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The Walking Revolution: Graham Coreil-Allen and his Walking Tours

By Albert Huang

In 1968, the entire advanced capitalist economy of France was virtually shut down by the spontaneous May Uprising, during which almost a quarter of the entire population of the country was on strike at its apex. Part of the inspiration—the slogans daubed on walls, mottos shouted, and ideas propounded—by the many students, unions, and citizens protesting the government during this volatile time, came from a group of avant-garde artists and radical political theorists called the “Situationists.”

Their ideas, during decades of unprecedented post-war boom, aimed to critique the excesses and complacency inspired by capitalism, specifically their idea of the “spectacle”. The “spectacle” was the idea that materialism was infiltrating our social relations and how we live our lives. Commodities and goods were becoming proxy for first-hand experiences and individual expression.

Entire lifestyles were becoming commodities, sold by the industrial political complex to their profit. Just imagine the classic 1950s white collar family, and all the material and behaviors expected from them. If you live your life in a fixed way, living how corporations (and governments) deem you should live, if you cannot choose your own life’s experiences, how can you choose to be free in mind and thought?

As their name suggests, their solution was to exhort the citizenry to trade “things” for “situations”, subversive moments of life meant to reawaken and authentically satisfy your life’s desires. More than that, they believed people must fight the passive thought control of sanctioned or commercial entertainments to gain freedom.

Part and parcel to that, was the use of art as a political weapon. The Situationists saw art of worth as being inseparable from politics. Through techniques like “détournement”, where corporate marketing tools were wielded as weapons against the system in subversive prank and satire, they could turn precious commercial and political propaganda against their makers.

In America, many “artist-revolutionaries” took their brush, or their pen, or their hammer to do the same, with the same goal: To shock society into seeing the unfairness of the status quo with unorthodox expression, and to make art relevant as the Situationists had seen it – relevant to real, current events that affect real people every day.

One such modern-day revolutionary is Baltimorean Graham Coreil-Allen. Holding kinship to the civic and artistic ideals the Situationists, and their later American counterparts, Coreil-Allen is taking on, in his own unique way, the inequality taking place every day on the streets of Baltimore. Through mock tours modeled, in part satirically, off of staid and kitschy corporate tours, he eschews tourist traps for a more profound set of destinations. “Invisible public sites”, in Coreil-Allen’s lexicon, describes the eccentric and strange public spaces all around you. Many of them are remnants of undemocratic centralized or corporate-driven urban planning, they stand as reminders that our homes and local communities are not entirely controlled by us. Our own sense of place is branded by cold, capitalist-driven moneyed interests.

More than that, strict urban design beyond our control has instilled limits in how we perceive our own unconscious freedom to explore and utilize our local urban spaces to our benefit. The Situationist idea of “dérivé”, or “drifting”, inspired Coreil-Allen’s idea of “radical pedestrianism”, where we literally empower ourselves against corporate mind-control by walking. By shattering the mental boundaries of where we can go, not only can we redefine the expected uses of such spaces for community benefit, we can raise awareness about deficiencies and opportunities in our own environment.

Using “linguistic anarchy” and performance art, Coreil-Allen’s venture is manifested in his project known as “New Public Sites”, where he leverages language, communication, and design to spark discourse among his “tourists” on the true nature of the city, and the need to become enfranchised in one’s own urban geography.

Here, I had the opportunity to sit down with Coreil-Allen and ask him about himself, his work, and some illuminating experiences he had on his tours.

Albert: First thing I would like to talk about is personal identity. I was reading all these articles about you and your work, and it seems like you elude description. There are all

These different terms that can be used to describe you. You're a public artist. You're an interventionist. You're an anarchist. You are so many things. Right now, you're a Baltimorean.

Based on the philosophy of your work—which is using performance art and faux corporate tours to challenge the corporate control of city branding and urban planning—I find it very interesting that you yourself avoid a single, monolithic label. You are interdisciplinary when it comes to how to approach things, and how you do your work.

However, if you were to choose a choice description for yourself, what would, more or less, captures your mission or defines you?

Graham: I would say that, for me, the title that I use most prominently is “public artist”. And I mean that in a very wide sense. When we talk about public art, oftentimes people think of very concrete things, like “this is a mural”, or “this is an object in a public space”, but I operate as a public artist in a much broader terrain, as you had described – in an interdisciplinary way. For me, it includes not only urban design, but also programming – you know, events, event organizing – which in it in itself is a very practical skill to have, and it is a form of design.

Being able to write and engage people through language, different forms of media, like photography, video, and so on. All of this, serve as different “platforms” for art, so-to-speak, but also tools for turning people out and getting together in public space, which is ultimately, my biggest motivation: to make cities better, especially the public spaces that we share.

Albert: Taking into account all the different projects you've undertaken so far, from these walking tours that are the core of your current project “New Public Sites”, to other installations you have done – from hopscotch crosswalks for jaywalkers, exhibits, and more – all of them mesh together to provide an intriguing multidimensional and multimedia challenge to the role of public space. But you must have had some starting point, right?

Like I now you have a background in architecture and fine arts, starting from your architecture degree at Tulane. What got you thinking to start on this path? What got you to pull all these strands of thought – philosophical, civic, and aesthetic – together?

Graham: Well, I've always been interested in art. I've had support from my parents at a young age to be an artist, which is pretty cool, especially in sculpture. I took a keen interest in it, so I had the great fortune of being able to a public arts high school in Tampa, Florida, called Blake. And I studied sculpture there, among other disciplines.

I was always into sketching and making sculptures. But the whole time, I was also obsessed with cities, urban planning, and architecture. Throughout high school I was reading books about the disinvestment of cities through suburbanization. The reconfiguration of daily life based around automobile, private transportation, and how that's gone to kind of reshape our cities and our modes of existence, which I find infinitely fascinating, completely troubling, and also, inspirational. I always find these nooks and crannies of people who are making cities a better place, even despite all that. And you know, we're slowly seeing, a tidal shift, in terms of what people consider to be healthy, livable, accessible cities for all.

And so for me, I kind of followed this series of interests and engaged in different fields along the way. I went to architecture school because I thought it would be a good, hands-on way to affect the city, as an architect. But I realized that being an architect basically entails, not only doing all this kind of work and getting licensed, but oftentimes, doing other people's drawings for many years.

I really had an urge, when I was a freshman and sophomore in college at Tulane, to be affecting the city right now. And so, ultimately I decided to leave the School of Architecture, and go back into art, where I felt I could start implementing and creating these "situations", these "art situations" in public spaces, through events and sculptures and things, that would have a direct, immediate effect.

That is something I am still very much interested in. This type of ambition, and these strategies, are very much inspired by, historically speaking, "The Situationists", as an art movement and as practitioners in cities, and then also politically. Anarchism, as you know, is not only just a kind of philosophy, an aspirational philosophy, but also a set of strategies – direct action, mutual aid, voluntary association – what I consider to be some of the essential, truest forms of democracy, which I use as a guiding force in my everyday ways of collaborating with people. And hopefully, making my immediate surroundings a little bit more accessible and just.

Albert: Reading about, Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationists, and his idea of the "spectacle", would you say that's definitely a major problem for American cities like Baltimore, today?

I remember one of the other articles in which you were interviewed, it was mentioned that Los Angeles was a case like this, back then when there were the riots. Where essentially, people didn't have control over their living space and suffered because of that, leading to a breaking point.

Do you believe, this concept of "spectacle", of us living through commodities and objectified lifestyles, controlled by corporations and government, is something that's really reversible

with efforts such as yours?

Graham: Yeah, absolutely. I think that the “spectacle” as it was described back in the 60’s, was quite prescient of the type of environment we’re living in today. Obviously, the Situationists’ writing is a bit dated at this point, but nevertheless, what they were getting at is has been completely realized and exemplified through many contemporary forms of urbanism and political contexts.

So you know, we’ve got cities that are advertised. Cities kind of create an image for themselves. Marketers create images of place, and they leverage place as a way to drive consumerism. And consumerism not just in the sense that “oh, you’re going to go to the store and buy something”, but also “complete consumerism”, or lifestyle consumerism, where it’s now pretty cool to live in cities.

Which is great. Because for many decades it was all about living in the suburbs. And now people are moving back, and you have this problem of cities being sort of sanitized and scrubbed, where effectively class wars being waged on the working classes who have held down cities for so long while they were abandoned by the middle and upper classes. People are coming back and displacing them. So that they can “acquire” this spectacular lifestyle of, living in a loft, being around arts and culture, and having access to this image of what it means to be “urbane”.

This should not be an exclusive thing. This sort of notion of what is a vibrant city, is based off of many different kinds of fleeting moments in time, oftentimes we think about downtown New York, the Sohos, of the sort of revered era of the 60s to 80s. But that has all but kind of decimated now due to gentrification. And there’s many other examples of this.

In order for that type of true urbanism – and by “true”, I mean, not the “spectacle”, not the image of “this is the lifestyle that is exclusive and that’s really fun for me, but that is based on the ignorance of others”, which ignores how others underpin this lifestyle, the fact that the working class people now have to live farther out, away from accessible transit, in order to support to the businesses that upper classes benefit from.

Going back to it requires embracing this kind of catchphrase that has gained some currency – the “right to the city” – which means that everyone has a right to the city. We all have a right.

Ideally, we need to have neighborhoods that are mixed income, neighborhoods that would have accessible transit so that you wouldn’t necessarily have to drive a car. This should not be the type of thing that is only available to certain types of people who can afford to live in

these areas. So we get to this issue of capitalism ultimately, when you let the free market kind of have reign – which is a total misnomer, the idea that freedom is bullshit – because oftentimes the free market is entirely subsidized and contextualized by urban city, state, and national policy. We can really change the ways that the economy works to benefit more than just certain classes of people that fit within that “spectacle” of what the cities. – what oftentimes cities are striving for.

So, I do think it is entirely possible to be seeing moments of resistance and cooperation and creativity and innovation happening all over the United States and the world, especially here in Baltimore. We’ve got not only artists, but all types of other different cultural producers. I would describe them as anyone who helps produce culture – that’s pretty much all of us. We all have cultural associations, it’s like you go to your church, you throw a block party, you play music, you landscape your yard – this is all, speaking from an art-kind of perspective, these are all forms of aesthetics. But what makes them real, what makes them genuine is we’re engaging with them through others in our daily lives, and we see these little moments of kind of altered urbanism – ways people are making neighborhoods better through cooperation, through themselves, working under and around and with powers at hand to make these places better. So these are all examples of shattering that spectacle to create a people’s image of what the city can be.

Albert: There’s something I read by Ian MacLean Davis, who also went on one of your tours, who talked about how one of the most meaningful things she saw in your tours is, while you use the guise of a stereotypical corporate tour, instead of just looking at buildings and things like that, you actually engage with people.

You point out whether you’re walking down a “median line” or drifting down the “Highway to Nowhere”, you point contradictions, you provide a social commentary, you get people to engage with people, yet you also wrap it up in a very appealing way – you use the tools of corporate marketing against their makers to undo and point out instances of undemocratic capitalism and urban planning.

Graham: Oh yeah. Right. I mean, that’s what I see. I mean, there’s a couple things there. One, yes, I’m very interested in creating situations of dialogue. That’s both within our tour [and outside of it]. You know, people can talk and chime in, I always say “I’m an expert on public space, but so are you”. Anyone who uses public space is the expert on public space, way more than the planner that help make that public space, or who might be envisioning it for some type of use. So people will come in, and have their own insights, and have their own kind of background details. They may know more about the history, or whatever. In addition, we have the opportunities on the way to here, specifically from others I have collaborated with. When possible, I try to get some people who are a part of these

Landscapes, a part of these cityscapes, to be talking about it directly. So, when I did a tour through Old Town Mall, which is perhaps one of the most intensely devastated areas, yet immensely valuable historically speaking, neighborhoods of the city, I had a couple of shop owners talk about, their thrift store, or their pawn shop. And despite all the disinvestment, their offering services that are meeting people's needs. You know, affordable clothing. Affordable objects. And it's really great to hear about that.

And so, I think it's helpful on these tours to kind of be able to talk with anyone and everyone in the environment, and I try to be sensitive as I can to be mindful of people's space. There's different layers of publicness in public space. And I try not to encroach or adversely affect these types of more intimate public spaces that may be sort of, skirting on the way. Nevertheless, I think it's an opportunity to get people to realize that these areas, despite all their challenges – like my neighborhood also has suffered, struggled through, succeeded despite many of these challenges – that these are great places and that you can hang here and you can just talk to people. And if you come in, and you are intimidated and scared to talk with someone in a genuine way, they're going to sense that. It's just like anyone. You can tell when someone's intimidated. You can tell when someone's being fearful or being aloof for whatever reason, anxiety or what have you. And you're not going to want to talk to that person. But if they come up to you and their genuine and open and warm, and they're just like, you know, "I want to talk to you as another equal person", then you start off the conversation in a more...in the right way. And I think that can be a really helpful first step in terms of just redefining how we can combat racism in our everyday lives, from the perspective of white people.

Now, in terms of the marketing, yeah, that's kind of part of my aesthetic toolkit there. You know, I think about the immense challenges that we're up against, in terms of the "spectacle", so to speak. People's minds being warped from a very young age to buy and live in certain ways, and glom onto identities that can only be achieved through consumption, for example, believing in things like brands or teams, or what have you. Or about making money, but that becomes part of your identity.

And it's like you know, you also have these mixed relationships where it's like the Ravens. Sports franchise. They exist to make a ton of money. They do make a ton of money. They get paid absurd salaries. We get ripped off by going to the games, you know. But nevertheless, it's still a beautiful culture. It should be celebrated. "Ravens culture", it's really awesome. It's a great way for people to just share in great moments in each other's lives. To have tailgating. To talk about, to keep up with how things are doing, to wear your colors, and so on.

And so I see that there's some contradictions here, but nevertheless, I wanna to be able compete with that when it comes to culture. Because people's identities and ways of living are being shaped by very highly skilled marketers, scientists, and designers who are studying them and their behaviors, and are optimizing objects and lifestyles that are sold back to them in such a way that they feel that it's what they want to do. You know, it's like "Oh, this is my independent choice. This is who I am. I choose to wear this brand, or to eat this food, or whatever. Or to buy this car. To live in this type of neighborhood". A lot of it is being guided by capitalist forces that are not about individual culture. That are not about benefit for all. It's about making some people some money. But you do that in the most subversively evil ways possible which is where you make them believe that they are this. That they are what they wear. That they are what they eat. And, they are what they buy in the long run. And that's kind of putting it in a kind of general way.

But for me, the most exciting challenge is to kind of turn that around. Because marketers are always taking from artists. They go, "Oh, look at this creative thing that this artist or performer did in public space. That's really fun, let's appropriate that and turn it into our own viral campaign". You know, do we realize that that wanky thing that some people are doing out in public space shot with a shaky cell phone cam, is actually an advertisement for Oreos?

I totally saw this in New York City, it was stupid. And I'm like, this is what they want, they want to make it appear as if it is natural culture. We have to combat that. And we can do that in our own ways. Because we are the ones who are inventing all this. They just appropriate it and have a ton of money to leverage it on a much larger scale. So I am attempting to do that – to be a designer, to be a marketer, to operate in these strategic ways using aesthetics.

Albert: "Sense of play", right?

Graham: Yes, "sense of play". A "sense of place". Bringing people together through cool aesthetics. I'm like, "Yeah, come on, do this tour. The tour's totally safe, legit, and fun. And you can tell that because I've got a good-looking logo. You can trust a good-looking logo. And I wear a uniform, so clearly, you must be able to trust me". And yeah, it's kind of funny. I play with that. I indulge that. For me, I exist...I kind of wear both...sort of modes. I am an expert. I believe in the badge. But the badge is just me, and I don't lie about that. I'm not like a corporation, where I pretend I'm something else. The badge just represents me, and that's all that is. I want to show people, you know, that we can all create our own badges.

We can create our own organizations, our own initiatives, and they are just as legitimate as any corporate initiative or media campaign out there. And if we have more access to the

skills, and tools, and aesthetics that are otherwise used to shape our lives for consumption, then hopefully we can push it, you know, a more inclusive, alternative, and accessible vision for culture in our everyday lives. Celebrating what already exists. So I try to do that with the tours, with the website, with the merchandise that I make. It's just basically a way of making it fun, accessible, and trustworthy, which is what I aspire to be.

Albert: So one article mentioned your uniform...

Graham: Haha, yes. Khaki shorts. And a teal polo shirt with a badge on it.

Albert: So going off of what you just said. This brand. This mark. This person that you've marketing...you're marketing yourself, you're not marketing some insidious campaign. Do you put on any component of performance? You describe it as "performance art". Do you have a specific stage persona? Or...

Graham: Yeah, it is performance art. Like many art forms, there are many different types of performance art. What I do...I mean I consider everything I do to be art in different ways. And so when I talk of performance art, for me it is all about the body. It has to be rooted in one's physical body. So when I am out there, with people, walking through space, talking to each other, and learning from these environments. I am engaging in a form of what I consider to be performance art.

But I'm not necessarily presenting like a character that is different than who I am. I am just being myself, albeit I'm being what I describe a "public version" of myself. So I'm not talking about my personal life, or whatever. I'm talking about the environment as I see it, and I use the tools that public people need to use in order to be engaging. I project my voice. I've practiced some language. And as we kind of touched on earlier. I identify different types of invisible public spaces through terms and ideas that I've appropriated from architecture and also created in conversation with people. And for me, this is an opportunity to kind of, create new ways of having a conversation. It's kind of hard to talk about a place if you don't have a name for it. So for all these weird public spaces, which for me are so insightful and meaningful about cities, don't have names. It's kind of hard to understand, like, "Wait what's going on here?", if we don't have the terms, the tools, to talk about it. So I try to present these. There's a sort of pedagogical aspect to my tour. We're not only presenting places, we're presenting concepts of how to understand them. Of how to trade them through conversation.

And so, for me, it has the pedagogical aspect, the sort of functional aspect of language. But more...just as compelling for me is the fact that it is a form of poetry. This is what I kind of turn to when people ask me, "In what way is this performance art?". Well, for me, the language is a form of architectural poetry. I craft the language to be, at times, pretty

straightforward and didactic. But I also try to optimize to be, kind of, catchy, have a little zing to it, or perhaps have a little ennui. Or you know, maybe [have something] beautiful or something subliminal about it perhaps. I hope they can be at times, many different things. And I enjoy that as a writer. And I enjoy performing it as well, and carrying through that language.

Because it's one thing to read a book, but if you've ever heard the author read an excerpt from a book, it can be so much more powerful. You know, you're at Hopkins, I had heard Ta Nehasi Coates read from his book, his latest book, "Between the World and Me". And, it's really, really powerful to hear him read his own writing. And I hope to be able to energize some of these words I'm setting out into the world through my modes of performance. Which are, what I said, kind of rooted in my body. I wear the uniform; I try to make this a legitimate encounter for folks. I also try to make it a safe space as we move through the environment. And I try to make it a little different to open up the possibilities of what can happen during a guided tour. It's not just a ghost tour, where I'm probably telling a whole bunch of lies, but in an entertaining way. Here... I'm trying to kind of navigate between pedagogy, play, performance, and ultimately, the political. And getting people kind of motivated to understand their everyday environments and hopefully to go out and continue to build on the change that people are already doing.

Albert: I've read a number of blog posts of people who were on your tour. And one of them said that it kind of blew his mind. They compared you to...I know one of your inspirations is Robert Smithson. He compared you to the Baltimore version-

Graham: That would be a huge compliment. One day, I hope to be as good as Robert Smithson.

Albert: But essentially, through the process of going through your tour, through the way you have these people drift through the cities, it really made these people see things in the way they didn't imagine they could see before. Do you have such an experience where either you or one of your audience members had this kind of engagement that they themselves did not expect they would have?

Graham: Yeah. Absolutely. I'm trying to think of some examples of...because this always happens... Okay, so I'll give you an example my most recent tour I did in collaboration with McDaniel College.

Albert: In Westminster.

Graham: Yeah, Westminster. I worked with some students to learn about their campus. And I also worked with residents along this street called Union Street, which kind of runs along the south edge of campus and is one of the two historically African-American sections of Westminster. And it still is a Black street. One of the huge assets on Union Street is the Boys and Girls Club. And this is a place where hundreds of kids get really great engaging afterschool care programming. Where they are motivated and provided with guidance to do their homework. Are given some physical recreation. And have opportunities to have safe access to Internet and things like this. Really, really great institution. And oftentimes, you know, I wanted to understand – how did this thing get created. Other than talking about, “Oh, this is a thing as it exists, it’s good”.

Well, it was one of the residents on that street who would illuminate us on the tour. And she kind of filled this gap which I couldn’t track down. I was able to look back in time and determine that Boys and Girls Club was created with in part with a huge grant from this Methodist organization. It was created after the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles as a way to address the issues of justice and equality through faith-based support. And now, essentially, there are this huge granting organization and they helped pay for this really awesome building on Union Street, essentially. And that was about as far as I got.

Well what I didn’t know, was that the initial idea, before that was brought to this organization, was created by the church that was started across the street, by the pastor. Originally the Boys and Girls Club was in his church, in a much smaller space. And the pastor, an African-American pastor on an African-American street, knew the needs of those families. They needed a place for their kids to be after school until their parents got off work. That was the Boys and Girls Club. So they started doing a Boys and Girls Club program within the church to meet the needs of their community, and essentially he worked in collaboration with some other Methodist organizers in the school itself, and ultimately put together this proposal that was then sent to this granting organization that secured the million dollars that built this awesome building across the street.

So I was like, yes, okay. It’s deep history there, right? But...that was not written down on the Internet. I couldn’t just find that. I needed to know that from a neighbor who was working and living there on the street. And she used to go to the church on occasion. So she kind of filled in that gap. So I was like, “Yes, thank you”. And that is for me, a hugely inspirational. Not because I’m necessarily trying to support this or that program or church or whatever. Just the fact that “Hey, this is what community leaders do”. This community leader saw a need. He started meeting that need with whatever means he had available in the immediate scene, in their church, right? And then...hey, we have an opportunity to scale it up, let’s look for the bigger resources. That is people power. That is people working together. And now all of the sudden, they have this building. They have this huge building that’s benefiting over a

hundred kids afterschool. So they have directly created part of the city. I mean, look at that now, that's physical chunk of the city. It's a cool chunk of the city. And it looks awesome, it's a beautiful, historic-looking building that totally respects the street scape. It is a beautiful bridge between Union Street itself, and the back door literally has steps up into Westminster College from which they get a lot of their volunteers.

Albert: It seems like an epitome of the community taking control of its own space.

Graham: Yeah, it is. It is also a great example of a community working in collaboration with larger institutions to meet their needs, and to create a really great relationship with the college on the hill. Oftentimes, you talk about the “college bubble”, students not getting off-campus. I mean, that exists at Westminster as well, but at least through the Boys and Girls Club, you have a lot of interaction between, these really great mentors, the college students who know a lot who can help offer tutoring services to the kids and so on, and then the youth who live literally right next to the school. And, so that's just one example.

Albert: How did you get inspired to start these tours in the first place? And what motivated you to come up with the terminology you use to describe these “invisible” public spaces, what you call the “Typology of New Public Sites”? I know you appropriated some of them, using what you called “linguistic interventions”. But how did the inspiration find you?

Graham: It kind of developed organically. And it came out of just problem-solving in terms of what I wanted to do.

So, the quick version of the story is basically, in New York I was doing these site-specific installations. Situationist “détournements”. Where I go into a space, I take some of the existing material, and try to rearrange them in such a way that it would reveal a latent truth or condition that I was interesting in highlighting about the space. So for example, there was this big vacant lot in my neighborhood. I lived in Northwest Buschwick. And there was this half-sized city block. It was all overgrown and it was developing an ecosystem. It was an abandoned construction site. They tore down the building, they dug out a pit, they built a retaining wall, they had a bunch of rebar lying around, some barrels, big piles of sand, and big piles of rocks and things. And then all of a sudden, the construction appeared to have been just abandoned. The whole area was getting overgrown with trees, beautiful grass, and all sorts of urban ecology.

Some of the regulations came in. It was supposed to be a bread and milk distribution facility, and so they started building this new distribution facility until environmental testing revealed that this was in fact a toxic ground field. And you cannot build a food distribution on top of toxic waste. So the whole thing was abandoned and held in a state of suspension.

They put up a chain-link fence, but of course...if you put up a chain-link fence, someone would cut a hole in the fence. So I found the whole in the chain-link fence that people cut into. And I found a few things there, like, for one, people had lived there. We found abandoned campsites. And so I wanted to highlight that respectively. People had done beautiful street art there. There were toxic barrels that were all still left there. So I used flagging tape to literally just draw little rectangles around these things. Be like “Hey, here’s this. This is the context. This is the frame.” I’m using flagging tape, which is a type of material that one can find on the site. It was a construction site. To say, “Here’s a frame. Why are these toxic barrels here?” “Here’s some street art.” “Here are the effects of what used to be part of a campsite, also pointing out that there is a huge housing shortage in New York.” People are living in a toxic waste site. It was abandoned, so I thought that that was okay at the time.

So, I had other installations of this nature in different places. And I was drawing these maps, and I distributed a series of maps around different art galleries and bodegas, and storefront spaces in the neighborhood. Locating these places and inviting people to go experience as sculptures, kind of like out in public space – temporary interventionist sculptures of the Situationist inspiration. It was cool. I had fun. It seemed that my friends enjoyed. But I had no feedback from anybody else, obviously, because I had no direct level of engagement. So it was unclear to me whether or not anyone or not was responding to the maps. And once they got to the site, if they went so far to actually visit it, what their reaction was to the places I was highlighting through my use of installation materials.

When I came to Baltimore, I was thinking about this a lot. And I realized that, “Well, I’m mostly trying to draw attention to conditions of the site”, which is about the history, the current design, the attempted design, the current uses of that site, and how this is very telling about our neighborhood, and we can learn something from it. And that while this may look like an abandoned lot, it is actually a very vibrant space, even despite it being a toxic waste site with a chain-link fence around it. So it became pretty evident that I was like “Well, I can do these sculptures to try to attention to stuff. Or I could just go out there directly and talk with people about it. And point it out directly.” And I was like, “Eh, well I guess that’s effectively being a tour guide.” People had actually suggested this before, like “You should just do tours about these public spaces as well.” And I realized, well, if I want to be doing a tour, I’m not going to actually need to do the sculptures. So I dematerialized. I went from being a sculptor trying to draw attention to conditions of urbanism, to a person just going out there with people and talking about it. So I started doing these tours.

This was before I started using the “Typology”, before I started identifying the language. I was just doing these tours. And I realized as I was doing these tours – I did one at MICA, and I did one on Jasper Street, and I did one in DC – I was like, huh, I was using a lot of this

language over and over again. Some of this language is becoming repetitive. And a lot of it was drawing from my background in architecture and planning. And I was tweaking the definitions a little bit, like to better to fit the tour format, and also to better fit exactly what it was I trying to point at. And I realized, huh, that's also its own form of intervention in the sense I'm kind of optimizing the definitions of these terms to better fit. And that is the essence of language, words change their meanings. We change the meaning of words over time. And that this is something we are empowered to do. Just because the dictionary says it is this now, doesn't mean we can't make it say something else later. So that's when I was like, oh, I'll just start collecting these words as well.

I'm essentially, a tour guide offering a framework which the tour itself is the frame, and also offering many frames within that, which are the words, the signs, the symbols, the signifiers of these particular moments and experiences and objects and features of the everyday environment. So I started writing them down, collecting them, and using them. So all the time I learning, people come to me with new observations and insights, or I see something, and I say "wait, I don't have a word for that yet". Is there a word for that? And I'll look it up and say "oh, okay, that's boring", come up with a different one. And write it a definition that tries to get to that. And so it's rupturing the language, which is what we're constantly doing all the time. Culture is always rupturing itself, it's always redefining it constantly. Meaning and experience through creativity.

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