

## TRAFALGAR SQUARE

[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] *Great Britain, winter 1972: the miners' strike leaves the entire country in the dark and in a state of absolute chaos. The Tory government declares state of emergency: the lights of the City are turned off, the electronic brains stop working, industrial machinery ceases to function. Summer 1972: the gigantic flare of the dock workers' strike blocks the entire chain of supply—not only foodstuffs—of the country.*

This is Mario Mieli's description of the state of affairs in England in 1972, the year when the first official London pride march was organised. Mario is writing for FUORI!, the Italian Gay Liberation Movement's magazine, which he edits. The year before he had taken part in demos in London organised by the GLF, he attended meetings, met activists from all over the world.

Mario's writing opens a window to another world—he's creating international alliances, he's telling Italian homosexuals about the revolution that's happening elsewhere. He would draw inspiration from his time in London to stage the first Italian protest by homosexuals in 1972.

I wonder what windows my writing can open here—in a way, I am telling friends and family about places in London, about their hidden history, and about my own personal history that I have hidden from them. Just like protestors in the 1970s, this is my way of coming out: I am coming out to you, I am coming out to whoever is listening. I am coming out to someone dear who wanted to visit me in London and never managed, because she's not here anymore. I am telling her about another city, another self, another way of life.

In 1970, Mario had travelled to England to work on his English with the support of his wealthy family. And as soon as he arrived in London, he joined the movement.

[MALE VOICE, ITALIAN ACCENT] *in the summer [of 1972], while fifty-thousand dockers, threatened with redundancy, cross their arms in spite of anti-strike legislations, government, Labour and unions; London's revolutionary homosexuals fight the very first local battles against bourgeois society's deadly phallocratism, to obtain through force—and violence, if needed—the right to a shared life in accordance with the style dictated by the slogan "come out".*

Coming out, being visibly gay was at the centre of the GLF's activism, as one of the people I interviewed told me:

*[MALE VOICE] the idea was one of coming out and making people aware that there were lots of us. [...] The emphasis was on going public because that made us free as well to demonstrate in any way we chose to make people aware of our situation.*

In this sense, the city's public spaces were a place to reclaim, a place to take over.

*[MALE VOICE] Why public spaces? Protests are about public spaces. [We chose the places] with the most impact [...] the cultural icons and institutions of the city.*

*[MALE VOICE] How did it feel? Well exhilarating, really, and a good laugh, and altogether enjoyable [...] very liberating, it was exciting to be standing on the plinth in Trafalgar Square.*

Trafalgar Square was the chosen location for either the start or the end of the first few demonstrations. From this page, on your phone or laptop you can see pictures from the first GLF demos in Trafalgar Square alongside pictures from my family's trip from 2011. These make up a small archive of my own engagement with this place—they merge personal and political history, they speak of my physical journey to London and my journey of discovery of queer history. Through this pictures, for the first time I look around Trafalgar Square and beyond the towering presence of Nelson I feel something else—I feel that this place is also mine, in a way, almost by accident.

My mum says she doesn't remember much about Trafalgar Square and perhaps the pictures you can find here are the only evidence that we were here ten years ago. Just like the photos from the 1970s demos, these pictures open windows to another time. I ask my mother about what she remembers of this place from her stay in the 1980s, I ask her about any photos she may have. She says her mother has thrown everything away for a reason we can't understand—and here I attempt to put together a queer family photo album, made of pictures and histories surviving and being forgotten, attempting to remember different events and trajectories crossing this square as I cross it now, as you walk on the same path I walked, the same path that the GLF walked at the start of the 1970s.

They say that the first pride march took place in 1972 starting from Trafalgar Square all the way to Hyde Park's Speakers' Corner. But many other demos took place in the area, and it's hard to pick out one march over others. When I asked one interviewee to tell me about the date of the first pride march, he replied:

*[MALE VOICE] What do you call a pride march?*

He talked about other marches and demos around the area and then added:

*[MALE VOICE] it's 50 years on, darling, the dates can be a bit [confused...] we were all on LSD, what do you expect?*

This was the exhilarating atmosphere of these marches, the exalting feeling of being 'out' on the streets. From my interviewees' accounts, one particular march stands out.

*[MALE VOICE] The funniest pride march I can think of was the rehearsal that we had for the 1972 pride march, where we just thought we'd walk the route, and it was like 6 of us in sort of like counter-drag, started off, no, probably 20 of us, and we were walking down the pavement from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, and when the police saw all this, they suddenly decided, mmh, "what are you doing?" "why, I'm walking down the route of the march we're going to have next week" but we started to attract a crowd, so, the police decided it was actually a march and they were just going into the road [...] we started chanting, anyway [...] people started joining us*

This rehearsal that became an actual march has an inherently queer quality to it and it tells something of the work that we're undertaking now. In a way, pride is the commemoration of the Stonewall uprising and a reenactment of that event. As you walk around Trafalgar Square, you are reenacting not only the first London pride but also part of my personal history and you connect it to your own, as we both remember this past and bring it back to life through our walk. We make Trafalgar Square a window to other times and other worlds—and perhaps we can start to imagine, what do we want this place to look like in the future? What events will take place here?