Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto Study Guide

Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto by Chuck Klosterman

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto by Chuck Klosterman is a novel about the development of Generation X, and how cultural icons both affected this development, and were affected by the same generation. This is not a scientific look, but rather, a personal one that examines the life of a Gen Xer through the eyes of someone who was in the center of a bombardment of cultural media, and who has embraced that media throughout his life as part of his continued career.

Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto by Chuck Klosterman is a study of a generation through references to pop culture. Klosterman, a part of Generation X, seeks to explain how his culture affects and has been affected by mainstream media and popular culture icons. He begins by using movies to explain the lack of personal relationships within those of his generation. Klosterman believes unrealistic romance movies have led to unrealistic concepts of love. Klosterman also points out how The Sims video game mimics life, how the "Real World" television show shaped his generation's singular sense of self, how "cool" is a relative term, and how tribute bands are a statement of the state of the world.

Klosterman then moves to examining sexual icons and the institutional acceptance of failure for children inside the sport of soccer. Klosterman next evaluates all arguments in relation to the Celtics and the Lakers, examines the use of porn to expand the use of the internet, gives twenty-three questions he uses to understand people, and discusses the marketing of breakfast cereal. Next, he analyzes the television show "Saved By the Bell", the effect of Star Wars on the development of Generation Xers, how movies have influenced his generation, and how cinema has changed over time. He notes that good films in modern times ask the question "What is Reality?" since reality is no longer static enough to create movies based on explaining cultural movements. Country music is then analyzed in terms of how this music relates to society in comparison to alternative country, and serial killers, as the modern criminal, are examined in depth from interviews with those who know or have had experiences with them.

Next, Klosterman examines the rising concept within the newspaper industry that people do not want to read. He disagrees with with that statement and believes newspapers should, in light of the war with television news, become more expansive with longer stories, as opposed to writing shorter, more colorful stories. He explains true journalism, and discusses sports writers. His next topic is the analysis of those who critique music in contrast to those who perform it.

Finally, Klosterman discusses religion, born again Christianity, and the Left Behind series in relation to its impact on society. As a complete analysis of pop culture, Klosterman's book is a trip down memory lane for anyone of his generation. His references, while dated, are just as relevant as modern references would be to the youth today. His concepts are unique and entertaining, and seem to have some merit in terms of the examination of Generation X. All in all, the book is a light, humorous, and yet intellectually stimulating book about the development of humanity.

Introduction and '1: This is Elmo, 0:01'

Introduction and '1: This is Elmo, 0:01' Summary and Analysis

Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto is a novel about the state of postmodern America, written through an examination of pop culture. Author Chuck Klosterman uses movies, songs, icons, video games, and other pop culture media references to analyze the world around him in a way that speaks wholly of Generation X. The book is a humorous, thought provoking look at how pop culture molds modern society, and the people of a generation.

In the untitled Introduction, Klosterman explains that his book was written in the stage between sleep and alertness, and that his goal in writing the novel was to explain why we are alive. He admits that he examines this question through the use of popular culture references. He seeks to examine why his generation is as they are, and what influences from his generation were used to shape the society he lives in.

In "The is Elmo", Klosterman opens by noting no woman will ever satisfy his sense of the ideal, and that he will never satisfy a woman's idea of the perfect partner. Klosterman blames John Cusak, an American actor, primarily for this, because John Cusak's character, Lloyd Dobler, in the movie "Say Anything" was the ideal man. Klosterman calls this ideal concept "fake love". Klosterman uses television characters such as Claire and Cliff Huxtable and the characters on Friends as well as book characters such as Bridget Jones to explain that all of society bases their relationships on false couples and friends who bear little resemblance to real life. However, Klosterman also points out that this can work to the advantage of some. He uses himself as an example, and explains that because of Woody Allen, he and other "nerdy" men were able to have attractive girlfriends. Allen made intellectual wit a desirable trait. Klosterman also mentions however, that this too led to failure, in that a person can begin to believe having an intellectual relationship is somehow different and better than having a purely sexual one, and in reality, they are the same thing. Both result in much silence, and Klosterman believes silence has been marketed to be the sign of impending problems in a relationship. He continues to explain that because of films like "When Harry Met Sally", people believe their friends may be their soulmates, and that this too is an unrealistic concept. Klosterman finishes the chapter by noting that we need to worry about how popular culture is affecting our relationships.

'2: Billy Sim, 0:12' and '3:What Happens When People Stop Being Polite, 0:26'

'2: Billy Sim, 0:12' and '3:What Happens When People Stop Being Polite, 0:26' Summary and Analysis

In chapter two, Klosterman examines the video game series known as "The Sims". In the game, players create characters and help those characters live normal lives where they work, date, get married, have children, and do every day things such as shower, eat, and be entertained. After explaining the development of the game by company Electronic Arts, Klosterman notes that the game forces people to examine who they are. His own character shows him how futile existence really is, and shows him how all humans are slaves to their needs and desires. He admits that much of the problem in the game, as in life, is that the Sim character is primarily driven by materialism. Without high-cost technology, games, and other devices, the Sim character is miserable. Klosterman knows much of humanity is similar in nature, but admits he himself hates shopping. He also believes many who play the Sims do so to mimic the relationships they are unable to attain in reality. Klosterman himself tries to have a romantic relationship in the game, but is denied. Depressed, Klosterman calls the developer of the game, Will Wright. Wright believes that people who play the Sims are forced to ask themselves the meaning of their own lives, and that in doing so, can improve their own understanding of the world. He also notes that while consumerism may seem the goal of the game, those who play enough realize that those high cost items all eventually break or explode, causing more problems for the Sim, thereby showing that materialism does not equate to happiness. Finally, Wright reminds Klosterman that many who play the game originally begin by playing God, in that they create a Sim to lock them in a room for five days without sleep, food, bathrooms, or showers, "just to see what happens". Klosterman, who has done exactly that, returns to his game, and allows his Sim to have "Free Will", where the Sim goes to sleep for fourteen hours.

In chapter three, Klosterman examines life from the standpoint of the reality television series The Real World. Klosterman admits everyone during 1992 was watching the show, which was virtually about a group of individuals who argued all the time. He realizes that the producers of the show helped to create mainstream youth culture, in that soon everyone became one of the seven cast members of the show. Klosterman studied the show for many years, knowing he could gain valuable insight into youth culture by analyzing the characters. In the beginning, he notices the characters are like people he knows, but over time, people he knows become the characters on the show. Klosterman notes the character classes portrayed on the show really were developed in the 1980s with movies such as The Breakfast Club and St. Elmo's Fire, and that these archetypes suddenly became the norm for Klosterman's own generation. The cast of the first season alone were real, however, since later casts knew what the shows would look like. Only the first cast was truly real in their interactions, and this, to Klosterman,

was the entertaining factor, that the boringness of reality made for entrancing television. Kevin, the educated black man, and Julie, the anti-intellectual, went head to head in season one, and the two personalities became mainstream. Klosterman blames MTV for portraying all blacks and homosexuals negatively, in that they only cast those whose identity consisted only of this aspect of themselves. He believes, after season one, that the producers began choosing one dimensional characters to better relate to youth culture. In season three, the reality aspect of the show cracked because Puck and Pedro, two house members, began playing to the camera and using the show to further their own causes. By the summer of 1994, Klosterman notices everyone he meets has developed a singular self awareness. While Klosterman toys with the idea of getting on the show, he realizes to be on the show is to forever be asked about it, and to do nothing else with your life. He closes the chapter by noting that if the show "Big Brother" had been played to a soundtrack, it would have survived.

'4: Every Dog Must Have His Every Day, Every Drunk Must Have His Drink, 0:42' and '5: Appetite for Replication, 0:56'

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In chapter four, Klosterman examines the conception of "cool" in mainstream society for Generation X. He begins by noting that his generation will be known for being cool, but that's all, because that's all anyone strives to be. However, he notes, there are some artists, such as Billy Joel, who appear to be great regardless of their "coolness". Klosterman reminds readers that for most rock stars, being great is directly related to being cool, but in Joel's case, the two appear unrelated. His songs are lonely, and Klosterman notes that his worst songs, those on albums after "An innocent Man" are simply ignored in any analysis of his greatness. "Glass Houses" was loved by everyone of all ages, and Klosterman believes this is due to Joel's ability to relate to everyone through songs of boredom and feelings of being trapped and unimpressed. Klosterman analyzes what people experience when they listen to music, and notes that artists like Bruce Springsteen became an icon for the middle class, in spite of childish lyrics that resemble those of Meat Loaf and Van Halen, only because people see him as genuinely middle class. However, artists like Joel are overlooked because their persona is not noticeable. He believes Joel should have been defined by the self exploratory songs on "A Nylon Curtain", which very few people have heard, much like Led Zeppelin was defined by songs such as "Immigrant Song". But, Klosterman points out, Joel's popular songs are often not personal, and his best, such as "Where's The Orchestra?" and "Laura", are seemingly narrated by him about his own life. They are based in depression, and honesty, and Klosterman enjoys the notion that Joel's music is not about perfection, but about enjoying and accepting imperfection. He believes he can't find Joel cool, because Joel makes him see himself.

Chapter five opens with Klosterman and the members of a Guns and Roses tribute band, "Paradise City", having breakfast on the way to a show in Harrisonburg. Randy Trask, the front man playing Axl Rose, notes that he does not want Klosterman's coverage of the show to be against Guns N' Roses in any way, as he believes he and his band mates are doing the band justice. Klosterman notes the oddity of cover bands, in that if they truly succeed, they lose themselves entirely. There are thousands of tribute bands, he notes, all of whom do far better financially than new non-cover bands. To create a cover band, however, is more difficult, in that the members of the band must both be able to play like the original members as well as should look and act like the original members. Klosterman goes though the band comparing each member to the original Guns N' Roses person. Paradise City travels by dual car, since they literally lost

their tour bus, and by the time they pick up the last member, all of them are under the influence of something. Klosterman, an avid marijuana smoker, finds himself very high as a result of their weed. When asked why they are a cover band, the members note they can be paid to play, as opposed to paying to play as most non-cover bands do. The band also notes they do not delude themselves, in that they know their fans are Guns N' Roses fans, and not their own. Klosterman believes they care more for the original band than Guns N Roses' own members. The band is thrilled to hear a commercial announcing their next show, and Klosterman talks with them about the original band, and Axl's new solo album. The band isn't worried, however, in that they believe fans will love GnR, no matter how Axl does on his own. Paradise City takes the stage later that night, and Klosterman is impressed by their performance. As he watches, he realizes these men are paying tribute to GNR in order to live their lives. Later, they take pretty girls back to the hotel, and Klosterman retires to bed. In the morning, some members claim nothing happened, but Randy tells him it was insane, proving to Klosterman that illusion is the entire point of the cover band.

'6: Ten Seconds to Love, 0:71' and '7: George Will vs. Nick Hornby, 0:86'

'6: Ten Seconds to Love, 0:71' and '7: George Will vs. Nick Hornby, 0:86' Summary and Analysis

In chapter six, Klosterman analyzes the concept of societal desire by examining the Pamela Anderson/Tommy Lee sex tape. Klosterman admits that he doesn't find the tape erotic, but does see its importance as a symbol of what his generation desires. He compares Anderson to Marlyn Monroe, and notes the two are similar in that both represent the ideal woman of their times. However, he also notes many seem to hate Anderson, either because of her plastic nature, or because she represents a false female not many can attain. Klosterman bashes "The Man Show" for convincing females and others that Neanderthal men are the norm, because he himself likes Anderson, but not for her breasts or looks. He realizes Anderson represents American society. He discusses Monroe's marriage to DiMaggio in 1954, and how DiMaggio and other Monroe lovers must have felt, knowing she was unattainable, much as Anderson is. Monroe, he believes, was seen as a sexual icon, but in a pure way. Anderson is a sexual icon in an unpure way, but both represent sexually tragic icons of society and both represent what the world values. Men wanted Monroe because those she slept with were idolized men, and men want Anderson because she makes love to the idea of celebrity. After a discussion of why Monroe couldn't have dated a sports figure in today's society, Klosterman notes Anderson can't date sports stars because there is now a vast chasm between sexuality and classic greatness. Anderson, as a contemporary representation of sex, must have partners that are contemporary, as well, hence her relationship to Tommy Lee. Lee is a celebrity because he strives to be, and not because of any greatness, and that, to Klosterman, is the difference. Anderson and Monroe are both representations of the sexual mores of society, and they are such in part due to their complete singularity. They are only about sex. Whereas Monroe represented ideas of sexuality and impurity in a seductive way, Anderson represents those concepts in a direct way. She is not manufactured, like Madonna, but instead shows the world exactly what it values, and what it desires.

Chapter seven discusses the game of soccer as a representation of failed youth. Klosterman opens by noting his hatred of the sport of soccer and insists it will never be popular in the United States because it inherently appeals to outcasts, and very few outcast sports or pastimes also rely on team effort. He notes children do not love soccer, although millions play it, but simply like it better than the alternatives that require skill. Scoring is minimal, as is contact with the ball, so children can pretend to do well and never have to be in physical contact or work too much physically. By high school, Klosterman notes, those who hate sports simply stop playing, and those who like competitive sports start playing real sports such as football and basketball. Klosterman admits his hatred of the sport likely comes from his time as a Little League baseball

coach. As coach, he worked his kids too hard, emphasized winning too much, and was eventually fired. During that time, however, he learned that most of the kids on the team cared little for the sport, but played because they were told to. After an argument with the mothers of the team members, Klosterman realizes that these mothers wanted their children to be playing a sport where ability doesn't matter and drive isn't an issue. In that, he believes, these mothers wanted their sons to play a game like soccer, without it being soccer. He admits he hates soccer because it forces equality, and he firmly believes the sport will never be popular.

'8: 33, 0:97' and '9: Porn, 1:09'

'8: 33, 0:97' and '9: Porn, 1:09' Summary and Analysis

Klosterman examines the state of the world in chapter nine by comparing and contrasting all issues to Lakers and Celtics fans. According to Klosterman, most Spike Lee movies show a white man and a black man arguing about basketball, where the white man is a Celtic fan and the black man is a Laker fan, and that this argument is a metaphor for all of America. He believes this argument shows all individuals are unconsciously racist, and that the racial separation of these two teams from 1980 to 1989 represents all arguments in American culture, because they act as the argument between the black and white philosophies of the world. Klosterman believes that, in that time frame, rooting for the Celtics meant rooting for the Republican national party. The Celtics coached themselves, and avoided anything taxing. The Lakers, on the other hand, had a strong central coach who, much like the Democratic party, had a strong centralized power. Klosterman points out this view is unique, but also points out that an interview with Pat Riley, coach of the Lakers, shows he believed that to beat the Celtics, one had to imagine them as the original Celts, cultist and sinister. Klosterman then gives ten examples of how life is similar to the Celtic/Laker debate. In all situations, Laker choices are American, showy, hurried, flashy, and unstable, whereas Celtic choices are foreign, pretty, stable, and uncomplicated. Within racist arguments, Bob Ryan believes the Celtics were the choice of obvious racists, and Klosterman admits he may be naive in his thinking that they represent so much more, but he reiterates that all people should choose a side.

In chapter nine, Klosterman examines society in terms of internet pornography. Klosterman believes that those who claim internet porn degrades the expansive potential for the internet are missing the point. He notes that it is because of internet porn that the internet even took off. Originally, few knew about the internet, but as the availability of porn increased, so did the need for the internet. Klosterman thinks modern porn sites lend a window into society, and that the internet allows people to participate in a collective conscious, where all things desired are possible. Most, he notes, want to know imperfection is the norm, hence all the armature porn sites. He points out the hyper-accelerated development of the internet forced amateur porn to the forefront, because it was something everyone could identify with. Unfortunately, he notes, much of the porn is dedicated to the fantasy, or to the completely illogical and unrealistic sexual perversions of much of society. In addition, Klosterman notes, the urge to see celebrities naked feeds into this same concept, in that, when naked, celebrities are revealed to be much like everyone else. The internet, therefore, puts everyone in the same group and allows everyone the same educational tool. He does point out, however, that women seem to have skipped this pornographic movement, and moved straight to understanding the concept of the internet without the need for porn.

'10: The Lady and the Tiger, 1:19, 'Twenty-Three Questions', and '11: Being Zack Morris, 1:35'

'10: The Lady and the Tiger, 1:19, 'Twenty-Three Questions', and '11: Being Zack Morris, 1:35' Summary and Analysis

Klosterman examines what breakfast cereals tell us about society in chapter ten. He explains that breakfast cereal was originally a by product of Sylvester Graham's insane concept that insanity and disease were direct results of an individual's bad food intake and their inappropriate sexual desires. James Jackson used this concept to develop "Granula", or the precursor to granola. He used this to feed sanitarium residents, and when Ellen White discovered it, she brought the idea to her own sanitarium, where John Kellogg and his brother William worked. The two developed a corn flake cereal, and the commercial breakfast cereal business was born. Klosterman believes early cereal commercials still upheld the belief that cereal and sex were related, but that few today see a relationship. Instead, today's commercials focus on explaining to kids what is cool. He points out the popular commercials where characters try to steal cereals, including those of the Trix Rabbit, Sonny the Cuckoo Bird, the Leprechaun, Cookie Crisp's Crook, and others. Klosterman believes that teens and adults make choices based on the idea of not being uncool, but that children base their decisions on the ever elusive artifact that is just out of reach, or the coolness factor. Something cool is original without being too original, elitist without being too elitist, and while these ideas are lost to children, their effect is legitimate. He himself is a nonsense person, he notes, and therefore eats sugar cereal. No nonsense people, he believes, eat wholesome cereal. He thinks the search for coolness, and therefore for an escape of mediocrity, is found in the search for cereal.

In Twenty-Three questions, Klosterman asks a series of questions to those he meets to determine if he can like them. The questions include a range of topics from whether a real magician is more impressive than Einstein, whether a person would hurt an animal or horse to spare the lives of people they don't know, how much they would do to spare someone they loved, their opinions of how to use time before they die, their opinions of premonitions, their self-image, their sexual history, their ability to lie, and their opinions of the past. All questions, however, are asked entertainingly in a way that hides the intention of the question. While this section does not discuss society specifically, it does use modern pop culture as a guide for one to determine his or her own life opinions.

In chapter eleven, Klosterman evaluates the television show "Saved By The Bell" in terms of its cultural impact and artistic merit. He first notes that popular ideas are often the most cliched concepts. He uses the example of making a love song CD, and giving

it to two different women, not to be mean, but because his feelings for both were represented by the same songs. He relates this idea to Saved by The Bell, in that the show was a show about high school kids. He knows shows like The X Files require much more to explain their plot, but notes that Saved By The Bell was simplistic, and non-artful. It was easy to watch without thought, and as a result, became part of life for thousands of high school students at the time. He and other high school and college students often watched the show together, and Klosterman believes its popularity was partially based on its unreality. The show, he notes, was neither realistic nor believable, but at the same time, was a catalyst of all high schools in America, where all kids are simply props for the popular people. The plot line is often fantastic in nature, but at the same time, viewers could swallow much of the unrealistic nature. Only things out of character surprised the viewers, thereby proving the show had the ability to suspend belief. Understanding the show, he notes, meant that one understood life, and how popular culture worked. MASH, he notes, was intellectually challenging, but no one learned anything from Saved By The Bell, and that was the point. Klosterman points out the actors themselves went on to take roles completely opposite of their high school counterparts, but that simply shows they felt as trapped as their characters. The "Tori Paradox", where a character shows up for part of a season and then disappears without mention, is, to Klosterman, the only realistic part of the show. He recalls people in his life who disappeared for months due to relationships, illnesses, or other circumstances, only to reappear as though they never left. In closing, Klosterman notes that Saved By The Bell worked because the characters were so unreal, that they were always like someone everyone knew.

'12: Sulking with Lisa Loeb on the Ice Planet Hoth, 1:49' and '13: The Awe-Inspiring Beauty of Tom Cruise's Shattered, Troll-like Face, 1:59'

'12: Sulking with Lisa Loeb on the Ice Planet Hoth, 1:49' and '13: The Awe-Inspiring Beauty of Tom Cruise's Shattered, Troll-like Face, 1:59' Summary and Analysis

In chapter twelve, Klosterman begins by noting the popularity of the Star Wars trilogy. He believes, however, that the movie was originally underrated on its release, but is now overrated, in terms of its value in mainstream society. As the precursor to the blockbuster movie, Star Wars altered the social perception of what a film should be. He notes that the second file, Empire Strikes Back, is a particularly important film, in that it defined Generation X. The first film he saw in a theater, Empire's plot line celebrates the demise of primary characters, and this is why Klosterman feels it speak for Xer's. Generation X, he notes, rejected working class values in the nineties, as they were too smart to find them satisfying, and are lazy by nature. In addition, they believed little in hope, or in the future. Thus, Klosterman points out, Luke Skywalker, with similar characteristics, was the first of generation X. Whiny, over educated with Jedi information that had little purpose outside of a specific profession, in love with his sister, and with a pushy father, Luke fit the stereotype. The scene, Klosterman notes, between Luke and Darth is the essential father/son fight scene all children experience. In addition, the ending of the film, where Luke is forced to choose between giving up his morals and succeeding, or fighting a war he won't win, is the same argument many have once they graduate college. Reality Bites, another movie, held a similar point, in that Generation Xers are perpetually cynical optimists. Consistently, movies such as Empire and Reality Bites show Xers as those who choose a path of higher difficulty in pursuit of higher morality. Just as Empire is the second act of a three part play, Klosterman sees Xers as a second act generation who followed the sexual revolution of the sixties and ended with the fall of the World Trade Center.

In chapter thirteen, Klosterman opens by noting he hated his career as a film reviewer, but does like to read those of others. Upon reading a review of Vanilla Sky, Klosterman finds himself in disagreement however. He enjoyed Vanilla Sky for the very reasons critics disliked it, in that the film was based on the question of "What is reality?" He notes that prior generation movies such as Cool Hand Luke and The Last Picture Show are wonderful films, but that modern film is drowning in movies made for the masses, as opposed to movies made to challenge one mentally. In the past, movies sought to

change society and validate social evolution, in that the characters introduced modern audiences to the reality they existed in. Now, reality is so unstable that movies can no longer present it in a logical manner. Reality is splintered so that no one can explain sociological evolution with any degree of accuracy. Thus, Klosterman notes, movies that question the basis of reality are the only ones still worth watching. In Vanilla Sky, Klosterman is forced to choose between an unhappy reality and a happy fake world, and he chooses the real world. So does Neo in The Matrix, but Klosterman wonders if this is a realistic representation of choice. If forced to choose on a sweeping, life changing level, Klosterman believes most people would choose blissful ignorance in unreality over unhappiness in reality. In Waking Life, the characters spend the movie wandering about an alternate reality and examining how this relates to his normal life. In Memento, the main character lies to himself to create and expand his own reality. In Mulholland Drive, a woman with amnesia is seen as being the figment of another's imagination. Klosterman believes that, combined, these movies teach us that reality is "reflexive and inflexible", in that there is a hard reality that everyone is forced to live in that we can't alter, but also can't know unless we exist within it. he ends the chapter by sharing some letters about Cruise he read following Minority Report's release that prove people choose their own realities based on what they believe.

'14: Toby Over Moby, 1:74' and '15: This is Zodiac Speaking, 1:87'

'14: Toby Over Moby, 1:74' and '15: This is Zodiac Speaking, 1:87' Summary and Analysis

In chapter fourteen, Klosterman analyzes the attraction of country music. He notes that, when he reported on a Dixie Chicks concert, he noticed that the audience was teeming with teenage girls, showing that country is the new rock. Modern country, he believes, speaks to modern civilization and does so in a rational way most understand. Alternative country is vacant and blank, and is a conscious effort to move away from modern country. Klosterman believes these songs feel authentic, but only to those who glamorize poverty and the lifestyle talked about in lyrics. Popular music is often the result of listening to lyrics about conditions that don't apply to one's own life. Alternative country singers often speak down on popular country, but Klosterman believes mainstream country like the Dixie Chicks are more important, because their brand of country is old style with new techniques and a pop outlook, making them megastars. Klosterman notes that the teenage girls of today are the teenage boys of yesterday, including all of their sexual promiscuity, and he believes that mainstream country, or Walmart country, will always remain flexible and reflexive enough to move with this audience. He compares Trisha Yearwood's "She's in Love with the Boy", to Johnny Cougar's "Jack and Diane", and notes the pop culture lyrics and similarities between the songs. Both make listeners relate. In addition, he believes mainstream country such as this is easy to understand, making it popular, as well. Academics and music critics often hold up unintelligible or complex lyrics as desirable, but Klosterman believes most normal adults want to listen to lyrics that make sense, both literally and intellectually. He cites Eminem as a perfect example of this theory. Musicians like Moby, who work hard to make challenging music, will never be as popular as Toby Keith, who writes easy songs people can relate to. Klosterman closes by noting that most people see life as a job and either dream of completely unrealistic fantasy or of simple normalcy, and modern country music contains lyrics representing both.

Klosterman opens chapter fifteen by recounting a time when a female friend of his, Sarah, inadvertently danced with a man who was revealed a few weeks later to be a serial killer. He admits he knows three people who know or have met serial killers, and that he himself is fascinated by them. Serial killing, Klosterman believes, is a modern type of crime, and therefore has a modern feel to it. It's the randomness and senselessness of the crime he finds fascinating. He began studying serial killers in fourth grade, and notes the humor of their cliched lives. He believes he has much in common with many of these individuals, and therefore finds himself hounding those he knows who have serial killer ties. He speaks with Eric Nuzum who knows John Wayne Gacy as a result of his membership in an anti-censorship group. After finding out Gacy was not allowed to sell his artwork, Nuzum sought to remedy the situation. For years, he

had a relationship with Gacy, and revealed he was interested in movies, as well as mainstream culture, but Nuzum admits he doesn't like to think of Gacy's crimes. He doesn't doubt Gacy committed them, but he also doesn't understand their meaning. However, he does admit that knowing Gacy allowed him to have a broader view of serial killers than most, in that he could see Gacy committing the crimes.

Klosterman also speaks with John Backderf, or 'Derf', who was friends with Jeffrey Dahmer in high school. Derf published a comic called "My Friend Jeff" which told of his relationship with Dahmer. Dahmer would pretend to be suffering cerebral palsy for money in a local mall after heavy intake of alcohol. Dahmer was an extreme alcoholic and had few friends. It is clear to Klosterman that anyone paying attention would have seen Dahmer as a future problem. Derf agrees, but points out that his sympathies for Dahmer ended when he made his first kill. He compares the interest of knowing Dahmer to someone who knows a celebrity, but Klosterman thinks serial killer fame is much more authentic, in that there are thousands of young, pretty people, but few who senselessly murder others. Derf and Sarah both agree that their relationship with a serial killer means nothing, but Klosterman is unsure, and believes that to know one is to know the "darkest kind of power". Klosterman, in his final note, mentions his belief that nearly everyone can be described in a single sentence.

'16: All I Know is What I Read in the Papers, 2:03', '17: I, Rock Chump, 2:19' and '18: How To Disappear Completely and Never Be Found, 2:28'

'16: All I Know is What I Read in the Papers, 2:03', '17: I, Rock Chump, 2:19' and '18: How To Disappear Completely and Never Be Found, 2:28' Summary and Analysis

In chapter sixteen, Klosterman responds to critics who bash the media by agreeing they should hate it, but notes they hate it for the wrong reasons. First, Klosterman notes, journalists really do not have agendas. Instead, he insists, bias in journalism often stems from whomever called a reporter back first. He believes most reporters spend so much time trying to eradicate emotion that they wind up with none, and therefore cannot possibly have any emotional bias when reporting. Instead, whomever calls the reporter back first ends up driving the story, because all interviews that follow will be directly influenced by who spoke first. In addition, he notes, timing affects a story, in that the life of the reporter may dictate where he or she is at a certain time, and that can influence a story. He also points out that people need to mistrust the right staff. It is not the reporter who manipulates wording, but the copy editors, who make sure editorial information is removed from the story, and blatantly insert false information, such as the word "alleged" in a story about a man who openly shot people in front of witnesses. This is necessary for journalism, but does create the air of fiction. He thinks many seek editorials for their factual information to overcome this, but notes these too are full of information only those who already agree can relate to. Instead of inserting lies, these individuals omit facts. The end result is the same.

Klosterman also points out that sports writers hate their jobs. Over time, conversations with high schoolers who don't want to talk, college students who commit crimes and still remain on the team, and professionals who, without sport talent, would be in jail tend to jade the reporter. In addition, sports reporters find no one will speak to them about anything other than sports.

Klosterman also notes that the latest trends that support celebrity journalism also promote the concept of lies in the media. Often, he notes, the person being interviewed knows little of the character they play in a film or show, and the reporter is forced to use conjecture to fill in the blanks of the interview.

Finally, Klosterman sarcastically discusses the notion that people who read newspapers don't want long, complicated stories, but instead want short stories with pictures. Page

designers, he notes, now run the industry as they design the paper everyone sees. Klosterman thinks this notion is against journalism and that newspapers should focus on providing more news and longer stories to combat the fast-paced news delivery system of television. Klosterman believes that to do less is to lead the reader to the stereotype that already exists.

Klosterman recounts his experience at the Pop Music Studies conference in 2002 in chapter seventeen. The conference brought together a group of highly respected intellectuals in the music industry. As Klosterman discovers, however, these individuals are truly intellectuals. They rarely drink, there are no drugs, and the conversation is solely about music few have heard of. Klosterman, the first night, skips the meal and instead goes to a local bar and gets drunk. The following morning he is surprised that he is the only person who appears to be late to the conference. He attends meetings where everyone pretends to love all types of music, and where speakers attempt to prove they can think of music in the abstract. Klosterman laments that the papers presented at the conference are detached from reality, but also notes some are daringly honest. However, at the final event of the conference, four musicians take the stage and prove to Klosterman through their silence and their clear distaste at being there that musicians do not think of music in a new way. He leaves, knowing that anyone who believes pursuing an analysis of music at an intellectual level is wasting their time, since the musicians themselves do not emphasize the intellectual.

In the final chapter of the book, Klosterman discusses the world in terms of the religious series "Left Behind". "Left Behind" is a series of books revolving around the rapture. The book follows those left behind following the rapture as they fight the Antichrist. The book's hero, Buck Williams, shares the name of a professional athlete, which leads Klosterman to note the large number of athletes who are obsessed with God. Klosterman finds this odd, considering the number of players arrested for heinous crimes, but he also notes the belief in God has helped some players. This belief in God has helped others, too, including Kirk Cameron, who played the main character of the movie version of Left Behind. Klosterman points out that a born again Christian, like Cameron, has one purpose alone, and that is to convert others. He admires that ability to have a sole purpose. However, Klosterman does take issue with the book's assumption that all children are innocents, and therefore are taken in the rapture. He asserts that children are cruel, and should not be deemed not responsible. The fundamental question of the book, he notes, is who is taken during the Rapture? The book, through its characters, assures readers that only those who accept Christ and have faith are allowed into heaven.

Klosterman's issue with the book is that the justification for faith is fear. He notes that he is unable to accept born again Christians because the urge to do good cannot be the only driving force behind salvation, or those who do things they believe are good, such as Hitler, would be just as apt to be saved. Klosterman compares Left Behind with two other religious films, those of The Rapture and The Omega Code, and notes that both were substantially more successful. He believes this was because Left Behind was released on video before theaters, and that on the video, Cameron tells viewers to urge everyone they know to see the film in theaters. Klosterman sees this as proof that the

Left Behind series had a moral point, and did seek social change. On the other hand, he realizes this could have simply been a marketing scheme to make more money. He notes he is thankful for being born Catholic.

Excerpt from Downtown Owl and Excerpt from Eating the Dinosaur

Excerpt from Downtown Owl and Excerpt from Eating the Dinosaur Summary and Analysis

In the excerpt from "Downtown Owl", three characters from the story are discussed, those of Mitch, Julia, and Horace. Mitch is a high school football player who is angry at his coach, Laidlaw, who keeps impregnating high school girls. The name of the team is discussed, as is Laidlaw's demands for the team to ignore rumors. Julia is a new teacher at the school and already hates the town. After a meeting with the principal, she goes home to her small apartment to smoke several joints. Horace, an older gentleman, and his cronies, discuss the local events, including a fight in a bar with the local drunken bartender. In the excerpt from "Eating the Dinosaur", Klosterman discusses his views of time travel in relation to movies, books, and other media on the subject.

Characters

Chuck Klosterman

As the only true character in the book, Chuck Klosterman is the author of the novel, and the only point of view given in the story. Klosterman is bright, inquisitive, and an admitted member of Generation X. He is also a self proclaimed 'nerdy' guy. Klosterman has written the book as a series of essays, claiming they were written in the wee hours of the morning, when things become most clear. His work is not based on scientific research, but is instead a journey through his life to discover the reasons and motivations of people within his generation. He uses cultural phenomenon such as Pamela Anderson's sex tape, Saved By The Bell, and Fight Club to explain a generation of individuals he considers lazy, depressed, but sarcastically optimistic. Klosterman doesn't seek to excuse these characteristics, but does seek to discover their roots, and their effects of the culture that has stemmed from the generation. He not only examines himself through these icons, but also examines his generation's impact on the entertainment industry in general. Klosterman's style is witty, easy to read, and extremely funny while still being educational, in a sense. Overall, his stories are enlightening and relative to his overall point that pop culture helps define who we are, just as we help define what can be considered pop culture.

John Cusack

John Cusack is an American actor who played primary teen roles during the 80s and 90s. In particular, cusack played the character of Lloyd Dobler in a film called 'Say Anything' with Ione Sky. In the film, Cusack's role was one of a gentle, caring, honest, sincere teen who adored Ione's character. Klosterman notes that miost women of generation X fell in love with this character, and that this is who they dream of when they think of the ideal man. Unfortunately, Klosterman points out, this character is not real, and is unattainable. It is not Cusack women want, Klosterman assures readers, but the character of Lloyd Dobler. Women can see other films of Cusack's such as Grosse Pointe Blank and not have the same passionate reaction, but with Say Anything, the desire for Cusack is clear. Klosterman blames Cusack for his inability to please women, in that Cusack has led an example that is not replicable.

Woody Allen

Woody Allen is an America film director of movies such as Manhattan and Annie Hall. Klosterman credits Allen with allowing nerdy males of generation X to have sexual relationships with pretty women. According to him, Allen presented the concept in film that intellectual wit was a stimulating quality, and as a result, relationships stemming from intellect were more satisfying than those stemming from sexuality. Because of Allen's films, which often revolved around Allen himself as the nerdy character,

intellectual men were seen as desirable. It became not only popular to have intellect as the focus of relationships, but also a main component, and to Klosterman, this represents pure genius. Most women who saw Allen as a person, he reminds readers, wouldn't classify him as sexy or desirable, but through his films, those like him became just that. The emphasis was placed on the essence of happiness as opposed to beauty, and this, Klosterman notes, was the reason he and many others were able to have sex with anyone who was remotely attractive.

Will Wright

Will Wright, who works for Electronic Arts, is the creator of the Sims game series. Sims, a role playing game of reality, began with SimCity, where players could build cities and manage them. Next came SimEarth where players helped evolution by creating a proper planet. The Sims, though, was a game where players actually created computer versions of people, and led them through their normal lives of drinking, eating, working, sleeping, showering, and enjoying life. When Klosterman plays The Sims and begins to question its motives, he calls Wright. Wright explains that the Sims sometimes allows people to see something within themselves they otherwise were unaware of. He notes that the goal of The Sims is to show that although buying new technology and other goodies makes a person (or a Sim) happy, those material possessions eventually explode, causing grief and anguish. In reality, happiness is fostered by relationships, which is why Sims are able to marry, have children, and have friends. Wright also explains that people, on first playing the game, often see themselves as God, and do experiments on their Sim, such as locking them in a room without food or water. However, he notes, at some point that power becomes boring, as there is no one pushing back.

Billy Joel

Billy Joel is a musician who was popular in the 70's and 80's. Klosterman believes Joel was cool because he didn't try to be. His music was often about loneliness and boredom, and as a result, was easy to identify with for a wide range of audiences. Joel's more popular songs, Klosterman believes, were manufactured by the record companies to sell more records, but his truly great songs are those that are personal, raw, and meaningful. Joel did not seek to dress for the masses, or sing for the masses, but rather, to be himself, and Klosterman finds that cool. He believes Joel represents the truly cool of generation X musical influences.

Randy Trask / Axl Rose

Randy Trask is the front man for a Guns N Roses cover band called Paradise City. Trask plays the role of Axl Rose, the singer of Guns N Roses. Trask does not believe he and his band represent GNR, but that they are a tribute to them as a band. First and foremost, Trask seeks to ensure that the dignity of the band is maintained, which is a

concept Klosterman finds humorous, since the real band never sought dignity. Trask informs Klosterman that the band members are in a cover band because it allows them pre-made fans and arenas where they can play and be paid. Many original bands, he notes, have to pay an arena to play there, only to have very few people show up. To Trask, a cover band of GNR allows the group to live the life of GNR while still making a living.

Pamela Anderson

Pamela Anderson is an American actress in the 1990s who, according to Klosterman, represents the modern day equivalent of sex in an era where sex is no longer particularly desirable. Anderson is a 'Barbie Doll', Klosterman believes, and appeals to the base desires of all modern males. She is blond, with large breasts, a perfect body, and she clearly enjoys the act of having sex. She and her then husband, Tommy Lee from the band Motley Crue, created a sex tape that shot an already famous Anderson to stardom. Klosterman believes men idolize Anderson because she is the idealization of all things sexual. He compares Anderson to Marilyn Monroe, in that both are sexual icons, and victims of modern society.

Marilyn Monroe

Marilyn Monroe was an American actress and singer in the 1950's who, according to Klosterman, represented the concept of sexuality in an era when sexuality was taboo. Monroe was a dark character, often suicidal and depressed, and was linked to several famous individuals over the years. Her sexual partners often included famous sports figures, musicians, presidents, and other business leaders. Klosterman believes Monroe was so adored because she was having relations with people others wanted to be. She was talented, but a victim of her own society, who chose to see her as a pure symbol of sex.

Tom Cruise

Tom Cruise is an American actor who plays in the film Vanilla Sky. He is part of popular culture, and Klosterman generally dislikes most things Cruse stands for. In Vanilla Sky, however, Cruse's character plays a handsome man forced to choose between a fake life that is happy but unsatisfying, and a real life that is miserable, but real. Cruse's characters chooses the latter. It is Cruse's portrayal of the character in the film that he finds entertaining, and he points out later his dislike for the man himself. Additionally, Klosterman does slam Cruse for his Scientology beliefs.

John Wayne Gacy

John Wayne Gacy is a serial killer. Known most for dressing as a clown for children's birthday parties, Gacy often raped and sodomized young boys before killing them. His

crimes were, according to his own statements, sexually based and not violence based. He never harmed animals growing up or other human beings until his first kill. Gacy was an amateur artist, and sought to sell his paintings from prison. he was helped by Eric Nuzum, who later gave an interview about Gacy to Klosterman. According to Nuzum, Gacy liked popular culture such as action movies, and was not a bright individual. Nuzum admits that after getting to know Gacy, he could see him being the monster he was. Klosterman finds men like Gacy a symptom of a hyper-reality based culture, and sees their crimes as the darkest, since they are random and without logic or reason.

Jeffrey Dahmer

Jeffrey Dahmer is a serial killer / cannibal. An alcoholic, self hating homosexual, Dahmer was convicted of killing and partially eating young boys. Dahmer, as a youth, would drink heavily often, and was made fun of on a consistent basis. His few friends would pay him to pretend to have cerebral palsy at a local mall, just for laughs. A friend, John Backderf, explains to Klosterman in the book that had anyone been paying attention, it was clear that Dahmer was disturbed and needed assistance. However, he also notes that all sympathy for Dahmer left when he began killing others. Klosterman finds serial killers a symbol of modern culture.

Kirk Cameron

Kirk Cameron is an actor best known for his role as Mike Seaver on the family sitcom, "Growing Pains". Cameron, at age eighteen, went through a religious reawakening, and has since sought to bring the message of God to others. Cameron plays Buck Williams, the lead role, in the film adaptation of 'Left Behind', a highly religious film about life after the Rapture. He also introduced the film on its video release, and asked those who purchased the video to rally for a theater showing in their areas. Cameron represents the born again Christian to Klosterman, who he idolizes for their sincerity.

Objects/Places

Paradise City / Guns N' Roses

Paradise City is the name of a Guns N' Roses cover band that Klosterman follows for a story. Guns N'

Roses is a metal band from the 1990s.

Pamela Anderson / Tommy Lee Tape

The Pamela Anderson / Tommy Lee tape was a videotape of Anderson and Lee having sexual relations that became an internet sensation when it was aired online .

Cocoa Puffs of Power

Klosterman's concept of the Cocoa Puffs of Power is the idea that the marketing of breakfast cereals relies on the idea that coolness is unattainable.

Tori Paradox

Klosterman explains the Tori Paradox as the situation that occurs in life when members of your social network suddenly disappear and reappear without explanation. In the case of Saved By The Bell, Tori appeared halfway through the season, and then disappeared at the end, without mention.

Vanilla Sky

Vanilla Sky was a movie starring Tom Cruse that Klosterman uses as an example of decent films that ask the question "What is reality?".

Dixie Chicks

The Dixie Chicks are a country band Klosterman believes will be popular for a long time due to their ability to relate to mainstream culture.

Left Behind

Left Behind is a book series, as well as a movie, that focuses on the the Earth following the Rapture. The movie stars Kirk Cameron, of the television show Growing Pains.

Themes

Pop Culture's Relationship to Societal Desires

One of Klosterman's main points in the novel is that pop culture can be a mirror of societal needs and desires, as well as a leading force for those desires. In one sense, pop culture is simply a reflection of what a generation believes to be desirable. Klosterman uses Pamela Anderson and Marilyn Monroe as perfect examples of this theory. He notes that, in the 1950s, Monroe represented all things desirable, which was power, discrete sexuality, fame, and a sense of purity that was slightly tainted. Anderson, on the other hand, represents modern desires with blatant sexuality, fame, high society, and celebrity status. To Klosterman, both women show clearly that in some cases, pop culture doesn't define coolness or popularity, but simply reflects it.

On the other hand, Klosterman also points out that in some cases, pop culture drives what is considered desirable. One of his examples is the marketing of breakfast cereal to children. Klosterman notes that breakfast cereals often play on the idea that their cereal is so desirable, creatures wish to steal it. They incorporate existing concepts to make children believe their cereal is more desirable than another brand. To him, this type of marketing is simply a drive to direct mainstream society in their choices, and shows that pop culture can be a driving force behind what becomes "cool".

Movies as a Validation of Social Evolution / Reality

One popular theme throughout the novel is the idea that the principle point of good films is to validate the social evolution of any given society and help a culture define their own reality. Klosterman points out that films take time to make, and as a result, cannot drive what is popular, because they are always one slight step behind the culture. In response, then, the good films simply take popular culture and help to validate it in the minds of mainstream society. Films such as One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest were not made to show mainstream culture how to behave, but were made to help that culture understand reality. Other films, such as Memento, Mullholland Drive, Waking Life, The Matrix, and Vanilla Sky, help to define the fundamental points of reality and help to define what reality really is. Klosterman notes that in many of these films, the question of reality falls into the idea of choosing between a false reality where one is happy, and a true reality, where life is more difficult. In most films, he notes, the hero chooses the path of more resistance because doing so is more fulfilling. In this, movies help viewers define their realities and define their own culture.

Generation X

Another theme running throughout the novel is the concept of Generation X, and how that generation is affected by and affects mainstream culture. Klosterman believes those in his generation are "angst-ridden", "disenfranchised", and "lost". He notes that

his generation rejected the working class lifestyle because they understood that this lifestyle was not pleasing, nor did it satisfy. They were, he notes, smart enough to realize this way of life was outdated and no longer served a purpose in the modern, fast paced, technological world. He also notes Generation Xers are extremely lazy and want instant gratification with little effort. He believes his generation latched on to groups such as Nirvana because they pointed out the sociological and cultural problems associated with the Reagen era. Gen Xers are, he believes, depressed about everything because they realize there is little left to look forward to, and they are self-absorbed. He blames this, primarily, on the culture in which Generation X developed. According to Klosterman, films like the Empire Strikes Back helped solidify these characteristics, in that the film, along with others like Reality Bites, Singles, and others, stressed the depressive nature of the world, and the hopelessness of the characters. Often, happy endings were rejected for unhappy endings that seemed more realistic. Music, too, developed with the idea that happiness was unattainable, and that surviving was the key. Shows such as Saved by the Bell encouraged a complete detachment from reality, while icons such as Pamela Anderson showed Gen Xers what was desirable, even if unattainable. In the end, Klosterman believes his generation is aptly described, and that because of the speed of technology and the hyper-accelerated culture in which we live, Generation Xers formed an unreal sense of the world that persists as they enter adulthood.

Style

Perspective

Klosterman writes the novel from a first person perspective, which is vital to the success of the novel. Klosterman is admittedly biased, in that the entire novel is an analysis of himself and his generation through the eyes of pop culture. As such, Klosterman uses references he himself is familiar with to describe aspects of his generation that he sees as accurate. The entire point of the novel would be missed were it not for the first person perspective. Klosterman is a journalist, a previous movie reviewer, and a member of the generation he writes about. These aspects of his personality allow him not only to write from a viewpoint that is unique and informed, but also allow him to use personal information to prove his theories of pop culture. His opinions are valid, in that the book is, in fact, simply a collection of essays that explain his opinions on the world around him. Whether the topic is music, movies, journalism, sex, or reality, Klosterman uses his own life to focus on what these issues really mean to his generation. This perspective allows the narration to appear informative and specific, as well as reliable, allowing the reader a glimpse not only into Klosterman's own mind and perspective, but into a world view that only those within his generation are able to see.

Tone

The tone of the novel is one of the most entertaining parts of this novel, in that the topic of the book demands the tone be combative for much of the novel. Klosterman is passionate about his writing, and writes with a flair that is rare. His desire to explain his world through his own eyes so that readers can understand is clear, and the resulting tone in his writing ranges from instructive to passionate to biased to objective and everywhere in between. He does not seek to present an unbiased opinion, and in many cases, not only claims to be biased but actually explains his bias and where it comes from. When speaking of movies, he notes his own personal favorites, and when speaking of music, he admits that which he listens to most often. He mentions his previous positions, not in an effort to give himself credentials, but actually to explain to the reader why his tone is as it is. This alone makes the novel highly entertaining to read, and lets the reader ponder the information without discussion of whether or not bias exists because it does from the beginning. Klosterman's use of his bias to entertain and to make convincing arguments for his theories of generation X would not be possible without these deep seated biases.

Structure

The novel is separated into eighteen chapters of unequal length, each of which is named with a chapter number, a name that designates the topic for that individual essay, and a page number, listed in time format. In addition, there is an introduction and

an acknowledgment. In between each chapter, Klosterman adds a small essay, generally telling a small story of his own life that uses some of the concepts he has discussed throughout the novel. In the middle of the novel, there is a section asking twenty-three questions Klosterman finds important for discovering who someone is. Finally, at the end of the novel, there is an index as well as two excerpts from other Klosterman novels.

Klosterman's writing is not for those easily offended by language or topic, in that Klosterman speaks openly about his opinions on society and culture. He speaks of sexual relationships, gender issues, homosexuality, violence, and other topics, and does so passionately. Part of the brutal honesty of the novel is contained in the harsh language used within the novel, in that, as Klosterman himself points out, Generation Xer's care little about language other than to use it as a weapon. For someone not a part of Generation X, some of the reference points Klosterman uses may be lost, and so a basic knowledge of 80s and 90s culture will help. However, Klosterman does a fine job, generally, of explaining the more obscure references in his essays, and uses other reference points as well, to show his theory.

Quotes

"In and of itself, nothing really matters. What matters is that nothing is ever 'in and of itself'."
Introduction

"Every relationship is fundamentally a power struggle, and the individual in power is whoever likes the other person less." - "This is Emo", pg. 9.

"We don't need to worry about unconsciously "absorbing" archaic secret messages when they're six years old; we need to worry about all the entertaining messages people are consciously accepting when they're twenty-six."
This is Emo, p. 10

"The Sims makes the unconscious conscious, but not in an existential Zen way. The Sims forces you to think about how even free people are eternally enslaved by the processes of living." - "Billy Sim", pg. 17.

"People have always been depressed, but -during the early eighty's- there just seemed to be this overwhelming public consensus that being depressed was the most normal thing anyone could be. In fact, being depressed sort of meant you were smart."
Every Dog Must Have His..., p. 52

"History is not an issue for these people; for them, the past is not different than the present, and the future will be identical."
Appetite for Replication, p. 66

"Men in the fifties wanted Monroe because she made love to the men they respected; modern men want Anderson because she makes love to the concept of celebrity."
Ten Seconds to Love, p. 78

"It's not xenophobic to hate soccer; it's socially reprehensible to support it. To say you love soccer is to say you believe in enforced equality more than you believe in the value of competition and the capacity of the human spirit."
George Will vs. Nick Hornby, p. 95

"Life is rarely about what happened; it's mostly about what we think happened."
33, p. 103

"The desire to be cool is - ultimately - the desire to be rescued. It's the desire to be pulled from the unwashed masses of society. It's the desire to be advanced beyond the faceless humanoid robots who will die unheralded deaths and never truly matter, mostly because they all lived the same pedestrian life."
The Lady or The Tiger, p. 124

"Quasi-intellectuals like to claim that math is spiritual. They are lying. Math is not religion. math is the antireligion, because it splinters the gravity of life's only imperative

quation: Either something is true, or it isn't."
Being Zack Morris, p. 148

"Derf knows that Dahmer was always just a guy who couldn't (or at least didn't) relate to the normal boundaries of right and wrong. To know that kind of person is to know the darkest kind of power. To me, that has to mean something."
This is Zodiac Speaking, p. 200

"Nothing offends me more than those who claim they wish they could become blindly religious because it would "make everything so simple". People who make that argument are trying to convince the world that they're somehow doomed by their own intelligence, and that they'd love to be as stupid as all the thoughtless automatons they condescendingly despise."
How To Disappear Completely..., p. 234

Topics for Discussion

Klosterman notes in the beginning of the book that at first he fears that the book will be immediately dated because of his choices of references throughout the novel. On the other hand, he believes the temporary nature of any generation is part of the point of his book. Which do you agree with more? Why? Does Klosterman's use of generation X pop culture references enhance, detract from, or have no effect on his points in the novel? Why?

Klosterman points out in chapters four and five that members of rock bands are generally cool not because of who they are but because of what they do. Their music, he believes, doesn't define them as cool so much as their actions do. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Give examples from mainstream culture to show your point. Does society see your example as "cool"? Why or why not?

Klosterman believes the movie Empire Strikes Back, and specifically Luke Skywalker, are symbols of Generation X. What characteristics does he claim support this theory? Why do they resemble Generation X? Be sure to use examples from the book. What did this movie do to film at the time? Why?

In chapter eight, Klosterman points out that all arguments in the world can be represented by the Celtics/Lakers debate. What is his reasoning for this belief? What are some arguments he uses to support this concept? Do you agree, after reading his examples? Why or why not? What does this say about the relationship between sports and life?

Klosterman argues in "Porn" that it is because of pornography that the internet was successful. What is his reasoning behind this statement? Do you agree? Why or why not? If so, can you think of any other reasons the internet may have succeeded? If not, what do you believe the reason to be that the internet was such as rapid success? What does this say about modern society, and how does it relate to Klosterman's point in chapter six that all men are seen as shallow individuals who love women for their bodies? Does Klosterman foster that stereotype?

Klosterman uses an analysis of music several times in the novel to explain certain aspects of society. For example, he uses Billy Joel to discuss what is "cool", and he uses Dixie Chicks to discuss an ability to relate to common man. Choose one example from the book where Klosterman uses music to analyze an aspect of society. What is his point in this case? Is his point valid? Does the use of music to explain the point add or detract from the argument? Why?

Klosterman compares Pamela Anderson to Marilyn Monroe in the novel. Explain his comparison. Why does he see these women as similar? What makes them the same? Do you agree? Why or why not? What do you think this says about the way society views females sex symbols? Why do you think that?

From a general standpoint, Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs is written as an analysis of Generation X through the use of pop culture relevant to that generation. As such, do you believe Klosterman is successful? Why or why not? What are some points he makes in the novel that you disagree with? Why? What are some points you agree with? Why? What are some pop culture references you can think of to analyze your own generation? Are the similar, or different? What does this say about pop culture in general?