



The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War

By Robert Bevan

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A decimated Shiite shrine in Iraq. The smoking World Trade Center site. The scorched cityscape of 1945 Dresden. Among the most indelible scars left by war is the destroyed landscapes, and such architectural devastation damages far more than mere buildings. Robert Bevan argues here that shattered buildings are not merely “collateral damage,” but rather calculated acts of cultural annihilation.

From Hitler’s Kristallnacht to the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s statue in the Iraq War, Bevan deftly sifts through military campaigns and their tactics throughout history, and analyzes the cultural impact and catastrophic consequences of architectural destruction. For Bevan, these actions are nothing less than cultural genocide. Ultimately, Bevan forcefully argues for the prosecution of nations that purposely flout established international treaties against destroyed architecture.

A passionate and thought-provoking cri de coeur, *The Destruction of Memory* raises questions about the costs of war that run deeper than blood and money.

“The idea of a global inheritance seems to have fallen by the wayside and lessons that should have long ago been learned are still being recklessly disregarded. This is what makes Bevan’s book relevant, even urgent: much of the destruction of which it speaks is still under way.”—*Financial Times Magazine*

“The message of Robert Bevan’s devastating book is that war is about killing cultures, identities and memories as much as it is about killing people and occupying territory.”—*Sunday Times*

“As Bevan’s fascinating, melancholy book shows, symbolic buildings have long been targeted in and out of war as a particular kind of mnemonic violence against those to whom they are special.”—*The Guardian*

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Editorial Review

Review

"Timely and original. . . . In this indispensable and beautifully written first international survey of its type, Robert Bevan raise the importance of safeguarding the world's architectural record."

(Ellen Bennett *Building Design* 2005-07-01)

"Mr. Bevan's text is brimming with detail and informed insight regarding the conflicts he covers. . . . Excellent book."

(*Art Newspaper* 2006-01-05)

"As Bevan's fascinating, melancholy book shows, symbolic buildings have long been targeted in and out of war as a particular kind of mnemonic violence against those to whom they are special."

(*Guardian*)

"The idea of a global inheritance seems to have fallen by the wayside and lessons that should have long ago been learned are still being recklessly disregarded. This is what makes Bevan's book relevant, even urgent: much of the destruction of which it speaks is still under way."

(Lucy Daniel *Financial Times Magazine* 2006-01-22)

"His narrative is compelling and convincing. This important book reveals the extent of cultural warfare, exposes its nature and, by helping us to understand some of the most terrible tragedies of recent times, gives us the means and resolve to fight this evil. All who care must read this book and learn its lessons."

(Dan Cruickshank *The Independent* 2006-02-10)

"The message of Robert Bevan's devastating book is that war is about killing cultures, identities and memories as much as it is about killing people and occupying territory. War is not just licensed murder but licensed vandalism. Since people are replaceable but buildings and cultures not, the destruction of buildings is often the more ferocious."

(Simon Jenkins *The Sunday Times (UK)* 2005-02-26)

The Destruction of Memory presents a dark account of how that devastation is brought about, along with a cogent argument for why it deserves recognition as an atrocity separate from the human carnage it so often accompanies. . . . Bevan's grim statistics force readers to confront yet another dimension of the savagery of our age."

(Tom Lewis Wilson *Quarterly* 2006-04-01)

"Bevan wisely doesn't push his case to the point of strict consistence; his weighting of the role of architecture in war is not absolutely uniform from case to case, nor does it need to be. . . . It is sobering to have so many apparent facts and figures in one book. . . . Where power belongs to the aggressor, the destruction of one family's home might be taken as the first embodiment of a genocide. In reminding us of this Bevan has performed a valuable service, no matter what we may think about a rebuilt Warsaw or a cherished ruin. . . . If we accept that there is no architecturally embodied identity of a nation or people, that our current historical existence is not vitally wrapped up in relics of an imagined past except as nostalgia, then we are unlikely to worry about the occasional destruction of buildings. Bevan's book makes clear that such insouciance (and

nostalgia) is the privilege of the secure and well-defended nation-states where the continuity of home and shelter is assumed."

(David Simpson *London Review of Books* 2006-05-25)

"Thoughtful and provocative. . . . Yet from the Nazi looting of synagogues to the Taliban's demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas, deliberate destruction of the physical environment has often presaged devastating conflicts. Bevan's timely book urges us to remain attentive to such early warning signs."

(Joshua Arthur *In These Times* 2006-07-07)

"This absorbing study attempts to tease out meaning from these various vandalisms."

(*The Scotsman*)

"His research runs deep, and his visits and interviews are wide-ranging. . . . Instructive."

(Reamy Jansen *Bloomsbury Review* 2006-09-01)

"The sheer volume and scope of the material Bevan has gathered on the destruction of architectural heritage as a form of 'cultural cleansing' makes *The Destruction of Memory* a valuable resource. . . . The mass of absolutely fascinating, morally complex, and, to me at least, often unfamiliar material . . . makes Bevan well worth reading. . . . And yet the book is worth reading, because Bevan uses vivid narrative detail to bring to our attention the important insight that 'the destruction of the cultural artifacts of an enemy people or nation' can be a kind of analog to genocide or ethnic cleansing."

(Diana Muir *History News Network* 2007-05-14)

"Concentrates on the erasure of cultures by the destruction of their buildings and is a must-read."

(*RIBA Journal* 2007-04-01)

"The ways in which memory inheres in all parts of the built environment is expressed clearly and this is an absorbing, sobering and scholarly book."

(Leslie Sklair *Political Studies Review* 2007-05-01)

About the Author

Robert Bevan is the former editor of *Building Design* and writes regularly on architectural, design, and housing issues for national newspapers. He lives in Sydney, Australia.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frances Smith:

This book entitled *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* to be one of several books which best seller in this year, this is because when you read this book you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy that book in the book retail store or you can order it via online. The publisher in this book sells the e-book too. It makes you easier to read this book, because you can read this book in your Smartphone. So there is no reason for your requirements to past this book from your list.

John Guenther:

People live in this new day time of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the time or they will get great deal of stress from both everyday life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have time, we will say absolutely without a doubt. People is human not just a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to you of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, typically the book you have read is usually The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War.

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