Culture Unbound
Journal of Current Cultural Research

Miss(ed) Generation: Douglas Coupland's *Miss Wyoming*

By Mikkel Jensen

Abstract

This article presents a reading of Douglas Coupland's 2000 novel *Miss Wyoming*. Long before this novel was published Coupland had denounced the Generation X phenomena he had started in the early nineties, and this article examines *Miss Wyoming's* intertextual references to Jack Kerouac as a representative of the Beat generation, which was the previous self-labeled literary generation in North America before the Generation X of the 1990s. Taking this relationship as a point of departure, the article also explores the novel's relationship with the *Bildungsroman*, and it is suggested that the novel portrays communicative and emotional immaturity especially in relation to ideas of postmodernism and irony.

Keywords: Douglas Coupland, Miss Wyoming, generational literature, irony, postmodernism, Bildungsromane

Jensen, Mikkel: "Miss(ed) Generation: Douglas Coupland's *Miss Wyoming*", *Culture Unbound*, Volume 3, 2011: 455–474. Hosted by Linköping University Electronic Press: http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se

Douglas Coupland's *Miss Wyoming*

When Douglas Coupland in 1991 published his debut novel *Generation X*, he invoked the old tradition of using the concept of the generation as a way of constructing meaning in literature. As such, he made it possible for the label to spread out in a broader sociological sphere beyond the realms of literature and literary criticism, and it soon become clear that "Generation X" did indeed become a buzz phrase in the early nineties in fields as diverse as literature, sociology and marketing. This publication came in the wake of the late 1980s when there had been considerable interest in many postmodern phenomena: literature, theory (often with a capital "T") and postmodernity as a concept to describe contemporary culture. If one looks at the research output in literary studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s one is faced with some (now) very influential works on postmodern literature (McHale 1987; Hutcheon 1988; Maltby 1991). In much of this research, one of the aspects which many critics stressed when describing postmodernist fiction was the idea of *fragmentation* – it was in this intellectual climate Coupland reinvigorated the generation as a signifier. That Coupland revisited the generation as a label signifying unifying traits (through its connotations of family and closeness) rather than fragmentation must certainly have added to the interest, which the novel was met with after its publication. In a sense it was somewhat of a postmodern paradox.

Before GenX (as the cultural derivative the novel created was soon to be called) there had been a few literary generations in American literature in the 20th century, the most famous being the Lost Generation of the 1920s (Hemingway, Fitzgerald et al.) along with the Beat Generation in the 1950s (Kerouac, Burroughs, Ginsberg et al.). There had also been a so-called Blank Generation in the 1980s (Easton Ellis, McInerney et al.), but because that generational marker had been coined by critics and not by the writers themselves (making it a so-called other-labeling) it never gained the same currency as the preceding self-labeled generational constructs had (Sørensen 2001: 102). At present, Coupland's "Generation X" marker is still the most recent successful attempt at creating a generational signifier which has been successful in being broadly disseminated in a North American context. But although Coupland would soon swear off his spokesmanship for the 90s generation,[1] stating in a 1994 interview that the term is "beyond a cliche by now" (Lohr 1994), he has nevertheless alluded to ideas of the generation several times later in his career – perhaps the most obvious being his recent novel *Generation A* (2009).

However, in the time between *Generation X* and *Generation A* Coupland published another novel which also engages with ideas of generational literature. That novel is *Miss Wyoming* (2000) – a novel filled with intertextual references to the previous self-labeled literary generation before Coupland's own Generation X: the Beats and especially to Jack Kerouac who perhaps is still *the* writer whose name is most often associated with the Beat label, which is not a strange thing consider-

ing he is the person who made it popular. However, this poses the question of what exactly it is *Miss Wyoming* says in these intergenerational comments, both with regard to generational literature as such as well as to Beat Generation literature in particular? Keeping in mind that Coupland already swore off the spokesmanship for his generation long before *Miss Wyoming* was published, what is he then doing when he keeps writing about generational matters? This article will try to offer an answer to that question.

Generationality

To establish what is meant by *generational literature* I turn to Bent Sørensen's *Labelling a Generation – Generationing the Text* (2001), which provides an investigation of generational literature from a cultural as well as a literary approach. The work specifically focuses on *Generation X* as a literary/cultural phenomenon, and as such it seems relevant to use it as my point of departure in order to set up an understanding of what generational literature is. I consider this to be crucial if one is to understand the intricacies of what *Miss Wyoming* performs in relation to this cultural/literary concept.

Sørensen describes the generational novel as being a subset of the so-called *Bildungsroman* (Sørensen 2001: 10) – a type of novel which portrays various transitions; most frequently transitions from immaturity to maturity – financial, spiritual, intellectual etc. However, Sørensen states that while "all generational novels are examples of/or pastiches of the *Bildungsroman* … not every *Bildungsroman* is a generational novel" (Sørensen 2001: 10). The difference – "the generational twist" – is that generationality "can be pinpointed as a thematic feature concerning issues of belonging to (in-group) and/or deviating from (out-group) entities seen as age/cohort specific and involving culturally mutual inter-generational embattlement" (Sørensen 2001: 10). Also, in Sørensen's defintion a generational novel must be contemporary with the generation it portrays otherwise it is merely a memoir.

If a novel is successful in creating and being discussed as a generational construct, the novel will, by extension, make it possible for the author to achieve a spokesmanship for his/her generation. This success depends on whether the generational construct is picked up on in reviews, criticism and cultural debates in general. If it is successful it will subsequently be disseminated into other social discourses than the literary one it originated in.

A peculiar trait common to all the literary generations from North America in the 20th century is that the generational label always carries signification of both presence and absence insofar as the very word "generation" carries connotations of family, lineage, and belonging while the particular generational names all signal some sort of absence: Lost, Beat, Blank, X (Sørensen 2001: 21). With this type of generationality, then, labeling becomes important with regard to marketing

generational cultural texts as goods (music albums, novels, films etc.) – the consequence often being that the counter-language such as that of Generation X and the Beats is "co-opted" – which can undermine the critical potential which originally was central to the work. The idea is that the generational label (which initially starts out as a critical position) is used in so many contexts that its potential as a label of signifying something deviant, subversive or critical eventually is reinterpreted, and that it then becomes laden with so many new different connotative meanings that the term's signifying potential and significance become undermined. As a consequence, the generational labels have always been abandoned eventually; this happened both in the case of the Lost Generation, the Beat Generation, and it also happened to Generation X.

With this definition in mind it seems clear that *Miss Wyoming* is not a generational text in Sørensen's definition like *Generation X* is. In its reception (i.e. in reviews etc.) the novel was not constructed as a generational work of art. Moreover, we do not find issues of in-group/out-group belonging or deviance, and as for "inter-generational embattlement" there is probably only a single scene which could be read in such a way. But I will get back to that scene at a later stage. *Miss Wyoming* does, however, participate in the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. So there is something new on the agenda for Coupland this time. But let us just briefly recap the story of *Miss Wyoming* before proceeding with the analysis.

Miss Wyoming

The narrative in *Miss Wyoming* revolves around what is essentially a peculiar love story between two protagonists: actor and childhood beauty queen Susan Colgate and successful film producer John Johnson. Both of these characters are lonesome seekers trying to make some sense of their lives. In chapter one we are told of Susan and John's first encounter at a Beverly Hills restaurant not long after Susan has returned from a year-long disappearing act: On a trip from New York to Los Angeles Susan's flight had crashed in a desert leaving her as the sole survivor; she soon grasps this as an opportunity to get away from her then current way of life and she leaves the site of the crash letting the world believe that she too had died. When John and Susan meet in Beverly Hills they are almost immediately attracted to each other, and they take a long stroll together through Los Angeles, eventually agreeing to meet up again at a later point.

However, Susan disappears yet again, consequently igniting John to start an adamant search for her, during which he comes into contact with a video-store clerk with a huge crush on Susan Colgate and a psychic who is supposed to help John find Susan. The reader then follows John on his mission to track Susan down; a narrative that is interspersed with extensive flashbacks depicting Susan and John's life stories. Through the flashbacks we also learn of John's earlier experiences of going out on the road to live like a "nobody," an idealist yet futile attempt at rein-

vigorating his life. Even though both John and Susan both eventually return to their regular lives from their times in obscurity, there is a strong sense in the novel that they have developed as a consequence of their adventures. It is with this trait in mind I argue that although *Miss Wyoming* is not a generational novel, it is a form of/pastiche of the *Bildungsroman*.

Also, through the flashbacks the reader is introduced to the most literal meaning of the novel's title: Thanks to a determined and pacing mother Susan is forced to contend frequently in beauty pageants throughout her childhood and adolescence. Susan's mother, Marilyn, is so determined that she decides that they need to move to the state of Wyoming, which due to its sparse population would only offer Susan little competition for the state title, and therefore she would be able to advance to the national pageant. And as planned, Susan does go on to win the Miss Wyoming title. As for the other more metaphorical meanings of the title, *Miss Wyoming* continues Coupland's inclination to insert a central ambiguity in the title. One meaning is *to miss* (as in nostalgically long for) Wyoming – in the sense that there is a longing for a pastoral setting which is not a reality framed by mass media images to paraphrase Bran Nicol (Nicol 2002: 4). However, the novel does not seem to suggest that that pastoral ideal is anything but a fiction/illusion. The second meaning is to *have missed* (as in not have been able to experience) Wyoming. The title thus illustrates a nostalgic longing for something a person has not experienced himself, effectively underlining Coupland's portrayal of people who "…have never known reality unframed by mass media" and are consequently unable to avoid relating everyday "real" experience to everyday fictional experience (Nicol 2002: 4).

Both characters have thus had less-than-perfect childhoods; Susan felt that she was pushed to compete in beauty pageants whereas John was hospitalized for nearly a year due to breathing problems around the time when he was 14 years old (Coupland 2000: 71). Though neither of them is particularly depressed, neither of them is really quite happy nor content either; a fact which is used to develop the thematics of searching and *Bildung* in the novel. Furthermore, before the two meet in a fancy Hollywood restaurant, both of them have opted to "drop out" of society for a period of time. As mentioned, Susan did so after miraculously being the sole survivor after a plane crash, whereas John's experience of leaving society was more premeditated. He simply decided to get up and go out on the road one day despite (or as a reaction against?) his comfortable lifestyle as a well-established movie producer.

"That's so True!"

In relation to John's road narrative there is a rather explicit comment on the immediately preceding self-labeled[2] generation in North American prose before Coupland hit the stage with his Generation X construct, and that reference is to

the Beat Generation of the 1950s. In *Miss Wyoming* Coupland hints at what his relationship is to this other literary generation which preceded *his* generation who were born in the 1960s. Specifically Coupland addresses the writer Jack Kerouac, who was (and still is) seen by many as a central writer of the Beat Generation. A very exhilarated John Johnson tries to tell his friend Ivan about his plans to leave Los Angeles and go out on the road in order to lead a freer life:

> "Ivan, let me pitch it to you: This is the road we're talking about—the romance of the road. Strange new friends. Adventures every ten minutes. Waking up each morning feeling like a wild animal. No crappy rules or smothering obligations."
>
> Ivan was appalled. "The road is over, John-O. It never even was. You're thinking like a kid behind a Starbucks counter sneaking peeks at his Kerouac paperback and writing 'That's so true!' in the margins. And if nothing else, Doris [John's mother] is freaked out by this totally." (Coupland 2000: 52)

In this section there are several clear references to Kerouac and his novel *On the Road* (1957) (authorname, "the road"). The protagonist John has a rather idealized view of life on the road, expecting to experience "adventures every ten minutes" and a rule-free life. John's friend Ivan, however, is skeptical about his friend's thinking. He has a deeply ironic understanding of John's ideas, even suggesting that his friend is thinking like a stereotypical and naïve teenager. But it is important to note that it is Ivan who makes the comparison to Kerouac explicit by referring to his name, which makes the conversation take an ironic turn. His friend John is telling him about his ambitions about what to do with his life, but Ivan does not offer any support for his crisis-stricken friend or even criticize his ideas on their deficiencies. No, rather than doing that, Ivan reads John's thinking into the literary/cultural context of Jack Kerouac's novel, which was published almost half a century earlier. By doing so Ivan conceptualizes these ideas into a cultural construct he can then be sneeringly ironic about, a reaction reminiscent of one of the paratexts in *Generation X* called "knee-jerk irony" defined as "The tendency to make flippant ironic comments as a reflexive matter of course in everyday conversation" (Coupland 1991: 174). As a result, Ivan succeeds in being condescending towards his friend, a rather respected and accomplished writer (Kerouac), and youthful idealism in general. Ronna Johnson writes that Kerouac's "writing has been overshadowed by his mass culture image" (Johnson 2000: 22) and this is very much what Coupland portrays here.

As mentioned all generational constructs are ultimately abandoned partially due to the reductionism they eventually undergo in the public discourse. This raises the issue of whether the novelist who spawned the label can later separate himself and his literature from the reductionism the label is put subjected to. Ronna Johnson and Coupland seem to agree that Kerouac's legacy may be challenged in this respect. However, the concern Ivan shows for Doris (John's mother), is only added as an additional rationale for not going out "on the road". For Ivan, an ironical (mis)understanding thus comes before a human concern for his friend. So there is

a sense that being informed by a large knowledge of cultural narratives makes it natural for Ivan to react in this way as irony has desensitized him.

Andrew Tate[3] states that Bran Nicol's view of postmodernism is rather pertinent about how people are represented in Coupland's fiction (Tate 2007: 2). Nicol writes that people "…have never known reality unframed by mass media and are consequently unable to avoid relating everyday 'real' experience to everyday fictional experience…" (Nicol 2002: 4). It seems that this media-saturated image of society and human experience is the background for Ivan's culturally informed ironic perception of John's ideas. It is also suggested that John's way of thinking is quixotically naïve, and as such Coupland seems to be suggesting that it is impossible at this point in time to simply choose not to acknowledge the media saturated reality that we live in. John's mistake is that he does not realize the communicative situation in which he is speaking; he is not aware of his surroundings. The point is that the intertextually informed postmodern person cannot submit to a voluntary ignorance of sorts, which resonates with Andrew Tate's comment that the characters in *Miss Wyoming* "want to cast off the sense of inhabiting quoted or appropriated lives – to escape an existence that plays out like an exhausted pastiche of reality" (Tate 2007: 59). But through John as an example we see that one cannot shed this experience through mere ignorance.

Once a person is aware of the ironic media informed reading strategies, s/he has to be aware of these when communicating, and if we see this in the perspective of literary history then Coupland is renouncing the possibility that one could "regress" to pre-postmodern types of communication and constructing meaning. If something new is to come after postmodernism, it must be informed by the skepticism of postmodernism. Therefore postmodernism is not just the cultural artifacts we can analyze, it is also the space between; the communicative space, Coupland seems to argue. Linda Hutcheon once noted that the postmodern irony which emerged in the 1960s wasn't only grounded in a break with modernist aesthetics, but also very much a consequence and reflection of the ethos the age it emerged in (Hutcheon 1988: 202 - 203). The same seems to be the case with Coupland who both portrays irony as a cultural baggage people today have to deal with but also something which springs from people's everyday experience. In relation to this issue Umberto Eco has noted that

> I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows that he cannot say to her "I love you madly", because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland. Still there is a solution. He can say "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly". At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly it is no longer possible to talk innocently, he will nevertheless say what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her in an age of lost innocence. (Eco 1985: 111)

This is what could be called "the postmodernist's dilemma": Being aware of the impossibility of saying anything that is not informed by one's cultural baggage,

though one still asserts language as a way of communicating and treating lived experience in a relevant and even adequate way. In this way postmodernism cannot simply be seen as a literary or cultural parenthesis. Through John, Coupland makes the point that disregarding the postmodern meta-aware way of communication is essentially immature and naïve at this juncture and that it is neither credible nor viable. It cannot simply be disregarded like John tries to do, Coupland seems to be telling us.

This notion seems to resonate well with the ironic stance Ivan takes in the above quote. Thus, it seems that the mass media reality that Ivan and John live in is a *cause* for the irony. But Coupland is not only critical of John's thinking, as also Ivan's ironic distance is criticized for being callus towards his friend who does seem to be at a rather vulnerable stage in his life. So it is both naïvety and ironic detachment Coupland criticizes: in relation to the *Bildungsroman* format these two characters are at immature points in their developments, and there is a task (*Bildungsreise*) for them to traverse before they can achieve a measure of *communicative maturity* as I would call it.

The irony which is portrayed in relation to The Beat Generation also seems to be Coupland's own response to those mechanisms of cooptation which seemed to get the best of the Generation X marker, which is what he comments on through Ivan's line that compares John to "a kid behind a Starbucks counter sneaking peeks at his Kerouac paperback and writing 'That's so true!' in the margins."Also, this seems to be a way of marking his dissatisfaction (but also retrospective acceptance) with the fact that that was what happened with his own generational construct. In this way *Miss Wyoming* becomes a statement of solidarity with the Beats. It suggests that these kinds of social criticisms have more in common in terms of how they see their relationship with their social surroundings and as such *Miss Wyoming* doesn't engage in any kind of "intergenerational embattlement" (as Sørensen puts it) with the literature of the Beat Generation. At the same time the novel also becomes a reading of *On the Road* – valorizing that novel as a potent and important piece of literature. However, as I noted earlier there is a particular scene which does have something to with "intergenerational embattlement" as well as irony and generationality.

"A Singapore Sling?"

At one point during John's quest to find his lost love Susan, he is at a bar with Ryan, a young clerk from a video rental store, and the young man orders a drink called a "Singapore sling". This comic scene opens up for a discussion of irony which John tries to claim ownership of:

> "A Singapore sling?" said John. "Where are we? In a Bob Hope movie? I feel like I'm having drinks with my mother."
>
> "It's a jaunty ironic retro beverage."

> "You little twerp. I pioneered irony and retro back when you were shitting your Huggies." John looked at the waiter: "A rusty nail, please." (Coupland 2000: 158)

In this quote we find an illustrative depiction of one of the (at least) two types of irony we can find in *Miss Wyoming*. As we established earlier, John is naïve as to how he can communicate with his friend who is ironic – in that scene he exhibits a communicative immaturity as he is using a naïvely sincere mode of communication with Ivan. But in the above section we see a stark contrast to that naïve immaturity. When John hears that Ryan orders a so-called Singapore Sling, he immediately engages in an ironic reading strategy by framing it in the cultural context of a Bob Hope movie. This is the same approach Ivan used when he learned that John was thinking about going out on the road, and it is particularly interesting that John tries to assert ownership over irony by saying that he "pioneered" a long time ago when his young acquaintance was "shitting [his] Huggies". John, who is 37, seems to feel that Ryan is invading his territory by using the prime weapon in his rhetorical arsenal. Still John tries to one-up his friend by ordering a Rusty Nail. Coupland seems to be implying that irony cannot be claimed by any group.

In the field of postmodern American fiction writers such as David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen have criticized the early postmodern fiction of Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis, and John Barth etc. To a certain (as yet unidentified) extent Coupland seems to have a similar interest in the pervasive influence of irony in contemporary society, which also interests/interested Franzen and Foster Wallace. The early postmodern writers like the ones mentioned along with Kurt Vonnegut and Joseph Heller etc. were, in fact, pioneering irony back when Coupland, Wallace and Franzen were infants "shitting their Huggies", as John puts it. As such this little chat is Coupland's comic metaphor for how irony is debated in American fiction. In this sense the old postmodernists are represented by John and the new generation[4] is represented by Ryan. Coupland seems to be suggesting that both groups have irony in common as an important feature in their fiction. It is also suggested, however, that the use of irony hasn't really evolved since the days of early postmodernism, though several of Coupland's novels look like attempts to move beyond the poetics of irony which characterized early postmodernism.[5] So in a sense this scene can be seen as a meta-level image of Coupland's own view of irony. Though he tries to distance himself from irony, using irony is so much a part of his postmodern style of writing that he cannot abstain from using it.

As such Coupland seems to portray irony rather ambivalently; for while he is skeptical of the "human costs" it can have on communication and interpersonal relationships, he does apply irony to great effect in his humor. Coupland seems to be suggesting that irony may still play a part in contemporary fiction, but that that part should chiefly be that of comic relief. The "deeper" messages must be communicated without the use of ironic detours. This abandonment of irony does

seem to be a consistent feature in Coupland's fiction seeing how tones of sincerity and pathos are consistent features in works such as *Life After God* (1994)[6] and *Hey Nostradamus* (2003). This is coupled with the notion that irony may have become tired since John (and the early postmodernists) "pioneered irony and retro back when" Ryan (and the new postmodernists) "were shitting" their "Huggies." If *Miss Wyoming* were to resemble a generational text this instance of intergenerational embattlement would be the closest we could come to making that claim, which, however, is in no respect a reason to say that the novel is a piece of generational literature. But this issue of dealing with and evolving postmodern poetics is more marginal in relation to the discourse of generationality which is the focus here and in relation to Beat Generation literature, there is no form of intergenerational embattlement in *Miss Wyoming*.[7]

"John Realized That..."

In his definition of the *Bildungsroman* (which is also the definition which Sørensen uses in *Labeling a Generation...*), Franco Moretti states that *Bildungsromane* do not try "to shape consistent worldviews, but rather *compromises among distinct worldviews*" (Moretti 2000: xii, his italics).[8] In *Miss Wyoming* this compromise is between communicative worldviews, that are characterized by either irony or sincerity. I.e. before an individual can successfully use these types of communication while also being aware of his/her context, that person is communicatively immature, whereas communicative maturity would come from being able to use and combine both communicative strategies, meaning that that person can emotionally and intellectually handle the different ways of seeing the world which can accompany either strategy.

I would argue that there is both an intellectual development with regard to how the main characters perceive the world they inhabit in the novel as well as an emotional one; both in John and Susan these developments (intellectual and emotional) are, however, very contingent on one another. Going from one state of mind to another often means that you have to realize some things i.e. see them in a new and different light and this happens frequently in *Miss Wyoming*: In the course of the novel the word "realize" is actually used a total of 32 times.[9] Perceptions are changed and transformed throughout John's and Susan's life stories, and this simple observation suggests that there is a great deal of transformation going on in a lot of the characters; especially in Susan and John. Also other constructions are used to signal a change of mind: when John comes to see loneliness in a different light it says that it "hits" him (Coupland 2000: 105). "To realize" something implies that the attitude which is "realized" is more valid than an earlier attitude. The extensive use of this verb thus suggests that some beliefs are constructed as holding a great degree of, well, truth, and I would argue that this quan-

titative observation supports the idea that the novel explicitly thematizes character development.

However, as irony plays an important role in *Miss Wyoming*, these "realizations" could be read as Coupland in overtly trying to call attention to the problematic form of the *Bildungsroman*: by saying "realize" so often the novel could be read as a parody of the *Bildungsroman*. However, I would argue that it would be more accurate to say that *Miss Wyoming* is rather an honoring pastiche: the novel seems to be suggesting that it is metafictionally aware of the tradition it inscribes itself into, but that it does actually believe in and is serious about the themes of personal development it goes to great lengths to portray. This means that the narrative and thematics of personal development are not undercut by ironic distancing which seems to support Tate's claim that "…Coupland's fiction emphasizes a humanist idea that the search for a coherent life story is a core element of our identity as a species" (Tate 2007: 55). In Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* the "road" is portrayed as the space where personal development is sought for.[10] This is also true as John *does* go out on the road, however, only to be very disappointed with what he experiences:

> John was a noble fool. His plan to careen without plans or schedules across the country was damned from the start. He was romantic and naïve and had made pathetically few plans. He thought some corny idea to shed the trappings of his life would deepen him, regenerate him—make him king of fast-food America and its endless paved web. (Coupland 2000: 103)

So after actually living as a "dharma bum" (Coupland 2000: 62),[11] John cannot get by as he hasn't organized himself in any way in terms of securing fundamental necessities: "In his enthusiasm to run away, he'd skipped over the subject of food, assuming that it would somehow just appear" (Coupland 2000: 103). In these quotes we see how John's endeavors are seen by the narrator of the novel. The novel is narrated in the third person, in a manner which is judgmental yet sympathetic towards John's ambitions, which suggests that there is an authorial criticism of this character as well as an ambiguous valorization in the narrative style. But as is often the case (especially when irony is employed in a narrative), one should hesitate to equate the narrator's judgments with Coupland's views. Though critical, the narrator is to be fundamentally sympathetic towards the characters in the novel. In this section John is still out on the road meeting new people:

> The following night he scored again, this time with a frowzy-haired plump young mother strollering her eight-month-old past a Pottery Barn. She also lived close by, and offered John a meal afterward—lettuce and a packaged stroganoff casserole, which he ate without talking. The woman and her screaming child struck John as being so alone in the world. It hit him that his own form of loneliness was a luxury, one as chosen and as paid for as three weeks in Kenya's velds or a cherry red Ferrari. Real loneliness wasn't something an assistant scoped out and got a good price on. Real loneliness was smothering and it stank of hopelessness. John began to consider his own situation a frill. The only way he could ennoble it was to plunge further, more deeply and blindly, into his commitment to the life of the road, and garner

> some kind of empathy for a broader human band of emotions. (Coupland 2000: 104 - 5)

In this section there is an undeniable pathos that calls for the reader to sympathize with the woman in the quote. "Real loneliness was smothering and it stank of hopelessness" is contrasted with John's perception of his own form of loneliness, which when compared to the woman's situation seems like a "luxury." As a result, there is not much postmodern self-reflection present in this passage.

In *An Ethical Halls of Mirrors*, an attempt at creating a new and more nuanced poetics of postmodernism, literary historian Tore Rye Andersen uses the concept of the so-called "ironyfree passage" which is supposed to denote a place in (postmodern) literature "which urgently insists on being real", even though such passages appear next to passages steeped in irony and ironic distance (Andersen 2007: 33, my translation). In this perspective the description of the lonely woman and her child seems to be exactly such a passage. Describing irony in postmodern literature Andersen uses Wayne C. Booth's definition from *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) in which Booth's conceptualizes irony in a manner which makes it possible to view irony as not being all-pervasive.

Booth distinguishes between stable and unstable irony which signify those different instances where the reader is either sure that what it says on the page is meant to be taken ironically (stable irony) or whether the reader is unsure whether what s/he reads in a passage is meant to be sincere or ironic – thus creating the unstable mode. It seems that Andersen's application of Booth's work on irony to postmodern fiction offers more apt descriptions of postmodern literature in general than viewing irony as a monolithic critical impulse as some critics tend to do. It simply seems more productive to use Booth's definitions when discussing Coupland's fiction – and his nuanced descriptions of irony also seem to mirror the multifaceted portrayal and use of irony one can find in Coupland's novels.

However, Booth also writes about local and infinite ironies, which is to say that irony can both be an isolated phenomenon as well as something more all-pervasive (Booth 1995: 235). By using Booth's dichotomies, Andersen sees that the criticism David Foster Wallace made against a lot of postmodern literature actually "is aimed at … the unstable and infinite irony, rather than the local and stabile irony which his own works are full of" (Andersen 2007: 194 – 195). That Hutcheon makes a similar conceptualization of irony has to do with that she doesn't treat irony in the classical rhetorical way "which lets a sender say one thing while meaning something else (and which lets the recipient understand this)." According to Andersen, Hutcheon views irony "not so much a communicative category as an epistemological category which says something about how the persons using it perceive and portray an issue" (Andersen 2007: 195). This means that the novelists participating in the current showdown with postmodern irony in American fiction would benefit from pinpointing that it is the *all-pervasive and*

unstable irony, rather than the local and stable irony which they apply often to great effect in their own novels.

Andersen writes that using Booth's view of irony "would allow one to see irony as a local, temporary effect which communicates a specific message without necessarily undermining the utterance of the entire work. The irony on page 14 does not necessarily undermine the pathos on page 17" (Andersen 2007: 158, my translation). This view is the anti-thesis of the notion that a novel is either entirely sincere or entirely ironic – a view which may well reduce the complexity of many works of art. As noted, this all-pervasive irony is how Andersen sees irony conceptualized in the research of Linda Hutcheon, the non-fiction writings of David Foster Wallace, as well as in Brian McHale's research.

What this comes down to is that the kind of reading strategy a reader applies to a novel such as *Miss Wyoming* heavily affects his/her understanding of that piece of art. And I would argue that to understand postmodern literature in general, and *Miss Wyoming* in particular on their own terms entails adopting Booth's multifaceted and nuanced discussion of irony with its different categories and distinctions. If the description of the lonely woman isn't to be taken seriously, then what is the reader supposed to make of this description? Laugh at an attempt to convey feelings? Booth's approach is both more loyal to the strategies often found in postmodern literature and it also has the added quality of letting many works of art be seen as the polyphonic works they often are. To use Booth's perception of irony makes it possible for the reader to read Coupland as trying to be neither "genuinely" heartfelt nor merely ironically so. Though Coupland uses ironyfree passages, his novels still feature instances which seem fundamentally ambiguous in terms of irony and sincerity; instances where the reader is challenged when trying determinate what is meant to be taken ironically and what is meant to be taken sincerely. Sometimes postmodern fiction is accused of being ironical almost for the sake of irony - an accusation which is often accompanied by the claim that this kind of fiction is disinterested in the world its readers live in. Here *Miss Wyoming* stands as a reminder that postmodern fiction since its beginning has always been using both ironic and sincere modes of discourse, meaning that the reader may well be intended to empathize with the almost claustrophobic condition John sees: that "Real loneliness was smothering and it stank of hopelessness." The ironic stance is something which must be dealt with in a novel which tries to defend and revitalize the potential of the road narrative. And if such a defense is to be credible it has to deal with how the type of narrative can be read with an ironic distance. This is both seen in the dialogue between John and Ivan as well as in Coupland's engagement with irony as such, which seems to parallel Booth's description of irony. With this mind, I would suggest that Booth's work on irony may well be a more fruitful approach to Coupland's fiction than Richard Rorty's work on irony as Mark Forshaw has suggested (Forshaw 2000).

If we accept that we can divide texts up in such a way and thereby accept the premise of the "ironyfree passage," John's meeting with this woman may well be read as such an instance. But as Andersen points out, these instances are often "banal passages, which in their insistence on telling the truth are vulnerable and easy to ridicule" (Andersen 2007: 65–66, my translation). Given the effects of postmodern irony which the character Ivan demonstrated rather lucidly when he ridiculed John's plans about going out on the road, I accept that instances which call for sympathy may easily be ridiculed and made fun of. But I would argue that Coupland escapes this vulnerable side here, as the reader is not called to sympathize with the protagonist, but another character whom John meets, making the pathos seem less overtly "deliberate" or constructed. In this way I see Coupland as being successful in describing a loneliness that was "smothering and … stank of hopelessness." Here we see that Coupland discretely proposes an ethical lesson of postmodern irony. If one empathizes with another person's situation (in this case a very lonely one), there is a possibility is that other people could do the same for that person.

However, though John makes this distinction on how fundamentally different their situations are, his conclusions seem rather odd. John is not scared off by the desperation he sees in this stranger. Rather than that, John decides "to plunge further, more deeply and blindly, into his commitment to the life of the road, and garner some kind of empathy for a broader human band of emotions." It seems that John believes that "true" character comes from and can only be found through adversity – a classic formal trait of the *Bildungsroman.* And the "lesson" John learns from this woman is in the end quite selfish in that he is only interested in his own identity project. He sees a human being in a desperate situation and concludes that he has to strengthen his commitment to his own *Bildungsproject* on the road. Though it seems that Coupland sympathizes with his character's state of mind, he does not condone or defend his actions. In this section it is made very clear that John's relationship to the empathy he wants to be able to feel is only an abstract concept in his *Bildungsproject* as the woman who is right in front of him is rather seen as a reminder of *his* journey, than a human being whom he could actually feel empathetic towards, and thus he is still not ready to "garner some kind of empathy for a broader human band of emotions." So the focus for John is the "ennobling" part – not the empathy part. Since *Miss Wyoming* is a *Bildungsroman* (which by definition portrays transitions from immaturity to maturity) in some (pastiched?) form, this could be seen as an instance of emotional immaturity in John.

And this is one of the more important points the novel makes: the point of departure of a *Bildungsreise* in a postmodern reality is this kind of third person perspective of one's own place along the way in the process of character formation. This thematization of the third person perspective is interestingly mirrored in the fact that *Miss Wyoming* is Coupland's first novel narrated exclusively in the third

person. John's "plunge" further into his *Bildungsproject* is informed by the fact that he has a meta-awareness of his personal development. He is fundamentally aware of his place "along the way". John conceptualizes character formation as a journey, and though he in one respect is aware of the fact that he is still in the immature section of that journey (*Bildungsreise*), he is at the same time unaware of *how* this immaturity affects his actions, and that is why he is therefore unaware of the desperate woman in front of him. Though *Miss Wyoming* portrays communicative maturity, this shows us that it also portrays emotional immaturity. The message is that despite the fact that John is meta-aware of his own immaturity, he truly still *is* immature in effect, which is revealed through his actions and thinking. This immaturity is not negated by the fact that he is able to see his own *Bildungsreise* from a meta-aware third person perspective. Recalling how Ivan ridiculed John's road ambitions, we can see that though Coupland is aware of how the roadnarrative/*Bildungsreise* can be criticized through the use of irony, *Miss Wyoming* is Coupland's way of defending both his own road narrative as well as a defense for Kerouac's *On the Road*.

In discussing Coupland's short story cycle *Life After God* (1994), Sørensen notes that "The postmodern condition has long been endemic, and the cure for its repetitiveness and ennui seems to lie in a new (hopeless?) sincerity. This narrative position is dangerously close to naiveté …" reminding us that a sincere mode of communication can easily be (mis)understood as an expression of a naïve writer's inability to be aware of her surrounding culture. Sørensen goes on to note that:

> [*Life After God*] is therefore either an attempt to get beyond the ontological desert of post-modernism by re-boosting the importance of the little, or local narratives, or an attempt to reach backwards into Romantic teleological notions, more characteristic of a Bildungsroman than of a post-modern short story cycle. (Sørensen 2004: 22)

I hope it seems clear that *Miss Wyoming* can very well be viewed as a *Bildungsroman*. The teleology traditionally associated with the *Bildungsroman* is, however, undercut by M*iss Wyoming*by how the ending rather marks a new beginning for the protagonists, than a beautifully resolved plot which ties up all loose ends into an artificially coherent narrative conclusion. A formal trait of the *Bildungsroman* is thus left behind in Coupland's reinterpretation of this old traditional narrative template, suggesting that though sincere communication, pathos (e.g. the lonely woman) and personal development are central features in *Miss Wyoming*, the novel is not a rehashing of the Romanticist *Bildungsroman*.

Closing Remarks

In closing I would argue that Coupland is updating Kerouac's vision and conceptualization of the road narrative to postmodern times where people, according to Bran Nicol, "have never known reality unframed by mass media." As I have demonstrated, *Miss Wyoming* is not a generational novel as it simply does not

exhibit neither the extra/paratextual nor the sufficient intratextual features which in tandem constitute generational literature; the novel does, however, go to great lengths in trying to defend the generational novel as it is both a pastiche and a defense of Kerouac's novel *On the Road*. First; Coupland's roadnarrative is more optimistic than Kerouac's. Where John's disappointment in the road comes early (p. 103), Sal (the protagonist of *On the Road*) is only let down at the end of *On the Road* – it seems that Coupland tries to learn the lessons of *On the Road* and then uses them as a point of departure in *Miss Wyoming* in that the concluding disappointment of *On the Road* is the backdrop against which *Miss Wyoming* discusses the issues of *Bildung*, cooptation of critical literature and loneliness. *Miss Wyoming* seems to be very direct in communicating this cultural development insofar as its own ending quotes a passage from the early pages of *On the Road*.[12] In this sense the novel tries to establish a feedback loop which creates a synergy between the two novels, in turn suggesting that the two novels could be read in tandem with each other as we have done here – and in this sense *Miss Wyoming* is a defense of the potential of the roadnarrative, in particular as to how this narrative form can be seen as a legitimate and potent way of portraying character formation. However, *Miss Wyoming* also re-writes *On the Road* in the sense that maturity (a central feature of all *Bildungsromane*) is portrayed as having evolved as a concept in postmodern times, as opposed to the 1950s reality Kerouac released his novel into. A new paradigm which maturity must deal with in postmodernity is that which I call *communicative (im)maturity*, as demonstrated in the comparisons between the different applications of irony in the dialogue of the novel.

And being a defense of the *Bildungsroman*, it seems inevitable that *Miss Wyoming* had to address an ironic reading strategy it could well expect some readers would use. If it hadn't, it would itself be as communicatively quixotic as John's notions of the road. As such, it is this defense which can explain the novel's intense engagement with discussions of irony. Coupland has since *Generation X* been preoccupied with the role of irony in contemporary society, but in *Miss Wyoming* the interest takes a new turn as this novel adamantly tries to defend the human and narrative potential of both the road narrative and the *Bildungsroman*. In this way the novel comes to show meta-awareness in that it anticipates an ironic strategy that could undermine the novel's defense of the *Bildungsreise*, which in turn makes it necessary for the novel to preempt this (cynical?) reading of the novel.

Another important point in *Miss Wyoming* is that it tries to criticize the cooptation of subversive discourses through familiarization and ironic distance. The novel tries to offer a subtle cultural defense of the Beat Generation literature (exemplified through the references to Kerouac and *On the Road*) and by extension this also serves as Coupland's defense of his own *Generation X*. At least as early as 1994 Coupland conceptualized the Generation X idea as having been lost as a cultural signifier as it had effectively been coopted in a broader cultural context

which undermined the possibility of the sign to signify any form of cultural critique. This cooptation has eventually happened to all three of the self-labeled literary generations of the 20th century in North America. *Miss Wyoming* comments on this development effectively stating that the messages and literary forms which both *On the Road* and *Miss Wyoming* use are still important and potent forms of cultural expression in the 2000s.

Fundamentally, Coupland argues that the Beat ethos is still important in North American culture, while still acknowledging that one must not be naïve about it as the character John is. However, the *Bildungsreise* is asserted as being a potent endeavor for personal development. In this sense *Miss Wyoming* is both a pastiche and a defense of *On the Road* which suggests that though the postmodern individual easily can deconstruct the road narrative – one should not do that as it should be revived and recognized as a potent form of narrative. In this sense Ivan's ironic take on John's "Kerouac routine" is dismantled while John's naïvety is criticized. Though the road narrative is attacked with irony – postmodern literature's weapon of choice – Coupland also uses irony to defend it. This is achieved in the face of postmodern irony; an issue which the novel insistently comments on. In keeping with the notion that the novel is a defense of the *Bildungsroman* format, it comments at length on the conceptualization of maturity, which is inherent in this particular genre. *Miss Wyoming* asserts that the genre is a potent form of narrative with a central point of focus which is fundamentally and somewhat strangely out of reach for postmodern skepticism and negation: Though John recognizes that he is marked by immaturity, he is still caught inside this immaturity not knowing how it affects him, and as such Coupland suggests that even in postmodern literature and postmodern times the *Bildungsroman* is still a relevant cultural template for discussions of identity, maturity and formation of character. The type of maturity discussed in the novel is primarily related to issues of intellectual, emotional and communicative immaturity. Taking into account how contested a concept the *Bildungsroman* is, Anniken Iversen describes how it is often strongly associated with German Sturm-und-Drang Romanticism (Iversen 2009: 9–20) whose ideals of always striving upwards is something many people would see as being very much at odds with the skepticism and decenteredness of postmodern thought. In this respect Coupland tries to update the format to a society saturated in mass media and the skepticism and rolled eyes which sometimes accompany it. The result is a very tentative and preliminary model of personal development which is self-aware (through the Kerouac references and the negational irony), though it is incapable of deconstructing immaturity. As such Coupland's model of the *Bildungsroman* can be viewed as being less grandiose than the pathos laden romanticist incarnations of the *Bildungsroman* (a classic example being Goethe's *Die Leiden Des Jungen Werthers*). In this way, unlike some of his contemporaries Coupland does not denounce irony as a useful rhetorical device, but rather uses it in a particular discussion – that of the potency and relevance of the road narrative and the

Bildungsroman. Ultimately, Coupland defends the narrative template of the *Bildungsroman* in his own particular way by portraying characters living in a media saturated postmodern world. And this is despite the fact that the *Bildungsroman* to some could appear to be at odds with postmodern ideas of decentering. It is undeniable that the *Bildungsroman* is a contested concept and that it has a long and rather complex cultural history, but Coupland nevertheless updates it to postmodern times.[13]

Mikkel Jensen holds an MA in English and History from Aalborg University, Denmark and works as a teacher. E-mail: mikkelbrendstrup@gmail.com.

Notes

1 Coupland also wrote about this matter in the piece "Generation X'd. You were born in the 60s. Does that mean you have to pay for it for the rest of your life?" which was first published in 1995 in the youth-oriented magazine *Details*. Denouncing spokesmanship for the literary generation a writer has been engaged with, is something that has happened to all the self-labeled generations of the 20th century. For an introduction and discussion of this matter see Sørensen 2001 pp. 136–159. Pp. 153–157 contains a minute analysis of the *Details* piece.

2 It seems important to distinguish between self-labeled and other-labeled generational constructs. One could argue that the immediately preceding literary generation in North America before Generation X would be the Blank generation of the 1980s. However, that generation had been labeled by critics and by the writers themselves and as a consequence the label never gained the significance or widespread usage which the self-labeled generational tags did. See Sørensen 2001 pp. 19–22 & 188–216 for a discussion of this matter.

3 Tate's monograph, simply titled *Douglas Coupland*, was the first book-length study published on Coupland's fiction. This does seem to be rather late for such a first when one considers Coupland's fame and the fact that at least a few of his novels (esp. *Generation X* and *Girlfriend in a Coma*) have garnered critical attention.

4 In his highly readable *An Ethical Hall of Mirrors* (*Det Etiske Spejlkabinet*), Andersen does important work in establishing a preliminary poetics for this new generation of writers, which he labels the "postironic" writers – a label lifted from a blurb Thomas Pynchon once wrote for Emily Barton's novel *The Testament of Yves Gundron* (2000). The term, however, had already been used as early as 1994 in a review of *Life After God*. (Publishers Weekly 1994)

5 The time when some of the first works of postmodern fiction were released coincides rather accurately with the time when a new pack of (postmodern) novelists were born: Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), Thomas Pynchon's *V.* (1963), Kurt Vonnegut's*Cat's Cradle* (1963). These dates coincide with the time when a new generation of novelists were born who each in his own way continue this postmodern tradition of writing: Chuck Palahniuk (b. 1962), David Foster Wallace (b. 1962 - 2008), Jonathan Franzen (b. 1959), Douglas Coupland (b. 1961) As I see it, this coincidence is part of what this particular scene jokes about.

6 Sørensen has argued that *Life After God* is Coupland's way of entering the "post-ironic" mode of fiction, featuring "young protagonists from broken families who seek other narratives than the generational, familial and religious ones to create cohesion in their lives" (Sørensen 2004: 10).

[7] In Susan's and John's romance there is also an intergenerational relationship, but not one characterized by embattlement.

[8] Anniken Iversen notes that there are diverging uses of the concept *Bildungsroman*. One is found among the so-called Germanist Purists, who are to be found particularly in Germany and within *Germanistik*. They state that one should use the concept only in its original meaning, i.e. when discussing German from the late 18th century and early 19th century. There are, however, also those whom Iversen calls the Internationalist Pluralists who "insist there is a strong bildungsroman tradition outside Germany." According to the Germanist Purists the Internationalist Pluralists use the term "far too widely and divorced from the historical context that it is inextricably bound to" (Iversen 2009: 10). My work, then, fits into the Internationalist trend as its definition of the *Bildungsroman* doesn't conform to the limited use one would find within *Germanistik*.

[9] See pp.: 6, 11, 11, 15, 20, 22, 27, 39, 60, 100, 101, 104, 115, 119, 121, 150, 150, 173,177, 178, 184, 193, 194, 195, 199, 213, 214, 220, 229, 239, 246, 265.

[10] Sørensen states that works of generational literature also share commonalities in their depiction of spatial features in that "[t]hese works share the feature of illustrating intercultural encounters where generational representatives formulate their own subcultural consciousness and identities in topographical terms…" (Sørensen 2001: 217) In *On the Road*, a part of this is to be found in the depiction of "the road."

[11] Coupland's usage of this phrase is clearly a reference to Kerouac's 1958 novel with that particular title.

[12] To validate this claim I here include the passages which I believe are so similar that they in fact constitute a quotation. First the bit from *On the Road*:

…the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars… (Kerouac 2007 (1957): 5–6)

And now the ending of *Miss Wyoming*:

John felt that he and everybody in the New World was a part of a mixed curse and blessing from God, that they were a race of strangers, perpetually casting themselves into new fires, yearning to burn, yearning to rise from the charcoal, always newer and more wonderful, always thirsty, always starving, always believing that whatever came to them next would mercifully erase the creatures they'd already become as they crawled along the plastic radiant way.(Coupland 2000: 311)

These two quotes seem similar due to their descriptions of yearning individuals, while they also share a rhythmic quality due to their numerous repetitions. In her PhD dissertation "*On The Brink of Knowing a Great Truth": Epiphany and Apocalypse in the Fiction of Douglas Coupland*, Mary McCampbell states that*Miss Wyoming*'s ending "possibly alludes to both the biblical concept of 'refiner's fire' from Zechariah 13: 9 and Revelation 3: 18, as well as the mythological concept of the phoenix rising from the flames" (McCampbell 2006: 41). However, given the other Kerouac references in *Miss Wyoming*, I would argue that saying that it is a valid and plausible interpretation of the ending of the novel to say that it is (at least also) a reference to *On the Road*.

[13] This article contains some revised sections from my MA thesis. I want to thank Birgit Ørts Nielsen for a thorough proofreading of this article.

References

Andersen, Tore Rye (2007): *Det Etiske Spejlkabinet*, Aalborg: Aalborg University: http://vbn.aau.dk/research/det_etiske_spejlkabinet(13659782) (accessed30/11/2011).

Booth, Wayne C. (1974/1995): *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Coupland, Douglas (1991/1993): *Generation X – Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, London: Abacus.
—— (1994/1999): *Life After God*, London: Scribner.
—— (1995): "Generation X'd. You were born in the 60s. Does that mean you have to pay for it for the rest of your life?", *Details*, June issue.
—— (1998): *Girlfriend in a Coma*, New York: Regan Books.
—— (2000/2004): *Miss Wyoming*, London: Harper Perennial.
—— (2003/2004): *Hey Nostradamus*, London: Harper Perennial.
—— (2009): *Generation A*, London: William Heinemann.
Eco, Umberto (1984/2002): "Postmodernism, Irony, The Enjoyable", Bran Nicol (ed.): *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel – A Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002.
Forshaw, Mark (2000): "Douglas Coupland: In and Out of 'Ironic Hell'", *Critical Survey*, 12:3, 39–58.
Hutcheon, Linda (1988): *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, London: Routledge.
Iversen, Anniken Telnes (2009): *Change and Continuity: The Bildungsroman in English*, Tromsø: University of Tromsø: http://www.ub.uit.no/munin/bitstream/handle/10037/2486/thesis.pdf(accessed 30/11/2011).
Johnson, Ronna (2000): "'You're Putting me on': Jack Kerouac and the Postmodern Emergence", *College Literature* 27:1, 22–38.
Kerouac, Jack (1957/2007): *On the Road*, East Rutherford: Viking Books.
Lohr, Steve (1994): "No More McJobs for Mr. X" *New York Times*, 29 May 1994.
Maltby, Paul (1991): *Dissident Postmodernists: Barthelme, Coover, Pynchon*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
McCampbell, Mary, (2006): *"On The Brink of Knowing a Great Truth": Epiphany and Apocalypse in the Fiction of Douglas Coupland*, Newcastle: University of Newcastle: https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10443/247/1/mccampbell06.pdf(accessed 30/11/2011).
McHale, Brian (1987): *Postmodernist Fiction*, London: Routledge.
Moretti, Franco (2000): *The Way of The World*, London: Verso.
Nicol, Bran (ed.) (2002): *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: a Reader*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Publishers Weekly, 28 February 1994, http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-671-87433-9 (accessed 22/10/2011).
Sørensen, Bent (2001): *Labelling a Generation – Generationing the Text*, Aalborg: Aalborg University.
—— (2004): "Youth and Innocence as Textual Constructs in the Short Stories of J.D. Salinger and Douglas Coupland" *OASIS 62*, Odense: University of Southern Denmark.
Tate, Andrew (2007): *Douglas Coupland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.