Brooklyn has all the features of a “global borough”: It is a base of immigrant labor and ethnically diverse communities, of social and cultural capital, of global transportation, cultural production, and policy innovation. At once a model of sustainable urbanization and overdevelopment, the question is now: What will become of Global Brooklyn? Tracing the emergence of Brooklyn from village outpost to global borough, Brooklyn Tides investigates the nature and consequences of global forces that have crossed the East River and identifies alternative models for urban development in global capitalism. Benjamin Shepard and Mark Noonan provide a unique ethnographic reading of the literature, social activism, and changing tides impacting this ever-transforming space.

Cover and interior images of a rapidly transforming global borough by photographer Caroline Shepard.

Benjamin Heim Shepard is a professor of Human Services at New York City College of Technology, located across the street from Brooklyn Bridge in the epicenter of a rapidly transforming downtown Brooklyn. Much of Shepard’s scholarship is based on the ethnographic study of social services and social movements in New York. He is the author/editor of many books, including Rebel Friendships, The Beach Beneath the Streets and From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization.


For further information:
www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-3867-7

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Figure 1: “Mark Noonan and Benjamin Shepard on a walking tour along the waterfront, July 2010.” Photo by Caroline Hellman.

Drifting through the Brooklyn Tides, we’ve encountered friends, supporters, storytellers, photographers, anti-consumer advocates, marching band performers and renegade community gardeners. In their own ways, each supported an image of Brooklyn, New York as a space where stories expand and clash into one another, allowing new ideas to grow. Special thanks go out to Bill Talen; Savitri D and Lena (who reminded us there are still secret places, doors leading to hiding places under the boardwalks of Coney Island); the Public Space Party and its heroes; Imani Henri; and everyone who ever declared, “Hands Up Don’t Shoot,”
or stepped into the streets, volunteered at an Occupy Sandy event, or spoke out at a community forum about this ever-changing borough.

Many of these characters offered distinct support for this project. A few of these include Caroline Hellman and Greg Smithsimon, both of whom offered critical appraisals of the text early on that helped point us to where the project needed to go. Our anonymous readers furthered the process. When I was first thinking about writing about Brooklyn, Greg suggested I delve into the literature on global cities. This story grew out of that suggestion. Caroline, in turn, suggested Brooklyn Tides both as a title and a concept.

Almost a decade ago, we both participated in a grant at New York City College of Technology called “Water and Work on the Brooklyn Waterfront.” Many of the supporters and participants of that project (Richard Hanley, James Reid, Robin Michals, Peter Spellane, and Stephen James) helped inform this project over the subsequent decade. Other scholars of the waterfront, including Joshua Freeman and Marta Effinger-Crichlow, also helped inspire the book as did our many students at City Tech over the years.

Bill Weinberg and Ian Landau both read through the manuscript, offering copy edits and suggestions to improve the text.

We want to acknowledge every poet of the waterfront, every dreamer who imagined a new space here, whose prose looked to make sense of this ever-changing space.

Caroline Shepard’s photos come as close to anything to capturing this feeling. Thank you for that. Ten years ago when we came back from California, you and I started talking about the stories of the Brooklyn Tides. Thanks for being there with me for them, bike riding along the waterfront through the years.

The images of the space only grew from there. José Parlá, Robin Michals, Erik McGregor, Brennan Cavanaugh, and Barbara Ross generously added to this picture, donating photographs to the book.

Portions of the stories found in these pages first found their way into print through various publications including Working USA: A Journal of Labor, Socialism and Democracy, Theory in Action, Play and Ideas, and the Norman Mailer Review.

Like Benjamin’s Berlin Childhood around 1900, this was our Brooklyn diary, an homage to stories about a space hashed out over pints at Barbes as Slavic Soul Party played, after union meetings at Bijan’s, the Brooklyn Inn, or the Montero Bar, where the conversation began.

This project has been about a love affair with a space where Woody Guthrie found a bit of a home on Mermaid Avenue. It’s about a borough that Lawrence Ferlinghetti captured so well in his A Coney Island of the Mind, a circus-like book where poems seep from the street clashes and insurrectionary possibilities of the everyday. As Ferlinghetti pointed out in his “Populist Manifesto No. 1”,

Poetry still falls from the skies
into our streets still open.
They haven’t put up the barricades, yet,
the streets still alive with faces,
lovely men & women still walking there,
still lovely creatures everywhere,
in the eyes of all the secret of all
still buried there,
Whitman’s wild children still sleeping there,
Awake and walk in the open air.

Reading these words, it’s not hard to imagine the bard referring to his old home
and a summer in Brooklyn:

when they closed off the street
    one hot day
    and the
        FIREMEN
            Turned on their hoses
and all the kids ran out in it....

Figure 2: “View of the Montero Bar on Atlantic Ave.” Photo by Benjamin Shepard.
Prologue

Brooklyn Is Expanding: Introductory Notes on a Global Borough

Written with Greg Smithsimon

Figures 1 and 2: “Brooklyn, USA.” Photos by Benjamin Shepard.
This book concerns tides: tides of people, tides of development, tides of industry, tides of power, and tides of resistance. Brooklyn, once a city, then a borough, and now a brand, illustrates the tensions that arise between the local and the global in a given place. The ebb and flow of these dynamics can be witnessed on the street as well as in the many seminal books and films set in Brooklyn and concerned with its unique status as both a distinctive place and an ever-evolving imaginative space evoking a wide range of associations and emotions. We witness these dynamics, for example, in Woody Allen’s film Annie Hall (1977).

In an early scene, the protagonist, Alvy, is seen as a child in a doctor’s office in Coney Island in the 1940s. The doctor asks Alvy why he is depressed.

“It’s something he read,” explains Alvy’s Mom.

“Something he read, huh?” asks the doctor.

“The universe is expanding,” explains Alvy with his head down.

“The universe is expanding?” asks the doctor.

“Well, the universe is everything, and if it’s expanding, some day it will break apart and that would be the end of everything!” Alvy posits.

“What is that your business?” notes his Mom with exasperation, turning back to the doctor. “He stopped doing his homework!”

“What’s the point?” explains Alvy.

“What has the universe got to do with it?” his Mom chimes in. “You’re here in Brooklyn! Brooklyn is not expanding!”
As the scene ends, the camera zooms out from the Coney Island roller coaster, the Cyclone, with an image of Marilyn Monroe, as if in a film, blurred within the iconic landscape of this amusement park for the people. The meaning of this shot is as rich and complicated as Alvy's adolescent psyche. Monroe, of course, remains the quintessential icon of glamour. Her marriage to Arthur Miller gave the playwright a heavy dose of Hollywood glitz to accompany his Brooklyn accent. Though Monroe often claimed she wanted to retire in Brooklyn, the couple's polar personalities ensured the marriage would be brief. The grit of Brooklyn and the glamour of Hollywood did not pair off easily. The scene reminds us of the extent to which places, like celebrities, constitute a system of semiotics and often contending associations. Raised in a part of Brooklyn that remains both an actual and mythological space, Alvy, accordingly, confesses to having a hard time differentiating between reality and fantasy and, for the remainder of the film, despairs of ever finding himself on solid ground.

But Alvy's anxiety was not without reason: Brooklyn was literally expanding and, throughout the 1950s, would experience its most transformative decade as tides of newcomers arrived, while another human wave, largely white and middle-class, left for the suburbs. Existentialism was in the air in post-war Brooklyn, a strange feeling that nothing was ever going to be quite the same again after the world war which brought so many away and back. Outside global forces were at work as well, as many returning soldiers and their families moved out to the borough.

The city of Brooklyn had been contending with waves of people and change long before the mid-twentieth century. Whitman says as much in his poem “City of Ships,” written in 1865:

City of the world! (for all races are here;
All the lands of the earth make contributions here;)
City of the sea! City of hurried and glittering tides!
City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling in and out, with eddies and foam!
City of wharves and stores! City of tall façades of marble and iron!²

Hurried and whirling tides are what Brooklyn—“city of wharves and stores”—and Manhattan—“city of tall façades of marble and iron”—have in common. At the same time, the city across the river has always felt like something very, very far away. Globalization and mercantilism, war and environmental change, have also felt like faraway notions. Nonetheless they were still felt. The incoming tides were, consequently, not always gleeful, for Brooklyn was often at the mercy of outside forces. The Dodgers were to depart in the 1950s in an example of what a global marketplace and local powerbrokers with alternate ambitions can do to a local space; this was only after the team had helped integrate
baseball, offering a feel-good narrative replaced by a sense of emptiness which would last decades. From the nineteenth century into the twentieth, Brooklyn was always part of something larger, something global, with which it was both connected and seemingly disconnected, displacing residents like its beloved baseball team.3

It was hard to expunge the feeling that the borough was seldom at the center of things. “When I was a child I thought we lived at the end of the world,” explains Alfred Kazin in his 1951 book, _A Walker in the City_. “It was the eternity of the subway ride into the city that first gave me this idea.” Brooklyn was almost all periphery. Like present-day Los Angeles, it seemed to go on forever, especially on the long subway ride he describes, from the East River, beneath the Brooklyn Bridge, past Borough Hall and Prospect Park, out to Canarsie. “We were of the city but somehow not in it,” he confesses. “We were at the end of the line. We were the children of immigrants who had cramped at the city’s back door, in New York’s rawest, remotest, cheapest ghetto, enclosed on one side by the Canarsie flats and on the other side by the hallowed middle-class districts that showed the way to New York.”4

Kazin’s concerns about his life in the city are familiar to many. “The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space,” argues Michel Foucault in his essay, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias.” Spaces are not mere containers, even as they can sometimes entrap people, when there are no doors for exit or entry. For Foucault, they are places involved with sets of relations that give them meaning. “In other words,” he writes, “we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things ... we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another.... Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.”5 The “form of relations,” of which Foucault speaks, take shape through our interactions within the time we spend walking the streets, riding the subway, sitting on stoops, or hanging out in public space, where we make new friends and discover other spaces.6 It even takes shape within Brooklyn’s relationship with its Manhattan neighbor. Manhattan is most often considered a place for work, while Brooklyn is seen as a place of residence—though even this is changing. The city is shaped by our interactions within these spaces, and the social relations amongst the tides of people filling them. Waves of people, economic systems, and stories shape the borough. Increasingly, Brooklyn is a place where difference finds space between bike rides, bridges, brownfields, block parties, foreclosure-defense street actions, communities of resistance, and community gardens created by and for the people here. Here we dance with marching bands, celebrate the legacies of Michael Jackson and Prince at Fort Greene Park, visit Coney Island, or simply hang out on Brooklyn’s lively streets and in its many watering holes and restaurants. Here, heterotopias take shape, day and night, through interactions with a mix of people across class and ethnic lines.
These are spaces of otherness, with countless ebbs and tides between who’s coming and who’s going.

Flowing through this book are the stories of community gardeners, agitators, artists, students, and local residents trying to find a place to live, of those like Kazin, who felt on the outside, while contending with the clash of bodies and forces of the city “beyond.” They are the narratives of those lost on the subway. It is the Brooklyn which has long had to cope with alienation, low-wage jobs, inadequate housing, police violence, the possibility of deportation, incarceration, and stop-and-frisk policing. As depicted in fictionalized stories such as A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Death of a Salesman, and Do the Right Thing, as well as in real life, Brooklyn is filled with those longing for greater respect and upward mobility. It is a very distinct local place. Yet, as Alvy understood well, it has always been connected to something much, much larger that is in constant flux. This is a place where global forces always seem to have the upper hand. But it is also a place where people organize and build their own commons. Here, communities rise and fall, and rise again. Instead of the same old thing, citizens have learned to ride the tides, forging their own distinctive livable globalized space.
Hovering over these conversations is the concern that it may all be too late. The condominiums popping up everywhere, skyrocketing rents, ugly buildings overlooking Brooklyn Bridge Park, rampant police abuses, hospital and independent bookstore closings lend credence to this conclusion. This specter of failure has always been a part of life here. General George Washington famously lost the Battle of Brooklyn, retreating into the fog rather than face British troops who outnumbered his. The events of August 27, 1776 have often been recognized as a moment of losing a battle but ultimately winning a war. Instead of following conventional rules of engagement, Washington led his troops West through the fog, past the marsh that would become the Gowanus Canal, to the East River, where they fled to safety. Sometimes you have to retreat and pick your battles. That is the story of this book, of battling titans, the British troops, even capitalism itself. You are not always going to win, but you are going to retreat, rope-a-dope, elude opponents, in the fight to preserve something truly special. We see it today in the streets of Brooklyn from Bed-Stuy to Prospect Park and Coney Island. This is a book about lots and lots of small battles that amount to large wins.
This trend can be found in the advancing and receding waves of people and history. To the western-most edge of Long Island have come successive tides of people—Native American, Dutch, English, African-American, Irish, German, Italian, Swedish, Hispanic, Caribbean, and Asian. For thousands of years, Brooklyn was home to the Leni Lenape, who followed prey in the forests and, in the summer, settled near shellfish-rich waters. Their vanquishers, the Dutch, used axes and tidal mills to clear and drain the land to establish farms that would supply agricultural products first for themselves, then for the British, then for the Americans following the Revolutionary War. In the nineteenth century, Brooklyn was flooded with people following tides of work—handling products and raw materials, building ships, tunnels, and bridges, and manning the warehouses and factories that would subsidize the Empire City across the river. Settling in working-class, immigrant communities, Brooklyn residents would continue to experience successive tides of dramatic change. Between the rise and fall of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the Great Migration of African Americans from the South from 1910-70, the slum-clearing policies of Robert Moses, the red-lining of real estate companies in the 1950s, the gentrification of the last two decades, the compulsive re-zoning of mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio, the rising waters of Super-Storm Sandy in the fall of 2012, and waves of
young people clogging the streets with their hands in the air, declaring, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” and “Black Lives Matter” in the fall of 2014, Brooklyn has endured countless tides. The pattern is long in the making. So is the literature on this global borough and its persistent questions.8

Figures 6, 7, and 8: “Images of a changing borough from Clinton Hill to Crown Heights.” Photos by Caroline Shepard.
A Global Space

Scholarship on global cities has identified the distinctive roles that places like New York, Paris, Tokyo, London, Los Angeles, and Chicago play in the global economic system. However, most studies of the new role of these “global cities” focus on downtown, the financial district, the multinational financial institutions, and the white-collar employees who work there. Far less emphasis has been placed on the contributions of the large numbers of working-class immigrants and their transnational culture, the armies of service industry workers who sustain the financial industry and its executives, the reduced social contract working people are offered in the neoliberal global city, and the precariousness of this new economic order for most workers. Their experience propels Global Brooklyn. Writing on global cities has rarely undertaken a sustained examination of the periphery of the global city, even though it makes up the vast majority of the city in terms of population, lived experience, and space. Global Brooklyn wakes the city up in the morning, provides the labor power that gets it through its day, and puts it to bed at night. Its diverse communities are also rich sources of global cultural production, even while residents face some of the most severe consequences of the neoliberal policies generated by the global city. On a day-to-day basis, its residents cope with a neoliberal political ideology that protects private property interests, drives down wages, advocates the privatization of social resources, and protests regulatory frameworks that hinder free market values. “[U]neven development inherent in neoliberal entrepreneurial economic development strategies favor ... concentrated capital at the expense of the poor and middle classes,” notes Brooklyn sociologist Alex Vitale. Those on the margins of this global borough feel the squeeze, as inequality increases. Over and over again, the development of cities seems to mold a polarization, dividing classes, creating pockets of urban poor, who are increasingly restricted.

In a departure from previous studies, Brooklyn Tides considers globalism’s effects on these local populations, placing particular emphasis on the agency people have to act and challenge the structural constraints the global city imposes. Brooklyn Tides addresses the question of what it means to live in a global city for the millions of residents who experience the benefits and costs on a daily basis. Is there the possibility of another type of urban experience in the glare of globalization? How do local people find space for autonomy while contending with the tides of neoliberal urbanism crashing in around them? These questions churn through this study of the ebbs and flows of Brooklyn’s tides.

To answer these questions, we consider the literature and history of Brooklyn as well as the efforts of activists who have sought to have an impact on this space. The early chapters consider Brooklyn’s past, while the latter half of the book addresses current struggles. Living up to Walt Whitman’s adage
that Brooklyn can be a “City of Friends,” we trace the stories of past resistance to groups of contemporary activists combating police brutality, fighting for bike lanes and community gardens, opposing big-box stores, and forging a sustainable city. While many suggest that there is no space for agency in the era of globalization, these efforts suggest that Brooklyn can be a place where actors successfully take on inequality and police brutality, while emphasizing a more livable model of sustainable urbanism. Building on the principles of participant observation, these later chapters borrow from the perspective of local activists (including one of the co-authors of this book, Benjamin Shepard) to suggest there is still room for regular people to have a larger impact on globalized cities. Along the way, we trace the workings of anti-gentrification activist Imani Henry, of cyclists Keegan Stephan and Monica Hunken, anti-consumer activist Reverend Billy (a.k.a. Bill Talen) and his Church of Stop Shopping, artists Robin Michals and José Parlá, as well as groups such as Right of Way, Public Space Party, Occupy, Equality Flatbush, and Transportation Alternatives to trace an alternative story of global Brooklyn. This book does not consider the struggles of every activist or campaign in this borough; rather it focuses on a small group of artists and activists taking on the challenges of the globalization churning through the streets of their neighborhoods. Through their efforts, each suggests that there are things everyone can do to create a livable city. This is a vision of a just, sustainable city, supported by mutual aid and friendship, not high poverty rates and escalating cycles of police brutality to discipline the masses.

Still, why study Brooklyn? Just as every global city has a business district, every global city has a Brooklyn. Whether they are called outer boroughs, banlieues, peripheries, suburbs, or shanty towns, these are the vast districts, much larger than the center-city home of power and wealth, which provide the labor for the global city. Just as each city’s downtown is different because of the individual roles each city plays in the global financial economy, so, of course, every “Brooklyn” is unique, shaped by its distinctive history, the residents’ responses to globalization’s demands, the particular composition of its immigrant communities, and the cultural production that takes place in each borough. While no book can do justice to every facet of globalization across this borough, Brooklyn Tides examines the stories of everyday residents of Brooklyn to understand some of the most significant features of New York’s most famous working-class, immigrant, and service-industry suburb.

Brooklyn has coped with the ravages of displacement and deindustrialization for decades. In its most desperate decade, over half a million people moved out of the borough. The borough lost tens of thousands of jobs. Between the infusions of financial capital, economic development, cultural redefinition, and accompanying homogenization, its neighborhoods were being remade in front of our eyes. Within the last decade, rapid gentrification has made parts of the borough sites of luxury living, work, and recreation. Today, its renovated waterways
are being filled with high-rise condos. Much of this development is supported by the legacies of red-lining, foreclosures, police brutality, sky-rocketing rents, and hyper-policing of public space. In order to ensure this better business climate for urban growth and development, New York's brand of urban neoliberalism has cultivated intricate public policies and policing approaches aimed at maximizing social control of public spaces, including "closed-circuited video surveillance systems, anti-homeless laws, and gated communities."

Today, its citizens revel in the borough's vast cultural resources but lament patterns of displacement and uneven development which follow such patterns of urban flux. While many newer residents bring affluence, for much of the borough New York's fiscal crisis of the 1970's never ended. The borough continues to endure persistent unemployment and loss of work for the lower and middle classes. The story of global Brooklyn also demonstrates the power of global capital and the processes of cultural erasure, as homogenization robs local spaces of their color. Nonetheless, while the forces of top-down globalization steamroll communities, Brooklyn is hanging on, and even fighting back. Down the same Coney Island boardwalk where local actors fought a wrecking ball aimed at making way for franchise and new condo developments, Brighton Beach offers a pulsing Brooklyn immigrant and cultural mix, adding to the neighborhood's rich history. Each day, countless communities here counter social controls with movements aimed at spurring a vital and progressive urbanism.

As a global borough, Brooklyn contends with both cultural erasure and expansion. Like many urban geographies, Brooklyn's public spaces, its waterways, its spaces for work and play, have become sites of contestation that seek to navigate lurching changes. After all, for much of the nineteenth century, Brooklyn was an agricultural community, transformed by the region's industrial development in the post-bellum period. As late as 1879, it provided much of the region's vegetable production. Four decades later, little was left of this once flourishing agricultural economy or the rural communities it helped sustain. This history raises the question: is urban development an inevitable component of industrialization? Could the agricultural base of Brooklyn's past have survived the residential real estate development with some foresight? This is a question well worth asking. Brooklyn's transformation from rural economy into a dense urban center took shape in response to both technological innovation and a seemingly blind faith in free markets which made farmland prohibitively expensive. Still, questions about costs and benefits, what was lost and gained from what Marc Linder and Lawrence Zacharias term "irrational deagriculturization" grip global Brooklyn. Any number of values were stifled when the borough paved over a once vibrant agricultural terrain. Facing a rapidly changing landscape, can this "agricultural dissolution" be reversed here? Some suggest the answer is affirmative. Urban farms are making a comeback in Brooklyn. The largest of these, Brooklyn Grange, produces over
40,000 lbs. of organically-grown vegetables, grown on rooftops in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. According to Paul Lightfoot, the chief executive of Bright Farms, “Brooklyn ... has now become a local food scene second to none. We're bringing a business model where food is grown and sold right in the community.”

For such initiatives to become a sustained reality, policy makers must support a host of progressive ideas, particularly the right to open space. Of course, such thinking challenges cities to question a dominant paradigm which views economic development and community needs as opposites. They need not be. Others follow a different road along a seemingly unsustainable path toward hyper-development. Over the dozen years of the Bloomberg era here, space was rezoned—a third of the city—to make way for more sky-scrapers, gentrification, blandification, and inevitable displacement. And the process continues today.

Here, all that is solid melts into air. Marx was willing to note that capitalism does amazing things, yet he was appalled by the human cost. Still, negative development is not all inevitable. Throughout Brooklyn Tides, we consider the social, cultural, and ecological costs of such patterns, while suggesting there could be a different route for a global city. Could this be a space where regular people fight off what look like inevitable tides? Just as the Native Americans, for a brief spell in the 1650s, resisted the Dutch, and brownstone owners in Brooklyn Heights in the 1950s protected their neighborhood from demolition by Robert Moses, the borough's past suggests there might be other paths for such a global space. Is it possible for this global borough to follow a path toward a more sustainable urbanism? This account of Brooklyn's past and present insists that the future of the borough remains in the hands of the people who live here.

* * *

“Take me to this place known as Brooklyn!” Allan Swann orders his host, Benjy, in Richard Benjamin's 1982 film My Favorite Year about 1950's television. “Where is it?” he asks. Played by Peter O'Toole, this Errol Flynn-like film star is escorted to a place which feels like the end of the world from its Manhattan neighbor. There he meets Benjy’s Jewish mother, her Filipino husband, former boxer Rookie Carroca, and the rest of his outlandish tribe, as well as most of his neighbors in the apartment building. The building, teeming with quirky eccentrics, welcomes Swann as a hero. For Michel Foucault, a heterotopia is a space for difference; a space for otherness; a welcoming space for long-time residents and newcomers, insiders and outsiders, such as the tribe Swann encounters. Can the same be said of Brooklyn today?

Sometimes marketed as a Manhattan suburb, is it a space of difference or has it become something more digestible? Long a borough of immigrants and
mixed races, a reverse migration has set in. Many residents are simply displaced while even long-time home-owners have chosen to leave. As Spike Lee laments about his historically black neighborhood of Fort Greene, increased real estate values have caused many locals to sell out: “Black people by droves [are] moving to Atlanta, they’re moving to North Carolina … They’re selling their houses and I don’t blame them. I can’t say to them, ‘you can’t sell your house’ … What we need is affordable housing for everybody … Brooklyn Heights is the most expensive neighborhood. Then you got Park Slope, Fort Greene, Cobble Hill, Clinton Hill and then, you know, it works like this… the rents get cheaper the further away you go from Brooklyn. And the reality is, after the sand on Coney Island, it’s the motherfucking Atlantic Ocean. So, where you gonna go?”35 Despite increased rents, the space does, however, remain a draw for writers and those working in creative industries.36 Today, many see their Manhattan neighbor as the outer borough. The tides of people, work, resistance, and flux continue.

*Figures 9, 10, and 11: “Street party in Spike Lee’s Fort Greene.” Photo by Brennan Cavanaugh.*
Figure 12: “Sign at Summer 2013 rally on the Brooklyn Bridge protesting hospital closures. Recalling the famous Post headline announcing President Gerald Ford’s refusal to save NYC from bankruptcy in the ‘70s, this sign is a reminder of how government officials still view the needs of Brooklyn’s local residents as somehow distant, removed from more central concerns.” Photo by Benjamin Shepard.
Figures 13, 14, 15: “Scenes of a man fishing and a waterfront in transition.”
Photos by Caroline Shepard.
In 2004, Brooklyn’s Red Hook neighborhood lost its last shipping dry dock to make way for an Ikea store. The end of the shipping industry coincided with patterns of home foreclosures and the closures of community hospitals and libraries. Today, many worry that Brooklyn is losing its soul to rampant real estate speculation and displacement to make way for sameness rather than difference. Others suggest Brooklyn is finding its center again, even as it loses itself from time to time. It’s a bit of sacrilege to talk baseball here, given the infamy of the Dodgers’ lamented departure. Yet, it wasn’t the Dodgers who left, so much as it was Robert Moses who would not welcome them into a home at Flatbush and Atlantic, the space where basketball and trendsetting now takes shape. Jason Collins was the first openly gay player in the league who played for a brief while for the Brooklyn Nets, his jerseys selling as blows against homophobia, just like Jackie Robinson jerseys once served as emblems of anti-racism. Prior to the completion of the Barclays Center, there’d been a lot of years of Brooklyn being lost to cars and Robert Moses’ vision of urban dystopia. But many of us are still here, telling stories, taking pictures, cheering for our new teams, organizing, and remaking lost objects.

In December 2014, Prince William and his wife Kate Middleton, came to Brooklyn to take in a Nets game at the team’s stadium named after a British bank. With “Black Lives Matter” protests swirling outside, they arrived for the
second half of the game. During warm-ups, Lebron James and his team-mates wore “We Can’t Breathe” t-shirts. The local press would note that British royalty have not always been welcomed here, just miles from the scene of the first battle of the Revolutionary War to take place after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Battle of Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{39} In the same location, new battles have emerged in the on-going fight for justice and equality.

These experiences of parks and places, gardens lost and found and remade—this is perhaps the making of a more abundant narrative, in which we beat back the inevitable feeling of loss which so often envelops those of us who live here. Perhaps, just perhaps, we are moving somewhere else beyond a last exit. Still, to what end? How does this space cope with the tides of neoliberal urbanism rapidly transforming it? How has it coped with them? These questions churn through this story of the Brooklyn Tides.

\textit{Figure 16: “Bedford-Stuyvesant Rubinstein staircase.” Photo by Caroline Shepard.}
Figure 17: “Kids playing in Brooklyn Bridge Park along a waterfront in transition.” Photo by Benjamin Shepard.