

## ALL SAINTS CHURCH

[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] *Born two years ago at the London School of Economics by initiative of two students who had been in contact with the American Gay Liberation Front, London's Gay Lib soon gathered consensus among far-left homosexuals. The movement has reached notable numbers: in the course of two years over ten thousand badges have been sold in London only and every week, during Notting Hill Gate's general meetings, hundreds of homosexuals take part in open debates about the movement and its politics.*

Writing to his Italian comrades from the pages of *FUORI!*, Mario here describes the environment in which the GLF was born. When it soon attracted more participants than the basement at the LSE could host, general meetings were moved to Notting Hill's All Saints Church. This should now be in front of you, and if you're not there in person you can find a few pictures on the website. Alongside them, you can find some extracts from Mario's own book, *Elements of a Homosexual Critique*.

[MALE VOICE] *We started off at the LSE, so students [...] and to a certain extent [...] a certain academic discourse, it was in a student space. [...] but then when it moved to [...] Notting Hill Gate, completely different thing because [...] you walked into a university space, the discourse was somehow different, especially if you weren't a university kid [...] try get a queen off the street [...] to come round to the LSE, it's like, oh my god it's like going down to school, am I gonna be with a load of spotty students who talk a language that I don't understand.*

So much of what I'd learnt about myself I'd learnt at university—I took a course on gender studies, back in Scotland, which exposed me to the thoughts of people who, like me, sought answers to questions such as: Why and how are homosexuals oppressed? What is the role of sexuality in politics? I loved reading every single article and book on queer theory, gender performativity and everything else, including Mieli's own writing. But I could not shake off the sense that the language and knowledge of these books sounded so complex. In a way, back then the GLF was already focussing on what we would now call accessibility, and the very spaces they occupied were proof of that. As one of my interviewees reminds me,

[MALE VOICE] *Notting Hill [...] was the centre of the black, dispossessed [...] it's where you went to buy your drugs, honey! [...] Very alternative culture [...] so that affected attendance and discussion. [...] All Saints Church [...] was very unchurchy even then [...] there was a lot of space outside [...] cruising went on inside and outside the halls there [...] that area of West London was the epicentre of the gay universe.*

The GLF took an approach that we would now call intersectional. They saw Gay Liberation as something to be fought for alongside other battles, like those against racial oppression, the housing crisis, and the working situation which led many to strike in the early '70s. Mario knew all these things well, having lived in Notting Hill for a few months

*[MALE VOICE] I knew Mario [...] who lived in that little flat [...] I was three years younger, so [...] take that into account. I knew [him] because [he] used to come round the commune I was living in [...] in Notting Hill Gate close to the Tabernacle. [...] I was invited round to their flat a few times.*

Between meetings in All Saints Church, visits to friends in communes and activism between London and Milan, Mario begins to build an understanding of militant homosexuality, one that will so clearly emerge in his later writings. Once again from the pages of FOUR!!, he writes to Italian comrades about the exciting discoveries made in London that will influence his politics.

*[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] Today [...] the Gay Lib [...] occupy homes with feathers on their heads and plenty of mascara; they impose the presence of homosexuals who have come out on the borough, living in chaotic communes with no schedule, no authority, no moral, without jobs and without money, in an orgy of mattresses and jumble-sale clothing spread over messy rooms covered in jam and smelling of herbs, with overflowing wardrobes and mirror cases full of make-up, countless cups of tea, drawers full of LSD and shoes of every shape, preferably silver stilettos. [...] Against the theoretical abstraction of more or less traditional left wing parties and groups, [...] the Gay Liberation Front proposes the alternative of a life that is itself revolutionary, denying the system of its fundamental strongholds (work, family, phallocentrism, morals, propriety), making fun of the mask of tolerance behind which English society hides sexual repression and attentively fighting against the threat of the bourgeois come back, that chameleonic monster of a thousand faces, a thousand tentacles and temptations, the risk of which is constantly renewed. Wherever they meet, comrades of the Gay Liberation Front kiss each other openly. A climate of open homosexual solidarity reigns among them, in the shared search for concrete and always new actions to channel the revolutionary fervour that unites them.*

As I walk around All Saints Church, I think about all those who walked down these streets to discuss politics and sexuality and I think of Mario. I think about the discourses happening in this hall and I also think about the cruising—one of the reasons why the GLF attracted so many so quickly. And I think about how sex and politics go together, something that Mario strongly believed in when he defined communism as ‘the rediscovery of bodies and their fundamental communicative function, their polymorphous potential for love’. I think about

how oppression is exerted on the body, and how the body, on the other hand, becomes the perfect instrument to stage the revolution: against heteronormativity, against the capitalist ordering of bodies, against any form of oppression.

*[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] What in homosexuality particularly horrifies homo-normalis, the policeman of the hetero-capitalist system, is being fucked in the arse; and this can only mean that one of the most delicious bodily pleasures, anal intercourse, is itself a significant revolutionary force. The thing that we queens are so greatly put down for contains a large part of our subversive gay potential. I keep my treasure in my arse, but then my arse is open to everyone...*