

‘Foreshadows and repercussions’: histories of air war and the recasting of cities and citizens

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Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, eds., *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 239 pp. (hb), £65, ISBN 978-0-754-66038-5.

Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 245 pp. (hb), £58, ISBN 978-1-107-00929-5.

Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 343 pp. (hb), £60, ISBN 978-0-521-87494-6.

Claudia Baldoli, Andrew Knapp and Richard Overy, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples in Western Europe 1940-1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), 365 pp. (pb), £19.99, ISBN 978-1-4411-8568-6.

Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* (London: Hazan, 2011), 447 pp. (hb), £40, ISBN 978-2-7541-05309.

In the preface to the 1941 edition to his 1908 novel, *The War in the Air*, H.G. Wells wrote: ‘I told you so. You *damned* fools’.¹ The books discussed here illustrate how, in the few intervening decades, air war moved from a fearful vision into reality, and detail the varied experiences and consequences of the aerial bombardment of cities and civilians. The histories of air power and the bombing of cities have centred on the Second World War, moving from the humanising endurance of Londoners during the Blitz to the entirely dehumanised horror of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²

¹ Quoted in Leo Mellor, *Reading the ruins: modernism, bombsites and British culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 11.

² For the Blitz in Britain see Mark Connelly, *We can take it! Britain and the memory of the Second World War* (Harlow: Longman, 2004), Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: history, myth and popular memory* (London: Francis and Taylor, 2000), and Angus Calder, *The myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992, first published 1991). For Hiroshima see R.L. Messer, ‘“Accidental judgements, casual slaughters”: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and total war’, in Roger Chickering et al., *A world at total war : global conflict and the politics of destruction, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 297-313.

The texts reviewed here extend the histories of air war and highlight the importance of the city and the home as a target for bombing while remaining the place where people carried on their daily lives.³

As Richard Overy states in his introduction to *Bombing, States and Peoples*, much of the literature on bombing has focussed on the strategic aspects, the moral questions, or comparisons of bombing with other disasters which provoked urban change.⁴ Histories of air war and total war in cities that acknowledge how lived experiences were, as Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene argue, ‘intertwined with foreshadows and repercussions’, can provide a broader picture of how cities were recast by modern war.⁵ By focussing on the everyday aspects of living in a city under fire, reflected in the responses of civilians, writers, and governments to the realisation of the fear of air war, the historiography addresses the crucial concern posed by Susan Grayzel: ‘how the once unthinkable has become acceptable’ (p. 320). In order to do this historians have to deal with the urban aspects of air war, which Goebel and Keene describe as ‘total war par excellence’.⁶ The works discussed here historicise the Blitz and air war through comparative analysis of experiences of bombing in different countries, and by extending the period studied before 1940. The texts thus begin to demonstrate the ways in which the destruction of cities and the killing of civilians from the air became a convention of modern war.

The physical and cultural recasting of cities

A defining characteristic of air power is that the notions of wartime and peacetime, of combatant and non-combatant, can no longer hold. Mary Dudziak has recently illustrated how the notion of wartime as separate from peacetime was increasingly upset in the twentieth century. Dudziak tracks the ways in which wartime was expanded out of a temporally defined state of exception and

³ There is little mention of the two world wars in the major urban history of Britain, Martin Daunton, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, vol. III: 1840-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). A book that does engage with the urban aspects of modern war is Marcus Funck and Roger Chickering, *Endangered cities: military power and urban societies in the era of the world wars* (Boston: Brill, 2004). For a historical geography extending back before the twentieth century see G. J. Ashworth, *War and the city* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁴ Richard Overy, ‘Introduction’, in Richard Overy, Claudia Baldoli, and Andrew Knapp, eds, *Bombing, states and peoples in Western Europe, 1940-1945* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 1.

⁵ Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, ‘Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War: An Introduction’, in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, eds, *Cities into battlefields: metropolitan scenarios, experiences and commemorations of total war* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 4.

⁶ Goebel and Keene, ‘Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War’, p. 23.

highlights the implications for the politics of war during the Cold War and the 'War on Terror'.⁷ It was the arrival of air power which carried with it the new need for civilian populations and cities to be 'prepared' for a war which could erupt, and the bombs that could fall, at any moment. By the start of the Second World War, cities had become the main focus of aerial warfare, and perceptions of urban life were increasingly marked by fears of air raids. Grayzel argues that the Blitz should not be viewed as an unprecedented event, but 'as part of a much longer story about air power and what is at stake in the life and death of the metropolis'.⁸ While the history of attacks on cities from the air stretches back before the twentieth century, the zeppelin raids on Britain in the First World War marked the start of the modern era of air war.

The impact of the aerial aspect of the First World War have largely been obscured by the horrors of Flanders, but, as Grayzel shows, the zeppelins and planes brought the war to British cities far away from Western Front. She recognises the 'beginnings of a cultural shift' during the First World War which classed air raids as 'genuine experiences of war akin to what soldiers faced on the front line' (pp. 64-65). This feeling was not limited to those women and children who remained in the cities, but was reflected in the testimony of soldiers returning from Europe only to find themselves still in a war zone. Grayzel quotes a soldier on leave from the Western Front who told the *Times* how seeing planes sweeping over London made him seek cover in a railway station, 'just', he said, 'as I would have done in the subsidiary line in front of the Messines Ridge'. When he emerged from the station the sight of people staring fixedly up into the sky reminded him again of Flanders (p. 73).

Grayzel argues convincingly that by the end of 1916 everyone in England – 'men and women, young and old – had to adjust to the new reality of aerial warfare'(p. 63). A striking example of the how air raids were brought into the ordinary realities of everyday life is the existence, already in 1915, of special insurance policies advertised in newspapers which offered financial protection against damage from air raids (p. 34). Grayzel utilises personal accounts to illustrate how quickly this transition from civilians to quasi-combatants, or at least to regular targets for bombings, came about. The radical blurring of the boundaries between the fronts was the result of a war in which 'wives could tell their distant soldier-husbands about gunfire while putting the children to bed' (p.

⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *War time: an idea, its history, its consequences* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸ Susan Grayzel, 'A promise of terror to come': Air Power and the Destruction of Cities in British Imagination and Experience, 1908-1939', in Goebel and Keene eds., *Cities into Battlefields*, p. 62. The bombing of Guernica has often been described as marking a new kind of war, see Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (London: Profile, 2007).

86). From the city as the target of bombing, she zooms in to the home as the first line of defence against air raids, arguing that war became part of domestic life in a new way.

One of Grayzel's central arguments is that, with the coming of air power, the survival of the state relied on 'the joint efforts of combatant and non-combatants', and the 'key work of preparing Britain to accept this transformation was cultural' (p. 315). Grayzel's work is an important contribution to histories of air war in Britain, as she shows the central importance of culture in the processes through which air raids became a familiar feature of domestic life. The experience of air raids in the First World War had legacies which informed the state practices and the literature of destruction from the air, which both prepared the ground for the next air war.⁹ Leo Mellor and Grayzel both deal with the period between the wars when the destruction of cities from the skies was performed continuously in culture. Mellor's close reading of interwar fiction and poetry reveals an occupation with the threat from the air in a diverse range of writers. He analyses how writers fictionalised their experiences while crucially asserting the importance influence of the material conditions of life in a city under fire. Mellor also highlights the longer story of literary approaches to air raids before 1940 and the broader culture of fear. He argues that:

fears about the vulnerability of the city to attack from the air, and the literary representations of such fears, over the decades leading up to the Second World War [...] were mutually interlocking relationships between war as practised and literature as written, with air vice marshals taking ideas from novels, and science fiction writers scaling up biplanes into omnipotent rocket-ships. It was a literature of both reportage and imaginative excursions, of political warnings and lurid extrapolations.' (p. 31)

The interlocking of fearful literary visions with official government approaches to the techniques and possible consequences of industrial-scale air war reveals the essential role of cultural understandings of war in this period, when its meanings and legalities were still being fought out at international conventions. The preoccupation with developing air arms and bombing capabilities between the wars reflected the significance attached to air power.¹⁰ Despite the demonstrations of

⁹ For interwar air war literature see Paul K. Saint-Amour, 'Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism', *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 42, no. 2 (2005), pp. 130-161; Sven Lindqvist, *A history of bombing* trans. Linda H. Rugg, (New York: New Press, 2001); Martin Ceadel, 'Popular Fiction and the Next War, 1918-39', in Frank Gloversmith ed. *Class, Culture and Social Change. A New View of the 1930s* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 161-184. For literature during the war see Adam Piette, *Imagination at war: British fiction and poetry, 1939-1945* (London: Papermac, 1995).

¹⁰ Andrew Barros, 'Razing Babel and the Problems of Constructing Peace: France, Great Britain, and Air Power, 1916-28', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 126, no. 518 (2011), pp. 75-115; David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: an essay on a militant and technological nation* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1991).

bombardments in the First World War, which made clear that in modern war no-one was truly safe, air power was still a young technology. There was a significant space between what many central military figures asserted air power could do and the reality of the time.¹¹ The uncertainty about air power and the importance of cultural understandings of air power were illustrated when a special sub-committee of London officials met in March 1931 to discuss evacuation plans. Major Tomlin of the Metropolitan Police suggested that the group consult ‘somebody like Mr H.G. Wells... to help fill in the picture’ about likely conditions in future air raids (quoted in Grayzel, p. 140).

The culturally constructed ideas about air war and the practical precautions developed by states were closely interconnected. Mellor highlights the ways in which existing cultural ideas provided terms of reference for writers trying to reflect on the new landscape of ruins and fragments during the Second World War. He argues that for writers in Britain the development of surrealism provided a cultural background to visions witnessed during and after air raids. He uses a discussion of surrealism to trace the changing cultural responses to air war and the physical destruction of cities. Surrealism moved from ‘being a newly imported foreign sensation in the 1930s to acquiring popular recognition as fearfully ‘premonitory’ at the outbreak of war – encoding the excess of fearful possibility beyond the rational’. When the bombs fell and the urban aspect suddenly displayed the macabre visions of ruin and death, surrealism ‘was naturalised as a mode of dealing with extraordinary, implausible and terrifying sights’ (p. 85). Lara Feigel notes how writers in both Germany and Britain tended to ‘aestheticise the war around them in similar ways’. Central to the photography of the 1940s was the need ‘not so much to witness as to haunt, or be haunted’.¹²

Living in cities subject to unpredictable attacks resulted in a number of different responses which sought to explain, or take account of, the devastation. Vanessa Chambers illustrates how in Britain, ‘the anxiety occasioned by the war and the unpredictable nature of life on the Home Front caused many people to turn to a variety of supernatural forces’. There was not a repetition of the major turn towards spiritualism that was that witnessed in the First World War, but the sheer unpredictability of air raids, where death could potentially arrive at any moment, prompted people to consider the role ‘fate’ or ‘chance’ had in their survival.¹³ The increasing familiarity of death and destruction was a particularly urban experience. Mellor argues that the unique aspect of the

¹¹ Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and reality in air warfare: the evolution of British and American ideas about strategic bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹² Lara Feigel, ‘The photograph my skull might take’: Bombs, Time and Photography in British and German Second World War Literature’, in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, p. 133.

¹³ Vanessa Chambers, ‘Defend us from All Perils and Dangers of this Night’: Coping with Bombing in Britain during the Second World War’, in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, pp. 154, 164.

bombed city, 'unhoused, on edge and shattered, was one amenable to numerous forms of strange sensations – and depictions'. The visions of destruction made the unconscious conscious (Mellor, p. 138).

The everyday experiences of people living in cities under fire was perhaps the most comprehensive and tangible way in which the destruction of cities became part of everyday life. It is important to note, however, that cities at war were both sites of destruction and production on previously unseen levels. Jean-Louis Cohen demonstrates how new industrial architectures and geographies were developed in anticipation of war which subsequently became the standards for post-war industries.¹⁴ As industry was irrevocably altered by the exigencies of war, so perceptions of cities and more simple domestic buildings were changed. He argued that cities 'were the bastions of the home front' in the systems required to wage total war (p. 68). He addresses the surprising omission of the war years from histories of twentieth century architecture, by highlighting how 'each and every dwelling was mobilised from the very first days of the war' (pp. 12, 68). The intervention of war into the home is a recurring theme for Grayzel. Similarly Cohen's focus on the material objects of the home illustrates how 'war culture affected every practice within the house' across the warring nations (Cohen, p. 68).

Air raid shelters and protection from bombing have been the most commonly discussed architectural features of modern war.¹⁵ Despite calls for large public shelters the British government persisted with a shelter policy that centred private protection for families at home. Grayzel argues that the household was the 'primary unit left to face the air raids', affirming the 'new status of, and reliance upon, ordinary civilians at home in a future war' (p. 147). Air raids and air raid precautions were central to the architectural aspects of the Second World War in particular. Dietmar Süß discusses how differing interpretations of the building of bunkers and air defences reflected the condition of wartime societies under constant threat. Using the concept of war as 'a condition of society', Süß argues that in both Britain and Germany the 'temporary relocation underground of wartime society [...] meant a dynamic mobilization of everyday urban life'.¹⁶ The architectural

¹⁴ See Jean-Louis Cohen, *Architecture in Uniform: Designing and Building for the Second World War* (London: Hazan, 2011), ch. 3. The increasing importance of wartime approaches to urban planning in peacetime as a response to the fear of air war is the central topic of my PhD thesis, 'Material Cultures of Apocalypse and the Politics of Survival in Great Britain, 1935-1952', due for submission September 2013.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-172; see also Joseph S. Meisel, 'Air Raid Shelter Policy and its Critics in Britain before the Second World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 5, no. 3 (1994), pp. 300-319.

¹⁶ Dietmar Süß, 'Wartime Societies and Shelter Politics in National Socialist Germany and Britain', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, pp. 24, 38. For the concept of war as a condition of society Süß cites J.P. Reemstma, 'Krieg is ein Gesellschaftszustand. Reden zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung

features of the city were closely entwined with its designation as both a site of danger and potential refuge underground.

In Britain the imagery of bombing in the Second World War, the story of stoic, even cheery, survival in London Underground stations, which was presented as a unifying national experience has been challenged by historians.¹⁷ Gabriella Gribaudi's discussion of the conditions in Naples reveals a different version of life beneath cities under fire. As in London, Naples's architecture was refigured by air raids. Most shelters were made from the ancient hollows beneath the city, as well as the waterworks and underground stations. Collapsing shelters, pressing crowds and epidemics that grew in the poor conditions claimed thousands of lives. Gribaudi estimates that in 1943 alone there were about 6,000 victims in the city. Daily life for thousands of Neapolitans was dominated by air raids, with as many as 11,930 people living under the city every day in the autumn of 1943 when the bombing was at its peak.¹⁸

The air raids in Italy, and the Fascist regime's inability to offer meaningful protection to civilians, were an important factor in delegitimising the Italian authorities. Both Elena Cortesi and Claudia Baldoli point to Mussolini's address on 2 December 1942, in which he told Italians that it was their duty to evacuate threatened cities, as a key moment. It was then that Italians knew evacuation represented the state's only anti-aircraft measure. Baldoli illustrates how, with the state unable to protect civilians from air raids, the Catholic Church became a central actor in air raid precautions. The actions of Priests, who 'blessed shelters, placed crucifixes in them, and visited bombed towns to bring words of comfort to survivors [...] came to be perceived, albeit unconsciously, as an important part of Italy's civil defences'.¹⁹ Baldoli's discussion about the shift from the state to the Church in Italy highlights how air raids profoundly influenced the relationship between subjects and the state.

Citizenship and the state under fire

"Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wechmacht 1941-1944", ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998, pp. 8-13.

¹⁷ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Calder, *Myth of the Blitz*.

¹⁸ Gabriella Gribaudi, 'The True Cause of the 'Moral Collapse': People, Fascists and the Authorities under the Bombs. Naples and the Countryside, 1940-1944', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, pp. 224, 226.

¹⁹ Elena Cortesi, 'Evacuation in Italy during the Second World War: Evolution and Management, in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, p. 63, Claudia Baldoli, 'Religion and Bombing in Italy, 1940-1945', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, p. 137.

A key problem for governments was how to involve civilians in air raid precautions before bombs began to fall without causing panic about imminent disaster. Through these interactions the relationship between the subject and the state shifted as the role and identity of civilians changed. Marc Wiggam's comparison of the blackouts in Germany and Britain illustrates some of problems of mobilising civilians. Wiggam argues that the increasing militarisation of society depended on the articulation of community bonds 'and the role community assumes in the defence of the nation'.²⁰ The idea of duty was central to the creation in Britain of 'the nation' as 'totalizing category of identity' before the Second World War, while within this, smaller gender, class, ethnicity and age groups were targets of specific policies (Grayzel, p. 133). Similarly, Mellor argues that in the films of Humphrey Jennings 'the patriotism engendered by the war moves beyond conflict to duty' (p. 135), and Grayzel observes in Britain feelings that 'there was something just and right about shared danger and sacrifice in total war', which returned to responses during the First World War. In continental Europe there was a more complicated picture (p. 291).

The chapters on Italy in *Bombing, States and People* illustrate how the legitimacy of the fascist regime was fatally undermined by the inability to offer meaningful protection from air raids. In a divided and occupied France, ideas of national identity were complex, as were the reactions to Allied bombing of French cities.²¹ Lindsey Dodd discusses how aid for bombing victims in Vichy France was used 'in the service of different factions to mobilize support for their own ideological conceptions of the future nation'.²² The Vichy leader Philippe Pétain attempted to use the Allied bombing of France to articulate a common French war experience that was a consequence of Allied bombing as well as German occupation, and to foster national solidarity. Pétain wanted to use the raids to reinforce the links between the population and his regime. Michael Schmiedel's chapter demonstrates how a programme involving the adoption of war-damaged cities in France was both a way for French citizens to support their fellow countrymen, and a potential propaganda resource for the Vichy regime. Direct support in the form of the evacuation of children from adopted target towns to their parent cities was largely a failure, instead, Schmiedel argues, 'indirect and symbolic solidarity' was a more effective way 'to generate a feeling of social and national cohesion'. The response to air raids in France included charitable initiatives led by private donations and run on a

²⁰ Marc Wiggam, 'The Blackout and the Idea of Community in Britain and Germany', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, p. 21.

²¹ See also Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied air attack, 1940-1945* (London: Continuum, 2012).

²² Lindsay Dodd, 'Relieving Sorrow and Misfortune'? State, Charity, Ideology and Aid in Bombed-out France, 1940-1944', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, p. 75.

local basis which incorporated a genuine notion of national solidarity. Despite the local origins of these movements their propaganda potential was quickly seized upon by the Pétain regime and as such, he argues, they must be seen as an 'orchestrated solidarity'.²³

The provision of aid and welfare services to the victims of bombing is an important element in the way air raids and total war changed the relationship between state and subject that extended beyond the immediate emergency of wartime. Grayzel argues that in Britain between the wars the increasing intervention of the state into the home, which had escalated in the First World War, resulted in the warfare and welfare states 'expanding in tandem' (p. 317). She engages with David Edgerton's argument that after the First World War the Britain was more a warfare than a welfare state, and suggests that the state which grew out of the First World War was both.²⁴ Crucially, once homes and domestic life were explicitly targeted through air raids state intervention in the home gained a different aspect and legitimacy. For Grayzel, such intervention had become 'justified to secure the survival of home life and thus the state itself' (p. 318). Air war and total war transformed the everyday life of civilians and their understanding of their role within the nation, as well as the obligations that government had to fulfil in order to secure the support of the civilian population. Warfare and welfare went increasingly interdependent.

The experiences and responses of those living through the new realities of air power profoundly influenced the development of the post-war world. In *Bombing, States and Peoples*, Jay Winter discusses how exile politics during the Second World War shaped the international human rights regime which developed after 1945. He addresses the questions of the warfare and welfare state, and argues that 'a new human rights regime was born' at the lowest ebb of the fight against Nazism, 'during those desperate hours, during the Blitz and in its aftermath'. Huddled in shelters in London, political exiles 'constructed a blueprint for the future, through which the warfare state would be turned into a welfare state, and in which the defence of human rights came before the defence of national interest'. He writes how veterans from the First World War found a home in the League of Nations, and argues that a central theme in the story of the development of human rights is that it 'starts with the victims of war and ends with the claim that rights belong not only to victims

²³ Michael Schmiedel, 'Orchestrated Solidarity: the Allied Air War in France and the Development of Local and State-Organized Solidarity Movements', in Overy, Baldoli, Knapp, eds., *Bombing, States and Peoples*, pp. 206, 211, 215, 216.

²⁴ David Edgerton, *Warfare state: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

but to us all'.²⁵ It is important to note, however, that by the end of the Second World War, or even as Grayzel argues in Britain by the end of the First, the entire notion of the victims of war had been transformed. The extension of rights cannot be disassociated from the concomitant extension of the obligations of citizens, which included being in the line of fire for enemy bombers.

Winter focuses on René Cassin as representative of those who 'suffered in one war, risked their lives in exile in a second, and who were determined to move from efforts to heal the victims of war to efforts to establish the new international order on a foundation of respect for human rights'.²⁶ Winter thus demonstrates the central influence of war and war experiences on notions of citizenship and human rights in the twentieth century.²⁷ While the ideas behind the creation of international human rights were built in opposition to the conditions of modern war, the totalising nature of war and the reach of the bombers meant that notions of rights of citizens were inextricably bound up with ideas of sacrifice and service for the nation. In this context, it is important to remark that key theorists of air power after 1918 envisaged attacks on cities as a more humane alternative to the slaughter of the First World War.²⁸

Reconstruction, memory and memorialisation

As the role of civilians was transformed so cities themselves were remade and their future reconstruction was a 'galvanising term for mobilisation' across Europe (Cohen, p. 372). Along with the destruction of cities, reconstruction was not a brief moment apart or simply a response to an emergency, but was a preoccupation of architects, planners and politicians throughout the twentieth century.²⁹ Cohen's extensive discussion of wartime reconstruction plans for Europe illustrates the extent of international exchange in planning ideas (Cohen, ch. 11). As air power developed reconstruction became ever more closely tied to anticipated, and then witnessed, destruction from the sky. The debates about the future of cities together with questions about how

²⁵ Jay Winter, 'From War Talk to Rights Talk: Exile Politics, Aerial Bombardment and the Construction of the Human Rights Project during the Second World War', in Overy, Baldoli, and Knapp, eds, *Bombing, states and Peoples*, pp. 317, 322, 319.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

²⁷ Antoine Prost and Jay Winter, *René Cassin. René Cassin et les droits de l'homme: le projet d'une génération* (Paris: Fayard, 2011).

²⁸ A famous example is B.H. Liddell Hart, *Paris, or the Future of War* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1925); Biddle, *Rhetoric and reality in air warfare*, ch. 2.

²⁹ This is the key theme in Jeffry Diefendorf, ed. *Rebuilding Europe's Blitzed Cities* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

to remember the consequences of air raids was a central problem for the world emerging out of the Second World War.

In the introduction to *Cities into Battlefields*, Goebel and Keene address how reconstruction after 1945 was 'complicated by aesthetic considerations and financial constraints,' and argue that 'replanning and rebuilding were in truth powerful acts of remembrance and forgetting.'³⁰ In the reconstruction of bombed cities the memory and memorialisation of the death of civilians and the destruction of cities has proven problematic.³¹ The traditional language and imagery of war memorials struggled with the dissolution of the distinction between civilians and combatants, while the remnants of modern war, the ruined buildings and streets were being incorporated into the architectural language and identity of the city.³²

Three chapters in *Cities into Battlefields* deal with how commemoration and reconstruction were intertwined in Coventry and Japan. Goebel demonstrates how a provincial English city developed into the leading 'commemorative cosmopolis' of post-war Europe. Coventry has been embedded into the vocabulary used to describe the new experience of the destruction of a city from the air. 'Coventration', or *coventrieren*, had 'given the unspeakable a name'. It had also given Coventry an international identity and a unique voice in the Cold War debates about nuclear war. Coventry was at the heart of a transnational movement that reached through the Iron Curtain to foster international understanding and reconciliation.³³ Partnership schemes with Dresden illustrated the potential of remembrance that was not nationalistic or univocal.

In contrast, the chapters by Lisa Yoneyama and Julie Higashi raise questions about memorialisations in Tokyo and Hiroshima. Higashi argues that the Yasukuni Shrine and the museums nearby 'make a mute statement by not inviting visitors to reflect upon the complexity of wartime experience'. Nationalistic and militarist overtones 'represent the present as an extension of the

³⁰ Goebel and Keene, 'Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War', p. 35.

³¹ This is particularly the case in Germany as evidenced by the response to Winfried G. Sebald, *On the natural history of destruction* trans. Anthea Bell, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003) and Jörg Friedrich, *The fire: the bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* trans. Allison Brown, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). See also Jörg Arnold, *The Allied air war and urban memory: the legacy of strategic bombing in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³² Goebel and Keene, 'Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War', p. 35.

³³ Goebel, 'Commemorative Cosmopolis: Transnational Networks of Remembrance in Post-War Coventry', in Goebel and Keene, eds., *Cities into Battlefields*, pp. 163, 165, 177.

imperial past, uninterrupted and ongoing'.³⁴ Debates about some of the problems with memorialisation, like those criticised by Higashi which subsume the complexities of experience were revived recently with the unveiling of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, in London. The memorial demonstrated the ongoing problems of remembering air war and suggested that, as the threat of nuclear annihilation has receded, air war is seen with a less critical eye. While a meaningful partnership was forged between Coventry and Dresden in the 1950s, it required a direct intervention from the Mayor of Dresden, Helma Orosz, when the plans for the memorial became public in 2010 to create any transnational communication.³⁵ In addition to the inscription honouring the 55,573 airmen who died, an inscription was added to remember 'those of all nations who lost their lives in the bombing of 1939-45', but this was largely absent from the media coverage of the unveiling.³⁶ There is a danger that such memorials obscure the complexities and ambiguities about the Allied bombing offensive and suggest that the deliberate destruction of entire cities from the air was and is as an inevitable consequence of modern war.

In all these works there is a distinct awareness of the importance of remembering, as Overy puts it: 'the harsh reality for all bombed communities was mass death and mutilation'.³⁷ The books reviewed here reveal a complicated reaction to air war in Britain and offer important international comparisons. Grayzel and Mellor demonstrate the varied ways in which the fear of air raids, and the experience of living in a city under fire, impacted on people, which have been obscured by traditional accounts of the home front in Britain. Cohen's architectural history demonstrates the pervasiveness of war and its influence on objects as well as subjects, while the two edited books introduce important themes and trace them across borders. By focussing on the city and how war has altered it and how it is perceived, while avoiding a depoliticising tendency to assume a 'natural' relationship between cities and destruction, historians can continue to question how people remember war. Cities were recast as targets and then as ruins, as sites of war production and national survival where the state and subject became increasingly inter-dependent, and as memorials to past wars. Discussions of the changing role and face of cities should deal explicitly and critically with the ways in which the 'unthinkable has become acceptable', and how the boundaries

³⁴ Lisa Yoneyama, 'Memories in Ruins: Hiroshima's Nuclear Annihilation and Beyond, in Goebel and Keene, eds., *Cities into Battlefields*, pp. 185-202; Julie Higashi, 'The Spirit of War Remains Intact: The Politics of Space in Tokyo and The Yasukuni Shrine', in Goebel and Keene, eds., *Cities into battlefields*, pp. 217, 203.

³⁵ James Meikle, 'Queen unveils memorial to Bomber Command', *The Guardian* 28 June, 2012. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/28/queen-memorial-bomber-command?INTCMP=SRCH>.

³⁶ 'Queen unveils RAF Bomber Command memorial', BBC News website, 28 June, 2012. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18600871> [accessed 07/02/2012].

³⁷ Overy, 'Introduction', p. 18.

between war and peace, combatant and non-combatant, city and battlefield, are increasingly hard to determine.

Comparative histories of the varied lived experiences should be brought together with the ways in which these experiences were fictionalised and remembered. An inter-disciplinary approach can bring together the physical and imagined city. Building on these texts, historians can address the question of how bombing civilians became normal and acceptable, by analysing the ways in which the ideas and discourses of air war were translated into the material fabric of the city itself: its architecture, streets, and infrastructure. Historians can illuminate further how air raids became both a feature of urban life and part of the physical aspect of cities, by taking cultural histories into the built environment, and discussing how the fear of air raids was written into material cultures of cities. Building on these texts, more work addressing how air raids became routine could focus on how the fear of bombing was written into the visions and plans for the future of cities, outside the temporary emergency measures of civil defence planning. Urban planning offers a way to critically analyse the idea of a 'temporary emergency' in the age of air war. Cities and citizens were transformed as aerial warfare became a feature of urban planning and urban life, belying the notion of wartime as an exceptional moment, and recasting it as a chronic condition.