



In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz

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Few artists have captured the emotional, sexual, and political chaos of modern urban life as perceptively as David Wojnarowicz, whom Out magazine has called "an acute observer of the unmapped region surrounding his heart and one of the best writers of his generation." In journal entries from age seventeen until his AIDS-related death at thirty-seven, *In the Shadow of the American Dream* chronicles the life of a radical artist who unequivocally defied bigotry even as he became a target for the right wing. It tells the story of Wojnarowicz's creative birth, from publishing his first photographs and writing what would become *The Waterfront Journals* to completing his tour de force, *Close to the Knives*, at the height of his fame. *In the Shadow of the American Dream* is finally a record of the private Wojnarowicz, falling in love, exploring erotic possibilities on the Hudson River piers, becoming overwhelmed by the demands of survival, and searching for the pleasure and freedom he believed one could live on.

In the Shadow of the American Dream: The Diaries of David Wojnarowicz Details

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Izzy Strazzabosco says

i had to return this to the library before i finished it completely, but i read through the majority of the essays. i loved it so much, especially the entries at the beginning from when he was younger, his stories of being stranded on an island at summer camp as a kid in particular. his voice here is gentler, funnier, and more conversational. dont get me wrong, i love his intensity but i also love the side of him he shows here <3

Peter says

I take back everything I said about David's other book--this book is life-changing. I can't believe a person so precious as David ever existed. I feel such tenderness for him, and such awe for his brilliant writing--which is both surreal and sublime. I feel for this person more than I feel for myself. He put me back in touch with a part of myself that I felt was lost, but that he was able to hold onto even through the hardships he faced. I want to inhabit his world. I feel nostalgia for a place I never experienced. I love David Wojnarowicz; I want to honor him any way that I can.

pan ellington says

the meaning of this book has changed profoundly in the last five weeks...

diary entries that read like poetry, love it's otherworldlyness. such a profound feeling, reading a work which mirrors so much of my thinking. a beautiful comfort...

Jennpants says

fucking destroyed me. now i wish even more that i could get my hands on some of his other books.

D. says

Until a definitive biography of DW comes out, this offers good insight into his early years, especially his teens and 20s, before finding success in his art and literary work. However, as such, it has the moments of narcissism and self-indulgence one would expect from teen and twenty-something diaries. It's interesting, illuminating, yet also somewhat disillusioning to see the early, naive DW, and disappointing that so few diary entries describe his later years in the worlds of art galleries and AIDS activism. For those years, clearly his energies went into his work, not his diaries. Definitely an interesting read with beautiful passages, but not anywhere near as powerful as Close to the Knives or Waterfront Journals.

Robert Vaughan says

Wowsah!

rebecca says

this book was just laying around my house. not shitting. oh yeah, it is awesome. hasn't talked about his crazy last name yet. (these are his diaries)

Jenny Gonzalez- Blitz says

There was always a New York that people either didn't want to acknowledge was there or were drawn to for all the most superficial of reasons, and contrary to popular belief is still there, driven always further into hiding by our encroachers. David lived there. Even when he was on a wilderness retreat, or in France or San Francisco. And he wrote of it casually but always with a lyric descriptive quality that never seemed forced. Struggling not with the creative process itself but to feel recognized and validated for his part in it. There were the men he hustled with to get by, and there were the ones he truly cared for and wrote about with the same openness of a teenager experiencing their first love - I got the sense that all the horrors described in "7 Miles A Second" were never able to kill off that part in him, even if AIDS and government neglect eventually killed off his physical body.

endrju says

Compared to "Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration" it is a bit "tamer" although it is still recognizable Wojnarowicz - it is still about sex, love, death, art and everything inbetween. It is still Wojnarowicz who is angry, extremely creative, lonely, full of life. I just wish diary entries have not been edited, that is, it would have been better to have an integral print of complete journal(s).

Evan says

Sunlight drift over New Jersey cliffs illuminates sparse architecture and great warehouses and piers and ships all shapeless from the blinding show of sun making it all look like India with orange postal card skies and you expect a huge herd of cows to be flat-walking over the river surface---where's the Taj Mahal!?

I get carried away, huge tumble rush of glad-in-the-boots-up-to-the-eyes feeling . . .

Pleasure derived as much from the witnessing of lovely images as from any sexual embrace. Remembering how when I was younger and was rejected by the sturdy rogue men ten years older than me whom I met within the dark avenues of the river, how I came close to telling them it didn't matter, I had their images,

their faces and bodies and all the associations in my head to go home at leisure and lay down upon the warm sheets of a summer room and lay my hand to myself and have them anyway.

They think destructiveness is anarchy. Given a window and told they can do whatever they want with it they would more often break it. There's no imagination in that.

The only hero I have or can think of is the monkey cosmonaut in the Russian capsule that got excited in space and broke loose from his restraints and began smashing the control board. The flight had to be aborted.

Robert Mooney says

If you survived the initial AIDS years, and lost a lot of friends to the plague, this book will break your heart. David will remind you of what, and who, we lost and will never regain. The 70's and 80's are generally defined by the music, most of it dreadful crap, while little attention is paid to the people who lived outside the mediocre society, the people who created the arts and cultures that were dumbed down and exploited by cocaine-maddened charlatans. David's diaries reminds us where we come from and makes us wonder how the hell we ended up here.

Dario Lasta says

After seeing the Whitney Museum's fabulous exhibit of late artist David Wojanrowicz's work called "History Keeps Me Awake At Night," I was intrigued and wanted to learn more about the man himself. These diaries give the reader an intimate glimpse into his private life, encapsulating his hustler days, his nighttime cruising at the Hudson piers, and his mindset during his decline due to AIDS. I found his writing to be heavy, verbose, brilliant, and a bit depressing. I can't help but feel both pity and awe at the raw emotions on display. The diaries were edited judiciously, although I think my interest would have been more piqued if I'd started with his memoir "Close to the Knives" instead. However, I acknowledge David's remarkable and visionary contribution to the art world and to his valuable voice as an AIDS-afflicted gay man living in New York City in a time of crisis.

Cherie says

A Excellent journals of Wojnarowicz - you really get a sense of WHO he is - his dreams, his struggles, sex life, the sad times in the late 80s/early 90s when the gay community was losing many people due to AIDS. Powerful, great.

lisa_emily says

Curious. Admittedly I know very little about Wojnarowicz's art, but a former lover tossed this to me to read. He disliked it, and I ended up liking it. It was a window into a world I will never experience.

Tanya Marquardt says

I read *In The Shadow of the American Dream* in my early 20s, and found it out on a random shelf at the local library. I carried it with me for months before finally returning it. Now I own a copy, and dip into it at least once a year. As a teen runaway, I found Wojnarowicz's diaries so compelling, especially his longing for home - whether an actual place, a lover, or a nameless body - and the aimlessness that comes from roaming around to try to find a space in the world. There are bittersweet renderings of love that are drawn out of raw and often broken moments - fragments of love affairs, sexual encounters, even art making and writing. I cherish this book immensely, perhaps more so that I found it at a time when I needed his voice. It is one of those books I'd want to run into a burning building to save.

Another reviewer mentioned they wanted to see the diaries in full, and I would echo that as my only criticism. I want to read every entry - no matter how fragmented. I also love seeing the random drawings and photographs that Wojnarowicz embedded within the pages. You see him develop creative thoughts and artistic ideas, as well as the comings and goings of his lovers and his daily life. I could have read every entry.
