THE RESILIENT CITY:
HOW MODERN CITIES RECOVER FROM DISASTER

In their Introduction to Resilient Cities, Vale and Campenella argue that cities have historically been resilient to disaster, but that the rate of resilience also seems to be increasing over the past 200 years even while "the mechanisms for destruction have multiplied." The authors classify urban disasters by scale of destruction, human toll, type of disaster (natural disasters, such as fire and flood, are distinguished from human disasters, which are classified as accidental or deliberate and place-targeted). The authors discuss what it means for a city to "recover," and that assessment of recovery depends on whether one is thinking in terms of economic recovery, infrastructure rebuilding/recovery, or recovery of the inhabitants' sense of well-being and normalcy.

In the conclusion to Resilient Cities, Vale and Campanella propose a theory of urban resilience integrating case studies from different cities to develop a set of common factors influencing a city's resilience to urban disaster. They propose twelve axioms that cover most aspects of urban resilience: narratives of resilience are a political necessity; disasters reveal the resilience of governments; local resilience is linked to national renewal; resilience is underwritten by outsiders; urban rebuilding symbolizes urban resilience; remembrance drives resilience, resilience benefits from the inertia of private investment; resilience exploits the power of place; resilience casts opportunism as opportunity; resilience is site-specific; and resilience entails more than rebuilding.

Of these, I was particularly interested in the inertia of prior investment as benefiting resilience. I found the example of reconstruction of the World Trade Center helpful in demonstrating how entrenched economic interests play a large role in determining the city's reconstruction, favoring return to the pre-disaster status quo. I was also intrigued by the finding that "resilience is underwritten by outsiders," especially the powerful roles that insurance companies (in the case of lower Manhattan), and international politics (in the case of Tangshan, Gernika, and Bam) play in affecting resilience to disaster.