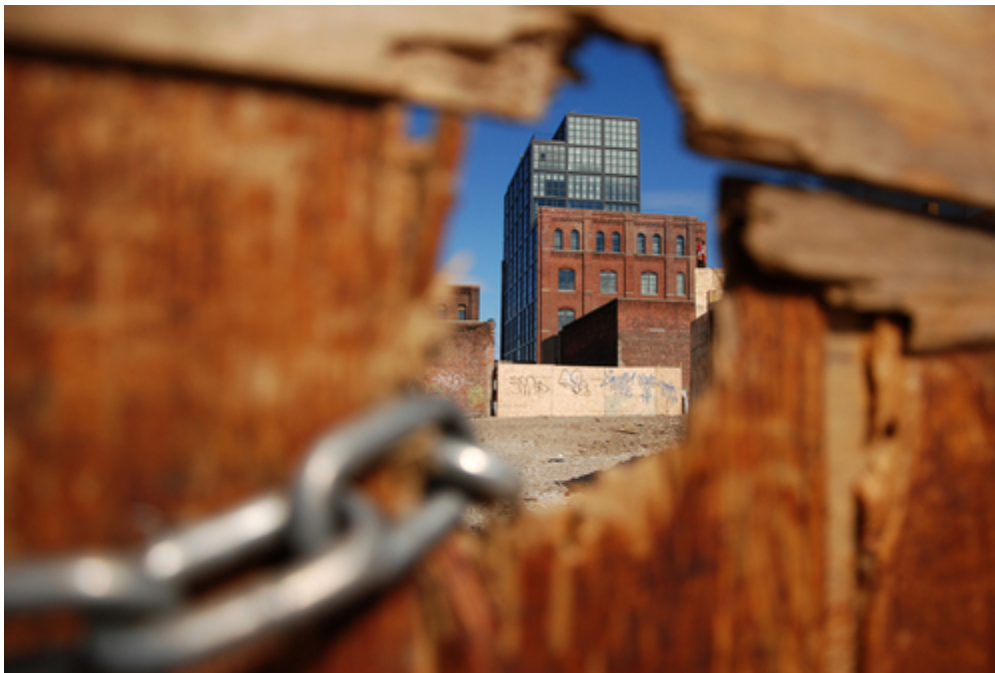


CURBED,

## [Looking At Brooklyn's Gentrification Through Two New Films](#)

Thursday, March 7, 2013,

Welcome back to *Camera Obscura*, Curbed's series of photo essays by [Nathan Kensinger](#). This week, Kensinger explores the locations of two new documentaries about development and gentrification in Brooklyn.



["Gut Renovation" and "My Brooklyn," two new documentaries that examine development and gentrification in Brooklyn, will both be in New York theaters this weekend.]

"Isn't that hideous?" asks Su Friedrich, wandering through the plush lobby of the latest luxury glass tower to spring up on the **Williamsburg** waterfront. "I mean, what does this have to do with living in an 'edgy neighborhood'? They sold this as an 'edgy neighborhood.'" Friedrich, a filmmaker who lived in Williamsburg for 20 years before being displaced in 2009 by a tidal wave of rising rents and new condominiums, filmed her latest documentary "**Gut Renovation**" while the neighborhood was torn down around her. The film, which opened on Wednesday for a one week run at the [Film Forum](#), is epic in scope, yet tells a scathing, highly personal story about "The Rape of Williamsburg," as the [NY Times](#) bluntly put it in their film review.

Friedrich's documentary is centered around the block she called home, which was once populated by small industrial businesses and artist lofts, and which is now the epicenter of a new,

over-branded Brooklyn experience. The Whiskey Brooklyn is at one end of her old block, by the Brooklyn Brewery and around the corner from Brooklyn Bowl. Nearby, a 50-foot-long advertisement for the HBO show "Girls" is painted onto an old warehouse across from the posh [Wythe Hotel](#), while the newly expanded headquarters for Vice Magazine just opened up next door to Friedrich's old building. "When I moved to Brooklyn, no one was moving to Brooklyn," said Friedrich. "It wasn't a brand. Now it's so branded. That's what happened here—**Williamsburg got branded.**"

Just a few miles away in **Downtown Brooklyn**, a similar story of super-rich developers forcing out small businesses and displacing long-term residents is playing out. "I feel like here, we are skipping the hipster and going to straight up luxury," says Kelly Anderson, standing near the new Armani Exchange on the Fulton Street Mall. Anderson's documentary "My Brooklyn"—which will open for a third week of screenings at [ReRun Theater](#) this Friday, after selling out its first two weeks—tells the story of the mall and the surrounding neighborhood, where numerous mom & pop businesses have been shuttered in the last few years, replaced by boutique hotels and a generic new version of Brooklyn that includes establishments like The Brooklyn Terrace and the Brooklyn Brewpub. Anderson's film is a powerful indictment of a city government that favors developers over residents, and presents a sweeping historic overview of the policies that have transformed Brooklyn over the past 50 years. "I think it's disgusting, what happened here," says Anderson. "It was so much about getting rid of one community for another. There is so much money being made here, and none of it is benefitting the people." With both "My Brooklyn" and "Gut Renovation" in theaters this week, residents of New York will have an opportunity to contemplate how quickly their city is being changed around them, and what has been lost.



"It's kind of alienating or disorienting," said Su Friedrich, contemplating the changing landscape of Williamsburg from the roof of her old building. A new luxury apartment complex recently

opened across the street, while Friedrich's building "was sold for \$16.5 million about a year ago" by its landlord.



"That used to be a garment factory," said Friedrich, looking down the street to the new **Wythe Hotel**. Her film "Gut Renovation" documents the closure of countless small industrial businesses in Williamsburg over the past few years, which was caused by the city rezoning the neighborhood in 2005. "We really need those places more than a bowling alley."





On the corner of her old block, a mural of "Girls" is painted on the side of a warehouse used as a bus depot, symbolizing the clash between Brooklyn's industrial history with its new reality as a commodity. "You had people from outside branding the neighborhood as a place where artists lived," said Friedrich, and as a result, "there's lots of people who won't be able to keep living where they live."



In Downtown Brooklyn, "so many people have just moved," said Kelly Anderson, standing in the middle of the **Fulton Street Mall**. Much like Williamsburg, the city rezoned this neighborhood in 2004, leading to a real estate boom that drove out many longtime tenants and residents. "The change over the past five years is mind blowing."



Due to skyrocketing rents, the [Fulton Street Mall](#) is seeing an increase in chain stores like H&M, T.J. Maxx and Starbucks. "If you said before 2006 that you would have Brooklyn Industries and Shake Shack on either corner, it would have been absurd to suggest," said Anderson. "Why does everything have to look the same? Why does everything need the same stores?"



Smaller independent businesses that served generations of customers were once a common sight along the Fulton Street Mall, including places like Fulton Hot Dog King and Fulton Eyes



Optical. "The question is how long are they going to hang on? Do they own the building?" asked Anderson. "There is just no way Fulton Mall is going to survive in any former shell of itself."



"Who are these people? What do they do?" asked Friedrich, biking through the thicket of new luxury towers that have sprung up along the waterfront of Williamsburg. **"It's like reality T.V.** It's totally cut off from what the city is."



"Anyone who lives here is going to hate my film, I figure," said Friedrich, while passing out postcards for "Gut Renovation" to Brooklyn's newest residents at the [Northside Piers](#) condos. "If people get pissed about the film, at least that will start a public conversation."



"It was fallow for so long," said Friedrich, who made one of her earlier films in an empty lot on Williamsburg's waterfront, before it was transformed into a coastline dominated by glass boxes. "Now it feels like there are so many parts of New York that are like this."





Throughout Downtown Brooklyn, a similar breed of upscale residential towers has sprung up. "It's not even luxury, it's just anywhere," said Anderson of the new buildings. "It has this feel of being top down, from people who have never been here."



At the former site of the Albee Square Mall, which was [immortalized by rapper Biz Markee](#), an empty hole awaits the impending arrival of [City Point](#), a massive residential tower and retail complex that will be built on public land, according to Anderson. "Why are we building a private development on public land with no public benefit?" asks Anderson. "Some of that benefit should go to the public."





"The side streets were so awesome—they were the best thing about Downtown Brooklyn," said Anderson. Today, on Bridge Street, a 54-story tower is being built, one of the many new hotels and apartment buildings coming to the neighborhood, replacing a much smaller scale landscape.



Along Willoughby Street, closed down stores and businesses are now being gutted and their buildings torn down. "The big, dramatic changes are on the side streets," said Anderson, peering into the windows of Ngone Hair Braiding, which was featured in her documentary "My Brooklyn" before it went out of business.



The empty businesses of Downtown Brooklyn and Williamsburg are just one visible symbol of how Brooklyn is rapidly being transformed. "The more people understand the forces behind the changes in the built environment, the more they can have an impact," said Anderson. "It is the demystifying of a process. It's our city—we should know what's going on."

*Editor's note: Nathan Kensinger is the Director of Programming at the [Brooklyn Film Festival](#), where both "My Brooklyn" and "Gut Renovation" had their world premieres in 2012.*

[http://ny.curbed.com/archives/2013/03/07/looking\\_at\\_brooklyns\\_gentrification\\_through\\_two\\_new\\_films.php](http://ny.curbed.com/archives/2013/03/07/looking_at_brooklyns_gentrification_through_two_new_films.php)