Battery Park City: An American Dream of Urbanism

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The process of creating design guidelines brings into play important existential questions about how we view ourselves as a culture through our architecture and urban form. In some cases, design guidelines are the perpetuation of existing misunderstood value systems or, worse yet, the unwitting perfecion of ideologies that are reluctantly understood to be disdainful. The results are comfortable and supportive of the existing socio-economic conditions, but contain an underlying crisis of meaning, experience, and culture. With this perspective we will examine Battery Park City in Manhattan, which was formulated according to a comprehensive set of design guidelines governing both its urban morphology and architectural expression. Of particular concern is the resultant urban morphology and architectural iconography as it reflects the underlying ideology of the design guidelines themselves. Battery Park City is relevant because of its comprehensive planned structure within one of the world’s most well-defined cities, as well as its manifest ideology, created during this “moment of late consumer or multi-nation capitalism,” as Frederick Jameson labels the end of the twentieth century (Jameson, 1983, 125).

Battery Park City is a $4-billion mixed-use development on 92 acres of landfill in the Hudson River adjacent to the west side of Lower Manhattan. The landfill is a product of the early 1970s excavation for the foundations of the nearby World Trade Center towers and other buildings. Proposals had been made for the planning of this site as early as 1969; the current proposal was formulated during 1979–85 by Alexander Cooper Associates (Cooper Eckstut). This proposal called for structuring the new urban morphology on a grid system, with land parcelization as is typically found in Manhattan. In addition to the master plan of the development, Alexander Cooper formulated specific guidelines to determine building siting and massing, and a detailed set of restrictions on architectural qualities that determine colors, materials, and facade articulation. As promulgated by the designers, Battery Park City was to recreate and extend Manhattan across a narrow strip of landfill. In analyzing this plan, its guidelines, and built form we are able to understand its ideology and observe how it operates as a reflection of our current culture.

THE MASTER PLAN AND ITS URBAN MORPHOLOGY

Prior to its annexation and landfill, the Battery Park City site was part of the Hudson River pierhead. While this landfill is certainly the largest single expansion of Manhattan in recent years, it represents only a continuation of the expansion process that began shortly after the settlement of the city. Because Manhattan is an urban island,
the quality of the relationship of the urban fabric with the edge takes on a special meaning. Until the 1940s, the Manhattan waterfront was devoted to the service of maritime industry with an active pierhead. The edge of Manhattan was defined by the nature of activities along the river as well as the river itself. While the port defined the edge of the city, both physically and functionally, the core of Manhattan grew around the spine of Broadway, where retail, commercial, banking, and legislative functions congealed to constitute “downtown.” Manhattan’s development up to the mid-twentieth century had been driven primarily by a tendency to turn away from the river toward the interior of the island and the “civilizing” activities of culture. When the necessity of open space became apparent, New Yorkers proceeded, with the help of Frederick Law Olmsted, to fabricate their own version of “nature” in the 500-acre Central Park. Only after World II did new pressures of land speculation and urban density force a reconsideration of the waterfront as habitable space. In 1947, Paul and Perceival Goodman wrote of Manhattan, “By taking advantage for the first time, of its rivers hitherto, almost prevented by commerce and industry—it can become a city of neighborhoods wonderful to live in, as leisurely and comfortable as it is busy and exciting.” (Goodman, 1960, 227). But as the port activities of the waterfront declined under the encroachment of rail and road, the edge of Manhattan was redefined by the east- and westside highways, and the Goodman’s vision was abandoned.

Noncommercial Manhattan developments have typically initiated ambivalent responses to the waterfront. The highrise housing of Tudor City on the East River oriented its views away from the river and its industrial structures along the waterfront. But in the 1940s the United Nations chose a site on the river where it replaced a stockyard. Perhaps the most positive response to the river was Riverside Park, modeled by Olmsted, which avoided the Westside Highway and moved directly to the water’s edge. The park itself became a transparent buffer that replaced the function of the previous working edge of Manhattan.

The first major proposal for building to the waterfront was described in a 1966 proposal for Lower Manhattan in a linear city of low-rise, high-density fabric by Wallace-McHarg, Wittlesey and Conklin. This proposal covered the waterfront from the Brooklyn Bridge on the east to Canal Street on the west. Office and housing towers on stepped section plinths with courtyards were to constitute whole blocks on the waterfront. These blocks were disengaged from the pattern of the inner-core fabric, blocking many vistas from the center core to the rivers. All of the buildings, except for the towers, were six to eight floors and bordered by a continuous promenade along the rivers. When the Battery Park City landfill was suggested, a new study was undertaken by Harrison and Abramovitz, Johnson and Burgee, Conklin and Rossant in 1969 (Fig. 18-1). Similarly, this was a “megastructure” scheme that designated north and south waterfront housing groups, or “pods,” on either side of a retail and recreational area across from the World Trade Center, with three interconnected office towers at the southern end of the development.

The current proposal, developed in 1979 by Alexander Cooper Associates (Cooper Eckstut), differs from the previous proposals in choosing to reemphasize the “street” by extending the Broadway grid over the site. The development is zoned into two residential areas at the north and south, bracketing a commercial center situated across from the World Trade Center (Fig. 18-2). The six-million-square-foot commercial center consists of three 50-story office towers and a cluster of low structures at their base. The residential areas are organized on small east-west cross
Figure 18-2. 1979 Battery Park City Plan.
streets originating from the Broadway grid and a few major north-south avenues. Each residential area has special open spaces, such as Rector Place, South Cove, and Battery Place on the south, and North End Avenue and Chambers Park on the north, and is ringed along the river by a 1.2 mile esplanade running the length of the development to Battery Park.

A relationship to “edge” marks most clearly the heritage against which new developments on Manhattan’s waterfront can be viewed. Accordingly, we can understand the novelty of Battery Park City relative to the historical attitudes about development of the Manhattan waterfront. At no point in Manhattan is the street grid extended to the water, either over or under the existing roadway barriers, though the experience of the river in an esplanade and a park has been used successfully in Riverside Park, Carl Schurz Park on the Upper East Side, and elsewhere. Where building has moved to the river, it occurs as an “overlook” condition without direct access to the water, for example, Sutton Place and Brooklyn Heights. Traditional modernist methods of building to the water have advocated a puncturing of the edge with megastructures, such as Paul Rudolph’s proposal for a media center and Davis Brody’s Waterside Apartments built in 1974. This later built project is a semisuccessful creation in which the megastructure projects as an object-island into the East River.

The Block and Street morphology of the Battery Park City plan clearly has much more in common with Manhattan than previous modernist waterfront proposals. However, this proposed “extension” of the city’s urban fabric is distinctly apart from that from which it is derived. Though extended from Broadway the Battery Park City street grid is dissimilar to the rest of the city’s block structure. The Manhattan grid is composed of rectangular blocks that provide an orienting structure within the city. Rectangular blocks in the east-west direction, combined with the narrowness of Manhattan Island, tend to direct views in either direction from the core to the waterfronts. Even though the river is largely inaccessible, this view mechanism also provides orientation. Battery Park City’s mostly square blocks may create a disorienting factor within the new district (Schwarting, 1981, 36).

Additionally, the divisive position of West Street at the east side of the new district functions to isolate the area. While the scale of this road is smaller than the previously planned Westway proposal (a six-lane highway along Manhattan’s west side), it still poses an insurmountable barrier between Battery Park City and the core of Lower Manhattan. Despite the intentions of Battery Park City’s planners to extend the fabric of the city, the 275-foot width and high-speed vehicular activity of West Street prevent an experiential unification of the new development with the city. Because of this, Battery Park City will remain a separated and autonomous part of Lower Manhattan. A more effective approach to integrating Battery Park City with the rest of the city would have considered not only the basic grid structure of the city, but more importantly the existing relationships between districts in Lower Manhattan. “Generally the districts relate to areas with distinctive character and place and often relate to the formal morphology of Manhattan, their name alone provides a degree of awareness.” In addition, “it would appear that Lower Manhattan ... has a very complex morphology which, if ordered, is more latent than actual, or more implicit than explicit” (Schwarting, 1975, 5). Districts in this area would have an adjacency, which is somewhat amorphous, created by areas of overlap and buffers operating as transition zones. This is the organic nature of the urban fabric.

Battery Park City does not participate in these mechanics, primarily because of West Street. The boundary condition will be too severe to permit overlap. So that while the extension of the grid, though distorted, carries with it a conceptual idea of the continuation of the urban fabric, this is not reinforced by the perceptual unification of the parts that manifests itself in the urban fabric of Lower Manhattan. In its ambivalent response to the basic existing edge conditions of Manhattan the new morphology of Battery Park City does not adhere to the inherent urban structure of its context. The designer’s initial response of extending the grid to reassert the primacy of the street is a logical extension of the urban fabric, but an essentially superficial one. This is a theme that carries through the development, in its determining design guidelines, and its underlying ideology.
DESIGN GUIDELINES AND ARCHITECTURAL FORM

The development at Battery Park City represents a public-private partnership on a scale unprecedented in New York. Because of the proposed participation of numerous parties, Coopers Eckstut enacted a far-reaching set of planning and design guidelines for the development. The bulk of these guidelines were created for the residential areas north and south of the commercial center. This analysis of design guidelines and architectural form will focus on the south residential area, Rector Place in particular (Fig. 18-3), as this is the first completed district, and the first to reflect the final product of the design guidelines.

The established development guidelines for the south residential area are as follows. Massing is largely composed of 6- to 9-story buildings with taller buildings interspersed at the ends of Rector Place (Figs. 18-4, 18-5). A series of towers along West Street steps up from 250 to 400 feet. All massing maintains strong street walls. Rector Place is massed with two 25-story buildings at both west and east ends with a 25-story building across from a 44-story building on the south. In the middle on the north side is a 15-story apartment building situated across from a low 9-story building. Height of street walls are dictated as 60–85 feet on the west and 110–35 feet to the east of South End Avenue. Land allocation is dominated by residential use, except on the ground floors, where retail and professional office use are preferred on all north-south avenues. Restaurants and community facilities are sited adjacent to large open spaces.

In addition to guidelines governing the project at the scale of the massing, land use, and so on, another set of guidelines dictated specific architectural details of each building as follows. Buildings should be made of brick with a two- or three-story stone base; metal and glass curtain walls and concrete are prohibited. Special articulation is required at lobby entrances, polished stone is discouraged. Brick walls should be constructed with standard 2 1/4" × 8" bricks with intermediate expression lines of stone at 75–85 feet on the facade to reduce the scale of the streetwall. Different color brick tones are required for adjacent or
opposite development parcels. Reflective glass in the windows is prohibited, with variation in the window size encouraged. Masonry colors must be within a range of warm earth tones, contrasting colors are discouraged. "Sensitive arrangements of colors and materials are desired for decorative purposes in special locations." Colors of metal elements, window frames, railings and fences are to be a "parklike" black or dark green. Rooftops and bulkheads of buildings should be designed to create special and interesting effects with terraces and setbacks recommended. Articulated roof lines or parapets should be major decorative features made of stone or masonry. Expression lines marked by changes of color, texture, materials, or fenestration are required at 75–85 feet. Pedestrian arcades are required on north-south avenues to provide weather protection and access to retail and commercial facilities. Balconies may not occur within ten feet of a corner nor below the sixth floor. Relief of scale is encouraged on the stone bases of the buildings through changes in type, height, and pattern of the stonework to visually distinguish two different buildings and "thereby avoid excessively large massing on the streets." Roofs of parking structures must be landscaped and all roofs should be designed with consideration to the views from above. All exterior lighting will be the same type of lamp commonly used in New York City parks. Other guidelines restrict signage, fencing, canopies, and exhausts, and so forth (Cooper, Eckstut, 1985).

These guidelines, set forth in the May 1985 Master Plan for Battery Place, are those that governed the design of the Rector Place residential area and other residential areas when built. The recently completed Rector Place is part of the southern residential district, located just south of the commercial center and the preexisting Gateway Plaza. As intended, the existing massing of the eight buildings along Rector Park follows the massing guidelines. All of the buildings have unique qualities, but they also have, necessarily, the same types of features—stone bases, expression lines and cornices, honorific articulation of entry, and a picturesque massing of the upper floors and bulkheads. Some buildings are highly articulated while others meet the minimum requirements of the guidelines. For example, the building on site H/I (Fig. 18-6) at the northwest corner of South End Avenue, by Charles Moore,

Figure 18-6. Initial Architectural Proposal for Parcel H/I.

is perhaps overdesigned for a "developer's condominium," with multiple cornice lines, balconies, and a distinctively framed arched opening midway up the facade. Conversely, the building across Rector Park on site L and A by Bond, Ryder, James is plainly articulated on the upper stories with dominant brick panels extruded from a stone surface. Most of the detailing, with cornices, arched openings, rustication, and the like, is based on traditional models of masonry construction, even though all surfaces are veneered. This detailing in the construction of the stone bases, with the use of carved panels and varied textured, colored, and sized coursing gives the illusion of bearing wall joinery. Bulkhead design on the buildings range from a semiconstructivist treatment in James Polshek's corner tower, a recycled Art Deco expression across the park in the top of Ulrick Franzen's building, and a traditional heavy cornice on Charles Moore's building.

Distinctive design in these buildings, ranging from picturesque massing to detailing of the stonework, is an attempt to use a stylized architectural vocabulary to denote a distinctive identity intended to contribute to a feeling of "place." Every detail, as structured by the guidelines, is successful at reducing the scale of fairly massive buildings to the level of the pedestrian and at attempting to lend the buildings and space some intimacy. In summary, the entire complex is apparently suc-
cessful at bringing together the best aspects of Manhattan’s urban fabric. Attractive brick and limestone buildings, a plenitude of landscaping in street trees and pocket parks, and a beautiful waterfront esplanade complemented by a luxurious yacht club are all set within the New York gridiron structure. This adoring view of Manhattan is intact down to the reproduced Central Park lampposts and prewar cast-iron benches.

It would be interesting at this point to return to the design guidelines with a closer examination of their origins and implications. Battery Park City is conceived, in its morphology of grid extension and articulation of building mass, to be a continuation of Manhattan’s urban fabric. What the master planners sought was a way to reproduce the essence of the best qualities of “New Yorkness” in its physical—if not exactly its social—form.

The formulation of the development control guidelines applied to Battery Park City have their roots in the early 1970s. Alexander Cooper, together with a team of planners for the city of New York, worked on a project that resulted in a new Zoning for Housing Quality, enacted in 1975. The study brought to fruition the efforts to promote and protect integral urban form that gained impetus in the 1960s with the theories of Jane Jacobs. At the root of these motivations was the notion that the city is wonderful and that it operates in a complex and miraculous way. The object was to study the city, understand how the best aspects of it worked, and then distill this into a usable formula. According to Cooper, “The challenge was to define and then quantify quality.” The group ended by establishing those goals common to neighborhoods, and good urbanity in general: security, stability, maintenance, privacy, scale, variety on a city scale with homogeneity on a neighborhood scale, vitality, convenience, and identity. These were the tools with which planners could start “providing the basis for genuine and original architectural expression growing out of valid needs and aspirations” (Reiss and Kwartler, 1974, p. 4). And this was the ideological foundation promulgated by the Battery Park City master planners and their guidelines.

The guidelines are a distillation of the morphological and iconographic conditions that make the traditional, prewar, block of New York successful. Cooper Eckstut catalogued those conditions from the cornices down to the fence railing and presented them in a formula for what the residential areas of Battery Park City should look like. In support of the guidelines they went so far as to include photographs of the nicer residential districts of Park and Fifth Avenues, the rooftops of Central Park West and others (Fig. 18-7). In the conception of Battery Park City, Cooper Eckstut has achieved the intent of the goals defined in 1975. The existing and projected built environment does achieve scale, variety and homogeneity, vitality, and identity. The spaces of Battery Park City are pleasant. The perceptual elements of the existing space are functioning well. The semiological aspects of the architectural language in the built projects work on a superficial level of apparent variety. The predominant stylistic tendency of borrowing historical styles is not immediately disturbing even where precedents are literally apparent, such as Chanin’s Century Towers in the work of Franzen, the McGraw-Hill building adapted by the Gruzen Partnership’s first proposal for parcel D, Conklin-Rossant’s duplication of the Dakota in the unbuilt first proposal for parcel C, and references to McKim, Mead and White’s 999 Fifth Avenue by Charles Moore (Marpillero, 1984, 21).

**IDEOLOGY**

Ideology can be seen as a certain set of representations and beliefs—religious, moral, political, and aesthetic, which refer to nature, society, and to life and activities of men in relation to nature and society. Ideology has the social function of managing the overall structure of society by inducing men to
accept in their consciousness the place and role assigned to them by this structure (Gandelsonas, 1973, 94).

The desire to control the urban development of large areas is essentially utopian. New forms are continually engineered to improve the environment of city dwellers, if not to propose a perfect society in themselves. The intent, or ideology, of these “perfections” is manifest in the form of the improvement and is of considerable impact to the occupants. The presence of ideologies is revealed in either latent or active form, each perfection adopting its own critical posture toward all others that preceded it. Clearly, to understand the true ideological foundation of this controlled urban development, we must look beyond the well-intentioned stated notions of the designers.

The ideology of Battery Park City as manifest in its design guidelines and built form is complex. The development of Battery Park City in both urban morphology and architectural expression postulates a pervasive disaffection with modernist notions of making urban form and architectural context. An essentially historicist attitude toward making architectural expression dominates the articulation guidelines of Battery Park City, and a contextual approach is adopted in recurrent reference to Manhattan’s morphology and iconography. This thinking reveals a romantic view of the mature urban context and its cultural richness that describes the uniqueness and essential fragility of the complex framework of urbanity.

At the same time, despite the antimodernist derivations from context and historical precedent, the form and guidelines of Battery Park City retain an inherent modernist attitude toward urban planning. In the tradition of the planning theory of the 1950s and 1960s the designers of Battery Park City have relied on a highly rational “systems approach” to defining and then “quantifying quality.” It is the rational approach to contextual and historicist applications through design guidelines that results in an ideological conflict. In formal terms this approach creates, at best, a “scientific picturesqueness.” Unfortunately, the street and block morphology and the prewar iconography, as recommended by the plan and guidelines, are mechanically derived from the New York context without benefit of its inherent cultural framework. Contextualist urban designers understand that the character of Manhattan is difficult to formulate and in cases of redevelopment is far more easily destroyed than recreated, as in recent proposals for Times Square (Hiss, 1990, 94). More importantly they know the essential qualities of “place” and context to be the history of the city and the nature of the people that occupy it. The architectural form of Battery Park City has been rendered without true insight into the nature and form of the city, much as the new urban morphology has been structured without understanding the complex district identities of Manhattan.

Further inconsistencies are evident. The mechanical derivation of design guidelines stems from positive humanistic concerns, but its misapplication results in serious consequences. According to Jencks, today’s notions of reinserting meaningful signs and symbols into architecture was a by-product of the response to the negative semiosis of late modern architecture (Jencks, 1980, 110). Yet the methodology proposed in the design guidelines to carry this out was still essentially modernist: to intellectually dissect, and then reconstruct, a “system” of meaningful architectural form. This same rational system of thought that, in late modernism, insisted that truthfulness of form was to be reflective of the inherent function of the building, now accepts the notion that the mechanical derivation and production of meaningful iconography through design guidelines is an acceptable functional activity for an architect. As Geoffrey Broadbent would say, “According to these, the creation of meaning is seen as functionalism” (Broadbent, 1980, 120).

However we understand the following discordance. While the creation of meaning is a functional goal, the meaning attempted at Battery Park City (historical “New Yorkness”) is unacceptable because it represents neither the true character of the new urban form nor its contemporary culture. Subsequently true modernists will reject this attempt though today, in the postmodern culture, we accept what they would not: that there necessarily exists a close relationship of sign behavior to “substitution,” as Umberto Eco put it (Eco, 1976, 6–7). The resultant architectural form of the guideline process at Battery Park City, the Rector Place Residential District in particular, displays rather clearly the “substitution” of a misappropriated language.

This is important in ideological terms, but also
for the "making of place." "Things... tell... about their own making, historical circumstances under which they were made, and if they are real things, they also reveal truth" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 187). The structural nature of the design guidelines is present in the architecture, even if the sought after qualities of "New Yorkness" are lost. It is the visibility of the design controls within the "inauthentic" architectural form that causes our identification of the "place" to be "untruthful." This condition causes deeper problems, particularly alienation, in which "man's loss of identification with... his environment... loss of place [causes] things [to] become mere objects of consumption which are thrown away after use" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 168).

It is just this urban alienation that the notion of the progressive master plan and architectural guidelines are designed to prevent. The reactionary response of postmodern planners, which attempts to recreate a known successful precedent, is not in itself dislikeable, but it is naive. It cannot succeed at making a place because of its own inherent limits. This method is not able to create new forms, but only to recombine environments, many of those without their necessary cultural structure. The "quantification of quality" is in itself a contradiction in terms. At best, it results, through design guidelines, in the uniformity of quality control.

In retrospect, we can see that the designers and the Battery Park City Authority do clarify early on that restrictive development guidelines, however eschewed by the developers themselves, would ensure a consistently high quality of environment, attractive to investors and consumers alike. Once developers became comfortable with the idea that guidelines would help them, they worked closely with the planning officials. Battery Park City represents the best of the political hybrid system, typical of New York, in which massive development projects are initiated and sometimes carried out through a colossal marriage of corporatism and public policy making, such as Westway, Lincoln West, and the Times Square Redevelopment Plan (Savitch, 1988, 59). The detailed guidelines are the ersatz legal manifestation of a corporate desire. Overarching this is the pervasive attitude that, indeed, above all else, the "city is a machine for wealth creation" (Hall, 1988, 343). Here it is difficult to avoid the Marxian critiques of planning popular in the 1970s. "Planning is an historically specific and socially necessary response to the self-disorganizing tendencies of privatized capitalist social and property relations as they appear in urban space" (Hall, 1988, 337). The design guidelines for Battery Park City have more to do with protecting developers from themselves than anything else.

It is possible to recognize another sinister yet successful ideology from within this analysis. As the ends justify the means, so the misappropriation of form in functional terms represents clearly three themes: the reinforcement of the urban symbols of the status quo, the vehicle for the driving economic pragmatism that makes New York what it is, and the structure for the protection of the economic system that will keep it working. Some would argue that the pursuit of profit is the "nature" of Manhattan. Notwithstanding, as Norberg-Schulz puts it, "the socio-economical conditions are like a picture frame, they offer a certain 'space' for life to take place, but do not determine its existential meaning" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 1).

MEANING

Economic pragmatism is the predominant theme typical of what Peter Hall terms "the Rousification of America" (Hall, 1988, 357). In the case of Battery Park City, the image being sold is "New Yorkness" with an economic and legal framework erected to support it. Most disturbingly, the result is more than the intentions of the developers, it is what the consumers demand.

Wholly preoccupied with reproduction, with the creation of urban disguises... the Ersatz Main Street of Disneyland... the phony historic festivity of a Rouse Marketplace... this elaborate apparatus is at pains to assert its ties to the kind of city life it is in the process of obliterating... an architecture of deception which, in its happy-faced familiarity, constantly distances itself from the most fundamental realities. The architecture of this city is almost purely semiotic, playing the game of grafted signification, theme park building (Sorkin, 1992, xiv).

It is the design guidelines that structure this urban illusion. Within a standard spatial structure and urban morphology, the architectural expres-
sion functions over a rigid syntax to produce a required varied semantic. The overall image is structured to create a “New York” environment. Individual buildings are designed to create a limited diversity. Images of turn-of-the-century Beaux-Arts work sit next to Art Deco or picturesque chateaux in relative pluralism, but a pluralism that is only “a willy-nilly juxtapositioning akin to the variety of media images that we can see on television” (Sorkin, 1985).

Controlled development and design guidelines have created a crisis of meaning in the architecture and urban structure of Battery Park City. Perhaps the strong contextualist approach to creating new urban and architectural form is to blame. Through the guidelines, the individual designers are required to look at prewar New York for models of appropriate architectural expression. They have accommodated the guidelines by creating “recombinant” architectural expressions that are not creative acts of interpretation and translation, but are directly borrowed from an established precedent (Fig. 18-8). This becomes both a confirmation of the designer’s restraints in creating original form and contemporary culture’s comfort with relying on known “cultural alibis” (Norberg-Schultz, 1979, 169).

As a prime component of the crisis of meaning the design guidelines’ reliance on historical precedent is an important issue and one endemic to the controversy of postmodern architecture. On the one side, it is clear that some reference to precedent is necessary as the precondition of any common understanding of architectural meaning. On the other side, we find that nontransformative recall of historical architectural form is more effective in undermining the desired meaning than in promoting it. According to Colquhoun, we are standing today, on one side of the “chasm” of twentieth-century modernism, where, when we recall historical form, “we tend to express its most general and trivial connotations; it is merely the ‘pastness’ of the past that is evoked” (Colquhoun, 1984, 38). Theorists claim that historicism is appropriate in appealing to society’s collective memory. In the context of Battery Park City, this tendency is more exploitive than accommodating as it taps “the semantic potential of heteroglossia, the ragbag collection of historical quotations” (Boyer, 1990, 126).
Without the meaningful expression of referent historical form, we are left with another problem. The architectural signification of recombinant form is not only chaotic, but it is directed toward "nonmeaning" in a very specific way. This product is "kitsch," which according to Leon Krier, "leaves us today either with shambles and detritus or with arrogant caricatures and illusions of culture, but in most cases with kitsch. Kitsch might be described as an amorphous compilation of confused codes... It is truly the most violent indication of the profound alienation which lies at the basis of industrial production" (Krier, 1978, 57). To a large degree, this is exactly what design guidelines are intended to prevent.

EXPERIENCE

As design controls have contributed to the crisis of meaning, they have also created a crisis of experience. The nature of the design guidelines at Battery Park City has confined the experience of the architecture and urban structure to a series of "images." Each building is expressed, largely, through a basic structural framework as a two-dimensional architectural image. Each urban space is a volumetric and visual composition that recalls other Manhattan spaces. All of this relies on references to architecture and urban form other than itself. The processing of these images is the seminal experience of the viewer, more so even than the spatial experience of blocks and streets or open public spaces. In this case, the phenomenological understanding of built form is overridden by a cognitive "reading" in which one experience depends on another for legitimacy. What spatial reality that exists is transformed into images. Frederick Jameson asserts that this is one of the extremely negative aspects of postmodern culture (Jameson, 1983, 125). The result is a topological understanding of "place" and space. Piaget views this process, not so much negative as naive, in the same way that he proposes that children perceive space, without the critical judgment necessary to define a three-dimensional environment nor the relative understanding of how to interact with it (Arnheim, 1966, 187). However, it is clear that in the same way that children interact with and represent the world with wildly disproportionate elements, so the architectural design guidelines of Battery Park City have disproportionately loaded the majority of the experience of "place" on the manipulation of what has become imagery. This implies the relative unimportance of spatial qualities in the experience of public places. This is not altogether surprising in its appeal to a contemporary culture for whom the experience of "place" is typically derived from the flat screen of a television.

CULTURE

Every aspect of this analysis of development control in Battery Park City has been constituting a description of a perceived crisis of culture. As urbanism manifests the ideology of the culture that produced it, so Battery Park City tells us about the current culture of consumption and its accompanying social disintegration. At their most fundamental level in Battery Park City, design guidelines are implemented to create a product and to ensure "quality control" during its manufacture. It represents refined methods in the production of "place" by postindustrial culture. The effort to create a more humane built environment through design controls has clearly been coopted by political and economic forces. But the result is not contrary to what the users need and expect. The shaping of the means of making "place" by the directives of marketing forces has come to be expected by contemporary society. The Battery Park City Authority should more accurately call itself the "Urban Experience Development Corporation," as Tony Hiss humorously describes the capitalism of place-making (Hiss, 1990, 99). This tendency manifests itself in the commodification of the urban experience through a production system of development control. The fabrication of consumable images of "New Yorkness" through the control of architectural and urban expression is compatible with the targeted group of users. In spatial and social terms, the experience sought has less to do with New York and more to do with preconceived ideas of what New York is or should be. This "post-modern culture can be said to be about the weaving of ever more elaborate fabrics of simulation, about successive displacements of 'authentic' signifiers" (Sorkin, 1992, 229). The urban experiences at Battery Park City are removed further and further from reality to
ics and Architecture: Ideological Consumption or Theoretical Work." *Oppositions* 73, no. 1: 93–100.


