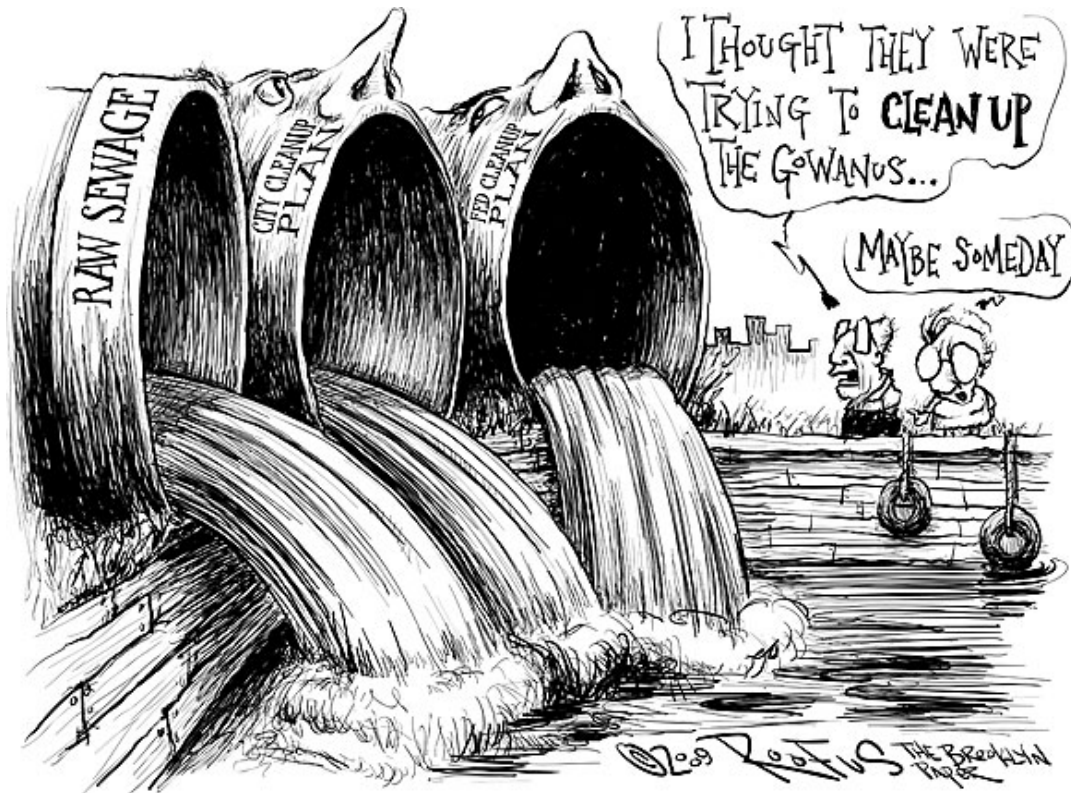


Learning Places Fall 2016

SITE REPORT #1

The very polluted waters: *The Gowanus*



- The canal that suffers because others decide to pollute it, not thinking of future consequences.

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In every place in the world there are things that make that certain place so unique like no other. I refer to the place known the most for its pollution that for anything else; this is the Gowanus canal. It is considered to be one of the most polluted place in New York City, The canal history dates back to the industrial revolution. Along the Gowanus canal, there used to be a lot of working factories such as concrete factory, soap factory and many other that were located along the canal. These factories used the canal as their waste disposal place, just by knowing is the disposal place for factories we can see how polluted those waters are. A more worrying scenario is the fact that there has been sewage overflow that end up going to the canal.

The Gowanus is like no other place out there. As soon as you reach the beginning of the canal, the north, which is located at the dead end of Douglas street towards bond street, you can smell that unpleasant odor of the so polluted canal. The smell is like a really strong chlorine solution such as the ones used in pools. Not just the smell but, the atmosphere of the place give you the sense as if you were transported back to the revolutionary era, where you had all of this factories one next to the other. Although these factories have been closed down you can still picture how this place got so polluted. Also something that is very noticeable is that water pump that its job is supposedly to make the water flow but, seriously I don't see the purpose of it, the only piece of water that is been taken care of is from the head of the canal. It can be seen that not far down the canal there is like a floating barrier that does not let the water circulate far more down. Vegetation along the canal is not as much as one might expect, the most vegetation is found at the beginning of the canal, more than that there is not much. Toward the more urbanized side of the canal there is a program that has been developed to help out the canal. The program is called "Gowanus sponge park". This very small park consists in having the excess of water such as rain ran through pipes to the park, the water filtrated and then goes

directly to the part. The other way this helps is that the water will not go into the sewage to prevent overflow and more contamination of the canal.

Leaning toward the Gowanus neighborhood, there are things that I did not expect and some other things that are very impressive. In the first place, in New York is very rare to see a place like this especially if close to the heart of New York. This place is the quietest place I have ever been on; the only people you see the most are those who work in the few factories that are still open. Traffic in the upper part of the neighborhood is very low in volume, at a point you feel this sense that this place does not fit into the definition of New York as a loud and where there's always people around. There are a lot of old houses in the north part of the canal which seem to be very old. You can see the paint peeling off the wall, in some other places the sidewalk is full of grown trees and grass. It gives you again the sense of abandonment and deterioration. In the other hand, you can notice that the neighborhood has been going under some transformation in term of the old houses and new building that are being built; the old Gowanus is basically being destroyed with all of these new buildings that before were houses. The spirit of this place is vanishing away; the neighborhood is totally being modified, it's not the same no more. Although there were a lot of artist in this place back in the days I never thought that this place would have such amount of graffiti drawings. One can generally say that there are graffiti in every part of the neighborhood from naked woman to wooden water tank full of graffiti on top of buildings. The neighborhood has also its more populated place more down the path along the canal. As soon as you go past the Union street bridge, you start to see more people, that sense of a very lonely place goes away and you get to feel like really what New York is. Past Union Street the neighborhood becomes something totally different. It feels like the real New York but, why. There are a lot of construction, very tall buildings replacing the old houses, which is the reason why is being harder and harder for those folks that have been living there for year to afford the rent and there is no other option than to move out. You can even notice that people are creating

docks with this new building which at the long run will have a negative effect due to the emission of an engine. In this neighborhood can also be seen that gentrification is actuating a bit on it, there is a very decent amount of restaurants, a Whole Foods and some other minor business.

The Gowanus is a neighborhood in transition, as I mentioned it's not the same as it was before with all of this new urbanization going on, I did not expect to see that much construction going on. It might seem for a minute that we are in two different worlds but, the fact is that little by little its rich history is being taken away. My opinion is that to keep that neighborhood spirit alive and not kill it is what makes that place interesting. Eventually we won't find a place that does not feel like New York in New York. Aside from the neighborhood concern there we have the so well-known canal. The water pump and the sponge park are not enough to help out the canal to become a better place. Is the government and local authorities trying/will develop a long term plan/solution to make the canal water not so polluted (must take care of the whole canal not just on section of it)? Also the fact that there are still some factories in the area (probably suing the canal as the disposal of their waste) do they keep using the canal as their waste dumping place, if yes, what other alternatives do they have if they get government regulations not to dump their waste in the canal. On the other hand, a place with rich history is being destroyed, are those trying to preserve the Gowanus rich historical context willing to stand up against the ones modernizing the old Gowanus.

Key-words

- Gentrification
- Pollution
- Urbanization
- The canal bar
- Flushing pump



2B *Recent built building in the urbanized area with some. of the old Gowanus traits.

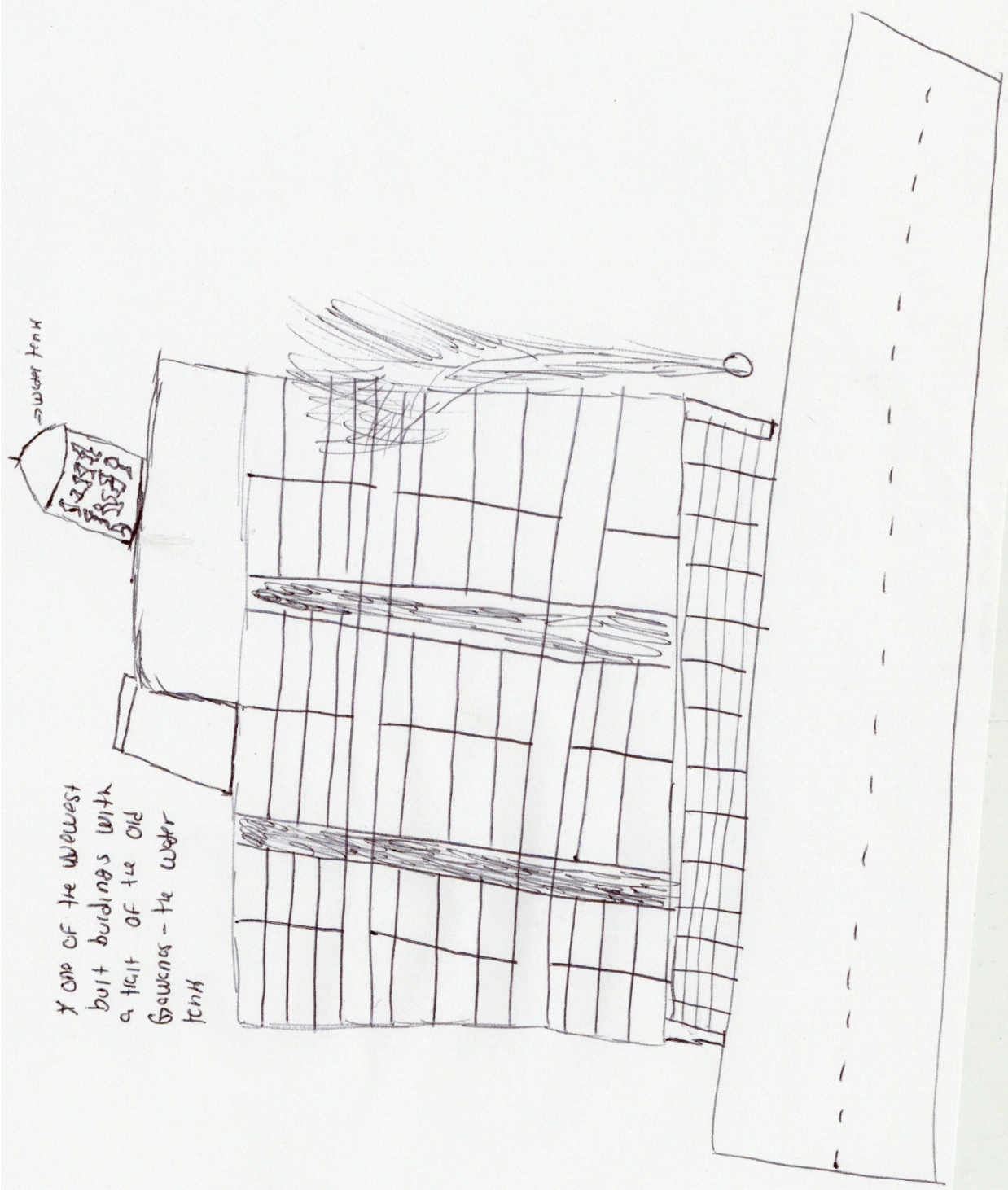
The water tank with graffiti



1A *The poor vegetation along the canal.



1A* Graffiti right along the border of the canal.



One of the newest
built buildings with
a flat of the old
Gardens - the water
tank

