

bridge to the emerging New Urbanism and its universalizing polemics of “tradition.”

Like many subsequent New Urbanist formulations—not to mention the original cities from which its forms were derived—Battery Park City has its virtues. Its scale is reasonable, and its look conventionally orderly. Its waterfront promenade is comfortably dimensioned, beautifully maintained, and blessed with one of the most spectacular prospects on the planet. Vehicular traffic is a negligible obstacle to circulation on foot (although there is almost no life on the street to get in its way). The deficit is the unrelieved dullness of its bone-dry architecture, the homogeneity of its population and use, the repression of alternatives under the banner of urban correctness, the weird isolation, the sense of generic simulacrum, and the political failure to leverage its economic success to help citizens whose incomes are inadequate to live there.

By the time of the construction of Battery Park City, the assault on Modernist urbanism and the spirited defense of the fabric and culture of the historic city had long been paralleled by a withering interrogation of life in the suburbs. These were not simply the most rapidly growing component of the metropolis but were—largely under the analytical radar—increasingly taking over center-city roles en route to becoming the dominating edge city of today. The difficult reciprocities of city and suburb were longstanding as both facts and tropes. Indeed, the city itself was first recognized as a “problem” at the moment its boundaries exploded to produce the idea of the suburban during its industrialization-driven expansion in the nineteenth century. At that moment were realized the political, economic, social, technical, and imaginative forces that created the repertoire of forms of the modern city—the factory zone, the slum, and the suburb—as well as the array of formal antidotes that constitute the lineage of urban design. More, the invention of the city as the primal scene of class struggle, of self-invention, of a great efflorescence of new ways of pleasure and deviance, of habit and ritual, and of possibility and foreclosure, had immediate and deep implications for the creation and valuation of fresh form.

The mainstreaming of urban design in the 1960s and 1970s was, in part, a product of the diminished appeal of the suburbs, contingent on a parallel revaluing of the city as the site of desirable middle-class lifestyles, the happinesses that a previous generation had understood itself obliged to flee the city to achieve. The widespread critical re-