

Learning Places Fall 2017

# SITE REPORT #1

## My Mid-Day visit to Gowanus



Cover Image: I selected this image because it depicts how different one part of Brooklyn is from the other. You can clearly see Downtown Brooklyn in this image, and then you can see the pollution that might've been caused by gentrification.

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### INTRODUCTION

The scope of this activity was to learn more about how neighborhoods can be different, even if it's only within a mile from a place like Downtown Brooklyn. It was great seeing residential parts of Brooklyn, and how it differs from a place that just has skyscrapers, which we are used to. I got to see actual houses rather than just apartment buildings.

## SITE OBSERVATIONS :

What do you notice about the scale and shape of buildings?

The buildings aren't nearly as tall as most parts of the city, such as Downtown Brooklyn or most of Manhattan, or even the Bronx. Most of the buildings are also a bit older and have more of a "classic" look to them.



Caption: This is a picture of a street that contains almost all residential homes. You can see how there are new buildings toward the main street in the area, and then how it goes back to older homes in the background.

What patterns, textures, colors, and ornamental features of the buildings stand out?

Some of the buildings are gray, and some are brown. Some of them have brand new buildings in between two old buildings, so you can clearly see that they are trying to change the neighborhood. Most of the buildings have a lot of windows, and have balconies or awnings.

Notice and note location of trees and other types of vegetation

Trees are lined up along the sidewalk, and you can see in the image above that there are a good amount of trees in that neighborhood.

Even near new buildings, vegetation is becoming a common practice in the area:



Caption: this image is a new apartment building right by the Canal. This will most likely contain luxury apartments. You can see how they are relying on the canal to gain new tenants, and they're advertising the canal as a luxurious place to live near.

What are the functions of different buildings and spaces in this place? Does the place include residential, commercial, or industrial sites? Are there stores, restaurants, cafes? Are there public spaces like public squares or parks? Areas where people can get together? seating?

There is actually different parts of the area. One street is basically dedicated completely to residential houses. Another part is all industrial with companies that operate right by the Gowanus Canal. There are a lot of Auto Mechanic shops in the area, and there is also a decent amount of construction going on currently, so I think it will become more industrialized. In some cases, there are businesses such as auto shops, right in front of apartment buildings. There are a few stores and restaurants, and they're mostly local businesses. They aren't the big franchises we all see on a day to day basis. There really isn't a big park or anything where people come together and sit, but the new building in the image above, has a decent amount of seating and is right by the canal.

Does this place seem planned or organic? How do the structures and buildings in this place interact with or disrupt the natural environment?

It looks like it was initially planned, but as businesses started moving in, it became more organic. It relied on where the residential homes were, and where the businesses were. They seem to be split up now based on that, with some businesses taking over blocks, and on other blocks you see all residential homes.

What people occupy the space and how do they interact with the environment? Is this place crowded? Walkable? Easy to navigate?

For the most part, it looks like a pretty nice place to live. It's pretty quiet most of the time, and it's an easy commute to Downtown Brooklyn or even Manhattan. The place isn't too crowded, it has more space than Downtown Brooklyn, so people are much more spread out. It reminds me more of a suburban area, that's slowly starting to be pulled into the city. Some roads leading to the Canal had a sort of classic theme to it like the one in the image below:



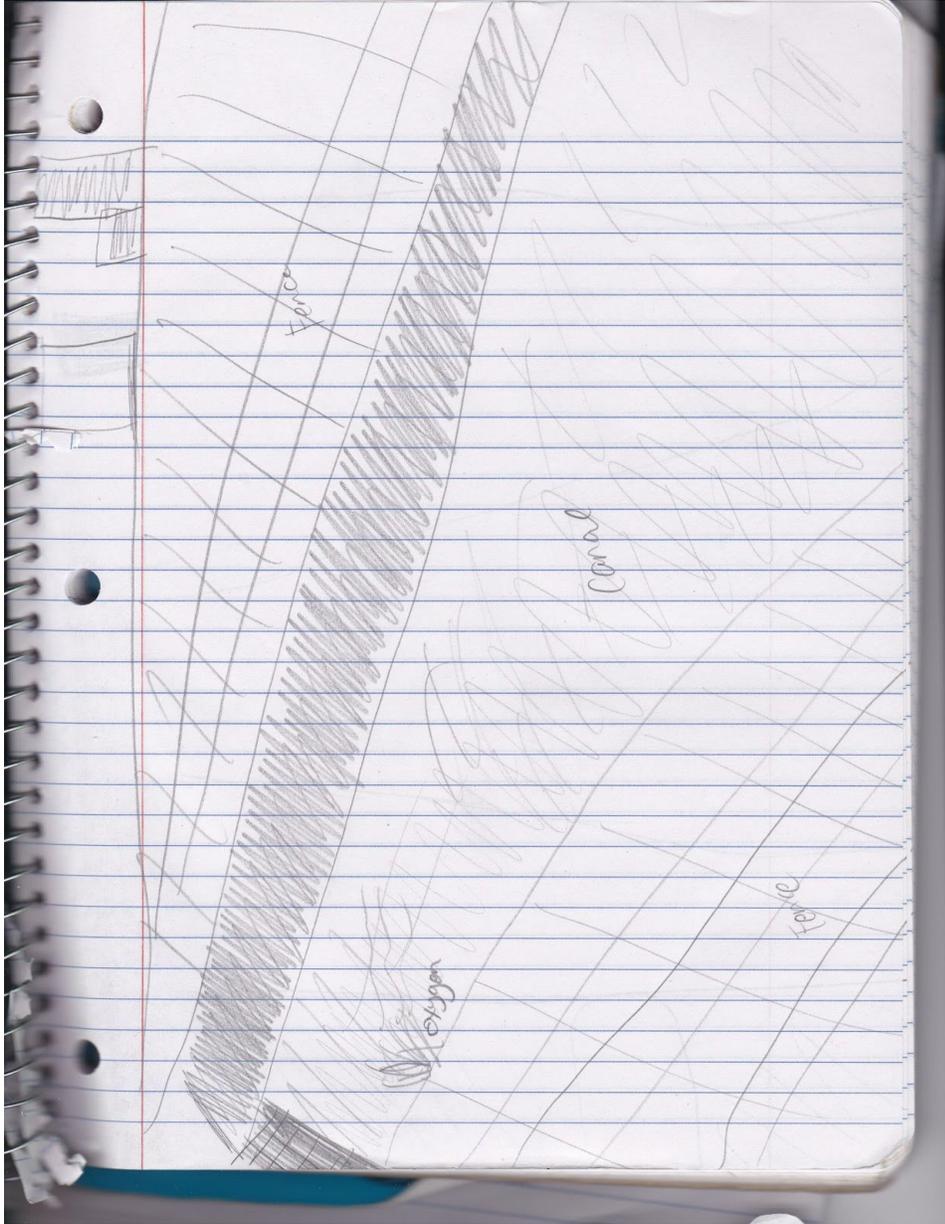
What is your personal experience of the place? Think about sound/smell/touch, your body's movement, contact with the ground and physical comfort - how does the place make you feel?

I liked the area. I am from Long Island, so it reminded me a little bit of that. It shows an area that is slowly being pulled into the city, and is being gentrified. The area is losing its old roots, and is being replaced by newer buildings and this is causing people to move out, or pay high rent prices in some of the buildings or homes.

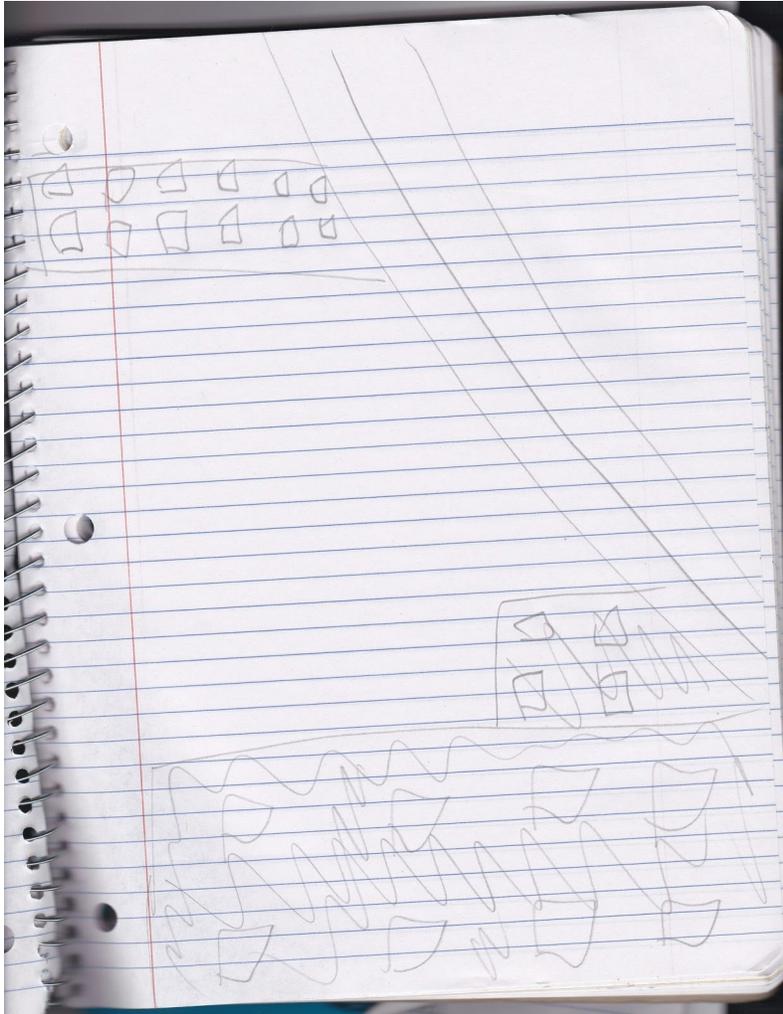
## ANALYSIS/DISCOVERIES

This place was a residential place, that looks like it was taken over by businesses about 20 years ago. Since then, people have had to move out because of high rent prices, and mainly because businesses just made the place polluted. Since then, it looks like it never really regained the once residential side it

had awhile back. Businesses are lined up along the streets, and it looks pretty deserted. The businesses aren't packed with people, and it looks pretty empty. This could've just been because we went during the middle of the day, but even the restaurants at lunchtime weren't too crowded. The Whole Foods we saw toward the end was much more crowded, and this kind of explains the whole process of how a neighborhood changes. The new franchise store in the neighborhood is kind of ruining the smaller businesses' chance of surviving in the area. The area looks kind of run down now, after everyone was forced to move out because of high rent prices. It once might've been a great neighborhood to raise a family in. It really tells us that Brooklyn is a big borough. Downtown Brooklyn and Gowanus are completely different. One relies heavily on luxury condos and apartments, while another basically relies on smaller businesses. New York City is also very big, but it also kind of speaks about how the city is also changing. Some parts of the city, which used to be all residential, are slowly becoming gentrified and are going to become very expensive and industrialized very soon.



Caption: This shows a view from when you first walk down Douglass St to the end of the street and look out and see the Canal from the corner of the fence.



Caption: This is a view from Douglass St, where you see old homes on one corner of the block, and then you see the Gowanus Projects on the other corner which are much larger and take up a lot more space.

**KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY** (these might include specialized vocabulary, city agencies, names of businesses or people  
\*5 keywords minimum required per site visit)

1. The Green Building - it's a popular event venue, ranging from weddings to just corporate meetings.
2. Pig Beach - a big restaurant, and outdoor grill with a bar that has been popular among the area for years now.

3. Gowanus Canal Pilot Sponge Park - designed by the City to address the pollution in the river by filtering the storm run off water.
4. Lavender Lake Bar - a popular bar in the area, which was initially based on the color of the river perhaps, but now the name doesn't fit the area too well.
5. La Violette Fancy Food - a local supermarket that was initially designed to sell "fancy" or luxurious food.

**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; do not include questions you can answer with a quick google search)

1. What really happened to the people in Gowanus, why did it become so industrialized. Was it because of the businesses coming in and taking over, or was it based on other parts of the city growing?
2. Is the Gowanus really toxic if someone goes into it, and if so why?
3. Will the Gowanus ever be a nice enough place to raise a family again, or will it remain dull like it is now?