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Dan Graham: Rock/Music Writings



Synopsis

As admired for his writing as for his work in art, photography and architecture, Dan Graham was one of the first contemporary artists to embrace Punk, Postpunk and No Wave, becoming a figurehead for those movements, and an early supporter of (and friend to) Glenn Branca and Sonic Youth among many others. Rock/Music Writings collects 13 of Graham's most influential writings, on bands ranging from The Kinks to Bow Wow Wow, first published in art journals such as Real Life, Open Letter and ZG between 1968 and 1988, and in the now rare volume Rock My Religion. It includes such landmark essays as "Punk as Propaganda," which explicates the self-packaging and media critique of The Ramones, Devo, the Sex Pistols, the Desperate Bicycles and others; "Rock My Religion," in which Graham traces themes of ecstatic reverie in rock performance (with a focus on Patti Smith), through a beautiful composite of quotation, commentary and photography; and "New Wave Rock and the Feminine," which discusses the onstage personae of Lydia Lunch, Debbie Harry and Siouxsie Sioux, and the gender politics of all-female groups such as The Slits, The Raincoats, Bush Tetras and others. Throughout Rock/Music Writings, Graham's appraisals are clear-eyed, sophisticated and poetically constructed, a genre of their own within artists' writings.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Primary Information; First Edition edition (September 30, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0978869737

ISBN-13: 978-0978869731

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #251,835 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Arts & Photography > Individual Artists > Essays #283 in Books > Arts & Photography > Collections, Catalogs & Exhibitions #1716 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > History

Customer Reviews

I heard Dan Graham talk at a University earlier this year at a screening of his film "Rock My Religion" (1984). I found him inspiring and ordered "Rock/Music Writings" that night on . When the book arrived, after I had read the first few pages, I put it down, wanting to save it as a reward as I

thought it would be a really good book. But I couldn't wait. Dan Graham's book seems to me (an outsider to the worlds of rock and art) to be full of original and insightful ideas. In the early sections of the book where he describes bands, the writing is artistic and exploratory. Then the book moves into chapters that are more theoretical. His theory is made accessible to the reader and is presented in flowing style; you mightn't realise that it is theory to start with. In the section on "Rock My Religion", stills from the film are provided. Dan Graham links rock to art. He sees how the rock of the 60s and early 70s was a construct from big record companies to tap into the new market of the teenager. In particular, he explains how the "rock star" was a fabrication; something which he says the audience always half knew anyway. But then came punk; it countered the idea of the rock star. Bondage was symbolic and telling the public that we are repressed. Punk was acting as a representation of a representation (i.e. rock culture) of reality. The link with art, is that pop art played a similar role when it opposed the construct of the creative genius. I think the book is complex, and could be read over again. "Complex" is how Dan Graham described the city in which I live. Based on his writings he seems complex too. What lingered with me most after reading it, was his ideas of the feminine in the chapter "New Wave Rock and the Feminine". First he discusses the often male oriented structure of film and music as based around the male ego (with women as receivers of a gaze). But then he discusses music that has a female perspective. When he points out the Dylan's music is mostly the male perspective, he told me something that was always in front of me and clear, but which I had never noticed. The only down side to the book is that because it is collected writings, some of the sections repeat themselves. However, I believe the book has a plentiful supply of material to inspire many.

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