

I Don't  
Miss Wyoming

Douglas  
Coupland



Introduction  
Miss Wyoming Book Tour Diary  
November 2020

The release of the novel Miss Wyoming was promoted with a book tour in 2000. The experience was logged with entries faxed and emailed from the road to a webmaster that posted them onto the Coupland.com website. The following compilation is the recovered diary along with written works related to this time.

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The tagline in the print advertisements for Miss Wyoming read: “Reinvent yourself today — tomorrow may be too late.”

Day 01

Vancouver - Montreal

January 03, 2000

Canada's National Post newspaper ran a small article I wrote on the difference between truth and fiction. At the end of the article they wrote a list of my books, and included one called Beach Music ...huh? Question: how on earth does a glitch like that happen? It's like an Evelyn Waugh novel. Good photo, though. It looks like I'm a Canadian flag, with my head in the middle of two trees.

Oh, in the National Post's Toronto edition, the editors left out the first two letters in 'FICTION' in the headline, thus creating a new word for the English language, 'CTION.'

I flew on Air Canada today. They now own Canadian Airlines, so this was my maiden flight on Canada's new air monopoly, 'Mapleflot.' I truly dread the next few years.

The hotel is dead empty in Montreal. The absolute end of the holiday season, and I nearly have the whole place to myself. This actually did happen to me once, in Edmonton, Alberta, during a previous book tour. It was the day after Labour Day, and I was in the Ramada (or a Radisson?) downtown beside what everybody called 'Needle Park.' I walked into the lobby of this 17-story building and the girl behind the counter said, "You must be Mr. Coupland." I said yes, and asked her how she knew; she told me I was the hotel's only guest. I said, "Cool!" She then gave me my room key ...she'd put me in room 1313. I couldn't believe it, "What are you doing, putting me in 1313? I'm not even triskaidektaphobic, but 1313 is too much." She grudgingly put me into 1311.

I just looked up Beach Music on Amazon dotcom and it's a Pat Conroy novel. Conroy/Coupland; Coupland/Conroy ...I suppose I can see how that would happen.

Airline food:

Cold Chicken; tiny portions and once the meal's over, that's it, buster. No more for you. European airlines have a small pile of sandwiches up front. If you're hungry, you grab one. Easy. Why will North American airlines not learn this simple lesson?

Name of Montreal media escort:

Rita.

Model of car:

Green Honda sedan.

Condition of car:

Clean.

Has actually read Miss Wyoming?:

To be determined tomorrow.

Book actually being read by escort:

To be determined tomorrow.

Weather:

-3 Celsius, clear, icy wind.

Price of small bottle of mini-bar gin:

\$8.00 CA / \$6.00 US.

No, Uncle Ted, that isn't you in my new novel.

Well, maybe a little. My friends and family always see themselves in my fiction.

National Post (Toronto edition)

January 03, 2000

Ever since the publication of *Generation X* in 1991, not a year goes by without a few people telling me, “Doug, you know that scene where Andy comes home for Christmas — the one where he lights the candles all over the living room on Christmas morning? Man, did you ever nail it. It's as if you were in my own parents' living room. It's like you stole the house right out of my brain.”

I'm always happy to hear this, but I'm also unnerved. If one reads through the chapter, one will find that aside from the fact that the house has a garage, a front door and a set of stairs, there are no actual descriptions of the house. This was deliberate on my part. I figured that no matter what I wrote, people were going to insert their own house into the narrative, so description was futile. And it appears I was correct.

I once read a Margaret Atwood interview where she said that if she gives a character freckles, then every single person she's ever known with a freckle reads that one character description and says to her, “That freckled character — that's me — right down to the last stroke.”

I can only imagine this is an experience common to all writers. Book readers generally have a set of archetypes deep inside their head. Given a deficit of description they will quite cheerfully insert their own personal archetype (in the case of *Generation X*, ‘home’) to fill the gap. In the ‘freckle scenario,’ however, readers are not merely filling in an information gap; they're overriding it with other information: “Me! That's me!”

Another equally powerful instance of reader override is the Hero/Heroine scenario. Let's

create a character, Gwendelyn:

“Gwendelyn was three feet tall. Her carrot-red fright wig accentuated her sky-blue skin. Instead of words, Gwendelyn spoke with a series of high-pitched squeaks a few notes above a piano's high C.”

The description can continue on for pages. However, the reader, having ascertained that Gwendelyn is the protagonist, will simply skim the descriptive data and insert his or her own stock heroine into the situation. After years of asking people to describe their own interior heroes and heroines, I've come to realize that Harrison Ford and Jaclyn Smith will possibly live on forever in the public mind.

And then there's the author's family. Any author's family greets the appearance of a new novel with a polite but freighted thank-you. Each page can only be agony as they look for what can only be bits and pieces of each family member (or their actions) in the pages. And they're quite right in doing so. Our archetype library and core dramas in life are largely established by puberty. Family dramas reconfigure themselves over and over inside an author's narrative — and not even consciously. Oftentimes a writer simply writes by not overthinking the words streaming out of the pen. The author might not be aware of how cleanly the family skeletons have been laid out for picking.

“Crandall's kleptomania and compulsive handwashing disorder masked his deeply rooted hatred for the time his father showed up drunk at the PTA meeting and screamed invective at members of the Cloakroom Fundraising Drive.”

But the most frequent question an author receives is, unsurprisingly: “Is that you in all those characters?” What a question! Yes. No. Partially.

Theoretically, any trace a person leaves behind is autobiographical, from footprints on the beach right up to the memoirs of Winston Churchill. Back in art school, I once collected shopping lists people left behind in grocery stores — they seemed intimately revealing.

Think about it: In writing, there's no way to not leave an autobiographical trace behind. During the Unabomber hunt, the FBI appealed to U.S. teachers of all levels who might have recognized Theodore Kaczynski's self-consciously sterile style. Teachers didn't, but his brother sure did.

Try concocting a mythical planet inhabited by jellyfish creatures who crochet tea cozies their whole lives. Whoops — you just gave yourself away. Even nonsense is deeply telling of the author: *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*; *Da Doo Ron Ron*; *Alice in Wonderland*.

So when an author is asked, “Is your book autobiographical?” the only possible truthful answer is yes. Personally, I have a real beef with people who write murder mysteries or violence-drenched novels, and in interviews say, “Oh, it's all only fiction.” Uh huh. So what are you saying — the computer wrote it for you? I'm not saying you're a murderer, but don't go pretending they're not in some way autobiographical. Oh God, I'm ranting.

Characters in my books tend to have lives quite close to my own and the people around me. This is natural enough — it'd be very strange, for instance, for me to write about a 70-year-old Lebanese woman. Yet would it be strange to write about a 70-year-old Vancouver housewife? Or would that be an example of ‘appropriation of voice’? Would writing about a 70-year-old Vancouver male be somehow more appropriate? Maybe that's too old ...a fiftysomething? A vampire fiftysomething? Where do you draw the line? At what point does an author's work cease being creative and enter the territory of PC infractions — or plain old inappropriateness?

The ultimate extension of this sort of thinking is a world without fiction — a world libreried purely with autobiography. And of course, the irony is that all fiction truly is autobiography. Oy!

Writers are like magpies. They'll steal the shiny blue cap of the Bic pen, but they'll leave the pen behind. The cap resting in the nest doesn't stand for the pen. It's simply the cap. But try telling this to a friend who thinks that the character who limps on Page 171 is a complete ripoff of said friend's identity because that friend limped for six months during the Reagan administration. You really have to wonder about people sometimes. Chances are that the limping character limped merely because it was necessary for another character to get out of the room first.

Have I ever seen myself in fiction? Yes, once, and it was so disturbing, I couldn't go more than a little bit into it; I can empathize with others who've felt they've been 'stolen.'

The work in question was by a Californian writer, Carla Sinclair. In its earlier forms it circulated under the title *In Search of Douglas Coupland*. Yow! It was a novel set inside the San Francisco Bay Area's tech culture. I heard that I came out of it OK (as I say, I couldn't go very far), and at the last minute the title was changed to *Signal to Noise*, and I was turned into Canadian novelist Darren Somethingorother. Relief.

What can all of this mean, then? Have we been mislabelling autobiography as fiction for all these centuries? Now, having entered the new millennium — (Gotcha! I just wanted to annoy you one last time, a benefit of running a piece in the Jan. 3 issue of a newspaper. Return to the article now ...) Is the author nothing more than an interior exhibitionist? Is the imaginative creation of character actually the theft of voice from others? And does the author merely create narrative structures that are quickly demolished and renovated with each new reader?

Oddly, yes. But it doesn't really matter. Imagination is imagination; character is character; a story remains a story. Books remove us from the world while bringing us closer to it. Hi Mom. The next book's all about you.

Day 02  
Montreal  
January 04, 2000

I'm starting to be interviewed by adults who studied my books in high school and college, so I'm feeling old. Also, the signs advertising tonight's event used a photo of me taken on a good summer day in 1992. The audience can only gasp in disbelief as I walk onto the stage. ("How deeply haggard Doug's become!") How does this happen? Why is it only the wildly out of date photos people use?

This one journalist was the daughter of a priest and a nun who had renounced their vows to marry. I was floored. I didn't want to talk about me — I wanted to find out more about her life. It was like meeting a seventh son of a seventh son of a seventh son.

A wonderful reading tonight in this intimate circa 1910 theater with blood red walls. I didn't know what to read, so I read a chapter from *Miss Wyoming* which was heavier than I remembered. Uh oh. After that I read the chapter from *Generation X* called 'Jan. 01, 2000,' the final chapter. It was nice.

Next came an on-stage interview with a local book reporter. I think I might have given away too much of myself in it. I got all choked when I remembered that rainy day in Toronto in 1988 when I decided to change my life and write fiction. I never realized what a moment it was for me.

Afterward we played a game of 'Random Paragraph.' That's when you get a pile of very opposite books, and a person from the audience comes up and pokes their finger onto a random paragraph. I read the paragraph out loud and mayhem ensued. I read from a *Fantastic Four* novelization (I actually got to read out the words, "Flame on!"), the memoirs of Pope John XXIII, and Sue Grafton (who I've never read, but I liked the bits I did read, so

now I'm going to read her stuff,) and then finally this wild and woolly paragraph on how to be a good dominatrix: “make sure your leather tassels are unknotted; knots make for messy floggings and contribute to an undominant image.” (!)

I gave the audience members index cards and asked them to make a list of their five favourite books. They got bonus points for actually drawing the book cover from memory.

Oh, the CBC technicians are on strike so there's no early morning media gig tomorrow. I'll happily take the extra sleep, but still, it'd be cool if the system simply just ...worked.

The audience is very young. This always means the event was advertised only in the local alternative weeklies, and that indeed turned out to be the case. Many of the women had Catholic names and brought copies of *Life After God*. It reminded me what a religious place Quebec is.

Sleep:

Not enough. I felt stoned all day.

Nutrition:

In order to stay awake I had to drink about 20 cups of coffee, which turned off my hunger switch. So, I got buzzed and starved.

Has media escort actually had read *Miss Wyoming*?:

Still to be determined tomorrow.

Book actually being read by escort:

Still to be determined tomorrow.

Weather:

10 Celsius, mild and wet.

Bonus:

I found this store that's going out of business on Sainte Catherine's Street that sells automotive paraphernalia. I stocked up on decals and graphic supplies there. I got a cartoon woodpecker to go onto the Eames chaise I painted blue and gave a racing stripe last month.

Day 03

Montreal - Vancouver

January 05, 2000

Only had one live-to-tape interview session at noon on a book show. I saw myself on the monitor and gasped at my image — that's not me! No! It's not true. My fatal mistake? Didn't drink enough water so I was all puffed out. And no make-up, so I looked like a corpse. You HAVE to have make-up on TV, even if you're a casual bystander at a house burning down. Andy Warhol said that funerals are usually the most glamorous moment of most people's lives because afterwards all everybody talks about how good the make-up was or wasn't. Most TV stations lost their make-up staff in the early 1990s, and even though the economy's booming, they were never hired back.

Guaranteed this one tiny book segment is the one segment people everywhere will actually see. (“Gee, Doug’s looking really awful...”)

Sleep:

Woke up at 10:45 AM on a fluke alpha wave high, so I sailed through the day, only to crash on the flight to Vancouver.

Airline:

Mapleflot.

In-flight meal:

Oddly enough, chicken, thus scotching the long held chicken-east/beef-west theory.

In-flight film:

Ashley Judd stars in Double Jeopardy. This was one of the dopiest films or 1999, but some of it was shot in my Dad's office neighborhood; a few months ago a bunch of us went

to see it during its theatrical release. In the movie, the neighborhood becomes 'Boulder, Colorado.' Sometimes it feels really slutty to be from Vancouver because so many films are shot there and it's never Vancouver — it's always Seattle or Portland or 1950s suburbia. One of these days there'll be an uprising.

#### Nutrition:

I ordered poutine in Dorval Airport's Burger King. For non-Quebecois, poutine is a dish made from mild cheese curds semi-melted onto french-fries, all drowned in brown gravy. I've always been curious to try it but frankly, I lacked courage to do so. However, I noticed in Quebec newspapers that the French call Vladimir Putin, Vladimir 'Poutine,' so it's the spirit of the age.

#### Has media escort actually had read Miss Wyoming?:

Couldn't think of a polite way of asking, so I'll never know. But she was really great, and during two free hours she took me to all the best art museums. I dropped a bomb on art books.

#### Weather:

-3 Celsius and windy

Day 04  
Vancouver  
January 06, 2000

This year I continued a loose tradition of guest editing Vancouver Magazine where I started out my life as a writer over a decade ago. This issue features amazing 2-page illustrations by Ken Steacy, Paul Rivoche, Mike Lark, Glen Mullally and the issue is entirely dedicated to visualizing the city's future.

It's very strange to be 'touring' through my hometown. It's like suddenly everything in the world turns into a homework assignment.

I've never done events here in Vancouver – readings and such. It was a decision I made back in 1991, that if I'm going to live here, then I want to be able to live here without that particular pressure. Some people thought I was being pissy when I never did readings, but now I think they understand. At least I hope they do.

Did an email interview with Barnes and Noble dotcom. This kind of interview is so ...unsatisfying. It leaves an interesting archive of Q&A, but for every question that got answered, maybe 50 didn't. So maybe it only promotes dissatisfaction. Je ne sais pas. B&N is a big company. They know what they're doing.

Healthwatch:

This year's flu seems to be pretty virulent. So many people are dropping off the radar. This year's bug is intestinal in nature.

Nutrition:

As always, lunch or food wasn't factored into things, so it was coffee and more coffee.

Has media escort actually had read Miss Wyoming?:  
Forgot to ask.

Weather:  
Mild and rainy. Nice.

Guest Editor's letter (excerpt)  
Vancouver magazine  
January/February 2000 issue

Vancouver's different — we all know that. Take any other city in North America and try imagining it in, say, 30 years. Chances are it'll be pretty much the way it is now except older. Toronto will still be Toronto. Sioux City will still be Sioux City. But Vancouver? We don't even know what this place is going to be like next year. The city rewrites itself almost daily, and that's a big reason we love it here.

Day 05  
Vancouver  
January 07, 2000

Full day of press.

Finally bought a new wallet. My old one looked like something removed from Ernest Borgnine's butt crack. I cleaned out a wad of business cards that had been there for over a year in some cases.

I'm utterly unprepared for the tour. I'm in denial. It's scary. The thing about being in denial is that knowing you're in it still won't change your behaviour.

Name of media escort:

Laurie.

Vehicle:

Minivan.

Condition of minivan:

Clean.

Has media escort actually read Miss Wyoming?:

I forgot to ask, but then I heard her tell someone she gave her copy away.

Weather:

Rain. Buckets.

Day 06

Vancouver - Victoria - Vancouver

January 08, 2000

As it turned out, there was no trip to Victoria. Too much wind, so the sea planes canceled all their flights out of Vancouver Harbour. I was looking forward to it — I spent a good portion of my youth in de Havilland Otter, and the reading was at the McPherson Playhouse, a beautiful venue. I think we're doing a raincheck. I hope so.

Weather:

Windy. Obviously.

Day 07

Vancouver - New York

January 09, 2000

Airline: American.

In-flight movie:

For the Love of the Game (Kevin Costner; Kelly Preston) I know nothing about this movie and I didn't watch it, but everyone else on the plane was livid because the English sound didn't work, only the Spanish version. Every time I looked up at the screen Kevin Costner was crying. So, it was a sensitive movie.

The room service brought a carrot sorbet along with the cheeseburger. You really have to face it that food got good in the 1990s, which still remains the case in this decade without a name.

Got an email from a friend at LucasFilm. Some of the staff there call the Star Wars franchise, 'The Bible Killer.' Shades of Beatles records being burned.

Tonight was the Keith Partridge biography on TV and I missed it. Everybody back west I spoke with on the phone tormented me with things like, "She's the perfect Susan Dey," and "An even better Danny Partridge than in last month's Partridge Family movie." Did anyone get this on tape? I'll pay. I will.

Reading:

Chrome Yellow, by Aldous Huxley. Rereading, actually. This is about my fourth read.

Cost of mini bottle of gin from the mini-bar:

US \$6.00.

### Fond Airport Memory:

Last tour I was waiting by the luggage carousel at Denver International — it's huge, like a Soylent Green factory — and there was a yellow police tape closing off the odd-size carousel used for skis and golf bags. Turns out a few days before some guy was sitting in one of the slots as a joke and he got, well, sheared into bits as it rounded a corner. Have these people not heard of beta testing?

Day 08  
New York  
January 10, 2000

Woke up at 9:30 AM EST, the equivalent of 6:30 AM PST, which is some sort of new record for me. I surprised myself with how functional I was being all day. I kept waiting for ...the crash. It never arrived. Small miracles.

Cabin fever. I spent much of the day in the hotel meeting people for press and so forth and I drank about 200 cups of coffee, so I had that stoned-on-coffee sensation all day.

Dinner was with some booksellers. One was Bob from St. Marks books, so afterward I cabbied down to the store and dropped a bomb on a stack of art books. They always have the best stuff first there.

My voice is getting very 'trachea slit' (awful expression) — like the dead realtor in Beetlejuice who smoked cigarettes out of her neck. I hope my voice doesn't die.

New York is even squeakier clean than ever. Where did everybody go?

Miss Wyoming Q&A  
Pantheon Books  
January 2000

The following is a back and forth I did with Suzanne Williams in Pantheon's publicity department. I was handed to her as a new assignment and our initial contacts were in the form of this Q&A. Yes, it's an in-house Q&A, but Suzanne's questions were pretty much anybody's questions.

Q: What's the story in Miss Wyoming about?

A: It starts out with these two characters, John Johnson and Susan Colgate, who meet and really click with each other like crazy. Susan's 27, an ex-pageant queen, a faded child TV star and in an empty marriage to a rock star. John's a decadent action movie producer. And then Susan goes and disappears. Where to? The book becomes a mystery. Where did she go? Why did she go? The book also becomes an examination of how these two people reached such extreme and bizarre life situations. It examines why the two end up being somehow fated for each other.

Q: Your character, John Johnson seems to be a familiar Hollywood type ...thirty-seven ...seedy.

A: Yes and no. I think we're all a bit seedy in the end. But in Hollywood any proclivity toward seediness is certainly indulged as long as you're profitable.

Q: The two characters seem pretty desperate to reinvent themselves. It seems to be what binds them together. Yes?

A: Very much so. They both have the sensation many people get, that this is as far as they're ever going to go, the remainder of their lives has been mapped out for them and they can't, won't stand for it. Like that Talking Heads song 'This is not my beautiful wife. This is not my beautiful house. My God, what have I done?'

Q: The pageant world is portrayed in part of the book. It's pretty big, right? What led you to use this as a backdrop in *Miss Wyoming*?

A: Big? It's staggering. It's a huge sub-industry — a vast style tribe — women who try and wear gowns to ten different events a month. It's that whole JonBenét Ramsey culture. I found out about it by accident. A friend of mine is a seamstress and I saw a corner of this magazine peeking out from under a stack of others. I went to reach for it and she lunged at me, but I got it in time. It's called *Pageantry* and it's like a September *Vogue*-sized quarterly style bible for pageant goers. It turns out my friend is a secret pageant addict! It was slightly shocking to discover, like finding out she had a Vanilla Ice tattoo. There's this tainted allure to the whole pageant scene — this eerie netherworld between the trailer park, the suburbs and the Marriott ballroom — an uncomfortable gap between the body and the way we're taught to idealize it.

Q: You first hit the literary radar with *Generation X* — which was published in 1991 — pre-grunge even. Why does this book still hit home for readers?

A: Because it's a novel, and novels hopefully tap into something eternal, which is what *X* did, and which is what all my novels do to some level or other.

Q: How do you cope with being attached to a generation that you've long-since outgrown?

A: Outgrown? Not at all. Everybody grows old together. No one escapes.

Q: ...But the 'X' label?

A: It's a part of my life. It's my Campbell Soup can. It's no big deal to me.

Q: How is *Miss Wyoming* different than some of your previous novels?

A: I hope that it shows a few evolutionary jumps in terms of narrative construction and creation of character. But in the end it's a subjective judgment for a reader to make. All my

novels have been different from the others. This is the biggest break, yet it's also the most 'Me.' After a point you just have to go with it.

Q: You've just left your long time editor, Judith Regan, yet some say this is your best work yet. What was the sequence of events here?

A: I'm 38, I write for a living — and for that matter, writing is my life — and I want to get better and deeper at it. To do this I had to make some large changes in the way I do things. Switching editors and publishing houses isn't something done lightly — ask any writer. But mine and Judith's lives are so extraordinarily different than what they were in 1991 when I began with her — a change seemed very natural eight years later.

Q: How did your new editor alter your writing process?

A: With a finickiness and intensity I never quite believed existed in the publishing world. Jenny Minton and Pantheon challenged almost every syllable I wrote — not changed, but challenged. Any changes were left to my discretion, but most of their challenges were smart, and many were met. The learning curve was like an Alp on this one.

Q: How did you start writing?

A: By accident. I was working as a sculptor and began writing about art. It was a cheap and quick way of paying studio bills. And then I realized I got more out of writing than I did from sculpture. So at the age of 28 I started everything over from square one — going from sculpture into fiction. Talk about a career decision calculated to freak out one's family...

Q: You have a degree in Japanese Business Science?

A: I studied sculpture in Sapporo, Japan in the early 1980s and very much wanted to return and work inside the Japanese creative world which was, and remains, I'm convinced, about 20 years ahead of North American media. But without a degree and friends within

Japanese industry it's, well ...good luck. So I went and got the degree. I think everybody should live in Japan at least once.

Day 09  
New York  
January 11, 2000

My throat! I woke up and thought my lungs were going to shoot out of my mouth like half-melted Fudgesicle. Suzanne dropped a bag of Duane Reade drugstore meds at the hotel, and I had a mild not unpleasant Robitussin buzz all day.

Press in the AM. My nephew had a Woody doll from Toy Story this Christmas, and every time he pulled its string it said, “Thar's a snake in mah boots.” I'm learning what my particular snake-in-the-boots-like mantras are going to be this tour. It's amazing how quickly that gets figured out. But that's good.

Lunch with Eric [Simonoff; then agent at Janklow & Nesbitt] at a midtown stick insect restaurant. Dropped a bomb at the MoMA bookstore afterward. More press.

Great reading. Just great, except I miscalculated how long the two chapters were going to take, and I was inwardly freaking out, because people were yawning and shuffling in their seats which is such a bad sign. I tried to shorten things but ...well it was a very patient crowd. And I think everybody liked my impersonation of a Canadian flight attendant serving meal service.

This couple got married today and then came to the reading before they went out for dinner. It was so romantic. Her name was Sonya and his was — I can't remember (sorry...) but he's from Vancouver. It was so amazing that I told everybody in the line-up and they got cheers.

I got what can only be described as a fabulous Christmas stocking-like ‘tour survival kit’ from two readers, Erik and Anne. It was a bag filled Pop stuff like candy, Whitney Museum

brochures. and an Andy Warhol daytime planner. There was even something for my Mom inside, it was just so lovely to get it.

This one reader, Claudia, was there. I was so surprised because I'd met her at the San Francisco reading for the last book, and she was the mental picture I'd always had of what Vanessa in Miss Wyoming looks like. She left before I could tell her. So if you read this, Claudia, there you go.

I asked everyone in the audience to list their five favourite movies on index cards, and they got 'bonus points' for drawing the poster or VHS box.

It's after midnight. Late as I type this, very zonked, and I really hope my throat gets better soon. I think it's just from talking too much.

Still Fresh by Alexander Laurence (excerpts)  
FREEwilliamsburg  
interview conducted on January 11, 2000

I met Douglas in New York City. He was staying in a hotel in the upper 50s. I called him on the phone and he told that he was wearing a bozo suit and he would be easy to recognize. I had interviewed him before and was ready to be subverted.

Alexander: How did you celebrate the year 2000, the Millennium?

Douglas: I was going to have this big bonfire where I live, down on the beach. Of course there were no Y2K disasters. So the municipalities and the police had nothing better to do than to crack down on anything that seemed seditious like a bonfire. The bonfire was canceled. So we had to think of something else to do. We drove around in Vancouver on the most blank part of freeway possible. And 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...

Alexander: In Seattle they canceled all the celebrations there.

Douglas: They overreacted though. You're not from Seattle, are you?

Alexander: No, but I went there once. In the summer of 1991.

Douglas: (laughs) Things were more interesting then. There's so much going on there now. (looks at an advertisement in a newspaper) Who's Ani DiFranco?

Alexander: She's a singer/songwriter. She has her own label. Not really my cup of tea. Do you listen to a lot of music?

Douglas: You know what I'm listening to now is Stereo Total. Also Guided By Voices. I saw them in November in Tokyo and I thought 'This is great!' and got the whole thing.

Alexander: You have been involved in a few think tanks. What do you do there?

Douglas: My real strength in that department is that I can predict how things are going to go wrong. I can look at any situation, like that bartender getting us some drinks, to any political situation. I can see the weak links, where it failed, and who forgot to bring the backup disk. That's a practical thing in the short term. But in the long term, I think that they should teach children in first grade reading, writing, social studies, and stochastic forecasting. It is something that we are all capable of doing. The ability atrophies.

It's hard to think beyond our own lifetime because we're so selfish. We always like to think that right now we were a thousand years in the future and what would be mind-blowing to us in the past. Are we male humanoids not wearing eye-coverings? Is that asphalt? Oh my god, there's no plants here. They're breathing air unassisted. There's a woman alone, not part of a harem.

Alexander: What about the human body? Could you imagine any improvements?

Douglas: If you have people who are 120 years old but physically they're 30? What are old people like? They're crabby, they know what they like, they know what they don't like, they're opinionated, nothing going to sway them. So you got these "old" young people walking around.

I had a discussion with a friend and we were trying to think of pharmaceuticals in the future. Two of them came to mind. One was a pill you could take that has no immediate effect, but over a long period of time it would make you feel that you had a lot of time. You

know how people always say 'That year went by fast.' This would be the opposite of that, 'the time slower down pill.' Then if you're in jail, there's 'the time speeder up pill.' You take it and then you out! That was easy.

There's a third one: there's these pills that are white and cheap, ten cents, and you take one and you're instantly cured of all addiction. You have a heroin habit or alcohol problem, and then it's gone. What would happen? The result would be that people would take more drugs and drink more than ever, because everyone would think 'Hey, I can quit anytime I wanted.' These pills would become illegal, while the drugs would become legalized.

Alexander: Have you been doing any day trading or playing the stock market?

Douglas: I have yet to meet a day trader. Do they ever make any money? They are really contributing to society. Everyone I've ever met with even a little trust fund is messed up. Having money at a young age is a guarantee of nothing happening in that person's life. This is a sample sentence you would get from a trust fund kid: 'Well, I'm working on this novel and it's really coming along okay, but I need a bit more time to think about it, so I am going to Boca Raton for a week or so.' And a year later: 'I'm not writing anymore, now I'm producing a film. Do you think I should get engaged?'

Alexander: Years back I used to work in San Francisco in a building that housed a bunch of new magazines like *Might Magazine*, and *Wired* magazine was on the second floor. They'd have bottles of champagne every month celebrating each issue. We'd be there working on our little literary magazine or whatever scratching our heads and wondering what all this technology shit was. You used to write for *Wired*?

Douglas: *Might Magazine* was so funny. Have you seen *Wired* lately? It's different. I don't know anyone there anymore. I went through that. Everyone goes through that. The whole

1980s was like that for me, watching everyone having a party in the big ballroom, and banging my head on the table. I'm hardly in the ballroom now.

Alexander: Are there any TV shows that you like?

Douglas: I watch The Simpsons. I'm finally getting into Futurama. I always know it's going to be on at 8pm on Sunday. If they fuck with that, I'll never see it again. The other thing I like is America's Best Car Chases. When Good Times Go Bad which is like wedding dresses catching on fire. Ho! Ho! These people are so surprised when the animal fights back. Oh please.

Alexander: Are there any covert messages you'd like to say to your fans?

Douglas: No. Maybe I'll go over to the MoMA bookstore before the reading tonight. I get the feeling that there's a real question that you wanted to ask me. You can ask me a question.

Alexander: No, not really.

Day 10

New York - Washington, DC

January 12, 2000

Medical drama: I woke up, yes, sounding very 'trachea slit' and this, after a night of being unable to sleep owing to too many conflicting cold drugs in my system. Suzanne from Pantheon and I got to the airport in Washington, and there was no way around it, we had to find a doctor, but first we had to tape some radio shows. In the lobby of the radio building we looked on the marquee, and there was an ear/nose/throat doctor on the 15th floor, so we did this weird one-stop shopping trip to that building. It was so easy.

It's not a flu or cold or anything — it's just too much talking. My day-to-day life is very quiet, and then suddenly I'm non-stop talking for 16 hours a day. It's like an out of shape person doing 500 push-ups.

Anyway, I got drugs right on the spot (yes!) but Suzanne had to entertain visions of an entire intricately planned author tour vanishing in a puff of an asthma inhaler. All was well in the end. Then I got the bill, and I remembered how expensive it is to get sick in the US. What do Americans do if they're uninsured and between jobs or something? It'd be so scary. To me it seems like such an obvious political issue.

Suzanne has endured all my paranoia and worries over the past few months, and I'm certainly glad for her sake things are working out. Publicists always see the worst sides of people — their physical and emotional frailties — and it can only be a somewhat disillusioning process. Tonight, after a booksellers' dinner, we went to a bookstore and Suzanne had read everything in its NEW section and I was so impressed. I'm now convinced that everyone else on earth uses their time more efficiently than me. I wake up, exist for a few hours, fall asleep, and it's already the next day. Everybody else is out there achieving like mad. Maybe it's all this American metropolitan energy. How are people doing it?

Update:

Sonya last night got married to Jason. I found his filled-out index card.

I also found some of those car decals I bought in Montreal inside a flap in my carry-on bag. I thought I'd lost them.

Weather:

50 degrees and clear. Like Vancouver in October. Some cherry trees were blossoming beside the Potomac.

Coupland's back with Miss Wyoming by Jamie Allen (excerpts)  
CNN Interactive  
interview conducted on January 12, 2000

It's probably not symbolic in any way. But it's worth noting that Douglas Coupland, the author who has been called 'the voice of his generation,' has laryngitis.

He's talking on the phone in his Washington D.C. hotel room between sips of a Diet Coke, his voice a muddied rasp.

Since Generation X, Coupland has written six other books, including his latest, Miss Wyoming, the tale of a Hollywood producer and a cheesy sitcom star who fall in love and set off for adventure through the 'strip-mall landscape of California.'

Coupland says this book is different from his previous works. He winged it. He used to take copious notes, researching his environs, and eventually turning those notes into a book.

Miss Wyoming helped him let go, he says.

"I just learned I didn't need notepads anymore," he says. "I could invent what I needed. It was written from beginning to end, no notes at all."

"You have the characters and they become much more real and don't become tokens or emblems and you put three of them in a room and they say things," he says. "I'm like, 'Oh my God, I can't believe they said that. Wait, I said that.' And that's new. That's still kind of an amazing thing to me."

He's touring this book through January, laryngitis or not. Then he's going to have a party,

he says.

“I always recommend writers have an ‘It's over.’ party.” he says. “Because when is it over? When it goes into Norwegian paperback? It never ends, so after your tour you have a party with your friends and you ceremonially burn a copy of the book and you wake up the next morning and you're not waiting for things to continue happening. Any writer, it's good advice.”

Coupland says he plans to keep writing into the new millennium. But for now, he's still trying to figure out the 1990s.

“It's still a nameless decade,” he says. “The decade just shifted. It was like two half decades wasn't it? One was grunge, and the other was Gap.”

Day 11  
Washington, DC  
January 13, 2000

Glorious day — sun and warmth and cherry blossoms. Did a wonderful NPR show and then went downtown to do the most Wayne's World TV situation I've ever found myself in. I won't name the station, but Suzanne and I were down in the lobby laughing our brains out afterward. Enough said. At the reading I asked if anybody in the room, about 300 people, had seen it and not a one. So, TV's not always the best thing.

I can't believe the things I find myself saying on the radio these days. It's loose cannon on deck time. All the stuff I used to worry about — gone. What a relief.

This one interviewer in Boston was an old friend of Andy Warhol, and of course the moment I learned that, I didn't want to discuss anything else. We talked off the air, and we're going to try swapping some art for furniture.

Great crowd tonight in Olsson's Books of F Street. Some of the people were people who saw me there in 1991 and it's so nice to see their faces again. Why are faces so easy to remember and names so hard?

Tonight I asked audience members to draw on their index cards, 'the thing I used to doodle obsessively in my high school note book.' The results were so great I'm going to do it a few times more: kitty cats, muscle cars, Don Martin characters, Van Halen logos. So amazing.

Throat? Better, it seems.

Day 12

Washington - Boston

January 14, 2000

So much for cherry blossoms. Hellish cold. And all of those civil servants standing outside the Federal buildings puffing away looked even more forlorn than usual. If Washington DC needs a civic mascot, it ought to be 'Larry the Pariah Smoker of K Street.' There's something so incredibly ...shunned looking about people smoking outside office front doors. Smoking is so weird. I quit on Halloween night, 1988, and I could still start just like that. I can't even allow myself to hold a pack because it reminds me so cellularly of my smoking era.

Throat? All better.

Washington National Airport is now Ronald Reagan National Airport, and it's a beauty. All the metal is arranged in a series of mathematical, Islamic looking mini-cathedrals painted margarine yellow. It works. Every city on Earth got a new airport the past decade. It's like the government knew in advance this was going to be a busy time. Conspiracy theories, anyone?

Boston suddenly looks like the City of Tomorrow — the construction going on here is ferocious, there are all these amazing office towers in mid-demolition that are half-rubble and look like Beirut. Just gorgeous. Every building has something attached to it — a cell tower, an aerial, a crane, a weatherproof pedestrian tube. Boston used to look like the Past, and now it's the Future. Europe's like that, too.

Staying at the Ritz, which sounds great, but then this particular Ritz just got bought a few weeks back, and the staff is absolutely mutinous as most of them are out of work in two

weeks. The service was like Fawlty Towers. Most of the people who work here are really old, and you just know they're going to be history. New owners always gut the place.

Good crowd at Brookline Booksmith; it's a below-ground venue, so it got very muggy very quickly. I made Fire Marshal jokes, and then I realized that with all the people it might not be too good an idea. The event felt déjà vu-ey, as if the intervening years never occurred. Remembered some of the readers from past years and got some lovely tour gifts (cookies; books; zines.)

Driving back to the hotel (Volvo, interior clean, driver, Patricia, articulate) I was idly touching my hair and I realized I forgot to comb it. It was sticking out in tufts all night and nobody mentioned it. It's like three weeks ago when I went around the whole day with a V-neck sweater on backward and nobody mentioned it.

Toga party going on in the room next door. Had to switch. 8,000 phone messages. Just started reading *The Orchid Thief*.

Campaign 2000 ...Crunchy New Charisma for a New Era  
 posted on Coupland.com  
 January 2000

As politicians become ever more cartoon-like, why not follow this trend to its ultimate expression. Herewith, a fresh new crop of faces on the political landscape.

### Cap'n Crunch

As the perennial Lee Iacocca let's-get-things-done candidate, the Cap'n runs a tight ship, sure — but he's also rumored to be slushing millions through small offshore island accounts. A recent Washington Post story revealed his galleon to be registered through a quagmire of Liberian numbered companies. Hey Cap'n: IRS on line three. And one young reader, Amy Steedman writes,: “What's the deal with the walrus mustache? Are you one of these new ‘bears’ we've been hearing about? Older gay males who've sexualized their paunch and bristles?”

### ‘Sonny’ the Cocoa Puffs Bird

Sonny's tendency to go random during press conferences is a long-standing source of amusement with jaded campaign followers. A highly strung seemingly single-issue candidate, yes, he's cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs — but where does he stand on Medicare? Global warming? Younger voters, members of the so-called ‘Generation X,’ find Lucky's vertical hairdo pleasingly retro and evokes a strong nostalgia vote for those who came of age in the early 1980s.

### Toucan Sam

As spokestoon for Froot Loops, Toucan Sam has campaigned hard for gay, lesbian and bisexual rights. His image took a drubbing in 1996 after he pooped on the AIDS Quilt during an overexcited moment meeting Elizabeth Taylor for the first time. His recovery has been strong, though, especially after the wide outpouring of sympathy after he revealed on Barbara Walters that he spent much of January 1999 in a Special-K hole and was currently seeking counseling.

### Tony the Tiger

Tony is the Charlton Heston of the cereal spokesworld. Robustly heterosexual, he's a good old boy who's equally at ease on the golf links, lunching with Bill Gates, or manning the air-dryer device which gives mashed corn droplets their famous flaked shape. Tony's always first guy into the Bohemian Grove sweat lodge, and one nod from the Tonester, and your kid's in Yale, no questions asked.

### Trix Rabbit

While well known for espousing children's rights, we have yet to see much evidence of Trix's involvement in modifying Third World child labour practices. Also, even after some cosmetic surgery he still appears slightly, (there's no way around it) demented looking. Thyroid? Diet pills? Something else we don't know about? A bit of a dandy, Trix and fellow PETA spokescreature Christy Turlington have been seen on the town recently, and political cartoonists had a field day sketching the appearance of potential offspring.

### Count Chocula

As a candidate, 'The Count' has it all: good looks, charisma, intelligence and breeding. Says his campaign manager, Elizabeth Klein, 'The Choculas are like the Kennedies of Transylvania.' Unfortunately, as the Count wasn't born on US soil, he's ineligible for presidential candidacy, and can be found brooding on park benches in Dupont Circle, shrieking out brilliant chess moves to confused pensioners playing jumbo chess.

### Cozmik Crunch

Coz goes down well with younger voters, and his Mexican family background makes him an alien alien. Most voters remain somewhat perplexed by Coz's offbeat 2000 platform: 'Less gravity, More zinc,' and pretty well everybody's baffled by his demand that all the

nation's CAPS LOCK keyboard keys send out an infra-red pulse which would then be registered in a data base to be buried two miles beneath Kissimmee, Florida.

### Honey-Nut Cheerios Bee

This blue-blood Beltway insider can trace his hive right back to Eleanor Roosevelt's 'Victory apiary.' Yet 'Buzz' also gets a charismatic jolt of adrenaline from a strain of aggressive Africanized bees on his father's side. His April Gap ad, considered dodgy at the time, gave Honey-Nut a leadership sting that's left all other spokestoons crackling with envy — and begging for a shot of antihistamine! Older voters like Honey Nut's sweet-but-not-too-sweet nutty crunchy taste.

### Lucky, the Lucky Charms Leprechaun

Lucky seems to have recently undergone cosmetic surgery, rendering him less ethnic, more youthful and seemingly more energetic. Cynical pundits notice Lucky's striking similarity to Snap, Crackle and Pop — word on the street has it they all went to Dr. Harry Glassman, cosmetic surgeon to the stars, and husband of Victoria Principal, Pam Ewing of TV's Dallas. However, the Krispies 'troika' is very much in league with Kellogg's, while Lucky is General Mills all the way.

### Sugar Bear

Sugar was once a possible independent candidate — the toast of the primaries, with Stevie Nicks a fixture at his side — but he was done in by an insurmountable sucrose addiction. A recent photospread by Europe's Hello! magazine showed a new, clean Sugar at home in Carmel, where readers saw Sugar in his hot tub, Sugar proudly displaying his collection of Egyptian 'Ankh' fertility symbols, and Sugar driving his George Barris kustom-designed 'Puffmobile.' Quips Sugar, "I believe deeply, that were it not for my sucrose addiction, I'd be president today — but I've beaten the addiction. I'm proud of that, damn proud." Pundits are quick to point out Sugar's refusal to wear age-appropriate outfits.

## Booberry

'Boo,' as he's known to his supporters, is the ghost of an American citizen and thus has the theoretical, if unprecedented, right to run for elected office. The fact that his cereal has been discontinued only loans street cred to his deadness. Boo's campaign, however, seems stalled after his ill-advised Dayton, Ohio speech on the need to enforce national standards on making all coffins escape-proof. It's hard to figure out if Boo is a liberal or conservative, but in general, voters find his abilities to pass through walls slightly creepy.

## King Vitaman

King is a perennial dark horse candidate in the spirit of the late Pat Paulsen. 'Dark Horse?' asks Dan Rather, "He's a black hole candidate." Bitter, bitter, Mr. Rather, and please remember that King's unflinchingly zany regal persona wins him big points in 'tornado country' — his rural Oklahoma and Texas home constituency. For the 2000 race, King is involved in a nasty, if not amusing, legal battle with crabby film producer James Cameron over the rights to the term, "I'm king of the world."

Junk: Roll Call  
Dirt magazine #3  
December 1992

What are the three worst and three best things about America?

Worst:

“The perverse, Dante’s Inferno-like inability of the Trix Rabbit to locate a reliable food source; the nation’s obtuse refusal to perceive Tina Louise as anybody except Ginger; helmet hair.”

Best:

“Freedom, opportunity, energy.”

Day 13  
Boston - Toronto  
January 15, 2000

Mapleflot again. The plane was almost entirely empty, like a flight from the dead. It's my favourite kind of flight.

Mac vs. PC.

Oh God. The clicker thingy on my Mac Powerbook 3400c (OS 7) is dying. So are the 'A' and 'T' keys. So I'm going to try and locate a Mac dealership in Toronto and get a new laptop. This one is such a woodburner. It was such a big-woo machine in December 1996, and now it's ...a joke.

I just can't bring myself to get a PC. I just can't. I was thinking of it, then I tried somebody's PC — and its file system alone was so counterintuitive. Why does the public put up with it? How did such a mediocre system ever become so big?

News:

I see Bill Gates has resigned as Microsoft's president. He's going to return to his roots as a software engineer.

Day 14  
Toronto  
January 16, 2000

Freedom.

Woke up at a normal time. Lazed around. Visited the Art Gallery of Ontario. It was 'Bring Your Kids Day' or something, so it was, like 900 crack babies all over the place. In the European Artifacts Section there was a vitrine filled with Faberge Eggs, Medieval chalices and religious paraphernalia of the Czars. This kids walks by and shouts out, "Dad, look — soccer trophies!" So I turned around, and they did look like soccer trophies.

The Henry Moore room was — oh God. It's one of my favourite rooms on this planet. I finally bought the Henry Moore 1-to-6 series the AGO publishes.

Dinner at the Fraser's and we all watched The Simpsons at 8:00. Someone said The Simpsons are being moved from that slot. Is Fox nuts?

Day 15  
Toronto  
January 17, 2000

Toronto = Work.

Toronto is the hardest city on any tour in any country; almost all of Canada's media is in this one spot. I did a lot of TV, it felt weird because I kept repeating myself, and anyone who saw any of the shows would think I was this robot parrot — but really — if you ask the same question, you get the same answer. Nobody can modify reality to fit every single time.

The acoustics at the CBC's Glenn Gould Auditorium are the best of any space I've ever read in. I could whisper and the people in row 30 could hear me. Everybody in such good spirits! Probably the most enjoyable reading I've ever done.

Weather:

Yet again psychotically cold. Minus 10 Celsius. Edmonton, tomorrow, is going to be minus 25. Oh God.

Day 16

Toronto - Edmonton

January 18, 2000

Did four Toronto TV slots then got to the airport where my wood burning computer chose to die. Not \*die\* per se, but the little clicky thing beneath the tracking pad gave out from being clicked a billion times (thank you, Solitaire.)

Maplefort is now a monopoly but do they have to act like it? There was this horrible attendant at the entrance to the business lounge, just drunk with power — you know the type? All these exhausted bored travelers going through — all they want to do is get home, and he sits behind the counter fucking with people's minds over boarding cards and the like. I had a friend with me at the airport and wanted to bring them in as a guest. It was the most this attendant could do to not cackle with glee to tell me that even though I was full fare business class, technically I couldn't bring a guest in because I didn't have some sort of card I'd lost. I told them that they're being assholes. And they were.

Edmonton:

A cold cold city.

Day 17  
Edmonton  
January 19, 2000

Cabin fever.

Spent the day doing press in the hotel. Very cold outside, but bright, sunny and no wind, so the whole city felt like it was in a trance. It felt the way I think Moscow must feel like. In the late afternoon myself and Sherry, the media escort (mini-van; clean interior) drove to a second-hand shop for a brief burst of non-hoteliness. Bought some beat up old magazines, then we did some radio and TV. Back in the hotel I ordered Kraft Dinner from the kid's room service menu. Touring really makes you regress big time.

The reading had a smaller audience — 150 or so — and that was kind of weird, because 150 people react differently than 400 people. With 150 people there are gaps (empty seats) between people, and there isn't that gazelles-drinking-by-the-springs feel.

One reader, Jhenifer, brought me a tape of the David Cassidy biography movie from last Sunday night — there is a God! So I asked the hotel to bring up a VCR and they gave me that 'So you bought a porno tape' voice.

I again asked everybody in the audience to draw the Canadian flag on index cards. Our flag is utterly undrawable. The only flag more ridiculous than our own is Brazil's — it has the globe on with the words 'Open 24 Hours' written across it in Portuguese.

I'm so far behind on my emails I think I'm going to erase them all and start from scratch.

Oh, I've decided for sure: I'm getting a PowerBook G3 400 laptop. Josh, a Mac consultant who came to the Toronto reading advised me.

Day 18

Edmonton - Calgary

January 20, 2000

Flew from Edmonton to Calgary and did press. The Glenbow Museum, the city's biggest, is across from the hotel; they had this wonderful exhibit of 100 years of prairie life. The show was entirely composed of domestic artifacts, it was fascinating and the objects were lovely – but it made me very happy to be living in the 21st century. Upstairs there was a museum of mineralogy and so it was Feldspar/Gneiss time. Saw a piece of the world's oldest rock (3.9 billion years old) and saw various uranium minerals. You can always tell uranium-based minerals because they're either taxi yellow (only cadmium also does that) or that Irish green colour people in Dublin paint their front doors. I came away from the museum wanting to design a new mineral.

A wonderful crowd at the reading and a lunar eclipse going on outside, but it was cloudy, you couldn't see it, so nobody bailed. This one guy asked for a tip for aspiring writers, so I told him never to schedule a reading for Academy Awards night, because nobody'll come. It's good advice, and not the sort of thing they teach you in Lit class.

What else ...tomorrow I get two days off.

Day 19  
Calgary - Vancouver  
January 21, 2000

I had a big melt down with a woman interviewer from the CBC. It got off to the wrong start, it kept on getting wronger and wronger. We were yelling at each other, and I've never done that with a member of the press before — wait, I take that back: there was this creepy Dutch reporter in London in 1998 who I yelled at. He deserved it. Anyway, this CBC thing was really crazy — it kept getting bigger and bigger. The crux was that she wanted to air things she'd taped audience members saying in line-up at the reading last night. I said fine, but I didn't want to be in the room to hear them. She took offense at this, and I tried to explain to her that I'm almost medically unable to see myself in print, on screen or on tape — or being discussed in those formats. She thought I was being a prima donna (actually, she said, “Doug, I can be a prima donna, too.”) It was so crazy! So, I left the studio, and she stormed out after me, yelled and yelled, then we felt slightly stupid, so then we started really talking — there, in the green room. And it was intense, and we ought to have been taping our green room conversation. It turns out she's also a writer, and we're both irked by the conventions and assumptions of the writer on tour — of how indecorous and counter-intuitive to go out there and try to be ‘on’ all the time discussing a work that you wrote over a long period of time in your most quiet of moments. It really does chafe. I mean, you can go along with it to a point, but then you snap.

Anyway, we ended up back on the air, and it was a good enough discussion. The thing about having it out with someone is that you really do feel close to them after it's all been settled. Time to go back to Vancouver for two days of civilian hood.

Day 20  
Vancouver  
January 22, 2000

Family. Haircut. Poked through the fridge. Italian dinner at Carmelo's. Watched the David Cassidy movie on tape because the hotel's machine didn't work the other night. Big stack of art books to read. A perfect day. It was like Our Town. It was such a perfect perfect day.

Day 21

Vancouver - Denver

January 23, 2000

A low-key travel day. In the waiting lounge at Vancouver's airport I said to myself, “At the count of three I will give myself 60 seconds to find something beautiful. One, two three...” and I did – one of those multicoloured soccer balls they sell in every airport on Earth these days. I bought one and pelted it with a pair of nail scissors while waiting for the plane to board. It looked like one of those pharmaceutical ads in my Dad's old medical magazines.

The plane was filled with noisy dotcom billionaires and I kind of wanted it to crash. Why are dotcom billionaires so annoying? Because you're not one of them, Doug. I keep on remembering the fact that \$1,000 put into Microsoft right before the Windows 95 introduction would now be worth just over \$32,000. Could have been a dotcom millionaire. But then I have to remember that I can barely sleep at night with money in a savings account let alone have it invested in the stock market.

At SeaTac I barely caught the connecting flight to Denver. The plane was so full it felt stuffed. United really squishes people in.

Day 22  
Denver  
January 24, 2000

In the 1960s they did experiments where people in sleep labs were woken up every time they entered REM sleep. After a while they invariably went crazy. Today was like that for me, except I had the waking version of the experiment: every time I thought I had a moment to myself, however brief, that moment was colonized by either the phone, hotel staff, or something press-related. I was kind of going nuts near the day's end.

Okay, that's grumpy. My BIG NEWS was that Tom Wolfe went on the record in a TV interview with the following statement: "I happen to be an extravagant admirer of Douglas Coupland whom I think is one of the freshest, most exciting voices in the novel. Miss Wyoming reminds me of Nathaniel West with an eye for the year 2000." Oh. My. God. What can I say? This is one of those moments that in some way transforms your life, if for no other reason than that someone whose work I've admired since Day One is actually reading something I wrote. So, I've been in a bubble all day.

Denver is such a 1974 city. Everywhere looks as if Steve McQueen is lurking around the corner with a vanload of bank robbers waiting to pull off a heist. I couldn't shake the sensation ...large brown bank lobbies and atriums. Very cool.

The daily surprise was around 1:00 when out of the blue, in the middle of a phone interview, another call came in — it was a journalist from Belgium who'd flown to Denver for an interview. Nobody told me. So, there's this guy sitting downstairs and in a flash, the afternoon I'd scheduled as minutely as a Rose Bowl half-time show collapsed completely. Bart is a good guy, and a pleasure to be with, but I was feeling so crazed because I didn't have any personal time. Even in the bathroom the phone rang.

The reading at Tattered Cover was a pleasant, successful event. Good turnout. (There must be tons of shoplifting during readings ...so many people, and they clear out shelves and then sit on the shelves. I hope bookstore owners know what they're doing. They must.) I asked everybody to draw a Canadian flag on the index cards and to be honest, they were WAY better than the flags drawn by Canadians. So, what does that mean? It's not what I expected.

There was more, but it was a long day and I am pooped, so c'est la vie.

Day 23

Denver - Boulder - Denver

January 25, 2000

I had two hours in Boulder which I spent in a second-hand/antiquarian bookstore going out of business, so I bought some old Look magazines, Soviet Life and Better Homes and Gardens from the 50s and 60s. Then they let me go upstairs and cut and paste in a spare room for an hour and it was true bliss. Tonight I asked everybody in the audience if they would draw, 'That tattoo they secretly want to get.'

The day vanished like that. Where did it go?

Day 24

Denver - San Francisco

January 26, 2000

Crappy Denver morning.

The gist of it is as follows: When you're traveling on business or on a book tour or as a member of the Ice Capades or whatever, you're totally at the mercy of a long succession of people in the service industry. Most of these people, and I speak from experience, truly want to do a job well, but the fact of the matter is, more than a few are ill-suited, if not terrible at their job. Some of them are flat out fuck-ups. And so when one of these people fuck up, they don't realize that they're piling their fuckup on top of every other fuckup the traveler has endured that day. And so when a traveler goes ballistic, they act so surprised ... 'Gee, I'm sorry I lost your bag, but it's only a lost bag, and we did get it back in the end...' That kind of thing.

So this morning, leaving the hotel, I entered some kind of cosmic fuckup warp, and every single person in the hotel did their job badly. I finally snapped outside on the curb when I saw the dude with the fancy Johnny Bravo outfit put my luggage in the wrong car. I just lost it. Totally. And all these old people around me were going, 'Oh, tut-tut — no need for language like that.' Where do these people live in their minds — inside a Norman Rockwell painting? And then the cab driver took some sort of 'experimental' (his word) route to Denver's airport, which is the farthest away from the downtown core than any large airport in North America. So I was last on the plane, and dripping with sweat upon takeoff.

It was a good flight. I left the fuckup warp. Phew.

Later in the afternoon I did another Wayne's World-type web show ...The Alex Bennett Program on PlayTV, a relief after what has been an intense and rather serious few weeks of

interviews. We went totally random. It was such a blast. I think the best gig you could possibly have would be to host a radio show. Radio guys are always the most relaxed people going.

Afterward I went to Japantown and dropped a bomb on books at the Kinokuniya. There used to be this hotel called the Miyako adjoining the Japantown mall. It was built for Japanese travelers directly from Japan, and staying there was so wonderful. Technically it's still there and it's still called the Miyako, but Radisson bought it and now it's just another hotel. I have my memories. That's happening to all the independent hotels these days – getting gobbled up by the chains. Oh – there's a whole store in Japantown dedicated to Hello Kitty merchandise. And this incredibly glamorous looking drag queen asked me where the pay phone was.

Good reading at Clean Well Lighted Place for Books, and I finally got a copy of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius: A Memoir Based on a True Story* by David Eggers. I've been waiting for it for months – it's a memoir. I was exhausted when I went to bed but it was so good I stayed up for two hours reading. It's the best thing I've read in ...years. It's ...just go out and buy it.

Day 25

San Francisco - Palo Alto - San Francisco

January 27, 2000

A humdrum press day, and then I met novelist Timothy Findley for the first time in the drabbest, most boring TV station lobby imaginable, an ABC affiliate. It was a transformative experience, and I won't go into it past that, other than to say the experience made me feel as though I'm a part of something that's important which has been going on for far longer than I can imagine. He's a gentleman.

Dropped a bomb at the SF MoMA bookshop, then went and bought packaging materials at the FedEx shop on Pine Street. I'm certainly putting the FedEx children through beauty school with this tour.

Tonight's reading was in Palo Alto (Menlo Park, technically) at Keppler's Books. A strangely subdued crowd. They didn't laugh at any of the amusing stuff, which is so unnerving. Why does that happen with audiences? Ten in a row are crack up, and then the eleventh just sits there.

Afterward I met a number of readers who were so intelligent it almost scared me, and it made me want to be 23 again, hating and loving the world, and wanting to meet and meet and meet people, and be a part of life's bigness. Some came in from Reno and Stockton and Santa Rosa. I almost wanted to cry. I miss that part of being young so much.

Big news: on the cell phone on the way back, I found out I was a question on, Who Wants to be a Millionaire? — or rather, Generation X was. The contestant had to put The Beats, The Me Generation, Generation X and a few other generations in chronological order. Apparently the Gen X guy got it right. Yay! But it still doesn't beat being a Jeopardy! question. That was honestly, the first time most of the people in my life acknowledged that I do actually write.

Jeopardy!  
episode #2921  
aired on television April 21, 1997

### LETTER PERFECT

\$100

This letter was a symbol of perfection  
after Giotto drew a perfect freehand circle to impress the Pope

\$200

This supposedly sullen generation, born in 1961 & after,  
was named by novelist Douglas Coupland

\$300

For 30 years Desmond Llewelyn,  
the actor has played this character

\$400

This computer chip is named for the type of  
TV programming parents may want to block

\$500

Antigens designated by these 2 letters  
determine blood types

Answers: O, Generation X, Q from James Bond movies, V-chip, A & B

Day 26  
San Francisco - Seattle  
January 28, 2000

I can't remember what happened this day.

The Ride Stuff by David Templeton  
Sonoma County Independent  
interview conducted on January 28, 2000

It is a decidedly low-energy Douglas Coupland who crouches at the curb in front of his San Francisco hotel. Bearing the weight of too many early mornings after too many long nights, he peers into the open doorway of an ultra-sleek black stretch limousine. As he contemplates the vehicle's cavernous interior, his face is a sloppy mix of sleep deprivation and mild embarrassment.

“Um, omigod,” he finally proclaims.

Generously arranged for by Coupland's publisher, the imposing limo has been sent to transport the mild-mannered reluctant icon (author of *Generation X*, *Shampoo Planet*, and *Microserfs*) to the airport, where he'll catch a flight to Seattle for another full day of interviews. With an audible sigh, Coupland clambers in and takes a seat, making room for me.

“Suddenly this feels really silly,” confesses my host, as the uniformed driver securely shuts the door behind us.

“I feel like we're on our way to the senior prom or something,” says Coupland, peering through the tinted windows as we sail away from the sidewalk. “I feel like I should have brought you a corsage.”

Coupland, 38, a native of Vancouver, Canada, is currently finishing up a months-long book tour to promote his latest uncategorizable opus, *Miss Wyoming* (Pantheon Books; \$23), the comic-tragic tale of two Hollywood players, one a seasoned producer of direct-to-

airlines cinematic schlock and the other an emotionally wounded B-level starlet who was once a child beauty-pageant queen.

Taking advantage of strange twists of fate — he suffers a mystical near-death experience, while she is believed to have disintegrated in an airplane crash — they each drop out of their former lives, disappearing from the world's cultural radar. The central story is about what happens after they reappear and accidentally merge into each other's lives.

Critics are divided over this latest offering, just as they have been since Coupland trampolined into the mainstream with 1991's phenomenon-sparking, bestselling novel *Generation X*, the bible of the slacker generation. Yet the new book is widely recognized as the work of an increasingly confident (dare we say mature?) writer of idiosyncratic yet genuinely compelling fiction.

Which brings him to the West Coast, where he's spent the last few days schlepping from bookstore to bookstore. He was hoping for a little free time to, you know, catch a movie or something, but no such luck for Coupland, who's been receiving a surprising amount of media attention for a guy some critics wrote off years ago.

At the moment, though, Coupland wouldn't mind a tiny bit less attention. “I'm so tired of talking about my book,” he confesses, as our 35-minute ride begins. In demonstration of this point, he feigns snoring. “Promise me you won't ask me anything about the book.”

‘Well,’ I think to myself, ‘although I understand how repetitious such book-hawking interviews can become, I nevertheless am a professional — as are you — and feel that I must ask you a number of precisely planned questions specifically focused on your latest novel.’

But what I say is “OK, I promise not to ask anything about the book.”

Fortunately, Douglas Coupland is the kind of author who has a lot on his mind and needs very little prompting to divulge it. In fact, the man who claims to have become an author only by accident — his book jacket lists his occupation as ‘designer and sculptor,’ a reference to his art-school education and favorite hobby — seems to have something amusing to say on almost every subject.

He talks about movies — “1999 was just the best movie year. In the old days you would go to a movie and know everything that's going to happen, but nowadays you go to a movie and you never know what's going on.” And he talks about the mental habits of overly verbal people — “Even as I say these words to you, I'm seeing the words before me, like on a teleprompter. The only time I don't see them is when I'm sculpting” — and about the problem of Prince Charles’ face. But more on that later.

“Kssssshkk. This is your captain speaking,” Coupland intones, skillfully rendering an echoey impression of airplane intercom blather. “Tonight's in-flight movie will be . . . ksssshkk ...Sister Act 2.’”

Which brings up another of Coupland's favorite subjects: airline flight.

“For this one-year-and-a-half window, Sister Act 2 was like this spawn from hell that followed me on every flight I took anywhere in the world,” he complains. “The current spawn from hell is Kevin Costner and Kelly Preston in For Love of the Game. ‘Kssssshkk. Tonight's in-flight movie will be For Love of the Game with Kevin Costner and Kelly kssssshkk Preston.’ I've seen it so many times I know it by heart.”

There is, in fact, just such a reference in *Miss Wyoming*. When the movie producer character plunges into his near-death experience, the doctor who attempts to resuscitate him gripes about the in-flight omnipresence of the filmmaker's latest film, *The Other Side of Hate*, of which the doctor says, "They might as well have shipped the dailies directly up to the Boeing factory."

"Perhaps," I wonder, "if I mention this correlation, he'll accidentally say something about the book."

I boldly give it a try.

"Mmmmm," Coupland acknowledges, nodding — then offers an entirely different observation about flying.

"I sat next to Josh Brolin once on an airplane," he says. "It's a rule of airline flight: you never get to sit next to Jodie Foster or someone cool. It's always like, 'Excuse me. Are you Suzanne Pleshette?'"

The airport looms in the distance.

As a last-ditch effort, I ask Coupland to name the best or worst question he's been asked during the tour.

"Well, there have been a lot of really good ones," he muses.

"Bingo," I think, envisioning some penetrating query from one of Coupland's hyper-intelligent fans.

“The best question,” he reveals, “was probably ‘How do you feel about genetically modified food?’”

Come again?

“It's a big deal in Canada,” he grins. Then, following some hairpin tangent that takes my breath away, Coupland is suddenly reminded of ...Prince Charles.

“See, someday Prince Charles is going to be on our money and our postage stamps, and we're all really dreading this. As long as he was married to Diana it was ‘Well, at least we might have an attractive person on our money.’ Then they got divorced and we all went, ‘Fuck. Now our money's going to look like shit for decades.’”

As the limousine arrives at the terminal, gliding up to the white curb, Coupland adds, “The ironic thing is that Charles is this big anti-genetically-modified-foods person.”

And so our journey ends. As the driver unloads Coupland's luggage, he stands up in the early afternoon sunshine.

“This was fun,” he says, meaning it. “Let's do this again on my next tour.”

And with a handshake and a final spirited yawn, Douglas Coupland vanishes through the double doors of the terminal. I climb back in the limo for the return trip, thinking, ‘Well, at least he's a funny guy. And I did like his book, even though he wouldn't talk about it. Next tour? It's a date.’

Next time, though, I want a corsage.

The Year 3000  
posted on Coupland.com  
January 2000

This was written for the son of a friend attending a college back East. It's the only thing I've written about this whole 2000 thing.

For many people, the year 2000 is a psychological cut-off point after which, any event that happens won't matter. History was something that happened before January 01, 2000 — and preferably in the 20th Century. If you were born around 1980, this attitude will probably strike you as both annoying and baffling, but for people born before 1980, there was this whole 'Cult of Decades' thing that was going on The Psychedelic Sixties. The Me Decade. The Greed Decade. The — well, nobody seems to have summed up the 1990s yet — probably because they're frantically trying to classify the past two thousand years instead. The @ Decade? Ugh. Even trying to name a decade now that it's over seems dumb. And I sense panic in that nobody really knows what to call this next decade — First Decade? We'll have to wait and see.

What constitutes history is largely a matter of who bothers to record it, and who bothers to read it. For most people on earth, illiterate and simply trying to eke out a living amid dwindling resources, history is a bizarre luxury indulged in by the industrialized nations. The majority of people on earth are unaware of the History Machine and probably would scratch their heads to hear that Jacqueline Onassis was one of the 20th century's most important figures. Who? What? Why? I'd rather have something to eat, please.

Another reason many people are freaking out about the year 2000 is because in the 20th century you had essentially very few definitive history-designating press organs. Life magazine, believe it or not, was once the largest and most admired and era-defining magazines on Earth. And then there was Time, Newsweek, the New York Times and ...the

list dwindles very quickly thereafter. Nowadays we have an absolute glut of magazines and a glut of webzines and historical channels on TV. Getting all of these organs to agree on what is, and isn't, history is nigh impossible. Life magazine used to be one-stop history shopping. Too many viewpoints.

Another psychologically odd thing about the year 2000, and why it disturbs some folks, is because it makes a person think about the next thousand years and of how dead they'll be maybe halfway through the 21st century. It makes them think of the year 3000 and the year 47,000 and the year 1,200,000. It forces people to think about death, never a popular activity, and it makes them realize that they're never going to get to see the final reel of dramas that were being enacted in their lifetimes — new models of airplanes, new species of computers, the future of food — the day that big chunk of Southern California finally bumps into Alaska.

I used to go to school and work in Japan. They have a dual calendar system there, one based on the Gregorian calendar, and one based on the rule of the current emperor. If one seems overwhelming, simply go to the other. When I was there, it was 1985 or Showa 62. They have a new Emperor now, so it's something like 1999 and 07. In fact, pretty well every culture has its own calendar. The Gregorian one is simply the one we use to schedule Lufthansa flights and regulate auctions on eBay.

I remember 1984 was supposed to be a big woo when New Year's Eve came. Instead it was a sterile, eventless transition. I expect much the same thing from 2000. In Iran it's something like 7,516. Who knows what it is in, say, Nigeria, and I doubt December 31 is as a big deal in either locale.

For Immediate Release: Pantone's Color of the Year 2000  
Carlstadt, New Jersey  
April 26, 1999

The official color of the millennium is Cerulean Blue PANTONE 15-4020 TC, the color of the sky on a serene, crystal clear day, says Pantone, Inc., the world's leading authority on color and color trends.

Lifestyle movements suggest that consumers will be seeking inner peace and spiritual fulfillment in the new millennium. This is a paradoxical time in which we are heading toward an uncertain, yet exciting, future, and also looking back, trying to hold onto the security of the past. In this stressful, high-tech era, we will be searching for solace and Cerulean Blue produces the perfect calming effect.

“Psychologically, gazing at a blue sky brings a sense of peace and tranquility to the human spirit,” says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute. “Sky blue is imprinted in our psyches as a retiring, quiescent color. Surrounding yourself with Cerulean blue could bring on a certain peace because it reminds you of time spent outdoors, on a beach, near the water-associations with restful, peaceful, relaxing times. In addition, it makes the unknown a little less frightening because the sky, which is a presence in our lives every day, is a constant and is always there. That's the dependability factor of blue.”

“Our studies show that blue is the leading favorite color for designers and consumers worldwide, regardless of culture, gender or geographic origin,” says Lisa Herbert, vice president, corporate communications worldwide, Pantone, Inc. “Not only is it a favorite in the U.S., but it is the first color choice in Europe and Asia as well. We've chosen Cerulean Blue as the official color for the millennium because of its mass appeal. It is a universal, unisex color, applicable to just about every consumer product including women's, men's

and children's fashions, interior design and home furnishings, cosmetics and even automobiles.”

Physiologically, the viewing of blue reduces blood pressure, heartbeat and respiration rate and creates a calming effect.

Socio-ecologically, as we enter the next century, water issues are emerging at the forefront of the public's consciousness. Exhausting our natural resources and polluting our environment, particularly our water supply, continues to be a concern, another reason for the popularity of blue for the future.

Day 27  
Seattle  
January 29, 2000

Sun. Slightly cool — need a sweater — laryngitis.

Walked around the town and bought materials for art projects.

Nice reading at Elliot Bay Books. They fixed the ventilation so that even with all the people down there, it's not as call-the-Fire-Marshal as it used to be.

Friends in town. A good day.

Day 28  
Seattle - Portland  
January 30, 2000

Had to get up at 7:30 to catch a flight to do a 12:30 AM gig in Portland and so I didn't get to sleep in the one day of the week I was hoping to. Kind of furious about it. Day went well otherwise.

These entries are purposefully short. This is my time off.

Day 29  
Portland  
January 31, 2000

My Visa number (not the card itself) was stolen, so Visa killed my account which on the road, is not too convenient a thing to have happen. It turns out that the reason they ask you the expiry date when you order things over the phone and the internet, isn't to ensure that the card is valid, but rather, to see if the person with the number is guessing at the expiry date. If you give the wrong date, the computers will automatically stop your file. Usually the first thing people do when they steal a card number is make a quick long-distance call — and guess the number. So, now you know!

A lovely Portland day. Did press and walked around when possible. Had a dinner with booksellers in the evening.

I think I'm going nuts.

Comments posted on MetaFilter Community Weblog message board (excerpts):

> There's a great fiction piece by Parker Posey (mmmm...Parrrkerrr Pooooseeeey), one of my favorite musicians Nick Cave talking about religion, Ben Stiller and Janeane Garofalo doing some self-help stuff, Bill Bradley talking about affirmative action, and hey look! Douglas Coupland is doing a live event next Friday!

posted by mathowie at 11:73 PM on January 21, 2000

> If you plan to see Douglas Coupland on his current book tour you might want to bone up on how to draw the Canadian flag. Since he was in Seattle tonight he also asked the audience for stock tips.

posted by jessamyn at 1:43 AM on January 30, 2000

> He did a live chat on Friday that I missed, but it's archived.

posted by mathowie at 2:36 AM on January 30, 2000

> Toronto draws the Canadian flag.

posted by jessamyn at 12:19 PM on January 30, 2000

> Wow, the Coupland site is all kinds of fun to explore... I especially enjoy the kitchy flash animations and the collages. His comments about Boston are making me homesick for the cold northeast. Can anyone find part of the site that lists his current tour schedule? Has it ended already?

posted by sixfoot6 at 1:15 PM on January 30, 2000

> Matt included the tour schedule a few weeks ago in post. Yum, Tasos pizzas.

posted by tomalak at 1:32 PM on January 30, 2000

> Yeah, I saw Coupland when he was in New York a few weeks back and he made the audience write their 5 favorite movies on an index card (extra points for drawing the video box). I had never been to a reading of his, and I was quite surprised to see that he actually makes more pop culture references in person than he does in his books. Quite amazing.

posted by geoff at 11:19 AM on January 31, 2000

Day 30  
Portland  
February 01, 2000

The Vancouver home office is complaining my tour entries are too short, hence I'll try and beef them up a bit; I suppose they have been short.

To explain the day of February 01, I'll have to preface it by saying that I need to get 8.5 hours of sleep every day or else ...or else the day feels as if I'm underwater. It's always been like this and I suspect it always will be. Even a mere 8 hours of sleep is enough to leave me feeling clubbed over the head the rest of the day. It just is. I don't know why. It's like the opposite of insomnia — I think the technical name is hypersomnia. New York has been pretty good at keeping the early mornings free, but today everybody on both coasts dogpiled on me to do an in-studio morning FM broadcast at a Portland independent FM station. So I did it and I felt sickish for the rest of the day. Added bonus: I have no memory of the interview.

Had a lovely underwater lunch with Paige P. and the Portland set at a restaurant called Saucebox. I thought 'saucebox' was an Americanism for 'bar,' but it was just the name of the restaurant. Everybody was talking about the awkward things they do with their bodies when the cameras come out. Everybody does something. I turn my head to the left. Some people turtle their heads outward to hide the extra chins. Some people try to 'pull their nose in,' thus scrunching up their facial muscles. One guy there, Thomas, suggested that if you want to have a good photo taken, exhale. 'Most people suck in air for the camera, and it makes your shoulders hunch unnaturally.'

Walked around the city for a while in pursuit of clarity and fresh air. Portland really is a good walking city. One of my favourite things is walking past the money-shredding facility near Burnside and 10th, scouting for filaments of hundred dollar bills. Didn't find any. I

guess they put a filter on their vents. Bought some great old Look magazines — the printing quality on them is so much better than old Life magazines. I'm a convert. And the guy at the store put the magazines into a Biohazard Waste bag — excellent.

I tried napping but it only got me from about 100 feet underwater to about 15 feet underwater.

It came time to do the reading, and the media escort picked me up in an aging Volvo wagon. Driving away from the hotel in the dark and the rain, I noticed that the dash lights were dead and the headlights not casting much light. She said everything was fine, but I said, 'no, I really don't think the lights are working.' Then we drove onto Interstate 5 in rush hour traffic when, of course, the car died in the middle lane and the media escort really flipped out, like Annette Bening in *American Beauty*. A friend and I got out of the car, pushed it off the freeway's median as 18-wheelers roaring by like Saber jets. The escort's cell phone, this big 1974 Soviet honker, was dead, too, so we walked uphill toward the freeway's next exit, a mile or so away. I will say this — the one good thing about having somebody flip out on you is that it makes you, yourself, not flip out.

Anyway, out of the blue this woman driving by with a U-Haul pulled over and gave us a lift. It was like the opposite of evil. She simply pulled over and gave us a ride right to the bookstore. It turns out she left her family in Southern California to move to Idaho, but the weather was too cold, she missed her family and was driving back. She was so sweet. So whoever you are, you have affirmed my faith in humanity being more good than evil, and best of luck in California.

The reading was unusual because there was no podium and no mic, so I had to be Mr. Guy With A Projecting Voice. Acoustics are such a weird issue. I still dream about how amazing the acoustics were in Toronto at the Glenn Gould Theatre.

Some people drove up from Eugene for the event; I was so honoured. I asked everybody to draw their favourite book, and got some lovely responses.

Oh, I'm realizing my website is very crashy for people with Macs. Sorry. Some people got huffy about the number of plug-ins required to visit. Sorry about that, too, but it boils down to economics — sites are insanely expensive to build, and I couldn't afford to rebuild it again next year. Publishers don't help out on sites, which makes sense, because otherwise they'd hemorrhage money, and there's still no real proof that they sell anything. Coupland.com's a labour of love. I mean, if somebody's visiting the site, it's not as if they're encountering my existence for the first time. I would think. And I mean, who's going to impulse purchase a book that way? The truly dangerous place for impulse shopping is eBay. It's so scary how quickly it can suck money out of you.

The first airline that can allow passengers to go online while in flight is going to be the world's richest airline. Oh, and I just remembered a guy I met in Palo Alto who designs gaming devices for Las Vegas. I told him how I'd gladly gamble away my life if they'd come up with a way to bet on Solitaire — it turns out they are working on it.

Weather:

Mild and very rainy,

Nutrition:

The Benson hotel had Gardenburgers on the menu, so I've been living on them for two days. I'm not a vegetarian, but they're so good on their own.

Lost in Solitaire  
Forbes ASAP online  
November 30, 1998

I'm in a 737 right now headed south from Vancouver, my hometown, to Los Angeles, a three-hour flight. Out the window to my right the sun is shining. A meal has just been served — beef with vermicelli — ‘beef south, chicken north,’ as the old saying goes. My laptop tells me I've just finished my 1,523rd game of Eric's Ultimate Solitaire. My total playing time has been 61 hours, or roughly 2 minutes, 24 seconds per game. I've won 10% of my games, and my average score is 11 out of a possible 52.

But to my credit, I've been having much higher scores lately. Somewhere around game 800 or 900 my brain kicked into total game fluency.

But yes, 61 hours of Solitaire — the game that ate my brain.

That's two full days of my life spent piling phantom electronic cards atop one another. I'm unsure if this is pathetic or cool. Maybe it's both. But life is short; time is precious — why did I do this? And why will I, in all likelihood, continue to cheerfully waste thousands of more hours playing Solitaire?

I fly more than most people. This is partly because of my work, and partly because my father was a Canadian Armed Forces jet pilot who still spends his weekends flying up and down the British Columbia coast in a seaplane. I have no memories of ever not flying. Taking a taxi is weirder to me than flying from Vancouver to Frankfurt over Greenland and seeing the aurora borealis dance. A quick and very conservative tabulation tells me that I've spent well over a solid year of my life either in the air or in airports — several hundred times more hours than I've spent playing Eric's Ultimate Solitaire.

A decade ago, flying was fun. Destinations were still glamorous, and no seat uncomfortable. And the meals! Well, the meals honestly haven't changed much. Ten years ago the in-flight meal would have been beef and 'noodles.' Over the years, however, my zest for air travel has eroded.

Anybody who's flown much knows the progression: You stop speaking to the person next to you; you get addicted to business class and first class; you perfect your carry-on luggage strategy. And so on. Flying becomes a deglamorized chore. The final step is the prayer that, as a species, we invent the Star Trek teleportation device: "Beam me into O'Hare, Scotty!"

Like some people, I'm unable to either read or sleep on planes, and until recently I was at my wit's end as to how to make my hours in the air more tolerable. Flying, at a certain point, had become hours spent staring at the seat-back in front of me. A big change came when I got my first laptop — whee! I thought my in-flight time problems were over, and they were, until the battery died after 37 minutes of use. So I got another laptop, and the salesman lied to me, and it died after 38 minutes. So finally I bought the laptop I now use, not because it has any glitzy features but merely because (are you listening, manufacturers?) it provides two hours of flat-out usability. And with this new laptop came my big discovery this year: Time spent playing computer Solitaire is time that vanishes. Completely. I get on a plane, I turn it on, I play, I blink, and two hours are gone. Wow. Finally, a way to genuinely erase time.

To judge from my internal excitement, one would think I'd discovered uranium or invented the wheel. But then my father quickly brought me down to earth. "Solitaire?" he said. "We used to kill whole days at a time playing Solitaire when I was stationed in Thule up in Greenland in 1958. I would have gone crazy without it."

A genetic link!

Last Christmas, at about the same time I got my new laptop, my brother got my dad a small PC loaded with, yes, Solitaire. My father now plays it almost daily in his den. I asked him last week why he keeps on playing even though he's a busy guy. He said, "That's easy. Every time I push the key and it deals me a new round, I get this immense burst of satisfaction knowing that I didn't have to shuffle the cards and deal them myself. It's payback time for all the hours I've ever wasted in my life shuffling and dealing cards."

Some West Coast Indians in British Columbia believe that when you travel, whether on a canoe or in the Concorde, your soul can follow you only as fast as you're able to walk. I think of the times I've flown to Australia or Chile or Italy and there's my plucky little soul chugging along, only miles away from the Vancouver airport where the trip began.

I think about this, and about the need to kill time in the air, and I wonder if there's a connection — if there's a need to kill time in the absence of a guiding internal spirit. We're all so willing to accept the strange reality of geographical displacement when we travel — waking up in Vancouver and going to bed in Oslo — yet we're unwilling to believe in time sickness. Not just jet lag but genuine damage done to the sense of time and the spirit as we hop between continents. We look for salves.

We look for the aurora borealis. We look for a red eight to slap onto a black nine. I look for the 61 hours I lost in computerized Solitaire, but I know I'll never find it. And I know I'll lose far more time in the future.

The captain just announced we'll be landing at LAX in 20 minutes.

This flight has been 'fast' because I was writing this, and it involved emotion and reflection. Maybe I should start talking to the people sitting beside me more. Maybe I should

start believing that instead of just shuffling these glowing kings and queens and jacks and aces every time I push the Return key, I'm building a beautiful house of cards instead. It'd be a beautiful place, and my soul could go there instead of forever traipsing its way out of the city and back. I'm 36. I've flown a whack of miles and I'm going to fly a whole whack more. My soul must have awfully sore feet by now.

Day 31

Portland - Cedar Rapids / Iowa City

February 02, 2000

Groundhog Day.

Nobody seems to know anything more about Kurt Vonnegut, and everybody seems to be web trolling as much as myself. Critical condition. Smoke inhalation. Seventy-seven. Doesn't sound good. And as old as he is, and long-time chain-smoker that he is, the thought of his being gone offers the same pang felt as when Jim Henson died. A part of our youth is checking out in some New York hospital. The man is such a part of our post-1960 cultural complexion as the Ford Mustang and Tang. Kurt! Hang in there! Let us hold a parade outside your window! Don't go!

Up this morning at 6:00 AM, an evil personal record unparalleled since high school days of hitchhiking up to Whistler to ski. Spent the day feeling like a grape entombed within a Jell-O molded salad. Got to Iowa City expecting a freeze-drying arctic blast; instead it was a winter wonderland, and visions of Ali McGraw puffing out love poems to Ryan O'Neal seemed to fill the air.

Great used bookstores here, but expensive; that extra money is like a surcharge you pay the bookstore for winnowing out the crap. Bought a book of photojournalism about the Vietnam War.

The Prairie Lights reading was on NPR, I was swearing like a pirate, and I think the host was mad at me. But it wasn't gratuitous swearing, and let's face it, people swear. In a school it'd be out of place, but the real world? I don't know. It's this whole Americans-can't-handle-swearing thing, like I wrote about in Denver a week ago.

I told the story about how Spike Jonze, Andy Jenkins and Mark 'Lew' Lewman passed through Iowa City seven years ago when I was reading there, and we ended up doing a chocolate-tasting contest in the hotel room.

The hotel was weird. I think it was a Holiday Inn, but all the signage was wrapped in blue vinyl, and the in-room phones had stickers covering the name. It had the worst staff of any hotel I've stayed in. You people should be ashamed of yourselves! Sullen, incompetent, gum chewing, and the place was filthy. Just filthy, like the fourth best hotel in Grozny. But it's the only game in town, so they can get away with it. Any nascent hotel builders might be wise to consider Iowa City.

My upper lip is splitting from the dryness, and my complexion is disintegrating.

Almost finished the Dave Eggers book.

From Fear To Eternity (excerpt)  
Spike magazine  
December 01, 1996

If your name is Spike, you'll be the second one I know — which is statistically improbable. The other Spike is Spike Jonze, lately of MTV video fame, but before that of Dirt fame — a short-lived US magazine for 18-25s. He and the staff came up to Vancouver for a day and a half to visit me as part of their 'Discover America — a month on the road' issue. It was great fun, and then a few weeks later I was doing a reading at the University of Iowa and they were driving through and heckled me from the back and it was great fun. They'd just done this chocolate rating system on Canadian chocolate bars (essentially identical to England's — Kit Kat, Aero... ) and they gave the bars really low ratings, which sucked because have you ever tried US chocolate? Hork! They had just come back from Devil's Tower monument (Close Encounters of the Third Kind) where, after they finished a chocolate bar, they tossed it out to the prairie dogs. If the dogs ate it, the bar got an extra point. If they wouldn't eat it, the bar lost a point.

I decided that I had to defend my nation's chocolate's honour so I bought about 12 US bars at the Circle-K Mart and then we went to my hotel room and had a Tasting Session. I'd take a bite of a bar, make comments, spit it out into a waste paper basket and take a drink of water and move on to the next bar. I described the 3 Musketeers bar as having a definite log-in-the-toilet aspect. They printed this in the chart in their magazine and the company that makes 3 Musketeers bars went ballistic and pulled their ads and the magazine folded shortly thereafter. Whew! What a long story. So, hi.

Americans are obsessed with putting peanut butter in virtually every chocolate bar — why? It smells like dog doo.

You have to watch it because Americans go nuts if you slander their chocolate. They really do. I guess it's because it's such a gratifying signal that goes in early and deep into the child's mind.

Canadian Candy  
Dirt magazine #6  
'Special All Tour' September 1993 issue

[editors of Dirt:] Canadian candy bars are, on the whole, terrible. Here are brief reviews of what our Northern neighbors have to offer. The bars have been conveniently rated on a 1-5 scale, 5 being the best, but don't hold your breath. Andy/Lew/Spike judged all candy by taking a bite, chewing, swallowing, then cleansing the palate with spring water.

-☆☆ Crunchie:

"Crunchie was horrible ...like toxic Styrofoam ...danger."

★★½ Wunderbar:

"Somewhat of a \$100,000 Bar, but not so much caramel ...perfect, except it's extremely over-sugary."

★★ Kit Kat (Canadian version):

"Canadian chocolate just isn't as punchy ...made me feel cheap and dirty."

★★ Mirage:

"It's called Mirage because it looks like a full candy bar, but it's actually air ...it melts in your mouth because it has so many air pockets."

★★ Snack:

"Has all the qualities of a Baby Ruth, only with a Twix-like center ...Twix-like, but the substance inside is definitely not a cookie ...it's a tookie."

**★★ Crispy Crunch:**

“The white-trash cousin of a Butterfinger ...I would never buy this, but that’s only because I couldn’t if I wanted to.”

**-☆☆ Cadbury’s Dairy Milk:**

“Look at the tone. You already feel sick ...I realize now why I’ve never heard someone say, ‘Oh, I’m sending my girlfriend Canadian chocolates’ ...can be eaten in desperation only, although I might gnaw my own finger off first.”

**-☆☆ Eat-More:**

“Chocolate flavored sawdust with nuts.”

**★★★★ Caramilk:**

“I like this one. I could eat the whole thing if my teeth weren’t beginning to dissolve.”

**★★½ Sweet Marie:**

“Soft, fudgy logs ...tempting, but in a circus freak-show way.”

Vancouver, British Columbia; Douglas Coupland (excerpt)

Dirt magazine #6

'Special All Tour' September 1993 issue

Andy: May 02, 1993. Douglas Coupland lives on the west side near the beach. He's tall and slender as he walks towards us on the street — very personable, with a large laugh. Sharp and witty. Upstairs in his 'bunker' as he calls it — a modest apartment filled with memorabilia — we meet his studio assistant Kacey. They are working on a series of small hand-made books of stories Douglas has recently written, gluing and cutting each by hand. There are nine books and he's only making 20 of each. All are spoken for — being sent to friends as gifts. Bound to be great collectors' items.

Doug's 'projects' are simple, rewarding outlets for all the spare time that accompanies being modestly rich and famous: building an anatomically correct model of a human skull out of all-white Legos; visiting globe factories and nuclear test sights; applying for work repeatedly at various McDonalds.

He keeps getting rejected because the hiring managers are suspicious of why a man 10 years out of college with no criminal record wants to work the french fry vat. "The day I make Employee of the Month, I'd steal the plaque with my picture on it and quit." Doug explains.

After helping fold sheets and chatting for an hour or so, we head off in Doug's Jetta towards his childhood stomping grounds northwest of the city — a rainforest surrounding Capilano River. Absolutely amazing. We hike around at a quick pace for an hour or so, breathing in the humid air and forgetting all about Los Angeles, until at one point I realize how happy I feel to be away from there. I also notice I've been hesitant to say Los Angeles when people ask where I'm from. I'll sometimes say San Pedro, or I'll preface any response with a 'Well we all grew up in different parts of the country but....'

Back at the Coupland bunker, we drink Japanese sports drinks and cold Japanese black coffee from a can. I read two of his books while he does a phone interview in the other room. I continue reading as he talks to Spike and Lew. Eerie feeling. He definitely writes in his voice.

Andy: Are any autobiographical?

Doug: Everything's autobiographical. It's true, you know? Even a grocery list is. I mean, you can't write anything without having it be, on some level, completely about yourself.

Spike: Everyone's first book is autobiographical.

Doug: That would be exact, yeah.

Spike: Has anyone ever approached you and said, 'I would like to write your biography?'

Doug: Noooo. Boring. There's a lot of biographies people would rather read first.

Lew: You know whose biography I saw the other day that I just couldn't believe, it was that thick. It was thicker than Wilton's book (over 700 pages).

Doug: Who?

Lew: Michael Caine.

Doug: Really? Talk about a star who you couldn't care less about ...that's like 'Ruth Buzzi, My Story'.

Lew: Have you been approached about movies on your books?

Doug: Yeah. All the time.

Lew: Are you anti that?

Doug: If Jodie Foster calls me, then ...but, until then.

Spike: What is the scariest thing someone proposed to you?

Doug: Uh, in vitro fertilization.

Andy: No.

Doug: Yes.

Lew: Spike and I are both non-collegiate, so you'll have to explain the big vocabulary words.

Doug: Hey, I went to art school. But it's like, would you like to father, by a test tube, a child?

Spike: Wow!

Andy: Was it someone you knew or a stranger?

Doug: A stranger. Adding yet another dimension. Wow.

Lew: Were you flattered?

Doug: Of course.

Andy: Did they approach you on the street or through your publicist?

Doug: It was a letter given to me at a reading.

Andy: Speaking of readings, is that a pretty weird thing?

Doug: Oh, I like doing readings.

Andy: What about meeting the public?

Doug: Uh, I don't mind it.

Lew: When you read, what do you read?

Doug: New stuff. I never read old stuff.

Spike: This stuff (referring to his stories)?

Doug: Yeah, I'll be reading that in this upcoming tour.

Spike: Do you read to promote something, or just to do it?

Doug: Ummm, in the fall I'm doing it just to do it. I'm sort of grudgingly doing this mini-tour. The slacker tour. I'm going to like, these slacker towns.

Andy: Your publisher got you into it?

Doug: Well, because you have a relationship with your publisher, and they do work hard for you. You can't just shit on that relationship, so you gotta do something in return for them. I don't think it's like record companies or something like that. The music business must be so evil.

Lew: When you did your first book with them, did you get pushed around by the publisher, or have to do a lot of revision or anything?

Doug: No. When it comes to the actual physical act of writing, I'm really lazy, so I only want to do it once.

Lew: You said you make your books editor proof?

Doug: Well no, it's like, from working in magazines I know that you work with an editor, and usually it makes things better. So I like getting edited, that's never been a big issue with me. But, I have to beg for editing and I still don't get it. Most writers hate getting edited and they get edited all over the place. People think I'm gonna freak out if they so much as touch a semicolon, I'm like, 'Fuck, delete paragraphs, make me happy' I want guidance, you know?

Spike: What does your family think of all this?

Doug: They're like, 'That's nice. Are you coming home for dinner?'

American Candy  
 Dirt magazine #6  
 'Special All Tour' September 1993 issue

After hearing how poorly Canadian candy rated in our taste-testing, Douglas Coupland, noted Canadian candy expert and author, accepted our offer for rebuttal. We chose a few well-known American candy bars and fed Douglas enough chocolate to kill a goat. Here are his reactions and comments.

★★★★½ Caramello:

“Pleasing, brick-like aspect ...made by Hershey, a name I trust ...delicious, very high on the chocometer.”

★★ Bar None:

“An unexpected, finger-like structure, but too much peanut butter ...I would only eat this if it was the last one in the glove box.”

½ 3 Musketeers:

“Log-in-the-toilet look ...I’m tasting chemicals here ...if I got these in my Halloween bag, I’d huck ‘em at a car.”

★★ Milk Duds:

“Rodent pellet look ...a pleasing trip to the forest feel ...I expected it to be brittle, like biting into an old woman’s hip ...chocolate too waxy — raised my hopes only to crush them.

★★★★★ Whatchamacallit:

“Nice heft to it ...Looks kinda like dried pet food in the middle ...you can hear the crunch in your jawbones and inner ear ...definitely the best texture of any chocolate bar so far.”

★★★ 5th Avenue:

“Look up chocolate bar in the dictionary and you’ll see this ...the cross-section is an interesting geological mica aspect with dainty little flakes ...a pleasant surprise, has almost a salty taste to it.”

★ Butterfinger Chips:

“Chocolate’s a little grey, like in March when the snow melts and those little poohs come out ...a subtle citrus bouquet ...I can’t imagine myself ever saying, ‘Gee, I feel like a Butterfinger.’”

½ Zero:

(opens wrapper and discovers bar is completely white chocolate) “ Oh my god, this is like when you find out the woman’s actually a man in The Crying Game ...Nougat. Your grandmother eats nougat ...Zero gets a zero. No, it gets half a star for shock value.”

-☆ Payday:

“Really tough, like leather ...looks like a doggy chew toy ...aggressively terrible ...back to the lab, guys.”

★★★★★ PB Max:

“Don’t like the appearance ...Mmmm, peanutty without being vulgar ...This is something I’d remember and come back to.”

Diary: Special Treat! 'Diary' Column  
 Sassy magazine  
 July 1994

It was like science fiction: one entity divided among three different bodies — Jane [Pratt], Spike [Jonze] and Doug [Coupland] — cruising down Sunset Boulevard in Spike's Honda, 1:30 AM, suddenly, desperately, simultaneously craving toxic food, and screeching into a Circle K, not three blocks away from the Viper Room.

Give us Slurpees! Give us snot gum! Give us the fruits of modern chemistry!

Atmosphere description, the lighting:  
 Harsh.

The staff:  
 Justifiably wary of late-night trash-food shoppers.

Fellow shoppers:

- 1) Whisky a Go Go refugees (the hair!)
- 2) Funsters and funsterettes from the 'Shannen Doherty nightclubs' further down Sunset, sashaying in for diet Cokes and Fritos
- 3) Assorted street life of the sort that only LA generates — street people with really good cosmetic surgery
4. Spike: making Doug and Jane try on humiliating hats and 1970s Erik Estrada sunglasses — then photographing us

The surprise attraction:

The magazine rack. Forget the food. A complete analysis of the modern magazine industry ensued. Which led us to ask one of the grand questions of our day: Why is it that

the conversation always turns to discussion of leggy supermodels?

Oh you wacky models — Linda! Christy! Kate! And all of you others! Behave yourselves, you crazy young things — save those pennies! Treasure your youth! Be flowers but close your petals when the darkness of night arrives!

An afterthought:

This is good advice not only for supermodels, but also for those of us who are not supermodels. Anyway ...Jane and magazines; magazines and Jane. I cannot separate the two. It was a good night. xox Doug

Comment posted on Morrissey-Solo message board:

> Douglas Coupland mentions Morrissey at reading

> From Jamie:

Douglas Coupland, the author of *Girlfriend in a Coma*, read from his new book, *Miss Wyoming*, here in Iowa City on 2/2/00. He was saying how the female protagonist in the new book was based roughly on Kristy McNichol and joked that he hoped she didn't hate his guts.

> "My last book was oriented around a number of Smiths and Morrissey song bites," he started, then paused for effect. "How would you like to go through life knowing MORRISSEY hates you?!" A goodly portion of the audience clapped and laughed, seeming to know of Mozzer's occasional bouts of vindictive feelings.

> "So, during the tour for that book," he continued, "the PRESIDENT of his US fan club came up to me in Boston, really quiet and not smiling. And I asked (scrunches face, looks nervous), 'well....what does HE think?'"

> "He was quite flattered," she said.

> When I got my book signed, I told him that I was going to Chicago to see Morrissey next week. Coupland made a disappointed noise and said, "Oh, I'm so jealous!" Evidently, he knows about the tour and can't see it because of his own commitments.

> By the way, his website, [www.coupland.com](http://www.coupland.com) is really cool and worth checking out.

posted by David T at 9:20 AM on February 4, 2000

Day 32

Iowa City - Madison

February 03, 2000

Honesty time: I'm writing this entry two days later, so I'm forgetting much of this particular day. It took six hours to make a triangle between Iowa City, Chicago/O'Hare and Madison. In Chicago, all of these executive types on the commuter flight were getting huffy because their carry-on bags — vast, like the Ark from Raiders of the Lost Ark — had to be checked in as luggage. So, I looked at the nametags and they were all executives from Kraft (how Wisconsin!) So now I've seen the dark underbelly of Kraft Dinner.

Wonderful reading at the University of Wisconsin Bookstore. Lovely crowd, and they closed the whole store just for the reading. I asked everybody to draw their favourite book.

No time to properly eat during the day, so I had ordered-in pizza at midnight. They put sugar in the crust! It was so odd. Like pizza flavored pastry.

Very homesick more than anything else. One-month anniversary of the tour's start.

Day 33

Madison - Milwaukee

February 04, 2000

So wonderful to drive to a new city instead of flying! One hour on a sunny wintry Interstate. Ahhhh.

Milwaukee is very industrial-meets-post-industrial, with a massive freeway cloverleaf in the heart of the old downtown core, like something from deepest San Bernardino County. Bricks, Schlitz and Beatrice and steam puffing out of all the infrastructural orifices.

Was a prisoner of the room doing phone stuff all afternoon. Made a brief trip to a used bookstore located temptingly across the street. And the Toronto Raptors checked in and the lobby was filled with tables of food; stocked up on apples.

A lovely reading — a slightly older crowd. I handed out pens and index cards to the audience and forgot to ask them to draw anything — d'oh! So at the end I quickly asked people to write in their five favourite books. Guilt.

Tomorrow is a free day. Joy!

Day 34  
Milwaukee - Chicago  
February 05, 2000

Had an amazing conversation with the car driver while going down Highway 94. We talked about families.

Got to Chicago and hit the art galleries.

I'm actually writing this two days later, and nothing else springs to mind. I'm being supremely lazy here, but there's also not too much else to say about the day, either. Blah.

Day 35

Chicago

February 06, 2000

I feel like I'm 19 and stuck in Europe for a few days waiting for my non-changeable charter air flight to take off. Time is just creaking by and all I want to do is be home opening my mail and seeing what's in bloom.

Tick tick tick tick tick tick.

A short entry, but what a day.

Entertaining Mr. X by Fred A. Bernstein (excerpts)

The Independent

interview conducted on February 06, 2000

On a bitterly cold day, on the North Side of Chicago, Douglas Coupland, premier chronicler of Generation X since his 1991 book popularised that term, is looking for a Kinko's. His plan is to purchase bubble-wrap and cardboard cartons; after a day spent buying ceramic vases, he needs to ship the lot home to Vancouver. But once inside the store, Coupland can't resist the siren call of the rent-by-the-minute computers. Soon he is immersed in Coupland.com, a website so dense that the laptop back in his hotel room doesn't do it justice. "This is the first time I've seen it at full speed in weeks," he says of his site.

Among its features are diaries of the days he's been touring to promote his seventh book, *Miss Wyoming*, and collages produced daily from the detritus (ticket stubs, newspaper ads) he accumulates on tour, which he arranges with scissors and glue and then sends home to Vancouver for uploading.

He is also busily 'repurposing' mid-century American ceramics. On the day I met him, he walked from store to store, picking up half a dozen pieces. "I have a morphological agenda," he said. "I'll buy a doggie chew toy if it has the right shape." He doesn't look at the prices, nor does he tell the shopkeepers that he plans to cut, drill and sandblast their precious wares, combining them into sculptures reminiscent of Brancusi (although he resists the analogy, since Brancusi shapes, he says, have become 'Candle Shack' clichés).

Using the language of visual arts to describe his writing, Coupland says he's moved from quilting (which, he says, creates a field, but not a pictorial space) to collaging — which "creates a pictorial space, however fractured." (Ironically, he writes on scraps of paper, creating as much of a visual as a verbal collage, because "as a Canadian and a Presbyterian, I find using blank white paper presumptuous.") The other artists Coupland

says have influenced him are Andy Warhol and Jenny Holzer. It's almost too easy to note that both made their reputations for appropriation — Warhol of everyday objects, Holzer of everyday ideas.

It was four years ago, when he was reading the National Enquirer that Coupland came upon the story that inspired *Miss Wyoming*. It was, he says as if reciting the headline, “Leathery movie producer Robert Evans marries Eighties soap star Catherine Oxenberg.” To anyone else, the article might have been worth a moment's contemplation, but to Coupland, it resonated with important themes of renewal: “Here were two been-around-the-block-a-few-times people,” says Coupland (whose adjectives are as long as other people's sentences). “Suddenly, for a few minutes, they found hope. They were alive.”

Coupland is quick to point out that this isn't a roman à clef. Its characters — John Johnson for Evans and Susan Colgate for Oxenberg — don't marry, although they do end up in the Enquirer after each stages a disappearance: Colgate, a former beauty queen (thus *Miss Wyoming*) walks away from a plane crash before the rescue workers arrive; as long as everyone thinks she's dead, why not enjoy the freedom? She would rather live in a dumpster than be hemmed in by her public persona. So, too, Johnson effaces his identity (he re-emerges, Prince-like, as ‘.’ after the city clerk requires at least one keystroke on the name-change form), and starts walking east from Eden, with no destination in mind. Along the way, he encounters ‘nobodies’ — who, he notices, are almost always men. “Women,” he thought, “had so many more ways to connect themselves to the world - children, families, friends.” But before Coupland can explore this theme, he retires his characters in a fussy cinematic conclusion.

Coupland does have non-television sources; he admits he carried around notepads for years, “writing down what everybody said.” In 1997, he says, he began to resent having to do that, and stopped, although he figured, “Oh, fuck, there goes my career.” Now he relies

on the subtitles that he says he sees all the time (“Essentially, I see every word I hear or say in front of me.”)

If the book is selling, however, it may be largely because of Coupland's indefatigable touring — despite his claim to hate the ‘flight-airport-flight-airport’ rhythm of U.S. travel. (In England, he says, it's better because “you get on a Willy Wonka train, and you eat a sandwich and there are sheep outside.”)

In the hotel coffee shop, he selects the \$18.95 buffet, then eats a single pastry. He apologises for his outfit (moss-green slacks and moss-green sweater), claiming that, more than a month into his book tour, everything else is at the cleaners. (In truth, the items delivered that evening don't look very different from his clothes-of-last-resort.)

Later, he turns to his collages, cutting up old magazines as blithely as he'll later violate the pottery piled up in the hallway. The work is therapeutic (and the only kind of therapy he's been in, despite several deep depressions, which he calls “one of Nature's most powerful humbling strategies.”) Making things with his hands, he says, “is my way of turning off the subtitles I see all the time.”

It isn't easy turning subtitles into a sustained literary effort. It's less interesting to read about Susan Colgate's mad dash across America than about Douglas Coupland's recorded daily on his website.

Bedroom shocker ended Dynasty beauty's 10-day wacko marriage  
National Enquirer  
August 11, 1998

It's a story that could happen only in La-La-Land — the recent marriage of 68-year-old movie producer Robert Evans and 36-year-old Dynasty beauty Catherine Oxenberg ended after just 10 days!

“I can't believe I married Bob!” Catherine told a friend. “The reason is laughable now, but at the time it seems so right.”

“My good friend and I went on a spiritual retreat in June. The message was to help others, and it was so hammered into my mind that I couldn't wait to find a person to help.”

“Then at the beginning of July. Bob threw a birthday party for a mutual friend and I attended. That evening Bob and I talked for hours and I felt like a bolt of lightning came out of the sky.”

“Bob talked about his recent stroke, told me how much he wanted a woman like me in his life. I thought this was a sign to help a person in need and Bob was the one. We spent the next seven days together. Then he suggested we marry!”

“I was already involved with my live-in boyfriend David [Michaels], but we were having problems and Bob is one charismatic man.”

“The idea of having sex with him seemed wrong, but when Bob told me he couldn't have sex since his stroke, I figured, what the hell — I'll marry him because I desperately want to help him.”

So British-bred Catherine tied the knot with Bob, who supervised production of *The Godfather*, *Love Story* and other hits, on July 12. It was her first marriage, his fifth.

“Week one seemed to be OK,” Catherine told her friend. “Then on Wednesday, July 22, I was taking a nap in Bob’s bed and got the surprise of my life when the door opened and in walked Bob.”

The producer was stark naked – and it was obvious he was quite capable of consummating the marriage, Catherine told her friend.

She said, “What are you doing? You told me you couldn’t have sex!”

Bob shot back, “As you can see I was only kidding when I told you that. You’re my wife now so let’s enjoy each other.”

Catherine continued, “I was shocked, I jumped out of bed and said ‘I’m not your wife anymore. I’m leaving you and never coming back!’”

Another friend of the actress added, “Catherine told me, ‘I was temporarily insane.’ Now she’s back home, begging David to take her back, and it looks like he will.”

Evans, Oxenberg untie the knot by Army Archerd  
Variety magazine  
July 27, 1998

Producer Robert Evans and actress Catherine Oxenberg have agreed to annul their marriage, which was performed July 12 in Evans' Beverly Hills home.

Evans tells me, "During my recent medical crisis, Catherine was there for me. And I fell for her. So much so, I forgot it had only been six weeks since I had been hit with a stroke. Between my various film commitments and the physical therapy, it became unrealistic to believe I could simultaneously incorporate a whole new family, home, and lifestyle. That would be terribly unfair to Catherine."

Oxenberg told me, "As we all know, during a life and death experience, people tend to bond very quickly. Both of us acted spontaneously and we regret any confusion we may have caused. At this point, we have reverted to friendship — being preferable to vows."

Evans added, "We both agreed to annul our marriage but not our friendship. Who knows, down the road maybe we'll give it another shot."

Evans is now developing three features, and plans to write a book about his stroke, titled *I Heard the Fat Lady Sing*.

Day 36  
Chicago  
February 07, 2000

I did it again! I handed out index cards to everybody in the audience and then promptly forgot to ask them to write something on them. D'oh! D'oh! D'oh! So I told everybody about how a few years ago I was worried I was losing my memory, and that I tried to remember all the counties in the United States as a foil. And then I asked them to write down their home town and home county. They're so exotic sounding (to Canadian ears, at least):

Cook County, Illinois, Chicago, Homewood, Palos Park, Hickory Hills, Schaumburg, Elmwood Park, Buffalo Grove, Tinley Park, Morton Grove, Des Plaines, Park Forest, Evergreen Park, Western Springs, Mt. Prospect, Arlington Heights, Glenwood, Bloomfield Hills

I thanked everybody for showing up for the reading and for (no doubt) taping the 'Mary & Rhoda' made for TV movie.

Oh — in a taxi I turned a corner this afternoon and a sign said, 'End of Historic Route 66,' and it was just this cheesy little brown sign. I mean, in Santa Monica there's a pier to drive the car off of. Here it's just ...a corner.

## DCML Mix CD

netCoupland web community mailing list on ListBot  
posted online in 2000

netCoupland is a web community mailing list on ListBot for reader fans. The following is about the mix cd created and shared by its members.

> Timothy Bieniosek.

19 years of age.

Born in Northeastern Ohio.

Studying computer science at Drexel University, in the City of Brotherly Love.

> Introduction [by Tim Bienlosek, list member]:

The DCML CD is a project we (the list) came up with in the summer of '99 (insert Bryan Adams guitar riff).

> What happened was this: As a way of getting to know one another, each listee posted their 'Desert Island Disks,' which are the 10 CDs you would take with you if you were stranded on a desert island. We noticed there were some remarkable similarities, and a list of everyone's choices was compiled. From that I extracted our favorite artists. We voted on our favorite songs by those artists, and arrived at the track listing you see below.

> I volunteered to coordinate the project as I am a college student with an excessive CD collection, a CD burner on my computer, and too much free time.

> Basically, this is just a favor I'm doing for an increasingly closely-knit group of online friends. Anyone who'd like a CD is welcomed to one (or several), I only ask that you help me out with the cost of materials, as enumerated below.

## &gt; Track listing:

R.E.M.	Daysleeper	3:39
Radiohead	Fake Plastic Trees	4:50
Tori Amos	Pretty Good Year	3:26
The Beatles	Across the Universe	3:43
The Smiths	Girlfriend in a Coma	2:01
Smashing Pumpkins	1979	4:25
David Bowie	Space Oddity	5:18
Pearl Jam	Better Man	4:28
Belle and Sebastian	The State That I Am In	4:57
They Might Be Giants	End of the Tour	3:18
Air	Sexy Boy	4:58
Pink Floyd	Brain Damage/Eclipse	5:54
The Cure	Boys Don't Cry	2:34
U2	With or Without You	4:56

Plus a few surprises... :-)

> The CD will come in a paper sleeve (jewel cases are expensive to buy, expensive to ship, and break easily), decorated by digital artwork done (or, more accurately, stolen ;-) by me. All tracks were copied direct from the original CD, with no compression in between. In other words, it should be of the highest quality. If anyone wants mp3s of the tracks made, let me know and we can work something out.

Day 37

Chicago - Ann Arbor

February 08, 2000

Oh my. The final reading of the North American tour. It felt like the last scene in Carrie when Amy Irving is in slow motion and the cars in the background run backwards. It was three hours, but it felt longer, in a good and memorable way.

But first of all, the escort — driving from Detroit Airport to Ann Arbor — one of those people who can't have silence, so the moment I was finished answering a question, there was another question within a tenth of a second, really boring questions, and I finally pretended to take a nap because there's no other way to deal with that kind of person. I mean, I couldn't just jump out of the car at 72 mph, though it certainly passed through my mind. And here's a thought: if people are always taking naps around you, maybe you should, um, think about things.

I stayed at one of those operated-by-Muppets hotels like I did last tour in St. Louis. At least now I recognize these things and make mental provisions.

Ann Arbor is a pretty college town. Impressive faculty buildings like UW in Madison. It takes just as much work to build an ugly building as a good one. Why don't people just put up good buildings like they do here? The ironic thing is that people who build bad buildings are the sort of people who are also really worried about resale — and nothing helps a building hold value like good design. The world!

Warner-Lambert and Pfizer announced their merger today, and Ann Arbor is a Warner-Lambert town, so the 'townsfolk' are paranoid about local jobs being cut. Needless to say, press releases said there won't be any cuts, but it's like the Ritz in Boston a few weeks ago — everybody knows they're toast.

Mobs of readers, and a fair number drove from places galaxies away, and I never know how to say thank you to this sort of reader because my tolerance for any car ride over 30 minutes is nil. If you're out there and reading this, thanks, and I hope you made it back okay.

What else ...one reader brought I some old Soviet Life magazines with great collage potential. Lots of weird cameras tonight too. Only one audience member watched the 'Mary & Rhoda' show last night, one out of 200, which was shocking, and I asked, and she said there was no laugh track. I mean, what were they thinking?

As the hotel was a operated-by-Muppets hotel, I took a cab out to the fringe of town to the 24-hour supermarket and bought yogurt and other morning foods. I also found a box of house-brand macaroni and cheese for the ongoing collection — no spirals or white cheddar variants allowed.

Day 38  
Ann Arbor - Vancouver  
February 09, 2000

Home.

Washed-Up Child Star Spills All While Drunk and Sitting in Seat 24E (Coach) en route from LAX to Honolulu on December 31, 1999  
posted on Coupland.com  
February 2000

“Actors. Actresses — all just a bunch of freaks. All they care about is how they come across. Not how they look, but how they come across. Want to know the single best way to have an actor stuck to you like a fridge magnet?”

“Sure.”

“You say to him or her, ‘Gee, it’s amazing the effect you have on people. Do you fully know the effect you have people?’ Trust me. After that, they’re yours. You want to know more? Name a star. Any star.”

“Erin \_\_\_\_\_.”

“Erin moved to Sacramento to drink herself into hell. She married a Mr. Goodwrench repairman who left her after eight months, and that sent her screaming into the suburbs, and she cut hatchmarks onto her inner arm on some stranger’s Pontiac. She told the cops it was one for every abortion she’d ever had.”

“I knew about Sacramento and the divorce, but all the rest?”

“Look for stars who can’t wear short-sleeve shirts. There’s a lot of them.”

“Okay how about Jenny \_\_\_\_\_ from the late 1970s.”

“Jenny used to be textbook pretty but she lost her prettiness as she got older, but without becoming interesting looking in the bargain. She tried to become a serious actress but she couldn’t rise above her TV stereotype or her love of cocaine. She turned into a Eurotrash Queen. She lived in a hovel in New York scamming dinners and weekends and coke from garbagy Italians and Germans. For them she was like a cross between a long-running in-joke and a hot potato. She ended up back in her parents’ den in Batavia, New York, I think. Last heard of, she was confusing local homeowners who answer their doorbells to find Jenny, all empty eyed and dim voiced, raising money for God.”

“I missed the Eurotrash connection. But I knew about the pamphleteering from the Internet.”

“There you go.”

“What about Donna \_\_\_\_\_?”

“She fluked into a cash cow TV series stint which ended after four years. She was a limelight pig. She had to be the focus in any situation, and her reputation for being difficult was so bad that people stopped hiring her. She started spreading her legs for magazines

and before you knew it, people were saying she was, ‘fucked out.’ Some quack psychotherapist told her she should get a job and be a part of the real world, so she ended up in minimum wage hell in Laughlin, Nevada, working as a barmaid in a corporate-run casino. She got two 15-minute breaks and a 45-minute lunch. During lunch she’d go spend her tips on crystal meth out behind the delivery bays, and after work she’d bang elderly conventioners, which is what got her thrown out of town keyster — first, like a cartoon character. She was just so lost on drugs. So lost, and so desperate to get back into the spotlight. She held up a branch of a Wells Fargo bank by pretending to carry a handgun which was actually her fist clamped onto a Dalkon Shield. I mean, we all saw the pictures on TV and stuff, but what I noticed was that she was wearing the same navy blazer in the stickup that she wore to a CBS promotional barbecue a decade before that I’d seen in *People*. It had the CBS logo.”

“I never knew about the jacket. But of course I remember the stick up from TV. Everybody does.”

“Look at it this way — society makes child stars just as much as it makes tractors or cameras — hundreds of child stars every decade, and only a few survive and flourish as they get old. The others? Well, they end up like Erin. Like Jenny. Like Donna. Like me.”

“What about you?”

“I’m on this plane, aren’t I?”

“So?”

“What time do we cross the dateline?”

“In a half hour. The stewardesses are getting champagne ready.”

“I hope we crash. That’s why I’m here. Y2K shit. That’s why I chose this flight. There’s no car waiting for me on the other end. I don’t have a hotel booked. Nothing.”

“But what if we don’t crash?”

“That’s the difference between you and me. I believe it will. You don’t.”

“But what if it doesn’t?”

“Don’t you listen? I BELIEVE IT WILL.”

“You’re making everybody stare.”

“You think I’m fixable. You think I’m not a broken person.”

“It’s amazing the effect you have on people.”

"Oh shut up."

Day 39  
Vancouver - London  
February 25, 2000

Travel day.

Airline:

British Airways, Flight 84, 9 hours and 15 minutes.

Day 40  
London  
February 26, 2000

Here is London — brash, outrageous and free. Teeth and bones in the Thames mud at low tide; fibre-optic cable being laid in the soil under Pudding Lane.

Cars like candy; hungry white birds.

I never saw so much I liked.

Day 41

London

February 27, 2000

I woke up too early.

I undergrounded to the Whitechapel Gallery, for a show about 1970's conceptual art. It was well put together, but I don't know how many more times I can see a pile of dirt on a gallery floor. The whole 1968 crew is in total power now so I suppose its mounds and mounds and mounds until they all die out circa 2020.

Magazine article in today's The Independent. The reporter wrote about my (literally) laundry. I think it's maybe approaching the time to pull some sort of plug.

Went book hunting on Charing Cross Road. All the art bookstores were closed ...maddening! But it saved me a pile of money, but then money's just money and there were all these stunning books.

Slept for three hours ...so I threw my up-until-now perfect jet lag adjustment totally out of whack. Piss.

Late dinner with the Wallpaper crew. Tyler Brûlé is in Palm Springs on a fashion shoot (which is so Tyler). Popped in to see the new offices, which were just as one would hope they'd be. I left them a square dot table I created with Edmonton-based Pure Design as a gift and it really is so beautiful.

Up late ...it's 2:30 AM as I write this, so I'll look like crap for photos tomorrow ...wait! I no longer care about my appearance ...I'm free! Heavy day tomorrow. Reading Carol Shields new book of short stories, Dressing Up for the Carnival, before bed.

Day 42  
London  
February 28, 2000

The paper in the early editions of my books is turning yellow and I'm starting to feel like a ...haiku or something.

The bookstores here have such a vast selection of fiction, half of which I've never seen in Canadian stores. It's a parallel universe.

Tonight's book reading was at a huge theme park mall called O2 in Swiss Cottage, and it was like something out of deepest Los Angeles. The room was a gymnasium with no ventilation, and several hundred people plus myself emerged from the CO<sub>2</sub> experience about 3 IQ points stupider.

I twisted my ankle in Piccadilly. At the hotel I had a photo taken by one of those rock-n-roll photographers who also does photos for Hello! magazine. I told him I like Hello! because when they do at-home shots, you can see the traffic patterns in the nape of the carpeting.

He was in a rush because he had to go to Heathrow then to Los Angeles to shoot Warren Beatty.

Very sleepy. I know I'm forgetting something ...what?

Oh ...I'm reading small bits from all my books this time, like songs. It's a new thing. Tonight at the event I asked everybody to write on the index cards their 3 favourite songs.

Day 43

London – Newcastle

February 29, 2000

Oof! Very tired tonight. A long day. The whole country looks like such a dream of a country, and people seem unsure whether to rejoice in global weather changes, or to gnash their teeth.

British trains are so posh now! Focaccia and chives (truth be told I hate focaccia, and rue the day it was invented; BLT for me.)

Arrived in Newcastle around 5:00 PM. They ran out of coal here a few years ago, and so they decided to become ‘the fun city’ – and it is.

Lovely reading at Tyneside Cinema. I asked everybody to draw themselves on their supplied index cards, and to rewrite underneath it the name they always wanted. Mine was: Andrew.

Half the guys in the audience were named Andrew. Is anybody ever happy in this world?

Got back to the hotel late and I had eggs benedict for dinner and boiled cabbage. Good clean, focaccia-free food.

Must sleep.

Day 44

Newcastle – Manchester – London

March 01, 2000

The day that was actually two days compressed into one – or so it felt. A good day but long. This is how it must feel to be Madeleine K. Albright.

Glorious train rides ...sheep, meadows, larks, nuclear cooling towers, and cartoon clouds. Newcastle has these steep, tangled roads like Bel Air canyons, but covered in bridges, viaducts, castles, and dungeons. I've only been there 3 times but I have a Newcastle dream at least once a month.

Then off to 'sunny Manchester', which is now a clean 'post-city' city; glass and steel, and like every place in the UK, trenches are everywhere for the laying of optical fibre.

The city was inundated with football hooligans. I said to Karen from Harper Collins, "Hey look – yob!" and she blanched and said that's not a word one uses too loudly.

The reading was in a theatre/club called Planet K. I wanted to make a joke, that the original name was Planet C, but they changed it because 'K' is funnier – but I think that was too American for a UK crowd.

We only had 90 minutes because we had to catch a train so the event was so, so rushed and (to me) unsatisfying. I asked everybody to draw Canadian flags on the index cards. Oh – one guy asked me if North Americans were using the word 'wanker' and I assured him that this was indeed the case.

No sign of Morrissey at the event ...blast it!

The heat wasn't working on the train back to London ...it felt like that TV movie of Stephen King's *The Langoliers*.

Oh — Karen calls my down vest a 'puffer' — I laugh every time.

I'm bagged.

Day 45

London – Brighton – London

March 02, 2000

No more jet lag — good! The more I see of London, the more I want to live here. It's one of the few cities where instead of being homogenized by global forces, its going 'fractal.'

I did press. Went to Zwemmer's art and photography bookshop on Charing Cross Road ...dropped a bomb.

Ninety minute drive to Brighton. It was a good reading tonight; 85 guys named Paul and 85 gals named Sara(h). England!

Tomorrow I have time to go exploring ...jailbreak!

Day 46  
London  
March 03, 2000

Longest book reading I've ever done — over an hour of greatest hits, parts of Generation X, Life After God, Microserfs and Miss Wyoming.

The Borders on Charing Cross was mobbed and all the people at the back couldn't hear a thing — only the Charlie Brown teacher noise. So, it could only have been dull for them.

At the signing afterward, a group of people who'd collectively come from all over Europe just for this one reading showed up and they were so ...kind and so lovely that after they left I had to go over into the back of the store behind a pillar and cry for a minute because across the years I've always felt like I was writing into an empty room ...and I've never felt like I was a part of anything, even after all the good things that have happened since 1991, and then suddenly there were these people who were ...such kind and good people, and for a few moments before my psyche healed over and returned me to my usual lonely self, I felt that I'd actually touched some souls in the way I'd always hoped I'd touch souls, like being in love, but also like touching minds and belonging, as if we shared a secret hideaway up in a tree, or a cabin in the sky. Life is so hard. And it's so long and so short, and sometimes I think that the only moments that matter are those moments where you connect, and everything else is filler and crap and drudgery. I don't know. I feel different about life now. Slightly different than I felt about life yesterday, and different in a better way. There's that line by Celine, 'We live as we dream, alone. To break the spell we mix with the others. We are not born in isolation, but some times it feels that way.' Imagine going through your whole life and never feeling isolated — that would be heaven — and last night it felt like there at least existed the possibility of going through life without isolation. It's so much to ask for, but the only thing worth asking for. I mean, isn't it?

I'm in Covent Garden as I type this, and they want me off their computer.

Tomorrow's a day off. Joy.

Day 47  
London  
March 04, 2000

Day off!

Ambled, strolled, moseyed, lollygagged about London, and it was kind of a dream.

At 3:00 I had drinks with the producers of CNN's Cold War series, which I listed as my favourite 'book' of 1999 even though it was a TV documentary. When we got up to leave, a woman from the restaurant came up to me saying, "Sir! You've forgotten your bag!" and she handed me a white plastic shopping bag. I couldn't remember if it was mine or not, so I opened it up, looked in, and it was full of the smelliest cheeses imaginable. Then from the table behind us I heard, "Oi! That's my bag there, mate," and it was Bob Geldof. Brush with fame.

Day 48

London – Glasgow

March 5, 2000

On the flight up to Glasgow I brought out this old Petula Clark 33 album cover I bought in a junk shop. I put my hand in it and put on a small Petula Clark puppet show for Karen — when across the aisle this old Scottish guy — late 60something, says, “Oi! That's Pet Clark! Can I see that?” I gave it to him, and he said, “I was in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina two weeks ago and saw Pet playing there. Lovely girl, she is.” (!!!!) So, Pet's still out there packing them in.

Everybody on the plane was being almost obscenely obsequious to this old guy. We tried to figure out if he was Lord British Airways. And on the ground people were acting like he was the Pope. He probably owns all of us, and we don't even know it.

Glasgow = Rain.

Moody. Dark. Hills. Like San Francisco in some ways.

Final reading of the tour. I couldn't believe it was the final reading. It didn't make sense to my brain. I went on for 90 minutes — the longest reading I've ever done, period. And most of the people in the line-up afterward were named Fiona or Stephen. It was like The Midwich Cuckoos.

Eurostar train to Paris tomorrow. Is the tour over? Again, my brain refuses to acknowledge the fact. Germany in Fall. I suppose it never ends, really.

Best tour ever. Not even a question.

The Book Tour Kit and Game  
posted on Coupland.com  
February 2000

Last November in NYC, I met Tom Wolfe at the start of his Man in Full tour. Then, a few weeks later, the two of us were slated to attend a lunch in Toronto being held by a mutual friend. Knowing this, I wanted to make a present for Tom, something to acknowledge the surrealistic structure and pace of book tours.

I tried to think of something tour-ish to give him to mark his tour's end. So, I brought along the 'TO MY CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND...' rubber stamp that I used on the 1995 Microserfs tour. Then, on the flight to Toronto I decided I'd make him a proper 'Book Tour Kit and Game.' I made the whole thing in the hotel room later that night. It's all cobbled together from junk one finds in a typical airport/hotel travel day. I built it atop a foam board that was leaning against the wall of the King Edward Hotel's business center.

Tom got a kick out of it, I think. One reaction upon reading the square where I mention the media escort's Taurus with the filthy interior: 'I've BEEN in that Taurus!' I also think the kit taps into some universal truths about book tours whether you're fiction or non-fiction or cookbooks.

Anybody seeking extra info on the subject might consider renting Michael Moore's documentary film, The Big One, which is genius.

I am the world's grouchiest tour author. I ask the publishers to let people know this in advance so that they're not surprised when I come across like Oscar Madison from the Odd Couple. Part of the problem is repetition. People ask the same questions over and over, and this is only natural. But in my head, I feel like I'm cheating if I give the same answer in Seattle that I gave in Chicago. Actors have no trouble with this (how do they do it?) but for

me it's hard. If I meet anyone on tour and I grouse at you, please, consider this advance warning.

Also, I need 9 hours of sleep a night and I don't get it on tours and it turns me into a robot. Just when I ought to be putting my best foot forward, people instead see me at my worst. It's frustrating. And in the US in particular, the onus of an interview is for the author to 'bond' with the interviewer and become a friend. This is fine, but it's hard to be in the friend-making mode on a tour. The best an author can do is be civil. But the Europeans despise you if you try to be their friend. So, there's a big gap right there.

The most enjoyable city for a book tour: Newcastle, England

The worst city for a book tour: Los Angeles

The most energy-demanding city for a book tour: Toronto

The most interesting city for a book tour: Helsinki

The most civilized city for a book tour: Amsterdam

The most civilized book tour city: London

The most bizarre city for book tour: Halifax

The best US book tour city: Portland

Publishers have a selection of mostly women in each city who function as media escorts. They take you from, say, a radio station to a local daily paper to the venue. Their job is an

important one – all tours would collapse without these people – and they bring with them an almost universal personality type which is never going to change, so one has to go along with them. The older they are, the more experienced they are, and they get the job done, bang bang bang. The younger ones are where things go random ...don't know the city ...don't know how hotels work ...cars are dirty and barely functional. They can really screw up an otherwise okay day, and if they do, they get away with it scott free. So on this next tour I'm going to be rating the media escorts in a daily update.

What they say:

“I've just started reading your book and I'm really enjoying it.”

What they mean:

“I'm reading 'Hollywood Wives.’”

What they say:

“We'll be there in another ten minutes.”

What they mean:

“We're lost.”

What they say:

“To be honest, I'm not too familiar with your work.”

What they mean:

“I drew straws with my friend, Elaine, and she got to drive Ann-Margret.”

What they say:

“We'll eat dinner between the stock signing and the reading.”

What they mean:

“Room service club sandwiches at 11:45 PM.”

What they say:

“You look exhausted.”

What they mean:

“Please flip out on the media escort in your next city, not on me.”

What they say:

“I'm looking forward to reading your book.”

What they mean:

“I can get \$6.50 for it at the second hand shop.”

72nd Academy Award Winners  
Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles  
aired on television March 26, 2000

Best Actor: Kevin Spacey, American Beauty

Best Actress: Hilary Swank, Boy's Don't Cry

Best Supporting Actor: Michael Caine, The Cider House Rules

Best Supporting Actress: Angelina Jolie, Girl Interrupted

Best Director: Sam Mendes, American Beauty

Best Picture: American Beauty

Day 49

Victoria, British Columbia

April 01, 2000

April Fool's Day. I didn't think I'd been nabbed until I arrived at the theater for the reading and there was a big sign out front saying Douglas COPE-land was to appear. Very Spinal Tap. Nobody escapes. I suppose this was technically the last city for Miss Wyoming even though Glasgow was X number of weeks ago.

Good theater with great acoustics. Behind me was the stage set for a domestic comedy. It was as if I was giving a reading from the set of *The Happy Homemaker*. It was great. The audience paid \$7.50 for tickets so I felt I had to read for a long time, and I did. 90 minutes all told? But then I paid \$29.50 to see Steven Wright last year and he was only on stage for 50 minutes. He's on to something.

Victoria is pretty but there are so many traffic lights and cars — wow. Their traffic is worse than Vancouver, which is saying a lot. Just so many ...cars. And gaming stores — *Dungeons and Dragons* and the like. I was told it's the Goth capital of North America. Sounds probable. And so many antiques. I guess it's because of all the old people there — when they die the relatives phone from Quebec or somewhere and say, "Liquidate everything."

Chapter Six (excerpt)  
Miss Wyoming  
published in 1999

“So what do you want?” Cindy asked.

“Truth be told,” John said, “the one thing in this world I want more than anything else is a great big crowbar, to jimmy myself open and take whatever creature that's sitting inside and shake it clean like a rug and then rinse it in a cold, clear lake like up in Oregon, and then I want to put it under the sun to let it heal and dry and grow and sit and come to consciousness again with a clear and quiet mind.”

The CD player clicked and purred as it changed albums, and Cindy and Krista kept their bodies still. Cindy said, “Okay. I'll work for you.”

Krista said, “Me, too. I'm in.”

John said, “Good,” and music came on, Edvard Grieg, a flute solo. “What's going to be your next move then — John?” asked Krista.

“I'm going to liquidate myself.”

“Like going offshore or something? Taxes?” asked Cindy.

“No. I'm going to erase myself. I'm going to stop being me.” John saw the look on the twins' faces, and it wasn't fear, but neither was it comprehension. “No. Not suicide. But suicide's cousin. I want to disappear.”

“You've lost me,” said Cindy.

“I'm going to start my own witness relocation program.”

“Help us out here, John.”

“It's easy. I don't want to be me anymore. I think I've gone as far as I can go in this body.”

“In this body?”

“Yeah.”

“Who gets your money?” Cindy asked.

I Don't Miss Wyoming  
Vancouver  
November 01, 2020

Friends of mine had a baby daughter last month. Her name is Paloma, and when I met her I said, "You know, when you're my age, I'll be 116." I then realized Paloma will see the twenty-second century. Me? I wonder if I'll even see the year 2040, a point in time as far away from now as was 2020 back in 2000.

\* \* \*

The year 2000 was a strange place, possibly our last good year. The 1990s were over but 9-11 had yet to happen. The 'internet' as a word was still capitalized and it had yet to turn violent on us. A temporary (and cyclical) tech bust aside, humanity's collective future still felt as though it was harmoniously aligned with whatever new technologies were about to be developed.

\* \* \*

I've been in book publishing for thirty years now, and have been consistently engaged in watching it evolve in real time — as well as watching a relentless stream of boogeymen threatening to destroy the industry: the collapse of the independent stores; the rise of the super-chains like Barnes & Noble; Amazon; ebooks; the collapse of the super-chains; rampant online sharing of pdfs and whatever it is next year. There will always be something threatening to kill publishing.

\* \* \*

These days when a book is to be published, a publisher's publicist will ask the writer, "How many followers do you have online, and do you have a website?" And ...that's about it for publicity from the publisher's end. The best (and increasingly the only) way now to even be published at all is to first show how many books people have pre-ordered on your website. Some writers thrive in this information ecosystem, but mostly they don't. Writers are still largely introverted homebodies with iffy PR and social skills. In the end they may or may not strike oil being interviewed by a national media organ. What they may not realize is that media outlets have book shows because book shows are free content with zero production cost right along with listener phone-in shows.

\* \* \*

In the 1990s and up to around 2010 or so, I did a lot of book tours. The goal of a tour was to generate sales by visiting an array of cities to do book reading events. I must state right here: book events are a blast to do, and the energy any writer gets from them is crazy. This is the only moment in a writer's life where they get to see the actual human beings who read what they write. It's oxygen.

\* \* \*

The more scientific reason for book tours was to do events at targeted bookstores that report their sales to the New York Times bestseller list in hopes of having an NYT Bestseller. These days a writer gain bestsellerdom by taking a book, niche-ifying it, ('Novels about cats') then putting it onto Amazon and having a slew of friends buy five copies apiece at exactly 9:00 AM EDT and kablam: Amazon Bestseller!

\* \* \*

Book tours never seemed to me to be time- or cost-effective, mostly because they're expensive (flights + hotels + media escorts + incidentals) and they're severe acts of carbon crime — oil — and because they rely on fully functioning national book supply chains as well as well print and/or media hits pinpointed long in advance. Describing a book tour in 2020 feels like I'm describing an archaic and complex medieval ritual for Easter dining with the king of France. However, for better or worse, the internet and covid have ended the book tour.

\* \* \*

In reading these postings from 2000 I'm amazed by how easily entertained I was back then. Read a newspaper here; flip through a magazine there. Sitting in Newark for three hours? No problem, I'll people-watch. I'm also amazed at how patient I was putting up with (always) being at the receiving end cascade of many other people's fuckups over the course of a day. What — it's 11:05 PM so there's no longer room service nor any nearby restaurants? Fine. I'll fast. The flight is cancelled? I'll wait four hours for the next one.

\* \* \*

I am not a patient person, and I lose it quite easily when people in any situation can't perform their job properly — especially at the end of a day. During book tours I was generally unhappy for many reasons not to do with tours themselves, and I never really wanted to do them in the first place. I was torture to be around, but I tried to be a good sport. Well, it doesn't matter anymore as it will be decades, if ever, before live multi-city book tours return.

\* \* \*

...But I'm also not totally stupid. I'm lucky to have done so many tours, and lucky to have met so many new lifelong friends and creative collaborators along the way. Mostly I was lucky to witness a way of publishing that is gone and never to return, and the hammer came down on September 11, 2001, like it did so many things. On that morning I was marooned in Madison, Wisconsin, the first city of a 42-city world tour, and that tour is absolutely another story.

Book Tour 01 – 49 entries, Copyright © 2000 Douglas Coupland  
No, Uncle Ted, that isn't you in my new novel by Douglas Coupland, Copyright © 2000 National Post  
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