Chapter 4

Labors of Love

Biopower, AIDS, and the Buddy System

Since its initial appearance in *The History of Sexuality, Volume One* Foucault's concept of biopower has indeed taken on a *bios* of its own. Ubiquitous in recent academic analyses of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape, the concept and its kin (biopolitics, governmentality) find their most productive—although, as I hope to show, somewhat misguided—articulation in the collaborative work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (*The Labor of Dionysus* and the *Empire* trilogy).1 Shifting Foucault's focus from population and social management to labor, globalization, and sovereignty, these authors conceive of biopolitics in economic terms, detailing the consequences of the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist labor practices. Significantly, whereas Foucault designates sexuality the principal apparatus in the functioning of biopower, Hardt and Negri argue that sexuality in the post-Fordist era is no longer the privileged site of biopolitical control: when human affect, language, and cooperation are subsumed into the productive processes of capital, the gestures, expressions, and movements—indeed, the very flesh—of the social body become commodities. Their thesis raises a number of pressing questions that bear on the future of sexuality studies: Has sexuality itself been totally subsumed into the productive processes of postmodern capital? Is Foucault's "deployment of sexuality" too blunt an analytical tool to understand biopower in post-Fordism? Indeed, is sexuality any longer a productive category for social analysis at all?

Although such questions are not the primary focus of this chapter (my aim here is far more modest), they take on quite different meanings in the face of AIDS, a subject that receives no serious discussion in Hardt and Negri's work. If, as I argue, AIDS is understood as a primary locus of biopolitical struggle, sexuality simply cannot be ignored or subsumed into a generalized concept of *bios*. Even a cursory glance at the focus and scope of recent HIV-prevention research reveals that the "life" valorized
in biopower continues to turn on that most stubborn of discursive constructions, the homosexual-heterosexual binary. A 2006 study by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) concerning male circumcision as an HIV preventative for men engaging in "heterosexual intercourse," for example, appears more invested in naturalizing the homo-hetero binary than in disseminating accurate and practical HIV-prevention information. Although AIDS education campaigns have attempted for decades to distinguish high-risk behavior from high-risk groups and identity-specific sexual behavior from corporeal acts (not "gay sex," but vaginal, anal, oral sex, etc.), the use of the phrases such as "heterosexual intercourse" in the NIH press release reveals the persistence of heteronormative assumptions and objectives in contemporary AIDS research and funding.

The scientific research that proved definitively that HIV does not discriminate based on sexual orientation, then, ironically serves to perpetuate discrimination against sexual minorities. In the early 1980s, AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs) responded to such discrimination by emphasizing the human devastation wrought by AIDS and by delinking HIV from sexual identity. Specifically, the AIDS buddy system strategically shifted the discursive terms of AIDS politics from sexuality to friendship. Guided by an ethics of discomfort, this support network, I argue, sets the stage for a politics of friendship as shared estrangement in later AIDS activism. As a collaborative project that communized caregiving, the buddy system engenders a biopower "from below," providing an alternative to the often prejudiced health care of AIDS-phobic medical institutions and fostering new forms of cooperation between the sick and the healthy, between the gay-identified and straight-identified, between lesbian separatists and gay male liberationists. By situating the buddy system on a larger historical-theoretical grid concerning biopolitics, AIDS, and affective labor, I understand it as a modern project of subjectivation—a deflection from the biopolitical administration of life—consistent with a Foucaultian project of toppling "the monarchy of sex."

The Life of Biopower

In Chapter 3, I placed emphasis on the fact that Foucault's (early and late) articulations of biopower stress the centrality of sexuality. In order to resist the biopolitical administration of life, according to Foucault, the link between sex and truth must be broken. In elaborating and ostensibly updating Foucault's concept, however, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri desexualize it by asserting that biopower no longer employs sexuality as the principal apparatus in the social management of life. Whereas, according to the authors, Foucault limits his analysis to the state's across-the-board use of biopower, Hardt and Negri argue above all in Empire that the reach of biopower extends beyond the nation-state, which comes to play second fiddle in the supranational march of capital. They analyze in Empire the multiple processes of globalization—the worldwide saturation of capital, the steady "bourgeoisification" of the globe, the withering of the nation-state, the post-imperialist political landscape—and argue that the new sovereign, the new order of the globalized world, is a decenttered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule they designate (capital 'E') Empire. Empire is neither a metaphor nor a term by which other historical empires can be characterized. Rather, distinguished by a lack of boundaries and a suspension of history, Empire is an extreme form—or the logical conclusion—of Foucaultian biopower. Although accorded a privileged status in the logic of Empire, neither the United States nor any other single nation-state is the superpower Svengali pulling the strings behind the scenes. Gliding on a smooth, unstricted plane of fluid boundaries and hybrid identities, Empire operates beyond the nation-state, beyond imperialism, unlimited and unbound by any geographical region—a topography at once liberating and daunting for any progressive political project. In a historical moment, "when language and communication, ... when immaterial labor and cooperation, become the dominant productive force" (Empire, 385) a moment in which the material effects of global capitalism are mystified perhaps more than ever due to—not in spite of—the explosion of information technologies, exploitation proliferates in increasingly protean forms. As Hardt and Negri traverse this postmodern terrain of exploitation, they discern an emerging multitude seeking an alternative global society and examine political sites and phenomena in which the immanent workings of biopower are not so much countered as comprehended and redirected toward alternative ends (e.g., demonstrations against immigration policies as a move toward global citizenship; the generality of biopolitical production prompting a demand for a new social wage, etc.). In doing so, the authors affirm and nurture the potentials of a new constituent power in the form of a multitude.

Conceptually, multitude is Hardt and Negri's attempt to think beyond the limits of political models founded on either identity or difference. These authors locate an organizational form for their multitude in the network, a configuration that emerges at the point of contiguity between identity and difference. As they write in Multitude:

The two dominant models posed a clear choice: either united struggle under the central identity or separate struggles that affirm our differences. The new network model of the
multitude displaces both of these options—or, rather, it does not so much negate the old forms as give them new life in a different form. . . . In conceptual terms, the multitude replaces the contradictory couple identity-difference with the complementary couple commonality-singularity. In practice the multitude provides a model whereby expressions of singularity are not reduced or diminished in our communication and collaboration with others in struggle, with our forming ever greater common habits, practices, conduct, desires—with, in short, the global mobilization and extension of the common. (217–18)

The commonality–singularity dyad cuts a transversal line through the dialectic of identity-difference. The network form, characterized by decentralized leadership and horizontal linkages between autonomous nodes, is most effective in the struggle for (and, conversely, the dismantling of) democracy in a biopolitical world. Resistance movements organized as networks are distributed, open, and thus mimic, or, at times, take advantage of, the dispersed structure of biopower. These struggles come into view on the political horizon in an era when life-forms previously held in common—affect, language, indigenous knowledges; what Marx in the Grundrisse designated “the general intellect”—become increasingly privatized and commodified. Although biopower promotes a standard of life and a form of individuality in the service of realizing the capitalist dream of a “global village” of consumers, it likewise brings into being new forms of community, new power structures, and new avenues for creative cooperation. Progressive networks use the tools of biopolitical production to work toward an alternative form of globalization. Counterpoised by the G20 and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the multitude is formed “from below” through communicative networks that collaborate to actualize common goals. The small-scale Creative Commons project (software engineers who exchange ideas over the internet to create the best possible version of a free computer application) as well as the large-scale convergence movement (composed of diverse progressive groups protesting together, most famously in the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle, 1999) implement biopolitical strategy (biopotenza) to reclaim the common and to resist the inhuman, profit-making imperatives of the market.

The multitude in Hardt and Negri’s estimation is thus a thoroughly positive concept: it is the political model through which the dream of democracy—the rule of all by all—can be realized. By contrast, the network form appears in many guises and can be used by organizations with contradictory objectives. Anti-democratic, terrorist organizations, counter-insurgency military operations, and progressive political movements all have adopted the network form to achieve their ends (Multitude 54–56). Formally, then, the network is ambivalent and malleable: It can be seen in protest movements that vanish from one part of the globe only to rematerialize in another, as well as in thoroughly local insurgencies that disintegrate after achieving their goals. Because of their nomadic, often swarm-like activity, movements structured as networks often sneak under the radar of traditionally organized political blocs, appearing from the latter’s vantage point as monstrous and ill-conceived. Significantly, however, the network is the organizational model the modern state and capital have implemented and mastered in the age of Empire. As used by the multitude in the pursuit of an alternative model of globalization, it is most effective, according to Hardt and Negri, in actualizing absolute democracy.

One such progressive use of the network form, mentioned in brief earlier, emerges in the convergence movement for global justice, as exemplified in the 1999 WTO protests. Here Hardt and Negri find the most palpable manifestation of the multitude—a site in which the political potentialities of an immanentist ontology are realized. Characterized by the coordination of self-governing groups toward common goals, the convergence movement becomes for them the social expression of Spinozan anatomy. If “the human body is composed of many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite” (Multitude 190), the convergence movement follows the body’s lead in respecting difference at an ontological level and allowing its constituent parts to collaborate without sacrificing their autonomy. In doing so, this body grows ever more powerful as singular habits and practices in their repetition become increasingly common.

What’s striking, however, both in the demographics of the actual convergence movement and in Hardt and Negri’s theoretical assessment of its constitution, is the glaring absence of those who likewise formed a political movement in heeding the call of the body—that is, queers. Although the direct-action tactics and street theatrics of queer vanguard groups such as ACT UP, The Lesbian Avengers, and SexPanic! often are cited as the inspiration for convergence movement political strategy, those groups’ founding principle for action—generally speaking, that the discursive construction of sexuality ties into larger issues of social power, privilege and access—falls by the wayside. In the words of convergence movement participant and critic, Liz Highleyman:

Progressive thinking has evolved with regard to racism and sexism, and most now agree that the issues of people of color and women are integral to the larger project of achieving
social justice. . . . But when it comes to queers, the issues of sexuality and gender are still downplayed. There remains a sense among some on the left that issues of sex, sexuality, desire, and gender are frivolous, a luxury of the privileged or a waste of time. They are seen as private rather than public, and are associated with leisure rather then work. (*Radical Queers or Queer Radicals?*, From ACT UP 116)

Even though the much-lauded, creative forms of protest invented by queer radicals of the 1980s and 1990s are arguably the result of queer sexual practice and sensibility, as I argue in Chapter 5, sex and sexuality, from the standpoint of many a convergence movement activist, are identity issues that belong to a bygone political era. While there is something quite appealing in understanding the convergence movement as beyond identity politics, the exclusion of sexuality from its purview smacks of the same scorn heaped on gender and sex activists in various twentieth-century Marxist movements (Highleyman, 117–18). Put differently, based on the experiential and theoretical accounts of queers involved in the convergence movement, it appears that our multitude has not necessarily toppled the monarchy of sex (i.e., has not extracted sexuality from a regime of truth), but instead appears to be repeating past mistakes and reopening old wounds that have had all too brief a time to heal.

Hence, although much can be gleaned from Hardt and Negri’s analysis, questions remain concerning the status of sexuality in the age of Empire. In a published conversation between Antonio Negri and Cesare Casarino entitled “It’s a Powerful Life,” Casarino raises such questions. Concerning Foucault’s theorization of sexuality in relation to politics, Negri notes: “[R]ather than disregarding or neglecting Foucault’s elaboration of biopolitics in the context of the deployment of sexuality, I assumed such an elaboration and expanded it so as to account for the overall construction of the body in the indistinguishable realms of production and reproduction, that is, the realm of immaterial labor” (167). Building on a crucial insight of standpoint feminism (i.e., that labor power reproduces itself through sexuality) Negri argues that when immaterial labor is the primary productive force, production and reproduction collapse into one, and corporeality itself—including but not limited to sexuality—becomes the link between individualizing and totalizing techniques of biopower. In a succinct formulation of this crucial shift in production, Sylvère Lotringer explains in his foreword to Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude*:

In the post-Fordist economy, surplus value is no longer extracted from labor materialized in a product, it resides in

the discrepancy between paid and unpaid work—the idle time of the mind that keeps enriching, unacknowledged, the fruits of immaterial labor. . . . Workers used to work in servile conditions, leaving them just enough time to replenish. Now their entire life is live labor, an invisible and indivisible commodity.10

By extension, when thoughts, affect, and human cooperation are for sale, when life itself is the chief agent of production, biopower “from above” [biopoterel], according to Negri, no longer needs to deploy sexuality qua sexuality to achieve its ends.

Our multitude theorists, however, can de-emphasize the importance of sexuality for biopower only because the politics of AIDS figures so marginally in their analyses. When it comes to AIDS funding and research, sexuality remains without question a determining factor in the distribution of resources. A 2006 NIH HIV-prevention study, to cite just one recent example, calls attention to the continued relevance of sexuality for biopower.11 The study, conducted in Kenya and Uganda with 7,780 heterosexually identified, HIV-negative men divided into circumcised and uncircumcised groups, tested the effectiveness of male circumcision in the prevention of HIV transmission from a woman to a man. Its press release concludes that “medically performed circumcision significantly reduces a man’s risk of acquiring HIV through heterosexual intercourse.” Tellingly, however, “the amount of benefit provided by circumcision is unknown” for men who have sex with men, among whom, at least in the United States, most new HIV infections occur.12

The rationale for the study rests squarely on heteronormative assumptions and its findings obscure rather than illuminate the basic facts of HIV transmission. Its focus on “heterosexual intercourse,” as opposed to identity-less sexual behavior, for example, is vague to a fault. “Heterosexual” in the study’s wording qualifies an act, “intercourse.” Although the presumed behavior here is penile-vaginal intercourse, this is in no way clarified or specified. “Heterosexual intercourse” can be taken to mean, willfully or unconsciously, oral, anal, and/or vaginal penetrative sex between men and women—even though these behaviors carry radically different levels of risk and are understood in proper safer-sex education as unique and discrete acts. Such imprecise language is also misleading and dangerous because it grants circumcised heterosexually identified men a permission of sorts to practice less-safe sex—be it anal, oral, or vaginal sex, such heterosexuals apparently are taking fewer risks than homosexually or bisexually identified men (who may in fact be practicing exactly the same, or even less risky, types of sex). Finally, as
we learned in the early days of AIDS panic, the use of sexual-identity terminology in HIV prevention has done more to demonize sexual minorities than to prevent the virus's spread. In failing to use more precise language (penile-vaginal intercourse) and the less discriminatory, more scientifically accurate term risk behavior, this study, at worst, insinuates that risky types of people transmit HIV: Sexually specific "risk groups" become the infectious agents, not the ordinary, average citizens who do risky things when having sex. The effect of this casual slippage is that entire social groups are blamed for the transmission of a virus that cares little about the sexual or national identity of its transmitter. As Jan Zita Grover pointed out almost twenty-five years ago, the medical term risk group, when taken out of its epidemiological context, "has been used to stereotype and stigmatize people already seen as outside the moral and economic parameters of 'the general population.' . . . [It is used] to isolate and condemn people rather than to contact and protect them." Although reliable HIV-prevention campaigns discuss high-risk behavior instead of high-risk groups and corporeal acts instead of identity-specific "homo" or "hetero" sex, this study does more to naturalize the homo-hetero binary than to disseminate scientifically sound health information.

Indeed, quite disturbing questions follow from the study's conclusions: Is anal or oral sex between a man and a woman "heterosexual intercourse"? Or, are these activities by default "homosexual intercourse"? Is penetrative vaginal sex—apparently, the sole focus of the study—more important or more prevalent than these other acts? Do these findings intimate that unprotected vaginal sex is now safer sex for circumcised men? What about the women? What is unspoken here speaks volumes. Do the categories "homosexual" and "heterosexual" hold the same meaning in Africa as they do in the United States? Are women in general, or, perhaps even female sexuality itself—historically associated with insatiability and contamination—held symbolically responsible for the spread of sexually transmitted disease? Would such an experiment—in which certain subjects are given a hypothetical advantage over others in protecting themselves from HIV—be conducted in the United States? Bearing in mind the potential harm to the trial's subjects, is an African life less valuable than an American one?

To add insult to injury, in The New York Times report on the study, risk groups expand exponentially into "risk countries" and "heterosexual intercourse" becomes the vaguer—and even more misleading—"heterosexual sex." The result is a confusing jumble of heteronormative disinformation and Western cultural bias: Unprotected heterosexual sex is 48 percent safer with male circumcision; heterosexual sex is in general safer than homosexual sex, which remains unexplored. Kenya and Uganda are perilous and potentially contagious in their very existence as nations; Africa, by extension, remains—no surprise here—"The Dark Continent," the dangerous, libidinal underbelly of the rational and enlightened West.

It is clear, then, that the rationale of the NIH study and the reportage surrounding it betray a patriarchal, heterosexist, and colonialist bias. Moreover, the conception of sexuality on which this study rests and which it indisputably affirms is precisely the one Foucault understood as crucial to the functioning of biopower. Practicing two completely different types of sex, according to this study, heterosexuals and homosexuals become distinct species. Sexual behavior is assumed to be naturally linked to personal identity and the lives of the social groups associated with these sexual identities—one, heterosexual: comprehensible and worthy of study; the other, homosexual: "unknown" and mysterious—are valued hierarchically and treated unequally. It is thus clear that in the distribution of AIDS treatment and funding, sexuality has not, contrary to Negri's claim, been completely assimilated into a generalized concept of "life."

Although in their first collaboration, The Labor of Dionysus, Hardt and Negri praise AIDS activists for calling into being a new form of subjectivity "that has not only developed the affective capacities necessary to live with the disease and nurture others, but also incorporated the advanced scientific capacities within its figure" (13), in Empire and Multitude such praise is by and large directed toward the organizational innovations of contemporary labor movements. The shift of focus raises further questions: What has become of these AIDS-activist subjectivities? Is their work only relevant for its influence on the new, supposedly "post-sexual" multitude? Does the absence of AIDS from these discussions speak to the same historicidal will-to-forget that motivates the ideological relegation of the syndrome to the Third World, the same will that fostered the false sense of security in the West after the discovery of antiretroviral therapy? In Empire and Multitude AIDS, when it is mentioned, is appropriated as a useful metaphor for the boundlessness of global capital, the fear of HIV's spread becoming the symbolic crystallization of postcolonial anxiety surrounding "the new dangers of global contagion" (Empire 136). Such a rendering, to put it mildly, is somewhat cavalier: Let's forget, from its very inception AIDS was and continues to be a matter of life and death. And the new forms of life invented in AIDS activism still inhabit—and irrevocably alter—the global biopolitical landscape. Especially in regards to AIDS research, then, sexuality remains a vital factor in determining the value of life (and hence the time and money it should be allocated) and thus must be included in any and all discussion of biopolitics. In contradistinction to Hardt and Negri, then, I take seriously Foucault's claim that sexuality is a linchpin between the individualizing and totalizing
techniques of biopower and find in early forms of AIDS caregiving strategies for delinking sexuality from truth.

Labors of Love

The elision of AIDS in Hardt and Negri's analysis of the biopolitical turn thus mirrors and perpetuates the silencing of sexuality in twentieth-century labor movements and recent convergence activism. When AIDS is taken seriously as a site of biopolitical struggle, sexuality, as I have been arguing, does not disappear in bios. Initially appropriated in the United States as a means of reinforcing a normative "Us vs. Them," namely, homo-versus heterosexual, binary, AIDS only became meaningful through, and ultimately overdetermined by, discourses of sexuality. As the reality of the disease changed (epidemic became pandemic), heteronormative binary oppositions became increasingly difficult and finally impossible to sustain—at least on a conscious, rational level. A rigid, politically charged representation gave way to a variety of countervailing perspectives concerning exactly what AIDS is and how it should be understood. Yet through its ideological demonization ("AIDS is God's punishment to fags") and the opposition to that demonization ("AIDS does not discriminate"), AIDS, as glimpsed in the NIH study, remains servile to King Sexuality. My purpose here is not to offer a close analysis of representations of AIDS nor to detail the intersections between discursive constructions of AIDS and the policing of sexuality—this has already been done so admirably by Simon Watney, Cindy Patton, and Elizabeth Waldby, to name just a few. Rather, my aim is to point out that our multitude theorists can de-emphasize the importance of sexuality only because AIDS figures so marginally in their analysis of biopolitics. Foucault's understanding of sexuality as a tool deployed to encourage a navel-gazing self-discipline that thereby ensures the smooth functioning of biopower becomes meaningful again when considering the specific strategies of ASOs and AIDS activists.

From struggles with multinational pharmaceutical giants to genericize AIDS drugs to the almost visible north-south divide demarcating the tip-heavy distribution of both global capital and antiretrovirals, AIDS has become a key locus of biopolitical exploitation, resistance, and creativity. Foucault's observation, analyzed in Chapter 3, that anti-authoritarian struggles in the biopolitical era are struggles "against the submission of subjectivity" and for the valorization of new forms of life becomes relevant here. Like those struggles (women's rights, children's rights, etc.), AIDS activism arguably begins in identity politics and expands centrifugally to a larger project of social justice. Although AIDS has been given many identities by mainstream media—the gay male with Kaposi Sarcoma lesions, the emaciated IV drug user, the poverty-stricken African mother, the Indian prostitute—it exceeds all of them. As the pandemic spreads, social categories blur and ossified boundaries between ethnicities and nationalities become less distinct. And yet in the distribution of treatment and funding, hard geographical, racial, and class lines are drawn. AIDS thus crystallizes the paradoxes of both biopolitical production and global capitalism in the age of Empire: However radically indiscriminate, it continues to be associated with particular social groups, regions, cultural "Others," and minoritarian politics. By calling into question the validity of the identity categories assigned to it, AIDS in turn questions the efficacy of a politics founded on such categories. In early AIDS caregiving and activism, then, I find the seeds of a post-identitarian politics—the overcoming of biopolitically administered identities and the creation of new forms of being in the recognition of a common project. This is to say, in revealing the instability of national, cultural, and ethnic identities, AIDS gives rise to a multitude of its own making.

With AIDS now situated at the heart of biopolitical struggle, Hardt and Negri's discussions concerning the revolutionary potential of affective labor and love become useful. In "Twenty Theses on Marx," Negri begins this discussion by interpreting Marx's conception of living labor as immanent production. Whereas the early, humanistic Marx, according to Negri, understood revolution as a dialectical return—the de-alienation of labor and hence the reunification of the individual with his species-being—the later Marx can be shown to understand it differently. The capitalist system for Marx becomes a mere concretization of the force relations immanent to the social field: It is dead, objectified labor. Living labor, by contrast, is power in its productivity and creativity; in its infinite movement living labor by definition tries to free itself from the constrictive grip of capital. Negri writes:

Up until now we have excavated in the system of dead labor, of capital, of Power, and we have seen how, wedged into that system, there was a clandestine, subterranean, hidden motor pulsing with life—and with such efficiency! We have, in a manner of speaking, rediscovered the Marxist affirmation of living labor in today's world, when living labor is already completely separated, autonomous and positioned against every naturalistic rigidification of being. (170–71)
With a Spinozan twist, Marx’s living labor becomes ontological potentiality. Capitalism flourishes only to the extent to which it can usurp a force that always threatens to overflow its containment and seep through the (metaphorical and literal) factory walls. Hardt and Negri argue that these walls begin to crumble as postmodern capital tends toward immaterial production. In this process of dilapidation, the possibilities of redirecting living labor toward more democratic ends become ever more palpable.

The project in *Empire*, then, is to theorize a historical passage in social forms—from Fordism to post-Fordism, from disciplinary society to control society—to tease out the democratic possibilities of living labor. “[T]he entire first phase of capitalist accumulation (in Europe and elsewhere),” the authors write, “was conducted under this [disciplinary] paradigm of power” (23). Disciplinary power functions through the organization of sites of confinement (the prison, the school, the factory, the asylum) that “produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices,” that determine normal and deviant behavior, and that enforce obedience through fear of social exclusion (23). In control societies, by contrast, biopower is the rule: They are characterized by fluctuating networks, variable flows, and modulative mechanisms of command. Deleuze, from whom Hardt and Negri borrow this historical schematic, describes the difference between the two societies in his essay “Postscript on Control Societies”:

Money, perhaps, best expresses the difference between the two kinds of society, since discipline was always related to molded currencies, containing gold as a numerical standard, whereas control is based on floating exchange rates, modulations depending on a code setting sample percentages for various currencies. . . . [C]apitalism in its present form is no longer directed toward production . . . it’s directed toward meta-production. . . . What it seeks to sell is services, and what it seeks to buy activities. It’s a capitalism no longer directed toward production, but toward products, that is, towards sales or markets. (*Negotiations* 180–81)

This passage hints at a decisive shift in capitalism critical to Hardt and Negri’s analysis: the passage from the formal subsumption to the real subsumption of labor. The authors build on Marx’s thesis in the *Grundrisse* that abstract knowledge becomes the principal productive force in capitalism’s development. This “general intellect”—common knowledges, habits, and affects that for a time were of little interest to production—becomes objectified into fixed capital. Labor in turn is increasingly immaterial and the proletariat as a class becomes dispersed, if not residual (*Grundrisse* 704–707). “What it seeks to sell is services”: services of the communication- and information-technological variety (cellular/wireless technologies, news services, etc.); knowledge-based services (computer help-lines, consultants); and problem-solving services (brokerage, financial advising, etc.). In the post-Fordist era, in a control society in which the immaterial is increasingly put to work, the production and manipulation of affects is essential. As the life force of living labor, however, affect can likewise be harnessed for anti-capitalist, democratic projects.

Historically, women and queers have been the primary participants in affective labor practices: from childrearing to social work to nursing, affective labor in earlier phases of capitalist production denoted femininity (or effeminacy) and was thereby relegated to the margins. In the shift from disciplinary to control societies and the real subsumption of labor under capital, however, affective labor becomes more generalized and diffuse. Immaterial yet corporeal, affective labor produces not a product but an intangibility: feelings of ease, comfort, love. Hardt and Negri describe it as follows in *Empire*:

Affective labor is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of “women’s work” have called “labor in the bodily mode.” Caring labor is certainly immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower. (293)

Deborah B. Gould, following Brian Massumi, marks a distinction between affect and emotion that helps clarify Hardt and Negri’s investment in affective labor.18 Whereas affect refers to the “nonconscious, and unnamed, but nevertheless registered, experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body,” emotions are “what [part] of affect—what of the potential of bodily intensities—gets actualized or concretized in the flow of living” (*Moving Politics*, 19–20). Although affects and emotions can occur simultaneously, the former always exceed the latter: emotion is only an approximate representation of affect and is subject to the rules of semiotic systems (language, culture, bodily gesture and expression, etc.—all historically determined). Affect, by contrast, is unrepresentable: In the remainder not captured in social life lies the potential for articulating, gestulating, and communicating in ways incomprehensible to extant semiotic systems. Moreover, whereas emotions are attributable to a subjective interiority, affects shoot through the subject, unfolding its interiority. No individual or corporation can
thus own affects: They are common property, radically social. It is the
immanence and ambivalence of affect, then, its nonpredetermination,
its unruly, communal nature, that entices Hardt and Negri as they chart
capitalism's increasing reliance on affective labor.

Although affective labor in post-Fordism is a primary source of
surplus value, it at the same time "provides the potential for a kind of
spontaneous and elementary communism" (Empire, 294). The cooperative
interactivity endemic to affective labor can extend beyond the confines
of the workplace. A radical "elementary communism" emerges when
communities fostered in such labor practices put their cooperative
interactivity to use in a different arena. Like living labor, then, affect
exceeds its usefulness for the market. In control societies, capitalism thus
becomes, unwittingly or not, communist: Biopower, which involves the
integration and exploitation of affect, creates new forms of association
and cooperation that hold the potential to engender other, more authentically
democratic, biopolitical worlds.

In addition to being highly effective emergency-response networks,
then, the ASOs developed in the early 1980s and continuing today, must
be understood as an innovative response to postmodern capital's affective
turn.9 Indeed, such support systems reclaim affect from its commodification
and put it to work in the service of a grassroots biopolitical project. Because
the care of the self falls under the auspices of the state in biopower, fostering
dependence rather than self-transformation, ASOs furthermore instantiate
a modern project of subjectivation: Like the Hellenist philosophers of yore,
discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, ASOs work with the community both to
achieve self-autonomy and to reconnect exercises of self-transformation
with self-knowledge. Dissatisfied with biased and inadequate health
information from medical and governmental authorities, ASOs modify
and/or invent caregiving and health regimens that give rise to powerful
subjective and relational forms. Consequently, the affects produced and
the ethical practices encouraged in AIDS caregiving pave the way for a
resistant politics; it took five brutal years of nursing, loving, and grieving
to usher ACT UP into existence. However exploited in the post-Fordist
workplace, the affective labor of grassroots ASOs ultimately found outlet in
a rageful activism.20 Such activism, I argue, is informed by the politicization
of friendship as shared estrangement in the AIDS buddy network, an early
AIDS support system whose work involved the delinking of sexuality from
truth, relationships of entrustment, and an ethics of discomfort.

A volunteer program to assist people with AIDS, the AIDS buddy
system was developed by New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis in the
early 1980s and became *de rigueur* in international AIDS caregiving soon
thereafter. One of many early efforts to come to terms with an illness
initially believed to affect only gay men (hence AIDS' early medical
acronym GRID [Gay-Related Immuno Deficiency], or, the more derogatory
and illusorily encompassing "gay plague"), the buddy system changed the
direction of a public discourse seeking to scapegoat the gay community
for its purportedly irresponsible sexual "lifestyle." Modeled after buddy
systems used in the military, the Boy Scouts of America, and even scuba
diving, the AIDS buddy system can be understood as an attempt to
humanize PWAs and to promote a social acceptance of homosexuality.21
In a political climate rife with AIDS-related discrimination and denialism,
in a society divided by the Reagan White House—in decidedly genocidal
fashion—into the "general" (natural, lawful) heterosexual population and
(monstrous, dangerous) risk groups,22 the AIDS buddy system borrowed
the organizational form of respected institutions to draw attention to
the human dimension of AIDS, to distance itself from mass media and
medical prejudices regarding homosexuality, and to seek community
aid and funding for a health crisis by and large neglected by federal
institutions. However, in addition to lobbying for the social legitimacy
of homosexuality and the social tolerance of PWAs, the buddy system
at the same time strategically shifted the AIDS debate from a politics of
sexuality to a politics of friendship. If AIDS became meaningful, political,
through discourses of sexuality, the turn toward friendship—traditionally
understood as a relation free from sexuality—short-circuited discursive
links between AIDS and sexual identity. Given Foucault's presentiment
that the future of homosexuality lies in friendship, it is significant that
one of the gay community's first steps in AIDS caregiving was the
desexualization of AIDS via the quasi-institutionalization of friendship.
Beyond a bid for social respectability, such strategy is consonant with a
Foucaultian project of friendship invested in both emptying sex of its
truth content and in reclaiming a privatized relation for a communal
politics. As I have argued, for Foucault the overcoming or turning away
from sexuality as a truth-revealing hermeneutic is paramount to modern
biopolitical struggles. The AIDS buddy system, then, can be interpreted
as a step toward toppling the monarchy of sex: that is, as a movement
of subjectivization that works toward freeing the "homosexual self" from
the straitjacket of sexual identity.

The buddy's role is to offer a PWA functional support in her or his
everyday life; the volunteer is more or less a caregiver, a home health
aid, an errand runner, a friend to sit and chat with indoors, a friend to
go on a walk with outdoors. In *RePlacing Citizenship*, Michael P. Brown
notes the open-endedness of the relationship: "The open-ended definition
of support stems from the variegated and diverse needs any particular
person living with AIDS might have at any given stage of the illness's
progression. That open-endedness also denotes the widespread failures of both state and family structures to provide adequate support immediately during the years of the crisis” (125). Buddies are matched according to the volunteer’s availability and the client’s needs. The absence of a shared history, according to Brown, is precisely what makes the relationship successful. With a freedom from a common past and a foundational acknowledgment of finitude, the unencumbered buddy can do things that family or life friends often cannot—giving the client “permission to die,” for example (147–48). The buddy friendship, then, has no foundation other than the experience through which it is forged; it is a malleable relation that not only has the potential to transform individuals on a personal level but one that also offers a window onto a heterogeneous conception of community. Differences of wealth, race, gender, class, age, and sexual orientation between buddies are not ignored. The organization provides a framework encouraging certain intimacies, but clearly marked rights and duties for each buddy prevent power disparities arising from social differences from developing into exploitative relationships.

This relational structure corresponds with the “entrusted” friendships in the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, an Italian feminist group also active in the 1980s. Entrance secures each friend’s distinct role in the collaborative effort of inventing a new social identity for women: Difference becomes the very ground on which the friendship is built: Disparities with respect to social and economic privilege are not conveniently swept under the rug but instead become a productive tension that propels the relationship. Teresa de Lauretis describes entrustment as follows:

Briefly, the relationship of entrustment is one in which one woman gives her trust or entrusts herself symbolically to another woman, who thus becomes her guide, mentor, or point of reference—in short, the figure of symbolic mediation between her and the world. Both women engage in the relationship . . . not in spite, but rather because and in full recognition of the disparity that may exist between them in class or social position, age, level of education, professional status, income, etc. That is to say, the function of female symbolic mediation that one woman performs for the other is achieved, not in spite but rather because of the power differential between them, contrary to the egalitarian feminist belief that women’s mutual trust is incompatible with unequal power. (“Essence” 14–15)

Buddy friendships are a similar experiment in difference. Their goal is not to eliminate social/economic/health dissymmetries from the relationship but to maintain them precisely as a productive tension. The “desire-in-uneasiness” that marks Foucault’s friendship thus binds the buddy relation; indeed, an ethics of discomfort becomes its practical guide. Power differentials form the backbone of the friendship and individual autonomy is not fused into an identity but maintained in the pursuit of a common objective. To paraphrase de Lauretis, buddying reveals that mutual trust is incompatible with unequal power. Instead, thanks to, not in spite of, such disparity these friendships begin and remain in a mutual discomfort that nurtures singular and collective potentiality. In practice, buddying is a functional, sometimes instrumental form of friendship—a way to ease the burden of another in need. Formally and philosophically, however, it offers an ethical model capable of provoking radically democratic subjective and social formations.

The relational terms of the buddy relationship, then, encourage an ethics of discomfort akin to the sort glimpsed in the problematic friendships of Antiquity. Like those, a “desire-in-uneasiness” forms its bedrock. The buddy system emerged as a response to the social and sexual stigma—often including familial rejection—which accompanied an HIV-positive diagnosis. As more customary social support systems faltered, friendship bonds were no doubt invested with an urgent intensity. And yet, traditional philosophical models of friendship in the face of AIDS ring hollow and unreliable. Montaigne’s “soul-fusion” in which selves merge and endure beyond the grave; Aristotle’s complete friendship as the non-threatening cradle of common virtue; Plato’s teleological ideal, which begins in lack and culminates in an otherworldly Good; reified, sentimental representations offered by the culture industry—all of these friendships are impotent when death is ubiquitous, imposing, impending. In its capacity for radical destruction, in its absolute immanence, AIDS gives lie to dreams of transcendence. To its credit, the AIDS buddy relation incorporates this fact into its very form: it refuses to soften death’s blow, let alone triumph over it via the various clichés of friendship’s salvationist promises. Founded on the bald fact of each friend’s finitude—that “unspeakable” which must remain most private in biopolitical regimes—buddying begins at the point where “normal” friendships end. Given the disparities in health, social status, and station between many participants, given the fact that death overshadows each meeting of these strangers, budding is an uncomfortable, awkward, often contentious, and always difficult relationship.

In this sense, I see in these friendships traces of ancient intergenerational philia, discussed in Chapter 2. The ethics encouraged in those relationships demanded a simultaneous respect for the alterity of the other and a cultivation of the unknown in the self. What sets the buddy relationship apart from its predecessor, however, is that the metaphorical
death immanent to the ancient friendship, that is, the friendship's transformation into institutionalized patriarchal homosociality, is here literalized. In the buddy relation, there is no "afterlife," no hope of ruling the polis together, no becoming equal after all. However, the centrality of difference and finitude in the buddy relationship creates an unbridgeable distance between participants that paradoxically produces an openness to alterity, a receptivity to otherness, and a respect for the foreignness in the friend and the self. Avoiding or assimilating such alterity is impossible here: With finitude foregrounded and ever in-between, differences cannot be subsumed into an identity. What emerges is an ethics of nonrecognition—I can't see myself in the other, I can't subsume the other into myself—which leaves the radical foreignness of both parties in tact and unharmed. Such nonviolative relationality affords an opportunity to cultivate foreignness, to nurture unseen selves and unusual intimacies. Foucault's remarks on the disorderly and unauthorized affective ties between soldiers at war illuminate these aspects of the buddy relation:

During World War I, men lived together completely, one on top of another, and for them it was nothing at all, insofar as death was present and finally the devotion to one another and the services rendered were sanctioned by the play of life and death. And apart from several remarks on camaraderie, the brotherhood of spirit, and some very partial observations, what do we know about these emotional uproars and storms of feeling that took place in those times? One can wonder how, in these absurd and grotesque wars and infernal massacres, the men managed to hold on in spite of everything. Through some emotional fabric, no doubt. I don't mean that it was because they were each other's lovers that they continued to fight; but honor, courage, not losing faith, leaving the trench with the captain—all that implied a very intense emotional tie. It's not to say: "Ah, there you have homosexuality!" I detest that kind of reasoning. But no doubt you have there one of the conditions, not the only one, that has permitted this infernal life where for weeks guys floundered in the mud and shit, among corpses, starving for food, and were drunk the morning of the assault. ("Friendship" 139)

The openness encouraged in the buddy relation, like the soldiers' "storms of feeling," holds the capacity to provoke affective ties that exceed practical utility and institutional codes. Something as paltry and restrictive as "sexuality" cannot define or contain the multifority of desires, hatreds, loves, and ambivalences that might arise between these friends. Indeed, self-identity, sexual and otherwise, is for all intents and purposes checked at the door upon entering into a buddy relation; one leaves the world behind to join Nietzsche's "brotherhood of death," to share in Guibert's "common thanatological destiny." The political potential of such sharing is not to be overlooked.

Paolo Virno's essay, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," helps clarify the radical implications of the acceptance of finitude at the core of the buddy relationship. Like Hardt and Negri, Virno draws connections between contemporary labor practices and the common modes of feeling he finds in a diverse range of experience amid the biopolitical landscape. "Uncertain expectations, contingent arrangements, fragile identities and changing values" (15), though once considered unserviceable for capital, create a new breed of worker in the post-Fordist age. Feelings of alienation and disenchantment, once thought to carry revolutionary potential, have been integrated into the workplace as cynicism and opportunism. Nomadic uprootedness, now a quite common if not necessary way of life in a global economy reliant on migrant labor, benefit-less temp work, and pension-less careers, dims possibilities of forging revolutionary attachments through labor practices. Virno wonders, however, whether there might be a "neutral kernel" (24), an ambivalence, at the heart of this bleakness. He writes:

Opportunism, cynicism, and fear define a contemporary emotional situation marked precisely by an abandonment to finitude and a belonging to uprooting, by resignation, servitude, and eager acquiescence. At the same time, they make that situation visible as an irreversible fact on whose basis conflict and revolt might also be conceived. (33)

Because capitalism has incorporated uprootedness and alienation into its productive processes, because the proletariat as a political class has been altered dramatically in its location and composition, Virno, again like Hardt and Negri, rethinks the traditional Marxian dialectic of class struggle. He begins with an acceptance of the present's irreversibility. Refusing to locate salvation in the past or future, Virno seeks revolutionary potential in the immanence of contemporary disenchantment. The ambivalence he locates here turns on belonging-as-such: What unites "the software technician, the autoworker at Fiat, and the illegal laborer" are feelings of belonging to volatile contexts, to the opportunism of labor, to adaptability itself (18). With the general intellect at the center of production, subjectivity is irrevocably uprooted and multiple, belonging
not to a determinate something but rather to belonging-as-such. In this
text, Virno sees the emergence of community forms predicated not
on shared essences, property relations, or exclusivity. The only hope for
transforming the capitalist status quo lies in leaving behind traditional
conceptions of community and embracing an "abandonment to finitude."

This abandonment—a disavowal of any and all flights into
transcendence, be they religious, New Age, or philosophically dialectical—is
precisely what engenders an intense attachment to belonging itself.
Virno explains: "The abandonment to finitude is inhabited by a vigorous
feeling of belonging. This combination may seem incongruous or
paradoxical.... And yet, alienation, far from eliminating the feeling of
belonging, empowers it. The impossibility of securing ourselves within
any durable context disproportionately increases our adherence to the
most fragile instances of the 'here and now'" (31). Distinct from the
existential imperative to put finitude to work in the service of life, that
is, to subsume death into life so as to live more authentically, Virno's
abandonment to finitude is not necessarily a conscious philosophical
position and by no means guarantees revolutionary action. Rather, it is one
of the nonconscious affective consequences of the perceptual surplus and
structural fleetingness of the postmodern landscape and workplace. Cynics
and opportunists—shape-shifters, masters of adaptability, subjectivities
belonging only to the vicissitudes of the market—succeed financially
precisely because their belonging-to-uprootedness adheres to the ever-
mutating yet seemingly immovable capitalist present.

However, belonging-as-such, in its ambivalence, can be put to
work in the service of radical political projects: "Youth movements and
new labor organizations," for instance, that seek to "abandon their roles
and throw off their oppressive chains rather than confront them openly"
(31). These movements, among others, punk subcultures and Italian
autonominism, choose "defection and 'exodus' over any other form of
struggle" (31).27 Autonomists, discussed briefly in Chapter 3, abandon not
only transcendent Marxist goals but also their very identities as workers;
punks, at least in their more "crusty" incarnations, likewise refrain from
squaring off with authority and instead turn their backs, forsaking hope
in the present and future alike. And yet, in the experience of defection
these deserters actively affirm and invent new forms of life. Cynicism and
nihilism may be these groups' constitutive ground, but in the movement
of exodus from the present ways of being are fashioned, common habits
surface, and the hazy horizons of a political project might be delineated.
As Foucault described in "The Subject and Power," the movements of
which Virno speaks are struggles for subjectivation; they seek to overcome
biopolitically administered identity at any cost, often without conscious

knowledge of exactly why or of what lies beyond. Indeed, the Foucault
who in interviews extricated himself from Socratic dialogue in order to
experiment with new ideas, the Foucault who abruptly rerouted his study
of sexuality because he found that "after all, it was best to sacrifice a
definite program to a promising line of approach" ("Preface," Essential, V:1:
Ethics 205) himself adumbrated such exodus. Disengaging from dialectical
frameworks that ultimately reproduce dominant discursive terms and
logics involves thinking and living experimentally. The boundaries of the
"place" toward which these defectors travel are ever shifting; the project
uniting them reveals itself only in the unfolding of the journey.

It is here where I find a connection between the ethics of the
AIDS buddy system and the politics of later AIDS activism: in leaving
behind traditional transcendent conceptions of friendship, the buddy
system paved the way for a politics of friendship as shared estrangement.
Moreover, the transformation of previous buddy system models, the
disengagement from sexual identity, and the rethinking of friendship—all
of which amounts to an experimental deflection from the present—
can be understood as the radical gesture of exodus that allows for the
constitution of a political project. The complicated affects produced in
the buddy relation (discomfort, frustration, love), the impersonal ethics
encouraged (nonrecognition, openness to alterity, respect for absolute
difference), and the constitutive abandonment to finitude (engendering
intense feelings of belonging, belonging-as-such) find expression in ACT
UP's inventive activist tactics, including die-ins (a form of protest in which
activists play dead in charged public spaces, most famously Saint Patrick's
Cathedral), and the Ashes Action (a protest in which ACT UP members
threw the ashes of dead friends and lovers on to the White House lawn).
None of this of course was necessarily intentional, planned, or inevitable:
The political program and strategy became clear only in the flight from
dominant frameworks of meaning and relating.

From the historian's perspective, this narrative might seem
dubious, simplistic; but at the risk of transforming a complex history
into a teleological narrative, at the risk of rewriting a history that has
been so meticulously researched, I am making connections between the
impersonal ethics of the buddy system and the radical politics of AIDS
activism to stress the political viability of an ethical/political program
that turns on shared estrangement. In the course of doing so, an essential
paradox comes to light: How can a relation that bespeaks the anarchical
contingency of all relatedness in any way comprise an ethical framework,
ground a political program, or establish the terms of a social contract
replete with rights and duties? Just as affect always exceeds emotion, the
asubjective force of friendship likewise creates a surplus uncontrollable
by political forms and institutions. In this surplus lies the potential to do, make, say, and think differently. Although friendship is by design incapable of cohering in an epistemological object deemed “society” or “politics,” we must nonetheless seek out those social and political forms that best accommodate or approximate the antisocial nature of friendship. Only in these forms might we break away from the inherently inequitable and vicious hierarchies of identitarian difference. This is all to say that the impossibility of instituting friendship in something like the AIDS buddy system must be affirmed as a contradiction: Instead of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater we must tarry with this essential paradox and valorize those communal forms that acknowledge and respect the impossibility of sociality as such. In the next chapter, I explore friendship as shared estrangement in connection with AIDS activist practices, and contemplate how we might resuscitate this relational model for contemporary queer politics. To set the stage for that discussion, and to bring to a close my critique of Hardt and Negri’s project, a brief word on love.

Hardt and Negri seek in their multitude the politicization of love. Love quite literally has the final word in *Multitude* and the authors link constituent power with premodern Christian and Judaic conceptions of love to tease out their contemporary political potential. They write:

> We need to recuperate the public and political conception of love common to premodern traditions. Christianity and Judaism, for example, both conceive love as a political act that constructs the multitude. Love means precisely that our expansive encounters and continuous collaborations bring us joy. There is really nothing necessarily metaphysical about the Christian and Judaic love of God: both God’s love of humanity and humanity’s love of God are expressed and incarnated in the common material project of the multitude. (351–52)

Hardt and Negri’s recourse to theological texts here, quite *à la mode* in contemporary Continental Philosophical circles, is indicative of a broader Christian undertone in their project. Not only, as Sylvère Lotringer astutely observes, do the authors use the historical rise of Christianity as an analogy for revolutionary desire in *Empire* (“Foreword,” 14), but the very telos of their multitude—to “push through Empire to come out the other side” (*Empire* 218)—serves as the heavenly afterlife that organizes the becoming of—indeed, the very being of—the multitude. Again, in Lotringer’s words, “The telos, in other words, precedes the multitude and for the most part replaces it” (15). Christian love thus suits Hardt and Negri’s project: just as the nun denies herself earthly, sexual delights so as to prove her devotion to Christ, their multitude transcends the tedious politics of sexuality and unites in an idealized love to reach “the other side.” The authors of *Multitude* fail to divest love of its burdensome history as the bourgeois home of proper sexual expression and as the transcendent romantic solution to messy, worldly matters. Unlike the AIDS buddy system that turned to friendship to delink sexuality from truth and, hence to deprive sexual identity of its social power, Hardt and Negri neglect to consider exactly how sexuality figures into their concept of love—its material manifestation and its political form thus remain hazy at best. Although the authors claim to be lending name to an already-existing multitude (various movements for social justice), and the affect that binds it (love), these names in fact fold and determine a mythical multitude’s actions and relations. In the end, what we have here is arguably Márquez’s famous mantra, “Make Love, Not War,” sans the sexual inflection—for the multitude’s love is positive, active, “pure” in the Christian sense . . . but not necessarily of this world.

To be fair, the authors have complicated their theory of love after the publication of *Multitude*, pointing to the problems involved in adapting its premodern theological conceptions. In a lecture entitled, “Love in the Multitude” given at the University of Minnesota, Hardt traces a genealogy of love’s depoliticization: in the Christian tradition, the separation between *eros* and *agape* (the former private and selfish, the latter public and charitable) and the destruction of difference in the transcendent unity of the love bond; in bourgeois society, the privatized entrapment of love (in the couple, the family, the nation, etc.) and the romantic reification of our powerlessness in relation to it (love “happens” like a lightning bolt, we “fall” in it, it comes from elsewhere, sneaks up on us, etc.). In the last installment of the Empire trilogy, *Commonwealth*, the authors seek to disentangle love from these corrupt forms and put it to work as (a) a social experiment in difference that affirms singularities in a common world; (b) the exercise of joy with the recognition of an external cause; and (c) a communal endeavor which increases collective power and realizes individual potential (182–87). Love, like the multitude, then, is positive and above all active: It is “productive” (180), “an ontological motor” (195), politically compositional (184), indeed, “the power of love is the constitution of the common and ultimately the formation of society” (195). Passive affections—for example, love’s opposites (tolerance and indifference) and evil (the corruption of love to such an extent that its active power is obstructed)—require transformation. Following Spinoza’s understanding of ideas and affects to the letter, the authors fail to complicate the gendered hierarchies at work therein: According to
Spinoza, inadequate ideas lead to passivity and increased susceptibility to the passions; passive affections must become active affects in order to be productive; affections must transform from a state of being acted on to a condition that increases the body's ability to act (Spinoza, 40-41). Although obvious from the vantage point of feminist theory, the value hierarchies emergent in this active-passive conception of love and its opposites are never problematized in Hardt and Negri's work. Is Spinozan love beyond gender and sexuality? Is active love masculine and tolerance/indifference passive and effeminate? If evil is merely "bad love," love in which productivity is stymied, is the material form of that love non-productive, i.e., non-procreative, promiscuous... homosexual? Furthermore, is there anything to be said for, as Leo Bersani asks in "Is the Rectum a Grave?", a power gleaned from passivity?

For Bersani's part, anal sex—historically and discursively linked with femininity, male homosexuality, and the abdication of power—brings about a certain empowering ego destruction. In "Rectum," Bersani reads Freud's *Three Essay on the Theory of Sexuality* against the grain to argue that masochism lies at the very foundation of a developing sexuality. The shattering psychic structures, according to Bersani, is the precondition for the establishment of a sexual relation to others. And with this shattering comes jouissance. The male sexual subject's originary masochism, however, must be disavowed in the social realm as the (patriarchal) self is valueless unless active and autonomous. The relevance of queer male anal sex to Bersani's argument, then, concerns its social and discursive link to "losing one's manhood" and self debasement—anal sex at once fantastically re-enacts the ecstatic ego exploding of the subject's originary masochism as well as a metaphorical fucking of the sadistic, masculine ego ideals internalized by the gay male subject. It is this gay male bodily practice—not the parody of masculinity by the leather daddy nor the mockery of it by the camp queen—that serves as both the inspiration for the fantasmatic revulsion and physical violence perpetrated against queers in the social realm and, simultaneously, a potential site of queer resistance to the ever-seductive identification with/love of the ur-masculine ideal.

If the rectum is a grave in which the masculine ideal (an ideal shared—differently—by men and women) of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death. AIDS has literalized that potential as the certainty of biological death, and has therefore reinforced the heterosexual association of anal sex with a self annihilation originally and primarily identified with the fantasmatic mystery of an insatiable, unstoppable female sexuality. It may, finally, be in the gay man's rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgment against him. (222)

This, of course, is not to say that gay male anal sex is inevitably a site of queer resistance. Rather, it is a material practice that invites a fantasmatic destruction of normative masculine ego-ideals, a practice that potentially gives life to a queer self who, nurtured in the ecstatic pleasures of the anus, turns traitor against violent, patriarchal manhood.

Can Hardt and Negri's theory of love account for such a practice? Or, does love lift us up to a never-never-land unconcerned with such "dirty" acts? In discussing the "pseudocupulation" of male wasps, the authors make a nod to the political potential of "cruising and serial sex common to gay male communities" (*Commonwealth*, 187). Following Deleuze and Guattari, they describe the promiscuous sexual behavior of wasps (who "fuck" certain orchids not for nectar or survival but for pleasure) to highlight an unproductive form of love "based on the encounter of alterity but also on the process of becoming different" (187). They find in this coupling the very form of love that animates the biopolitical economy—immaterial labor, the production of affects—and applaud the wasp-orchid assemblage for its metaphorical indifference to (capitalist) efficiency and output. And the gay men who likewise direct biopower toward such unproductive, joyful ends? "This is not to say that cruising and anonymous sex serve as a model of love to emulate for Guattari (or Genet, Wojnarowicz, or Delany), but rather that they provide an antidote to the corruptions of love in the couple and the family, opening love up to the encounter of singularities" (187). When it comes to defining the material role of sexuality in a political model of love, the authors once again back away. What they offer in the right-hand, they take away with the left: Promiscuous serial sex is useful as a metaphor but not to be emulated as a political model; it's fine for wasps, but humans, apparently, can do better. To claim, moreover, that the three mentioned gay male writers do not consider promiscuity an emulative model of love, let alone articulate its political potential, is either the result of bad reading or a deliberate whitewashing of their work.36 In the end, Hardt and Negri fail to address the normative sexual standards that might emerge in their multitude's politicization of love. Overemphasizing the conceptual active-ness of the affect while simultaneously dismissing the ethical and political potential of actual, human practices of unproductive love, they unwittingly reveal the gendered and heteronormative realities of their idealized political project.

By contrast, if, as Foucault argues, sexuality is instrumental to the conceptualization and implementation of biopower for administrative
purposes, then perhaps it is through sexuality that we might, like wasps and orchids, create alternative biopolitical assemblages. That is to say, if sexuality has been so useful for biopotere, the affects produced in unproductive sex practices may be vital to biopotenza. In the AIDS buddy system, we see the delinking of sexuality from truth via the institution of friendship as desire-in-uneasiness. In these friendships, as in Bersani’s account of anal sex in a time of AIDS, both literal and fantasmatic deaths loom large. Such deaths, however, serve not as a limit to friendship; instead, just as a new self is valorized in Bersani’s ego-explosive sex act, finitude becomes friendship’s life-giving bedrock.

Chapter 5

Common Sense and a Politics of Shared Estrangement

If, in essence, the goal of this book is to make some sense of Foucault’s strategically vague proclamation that the “development towards which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship,” then the task of this final chapter is to draw some connections between homosexuality in its historical specificity and a politics of friendship. I have thus far outlined the relational terms of a Foucaultian friendship of shared estrangement—guided by an ethics of discomfort, provoking an openness to alterity—and, however anti-institutional, indeed antisocial, called attention to its efficacy in the AIDS buddy system. The abandonment to finitude at the heart of the buddy relation, I suggest, produces an affective surplus—intense feelings of belonging, belonging-as-such—that can be directed toward non- or anti-institutional ends, namely, political activism. In the ubiquity of death, in friendships that refuse to transcend death, a radical politics lies in wait. However, I want to supplement this possibly too tidy narrative with a question: What does any of this have to do with homosexuality? If, as I argued in Chapter 3, the actualization of the Foucaultian friend requires the overcoming of homosexuality, that is, a movement of subjectivation that delinks sexuality from self-identity, why might this anti-identitarian gesture occur in homosexual communities? Is there a specifically queer component to the story of friendship’s politicization as shared estrangement? A sexual or sensual component? Taking up Foucault’s gauntlet, then, I explore in this chapter the ways a friendship as shared estrangement is explicitly linked to homosexuality and what friendship might do to solve, as Foucault deems it, this “problem.”

For this reason, among others, I concluded the last chapter with a brief discussion of Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” an essay that locates an anti-identitarian self-shattering—the dissolution of the (illusory) masterful, patriarchal ego and of coherent sexual identity—in a specifically gay male sex act. Bersani, whose work from the seminal “Rectum” onward has been arguably a love-hate letter to Foucault, wants to argue that there is indeed something unique to queer desire and sexual
our freedom/ In the name of liberty," a comment on political strife in Northern Ireland.

19. In his own words: "C'est ce groupe d'intellectuels hostiles au reaganisme mais hostiles également aux nouvelles formes de la politique, qui est visé en tout premier lieu dans Saint Foucault. Le livre fut écrit contre eux" (13). It is this group of intellectuals equally hostile to Reaganism and to new forms of politics who are targeted in the first place in Saint Foucault. The book was written against them. (translation mine)


Chapter 4

1. The Empire trilogy includes: Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000); Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire (New York: Penguin, 2004); and Commonwealth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009). I designate Hardt and Negri's project the "most productive" elaboration of Foucault's biopower because I essentially agree with their critique of the various adaptations of the concept by authors such as François Ewald, Roberto Esposito, and Giorgio Agamben. In essence, their critique concerns these authors' failure to grasp the dual nature of biopower: its capacity for normative management of populations (biopower) as well as its potential for subjectivation: the production of alternative subjectivities (biopotenza). I discuss this distinction in detail in note 8. For more on their critique of biopower's theorists, see Commonwealth 56–63.


3. In her definitive history of ACT UP, Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS, Deborah B. Gould divides AIDS activism into two phases: (a) 1980–1986—activism is marked by caregiving, service provision, lobbying, and candlelight vigils; (b) 1986–mid-1990s—founding of ACT UP, turn toward more direct-action activism, including die-ins, civil disobedience demonstrations, and the like. One goal of Gould's book is to explain the reasons for this shift in activist tactics. In addition to various historical events that galvanized gay and lesbian communities (including the Bowers v. Hardwick decision, which essentially criminalized gay sex on a federal level), Gould, guided by Raymond Williams' notion of "structures of feeling" and a Bourdieuan conception of "emotional habitus," argues that the historical "feeling states" circulating in gay communities played a significant role in the shift from "polite" to confrontational activism (46). By and large, I follow her historical schematic and discuss it in detail later in this chapter.

4. Gould notes that it was during these early days of AIDS caregiving that the term lesbian and gay community became more common (as opposed to the earlier gay men or lesbians). Of course, historically entrenched tensions between gay men and lesbians did not simply disappear during this time. Because mainstream media, medical, and political establishments discursively constructed HIV as a "homosexual problem," however, many lesbians felt that they too were under attack and that it was important to rally behind a shared gay identity to combat AIDS-phobia and anti-homosexual sentiment. See Gould, 65–68.

5. Melinda Cooper convincingly refutes this claim in her book, Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era. In a masterful analysis of the enmeshed development of biotech industries and neoliberal economic policy, she argues that as a result of various processes of financialization and debt creation in the 1980s and 1990s, the United States does indeed occupy a privileged position in terms of global capital flows and imperial power. She writes:

[T]he life sciences have played a commanding role in America's strategies of economic and imperialist reinvention. Over the past few decades, the U.S. government has been at the center of efforts to reorganize global trade rules and intellectual property laws along lines that would favor its own drug, agribusiness, and biotech industries. (4–5)

For more on the United States as the focal point of economic and imperial power in the age of Empire, see Cooper, Chapter One, "Life Beyond the Limits," 15–50.

7. See Marx, Grundrisse 693–706.
8. The distinction between a biopower "from above" (biopotenza) and "from below" (biopotenza) in Hardt and Negri's formulation is crucial in understanding the anti-authoritarian political forms emergent in biopolitics. Biopotenza delineates a constituted power and biopotenza a constituting one. Cesare Casarino describes these forms in the following way: "Potenza [pouvoir in French] can often resonate with implications of potentiality as well as the decentralized or mass conceptions of force and strength. Pouvoir [puissance in French], on the other hand, refers to the might or authority of an already structured and centralized capacity, often an institutional apparatus such as the state" (Casarino and Negri, "It's a Powerful Life: A Conversation on Contemporary Philosophy" 181). I find this distinction especially useful for articulating the politics emergent—the biopower "from below"—in the AIDS buddy network.

9. Here again, the absence of any discussion of the global politics of AIDS reveals the shortcomings of Hardt and Negri's analysis. For example, South Africa's 1997 Medicines and Related Substances Control Amendment Act authorized the Mandela administration to bypass Big Pharma patent protections in order to make available antiretrovirals to its citizens. Consequently, the United States, ever invested in Big Pharma, threatened sanctions. Adam Sitze deems Mandela's Act a key moment in the history of the global multitude. He writes: "[m]any altermondialists cite Seattle as the first significant victory over the ostensibly anonymous and abstract forces of multinational capital, we must not forget that, two months earlier, seven hundred highly motivated and highly organized people forced the USTR [U.S. Trade Representative] to announce, against a supposedly invincible Big Pharma lobby, that the trade dispute was resolved and that the
U.S. government would cease pressuring South Africa on the issues of compulsory licensing and parallel imports” (779–80). At this point one must question why Hardt and Negri fail to discuss this important altermondaliste victory, let alone offer it as a prime example of their multitude’s power. Since the victory reveals that there are in fact national focal points in the age of Empire, namely, the United States and its Big Pharma business interests, does it draw too many lines in their unstratified biopolitical global landscape? Because AIDS itself is so overdetermined by the category of sexuality, does ignoring its history and politics allow the authors to unscat sexuality as biopower’s central dispositif?

10. Sylvère Lotringer, “Foreword: We, the Multitude,” A Grammar of the Multitude 12.

11. It goes without saying that sexuality, however important, is merely one factor in the biopolitical determination of valuable forms of life, lives deemed worthy of living, saving, and investing in. Indeed, as Adam Sitze notes in “Denialism,” from the standpoint of capital both African PWAs and free antiretrovirals are expendable because neither creates surplus value. He writes: “To the extent that essential medicines cannot generate capital, capital renders them inessential, withholding them from the vast majority of people they are designed to treat. Conversely, by refusing to commit to the health of people living with HIV/AIDS unless those people satisfy a condition extraneous to health (the capacity to produce surplus value), capital separates people with HIV/AIDS from what they could do with ARV [antiretroviral] treatments” (775–76). I focus exclusively on the politics of sexuality in this particular case study, then, not to ignore the numerous factors at play in determining the allocation of HIV/AIDS treatment and research funding, but instead to emphasize the conceptual power sexuality continues to hold in the logic of prevention. Furthermore, the NIH trial highlights the limitations of Hardt and Negri’s analysis of global biopolitics, in which sexuality disappears in a generalized concept of bios.


14. Analyzing the West’s involvement in South African HIV prevention, Melinda Cooper notes: “[T]he tools of Western public health are wholly unsuited to dealing with the specificities of the disease in Africa, where heterosexual transmission has always dominated; the imposition of the Western model of AIDS prevention in South Africa amounts to the pursuit of apartheid-era public health policies by other means” (69). What goes unexamined in Cooper’s analysis is a discussion concerning the Western invention and enforcement of the very categories “heterosexual” and “homosexual.” I raise the question of these categories’ applicability to the African AIDS crisis to draw further attention to the apartheid-style politics the homo-hetero binary engenders.


16. See Watney, Policing Desire; Patton, Inventing AIDS; and Waldby, AIDS and the Body Politic.

17. Even George Bush’s PEPFAR (The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS), praised as the “single most beneficent achievement of this beleaguered White House,” by the most liberal of New York Times columnists, Frank Rich, ultimately secured Big Pharma’s patent rights for antiretrovirals (“The Gay Old Party Comes Out,” New York Times, October 15, 2006, web). On the surface a humanitarian project devoid of profit-driven motives and instituted only after many years of hard work by AIDS activists, PEPFAR in fact works to make sub-Saharan Africa ever more, forever more, dependent on U.S. pharmaceutical corporations. As Sitze notes, “Even though Bush’s speechwriters included in his 2003 State of the Union address an unusually candid remark regarding the ‘immense possibility’ offered by generic HIV/AIDS treatments, PEPFAR’s only notable achievement, since then has been how quickly it has thrown the immense powers of the executive branch behind Big Pharma’s suppression of that very possibility” (778). Concerning the immanence of HIV/AIDS and global capital, see Sitze, 776–79. For more on neoliberal capitalist delirium—the investment in biological futures and the concomitant devaluation of actually existing life—see Cooper, 24–49.

18. Like Hardt and Negri, Brian Massumi builds on Deleuze and Guattari’s and Spinoza’s concepts of affect. See Massumi, Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia; and Spinoza, Ethics, “Part Three: On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions.” For helpful summaries of Massumi’s and Deleuze and Guattari’s work on affect, see Gould, 18–30, and Shouse, Feeling, Emotion, Affect.

19. As Gould’s history of AIDS caregiving and activism does not include a discussion of the affective turn in labor practices, I raise the issue to supplement and build on her thesis. Without doubt, the “moving politics” of AIDS activism are likewise informed by, if not an indirect response to, the major economic shifts in the late-1970s: the embrace of neoliberal economic theory in the West (emphasizing individual accountability and privatization at any cost), the re-structuring of the American healthcare system with the passing of The Health Maintenance Organization Act of 1973 (emphasizing profit over care), and, as Hardt and Negri point out, capitalism’s increasing investment in affect. I am arguing, then, that in addition to being shaped by what Gould understands as “bad feelings like shame about gay sexual difference and a corollary fear of ongoing social nonrecognition and rejection” (57), that is to say, in addition to being a bid for social respectability and acceptance, the buddy system also is a creative response to larger economic shifts and a genuinely democratic biopolitical response to the increasing incorporation of affect into labor practices.

20. Gould counters a teleological tendency in histories of AIDS activism “by treating the 1981–86 period with its own integrity, valuable in its own right, rather than seeing it as ‘not ACT UP’ or as simply laying he ground for ACT UP’s entrance onto the historical stage (although it certainly did that)” (56). I too hope to avoid such a tidy narrative, but will run the risk for validating it (as Gould does in the parenthetical conclusion to the quoted sentence) by arguing that the affects nurtured in AIDS service provision, specifically, the experience of friendship as shared estrangement in the buddy system, informed ACT UP actions such as
die-ins and the Ashes Action. Additionally, whereas Gould seeks to describe the emotional habitus that delineated the political horizon in the various stages of AIDS activism—that is, seeking to understand why certain forms of activism occurred at certain times while other options were foreclosed—I am more interested in focusing on the ethical terms and affective dimensions of the buddy friendship in order to tease out the fecund political dynamic occurring therein.

21. For more on early AIDS service organizations and the social acceptance of homosexuality, see Gould, 85–100.

22. A statement made in 1985 by Margaret Heckler, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, reveals the Reagan administration’s eugenic approach to solving the AIDS crisis: “We must conquer AIDS before it affects the heterosexual population, the general population. We have a very strong public interest in stopping AIDS before it spreads outside the risk groups, before it becomes an overwhelming problem” (as quoted in Paul Ranogajec, “Letter from the Editor: A Shameful Budget,” web). For more on the Reagan administration’s denialist response to AIDS, see Gould, 49–51.

23. This structural similarity is not coincidental. Many of the early ASOs and activist strategies are indebted to, if not derived directly from, self-help, consciousness-raising models used in the women’s health movement and various feminist political organizations. For more on the grassroots models that informed ASOs, see Patton, 9–17.


25. In Foucault’s words: “Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion: death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it; death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (HoS, V1 138). In Chapter 5, I complicate Foucault’s distinction between public = life/private = death in a discussion of the relationship between biopolitics and finitude.

26. In Unlimited Intimacy, Tim Dean discovers similar ethical principles in cruising and impersonal sex, but argues that an ethics of non-recognition are not necessarily the province of sex practices. Such ethics, then, can and should emerge in other social and cultural sites as well. I discuss Dean’s work more extensively in the next chapter, but here I would like to note that the buddy relation—by the books, strictly nonsexual—can be understood as one of those sites beyond sexual practice in which an impersonal ethics emerges.

27. Given the historical moment about which Virno writes (1989) and the described political strategy of the youth movements and labor organizations (defection, exodus), I surmise here that Virno is referencing punk subcultures and the Italian autonomist movement, perhaps among others.

28. See Giorgio Agamben’s The Time That Remains: A Commentary On The Letter To The Romans; Alain Badiou’s Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism; and Slavoj Žižek’s The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?

29. The political salience of David Wojnarowicz’s model of unproductive sexual promiscuity is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

1. In “A Conversation with Leo Bersani,” among other essays, the author reveals that while Foucault has been “immensely important” to him, he has “mixed feelings” about Foucault’s work itself (182). Bersani’s ambivalence in the end concerns Foucault’s dismissal of psychoanalysis: Among other things, Foucault understood psychoanalysis as an integral component in the deployment of sexuality, as the heir to Christian confession, and as a tool of heteronormativity in postwar France and America. The status Foucault has been granted as the founding father of queer studies, however, unduly sidelines Bersani’s important early work on the psychic life and social effects of queer subjects and practices. In the recent antiscalar turn in queer studies, discussed in this chapter, Bersani’s work, in all of its complexity and contentiousness, seems to be getting its due. As fate would have it, queer theory, appropriately enough, has two daddies. For more on the tensions and complications between Bersani and Foucault, see “Fr-oucault and the End of Sex” in Rectum and Chapter Three, “The Gay Daddy,” in Homos 77–112.

2. Tim Dean, in a February 2010 lecture at Brown University, “Why is Pleasure ‘a Very Difficult Behavior’?”, explores the titular comment made by Foucault in a 1983 interview, “The Minimalist Self.” “I think pleasure is a very difficult behavior. . . . I would like and I hope I’ll die of an overdose [Laughter] of pleasure. Because I think it’s really difficult and I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure and, for me, it’s related to death” (Politics, Philosophy, Culture, 12). Unlike Bersani, who, in “Fr-oucault” argues that a psychoanalytic account of the death drive is useful in understanding how the development of the relational modes deriving from pleasure can be blocked (137), Dean focuses instead on the “double helix” of power/pleasure in Foucault’s work. He argues that part of the reason pleasure is so “difficult” for Foucault is because it opens the self-contained subject up to potential intimacies, violations, and risks. In short, in becoming infinitely more susceptible to pleasure, as Foucault urged, Dean argues that we also become infinitely more susceptible to power and manipulation. Such susceptibility can be, on the one hand, ecstatic and transformative, but, on the other, invasive, violent, and deadly. Moreover, Foucault’s friendship, both “the sum of everything through which they [the intergenerational friends] can give each other pleasure” and, at the same time, a relation founded on a “desire-in-uneasiness,” likewise reveals how enmeshed difficulty and pleasure are, how pleasure might even be ontologically indebted to difficulty (“Friendship” 136). A version of Dean’s conference lecture will appear as “The Biopolitics of Pleasure” in a forthcoming special issue of South Atlantic Quarterly entitled “Future Foucault,” edited by Jacques Khalip.

3. “The Gay Daddy” is the title of Chapter Three of Homos in which Bersani critiques Foucault’s desexualization of homophobia and pleasure.

4. My argument here is indebted to Douglas Crimp’s seminal essay, “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” (AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism 237–71). For Crimp, promiscuity teaches experimentation, creativity, and adaptation: precisely the skills needed to develop effective HIV-prevention