

## Notes on Friendship

I have selected different types of fragments for reprint, that I am putting in relationship with each other, as is often the case in my practice. So that the cumulative sum of these things, words, ideas, somehow proposes something that each part alone could not; through this I speak, not so much through an individual authorial voice, but also through a multiplicity of voices. To try to say something, I try to think, and find my position through collecting and navigating through material; I also try and make work that speaks in the same way, that works by articulating a complexity of material, explicitly in both form and content. Perhaps this is a way of doing things that creates close ties and connections between things, people, and myself, and that is something that more often than not has the feel of a friendship of sorts. I work by spending time with things I have collected, the references that I carry along, like friendly voices in my head, the numerous voices that are part of the process of thinking through and developing work – of friends, acquaintances and peers – but which also include the essential voices of inspirational thinkers from the past, that populate our thoughts and conversations and are in this way, also present.

Friendship then, is perhaps a condition of work in my practice – even though it may never be the actual subject of the work, however close it is to a long term object of my practice, support – but a formative, operational condition that works on multiple, simultaneous levels. With this peculiar awareness in mind, I collected here material that exposes what it may mean to consider friendship as a condition for thinking, and does so through the specific friendship of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy. Much of the following thoughts and observations have developed in conversations with philosopher Johan Hartle, who very generously offered his knowledge and time to think with me. Also, a note: age 37, I decided to stop apologising for being an intellectual and an artist.

Friendship is a fundamental aspect of personal support, a condition for doing things together; I'd like to address it as a specific model of relationship in the large question of how to live and work together – and autonomously – towards change, as a way to act in the world. Friendship, like support, is considered here as an essentially political relationship, one of allegiance and responsibility. Being a friend entails a commitment, a decision, and encompasses the implied

positionings that any activity in culture entails. In relationship to my practice, friendship is, at its most relevant in relation to a labour process: as a way of working together. The line of thought that threads through the following material therefore, is that of friendship as a form of solidarity: friends in action. Also, as we know, working together can both start from and create forms of solidarity and/or friendship, which are therefore pursued as both condition and intent, motivating actions taken and allowing work undertaken.

The ancient tradition defines friendship as an exercise in freedom, which needs to be exercised in freedom, meaning exclusively by and with free and equal subjects. As usual, such a freedom is defined negatively: freedom from oppression, coercion, from unreasonable external constraints on action, but also from affects and inclination, from the slavery of desires etc. However, jurisdictional equality is what counts – so that in a world in which women and slaves are not considered part of the polis, of the democratic space of the city, but just occupy the physical space of it, then friendship can only take place amongst men. Which means that according to that tradition, freedoms like friendship can only be exercised by free men, and that in a world in which women are subaltern, they cannot be addressed in friendship, and are therefore also excluded from its discourse. As the discourse around friendship is born and develops in ancient Greece, where women and slaves are excluded from democracy, this rather heavy footnote is bizarrely carried through the history of philosophy all the way – but only sometimes consciously so – until it reaches us; so that this discourse, like many things, replicates the same exclusions it was born in. Hannah Arendt – the only woman on the philosophers' shelf – revives the polis model of freedom and places politics in the realm of action (what she calls *vita activa*, active life), but in her terms separates it from labour (the production of humanity's own survival) and work (the construction of the material world). She doesn't explicitly exclude slaves or women from the space of democracy, but neither does she include them; and she continues to disqualify what has traditionally been attributed to women and slaves: sensuousness and materiality. I really like and am drawn to the idea of living together and sharing acts and thoughts in common, in a way that what is shared is not things, objects, property, qualities (being brothers, men, French, artists, or whatever) but an activity,

a process of co-existence through doing and thinking. What this proposes is a process of association that remains open as to what or whom may partake in it. Furthermore, could a woman speak in friendship? And in that way overcome the structure of classical philosophical discourse by occupying it, and acting within it? If we were to engage in the work of friendship this could lead to what Arendt recalls in her friend Mary McCarthy: "It's not that we think so much alike, but that we do this thinking-business for and with each other." The thinking-business is work in friendship, and friendship in work.

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