

Commercial Way. Yellow flowers spilling out of pots above this sign. I squint into the sunshine with a sense of jubilation: the beginning of a journey! A right turn, the noise of traffic, but I enjoy the sound of my footsteps and turn into a side road. Bird in Bush Road! Quiet, flowers, sunshine on new bricks. I follow the sound of shouting and find two churches next to each other, competing in fire and brimstone sermons. I stop to record and feel a little self-conscious as people walk past. Dictaphone wedged between green railings. The church next door has a sand pit outside. A woman, down on her knees, is moaning. A man stands in white robes but I can't read his expression. Impossibly white sand with footmarks. I want to record my footsteps now and slide the dictaphone into the turned up bottoms of my jeans but it skitters away after a few strides. I pretend to do my shoelace up and wedge it more firmly but it still escapes. A park appears, Surrey Canal Walk, and I admire a sign, searching for words of interest. A spider, spot lit on its web spun between the metal posts of the sign. A winding path to Trafalgar Avenue. I sit on a bench, eat cous cous and some crisps, listen to the conversation I recorded with the taxi driver and smile. I listen to the sermon too, understand more from the recording than I had in person. Trees rustle, I think I hear a woodpecker. Three men carry blue plastic bags and I hope they won't sit next to me. Another church, but it seems disused. Rubble outside and brightly patterned clothes hang drying behind a padlocked gate. Maybe I'm wrong and the church is in use after all—but I've already lost interest and head down a path, spotting the gherkin rising in the distance. Pigeons peck at the ground, shuffling over browning leaves. I'm struck by the sound they make, but when I try to get closer to record they trot away. It takes patience for them to return to the leaves again. Old Kent Road and I'm already on familiar turf with buses heading towards Elephant and Castle. A large Tesco. I think about Old Kent Road, that it still reminds me of a Monopoly board and that brown bar that represents an area. Does that mean I'm still new in London, that these things still remind me of games, of popular culture and have not been replaced, re-associated? I don't want to cross at London Bridge so I take a right down an unpromising road. Marcia Road turns off this and looks prettier so I head in that direction. A set of Mr Man stickers and a dead end. I retrace my steps, noticing two wooden ladders – thinner at the tops – chained to railings in a front garden. I stoop down to take a photo, wondering who would steal a ladder and spot the broken remnants of an old one still fixed to the railings. Several people pass by. Returning to the street I briefly follow a woman with 'Abercrombie' emblazoned across her track-suited bottom. I take roads whose names please me: Mandela Way, Willow Walk, Pages Walk. They seem to be trying to conceal the grim, industrial mess they signpost. A Royal Mail depot, almost deserted, with an unlikely looking Rolls Royce parked outside. The hum of turbines carries along a passageway. I pick up a religious pamphlet, thinking I'll read it somewhere nicer, and stow it in my bag. And then I'm on Tower Bridge Road and this is feeling a little too easy. A building with peeling blue paint tempts me down Grange Road and leads to an estate of several tower blocks. I want to get lost in the estate but it's not big enough. A few twists and turns and then another church. Drunks sit on a bench in the churchyard, and in the sunshine a young couple eat thickly cut sandwiches. An overgrown tomb, boxed by black railings and I'm back onto the street again. On Long Lane I spot my first phone box but it swallows my 50p, so I phone Bram with my mobile instead, try to describe my surroundings in about a minute. In doing so I make mistakes: the name of the street is wrong, there is no gate but metal railings, and it is actually a man who sports a chequered hat. I feel weary. Another couple of twists and I'm at London Bridge. I don't want to cross the river here so I head directly through the station with its smell of hot pasties and turn right down Tooley Street. There's always a line of people outside London Dungeons and I push past. A man in a black cape with whitened face and red lines dribbling from his mouth. I stop to record sounds of the Dungeons and feel like a tourist. Passing Stoney Street I remember finding a pigeon chick that had fallen from its nest. It squirmed pathetically, and I still regret leaving it to die slowly.

More London Place and I stop to photograph a stone tablet with running water. A man takes exactly the same photo so, feeling competitive, I take out a leaf I found earlier, place it in the water and photograph that. A stunning view of HMS Belfast and Tower Bridge and I remember I have a message from Bram. I listen to him describing where he is—so different to where I am. As I'm listening I spot the man who copied my photograph and decide to follow him, copying one of his. A small girl apologises as she scoots in the way of his shot. People pass, speaking a different language. Tourists are lined up along the river and I smile with pleasure. A tour bus passes by my side on Tower Bridge, but I'm too slow with my recorder. A twisting patch of green by the Tower with steps leading down to it. North of the river: I reward myself with a pear and a man asks for directions to Trafalgar Square. I give them, badly. Nothing to keep me here so I push on towards Aldgate. Busy roads, crowded bus stops. A bronze plaque tells me I'm on Mansell Street and I'm lured down Tenter Passage. Close to home now, but these roads aren't familiar. Another couple of twists and there's Gunthorpe Street. It's near to my house so I realise I'm not noticing so much, just having memories triggered. Doing the Janet Cardiff walk from Whitechapel with Bram and missing this crucial first turn. Then I'm at Wentworth Street and remember stumbling across a Jack the Ripper tour. They stopped at a building on Thrawl Street so I photograph it, focusing in on the moulded face on its side—wondering what those eyes have seen. Bram sends me a video of him walking but I can't work out how to respond in kind. Brick Lane is full of smells I wish I could record. I enjoy the crush of people for a time and then get frustrated so turn off towards a small farm on Buxton Street. Children are petting a donkey. A beautiful church façade and then Vallance Road. Garish signs by the bridge and I turn down Dunbridge Street. A woman in a red dress stands, talking on her mobile. I slow, hoping to catch what she says and am rewarded: "Yes, yes, she's in the most future strand of the story." A burst of energy now I'm so close to home. Ghosts of leaves left on the pavement, leaving darkened patches. Wilmot Street and I spot some red braces and belts hung on a railing. I pretend to check my phone as people walk past and then take them, smiling that I'd told the taxi driver I often find clothes in the street. A man stops me for directions and I mistakenly think he's going to ask for his braces back. Bethnal Green Road—I write the name down while waiting for the lights to change. An estate on Clare Street with clothes hanging outside and music playing. At first I think the road is nameless but then I spot the sign, and a new route through to my house. On Hackney Road my housemate sees me long before I see him. We talk for a moment and watch his bus drive past. Around the corner, through the fence door and home.