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search & discovery

Search & Discovery
Cross-Reference Chronicles 2

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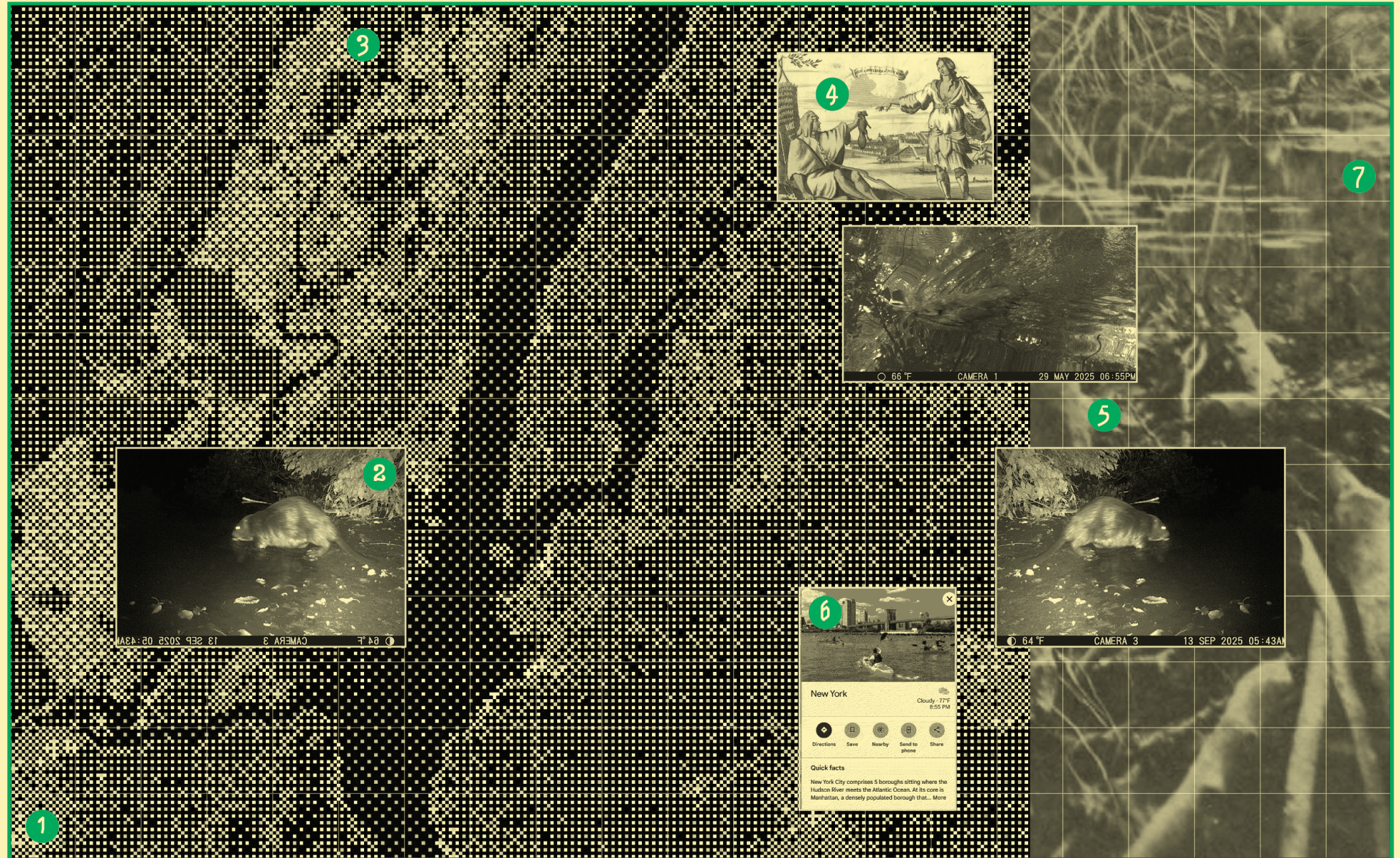


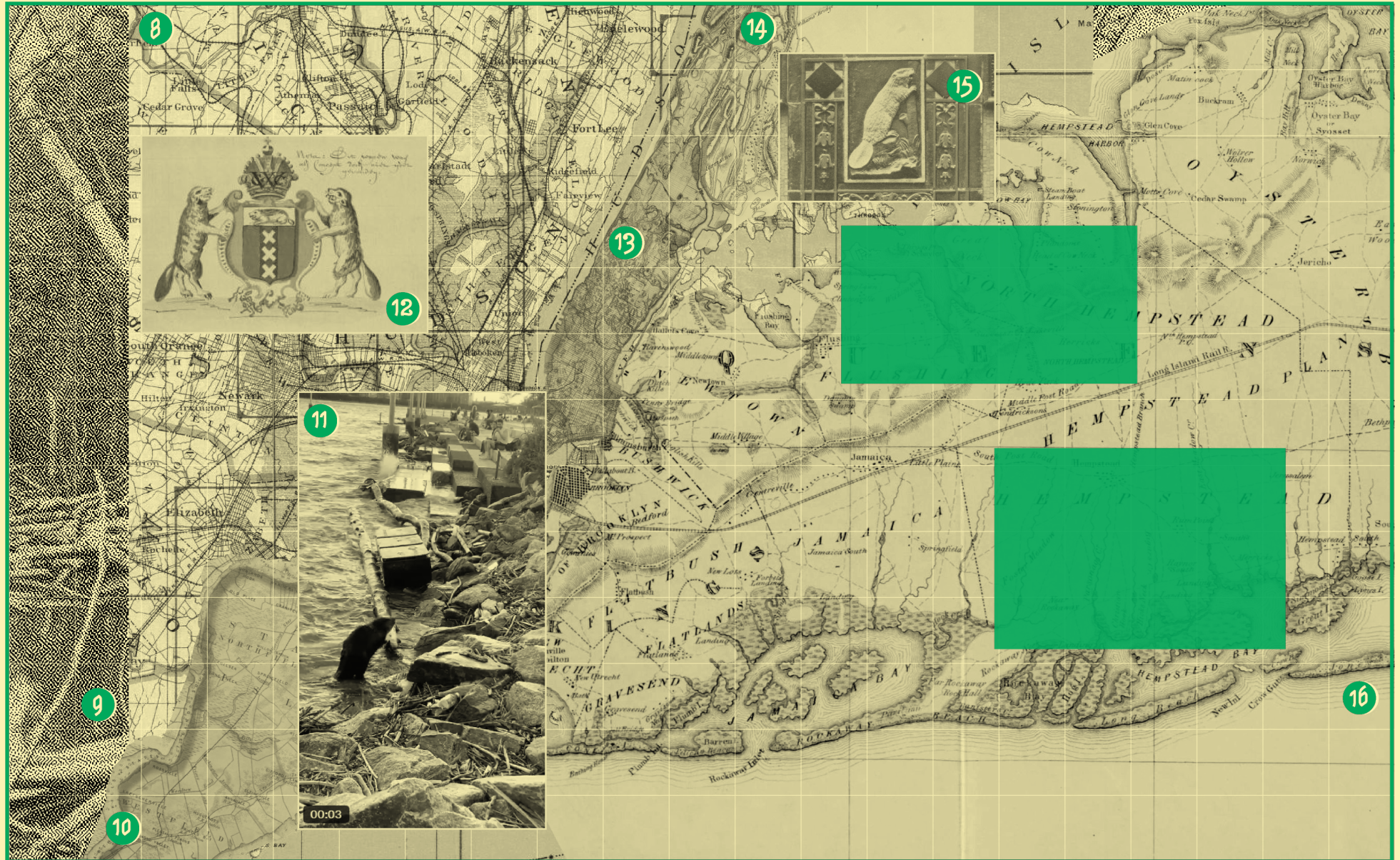
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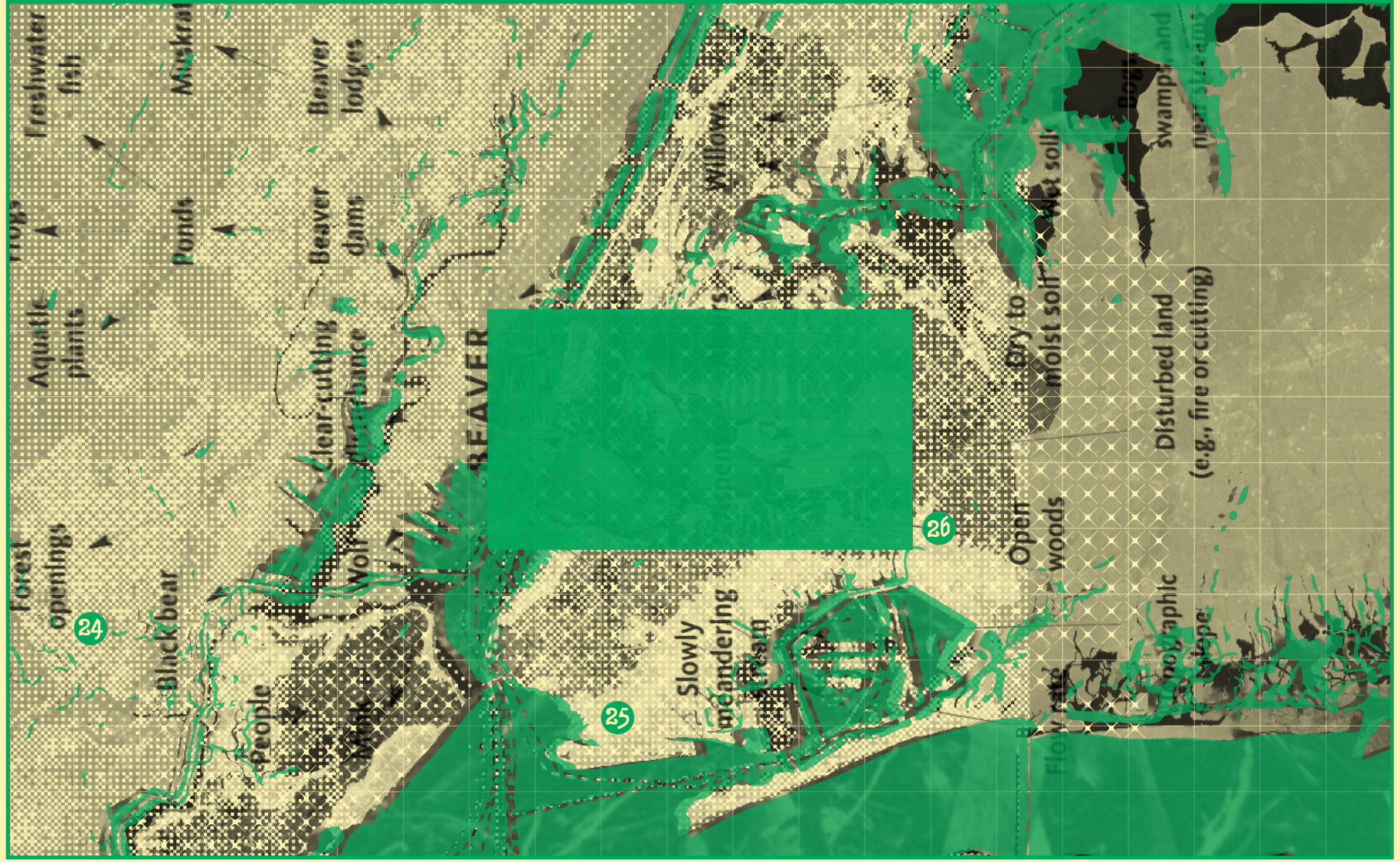
Homecoming

Vân Anh Lê

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artist and designer, based in Queens,
NY. Their creative practice explores
themes of collective grief, memory,
and migration through textiles and
speculative media.*







Captions & Credits

1 Earlier this year, I saw a social media video about a beaver sighting in New York City. I didn't know beavers could survive in these waters. My introduction to local bodies of water was a dreary Circle Line cruise, followed by a "field trip" to Newtown Creek, possibly one of the most polluted waterways in the United States. Both experiences were part of a required undergrad course, so of course they're blurred-out memories now. Throughout our Search + Discovery class, I've been thinking more and more about this beaver. It turns out, my initial assumption was partially right. Beavers don't really live here anymore, but as recently as 1600, there could have been a million beavers making homes in the marshes, hills, forests, and meadows that existed on the landform we now know as New York City.

Recounting what I've learned about the beaver, I created four collages. Each collage contains various pieces of beaver history—past-present-future—sourced from across NYC archives and other people's memories, stitched together to form distinct but interwoven maps. Drawing some inspiration from Toni Morrison's practice of "literary archaeology," I invite you to meander through my recollection—and the archives' records—of the beaver and of New York City. "Journey to a site to see what remains were left behind," Morrison invites us, and "reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (2026, 10). Let us welcome the beaver home and remember its central role in the creation and ongoing care

of New York City.
Quote from Morrison, Toni. *The Site of Memory*. Spiral House, an imprint of Silver Press, 2026.

2 Camera trap photo of a beaver in the Bronx River, by RJ Hawkins. "Camera Traps Reveal Beavers Have Finally Returned to the Bronx River After 'A Very Long Time.'" *Good News Network*, October 5, 2025. <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/camera-traps-reveal-beavers-have-returned-to-the-bronx-river/>. Fair Use.

What's a beaver? In North America: *Castor canadensis*. Furry rodent body, chunky head, buckteeth. Slick flat tail, webbed back feet. The original engineers of the land we now call New York City. Dam crafters and lodge builders, river conductors controlling the flow of water, sculptors shaping the continental landscape. Their relationship with this land can be measured in millenia, whereas I've lived in New York City for only thirteen years.

This beaver, in particular, was sighted in 2025 in the Bronx River. It's the third individual beaver to have reportedly returned to this land since the early 1800s.

3 Screenshot of The Welikia Map Explorer, a project maintained by the Urban Conservation team at the New York Botanical Garden, with research from Dr. Eric W. Sanderson and colleagues. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://www.welikia.org>. <https://www.welikia.org/map-explorer#9.5/40.7213/-73.9741>. Fair Use. The reconstructed ecological map of New York City as it existed in September 1609, before Henry

Hudson and his crew, employed by the Dutch East India Company, sailed into the harbor and made contact with the Indigenous Lenape people. For thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers, this land was an abundant and thriving ecosystem, home to the Lenape people, the beaver, and a plurality of species. The word welikia (pronounced “way-LEE-kee-uh”) is borrowed from the Munsee-Lenape language, and it means “my good home.”

4

Nieu Amsterdam at[Que] New York. 1673. a print described as depicting “a Caucasian man holding up a beaver to a Native American woman.” From The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/e63e7840-c536-012f-6cf7-58d385a7bc34>.

5

Camera trap photo of a beaver in the Bronx River, by RJ Hawkins. “Camera Traps Reveal Beavers Have Finally Returned to the Bronx River After ‘A Very Long Time.’” *Good News Network*, October 5, 2025. <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/camera-traps-reveal-beavers-have-returned-to-the-bronx-river/>. Fair Use.

6

Screenshot of the place page for “New York, NY” on Google Maps, featuring a photo by Richard T. of kayakers on the river. Accessed August 7, 2026. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/hrw9qk8ELjpqRpSR9>. Fair Use.

For a long time, Google Maps was the main tool I relied on to sense-make in this city. There are only a few locations that pop up when you search “beaver,” one of them being the beaver plaques in the Astor Place subway stop.

7

Beaver Dam on Marquette River, 1865-1880. From The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/96d3cc20-c548-012f-b6f8-58d385a7bc34>.

The Marquette River is in Michigan, another natural habitat for the North American beaver. From Michigan to New York to California, efforts are being made to (re)introduce and preserve beaver populations, in the hopes that their dam-building activities can help revitalize wetlands and create more climate resilient landscapes (Hallberg, Lukas, Annegret Larsen, Natalie Ceperley, et al. “Beavers Can Convert Stream Corridors to Persistent Carbon Sinks.” *Communications Earth & Environment* 7, no. 1 (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-026-03283-8>).

8

Bien, Joseph Rudolf, and Cornelius Clarkson Vermeule. *Index Map*. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection. Julius Bien, 1891. <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/euyqm2>.

9

Photograph of beaver dams in Bear River, 1850-1930. From The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New

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York Public Library. *Beaver Dams of Bear River Near Its Source*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/fe902df0-c56b-012f-4b9d-58d385a7bc34>.

10

Staten Island from Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library. *Asher & Adams' Map of the Bays, Harbors and Rivers Around New York: Showing the Channels, Soundings, Lighthouses, Buoys & C. And the Complete Topography of the Surrounding Country: Including Hempstead, Sandy-Hook, South-Amboy, Newark, Yonkers, N. Rochelle & Glencove*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 5, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/e0b4cf10-c602-012f-20dc-58d385a7bc34>.

11

Screenshot of the first recorded beaver sighting in Hudson River Park's Estuarine Sanctuary. Original recording taken by Sophia Tulp and shared by Hudson River Park (@HudsonRiverPark). "Check out the Park's Newest Visitor — a Beaver!" X (Formerly Twitter), June 5, 2026. <https://x.com/HudsonRiverPark/status/2062685858809926013>. Fair Use.

12

New Netherland's coat of arms, featuring three beavers. From Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *Coat of Arms of New Netherland, 1630*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 5, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/05d41210-c609-012f-e191-58d385a7bc34>.

New Netherland was the colony originally settled in 1614 by the Dutch West India Company to capitalize on the fur trade in North America. Dutch colonizers expanded their territory along the Atlantic coast and established a capital in New Amsterdam, now Lower Manhattan.

13

Manhattan from Viele, Egbert L. *Sanitary & Topographical Map of the City and Island of New York*. David Rumsey Historical Map Collection. Ferd. Mayer & Co. Lithographers, 1865. <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/s/7ol4s2>.

This map reveals the streams and rivers that once flowed through Manhattan. Four hundred years ago, each water network may have been home to a beaver family. In Manhattan's Financial District, Beaver Street was named after the beaver pelt trade that became the backbone for New Amsterdam's economic growth and colonial expansion. It remains a preserved part of the New Amsterdam street grid that eventually replaced these waterways.

As described in the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society's Tenth Annual Report: "There were beavers on Manhattan Island when it was settled by the Dutch and Beaver Street (formerly the Bever Paatje and Bever Graft) marks the site of a little stream where we may conclude they had one of their dwelling places. The intelligence and industry of these little animals, their ingenuity as house-builders and their amphibious character make them eloquent symbols also of the City of New York." From the New York Public Library, page 825. 1915.

14

The Bronx from George, III, King of Great Britain, King of Great Britain George, IV, Henry Clinton Sir, George Taylor, and Andrew Skinner. *A MAP of NEW YORK, & STATEN ISLDS; and Part of LONG ISLAND: Surveyed by Order of His Excellency General Sir Henry Clinton K.B.* Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center, Boston Public Library. 1781. <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:hx11z3576>.

15

Image of a beaver plaque at New York City's Astor Place subway station. New York Interborough Rapid Transit Company, 1904. From the Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library. *Plaque Showing Beaver at Astor Place Station; Express Station at 14Th Street, Showing Island and Mezzanine Platforms and Stairs Connecting Them*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/72a71af0-c6d1-012f-be14-58d385a7bc34>.

John Jacob Astor, the first millionaire in New York, made his fortune from the beaver pelt trade and real estate. In 1808, Astor established the American Fur Company and further expanded his business monopoly across North America. By the 1800s, the 60-million beaver population in New York State had been decimated. There would be no sighting of a beaver in New York City for 200 years. At his death, Astor bequeathed \$400,000 for the founding of the public Astor Library, which was eventually consolidated with the Lenox Library and the Tilden Foundation to become the New York Public Library in 1895.

16

Queens and Long Island from Mather, William Williams and J. Calvin Smith. *Geological Map of Long & Staten Islands With the Environs of New York*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 5, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/58d042c0-c5aa-012f-7978-58d385a7bc34>.

17

Drawing of a beaver from Romer, Wolfgang William, Richard Sims, George Henry Moore, and George Hayward. *A Mappe of Colonel Römers Voyage to Ye 5 Indian Nations: Going From New Yorck to Albany, Thence West*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b05837f0-34aa-0134-d0dc-00505686a51c>.

18

City Seal of New York, originally designed in 1915. NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services. Accessed August 5, 2026. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dcas/about/green-book-city-seal-and-flag.page>. Two beavers make their home here.

19

Screenshot of “New York City” from OpenStreetMap. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=11/40.7143/-74.0059>. Copyright and License: openstreetmap.org/copyright.

20

Probability of distribution for beavers in 1609 Manhattan. From Sanderson, Eric W, and Markley Boyer. *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City*. Abrams, 2013, 203. Fair Use.

2 1

The first recorded sighting of a beaver in New York City in over 200 years. Lovingly named José, this beaver lived in the Bronx River. Image by the Wildlife Conservation Society, from O'Connor, Anahad. "After 200 Years, a Beaver Is Back in New York City." *The New York Times*, February 23, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/23/nyregion/23beaver.html>. Fair Use.

2 2

Illustration of *Palaeocastor peninsulatus*, an ancient ancestor of the North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) that lived during the late Oligocene to early Miocene, 29.5~18.5 million years ago. By Tamura, Nobu. *Palaeocastor BW*. Wikimedia Commons. January 11, 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palaeocastor_BW.jpg.

2 3

Photograph of beaver dams in Bear River, 1850-1930. From The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. *Beaver Dams of Bear River Near Its Source*. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed August 4, 2026. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/fe902df0-c56b-012f-4b9d-58d385a7bc34>.

2 4

The floating text is from a Muir diagram featured in *Mannahatta* (Sanderson, 2013, 189). A Muir diagram illustrates the interconnected relationships that exist in an

ecosystem. This one focuses on the beaver in New York and maps out the various species that the beaver depends upon—which are in-turn dependent on the beaver—in its home environment.

2 5

Screenshot of NYC Department of City Planning's "NYC Coastal Flood Hazard Mapper," which predicts coastal flooding patterns in NYC up to the year 2150. ArcGIS. Accessed August 7, 2026. <https://experience.arcgis.com/>

Past future. Wetland floodplain. "All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (Morrison, 2026, 18).

2 6

These notes don't tell the full story of the beaver or New York City. There are many more layers to recover—more searching, collecting, and cross-referencing to pursue as we prepare to welcome beavers home. And as you continue your discovery of the beaver, remember there is much more the beaver has to learn about this version of New York City.

I hope in the near future, you will get to meet a beaver or some other creature on its journey home. Tell it about this land, about everything it's missed across the years, about the New York City in your memory.

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Going Slowly All the Way Round the Outside

Karly Wildenhaus

Karly Wildenhaus is a librarian residing in Jackson Heights, Queens. She currently works at the New York Public Library managing the metadata team for NYPL Digital Collections. Outside of work, Karly enjoys spending time in forests and at beaches in the NYC area, watching movies, and contributing to Wikidata.



Figure 1: Russula found in Van Cortlandt Park by the author, 2022.

The first time I found a ghost pipe I was looking for something else.

It was summer 2021, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic and two years into my second stint living in New York, a return necessitated by the onerous task of finding a job after finishing library school. To counteract the sudden primacy of a computer screen as the frame for the entirety of my professional and social life, I began spending weekends looking for mushrooms, and on this particular day in July I trekked out to a state park preserve on the Long Island Sound. 2021 was a boom year for fungi in the greater New York City area due to above-average precipitation, and I had already found several russulas, amanitas, and chanterelles before I encountered an unsettling cluster of translucent white stalks on the forest floor, which I initially (and enthusiastically) mistook for a new-to-me mushroom—before some excited web sleuthing revealed otherwise.

Ghost pipes, or *Monotropa uniflora*, are a wildflower native to what is now the Eastern United States, among other temperate regions of North America, Latin America, and Asia. Unlike most flowering plants, ghost pipes lack chlorophyll, which gives them the appearance of an otherworldly plant drained of any green pigment. They obtain their energy not from photosynthesis, but by parasitizing fungi, particularly in the context of the mycorrhizal networks formed by mycelial strands that make fungal growth possible and connect nearby trees and other plants via their root systems. The ghost pipe's fungal host is



Figure 2: *Monotropa uniflora* (Figure XXI) from Homer D. House, *Wild Flowers of New York, pt. 2, New York State Museum Memoir 15* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1918), public domain.

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Figure 3: Black Staining polypore found in Forest Oak by the author, 2026.

the *Russulaceae* family, which includes russula, a genus of mushrooms known colloquially as brittlegills for the fragile gills found underneath their bright—often red—convex caps that make them easy to spot amidst dead leaves and tree roots.

While ghost pipes are not themselves fungi, they have become one of my favorite markers of summer in subsequent years, which I now experience as a cyclical series of appearances beginning each March with skunk cabbage, followed by fairy shrimp, morels, warblers, horseshoe crabs, pink lady's slippers, amanitas, raspberry slime molds, chanterelles, milkcaps, rustgills, birch polypores, and then a stretch of relative dormancy through the winter months. Some of these species are the fungi I set out to find, but many others have begun to shape my perception of time passing simply because they are what I came across when looking for something else.

Socioeconomic factors and transportation infrastructure position Manhattan as New York City's gravitational center, but my perpetual search for fungi has me circumnavigating the edges of its five boroughs via a constellation of greenspaces—Inwood Hill, Van Cortlandt Park, Pelham Bay, Alley Pond, Cunningham Park, Forest Park, Jamaica Bay, Green-Wood Cemetery, Long Pond Park, and the Staten Island Greenbelt. The act of scanning a landscape for something rarely bigger than my own hand has expanded my mental map of this 321-square-mile city. I've called New York City home for only six years, but I can trace my fondness for cities' edges across everywhere I've lived, where I've often found myself in the liminal spaces of low-density industrial zones, arterial canals, hidden beaches, and remote parks outside the boundaries of what is typically perceived as the city.

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As I don't forage or consume what I find, the pleasure I experience in looking for mushrooms comes simply from the act of discovery itself. Having taken up an amateur mycology hobby well into my thirties, I often think of how much of my life has been spent in the vicinity of fungi, flora, and fauna that I had not yet trained my eyes to see. Every visit to the woods shapes my emergent intuition for navigating an environment by way of recognizing the innumerable relationships between its organisms, ranging from the biggest deciduous trees to slime molds so small as to be imperceptible without a pocket loupe.

Search within an ecological setting makes apparent a modality that is indirect, relational, and slanted. You learn to look via indicator species, which convey particular conditions or announce the likelihood of finding something else. To look for ghost pipes is to look for russulas. To look for morels is to look for tulip poplars. Scan within patches of the ever-omnipresent false turkey tail and you might find the intensely coral-pink *Phlebia incarnata*. To characterize this kind of looking, I've begun to think of it as "oblique search."

The use of "oblique" as an adjective immediately brings to mind *Oblique Strategies*, a set of 55 cards that offer creative prompts, first created in 1974 by musician Brian Eno and artist Peter Schmidt. (Aptly for the context within which I arrived to oblique search, one such prompt is to "Go slowly all the way round the outside.") In investigating whether the idea of oblique *search* had any precedent, I found a 2005 blog post by the designer DSri Seah titled "Oblique Searching Strategies," which lists a series of techniques for bypassing then-still-emergent search engine optimization slop. There are also parallels between oblique search and the concept within



Figure 4: Ringless honey mushrooms found in Forest Park by the author, 2026.

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librarianship of serendipitous discovery, explored by information studies scholars Marcia J. Bates (1989) as “berrypicking” and Sandra Erdelez (1997) as “information encountering.” Tracing citation chains and scanning the shelf around a known book to find others relevant to your interest have resonances with searching via indicator species in a natural setting: each uses relationships and proximity as a catalyst for encounter.

Beyond information systems, obliqueness has resonance with subcultural and queer modes of search, where cues like flagging operate through selective visibility, which is legible only to those who know how to look. Jacob Riis Park, situated on the southwest tip of the Rockaway Peninsula, provides a grounded instance of this spatial logic. Affectionately called the “People’s Beach,” its nickname reflects both the progressivism of its namesake, social reformer and journalist Jacob Riis, and the federally-owned public park’s egalitarian qualities as a beach accessible to New Yorkers of all kinds. The People’s Beach is also home to a stretch of the shore that has served as a queer beach since the 1940s and is still a catalyst for queer self-discovery and community today, despite ever-encroaching threats of development and neglect-induced erosion. Approaching from the park’s entrance, finding your way to the queer beach makes literal the idea of obliqueness: it is all the way to the leftmost edge, long concealed by the ruins of recently-demolished Neponsit Beach Hospital. Yet this spatial obscurity is what made such a queer public space possible—a reminder that peripherality can be advantageous.

Oblique search offers an antidote to present-day trends driven by corporate web engines, which prioritize direct answers and flattening AI summaries. By intentionally curtailing deeper,

more tangential inquiry, these systems ensure that not everything worth knowing will appear in an AI overview. In contrast, oblique search foregrounds context, ecologies, and the edge as useful infrastructures of knowledge. Ultimately, to search obliquely is to reject the efficiency of the literal for a way of seeing that honors the complexity of the periphery. This practice serves as an acknowledgement that circumnavigating the edges—whether in physical or information landscapes—has its own inherent value, revealing discoveries we never thought to seek.

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Orienting from a Distance

Alexandra Nicome

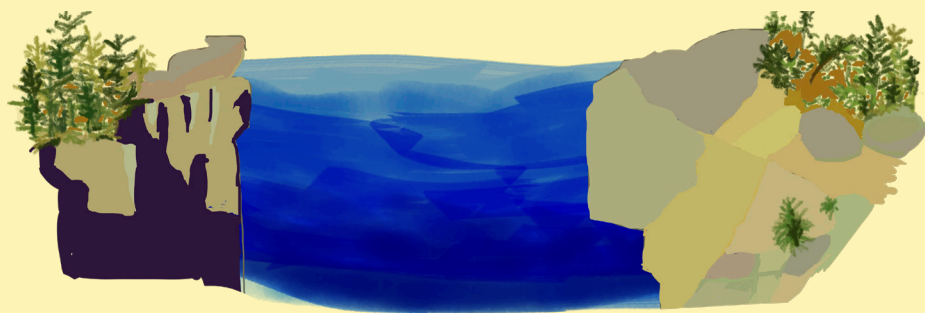
Alexandra Nicome is a Belle da Costa Greene Curatorial Fellow at The Morgan Library & Museum and a graduate student in library science. She is passionate about facilitating access to rare materials through catalog records, archival description, reference services, instruction, and exhibitions. In her free time, she enjoys reading, walking, and making little art objects.

Waterbound

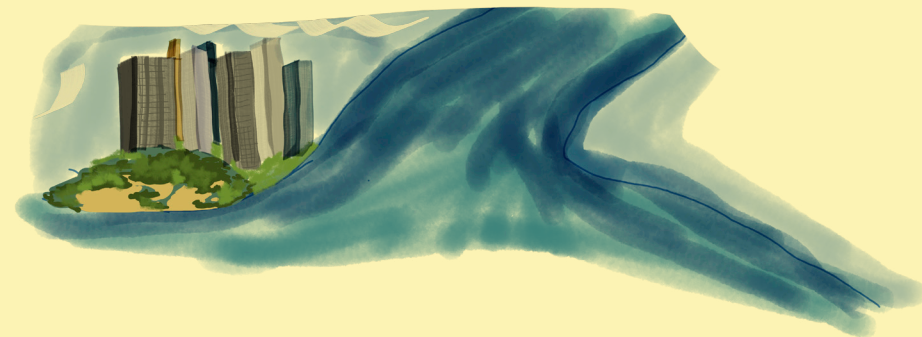
When I moved to New York City in September 2025, I rushed to visit *The Magical City: George Morrison's New York* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Morrison (1919-2000) was an abstractionist who spent his career exploring the “enigma of the horizon” through painting, sculpture, drawing, and printmaking (*Bockley Gallery*, 2026). He was a member of the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa, and after many years living on the East Coast, he retired to a home and studio near the Minnesota town where he was born. Living along the shores of Lake Superior, Morrison enjoyed a daily view of an expanse of water that looks as endless as the Atlantic.

I grew up in Minneapolis, where my daily activities were shaped by the Mississippi and the Twin Cities' many lakes, creeks, and streams. While the scale and density of New York sometimes overwhelm me, I am comforted by the familiar boundary of a waterfront. Morrison's own transition to New York in the 1940s had a similar quality of guidance from a distance; as journalist Robyne Robinson (2024) observed, “Even when he was surrounded by concrete and taxi cabs, deep green forests and North Shore sunsets were always with him.” Rather than a dissonance or dissociation, the internal/external dynamic Robinson identifies seems to me like the relationship between the ocean and the moon. Through his work, Morrison mediates the forces by which different forms meet.

I can see many shorelines unfold across Morrison's paintings. Fuchsia, mauve, orange, and blue latitudes cut across his canvases, leaving the viewer to decide where the horizon separates water or land from sky. Morrison's abstract geography is a gentle guide; capacious enough for all my old and new orientations.



*Vantage: Lake Superior,
Illustration by author, 2026*



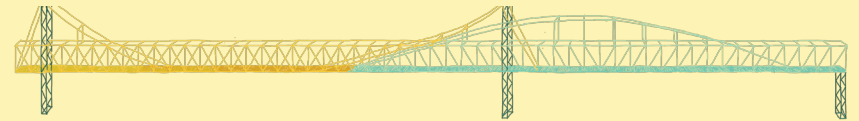
*Vantage: Cityscape on the Water.
Illustration by the author, 2026.*

Barriers and Bridges

The Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge links the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden to a sprawling, downtown public park. Designed by Iranian artist Siah Armajani (1939-2020), the bridge is bright yellow and blue with two parabolas—one rising, the other falling—honoring the suspensions and arches that define Minnesota’s waterways. The bridge joins two neighborhoods that are divided by a highway in what the Walker Art Center once described as “a metaphoric handshake” (*Weeks, 2010*). I walked this bridge countless times during my childhood, only ever catching a few words of the John Ashbery poem installed along its upper beams.

On a recent hot Saturday afternoon, I spent hours looking for Armajani’s contribution to the public plaza at Battery Park City. It was completed in 1989, the year following his bridge in Minneapolis, and also includes lines of poetry—this time Walt Whitman and Frank O’Hara. In preparation for this zine, I tried to illustrate an “excerpt” from Armajani’s railing: “One never need leave...”. Just four words from O’Hara’s poem “Meditations in an Emergency.” My only clue about the text on Armajani’s railings was in a picture I found online, as the sculpture is currently obscured by construction notices, tall barriers, and chain-link fences while the city reconfigures the waterfront to handle more frequent and intense storms. An emergency, indeed.

“One need never leave the confines of New York,” O’Hara’s complete phrase reads, “to get all the greenery one / wishes—I can’t even enjoy a blade of grass unless I know there’s a subway / handy, or a record store or some other sign that people do not totally regret / life” (1957). When construction is



*Siah Armajani's Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge (1988).
Illustration by the author, 2026.*



*Siah Armajani's Battery Park City Railings (1989).
Illustration by the author, 2026.*

complete, I will return to discover how much of this sentence is wrought into the railings Armajani designed. Until then, I will practice the art of slowing down to “read” the public spaces around me, as Armajani’s work taught me in Minneapolis and, heightened by its temporary inaccessibility, teaches me in Manhattan.

Absent Markers



Seitu Ken Jones, *Celebration of Life* mural (1996-2000).
Illustration by author, 2026.

In the late 1980s, artist Seitu Ken Jones contributed a portrait of W.E.B. Du Bois to a mural on the Pathfinder Press building in Greenwich Village. His was just one of several revolutionary figures painted on the wall, which included Che Guevara, Malcolm X, Lolita Lebron, Ho Chi Minh, and many others. Writers in the Pathfinder journal recounted several years later,

Only days after the Berlin Wall came down, and the capitalist masters of the world were trying to convince us all that they had emerged victorious in a historic battle against the toilers of the world, the ribbons were cut on that work of art celebrating the past, present and future struggles waged by the modern working class and its allies on the road toward emancipation (Barnes and Waters 1998).

The mural was immediately controversial and, for structural reasons (not critical ones), it was demolished in 1996. Multi-million dollar condos rose in its place (*Kates, 2020*).

As *Pathfinder* came down, Jones and his collaborators Ta'cumba Aiken and John Biggers put the final touches on their *Celebration of Life* mural, which

was painted on a highway sound barrier in North Minneapolis. Depicting brightly hued turtles, birds, and stools, the mural reflected the diverse cosmological beliefs represented in the adjacent, historically Black neighborhood. Only four years later, the mural was demolished when the city built an affordable housing community in the exact spot where the work of art was installed.

I do not remember seeing *Celebration of Life* in Minneapolis, and *Pathfinder* came down shortly after I was born, but their vibrant surfaces populate my mind as if I had once stood before them. Looking through three-by-five photographs as I was processing Jones's archives, I got to know these monumental works of art. Through flyers, letters, calendars, postcards, and newspaper clippings, I adopted guideposts for these absent landmarks.

When substantial structures like brick buildings and concrete walls aren't stable enough to support revolutionary ideas, I wonder whether our memories are sufficient containers to carry forward their radical message. Is it enough that some people know "what used to be there"? I hope the archival residue of *Pathfinder* and *Celebration of Life* can guide future generations to those radical landmarks, eternally renewing a revolutionary sense of place.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank all the wonderful organizations and people who hosted our Cross-Reference class in the Winter/Spring of 2027. From our visit to the Maps department at Argosy Bookstore to our tours of Poets House and WFMU, I enjoyed learning about different methods of search and discovery with my wonderful cohort. And finally, thank you to Shannon Mattern, Becca Quon, Traci Mark, and Mary Bakija, and all the folks at the Metropolitan New York Library Council who made this course possible.



*Seitu Ken Jones, Pathfinder Mural (1988-1996).
Illustration by the author, 2026.*

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Re:Discovering the Sixth Borough

Brendan Crain

Brendan Crain is a writer and arts administrator who lives in Queens. He is interested in the relationships that people form with places. Currently, he serves as the Program Director for Open House New York. Previously, he was the Program Manager for NYC Culture Pass, a co-presented program of the Brooklyn, New York, and Queens Public Library systems.

You are being lied to.



Everybody knows that New York City has five boroughs.

This was not always true. There was once a sixth borough, and its disappearance has been the subject of one of the greatest cover-ups in history. In 1958, a “freak accident” at Brookhaven National Laboratory’s Cosmotron facility caused a rare instance of a phenomenon known as spatio-temporal subduction, in which the entirety of Long Island became trapped in spacetime. The earth rotates at a speed of just under 800 miles per hour at the fortieth parallel, so in the fraction of a second that the island was immobilized, roughly seven miles of its western end slipped beneath the earth’s crust.

The sixth borough and its million-odd residents simply vanished beneath the island of Brooklyn (which had, until that point, been a land-tied island separated from Long Island by a narrow strip of wetlands, the remaining bits of which became the Newtown and Spring Creeks). Brooklyn, in turn, suddenly found itself affixed to the distinctly more bucolic borough of Queens.

To hide its negligence, the federal government launched a massive—and tragically successful—campaign to scrub the sixth borough from official records, and even from public memory. Maps were redrawn, street names changed, records purged, and academic curricula forcibly altered.

For those who know where to look, there are clues that hint at what was lost. At the intersection of Queens Boulevard and 58th Street in the neighborhood of Woodside, you can find a compass rose embedded in the pavement of a traffic island that marks the spot as the city's geographic center. It is not—but it once was. On the grounds of the historic Vander Ende-Onderdonk House you can see the Arbitration Rock, a boulder supposedly placed there in 1769 to establish the border between Brooklyn and Queens. In fact, the rock was dug up during a road construction project nearby, and an elaborate legend was concocted by the powers that be in order to help sell the fiction that Brooklyn and Queens had always shared a landmass.

Perhaps the most glaring piece of evidence of the subduction event is the actual border between these two forcibly conjoined boroughs, a jagged scribble that swerves preposterously through the crosshatched street grids of Bushwick, Ridgewood, Cypress Hills, and Woodhaven.

Whether or not the deletion of one of the country's most stalwart enclaves of leftist political organizing and cultural agitation in the early years of the Civil Rights era was truly "accidental" is still debated among the rebel archivists and historians who whisper to each other about the sixth borough. Either way, this secretive group has created a cipher to help truth-seeking New Yorkers use intuition and common sense—along with resources hidden throughout the city's network of public libraries—to reconstruct the sixth borough.

You now hold that cipher in your hands.

Instructions: Precious little of the Sixth Borough's history has been preserved. In order to protect this vital knowledge from the redaction pens of government officials, it has been hidden in carefully altered versions of everyday books in several of the city's public libraries—namely, those located in communities along the Brooklyn-Queens border. To use this cipher and learn about the Sixth Borough, you will need to:

1

Visit these library branches in person; digital records are too easily found and altered.

2

Trust your intuition; facts about the Sixth Borough cannot be written down directly. You will need to gather information and use it to deduce the truth.

3

Trace your place within the spatial logic: as New York City's libraries use Dewey Decimal to organize their collections, you will need to reference this system of categorization to find your way to the correct area of each branch.

The Grandest Branch: The large brick library on Arlington Street in Cypress Hills is unlike any other branch in the city. This is because it was part of the library system that served the Sixth Borough, and was absorbed by the Brooklyn Public Library system when it was orphaned in 1958. It is here where you can learn the name of the city's lost borough. Find the largest atlas in the 900 section, where books on geography are kept, and locate within that atlas the most detailed map of the country of Guyana. Like New York, Guyana was colonized by the Dutch before it was taken by the British. Looking at the map of Guyana in the Arlington Library's largest atlas, read the names of all the towns located along the coast, left to right, between the capital of Georgetown and the city of

New Amsterdam (which, for some reason, the Brits decided not to rechristen as they did with New York). The name that comes to mind immediately after will be the name of the Sixth Borough. You will know it when you think it.

The Loveliest Street: The Sixth Borough's—and, many would have agreed, the whole city's—most beautiful street ran for fifty blocks, roughly northwest to southeast. Lined with elaborate nineteenth century mansions, this landscaped parkway would have started roughly at the same coordinates where the Ridgewood branch of the Queens Public Library now stands. Find all of the books in the 700 section of the Ridgewood Library, where books on arts and recreation are kept, that have blue or red spines and note the authors' last names. When you read the list, the name of this loveliest of streets will come to you. The names on the blue spines are those of the borough's wealthiest families, whose elaborate mansions lined the thoroughfare. Those on the red spines are of the painters, poets, sculptors, authors, musicians, and raconteurs who lived in the apartments these mansions were subdivided into after the wealthy fled during the Great Depression, and the area became the Sixth Borough's most storied bohemian enclave.

The Most Boisterous Parade: Residents of the Sixth Borough were known for their strong sense of local pride. Every year, residents of the borough's seventy-six neighborhoods would construct elaborate floats celebrating attributes of communal identity to ride in a parade that stretched for miles. The most elaborate of these were typically produced by the neighborhoods located along the borough's waterfront, an area colloquially referred to as "Little Ellis Landing"

as so many new immigrants made their way here. Today, Queens is the most ethnically diverse county in the mainland United States, and its independent library system is renowned for its foreign language collections. In the Woodhaven Library branch, you can learn where the Sixth Borough's most vibrant ethnic enclaves traced their roots. Note all of the languages represented in the library's foreign language section, which can be found in the 400s. While they won't necessarily be the most prominent in the group, your intuition will tell you which five languages were most commonly spoken in the Sixth Borough's immigrant enclaves.



The Wisest Institution: Washington Irving, a writer remembered for his fantastical historical accounts of New York City life, in actuality wrote extensively about life in the Sixth Borough—though much of this work has been lost. In the Brooklyn Public Library branch that now bears his name, you can learn about the city's greatest lost museum. Built around the same time as Manhattan's American Museum of Natural History and Metropolitan Museum of Art, which collect and display artifacts representing the natural sciences and the arts, the Sixth Borough's Museum of Philosophy was a sprawling marble edifice that enlightened generations of New Yorkers before its sudden disappearance. To discover the subjects of the museum's most visited exhibitions, visit the 100 section of the Washington Irving branch, where philosophical books are kept, and take note of the books at the end of each shelf. Common sense will reveal to you the information that you seek.

VERY SPECIFIC VERY SMALL PLACES

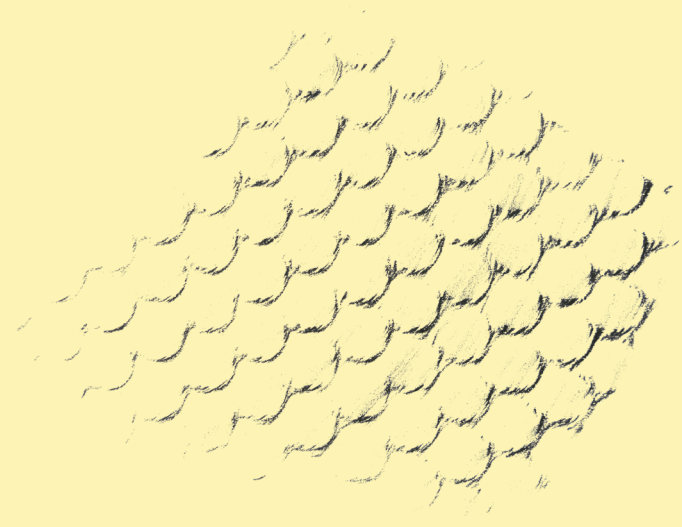
**Method for Personal Attachment to Urban
Micro-Sites in Support of Emotional Well-Being
and Belonging in New York City**

Andrew Blackwell

*Andrew Blackwell is the author of
Visit Sunny Chernobyl, a book about
the world's most polluted places. He
is also a Senior Producer for
Op-Docs at the New York Times.*



It's a big city, and crowded, and frequently noisy and messy, and if you move here without knowing very many people, you might find it a little alienating. Especially if, say, you work the late shift in an empty office building with echoing corridors, and return home at two or three in the morning, riding empty, rattling subway cars and walking deserted sidewalks. The city without its people is disorienting. But also during the day (crowded subways, lively sidewalks), when the presence of all those people can itself feel isolating, when everyone respects each other's space a little by leaving them the hell alone—but maybe too much.

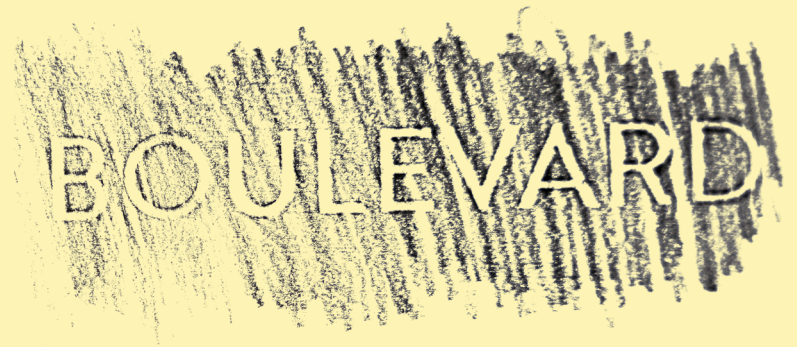


So while you're going around the city, you might look up at the massive buildings, or hear the thundering of a passing express train, and you might wonder what all of this city built over centuries has to do with you, personally, and what you're even doing here. You might ask:

Am I out of place?



You need to nip this in the bud. All the people of the world belong here. Even the rats and racoons and pigeons and bats belong here. So do you.



What you need is a toe-hold. A minimum viable place of belonging in the city. A spot where you can hang your hat, metaphorically. A coordinate that is specifically, uniquely yours.

**VERY SPECIFIC VERY
SMALL PLACES** | Andrew Blackwell

Let's find this spot for you.

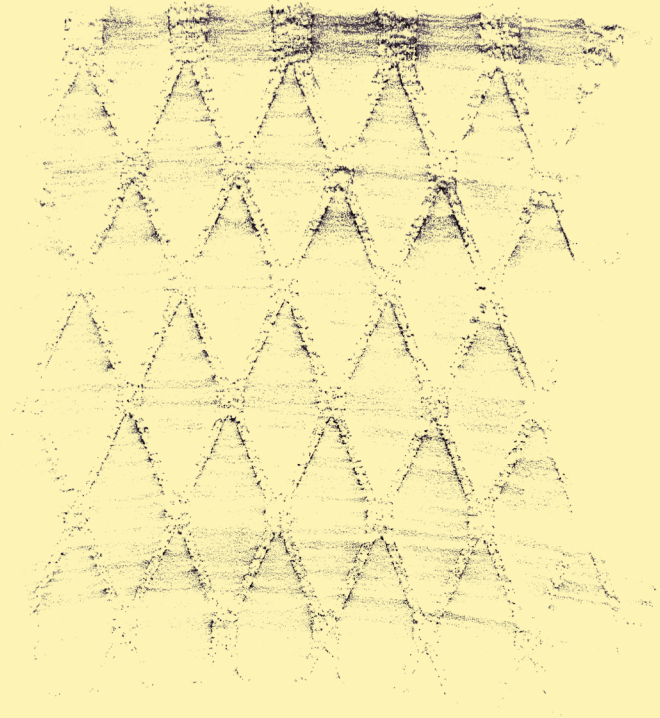
Pay attention as you go along your daily routes. Look at everything around you that's not moving. You're waiting for your eye to rest on some tiny corner of something. A totem in hiding.



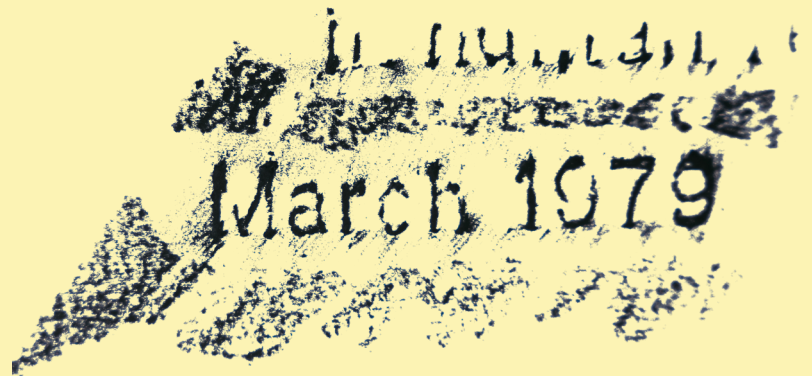
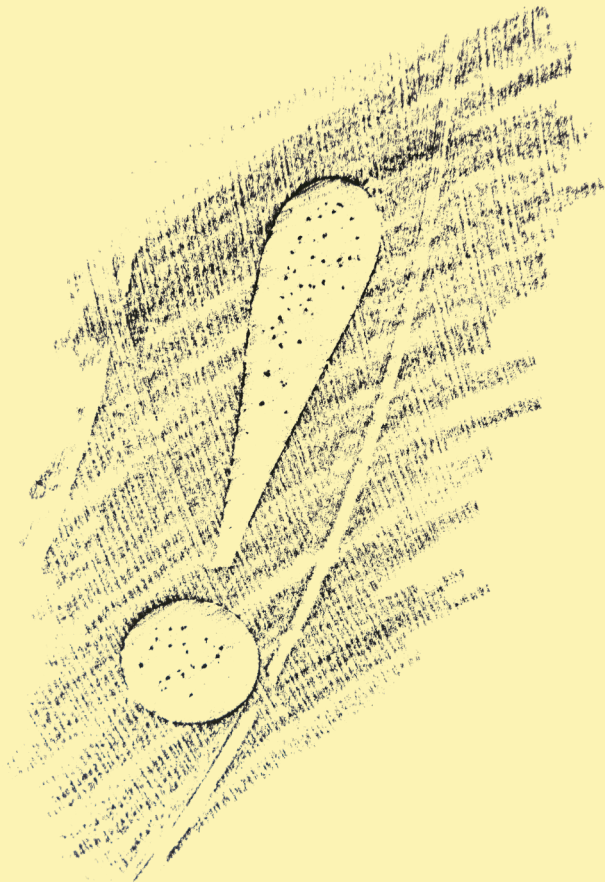
Don't think "a subway stop." Think "a specific rivet in a specific pillar on the platform at Queensboro Plaza."

Don't think "the library." Think "a single engraved word by the library entrance."

Something you will be able to remember. The oddly shaped paving stone. The one blue tile in the mosaic. The game is to ask: what is the smallest possible piece of the city that could retain some interest or personality or meaning for you?



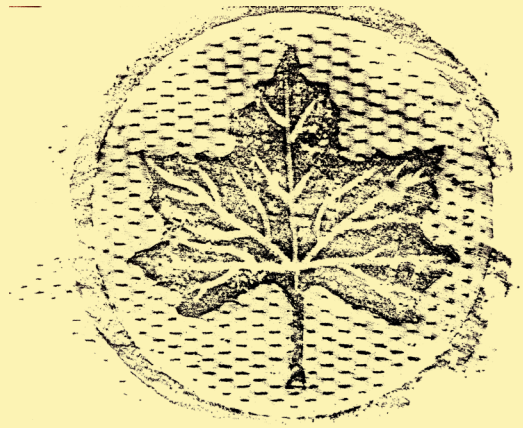
Once you've chosen it, make sure to notice it every time you pass by. Stop for a moment and touch it with your fingertips.



Repeat regularly for between one month and sixty years.

**VERY SPECIFIC VERY
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Am I saying you should become a connoisseur of manhole cover textures? Am I saying you should, over a significant portion of your life, go out of your way to visit an individual mosaic goose?



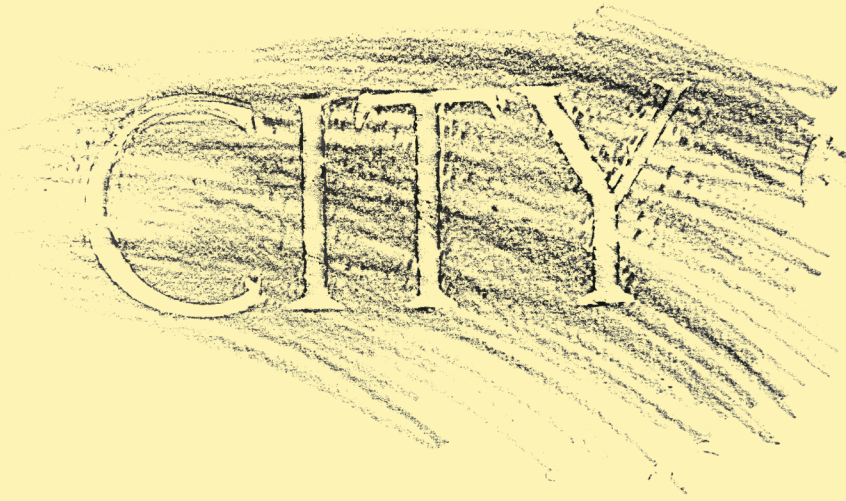
I'm just saying it's an option.

As of this writing, many top-tier urban micro-sites remain available for adoption. Enough to go around. Possibly infinite.

The big, carved letter L in the stone wall by the Scholar's Gate entrance to Central Park: this is a good one. Especially if the letter L is meaningful to you. Or you could claim the whole word. The city is festooned with carved words and dates, any one of which could become meaningful to you.

Also good: the northeasternmost lamppost on the terrace of the Main Branch Library, near 42nd Street. Better: one of the decorative iron vines curling up its base. Better still: a single leaf on one of those vines.

Subway art is rich territory, too. But don't simply choose the penguins in the Fifth Avenue N stop. Choose the third penguin from the left. Or just its beak.



Or choose a single slotted screw, on a single step, at the top of the staircase of a particular subway entrance. You will be the one person in the city, in the world, who pays attention to that spot, who visits it, who makes a friend of that infinitesimal bit of city hardware, who sees how it lasts, nearly unchanged, year after year, as millions of your fellows step over it. And if one day, after decades, you pass and see that it's been torn out, or that the stair has been replaced, then you'll be the one who notices the change.



Maybe you'll find yourself grieving the absence of a single slotted screw. But by then you won't be questioning whether you belong here.

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ecologies

Colophon
DGM Saffron
Rosette
Bogart

Edition of 200
Printed on 70lb Lettermark Text,
65lb Astrobrights Cover, 60lb
Astrobrights Text and 27lb Vellum.

Risoprinted and handbound set
of four zines.

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