

Learning Places Fall 2017

SITE REPORT #1

Gowanus



(View of Gowanus Canal from F Train)

Janelle Foucault

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Introduction

For our first site visit we visited the Gowanus canal and the area surrounding it. I expected the Gowanus area to look like Bushwick area, a hippie but up and coming neighborhood with cool shops. In a sense they were similar but there were a lot of difference, one being the Gowanus canal, and other things that give it its charm. Walking around the area I noticed there's not a lot of foot traffic but, there is a lot of cars and trucks passing through, especially when we started to get closer to bigger stores such as Whole Foods. Geographically I felt the area was a oxymoron of itself for many reasons. One there could be development on a high rise and literally across the street there's an abandoned, run-down warehouse. Or how there are paved streets with bike lanes, than the intersecting streets would be cobblestone, which gives us a glimpse of history of the neighborhood. To some, these contradictions may fall on the back of the city for being lazy but, as we learned thus far in class, everything is planned. For example, what seems like an abandoned building could be the headquarters of an up and coming startup or restaurant, yet the exterior structure stayed the same to give it a historic aroma. Throughout the visit I took series of photos to document my experience of Gowanus.

Site Observations



(Gowanus Hosuse)

In this photo you see **Gowanus Houses**(right) and across from it smaller scale apartment and family homes. The Gowanus houses are 9 stories, with a uniformed jigsaw structure and all the buildings are in balance with one another. Also the **massing** of Gowanus houses contrast with the smaller building across the street that are one-dimensional and only 3 stories.



(Renovated apartments in Gowanus)

In this photo you see the **juxtaposition** of the building, which helps us see the difference between the modern and earlier ones. The modern ones have stylish colors such as orange, white, matted black, with smooth **facades**, **folly** windows, and a rooftop. The older ones seem made with **bubble brick** meaning the exterior surface is a bit rougher.

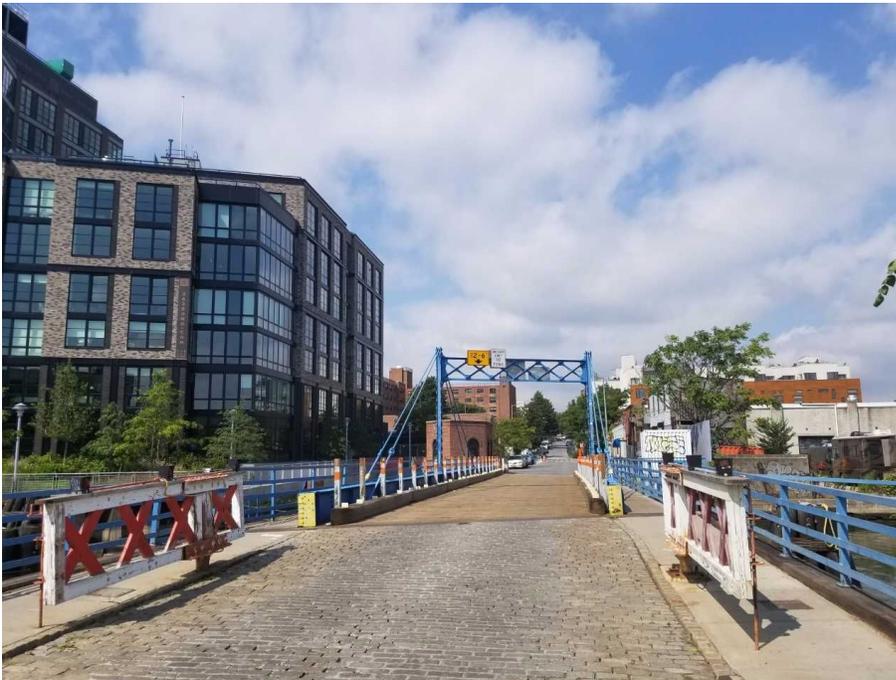


(Entry way toward Gowanus canal)

In this photo see a lot of the older buildings/warehouses have graffiti, which brightens up the blocks. Across the street you can see the wild vegetation that gives the street this abandoned vibe which is contrast with the amount of cars parked.



(Left: Industrial building, Right: Residential area) In these photos we see how wildlife is incorporated into the building and neighborhood. To the left is a well kept garden of the natural vegetation that grows in the area such as flowers and bushes. To the right is an average depiction of the residential area of the neighborhood where trees are bordered and distance away from the houses.



(One of the bridges over the Gowanus canal)

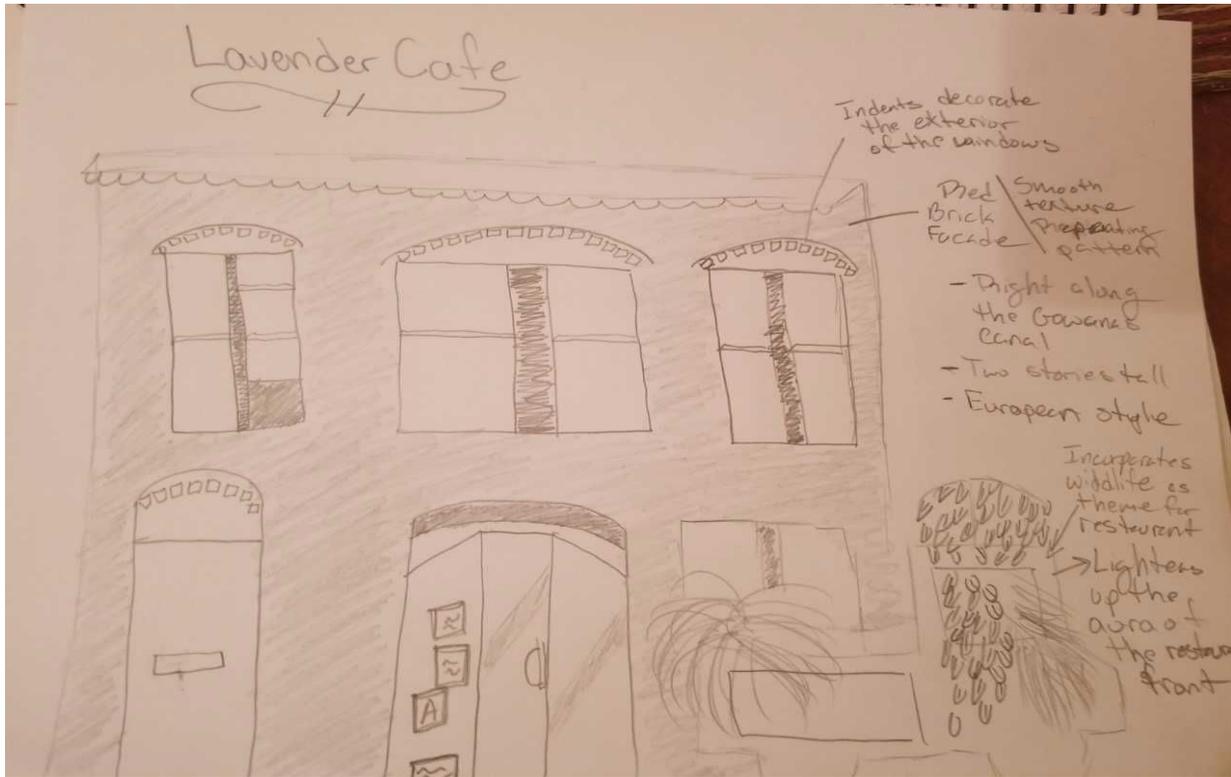
This photo captures what's around the Gowanus canal which is more of commercial and

industrial sites such as the Whole Foods, start-ups, offices and restaurants. Further away you will see the residential homes, but most the businesses are on the main street which would be Smith street. We also must note that the industrial buildings have been **re-purposed** for more modern uses.



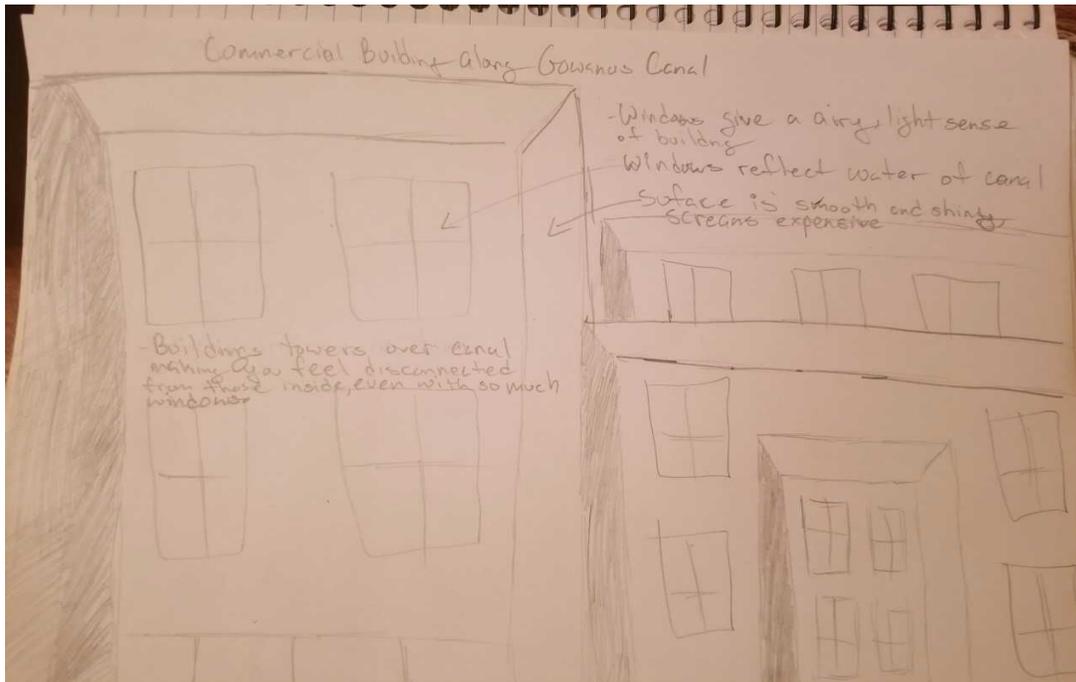
(Left: Seating along sidewalk with view of Gowanus, Right: Gowanus canal shore line walkway with public seating)

What I appreciate what the developers, architects, and city planners, etc, have done is that they don't try to incorporate the Gowanus with their plan but, worked their plan around the Gowanus. Their plenty of easy accessible walk ways and public seating along the Gowanus to just enjoy the beauty of the canal. For brief moment you forget it's heavy polluted with all the beauty that surrounds it.



(Lavender Cafe)

Lavender Cafe is popular restaurant along the Gowanus Canal, I sketch this building to show the development of Gowanus and how they keep the charm of the neighborhood.



(High rise along Gowanus Canal)

ANALYSIS/DISCOVERIES

After walking through Gowanus, if I had to give it a **Genius Loci** I imagine an older man with smudges on his face wearing a raincoat and rain hat just sitting in a tiny rowboat fishing in the Gowanus while smoking a cigar. I believe this is the spirit of the place because I can imagine workman leaving the factory for the day just walking along the canal, their sweat and dreams being swept away in the canal. Based on my spirit I can conclude that the people who live and work here are hard workers with a dream in mind, and dreams are then established along the canal for others to come and see that anything is possible. For example putting a popular restaurant or an elite high rise along a polluted canal.

Another conclusion I made was before Gowanus was really just area just work and someplace you would live. This also show the strong contrast of Gowanus to other areas nearby such as Park Slope and Cobble Hill. While in those areas you can't really see the past unless you were there before the renovation of Downtown but, in Gowanus you can still see it. I could tell that by the amount of industrial buildings vs apartments that haven't been renovated. Yet I could understand the charm and see in the future Gowanus being a hipper version of Dumbo, like a we'll kept Brooklyn secret.

In the end just like Gowanus a lot parts of Brooklyn were left on their own devices and claimed to be too lowly to inhabit. Yet, now Brooklyn is the place to be when coming the New

York City. Gentrification is in full effect, all we come hope for is that our genius loci isn't lost with our neighborhoods.

Keywords

1. Gowanus Houses
2. Gowanus Canal
3. Massing
4. Facade
5. Juxtaposition
6. Bubble Brick
7. Folly
8. Re-purpose
9. Lavender Cafe
10. Genius Loci

QUESTIONS

1. When can redevelopment become too modern and loses the charm of an area?
2. Is it possible for gentrification to accommodate the community already in the neighborhood than the one coming in?
3. Why is possible for genius loci to change from one block to the next in the same neighborhood?