POSTHUMANITY AND THE PRISON-HOUSE OF GENDER IN DOUGLAS COUPLAND'S *MICROSERFS*

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Captivity narratives have comprised a major part of the storytelling tradition in the history of humanity. From ancient myths to contemporary literature, the history of literature presents us with the tragedies of captive minds and captive bodies. However, all these different forms of captivities frequently stressed a captivity based in inhumanity and the characters' struggle to free themselves from imprisonment, which inevitably signifies a struggle to (re)humanize their minds and their bodies. Although such an emphasis on decency or the limits of humanity remains ambiguous, it can reasonably be argued that posthumanism offers a new outlet for breaking the chains of captivity, that is, escaping into the non-human to redefine humanity and to emancipate the human mind and human body to advance a more liberated and more equitable definition of humanity.

Indeed, the human body has been a domain of struggle, a struggle of captivity and enslavement and a struggle for enfranchisement and redemption, a struggle over shaping and reproducing the physical forms and appearances of the body as well as redefining the mind and perceptions of human existence. The body is a cultural artifact, a textual construction, "a medium of culture, a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (Bordo 2362). The body as a physical entity had

sustained its unquestionability and obscurity for ages and "there was a relentless effort to convince people that they had no bodies" (Baudrillard, *The Consumer* 148). Only recently was the human body stripped of its sanctity, and has therefore become an object of scientific investigation. The categorizations of body and sex were established on the basis of negations and perversities through medicalization as a relationship of domination and as a way of positioning difference as abnormal. Therefore, Western civilization, as Foucault discussed in detail with reference to sexuality in antiquity and then in Judeo-Christian culture, was concerned more about defining anomalies, illnesses, and transgression in order to delineate heteronormativity. Pre-modern cultures recognized transgressive forms of the body and sexuality and even sometimes regarded them as holy and god-given, whereas modernity almost reinvented the human body and sexuality as a social construct like race, class, and ethnicity by regulating and redefining time, space, and human interaction through which bodies were trained and shaped with prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, and femininity. Moreover, Western modernity suppressed the visibility and eligibility of "deviant forms" of the human being including sexual, racial and ethnic diversities as well as eliminating the lower classes from the public realm. The history of Western urbanization and industrialization, then, may as well be read as an attempt to construct divisions in terms of the formation of the human body and public appearance. Women, and by extension, non-white and non-heterosexual forms of gender, have been left out of the central core of the social structure.

However, the dissolution of grand narratives with postmodernity also brought about a dissolution of the heteronormative and essentialist uniformity and solidity of the human body. Definitions of gender and sex, as the major grand narratives of identity, were questioned and transformed into dispersed and commodified forms. As gender and sex are further marked by the mechanical and mass-mediated reproduction of human experiences, history and memory, space and time, postmodern gender theories present a perpetual in-betweenness, transgression and fluidity. Gender therefore is necessarily "transsexual not just in the sense of anatomical sexual transformation, but in the wider

sense of transvestism, of playing on interchangeable signs of sex and by contrast with the previous play on sexual difference, of playing on sexual indifference" (Baudrillard, *Screened Out* 9).

An escape from identity politics characterizes postmodern gender structures since all forms of identity politics, whether patriarchal or feminist, seemingly confine the human body and sex into manageable and consumable units, which implies that, as Judith Butler suggests: "if the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the true effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (136). While lacking any substantial frame of reference, or cultural or historical roots, gender is characterized with a parallel tendency for reclaiming the possession of one's body and sexual identity as a desire to transform the body as a physical entity through plastic surgery, genetic cloning, in vitro fertilization and the computerization of the human mind and memory. Therefore, the body has lost its quality as gendered and sexed and turned into the embodiment of infantile innocence and manipulability, a "ghost in the machine," or a cyborg, a hybrid of machine and organism (Haraway 2269). Pramod Nayar further suggested that "the human body as a coherent, self-contained, autonomous self is no longer a viable proposition. We have to see the self as multiple, fragmented and made of the foreign" (89). Michel Foucault, in his *History of Madness*, comprehensively illustrated that human rationality is based on unreason or madness, eventually toppling the idealization of the human subject and the overarching significance of rationality as the chief signifier of human actions.

The perception of the body today also marks a disintegration of the boundaries between the body and its compatibility with the environment since the human body now functions as an interface through which information flows and embodies an aggregation of human-machine corporeality. The human-machine symbiosis, then, is exteriorized and extended into a network of objects switching the "natural human body" to an immaterialized, dehumanized, and prosthetic "data made flesh." Katherine Hayles comments on the intriguing affinity between human cognition

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and cyborg consciousness, which: "implies not only a coupling with intelligent machines but a coupling so intense and multi-faceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed" (35).

At this point, posthumanism offers a fairly radical and overall decentering of the traditional coherent and autonomous human body. The humanist view postulates a patriarchal hierarchy that privileges human beings not only to non-human forms but also men to women, western people to non-western people, white people to all people of color, abled bodies to disabled bodies, which justifies partiarchal hegemony by labeling others as irrational, antimodern, savage, primitive, or unproductive (Rutsky 2). Humanism assumes a taken for granted universality in understanding the human body as categorically different from all "non-human" forms. Posthumanism, on the other hand, hinges upon a perception of "human subjectivity as an assemblage, co-evolving with machines and animals" (Nayar 23), which consequently denotes an encompassing definition of life, and ethical responsibilities toward non-human forms as the boundaries between species increasingly blur and inter-mingle. Therefore, posthumanism inevitably offers a political disposition that negates the hierarchy of life forms. Considering that the human body has been functional when aided by simple tools and machines, it would be reasonable to argue that it is already (and necessarily) technologized and dehumanized and that distinguishing the organic or mechanical from the humanoid has become even more challenging. In other words, the human body is identified with ambiguity and imprecision and there are no "natural" distinctions between human beings, non-human organisms and machines in terms of tool use, language, social behaviors, and organizational skills (Haney 84).

In light of such a theoretical background, this paper will dis-cuss the end of captivity within gendered identities in Douglas Coupland's 1995 novel, *Microserfs,* as an attempt to read gender from a posthumanist perspective and a redefinition of humanity. Posthumanism presupposes an ontological condition where human beings coalesce with a network of machines and other life forms while investing in the potential perfectibility of the human body,

or an intensification of human capabilities, to produce an improvable and modifiable by-product. Accordingly, it goes beyond the pessimism and dystopianism of postwar cultural criticism, especially in regard to machine–human interaction, and provides an integration of technology and the 1980's counterculture, the culture of video games, punk, and nihilistic anarchism (Fitting 296). Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs*, on the other hand, redefines humanism "in conjunction with contemporary technology rather than to use humanism to defeat the machine it created" (Miller 384). Coupland boldly explores the potential of posthuman culture to provide a deconstruction of human subjectivity through an analysis of the postmodern identification of human and machine.

Microserfs tells the story of a group of geeks, Generation X Microsoft employees, as narrated by Daniel Underwood, living in a group house with his friends, which is furnished with "useless furniture with ugly colors and shapes, full of toys and crappy hobby stuff, magazines, toys, baseball caps, and Battlestar Galactica trading card album, IKEA mugs and vitamin bottles" (7). Headed by Michael, a senior coder, they decide to leave Microsoft and start their own company and software, Oop!, in order to (in Daniel's words) "forget the whole business and get on with living–with being alive. I want to forget the way my body was ignored, year in, year out, in the pursuit of code, in the pursuit of somebody else's abstraction" (90–91). Similarly, Cary Wolfe emphasizes that "the very thing that separates us from the world connects us to the world, and self-referential, autopoietic closure, far from indicating a kind of solipsistic neo-Kantian idealism, actually is generative of openness to the environment" (21). In this regard, with brilliantly expressed references to the interconnectivity between human beings and computers, and sometimes intriguing remarks on the transformation of human beings into computerized humanoids, *Microserfs* provides an inspiring understanding of the world of Generation X as "human units," "amnesia machines," the "middle children of history" who refuse to grow up and participate in the game of grown-ups because they are looking for meaning and enlightenment in the immaterial cyber-universe.

Microserfs ostensibly offers more than the story of a bunch of geeks decorating their high-tech office lives with their gib-

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berish jargon. Instead, *Microserfs* reflects the anxieties, hopes, and transformation of Generation X and their strive to find meaning in their "cramped, love-starved, sensationless existence" (90). Their release from the corporate Microsoft universe also delineates their delivery from a universe where their bodies are sacrificed in the "pursuit of efficient, marketable code" and turned to "artificial, disembodied intelligence" (76). Coupland's characters are fugitives of the middle-class American dream and inevitably reside in a capitalist culture that produces waste of all kinds—industrial, cultural, and political—and their stories, therefore, are born out of that garbage pile which fills their stories with ambiguities, controversies, predicaments, and finally, bitter irony. The mythology of the *Microserf* generation, thus, is strictly indebted to distracted and creolized subcultural narratives that defy and, at the same time, celebrate mass-produced motifs and images (Tate 4). Late capitalism seizes subjects in a convolution of images and representations where everything can be potentially translated into computational data, which converts personal and cultural memory to a partial and contingent pastiche. In this regard, Douglas Coupland's constant references to popular culture or cultural icons in *Microserfs* generates a random-access memory of cultural data and styles (Rutsky 16).

The fundamental qualities of human beings, or the absence of qualities that make humans different from other animals and machines, are the major concerns of the novel. Daniel, for instance, introduces himself and his friends according to what their seven ideal categories would be if they were contestants on Jeopardy! Although each of them pursues an individual identity quest, or identity transformation, they all pursue a new and satisfying life in conjunction with machines rather than a life without machines. Reflecting the zeitgeist of their generation, their activities have to do with getting back in touch with their bodies as they have been neglecting them through eating disorders, malnutrition or lack of use (Miller 402). Dan complains that he doesn't even do many sports anymore and his relationship with his body has gone all weird. He reduces his bodily functions to mere instrumentality and realizes that he feels that "his body is a station wagon in which he drives his brain around" (4) because

"at Microsoft you pretend bodies don't exist… BRAINS are what matter. At Microsoft bodies get down played to near invisibility… so that employees morph themselves into those international symbols for MAN and WOMAN you see at the airports" (198). As other geeks who have no life outside the internet, Daniel has been completely dehumanized and believes "email is wonderful because there is no possibility of connecting with the person on the other end" and "he can get away with as little as fifteen minutes of 'facetime' each day" (Miller 401). Moreover, Susan, a member of the Oop! crew, wonders that

we, as humans, bear the burden of having to be every animal in the world rolled into one… we really have no identity of our own. What is human behavior except trying to prove that we're not animals? […] I think we have strayed so far away from our animal origins that we are bent on creating a new, supra-animal identity […] What are computers but the everyanimal machine? (17)

Posthumanity is mainly concerned with the question of the fundamentals of the dismantled boundary between human beings and other life forms. Human and animal biology and behavioral science tore down the separations of human and animal, shaking the foundations of a long-lived assumption that the body is a sacred and unique creation of God, and that the human body must have certain qualities that would make human beings superior to other creatures. In this sense, sex and gender just like race or class-consciousness appear to be an "achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism" (Haraway 2275). Posthuman theory basically challenges the dichotomous conceptualization of mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized. It also regards these binaries as a burden of modernity and emphasizes that modern dichotomies and ideological categorizations of the human body have proven to be obsolete and all human embodiments are already technologized. All cognitive systems of human existence like language, memory and intelligence as well as perceptions of sex and gender have now been governed by machines and computerized networks of domination. Therefore, the posthuman body is not based on Oedipal

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and heterosexual interrelations but a non-Oedipal and decentered sexuality. In other words, the human body, according to posthuman theory, has been deprived of its sexual and gendered connotations, and exists as a shattered tabula rasa, a void desire waiting to be filled (Levin 91). The immateriality of the body and gendered identity, then, corresponds to the immaterial reality of the cyber-universe, which offers a chance to construct a sense of belonging and defines gender on the basis of performativity and pastiche.

Discussing the feasibility of animal-like software projects, Coupland's geeks are troubled with the fundamental questions posed by the history of philosophy and still unanswered in the age of the information superhighway and global networks of computerized memory: "What is the search for the next great compelling application but a search for the human identity? (15) asks Dan. "What makes any person any different from any other? Where does your individuality end and your species-hood begin?" asks Karla (236), seeing humanity through the eyes of a flock of birds and claiming that their generation lacks the differentiating qualities as human units. Therefore, cyborg bodies in their struggle for emancipating themselves from essentialist categorizations of the body seeking new terrain, a new definition of humanity and gender, refraining from taken for granted embodiments and engenderment and taking refuge in anonymity and diversification. Dan feels excited to see what's next: "I remember back in grade school. VCR documentaries on embryology, and the way all mammals look the same up until a certain point in their embryological development, and then they start to differentiate and become what they're going to become. I think we're at that point now" (194).

This is also a point of departure from humanity into the union of machine and human being into cyborg bodies. For Haraway, "it's not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. Like other discursive definitions, we have no ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic" (2296) and cybernetics "mediates the translations of labor into robotics and word processing, sex into genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, and mind into artificial intelligence and decision procedures" (2285).

The human body in the post-gender era is destined to become a pros-thesis, a machine (Baudrillard, *The Consumer* 11) with exteriorized body organs. Besides frequent references to the "body as a periph-eral memory storage device" (Coupland 66), "the body as hard drive" (67), "bodies like diskettes with tags" (205), and "the corporate invasion of private memory" (177), the members of the Oop! team develop an umbilical relationship with computers and like any other umbilical relationship, it is both liberating, life-giving, and encapsulating and subjugating. Michael admits that he has been subliminally modeling his personality after machines and secretly dreams of speaking to machines. He wonders what it would be like to be a humanoid: "do you think humanoids—people—will ever design a machine that can pray? Do we pray to machines or through them? How do we use machines to achieve our deepest needs? What would r2d2 say to me if r2d2 could speak?" (183). Further-more, when she was an adolescent, Karla dreamed of wanting to become a machine, and one day when she had a sunstroke and was taken to hospital, injected with isotopes, inserted into body scanning machines her dream came true, she became a machine and "felt glad to be no longer human for a few brief moments" (64). The major characters in *Microserfs*, indeed, experi-ence the same dilemma that Gregor Samsa goes through when one morning he finds himself exiled into the body of a vermin but unlike Kafkaesque angst and alienation, the Microserfs' reac-tion is to celebrate and enjoy the concept of being a humanoid (Kroker 94). Each character in the novel transcends his or her sense of isolation and self-limitation through the mediation of computer technology, becoming more human in the wake of posthuman-ity. In the process of their emancipation from Microsoft, they begin to learn about their own selves and bodies; Karla reconciled with her body, ends her childhood obsession with Barbie dolls, and becomes more feminine; Todd and Dusty "engage in the serial embrace of ideologies, beginning with body building and progress-ing through Marxism and Maoism" (Heffernan 97); Bug comes out of the closet and declares that he is a homosexual; Michael desperately falls in love with an anonymous cyber identity without knowing his/her age, gender, or sexual orientation; and Susan builds up a feminist network through the internet exhibiting a cyborg

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feminist stance, a blatant mixture of Charlie's Angels and manga hipness. Furthermore, Karla and Dan see themselves as a human reflection of the Windows-Macintosh interface they are designing for Oop! and categorize the characteristics of genders in association with the characteristics of Windows and Mac products. What is more striking is that Dan's mother only becomes the center of attention and expresses herself directly after she has a stroke and is connected to a machine, when her "password was deleted" (365). Her muteness as "part woman/part machine, emanating blue Macintosh light" (369) and as "the condition of the silent uncomplaining woman" (Bordo 2371) is transfigured by a computer program specially designed by the kids that enables her to speak like a "license plate…like encryption…it's real life" (370). The final resolution of the novel comes only when the ultimate object of desire, mother, literally turns into a cyborg, i.e. when computers take possession of Dan's mother.

Indeed, in the posthuman culture, the traditional oedipal family structure as a unit of social control has lost its capacity to produce a phallocentric governing power. The self becomes a construction of so many different identity signifiers, making identity much more fluid and changing, more nomadic in one respect, but also more peer-bound in another. Therefore, *Microserfs* is deprived of an all-powerful, omnipresent father figure; instead, the idea of an oedipal father is reduced to a ghost-like invisibility and impotence. Bill Gates, for instance, serves as the role model, the omnipresent father figure of the Microsoft geeks. Bill "is wise. Bill is kind. Bill is benevolent" (1), and his presence "floats about the campus, semi-visible, at all times, kind of like the dead grandfather in the Family Circus cartoons. Bill is a moral force, a spectral force, a force that shapes, a force that molds. A force with thick, thick glasses" (3). Bill is everywhere like machines, not as a real person but a simulation of power and domination, a mediated image of invisible omnipresence. Therefore, the phallic symbolism of the Father, or God, has diffused into microsystems of authority and domination, reproducing itself in various forms and degrees. Michael, for instance, becomes the father figure and a new Bill for the Oop' team. He finds the kids playing computer games or watching the Simpsons when they are supposed to be coding,

and immediately freaks out and tells them to get back to work. But the Oop! team, indeed, needs an all-powerful and repressive father figure. Dan says "he is really such a slave driver. He squishes everything he can out of us. It's very Bill, so we can relate to it" (241). He not only watches over the kids in the office but also mentors and "reprograms" Dan's father who has become first demasculinized (he started watching Oprah) and then infantilized (he started playing with model trains and walking around aimlessly and annoyingly) because he lost his job by being made "redundant" in a working culture in which "it is as if all young America is out of school and it's like the year 1311 where everyone over 35 is dead and out of sight and mind (14)."

Judith Halberstam argues that technologies that remake the body also permeate and mediate our relationship to the "real." The "real" is literally unimaginable or only imaginable within a technological society. Technology makes the body queer, fragments it, frames it, cuts it, transforms desire; the age of the image creates desire as a *screen* (Halberstam and Livingstone 16). Given that the subject is clenched in a state of uncertainty and amorphous fluidity and deprived of its secure position in a cobweb of Oedipal dichotomies, and if, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, capitalism has produced dehumanized desiring machines, a body without organs, it would be reasonable to suggest that human beings have been entrapped in infancy and immaturity as sexless, genderless, and bodiless human units who make and are made by the machines. Infantilization seems to be the ultimate and inescapable end of the post-industrial world of leisure, plenty, and childish playfulness. The 21st century has witnessed infantilized, sexless role models among grownups: Hollywood stars and popular singers playing on transsexuality and infant innocence, big muscle heroes acting like kids unwilling to grow up or pregnant scientists, presidents playing the saxophone or killing time on their private golf courses. Once scorned as a juvenile pastime, science fiction and fantasy fiction, as well as movies and RPGs have become immensely popular and taken as a serious way of life among adults. The vocabulary of business and management has increasingly been invaded with play-related idioms, like 'being a team player', 'playing the game', and 'win-win strategies' signifying a transformation

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from a military vocabulary to a rather consumerist vocabulary. The earlier Protestant ethic of hard work and deferred pleasure has been eroded by the rise of mass production and consumer culture, and the cultural and moral justification of capitalism becomes the idea of pleasure as a way of life.

Play is suggested as the response to the removal of patriarchal certainties, and information technology, just as much as the objects and icons of commodity culture, functions as a medium for this type of play. As the borderline between work and leisure, between indoors and outdoors, and between work and rest disappears "to the point of unrecognizability" (211), the "fort da" game of having and losing reinforces the sense of incompleteness and imperfection, which enslaves the infantilized generation of cyborg culture through little promises, like stock options or high salaries and commissions, playground-like office environments, flexible and relatively independent work conditions. Daniel remarks: "employees at Microsoft are bounded with stock shares. It's a psychic yo-yo" (6). Daniel also describes his generation as "the children who fell down life's cartoon holes… dreamless children, alive but not living we emerged on the other side of the cartoon holes, fully awake and discovered we were whole" (371). Play, in this sense, apparently gives Generation X the capacity to dream to be whole and to unite with their adult selves. Consequently, play is both enslavement and liberation from the restraints of status anxiety that are directly related to the constant pressure in a period of rapid economic and social restructuring. Having been fired from his job, Dan's father creates an idealized and simulated environment made out of Lego bricks for their new office through the introduction of play into the heart of the productive process. Here is the first reaction of Dan to what his father has been secretly dealing with for a long time: "This universe he had built was a Guggenheim and a Toys-R-Us squished into one… and I said 'Oh, Dad, this is—the most *real* thing I have ever seen'" (220). The distinctions between play and work, technology and toys, Guggenheim- style high art and commodity culture bring out the erosion of the simulated and the real in this new economic and social regime.

However, Dan confesses that he and his friends are "all pretty empty file in the ideology department" (28) and that "politics

only makes people crank. There must be some alternative form of discourse" (251). The notions of political commitment, class solidarity, and outright opposition to the relations of capitalist production lack any substantial sense of class identity or location for Generation X. Douglas Coupland's characters are not apolitic, individualistic, and self-centered yuppies. On the contrary, Coupland deliberately underlines a political solidarity among the Microserfs, an impulsive gesture of openness that was believed to be lost in a cynical generation of Microserfs. Coupland basically explores what it means to possess a body, with the characters experiencing bodily, sexual, and emotional moments of reawakening. Karla recovers from anorexia, Susan establishes a guerilla girl collective, Chyx, to reconstruct her femininity, Dan gains an insight into his body and feels like his memory is "thawing inside the body" (67). The tone of the novel is paradoxically heightened with subtle political insinuations in an age when any political commitment is immediately dissolved and marketed and when the only uncompromising political attitude should be utter nihilism. Therefore, the sketchy political awakenings of the media-hype generation, or slackers, in the novel do not necessarily suggest that Generation X has abandoned the political struggle but, in contrast, their disillusionment with politics denotes a denial of political paradigms and points to an attempt to create a new political language that corresponds to the chaotic and discontinuous absurdities of real politics (Tate 21).

Politics is simply a language game, absorbing an ideology as the equivalent of learning a new code. Therefore, Coupland's characters react to the domination of ideological reconstructions and constraints in their life through writing new codes, remodeling and distorting language as the central dogma of phallocentrism because "decoding and restructuring language is a Lacanian upheaval against the linguistic and cultural roles of the Father" (Bordo 2369) and therefore, "cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly" (Haraway 2295). Cyborg language, then, values noise over clear-cut definitions, ambiguity and experimentality of language over the predetermined patterns of knowledge. Accordingly, Douglas Coupland's

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use of typography and paratextual material proposes a new avant-garde textual form and appropriates a multiplicity of visual techniques, blending them with fiction, diffusing the meaning and form and replacing it/them? with experimentality. Obviously, Coupland is reviving the modernist avant-garde tradition characterized by the loss of a belief in originality, by creative repetition, and a pastiche of written and visual languages like the agit-prop avantgarde of the 1920's. For Daniel, for instance, "language is such a technology" (174). He creates a new language, reinforcing the continuity between the languages of information technology, the codes of mass culture, and the process of commodification. But after a while, it turns out that Daniel's subconscious speaks through the computer and submerges his deeper self with the machine. Eventually, it becomes virtually impossible to say whose subconscious is let out. Abe combines numbers and letters in order to create a new language similar to the one Prince uses in his lyrics. Michael experiments with deleting vowels and discovers that the words still remain comprehensible. Daniel writes two words over and over again, machine and money, two flag points of industrial capitalism, and discovers how one can easily enter the domain of the immaterial and an infinite series of *deja vus*, and produce meaninglessness. What Daniel has accomplished can be interpreted as a revolutionary deconstruction of the mass-produced, mass-mediated, and immaterialized language of late capitalist culture that has immaterialized the concepts, images, and categorizations in time.

As a conclusion, Generation X is the product of a culture in which power is inscribed in cultural codes, the ownership of knowledge and computal know-how, a culture where members of Generation X "have created a computer metaphor for EVERY thing that exists in the real world" (145). In this timeless and spaceless culture of fluidity and uncertainty, the prison-house of gender proves to be inadequate, urging man and woman to swing between masculinity and femininity, organic bodies and machines, childhood and adulthood, materiality and immateriality, sexual drives and childish playfulness, and dependency and independency. The sexless, genderless, and bodiless representations of the human being in *Microserfs* lead to the conclusion that "posthuman bod-

ies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences" (Halberstam and Livingstone 3). They are a product of technology and technology itself, or a techno-body, a projected image; a source of contamination, and contamination itself, a reflection of the image, and the image itself. They are a pastiche and a "chimera, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism, in short we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology, it gives us our politics" (Haraway 2270).

Despite all the concerns about the dehumanization and mechanization of the body and mind, all the social and political concerns about the highly technologized society, and bleak images of post-apocalyptic dystopias, posthumanism boldly highlights the potential of human and machine interaction: machines and computers function not only as prosthetic body parts but are an almost organic manifestation of human imagination and desire: machines really are our subconscious, our liberation, and our prison. "We live in an era of no historical precedents—no historical roots. […] the cards being shuffled; new games are being invented. And we are actually driving to the actual card factory" (99), says Karla while talking about trekpolitics. She adds: "left vs. right is obsolete. Politics, in the end, is about biology, information, diversification, numbers, numbers, and numbers—all candy coated with charisma and guns" (260). Generation X is profoundly disillusioned with politics and technology. Computers are all they have left to emancipate themselves from a culture stuck between Windows and Prozac, a culture that infantilizes, pacifies, and captivates people whose lives are destined to end when they turn 30, people whose creativity is confined to code writing and data processing, who become machines that produce machines that produce machines. Posthuman culture potentially perpetuates ambiguity between "natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed" (Haraway 2272) and dematerializes the body so as to be articulated with a strategy for escaping contemporary institutions of power (Silvio 61) and reconstituting them.

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