

## **Metropolitan Catastrophes: Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations**

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Organized by the Centre for Metropolitan History, London, with support from the Leverhulme Trust, the conference on „Metropolitan Catastrophes: Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations in the Era of Total War“ explored the cultural imprint of military conflict on metropolises (understood as cities of international stature, but not necessarily capital cities) worldwide since the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It brought together cultural and urban historians and scholars of related disciplines including anthropology, education, geography, and urban planning. The aim of the conference was to examine how the emergence of „total“ warfare blurred the boundaries between home and front and transformed cities into battlefields.<sup>2</sup> The logic of total mobilization turned the social and cultural fabric of urban life upside down. Moreover, large cities and city dwellers became legitimate targets of enemy action and suffered disproportionately from air raids, sieges, and genocide in the wake of war. The social upheavals and physical devastation of „total war“ cast a long shadow over the post-war years. Survivors and later generations set out to reconstruct urban life and to search for meaning in the midst of the ruins of their communities.

### **1. Scenarios**

The imagery of urban disaster preceded and, to a certain extent, pre-configured the eventual experience of metropolitan catastrophe. The first strand of the conference, „scenarios“, discussed the apocalyptic imagination of intellectuals and experts in peacetime. Artists and writers anticipating doom presented the coming upheaval as an urban event – a commonplace of late-Victorian and post-1918 pessimism. On a different plane, architects, civil servants, and engineers materialized visions of urban chaos and devised countermea-

sures in case of emergencies. Both groups helped to furnish a repertoire of cultural forms which channelled and encoded the urban experience of the two world wars.

Taking the fiction of H.G. Wells and Cicely Hamilton as her starting point, Susan Grayzel (University of Mississippi) explored the intellectual and cultural „pre-history“ of the Blitz, that is ways in which urban destruction in aerial warfare was imagined in Britain before, during and after the Great War. In literary accounts, cities became synonymous with civilization; air raids threatened to destroy not only the citizen but also civic life. From a feminist point of view, Hamilton described in „Theodore Savage“ the fall of the urbane (and urban) man from civilization in the aftermath of airborne apocalypse. The male survivor transmutes into as a brutal and unbalanced primitive. This and similar works of fiction were not only popular with general readers but also affected the perception of experts. Significantly, works dealing with the scientific, strategic or political implications of air-raid precautions during the inter-war years made specific references to the groundwork laid by previous speculative literature. While the imagery of urban conflagration predated 1914, the notion that civilization was at stake gained rhetorical power in the aftermath of the attacks on London in the Great War. Due to the combined effect of fictive accounts and the first taste of „a promise of terror to come“ (Hamilton), air-raid precautions were thus under way both imaginatively and practically prior to the Luftwaffe's attacks on London. As a result, Grayzel concluded, „the Blitz needs to be seen not as the unimaginable event that it has sometimes been taken to be but put as part of a much longer story about air power and the life and death of the metropolis“.

In France and Germany, too, intellectuals and experts became increasingly aware of the particular vulnerability of the modern metro-

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<sup>1</sup>Menden, Alexander, Von Blitz und Bomben. Eine Londoner Tagung über Katastrophen in großen Städten, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung 175, 31.7.-1.8.2004, S. 15. For further information about the Centre for Metropolitan History, visit <<http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh>>.

<sup>2</sup>On „total war“, see Chickering, Roger; Förster, Stig (Hgg.), Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918, Cambridge 2000.

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polis to the most modern forms of warfare. In her paper, Roxanne Panchasi (Simon Fraser University) addressed how French military strategists and urban planners imagined Parisian landscapes during the Great War and in the inter-war period. The military envisioned the construction of a fake Paris made up of an elaborate system of lights as a false target for enemy aircraft. The illusory city was situated southwest of Paris, at a place where the River Seine bends in much the same way as it curves through the ancient capital. Work on the site had started during the Great War but was brought to a halt in 1918. While military strategists came close to realizing their urban fantasy, architects and planners' attempts to imagine an alternative Paris were stillborn. They were caught in the dilemma of representing a futuristic conurbation safe from aerial attack within the parameters of a historic city they regarded as impossible to defend.

While Panchasi located visions of futuristic „Parises“ in the anxious French cultural climate of the inter-war years, Janet Ward (University of Nevada, Las Vegas) highlighted the transformative challenges, even benefits, for predominantly German contemplators of urban destruction in the twentieth century. Ward analysed a group of intellectuals for whom urban catastrophe contained within itself the seeds for urban regeneration. The Second World War in particular gave stimulus to urban transformative *tabula rasa*, as the bombing campaign brought about the long-envisioned opening-up of high-density metropolitan landscapes. The bombs had turned large cities into „Stadtlandschaften“ („urban countryside“). Both Nazi and post-war planners cultivated and used the notion of „Stadtlandschaft“ to re-inject new natural life into the decaying metropolis.

Unlike Europeans, Americans are a nation with little direct experience of war in an urban context. Thus they have had to rely on their imagination. Fictive accounts of the devastation that modern war can wreak on cities occupied a special place in American culture over the last century and a half, argued Carl Abbott (Portland State University). However, Abbott highlighted a tendency among American authors to write around big cities rather than about them. The city, and the metropo-

lis in particular, is if anything conspicuously absent in the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction. When cities do feature, they appear as dangerous and deadly bearing the burden of the past rather than the hopes of the future. Abbott distinguished between two scenarios: „big blowups“ envisaged in the older literature that rendered cities uninhabitable landscapes on the one hand, and, on the other, „quiet catastrophes“ caused by neutron bombing which wiped out urban populations but leave physical structures intact. Novelists reiterated and refashioned an American preference for the „middle landscape“ by setting post-war stories outside the city: in suburbs beyond the blast zone, in rural enclaves, in desert hideaways or across the prairies. Abbott's findings point to a striking contrast between American and European urban disaster fiction; the notion of cities symbolizing civilization – a trope discussed in Grayzel's paper – was an anathema to American writers.

The contributors to this strand of the conference concentrated predominantly on scenarios of metropolitan catastrophe in intellectual discourse. By contrast, Daniel Prosterman (New York University) discussed how the spectre of totalitarianism affected metropolitan politics. No enemy airplanes dropped bombs on New York City during the Second World War, yet scenarios of foreign threats to local security dominated urban politics in America's largest city. Focusing on the debate about proportional representation which was introduced in 1936, Prosterman argued that New Yorkers connected global actions, particularly the Second World War in Europe, to local politics. Participants in the debate pictured the threat of „a Hitler or Mussolini type of city government“ emerging in New York City. City politicians manipulated perceptions of foreign threats to domestic security to sway voters in city elections during the 1930s and 1940s. Scenarios of „a storm troop rule here under the cloak of patriotism“ – as one contemporary put it – found broad popular resonance. Public officials implicated visions of international affairs in metropolitan politics and thereby shaped the local impact of global conflict for their own political gain.

## 2. Experiences

The second strand dealt with the metropo-

litan experience of „total war“, notably mass mobilization, deprivation and destruction in wartime. Historians have debated whether the American Civil War marked the beginning of a new age of „total“ warfare.<sup>3</sup> The contention of this conference was that „total war“ has a significant but often overlooked metropolitan dimension. Thus one might ask whether there is a metropolitan story to be told about this embryonic „total war“. Eric Homberger’s (University of East Anglia) case study of New York City in 1863 focused on an event which until recently has attracted little attention from historians. Following the defeat of the Confederates at Gettysburg, New York City witnessed four days of social disorder. The disorder was occasioned by the manpower crisis, and the decision to resolve it through a draft. The tension between the city dwellers’ attitude to the war and the demands of „total“ mobilization led a break-down of the social fabric of the metropolis. Homberger distinguished between four simultaneous but distinct disturbances triggered off by the draft: the rioting against conscription, race riots, random acts of robbery and arson, and assaults against the „wealthy“ indicative of a revolutionary hatred for the rich. While violence up to a certain point had not been an unfamiliar aspect of urban life prior to the war, the events of 1863 were unique in savagery and scale. The death toll was no more than 150, but the social significance, according to Homberger, lay in the revelation of a community suddenly turning upon itself. „The real catastrophe was not something awful happening to New York, but what New Yorkers did to each other.“

Eyal Ginio (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) explored the relationship between the metropolis and mobilization from a different angle. In his paper, Ginio examined the mobilization of Edirne (Adrianople) and its multi-ethnic population for propagandistic purposes during the Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913. The city’s imperial tradition as the first Ottoman capital in Europe, the grandeur of its architectural heritage, its large and multi-ethnic population, and its proximity to Istanbul, contributed to Edirne’s rise to a prime wartime symbol. Besieged and bombarded by the Bulgarian army during the first Balkan

War, the citizens of Edirne became a collective national icon for Ottomans, notably those outside the historic city. The celebration of the civilians’ determination and steadfastness in wartime propaganda – ranging from theatre plays to picture postcards – marked a new phase in the Ottoman search for all-inclusive symbols, symbols that were attractive to large and diverse target groups and might imbue them with a form of „national“ identity. The successful recapture of Edirne during the second Balkan War induced the Ottoman authorities to highlight once again the national significance of the city. This time, however, it was Edirne’s Muslim character rather than the valour of its multi-ethnic population that featured prominently in official propaganda; the all-inclusive Ottomanism of the first war gave way to an Islamic-centred nationalism.

Ottoman wartime propaganda reinforced Edirne’s status as an imagined metropolis. While Ginio’s paper focused on the representation of the city in propaganda, Jovana Knežević (Yale University) examined the impact of propaganda on civilian life in the metropolis. Her paper on Belgrade under Austrian occupation between 1915 and 1918 addressed the ways in which the local population coped with one critical aspect of metropolitan history in extremis: the question of the balance between information and anxiety. Free availability of news is one distinguishing feature of the modern metropolis, but in occupied Belgrade information was a scarce and valuable commodity. The Austrian Military General Government understood that controlling information was essential to controlling the population and, therefore, imposed rigorous measures of censorship, banning all press except for its own daily „Beogradske Novine“. The official newspaper became a key weapon in the campaign to win over the population’s support. It represented the occupied city as a peaceful and thriving metropolis. Although they read the „Beogradske Novine“, Belgraders recognized that it was a dubious source of information. Yet the mail was equally inadequate for it was subject to cen-

<sup>3</sup> See the debate in Förster, Stig; Nagler, Jörg (Hgg.), *On the Road to Total War. The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, Cambridge 1997.

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sorship and arrived irregularly. In an effort to overcome this state of darkness, people rediscovered traditional word-of-mouth channels of information. In informal gatherings in private homes, they exchanged and discussed „news“ and thus spread rumours.

The lack of information in wartime undermined a quintessential metropolitan function of the Serbian capital. Twenty years later, Vienna, too, witnessed a demotion from „Weltstadt“ to „Provinzstadt“ under German occupation. Although newly reorganized Greater Vienna was geographically the largest city in the Third Reich, the German occupiers were anxious to weaken Vienna's historical status as capital city. A competitor arose in Linz – an officially designated „Führer city“ – while Vienna was classified as a provincial city. Many Viennese were outraged about what they found to be a scandalous process of Prussianization, Maureen Healy (Oregon State University) pointed out in her paper on Vienna in the two world wars. Outcries against German occupation were illustrative of the cleavage which developed in wartime between the city and the larger polity that was waging war. Healy argued that in both wars Viennese civilians waged remarkably local wars against perceived internal enemies: „Who or what the population was fighting for or who or what it was fighting against – foundational questions in any war – change as we move from state definitions to articulations about the enemy in everyday life within the city.“ During the First World War, Hungarians and Jews had been a thorn in the citizens' side; in the Second World War, the German occupiers emerged as „internal enemies“ in everyday-life situations. Articulations of anti-German feelings were widespread, yet Viennese people never rose up against the Germans because new internal enemies facilitated the persecution of older, long-standing internal foes – „the Jews“. Nazi Germany's state-sanctioned, racially-based anti-Semitism meshed with the everyday variety of anti-Semitism endemic to Vienna. The legacy of the First World War came to the fore once gain: Christian, German-speaking Viennese used world war to settle scores with imagined local enemies in their midst.

The physical restructuring of Greater Vien-

na was relatively modest compared to the re-making of urban space through ghettoization in Hungarian cities under German occupation in 1944. Like in Vienna, the German occupiers made common cause with local anti-Semites in Budapest. The overall policy was dictated by Nazi officials and the parameters of ghettoization were framed nationally in ministerial directives, but the practicalities of implementation were entrusted to local administrators. Tim Cole (University of Bristol) showed how urban space was negotiated between various actors and how ghettoization was contested by both Jewish and non-Jewish city dwellers. In the university city of Szeged, debate focused on whether to establish the ghetto at the centre or on the margins of the city. In the end, the ghetto was established in the city centre near the synagogue. In Budapest, by contrast, the debate centred on the scale at which ghettoization should be implemented and whether it should assume a concentrated or dispersed form. Initially, plans were drawn up for seven mini-ghettos across the city. Thus the symbolic heart of the city was, in the language of the local officials, to be „cleansed“ from the „dirtying“ presence of Jews. However, within a month, this scheme was replaced with plans for an ultra-dispersed form of ghettoization. Officials decided to concentrate Jews in 1,948 ghetto houses throughout the city, thus taking the ghetto to where Jewish people already lived. On the one hand, ghettoization proved contentious for it threatened non-Jewish residents with forced relocations. On the other hand, it offered many ordinary Hungarians opportunities for upward mobility. Some called for ghetto status for their apartment building in the hope that they would obtain more decent accommodation. However, for Budapest's 200,000 Jewish citizens, the city became a divided and shrunken space.

The reshaping of eastern European urban centres into segregated Jewish and non-Jewish living spaces during the Second World War is the most extreme case illustrative of a larger trend dating back to the First World War: the remaking of cityscapes in „total war“. Focusing on the years 1914 to 1920, Mark Hatlie (Universität Tübingen) discussed the re-mapping of Riga in war and re-

volution between 1914 and 1920. The wars brought about the loss of much of Riga's population and an intensification of ethnic conflict. It also brought about numerous rapid regime changes, each of which resulted in interventions in the urban landscape; „power locations“ such as government buildings and schools changed hands, new parade routes re-mapped the city on special days, churches were reassigned, streets renamed, and signs rewritten in another language. Against the backdrop of Riga's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional population (primarily Latvians, Russians and Germans but also Jews, Poles, Lithuanians and Estonians), these changes exacerbated the internal tensions within the city, especially that between the German elite and the fervently patriotic Latvian majority.

In western Europe, the restructuring of urban space was less radical, yet contemporary observers were struck by the changes. Exploring relational perceptions of town and country in metropolitan London and the countryside in two world wars, Keith Grieves (Kingston University) showed how both wars heightened urban-rural schisms and changed people's perception of metropolitan space. In the era of the world wars, feelings of disequilibrium were expressed among rural visitors to London and by Londoners who spent time in country residences. The nerve centres of the metropolis became what Grieves calls „sites of wonderment“ to rural inhabitants within its orbit. In the metropolis, numerous sources of information, buildings damaged in air-raids, bustling railway termini, walls plastered with propaganda posters, and food queues gave visitors from the country cause to reflect on the gulf of metropolitan and rural lives. For instance, during the Great War, country gentlemen, driven by perceptions of rural isolation, visited sites of mobilization to catch the atmosphere at critical locations such as the War Office, Horse Guards and Wellington barracks. Wartime London was a complex fabric of „texts“, and the visitor moving in it was a kind of reader. Similarly, the countryside around the capital was visited or „read“ by city dwellers as containing places of recuperation where timeless continuities might still be found.

The two world wars created a core-

peripheral relationship between London and the country, marginalizing the rural in relation to the metropolitan. In Second World War propaganda, the depiction of the safe „otherness“ of the country was a dominant motif. Yet it was the London Blitz that became the most iconic „lieu de mémoire“ of the Second World War. „In 1940, London seemingly became the nation, and its inhabitants the 'People's Army'", Grieves suggested. This theme was further developed by Helen Jones (Goldsmiths College, London) and Peter Stansky (Stanford University) in their papers. Jones concentrated on two sets of enduring public images of London during the Second World War: Henry Moore's shelter drawings and Herbert Mason's photograph of St Paul's Cathedral. Moore produced roughly 400 sketches of Londoners seeking shelter from the bombs in the underground. Jones challenged historians such as Stansky who have suggested that Londoners seeing Moore's drawings on display in the National Gallery during the war identified with them in that they, too, had memories of these shelters.<sup>4</sup> Jones, by contrast, stressed that Londoners typically chose not to shelter – above all in the smelly underground. In fact, visitors to the National Gallery felt baffled and insulted by the passive and dehumanized figures, Jones argued. Mason's photograph of St Paul's standing unharmed in the midst of the burning City, described by the „Daily Mail“ as „war's greatest picture“, came to stand as prime signifier for the Blitz as a whole. In contrast to Moore's totemic figures, Mason's image of St Paul's conveyed hope, national unity and London's resolve. Moreover, it responded to an increased wartime interest in the spiritual.

Peter Stansky, who had previously worked on representations of the London Blitz, decided to revisit the subject in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on „9/11“. His paper focused on the collective psychology of September 7, 1940, the first day of the Blitz. In Britain, the Blitz, he argued, marked the grand introduction of terror in a modern way. „The terror of terror it that, although some areas are more at risk

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<sup>4</sup>Stansky, Peter; Abrahams, William, *London's Burning. Life, Death and Art in the Second World War*, London 1994.

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than others, it might strike anywhere. No one is safe." On Black Saturday, September 7, it became apparent that the people and not the military were in the front line of this new war. The Nazis pursued a strategy of terror, hoping that the bombs on the docks and dense residential areas of the East End would destroy morale. The cracking of morale did not happen, but, according to Stansky, it was a real possibility that first weekend. Contemporary accounts reveal that the terror came as a shock even though virtually every Londoner had been issued with a gas mask by the time of the outbreak of war in 1939. Moreover, cardboard coffins had been stockpiled in the metropolis. Among politicians and experts there was an expectation that there would be an immediate and intense panic. In the event, such fears proved unfounded. Londoners came to accept the threat of terror; a great part of the population knew that it might be victim over a long period of time. Such fate had a degree of arbitrariness, a degree of chance, and that is the essence of terror in its modern form, Stansky emphasized.

The contrasts between London and Paris in the Second World War are striking. In his discussion of Paris under the impact of „total war“, Patrice Higonnet (Harvard University) stressed the exceptionality of Paris and thus challenged the concept of „total war“ or its relevance in this case. Touching briefly on the First World War, Higonnet concentrated principally on the experience of German occupation between 1940 and 1940. Pre-war civilian life seemed to continue uninterrupted, and the cityscape remained by and large unchanged. The Parisians, Higonnet suggested, pretended that the war was not happening. The first cinema reopened within a day of German troops entering the city; the telephone system never ceased to operate; and new metro stations were being built. To be sure, the population of the French capital were adversely affected by rationing and a night-time curfew. For the average, non-Jewish Parisian, life was unpleasant, but not horrendous. Parisians proved resistant to German cultural propaganda (such as concerts of German composers in the Luxembourg gardens) and managed to carve a niche for themselves into the cultural life of the city. Entertainments flourished for they

provided a culture of normality, a way for the city dweller to escape from the war. Because Paris chose to ignore the war, Higonnet concluded, the city „fell out of world history“.

Arguably, Paris represented the exception that proves the rule. Urban warfare in Stalingrad and Berlin, by contrast, approximated to the ideal type of „total war“. Antony Beevor (London) studied house-to-house fighting in Stalingrad and Berlin, a new form of warfare concentrated in the ruins of civilian life. The detritus of war – burnt out tanks, shell cases, signal wire, and grenade boxes – was mixed with the wreckage of family homes – iron bedsteads, lamps, and household utensils. At Stalingrad, the relentless bombing of the city by German aircraft had produced ideal conditions for the defenders. German soldiers found close-quarter combat in Stalingrad psychologically disorientating. „Not a house is left standing“, a German officer wrote home. „There is only burnt-out wasteland, a wilderness of rubble and ruins which is well-nigh impassable“. The former inhabitants trapped in the city, suffered, of course, most from artillery bombardment and street fighting. In desperation, they sought shelter in the cellars or ruins, in sewers, in caves dug into steep banks, and even in shell-holes. Many a Soviet soldier who survived Stalingrad took part in the assault on Berlin. This time, the roles were completely reversed, with the Red Army as the attacker and the Wehrmacht as the ambusher. Again, the presence of civilians made little difference to military operations. Soviet soldiers forced civilians out of their shelters into the street despite crossfire and shelling. One officer remembered that „sometimes we were just throwing grenades into the cellars and passing on“.

The battles of Stalingrad and Berlin exemplify the near-total scale of warfare reached between 1942 and 1945. Yet, paradoxically, both cases also reveal how generals pursuing total strategies tended to loose control of events far more rapidly in urban settings than in the field. However, total control re-emerged as a preoccupation in the immediate aftermath of the end of hostilities. Clara Oberle (Princeton University) showed how railway stations became cultural and administrative foci of the rituals and rhetoric of order in

post-war Berlin between 1945 and 1948. Inter-Allied rivalries over the material use of railway termini testified to an underlying conflict over who was to control the resources of the German capital and thus shape the new political order of Europe. The Allies' efforts to impose order on the city's railway stations was paralleled by German administrators' quest for some form of order. In the latter case, a number of very practical, physical motivations joined psychological as well as older, profession-related desires for order. Reconstructing railway stations was, ostensibly, a practical imperative; officials were concerned about health and safety and keen to improve the efficiency of the transport system. Moreover, a yearning for order was deeply ingrained in their occupational culture. But behind practical reasons and profession-related attitudes was, according to Oberle, „the idea that removing debris and removing guilt would go hand in hand“. German administrators clearing the debris were effectively eradicating material remains that would keep awake unpleasant memories of their own role in the Third Reich.

### 3. Commemorations

The debris of war featured also prominently in the third strand of the conference. Like Oberle, Fiona Henderson (Royal Holloway, London) suggested that the removal or restoration of ruined buildings in post-war Berlin was a way of purging the traces of the past. In her paper on the visual practices promoted in guidebooks to post-war London and Berlin, Henderson emphasized the ambiguities inherent in war ruins as both mementos of war and tourist attractions. Berlin's Gedächtniskirche, which appeared on the front of many tourist guides during the 1950s and early 1960s, acted as a physical reminder of the violent losses inflicted on both the cityscape and the city dweller. Yet, at the same time, tourist guidebooks embraced the modern western city symbolized by the nearby Europa Centre shopping complex. Henderson noted that attempts to gloss over the war and to locate West Berlin's rebirth in the modern consumer landscape of Kurfürstendamm only tended to reinforce cultural dissonances. However, the tourist narrative about post-war London was equally ambiguous. Britain had

won the war, but London had had the bear the brunt of enemy terror. The tourism industry came to regard the ruins of the Blitz as a business opportunity. Thirty-minute flights over London offered a view from above – a view that was even more detached than the one presented in many guidebooks. Guidebooks mapped out new routes thorough London often comparing bombsites to the ruins of antiquity. The city's landscape seemed to be enhanced by its disfigurement. Yet, one aspect was conspicuously absent from tourist guidebooks: the former inhabitants of the houses destroyed featured merely in parenthesis.

Bombsite tourism tended to blur over the human tragedy underneath picturesque ruins. Yet, there was more to ruined buildings than „dark tourism“. Focusing on the discourse and practice of urban reconstruction in post-Second World War Europe, Joe Nasr and Peter Larkham (University of Central England) pointed out that many city planners discovered ruins as ready-made memorials symbolizing a city's grief. To be sure, demolition squads ready to pull down anything considered hazardous presented many a planner or architect with a *fait accompli*. Thus, not every building that survived wartime bombing survived post-war clearance, but what survived clearance generally survived reconstruction. Semi-ruined churches in particular became treated as „special buildings“ and survived in this way, unlike much of the ordinary fabric around them. While a number of churches were transformed into memorial gardens, the origin of the idea was in many cases soon forgotten. Therefore, the concept of „memorial“ seems problematic as a descriptor of the variety of ways in which churches have been preserved since the Second World War. Instead, Nasr and Larkham introduced the term „mementification“ to describe the process of turning vestiges into mere mementoes rather than proper memorials. Mementification implied a new way of thinking about historic monuments which highlighted a building's place within a zone rather than the value intrinsic to the structure as such. This shift of emphasis, Nasr and Larkham argued, was „a necessary step towards the imagination of historic areas rather than historic buildings“.

In November 1940, an air raid left almost

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the whole city centre of Coventry in ruins. Stefan Goebel (Institute of Historical Research, London) examined how the ruins became a spark of life in Coventry's international mission of peace and reconciliation. Unlike other British cities levelled by the Luftwaffe such as Bath, Bristol or even London, Coventry had never been content with simply remembering the air raids within a local framework. Instead, it reached out beyond its city walls and national frontiers to negotiate transnationally the meaning of the recent past and its implications for the future. Hitherto a provincial city, war-torn Coventry matured into a „commemorative cosmopolis“ of the post-war era. In the aftermath of the bombing, Coventry became an international symbol around which Coventrians spun a worldwide web of commemorative partnerships. The city council built up a network of international linkages with war-torn cities. By 1962, the Midlands city was linked to over twenty cities around the globe. Among its partners, it counted Stalingrad, Dresden, Kiel, Caen, Lidice, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Arnhem, and Warsaw. Not only the city council, but also the cathedral set itself the master theme of international reconciliation. From the ruins of Coventry Cathedral emerged a new, post-national mode of commemoration, a mode which postulated love and forgiveness for former enemies. In the words of a later provost, the cathedral matured into „a laboratory of experiment in Christian renewal“ beyond national boundaries.

The legacy of near-total destruction put Coventry on the map of worldwide remembrance. Like Coventry, Hiroshima reinvented itself as an international site of memory after the war. Lisa Yoneyama (University of California, San Diego) explored the ceremonial landscapes and narratives of Hiroshima's nuclear annihilation. By foregrounding the notion of „ruins“ – both physically and metaphorically – as an analytic, Yoneyama suggested that „as history moves us forward in time, monuments, memorials, testimonies and other media of memory with which we remember the past are always already in the state of ruins – that is damaged, second-hand, and compromised“. Since 1945, various groups and individuals have tried to impose their understanding of the past onto the cityscape, particu-

larly the Peace Memorial Park. Business and political leaders have exploited the symbol of peace to emphasise post-war recovery; anti-nuclear campaigners have used the park as a spectacular stage for mass rallies; and individual survivors have retold their story in public thus trying to reclaim the landscape of death and destruction. Conflicting political and commemorative agendas notwithstanding, such acts of remembrance in Hiroshima underlined that catastrophe is quintessentially a metropolitan event – a notion reinforced since „9/11“. Yet, the metropolitan as a category, Yoneyama argued, obliterates as much as it reveals. The attack on Hiroshima has been remembered as an „event“ marked by a segmented temporality and reconstituted around a „ground zero“. By contrast, incidents which do not possess a distinctive „ground zero“ and are not identifiable by calendrical time as „events“ tend to fade into commemorative darkness. The contrast between the obscurity of atrocities committed in Japan's military comfort stations and the prominence of the fate of Hiroshima is a case in point.

While Hiroshima emerged as an internationally recognized symbol of „peace“ from the Second World War, the spirit of war remained intact in Japan's capital city. Julie Higashi and Lim Bon (Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto) studied the spatial use of Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine after 1945. Established in 1872 as a war shrine in honour of those dead who had fought on the victorious side during the civil war, the shrine survived both the earthquake of 1923 and the fire bombing of the Second World War. The fact that the Yasukuni Shrine remained intact while both the imperial palace and Meiji Shrine were heavily damaged fired the imagination of Japan's imperialists. Overjoyed that not even the Allies could destroy the war spirits enshrined on the site, they erected, in 1969, a memorial commemorating the air raid on Tokyo. A decade later, Japanese war criminals were quietly enshrined, too. The latest addition to the site is the Showakan museum. Founded in 1999 by an association of bereaved families, it recalls the hardships shared by those who lived through the post-war years. Most recently, the politics of space around the Yasukuni Shrine led to the reo-



pening of the Yushukan museum, an institution dating back to 1881. The new extension of 2002 features inter alia displays of kamikaze planes. The museum's so-called educational programme recruits young men for special membership to support the „eirei“ or the spirit of the war dead. „There is no remorse, no reflection of the past“, Higashi and Lim concluded.

The processes by which older symbols take on a new significance after the Second World War was also the subject of Bernhard Rieger's (International University Bremen) paper on National Socialism, air war and local memory in Bremen. Similar to the Yasukuni Shrine, the statue of Roland in Bremen's market square had outlasted the firestorm physically unscathed. Yet the parallels seem to end here. Bremen citizens found it impossible to ascribe to Roland any definitive, concrete meaning in the immediate post-war period. A powerful icon of „civic liberty“ during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Roland had been tarnished during the Third Reich. In 1938, the local Nazis had ordered a complete overhaul of the figure and turned the restoration into an act of creation in their own image. Attempts to forge a post-war civic identity for Bremen encountered Roland and his Nazi past as a stumbling-block. To be sure, Roland provided a private sense of continuity after 1945, but the figure could no longer function as an official symbol. „Its appropriation by the Third Reich“, Rieger argued, „remained invisible, yet nonetheless stood in the way of efforts to reclaim it as a marker of public identity“. However, in 1953, a new figure stepped into Roland's shoes, when city official unveiled a statue of the Bremen Town Musicians. Designed by an artist persecuted under the Nazis, it recalled the Brother Grimm's fairy tale of the donkey, the dog, the cat, and the cock who fled from abusive masters to start a better life in Bremen. Bremen reinvented itself as a modern and tolerant city welcoming strangers. „One wonders“, Rieger remarked, „what is means that to tell such a story, the citizens of Bremen turned to a children's fairy tale“.

In her paper on the commemoration of the siege of Leningrad, Lisa Kirschenbaum (West Chester University) focused on the tension

between local memory and national myth-making. The commemorative process in post-war Leningrad was profoundly political and deeply personal at the same time. The first local plans for „victory“ monuments date back to the time when the city was still under siege. They provided one way of coping with catastrophe and reasserting local identity. After victory had been achieved, Stalin, eager to erase the memory of the failure of the first years of the war, forbade the planning of new monuments and demolished those erected during the war. His successors, however, began promote the memory of victory in the Great Fatherland War in an effort to bolster the Soviet system. The planning and construction of the two most important memorials to the siege, the Piskarevskoe Memorial Cemetery and the Monument to the Heroic Defenders of Leningrad, reveal the underlying conflict between ordinary Leningraders wanting to remember the tragic, urban and largely female experience of the blockade and a regime intent on celebrating the victorious Red Army. On the surface, the two monuments, which were unveiled in 1960 and 1975 respectively, seemed like an outright celebration of Soviet heroism. However, Kirschenbaum pointed out that „the individual memories that Leningraders brought to Soviet sites of memory – that in part structured those sites – complicated, without necessarily rejecting, the closure and cant of official myth“.

In his keynote entitled „Configuring Catastrophe“, Jay Winter (Yale University) examined the phenomenon of metropolitan nostalgia in the aftermath of total war. Although he drew his examples from the ongoing research project into „Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919“,<sup>5</sup> Winter explored a theme running through a number of papers given at the conference. That theme is the extent to which total war, the most modern form of warfare, precipitated a deluge of nostalgic or traditional forms of representation. „The more the Great War modified urban life, the greater the urge to return imaginatively to its pre-war contours“, Winter argued.

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<sup>5</sup> Winter, Jay; Robert, Jean-Louis u.a., *Capital Cities at War. Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, vol. 1, Cambridge 1997. Winter, Robert and their co-authors are currently preparing vol. 2.

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Borrowing from the work of Svetlana Boym, Winter drew a distinction between the restorative nostalgia of political leaders eager to return to a pre-lapsarian past, and the reflective nostalgia of groups of individuals who expressed their longing for shared everyday frameworks of cultural memory. Both are conservative forces but the second type admits to the loss of collective memories and abjures any faith in the material reconstruction of the lost world. The (restorative) nostalgic turn in metropolitan life was much in evidence in the mythical construction of a pre-war urban world of pub, café, music hall, and theatre. Dreams about the world before the deluge became inscribed on the landscapes of Paris, London and Berlin during and after the Great War. Winter argued that metropolitan nostalgia was triggered by sites. „Narratives about the past jostle with each other in brick and mortar, on the spires of churches, or the facades of public buildings, or in the sweep of public spaces and parks.“

The research presented at this conference examined the imagery, experience and memory of total war within a spatial framework. Various papers highlighted the tensions between metropolitan space and world war. City dwellers experienced and understood the global conflict and the national war effort through close reading within specific locales and venues. The approach adopted in many papers was to trace the cultural history of war through a series of sites. Sites as diverse as railway stations in post-war Berlin, the war ruins of the Blitz, and museums in contemporary Tokyo were central points of reference for the contemporaries' attempts to understand the world in which they lived. For the urban historian, one of the attractions of „sites“ is that they are theatres, places of both spectacle and performance. However, the wartime metropolis was also a site of annihilation. Total war turned established spatial structures upside down. House-to-house fighting, ghettoization, carpet bombing (imagined or physical) threatened the very existence of metropolitan space.

Winter concluded that in Europe the horrific consequences of the Second World War made it impossible for many survivors to return to representations of metropolitan nost-

algia after 1945. However, nostalgia might have followed a different trajectory in post-war Japan. Restorative nostalgia flourished in the aftermath of the firestorm in Tokyo, and even in Hiroshima some individual survivors driven by a sense of reflective nostalgia managed to carve a niche for themselves into a commemorative culture that was based on „memories in ruins“. In defeated Germany, older symbols could retain a confusing public presence. In Bremen, the statue of Roland continued to be a private maker of identity. To be sure, displays of restorative nostalgia became infinitely more problematic after 1945. As these examples demonstrate, the study of metropolitan catastrophes encourages – perhaps forces – the historian to leave national boundaries behind in order to identify cultural convergences and national peculiarities. The comparative history of total war remains largely unwritten. Choosing a case study of metropolises might be the best place to start. The purpose of this conference was to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas on the comparative history of metropolises and wars.

Footnotes:

Tagungsbericht *Metropolitan Catastrophes: Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations*. 12.07.2004-13.07.2004, , in: H-Soz-Kult 14.12.2004.