

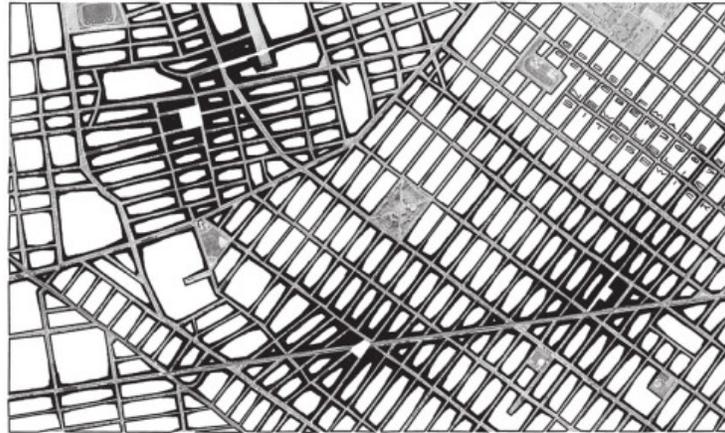
## the contemporary past (anth 6651)

*"Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past" is a seminar in the Anthropology Department at Columbia University*

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### A disorientation guide to the city you thought you knew

Posted on [February 8, 2013](#) by [Eli Geminder](#)

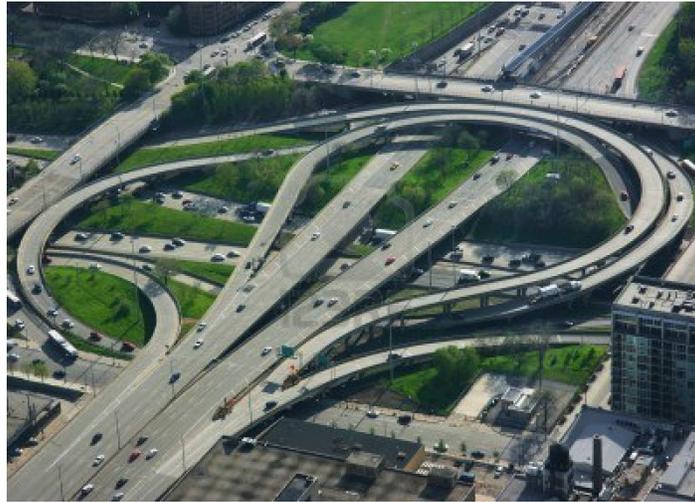


NPS map – Bushwick, NY

**New Public Sites** is an ongoing project from self-described public artist [Graham Coreil-Allen](#) who is intent on redefining the public's relationship to the frequently obscure and forgotten features of urban landscapes. It's goal is to be a "radically expanded understanding of civic space" which "proposes alternatives for representing and activating the potential for such under-recognized sites". His project consists of a website where interested people can find an extensive [typology](#) of sites, along with walking tour [maps](#) of several cities, and a schedule of tours led by the artist in Baltimore, where he lives.



Exploring interstitial spaces



Freeway eddies – Chicago, IL

Many of these sites are artifacts of a built environment whose proportions are often tuned to the needs of automotive transport rather than pedestrians. One classic example is the “freeway eddy” which he describes as “an interstitial fragment of space between intersecting curves of highway pavement”, or one of my favorites the “desire line”, “a path developed by pedestrian footfall erosion, marking the shortest and most easily navigated route between origin and destination”. A roadside post without its sign or a disused billboard scaffold becomes an “empty signifier”. Other sites are the orphaned spaces created by uneven development such as “displaced forests” or instances of “monumental isolation”, an “anonymous mass conspicuously framed by a large pavement expanse”. By devising catchy and poetic names for the liminal spaces, structures, and markings of the urban landscape, Coreil-Allen seems to be engaging in a rebellious reverse engineering of the discourse of public space. By naming these new public sites, our attention is drawn away from the parks, squares, and other fetishized spaces we normally think of as public space, and towards the occluded, sometimes uncanny aspects of the city.



Monumental Isolation

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