

ON MY WAY: FINDING A WAY

I like to think about cities as men I've known. Milan is a dark-eyed man from Sicily, ironically, that I miss and that I will never see again. Glasgow is a tall man who plays the piano and is a bit too pale. Edinburgh's a man who drinks too much and wears glasses. London is another name for Mario, the man whose steps I've been following and whose story so closely resembles mine.

More than streets and squares cities are made of memories we rediscover when we return years and years on. They live inside us in the nostalgic gaze that takes us back and makes us think: everything has changed. That's where I was kissed, by the lake, before he ran away in shame. He took me to that bar in Glasgow, for my twenty-second birthday, and I had too much gin to drink. By the Edinburgh Castle is the café where I cried for hours—that place has now closed and does not exist anymore.

They're the very sweat of these walks, these pilgrimages to the places where things happened. That's what cities are made of.

[FEMALE VOICE] La sento e l'ho sempre sentita come un destino, perché io l'ho amata da subito e ci avrei vissuto, ma sapevo che non era possibile per me. È come se non avendolo potuto fare io l'avessi trasferito su di te...

My mum speaks of London in the subjunctive—the city where she'd first encountered difference and independence is a place of *what ifs*—what if she moved there? What if...? My presence in London feels to her as a kind of intergenerational transfer, a twisted trajectory through which my mother's past becomes my present. The narrative that I'm creating here is one that takes me to places other people have been—and as I get lost in London, I can find my way back following other people's trajectories in time.

[FEMALE VOICE] A dir la verità non vedevo l'ora che diventassi abbastanza grande per poter vedere Londra anche tu, era proprio una cosa [...] questa cosa è stata incredibile per me, un'esperienza incredibile.

My mother sees my stay here as the result of her unfulfilled fate in the city, and in a way she is right; the possibility of migration perhaps wouldn't have been on the cards had she not almost emigrated herself. But I am also following Mario Mieli's queer traces as I attempt to remember each story and make it part of my own repertoire of journeys and movements.

[SOUND OF STEPS] What trajectories are you following as you travel to the locations I have chosen? Is there something from your past that you are trying to remember, or are you here to find out about new stories? As you follow my steps around London you take this multiplicity of trajectories on your own body, which becomes the physical conduit for my memory, other people's memories.

[END OF SOUND OF STEPS] The act of remembering is central to this project, not only because my own presence here is reminiscent of my mother's and Mario's stays. My interest in memory also takes the shape of the ways in which queer histories are remembered, documented, or forgotten. An original member of the GLF that I interviewed was glad to share his testimony with me and commented that

[MALE VOICE] *In the pre-internet age... So much of this history is just getting lost, you know? Because it wasn't being recorded. When you tell people you used to organize demonstrations by going to a telephone box, people look at you as though you are mad!*

His enthusiasm in sharing his story with me can be traced back to the issues that queer history faces—the memory of the gay liberation movement is threatened by the biased process of documenting history. Cities are open air museums that tell stories about their past. But what happens when this city actively excludes communities from being able to tell their stories? What if the city is a homophobic space?

Information, stories and journeys only go on living with the people who lived through them and risks disappearing with them. The digital medium allows me to transfer this wealth of remembrance on to you. The intimate space we've created in this encounter becomes a place for sharing the past as if I was whispering it in your ear—while also making it accessible to so many more. And through our own bodies, the way we walk in the steps of those before us, we keep this history moving, always accessible in our own presence.

In his memoir, writer Jeremy Atherton Lin talks about queer histories as ghost stories:

[MALE VOICE] *Gay history is a palimpsest of what ifs. Walking city streets in a detective mood [...] I am a participant in an archaeology of looking, of cruising. (Cruising was once called haunting, and the men who participated were referred to as ghosts).*

The stories I am telling aim to unearth the half-dead, half-alive queer traces in the urban landscape. They turn our bodies into the haunted spaces between the past and the future. They map out a narrative that does not only deal with space, but also with time: they are histories about reclaiming space, memory, and identity that indicate the future possibilities for the urban space. Our journeys through memory must point towards a queer utopia, a future that is made of and looks back on the past trajectories that constituted it.

[SOUND OF STEPS] As we walk around London we change the city a little: my hope for these recordings you listen to is for them to open portals through time on your phone. I want them to turn the spaces of the city into a space of memory, knowledge, and redemption. And your walk becomes a form of re-enactment. [END OF SOUND OF STEPS] As we walk down the same path of the first ever pride, or visit haunted places, we wear memory on our shoulder, we remember in an embodied way, through the bodily acts of walking, seeing, doing.

[FEMALE VOICE] *Forse in una vita precedente sono stata di quei posti e una parte della mia anima se lo ricorda, non lo so, è una sensazione come di casa che forse qui... forse soprattutto Come mi sta un po' stretta.*

My mother talks about a sense of familiarity with the city, that she attributes to having perhaps lived a past life in London. And this is not so dissimilar from what I've been up to—projecting my story onto Mario Mieli's journey, to make London itself a bit more like home.

My migration started as an attempt to make my final destination something more like my own place—but I have ended up suspended between places, forever foreign in my new home and always running from the place where I started.

When my mum first told me about working in the lamp factory just outside London in the 80s, I used to get upset as she told me the story of a friend she met there. After keeping in touch for years across the Channel, one day my mother simply stopped sending letters back. I so wanted to find this lost friend and reconnect them—but she had snapped the tie, because her friend no longer existed in her present. This was too far away in space and time, it connected herself to a younger self that no longer existed.

I feel that my migration is a process opposite to this: I struggle to keep up with my one time home, as those left behind talk to a version of me that no longer exists. [SOUND OF WAVES] Migration is embodied nostalgia—it is a longing for a home that both past and yet to come, it is a continuous search for meaning and belonging. And this journey I'm undertaking now is part of this meaning-making process: it is a journey to another space-time, it is the constant making and re-making of my past and of the past of my communities. [SOUND OF WAVES CROSS-FADES WITH SOUND OF TRAFFIC] It is in this sense that my journey takes the shape of a map: it is at once a connection of loose ends, a network of instructions to reach a place in the future.

We bring forward a history that has been passed on to us, we fight for its survival—but in the very process we change it, we make it our own. All history is personal. This is why I am presenting the testimonies I have been given not as the be-all and end-all of what happened, but rather as my own journey towards accessing them and making sense of them myself—transforming them as I pass them on to you. [END OF SOUNDS OF TRAFFIC]