

## ON MY WAY: GETTING LOST

How do we know where we're going? I kept all the paper maps of London I collected during my first few trips to England. They carry the marks of the places I visited and they're all worn out around the edges. As a tourist I used to behave like a conqueror—my map was a means of controlling, of marking my territory in an undiscovered land. Now, those old maps tell of trails I am coming back to, as my previous journeys become the objects of my quest. These personal mementos seem to foreshadow the trajectories I am following now: looking for Mario, looking for a queer past. And as London becomes my home, I prefer to get lost on the same routes I once wanted to master.

[FEMALE VOICE] *Faced with a need to know [...] you reach for the map and lay it out upon the table. Here is 'space' as a flat surface, a continuous surface. Space as the completed product. As a coherent closed system. Here space is completely and instantaneously interconnected; space you can walk across. [...] It tells of an order in things.*

The map I have drawn here is partly the kind of map Doreen Massey just described: it's a map to find my way, to help you find a way—it's a grasping of space that speaks of an identity that I am constructing. It's a collection of events from the past that fit into that narrative. But my map also has another purpose: it's a guide to getting lost, to let the space itself take over. I want my map to look like the bird's eye view of a labyrinth, a collection of attempts to find a way. That's the journey I've been on—that you are on—to find traces of Mario, to find myself, somewhere else.

In his both fictional and autobiographical novel, *Il Risveglio dei Faraoni*, Mieli remembers of a time when, in London,

[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] *I met an old lady on the street, and I asked her where she was going. In a feeble voice, she said: "I don't know". There, I was just like her: a passer-by.*

Walking around London I feel a bit like a tourist and a Londoner only tentatively—just like Mario, I feel like little more than a passer-by. Public spaces embody narratives of identity and tell stories of the past, and these stories set boundaries around notions of 'Englishness' and belonging the same way streets have gates and 'do not enter' signs. Who does the city belong to? This city isn't made for me—I am just passing through.

[SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC] As I look for the traces of a queer past in London, I follow directions towards an elusive destination, thinking: my getting lost, your getting lost as you look for these places, these are the very trajectories that make up the map of London I am drawing. It's a queer space beyond the immobile things that are fixed on it, it is made of the journeys we make looking for them, our attempts to find, to remember. [END OF SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC]

Maps are stories, and like any kind of story they can write, erase and re-write the space that's around us. Our cities are increasingly built as networks where each action is measured and optimised against a quantitative standard. How are you travelling to your chosen location? [SOUNDS OF THE TUBE] Are you on the Tube, as you listen to this? The tube map is a great example of this—it doesn't show a picture of what London really looks like; rather, it creates an imaginary space where the city appears as it is ready to be used and travelled across—places emerge only to the extent to which they are connected in the most efficient way, the fastest to travel between them. Here, the city is little more than the commute between home and work, the map is a blueprint for maximised productivity. [END OF SOUNDS OF THE TUBE]

In this capitalist city, our contemporary city, getting lost becomes a revolutionary act. Stopping to seek out what has been hidden, taking the time to look around and find out our city's past is a political gesture of resistance.

The map I have created is a guide to getting lost in this way—it is meant to encourage a different engagement with the urban. It indicates the possibilities of a queer way of moving, one that unlocks the door to a different kind of space. It is an encouragement to engage in psychogeography, meaning

[FEMALE VOICE] *The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.*

It's a way of walking towards no destination, allowing our senses to unveil the city's political and economic forces. It's an attempt to newly experience public space and reimagine it.

When I choose to get lost in the city, I remember the first time I visited London ten years ago, in 2011. [SOUNDS OF A CAFÉ] The Shard was being completed, with cranes towering over its glittering glass top, and preparations for the 2012 Olympics were underway. Back then, London unfolded itself in front of me like a tourist map, a set of attractions that together represented everything that the city was and had to offer. [END OF SOUNDS OF A CAFÉ]

As I walk around the city, I think about what these tall buildings do—they mark a space that is closed off, one that I cannot afford. They constitute a city within the city, made of people that I wouldn't speak to, that I might just walk past on the Tube. Now that I've welcomed you in to my city, will you invite me to yours?

Back in 2011, I followed my mother around London as she showed me the city she knew. That was the first time she had returned to London after her stay in the '80s, when as a language student she briefly lived in the UK while working in a lamp factory. She was eager to unearth memories from that time. She was particularly excited by Carnaby Street, which I didn't understand, and as a literature student she was keen to take me to 221b Baker Street, not far from where I'm recording this now. London was being presented to me as an entity somewhere between the real and the imagined, remembered through my mother's eyes and mythologised as a city of literature, and arts, and writers.

*[FEMALE VOICE] Era tutto molto esaltante, era bello vedere tutte queste cose diverse che qua non vedevo... mi è sembrato, nella mia non consapevolezza, mi era sembrato di essere proprio al centro del mondo.*

This is how my mother remembers London—from her perspective as a foreigner from a provincial Italian town, which I too came from, London was the centre of the world, it was a space already situated in the future.

*[FEMALE VOICE] Per la prima volta avevo una mia indipendenza economica, e riuscivo a comprarmi le cose che volevo con i soldi guadagnati.*

She talks of a sense of freedom I too would experience forty years on, and she remembers the shock when

*[FEMALE VOICE] ero rimasta molto sconvolta da Michelle [...] perché era più giovane di me e già conviveva, cosa qua assolutamente impensabile per l'epoca.*

...the shock when her younger friend, in her early 20s, told her she was living with her partner—something that was absolutely unheard of in the conservative environment my mother grew up in.

In 2011, my mum shared all this with my younger self, and we jokingly exchanged looks of understanding every time we heard someone speak Italian—someone that shared our desire for moving, and perhaps like us experienced exhilarating change and difference and freedom.

In hindsight, Italian speakers in London were underpaid café workers more often than not, serving lattes in Café Nero or espressos in Pret, their accents exploited as subliminal signifiers of their coffees' authenticity. But at the time on these workers I projected my view of London as a realm of potential, ripe of future possibilities. When the 2008 financial crisis hit I was 11 and couldn't understand all the talk of furlough and redundancies, but I did understand that it would have an impact on me. And just like many other Italians my age and older, London

appeared to me as a safe destination. It was the shimmering London of the Shard and the City, that my mum had seen as the centre of the world—a place where it seemed like it did not matter what I wanted to do, where I came from, or who I was. This was London as a European city, where free movement was taken for granted. A year on from settling here, I'm still not sure whether that London is a real or an imagined place.

[SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC] What kind of London are you after? As I walk these streets, in a way, London is all these cities at once. It's a set of intersecting maps, historical layers on top of each other, stories as personal as my mother's and nostalgic returns like my own. It could be a city you've imagined or one as real as the concrete buildings and the train timetables, the rising housing prices, the rain running in the drains. Do all these cities coincide? [END OF SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC]

Doreen Massey argues that *'all spaces are, at least a little, accidental'* and such elements of chance are hidden in the places that symbolise elsewhere, places that remind us of other times and other walks, other people.

It is in this unstable city that I encourage you get lost in—the map I have created draws a narrative that is my own, and also Mario Mieli's, and a narrative that belongs to many others, people who took on the streets in the early '70s: this is the map that I have struggled to pick out of the many possibilities inscribed in urban spaces. This is my map of London, where my identity is projected onto the streets I have included. In a way, I am London. What's your place in it? What does it feel like to follow someone else's story?