

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 trails, eyes downcast, something purely to be suffered until we reach our destination.

Surrender to the city's own pace – immobile and immortal. 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 experiences, playfully exploring our city, we come together to create.

Open to all with no set ambitions, join us to collaboratively produce publications which showcase and investigate the city we inhabit.

City As Material was a series of day-long events, using an ambiguous theme as a stage for shared discourse and making. This overview details what happened on each, and the process of creating the series as a whole.



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.

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*.

City As Material An Overview

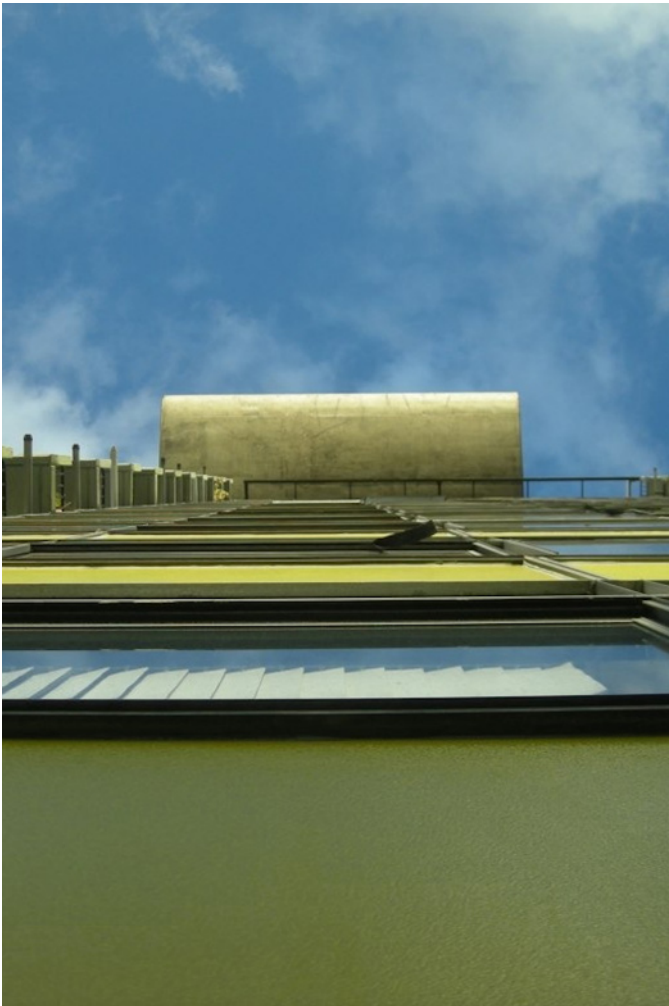


After some introductions and hearing participants' particular interests, we started pitching, planning what we would like to see in our collaborative publication. Many ideas were inspired by personal projects, but the group soon gave birth to some new, exciting concepts, (as well as a debate about when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



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

Streetscapes



[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

Alexandra McGlynn

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 (in Canada).

Ben Eastop

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.

Martin Fidler

Walking around London and seeing it through other people's minds refused 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.



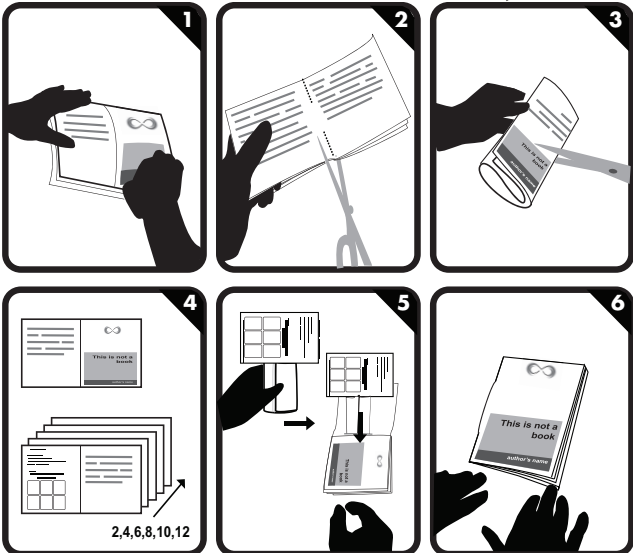
City As Material An Overview

Giles Lane & Hazem Tagiuri
Part of Proboscis' City As Material

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We had decided that rather than strain to produce a typical eBook with original work and concepts, which would be limited under the circumstances, we would instead purely document the day's trip and link to audio recordings made during it. After capturing some of the ambient and wildlife sounds in Hyde Park (mingled with the hum of construction work and a talking animatronic tree), we entered the bustle of Mayfair and Soho. Surprisingly, in this sprawl the sound landscape was remarkably similar, and sometimes indistinguishable, when we were in enclosed courtyards and winding alleys, the geography creating immersive sound bubbles. Lastly, we managed to record the faint notes of a church organ, in the undercroft of the chapel at Lincoln's Inn. Back at the studio we created the eBook, lifting the images and GPS located maps of the recordings from Auduboo, and using a QR code to easily link to the relevant page. For the last few pages, we used images from *The Cries Of London* and *The Beggar's Opera* playing cards sets, then a page consisting purely of a visualisation of white noise, to illustrate the change of the sound landscape in recent years – the cries of market traders promoting their wares has given way to a homogenised hubbub of engines and vehicles.

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 bookleeter 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

Once back at the studio, and after numerous teas, coffees and fig rolls, we started to form our publication. We decided the brick circle in the middle of Golden Lane estate, which we deemed the "Unplace", would be our focus – the eBook chronicling our journey there, and our experience within. Thus, the *Unbook of Disappropriation: Situated Moments From The City* was created. We liked the concept that this eBook would not just be inspired by the city, but that we would add to it as well, so we included a blank page for readers to write down their own experiences of the Unplace, then tear it out and leave it somewhere else.



We then headed through the Barbican, and into Postmans' Park to read the plaques that form the *Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice*, poignant tributes to those that have died attempting to save others. This was an amazing place, one I had never visited before, and it served as a perfect end to our expedition.

From Smithfield we walked through Charterhouse Square, onto Aldersgate, and then into the Golden Lane estate. We must have resembled a tourist group; eyes skyward as the history of our surroundings was recounted by those who had tales to tell. By accident we stumbled across an unusual circular space, at odds with the towers of the estate. A haven to rest and exchange stories, we soon discovered the unusual acoustics of the circle, and formed a ring in the centre to test them.





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

River

We met at Hermitage Moorings in Wapping (where one of the participants is a founder member) and spent a short time introducing ourselves and our interests in the topic. Giles had prepared a map with a possible route for us to take from our point of origin back to Proboscis' studio and this served as a useful conversation point about the nature of the river as a channel for transportation, habitation, pleasure, boundary, margin and about the city's push/pull relationship with it.



A shortage of participants (probably due to the icy weather and weekday timing) meant that myself and Giles were alone in our wander though London, resulting in a slightly different walk than usual. Equipped with Audioboo, we set off to record the different sound properties of the city, in a far more leisurely and exploratory mode than previous events.



Sonic Geographies

With: Giles Lane, Hazem Tagiuri



Alexandra had suggested visiting the 4D Model Shop round the corner, to pick up 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 side streets 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.

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.

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*.



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.

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.





Underside

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



We met at Poppies Diner in Whitechapel, a cafe 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 caff / diner hybrid proved a fitting start for Underside, a theme more ambiguous than our previous events.



With: Simon Pope, Giles Lane, Martin Fidler
Katharine Willis, Radhika Patel, Hazem Tagiuri

Skyline



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.