Dan Graham Rooftop Urban Park Project

Perched on a platform, Dan Graham's pavilion for Dia is elevated above the ground line, cantilevered against the vista of sky and urban horizon. Composed of two-way mirrored glass, and hence both translucent and transparent, reflective and opaque, it mediates between the specifics of the site and the broader reaches that it frames in ever-shifting perspectives.

For Graham, the pavilion is at once a sculptural object and a quasi-architectural entity. Its origins lie as much in Minimal art of the sixties, which was often aligned with the purely formal characteristics of the physical contexts in which it was devised and displayed, as in modernist architectural styles and (earlier) architectural typologies—typologies that range from the gazebo to the pergola, from the conservatory to the contemporary atrium. Tellingly, such architecture is public rather than private, and is involved with leisure and display, and with mediation as well as social interaction.

The outer rectilinear structure of this site-specific sculpture refers to the city below to the grid pattern, which determines its topography; to the predominance of modernist architectural styles of high-rise architecture; and to its framing of the dual character of urban social experience, of seeing and being seen, of spectatorship and spectacle.

Lifted some three feet above the roof, these sheltered environs offer unexpected opportunities for panoramic surveillance, yet opportunities in which the viewer never escapes the possibility of being him- or herself the object of scrutiny. Moreover, in Graham's work, perception always becomes a participatory activity, so that whatever the viewer experiences involves recognizing his or her own contribution to that activity.

In this regard they develop certain of his earlier concerns from the 1970s when he was principally preoccupied with performance, video, and film activity. Recalling "the three years it took me to realize this piece," Graham revealed that:

- The solution came out of wanting to go back to that period when I was doing films and video. The first film that I made, From Sunrise to Sunset, actually was concerned with the horizon line making a gradual spiral to map the entire length, and so you were at the very top of the sky at sunset and at sunrise ...
- And for the last film that I did, Body Press, I had a man and a woman, each naked, holding a camera against their bodies and making a spiral mapping their bodies .... Also, because it was clearly handled, held in people's hands, it had that subjective sense of being identified with the performer, so the spectator identified with the performer.

At once the basis for and correlative of his current activity, video is given a place in this rooftop project in the medium through which he or she is experiencing the work, as well as with the conditions of spectatorship itself. If participation in the pavilion arises inevitably out of the spectator's actual behavior, in the case of the videotapes it involves a degree of complicity. In both, however, looking becomes self-evidently a participatory activity, so that whatever the viewer experiences involves recognizing his or her own contribution to that activity.

notes
1. Two-Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube was created specifically for this site, and was acquired by Dia in 1997.
2. "Notes for Two-Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube and a Video Salon" project notes, Dia Center for the Arts, 1991. Graham's decision to produce a video rather than a printed catalogue to accompany this project, both documenting it and indicating some of its origins, was prompted partly by the links it made to his own videos, which can be reviewed in the video salons.
Dan Graham was born March 31, 1942, in Urbana, Illinois. He currently lives in New York City. Since his first solo exhibition in 1969, he has exhibited widely in numerous international exhibitions.

The Rooftop Urban Park Project was designed by Dan Graham in collaboration with architects Modjeh Baratloo and Clifton Balch.

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