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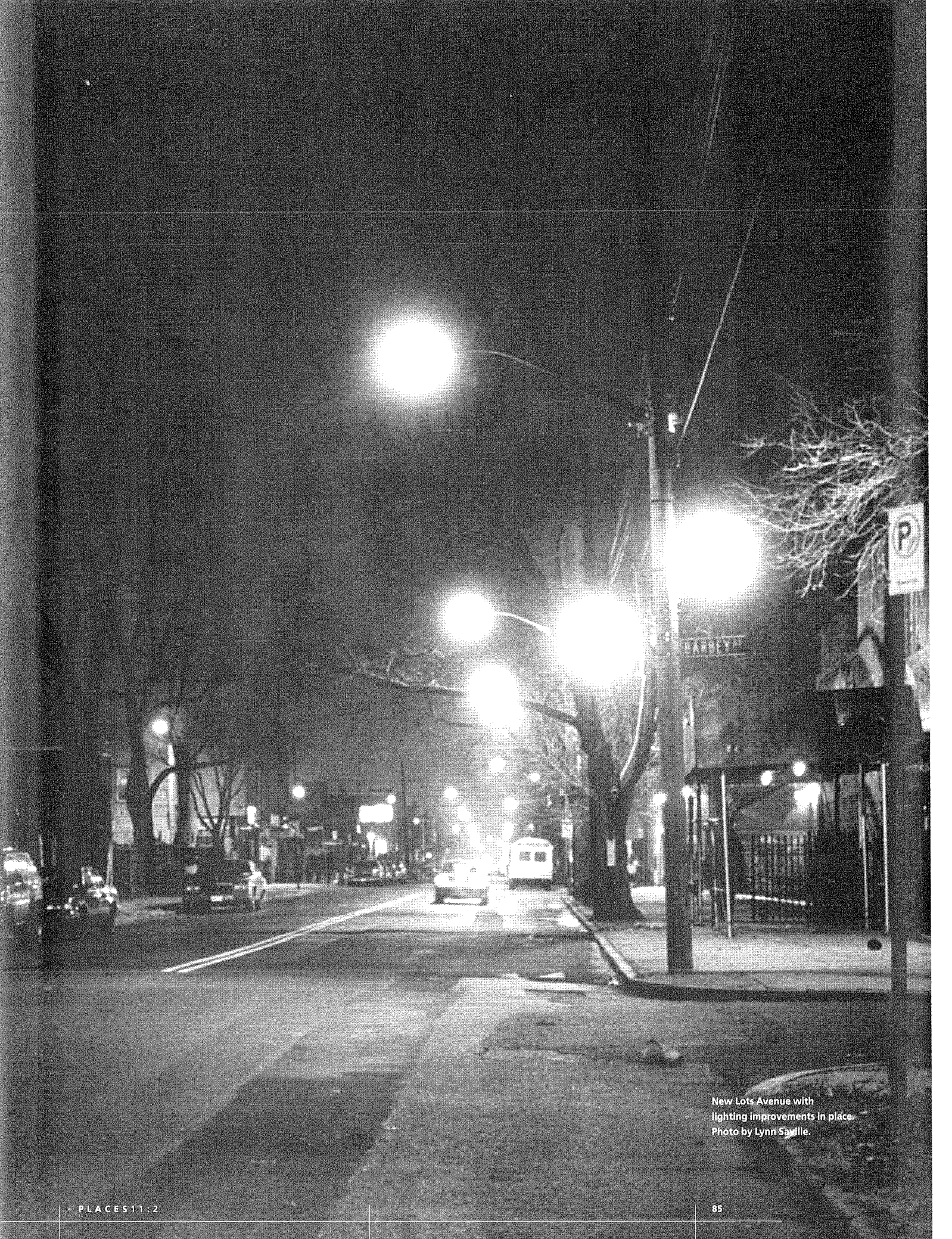
Nighttime Lighting and Community Character

It is 5:30 on a winter's evening at the intersection of New Lots and Schenck avenues in East New York, Brooklyn. Residents are making their way home from subways and buses, picking up children from the day care and after school programs at the local community center, or heading to the neighborhood library.

As they walk down the sidewalks past the vacant lots, the multiracial clusters of families, small groups of older women and bunches of young people are illuminated by a series of experimental lighting interventions that highlight places and paths important to the community. These changes are part of a recently implemented pedestrian lighting project created by the Parsons School of Design Masters in Lighting Program and sponsored by the New York City Department of Transportation's Pedestrian Projects Group.

With resources at a minimum, my colleagues at Parsons and I took an exploratory and experimental approach. For example, although East New York is classified as a high-crime neighborhood, we did not attempt to change bad behavior by flooding potential crime spots with light. Nor did we focus light and attention on dark, unused streets. Rather, we worked to support the many positive activities going on in the neighborhood in non-commercial areas.

We lit a well-traveled route to active community destinations and a landmark church.

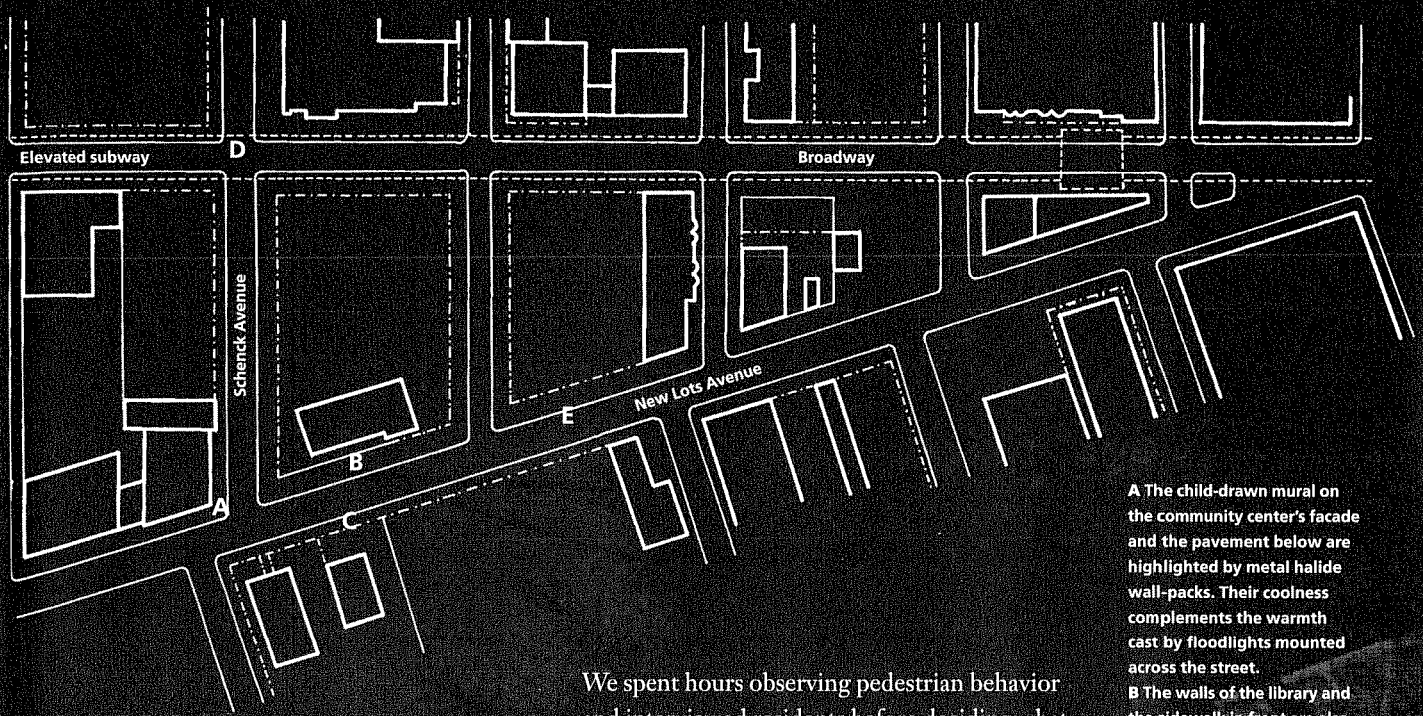


New Lots Avenue with
lighting improvements in place.
Photo by Lynn Sawille.



Designers used computer simulations, such as this view of Schenck Avenue, to study how lighting changes would change the pedestrian environment. This simulation shows the effect of painting the underside of the elevated subway white and adding uplighting, and of washing a mural on the community center wall with light. The original conditions are shown in the inset photo. Simulation by ASco/Amy Samelson, photo by Lynn Saville.





A The child-drawn mural on the community center's facade and the pavement below are highlighted by metal halide wall-packs. Their coolness complements the warmth cast by floodlights mounted across the street.

B The walls of the library and the sidewalk in front are also washed by floodlights.

C The white wood walls of the 150 year-old Dutch Reformed Church are luminous, in sharp contrast to the dark cemetery and the general surroundings.

D The underside of a subway viaduct is painted bright white and glows with light directed from below.

E On New Lots Avenue, light is cast by decorative lanterns hanging from light poles that previously directed light only towards the roadway.

We spent hours observing pedestrian behavior and interviewed residents before deciding what routes to focus on, noting that the graffiti-free church, community center mural and library seemed to be cared for by the community. We made computer simulations of our proposals and showed them to community members to get their response. We were seeking to accomplish precise interventions that would make small but significant differences in the daily life of those who walk the streets.

Rather than focus on "making the streets safer" we developed solutions that treat aesthetic and practical considerations as inseparable. Key to this approach were selecting a community that was in the process of rebuilding itself and developing close working relationships with community members and city staff. This allowed us to experiment with unconventional solutions. For example, we installed fragile decorative fixtures that depend on community protection against vandalism. (Six months after installation not one has been broken.) The presence of these fixtures sends a strong message that the community is of value to itself and the rest of the city.

In the coming year we will revisit East New York to evaluate how our interventions have affected pedestrian behavior and people's impressions of the neighborhood. We hope that our modest project will address some of the community's needs and point to new ways of lighting all kinds of pedestrian areas.