

FROM SOUVENIRS OF
CANADA
TO GLOBAL DYSTOPIA:
NOSTALGIC CANADA AND A
GLOBALIZED WORLD IN THE WORK OF
DOUGLAS COUPLAND

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Abstract

Douglas Coupland is a multifaceted artist: novelist, non-fiction writer and visual artist. Coupland shows his local Vancouver, his nation of Canada and encompasses the global transnational dimension. This thesis sequentially explores each of these geographical marks to analyse the recurrent use of concepts of (cultural) citizenship, settler colonialism, the Canadian postmodern, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization in a cross-section of Coupland's oeuvre.

In chapter one, Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books are discussed. *Souvenir of Canada* unfolds the national identity and cultural citizenship of Coupland's Canada through Canadiana. The artistic use of the concept of cultural citizenship in *Souvenir of Canada* is equally analyzed to categorise the genre of the books.

Chapter two analyzes local citizenship and dystopia in the early 2000s in Coupland's Vancouver set works *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1998), *Hey Nostradamus!* (2003) and his non-fiction book *City of Glass* (2000). These works are examined through the theoretical ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan to manifest how Coupland's hometown is simultaneously a place of belonging and uncanniness.

Chapter three addresses the depiction of Canadian cultural identity on the one hand and postmodern detachment and globalization on the other in Coupland's Monograph *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* (2014). This chapter builds upon nostalgia, and the use of space-time compression.

Chapter four evidences alienation and dislocation as consequences of globalization and transnationalism in *Life after God* (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004). Putnam is utilized to analyze the effect of globalization on society and also the characters' axis of movement is taken into account.

Chapter five, through theory of globalization, cosmopolitanism and cultural citizenship, examines personal relationships of Canadians in Coupland's *Generation A* (2009) and *Player One* (2010) as means to deal with looming apocalypse.

Dedication

To my family

Acknowledgements

Finishing up this PhD in 2020 has been quite surreal; moving around paragraphs about the apocalypse whilst the world, and especially Europe, is on a lockdown was not how I imagined finishing this. The content of Coupland's apocalyptic novels and the reactions of Coupland's characters have never seemed more appropriate though. Let's hope that mankind, just as in Coupland's books, will come together. Let's hope: *Andrà tutto bene*.

This part-time PhD has covered approximately ten years of my life; it has been a constant factor through all normal stages in those years. It has accompanied me on my travels, building up a relationship with my now husband and the birth of my child. Along the way I have come to realize that a PhD is an iterative process, I realize that no version would be a finite product and the manuscript could be improved and re-evaluated indefinitely. Maya Angelou wisely said: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." The product which I now hand-in has been through the process of improvement and (re-)evaluation many times and is the best it can be at this moment in time. Handing in is letting go.

Working on this PhD would not have been possible without those in my near vicinities helping me and supporting me; my family deserves nothing but gratitude. An especially big thank you to my husband and my daughter for being patient with me and giving me the space and love to develop myself. Also, a big thank you to my parents who baby-sat more than I can imagine and supported my different choices in every way possible. Next to my immediate family, also a thank you for my family who supported me from far away. E.g., my Zia Franca and Zia Marianna from Sicily have been looking forward to my graduation ceremony for quite some years now, I hope not to disappoint them.

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INTRODUCTION: FROM SOUVENIRS OF CANADA TO GLOBAL DYSTOPIA: NOSTALGIC CANADA AND A GLOBALIZED WORLD IN THE WORK OF DOUGLAS COUPLAND

“I'd rather be Canadian than American.”

- *Douglas Coupland in an interview with Alexander Laurence, 1994*¹

“This is one of those things that's weird to explain to non-Canadians, but Canada is so young—still—that it works every day to locate its identity. We're 100 years younger than the US. We're still establishing our myths, and also it's a tiny country, in so many ways.”

-*Douglas Coupland in an interview with Interview magazine*²

¹ Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Alexander Laurence for *The White Stuff*) (1994) <<http://www.altx.com/int2/douglas.coupland.html>> [Accessed 2 December 2015].

² Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Alice Pfeiffer for *Interview Magazine*) (15 September 2010) <<https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/douglas-coupland-bag>> [Accessed 5 December 2017].

THE WORLD OF DOUGLAS COUPLAND

Douglas Coupland is a multifaceted artist; he is the writer of many novels and non-fictional books, a columnist for the *Financial Times* and he is also a visual artist with various exhibitions – within and outside of Canada - to his name.³ Coupland's public career spans almost three decades as his first, widely acclaimed novel, *Generation X*, was published in 1991. In *Generation X* Coupland reflects the zeitgeist of the late eighties and early nineties not only because of the title of his book, which refers to people born between roughly 1965 and 1980 and coming of age at this time, but also, especially, because of its content. Coupland remembers the era in one of his FT columns:

So that was March of 1991. The 1980s were over and I had this sadness that some dimension of history, a certain kind of potency, was over ... that somehow as a culture we'd reached a point where we couldn't count on decades to create looks and feels and tones the way the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s did. I think it's called pattern fatigue, and meanwhile, Francis Fukuyama was declaring the end of history. The art world was dead. Life felt stagnant.⁴

³ Novels: *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991); *Shampoo Planet* (1992); *Microserfs* (1995); *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1998); *Miss Wyoming* (2000); *All Families Are Psychotic* (2001); *God Hates Japan* (2001); *Hey Nostradamus!* (2003); *Eleanor Rigby* (2004); *jPod* (2006); *The Gum Thief* (2007); *Generation A* (2009); *Player One* (2010); *Worst. Person. Ever.* (2013)

Short stories and collections: *Life After God* (1994); *"Fire At The Ativan Factory"* (1998), short story; *Highly Inappropriate Tales for Young People* (2011)

Non-fiction: *Polaroids from the Dead* (1996); *Lara's Book: Lara Croft and the Tomb Raider phenomenon* (1998); *City of Glass* (2000); *Souvenir of Canada* (2002); *School Spirit* (2002); *Souvenir of Canada 2* (2004); *Terry* (2005); *Extraordinary Canadians: Marshall McLuhan* (2009); *Shopping in Jail: Ideas Essays and Stories for the Increasingly Real 21st Century* (2013); *Kitten Clone: Inside Alcatraz-Lucent* (2014); *The Age of Earthquakes* (2015); *Bit Rot* (2015) *Machines Will Make Better Choices Than Humans* (2016); *Photography at MoMA: 1920 to 1960* (2016) (Contributor); *It's All Happening So Fast: A Counter-History of the Modern Canadian Environment* (2017) (Contributor)

Selection of exhibitions everywhere is anywhere is everything (*Exhibition Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, 31 May - 1 September 2014; Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto, 30 January - 18 April 2015 and Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 30 January - 26 April 2015*); *Vortex* (Vancouver Aquarium, May 18, 2018-April 30, 2019)

⁴ Douglas Coupland, 'Regeneration X', *Financial Times Magazine* (29 March 2013)

<<https://www.ft.com/content/c222c31a-9677-11e2-9ab2-00144feabdc0>> [Accessed 6 March 2017].

Coupland seems to describe some sort of postmodern ennui here, a feeling also expressed in the novel itself. Moreover, in *Generation X* terms such as “McJob” and “Boomer Envy” are popularized. Especially a word like “McJob” struck a chord as it reflects the economic difficulties many young generation Xers found themselves in at the beginning of the ‘90s. Coupland himself never expected such recognition with his generational peers: “While I was writing the book, I thought there would be, at most, a few people who I attended school with in Vancouver who might kind of get what I was writing about – or maybe a few people down in Seattle, which was a little bit like Vancouver back then. I was surprised, and remain surprised to this day, that so many people clicked with X.”⁵ Coupland was thus thinking regionally at this point of his career, not imagining that his work could find connection with a larger global audience. However, to his own dismay, Coupland was appointed as the voice of Generation X, a generation seen as different from their predecessors because of their use of new technologies but also the fact that they carried the weight of the previous generation – the baby boomers – on their shoulders and were stuck in “McJobs” because of recessions.⁶ The disappointment of Coupland’s generation is made apparent in his early novels and displays the barren globalized world in which his generation lives. Coupland’s *Generation X* is typical of his work; it asks questions about the characters’ affiliations with their region and each other whilst making flippant remarks and observations about the present day.

In general, Douglas Coupland’s novels typify life in western industrialized countries through modern technology and the evanescence of distances. In the *FT Magazine*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Generation X: Lives on Hold* <<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/society/youth/generation-x-lives-on-hold/generation-x-the-novel.html>> [Accessed 6 March 2017].

Coupland writes that “[t]he thing about 2013 is that people are more connected than they’ve ever been before – except they’ve been tricked into thinking they’re more isolated than ever.”⁷ In his column Coupland addresses the advent of social media and how it has united lives online, even if people often still feel excluded in physical life. His characters use modern means of communication to stay in touch with each other, even, or rather especially, when residing cross country or even over various continents. Moreover, his characters fly all over the world in a heartbeat looking for a better home, a place to explore their own being, or in search for adventure. The world has become small in Coupland’s novels, and characters are always capable of contacting each other even if they are traveling the world. These characteristics seem to fall in line with contemporary life, albeit some of these characteristics are only valid for privileged educated people from industrialized countries and are described in terms such as globalization and transnationalism. Coupland is well aware of these concepts and even addresses them in one of his other columns for the *Financial Times*. For example, he asserts that the biggest worries about globalization are: “that it’s boring, alienating and controlled by technocratic elites who feel sorry for you for having to fly commercial, not private, and that any resistance to their decreed future is futile.”⁸ In other words, Coupland’s concept of globalization is that whilst it has a major impact on modern life, regular citizens have little to no control over it. More interestingly, Coupland seems to permanently link globalization to consumerism. In this same article, for example, he links it to HSBC bank and the airport space: “I fly more than most people, and I really have to congratulate

⁷ Douglas Coupland, 'Douglas Coupland: Notes on 21st-Century Relationships', *FT Magazine* (6 December 2013) <<https://www.ft.com/content/131b7458-5c69-11e3-931e-00144feabdc0>> [Accessed 8 December 2019].

⁸ Douglas Coupland, 'Douglas Coupland: Globalisation Is Fun!', *FT Magazine* (14 February 2014) <<https://www.ft.com/content/bb4af556-9443-11e3-a0e1-00144feab7de>> [Accessed December 12, 2019].

HSBC for targeting what is probably the single most potent metaphor for globalisation – the airport jetway ramp – and for branding a piece of infrastructure in a kickass manner that hasn't been seen since Hitler championed the autobahn.”⁹ Coupland's parallel between HSBC's branding of the airport jetway ramp and Hitler's autobahn cannot be seen in positive light, it seems that Coupland thinks that HSBC has taken globalisation too far. Further on in the same article he describes how he believes that if industry globalizes any further the world will be coming to a crypto-communist system - a system in which there are only a few players regulating the market. That is to say, he links globalization fully to consumerism and eventually the (end of) free capitalist market, as if the one cannot exist without the other: Coupland concludes his column about globalization by arguing that “[g]lobalisation is so boring people fall asleep before they can articulate the issue. Boringness is the superpower of communism. Globalisation might kill you but, first, it puts you to sleep.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, for a topic which Coupland deems so boring, it will become apparent that he makes grateful use of its themes to describe contemporary society and matching contemporary issues in his novels. Moreover, Coupland's “boring” should be taken with a grain of salt; he is of course very much aware that globalization is causing citizens to lose power or agency to corporations. The statement: “it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism”, attributed to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, seems weirdly appropriate for Coupland's writing.¹¹ Whereas the world nearly ends multiple times in Douglas Coupland's novels, capitalism never quite ceases to exist. Examples of novels in which

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Imre Ungvári Zrínyi, 'Authentic Human Relations and the Economy', in *Caring Management in the New Economy: Socially Responsible Behaviour through Spirituality*, ed. by László Zsolnai and Ora Setter (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 23-46 (p. 43).

the collapse of capitalism comes close are his novels *Generation A* (2009), *Player One* (2010) and *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1994). In *Generation A* the main characters come together on a remote island, not needing capitalism because they are so close, but capitalism clearly still exists outside of this small inner circle in the real world. In *Player One* the whole economy collapses because of an oil crisis almost causing an apocalypse but things return to a new normal and life restarts as before, and in *Girlfriend in a Coma* economy just picks up where it left off after the apocalypse was undone.

At the same time Coupland offers a different reality – or perhaps better said – an extended reality in his works of fiction. His novels show a world connected by the internet, in which characters hop countries and in which a poor inhabitant of a developing country is most inspired by American culture. Moreover, the world as the reader knows it constantly seems ready to implode because of ecological and geopolitical troubles. Coupland's novels about present times question modern existence and flirt with ideas of existentialism – only to question their validity afterwards. In line with his questioning of modern existence, his novels keep inquiring into globalization and cultural imperialism: is Canada the U.S.'s little brother? Are other countries striving to be Americanized? This tension goes further than Coupland's works of fiction and has also crossed over to his non-fiction and visual art. As David Dowling writes "Coupland despises being mistaken for an American in his ongoing effort to foreground his own transnational identity as a German-born Canadian."¹² Coupland tries to affirm his Canadian cultural citizenship, but also his international birth. Coupland's non-fiction and his visual art gratefully make use of the same concepts as his novels. A number of Coupland's non-fiction books and visual

¹² David Dowling, *Capital Letters: Authorship in the Antebellum Literary Market* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), p. 165.

installations use the theme of his region, British Columbia, and his country, Canada, to show cultural citizenship. At the same time Coupland uses the themes of the transnational and globalization in his non-fiction and visual installations; for example, Coupland wrote a book on Lara Croft – the main character from the video game series *Tomb Raider* – and has Lego art which shows globalized cities. All in all, it is clear that Douglas Coupland has certain recurrent themes which he continuously explores.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS THESIS

Douglas Coupland shows modern society in its different facets, at local or regional, national and global levels, and he is at the avantgarde for recognizing topics such as changes in society, ecological disasters, and geopolitical issues. In this thesis I will explore a number of key topics in Coupland's works which will demonstrate how he often shows awareness of problematic topics but at the same time does not manage to offer answers. This is to say, Coupland's full oeuvre raises questions about the contemporary world and the identity of its inhabitants, albeit selectively. More interestingly, Coupland's works present tensions: irony versus nostalgia; knowing versus naïveté; cultural citizenship versus globalization and cosmopolitanism, the global versus the local, the national versus the international, the nostalgic versus the progressive future, fiction versus non-fiction and the visual versus the non-visual. Coupland is thus a man of opposites and explores all of these contradictory elements in his different works, sometimes even uniting these counterparts in a single piece of work. Notably, the tensions between local and (inter)national identities are tangible in his work. Examples of such contradictions are Coupland addressing local Vancouver identity and Canadian citizenship in books like *City of Glass* and *Souvenir of Canada* and transnationalism and globalization in novels

such as *Generation A* and *Life after God*. Douglas Coupland seems to offer his visions on his version of Canada especially in his non-fiction books and at times his visual art; he portrays “his” country through showing symbols of his youth and exhibiting his nostalgia. For example, his *Souvenir of Canada* is a non-fiction book in which he collected a myriad of banal items close to the (or at least his) Canadian heart and identity, many from his youth, showing that his interest in his homeland is very much developed. Problematically, Coupland largely leaves out of this discussion that “his” idealized 1960s Canada is built upon an indigenous Canada. Even if, by exploring these previously mentioned tensions, Coupland gives an image of being nuanced he leaves a number of issues - willingly or unwillingly - unexplored. Coupland touches upon the topic of indigenous people in Canada various times in his different works, but hardly ever explores further. Also problematic is the fact that Coupland often portrays a very white middle class Canada in his novels, probably the Canada he knows from his own middle-class background, and his novels hardly leave space for multicultural or indigenous characters. In his non-fiction he does address a multicultural and indigenous Vancouver and British Columbia in his *City of Glass* (2000), but he avoids exploring too deeply and readily admits that he does not know how to progress the topic. The approach I use in this thesis will clarify Coupland’s position on the topics mentioned above – the tension within Coupland’s monocultural Canada but also the tension with the global - and will advance an understanding of Coupland’s work in relation to these problematic topics.

This thesis will explore the above-mentioned themes by establishing a theoretical framework to research them. The key theoretical underpinnings used for this thesis are: globalization, transnationalism, (cultural) citizenship, cosmopolitanism, the Canadian postmodern and settler colonialism. These different concepts are all recurrent ideas in

Douglas Coupland's works and lend themselves to look at the contemporary themes addressed by Coupland. To substantiate the relevance of these concepts for the analysis of Coupland's work, these definitions will be further narrowed down and clarified. This theoretical framework will make it possible to clearly analyze the chosen works by Douglas Coupland for the tensions he creates by choosing to address the mentioned opposites in his works. These key concepts will also facilitate the analysis of Coupland's works for problematic topics such as the (post-)colonial status of Canada and the relative absence of multiculturalism and the indigenous populations in his works.

For this thesis a variety of works from Douglas Coupland will be used to analyze the perceived impact of globalization, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and settler colonialism on citizenship. When selecting these primary works, i.e., novels, non-fiction works and visual artworks, a few criteria were kept in mind. All of the works chosen have to relate to globalization, transnationalism, citizenship, cosmopolitanism, or their interaction in any combination and all subsequent ideas related to these terms. This does not mean that non-selected novels or works do not deal with these themes at all, but that they were regarded as less relevant for this specific research topic. The key concepts of settler colonialism and Canadian postmodernism will be taken into account but have not been used as a selection criterion.

As already mentioned, in this thesis there will be an exploration of Coupland's dualisms: for example, his curiosity for a nostalgic Canada on the one side versus his fascination with the consequences of globalization, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism on the other. To reach conclusions about the overarching aim of this thesis it is necessary to examine all elements of Douglas Coupland's selected works; novels, non-fiction books,

and visual art. The combination of these components will provide a representative overview of Coupland's use of globalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and citizenship and of any correlation between these terms. The thesis is divided into five chapters. The chapters move from inward to outward: the thesis starts from Coupland's local and national and discusses in later chapters transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization. Chapters one and two deal with the local and national using both non-fiction books and novels. Chapter three deals with Coupland's visual art and analyzes the Canadian identity in relation to space-time compression. Chapter four and five deal with Coupland's novels which display transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and globalization. Because of the variety of works, the mix of fictional, non-fictional and visual arts, and the different concepts used by Coupland, this thesis will also use a variety of approaches to analyze the different topics. Naturally, the approaches and methods are chosen on the basis of the content of the selected works. A more comprehensive overview of the chapters will be given at the end of this introduction.

KEY CONCEPTS

(Cultural) Citizenship

The first concept to be discussed is citizenship. T.H. Marshall argues that "[c]itizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community" and makes a distinction between civil, political and social citizenship and associated rights.¹³ In ancient Greece, the holding of citizenship was a sign of a person's status and equality to other highly regarded citizens; citizenship was determined by class, race and gender.¹⁴

¹³ T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 28 and p. 10.

¹⁴ Keith Faulks, *Citizenship, Key Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

Those with citizenship had “full membership” of society whilst slaves, women and subjects were marginalized and had fewer rights. Through protests over the centuries and the redefining of citizenship, groups such as women, racial minorities and other marginalized people gained full citizenship in the countries in which they resided.¹⁵ Whilst Faulks argues that we have left the unequal form of the ancient Greek citizenship behind, and that citizenship is now “inherently egalitarian”, it cannot be denied that citizenship is still an exclusive form of membership to a society.¹⁶ Legal immigrants without full citizenship will frequently enjoy fewer rights -- for example, not being able to vote for a government -- than those with the nationality of the country in which they reside. Moreover, government has no obligation to grant full citizenship to these immigrants, even if they fit into society and enjoy many of the privileges and obligations which would normally be associated with citizenship. Illegal immigrants have an even more precarious position, even though they might have been participating in their host society for years, have always abided by the laws of their host country and may even have children who are integrated more thoroughly in the host society than in the native society of the parents, who upon being caught by the appropriate governmental authorities may be deported.

Citizenship is thus something which is not automatically granted to everybody applying for it, and every country has rules and regulations on how to acquire the nationality and therefore “membership.” Cairns calls citizenship a “linking mechanism” between the citizens and the state, for citizenship provides unity in society.¹⁷ This unity seems to be

¹⁵ This is still not valid for all nations; however, it generally is valid for western industrialized countries.

¹⁶ Faulks, p. 3.

¹⁷ Alan Cairns, *Citizenship, Diversity, and Pluralism: Canadian and Comparative Perspectives* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 4.

an important issue, especially the feeling of belonging to a society. The minute somebody does not 'fit in' with this level of exclusivity as demanded by the state, chances are that this person will not be accepted for citizenship. Faulks explains that with membership there is a "package of rights, duties and obligations, [...] which implies equality, justice and autonomy."¹⁸ Nevertheless, Faulks emphasizes that "[r]egarding the extent of citizenship, to ask who is to be included as a citizen is also to ask who is to be excluded from the status."¹⁹ Nation-states determine who is or is not to be excluded from "membership"; however it is against the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 15) to have no nationality at all.²⁰ Having no citizenship would mean that an individual would have no access to any social resources associated with a state and would mean a lack of basic rights: they would be stateless. It is therefore not easy in Western countries to revoke citizenship.

Therefore, the question arises of what citizenship exactly entails, as it might in fact be just a legal concept, an exchange of rights and obligations between the state and citizens. Rubenstein and Adler contract these different concepts to two main groups: firstly, the legal aspect and secondly the rights, duties and participation.²¹ Both of these groups are necessary in order to have a full citizenship. For example, a group of people can have full legal rights to citizenship but still be ranked "second-class citizens." For example, this was the case with women in most western European nation-states and North America in the early twentieth century; they were considered citizens but were denied the vote at the

¹⁸ Faulks, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁰ United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, (1948) <<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

²¹ Kim Rubenstein, and Daniel Adler, 'International Citizenship: The Future of Nationality in a Globalized World', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 7 (2000), 519-548 (p. 522).

same time. On the other hand, Bosniak asserts that there are four different concepts to describe citizenship: first of all citizenship as a legal status, second of all citizenship as a right, third of all, citizenship as a political activity, and lastly citizenship as a collective identity or sentiment.²² This thesis will use Bosniak's notion of citizenship as a collective identity or sentiment as this best matches with the cultural expressions Coupland displays in his works about Canada and the absence of the discussion of legal rights and obligations in his works.

Benedict Anderson addresses the idea of a community or nation as a construct by society to create a collective identity.²³ In his book *Imagined Communities* he defines the concept of the nation as: "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."²⁴ Anderson explains his definition. First of all, he argues that the nation is "imagined" as most citizens belonging to a specific country would not know all fellow-members. Still, citizens would still feel belonging and connectiveness to others with a similar status. Second of all, Anderson argues that the nation is "limited" because every nation, no matter its size, has borders. Third of all, the nation is "sovereign" because "the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm."²⁵ The sovereign state thus has freedom as emblem. Lastly, Anderson addresses "community" arguing that the state is perceived as "a deep, horizontal comradeship" regardless of "actual inequality

²² Linda Bosniak, 'Citizenship Denationalized (the State of Citizenship Symposium)', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 7 (2000), 447-509.

²³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2006).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

and exploitation.”²⁶ Anderson emphasizes in his reasoning that a country is a social construct and therefore represents more than mere political unions; they have a sentimental component which links citizens to each other and promotes the feeling of “comradeship”.

Large parts of Coupland’s work are drenched in expressions of Canadian cultural citizenship and certain sentimental components, especially in his non-fiction books such as *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2*, but also in *Terry Fox* and *City of Glass*. In his visual art Coupland has produced installations which make use of stereotypical Canadian items such as hockey masks, Canadian beer bottles and lumberjack patterns. Citizenship is less foregrounded in his novels, but he still has a number of novels set in Canada or dealing with Canadian characters. Coupland’s affiliation with Canadian citizenship is constantly seeping through in his works and provide an interesting focal point especially regarding the fact that Coupland is also recurrently writing about the apparent opposites of (cultural) citizenship; globalization, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism.

Settler Colonialism

Lorenzo Veracini explains settler colonialism quite straightforwardly as “circumstances where colonisers ‘come to stay’ and to establish new political orders for themselves, rather than to exploit native labour.”²⁷ This is of course quite problematic as:

[T]he colonies settlers build for themselves are either independent or politically subordinate to the colonising metropole, a capacity to establish a new society that

²⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁷ Lorenzo Veracini, ‘Settler Colonialism’: Career of a Concept, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41 (2013), 313-33 (p. 313).

replicates the original one (without its perceived shortcoming) is inevitably premised on the possibility of controlling and dominating indigenous peoples.²⁸

According to Veracini settler colonialism is different than “regular” colonialism in the fact that settler colonialism is not dependant on the labour of indigenous people whilst regular colonialism is.²⁹ Chris Youé explains this further: “the settlement colonies that became the backbone of the British commonwealth (the Antipodes and North America) when the white invaders formed a majority and when land, not labour, was their objective.”³⁰ Countries which were colonised in the past, for example India, had its populations dominated but they took back or were returned self-governance after the settlers left. In settler colonial countries the settlers did not leave the settlements and did not return the country to its original populations. This has made it difficult in settler colonial countries to speak about postcolonialism. Veracini quotes Australian Aboriginal poet Bobby Sikes saying: “What? Postcolonialism? Have they left?”³¹ Youé explains this new permanent power very clearly arguing that:

In this manner the settler colonists transcend their settler origins and become the new “natives”, with the old “natives” literally and metaphorically pushed to one side. When liberal democracy is achieved, the idea of the “settler” is redundant because “settlers” have transformed themselves into citizens of a nation-state who have dispensed with their imperial overlords (and one-time protectors) and inhabit a modern, urban-based society.³²

Youé thus argues that because of the casting aside of the indigenous population the new settlers become the “new natives”. Youé acknowledges further on in his article that even though the Canadian government has made treaties with their indigenous populations:

²⁸ Ibid., p. 314.

²⁹ Lorenzo Veracini, 'Introduction: Settler Colonialism as a Distinct Mode of Domination', in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, ed. by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

³⁰ Chris Youé, 'Settler Colonialism or Colonies with Settlers?', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 52 (2018), 69-85 (p. 69).

³¹ Veracini, 'introduction', p. 3.

³² Youé, p. 70.

“American Indians and their Canadian counterparts have a limited dependant sovereignty.”³³ This therefore means that the treaties made did not amount to a solution.

When Douglas Coupland shows off his Canadian citizenship and all banal items belonging to his youth in his non-fiction book *Souvenir of Canada* it is the settler colonial Canada which is featured. Furthermore, when Coupland writes about Canadian families it is the white middle-class settler colonialism families that are featured. This tension between Coupland’s cultural citizenship and Canada as a settler colonial country is a problematic one. Terry Goldie summarizes the problem by arguing: “The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?”³⁴ Goldie offers two solutions for settler colonial nations to deal with this impasse; The first solution is to incorporate native culture through cultural appropriation “through beaded moccasins and names like Mohawk Motors” or the second solution would be to “reject the indigene.”³⁵ The way society deals with the subject is similar of how the arts deal with it. Goldie argues that: “Of course the majority of writers in all three countries [Australia, New Zealand and Canada] have given brief or no attention to native peoples.”³⁶ Coupland is no different and mostly ignores the indigenous population in his works, even if still making some brief references to the indigenous inhabitants of Canada throughout his oeuvre. Lisa Slater argues that white settlers, she uses herself as an example as a white woman in Australia, experience anxiety when

³³ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁴ Terry Goldie, 'The Representation of the Indigene', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 232-36 (p. 234).

³⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

dealing with indigenous people. She explains that: “A settler Australian – myself – comfort and sense of belonging is disturbed in the face of Aboriginal – in this case Wik – jurisdiction and primacy.”³⁷ Her explanation shows that she is uncomfortable dealing with indigenous people, and it is possible that Coupland experiences the same when dealing with the topic of indigenous Canadians. This tension in Coupland’s work is telling; he feels comfortable letting his characters wander all over the world, but he barely comments on issues with indigenous people in his home country. This tension makes the topic of settler colonialism especially interesting to analyze in Coupland’s works. For this thesis settler colonialism will be defined as Veracini coined it: “circumstances where colonisers ‘come to stay’ and to establish new political orders for themselves, rather than to exploit native labour.”³⁸

Globalization

Historian Eric Vanhaute dedicates a chapter of his book *World History: An Introduction* (2013) to globalization and its links to history. Vanhaute finds it difficult to define globalization, as it has been appointed many forms, cannot be named a neutral concept and has a long history, but concludes that “[g]lobalization has been an ideological lever for reducing national regulation and control in favour of more international economic mobility.”³⁹ Vanhaute argues that whilst the first use of the word globalization occurred in the world of finance - it was first used in a 1959 edition of *The Economist* - it took another thirty some years before the term gained in popularity. As Vanhaute correctly points out, globalization became a catch phrase to "unite all the historical processes of

³⁷ Lisa Slater, 'Anxious Settler Belonging: Actualising the Potential for Making Resilient Postcolonial Subjects.', *M/C Journal*, 16 (2013) < <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.705> > [Accessed 9 December 2020].

³⁸ Veracini, 'Settler Colonialism', p. 313.

³⁹ Eric Vanhaute, *World History: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 133.

increasing interaction and interconnection.”⁴⁰ The problem which results from this is that, if the word “globalization” has become a container term, it will at some point just become opaque and subsequently it will lose any true meaning or relevance. The eventual popularity and increase of the use of the word started around the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) and the increased use of the internet. Vanhaute shows that the term globalization is mostly linked to the dissolving of economic borders and limitless "'flows' of knowledge, information, ideas, values and beliefs.”⁴¹ It could be argued that these processes caused a "shrinking of the world.”⁴² It might thus be argued that globalization is in fact the unifying of the world. In this thesis, globalization will be largely defined by Vanhaute’s idea of a “shrinking of the world”.

Whereas citizenship pointed at the exclusive membership to the nation-state, globalization is generally aimed more towards the economy and consumerism. For example, the globalization of economic markets means that multinational corporations can establish themselves in many different countries. Some of the most famous of these corporations are in the retail sector, and have lent their names to terminology describing these global markets: e.g. McDonaldization or Gapification.⁴³ These terms illustrate the way in which globalization is understood as primarily an economic matter. However, as Paul Jay writes in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, “the debate over whether globalization is an economic or cultural phenomenon is based on a

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴² Ibid., p. 124.

⁴³ George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Assessing McDonaldization, Americanization and Globalization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization* ed. by Nathan Sznajder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003) pp. 30-48; Samir Dayal and Margueritte Murphy, *Global Babel: Questions of Discourse and Communication in a Time of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2007).

false distinction. We cannot neatly separate economic from cultural commodities; when commodities travel, culture travels, and when culture travels, commodities travel.”⁴⁴ In other words, even though globalization is often linked to economic currents, these economic currents are also linked to cultural movements. In this thesis, in addition to Vanhaute’s definition of globalization as the shrinking of the world, Jay’s definition of globalization as a cultural and economic commodity will be adhered to.

The use of both citizenship and globalization is interesting as they often are presented as opposites. Politically seen, globalization in Canada has an impact on Canadian citizenship in multiple ways and can be of concern to the leaders of the nation-state.⁴⁵ One of the reservations that leaders of a nation-state have is that citizens with multiple citizenships and multiple nation-states are thus no longer loyal to one particular nation-state which might lead to a conflict of interest. Rubenstein and Adler argue that “[g]lobalization emphasizes different identities of membership as the norm, according less reason to utilize a singular notion of citizenship, or a single legal status linking directly to the nation-state.”⁴⁶ This worries Rubenstein and Adler, as this might mean that soon “non-nation-state frameworks” could define the different notions of citizenship.⁴⁷ This could affect all four of the notions of citizenship, the legal aspects, the rights which accompany it, the political and sentimental aspects. This concept, globalization, will inevitably lead to problems: if citizens no longer feel like members of the state it might disrupt society

⁴⁴ Paul Jay, *Global Matters the Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Jessica Breugh, Catherine DeJong, and Lauren Rutherford, 'Reconsidering Canadian Citizenship Policy in an Era of Globalization: Dual Citizens, Non-Resident Canadians and the Cost of Cosmopolitanism', *Potentia*, Fall (2009), 1-21.

⁴⁶ Rubenstein and Adler, p. 524.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 524.

or at the least drastically change the relationship between the nation-state and its inhabitants. In worst case scenarios, such as war, citizens with multiple nationalities or those affected by globalized citizenship have to choose between states. Having dual citizenship in such extreme situations could lead to questions of loyalty on both sides. In less worrisome scenarios the feeling of being a member of a group and the amount of solidarity between citizens might be called into question.

Looking at Coupland's personal history his globalized background is quite impressive; Coupland was born on a Canadian military base in Germany, something that he mentions frequently, spent his childhood in the Vancouver area, studied on both the east and west coasts of Canada, moved to Italy to study at the European Design Institute in Milan and afterwards moved to Japan to follow a course in product design at the Hokkaido College of Art & Design, only to come back to reside in Vancouver.⁴⁸ Coupland's views on globalization thus seem heavily based on his own personal experiences as a white male middle-class globalized person. Globalization readily appears in Coupland's novels: e.g. *Generation A* shows the interconnectedness of global catastrophe, *Player One* is set at an airport hotel – the ultimate globalized environment – and *Worst. Person. Ever.* shows its characters causing global problems. Coupland's non-fiction focusses less on globalization, even though references to it are made on occasion. For example, Coupland's *Tomb Raider* deals with the computer game bearing the same name and its global impact. Coupland's visual art makes use of and points to both Canadian art and also to international art and utilizes this without inhibition. Interestingly enough in his

⁴⁸ Brian John Busby and Karen Grandy, 'Douglas Coupland', in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia* (Canada: Historica Canada, 2011/2012) <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/douglas-coupland>> [Accessed 9 December 2020]; 'Douglas Coupland', (2020) <<https://www.coupland.com/>> [Accessed 25 January 2020].

novels Coupland often links globalization to the end of the world; in other words, despite being himself a global citizen Coupland still feels anxious about the subject. Again, in this thesis globalization will be defined as Vanhaute's "shrinking of the world", but also as Paul Jay's idea that globalization also facilitates cultural exchange. This matches with how Coupland depicts modern society in his novels and visual art; a world which is getting easier to travel and culturally uniform.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a term which – just as citizenship and globalization - has been given many different meanings and interpretations over the last decade. At times it has been used as a catch-all term for a range of migration matters, but as Portes argues this sort of use renders the term meaningless.⁴⁹ In this research the view of transnationalism as an "avenue of capital" and "(re)construction of 'place' or locality" will be adhered to.⁵⁰

Transnationalism as an avenue of capital fits with the idea of a globalized market economy with an unlimited flow of goods and a transnational capitalist class.⁵¹ This part of transnationalism also fits in with the idea of globalisation as a "shrinking of the world." The second aspect of transnationalism is distinct from globalization: the (re) construction of 'place' or locality, refers back to the increasing feeling of many citizens of not being part of local culture anymore. This might have various reasons, for example it might be due to social media which relieves the need to have a social network nearby and shifts social connectivity to the online world, or the fact that for those of the transnational

⁴⁹ Alejandro Portes, 'Globalisation from Below: The Rise of Transnational Communities', *Transnational Communities Programme Working*, 1 (1998), 2-26 (p. 219).

⁵⁰ Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism, Key Ideas* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 8.

capitalist class international travel is easy to access. As Appadurai writes transnationalism is “the growing disjuncture between territory, subjectivity and collective social movement” and the “steady erosion of the relationship [...] between spatial and virtual neighborhoods.”⁵² Whereas the concept of globalization at times seems to flatten culture through a globalized economy and culture, the concept of transnationalism is used in this thesis to show individual characters reaching beyond the nation-state to find meaningful places and connections.

Transnationalism is thus, in this thesis, used as a way of redefining traditional borders -- for example, the easier movement of the transnational capitalist class between countries -- and the rediscovering and redefining of identities and citizenship in a globalizing world. This redefining is in fact necessary because through transnationalism and globalization many paradigms, such as traditional nation-state borders, are shifting.

As already mentioned, Coupland’s own personal history is that of the transnational capitalist class – he managed to travel the world and settle in different countries without any problems. These ideas of a transnational capitalist class and also this feeling of not being part of the local culture anymore is evident in Coupland’s novels, both for Canadian and international characters. In *Eleanor Rigby* the main character never feels quite at home in her own Canada and only discovers love when travelling to Europe; in *The Gum Thief* the main character also needs to travel to Europe to discover who she is and the main characters of *Generation X* – Coupland’s first novel – need to move to Mexico to make peace with themselves.

⁵² Arjun Appadurai, 'The Production of Locality', in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. by Richard Fardon (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 204-25 (p. 213).

Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism is an interesting term, which, just like the other terms used, is often difficult to define because of changing viewpoints and ideas in society on the concept. According to Bruce Robbins cosmopolitanism used to be a simple term to denote the idea that the world is small, and a cosmopolitan person has loyalty to the whole of humanity.⁵³ Robbins quotes Martha Nussbaum to prove his point: the ““very old ideal of cosmopolitanism”” makes reference to ““the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings.””⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Robbins acknowledges that the idea of cosmopolitanism transformed into much more than that. Robbins argues that for many scholars: “the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are underprivileged – indeed, often coerced.”⁵⁵ This thus leaves the term applicable to both the “weak and underdeveloped as well as the strong and privileged.”⁵⁶ Still, Robbins admits that recently the argument has returned that cosmopolitanism mostly advocates universalism, bringing new life to the idea that indeed a person has loyalty to the rest of worldwide society.⁵⁷ This latter idea matches with Timothy Brennan’s stand on cosmopolitanism. Brennan places cosmopolitanism as a concept in a lighter context: “What cosmopolitanism popularly evokes – among other things, the thirst for another knowledge, unprejudiced striving, world travel, supple open-mindedness, broad international norms of civic equality, a politics of treaty and understanding rather than conquest – can hardly be devalued.”⁵⁸ Looking at Coupland’s

⁵³ Bruce Robbins, 'Introduction Part I: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1998), pp. 1-19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Timothy Brennan, 'Cosmo-Theory', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100 (2001), 659-91 (p. 659).

works it becomes clear that he does not place emphasis on the underprivileged in society, but rather portrays white middle-class people and their lifestyle without boundaries. For this reason, this dissertation will use the definition of cosmopolitanism as defined by Nussbaum (and is also in line with Brennan's definition): "the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings."⁵⁹ At the same time it will be kept in mind, as proposed by Robbins, that cosmopolitanism can also be applied to a wider audience, for example the underprivileged.

The Canadian Postmodern

On the cover of the book *Re: Reading the Postmodern: Canadian Literature and Criticism after Modernism* there is a picture of one of Douglas Coupland's artworks: 'Generation x Hornet's Nest' (2004). This picture depicts Coupland's handmade hornet's nest papier mâché model which is made from his own debut novel: *Generation X*. Coupland is also featured in the text of the book itself, on page 116 he is called one of the "younger postmodern writers".⁶⁰ Coupland's prominent feature in the book is no surprise, and also numerous of his artworks can be labelled postmodern. The (English language) Canadian postmodern differs from other postmodern literatures. Janet M. Paterson discusses the difference between Québécois postmodern literature and the French and American variants.⁶¹ According to Hutcheon, the Canadian postmodern novel differs from all three of these conceptualizations by "the very real challenge to the conventions of realism has always come from within those conventions themselves" and she continues

⁵⁹ Robbins, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Stephen Cain, 'Feeling Ugly: Daniel Jones, Lynn Crosbie, and Canadian Postmodern's Second Wave', in *Re: Reading the Postmodern: Canadian Literature and Criticism after Modernism*, ed. by Robert David Stacey (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 2011), pp. 103-122 (p. 116).

⁶¹ Janet M. Paterson, 'Le Postmodernisme Québécois: Tendances Actuelles.', *Études littéraires*, 27 (1994), 77-88 (p. 77).

later “English Canadian novels have self-consciously milked realism for all its power, even while parodying and subverting its conventions.”⁶² Robert Davey Stacey writes that the ideas on the Canadian Postmodern were mostly formed by Linda Hutcheon’s work and that academia still makes heavy use of her conceptualizations.⁶³ Stacey typifies Hutcheon’s work on postmodernism: “the dominant view has been Hutcheon’s; [...] postmodernism itself [as formulated by Hutcheon] is reducible to the fictional genre of “historiographic metafiction” and / or to her favoured tropes of irony, parody, metafictional self-consciousness, and thematic “ex-centricity.”⁶⁴ What makes Hutcheon even more applicable to Coupland’s works are her ideas about postmodernism and nostalgia. Hutcheon writes “[i]n the postmodern, [...] nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, *and* ironized.”⁶⁵ Later on she adds: “Our contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic; some parts of it – postmodern parts – are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony.”⁶⁶ It is exactly this irony applied to the past that puts it into perspective, so that the new work becomes “a comment on the present as much as on the past.”⁶⁷ Especially Coupland’s more nostalgic works, his non-fiction books *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* and his visual installations about Canada but also his re-envisions of for example paintings by Mondrian or the Group of Seven fit Hutcheon’s description. In this thesis I will make use of Linda Hutcheon’s theorization of the Canadian postmodern.

⁶² Ibid., p. 20.

⁶³ Robert David Stacey, 'Introduction: Post-, Marked Canada' in *Re: Reading the Postmodern: Canadian Literature and Criticism after Modernism*, ed. by Robert David Stacey (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 2011), pp. ix-xl.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. xiii.

⁶⁵ Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern: A Dialogue', *Poligrafías 3* (1998-2000), 18-41.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

Even though all of many of previously discussed terms, such as citizenship, globalization, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism encompass different ideas, these terms are interrelated and cross-influence each other. For example, Christien van den Anker writes about transnationalism asking questions such as: “Should global citizens only live a specific cosmopolitan lifestyle, or should they act in support of ‘others’?” and “what is it about transnationalism that supposedly creates any of these versions of increased (moral) global citizenship?”⁶⁸ As the notions are closely related it is not surprising that Douglas Coupland uses them in conjunction. Based upon the previously discussed theories, it could be argued that Western contemporary life is typified by modern technology and the resulting fading of distances whilst still retaining the original notions of (cultural) citizenship in a settler colonial environment. In his oeuvre Coupland thoroughly depicts how these phenomena interact, but also the complex tension created through these interactions and their impact on modern (Canadian) society. Coupland’s work raises questions about modern society. On the one hand Coupland depicts, especially in his non-fiction, a very nostalgic settler colonial Canada whilst making use of postmodern irony. On the other hand, in his novels he depicts a global world without boundaries and a distinct hope for a cosmopolitan future regardless of the various apocalypses and dystopian elements. The contradiction of these two elements is striking and warrants further research.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There is an incongruence between the scholarly work done on Coupland’s fictional works and his non-fictional and visual art; whereas his novels are addressed in scholarly works

⁶⁸ Christien van den Anker, 'Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Towards Global Citizenship?', *Journal of International Political Theory*, 6 (2010), 73-94 (p. 74).

quite regularly, his non-fictional and visual artwork has not been sufficiently researched so far. Though Douglas Coupland has been publishing works since 1991 there is only one critical work published on his full written fictional oeuvre – *Douglas Coupland* by Andrew Tate.⁶⁹ As can be deduced by the date of publishing, 2007, this scholarly work deals mostly with Coupland's earlier novels. Next to this there are some independent scholarly works published about Coupland's novels: e.g. *McJobs: Life and Culture in Douglas Coupland's Early Novels* by Michael P. Mazenko and *X=What? Douglas Coupland, Generation X, and the Politics of Postmodern Irony* by Susan Zubrig.⁷⁰ Moreover, there is a large number of essays, and theses which have been written about Coupland. For example, Louis Greenberg wrote a PhD thesis on the post-religious apocalyptic fiction of Douglas Coupland and Mary McCampbell's PhD wrote a thesis with a similar theme: 'On the Brink of Knowing a Great Truth: Epiphany and Apocalypse in the Fiction of Douglas Coupland'.⁷¹ It should be noted that none of the above works deals with Coupland's works in the light of globalization, transnationalism and citizenship. There are works which deal with Coupland's novels in the light of globalization such as Petra Sapun Kurtin's book section on 'Storytelling in the Global Village: Douglas Coupland's *Generation A*' and Sinem Yazicioglu's essay 'Between the

⁶⁹ Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ Michael Mazenko, *Mcjob: Life and Culture in Douglas Coupland's Early Novels* (U.S.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016); Terri Susan Zurbrigg, *X = What? Douglas Coupland, Generation X, and the Politics of Postmodern Irony* (Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008).

⁷¹ Louis Greenberg, 'Faith at the Edge: Religion after God in Four Novels by Douglas Coupland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Witwatersrand, 2010) in WiredSpace: Wits Institutional Repository environment on DSpace
<http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/10459/Louis%20Greenberg%209100531P%20PhD%20-%20FINAL.pdf> [Accessed 9 December 2020]; Mary McCampbell, 'On the Brink of Knowing a Great Truth: Epiphany and Apocalypse in the Fiction of Douglas Coupland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2006) in Newcastle University DSpace
<http://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/247> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

local and the global in Douglas Coupland's *Shampoo Planet*'.⁷² Moreover, Elleke Boehmer from the University of Oxford briefly addresses Coupland in relation to transnationalism in her essay 'Global and textual webs in an age of transnational capitalism; or, what isn't new about Empire'.⁷³ Karen E. H. Skinazi deals with both cosmopolitanism and citizenship in her essay: 'A Cosmopolitan New World: Douglas Coupland's Canadianation of AmLit'.⁷⁴

Whilst many scholarly essays and especially B.A., M.A. and PhD theses have been written about Coupland's novels few academic works have been written on his non-fictional and visual works. There are still a number to be found though. Sally Chivers' 'Ordinary People: Reading the TransCanadian Terry Fox' is one of the essays that does deal with Coupland's non-fiction, while Andrew Tate addresses *Souvenir of Canada* briefly in his book chapter 'Nowhere, anywhere, somewhere; Coupland and Space'.⁷⁵ *Souvenir of Canada* is also used by Mira Sucharov in her 'Imagining ourselves then and now: Nostalgia and Canadian Multiculturalism' – an essay about the tension between assimilation and multiculturalism – but also in Ryan Melsom's 'A (Queer) Souvenir of Canada: Douglas Coupland's Transformative National Symbols'.⁷⁶ Coupland's catalogue

⁷² Petra Sapun Kurtin, 'Storytelling in the Global Village: Douglas Coupland's *Generation A*', in *Social and Cultural Implications of Multiculturalism - Implications Sociales Et Culturelles Du Multiculturalisme*, ed. by Biljana Kostadinov and Gordan Matas (Split: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Splitu, 2011), pp. 159-175; Sinem Yazicioglu, 'The Interplay between the Local and the Global in Douglas Coupland's *Shampoo Planet*', *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute* (2016), 406-418.

⁷³ Elleke Boehmer, 'Global and Textual Webs in an Age of Transnational Capitalism; or, What Isn't New About the Empire', *Postcolonial Studies*, 7 (2004), 11-26.

⁷⁴ Karen E. H. Skinazi, 'A Cosmopolitan New World: Douglas Coupland's Canadianation of AmLit', *AmeriQuests*, 4 (2007), 1-14.

⁷⁵ Sally Chivers, 'Ordinary People: Reading the TransCanadian Terry Fox', *Canadian Literature*, 202 (2009), 80-94; Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Mira Sucharov, 'Imagining Ourselves Then and Now: Nostalgia and Canadian Multiculturalism', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 16 (2013), 539-65; Ryan Melsom, 'A (Queer) Souvenir of Canada: Douglas Coupland's Transformative National Symbols', *Canadian Literature*, 216 (2013), 35-49.

for his exhibition “everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything” features essays by various writers and focusses on an overview of Coupland’s visual work.⁷⁷

In other words, though there are a number of scholars working on Douglas Coupland’s works this thesis is the only research which cross-references Douglas Coupland’s multiple art forms whilst examining his works from the perspective of globalization, transnationalism and citizenship. The importance of this PhD-research lies in the fact that Douglas Coupland is one of Canada’s most published writers, and one of the best-known Canadian visual artists. In his works, Coupland reflects on both a past and contemporary Canadian society and that of a modern globalized world. Coupland’s novels, non-fictional works and visual art echo continuous changes in society, in literature and in the arts. These changes in society are reflected in Coupland’s work; he analyzes globalization and transnationalism because of it, but at the same time it seems to give him a yearning for a simpler past and a simpler future. These opposites are interesting and lend themselves to further research.

DIVISION OF THE CHAPTERS

The first chapter, ‘M memoir of Canada? A Closer Look at Genre and Douglas Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* (2002) and *Souvenir of Canada 2* (2004)’, deals with Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* books. These non-fiction books portray Coupland’s opinion on his country and especially portray his sentimental feelings about it. This is done through short entries, pictures, collages, and any type of Canadiana such as old beer bottles, hockey

⁷⁷ *Douglas Coupland: Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014).

cards or licence plates. Coupland's Canada here does not reflect globalization but rather hints at a happier, non-globalized, past. The original genre of the non-fiction works is blurry and indistinct. These works will be analyzed for genre because by determining the genre of the books the mixed media format and the message behind the chosen format will become clearer. Moreover, the concept of cultural citizenship will be used in this chapter to suggest various traditions of understanding individual and communal identity.

The second chapter is 'Local Citizenship: The Depiction of Local Citizenship and Dystopia in Douglas Coupland's hometown Vancouver in his Novels *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1998), *Hey Nostradamus!* (2003) and his non-fiction *City of Glass* (2000).' This chapter will deal with two of Coupland's locally set Vancouver novels and his non-fiction work about his home city of Vancouver, all written around the turn of the millennium. The chapter will analyze (geographical) spaces in the books through the ideas of Yi-Fu Tuan. Moreover, it will demonstrate how the city of Vancouver functions in Douglas Coupland's works as a place of belonging and at the same time as a place of nightmare.

The third chapter is 'Canada/Everywhere/Anywhere: An Analysis of Nostalgia in Canadian Cultural Identity and Space-Time Compression in Douglas Coupland's *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* (2014)'. Chapter three deals with Coupland's visual art through his *everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything* exhibition and monograph (2014) and is a chapter which brings ideas of citizenship, globalization and the form of the works together. In Coupland's visual work there is a clear distinction between a nostalgia for a Canada of the past, postmodern detachment and an anxiety of modern concerns on environmental, political and human rights issues.

The main ideas in chapter three will be the concept of nostalgia for Coupland's 1960s Canada and how this relates to the idea of space-time compression.

The fourth chapter is 'Westwards, Eastwards, Home: Alienation and Dislocation as a Consequence of Globalization in Douglas Coupland's *Life after God* (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004)'. This chapter will deal with the consequences of globalization and transnationalism for individual citizens: alienation and dislocation. The novels chosen, *Life after God* (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004), show Coupland's concern regarding alienation and dislocation. Both of these specific novels very clearly portray main characters struggling in a contemporary and globalized world in which there is less space for the community.

The fifth chapter is 'Morphing Identities: Globalization and the End of Days in Douglas Coupland's *Generation A* (2009) and *Player One* (2010)'. This chapter deals with Coupland's idea of an approaching apocalypse and its relation to globalization in the novels *Generation A* (2009) and *Player One* (2010). This chapter will analyze how the novels use the concept of globalization, cosmopolitanism and cultural citizenship to materialize the end of days in Coupland's work. This apocalyptic event is avoided in the end and brings redemption for humanity.

In the conclusion of this thesis we will return to the objective of this thesis and will address how the different key concepts were applied to Douglas Coupland's chosen works. We will return to Coupland's representations of local, national and global identity. Most importantly however, we will also have a look at the elements of Coupland's works

which are problematic; the fact that his works are largely monocultural, the absence of indigenous peoples in “his Canada”, and the fact that Coupland rarely provides answers to the questions he raises, even when offering hope and interconnectedness as a replacement.

**CHAPTER 1: MEMOIR OF CANADA? A
CLOSER LOOK AT GENRE AND DOUGLAS
COUPLAND'S *SOUVENIR OF CANADA* (2002)
AND *SOUVENIR OF CANADA 2* (2004)**

INTRODUCTION

Douglas Coupland is a versatile artist; he has written novels, non-fiction books, created visual art and held many exhibitions. Coupland's topics of interest range from issues with global concern to a focus on the national (*his* Canada) and the local (*his* city of Vancouver). This chapter will focus on the national, in the form of Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books and documentary. The *Souvenir of Canada* package gives an insight into Coupland's Canada, a country which he attempts to characterise through his own experiences. It is thus no surprise that on the back of *Souvenir of Canada* the Canadian author writes, "I wanted to give people a book that explains what it feels like to be Canadian. And I wanted to find a new way of doing this ... and here it is."¹ Coupland found this personal perspective on writing about Canada by crossing the boundaries of genre. For example, in both his *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* he opts for a distinctive array of pictures ranging from a Nunavut licence plate to Coupland's mother's kitchen cupboards. Next to this, he includes his own texts covering a wide diversity of topics that always relate to his beloved Canada. Whilst emphasizing the effect of the variety of short texts, the genre of the *Souvenir of Canada* books chosen by Coupland becomes blurred and indistinct. Coupland takes readers on a nostalgic trip through the narration of his past experiences in relation to his experiences in his native Canada. At the same time, he shows his readers pictures that – according to him – only make sense to those who are Canadian born. The claim that his books cover all that is Canadian for every single Canadian is, of course, a rather bold statement. Through his entries Coupland intends to portray not only his own feelings of belonging and

¹ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 2002).

citizenship, but those of his contemporaries as well. Coupland's entries range from highbrow to more general or even personal topics, for example, how he made a road trip across the Trans-Canada highway, his amazement at bilingual advertising, and his memories of having to colour in the newly designed Canadian flag in primary school during the 1960s. By focusing on general topics to which most people with similar a background can relate on the one hand, and by keeping the narrative style personal on the other hand, Coupland very much appeals to the nostalgic affiliation sentiment of Canadians and artistically conveys what it feels to him to be a Canadian. Coupland does not really discuss rights and obligations of being a Canadian citizen, the diversity of Canada, inclusivity issues or other complex matters; he keeps most of his topics light and mundane.

Citizenship is a complex concept, the initial meaning of which has evolved over years from being a straightforward deal between the government and its subjects to its present meaning of cultural citizenship which signifies a more balanced idea of belonging. Julie Rak asserts that "[o]ne of the terms of recognition that has clearly become important for [...] readers is citizenship as a way to describe a state of belonging, and a way of belonging within a state that is not always subject to the liberal requirements that the state may place upon its citizens."² This means that instead of being overly centered on the citizen's relationship to the state, citizenship has now become a way of being part of a group of people sharing a common identity and similar backgrounds. Rak argues further that contemporary citizenship "becomes a way to express a need for any kind of public belonging, and a way to articulate an individual's imagined relationship with others in a

² Julie Rak, *Boom: Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), p. 210.

public sphere.”³ In other words, citizenship now goes past the straightforward idea of having rights and obligations towards the state; citizenship now also addresses the state of belonging to a group. In this sense belonging applies to a group of people with common national background and is manifested through sharing of the same cultural citizenship. Moreover, Rak argues that citizenship is closely related to personal identity, the identity which does not pertain to the state as legal entity but is based on the sentiment of belonging that a state usually cannot or does not provide: cultural citizenship.⁴

The term cultural citizenship was coined by Renato Rosaldo.⁵ In Rosaldo’s case this is his U.S. citizenship viewed through his eyes (and the eyes of his peers): a Latino who does not belong to the mainstream WASP culture. Rosaldo’s idea can be summarized by his poem ‘Invisibility’: “We celebrate their days, / eat hot dogs, love baseball, / but they say we were born to weed, / change diapers, carry crates in the gray of dawn / while they sleep. Awake, they look at us without seeing.”⁶ In Rosaldo’s writing cultural citizenship is the fact that, even though a person might have legal citizenship of a country, including all rights and obligations, and attempt to integrate into the culture, they might still be considered or at least feel like an outsider or second-class citizen. Jean Beaman agrees with Rosaldo’s view that citizenship is more than rights and obligations and asserts that: “As such, citizenship is not only solely based on laws but also on socially agreed upon norms, practices, meanings, and identities.”⁷ In other words, according to Rosaldo,

³ Rak, *Boom*, p. 211.

⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

⁵ Henk Schulte Nordholt, 'Modernity and Cultural Citizenship in the Netherlands Indies: An Illustrated Hypothesis', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 42 (2011), 435-57 (p. 439).

⁶ Renato Rosaldo, 'Invisibility', in *What Have You Lost?*, ed. by Naomi Shihab Nye and Michael Nye (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1999), p. 32.

⁷ Jean Beaman, 'Citizenship as Cultural: Towards a Theory of Cultural Citizenship', *Sociology Compass*, 10 (2016), 849-57 (p. 851).

holding a specific citizenship does not necessarily mean that one feels comfortable with the corresponding dominant culture. However, it is complex to define the culture which is the standard. Renato Rosaldo explains that: “In ‘our’ own eyes, ‘we’ appear to be ‘people without culture.’ By courtesy, ‘we’ extend this noncultural status to people who (‘we’ think) resemble ‘us.’”⁸ Thus, Rosaldo implies that people tend to take their own culture and background as the norm and by doing so do not realize that their own culture is not universal. Especially a mainstream culture would not see itself as a separate or special culture but as the norm.

To begin, it is certain that Coupland’s cultural citizenship resonates with his contemporaries coming from a similar background. Sarah Milroy discusses *Souvenir of Canada* in her *Globe and Mail* review and explains the feelings it conveyed to her. In Milroy’s perception of the book, Coupland is “cleaning the attic of the Canadian consciousness and setting it out for a kind of giant sidewalk sale.”⁹ Milroy’s observation is valid as Coupland dives into the Canadian collective consciousness to find and emphasize similar life experiences pertinent to Canadians. Furthermore, other reviewers affirm this emphasis on the Canadian experience. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* calls these musings “pithy commentaries and personal reflections on all things Canadian,” and Kurt Halfyard from the Canadian Twitch film website calls the *Souvenir of Canada* books “quirky coffee table picture-book[s]” which stimulate its readers to “get together and

⁸ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 215.

⁹ Sarah Milroy, 'A Gen-Xer's Love Letter to Canada', *Globe and Mail, Toronto* (June 29, 2002) <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/a-gen-xers-love-letter-to-canada/article4136985/>> [10 December 2020].

celebrate the iconic mundaneness of Canada!”¹⁰ The *Souvenir of Canada* books and documentary therefore had quite a positive reception in the media and are recognized as celebrations of a mainstream and nostalgic Canada, even though not much scholarly criticism has been written on them.

This does not take away from the fact that Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* are interesting material to explore in relation to the Canadian identity and its scope within the dimension of cultural citizenship. Interestingly enough, the *Souvenir of Canada* books are usually referred to as “non-fiction” books, without further specification of their genre and this complicates the process of proper analysis. For example, Coupland’s own official website classifies the books under non-fiction.¹¹ Nonetheless, it is pertinent to discern the genre of *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* because the categorization of the book will facilitate the content analysis. For example, David Duffy (2000) discusses genre as a “recurring type or category of text, as defined by structural, thematic and / or functional criteria” and further explains that this definition of categories helps in the classification of books, both fiction and non-fiction.¹² Moreover, as Coupland not only works in both fictional and non-fictional modes, but also as a visual artist, an analysis focused on the use of a distinctive genre with predominantly visual content for the expression of cultural citizenship will allow us to situate the *Souvenir of Canada* books within his larger oeuvre. The ambiguous choice of genre for his *Souvenir*

¹⁰ Brian John Busby and Karen Grandy, 'Douglas Coupland', in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia* (Canada: Historica Canada, 2011/2012) <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/douglas-coupland>> [Accessed 9 December 2020]; Kurt Halfyard, 'Tiff Report: Souvenir of Canada Review', (September 16, 2005) <<https://screenanarchy.com/2005/09/tiff-report-souvenir-of-canada-review.html>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

¹¹ *Douglas Coupland* (2020) <<https://www.coupland.com/books>> [Accessed 25-01 2020].

¹² David Duffy, *Modern Genre Theory, Longman Critical Readers* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. xiii.

of Canada books and the intricate form Coupland uses to express his cultural citizenship results in the complexity of content. By analyzing the particular genre of his *Souvenir of Canada* books in this chapter his expressions regarding his cultural citizenship will become clear as well. To conclude, this chapter will attempt to determine the genre of the *Souvenir of Canada* books and by doing so establish how the genre of the books influences and facilitates the depiction of (Coupland's own) Canadian cultural citizenship.

GENRE: PICTORIAL OR COFFEE-TABLE BOOK?

Douglas Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* are non-fiction books, which at first sight have the appearance of coffee table books. As established, they portray many images of Canada and especially pictures of Canadian products and paraphernalia. Next to the colourful photos, the author, Coupland, includes personal anecdotes about himself and his family in relation to Canada, his vision of the country and tries to define the Canadian identity. In her review of the first *Souvenir of Canada* book *Globe and Mail* journalist Sarah Milroy compares the book to (other) coffee-table books discussing Canada.¹³ She has the view that most coffee-table books about Canada discuss the same clichés and thinks that Coupland's work is different. Milroy argues that the book "*Souvenir* allows Coupland the opportunity to put his own and other people's pictures in his own words – something he likes doing a lot – in an effort to get at the experience of being a fortysomething Canadian today."¹⁴ The fact that Milroy compares the *Souvenir of Canada* book to 'other' coffee-table books makes it clear that Coupland's

¹³ Milroy, n.p.

¹⁴ Ibid., n.p.

non-fiction works show the characteristics of a coffee-table book and that it discusses the theme of Canada – even if in a distinct “Couplandish” way. Milroy continues: “Instead of selling Canada by the pound, *Souvenir of Canada* is a nimble little book that ducks and weaves through the eccentricities of Canadian culture, combining personal anecdote with journalistic observation and the occasional patriotic rant.”¹⁵ In other words, Milroy believes that instead of portraying the obvious clichés, the *Souvenir of Canada* books look for the more remarkable aspects of Canadian culture. At first glance, Milroy might be right to call the books “coffee-table books,” especially if we look at the definition of a “coffee-table book.” James L. Peacock describes coffee-table books as “large, colorfully illustrated, and expensive – suitable for display on a table. [...] The book captures the sights on a grand tour or the exhibits in a great museum.”¹⁶ *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* partly fit this image, since they are slightly larger in size than novels, incorporate many illustrations and, as a matter of fact, do look suitable for display on any table. Nevertheless, they are perhaps not as expensive as they could be, for they are in paperback format, and perhaps have too much text for quick browsing. For example, Canadian coffee-table book *Doors* by Bob Wilcox does not have any text at all and just shows hundreds of different types of doors.¹⁷ It is therefore useful to further analyze the layout and characteristics of the books to discover whether or not the *Souvenir of Canada* works match the image of coffee-table books as Milroy named them.

¹⁵ Milroy, n.p.

¹⁶ James L. Peacock, *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 118.

¹⁷ Bob Wilcox, ed., *Doors* (Canada: Firefly Books, 2015).

Library and Archives Canada classifies *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* as “1. Canada – Social life and customs” and “2. Canada – Pictorial works.”¹⁸ Conceivably the latter classification could best be read as a variation of the term “coffee-table book.” The books definitely discuss Canada at the level of social life and Canadian customs as applicable to a certain age range and, as was already established, the books show an abundance of pictures. According to the University of Hawaii website, which explains the Subject Cataloguing Manual of the Library of Congress, a pictorial work should encompass the following characteristics:

Works consisting of text with illustrations. If the work being catalogued consists of text accompanied by illustrations, assign an additional heading to bring out the pictorial aspect, but only under the following conditions: (1) more than 50% of the work is pictorial, and (2) the publication features, or stresses the importance of, the illustrations, by using a term such as illustrated as part of the title, by giving special credit to the photographer, etc.¹⁹

Douglas Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* do place great stress on the pictures as more or less every two pages of text are followed by two pages of pictures (see figure 1).

¹⁸ Library and Archives Canada, *Amicus: Canadian National Catalogue* (2003) <http://amicus.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aaweb-bin/aamain/itemdisp?sessionKey=999999999_142&l=0&d=2&v=0&lv=1&itm=26039587> [Accessed 26 June 2013].

¹⁹ University of Hawaii, *H 1935 Pictorial Works* (2004) <<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~chopey/H1935.htm>> [Accessed 26 June 2013].

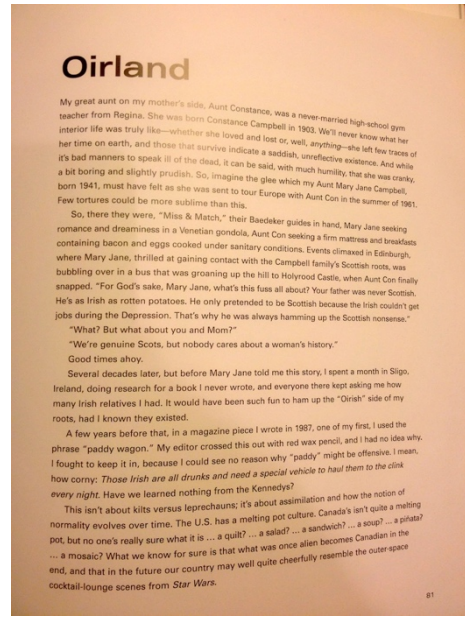


Figure 1: Canadian canned delicacy - one page of text is accompanied by one illustration, (*Souvenir of Canada 2*, pp. 80-81)

In other words, approximately fifty percent of the books are indeed dominated by photos and illustrations. However, as explained below, the pictures often serve as mere illustrations to the texts or are at times even unrelated to the text. Moreover, there is no emphasis on “illustrated” in the title, and there is no emphasis on a particular photographer. This therefore seems to dismiss the fact that the *Souvenir of Canada* books are simply pictorials.

Souvenir of Canada and *Souvenir of Canada 2* are heavily illustrated, but Coupland’s brief commentaries on Canadian society create a book that has a function beyond general entertainment. The most important goal of the books does not necessarily seem to be the pictures, but Coupland’s vision of and relationship with his motherland, and he describes this in great detail in his accompanying texts. For example, when Coupland shares his

ideas on the “Group of Seven,” two paintings – one from Lawren Harris and one from A.Y. Jackson – accompany the text.²⁰

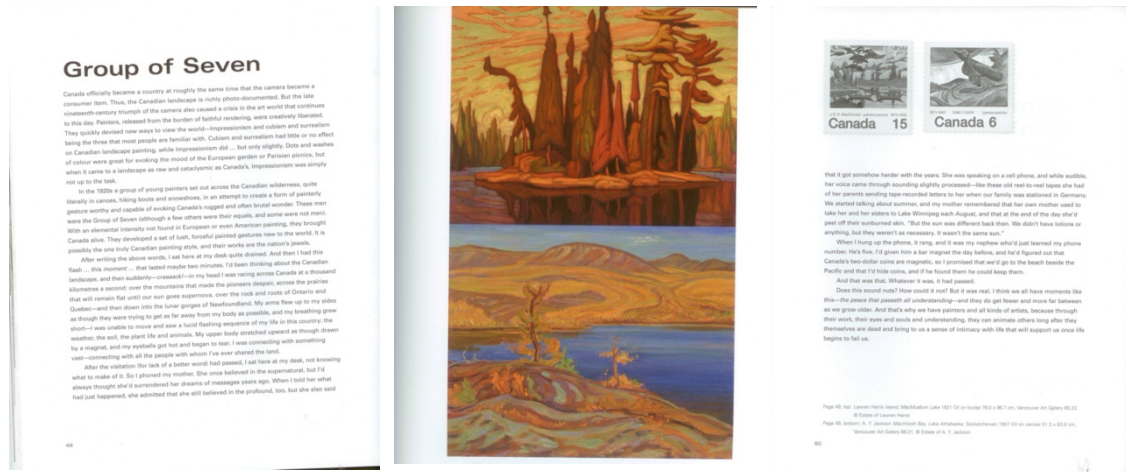


Figure 2: Entry on the “Group of Seven”, (*Souvenir of Canada*, pp. 48-50)

Nonetheless, Coupland does not describe or analyze the paintings. Coupland starts his text, appropriately called “Group of Seven,” by explaining how the rise of photography caused a crisis in the art world. At the same time, he asserts that painters were “liberated” from truthful rendering of their subject as photography already took this role. In the second paragraph of the text, consisting only of seven lines, Coupland describes how in the 1920s a group of young Canadian painters set out to capture “Canada’s rugged and often brutal wonder” (48) – i.e. Canada’s nature. Coupland praises these artists as he views their paintings as the only truly Canadian style and the only painting style invented in Canada. Coupland views these artists as pioneers in Canadian art and, especially, as a visual artist himself it seems that Coupland has utmost respect for them. It is not surprising that, outside of the *Souvenir of Canada* books, he also made a number of visual

²⁰ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 2002), p. 48. All subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically in the text.

works based on the Group of Seven and thus kept coming back to it. The third and fourth paragraphs - a total of twenty-two lines - describe Coupland's reaction to his above words. He argues: "After writing the above words, I sat here at my desk quite drained" (48). He describes in these two paragraphs how his consciousness rushes through the Canadian landscape from behind his desk and how Coupland calls his mother after calming down from his mental trip to discuss the experience. The last two paragraphs of the text discuss how this "mood" was broken by his five-year-old nephew ringing up with a banal question, and afterwards Coupland muses in the last line about artists in general and how their art supports a vision of life.

In other words, the pictures by Harris and Jackson are only used as a visualization of what pictures of the "Group of Seven" more or less look like. They are an example of the genre of painting which is described by Coupland as being truly Canadian, even if they were mostly based off the East coast (except for unofficial member Emily Carr who was born in Victoria, B.C.). It might be said that these illustrations show the style of painting, but further than that they serve no specific purpose. As established, more than half of the text on the "Group of Seven" is actually about Coupland's reaction to the feeling he had after writing a full paragraph about the aforementioned artists. This set-up is often used throughout the *Souvenir of Canada* books: there is a text on a Canadian topic, Coupland introduces this topic briefly explaining something about the actual topic and afterwards he shares his own feeling and experiences in relation to the topic. Pictures are often included, but usually as an illustration and not often as an indispensable part of the text. Kenneth Marantz, quoted in Sylvia Joyce Pantaleo, asserts that picture books are "visual-

verbal” entities that are not “literary works” but “art objects to be experienced.”²¹ This might or might not be true in Coupland’s case, for the emphasis is not necessarily on the pictures as they often just show an item of Canadian nostalgia, a collection of recognizable memorabilia for a number of Canadians. The end result is that all this eclectic visual and written information given by the author adds up to Coupland’s individual Canadian cultural citizenship. Marantz believes that picture books are a combination of pictures (the visual) and texts (the verbal). Naturally, the text from the *Souvenir of Canada* books could be read separately from the pictures, or the pictures could be separately viewed from the text but neither option would give a complete vision. Marantz believes that books containing both pictures and illustrations should not be considered as literature but as art; they are one intertwined element and do not give a full view if seen separately. Marantz might be right in recognizing this; however, this point of view is rather opaque and does not answer all necessary questions, e.g. how pictures and text relate to each other within one book.

J. Hillis Miller, quoted in Amy Tucker, sheds light on the relationship between a text and its illustrations and asserts that it is “a continual back and forth movement which is incarnated in the experience of the reader as his eyes move from words to picture and back again, juxtaposing the two in a mutual establishment of meaning.”²² Hillis Miller clearly shows here that the text and the illustrations interact; however, it should also be taken into account that there are different methods of how the text and the illustrations can function together. In their paper, Emily E. Marsh and Marilyn Domas White give a

²¹ Sylvia Joyce Pantaleo, *Exploring Student Response to Contemporary Picturebooks* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 8.

²² Amy Tucker, *The Illustration of the Master: Henry James and the Magazine Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 37.

classification of the relationship between images and text.²³ Marsh and White distinguish between three main categories: a) functions expressing little relation to the text, b) functions expressing close relation to the text and c) functions that go beyond the text.²⁴ Sylvia Pantaleo has a similar quest in her book: she also tries to discover how the relationship between text and pictures work and to achieve this she analyzes works by various children's literature experts in visual images.²⁵ Pantaleo, like Marsh and White, also tries to establish which categories of picture versus text interactions are imaginable. Joanne Golden sees five types of text-illustration relationships:

- [1] text and picture are symmetrical;
- [2] text depends on picture for clarification;
- [3] illustration enhances, elaborates text;
- [4] text carries primary narrative, illustration is selective; and
- [5] illustration carries primary narrative, text is selective.²⁶

This five-category model adds to Marsh and White's three-category model, though of course there is an overlap in the fact that both Golden, quoted in Pantaleo, and Marsh and White recognize that text and pictures could be closely related, that pictures can go beyond the text and the fact that pictures can just be decorative. Golden's two additional categories seem a valuable addition for there are indeed books in which the text or the illustration seems more important. The fact that the first categories are overlapping with Marsh and White points out, however, that these are perhaps the most agreed upon categories.

²³ Emily E. Marsh and Marilyn Domas White, 'A Taxonomy of Relationships between Images and Text', *Journal of Documentation*, 59 (2003), 647-72 (p. 652).

²⁴ Ibid., p. 652.

²⁵ Pantaleo.

²⁶ Pantaleo, p. 8.

On the other hand, Pantaleo shows how Denise Agosto distinguishes between only two categories, the parallel storytelling idea and the interdependent storytelling idea.²⁷ The idea of parallel storytelling is applicable to texts that construct a story simultaneously through the text and the pictures; both the text and the pictures tell the same narrative, though they could be separated, and the text or pictures would still make sense separated from each other. The idea of interdependent storytelling differs as both the pictures and the text must be taken into consideration to understand the story as a whole: without the text or without the pictures the rest of the story would not make sense. Agosto's approach seems to be valid and overlaps with both Golden and Marsh and White in the fact that it also points out that the text and pictures work together towards one story or that the pictures or text just serve as illustrations.

The previously mentioned example, from Douglas Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books on the Group of Seven, shows that the interaction between the Group of Seven pictures and Group of Seven text is minimal. Coupland does not address the depicted images in his running text; moreover it is never explained why these exact paintings were chosen and not others, and without the text the pictures would not have had an immediate purpose. This does not mean that the audience might not have recognized the images depicted as paintings from the Group of Seven and therefore a great part of the dominant culture and Canadian heritage. Yet, without text it would have been guesswork to know what Coupland wanted to do with them in combination to his other texts. Moreover, this does not seem to be the only example of complete randomness of the pictures in relation to the text in Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada*. For example, on page 6 and 7 of *Souvenir*

²⁷ Pantaleo, p. 8.

of Canada (see figure 3) Coupland discusses his high school work-experience program in marketing which he followed in grade 12 and separately from that, in a following text, the word “Canuck.” The topic of his work-experience program and the topic of the word Canuck are explained in two full pages of text. Coupland does link the word Canuck to the ice hockey team from Vancouver in the running text, but then, when continuing to page 8 and 9 there are two pages of pictures featuring an old sticker book about the Toronto Maple Leafs. This jump from the Vancouver Canucks to the Toronto Maple Leafs seems quite puzzling, especially as they are rival teams and the switch leaves the reader with an incoherent feeling. The reader could assume that pages 10 and 11 perhaps discuss the Leafs, but the texts on these subsequent pages continue on “Capitaine Crounche” and “Cheeseheads” (see figure 3). There is, in this instance, thus no absolute relationship between the pictures Coupland chose and the text that he wrote. This could thus be pointing at the fact that Coupland might be making use of parallel storytelling or the fact that the text carries the primary narrative. The pictures are not always necessary to understand the written story that Coupland is trying to share. Nevertheless, Coupland, being a visual artist, must have chosen the different pictures for specific reasons and their importance to Canadian culture.

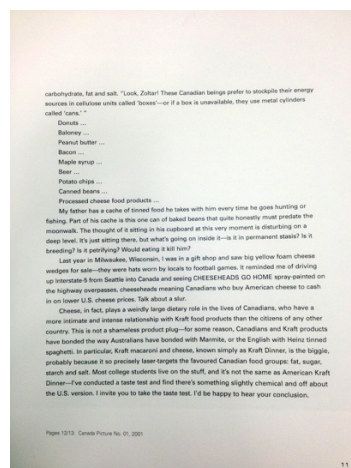
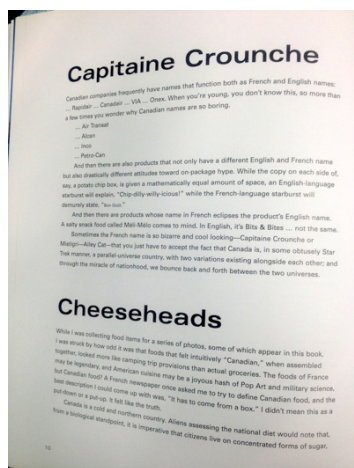
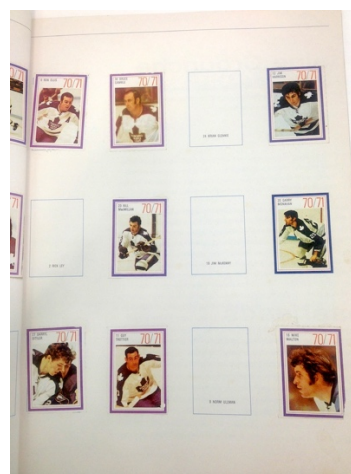
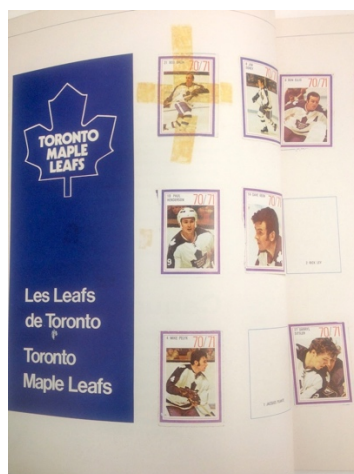
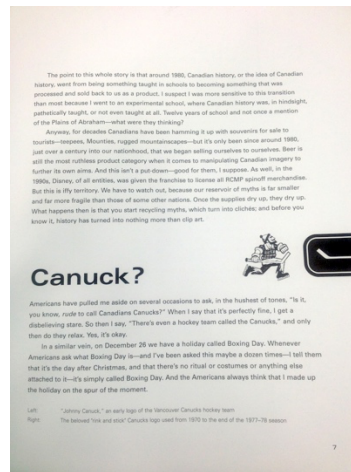
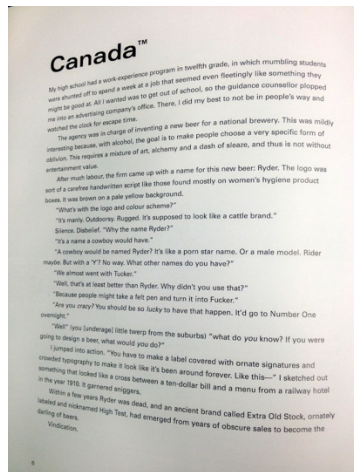


Figure 3: Pages 6 – 11 from the first Souvenir of Canada book: page 6-7 discuss Coupland's high school work scheme, and Canucks, page 8-9 show sticker book pages about the Maple Leafs, and page 10-11 discuss "Capitaine Crouche" and "Cheeseheads"

Surely, Coupland repeatedly inserts pictures on Canadian topics between texts which do not stand in direct relation to these texts or which seem out of place. For example (see figures 4-8 underneath), there is a medicine box inserted for no apparent reason, news pictures are included without being discussed in the running text, pictures that have an artistic appearance or are collages are put in-between, a picture of Coupland's own father hunting is added to a text about the fact that Canada is a young country and, moreover, nostalgic Canadian products are shown repeatedly. This joining together of images gives a great variety, and at times produces an effect of complete incoherence of meaning.



Figure 4: A bilingual medicine box (*Souvenir of Canada*, p. 117)



Figure 5: News photo, protesters in Quebec City in 2001 (*Souvenir of Canada*, p. 41)



Figure 6: Collage / art picture made by Coupland showing Canadian themes (Souvenir of Canada, p. 28-29)



Figure 7: Douglas Coupland's father as a young man hunting (Souvenir of Canada, p. 131)



Figure 8: “fiddlehead greens”: unclear whether this is an original advertising photo, or an old package photographed by Coupland. (*Souvenir of Canada*, p. 136)

The *Souvenir of Canada* books do not seem to be meant as a serious account of Canada, but Coupland’s intention to show the “true” culture of the country through a tongue-in-cheek version: perhaps a postmodern ironic version. Coupland himself comments, in Milroy, about the *Souvenir of Canada* books that he does not “think of them as high culture or as low culture.”²⁸ He explains this by commenting on the photographs

²⁸ Milroy, n.p.

included in the books saying that they are "just as humble, communal shared culture."²⁹ This establishes that Coupland wanted to show a "true" picture, and the mix of topics – sometimes highbrow as in the case with the "Group of Seven" and sometimes lowbrow as when discussing hockey. The pictures – "humble, communal shared culture" – match Coupland's texts that describe this culture. Coupland sees the books as he sees the pictures, as something to which specific Canadians can relate and which they themselves can understand. The topic of Coupland's Canada is foregrounded, but the chosen images barely relate to each other even if all of them point at an aspect of Canadian culture. In fact, at moments it gives the feeling of reading somebody's scrapbook, because of the variety of images and products used. Further on in this chapter the idea of the scrapbook will be analysed more in depth; however, the idea of the souvenir will be explored first.

QUESTION OF THE SOUVENIR

"Souvenir", the description of the books suggested by their title, is a French word for memories or remembering but can also be used as a word for keepsakes or mementos. For example, in French one could say "on peut acheter des souvenirs"; in this case one would not be buying memories but keepsakes to keep the memory of a specific place or moment alive. Rolf Potts traces the definition in English back to the 1700s but argues that it was only during the "late nineteenth century" that the term started to gain extensive use as this was the period that mass-produced souvenir shops became more common.³⁰ The concept of the souvenir is a broad notion, and it is difficult to determine what is exactly a souvenir and what not. Rolf Potts argues that "On that same token, many people collect

²⁹ Milroy, n.p.

³⁰ Rolf Potts, *Souvenir, Object Lessons* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 2.

non-travel objects – mementos, keepsakes, heirlooms, trophies, antiques, memorabilia – that have souvenir-like qualities while not being souvenirs in the literal sense.”³¹ This means that some objects which are collected by individuals could have souvenir-like properties whilst not truly being souvenirs; it seems to be implied that a true souvenir is picked up at a (foreign) destination. For example, Torabian talks about the idea that souvenirs exist between ‘substance and essence’: “Souvenirs in substance are tangible, physical, and material objects that identify place and a singular experience. Souvenirs of essence include intangible memories and enjoyable holiday experiences.”³² In other words, the souvenirs in substance are touchable souvenirs from places visited which can be displayed like the pictures in Coupland’s books; Coupland’s stories surrounding his pictures would be the souvenirs of essence.

Torabian and Arai differentiate between four types of souvenirs. Torabian and Arai distinguish between, firstly, the *Symbolic reminders*, secondly, *the Tourist Commodity*, thirdly, *Other Unintended Commodities* and, lastly, as *Reminders of the Tourist Experience*.³³ *The Symbolic reminder* is the straightforward main-function of souvenirs and serves as a reminder of the trip and is preferably put on display in the home for everyone to see. *The tourist commodity* is mass-produced and serves the purpose of consumerism without “emotional attachments”.³⁴ More interesting are the *other unintended commodities*, as these are items which were acquired during a voyage and thus remind of it but were not specifically made as tourist objects. Lastly, the *reminders of the tourist experience* are the less obvious elements such as a “immigration visa or

³¹ Potts, p. 7.

³² Pooneh Torabian and Susan M. Arai, 'Tourist Perceptions of Souvenir Authenticity: An Exploration of Selective Tourist Blogs', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19 (2016), 697-712 (p. 702).

³³ Ibid., p. 702.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 702.

stamp in a passport” but also “stories, recipes, a suntan” or a “tattoo.”³⁵ This means a souvenir ranges between a tangible item bought with the purpose of being a reminder to intangible memories of a trip.

Coupland raises specific expectations of his readers by calling his books “Souvenir of Canada.” He even specifies that “These aren’t souvenirs you’ll find in any giftshop.”³⁶ The reader expects to find photographs of items and media which relate to the stereotypical Canada that people think of when thinking of the country. However, the items portrayed are indeed not the souvenirs of substance found in general souvenir shops: it is not keyrings with the maple leaf and t-shirts with the word “Canada” which are displayed, but the book shows objects from a certain collective Canadian memory. Coupland’s objects, his souvenirs of substance, are recognized by those possessing similar cultural citizenship as Coupland. The items Coupland selects deliver true Canadiana, but the objects shown by him also demonstrate his age and place in society as well. Not all Canadians might understand Coupland’s choices: Québécois, indigenous Canadians or younger generations have a different background than Coupland. For example, on the front of the first Souvenir of Canada book there is a beer bottle (a stub) which is only familiar to people who still used these types of bottles, to those who saw their family or people in their environment use them or to those who like specialty craft beers as the bottle is sometimes still used by small breweries.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 702.

³⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2005) [on DVD]

Souvenir of **Canada**



Figure 9: Cover of Souvenir of Canada, showing the beer stub.

According to Troy Burtch, the “stubby” or “stub bottle”, portrayed by Coupland on the front of his book, was in use between 1961 (Douglas Coupland’s year of birth) until approximately the mid 1980s (when Coupland was in his twenties).³⁷ This means that those who are Canadian born from 1985 onwards will probably not remember this bottle, and therefore fall outside of the cultural citizenship depicted by Coupland. The souvenir Coupland portrays is not only a souvenir in the sense of a souvenir of substance or tangible object, but it is also a souvenir of essence; Coupland’s souvenirs are collective memories showing cultural citizenship of a specific generation and a specific people. Coupland makes his personal memories, for example of the stub, public by taking pictures of these sort of Canadiana items and displaying them and by doing so he provides souvenirs of substance. The added stories provide the souvenir in essence, the memories which he made, and which are probably similar to those of Canadians of similar age and background. Through this process of making the personal souvenirs and memories public Coupland affirms his cultural citizenship and that of those with similar remembrances.

³⁷ Troy Burtch, *Canadian Beer Bottles: Do You Know Your History?* (2012) <<https://www.canadianliving.com/food/entertaining/article/canadian-beer-bottles-do-you-know-your-history>> [Accessed 25-01-2020].

However, as noted, at the same time, Coupland's book excludes those Canadians who have different backgrounds and age. Coupland's souvenirs and memories are not fully transferable to, for example, the experience of a Québécois, indigenous Canadians or newly arrived immigrants as their cultural citizenship is not identical. The fact that Coupland includes his own narratives which discuss his experiences of his version of Canada makes it very personal and is reminiscent of the genre of life writing. In the following section this genre will be explored further.

LIFE NARRATIVES: AUTOBIOGRAPHY VS. MEMOIR

According to Couser, "life writing has become the umbrella term used to refer to all nonfictional representation of identity."³⁸ Because of the fact that the first-person narrator in *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* is also the author, the two categories that seem most applicable to investigate in relation to the *Souvenir of Canada* books are the genres of autobiography and memoir.

In her book *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson quotes Philippe Lejeune's definition of autobiography: "A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality."³⁹ Anderson notes that this definition is still quite imprecise for it could also apply to related genres in autobiography or fiction such as journaling in scrapbooks, or the writing of diaries. Meanwhile, Thomas Larson states about the genre of autobiography that: "there is only one life – the person lives it and writes it. Boom, done."⁴⁰ Moreover, he argues that an autobiography mostly tries to be "*the* record of *the* past." Or, rather, the

³⁸ G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 24.

³⁹ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography, The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Thomas Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 17.

autobiography could be considered the most important method of writing down life narratives. Larson notes that this differs from, for example, a memoir because a memoir just tries to be a small piece of the past – “a variation on what happened.”⁴¹ Strictly speaking, to summarize the above information, an autobiography tries to be very precise and show one specific person’s full life in hindsight from his or her own perspective.

Another imperative element to autobiography is the fact that the protagonist of the narrative should be an “I”-figure. More importantly, according to Anderson, it is quite clear that there should be congruency between the author, the narrator and the protagonist. Philippe Lejeune calls this idea of harmony part of the autobiographical pact.⁴² The autobiographical pact is an agreement between the narrator, reader and publisher on the fact that in an autobiographical text the *identity of name* between the author, narrator and protagonist should be the same.⁴³ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson concur with this; they write that a distinction should be made between the different first-person subjects or – as they call it - “I”s in autobiographies.⁴⁴ The four distinct “I”s Smith and Watson distinguish are the a) real or historical “I”, b) the narrating “I”, c) the narrated “I” and d) the ideological “I.” Simply put, the real or historical “I” can be viewed as the actually living and breathing person whom eventually wrote down the story. We do not actually know this “I”; we are just aware of this person’s existence. The narrating “I” is the actual narrator in the story; he or she is “the agent of discourse.”⁴⁵ The narrating “I” is not the

⁴¹ Larson, p. 19.

⁴² Philippe Lejeune and Paul John Eakin, *On Autobiography, Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), n.p. Original emphasis.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 207.

⁴⁴ Smith and Watson, p. 73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

same figure as the narrated “I”, as the narrated “I” is a remembered and de facto younger “I” than the narrating I. The narrated “I” is therefore a figure from the past, not actually living in the present or actually having existed in this manner as they are conjured up from memory. For the ideological “I” Smith and Watson quote Althusser and explain that this “I” is neither “a transparent subject nor a free agent.”⁴⁶ In other words, the ideological “I” points to the fact that every narrator is tainted by his or her historical location or his or her ideology. Both *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* show examples of this: for example in *Souvenir of Canada 2* Coupland discusses “hooch”, and he reflects how during the prohibition of liquor in the United States, Canada actually started exporting it to its “bored southern neighbour” and because of this Canada became a “pretty good maker of whisky and beer.”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, according to Coupland’s description, the Canadian government wanted to discourage its own inhabitants from using liquor and Coupland explains how, before and even during the 1960s, you could only buy liquor in a store after filling in a form at a special window and afterwards presenting it to the clerk at another window. Coupland here refers to the period of the 1960s and earlier when liquor stores were still not self-serving; it was out of the question for a customer to just grab a bottle of alcohol and pay for it. Additionally, in many provinces the liquor consumer also had to buy a liquor permit. This permit was in fact a sort of passbook that had to be presented at every purchase.⁴⁸ This bureaucratic method of alcohol purchase is very typical for the morals and customs of that time; it shows peoples’ attitude to alcohol. Coupland explains that now “[t]hose days are gone” even

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁷ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada 2* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004). p. 38. All subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁸ CBC Digital Archives, *Alcohol: A 1969 Survey of Drinking Laws* (n.d.)
 <<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/lifestyle/food/last-call-canadians-and-alcohol/a-survey-of-drinking-laws.html>> [Accessed 22 July 2013].

though he thinks a “similar moral tone prevails” as alcohol is now still heavily taxed by the Canadian government (38). It is interesting that Coupland links the taxation of alcohol to a “moral tone”; it shows that he finds the heavy taxation on alcohol in fact a state interference and though simple taxation is indeed preferable to filling out forms and getting a permit, it is still what it is, state meddling with a moral reasoning. Moreover, it also says something about the time in which Coupland grew up: he is now used to a more relaxed liquor policy and thus accepts this as the normal standard. If Coupland had been born elsewhere, or in a different time, his liquor attitude might have been very different. The ideological “I”, Coupland, is thus tainted by his historical location (the present and in part the decades in which he grew up) and his own ideology (being a white man from a mainstream Canadian family). The real “I”, Coupland right now, is left out of the story – we know he exists – but he is not the “I” on paper. The narrating “I” however shows that he is fascinated by “hooch” and its selling, and that he is curious to explore the topic. The narrated “I” is even absent in this particular eleven-line abstract – there is no anecdote about his own experience with his alcohol consumption. This specific entry therefore mostly deals with the “ideological ‘I’”, even if many other Coupland entries in the *Souvenir of Canada* books put the emphasis elsewhere.

To be able to determine whether *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* are indeed life narratives, it is important to first discover how to decide whether a book does or does not fit the description of an autobiography or memoir. In his book, *Memoir: An Introduction*, G. Thomas Couser gives practical guidance to determine whether a book is

an autobiography or memoir.⁴⁹ As might be noticed, Couser's checklist follows the idea of the different "I"s:

One obvious indication that a text is a memoir or autobiography is that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist share the same name and vital statistics (such as date of birth). They are identical, in more than one sense: (1) they are all the same person, and (2) their congruence establishes the *identity* of the memoirist. This is in itself a sufficient signal that a narrative is a memoir. But notice that in order to discover this congruence we need to consult the title page, which is not part of the narrative proper.⁵⁰

At first sight Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* match Couser's description of autobiographies and memoirs; Coupland is the author, and the narrator, and his life plays an important role in the books as it is like the thread through the telling of the recent history of Canada. However, Coupland is not the only protagonist; the books do not only tell the story of Coupland, but especially his relation to a Canada from the recent past. Coupland shares the story of Canada through his own experiences, but Canada (at times in relation to Coupland), not Coupland himself, always stays the main focus. For example, in *Souvenir of Canada*, Coupland explains how he was interviewed by an Austrian television-journalist who told him that he had heard "that everybody in Canada is named Doug" (23). Coupland ponders on this comment, denies it in his own mind, and is subsequently confronted with three more Canadians named Doug. This makes him realize that Doug is indeed a stereotypically Canadian name. Coupland stays at the surface and does not ask questions on why Douglas is such a popular Canadian name; he leaves out whether it has anything to do with colonisation or race. Still, the latter example illustrates that even though Douglas Coupland relates all experiences to himself, in the end the common theme running through the books really is the topic of Canada. Point two, as mentioned by Couser, does hold true as well, since congruence

⁴⁹ Couser, p. 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

exists between the author, the narrator and the protagonist, and together they form “the *identity* of the memoirist” – only in this case the memoirist’s identity is especially focused on the relationship with Canada.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that the *Souvenir of Canada* books could be viewed as an autobiography or a memoir. To establish whether it is the one or the other, however, it should first be determined what the differences are between the two genres. This is more difficult than it seems for, as Larson argues, “critics have conflated autobiography and memoir throughout our literary history.”⁵¹ This implies that the difference between autobiography and memoir is not as clear-cut as is necessary to make a sharp distinction. A reason for this might come from Rak. She explains how “unlike autobiography, ‘memoir’ has received very little critical attention in its own right.”⁵² This absence of critical reviewing might be because “[m]emoir [...] is understood to be less sophisticated than autobiography and therefore, is the province of less-skilled writers.”⁵³ As memoirs were seen as “less sophisticated”, it might explain why scholars in the past might not have given so much attention to the subject. Rak thus argues that the autobiography was usually, historically, seen as literature, whilst memoirs were seen as a pulp genre, a genre of lesser quality.⁵⁴ This disregard of memoirs has also shaped the view on memoirs. As Rak notes that memoirs are often viewed as not being real or authentic, the memoir “does not need to have literary merit”, and its authors are usually viewed as lesser writers.⁵⁵ Rak also explains why it is hard to define memoirs: “Memoirs blend private and public; they

⁵¹ Larson, p. 17.

⁵² Julie Rak, 'Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity', *Genre* 36, Fall/Winter (2004), 305-26 (p. 305).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

contain writing about the self and about others; they are written by the most powerful public men and the least known, most private women.”⁵⁶ Rak clarifies that the group of memoir writers is very diverse, the topics are very diverse and also the spheres discussed vary. Considering the fact that the group writing memoirs is so varied and the fact that they all have different topics addressed in their works perhaps explains why it is so difficult to define a memoir.

Nevertheless, an attempt at defining a memoir should still be made and it seems that many scholars prefer defining a memoir by contrasting it with the genre of biography or autobiography. For example, G. Thomas Couser explains that a memoir “usually signals that it is based primarily on memory, a notoriously unreliable and highly selective faculty.”⁵⁷ Couser places this against biographies, which are, according to him, usually well researched, and try to resemble the truth. Couser explains this by saying that whilst a biography could be written about any historical figure, a memoir can only be written from memory. Exactly for this reason, a memoir will always discuss the writer or somebody close to the writer. An autobiography on the other hand, is usually also written from memory, even though the writer might try their hardest to check their facts. As Smith and Watson argue, the narrating “I” fills up the narrated “I”, or differently said, the “I” currently narrating the story is conjuring up a previous “I.”⁵⁸

Larson also comments on memory and argues that (in the past) “[a]utobiography’s central tenet - wisdom gained through many years – is much too grandiose for the memoirist. In

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 316.

⁵⁷ Couser, p. 19.

⁵⁸ Smith and Watson, p. 73.

fact, memoir writers are so bent on activating the particular in their books that many are writing of the immediate past, even the still-corruptible present, not waiting for time to ripen or change what they know.”⁵⁹ Larson therefore tries to assert that whilst autobiographies are the product of maturing and experience, memoirs are not evaluating the recent events that are described as carefully. Moreover, through Larson’s statement it is made clear that memoirists write about the immediate past, not necessarily a complete life-span as in autobiographies. Coupland’s work is indeed about himself; nevertheless, it is not a chronological account of his life, but a patchwork of (mundane) subjects and memories of Canada stuck together in two books. This seems to suggest that Coupland’s books have more in common with memoirs than autobiographies.

Furthermore, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson agree with Larson on the fact that the term memoir is usually applied to life writing that only focuses on a particular section of somebody’s life, usually concentrating on “interconnected experiences” within that life.⁶⁰ They explain their understanding of memoir – from the historical point of view – as a way of placing the subject in a social environment. In this environment the subject can be an observer or participant, but the memoir focusses on other individuals as well – their lives and activities away from the narrator.⁶¹ An autobiography would stay much more on course, keeping the main focus on the autobiographical subject. It is clear that this is indeed applicable to the *Souvenir of Canada* books, for example, as discussed earlier in the “all Canadians are named Doug” example. Coupland discusses his life in relation to Canada, as an observer and as a participant. The main focus of the book is therefore not

⁵⁹ Larson, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Smith and Watson, p. 274.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 274.

as strongly directed to Douglas Coupland – in relation to the narrated “I” - as it would be in an autobiography, but much more towards the relation of Coupland with his social environment e.g. his family, friends, fellow Canadians– thus in the ideological “I” form. An example of this relation with his social environment, in this case his family, would be when Coupland writes about hockey in the first *Souvenir of Canada* book (55). Coupland recalls that his mother visited his studio at the moment that a table hockey game was being prepped for a photo shoot and quotes the conversation he had with her. He describes her feelings concerning the game and how much she loved playing it with her sisters when she was still a teenager. After explaining how much his mother loved the game Coupland goes into the feelings his father and brother have towards the game and that they love hockey. Coupland takes these examples to show that hockey, according to his vision, has basically affected the Canadian nation asserting that it is the one place in which the national anthem is sung. In other words, this example shows perfectly how much Coupland makes use of his social environment to prove his point. Coupland, a private person, makes himself public and as he tries to pass himself off as the quintessential Canadian born in the 1960s; in other words, it is not only about him but also about his environment. The memoir does not only look at private events but takes the public sphere into account; and this is what Coupland tries to achieve, his Canadian experience shared with others.

There are more examples of why Coupland’s work could be regarded as a memoir. Julie Rak explains how George Fetherling calls memoirs “[m]ore tightly focused, more daring in construction, and (its author hopes) more penetrating. A memoir can be of one’s self

or of other people or of a particular decade – or of a particular place.”⁶² Fetherling states that a memoir is indeed broader than an autobiography and can thus focus on a particular moment in time or on a specific moment in time. Coupland does both by writing both about Canada and his own generation. Georg Misch, quoted in Rak, explains that a memoir does not necessarily talk about a person but that a memoir’s focus is memory and the recording or sketching of it.⁶³ Misch asserts that in autobiography on the other hand the main focus would be on a specific person. Misch’s statements also fortify the case for seeing the *Souvenir of Canada*-works as a memoir for – like Fetherling – again it is shown that the subject is not necessarily that most important aspect of a memoir. Misch places emphasize on the fact that memory is the most important part of a memoir, and through all Coupland’s anecdotes and nostalgic pictures (such as his father or an old package of fiddlehead greens (see figure 8)) it is clear that Coupland places the main importance here as well.

Couser also agrees that the term memoir could indeed be used for a work that is primarily about someone – or something – else.⁶⁴ That is to say, whilst autobiographies really must discuss the protagonist, memoirs can talk about the protagonist in relation to someone or something else. Couser points to Rak’s article ‘Are Memoirs Autobiography?’ to explain that the term “memoir” is highly ambiguous and that many scholars give alternative meanings to the term.⁶⁵ However, there does seem to be a certain consensus and overlap between authors as well.

⁶² Julie Rak, 'Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity', *Genre* 36, Fall/Winter (2004), 305-26 (p. 305).

⁶³ Rak, 'Are Memoirs Autobiography?', p. 309.

⁶⁴ Couser, p. 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Another important aspect to this discussion and chapter is the fact that the memoir genre might be seen as a vessel to learn about cultural citizenship. Rak writes, “Memoir [...] is a genre where problems with citizenship and identity are often worked on, worked out, and read about by others who want to understand what citizenship and belonging can mean.”⁶⁶ Rak’s observation seems very applicable to *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2*, since it is exactly in these books that Coupland searches for the Canadian – his Canadian – identity, and tries to assert his cultural citizenship. The question then becomes, why is the memoir such a fit place to assert citizenship? Smith and Watson address the topic of identity and assert that “autobiographical acts involve narrators in ‘identifying’ themselves to the reader.”⁶⁷ The writer asserts his or her race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, class or whatever else is relevant to their view of themselves. According to Smith and Watson life writers use these different identity categories in their writing, and they do this as a way to present themselves in a clearer way to their audience.⁶⁸ Cultural citizenship could and should be counted as one of these identities. Chaney argues: “citizenship [...] is meaningful in spheres such as legal, political and social because it guarantees an identity.”⁶⁹ As cultural citizenship is part of an individual’s identity and cultural upbringing it will almost certainly, consciously or unconsciously, be part of the author’s writing. Accepting that Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* books are memoirs also affirms the fact that Coupland writes about his version of Canada, his cultural citizenship which he wants to share with the outside world. The

⁶⁶ Julie Rak, 'Insecure Citizenship: Michael Ignatieff, Memoir, Canada', *Biography*, 33 (2010), 1-23 (p. 11).

⁶⁷ Smith and Watson, p. 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ David Chaney, 'Cosmopolitan Art and Cultural Citizenship', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19 (2002), 157-74 (p. 170).

memoir is also more suited to Coupland's work as it shows the mundaneness of Canadian culture, which in line with Couser's previously mentioned idea that memoirs are usually less researched and more based on "memory, a notoriously unreliable and highly selective faculty."⁷⁰ Still, the *Souvenir of Canada* books cannot be seen as simple memoirs. The extensive use of pictures and illustrations in the books seems to hint at the fact that the book also has a pictorial function and, because of the patchwork between text and pictures, the idea of parallel storytelling through scrapbooking comes to mind. In the following section will analyse the *Souvenir of Canada* books for traits of scrapbooking.

SCRAPBOOKING AND THE QUESTION OF MEMOIR?

G. Thomas Couser writes that "[o]ne of the most humble life-writing genres may be the scrapbook. It is so humble that I never thought of it as a genre - until one of my cousins showed up at a family reunion with a multivolume bound edition of a scrapbook documenting his life from early childhood to retirement age."⁷¹ This is the only mention of scrapbooking in Couser's text and other experts on life narratives, like Smith and Watson, do not even mention scrapbooking at all. It seems that, thus, scrapbooking itself is seen as a lesser form of a life narrative. As a matter of fact, as was already established, the texts in *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* have a recurring first-person narrator and there are many references to the author's own life. It is therefore interesting to consider whether this work might be a "pictorial work", "scrapbook" in combination with being a memoir, ultimately making the *Souvenir of Canada* books a hybrid genre.

⁷⁰ Couser, p. 19.

⁷¹ Couser, p. 31.

In a 2005 paper Eugene H. Fram tackles the topic of the, at that moment, trending hype of scrapbooking. According to Fram “The significant appeal of scrapbooking is part of a wave of interest in “nostalgia” products and services that have washed across the U.S.A. for at least the past ten years.”⁷² Even though Fram specifically addresses the hype of scrapbooking in the U.S.A., Hof gives evidence in her paper that the scrapbook trend actually went far over the borders and even affected European countries.⁷³ The first *Souvenir of Canada* book, being from 2002 and the second from 2004, consciously or unconsciously might well have been playing into this trend.

Definitions of scrapbooks are plenty; for example, Todd L. Goodsell and Liann Seiter summarize scrapbooking as “the practice of preserving photographs and other mementos in an album garnished with narrative and ornamentation, [it] represents an everyday grappling with multiple realities.”⁷⁴ According to Goodsell and Seiter a scrapbook is thus a book full of memories – written, photographed or otherwise collected. Fram adds to this saying that the origin of scrapbooking started around the late 1800s when it became fashionable in the U.S. to preserve letters, photos, postcards and other things in scrapbooks.⁷⁵ Fram adds that this could be seen as a way of preserving them for future generations. Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* books behave like Goodsell, Seiter and Fram describe scrapbooks. Of course, there are instances in which there is a relationship between the picture and the text. For example, Coupland starts the first *Souvenir of*

⁷² Eugene H. Fram, 'The Booming Scrapbooking Market in the U.S.A.: Despite Phenomenal Growth, the Future's Unclear', *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 33 (2005), 215-225 (p. 215).

⁷³ Karina Hof, 'Something You Can Actually Pick Up: Scrapbooking as a Form and Forum of Cultural Citizenship', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9 (2006), 363-84.

⁷⁴ Todd L. Goodsell, and Liann Seiter, 'Scrapbooking: Family Capital and the Construction of Family Discourse', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 40 (2011), 318-348 (p. 318).

⁷⁵ Fram, p. 216.

Canada books by talking about Baffin Island, and included above the text is very appropriately a picture of Nunavut (see figure 10).



Figure 10: Picture by Roberta Bondar taken in Quttinirpaaq National Park, Nunavut. (*Souvenir of Canada*, p. 4-5).

Still, as already shown above, mostly the reader is presented with a variety of topics and a variety of mementoes mixed up and all put together. Many items and texts in the *Souvenir of Canada* books seem randomly chosen, the only common denominator being that all subjects have to do with the overarching topic of Canada. Whether Coupland intended to preserve “his” Canada through his works, as was the fashion during the 1800s, is undeterminable but it is clear that his view of Canada from his childhood upwards is what is depicted and described. This showing of images (a reminder of the souvenirs of substance) and sharing of stories (a reminder of the souvenirs of essence) from Coupland’s childhood until now is typical of a scrapbook as described by Fram. On the other hand, the texts seem to go deeper into the subject matter than would regularly happen in scrapbooking. Scrapbooking usually makes use of “journaling”, which means writing text next to the pictures or included memorabilia to explain what the importance

of the picture or item is to the family.⁷⁶ Coupland goes beyond explaining his collected pictures and items: he narrates his past experiences and includes (at times) related illustrations. However, as previously explained, there are also instances in which related pictures make no sense to the text. In these cases, it is thus hard to describe the text included in *Souvenir of Canada* as journaling, for it obviously goes past the narration of the included material. Medley-Rath asserts that many scrapbookers in fact do not use any journaling at all, or sparingly to add a few words or data to memorabilia or a picture.⁷⁷ Therefore, the journaling in scrapbooks does not seem to behave as the texts in Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books as the latter does not always relate words to pictures and vice versa. Moreover, Coupland does not write a few words to clarify but he tells his own story in relation to Canada. For example, looking back at the "Group of Seven," it was very noticeable that the text was the focus point and the pictures were not as important to the argument; however to give the reader a sense of the "Group of Seven" the pictures were of course important in their own right.

It is interesting to look at Karina Hof's paper in relation to Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books, as Hof clearly shows in her text that scrapbooking is linked to citizenship – and thus it makes sense for Coupland to use it as a genre when taking into consideration his main topic of Canada. Hof asserts that "[c]itizenship comes by way of scrapbooking as it offers a very visible form and forum through which scrappers show what and whom they care about, how they live and where they fit into society at large."⁷⁸ Scrapbooking,

⁷⁶ Stephanie R. Medley-Rath, 'Scrapworthy Lives: A Cognitive Sociological Analysis of a Modern Narrative Form' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Georgia State University, 2010) in ScholarWorks@Georgia State University <https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/sociology_diss/51/> [Accessed 09 December 2020], p. 1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 329.

⁷⁸ Hof, p. 364.

being an expression of identity of the person putting it together, could therefore be seen as a great tool to discover more about feelings of belonging and citizenship of the person constructing the scrapbook. The topic of cultural citizenship in relation to Coupland's work will be looked into in depth further on in this chapter.

Douglas Coupland's books are thus different from regular pictorials or coffee-table books, as they are a fusion of text and images, but also because the pictures and memorabilia photographed seem somewhat randomly chosen. It is undeniably true that the books contain a lot of pictures and text and this mixture of the one and the other is probably why the Library and Archives Canada has emphasized both the "social life and customs" as the "pictorial" portion of the books. However, the pictures and variety of (photographed) items included remind the reader of scrapbooking. The disregard of the normal "journaling" scrapbook conventions gives the impression that the *Souvenir of Canada* books are perhaps hybrid: a scrapbook memoir.

As written earlier, in comparison to an autobiography, memoirs usually discuss a shorter and more recent period of time and, secondly, are not solely concerned with the development of the author's character. Both are applicable to the *Souvenir of Canada* books; Coupland does not discuss his life in relation to Canada from the cradle onwards but shares anecdotes where appropriate, and moreover, he at times seems to be a side-figure to the real topic, Canada. The *Souvenir of Canada* works could be seen as a hybrid genre, a scrapbook-memoir, even though this is a relatively unknown genre. There are some rare examples though, such as the book *Some of My Lives: A Scrapbook Memoir* by Rosamond Bernier and *Steps Along The Way: A Governor's Scrapbook* (classified under

memoir) by Alexander Lamar.⁷⁹ These two examples show how the genre of scrapbooking and the genre of memoir can work together. Nevertheless, they are not exactly similar to Coupland's works. Bernier's book is not so much a pictorial book as Coupland's books. Bernier's book mostly has placed different types of text together to form a scrapbook but is quite barren concerning pictures. Lamar's book contains more pictures but still does not convey the same scrapbook-like feeling that Coupland's books express.

At first sight, from a cultural citizenship point of view, scrapbooks behave in a similar fashion as a memoir. According to Stephanie R. Medley-Rath scrapbooks could be seen as both bordering on the public and the private – something that also often holds true for memoirs.⁸⁰ Scrapbooks are, according to Medley-Rath, usually made to share with family but as the choice of *showing* or *not showing* lies with the owner, it should be seen as a private medium. Medley-Rath views scrapbooks as a more private medium than, for example blogs, as blogs are accessible to anyone. This invariably leads to one problem; whilst blogs are often produced to be read and understood by others, scrapbooks do not behave in this way and the content of a scrapbook might not be understood by anyone other than its maker. This makes scrapbooking a very personal genre in which personal characteristics, but also ideas on belonging, may be expressed. As Hof puts it: “Scrapbooking’s concretely creative modes of production index the uniquely individual self, while its communal aspects cultivate a sense of greater belonging.”⁸¹ This might be

⁷⁹ Rosamond Bernier, *Some of My Lives: A Scrapbook Memoir* (U.S.A.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011); Alexander Lamar, *Steps Along the Way: A Governor's Scrapbook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986).

⁸⁰ Medley-Rath, p. 153.

⁸¹ Hof, p. 364.

explained by the fact that scrapbooking is often done by communities of scrapbookers. Hof continues explaining that scrapbooking “is both a form and a forum of cultural citizenship” in an era when cultural citizenship is no longer straightforwardly related to the place you were born or the ethnicity you come from.⁸² As Smith and Watson explain, and as was mentioned before, one’s identity is made up of many different aspects such as gender, race, sexuality, place of birth, and education.⁸³ All these aspects influence the way somebody composes a scrapbook.

Scrapbooks thus also deal with citizenship, but often much more on a more family level than on a collective level. Still, Goodsell and Seiter assert that scrapbooks are much more than just photo albums, and that “scrapbooks condition knowledge within the family and define the family’s collective identity.”⁸⁴ In scrapbooks the lives of different family members are visually, and, at times, textually represented; the scrapbook becomes a narrative of their life. Further on, Goodsell and Seiter⁸⁵ explain that women in many cultures use their handiwork as a form of building a collective family identity and the woman’s preferences are shown through the decisions made in the process of making their family objects. The choices made in the process of putting together a scrapbook thus put together a family narrative and moreover – according to Goodsell and Seiter – builds a moral structure that is to be passed on to the family and particularly any children. In fact, this is cultural citizenship building on a microlevel. This also fits in with Coupland’s opinion which he vents in the introduction of his first *Souvenir of Canada*; *Souvenir of Canada* is a book “that only Canadians would get” (3). Coupland thus asserts that he

⁸² Ibid., p. 364.

⁸³ Smith and Watson, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Goodsell and Seiter, p. 320.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 320.

fabricated a book which makes sense to those who are in the “in-crowd”, to people like him who have the same background. Coupland is therefore comparable to Goodsell and Seiter’s women who build a collective identity through their handiwork and their own personal preference of what to include. In the *Souvenir of Canada* books Coupland plays with his Canadian identity and tries to use his references as a way of building cultural citizenship. However, like the women trying to scrapbook their own family histories, Coupland’s effort excludes those Canadians with different cultural citizenship.

DOCUMEMOIR OF CANADA

The Douglas Coupland *Souvenir of Canada* books were transformed into a documentary in 2005. The fact that the documentary format is again a genre related to life narratives makes it a suitable platform for Coupland’s ideas. In fact, this documentary has many characteristics of an autobiography. The documentary genre allows Coupland to play on emotions and feelings concerning Canada and everything Canadian. Coupland, for example, explains to his audience that he disliked Canadian game shows as a young boy as he thought these shows were badly produced in comparison to American ones. Nonetheless, he appreciated these shows as well, for “their badness generated an emotion, and that emotion became a form of cultural glue between me and other Canadian kids.”⁸⁶ It is clear that Coupland is yet again trying to show that there is a bond between him and other Canadians with similar age and background. Coupland thus refers to those with similar cultural citizenship. The *Souvenir of Canada* documentary is thus a continuation of the *Souvenir of Canada* books by Coupland, a perfect place for him to delve deeper

⁸⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2005) [on DVD].

into his cultural citizenship. This section of the paper will discuss the documentary genre and how Douglas Coupland's documentary matches up to it; consequently it will analyze cultural citizenship and belonging in the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary.

It is interesting to examine how Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* documentary actually fits into a long line of (Canadian) documentaries. John Grierson, founder of the National Film Board of Canada, explained the term documentary as an "artistic representation of actuality."⁸⁷ Douglas Coupland does this: he shows his own life – or rather parts of it – for us to discover, even if the audience cannot guess the extent of realism actually shown. Coupland is not portrayed getting up in the morning or going to bed late at night; we do not see him sweat over his writing or observe him eating his dinner. There are many moments hinting at it though; for example when Coupland comes home after a long day at work the first thing he asks his mother is whether she has got anything to eat and Coupland's parents tell the camera crew in full honesty how Douglas does his work or how he functions at home. What is shown more often though are fragments that make sense to the topic of Canada and fragments that artistically make sense. Also, just like the books, the documentary makes use of souvenirs of essence (Coupland's stories) and souvenirs of substance (the items shown). For example, Coupland takes the viewer on a trip to his, in the documentary, latest project, Canada House. Coupland takes the audience shopping for an empty old house built according to Canadian style blueprints and shares the items he is going to put in his enormous art project: these houses could be viewed as

⁸⁷ Susan Kerrigan and Phillip McIntyre, 'The 'Creative Treatment of Actuality': Rationalizing and Reconceptualizing the Notion of Creativity for Documentary Practice', *Journal of Media Practice*, 11:2 (2010), 111-30 (p. 112).

souvenirs of substance, just as the items presented in the final house. The viewer is presented with Terry Fox's running sock and prosthetic, First Nation-inspired button blankets, and Canadian geese.

Douglas Coupland's documentary fulfils the criteria of a documentary. Grierson describes the documentary as: "the branch of film production which goes to the actual, and photographs it and edits it and shapes it. It attempts to give form and pattern to the complex of direct observation."⁸⁸ Coupland tries to portray his reality about Canada through displaying his life and art as an example. A documentary traditionally contains a "voice-of-God" voice-over, an analytical argument, interviews with experts and regular citizens and perhaps some music and educational animations.⁸⁹ In a tongue-in-cheek way Coupland's documentary does contain all these elements. "The voice-of-God" is nothing more than Coupland's own voice, his analytical argument is his quest for his Canada, and the experts on Canada are his parents. This appointing of the expert role to his parents is also highlighted by the dedication to Coupland's father in *Souvenir of Canada* stating that: "a more Canadian man is harder to imagine" (3). Whereas Coupland often portrays himself as transnational he sees his father as the epitome of the average Canadian. As "regular citizens" Coupland shows his friends and their reaction to his "Canada house" in Vancouver. Coupland also uses music, for example at the end of the documentary he includes Canadian, Vancouver-based, band Spirit of the West's 'Home for a rest' to add colour to the scene of his trip to "Canada house" in London. The educational animations are included to show what Canada's future could look like. It is thus fair to say that the

⁸⁸ John Grierson, 'Postwar Patterns', *Hollywood Quarterly*, 1:2 (1946), 159-165 (p. 160).

⁸⁹ Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 9.

Souvenir of Canada documentary definitely belongs to the documentary family, but is perhaps made in a much looser style than some more classical-shot documentaries.

There have been shifts in the world of documentaries, however. According to Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski documentaries were traditionally made in ‘public gaze’ style, meaning that “the images on the screen and their arrangement in the editing room must provide an external and supposedly objective viewpoint on the film’s subjects.”⁹⁰ This is confirmed by what Canadian filmographer Michel Brault, NFB, quoted in Cynthia I. Gerstl-Pepin and Judith A. Aiken, once said: “I don't know what truth is. Truth is something unattainable. We can't think we're creating truth with a camera. But what we can do, is reveal something to viewers that allows them to discover their own truth.”⁹¹ However, this is no longer the case. Many contemporary documentaries do not offer this objective viewpoint anymore, but offer a very subjective viewpoint instead. The ‘public gaze’ of the documentary is therefore disappearing. Leach and Sloniowski explain this by proposing that “[t]his development owes much to the social and cultural changes that have produced the so-called ‘postmodern condition’ in which objectivity no longer seems possible and ‘reality’ is difficult to distinguish from the proliferation of media images that claim to represent it.”⁹² It seems that, after the aforementioned analysis, this is also quite applicable to the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary. What is the truth and what is distorted reality in the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary is difficult to determine. It is unclear how honest Coupland is in the portrayal of his own character and in the motives behind his

⁹⁰ Jim Leach and Jeannette Sloniowski, *Candid Eyes: Essays on Canadian Documentaries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 4.

⁹¹ Cynthia I. Gerstl-Pepin and Judith A. Aiken, *Social Justice Leadership for a Global World, Educational Leadership for Social Justice* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Pub., 2012), p. 173.

⁹² Leach and Sloniowski, p. 5.

documentary, but this tension happens in every life narrative. Coupland seems very sincere, as do his parents, but the viewer is presented with a certain amount of facts not knowing whether these facts are sincere and complete or insincere and incomplete. Keith Beattie argues that “truth claims reflect a tacit contractual agreement or bond of trust between documentary producers (whether an individual film-maker or broadcasting institution) and an audience that the representation is based on the actual socio-historical world, not a fictional world imaginatively conceived.”⁹³ Reality or fantasy aside, Coupland does not portray Canada objectively, and the viewer is well aware that it is Coupland’s view being shown and is not necessarily public opinion. When Coupland calls an old Canadian game show “bad”, this is his opinion and the viewers are allowed to disagree with this.

It is interesting to note that the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary is not just a factual transfer from book to film form, but it is a work which is loosely based on the original books. For example, Coupland repeats some facts which are also in the books such as the information that all Canadian airport-codes start with a Y.⁹⁴ So, to illustrate, if you fly to or from Vancouver the code on your baggage label will be: YVR. Other things - facts not previously appearing in the books – make their entrance in the film. Perhaps more interestingly, even more strongly than in the books the documentary focuses on Coupland's private life. During the documentary both Coupland's parents are interviewed on the topic of Canada, but even more emphasized is the relation they have with their famous son. Moreover, we see the interaction between Coupland and his parents.

⁹³ Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television* (New York: MacMillan International Higher Education, 2004), p. 11.

⁹⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada 2* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004), p. 127.

Coupland and his father are filmed standing next to each other discussing the fact that Coupland senior reads his son's novels. Douglas Coupland reacts to this by arguing that it is weird to have your parents read your books, as writing any type of narrative is such personal work. This conversation has little to do with Canada but much more to do with Douglas Coupland as a person. Through these scenes the audience learns how important family is for Douglas Coupland. There is a hint of this family love in the books - one is dedicated to his mother, the other is dedicated to his father - but it never gets as personal, direct and off-topic (Canada being the main topic in the books) as in the documentary. The documentary seems to have many more autobiographical qualities than his books tended to have as they focus much more on the persona of Douglas Coupland. The implication of this is that the audience gets a more insight on Coupland's private life than in the books.

All these elements, the nostalgic stories about the Canada of Coupland's formative years and the images and nostalgic products from a past but also contemporary Canada, sum up in an interesting view into Coupland's life and his feelings of cultural citizenship or belonging. However, Coupland does not approach his documentary as an objective story; he approaches it from his own viewpoint. Coupland does not sum up figures about Canada based on StatsCan; instead he portrays himself in relation to his beloved ones and gives an insight into his quirky life and his take on Canadian cultural citizenship. Coupland portrays himself as the voice of his generation and his country, looking for a Canada based upon his experiences and memories which he is perhaps afraid to forget, and which is therefore meticulously documented in the mundane items shown. His Canada also unites him with other Canadians who have similar backgrounds; when during the

documentary Coupland shows his friends his Canada House in Vancouver and he bonds with them, makes them draw Canadian flags and discusses the eccentric but ultimately Canadian items collected and exposed. Therefore, the perception of Douglas Coupland on his Canadianness must be that it is a way of sharing his cultural citizenship and ideas. Being Canadian in Douglas Coupland's manner is a way to experience belonging and cultural citizenship within a group of likeminded people.

All in all, the *Souvenir of Canada* documentary is a valuable addition to the *Souvenir of Canada* books, as it goes deeper into the persona behind the *Souvenir of Canada* books – Douglas Coupland. The documentary makes it even clearer that Coupland is very dedicated to his Canadian heritage and very eager to share it with others and the format of a documentary was smartly chosen, as it is a fit choice to share life narratives.

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP, BELONGING AND THE SOUVENIR OF CANADA WORKS

Douglas Coupland ends his first *Souvenir of Canada* book by asserting that “we are the land, and the land is us – we are inseparable – that the land makes us who we are, and continues to do so- and that this knowledge binds us together in a covenant that is as sacred and precious as any written under the eyes of God or otherwise, since the creation of the world. O Canada” (142, original emphasis). This ending of *Souvenir of Canada* is complicated; Coupland is not an indigenous Canadian but still shows great connection to the land. Apparently, the “we” in the quote is aimed at anybody feeling connected to current Canadian mainstream cultural citizenship, and Coupland stereotypically ties together the rough nature of Canada to its settler inhabitants and the impact that this

landscape leaves on the average citizen. Coupland's statement is a perfect example of settler colonialism, the indigenous population being replaced by the new settler population. By now, it is clear that the *Souvenir of Canada* books address Coupland's own feelings of being Canadian, and, that through writing his books he is making a hybrid scrapbook-memoir addressing the fact that he belongs to a specific generation and cultural sub-group of Canadians. The choice of scrapbooking and memoir might be explained by the fact that both these genres are, as demonstrated earlier, easily linked to the ideas of belonging and especially to cultural citizenship.

Nevertheless, not all life narratives automatically deal with citizenship. Rak states that "[a]lthough the majority of memoirs published by major companies do not reflect differences of race, class, gender, and religious/cultural differences in great numbers, the ones that do also become ways for the authors to negotiate what citizenship means to them."⁹⁵ To some extent, Rak is implying here that minority memoirs account for a different perception of the idea of citizenship than somebody who would be a mainstream majority writer. Mainstream writers in fact might take the predominant culture as a status quo, whilst for a writer from a minority group this is far from obvious. This idea affects Coupland's writing in so much that Coupland is a Canadian white male writer and is thus easily placed outside of any minority group. As Coupland is gay, openly coming out in 2005 in *The Advocate*; his sexuality might be taken into consideration and could have placed him into a minority writer category.⁹⁶ Yet, Coupland never places any emphasis on this part of his identity. Coupland also established this by explaining his coming out

⁹⁵ Rak, *Boom*, p. 155.

⁹⁶ Ken Macqueen, *Douglas Coupland: Playing with the Google Generation* (2006) <http://www.macleans.ca/culture/books/article.jsp?content=20060508_126415_126415> [Accessed 22 July 2013].

in an interview: “it's just another part of my life, and, I mean, it just sort of defuses a situation that actually didn't need to be there in the first place.”⁹⁷ Concomitantly, Coupland still explores his cultural citizenship, perhaps facilitated by the fact that he spent years traveling around the world and has lived in various countries. Besides, every book written by Coupland features a biographical note ascertaining he was born on a military base in Germany. His transnational identity has triggered or intensified his interest and glorification of his home country: Coupland admits to this in his *Souvenir of Canada* documentary.⁹⁸ More importantly, Rak explains in her article about Michael Ignatieff and citizenship that the transnational identities of U.S. President Obama and Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff show the same characteristics.⁹⁹ Both these politicians identified themselves with other cultures (e.g. the culture of their ancestors) before embracing their birth country's culture. Coupland's tries to emulate a similar journey: in his biographical note he reminds the reader that he is born to Canadian parents in Germany before coming to Canada. Still, Coupland, through his *Souvenir of Canada* book, flaunts his mainstream Canadian cultural citizenship and not his globalized lifestyle.

As already asserted, not all Canadians fit in with Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* musings. Will Kymlicka addresses issues of citizenship from a multicultural Canadian viewpoint and pleads that requests from different ethnic groups in a nation to integrate should be met with a willingness to facilitate their participation in society: “Similarly, most polyethnic demands are evidence that members of minority groups want to

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2005) [on DVD].

⁹⁹ Rak, 'Insecure Citizenship', p. 5.

participate as equals in mainstream society. Consider the case of Sikhs who wanted to join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but, because of their religious requirement to wear a turban, could not do so unless they were exempted from the usual requirements regarding ceremonial headgear.”¹⁰⁰ Nick Stevenson takes the argument further and argues that it is not only one’s ethnic background which determines cultural citizenship but also one’s educational and class level might be in play: “Unless educational resources make some attempt to reverse the flow of cultural capital transmitted in the home then the end result will be enhanced forms of cultural inequality.”¹⁰¹ Kymlicka aligns with this argument:

Some members of these groups [blacks, women, religious minorities, gays, and lesbians] still feel excluded from the ‘common culture’, despite possessing the common rights of citizenship. In each of these cases, groups have been excluded from full participation not because of their socio-economic status, but because of their socio-cultural identity—their ‘difference’. Of course, members of these groups are often materially deprived as well. But that is not the only cause of their cultural exclusion, and so providing material benefits will not necessarily ensure their integration into a common culture or develop a sense of shared loyalty to a common civilization. Like the working class (but unlike national minorities), these groups are demanding inclusion into the dominant national culture.¹⁰²

Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* books show mainstream Canada, the settler colonial Canada, or rather the Canada which Coupland knows from his own past and background. As already mentioned, Coupland hardly takes his reader out of his mainstream experience even if he does try to include some references to, for example, Québécois. The fact that Coupland does try to show different viewpoints demonstrates that he is aware that the experience of being Canadian does differ between people. Claire Omhovére argues that

¹⁰⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford Political Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Nick Stevenson, 'Cultural Citizenship: Questions of Consumerism, Consumption and Policy', in *Cultural Theory: Classical and Contemporary Positions*, ed. by Tim Edwards (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2007), pp. 255-273 (p. 265).

¹⁰² Kymlicka, pp. 180-181.

a number of pictures in the *Souvenir of Canada* books, especially the still life pictures such as the *natures mortes*, suggest a deeper layer: “These pictures also suggest that Canada’s past, glorious as it may seem in retrospect, was premised on a less than romantic exploration of the land and its resources leading to decay and exhaustion.”¹⁰³ Nevertheless, there is no substantial evidence in Coupland’s entries that this is actually suggested by Coupland. Burke also discusses these same still-life images but comes to a different conclusion, he notes that “the connection between life and death that is at the heart of the uncanny provides a way of understanding the inert objects that comprise Coupland’s still lifes: they are the un-dead; the detritus of an era that is past but not yet fully departed.”¹⁰⁴ Something which is more substantiated is Omhové’s claim that: “the homely clutter shown in these pictures is imbued with the nostalgia aroused by the vintage labels [...] that once reflected to the nation a remarkably homogenous image of itself as massively consumerist, white, and middle class.”¹⁰⁵ Coupland does not seem overly interested in the contemporary age; he prefers to retreat into nostalgic items and anecdotes discussing his childhood and youth in Canada. Additionally, the pictures as used by Coupland in the *Souvenir of Canada* books are in place to fortify the memories and the feeling of traveling back in time. For example, in *Souvenir of Canada 2* Coupland describes CHMC houses – houses that were built according to Canada Housing & Mortgage Corporation blueprints in the decades following WWII (16). Coupland illustrates his text about the CHMC houses with the different models of these dwellings

¹⁰³ Claire Omhové, 'Canadian Photography and the Exhaustion of Landscape', in *Beyond “Understanding Canada”*: *Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature*, ed. by Melissa Tanti, Jeremy Haynes, Daniel Coleman and Lorraine York (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2017), pp. 131–49 (p. 146).

¹⁰⁴ Andrew Burke, 'The Nature of Things: Coupland, Cinema and the Canadian Sixties and Seventies', in *Double-Takes: Intersections between Canadian Literature and Film*, ed. by David R. Jarraway (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 2013), pp. 259–75 (p. 290).

¹⁰⁵ Omhové., p. 146.

depicted next to the texts. In the documentary *Souvenir of Canada* Coupland comments that these houses are now disappearing, but he also asserts that this housing is quintessentially Canadian and that everybody remembers them. Arguably, this is not necessarily true; in the best case everybody of similar background and age to Douglas Coupland remembers them. Still, both in the books and the documentary, he plays with feelings of nostalgia for the Canada he grew up in and he tries to make the reader complicit by making them part of his culture too. This appears to be the intent of the illustrations next to the text and in the documentary; images are meant to make it easier for the reader to picture the discussed residences and arguably feel nostalgia for the represented reality too. Even if Coupland at times tries to present the items in the books as universally Canadian, Coupland's citizenship and belonging are rooted in his own generation, the generation which he himself dubbed 'X'.

CONCLUSION

*"These aren't souvenirs you'll find in any giftshop"*¹⁰⁶

*"In the twenty-first century there are many authors who consider themselves Canadian with a certain patriotism, and – judging by his nonfictional publications such as Souvenir of Canada (2002) and Souvenir of Canada 2 (2004) – even Coupland seems to go in this direction"*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2005) [on DVD].

¹⁰⁷ Martin Kuester, 'The English-Canadian Novel from Modernism to Postmodernism', in *History of Literature in Canada*, ed. by Reingard M. Nischik (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 310-329 (p. 329).

To conclude, in English the word “souvenir” is usually associated with a memento or keepsake from a place visited or from a specific happening. A souvenir serves as a remembrance of that specific event. The etymology of the word is from French, however, and in French the word “souvenir” means nothing more than “memory” or “memories”, and the verb “se souvenir” simply means “to remember” as in the motto of the Canadian French-speaking province Québec: “Je me souviens.” For example, “garder un bon souvenir de quelqu’un,” means to have good memories of someone. The word souvenir could therefore also be read as memoir, leaving the title of Coupland’s books to be “memoir of Canada.” The books do fit with this title, as it can be concluded that Coupland writes about a specific time in his life and his relationship to Canada. The *Souvenir of Canada* books are clearly not an autobiography or biography, simply because the full history of both Coupland and Canada have not been treated in the texts. *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* in fact show a cross-section of Canadian history, written through the memories accumulated during Douglas Coupland’s own life span and not dealing with events outside this timeframe. According to Julie Rak, historically, “memoirs were produced by people who wanted to record their lives in relation to others, whether that meant in relation to the stories of other people, or in relation to a historic event, such as battle or the holding of an important public office.”¹⁰⁸ This description could also be seen as quite fitting for Douglas Coupland’s *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2*, as both books show the author’s life in relation to Canada and other people in Canada, as he relies heavily upon his own life experiences and his memories.

¹⁰⁸ Rak, *Boom*, p. 4.

In addition, it is clear that the illustrations and pictures included in the *Souvenir of Canada* books are important to the completeness of the work. Without any pictures the *Souvenir of Canada* books would not be read in the same manner as they are now. Indeed, all these loose paraphernalia show what the text cannot describe: Coupland's childhood and memories in multiple pictures and items. All these pictures, items and texts included are part of Coupland's personal memory and thus a part of Coupland's identity and thus cultural citizenship. Duffy designates the mixing of genres as "hybridization", which is the development of two or multiple genres into a new genre or a subgenre or the combining of elements of different genres into one single work.¹⁰⁹ After careful consideration it could be said that *Souvenir of Canada* and *Souvenir of Canada 2* are in fact best placed as a hybrid genre: a scrapbook-memoir. Coupland's documentary seems to be closer to Coupland's own life story and could be seen as having autobiographical traits.

As Thomas Larson argues: "writers have written autobiographically. Which is to say, they have used personal experience in story, essay, poem or travel account – in the short form – in service of a larger subject."¹¹⁰ This can be applied to Douglas Coupland as well. His life narratives, a scrapbook-memoir, and a documentary, perfectly fits his desire to portray "the formal beauty of the still life to draw in the viewer, and then confront him or her with icons and forms which draw on our nation's shared memories, both humble and noble."¹¹¹ Coupland uses his chosen genre, a mixture between scrapbooking and the memoir, to affirm his cultural citizenship and that of his likeminded fellow Canadians

¹⁰⁹ Duffy, p. xiv.

¹¹⁰ Larson, p. 13.

¹¹¹ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 2002), p. 4.

with comparable social background. By doing so Coupland offers a picture-text symbiosis, perhaps himself trying to become a symbol for Canada by sharing his past and creating a true scrapbook-memoir in the process.

**CHAPTER 2: LOCAL CITIZENSHIP: THE
DEPICTION OF LOCAL CITIZENSHIP AND
DYSTOPIA IN DOUGLAS COUPLAND'S
HOMETOWN VANCOUVER IN HIS NOVELS
GIRLFRIEND IN A COMA (1998), *HEY
NOSTRADAMUS!* (2003) AND HIS NON-
FICTION BOOK *CITY OF GLASS* (2000)**

Douglas Coupland is a master of depicting a changing society; in many of his books he depicts the ongoing globalization of humanity's current reality. However, not all Coupland's novels are positioned in a global perspective. *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* are two novels which are strikingly similar in storyline and very locally oriented.¹ Both novels have strong elements of the local and only weaker elements of the global. The two storylines mainly evolve in the confinement of Vancouver; the characters identify the city of Vancouver as their home and feel an attachment to the area. Whereas in many other Coupland novels his characters flee their hometowns and the possible comfort of their families, *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* are predominantly locally set. It is important to note that the main characters in both novels are homebodies; they restrict themselves as much as possible to the city as if they have a fear of going further than the local. The few characters who do make it across the border, both that of the city and the country, do not find happiness abroad but confusion and at times death. Interestingly enough, both of these novels are predominantly narratives with a strong focus on relationships made in teen years and in the local vicinity, and, in addition, both of these stories narrate a series of tragic and fatal events in the lives of their characters. These events test the relationships that the characters experience with those around them and cause disruption in some of these unions whilst bringing other characters closer together.

¹ Douglas Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004); Douglas Coupland, *Hey Nostradamus!* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004). All subsequent references to these texts will be noted parenthetically in the text.

As noted, both mentioned novels take place in Coupland's hometown of Vancouver (BC). On his hometown, Coupland has also written a non-fiction book: *City of Glass*.² In this non-fiction book Coupland puts forward a look at Vancouver quite similar to the one on Canada in his *Souvenir of Canada*. Ideas and settings proposed in *City of Glass* also seep through in both novels, e.g. Vancouver's Hollywood aspirations, Vancouver's nature and Vancouver's tolerant attitude towards the party scene. Yet, other elements are complete opposites; whereas in *City of Glass* Vancouver is depicted as a vibrant multicultural city, in his novels *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* his characters are actually not significantly multiculturally oriented or affected by a global world. The pairing of Coupland's fiction and non-fiction books with Vancouver as a setting will give a better idea of the role and position of Vancouver in and across Coupland's writings. Thus, both Coupland's fiction and non-fiction books provide an opportunity-limited geographical setting – Vancouver and its vicinity, in the context of which the depiction of local citizenship will be analysed in this chapter.

Vancouver, throughout these novels and the non-fiction book, represents Coupland's local. It would be expected that Coupland's local is always a safe haven in which he and his characters feel protected and experience a strong sense of belonging, but nothing is less true in his novels. Vancouver is home to dysfunctional families, ennui and the apocalypse; in fact, it could be argued that part of Coupland's Vancouver conjures images of a dystopian city. The main characters go through the devastating loss of their loved ones, they fail to connect with other characters, are confronted with the obstructive forces

² Douglas Coupland, *City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000). All subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically in the text.

of evil from the outside and have trouble finding their own paths. This element of Vancouver as an imperfect city, albeit not as forthcoming, is also included in Coupland's non-fiction book *City of Glass*. In this book Coupland addresses the danger around the corner of Main and Hastings where drugs are sold and Coupland shares his worries around the party scene in his entry "Vansterdam." Even if dystopian at times, the main characters experience Vancouver as their home and they are not necessarily eager or capable to leave this setting. In fact, they seem more eager to stay in or to return to Vancouver than to leave it. This eagerness of the main character to stay put in their city also means that the global elements contained in the novels and the non-fiction book are marginal and not in line with the abundance of globalization as it is the case in novels such as *Generation A*. Of course, Coupland discusses the large influx of immigrants to Vancouver in *City of Glass*, the international careers of main characters in *Girlfriend in a Coma* and the Vegas marriage in *Hey Nostradamus*, but these elements are never the main focus.

Interestingly enough, Coupland's ideas on Vancouver seem to be contradictory; Vancouver is both a place for which the characters feel attachment and belonging, and it is a source of their worst nightmares. This chapter is going to explore how local citizenship is depicted in Douglas Coupland's Vancouver and, as these contradictory attitudes are conflicting, it will do so in a two-fold way; on the one hand it will explore Vancouver as the characters' home and how Vancouver adds elements of attachment and belonging and, on the other hand, it will explore the characteristics of an imperfect or dystopian Vancouver. This duality, Vancouver as a city of belonging versus Vancouver as a dystopia, are explored through Yi-Fu Tuan's ideas on place. Tuan is an expert in humanistic geography and his work will help to explain how different spaces and places

function for its inhabitants. Specifically, for *Girlfriend in a Coma* also theory on the dystopia is used to explore Coupland's dystopian city. Through exploring Coupland's descriptions of his hometown it will become clear how Coupland's locally set novels and non-fiction book fit into his oeuvre which deals with the national or global.

THEORY OF THE LOCAL

To be able to analyze the meaning of Vancouver in Douglas Coupland's work it is necessary to analyze the different elements surrounding space and local citizenship. Coupland does not only look at Vancouver in *City of Glass*, *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* but he also looks at other regional and national elements such as the state of the home and its meaning to its inhabitants, but also the importance of cities, neighborhoods, regions and the nation-state.

These geographical marks can be conveniently examined against the concepts coined by Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan explains in his essay 'Place: An Experiential Perspective' that there are various gradations of place and the way that mankind experiences place.³ Tuan identifies "place" as "a center of meaning constructed by experience."⁴ Tuan asserts that places exist at different scales. He distinguishes between "places within the home", "home", "city", "neighborhood and region", and the "nation-state." Tuan emphasises that places within the home are the most personal; the items and memories of different places and objects within the house are special to the inhabitants. To this end, Tuan gives several examples such as the fireplace, a rocking chair or somebody's bed. Tuan articulates this

³ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective', *Geographical Review*, 65 (1975), 151-65.

⁴Ibid., p. 152.

as follows: “The hearth, rocking chair, and bed within the home are recognizable places once they are pointed out.”⁵ Tuan then equates the home with a safe shelter for its inhabitants. He points out that within a home, inhabitants have the freedom to “openly and comfortably admit our frailty and our bodily needs.”⁶ Tuan connects the home with routines, such as cleaning oneself, eating, and resting but also asserts that home is the place that people always return to. Tuan argues that at times the home is replaced with similar places such as a hospital or a hotel, places which offer the same type of shelter as a domicile.

In between the home and the city there is the neighborhood. Tuan argues that the neighborhood lacks the “city’s perceptual and conceptual visibility.”⁷ Whereas cities are recognizable because they have clear borders and names, neighborhoods are less prominent. According to Tuan, neighborhoods “lack sharp, physically defined boundaries, and they have no distinctive skylines that can be seen from vantage points outside them.”⁸ This lack of boundaries makes it difficult to exactly pinpoint a neighborhood; after all, usually there are no clear maps or pictures. In fact, there are very few neighborhoods which are known to the outside world; Tuan gives the example of “Greenwich Village.” However, the neighborhood is a place of experiences: “experiences of place grow imperceptibly with each subconscious imprint of taste, smell, and touch, and with unheralded acts, like lending or borrowing sugar, daily compounded.”⁹ The joining combination of these conditions form a neighborhood for those who live in there,

⁵ Ibid., p. 154.

⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

⁸ Ibid., p. 157.

⁹ Ibid., p. 158.

and those who live there form affinity with their neighborhoods and the people and amenities in there. Tuan argues that “[b]asic humanity is nurtured in the confined spaces of home and neighborhood, family and community.”¹⁰ In other words, the fact that people successfully belong to homes and neighborhoods and to families and communities gives them a connection to the others around them and nurtures their well-being. It could be argued that if people do not manage to feel belonging in and for their homes and neighborhoods this feeling of belonging will be disrupted.

The city is different from the home and the neighborhood because, according to Tuan, they “warrant cartographic representation.”¹¹ Most importantly however, the city is not just a collection of places. Tuan argues that cities are full of meaning, and this meaning is given to them by individual people “including their fireplaces, beds, and chairs.”¹² It is this meaning which grants the right to cities to bear “proper names” and noticeable mentioning on maps, whereas the “emptier lands” have less straightforward labelling. Tuan asserts that the borders of a neighborhood or region are less protrusive than that of a city. Neighborhoods and regions “lack visual and conceptual prominence.”¹³ A region is usually larger than an individual city, and Tuan therefore argues that it is too vast to be experienced by all of its inhabitants in a similar way. A region is “therefore primarily a construct of thought.”¹⁴ People in certain regions, though without any clear borders, might develop “a shared body of explicit knowledge”, regional knowledge which is locally

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'A View of Geography', *Geographical Review*, 81 (1991), 99-107 (p. 99).

¹¹ Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective', p. 156.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

known but not outside of their region.¹⁵ The nation-state is the largest identifiable element in Tuan's argument; he sees it as a place which is "even less capable of being directly experienced" but at the same time it is a place full of meaning to its inhabitants which stirs emotions such as loyalty and attachment.¹⁶

However, no matter how all different elements are labelled it is important to keep in mind that home can also be seen as a larger concept. In another essay Tuan argues that: "Home is the key, unifying word for all the principal subdivisions of geography, because home, in the large sense, is physical, economic, psycho-logical, and moral; it is the whole physical earth and a specific neighborhood; it is constraint and freedom-place, location, and space."¹⁷ Home is thus a complicated concept; being all-encompassing and very small at the same time.

THE LOCAL AS A PLACE OF BELONGING: VANCOUVER

Tuan writes that: "Place may be said to have 'spirit' or 'personality', but only human beings can have a sense of place."¹⁸ People demonstrate their sense of place when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations." It is clear that Douglas Coupland has a strong opinion about "his" city, Vancouver. As Coupland grew up in the city it is a convenient and natural setting for his novels *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!*, this ease of describing Vancouver and his local familiarity and attachment also shine through in his non-fiction book *City of Glass*. This subsection will look at

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁷ Tuan, 'A view of Geography', p. 99.

¹⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective', in *Philosophy in Geography*, ed. by Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson (Dordrecht: Springer, 1979), pp. 387-427 (p. 410).

Coupland's description of Vancouver and especially his use of Vancouver as a place of belonging; after all both Coupland and his fictional characters grew up in the city and therefore have tight bonds to it.

The local elements with which Coupland associates are clearly recognizable in the text of *City of Glass*; in this book, much like in his other non-fiction book *Souvenir of Canada* about the Canadian identity, Coupland recounts his own and his family's history through the city in which he grew up. Like the *Souvenir of Canada* books *City of Glass* shows traits of a memoir and a scrapbook. Where *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* fully read as bildungsromane, in part, *City of Glass* also reads as a bildungsroman. Coupland constantly reminds the viewer that he grew up in this specific city; in the subsection "Beads and Granola" Coupland writes "When I was growing up" (14); he repeats this same phrase and variations on it numerous times e.g. in his subsection "Birds" "I grew up thinking" (20), and in "England's Dreaming" "I grew up in a part of Vancouver" (30). Furthermore, Coupland passes the reader through all phases of his life. He takes the reader through his childhood; in "The Harbour" he explains that he read his first words in the Vancouver Harbour: "The very first words I ever learned to read were 'Alberta Wheat Pool.' I was five or so, our family was in the car, and my older brothers were tormenting me because they could read and I couldn't" (50). Coupland also takes us through his high school years; in "Chinatown" he explains how "In the fifth grade, I'd take the buses down to Chinatown on rainy Saturdays" (23) and would wander through its streets and alleys. In "Grouse Mountain" (46) he explains how he, as a teenager, "lived" on the skiing slopes – much like in *Girlfriend in a Coma* - and how he, to this day, still dreams of night-skiing at least once a week. Also, when Coupland addresses

himself as a grown up, he explains in “Salmon” (107) how he receives friends from abroad and shows them around Vancouver. In other words, not only is Vancouver part of Coupland’s life but it is also very clearly the place where Coupland grew up from the boy who could not read to the man that he is today.

Coupland admits that he has been away often, e.g. “In late 1986 I arrived back in Vancouver after living abroad for a year” (116), but at the same time he has great love for all aspects of the city. One of these expressions of love comes up when Coupland addresses the “Lions Gate Bridge” and the rumours that it might be broken down: “Why was it so hard until recently for me to simply say that the bridge is a thing of delicate beauty – an intricate part of my life and memories?” (119). Vancouver is a place of belonging to Douglas Coupland and perhaps even more than full of belonging also a very special place.

According to Douglas Coupland he spent his “twenties scouring the globe thinking there had to be a better city out there, until it dawned on me that Vancouver is the best one going.”¹⁹ Coupland affirms and re-affirms over and over his love for Vancouver and portrays himself as “somebody who loves the city.” Moreover, in his book *City of Glass* Coupland seems to be very protective of “his” Vancouver. On the first page of his non-fiction book *City of Glass* he complains about tourists from Toronto or Ottawa calling Vancouver “Van” and he “can’t help but shake my head and wonder” (4). On the same page Coupland spews his frustration with people addressing British Columbians as “Colombians”; “It’s just a vowel, we know, but we care.” It is obvious here that Coupland

¹⁹ Coupland, *City of Glass*, back cover.

feels part of his native region, his use of the word “we” shows that he identifies with part of a larger group of British Columbians and Vancouverites. Coupland is visibly annoyed by the ignorance on place names of those from outside of the region. More interesting however is the fact that he does not acknowledge in this entry that British Columbia and Vancouver are colonial names given by settlers. For example, the name Vancouver refers to Dutch explores coming originally from (van in Dutch) Coevorden, a small Dutch city in Drenthe.²⁰ Coupland does refer to this Settler Colonialism further on though; in an entry called ‘Stó:lō’ he addresses the original names of Vancouver by the Stó:lō people and the fact that he feels ambiguous about having been taught in school that “[t]his is your culture, this is part of your heritage” (131). Coupland addresses that “Native land rights are probably the biggest issue facing the province of B.C., let alone Vancouver” and adds that “land simply got taken, so it’s all mucky and undefined” (131). This one entry in a one hundred fifty-two-page book is the only one dealing with the topic of colonialism. This matches with Eva Darias Beautell’s analysis of the book: “Vancouver is figured as a conflicting site [...], moving uneasily between colonial, post-colonial, and neo-colonial forces” however “instead of engaging with the source and implications of these tensions, Coupland tends to smooth these conflicts out”.²¹ Coupland makes clear that he is aware of the topic but does not want to make it the main focus and rather focusses on a (settler) colonial version of Vancouver.

²⁰ Chuck Davis, *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver* (n.d.) <<https://www.vancouverhistory.ca>> [Accessed 28 July 2020].

²¹ Eva Darias-Beautell, 'The Production of Vancouver: Termination Views in the City of Glass', in *Unruly Penelopes and the Ghosts: Narratives of English Canada*, ed. by Eva Darias-Beautell (Waterloo, ON: Wilrid Laurier University Press, 2012), pp. 131-156 (p. 136).

Coupland sees the city of Vancouver, and British Columbia, as something separate from “normal” Canada. Most of all, Coupland wants us to know that Vancouver “is not part of Canada. Not really” (106). Coupland states that whilst Ontario (with its political capital Ottawa and Toronto as the fourth largest city in North America and the largest in Canada) “looms large in the minds of most other Canadians” British Columbia is mostly a forgotten place (106). However, according to Coupland there is “nothing unpatriotic about Vancouver’s psychic disconnection from the Rest of Canada” (106). Coupland argues that Vancouver is a new city which prefers to set its own new course rather than focussing on the establishment. Coupland is proud of his Vancouver to the point that he proposes to “franchise ourselves and put Vancouver all around the world – it’s actually not a bad idea” (106). It is unclear whether Coupland realizes how imperial this statement sounds. It is clear however that Coupland celebrates Vancouver, including any negative elements that may occur within its limits, and identifies it as his home. Vancouver is Coupland’s proverbial hearth, rocking chair, and bed.

Even though Vancouver is regularly referred to in *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!*, it is somewhat less applauded in these novels and it appears therefore to be of a lesser importance than the storylines themselves. Interestingly enough the two novels are quite similar. The main characters in *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* are introduced to the reader as teenagers and throughout the novels there is a passage from youthful naivety to adulthood or, perhaps rather, maturity. In fact, both novels fall in the genre of bildungsroman with a strong emphasis on (inter-)generational relationships. The set-up of the two novels is similar; the novels describe young teenage couples who are in love and of which the female character is pregnant. After the female

main characters are taken out of the storyline through death or a coma the stories diverge. It seems that Coupland made two takes on the same basic ingredients. However, in both novels Vancouver is the setting, including its districts, and regional places that are regularly referred to. Nevertheless, like Tuan argues, Vancouver is described through the eyes of the characters and their moral and aesthetic view on it. Besides the references to the city there are also multiple references to the home and the neighborhood in the novels and these places are significant because they are important for and full of belonging to the characters.

In *Girlfriend in a Coma* Vancouver takes a prominent place in the story. The first sentence from Richard's story sets the scene: "Karen and I deflowered each other atop Grouse Mountain" (6). Grouse Mountain are the skiing slopes in North Vancouver and are also referenced in the subheading "Grouse Mountain" in *City of Glass*. Just as in *City of Glass* the skiing slopes of Grouse Mountain are also special to the characters in *Girlfriend in a Coma*. Richard admits that here he "was happiest" whilst he and his friends were "empty pagan teenagers lusty atop a black mountain overlooking a shimmering city below, a city so new that it dreamed only of what the embryo knows, a shimmering light of civil peace and hope for the future" (6). Coupland's Vancouver in *Girlfriend in a Coma* is similar to his Vancouver in *City of Glass*; Vancouver is a new city but still full of hope and memories for its inhabitants.

The relationship Richard has with Vancouver is a difficult one; he remembers the good moments such as the episode on Grouse Mountain but at the same time he has difficulty feeling belonging after Karen ends up in a comatose state. Richard's uncanny feeling is

shown in the novel through the lack of a stable home. While Yi-Fu Tuan discusses places in the home and the home as salvatory places, Richard does his best not to get attached to a specific house or settle down.²² In fact, at some point Richard becomes a house flipper – he buys dilapidated houses which he renovates and then sells them for extra profit. Richard does not buy houses to make them his own, to build memories there and live his life but instead he takes old pieces of property and tries to make them beautiful again against as much profit as possible. It seems that he tries to avoid the making of memories, as his pattern is to buy a deteriorating house and do it up as quickly as possible to sell it without getting attached. Richard argues that he does not do this because of greed but “countless silent moments hastily varnished with vodka and thoughts of renovations” (69). Richard in fact tries to make these houses homes; he tries to include elements which will convince people to see their own hearth, rocking chair and bed but he does not manage to make any of these homes his own. Richard prefers to be distracted by busy work such as renovations as this will prevent him from having to reflect on his own situation. In fact, it seems that Richard’s habits – both the house-flipping and the alcohol abuse - prevent him from forming any kind of attachment to his direct environment and, even better, avoid him thinking about his past, present or future. As long as Richard is absorbed with improving and renovating houses, he manages to neglect improving and working on himself and thus avoids having to achieve self-actualisation.

Richard’s attitude towards his city of Vancouver is similarly bleak, ignored and unloved, until he finds a job that he appreciates as a location scout: “Once again, for the first time in what seemed like a decade, the city was a place of enchantment for me” (86). Yi-Fu

²² Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective'.

Tuan points out that it is individual people that form the city; Richard is a cog in the machine and his experiences in Vancouver shape his opinion of Vancouver.²³ It is only after he finds a profession that he values that he starts appreciating his environment again. Nevertheless, there does seem to be quite a lot of irony in this newly found love for Vancouver through becoming a location scout. The enchantment that Vancouver brings Richard is not because of the local culture but because of the blandness that the city at times portrays. In *City of Glass* Coupland asserts that “Vancouver is one of the few cities going that are bucking the trend toward homogenization and pasteurized global taste” (151). Coupland seems very proud of his city: “It’s unique, and it’s my home” (151). Yet, whilst Coupland argues in *City of Glass* that Vancouver is not globalized in its style, this is not what he hints at *Girlfriend in a Coma*. In *Girlfriend in a Coma* he hints at the fact that Vancouver can be turned into any city and is therefore such a successful filming location: “Scott, a production guy from Los Angeles, told us that ‘they film everything here because Vancouver’s unique: You can morph it into any North American city or green space with little effort and even less expense’” (87). He repeats the exact same idea in *City of Glass*. Coupland asserts: “The thing is, Vancouver can neatly morph into just about any North American city save for those in the American Southwest, and possibly Miami” (6). Coupland seems bothered by this from the position of a Vancouverite in *City of Glass*: “Whatever the movie, the crew is always busy disguising Vancouver as some other city. There’s a bit of self-loathing as we let our identity be stolen so regularly” (6). Coupland seems to hint here at the fact that the population of Vancouver is not happy about this chameleon like quality – as Vancouver can easily represent any city, it takes away from its own identity and the identity of its inhabitants. The fact that Vancouver

²³ Ibid., p. 157.

can look like any city takes away from its own *couleur locale* and thus leaves the locals – according to Coupland - with an identity crisis. The fact that Richard rekindles his love for Vancouver through scouting it for places which could depict any North American city is remarkable and contradictory at best; indeed, it seems that Richard has the self-loathing that Coupland addresses in *City of Glass*. Subsequently, through the help of Richard's scouting work, Vancouver becomes a blank bland city without a real *couleur locale*. This blankness is probably similar to the blankness felt by the Indigenous people who have lost their original culture to a colonized Vancouver. Arguably, this removal of the local identity makes the city less painful and less personal for Richard as it gives him the opportunity to pretend that he is elsewhere than Vancouver and that this is not his home where he has to deal with painful situations from the past.

Another important element of place in *Girlfriend in a Coma* is Rabbit Lane: “the neighborhood where Karen and I [Richard] and Hamilton and Linus and Pammie had all grown up” (23). The moment Richard leaves his neighborhood with a comatose Karen in the ambulance it is clear that this is a rite of passage and a break with everything that came before: “how was I to know that time was now different?” (24). Rabbit Lane constantly pops up through the novel and serves as a safe haven; moreover it is also a stark contrast to Karen's hospital scenes. Rabbit Lane is where Karen's parental house was, the sanctuary from which she was taken to hospital to lie in a bed for the duration of her coma; Rabbit Lane is also where Richard's parents and Karen's parents help Richard take care of his daughter, and it is also the place where all characters go back to when the apocalypse occurs. For example, when Megan sees that the apocalypse is happening all around her, she muses that “Everybody's heading *home*” (192, original emphasis) and

Megan herself goes “into Rabbit Lane. She is home” (193). After all the travels and life experiences that the different characters had, it seems that they are destined to come home and face their *ennui*. Karen says: “And I’m noticing that we all ended up returning to the same old neighborhood like so much undeliverable mail. I bet we probably couldn’t escape Rabbit Lane even if we tried” (156-7). In times of despair the main characters chose to go back to the places which Tuan would describe as the most intimate, spaces within the home, the home and the neighborhood.²⁴ Even if the various characters had flown out to get to know themselves, it is here in their own environment that they really learn to know themselves and their most intimate friends and family.

In *Hey Nostradamus!* Vancouver and its different spaces are mentioned several times, but it is seldomly used as a place of belonging. Some spaces, such as the school Cheryl and Jason attended, and the elderly house of Jason are actually tainted by past events and leave little room for belonging. The school is never described as a place that the characters felt home in because of the gruesome school shooting which led to the death of a number of students. Nevertheless, space is still very important to Coupland’s *Hey Nostradamus!* and there are instances where space is used for very personal purposes and in this case, memories are often linked to this. As Tuan writes: “Wherever we can point to human beings, there we point to somebody’s home – with all the kindly meaning of that word”, and this link between the characters and their domicile is a strong one.²⁵ In the opening pages of *Hey Nostradamus!* the setting is laid out to the reader; Cheryl describes her local habitat:

²⁴ Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective', p. 154-156.

²⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 114.

It was a glorious fall morning. The sun burned a girly pink over the mountain ranges to the west, and the city had yet to generate its daily smog blanket. Before driving to school in my little white Chevette, I went into the living room and used my father's telescope to look down at the harbor, as smooth as mercury, and on its surface I could see the moon dimming over East Vancouver. And then I looked up into the real sky and saw the moon on the cusp of being overpowered by the sun. (3)

In this paragraph different forms of space are proposed, especially the city and the home. The city here is described through its nature on the one hand, and its inhabitants on the other. For example, the typical mountains of Vancouver are partly described through the way the sun casts its light upon them. On the other hand, Cheryl also describes the smog produced by the inhabitants, and how she will add to this and be part of her city as she says that she will drive to school in her Chevette. The home is not literally described in this paragraph but Cheryl's comfort with changing rooms and her peeking through her father's telescope shows how much at ease she is in her environment. It is clear that she is home and she realizes this bliss: "It was lovely, all that silence and all that calm order, and I thought how lucky I was to have had a good home" (4). She describes her parental home with a touch of vulnerability that denotes belonging as she realizes that soon she will move on to be with Jason. This belonging applies especially to the places that she generally uses; Cheryl describes how she does not want to use her normal bathroom to take the pregnancy test and uses the guest bathroom. Cheryl: "The guest bathroom felt one notch more medical, one notch less tinged by personal history – less accusatory, to be honest" (6). Cheryl also describes her neighborhood and that of her classmates and shows her affection for it: "Most of them grew up in rectangular postwar homes that by 1988 were called tear-downs by the local real estate agents. Nice lots. Nice trees and vines. Nice views" (7). Even if the homes are no longer beautiful, the land upon which they are built still is. It is clear that Cheryl's home and its different spaces but also her

neighborhood, city and region are important to her and that she is a part of her home and city.

Jason's dwelling which he inhabits as an adult is described differently and with much less conveyed belonging as compared to Cheryl's affectionate words about her childhood home. Jason describes how he won his apartment in a poker game; nevertheless, he likes it as such and calls it "nicer than something I would have found on my own" (65). Jason does not describe important places within the house he just expresses he managed to ruin parts of it "with failed houseplants and empty bottles" (65). Jason neutrally describes that his view is that of the English Bay and the rest of Vancouver. Jason's adult house does not get described as if it were a home; it gets described as nothing more than an alternative to being out – impersonal and disheartening. Jason's visit to his father's empty apartment evokes the same emotions of emptiness and human detachment: "The thought of my silent, sour-faced father walking from room to room – rooms in which phones never ring, where other voices never enter – it almost broke my heart, but then I realized, Wait a second, this is Reg, not some monk" (96). Reg still keeps memorabilia in his apartment such as a picture of his family before his divorce, but Reg's apartment is as much of a home as is Jason's: "I ought to note how much his place is like *my* place" (96, original emphasis). Whilst Cheryl came from a loving home, it is clear that Jason's past and his broken family life – both the trouble with his father and losing Cheryl and his child – make it difficult for him to connect to others. Though Jason does have a feeling of connection to Cheryl he does not manage to use this belonging productively or to deal with this belonging as to rise from his ashes. His home, and his father's home, both reflect the broken men behind those houses. The neighborhood also does not bring solace in

Jason's Vancouver; after the shooting there are concerns that Jason might have something to do with the situation and "By evening our house had been egged and paint-bombed" (89). Jason and his mother are forced out of the house by their neighbours and find temporary accommodation elsewhere. The neighborhood does not accept Jason as a hero, but unfairly shame him as a perpetrator, driving him out of the neighborhood and out of the community. Logically, this disconnection stays with Jason for the rest of his adult life and leaves him with an inability to reconnect.

Tuan argues that the:

Home, neighborhood, and nation-state are all delimited spaces, and culture itself frees humans to the extent that it confines and channels their energies. Basic humanity is nurtured in the confined spaces of home and neighborhood, family and community. Even when a people feel threatened at home and escape boldly across an ocean or a continent to freedom, their purpose is still to reestablish a bounded world in which they can pursue a familiar way of life.²⁶

It is clear that in Coupland's chosen works the home, neighborhood and community are of utmost importance. The good and bad experiences that the characters have had influence their lives and the current and future experiences they will have. The characters experience the borders of what is acceptable in their communities and seek refuge with friends and family when they can. It is not the city which influences them, but it is they who influence the city. Moreover, in all three of these works, the two novels and the non-fiction book, the perception of the main characters on Vancouver and their homes is omnipresent. Tuan attempts to find the common denominator in the experience of belonging by different people and comes to the conclusion that "they all bear on the way human beings respond to their physical setting - their perception of it and the value they

²⁶ Tuan, 'A View of Geography', p. 104.

put on it.”²⁷ Coupland himself and his fictional characters react differently to Vancouver, but it is clear that when they do it is usually through a mixture of belonging and (painful) memories.

THE CITY AS A NIGHTMARE: CATAclysms AND POST-APOCALYPTIC DYSTOPIAS

Whereas most elements in Coupland’s Vancouver seem to point at the city as a place of belonging, it is already clear that some of the memories recollected by the main characters are far from happy. For example, the narrator of *Hey Nostradamus!*, Jason, recounts his life’s story and many of his youngest memories are bleak. This section of the chapter is going to explore Vancouver as a place which is not a safe haven of belonging and perhaps even a nightmare to its inhabitants. First of all, *City of Glass* will be analyzed, then *Hey Nostradamus!* and subsequently *Girlfriend in a Coma*.

In *City of Glass* Vancouver is often depicted as a pleasant place: relaxed and happy. Still Coupland does describe certain drawbacks to his home city too. One of the rawest subsections in his non-fiction book is his description of “Main & Hastings.” According to Coupland “Main and Hastings” is in the “poorest postal code in Canada” which brings “untold social ills” (87). Coupland personifies this part of the city and alleges that it is “in chronic pain” (87). Coupland describes how the alleyways of Main and Hastings are riddled with drug paraphernalia, and how “Welfare Wednesdays” increase “social wreckage” (87). Coupland does not fear the place though; he adds that he lived close to

²⁷ Tuan, *Topophilia: a study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values*, p. 2.

the district and actually recommends the reader to “open your mind and your eyes” (87) to what there is to see. Coupland also warns against other parts of the city such as the port area of Vancouver. Coupland asserts that “you really have to watch out, because there are a lot of people down there moving around things that, er, shouldn’t be moved, and they *don’t* want you seeing it” (50, original emphasis). However, at the same time he does deflate the situation declaring that “I also hear that the seagulls there are extra mean” (50).

Coupland realizes that Vancouver has more drugs than just the use of it in Main and Hastings. Currently cannabis is legal in Canada, but at the time when Douglas Coupland wrote *City of Glass* this was not the case yet. In ‘Grow-ops’ Coupland recounts how Vancouver has “world renowned” “pot” which is grown in private houses “most likely rented out by unaware dupes” (47). Coupland expresses that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is probably more preoccupied with heroin than with “pot” and that the rest of the Vancouverites have similar opinions. Coupland asserts: “Most Vancouverites basically don’t think pot’s the real issue, and suspect – with whatever accurate level of paranoia – that pot crackdowns have something to do with the Kremlinological machinations of the White House rather than the plant itself” (47). The issues around marijuana also come back in Coupland’s subsection “Vansterdam”. According to Coupland “The New York Times calls Vancouver ‘Vansterdam’ because of its Dutch laxity on the issues of sex and pot” (138). Coupland argues that this laxity leads to “an awful lot of very funky-looking people roaming the streets” (138). However, Coupland wonders whether Vancouverites are fully aware of the things going on in the city concerning “sex and pot” and compares it to the attitude of the Dutch; they know that

something is going on but accept these things as being part of a free society in which people have rights.

Coupland compares and contrasts this policy to the “American zero-tolerance strategy” which he deems “viscerally abhorrent” (138). It is clear that Coupland does not deem Main and Hastings as a dystopian part of town, just as he does not condone other elements such as “sex and pot.” He does not see these matters as elements of an immoral or askew society, but he sees them as the fringes of a free society in which human beings have the right to choose their own path. In fact, he finds the “American zero-tolerance” more of a sign of an askew society than the Vancouverite system of tolerance. The City of Vancouver even set up a supervised injection site (Insite) where drug users can get clean needles and inject drugs safely.²⁸ Whilst a dystopia is generally an “imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice” the American zero-tolerance policy to this extent does show similarities to a dystopian society.²⁹ For instance, the characteristics of a dystopian society which shine through are those of:

- Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted
- Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance
- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad
- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.³⁰

²⁸ City of Vancouver, *Safe Injection Site and Needle Exchange* (n.d.) <<https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/safe-injection-site-and-needle-exchange.aspx>> [Accessed 28 July 2020].

²⁹ 'Dystopia', in *Oxford English Dictionaries* (2020)

<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58909?redirectedFrom=dystopia#eid>> [Accessed 11 December 2020]

³⁰ Read-Write-Think, *Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics* (2006)

<https://www.google.nl/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUK EwiW8oK_nr7LAhVMEpoKHcC3BrQQFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.readwritethink.org%2Ffiles%2Fresources%2Fflesson_images%2Fflesson926%2FDefinitionCharacteristics.pdf&usg=AFQjCNF7sWi57Q_Uu9SqrN0-PJSKpZ01Sw> [Accessed May 3, 2016].

Vancouverite laxity would actually not match with these dystopian ideas, and thus it creates a free society – even if that free society has drawbacks and the occasional dark trait.

Whereas in *City of Glass* Vancouver cannot be classified as a dysfunctional city, especially in comparison to its Southern neighbors, for *Hey Nostradamus!* the story is more complex. In *Hey Nostradamus!* the main characters have very few people to fall back on and the people who are seen as friends are rather a source of distrust. The sense of community as described by Tuan in homes, neighborhoods and cities is actually problematic in this novel as most main characters have trouble attaching to others.

Though there is no fantastical apocalypse in this novel, and it is a realistic society, it is clear that the environment depicted in this novel is flawed and unsafe. The cataclysmic event in the novel is the school shooting which happens early on in the novel. Coupland felt the need to write about a school shooting because he was profoundly taken by the events which happened at Columbine High School in 1999. Coupland implies that what happens on regular basis in the U.S. can also happen in Canada. Dylan Foley quotes an interview with Coupland saying that he “was interested in what effect the shootings had on the survivors' internal life” and that Coupland says he “went through 1,000 pages of Columbine transcripts” to understand the event better.³¹ Coupland comments that after all his research that “The weird thing about high school shootings in the end is that they

³¹ Dylan Foley, 'Douglas Coupland on "Hey, Nostradamus" and a Columbine-Like Atrocity', *The Denver Post, Denver* (December 21, 2003) <<http://dylanmfoley.blogspot.com/2011/11/douglas-coupland-on-hey-nostradamus-and.html>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

are all the same. Even if you try to be specific, there is something so generic about the act. School is such a formatted experience - we all have physical education class, we all have lunch."³² This banality is also featured in *Hey Nostradamus!* itself, before and during the shooting the setting is described: lockers, teachers and the cafeteria including all its furniture and personal objects.

Carol Toller from *The Globe and Mail* quotes Coupland as saying "My personal litmus test was that I didn't want any family member of a Columbine shooting to feel that their loss was being exploited."³³ Coupland thus tried to deal with the heavy topic in a respectful manner but obviously had difficulty with it. Coupland's reaction to the shooting is not only seen in his novel; also in Coupland's visual art the topic seeps through. Coupland made an installation called "Tropical Birds" (2003) and a subsequent transmounted digital print. The work derives its name from "the eerie sounds of unanswered ringing cellular phones after the massacre."³⁴ The installation shows a school cafeteria which noticeably looks like a shooting has just occurred; there are books scattered around, food on the floor and personal user objects such as mobile phones, jackets and a skateboard. The setting is dark and familiar at the same time, leaving the judgements and emotions to the viewer themselves.

The school shooting is the cataclysmic event in the novel, and at the same time is the climax of the portrayal of the dysfunctional human interactions and relationships in the story. Cheryl describes her experiences in the cafeteria whilst being threatened by the

³² Foley, n.p.

³³ Carol Toller, 'The Massacre Motif', *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto (July 31, 2003) <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/the-massacre-motif/article1019459/>> [Accessed 10 December 2020].

³⁴ *Douglas Coupland: Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014), p. 169.

gun-men. She argues that she could have made a difference by making noise or inciting others to do something, but instead hides under the tables. Cheryl feels guilty for not stepping in to stop the shooting arguing that “Silence was my sin” (18). However, Cheryl’s choice is the one that all other students make as well; everyone is hidden away under the tables not to make noise. Coupland said in an interview that: “You experience the world through your tribe”, and with this he refers to specific cliques or groups in high school or outside.³⁵ At the moment of the shooting all students come together, all being victims of the same crime. However, the shooters in the novel are aware that the group of roughly 300 students can be divided into smaller tribes, they deem Cheryl’s group: “Oh, if it isn’t the Out to Lunch Bunch slumming with us, the damned, here in purgatory, School District 44” (30). When the shooters, Jeremy, Mitchell and Duncan, start realizing that time is running out they start arguing about who should be shot and conclude that the sporty students would be an option: “killing those stuck-up pigs who feed on taunting anybody who doesn’t have a numbered sweater” (36). Later on, when Jeremy points out that he does not want to shoot random students anymore the other two shooters turn on him and kill him; Jeremy was not safe amongst his own tribe. Subsequently, the other shooter, Mitchell, gets killed by Cheryl’s boyfriend Jason, leaving Duncan unprotected from an attack by “the boys in the camera club” who “lifted up their table and used it as a shield as they charged against the sole surviving gunman” (41). The boys of the camera club push Duncan on the floor with the table and “begin jumping up and down on it like a grape press” (41) after which other, previously peaceful students, join in. The scene, reminiscent of Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*, shows “children crushing other children. And that was that” (41). Cheryl’s account of this last act is not so much that of shock, but

³⁵ Foley, n.p.

more the acceptance that everyone is capable of sin and cruelty under the right sort of circumstances. The human interactions between the shooters and the students, but also amongst the students under the tables, are disrupted. The whole scene shows a survival of the fittest amongst the present students – whether it is for them to fake their death, or to kill before being killed. The school shooters are not religious extremists – even if they have their own manifesto - but boys who feel isolated from the rest of the school population. This makes these boys as dangerous as the overly religious characters in the novel. The only people not affected by religious extremist ideas or by this isolation from others seem to be Cheryl's parents who were not “so much anti-God as [...] [they were] pro the world” (13). In other words, there are also people in *Hey Nostradamus*' Vancouver who are not affected by these ideas of extremism, even if rare.

Before the shooting, the protagonists, Cheryl and Jason, are both linked to a Christian youth organisation called “Youth Alive!”. Cheryl, from an atheist family, converted to Christianity and joined the group out of free will. Jason's father and brother being highly religious leave no choice but for Jason to automatically join. Both Jason's father Reg and the “Youth Alive!” group share a *modus operandi*, both use religious propaganda to control Jason and Cheryl and restrict independent thought and freedom. Both Reg and the “Youth Alive!” group worship God in their own way and keep those close to them and part of their circle under close surveillance. An example here would be the fact that Cheryl keeps being questioned by the members of her group about her relationship with Jason: “Everyone's talking, Cheryl. Your reputation is being tarnished. You have to do something about it” (8). It is clear that the group expects a certain behaviour and morality from Cheryl, and when she seems to show deviant behaviour the group as a whole try to

correct this. In other words, the group has a very controlling attitude towards their members and do not accept anything but their example. In contrast, neither Jason nor Cheryl fear Reg or the “Youth Alive!” group they do start to avoid them where possible.

Even though the school shooting is the cataclysmic event in the novel, it is clear that the school shooting just aggravates the situation of miscommunication and loneliness which already preceded the shooting. In the novel the occurrence does not make the students or families come together, but rather drives them further apart. For example, one of the most unhealthy attitudes towards the other would be Jason’s father arguing with the RCMP about his son being or not being a hero; whereas the RCMP see Jason’s actions in the killing of one of the shooters as a sign of bravery, Jason’s father Reg disregards the fact that Jason might have saved other children and asserts that his “son experienced murder in his heart and chose not to rise above the impulse. I understand that my son is a murderer” (77). Reg does not want his son to think for himself, but he wants him to follow Reg’s version of religion to the letter.

Moreover, after the cataclysmic event and the death of Cheryl and Jason’s unborn baby, Jason can never really connect again to others in his society. Jason explains that it was not until later that the death of his child affected him: “It wasn’t until a month later, while I was waiting for a bus in New Brunswick, the temperature well below zero, that the baby caught up to me” (89). After the realization Jason goes through various stages: first he starts wondering if other kids he sees in the street should have been his and afterwards he cannot deal with being around any children at all and escapes reality by taking logging jobs and jobs in construction and surveying. In fact, Jason stops trying to be part of

society, afraid that somebody will figure out his past and he will have to explain himself again. There are a few instances in which Jason does seem to want to connect, but those are rare, awkward and end badly. For example, Jason elopes to Las Vegas and marries and sleeps with Barb, the wife of his brother, on the night of his brother's death. When the couple gets spotted by someone they know, Barb sneaks out on Jason to murder the witness and save their name. She shows no remorse and sleeps with Jason upon returning to the hotel room. The fact that Barb murders this person denotes an extreme fear of the outside world and the dehumanized state of loneliness and miscommunication that they live in. Jason only learns about the murder the day after and is shocked by Barb's actions: "Oh, God, this is how my father felt back in 1988" (145). Jason's connection to Barb is tainted by these events and makes Jason retreat back into his own world once more.

The effects of the cataclysmic event are thus abundantly visible in *Hey Nostradamus!*; however, none of these effects are signs that Vancouver itself is an unsafe place much less a dystopia. Vancouver is portrayed in the novel a myriad of times, but it is never the place itself which is described as evil by Coupland. Places are described neutrally or even with love: for example, "Delbrook Senior Secondary is [...] located about a five-minute walk north of the Trans-Canada highway, up the algae-green slope of Vancouver's North Shore" (6-7) or Cheryl's musings on how she "loved the world, [...] pigeons sitting a fist apart on the light posts entering Stanley Park; [...] powdered snow down to the middle gondola tower of Grouse Mountain [...]. The world is a glorious place" (10). All in all, in *Hey Nostradamus!* it is not Vancouver itself which is a place of evil but certain people living in it, often because of the failure to fit in and belong. *Hey Nostradamus!* seems to

concur with Sartre's idea of "L'enfer c'est les autres" or "Hell is other people."³⁶ It is not Vancouver as such which provides misery to the various characters, but it is the oppression of each other, the viewing of characters as "the other" and the difficulties that this brings with it. The characters in *Hey Nostradamus!* presume to know the other personages without actually communicating with them. On the last page of the novel Reg asserts that Jason cannot "imagine what it is to lose your child" as "you were never a father" (244). If Reg would have connected with his son Jason, he would have been able to see Jason's pain of losing his wife and child during a school shooting and he might have known about the twins. In *Hey Nostradamus!*, *l'enfer c'est les autres*.

Girlfriend in a Coma is quite different from the two other books discussed; whereas *City of Glass* is the description of a real-life city, and *Hey Nostradamus!* tries to make use of realistic themes and uses real happenings as a basis, *Girlfriend in a Coma* makes use of the concept of the apocalypse. This gives *Girlfriend in a Coma* a science fantasy element which the other novels do not have. For this reason, before delving further into the apocalypse in *Girlfriend in a Coma*, I will first look at the theory surrounding utopia, dystopia and the apocalypse. As will become clear, underneath all the science fantasy elements, *Girlfriend in a Coma* still discusses the same elements of home and belonging to a neighborhood or community.

Marlene Goldman argues that, historically seen, "Canadian exploration more often invoked apocalyptic visions of hell than of paradise."³⁷ Goldman argues that Canadian

³⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos* (Amsterdam: Atheneum Uitgeverij, 1999).

³⁷ Marlene Goldman, *Rewriting apocalypse in Canadian fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 3.

literature has been linked to the apocalyptic visions from the early European explorers and settlers onwards. The apocalyptic theme is still popular in contemporary times, within and outside of Canada. Grubisic, Baxter and Lee write that part of this current obsession with the dystopia and (post-)apocalyptic is the “post-millennial disquiet” which is “compounded by ongoing economic, political and environmental crises.”³⁸ This has led to the fact that, as Bruce Holsinger writes; “Our present era (both pre- and post-Y2K) has of course seen an efflorescence of apocalyptic imaginings.”³⁹ It therefore seems that not only countless examples of popular culture make use of post-apocalyptic and dystopian elements, but also the more mainstream literary writers such as Douglas Coupland.⁴⁰

In popular culture the terms utopia, dystopia and (post-)apocalyptic fiction seem to have a catch-all status even if the distinction between the three is quite straight-forward. Some scholars have even described it as quite clear.⁴¹ First of all, utopias will be discussed. Lyman Tower Sargent defines a utopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.”⁴² As can be derived from this quote the first part could actually apply to utopias, dystopias and (post-)apocalyptic literature; the difference is in the fact that for

³⁸ Gisèle Marie Baxter, Brett Josef Grubisic, and Tara Lee, *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase: Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), p. 5.

³⁹ Bruce Holsinger, 'Empire, Apocalypse, and the 9/11 Premodern', *Critical Inquiry*, 34 (2008), 468-90 (p. 475).

⁴⁰ Examples of popular culture: graphic novels like *The Walking Dead* (2003-...), Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Book of Eli* (2010), *The Matrix series* (1999-2003), *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015) or *I Robot* (2004), computer games such as *Fall-Out 4* (2015) and *The Last of Us* (2013) or television series such as *Revolution* (2012-2014).

⁴¹ E.g. Peter Fitting, 'Utopia, dystopia and science fiction', in *The Cambridge companion to utopian literature*, ed. By Gregory Claeys, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 135-153 (p. 135).

⁴² Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 5 (1995), 1-37 (p. 9).

utopic writing the reader is presented with a considerably better society. Utopia writing attracted interest because of Sir Thomas More's renaissance work *Utopia*.⁴³ Though More's work was not the first utopian work, e.g. Plato's *Republic* sometimes is typified as one, his work did actually coin the term into the (English) language through the title of his book.⁴⁴ Thomas More, being a Renaissance man, was living in a tumultuous time in which the idea of utopia was very much influenced by all the sea-faring travels which were undertaken by explorers. However, the utopia sub-genre seems to have lost popularity. Fitting writes that "the positive utopia was the prevailing manifestation of the genre until the first half of the [twentieth] century when these bleaker forms came to dominate" because of "social upheaval" and "negative reactions to the prospect of socialism."⁴⁵ However, this does not mean that the utopia genre is now forgotten or obsolete. Fatima Vieira argues that, contrary to what a number of scholars argue, utopia-writing is not dead.⁴⁶

Allen Madeline Davis Rogan mentions the same trend of believing that utopic literature is no longer viable, arguing that utopia writing is not popular at the moment because it is "culturally problematic."⁴⁷ Rogan argues that such an ideal place "no longer seems plausible" and is thus out of favour.⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, according to Rogan, that the sub-genre is now fully disused, but it does mean that it is less popular than its

⁴³ Fitting, p. 137.

⁴⁴ David Seed, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 73.

⁴⁵ Fitting p. 138.

⁴⁶ Fatima Vieira, 'The concept of utopia', in *The Cambridge companion to utopian literature*, ed. by Gregory Claeys, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 3-27 (p. 19).

⁴⁷ Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan, 'Utopian Studies', in *The Routledge companion to science fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 308-316 (p. 309).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

darker sibling, the dystopia, a sub-genre which is therefore closely linked to the positive utopia.

According to Fatima Vieira “Literary dystopia utilizes the narrative devices of literary utopia, incorporating into its logic the principles of euchronia, but predicts that things will turn out badly; it is thus essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images.”⁴⁹ Vieira writes that “the contemplation of a worse future also affected utopia as a literary genre” because it was suddenly necessary to make the distinction between the utopia and dystopia.⁵⁰ However, as Vieira argues, “the main aim of this sub-genre is didactic and moralistic: images of the future are put forward as real possibilities because the utopist wants to frighten the reader and to make him realize that things may go either right or wrong, depending on the moral, social and civic responsibility of the citizens.”⁵¹ The dystopic sub-genre thus attempts to convince the reader of their viable part in the future of earth. As Vieira argues, dystopias are not meant to make the reader despair; quite the contrary, it is to offer the reader a glimpse of reality and understand how they can escape this future fate by changing the present. The dystopic novel offers the reader an escape route. The difference between utopic and dystopic writing is thus the fact that whereas the utopia mirrors a society which is striving for a better humankind, the dystopia shows a society which has gone awry.

(Post-)Apocalyptic literature is usually more closely related to the dystopia than to utopia. According to Marlene Goldman “[t]he basic elements of the apocalyptic narrative include

⁴⁹ Vieira, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17.

a transformative catastrophe and a subsequent revelation of ultimate truth.”⁵² Thus, whereas a dystopia would reflect a society where things went amiss through, for example, a totalitarian regime or technological invention, a (post-)apocalyptic novel makes use of a disaster which changes the whole world. The post-apocalyptic part of the story can only take part after this disastrous event has happened. As Aris Mousoutzanis asserts “the post-apocalyptic future is often envisioned as the resurgence of a pre-modern, pre-industrial past.”⁵³ This means that after this cataclysmic event there is a transition to a newly established society which, for example, does not have any access to technology anymore and where the satisfaction of primary needs and the day-to-day survival are part of the plot. In other words, usually there is a shift in these narratives from globalization and transnationalism to the local. The anxiety of modern technology seems to fuel the idea that an apocalypse might happen.⁵⁴ For the post-apocalyptic survivors in novels, the apocalypse never means a full annihilation; otherwise there would be no narrative left. Mousoutzanis also discusses how some apocalyptic stories make use of time-travel to put off the final occurrence of the apocalypse.⁵⁵ He argues: “This is characteristic of some apocalyptic narratives that endlessly circle around but insistently deny the traumatic moment of total annihilation, which is never represented but only talked about or hinted at.”⁵⁶ This notion coincides with Maria Manuel Lisboa's idea as she argues that “in scenarios of apocalypse, at the heart of terror there lies always the explosive combination of the possible and the unknown: the possibility of transgression and the crossing of a

⁵² Goldman, p. 4.

⁵³ Aris Mousoutzanis, ‘Apocalyptic SF’, in *The Routledge companion to science fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 458-462 (p. 459).

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 458.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 459.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 459.

line from what is familiar into unimagined, unimaginable territory.”⁵⁷ In other words, it might not even be so much the apocalypse which looms over the main characters in apocalyptic novels which scares the readers, but especially the question of what is going to happen after the great disaster takes place. Aris Mousoutzanis asserts that this does not have to be troubling to readers as “[t]he continued imagination of the apocalypse suggests that it might not have happened yet” and is thus a comforting thought as this would mean there is still hope for the future.⁵⁸ Nevertheless Lisboa states the opposite: “And it is because of what is not fantastic but instead disquietingly familiar (and therefore plausible) beneath the thin veneer of childishness or silliness, whether in children’s literature, horror narrative or science fiction, that we ought to be at least as disturbed as entertained by the outcome of the outlandish events involved in all three genres.”⁵⁹

Utopia, dystopia and the (post-)apocalyptic are thus closely related. Whereas the utopia tries to depict a positive society which humanity would like to mirror, the dystopia functions more as a warning sign, showing quite the opposite through a darker worldview. (Post-)Apocalyptic literature depicts modern fears of globalization, fears of technology and heavy industrialization and what will happen if this comes to an end. The genre is driven by modern society and the developments of the last century. As Margaret Atwood writes: “The twentieth century could be seen as a race between two versions of man-made Hell – the jackbooted state totalitarianism of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the hedonistic ersatz paradise of *Brave New World*, where absolutely everything is a consumer good and human beings are engineered to be happy.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Maria Manuel Lisboa, *The End of the World* (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2011), p. xviii.

⁵⁸ Mousoutzanis, p. 462.

⁵⁹ Lisboa, p. xix.

⁶⁰ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: Sf and the Human Imagination* (Toronto: Signal, 2011), p. 148.

ReadWriteThink, an association related to the International Literacy Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, gives a list of traits of dystopian literature:

Characteristics of a Dystopian Society

- Propaganda is used to control the citizens of society.
- Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.
- A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society.
- Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance.
- Citizens have a fear of the outside world.
- Citizens live in a dehumanized state.
- The natural world is banished and distrusted.
- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.
- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.⁶¹

In many of Coupland's novels technology, money and a decadent global lifestyle feature as both the highest attainable goals in life and as the most destructive forces in the contemporary world.⁶² These elements together are the "worshipped" concept from the list of dystopian characteristics. Other than those key moments in which main characters retreat to nature to heal, most of Coupland's novels take place in urban settings. In these urban settings characters try to adjust to the expectations of others, their fathers, mothers or friends. They are expected to follow the common ideas of happiness, the utopia that society sketches for them, whilst this is usually not their utopia. Their story usually commences by characters realizing that they are unhappy in their circumstances, i.e. their own personal dystopia, and afterwards seizing the opportunity to set themselves free from their self-inflicted drudgery.

⁶¹ Read-Write-Think, n.p.

⁶² E.g. *Worst. Person. Ever., Generation A, Player One.*

The apocalypse in *Girlfriend in a Coma* is an interesting element. Logic would classify the apocalyptic book as a dystopia, a novel to make the reader think about the future and want to change it. Nevertheless, *Girlfriend in a Coma* is not a dystopian story according to the guidelines of ReadWriteThink's *Characteristics of a Dystopian Society*: there is no propaganda to control the inhabitants of Vancouver, there is no restriction on freedom, nobody is worshiped, there is no constant surveillance or fear of the other, there is no dehumanized state, the natural world is still part of their lives, the main characters do not conform to expectations and society is not a perfect world. In fact, pre-apocalypse, all of these elements are lacking, and the overwhelming amount of freedom makes it difficult for the characters to choose their own paths and leads to *ennui* instead. However, the apocalypse in *Girlfriend in a Coma* does match Fatima Vieira's idea that the dystopia "predicts that things will turn out badly; it is thus essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images."⁶³ Coupland's apocalypse shows the death and destruction of modern civilization as is known by the characters and the reader. After all, secondary characters who are loved by the main characters die and mummify in bedrooms, streets and supermarkets. These images invoke fear and renders surviving characters doubtful of their futures.

Nonetheless, these elements of apocalypse in *Girlfriend in a Coma* actually also bring forward utopian elements and a utopian society. As mentioned before, Sargent calls a utopia: "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably

⁶³ Vieira, p. 17.

better than the society in which that reader lived.”⁶⁴ *Girlfriend in a Coma* is a convincingly realistic novel right up to the moment of the apocalypse. The circumstances the characters live in are similar to modern society; this includes modern day problems such as alienation and drug use. The apocalypse gives a breach between “reality” and this new status quo of the apocalypse. The apocalypse might cause mayhem, death and change, but Coupland’s apocalypse also improves the main characters’ circumstances. While this specific apocalypse eliminates most of Earth’s population, the main characters do not perish. In fact, *Girlfriend in a Coma*’s most important characters are forced to connect to each other, something which never occurs in *Hey Nostradamus!* The main characters manage to find comfort in their circle of family and friends, and these characters manage to finally deal with the personal problems that they have been ignoring for years as there are no external excuses or distractions not to do so anymore. For example, in the post-apocalyptic era Pam and Hamilton finally recover from their drug addictions and feel better because of it. Whereas first the novel still featured the possibility to go abroad – Pam travelled extensively, but also Linus went to Las Vegas to find himself - the apocalypse takes away these options to travel and try to find happiness through this. The apocalypse brings a global world back to a fully local domain. Whilst the apocalypse causes enormous change, for the main characters these changes are actually beneficial. The apocalypse brings forward a society which has utopian characteristics; it is a better society than the society in which they originally lived and provides them the opportunity in which they finally find some sort of fragile happiness.

⁶⁴ Sargent, p. 135.

Andrew Tate argues that, “[i]mages of judgement and catastrophic endings torment many of Coupland’s characters, and his early fiction features a recurrent narrative strand related to the end of the world: *Generation X*, *Shampoo Planet*, *Life after God* and *Microserfs* all include end-of-the-world stories.”⁶⁵ Tate could have also included *Girlfriend in a Coma* to this list as this novel makes use of an apocalyptic theme as well. As was already pointed out, “The basic elements of the apocalyptic narrative include a transformative catastrophe and a subsequent revelation of ultimate truth”⁶⁶ and after this event there is a change from the global to the local, from the modern to the pre-industrial.

In fact, Karen predicts that something disastrous is going to happen on a specific date and she begs the other characters to stay near her in the local, specifically Rabbit Lane, yet none of them do: “And so Richard went to Los Angeles. Lois had gone out shopping and George was down at the auto shop; Megan was out with Jenny; and the gang were all out in the world on the one day she knew they oughtn’t to be” (198). The apocalyptic event taking place resembles a Stephen King story; people are tired and feel like they need to sleep and when they cuddle up to sleep in the strangest places they pass over. The remarkable thing is that Coupland equates these sleepers with those wanting to go home, not a physical home but home to the afterlife or perhaps heaven or whatever religious notion that Coupland has about it without voicing it specifically. For example, when describing Lois’ last moments, she thinks of her life: “*I think I’ve just about as much of this world as I’m able to take. I’m pooped. I’m sleepy. I just want to go home*” (182, original emphasis). Lois does not refer to Rabbit Lane or any other specific Vancouver place and makes no attempt to get to the car in the supermarket parking lot but instead

⁶⁵ Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2007), p. 151.

⁶⁶ Goldman, p. 4.

climbs into the meat section and “She closes her eyes and goes home” (182). This idea of going home also matches with Tuan’s ideas mentioned earlier: “home, in the large sense, is physical, economic, psycho-logical, and moral; it is the whole physical earth and a specific neighborhood; it is constraint and freedom-place, location, and space.”⁶⁷ Coupland’s “home” seems to point to a final safe-haven where the various characters can find peace and not necessarily to a brick-and-mortar structure.

Interestingly enough, contrary to the standard apocalyptic stories in which characters are bound to fight endlessly for survival in a local setting, Coupland’s apocalypse is reversible. When Karen goes back into her coma the world returns to its pre-apocalyptic state leaving the main characters – the group of friends and Megan – with a conscious memory of the apocalypse and the wonder of what it all meant. Veronica Hollinger argues that the characters are released from the apocalypse when “these characters come to accept their roles as the neoapostles of a re-created reality”.⁶⁸ Most of all, the apocalypse and the reversal of the apocalypse meant a rebirth for the characters. When Karen takes Megan’s baby and the apocalypse is reversed, Megan is pregnant again waiting for her child to be born in nine months. However, it is also a rebirth for Hamilton and Pam who are now sober and can let go of their destructive lifestyles. Nevertheless, most of all it is a rebirth for Richard who now managed to close off the past and can finally let Karen go and give a place to all the things happening in his life. Richard argues: “no my daughter is *not* confused and angry and lost on drugs. ... No, the woman I love is *not* a papery husk

⁶⁷ Tuan, 'A view of Geography', p. 99.

⁶⁸ Veronica Hollinger, 'Apocalypse Coma', in *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, ed. by Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 160-173 (p. 166).

of a woman My friends are *not* lonely and tired and dried-up and sad” (280, original emphasis). The end of the apocalypse is a new beginning for the characters. Jared asserted earlier in the novel that “there are three things we cry for in life – things that are lost, things that are found and things that are magnificent” (275). The fact that the main characters lost their “normal” lives and find a new version of it after the apocalypse makes them feel that life is worthwhile. Most importantly, they also found themselves and each other in their old safe local neighborhood in the process. The end of the apocalypse is not specifically the rebirth of Vancouver, the end of the apocalypse is the rebirth of the characters within their native city and in connection to the others around them. Or, as Hollinger phrases it: “the end of the world provides a genuine salvation for disaffected characters”.⁶⁹

The three different books discussed, *City of Glass*, *Hey Nostradamus!* and *Girlfriend in a Coma* are three very different works all dealing with the dark side of Vancouver and those affected by living in it. All three books show the attitudes of people towards each other and the city and do this in different ways. The non-fiction book *City of Glass* shows a pragmatic and realistic approach to any misery or debauchery going on in Vancouver, the novels on the other hand place emphasis on human connections and communications using Vancouver only as the setting. While the beginnings of *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* seem very similar – both have male high school students being torn away from their true loves – the end scope of the two is very different. Whilst in *Hey Nostradamus!* human contact never really succeeds, especially after the cataclysm, and

⁶⁹ Veronica Hollinger, 'Notes on the Contemporary Apocalyptic Imagination: William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma*', in *Worlds of Wonder*, ed. by Jean-François Leroux and Camille R. La Bossière (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), pp. 47-56 (p. 51).

people turn out to be each other's worst enemy in *Girlfriend in a Coma* the apocalypse is a renaissance for its main characters showing them what a true utopia could look like in the form of community spirit.

As a footnote to this part about Vancouver as a "nightmare city", it should be noted that the most prominent absence from Coupland's novels seems to be the absence of the global and the colonial. From Coupland's other comments in his non-fiction book *City of Glass* it is obvious that Vancouver is very much globalized in many different aspects and at times also acknowledged as being colonial. Coupland gives many quick examples; "Stanley Park is named after Lord Stanley, some dead English guy" (130), "Dim Sum is one of those things, like karaoke, which were exotic and foreign a few years ago, and which now almost fully integrated into the city's fabric" (30), and "Mixed-ancestry marriages are common in Vancouver" (26). The Vancouver in Coupland's *City of Glass* is a city which is extremely global and not only local. Yet Coupland's two selected novels do not extensively deal with these themes; the main characters are white and do not address the city's multiculturalism or the widespread globalization of current society. The novels' characters are also not necessarily well-travelled; there are examples of a few characters travelling the world to find themselves and some voyages to the United States but there are no elements which make the novels truly global. The characters are so wrapped up in their local experiences that there does not seem to be much place for global elements. Especially for *Girlfriend in a Coma*, set in the late 1970s, it is likely that Coupland based the book on his own personal experiences and circle of friends which might explain the absence of the global.

There are only a few examples in *Girlfriend in a Coma* trying to show how the world is in touch through Karen during the apocalypse:

She closes her eyes and she sees things: images of blood and soil mixed together like the center of a Black Forest cake; Grand Canyons of silent office towers. Houses, coffins, babies, cars, brooms, and bottle caps all burning and draining into the sea and dissolving like candies. ... She sees a convenience store in Texas, and a black-and-white monitor camera shows two children lying on the floor covered in slush drinks. She sees a nerve gas explosion at Tooele, Utah, a yellow ghost rising to haunt the continent. She sees work cubicles, an office in Sao Paulo, Brazil. (200)

Karen is global at the time – and only at this time - of the apocalypse; she proves to have visions of the past, present and future and can tell her friends exactly what is happening where. Her bird's eye perspective means that she can finally see above her problems and those of her friends. She sees what is happening in Japan, but can also tell what happened to specific friend's family members. Whilst, as pointed out earlier, the apocalypse is usually a move from the global to the local this does not prove to be true for Karen's consciousness, as she finally is connected with the whole world and therefore becomes globalization personified. For Karen the apocalypse means she is finally in touch with the rest of the world and rises above the local. This transcendence which Karen achieves would not have been possible without the apocalypse.

These moments of global connectedness in *Girlfriend in a Coma* are rare though, and only happen during the apocalypse. Still there are no references to Vancouver as a multicultural city in *Girlfriend in a Coma*. Moreover, these global elements do not happen

at all in Coupland's other discussed novel *Hey Nostradamus!* The absence of globalization is almost uncanny as in some of Coupland's other novels it largely takes place and as it is also a part in his non-fiction book *City of Glass*. Coupland's absence of globalization is also a message and shows to his readers that whilst the world is global and multicultural at times on the one hand there are also occasions in which the real-life local counts the most.

CONCLUSION

As Vancouver is Douglas Coupland's home city it is a logical setting for his non-fiction book *City of Glass* and his novels *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* In *City of Glass* Vancouver is described through the many different interesting facts and aspects of the city. Coupland describes Vancouver as a young but pleasant multicultural city, even if it still has to deal with realities such as drug abuse. Moreover, Vancouver is described as Coupland's home. Coupland describes his favorite places and how he grew up in the city and returned to it at later age. The Vancouver in *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Hey Nostradamus!* is placed less in the foreground as they have a different function than the non-fiction book. Yet, in the novels Vancouver is still a very important and noticeable element. The Vancouver of the novels is the setting against which the storylines take place, the characters within it feel belonging to their homes, neighborhoods and city and feel at times connected and at times disconnected to each other. During the novels it becomes clear that it is not Vancouver which is malevolent, dystopian or apocalyptic; it is the characters within the city who influence the experiences of others and bring relief and hope or hell. This also follows the theory behind space and place: "Inhabit transforms

a space into a place and creates deposits around this act in our memory” and Sartre’s
“L’enfer c’est les autres.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Helder Maia and Catarina Braga Araujo, 'Space and place in urban culture', in *Keep it Simple, Make it Fast! An approach to underground music scenes*, ed. by Paula Guerra and Tania Moreira (Porto: University of Porto, 2015), pp. 563-68 (p. 565); Sartre, n.p.

CHAPTER 3:
**CANADA/EVERYWHERE/ANYWHERE: AN
ANALYSIS OF NOSTALGIA IN CANADIAN
CULTURAL IDENTITY AND SPACE-TIME
COMPRESSION IN DOUGLAS COUPLAND’S
MONOGRAPH *EVERYWHERE IS ANYWHERE
IS ANYTHING IS EVERYTHING* (2014)**

“You have to know the past to understand the present.”
— Carl Sagan¹

“He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the
past.”
George Orwell, *1984*²

¹ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (U.S.A.: Random House Publishing Group, 2011).

² George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 2003).

INTRODUCTION

Douglas Coupland's 2014/2015 exhibition *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* was the first comprehensive exhibition of his visual artwork.³ The chosen artwork is therefore a typical overview of his (visual) work. For instance, in this exhibition Coupland depicts citations similar to the ones in novels such as *Generation X* and *Microserfs* on plaques of different colours. Coupland also employs Canadian cultural symbols and installations which were also used in his non-fiction books such as *Souvenir of Canada* and earlier exhibitions such as *Canada House*. Coupland also added new works to his Canadiana collection: for example, Coupland shows kitsch Canadiana objects, nostalgic hutches, wall decorations and abstracted paintings from the quintessential Canadian painter group the Group of Seven. However, next to these Canadian-themed works Coupland also shows more progressive themed installations in which he shows his bleak vision of twenty-first-century globalized life. In this part of his exhibition there are works on 9/11, atemporality, the heightened use of technology and school shootings. The works on show are thus on a wide range of themes and, interestingly enough, the issues which are presented in the exhibition are also developed in his written works (his novels and non-fiction books). This wide-ranging exhibition resulted in a new publication. Black Dog Publishing, the publisher of *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything*, classified the publication as a monograph on their website and not as an exhibition catalogue as one could expect. Libraries define a monograph as:

³ *Douglas Coupland: everywhere is anywhere is anything is everything* [exhibition] (Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver: 30 May 2014 – 31 August 2014; Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto: 30 January 2015 - 18 April 2015 and Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, 30 January 2015 - 26 April 2015).

A separate treatise on a single subject or class of subjects, or on one person, usually detailed in treatment but not extensive in scope and often containing bibliographies. Frequently published in series. In cataloguing, any publication which is not a Serial.⁴

Admittedly, *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* somewhat conforms to these criteria, as the monograph gives a deeper extended insight into his oeuvre and places it in the context of Coupland's other works. This in-depth approach is much more thorough than a mere catalogue would be. The monograph combines images from the likewise named exhibition and previous exhibitions and artwork with observations from journalists and specialists, and scholarly writing from academics about and interviews with Douglas Coupland. It also provides a "Chronology", a list of important data in Douglas Coupland's life and work. In doing so the monograph provides a comprehensive overview of Coupland's life from his birth on a Royal Canadian Air Force Base in Baden-Baden in Germany – to the public display of his exhibition in 2014 accompanied by this published monograph. The interest of this exhibition and subsequent monograph are crucial to understand Coupland's work. Both the exhibition and monograph materialize Coupland's perception of the world around him, even if at times Coupland's concepts seem to be fully contradictory. Coupland, in the preparation of the work for this exhibition project, seems to be torn between a nostalgia for a Canada of his arguably pre-globalization childhood as depicted in his installation *Secret Handshake* and an obsession with space-time compression in contemporary life in *The 21st Century Condition* and *Pop*

⁴ e.g. "Glossary of Government Information Terms", University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, (n.d.) <<https://www.library.illinois.edu/govinfo/u-of-i-unit-library-homepage/researchtools/guides/general/glossary/#m>> [Accessed 19 August 2018]; Iowa Library Service Areas, *Acronyms and Glossary* (2003) <<http://www.ilsa.lib.ia.us/glossary.htm>> [Accessed 19 August 2018].

Explosion. This constant tension between Coupland's citizenship and his fascination with globalization is omnipresent, both in his visual art and in his written work. In the case of Coupland it seems to be an iterative process: Coupland feels that society has moved towards globalization; he feels nostalgic about a period before globalization; he combines the two and develops it further; only to realize that more things have changed which causes further nostalgia and the cycle starts over again.

Douglas Coupland is an artist who has earned his place in Canadian arts and literature. Coupland is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and an Officer of the Order of Canada.⁵ In other words, he is a well-respected Canadian artist. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Coupland does not have his critics – his exhibition *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* and matching monograph were not always well-received. For instance, David Balzer (2015) is critical of Douglas Coupland's art and motives and voices this opinion strongly:

Didactics inform us that textile works, containing embedded “dream catchers,” speak to the material traditions of First Nations and women artists. I doubt this. Coupland is less flaneur than entrepreneur, acquiring rather than inquiring; he wears the title of “artist” in the style of a “Hello My Name Is” name tag. Indeed, like the Gen X worker he so criticized and immortalized, Coupland's detachment is privileged, effortful, performative and above all dark. He's the comic-book-store guy, the record-store guy, the '90s guy. Sure he'll talk with you—but only if he absolutely has to.⁶

⁵ Brian John Busby and Karen Grandy, 'Douglas Coupland', in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia* (Canada: Historica Canada, 2011/2012) <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/douglas-coupland>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

⁶ David Balzer, *Douglas Coupland Doesn't Care About You* (2015) <<https://canadianart.ca/reviews/douglas-coupland-doesnt-care-about-you/>> [Accessed 20 July 2018]

Balzer thus argues that Coupland is not genuine, producing “art” for the sake of being able to call himself an artist and gain money. He thus implies that Coupland’s art is missing a deeper layer.

During this chapter it will become clear that some parts of Douglas Coupland’s exhibition are indeed kitsch, and low entry art. For example, Clint Burnham explains how and why he revisited Coupland’s exhibition with his son:

Given Coupland’s infantile material—he has a room of Lego—I revisited the exhibition with my 13-year-old son, to see if perhaps I am just not Coupland’s intended audience. He has said, for instance, that his *Gum Head* (2014) public sculpture outside the gallery is designed to lure in those who would not normally enter an art gallery, which is, of course, the purpose of summer shows in a tourist-destination city like Vancouver. My son liked the Lego art a lot. And walking through the room of Canadian kitsch again, I saw a blot or a stain, a leak under an ice machine. Douglas Coupland’s brain is leaking, and it was there on display at the Vancouver Art Gallery.⁷

Burnham’s opinion is clear; he is not interested in Coupland’s art and finds his art “infantile.” There thus seems to be a gap between Coupland’s status as a well-respected author and artist and (a number of) his works according to the critics. Burnham also comments on the audience attracted to Coupland’s art by testing the exhibition out on his son, implying that Coupland’s art is more suited for teenagers.

This third chapter will analyze how Douglas Coupland’s nostalgia for a white 1960s Canada correlates to the notion of space-time compression in the projection of a bleak future depicted by Coupland. The key concepts for this chapter are postmodernity, “nostalgia” and atemporality. Firstly, the concept of postmodernity will be analyzed in a

⁷ Clint Burnham, *Douglas Coupland: Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything* (2014) <<https://canadianart.ca/reviews/douglas-coupland-vancouver-art-gallery/>> [Accessed 20 August 2018].

selection of his works. Secondly, the concept of nostalgia will be analyzed and the theory of the concept of “nostalgia” will be applied to the “Secret Handshake”, part of Coupland’s monograph. Thirdly, for *21st Century Condition* and *Pop Explosion* the idea of space-time compression will be analyzed. Subsequently, through exploring the theme of nostalgia and space-time compression in the full scope of Coupland’s visual work, the construal and the use of these terms by Coupland to describe a rapidly advancing technological and globalized world will be examined. At the end of the chapter the questions raised by Balzer and Burnham whether Coupland is a detached postmodern artist or whether he is aware of deeper issues going on in society will be answered.

COUPLAND'S POSTMODERN ART

This section of the chapter will showcase examples of Coupland's postmodern art. This specific art, created by Coupland, leans heavily on postmodern ideas of detachment and the lack of new original ideas, i.e. everything has been done. This matches with the idea that Balzer describes: Coupland as the detached '90s guy. However, there is also a sense of nostalgia in these works; they make use of older paintings and ideas. These borrowed elements are both from high culture and low culture, some historical some more recent. Cristina Degli-Esposti explains this mixture of old and new: "The bombardment of the present which we face in our current media erases our concepts of past and future, and as soon as a product becomes 'old' or 'out of fashion' it is suddenly rendered 'new' again while remaining 'old' at the same time."⁸ According to Degli-Esposti, Frederic Jameson names this the "nostalgia for the present", the idea that even though something is contemporary it still refers back to or even pretends to be part of the past.⁹ Even though Degli-Esposti argues that Jameson's ideas are mostly applicable to cinema, it is also valid for Coupland's art.

⁸ Cristina Degli-Esposti, *Postmodernism in the Cinema* (U.S.A.: Berghahn Books, 1998), p. 77.

⁹ Oxford Reference, *Overview: Nostalgia for the Present* (2020)
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100239921>> [Accessed 21 April 2020].

QR-Codes (2010-2011)



Figure 11: *Coupland's Broadway Boogie Woogie 1943*, Piet Mondrian, 1872-1944 (2011)¹⁰

¹⁰ Douglas Coupland, *Broadway Boogie Woogie 1943*, 2011, acrylic and latex on canvas, w259 x h259 cm < <https://theartstack.com/artist/douglas-coupland/broadway-boogie-woogie-3> > [Accessed 14 July 2018].

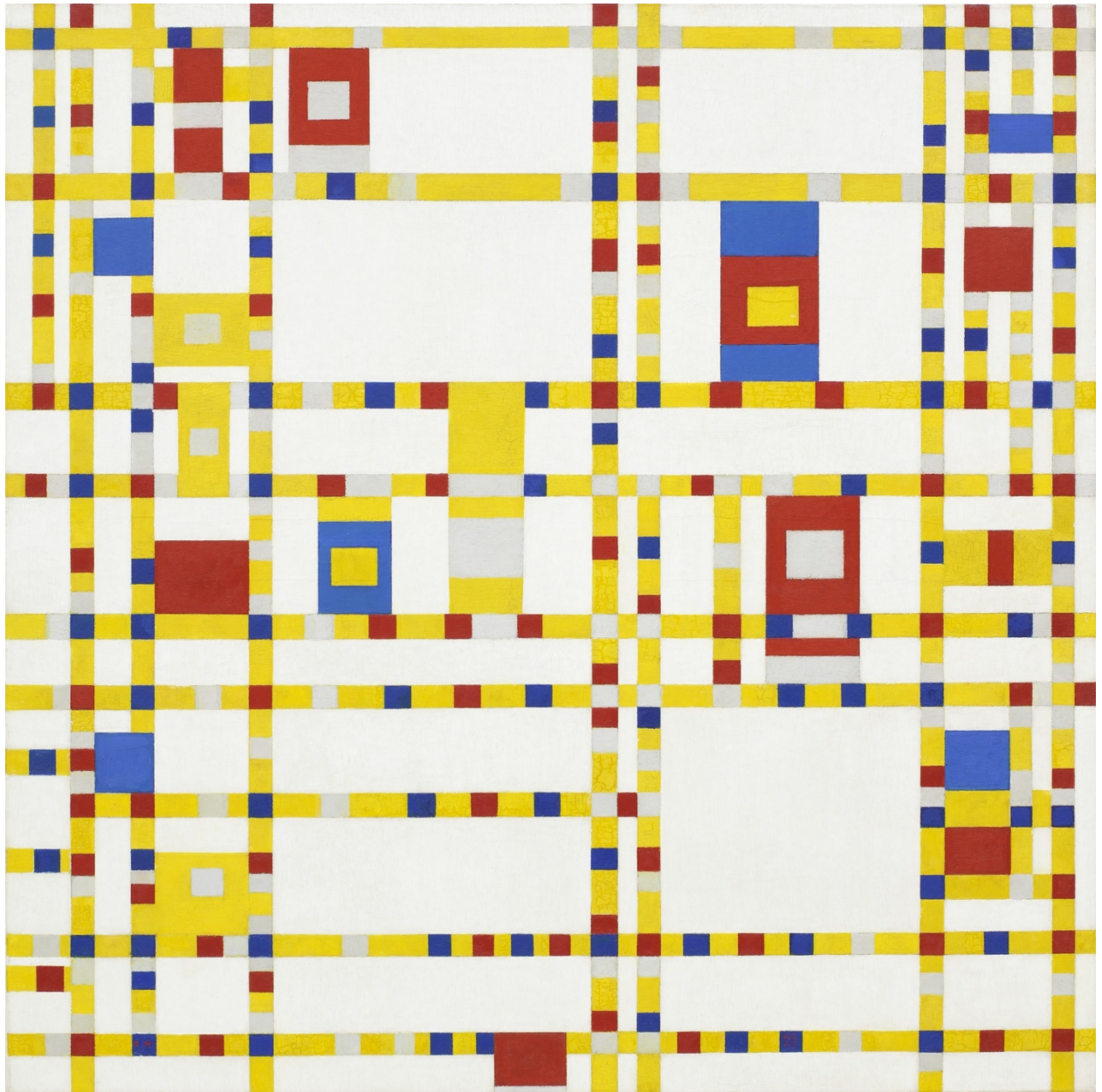


Figure 12: Piet Mondrian's original Broadway Boogie Woogie (1942-43)¹¹

Coupland's QR-series plays with the idea of abstract paintings, western (pop-)culture and operational Quick Response-codes (QR-codes). By putting these elements together Coupland is creating a peculiar postmodern pastiche. Coupland's codes were inspired by

¹¹ Piet Mondrian, 'Broadway Boogie Woogie', 1942-43, oil on canvas, w127 x h127 cm
<<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78682>> [Accessed 18 July 2018].

artists such as Piet Mondrian and Gerhard Richter.¹² They have similar colours and lines, but can be read through QR scans on modern equipment and give messages to the viewer when observed through a phone. The idea is that, whilst referring back to original works of art, these images are immediately recognizable to modern audiences as being QR-codes. The messages behind these QR-codes are varied; there are QR-codes which refer to the bible, to popular culture such as Star Wars (*May the force be with you*, 2010) and to inspirations such as Mondrian's work *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. As can be seen in figure 11 and 12, Coupland's version and Mondrian's original painting are quite similar in colour palette and the use of its lines. As a side-note, Coupland's adaptation of *Broadway Boogie Woogie* looks more like Mondrian's *Victory Boogie-Woogie*, especially as it is turned on its side 45 degrees. Just as Coupland used Lichtenstein's work as an inspiration for his atemporality works (mentioned later in this chapter), he similarly used Mondrian's work – also showing atemporality in his QR-codes because of its mix of recognizable old paintings and modern technology. The QR-codes are an allusion to these previous paintings, but also to the pop and high culture they refer to and a reference to the atemporal. According to the text accompanying one of his QR-codes on Coupland's personal website, "the hidden texts satisfy the current generation's penchant for instantaneous information while enabling Coupland to bypass popular search engines such as Google and communicate directly with his audience. Ultimately, his modern memento mori remind us not only of our own mortality but also, more impressively, of technology's stark perpetuity."¹³ Some of Coupland's messages have elements of

¹² Coupland, *Anywhere*, p. 173.

¹³ Douglas Coupland, *Sworn to Fun, Loyal to None*, 2010, print, 182.9cm x 182.9cm x 5.4cm <<https://coupland.com/sworn-to-fun-loyal-to-none/>> [Accessed 15 July 2018].

nostalgia: quotes from the bible, references to older painting, and popular culture from decades ago. However, these quotes are now being explored through modern technology. Coupland's QR-codes mix times, cultures, messages and meaning and in doing so are playing with time and space. Coupland mixes elements of history with modern elements, showing his viewers that modern technology dominates their lives and even the way that they experience high and low culture from their youth. Coupland thus manages to make perfect examples of Jameson's postmodern idea of *nostalgia for the present* by making a pastiche of old ideas and images and amalgamate it with new modern ideas and images.

Tokyo Harbour (2000)



Figure 13: Detail from *Tokyo Harbour* (2000)¹⁴

Coupland's *Tokyo Harbour* (2000) is a collection of Japanese cleaning products which Coupland collected whilst in Japan. *Tokyo Harbour* is neither a pastiche of different

¹⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Tokyo Harbour*, 2000, 108 plastic bottles, w132 x h236 x d12 cm
 <<http://www.alanacdehaan.com/blog/2015/5/10/everywhere-is-anywhere-is-anything-is-everything>>
 [Accessed 19 July 2018].

elements, nor does it refer back to a deeper meaning. Coupland chose the various bottles because of their colours, fonts and eye-catching labels, or, in other words, on basis of their exterior. He called this display *Tokyo Harbour* because instead of taking the full product home, he only took the empty bottles after flushing its original contents through the toilet. Coupland thus named this work of art after the place where the content of his bottles ended up. The focus here is definitely on the colourfulness of these bottles and seems to affirm Balzer's and Burnham's reservations about Coupland's works: there is no deep significance in this installation.

G7 series



Figure 14: Tom Thomson's *On Georgian Bay* (1914)¹⁵

¹⁵ Joan Murray, *Tom Thomson: Catalogue Raisonné* (2018)
<<http://tomthomsoncatalogue.org/catalogue/entry.php?id=194>> [Accessed 24 July 2018].



Figure 15: Coupland's version of Tom Thomson's *On Georgian Bay* (2011)¹⁶

¹⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Thomson No. 10*, 2011, pigment print on watercolour paper, w79 x h58.4 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/thomson-no-10-on-georgian-bay/NQG28LOcNulpbg>> [Accessed 18 July 2018].

Coupland's *Secret Handshake*, which is part of his exhibition *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything*, also includes several of the Group of Seven paintings, which have been adapted by Coupland. The Group of Seven were a Canadian painters' collective from the 1920s and 1930s, and are renowned within their national borders. Their paintings are regarded as quintessential Canadian artwork. Similarly to the QR-codes, Coupland makes use of high art to present his works. Therefore, Coupland's G7 works are an interesting bridge between his more kitsch lowbrow objects used for the hutches (described later on in this chapter) and collected items on the walls of the exhibition and his high art work. In this part of the exhibition a selection of the original *Group of Seven* paintings are highly stylized by Coupland. For example, in figure 14 and 15 there are two versions of the same painting. Figure 14 is the painting *On Georgian Bay* as painted by Tom Thomson in 1914; in figure 15 you can see the painting as adapted by Douglas Coupland (2011). Coupland's version of Thomson's picture is a very abstracted image; the original colours of the landscape are preserved but the level of detail is reduced through introduction of larger solid colour areas with straight lines. Coupland used Adobe Photoshop software to make highly abstract images, grouping colours used in the original painting together and in this way making blocks of colour. Coupland sees the Group of Seven as a quintessential Canadian group and argues that that these paintings "brought Canada alive" and are "a secret handshake among Canadians" with no meaning to non-Canadian viewers.¹⁷ According to O'Brien reprints from works of the Group of Seven by Samson-Matthews Limited, a publisher, were promoted nationwide between 1943-1962 by the National Gallery of Canada and the Canadian government.¹⁸ The reprints "were

¹⁷ John O'Brien, 'The Bomb, the Group of Seven and Douglas Coupland's G7 Series', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 69-71 (p. 69).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

circulated to schools, hospitals, banks, mining corporations, municipal offices and Canadian Armed Forces bases.”¹⁹ These prints were thus an important and central Canadian phenomenon. These Group of Seven paintings were thus used in the past to bring a sense of belonging to Canadian audiences, and this is exactly what Coupland tries to recreate with his abstract derivations. Coupland’s versions are a nudge to Canada’s past – a nostalgic element - whilst at the same time creating a feeling of belonging to a pan-Canadian identity. Coupland argues that: “These were images which, when shown to Americans or Europeans, would read as abstracted landscapes but, when shown to Canadians, created a sort of Aha! moment: ‘That’s a Lawren Harris, isn’t it? It is!’ And every time viewers saw my crystallized images and made the right artistic connections, they became just a tiny bit more Canadian than they perhaps thought they might be.”²⁰ Interesting in Coupland’s G7 series is the schism between his other Canadiana art and these more highbrow, yet popularized, paintings. Coupland’s abstracted paintings differ from his collection of packages, hutches and other Canadiana items (discussed later in this chapter) as Coupland here works with real art instead of compositing ready-made objects.

Coupland’s use of the past in his works raises questions about the postmodern. Linda Hutcheon addresses the postmodern from a Canadian viewpoint. In her book, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction*, she analyses the term postmodernism and its implications for especially English Canadian literature in comparison to other literatures. According to Hutcheon: “What is striking and particular

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰ Portia Priegert, *Secret Handshake: Douglas Coupland and the Sampson-Matthews Prints* (n.d.) <<http://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/secret-handshake%3A-douglas-coupland-and-the-sampson-matthews-/>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

about Canadian postmodernist fiction is that the very real challenge to the conventions of realism has always come from within those conventions themselves.”²¹ She clarifies this by arguing that “[u]nlike the more radical American ‘surfiction’ or the Québécois linguistic play, English Canadian novels have self-consciously milked realism for all its power, even while parodying and subverting its conventions.”²² This means that English Canadian postmodern literature is quite distinct from U.S. and Québécois postmodern literature. According to Hutcheon the postmodern literature of the United States uses metafiction to show awareness of its own fictional status. On the other hand, Québécois linguistic play is typically anchored in some referential data, often of problematic nature arising from a political, cultural or social context.²³ English Canadian literature leans towards realism, even if showing postmodern qualities such as parody. Moreover, if looking at the theme of the past, Hutcheon argues that: “For the Canadian postmodern, history is ‘a vast theatre in which a drama is unfolding, that of representation, or of art itself’. Unlike the art or literature of modernism, the postmodern uses its tendency towards self-reference as a way both of engaging with its own past, usually through irony and parody, and also of engaging with its audience.”²⁴ Hutcheon thus argues that the use of the past is common for the postmodern and has a function. Coupland uses these functions in his work; he refers to Canada’s past to interact with especially his Canadian audiences. Hutcheon expands on the use of the past later on in her book: “In other words, the aesthetic and the social, the present and the past, are not separable discourses in the novels. They represent a postmodern self-reflexivity that moves outward to the world

²¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 20.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²³ Janet. M. Paterson, 'Le Postmodernisme Québécois: Tendances Actuelles.', *Études littéraires*, 27 (1994), 77-88 (p. 77).

²⁴ Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, p. XI.

beyond their borders – to history, biography, philosophy, religion, politics”.²⁵ Coupland shows this self-reflexivity in his works; the past is mixed up with the present in, for example, both his QR-codes, and his G7 series.

Hutcheon also talks about the use of nostalgia in the postmodern. Hutcheon argues that “[o]ur contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic; some parts of it – postmodern parts – are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose through irony.”²⁶ The use of irony embeds the nostalgia used and makes sure that it is placed in perspective. Or, as Hutcheon writes: “The knowingness of irony may be not so much a defense against the power of nostalgia as the way in which nostalgia is made palatable today: invoked but, at the same time, undercut, put into perspective, seen for exactly what it is – a comment on the present as much as on the past.”²⁷ Coupland’s use of Mondrian’s paintings or the Group of Seven painting do just this, they show a nostalgia for the past but put it into perspective at the same time and update it for contemporary audiences. Whereas modern audiences might recognize Mondrian in Coupland’s QR-codes, past audiences would have never understood the QR-codes as they were not in use yet. To understand Coupland’s art the viewer needs both an understanding of the past as the contemporary.

Frederic Jameson also addresses this use of the past in postmodern works. He argues in a chapter about the American 1950s that there is a nostalgia for the United States of the 1950s which is based on sit-coms and soap-series.²⁸ Jameson argues that these views of

²⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁶ Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern: A Dialogue', *Poligrafías 3* (1998-2000), 18-41 (p. 23).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

the 1950s are not necessarily accurate but provided a light-hearted ambience during harsh times. Jameson writes:

If there is "realism" in the 1950s, in other words, it is presumably to be found there, in mass cultural representation, the only kind of art willing (and able) to deal with the stifling Eisenhower realities of the happy family in the small town, of normalcy and nondeviant everyday life. High art apparently cannot deal with this kind of subject matter except by way of the oppositional: the satire of Lewis, the pathos and solitude of Hopper or Sherwood Anderson.²⁹

This difference that Jameson sees in 1950s American high- and lowbrow culture is different for Canada and the Group of Seven; these painters were part of high art but at the same time commoditized: their paintings ended up all over Canada. Canadian nostalgia is thus also intertwined with these examples of high art, whilst, according to Jameson, American nostalgia is dominated by lowbrow culture such as soap operas. Whereas, Coupland's *Canada House* works and Coupland's *Hutches* make use of what Coupland experienced in his everyday life as a child and depicts many items of low-culture, mostly in the form of Canadian stereotypes such as lumberjack prints and typically Canadian items such as beer bottles or licence plates – much like Jameson's soap operas and sitcoms - his Group of Seven works honour Canadian high culture. However, as mentioned, the Group of Seven's works have also been made into mass culture representation – the government printed and dispatched the paintings all over the nation to make sure that a Canadian identity was formed. So, even though the G7 series is based on high culture objects, they are still linked to Canadian mass culture. Once more, Jameson's idea of *nostalgia for the present* seems to be active here; whereas the original (re-)prints can seem to be outdated Coupland's updated version makes them relevant

²⁹ Ibid., p. 280.

again. Moreover, Coupland's nostalgia for a collective Canadian identity in the G7 series does not seem to link back to the time that the painters were active, but much more to the time that Coupland was exposed to the reprints of these paintings in his childhood. He uses the G7 series to show that Canadians have a general collective memory of these reprints which were widely dispatched and shown in public institutions over the country. Through his distinctive revisiting of the G7 series, Coupland has placed these works within Jameson's concept of the *nostalgia of the present*.

THE END OF DETACHMENT: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NOSTALGIA

Though Frederic Jameson makes use of the term nostalgia in his concept *nostalgia of the present*, the concept of nostalgia itself is much older. The term nostalgia and its conceptualization has changed over the centuries, moving from a very negative to a more positive connotation. Even though the emotion behind nostalgia is already referred to in, for example, Hippocrates, Caesar and the Bible, the term nostalgia was originally devised by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century.³⁰ Hofer used the term to give the sense to the feeling of an unbearable want to return to one's home(land). Symptoms of Hofer's nostalgia were grave and could lead to the demise of a person; "bouts of weeping, irregular heartbeat, and anorexia."³¹ Trnka notes that "Over time, the medicalized origins of nostalgia have disappeared, and it would be unthinkable today to find medical professionals diagnosing patients with this condition."³² The word nostalgia

³⁰ E.g.: Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt, and Clay Routledge, 'Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future', *Current Directions in Psychology*, 17 (2008), 304-07; Susanna Trnka, 'Playing Cowboys and Indians: The Therapeutics of Nostalgia', *Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 57 (2015), 284-98; Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2005).

³¹ Sedikides e.a., p. 304.

³² Susanna Trnka, 'Playing Cowboys and Indians: The Therapeutics of Nostalgia', *Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 57 (2015), 284-98 (p. 284).

has progressed from having a medical dimension to having a more general meaning of contemplation of the past of a person or a country and a clear wish to return to it or to bring elements from this past back to the now Sedikides et al. add to this that it is “a sentimentality that is pervasively experienced.”³³ In other words, it is not uncommon for a group of people to have the same nostalgic feelings. However, Trnka believes that even today the underpinning feeling which the term nostalgia transfers still “continues to reverberate with negative overtones, often suggesting suffering, melancholy or loss.”³⁴

Not all recent research matches with Trnka’s ideas. For example, recent psychological research amongst various audiences has led to the idea that “[n]ostalgia increases meaning relative to a recent experience of happiness and a desired future event of great personal significance. Nostalgia is not a rare pathology. It is commonplace and functional.”³⁵ Biskas et al. explain that the test-subjects questioned by Routledge et al. usually come up with personal and meaningful life events which embedded the self of the person questioned in a social environment.³⁶ These test-groups saw nostalgia as a mostly positive emotion as they were remembering important life events. However, as Biskas et al. assert, even though the positive element was the stronger one, there was still a “hint of negativity” as there was a sad remorse that this event was completely over at the same

³³ E.g. Susanna Trnka, 'Playing Cowboys and Indians: The Therapeutics of Nostalgia', *Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 57 (2015), 284-98; Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, 'Nostalgia for the Future': Memory, Nostalgia and the Politics of Class', *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HERITAGE STUDIES*, 23 (2017), 612-27; Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, Jamie Arndt, and Clay Routledge, 'Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future', *Current Directions in Psychology*, 17 (2008), 304-07.; Tim Wildschut, Clay Routledge, Constantine Sedikides, Jacob Juhl and Jamie Arndt, 'The Power of the Past: Nostalgia as a Meaning making Resource', *Memory*, 20 (2012), 452-60; Sedikides e.a. p. 305.

³⁴ Trnka, p. 284.

³⁵ Tim Wildschut, Clay Routledge, Constantine Sedikides, Jacob Juhl and Jamie Arndt, 'The Power of the Past: Nostalgia as a Meaningmaking Resource', *Memory*, 20 (2012), 452-60 (p. 458).

³⁶ Marios Biskas, Wing-Yee Cheung, Jacob Juhl, Constantine Sedikides, Tim Wildschut, and Erica Hepper, 'A Prologue to Nostalgia: Savouring Creates Nostalgic Memories That Foster Optimism', *Cognition and Emotion* (2018), 1-11.

time.³⁷ Sedikides is more balanced and argues that during nostalgia “positive and negative elements were often juxtaposed to create redemption, a narrative pattern that progresses from a negative or undesirable state (e.g., suffering, pain, exclusion) to a positive or desirable state.”³⁸ Interestingly enough, Sedikides also argues, on basis of research by Routledge, et al., that nostalgia gives meaning to life, making it easier for an individual to deal with the existential peril in their lives.³⁹ Leading a meaningful life is seen by them as one of the foremost challenges a person can deal with especially in the light of the fact that death is an unavoidable ending. Sedikides argues that “one can mitigate existential anxiety through shared beliefs about the nature of reality that imbue life with meaning” and “[n]ostalgia can contribute an overall sense of enduring meaning to one's life.”⁴⁰ Both Biskas et al. and Wildschut et al. agree that nostalgia gives meaning to life and furthermore argue that nostalgia improves a person's mood, elevates the feeling of being a part of a social circle and diminishes tedium.⁴¹ Nostalgia is therefore more than just positive memories; it is “the self-focused emotional process through which people recollect experiences that imbue their lives with meaning.”⁴²

Svetlana Boym has three pivotal ideas about the concept of nostalgia.⁴³ The first idea is that nostalgia and modernity are not opposing concepts: according to Boym, nostalgia is “the result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into ‘local’ and ‘universal’ possible.”⁴⁴ Secondly, Boym argues that nostalgia is not “a longing for a

³⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁸ Sedikides e.a. p. 305.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 305.

⁴⁰ Sedikides e.a., p. 305.

⁴¹ Biskas e.a.; Wildschut e.a. p. 453.

⁴² Wildschut, p. 459

⁴³ Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia', in *Atlas of Transformation*, (n.d.)

<<http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/index.html>> [Accessed 24 August 2018].

⁴⁴ Ibid.

place but is actually a yearning for a different time.”⁴⁵ By this Boym means that when a person feels nostalgic, they usually want to go back to a point in their childhood or a moment in their lives in which they were really happy. Boym argues, “It could merely be another time, or slower time.”⁴⁶ The third idea Boym coins about nostalgia is that it is not necessarily retrospective but can be forward looking as well.⁴⁷ She argues that nostalgia “has a utopian dimension”, because the nostalgia felt by an individual about the past has an influence on the future.⁴⁸ Boym’s ideas on nostalgia are determined not so much by a need of a concrete location but much more by abstract ideas of longing, and time and space.

It should be noted that nostalgia is a term which is used in different fields of studies and can be subcategorized further. For example, Smith and Campbell, who use the term for their research in heritage studies, make a self-invented distinction between “reactionary nostalgia” and “progressive nostalgia.”⁴⁹ Smith and Campbell see “reactionary nostalgia” as “a reactionary desire to return to an idealised and fetishized past.”⁵⁰ Their idea of progressive nostalgia is more interesting as it does not necessarily glorify the past. Smith and Campbell argue that:

What we see as ‘progressive nostalgia’ is a particular and unashamedly overtly emotional way of remembering that actively and self-consciously aims to use the past to contextualise the achievements and gains of present-day living and working conditions and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future. This process of remembering contains not simply an understanding that the past was not perfect, but rather an explicit understanding that it was hard, difficult and inequitable.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, ‘Nostalgia for the Future’: Memory, Nostalgia and the Politics of Class’, *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HERITAGE STUDIES*, 23 (2017), 612-27 (p. 613).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 613.

⁵¹ Smith and Campbell, p. 613.

Svetlana Boym also differentiates between two types of nostalgia: restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia.⁵² Restorative nostalgia “attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” whilst reflective nostalgia is about “the longing itself.” In principal, Boym’s types of nostalgia are not very different from Smith and Campbell’s typifications. Restorative and reactionary nostalgia share the idea that the past is to be idealized and as such can thus be used for nationalistic and religious purposes. Reflective and progressive nostalgia share the idea that the past is not necessarily ideal. For example, Boym writes: “longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another.”⁵³ Reflective, or progressive, nostalgia understands that whilst there might be a longing to a past time it does not make this previous era necessarily better or politically correct.

The understanding of the idea that the past was not perfect and most certainly unbalanced leaves a way to deal with the fact that in a post-industrial-revolution and post-colonial era there is still a benefit of looking back and accepting how society has progressed. In this conceptualization of the term nostalgia the harsh past valorizes the progress which has been made and sheds light on what still has to be done in the future. This viewpoint makes nostalgia a realistic review of the past and gives hope for a better future. Adam Muller quotes Boym by arguing that the "past has become much more unpredictable than the future" because it is not set in stone and he adds that this “unpredictability ... is troubling, particularly insofar as it may be found regularly exploited by those concerned with politicizing nostalgia, with using it to buttress the static conceptions of imaginary

⁵² Boym, n.p.

⁵³ Ibid.

homelands at the heart of every nationalism, moderate and rabid.”⁵⁴ Muller has a valid point: unrealistic nostalgia and glorification of the past can lead to undesired situations in present times, for example a political draw to the extreme right.

In this regard, Douglas Coupland is a pertinent case study; in parts of his work, be it written or visual, he uses nostalgia for a Canada of his youth and, through juxtaposition, he gives a depiction of all the flaws he finds in our current twenty-first-century society. Coupland plays with the ideas coined by Boym and by Smith and Campbell; he looks back at his childhood country and sees the issues which were going on whilst still feeling nostalgia for it as it is his past. Coupland’s longing is not for a specific place, he still lives in his Vancouver, but for a specific time. His twenty-first-century works do not portray the same nostalgia as his Canadian works, but still Coupland plays with time, memory and in part nostalgia. In his twenty-first-century work he makes use of the concept of time-space compression – juxtapositioning different time periods next to each other and mixing up nostalgic elements with modern day concepts. The next section of this chapter will analyze Coupland’s nostalgic vision of Canada as depicted in his monograph. The subsequent section will analyze the way this vision is related to space-time compression and his bleak twenty-first century portrayals. Finally, the terms nostalgia and space-time compression will be further elaborated during the rest of the chapter in the context of Coupland’s oeuvre and will be used to determine how nostalgia and space-time compression are given form by Coupland in particular, in both his Canadian work and in his 21st century comments.

⁵⁴ Adam Muller, 'Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European "Heritage" Films', *New Literary History*, 37 (2006), 739-60 (p. 740).

SECRET HANDSHAKE

The Canadian cultural installation, called *Secret Handshake*, resonates with Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books and the Canada House exposition.⁵⁵ A part of the work exhibited in these previous installations and books have been reused for the *Everywhere* exhibition. Looking at the installation of *Secret Handshake* in *Everywhere* there is newer work included in the form of so-called hutches⁵⁶ but there is also, for example, the *Hubcap Quilt* (2003) from Canada House. In this section of the chapter the idea of nostalgia will be applied to selected examples of Coupland's older work which has already been used for Canada House, but also to his hutches.

⁵⁵ N.b. parts of his *Souvenir of Canada* work were also used for this exhibition and subsequent monograph.

⁵⁶ An American piece of furniture: according to the Merriam-Webster: a) a chest or compartment for storage b) a [low] cupboard usually surmounted by open shelves. 'Hutch', in *Merriam-Webster* (2018) <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hutch>> [Accessed 10 July 2018].



Figure 16: Hubcap Quilt (2003)⁵⁷

One of the most interesting items which had previously been used for the Canada House exhibition and has afterwards been reused for *Everywhere* is the *Hubcap Quilt* (2003). Here, the feeling of nostalgia is expressed through a contrasting juxtaposition of various symbolic elements related to different aspects of Canadian culture. As can be seen in the image this quilt is composed of various elements; there are hubcaps, but also dreamcatchers, and the patches used to create the quilt are significant to stereotypical

⁵⁷ Douglas Coupland: *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014), p. 67.

Canadian culture – there are a few National Hockey League patches, a lumberjack patch, First Nations art patches, a commercial piece of cloth turned into a patch depicting the maple leaf and even old sweater patches. As such, the juxtapositioning of these items seems random and for those not very familiar with First Nations art the quilt can be quite puzzling. The quilt is a direct reference to “button blankets” made by First Nations and these blankets have quite an interesting history which tie in with the erection of a colonial Canada. In figure 17 a First Nations Haida button blanket, from around, 1900 is depicted. This button blanket is decorated with pearl buttons forming a human figure.



Figure 17: Button Blanket with a Human Figure, Haida (ca. 1900)⁵⁸

As such, the button blanket is seen as “the most popular piece of contemporary feast attire among the people of the north coast - the Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit and Nisga'a.”⁵⁹ The blankets were not made or in use before the arrival of Europeans to Canada. European maritime traders and afterwards one of the world’s now oldest companies, the Hudson Bay Company, used to trade woolen blankets to Natives for fur and the blankets were subsequently decorated with pearl buttons by the natives and used for festive occasions.

⁵⁸ Canadian Museum of History, ‘Button Blankets’, in *Canadian Museum of History* (n.d.) <<https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/tresors/treasure/232eng.shtml>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Coupland's quilt is therefore – just like the button blankets – more than a household object. The *Hubcap Quilt* depicts the Canadian identity which grew all the way from the first encounters with the First Nations to a more modern take on Canadian identity. Michael Prokopow argues that the “quilt speaks to the relationship of original inhabitants and immigrants, tradition and modernity, spiritual and material aspirations, and the complications of postcolonial co-existence.”⁶⁰ Thus, the quilt in figure one resonates with the button blanket in figure 17 and problematizes the relationship between the Natives and the Europeans. Instead of a natural woollen blanket Coupland shows a patchwork of different stereotypical Canadian identities. These identities are often nostalgic and vary between white Canadian and Indigenous people. Instead of natural pearl buttons Coupland uses hubcaps, a clear sign of modernity, industry and mobility. The dreamcatchers, used by Natives to ward off evil, shows Coupland's understanding that the nation of Canada has been built on inhabited land. Also, it should be noted that whilst the button blankets are from the north coast (Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit and Nisga'a), the dream-catchers were originally from another nation from the East, the Anishinaabe. Coupland thus blatantly mixes between nations, without concern for its authenticity. It seems that Coupland is self-consciously staging problems in Canadian society. Perhaps with these contrasting identities Coupland show the “risks and lures of nostalgia” which Hutcheon describes.⁶¹ Coupland's nostalgic quilt is not a clean product, but the product of colonization and, by depicting it as it is, a mismatch of First Nations and European Canadian, Coupland seems to be torn between his childhood “hockey nights” and the idea

⁶⁰ Michael Prokopow, 'Coupland's True North Strong and Free', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 49-63 (p. 52).

⁶¹ Hutcheon, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern', p. 23.

that his country was built on somebody else's nightmare. This staging and exploration of Canadian issues by Coupland will be shown further down in this chapter.



Figure 18: *Canadian Sofas*, picture taken at Vancouver art gallery (2014)⁶²

The *Hubcap Quilt* is not the only object which was already used for Canada House nor is it an isolated comment on Canada's colonial past. Coupland understands and conceptualizes the problems that the Canadian identity pose. In figure 18, on the left, a

⁶² George, 'Douglas Coupland: Author/Conceptual Artist', in *Art Appreciation 101* (2014)
<<https://artappreciation101.wordpress.com/2014/08/29/douglas-coupland-authorconceptual-artist/>>
[Accessed 1 July 2018].

sofa is exposed showing the division of land and perhaps rights in Canada. The sofa is divided into two parts; a red tartan part which is quite spacious and comfortable and next to it a tiny little part, separate from the red tartan, that is decorated by the traditional patterns of an unspecified First Nation group from Vancouver Island. The spacious part is the part of Canada that the British and French colonisers took for themselves and the seat next to it – the part which is too small to sit on – is what was left for the natives. The love seat or rather double chair on the right in picture 18 is another comment on Canadian society. The chairs, though attached, face in opposite direction. It seems that even though they are attached, they do not have the same outlook and view on life as the other. The blue lumberjack pattern suggests belonging to Quebec, whilst the red lumberjack pattern seems to signify the Anglophone part of the country. Through this fabricated love-seat Coupland comments on even more identity divisions in his country. The interesting thing is that both sofas are set against a background of trivial but very stereotypical and at times nostalgic Canadiana items: hockey goalie masks, regional licence plates, Canadian bottles, cans and models of Canadian airplanes. Burnham calls it “a room stuffed with Canadian kitsch: old beer bottles, hockey masks and furniture that referenced the FLQ crisis and the suburban ‘905’ area around Toronto.”⁶³ This juxtapositioning shows Coupland’s own division of his own white Canadian upbringing and the stages Canada has gone through to build the nation. Coupland seems to match here with Boym’s reflective nostalgia and Smith and Campbell’s idea of progressive nostalgia: he knows the past is not politically correct – but at the same time it has formed the present. At the same time the notion of kitsch is an interesting one: Bjorn Schiermer and Hjalmar Bang Carlessen address nostalgia and irony in their article ‘The ritual watching of The Disney

⁶³ Burnham.

Christmas Show in Scandinavia'.⁶⁴ Schiermer and Carlessen argue that Boym's reflective nostalgia turns ironic at times and in their paper "construct ironic nostalgia as a form of (ironic) affection, which often combines with forms of so-called Proustian nostalgia."⁶⁵ Ironic nostalgia is according to them "a more sophisticated, tender and emphatic variant of irony directed at particularly anachronistic, inauthentic or kitschy objects of the recent past."⁶⁶ According to Schiermer and Carlessen this ironic nostalgia serves an important purpose: the fact that it does not want to "restore the past political and social context" and the fact that irony "does not idealise on its own behalf" but "savours the inauthentic idealisations of oneself and others."⁶⁷ Whilst restorative nostalgia wants to bring back the past and reflective nostalgia places the emphasis on the feeling of nostalgia as it realizes the original object is gone, ironic nostalgia celebrates the inauthentic glamorization of the past – showing the knowledge that this is not a viable option to go back to and it "distances itself from the sentiment of nostalgia."⁶⁸ Through using many kitsch objects for his installation "Secret Handshake" Coupland hints at this ironic nostalgia, and portrays knowledge that his nostalgia might be an inauthentic glamorization of the past. Nevertheless, this is still mixed with a reflective nostalgia as he experiences parts of his childhood again through his installations and seems to have a longing for his youth.

Hutches

Newer elements to Coupland's *Secret Handshake* installation – items from Canada House being the older sections - come in the form of a series of hutches from 2013. Through

⁶⁴ Bjorn Schiermer and Hjalmar Bang Carlsen, 'Nostalgia, Irony and Collectivity in Late-Modern Culture: The Ritual Watching of the Disney Christmas Show in Scandinavia', *Acta Sociologica*, 60 (2017), 158-75.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162

these cupboards, just like his previous Canada House works, Coupland reflects on Canadian life and identity – both in the past and present. The singular positive hutch is the *Trans Canada Hutch* (2013) (see figure 19). The *Trans Canada Hutch* is composed of road signs and features Canadian Terry Fox's leg on the top of it. The road signs remind us of the places which Fox ran to in 1980 to collect money for cancer research (Thunder Bay being the last city he reached before having to give up) and the leg is both reminiscent of the leg that Fox lost and the good leg on which he covered "5,373 kilometers in 143 days."⁶⁹ Coupland refers to Fox more often in his works: Coupland also wrote a biography on the athlete: *Terry: Terry Fox and His Marathon of Hope* (2005).⁷⁰ In the book, Coupland depicts Fox as a Canadian hero and sees him as someone who brought the nation together. In his foreword to *Terry* Coupland writes about the impact of sifting through a storage unit full of written messages to Terry Fox from the beginning of the 1980s; his writing implies that he is being nostalgic. Coupland writes: "I don't think I've ever felt as safe as I did for that brief one-minute window on a Vancouver weekday, surrounded by the goodwill of so many Canadians. Collectively, those names testify to something divine – our nation, our home and our soul."⁷¹ In other words, Coupland sees Fox as a unifying component to the Canadian identity: a collective memory. Terry Fox was such an important figure at the time of his life and death that in his book Coupland included two pages of pictures of buildings named after the young runner: the Terry Fox public school, the Terry Fox Theatre, and the Terry Fox avenue. The *Trans Canada Hutch* is a purposefully nostalgic item – even if the materials are new - used by Coupland to

⁶⁹ Prokopow, p. 52.

⁷⁰ Douglas Coupland, *Terry* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005); Coupland donated all his royalties to the Terry Fox foundation for further research in the fight against cancer.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3.

look back at a real-life Canadian turned into a hero by him and the Canadian people. The hut dedicated to Terry Fox is a dedication to a unifying element in Canadian history and a nostalgic piece for that moment of time.



Figure 19: Trans Canada Hutch, (2013)⁷²

⁷² Douglas Coupland, *Trans Canada Hutch*, 2013, hutch of plywood, steel, acrylic, high density urethane foam, w152.4 x h204.7 x d45.7 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver
<<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/trans-canada-hutch/GgFHql6jPhKjIw>> [Accessed 19 July 2018]

The other hutches in Coupland's monograph are less positive; they comment on the division between the Québécois and Canadian culture (FLQ Hutch), the colonisation of the Inuit (Arctic Hutch), the pollution of the Pacific Ocean (Tsunami Chest) and issues surrounding immigration and free trade in North America (Free Trade Hutch). Coupland's hutches reveal his anxieties and the fact that he sees problems in his Canada but also global issues. The themes of these hutches are thus consistent with the topics discussed in Coupland's other written and visual works. The interest in these hutches lies in the fact that they are a mix of nostalgic items and at the same time give a dark unheimlich comment on Canadian society – past and present -- and show that Balzer's comment that Coupland is detached from society is not actually true.



Figure 20: *FLQ Hutch* (2013)⁷³

For example, the *FLQ Hutch* consists out of nostalgic elements such as vintage French language Pepsi grips, strangely coloured drawers and a vintage television. Or as David Balzer argues: “Elsewhere in this section one finds FLQ Hutch, a mid-century hutch with French Pepsi-sign drawers, two makeshift bombs and the funeral of Pierre Laporte flickering on a vintage television on top of it.”⁷⁴ Laporte was a Québécois politician

⁷³ Douglas Coupland, *Flq Hutch*, 2013, hutch plywood, steel, mistinted paint, vintage enamel coated metal door handles, w183 x h207.6 x d55.2 cm, Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/flq-hutch/EQHnD8OuchUpKg>> [Accessed 15 July 2018].

⁷⁴ Balzer, n.p.

abducted and murdered (1970) by the Front de Libération du Québec, a separatist group which was fighting for an independent Quebec. The bombs are reminiscent of the FLQ's fight for independence. Douglas Coupland addresses the hutch in an interview and asserts that "The FLQ Hutch is a piece of furniture based on all the misinformation about Quebec I had growing up."⁷⁵ In the interview Coupland remembers being in Gatineau, Quebec, with his parents and he remembers that the houses were painted— for him — in strange colours. Coupland's mother informed him that: "[t]hat's because they ship all the mis-tints to Quebec."⁷⁶ Therefore, the drawers of the *FLQ Hutch* are in these specific tints. Coupland also remembers having to watch Pierre Laporte's funeral on television in his school gymnasium; however he had not understood what they were watching: "[W]e didn't know what was going on. It was like worshipping this lone blue object. It took years before we figured out what it was."⁷⁷ Thus, the object is a mixture of Canadian history and Coupland's own childhood memories from growing up. Coupland shows his own vision on the Quebec question by using his own personal memories, memories from when he was a boy and could still not make full sense of the world. The FLQ hutch is not nostalgic in the sense of Coupland wanting to go back to this time, but in the sense that he tries to make sense of the impressions he experienced when growing up and that he mixes the exotic nostalgic (the colours, the Pepsi-drawers) with the serious (the FLQ). Elements of this hutch seem to be ironic, the "Buvez-Pepsi" handles do not serve a real purpose except for emphasizing the 'foreign' and other elements of this hutch seem to be reflective. Coupland shows through this hutch that he has the reflective capacity of

⁷⁵ Coupland, Douglas, *Flq Hutch*, 2013, hutch plywood, steel, mistinted paint, vintage enamel coated metal door handles, w183 x h207.6 x d55.2 cm, Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/flq-hutch/EQHnD8OuchUpKg>> [Accessed 15 July 2018]

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

understanding the full scope of the Quebecois issues now as an adult, whilst back then, as a child, his perception was a limited one.

Arctic Hutch



Figure 21: *Arctic Hutch* (2013)⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Arctic Hutch*, 2013, hutch of plywood, steel, low density foam insulation, cardboard, target from dart game, glass and other materials, w183 x h199 x d46 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/arctic-hutch/0QE3zj5GQ0TtCQ>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

Figure seven depicts Douglas Coupland's *Arctic Hutch*. David Balzer typifies this hutch as: "Another hutch alludes to the Arctic (or rather its conquest?), a narwhal tusk affixed to it like an antenna-cum-hunting-trophy."⁷⁹ Coupland's hutch is interesting, indeed, because of the depiction of Inuit. The pictures Coupland took are from Canadian artist Thomas Harold Beament (1898-1984). Beament was in service of the navy until 1947 when he "embarked upon a journey to live with and study inuit [sic] peoples of Baffin Island."⁸⁰ The hutch uses two of Beament's pictures, the right one being the "Departure for the Hunt" (1948). Propokow calls Beament's right-sided picture "Departure for the Hunt" "decidedly problematic" because of the smiling "Eskimo."⁸¹ According to Propokow, with his hutch Coupland is "drawing attention to the plight of Indigenous peoples in the face of development and the known consequences of the West's rapacious hunger for natural resources of Canada's North."⁸² Still, the hutch has the regular nostalgic elements and personal touches which Coupland has used before. On the top of the hutch stands a similar radio to the one that Coupland's father operated when he was "stationed in the north."⁸³ Though the images on the hutch are now controversial, Coupland, who was born in 1961, must have grown up with them. The radio functions as a personal reminder of his father's mission up North. Though certainly the imagery is now problematic, Coupland does manifest an uncanny nostalgia to this period. This nostalgia is not restorative, but rather reflective and perhaps partially ironic. Coupland's *Arctic Hutch* is a reminder of the approach white Canadians took to native peoples in his childhood but the very personal object on top of it – his father's radio – shows that the

⁷⁹ Balzer.

⁸⁰ Pegasus Gallery of Canadian Art, *Thomas Harold Beament* (n.d.)

<<http://www.sampsonmatthewsprints.com/artists/thomas-harold-beament/>> [Accessed 23 July 2018].

⁸¹ Prokopow, p. 55.

⁸² Ibid., p. 60.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 55.

hutch is a personal comment on Coupland's family. Coupland's father was a pilot and "[h]e often flew over areas of land where the maps actually read, 'Unknown'."⁸⁴ Coupland's father's obituary reads that: "He was a true explorer in a way that maybe no longer exists."⁸⁵ While it is unclear where Coupland wrote his father's obituary, it is clear that this portrayal matches Coupland's depiction of his father for the hutch. In Coupland's hutch Canadian colonial history is tied in with Coupland's own personal family history, and his own personal version of the truth. The hutch is reflective in a manner that Coupland reflects on Canada's past with no interest in going back but with a nostalgia for his family history, whilst at the same time showing irony through Beament's painting which was already inauthentic romanticized representations of Inuit life when they were painted.

⁸⁴ *Dr. Douglas Charles Thomas Coupland (February 22, 1926 - October 10, 2016)* (2016) <<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/nsnews/obituary.aspx?n=douglas-charles-thomas-coupland&pid=182182279>> [Accessed 16 August 2018].

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Tsunami Chest



Figure 22: *Tsunami Chest* (2014)⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Tsunami Chest*, 2013, hutch of plywood, steel, Japanese tsunami debris harvested from the north coast beaches of Haida Gwaii, w197.5 x h110.5 x d62.9 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/tsunami-chest-douglas-coupland/XAG2lWD_JOGZLw> [Accessed 19 July 2018].



Figure 23: Detail from Tokyo Harbour (2000)⁸⁷

Tsunami Chest is an interesting piece of work, also because it ties in with his work *Tokyo Harbour* (2000). However, this work of art gained new meaning to Coupland years later: “Thirteen years later when I went to Haida Gwaii, British Columbia to clean up debris from Japan’s catastrophic 2012 tsunami, I was surprised to find Japanese cleaning product bottles arriving, unbidden, from Japan. This discovery brought up a complex array of emotions (...).”⁸⁸ The washing up of cleaning bottles on the shore of Canada worried Coupland to such an extent that he also features it in multiple works. For example, *Tsunami Chest* and his new installation “Vortex” opened in the Vancouver Aquarium in 2018. *Tsunami Chest* is fabricated from “japanese [sic] tsunami debris harvest from the north coast beaches of Haida Gwaii.”⁸⁹ In other words, the materials which Coupland used for this chest are from his trip to clean up debris from remote British Columbia

⁸⁷ Douglas Coupland, *Tokyo Harbour*, 2000, 108 plastic bottles, w132 x h236 x d12 cm
<<http://www.alanacdehaan.com/blog/2015/5/10/everywhere-is-anywhere-is-anything-is-everything>>
[Accessed 19 July 2018].

⁸⁸ Augaitis, p. 146.

⁸⁹ Douglas Coupland, *Tsunami Chest*, 2013, hutch of plywood, steel, Japanese tsunami debris harvested from the north coast beaches of Haida Gwaii, w197.5 x h110.5 x d62.9 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/tsunami-chest-douglas-coupland/XAG2IWD_JOGZLw> [Accessed 19 July 2018].

beaches. Coupland commented that finding the same cleaning product bottles he had taken from Japan years ago washing up on Haida Gwaii's beaches "evangelized me, in a way."⁹⁰ The items he collected vary from Japanese milk cartons to bottles of Japanese cleaning products. They made the artist very much aware that disposable plastic is ruining the world's oceans. Coupland's exhibition in the Vancouver Aquarium shows all the plastic he collected washed up on the shores of British Columbia. The *Tsunami Chest* is an original piece of art regarding the topic of nostalgia because of the different personal meanings it has to Douglas Coupland. For instance, Coupland, who lived in Japan for a period of time, is reminded of his life there because of all the Japanese items but at the same time his chest is a warning for the future.

Moreover, he also included the idea of plastic waste in the oceans in one of his novels: *The Worst Person Ever*. (2013). In this novel Coupland touches on the trash vortex forming in the Pacific Ocean and through mentioning this implicitly expresses his anxiety about the implications that this plastic waste has on the environment. Lucy Ellman from *The Guardian* writes: "The only subject on which Coupland and I are in agreement are the horror of the "trash vortex" in the Pacific Ocean, a swirling mound of plastics and other manmade mess twice the size of Texas."⁹¹ Finding Japanese cleaning products bottles on the Canadian coast is a symbol of these worries, and through this experience Coupland's *Tokyo Harbour* was historically revised from a symbol of flashy foreign containers to a sign of globalized world pollution. *Tsunami Chest* is the embodiment of

⁹⁰ CBC News, *Douglas Coupland Explores Impact of Plastic Waste in Oceans in New Vancouver Aquarium Exhibit* (2018) <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/douglas-coupland-explores-impact-of-plastic-waste-in-oceans-in-new-vancouver-aquarium-exhibit-1.4664515>> [Accessed 18 July 2018].

⁹¹ Lucy Ellmann, 'Worst. Person. Ever. By Douglas Coupland - Review', *The Guardian*, London (September 25, 2013) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/25/worst-person-ever-douglas-coupland-review>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

these worries, and again it is a mix of Coupland's personal life and real-life issues. *Tsunami Chest* tracks the changes in Coupland's art; it is no longer about pretty packages or pretty lettering but about being a commentator on contemporary problems. Coupland's nostalgia for the Japan in which he discovered all the different packages mixed with his worries about pollution poses an interesting piece of art. Whereas *Tokyo Harbour* was mainly kitsch, *Tsunami Chest* poses questions about the environment and makes the viewer and artist reflect on past sins – that of buying and idealizing disposable plastics. Though there is nostalgia shining through for a different time in Coupland's life, it is mostly anxiety for the future which dominates the *Tsunami Chest*.

Free trade Hutch



Figure 24: *Free Trade Hutch* (2013)⁹²

⁹² Douglas Coupland, *Free Trade Hutch*, 2013, hutch of plywood, steel, agricultural grade cardboard, spun aluminum, glass, w183 x h136 x d46 cm, Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto
<<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/free-trade-hutch/SgGQslW0YvVxnQ>> [Accessed 20 July 2018].

The *Free Trade Hutch* is an interesting hutch because it is the only hutch that does not show any straight-forward nostalgia but rather functions as a political comment. The North American free trade agreement (NAFTA) is an agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico which was signed in the early 1990s.⁹³ As Jeffrey J. Schott writes NAFTA is: “an important milestone in the longstanding process of regional economic integration. It reinforces the strong trade and investment ties that already exist within the region.”⁹⁴ However, NAFTA has not been without controversy. Within Canada the NAFTA became much discussed and had both its critics and its believers: critics predicted that the U.S.A. would take over whilst the believers of free trade thought that the Canadian market would become more competitive.⁹⁵ But, also outside of Canada there was worry: according to Stephen W. Hartman “[f]our of the most vocal criticisms are the loss of U.S. jobs to Mexico, the loss of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the United States, no net income gain for the average working American, and illegal migration from Mexico as a result of NAFTA.”⁹⁶ Though Hartman argues that three of the four criticisms proved to be untrue in research, one of the four – “illegal migration from Mexico has been an unintended consequence of NAFTA” – proved to be true.⁹⁷ Or, to put it in another way, NAFTA was so harmful to Mexico that many Mexicans felt they had to migrate to the U.S. under clandestine conditions in order to survive. Coupland’s *Free Trade Hutch* plays with these ideas; the hutch looks like a cardboard box used for products being shipped from one country to the other. The box features two interesting

⁹³ Jeffrey J. Schott, 'Nafta: An American Perspective', *The International Trade Journal*, 8 (1994), 3-8; Fausto Hernandez-Trillo, 'Mexico, Nafta, and Beyond', *The International Trade Journal*, 32 (2018), 5-20; Stephen W. Hartman, 'Nafta, the Controversy', *The International Trade Journal*, 25 (2010), 5-34.

⁹⁴ Schott, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Beverly Jean Rasporich and David Taras, *A Passion for Identity: Canadian Studies for the 21st Century*. 4th edn (Scarborough, Ont.: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2001).

⁹⁶ Hartman, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

characteristics: first of all there is the “caution” traffic sign which features illegal immigrants crossing the road and secondly there is the “product of” checkboxes on the other side featuring the option to choose U.S.A., Canada or California (with Mexico crossed out underneath). The “caution” sign is a real traffic sign which used to be in use in California (until 2018 when the last sign was removed) to warn drivers that illegal immigrants might cross the road.⁹⁸ The sign was seen as problematic for multiple reasons; Kate Morrissey argues that “The yellow caution sign's image has been the source of controversy, with some seeing it as an offensive caricature of Mexican immigrants.”⁹⁹ Moreover, “critics of the sign's imagery felt that it dehumanized migrants by likening them to animals.”¹⁰⁰ The white statue-like objects on top of the hutch represent water towers from the different Great Lakes. Propokow argues that “Coupland’s hutch draws parallels between the lawful shipment of Canadian water south to the United States and the illegal northern movement of Mexican citizens.”¹⁰¹ According to Propokow Coupland’s hutch raises questions about “national borders and the exclusionary character of citizenship.”¹⁰² This hutch marks the NAFTA agreement and raises the appropriate questions surrounding this agreement. The hutch is not nostalgic but still an important piece of work because it fits in with the themes that Coupland addresses in his written work, the tension between globalization and citizenship. The lack of nostalgia in this hutch is telling; whereas in the previous hutches Coupland would add something personal from his youth or childhood this hutch is tellingly impersonal. It seems that Coupland has

⁹⁸ Kate Morrissey, 'Last of Iconic Illegal Immigration Crossing Signs Has Vanished in California', *Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles* (February 10, 2018) <<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-immigration-sign-20180210-story.html>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Prokopow, p. 60.

¹⁰² Ibid.

no feelings of nostalgia towards the topic, which is a comment in itself on how he feels about it.

Hutches Conclusion

These various hutches thus show the various geopolitical topics that Coupland is concerned with. These topics all relate to Canada at various stages of its existence: from colonialism to nation building, and from environmental problems to internal and international politics. Coupland builds on his childhood memories by including objects from his youth or reminiscent of his youth, but he also expresses and depicts his current anxieties. In addition, most of his hutches are also nostalgic in the sense that he remembers this period of time with fondness (e.g. Terry Fox hutch, the amazement with the colours of the houses in Quebec) but also in the sense that his work shows where the present Canada has come from (FLQ, colonization) and the problems which it still has to address (political issues, environmental issues). It could thus be argued that the cultural symbols used in hutches range from a past Canada, through a present view of Canada to anxiety about its future. Through his hutches Coupland expresses his concern that Canadian history is not flawless, he utilizes his own (childhood) memories resulting in an intriguing mix of nostalgia – at times reflective and at times ironic - and a protest experience against pollution and the consequences of NAFTA.

COUPLAND'S NON-CANADA-SPECIFIC ART

At the same time Coupland's monograph shows a grim globalized 21st century, not only because Coupland is an avid collector of foreign items such as Chinese cigarette boxes and Japanese detergent containers, but also because of his 9/11 dot-pictures, and Lego installations of general big cities and the "world." There is a stark contrast between his Canadian-inspired work and his comments on twenty-first century life; his Canadian-inspired work emphasizes a nostalgia for a twentieth-century white Canada – even if there is the occasional trip to the twenty-first-century (e.g. *Tsunami Chest*). This twentieth century Canada is the Canada he remembers from his childhood and despite it being imperfect he feels a strong affection for it. Moreover, his comments on twenty-first-century life – both in his novels as in his visual work - raise questions about the future of the planet and its further existence: e.g. 9/11 and all its privacy impacts, the disappearing of the bees, a trash vortex in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, loneliness in human beings, and the increasing dominance of technology. Coupland calls these events "mini-earthquakes" in an interview with Brenna Clarke Gray, pointing at the fact that every one of these events changes the world and Canada as a part of it.¹⁰³ The following section of the chapter will examine a variety of Coupland's dominating twenty-first-century anxieties and will establish how Coupland makes use of the concept of space-time compression to make sense of modern reality and his nostalgia as researched in the previous sections.

¹⁰³ Brenna Clarke Gray, 'A Conversation With Douglas Coupland: The Hideous, the Cynical, and the Beautiful', *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 36:2 (2011), 255-278.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TIME-SPACE COMPRESSION IN POSTMODERN THINKING

In 2009 Douglas Coupland published a biography on Canadian professor Marshall McLuhan: *Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work*. McLuhan was a media-specialist and already predicted in the 1960s that the world was moving away from printed media into a more visual and technology-dominated era.¹⁰⁴ McLuhan's most famous ideas are "the medium is the message" and "the global village" Coupland explains "the medium is the message" as the fact that the choice of the medium already defines "the way we emphasize our senses – seeing versus hearing versus touching."¹⁰⁵ Marshall's other idea, "the global village," is defined by Coupland as "the fact that electronic technologies are an extension of the human central nervous system, and that our planet's collective neural wiring would create a single 24-7 blobby, fuzzy, quasi-sentient metacommunity."¹⁰⁶ Coupland admires McLuhan and argues that McLuhan's visionary theories came not from his technological insight but through pattern recognition in historical literature and history.¹⁰⁷ According to Coupland, the contemporary value of McLuhan's world lies in a changed society. Whereas previous biographies on McLuhan might have provided interesting insights into McLuhan's life now the world has changed and has come into accordance with McLuhan's ideas. Coupland writes that people have an information overload on daily basis and "[a]ll this information and more has overtly, osmotically, or perhaps inadvertently damaged a collective sense of time that has been working well enough since the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the middle classes."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Marshall McLuhan* (New York: Atlas & co., 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

Coupland names this phenomena “timesickness”, arguing that “[g]eography has become irrelevant” and “[t]ime speeds up and then it begins to shrink. Years pass by in minutes.”¹⁰⁹

David Harvey’s ideas on “Time-Space compression” follows a similar line of thought as Marshall McLuhan’s ideas, even if Harvey seems to approach the matter from a more economy-driven outlook. Harvey notably quotes McLuhan’s idea of the global village in his 1990s essay *Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition* to prove that “[w]e have, in short, witnessed another fierce round in that process of annihilation of space though time that has always lain at the center of capitalism’s dynamic.”¹¹⁰ The idea behind Harvey’s Time-Space compression is that both time and space are “socially constructed” and, that if a society changes the ideas on this construct, time and space automatically change as well.¹¹¹ Jameson also agrees with the idea that time and space are social constructs: “On this account, however, neither space nor time is ‘natural’ in the sense in which it might be metaphysically presupposed (as ontology or human nature alike): both are the consequence and projected after images of a certain state or structure of production and appropriation, of the social organization of productivity.”¹¹² Harvey explains how views on time and space change over time: “societies change and grow, they are transformed from within and adapt to pressures and influences from without. Objective conceptions of space and time must change to accommodate new material

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁰ David Harvey, 'Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition', in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. by Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 5-17.

¹¹¹ David Harvey, 'Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 80 (1990), 418-34.

¹¹² Jameson, p. 367.

practices of social reproduction.”¹¹³ Harvey gives examples of how time and space were altered in history: for example, the European settlers in the Americas imposing their idea of time on the Indigenous peoples or attempts in the 19th century to bring Cairo in line with western ideas by changing the interior organisation inside houses, classrooms and cities. Harvey later links these ideas to capitalism, arguing that when people for example eat, for example, they have no idea where the individual items on their plate come from or under which social conditions these were produced. Harvey admits that these ideas match with Karl Marx’s ideas on “The Fetishism of Commodities”, and he feels there is a discrepancy in knowledge between what the audiences know: the audience’s habitat (fairly local) and the truth behind their well-travelled non-local food.¹¹⁴ In fact, he argues that the public is ill-aware of the fading spatial barriers or the social construct of space and time they live in.

Harvey also comes back to food in his other essay, this time not questioning where the food has been produced but the fact that “[t]he whole world’s cuisine is now assembled in one place.”¹¹⁵ Harvey argues that this is now even “exploited” by capitalism: “in entertainment palaces like Epcot and Disneyworld; it becomes possible, as the US commercials put it, ‘to experience the Old World for a day without actually having to go there’.”¹¹⁶ In other words, in modern times spatial barriers are fading away leaving audiences more aware to “what world’s spaces contain.”¹¹⁷ Harvey also seems to refer to Baudrillard’s ideas of simulacra and simulation, as Baudrillard also refers to Disneyland

¹¹³ Harvey, ‘Between’, p. 419.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 419.

¹¹⁵ Harvey, ‘Time-Space’, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 13

¹¹⁷ Harvey, ‘Time-Space’, p. 13.

in his work - not in relation to the spatial but in relation to it being a simulacrum.¹¹⁸ Or, as Baudrillard puts it: “But this masks something else and this ‘ideological’ blanket functions as a cover for a *simulation of the third order*: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that *is* Disneyland.”¹¹⁹ To paraphrase, Disneyland is seen as a non-existing fantasyland in order to “make us believe that the rest is real.”¹²⁰ Baudrillard adds that “Los Angeles is surrounded by these imaginary stations that feed reality, the energy of the real to a city whose mystery is precisely that of no longer being anything but a network of incessant, unreal circulation – a city of incredible proportions but without space, without dimension.”¹²¹ Not only are Harvey’s spatial barriers fading away, as Europe can be experienced in Disneyworld’s Epcot, but both Harvey and Baudrillard are quite aware of the irony a place such as Disneyland produces.

Coming back to the social construct of time and space Jameson adds that:

Thus, for the modern, we have read a certain temporality back off its characteristically uneven space; but the other direction can be no less productive, which leads to some more articulated sense of postmodern space by way of postmodern fantastic historiography, as that is found alike in wild imaginary genealogies and novels that shuffle historical figures and names like so many cards from a finite deck.¹²²

Jameson admits here that time and space are no longer linear; in postmodernism an artist or author can make use of historical facts and stories. Douglas Coupland’s *Atemporality* installation makes clear use of these ideas.

¹¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, The Body, in Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²² Jameson, p. 367.

Coupland, being well aware of Marshall McLuhan's ideas, and most likely also the ideas surrounding space and time in relationship to postmodernism as he mentions these by coming up with "timesickness", uses these ideas in his art. In this part of the chapter, Coupland's 21st century *Atemporality* art will be examined through the framework of space-time compression and nostalgia. *Atemporality* leans on the idea that there is no longer one set time-period but that current life entails living through all different eras at the same time.

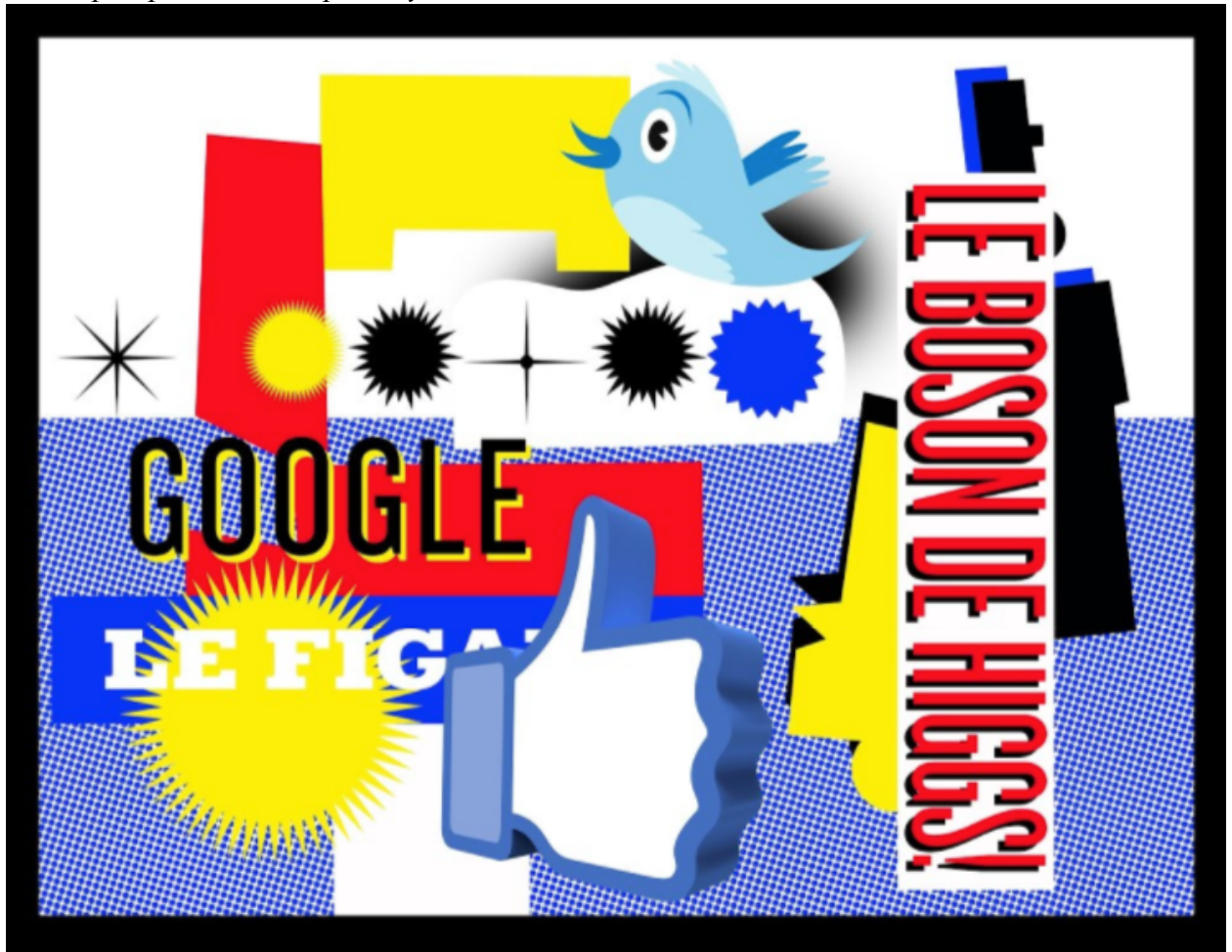


Figure 25: *Le Boson de Higgs* (2012)¹²³

¹²³ Douglas Coupland, *Le Boson De Higgs*, 2012, pigment print on watercolour paper, w131 x h97.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/le-boson-de-higgs-douglas-coupland/rQHrFrkjWg-vng>> [Accessed 19 July 2018].



Figure 26: Still Life with Twitter (2012)¹²⁴

Coupland's ideas on atemporality are a comment on contemporary life. According to the Daniel Faria Gallery Coupland plays with the fact that there are no longer any characteristic periods of time: "The advancement of new technologies has flattened time and space, creating the present where all previous eras of time can coexist without one particular period emerging as dominant."¹²⁵ Coupland expresses this atemporality in his works, in for example *Le Boson de Higgs* modern elements such as the Twitter logo, the

¹²⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Still Life with Twitter*, 2012, pigment print on watercolour paper, w131 x h97.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/still-life-with-twitter/uwGtoVxIktkcXg>> [Accessed 19 July 2018]

¹²⁵ Douglas Coupland: *The 21st Century Continues Part I* [exhibition] (Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto: 20 June 2013 – 3 August 2013).

word google and the like-thumb from Facebook are posed next to older elements such as the pointillism of Roy Lichtenstein, the reference to *Le Figaro* – a newspaper founded in the 19th century - and the Higgs boson theory which originated from the 1960s but which was confirmed only recently.¹²⁶ This is to say that: “The wordmark from Cinzano, an Italian vermouth first introduced in 1757, and the masthead from Le Figaro, a daily French newspaper founded in 1826, are placed side-by-side with modern signs and symbols to create a hybrid image that is lost in time or, from all times.”¹²⁷ The idea of placing old and new iconic brands and art styles together indeed makes an interesting effect: it offers the idea that specific things are timeless and that new things are included in this timelessness. These art works fully fit in with Coupland’s remarks about “timesickness”; they show a disregard of geography – brands from different nations are stuck together – and also show a disregard for time as the brands represent older and newer company logos. The disregard for a specific time or a specific region makes the art fit in with the ideas about time-space compression: Coupland’s art surpasses spatial boundaries.

William Gibson links this end of specific cultural periods to a feeling of nostalgia. Gibson, a long-term friend of Coupland, writes: “I don’t miss that special utter awareness of given decades as cultural eras unto themselves. It can feel rather like a special utter awareness of Tuesdays, and it can contribute to fundamentalism, and to nostalgia, two sides of the

¹²⁶ Natalie Wolchover, 'A New Theory to Explain the Higgs Mass', in *Quantamagazine*, (2015) <<https://www.quantamagazine.org/higgs-boson-mass-explained-in-new-theory-20150527/>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

¹²⁷ Douglas Coupland, *Still Life with Twitter*, 2012, pigment print on watercolour paper, w131 x h97.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver <<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/still-life-with-twitter/uwGtoVxIktkcXg>> [Accessed 19 July 2018]

same coin.”¹²⁸ According to Gibson this atemporality can thus take away a need to feel nostalgic, as there are no clear eras anymore. Gibson asserts that the “now” was experienced differently a number of years ago: “Truly in the back of beyond, now was still centuries. The difference was made by emergent technologies, be they cereal agriculture or the machine gun: change-drivers.”¹²⁹ This atemporality leads to discovering past decades whenever is convenient: “Children now have an expected developmental season of discovering The Beatles.”¹³⁰ It could thus be argued that atemporality takes away the need for nostalgia for the simple reason that if culture and artists are to be rediscovered over and over there is nothing to want to go back to. However, Sara Doris writes that “Just as Lichtenstein retrospectively characterized the Depression as optimistic, Coupland sees Lichtenstein’s art as the product of a more optimistic era. His own Modern work, he believes, reflects darker times.”¹³¹ This implies that even if Coupland shows a current state of atemporality through this art work, he still believes in the fact that past times used to be better. Doris argues that Marshall McLuhan, had a utopian view of a “globally collectivized experience” through modern media.¹³² Doris insists that Coupland’s view of global mass communication and culture is less utopian: “The sounds and images of virtually any era are available at the click of a mouse, yet historically undifferentiated when viewed through a digital portal. This possibility has created a global society in which we are all ‘cultural parasites,’ ‘looking at the past as a Tumblr archive’.”¹³³ The terminology used by Doris is clear; her quoting of Coupland’s

¹²⁸ William Gibson, 'Atemporalities', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 193-195 (p. 193).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹³¹ Sara Doris, 'Time Cannibal: Douglas Coupland's Digital Pop', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 181-192 (p. 186).

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

‘cultural parasites’ and ‘the past as a Tumblr archive’ points at a not so positive experience of Coupland’s atemporality. The truth however lies somewhere in the middle; Coupland seems to want to reflect a changing – timeless - society without necessarily being positive or negative about it. Nostalgia is irrelevant to these works as they reflect a mixture of times and shows how nostalgic elements are currently perfectly mixed in with modern (social) media. In other words, nostalgia has become obsolete in this version of Coupland’s modern society as the old and the new exist simultaneously. Coupland did not explicitly apply these ideas to his Canadian art; Coupland’s nostalgic Canada remains just that, a nostalgic Canada.

9/11

Douglas Coupland’s 9/11 art is a collection of images relating to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York. Coupland’s 9/11 works feel to some extent separate from the previous sections; even though it is definitely typical of his oeuvre – for example, having to view the art through a smartphone and mixing a serious message with his playful art, and it has elements of atemporality– 9/11 is not Coupland’s typical post-modern art or art in which he is trying to convey a warning on how mankind should change its ways. 9/11 is more of a reflection on the events which took place in the recent past. The 9/11 installation could almost be typified as a cultural remembrance, depicting the same images which were prevalent after the event and repeating them over in a new fashion. Though Coupland’s 9/11 installation is reminiscent of his *QR-codes* or his *G7* works, his previous works lack the shock value that 9/11 conveys. The depiction of, for example, Douglas Coupland as a jumper of one of the World Trade Center buildings is an extremely powerful image and reminds of postmodern art made to shock. However, it is not typical for Coupland’s postmodern art; it is not whimsical or

innovative. The picture is rather confronting and gives an almost personal perspective on the happenings of that tragic day. It seems that Coupland tried to imagine how it feels to have to jump off the World Trade Center, which is rather macabre. Still the audience has the choice to view these pictures or not as they will have to deliberately take out their smartphone to be able to view a selection of the pictures.

Just after 9/11 took place voices in the media appeared suggesting that 9/11 caused the end of postmodern irony. Time magazine journalist Roger Rosenblatt wrote on the 24th of September 2001 that: “For some 30 years—roughly as long as the Twin Towers were upright—the good folks in charge of America’s intellectual life have insisted that nothing was to be believed in or taken seriously. Nothing was real. With a giggle and a smirk, our chattering classes—our columnists and pop culture makers—declared that detachment and personal whimsy were the necessary tools for an oh-so-cool life.”¹³⁴ Rosenblatt argues that even though the events of 9/11 are horrendous, the one good thing coming from these events is the end of irony, and the end of detachment. Rosenblatt was not the only one arguing this, on September 18th, 2001, Graydon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair* had already declared: “I think it’s the end of the age of irony.”¹³⁵ Whilst Michael Hirschhorn argues that regular irony in fact did not end, irony as used in its postmodern connotation ended and never made a come-back: “It may never be provable that 9/11 is the reason irony went tits-up, but it’s certainly curious that irony reared its pointy head neither during the boom years nor during the bust that (in classic ironic fashion)

¹³⁴ Roger Rosenblatt, 'The Age of Irony Comes to an End', *Time Magazine, New York* (September 24, 2001) <<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000893,00.html>> [Accessed 10 December 2020].

¹³⁵ Michael Hirschhorn, 'Irony, the End Of', *New York Magazine, New York* (August 27, 2011) <<https://nymag.com/news/9-11/10th-anniversary/irony/>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

followed.”¹³⁶ Relating this to Balzer’s comments on Coupland being “detached” at the beginning of the chapter, gives an interesting perspective. 9/11 is a subject which does not leave space to be detached, not even for Coupland.



Figure 27: Self Portrait as North Tower Jumper (2012)¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Douglas Coupland: *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014), p. 218.

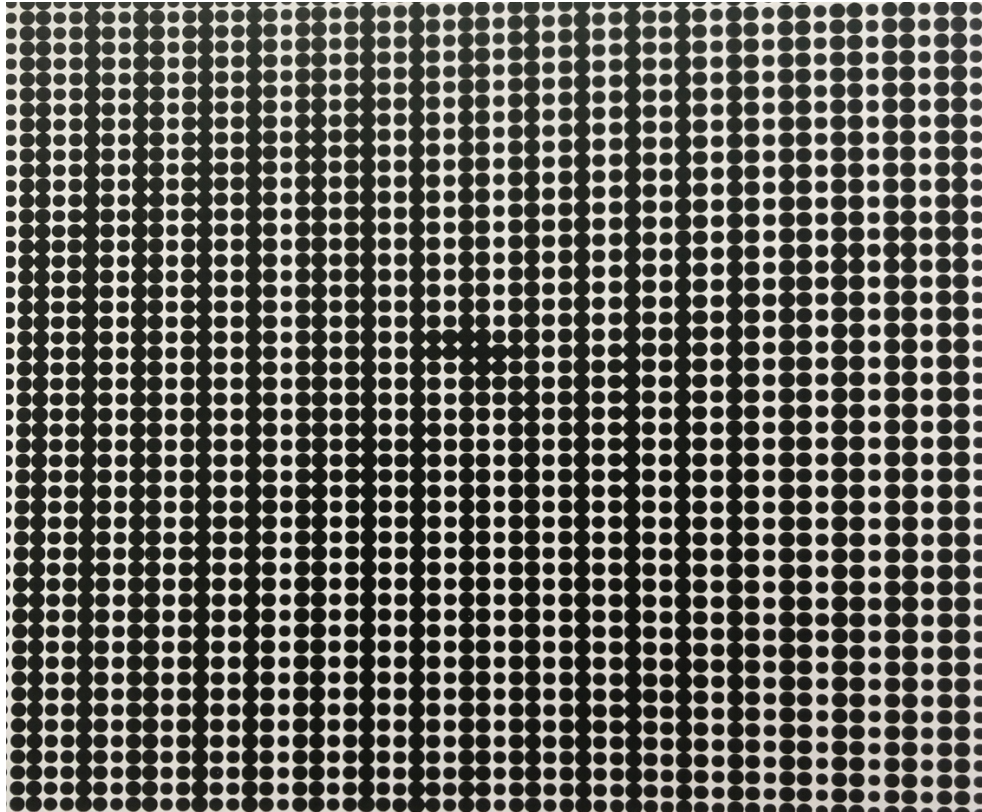


Figure 28: Detail of *The Poet* (2013)¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Douglas Coupland: *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014), p. 220.

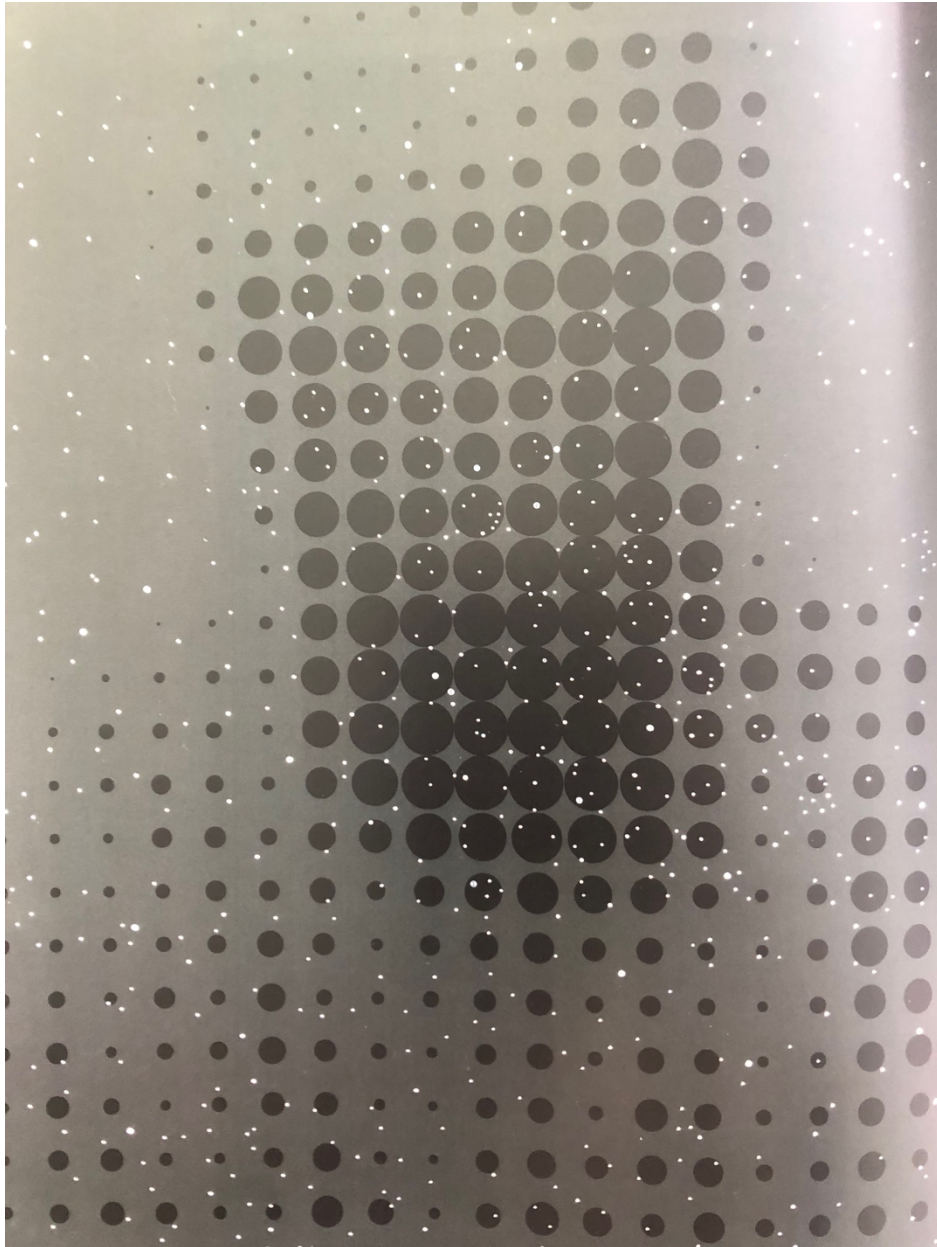


Figure 29: *Jumbo Boogeyman in the Sky with Diamonds* (2013)¹³⁹

The 9/11 terrorist attacks are what McLuhan would call a “globally collectivized experience”, an event which not only dominated U.S. media but also the media of many other countries. The fact that Coupland uses these images does not seem to pinpoint a historically undifferentiated moment in time, as could be argued for his *atemporality*

¹³⁹ Douglas Coupland: *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Diana Augaitis (London: Black Dog, 2014), p. 228.

works, but in fact it tries to show the magnitude of the event and the impact it had on those living through it. Sophia Al Maria argues that in this collection: “Coupland combines cognitive trickery and historical emblems of the ‘War on Terror’ to investigate the impact of 9/11 through the lens of the media on North American cultural memory.”¹⁴⁰ The cognitive trickery comes from the fact of how the images are made and presented. The images are a mixture of photomontage (e.g. figure 27, *Self Portrait as North Tower Jumper*, 2012), true images from that unfortunate day in dot form and only visible through a smartphone (e.g. figure 28, *The Poet*, 2013), and images of the iconic picture of Osama Bin Laden also in dot form and enhanced with at times fake diamonds and googly eyes (e.g. figure 29, *Jumbo Boogeyman in the Sky with Diamonds*, 2013). Al Maria reasons that “In deploying this fundamentally laden material, Coupland found that the only way to get people to engage with the distressing TMI of what he calls the “last under-documented mega event” was to give them choice: to see it or not to see it.”¹⁴¹ In other words, the dotted pictures are images which are part of western cultural memory, and by presenting them as dotted instead of in focus the audiences can choose whether to see the picture in focus through his or her smartphone or they can choose to ignore the image and leave it latent in the background of their memory. Or, as Michael Stipe puts it:

By evoking memories that can’t be deleted by willful ignorance or overabstractions, Coupland reminds us that we all share a set of uncloseable doors in our minds, and through these opened doors, in an almost cartoon-like way, now march the NSA, Google, spooks, shadow governments, a lost pathetic 4th estate, squandered militaristic might and rampant terrifying nationalism.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Sophia Al Maria, 'A Millennial Moment', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 229-37 (p. 229).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁴² Michael Stipe, 'Thoughts on the 21st Century', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 219-228 (p. 222).

Stipe's argument follows up on memories in a different way. Society is perhaps not wanting to go back to the events of 9/11 but Coupland does remind his viewer that this is a turning point in history. In fact, 9/11 has changed society in a fundamental way and, as Stipe argues, gave power to agencies that are now permanently keeping society under surveillance. If there is any nostalgia to be found it is perhaps a longing for the time before 9/11, when there was not an omnipresent monitoring control of society. Moreover, Douglas Coupland's *9/11* series also plays with the fears experienced by the audiences regarding personal privacy. As Stipe notes: "I'm seeing Doug Coupland surveying the twenty-first century world: I'm seeing video surveillance everywhere. I'm seeing ourselves watching ourselves and it's deeply frightening, as new form of infrastructure that relentlessly monitors and peels back our privacy, our mysteriousness, our individuality, in every way."¹⁴³ It could be argued 9/11 evokes a mixture of negative feelings because of the horrific impact of the attacks on the day itself and because of all the events after it. However, there is also the feeling that the twin towers themselves provoked pre-9/11. Stipe, for example, explains that in principle he did not like the towers being built in the first place. He resented the idea of these two big towers in the middle of his New York. However, afterwards Stipe started to accept the towers as a natural part of the city and used them as beacon when navigating through the streets. Moreover, Stipe remembers that the World Trade Center towers were more than just offices or blocks of concrete: "And there were some great, wild dance parties at the rooftop restaurant. It was a moment and that moment is gone. But I am being nostalgic here and romantic."¹⁴⁴ Therefore, Coupland's *9/11* series does not only evoke memories of that horrific day but it also refers to a time before the terrorist attack, a time in which the towers were a beacon,

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 223.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

a workplace and a place for enjoyment. 9/11 does provoke nostalgia in a part of the audiences, especially because the images that Coupland uses were recycled again and again in the media. Coupland's *9/11* series leaves these things up for debate, and only visible for those wanting to see it through means of their smartphone.

DETACHED OR ENGAGED?

At the beginning of this chapter there is a quote in which Balzer accuses Coupland of being privileged and dark. Both remarks are true; Coupland is privileged in society being from a white, well-educated, middle class family and part of his art is quite dark; Coupland readily admits this. However, far more than the detached '90s guy that Balzer accuses Coupland of being, there is a definite meaning to a large portion of Coupland's art. Coupland addresses Canada's colonial past; he addresses twenty-first century struggles such as the increasing use of technology and the problem that plastic waste is causing in society. Coupland can both be privileged and still take a stand about problems that he recognizes in society. It could be argued that an artist's job is to reflect humanity, not to solve its problems. Or, as Nina Simone asserted: "An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times."¹⁴⁵ Coupland does this immaculately; he shows the distraught identity of a (post-)colonial country torn between a carefully constructed nostalgic identity made up out of lumberjack patterns, hockey league patches whilst at the same time this construct of Canada is built upon taking land from the First Nations. Especially Coupland's home province of British Columbia has very few treaties with the indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁶ Next to this, Coupland shows the current problems with technology and society and moreover he is consistent in doing so as the same themes rekindle in his novels. Coupland has written about the effects of globalization on identity

¹⁴⁵ Moni Basu, *Nina Simone and Me: An Artist and Activist Revisited* (2017) <<https://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/11/entertainment/nina-simone-revisited/index.html>> [Accessed 15 July 2018].

¹⁴⁶ Government of Canada, *Treaties and Agreements* (2020) <<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231#chp1>> [Accessed 9 October 2020].

and citizenship, modern loneliness, technology, school shootings, the possibility of the end of the world, the disappearing of the bees and the gargantuan plastic soup which ruins the world's oceans. It is therefore unfair to label him as "detached"; Coupland knows very well what current problems haunt society. Critics are divided; for example Bjarke Ingels calls Douglas Coupland a prophet "of the present", a title which is very far removed from Balzer's comments.¹⁴⁷

Coupland's art does not seem to speak to all viewers, just as Marcel Duchamp's urinal did not please all audiences. Perhaps in this intended inclusiveness lies Douglas Coupland's strength. William Gibson quotes critic Dave Hickey as writing "Bad taste is real taste, and good taste is the residue of someone else's privilege."¹⁴⁸ Coupland's art is, personally tailored to his memories and his (current) anxieties. All his works encompass feelings of nostalgia for a lost era, some of these works are specific to Canada, some of these works are valid for a general Western experience. Coupland's nostalgia matches with the definition of Routledge et al.: "the self-focused emotional process through which people recollect experiences that imbue their lives with meaning."¹⁴⁹ Coupland's nostalgia is functional as it gives meaning to his works and his memories. Moreover, Coupland adheres to Smith and Campbell's idea of progressive nostalgia and Boym's reflective nostalgia; his works show "not simply an understanding that the past was not perfect, but rather an explicit understanding that it was hard, difficult and inequitable."¹⁵⁰ Coupland's Canadian work shows the colonialism and terrorism which was present in

¹⁴⁷ Bjarke Ingels, 'Art Atom', in *Everywhere Is Anywhere Is Anything Is Everything*, ed. by Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2014), pp. 115-129 (p. 115).

¹⁴⁸ Gibson, p. 193.

¹⁴⁹ Routledge et al., p. 459.

¹⁵⁰ Smith and Campbell, p. 613; Boym, n.p.

Canadian society, his 21st century work shows horrid events such as 9/11, school shootings, and the extensive use of technology and all hard questions surrounding this. Especially Coupland's 21st century works are not necessarily closed off eras but occurrences in progress, a mixture of nostalgia and a constant movement forward. Coupland tries to trigger change by giving these events attention, making audiences aware of their position in current life and by giving them awareness that empowers them to change what they do not like.

CONCLUSION

It could thus be argued that in Douglas Coupland's exhibition and matching monograph *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything* he has sections which align with Balzer's definition of postmodern detached art. Nonetheless, concomitantly in his other installations Coupland expresses an acute tension he perceives between his nostalgic, albeit colonial, Canadian cultural identity and his grim anxious view of the modern globalized 21st century world which is filled with ecological and terrorist disaster. The tension depicted in these installations is quite different from his *Souvenir of Canada* books. The mood seems to be lighter in these books: in them he recounts anecdotes about his youth and his experience as a Canadian. Coupland's installations are still based on Coupland's experiences, but they make use of heavier topics such as colonialism and The Front de libération du Québec. His hutches depict serious subjects and show a Canada past which is obviously flawed but also remembered with great nostalgia. This matches with Hutcheon's remark that nostalgia is nowadays both "a comment on the present as much as on the past."¹⁵¹ In *Souvenir of Canada* there is only Coupland looking back,

¹⁵¹ Hutcheon and Valdes, 'Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern', p. 23.

whilst in the *Everywhere* exhibition he is also looking forward. Both in his *Secret Handshake* installation as in his non-Canadian-specific works Coupland often longs back for the time of his youth, a time which he experienced as more positive. The difference lies especially in the fact that many of the various installations in *Secret Handshake* could be regarded as definite time periods: the *Trans Canada Hutch* reminds the viewer of the 1980s, the *FLQ Hutch* of the 1960s, the *G7-series* reminds of the 1930s when the Group of Seven was active but also the 1960s when the reprints were popularized. In Coupland's non-Canadian specific work there is a mix of closed off events – e.g. 9/11 – and his works which adhere to space-time compression. Both in his Canadian specific and non-Canadian specific work Coupland shows signs of nostalgia even if mixed with the knowledge that the past was not always unblemished. Especially in his non-Canada specific works he shows anxiety for current times and through that the future; perhaps the use of nostalgia is also a self-protection as it provides an escapism. Coupland says in an interview: “Many people are underestimating the scope of change we are currently undergoing - treating it like it's only here for a visit ... but it's not leaving. So we may as well try to develop new language for describing what it feels like to be in this new world.”¹⁵² This is what Coupland did in his installations: creating art for a new technological era, adhering to McLuhan idea of “the medium is the message”, whilst looking back at where western society, and especially Canada, came from.

¹⁵² Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Susan Wyndham for *The Sydney Morning Herald*) (28 March 2015) <<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/welcome-to-the-age-of-earthquakes-says-douglas-coupland-20150327-1m9259.html>> (Accessed 10 December 2020).

**CHAPTER 4: WESTWARDS, EASTWARDS,
HOME: ALIENATION AND DISLOCATION
AS A CONSEQUENCE OF GLOBALIZATION
IN DOUGLAS COUPLAND'S *LIFE AFTER
GOD* (1994) AND *ELEANOR RIGBY* (2004)**

According to Philip Leonard, globalization at times displays “impermanence and dislocation as the underlying condition of cultural and territorial attachment.”¹ Douglas Coupland frequently engages with the concept of globalization and often touches upon these notions of impermanence and dislocation in his novels. In *Life after God* and *Eleanor Rigby*, for example, Coupland depicts the struggle of the main characters, middle-class white people of Canadian origin questioning their identity and travelling with ease between countries and trying to figure out who they are and where they belong.² One of the characters in *Life after God* asserts that he is “no longer ... capable of kindness” and “beyond being able to love” (289), and it is these sorts of feelings of lack of attachment that reign throughout the two novels. Both main characters are mentally drained whilst trying to reach self-actualization; both struggle with the tension between their cultural and territorial attachment on the one hand and impermanence and dislocation on the other.

Around the time that Coupland published, *Life after God* (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004) there were more expressions of anxiety surrounding alienation in society. Robert D. Putnam describes the lack of attachment by depicting a downwards spiral of especially American community life in his 1995 article and subsequent book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000).³ Putnam asserts that American

¹ Philip Leonard, *Literature after Globalization: Textuality, Technology and the Nation-State* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 2.

² Douglas Coupland, *Life after God* (London: Scribner, 1994); Douglas Coupland, *Eleanor Rigby* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004). All subsequent references to these texts will be noted parenthetically in the text.

³ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

society has suffered from a loss of social capital as people do not have the same close relationships with others in their near vicinity anymore. Even though the Putnam based his book on five years of research within the United States his book was well received globally. According to Neil Seeman and Adalsteinn Brown “researchers and opinion leaders around the world latched on to the idea of social capital as a driving force for equity, tolerance and trust in institutions.”⁴ Seeman and Brown argue that Putnam was well received in Canada as well, for example “Canadian sociologist Jean Kunz pointed to Putnam’s idea of social connectedness as a key predictor of how successfully new immigrants would integrate into Canadian society.”⁵

Putnam argues people in society used to have better associations approximately 50 years ago and are now, in modern times, less integrated in their communities and as a consequence lonelier. Putnam gives a number of reasons for this change in human connectivity: the fact that women moved into the labour force, greater mobility within the country, other demographic alterations and the “technological transformation of leisure.”⁶ Out of these reasons, especially the last three stand out and could be easily linked to globalization. First of all, globalization facilitates greater world-wide mobility. Putnam correctly notes that “[m]obility, like frequent re-potting of plants, tends to disrupt root systems, and it takes time for an uprooted individual to put down new roots.”⁷ In other words, it is more difficult to become involved in the community and feel part of it

⁴Neil Seeman and Adalsteinn Brown, *We Are Not Bowling Alone* (2012)
<<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/come-together/seeman-brown/>> [Accessed 5 October 2020].

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995), 65-78 (p. 75).

⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

if one has just moved there. Nevertheless, one can also be dislocated in their own environment. Bruce K. Alexander explains dislocation in relation to globalization:

Dislocation afflicts both people who have been physically displaced, such as economic immigrants and refugees, and people who have remained in place while their cultures disintegrated around them. Dislocation occurs during boom times as well as recessions, among the rich as well as the poor, along capitalists as well as workers. Today, dislocation threatens to become universal, as global free-market society undermines ever more aspects of local social and cultural life everywhere.⁸

Ergo, world-wide mobility leads to dislocation, both within the culture from which people might move to the culture that people have moved to or in cultures that have been heavily affected by (im)migration, for example, through globalization.

Under “other demographic changes” resulting in the loss of community Putnam notes elements like the increase of divorce but also:

the changes in scale that have swept over the American economy in these years--illustrated by the replacement of the corner grocery by the supermarket and now perhaps of the supermarket by electronic shopping at home, or the replacement of community-based enterprises by outposts of distant multinational firms--may perhaps have undermined the material and even physical basis for civic engagement.⁹

The fact that the so-called “mom and pop” stores are being replaced by globalized multinational firms, big boxes, or even the start of online shopping in the 1990s, distances human interaction and makes the process of shopping less socially connecting.¹⁰ This lack of social connectivity might lead to loneliness. Putnam’s last example comments on the fact that the American population have increased their intake of television series and

⁸ Bruce K. Alexander, *The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 1.

⁹ Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', p. 74.

¹⁰ Michael Aldrich, 'Internet Online Shopping', in *The Michael Aldrich Archive*, (Brighton: University of Brighton, 2011) <http://www.aldricharchive.com/internet_online_shopping.html> [Accessed 9 October 2020]; Kenneth Jones and Michael Doucet, 'The Big Box, the Flagship and Beyond: Impacts and Trends in the Greater Toronto Area', *The Canadian Geographer*, 45 (2001), 494-512.

shows; however, if his writing would have been from ten years later this could have just as easily added social media and mobile phones. Globalization is often attached to heightened technological advance.¹¹ Even though Putnam's critique is specifically aimed at the United States, most inhabitants of western countries would recognize elements of these changes in their own countries, and this would also extend to Canada. In Putnam's book these elements cause loss of community, which subsequently leads to, loneliness, dislocation and alienation, much like in Coupland's two novels *Life after God* and *Eleanor Rigby*.

While Putnam indirectly argues that globalization is one of the main reasons for the loss of community, globalization as such is not always seen in such a polemic light. For example, Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider argue that "Ironically, when national cultures were invented, they were open to the same criticisms as those directed at global culture today. They were once similarly dismissed as superficial and inauthentic substitutes for local cultures that were once rich in tradition, and they were criticized as being much too large and alienating."¹² In other words, it would be speculative to argue that globalization alone is responsible for alienation or the erosion of a social society. In this chapter this tension in Coupland's work between globalization as source of social loss or as a logical next step up from the national will be weighed up against each other.

Though the novels *Life after God* (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004) are written ten years apart, both novels show variations on the same theme of loneliness, alienation and the

¹¹ Leonard, p. 2.

¹² Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 15.

search for a home. Both main characters are affected by the last three elements described by Putnam, leaving them in search for a community they can feel comfortable in and which leaves them the option to put down roots. Nevertheless, the novels, though having similar themes, deviate as the short story '1,000 years (Life after God)' in *Life after God* portrays the Canadian main character wanting to retreat into Canadian nature whereas in *Eleanor Rigby* the Canadian main character has a deep need for the "old world" which is Europe and she cannot manage to feel home on the, relatively newly built, West coast of Canada. Both characters have an opposite axis of movement: the South-North axis in *Life after God* opposite of the West-East axis in *Eleanor Rigby*. This choice is interesting because it shows Coupland exploring the same theme, alienation and a feeling of not having a clear community, with different outcomes and solutions. This chapter will explore Coupland's perception of alienation, dislocation and the loss of community in relation to globalization in his novels *Life after God* and *Eleanor Rigby*.

LIFE AFTER GOD: A QUEST FOR CANADA'S REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Coupland's novel *Life after God* is an impeccable example of the tension that the main characters experience between the regional or national and the various influences of globalization. Within *Life after God* there is a short story, '1,000 years (Life After God)', which will be the focus of this section. The story mentioned is cyclical; it begins with Canadian teenage friends bathing in Vancouver swimming pools, and it ends with the main character – who is referred to as Scout by the others - bathing in a lake on Vancouver Island as an adult, trying to regain his past. The first sentence of the short story is: "As suburban children we floated at night in swimming pools the temperature of blood; pools the color of Earth as seen from outer space" (219). This beginning of the story almost

depicts birth and a strong belonging within a group of peers but also within the region and to the Earth in general; the fact that the children of Vancouver bathe in “pools the temperature of blood” is reminiscent of the womb. The pools have the “color of Earth” which shows a connection and belonging to their surroundings. The last sentences of the story attempt to recapture this beginning, but the belonging to peers and the warmth of the water depicted in the beginning of the story are now unattainable for the main character. Scout describes his entering of the water: “I walk deeper and deeper into the rushing water. My testicles pull up into myself. The water enters my belly button and it freezes my chest” (290). Scout tries to recreate his childhood memories to feel safe and warm but instead gets freezing water which is still enough to “forget gravity and “float” (290). This offers a strong image; the main character retreats to the familiar, his Canada and the act of bathing in water which reminds him of his youth, in hope of attaining a phoenix-like rebirth after which he will have regained his identity and will be capable of bonding to his homeland again.

The story told in between the scene at the swimming pool and the scene at the lake is one of lost identities, alienation and dislocation arising from globalization. Scout summarizes this feeling by arguing that: “I’ve bottomed out a few times; in motel rooms, say – alongside naked bodies close by in cities I can’t recall – looking at phones with nobody to dial. And I’ve been hooked on a few things, too, and lost months and years there” (252). Karen Skinazi writes about Coupland’s characters and argues that:

Coupland’s characters are of an era of change and fluidity. They are not bogged down by traditional versions of history or geography, but they have not fully rejected the human particularities that make individuals and groups unique, either. Characters are Canadian or American or both; histories are Canadian or American or both; stories and lives cross borders and expand the possibilities of the continent. If the New World is not the most perfect society now existing in the

world, it at least can be, because the freeways gleam and the borders are, for the most part, open. People can continually join multiple, overlapping micro-communities that share voluntary, not biological, affiliations, and they can use these affiliations to find ways of making meaning in a 'life after god.'¹³

Skinazi argues that Coupland's characters are truly globalized and transnational, as they are no longer defined by their nationality and have the option to discover and form new affiliations on both their own continent or cross-continently. Coupland's characters are the rich – or at least affluent or economically comfortable – transnational capital class, who are able to travel and settle wherever they want: a class of people who are not hampered by borders or lack of funds. Skinazi is right in her argument that Coupland's characters have the choice of settling down wherever they want or forming bonds with whomever they want. However, unfortunately, their transnational nature does not protect them from something like alienation. It is clear from Scout's words, "looking at phones with nobody to dial" (252), that even though he travels with ease he is no longer able to connect. The fact that, as Skinazi asserts, the borders are now open and new connections can be made randomly, does not necessarily mean all of Coupland's characters know how to deal with these changes in their modern-day reality. In other words, the protagonists of Coupland's novels surely do have the freedom to pursue new affiliations, but they do not always have the social skills or options to do so, often leaving them feeling alienated and dislocated.

This group of friends is indeed representative of the "micro-communities that share voluntary, not biological, affiliations" which Skinazi addresses. Unfortunately, in this particular story the "use [of] these affiliations to find ways of making meaning in a 'life

¹³ Karen E. H. Skinazi, 'A Cosmopolitan New World: Douglas Coupland's Canadianation of Amlit', *AmeriQuests*, 4 (2007), 1-14 (p. 4).

after god” is out of the question.¹⁴ For example, Scout poignantly describes the current adult lives of his friends with whom he swam as a teenager and it is clear that these lives are not what they had envisioned for themselves. For example, Scout meets his old friend Stacey and explains that: “Stacey is an alcoholic now. And her face has that hard look of people who flirt with coke” (227). Stacey explains to him: “Well you know that point you reach one day – the day where you suddenly crash and realize that you’re all alone in the world and you fall into the abyss?” (229). Scout reacts to Stacey’s statement with understanding. It is clear that Scout is not the only person to be lost, but that his friends are going through similar problems finding themselves and their place in the world. All of Scout’s friends are lost; his friend Mark was diagnosed with HIV, Stacey became a divorced alcoholic, Julie got married with children but is cynical about life and contemptuously nicknamed her children Damien and Satan. Scout’s other friends are not doing much better: every one of them is cynical or confused or both. All of them travelled around the world, some of them extensively, which has caused this group of friends to, mostly, fall apart. They are no longer in constant personal contact with each other and have lost touch with the group and with an affiliation that had made them feel safe during their teenage years. Scout himself experiences this too, he sometimes hears from or about the others, but it only happens on rare occasions and these moments are usually awkward or uncomfortable for both parties. It is at these moments that Coupland depicts the social clumsiness that hampers his main characters from making the connections that Skinazi describes.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Scout addresses the rare moments of contact left, and the unwillingness of some of some of the former group members to keep in contact. For example, he talks about his contacts with Todd and the difficulty of keeping in touch with him: "I'm the only one of the old group he keeps up with, and even then, it's entirely through my own efforts. The possibility of a reunion for all seven of us is pretty much out of the question" (244). Scout's behaviour and sadness about the impossibility of a reunion resonates with the words of Marshall McLuhan: "The past went that-a-way. When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future."¹⁵ This is to say, Scout seems unable to let go of his past group of friends, and keeps trying to go back to a status quo, or recreate a past, that has long ceased to exist. Even though Scout moves forward into the future every day, his main preoccupation keeps being his past. An example of this is Scout meeting his friend Dana again after a year of silence; it becomes apparent that Dana never told Scout that he got married and had children and moreover, Dana does not really want any contact either. The only thing Dana can vocalize when meeting Scout by accident in front of the supermarket is: "I can't talk to you, Scout, I just can't" (239). Whereas Scout is obsessed by his past, Dana tries to occlude it from his life as if it is a painful memory, leaving more precision needed why the memory is uncomfortable.

Needless to say, Scout misses this personal contact from his formerly close-knit group of friends, the group of friends he had sought affiliation with. It becomes apparent that Scout feels socially alienated from both his past friends and society in general. He mostly lacks

¹⁵ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message* (UK: Penguin, 2008), pp. 73-74.

contact with both his new affiliates as his biological family. Globalization and transnationalism should be to blame for this lessened community feeling. The fact that characters swap countries so easily and are constantly absorbed by modern day life, next to the fact that their priorities have shifted from since they were adolescents, has clearly caused the group to drift apart. In the conversations Scout has with Julie he seems to regret this deeply; he resents the fact that they have grown up and gone their separate ways. At one moment, he expresses his wish to have had a family with Julie: “I’d give a million dollars to be able to stay here at this house with *you* – to be Simon for a day” (235 – original emphasis). Scout expresses the desire to move away from chosen affiliations to having a nuclear biological family. Scout is now desperate to explore all options that might allow him to feel part of a community. Yet Julie bursts his illusionary bubble of the family as the cornerstone of society and safe-haven: “You know, it’s a good life, Scout – but I get lonely here, too – inside the house. Don’t fool yourself” (235). In other words, Coupland argues that no one is safe from the so-called horrors of growing up, especially in a globalized world in which there is no place to be disheartened about the past whilst constantly moving forward. This alienation creates a situation in which it is easy for the characters to make the wrong decisions and it is thus not surprising that they end up regretting their choices and current life. Globalization has not relieved the alienation of Scout and his friends at all but worsened it because the characters have drifted apart in a world which, technologically seen, allows them to stay in constant touch. The fact that this former group of friends can stay in touch, but rarely do, makes the situation even more poignant. Because of the fact that the main character, Scout, realizes his discomfort with his current globalized life this makes him Coupland’s ideal protagonist. While the protagonist and his friends could have chosen to keep affiliating with their own group of

friends, in fact, because of social awkwardness and a lessened feeling of community they do not. All characters deal differently with their present situation: Scout repents the loss of his past, Todd ignores it, Dana occludes it and Julie chooses to move on and start a nuclear family. Whereas Skinazi is right that Coupland's characters can choose any affiliation they want in this globalized world, it is poignant how little Scout succeeds in forming any relationships in '1,000 years (Life after God)'.

GLOBALIZATION, AMERICANIZATION AND THE IMAGE OF THE ALIENATED SALESMAN

Because of the aforementioned reasons such as alienation and dislocation Scout has ambiguous feelings towards his globalized and transnational life, and this is poignantly described through his trips to the United States. Scout's feeling does not only seem to be a confusion of his own life and his journey to adulthood, but also seems to be a confusion of his Canadian citizenship. These feelings of ambivalence towards Scout's Canadian citizenship are not surprising; a globalized world is usually assumed to lessen the power of the nation-state and thus lessens the feeling of citizenship. Steven Slaughter and Wayne Hudson describe the struggle between globalization and citizenship: "The primary contention is that various political, social and economic processes of globalisation are disrupting and overwhelming the relationship between the citizens and their state."¹⁶ In this case however it could be questioned whether Scout is experiencing globalization or a post-modern form of Americanization. The difference between these two terms is

¹⁶ Wayne Hudson and Steven Slaughter, *Globalisation and Citizenship: The Transnational Challenge*, Routledge/*Challenges of Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

marginal, and some scholars see the one as a logical outcome of the other.¹⁷ This is to say, Americanization would not be able to exist without globalization, as globalization is needed to disperse American culture. Ritzer and Stillman define globalization as “most often [referring] to the growth of transnational politics, the integration of the world economy, and a subsequent blending of cultures around the world.”¹⁸ Other scholars also tend to point out the increasing importance of technology in this process.¹⁹ On the other hand, Americanization is described by Ritzer and Stillman as “a powerful one-directional process that tends to overwhelm competing processes (e.g. Japanization) as well as the strength of local forces that might resist, modify and/or transform American models into hybrid forms.”²⁰ This is to say that globalization is more concerned with global processes whilst Americanization is the process in which countries or regions struggle with the appeal of American culture to their own population. Ritzer and Stillman emphasize that “Americanization is cousin to a neo-Marxian conception of economic imperialism and cultural hegemony.”²¹ In other words, American cultural imperialism is so strong that it defines other countries. It is logical that Americanization in Canada is different than Americanization in Asia; however the idea of being overrun by American culture and policies is still an anxiety for some Canadians. For example, Douglas C. Nord explains that “[w]hile there exists a significant store of positive affect towards Americans on the part of many Canadians, there also can be found a major reservoir of skepticism and

¹⁷ E.g. George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Assessing Mcdonaldization, Americanization and Globalization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, ed. by Nathan Sznajder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 30-48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁹ e.g. Thomas J. Courchene, 'Embedding Globalization: A Human Capital Perspective', *Canada House lecture series*, 67 (2001), 1-47;

Philip Leonard, *Literature after Globalization: Textuality, Technology and the Nation-State* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

²⁰ Ritzer and Stillman, p. 35.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

critical attitudes directed toward recent American political leaders and policies.”²² This image of distrust that Nord depicts is also supported by Canadian media: Heather Mallick from the *Hamilton Spectator* argues in a 2018 article that English-speaking Canada should be more like Quebec: “I’d like Ottawa to be this implacable and find a way to sustain [Canadian] culture with more than cultural protection.”²³ In a similar fashion Léandre Larouche from *The Concordian* argues that “From NAFTA to Netflix, we are annexed now more than ever” and concludes that “No matter how different we Canadians think we are, we may one day begin to see the downsides of such a close link with our southern neighbour.”²⁴ This is similar in Coupland’s *Life after God*. In Coupland’s included short story the protagonist is mostly worried about and engaged with U.S. culture, first and foremost because this is where his travels take place, even though some key elements of globalization still clearly define events. Seen from a historical point of view, the fact that Coupland was more worried in 1994 about the status of the United States and Americanization might have been a direct result of the Free Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Canada in 1989 and consequently the NAFTA agreement in that same year as *Life after God* appeared. Both these agreements changed the Canadian economy and favoured a continental above a national approach to business. These events fit in with Scout’s business trip to the United States; it shows Coupland’s concern, at that moment in time, with these ever-integrative approaches between North American countries and Coupland’s fear of losing a distinct Canadian national identity. This fear of

²² Douglas C. Nord, 'Discourse and Dialogue between Americans and Canadians—Who Is Talking to Whom?', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 41 (2011), 391-401 (p. 391).

²³ Heather Mallick, 'Protecting Our Culture Essential to Fighting Off ‘Americanization’', *The Hamilton Spectator*, *Hamilton* (September 10, 2018) <[https://www.insideottawavalley.com/opinion-story/8890549-protecting-our-culture-essential-to-fighting-off-americanization-/](https://www.insideottawavalley.com/opinion-story/8890549-protecting-our-culture-essential-to-fighting-off-americanization/)> [Accessed 10 December 2020].

²⁴ Leandre Larouche, 'Being Canadian Rather Than ‘Not American’', *The Concordian*, *Montreal* (September 19, 2017) <<http://theconcordian.com/2017/09/being-canadian-rather-than-not-american/>> [Accessed 28 July 2020].

the United States overrunning Canada is much more prominent in *Life after God* than worries about overall globalization. The protagonist's name, Scout, might already be a first omen, a symbol that he is sent out from the far North to the United States to see whether Canadians should change their ways to be more American. In other words, Scout seems to be "scouting out" the United States lifestyle and evaluating whether it is an attractive alternative to the current socio-political and economical system in Canada.

A week before Scout's climactic retreat to Vancouver Island he travelled to New York for business by his Vancouver company. Scout's description of his business trip is significant: "merely endless meetings and fear: hierarchy-addicted weasels and dinners with drunk product reps" (255). The world described by the protagonist is one of a lonely concrete jungle. Scout describes New York as Baudrillard does in his 1989 work *America*:

The American street has not, perhaps, known these historic moments, but it is always turbulent, lively, kinetic, and cinematic, like the country itself, where the specifically historical and political stage counts for little, but where change, whether spurred by technology, racial differences, or the media, assumes virulent forms: its violence is the very violence of the way of life.²⁵

It is no wonder that Scout dislikes his tiny hotel room in Manhattan with the "unending grumble of traffic down below" (255), the obvious signs of Baudrillard's constant change as a virulent form. Scout, not being an American citizen, logically feels out of place and cannot sleep. He finally decides that this is "[a] salesman's life" (255), before taking sleep medication because of his sleeping problems. The salesman image which Coupland conveys here is a powerful one. The image of the salesman is that of someone who, in some senses, does not produce anything but makes money through smooth talk. It is obvious that Scout is not managing his lifestyle. He suffers from the constant hustle and

²⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *America* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 18.

bustle as described by Baudrillard. He is unstable and unhappy and needs medication to get through his days. Scout recounts how he needs his medication to manage his anxiety and depressions. Scout's doctor reassures him: "these pills were extremely common and that most people ended up having to take them at some point in their lives" (222). Scout manages modern life better through them: "I must admit that they did make my temper less haywire" and "I also became a much 'nicer' human being" (222). Scout's lifestyle causes alienation from society but also alienation from himself as an individual as his aspirations are artificial work goals and not personal self-actualization. The fact that he needs pills to function in modern society and in his job as a salesman is telling.

Scout's identity crisis also surfaces in his questioning of his Canadianness. Especially his trip to the United States makes him wonder about his Canadian identity. At some point, Scout contradictorily asserts his Canadianness by exclaiming: "I don't consider myself political; being Canadian, American politics have only a detached appeal" (256), but shortly thereafter he wakes up from his groggy drugged state and decides for no reason whatsoever to visit Washington for the presidential inauguration. Or, as Scout puts it; "I figured the inauguration must have meant something important to me to cut through the fog" of this drugged state of being (256). The fact that Scout, as a Canadian, still wants to be a part of America's presidential inauguration is telling: the appeal of the culture is obviously present to him and seems to be an exotic alternative to his Canadian lifestyle. Alternatively, to the protagonist, the U.S. way of dealing with politics is at least interesting enough to "scout out". In this case, Americanization truly has seeped through. This scene resonates with Jefferson Faye's argument that Coupland focuses upon

addressing “U.S. cultural imperialism” in his books.²⁶ Faye writes that: “As one of the best-selling Canadian novelists of the last decade, he is deeply aware and vehemently critical of the damage done to Canada by exported ‘American culture’.”²⁷ Faye’s argument fits in with Scout’s contradictory attitude towards the inauguration; he is not at all interested in U.S. politics but still goes because he finds it important to observe the ceremony. It does not actually matter whether Scout would like to see the American system copied in his home country or whether Scout is just genuinely fascinated by American politics which he must have often seen on Canadian television; it is clear that Scout finds the event important. Coupland seems to suggest here that Canadians are so indoctrinated by their Southern neighbours’ culture that they want to experience their lifestyle, if not conform to it, because of the clear impact of Americanization. Scout’s viewpoint here does not seem to be that of a globalized society, as in this context other political systems or open borders do not matter, but he operates solely in the light of political Americanization as Ritzer and Stillman define it: “unilateral political action by the U.S.A. and its allies”, of which Canada is of course, one.²⁸ Scout seems to ignore his own Canadian descent and tries to find answers to his own identity crisis through the politics of his neighbouring country. Whether this will actually be successful is doubtful, as Coupland does not give Scout the tools to make a well-reasoned decision. Scout, in this part of the story, is so stressed out by his travels to New York and his yuppie lifestyle that he is not capable of any thought-through judgements. Coupland seems to critique the fatigue of globalized living and the fact that Scout’s lifestyle alienates him from society; both U.S., society and Canadian society.

²⁶ Jefferson Faye, 'Review Essay: Canada in a Coma', *American Review of Canadian Studies* 31 (2001), 501-10 (p. 501).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

²⁸ Ritzer and Stillman, p. 36.

Upon his arrival in Washington, Scout tellingly stays with a Canadian friend, not an American one, and stops taking his prescribed medicine, something which might be seen as a first sign of his withdrawal from the U.S.'s Prozac nation culture. Coupland's concern with medicine abuse seems to be part of the zeitgeist as Elizabeth Wurtzel's autobiography *Prozac Nation* was published in the same year as Coupland's *Life after God*. Wurtzel's account resonated with its audiences because of its strong depiction of medicine abuse in the United States. '1,000 years (Life after God)' seems to echo the concerns voiced in *Prozac Nation* and the fact that medication seems to lessen a person's consciousness and furthermore alienates them from society; Coupland's protagonist is numbed emotionally as long as he is on his medication. In '1,000 years (Life after God)', with every hour that Scout spends in Washington without taking his medication he feels more present: "My old personality was, after months of pills and pleasant nothingness, returning" (263). Additionally, it seems that his decision to travel also improved his state of being and helps him to define his own citizenship. The idea of traveling being linked to finding one's identity returns often in Coupland's writings, for example in *Souvenir of Canada* Coupland asserts that British people who just moved to Canada: "pygmalionize into SuperBrits."²⁹ Furthermore, Coupland also expands on this idea in his column for the *Financial Times Magazine* explaining that: "when people travel, their sense of self begins to erode and they need to purchase something, anything, to shore up their sense of identity. It's why airports sell stickers and pins and car decals from around the world. (Kiss me, I'm Oirish!)."³⁰ This is thus to say that, according to Coupland, being away

²⁹ Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 2002), p. 27.

³⁰ Douglas Coupland, 'Douglas Coupland: Globalisation Is Fun!', *FT Magazine* (14 February 2014) <<https://www.ft.com/content/bb4af556-9443-11e3-a0e1-00144feab7de>> [Accessed 12 December 2019].

from one's regular habitat breaks away from people's identities to such an extent that they will try to hold on to their heritage. This is also a concept which Coupland explores in '1,000 year (Life after God)' where the assertion of Scout's identity is even clearer after his travels to Washington DC and the viewing of the ceremony. Nevertheless, after watching the inauguration ceremony with his Canadian friend on CNN, Scout needed further confirmation of his confused citizenship and "walked down to Pennsylvania Avenue where the citizens stood ten deep waiting for the parade" (262). Interestingly enough Scout refers to the Americans around him as citizens, and not as Americans. At first glance this seems to imply that he somehow feels part of the crowd, a confirmation from Coupland that the U.S. and Canada have truly merged into a single state, both inhabitants of Canada and the U.S. being citizens. On the other hand, it could also be a hint from Coupland that Scout does not feel part of the crowd at all. The reference to the citizens around him could be in fact pointing out that the Americans have chosen their own rule, they are not subjects to the British throne as the Canadians once were. Moreover, Scout does not belong to them as he is not an American citizen. Americans are American citizens who are free in choosing whomever they want as president, whilst Scout belongs to the Commonwealth, is a Canadian citizen and can only vote for his preferred political party. This would thus mean that Scout points out the difference between him and the others in the crowd. This last interpretation matches best with the spot Scout chooses for his view of the parade, which is 501 Pennsylvania Avenue, the sidewalk in front of the Canadian Embassy. Or, as Scout formulates it: "I squished myself into the crowd in front of the Canadian Embassy" (262). The tension between Scout's

indoctrination into the American dream and his desire to be Canadian is clear here. After his final decision to stand in front of the Canadian Embassy and thus to align himself politically with his own home country, he starts feeling more comfortable with himself. Whilst Scout is still dislocated and alienated, this clear representation of the national abroad – the Embassy - makes him feel more comfortable with himself and gives him the opportunity to rekindle his national identity.

THE SOUTH-NORTH AXIS IN LIFE AFTER GOD: *WESTWARDS IS HOMEWARDS*

Next to playing with the difficulties of forming relationships and specific national identities, *Life after God* also plays with the idea that moving in a specific direction will cleanse the main characters' sins and their past trespasses. The title, *Life after God* already shows Coupland's fascination with the tension between contemporary life and the nostalgic feelings about bygone times. These bygone times refer to a historical past in which religion was present to guide citizens but currently all that is left is a detached attitude and religious vacuum. The main character of the story '1,000 Years (Life After God)' is, as mentioned before, an adult Canadian citizen looking back on his life from when he was a child and teenager until his present life now. In a '1,000 Years (Life after God)' main character Scout is a travelling businessman who leaves the Canadian west for the east of the U.S. for business. Even though Scout is constantly surrounded by Americans in the east of the U.S., during the entire story Scout never actually has any personal contact with them. He never holds a conversation with an American or questions them on their point of view; they are just the significant and valued "others" to whom one could want to belong. These "others" are in fact part of a twisted version of the American "dream" because, to attain it is not something to aspire to. Coupland points out here that

whilst people might have the illusion that things are better across the border, and especially towards the east, it is sincerely questionable whether this is true. In this story Coupland's protagonist prefers the safety of the West, the region where he grew up. Robert McGill comments upon the "archetypal myths of journey westward" as described in Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier hypothesis" and how this does not always hold true for Coupland's works.³¹ Scout's trip to the south-east proves to be unfruitful as his disillusionment with Americanisation is real. This is one of the reasons why he subsequently hides in the Canadian woods to reaffirm his own stereotypical idea of being Canadian.

In '1,000 years (Life after God)' Scout's journey is not immediately shown as the legendary westwards quest and the search for the Promised Land. Scout, in fact, is already almost as west as a person can get as he lives in Vancouver. Scout's initial journey is quite the opposite from the westward explorations described by Turner as he is travelling towards the east of North America, to New York and Washington DC, the older cities of North America and often associated with old and especially highbrow culture, whereas the west often conjures up associations with newly founded cities and lowbrow culture.³² Scout's journey is thus a journey to the beginnings of the "New World" as colonized by the Europeans. His visit perhaps therefore begins in New York City, as this is the older one of the two cities, founded in 1625 by Dutch settlers and subsequently taken over by

³¹ Robert McGill, 'The Sublime Simulacrum: Vancouver in Douglas Coupland's Geography of Apocalypse', in *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase: Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature* ed. by Gisèle Marie Baxter, Brett Josef Grubisic, and Tara Lee, (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), pp. 275-290 (pp. 277-278).

³² Paul McDonald, 'American Paleface and Redskin Humour', *Australian Journal of Comedy*, 5 (1999), 7-25.

the British in 1665. Scout's New York City is not the city upon a hill as envisioned by some settlers arriving to the U.S., but a roaring beast which drives Scout crazy and in which no peace is to be found. Scout is relieved to leave from New York City to travel onwards. On the other hand, his visit to Washington DC is not only eastwards, but also further away from Canada as he is going South. This trip is depicted by Coupland as an evaluation of the American independence from the British as Washington DC was only founded in 1790, after the Declaration of Independence had been written. Washington DC had thus never been in British hands and would therefore be an ideal location for Scout to see how this self-rule changes a city and country, and how it changes from his experience in his own country. Though Scout does not necessarily voice his disapproval of Washington DC, as he had done with New York, he does not feel at home between the vast amounts of Americans. This feeling of uncanniness is probably why he seeks refuge at a Canadian friend's home and outside the Canadian Embassy. He observes the crowds in Washington DC as an outsider or anthropologist would do, but never becomes part of the crowd thus showing his alienation.

Being a logical outcome of his dislocation and alienation, this is also where Scout's westward quest seems to begin. Scout flees back home to Vancouver to find peace there, but realizes he also feels like an outsider in his hometown. Coupland's Vancouver in *Life after God* is perhaps too Americanized for Scout to feel at home and it is thus here that he decides to go even further west to Vancouver Island, the last bit of wilderness to be attained and final stop before the Pacific Ocean. In relation to Coupland showing these frontiers, or better said ultimate borders, McGill argues that "Coupland's texts likewise evince an awareness that there are no more new worlds to which one can escape", and

argues that whilst traditionally there was a movement from East to West, Coupland describes an “axis” involving South to North – from the United States to Canada.³³ McGill insinuates here that Coupland thus echoes the Canadian anthem, “The true North strong and free!” Canada is thus placed, in Coupland’s opinion, opposite the U.S. Though McGill might have a point here, especially for Coupland’s later works, in this earlier work it seems that the frontier narrative is still alive, even if the protagonist first has to go east to be drawn west again. The virgin land that Scout discovers on Vancouver Island soothes his being and enforces his feelings of being Canadian; it is his discovery of the Garden of Eden, his city upon a hill, where humanity has not yet ruined the wilderness.

However, the question arises if he even knows how a “real Canadian” behaves. Instead of chasing his American dream further he retreats; he first hides at his home in Vancouver for a week and afterwards he trades in his American dream for the nostalgic Canadian image of wilderness. In his full work suit he sits in a tent in the middle of Vancouver Island, farther west than Vancouver, an obvious sign of retreat from modern urban life that refers back to the images described by Northrop Frye of the Canadian wilderness. Scout apparently sees the, perhaps out-dated but definitely nostalgic and perhaps even stereotypical, image of the wilderness as a sign of being Canadian. The protagonist in fact trades one national myth for another, and neither of these myths is especially helpful in leading a meaningful life in the community. Additionally, the suit could be a symbol of Scout already being so overly indoctrinated into a capitalist lifestyle that placing himself in the middle of nature might be actually a grave mistake for he might not be able to survive it.

³³ McGill, p. 279 and p. 283.

Nonetheless, this is not Scout's first time in Canadian nature. Scout nostalgically thinks back to his experiences of fishing with his father in the north of British Columbia during his childhood, a period described as a time of happiness, safety and family life. The so-called wilderness thus becomes a safe haven, a distant memory from his childhood that Scout is trying to relive as he sits in his tent. It is not actually the notion of nature that is important to the protagonist, but the nostalgic feelings that he has attached to the environment. In fact, his retreat to nature will not help Scout find the meaning of life, or how to be part of society, or the answers concerning the NAFTA or a globalized or Americanized Canada. The landscape around him brings him back to his family roots and makes him feel safe; it is a way for him to occlude modern life. Scout realizes that his chosen relationships cannot replace his biological bonds and ties with his family. This does not take away from the fact, however, that at some point Scout will still have to come out of the woods, and outside of these woods nothing will have changed.

The Canadian setting even makes Scout comfortable enough to beg for God on the last pages of the story, requesting him to heal him and give him strength. Though God does not reply, the novel being named *Life after God*, Scout eventually equates nature to the divine and feels as if it will heal him, and this fits in with equating this peaceful wilderness to the Garden of Eden. As already mentioned, the chapter ends with Scout bathing in a Canadian stream in the middle of nature and to do so he removes all of his clothing. Entering the pool naked seems to point at both a baptism and a rebirth especially as he describes his experience as a healing process. Scout describes that: "I submerge myself in the pool completely. I grab my knees and forget gravity and I float within the pool and

yet, even here, I hear the roar of water, the roar of clapping hands” (290). The hands described are “hands that care”, those hands which “tell us we are whole” (290). The similarity to the beginning of the story – when he was still a teenager untainted by adulthood and the subsequent American dream – is striking. The story began with Scout and his friend, when they would “float and be naked – pretending to be embryos, pretending to be fetuses” (219), and thus ends in a similar way. It could be argued that Scout tries to rediscover his roots and his Canadian identity by being in the middle of nowhere. His quest is partially successful, as he does feel better. As Scout himself asserts: “But what remains in my head are the memories of the landscapes we entered as a family: the raw mountains; the charging rivers; the purity of it all” (279). Here too McLuhan resonates; Scout is still unable to let go of his past and now that his near past is unavailable, he chooses to recreate his distant past. Nevertheless, this distant past is just as unattainable as his near past. Here Coupland does not offer answers, Scout will not be able to stay in nature forever, and the Canadian economy has shifted from being predominantly a staple economy to being predominantly a service economy.³⁴ As mentioned before, the divine raw mountains and charging rivers that Scout admires are just images of another national myth, not actually a helpful strategy for modern life but much more an ideology from the past, a temporary safe haven. The dislocation and alienation that Scout experienced previously might have been replaced by a feeling of safety and being in place, but at some point, he will have to come out of the woods for he is in fact still dislocated and alienated from his friends, family and society. Though

³⁴ David Parkinson argues that: “Fifty years ago, services made up about 55 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product; today, they account for 70 per cent.” In David Parkinson, 'A Seismic Shift: Signs of Change: Canada's New Economic Reality', in *The Globe and Mail* (2016)
<<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/economy/canada-economy-shift-resources/article30715265/>> [Accessed 9 October 2020].

Scout's feeling of dislocation and alienation are temporarily relieved by his travels in fact globalization, and especially Americanization, still leaves him alienated from others. Furthermore, the westward journey is finished, and Scout will not be able to travel further to the frontier without hitting the Pacific Ocean. Though Coupland finishes this story with feelings of hope and fulfillment, in fact Scout has nowhere else to go.

Coupland's novel *Eleanor Rigby* engages with the same themes of alienation, dislocation and globalization as *Life after God* but contrary to *Life after God* the main character of *Eleanor Rigby* needs to get out of Canada to find, understand and come to terms with her own identity instead of returning to it and hiding in deep nature. The title of the novel already suggests a melancholic atmosphere behind the story since *Eleanor Rigby* is, of course, the title of a 1960s Beatles song about desolation and isolation. The title is only featured once within the novel itself as the main character, Liz Dunn, uses this Beatles song as her email address: eleanorrigby@artic.ca. The fact that Liz blatantly uses the song title on one hand illustrates her alienation from society, and on the other hand emphasizes the fact that such a global cultural reference - a song from a world-famous British band - is perfectly functional and reflects the international influences at play and positions alienation and globalization as core ideas of the novel. Solitude constantly surrounds Liz like a cloud of mist, a mist from which she cannot seem to escape until she forces herself out of her comfort zone by traveling abroad and seeking new identity affiliations in Europe. In the following section Liz Dunn's constant alienation, dislocation, and the relation of these to globalization, will be used to analyze Liz's quest for a new identity.

THE WEST-EAST AXIS IN ELEANOR RIGBY: *EASTWARDS IS HOMEWARDS*

As noted by Bruce K. Alexander sometimes an individual can be dislocated in their own environment. Just as in *Life after God*, dislocation also plays an important role in *Eleanor Rigby* as Liz has difficulties becoming a full member of her own Canadian society and uses travel as her way to find an identity.³⁵ As already mentioned, Liz's first socialising experience takes place during a school trip in Rome and she evolves as a person and member of society through subsequent trips as an adult to Germany and Austria. Liz's life is at times like the forming of a white Canadian identity, constantly looking back at Europe to discover who she truly is. This is possible, as Andrew Tate points out, because of "modern technology",³⁶ since without globalized technology Liz would have never been able to go out on her quest to search for answers concerning her one-night-stand as a teenager and the identity of the father of her first child.

Europe is also where Liz's healing process takes form, where she gets cured from her eternal alienation and spinsterhood. Liz flies to Vienna to meet the father of her son for the first time since she got pregnant as a teenager, a man who she cannot remember at all. The journey triggers her questioning of the (in)voluntary nature of the intercourse and the accuracy of her memory of the physical appearance of her child's father. Until that point her past is a fully unresolved memory, and thus her future is an eternal blur for Liz. Traveling from Canada to Europe already has a healing power as Liz reflects that: "Travel dissolves you. It makes you need to rebuild yourself, forces you to remember where you're from" (204). In other words, the travel she undertakes already improves her feelings of alienation and being lost and enforces her sense of being. This is perhaps much the same as the trip that Scout took to Washington in '1,000 years (Life after God)', as

³⁵ Alexander, p. 1.

³⁶ Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 33.

he also started feeling better because of his travels and remembered his personal identity because of it.

Additionally, Liz's trip to Vienna also reflects her past and shows that her previous experiences were not as bad as she keeps imagining perceiving them. Her meeting with Klaus, her one-night-stand, in fact turns out to be a pleasant reunion. He remembers her well, recounting her the events of the evening that she got pregnant: "Well-I asked you about yourself. You said you were from Vancouver, and that you were the loneliest girl in the world" (231) and he continues later that "[i]t was romantic" (231) to make love to her. The fact that Liz does not remember anything from her past experiences with Klaus, her memory loss or repression of the past, is telling. It is interesting that Liz is happy with Klaus' version, not ever doubting if he is speaking the truth, and feels "that there wasn't just crap parked away in my subconscious, but also a big and happy memory somewhere too" (232). The repressed past that Liz hung on to for all these years is readily replaced with happy memories, regardless of the truth. Liz has apparently no problems with historical revisionism or denialism. The rediscovery of her revisited past brings Liz closer to Klaus; she imagines in him a kindred spirit and not the horrible rapist she previously imagined: "Klaus, you're lonely too, aren't you?" Again he said 'Yes.' ... He looked in my eyes, and that's when we fell in love. ... It changed nothing, and yet it changed everything" (246). Liz's immediate acceptance of Klaus's version of the truth is troublesome, and over-romantic, but Liz is so eager to escape her own reality that this does not bother her at all. Liz would rather have the cliché "ignorance is bliss", above a perhaps horrendous story of herself as a teenager. In the novel Coupland does not seem

to critique Liz's response or endorse it, but it rather shows the reality of her choices which are probably pushed by her loneliness.

Whereas Liz set out to find out the truth when she travels from her Canadian home to Europe, she settles for another occluded memory. This might have to do with Liz's dread to be alone again, as she points out: "I suddenly went into a panic. I was going to be alone and lonely in a suite of rooms in a foreign city. My Viennese mission had been accomplished, and I was merely me again" (232). It is at this moment in the novel, with the full acknowledgement of Klaus's version of the past and a renewed sense of love, and most important a fear of loneliness, that Liz Dunn chooses to live and makes the decision of trading Canada for Europe. This, perhaps foolish but at least significant, decision leaves her pregnant with Klaus' baby for the second time in her life. The first time was an unconscious decision to get pregnant, but this second time the child is wanted and expected. This is, as Andrew Tate writes, in fact a rebirth – a new beginning.³⁷ This rebirth also functions as a rebirth of her son; Liz will now get the chance to raise her and Klaus' child and care for it as she was unable to do with Jeremy. This theme of rebirth would also tie in with Coupland's '1,000 years (Life after God)', in which there is no physical rebirth but a mental one. It seems that Coupland finds hope for today's globalized society in physical birth and mental rebirth, even if the past or present are comfortably ignored to achieve this.

However, Liz embraces her new life, as it seems that she was dislocated in her own life, and that the move to Austria is part of a healing process. The fact that Coupland sends

³⁷ Tate, p. 34.

Liz to Europe for full healing is interesting as in *Life after God* the move was westwards towards virgin land, wilderness and nature, and not eastbound or towards the old world. Of course, in Coupland's own life he has done both, he has explored the old world to come back to his hometown Vancouver. When Liz, as a teenage girl, disclosed that she would like to go to Rome, her father even argues with her choice: "That's yesterday's world. Go to Tomorrow. Go to Houston-San Diego-Atlanta" (36). Liz typifies her father by saying that he was "only interested in making new things" and that to him old monuments "would be nothing more than a shell on the beach" (36). Liz is not interested in the westward or northward move as described by Robert McGill in his essay about Coupland's works. In fact, *Eleanor Rigby* does not keep to the westward or northward movement, but Liz seeks her healing from an eastward move; she hopes to find answers in the old world.

This desire for the old world, mixed with Liz Dunn's full denial of her own past, raises questions about her Canadian identity and citizenship. When analyzing *Eleanor Rigby* for Liz's feelings of citizenship very little comes up, and Canada or Canadian are only referred to seven times in total during the novel and usually not in a positive light. Liz mentions her own citizenship only once, in connection to her visit to Rome: "It carried me back two decades to the night where fat, plain, Canadian *me* stood in the rain on a rooftop near the Colosseum" (35, original emphasis). The adjectives added to "me" in the latter sentence, "fat, plain and Canadian", show Liz's feelings towards her nationality. In fact, fat and plain are not very positive adjectives, and Canadian is mentioned in one breath with them and thus put on the same negative level. Nevertheless, at the same time, by mentioning this it becomes clear that she does realize that she is part of Canadian

culture and formed by her youth on the West-Coast of Canada. Two of the other references to “Canadian” in the novel come in the form of the Canadian government trying to help Liz when she is detained in Germany for carrying around radioactive material. Here a certain Ms. Greenaway from the Canadian government tries to get information from Liz, without actually offering her any help and subsequently the Canadian government approves the Germans to interview all of Liz’s family and friends. Liz is not mesmerised with either Ms. Greenaway or with the permission given to the Germans to contact her whole family and all her friends. In fact, Liz seems to dislike Ms. Greenaway and her lack of humour and is not impressed by her actions. This again shows a negative attitude of Liz towards her home country, this time in the form of its humourless representatives.

Two references to Canada are geographical: Liz refers to “Canada’s longest red light” (15) in connection to a friend and the second reference is when she recounts how she and Jeremy, her first born, crawled along the iconic TransCanada highway. Neither of these references seem to be meant in a positive or negative way; they are put forward as a fact of life. The red light is a complaint from Liz about the time it takes for the light to change from red to green, and is not meant to address anything deeper. The reference to the TransCanada highway does seem to clearly position Liz in Canada, however. The remaining references to Canada appear in questions from Europeans asking her about what she does in Canada and if she still lives there. Though Liz reacts affirmatively to these questions, here too she remains facetious in regard to her homeland. When asked what she does in Canada she responds with a negative comment about how boring her

job is. When her interlocutor realizes it is a joke and asks Liz about this she replies: “No. The joke is always on me” (189).

Whereas Liz’s father equated the west with all things new, Liz herself compares it to a boring and simple lifestyle. Liz obviously finds a greater appeal in a European lifestyle and European people, an opinion which she propagates throughout the novel. Her mother seems to add to this belief in the grandeur of European culture: “Lizzie is going to go to Rome, and she is going to learn about the great works of art there and ... eat *Roman* food, and [...] become a serious and scholarly young woman” (38, original emphasis). Though Liz actually just wanted to “see naked statues” it is clear that Rome’s culture did have a great appeal for her. Moreover, she evaluates the Austrian boys she met in Rome and argues that “they were all good genetic raw material” (90). The way she describes the Austrian boys is in stark contrast with how she describes herself; whereas they are described as handsome, she describes herself as frumpy. Furthermore, she describes European things, such as the architecture in Vienna, as “so ornate and delicate that it seemed to be dreaming” (227) and the inside of buildings with “marble floors buffed by centuries of genteel shoe leather” (217). It is clear that Liz deems Canadian culture to have a limited appeal, whereas Europe seems to inspire her and makes her feel interesting. This feeling combined with her new love interest and the fact that she feels the need to escape her alienation explains her choices.

Returning to Turner’s frontier thesis it could be argued that Liz is the opposite of people moving westwards as described by Turner. In his book *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* Turner describes how the frontier “is the line of most rapid and

effective Americanization”; this is to say that it “strips off the garments of civilization and arrays ... [the European] in the hunting shirt and the moccasin.”³⁸ Turner’s comment is reminiscent of indigenous people, but can also be seen as the fact that the New World makes, in Turner’s eyes, the European less civilized. Liz, depicting herself as fat, plain and Canadian, in fact portrays herself as being uncivilized and inelegant. She is the opposite of how she describes what she sees in Europe. Her voyage eastwards is the drawing away from the westward move as described in the Frontier Thesis; it is thus a move of trying to “regain” civilization. Turner’s argument surely is that “the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe”.³⁹ Liz is thus undoing this westward movement by moving back to her, as Turner labels it, “Germanic origin.” The fact of the matter is that the protagonist moves back, not only to Europe, but also specifically to Austria and this is thus how she undoes the westward movement of Americanization as described by Turner.

Liz’s current migration is therefore an actual solution to her alienation, her unstable relationship to her community and her feelings of uncanniness towards her home and homeland. The fact that Liz can move towards Europe and subsequently does so proves that she knows how to make use of a globalized world. Moreover, it seems that Coupland tries to depict that in this globalized world there is a place and a person for everyone, as long as you are, of course, fortunate enough to be part of the transnational capital class. At some point Liz says about Klaus: “To think that all this cosmopolitan grown man ever had to do to see the world was simply to go and buy a ticket” (248). Coupland thus

³⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner and Elfriede Martha Abbe, *The significance of the frontier in American history* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), n.p.

³⁹ Ibid.

displays the globalized world in *Eleanor Rigby* as a positive; it brings the middle classes closer to those similar to them in other countries and gives them the opportunity to flee their past. In this case the nation-state becomes irrelevant; what matters are open borders and limitless opportunities for the fortunate few. Surely Liz Dunn does not have a great affiliation with her home country, even if she recognizes her roots, and sees the move away from it as an opportunity. Liz makes perfect use of the opportunity to move to Europe to form new bonds.

UNCANNY LONELINESS

The opening of *Eleanor Rigby* reads as if Liz Dunn is a cat lady without cats: she is hardly getting out of the house, constantly laments her past and present and preferably has as little contact as possible with those surrounding her. Liz Dunn has a strange relationship with those close to her, her colleagues and her family. She talks to them and loves them, but at the same time keeps them at a distance. This distance that Liz creates originates from her younger years, even before her being affected by globalization in any way. In fact, contrary to Scout in '1,000 years (Life after God)', Liz has never really belonged to a group of friends as a teenager, always being isolated from others and excluded simultaneously by her own choice and through the choice of others. This has caused her strange feelings of loneliness as an adult:

When I feel lonely, I assume that the mood will never pass – that I'll feel lonely and bad for the rest of my life, which means that I've wrecked both the present and the future. And if I look back on my past, I wreck that too, by concentrating on all the things I did wrong (12).

In other words, Liz's alienation from society defines her existence; it affects her identity and makes her worry that things will never change. Moreover, Liz, according to this quote, has no past, no present and no future. She tries to block memories, refuses to live

in the here and now, but also refuses to dream of a good future. Contradictorily, Liz both hopes for and fears being alone. What is poignant however is that Liz has never really tried to be part of society. The one exception to this is when she joined a study trip to Italy as a teenager. Nevertheless, this attempt at socializing was not very successful as it left her pregnant in Rome without being aware of the identity of the baby's father. Nonetheless, alienation was Liz's natural state even before she travelled to Rome. Throughout the novel she attempts to use migration as a means to become a part of society as she is poorly integrated at home. This process is thus the opposite of what happens in the '1,000 years (Life after God)'; here Liz needs dislocation to become part of a group whilst Scout needs to return to Canada to regain his identity.

Moreover, whereas in *Life after God* main character Scout enjoys reminiscing about his past and takes strength from past memories, Liz is the complete opposite. Liz "forgets" things which are not convenient and occludes them from her everyday life. Jan Assman writes that:

Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These "others," however, are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past. Halbwachs thinks of families, neighborhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations. Every individual belongs to numerous such groups and therefore entertains numerous collective self-images and memories.⁴⁰

Liz's memory loss and obscuring of her past makes it even easier for her to retreat into her own world. By choosing not to remember, Liz unconsciously chooses not to be affiliated by those groups of different people as mentioned by Assman. Liz tries not to be

⁴⁰ Jan Assmann, and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125-133.

involved too closely with family, her neighborhood, her professional groups or even her nation-state. By not remembering or by purposefully ignoring her past she does not have to bear the pain or joy that past moments gave her. Liz is a perfect example for Putnam's idea of isolation as she is trying to get through life by herself without help or opposition from others – and as such she is proverbially bowling alone for most of the beginning of the book.

Examples of her “forgetting” things are plenty, for example, Liz has an inexplicable memory gap and cannot remember much of her one-night-stand in Rome. Next to memory loss Liz is used to obscuring her past, and she happily makes use of this method to avoid being hurt by the things that occurred in her life, the most distressing example being the relationship with her son. Liz's denied son has always been a prominent part of her life: in the beginning of the novel he is the painfully ignored absentee and sore reminder of her mistakes. It is not until afterwards when she allows him into her life that he is suddenly and surprisingly present and teaches Liz how to be a caring loving mother and part of society. Nevertheless, after this short time of providing Liz with happiness and a purpose Liz muddles his memory again after his death. Liz keeps denying her son's memory until she evolves enough as a person to turn his life into a happy remembrance. A further inquiry into the given illustrations, including some additional ones, will follow in the next paragraphs to illustrate the importance of these examples of memory loss and blocking the past from her memory.

Liz's memory loss and her blocking of the memories of her son would seem an effect of her difficult past, and her lack of belonging; however it also seems to be a family wide

problem. It would explain why she keeps feeling uncanny in her own house. Even if Liz's trips to Europe and her experiences with her son are the biggest examples of blocked and lost memories there are many more examples of it in the novel. For example, Liz's father died in a car accident in 1985, her mother "remembers none of it" and Liz implies that her father "never spoke much, and as a result I have few memories" (37). Moreover, her son Jeremy seems to be having the same issues of wanting to hide the unpleasantness of his life. Jeremy suffers from multiple sclerosis and does party drugs at the same time even though it worsens his condition. When Liz asks why, the answer is simple: "To forget ... MS" (86). Another example of Jeremy's fleeing from reality is the fact that he put off meeting Liz for years. Liz meets her son Jeremy for the first time since his birth through unfortunate circumstances. Jeremy apparently already knew who his mother was for four years before they meet and carried a MedicAlert bracelet with her details when he overdosed.

In fact, it seems that Liz's whole family has problems with the past, even if in the end they seem quite honest about their need to hide their feelings. Liz's mom tells Jeremy: "It's not my fault. It never was" and later continues by saying "We never talked about him – *you* – Jeremy. Ever." (96). The fact that they have tried to hide their feelings and try to negate the blame does not mean that they do not care about Jeremy. The relief that the characters experience when being able to talk about the past and the redemption felt by Liz when taking care of Jeremy is almost tangible. Moreover, Jeremy realizes the impact he has on Liz and her previously experienced alienation. When he asks her: "So you're lonely" (53), she readily replies with "Yes, of course I'm lonely. Who isn't

lonely?” (53). It becomes more and more apparent throughout the novel that selective memory is a family problem.

As already noted, after Jeremy’s death the immediate reaction of the family is a familiar one, as her mother rids Liz’s apartment of anything which could remind her of Jeremy: “To walk in, you’d never know there’d been another person in there all this time but you” (238). Again, Jeremy, now dead and buried is occluded from their lives. However, this second time his memory is not that easily ignored. Even if her apartment is cleaned up, Liz admits her home is no longer a safe haven: “It took almost a year before going home stopped giving me the creeps” (241) and further on in the novel she realizes she “wanted to go home, but home wasn’t home anymore. I could no more live in my condo again than on Mars” (246). Liz is an example of Putnam’s uprootedness; Liz did not change environment, but her environment changed from its previous status quo and left her in a different state of mind. Even though Liz tries to go back to obscuring her past, she is no longer capable of doing so. Liz’s time with Jeremy and her newly found feelings of belonging and love have changed her. Coupland’s choice to send Liz abroad to find out about her past and become part of society does not seem an obvious choice as globalization is not always seen as promoting stronger communities or common remembrances. As already mentioned, Putnam commented that uprooted individuals have difficulty in putting down roots, to become part of their new community and build up a new social network.⁴¹ It is clear that Liz is already dislocated in her own environment; she has always blocked laying down roots, and the only choice is to leave her own community to find like-minded spirits. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, not

⁴¹ Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital'.

every theorist would agree that globalization will cause the end of local communities. In fact, as already noted in the introduction, it can be argued that “nation-states were also once rejected as too broad to produce a common memory for much the same reasons; in the nineteenth century, for example, fears were expressed over the loss of local traditions, and a contrast was made between the "natural" solidarity of smaller social units and the "mechanical", or unnatural and therefore weak, solidarity of the emerging nation-state.”⁴² In other words, the change from smaller communities to larger communities instills the fear of change even if these changes are still functional and still provide new communities and cultural memories. Liz needs to get out of her smaller and for her non-functioning community to find a larger community of which she is eventually allowed to be part. By becoming part of a larger community Liz can also regain her memories. In fact, Liz goes from being lonely in her own community to being at peace in a newly chosen one where she has found affiliations and the start of a newly formed nuclear family. The novel thus ends on a note of hope for Liz, the hopefulness that the future will be better than the past.

CONCLUSION

Life after God (1994) and *Eleanor Rigby* (2004) were written 10 years apart and during those years it seems that Coupland has taken on different viewpoints. In an interview from 1994, around the time that Coupland published *Life after God*, he asserts that:

I began kindergarten and finished high school with the exact same group of people. My parents aren't divorced. It was very stable: the community was incredibly intact. Once the kids left, the parents tended to move away, At the time, it was an amazing uniformity of view. It was literally the last suburb. There was a cyclone vent between us and the wilderness, which is the rest of British Columbia. Being from where I am makes you hyper-aware of yourself as an

⁴² Andreas Huyssen and Daniel Levy, 'Globalization and the Emergence of Cosmopolitan Memories', in *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs* (2002) <https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/916> [Accessed 20 November 2019].

organism and your connection to nature: A. that you're a part of nature B. that you're a human being and there's a part of you that transcends nature.⁴³

It is clear that Coupland's youth is Scout's youth; both have had this stable group of people during their childhood and teens and both have grown up amidst the majestic British Columbian wilderness. It is clear in '1,000 years (Life after God)' that Scout wants to return to the safety of this childhood community, even if this safety net is no longer there. The fact that there is nothing to go back to makes Scout retreat into nature, looking for the closest thing he can get to feeling at home. *Eleanor Rigby* is different from *Life after God* because this safe community environment that Scout had during his childhood has never been part of Liz's experience. The ten years between the two books seems to have changed Coupland's view; whereas in *Life after God* he remembers his strong sense of community, in *Eleanor Rigby* he annihilates the concept. In an interview with the BBC in a programme called *Hard Talk* in 2005 the interviewer asks Coupland to answer the question "where do they [all the lonely people] all come from?" Coupland's answer is clear: "I think we all used to live in smaller towns. And, we all used to live in situations where even if you were a freak or an outcast you still were part of the family. And I think that is gone now. It is like musical chairs. Some people end up without a chair."⁴⁴ Coupland's answer touches upon Putnam's remarks upon the lack of communities; even if Liz still has her family around her, she is not accepted to the fullest because her relatives and she herself feel the need to revise their own histories to be socially acceptable. Other than that Liz has a lack of social connections in general and does not socialize through

⁴³ Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Alexander Laurence for *The White Stuff*) (1994) <<http://www.altx.com/int2/douglas.coupland.html>> (Accessed 2 December 2015).

⁴⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Patrick O'Connell for *BBC Hardtalk*) (21 January 2005) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=npWBqDSUohc&t=2s>> (Accessed 10 December 2020).

school or later during her worklife. In 2004 Coupland does not address the strong community he grew up in anymore, and which he would like to revisit but he shows an example of the loss of a strong community.

Whereas both Scout and Liz have loneliness and alienation at the bottom of their problems the reasons and solutions they have to solve this are contradictory. Scout started from a safe community but lost touch when he and his peers started to travel and work; Liz never had a safe environment to start with. Scout tries to retreat into his old familiar environment, and when this does not prove to work because his old environment is not the same either, he retreats into the familiarity of the almost stereotypical Canadian wilderness. This does not erase the fact however that he is dislocated in this situation too as he wears a full business suit to roam around in the wilderness on Vancouver Island. Scout has the overwhelming need to retreat into his youth but does not realize that there is nothing to go back to. Liz also tries to find refuge into her old habits many times during the book, but for her these customs constitute ignoring past, present and future. Liz does not have the safety net of a pleasant childhood or school experience and she also has little going on in her regular life. Liz cannot retreat into her own past and therefore retreats into the old world where she hopes that she will have a better life, a nuclear family and connections. Globalization facilitates the main characters; they have the ease to travel and communicate easily with others wherever they are (dis)located. Nevertheless, there is an evolution in Coupland's work here too; in '1,000 Years' Scout is mostly traveling around North America. Scout goes from British Columbia to the Eastern North American cities back to the utmost North-Western frontier. Liz in *Eleanor Rigby* leaves British Columbia and all its newness to find comfort in old world Europe.

At the end of the stories both the characters experience a rebirth, and a new chance at life, or as Liz formulates it: “my head felt like a room with all the windows open, letting in gusts of fresh air” (249). It is clear that both main characters do not feel alienated or dislocated at the end of the novels, and both characters have found coping mechanisms to deal with their globalized environments. Nevertheless, despite their effort, neither of them establishes the solutions to full happiness in a globalized society; they are trying to find or form a community around them but – as Putnam asserted – this is not easy for dislocated people. Scout will not be able to hide in nature forever, and Liz will have to learn to deal with her past and, if the radiation does not kill her, finally start being part of a community to be able to raise a happy and healthy child. Coupland does not provide final solutions to changing and globalizing societies, but these two novels very clearly depict the problems surrounding the loss of community in relation to globalization and the unhappiness that can derive from this for individual people. Afterwards it is up to the individual characters and people to make the best out of it and regain a sense of self and community. In *Life after God* Coupland writes, “Time ticks by; we grow older. Before we know it, too much time has passed and we've missed the chance to have had other people hurt us. To a younger me this sounded like luck; to an older me this sounds like a quiet tragedy” (49). It is clear that Coupland is aware that communities are needed for people to thrive, even if life is sometimes painful.

**CHAPTER 5: MORPHING IDENTITIES:
GLOBALIZATION AND THE END OF DAYS
IN DOUGLAS COUPLAND'S *GENERATION A*
(2009) AND *PLAYER ONE* (2010)**

*I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,
And men forgot their passions in the dread
Of this their desolation; and all hearts
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:
‘Darkness’ by Lord Byron¹*

¹ George Gordon, (Lord Byron), 'Darkness', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 614-16.

INTRODUCTION

As already stated before in this thesis, Douglas Coupland himself is a globalized person, he was born on a military base in Baden-Baden in Germany, studied “art and design in Vancouver, Milan, Italy and Sapporo, Japan”, extensively toured the world to promote his works and even wrote for the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford.² Many of Coupland’s characters,³ though usually North American, show similar mannerisms as they travel extensively and display traits of being part of the transnational capital class. In chapter 4, ‘Eastwards, Westwards, Home’, globalization is linked to loneliness and alienation. Both in *Eleanor Rigby* and *Life after God* the main characters struggle with finding their place in a globalized world and badly manage making connections with other human beings. At the end of the story, Scout, in ‘1,000 Years’ ends up alone in the Canadian wilderness; Liz Dunn in *Eleanor Rigby* finally finds love resulting in a small nuclear family. Neither of the two characters ends up being part of a collective; they never fully become integrated in any society – neither in their native Canada nor their host countries. Still globalization is not only linked to loneliness or alienation in Coupland’s works. The latest Coupland novels all deal with the theme of globalization and the apocalypse and finding human compassion through it: *Generation A* (2009) shows a globalized world coming together trying to find a solution to an environmental problem which will otherwise mean the end of the world, *Player One: What Is to Become of Us* (referred to as *Player One* throughout the text) (2010) investigates a group of individuals at an airport cocktail lounge whilst going through the start of a global apocalypse and *Worst. Person. Ever.* (2013) deals with a British man who causes the apocalypse because

² Snagy, 'From the Mind of Douglas Coupland', *Globe and Mail, Toronto* (10 January 2008) <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/from-the-mind-of-douglas-coupland/article18441390/>> [Accessed 23 January 2020].

³ E.g. characters in *Player One*, *Generation A*, *Worst. Person. Ever.*, *JPod*.

of stupidity whilst being on Kiribati. Globalization is a trigger for the apocalyptic settings in these novels and causes changes to the characters' lives and their societies.

Thomas J. Courchene writes that globalization and the information revolution could be seen as "transforming long-standing relationships among and between citizens, governments, markets (enterprise) and civil society."⁴ In *Player One* (2010) and *Generation A* (2009) Coupland explores the tensions described by Courchene, the tension between a globalizing world, new technology, citizens and the government, but, more importantly, Coupland also explores the effects of these tensions. These themes of globalization and especially the apocalypse resonate with his earlier works, e.g. in *Life after God* (1994) or *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1998). Still, especially, his latest three novels show a common thread of strangers, sometimes from all corners of the world, coming together. In light of his oeuvre it seems that Coupland's obsession with the end of the world and with globalization has remained constant or even increased over the years. Moreover, it should be pointed out that Coupland is definitely not alone in relating the apocalypse to globalization. The word apocalypse comes from the Greek word "*apokalypsis*", which means revelation and not the ending of the world. According to Pankaj Ghemawat in "biblical writings, the term [apocalypse] came to denote an abrupt transition from the present age to a future age, accompanied by great upheaval and extreme outcomes."⁵ Ghemawat thinks this upheaval by globalization lies in the disappearance of the nation-state and the opening up of world markets. Globalization is thus, in Ghemawat's opinion, a form of an apocalypse. Coupland makes use of the same

⁴ Thomas J. Courchene, 'Embedding Globalization: A Human Capital Perspective', *Canada House lecture series*, 67 (2001), 1-47 (p. 3).

⁵ Pankaj Ghemawat, 'Apocalypse Now?', *Harvard Business Review*, Brighton, MA (October 2006) <<https://hbr.org/2006/10/apocalypse-now>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

meaning of the word apocalypse, as referring not to the terrible ending of the world, but to a transition from a current age to a future age. By doing this Coupland explores social threats and how these risks could impact the future.

It is exactly in this element of exploring social threats that Coupland's work could be named speculative, as the line between Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction is a thin one and scholars on the subject do not necessarily agree. For instance, Margaret Atwood, in her essays and book about speculative fiction, believes that novels which show a future that could actually take place on basis of our current technology should be considered speculative fiction and labels her own novels about the future speculative.⁶ Robin Roberts on the other hand labels Atwood's books science fiction. Coupland's *Generation A* has some interesting concepts in it which are very technologically advanced, but in principle Coupland does not show any ideas which are out of reach of current technology and could thus not happen.⁷ This would thus qualify him, in the eyes of Atwood, as a speculative fiction writer. This matches with the idea, as was seen in chapter three, that Coupland likes to warn his audiences about changes in nature and society. The most notable event in *Generation A* would of course be the ecological disaster taking place: the disappearance of the bees. In *Player One* it is not an ecological disaster but rather a geopolitical disaster, one which is not unimaginable.

Even though the novels *Player One* and *Generation A* both display the changing of society because of and through globalization in relation to a doom-like ending of the

⁶ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: Sf and the Human Imagination* (Toronto: Signal, 2011).

⁷ Robin Roberts, 'American Science Fiction and Contemporary Criticism', *American Literary History*, 22 (2009), 207-17 (p. 207).

world, it is too simple to label these novels as just apocalyptic. The apocalyptic moments in the novels are averted or even avoided through acts of humanity, self-sacrifice and compassion between the main characters. In the toughest moments of the novels the main characters seek support in each other and form close bonds and by doing so together they solve the wrongs of the contemporary world. Both storylines thus point at some sort of hope for a future in which people are experiencing a feeling of community and belonging. This chapter will therefore explore how *Player One* and *Generation A* use the concept of globalization and (the tension with) cultural citizenship, to come to the archetypical Coupland apocalypse and how this (near) disaster subsequently leads to a positive change in humanity. There will first be a focus on the theory, secondly globalization will be examined as a connecting force in the novels, thirdly, the critiques of globalization in the novels will be analyzed and lastly Coupland's use of speculative fiction.

COUPLAND'S GLOBALIZATION

Mark Levine and Scott Henderson argue Coupland's first 1991 novel *Generation X* was inspired by globalization: "[l]ong before globalization became such a significant concern, Canadian youth were already experiencing its effects. Canadians are acutely aware of issues of cultural displacement. Living along the world's longest undefended border, shared with the world's largest provider of popular entertainment, has meant that Canadian youth grew up inundated with American culture."⁸ Levine and Henderson astutely point out here that Canada was already part of globalization – e.g. the faded borders - before the term became a "shibboleth", and they relate this directly to the world

⁸ Mark Levine and Scott Henderson, 'Generation G Comes of Age: Youth and Revolution in the Middle East and North Africa', in *Generation X Goes Global: Mapping a Youth Culture in Motion*, ed. by Christine Henseler (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 293-314 (p. 296).

explored in Coupland's *Generation X*. Levine and Henderson do seem to equate Americanization with globalization by writing this, but this is done more often; for example Ritzer and Stillman call Americanization a "subset" of globalization.⁹ As Ritzer and Stillman argue: "American cultural artefacts are an increasingly central element of global culture," suggesting thus that Americanization and globalization are intimately related to each other.¹⁰ The fact of the matter is that on the world stage U.S. culture is dominant in many ways, and this means that it is logical that it will have a bigger impact on globalized culture than that of a smaller country. This means that according to Levine and Henderson globalization – even if in the subset form of Americanization - has been represented in Coupland's books since he began his writing career, even if it might not have been recognized as such by readers and critics in the beginning.

Globalization is a notion that is difficult to define, especially since it often refers to a fast-changing set of circumstances. Suman Gupta gives a full account of the term globalization in his book, explaining that many different scholars have given it many different meanings. For example, Gupta quotes Anthony Giddens' well-accepted definition that: "[globalization is] the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."¹¹ Nevertheless, at the same time Gupta explains that because of its popularity, the term globalization is also becoming something obscure, a word that can

⁹ George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Assessing Mcdonaldization, Americanization and Globalization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, ed. by Nathan Sznajder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 30-48 (p. 44).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹ Suman Gupta, *Globalization and Literature, Themes in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 3.

be applied to almost anything.¹² Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh address the same issue and confirm Gupta's concerns: "One of the primary difficulties in assigning meaning to [...] globalization is that the term has been consistently deployed to name quite different things" and this causes "inevitable slippage between these varied meanings."¹³ Perhaps Bauman explains it most poetically: "'Globalization' is on everybody's lips: a fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries: the more experiences they pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become opaque."¹⁴ As with many other notions, the overuse of the term globalization has thus made it a term that needs to be clearly defined when being used.

It can thus be concluded that the term "globalization" is not necessarily clear cut but that a precise definition of the term is important when using it. William I. Robinson notes that there are at least five different phenomena to be observed in globalization from the 1970s onwards:

One was the emergence of a globalized economy involving new systems of production, finance and consumption and worldwide economic integration. A second was new transnational or global cultural patterns, practices and flows, and the idea of 'global culture(s)'. A third was global political processes, the rise of new transnational institutions, and concomitantly, the spread of global governance and authority structures of diverse sorts. A fourth was the unprecedented multidirectional movement of peoples around the world involving new patterns of transnational migration, identities and communities. Yet a fifth was new social hierarchies, forms of inequality, and relations of domination around the world and in the global system as a whole.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

¹³ Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh, *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*. 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2011), p. xiii.

¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁵ William I. Robinson, 'Theories of Globalization', in *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. by George Ritzer (U.S.A.: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 125-143 (p. 125).

These different phenomena make it, as already concluded previously, difficult to have a generally accepted scholarly definition. The first one deals with the economy, the second one with cultural patterns, the third is mostly political, the fourth one deals with movement and the fifth is the changing of social structures. Globalization is thus a layered term and has relations to different fields. However, most academics agree upon some key elements of globalization. According to Robinson these key elements include: the fact that globalization impacted social change and human culture in the late twentieth century, the fact that this social change brought connectivity between people and countries, and, as already concluded, a recognition that the effects of globalization are multidimensional – they influence cultural, economic, social and political processes.¹⁶

Ritzer and Stillman explain these aforementioned facets of multilayered globalization. For example, they define the globalization of the economy as the “[e]xtension and intensification of world trade” and the globalization of culture as “[i]ncreasing opportunities for self-transformation and bricolage.”¹⁷ In other words, they point out that a globalized economy is in fact world-wide trade without boundaries. On the other hand, globalized culture gives individuals the chance for self-exploration and the choosing of cultural elements they like from different parts of the world to form an identity. These elements are thus key concepts which will be analyzed during the close reading of Coupland’s works. It will thus be necessary to look at globalization on multiple levels; after all, globalization does not only effect human relations, but also elements such as the economy and cultural citizenship. In *Player One* and *Generation A* Coupland seems to

¹⁶Ibid., p. 126-7.

¹⁷ George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Assessing Mcdonaldization, Americanization and Globalization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, ed. by Nathan Sznajder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 30-48 (p. 36).

put emphasis on certain aspects of globalization. As will be demonstrated throughout the chapter, Coupland especially gives importance to the connectivity between people through technology and globalized culture, the drawbacks caused by globalization and the ecological and geopolitical concerns.

MORPHING TOGETHER: GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Whereas in chapter one cultural citizenship has an important role to play in the *Souvenir of Canada* non-fiction books, this seems to be less the case in *Player One* and *Generation A*. Especially in *Generation A* culture seems to be globalized, even if, at times, with smidges of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship has been identified in chapter one as the part of citizenship which is not just about rights and obligations but also about common, shared culture and belonging to those of a specific nation-state. Rak ascertains that contemporary citizenship “becomes a way to express a need for any kind of public belonging, and a way to articulate an individual’s imagined relationship with others in a public sphere.”¹⁸ Whereas cultural citizenship as in the form of showing cultural citizenship to a specific country is not plentiful in *Player One* and *Generation A* global cultural citizenship seems to be much more adhered to by Coupland. The characters, in especially *Generation A*, show a common framework of reference of globalized brands and culture. Here Coupland seems to play with the idea that the world is culturally globalized. This seems to link to cosmopolitanism and Martha Nussbaum’s idea, quoted in Bruce Robbins, that a cosmopolitan is “the person whose allegiance is to the

¹⁸ Julie Rak, *Boom: Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), p. 211.

worldwide community of human beings”¹⁹ or Brennan’s: “What cosmopolitanism popularly evokes – among other things, the thirst for another knowledge, unprejudiced striving, world travel, supple open-mindedness, broad international norms of civic equality, a politics of treaty and understanding rather than conquest – can hardly be devalued.”²⁰ Coupland’s universe, especially in *Generation A*, depicts a humanity who looks over their borders both by travel and technology to try and understand and connect with their fellow man. Coupland’s depiction of a cosmopolitan society is not used for minorities or the underprivileged, but for like-minded people of the same class. The only exception to being white, middle-class westerners is the character of Harj from Sri Lanka in *Generation A*, however he has so much affiliated with the white, middle-class that he is hard to tell apart and manages to merge in their cultural framework without issues.

Generation A depicts a world in which bees have almost become extinct. The story focusses on five different main characters from different cultural backgrounds who each have their own chapters and narratives in the novel. All five, Zack, Samantha, Julien, Diana and Harj, get stung by bees and are swept up by the government to be researched upon. The world Coupland portrays in *Generation A* is highly technologically advanced and all of the five main characters are actually in almost constant contact with remote locations in the world – a representation of a contemporary cosmopolitan society. Most main characters are in fact so tuned in that at the moment of getting stung they are all in contact with others through globalizing technology. For example, when getting stung Harj from Sri Lanka is phoning a journalist in New York, Zack from the States is calling an

¹⁹ Bruce Robbins, 'Introduction Part I: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1998), pp. 1-19 (p. 2).

²⁰ Timothy Brennan, 'Cosmo-Theory', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100 (2001), 659-91 (p. 659).

admirer in Singapore, and Samantha from New Zealand is calling a friend in Spain. Julien and Diana might not have been connected to remote corners of the world when getting stung, but both show clear affiliation with the new digital world and new technology. Julien is a gaming freak who spends days in a row in a virtual world and Diane dabbles in online dating, clear markers of the new technologies. This does not mean that the various characters are part of society however; for example, Harj is calling a journalist under false pretenses and has no family or friends, and, Julien, the French character, is more into his virtual world than meeting real-life people. Both Harj and Julien could be labelled as detached from regular society.

The fact that all the main characters can communicate with the outer corners of the world on an everyday basis and the fact that they do, shows Coupland's use of cosmopolitanism. In his novel *Generation A*, thinking in national borders has faded and the masses around the world can now easily communicate with each other. None of the characters show their surprise at this technologically advanced world. The characters act as if they are used to it and perhaps even take it for granted, perhaps much like in contemporary reality. Moreover, they play with their connectedness, and enjoy it. For example, Samantha from New Zealand has great fun making earth sandwiches. Making earth sandwiches entails placing two slices of bread at opposite ends of the world at the same moment.²¹ Subsequently, both parties photograph the slice of bread and upload it to a special website whilst including the coordinates. In 2006, Ze Frank, an American artist, was the first person to have thought of and to have laid an earth sandwich. However, to his own

²¹ Ze Frank, *If the Earth Were a Sandwich* (n.d.) <<http://www.zefrank.com/sandwich/>> [Accessed 9 December 2020].

disappointment, he is not credited in Coupland's work.²² The making of earth sandwiches has no other reason than entertainment, but it does need two people at opposite sides of the earth to make it function. It is thus a way of bringing people from different countries and cultures together. A real-life example of making an earth sandwich is from 21 January 2020 when Etienne Naude in New Zealand and Angel Sierra from Spain made an earth sandwich.²³ The men explained that it is quite a complex thing to arrange: a second person is needed at the exact opposite coordinates, there is a time difference, and only 15 percent of the earth has an opposite which is suitable as the rest of the planet is mostly water. Still, the fact that an earth sandwich makes you part of a global community seems to be appealing. Sierra attains that: "it can help to show how people can work together across the globe...I felt that I was making something bigger than me."²⁴ Something as silly and perhaps trivial as an earth sandwich can thus still produce a feeling of connectivity across the globe. Samantha's use of it shows that she is in tune with the rest of the earth and feels connected through these sorts of experiments.

Another example of the ease of technology to facilitate connection through globalization is found in the character of Harj. In the Sri Lankan Abercrombie and Fitch call center of his employer Harj responds to phone calls from clientele in North America. Harj does not introduce himself as Harj but uses American sounding names and a fake American accent to connect to his customers, make them feel at ease and make them feel like they are talking to somebody nearby. In other words, during working hours Harj denies his own cultural identity to take a fake North American call-center identity. Interestingly enough

²² Ibid.

²³ Owen Amos, *'Earth Sandwich' Made by Two Men 20,000km Apart* (2020) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51171834>> [Accessed 8 March 2020].

²⁴ Ibid.

his knowledge of North America is strong enough to do so. Nevertheless, Harj has a double-sided relationship with North America; he admits that when he was younger, he would show young American tourists around in Sri Lanka who were trying to find themselves. Harj comments: “Oh, the awful conversations I have had to endure, listening to a Kris or a Max or an Amy or a Craig discuss what it means ‘to be free inside one’s head’.”²⁵ Harj confesses that these tourists would usually insult him by calling him Apu, like the Indian character from *The Simpsons*, behind his back and this leaves him wondering “I ask you, is it so wrong to want to kill a Craig?” (28). On the other hand, Harj also shows extreme fascination with Americana: “My territory was the North American Midwest, and the only thing that really kept me on the straight and narrow was the possibility of taking over the highly glamorous, Maine-containing New England Division, located over by the guava bins at the far end of the warehouse” (32). Harj might find specific Americans disappointing at times, but he still has enough cultural citizenship of North America to understand that New England, with its history and ivy league universities, is considered more prestigious than the American Midwest.

Still, Harj is not only connected through his call-center; during and after working hours Harj uses the internet to connect globally. Harj does not do any lifesaving research, or make an attempt to get ahead in life, but he uses the internet to watch *The Simpsons* and *The Family Guy* and build fake websites where people can donate money. One of the websites Harj builds is a website on which he sells (fake) background noise from the homes of rich Hollywood stars. His fake website is so popular that a journalist from the New York Times wants to call with him, Harj takes the call but fakes a German accent

²⁵ Douglas Coupland, *Generation A* (London: Windmill, 2010), p. 28. All subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically in the text.

and pretends to be Werner from Kassel, Germany, because this is, according to Harj, “the kind of place that would be home to over-educated people with nothing better to do than to design commodities like designer silence” (33). Whereas Harj hates being stereotyped by others as Apu, he has no problems returning the stereotyping, whether it be typifying Americans as shallow Craigs or Germans as intellectual. Nevertheless, it is clear that Harj uses the internet to fit into a globalized culture and play with ideas and notions whilst being online. Here, Coupland seems to be depicting the technology revolution that Courchene mentions quite clearly, but Coupland’s representation of it suggests that globalization is primarily driven by light entertainment, commercial concerns and stereotyping the other. Indeed, even outside of Harj’s personal actions in the call center, the call center of Abercrombie and Fitch *an sich* is already a clear illustration of how technology and globalization go hand in hand in the name of profit.

Harj seems to be completely drenched in globalized culture and does not show much affiliation with the local Sri Lankan culture. Harj reveals very little about his home country, especially in comparison to how much he talks about America and the west. Coupland does this on purpose and shows through Harj that the world is moving towards a globalized culture. Coupland is not alone in arguing this: evolutionary biologist Mark Pagel asks the question if it might be that “globalization turns us into one giant, homogenous world culture?”²⁶ His initial answer is an affirmative one; Pagel argues that mankind can now get a similar cappuccino at any Starbucks, whether one is in Brazil,

²⁶ Mark Pagel, *Does Globalization Mean We Will Become One Culture?* (2014) <<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20120522-one-world-order>> [Accessed 5 March 2020]; Mark D. Pagel, *Wired for Culture: Origins of the Human Social Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton & company, 2013).

Japan or Europe, and he sees this as a sign that global culture is dominating.²⁷ Pagel explains, from an evolutionary psychology point of view, that mankind has an interesting ‘capacity for culture’: the idea that people do not have to start over every generation but can build on the ideas of previous generations – contrary to, for example, chimpanzees.²⁸ Individuals also honour those who came before them and invented commodities or laid the foundations of science. Pagel recounts that over the course of history mankind started in small tribes with many separate cultures only to be changed into “chiefdoms”, and “[e]ventually several chiefdoms would come together in nascent city-states” and afterwards “City-states gave way to nation-states, and eventually to collections of states such as the United Kingdom or the United States” or even collections of nations such as the European Union.²⁹ Pagel’s argument resonates with Levy and Sznajder’s statement that “[i]ronically, when national cultures were invented, they were open to the same criticisms as those directed at global culture today. They were once similarly dismissed as superficial and inauthentic substitutes for local cultures that were once rich in tradition, and they were criticized as being much too large and alienating.”³⁰ Pagel argues that this ends up in two competing tendencies: “one an ancient disposition to produce lots of different cultures, the other an ability to extend honorary relative status to others even in large groupings.”³¹ Even though there might be setbacks for the forming of a common culture, Pagel notes that the different unions might become too big and will not leave all individuals under their reign satisfied. In the end Pagel believes that:

Against this backdrop the seemingly unstoppable and ever accelerating cultural homogenization around the world brought about by travel, the internet and social

²⁷ Pagel, 'Does Globalization Mean We Will Become One Culture?'.
²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), p. 15; Also referred to in chapter 4.

³¹ Pagel, 'Does Globalization Mean We Will Become One Culture?'.

networking, although often decried, is probably a good thing even if it means the loss of cultural diversity: it increases our sense of togetherness via the sense of a shared culture. In fact, breaking down of cultural barriers – unfashionable as this can sound – is probably one of the few things that societies can do to increase harmony among ever more heterogeneous peoples.³²

Pagel thus notes that the globalization of culture, cultural homogenization, can be seen as an advantage because of its egalitarian approach.³³ According to Pagel globalization thus works as a connecting factor; mankind will become more heterogeneous because of a globalized world and culture.

The real connection through globalization comes when the characters of *Generation A* meet. Towards the end of *Generation A* the five main characters come together on a remote island on the coast of British Columbia and here they start telling each other stories. It is often said that literature and common culture is a part of nation building; it would thus make sense to assume that the stories the characters tell each other fortify their common bond.³⁴ The characters from *Generation A* do not belong to one nation but they still all appear to have the same cultural framework, a direct consequence of globalization. They all watch the same films and have the same cultural memory, the same references and indeed a similar (global) cultural citizenship. In other words, as they all have the same information, the same cultural background; it is in fact as if they are already from one nation. The more stories they share with each other, the more they start thinking as one collective group. It is clear that though all the characters come from different continents, globally shared popular culture is bringing the characters closer together. Their common

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ E.g. Elizabeth A. Galway, *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood: Children's Literature and the Construction of Canadian Identity, Children's Literature and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 1; Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman, *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing, Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 11.

background and cultural memory make it easier for them to form a new global community, and this seems to be a positive point in the story hinting at the fact that global culture and homogenization are actually not negative. Coupland does not emphasize a flattening of culture but the fact that there is a global, shared common culture. As Pagel argued, the characters in *Generation A* have no problem with accepting a globalized world, and the fact that the different characters have a similar cultural experience whilst being from very different countries. This also matches with the previously mentioned definition of cosmopolitanism by Nussbaum, quoted in Robbins, and shows characters with “allegiance [...] to the worldwide community of human beings”.³⁵ It is problematic of course that this culture is largely Western albeit American, especially a character like Harj has lost touch with his Sri Lankan heritage.

To illustrate this further, one of the characters refers to Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*, and the stories of this fourteenth century book in fact serve the same function of the stories of the characters in Coupland’s *Generation A*. In *The Decameron* the reader learns about Italian life in the fourteenth century, about morals and values, a sense of humor, and life lessons. The stories of the *Generation A* characters are no different: they depict the same things, only centuries later. Just as Boccaccio’s stories give insight into an era, so do Coupland’s main characters. More importantly, however, is that *The Decameron* is a patchwork of stories from different countries and sources, just as in *Generation A*. Both books in fact take art, music, and literature from different countries and lodge these in the cultural memory of the characters. Millicent Marcus and Douglas Radcliff-Umstead explain in their papers how Boccaccio uses sources from different countries for *The*

³⁵ Robbins, p. 2.

Decameron.³⁶ Boccaccio updated various Latin stories and folktales he once heard to then modern variants. Millicent Marcus asserts that some of these stories make use of popular sayings – just as Coupland makes use of popular culture.³⁷ Boldly said, Boccaccio was practicing globalization *avant la lettre*. Coupland might have used Boccaccio to make a point; globalization in a much less technological form already existed in Boccaccio's time. During Boccaccio's life there was an exchange of stories and ideas with other cultures, and perhaps not as much has changed over the centuries as scholars would like to believe. An example of Coupland's use of popular culture comes back in one of the stories of Julien, for instance. The story of Julien, the French character, is about a teenage girl in the United States seeing an age-inappropriate horror film and being traumatized because of it; she cannot stand being near the window anymore. The interesting thing is that all the characters in Julien's story have American brand names such as Mr. Kellogs (as in cornflakes) and Dr. Marlboro (as in the cigarette brand) (207). In other words, Julien – like the characters in Boccaccio's *Decameron* - makes use of popular reference points (brands) and low culture (horror). This use of brands and low culture is well-understood by all other characters around Julien. The characters in *Generation A* in fact understand each other's references so well that towards the end of the book the five characters actually start 'morphing' together: "Haven't all of you noticed that your personalities and your ideas have begun to morph into each other's? It's a terrible pun, but the five of you are turning into a hive mind" (344). The terrible pun, or irony, in fact is that at the same time that hive oriented bees start disappearing, humanity turns into a hive mentality no longer separated by borders or boundaries.

³⁶ Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, 'Boccaccio's Adaptation of Some Latin Sources for the Decameron', *Italica*, 45 (1968), 171-94; Millicent Marcus, 'Cross-Fertilizations: Folklore and Literature in Decameron', *Italica* 66 (1989), 383-98.

³⁷ Marcus, p. 383.

To return to the notion of globalization, the question becomes whether the morphing together is in fact the ultimate liberation of the individual now being able to “bricolage” his or her identity or whether the morphing together points to the ultimate loss of the individual.³⁸ Pagel would argue that globalization “increases our sense of togetherness via the sense of a shared culture.”³⁹ It seems that Coupland purposely does not answer this so the reader can decide for himself or herself whether they believe the morphing together to be positive or negative; what is clear is that Coupland, like Pagel, does agree that it has increased a sense of togetherness for the characters in the novel. More importantly, through *Generation A* Coupland does try to express his faith in a new world order. Harj has the last words in the book saying that “we were the only hope they ever had of moving forward – that we were the only hope they had of finding their way home” (357). “We” in Harj’s sentence are the five main characters and “they” are the bees. The morphing of the five previously lost and scattered souls – much like the characters from *Eleanor Rigby* and *Life after God* were lost - seems the ultimate globalization attempt. The fact that uniformity is the terminus seems to be a necessary evil in Coupland’s novel. Through this coming together of minds the world actually seems to have a chance of being saved and becoming whole again. Coupland does not necessarily dismiss the present globalized world, but it does seem to show a utopian desire for mankind to come together and work together. *Generation A* offers hope, food for thought, and shows faith in mankind without trying to promote chaos or anarchy. Coupland seems to imply that if

³⁸ Courchene; William I. Robinson and Jerry Harris, 'Towards a Global Ruling Class? Globalization and the Transnational Capital Class', *Science & Society*, 64 (2000), 11-54; Eugene D. Tate, 'The Search for Canadian Identity(ies): The Importance of Stories for Defining Identity', *Canada House lecture series*, 60 (1998), 1-36 (p. 36); Beverly Jean Rasporich and David Taras, *A Passion for Identity: Canadian Studies for the 21st Century*. 4th edn (Scarborough, Ont.: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2001).

³⁹ Mark Pagel, 'Does Globalization Mean We Will Become One Culture?'

humans come together to form strong real-life communities it could actually save the environment and make the world a better place. The unfortunate thing is, however, that the characters do not actually manage to solve any of the problems in the end, something we will come back to later in this chapter.

Douglas Coupland's book *Player One: What Is to Become of Us* has many common points with *Generation A*. Both worlds revolve around our modern-day technology and in both books, characters need to lose this technology in order to be able to forge emotional bonds. However, where in *Generation A* an apocalypse was only hinted at, in *Player One* it is elaborated upon as society indeed seems to rapidly fall apart because of an oil crisis. The basic plot of *Player One* revolves around the fact that a group of people end up trapped in a Canadian airport hotel lounge bar. The airport lounge is a powerful image and reminds of James Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century*.⁴⁰ In this book Clifford recounts his reading of Amitav Ghosh's tale "The Iman and the Indian." Ghosh voices his expectation that the men in a rural Egyptian village are probably not well travelled but are very well rooted in their own village. Still, in Ghosh's tale this proves not to be true: "The men of the village had all the busy restlessness of airline passengers in a transit lounge. [...] some of them had passports so thick they opened out like ink-blackened concertinas."⁴¹ Ghosh explains further on that, against his expectations, this had been the case for generations, and that the men's ancestors already travelled and migrated. Clifford asserts that the image of the "traditional, rural village as airline transit lounge" is a powerful one. He argues that: "It's hard to imagine a better

⁴⁰ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 1.

figure for postmodernity, the new world order of mobility, of rootless histories.”⁴² Still, of course, the airport lounge would, first and foremost, be a symbol for people who can afford it. This would mostly be an affluent transnational capital class, still the image of rootlessness – as will become clear - is very applicable to Coupland’s story. Even one of the characters, Luke, argues that “[a]n airport isn’t even a real place. It’s a pit stop, an in-between area, a ‘nowhere,’ a technicality – a grudging intrusion into the seamless dream of transcontinental jet flights.”⁴³ At first, everything seems to be about human interaction: Karen – a 40 year old mother – flew cross-country to meet an internet hook-up; Luke – a pastor – ends up in this same lounge bar because he just lost his faith and therefore “accidentally” stole \$ 20.000 from his congregation; Rachel – a beautiful but robot-like young woman – is there to find a one-night stand and have a baby to prove her father wrong, and ex-alcoholic bartender Rick is hoping to meet his idolized self-help guru. During their stay in this dreary lounge bar the world outside changes from normal everyday reality to ultimate chaos when oil prices skyrocket and subsequently oil is not sold anymore. The reader is not offered a full explanation, but from what is implied in the novel the streets turn into mayhem following these events, even causing various chemical explosions, and extreme pillaging and plundering. Consequently, the characters end up being prisoners within the airport lounge with some additional characters joining in at a later time, e.g. Bertis, a vehement anti-globalization individual shows up and makes the situation worse and Max, a teenage boy who was separated from his family in the chaos which ensued the oil problems.

⁴² Ibid., p. 1.

⁴³ Douglas Coupland, *Player One* (London: Windmill, 2011), p. 71. All subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically in the text.

The beginning of *Player One* appears very close to contemporary age. The first few pages, telling the story of Karen, already make clear how interwoven modern technology is in modern day and age. Karen, sitting in an airplane and feeling hot opens a few buttons of her dress when she realizes that “everyone has a camera these days, and any of those cameras might photograph her” (2). Karen is right in feeling a lack of privacy because not much later a teenage boy shows interest in her. Karen knows that: “this horny kid probably has some kind of sin-detecting hand-held gadget lurking in his shirt pocket, lying in wait for Karen to undo more buttons or pick her nose or perform any other silly act that was formerly considered private, a silly act that will ultimately appear on a gag-photo website” (2). Modern technology and globalization are advanced enough for Karen to feel uncomfortable about the tension between the private and public. In her head Karen declares: “Modern technology be damned” and not much later the teenage boy “discreetly” snaps her picture. In Karen’s case globalization feels as if it is a threat to individual freedom. At the same time Karen makes grateful use of modern technology; the reason why she is flying is because she is going to meet Warren. She met this man through online dating and is going to meet him in the airport hotel cocktail lounge to see whether they are a match or not. Karen is enthusiastic about the location: “How sleazy and how wonderful – and best of all, how low-commitment” (5). If there is a mutual attraction, she will spend time with Warren and otherwise it is “right back to the airport and the next flight home” (5). This approach matches the earlier mentioned idea of Clifford seeing the airport lounge as a “figure for postmodernity, the new world order of mobility, of rootless histories”.⁴⁴ Of course, Karen is a middle-class Canadian woman who has no monetary problems; this makes it possible for her to be a part of a “world

⁴⁴ Clifford, p. 1.

order of mobility” and a chosen “rootless history.” Karen has the option of moving herself to other places and choosing to start a new chapter in her life, or to back out from it at will, because of her globalized environment. Coupland seems to be showing the two extremes here; Karen is fearful of globalization because it could harm her individual freedoms but at the same time she enjoys the advantages of globalization by trying to connect – without immediate attachments – to others.

Rick, contrary to Karen, is not a very good example of a globalized person. Rick is the bartender at the airport hotel lounge bar and gives another dimension to the blandness of the chosen setting. Rick does not have the means to travel himself at the moment; he lost his business as a landscaping architect because of an alcohol problem many years ago and therefore built a career as a bartender instead. Yet, more importantly, at the beginning of the book he is waiting for his self-help guru Leslie Freemont to walk through the doors of his bar. Rick is thus not actively travelling himself but hoping to meet up with someone who is. Rick knows his self-help guru is in town for seminars and it is established that somewhere that day he will pass by the bar. Rick discovered this because his neighbour tracked Leslie’s itinerary and whereabouts through the internet. Rick himself is, next to not travelling, also not very technologically connected: “Rick would have tracked down Leslie himself, except that his PC died ages ago and is now out on his balcony collecting birdshit and grit. Its dead keyboard covers his canister of protein powder on the kitchen counter” (16). It is clear that Rick is both not well-travelled at the moment and also not well connected through modern means of technology.

Rick does not seem to be the most globalized character of the book but is arguably the most tuned-in with other people. It seems that in *Player One* the less the character is connected to the world, the more he or she shows empathy for others. For example, when Karen comes into his bar, he can guess that she is waiting for an internet love interest: “You’re here on an Internet hookup, aren’t you?” (17). This leaves his customer, Karen, baffled: “Honey, you are *good*. How did you *know* that?” (17, original emphasis). The irony is that Rick does not need Leslie Freemont, because as a bartender Rick himself is some sort of counsellor. Rick is used to getting confessions from people because: “People tell Rick the truth about themselves because Rick works in an airport hotel lounge bar and is hence transient and disposable within his guests’ universes” (11). Further on Coupland emphasises: “airport bars have no regulars – just drinkers without roots and with temporarily absent inhibitions” (11). Again, the image of the hotel lounge bar is presented as postmodern, a part of the worldly mobility and rootless. Rick’s customers are transients, going from one place to another which is the ultimate representation of an airport hotel lounge bar. Later again, Rick is described as a great listener, someone who knows how to listen to customers. It seems that Rick, being badly in tune with globalization, does understand all facets of direct human contact.

In fact, just as in *Generation A*, the taking away of technology from amidst the characters leaves them no choice but to connect to each other and bond. Perhaps it could be suggested that this lack of technology and lack of constant movement between continents makes *Player One* a less globalized world than *Generation A*. However, the world in *Player One* before the crisis was just as globalized and technologically advanced as the world in *Generation A*. Still, this constant connectedness to the internet and technology

before the “apocalypse” does not mean that there were strong connections amongst people. Robert D. Putnam’s argument that modern-day society is detached and rootless matches with these ideas in *Player One*.⁴⁵ For example, Max, a boy who wandered into the hotel bar lounge tells about his mother who left his family some time before the apocalypse: “I miss her all the time, and she won’t even answer my emails. She pretends she doesn’t know how to work a Gmail account. And then she accidentally cc’ed me about a barbecue she was having the afternoon she was supposed to be at my sister’s violin recital” (179). Thus, globalization and advanced technology do not necessarily promote connections with others in *Player One*.

In the novel, at first, the characters can keep in contact with the outer world by checking the Internet and through television, but as more chaos develops in the outside world, these means of communication are scarcely or even no longer available. The world in *Player One* at this moment in time develops from a globalized technological world to a world that is based on the local, a place where people are no longer in constant contact with the rest of earth’s population. The scarce information the main characters do get comes from one or two haphazard phone calls Karen has with her daughter and the old-fashioned method of just looking out the windows. The absence of the globalized world, and thus the lack of contact the characters have with the outside, causes them to start relying upon each other. During the novels characters start working together to find solutions to their problems; together they catch the murderer Bertis and together they help Max. At the end of the novel it becomes clear that love interests have formed: “Karen will live in a hostel with Luke while they wait three weeks for planes to fly again. A few months after that

⁴⁵ Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995), 65-78 (p. 74).

they will get married” (212). Moreover, Rachel will marry Rick and together they will have a child. Rachel addresses these changes at the end of the novel:

Seeing one’s life as a story seems like nostalgic residue from an era when energy was cheap and the notion of the super-special, ultra-important individual with blogs and Google hits and a killer résumé was a conceit the planet was still able to materially support. In the New Normal, we need to strip ourselves of notions of individual importance. (211).

The characters come together in the airport lounge from different places to find human contact, to stop feeling detached, and whilst there are multiple people in the bar, they only truly communicate after the implied apocalypse. Globalization, the constant nearness to everybody on earth and the advanced technology, need to be taken out of the equation for the characters to come together. In *Player One* the apocalypse therefore causes humanity to renegotiate their relationships with others in the direct environment and place the common good first.

Unlike in *Generation A* the characters do not necessarily have the same (cultural) references; Karen and Warren are experts in shady websites about the end of oil, Rachel is very skilled in the topic of white mice, Rick knows everything about Leslie Freemont and Luke has a theological background. The characters themselves also struggle to make connections, for example Rachel struggles even more than others in connecting to other humans. Kit Dobson argues that “Rachel provides a clear demonstration of the limits of what can be accommodated within the category of the human, as she only marginally fits the rubric that the world provides for her.”⁴⁶ Whereas in *Generation A* there was a lot of

⁴⁶ Kit Dobson, 'Dystopia Now: Examining the Rach(a)els in Automaton Biographies and Player One', in *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase: Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature*, ed. by Brett Josef Grubisic, Gisèle M. Baxter and Tara Lee (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), pp. 393–408 (p. 404).

cultural overlap between characters of different countries, in *Player One* the characters – all North American - mostly have their own interests, backgrounds and knowledge. Whereas it is clear that in *Player One* humanity comes together and has to abandon “notions of individual importance”, there is not necessarily a flattening of culture at the end of the novel.

Generation A and *Player One* thus show similar patterns; the loss of globalization because of the (near) apocalypse means the coming together of characters. Whereas at the beginning of the novels they were individuals seeking global comfort at the end of the novels they become part of society. In *Generation A* they adopt a hive mind in which the characters have a common framework of reference, and in *Player One* they stop putting individual needs first and start forming relationships and connections. Nevertheless, Coupland does not only show characters in favour of globalization; in the next section the anti-globalization notions as given by the different characters will be explored.

THE ANTI-GLOBAL: THE OTHER SIDE OF GLOBALIZATION

However, Coupland’s exploration of globalization is more nuanced than it first appears, since he sometimes plays with the confusion between globalization, Americanization and McDonaldization. According to George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, these three key-elements should be distinguished even if – as previously mentioned – Americanization and McDonaldization could be seen as a subset to globalization.⁴⁷ Ritzer and Stillman understand globalization after Robert Robertson as being “the compression of the world

⁴⁷ George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Assessing McDonaldization, Americanization and Globalization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization* ed. by Nathan Sznaider (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 30-48 (p. 36).

and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.”⁴⁸ In other words, the world is becoming smaller and people are becoming more aware of each other. Meanwhile, Ritzer and Stillman use Francis Williams’ 1962 book *The American Invasion* to understand Americanization as the “propagation of American ideals and customs.”⁴⁹ They view McDonaldization as formulated by Ritzer himself in 2001, as “the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.” Furthermore, they define McDonaldization as the: “emphasis on efficiency, predictability, calculability, and the replacement of human with non-human technology.”⁵⁰ In Coupland’s *Generation A* globalization, Americanization and McDonaldization are important parts of the plot, and these concepts often complement each other. In the book, Americanization often goes hand in hand with globalization or McDonaldization and vice versa. As said, Ritzer and Stillman readily admit that “the case can be made that Americanization is an important form of globalization.”⁵¹ The fact is that in a setting of globalization, the U.S. is often thought to be taken as a model for the rest of the world. For example, Yoichi Shimemura explains how his native country Japan absorbs everything which is American: from Starbucks, to GAP, McDonalds and popular American Hollywood culture. Shimemura explains how this could easily be seen as the Americanization of Japan. However, Shimemura sees some clear indications that this Americanization is perhaps not as “American” as it seems. Examples he gives are the fact that many companies adjust their products for the local market; McDonalds Japan sells - next to the regular burgers – the green tea shake, the Teriyaki burger and iced coffee, for example (84). Shimemura

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 44.

appropriately asks the question whether this should be seen as the Americanization of Japan or as the Japanification of Americanization. This process could be seen as a sign that American companies need to adjust their products to the various local markets to be successful – something which seems to be a *contradictio in terminis* with Americanization. Besides, as Shimemura argues by giving the example of sushi, Americans are not the only ones caught in this process. According to Shimemura, sushi is sold in many countries over the world and has thus become a globalized product. Like McDonald's food, sushi has been adapted to the tastes of the various foreign countries which adopted the food and is not necessarily made by Japanese anymore. Sushi might be Japanese in origin, but in many cities over the world the globalized version can be easily consumed. In this chapter Americanization will thus be seen as the process of globalizing culture whilst retaining some elements of the original local cultures even if these are flattened or adapted. McDonaldization will be seen as the emptying of culture as it emphasizes a space beyond culture; the emphasis is no longer on culture but on efficiency, standardization and blandness.

In *Generation A* Coupland plays with the concepts of Americanization, McDonaldization and globalization. Americanization especially seems to be put forward in the beginning of the story for Harj adores anything American. For example, Harj has rebranded himself as Apu – after the lovable Indian figure from the Simpsons - because he thinks this is what the American public wants, and this is what he knew from his time as a tourist guide in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, not all Americans depicted in the book seem to care at all whether Harj is called Apu or something else. Also contradictory to Americanization, Harj is unsure what to think of Americans: one moment he is full of awe but only a moment later he mocks them for their ideas and beliefs. Harj's reservations about real-

life Americans are not limited to culture, since, when visiting his American Abercrombie and Fitch colleagues they in fact drink – to his great dismay – Mexican and Czech beer (154; 158). Harj finds this disappointing because he was expecting American products in America; for him the foreign beer shows that America is not untouched by other cultures. It is not the American colleagues who are disappointed with their international drinks, but Harj, because it does not gel with his idea and desire for an America that he has encountered at the movies and on the internet: an America full of American products and no foreign intrusions. Harj has difficulty realizing this image he has of America is an America which, in fact, does not exist. Harj's view is naïve, not taking into account that the United States has always been a country of immigrants who bring their own culture to the melting pot or the salad bowl. At least Harj recognizes his own shortcomings in the end as he points out that: "People want America, not Mexico. Well, maybe at least the *idea* of America ... America before the year 2000" (154-5). Harj's ideas show sentimentality; he wants to return to a previous U.S., even if Harj has never been to America in the past either. The America Harj refers to probably refers to a version that he saw in movies, sit-coms and commercials; not the cities and towns composed of real-life people which he never visited, and not the little Chinas and Italies which are part of them. In fact, Harj sees America as a great big Disneyland rather like Baudrillard's idea of "Simulacra and Simulation." Baudrillard argues in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* that mankind has lost touch with reality, and there has been a shift from the real to an illusionary existence through the signs and symbols that are used. That is to say, according to Baudrillard⁵² there are three phases of simulation before reaching the fourth phase of simulacrum (or hyperreality); the first image reflects "a profound reality", the second

⁵² Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, The Body, in Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 6.

image “masks and denatures a profound reality”, the third one would mask “the *absence* of a profound reality” and in stage four the picture would have no connection to reality and thus becomes part of hyper-reality. For example, if people think of nature these days they think of well-maintained parks and not of the rugged wilderness it once was or when seeing Disneyland’s Main Street U.S.A., they relate it to the real America. In fact, these places are copies without an original, and thus the simulacrum exists in its own so-called hyperreality. Whereas Disneyland’s Main Street U.S.A. is based upon no clearly identifiable current reality, in itself it has become reality: therefore, it is a hyperreality. Baudrillard’s ideas can be applied to Harj’s mindset for he has a pre-formed vision of America which comes from sitcoms and his employer who sells crispy, clean, beautiful new clothing. This vision thus seems to come from information Harj found on the internet and from his communicating with a few American tourists. It could therefore be argued that Harj’s vision is built upon nothing concrete and that he only knows the simulacrum of the U.S.A. Harj has built a vision upon these factors drawn from popular culture and commodity culture, and since he has never actually been to the U.S.A, he has no idea and especially no desire, to discover the real America. He is content with the America he has in his head, the clean and neat hyperreality conceptualized by Baudrillard. Harj’s vision of America is a direct consequence of globalization; without his experiences at his American company in Sri Lanka, his internet connection and the American tourists he showed around he would not have had an insight on American life. The only problem is that the things Harj has learned American culture through, his sit-coms and his commercial company, are also not true representations of American life. Abercrombie and Fitch portrays an illusion of a world of beautiful people and fresh clothing. Ironically enough, it is hardly possible that Harj experiences Americanization if the images he

knows are in fact never any true part of America. Harj's version of America is rather an example of McDonaldization, a bland and faceless simulacrum. Harj is disregarding the fact that America is a real country and perhaps just as globalized as the rest of the world. Harj does not realize that the America exported to him in Sri Lanka was in fact – as was argued by Shimemura - an America created for a globalized world. Harj's vision of America is a result of a globalized world, because without globalization he would not have been able to gather so much information.

As mentioned previously, globalization and McDonaldization are prominent in *Generation A*. The five globalized main characters all get swept up by their respective governments after being stung by a bee and are sent to a nearby (if possible) Center of Disease Control in North America or, in the case of the European character Julien, Sweden, for further research. The characters are mostly in different CDCs; Zach and Harj are contained in North Carolina, Samantha is in Atlanta, Diana is in Winnipeg, Canada, and Julien is in a small village, Solna, in Sweden. In the various CDCs, they are locked up in rooms, which represent the complete opposite of their regular lives. The cells in which they are tested like guinea pigs contain no branded goods and are completely unpatterned and neutral. Zack comments on the neutrality of his cell: "There was no TV, no computer, no thermostat, no medical apparatus, no light switches, no bed controls, no fridge, no books – it was like being in the future and past at the same time" (37). In fact, the room is reminiscent of a container or travel box for an animal, which fits in with the fact that the characters are observed and being tested upon as animals would be in a laboratory. This resonates with Samantha being told by the researchers: "Because science is about being neutral, and our results are too valuable to screw up" (88). It seems that,

indeed, the researchers treat the five individuals as test animals. Zack becomes even more anxious when he investigates his room further: “After maybe half-hour of this, I noticed something extra spooky about my room: there were no logos on anything. There was no little metal plate on the bed showing that it was made in Bumfuck, Wisconsin” (37). At first glance, there are definitely no traces of *couleur locale* in these CDC quarantine cells.

Furthermore, the characters are completely contained from any contact with the outer world: they are left without internet, phones or even newspapers and books, and are therefore completely taken out of their normal habitat. This leads to boredom amongst the characters; for example, Samantha argues that her time in the cell was: “soooooooooo boring, like a Qantas L.A. to Sydney flight that never lands” (88, original emphasis). Even the food they are served is indistinguishable and cannot be placed culturally; it is only later that the main characters learn this is because the food is synthetically made out of themselves. Conceivably this feeding on themselves could be seen in the light of the ultimate homogenization; everybody becomes the same. As there are no food choices left and as there is no individualism possible in the white rooms it could be argued that globalization here is seen as a threat to the individual. All these characters from all these different backgrounds should have and live with some sort of *couleur locale*; however this is not the case: all characters in fact end up in the same drab white rooms, eating the same indistinguishable jelly. In a normal hotel or hospital room there would be markers of what is made where, and in a normal eatery food would be local or imported. Normally products show through style and labels what their origin is, but in these CDC isolation rooms there is no local identity left. Perhaps this ultimate homogenization is what Ritzer and Stillman would call McDonaldization, since typical characteristics of

McDonaldization include "emphasis on efficiency, predictability, calculability, and the replacement of human with non-human technology."⁵³ The white rooms are exactly this, efficient and predictable, especially as the characters have no actual human contact while they live in them. Ironically, even though the room is supposed to be neutral, one of the characters, Julien who is in the CDC in Sweden, recognizes the furniture as coming from Ikea of Sweden, which is perhaps the only *couleur locale* and at the same time one of the biggest globalized brands to have been found. This specific type of furniture, it is a Billy cupboard standing in his cell, is so commonly used world-wide that a Frenchman would recognize it without any problem. Hence, this is a sign that though the cell has all the characteristics of McDonaldization because of its efficiency, predictability and dependence on technology, it can still be recognized as containing branded furniture. This seems to be a hint that even though there is an enormous effort by the CDC to take out all local and global culture through their white cells, globalized products have so much become a part of everyday life that they cannot be avoided.

The only contact the main characters do have is with a mysterious non-human computer voice operated by a group of researchers. The main characters can choose whom the voice sounds like; among their somewhat predictable choices are pop stars and movie stars, for example actor and president Ronald Reagan and actor Morgan Freeman. With the exception of being asked questions by the computer voice, the characters are in fact quite bored in their plain white media-free cells. Suddenly they are left with nothing more than the content of their own brain, and what seems to come out at these moments is how their identity has been formed over the years: they produce commercial jingles in singing

⁵³ Ritzer and Stillman, p. 36.

(which the computerized voice does not allow); they think of computer games and local and globalized stars. For example, Julien thinks of his mother's love of French pop star Johnny Hallyday and confides to the reader that "While I am actually quite a good singer, the few times I tried singing a Hallyday classic in the Neutral Chamber, Johnny's own voice shut me up: too much branded media information" (100). This makes clear that this tiny little room is not so much a safe haven against globalization even if the occupant is being sheltered away from society, but rather a form of McDonaldization as in fact everything is overly homogenized – local culture and global culture are prohibited.

The question of Americanization and globalized culture is far less important in *Player One* as it almost immediately disappears from the plot because of the oil crisis and subsequent implied apocalypse; there is no global left. Nevertheless, there is an important passage that deals explicitly with this topic. Fake prophet and deranged murderer Bertis asks the main characters to:

Look at modern culture. Look at Americans – they're like children, always asking for miracle this or love that, or *Gee, I tried my hardest*. But God created an ordered world. By constantly bombarding Him for miracles, we're asking Him to unravel the fabric of the world. A world of continuous miracles would be a cartoon. In repayment for being an endless nuisance, Americans have become a quarter-billion oil-soaked mallard ducks. (134).

In other words, Bertis believes that Americans are responsible for their own downfall because of modern culture, and he asserts that they need their oil and at the same time, that it destroys them. When another character complains that this vision of the U.S. and its citizens is nothing more than a generalization, Bertis answers "People are pretty much all the same" (135). Perhaps Bertis is referring here to the "hive mind" experienced at the end of *Generation A*. A few pages later he continues his tirade by saying that all other

characters are “a depressing grab bag of pop culture influences and cancelled emotions, driven by the sputtering engine of the most banal form of capitalism” (136). In reality, Bertis is spouting his doom-like visions against post-modern culture at a group of people who have completely lost their own sense of individual identity, who are in this bar to find some form of happiness to a boring, lonely, and, at times, unbearable existence. Bertis seems to take the side of those who think globalization to be a threat to individual nation-states and individualism. The globalized need for oil, and the reality of constant worldwide communication via technology have left the main characters in a state of emotional and physical chaos. So, perhaps it is no surprise that instead of going against Bertis’s ideas and telling him he is absolutely wrong, the characters who are all feeling as if they are on the brink of the apocalypse themselves, start agreeing with him. Emotionless Rachel is even the first to agree that people and things are all the same; Rick follows later and Luke recognizes his own, despised, father in this man. But the apocalypse described by Bertis never comes to completion, and it seems that Bertis’s speech about it was only needed so that the characters could move past the negative implications of globalization – the loss of the individual and the loss of the nation-state. In fact, Bertis is so unsympathetic that it is difficult for the characters to keep supporting his point of view.

Coupland ends the novel with Rachel being shot, and while hovering between life and death, she suddenly sees the future. She sees how order will be restored by the government, how chaos will not prevail and how there will be a return to nation-states. She also sees that all the characters who were formerly trapped in the airport lounge bar will go back to their lives often now as couples together, Rachel with Rick and Karen

with Luke. In other words, that there will be a restoration of human relations and a rediscovery of their individualism. While the characters do not turn into a hive, they do stick together. Because of the main characters rediscovering themselves and as they start caring for others, in fact, the novel depicts their personal healing and rehabilitation into society. Coupland does not seem to take a stand against capitalism or globalization per se, because the character of Bertis, who is vehemently anti-capitalist and anti-globalization, is far too unsympathetic for this. However, Coupland does seem to warn us that in *Player One* capitalism and globalization cannot go on like this forever, and when it comes to an end humans will need to seek comfort in each other on a more localized level in communities and nation-states. Coupland's message here seems to be sentimental and almost utopian; mankind will find comfort and hope in each other and survive the apocalypse.

In *Generation A* and *Player One* Coupland demonstrates a world in chaos and represents, as Bertis calls it, "pop culture influences" and "the most banal form of capitalism" (136). Thus, in both *Generation A* and *Player One* globalization and Americanization are clearly incorporated into the story, even though, as Robertson asserts, the term Americanization is in fact misleading as it only points to U.S. culture instead of the culture of the full continent of America.⁵⁴ Indeed, in *Generation A* the references to U.S. companies and U.S. culture are abundant and a character like Harj dreams of an illusionary U.S.A. which is exported through the products of popular culture, yet America also proves to be full of globalized products such as foreign beers. Americanization is definitely not absent from

⁵⁴ Robert Robertson, 'Rethinking Americanization', in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, ed. by Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider and Rainer Winter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 257-264 (p. 261).

Player One, since Bertis refers to Americans in relation to capitalism and there are various references to American landmarks such as McDonald's and Disney characters. On the other hand, the fact that in *Player One* the lack of oil leads to worldwide chaos shows how much all countries are linked with the same basic resource needs and how these needs are globalized. The oil chaos is not solved worldwide but by nation-state intervention, pointing at the fact that the nation-state is still relevant whilst there is no worldwide solution. Moreover, in Coupland's novel *Generation A* the United States is not as Americanized as we might expect. In *Generation A* the U.S. is "tainted" by foreign products such as foreign beers and Ikea furniture where, under the process of Americanization, there should have been American beer and "Made in the U.S." furniture. Again, the illusionary U.S.A. of Harj does not seem to exist, and the U.S.A. of Coupland's imagining is a global country making use of global products and thus part of the global community. However, for many people it is difficult to fully grasp the difference between Americanization and globalization.

Some perceive the difference between globalization and Americanization as negligible; both concepts show the move from a centralized local world to a decentralized global one.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, there are clear differences between the two. Roland Robertson writes that "[i]f we maintain the distinction between globalization and Americanization ..., then it can be argued viably that globalization is a process involving the expansion of attention to a very wide range of cultural themes."⁵⁶ This definition of the globalization process is clearly visible in *Generation A*. In *Generation A* the main characters come from all

⁵⁵ Sophie Meunier, 'Globalization, Americanization and Sarkozy's France', *European Political Science*, 9 (2010), 213-22.

⁵⁶ Robertson, p. 261.

corners of the world taking their own background knowledge. However, conforming to Courchene's earlier mentioned definition, both books show the fading of borders, the quick development of new technology and, at times, seem to register Coupland's disapproval of these processes. Robertson asserts that "[i]t is much more accurate to say that the world is becoming more hybridized (or, at least in mundane respects, cosmopolitanized), both resulting from globalization rather than Americanization."⁵⁷ Robertson's opinion coincides with the worlds depicted in Coupland's *Generation A* and *Player One*. In Coupland's novels the world is becoming more and more globalized resulting in a common world culture.

WORRIES ABOUT THE FUTURE: COUPLAND'S SPECULATIVE FICTION

In previous chapters it has already become clear that Coupland likes to be a whistle blower for those things which are harming the planet, and as such he makes use of current modern-day anxieties in his fiction, non-fiction and visual works. For example, in his 2014 novel *Worst. Person. Ever.* and in his 2018-19 exhibition "Vortex" in the Vancouver Aquarium Coupland addresses the plastic soup which has polluted the oceans.⁵⁸ In an interview with *Vancouver Magazine* Coupland explains that he cleans the beaches in British Columbia on regular basis and warns the reader that "Everything you do now has some sort of global ramification."⁵⁹ Coupland's novel *JPod* (2006) shows similar

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 261.

⁵⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Worst. Person. Ever.* First Blue Rider Press Edition. (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014); *Douglas Coupland's Vortex* [exhibition] (Vancouver Aquarium, Vancouver: 18 May 2018 – 30 April 2019).

⁵⁹ Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Laryssa Vachon for *Vancouver Magazine*) (1 June 2018) <<https://www.vanmag.com/qa-douglas-coupland-on-the-realities-of-ocean-plastic-pollution>> (Accessed 10 December 2020)

concerns. Cheryl Lousley writes that “*JPod* closes with a scene where climate change itself is made into a commodifiable spectacle.”⁶⁰ In *Jpod* the main characters make a globe-shaped screen which shows billions of years in the past and future of planetary change. The characters play with different ways of ending the earth, for example melting Antarctica. Coupland thus shows that he is very aware on multiple levels that the earth is small and suffering from global pollution and population. As already mentioned, Coupland’s *Generation A* is a novel about five people from different parts of the world getting stung by bees. Though at first sight this seems to be an over-simplified plot, in the speculative fictional world created by Coupland, bees are actually believed to be extinct due to globalization. To be stung by a bee is therefore an unusual occurrence and causes a flood of consequences for the main characters. Coupland bases his fictional world on real-life facts as bees have truly been in decline over the last decades.⁶¹ Philip Donkersley explains that there are approximately 800 different wild bee species living in Europe; of this more than 150 are in severe danger of extinction.⁶² Moreover, Donkersley adds that it is not only bees who are being threatened but other species of insects as well. Numbers given by Donkersley are high: “A recent study suggests that as many as 40% of the world’s insect species are in decline. Insects are facing extinction rates that are eight times higher than vertebrates. In Germany, scientists have recorded losses of up to 75% of the

⁶⁰ Cheryl Lousley, 'Ecocriticism and the Politics of Representation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Greg Garrard and Cheryl Glotfelty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 155–71 (p. 155).

⁶¹ See e.g. Rebecca Morelle, '*Extinct* Short-Haired Bumblebee Returns to UK' (2012) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-18194778>> [Accessed 8 March 2020]; Elizabeth Grossman, *Declining Bee Populations Pose a Threat to Global Agriculture*, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (2013) <https://e360.yale.edu/features/declining_bee_populations_pose_a_threat_to_global_agriculture> [Accessed 8 March 2020]

⁶² Philip Donkersley, *Bees: How Important Are They and What Would Happen If They Went Extinct?* (2019) <<https://theconversation.com/bees-how-important-are-they-and-what-would-happen-if-they-went-extinct-121272>> [Accessed 8 March 2020].

total mass of insects in protected areas.”⁶³ The reason for extinction is partly due to globalization; the accidental arrival of the Asian Hornet in Europe is problematic as “a single hornet is capable of killing an entire hive” of honey bees.⁶⁴ Other reasons given for the decline of insects are, for example, the increase of pesticide. Coupland’s use of the extinction of the bees is therefore based on a real-life trend, and most likely meant to cause a reaction of the reader. According to Jenny Kerber, Coupland recounts in an interview that he “‘just wanted to hurl’” when he first heard of the “widespread death of bees at sites around the globe.”⁶⁵ If bees and other insects would go extinct this would be problematic for the ecosystem. Kerber argues that: “in *Generation A*, the problem of incremental ecological destruction is assigned a more prominent and troubling role, in part because the novel offers no easy solutions to its alleviation.”⁶⁶ Kerber is right as Coupland offers no solutions. However, interestingly enough, bees are hive creatures; they form colonies and work together. The fact that the five characters who got stung by bees start to show signs of being part of a small colony seems to show Coupland’s idea that humans should perhaps come together more. It is without doubt however that Coupland has carefully analyzed the world around him and has drawn upon this particular environmental development of the disappearance of the bees as a possible scenario for mankind's future in his books.

Player One has a less straightforward reason for the end of the world, but it seems to be that a lack of oil has caused world-wide riots and disorder. During the novel there is a

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jenny Kerber, 'You Are Turning into a Hive Mind': Storytelling, Ecological Thought, and the Problem of Form in *Generation A*, *Studies in Canadian Literature/Etudes En Littérature Canadienne*, 39 (2014), 317–38 (p. 317).

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 317-18.

build-up of the rising price of oil: it starts with the regular news on television being interrupted to show OPEC leaders in Brazil fleeing a large explosion which was caused by rioters because of the “light crude oil listing on the Dow at US\$ 251.16 a barrel” (53). Warren, Karen’s internet love interest, refers to Hubbert’s Peak – a global production peak - and shortly after oil goes to 290 USD a barrel (54). After this news, the television stops from broadcasting. The characters use the computer to get more news on the situation. From 290 USD per barrel of oil it goes up to 350 USD, after which the connection on the computer stops working. To receive more news a small group of characters goes outside to listen to a truck radio, and here they learn that Canada is also affected by the mayhem, Niagara Falls has closed its border crossings and there are riots at the Eaton Centre in downtown Toronto. Just after that there is an explosion on the horizon: Rachel argues that “It’s not nuclear. It’s chemical. Oil, most likely, given the black smoke at the bottom” (80). When the characters try to get back to the lounge, Karen’s potential love interest gets shot by a sniper, Bertis, and inside the lounge they learn through a temporarily restored internet connection that oil now went to USD 900 a barrel and is no longer for sale (80). Not only is there major mayhem outside of the airport lounge but the world has also become less globalized; the television, the internet, and even the truck radio are all faltering. Since the price of oil went up tremendously movement through the air or even by ground also became difficult, especially with the explosions outside. It is clear that this is some sort of apocalypse which is going on.

Just as in *Generation A* this catastrophe in *Player One* is based on real evidence; Hubbert’s peak is indeed a theory predicting the fact that oil will at some point run out. Hubbert predicted in 1956 that oil production would “peak” within the United States in

the 1970s.⁶⁷ The predictions of Hubbert were based on mathematical calculations and historical analysis. Hubbert's predictions were not fully correct but close enough to be "in the ballpark."⁶⁸ However, in *Player One* the consequences of the ending of oil are tremendous. For example, at some point looking out of the window the characters "saw a chemical blizzard – it was like watching the World Trade Center collapse, but with coloured dust, not just grey, and with what resembled fragments of hornets' nests drifting and landing higgledy-piggledy in all direction. Daylight had vanished" (124). The imagery Coupland evokes reminds the reader of Lord Byron's poem *Darkness* in which the sun has disappeared, and mankind starts dying out. The fact that it is not quite clear what is happening on global scale or even just outside of the airport lounge causes the characters even more confusion. The disappearance of oil seems to cause literal darkness, confusion and lawlessness – a reaction which could be close to real life.

None of the characters are properly prepared for these events and their reactions vary. For instance, Rachel considers her line of work in relation to the problems outside and argues: "society will continue to need white mice, even a society permanently crippled by diminished oil and all of the political, economical, and environmental anarchy the shortage has already begun to unleash" (122). On the other hand, Rick, who just discovered he is in love with Rachel, does not care about the outside world anymore:

You know, shoot me if you want, you whack job. It doesn't matter because I'll die a happy man. Chemical cloud? Eat me! I don't care, because you can't corrode the love that protects me like a triple wax polish on my old Barracuda. Booze? Don't even try killing me this time, booze. It's over between you and me. I am a man in love, and for this brief chunck of time, life and death have become the

⁶⁷ Tushkar K. Ghosh and Mark A. Prelas, *Energy Resources and Systems; Volume 1: Fundamentals and Non-Renewable Resources* (Columbia: Springer, 2009), p. 649.

⁶⁸ Robert Rapier, *What Hubbert Got Really Wrong About Oil* (2016)

<<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rrapier/2016/09/08/what-hubbert-got-really-wrong-about-oil/#11caa6f32a3b>> [Accessed 8 March 2020].

same thing- living is the same as dying as is living as is dying as is – (130, original emphasis).

Luke, the pastor, is not in a state of nirvana and thinks about the implications: “But a joke is not what’s going to be needed when everything turns black – or not even black – it will feel like the world turned itself *off*” (130, original emphasis). Luke considers everything that disappears “*item by item*” (130, original emphasis); and muses that his father would have loved the situation: his “father wanted to go to heaven and would have cheerfully taken the next bus there without hesitation” (131). The variation of the reactions portrays that every character deals with the nearing apocalypse in their own way, based on their background and personal situation.

What should not be overlooked is the fact that in both novels the approaching apocalypse is hinted at but never takes place. In *Player One* this apocalypse seems immediate after the price of oil rises dramatically and in *Generation A* the disappearing of the bees seems to be the trigger for it. Marsha Lederman calls Coupland’s obsession with these sorts of topics a sign of his being an “anticipator of societal threats.”⁶⁹ Yet this constant hinting towards the looming apocalypse, but it not actually happening seems to point out that there is hope. For example, in *Player One* mankind might be depicted as confused citizens sitting in a bland airport bar – a symbol for the ultimate in-between space – but after the extreme wake-up call of the approaching apocalypse human interaction in fact triumphs. Ergo, human bonding and romantic relationships end the novel. The same could be said for *Generation A*, as five obviously lonely characters find themselves and particularly one another at the end of the narrative. It seems that in Coupland’s novels neither

⁶⁹ Marsha Lederman, 'Douglas Coupland: An Omnipresent Superstar for an Easily Distracted Era.', *Globe and Mail, Toronto* (October 11, 2013) <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/douglas-coupland-an-omnipresent-superstar-for-an-easily-distracted-era/article14832775/>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

globalization, nor Americanization nor McDonaldization triumph, but rather humanity and love take their place.

According to various scholars such as Andrew Tate, Mary W. McCampbell, Marlene Goldman and Mark Forshaw,⁷⁰ Coupland's work is usually religiously themed or focussing on the apocalypse. Andrew Tate elaborates on this by writing about Coupland's fixation on the apocalypse – the end of the world and, at times, the post-apocalyptic order - in earlier narratives.⁷¹ Tate describes the same patterns in Coupland's earlier fiction as can be observed in *Generation A* and *Player One*: an apocalypse brought upon humanity which is afterwards undone by a miracle. Through this miracle: "time is reversed, broken bodies are healed and the world is remade, his characters restored but their consciousness changed irrevocably."⁷² In fact, in a typical Coupland novel, the whole narrative works up to a character change; Coupland tries to make his protagonists into better people. Tate perhaps rightly views this as moralizing; he considers Coupland's reoccurring apocalypse theme as a warning by Coupland against "the anaesthetic qualities of contemporary Western life" and a longing for nostalgia and sentimentality.⁷³ Tate is probably correct in his analysis, as this longing for and adoration of the past is also very clearly visible in Coupland non-fiction works, such as *Souvenir of Canada* (2002) and *Terry* (2005). However, what sets *Player One* and *Generation A* apart from his other novels is that the

⁷⁰ Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Mary McCampbell, 'On the Brink of Knowing a Great Truth: Epiphany and Apocalypse in the Fiction of Douglas Coupland' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2006) in Newcastle University DSpace <<http://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/247>> [Accessed 9 December 2020]; Marlene Goldman, *Rewriting apocalypse in Canadian fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Mark Forshaw, 'Douglas Coupland: In and out of 'Ironie Hell'', *Critical Survey*, 12 (2000), 39-58.

⁷¹ Tate's scholarly writing is from 2007, so precedes *Generation A* and *Player One*.

⁷² Tate, *Douglas Coupland*, p. 154.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 154. and p. 156.

books clearly make use of the theme of globalization to both (nearly) cause the awaited apocalypse but also to show that globalization plays a part in the connectivity of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Globalization could be seen as a threat in *Generation A* and *Player One*. In *Generation A* globalization destroys individual culture. Yet, at the same time, it brings the main characters together because they adopt a hive-mind mentality towards the end of the novel and achieve happiness through this. The fading of borders in *Generation A* and the interconnectedness between characters also points at Coupland's vision on cosmopolitanism. The achievement of happiness also seems to be relevant to *Player One*. In *Player One* globalization also brings the main characters together whilst healing them from previous setbacks in life and allowing them to form new bonds and romantic relationships. These bonds and relationships could not have been formed if the main characters had not been through such an ordeal together, so in one sense the exhaustion of oil and the onset of global chaos were needed for a return to a decentralized world and human connectivity. Coupland seems to build in the looming end of the world into his narratives so that the shock leads the characters away from globalization and back to a utopian and perhaps sentimental version of the world in which life was still lived locally. It seems that Coupland builds his own simulacrum, a longing for a sentimental past that never existed. Coupland's sentimental past is in fact no different from Harj's U.S.A.

Coupland uses globalization and its subset concepts of Americanization and McDonaldization to explore its impact on society – be it because of ecological change or

geopolitical change - and to provoke a reaction from his audience. In both books the concept of the apocalypse is needed to change humanity for the better, even if in *Generation A* that means that the characters form a tight group that erases their individualism, and in *Player One* it means moving past globalization back to smaller, tightly-knit communities. By presenting two books which play with the same theme, and by having asked the same question in his past novels such as *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1998), it could be concluded that Coupland is not done asking questions. At the end of *Generation A* Julien asks Harj “what was the tsunami like – as it was happening. What was it like to be there during it?” Harj’s answers is simple: “Well, it was sort of like right here, [...] and then ran out of force” (355). Globalization in Coupland’s two novels functions the same as Harj’s tsunami: it is “sort of like” there until it runs “out of force” at which moment mankind enters Coupland’s nostalgic past – a utopian sentimentality which accepts modern-day globalization but hopes to incorporate certain utopian elements. It also matches with Coupland’s use of cosmopolitanism; the worldwide community is brought together through the faltering of globalization. Perhaps what Coupland tries to do is best summarized by what Rachel asserts at the end of *Player One*: “Here’s to all of us reaching out our hands to other people everywhere, reaching out to pull them from the icebergs on which they stand frozen, to pull them through the burning hoops of fire that frighten them, to help them climb over the brick walls that block their paths. Let us reach out to shock and captivate people into new ways of thinking” (214). This is exactly what Coupland does in his two novels; he reaches out “to shock and captivate people” into new ways of thinking and, during this process, he shows that the apocalypse is not the end of the world but just a new beginning.

CONCLUSION: DOUGLAS COUPLAND AND HIS OPPOSITES

This thesis demonstrated how, in the selected works, Coupland shows the tension between (cultural) citizenship on one hand and cosmopolitanism, globalization and transnationalism on the other hand. Coupland's national environment is often depicted as safe and comfortable, especially in his non-fiction books *Souvenir of Canada I and II*, whilst the globalized world of his visual art and novels is often bleak and filled with anxiety directly affecting his fictional characters and indirectly influencing the perception of his readers or audiences. Hutcheon argues that "[t]he postmodernists writing today are, like myself, products of the sixties, those paradoxical years of political engagement and self-indulgence. Their work, like this book, may question authority – in all its guises – but often it offers no final answers indeed, it is suspicious of the very notion of final answers."¹ Douglas Coupland, perpetually showing off his 1960s Canadian childhood in his non-fiction, seems to be the posterchild for not offering final answers in his works. Coupland readily admits this himself arguing: "I remember growing up, the stories in which they live happily ever after, and the only part that I was interested was, like, after that. Well it was fun for a while then they broke up and she got into crystal meth, found religion and turned into a lesbian. That's the part I wanted to know. That's far more interesting to me."² Coupland's lack of answers leaves the reader and viewer to wonder about the topics addressed in his work.

¹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. x.

² Andrew Anthony, 'Close to the Edge', *The Guardian*, London (24 August 2003) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/aug/24/fiction.douglascoupland>> [Accessed 11 December 2020].

The objective of this thesis was to analyze Douglas Coupland's work for problematic opposites (for example, irony versus nostalgia; knowing versus naïveté; cultural citizenship versus globalization and cosmopolitanism) and societal changes in modern society (for example ecological and geopolitical issues). This thesis has done so through using the key concepts of (cultural) citizenship, globalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, settler colonialism and the Canadian postmodern. Through analyzing Douglas Coupland's work at the hand of these key concepts it became clear that Douglas Coupland indeed rarely offers answers to his self-raised questions but moreover, also obscures the topic if it is not convenient enough. This thesis was written starting from Coupland's Canadian viewpoint and chapter by chapter moving forward to depict his gaze on the world. The first chapter established cultural citizenship in and genre of Coupland's *Souvenir of Canada* books which give Coupland's personal view on his Canada: it did this through looking at cultural citizenship and genre. Chapter two establishes a theory of the local, especially in relation to how Coupland's local city of Vancouver was dealt with through his novels *Girlfriend in a Coma*, *Hey Nostradamus!* and his non-fiction work *City of Glass*. The third chapter investigated Coupland's visual work establishing the theme of nostalgia and of the use of space-time compression in his monograph *Everywhere is Anywhere is Anything is Everything*. In this monograph Coupland's Canadian visual art merges with his more internationally orientated visual art. Chapter four and five examine Coupland's transnational, cosmopolitan and globalized outlook. The common denominator through Coupland's works is the fact that Coupland constantly makes use of contradictory concepts and is testing these out in different settings. In this conclusion I am going to discuss the main outcome of this body

of research. I will discuss the problematic tension between Coupland's depiction of globalization in modern-day life and a settler colonial nostalgic Canada.

Murky Nostalgia vs. Globalized Modern life

The tension between Coupland's depiction of modern life versus his nostalgic version of a white twentieth-century Canada is poignant but also problematic. It is clear that Coupland is concerned about the global future and all ecological and geopolitical elements involved, but it is also clear that he fails to address Canada's colonial heritage. For the global future he addresses things such as the disappearance of bees in *Generation A*, modern-day loneliness in many of his novels such as *Eleanor Rigby* and the plastic island forming in the oceans in *Worst. Person. Ever.* In his visual work he uses Lego sculptures of faceless cities and dotted paintings of drones and Osama Bin Laden which are only comprehensible if looked at through a camera lens. Coupland raises questions about our global future and lays out different scenarios for mankind, often trying to spark a message of hope. For example, in *Generation A* he promotes a cosmopolitan coming together of the group of people stung by a bee, yet he does not offer answers for the rest of the planet, in *Girlfriend in a Coma* Coupland offers an epiphany and salvation to a small group of people but does not change society fundamentally and in other novels such as *Life after God* or *Hey Nostradamus!* no answers or solutions are provided for even the main characters on how to manage to live in modern society.

In his exploration of Canadian themes, his non-fiction works such as *Souvenir of Canada*, *City of Glass* or some of his visual arts are more often a collection of nostalgic stories and objects reminding of a Canada which has passed, than a depiction of the modern Canada. His heavily-Canadian-accented *Souvenir of Canada* works seem to be a form of escapism

to a “happier” time in a pre-globalized world. His anxiety about the future is lessened by looking to his memories of his own happy childhood and youth and could even be seen as a simulacrum of the past, in which days existence appeared to be easier and all environmental issues seemed, at least to Coupland, to be of a lesser concern. It is problematic that Coupland often addresses Canada in his work, or a globalized world, but not often Coupland represents an indigenous or multicultural Canada. Coupland’s modern-day Canada, especially Vancouver as depicted in his book *City of Glass*, depicts a more nuanced picture of Canada than his *Souvenir of Canada* books. In *City of Glass* Coupland also includes entries about multiculturalism, the poorer parts of the city or the use of drugs, therefore showing more balanced view of the city and subsequently the country. Still, Coupland’s Canada does not leave much space for issues such as the remnants of settler colonialism or the relations between Canadians and Québécois. In fact, looking at his Canadian-set novels there are almost no non-white characters or indigenous people. Coupland’s Canada, consciously or subconsciously, is a product of settler colonialism. The original population, the indigenous peoples, have been replaced in Coupland’s works by the new population, the descendants of European settlers. The indigenous population on the other hand has been largely forgotten by Coupland.

At rare times Coupland does not manage to surpass the topic of the indigenous population and at such instances he admits that the situation is problematic. An example of this, mentioned in chapter two, is in his non-fiction book *City of Glass* where Coupland addresses feeling uncomfortable because of indigenous culture was being taught as his culture in the school curriculum or when Coupland acknowledges that “land simply got taken, so it’s all mucky and undefined” (131). Moreover, Coupland also does briefly

touch upon these ideas through his visual art, for example his hubcap blankets, and his hitches in his *Souvenir of Canada* books and his monograph *Everywhere is Anywhere*. Therefore, he does show some understanding, he is aware at times, and his choice to not explore these heavy topics further in for example his novels is probably a conscious one. One could speculate why Coupland does not go deeper into these subjects, as he is socially engaged in his novels regarding, for example, the environment or geopolitics. In an interview however Coupland gives a possible reason: “It was always just about my own experience” and people relate best to that.³ Coupland’s personal experience is, as a white-writer, not closely related to First Nations, recent immigrants or Québécois but to his part of his hometown of Vancouver and especially the white middle-class experience from his childhood. His global experiences are linked to his extensive travels and studies abroad. Coupland might feel more comfortable with the global, as he experienced this firsthand, than with political issues relating to the First Nations or Québécois. Another reason could be that Coupland likes a simple nostalgic past and a hopeful future, and anything in between is inconvenient and too realistic. Douglas Coupland could therefore be typified both as an engaged writer and a detached writer; he cares about (global) environmental, social and geopolitical issues but fails to show engagement when it comes to some of the difficult social topics in his own country caused by settler colonialism.

³ Douglas Coupland, *Interview with Douglas Coupland* (interviewed by Andrew Cattanaach for *Booktopia TV*) (03 July 2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTc_yzrS87Q> (Accessed 28 April 2020).

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