

Notes on  
Eating the Dinosaur  
Author of book: Chuck Klosterman  
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## 1 Something Instead of Nothing

Why do people respond to interviews? Chuck says he has often given interviews that would not help his career and have the downside that if he says something stupid it will be remembered. So why do it? Why does anyone do it?

1. When asked a direct question, its human nature to respond. Okay, but why is that?
2. People feel a need to given account of themselves, not just to others, but to themselves.
3. A desire to get approval.
4. Can be like therapy or group therapy.
5. Ira Glass (NPR-all things considered) says people open up to him because he genuinely cares about what they are talking about.
6. Errol Morris (he makes documentaries, including one on Robert McNamara). People who lie and don't know they are lying are more interesting than people who tell the truth.
7. James Frey who wrote *A Million Little Pieces*: He first wrote it as fiction and nobody wanted to publish it. He then claimed it was fact and it got very popular (he was on Oprah) until people found out it was fiction. It was about his awful life- drugs, jail, etc. But it wasn't true.
8. Prince mostly declined to be interviewed. When he did he insisted no notes, no recording. This way the interviewer would get an IMPRESSION of Prince but less details.

9. Chris Health (Rolling Stone, he has done many celeb interviews) *If a question is interesting, it is very difficult to resist answering it, because you will usually find your own answer interesting to yourself. If you have any ego at all, or a desire to share your experience and thought process, then you may also imagine your answer will be of interest to other people.* He later says that this only works if the interviewer is genuinely interested in the answer (like Ira Glass said).
10. EM: There are two theories about how well we know ourselves. Either we all have a black box of secrets that we know but we don't want others to know. OR we don't even know whats in the box.

Side Note: Rick Rosner

1. He is one of the smartest people in the world by IQ tests. He has been on quiz shows and once sued *Who wants to be a Millionaire* claiming they had a bogus question. The question was  
*What Capitol City Is Located At the Highest Altitude Above Sea Level?*
  - (a) Mexico City
  - (b) Quito
  - (c) Bogota
  - (d) Kathmandu

He answered Kathmandu which is HALF of the altitude of Quito. However Rick Rosner said that the actual highest capitol was not on the list. Here is the list from Wikipedia:

- (a) La Paz, Bolivia, 3640 meters. Seat of government.
- (b) Quito, Ecuador, 2850 meters.
- (c) Sucre, Bolivia, 2790 meters. Constitutional Capitol. (This is whats listed on Wikipedia.)
- (d) Bogota, Columbia, 2625 meters.
- (e) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2355 meters.
- (f) Thimphu, Bhutan, 2334 meters.
- (g) Asmara, Eritrea, 2325 meters.

- (h) Sana'a, Yemen, 2250 meters.
  - (i) Mexico City, Mexico, 2240 meters.
2. He doesn't seem to have done anything with his intelligence. He has been a stripper, roller-skating waiter, bouncer, nude model. He has been in documentaries and been in a dominoes pizza commercial. Wikipedia says he is a *Television writer and reality television personality*.

## 2 Oh, The Guilt

Nirvana breaks guitars on stage. They even did this when they were an unknown band who perhaps could not afford to do it. Kurt Cobain wanted to be rebellious. A few notes on this

1. In 1994 Kurt Cobain committed suicide. In 2023 one of Kurt Cobain's smashed guitars sold for \$600,000.
2. Their first album was *Bleach* (1989). Critics liked it but it did not sell well, though it sold better after their second album was a big hit. Their second album *Nevermind* (1991) was a massive hit— it sold 30 million copies world wide. See next item.
3. Kurt despised success. *Nevermind* was anti-establishment, yet it made a lot of money for both Nirvana and their record company, which could be called the Establishment. He was determined to make his next album, *In Utero*, un-listenable. He bragged about it and INCORRECTLY claimed that the suits didn't like that. See next point for Chuck's opinion.
4. *My suspicion is that the label merely wanted an album that a large number of people might like, and they did not think such a desire precluded the band from making an album that was valid. but Nirvana (or at least Cobain, and possibly bassist Krist Novoselic) did not agree. They could not reconcile the dissonance between mass success and artistic merit; interestingly, they assumed combined mass success with dissonance was the only way to salvage any merit at all. And this reality requires some very weird questions. Why did In Utero need to be conventionally "bad" in order for it to be exceptionally good? And—perhaps*

*more importantly—why did he fraction of the badness only matter if people knew that the badness was intentional?*

5. *In Utero* ended up selling 15 million copies. And it was listenable. It came out in 1993 and Kurt C committed suicide in 1994.
6. Cobain made his wife Courtney Love return a Lexus she had bought. They really could afford it but he didn't want to be the kind of person who drives a Lexus. Again he was anti-commercialism but very rich, which drove him ... to suicide(?)

Kurt Cobain and David Koresh similarities:

1. Both had shoulder-length hair, played guitar (Cobain much better), had a bad childhood, often complained of stomach problems (this one seems less interesting), and had troubling taste in women, considered themselves outcasts from society, and were the partially the authors of their own demise (David K had help from the ATF).
2. Both had a persecution complex and were delusion. Given how David K died, it might not have been a delusion. But we have a chicken-and-egg problem: He stocked up on guns in case (say) the FBI wanted to attack his compound; however, since he had so many guns the FBI did attack his compound. OR, as Chuck points out, they didn't like that he was weird and outside of the norms of society.
3. *Koresh decided he was literally God. Cobain was told that he was figuratively God. Which should make a man crazier?*
4. Both wanted to seal themselves off from the rest of the world with a small set of true believers. *Cobain failed at his attempt to true followers from the rest of America and he destroyed himself. Koresh was destroyed by others for succeeding at the same goal.*
5. *A frustrated rock musician with a Messiah complex, armed to the teeth, and trying to fuck anything that moves. This sounds like everyone of my friends from Austin.*

Misc Kurt C stuff

1. *Insecticide* (1992) is a collection of B-sides and outtakes. The liner notes say *If any of you in any way hate homosexuals, people of a different color, or women, please do this one favor for us— leave us the fuck alone. Don't come to our shows and don't buy our records. BUT THEY ALREADY HAVE BOUGHT IT.*
2. How good were Nirvana? There is a problem with this type of question. Consider:
  - (a) Who was the best president ever? People often say GW or AL or TJ. They will NEVER almost never say anyone in the last 100 years. The two three slots are taken. They defined the role so its hard to break in. FDR sometimes does. Anyone coming along will be compared to them.
  - (b) Who was the best writer of all time. Shakespeare. Again, its hard to break in. Anyone coming along will be compared to them.
  - (c) Who was the best rock band of all time? The Beatles and the Stones. Its hard to break in Anyone coming along will be compared to them.

Chuck things Nirvana SHOULD be included since they took the notin of hating your success to new levels that later bands can only imitate. Counter argument: they only produced three albums.

3. Artists (including Cobain) start out by singing about what they know which means parts of their own life. But once they are a success people assume EVERYTHING in their songs is from their own life (which is not true). Then Cobain claims NO- NONE of is my life, also not true. It can become paralyzing if you know that whatever you write people will think its about you.

Misc David K stuff

1. Yes he was crazy but the government does not kill people for being crazy.
2. Whether or not they started the fire or the FBI started it (by accident) the FBI really did kill Koresh. The legal thing- they took actions that they could foresee would cause harm.

3. *The fact that he believed he had to sire 25 kids so that they could rule the world seems lie a creative way for a psycho to meet girls.*
4. The Branch Davidians were a diverse bunch. They had in common that they thought the world was going to end soon.
5. They bought and sold guns as a business. Anyone who thinks they were going to attack the United States truly did not understand them.
6. Some of the guns were AK-47's and illegal. *But perhaps they thought the FBI would rive tanks into their homes and fire tear gas at their children while broadcasting the phrase "This is not an assault" over an intercom. Maybe they thought the government would shoot at them from a helicopter and burn them alive. They were, after all, insane.*

### 3 Tomorrow Rarely Knows

Time travel: Why do it? The title of the book *Eating the Dinosaur* comes from this chapter- that is one reason to time travel- to see what its like to eat a dinosaur. Good luck with trying.

A Time Slip is when the mechanism is not explained. Fictional Time Travel:

1. *Rip van Winkle* by Washington Irving in 1819. The title character drinks alchol out of a keg, with people who may be ghosts, falls asleep, and wakes up 20 years later. He is 20 years older, so not sure if this counts. Rip falls asleep a few years before the American Revolution and wakes up after it. Time Slip
2. *Memoirs of the 20th Century* by Sam Madden, written in 1733. A book from 1997-1998 gets transported into the past. Some say its the first real example of time travel. The book that was transported is a set of diplomatic letters back and fourth. Hence it portrays how the world will be in 1997. More interested in politics than technology— the tech is unchanged. Sam Madden destroyed most copies, though some survived and its been reprinted. Time Slip
3. *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens in 1843. One could argue that he goes to the past and the future and then back to the present. If

so, this is the first such fictional piece where someone does that. Done with ghosts. Time Slip.

4. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Author's Court* by Mark Twain, written in 1889. A Yankee Engineer (prob from 1889) gets a blow on the head and wakes up in the reign of King Author. Time Slip.
5. *Golf in the year 2000* by J. McCullough, written in 1892. Gibson falls asleep in 1892 and wakes up in the year 2000. Pretty good for predictions, including televised sporting events and more rights for women. Time Slip.
6. *The Time Machine* by HG Wells in 1885 was the first story to have someone *control* where they go, and use science as such.

Problems with going backward in time (going forward seems fine).

1. Intentional Butterfly effect. Don't leave a modern technology in the past- it may destroy the world.
2. If you go back in time to stop something terrible from happening (e.g., kill baby Hitler) then you remove the reason you went back. Chuck thinks the infinite-universe theory is insane (oddly enough, in another book he thinks the Simulation Hypothesis is reasonable).
3. A Time Loop may make an object have no origin. You go back in time and give Shakespeare a copy of Hamlet that you bought in a used book shop.
4. Unintentional Butterfly effect. Don't sneeze, you could kill everyone.
5. You could meet yourself.
6. You might tell yourself it worked. What if you and former-you destroy the machine?
7. Butterfly affect- people's memories would change.
8. The past has already happened and can't be changed. This is the theme of the movie *12 Monkeys*. If you see it more than twice then you are a Calvinist.

Why time travel? *Its to important to use only for money but to dangerous to use for anything else.*

## 4 Through a Glass Blindly

Watching other people is fun (for Chuck) since you do not know what they are doing or why. Movies like *Rear Window* get this wrong: the watcher sees people (not just the killer) do things and know what they are all about- like a lonely woman who pretends she is making dinner for a date and eats it and cries- the watcher knows that she is doing this. In real life a watcher would see her do random things and NOT be able to put together a story.

Why is watching fun? If you see other lives and see that they are meaningless it makes you feel less bad about your meaningless life.

## 5 The Passion of the Garth

Sometimes a musician invents another personality (and this is not a secret). *Garth Brooks*: He released one CD with the name *Chris Gaines*. It had fictional liner notes. Gaines was allegedly emotionally conflicted. *A lot of people he knew died violent deaths. Gaines almost died in a car accident that resulted in plastic surgery for his face, hand, and shoulder.* Chuck wonders- why the shoulder? The Chris Gaines Persona never really took off. The CD sold 2 million copies which Chuck says is *a relative failure in the music economy of 1999*. (In the year 2023 2 million would be one of the top 5 albums of the year.) Garth really wanted Chris Gaines to do well. He wanted to be more like Chris (A deep thinker?)

More generally, if a singer adapts a new persona that may be who they really want to be. It's an odd thing to be faking it yet everyone knows you are faking it.

## 6 "Ha Ha" he said "Ha Ha"

Chuck does not like to criticize things and always tries to find *something* positive to say. Oddly enough he rattles off things that people think are terrible to make the point of how positive he is:

1. The movie *Medellian* from 1999 (not even on Wikipedia)
2. The comic strip *Mary Worth*- he claims he read it for a decade.
3. He saw *Korn* in concert three times and enjoyed it once.



4. The movie *The Day after Tomorrow* which got a 6.5 in IDMB- not that bad.
5. Chuck bought a very expensive robot that doesn't do anything.

BUT one thing he despises and sees no redeeming value in is

### **LAUGH TRACKS**

1. *Filmed before a live studio audience* is no better than a laugh track since the audience is primed to laugh.
2. People tend to laugh because they think they are supposed to. Like liberals watching *The Daily Show* laughing to show they are hip. Also for politeness or for filler. Sometimes because something is actually funny.
3. Germans only laugh when something is funny. Chuck was in Germany and was asked if he had exact change he didn't so he had a nervous chuckle. The LACK of the cashier also chuckling made him realize that his own laughter was just filler.
4. Laugh tracks or live-studio-audience are still used. The Big Bang theory uses a laugh track. (This surprised me)
5. Laugh tracks have been criticized since their origin.
6. If you see a show with the laugh track removed its really odd since the laughter is there during a pause.
7. Why do execs use laugh tracks: Because they think Normal people do not have enough confidence to know what they think is funny. Chuck then says that this is sadly true, but its not our fault. He does not elaborate. Darn.
8. NOT having a laugh track is signaling to the audience that you are a better show.
9. If there is NO laugh track and a joke is told that doesn't work, the audience may wonder if it was supposed to work. The audience won't really know if it was a failed attempt at laughter. For a show like *30 Rock* they may even think it was a satire of what a joke is on a TV show. They may even be right.

10. Without a laugh track you might even enjoy a laugh-less sitcom. He gives *Sports Night* as an example.
11. As a kid Chuck thought that the laugh track was there because TV was 2-way and he was hearing the laughing of other people watching the show.
12. Exclamation points in literature is like a comedian laughing at his own jokes.
13. Chuck want to see *crying machines* so we'll know when to cry.

## 7 It Will Shock You How Much It Never Happened

Adverting is deceptive: they want you to associate, say

1. Pepsi is hope. (This was a campaign in the Obama Era and played off of that.)
2. The Kodak Carousel is nostalgia (This is from *Mad Men*.)
3. Rice Krispies treats are about a granddaughter and grandma sharing (I wonder about the grandmothers teeth.)
4. Beer is sold as a lifestyle.

*So, what happens when everyone knows the trick? Does it still work?*

*It does. In fact, it works better*

We are now a generation who analyzes commercials and talks about their ascetics. There are TV shows *Best Superbowl Commercials*.

Yes we still buy products with good commercials.

So to revisit the first one, Pepsi

*Pepsi is not really trying to market soda pop to optimistic people. Thats impossible and nonsensical. They are hoping that when consumers recognize that Pepsi is trying to tie Soda to Optimists, some people will decide "Thats a good idea. Its ridiculous, but I see what they are doing I am willing to associate myself with this gimmick." Its the difference between a magician performing a trick to impress his audience, and a magician trying to sell that trick to other magicians. There is nobody left to fool. We are all magicians.*

*An Example of how much we care*

Tropicana Pure Premium Packaging changed *the picture on the package*. Not the content just *the picture on the package*. Consumers revolted and the original packaging was back a few weeks later.

*People aren't just buying something because of the advertising. They are buying the advertising itself.*

## 8 T is for True

Irony is when someone says something with an unclear level of sincerity. Most people do this. Those that don't confuse us.

Ralph Nader is never ironic and doesn't know what irony is. That may be why he has never been in a romantic relationship.

We *expect* our politicians to lie to us (on some things) and are not shocked when they do, nor is it scandal. Clearly Obama was for same-sex marriage when he ran in the primaries in 2008 but said he was not. When he changed his mind not even republicans accused him of flip-flopping.

The last chapter was about how we see advertisements as being about more than the produce. Same here- when people say X what do they really mean? It can't really be X.

Weezer is a rock group that sings very straightforward songs. The fans don't get it.

Movie directors sometimes use a shaky hand-held camera to make a fictional movie seem like it was an amateur real movie. *The Blair Witch Project* was one of those.

The TV show *Friday Night Lights* (which Chuck likes) uses camera motion to manipulate your emotions.