Seventh MHJ Lecture
A History of Friendship—Among Other Sentiments

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I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to the Medieval History Society for the invitation to deliver the Seventh *Medieval History Journal* Lecture here in New Delhi. I have had the privilege of association with this prestigious journal since its inception and have watched its growth with admiration. It gives me great pleasure to strengthen the association as I deliver this lecture. The invitation has also given me the chance of visiting New Delhi after a gap of 22 years and to renew contact with several friends I had met here and in Paris between 1979 and 1992. It also gave me a reason to reopen a file that is important to me but had lain dormant for some time.

In a famous and very oft-quoted lecture given to the young students of the Normal School (Ecole Normale Supérieure), published by the *Annales* in 1941,[2] a year after the French defeat of 1940 when Paris was occupied by the German army, Lucien Febvre wrote:

> We have no history of Love. We have no history of Death. We have no history of Pity nor of Cruelty. We have no history of Joy. Thanks to the 'Semaines de synthèse' organized by Henri Berr, we had a quick outline of a history of Fear.

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[2] Febvre, 1941. 'Comment reconstituer la vie affective': 12 ff.

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It is enough by itself to show us the great interest of these kinds of history…
It is evident that what I call for is not a study of Love or of Joy during all
the periods of time and in all the civilizations. I only point to a direction of
research…I ask for the opening of a large and collective inquiry on the basic
feelings of men and on their ways of expression… (*modalités*).

This text had sometimes been (wrongly, I think) interpreted at that time,
and even today, as if its purpose had been to lead the scholars away from
much more topical and important research subjects that could have attracted
the attention of the German and the French censors, of which *L'étrange
défaite. Témoignage écrit en 1940*[3] may be seen as the best example.
Written by Marc Bloch between July and September 1940, this book was
a reaction, both personal and very thoughtful, to the conditions and to the
reasons of the defeat of the French army, but it could be published only in
1945 after his own death (on 16 June 1944) and the end of Second World
War. Defeated one year earlier, France had accepted the conditions of the
Armistice imposed by Germany; it was divided into two parts, one (including
Paris) occupied by the German army and submitted to the direct control of
the German police (Gestapo), and the other, called 'free', submitted to the
authority of the Field Marshal Pétain government that was settled in Vichy
and had decided to 'collaborate' with Germany and the Nazi 'regime'.

Another interpretation was later more broadly accepted in the post-war
context, and looks to me more consistent with the real situation. Lucien
Febvre, after the 'Armistice', had made the choice to go on with the
publication of the *Annales*, in spite of the anti-Jewish decisions of the
Vichy government that forbade Marc Bloch to be officially his co-editor,
and he had disagreed very strongly on this subject with Bloch (who
finally went on writing in the journal, under the transparent pseudonym
of Marc Fougère—the name of the small village where he had bought a
house before the war to spend the summer holidays). Febvre would, at
any cost, keep alive a journal that would be identified with a living and
innovative history, and promote all the renewals of the curiosities and of
the interests of the historians. It was for him the best form of resistance—an
intellectual resistance—to the German occupation. His call of 1941 quickly
became, from the 1950s onwards, at least in France, the foundational
text of a 'historical psychology':[4] this new approach to the past should

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[3] Bloch, *L'étrange défaite.*
[4] Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne.*

go beyond the individual attitudes and reactions and focus its attention on the collective sensibility, that is, on the sentiments and emotions, the conceptions and representations that inspired them, the modes of their expression through words and gestures (including silence, smiles and tears), their mutations in time and space, their differences according to the social categories and the cultures, the words that were used to express and describe them, and the norms that aimed to direct them and to control and regulate their practices.

This ambitious program fitted with the perspective drawn by Febvre eight years earlier in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in Paris,[5] when he explained that history had to be written as an answer to a problem, to a question put by the present to the past, and that the historian had to use, for such an answer, all kinds of sources: 'Texts, yes, but all kinds of texts… and not texts alone'. 'All kinds of texts' means for the historian not to limit himself to the documents produced over time by political, administrative, military or religious authorities, or to all kinds of manuscripts and more and more, from the sixteenth century onwards, printed texts of what we call literature—an attitude that identified up to very recently the birth of history with the invention of writing and with the first official texts that we know in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The historian should take into consideration all categories of private writings everywhere these have been preserved, as they have been written from a different point of view—from below and not from the top, from a more individual level and not from the norms and laws level, from the daily life of single individuals and not from the idealised or idealising point of view of literature—and for different readers; they give us, at least to those who are able to and interested in reading them, much new information of a very different kind that is very useful to the historians who have accepted that history needs to be written not from one but very many different points of view. 'Not texts alone' invites us to look in a systematic way at a large range of 'documents', existing or produced, made available and opened to interrogation and scientific use by new technologies, but that have been and still are neglected by historians. Thus, for example all the documents related to archaeology, cartography, images and their copies and reproductions (paintings, designs, incisions, sculptures, etc.), photographs, movies, ethnographic researches, but also botany, zoology

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[5] Febvre, 'De 1899 à 1933': 3–17.

and so on. The list was already very long for Febvre in 1931, but would be much longer today, as a result of the application of scientific methods to the 'traces' of the past, but also to the development of laboratory experimentations in the field of social sciences: let us think, for example, of the development of researches of the non-verbal expression (that is, what you say with your hands and with your face even while you are talking to somebody very far on the telephone) by social psychologists, using both film and computer.

The program of Febvre was partly achieved by historians, though chiefly after his death in 1956. Let us think of the *History of Fear* by Jean Delumeau, of the large range of studies dedicated to the history of death (Alberto Tenenti, Philippe Ariès, Michel Vovelle, François Lebrun), or of the history of love, including its sexual dimensions (Jean-Louis Flandrin). Other sentiments have been generally less studied, like joy, pity[6] and cruelty, even if the interest in this last topic has increased recently with the emerging new forms of violence, that compete with the pretensions of the state to impose on it its own monopoly:[7] our societies rediscover, as something to study and try to understand, the pleasure of killing, not only the individual but also the collective killing that can reach the dimension of a genocide, as, during the last decades, in Rwanda or in Bosnia. But we may be surprised by the words missing on the list proposed by Febvre. For example 'Laughter', to which Jacques Le Goff dedicated several years of his own Ph.D. seminar, but had not the time to write the book he had announced; we can only read his long article published in 1989, 'Rire au Moyen Age' (*Laughing in the Middle Ages*) and reprinted in 1999 in *Un autre Moyen Âge* ('Another Middle Age').[8] Missing also are 'Hate' and 'Friendship': these two words form with 'Love' a cluster of words and sentiments, of which none can be studied in total isolation from the others. Moreover, 'Love' and 'Friendship' have, both in English or in French, 'Hate' as the main antonym with 'Indifference' as an alternative, while English has two verbs (to like and to love), and French only one ('*aimer*'). But the result is there: the reception of the message of Febvre has been one of the main factors of a dynamic approach that convinced historians to reformulate their researches around sensibility and sentiments first, then

[6] Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié*.

[7] Barnavi and Rowley, *Tuez-les tous ! La guerre de religion à travers l'histoire. VIIe-XXIe siècle*.

[8] Le Goff, 'Le rire au Moyen Âge': 1–14; Le Goff, 'Une enquête sur le rire': 449–55.

mentalities, then representations, before dedicating themselves to the necessary deconstruction of these analytical categories.

As for myself, my interest in the history of friendship was a result of a combination of circumstances in quite a particular context: the compilation of the third volume of a *History of Private Life* dedicated to the early modern period, of which Philippe Ariès was the editor, substituted by Roger Chartier after his death.[9] In extension of the line of interpretation from his researches on the 'invention of childhood' that in his view happened during the same period,[10] Ariès proposed to us the organising of a volume around the core idea of an 'invention of the private life' that would have been the key change during these three or four centuries, and was linked for him to another 'invention', the 'invention of the individual and of individualism'. My own experience with the study of capitalism and the originality of the Italian case had convinced me to distance myself from the concept of transition and from its too systemic use by historians. Its limits were evident even for understanding economic and social systems that had been its traditional fields of application. In a period where historians were seeking from the study of mentalities, sentiments and sociability to identify new directions of research, they had to focus their attention much less on one-way historical dynamics than on the complexity of concrete situations and on the coexistence between opposites and differences, in the same period and in the same societies; individuals and groups had to invent solutions that could accommodate conflicts and reconcile the rules and the exceptions to the rules. I suggested to Ariès and my other colleagues a more contextual approach, less one-way oriented, and more open to the chronological gaps, to the differences and internal contradictions, an approach that should start from a detailed analysis of the relations of single individuals with the different partners of their personal and social life, and of the way in which their own conception and management of these interpersonal relations could contribute to their integration in a larger network of interpersonal relations of which each of them was only one single component, but that constituted the social environment of which they could use the potentialities and resources, even as they had to accept the constraints.

The family had in this context a central importance: the influence of anthropology (that had been for many historians of my generation a real

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[9] Ariès and Duby, *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 3.
[10] Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie.*

discovery) had promoted the family, from the end of the years 1960's onwards, to a core position for most of our researches: we had started giving more attention, for each single Ego, to the concentric circles of constraints, solidarities, rivalries, but also of power hierarchies imposed on it by the rural and urban communities, and by the various levels of the church and state authority, and, last but not least, to the very concrete links that controlled the communication between and among these different circles.

Close to the family, we could think of the relations deriving at least partly from choices that could be personal, made in a totally independent way and defined as such by the partners, but on which the families did their best to impose their own control, so as to use them for their self-interest and to keep them on the 'right' path, as was the case for love and friendship. Then came the relations that looked, from the available documents, to have deeply changed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, but maybe only slowly and at the upper- and more-educated levels of the society, with two different partners: God and the self, the very self for whom Philippe Lejeune has brightly put in evidence that it was based on a split personality (*dédoublement de personnalité*), because 'I is another' (*Je est un autre*).[11] For God, the practice of the confession is rethought and redefined by both religious Reforms, whether Protestant or Catholic: the Protestant confession is made directly to God, without any intermediary and the Catholic one based after 1560 on the stating by the penitent of his own sins and no more on an answer (yes or no) to the questions of the priest, who used a penitential book. For the self we observe the multiplication of personal diaries and other inmost texts. These two different, but complementary practices, organise the stage for ego as the main actor in two new kinds of 'face to face'.

Seen from this point of view, friendship had in the past, and still has today, an original position, on the frontiers between the solidarity circles organised around the family and the rest of society, and its collective—and not only individual—character was evident. But at the same time it involved very often, if not always, the individual—the self—that could find in it a field to assert its own relative autonomy, to organise around him his social environment and to build up his own personality. To write the chapter on friendship, the importance of which was evident for me,

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[11] Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique*; and *idem.*, *Je est un autre.*

was not however an easy task. It was not my own choice, but all the other members of our small group had their own field of research, and I had none. Friendship was handed down to me because at this time, 30 years ago, this matter had not yet interested historians, who had left its study at one end to philosophers and to specialists of literature, that had both focused mainly on the norms and on the models, and, at the other end to sociologists and anthropologists, who had mainly studied the reality of practices, the justifications and explanations that were given them by the actors of the game, and the rules they followed in their daily life. Between these two different traditions of research, and between them and the historians, no serious dialogue had yet started.

This first experiment was limited in space to Western Europe, and in time to the 'short' period of the three or four centuries of the early modern period, that I had to analyse starting from one main point of view: the importance and the roles of the relations of friendship that we could glean through the available documents in the broader context of the organisation and the development of what we call today the 'vie privée', or *privacy*. These two colloquial expressions appear, the first in French and the second in English, during the eighteenth century in the literary texts, and become during the second half of the nineteenth a juridical concept, defined as such, and I had to face the main risk for a historian, that is, the risk of anachronism. But I had also to give it from one side the status and the dignity, but also, from the other, the problematic complexity of a historical subject, and to define its possible contents for the past.

While 'vie privée' and 'privacy' were relatively recent expressions, the distinction between private and public, inherited from the Latin language and from Roman culture, had a history of more than two millennia, marked by continuities but also by forgetting, breaks, rediscoveries and changes. The most important of these changes transformed this distinction into one of the basic principles (like, later on, the distinction between state and church or religion) of the modern state[12] that extended its legal use to many fields like law and property first, then more recently, in particular, to the 'écrits du for privé' (private writings), or Ego-documents (in French, Dutch and German), that is, to all the productions of individual writing where we can find traces of the daily life and of the opinions of their authors. Their progressive admission during the last 50 years in the state

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[12] Kaminski, 'Res Publica, Res Privata': 337–51.

archives that from their inception had collected quite exclusively public documents confirmed their new role as historical documents. The word 'private' changed its meaning through time, but always kept its link with its etymological origin: the idea of limits that separate, isolate and even protect. You find this idea in the French expression 'the wall of private life' of which Stendhal in 1823 attributes the invention to Talleyrand, Bishop before the Revolution and then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Napoleon. It establishes a link with the opposition theorised by Aristotle in the fourth century BC between the *polis* (the city as a political unit), that was the domain of politics, and the *oikos* (house) considered as the domain of the family. But it suggests also to look with more attention at the very nature and reality of these limits, to the changes in space and time, and, even more important, to the coexistence, in the same period and place, of a plurality of limits that could interfere with each other. For example, the Roman father (*paterfamilias*) had the right, that looks to us exorbitant today, to agree or refuse to bring up the babies of his wife, and to abandon those he refused outside, in a public place (like the Campo dei Fiori in Rome, where Giordano Bruno was burnt as heretic on 17 February 1600), and he also had the right to send to death his own slaves. On the contrary, the new-born baby was acknowledged from the early medieval period under the influence of the Christian religion to have the right to live, and, in many if not all the countries today, children and women are more and more protected by the law and the public authority against the physical violence and ill treatment they might suffer in the context of their family life.

From this point of view, both the norms and ideal rules on one side and the social practices on the other of what we call today friendship relations in early modern Europe give a large range of examples of the mobility, complexity and frequent transgression of these limits. The first ones, that were referring to ancient authors and mainly to Aristotle and Cicero, focused on the free choice made by the partners, on the strictly personal dimension of their joint commitments, and on a lifestyle of usually two persons, or, more exceptionally very small groups (the transitivity of friendship relations is not at all automatic, and the friends of your friends may not be your friends) based on intimate conversation, free exchange of ideas, mutual help, common values and full respect for the other. The friends usually do not live together, they have both a family (wife, children and eventually servants) and a professional life; they meet where and when

they decide to do, without any outside interference. Through these relations and during these moments, they assert their autonomy from any kind of external constraints, both from the family and from the rest of society.

But real practices challenge this apparent simplicity. The families are the first to try to get back and to reaffirm their rights on the individuals. For them, friendship is absolutely necessary with their neighbours in the village or in the district or even the street of the town where they live, and marriages with them are actually the best way to renew and reinforce this friendship, generation after generation. We see this representation very clearly expressed in the demands for exemptions from consanguinity they submit to the bishop to be allowed to marry a too-close cousin (the Catholic Church fixes around 1560 the limit after the fourth degree, that is, at the fourth generation). They always used to call the inner circle of solidarity around any individual, a cluster of three words, *parenti, vicini e amici* in Italian (where it is even today proverbial), that is, 'kin, neighbours and friends', that expresses this endogamic ideal based on vicinity more than fortune and social status. If Romeo and Juliet cannot marry and have to make their choice between love and life, it is because their two families have been enemies for several generations. As the texts of these demands indicate, apparently personal requests use models and sets of arguments that maybe accepted by the church authorities:

> …we are neighbours, we need to be friends, and only a marriage will allow us to renew between us a friendship that becomes weaker with the succession of the generations, but that is essential to create between us a general agreement that will help us overcome and settle our existing or eventual conflicts.

Friendship reinforces the solidarity between the cousins on both sides around the nuclear family, and the cohesion of the larger 'extended family' (*domus, casa, ostal*) that gets the possibility to renew or conclude alliance with their neighbours. We read exactly the same in L.B. Alberti's *Libri della famiglia* (*Family's Books*) when one of his cousins says for all the others to his old father: 'we would that everybody acknowledges us as your good and faithful kins (relatives), and if friendship is stronger than kinship, we will be the same as true and upright friends'.[13] Rich bourgeois families of northern Italian cities behave, from this point of view, exactly as did the European sovereigns up to the First World War,

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[13] Alberti, *I Libri della famiglia.*

for whom exchanging women was the best way to guarantee a peace that was supposed to be long: Queen Victoria could be considered at the end of the nineteenth century as the 'Grandmother of Europe', through the marriages of her daughters and granddaughters with all the main kings of Europe, and the symbol of a peaceful future, which Georgie, Willie and Nicky (as George V, Wilhelm II and Nikolas II called each other) had to renounce during summer of 1914.

In the same way, the families paid particular attention to the relations of friendship that their sons could contract when they were sent to live outside for a more or less long period. We see it very clearly for the pupils of the early modern colleges that will be, from the mid sixteenth century onwards, the main educational institution for the upper classes including upper middle class, of which the Jesuits improved the model through the introduction of a systematic plan of studies (*Ratio atque Institutio studiorum Societatis Iesu*, 1598) between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the number of these pupils remains more or less the same, around 50,000: they must develop their 'advantageous acquaintances and friendships that often last until the end of their life' writes P. Coustel in 1687 in his 'Rules for the education of children' (*Règles de l'éducation des enfants*). A few years later, a member of the Senate of Bologna, in a letter to his son who studied in the College of Parma, underlined the importance for all the life of these groups of same-aged fellows: the friendships that his son will contract 'with comrades who will leave the College at the same time as you', and who will be 'Prelates, Cardinals, Ambassadors or Generals'… may be 'crucial for the fortune' not only of himself but also 'of the house where you were born by the will of God'. The life of the college may reduce the social disparities between teenagers, and create opportunities to catch up for those of lower birth, and these opportunities would be even more useful for the younger brothers as a consequence of the increasing practice of male primogeniture in the upper classes. With no fortune, the younger will need for their career these links developed during the years they spent in the college. The families use the potentialities of sociability proposed by these 'private schools' where they send their sons to create relations of friendship that will be useful to themselves but also to their family as a whole.

We have to wait until the early eighteenth century to see the suspicion of homosexuality explicitly formulated by the directors of these colleges, but not by the families themselves, a subject to which Foucault dedicated

one of his last texts, published after his death, and that will find its place in many novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But this situation has two other consequences. First, as Montaigne writes, friendship (the true but exceptional one he could develop with La Boétie) cannot find its place inside the nuclear family: the relations between the father and his children are based on the respect, and between brothers rivalry gets the better of fraternal friendship, because, often if not always, 'the wealth of one means the poverty of the other'. Second, the college introduces a separation between brothers and sisters that are no more educated together by a private tutor. The sisters will be sent to monasteries that become during the same period the main educational institution for the young girls of the middle and upper classes, but not a place where they are encouraged by their families to contract friendships for the future. It did not mean that these friendships did not exist, but we know much less about them, with a few exceptions. For these young girls, two options were opened: the religious life in the monastery, or a marriage decided by their family. And in both cases, even if they marry, it will be much more difficult for them to maintain their relations with their friends.

As we can see, the families have with relations of friendship a large range of ambiguous attitudes that differ very strongly according to the place, the period, the social and professional environments, the personal careers, and, even more, the gender. They would reinforce an internal cohesion organised around kinship, and broaden their relations with other families that use both the resources of marriage alliances and the reciprocity of mutual commitments from one side, and of the exchange of favours from the other. They may leave more autonomy and flexibility to some of their members that allow them to take individual initiatives, from which they also make collective profits. Inside the family the right to an autonomous ideal friendship will most often be a privilege of the father who is in charge of the continuity and of the interests of the family. But the families know also that the risk of loss or of failure exists and they do their best to keep control of the situation and to put pressure on their members so that they do not forget their duties, even if it is not always enough to avoid catastrophes. A good example of such situations would be the famous comedy of Molière, *Tartufe*, where Orgon, the father, who wants to impose his complete authority on all his family, develops such a passion for a religious hypocrite he has accommodated at home that he wants to force his daughter to marry him and decides to give him all his

fortune. As a comedy needs a happy end, the religious hypocrite is shown up, and arrested by the decision of the king himself, supreme protector and guarantor of the honour and of the interests of the family. Reason has the upper hand and the father needs to admit that his own authority has its limits.

But during the same period of time, we can observe other changes in the overall social and cultural environment that limit the means and range of action of the families. The first is the limitation of the circles of the spiritual kinship that created links between the godfather and godmother and their families, and between them and the child, and were broadly spread at the end of the Middle Ages. The spiritual kinship enlarged and extended the limits of the family, and created a large range of reciprocal obligations. Both the state and the church (whether Protestant or Catholic) encourage or oblige families to rally their ranks around their members, and to give more importance to the nuclear family formed by the parents, their children and eventually the grandparent(s), if still alive. As a consequence, the field is left free for the organisation and development of new relations of solidarity that take over the language and the institutional form of the family: for the artisans, the '*compagnonnage*' organised by the trade guilds takes charge of a part of the period of apprenticeship when the young artisan leaves the family and the town of his first master to visit the country and learn other techniques, and are hosted during their travel by 'mothers' that take them into their house. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the vocabulary and the ritual of the first trade unions are still those of confraternities and 'brotherhoods'. Both are quite exclusively male, as are the 'kingdoms' or the 'abbeys' of youth that started from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in a large part of Western Europe, and constituted organised groups for teenagers from puberty to marriage and to the professional stabilisation. The same sexual division remains today one of the basic principles of the freemasonry that developed during the eighteenth century, and overemphasises the perfect equality between its members to whom it proposes as a rule collective conviviality and conversation during meetings, and the exchange of services between the 'brothers' in the daily life. The first female lodges will appear much later and remain a minority, but no lodge ever accepted the coexistence between men and women.

We have today much more information on these changes of the rules of contracting interpersonal relations outside of the family than 50 years

ago. To the philosophical and ethical norms and to the literary texts have been added an increasing quantity of very different texts that did not exist, or were much less numerous and were also less carefully preserved during the medieval period: autobiographies, letters and other private writings, a small minority of which have been published and gives us the possibility of studying the very deep progressive transformation of the relations both with oneself and with the other, that are more and more conceived as a dialogue either with yourself in the first situation, and with one or several persons in the second. These transformations are more broadly documented for the upper and more educated classes of the society, whose texts have been more numerous and better preserved. But it does not mean that these transformations were limited to them. Writing is for historians important for a more detailed description and analysis of sentiments, emotions and pleasures linked to the relations of friendship and of their modes of expression as also for understanding the way in which they were lived through by individuals involved in them. But many documents suggest that the circulation of literary models popularised by theatre and novels was more broadly spread and could establish a continuity between writing and orality, create a larger area of common feelings and expressions of these feelings (like tears in the eighteenth century), and give them a more general, even if not universal dimension.

Around 1665, Alceste, the 'Misanthrope' of Molière says openly, 'I am not and do not want to be the friend of mankind'. But Don Juan, when he could not convince the beggar to swear against God so as to receive the coin that he proposed to give him, gives it finally saying, 'I give it to you for the love of mankind', a sentence that we can understand only if we think that in the seventeenth century the word love was used by the upper classes only for God, while they called friendship, or 'fond' and 'honest friendship' the sentiment between wife and husband and even between two lovers. One hundred and twenty-five years later, in Paris in 1788, a Society of the Friends of Black People was created and Pierre Philippeaux, a barrister who had been elected at the Convention, started in 1792 a weekly publication called 'The Friend of mankind or the Defender of truth'; he would be sentenced to death and sent to the guillotine with Danton and his group of supporters. You can see him, close to Danton/Gérard Depardieu, in the famous film of Wadjda. At this time the word friendship, as the word Federation in 1790, was put forward as the organising principle of the rebuilding of society on a new

basis: both words had in common the idea of a voluntary decision taken by every citizen and accepted by all of them.

Starting from this too-long presentation, I would try very briefly to summarise the first results of my more recent researches that are still in progress, and mostly second hand. I started exploring two different ways to answer two main questions. The first: is a longer run history of friendship in Western Europe, from Antiquity up to today, possible, and may it be useful? The second: up to what point can we compare the Western European experiences with other ones that may be observed in other parts of the world and other civilisations so to check if we can identify similarities and differences?

For both questions I think it may be useful to keep in mind four levels of analysis. The first is the philosophy and ethics of friendship that have been elaborated and developed in different places and periods. The second would be the literary models, their success, their circulation and their transformations over time. The third would be the rituals of contracting friendship described and analysed by ethnographers and anthropologists for traditional societies and of which we can find more recent evidence today or during the last centuries (the solemn oath, the blood drunk from the wound itself, the commitments for life). The fourth would be to take into consideration as much as possible the coexistence between different forms of friendship at the different social and cultural levels, that gives us access to a more comprehensive and complex view of the place and the role of relations of friendship and networks in the building of social environment and of the representation itself of societies by themselves and by others.

For the long run, I would take into consideration three different moments: Antiquity, Middle Ages and today's world. For the two first periods, we have a relatively long tradition of research that had focused on some particular aspects, and also went through important developments during the last decades

Ancient Greece and Rome were, up to a recent period and are still today,[14] a kind of starting point of the philosophical and ethical thought on friendship and its ideal definition: norms and rules, and their theoretical definition on one hand, and, on the other, social practices and their ideal description mainly in exchange of letters, written as literary works to

[14] Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié.*

be read also by a select public of other persons than the addressee—a practice that was rediscovered during the Renaissance—was to last during all the early modern period, and was imitated by authors of novels, like, for love and not for friendship, the *Lettres de la Religieuse portugaise* and *Les liaisons dangereuses* of Choderlos de Laclos. Friendship, as love and many other deeply socialised sentiments and emotions need models to imitate that prepare and guide the choices of single individuals: as la Rochefoucauld wrote for love, 'many men would not love if nobody had ever informed them about it'. Even if Greece, with Plato's *Lysis* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, imitated by many other Greek authors, had been the starting point of these reflections on *philia*, and of a long scholarly tradition that starts at the end of the nineteenth century, but had an important development during the last four decades,[15] the huge Latin literature, that was the most read during the Roman and medieval periods, and the first to be printed, translated and read in the colleges from the sixteenth century onwards, had the major and the most evident influence: Cicero, with his *De amicitia* and his *Letters to Atticus*, was the first and the most important author, and after him Seneca and his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*. In Cicero's words, 'Friendship is nothing other than agreement in all matters, divine and human, joined with goodwill and affection. Besides wisdom, I think the immortal gods have given humanity nothing better (*nihil melius homini*).'

This kind of literature proposes the model of the 'true' friendship, born of the search by two individuals of friendship for itself, superior to all other forms of interpersonal relations, different from all other forms of friendship, and able to transform the partner into another ego. It was able to impose for two millennia friendship as a core value of the Roman culture of leisure (*otium*), as opposed to the political and judicial activities (*negotium*), based on trust (*fides*) and reserved to persons that should be equal in status and fortune: it leaves no place either to slaves or to women.

The systematic use of other texts (like novels) and mainly of epigraphs (that we can compare up to a certain point with 'Ego-Documents', written or dictated by individuals, but that respected common rules of presentation, and were proposed to be read by the public) has put a quite different reality

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[15] Dugas, *L'amitié antique*; Fitzgerald, *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*; Fraisse, *Philia*; Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World*.

in evidence recently. As for the women, among many examples we have now, I would quote only one: several letters found in Vindolanda near Hadrian's wall, in northern part of England and written on thin wooden tablets by a lady to another whom she calls sister (*soror, anima mea et karissima*, but not *amica*) and invites to her birthday party, both being the wives of Roman officers. As for the slaves, we have the monument of the Statilii family in Rome, with more than 400 epitaphs naming 657 individuals, including epitaphs of several slaves dedicated to other slaves that they call their friends (*amicus amico*), and also of freedmen.[16] Once more, if we introduce new documents in the discussion, you may get a very different view of the reality: the rich free male authors lose their monopoly of writing history for the present and for the future. But the same new documents need to be read carefully, and the ambiguity of the uses of language to be taken into consideration: quite often, the word 'friend', *amicus*, is used instead of *cliens* by the clients themselves to define their relation to their 'patrons', as friendship and patronage have in common 'the ideal of a mutually bonding trust or trustworthiness (*fides*)'.[17]

As for the medieval period, after Marc Bloch, many authors had focused on the omnipresence of the uses of the vocabulary of friendship at all the levels of the feudal society, and on the transfer of feudal vocabulary onto the one of friendship, 'vassal' and 'friend' becoming quite synonymous (as client and friend in Rome). The pairs of young male friends, like Olivier and Roland, play a central role in the epic poems or 'chansons de geste': they have nothing to do with Cicero and his friend Atticus. Fifty years ago, Georges Duby had analysed very brightly the link between literary models and social groups that constituted their public:[18] using the histories of the seigneurial families of north-western France, he focused on their sons, called by the texts *juvenes* (young in Latin) or, collectively, *juventus* (youth). These two Latin words are used in a very different context than in ancient Rome. The beginning is in both cases a rite of passage, around 17 years: a political and military one in Rome (the *toga virilis*) that opened the access to adulthood, to a political career and to the army as Roman soldier; on the other end, an exclusively military one in the Middle Ages

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[16] Williams, *Reading Roman Friendship*: 70–71, 302–03.

[17] *Ibid.*: 46. See also Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire*, and *idem.*, 'Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome': 49–62.

[18] Duby, 'Au XIIe siècle': 835–46.

(the young is dubbed as a knight) that opens the way to an adventurous life, between tournaments and wars, as a member of a group of 'young', often led by the son of their own lord, with the only hope to be given their own seigneurie or to marry a rich heiress when they are not the eldest son of the family. For Duby, they are members of pack of hounds let lose by their families 'to conquer glory, profits and female preys'. At other social levels horizontal solidarity networks play in a different way an increasing role, including more and more often, close to the kin, neighbours and friends. Philosophy arrives later, with the general translation of Aristotle in the middle of the thirteenth century, giving birth to a rethinking of friendship, and research can move from the social practices to the moral theorisation: that is, contrary to what happened for ancient history.

If we look at our world, the relative decline of the importance of family, that is less and less a constraint on the decisions of the individuals, but invests more and more in their education and training, it appears to have as a consequence a polarisation around two extreme situations. On one side, friendship is seen and praised as an individual and autonomous decision, with major importance given to the friendship contracted by young persons, either male or female, who meet at the high school or at the university, much less at older ages like Cicero and Atticus or Montaigne and La Boétie. On the other hand, workplaces (factory, office) and neighbourhood still create opportunities for the meeting and selection of new friends and eventually the creation of social groups of networks, for which the sociologists can identify a very large range of places, of opportunities and of ages.[19] Between youth and adulthood, the end of the compulsory military service has eliminated the last and more general rite of passage (for young males only) in the Western European societies. At the same time 'friend' or 'friendship' are more and more identified with trust, seen as the core value of the interpersonal relation: 'a friend is the person that will be present when you need really something. You can rely on him if things get rough.' 'Friendship is trust. You need to have the possibility to tell him everything, and depend on him.' 'With a friend you don't need to speak to be understood. Actually he has to be like me.'[20] But even if it is present everywhere and referred to (sometimes as a lack) in daily life, friendship is less and less used as the central argument of a

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[19] Bidart, *L'amitié, un lien social.*
[20] *Ibid.*: 18–20.

work of fiction, with two main exceptions: films, of the Western and of the detective stories, which give today the last examples of a friend (usually also a male) who is ready to die to defend his friend. But on the other side, the disappearance of friendship is often presented and accepted as a reality. Young people have pals and mates, no real personal friends for life. Social networks are said to be the cause of this 'new situation' that looks to confirm the old proverb, inspired by Aristotle: one who has too many friends has no friends.

At the same time the present would also confirm what has been the central idea of my lecture: friendship, as an attempt to permanently rebuild the social links around individuals, is never simple and easy to define. It is permanent tension, contradiction and complexity, but also permanent resilience and adaptation, with an extreme plasticity, that renders many historians unhappy in that other scientists use words that have only one meaning. As for myself, I learnt long ago from Fernand Braudel that historians need to use the language of their own society, with their many meanings and imprecisions. As he liked to say, I use words as far as I am not able to define them clearly in a simple way: when they are defined, they become useless for me. Friendship exists both as a social reality and as an ideal, but the words we use to describe it have very often different meanings according to changing contexts. *Amica* in Latin means very often the person (and the interpersonal relation with her) we now call girlfriend in English, '*petite amie*' in French, but *novio* in Spanish and *fidanzata* in Italian, that is, the 'fiancée', whom you are engaged to (even if it is seen and lived by the actors and their families as a temporary relation).

But we cannot at this stage limit ourselves to the history of a single civilisation, the European, of which we can follow the development in time and space over several millennia. It suggests to us the long run continuity of a special kind of social and personal relations, different from the other ones, between individuals who try often, even if not always successfully, to distinguish themselves from the other existing forms of relations: family (based on alliance, kinship and birth, that is, on all things that existed before them, contribute to predetermine them and go along with them for all their life), the political power (that demands from them obedience and allegiance) or the economic networks (based on free cooperation) that aimed to create larger links of exchange and interdependence. Can we think that friendship, permanently renewed and reinvented, and based on

a frequent compromise between its institutional weakness and the ideal reference to a model and to rules that aimed to overcome the existing and much stronger social constraints, had actually what Mark Granovetter called in his famous 1973 article the 'strength of weak ties'?[21]

Such a question cannot be answered at this preliminary stage without a glance at some, though not all, civilisations, in an initial stage, that had the same importance, continuity and complexity that the European one, and had in common with it philosophy and ethics, literary traditions, and a more or less large range of concrete examples of individuals making their choices and taking their decisions at different stages of their life, and, last but not least, a sketch of an ethnological and sociological research and reflection that had started to put some order in a very heterogeneous documentation.[22]

The first example will be China, where friendship had from the early beginning a very central role, both in philosophy and literature (poetry and novels). For Confucius, writes Rémi Mathieu, friendship is, with the family relations, the other basic set of social relations. But, as Confucius is supposed to have said: 'Between the beneficial things, there are the three friendships. Between the detrimental things, there are the three friendships.' And he would have said the same about joy: another way to say that friendship or joy have both their positive and negative aspects.[23] As for the Taoists, they consider friendship as a relation where talking is unnecessary. If friendship is a very common topic in Chinese poetry, most of the time it is a relation between men, quite never of a man with a woman or between women. And many paintings depict small groups of male scholars, sitting outside under the moon, declaiming poems and drinking. The cult of friendship is also a central topic in several Chinese novels like the Honglou meng (*The dream of the red pavilion*) or the Shuihu zhuan (*On the riverside*), where friendship is part of a broader theme, the revolt. As explained to me by Huang Bei, even if the place of friendship

[23] Le Blanc and Mathieu, *Philosophes confucianistes*: 186.

is very limited it would be possible to identify two kinds of situations: friendship between the lady and her servant, and between the different spouses of the same husband, who is often a mandarin, that is, a scholar (as, for example, in *Two Cousins*, translated by Rémusat and read even by Goethe). A third situation would be, in a novel called *Narration of an Ephemeral Life*, the case of the wife of a man (who loves her very much), who convinces him to introduce in her house a concubine, a courtesan by origin; but it looks like a proof more of love than of friendship. As we can see, we have there only a part of the story: the literary and ethical one. A social history is still missing, and needs to be written.

In Japan, the word itself *Yujo*, that means 'friendship', has not at all the same value and linguistic status. It is felt as external, and then foreign to a society that the still widely accepted sociological tradition describes as a 'vertical society': that is, a society where the interpersonal vertical links, much more powerful and inherited from the past, would have constituted the basis of the Japanese 'economic miracle' after 1950–60, and inspired a strong and quite exclusive solidarity between workers and employees from one side, and their enterprise from the other, that was seen and lived by them as the key factor of their own identity.[24] A confirmation can be found in the book of Iwamoto Yoshiharu (1868–1912, baptised in 1885), author of *On Marriage* published in 1891 during the Meiji era, where he supports the idea of a major change to introduce in the Japanese marriage: the free choice of the two partners, that would become independent from the decision of their parents and would have created between husband and wife an equal relation:

> Equals never exist on Earth. We fear our parents; our elder brothers and sisters are above us; our younger brothers and sisters are smaller than us; we serve our lord and our vassals serve us. True friends are equal, and for the first time this equal situation gives birth to a sentiment where love is not mixed at all with fear. But this desire itself to be equal to your friends is the proof that there are no actually equal persons on Earth....Husband and wife are the only ones who may be equal, and couple is the only place where it is possible to feel, for the first time, this true friendship (*makotono yujo*) that is convenient between friends.

[24] Nakane, *Japanese Society*. This concept of vertical society' is used by the author to propose a 'structural opposition' between 'Indian system' and 'Japanese system'. The Indian system is said 'to leave to the individual a larger intellectual freedom but a minor freedom of action' (p. 24 of the French edition).

Father, mother, brothers and sisters: they have been without their own knowledge united by Heaven…live in the same household, and keep alive this relation, so difficult to cut…, that is the family link that is based on the same blood….That is a household. I come from the group formed by parents and siblings, I am not separate from it, I am inside it, we form a same body.[25]

We read in this text the perfect and total insertion of the individual in the family group where he was born and that is totally structured by the same hierarchy of generations and ages, but not of gender that we can find in Montaigne, with the only possible exception: the couple formed by the husband and the wife who are the only ones to be able to develop the relation of perfect equality that friends would also create between themselves but they cannot achieve. Marriage is the only place for true friendship, and nothing exists outside the family.

Friendship does, however, exist in Japanese society and cultural tradition. The ideal of total equality that would abolish or ignore all the social hierarchies may be found either in a poem of an unknown author who wrote around 100 BC[26] and a recent movie by Nishida Toshiyuki where two men become friends while fishing together before discovering that one of them is the employee of the other. In both cases the authors respect the Japanese rule and prefer to suggest rather than saying explicitly, as does the poet Basho in his *haiku* where, living in the city, he thinks of his peasant neighbours living in the countryside:

It is late autumn
I wonder what my neighbours
will be doing now

We find here the same link between friendship and silence that was promoted by Taoists, and defined as the quality of the true friend that one employee was asking from a friend in France today. But at the same time, friendship is today one of the main components of the story line of the famous *manga*s, the Japanese comic strips that are said to be the most widely read.

The last example I would give here is situated in the Himalayan area, in Bhutan, Nepal and Ladakh, and is the result of an anthropological

[25] Butel, 'Des couples aimants pour une nation moderne': 361–79.
[26] Brecht, *Poésies* (*poèmes chinois*): 143.

research in the field[27] that could study the tradition of the oath of friendship both inside the same rural population and between different groups of population (mainly nomads and sedentary peasants). In both cases, friendship is collective, and celebrated by a feast, a meal and by drinking beer, and looks to be necessary to the economic life and to the exchange of products and services between both groups. But it may also have a religious dimension, as for example in Bhutan, when the chief of the religious order Drugpa–Kagyupa decides to leave his position: here also we find the use of the family words (sister and brother, either older or younger) to call the members of new groups of seven persons, whose children will be forbidden from marrying each other.

I am sure that much more information is available that I was not able to identify. But I am also sure that more systematic research has to be done in different countries and cultural areas so to find sources, material documents and oral traditions that will help us to understand better from inside the societies we would study. And I am convinced that anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, specialists of literature and historians have to work more and more together on this common field of research where we have all very much to learn.

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[27] Jest, 'De l'affection à l'amitié jurée: expériences asiatiques': 203–16.

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