower collapses.

10:10 a.m. A large section of The Pentagon collapses.

10:10 a.m. United Flight 93 crashes in a wooded area near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers confront hijackers.

10:28 a.m. The WTC North Tower collapses.

NOVEMBER 3 General Election, New York.

Michael R. Bloomberg is Mayor-elect.

NOVEMBER 29 New York State and NYC name 16 board members (later increased to 21) of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), a Joint State-City initiative to oversee the rebuilding and revitalization of Lower Manhattan, defined as south of Houston Street.

DECEMBER 30 The first public viewing platform at Ground Zero opens at Church and Fulton streets.

JANUARY 17, 2002 A New World Trade Center exhibit opens at Max Protetch Gallery in NYC, the first broad overview of design approaches to the site.

FEBRUARY 1 New York New Visions, a coalition of 21 architecture, engineering, planning, landscape, and design organizations, formed in September 2001, releases Principles for the Rebuilding of Lower Manhattan.

FEBRUARY 12 Renewing, Rebuilding. Remembering exhibit opens at Van Alen Institute, the first exhibit to put New York's disaster in the context of other urban disasters in the past decade.

MARCH 11 "The Sphere" interim memorial is dedicated in The Battery, consisting of the recovered fragments of the steel and bronze sculpture by artist Fritz Koenig that had stood in the 5-acre WTC plaza.

The temporary "Tribute in Light" is illuminated at 6:55 p.m. The memorial, situated within yards of Ground Zero in Battery Park City, consists of two banks of forty-four spotlights projecting into the night sky.

APRIL 9 The LMDC releases Principles and Preliminary Blueprint for the Future of Lower Manhattan, which emphasizes the importance of transit, and connecting the site to downtown's historical monuments.

MAY 20 Nearly 5000 people gather at the Jacob K. Javits Center for the "Listening To The City" public meeting, led by the Regional Plan Association-organized Civic Alliance and America Speaks. Citizens exercise "direct democracy" regarding priorities for the site in response to six proposals released by the LMDC/Port Authority. Participants are highly skeptical of the plans' merits. The Families Advisory Council of the LMDC presents its mission statement for the future memorial.

JUNE 10 Imagine NY: The People's Visions released, summarizing the 19,000 ideas for the site that came from over 230 meetings throughout the city and region, sponsored by a coalition initiated by the Municipal Art Society.

JULY 20 An official ceremony ends the cleanup and recovery efforts at Ground Zero.

AUGUST 24 Exhibition of the WTC concept plans opens at Federal Hall on Wall Street.

AUGUST 12 Up to $4.55 billion is committed by the Federal government to revamp Lower Manhattan's infrastructure.

AUGUST 14 The LMDC issues a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for five teams of architects and planners from around the world to take part in an October-November design process to prepare additional concept plans, and issues additional planning and design RFQs and contract extensions.

AUGUST 20 LMDC/PA initiate public hearings on permanent memorial ideas.

AUGUST 21 A viewing wall at Ground Zero is announced, following negative reactions to proposals to wrap the site in a 40-foot-high solid wall.

SEPTEMBER 11 Anniversary Ceremony at WTC site. First phase of WTC Viewing Wall completed.

2003 Completion of master plan, Spring. Expected selection of memorial design following international design competition, September.
retread or reinvention: how cities change after disaster

The following transcript is from a roundtable held at Van Alen Institute, New York, in August, 2002.

DIANA BALMORI Landscape and urban designer, Principal, Balmori Associates, and Chair, Temporary Memorials Committee, New York New Visions.


SHERIDA PAUSEN Architect and Chair, NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission.

LAWRENCE J. VALE Professor and Head, Department of Urban Studies and Planning and MacVicar Faculty Fellow, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Vale co-directed the spring 2002 colloquium “Resilient City: Trauma, Recovery and Remembrance.”

Raymond W. Gastil. The Buell Center and MIT had the same fundamental response to 9/11 that we did here—that there was something to learn from the experience of other cities after disaster. In the institution’s exhibit we focused on the past decade, while at Columbia and MIT your lecture series looked back further in history.

Joan Ockman. As a center operating within an academic institution, we felt we could contribute best by offering an historical and scholarly perspective on the situation downtown. Our approach was not so much to comfort people about how quickly cities bounce back in the aftermath of disasters as to explore a spectrum of responses. Indeed, some of the lectures we presented served as cautionary tales. But taken together, the nine cities we focused on, from the eighteenth century to the present, illustrated not just a set of variations on the theme of urban destruction but also demonstrated the multiple meanings and commonalities of urban experience.

Lawrence J. Vale. Many of us were taken aback by people saying “build bigger and stronger and better and show that terrorists can’t win,” rather than asking probing questions about what a trauma means at the societal level, yet alone the architectural or design level. We wanted to think much more holistically about what means for a city to be subjected to a sudden traumatic disfigurement. Not only in what actually happens and the mechanics of recovery, but to see this as almost a diagnostic window into what the conditions were at that place at that time. We wanted to know who rebuilds what, where, and by what mechanisms. Our questions were both urbanistic ones, and also engaged what I call the design politics of recovery. The term “Resilient City” does show an initial impulse to find reassurance or to help people come to terms with what had happened. As we progressed through the series, any lingering naivete about that particular name dissipated. Just as it was clear that there had been remarkable forms of recovery, it was also very clear that there was also what Ed Linenthal calls “the toxic narrative” for many people involved in these events. If you think of these as moments that reveal key insights about society, you have a sense of what makes these things politically charged.

Diana Balmori. Some of that “charge” lies in the transformed and temporary site that such events leave behind. That site is a landscape of destruction. When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took charge of the World Trade Center site, an informal network of people emerged who worked with GIS (Geographic Information System) and they produced 2,600 maps in six months showing us this constantly changing landscape. When we were launching the Temporary Memorial Committee, Laura Kurgan started the effort to do the “Around Ground Zero” map series, it was impossible to get the information from different parts of the city to do those maps—it was all locked up. The group GSMS (Geographic Information Mapping Operations) and FEMA unlocked it in the case of Ground Zero. For those months, information really flowed.

These temporary landscapes of destruction and their documentation are important for the new situations and they produce healing temporary responses by those Kobe’s Paper Church, Beirat’s Archajic Passage, or the InfoBox in Berlin, or even our own Temporary Memorials Committee’s mapping effort.

Lawrence J. Vale. Yes, the struggle for memorial begins on the day, it and it takes all sorts of forms. In the 1970s the National Science Foundation sponsored a research project called Rebuilding Reconstruction of Disaster. They present four phases: recovering, rebuilding, and then remembering. Yet whether you have a formal temporary memorial process, like the ones in New York, or not, memorializing begins at the start. There were all sorts of tensions over the temporary memorial process, not least of which involved the residents of Battery Park City, who didn’t want to see themselves as part of “the site” or the landscape of remembrance.

I agree with Diana that the temporary or transitional developments downtown are significant and wild, in retrospect, become key markers in the history of this crisis and this city. Time (and timing) is as important a dimension as space in the rebuilding process. Of course, one of the things that is extraordinary when an event like this occurs is that everything gets destabilized. Cities are full of petrified social structures and institutions, not to mention sedimented physical ones. In the wake of an event like this, everything momentarily seems to be opened up, to be up for grabs. Certain kinds of changes suddenly become imaginable. At the same time, how much really does or can change? One of the things I found interesting in the lecture in our series on New York, by Max Page, was his observation that after previous disasters befall New York—fires, epidemics, riots—not a whole lot was altered. Longer-term problems like urban sprawl, the rise of the automobile, and construction of commercial infrastructures (like the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825) we have far greater impact on the overall trajectory of the city. Of course, the events of September 11 are not quite like anything that has occurred before.

Disasters also sometimes defer or indirect effects. In Chicago after the fire of 1871, to take another example, there was a huge real-estate boom and a slum crisis. This was followed a couple of years later by a national depression, when there was no building at all. As Ross Miller, our lecturer, pointed out, it was this post-fever experience rather than the disaster itself that ultimately engendered Chicago’s great period of architectural modernism in the 1880s and 1890s. Architects like John Wellborn Root, Daniel Burnham, and Louis Sullivan were at a formative moment in their careers in the 1870s. It was the experience of living through this undistinguished period that inspired them to rebuild Chicago in a very different way.

LJV. We asked in our series whether we should assume that resilience is a good thing to build on. Diane Davis wrote Urban Leeward about 20th century Mexico City without saying very much about the 1985 earthquake. In her talk last spring, she said she saw how the reverberations of that earthquake on the whole political system ultimately led to the downfall of the one-party state that had been in control for decades. The temporary, spontaneous actions by citizen groups revealed a lack of confidence in their government that people were eventually able to act upon. It was a telling moment to see what really “hits you” as a bounce back to where you were before, and who sees this as an opportunity to alter the status quo.

Sherida Paumen. With all the constituencies involved in New York, we are at a temporary standstill. Nobody wants to go back to what was. They want something different, but they don’t know what it is, and there are so many viewpoints that I think we’re more in the Chicago model where we build something because we’ve got to build something. Right after 9/11 FEMA took charge, because they were the only ones who had a plan, and who had the resources and personnel. But today, we have a range of agendas set for the longer-term: New York New Visions came into Civic Alliance came together, and we have the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Port Authority, the Mayor, and the Governor, all setting different agendas.

JO. Another interesting reflection that came out of the comparative perspective has to do with the role of individuals in the rebuilding process, and the presence or absence of civic urban thinkers at particular moments. Again, in Chicago, there was a vacuum after the fire, nobody raised it, but nobody had any big, significant ideas. In Lisbon, on the other hand, after the earthquake of 1755 (an event that apparently didn’t attract a register on the Richter scale), the Marquis of Pombal emerged and took charge of the situation. He was a visionary, much like a Baron Haussmann or a Robert Moses—and also a despot. As Kenneth Maxwell illustrated in a beautiful talk, Pombal turned Lisbon from a provincial and jumbled urban place into a commercial, Enlightenment-oriented city with modern sanitation and fireproofing systems. Two hundred and fifty years later the evidence of his intervention is still perfectly legible.

In the case of Hiroshima, you also had a significant individual. This time it was a young architect, Kenzo Tange, who appeared on the scene. Tange had an ambitious and visionary plan for reconstructing Hiroshima. Very little got realized, and the central complex, although he allowed to return a decade later and implement a couple more components of his original scheme.

So today we have Bloomberg. It’s interesting to think about how he and the other players on the scene right now will leave their mark.

RWG. There has been a call in New York that there should be cultural leaders convened to address the meaning and future of the site. Did this happen historically? Are “the best and the brightest” ever at the forefront of rebuilding?

JO. In Rotterdam, one of the other cities we looked at, something like this occurred. Rotterdam’s reconstruction after World War II is often cited as an exemplary instance of rebuilding on a modernist model. You had enlightened members of the business community, progressive socialist, and modernist architects putting their heads together. Many welcomed the opportunity to overhaul this antiquated and congested port city, in fact, they had wanted to do so for years before. Among other things, they saw Moses’s highways in New York as an example to emulate. But now, as the years of the postwar reconstruction has not been so positive, according to Han Meyer, a Dutch planner. By the 1960s, when postmodernism (exemplified by Rossi’s theories of the city) was becoming ascendant in Europe, people in Rotterdam began to feel that the postwar planners and modernist ideology had done more damage to their city than the Nazi bomb. In recent decades the city has attempted in various ways to recreate the urban fabric and replan along more traditional Dutch or European lines.
grand urban visions and transportation experts.
New Haven had much of its center destroyed in this way and still hasn’t recovered. It left the town with a fear of anything new. I was thinking that the building of highways in American cities has probably been as
destructive as earthquakes.

SP: When you look at the World Trade Center, if the great achievement is that we can put back the old street pattern, this is really sad. The Trade Center was the great anomaly of modern design, sitting in the middle of flyby
itty-bitty streets, and it was done to allow commerce to con
inue to exist in Lower Manhattan, and now it is gone. At the Listening to the City event in July people responded strongly to the singular vision of the World Trade Center.
Whether they liked the buildings or not, they felt that there was a singular vision, and that had been lost.

RWG: In all of these programs, and for New York, the question comes up as to how the tragic opportunity is seized upon to build a better city. Do we know what that is?

SP: Who is this better city for? With compelling interests between the tourist city and the local city and global city, is it possible to reconcile all these interests and give a piece to everybody?

DB: What is this better city? The fundamental question may not be what, but how? Let me try to search for an answer by making everything in it work the way natural processes work. How can we make the basic systems of a city like water or light work as in a natural process? Water, for example: we want to save it, clean it, we want it to reach new or groundwater slowly so it filters through soil and is cleaned and does not pollute or flood rivers. We want to retain it too, to return it to the atmosphere through the evapo-transpiration of plants, cooling the overheated atmosphere of the city in the process. How do we do that? We design surfaces to be absorbent. Does this mean all of Ground Zero is a park? No, how? Then by making building roofs into parks, by weaving parks into skyscrapers, by using green vertical walls, by paving streets with permeable materials.
That’s how. That’s a piece to start.

Let’s take light, how can we make this part of the city the most beautifully lit environment in the world. Except for Times Square and a few of its tall buildings, New York has abominable lighting for its urban spaces. Can we think of it in terms of a system, not individual light fixtures, and can it be designed to use the energy of the sun through photovoltaics?

We start then with each of the basic systems that make up a city and ask how to have it work as closely as possible to a natural process. Which does not mean natural. You can get things to work as natural processes through mechanical means. Then see the consequences this has for buildings and their forms and design them at the end of this process, not the beginning. They need to be beautiful in the end, but their aesthetic is to be derived from the way we go about it, the how, which will deliver a city closer to living processes.

JO: I agree, I think the ecological city is a key idea of our time. We’re just waiting for the right architects, planners, and landscape designers to seize the initiative. The astonishing far-reaching impact of still demon-

strates that we can no longer afford to think about components of the city as piecemeal or independent conditions.

But may I go back to the example of Berlin for a moment? As part of our series we presented Berlin Babylon, a film by Hubertus Siegert completed in 2001. It’s about the rebuilding of Berlin since the fall of the Wall. What’s unusual about Siegert’s approach is that rather than making a conventional documentary about the rebuilding program or a narrative of architectural achievements, he highlights, in a very poetic way, the brutality, banality, and arbitrariness of the urban process. The construction worker is a protagonist as much as the planner and the architect. The title of the film (which conflates Baby and Babylon) suggests the hubris of such a vast urban transformation,

DB: I hope it doesn’t happen that way in Lower Manhattan.

SP: To start, we have to realize that any decision about the World Trade Center site has to be tied into a comprehensive public space idea for Lower Manhattan, and there has to be a program that captures the imagination for Lower Manhattan. I heard Senator Chuck Schumer describe his vision of putting the U.N. at Ground Zero at a recent breakfast. People were silent in this room this great institution, and the location, and wouldn’t this be great. Then he said the UN didn’t want it, and offered his alternative, a great institute for the study of peace, and people in the room began talking while he was talking, unable to visualize that.

RWG: Does the U.N. example show us that no one wants to be “centered,” to have a headquarters, for fear of being a “target”? Is the idea of a center at risk?

JO: Apart from practical and security concerns, there has certainly been a lot of talk at the theoretical level about decentering, about network cities, global cities, edge cities, polycentric cities new urban paradigms in the twenty-first century, as opposed to the classic metropoli
tis or empires that New York was in the twentieth century. Obviously such a historical shift has major implications with respect to the way we think about rebuilding the World Trade Center site. Two speakers in our series argued very strenuously against giving up the idea of physical centrality and proximity that we have traditionally associated with the best spaces of public urban culture and democracy. One of them, Benjamin Barber, the author of the book Jihad vs. McWorld, warned against transforming cities into little more than privatized residential communities, shopping malls, and cybercafes on a kind of suburban model. The other, Milan Prodanovic, coming from the opposite world of Belgrade, offered the lesson of the way anti-cosmopolit
ian ideology and ethnic fundamentalism conspired to destroy Balkan cities, perpetrating another form of what he called “urbanicide.”

This goes into the question of what makes a city a city. I’ve heard phrases like “a bedroom community” being developed in Lower Manhattan, because, why would you need to build the office space back? That’s a tragic thing to say about Lower Manhattan, because it is and has been all these things—commercial, industrial, and residential. It’s been this amazing land of renewal happening for hundreds of years.