Gazing upwards, we strolled towards the Gherkin and then Tower 42, before breaking off from our path to explore some secluded passages and elevated walkways, spotting little wonders you would never notice during everyday travels. Walking right past office workers’ windows, we got some unusual glances as we peered inside and discussed the relationship between the buildings in the City and its dwellers, taking heed of the abundance of CCTV cameras recording our steps. These, plus the unusual nature of some of the areas we visited, almost make you feel as if you are trespassing, even though we were on public land. A hidden garden we wandered upon seemed to be a haven of exclusivity, with little seating alcoves that resembled guard posts.

Trundling along our everyday routes through the city, our minds often consumed by thoughts of work and daydreams, our surroundings become all too familiar; a grid which we traverse on set rails, eyes downcast, something purely to be suffered until we reach our destination.

Surrender to the city’s own pace – immobile and immemorial. Delve into dark corners and gaze upwards at spires; abandon the city as a stale platform for living, and seize it as material to inspire. Through shared excursions and explorations, playfully discover into dark corners and find new perspectives and insights into the city. We come together to create something out of nothing, using the city itself as raw material. Through shared experiences, we can transform the city into a canvas for our ideas and imagination.

City As Material
An Overview

Back in the main streets, we made our way to the Monument, our aim to ascend its 311 steps and be rewarded with an elevated view of the city. Traveling up the narrow, winding staircase was a hefty task, but once at the top the panorama was breathtaking. The sense of detachment from the lived in, street level, as the strong wind whipped across the tiny viewing platform, was poignant and surreal. 160 feet high, looking down at rooftops and across to spires, we saw London as a bird might, the human element below seeming very far away.

Thoroughly deserving of lunch, we had a rest, ate and further explored Simon’s photo essay, starting to pick up on themes and possible ideas for the eBook we would produce back at the studio. Once there, we discussed the day and compared photos, as well as a GPS account of the route we took, from Katharine’s phone, and some amazing drawings by Martin, from a previous trip to the Monument. The concept of looking up, and down, rather than purely across at a skyline, really interested us, and inspired the format of the publication created – Ancient Lights, City Shadows.
Walking around London and seeing it through other people’s minds refocused my interest in my city and introduced me to new friends. There are so many concepts interconnecting people’s lives and livelihoods in a city that choice of a topic or theme ‘could’ be based on how we envisage the city supporting life into the future. I think the unique work that Proboscis does represents sending out an antennae that touches on this issue: past, present and future.

Martin Fidler

Even though I live and work on the river I rarely get time just to walk up and down the shore, think and talk. It also made me more conscious of other work I am developing in relation to the river.

Ben Eastop

I went with my daughter Aurelia on the walk from Limehouse to Farringdon: River as Source during her half term. We both enjoyed meeting the other participants and our conversations… [it] was nice to talk and walk around without computing devices. Taking part has encouraged me to apply for a commission which is centred on a river and down the shore, think and talk. It also made me more conscious of other work I am developing in relation to the river.

Alexandra McAdie

It was great to simply walk and talk in the context of the city. The format itself was refreshing and especially useful for thinking about my teaching. I would have liked to explore the collaborative editing process in as much depth as the collecting and discussion process that took place during the walk and the session at the end of the walk.

Katherine Willis

Streetscapes

With: Giles Lane, Tim Wright, Anne Lydiat, Fred Garnett, David Jennings, Hazem Tagiuri

After some introductions and hearing participants’ particular interests, we started pitching, planning what we would like to see in our collaborative publication. Many ideas were inspired by personal projects, but the group soon gave birth to some new, exciting concepts, (as well as a debate about when the first pineapple was grown in Britain) and after a brief interval of lunch to refuel, we set off to wander around the City of London, taking notes on some streets and discussing our ideas.

Fred Garnett, David Jennings, Hazem Tagiuri

City As Material
An Overview

Giles Lane & Hazem Tagiuri

Part of Proboscis’ City As Material
City As Material emerged out of a desire to bring people together to make books collaboratively and, to look again at the city we inhabit: its patterns, rhythms, fissures and faults. The series drew on previous work by Proboscis such as the Pitch Up & Publish workshops where we helped people to use bookleteer for their own publishing projects; as well as a course taught by Giles in Autumn 2009 to students from Vassar College’s International Program exploring the ‘city as material’ for artistic experimentation and creation. It also drew on the ‘zine’ culture research that Hazem began undertaking at the start of his placement with Proboscis during the summer.

We chose a deliberately vague and evocative theme and topics as starting points for the series of experimental urban explorations and collaborative book making events. Our intention was to invite people to bring their own interpretations and enthusiasms, to allow our shared experiences to find their own directions. We also invited guests to accompany us and to make their own personal books to adjoin the collaborative books arising from the events.

The results of this experiment have been richly rewarding – wonderful conversations and new connections, inspirations for future events and projects. In 2011 we will continue City As Material albeit on a different track, this time exploring other towns and cities with locals, to imagine and articulate visions of these places that exists somewhere between knowledge and unknowledge, innocence and experience.

Giles Lane & Hazem Tagiuri, February 2011
We met at Hermitage Moorings in Wapping where one of the participants is a founder member. A shortage of participants (probably due to the icy weather and weekday timing) meant that myself and Giles were alone in our wander through London, resulting in a slightly different walk then usual. Equipped with Audiboo, we set off to record the different sound properties of the city, in a far more leisurely and exploratory mode than previous events.

River
With: Anne Lydiat, Alexandra McGlynn, Aurelia McGlynn-Richon, Ben Eastop, Martin Fidler, Fred Garnett, Giles Lane.

Sonic Geographies
With: Giles Lane, Hazem Tagiuri.
Alexandra had suggested visiting the 4D Model Shop round the corner, to pick up some materials to work with along the walk. After acquiring some unusual knick knacks, including miniature models of Barack Obama and the first lady, and a polystyrene egg (clearly novelty triumphs over practicality every time), we set off.

We were particularly interested in hidden flows in the city, and the alternative uses of the networks that these travel within. Alexandra speculated over what would become of BT’s phone lines in the future, once technology had outgrown their capability. Giles explained the history behind manhole and coal covers, and the abandoned infrastructures London rests upon. Our walk took us through some of us had never traveled through, and the slow pace highlighted quirky features dotted around the city that are ignored in frantic daily routines.

We talked about how the city so often seems to turn its back on the river, to build buildings that look inward to the city, and how it is only recently, with the shift in the Port of London to Tilbury that Londoners have at last begun to reclaim access to the river from what were previously commercial wharves and stairs. As it was low tide at 12.30pm we were able to include some beachcombing/mudlarking with our walk—finding the ubiquitous clay pipe stems and pottery shards from earlier centuries, as well as the ever present animal bones, tiles and chalk. We shared stories and bits of knowledge about these stairs, their uses, the hidden rivers flowing out into the Thames.

Arriving back at the studio we began collating the drawings, objects, ideas, writings and photographs that had been created along the way and started to sketch out the structure of the collaborative publication – *Ebb and Flow*.

During lunch, we fiddled around with our bounty from 4D, and after Alexandra experimented with using different props she had made against the backdrop of the Barbican, a place containing vast expanses, though also riddled with unusual nooks and crannies.

Once at the studio, we started to form the eBook sketching the layout and deciding how the materials we had gathered during the day could work within our theme. Later on in the week, after everyone had contributed, the publication, *Layered*, was finished.

Whilst sitting in the Hermitage Pier House, then on Anne’s boat in the river the conversation flowed across these issues of liminality and tension – about how the city has slowly encroached on the river, fixing artificial banks where it previously had a wide flood plain, such that we are now concerned about that flood plain being at risk with rising sea levels. Ben, who also lives on the river, spoke of how his home is different every day, changing position with the tide and weather; he also talked of the enormous variation that the sky, light and weather has on the character of the water and its constantly changing surface.

From Hermitage we then walked west along the Thames Path via St Katherine Dock, the Tower of London, Customs House, Old Billingsgate to Queenhithe, where we turned north and cut through the City, St Pauls, St Barts and Smithfield to arrive at the studio.
Meeting at Leadenhall Market, we listened as Simon explained his interest in the topic, whilst introducing the photo essay he created for the Skyline notebook, before starting our journey through the heart of the city.

Underside

With: Alexandra Deschamps-Sonsino, Mandy Tang, Radhika Patel, Hazem Tagiuri, Giles Lane, Christina Wanambwa

We met at Poppies Diner in Whitechapel, a café decked out in Americana, quotes from Hollywood films adorning the walls (though some a bit off the mark) and the most glamorous of culinary staples... fried chicken and builders tea. This cafè / diner hybrid proved a fitting start for Underside, a theme more ambiguous than our previous events.