

Learning Places Fall 2017

# SITE REPORT #1

## Gowanus Site Visit

Gowanus Canal, Picture taken from the Union Street Bridge 9.7.2017



Lisa White

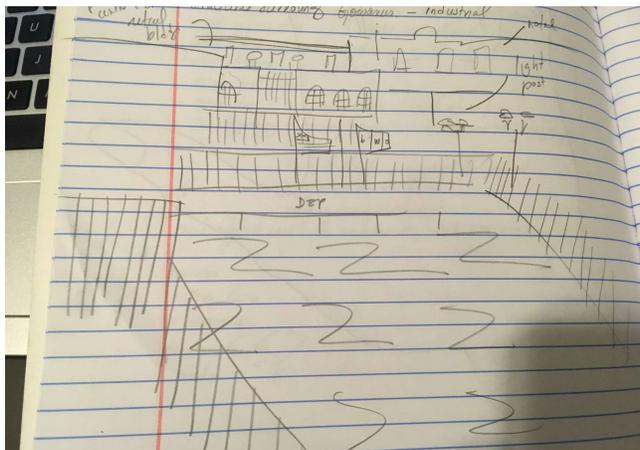
09.11.2017

### INTRODUCTION

The scope for the site visit to Gowanus Canal was to understand the development, vegetation, smells, sounds in and around the canal. On my visit to the canal, walking from the Union Street train station which appears to be a central point in this area there were cafes and mom and pop stores, everything else

appeared to be very industrial until you reached Union and Bond. Once on Bond street I could see the changes. Alongside the canal and Union there is a very hip restaurant called the Pig Beach and once on Bond a lot of new modern residences. Going in I knew the area became gentrified, so I expected to see grassroots businesses and cafes. The commute to the train is quite far, so logistically for public transportation to me, it's somewhat of a nuisance but if you're riding a bike it would be fine. The area does lend itself to walking and taking in the new grassroots stores and businesses.

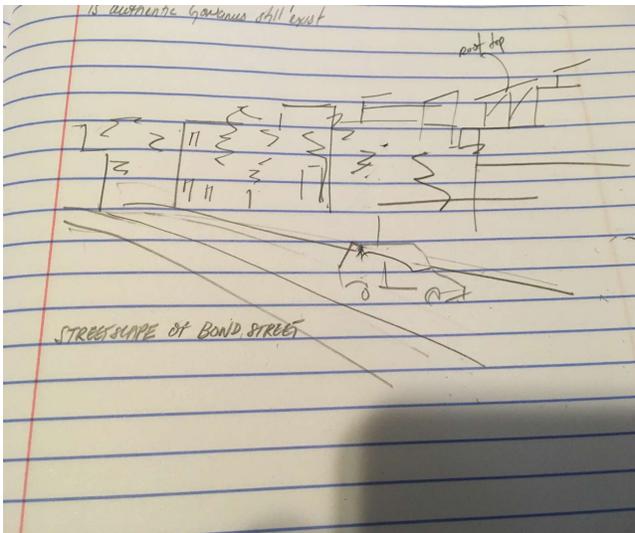
#### SITE OBSERVATIONS:



Sketch of Gowanus Canal, view from Douglas Street



[Native Gowanus Canal Resident](#)



[Sketch of Bond Street Developments](#)

[Being on the Canal from Douglas Street I can still detect an odor. The odor wasn't pungent but was still recognizable. It is evident that The Gowanus Canal Association has done some clean up of the area. Alongside the water plant there are seating and plants aligning the canal. The street on Douglas gave a look back into time with the roadway paved with belgian blocks. Water alongside this part of the canal had a sense of movement due to the treatment plant recycling the water in that adjacent area, the remainder of the canal was still but alongside the new Luxury Apartments you can see a resurgence of balance within the ecosystem evidence by a school of fish. The vacant industrial buildings on Butler Street next to the water treatment plant and the beginning of the canal are going to be redeveloped into retail spaces and a Hotel.](#)

[We were very fortunate to meet a native resident of the Gowanus who was gracious enough to tell us a little bit about how the area looked in the early days of the Gowanus. He talked about how the smell from the Gowanus was overbearing and how Superstorm Sandy affected the area.](#)



Graffiti wall off of Bond Street



Modern Residences on Bond Street

Continuing along Bond Street you can start to see where the Old Gowanus meets the new evidenced by new developments and shops within the area. Uncommissioned Graffiti adorns some of the buildings while modern residences start to take shape. These pictures depicts the change taken place on Bond Street, one block away from the Canal

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

All the buildings on Bond Street were ununiformed except for the the housing complexes. In the in blocks off of Bond, the houses were uniformed, neutral in color, and of brick facades.

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

The buildings on Bond were a mixture of brick and modern residences. One building had a metal facade that has patinaed due to normal weathering. Most of the buildings have a roof top garden. The street on Douglas was still industrial and represented Old Gowanus depicted by the belgian block road.

Notice and note location of trees and other types of vegetation

There weren't many trees throughout the area. The vegetation on the canal are wild weeds that has spore up. The only other area where there is purposeful vegetation is a garden manned by the Gowanus Conservancy and the new residential development alongside the canal.

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 an array of buildings within and around the Gowanus that includes a Ceramic shop, event space, BBQ restaurant, candle making shop, upscale residences and most importantly Whole Foods. These all lend to the culmination of industrial and residential. Currently there are only pockets of seating along

the canal adjacent to the new residential development and at Whole Foods. This is what makes this area charming and uncommercialized.

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

Interestingly, the current development is keeping the area organic by allowing the structures to blend into the streetscape

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

As stated previously the area is walkable but not close to transportation. The bridges across the canal keeps the connection to both Old Gowanus and New Gowanus central. Currently, the area is overpopulated but as development continues this will most likely change.

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?

The Gowanus is a quaint area that appears to be the next hot spot that will continue to grow. Texturally the buildings are rough but modern, while the canal (only alongside the water treatment plant) gives movement. The odor wasn't too bad but still apparent. For me Gowanus will continue to flourish and grow primarily because of gentrification. If there wasn't this movement no one would care and residents of Gowanus would not get this attention.

## ANALYSIS/DISCOVERIES

Gentrification has a positive and negative effect on all communities, throughout New York City  
gentrification has helped communities get resources they never had before, property values have  
increased and notoriety of an area has taken shape. Unfortunately, this comes at a price normally to  
native residents who get pushed out because they cannot afford the increasing rental prices. The  
Gowanus is no different. The Gowanus Canal was a transportation hub which is now a superfund site due  
to the pollution of the canal. To date the canal is still used for water borne transportation of fuel, scrap  
metal, tugs and barges. Revitalization of the Canal started with the Federal Water Pollution Control Act  
1948, the EPA 1970, and The Clean Water Act in 1972. The EPA approved a cleanup plan in 2013 that will

be completed by 2022. This cleanup is integral to the Gowanus as the canal is its Genius Loci, the Venice of New York.

#### KEYWORDS/ VOCABULARY

1. EPA
2. Superfund Site
3. Urban Renewal
4. Pig Beach Restaurant
5. Clean Water Act

#### QUESTIONS for FURTHER RESEARCH

1. How will revitalization of the Gowanus affect native residents?
2. Will the Gowanus be able to maintain its uniqueness and charm? or Will it concede to commercialization?
3. How does rezoning affect future projects around the Gowanus Canal?