

## Even Less: Antinomies and Aesthetic Anorexia in the Magnetic Fields' *69 Love Songs* (An Album for Boys and Girls)<sup>1</sup>

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Even less  
a little glimpse of nothingness  
sucking meaning from the  
rest of this mess  
The Magnetic Fields<sup>2</sup>

In anorexia nervosa, what the child eats is the nothing.  
Jacques Lacan<sup>3</sup>

This paper is motivated by a paradox in the reception of the Magnetic Fields' three-volume album, *69 Love Songs*.<sup>4</sup> In a class in which we discussed this album, a group of students maintained that this is a great collection of songs to listen to after the break-up of an amorous relation because it entirely deconstructs love and shows its absurdity. Another group of students emphatically disagreed, arguing that it would be too painful to listen to these songs because their overall assertion is that one can find happiness only in the plenitude of love. Do the *69 Love Songs* deconstruct or reaffirm love? 1

The question seems to have already bothered others. In the year of the album's release, Rob Tannenbaum reports, with postmodern impartiality: 'Merritt and three other singers celebrate or condemn romance in its myriad guises, from boy-girl to less common permutations, bending gender roles with cantankerous glee.' I do not think, however, that either our class's exclusive disjunction (either a celebration or a condemnation of love) or Tannenbaum's inclusive pluralism (some songs celebrate and others condemn) justify his conclusion that 'even reasonably smart audiences don't know what to make of Merritt and his music.'<sup>5</sup> 2

### The Dynamic Songs

An inexorable tension between impossibility and necessity seems to stigmatise love throughout the *69 Love Songs*. Already the very first line of the three-volume concept-album warns: 'Don't fall in love with me yet.' You 3

are initially misled to hear in this imperative the exigencies of a matured caution against haste: 'We only recently met.' But the song continues: 'True I'm in love with you', yet for all that, 'you might decide I'm nut', and if you 'give me a week or two to / go absolutely cuckoo', then you will 'see your error' and 'flee in terror / like everybody else does.' The amorous affair is introduced as doomed to fail in the progress of time. *A fortiori*, you must not fall in love with me precisely because the affair *must* fail, for 'I'm easy to get rid of / but not if you fall in love', in which case you are likely not to flee away. 'If you make' this 'mistake' of falling in love with me, 'my heart will certainly break' and 'I'll have to jump in a lake', but if you do not fall in love with me, 'like everybody else does', I (and you) can perpetuate the recurrence of the failure of the love affair ('Absolutely Cuckoo', vol. 1). And in doing so, we reconfirm love's absolute power. For if I implore you not to fall in love with me it's not because love does not have a grip on me, but, quite the contrary, because love has the power of making me 'jump in a lake.' Love triumphs as absolute and omnipotent transcendental necessity only as long as the empirical amorous affair is doomed to fail.

This split between transcendental concept—Love as necessary and invincible Law or Force—and empirical amorous affair—the experience of invariably failed love affairs in the subject's history—constitutes a prominent epistemological leitmotif in the 69 *Love Songs*, determining those songs which I call, for reasons that will become clear below, the *dynamic set* of songs. 4

In this set, 'I could make you fly away / but I could never make you stay' ('All My Little Words', vol. 1). The Law of Love can be upheld only through the empirical loss of the beloved—'I don't want to get over you / cause I don't want to get over love' ('I Don't Want To Get Over You', vol. 1)—or, what amounts to the same, through unrequited love—'love you, obviously, /like you really care' ('How Fucking Romantic', vol. 1); 'I made you mine, or so it seemed... /You never will love me at all... / You're dreaming of / the corpse you really love' ('The One You Really Love', vol. 1). Not excluded from this empirical pain is the merciless cruelty break-ups or divorces may involve, as in the arguably exemplary dynamic song, 'Yeah! Oh, Yeah!' (vol. 3). One way or another, 'my only love has' always 'gone away', 'my heart' is 'gone', and 'life goes on' only as my 'death goes on' ('My Only Friend' and 'Epitaph for My Heart', vol. 2). Like a zombie, 'bitter tears keep me going / through the years', until 'all the world', including 'moon', 'stars', and 'the dead in their graves / and the gods in their caves' are 'singing the blues' ('Bitter Tears' and 'Blue You', vol. 3). In the dynamic songs, the truly inseparable lovers seem to be love and death themselves, *their* amorous affair alone being both necessary *and* possible. 5

Conversely, just as the empirical impossibility of the affair guarantees the transcendental Law of Love, the necessity of Love guarantees the law of the 6

impossibility of the affair. This is the relation between transcendence and experience, the sole characters in the dynamic set of songs whose love is both necessary and possible. The theme is old but far from exhausted. What is the effect of coupling not human lovers but love and death, as the stand-ins for transcendence and experience, in the only embrace that can endure? I suggest that we can approach this question by following a Spinozian-Kantian-Lacanian line of thought.<sup>6</sup>

The Magnetic Fields, or at least Stephin Merritt, who, in his own words, 'thought of the idea' of the *69 Love Songs*, shared the fundamental concern underlying Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Merritt wrote not just one or even '40 love songs', which 'would be silly', but 'Sixty-nine', which, beyond its 'obvious relation to romance' and 'graphic possibilities', is 'grandiose'; it was in fact only because of practical reasons that he did not write '100', as they 'would be 200 minutes long which is hours and hours'.<sup>7</sup> Whether one sets out to make 100 or 69 love songs, the intention obviously is not to speak about one historically contingent case of a love affair, but to make a comprehensive statement about love, to approach love universally and as a totality. This intention is reconfirmed also by the musical ambitions of the album which undertakes an indefatigable journey in the history of music that passes through, and often combines within an individual song, periods, genres and styles, such as: *a cappella*, blues, jazz, 1960s beat jazz poetry, jazzy Lieder and bebop, bubble-gum pop, choral pop, summery pop and sentimental pop, old cowboy ballads, rock 'n' roll ballads, rock ballads and 1980s pop ballads, slow dance (e.g., in the Phil Collins tradition), Irish folk tunes, cosmic background, space rock, drone music and shoegaze, dirges, piano-bar solo songs, epic show tunes (Broadway or Tom Jones type), Africa, Caribbean music, cheer songs, hippy protest songs, disco, new wave, country, serenades, apocalyptic music, punk, balalaika songs, post-WWII chansons, duets, lullabies and children songs, carnival or circus music, blue grass, waltz and sentimental melodies—a list that is far from exhaustive—as well as playing styles that range from acoustic to 1970s strumming guitar and everything in-between or thereafter.<sup>8</sup> On the musical level, too, the *69 Love Songs* aspire to reach the limits of experience and cover its totality, in this case, the totality of the history of twentieth-century Western music, which, of course, has in itself already incorporated and appropriated to its own ends a long musical tradition since the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as well as non Western music, notably in this case African. In short, in the enterprise of the *69 Love Songs*, Merritt and his collaborators shared the same ambition as Immanuel Kant, whose 'transcendental critique' aimed at nothing less than approaching a subject—in his case, the world or all possible experience—as a totality. The album literally belongs to the 'transcendental', not the 'dumb', part of 'The Book of Love' (vol. 1).

But, as Kant admonishes us, the first obstacle in speaking of 'absolute 8

totality', be it that 'of all possible experience' or of all possible love experience, lies in the fact that 'absolute totality [...] is itself not experience' but a '*transcendent*' thing, a pure concept of reason, and not something that one can actually experience.<sup>9</sup> I may be able to entertain in the abstract the concept of all possible configurations of love, but I cannot actually experience them. But even the abstract contemplation stumbles against obstacles. For the second impediment emerges from *reason's* failure to constitute the 'totality' of 'all possible experience', of 'love', or what have you. To explicate this point, Kant offers the following example of what he calls the dynamic antinomy of pure reason. Regarding the cause of everything in the world, reason can prove two contradictory statements as true: the thesis that beyond the 'laws of nature [...] there is also [...] freedom', and the antithesis that 'there is no freedom' but only 'laws of nature.'<sup>10</sup> After extensively proving as true both freedom and determinism, Kant proceeds to argue that reason nevertheless does not fall into an antinomy here, for 'if natural necessity is merely referred to appearances'—the realm of experience—'and freedom merely to things in themselves'—the realm of transcendence—then, 'no contradiction arises if we [...] admit both kinds of causality [...] to one and the very same thing, but in different relations—on one side as an appearance, on the other as a thing-in-itself.'<sup>11</sup> Reason does not fall into an antinomy as long as the exception of the transcendent free thing-in-itself guarantees the subjection of the totality of experience to the law, and vice versa. In other words, in the case of the dynamic antinomy, reason manages to form a whole or a totality (deterministic experience), but only by positing an exception (free thing-in-itself) to that totality.

Cast in terms more directly relevant to *69 Love Songs*, 'one and the very same thing', human action, can 'on one side as an appearance' within empirical reality be determined by the law of a repetition compulsion to fail in the amorous endeavour, while, 'on the other [side] as a thing-in-itself', in the realm of transcendence, it can be free of this law and instead be caused purely by the Force of Love. While love is the transcendental cause of human action, in their empirical reality humans are governed by the compulsion to fail in their love affairs. The empirical law of the repetitive amorous failure is sustained by the transcendental Law of Love as the ultimate cause of human action, and, conversely, the compulsive repetition of the amorous failure sustains Love as the transcendental Law of human action. Reason fails in this set of songs in *69 Love Songs* in the mode of the dynamic antinomy—hence the set's name. 9

And in failing in this way, these songs grasp the relation between the two cardinal causes of human action, as conceived in Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis: the pleasure principle and the death drive (the latter being another word for repetition compulsion).<sup>12</sup> As Deleuze has succinctly clarified, contrary to a common misunderstanding, the death drive is not the exception to the pleasure principle, but its transcendental precondition: 10

What we call a principle or law is [...] that which governs a particular field; it is in this sense that we speak of an empirical principle or a law. Thus we say that the pleasure principle governs life universally without exception. But [...] there must be a principle of another kind, a second-order principle, which accounts for the necessary compliance of the field with the empirical principle. It is this second-order principle [the death drive] that we call transcendental.<sup>13</sup>

While subjects are empirically (consciously) motivated to act by their search for pleasure, it is another, second-order or transcendental (unconscious) principle, the death drive, that determines their actions to be governed by the pleasure principle.

The ingenuity of the universe of the dynamic set of the *69 Love Songs* lies, however, in an apparent inversion regarding the domains of the death drive and the pleasure principle, according to which the latter governs transcendence while empirical life is dominated by the death drive: if affairs fail empirically it is because they succumb to the death drive so that Love and its pleasures can triumph transcendently. 11

Although fully *aware* of the invincible Force and bliss of love, the 'characters' of the songs do not ever let themselves experience it, for the unshakable *belief* in the dynamic songs is that love's joy is empirically impossible, a hypothesis of an always unrealisable possibility. These songs advance, therefore, the properly psychoanalytic thesis that the unconscious—the Real of one's desire—is on the side of *knowledge*, not on that of *belief*. As Slavoj Žižek writes regarding the question, 'where...does the desire reside': 'contrary to the obvious answer (in the belief—I know that X will take place, but I refuse to believe it since it runs against my desire...)', the Lacanian answer [...] is [...]: in the knowledge.' To exemplify his point, Žižek turns to a filmic example, Arbogast's murder in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). In Žižek's words: 12

the greatest surprise is caused by the complete fulfillment of our expectations...'I know very well that X will take place (that Arbogast will be murdered), yet I do not fully believe it (so I'm none the less surprised when the murder actually takes place)'....as viewers of *Psycho*, we desire the death of Arbogast, and the function of our belief that Arbogast will not be attacked by the 'mother'-figure is precisely to enable us to avoid the confrontation with the Real of our desire.<sup>14</sup>

What we know and desire—the Real of our desire—is Arbogast's murder; yet our defence against confronting the Real of our desire, the mechanism through which we repress this desire so that we are not conscious of it, is

enabled by our conscious belief that Arbogast will not be attacked, and, at the end, we are surprised by seeing fulfilled what we always already have unconsciously known.

By the same token, the 'horrifying reality' that the dynamic songs refuse to 'believe in' and to 'integrate into [their] symbolic universe' (to sing) is the triumph of love within the realm of experience, the fact that the empirical amorous affair could be successful, as it used to be represented, say, in just about every romantic Hollywood film in the 1950s. The postmodern postulate regarding love manifests itself here as the inversion of the standard classical happy ending, whereby the logic becomes: 'I know very well [on a transcendental level] that my love affair will fail, yet [empirically or practically] I do not fully believe it, so that, on the one hand, I act as if it would not fail (i.e., I do engage in love affairs), and, on the other, I am taken by surprise when it actually fails.' Except that now this well-known modernist fetishistic logic is adulterated by the further postmodern knowledge that 'You and me, we don't believe /in happy endings'—i.e., a second-order belief beyond the one (in the happy ending or the non-failure of the affair) allowing us to defend ourselves against our knowledge (that it will fail), and which (second-order or transcendental belief) thus overlaps entirely with our (transcendental) knowledge (that the affair will fail) ('My Only Friend', vol. 2). There is no longer a distance or discrepancy between knowledge and belief. Which is why postmodern subjectivity enters the love affair, and this without the remotest sense of guilt, not with unmitigated passion but with calculating caution.<sup>15</sup>

The dynamic songs are an artistic representation of the formal matrix underlying the postmodern configuration of knowledge and belief regarding love. By sustaining Love as a transcendental Necessity in the midst of postmodern discourse, these songs reveal that love is the repressed Real of the desire underlying its cynicism, camp and the generalised biopolitical demand to treat romance, love and sexuality as a trine of quasi-professional partnership, a health issue and an athletic activity.<sup>16</sup>

This insight entails that the *69 Love Songs* perform a kind of social criticism. Yet we have to specify both the object and the method or strategy of this criticism. To do so, I am now turning for a comparison to a moment in modernist social criticism, and specifically the work of the Neo-Realist film director Michelangelo Antonioni. Like the dynamic songs, Antonioni's films, as Deleuze argues, 'are inseparable from an objective critique', but, as we shall presently see, the former are so in an intrinsically postmodern way.<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze describes Antonioni's 'aesthetic vision' as follows:

[W]e are sick with Eros, because Eros is himself objectively sick: what has love become that a man or a woman should emerge from it so disabled, pitiful and suffering, and act and react as badly at the

beginning as at the end, in a corrupt society?<sup>18</sup>

If in Antonioni the distinction between a sick Eros and a 'corrupt society' is rigorously maintained, in the dynamic songs the societal corruption is already biopolitically integrated in the man or the woman, so that the distance between society and individual voice is evanescent, and words, speaker and addressee are always already ethically corrupted: 'and who said a man was fair?' ('Sweet-Lovin' Man', vol. 1). Betrayal is taken for granted: 'When you betray me /betray me with a kiss' ('Come Back from San Francisco', vol. 1). Words lie bilaterally: 'You've lied too/but it's a sin that I / can't tell the truth' ('I Think I Need a New Heart', vol. 1). If something momentarily seems to point to a hope beyond this generalised turpitude and vice, this is singing itself: 'all comes out wrong/unless I put it in a song' ('I Think I Need a New Heart', vol. 1). Yet, songs and music, too, could not ever prevent the failure of the amorous relation: 'but I could never make you stay / not for all the tea in China /not if I could sing like a bird [...] / not if I could write for you / the sweetest song you ever heard' ('All My Little Words', vol. 1). At most, they can have a higher understanding of the lover—as with the 'acoustic guitar', which seems to 'understand where she's coming from / which I obviously don't / or she wouldn't be gone' ('Acoustic Guitar', vol. 3)—or a cathartic power, albeit not cleansed from vengeance: 'but my sentimental melody / like a long-lost lullaby / will ring in your ears / down through the years / bringing a tear to your eye' ('My Sentimental Melody', vol. 1). But, all in all, songs too cannot escape the universal law of dubiousness and deception: 'it's all just a song / just beautiful lies' ('My Sentimental Melody', vol. 1).

If Antonioni's modernist film, *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962) pointedly links the objective sickness of Eros to the demands of the capitalist economy on the characters, the *69 Love Songs* shunt any attempt to distinguish between the so-called individual and politico-economic realms. Rather, their critical practice is governed by the consciousness that an effective postmodern political criticism must bypass the traditional distinctions between the various discourses on ethics, economics, politics, society and the individual, and address all of them as a biopolitical assemblage. Indicative of this approach is Merritt's self-representation, whose biopolitical resistance frustrates the expectations of and norms imposed on indie-rock and mainstream, alike. For instance, despite having grown up in relative poverty, Merritt poses as a 'spoiled rich kid' and, thumbing his nose at identity politics and political correctness, refuses to flaunt homosexuality, to champion hip-hop and even to identify with the 'indie-ghetto', generally withdrawing from the privilege of representing the subaltern periphery (Merritt in 'As Hundreds Cheer' and liner). And, while these are gestures that some would welcome (even if for different reasons than Merritt's), people in the USA, unlike the 'English', 'again and again' feel that 'Merritt hates them', for he also infringes on more universalisable postmodern biopolitical injunctions of the USA, including

political correctness (the main focus of *The New Yorker's* Sasha Frere-Jones and *Chicago Reader's* Jessica Hopper), anti-intellectualism, sloppiness of expression, idle talk, polite hypocrisy, systematic engagement in social and sexual intercourse, cheerfulness and even a higher pitch of voice than he actually has.<sup>19</sup> In the U.S.A., Merritt's biopolitical rebellion may render him an outsider to both 'centre' and 'margin', yet, though the life of the artist is inseparable from his work, an *ad hominem* argument does not suffice. More crucial to my argument is the resistance inscribed in the songs.

Of the sixty-nine songs, only 'I Don't Want to Get Over You' (vol. 1) explicitly resists current biopolitical trends, with the narrator's refusal to take 'Prozac', 'listen to my therapist', 'pretend you don't exist', and 'smile all night / at somebody new.' The remaining songs often adopt the biopolitical demands of postmodernity as, if you wish, 'uncritically' integrated parts of the lover's discourse—e.g., 'kiss me, I've quit smoking' ('Come Back From San Francisco', vol. 1). Metaphors marrying the lover's discourse with the scientific foreground the dominant technologisation and scientification of emotions in contemporary biopolitics by replicating its discourse: 'It's making me blue / Pantone 292 / Reno Dakota I'm reaching my quota / of tears for the year' ('Reno Dakota', vol. 1), or passim in 'Wi' Nae Wee Bairn Ye'll Me Beget' and 'Experimental Music Love' (vol. 3), not to mention the 'Epitaph for My Heart' (vol. 2):

Caution: to prevent electric shock  
do not remove cover  
No user-serviceable parts inside  
Refer servicing to qualified  
service personnel

Moreover, with its prevalent concatenation of love and suffering, on the one hand—'If you don't cry / it isn't love' ('If you Don't Cry', vol. 2)—and emotionless sexuality with a joyful nonchalance, on the other—'A Chicken With Its Head Cut Off' (vol. 1), 'Let's Pretend We're Bunny Rabbits' (vol. 1), 'Underwear' (vol. 3)—the album reinforces the dominant biopolitical pathologisation, if not incrimination, of romantic notions of love—'It's a crime to fall in love / heart and mind and soul in love / It's a crime to fall in love so hard / so hard' ('It's a Crime', vol. 3). Beyond the absence of any distance from the discursive tropes of postmodernity, the text of this compilation of songs is quintessentially postmodern also in the sense that it covers aspects of love and uses vocabulary that in the past would not be represented in a love song (eminent examples being 'How Fucking Romantic' and 'Punk Love' in vol. 1, or, again, 'Underwear' and 'Yeah! Oh, Yeah!' in vol. 3). And last, but not least, these songs are marked by sarcasm. *A fortiori*, for Merritt a song is 'a love song if it's sarcastic', and 'in the context of *69 Love Songs*, it's automatically sarcastic.' Unlike any other expressive mode, sarcasm alone seems to have the prerogative of singing love in postmodernity.



Sarcasm, however, is the turning point in the *69 Love Songs'* Moebius band, at which, having followed all along this distinctly postmodern path, we are surreptitiously led to the centre of modernism. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, among the symptoms of the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism is the replacement of all forms of parody, whose function is by definition ironic and even sarcastic (and hence critical), with what Theodor Adorno, in his work on Schoenberg, had called the pastiche. In Jameson's words, in postmodernism,

parody finds itself without a vocation [...] Pastiche is like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral pastiche of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.<sup>20</sup>

To refer to an at once pioneering and quintessential example of postmodern pastiche in film production, think of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), which cites a large array of filmic genres and periods, from hard-boiled film noir and Orson Welles to Hong Kong action film and post-futurist science fiction, without thereby indicating either that any of these styles is more proper than the others or that some other style, not represented in the film, would be the proper one. Judging on the album's wild variety of musical styles, referred to above, the *69 Love Songs* could also be heard as a musical pastiche—except for their irony or sarcasm. For one thing, none of these sixty-nine tunes is performed 'straight' or 'seriously.' The Irish folk borders on shoegaze, the piano-bar solo songs are decelerated to the point of dozing, not unlike the epic show music whose additional minimalism leaves only an emaciated skeleton of grandiosity haunt us; or, pushing parody to its limits, minimalism is brought to coincide with repetitive, barely 'musical', excess, as in the 'Experimental Music Love' (vol. 3); plucking the fiddle is executed with the virtuosity of plucking a chicken; traditional high-brow instruments are electronically manipulated to hilarious or pompous distortion; solemn voices are accompanied by droll sounds and made to sound automated ... and the list goes on. (The same, sarcastic, distance is also suffused throughout the album by Merritt's off-key voice.) The musical cornucopia of the album combined with the ingenious and irreverent simplicity with which each individual song echoes its chosen genre(s) cannot fail but advance the thesis that: at this point of history, not a single one of these styles is worth replicating, yet, knowing them and being able to replicate them by distorting them—that's the beginning of wisdom. In other words, far from engaging in pastiche, the *69 Love Songs* execute a laborious (at once appreciative and critical) parody of a long musical tradition, to single out respectful knowledge and impious defiance in the face of tradition as

'some healthy linguistic normality.'

But if this may appear as just an aesthetic point, The Magnetic Fields' (ironic) criticism extends beyond to address and encompass the ethical level. If, as Daniel Handler argues, in Merritt's songs 'usually [...] the narrator is [...] sad or mourning the loss of innocence', it is precisely because she or he 'is still innocent', still capable of love, even as she lives in and speaks this 'spoiled' world and language. For if she were not, she would lack the critical distance required to experience her own and the world's absence of innocence as a loss—non-innocence would be the sole conceivable state of being. In spite of the narrators' empirical corruption, their transcendental innocent gaze introduces a critical distance between enunciation and statement, so that the sarcasm inhering in their 'spoiled' language turns against itself. Innocence and love reappropriate postmodern sarcasm against its own language and biopolitical rules. Unlike in Neo-Realism, where there is a distance between individual and society (language), here there is a fissure within the individual, between his statements (language) and the position from or gaze under which they are enunciated. 19

The critical strategy of the dynamic songs is a postmodern reappropriation of modernist sarcasm, which, by capitalising on love as the exemplary discourse through which every aspect of society can be, and is, spoken, exercises socio-political criticism directly on the biopolitical level. In the era of universalised exchange value and the catholic commodification and substitutionability of all objects, including love objects, nothing may be a stronger point of socio-political critique than the resistance to allowing oneself and others to become exchangeable objects, enabled by an irony and even a sarcasm that, through the back door, introduces a gaze of uniqueness and irreplaceability. It is possible that in the era of the quasi-ecumenical commodification of love and sexuality, nothing could have more critical power other than the romantic concept of irrevocable love, whose encomium is surreptitiously sung by ostensibly cynical lyrics—'only a gun / could stop these bitter tears' ('Bitter Tears', vol. 3). In postmodernism, the 'solution' may indeed shackle together 'love, music, wine and revolution' ('World Love', vol. 2). 20

However, a caveat is required here due to a certain dominant tendency within the tradition of modern Western philosophy. The dynamic songs' biopolitical critique is predicated on the conceptual distinction between experience and transcendence, but the relation between the two can be conceived either in a dualist or in a monist way. The dualist understanding of transcendence severs it from empirical experience, as is the case in Descartes' division between body and soul, with the latter being immortal.<sup>21</sup> The monist conception of transcendence places the latter within the same plane of immanence as empirical life, so that there can be no soul without body, as Spinoza argued in his refutation of the soul's immortality.<sup>22</sup> This 21

division of Western thought continues to perpetuate itself today, as is evident in the distinction between ego-psychology—for which the death drive is inconsequential to empirical life which is governed exclusively by the pleasure principle—and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis—for which the death drive, albeit the transcendental precondition of the pleasure principle, is operative within the immanence of empirical life.<sup>23</sup> If love is upheld in the 69 *Love Songs* as a transcendental function in the dualistic sense, then the thrust of their social criticism would be pre-empted, as this love would be expelled from the immanence of experience, as inconsequential to empirical life. It would be an Ideal incapable of entering reality, whether out of one's fear of it (the neurotic approach) or because of one's dismissal of it as idealism (the cynical approach)—assuming that there is a real difference between the two.

Indeed, at least according to one interpretation, the dynamic antinomy shares the dualistic conception of transcendence, as becomes particularly evident in Kant's application of the dynamic antinomy to his political philosophy. In his notorious article, 'What is Enlightenment?', Kant argued that unconditional obedience should be expected from the 'citizen of civil society', while 'freedom' should be reserved only for 'scholars' as 'world citizens'. For, in this way, no contradiction arises if the imperative, 'Argue as much as you will, and about what you will, but obey!', is addressed to the very same subjects, but in different relations—on one side, as 'members of the community [who] must passively conduct themselves with an artificial unanimity', where 'argument is certainly not allowed—one must obey', and, on the other side, 'as a member of the whole community or of a society of world citizens', where the scholar 'certainly can argue without hurting the affairs for which he is in part responsible as a passive member.'<sup>24</sup> Kant's conception of enlightened civil society in the fashion of the dynamic antinomy precludes any interaction between empirical civil society and transcendental universe of world-citizens, rendering the freedom of the latter realm inconsequential to the rigidity of the realm of unconditional obedience. The formula of this society is: 'everyone is subject to the law, under the precondition that only in a different aspect (as a "scholar"), everyone is not subject to the law'. The political stakes of this logical hat trick are amply evident in Frederic II's jubilant response—'Let them reason all they want to as long as they obey.'<sup>25</sup> As Hannah Arendt has put it, political freedom in Kant is in the last analysis reserved only for the 'spectator', the scholar capable of assuming the 'general standpoint' of 'impartiality', which takes 'others into account' but knows nothing of 'how to combine with them in order to act.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, a dualistic conception of love would reduce it to an object of speculation for the 'spectator', the 'scholar' or the listener who would know nothing of how to engage with the other in an act of love.

To approach the monistic understanding of transcendence, let us return once again to the Neo-Spinozist philosopher Deleuze. If we call, with

Deleuze, the entirety of time the 'crystal-image' its manifest present aspect the 'actual image' and its presupposed past aspect the 'virtual image', then the relation between present and past reveals itself as follows: 'The present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror.'<sup>27</sup> In the crystal-image, 'each side', the actual and the virtual, takes 'the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility', whereby the past is the transcendental precondition of the present, and vice versa.<sup>28</sup> Thus, although past and present are 'distinct', they are 'indiscernible', so that 'the actual and the virtual [...] are in continual exchange.'<sup>29</sup> Here, actual and virtual, or empirical and transcendental, are 'contemporaneous' and homogeneous, that is, of the same ontological status, so that the one can take the place of the other, and their roles exchange. This monistic conception of transcendence is presupposed so that transcendental love can be realised empirically (as well as so that the *69 Love Songs* can, as they do, also include songs in which the characters revel in the plenitude of their love).

What guarantees the monistic conception of transcendence in the *69 Love Songs*? For, as long as the dynamic antinomy allows for a dualist reading, the dynamic songs cannot in themselves prevent an understanding of transcendence as an exception that is required for the constitution of the realm of obedience but remains external to it. 24

### The Mathematic Songs

The dualistic conception of transcendence in the dynamic antinomy is also presupposed in the Lacanian formulation of sexual difference, when read as a rearticulation of the Kantian antinomies, as proposed by Joan Copjec.<sup>30</sup> Crucially, 'sex', both in Lacan and here, indicates neither gender difference (a cultural construction) nor biological sex (whether a body has female or male characteristics), let alone sexual orientation (whether one is homosexual, heterosexual, etc.). Rather, sex indicates the failure of culture (and, hence, representation, language, or the signifier) to represent the human subject in its totality. The human subject is sexed (as opposed to simply gendered) precisely because the signifier (reason) fails to represent any totality, and hence also the totality of the subject.<sup>31</sup> 25

Kant named the law governing the totality of civil society 'obedience.' In the context of sexuality, Lacan calls the law governing the empirical totality of the human subject the 'phallic function [□]', and defines the male totality or 'man as whole' as the subject who 'acquires his inscription (*prend son inscription*), with the proviso that this function [□] is limited due to the existence of an x by which the function □x is negated (*niée*)', just as, in Kant's dynamic antinomy *qua* civil society, there is an x (the 'scholar' or 'world citizen') by which obedience is negated.<sup>32</sup> The male sex is the effect of reason's failure in the mode of the dynamic antinomy. 26

If there were only one antinomy, the dynamic, there would be only one sex, the male. But reason also fails in the mode of the mathematic antinomy. Here, Kant's example concerns the limits of the world, regarding which reason again offers two contradictory statements: the thesis that 'the world has a beginning in time, and is...limited' in 'space'; and the antithesis that 'the world has no beginning, and no limits.'<sup>33</sup> However, these two statements do not express truths about the world in itself, insofar as 'space and time, together with the appearances in them' are 'nothing existing in themselves and outside of my representations.'<sup>34</sup> Consequently, 'I cannot say the world is *infinite* [...] nor [...] that it is *finite*' because in either case I would speak of 'my representations' of the world and not of the world in itself.<sup>35</sup> 27

While this antinomy is incapable of producing true judgments about the world, its thrust lies in alerting us to the fact that there may be a 'world' in itself, a Real, beyond 'my representations.' In dualist fashion, the dynamic antinomy treats the thing-in-itself as a transcendent exception (Ideal) external to the empirical field (and representation), so that the latter forms a closed totality within which everything is unconditionally subjected to the law. By contrast, in a monist fashion, the mathematic antinomy allows the thing-in-itself to pierce representation and force it to raise the question about its existence, to which representation cannot respond anything that would reduce the thing-in-itself to an external exception. Thus, representation cannot form a closed totality, it remains not-whole, due to the thing-in-itself, the 'real', which 'resists symbolisation absolutely', without nevertheless being external to it.<sup>36</sup> The failure of reason in the mode of the mathematic antinomy becomes in Lacan the matrix of the female sex which does 'not allow for any universality', it remains 'not-whole, insofar as it has the choice of positing itself in  $\square x$  or of not being there (*de n'en pas être*).'<sup>37</sup> 28

It is through the mathematic or female songs that the *69 Love Songs* raise the question of the existence of the real—the real either *is* or *is not*—but statements about it are neither true nor false, for these are categories that pertain to judgments (representation), not to the real itself. *A fortiori*, the real is what persistently subsists beyond claims about truth and falsity, which is why it cannot be deconstructed.<sup>38</sup> Put differently, it is out of the failure of representation to decide as to the truth or falsity of the limits of a totality that the real emerges as an effect of an otherwise ecumenically deconstructive representation. 29

Thus, for the female sex, the more the *69 Love Songs* deconstruct love on the level of representation, the more they reaffirm it on the level of the real. This is the effect of the *69 Love Songs*' contradictory celebration and condemnation of love—an internal contradiction instrumental to the album's epistemology, stated at its most explicit in 'The Death of Ferdinand de Saussure' (vol. 3): 30

I met Ferdinand de Saussure  
on a night like this  
On love he said 'I'm not so sure  
I even know what it is  
No understanding, no closure  
It is a nemesis  
You can't use a bulldozer  
to study orchids'

You can't use words to study love, is the lesson of the 'father' of structural linguistics for The Magnetic Fields—yet it is only through this failure of the words that love triumphs on the level of the real, as the song continues to state: 'I do not know anything about love', yet 'I am nothing without love.' The mathematic songs concur with Roland Barthes: 'What do I think of love?—As a matter of fact, I think nothing of love. I'd be glad to know *what it is*, but being inside, I see it in existence, not in essence.'<sup>39</sup>

The mathematic songs, therefore, reveal the insurmountable gap between representation or appearances and the real—a fissure, which as we shall presently see, is necessary for the experience of love—but also the difference between desire—an affair exclusively of appearances or semblances—and love—something that emerges in the chasm between appearance and the real. If, on the one hand, as Hegel already indicated, and as Alexandre Kojève made explicit, '[d]esire is [...] "humanizing," or "anthropogenetic"', love, on the other hand, is for the living mammal we call *anthropos* that which, in Lacan's words, 'humanizes *jouissance* [enjoyment]', the latter being the subject's affair with the real, that is, an impossible, and unbearable, relation.<sup>40</sup> Expounding Lacan's statement that only 'l'amour-sublimation permet à la jouissance de condescendre au désir [love-sublimation allows *jouissance* to condescend to desire]',<sup>41</sup> Alenka Zupančič writes 'the other that is accessible to desire is always the imaginary other', the appearance or semblance of the other, 'whereas the Real (Other) of desire remains unattainable', for:

The Real of desire is *jouissance*—that 'inhuman partner' (as Lacan calls it) that desire aims at beyond its object, and that must remain inaccessible. Love, on the other hand, is what somehow manages to make the Real of desire accessible. This is what Lacan is aiming at with his statement that love 'humanizes *jouissance*.'<sup>42</sup>

If desire is too wrapped up in appearances to relate to the real of the other, to the other as a real human being rather than one's own imaginary construction, and if *jouissance* is too 'inhuman' to treat the other as human, as opposed to some inaccessible sublime object (Ideal), love is what allows *jouissance* to condescend to desire, to 'make it possible for the Real to

condescend to the appearance (in the form of a split in the very core of appearance)', whereby the Real does not turn out 'to be just another appearance' but rather 'it is real precisely as *appearance*.'<sup>43</sup> It is only by revealing the split between the inaccessible Real and appearance that the mathematic antinomy provides access to love as the transgression of their (apparent) opposition, thereby allowing us to experience the other as an accessible and all-too-human ideal.

### Aesthetic Anorexia

As the above line of thought indicates, the question of sex, just as the question of the reality or not of love, cannot be answered within and in terms of socio-cultural constructivism, as it pertains to the latter's failure, which is also to say its excess—'excess' being for Merritt the album's only theme beyond love. The mathematic songs point to excess most eloquently when approaching love not as a particular life experience but explicitly as a universal object that, as such, can be articulated around a universalising simile or metaphor, as in 'The Book Of Love' (vol. 1) and 'Love Is Like A Bottle of Gin' (vol. 3). Nobody cares to read the age-old, 'long and boring' book of love, and, nevertheless, 'I love it when you read to me / and...you can read me anything.' Although the enamoured subject can be described through metaphors properly pertaining to inebriation, the central simile is not reversible, with love's excess spilling over it: 'Love is like a bottle of gin / but a bottle of gin is not like love.'

In 'Meaningless' (vol. 3)—the most explicit mathematic song, an exuberant glorification of love *qua* real, beyond any possible representation or meaning—'everything' pertaining to love is 'meaningless'; in fact, 'even less / a little glimpse of nothingness.' The final fadeout, with its tireless sliding of adverbs, is a conceptual crescendo reaffirming the subsistence of the real as the register underlying all human experience, from the basic biological need of nutrition to transcendence:

<i>Nutrition</i>	'deliciously meaningless'
<i>Sensation</i>	'effervescently meaningless'
<i>Aesthetics</i>	'beautifully meaningless'
<i>Reason/Extension</i>	'profoundly meaningless'
<i>Finality</i>	'definitively meaningless'
<i>Reason/Totality</i>	'comprehensively meaningless'
<i>Sublimity</i>	'magnificently meaningless'
<i>Credulity</i>	'incredibly meaningless'
<i>History</i>	'unprecedentedly meaningless'
<i>Excitation</i>	'Mind-blowingly meaningless'
<i>Faith</i>	'unbelievably meaningless'
<i>Transcendence</i>	'infinitely meaningless'

Although the adverbial syntagma, as Handler says, 'could have gone on [...] forever', it is no accident that it starts with nutrition and ends with a literally excessive transcendence (insofar as the song fades out without ever pronouncing it), particularly as this choice was not made consciously. Merritt's intention was 'to make 26 lines and have them alphabetical', as was actually the plan regarding all the songs of the album, which were 'originally' intended 'to be sequenced alphabetically.' But Merritt 'abandoned that idea' because 'it didn't work', just as he had to abandon the idea of the 26 lines in the fadeout of 'Meaningless', mostly because of the difficulties the letter 'K' posed in finding an adverb. So, neither the compilation of the songs in the actual album nor the list of adverbs in this fadeout is the product of a plan. Merritt provides no explanation of either the one or the other; they just happened.

And yet, the link between nutrition and transcendence is both contingent and necessary, which is also to say, real. If love is said to amount to 'even less / a little glimpse of nothingness', it is because 'the nothing' is what the anorectic eats.<sup>44</sup> For, 'at the oral level, ' the real 'from which the subject...has separated itself off', in 'order to constitute itself' as a conscious (i.e., representable) self, 'is the nothing, in so far as that from which the subject was weaned', be it the breast or the bottle, 'is no longer anything for him', since he can now eat by other means. *Anorexia nervosa* is the symptom of the fact that the subject's 'lack'—the real of the subject's desire—is nothing other than 'the nothing' itself, that is, that 'the nothing' or 'the real' is a positive function rather than just nothing.<sup>45</sup> Just as the anorectic gives us a glimpse of the nothingness of lack, the lover gives us a glimpse of the nothingness of love, and both point to the nothingness of the real.

The epistemological and rhetorical strategies of the *69 Love Songs*, which elevate love to the level of the real via the defiles of monistic transcendence, meaninglessness and nothingness, replicate the logic of anorexia on a metaphorical level, in what could be called a practice of *aesthetic anorexia*. Once one grasps the logic of aesthetic anorexia, the meaning of individual mathematic songs, as was the case with 'Meaningless', is transformed and made to point directly to the overall effect of the *69 Love Songs'* aesthetic mechanism. For instance, 'Nothing Matters When We're Dancing' (vol. 1), does not simply point to the ambiguity that 'both nothing else matters when we're dancing' and 'nothing matters at all when we're dancing', but now makes the two sides of this double entendre, 'nothing else' and 'nothing at all', converge so as to reveal love as the sole thing that matters when we're dancing.<sup>46</sup> Love, as a monistic transcendence inseparable from experience, cannot but infect and undermine the latter's categories, time and space, so that they somehow vanish, and it eventually does not matter whether we are dancing in 'Paris or in Lansing' to the sound of 'dreadful tunes' and 'awful songs', for 'we don't even hear.' This is the effect of aesthetic anorexia,



because of which we are not idealistically ecstatic, but *extimate*: at once within and without experience: even though we don't hear the songs, we know they are awful.<sup>47</sup>

Extimacy, as the relation between love and experience, is reenacted in the relation between the music and lyrics of the *69 Love Songs*. Each song musically represents a particular soundscape or combination of discernible soundscapes, connected to a specific musical genre, history and place. And yet, whether the listener happens to be boy or girl, the totality of these soundscapes in the album produces for each a univocal statement about love—which is not to say that oscillation between the two alternative positions is excluded; for one thing, oscillation between two positions presupposes two distinct positions in the first place; for another, as Freud argued, unconsciously we are all bisexual.<sup>48</sup> 36

Recapitulating, while the dynamic songs could allow for a division of the universe into the realms of experience and transcendence, thereby posing love as the transcendental precondition of the empirical amorous affair, the mathematic songs guarantee that this transcendental precondition be not reduced to an exception to empirical life, an Ideal, but be instead posed on the level of the real—something which, albeit unrepresentable, is the core circumscribed by all empirical life and representation. The term *aesthetic anorexia* designates that artistic approach that circumscribes the real as the unrepresentable nothing. 37

Consisting of two sets of songs, the dynamic and the mathematic, the *69 Love Songs* is an album that is itself sexed—which is why, to respond to our initial question, for some listeners, the overall point of the album may be that love *is* (real), and for others that it is *not*, that it is an impossible, perhaps overrated, Ideal which, as such, we might as well discard. 38

It follows that, in more general terms, sex determines what appears real and what illusory, or, as Lacan puts it, sex is 'a matter of the constitution of the subject's reality', a process that takes place by 'testing the external by the internal.'<sup>49</sup> It is 'the judgment of existence, which consists in saying—*This is not my dream or my hallucination or my representation but an object.*'<sup>50</sup> 39

In other words, boys and girls, if your sex happens to be other than what you expected, or changes each time you contemplate the album as a whole, this does not indicate any confusion in your gender identity or sexual orientation. If sex has any relation to whether you identify yourself as 'female', 'male', 'transsexual', 'boyfriendable' or 'girlfriendable', etc., this is only insofar as your sex allows you to see that specific type(s) of sexual orientation and practice as real, and hence, also the potential locus of love, be it an ideal or real. 40

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to begin by thanking the students of my course, 'Introduction to Cultural Studies: Philosophy—Pop Songs—Film', offered in Spring 2002, whose enthusiasm and thoughtful discussions largely inspired the present essay. Among them, I would like to thank particularly Karl Dahlquist and Steve Jaksa for inspirational discussions and encouragement to publish this work. Next, my gratitude also goes to Siarhei Biareishyk, Ross Shields and Mark Verdin for their thoughtful and insightful feedback in the later stages of this project. Finally, I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of *Radical Musicology* for their highly helpful, attentive and inspiring, suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> The Magnetic Fields, 'Meaningless', *69 Love Songs* (CD, Merge Records, B00000JY1X, 1999), vol. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 104.

<sup>4</sup> Lyrics cited from *69 Love Songs* will in the following be referenced by song title and volume number in parenthesis.

<sup>5</sup> Tannenbaum, Rob. 'As Hundreds Cheer: The Glum Triumph of The Magnetic Fields.' *The Village Voice* (December 1-7, 1999). <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/9948,tannenbaum,10576,1.html>

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, Marx's thought is considered as a continuation of Hegel, but there is a by now well-acknowledged body of theory that sees in Spinoza an equally, if not more, decisive predecessor. This position is more or less explicitly upheld, for instance, throughout the work of Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Pierre Macherey, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and many other thinkers in their aftermath. Among the most recent works that directly address the continuity between Spinoza and Marx, I would like to single out Eugene Holland's 'Spinoza and Marx', *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Fall, 1998), available online at <http://clogic.eserver.org/2-1/holland.html> and Cesare Casarino's 'Marx before Spinoza (Notes towards an Investigation)', in Dimitris Vardoulakis (ed.), *Spinoza Now* (University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming). Kojin Karatani was among the pioneers of advocating, and contributing to, a Spinozian-Kantian-Marxist line of thought; see above all his *Architecture as Metaphor: Language, Number, Money*, ed. Michael Speaks, tr. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), but also his *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, tr. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). Regarding the connection between Marx and Lacan, Slavoj Žižek and what is often referred to as the 'Slovenian School of Lacanians' (though not only), have contributed a great amount of work on spelling out the conspicuous (and often explicit in Lacan's own work) linkage, but generally through the mediation of Hegel and Kant rather than Spinoza, whom they, notably Žižek, often attempt to differentiate as starkly as possible from Lacan. Joan Copjec has also played a decisive role in fortifying the link between Kant and Lacan; see her *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) and *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). Drawing critically and appreciatively on both lines of thought, I have elsewhere argued for the linkage Spinoza-Kant-Marx-Lacan; see A. Kiarina Kordela, *Surplus: Spinoza, Lacan* (Albany: SUNY, 2007). To put the argument in one sentence (as if this were possible or, rather, comprehensible), the conspicuous trend that bespeaks the affinity of Spinoza's thought, Marx's analysis of political economy and psychoanalysis, is monism (as evidenced, for instance, in the non-oppositional relation between truth and false in Spinoza and Lacan, and in the existence of only one substance in all three, be it 'God or Nature' in Spinoza, or surplus-value in Marx, or surplus-enjoyment in Lacan). In the present article, I do not involve Marx, which is why I am referring just to the tripartite connection among Spinoza, Kant and Lacan.

<sup>7</sup> Merritt, as cited in Tannenbaum and liner notes to *69 Love Songs*. All citations by Merritt or Daniel Handler (the accordionist and interviewer for the album's liner) with no further reference are from the album's liner.

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<sup>8</sup> By the way, it is this musical richness and experimentation that prevents the *69 Love Songs* from being classified as *chansons*, that is, as exclusively or primarily lyric-driven. If the '*chanson*' partakes in the album, this is so only as a subcategory among others rather than as an umbrella term.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, tr. James Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 70; §40.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and tr. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 484-485; B472/A444-B473/A445.

<sup>11</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena*, 84-85; §53.

<sup>12</sup> Already in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud had linked repetition compulsion to the death drive. Lacan stresses this link by stating that 'r p tition [...] est proprement ce qui va contre la vie. C'est au niveau de la r p tition que Freud se voit [...] contraint [...] d'articuler l'instinct de mort' [repetition is properly speaking that which goes against life. It is on the level of repetition that Freud saw himself constrained to articulate the death drive]. Jacques Lacan, *Le S minaire. Livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse, 1969-1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 51, my translation. Moreover, the invariable effect of 'cette r p tition' [this repetition] is, as in *69 Love Songs*, 'd faut,  chec' [lack, failure] and 'perte' [loss] (*ibid.*).

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1994 [Urzone, 1989]), 112.

<sup>14</sup> Slavoj  i ek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992), 231.

<sup>15</sup> I am evidently referring here to the central opposition within nineteenth-century German Romanticism between highly esteemed and praised *Leidenschaft* [passion] and the widely disdained (as bourgeois) and condemned *Kalk l*. Though it may at first appear as an index of a disillusioned and sobering maturation in historical consciousness, the postmodern repudiation of 'happy endings' is by necessity exposed to the slippery slant of fatalism. As  i ek puts it, for the last 'twenty or twenty-five years', particularly since 'the collapse of socialism', what has 'disappeared' is 'the belief that humanity [...] can actively intervene and somehow steer social development', so that 'we are again accepting the notion of history as fate.' Whereas in the past the 'idea was that life would somehow go on on earth, but that there are different possibilities' regarding our socio-political organisation, 'now we talk all the time about the end of the world', and it is indeed 'much easier for us to imagine the end of the world than a small change in the political system.' In  i ek's succinct capitulation, the postmodern motto is that: 'Life on earth maybe will end, but somehow capitalism will go on' ( i ek, in Rebecca Mead, 'Life and Letters: The Marx Brother (How a Philosopher from Slovenia Became an International Star)', *The New Yorker* (5 May 2003): 38-47: 40).

<sup>16</sup> In the 1970s, Michel Foucault coined the term biopolitics in order to indicate the modern linkage, gradually emerging since the seventeenth century (i.e., since the inception of capitalist secular modernity), between *bios* (life) and political power. This linkage involves a transformation in power's mechanisms, in which political control is exercised directly over bios and the body themselves. In the 'disciplinary society' of the first stage of modern biopolitics, institutions did not yet completely permeate individual consciousness and bodies, so that the individual could still resist power. But in the contemporary, all-permeative biopolitics of the 'society of control', the relation between power and individual becomes one of increasing implication, as power structures are now inscribed in individuals' habits and productive practices. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), particularly 133-159; see also his *Naissance de la biopolitique: Cours au Coll ge de France. 1978-1979*. (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2004). An eminent and relevant contemporary example is the control exercised on individuals, through venues that range from the medical and educational institutions to the mass media, regarding the products, practices, behaviours, attitudes, gestures, voice tones, words, etc., that are supposed to make them desirable, how people are supposed to organise and practice their sexuality, what are the limits of 'healthy' love, beyond which love is considered pathological, and so on. In other words, biopolitics

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designates a permeative power, with no identifiable points of oppression and resistance, or, restrictive laws and liberating desires or actions. As Foucault puts it: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (*The History of Sexuality*, 95). Rather than the old conception of power, in which the oppressors and the oppressed are facing one another vertically, the new form of power in question entails a horizontal and intertwining biopolitical assemblage of power and resistance (which is not in the least to be mistaken for an obliteration of oppression, exploitation, inequality, etc., something that would amount to the obliteration of both power and resistance; on the contrary, biopolitics means an intensification of power and its cognates, due to their increasingly surreptitious character.)

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time—Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> For those interested in more details regarding the representation of Merritt's persona, he was 'conceived by barefoot hippies' and raised 'by his mother, an English teacher' in 'the hippy style [...] "sometimes very poor".' Merritt's attempts to place himself squarely in the centre, as opposed to the 'indie-rock ghetto', rub the wrong way centre and periphery alike. Tannenbaum reassures us that 'again and again' he 'hear[s] people say Merritt hates them', and Merritt reaffirms that this is what some people think: 'Almost everyone in California thinks I hate them. I relate well to the English; they understand that I don't hate them.' Whether it is because he is a 'painfully intellectual [...] punctilious copy editor who would not countenance the usage of "like" when "as" is correct', and who 'speaks with great deliberation and long pauses, the better to respond with terse, Wildean wit and grammatical precision' or because he has 'a low voice and a sad facial expression' or because of 'the super-dark thoughts that plague his depressed mind' or because he 'prefer[s] honesty in conversation' or because 'he's odd, and dour, and a bit unsocialized' or because 'he doesn't like hip-hop', not even 'parties'—whatever the reason may be, people from *The New Yorker* to the most 'alternative' print basically agree that 'he's not the most pleasant person'. See John Cook, 'Blacklisted: Is Stephin Merritt a Racist Because He Doesn't Like Hip-Hop?' *Slate* (9 May 2006), <http://www.slate.com/id/2141421/>; Rusty W. Spell, 'Every Piece of Rock Journalism Ever Written About Stephin Merritt—In About a Thousand Words', *The Distant Plastic Treehouse* (August 2001), <http://www.rustyspell.com/merritt/merrittarticle.html>; Tannenbaum, 'As Hundreds Cheer'.

<sup>20</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>21</sup> See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, tr. F. E. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin Books, 1968), particularly the 'Sixth Meditation', 150-69.

<sup>22</sup> See Baruch (Benedict de) Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, ed. and tr. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), particularly *The Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometric Manner* and *Ethics*, 231-298 and 408-617.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, as I gather from the mass media, even mainstream psychology has increasingly been forced to take into account at least some aspects of the death drive; they usually refer to them as 'self-sabotage.'

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of the Morals and What Is Enlightenment?* tr. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1959), 87.

<sup>25</sup> Frederic II, as cited in Michel Foucault, 'What Is Critique?' tr. Lysa Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997, 23-82), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 44. Needless to say, the most widespread reception of Kant follows a humanist tradition that sees in his work the representative of a more positive or hopeful Enlightenment, in which the two realms of the 'scholar' and civil society, far from being separated, interact in such a way that, as one of the reviewers of the present essay put it, 'free public reasoning, as opposed to "private" obedience, can amount to people being

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persuaded by rational arguments so that a more rational arrangement can be introduced in the domain of obedience itself.' I leave to the reader to decide which of the two readings of Kant is more convincing, but for the purposes of the present argument, I will be relying on the first line of interpretation.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>30</sup> See the chapter 'Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason', in Joan Copjec's *Read My Desire*, 201-36.

<sup>31</sup> My exposition of Lacan's conception of sexual difference will be brief, as there is already an extensive literature on the subject. Beyond Copjec's aforementioned work, see, for instance, Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Alain Badiou, 'What is Love?' *Umbr(a)* Vol. 1 (1996): 7-21; Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994); Charles Shepherdson, *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2000), particularly the chapter 'The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex', 85-113; or A. Kiarina Kordela, 'Grammar of Secsual and Visceral Reason', *Parallax* Vol. 11, No. 3 (July-September 2005): 55-71.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Book XX. Encore, 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality; The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 79.

<sup>33</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 470-471; B454/A426 - B455/A427.

<sup>34</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena*, 82; §52c.

<sup>35</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 526; A 520/ B 548.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 66.

<sup>37</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> In other words, the real is in advance the psychoanalytic critical response to the later deconstructive principle that, in Jacques Derrida's words, '[t]here is nothing outside of the text', or in a more literal translation that 'there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*'. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 [*De La Grammatologie*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1967]), 158. Lacan expresses his reluctance to reduce everything to appearances or representation (text) also by arguing that 'if beyond appearance there is nothing in itself, there is the gaze'. Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 103. The gaze is real insofar as it does not exist, that is, insofar as it 'is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other' (*ibid.* 84). This imagined gaze is part of representation, which is why it can be deconstructed, but its precondition—the precondition of the fact that it can be imagined in the first place—is precisely the absent gaze, the gaze *qua* real. We could say, by analogy to sex, that the gaze is the failure of representation to represent the point of view from which it represents whatever it is that it represents. And just as there is no gaze in itself (i.e., the gaze is real), 'there is no such thing as a sexual relationship' (i.e., sex and the sexual relationship are real—i.e., non-experienceable, which is why, as we shall shortly see, love is required as the mediator that gives access to the real/sex) (*Encore*, 34).

<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, tr. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 59.

<sup>40</sup> Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Livre XX: L'angoisse 1962-1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 210.

<sup>42</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two (Short-Circuits)* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 179. Here, I would like to take the opportunity to thank one of the two anonymous readers for pointing out the connection between Zupančič's argument and my own.

<sup>43</sup> Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, 168.

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<sup>44</sup> Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 103-4.

<sup>46</sup> Handler.

<sup>47</sup> 'Extimate' and 'extimacy' (*extimité*) are words coined by Lacan out of the synthesis of the words 'exterior' and 'intimate' or 'intimacy', to 'problematize[]', in Dylan Evans's words, 'the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained'. Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), 58.

<sup>48</sup> In Freud's words, the human subject is characterised by an unconscious 'general bisexual disposition [allgemeinen bisexuellen Anlage]'. This unconscious bisexuality is not meant in the common sense of the word which refers to the practice of engaging in bisexual relations—for which, as Freud remarks, Ferenczi's 'homo-erotism [Homoerotik]' would be 'a better name'—but precisely in the sense of an internal unconscious split between the two sexes. Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud (London: Imago 1952) Frankfurt/M: Fischer.Freud 1999], V, 45-6, n. 1; *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, tr. and ed. James Strachey, (Perseus Basic Books, 2000), 13, n. 1. Note also that Lacan's attribution of sexuality to the failure of the signifier eliminates all biological remnants in Freud's grounding of his thesis on a presumed tendency towards 'bisexuality' ['Bisexualität'] in 'higher animals' in general (*Gesammelte Werke*, V, 46, n. 1; *Three Essays*, 13, n.1).

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Book III: The Psychoses, 1955-56*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 150.

<sup>50</sup> Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 150. At this point, in the third seminar, Lacan is actually not aware that the above statements apply to sexuality; he is rather talking about *Verwerfung* (foreclosure) and its difference from *Unterdrückung* (repression), as the two alternative versions of the process that 'occurs' at the moment when the human subject or 'child' is introduced to the 'field of symbolic articulation', that is, to 'language' or the 'symbolic order' (*The Psychoses*, 149). Eight years later, in the eleventh seminar, Lacan will have figured out that this same moment, at which the 'subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges in the field of the Other', is also the moment that 'makes present sexuality in the unconscious', that is, the moment at which the human being emerges as a 'sexed being' (*Four Fundamental Concepts*, 197-9).

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