

Urban design has acted as enabler in this precisely because of its ostensible divorce from the social engineering of planning, nominally expressed in its circumspect scales of intervention and resensitized approach to the physical aspects of urbanism. In New York—where our municipal leadership evaluates all development by the single metric of real estate prices—the Planning Department has largely refashioned itself as the Bureau of Urban Design, executor of policies emanating from the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development, the city’s actual director of planning, the man who would be Moses. While attention to the quality and texture of the city’s architecture and spaces—both new and historic—is of vital importance, the role of design as the expression of privilege has never been clearer. Whether in the wave of celebrity architects designing condos for the superrich, the preservation of historic buildings and districts at the ultimate expense of their inhabitants, the sacrifice of industrial space in favor of more remunerative residential developments, or the everyday cruelties of the exodus driven by the exponential rise in real estate prices, the city seems to everywhere sacrifice its rich ecology of social possibilities for simply looking good.

The most important physical legacy of the UDG approach is the 1979 plan for Battery Park City by Alexander Cooper (a former member of the UDG) and Stanton Eckstut, which—because of its successful execution and succinct embodiment of the new traditionalist lexicon of urban design—has achieved a conceptual potency unmatched since the *Plan Voisin*. This project, created ex nihilo on a spectacular landfill site, was controlled by a specially created state authority with a raft of special condemnation, bonding, and other powers, including relief from virtually all local codes and reviews (another Moses legacy and an ever-increasing element in the collusive style of large-scale development in the city), and attempted to channel the spirit and character of the historic city in a completely invented environment. It was surely also heavily influenced by the seminal *Collage City* of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, published in 1978, an argument for looking at the city as a series of interacting fragments, a promising strategy dissipated—like so much subsequent urban design—by inattention to the contemporary capacity for assuming meanings derived from the formal arrangements of imperial or seventeenth-century Rome. Battery Park City, by translating the UDG’s historicist ethos of urban design as a contextual operator into an agent for something entirely new and literally disengaged from the existing city, was the crucial