



Uneasy
SPACES

Uneasy Spaces is a photography project sponsored by the Design Trust for Public Space which considers the visual consequences that security measures have on public space throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The photographs document and illustrate individual security devices and situations as they arise in everyday existence. The project's process was generated by larger questions about public space and security as a condition of contemporary urban existence. While security measures sometimes involve prison-like structures surrounded by fencing and wiring, everyday life can be drastically altered or disrupted by security planning without it being recognized as such. The role of photography in this project was to expose these "hidden" security measures and literally "to make visible."

Uneasy Spaces is structured as a mapping project in which each of the five boroughs is fully represented. Design Trust Fellow Elizabeth Felicella imposed a grid over New York City using an MTA bus map, and chose evenly, though randomly, distributed points so that no coordinate was a previously known value. This structure was based on the assumption that security concerns are ubiquitous to urban existence and every location should be viewed as a source of equally valuable information. By implementing a less subjective selection process, Ms. Felicella hoped to bypass typical preconceptions about public space and move toward a more open and, at the same time, more detailed scale of examination. She granted careful attention to actual devices that were intentionally designed for security purposes, but also perceived and recorded unplanned elements that have come to serve a similar function. Where overt security measures were implemented, Ms. Felicella documented the local repercussions of those interventions. Where no security measures were immediately apparent, Ms. Felicella examined whether other elements might be serving a similar function in an unofficial capacity or why no measures had been deemed necessary. These less apparent measures, whether accidental or organic, have the potential to provide important insight into dangerous situations and suggest less invasive means of intervention.

This project grew out of concern that we are witnessing a general hardening of the public realm, whereby the aesthetic quality of our public spaces is compromised, contributing to an atmosphere of insecurity. Initially, the aim of the survey was to document architectural security measures that are implemented in public spaces throughout the five boroughs. For the purposes of the project, security architecture was defined as any element of a site that was designed, added or has come to function as a security/safety measure. Based on a literal interpretation of the definition, the category includes things like fences, lighting, and surveillance systems. Once work began, I realized that the question of security was often more elusive than an identifiable architectural structure—that it had to do with further reaching systems which set the rules or order of a space. In order to accommodate this broader working definition of security, I adopted the title, *Uneasy Spaces*.

In order to give the survey an identifiable structure, I treated it as a mapping project in which the five boroughs of New York City were represented. Fifty coordinates were taken from the MTA bus maps, each of which was documented as it pertains to the question of security and public space. This arbitrary division was intended to force a more detailed scale of examination and thereby challenge my own understanding of the physical and symbolic construction of security. Where blatant security measures have been implemented, my aim was to document the particular effect in that context—for instance, does a given fence or lighting installation prevent people from gathering in a space that is theoretically there for their use? If so, has another area been taken up to serve that local function? Where no security measures can be identified, my aim was to examine whether other elements might be serving similar functions in an unofficial capacity or why no measures have been deemed necessary.

In photographing, it became immediately apparent that not only were architectural security measures, as such, often difficult to identify but that the very grounds of the project raised fundamental and unanswerable questions—namely, what is security and who is the public? When talking about public space, security is largely a psychological construction and one that has everything to do with an individual's expectations of a neighborhood, if not the world, and his or her place in it—each of which are conditioned by the socioeconomic and the political. It is generally accepted that there is no one who may go absolutely anywhere at any time without any concern for his or her safety. There are boundaries and limits and territories and this is also generally accepted. This being the case, my difficulty arose in trying to establish criteria with which to understand the places that I documented. How could I determine whether a place "felt" secure if I had no way of circumventing my own sense of fear and security? And this was further problematized by the fact that photographing with a large format view camera is not a common entry in any list of public activity.

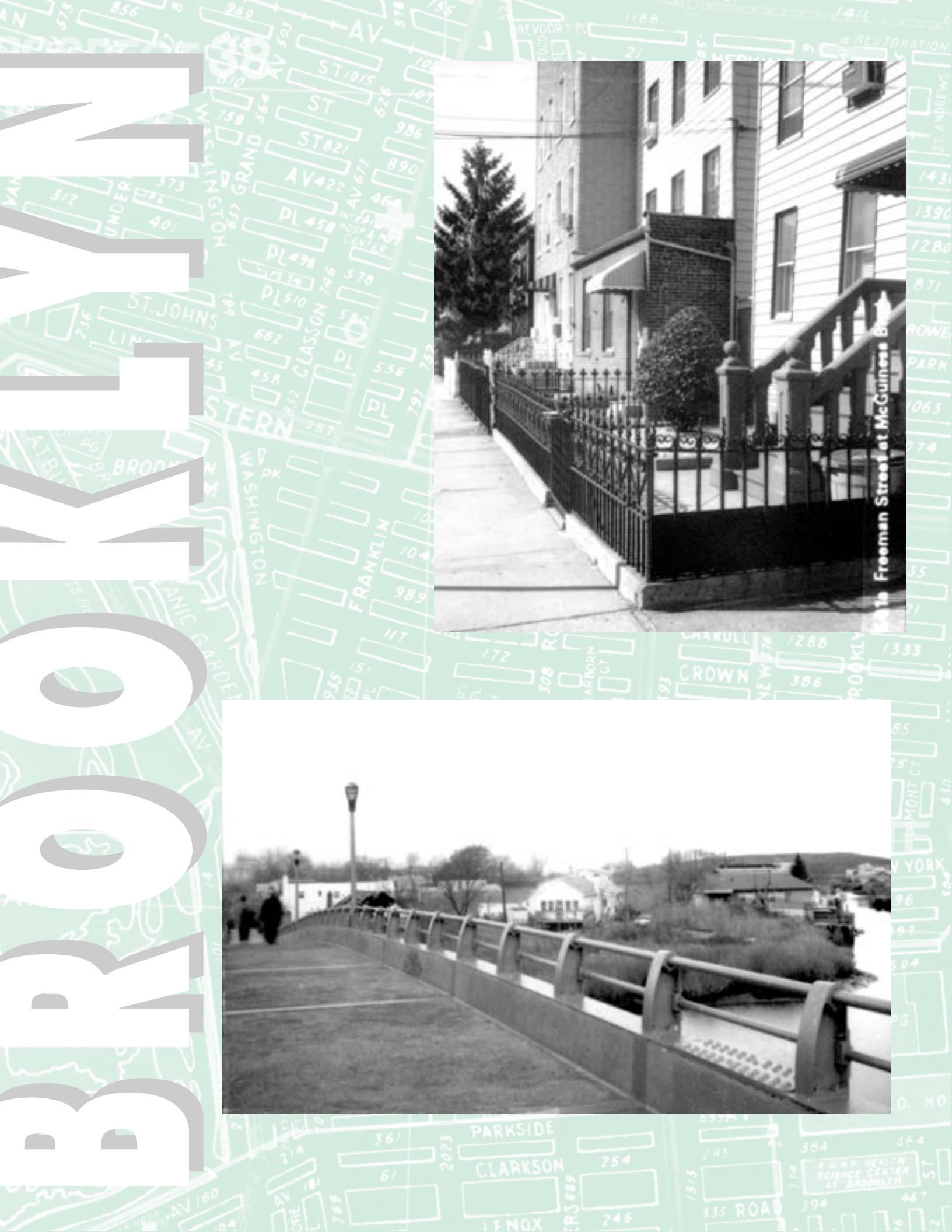
These were problems not only of method, but of perception itself, and as such were inescapable. However, the constant frustration of the limits and blind spots they imposed helped me to recognize aspects of security and public space that I had never considered. The most fundamental was the claiming and marking of space. I realized that the things that mark a neighborhood are both expressions of home and general indications of who sets the order. They serve to inform. Whether or not these signs actually insure the order they propose, this information is the first step in creating a sense of place and security. In terms of photographing, this meant that I looked for signs of whose neighborhood I was in and often documented these as the most preliminary and fundamental of security measures.

By accepting such things as security measures, I was also forced to reconsider what amounted to a general prejudice on my part that security measures were controls imposed on communities by outside powers. And while I would still not underestimate the detrimental controls to which many communities are subjected, I have come to understand security to be a more organic question of well-being within the active realm of sharing. This opened the field of subject matter even further, so that even the birthday decorations on a tree or a series of playing fields had something to do with security. It is also meant recognizing that although the category of safety is often exploited to gain control public of public space, there are, of course, legitimate and necessary safety precautions that foster the secure use of a space. Along these lines, I came to understand traffic divisions and guard rails as forms of security.

The photographs in the series refer to a ranging definition of security architecture – from this more abstract idea of marking and sharing to actual architectural devices, such as lighting or fencing. And within this range there are no clear categories into which the total; 140 images of the project can be sorted. When I began the project I imagined finishing with both definite conclusions about security and public space and a detailed overview of the subject. I cannot say that I possess either. Instead, I've developed a deep respect for the enormous complexity of the problem as it pertains to city planning and modern subjectivity. My hope now is that the project will continue to grow through the response of others and my own additional photography. I also hope that time will fill in some of the gaps, so that each image will be able to serve some purpose in the ongoing attempt to understand this organism that is our city.

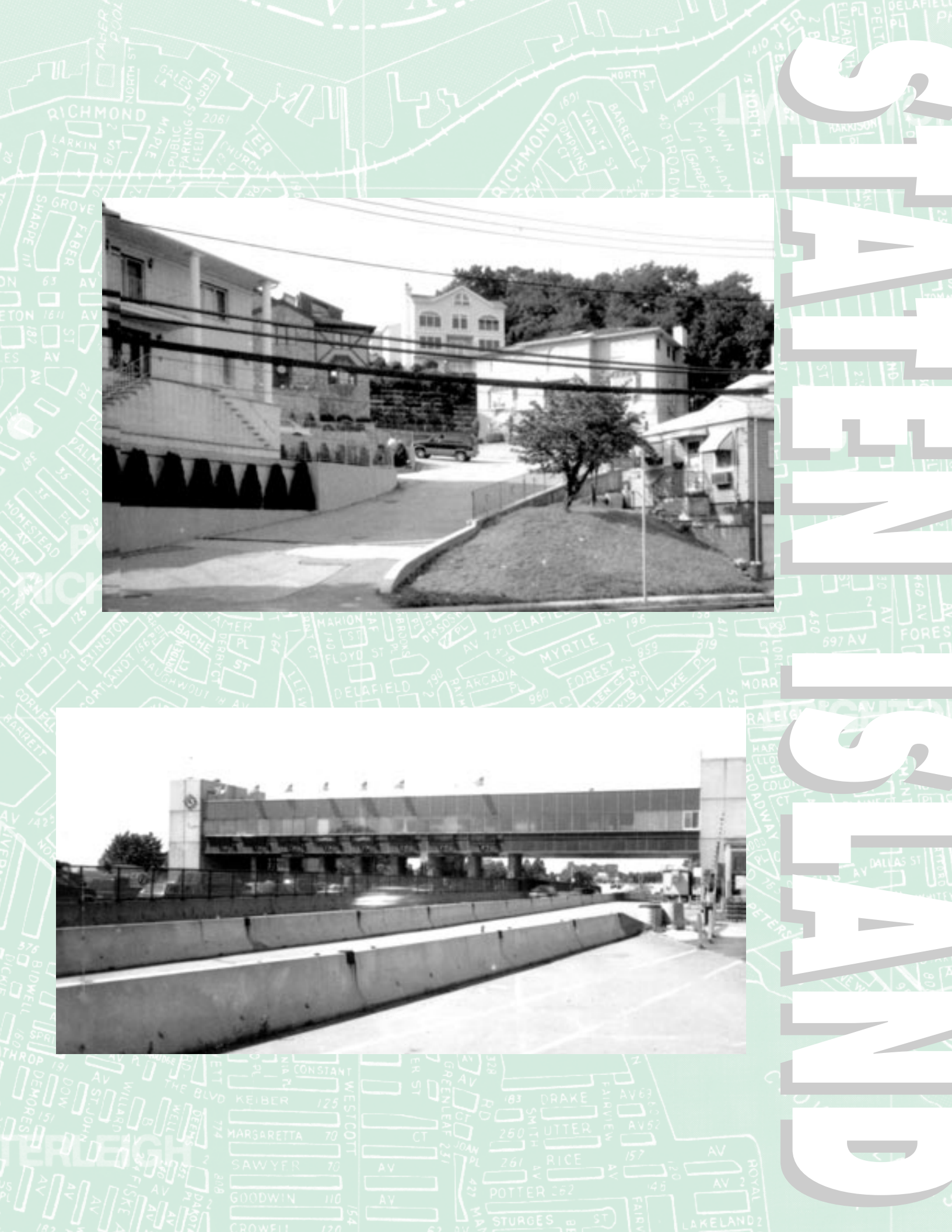
Elizabeth Felicella
1997

BROOKLYN



BRONX





S T A T E S T A M E N T



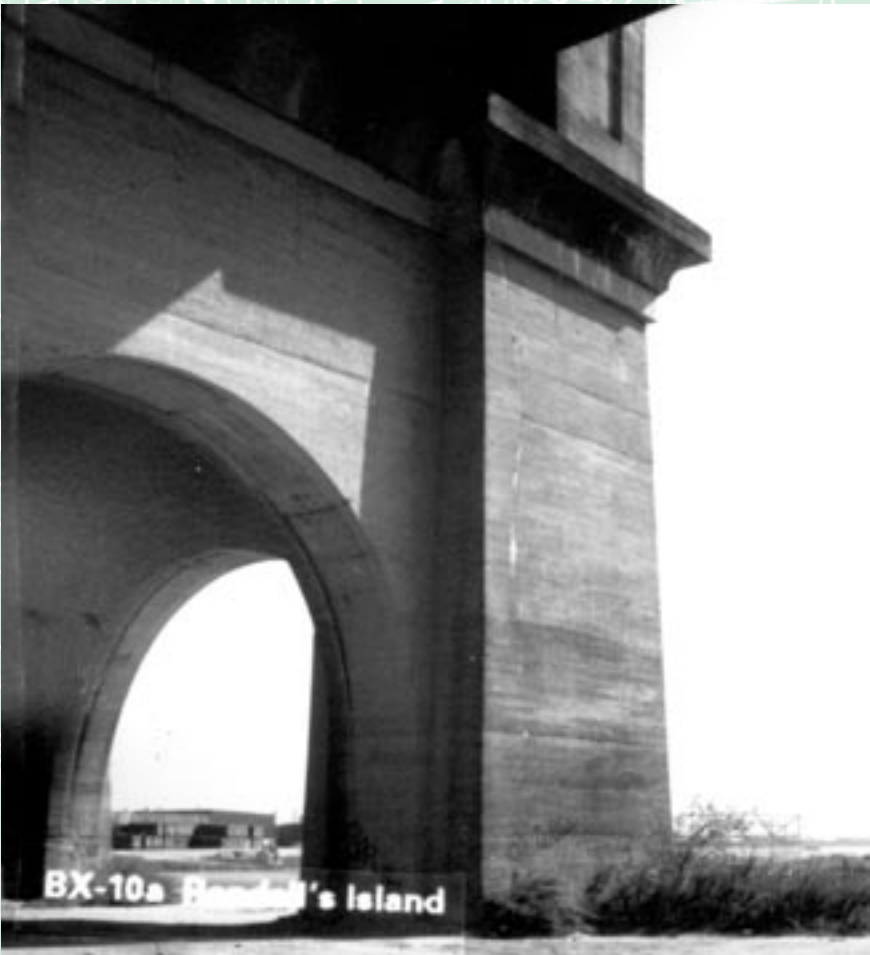
STAIRS





BRONX





BX-10a Randall's Island



BRONX





BX-05a Fordham Plaza



SEAFORD



65 FRESH MEADOWS



SE NE NE NE NE

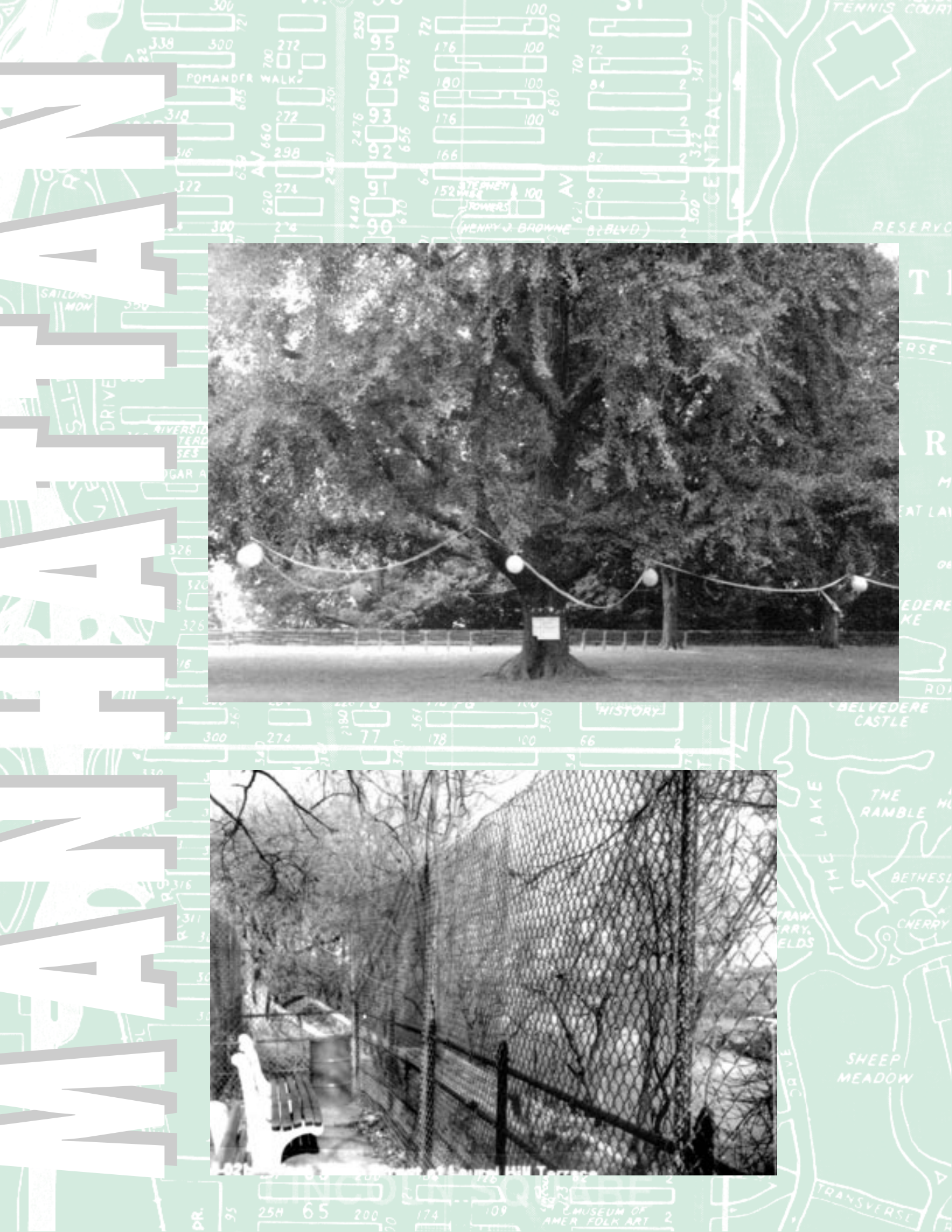


A green-tinted map background showing street names and building footprints. The text "FRESH MEADOWS" is visible in the upper left quadrant. Other street names include "PARK", "CLAWSON", "295", "3", "20A, B", "WEXFORD", "HILLSIDE", "WATER", "TER", "182 02", "183 02", "187 02", "188 02", "189 02", "190 02", "191 02", "192 02", "193 02", "194 02", "195 02", "196 02", "197 02", "198 02", "199 02", "200 02", "201 02", "202 02", "203 02", "204 02", "205 02", "206 02", "207 02", "208 02", "209 02", "210 02", "211 02", "212 02", "213 02", "214 02", "215 02", "216 02", "217 02", "218 02", "219 02", "220 02", "221 02", "222 02", "223 02", "224 02", "225 02", "226 02", "227 02", "228 02", "229 02", "230 02", "231 02", "232 02", "233 02", "234 02", "235 02", "236 02", "237 02", "238 02", "239 02", "240 02", "241 02", "242 02", "243 02", "244 02", "245 02", "246 02", "247 02", "248 02", "249 02", "250 02", "251 02", "252 02", "253 02", "254 02", "255 02", "256 02", "257 02", "258 02", "259 02", "260 02", "261 02", "262 02", "263 02", "264 02", "265 02", "266 02", "267 02", "268 02", "269 02", "270 02", "271 02", "272 02", "273 02", "274 02", "275 02", "276 02", "277 02", "278 02", "279 02", "280 02", "281 02", "282 02", "283 02", "284 02", "285 02", "286 02", "287 02", "288 02", "289 02", "290 02", "291 02", "292 02", "293 02", "294 02", "295 02", "296 02", "297 02", "298 02", "299 02", "300 02".



FAWNA





WALK



82b Street at Laurel Hill Terrace

65



LINCOLN SQUARE HOUSES 23



BROOKLYN

Page 50:

Above: The houses are fenced so that the stoops are private. I think of the neighborhoods where the stoops have been removed. Does that mean there are no neighbors anymore?

Below: BK-07 163rd Avenue at 1st Street. Photographed from the bridge. I was interested in the space below the bridge because it is insecure and as such very intriguing.

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Above: Coney Island is home of the single most absurd and unfortunate security measures—the sand fill of the space beneath the boardwalk. They left the steps and railings and small facilities and simply filled it with sand. No place to sit in the shade, I wonder how long the fill will last.

Below: Harborview at Shore Parkway.

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Evergreen Park Saint Felix at 60th Street.

STATEN ISLAND

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Above: Richmond Road at Raritan Avenue. Gated or partially gated communities under construction.

Below: Goethals Bridge.

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Above: Arthur Kill Road at Outerbridge Crossing.

Below: St. George Ferry Terminal. This parking lot is guarded by the display of a security booth.

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Amboy Road at Swinerton Street. The flags are here from the spring through fall.....Marked territory.

BRONX

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Above: East 155th Street at Harlem River Drive.

Below: Co-op City Blvd at Carver Loop. My sense here is that although the planning had everything to do with security and community, the result is just the opposite. The shared spaces don't appear to be used, not even by pedestrians who seem to be walking along the road, even where the sidewalk is in bad condition. Is it the volume or people? Or the fact that their private spaces are so far removed from the shared ground space?

Decided to shoot the chain stores and parking lot. This breakdown of locally owned stores and public transportation seems to pose the greatest threats to a scene of security. While photographing, I realized that many of the cars parked along the outskirts of the lot were occupied. One waits in a parking lot.

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Above: Foot bridge to the Bronx.

Below: Randall's Island is my favorite discovery of this project. During weekends there are numerous games going at once. Not all the fields are clearly demarcated, but the rules of each game set a general order. It is by far the most heterogeneous public space, in terms of activities and communities. Perhaps that has something to do with the fact that nobody actually lives here—everyone has equal claim.

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Above: 249th Street at Henry Hudson Parkway.

Below: Zerega Avenue at Turneur Avenue.

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Above: Fordham Plaza is a bus stop. It almost seems embarrassing to walk across its center.

Below: Ferry Point Park under Whitestone Bridge. In winter when I came to photograph under the Whitestone, I was afraid to stay. Instead, I shot from Zerega Avenue. I was pleasantly surprised to return and find the park full of families playing soccer and picnicking. This community is able to transform a dusty outpost into an actual park, because they are, in fact, a community.

QUEENS**Page 60:**

Above: Steinway at Ditmar Avenue. The same park design-concrete block with chain link fence that is falling apart in most neighborhoods is a well-used center here. The Greek men play bocce ball and hang out at the picnic tables. Returned in winter and noticed the houses across from the park-gated windows and fenced-in driveways. Literally the other side of homogeneous neighborhoods.

Below: Union Turnpike at Francis Lewis Blvd. It is interesting that when the fields are unpopulated they seem very vulnerable. But when they are populated in the summer, the parked cars provide protection from the fast road.

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Above: Rockaway Beach Blvd at 145th Street. Is the height of this wall necessary?

Again, the question of water access. Why isn't there some place for people to fish from? The other side of the island is interestingly unprotected. The houses line the beach without fences or dividers—leaving them vulnerable to both water and beach public.

Below: 80th Street at 77th Road.

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Above: 39th Avenue at 138th Street.

Below: Beach Channel Drive at 145th Street.

MANHATTAN**Page 63:**

Above: Louis Gulliver Park under Triborough Bridge. I've never seen anybody at this park. I like the outdated plywood graphics, but perhaps they function as a sign of disregard.

Below: John Murphy Park, Avenue C at East 17th Street

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Above: The Cloisters Fort Tyron Park. Children's birthday party announced on a tree. The decorations are both invitation and reservation of the space.

Below: West 186th Street at Laurel Hill Terrace.

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Above: Dewitt Clinton Park West 52nd Street at West Side Highway. A very unsettling park.

Below: West 113th Street at Amsterdam Avenue.