

Let's be honest. Friendship is rather not something we would die for in the world of narcissistic subjectivities, which is the world of ours, whether we like it or not. A sense of community makes us rather think more about a group of fans we may belong to by our own free will and a click than any kind of social ties that would bind us up. If almost everything is sharable today, sharing seems to be all but sacrificing a part of one's self for the sake of community. We rather prefer befriending as those individuals who voluntarily gather in elusive communities out of place and space and "sharing" some common interests, aesthetic raptures or instant ideas that are all subject to change as quickly as they make their appearance in digitalised world. We take this liberty for granted and strongly believe that it is our most cherished possession.

And yet this machinery seems to be jammed somehow. Among tonnes of clicked friends we have, we feel radically solitary, even though we have not learnt to confess it yet for fear of being unfit to "like" or to "follow". We simply cannot want more since we have everything, don't we? "Thou shalt be flexible" seems to be the ultimate commandment not only for today's job market. And so flexible we are in our lives and the ways we befriend. Indeed friendship, which our nostalgia would make us clarify further as "true", seems to belong to the bygone world we can only revive in a narrative mode starting by "it used to be better before". Saying that today's world is not the same as it used to be has become a common spiritual exercise and our favourite way to curse the soulless matrix we are in now. We somehow like our comfortable positions of those who remember, last witnesses and defenders of the fort, weaker and weaker from hunger after friendship and community, who make their last stand and proudly tell their stories. However, our forces drastically diminish since for those who were born in the matrix there has never been any "before". Is then the "better" world doomed to be lost? It is not, of course. If what we call "the world" strictly depends on the way we narrate it, all we need is to invent a new narrative instead of bewailing the loss.

Is the crisis of friendship the feature of today's world? "He who has friends can have no true friend". These words are not by someone who has just deserted Facebook. They are by Aristotle if we lend credence to his biographer Diogenes Laertius, which would ultimately mean that our embarrassment of friendships as *embarrass de richesse* does not really differ from that of the Ancient. And yet, how many misunderstandings about this Aristotle's adage in the history of philosophy! *Hô philoi, oudeis philos* [He who has friends can have no true friend] has been evoked by Montaigne, Nietzsche, Blanchot and Derrida. However, they all quoted it as *ô philoi, oudeis philos* which would mean: "O friends, there are no friends." Can it be that a simple error of a medieval copyist, who missed out a letter, somehow influenced what we know about befriending through philosophy?

In spite of its insolubility, this question, I claim, must be posed if we ever want to know what one may understand by friendship and community today. The main ambition of my research is to trace genealogical sources of the concepts of friendship and community, which are the pivot of the "communal turn" in French thought from the 1980s to date. On the one hand, the project endeavours to reveal this turn through reading works by French thinkers such as Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida. On the other hand, it aims to bring a critical review by confronting friendship and community with their specific biographical context, which was, as I intend to show, of a crucial importance for their current shape.

The premises here are the concepts of friendship and community one can encounter in Georges Bataille. If we lend credence to Bataille's "friends" invoking his name in their commentaries, he gave us "the most tender of the words: friendship" (Blanchot) and it was him who "experienced the fate of community in the most radical way" (Nancy). My hypothesis is as follows: our philosophical "acquis communautaire" has been largely shaped by "amicable commentaries" which somehow betrayed the friend in the very name of friendship. In the first place, friends comment on Bataille. Whenever they write about friendship and community, the name of their late friend (Bataille died in 1962) and his oeuvre (largely unpublished back then) serve as voice of authority. In the second place, when the commentaries themselves have gained the power of authority and, as a result, abolished the authority of the friend, there are nothing more but commentaries of "friends" who write to each other or, as Derrida may put it, who share their writing as friendship. Then, if both concepts are taken from Georges Bataille, they are also strangely taken over by his "friends" commenting on him.

Writing about friendship and community, even though it largely deals with philosophical texts, must go beyond a typical philosophical commentary. I am not a philosopher and I do not pretend to be. I shall read both concepts in relation to literature and philosophy on the one hand and history/biography on the other. My goal would be then to include history/biography in a philosophical inquiry and, as a result, to renounce to a philosophical interpretation, since a serious philosophical commentary refuses to consider the biographical or historical ground of any thought.

A reflection that has been with me for a while is that we simply ignore the biographies of philosophers or thinkers as something external to their philosophy or thought, whereas we are perfectly familiar with the biographies of writers or artists as something that might explain some fragments of their oeuvre. In fact, it is common knowledge that the life of a philosopher has nothing to do with his/her thought. We seem to be quite postromantic in our ways of thinking the thought itself. Romanticizing the thought, we somehow take it for granted that life in its contingency does not affect it at all. As a result, detecting ties between life and thought dealing with a philosopher would imply to frivolously psychologize philosophical concepts or see in the history of thought nothing but a sorry reflection of personal affairs. It is as if the very right to biography as an inherent part of the oeuvre was due to the fact of being (qualified as) a writer. It is as if when dealing with a philosopher's writing, our academic practices of analysis, for their seriousness' sake, condemn as a matter of course and in the name of some invisible philosophical authority any kind of the simplest and the silliest questions that one could ask when thinking of writers: what were they like? What were they thinking about when they wrote this or that? What were their relations to their fathers? What was the role of their significant others in their thought? As long as we will be unable to include those simple questions in our philosophical inquiry, philosophy itself will not have much to offer in terms of friendship and community.

If such questions appear as ill-chosen ones just because they target a philosopher and not a writer, one might see here the incontrovertible evidence of an interdiction that it would be interesting to investigate. Given the obvious limits of a philosophical inquiry here, it perhaps falls to a philologist to do it. On the other hand, the preference given to the historical/biographical entanglement of thought is somehow determined by the very nature of the concepts this project deals with. In fact, how is one supposed to think friendship and community without ties which bind them to those who are concerned? How could we bring such a friendship and such a community down to earth? However, if the essence of any friendship and community is dialogical and inevitably "friend-oriented", one has to depict different modifications and transformations which both concepts have been subject

to. Thus, it is necessary to scrutinize their changing history and to show how a friend can usurp both terms and bestow them with a new meaning in the very name of friendship.