

INTRODUCTION: THE ENCOUNTER

Hi there. Hi. My name's Gabriele but you can call me Gabs. Or Gab. I say that so often when I introduce myself I almost forget my name goes beyond the first three letters. I rehearse it every time, in my head, before the handshake: Gabriele, no, Gabs. It's a bit of a long story, I always say—I don't want to give my foreignness away immediately. Though my accent usually does that for me, as it may have done for you. It's always like, hi, here's my backstory. Should I go into that and give you an explanation of why I'm here, just as we get to know each other?

This is a space I've created just for that—it's a space for backstories and hidden stories, and right now we have the time, you and I, to go a bit deeper. I recommend that you wear your headphones, so it really is just the two of us. On your phone or laptop, you can see a set of audio recordings and, alongside them, a map with a number of signposted locations. My invitation is to travel to each location in person, if you can, and listen to the site-specific recordings I have prepared. All these places map a personal topography of London, telling the story of a journey I've been on, discovering more about the city, its past and its future possibilities. If you can't head there in person, you can experience each site online from the comfort of your room.

There is no set order to these sites—you can decide to visit the one closest to you first, or set time aside to travel to the one farther away. This is completely up to you. The set of audio recordings next to the map is titled 'on my way', and I encourage you to listen to these as you're heading to the locations on the map. They are meant to be listened to in linear order, so after this introduction look for number one, then two, and so forth.

If you follow my instructions, you'll be listening to my stories in the liminal space of the journey between locations, where you're not really there and not here either. You're in a place that is in between. This is a place that you can explore when you close your eyes, a place where we can stage our encounter. Perhaps we wouldn't have met otherwise—perhaps we would've just walked past each other on the street or taken the same bus by accident. Perhaps we have met before. This is a place to learn more about each other—you get to hear my story, and as I write this I imagine who you might be, what you might expect to hear. I hope we can meet halfway.

Now, close your eyes. [SOUND OF STEPS] Hi, this is Gabriele, no, Gabs. Imagine that you're inside my head and are accompanying me to the places I have chosen for us to visit. You're walking around London, but in my head. You can hear my thoughts. And because it's just the two of us here, we can share a bit more, and I can tell you things I've never really said out loud.

Keep your eyes closed. Forget everything that's around you. We're in the liminal space of the story, we're on our way there. Think of the city you're about to explore. [SOUND OF TRAFFIC] What does it look like? Is this the tall London of the City, with skyscrapers and shining glass? [REGENT'S PARK SOUNDSCAPES] Or is it the city of Regent's Park, Hampstead Heath, a green space with lakes and trees? [END OF SOUNDSCAPES] What does this city smell like? Can you smell the grass, or do you smell smoke? Think about when this city is placed in time—it could be the city of today, or a London from another time. Do you think of the chimney on the South Bank as an art gallery, or as a Victorian power station? Do you think of the Royals? Of Henry VIII in the Tower? Or do you think of the exploited children in the industrial age?

Me, I like to imagine London as all these cities at once, each on top of the other. On the map I imagine streets from different times and places overlapping, streets real and imagined. [SOUNDS OF THE TUBE] London is concrete and steel, it's the Tube and the post boxes, but it is also the city of invisible capital passing through the electric networks, the city of Sherlock Holmes and the streets walked by Clarissa Dalloway, on her way to buy her flowers.

[END OF SOUNDSCAPES] The story that I'm about to tell you is a story of journeys between all these versions of London—they're journeys across time, in and out of the imagination. This is the story of your journey as you follow me around the city, or, as I like to think of it, this is your journey and I come with you as a guide, like a portal towards other Londons, past and future, real and imagined.

I realise that being a guide to all these different cities means to be part of none them—it requires a certain detachment. Perhaps you too feel like an outsider and that's what's brought you here. Perhaps you don't know much about me but would like to try and put yourself in my shoes. Perhaps it's because I don't feel part of any of these versions of London I have created my own, through this map, and I invite you to explore it, I want you to spend a few minutes in it.

Now, choose the first location of our journey on the map. As you go there, you can listen to the first recording under the 'on my way' section.