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A Walking Tour of Forgotten Urban Spaces

Artist Graham Coreil-Allen takes locals on an unusual tour through Clarendon & Ballston.

By [Brooks Hays](#) [Email the author](#) March 6, 2011

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One of the most interesting and unique walking tours ever strolled occurred yesterday in Arlington, Virginia. Baltimore-based artist Graham Coreil-Allen guided a group of Arlingtonians through Clarendon and Ballston, revealing some of his favorite forgotten urban spaces.

Beginning at the Arlington Arts center at the corner of N. Monroe St. and Wilson Blvd., Coreil-Allen led an eclectic group of intrigued locals, young and old, around the neighborhood, revealing hidden niches of the urban surroundings. They were unassuming places, often more imagined than real. A crowded intersection of geometric perfection, an unrealized real estate project, a muddy underground stream exposed: Coreil Allen calls them "New Public Sites." An exhibit by the same name and addressing the same themes is on display at the Arlington Arts Center through April 3rd.

All attendees of the walking tour, which commenced at 2pm on Saturday, were introduced to the process Coreil-Allen coins "Radical Pedestrianism," a process by which average city walkers become hyper-aware of their concrete surroundings. Early in the tour a blaring Ambulance passed the group; Coreil-Allen described this instance as "Aural Saturation," one of his many trademarked terms for the overlooked instances of urbanity.

Jargon, followed by poetic performance, was Graham Coreil-Allen's main vehicle for communicating his strange love of the city landscape. At 9th St. and Pollard, there was "Perpendicular Extreme," a perfect right angle of building facades and crosswalks. Further down 9th at Quincy, Coreil-Allen revealed what he named "Vertical Squeeze," a narrowing of a city corridor.

It would be easy to laugh at Coreil-Allen's lingo and theatrics, but the young artist was simply having too much fun, and the tour group slowly bought in, at one point joining him on a sidewalk grate to soak in the rushing sound of the Metro below. Surrounded by mulch and shrubbery, he termed the raised grate "Seclusion Acres: A void of privacy surrounded by gathered screens of green."

On each stop of the tour Graham Coreil-Allen "resignified" a strange but overlooked aspect of the urban landscape. Sometimes these places were specific, like the "Box of Uncertainty," an elaborate concrete square doing a poor job of hiding a building's HVAC units, and other times they were abstract.

There wasn't anything exactly profound about these tour stops -- they were places that already existed, created by the chaos of urban development. But Coreil-Allen's dedication to the cityscape was admirable. His childlike fascination with public space was infectious, and he was ultimately

successful at compelling his audience to look just a little bit closer at their surroundings. Where many may walk by unassumingly on their daily commutes, there may exist "vistas invisible and playscapes for all."

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