

Learning Places Fall 2019

SITE REPORT #1

Gowanus Gentrification and Zoning



The Gowanus of old in the foreground with the fast-producing gentrification in the background.

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PART 1: SITE OBSERVATIONS

1. What are some general observations about the character of this neighborhood? What does it remind you of? How does it make you feel?

- During this class was the first time I have ever been to Gowanus, and upon my first meeting of the neighborhood, I felt a sense of familiarity. There are many buildings there that shows the history of Gowanus, both its good and its bad. However, there are more than a few modern buildings in the area as well. On some occasions, these modern buildings are in between the older, originally constructed buildings. This is an off-putting feeling, in the sense that the modern building stands out, but not in a good way. The reason that I felt familiar with the area of Gowanus, I was unable to explain at first. After processing, I realized that the reason that this area feels familiar is because there is another neighborhood in Brooklyn that is going through a similar change; Bushwick. I live in Bushwick, and it makes me very uncomfortable at seeing modern buildings being built faster than they can be occupied. What makes me upset is that Bushwick is now in the top 10 in most expensive place to live in New York. All of these familiar feelings I felt when I first took a look at Gowanus.

2. How is the natural world contained or shaped by human activity or architecture? In what ways does the natural world invade or disrupt human activity, planning or architecture?

- The most prominent thing in Gowanus that is shaped by human activity is the canal. I would like to think of this question more as how does human activity disrupt the natural world. You can see this as the canal is becoming more and more polluted as time goes on. Although the heavy factory working of Gowanus is in the past, as more and more people flock towards Gowanus, these natural areas will continue to be disrupted. One of the biggest concerns in Gowanus is the possibility of flooding, but it seems that builders did not learn their lesson during the last flood. There are newly constructed buildings next to the canal, such as the buildings on Carroll street, right next to the bridge.



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- The natural world is definitely contained. As Gowanus becomes more gentrified, the people dictate where to place the natural world.

3. What people did you observe in the neighborhood and what activities are they engaged in?

- As I ventured closer towards Carroll Gardens, I saw more people that seem to be middle to upper middle class, but as I enter more towards the heart of Gowanus, I saw more people that were not as affluent. The people towards Carroll Gardens were either jogging or walking their dog, but overall, they did not stay in one place for very long. The people closer to the center were busy working in their stores, and there were people of older age relaxing. They were either playing cards or just talking in the front of their apartments. Regardless of what side I was in, the neighborhood seemed peaceful. I am not a resident, so I do not know rather this holds true or not. If it is anything like Bushwick, it is peaceful.

4. Reflect on a **specific** place you viewed in this neighborhood. A specific place means a single building, or an intersection, or an individual built structure, etc.

- a. Insert 1 photograph and/or sketch and provide a *creative* caption for the image. The caption should be a word or short phrase that suggests a theme or conceptual association related to the photo or sketch.



Caption: Dystopian Nature

- b. What is the *program* of the space? How are people meant to interact with one another and with the environment?
 - This area is meant to walk in and to sit down. Due to the small space, there is not much that you can do in this area. The few times that I passed by here, I saw no one in this area. My classmates and I sat in this area for a few minutes and looked at all the greenery. People are met to sit here and relax, and because of all the covering in this area, it is great to stay out of the sun.
- c. describe a possible creative reuse of this **specific** space for a performance:
 - a) Which areas are best for performers/activists and which areas are good for observers? Do these spaces overlap? Mention specific objects and structures in your answer.
 - This area represents how the people that are redeveloping the neighborhood tore down most of the natural space, and cordoned it off into a small corner. Due to this factor, I believe that performers and observers should share the same space in this area, because regardless

of who you are, you are affected by this statement. Every single item in this area was placed by man and not the earth, so every area can be used as an instrument towards rapid redevelopment. The greenery in this garden is about the healthiest in this area, so it can be used to show how the greenery outside is vastly different.

- b) What kinds of performance would work best (intimate or grand; processional or stationary; text and/or music; interactive or passive audience; etc.)?
- I believe body performance would work best here, because what is being represented through performative dance will be the greenery. Plants do not speak, and so they must use a different method to convey their message, their emotions, their pain. Music can be used for this performance, but it must lend itself to the performance. This can absolutely be an interactive performance with people doing whatever movement they wish, as plant movement is diverse.

QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH. These should follow directly from your analysis section and be complex and specific enough to serve as the basis of a research project.

Questions might relate to architectural or environmental observations, socio-political problems and/or solutions, demography, history, zoning, civic processes, performance strategy, etc.

1. Question?

- Why is it that some areas of Gowanus are being gentrified but other areas are not, and who is affected by it?

2. Question?

- How are the current economical living conditions of Gowanus compared to 20 years ago?

3. Question?

- What is the city doing in regards to the canal pollution?

PART 2: RESEARCH

Choose and revise one of your research questions for further research.

Revised Research Question:

Why is it that some areas of Gowanus are being gentrified but other areas are not, and who is affected by it?

- The biggest factor towards why some places are gentrified and others are not is because construction companies currently cannot expand further. This is all expected to change if the rezoning of Gowanus is put into effect. The Gowanus rezone, which was introduced in late March, could potentially bring in over 20,000 new residents, and 8,200 apartments. While that all sounds great on paper, beneath the surface, this rezoning can have a detrimental effect on the neighborhood, mainly its workers. In constructing these apartment complexes, many industrial factories are expected to be destroyed, to make room for these apartments. This move can potentially put hundreds of people without a job, and with the cost of living most likely going up after this rezoning, it can also leave them without homes. Also, while the city is hard at work with pushing this rezoning deal through, it is forgetting that with the 20,000+ influx of new residence, that the canal could become even worse. The canal is known as a dumping ground for toxic sewage, and all of the waste that every resident put down their drain. The city currently has no plans in mind on cleaning up the canal, as they intend to build many buildings along the waterfront. This move can have a disastrous affect to all of these building if another flood were to occurs. With this rezoning taking 10 to 20 years to complete, the canal will continue to become more toxic, and negatively alter the lives of every current resident.

CITATION 1:

Why did you select this source? How does it address all or part of your research question?

<https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2019/06/18/gowanus-business-owners-rezoning/>

- I selected this source because when a developmental deal of this kind happens, there are always winner and losers, and often times, the workers of the neighborhood are affected. Through my journey in Gowanus, I noticed a good deal of factories in the area, and many of them still operational. I wanted to know just how affected all these people would be. This source addresses my question of why Gowanus is not fully gentrified yet, and it answers the question of who will be affected by this.

Is the source credible? Why or why not?

- This source came from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, which has been a trusted Brooklyn news source since 1841. I had no doubt that what is written on their website is factual and thoroughly researched.

What further information would you need to answer your question? Where would you look for additional sources?

- I would have liked to find out which other locations (besides factories) will be negatively affected by the rezoning process. In order for me to find this information, I would have to look deeper into which areas are being rezoned, and see which areas are most likely to be affected. The projects of Gowanus are most likely to be unaffected by this, but this is no guarantee as there are talks to destroy project buildings in Bushwick. If this follows through in Bushwick, then it could easily happen in Gowanus as well.

CITATION 2:

Why did you select this source? How does it address all or part of your research question?

<https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2019/05/22/gowanus-residents-make-last-ditch-effort-to-stop-city-plan/>

Is the source credible? Why or why not?

- For the same reasons as choosing the previous article, but in addition to that, the Brooklyn Eagle

has a vested interest in this topic, and it covers this topic more than any other source. I also noticed upon reading this article that Nora Almedia is quoted, and she seems credible to me.

What further information would you need to answer your question? Where would you look for additional sources?

- I would like to further inquire how much has the canal's water has been affected between now and the last 10 years. I can use a government source to find this information, but I suspect that this information is either lacking or false. I would have to look deeper into a non-government source that has the true readings.

PART 3: Performance Reflection (after second site visit)

Write a 200 word reflection about how you felt during the second visit to the space and during the performance activities. How did this visit change your perception of the place and your relationship to the natural and built environments? Did the experience of 'performing' in the space (i.e., moving your body) teach you anything new about the landscape or architecture?

- I actually enjoyed, like very much! In New York, we are constantly moving around quickly, and unless it is a strong smell, rather good or bad, we are completely unaware of it. The second visit made me realize that if I just slow down, visually digest what I am looking at, and then take in through my nose that I can notice smells that I never had notice before. I smelled one of the older factory buildings, and I was able to smell its rustic, weathered history. My sense of smell is very different than other people in that many smells that repulse others, I do not mind in the slightest, and smells people may love can potentially repulse me. Due to this, the way in which I smell things can illicit different emotions, such as the canal water smell reminding me of Caribbean vacation by the beach. I always knew that you could kind of tell how long an environment has been around through sight, but I never once thought that you can do the same through smell. This shocked me. The dance that my group was a dance showing conformity, by having my group partners mimic me, and if they did not, I made them go back to following me. This is the way that current Gowanus is forcing natural environments to behave.