

## Editor's Introduction

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### Introduction

Over the past three decades interest in the study of friendship has been steadily growing. This growth has been in all directions. Temporally studies can be found focusing on friendship from the earliest societies to contemporary times (perhaps there is even room for imaging friendship in the future). Geographically studies have focused on friendship in numerous locations across the globe, spanning not only geography but also culture. In terms of the location of friendship, studies have looked at pairings such as the dyad to the network of relations that transverse the globe. Friendship has been shown to connect the personal and the political. Conceptually, the kinds of entities that are capable of friendship have been expanded from the human to include groups, states and perhaps even animals. Furthermore, analysis has been undertaken on how the language of friendship changes the structure, expectations and possibilities of the world, both descriptively and normatively.

Within this context AMITY has always welcomed work that diversifies the study of friendship. Friendship cuts across cultural, ideological, disciplinary, and methodological approaches. It is inherently plural and is perhaps best understood not only as a topic or site of investigation, but as a kind of question: *how are we to understand what binds person to person, group to group?* Friendship is the investigation and theorization of horizontal ties of affinity, concern, and action. To think about friendship is to re-engage that sharing and basic connectedness which provides the fabric onto which the social, cultural, religious, and political world is woven. Without friendship – without the bonds between person and person – no recognisably human world is possible. This question can be addressed by a number of disciplines, ideologies, and from numerous cultural perspectives. It also tends to fuse, merge, and blur all of these 'neat' distinctions. It can be considered analytical, normative, or empirical and most likely a mix of all three. In times when the connective tissues of societies are said to be wearing thin, or actively being torn asunder, the question of friendship seems as relevant and as vital as ever. What resources does friendship provide to repair and maintain what is valuable; and what resources does friendship provide to help weave something new?

In this respect it is perhaps worth reflecting upon, and re-emphasising, two of the aims of the journal as a whole – and some hopes for what the study of friendship can entail. Importantly, it is hoped that in the pages of AMITY work is presented which locates friendship 'within and across states, cultures, traditions, and histories, welcoming

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contributions that explore friendship from plural vantage points, and from diverse societies around the globe', and that the work also helps to 'to inform and moderate current ideas about the state as power and politics as hierarchy'. These two aims are not simply coincidental but they belong together. The sheer diversity of friendship indicates the possibilities for alternative societal formations than those which have become hegemonic today. Whilst there is no doubt that friendship can act as a conservative force, its potential connects it to resistance, diversity, solidarity, equality, and justice. Importantly, as much work has shown, the study of friendship also has great potential to amplify and build-up and build-out from the local and personal interactions that form the politics of everyday life towards helping to shape something productive for the wider whole.

In recent volumes of AMITY these aims have been embraced and enlarged. There is increasing and welcome attention on understandings, forms, and practices of friendship which exist beyond the Western paradigm which has occupied much of scholarship in English, and AMITY continues to encourage and promote this work. This is crucial to realising the global potential of friendship not just as a site of study but also – perhaps – as a site of political praxis and change.