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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

**Migrating Birds, Dwelling Friends:
On the Radical Possibilities of Friendship**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Sociology-Anthropology

By Soha Mohsen Abdou Mohammed

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea
May 2018

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I look my audience in the eye and get ready to belt out those words I wrote very late at night when

I was very tired and just wanted to get to sleep and forget everything. And I say:

“Call it sentimental, call it Victorian and nineteenth century, but I say that anthropology that
doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore.”

And I mean it. Really mean it. Because my heart is broken. Because the one person I wish had
heard me sing this lament for him isn’t here. Can’t be here.

(Behar 1996: 283)

TO MY FATHER.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My friends,

I am writing to you because it is you who has been haunting me, accompanying me, tagging along and muddling through the days with me. Following me, calling me to follow you. I'm writing to you because there is so much to who you are, how you came up to me, and how your presence happened to disorganize my life, opening me to move beyond myself. *"I didn't think it would turn out this way" is the secret epitaph of intimacy*, says Lauren Berlant. I didn't think, I still don't think I'll ever understand that which is enigmatic, holy almost instinctive that draws me to you. But to exoticize, romanticize or idolize you or us would be to take away from the brilliance of the flawed, inconsistent, imperfect and fluid nature of our relationship- it would be to ruin it and kill you and that's not what I have intended to do.

What I have tried my best to do is to understand the promise(s) that our friendship holds and perhaps the threats as well. The tenderness, the violence, and what lies between, which is most of the time a push and pull between both. I am writing this to you because you are distant enough for a conversation but close enough to see me, listen to me, and understand. After all I believe friendship is precisely this promise, the promise that there will be a cushion when you take the leap, that you will be heard, seen, understood, bore with in a relation of mutual reciprocity, *"taking each other on and in but never collapsing the distance that allows for attention"*.

In my thesis I have spoken to, walked with and lived among friends, I have learned about and from them, I have listened to what they said and tried my best to pay attention to all that which insists on lurking in silence, dwelling comfortably in this enabling and generous space of intimacy that lets whatever wants to be, be. We spoke of the difficulty of passing the days in a precarity that feels as if one had been swallowed by a whale, and in the darkness of the whale's belly we need to find ways to figure out how best to carry on, together. We spoke of our home cities and together improvised our ways to reconstruct our cities as our homes and our homes as still belonging to those cities, Cairo and Alexandria, we had to constantly reshuffle and remake our maps, our ways home, our daily routes as they insanely alter shift disappear reappear and become otherwise, different street names, torn down buildings, new bridges, abandoned theatres, burnt police stations, central squares becoming car garage, histories erased and other made up. We spoke of ourselves and one another, how as friends we are deep and strange reservoirs of knowledge, of accumulations and memories, embarrassments, disappointments, dreams, revelations and traces of the other, that are as valuable, precious and rare as they are dangerous sometimes profound shocking, and overwhelming.

My thesis had to be an episode of life, a long conversation. Conversations, as Tim Ingold had recently argued, have three important and distinguishing properties: 1- They are processes; they carry on. 2- they are open-ended, not aimed at a final conclusion, but rather at posing more questions and engendering further life. 3- They are dialogical, they go on between and among people, that's precisely why I crafted my thesis in the form of a dialogic correspondence, an assemblage of voices that speak to one another, sometimes complement other times problematize and challenge one another. My insistence on pursuing the topic of friendship with all the complexities this entails, it stems from my belief that knowledge is something that emerges continually in-between humans, non humans, objects and materialities, atmospheres, amidst tensions and frictions, confusions and attractions, attachments, promising beginnings and world-

shattering ends. It is difficult to come to terms with the fact that I had to wrap up this conversation and perhaps even add a “conclusion” section at the end. because I think the term conclusion, meaning final judgment, verdict or reasoning, that reflects a sense of finitude and finishedness, and that will not by any means be able to serve, enhance or enrich the arguments I have tried to closely engage with, precisely the open-endedness that is characteristic of the relationship of friendship. To conclude a friendship in my opinion is to terminate it, and perhaps it is in this space here and now that I can try to add what might constitute a meaningful end-note to my thesis, a thesis that started by grounding itself in the radical possibilities of friendship, needs to also acknowledge that the possibilities are not always radical, and that sometimes, the possibilities of the becoming of friends lie in the impossibility of being friends.

Let me elaborate on that point further.

In a time characterized by anxiety, stress, disappointment, precarity, existential threats of climate change, extreme experiences of capitalist inequalities and political uncertainty, ideas and fantasies around what constitutes a good life have also significantly taken a different turn. Good-life fantasies, imaginations around how our lives might “add up to something”, for example the fantasy of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political institutions, markets etc. have certainly been put on edge, strained, dwindled, withered, frayed. To be more clear, this is not to say that this hiccup or glitch in the reproduction of life, or situation of crisis is exceptional to history in any way, but I’m trying to see how it can be traced as a mediated affect, embedded and entrenched in the everyday. a thing sensed, lived and shared, , it is experienced in transactions and transitions, unfolding in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming and finding and maintaining one’s footing in new manners of being, to keep bearing within a thick present. In this moment of un-foreclosed experience, our open, contingent and precarious ways of living require a tremendous labor of constant reimagining and re-adjusting in order to stay afloat.

In this mess, the complexity of being bound to life, being held in place, having anchor feeling-at-home in the world becomes interrupted, and in this perpetual state of suspension we linger, in proximity to each other, constantly becoming lost- together. I am a part of that hum that resonates around me, the everyday individual as well as collective attempts to hold on to something that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, incoherently. My project stems from that fact that I wanted to be able to capture something that happens in the middle of those attempts, in the atmospheres of sociality, in moments of expressive and emancipative relatedness as well as awkward silences, neither precisely euphoria nor despair, but the emergence of intimacy as potential footing in the world, while not knowing exactly how and whether this scene of collaboration, companionship will unfold, where it will wind up or what potentials it might open up. Throughout my fieldwork, I dwelled in friendship, I took residence in it, and it sometimes seemed like a home to which I can return, other times more like a sailing ship, constantly moving as some people hop on and other jump off. It sometimes held and other times failed me. Friendship comes with knotty entailments, we make mistakes, we disappoint each other, we abandon each other, we mean no harm but accidents happen. The hazy luminosity of the promise of friendship would shimmer on days and dim on others. I wanted to be able to write an ethnography together and collaboratively with you, without having to draw contours between us in order to define you, or myself. I wanted this ethnography to capture your voice and mine in polyphony, an assemblage of moments and encounters of harmony and dissonance in which our autonomous melodies (voices) can intertwine. I wanted to have a long, slow, open ended conversation with you, not free of humor, wonder, surprise. We couldn’t (perhaps we never wanted to) define friendship but it came and went embodied in moments of joy and sometimes of

confusion. My ethnographic journey started in the middle of friendship and moved from there- tracing the multiple rhythms and crises that shape the immediacy of intimacy in relation of broader political and structural durations. Those series of rhythms, patterns, habits, collaborative acts of living (eating, smoking, talking, working, walking, complaining) together were in themselves astoundingly rich and profound, in the knowledges they encapsulate and in how they articulate, convey and express various modes of creativity, inventiveness, human capacities for care, adjustment, carrying on and living with one another.

Friendship emerged as a possibility of living in proximity to a dear other, and not being crushed by what brings us together. Living with friendship is not the same as living under it. Friendship is not a proof or a contract of unending belonging, integration, it is not about a promise of being happy, fulfilled,- neither is it about accepting, containing, and bearing another for good- it is not neither project of forever-ness nor of any guaranteed positive outcomes. Friendship involves many other things than holding hands and leaning, crying on the friend's shoulder, relying on the consistent and continuity of the friend's presence. If a three-year training in Anthropology offered me anything, it is an awareness of the complex and multi-layered nature of things no matter how much they seem to be known, finished, understood, fully grasped. Look closer, it is only something that hasn't been looked at long enough and given sufficient attention time and attendance- Like most precious things, friendship is for the most part overwhelming and difficult, almost impossible to explain, and sometimes almost impossible to keep. The radical possibilities of friendship indeed include the possibility of its death, which is a part of the paradox of becoming, becoming ourselves/ friends/ ourselves/ otherwise. Friendship again is the home and the ship that admits to movement as both its condition and its consequence. How we throw ourselves actively in this relationship of becoming is not metaphorical or philosophical but depends on actual labor of the individual(s), acts of giving and acts of receiving, witnessing, catching up, staying in touch, attentiveness, responsiveness and response-ability that render lives answerable to one another. Friendships have vague beginnings and even vaguer futures, and I believe that friendship can only be understood in the complex and open-ended paradox of becoming, as something that is constantly moved towards but never really reached, never fully fathomed, never fully realized. Yet it remains life's difficult task to answer the question of how and whether friendship abides and which can only be traced by following the horizon of life as it moves. For example; the moment when a friend rests on the other's shoulder in the metro and feels safe enough to fall asleep, right there and right then.

To Dr. Hanan Sabea, the friend who accompanied me through the most exhilarating ride of my life, the past 2 and half years. I remember September 2015 when it all started, her voice, her jokes, her engagement with classic and contemporary social scientists, philosophers and thinkers, alive or dead, near or far, she brings them all to life. Hanan breathes life into texts, stories, and allows them to grow a heart and a soul of their own. She knows something about time, about imagination, about intellect, that pushes us ever so powerfully to constantly re-think that which is naturalized, to believe in the power to ask and not the power of the answer. Most of all, she incited a capacity in me for wonder and an openness to surprise, to awe, to the endless potentiality of thought and empathy. She taught us, in fact she is the one person I met who fully embodies something similar to what C.S. Lewis wrote one day; **“But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again”**. She reads them and reads them out loud to us, and invites us to restore the brilliance and inventiveness of little children, in how they pay attention to the world,

how they attend to details, how they express themselves wildly and freely, how they delightful yet fiercely stubborn they can be. Dr. Hanan travels through time, sometimes she's an Alice that leads us into the perplexing, dazzling wonderland of epistemologies, philosophies and concepts, other times she stands at the back of class, or at one corner, quiet and observing, and patiently waits as we begin to stutter, then give birth to theories of a different kind, sentiments, reactions, expressions, signs and articulations.

To Dr. Martina who witnessed and very much contributed to the very making of this thesis, as well as my overall experience at AUC. She guided me through my own thinking process, and introduced me to some of the most interesting and radical texts across several disciplines; Social Sciences, Philosophy, Urban Studies. I would like to thank you for your astounding generosity, sharing every piece of knowledge you have with those who surround you, and for always welcoming and encouraging new ideas, for the diligent and continuous effort you make as you 'keep your eyes open' for new ways of thinking and new modes of learning. Thank you for bearing with me and helping me pass the emotional lows and intellectual blocks. You have given me precious and absolutely timeless advice on writing, how to make it happen and how to let it, simultaneously, unmake and remake you. Writing is life, you used to tell me, and it is from you that I learned that the flow of writing is the flow of life itself. One does freeze life in order to write about it, they both happen together and to each other.

To Dr. Ian whom I met in 2016, and together with Dr. Kiven Strohm, we ventured into questions on affect theory and different approaches to reading and writing, to theorizing, to doing ethnography, to living, thinking and relating to one another. I would like to thank you for being genuinely open to exploring new territories of thought with me, and for constantly pushing me to write my heart out, without fear. In the last months of writing this thesis, you were there as I went through many moments of uncertainty and doubt, fear and anxiety and you always "knew" how it feels to be an MA student rushing and running after deadlines, and you kindly provided all the support, understanding, and also very helpful insight from your own experiences with writing as to make the process easier and less lonesome.

To Dr. Munira who blew my mind with her creativity, courage and warmth of heart. She challenged me to look for life where there seems to be only violence, destruction and death. I want to thank you for pushing me to pay attention to the silences and absences, and look for what lies behind them. I remember we shared a passion for Elena Ferrante novels, and you allowed me to extend my imagination and further pursue that passion, describe it, question it, trace write, write about it. I will never forget the sound of your laughter.

To Dr. Dina who very powerfully helped me ground myself in thinking about the everyday dynamics of and relations between work, personhood and the different kind of labor it takes to 'make' a living. I thank you for being extremely empathetic, patient and supportive with me. I thank you for making Fall 2017, which was a difficult and intense semester to say the least, much more bearable and kind, and for pushing my thesis topic by generously and openly sharing every bit of academic, textual, as well as personal bits and stories about friendship that might help enhance and enrich my project.

To Dr. Ramy who grounded me in the various views on and approaches to ethnography, ethnographic methods and ways of doing fieldwork. I thank you for taking in my very first attempts and "baby trials" at doing interviews. You have given me the rooms of time and trust that enabled me to share those tests and tryouts with you and with the rest of my colleagues. I thank you and I will always cherish the space of learning and interacting that you have constructed and invited me into, with much comfort and great care.

To Noha, to Hana, to Lily, to Suzan; the beautiful, kind, enthusiastic, and strong women in my life who taught me a myriad things about friendship. My life would have not been the same without you, and I cannot even imagine this thesis being a potentiality without all the love, encouragement, understanding and acceptance you have given me. I look up to you, and you never cease to astound me. You are worlds of care and of compassion, and you are also manifestations of resilience and bravery, and it amazes me how you carry on with the difficulties of life (with me!) with relentless grace and absolute vitality. You tolerated and embraced me when I could not bear my own self, and I am grateful to you for making me who I am and for holding me so gently, allowing me to breathe and bloom. Your doors, ears, hearts were always open for me and I hope I have not failed you.

To Nadia, Yasmine, Ahmed Serougi, Amro Ali, Hagar Adam, Sarah Bahgat, Nadiene Muhammed and Tarek Sharkawy; the migrating birds I thank you for sharing your Alexandria(s) with me, for guiding me into your lives, your homes, for the very openness that made our experiences and back-and-forth trips profoundly rich and exciting. I thank you for showing me as many lives to the city of Alexandria as there could be, you have expanded me horizons beyond what I have expected and ever imagined. We met either here, in Cairo, or there in Alexandria, and sometimes we accompanied each other on the road between both. It is impossible to think of Alexandria now without thinking of each one of you and the forceful and insightful stories you have shared with me, both personal and otherwise. Your friendship shattered any possible estrangement I had or could have had with the city that is not “mine”, as your company enabled me to make a home out of it. And for that I shall be eternally grateful.

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To Amyra Mahmoud, Diana Magdy, Chehab Adel, Ahmed Abo elFadl, Ahmed Abdelwahab, Salma Salah, Salma Wardani, Sherif Ahmed, Maged Nader, Muhammed el-Hajj I thank you for the wonderful times of friendship, and the memories that we have and still make together.

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To the Crillon hotel staff who hosted my wandering self in Alexandria, to my cats; Poussi and Gucci. To Cairo's Downtown and Alexandria's Downtown, where I get lost and found and lost again. I acknowledge the people, the objects, the streets, the trees.

To my brother and sister, my very first friends. And to my mother; I am still understanding your love, but it certainly is something like the moonlight, as Lola Ridge poem says, that constantly turns harsh things to beauty. It cannot be described, but it keeps spreading miles and years, ahead of me and beyond me, it is what keeps me alive.

To Our Friends (2015) - The Invisible Community

We would have liked to be brief. To forgo genealogies, etymologies, quotations. That a poem, a song, would suffice.

We wished it would be enough to write “revolution” on a wall for the street to catch fire. But it was necessary to untangle the skin of the present, and in places to settle accounts with ancient falsehoods.

It was necessary to try and digest seven years of historical convulsions. And decipher a world in which confusion has blossomed on a tree of misunderstanding.

We've taken the time to write with the hope that others would take the time to read. Writing is a vanity, unless it's for the friend. Including the friend one doesn't know yet.

In the coming years, we'll be wherever the fires are lit.

During the periods of respite, we're not that hard to find.

We'll continue the effort of clarification we've begun here.

There will be dates and places where we can mass our forces against logical targets. There will be dates and places for meeting up and debating.

We don't know if the insurrection will have the look of a heroic assault, or if it will be a planetary fit of crying, a sudden expression of feeling after decades of anesthesia, misery, and stupidity.

Nothing guarantees that the fascist option won't be preferred to revolution.

We'll do what there is to be done.

Thinking, attacking, building— such is our fabulous agenda.

This text is the beginning of a plan.

See you soon,

Invisible Committee, October 2014

(Invisible Committee 2015: 85)

Prelude:

I can't quite remember, I don't think any of us possibly can remember the moment where the first friend had been "made". Rather than trying to trace it back to a date or a certain age, I would like to make an attempt at memorizing and looking more closely at the holiness of the encounter. I realize now that friendship is a story as old as time, and I also realize that we think we know the story before it even begins. As I grew up I became more and more interested in and intrigued by the ways in which 'we grow together', by *we* I mean the people we choose to be witnesses to and companions in the constant unfolding of our being and becoming. A part of our personal histories is precisely the people we choose to grow up with and around. Our decisions, movements, and various transformations are tightly bound with a series of relationships that we engage in and play with and within. We constantly gain and lose friends, we constantly grow close to or apart from others, there is always a motion and a tension, acts of tenderness and kindness and others of abandonment, neglect, betrayal and deceit. We continuously situate ourselves among those with whom we share something, but that thing is not necessarily of a peaceful kind. It could be a discomfort, an estrangement, a sense of loss or an unease, which I would argue makes the particular relation formed on and/or around it one of a unique nature. Eight years ago, particularly in the summer of 2010 I lost the family member whom I have always seen and perceived as my best friend and favorite companion; my father. The loss entailed drastic changes in my life, one of which was that I needed to find a new best friend. A process laced with a sense of fear and uncertainty gave me an access and an insight to a world of "making" friends (and eventually of breaking). In and through which I can claim that I have been exposed to and confronted with the complex and manifold nature of friendship. My thesis question I insisted on forming is a part of and an extension to my own ways of living. I do not

wish to formulate a new territory of thought in which I plant observations, questions and reflections, I rather wish to dig deeper into that which is constantly moving and changing, evolving either growing or fading, but in all cases have been, is, and will be of immense significance to myself, to those whom I have met and to those whom I have not.

Introduction

In this thesis I would like to explore the notion of friendship in contemporary Egypt, as a contingent relationship born and maintained among various conditions of political, economic and urban precarity and uncertainty. Particularly, I'm interested in looking at the affective and creative modes of attachment, relating and belonging that people constantly invent and experiment with, when life is too messy for categories to hold. By following, tracing and accompanying friends and networks of friendship emerging in and across the biggest two cities of Egypt; Cairo and Alexandria, my goal is to co-construct an ethnography about the contemporary meanings, forms and purposes of friendship among young Egyptians. What can the relationships of friendship do, is the main question running throughout this work. My aim is to provide a rich ethnographic contribution to the existing anthropological literature on Egypt, by focusing on intimacy, co-existence and companion-ship.

This ethnography is founded on multiple co-constitutive conversations, virtual, theoretical and abstract on one hand and real, fleshy, bodily on another. The aim is to renew and revive the question of “what can friendships do” (Foucault), while lending this textual space as a window for possible answers and articulations. From various chats, encounters and talks with friends a particular portray of friendship, its meaningful presence or rather absence emerged as a possibility of a gathering ‘around’ something yet not under, a co-constitutive entanglement, a relationship that at best does not aim to crush, constrain or fix roles of the subjects involved. This perhaps could be read as a line of continuity from the many lines that Foucault’s question inspired; *What could be played?* (1981). Yet I would like to repeat over and over the term “possibility” and stretch it to also admit the impossibilities and the limits of friendship. I imagine the possibility as the dots between and... and... and (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 27), which is

precisely the open-endedness that wants to free itself from predetermined before(s) and after(s). This is not to say that friendship does not seek consistency or does not involve dreams of futures of togetherness and safe, ideal and steady life-long relations of companionship. Yet there is a lot to be said about ideas and imaginations of the “future” when one does not have much luxury to maintain a slot in the present. It is precisely the acute presence of conditions of precarity (political, economic social, infrastructural) that drives the myriad creative, inventive and radical negotiations and variations of subjects on “how/where to go next?” The questions that my thesis attempts to open up are rather focused on the “affective” negotiations, in other words re-workings, reconfigurations and re-makings of ideas and practices of relations, socialities and intimacies between friends.

I. Inheritances, Traces and Trails of Intimacy:

Friends constantly move around and with us, tell us things, challenge, accompany, confuse, lift, disappoint and world us. In trying to think of and through the bond of friendship, one of the primary conditions would be to situate oneself not “in place” but “along paths” of corresponding, co-constitutive and co-constructive thought. By that I mean that friendship is precisely born and maintained in the very entwining of the extending trajectories and processes of becoming. It emerges always “in the middle” and “in-between” things, where the other person embodies the condition for my “passing from one world to another” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 18). To trace the bond of friendship in say, written literature, is to actively surf among and with thinkers, philosophers, cultural theorists, artists, writers, and social scientists on a sea of non-stop shifting waves. Coming and going, those waves of thought and experience “travel in circuits of impact and reaction” (Stewart: 197), whereby the authors speak to each other and to us about something that keeps slipping in and out of existence, hardly completely graspable or fully fathomable.

This is not to say that friendship in and of itself comprises elements of mystification or perplexity, but rather that what friendship stands for, how it is represented, established, perceived and maintained varies tremendously from one context, time and place to another. In order to trace friendship in literature one needs to cultivate a sincere “openness to a world-in-formation” (Ingold 2011: 69), a world that constantly becomes-other than what it was the moment that the figure of the “friend” walks in or out. With this in mind, the tracing of friendship in different academic (and non-academic) genres and texts has been an intimate, animate and unfolding process that sailed slowly and with care. Rather than trying to bracket and formulate clear-cut definitions friendship, I am interested in assembling an array of voices, narratives, theories and reflections from within the crack, the gap or the distance (in time as well as in space) between the different collaborators and interlocutors, the real and the virtual, the ones I have met, the ones I have not that shall allow for more complex, layered and embrative understandings of friendship to emerge.

a. Fragmented Philosophies on Friendship

Surely the relationship we are dealing with goes back a long way. As a conceptual landscape, its roots can be traced to the time of the Greeks. The ‘friend’ is nothing less than the main and central figure of *philo*-sophy in the West. Mainly the ancient Greek philosophers have planted a concrete distinction between three forms of affection; *Agape*, *Eros*, and *Philia*. *Agape* is a general empathetic appreciation for the other, be that God or other human and non-human beings, which was also later translated in Latin as “*caritas*” which is the origin of the term charity. *Agape* can be understood as a broad-ranging endearment directed towards all other beings, strangers and/or kin, and also appears in religious discourses such as Christianity. *Eros* represents an affection that involves desire, namely sexual one. It stands for the irrational,

sweeping and perhaps dangerous form of affection as it entails a particular loss of control over the magnitude of the feeling. Perhaps we can say that Eros is the closest to what shapes the modern discourse on romantic love, as the charged forceful, magnetic, erotic and passionate attraction that draws two persons to each other. *Philia* is the form of affection that is most affiliated with friendship, as it necessarily involves a particular kind of relationship with another based on mutual appreciation, affection and reciprocity vacant of agendas of sexual desires or motives.

The dialogues of Plato and Cicero, the monographs of Aristotle, the letters by Seneca, the essays of Montaigne and Kierkegaard, along with other prominent philosophers textual contributions have founded the quintessential philosophical legacy on friendship, the very crucial labor of engaging, drawing on, and variously articulating the core values and nuances at play in this complex and multilayered interpersonal bond. Those writings have certainly played an essential part in formulating the main concepts, characteristics and understandings of friendship that have managed to pass over from one generation to another. However fertile the ground that those creations, makings and formations of thought have established, the messy muddling of human beings I believe seems to constantly exceed, rather than merely mirror the neatness of the philosophical system of suppositions. For example, in *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (1993), the editor Neera Kapur Badhwar combines a selection of fine 15 essay by 15 contemporary scholars in philosophy who present us with a diverse range of in-depth examinations of historical philosophical speculations on friendship, drawing on for example Aristotle and Kant. While one can certainly think with and through as well as benefit from Aristotle's famous classification of the three types/kinds of friendship: a) based on utility, b) based on pleasure, and/or c) based on goodness and virtue, this thesis stems from an

exasperation, an exhaustion more accurately an inability of conceptual abstractions and the solidifications resulting thereafter to catch-up with the messy dynamism of life. What I believe an anthropological contribution as this thesis could possibly offer is a fleshy, imperfect, incomplete (and I hear Eve Sedgwick's voice adding "weak") theory on the unpredictability and ungraspability of the affective and social bonds between human beings. Weak theory (Sedgwick 1997) signifies a mode of theorizing that takes place in the form of slow and attentive tracing of the "generative modalities of impulses, daydreams, ways of relating, distractions, strategies, failures, encounters, and worldings of all kinds" (Stewart 2008: 73). It inhabits the space of attending to things so as to constantly be able to track the possible throwing-together of things, and the open question of 'where they might go'. It does not aim to judge the value of analytic objects or imprison the analytic subject; it rather tracks the potential modes of knowing and relating that are present in and between the objects and subjects in moments where things throw themselves together. In other words, 'weak' theory is way of attending to life as a problem and an open question, not a simple and unified repository of systematic and structural effects but rather an ever shifting composition of actualities and potentialities, contact zones and structures of feeling, residues of moments of watching and waiting, as together people *make something of things* (Stewart 2008).

The writing of this thesis is drenched in and laced with loss, with awe and imponderabilia. Particularly because thinking of friends throws one off on a journey that inevitably extends and stretches out over one's entire life. From childhood to teenage years to adulthood, over daydreams and nightmares, over holidays on the beach and terribly long school mornings, over adrenaline rushes and forceful stirrings, first-time experiences, early realizations, confusions, the agonizing embarrassment of early disappointments and the aching naiveté of the

young heart, the young self. How everything seemed either life shattering or world building, no in-betweens. How and how much one anchors oneself in friendship is a matter that varies from one life to another, depending on the various individual life circumstances and conditions. Yet the knowledge, influences and impressions one acquires from and with friends at different instances and stages in life, directly and/or indirectly, occupies a central position in one's fundamental conceptions of the self, the other and the wide world outside.

b. Surfing the Waves of Friendship in Thought

"We must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential; by this I mean we must greet them in the relation with the unknown in which they greet us as well, in our estrangement. Friendship, this relation without dependence, without episode, yet into which all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends but only to speak to them, not to make of them a topic of conversations (or essays), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation."
(Blanchot 1997: 290,291)

To "surf" is to ride a wave towards, and only towards the shore but never really reaching the shoreline. It is a movement of a body over a moving wave that demands vigilant sensory alertness, mindful attention and an openness to *let yourself be carried*. Few days ago I happened to come across a recent magazine interview with Arundhati Roy; one of my favorite novelists and certainly one of India's most prominent writers and political activists, where she poignantly described the friendships in her life as resembling "walking on lily pads"¹. I found that description to be astounding, particularly because lily pads are very fine round leaves that float ever-so-delicately over the surface of water. I have never done the water sport of surfing before, but I can stare into the pictures of water lilies, videos and footages of real surfers for hours on end. This has immensely inspired me, in a metaphorical sense, to think in the same manner and

¹ <http://www.chatelaine.com/living/books/arundhati-roy-interview/>

ride along and float over the waves of friendships-in-thought as well as in life between thinkers, since this thesis is done in the spirit of friendship. The real-life friendships, connections and collaborations between thinkers, the collisions between their ways of thinking and theorizing I believe have immensely influenced my interest in this relationship and what it can offer, humanly but also on epistemological, conceptual, textual and theoretical levels. I believe it is necessary to start with exhibiting and thinking through at least few examples of friendships that occurred between thinkers who were in a sense, to borrow Segall's terms; "constant companions" (2001: 584) in my ethnographic endeavor. Also drawing on Segall, the tracing of the theme of friendship at the heart of this thesis does not follow a "unidirectional" route that begins with the field and ends at the academe, or vice versa. But rather a broadening and a stretching of a conversation, in which "voices in the field": who are in this case the real-life friends, and "voices from the field": the academic/ virtual interlocutors speak to, challenge, disturb, sometimes supplement and other times problematize each other. The two realms never were, are and will hardly ever be separable; instead "they are constantly and simultaneously implicated with/by one another" (583). I am imagining a number of people gathering together to sit and have a conversation, in say a lounge, a garden, a room or an empty space and I am drawn to an image where they arrange themselves in the form of a circle, they would not sit in rows.

Maurice Blanchot; the French writer, philosopher and literary theorist, has been one immensely influential friend in the thought-process of this thesis. His writings accompanied me and engendered a certain "movement in understanding" across the temporal and spatial gaps between us. He died in 2003 and I read him in 2016, and instantly emerged a relationship, a friendship between us in the form of an internal thought process. I read Blanchot in fragments, and experienced the birth and becoming of a friendship between us, exactly in the manner that he

had described in his article *For Friendship*; “a gradual occurrence, a slow process through time. We were friends and hadn’t realized” (2000: 25). With Blanchot I started a conversation about the “infinite distance” and the “fundamental separation” between two friends, which according to him, is necessary to allow a speaking “to” and not “of” friends. There is a potential buried in the reciprocal estrangement between two friends, or so Blanchot taught me.

Friendship, with its fleeting qualities, holds a unique and consistently precious place in the works of Blanchot. In his book *Friendship* (1997) composed of 29 literary, cultural and philosophical essays that read as a relation, a reflection and a response to a community of writers ranging from Georges Bataille, Franz Kafka, Lévi-Strauss and others, while also producing a narrative of its own on themes such as literature, war and translation. The authors are brought/ thrown together in this book and in their togetherness, the rhythm and the life of the text is created, especially Georges Bataille who was one of Blanchot’s closest friends and whose spirit haunts Blanchot’s words in direct and indirect ways. Blanchot performs friendship in his writing, whereby the essays are not a series of diary entries, meditations or confessions, but rather creating relations and binding chains of thought with authors whether alive or dead, near or far, as well as their texts and the ideas therein. To him friendship survives, in the very act of continuing the conversation, the death, disappearance or distance that separates those who are identified as friends, he writes in *The Unavowable Community*: “And it is in life itself that that absence of someone else has to be met. It is with that absence — its uncanny presence, always under the prior threat of a disappearance — that friendship is brought into play and lost at each moment, a relation without relation” (1988: 25). The distance between two people, that is the impossibility of complete understanding and communication, opens up an infinite possibility of new creations of meaning. By that I mean that this imponderable, mysterious and vague element

of friendship is somehow like a secret that unfolds in the making of the relationship itself. The unpredictability of this potential bonding takes the shape of an openness in thought, whereby the thought of the other opens itself to us only in relation to “the strangeness of the end”, Blanchot names it “the interruption of being” that “brings us together in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech” (1997: 291).

Besides his famous and compelling friendship with Georges Bataille, also Emanuel Levinas, Blanchot maintained a deep friendship: a personal as well as a philosophical dialogue running throughout his life with other figures like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Dionys Mascolo. Mascolo was a French writer and political activist with whom he shares powerful memories of comradeship and flashes of a deep friendship (which he insists on a distinction between) throughout decades of protesting/marching/writing against fascism, imperialism and colonialism in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. I learned about Mascolo first and primarily as a friend of Blanchot while reading Blanchot’s article *For Friendship* (2000). The article reads like a beautiful montage or mise-en-scène of memoirs of various scenes of contact and disaster, demonstrations, disagreements, and friendships as “an effusiveness of heart and mind” (2000: 26). Blanchot does not give the reader actual dates or precise chronology of the happenings and events he narrated, stating that he always felt “ill-at-ease with any supposedly historical narrative” since whatever is constructed as truth is somehow also always “a deceptive reconstitution reliant on the arbitrary nature of remembering and forgetting” (Ibid:28). In the article he chronicles and contextualizes the beginning of his friendship with Mascolo, but at a later point he insists that the moment of birth of their bond came at an afterward moment in time. The experience of friendship, as Blanchot describes, disrupts a typical or perhaps an overly

romantic scenario about instant clicking, and rather crystalizes over a set of situations, incidents and encounters that flows over a period of time.

Between April and October 1988, Dinoys Mascolo and Gilles Deleuze exchanged, in the form of letters, a compelling written correspondence on the concept of friendship, published in the edited volume: *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975- 1995* in the year 2006. Deleuze initiated the conversation mainly to express his appreciation of and inspiration by Mascolo's work: *On an Effort of Memory*. He wrote to Mascolo that he could sense a certain kind of "secret" in the purity of his writings, and he ends his letter by the following gesture, which seems to me to transcend the boundaries of mere textual/ intellectual reaching out and bonding: *Let me express me admiration, and, if you accept it, my friendship* (2007: 327). A week later, and only a day after he received the letter Mascolo replies, expressing not only gratitude but also surprise, as having been "found out". Mascolo reflects on the idea of the secret in his writing and puts forward a proposition that perhaps this particular kind of secret; one that does not seek refuge in shame or humor, a secret without secrets, a secret that does not seek to kindle or provoke other secrets, if recognized by another person then it does become a sufficient basis for "any possible friendship".

This correspondence is in itself a beginning of friendship, and at the same time, it gives us a space to examine and reflect upon the overflowing concept of friendship. It reveals friendship as both an embodiment and an articulation of a thought that originally resides within the contours of the self, yet one that is also always excessive, always moving and constantly seeking a space of co-habitation where it can grow and become. Perhaps Mascolo's conception of friendship is premised on a common language, or more precisely a common pre-language. "Friendship comes first" somehow, as an affective space of mutual relativity. This understanding

of friendship gives room to the unrevealed and the unspoken to be and be-come of significance, notwithstanding of the act of uttering as proof of or evidence to intimacy or closeness. Closeness is not measured only by the shared, but also by what dwells in silence, in distress, in tormenting uncertainty, in utter unfinished-ness or incompleteness inside each person and longs for the company of another “distrusted” thought in the other.

After three months Deleuze writes back, taking one step further the secret, elaborating by re-articulating to Mascolo and most probably to himself, that the idea of the possible friendship that is beginning to formulate is one that is based on a mutual “concern”. Yet taking another step and moving deeper, Deleuze attempts to scrutinize and question the position of this ‘concern’. Whether friendship acts as the internal necessary condition for thought, in other words: friendship comes first? Where the distress in thought, thought suspicious of thinking, requires a friend to go through the trials of “aphasia and amnesia” with, the necessary process for thinking itself. Deleuze is somehow inclined towards this supposition, which is an understanding that materializes, if one could say, becomes revealed in his immensely rich, interesting and generative friendship with Félix Guattari.

Gilles Deleuze’s friendship with the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari began in the late sixties, and through a series of significant intellectual collaborations, an active Ping-Pong of ideas between them over the years, they produced groundbreaking works such as *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972, *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980, and in 1994 yet another milestone in their oeuvre; *What is Philosophy*. Their works continue to be read internationally, inside the academic institution as well as outside, long after the death of the two authors. Also, there still seems to exist a curious and genuine interest among their readers in learning more about the ways in which this duo worked and produced their texts together, in and through friendship (see for

example *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (2010). Since it is their own voices that concern us most, I have been most interested in and devoted to collecting, from the available sources, how they themselves viewed, enunciated and described their collaboration. Again in *Two regimes of Madness*, and under the title: *Letter to Uno: How Felix and I Worked Together* (2007: 237), Deleuze wrote a poetic and simple note (originally to Kuniichi Uno, the Japanese translator of Deleuze, and a former student who later became a friend) on how peculiar his relationship with Guattari really is. While Deleuze compares Felix to the sea “always seems to be in motion, sparkling with light”, he then renders himself, almost in an antonymic manner, a hill; “I don’t move much . . . and the few movements I do have are internal”. They were two very different people and had very different lives, yet in Deleuze’s view their differences worked for far more than against them;

“Gradually, a concept would acquire an autonomous existence, which sometimes we continued to understand differently. Working together was never a homogenization, but a proliferation, an accumulation of bifurcations, a rhizome . . . Felix had these brainstorm, and I was like a lighting rod.” (2007:239).

Their first book was written primarily and mostly through letter-exchanges, and the personal meetings/dialogues were somehow periodic and irregular. In describing their work/thought process for *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari remarks:

“At the outset, it was less a matter of sharing a common understanding than sharing the sum of our uncertainties” (2010: 8).

Similarly, Deleuze remarked that the collaboration between their minds and intermingling of thought or the possibility of creation fundamentally involved “stuttering” “ellipses” and “inarticulate sounds”(Ibid: 9), and that along the invisible and imperceptible “borderline, a line of flight or of a flow” between both of their minds “things come to pass, becomings evolve, revolutions take shape.” (Ibid:10). The singular concept that emerges and formulates in the “and”

is an outcome or a culmination of a profound intimacy in thought, but not collision. It remains a potentiality that belongs to both, and a property of neither (Roach 2012). As a project of life, friendship here bears “the imprint of a historical relationship yet points toward a posthumous political project with a life of its own” (2012: 2). Here I am trying to chart the doings, enactments and potentialities of friendship, not merely tracing its conceptual terrain.

In Michel Foucault’s voice I hear a call to friendship as a way of revolutionizing the possibility of human relations and transformative capacities/ capacities for transformation. Foucault’s theory of friendship becomes significantly present in his late writings on power, activism and self-care as a mode of resistance. To him, friendship can be a “way of living” (1988) that shakes up the hierarchal and normative structures of identity and subjectivity. As a radical and anti-institutional act, Foucault offers a view of friendship as in and of itself a political form/fabric capable of engendering new conceptions of union and community, beyond and against the institutionalized, solidified and dead-ended categories of legitimization through narrow, rigid or possessive agendas of belonging and identity politics. Borrowing its title from an interview with Foucault in the 80s, *Friendship as a Way of Life* (2012) by Tom Roach is a book that rigorously compiles and deeply engages with Foucault’s “spare but suggestive” (ibid: 12) philosophical speculations, conceptual advancements and politically active arguments on the relationship of friendship as well as accounts of his real life friendships (in particular Foucault’s interesting and complex friendship with the French writer and photographer Hervé Guibert). By introducing and foregrounding the relevance of “betrayal” to the mutual theory of friendship between Foucault and Guibert, Roach ended up with a compelling yet unusual account of friendship that powerfully disrupts the idealized and canonical philosophies of friendship from Aristotle through Carl Schmitt. “Foucault’s concept of friendship, is anything but utopian,”

writes Roach; “betrayal, distance, brutal honesty, indeed, an impersonal intimacy founded in estrangement are its makings.” (Ibid: 8, 9). By delving into the minutiae of details that constituted the Guibertian-Foucaultian relationship, Roach becomes sufficiently confident to propose an argument (inspired by Foucault) where the most unorthodox and troubling aspects of friendship become the basis for its very foundation.

At the heart of Roach’s book lies an attempt to trace, highlight and emphasize the key elements of the Foucaultian discourse on friendship as a radical form of gathering/ a getting together that resists representation, eludes categorical and structural definitions and refuses to consolidate into a singular identity. In the distance between two friends resides a perpetual foreignness and irreducibility, a politics of shared estrangement that is always open to the infinite variation of being, whereby as Roach argues: “its very unrepresentability points toward a politics beyond representation” (ibid: 149). Roach draws on Foucault’s literature as well as personal life in order to convey while also attempt to develop the flashes, sparks, fleeting visions on friendship that Foucault experienced and grappled with, which at the same time can be seen as a part of a larger project aimed at imagining broader and more radical modes of relationality and sociality. Similar to Deleuze, Foucault sees friendship as a way of being and becoming, and friends as ‘those with whom we work on the historical conditions of our existence, and those with whom we share the practice of becoming who we are’ (Webb 2003: 119).

It might be useful to pause, momentarily, in order to take in, absorb and accordingly reflect on the conversation that has been taking place in the past few pages. I hear Jacques Derrida’s voice, then the voice of another but I am in bit of a haze. The previous assemblage of voices together is something I am already implicated and embedded in. In other words, a big part of my ethnography had been explored, imagined, thought of, and written “with them, against

them, and through them” (2001:583), and hence together they have acted as active participants in my ethnographic venture. Yet those acts of telling, as Michael Taussig would suggest, are like rites of passage that get stuck in transmission, hanging, suspended. I see Taussig upon hearing this. He stands up, looking quite bewitched, mesmerized, haunted by a metaphor. “*Like throwing a stone across a pond and see how it skips..*” he finally says, waving his hand as if to perform an imitation the act of tossing a pebble across water and watch how and how far it bounces off the surface.

While trying to remain attentive and attentively tuned to the beat and flow of the unfolding conversation, I also want to be able to have those views and stories of (European Male Philosophers) friendships negotiate with other readings, renderings and interpretations of the very same possibility: friendship. Rather than simply critiquing or supporting the previous engagements, I wonder whether it is possible to consider and adopt Kaufman’s (2001) notion of *intellectual hospitality*, which does allow for an experiential and experimental joining-in the correspondence between minds and ideas, and creatively taking the conversation to new directions. I find myself somewhat wary and perhaps a little unsettled. Suddenly, João Biehl (2014: 107) poses a question:

So do we need philosophy to reflect on our fieldwork?

I share the view with Biehl that there is a point to be made about the relationship between philosophy and anthropology as a creative exchange that should rest primarily on the unfolding ethnographic present “in all its repetitions, singularities and ambiguities” (2017: 113). Rather than emanating from concept, this mode of doing philosophy emanates from lifeworlds. In the edited volume *The Ground Between: Anthropologists Engage Philosophy* (2014), a number of eminent anthropologists such as Arthur Kleinman, Michael Jackson, Veena Das, Ghassan Hage,

and João Biehl (among others) manage to cleverly and persuasively tread the “ground between” anthropology and philosophy by initiating an open encounter with particular philosophical conceptual renderings of the world, of social relationships and as well as of the everyday phenomena. The authors approach and confront ‘P’hilosophy courageously yet with great care, in a genuine attempt to challenge its taken-for-granted epistemological authority and agitate the grounds for the recurrent imposed and naturalized hierarchy of knowledge(s) between Western Philosophy modes of theorizing and the undermined ‘other’ modalities of doing, producing and mobilizing philosophy. To Biehl; “people must come first in our work” (Biehl and Petryna 2013 as cited in 2014: 111), if philosophers tell stories with concepts then anthropologists can and should be able to tell stories with “instances of human becomings” (ibid: 115). The irreducibility, the plurality and contingency of ways of being, becoming and relating can act as the very possibility of bringing to being breaking open alternative, exciting and viable pathways to knowledge and wisdom. Ideas, in that sense, emerge within the interstices, the complex and multilayered landscapes of “*life bricolage*”, the creative, relational and constantly improvisational capacities of human beings to improvise, live, to live on, to think, to apprehend. In Biehl’s terms; the bricolage is “what people make, often agonizingly, out of whatever is available to them to endure, understand, and desire against all odds.” (ibid: 107). In the end the people, the social worlds they create and inhabit, and the conditions they manage (or not) to cope with are always more muddled, messy, and “unfinished” than philosophical plots tend to report of/ describe. Bit by bit, the conversation is taking a slight turn to explore, trace, map and illuminate the anthropological efforts and endeavors at studying friendship.

“I love the idea that a work can float a concept, allowing the spirit of play to enter the fraught space of curiosity, scholarship, curation, synthesis, explanation, desperation, aggression, and desire that engaged criticality amounts to. Without play, nothing moves, as we know from losing teeth. When Bergson writes that

laughter is “a momentary anesthesia of the heart,” this is what he gestures toward (1911: 5). The sheer impact of a thing induces a suspension of self-encounter where breathing, noticing, and not knowing happen so that an alien concept or world can begin to be metabolized, to become different and intimate.” (Berlant 2014: 274)

c. Anthropology and the Study of Friendship:

Generally, friendship as both a concept and practice has for a long time occupied a marginal position within the sociological and anthropological investigations and writings, whereas kinship has been made to “encompass the entire field of sociality” (Santos-Granero; as cited in Bunnell et al, 2011, P. 9). Its dynamics, characteristics and potentialities tend to be subsumed in broader social categories like ‘community’, ‘kin’, ‘networks’. We usually come across the term ‘friend’ in the ‘acknowledgements’ page or the preface, sometimes in the dedication section in anthropological or sociological texts but it is very rare that the conceptualization of friendship would lie at the core of the work, or occupy the center of analytic attention. Especially in the case of a country like Egypt, the ways in which it is “worlded” and “attended to” in contemporary anthropological writings reflect a certain pre-occupation with the broad question of defining the social “order”, “entity” or “structure” that would in turn produce explanations of and accounts for the activities of the actors within, that the other domains (like politics, economics, psychology, etc.) might have failed to fully capture and/or make sense of. As Bruno Latour argues, it is as if “the social could explain the social” (2005: 160), whereby the kinds of questions tackled and the topics pursued represent a rigid outlook on what, according to the social scientists, the current existing typical ingredients of “society” are or could be. The society according to this approach acts as an *already-out-there* solid and composed place-holder in which all actors live, interact, assemble and disassemble. Yet this approach to the ‘social’ as a composed and finished category incredibly hinders the knowledge production process as it reduces the human actors to a range of mere informants that represent and largely reproduce the

larger overarching context in which they are situated and “of which they see only a tiny part” (ibid: 32).

If this problem can be considered one of methodology, then the question of friendship’s position- among other forms of social relations- in the literature remains as open and unresolved. Another suggestive point may be that, as Michael Eve had proposed in *Is Friendship A Sociological topic?* (2002), that friendship does not hold a ‘structural’ significance fit within the genuine sociological ‘paradigm’ of what might constitute a “social unit” within the modern society. Eve elaborates that the perception of friendship in modern sociological endeavors confines it to the realm of the “private”, interpreted as a “free-floating dyadic relationship” between two individuals, and hence represents only the “personal” traits of the persons in question rather than the “social” (2002: 387). By situating friendship strictly in the realm of the private, the individualistic, as if it floats free of the external economic, political and urban conditions, this perspective removes friendship from the workings of the larger socio-economic-political sphere and hence misses out on the significant insights that closer and more grounded investigations of friendship might entail. In this view friendships, being less stable and formalized bond than say marriage, blood ties or civil unions- they have ‘no clear normative status’ and accordingly can only be defined by the active, ongoing necessary reciprocal work- which is problematic because highly affective, porous and difficult to grasp “scientifically”. By insisting on polarizing friendship as either highly emotional, dyadic, purified and personalized one-to-one relation, or conventionally place it as yet another category of the social life (like neighborhood, community) considered to yield more systematic and instrumental power, the relationship of friendship becomes rather obscured, and very rarely placed at the center of analytic and conceptual attention.

To take the conversation forward, I will devote this section to exploring and engaging with some of the major attempts from the social sciences (Anthropology & Sociology) throughout the last decade that have focused solely and entirely on the theme of friendship. I have chosen the works mainly on the basis of their substantial contribution of ethnographies, anthropological analyses, and the diversity of the range of debates and discussions of friendship. *The Anthropology of Friendship* (1995) edited by Sandra Bell & Simon Coleman presents a highly comparative undertaking of friendship, whereby it offers a valuable selection of ethnographic case studies drawn from contemporary Europe, East Africa, Brazil, China as well as ancient Ireland. The questions posed and pursued in the book are many and stem from skepticism, a wariness as regards to the applicability of Western notions of friendship and intimacy- *elsewhere(s)*. By that the authors do not only mean how people regard each other within the geographic worlds outside of the ‘West’, but on a deeper level whether “friendship” carries an essential definition, form and shape that works everywhere and at all times, and “whether it makes sense to think of friendship as existing in mutually comprehensible ways across cultures.” (1995: 2). The book presents a juxtaposition of the nine ethnographies/ case studies that mainly focus on the cultural and social aspects of friendship, indeed most concerned with the intricacies, specificities and particularities of how the relationship is understood and practiced in those different regions (cultures) between whom, according to and based on what.

The scholars in the book succeed in bringing forth and questioning number of rigid and seemingly universal, mainly western presumptions on friendship, where the ethnographic material nuances, challenges and scrutinizes their fixity. For example, in Mario Aguilar’s insightful chapter on East Africa within the context of pastoral African societies, he argues for an understanding of friendship as a “social and human process, culturally and contextually

constructed” (Ibid: 170) that inevitably takes different forms in different societies. In assessing friendships within pastoral societies, he argues that its manifestations stem out of “localized ways of being human and of being social” (Ibid: 171). The social importance of friendship here does not lie before or after that of kinship relations, but both continuously bleed into, shape and are shaped by one another. This particular point plays on and perhaps blurs a particularly vivid contrast/ distinction that is often found in many anthropological and sociological works between friendship and kinship, along lines of autonomy, voluntarism, freedom as a willed and agential act. While it is important to be aware of the differences between formal kinship structures and friendship ties, kinship and friendship should be treated as “partially overlapping rather than mutually exclusive, classificatory terms” (Herman 1987:19 as cited in 1995: 7). Another ethnography emphasizes this argument in the same volume conducted by Deborah Reed-Danahay (among the French community of Lavaille in rural France), where she argues that friendship ties are neither separable from kinship relations nor is it merely a “handmaiden” to the kinship system. She explores different patterns of friendship among men and women, during adolescence and also adulthood years in order to trace how the formation of individual as well as social meanings of friendship, how they vary and how they persist over the course of life and “help form cross-cutting ties that promote concepts of local attachment that go beyond that of the family and farm.” (Ibid: 152). To Reed-Danahay, kinship and friendship are highly overlapping rather than occupy different realms of relationship, both contribute to the process of cultural production of attachment to locality in the face of “economic problems and the lure of the city” (Ibid: 7). In and throughout Reed-Danahay’s fieldwork there is a constant process of co-production (by kin and friends) of imaginaries of sociality and intimacy, which strikingly

reverberates and echoes a familiar conception of sociality in the Egyptian context. I am instantly reminded by a famous and quite common Egyptian proverb:

(ana wa akhouya ‘ala ibn ‘ammi, wa ana wa ibn ‘ammi ‘ala al-gharib):
My brother and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against the stranger.

This proverb perhaps is a narrative that is, although free of the figure of the friend, becomes of high relevance to the previous argument. The reason why it came to mind is influenced by the popular, hegemonic and general scale of sociality in which prioritizing, patterning, distinguishing and siding are usually articulated in terms of statements using the grammars, orderings and arrangements of kin relationships. In a manner that is more vertical (hierarchal) than it is horizontal- to describe and re-affirm on the same wavelength, a certain hierarchal power inherent in familial positions and structures even for purposes of solidarity. The point I am trying to make is about how fluid and interactive the roles, categories, and metaphors of closeness/intimacy/sociality are, and that the positions they take vis-à-vis each other depend largely on the contextual framing and reasoning in which they are being deployed. It is a tricky, lively and dynamic setting in Egyptian and within the Egyptian day-to-day language because the overlappings and intersections of roles are endless, and in that sense problematizes any attempts at reducing, simplifying or clear-mapping of friendship as contrasting with or separable from family. Close friends tend to linguistically grant each other the status of (sister/ brother), while familial relationships also significantly use idioms of friendship to describe a specialty of the bond between the members: , in a way to say that what they share is more than just blood- also amity, harmony, acceptance, and understanding, a mutual trust and a sense of bonded-ness that is willed (not enforced)(see also Herman 1987 and Pitt-Rivers 1973). This, however, is not aimed at reaching an all encompassing theory on the interconnectedness of the two different forms of social relationships, but rather to highlight at point at how the rigid distinctions between kinship

and friendship present in Western models of friendship do not hold in other contexts, for example the contemporary Egyptian one. At the same time, this perspective pushes away from the limitedness of ethnographic gaze on Western societies while pushing further a possibility to think about and through friendship in other non-western contexts- not merely by differentiating it from, comparing it to, or contrasting it against kinship structures and family relations, since at the end as categories they have proven not to be mutually exclusive (Bunnell, Yea et al. 2012: 9).

Another important contribution from the field of anthropology is *The Ways of Friendship: Anthropological perspectives* (2010) edited by Amit Desai and Evan Killick. Again, an edited volume that exhibits a collection of eight ethnographies conducted in several parts of the world such as central India, rural South China, Lebanon, and South Africa with the main focus on the diversity of meanings attached to friendship across different cultures. By focusing on local ideas, practices and manifestations of friendship in the everyday life, most of the authors wish to variously crack open and further investigate “the ways in which friendship acts to express fixity and fluidity in diverse social world”. This volume can be considered another major anthropological attempt in the way that the scholars devote the entire analytic attention to friendship, and also, in their eager commitment to avoid the ethnocentric biases or the very imposition of Western conceptions on ‘other places and people’ (2010: 15). They attempt to do so by scrutinizing some of the constraints or obstacles that hinder the process of cross-cultural comparisons of friendship: “by opening up the definition of friendship as widely as possible to include a variety of relationships – patron-client, childhood friends, ritual friends – in order to draw out the social importance of these types of relationships and the things that they offer” (ibid). For example the authors argue against the presumed generality attached to encompassing notions like ‘relatedness’ (Carsten 2000, 2004). Such encompassing concepts, as the editors

argue in the introduction, rather mask the distinctions between the different forms and purposes of relating, hence loosening up “the boundaries that people might themselves posit in the articulation of those relationships” (ibid: 5). The editors Desai and Killick clearly set the grounds for their argument early on in the introduction, that the different ‘local’ approaches to and articulations of friendship, the spaces, histories and ideologies that shape the constitution of friendship as a particular social bond lie at the heart of the anthropological analyses in this volume. However, one observation is that most of the ethnographic endeavors in this book indeed *stick to* the significance of kinship framework, rather than work *with* it. While it is crucial to exert effort identifying and acknowledging the contingent, intersectional and complementary entanglement of kinship/ friendship relationships, a balance should be achieved as to maintain an adequate attention to the emotional and the affective states between individuals as well as within larger structural affinities that impact the establishment of friendships. The messiness and dynamism of production and re-production of social relations in any given context demands that we cultivate acute sensibilities to not only “the circumstances, conditions and barriers under which friendships are formed, encouraged, sustained and dismantled” but also the affective registers and atmospheres that surround them. (Kathiralevu 2013: 7). It is extremely significant to pay attention to how the use and understanding of the term friend varies tremendously with context; whereby in some cases it is articulated (in a way granted) only in regards to intimates who managed to achieve a particular status of trustworthiness. While in other cases it becomes an interplay of characterizations, where schoolmates, workmates, also neighbors in the living area are sometimes referred to called ‘friends’. Drawing on Laavanya Kathiravelu (2013) I believe that one of the ways in which it can be possible to grapple with those questions and arrive at different, vaster, more inclusive and nuanced understandings of friendship, is to start

from and follow the people's characterizations of friendships, as Biehl and Locke would advise us, to "listen carefully and notice swerves, follow leads and trajectories, and translate these movements into thought and writing". (2017: x). I am interested in following the doings, making and potentials of friendship at the moment of enactment "beginning in the midst of social life, its rhythms, affects, surprises (from the trivial to the tragic), and urgencies." (ibid), with a serious emphasis on how and how much can the affective element of friend relations allow for us a better understanding of collective affective atmospheres. Practices and dynamics between friends in the everyday express particular grammars of intimacy that are specific to the time and place of their happening, while they can also act as effective lenses through which wider social, material, and atmospheric states of being and becoming can be captured.

II. Situating Friendship: Atmospheres, Pockets and Infrastructures of Sociality

Reflecting on the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, one of the most striking facts is how temporally spread-out it is, it does not have a clear starting point in time. I can certainly tell that my analytic and conceptual attention (and eventually investment) in friendship began to crystallize, materialize and take a more formal shape nearly two years ago. Yet the stories of, from and about friendship have been ongoing throughout my entire life, and still are as I am writing this thesis. In fact the lives of the friends among and with whom I conducted interviews, formed chats, small and long talks (and walks, trips) are indeed constantly changing, in-motion, becoming otherwise, and so are our friendships. The challenge here becomes how to find a way in which to speak of friendship, that does not reduce, limit or constrain the unfinished, incomplete and open-ended nature of the lifeworlds of friends and of friendships. Moreover, my ethnographic project's birthplace is Cairo and Alexandria, which are cities that have over the past few decades undergone a fierce series of transformations on multiple levels (political,

economic, cultural, infrastructural). That is, the very fabric of life is made of stories of surprise, improvisation and unpredictability, and that certainly demands a willingness as well as openness in writing to trace people's trajectories as they improvise in figuring, disfiguring and refiguring their relationship to the world and to each other. The writing here resembles living- active, breathing and changing- in so far as it remains connected to the mysterious and unpredictable unfolding of mean-times which it witnesses and tries to describe, and in which it takes place and is inevitably implicated by. As Biehl and Locke argue (2017: 32):

Through fieldwork, we become a part of ethnographic open systems and are folded into lives, relationships, and swerves across time and space. These systems hold us in a kind of unfinished proximity with one another, retreating and reemerging, engendering unanticipated connections and reconfigurations, never definitively closed off nor decisively transformational. Ethnographic open systems tether us to other selves and worlds and destabilize the temporal and spatial boundaries of an imagined field we leave behind.

a. Atmospheres:

The particularities, ambiguities and ambivalences inherent in the different lifeworlds of human beings, including their social formations and constellations thus have to be understood in relation to the cultural, linguistic, historical, geopolitical or the wider macrocosm in which they are grounded (Jackson 2012). I would like to expand on Jackson's argument by bringing the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant and the inspiring anthropologist Kathleen Stewart to the conversation. Both thinkers call for a cultivation of an ethnographic sensibility; a sensibility of attending to the world, of writing the world that is attuned to the charged atmospheres of everyday life. In Stewart's words: "to pull academic attunements into tricky alignment with the amazing, sometimes eventful, sometimes buoyant, sometimes endured, sometimes so sad, always commonplace labor of becoming sentient to a world's work, bodies, rhythms, and ways of being in noise and light and space." (2010: 445). Similar to Jackson, Stewart highlights the need to

develop theory out of and with stories, through the attuning of one's senses to the emergent labors, imaginaries and potential ways of living in or living through things. Attending to atmospheric attunements according to Stewart is about being alert to the rhythms and refrains hanging up in the air, it is a labor of attending to emergent forces in the course of the ordinary as they reside in the everyday life of experiences, intimacies, conditions, things, dreams, frustrations, landscapes, hopes, imaginaries, and lived sensory moments.

Indeed, the realities we are entangled in today amidst the alarming conditions of political violence, financial collapse, environmental crisis, infrastructural breakdown, the stories we live and share are at the same time material and political as much as they are personal and ethical, whereby “neither the personal nor the political, the particular or the abstract, senses of ‘subjectivity’ can be postulated as prior. They are mutually arising; each is the condition of the possibility of the other” (Jackson 2012: 6). Hence parallel to the failure of the normative life-organizing structures (i.e. economic stability) happened a fraying of life-making promises and a collapse of ideal forms of the so-called good life. In Berlant's words, this situation opens up a problem or a lag in apprehension, a question on how to live, a threat that is sensed materially as well as affectively, to the sense of ongoingness in the durational present (2008). This pushes me to think deeper and further about the ways in which a shared alienation, estrangement or detachment can actually become the very foundation of a social and subjective formation or imaginary. This alienation might be a rupture in life, or a certain displacement or dispossession, a loss, a breakdown or a turning point where ‘life as we know it’ comes to an end. Here, friendship provides a potential, a promise or a possibility of an attachment in which one will feel held, grounded, footed in the world by and through relationality- though not necessarily a good one. (2008 interview with Hardt). Berlant's view of intimacy (1998) involves a longing for a narrative

about something shared; “a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way” (281). She describes the drive towards it as wild, unpredictable and scattered (284). This drive creates a space around it through practices, as an affective register that people can rely on, return to and that would hold a space for them in return to produce *something*, though frequently not history in its ordinary, memorable, or valorized sense, and not always ‘something’ of positive value. (285). Berlant through this image is asking us to see with her the possibility of a political subjectivity that lives with its fragility and still manages to build a world.

In this shared atmosphere of fragility, friendship looms as a possibility, a collaborative project of reinventing and reproducing ways of living life while also transforming and being transformed by what reciprocity means. The atmospheres that enfold the makings as well as the breakings of friendships must be always be attended to, paid attention to and analyzed, in order to ground the social-material-affective-political register in which lives and experiences shape and are shaped by. Friendship takes place between particular people, in specific contexts, places and times whereby the encounter opens a person to another in a relation that blurs and cuts across boundaries, interweaving the self and the other, the public and the private, the personal and the collective, while achieving a mutual shaping of surfaces. Learning to lean on another is a learning of awkwardness and risk, in learning to spin, fall and hang onto another is also learning to be open and take leaps. How we experience the encounter may vary, but the point is to render the encounter a possible adventure, to “open up the encounter in order to learn- without an expectation of fully accessing- a stranger’s thick histories and complex positionings in time and space” (Nagar 2014: 5).

“People labor in the very precarity of their situations, in an overwhelm of tendencies, openings and foreclosures, dissolutions and solidifyings, and in the cohesions of a milieu, a project, a habit entrained. The affective subject is a person who waits in the company of others for things to arrive, one who learns to

sense out what's coming and what forms it might take, one who aims to notice what crystallizes and how things ricochet and rebound in a social-natural-aesthetic ecology of compositions and thresholds of expressivity. For the affective subject, there is always the weight of the world in what can be hoped for and what must be feared, in what flourishes and what matters. Life is an experiment of being in a world" (Stewart 2017:194)

b. Pockets:

The practices of intimacy unfold over walks and talks, cigarette breaks, lunch breaks, co-working, co-studying, in streets, offices, homes, school/ university campuses, travel roads, classrooms, airports, cafeterias, elevators, parking lots, etc. Whether short term and transient or long term and steadfast, those experiences take place not in the void but in the built environments and infrastructures whereby they both witness and contain each other's beginnings as well as each other's failings and fadings. Those temporal and spatial pockets in the ordinary (and the extraordinary) life of the everyday and those fragments of sociality have to be considered always closely and in relation to one another. As will be discussed in chapter two, by drawing on the story of a personal friendship with a young woman from Alexandria, one that I mentally and emotionally associate the "city" with, I argue that our friendship gave birth to 'an Alexandria' as a porous space (see Stavrides 2007), mutually co-constituted by sets of shared encounters of navigation, imagination and interaction. I borrowed and drew on the concept of urban porosity as proposed by the Greek architect, activist and author of numerous books on spatial theories and practices: Stavros Stavrides. Stavrides builds on Walter Benjamin's concept of porosity, or the ways in which people's actions, practices and behaviors in space (particularly cities) as well as in time overflows, exceeds and thus loosens both presumed fixity of temporal boundaries (where the memories, collective as well as individual can be shared and utilized as grounds for forming new interpretations of space) as well as spatial boundaries (where the city that had existed and the one that does exist in the present are simultaneously present and absent

as we move inside it, existing both as reality and potentiality). To Stavrides, those practices produce what he calls “threshold spaces; in between areas that relate rather than separate” (ibid:

1)

“Thresholds create or symbolically represent passages towards a possible future, already existing in the past. Recognizing such thresholds, the flaneur, and the inhabitant as flaneur, can appreciate the city as a locus of discontinuities, as a network of crossroads, turning points. In the unexpected connections realized by these thresholds, otherness emerges, not only as a threat but also as a promise.”
(ibid: 3)

c. Infrastructures:

What freedoms does this city air produce? What dream-world alongside catastrophe is there here? What power of fantasy, outside of its relentless fantasies of fear, does a city like this possess? What ‘profane illumination’ can it still offer? (Abourahme 2014: 580)

On of the promises friendship offers in that sense is a fluidity of movement across borderlines and boundaries in everyday urban life. As an affective and embodied relation, it provides the potential to produce a different mode of sociality that produces its own social geographies between friends. Now, if the cities (understood in terms of physical infrastructure, their policies, economies) that contain those practices and performances are constantly becoming other than they were, we need to find ways to understand this movement and cultivate a perspective that is more decentered, multiple and shifting. It is not only important what infrastructure brings together, how it works as a site of assemblage for bodies and actions, but equally important is how we in return are inclined towards it “so that a holding takes place.” (156). This seems to be a promise similar to the one offered by friendship, yet in concretized material form. However, “infrastructure can’t really promise anything” (2015:158), it can only instigate a “temporality ‘set loose’ from calculation – a process of associating place, people, institutions, finance and politics that ramifies in unanticipated ways” (ibid). The apparently fragmented and disarticulated, sometimes disenchanting and ruinous, changes that take place in

cities can and do give rise to unanticipated interactions and open up new reciprocal linkages. Drawing on AbdouMalik Simone (2004) the notion of infrastructure could be extended directly to people's activities in the city. It rather acquires a more embrative definition, whereby people's ability to engage, interact and work the complex combinations objects, practices, persons and spaces- these conjunctions become a form of promising infrastructure, as they act as platforms "providing for and reproducing life in the city." (2004: 408)

The future of infrastructure, like friendship is about the spaces it opens and the potentials it makes possible. What, in Berlant's words, might help "maintain one's sea legs" (2011). Thinking about the politics of infrastructure affectively and in relation of affective friendships makes it possible to re-imagine, to re-invest and re-vitalize political questions as porous and disorganized as the lives we live and the spaces we inhabit. I keep re-calling and re-telling an incident that took place near the end of my fieldwork in Alexandria with Yasmine: one my Alexandrian friends (based in Cairo). Yasmine shapes a large part of this thesis, as another friend who contributed immensely to re-imagining Cairo and Alexandria through and within our friendship, while grounding our friendship in as well as across the two cities (on the road). For the purpose of narrating the following incident, I will try to re-construct the setting of the encounter, which could not possibly take place without bringing her, not only to the conversation but as a part of it as well.

The incident takes place on the 3rd of March 2017. I wanted to go to Alexandria and Yasmine had plans to go to spend a day or two with her mother there. We decided to go together and she kindly offered to host me for the night at her place, and that we can take the morning train next day back to Cairo, together. We took the bus from Abdel-Moneim Riyad, already a bit sleepy and tired, but we both felt like this was a good opportunity to talk and that there was a lot

to talk about, whether for ourselves or for my research, it did not seem to make that big of a difference. After all, as Yasmine repeatedly affirms and confirm, she is genuinely interested in what ‘might’ possibly come out of my research, which is something we both do not know, yet are optimistic about. To be more precise I would say; we were optimistic about the promise it carries, to tell us something back about friendship in its becoming, in our becoming, something about a possibility we desire and long for in perpetuity. We spent the first couple of hours talking, for a very small part with my sound-recorder on, and then I turned it off. I did not want us to ‘have’ to focus on a singular topic or just one kind of experience, I wanted us to be able to ‘go places’ in friendship and not necessarily for or according to the friendship-research. We arrived shortly after midnight (on what is now March 3rd) and there, Yasmine’s mother and stepfather were waiting to pick us up as the bus station is considered nearer to the outskirts of Alexandria than to downtown, and it would be difficult for us two to find a convenient transport at such late time. We were tired, sleepy, cold and started to also get moody, cranky, sulky. Yasmine’s mother came out of the car to hug her and greet me, while also opening the car’s trunk for us to throw in our backpacks so that we can sit as comfortably as possible in the car. Yasmine quickly stuffed her backpack in the trunk and I kept mine with me and we got in the car. Light and funny catching up conversations started to happen between Yasmine and her mother, as I stared out of the window trying to learn-as much as I can- about where we are and how I can familiarize myself with and sharpen my visual command of the road- between the bus station and Alexandria’s downtown- so that the next time I visit Alexandria by bus I will be able to easily figure my way around. I remember it exactly as follows: We were driving over a bridge (of course I had no idea what the name of the bridge or the street is) when I heard them gasping followed by collective ‘*ahhhh*’ ‘*go go go!*’, some strange, delirious collective utterances that did

not make much sense to me, but obviously those voiced and circulated expressions or codes were initiated as a response to something that they all knew or saw and that I missed. While taking few seconds to apprehend, I looked at Yasmine to ask her what is this all about, and before she responds, the stepfather suddenly hits the brakes as 2 police officers block the road with metal barricades. Confused as I was, Yasmine started to explain and make comprehensible to me, while all of them were laughing at the incident now, the curious shouts and utterances that they all performed. The 3 of them do know for a fact that this street gets “blocked” after midnight (around 1:00 AM, give or take) every night by the police for security purposes. This informal ‘rule’ is relatively a new one, that started with the recent construction of the new building for the Alexandria Security Directorate. Yasmine pointed at the building and told me “here, look, it’s new.. This street was nothing like this before”, it was on the other side of the road, which was already cleared out by then too. I took a minute to grasp the situation and listened as they all quite light heartedly, comically and hilariously ruminated on how “But we were so close to passing! We were few seconds/ steps from it!!” Our car was now the 2nd in what became a row, an in-formation line of cars, all of which now have to re-direct to an alternative narrow and bumpy route. The 1st car had a brief momentary chat with the police officer and he let him pass, which infuriated Yasmine’s stepfather. He complained briefly about how horrid that ‘alternative’ street is, full of bumps and breaks and that it is the opposite of an enjoyable ride. He decided to voice his objection to the officer and try out our chances of passing too. The officer refused, telling him “Khalas.. 1:00 AM”.. it was by then around 1:05 AM, then the stepfather used the slip of the first car to make his case, in a decent yet persistent manner: “Let us pass, you just let him, let us pass”. After brief hesitation, the officer did. The stepfather was satisfied, everyone

else was quiet. The thrill of the adventure had ended the moment we the barricades out-raced us!”

I find this incident to be incredibly telling about the ways in which informal yet official, known yet undeclared, volatile but also mandatory and enforced rules and structures are constantly revealed, sensed, and negotiated in emerging encounters of sociality. To learn about a city is a process of also unlearning, grasped always in relation to other who knew/ who knows/ who is unlearning and relearning as well. To maintain one’s sea legs, for example one can start by asking about the absences as well as presences; what was here before this? Why is not here anymore? One can start asking about the barricades and how to negotiate with them when they block one’s way, what time they are put and how to remember to arrive always a minute earlier. One needs to be able to notice the humor steeped in the everyday life of frustration, to the vague gestures of exasperation, boredom and outrage, the gasps, the sighs, “the moments of disturbance before form provides an anchor” (Berlant 2014: 3). One needs to cultivate a visual aptitude not only for the names of the streets and the bridges, but the hand-signs that denote neighborhoods and addresses. To borrow the phrasing of Berlant; “how the ongoingness of life produces an energetics of endurance- through touch, proximity, and conversation that’s both narrative (against the state and for the collectivity’s self-adherence) and eruptive in particular moments of pleasure.” (ibid)

III. To Attune, To Attend, To Accompany: Learning by Being With, Within, Without

“To listen and to tell a rush of stories is a method.” (Tsing 2015: 65)

I map and pin-point Alexandria by the homes and the neighborhoods where my friends lived and by the streets we walked and the roads we took and by the places of our gathering. I move through Cairo with my cellphone glued to my ear to be attended and accompanied by the voices of my friends as we share the minutiae, the agonies and trivia of our days. They tag along as I move through that which unfolds into happenings, big and small, some joyous others tragic or neither this nor that. I have long thought about the ways in which looking at friendship from an anthropological lens could be achieved without violating, reducing or defacing its extremely sensitive and complex nature. It is both personal yet collective, fluid yet generative, intimate yet in many ways explicit. By all means it is a relationship that involves motion and fluidity, hence the methods that might be suitable to trace it will have to be one of tracing associations and “following the actors themselves” (Latour, 2005: 12). It is the sort of ethnography that has to be lived, experienced and written with friends, and co-constructed, slowly, by friends in nothing short of a dialogic interaction and an ongoing conversation. This correspondent and dialogic mode of thinking, and of writing, I believe has the potential to open up new modes of attention to people’s art of existence and of practices of world-making, in a manner that that does not seek to bound, reduce or limit the contingent nature of human action and interaction. What it ultimately renders possible is a promise that the life-worlds of our collaborators, interlocutors and friends, their historical trajectories, their worldly fabrications and the knowledges they fashion can indeed bring to being new modes of theory and new figures of thought radically profound and powerful.

“As Paul Ricoeur phrased this thought in his last writing, our goal is not an identification with the other, which is, anyway, “neither possible nor desirable,” but “**an accompanying**” that means no one will have to live or die alone.”
(Jackson 2012: 278).

Being With(in)/ Becoming With(out)

“I think of anthropology as a process of coming home.” (Ingold 2017: 127)

A focus on the everyday enactments and doings of friendship necessitates a mode of interrogation that is embodied, affective and interactive in order to catch-up with the ebbs and flows of friendships’ formations and dissolutions. As Joao Biehl and Peter Locke have argued drawing on Deleuze in their book; *Unfinished* (2017), ethnography should always start in the midst of social life; amidst situations, objects, connections, habits, gestures, expressions, ambivalences grounded in people’s utterances as well as silences, attachments and threats, daily rhythms, in their own characterizations of themselves, others and the world. What the ‘world’ here denotes is an ever-shifting assemblage of becomings; ways of living, adjusting, and carrying on in the unfolding historical present. Arguing in the same vein as Biehl and Locke (2017), I too believe that ethnography should be concerned with “the ways in which our ethnographic subjects, their bodies, the material and symbolic worlds they inhabit, and the structural forces they must navigate all grow out of themselves, becoming other and unpredictably constructive or perilous in their entanglements and over time” (4). As ethnographers of the contemporary, it is important to recognize the ways in which we are caught up the very same webs of suspension, struggle, and precariousness as unfinished as our collaborators, as stuck and as hopeful. In this instance, a question once coined by Michael Jackson (2012) becomes particularly relevant: “How can we speak for others unless we recognize the ways in which they speak for themselves?” (272). The challenge at hand is the urgency of reflective and interactive thought and theory that are able to begin with the contingent, the incoherent and the awkward messiness of being-in-proximity to another without a ‘plan’. As modern neoliberal subjects we have not been allowed to imagine the possibility of a world without plans, we have not been trained to care, to be tender in relation to something without the dread of displacement, dispossession and

the future-to-come. However, I argue that one of the ways in which ethnography might be able to “honor what’s tender” (Berlant 2012: 5) is to work with and take-in (with extreme care, empathy and seriousness) the incoherence and indeterminacy of the immediate and the plasticity of subjects as they negotiate their complex realities in ways that are not given and hence not possibly foreseeable. I will end with what might be a long- yet astounding quote by Lauren Berlant (2012a:6), whose voice shapes so much of the atmosphere of this thesis:

What is politics in all this? Is the idiom of care and the ambition to be tender toward one’s objects and object-worlds a refusal of the massive violence of power, or a refusal to respond to power in its own idiom? To me the point of taking the risk of invention, of genuine experimentality, is not only to fail better, but to release my creativity from reproducing an absorbing repetition that goes nowhere apart from confirming that I am still who I was. . . Thinking politics affectively makes it possible to reinvest, to multiply, to enrich the political without producing the bad feeling, the ugly feelings of being always muddled up with incommensurate aims and attachments, without which there would be no worlding. Doing it together but non-normatively releases us from the isolation of reinventing the world minute by minute, time after time. Being alive beyond the conventions means not only helping each other improvise in the middle of demands to attend, attune, be right, and be good, but also symbolizing the alternative routes we might dig, collectively, not to reproduce the ruts in which, in a heavy rain, we might drown.

The story of friendship is and always has been a personal one. I am aware of my own implication in friendships as a social relationship that has been and continues to be an extremely significant part of my life. Hence in this thesis, others’ stories will have to be interweaved with mine, others’ voices fused with mine, and there is no way to escape that. The genre, style, feel and texture of doing and writing ethnography I am aiming for attempts to embrace the overlapping lifeways, the multiple layers of dialogue, emotion, embodiment and consciousness, while also problematizing and blurring the presupposed clear-cut distinctions between the self/other, home/field, private/public. As Anna Tsing had proposed on the indeterminacy and contingency of the self-other encounter; “The evolution of our ‘selves’ is already polluted by

histories of encounter; we are mixed up with others before we even begin any new collaboration” (Tsing 2015:55). The ethnographic practice I am adopting involves a back and forth movement between introspection into the vulnerable self, and a committed reflection on its situation and bearing across the circulating socialites, species, objects, institutions, laws, atmospheres, infrastructures and the lived proliferation of possibilities. Through the notion, practice and possibility of friendship I wish to explore how experiences of intimacy, companionship and collaboration can be seen as a resource for new understandings, insights and theories to come on how affects and effects of the everyday are absorbed, shared, circulated and held (togetherly) or dispensed. I hear Anna Tsing’s whisper to us, daring and promising, like Alice in Wonderland, leading on what seems to be an endless and endlessly long and dark tunnel: the blasted landscapes of life capitalism. It is not easy to know how to make a life at the end(s) of the world but luckily, she says, “there is still company”. I join her prayers, that perhaps it is still possible to “catch the scent of the latent commons—and the elusive autumn aroma” (2015: 391)

(2)

While We're Here, Pass this with Me:
On the Project of Friendship in a Present of Ruins

Sometimes common entanglements emerge not from human plans but despite them. It is not even the undoing of plans, but rather the unaccounted for in their doing that offers possibilities for elusive moments of living in common . . . Assembling assets, we ignore the common- even when it pervades the assembly. Yet the unnoticed, too, can be a site for potential allies. (Tsing 2015; 371)

On more than one level, the historical present is a mess. Most people are striving to have a life that does feel like a life. Juggling work and everything else happens at the cost of one's spirit. Capacities and practices of self-care and personal well-being are overshadowed by the harsh routines and disciplinary patterns needed to sustain a living in the current era of neoliberal restructuring. Moreover, under neoliberalism, notions of self-care are more often than not seen as an individual responsibility devoid of its connection with building communities. In his book; *Friendship in an Age of Economics: Resisting the Forces of Neoliberalism* (2012), Todd May provides an in-depth analysis of the unfolding themes and phenomena that underlie the “neoliberal” moment in which we live. May begins by drawing our attention to the fact that our social worlds are by no means immune, divorced or independent from the context and the moment-in-time in which we find each other and ourselves. While we should not take ‘neoliberalism’ to be the unitary, holistic and all-encompassing rubric under which the ongoing historical present might be reduced, it becomes important to identify how the term (neoliberalism), as a moment in time, an atmosphere, a collective affect, a set of conditions and consequences, shape much of who we are, with ourselves and with one another “and of the difficulty and perhaps even the darkness of who we are asked to be”, adds May (2012: 4).

“What I am calling neoliberalism is an emerging and intersecting set of practices, embedded in a particular economic orientation, that has contributed much into making us who we are today” (Ibid). One of the ways in which May defines neoliberalism as the current complete reliance of the governments on the mechanisms of the capitalist market, promoting the view that it is the best and most efficient system for an economy to be run. In this process, one

that has been happening over the past 30 or 40 years, the social relationships between people have inevitably been contaminated, influenced and largely altered. It is not that what we live and experience is utterly and completely predefined by the larger economic context hovering over us, but rather how neoliberalism as a project has given birth to a set of conditions, social, spatial, economic, cultural and political that largely mold our ways of living, and sculpt our current modes of existence. Taking this discussion further, May traces how the current set of neoliberal forces and conditions impinge upon individuals, giving rise to the particular figures characteristic of our time, particularly those of the “Consumer” and the “Entrepreneur”. May importantly stresses that those two figures are not and should not be thought of as the sole or exhaustive figural legacy of neoliberalism, yet through them, one might be able to gain a better understanding of the larger project of normalization that is intimately tied to the vision, goals and aims of state capitalism. The figure of the consumer is not an expression of merely someone who consumes, but rather someone whose identity is deeply tied to their activity as a consumer, that is, consumption largely determines who they ‘are’, it does not stop at what they ‘do’. As for the figure of the entrepreneur, May points at a character that essentially lives by a constant and frivolous engagement with the activity of investment toward the future, continuously seeking the best return or payoff for a given investment of material or time” (Ibid: 44) May deploys the structures of those figures; investment with an eye to return and consumption with an eye to enjoyment, in order to arrive at how and how much the current patterns of living, being and interacting can tell us about the degree, the intensity, the magnitude and the tightness of the grip of neoliberalism over our lives. While the figures indeed serve as timely manifestations or outcomes of the intersection between neoliberalism and our humanity, they lack the confusion, the puzzlement, the uncertainty, and the chaotic murkiness of contemporary existence.

I. The State of my Being is Walking: Mashy al-hal/ Mashya

More than often, when asked about your "day", one struggles for words and ends up "stuttering". We express ourselves in a splintered, shattered and confused language that only reflects how worn out we feel and how fragmented our days are. The control over and management of one's life in terms of 'time' is becoming an impossible and almost dreamy conviction, because for most of us, economic survival depends on "work", on "submission to the daily grind" (Frayne 2015; 18) with all the moral, material and political pressures that bear down on the worker throughout the "working day". Speaking from where I am in the world, in Cairo the everyday is a brutal and somewhat fierce encounter; one that is ever changing, and that carries within it possibilities; sometimes threats and other times promises of excess that sometimes translates into moments or incidents of a transformative hope, or hope for transformation while some other times weigh on the present as a never-ending despair, a perpetual sense of exhaustion. In the language of stuttering of the everyday, the question how one is doing, voiced in Ammiyya as "*Ezzay-yek/ak?*" is answered commonly by "*Mashya*" or "*Mashy al-hal*" which translated as "My state of being is walking". As Ghassan Hage had previously mentioned, the language of articulation of one's own well-being is in most cases tied with a notion of movement, metaphorical or physical. As opposed to "stuckedness" (Hage 2009), the walking represents a language of movement, of well-being that is more than a mere metaphor or figure of speech, but conveys a sense that "when a person feels well they actually imagine and feel that they are moving well" (98).

The thick and ongoing historical present, with its deteriorating social, political, economic and environmental conditions is most beautifully, eloquently and adequately described by Lauren Berlant as a mediated affect of "crisis ordinariness". In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Berlant engages

a broad and diverse conglomeration of “mass media, literature, television, film, and video” in an attempt to track and trace the “emergence of a precarious public sphere, an intimate public of subjects who circulate scenarios of economic and intimate contingency and trade paradigms for how best to live on” (2011:3). Berlant inspired a certain attunement in me to read the patterns and rhythms of adjustment that people constantly experience in moments of transition and transaction, how bodies, individually and collectively, sense and figure *glitches* in the reproduction of life in the historical present. The glitch in Berlant’s words is “an interruption within transition, a troubled transmission” (2016: 393). She writes;

“I want to show how transactions of the body of the aestheticized or mediated subject absorb, register, reenact, refigure, and make possible a political understanding of shifts and hiccups in the relations among structural forces that alter a class’ sense of things, its sensing of things. It involves encountering what it feels like to be in the middle of a shift and to use reconfigurations of manner amid the persistence of the body in the world to embody not the continuities of institutionalized history but something incoherent or uncongealed in the ongoing activity of the social. It is to see what is happening to systems of self-intelligibility through watching subjects getting, losing, and keeping their bearing within a thick present.” (2011: 198)

The shifts and the hiccups are interruptions or suspensions of norms of the reproduction of life that occur on a multiplicity of registers. Precarity here demonstrates a shift in the ordinary affective states, an impasse that circulates through diverse locales and bodies (ibid: 199). One experiences, works out, and adapts to the historical present as a “holding station that doesn’t hold security but opens out into anxiety, that dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure”, in Berlant’s terms, as an ‘impasse’ (ibid: 200). The impasse is the present. It is a stretch of time, a temporal structure, a moment of radical contingency, when the conventional imaginaries and fantasies of the good life start to fray and the traditional infrastructures for reproducing life- as we know it- begin to dissolve.

My ethnography takes place in two cities that are highly undergoing flux, alteration and change. In both Cairo and Alexandria, it is not hard to notice the heightened and intensified levels of anxiety and uneasiness, of both the state and the people, stemming from and pouring into vast range of conditions of precarity and insecurity. One of the aspects that added to this atmosphere of vulnerability or perhaps one can name it fear emerged in and with the economic turbulence that followed the Egyptian government's devaluation of the Egyptian pound in November 2017. This collective detachment of us, as subjects, from the normative, usual and known spending habits can easily be seen, heard, felt and experienced across cities, around the streets, and inside the comfort of homes, where "the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without assurances of futurity, but nevertheless proceeding via durable norms of adaptation." (Berlant 2011: 200). Almost everyone faced with waves of prices increase of every single commodity there is, basic as well as otherwise while incomes remain the same. Walking down the street, or driving around you are constantly stunned by the advancing techniques of urban (infrastructural) transformations executed by the state. The pace is very quick, and the implementation abrupt, beyond graspability and apprehension. All of which, happening in a gloom of intense political uncertainty, ambivalence and distress, one of living under, in and with a military government (dictatorship).

One of the most powerful and striking moments of my ethnographic interviews with Alexandrian friends revolved particularly around their frustrating, alienating and distressing experience of the urban infrastructural changes happening in their home city. The newly built bridge in Sidi Gaber area is one sudden and one can say bizarre infrastructural transformation that the Egyptian military executed in 2017.

“It’s so weird, I hate it.”
“It doesn’t feel normal to see the sea from ‘above’, it’s pointless and ugly. It frustrates me very much every single time I have to pass/drive by over it.”
“I can’t believe it, the entire neighborhood is nothing like what it used to be. Unbelievable”

The above are three immediate and spontaneous expressions of personal sentiments and thoughts about the bridge in Sidi Gaber, that came out from my Alexandrian friends. The third comment is by a friend, who I was with when he encountered the under-construction bridge for the first time, back in July 2017. He lived in Cairo, and this trip was after months of not visiting Alexandria and hence he had only heard, before that, but had not actually seen or walked by the site of the bridge-to-come. He was in a state of shock, inapprehension, peculiar denial, and mostly dispirited, downhearted. The precarity and vagueness of the scene as it lives in me does not only stem from the tension and intensity of the encounter itself, that summer afternoon when we walked from Alexandria train station (*Mahatat Masr*) to the café in Sidi Gaber to have breakfast and hang out with friends. The acuteness of the memory also pounds from the wound that the dissolution of the relationship between me and this friend created. Our relationship had rather transcended the bounds of friendship and morphed into a romantic entanglement, which did not last much beyond the summer of 2017. I believe the agony that he experienced during our walk, his wandering eyes and his wretched body, have been and will remain solely preserved within the folds of this encounter, that actually included a third friend. We both saw his troubled and confounded looks, and we walked next to him, in an attempt perhaps to mend his sense of brokenness and alienation by walking through it together. We had not the same feelings as him about the Sidi Gaber neighborhood, we have never lived there, not even close to it and our historical relatedness to it is rather futile because we are both Cairenes, but we could certainly only understand, or imagine to understand. We were moved by that which did not belong to us, yet to some extent we know how it feels. However, I cannot say that our “walk of friends” was

of any consolation to our Alexandrian friend. I do not think it, or for that matter any other relation, has the capability of grounding a person on a land of shifting sands. Let me also add that the shifting-ness does not stop at the surrounding environment. Me and this person are no longer a part of each others' lives, and this person and our third friend are no longer part of each others' lives, for variety of reasons that are a mesh of personal and impersonal disappointments, failures and ruinations. Perhaps we knew back then something about the unshareability and the ungraspability of pain, as Sarah Ahmed (2014: 31) had argued in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, the kind of attentiveness to and inhabitation of the situation was not based on the possibility that we can reconcile, repair or altogether heal his pain, but rather live and walk together, with and beside each other bearing witness to the pain, confusion and somewhat sadness ingrained in as well as enfolding our relationship with ourselves and others.

"In fact, we must love the visions we have, if there is any point to having them. We must be invested in them, whilst open to ways in which they fail to be translated into objects that can secure our ground in the world. We need to be invested in the images of a different kind of world and act upon those investments in how we love our loves, and how we live our lives, at the same time as we give ourselves up and over to the possibility that we might get it wrong, or that the world that we are in might change its shape." (Ahmed 2014: 141)

If everyone feels perplexed, baffled or at the very least shaky in an environment of undesirable if not unfathomable changes, what does it mean to lean on one's friends? In this chapter I wish to focus on the role of intimacy and in particular on friendship as a mode of relating and responding to others with whom we share a particular vulnerable present. As a social bond, friendship has existed everywhere and at all times, grounded, configured and practiced differently according to the historical, geographical, cultural, economic, social and political context within which it is embedded. In most, if not all cases, friendship endures as a relentless potentiality. Generative and flawed, active and irregular as it is, I would like to follow the project of friendship, in an attempt to glimpse, even if momentarily and fleetingly what it can hold and

what it can offer. The scene is one of “muddling through with others” (Tsing 2015; 385), and it is filled with flows, intensities, encounters, surprises, flashes of hope, as well as instances, embodiments and different materializations of exhaustion, weariness and struggle. How to look at, think through and write about survival as a collaborative project in which people do not “bridge over” but rather “pass this” with, with the help of, among and alongside each other?

II. *I Don’t Feel At Home in This World Anymore: Or How Predictable is Precarity?*

“Precarity means not being able to plan” writes Anna Tsing (2015) in her beautiful book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, in which she elegantly pours out in writing stories of divergence as well as collaboration between human subjects, non-human subjects and landscapes in a world that is falling apart under contemporary capitalism. Tsing chooses to take the knot that is the mess of the world, the mesh of entanglements as it is, and examine the beauty of or rather the potentialities laid out behind the interwoven, entwined and together-twisted strands. One travels on a journey with Tsing, reflecting upon the creative and awkward entanglements, interactions, connections and collaborations of the social on both local and global levels at a time where things are “messy” and “difficult”. When the notion of living with the unforeseeable, with contingency is no longer an exception or an abnormal temporally bounded affect, the present becomes a lived problematic that is “charged with intensity” (Stewart 2017; 194). How things unfold and play out is almost always a surprise. In fact, precarity has stretched out and swallowed us all. To live in the belly of the whale called precarity is no longer an unlikable and far-fetched nightmare, but rather a life-world, or a composition of circumstances, stirrings, possibilities, threats, assemblages, order and re-orderings, openings and foreclosures, circuits of force and form in an ongoing state of transition. The map that spreads out is one of multiplicity

of directions, with zero guarantees of safer or a better more stable tomorrow, or a brighter future. Which, I insist, is not necessarily a bad thing.

In the belly of the whale (precarity), it is dark, ambiguous and mostly frightening yet one is not alone in that, in there. You wait humbly in the ambiguity for “some uncharitable new current of life to stir” (Eagleton 2015; 67). After some time in the dark you usually lose your balance, you start to tremble, you start to get dizzy and lose your equilibrium, you stumble and almost fall, and sometimes or most of the time you regain your balance by using some help. A support body, a support system. You hold hands with the person next to you, you lean on them, you whisper or scream, you ask for help. This movement, this plea for help can be read as an openness to the transformative potentiality of the encounter with the other, the stranger next to you who might be-come a friend and might not. In all cases, with the intensified affect of fear or uncertainty comes “a heightened sense of belonging with other people” (Massumi 2015; 6), you remind yourself that you are not alone in this, and that affect alone brings a sense of potential to the situation.

Once more drawing on the literature by Lauren Berlant, the collectively held sense of glitch requires not only a training in contingency management, but also a learning and finding of one’s “footing” in new manners of being (2011: 196). A footing is a grounding in the world, a carving of a place in the world, an inhabitation, and a bet set on the world that it might be, after all, worth it. It can be said that intimacy, particularly one between friends, acts as a possibility, a potential space that “links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective” (Berlant 1998: 283). It provides a landscape fertile enough for footings, be them affective and/or instrumental, embodying an “aspiration for a narrative about something shared” (ibid: 281). While the fantasies associated with intimacy sometimes end up occupying the space of

convention, the desire for it is not necessarily a mode of organizing life, or persons, in a particular way towards a particular goal. Rather it is a drive that produces itself relationally, gradually and over time, through practices of and experimentations with reciprocity, responsiveness and closeness. Friendship presents a porous social, “an affective space where people ought to be legitimated because they have feelings and because there is an intelligence in what they feel that *knows* something about the world that, if it were listened to, could make things better.” (Berlant 2008:13). The intimacy shared between friends provides a mode that is different from (and alternative to) that which takes place within the purview of institutions of the state and the traditional and somewhat fixed ideals of the nation, community, and citizens, as it does not necessarily stick to a canon, a utopian fantasy, or a designated end place. Within friendship, the friend’s experience of the present moment is a story that is recognized (though not necessarily identified with or related to) in a way that allows a potential sense of belonging in and by a social world. Whereby the desire for intimacy that underlies, for example, the act of complaining to one’s friend(s) about the stresses and anxieties of the everyday, or the urge felt towards sharing a vague sense of discomfort and detachment, is also about a sense of potential belonging. Drawing on Berlant’s argument in *The Female Complaint* (2008a), the need for intimate spheres is at the end a desire for a place of simplicity, a site of potential rest from the hard cold world, it is in Berlant’s words; “the constantly emplotted desire of a complex person to rework the details of her history to become a vague or simpler version of herself” because there is nothing simple about the lives lived under all of the existing vectors of subordination. It is at the end an aspiration for having been “affectively recognized and emotionally important” (2008: 7).

III. You Can Count on Me: Economies and Labours of Intimacy

What does it mean to be together-in-vulnerability? And is being and becoming-together not in and of itself a vulnerable position/ process? As social beings, we are precisely dependent on what is “outside ourselves”. Hence having a “life” is not imaginable, thinkable or possible outside the interdependence of persons, and the reproduction and sustainability of social relations to the other (human as well as non-human) beings (Butler 2009). “No man is an island” and no one comes from with-*out*. One is born to this world from within the womb of another. To be more accurate; one is essentially *brought* to this world and hence one’s life is necessarily in the hands of the other from the start.

Given that the social relations that attach people to each as well as to their environment are part of the conditions of possibility for life itself, it is important to add that those relations are not necessarily of love or of care, as Judith Butler argues “but constitute obligations toward others, most of whom we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who ‘we’ are.” (2009; 14). Living, thus, involves a certain exposure, ‘laying out’ to that which surrounds us. It is a precarious life that you live inside that whale’s belly, but it is, at the same time, a social life. Being is being among, between and with others and so precariousness, or the weight of the present, is experienced both with-in outside this sociality. It is constantly a reciprocal and corresponding experience, in which one relies on and also responds to the other. Those affective systems of intimacy and attachment and their “knotty entailments” are the sites where things *happen*. The do not change the world, they might not carry each other up and out of the whale’s belly, yet they do offer flashes and sparks of an otherwise. Intimacy provides promise of living, of enduring and carrying on with life “without being torn and worn out by the labor of disappointment and the disappointment of labor.”

(Berlant 2010: 112). The promise, I believe, takes the shape of an open bet on trust, and time, and trust over time. Trust, here, inspired by Todd May's propositions, is not the same as trading precarity for predictability. "It is not a calculation that the friend will act in certain ways," writes Todd May. "It is instead a placing oneself in the hands of the friend. It is to let loose (without entirely abandoning) the grip of one's own cognitive orientation toward the world in favor of another's" (2012: 114). To trust a friend remains a potential, an enigmatic tiny miracle, that does not always guarantee a safe landing. Hence, the kind of trust I am describing it is a bet that is constituted by and at the same time constitutive of the present moment, although we can not say that it remains free of the weight of future expectations. Yet seen as a muddling-through-together, it is based on an attempt to support, strengthen and sustain an alternative to the eerie, wrecked, wretched and difficult experience of being in the whale's belly, in the dark.

IV. Modes of Sociality/ Intimacy: How Deep is Your Love?

We do not relate to the light, the earth, the air, and the warmth only with our individual sensibility and sensuality. We communicate to one another the light our eyes know, the ground that sustains our postures, and the air and the warmth with which we speak . . . We appeal to the others to help us be at home in the alien elements into which we stray: in the drifting and nameless light and warmth of infancy, in the nocturnal depths of the erotic, and in the domain of dying where rational discourse has no longer anything to say. (Lingis 1994; 184, 185)

The modes and modalities of intimacy in the zone of the contemporary neoliberal world are various and variously diverse. There are structures of affinity that are already existent a priori of our will, by that I mean the family. The family is the first and foremost form by and through which we learn what it means to live with and be surrounded by others. It is a fundamental placeholder that plants in most of us the basic principles of "care" and of "belonging". Much of the early attempts of classic social scientists have revolved precisely around the dynamics and positionalities of the different members of the "family", as a quintessential union or bond that ties people together. In my own view, and throughout my own personal experience, I have over

and over been troubled by what is constantly being left unsaid about the entailments of familial intimacy. And more fundamentally, what goes missing in the naturalization of the family as a social unit. In other words, there are numerous limitations and considerations that are integral to as well as constitutive of one's position in and response-ability to the family as a structure and a relationship, most of which have been under-theorized or altogether left out. There is a lot of taken-for-grantedness and not much uncertainty or scrutiny about the standards and magnitudes of closeness, of relatedness and of identification within and across family members. The mother, the father, the daughter, the son, the sister and the brother are structural roles that are configured and re-configured differently in different contexts, places and times yet there is a powerful rigidity to the expectations and outcomes that, at many instances, become beyond transformability.

The family as a unit, a standard for "familiarity" within the boundaries and the comfort of "home", is a largely unpacked and unquestioned social category. Much like citizenship, you are condemned to the family that you are born into, one that in the eyes of the state produces prosperous, good, well-raised and well-educated members of the society, the nation, the state. The family in Egypt mainly is portrayed as the embodiment of generations-manufacturing-factory, something that characteristics of efficiency, stability, consistency can be attributed to, also something that is expected to, eventually and at some point, yield a structure. The more it runs by a discipline, the more the possibility of success. At the end the family is a part of the state apparatus, as a central site for passing on, reaffirming and reinforcing stable affiliations and identifications of religion, nationality, and legality of the ties between the family members.

I do not wish to produce dogmas about the family as an inflexible and unbending authoritarian all-encompassing institution, or to imply that it is a structure that lacks all potential

for creativity and inventiveness. In fact it has, at many times and for a lot of people, demonstrated a profound ability to shatter and exceed many of the normative discourses and understandings of its codes, orders and function (ality). Rather I am interested in tracing the contours and in sensing the edges of what the family can and does offer, not only in terms of love, care and support but also in how much growth and movement it is able to catch up with, endure, hold, allow. Also, how much affective labor is involved in the relationship, and how is it possible to de-naturalize, de-familiarize and put to question the work involved in processes of “production of the soul” (Musil as cited in Hardt 1999: 97). It is important to consider and ponder upon the caring labor that takes place in the comfort of “home” and within the sphere of the “family”, and the kinds of affects that are circulated and mobilized, producing different subjectivities and commonalities among subjects. “This commonality is not a name but a power” as Hardt & Negri had argued (1999: 85), a power not of constriction or coercion but of desire. The flows and investments of desire are affective forces that drive productivity, constructing and transforming value according to the rhythm of what is common. Affective labor (and its productive effects) thus can be read as an expansive power that lies at the heart of our social not to mention productive life, and needs to be made more visible and legible in order for us to be able to de-constitute the taken-for-granted categories and institutions of intimacy (i.e. the family) then reconstitute them in a different, broader more expansive ways, and perhaps provoke fresh imaginaries of new (yet-to-come) social formations and organizations.

As Lauren Berlant argues in her book *Love/ Desire* (2012), the institutional forms of intimacy such the family, the married couple, have been central to shaping the modern states’ narratives about stability, security and consistency of intimacy, precisely the joy of intimacy, the happiness. In modern states the fantasy of romantic love is deployed normatively “as a rule that

legislates the boundary between a legitimate and valuable mode of living/ loving and all the others” (2012:87). That is, those traditional forms have become conventions that act as the sole proper sites for “providing the life plot in which a subject has ‘a life’ and a future.” (ibid: 86). This fantasy, the popular romance of “finding the one, getting married, and making a family” impinges on the public imagination as well on practice a reduction of life’s valid possibilities and potentials to a single route. The valorization of this “normal” desire, to love, to be loved, to belong to and fit within a romantic relationship, typically neutralizes, at least symbolically, the violence at play in the hierarchy of social and socially gendered relationships. This flattening of social power dynamics and inequalities, as Berlant points out, “suggests that structures and institutions of power can always be overcome by personal feelings, personal choices” (ibid: 108). The romantic couple is an aspiration for the utopian promise of a love that does not destabilize or threaten the very things (like identity and life) that it seeks to ameliorate. The idea of romantic love serves initially as a placeholder for the desire for happiness, companionship and reciprocity, as a longing for an intimacy that is something other than (higher than) the violence of disciplinary and institutional zones of belonging. However, it is important to think of how the mass cultural and political discourse of normative romantic love has obscured, and continues to obscure, the relations between “the hegemonic processes of collective life and what people typically imagine as love” (ibid: 109). The way a fetish does, the fantasy of heteronormative romance or love plot impacts on individuals the way the promise of national capitalism does, whereby the stimulation of desire is driven by ideologies of choice, consent, and fulfillment. Now a love story is a story naturally believed to express the true nature, unique feelings and happy destiny of the actors involved. However, as Lauren Berlant proposes, as long as the normative narrative and institutionalized forms of sexual life organize identity for people, these

love stories mainly get lived as a relation of “cruel optimism”. In other words, the optimistic attachment involves a strong belief in ‘the scene of fantasy’ that enables one to expect, that at this time, nearness to this thing will give me what I need, or will reproduce my world in just the right way. (2011:2)

The correlation between happiness and marriage (as an indication of the good life) had been beautifully explored by Sarah Ahmed in her title *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). She argues that certain framings of nearness or belonging to an object, in this case a social bond such as marriage, family, and heterosexual intimacy, are generally preconceived and as “happy objects” that contain the promise of future happiness. These objects, Ahmed suggests, are mobilized as such even in “the absence of happiness by filling a certain gap; we anticipate that the object will cause happiness, such that it becomes a prop that sustains the fantasy that happiness is what would follow if only we could have ‘it’” (2010:32). The consonance of marriage with happiness is construed from the idea that marriage is attributed as a happiness-cause, a social ideal, or a “stopping point rather like the word because. . . . When because becomes an answer to a question the conversation can stop Happiness provides us with a full stop, a way of stopping an answer from being a question.” (ibid: 203). Hence there needs to be a serious awareness of the moment when happiness turns from being the thing we want, to being the measure of the good. As Ahmed cleverly puts it; “We may need to defend our arguments by not making happiness our ground, while exposing the shakiness of happiness as a ground” (ibid: 204).

A friend comes into the picture as a set or a cluster of promises. Like family, like romance between couples, friendship is an unfinished and a messy category that constantly eludes and continuously exceeds clear-cut standardizations, definitions and analysis. My

understanding of friendship can only be expressed in a language that takes notice of the endless potentialities of surprise, accident, indeterminacy, scenes of emergence, and open-ended encounters. In Anna Tsing's words; "the very stuff of collaborative survival" (2015: 43), in my own words; the here and the now of things, of the flux that is life and the act of being and living together. Whether they are long-term childhood friendships or short-term and transient ones, I argue that the project of friendship offers a space for new orderings, mutual be-comings and reciprocal re-production of selves that can and does act in big and small ways against the capitalist processes of exploitation and precarization. As an "open threshold of potential" (Massumi 2015; 3), a placeholder for something yet to come, the friend is a realization of "the possibility of alliance" (Federici 2008) and hence the emergence of the possibility of moving radically together, in Federici's words: "in collective confrontation", against the established orders of capitalist control and governmentality. A friend is not a wishful projection of success or stability in the future, but rather s/he acts as a potential figure of freedom since one is always uncertain about where the relationship might go and what might happen in and through it. This perpetual engagement with the other is precisely the experiment of being in the world as it unfolds, of "waiting in the company of others for things to arrive" as Kathleen Stewart had beautifully proposed (2017; 194). "There is always the weight of the world in what can be hoped for and what must be feared, in what flourishes and what matters" (ibid). As precarious subjects struggling with different forms of state precarization, we constantly experiment with "finding ways to be in in circuits of force and form" among conditions that are by no means fixed but rather constantly slipping in and out of existence, "a rhythmic alteration that shimmers and dims" (ibid; 195).

V. **Friends as Polyphonic Assemblages: From Scattered Individual Melodies to Rhythmic Collective Harmonies**

My Friends by W.S. Merwin (1963)²

My friends without shields walk on the target

It is late the windows are breaking

My friends without shoes leave
What they love
Grief moves among them as a fire among
Its bells My friends without clocks turn
On the dial they turn
They part

My friends with names like gloves set out
Bare handed as they have lived
And nobody knows them
It is they that lay the wreaths at the milestones it is their
Cups that are found at the wells
And are then chained up

My friends without feet sit by the wall
Nodding to the lame orchestra
Brotherhood it says on the decorations
My friend without eyes sits in the rain smiling
With a nest of salt in his hand

My friends without fathers or houses hear
Doors opening in the darkness
Whose halls announce

Behold the smoke has come home

My friends and I have in common
The present a wax bell in a wax belfry
This message telling of
Metals this
Hunger for the sake of hunger this owl in the heart
And these hands one
For asking one for applause

²From *The Moving Target*, by W. S. Merwin, published by Atheneum. Copyright © 1963 by W. S. Merwin. Used with permission.

My friends with nothing leave it behind In a box
My friends without keys go out from the jails it is night
They take the same road they miss
Each other they invent the same banner in the dark
They ask their way only of sentries too proud to breathe

At dawn the stars on their flag will vanish

The water will turn up their footprints and the day will rise
Like a monument to my
Friends the forgotten

In living through and within an atmosphere of change and alterations, tyranny and corruption, injustice and oppression, how you spend your days and where and how relies on circumstances beyond one's control. Uncertainty enfolds your life and the goal is not to escape it, but rather navigate your movement within it. "Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others. We can't rely on the status quo; everything is in flux, including our ability to survive" (Tsing 2015; 44). Being attuned to the coming-together of movements and to the emerging fields of belonging grants us a "power to" rather than a "power over" our historical present. The company of the friend and the muddling-through-together becomes a creative conversion of the divisions and breakages that capitalism successfully, repeatedly and variously engenders between people in different ways. Friendship can thus be theorized as a political movement that "meets affective modulation with affective modulation" (Massumi 2015; 35); one is primarily concerned with the re-creation of its members by producing forms of "life", "solidarity" and "belonging" outside systems of exploitation and hierarchy. Friendship as a world-making project opens possibilities for forms of re-composition and re-organization that might be better able to grapple with the indeterminate and multidirectional forces that shape the present moment.

Friendship can be defined as a breathing moving relation between two or more people. It does have its own set of shortcomings, flaws and limitations yet I believe that its imperfect nature and somewhat spontaneous and contingent character makes it more generous to the messy state of things. The sustainability of the relationship of friendship depends on getting lost in different paths of growth and movement, then finding each other again in a shared and willed space of togetherness. And this is precisely why friendship matters, because it has an ability to endure the weight of the present and a chance that sometimes, we might be embraced, as we are.

(3)

Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train: On the Becoming of Friends and the Making of Cities

**Heartbeat of a Friend's Shadow (Tapeshe Sayehyeh Doust)
By Sohrab Sepeheri (2013)**

The village lay some distance away, darkly outlined
Our eyes, full of local legends, evoked the moon.
Night was very close.

We were passing through streaks of mud, now dry on the road,
Ears overflowing with the chatter of open green fields,
Backs loaded with the reverberations of distant cities,
The harsh reality of the land flowing underfoot.

In our ruminations the taste of tranquility swayed from side to side.
Our shoes, which had prophetic qualities,
With a breeze ripped us off the earth.
On its own shoulder, our walking stick carried eternal spring.
At every turn of thought we each had the whole expanse of the sky.
Each movement of our hands sang with the beating of
Dawn-enraptured wings.
Our pockets full of the chirping of childhood mornings.
We were a band of enamored pilgrims, and our road
Passing by villages familiar with detachment,
Went on toward boundless clarity.

Over a pool, heads bent down of their own accord:
On our faces, night was evaporating,
The voice of the friend reached the ear of the friend.

Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train, and other Ordinary Affects³

I was walking down the streets of downtown when I got a message on Facebook from one of the closest people to my heart. A dear friend. It was a very sweet message on an insane day. I was, as usual, caught up in the madness of Wust al-balad. Rushing, having my large scarf/shawl carefully wrapped around my chest like a life jacket, holding my heavy bag so tight; where I seem to carry all my belongings as if I might forget them if they do not accompany me everywhere I go. I check the phone in a hurry and the message slowed me down for a minute, my heartbeats were very fast and loud, I could actually hear it. I couldn't help but smile, genuinely. *"Guess what, I'm getting married.. and guess where, in your favorite city.. Alexandria! Please come. It will make me very happy"*

I read the message a couple of times, put the phone back in my bag and resumed the fast paced walking, the smile preserved itself on my face for a while. I detached from the environment for a while, and intuitively, drifted inside my head in crafting a response that could even partially express my delight with and excitement for my friend who is getting married to someone I know he loves immensely. I decided not to text back immediately as words were running after each other inside my head. I'll wait for a better moment; I told myself.

On the morning of the wedding, April 1st 2016, 6 of us got together at the Ramsis train station, 4 young men and 2 young women. We took the 9:00 o'clock Cairo-Alexandria train, ready with our gowns and suits for the occasion. The ride was three hours of sharing stories. Stories about ourselves, about our days, the films we watched, the friends we met, the friends we lost.

There's the promise of losing oneself in the flow of things, says Kathleen Stewart.

We couldn't escape politics. We all have friends who have been detained or imprisoned. We couldn't escape ourselves.

³ The fragments and sentences are by Kathleen Stewart from her book Ordinary Affects (2007)

The train stopped in Tanta after an hour or so, and there was a moment of silence. We watched the people getting off the train, families, women, men, kids. I looked out of the window, watching the fellow passengers, now drifting strangers as they left, and right next to me was a long pole with a picture glued on the side facing me. It was a black & white poster with picture of a young boy. On the white frame there was something handwritten, it was a telephone number. I looked closer, I couldn't read the words, the handwriting was relatively small but I could see clearly the phone number. One after the other, my friends saw the same scene, and nothing was said about it. I kept staring at the boy in the picture, he wasn't smiling. Neither was I. I looked at the friend sitting across me and asked him if he know what's this about. Then he, along with the other friend who was sitting next to me, said the same word at the same moment: absentee. I said, lost?

We all looked at the kid in silence. Questions floated around in my head, grey clouds. I couldn't stop staring. Where might he be? Alive? Well? Afraid? Why didn't my friends say that he's "lost", why absentee? Because changing one's place or straying away from what one comes to know as home, isn't really the same thing as being lost? Because they were all trying to figure out what that picture was about just as much as I was? Home is a splintered word, I said to myself. And I tried to remember where I have read that. And instead of googling the quote, I googled "Absentee": A person who is expected or required to be present at a place or event but is not.

"Something huge and impersonal runs through things, but it's also mysteriously intimate and close at hand. At once abstract and concrete, it's both a distant, untouchable order of things and a claustrophobically close presence, like the experience of getting stuck in a customer service information loop every time you try to get to the bottom of things."

‘Ceux qui m’aiment prendront le train. We should use that movie title for the photo album that we’ll make out of this trip, no?’ The train started to move, I’m losing the kid. I was starting to get a bit delirious but my friend’s voice caught my attention. I smiled, and I whispered a loving goodbye to the kid. I hope you find the home where you belong.

“and we try to forget, as if nothing happened. Just move on”

“What? What did you just say?” I asked my friend. He said “Those Who Love Me Can Take the Train, it’s this 90s French film that I watched few months ago, so I’m saying it can make a good title for the trip photo-album since we’re all traveling for that wedding.. but no, wait, it was about friends gathered for a funeral, so no really. We shouldn’t, it’s a bad omen.” I liked the title very much, I asked him what the film was about, I was intrigued. He told me it’s about a train ride where friends of a deceased painter gather on the way to attend his funeral, upon a request he left for them before he dies. He wanted to be buried in a city outside Paris, and precisely wanted those who love him to come farewell him together, by train. They don’t know each other and have never met each other before, and so they were bound by nothing but their shared love for him as well as their shared sorrow over his loss.

“Ahmed*⁴ is out!” Another friend shouted looking at Facebook timeline on his phone, and my heart stopped. Ahmed is a dear friend of mine who, at that point, was serving a 2-year sentence in jail, an abrupt and unjust detainment over a novel he had written, that “violates public morality” according to the Egyptian national ‘higher’ moral authority. I didn’t say a word, I couldn’t breathe. I just looked at him waiting to hear the details. We were all silent for a second, before it turned out that it was only a joke. Someone thought that this would make a good April’s

⁴ Pseudonym

fool joke. It was heart breaking. It took me few minutes to be able to breathe again. None of us found it funny. Ahmed.. You have been in jail for two months now. Have you made a home out of it? “I can’t believe he’s in jail for a novel, I still can’t believe it’s happening. Even more absurd than the guy who hijacked the plane!” said another friend. Everyone starts laughing, including me.

“But the promise jumps in a quick relay to the sobering threats of big business, global warming, the big-box corporate landscape, the master-planned community, the daily structural violence of inequalities of all kinds, the lost potentials, the lives not lived, the hopes still quietly harbored or suddenly whipped into a frenzy. Either that, or the promise of losing yourself in the flow becomes a dull, empty drifting that you can’t get yourself out of.”

We arrived at Alexandria. We had a big breakfast, we split to different apartments and hotel rooms, got in our soiree outfits and met again. We celebrated our friend, hugged him, danced with him, took pictures with him and the bride, and we left and spent the rest of the evening together then took the morning train the next day back to Cairo.

A week passed. I met the same friends last night and we went to see a film together in a downtown screening. A famous 1975 German film by Wim Wenders titled *The Wrong Move*. I think it’s about loneliness or desperation, or detachment, or the need to find oneself.

“.. And don’t lose that unrest and discontent of yours. You’ll need it for writing.” The film begins with this line, the mother tells her son. I close my eyes and I smile.



The vignette above was written in 2016, which seems to be the year where my restless fascination, hungry curiosity and perpetual absorption with the relationship of friendship began to formulate and flourish. In the months that followed, I decided to intensify and expand my visits to the city where many of friends happen to inhabit/ or at least come from, in an attempt to explore and look at the “cities’ affect” engendered in and expressed by our friendship as itself a place, carved in time and dispersed in and across the cities of Cairo and Alexandria. This chapter aims to narrate different experiences of movement and imaginations of stillness, and fleeting instances of what I call the affective dwelling. Dwelling here is defined by an enablement of moments of “rest” and “stillness” among conditions of change, instability and uncertainty. In other words, how does friendship feed into and contribute to shaping our perception of place and “being-at-home” in particular places at particular times? How does friendship constitute a part of what might be defined as “the city affect”? What is dwelling, if we try to expand on the meanings attached to the word and move beyond the rigid and slightly overused spatial aspect of the concept of dwelling? I draw on various moments of social intimacy and encounters of friendship in and across the cities of Cairo and Alexandria in an attempt to trace the contours of affective attachments that link friends to spaces, to each other, and to each other in and across shifting spaces.

The choice of the two cities started from my personal history with having/ making friends that are Alexandrians living in Cairo or moving between the two cities. Whether for seeking independence from stiff family structure, a job opportunity, wider networks of social and professional relationships and friends, the movement between Alexandria and Cairo carries a myriad of layered vibrations, aspirations, and hopes imagined as a movement from the “second city” to the capital, with all the economic, cultural and political discourse that this historical

relation engenders. As Amro Ali (2017: 4) states, quoting Jerome Isaac Hodos (2002); Alexandria's public self-consciousness bears the historical legacy of their city being "in a race to catch up with, or keep from falling behind of, other cities⁵." However, I found it to be of remarkable significance to pay an acute attention and attunement to how such relations to and between the cities come to present themselves in conversations between friends. I will discuss three practices of friendship, on both conceptual and actual levels, that I have found to be synonymous with patterns, scales and imaginations of movement and rest. The acts are: Witnessing, staying in 'touch', and catching-up as a collective or collaborative quest for a moment of stillness, a dwelling place, that can perhaps be realized by bringing together the past, present and the imagined-things-to-come in an encounter of intimacy and trust.

What movement stands for in my argument is a notion that disrupts, challenges and perhaps transcends the constructed the rigid and seemingly fixed distinctions between the "temporality" and the "spatiality" of experience. By focusing on the figure of the friend, I would like to unpack the ways in which notions of movement and rest are articulated and made sense of in ways that are spatial, temporal and social simultaneously. I believe that the lens of friendship provides a more complex and layered insight into how movement is desired, how rest is envisaged, and how/where intimacy kicks in those dynamic processes of thought and action.

Friends constantly move together back and forth in time, revisiting their individual memories and shared histories while also projecting singular as well as mutual visions and ambitions on an unknown and unknowable future. In terms of "cities", living in either Cairo, Alexandria or between both means living on shifting sands. In other words, each of the two cities has been undergoing a process of massive, and sometimes overwhelming infrastructural change

⁵Jerome Isaac Hodos, "Second Cities: Globalization, Institutions and Political Culture in Struggling Regions" (PhD, University of Pennsylvania 2002). 25.

implemented by the state. During those times of transition, it is important to devote a serious attention to the modes of attachment, detachment, response, response-ability, doing and undoing of intimacies and relations that unfold within the intensified atmosphere of instability. Instability here is not meant to convey a mere sense of insecurity about the future, but rather stretches to communicate a collectively held sense that life is daily changing to something other than it was. Hence notions of movement, dislocation and re-location are not only about changing one's home, instigating new beginnings in the life-long project of pursuing one's dreams but also about the disappearances or perhaps the deaths of certain attachments, familiarities and related-nesses with places in particular ways, and the emergence of others that re-define conceptions of 'being-at-home' in the world.

This chapter shall be an exploration of themes that emerged from conversations with friends in and during movement between the cities of Cairo and Alexandria, about space, time, and both of them combined in becoming. Certainly, our conversations are shaped by our own experiences and at the end they are not intended to culminate in a comprehensive evaluation or analysis on how the social relationships get affected by infrastructural alterations. However, I suggest that the social phenomenon of friendship does offer a significant and novel epistemological starting point to disrupt the taken-for-granted categorical and normative ways of thinking about and theorizing the city. By putting theory in conversation with intimate chats and informal, improvised dialogues between friends I hope to make possible an imagination broad enough to allow for the enmeshment of experiences to be taken seriously. How the doing and making of friendship is enacted is a question that is also about how space is lived and how time is experienced, hence the intimacy of friendship in this light constitutes a 'knot' between human beings as well as an enmeshment of different analytical concepts.

I. Nadia:

The God Abandons Antony
C.P Cavafy (1972)⁶

When suddenly, at midnight, you hear
an invisible procession going by
with exquisite music, voices,
don't mourn your luck that's failing now,
work gone wrong, your plans
all proving deceptive—don't mourn them uselessly.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving.
Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say
it was a dream, your ears deceived you:
don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these.
As one long prepared, and graced with courage,
as is right for you who proved worthy of this kind of city,
go firmly to the window
and listen with deep emotion, but not
with the whining, the pleas of a coward;
listen—your final delectation—to the voices,
to the exquisite music of that strange procession,
and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.

I found Nadia/ Nadia found me on the internet. Twitter is a social media platform that, at the time, allowed you only 140 characters per tweet. That is, each piece of content posted must not exceed the 140 letters, which makes it a place of fleeting fragments that are buried over each other. It is a very fast-paced site of words, personal as well as otherwise. Twitter became a famous and widely known platform in Egypt particularly during the events and clashes of 2011 revolution. I created an account around that time. Simple, fast and dynamic it acted as the most convenient platform on which updates about and from the Tahrir Square were circulated. In general, Twitter users in Egypt as well as elsewhere use it differently and with varying degrees of seriousness. Political activists and journalists for example sometimes benefit from reporting circulating certain incidents, while fashion bloggers advertise brands and looks, while friends

⁶ From C. P. Cavafy: Collected Poems translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Published by Princeton University Press. Copyright © 1972 by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Appears with permission of Princeton University Press.

pass on to each other jokes or inspirational quotes, and a myriad other thing happens. Having this element of enormous flexibility, I can say that Twitter eventually managed to become a digital “virtual” space of swift sociality, communication, networking, and self-expression. Near the end of 2017, the website issued an update that users are now given twice the “character count” - a full 280 characters “so that people can more easily “express themselves”⁷.

A Twitter profile can either be "private" or "public", which means that you get to choose the audience of your tweets and the level of privacy of your preference. You can follow any public profile and have complete access to every tweet they post, or "request to follow" any private account, and if accepted, you also get the full access to the content of their profile. Similar to Facebook and other social media platforms, Twitter allows you to "like", "reply" or "re-tweet" which basically means to share the tweet on your timeline and to your friend-list.

Nadia's Twitter profile was public at the time, the year was 2014. While randomly scrolling my timeline, although I am not a heavy user, I frequently stumbled upon tweets by Nadia. They were striking to me, and not because they were of an informative nature, but of a very similar and extremely familiar intellectual wavelength. She seemed to be a person who is interested in novels, like myself and also in film. Such phenomenon happens very often on social media, by that I mean, feelings of relatedness and distant, speculative yet familiar likeness. I do know and hear of a lot of relationships, whether friendships or romantic bonds that were formed on and through social media. For the above mentioned reasons I found myself intrigued by an imagination of who and what Nadia might be and be like. The only information I knew at the time, through her sarcastic, witty, intelligent and sometimes vaguely personal statuses was that she is based in Alexandria. I followed her and after few days I sent her a DM (direct message)

⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/twitter-character-limit-update-tweets-expanded-140-280-english-japanese-app-a7968961.html>

expressing a casual admiration of the content of her tweets and an interest in a potential friendship with her. Her response was fast and we soon started a conversation, and started to build a mutual relation of affection. We exchanged our phone numbers after that in order to be able to communicate better, deeper and more extensively and perhaps arrange to meet at some point, if whenever one of us could get to the other's city.

In December 2014 I visited Alexandria for a weekend with a friend, and had an immense excitement to meet Nadia in this trip. We set a date, a time and a place and until that point our relationship was completely virtual. What I knew about her was that she studies Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine in Alexandria in her 5th year, that she has three sisters, that she has two best friends (girls) whom she speaks of very often and very fondly, that her parents are quite conservative, and that she lives in Loran neighborhood in Alexandria. It was as if I knew the person, but not really, but I would like to actualize and make real this case of closeness and relatedness. On the day we were supposed to meet, she neither answered my calls nor responded to my messages. I felt a strange but nervous disappointment, yet I was in the company of other friends so I did not feel that my weekend was ruined by the incident. I could not think of reasons behind her disappearance, but I could feel a tinge of frustration. She surfaced late at night and texted me, apologetic and quite embarrassed by the inconvenience caused by her sudden and unexpected vanishing. She did not give me a full account of what happened and how and why, but she promised that she will make it up for me the day after and that we can definitely still meet in case I have not already left back to Cairo. I was indeed staying one more day, and I did not mind the promise. I was willing to try one more time and see her. Still my excitement and the thrill of making-real the friend that I had met and made "virtually" was higher than to let the whole idea go because of a missed appointment.

The next day I went to the place where we had agreed to meet which was al *ahwa al-togareyya* by the corniche. It is a very well-known, old and typical Alexandrian style *ahwa* in downtown Alexandria. Long Wooden windows and doors, *Dominos*, *Tawla*, *Shisha*, roaming cats, and loud laughters and chats between mostly old men, and groups of young men and women. I had a Cairene friend with me, the friend who made the trip with me and Nadia, finally arrived and also brought a friend with her and it turned out she is one of the two best friends she had told me about. I had not known before that she wears a veil, and even that aside, I was surprised by how I don't know her at all. She was nothing like I had thought, meaning; she was much more reserved, quiet and shy than she is on the internet. The friend who accompanied her was much more friendly, talkative and open throughout the couple of hours we spent together. Her friend had to leave at some point, and the rest of us; Nadia, my other friend and myself were starving. We walked together to the nearest *Kebda* (liver) sandwich shop, bought sandwiches and crossed the street to eat them on the corniche. This particular hour, which was near the end of the encounter, Nadia started to feel more at ease in our company, and it showed in the way she interacted with us. She started to talk more, which was something I had been wanting and anticipating yet not wanting to impose any pressure on her to perform. By the time we greeted her goodbye, I had really liked her, and I tried to fill in pieces of my imagination of her, like a puzzle to be completed. I originally liked someone I thought Nadia was, and when I did meet her, I wanted her to be that person that I had liked and admired in an indirect and perhaps unfathomable manner. Reflecting back on this situation in retrospect, I believe that the setting was too casual to hold the weight of a moment of real connection. We were four girls in a loud cafe, people smoking *shisha*, playing *dominos* and *tawla*, just wanting to have a good time.

Intimacy seems to me as something that requires particular conditions to happen, to actualize to take place and to flourish.

I returned to Cairo the day after, and stayed in touch with Nadia virtually, texting each other regularly using Whatsapp. Nadia soon told me about the context and causes of her disappearance in our first missed appointment, and it turned out that she had met with another new friend and time just passed by. I think I only understood and somehow appreciated this honesty of hers because what she did is something I usually do too. I do, or perhaps we all do sometimes, allow mess and chaos to happen in regards to who we meet, when and where and how the days are to be planned and passed, largely a hit and miss. It is not a matter of ethics of punctuality and politeness as much as it is about the larger disorderliness of things, of our days, of our selves, and of the places/ spaces we inhabit. In order for a relation of intimacy to hold, among conditions of chaos and unpredictability, the people involved must necessarily allow a room for uncertainty, instability and inconsistency. I do not mean a belittlement of the dedication, respect and sense of duty that by all means are fundamental values to friendship; yet I am precisely arguing for an understanding and undertaking of new meanings to and performances of responsibility and care. The sustenance of friendship at a place and time of chaos demands vaster, broader and more expansive practices and performances of care and more tolerance for confusion. Friendship here draws a metaphor of a place, with boundaries that are in need of stretching, pushing and expanding, or at least constant negotiation.

My friendship with Nadia evolved and grew as we grew up, as time passed by, me in Cairo and she in Alexandria. Between 2014 and now, we have grown closer and our friendship grew in a way that continues to astonish me. At the beginning it resembled having discovered a new species of a plant, one that you do not know how exactly to cultivate it. There is not really a

reference, a model or a guide for how to do or run a friendship 'comme-il-faut'. With Nadia, the bud of our friendship bloomed and blossomed, not without effort but it seemed that our modes of experimentation with intimacy worked well together. We stayed in touch via the internet, and we managed to meet for few hours whenever I visited Alexandria, which was around three times a year. She does not come to Cairo, for reasons that have to do with the intense nature and busy lifestyle of her studies (The Faculty of Medicine). Also, she has a strict and "conservative" household, as per her description, and her parents are not quite fond of the idea of her traveling alone or with friends to Cairo. On the other hand, I visit Alexandria very often. My mother does not mind me going on solo trips out of town, especially Alexandria since she had cultivated in me a familiarity with and a passion for it since young age. My mother had attended college in Alexandria, and lived for four years in a Catholic ladies-only student dormitory building near the University of Alexandria. Time and again, she re-told and re-narrated tens of stories about that experience, about the friends she made and the city of Alexandria that she built a relationship with during that time. Listening and thinking about our conversations, I started to sense that there is 'an Alexandria' that my mother knows and remembers, streets that she walked, friends that she made and a particular configuration of the city that she had established over the span of the four years of living there (from 1972 to 1976). Her Alexandria is quite different from mine, even in how we long for it. I long for the 'Alexandria affect' which I cannot quite pin down or articulate, or even completely understand. There is certainly an element of mystique or an allure to particular places, one that cannot be accounted for by specific or simple sets of causes.

Between my mother, my Alexandrian friends, and myself a particular "city affect" was being assembled. Stories about being inside Alexandria, about "having been" in Alexandria, about moving between Cairo and Alexandria kept recurring, echoing and resounding inside my

head, forming something that is not easy to label or name. I knew it was there, I believed Alexandria as a place had a certain affective power over me as well as over other people, but the “city affect” is a web of interwoven sentiments, ideas and imaginations and none of which homogenous or dominant over the others. It is an affect that is both specific and common. It is specific in the sense that our affective relations to the cities are formed through personal range of experiences that one goes through always individually, yet also always in relation to something, be it people, places, objects, tastes, smells, sounds, etc. Ultimately, each one of us has their own unique experience of the city, and hence affective relation to it. Yet the ways in which the city is said to engender “common” experiences of affective urbanism is mainly around how the city is shared “between us”.

“Urban political subjectivity thus comprises an articulated, relational assemblage. This assemblage consists of singular subjects comprising hybrid articulations of human and nonhuman material. These singular subjects are exposed to each other at the boundaries where they meet — the objects around and through which they live their lives. Urbanised political subjectivity thus consists less of citizens and their communities than singularities — the materialities they incorporate and the others to whom they are exposed. Much of this exposure happens precisely at the material surfaces that make up the things between us in the contemporary city. Walls, houses, trains, and fibers are all things that lie between us, things that might be incorporated into many different singular assemblages — and thus, as shared entities, the things that remind us of the presence of a plural alterity in the city. Thus it is the things of the city — the stone, glass, concrete, wire- which are between us in the contemporary city.”
(Coward 2012: 478, 479)

“Where walls tell us about the singularity we are when we dwell in a particular house, or wires expose us to the plural others whose messages are carried along them” (ibid). Sometimes it is the water dropping from the loud air conditioners in the city that fall over our heads, or the water dropping from the hanging clothes on the wires above us and we find our ways around them, sometimes it is the pond that forms out of a sewer blockage/ flooding in the street, which also we as well as everyone find our ways around. Sometimes we would stop talking because we can’t

scream as loud as the surrounding car horns and police car sirens. Sometimes the waiter comes in to politely imply that we need to “order” something to eat or to drink. S/he makes it seem like it is a choice we can make, but it’s not really. Other times we are interrupted by the kids playing a serious football match, a woman, a man, a child asking for money, selling roses, tiny brochures of Quran verses, our ringing phones, calls, texts, Facebook messages, Whatsapp messages, bumping into people we know; “such a small world” we say. Sometimes we would stop to take a picture of something we saw, of ourselves, of each other. Sometimes it is an accident that has nothing to do with us, yet we stop and stare. “Something throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation” whispers Kathleen Stewart. We are together, and we are togetherly suspended in the staring and wondering, in the “where this might go” “how this will turn out”, we are suspended in the not knowing, the state of potentiality, the reverberation, the resonance, the drifting into something outside us, inside us, between us. In Alexandria’s downtown, exactly like in Cairo, it is almost impossible to have a stable, unvarying, unwavering and uninterrupted walk that can last for more than 15 minutes. I am not talking about the quiet neighborhoods and side-streets and/or gated compounds in which special lanes are made for walking and cycling, I am talking about the buzzing, pulsing, vibrating, living streets of the city that constantly act and interact with the walkers and passer-bys. How much they take and how much they give is never a fixed equation, but varies tremendously from one day to the other. Hence even if you repeat the same exact walk everyday, in terms of route, you might very well be faced with a completely different experience. Similarly, our talks, our chats, sentiments, experiences are always liable to interruption, disruption and interference from the “outside”.

II. Urban Intimacy and Talking about Cities: Recuperation, Remembrances, Recompositions

“When a rise in the sense of a shared collective atmosphere results from an occurrence, feeling historical may rhyme with feeling historic. But what we’re witnessing here is what happens when a situation opens out problems in how to live that reveal a loss of trust in the historical future, threats to the sense of ongoingness in the durational present, and increased opacity within ordinary life. Life itself does not provide a ground for trust or solidarity but the sense of a shared affective management crisis does confirm belonging to a disturbed field, rather than a normative world.” (Berlant 2008: 5)

Contemplating the thought constantly as I walk the streets of Alexandria, I decided to have a conversation with Nadia about it. The aim was that we spontaneously pin-pong our ideas about our home cities, how we imagine them, how we conceptualize them and whether our friendship (or other friendships in our lives) have contributed to those imaginaries in any way. I wanted to make an attempt at thinking about and through those questions together, loosely yet in depth. By that I mean I have not had prepared any formal sets of questions or conversation starters, yet every experience of us walking the streets of downtown Alexandria together seemed like a beginning to something, it brought something up to the surface. During those walks things always happened around us and between us; sometimes she would throw in historical informative stories about some streets, some squares, closed shops and vintage abandoned film theatres, old and cinematic-looking motels, the breathtakingly beautiful churches, the semi-demolished buildings, the restaurants, the debris. Sometimes it was as if Nadia felt a certain duty to enlighten me about what this “is” and also what it “used to be”, a transmission of something she has lived through while I have not, or have at a distance. The infrastructural and urban changes in the cities, in the case of the city of Alexandria, seemed to ignite a notable sense of indebtedness or obligation to the city, in its “people”, to “pass on” stories about it. Those stories are never free of the teller’s own inevitable complicity and involvement with the places at

different stages of its lifetime and different phases of its being. Here the life history of the 'person' is enmeshed with the life history of the place. The stories and histories of the places were never free of Nadia's own vignettes and accounts of her own life and self.

Sometimes, I would notice and be annoyed by the anthropologist/ researcher in me enforcing, imposing, if not fetishizing certain generalities and expectations about how an 'Alexandrian' sees and thinks of Alexandria, and Cairo. For example, I remember how keen and vigilant I was to know what Nadia has to say about the Sidi Gaber bridge (that was constructed by the Egyptian military in Summer 2017), how and how much it affected her daily routine, while it was under construction and after it became a reality. Below is a fragment of our chat and how Nadia responded to my inquiry:

"Let's think together, I'll think out loud with you" I started our chat. Nadia is not her real name, but she chose it herself. She was born in June 1993 in a middle middle-class family and lived her whole life in Alexandria. She has three sisters, she is the eldest. After high school she joined the School of Medicine, and at the time we had our chat she had just graduated with good grades and was about to start her obligatory one-year medical internship. I began our chat, first by lighting a cigarette, then asking the question of; why Cairo? Then noticing a correlation with Youssef Chahine's film title "Eskenderiyya Leih?" with a striking reverse of the concept, and making a brief joke about it before Nadia had the chance to respond.

N: Partially it has to do with breaking free from the constrictions of my parents. But also, the centrality, you know? The capital. I feel that there are many more things (options) there to do than here. It's like how people from other cities like Kafr el Sheikh, el Behira, they come to Alexandria because they feel there are more things to be done here. By things I mean everything, more friends, more work opportunities/ there are lots of things happening/ it's fun/ here there isn't a nightlife, there's not the option of a night club, I know I wouldn't have gone every night, due to my family restrictions or finance or otherwise but it's about the option/ having the possibility at hand.. here there isn't even that possibility/ Here I'm always feeling like I'm missing out on something

S: If it's not about the family restrictions, would that still be the case, you think?

N: I think it'd have been different. I mean, I think the urge to go to Cairo would have been less. Or perhaps because it's something that I've wanted so bad and never happened, so the accumulation of this desire created a bigger fantasy about the possibility of being there. I think in that case I would have wanted to just visit Cairo every now and then, casually. Maybe it's not really that wonderful, perhaps it's just attached to an imagination that in life might not be true. I love Alexandria, truly, and I don't think I want to leave it for any reason other than escaping the confinement the restriction of the family life/ I have loved Alexandria since I was a kid, I love the streets and I love it.

S: But the changes that's been happening in Alex, how do you feel about that?

N: For example while the military built the new the Sidi Gaber bridge (2017) we lived a very difficult time during and because of its making. The entire city of Alexandria was jammed. Alexandria has got only two streets; the corniche road and the parallel tram one. So the roads were shifted and everyone took the narrow side streets which are quite tiny and cannot bear this amount of cars. I heard a story and I'm not sure it's true, that one of those side streets (I think Portsaid Street) the ground cracked because of the car load, can you imagine? It was really a difficult time, it took us much more than usual to reach our homes and everyday was a struggle to move from one area to another inside the city. If we are located before Sidi Gaber we must meet there, if after we meet there, but there was no way to cross that mess in order to meet. If you are in downtown for example and I'm in Stanley, then we can't meet, shouldn't, mustn't. This bridge (kobry) still feels strange, whenever I cross it I still feel a strangeness, an alienation. I feel it's temporary, why am I seeing the sea from above like that? It looks ugly, it looks stupid.

S: Do you think it's because it's new? What about the places that have been there and you used to meet friends in and then got demolished? I mean, I hear a lot about the enforced discontinuity or shutting down of certain social hubs, say cultural centers, cafes, restaurants?

N: There's one cafe (Crystal) it's wooden and very old, and it always hosted a vast diversity of people, old and young generations. Inside it's all mirrors, they say it's going to be demolished but it's still there. People are talking about it, but I can't remember particular places that have been demolished that I was attached to and feeling miserable because of that. It's more about the change of places and the friend groups. I used to meet certain people in certain places, then the place would be taken over by a different kind of people, for example very young and loud teenagers, so we would stop going there because we are not as comfortable, the

setting changes. Like there are some ahwas we used to go then at some point we started feeling we were being watched/ listened to by some old men, perhaps mokhberein? (police detectives). Speaking about whatever we want became less possible, also they started banning large numbers of people to sit together on the same table (not more than 5). In such cases we become less comfortable and we eventually stop going. So the place might still be there but we wouldn't want to go. The cultural scene also is closing badly (el cabinah, Cinema Rio rooftop), they don't all close up but some of them are prohibited from hosting such parties, and now the scene is mostly limited to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. The events that took place were not all of politically controversial or provocative nature even, in any way, but still they are not happening anymore.

In friendship talks, the story always begins in the middle and then goes in all directions, “perceiving, and/or making constellations of mutually referential elements” (Guyer 2017: 84). Few weeks after my conversation with Nadia, and upon re-listening to the recording, I realized that we zigzagged from Cairo to Alexandria, then forward, backward, and sideways to other things too. What was most interesting and vivid was the how the fluidity of movement-in-thought between friends allows for a vaster, more layered and more wide-ranging exploration of “big”, “classic” or “hegemonic” analytical themes like making sense of “place”, re-telling “memory”, understanding “belonging”, or even the bridge moment as a somewhat politically burdened and urbanely violent occurrence. Intimacy started to resemble calm seas, where whatever is deeply submerged had a chance, not matter how briefly, to expose itself, to float and surface. As we talked, I experienced numerous moments of perplexity in regards to what questions to ask my friend, how am I listening to my friend, and what to make of what my friend is telling me. It was precisely in those moments that I had the most difficult and burdensome sentiments of doubt and skepticism as to whether I would like to work on a project that plays on the very fine (virtual) line between the personal/ the impersonal, the academic, the serious/ and the otherwise, also the spoken/ and the silences that friends share which carries equally rich accumulations of knowledge. However, I managed to learn a technique of snapping-out of the

stiff and anxiety-fueled research mode and into the open fields and intricate folds of ease, comfort and trust of intimacy. The project ran mainly on a sense of trust in the value, the vibrancy and the richness of the bond of friendship and the talks between friends. By that I mean that there is something significant and worth knowing engraved deep in the talks and walks that friends do together.

“Understanding friendships within the context of urban encounter is about relationships enacted in a particular time-space.” (Kathiravelu 2013: 10)

When our conversation first began, I initially had a curious thought, a vague and fuzzy idea about friendships and cities that I wanted to think through and learn more about with Nadia. I have known, throughout our 4-year friendship, that she is fascinated by (the thought of) Cairo, and this is what at first seemed like a good and an important question to ask. What was striking in Nadia’s response was not only what she said, but also what she did not, precisely what she did not need to say to me. It shortly became clear that what she says to me as well as the ways in which I listen to, apprehend and process Nadia’s words will always be heavily influenced by that which I already know about her. To be more clear, I knew for a fact that Nadia had always wanted to go to Cairo, and that she has certain visions and expectations about what Cairo, the capital, the big city will offer her. In fact, I have a reservoir of multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives from my Alexandrian friends about how they perceive Cairo, whether at a distance or through real life experiences. However I wanted to be able to have an appreciation and a careful devotion to the ways in which each friend’s experience or story needs to be illuminated using the very details of their own lives, while also acknowledging the hegemony of the larger and somewhat dominant ‘Cairo imaginary’ that resonates among lots of different people. Nadia, like some of other friends, retains a particular imagination of Cairo that screams possibility, surprise, potential. Once another Alexandrian friend, Jihan, described it to me as;

“Alexandria now feels like a glass box. I know everything and everyone, there are no chances of anything new and exciting to happen.” It very much echoed Nadia as well as other Alexandrian friends’ sentiments. To go back to Nadia, she bluntly expressed a “fetish” of the capital-city, which she knows might be not be real after all. Rather than building up for an absolute and/or final narrative on Cairo, I wanted to know where Nadia’s narrative came from and how it formed. We ended up talking about her family, their extremely religious background, the strict and inflexible obligations they impose on her. Few examples of what we talked about the Medicine school, her love life, her two best friends, the quality and quantity of social circles and networks that surround her, her future ambitions, Alexandria and its narrow streets, Cairo and its heavy traffic, the restrained cultural scene in Alexandria, the political anxiety around public artistic performances. My point is that there was no limit as to how far we can go, together and without enforced or clear guiding, to events, moments and places in our lives that conjured up and evoked notions of time and space, how they are lived and made sense of. Each question, thought or even assumption, we were able to trace back freely and without limits, to as many associations and links were there. The trust and mutual understanding that our friendship had privileged us enabled a unique depth and an exceptional generosity in our intellectual exploratory journey.

In *Thinking about Feeling Historical* (2008b) Lauren Berlant examines the several affective genres, registers and atmospheres of how the historical present moment is apprehended, sensed lived and articulated. She attempts to “rethink the sensing of history, and of the historic”. Berlant points out that the processes of sense-making across multiple affective registers generate a sense of shared affective management that involves re-assessing the conditions of ongoingness, in focused and unfocused ways and “produces a way of grasping and inhabiting a collectively

significant ‘unthought known’’. Old landscapes, changed streets, and new infrastructures create a moment of shared absorbing, apprehending and making sense of what is here, now. As Berlant writes:

“Meeting the present is like meeting a new lover: telling the story of how you got to be this way in the present moment suddenly changes its usual cadences because of the occasion of the telling. Where you are from is suddenly a different ‘somewhere’ else, underdescribed or even hidden by the idiom of nation or state: the state’s name becomes a ridiculous sound that reminds you of where you were ridiculous and unsound. It is a handle on something historical barely yet experienced. It used to matter, where you came from, because you felt akin to the other people who lived there, since they knew what you knew- the landscape that the highway skims and random facts associated with patriotism. But now the enmeshing of global power and ordinary life has turned the scenic route into a situation.” (2008b :9)

In the acts of “telling”, “hearing”, remembering, looking around, pointing to things, wondering, asking questions, cities are made and re-made in the circulation and the mutual mattering. Drawing on Berlant, there is an “us” that is constituted by the “pooling and spooling what we have seen and what we know” (ibid), a “we” that is made by an ongoing activity of “catching up” with life as it is happening. Friendship practiced with an urban intimate context thus involves processes of re-composition of the present moment in time as well as in space on one hand, and on the other enables a the production of affective and emotional relations between-friends, activating a simultaneous re-production of selves and intimacies.

Accordingly, the ‘affective’ element of the everyday enactments and practices friendship retains an extremely valuable significance and productive potential, although it is clearly lacking sufficient academic attention. In this light and following Lavaanya Kathiravelu (2013), friendship as a form of social relation and interaction must be examined in conjunction with understandings of diverse urban cities. In other words, the literature on human geographies and politics of spatiality must be accompanied by and brought together with intimate and thick ethnographic research on social and affective configurations of “relationships, networks and ties

built on trust, respect and reciprocity” (Kathiravelu 2013: 3). Kathiralevu’s paper suggests and calls for a rather thicker mode of examining the affective bonds of friendship between different as well as similar urban residents, which is something I have taken in consideration and attempted to achieve while doing the fieldwork for this chapter. Examining a particular personal friendship of mine with a person from a different city under this light I believe does indeed offer novel and innovative ways to understand urban politics of companionship and co-existence. Such ethnographic attunement pushes the boundaries of academic areas of inquiry, and stretches to take in the urban dwellers’ own articulations of and about their social/spatial/temporal experiences, in their own languages of expression. “Friendships, in this sense, are seen as tangible ways in which the larger ‘urban unconscious’ can be felt, linking the intimate sphere of private lives and relationships with a public urban commons.” (ibid)

Here, friendship as an analytic framework can work dually; on one hand friendship talks hold reservoirs of constructions of place, whether imagined or lived that perpetuates along the lines of the relationship itself. Friends keep going back to the same place, but it is never the same and it is their friendship that bears the change and that enables new ways of sense making and potential re-enactments, re-engagements and/or different attachments to take place. On the other hand friendship talks act also, metaphorically, as a place that friends “can always go back to”. Meaning that as much as it contains potential for a movement further in time it also enables a particular re-assemblage of elements in order to “catch up with” a place that is no longer the same, for the sake of carving a moment in the present where friends can “stand still”, “rest”, and “dwell”.

In the above section of the chapter I have engaged with the deep, personal and inspiring ethnographic talks and walks that I had with Nadia and what came out of it. My friendship with

Nadia contains a particular Alexandria, the Alexandria I know. The places we repeatedly go, the encounters that unfold in them, the stories that she narrates to me about them, together form a unique map for navigating the city, one that will always be tied to this specific relationship, its history and its potential ongoingness. Nadia's intimate and open talk with me disrupted and suspended a certain fetishistic question that I began my fieldwork with, and pushed me to a different level of analysis. The question was something like *"how does the disappearance/ demolition of public places and infrastructures where friends met and gathered affect the social bond between friends themselves? Do friendships dissolve more easily with the fast paced urban alterations and mutations that are being heavily implemented in cities like Cairo and Alexandria?"* Paying a deep attention to my conversations with Nadia, with my other Alexandrian friends as well as Cairene ones, it began to be clear to me that the subjects' configurations of spatiality exceed and overflow the narrow dimensions of such a question. Places are important, but the happenings that unfolded "in" them do not vanish with their disappearance. In other words, my friends have told me that the absence of places does not take away with it the togetherness of friends. It remains up to them to be (come) together through the loss of the old and the birth of the new. Friends carry between them a map that traces a history of companionship that transverses the 'too much abstractedness' of categories and the 'too much concreteness' of violent reshaping of cities. Nadia is constitutive of the Alexandria I know and happen to have an emotional attachment to by virtue of what our friendship gave me in and about the place, over a period of time.

"The ultimate aim of a politics of worldbuilding, then, is the actual building of new worlds, including not only their infrastructure, values, and interactive practices, but, first and foremost, the onto-ethical grounds that allow for such worlds to emerge and remain. These are relationalities of being-with that onto-ethically sustain new possibilities for a community of whoever arrives, freedom as letting-be, and attuned care. A politics of worldbuilding as agonistic

*experimentation with an otherwise entails actually enacting this otherwise so that
it begins to stick and endure, rather than dissipate as if it never was.” (Zigon
2017)*

III. In Friendship We Dwell: On Movement and Stillness

Sanctuary⁸
By Jean Valentine

People pray to each other. The way I say "you" to someone else,
respectfully, intimately, desperately. The way someone says
"you" to me, hopefully, expectantly, intensely ...
—Huub Oosterhuis

You who I don't know I don't know how to talk to you

—What is it like for you there?

Here ... well, wanting solitude; and talk; friendship—
The uses of solitude. To imagine; to hear.
Learning braille. To imagine other solitudes.
But they will not be mine;
to wait, in the quiet; not to scatter the voices—
What are you afraid of?

What will happen. All this leaving. And meetings, yes. But death.
What happens when you die?

“... not scatter the voices,”

Drown out. Not make a house, out of my own words. To be quiet in
another throat; other eyes; listen for what it is like there. What
word. What silence. Allowing. Uncertain: to drift, in the
restlessness ... Repose. To run like water—

What is it like there, right now?

Listen: the crowding of the street; the room. Everyone hunches in against the
crowding; holding their breath: against dread.

What do you dread?

What happens when you die?

⁸ Source: *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems 1965-2003* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004)

What do you dread, in this room, now?

Not listening. Now. Not watching. Safe inside my own skin.
To die, not having listened. Not having asked ... To have scattered
life.

Yes I know: the thread you have to keep finding, over again, to follow it back to
life; I know. Impossible, sometimes.

“The word ‘Me’ is felt only in the warmth of the group, like when you knock on
the door of those you love and they ask, “Who?” and you say, “Me,” and they
know you by the tone of your voice.” Fouad Haddad (The First of May Saga
1963)

In the Arabic version “the tone of your voice” Fouad Haddad uses “*Hessak*”, which can
also be interpreted as “the affect of your being”. *Hess* is used literally as sound or voice, but also
quite commonly as a metaphor for the unique affective presence of an individual, its value and
the preciousness it brings. Haddad’s poetic phrase seizes a certain response that is revealing of a
deep familiarity and recognition. They know you, even though you have only uttered “me” and
not your name, they know you because they know something of your presence that exceeds your
name, they recognize your identity differently perhaps more genuinely. They have an affective
relation to you that is not reducible to the normative manners in which people identify
themselves and claim attendance in the world. They know the tone of your voice, perhaps also
the sound of your footsteps, their very particular pace.

Building on and responding to the first part of this chapter, here I wish to discuss three
practices of friendship that will help concretize and make visible the links between friendship
and movement, friendship and rest, and whether friendship can be theorized as a space where
friends mutually dwell. The notion of ‘Dwelling’ here is explored beginning with what Martin
Heidegger and after him Tim Ingold had presented, while trying to run forward with it. We do

know that *dwelling* is the ‘inhabiting’ of and ‘residing’ in the world. We know that Heidegger succeeded in pushing the boundaries of the term, from strictly tied with notions of occupation or residence to rather encompass the myriad ways in which one lives one’s life. Building, then, is not a pre-requisite for dwelling, but dwelling comes first to Heidegger as human beings need to first combine with and place themselves within the surroundings; the sky, the rain, the sunshine, the ground. The core and essence of life to Heidegger, is a fundamental mode of dwelling, which is “not the occupation of a world already built, but the very process of inhabiting the earth.” (Ingold 2011:147), and this necessarily comes before any kind of *building* can begin to take place. Tim Ingold later takes what Heidegger produced and builds on it, not without concerns, yet with much analytical generosity building up an equally stimulating intellectual venture. Ingold pushes the notion of dwelling more broadly to include the various forms of life that humans *work with*, whether in the imagination or on the ground, to produce and bear meaning within the moving and changing currents of their lifeworlds. To Ingold, dwelling is about the “immersion” of beings in life, singly and together, and how they deploy their capacities of attention and response in their practices and experience. Dwelling here is intimately tied with movement as Ingold suggests that the essence of what it means to dwell is “to be embarked upon a movement along a way of life . . . The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming.” (ibid: 12).

Taking both Heidegger and Ingold further, and extending the imagination of how dwelling might be imagined, thought and theorized, I would like to add that it is also an act of creating a “footing”⁹ in the world by means of cultivating a shared promise of intimacy, like a place one can go back to, rest and then move forward from. Here friendship, even if

⁹ A term borrowed from Lauren Berlant (2016)

momentarily, acts as a space of mutual dwelling offering a respite or refuge from a world of instability, discontinuity and uncertainty while mediating the vastness of what feels like an impossible, confused and baffled being. The common thread that runs through the three practices that I will discuss below is how they have the capacity to perforate spatial and temporal boundaries. In the cigarette-smoking minute shared between two friends, in the tone of the friend's voice, in the sharing of personal experiences, stories and sentiments, in the various modes connection, closeness and intimacy realized between friends lies a firm promise of an affective space that will hold itself and hold those attached to it, like a rescue lifeboat.

Vignette dated July 2017: The cigarettes that interrupt, intersperse and accompany the train ride are an integral part of the experience. The cigarette makes you more familiar with the train, it forces you to move around and find a convenient smoking spot, which in turn makes you more familiar with that who shares this small space with you; the other smokers. You all end up there, sooner or later, for the very same reason. A cigarette break. An interlude, an intermission, a hiatus. The cigarette encounter, beginning with finding a spot until lighting the cigarette and starting the actual smoking allows for a brief moment/ space/ of solace.

Witness(ing)

"The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves" (Arendt 1998: 50)

Bearing witness is an active and ongoing act of being 'there', taking an actual part of the life of the friend whether closely or at a distance. Friends witness the changes and flows in each other's lives as well as currents and tides that their surrounding environment undergoes. The presence of other who sees what we see and hears what we hear, as Hannah Arendt beautifully writes in *The Human Condition* fulfills a particular grounding, as I have mentioned earlier, a footing that is found in the shared encounter of intimacy yet not necessarily tied to consistency or continuity of the surrounding urban physical and infrastructural environment. Witnessing here is not defined as a mere collective "watching", "seeing" or passively "staring" at what is out there

as it changes and becomes otherwise. Instead it is rather an active responding to the life of the other as it unfolds in a scene of “mattering” - making that which it engages with and responds to- something that matters, at least to the friend if not to anyone else. Also and at the same time, together friends witness the unmaking and remaking of the physical spaces they inhabit, and this involves multiple sequences of negotiations and questions on what to hold on to and what to let go of, and how. Particularly, in the dynamic and extremely fast paced changing cities like Cairo and Alexandria, we preserve perceptions of and attachments to places in the stories that we share. When the place becomes otherwise, part of the story remains in the accumulated knowledge between friends, in talks or experiences, and hence the place never totally disappears since another has witnessed it in the same way as I did. The ability to exercise witnessing as a form of care, where one leaps ahead, backward and forward for the other created a shared horizon of meaning and understanding rooted in their togetherness. There is a sense of relief in knowing that the friend had witnessed the city as I did, this street, this particular experience, there is an affirmation in the presence of that who will remember things as they were, to whom I do not have to prove something that is no longer, and I do not have make-believe aspirations for the things to come.

Catching up

“For if remembering does not make the past into an object, then nor does imagining make an object of the future. That is to say, to imagine is not to project the future, as a state of affairs distinct from the present. It is rather to catch a life that, in its hopes and dreams, has a way of running ahead of its moorings in the material world. Where it runs is beyond the horizon of our conceptualization. At this horizon, future and past are no longer distinguishable. They merge at the ends of longing, in a place where all imagining is remembering, and all remembering imagining. It is a place we perpetually dream of and strive for, but never reach.” (Ingold 2016: 13)

“A friendship is not based on the happenstance of sharing and passion, one that seems no more than a stroke of good luck. Rather, it also involves what we might call a tending to, in the sense that one tends to one's garden. . . This tending to a relationship involves a recognition of the role of the past, of the personal history of friends.” (May 2012: 74)

Catching up with friends can be seen as a mode of slow affective and attentive activity of “presencing”, a term coined by Ingold, which means an activity capable of bringing together past remembering and future imagining in the active act of telling in the here and now. Catching up occurs as a movement that happens in time but that also takes places in actual built environment or spaces, acts as an invitation to trust and an enactment of responsiveness. It is a kind of “telling” that reproduces spatial and temporal contexts of a past moment, planting them in a field of trust that is the friend. This kind of telling is different, as Todd May had previously argued, from acts of “saying”, “asserting” or putting claims out to the public as an individual occupying the same space and adding to the general stock of knowledge. In telling and being told, in the act of mutual following of lives lies an invitation to trust as a land vast enough to contain the messy details and chaotic happenings of lives, while also being flexible enough to accommodate potential gaps, cracks and interruptions. It does not follow a singular structure and it does not have an official know-how and hence it becomes specific to what the friends make of it and how they decide to perform it, or not.

Catching up by definition is to manage to reach a person who is ahead of you, yet in the intimate encounter of friendship it becomes more about attending to the friend, making yourself present to them so that they can allow them into our presence too. Drawing on Ingold (2016), catching up can an excellent example of what he describes as correspondence of lives. “In answering to one another, lifelines co-respond”, implying a necessary fluidity and resonance with the movement of the things to which it attends. He writes; “... that awareness is always

awareness with before it is ever awareness of. We can recognize a movement, and respond to it, before we ever fix it in our sights.” (ibid: 12)

Catching up between friends over time is an emergent symbolic picking up of pieces or fragments of life as-it-unfolds. In the simple acts of listening, paying attention and following the life of the friend, what seems like ordinary everyday practices become non-authoritarian and non-deterministic registers or resources that hold the possibility for preservation, recuperation and redemption. Building on Jane I. Guyer (2017); in those “ordinary practices” of sharing stories, every word that is uttered and story shared becomes part of a larger assemblage or collective archive of knowledge for ongoing life. The radical-ity of this archive of intimacy, companionship and co-existence lies in the rhythmic worlding it performs, each time friends take the time to do it. They recompose pasts and imagine futures to come, while strengthening the tie that binds them to each other and to the world. This archive pushes forth a possibility of re-inhabiting the present differently, “as it pulls us off the center of ourselves, allowing us to expend ourselves on behalf of the friend.” (May 2012: 80). Using small elements of continuing value from yesterday and recombining them in meaningful ways with new elements from today and tomorrow (Guyer 2017), composing alternative approaches to emergent yet unknown futures in specific times and places. Quoting from Luce Irigaray in her chapter on listening “In Almost Absolute Silence”, in the book *I Love to You* (1996):

“I am listening to you prepares the way for the not-yet-coded, for silence, for a space for existence, initiative, free intentionality, and support for your becoming.” (116-117)

Staying in Touch/ Synch

“Living compassionately, sharing in the suffering of the other, does not require anything like complete understanding (and might, in fact, necessitate the disruption of this very yearning). Rather, living compassionately requires

recognizing and facing our responsibility to the infinitude of the other, welcoming the stranger whose very existence is the possibility of touching and being touched, who gifts us with both the ability to respond and the longing for justice-to-come.”
(Barad 2012: 219)

In the year 2012, particularly in Ramadan one very famous TV commercial came out and immediately became the hit of the year. It was a 4-minute song directed by an aspiring young Egyptian filmmaker Ahmad Abdallah, filmed around different cities in Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria, Aswan, Port Said) about different modes of solidarity between people, for the larger cause which is being a part of Egypt as a nation. The scenes included friends in the streets, people sitting together in public cafes, fans in a football match, families at a rural wedding, Bedouins in the desert. The song intro goes as follows:

*For that we have got to be together
For that we share the same land
For tomorrow, which awaits
And does not want to break us apart*

The song attempted to produce a simplistic and frivolous narrative about the coherence of the conglomerate mass that is the “Egyptian” identity, however diverse; at the end there is a clear illustration that it does exist and that it can be captured. Regardless of how artistic, the song resembled a long national anthem in the ways in which it adhered and conformed to a monolithic singular narrative about patriotic love for the country and the necessary fraternal harmony between the fellow citizens. Friendship was brought up a couple of times in the song, promoted as the ideal social bond that strengthens, supports and pushes “forward” the collective, while also inciting hope that things will get better if they carry on together- stability has a higher chance to be accomplished. However, as I had thoroughly discussed in this chapter, living in an increasingly shifting environment requires a recasting of the social life in a way that is open to improvisation, not on positive well-identified and defined projections on the future. As Brian Massumi argues in his latest book *The Principle of Unrest* (2017), the obsession of the macro-

political involves thinking in terms of structured bounded ‘wholes’ or ‘unities’. The macro-political cannot function without inscribing boundaries that delineate criteria for eligibilities, to include, they also have to be to exclusion, and this mode of organization (from above) is fundamental to how the macro-political state defines the notion of the social field. Similar to what AbdouMalik Simone proposed in his article *Passing Things Along: (In)completing Infrastructure* (2015) by exploring the act of making “statements”, as a way of making something “known”, “visible”. Whether issued by the state or the residents themselves, whether to make a claim on a space or consolidate an identity, they end up acting as contracts that frame the conditions and the capacities of persons to be part of specific kinds of places and relationships. “Statements draw lines among those considered worthy, eligible, and common, and inscribe divides among bodies and spaces. Statements are lines of delivery and articulation; they seal deals, define memberships, and incite antagonisms.” (152). If they define people as coherent entities to be addressed, they also define the contours of spaces in which individuals can operate. Whereas on the micro-political level, back to Massumi, things are very different. He writes:

“At the micropolitical level there’s a multiplication of differentiations and a vagueness that’s not a simple lack of definition, but an overfullness with potential . . . There’s a fringe or periphery that goes out in all directions, full of tendencies that have not been actualized, but might be at another moment, under different conditions . . . So the micropolitical field is a constitutively open multiplicity populated by tendencies and potentials, not subjects or objects.”(2017: 104).

Without having to conform by an assigned position vis-à-vis an overarching cause, within the interstices of the life of intimacy there is a lived “belief in the world” (Deleuze 1995). This belief is sufficient to spark, instigate and engender “new space-times however small their surface or volume”. To stay-in-touch is to remain close, and I would like to add: without a mapped-out “plan”. To borrow a line from Chris Marker's astounding short video-essay; *2084*: “. . . but

exactly in this period of great truths, it's rather healthy to imagine other things. For example, one way of acquiring new certainties is to learn to doubt together".

In the mutual efforts for sustaining friendship in cities-in-motion, friendship manifests as a space in the public imaginary and also in our private lives that people can re-turn to. Far from being a utopia, this space can be described as a space "defined by relationality" (Bifo 2009: 195), allowing "virtual co-presence of potentials" (Massumi 2015: 5). I argue that the continuity, expansion and extension of the lines of friendship contribute to a particular ability, strength and courage to "shoulder the sky" (Guyer 2017: 99) together. Shouldering the sky does not have to be a project of systematic progress, elevation, or a structural development that sweeps the people off their feet. Yet its significance lies in the people's capacity to pass the day and carry their own weight while also in many ways composing and collaboratively creating "a common ground" for themselves and their friends to sustain their footing in the relationship and hence a part of their belief in the world. Friendship becomes a mode of practicing the ordinary, every-day, big and small ethics of re-creating a liveable life, for oneself as well as for others. It is a value, a vocation and a practice that is much about surprise and emergence of flows and attachments, as much as it is about repetition. It is about 'recognizing', 'seeing' and 'containing' the other without being overwhelmed by the event of friction, or intoxicated, destroyed or ruined by the uncertainty and fluidity of the relation. The fluidity inherent in the relationship of friendship is key and is crucial to the making and maintaining of the bond, imbuing it with an adaptability to unknown and unknowable futures. Creating infrastructures of sociality and intimacy is necessary in order to be able to confront, handle and perhaps challenge the top-down spatial alterations. Staying in touch can be seen as means to build "affective infrastructures" that respond to needs and desires for a different future as they help bring them into being.

The goal is to make an attempt in becoming and staying in touch/ synch, while being ready for the next phase of movement. To reclaim the “space” through and by and within friendship in happens in the social proximity of friends that hold outs the prospect of a world worth attaching to *that's something other than an old hope's bitter echo* (Berlant 2017). Here, the infrastructure of the social or friendship emerges within, and takes on the dynamics of an open plan. That is we need to cultivate a skill at transforming that which separates or is aimed at separating can to make it a space where we can connect. This can be applied both spatially, converting spaces from the capitalist sanitary alienating zones to zones of shared encounters, as well as temporally, as the common memories and repetitive encounters can offer the ground of a relationship embedded in similar habits or values.



Address
by Sohrab Seperhi (1979)¹⁰

“Where is the friend’s house?”
Horseman asked by twilight and,
The sky paused.

¹⁰ http://www.perlit.sailorsite.net/Mahvash/sohrab_neshani.html

The passerby presented sands, the branch of light that he had in mouth
And pointed to a poplar tree and said:

“Before reaching the tree,
There is a garden alley that is greener than God’s sleep
And in it, love is as blue as the feathers of honesty.
Go to the end of the alley which stops at the back of adolescence.
Then turn to the flower of loneliness,
Two steps short of reaching the flower,
Stay by the fountain of eternal myth of earth
And you feel a transparent fear.
And in the fluid sincerity of the air, you will hear a scratch:
You will see a child
Who has gone up the pine tree, to grab a bird from the nest of light
And you ask him
Where the friend’s house is.”

Translated by Mahvash Shahegh

(4)

That it is From Your Eye that I find Myself: The Making of Friendship, The Making of Selves

Brown: So friendship is the soil out of which one has to walk in the larger world.

Illich: I wish it were the soil. I wish there were still soil to it. And it is not friendship unless there is something a little bit dirty to it. Dirty you don't say in English. You know, dirt in the good sense. Earthy.

Brown: Fleshy.

Illich: Because the eyes are fleshy. That image in there, in your pupilla, of me is fleshy.

Ivan Illich with Jerry Brown We the People, KPFA - March 22, 1996¹¹

Request

*I know another person's thought
and who I am, I know that not.
My vision is too close to me -
I am not what I saw and see.
I'd use myself more perfectly
if I could move away from me.
Yet not so distant as my foe!
My closest friend's too far off, no –
give me instead the middle ground!
Do you surmise what I propound?
(Nietzsche 2001: 15, 16)*

¹¹ http://www.wtp.org/archive/transcripts/ivan_illich_jerry.html

In this chapter I am interested in exploring the cracks that friendships undergo, the moments where precisely each friend is opened-up, made vulnerable by the revelations that emerge in the encounter of friendship, or rather in the ruptures of friendship. By drawing on experiences, Egyptian media art works as well as existent literature on friendship, I wish to explore the simultaneous making and breaking of notions of the self when challenged, disturbed or confused by the intimacy shared and accumulated between two or more friends. How do our friends contribute to the processes of re-assessing one's own self, whether they help unmake or remake one's own view of oneself? Do our friends make us see 'ourselves' better or differently? What transformative potential does friendship have, in terms of one's character? Historically, conceptions and imaginaries around the 'good' person assume that s/he shall make a 'good' friend. I am interested in how those ties and links are made and unmade in the life experiences of making and losing friends. I argue that those assumptions about the goodness of a person being integral to the standards of what constitutes a good friend no longer hold, because intimacy, as I will discuss below, entails a set of complicated ventures, interactions and intersubjectivities, processes of growth and decay, that constantly rework and reconfigure the clear cut definitions of and binaries between the self and the other, in that case; the friend.

By drawing on an Egyptian film made in 2005 and another TV series that came out in Ramadan 2017, I am interested in exploring how friends as 'figures' were depicted in the Egyptian drama, and what aspects of the relationship of friendship were highlighted, stressed and mobilized. Inspired by Lauren Berlant, I believe that the analysis of artworks across 'mass media', whether films, TV ads and TV series can act as an important sites or fields for tracking 'repetitions'; gestures and scenes of the present as a 'mediated affect' (Berlant 2011: 4). I found Berlant's methodology of reading and tracking patterns and repetitions across different aesthetic

and social contexts to be useful to trace and highlight the ways in which the affective expressions circulated in the different contemporary artworks (literature, film, poetry, etc.) embed and also enunciate and translate ‘structures of feeling’ central to the conceptualization of the everyday life and the pressures of the present moment on “the subject’s sensorium” (2011: 9). Berlant notes how literary or filmic moments can give voice to particular “organized but unspoken” arrangements of experience; “a residue of common historical experience sensed but not spoken in a social formation.” (ibid: 65). I argue that the depiction of the figure of the ‘friend’ in the public media is in many ways becoming more ‘imperfect’ and ‘flawed’ whereby the attempts at portraying friends are gently unclenching their grip on the static classifications of what constitutes either a “good” or a “bad” friend. The two media works I have chosen particularly revolve around the lives of two or more friends, though the works themselves are not typically about friendship. They rather follow friends as life happens to them, as individuals and also as a group, and through them along with ethnographic fragments, I am hoping to be able trace how currently, the bond of friendship can be said to be obviously extending beyond the ancient Greek concept of ‘philos’. I would like to take in and on Deleuze’s philosophical engagement with and re-turn to friendship by the terms he used; “*Distress*”. “*Amnesia*”, “*Aphasia*” in “*What is Philosophy?*” (1991), and also in his correspondence on the theme of friendship with Dionys Mascolo.

I. On Naked Personalities and Difficult Truths

Unless we are led back to the "Friend," but after an ordeal that is too powerful, an inexpressible catastrophe, and so in yet another new sense, in a mutual distress, a mutual weariness that forms a new right of thought (Socrates becomes Jewish). Not two friends who communicate and recall the past together but, on the contrary, who suffer an amnesia or aphasia capable of splitting thought, of dividing it in itself. Personae proliferate and branch off, jostle one another and replace each other:’ (1991: 71)

When someone's eyes turn to me, it is other light sources they seek, glowing in the light, to extend the depth of light in which he or she circulates. Sometimes, to be sure, the other looks to me to receive from me the image of what my eyes have seen; the other I meet on the Himalayan trek asks of me if I have seen the path to the grand visions that eyes are made to see.
(Lingis 1994: 214)

The famous novelist, poet, literary critic and academic C.S. Lewis had contributed a short significant essay in *Friendship: A Philosophical reader* published in 1993 entitled Friendship—The Least Necessary Love. The essay also happens to be an excerpt from his longer and more detailed discussion of friendship in his book *The Four Loves* (1960). The essay's title captures one of the main arguments that Lewis attempted to propose, which is that friendship is not a love based on or driven by biological instincts, "there is nothing throaty about it; nothing that quickens the pulse or turns you red and pale." (40). Lewis describes the affection that comes with and from friendship as tranquil, unlike 'Eros'; it does not quicken the heart or rack the nerves or charge one's brain with negative or consuming intensity. Unlike lovers who stand face to face, friends in Lewis's eyes stand side by side in a scene of proximity and nearness. A friend is neither jealous nor needy, it is a relationship of "disentangled, or stripped minds . . . naked personalities" (44). From this understanding springs the question: "'Do you see the same truth?'" Or at least, "'Do you care about the same truth?'" (42). I find that Lewis's conception of friendship poses an interesting thought; whereby he proposes that the birth of friendship takes place at the moment "when one man says to another 'what? You too? I thought I was the only one.'" (42) This is, in other words, a moment of a revelation of a certain commonness that breaks the isolation, the estrangement of singularity. He writes; "Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)" (41, 42). Yet at the same time this

moment/experience of commonness, which initially brought two or more persons together may and most probably does very well fade over time, and although friends need to keep a balanced appreciation and admiration for one other, according to Lewis they must be careful not to become a “mutual admiration society” (47) that exists just for the sake of something that “was” in the past and no longer “is”. There is some truth to the idea that Lewis proposes I think yet I think that it lacks the sufficient consideration needed to the complexity, the irregularity, and unpredictability inherent in processes of growth and change. That is, the enchantment of the moment when we find another person who sees and cares about the same ‘truth’ as us, is a brief occurrence that either develops into friendship- which in its turn will not be free of interruptions, disagreements and divergences- or will wither by the withering of the initial spark or impulse of commonality. As we grow up, there is an inevitability to the changes that occur inside as well as outside us. While some experiences, habits, contexts preserve their shape and form, others fade or become less relevant. Also, there is nothing fixed or naturally for-ever about the particular traits, tendencies, characteristics, attitudes and beliefs that we hold and embody from young age. The unpredictability of life stands also for the unpredictability of the personal growth of human beings, which directly affects how they see themselves and how they see others in the world, and basically shapes and reshapes the kind of friends or intimate others that they desire or imagine themselves with. Hence the sustenance of friendship over time, I argue, depends mainly on whether both friends are ‘able’ and ‘willing’ to re-produce themselves and re-create their friendship differently.

The least necessary love that is love between friends is indeed non-biological and certainly not a force majeure, yet one could say that it is precisely this non-necessity that renders its creation and maintenance difficult, daring and complex. For that reason I believe it would be

incredibly useful to put Deleuze and Guattari in conversation with C.S. Lewis, in a discussion on friendship. Other than being two of the most key figures and influential thinkers/ philosophers of the twentieth century, Deleuze and Guattari together exhibited and enacted a friendship in life and in thinking (eventually manifested in writing) that has continued to inspire generations of readers around the world.

In their innovative and intellectually stimulating text “What is Philosophy?” Deleuze and Guattari offer us a fresh reconceptualization of friendship as a concept and the friend as a figure. They take up the important question of ‘the friend’, which is the original ground upon which the Western *philosophy* first built itself. The task was and still is important, to evoke and perhaps capture the failures of the earlier political ideas of friendship understood as democratic consensus of friends or equals, what a ‘friend’ signified at the time of the Greeks no longer designated a ‘living category’. Deleuze and Guattari speak from a point where the ideal and utopian Greek vision of friendship based on equality, virtue and clear constant and consistent communication had already been obscured by capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari respond to the classic Greek model of friendship in such a manner that is broader, deeper, and certainly beyond the peaceful state of consensus and equality, introducing the implicit potentials of hostility, betrayal, distress, distrust that exist between friends. They establish the figure of the “conceptual personae”, in their own words:

“Or again, if we say that a conceptual persona is the Friend, or that he is the Judge or the Legislator, we are no longer concerned with private, public, or legal status but with that which belongs by right to thought and only to thought. Stammerer, friend, or judge do not lose their concrete existence but, on the contrary, take on a new one as thought's internal conditions for its real exercise with this or that conceptual persona. This is not two friends who engage in thought; rather, it is thought itself that requires the thinker to be a friend so that thought is divided up within itself and can be exercised. It is thought itself which requires this division of thought between friends. These are no longer empirical,

psychological, and social determinations, still less abstractions, but intercessors, crystals, or seeds of thought.” (1991: 69)

The friend’s presence in this view is “intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself, a living category, a transcendental lived reality” (3). Deleuze and Guattari thus arrive at an account of the friend as thought divided within itself hence forming the possibility of thinking as a process or a conversation, (Lambert 2008: 48). Yet unlike the Greek philosophers view, this sort of conversation is not merely around a certain “entity”, an essence or an essential truth that needs to be proven right or conquered, but rather “going through trials with that person like aphasia and amnesia that are necessary for any thinking” (Deleuze 1988: 329).

A deeper investigation of the amnesia and aphasia of Deleuze had been carried out by the prominent philosopher and literary theorist Gregg Lambert. In *Deleuze and the Political Ontology of ‘The Friend’* (Philos) (2008) Lambert traces the notion of ‘catastrophe’ as proposed by Deleuze, as the thing that evokes and tests the concreteness of the situation of friendship. This catastrophe introduces the concept of aphasia and amnesia between friends. Aphasia by definition is a communication disorder, it does not clinically impair the person’s intelligence, yet it gets in the way of the person’s ability to speak oneself, to find the right words to say what one means. As a term used to describe a certain state within friendship, perhaps one can metaphorically recount it as the lag, the paralysis one feels when one cannot find a common ground with the friend upon which to speak. In Lambert’s words; “Aphasia is not determined here by the simple form of strife or conflict that causes silence, as when ‘friends don’t speak with one another’, but refers to a more fundamental experience of the loss of a common language of friendship” (43) Whereas on Amnesia he writes: “Amnesia must be understood as more extreme than the simple forgetfulness that occurs ‘between friends’, as when they are separated by distance or time . . . Normal conceptions of friendship are usually bordered by these conditions

of permanence and volatility, and they are part of what distinguishes ‘the friend’ from other social relationships, such as the relationship with the stranger, the member of the family or the mere acquaintance. (What is particular to the relationship that defines ‘the friend’ is a character of becoming that does not seem to belong to these other relationships.) However, the experience of real amnesia or aphasia can never be imagined to belong to friendship, unless by the intervention of some catastrophe or by an ‘outside’ force that first appears as violence” (Lambert 2008: 43). Lambert sheds light on the Deleuzian contribution with or rather development of the Greek concept of friendship, by emphasizing the radical perspectives that Deleuze suggested as becoming fundamental to thinking and theorizing friendship. The possibilities of betrayal and distress or the exhaustion of friendship is something that Deleuze puts forward as integral to friendship, whereby the tranquil state of consensus and commonality is always co-existent with the loom of an outbreak of a difference that it cannot pacify, repress, or through which it cannot communicate (Lambert 2008: 39). Here, the Deleuzian discourse on friendship offers a mode to imagine the relationship beyond the narrow confines of the pre-determined likes and similarities as the sole basis for proximity and intimacy.

II. Jumana and Yasmine: We Hide and We Seek (Each Other)

“Enemies can’t break your spirit, only friends can” (Roy: 2017)

In 2005, the acclaimed Egyptian filmmaker and screenwriter Mohammed Khan made yet another film that revolves around the lifeworlds of two friends. Khan was one of the most prominent directors in Egypt in the 1980s; one pillar of a generation of filmmakers who were focused on depicting Egypt on screen, place and people, in cinematic realism. Moreover, Khan apparently had a very particular passion for and appreciation of friendship, always portrayed from within the context of the larger atmosphere in which it is born. For example; Dreams of

Hind and Camelia (*Ahlam Hind wa Kamilya*), a poignant story that Khan created in 1988 of two female maids in Cairo and their common struggle in making and sustaining a life. Throughout the films they become friends, also in various ways, they become each other's reason and hope for emancipation and well-being. *Downtown Girls* (*Banat Wust el Balad*) is another film by Khan that came out in 2005 which features the story of two working class young women who find and be-friend each other in the metro in Cairo. They come from different, lower-middle class neighborhoods in Cairo, one of them; Yasmine, works in a beauty salon (*coiffeur*) and the other; Jumana, works in a lingerie shop. Both the beauty salon and the shop lie in the downtown area of Cairo. Khan situates the story within a real *mise-en-scène* of the particular historical, social, cultural and economic moment of 2005 in Cairo, Egypt. Our protagonists are in their mid-twenties and full of life. Yasmine and Jumana are not crushed by difficulties of their jobs, households, or even by their obviously long commute to and from work. Early on in the film, we are able to track the two women's fantasies, dreams and personal ambitions but also sense the tensions that are clearly ingrained and entrenched in their friendship as a result of their criss-crossing, overlapping dreams. Yasmine and Jumana do live in relatively stable households with their families, but I describe them as "relatively stable" because they only seem "normal" from the outside. Jumana is the only member of the family still living at the family's house with the mother, who happens to be suffering from late-stage Alzheimer and who constantly hallucinates, after the husband passed away and the other daughter (Jumana's sister) got married and settled somewhere abroad with her husband. As for Yasmine, she lives in a typical lower middle class Egyptian household with her mother, younger brother and father who is mostly away as he works as a train driver. Things are apparently happy and tight in Yasmine's family, until her father confesses to her and her only that he is married to another woman and has two other kids and

awaiting a new baby. The two young women are filled with dreams of a different life. Each one dreams of the handsome, successful, and financially well-off knight in shining armor that shall sweep her off her feet. They hold multiple and sometimes rough and contradictory feelings for each other, at the moment when they realize the threat of competition between them, or when their fantasies seem to be so common that one of them has to let go, or step aside, for the other to win. At many moments of the film, Jumana wonders loudly; "who do you think will get married first?" The film does zoom into the everyday struggles that both women face on daily basis, whether they take place at their homes with their families, or at their workplaces with their bosses, or even in the street/metro. For Khan, the mundane is everything. He reveals in full detail representations of the emotional, psychological and sometimes physical violence that the women are exposed to, but only share with each other. In those moments of relativity, what is being shared, exchanged and negotiated are affective narratives that carry the weight of distress, stuckedness, weariness, burdensome and exhaustion, while also being narratives about why they decide/ or not endure this "cruel" life- according to how the subjects themselves perceive it. Here, "ordinary becomes an archive and a treasure trove for finding possible elements for ongoing life ", as Jane Guyer had argued, "and may be the ground on which narrative and elemental assemblage become quite different, or perhaps complementary or coexisting in composing approaches to an emergent, but unknown, future, in specific times and places" (2017: 92). The fragments of the everyday life, the situations, the mundane complexity and the complex mundanity is what generates the "fragments of redemption", or moments of recuperation that allows people affirm the possibility of existence among chaos and ruination.

For example, both Yasmine and Jumana go through experiences that had direct, violent and forced intervention with their bodies. One day while Yasmine is getting prepared for work,

her brother suddenly erupts and explodes, that he has become the man of the house and that he will not let her go to work wearing this particular outfit (a cotton t-shirt and a tight jeans). And while the mother smokes her cigarettes hiding in the bathroom, Yasmine keeps her pack in the bag and is not ashamed of smoking in public. Her brother snatches her bag and threatens that he will lock her in if she does not obey him and change her outfit. After an aggressive and loud argument, Yasmine leaves the house without the bag. In most of Khan's films we see that the subjects tend to end up sitting, waiting, resting on the stairs and wait for things to unfold. What will happen as a result of the act of waiting on the stairs in liminality is unknown and always open, but something always takes flight from that point. By point here I mean the limit reached; that "*we refuse to continue on this way*" (McGranahan 2016: 320). In this story, Yasmine's young sister, going to school brings Yasmine's bag along and gives it to her on the stairs. She sits tenderly next to her and kisses her on the cheek. Yasmine goes to work, and sleeps over at the salon that night. Jumana gets concerned as she doesn't find Yasmine, as she usually does in the metro, she calls her repeatedly and they eventually meet in their usual spot; the small café in downtown. In this encounter, we see how Yasmine narrates the seemingly traumatizing morning experience with her brother to Jumana but in an affective, highly intense, deeply personal and emotionally charged language. After describing the details of the incident, Yasmine recounts;

"You know, when Yasser (her younger brother) snatched my bag and turned it upside down and everything fell on the table, I felt I was naked.. I felt that what he's telling me is that I have no rights whatsoever... that nothing is mine to claim... do you understand?"

At this point the situation itself had already passed and Yasmine's brother had already made peace with her and apologized. However, the short yet revealing conversation between the two friends revealed and unearthed the thing that most powerfully hit Yasmine at her core. With her closest friend, Yasmine opened about how she had made sense of that incident, how it

affected and offended her, and at the background lies a wish for being understood, acknowledged, contained and perhaps re-paired, re-covered and recuperated.

Few days later Jumana faces an equal if not more brutal incident in the lingerie shop where she works. She was seen by her boss stealing a bra that she had really liked but most probably cannot afford. The boss saw her but did not confront her, she rather waited till the work-day was over then as Jumana was getting ready to go home, she yelled at her ordering her to get into the fitting room and "take off all her clothes", so that she can make sure Jumana had not stolen anything else. Jumana burst into tears, and promised that she hadn't stolen anything else and that she will not do this again, yet the boss insisted. Jumana had to go into the fitting room, leaving the door open, and strip all her clothes off to show the lady that nothing else is taken from the shop. She breaks down in tears in the fitting room, naked, as the boss shouts and screams asking her to never step in the shop again.

As both friends share those two stories with each other, and whether they eventually help each other out of it, is the thing that unfolds throughout the film, always in unpredictability and perhaps with a little bit of risk. The ways in which subjects narrate their experiences of "nakedness" and deep sense of "vulnerability" to the 'friend', have their own language of common entanglement and constructs a particular register of the world, one that I argue is different from the other languages, whether personal or political. This language contains elements of genuine honesty and openness, but also guilt, confusion if not a sense of doubt about what and who one really is and how to best narrate oneself in the world. Experiences of vulnerability are undergone differently by both friends and produce different feelings and fears of weakness and failure to become 'good' and 'real' persons. The sharing and common pouring

of narratives continue, until the two friends stand, literally, in front of each other and mirror each other's flaws and failings.

Later comes a moment in the film where the friendship between Juamana and Yasmine is put to test. Mainly because of a lie that Yasmine had started early on in the film, as she made up a fake story about her and Jumana's names, occupations and life conditions to two young men they had met in the metro, and were trying to impress. The fake story eventually got out of their control, and as much as Yasmine and Jumana originally meant no harm, neither to themselves and each other nor to anyone else, they ended up getting caught in a trap where one of them had to uncover the truth to the men by showing the other's 'truth'. Yasmine's made up story falls apart when the two young men, as well as Jumana, show up at the studio where she was supposed to act the persona she had pretended to be. She had told the men that she has a beautiful voice, and that she is member of a ladies choir band. She arranged with an actual member of a band to accompany her on one of the auditions, and pretend she is part of the band while her microphone would be closed. She invited the man whom she was playing the trick on, who brought his friend who brought Jumana. The three stood to watch Yasmine from behind the glass door. And while Yasmine gets into the song's mood and beat, and starts singing with the other ladies, confidently as she thinks the microphone is not working, it actually was. The song starts to fade and Yasmine continued singing not knowing that her voice was being heard by everyone who was there. The young men start laughing hysterically, then Jumana after some hesitation, laughs at her as well then stops and looks at Yasmine in guilt as she starts crying when she finds out that the truth of her ugly voice had been uncovered.

The scene is followed by the most intense encounter that happens in the film, which is the conflict between Jumana and Yasmine, and at the same time, a fierce unraveling of certain truths

about each friend, not only as a friend, but also as a person. The setting is the metro station late at night and hence empty, with the two of them facing each other, not side by side looking ahead as usual. The dispute starts with blame, when Yasmine wonders how could her friend laugh at her 'truth' like strangers, and why she could not save her from embarrassment and point out to her that the microphone was working. How could she Jumana let the world see, listen and have access to Yasmine's truth which she had deliberately hid? How could she, even if momentarily, be a part of the world's cruelty, humiliation, shaming? Jumana defends herself by saying that she had no other choice, she did not sign up for the lie from the start, and that Yasmine should take responsibility for the consequences of her choices. Both of them start to throw accusations at each other of not having been a good friend after all, while at the same time, illuminating dark aspects of each other's personalities as individuals. They know each other so well, they know each other's imperfections, vulnerabilities, points of weakness, that they know how to shock each other only by revealing each other's true selves, by an act of mirroring, friends can in this way destroy the masks and/or shields that we construct in order to get by in life among others. This moment of rupture entails disclosures and revelations, their depth varies with the depth and longevity of the friendship itself, and always holds the potential for a "making" of a more powerful and strong bond, or a complete break of the bond of friendship, at least until the people themselves decide, perhaps at a later point in life, to re-create a point of contact.

"You are the one who decides when to lie and when to confess, you are the one who gets to make all the decisions? What am I, then? The 'friend' of the heroine? The sidekick who follows you like a shadow?"

For the first time in the film, the camera moves in disturbance, filming the confrontation as it happens between the two friends from the side of each one, separately. They now face each other with questions about how they truly see each other and whether their "truths", that have always existed, will become a barrier to the continuity of their friendship or have actually an

acceptance and a recognition of the individual flaws always been there, at a level deeper than the mutual admiration and encouragement. For the first time, Jumana and Yasmine stand on the opposing platforms, not looking at each other, not smiling at each other and joking, for each has drowned in the weight of what had just been unveiled. The question poses a dilemma within each and ever deep intimate friendship, although the moment of rupture may and may not come, yet always remains a looming possibility. If it does come, the consequences are always up to the friends themselves, about what they can bear to know, and bear to live with, about both themselves and each other.





III. “Are you pure air and solitude and bread and medicine to your friend¹²?”

After Jumana and Yasmine each arrive at her home and spend a sleepless night, they bump into each other the day after, as usual, in the metro. One is already inside when the other catches the metro, they exchange looks that are at first tense and carrying multiple interpretations. Some of which are blame, uncertainty, but the carrying on with the eye- contact mostly implies a mutual desire for rekindling. They keep exchanging looks that turn over the course of few seconds tender and friendly, they then begin smiling at each other, and eventually they begin to laugh, together but at a distance. They stand up and hug, yet this re-union is not to be understood as a blank new page. If friends decide to start over, they do from where they broke. There is no point of un-knowing what friends know and learn about each other, especially in the case of Jumana and Yasmine, the film had closely displayed their clash in full detail, so that as audience we can stand on the edge of the abyss as they did. The coming back together of friends is always loaded with, not free of, the causes of the conflict or temporary separation. The acceptance of each becoming again a friend must be mutual, and must be a process of making peace with the truths that had been uncovered about oneself in the eye of the friend, the truths

¹² Thus Spoke Zarathustra 41

realized about the friendship, and the truths that lie in the heart of the friend, no matter how unacceptable they might have seemed initially. This narrative become clear to us as audience, however briefly, in the film's ending. The film ends with a voice-over narration by Yasmine, who once voiced her insecurity about being the heroine's sidekick, now moving beyond this tension towards a bigger question. "*Hanefdal sohab?* (are we going to keep being friends?)" Yasmine and Jumana both ask each other as Jumana is wearing the wedding gown and is getting married to the man of her dreams. They both say " *'ala-tool* (forever)" and kiss each other tenderly on the cheek.



Jumana now narrates the ending, while Yasmine narrated the beginning of the film. It is few years after and Jumana has become a flight attendant, she is over the phone arranging to meet with someone in the metro, and we find Yasmine, now a mother of a child who runs to Jumana and sits on her lap as the metro starts to move. Yasmine stares out of the window and says "You know what... I miss Downtown". Downtown here stands for not only the neighborhood and the space where their friendship was born and practiced and also almost broken, but also the time in their lives in which all of this happened. Their friendship lasted and

managed to survive “downtown”, yet it is precisely that the friend she lived “downtown” with can know and understand exactly what this longing is for and what it carries. Downtown here is a place that stands for something bigger than itself, it represents not only the streets which they walked together and grew up together, but also a time in which they were more young, free and full of desire and hunger for life.

IV. Friendship Makes and Friendship Breaks: Archives of Flesh and Blood

Sea Canes

*Half my friends are dead.
I will make you new ones, said earth.
No, give me them back, as they were, instead,
with faults and all, I cried.*

*Tonight I can snatch their talk
from the faint surf's drone
through the canes, but I cannot walk*

*on the moonlit leaves of ocean
down that white road alone,
or float with the dreaming motion*

*of owls leaving earth's load.
O earth, the number of friends you keep
exceeds those left to be loved.*

*The sea canes by the cliff flash green and silver;
they were the seraph lances of my faith,
but out of what is lost grows something stronger*

*that has the rational radiance of stone,
enduring moonlight, further than despair,
strong as the wind, that through dividing canes*

*brings those we love before us, as they were,
with faults and all, not nobler, just there.*

~ Derek Walcott

Friendship can be described as a mode of practicing the ordinary, every-day, big and small ethics of re-creating a livable life, for oneself as well as for others. It is a value, a vocation

and a practice that is much about surprise and emergence of flows and attachments, as much as it is about repetition and working with what is there. It is about 'recognizing', 'seeing' and if possible 'containing' the other, as they are, without being overwhelmed by the event of friction, intoxicated, destroyed or ruined by the uncertainty and fluidity of the relation. At the end of the day, friendship can and does fail at many instances and for many people. Yet the kind of friendship; sociability and/or relatedness that I have explored here does not aim for or entail neither pure utopia nor pure violence, and is hardly ever a project thought-of as for-ever. The fluidity inherent in the relationship of friendship is key and is crucial to the making and maintaining of the bond, and more importantly, for the re-creation of the friends themselves as they grow and change. Returning to Downtown Girls finale, the question of “Hanefdal sohab?” acted more like an epiphany, a question that contains the answer within in yet holds the space of openness for different answers or unfoldings. It poses an open bet on the future, like all true friendships it remains an encounter open to possibilities of life or death. This openness I argue is specific and fundamental to friendship, and I believe is important to theorize as one of the main radical potentialities friendship can offer. I believe that clash or the encounter of critical confrontation between friends is generative and critical because it is a threshold where the past, or whatever happened before it, and the future or what might entail the encounter, are carefully weighed and contemplated by the friends in order for a re-configuration of some sort to take place.

Near the end of 2017 I received a number of Facebook messages and tags from friends, as well as e-mails, sharing with me the link to a recent article that deals with friendship. The article, I have later found, is indeed beautifully written. In their interesting analysis, Bergman and Montgomery (2017) draw on an extensive range of sources, from Hobbes to Nietzsche to

The Invisible Community, the authors try to emphasize the radical freedom offered by friendship seen as an open-ended becoming. They begin by tracing the linguistic root of the word “friend” and they start by identifying how the word shares the same Indo-European root as “Freedom”; “**fri*, or **pri*, meaning “love.” Expanding on this argument, which has also been discussed by The Invisible Community, the authors ground their understanding in affect theory as it allows and enacts an attunement to the shifting capacities and openness of bodies and situations, hence it become more suitable as a lens from which to examine an active, ongoing and fluid relation like friendship- one that is always “in the middle”. Over all, Bergman and Montgomery aim to substantiate a solid argument about the generativity of the elusiveness of friendship, and the freedom that friendship entails and enacts. On one hand they discuss the capacity of friendship to empower people to be comfortable with who they are, even undo the ways in which they internalized notions of shame, doubt and insecurity and the “depleting patterns ingrained by capitalism and other forces of oppression” (6). On the other hand, they also maintain that intimacy and closeness can always possibly fire back and act as sources of oppression, coercion and manipulation themselves. They leave us on a brief note on “difference”, how it can sometimes be of a positive transformative effect as starting points for “growth of something new”. However, I believe the authors fail to give sufficient consideration to the real-life ambiguity of personal relationships and whether all what is lacking is the “freedom” to make or break the toxic patterns. At the last page of their article they write: “To turn friendship into a solution or a goal is to erase the form of freedom we are getting at, which is an open-ended capacity to transform relationships.” (9). However, isn’t this a utopian statement in itself? Don’t we in one way or another also seek a solution in and through our friendships? Don’t we somehow end up needing, wishing, counting and relying on the friendships in our lives to

represent solidity, concreteness and permanence, at least as much as we have invested in the friendship? My concern is that the tight coupling of the notions of freedom and openness to change with friendship might at some point lead to an over burdening of friendship as a relationship with no rules, no obligations and undermine the role that commitment plays in keeping friendships alive and going. Like any other social relationship, friendship does require a serious amount of effort to 'abide' and live on. I would perhaps shift or develop to the argument made by Bergman and Montgomery about the interconnection between friendship and resistance, by adding that sometimes friendship turns bitter or toxic, but to be free does not necessarily entail a clear identification of toxicity and hence killing it. Sometimes friendship goes on and endures, not because it empowers and supports, but despite the fact that it does not. In what follows I will elaborate on this view by briefly analyzing a recent Egyptian TV series that had been highly praised by viewers and critics for the fresh, timely and true-to-life characters and relationships it brings to life.

V. To be Answerable, One has to be able to Answer

Haza al-Masaa (2017) represented a striking leap in the Egyptian drama scene, not because of the originality of the plot, but rather because the authenticity of the characters and their messy, chaotic and at many times contradictory behaviors, sentiments and life choices. The writing of the characters took seriously the nuisances that cast gloom over almost all sorts of social relationships; whether we are dealing with a married couple, family members, or friends. The series script is a product of a writing workshop that included 5 persons, and I believe that the group or the collective writing immensely enhanced the richness of the final artistic production; the 30 episodes of 45-minutes that showed on Egyptian TV throughout Ramadan 2017. The

series made an instant splash on social media and on other media platforms, and was one of the most watched and most highly rated among the many TV works produced for Ramadan.

Two of the main characters of the series are two young men whom we learn have grown up together as best friends, however, they are two very different characters. As audience we can see that they have a history, rather a complex one but we don't have much access to it, we enter the story in the middle and somehow before the storm. The series deserves a long analysis which I believe must be developed in a separate essay, but for the purpose of my argument here I wish to convey how the series managed to dare to present us with a different imagination of friendship, one that is different in the sense that it is thicker and bolder than the usual versions and representations of friendship that appear on Egyptian public media. Samir, as we get to know him, is kind, polite, responsible, well educated, well dressed, emotional, reserved and is very diligent in his job. Sony works in a mobile shop, is a hacker who spies on people's personal phones for fun, and sometimes exploits them in return, womanizer, trouble maker, witty, pretty much a typical villain. But the brilliance of the series lies exactly in the fact that he is not a typical villain, he is a person with flaws, who causes much damage to himself and to those around him, including if not mostly to his best friend Samir, yet he constantly eludes the category of the "bad" person or the "bad" friend. Perhaps because the character is very smart, he confuses everyone by not allowing himself to be simply and bluntly categorized as one thing or the other. Sony loves Samir, but although they shared a similar history they do not share a corresponding present. Samir quit the hobby or rather profession of digital hacking and cyber bullying after he had exposed the secret life of one of his friends' wives to him and caused her murder. At some point Samir dropped this loop while Sony took it further. Samir developed other things in life, such as a more stable career while Sony remained the same, he also

developed a potential romance with a young woman while Sony only attracted women by threatening them to disclose their personal pictures publicly on the Internet and for everyone to see. It becomes obvious at some point in the series that the choices each friend made individually did not only affect the life of the person and the person alone, but also his friendship with the other.

When the drama escalates and we reach an intense conflict between the two friends, it is a malicious confrontation that erupts like a volcano. Like Jumana and Yasmine, the two friends face each other, both physically and metaphorically. The encounter takes place in an old and empty film theatre, which they usually hanged out in and used as their secret spot. They face each other in the corridor between the seats, while the young brother (Treika) stood between them trying to curb the heat of the situation. Again, something repeats itself in the moment of confrontation between close friends, they bring out each other's truths placing them on on the table, ones that are dangerous and painful. When Samir begins the fight by blaming Sony for the amount of troubles he has been causing to everyone, including a young woman they both happened to like, Sony does not try to de-criminalize himself but rather he reminds Samir that he used to be like him too, and that he had probably caused worse troubles. He also expresses that they are still 'friends' is not based on a peaceful, clear or innocent journey. Defending himself or making himself clear, Sony tells Samir that he is just like him, if not worse, but that the problem is he does not wish to be true to that, to himself or to other people about who he truly is. As audience we know for a fact that Samir changed, and did his best to become a better person, perhaps automatically wanted to erase previous versions of himself whom he is somehow ashamed of and burdened with guilt towards. Yet friendship is "an archive of flesh and blood" (as my friend Hythm el-Wardany once wrote to me), whereby the histories of "us" as individuals

as well as friends, over different periods of time, is preserved quite differently that it is in any other relationship.



To be more specific, the renderings of our lives as they exist within our old and close friends variously constitute archives of experiences, both big and small, inscribed in informal languages and codes of intimacy between friends. Those unofficial, unorthodox and "thrown-together" archives of being and becoming eventually compose a very different, precious and valuable reservoirs that hold what the friends as persons once were, what they currently are, and

a sense of what they might become. Perhaps not free of judgment, but certainly the good friend is the one who "re-members" and s/he is the one who I can count on to recall, re-cite and re-narrate my life for me. Sometimes with accuracy other times with bias, at times illuminating certain aspects while shadowing others, this archive does not aim at accreditation or validation of any kind while it is in the making, and it is tremendously interesting to think about the moments in which there comes an urge to bring to light parts of it for purposes of defending an image of oneself or an image of the friendship itself.

"A friendship is not based on the happenstance of sharing and passion, one that seems no more than a stroke of good luck. Rather, it also involves what we might call a tending to, in the sense that one tends to one's garden. . . This tending to a relationship involves a recognition of the role of the past, of the personal history of friends." (May 2012: 74)

I argue that the keeping of this entanglement going constitutes, in many ways, a history of friends' own making. I have argued throughout the chapter, by following Jumana, Yasmine, Samir and Sony that for friends, the continuity or the flow of the relationship depends mainly on the extent to which friends are able to not merely re-turn to a singular truth or essence that had brought them together, but rather recreate new territories of connectedness and realms of relatedness and empathy. I want to say that friendship thus enables a space of dwelling in the sense that the friend continuously performs, if allowed, an act of "witnessing" to the life of the other. And "giving and receiving, wherein lives are rendered answerable to one another, is the very impulsion that keeps it flowing" (Ingold 2016: 2). The act of witnessing, sharing and leaning on each other in and among different circumstances is a creation of a knot, where a strand is interlaced with another and tightened. "In a world where things are continually coming into being through processes of growth and movement – that is, in a world of life – knotting is the fundamental principle of coherence" (2016: 2) According to Ingold the necessity and vitality

of the knot lies in the active attentiveness and commitment to the movement of things and to the ways they want to go, it admits of movement "as both its condition and its consequence" (ibid:3). Attention to Ingold is a practice of care that lies in its resonance with the movements of the things to which it attends, in its "going along WITH them". To care for people we need to make ourselves present to them as the particular persons we are, but also we must allow them into presence so that they can "speak". Ingold is arguing for something that is other than giving explanations or justifications for the one's becomings, he suggests a notion of care that entails listening to what others have to tell us, which also demands that we respond in kind. "It is, as Mauss taught us, a matter of discharging an ontological debt, of giving back to the world and its inhabitants what we owe them for own formation" (ibid: 13).

Inspired by the fictional friendships narrated and explored in this chapter between, I hope to have shown that the meanings attached to notions of vulnerability and nakedness as well as questions about the layered truths of us as individuals begin to take on new routes if considered from the vantage point of friendship. The ways in which our close friends 'know' us are significant and various, and certainly vaster and more complicated than usually thought and said. The kind of friendship that involves a build up and an accumulation of experiences resembles an 'archive', not of any official and impersonal nature however, rather as my friend Hythm once wrote to me; "an archive of flesh and blood"¹³. However, the word archive here denotes a historical yet ongoing account or record of the friends' lives. This archive as a project runs against hegemonic definition of archiving as an act of documenting and preserving a "past", for what I mean by friendship as an archive must necessarily be an active participation with and acknowledgment of the friend as an ever changing/changeable human being in an open-ended becoming. I have also argued that one must retain a critical stance towards the claims of the

¹³ Email from Berlin dated 29 October 2017

open-ended flows and becomings of friendship, so as not to romanticize or over-determine the freedom needed for or achieved by means of friendship.

The following is a fragment from a chat I had with Nadia, my Alexandrian friend, about herself and her two best friends with whom she went to the Faculty of Medicine in Alexandria with. Rather than following a clear chronological order in tracing her friendship with her two best friends, we started our conversation somewhere in the middle. By that I mean that I found it important to try to understand something from the present moment, that can shed light on the past of those particular friendships as well as their potential future, and how Nadia herself imagines and articulates it. I did not have a set of arranged questions, yet the conversation took shape and produced understandings of the relationship of friendship through our own intimacy as two friends chatting, thinking together, and opening up to each other. I have known Nadia for over two years, and I do know that Rama and Sarah, who went to the Faculty of Medicine with her, are whom she considers her best friends.

S: How about growth and change. We are talking about 6 years of friendship between the 3 of you. Do you think this friendship holds historical versions of yourself that are no longer here? If so, is that a good or a bad thing? Do I want to have those versions of myself, or rather my past selves preserved in friends, or does that actually disintegrate over the years and become rather meaningless? Perhaps if I changed drastically, I will not want to have to be confronted with older past versions of myself captured by and through old friends.

N: I think it's not just us that change, they change too. I think I want to just be myself now, I certainly do not want someone to freeze me at a certain point in time. I don't want to remember how silly or naive I was 3 years ago. For example some people reflect on 2011 and feel like; what were we thinking? They rather find it silly now.

S: I'm not sure. Regarding 2011 in particular, I feel that people tend to be proud of the fact that they have gone through "that" together. I feel there is a certain power to nostalgia combined with romanticism for the sense of "collectivity" that happened then.

N: I think it's more about how those ideas are valid now, in the present. If we became friends for example in a context that is no longer here, I feel there won't be much to share anymore if we grew differently. Like being a part of a religious group for example, I used to go regularly to.. if you no longer follow this path, you won't be able to express your true self and identity now with someone who remained on this track.

S: What do you think might lead your friendship with Rama and Salma to end? Do you think you make a certain kind of effort to sustain the friendship or that this should happen effortlessly?

N: I remember than with Rama, there was a certain tension or jealousy between us. It was somehow a competition or a marathon around the personal freedoms and wild/ unusual experiences each of us can manage to achieve in our society. She's from Borg el Arab which is a bit far, for example to university it takes her an hour and half. So most people from there but not all, move to Alexandria and live independently. Rama did, first to get out of her house and emancipate herself from family restrictions. She came to Alexandria from the 3rd year in university and rented an apartment. We sort of competed over who will take off the veil first? It's such a big deal when facing the family with that, it wasn't easy for any of us. I think though that it was easier for her, because her family didn't expect that much from her. But my family, they had expectations about my appearance and what I should wear. Although his competition was never spoken about between us, it really did happen. Even with the number of new friendships each of us made, whom of us got to know more people, etc. This created a certain tension between us and made us not really comfortable in the company of each other, but it disappeared later. But it did happen for some time, there were months in which we didn't talk that much but we used to catch up later and talk, after little avoidance.

S: And can you tell how this tension died?

N: We never really spoke about it or confronted each other with it. I don't even know if she feels the same about it, or realizes it the same way I do. But now those things we used to compete over are no longer important, I now know my life isn't like hers and that the kinds of progress we make in terms of personal freedoms and experience are more personal and individual. I don't even feel we still want the same things, for example she's getting married soon, and I don't really want to get married now at all. That's an ambition of hers that I don't really have. So overall this was the only tension I can think of.

(5)

Mafish Sahib Yetsahib...

O My Friends There is No Friend:
An Ode to Friendship, And to Its Loss

O my friends, there is no friend.

I read and re-read Derrida's Politics of friendship, and I still struggled with it. My reading list was crowded and the book remained a mystery I'm unable to fathom no matter how many times I tried to read. One thing that came to my mind is that I could share it with a friend or a group of friends (who knows perhaps Derrida wanted things to be this way) and through collaboration and group discussion the book might become easier to grasp. I ask Rashid; the one passionate philosophy geek in my life if he had read it and he said he had not, but he showed much interest and genuine enthusiasm to read it and help me understand it. He started reading it and he created a share-able online document where he can upload notes to share with me and quotes from the book that he thinks I should focus on. Soon after we were over the phone when threw in what seemed like a random thought "Have you ever noticed Derrida's first sentence (O my friend, there is no friend) is the same thing as Mafish Sahib yetsaheb?" "True! It is really that, it is really the very same sentence! Oh my god Bravo, how come no one ever noticed that before now?" We both burst into laughter. It made so much sense to me. Perfect sense in fact.

Mafish Sahib Yetsahib (meaning: There is no friend to befriend) is an Egyptian Mahraganat¹⁴ song that came out in 2015 performed by "Shobbeik Lobbeik". Shobbeik Lobbeik is a band of three Alexandrian young men: Hassan Elbrens, Nasser Ghandi, and Fares Hemeida¹⁵ who come from a lower-middle class neighborhood in Montazah, Alexandria called Ezbet Mohsen. Hassan Elbrens is the one who wrote the song, and mentioned in interview with him that he had originally created this song to be performed in a family wedding. He indeed wrote and performed the song with the rest of Shobbeik Lobbeik band in the wedding, and from there it proliferated, spread and swelled up greatly beyond what the band members had ever imagined. The song achieved an immediate booming success upon its release and became a viral phenomenon, picking up over 20 million views on Youtube within the first 60 days of its release. 3 years later, I can claim that it still is one of the most popular tunes played in shops, street cafes

¹⁴ Mahraganat means festivals in English. It is 'street music' genre that emerged mainly from lower class and poor neighborhoods in Cairo and Alexandria in the years leading up to 2011 revolution. Gradually this genre of music spiraled out of the initial stereotypes it was confined within, and spread more widely into wider networks of visibility in the Egyptian culture. The Mahraganat songs eventually became more and more present in middle-class weddings for example, then also became an essential ingredient to most mass-production Egyptian films in the recent years, as a core entertainment that already guarantees the attraction wide audience.

¹⁵ According to the band's official Facebook page they had a fourth member "Zika" who passed away in an accident in September 2015)

(ahwas), local weddings, minibuses, and even TV commercials still rework the basic tune of the song, of course making use of its extreme familiarity while changing the lyrics to whatever serves the commercial content of the ad. Every time I stumble upon the song, or actively play it, I cannot help but think about the moment that a possible ‘imaginary’ relation was formed when my friend juxtaposed the Egyptian “there is not friend to befriend” against Jacques Derrida’s “O my friends there is no friend” which actually Derrida described as the quotation of a quotation, namely Derrida was re-iterating this quote by Montaigne, which Montaigne attributes back to Aristotle; a sentence which “Aristotle was used to repeating” (Derrida 1988: 632). The suggestive connection, the possible resonance, the inter-active co-constitution of relation that occurred I believe to be in and of itself itself a radical potentiality that reveals itself as a power-to play and a playful power inherent in sphere of openness (and intimacy) offered by the relationship of friendship. What this instance has possibly opened up for me, other than the sheer delight and humor of the encounter, is a question on the co-constitution as well as the passing-on of knowledge(s) between friends. In this light friendship is seen as an integral component of the ‘experiment’ and ‘experience’ of being in the world as an open sphere that allows, gives room for and makes possible the “co-presence of potentials”. (Massumi 2015: 5). Following this argument, and supposing that friendship is precisely this “active open ended-ness”, I also argue that the opposite completely obliterates the possibility of friendship. That is, the moment that friendship tightens, constricts or negatively locks the fluidity of processes of ‘becoming’, it annihilates the condition of its possibility and inevitably ends up dissolving.

I. Friendship: A Suspension Between the No Longer & the Not Yet

The continuity of life – and hence of knowledge – requires of every being that it should play its part in bringing other lives into being and sustaining them for however long it takes for the latter, in turn, to engender further life. It follows that all life, and all knowing, is intrinsically social. Life is one long conversation. More precisely, it is a tangled web of concurrent conversations, all going on at once, that weave into and around one another. They flow, spinning here and there into topics like eddies in a stream. And they have three distinguishing properties. First, conversations are processes: they carry on. Secondly, conversations are open-ended: they do not aim towards a fixed destination or a final conclusion, for everything that might be said invites a follow-on. Thirdly, conversations are dialogical. They are not solitary but go on between and among people. It is from these dialogical engagements that knowledge continually emerges. To join a conversation is to be ever-present at the cusp where ideas are on the point of making their appearance, of taking shape. (Ingold 2017: 97)

The interlacing or joining of lives, like that of strands forming a ‘knot’, always comes to being in the middle of lives, in processes of growth and movement. In his journal article “On human correspondence” (2016), the anthropologist Tim Ingold advances an extremely generative analogy and argument on the social lives of human beings. Correspondence, as Ingold proposed; is the entwining and joining of lives along lines and processes of growth and movement, acts of giving and receiving, and forces of tension and friction that are always in continual transformation. The inter-penetration of lives in the mesh of social world resembles the “knotting”, the process where for example two strands of string or yarn are interlaced and pulled tight forming a coherent knot. The stickiness of the knot, that is a metaphor for the tightness of the human bond is one that is by no means predetermined, but is constantly born out of practices of care and continuous ‘attention’ that moves in resonance with the movements of the things to which it attends. To Ingold, attention (which he prefers to give the name attentionality) is “longitudinal”, in other words it is an attunement to trajectories as they unfold that extends along their pathways of becoming. It is an awareness *with* before it is ever awareness *of*. I have given

the example of ‘witnessing’ as an act of attention that is sensitive to and mindful of the movement of things (in Chapter 2). Ingold invites proposes a way of thinking about attentiveness that carries connotations of not only looking after people, but waiting for them, abiding with them and following what they do: “We can recognize a movement, and respond to it, before we ever fix it in our sights.” (2016: 12). As such, this mode of care and attentiveness has to always be understood as a form of movement, a leaping ahead that concerns not only being but also the possibility of becoming something else. As such, Ingold’s knot “where lives are rendered answerable to one another” (2016: 2) provides a way to imagine social life in its ongoingness and its continual differentiation.

Correspondence is also a way to listen, to speak, to understand in a manner that is careful, attentive and patient, like the writing of letters that used to happen before e-mail and social media fast-paced communications appeared. Letter writing as a process required a considerable amount of care, attention and also patience. After crafting a letter you had to send (mail) it, and after that enter an unknown and unknowable duration of waiting: “for the letter to reach its intended destination and for the response to come back from the recipient.” (2017: 4). By putting together the two understandings of correspondence, as the intertwining of lives as well as a mode of conversing, I believe that together they can forge a different way of thinking about “how we come to know things” (ibid: 4). We come to know things together; “not through engineering of a confrontation between theories in the head and facts on the ground, but rather through joining with the things themselves, the very processes of thought” (ibid: 5). I have tried throughout my thesis to have an ongoing dialogic correspondence between my friends, my intellectual interlocutors and myself in which our different embodiments, instantiations, understandings and

experiences of friendship can join on another in an “ongoing, speculative and experimental exploration of what the potentials and possibilities of life might be.” (2016: 4).

“Let us begin with: how am I to listen to you?” (Irigaray 1996: 115 ①)



It is the summer of 2016 and I am in the middle of the beginning of what could be defined as: a research-frenzy. My eyes shimmer and glimmer every time I stumble upon or arrive at a new text on friendship. Between the library and the internet, I slowly and steadily familiarized myself with first; the foundational texts and philosophies on friendship written by the canonical figures of radical thought, and second; collecting and going through every other textual, also visual and audible material I came across, whether through individual research or by asking friends. It started to pop up in our conversations, first as the simple question of “Is there a favorite book, a film, a poem or a song that strikes you as related to friendship that you like? Something that either has friendship as its main theme or that alludes to it, literally or metaphorically to you? Or whose protagonists are maybe best friends?”

I remember a friend (Alaa) immediately referring to Sufi poetry, pieces by Hafiz and Rumi that she described as the most enchanting, perhaps even entrancing on the love, goodness, purity and kindness between friends. She was also this friend who advised me to look into the genealogy of the Arabic language multitude of terminologies for the “friend”; For example: the friend with whom you chat at night has a name: *Samir*, the friend who accompanies you in travel has a name: *Rafiq* (which is also used historically in the context of political comrades), the close friend has a name: *Sahib*. We kept trying to delineate, without solidifying the meanings attached to each, and whether or not those terms are still being used in reference to the friend in the Egyptian or more broadly the middle eastern culture in the contemporary moment.

Another friend (Rashid) took me to the world of philosophy; letters and the myriad correspondences and monologues by Seneca on the theme of friendship (also on Stoicism), some of which written to his friend Lucilius. I imagine now that Rashid had begun by pointing out the “letters” precisely because he knows that I am personally very passionate about written correspondences, and so knowing that, he knew those letters will be not only useful but also attractive, intriguing and mind stimulating to me.

Another friend (Mourad) associated the theme of friendship with films, most of which belonged to Mohammed’s Khan cinematic oeuvre. Mourad is currently a scriptwriter, and for many years he worked as a writer in the ‘Culture’ section of a well-known Egyptian newspaper. There he wrote and published numerous film analyses and reviews, as well as literary analysis essays. He was the one who re-introduced me to the filmography of Mohammed Khan and how dominant the relationship of friendship is in his work, how central it is to the lives of his protagonists and essential in the plot of their stories.

Another friend (Nihal) spoke of January 25th revolution, particularly the “Battle of the Camel” day (February the 2nd 2011), She recounts a near-death experience near Tahrir square, in which a man attacked her with a sword, placed it on her neck and almost, almost killed her but didn’t. “I was in the middle of Talaat Harb street not knowing where to go, but I had just took my son out of the square and made sure to have him safely leave the area of Downtown, then I was trying to return to Tahrir square when this man attacked me. He ran towards me, with a sword, and some friends were behind me and saw the encounter. He just placed it on my neck, he neither said anything and nor stuck it in my throat. Luckily few of my friends were behind me, in the same area, and they rescued me. They also decided that I should not return to the square, and they took me to a place, the last safe haven that wasn’t yet burned with the flying Molotoves that

were everywhere by then in downtown. This was place had been the premise of some political party, but at this it was a site where some of the wounded and the scattered activists started to gather and take shelter, friends as well as strangers. The reason why I am recounting this incident is what happened at this coming moment. There was a young lady with us in the same place, whom I had known from before. In the midst of all this she looked at all of us, everyone gathered under this ceiling and said *“You know if we made it out of here alive, we will never forget each other”*. I don’t really have any feelings for the ‘sword’ incident, except that it was traumatic. But this, what the girl said, is what still makes my eyes tear up every time I remember. What I am saying is that I was not really aware that we were living something ‘big’ and ‘historical’, because when she first said that I remember feeling like “what does she mean and why is she saying this?” But now it makes a lot of sense.” I then quickly asked Nihal, with piercing curiosity; “and do you remember everyone who were there?”

She answered: “Every single person.”

My chat with Nihal was one that was exceptionally difficult to decipher. It took me some time to be able to ‘see’ and ‘understand’ why exactly this story, why was this the first thing that “nagged” her when I asked her about friendship. On one hand I fully realize that the constellation of fragments, advise, memories, stories, references that my friends shared with me on friendship are not to be understood as engraved-in-stone, eternal or monolithic inscriptions of what friendship means to everyone, or even to them. Yet it was important to think through those chosen articulations in their full originality, singularity, particularity and peculiarity for the value they carry because after all, there is no definitive and all-encompassing narrative on or answer to the question of friendship; or what it means to different people and how they perceive it, make sense of it, envision it.

Why do we acknowledge only our textual sources but not the ground we walk, the ever-changing skies, mountains and rivers, rocks and trees, the houses we inhabit and the tools we use, not to mention the innumerable companions, both non-human animals and fellow humans, with which and with whom we share our lives? They are constantly inspiring us, challenging us, telling us things. If our aim is to read the world, as I believe it ought to be, then the purpose of written texts should be to enrich our reading so that we might be better advised by, and responsive to, what the world is telling us. (Ingold 2011: xii)

Sharing experiences, memories, sentiments, secrets, ideas, dreams, desires, fears, tragedies, small and big everyday nuances between friends involves a creation and an assertion of power, not over others or over events but rather a power that is an extended capacity to work and think through things-together differently. We are hence enabled, As Michael Jackson argued, “to grasp experiences that confound us, react to events that overwhelm us, and become creators rather than mere creatures of circumstance.” (2012: 48). This sharing may not always happen in the form of ‘storytelling’ that Jackson refers to, yet it resembles storytelling in the ways in which it engenders an endless capacity for creativity and inventiveness, combining acts of remembering and acts of imagination, that allows the emergence of new revelations and relations- in and through interactive mediation with the friend.

II. “But the knot remembers everything”: On Growing-out of Friendship

“I might never meet you again, Nigel, but there's still the chance that I will. It's like we talk of infinity: two parallel lines meet at infinity, and the rest; but we don't really understand infinity at all. (...) Well, I've bared my soul to you tonight, Nigel. Bared my soul.” (Arthur to Rapport in Bell & Coleman 1999: 114)

Again using Ingold’s ‘knot’ as the binding of lifelines in a meshwork of entangled relations, which I find to be an incredibly useful, productive and inspiring metaphor, I would like to consider also the separation, the fracture, the end of friendships much like the untying of knots. Ingold describes the untying situation not as neither an event of “disarticulation” nor “decomposition”, “It is rather a casting off, whence lines once bound together go their separate ways” (2016: 5). As I was re-listening to the many voice notes, interviews and chats from my

fieldwork period and as I was going through my scattered previously written field-notes, I was stunned by intensity of the encounters, the intimacy and the sheer closeness that sounds/ feels/ looks unbearably real. While some of the ‘lines’ of life continued and carried on, others did not. This thesis mainly started as a daydream in an apartment occupied by two Alexandrian friends in Downtown Cairo in the summer of 2017. My good fortune allowed me access into the lives of the two young men, their shared domestic life, their friendship. There was something particularly fascinating about them, coming from the same hometown yet living and working here in Cairo, perhaps because this act of independence and re-location is something that I have not experienced myself (but always dreamed of), or because the movement from the city of Alexandria to the capital has always been an intriguing and interesting phenomenon to me. I remember that physical manifestation of “movement” was tremendously overt in that apartment. The apartment spoke of “home” and “stillness” but simultaneously screamed “movement” and “drifting” as if the life that took place therein was always suspended on the verge between both. The backpacks and/or suitcases were hardly ever fully loaded neither fully emptied. Something was always ready to be installed, settled, and homed in Cairo, while something was also always ready to go back to Alexandria, impromptu, hesitant and unfinished. This place and those two friends had managed to inspire a whole lot of this thesis, and my gratitude to them is infinite and without end. However, while this thesis is a text that will live on, this context that I have been trying to describe had already died. We are no longer linked as we were a couple of years ago and this apartment is now alien to me. To be clear, I have not at any point entirely moved-in with them, but for an extended period of time their apartment was a second home to me, one in which I spent long periods of time, and that is no longer the case. “Home is where I take up such a tiny portion of the memory foam; home is a splintered word”, writes Karen Green (2013). I move

back to this apartment only inside my head now through the playful, elusive and fragmented memory of a distant friendship, and put together its bits and pieces like a jigsaw to create meaning.

Friendship is not possible without the correspondence of its constituents, with the friends answering and responding to each other's lives. Every relation like every process, every encounter, every life is itself a mode of becoming that has its own force, pace, and time. We constantly become 'more' and 'other' than our histories through our engagement with the dynamic environments of humans, non humans, other species, materialities, objects. Becomings are the various "processes of the production of things, processes that transform states of matter, processes that enable and complicate life." (Grosz 2011: 13). It is the entwining and interweaving of lives and of these ever- extending trajectories (in becoming) that comprises the texture of friendship and of life. I argue that friendship is, before all else, about becoming. It sometimes seems to me that friendship can only be understood in the complex and open-ended paradox of becoming, as something that is constantly moved towards but never really reached, never fully fathomed, never fully realized. It can best be described as a movement along paths rather than a being- anchored in spaces of safety, ideas, ideologies or particular ambitions about "how things should be". As Biehl and Locke beautifully argued; "Distinct from potentiality and not reducible to causality or outcomes, *becoming* is characterized by the indeterminacies that keep history open" (2017: 6). Being friends is not the same as becoming friends, I would say that the former is not imaginable without constant attempts at and leaps into the latter.

It is worth considering whether Ingold's portrait of the 'untying' of the knot is as simple as a "casting off" that "does not break things into pieces", applied to human relationships, remains as valid, simple and simply valid. Although later in the same article he does pass over

“loss” and “grief” upon the parting of lives, yet very briefly and en passant. Perhaps there is something to be learned from Hassan Elbrens; there is no friend out there to *be-friend*. Perhaps one can at best seek to be-come friends, time and again, with those who extend their hands to shake ours, who open their eyes to see (witness) what we see, who lend their ears in an effort to listen to what we have to say, and who split their hearts open to be able to understand that which remains unsaid, that which is dangerous and untouched.

The months I have taken to write this thesis, and since writing is mostly a lonesome and solitary activity, I have for the most part stayed away from my own friends, but they have not stayed away from me. In my defense I say; I am writing about friendship... I am writing about you! and soon after words fail me. This piece of writing is at best an ode to friendship and at worst a flawed trial at treading a much bewildering, perplexing, intricate yet delicate grounds. What I hope I managed to safely maintain, both at heart and in writing, are the precious voices of my friends, without suffocating, appropriating or forcefully assimilating them into mine. The source of the strength of friendship and its main domain, my friend Hythm believes, is in the ‘trembling vibrations of the friend’s voice’ whereas to him, everything else (like the facial features) can be said to belong to the other loves, the family, the state or age. You can age, you move to another country, get married, get a job, lose a job, but your voice remains with me, remains as familiar to me as it has always been, it belongs to me and to our friendship.

No society, then, but worlds. And no war against society either: to wage war against a fiction is to give it substance. There's no social sky above our heads, there's us and the ensemble of ties, friendships, enmities, and actual proximities and distances that we experience. There are only sets of us, eminently situated powers, and their ability to ramify throughout the endlessly decomposing and recomposing social carcass. A swarming of worlds, a world made up of a whole slew of worlds, and traversed therefore by conflicts between them, by attractions and repulsions. To construct a world is to create an order, make a place or not for each thing, each being, each proclivity, and give thought to that place, change it if need be . . . It's not a question of choosing between the care we devote to what we are constructing and our political striking force. Our striking force is composed of the very intensity of what we are living, of the joy emanating from it, of the forms of expression invented there, of a collective ability to withstand stresses that is attested by our force. (Invisible Committee 2015)

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