**We Are Wide, Like a Continent**

Heather Davis

…what precisely is an encounter with someone you like? Is it an encounter with someone, or with the animals who come to populate you, or with the ideas which take you over, the movements which move you, the sounds which run through you?

– Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*

...[friendship] 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.

– Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*

The dialogue is full of holes, of gaps, of distance. Blankness. A question unanswered. An answer unrevealed. The distance of seven years, of seven days. Between the living and the dead. Between friends. Between performer and audience. These silences that are actually full of words, full of words that are only for these two, for their intimacy, in that moment, for their relation. Only for the movements of time, for memory. Movements that move without content, for us, the readers. They preserve intimacy. And simultaneously reveal the workings of intimacy, without the supposed simplicity of the index of language to navigate our feelings. These words and spaces are full of love, connection, difficulty, annoyance, boredom, frustration, laughter, loss, and the deep desire to hold on, always. The intimate whispers of a life transmitted through the words we live in, together. Showing up, for each other.

The work that I come back to, that repeats as a refrain in the manner of this performance, in the manner of one of its explicit questions, is a short dialogue with Michel Foucault called “Friendship as a Way of Life.” In it, Foucault discusses the possibility of composing a life of desire outside the frameworks of the couple, of heteronormativity, of a predetermined and predetermining relation. He speaks of the formation of intimacy outside of cultures or spaces of institutionalization. He speaks of the ways in which there are no forms to navigate certain intimacies, intimacies that cross boundaries and defy expectations, intimacies for which we have no ready-to-hand descriptions or lexicon for. He writes, “They face each other without terms or convenient words, with nothing to assure them about the meaning of the movement that carries them towards each other.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is this unnamed space that k.g. and Nancy return to. The space of mentor-mentee, of friends, of desired companions, of teacher and student, of family, with no word as referent to guide us. “[W]e see how hard it is to adjudicate the norms of a public world when it is also an intimate one,” Lauren Berlant writes of the nature of intimacy, “especially where the mixed-up instrumental and affective relations of collegiality are concerned.”[[2]](#footnote-2) “It’s not professional what we’re doing,” Nancy says to k.g.. But it is in this undefined space, one yet unnamed that hovers between two or more realms, where some new relation emerges, some new sense of being and being-with. The two-ness of the space creates movement for subjectivity. Nancy repeats, differently, at various moments throughout the week, “Being in two worlds is a way of being free, for me. Being double.” To exist as two, in the sense of seeing binocularly, is not a matter of double-vision, but of opening up a whole new realm: a three dimensional universe. This freedom stops and starts throughout, loops around, falls out of earshot, comes back into view. There are multiplicities and openings and constrictions. In this movement in and out, in this doubleness, space is made, for a life, for an intimacy. “I am wide, like a continent, I contain multitudes,” Nancy says. “I am a loop, I am chewy. I am all these things.”

In the doubleness of words and the blank page, more and more space emerges. Until, finally, the last transcribed word is ‘Oh.’ Followed by more space. A letting go. The inevitable, terrible, beautiful movements of our lives towards space. Towards a place where language cannot follow.

1. Michel Foucault. “Friendship as a Way of Life.” *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, 310. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue” *Critical Inquiry* 24 no. 2 (Winter 1998): 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)