

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Rebuilding patterns: four books on urban reconstruction

Joe Nasr, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto M5B 2K3, Canada. E-mail: joenasr@compuserve.com

Carola Hein, Jeffrey M. Diefendorf and Yorifusa Ishida (eds) (2003) *Rebuilding urban Japan after 1945* (Macmillan, London, UK, 296 pp. ISBN 0-333-65962-7)

Nick Tiratsoo, Junichi Hasegawa, Tony Mason and Takao Matsumara (2002) *Urban reconstruction in Britain and Japan, 1945–1955: dreams, plans and realities* (University of Luton Press, Luton, UK, 100 pp. ISBN 1-860-20590-9)

Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, Harold Platt and Dieter Schott (eds) (2002) *Cities and catastrophes: coping with emergency in European history* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt, Germany, 241 pp. ISBN 0-820-45468-0)

Joan Ockman (ed.) (2002) *Out of Ground Zero: case studies of urban reinvention* (Prestel Verlag, München, Germany, 192 pp. ISBN 3-7913-2790-9)

In the study of changing city form, whether by avowed urban morphologists or not, far more attention has been paid to gradual, piecemeal alteration than to the radical changes precipitated by disasters. But recently this has begun to change. There has been something of a minor explosion in the historical literature devoted to post-disaster urban change in general, undertaken by non-morphologists. While change in urban form is never the direct subject of such studies, they are increasingly beginning to integrate the transformed built environment and its basic patterns (streets, lots, buildings) into their conceptual concerns, thus helping fill this lacuna among morphologists – who are still generally ‘gradualists’, some important exceptions notwithstanding. The four books reviewed here all contribute to this new literature and illuminate, to varying degrees and in various ways, the morphological transformations associated with cataclysmic events.

No broad catastrophe in history comes even close to World War II in the sheer scale of its destructive impact on cities. By contrast, the damage inflicted by World War I was more rural and confined to Europe. Not

surprisingly, then, the destruction of World War II and subsequent urban reconstruction have received most scholarly attention over the last two decades. Major surveys and analytical studies began to appear in the 1980s, particularly in Germany, France and Japan. Their publication in the respective languages of these countries, and their focus on national coverage or city case studies, limited their scholarly dissemination. This began to change by the 1990s, with the appearance of English-language works, many of them multinational in scope.

The book edited by Carola Hein, Jeffrey Diefendorf and Ishida Yorifusa on *Rebuilding Urban Japan after 1945* is part of this trend. The editors are, respectively, a German-born, US-based specialist on the history of Japanese urban planning, the leading English-language scholar on German post-war reconstruction, and the leading scholar on Japanese post-war reconstruction. They have produced an ambitious collection of essays whose strength lies in placing Japanese urban reconstruction within the context of Japanese urban and planning history. Its main drawback is that it greatly privileges one group of actors – the

'planners' – among the mass of agents who intervened and readjusted the direction that the rebuilding of the urban fabric took. The book's richness stems from its mixture of context-setting pieces and case studies.

Hein's brief introductory chapter draws parallels between post-war reconstruction in Japan and elsewhere, and anchors it within the history of Japan's adoption of planning. The longer second chapter by Ishida synthesizes the history of the planning behind the rebuilding of Japanese cities after 1945, covering war damage in 215 cities (plus others in the Ryukyu Islands that suffered ground battles); the general course of reconstruction planning under American occupation (a significant, mostly indirect factor in itself); the main actors involved in planning; the key enabling legislation; and the complex interactions between the national government, municipal authorities and local powers – notably property owners.

Then follow five city case studies: Tokyo (Ichikawa Hiroo), Osaka (Hasegawa Junichi), Hiroshima (Ishimaru Norioki), Nagaoka (Matsumoto Shōji) and Okinawa (Ikeda Takayuki).

The last four chapters provide context for the reconstruction planning experience. Chapter 8 (by David Tucker) may seem out of place in this book, dealing not with the post-war reconstruction, but rather with colonial Japanese planning prior to 1945, particularly in Manchuria. But this is an essential chapter because the colonies served as the prime training and experimentation ground for many of the reconstruction planners and architects of the reconstruction. The chapter might well have opened the book. It also contrasts the interventionist attitude of the Japanese in their colonial cities before 1945 with the more restrained American involvement after 1945 – concerned mostly about the expenditure of public funds.

In Chapter 9, Cherie Wendelken tackles architectural culture in the reconstruction period, posing the question: 'what, if any, meaning did Japanese tradition have after the radical changes caused by the war and the defeat?' (p. 188). She describes two shifts in

the mid-1950s: a push for a Japanese modernity in architectural expression (focusing on Tange Kenzō, the most famous architect of the period), and a movement to preserve pre-war physical and cultural vestiges. Both phenomena, to her, share a 'double invocation, of Western or modern practices and Japanese traditional models' (p. 206).

The two remaining chapters situate the Japanese reconstruction in space and time. Diefendorf compares the reconstruction of Japanese and German cities (both east and west) – surprisingly, a scholarly first. Superficially, the former wartime allies shared similar post-war conditions: a majority of cities damaged or destroyed, struggling reconstruction under occupation, then speed-up of rebuilding with their 'economic miracle'. Yet the reconstructions fundamentally differed because of 'the timing and nature of the destruction, the legal and conceptual frameworks for reconstruction planning, actual planning experiences and practice, the interplay between central and local initiatives, and historic architecture' (pp. 229-30). Hein returns to assess the balance between 'change and continuity'; while this theme is a cliché, it fits post-World War II reconstructions well. The rebuilding of Japanese cities was similar to that elsewhere, with its many continuities and considerable inertia, but, unquestionably, it also represented a break in Japan's urban history.

Hein also considers the role of architects, planners and the public in the reconstruction, but this treatment reflects a limitation seen throughout the book. The role of the professionals is considered at the expense of that of the public – or, as the book itself makes clear, the various publics. In case after case, architects and planners (often fresh from the colonies, with the freedom that these offered to their activities) developed initially wide-ranging reconstruction plans that inevitably shrivelled within a short time. In urban Japan, as Ishida notes, 'all the early postwar attempts at reform failed' (p. 44). While this record of extensive 'failure' had multiple causes, at its centre perhaps lay the impact of many different publics, often sharing one aspect:

opposition to the plans. While the book highlights the planning professionals, and the reasons for their failure, it hints nothing of the 'voice' of these publics – nor of the professionals, for that matter.

This is what the next book, *Urban reconstruction in Britain and Japan, 1945-1955: dreams, plans and realities*, conveys vividly. The added value of this shorter work is that it covers two countries (making each country's coverage necessarily thinner) and, importantly, gives voice to all participants involved. This latter feature is achieved through frequent and lengthy quotations, all well chosen. It means that the architects and planners appear here as merely one group of stakeholders, or rather actors. This balance explains Ishida's statement about failure. Whether these 'realities' represented ultimately a failure of the 'dreams' of planners and architects or the triumph of the will of the public(s) remains open to question.

The book is a team effort of two researchers from each country, Nick Tiratsoo and Tony Mason for the UK, Junichi Hasegawa and Takao Matsumura for Japan, all of them social and economic historians. The book is as neatly divided between the two countries, with an overview on each nation's reconstruction followed by three case studies. Opened with a two-page introduction, this is less a comparison than two parallel studies. Perhaps the dissimilarity of the two countries' experiences explains the absence of the kind of synthesis that Diefendorf so masterfully provides in the first book.

It is worth now returning to the five Japanese case studies in the collection edited by Hein *et al.*, to contrast them with the shorter ones in the Tiratsoo volume. Tokyo and Osaka feature in both groups. The representativeness of the cases chosen can be questioned in both books. The general flaw is that, overall, the case studies are, for individual reasons, the exceptions to the reconstruction story. The path followed by Tokyo may have been somewhat similar to that of many other Japanese cities, as it went from large-scale, even visionary, plans at the metropolitan scale, to a patchwork of interventions and pieces of

plans, within just a few years, with the decades-old land readjustment technique used as the main instrument for change in urban patterns. However, in itself, Tokyo is exceptional, as the capital, the seat of power and the centre of attention, as well as having more than twice the extent of building damage (over 700 000 structures) as the next closest city, Osaka, the country's most important industrial centre. Again, a plan was quickly proposed here, and at first things went more smoothly than in many other towns, but reality did catch up. Local opposition eventually emerged, as did fiscal pressures in the absence of the heavy subsidies that would have been required from the state and the provincial prefecture. The one city that stood out as the most 'successfully' rebuilt at the time (and, as a result, is suffering the consequences of this success) is Nagoya, which is not the subject of a case study in either book.

Two other cases in the book edited by Hein *et al.* are also not run-of-the-mill. Hiroshima earned its place in history instantly in August 1945, when it became the first ever civilian atomic target. Not surprisingly, it earned a distinctly symbolic master plan, and the core of the plan (by Tange Kenzō) was carried out largely as proposed – circumstances that make this case unique. Okinawa stands out in different ways: the nature of the damage here had been different (ground fighting) and, subsequently, the American presence was greater elsewhere, producing a greater level of interference by the US civil administration.

Turning to the British cases, there is Coventry, the most famous rebuilt city in England. The notoriety of its destruction, combined with specific local circumstances (including continuous local government control by the Labour Party throughout the period), created an unusual willingness to adopt a plan that broke with the past. Even so, Coventry's rebuilding was less radical and took years longer than anticipated. Another case was also special, though voluntarily: the Lansbury section of East London, one of its most damaged areas. What made it special among London's blitzed zones was its selection, in 1948, as the site of the 'living

architecture' exhibition as part of the Festival of Britain. Yet, although an intriguing story, this particular rebuilding was even more exceptional than Hiroshima's in a way – a model project rather than a 'real' reconstruction. Its inclusion in this book is unconvincing.

Hence, we are left with one Japanese city in each book (Nagaoka and Maebashi), and one British case (Portsmouth), as examples of characteristic post-war reconstructions: ones with conservative élites, interferences from the central government, petty local concerns, and urgent needs that force inhabitants and professionals to accept compromises. Portsmouth's chief planning officer gave up preparing grandiose schemes because of, in his words, 'finance and frustration' (p. 44). The relatively fast-moving planning process in the small town of Maebashi stalled when local residents split between those for and those against planning, the latter creating the Association for Deferment of Maebashi Town Planning (pp. 85-9). Ultimately, all of these get reflected in particular changes (or inertia) in street systems, in property-ownership patterns, in the built fabric – in other words, the bread and butter of urban morphology. It would have been more appropriate to illustrate these publications with more of these less-special cases of rebuilding. In their own ways, their stories (and 'failures') of planning are the richest in these two rich books.

These stories show how, despite the diversity of reconstruction experiences, various refrains recur: transitions from emergency response to reconstruction planning, attitudes of professionals and the powers (or illusions of power) they have when they are commissioned to prepare plans for damaged areas, and a multiplicity of visions of what should be done confronting each other. These themes are not specific to the experience of World War II and its aftermath. Yet there has long existed an unnecessary divide in much of the disaster reconstruction literature between disasters having 'natural' and those having 'human' causes. Such compartmentalization begins to be breached by books such as that edited by Joan Ockman,

*Out of Ground Zero: case studies in urban reinvention*, which jumps freely from one case (and cause) to another, focused solely on 'reinventions' that followed many a disaster. But more typical is *Cities and catastrophes: coping with emergency in European history*, edited by Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, Harold L. Platt and Dieter Schott. This collection of studies concentrates on 'natural occurrences' having their origin 'outside of human action', but the contributors find that the boundary between 'natural' and 'cultural' causation tends to blur (p. 5). So why erect a spurious partition in the first place?

The book suffers no shortage of causes for calamity: floods, water pollution, epidemics (of many types), earthquakes (often repeating in the same place), fires (intentional or not), hurricanes – numerous types of catastrophes that confronted the cities studied here. Spatially, these range from Finland to Barbados, and temporally, from the fifteenth century mainly to World War I. Across these very disparate events with varying consequences, the humanity of 'natural' disasters and their relation to 'Providence' ('acts of God') emerges clearly. The most famous debate around these issues remains as fresh today as it was when Voltaire threw a spark in his poetic attack on optimism in the face of the treachery of nature (including human nature) in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of Lisbon of 1755 – to which Rousseau retorted there would not be material damage from earthquakes unless human beings concentrated in specific places and in buildings with several stories in height, in other words in cities. This exchange is recalled more than once in this book, as well as in the first essay of Ockman's book. A strength of *Cities and catastrophes* is that, by examining historic emergencies, its chapters assert the primacy in disasters, not of the occurrence itself, but of the propensity to produce tragic consequences. These include ill-made choices, greed and the lack of wisdom in decisions, which turn a chance event into a disaster for vulnerable human groups (p. 102).

Some of the chapters are more pertinent than others for urban morphologists. This

depends, for one thing, on the type of cause. Pollution and disease, for instance, cause more death than destruction – though their indirect impact on the perception of the city as a literally sick place has well-known repercussions, through the hygienist's world-view, on the emergence of urban renewal as a principle for morphological transformation. Still, it is more direct agents of destruction, such as seismic, incendiary or climatic occurrences, that shake up (sometimes literally) the urban fabric and result in varying degrees of its transformation. Thus, morphologists might find Grégory Quenet's comparison of the shift in response between two French-centred earthquakes, a quarter-century apart but both under the reign of Louis XIV, particularly intriguing, not so much for the differences in rebuilding, but for the importance of understanding the social context for the rebuilding and, therefore, agency.

Four chapters focusing on fire-related reconstructions offer probably most interest. Those by Marjatta Hietala on Finland, Dieter Schott on Germany (specifically Hamburg), Cyrille Sillans on France, and Alexandra Yerolympos on the Ottoman Empire all focus on nineteenth-century conflagrations, each examining different aspects of the phenomenon. Hietala and Yerolympos both illuminate the role of disaster perception: one, the fear of fires as an impetus to change in urban patterns, architectural styles and construction methods; the other, the beliefs and rumours fanned by the flames of disaster, in this case the suspicion that the many fires in late-Ottoman towns were essentially municipal arson among some communities more than others, in order to effect transformation in the built city. The role of perception appears also in Schott's contribution, concerning the way in which three disasters relate to each other in the minds of Hamburg residents, and how the memory of the 1842 fire influenced the aftermath of the 1962 flood. In all cases, the morphological tendency has been towards the imposition of norms, rationalist layouts, orthogonal grids, and so on. These papers confirm the cliché that planners salivate at the opportunity offered them by disasters.

While disasters can be an impetus for 'bringing some order' to the city, there are many ways in which catastrophe represents a 'challenge to the social, economic, and cultural order of the city', as Massard-Guilbaud comments in her masterful introductory essay (p. 9). It is a long, comprehensive review of the historical literature on disasters, chiefly European ones, mostly pre-World War I, and exclusively restricted to 'natural' events. Too complex to summarize here, it should be required reading for anyone seeking orientation to the multiple dimensions of urban disasters, starting with historiography and ending by considering what shapes research agendas about disasters. These, she avers, are influenced in particular by 'human agency in the form of a selective process of remembering and forgetting' past catastrophes and their evidence (p. 42).

The editors' foreword is dated September 2001. How ironic that a book on cities and catastrophes was completed just as one of the most media-laden catastrophic events ever to strike a city was about to occur! It is this event – the strike on New York's World Trade Center, of course – which prompts Ockman's book, though it is not a book about the events of September 11 as such. It brings together contributions based on a series of lectures, held at Columbia University in the Spring of 2002, that sought to look backwards in time toward a range of previous disasters to see whether lessons can be learned about urban reconstruction following catastrophe.

For a book assembled so rapidly, it achieves its aim surprisingly well. It has some of the look of those content-free 'books' common on the racks of the architecture section of bookstores. Certainly the papers are uneven in quality, from the serious scholarship of the first paper on Lisbon's post-1755 recovery under the Marquess of Pombal (Kenneth Maxwell) to something called 'An architecture of liberty? The city as democracy's forge' by someone included in this book perhaps for being the author of a best-seller called *Jihad vs. McWorld*. Several of the papers do not fit the 'response to disaster' theme – those on Jerusalem (Kanan Makiya) and New York

(Max Page) are really about waiting for the destruction of the city, or imagining it (before it happened, in the latter case). Still, given these limitations, most of the cases in this book offer some lessons.

The book actually states its purpose clearly and basically matches its claim. These are indeed case studies in 'urban reinvention'. Here, the starting point is the effect rather than the cause. The premise on which the volume was built is that, in response to crisis (mostly, but not solely, physical disasters), certain cities reinvent themselves. Some places, and by implication not others, use such opportunities to respond to epic challenges in positive ways. Just who does the reinventing, what mechanisms are erected to permit them, what circumstances enable them to be successful – these are some of the questions posed by several, but not all, of the chapters. A few are especially pertinent to urban morphologists, as reinvention necessarily changes urban patterns. In fact, with some of the case studies, the reinvention is about inventing, adapting, or introducing new morphological features. Examples include the gridded layout without a dominant space for church or state in Lisbon;

the new building techniques, leading to the modern skyscraper, developed in the aftermath of the 1871 fire in Chicago (in Ross Miller's chapter); and the triumph of modernist architecture and urbanism in the fight over reconstructing the blitzed areas of Rotterdam (by Han Meyer).

These contributions, and many in the aforementioned anthologies, are relevant to the interests of urban morphologists, and help fill the gap in the scholarly terrain alluded to at the outset. In them, one can see some of the transformations in urban patterns that usually result from reactions to catastrophe, as well as the actors and contexts that enable and explain these particular transformations. Yet some of the contributions in these four books have shown not only a few of the patterns of rebuilding across time and space, but also how these rebuildings have themselves, in turn, become disastrous for some of the cities examined. Such rebuildings produce catastrophes from which the residents, the municipalities, the professionals and other stakeholders have been trying to cope, sometimes by seeking to reinvent themselves yet again.

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## Elections to the Council of ISUF

In accordance with the Constitution of ISUF, elections to the Council will take place at the conference to be held in London, 25-27 August, 2005, details of which are given on p. 15. There will be three vacancies to fill. Nominations

should be forwarded in writing to Professor Michael P. Conzen, Secretary-General of ISUF, Committee on Geographical Studies, University of Chicago, 5828 S. University Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637-1583, USA, to arrive by 1 July 2005.

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## Characterization

Issue 47 (Winter 2004/5) of *Conservation Bulletin*, published by English Heritage (the UK Government's main body for the historic environment), is concerned with 'characterization'. A good deal of the contents are about areas of different character that have been recognized and mapped. The emphasis is on historical landscapes, both urban and rural. The concern is particularly with older urban areas,

including sites of archaeological significance, but areas developed in the twentieth century are also considered. There are short reports on several individual English cities, including Bath, Bristol, Gloucester, Lincoln, Worcester and Merseyside.

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