

Generation X

Tales for an accelerated culture

By: Douglas Coupland

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First published in the United states by St Martin's Press 1991

Title.

Generation X is seen as the lost generation, the author explains the opposite.

In fact it is the generation that wants to lose all status and step out of the merry-go-round of status money and the social ladder.

The term Generation X was first mentioned in Paul Fussels book, Class.

Generation X was designated as part if America's social hierarchy rather than a generation.

The Author.

Douglas Coupland (born December 30, 1961) is a Canadian novelist.

His fiction is complemented by recognised works in design and visual art arising from his early formal training.

His first novel, the 1991 international bestseller Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture, popularised terms such as McJob and Generation X.

He has published twelve novels, seven non-fiction books, and a number of dramatic works and screenplays for film and television.

A specific feature of Coupland's novels is their synthesis of postmodern religion.

Literature

Contemporary literature.

Genre

It's a fiction Novell.

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Summary

Three friends live in a small town Palm Springs, near the border of Mexico.

Nothing much happens there which is exactly what Andy wants.

They come together to tell each other stories.

The stories are about their lives.

Dag tells a story about the time he was working class, a guy that has a big career ahead of him, he takes pride in winning every discussion.

When the inevitably happens and he loses a discussion, he quits his job and becomes a basement person, a system drop-out.

After acting as a basement person for a while he concludes that this is a farce as well, he is not a real basement person but is just acting as one.

Then he hits rock bottom and goes in to his mid-twenties crisis, after a while living at his brother Matthew, gone through all the pharmaceuticals and alcohol stuff he leaves for Palm Springs.

He just needed a clean slate, a new beginning.

Clair is from LA, one weekend she arrives with her family at the SPA where Andy works, when they meet and start a conversation Andy asks Claire to come and live in Palm Springs, he arranges an apartment next to his and Claire moves in.

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Claire tells a crazy story about a forgotten island in space.

One of the characters in the story gets the chance to flee the forgotten island, the catch is that she will die doing it.

Still she goes, leaving envious friends behind.

Andrew never fell in love with Claire in spite of mutual interest and effort.

He tells a story about a man, alone in his room, he never leaves his room and one day his dog becomes crazy and tries to bite him.

He flees his room to find a city that's changed in 10 years, he's a bumpkin in his own city and needs to learn all over again.

Later, working in Japan he is visiting a Japanese businessman who is going to show him his most valuable thing.

It's a photo from Marilyn Monroe, up skirt, without undies.

A text of Rilke shoots to his mind "we are all born with a letter inside us, and that only if we are true to ourselves may we be allowed to read it before we die".

He rushes out of the building leaving everything behind, just like Dag did when he lost his discussion.

Back home in Oregon he now he needs less in life

Less past.

So he moves to Palm Springs, to walk with the dogs, look at a cactus, a rock, and try to read his letter inside.

At a certain moment Dag disappears, later they here he is in the Mojave desert, the place where atom bomb tests were carried out, he promises a gift to Claire and Andy when he comes back.

At his return in Claire's house he hands over a large vase full of beads, the result of molten sand when bombs exploded in the desert.

By accident the vase falls and all the beads are scattered through Claire's house.

Claire cries out that her house is now contaminated and leaves to live with Andy.

Later in the book Claire gets in to a relation with an adonis Tobias, she is madly in love but is still able to rationalise her own state of mind.

Which is good because her friends don't like Tobias and after a while Elvissa takes off with Tobias.

Claire is sad but after all glad because Tobias and Claire didn't fit together having the lifestyle Claire has.

At Christmas Andrew visits his house, his parents still keep rooms available to give shelter to their kids.

His father tells him that none of his children came out the way they thought they would.

None of their kids have a normal steady life and they all seem to fall back on their elderly home from time to time.

Back in Palm Springs a message on his answering machine says that Dag and Claire are off to Mexico to exploit a little hotel.

They were planning this all along but were silent about it because they knew Andy would have second thoughts, he thinks too much.

Dag and Claire ask him to come over and join them.

On his way to Mexico a strange thing happens, looking at a mushroom cloud which is actually caused by farmers burning waste, he gets picked on his head by an erratic bird.

A group of mentally retarded kids see the event and they all crush him in an attempt to comfort him.

He finds himself in a crush of love unlike he had ever known.

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Characters

Andrew "Andy" Palmer.

The book's narrator and main character. Andy is a bartender (a "McJob," as he describes it). He is close friends with Dag and Claire. He is from Portland, Oregon.

Dagmar "Dag" Bellinghausen.

A former office worker, he now works with Andy at the bar, and lives next door to him. He is obsessed with the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, and is prone to occasional erratic behavior. Unlike the other characters (who are American), he is a Canadian, from Toronto.

Claire Baxter.

A friend of Andy and Dag that lives in a neighboring bungalow. She is from a large family connected by multiple divorces. She wants to live life as Andy and Dag are trying to, but struggles, partially because of her relationship with Tobias. She is from Los Angeles, California.

Tobias.

Claire's boyfriend, a superficial yuppie. He finds the lifestyle of Andy, Dag, and Claire to be interesting, but is unable to commit to it. Neither Andy nor Dag likes him, and he is a foil to the other characters in the novel.

Elvissa.

Claire's best friend, and Dag's love interest. She finds herself constantly trapped in the past, never quite catching up to the modern world.

Tyler.

Andy's younger brother. As the youngest child in a large family, he is somewhat spoiled, but secretly wishes he could live as Andy does. He is a "global teen", later deemed by the media to be a member of Generation Y, and bears great similarity to the main character in Coupland's second novel, Shampoo Planet, that shares his name and mannerisms.

Time and order.

The story plays in the year 1999 and 2000.

It ends Januari 1st 2000, Andy drives of to Mexico to join his friends exploiting a small hotel in a small place in Mexico.

Another attempt to minimize life.

Place/Space

America, Palm Springs, a city near the border of Mexico.

This place is chosen by the characters to find piece and quietness maybe tranquility.

A healthy environment without factories and no polluting industries.

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Background

Theme

Andy, Dag and Claire have been handed society prices beyond their means.

Twenty somethings, brought up with divorce, Watergate and Three Mile Island, and scarred by eighties fall-out of yuppies, recession, crack and Ronald Reagan, they represent the new lost generation "generation X".

Fiercely suspicious of being lumped together as an advertiser's target market, they have quit dreary careers and cut themselves adrift in the California desert; in Palm Springs, land of the liposuction clinic and the shopping mall, dumping-ground for dregs of American cultural memory.

Unsure of their futures, they immerse themselves in a regime of heavy drinking and working at McJob, "low-pay, low prestige, low benefit. No-future jobs in the service industry". Underemployed, overeducated, intensely private and unpredictable, they have nowhere to direct their anger, no one to assuage their fears, and no culture to replace their anomie.

So they tell stories: disturbingly funny tales that reveal their barricaded inner world.

A world populated with dead TV shows, "Elvis moments" and semi-disposable Swedish furniture.

Motto

You can only be happy if one listens to the inner voice and acts upon it.

Use of language

The writer tries to introduce many sayings and is quite successful doing so.

Generation X is now a well established term, as is McJob which stand for a non-responsible, low-pay, low-educated job.

Perspective

Generation X is a framed narrative, like Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales or The Decameron by Boccaccio. The framing story is that of three friends "Dag, Claire, and the narrator, Andy" living together in the Mojave Desert in California. The tales are told by the various characters in the novel, which is arranged into three parts. Each chapter is separately titled rather than numbered.

Opinion/Analysis

A crazy but nice book to read, this best seller debut of Douglas Coupland tells about 3 friends that flee the rat race of normal life.

They see the true value of it, not to be found in wealth or to have many friends.

It's a quest to find the thing most important.

To do so they quit their jobs and go live in a place as far away from everything they can.

Come to think of it this is exactly what I would like to do now, quit my job and leave to work at a McJob, reprogramming life and start all over again.

This should be one of the lessons in this book, first is that Generation X is not a lost generation but a generation that is able to turn back to the basics of life.

Funny thing is, that they all live in a nice house with swimming pool.

You need some money to do that, their former lives probably gave them enough to start all over.

So to get back to basics and find your inner self, you first need to have a career to come to the understanding that you're not following your inner voice and to earn enough to peep out.

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Evaluation

When I read this book I think, completely true but the perspective is superimposed.

Would you really lock yourself up in a room to come out after ten years and still manage to make it to Palm Springs and be free.

I think this is used to say that how ever deep you dig yourself in, there is always a way out.

Coupland tells how.

Easy to say for the characters in the book though, they don't have children, a family or relatives they have to take care of.

This subject touches the heart of a lot of people, the Generation X the most I presume, but is there really a Generation X, the subject is of all times, we all want to flee our obligations and daily drag.

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