

STAR FRIENDS February-March 2021

Title: STAR FRIENDS

Dates: February 6, 13, 20, 27; March 6, 13

Description:

Star friendship. — We were friends and have become estranged. But that was right, and we do not want to hide and obscure it from ourselves as if we had to be ashamed of it. We are two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together, as we did—and then the good ships lay so quietly in one harbour and in one sun that it may have seemed as if they had already completed their course and had the same goal. But then the almighty force of our projects drove us apart once again, into different seas and sunny zones, and maybe we will never meet again—or maybe we will, but will not recognize each other: the different seas and suns have changed us! That we had to become estranged is the law *above* us; through it we should come to have more respect for each other—and the thought of our former friendship should become more sacred! There is probably a tremendous invisible curve and stellar orbit in which our different ways and goals may be *included* as small stretches—let us rise to this thought! But our life is too short and our vision too meagre for us to be more than friends in the sense of that sublime possibility. — Let us then *believe* in our star friendship even if we must be earth enemies. —from Nietzsche's *Gay Science*

STAR FRIENDS is the first course in a year-long planned series on the subject of friendship, and it begins in a lonely place in which friendship, or rather a culture of robust adult friendships, has disappeared. Perhaps we have experienced deep transformative friendship and lost it or perhaps it belongs a utopian horizon, the absence of which can also be felt as a kind of anticipatory loss. As Judith Schalansky observes in her *An Inventory of Losses*, “Like a hollow mold, the experience of loss renders visible the contours of the thing mourned, and it is not uncommon for it to be transformed by the transfigurative light of sorrow into an object of desire...” (13). Though absence marks our entry point into the study of friendship, we will proceed *together* in search of knowledge of friendship (and perhaps this shared space will give rise to new friendship, or give new depths and textures to existing friendship).

This germinar begins with a [Scenography of Friendship: Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, and anchovy paste](#) by Svetlana Boym, because it was offered to me as a gift from a friendship, characterized by diasporic intimacy, now in abeyance. This hiatus is the grit, the irritant that I am producing this class around. Boym's work has been a medium through which one of my friendships happened, but I also feel a sense of amity towards Boym herself, now deceased, making her a kind of friend / ancestor.

To let the friend's preoccupations become our own, we proceed feelingly into their absence, noting what they noticed as well as what they didn't notice, or noticed and elected not to represent. As such, in addition to reading the essay mentioned above, we will read, as Boym did, the letters of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy.

Proceeding in this way will show friendship from several different angles. We enter Boym's essay, its content and arguments, from without. Making our own approach into her primary sources will give us both direct familiarity with the written record of Arendt and McCarthy's friendship, and it will enable a more intimate reading of Boym's essay. In the process, we will experience two of the textual modes of friendship: epistolary writing (which itself straddles the literary and the quotidian) and re-reading. As we read and discuss, we will also be engaged in the process of writing letters, whether they are circulated within living friendships, or written to dead friends, or "star friends."

Bio:

Zoe Tuck was born in Texas, became a person in California, and now lives in Massachusetts, where she is building the Threshold Academy, a future bookstore and non-traditional educational / performance space. She co-curates the But Also house reading series. Zoe is the author of *Soft Investigations* (Daisy Mayhem Books 2019) and *Terror Matrix* (Timeless, Infinite Light 2014). She is currently writing her newsletter, blogging about books, transiting Rilke in a work of speculative criticism, and chipping away at an autobiographical novel. In 2021 she will be engaging in a year of classes through the Liminal Lab around the theme of friendship. Oh, and she is also running for Northampton City Council for 2021 on an abolitionist platform. Find out more at zoetuck.com.

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