

Popular Music, Gender and Postmodernism

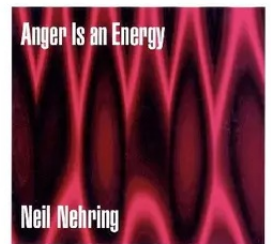
Anger Is an Energy

Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism begins by tracing the migration of cynical academic ideas about postmodernism into music journalism. The result has been a widespread fatalism over the presumed ability of the music industry to absorb any expression of defiance in hip-hop and rock. Commercial "incorporation" supposedly makes a charade of musical outrage, somehow disconnecting anger in music from any meaning or significance. Author Neil Nehring documents the considerable damage done by the journalistic employment of this tenet of postmodern theory, particularly in the case of the late Kurt Cobain of Nirvana, whose emotional intensity was repeatedly belittled for its purported incoherence. As a rebuttal to academic postmodernism and its exploitation by the mass media, Popular Music, Gender, and Postmodernism emphasizes that emotion and reason are mutually interdependent. Though mistakes can occur in the conscious choice of an object at which to direct one's feelings, the preverbal appraisal of social situations that generates emotions is always perfectly rational. Nehring also surveys work in literary criticism, psychology, and especially feminist philosophy that argues on the basis for the political significance of anger even prior to its full articulation. The emotional performance in popular music, he concludes, cannot be discounted on the grounds, for example, that lyrics such as Cobain's are difficult to understand. After detailing more and less progressive approaches to emotion in music criticism, Nehring focuses on recent punk rock by women, including the Riot Grrrls.

The migration of cynical academic ideas about postmodernism into music journalism are traced in this book. The result of this migration is a widespread fatalism over the ability of the music industry to absorb any expression of defiance in popular music.

The book synthesizes a number of fields: American and British academic and journalistic music criticism; aesthetic and literary history and theory from romanticism through postmodernism; alternative music such as feminist punk and grunge; political economy, which has fueled the obsession with commercial incorporation; and subcultural sociology.

POPULAR MUSIC,
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