

Learning Places Summer 2019

SITE REPORT #2

Newtown Creek Nature Walk



A Nature Walk Overlooking Newtown Creek

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SITE OBSERVATIONS



Newtown Creek Nature
Walkway

7 Stones of Indigineous
Places in New York

Native Salt Marsh
Grasses

1. Historically, what are some of the important developments that have created the current landscape of the Newtown Creek area. Refer not only to the reading and Prof. Spellane's lecture, but also what you learned on the Newtown Creek Alliance tour (hint... estuaries, for instance)?

The current landscape of the Newtown Creek area has seen many historical developments that have helped shape the creek and area around into what it is today. Newtown Creek is a major industrial waterway bordering between Brooklyn and Queens. It is part of the Hudson Estuary flowing west for 3.8 miles and emptying into the East River. The creek encompasses small branches, known as Dutch Kills, Maspeth Creek, Whale Creek, the East Branch and English Kills. The creek water used to flow between wooden elevations and further along lowlands until it eventually combined with salt water of the East River. The waterway has seen many years of raw sewage, oil spills and industrial pollution. Some of the developments that have created the current landscape is the Dutch Kills Bridge, the kerosene refinery, granite slab steps, plans and maps of new reconstruction and development in Newtown Creek and the DEP water treatment plant and microbiology lab. The Dutch Kills Bridge created a major shipping center, destroying all fresh water sources, it became home to sugar refineries, hide tanning plants, canneries and copper wiring plants. The kerosene refinery was the first modern oil refinery, which brought jobs and infrastructure to the area. The granite slab steps are located by the edge of the waterway. Historical maps are shown on tables are compared with maps of new development and reconstruction happening today. The DEP treatment plant helps flow fresh water into the creek and the building also contains a functional administrative building and a microbiology lab.

2. Discuss the historical remnants that you observed in the current landscape.

One of the historical remnants I observed in the current landscape was the 7 stones with native american names of indigineous places in New York. The first stone is Mahicanituk (Hudson River) and Schepmoes (Kip's Bay). The second stone is Canapaukah (Dutch Kills) and Muscota (Harlem River). The third stone is Mespæthes (Newtown Creek) and Sackhickneyah (Flushing Bay). The fourth stone is Sapokanikan (Algonquin Village) and Kapsee (tip of Manhattan). The fifth stone is Marackwieck (Navy Yard) and Rinnegachonck (Wallabout Bay). The sixth stone is Quandus Quaricus (English Kills) and Mechawanienc (King's Highway). The seventh stone is O Jik Ha Da Ge Ga (Atlantic Ocean) and Keshæchquereren (Greenpoint). Another historical remnant is Dutch Kills Bridge. The bridge opened in 1893 and was used in the shipping industry to help create an industrial landscape. One more historical remnant is the historical map on the round table. The tour guide gives a demonstration and shows us how the water flows on the map. The originality of the map was when Newtown Creek was first started. Additional historical remnants also include: native cactus plants, native salt marsh grasses and willow trees.

3. In what ways is the natural environment contained or shaped by the architecture of the Newtown Creek Nature Walk designed by George Trakas? In what ways is the natural world repossessing spaces that have been over-polluted or industrialized?

The natural environment is contained by the architecture of the Newtown Creek Nature Walk designed by George Trakas because of the way it has been shaped to conceive the natural way of the landscape. Newtown Creek is the site of massive oil seepage from industrial refineries that have operated along the creek since the 1800's. The view from the Newtown Creek Nature Walk Walkway reflects a combination of factories, a sewage plant and a large claw lifting and carrying away crushed cars and metal. On the slab stairs, descending to the edge of the creek, there are native salt marsh grasses growing inside and on top of the stairs. Also, located at the bottom of the stairs and in the creek are metal boxes where plant and animal life continue to prosper and grow. Also, trees and plants have been contained in the walkway by accompanying it with greenery to keep plant life a remaining factor in this repossessed space.

4. Discuss one instance of architectural semiotics. **Choose *only one building or built structure***. If the building or designed structure could talk, what would it say?



Architectural semiotics is defined as the architectural study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. One built structure is the Newtown Creek “Digester Eggs.” The digester eggs are involved in the Newtown Creek WasteWater Treatment Plant. They are the largest in New York City and are gigantic stainless steel containers which utilize the bacteria to break down and sterilize an estimated amount of 315 million gallons of raw sewage a day. If this built structure could

talk, every morning I think it would say, “Here we go again with the raw sewage.” And, “it continues everyday.” Also, “Why does it smell so bad?” I actually think the different eggs would talk to each other. Maybe discussing what’s wrong with all this sewage being pumped in and planning ways they can help change what’s happening in their community.

5. If you were to stage a performative intervention in a *specific* site (i.e., a single structural aspect of the walk or industrial remains) where would you stage it and what message would your performance convey?

If I were to stage a performative intervention in a specific site, I would pick the Watershed Bollard. Between two willow trees, at the corner of Whale Creek, there is the Watershed Bollard. The sculpture is in the shape of the posts, that were once used to secure the ships to port, with its surface engraved with an etching of Newtown Creek’s original watershed. Around the sculpture has rectangular-shaped seating. I would set up a table in front of the sculpture, the table would contain pamphlets (describing what’s wrong with Newtown Creek), flyers (showing events to help fundraising for Newtown Creek and get attention), buttons, pins are other influential items to reach our point. All signs and boards will be made out of recycled items and items we, as humans, would throw and/or dump into the creek. The message my performance would convey is to help clean up Newtown Creek, the government is working but they are working slowly and we need to clean it up to help our community.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Research Question (*should follow directly from your above observations, and be complex, specific, and researchable*):

- How are oil refineries contributing to the pollution in Newtown Creek?

Find an article from a journal, website, or newspaper that you believe will help you answer your question

MLA Citation for source:

- Navarro, Mireya. "Between Queens and Brooklyn, an Oil Spill's Legacy." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 3 Aug. 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/08/04/science/earth/04newtown.html?searchResultPosition=1.

How many sources did you look at before selecting this one? Why did you select this source? How does it address all or part of your research question? Be specific.

- I read five sources before selecting this one. I picked this one because this source discusses how long and how much oil has been dumped and is inside Newtown Creek. The other articles discussed separate oil spills in the Newtown Creek and the one I chose discusses Newtown Creek as a whole and all the spills and pollution contained inside.

Is this source credible? How can you tell (what criteria did you base your evaluation on)?

- Yes my source is credible. The article is from the New York Times newspaper which is a credible source for its reputation and it issues major facts on the country.

What other sources or further information would you need to answer your question? Where would you look for them?

- I would have to look back into history for further information. For example, figuring out if the other companies also influenced pollution in the area and also if the shipping industry was a contributing factor. I would go back to archives and libraries. I would also do internet research investigating how much oil and pollution is actually contained inside Newtown Creek and who is responsible for creating this situation for the environment and community.