Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
Centro de Comunicação e Expressão
Curso de Pós-Graduação em Letras – Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Doutorado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

"FIGURES FROM THE AIR": THE MEDIATISED VERBAL PERFORMANCES OF LAURIE ANDERSON AT WARNER BROTHERS

por

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Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
para obtenção do grau de
DOUTOR EM LETRAS

Florianópolis
Maio 2002

Esta Tese, de Carlos Guilherme Hünninghausen, intitulada "FIGURES FROM THE AIR": THE MEDIATISED VERBAL PERFORMANCES OF LAURIE ANDERSON AT WARNER BROTHERS, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras—Inglês e Literatura Correspondente da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS

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Florianópolis, 03 de junho de 2002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What we call writing is a collective agency. Buried deeply within this text lie the ideas, contributions, additions and subtractions of a good many people, near and far. I would not have completed this research without the immeasurable help, support and friendship of my advisor, Professor José Roberto O'Shea. I would also like to thank CNPq for sending me for six months to the other side of the Atlantic, where—at the University of Glasgow—I had the chance to discuss this project with Professor Steve Bottoms, who promptly welcomed me and whose expertise helped me unveil many aspects I would otherwise let go unnoticed.

This should go without saying but a special place in my heart deserves Professor Susana B. Funck, for her delightful jokes, *blithe spirit* and wit. I would also like to say thanks to all my friends and dedicate this to my Family.

Florianópolis, 03 de junho de 2002.

ABSTRACT
"FIGURES FROM THE AIR":
THE MEDIATISED VERBAL PERFORMANCES
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Carlos Guilherme Hünninghausen

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina—2002

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The main purpose of this research—to examine the song-texts of a selection of the mediatised performances of American multimedia artist Laurie Anderson released by Warner Brothers between the 1980s and the 1990s—has been informed by the observation that at the beginning of this new century mediatised performances have not only secured more prestige (having deprived theatre some of its privileges) but also produced a wider impact in the economy of cultural signs at work in the present (Auslander). This research tests the extent to which mediatised performances both exemplify a contested notion of performance and present more appropriate means to circulate commodity culture more efficiently than live performances. Having been referred to as "crossover performances" (Birringer), Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances represent a contested notion of performance because they refuse to be evanescent, traditionally one of performance art's foundations. My starting point was to establish the overall relevance of the term "crossover" for performance art in general and for Anderson's own brand of performances. Thus, I have started with a general theory of performance and performance art, investigating the overall relevance of Anderson's crossover. Originally coming from the New York avant-garde, Anderson invades the world of pop music circulating her performances in the media as products of various technologies.Anderson's work goes against ordinary trends of performance that understand the term to be mainly defined by its evanescence. Moreover, prototypical performance art is identified by its association with the historical Western avant-garde, not with the establishment (mass media). At the same time, mediatisation necessarily compels Anderson to become absorbed by the economy from which she draws. That is, mediatisation means that Anderson's performances can now be "mechanically" retrieved. Additionally, her electronic personae in performance—by surpassing the boundaries of both her own physical body and her original spatial (and temporal) co-ordinates—are inserted into the flow of commodity culture. Thus, these performances participate in the economy of repetition as cultural signs that, in the present, extend commodity culture's hold of reality (Baudrillard). One of my aims has also been to check how Anderson seems to have found in popular music not only a suitable vehicle to communicate her ideas but also a particular way to reflect on technology as performance. That is, by inserting her performances in the environment of mass media, Anderson can better negotiate the impact of mass media upon individuals and their identities. I have concluded that, crossing over and mediatisation, in respect to Laurie Anderson, means moving away from functioning mainly by way of the transgressive strategies deployed by avant-garde art and embracing the strategies of mass culture while still remaining politically resistant.

Number of pages: 267

Number of words: 82.717

RESUMO

"FIGURAS QUE VÊM DO AR": AS PERFORMANCES VERBAIS EM MÍDIA ELETRÔNICA DE LAURIE ANDERSON PARA WARNER BROTHERS

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O principal objetivo desta pesquisa—examinar uma seleção dos textos gravados das performances da artista de multimeios norte-americana Laurie Anderson lançados pela gravadora Warner Brothers durante a década de 1980 e 1990—surgiu da observação de que no início deste novo século performances que circulam na mídia parecem ter adquirido não somente mais prestígio cultural (tendo retirado do teatro muitos dos seus privilégios) como também maior impacto na economia de símbolos culturais que funciona no presente (Auslander). Esta pesquisa testa os limites destas performances em mídia, que representam tanto um conceito disputado de performance, como também possuem as ferramentas apropriadas para circular mais eficientemente na cultura de massa do que performances ao vivo. Tendo sido chamadas de *crossover* (Birringer) estas performances de Laurie Anderson representam um conceito disputado de performance porque as mesmas se recusam a ser evanescentes, tradicionalmente um dos conceitos centrais da performance. Assim, meu ponto de partida foi estabelecer a relevância do termo *crossover* para a performance arte em geral e para o tipo de performance apresentado por Anderson. Originalmente vinda da vanguarda nova-iorquina, Anderson invade o mundo da música pop oferecendo suas performances como produtos de várias tecnologias. Além disso, performances prototípicas sempre foram identificadas pela sua ligação histórica com a arte de vanguarda, não com os meios de comunicação em massa. Ao mesmo tempo, o processo de mediatização força Anderson a se tornar parte da economia da qual ela retira suas forças. Isto é, com o processo de mediatização não somente as performances de Anderson podem ser "mecanicamente" reproduzidas, sua identidade eletrônica em performance—ao ultrapassar os limites impostos por seu próprio corpo e por suas coordenadas espaço-temporais—é inserida no fluxo da economia de bens de consumo. Desta forma, estas performances participam na economia de repetição que funciona no presente como símbolos culturais que estendem o poder da economia de bens de consumo sobre a realidade (Baudrillard). Um dos meus objetivos foi testar como—com o processo de mediatização—Anderson parece ter encontrado na música popular não somente um veículo mais apropriado para comunicar suas idéias como também um modo particular de refletir sobre a própria tecnologia como uma performance. Isto é, inserida no ambiente de comunicação em massa, Anderson pode negociar com vantagens o próprio impacto da mídia sobre os indivíduos e suas identidades. Assim, conclui que passar da vanguarda para a cultura de bens de consumo, ao menos no que diz respeito a Laurie Anderson, significa afastar-se do modo como a vanguarda sempre funcionou e apropriar-se do modo de operação dos meios de massa sem, contudo, perder consciência política.

Número de páginas: 267

Número de palavras: 82.717

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What is the great globe
Itself but a Loose-Fish?
And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish
And a Fast-Fish, too?
(Herman Melville—*Moby Dick*)

Preliminary Considerations:

Performance and Mediatisation

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world.
It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding.
It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.
(Jacques Attali)

When there is an accelerating repetition of the identical,
messages become more and more impoverished,
and power begins to float in society,
just as society floats in music.
(Jacques Attali)

Broadly speaking this research is born as a result of my own impatience with a host of academic practices that still make value judgements based on ascribing high art a "serious" intention and denying mass produced objects (for instance, Laurie Anderson's "Odd Objects") their proper relevance and cultural import. To me (and other commentators such as Simon Frith or Philip Auslander[1]) this distinction has become untenable. The reason is rather simple. How can you escape producing art in an industrial context if practically the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the mass media industries (viz. Dave Marsh)? Many critics, however, have had difficulty adjusting to these new realities of mass produced art.

Thus, this research proposes to examine the song-texts (the printed lyrics which accompany the recordings) from a selection of the mediatised performances that American multimedia artist Laurie Anderson released for entertainment giant Warner Brothers. To my mind, these seem to exemplify a contested notion of performance. In other words, based upon the observation that at the beginning of this new century mediatised performances seem to have secured not only more prestige (having seized

theatre some of its privileges) but also have produced a wider impact on the economy of cultural signs at work in the present (Auslander *Liveness* 5, 162), this research wants to test the extent to which mediatised performances, that is, those performances (such as Anderson's) that have been fixed, made repeatable and which circulate in the mass media as various products of media technology and commodity culture, exemplify a contested notion of performance. In this sense, the appropriateness of Laurie Anderson seems clear because, as Jon McKenzie puts it, "the twists of [Anderson's] work lie in the path she cuts across these three terrains of performance: cultural, technological, and bureaucratic" ("Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 31), which seem to represent a fresh axiom of our days.

Coming from the New York avant-garde art world, Anderson "sells out" and enters commodity culture via popular recordings. Thus, her recordings for multinational entertainment giant Warner Brothers not only bring together the worlds of avant-garde performance and popular music into the landscape of electronic, mediatised performance distributed world-wide, they do so as integral, electronic performances disseminated as entertainment, mass produced cultural products intended for displaced audiences world-wide. McKenzie notes:

> her work situates cultural performance within the digital space of performativity, a space dominated by a certain ensemble of language games ruled by efficiency and profitability. Cultural performance—long studied in the U.S. as transgressive, resistant, transformational—can be read as a language game Anderson plays against and within two other, highly normative, games of performance: the technological and the bureaucratic. Technological performance refers to such parameters as the efficiency, speed, and reliability of a technical system. In the language

> games of engineering, performance is a criterion used to design and evaluate literally thousands of technologies, ranging from air fresheners to supercomputers. Thus, there are high-performance music systems, high-performance guidance devices, and high-performance race cars. On the not-so-other hand, bureaucratic performance refers to different, though related, parameters, those of profitability, flexibility, and optimization. ... Laurie Anderson's performance art, through its use of electronic media and corporate sponsors, creates an electric body that cuts across the stratum, recombining elements from the language games of cultural, technological, and bureaucratic performance. ("Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 39)

If McKenzie is right (and it is my opinion he is), the momentum that Anderson's mediatised performances gather points precisely to the course she takes across the fields of cultural, technological, and bureaucratic performance, i.e., by connecting in "her language games" these three fields that seem to have acquired more and more importance in contemporary times—"technical efficiency", "bureaucratic profitability" and "cultural performance"—Anderson is able to comment on the mechanics of their performances. In a broad sense performance can be understood as organised information. Thus, Anderson creates an "electric body" that interfaces and recombines apparently opposed fields in mediatised / electronic performance (McKenzie "Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 39). Consequently, this study is an attempt to address the functioning of these electronic performances as repositories of knowledge, exposing their conceivable substantial role in the formation of human identity (something which is unlikely to be found in ourselves, but which we construct, put on in everyday performance).

American critic Philip Auslander not only argues at length that contemporary times are witnessing "a further diminution of the symbolic capital associated with live events" (*Liveness* 162), he also speaks of Laurie Anderson's performances and personae as being "always already mediatised" (*Presence* 55). This is worth pausing over because it points to an important distinction. As suggested above, the term "mediatised" seems to imply a definition of mediatised performances based on their circulation in the mass media. Thus interpreted, however, it describes the situation of mediatised performances only halfway. True, Laurie Anderson's performances are mediatised when they go from live to recorded, but the situation is more complex and conceptual than this. "Mediatised" performances also imply and explore an awareness of the way in which reality itself is, eventually, a mediated, artificial construct or series of fabricated events.[2] Thus, mediatised performances recognise that attempts that aim at creating a transparent language that would serve as the means to explore objective reality have been proven deficient. In other words, mediatised performances (although in many aspects indistinguishable from "live" events) become events that offer an enhancement of physical space. In addition to this, mediatised performances acknowledge their own status as media within a mediatic system that includes the mass media and information technologies (Auslander *Liveness* 6).

My own interest in the song-texts of Anderson's mediatised performances here mirrors those notions that see media-derived experience as the cultural dominant of contemporary times (Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard) and recognise in the process of mediatisation a way of further contesting reality (Philip Auslander) not as degraded, second rate by-products of a much superior and more critical cultural context that is still to be found in the cathedrals of high art (galleries, museums, universities, etc). In short, audiences first experience Anderson's performances through the filter of mass

production, either by way of the heavy mediatisation of her live concerts (McClary "Start Making Sense!" 137) or because these performances have been originally designed to be inserted in the flow of commodities (economy of repetition) that makes up the media landscape (television, popular records, film, magazines and radio). Thus, my interest in the song-texts of the performances of Laurie Anderson released through Warner Brothers is justified insofar as these offer an adequate example of electronic, repeatable performance produced primarily for the mass media, a field which only now is starting to be properly theorised.

Historically, such is not the conventional view commonly used to control notions of performance art which, rooted in the European avant-garde and 1960s political theatre, read performance as an artistic format born out of artists' dissatisfaction with an art market increasingly capable of absorbing shock into its economy of objects (co-option) and the simultaneous exhaustion of formalist strategies to escape the regulation of pictorial representation (Goldberg *Performance Art* 184). Traditional notions of performance art imply both an ontology of performance based on its ephemeral existence and evanescence from the present (the idea that performances are live events), and that these are in short supply, serious high art.

From the moment of its inception then, and for decades afterwards, performance art rejected objecthood (that is, aesthetic beauty or its cult)[3] and pictorial representation in a struggle to fight back the dangers and treacheries of preservation (Phelan *Ends of Performance* 8), provoking and contesting normative notions of what art and artistic practice should be like. As a consequence of this radicalism, performance has been mostly connected to the avant-garde tradition and in its various guises over the years has failed to recognise in the field of mass produced cultural objects (say, television) the dominant context (or daily life experience) of the Western/ized world (Auslander

Presence 2, *Liveness* 2). Thus, the mediatisation of performances is placed at a crossroads: despite the erosion of the differences between mediatised and live events, performance theory continues to characterise their relationship as one of opposition (Auslander *Liveness* 11).

Mediatised performances represent a contested notion of performance because (unlike theatre and ritual, which—having been the cradle for performance studies—do not seem to require additional confirmation) in order to contrast mediatised performances with live performances many critics (Peggy Phelan, Josette Féral) still hang on to assumed ontological differences between the live and the recorded event. In my view, these are terms which, just as it has happened to their siblings "serious high art" and "popular, mass produced art", may as well have ceased to be operative in our postmodern context. The question is so pressing (and we seem to be so deeply buried by electronic performance) that doubts have been already cast as to whether mediatisation can still be considered human language or mere electronic noise (viz. Eric Bogosian). In addition, mediatisation (effectively?) kills off the relevance of the original and the commodity value of artistic objects by removing one of the privileges accorded to galleries and museums, that serious art has to be viewed and absorbed in special places, that an artistic object has to be unique. Philip Auslander:

> At a moment in cultural history when one literally can obtain the same cultural object at a garage theater in Soho and the neighborhood video store, at the museum and on network television, any clear-cut distinction between 'advanced' art and mass culture becomes untenable. (*Presence* 65)

Yet for many commentators (again, such as Peggy Phelan or Josette Féral) it is performance's entry into commodity culture that represents the death of performance. It

is precisely performance's evanescence from the present, performance's ephemeral existence and subsequent recovery as spectatorial memory that are at the core of its ontological resistance to commodification and mechanical reproduction (or should we say digital replication?). Thus, however historically correct, the traditional view of performance art, still premised on assigning high-art the realm of meaning while bestowing its debased counterpart, mass culture, the realm of non-meaning (Auslander *Presence* 170), cannot accommodate contemporary performances that have been predominantly designed for preservation and circulation in the mass media. Consequently, these mediatised performances inhabit a realm that is to a great extent outside the reach of avant-garde and academic circles not interested in television or popular music, whose scholars, as Auslander notes, seem to have dealt more fruitfully with the question of mediatisation than performance studies scholars (*Liveness* 3).

As I said at the beginning of this introduction, this study is partly born out of my impatience with expositions that fail to go beyond this simplistic categorisation—high culture as meaning/mass produced as non-meaning—and partly born out of my belief that the electronic, mediatised performances of Laurie Anderson, and therefore electronic presence, demand an urgent mapping out. Again, one of my premises for studying these electronic performances comes from Philip Auslander, who explains that Anderson epitomises one strand of performance art that

> engage[s] postmodern culture *critically*, even if the forms that critical perspective takes are not instantly recognizable as such, especially to those whose notions of the relations between art and politics were formed in the 1960s or who subscribe to a Frankfurt School view of mass culture[4]. (*Presence* 3, italics in the original)

Consequently, as Anderson wholly embraces the modes of production and status

common to commodity culture (mass distribution, mass production), her mediatised performances deny traditional models of performance art one of its most characteristic frameworks, that it is ephemeral live art in the presence of an audience (Phelan *Ends of Performance* 8). Thus, Anderson's mediatised performances seem to exemplify a problematic, yet-to-be-mapped, contested notion of performance (or performative product?) [5] at the crossroads of the electronic paradigm.

In other words, because mediatisation inserts performances into everyday life, staging the lives of other cultures as performative (Kershaw *Politics of Performance* 133), thus intensifying the performative quality of the representational world, this research proposes to investigate how the mediatised performances by Laurie Anderson participate in this economy of signs while, paradoxically, still working with the performativity of language. Thus, the focus of my analysis falls on the song texts of Laurie Anderson and what their words do, that is, the import of these particular words in mediatised performances as they enter the flow of commodity culture and how they are used to engage audiences' commitment to the electronic landscape of mass produced objects, or "the spectacle of a culture dominated by the new electronic media" (Birringer *Theatre* xiii).

These formulations certainly imply that, in contemporary times, electronic performance represents an adequate means to reach displaced audiences for whom the intrinsic and determining experience of daily life is marked by mediatisation. This, however, does not mean that I do not value live performance. My interest in mediatised performances derives from my feeling that mediatisation poses an intriguing paradigm: at present, mediatisation plays an important role not only because it seems to extend (and help maintain) the "reality principle" (viz. Freud, Baudrillard) across cultures but because, in order to be economically sound, live performance has to be backed up so to

speak by electronic mediatisation. This fact represents a "catch 22" of sorts that binds live performance and mediatisation together in relation to the electronic paradigm. In the electronic age, the age of digital replication (in which there is virtually no distinction between copies and originals), live performance emulates mediatised performance, and mediatised performance emulates liveness (viz. Auslander *Presence* 67), that is, together these two segments hold a critical balance in constructing a much desired reality effect (or should we say *ersatz* reality), inside which (the electronic paradigm) much of the Western/ized world seems to be immersed.

In my selection of the song-texts from Laurie Anderson's recorded performances released through Warner Brothers, read in close connection with the relevant theoretical material, I followed chronological and representational criteria. Since, in the words of Jon McKenzie, the "media blitzes" through which Anderson goes make it impossible to cover every aspect of Anderson's mediatised performances, this research, divided into three key sections, proposes to discuss the following: in the first section I offer a critical panorama of the contested notion of performance and performance art, trying to highlight the differences between these models of thought (meanings, definitions) and the import of these differences to an understanding of performance as engaged by such approaches. The purpose of this section is to suggest something of the complexity of the field and provide a context for the discussion that is to follow. In the second section I analyse Laurie Anderson's emergence from the avant-garde performance art tradition into mass culture, trying to highlight how, in the present, such formerly useful distinctions between serious high art and popular, mass produced art, original and copy, may have ceased to be operative in relation to mediatised performances. Thus, I emphasise Laurie Anderson's crossover (her moving from the New York avant-garde into corporate entertainment, as Johannes Birringer puts it) as an astute rebuttal to

commodification, highlighting the role storytelling plays in her mediatised performances. The third section examines selectively the song-texts of Anderson's mediatised performances included in *Big Science* (1982), *Mister Heartbreak* (1984), *Home of the Brave* (1986), *Strange Angels* (1989) and *Bright Red* (1994)[6], as stories which try to map out the utterly coded landscapes of the contemporary environment, which *we* recognise as the Western/ized world.

Throughout this study I have tried not to ignore my own perspective in writing (the apparatus available to me as critical tool) nor presume a critical view that denies its own implications in writing. In other words, I do not once pretend to stand back and regard Anderson's performances from some critically detached, unbiased perspective. On the contrary, I'd rather take full account of the trappings and misgivings inherent to writing (and why not say reading) as performative activities both contaminated and contrived by time, that is, happening (mostly?) as they unfold in front of you as *words*, and not as *meaning* that can be ideally recovered from a specific location at the end of this study. To achieve this kind of interaction I must first get rid of the artificially constructed boundaries proposed by traditional views on critical distance and consider myself part of Anderson's electronic audience, immersed in this electronic environment, a target of her "media-blitzes". Mine is an "ex-centric" position then, that of a Third World individual "trapped" in a [electronic, I would add] consumption of the "global" (Born 266); and taking into account this "*ex-centric*" position the reader is challenged to access and assess this research. Thus, I must admit to the limitations (and possibilities, too) of a research written by a white male Brazilian student of a Foreign Literature department in Brazil for whom the English language can never have the same taste of his own mother tongue partly erased in these writings.

However, even if I seek to hold on to (academic) writing as a performative activity, I expect the texts that make up this dissertation and recover the performances in question resemble open ended essays, for I do not—once—recognise in writing (academic or otherwise) a final activity. Jean Baudrillard:

> The only question in this journey is: how far can we go in the extermination of meaning, how far can we go in the non-referential desert form without cracking up and, of course, still keep alive the esoteric charm of disappearance? ... And the crucial moment is that brutal instant which reveals that the journey has no end, that there is no longer any reason for it to come to an end. (*America* 10)

Thus, hoping that my writing exceeds the (speed) limits imposed by meaning, I have taken the liberty of incorporating three "Interludes". These pauses are meant as personal reflections, which—assimilating autobiography—are inserted here to reflect on the content of the discussions carried out in their neighbouring sections, a way of getting rid of the artificially constructed boundaries proposed by traditional views on critical distance, and a way of considering myself part of Anderson's electronic audience. The next section begins with a discussion of the traditional models according to which performance and performance art have been structured.

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[1] Frith is a British scholar who has extensively researched on the meanings of contemporary popular music. Auslander is one of the first scholars to dedicate an entire chapter to Laurie Anderson .

[2] Although a rather ragged issue, since Deconstruction set foot in the academy, over the years the idea that reality may be nothing but a fiction of sorts has become more and more popularised, almost a cliché. Baudrillard seems to be one of the many responsible for popularising the issue beyond limit. It is from his approach that I develop my own. Historically, however, such notions may date as far back as Greek philosophy, when Plato divided reality, placing all forms of representative art in general in the lowest rank of his theory. Performance theory, as a recent annexation, greatly opposes such view, structuring its precepts upon the conviction that certain acts escape representation altogether, thus making it impossible to differentiate between representation and reality.

[3] Traditionally, objecthood could be further defined as the belief that art is supposed to create transcendence by means of aesthetically acceptable objects (Harrison 520).

[4] The Institute of Social Research, originally affiliated to the University of Frankfurt in 1923 (Harrison 520).

[5] The notion of the "performative" (as opposed to the "constative") comes, of course, from the collection of the lectures by British philosopher J.L.Austin. Published in 1962, *How to Do Things with Words* is centred on the suggestion that we can use language performatively, that is, we can use language to effect changes in the world ("I dare you" is a good example), instead of merely using it to convey information (which would be the constative use of language).

[6] Although I am aware that for some commentators the absence of a detailed analysis of *United States I-IV Live*, which for some represents Anderson's crucial mediatised performance, may constitute an unforgivable absence, I have to reiterate that in this thesis I am mainly interested in performances that have been originally released as mediatised performances, in other words, marketed as popular music recordings (commercial commodities) for Anderson's so called "electronic audiences". Thus, even though *United States I-IV Live* represents and encompasses a large part of Anderson's work for Warner Brothers, it still figures prominently as a recording of a lengthy live performance. The same applies to *The Ugly One with the Jewels* (1995), both of which I will keep under my sleeve, adding insights from these lengthy performances to be used whenever needed.

Chapter 1

Performance—A Critical Overview

1.1 What is Happening to Performance in this Study?

Theory of Performance vs. Performance in Theory

vs. Mediatised Performance

> All the world is not, of course, a stage
> but the crucial ways in which it isn't
> are not easy to specify.
> (Erving Goffman)

As we have seen, at the centre of this study are the ideas of performance and of performance art. Thus, from the outset, a number of questions have to be asked: What shared grounds do these two terms cover? How have they been used? How (and where) have they become accepted? Were these questions not complex enough, by focusing on the performances of Laurie Anderson, yet another question must be raised: mediatisation. The performances I am interested in here are performances that have been fixed and made repeatable. Thus, I am not dealing with live performances—to which theory has given more attention—but with a contested notion of performance. Let me start with the first set of questions.

Let us remember how performance and performance studies became accepted as legitimate fields of artistic practice and research. That is, how did a wide variety of events carve their way into the equally varied territory of art galleries, museums, universities and everyday life? Moreover: How did performances become accepted both as a discipline in universities, as art pieces in museums or galleries and as (sometimes) an all encompassing type of notion used to describe, in anthropological terms, a wide

range of social gatherings?

Marvin Carlson, in *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, asserts just how broad in practice concepts of performance can be: "as its popularity and usage has grown, so has a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyse and understand just what sort of human activity it is" (1). Henry Sayre puts it this way: because ordinary definitions of performance may include "performance [as] a specific action or set of actions—dramatic, musical, athletic, and so on—which occurs on a given occasion, in a particular place" ("Performance" 91), to work on a definition of "performance" one needs a comfortable frame in which this term can be accommodated and to which it can be keyed. Without this frame, the term easily escapes control, becoming somewhat fluid, impossible to be discussed or studied:

> Performance by its nature resists conclusions, just as it resists the sort of definitions, boundaries, and limits so useful to traditional academic writing and academic structures. (Carlson *Performance* 189)

Marvin Carlson writes of the discipline Performance Studies but the same observation could be made of performance art. Therefore, even if working from different backgrounds (Carlson is addressing here the whole set of discourses that have come to be identified as Performance Studies), a working definition of performance and of performance art is always—from the start and necessarily—an incomplete or fragmentary project. It is so not only in respect to academic notions of structure and writing, but especially in respect to the artists themselves who have been identified with performance since the early 1970s:

> Interestingly, the term performance has continued to elude a specific definition and most often artists who have produced performance-type works do not think of themselves as performance artists. Consequently,

> performance has sometimes served as a misused catch-all category. (Loeffler viii)

As a result, it is partly because of this elusiveness—some kind of slippery, treacherous ground—that performance art and Performance Studies are connected. For Marvin Carlson, no matter how elusive and complex this body of writing becomes, always defying stable categorisation, specification and conclusive boundaries, it will nonetheless

> look at the theory and practice of performance that seek within the general assumptions of a postmodern orientation to find strategies of meaningful social, political, and cultural positioning, arguably the most critical challenge confronting performance today. (*Performance* 9)

Thus, we have established one of the reasons for taking up performance. It represents yet a new opening, a new position from which judgements can be made. But to make matters more complex, Johannes Birringer adds: "one might have to rethink the idea of performance in the mid-1980s and after ... especially ... at the level of post industrial information and communication technology and mass-mediational systems" (*Theatre* 169). The latter is exactly the level that interests me.

As the critique of performance art and the theory of Performance Studies are the substance that fuels this body of writing, I will be intentionally evading dogmatic principles that presume to explain away the nature and core of performance because, as Birringer reminds me, my own preferences as an interpreter are shifting. This—to come up with a much too stable index of categories—would lead me to deny writing its performative qualities, its continued disappearance into readers' memory. Instead, in this section, starting from these broad questions on the theory of performance, I will go on to explore historical notions of performance (its emergence and current usage), then

elaborate on the notions of "performance" and "performance art" rooted in the late 1950s, together with a few of their possible anthropological implications, to make the reader aware of the different models used to control notions of performance before I start describing and analysing (in Chapter 3) Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances (an example of Birringer's observation a few paragraphs above), as she moves from the avant-garde art scene into mediatisation. What I want to explore here, namely the idea of performance "at the level of post industrial information and communication technology and mass-mediational systems" (Birringer *Theatre* 169), has been suggested by seminal work conducted by Johannes Birringer, Baz Kershaw, Peggy Phelan, and Philip Auslander, of which the 1980s and 1990s recorded performances of Laurie Anderson for Warner Brothers seem to be a "showcase".

The aim of this section then—following Carlson's approach—is to delineate a critical frame for an understanding of the term "performance" and of the bulk of theory surrounding it, as these notions have been used both in the theatre, in contemporary arts, and, more recently, in the academy but insofar as they continually present themselves as timely strategies for meaningful social, political, and cultural positioning.

1.2 The Avant-garde in Performance: From Happenings through Radical Theatre to Performance Art

People keep thinking that "performance art" is something
that was invented sometime in the '80s,
but of course it's actually been around a long time,
even before it had quotes around it,
but unlike ballet or opera
there are no companies that re-present this work
so it tends to disappear.
(Laurie Anderson)

Myths naturally arise where facts are scarce.
(Michael Kirby)

I begin with these two extracts because they encompass the extent of the difficulties in mapping out the series of events that, as Laurie Anderson has aptly put, once they had, as it were, quotes around them, became variously identified as performance art. Often described in connection with the institutionally defined avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, "performance art" now still validates one very specific, gallery-oriented idea of avant-garde art and resistance, a usage which was consolidated in the early 1970s when terms such as Body Art, Installations and Conceptual Art all became trademarks of an artistic practice that was above all ephemeral and which entertained the notion that art should surpass the boundaries of the object and of pictorial representation. Such ideas had been pioneered, although in a less coherent format, much earlier in some of the most influential avant-garde art movements from Europe: DADA, Surrealism and Futurism. These avant-garde movements, with special emphasis on DADA, threw to the ground much of the study of objecthood and of pictorial representation.

The terms "avant-garde" and "resistance" for these European movements were understood as expressing dissatisfaction with and opposition to (a) an art market increasingly capable of quickly absorbing most forms of creative expression, (b) a

certain bourgeois status quo. Of special interest for performance art are the DADA cabarets and the movement's raging manifestos which set out to explore and produce more "experimental" or "untested" forms of artistic practice than perhaps could yet be assimilated by the Art Exhibitions of Paris and New York. The wartime experiments of expatriates Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara (to name but a few), which started to take place at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich around 1916,[1] involved a blend of theatrical sketches and musical events. On those nights at the Cabaret Voltaire concomitant poetry would be recited in which random words formed the basis of the text, spontaneous music would be made by unusual instruments, and all such events collapsed into a series of performances that would take place simultaneously. In one of the movement's most emblematic turns, Marcel Duchamp took a urinal, named it *Fountain*, and turned it in at an art exhibition. Along other borders, Futurists explored the role of machines and speed in modern life connecting these ideas both with Fascism and enforcement of power, while the Surrealist group mainly concerned themselves with the translation into art of Freud's recent incursions on the interpretation of dreams and the unconscious (Melzer 11-44, Richter 66-94).

By the 1950s and 1960s the shock produced by DADA had already been absorbed, and the DADA performances at the Cabaret Voltaire (which took place either shortly before WWI or during it) had subsided into art-history and documentation. More than often, however, DADA left documents and artworks that denied their own status as artistic objects. Nevertheless, such "documents" found their way into museum collections and art galleries[2] as the only *products* of a considerable number of artists. As it is not farfetched to say that one of Dada's main concerns seemed to be ideas and not original artworks, its strategies and concerns began influencing other artists who were likewise not interested in formalist or pictorial experiences, and who were soon to

inspire a subsequent generation of artists. That is, long after DADA had dissolved, another generation of artists, again trying to evade the operations of the art market, resist the commodification of the artwork, eventually re-inscribe the limits of art and life, began working with volatile experiments, exploring a variety of media (projected images, film, dance, music, narrative, principles of collage, assemblage, etc.). Again, these experiments were not primarily intended as stable works of art, but as caveats to stable categorisations, both taking on from DADA and carrying out its ideas and experiments a bit further:

> In terms of art theory what mattered was the medium: art became something living, moving, and, by its nature, changing. Work and artist were "for the time being" the same thing, and the space of art was redefined as a moment or period or event: now the work stopped when the artist's show was over. (Frith *Performing Rites* 204)

Not that the show necessarily "stopped" by the time the artist left the spot. Again, documents of such events were almost always readily available, sometimes even making up for the bulk of the *work* itself.[3] What this changing moment meant, though, is that art became more than marginally connected to the artist and his/her bodily presence, and so it was that by the late 1950s the Happenings hit the art market.

1.3 Radical Theatre and Happenings

In the early days of performance art, working on the fringes of acceptance, artists may have had a lot in common with the European avant-garde movements of the 1920s, although this does not mean Happenings and performance art were exactly born at that time (perhaps both were only beginning to be recognised as such). RoseLee

Goldberg, who published in 1979 one of the first books on performance art, establishes that the emergence of performance as an "artistic form(at)" is directly related to the avant-garde movements of High Modernism. Her book on the history of performance art, as it equates the beginnings of performance art—a phenomenon that, as she also recognises, "defies precise or easy definition"—in the 1960s with the avant-garde movements of the 1920s (Futurism, Russian Revolution experimental theatre, Dada), places the roots of performance art on the impatience of artists with the "limitations of more established art forms" (*Performance Art* 184). Seen from this perspective, performance art becomes a field of operations that, in seeking a standpoint from which to deal with expressive materials that were not yet as completely exhausted as the traditional ones sanctioned by the art world, dismantled many of the foundations upon which Modern Art lay.

True, the very idea of escaping the boundaries of a recognised format of representation, say, the theatre building, the text, and inserting art into action, and then into the everyday practice of life, is disrupting, even irregular. Back then, leaking categories, in artworks that crossed genre borders, threatened the status quo; the separations and demarcations arbitrarily proposed (by theory, by tradition) on "life" were (as perhaps they still are) very much feared because of the social transformation they could generate. Ephemeral and volatile as these performances were, participation or complicity in the events seemed to be the keys with which to understand Happenings and performances then. Nevertheless, connivance in "mind expanding" events could lead to social upheaval. Thus, performance's immediate connection is with the theatre and its social and political vocation as expressed by Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), whose *Theatre and its Double* has sought to escape the trappings of modern Western society in search of an art that was not meaningless, possessed by metaphor, the text and

ultimately ruled by the disparity of language and feeling. Artaud, whose influence was undermined for several years by a text-oriented critical tradition (Carlson *Theories* 396), sees the theatre as displacement, a libidinal flow, the realm of desire. It could be argued that Artaud's notions resurfaced again in several early performances, which sought the experience uncontaminated by the signifiers of the theatre.

Hence, during the four decades from 1960s to the 1990s, the upheavals of counterculture structured around political activism (feminism, black power, gay rights) seemed to have found a space in the arts by means of radical theatre, Happenings and performance art. Resistance meant, above all, honestly (and voraciously) exploring individual consciousness and identities by exposing and mangling the human body, focusing on the stories told by the disadvantaged, the oppressed and the excluded. In short, it meant all at once transgressing as many principles as possible upon which Modern Art (and theatre) were founded. These politics, comments Marvin Carlson quoting Jacki Apple, challenge "the media's version of our socio-cultural reality" (163). By defying the media's version of a given reality,[4] artists openly sought to dismantle its narrative strategies. Now, what we have here is the very problematic atmosphere most performances (and why not say art) from this period dealt with: the contestation of an exclusive and (rather) obvious structure of reality.

The means more overtly available to artists at the time invoked this strategy: either you escaped commodification, with all possible problems involved—marginality, lack of sponsors, the police—and entered the "avant-garde", seeking in the outskirts some space from which to construct your "marginal" identity which (if effective) would dispute the surfaces proposed by the media, or else, you were co-opted, absorbed into the media's exchange economy of signs, objects and mass produced meaning, in sum, a cultural economy based on repetition, reproduction and exchange value. Because the

mirror was pointed at the culture industry, the media landscape and its spectacle, any position that worked from within these surfaces (television or popular music, for instance) would not be seriously recognised by the avant-garde as an effective means of challenge.[5]

The subsequent failure of the historical avant-garde to engage audiences in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Philip Auslander points out, lies in its inability to recognise resistance in terms other than these inherited ones (*Presence* 22). Thus, the main problem with 1960s political activist commentary, which had been inherited from the terms and strategies used by the European avant-garde (its notions of radical transgression[6]), was its inability to recognise any possibility of resistance articulated in terms other than these it had inherited: radical transgression, marginality, negation. I think this situation may have largely changed now and my attempt to focus solely on Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances seems to indicate this much. In postmodern times, strategies of transgression such as the ones mentioned above—which I equate with Modern thought—seem to rely on the idea of proposing value simply by opposing one set of activities (those associated with high forms of art) to another (those associated with the low). These, I reiterate, may as well have lost their prescriptive powers.

Following this path, what we see is that artists working in the early period of performance art, though merely beginning to explore other fields of cognitive representation (the body, its presence, time and space), starting to map the "new fields" (not the new styles) onto which art was being made possible when (somewhat) freed from the traditional conventions of artistic practice (objectification, transcendence), were also structuring a body of work which existed precisely to defy any stable and convenient categorisation between the arts of painting, sculpture, dance and theatre.

Cued by avant-garde experiments, a first generation of performers moved away from several accepted structures—aesthetic beauty, transcendence, finished objects, pictorial representation—to "stage" their creations in front of enthralled audiences.

Museums and art galleries acquired the rights to ideas and photographs, sounds and films that documented the existence of such ideas (and actions) instead of owning only finished artistic objects. Happenings and performances partly resisted commodification then because they were ephemeral, evanescent but also, and mostly, because the residue of their performances (documents, photographs, and videos) did not unequivocally match the status of other, more readily approved, artworks.[7]

This kind of early performance work, says Auslander, "is austere, often threatening in its emphasis on physical risk and largely eschews theatricality and concern with audience" (*Presence* 57). Avant-garde performances, at this point, had to be threatening: they should dismantle operative assumptions about art (life?). Performer Chris Burden is a case in point, perhaps best known for being shot in the arm by a friend in what, as C.Carr puts it, became one of the most emblematic images of 1970s body art (16). Through Burden's performance, it is interesting to notice how performances made the very notion of the artwork more than problematic. Performances not only questioned the authority of the object by rejecting pictorial sensibility (How was one supposed to understand art such as this?), they also subverted the idea that the artistic object spoke for itself.

Additionally, some early performance work was not meant to be seen by any audience but to "exist" only as a "concept" and in the document itself (usually photographs). Consider, for example, Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* 1972, or, again, Chris Burden's *White light/White Heat* 1975. In the latter, Chris Burden remained for twenty-two days out of sight from the gallery's audience on a platform (Carr 17). In *Seedbed*,

Acconci hid himself underneath a ramp where he would be purportedly masturbating (Sayre *Object of Performance* 4).

Liveness, the body and its presence (either mediated or not) were some of the "new" grounds on which art was now being pushed. This kind of artistic practice includes many other disparate examples such as Piero Manzoni's focus on the status of his own body as the generator of art in works such as "Artist's Breath", "Living Sculpture" and "Artist's Shit" (all from 1961), Carolee Schneeman's "Meat Joy", (1964),[8] most of John Cage's music theorising on the threshold of noise and silence, the several bloody rituals of Hermann Nitsch (called *Orgies, Mysteries, Theatre* and performed throughout the 1970s), and Chris Burden's "TV Hijack" (1972), in which Burden threatened the life of his interviewer.

Interestingly, however, for Marvin Carlson, the remote roots of performance art are to be found much earlier:

> It is unquestionably correct to trace a relationship between much modern performance art and the avant-garde tradition in twentieth-century art and theater, since much performance art has been created and continues to operate within that context. But to concentrate largely or exclusively upon the avant-garde aspect of modern performance art, as most writers on the subject have done, can limit understanding both of the social functioning of such art today and of how it relates to other performative activity in the past. (*Performance* 81)

Carlson's well-chosen expression "performative activity" instead of "performance" makes the point of not falling into the contemporary usage of the term: he wants to undermine emphasis on the strong relation that was established in the late 1960s and early 1970s between art, performance, and the avant-garde gallery circuit, just as much

as he seems to accord performance its unique existence and function as social activity. According to Carlson then, we may equate performance art only or mostly with the avant-garde (for some, highly unpopular and elitist art forms) only if we want to ignore the functioning of performance (art) socially. That is, to impart the history of performance and performance art exclusively onto the avant-garde is a limited way to attempt to grasp a plethora of complex phenomena. This is why, in the examples included in *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (1996), unlike RoseLee Goldberg (1979), Carlson goes further back in history than the European avant-garde to foreground some of his views on performative activities, performance and performance art.

Seen from Carlson's angle, performance (and thus performance art) acquires an anthropological dimension (viz. Richard Schechner), becoming part of social life, occurring in the gathering places of the general public. The circus and the fairground, says Carlson, "have been traditionally the favoured site of performance", even when he recognises "the solitary performer or small group of performers displaying their skills before a gathering, even a single family in a medieval great hall, [which] offered a more intimate performance model as one of the trends for performance that has continued up to the present" (85). At this point, the author offers several other examples of early performances:

> The classic period had its musicians, its mimes, its jugglers, even its rope-dancers, mentioned by Terence in the prologue to *Hecyra*. In the middle ages there were the troubadours, the scalds and bards, the minstrels, the montebanks, and that miscellaneous group of entertainers that in England were designated as the "glee-men", "a term which included dancers, posturers, jugglers, tumblers, and exhibitors of trained

performing monkeys and quadrupeds." (83)[9]

Thus, we move away from the avant-garde, Modernist idea of art necessarily anchored on the breaking of arbitrarily constructed boundaries, fastened to an institution (a gallery, a museum or exhibition), and viewed by (above all) small specialised audiences, to focus on practices that are not even inscribed in such foundations but that more genuinely connect social life and art: the public display of some sort of skill in an almost undifferentiated, involuntary movement, from skill to its translation into a patterned behaviour that will have—first—to be seen as playful, ritualistic or performative (all at the same time), and only then "artistic".

It is in this respect that performance meets anthropology and sociology; and it is the American anthropologist Richard Schechner who issued a major statement in the fall of 1973, when he listed seven areas of human activity where "performance theory" and the social sciences coincide (Carlson 13). I think it is worth repeating them here:

1. Performance in everyday life, including gatherings of every kind.
2. The structure of sports, ritual, play, and public political behaviours.
3. Analysis of various modes of communication (other than the written word); semiotics.
4. Connections between human and animal behaviour patterns with an emphasis on play and ritualised behaviour.
5. Aspects of psychotherapy that emphasise person-to-person interaction, acting out, and body awareness.
6. Ethnography and prehistory—both of exotic and familiar cultures.
7. Constitution of unified theories of performance, which are, in fact, theories of behaviour. (Apud Carlson 13-14)

Schechner's list, Carlson remarks, is reminiscent of Georges Gurvitch's attempt to

"suggest future areas of research between theater and the social sciences published in 1956" (14), and connects the whole set of activities surrounding the phenomena of "performance" with "theater" and "drama."

Because Schechner proposes that these three interconnected phenomena not only "occur among all the world's peoples" but also date back "as far as historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists can go" (68), we find ourselves confronting a fascinating prospect. That is, according to Schechner, performance is "coexistent" and "simultaneous" with human behaviour. As I understand it, Schechner's remark, "as far as historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists can go", signifies not only a going back in time to the limits of recorded enunciation, but also our complicity with the hypothetical terms in which this enunciation is formulated; that is, our very understanding of any phenomena (say, history) may already be inserted into a performative frame as well. Thus, performance emerges as a central element of human behaviour and, possibly, to human knowledge.

For example, both history and the very characteristics that we want to see preserved unscathed in time can only be made (or unmade) in performance. To my mind, it is from this perspective that we must understand the initial appeal of early performance art examples, as the ones described above. Performance art was an early attempt to bring this peculiarity out into the light:

> [M]uch of the recent anthropological analysis of performance has emphasized how performance can work within a society precisely to undermine tradition, to provide a site for the exploration of fresh and alternative structures and patterns of behavior. Whether performance within a culture serves most importantly to reinforce the assumptions of that culture or to provide a possible site of alternative assumptions is an

> ongoing debate that provides a particularly clear example of the contested quality of performance analysis. (Carlson 15)

It is thus that performance and its theory will become a highly contested field of operations in which human activity (mind you, machines and animals also "perform" and not always in front of a human audience)[10] is brought into focus. Performance becomes relevant as a representative item that informs our "locating ourselves" throughout the times:

> From a socio-historical perspective it would doubtless be relevant here to point to the increasing significance of performance in everyday life as an effect of urbanization and the decline of intimacy (more and more of our dealings are with people we do not know), as an effect of industrial capitalism (we no longer derive our identity from productive labor), as an effect of commodity fetishism (our consumption is now a matter of imagination, not need). (Frith 206)

What follows this state of things is best expressed by Steven Connor: "ours is a culture that is so saturated with and fascinated by techniques of representation and reproduction [cf. post-modernism], that it has become difficult for us to be sure where action ends and performance begins" (109). That is, in the present, when the world itself has become an intimidating repository of signs, nothing exists, nothing can practically happen outside a performative frame, that is, whatever we accomplish with signs, clues and indications, even when it only makes sense for us, right here, right now, is accomplished through performance. The image I have in mind is that of two mirrors facing each other. Which one is framing the performance, which one is framing, say, "reality"?

Since we are always, and necessarily, absorbed, being pushed over the limits of

expression—representation (and why not say enunciation) by performance—our involvement in performative activities may, eventually, not have any feasible end. It is rather a matter of ever expanding performative frames (the two mirrors facing each other). Theoretically, it is also possible to work within as many "performative frames" as there are indicators (keys) available for these frames to become distinguished. Within this sheath of single or multiple performative frames, many of us recognise postmodern times. If we can think of postmodern landscapes as being those in which values based on singular, absolute oppositions do not hold (for long), performance becomes the inevitable ground over which we must thrive, over which our judgement, coming suddenly to a halt, becomes performative, or at least aware of its performative qualities. However, I am getting ahead of myself, there is more to be said about performance art and Happenings.

As Michael Kirby says, in "Happenings: An Introduction", the prevalent mythology about Happenings is that they are theatrical performances with no scripts. In fact, Happenings were not improvisations, they had a structure and followed a rudimentary script (Kirby 2). Additionally: Happenings, which began in New York lofts, later on moving to open spaces, were seen by forty to fifty people at the most, so facts tend to get distorted and mythologies arise. I explain: the amount of people who have actually seen a Happening is much smaller than the amount of people who have *read* about them or seen its "documents" (3). Thus, a newspaper's captioned description of a Happening which might emphasise, say, the fact that a nude woman would be standing in front of the audience throughout the event actually reaches more people than the original event (2). Eventually it is this caption which will come to identify and distinguish such Happening: instead of participating in the event itself, or noticing the qualities of the entire performance, audiences would get slightly biased partial

descriptions, flawed "translations". In other words, by augmentation, by addition and selection, distorted versions of Happenings were incorporated into the vocabulary of the art-world. At this point Happenings were far from being understood.

Discussing Allan Kaprow's "18 Happenings in 6 Parts"[11] at the Reuben Gallery, Carlson says: "[I]ts real departure from traditional art was not really in its spontaneity, but in the sort of material it used and its manner of presentation" (96). If the central concern of much contemporary performance (art) is the medium, the "removal of the privileged status accorded to painting and sculpture in the Modernist vein [as] the means to open the practices of art to a more relevant, more modern, social anthropology" (Harrison 684), we have to understand that Happenings began with painting and sculpture:

> The fact that the first Happening in New York and many succeeding ones were presented in the Reuben Gallery—sometimes on the same three—or four—week rotation schedule that is common with art galleries—serves to emphasize the fundamental connection of Happenings with painting and sculpture. Could Happenings be called a *visual* form of theatre? (Kirby 3)

To better understand what is meant by a visual form of theatre, we have to go back in time, however briefly, and look at what two other artists were doing sometime before Happenings and performance art became trendy as separate categories in the art market. I am referring to the figures of Kurt Schwitters and Jackson Pollock, again to DADA, and to a movement called Abstract Expressionism,[12] respectively.

The German artist Kurt Schwitters, who had collaborated intensely with DADA, also had, by 1924, transformed his own Hannover home into a MERZBAU[13]: that is, he turned his home into an environment, its walls and rooms being slowly modified so as

to project protruding and angled shapes, receding rooms and secret panels. Ernst Schwitters, Kurt Schwitters' son, says that the Merzbau started with his father's interest in the relationship between the pictures he hung on the walls and the sculptures on the floor.[14] He began by attaching wires from the sculptures to the paintings that soon turned into wooden panels, which then led him to construct whole new compartments inside his Hannover home. This house was destroyed by allied bombing of Germany. Having to flee from Nazi Germany, at 60, Schwitters found in England's Lake District a barn where he set out to complete another ambitious construction: a US$1,000 award from the Museum of Modern Art in New York enabled Schwitters to pay for a barn's annual rent of £52[15] which, in spite of his decaying health, he began to transform with found objects. The work, however, remained unfinished. Schwitters died in 1947 in England's Lake District without completing his last Merzbau, called Merzbarn.[16]

Not much later, in the vein of Schwitters' experiments, American (and, to a lesser extent, European) painters, starting in the early 1940s, (but continuing throughout the 1960s), seeking an alternative to figurative expression, turned the conventions of representational painting upside down, as it were, by presenting pictures which, being "mere blots of ink", emphasised the sensuous action of painting itself, the materiality of colour and pigment on a surface, and the "gesture" that fixed this instant on a canvas. Pictures were no longer sites of meaning themselves (depicting one pictorial reality) but the residue of a gesture preserved on pigment. The painting stood for the memory of an action. In this sense, content (meaning) was less important than the activity that produced significance for that "meaning".

Jackson Pollock, for instance, exploded the limits of the picture frame, painting on the floor, and directly from a paint can, canvases that were sometimes eight meters wide.[17] Pollock said of his huge, dripping paintings: "I feel nearer, more a part of the

painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides, and literally be in the painting" (*World Book* 1998). These "action paintings" of Pollock's, as they were soon dubbed,[18] were, apparently, also highly performative, that is, centred around the execution and the display of the artist's vigorous skills in "jotting down with pigment", but were at any rate biased towards the memory (the preservation) of the event taking place. As a consequence, Pollock's (and other Abstract Expressionists') paintings left highly marketable "marks". Once the painter "performed" his job, it continued in the form of a finished, highly commercial, product or label (a canvas, an "action painting", an "abstract picture"); even when the message of these vestiges themselves was centred around the ephemeral memory of another action, such paintings began to gain currency as a valid aesthetic strategy, and as a further destruction of pictorial space initiated by Cubism (Greenberg "Towards" 557).

Soon, action (or Abstract Expressionist) paintings were being turned into commodities.[19] That is, the potential departure such movements may have had from traditional painting was almost instantly absorbed and jeopardised because such paintings did not really part with some of the more *overtly* recognised artistic conventions, mainly those already acknowledged as such: the gallery circuit, the frame (except for Pollock), pictorial sensitivity, transcendence. At this point, Pollock's action paintings could no longer be seen as revolutionary and shocking. Eventually, abstract expressionism became the aesthetics of the day (a "new orthodoxy"). Before long, everyone was blotting out with pigment, and galleries and museums flooded their consumers with such "trendy" artworks:

> [T]en years after a debilitating major war, many artists felt that they could not accept the essentially apolitical content of the then overwhelmingly popular Abstract Expressionism. It came to be

> considered socially irresponsible for artists to paint in secluded studios, when so many real political issues were at stake. This politically aware mood encouraged Dada-like manifestations and gestures as a means to attack establishment art values. (Goldberg *Performance Art* 144)

For the Abstract Expressionists, the departure from acceptable art forms failed to take place because their "manner of presentation" (framed canvases in galleries and museums) had carved its niche long before: the artist's show (the gesture of the painter) was not over but continued in the painting itself, it did not stop the moment the action stopped. On the contrary, it started on its "road to transcendence" once the painter put the brushes aside. Conversely, at the Happenings, once the artist left the spot, the "work of art" ceased to exist as such (at least in the physical world),[20] to be recovered only by its documents and spectatorial memory.

The final product of a Happening was not a highly marketable canvas but often a few photographs, scratches of paper and an assortment of materials which tried to detail (with words and drawings) the action or idea. As the focal point of artistic practice changed, shifting from the finished "objects" (an aesthetic formal realisation, expression and, nevertheless, shock) that could be easily incorporated by the well established art market always eager for the clash of the everlasting new, terms such as Happenings and performances (with their emphasis on the ephemerality of an experience vested in a variety of artistic practices) were beginning to be used to describe "events" outside the domain of the theatre. As we know, it is in the theatre that performance art always held its most immediate articulations, albeit articulations which were predominantly literary and verbal (the texts of performances long vanished as an archaeology of performance). The "new" usage for the term performance was needed to describe the enhancement of experience that a "special" moment or event could trigger. Curiously enough, all these

events were not less dependent on "shock."

It is interesting to note, then, that in the process of mapping new fields of artistic practice (through the body in action), Happenings and early performances were still informed by Ezra Pound's modernist motto: "Make it new! Make it new!", thus not entirely breaking up with tradition but merely reasserting another set of modernist principles. Nevertheless, these early performative experiments of the late 1950s and early 1960s succeeded in escaping the more overtly accepted forms of artistic representation, those conventionally defined by neat and convenient categories and labels. So, artists working with performance—even though still partly informed by modernist operations, that is, they still worried about breaking up with the past, with the rules of tradition, to show something "new" which reinscribed the relation between art and life—thought they managed to escape easily coined categories and the process of commodification. Happenings, which, as we have seen, reached audiences of forty to fifty people and took place in art galleries were thus still very much biased towards avant-garde audiences (museum goers, art critics, dealers) and hence towards high art. High-art continued to be the realm of meaning while its debased counterpart, mass culture, the realm of non-meaning (Auslander *Presence* 170).

The difficulty with this approach nowadays, as I hope will become more and more clear in the subsequent parts of this study, is that not only does it still work based on absolute values, and insists on keeping boundaries (and privileges) intact between high/low, avant-garde/commodified; it fails to reach audiences outside its closed circles. Again, I want to propose that this strategy has become ineffectual. Though Happenings and performances crossed the border of objecthood, producing ephemeral artworks, an additional move and more radical departure has been needed. It would be a crossing of boundaries of a different sort, a crossing which—I believe—could only be enacted by

escaping the hmits of the avant-garde itself and moving into popular culture. Enter Andy Warhol and his fetishist treatment of popular culture's objects and icons.

From the Brillo boxes to the fetishist treatment of American icons (Elizabeth Taylor, Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe), all immortalised by his silk-screen technique, which allowed for multiple copies (multiple originals?), passing through his flirtation with rock and roll via *The Velvet Underground*, Warhol's embrace of popular culture's values seems to deny the boundaries between high and low ("debased") art forms. If, on the one hand, Warhol's silk-screens seemed to have brought objecthood back to the fore, the artistic object celebrated a different kind of imagery now. In his images Warhol celebrated fame, portraying teen idols, movie stars, an array of other (small) American celebrities as well as mundane objects. Such attitude towards the artistic object challenged highbrow perceptions of art as something that transcended the present, the everyday. Warhol also made his ideas known in print, in the magazine *Interview* and in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. He writes:

> Some company recently was interested in buying my "aura." They didn't want my product. They kept saying, "We want your aura." I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it. So then I thought that if somebody was willing to pay that much for my it, I should try to figure out what it is. (77)

Laurie Anderson too was approached by a company. Whether they were also in search of the aura in her performances it is too early to say.[21] The rather funny story of how she eventually ended up seeking them out I will save for later. First let us find out why (and how) it is that performances suddenly became so valuable.

1.4 Coping with Performance

One might ask
what causes this pervading need to act out art
which used to suffice itself on the page or the museum wall?
What is this new presence, and how has it replaced the presence
which poems and pictures silently proffered before?
Has everything from politics to poetics
become theatrical?
(Michael Benamou)

I begin this section with Michael Benamou's observation on performance art because it is a case in point. One of the essential questions about performance art, performance studies and therefore Laurie Anderson's own performances is found at a convergence between theatre and anthropology. This interrogation starts when art moves away from its accepted objecthood, that is, when artists begin to move away from the finished artistic object and its ability to transcend reality into other realms: those of the theatre. This is the moment described by Benamou in the epigraph above. Art ceases to suffice for and in itself and becomes performative, that is, an act of communication, a Happening, a performance that extrapolates and eclipses the commodity value of the artistic object, thus re-inscribing the limits between art and life.

As we have seen, the term "performance" has been used in many contexts and defined against a variety of settings. As a recent discipline, however, performance studies can be attributed two "fathers", Richard Schechner and Victor Turner who, in the late 1960s early 1970s, as Peggy Phelan notes,

> "[i]n bringing theatre and anthropology together ... saw the extraordinarily deep questions these perspectives on cultural expression raised. If the diversity of human culture continually showed a persistent theatricality, could performance be a universal expression of human signification, akin to language? (*Ends of Performance* 3)

Thus, what we now call performance studies begins at a crossroads, in search of a common denominator. At the intersection of theatre studies and anthropology scholars expected to find enough room for recurrent patterns that could be taken for a "universal" language, a language that went beyond communication with words, a language that readily described social interaction as well as its attitude towards cultural objects. One way to understand performance studies then is to say that it is about uncovering the theatrical aspects of (mainly) human agency, that is, to find those aspects which would be persistently theatrical across cultures, across different territories of human behaviour. Thus, performance in art and in the academy inhabits a new theoretical space. Born out of the juxtaposition of the two disciplines (theatre and anthropology), performance studies threw light on a new territory, which soon grew important enough to render performance studies acceptable in the academy.

This much said, I would like to "perform" an experiment that, while grounding the term performance in language itself, I believe, can help us distinguish the issues that have to be faced when a general frame that seeks to provide boundaries for a concept of "performance" becomes necessary. The experiment is simple, even old-fashioned; I would like to test the definitions listed under the entry "performance" in a Dictionary of the English Language. In the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (1992), for example, one finds four definitions:

> 1-the action or an act of performing a (character in a) play, a piece of music, tricks, especially in the presence of the public;
>
> 2-the action or manner of carrying out an activity, piece of work, etc.;
>
> 3-the ability of a person or machine to do something well;
>
> 4-something that needs a lot of work, effort, or preparation.

Several points are to be made here. These definitions from a language dictionary

(intended to clarify language, not to confuse the glossed term) point out several attitudes towards performance and the boundaries normally used to control the application of the word "performance".

First, there is performance's immediate connection with theatre and drama: the idea of an actor's impersonation and the need of an audience unmistakably emerge. In earlier times, these connections were not as readily authorised as they seem to be now. Nevertheless, the relevance of this association means that performances are connected to acts of communication. Thus, performances as acts of communication channel not only modes of thinking but also behavioural codes. This is as good a point as any other to bring in the audience. It is the role of audiences to mark not only where (and when) a performance starts and where it ends, but also its duration (viz. Susan Bennett).

Second, implied in the word "manner" is the idea of a *distinct* or *exclusive* mode by means of which performances can be offset, or contrasted to other actions, different, perhaps less specialised and more ordinary manners of carrying out an activity. Thus, a differentiation between "specialised" and "ordinary" (routine) moments in the everyday is also brought in. One can only understand performances "as such" once they have been "framed", "characterised", or firmly "constituted" *as* performances. The starting question for Richard Schechner (*Between Theatre and Anthropology*) is not about distinctions between what is being staged and what is not, but more appropriately *how* activities are staged *within* the context of the everyday. To answer this question, a number of elements must be used to assess, to evaluate, or even offset such special events as performances within the everyday: these can be called frames or keys. Of particular interest for us here are ways of speaking, telling stories or jokes, for example, which can already characterise performances, and which, by the way, form the base of Laurie Anderson's recorded work. In this respect another American anthropologist,

Richard Bauman, in "Verbal Art as Performance", a text that appeared in the *American Anthropologist* back in 1975, exacted many of the keys and codes by means of which *spoken language* becomes performance. Jokes are the most flagrant examples, "hence people's claims that they can't tell jokes" (Frith 208). The telling of a joke involves a performance that goes beyond reporting with words. It is this article, in which Bauman details various other mechanisms by means of which vocal structures can be used to communicate alongside language itself, that has prompted me with the first elements of scrutiny for my analysis of Anderson's performances.

The third point to be made has to do with aesthetic value: how well can an action be performed? Central to this point is the fact that, as we have seen, machines, animals,[22] and humans all perform. That is, the term performance is used as a reference to assess the behaviour of human and animal agents, as well as to lay down the norms for the observation of artificial or mechanical devices: "performance is really framed and judged by its observers. This is why performance ... can be and is applied frequently to non-human activity" (Carlson 5). One discusses the performance of instruments, machines, software, and (in the sciences) the term is especially useful to measure and to provide standards for the particular operations of any number of organisms, processes and machines. Interestingly enough, nowadays the "observer" of a given performance can be another machine.[23]

Richard Schechner[24] estimates that there are many examples of animal rituals and playing which, if seen from a human perspective, appear to constitute performances. He proposes that instead of aesthetics (which eventually has nothing to do with "luxury" and "leisure"), we seek the "*survival value*"[25] of performance (*Between Theatre* 94). Thus Schechner's tentative definition of performance:

> *Ritualized behaviour conditioned/permeated by play.*[26] The more

> "freely" a species plays, the more likely performance, theater, scripts, and drama are to emerge in connection with ritualized behaviour. Some animals, such as bees and ants, are rich in ritualized behaviour but absolutely bereft of play. (*Between Theatre* 95)

The bottom line here is that we are always contrasting one set of responses, that is, one set of performative behaviour, or one set of "interpretive frames" (Bauman "Verbal Art" 293), to another, conferring one outline, one performance, one original constitutive status above another, equally performative outline, or frame. Against what and how can we estimate completely "original" performances? I suspect the answer remains close to the idea that performances are acts of communication. Thus, the scope in which performances can be observed, or framed, in Bauman's (anthropological) view, is varied; they, in principle, may range from the completely 'novel' (spontaneous invention) to the completely fixed (a traditional religious rite). The suggestion here is that all performances lie—necessarily—somewhere between these two extremes and that communication that is to be interpreted as performance must be restrained within certain shared rules which are promptly recognised by a specific group or community[27] (Bauman "Verbal Art" 293). Thus, Bauman's definition of performance:

> I understand performance as a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content. (*Story* 3)

And what—if any—is the relevance of how communication is carried out? If the essential term for Bauman's definition is communication, then what is the relevance of performance to communication? Communication that is to be interpreted as

performance goes beyond referential content. If this is true, it seems to resonate against what Laurie Anderson says herself: "As in: you hear the word 'free' and it depends on who's saying it—Crazy Eddie, William F.Buckley, or Jesus Christ" (Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 89).

Thus, the effectiveness of communication, or its value as meaningful expression, becomes dependant on performance, and it makes all the difference in the world whether the words have been spoken by Crazy Eddie, William F.Buckley, or Jesus Christ, as Anderson puts it. That is, in communication, the performer can affect the reception of the piece and influence its meaning. If details such as how, where and with what purpose do matter for communication, form—for the new field performance studies—becomes as important as the content of your communication. Does this sound familiar? However, there is more. Recognition of the rules of a performance plays an important role in communication, and repetition of specific patterns seems to be the essential component in this respect. Consequently, it is memory, or the ability to repeat patterns of behaviour, which becomes central to performance.

Following these tentative observations, the fourth point to be made from the dictionary attestations brings performance back into the theatre, with the idea of purpose and effort put into structuring a performance; Steven Connor can be invoked for clarification:

> [T]o perform means to act, make or do something, it also means to dissimulate or to pretend to act, to feign action. The difference between the two meanings of performance corresponds closely to the difference between 'acting', in the sense of doing something, and 'enacting', in the sense of playing out, or impersonating. The word 'performance' therefore points simultaneously towards immediate, spontaneous and

> ungoverned action on the one hand, and the act of doubling, and the doubling of action, in imitation, repetition or citation on the other. (108)

Thus, performance also involves ideas of the "doubling of action", "citation" or "feigning of action", or "enacting", that is, repeated, memorised, constructed or rehearsed behaviour, or, in the words of Richard Schechner, knowledge and actions which have been "restored", or that have been twice "behaved" (*Between Theatre* 108). As our attention centres on these processes, memory becomes central to performance, and so it is in the theatre, where both memory and performance have always had a special place, that performance has found its most fertile ground. When performance enters the stage, a place with its own rules and history, logical, or functional notions of "performance" become increasingly abundant. Theatrical notions of performance have been connected with the matrix of Western dramatic experience for a number of years now and seem to authorise the more readily recognised ideas about performance. Broadly speaking then, notions of performance in the theatre have been largely used to examine an actor's presence on stage, to highlight minute variations taking place night after night in a given dramatic production, or still, to distinguish between the words of a printed playtext and its actual production, that is, to centre on the gap between a playtext and the "actual staging" (performance) of that same playtext.

Literary critic Raymond Williams, in "Argument: Text and Performance", delineates several practical examples of "plays in performance", specifying the extent to which the problematic relation between playtext and performance is shown, on the basis of whatever relationships are built on such axis:

> For any dramatic writer, the problem of the relation between text and performance is what he takes, repeatedly, to his table; what he has been taking, in such different circumstances, for more than two thousand

> years. For any actor, designer and director, the same kind of problem—of moving the writing through to an actual production—is permanent, though in its very permanence, as for the writer, various, experimental, changing. (382)

Such changing or evolving of patterns, we can say, are at the heart of stage performance, and—even though not mentioned before—bring to light another key characteristic of performance, its *emergent* quality. Performances are never the same even when recorded, if, for nothing else, we can be sure that audiences' responses are also submitted to changing conditions, not to mention different, individual backgrounds and memories. To this emergent quality can be attributed performance's volatile, evanescent character, which I understand as follows: a performance lacks permanence, that is, performances can only make sense as they happen, in the process of unfolding for an audience, thus, the claims that acts such as reading and writing make up as highly performative activities. Consequently, meaning that is to be recovered from such activities can only happen again in performance, not as a stagnant pool of far away idealised structures which can be mechanically retrieved.[28] It is the emergent quality of performance that makes up for one of its most difficult and offsetting characteristics. Almost paradoxically, such characteristic was also recognised by Anderson as early as 1975, before crossing over to mediatisation:

> I don't understand permanence in performance. How is it possible? On pieces of paper? On pieces of tape? Of film? The stories are talked out, float for a minute, then are either wiped out or mixed into other people's memories complete with distortions, additions, deletions. They cannot be replayed, like the valentine from Minerva Miller c. 1850. "Remember me is all I ask, and if remembered be a task, forget me." ("Confessions" 22)

Coming back to something I said earlier, another crucial question posed by the doubling of action in performance is *citation*, that is, skills and behaviour that can (or should) be repeated. At once we recognise that the doubling of action implies repetition, which is controlled by memory. Performance then is dependent on memory, which as we have seen seems to form another centre of this process of performing. Without memory, as British critic Baz Kershaw notes, there can be no transmission of knowledge, thus no performance:

> Hence, the definition of performance as restored behaviour raises a huge question mark against just *how* behavior may be restored. Schechner aims to answer this through describing what he claims are the universal characteristics of the performance process—'training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool-down, aftermath'—but he does not analyse to any significant degree the *processes* that enable the performer to move through these stages. What is singularly missing in his account is significant attention to the *interiority* of performance, and particularly any sense of the centrality of memory to its processes.
>
> To put the case bluntly: without memory there cannot be any 'restored behavior.' Memory is the medium through which performance is transmitted in time, whatever the medium for that transmission might be in space. Hence, the processes of recollection are the invisible component of restored behavior; or we might more accurately say -- given that I am arguing that ultimately we cannot separate the dancer from the dance-- restored behavior is memory made manifest. (*The Radical* 173)

The lengthy block quote above is justified in that memory, regardless of its medium, is the central process through which performances can restore behaviour, and following this, if performances are a key element through which we can understand behaviour, what happens when memory itself becomes repeated? What happens when the whole world, made to pass through the filter of the mass media industry, becomes performative before it ever reaches you? What happens when memory is replaced by records of performative nature? Eventually, all these questions are part of Anderson's own claim for fame, the mediatisation of performance, the subject of the next section.

1.5 Mediatised Performances

> A new medium is never an addition to an old one,
> nor does it leave the old one in peace.
> It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds
> new shapes and positions for them.
> (Marshall McLuhan)

Following Philip Auslander's usage of the term, mediatised performances indicate that "a particular cultural object is a product of the mass media or of media technology" (*Liveness* 5). That is, mediatised performances not only propagate as "performance that is circulated on television, as audio or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies of reproduction" (Auslander *Liveness* 5), they can be transmitted across a network of electro-electronic systems based on technologies of reproduction (records, videos, radio, film, Internet) and disseminated as entertainment. Thus, a provisional definition of mediatised performances can be tied up to the environment in which they are made to circulate. Suggested by this perspective, mediatised performances, unlike live events, are not firmly bound or constituted by their original spatial-temporal location, nor are they documents of previous performances,

commodity by-products of performance art. This implies that Laurie Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers inhabit "an imaginary aural space with no possible physical analogue" (Auslander *Liveness* 74), a space that has been electronically enhanced, at once solid and made of thin air, constituted by performances that can be transmitted via a network of different means: television, videos, records, film, etc, and, in this process, incorporating many of the languages characteristic to each one of those specific types of performances (video, dance, sculpture, painting). Philip Auslander: "Today videos, photographs, and sound recordings are no longer documents of ephemeral performances but often constitute virtual performances in themselves" (*Presence* 58). As we have seen, Auslander identifies in the work of Laurie Anderson a performer and performances which are primarily mediatised, that is, always inhabiting a virtual realm and refusing presence which is not mediated by technological means. Thus, mediatised performances inhabit a parallel space, contiguous but not exactly simultaneous with the physical space in which most avant-garde performance itself has taken place.

My own understanding of the term indicates, first, that the performances of Laurie Anderson are mediatised because they have been recorded, made repeatable and available through the network of corporate entertainment industries, and second—but perhaps more importantly—that mediatised performances can be seen to recognise their own position *as media* in this environment. In other words, mediatised performances are, as it were, immensely aware of their own status as mediated events inside the media landscape. How is this possible? Auslander explains:

> Because the main structure of authority in performance is the concept of "presence", these deconstructive strategies [say, mediatisation] focus on putting presence into question... thus giving the spectator as social

> subject an opportunity to comprehend her own positioning under mediatisation. (*Presence* 171)

Both by making references to a virtual world and openly acknowledging their use of its resources to surface amidst other cultural products, mediatised performances assert their existence by negotiating ways by means of which they can maintain their position in a commodity economy (Auslander *Presence* 170). Thus, like virtual reality (William Gibson's "cyberspace"), mediatisation produces an enhancement of the physical space.

The difficulty arising from this situation is that much of what has been said about performance is centred on two diverse principles. First, that performances are ephemeral live events, "made temporarily visible" (Phelan *Unmarked* 167), thus based on physical presence, recovered only by memory; and second, that 'performance studies' in general have "struggled ... with the perils of preservation and the treacheries of transmission" (Phelan *Ends of Performance* 8). Thus, mediatised performances propose a contested notion of performance: "Anderson's performances occupy the cultural position of rock music more than that of performance art" (Auslander *Presence* 59). For Auslander, Anderson

> uses the technology of mediatisation to disperse her own presence and, thus, to deauthorize her position as performer, while presenting an implicit vision of a mediatised environment as one in which traditional ideological hierarchies are undone, a vision that holds out the possibility that a progressive cultural politics may yet be forthcoming from within the structure of mediatisation itself. (*Presence* 171-2)

The purpose of much of Auslander's argument is to assert that, by inhabiting or appearing in this space between performance art and entertainment, Anderson's mediatised performances herald the (utopian) possibility of change within the very

structure that maintains her work. Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers have been preserved on record and have crossed the line not only from the live environment of the gallery or the museum, theatre or concert hall, into mass-produced, recorded performances, but they have also crossed—perhaps at the same time?— the boundaries of a number of other fields: avant-garde art and popular music, low and high art forms, live and electronic presence (or absence). Implied by this idea of crossing over numerous boundaries, of contaminating different areas and fields is, I believe, a much needed shift of focus that goes well with the contemporary technological landscape. Not only by the time in which Laurie Anderson signed with Warner was the avant-garde struggling to survive, but the whole idea of contemporary high art would soon begin to change, turning on its radical politics and facing the whole host of strategies employed by entertainment industries more evenly.[29]

Nevertheless, such crossing over of boundaries undertaken by Anderson was not seen with good eyes: nobody knew—beyond the charges of "selling out"—what this move could possibly mean, and this is one of the tasks that Laurie Anderson took upon herself, to work on performances that escaped the avant-garde audiences and were literally placed inside the network ensued by the technological landscape. To complicate matters, not only did Laurie Anderson make this move into mainstream culture at an early point in her career, but, at the time she made it, she had already been accepted and established herself as an avant-garde performer in the New York art-scene. Thus, signing a contract with Warner Brothers—moving into mainstream culture—was a dangerous, if not a completely misunderstood matter. Additionally, there's the question of Anderson's electronic audience, of which she says—and coming from the New York avant-garde this can only be logical—she had no idea what was expected of her (*Nerve Bible* 6-7).

Thus, her records constitute mediatised performances, as Auslander calls them, or as it is also possible to define them rather more bluntly, *performative products*, that is, recordings of performances which begin (and here I am speaking chronologically) as documents of live performances and then, over the years, evolve into artificial, or virtual, electronic performances, not exactly ever intended for live presentations. In fact, as we have seen, for Auslander, Anderson's performances and personae are always already mediatised ones (*Presence* 55). That is, her electronic performances have surpassed not only the boundaries of her own body but also of her original spatial-temporal co-ordinates. Even live Anderson is never "immediately present" but refuses presence through mediatisation, as Auslander notices (*Presence* 57). Amplification and electronic devices help her fill a large performance space and the projections help create a context, but these are also "layers of mediation through which the spectator must perceive her" (*Presence* 111). An additional characteristic of Anderson's recordings is that they offer a performance which, albeit layered and framed within the market of popular music, is not bound by the authority of presence which informs most avant-garde performance work, but enters the flow of the everyday through our stereo systems, and which (in this portable form) can be recovered in a multitude of contexts (car, home, walking, travelling), thus escaping the occasional frame of live performance. Interestingly, Anderson has recognised that much of her work has been about "authority and reactions to authority" (Campbell 136), hence mediatisation functions as a way of further contesting authority: the format she has chosen her performances to take (mediatisation) displace one of performance's art more conspicuous frame: that it is ephemeral, evanescent live art, i.e., the authority of live presence.

From live and transitory to transmitted and—to some extent—preserved "forever there", inhabiting a virtual, electronic space that makes up for a large part of our contemporary landscape, Anderson's performances seem woven by the fabric of technology and its discontents. This is what we will be analysing next. What follows is a selection and assessment of Laurie Anderson's 1980s and 1990s performances released by Warner Brothers—*Big Science* (1982), *United States I-IV* (1984), *Mister Heartbreak (1984), Strange Angels* (1989), *Bright Red* (1994) and *The Ugly One with the Jewels* (1995)—, as recordings which seem to bring together the worlds of avant-garde performance and popular music into the landscape of electronic, mediatised performance distributed world-wide.

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[1] Zurich—at this time a peaceful oasis in the middle of war-torn Europe—was home to a number of artists, established writers and Russian Socialist exiles. James Joyce, Frank Wedekind, Lenin and Romain Rolland were all established in Zurich (Melzer 11).

[2] The most notable exception is Marcel Duchamp who can be said to have been one of the more prominent figures of DADA. Duchamp's artworks, by the time in which most of the works by other members of the DADA group were recognised, were still not granted the status given to other artistic objects.

[3] Consider Simon Frith: "In the gallery world, one important reason for taking up performance art was its impertinence: the performance artist mocked the ideology of transcendence and the exploitation of art as property (though of course, tapes of performances were soon marketed)" (*Performing Rites* 210).

[4] I think it is important to note that early artists would soon learn how to challenge this "media-version" of a given reality from within its own structures. Something the performers and artists of the 1960s could not get away with.

[5] Let us not confuse Andy Warhol's position here. The artists working with performance art at this point in time were by far more underrated than Warhol himself, who albeit sharing some of the same concerns, has always continually worked from inside the very structure performance artists sought to dismantle.

[6] Transgression and resistance are the terms Auslander, whom I follow, employs in *Presence and Resistance*. These terms represent a development of the framework originally developed by Hal Foster to describe two strands of postmodernist artistic practice in *Postmodernism or the Antiaesthetic*, which seems to work for the world of art and avant-garde artistic practice. Albeit much criticised (see Kaplan's book in the References) for confusing modernism with postmodernism, Foster's distinction between a postmodernism of "resistance" (which seeks to deconstruct modernism from a critical perspective) and a postmodernism of "reaction" (which eventually reaffirms modernism) has been useful to me insofar as it makes possible to contrast the status quo, with alternative forms of artistic practice. Whenever these terms appear here, they are meant to be understood in Foster's and Auslander's intelligence of them.

[7] Nevertheless, consider what Laurie Anderson had to say: "A few nights ago I was in a museum in Chicago, 'The Museum of Contemporary Art.' Downstairs, there a show called 'Bodyworks.' Basically, it was pieces of paper on a wall, photographs, notes, tapes. Artists putting their bodies on the line, putting themselves through various exercises, contortions, exorcisms, all in an effort to exit the body, the brain, trying everything short of jumping out of the window. But in fact, no bodies were there. Only paper" (*Nerve Bible* 109).

[8] For a more comprehensive description of these performances the reader should turn to RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance Art* (1979), cited in the references.

[9] Carlson's definition of gleemen is quoted from Thomas Frost's *The Old Showmen and the London Fairs,* p.19.

[10] For many commentators it is the audience that represents the key element that will define a performance. In addition, with the accomplishments in the field of artificial intelligence, we can soon expect that some machines (other than computers) will be exclusively performing in front of other equally capable and sophisticated machines (see note 23 below).

[11] Incidentally, it was Allan Kaprow's event at the Reuben Gallery in New York City (1959) which gave the form its name.

[12] "Abstract expressionism is the collective name for the work of a heterogeneous group of New York artists who produced vivid, emotionally charged non representational paintings characterised by very bold uses of colour and mass. The term abstract expressionism was used in 1929 by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., founder of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in reference to the early improvisations of Wassily Kandinsky" (1997 Grolier Interactive Inc.).

[13] The origin of the word MERZ is explained by Annabelle Melzer: it is a label Schwitters took from the word German "Commerz", which figures in one of Schwitters' collages. In addition "Bau" is the German word for construction. For several years Schwitters explored his ideas in MERZ a magazine he put out with other DADA artists and collaborators. Eventually he would call himself Merz (Melzer 199).

[14] http://www.stunned.org/mz1.htm and http://www.stunned.org/kdeE.htm (31/12/00).

[15]http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/news/pages/tim/99/04/21/x-timartvis02003.html (31-12-00).

[16] The remains of the work were finally taken away from the barn in Lake District and preserved at Newcastle's Hatton Gallery. (*The Times* Wednesday April 21 1999 http://www.sunday-times.co.uk/news/pages/tim/99/04/21/x-timartvis02003.html 31/12/00).

[17] Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956) first one-man exhibition was held in November 1943 at the Art of this Century Gallery in New York City ("Towards" Greenberg 560).

[18] "Action painting is a term first used by the American critic Harold Rosenberg in an article in 1952. He had the painting of Willem de Kooning especially in mind, with the idea that the work was itself a permanent record of the action, or process, of painting. Soon the term was used more or less interchangeably with abstract expressionism, although usually linked with the "gestural" abstract expressionists, such as Jackson Pollock and Hans Hofmann, as well as de Kooning" (1997 Grolier Interactive Inc.).

[19] By the late 1950s these paintings were even decorating the settings of many trendy Hollywood films. In Michael Gordon's award-winning comedy *Pillow Talk* (1959), Doris Day plays an interior designer constantly fooling around with such "valuable" pieces of high art.

[20]The situation is still noticeable. The residue of many of Joseph Beuys' performances that are (well) kept in museums is totally mysterious: a telephone, some rolls of felt, a blackboard on which words and schemes have been drawn. For the idle viewer, it becomes impossible to gather anything only from those scattered objects; as the performer is not there anymore, we can only rely on photographs of the action, descriptions, and records to guide us through the vanished performance.

[21] Walter Benjamin is the philosopher responsible for the concept of the "aura. " As an after thought I wonder if it ever occurred to him to think that his writings on the disappearance of the "aura" would enable his own resurrection as a cultural commodity.
[22] For a more comprehensive treatment of the subject refer to Richard Schechner, mentioned in the references.
[23] Electronic music is a case in point, where "sequencers" and "MIDIs" (musical instrument digital interface) are used to monitor and detect constantly the presence of other performing instruments and /or sounds.
[24] Richard Schechner established The Performance Group in 1967; as has been pointed out, his theoretical work has been at the crossroads between anthropology and theatre.
[25] Italics in the original.
[26] Again, italics in the original.
[27] Think of the formal conventions used in academic texts, for instance, and one has a pretty clear idea of how all this operates.
[28] Refer to the problems faced by those working in the field of artificial intelligence and automated, computerised translation. The results are still not 100% ideal.
[29] The three decades that separate the early 1960s from the late1980s seem to have witnessed a change from an interest in the body of the artist itself as the focus of art, simply an extension of modernist aesthetics, to a more generalised concern with the media (Goldberg *Performance Art* 190).

Chapter 2

Electronic Performance—Crossing Over and Mediatisation

2.1 Odd Objects:

Electronic Performance

at the Intersection of National and Other Borders

> Storytelling has always been about people
> huddling around a camp-fire,
> to me, electronics has always had
> the mystery and power of fire.
> (Laurie Anderson)

> The problem in the coming years
> won't be your family hogging the [phone] line ...
> It will be your fridge having a conversation
> with the washing machine.
> (Paul Saffo)

Because Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances represent a contested notion of performance, having been referred to as "crossover performances" (Birringer *Media* 65), a logical starting point here would be to investigate the overall relevance of this terminology that implies the idea of movement from one point to another, from one particular situation or set of alternatives to another. To be sure, also implied by Birringer's phrase is the idea of clearly marked borders and of limits that are made unstable, contested and—eventually—unmade. What then are the confines meant to be trespassed by Anderson's "crossover"? Johannes Birringer himself, who employs the phrase, acknowledges the limitations of this terminology to suggest more precisely the nature of Anderson's work by bringing to our attention the fact that, in a sense, most

performances are always crossover events. That is, because performances usually employ a variety of different media and different artistic languages (painting, dance, sculpture, video), this aspect of the terminology alone is not as useful a definition of Anderson's performances as one might expect, unless we use it to help us understand her simultaneous presence in the New York avant-garde art scene and in the world of mass-produced popular music. As modern technologies tend to cancel out the question of origin by attempting to surpass regional/spatial confines, Anderson's mediatised performances begin to share and occupy the space common to a thousand other mass-produced cultural objects, all struggling to hold on by the minute to the surface of the digital landscape. It is from this point of view that we can read more meaning into Anderson's crossover. We begin by tracing the trajectory this so-called "crossing over" has taken Anderson. Where does she come from? Where did she think she was going?

Even if seen from a great distance—remember, her predominantly extended presence in recorded media surpasses the spatial-temporal circumstances of her own physical body—the surfaces of Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances, the finished products we can hold in our hands, are never seamless in the sense that they are just a showcase of the latest "sound and vision" technology. In fact, Anderson says: "Technology is the least important thing about what I do" (qtd. in O'Mahony 3). The aspect of technology that does not interest Anderson is the obvious connection established between her using three tons of electronic devices in "live" performances and the distortions of interpretation that most often get associated with this situation:

> One of my worst fears when making big pieces involving technology is that I'll come across as a super enthusiastic electronics sales person pointing to equipment and saying, "Look at all these incredible new totally digital systems! Isn't Big Technology great?" (Anderson "Control Rooms" 127)

If she is not showcasing technology, what is she doing with three tons of it? What is she doing right inside the network of mediatised performances?

The first point to be made is that Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers are crossovers in the sense that her extensive use of mass culture forges an electronic body that, stretching out into popular music, appropriates many of its industrial resources and modes of production. Consequently, crossing over, which moves Anderson from one side of the "cultural continuum" (Auslander *Presence* 10), the New York avant-garde, to another, the record industry and the pop charts, represents, after all, one particular way of defining her performances. In addition to that, mediatisation places Anderson's performances alongside mass produced, low cultural forms, such as popular recordings. These two factors move Anderson's performances from one side of the "cultural continuum" to another. A trajectory which, arguably, still represents extreme positions in contemporary commodity culture.

This critical shift, this moving sides on the cultural spectrum—called "sweep on the dial" by Anderson herself—implies at least two things. One, that Anderson's performances circulate as audio or video recordings, products of media technology, and, two, that they can be seen as aware of their own status as "media" in a mediatic system. Thus, Laurie Anderson, who uses electronic mediation in every performance, becomes, in the words of RoseLee Goldberg, part of the "media generation" of performers, the "artist-as-celebrity" of the early 1980s (*Performance Art* 190), or, as we have seen, a performer who is "always already mediatised" (Auslander *Presence* 55).

The terms of this debate are clear. Anderson's work represents a contested notion of performance because she goes against ordinary trends of performance art that understand the term to be mainly defined by its evanescence and recuperation in audience's memory, its unique relation to the time and the space in which it happened for the first time. Moreover, as I have argued, prototypical performance art is identified

by its association with the historical Western avant-garde, not with the establishment, and not with the mass media. At the same time, mediatisation necessarily compels Anderson to become absorbed by the economy from which she draws. That is, mediatisation means not only that Anderson's performances can now be "mechanically" retrieved, but that her electronic personae in performance—by surpassing the boundaries of both her own physical body and her original spatial (and temporal) co-ordinates—are inserted into the flow of commodity culture. Thus, she performs a strategic move of which her performances for Warner Brothers are a constant reminder:

> One of the most significant effects of performance art's entry into the flow of commodity culture is the breakdown of the distinction between live and mediated performance, perhaps the final frontier of "authenticity" in performance, as the debates over the use of pre-recorded and pre-programmed sounds in rock concert suggest. (Auslander *Presence* 65)

The suggestion here is that mediatisation of performances put at stake the very hierarchy upon which value has been historically attributed to performances (and why not say art in general): the mutually exclusive relation that sees (in a certain sense since Plato) the live event as the primary one, therefore "real", and the recorded, or mediatised, as artificial, thus, largely secondary to live. Mediatisation of performances can be read as a further reduction (or effacement) of the importance of the above mentioned opposition because, strictly speaking, the mass-produced record comes to bear no resemblance to the live, neither authenticating nor explaining the live performance but existing *independently* from it in a network of different means (media): television, videos, records, film, etc. The bottom line may be as follows: Anderson's performances, by entering the realm of mass culture (through popular music), cross over a handful of meaningful (albeit, in my view, exhausted) demarcation lines, those

between the original and its copies, those between the avant-garde, serious art and mass produced, low art forms and, far more importantly, those lines that aim at maintaining intact the hierarchy between live and mediated events. Hence, Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers, as they foreground their own recovery as mediatised events on television, records, and videos (but also in here),[1] represent a contested notion of performance.

The purpose of much of my argument in this study is to show that Anderson inhabits and appears in this space that has been electronically generated and enhanced (mass media), at once solid (the finished performances are products, mass-produced goods) and made of thin air (their reproduction takes place as much inside your head as on the device used to reproduce it), because performances in this electronic space have subverted the classic dependence of copies upon originals; mediatised performances not only subsist on their own, their status is now rendered *virtually indistinguishable*[2] from those in real, physical spaces. In other words, augmented by mediatisation, their "*reality*" strikes you as larger than life, that is, larger than the reality of those events taking place in real, physical space. As regards Anderson's recorded performances, it is in this electronically generated, augmented space of mass-media and mediatised performance inserted into the flow of commodity culture that they unfold and display many unexpected angles. Simon Frith:

> I listen to records in the full knowledge that what I hear is something that never existed, that never could exist, as a "performance", something happening in a single time and space; nevertheless, it is now happening, in a single time and space: it is thus a performance and I hear it as one, imagine the performers performing even when this just means a deejay mixing a track, an engineer pulling knobs. (*Performing Rites* 211)

Thus, in this 'parallel' world of virtual electronic space and of electronic noise, records (and mediatised performances) can enact a subversion of the premises upon which performances in physical space have rested. Mediatised performances are bound only by the constraints of their medium. They are not exactly "framed [solely] by their occasional nature" (Auslander *Presence* 66), or "made [only] temporarily visible" (Phelan *Unmarked* 167) because of their ephemeral nature. Much to the contrary, mediatised performances may circulate endlessly and be experienced randomly (but also simultaneously) as one integral act that repeatedly seizes and shapes "reality" at the touch of the "play" buttom.

2.2 Repairing and Maintaining and the "Aura"

Consequently, one of the ways in which performances (and, to my mind, mediatisation of performances) work is by carefully maintaining a balance that seemed completely lost in the mechanical reproduction and which, supposedly, could only have been maintained by the live event itself. My point is that performance's failure to secure the real but in action re-establishes (re-enacts?) the relevance of one of Walter Benjamin's seminal, notions from his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In 1936, Benjamin describes and analyses the situation of the work of art when faced with its resurrection as mechanical reproduction.

Concerned with the historical forces that seemed to be shaping new perceptions at the time (Fascism, proletarianisation, to name just two), Benjamin notices that even the most perfect reproduction of an artwork lacks one particularly important element, its "aura", that is, "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (244). In other words, in the age of mechanical reproduction—a period

to which Benjamin equates the formation of the masses and their desire to bring things closer, thus overcoming the threat posed by mechanical reproduction—what is lost is the unique connection between the artistic object and its specific spatial-temporal location, that is, the authority of the artistic object as a unique, non-repeatable event, which, for Benjamin, is held together and given the name of "aura." Thus, for Benjamin, the original artwork is fastened to history, i.e., it oozes a unique bind to history, the specific time lapse and context in which it was conceived and in which it has existed ever since. In Benjamin's view, the reproduction necessarily lacks such elements because it is the "aura" and its authentication that determine both the history to which this object was subjected and the changes it may have suffered in its physical condition over the years (245). Consequently, the existence of the artistic object, which was never entirely loosened from its ritualistic functioning, that is, the integration of the artistic object into tradition, which takes the form of cult, in the age of mechanical reproduction, is severed from what Benjamin calls its "parasitical dependence on ritual" (246). In other words, if, on the one hand, reproducibility emancipates the artistic object from ritual, on the other, it effectively kills off the relevance of its unique existence, thus, the relevance of its "aura": we must not forget that it is precisely the possibility of verification of the "aura" of an artistic object that enables this object to become (or *not* to become) valuable as an artistic commodity (threats to the priceless "aura" of, say, the Monalisa, must be taken seriously, for—eventually—they represent a threat to history and, thus, to tradition). Benjamin cites manual reproduction, usually branded as forgery, as one of the methods that, unlike process and mechanical reproduction, cannot disrupt the value of the original. To me, much of the modernist project, modelled and anchored in the possibility of verification of the "aura", is shattered by the mass-media and, particularly, performance art, but in quite peculiar ways.

Interestingly, when the perspective advanced by Benjamin's concept of the

"aura" is superimposed onto notions of performance, the resulting operation not only provides a counterpart definition for performance art, it establishes the overall relevance of performance art to commodity culture. If we understand Happenings and performances as unique events that cannot be reproduced outside their unique spatial-temporal location (Kirby 3), Benjamin's remark in relation to the situation of the "aura" of the artistic object in contemporary times firmly foresees performance art as, perhaps, its only feasible occurrence in commodity culture. By trying to evade objectification, performance art interrogates the role of artistic objects in commodity culture.

As I said earlier, according to Benjamin, when faced with the prospect of mechanical reproduction (and its subsequent commodification), the authority of the artistic object (the authentication, by the "aura", of its unique existence) is jeopardised by its reproduction, i.e., an artwork's value and power are closely bound to the idea of the authenticity of its "aura", that which disappears in the mechanical reproduction. Thus, faced with the overwhelming pressure of the mass media, the value of the original artistic object, following Benjamin's terms, the value accorded to its "aura", is removed. The point of having, say, an original Leonardo da Vinci lies in the commodity value ascribed to the original "aura" of a Leonardo, now secularised, its pricelessness as a commodity bound to its unique existence. When reproductions can be put up in your home for even less than one hundred tenth of their original value, the "aura" of the artistic object greatly diminishes. Not the original idea.

Performance artists seem to understand this situation very well and have reacted accordingly. In 1962 Yves Klein made *Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zone 5*, in which the buyer of the piece burned the payment cheque while Klein threw 20g of gold leaf into the margins of the river Seine (Goldberg *Performance Art* 147). The relevance of performance art is established in the likelihood of its recovering the uniqueness of a work of art following the dissolution of the "aura" by commodity culture, as outlined by

Walter Benjamin, minus the possibility of unrestrained commodification attendant on the artistic objects. Through mechanical reproduction and commodification it is the value of the original that is jeopardised, not the expression.

To be sure, we must imagine that performances, in their "earliest" outline (as described by Kirby two paragraphs above), may have had the ability to restore a similar version of what Benjamin identified as the "aura" of a given artistic object, its specific relation to time (the history it was subject to) and space (its functioning and unique existence in a particular place), in sum, its presence, which was never entirely separated from its ritualistic functioning (Benjamin 245). Inside commodity culture, early performances establish their existence from a particular and unique location in time and space; that is, *from* their presence and history at a (mostly) single, specific and singular location stems their ritualistic functioning, their restoration of the 'aura" as a valid concept. Hence, in contemporary times, the particular appeal performances may have as a legitimate artistic strategy for an economy based on reproduction and repetition is located in performance's ability to evade the threat posed not only by mechanical and process reproduction but also by—through the operations of the art market—the commodification of the artwork, and thus, in performance, in *action*, effectively to restore the "aura" of a cultural product: sold as commodity, mediatised performances retain the ability to take momentary arrest of the real.

In other words, to an art market increasingly monopolised by commodity value and threatened by mechanical reproductions, the modernist project is modelled and anchored by the masses' desire to bring things closer, which, Benjamin points out, depreciates the quality (and value) of the actual work of art by meeting the beholder halfway, or disentangling it from its web of historical connections, thus undermining tradition; early performance art, which had to be absorbed in the special, restricted places of high-art (galleries, museums) and could not meet the beholder halfway, once

again re-establishes the uniqueness of an artwork's "aura" by resisting the possibility of facile reproduction. The peculiarity, however, is that performance's restoration of the "aura" can only occur in performance; that is, in commodity culture the aura can be brought back, but this time only in performance, as a performance. Thus, commodity culture's variation of the "aura" is bound to a transient performative frame. Thus, artistic practice once more becomes bound to ritual (see the work of Hermann Nitsch, cited in Goldberg P*erformance Art* 163-167).

Not much later, when performances become fixed, made repeatable (or mediatised) inside the economy of reproduction, or (as we will see) in the documents of performance art themselves, performances still hold that balance that, for Benjamin, was seemingly lost in mere reproduction: an artwork's specific location (history) in time and space, its single occurrence at a particular time and space. The tricky part, for me, is that performance's ability to restore the aura of authenticity of an artistic object escapes the realm of objectification and the cult of the beautiful (which eventually had informed most modernist aesthetic critiques) but restores art its ritualistic functioning; that is, performance's reparation (and maintenance) of the "aura" only seem to happen in the rituals of *performance art*. What I want to argue is that, analogous to performances in real space, mediatised performances (which subvert their dependence upon originals) enact once more the resurrection of the concept of the "aura" and of its experience as something relevant. Thus, in the age of digital reproduction, mediatisation produces commodified performances which restore an electronic version of the "aura", that is, which become products (reproductions) with an added value: their performative power. In other words, mediatised performances' abihty to restore aspects of Benjamin's concept—both recovering certain elements of it (an ability that, as I have mentioned, was seemingly lost in mere reproduction) and slipping in new ones as well—is now bound to the electronic environment in which they occur: the mass media.

What seems to be still very much present in the mediatised performance then is a new functional balance: the value of the original and unique artistic object in reproduction is augmented and expanded by its mediatisation. Thus, replaced by its multiples, what gets resurrected in mediatised performance (not completely unlike the reproduction) is a commodity with an added value for a commodity based economy. My claim, however, is that these objects not only fulfil the masses' desire to bring things closer (circulating continuously), but are able to maintain their "aura" *in* performance, regardless of their commodity status, at the touch of the "play" buttom.

Thus, performances—normally halfway between the "real" and the "reproduction", or the "real" and our failure to stabilise it—can move from one side to the other of the "cultural continuum" without losing their power to bring the real (that is, the *reality* of a performance, the real as performance, right here, right now)—if ever still so momentarily—to our *attention*. This is performance's *hold* on the real, a singularity of some value to contemporary times which see repetition at the basis of its exchange economy and witness an overwhelming multiplication of commodities struggling to hold on by the minute to the surface of the media landscape.

Additionally, the relevance of performance to commodity culture may be established once we recognise performance's ability to restore the "aura" of art as it relates to ritual. In other words, the real can only be made (temporarily) visible or invisible *by means of* performance. Consequently, in the digital age, the mediatisation of performances partly re-establishes the balance that, according to Benjamin, was lost at the beginning of the age of mechanical reproduction: before commodity culture sets in, our attempts to secure the real, that is, the artistic objects that were originated in the service of ritual—being, at first, connected to magical and then religious ritual—never lost their "parasitical dependence on ritual" (246). In the age of mechanical reproduction, artistic objects are, for the first time, emancipated from ritual, and, as we

have seen, in our attempts to *reproduce them mechanically*, what is lost is their "aura" (i.e., their unique existence in time and space). Mediatised performances therefore, by their own turn, maintain this balance intact because they subvert their dependency upon originals, upon the idea of a generating event that answers for the recorded or reproduced one. My point is that this balance achieved by performance between the live and the mediated is crucial to contemporary times which see repetition, the flow of commodity exchange, at the basis of its agenda. Thus, performances which can be said to create difference while still holding the delicate balance between what is live and what is not, what is real and what is not "real", can be placed at the topmost position of this exchange economy.

To me, this part of the argument may constitute the particular appeal mediatisation may have had for Laurie Anderson, for Warner Brothers (the company that first signed her up and distributes much of her work), and for electronic audiences world-wide. Mediatised performances can reach audiences across national borders, crash landing—so to speak—in our own living rooms, forever re-enacting uncertainty, Peggy Phelan's "failure to secure the real" (*Unmarked* 167), as electronic noise.

2.3 Curiously Resistant

Curiously, Anderson's mediatised performances also maintain another balance: while her performances remain implicated in practices (and critiques) that go back at least 40 years, when a brave new world of avant-garde art was variously identified by the name of "performance art", they also transform and articulate themselves using the resources of the culture industry, which more accurately appeal to the interests of contemporary audiences for whom it is the masses' relation to the landscape of contemporary mass-produced objects that remains a substantial and defining mode of

perception. Externally, these "electronic" performances become defined by circumstances other than those conditioning early live performance: because they have been "fixed" in a technological sheath, mediatised performances can be presented out of context; that is, as a product, they can be made to circulate forever in a virtual environment of economic repetition that surpasses the borders of specific cultural and social contexts.

Thus, crossing over and mediatisation, in respect to Laurie Anderson, means moving away from functioning mainly by way of the transgressive strategies deployed by avant-garde art and embracing the strategies of mass culture while still remaining politically resistant:

> Resistance in the electronic space is less about taking and maintaining a physical or logical position outside of power and more about playing multiple language games in order to learn a variety of moves, to point out the different rules governing them, and to invent new ones when necessary. (McKenzie 38)

Thus, what at first may sound quite paradoxical about Anderson's recorded performances, the fact that they move between the two extremes of avant-garde performance art and popular culture, eventually becomes quite stimulating: essentially it is impossible to frame her performances according to one particular stream, and, precisely because of this, we can never be sure which direction her games are taking us.

In this respect, Philip Auslander argues that commentators with a commitment to 1960s radical and transgressive performance strategies (left over from the historical avant-garde), such as Josette Féral or Peggy Phelan, see these "crossing over" and "mediatisation" processes as rendering performance void (when the performance meets the video screen, the film, or the record, as it does most of the time in Anderson's case, it becomes frozen and dies; that is, it acquires the status of just another commodity).

Again, my point is that performances as commodities, regardless of these (assumed) ontological differences, dead or not dead, are crucial to contemporary times.

Thus, the position of a given mediatised performance in the "cultural continuum" (Auslander *Presence* 10), say one of Laurie Anderson's performances, becomes less dependent on strategies such as transgression than on shifting attitudes towards artistic objects, and commodities *as* artistic objects. In fact, as Auslander puts it, Laurie Anderson becomes resistant exactly because she "epitomizes one strain of postmodern performance of the 1980s" (Auslander *Presence* 1) which, as we have seen in the introduction, "engage[s] postmodern culture critically, even if the forms that critical perspective takes are not instantly recognizable as such, especially to those whose notions of the relations between art and politics were formed in the 1960s or who subscribe to a Frankfurt School view of mass culture" (Auslander *Presence* 3).

Part of this argument, which at first seems entirely logical (historically, performance art was partly born of artists' impatience with traditional materials and their refusal to take part in the commodification of art), derives its power from the traditional belief that (as we have seen) the live event is the real event, and that the mediated is an artificial, technical reproduction of the live. That is, live performances remain forever outside representation because they can only be recovered in memory: "some performance theorists see performance's evanescence and its existence only in spectatorial memory as placing performance outside the purview of reproduction and regulation" (Auslander *Liveness* 151). However, this tradition denies one circumstance: the practical impossibility of escaping a process that has haunted performance since its inception: via its own documents, performances have long been framed, commodified and, according to this view, "killed." The difference therefore only pertains to Anderson's embrace of mass culture. Now, for the less obvious implications of such perspective in Anderson's performances, we must step aside and analyse the impact of

(photographic) reproduction for the arts and its subsequent role documenting performance art.

2.4 Photographic Documentation, the Masses' Desire to Bring Things Closer, Working Outside the Gallery Circuit and Crossing Over

Documents of performances were the quintessential means through which performances were preserved and substantiated. The significance of photographic documentation of performances, says Henry M. Sayre, was first established by artists such as Jean Tinguely and Rudolf Schwartzkogler, who produced performance art which could not be "easily" reproduced.[3] Authentication and validation of performances came in the form of documentation marketed by the museums and galleries which, having acquired the rights to the performances, virtually had no other objects to exhibit but this "performative residue" in the form of (in most cases photographic) documentation. These institutions owned "conceptual" ideas but nevertheless needed proof of such ownership. The fact that "we experience photography as presence itself—as a formalist art object—as a presence signifying the virtual absence of some a priori experience" [4] (Sayre *Object of Performance* 1), a means through which documents of performances could be taken into account, is one of the reasons why documents of performances were so keenly embraced by art galleries and museums. Thus, they acquired the rights of the photographs which documented them (Sayre *Object of Performance* 2). Because many performances left no residue, photography, with its straightforward presence signifying the absent referent, also indicated the quintessential way through which performance art became commodified.

An additional factor in this line of argument, as we will see, is that commodification of performances did not occur only at this "pictorial" level, but rather in more sophisticated ways, by means of funding, sponsoring, etc. Thus, commodification was always at hand, and not only made visible *in* the artistic objects. However, insofar as this line of thought maintains the boundaries between high and low art forms intact, it helps to identify the transition through which a new generation of performance artists were going. To this new generation belong Laurie Anderson, Spalding Grey, Andy Kaufman and others, who began to "crossover", to use Birringer's term once more, by adopting the language and the format of popular entertainment forms (rock, stand-up comedy, television). Philip Auslander: "[T]he idea that an artistic operation could participate in a commodity economy yet retain its political significance and integrity was not foreign to the 1960s, but it was articulated in the context of rock music rather than of the theater" (*Presence* 38). In short, the logic of the avant-garde demanded transgression and did not allow its participants compliance with mass culture, but the logic of rock and roll, supported by its consumers, and which seemed to involve the subversive implosion of capitalist culture from within, paradoxically demanded that people went out to buy new records on a even more steady basis.[5]

At this point, the avant-garde incurred in a critical inability to recognise in crossing over to mass-media a new aesthetic and political practice because its terms were alien to those the avant-garde had inherited (Auslander *Presence* 23); that is, the avant-garde could not recognise in this peculiar strategy of embracing popular culture (resistance from within, not transgression from the outside) any means for a valid criticism because its commitment in violating the "rules", avant-garde's inherited vocabulary, aimed precisely at escaping commodification, this new generation's crucial and first strategic move:

> In the 1980s, this vision of the political function of performance was seen as not responsive to postmodern culture, in which the most common form of collectivity is the serial relation of consumers of the mass media and in which the most effective form of social action (sic) are likely to be at the micropolitical level of specific interest groups. (Auslander *Presence* 44)

Thus, by the 1980s performers such as Anderson began to recognise in the failure of 1960s political strategies to engage contemporary audiences in the creation of a collective experience (including those strategies which helped define the performance field as such) a new paradigmatic break: the historical moment that was soon to be broadly defined as postmodernism did not operate according to the same rules laid out by movements which avoided participation in the economy of mass production. Postmodern audiences were more likely to embrace mass culture objects than avant-garde ideas. I follow Philip Auslander's point of view here: one of the reasons for the exhaustion of 1960s' more transgressive and radical strategies to win over audiences is situated in the artists' reluctance to engage commodity culture from within, i.e., by entering into it (*Presence* 42). Such failure is brought about because one of postmodern culture's most common forms of collective experience is expressed by consumers *in* their relation to mass media, that is, found in audiences' *consumption* of mass-produced cultural works, Walter Benjamin's desire of the masses to bring things closer, as we have seen. If we take the example of museums and art galleries which needed to display at least some residue of performances, we can see how deeply ingrained such logic operated. For one thing, the relation of proximity established between mass-produced (mediatised) cultural works and their audiences, also one of Walter Benjamin's cornerstones in the already mentioned "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), helps explain the importance of mediatisation and the avant-

garde's failure to address its contemporary audiences. This seems to underline Benjamin's argument in relation to the expansion of reproductions,

> [n]amely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. (Benjamin 246)

The implication is that it is alright for mass-produced cultural products to be "closer"; besides not relying on transgression (meaning representation outside the purview of reproduction), mass-produced objects may be scrutinised by audiences whose primary experience of reality has changed significantly, who participate more directly in the experience they wish to comment on. That is, contrariwise to high art objects, mass produced cultural objects can be "owned" and held closely by many, even if they are thought of as immaterial:

> You know, there's a very interesting lawsuit in the courts now. The plaintiff is a man who says that whatever he tapes off television belongs to him. He says, "Look, the minute that signal comes into my house, on my own private property, it is one of the two things, it is a) trespassing, or it is b) an unsolicited gift." If it is a), it is the obligation of the sender to prove it is not harmful to the receiver's health. This is difficult to do since television is radiation. Granted, radio frequency is an extremely low level of radiation but it is still there. And if it's b), then it belongs to the receiver, who may use it for any purpose. (Anderson *Stories* 157)

Anderson's story is extraordinary because it echoes Benjamin's maxim: "To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility" (246). Place both in conjunction with Auslander's precept that live

events nowadays aim at recreating the conditions of the studio recording because they are judged by their mediatised counterpart (*Presence* 67) and we have the factors that help mediated forms acquire such tremendous cultural authority. To my mind, avant-garde's failure lies in its inadequacy, its refusal (or inherited inability) to understand contemporary audiences' desires to possess anything (commodified reproductions, copies or duplicates), regardless of the fact that technical or process reproduction, as Benjamin puts it, may invalidate the authority of the original. Mediatised performances create a new kind of commodity object, one for which the historical avant-garde has no place, no affirmative critique.

Following Benjamin's statement, Auslander argues that, by embracing the formats favoured by mass culture, artists at last acknowledged that media-derived experience was an important, if not the most significant, cultural dominant of the times. In other words, since the nature of the artistic experience in the current cultural moment (having been redefined through audiences' relation to mass-produced objects) had changed, it is only logical that a new form of perception should be at hand. That is, albeit mass-produced objects (reproductions, copies, duplicates) lacked the element of their uniqueness in space and time, contemporary audiences were willing to overlook this situation because reproductions brought things closer. For Benjamin, by accepting the reproduction, mass audiences took away the authority of the original work of art, which was then depreciated, jeopardised:

> [T]he technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. (245)

Thus, reproduction is—at least—a twofold process: reproduced objects lose in authenticity what they gain in their increased circulation, and in the process their increased circulation "reactivates" the object reproduced once more. One of Benjamin's conclusions is that eventually this process destroys tradition. True, performance art dismantled many of the grounds upon which aesthetic value was grounded. Also true, when Anderson takes up technology as her subject in mediatised performance, she goes to the heart of this problem. That is, conceptually she is able to explore this subject in more detail once her performances become inserted into the flow of commodity culture, authorised by the mass media. Consequently, by the early 1980s, with the failure of the avant-garde to reach broader audiences, and in order to continually make comments, performers (which had found a way to restore the "aura" of an artistic object) had to begin participating in the commodity economy, then still an utterly foreign field for the avant-garde.

If, in the 1960s and 1970s, performers knew no better than to transgress, willing to risk everything to evade the process of commodification; in the 1980s, artists began to realise how important it was to participate in this economy in order to reach audiences outside the small circles of the avant-garde. Laurie Anderson recalls her own assessment of the situation at different points in her career:

> The first time I realized that I could work outside of the avant-garde circuit was 1978. I was scheduled to do a performance in Houston, and since the museum wasn't really set up for this sort of thing—no stage, no chairs, no sound system—the performance was booked into a local country-and-western bar. The advertisements suggested some kind of country fiddling, so a lot of the regulars came. They arrived early and sat along the bar, so when the art crowd showed up—dressed in black and fashionably late—there was nowhere to sit. It was a strange-looking

> crowd. About halfway through the concert, I realized that the regulars were really getting it. What I was doing—telling stories and playing the violin—didn't seem bizarre to them. I remember that I felt great relief. The art world was after all quite tiny and I'd been doing concerts for the same hundred people. This was a whole new world. (Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 154)

From the perspective advanced by artists such as Anderson, we can say that what was shifting, from the premises of the political avant-garde and theatre of the 1960s in relation to performances in the 1980s, is that performance artists were again impatient. They recognised, this time in the limitations of the avant-garde environment itself (Anderson realises she had been performing for the same tiny audiences), the failure of radical strategies to reach audiences outside the protective dome of the avant-garde. That is, the exhaustion of 1960s radical, transgressive strategies is partly brought about because of avant-garde's inability to work outside its own protective dome interacting with audiences which had remained excluded from the (rather specialised) commentary of the avant-garde. Anderson is both amazed and glad to see that "the regulars" were "getting it" because they represented new, perhaps larger, less uniform audiences which could also relate to what she was doing (telling stories and playing the violin). As performers realise that there is life, but perhaps more importantly, money beyond the avant-garde (meaning audiences outside the avant-garde circuit would buy commodified art but not avant-garde art), they begin to crossover. However, in order to reach even wider audiences, which did not exactly speak the language of the avant-garde, these artists had to compromise: reaching audiences for which the immediate satisfaction of media-derived experience seemed to be the only experience available required that they participated in this economy. Of course this represents a treacherous move; once

commodification sets in, artists are in danger of losing their own grip in the art they make.

The relevance of this recognition for Laurie Anderson may serve as an index to the idea that media-derived experience had begun to define the historical and cultural moment with apparently more precision than it was possible for its high brow counterparts, the avant-garde movements. Hence, Anderson's entering commodity culture and taking technology as her subject has a number of consequences which, in their own turn, are not easily recovered.

At an early point in her career, Anderson recognises that the avant-garde was—eventually—not exactly the safest place from which to work:

> I remember walking into the Museum of Modern Art in 1976 where I was doing a sound check for a performance. I saw a big poster for the performance that said:
>
> "MOBIL OIL PRESENTS A PERFORMANCE
>
> BY LAURIE ANDERSON."
>
> I was shocked. I had signed a contract with a museum, not an oil company. This was when I first realized that no matter how hard you tried to avoid it, if you were in the art world, the big money wouldn't be too far away. (*Nerve Bible* 57)

If the avant-garde itself is not immune to corporate capital, where can one "hide"? Perhaps in the only place where the "big money" would not look for any further resistance: inside its own structures, within commodity culture. As we have seen, RoseLee Goldberg calls this new generation of performance artists, who, although shocked to see that "big money" would always determine the experience and production of art, nonetheless embraced its modes of production and languages, "the media generation" (*Performance Art* 190).

It is one of my premises in this study that Anderson's work not only is exemplary of this media generation of performers, but also offers unprecedented insight into the mapping of this territory of performance at the convergence of mass media. Laurie Anderson then, whose trajectory began in the small and protective New York avant-garde art scene, ends up signing a contract with a major recording label, Warner Brothers, not because she was selling-out, but partly because "mediatisation" through popular music recordings would enable her stories, by becoming part of the media landscape, consistently to comment on the subject she seems to be most interested in. Additionally, circulating in the same arena of other mass-produced cultural products would enable Anderson to address audiences from a virtually undistinguished position inside the flow of commodity culture. Likewise, insertion in mass culture would enable her performances to reach audiences for whom the experiences of media-derived content seemed to be the only one available, the only one that made sense.

In short, we can retrace Anderson's crossing over from one environment (the avant-garde art scene) to another (that of popular music) in two movements: first, when she recognises, in the limits of the avant-garde, the exhaustion of a language that will still prove relevant to contemporary times and practices; second, when she understands the import of corporate capital for artistic practice and the practical impossibility of avoiding it. To come full circle, another action was needed:

> In 1980 I released 'O Superman' on a small New York label, Bob George's 110 Records. The idea was that we would sell it mail order, and the initial pressing was 1,000 copies, financed by a $500 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Then one day I got this phone call from London, an order for 20,000 copies of the single, immediately followed by another 20,000 by the end of the week. I looked around at the cardboard box of records and said, 'Listen, can I just call you back?'

> People from Warner Brothers had been coming to my concerts, and asking whether I wanted to make a record. I hadn't really been too interested; I thought that pop music was usually designed for the average twelve-year-old and I didn't want anything to do with it. On the other hand, I was really happy that so many people wanted to hear my music in England. So I called someone at Warner's and asked if they could just press and ship some records for me. They said they didn't usually do this sort of thing ad hoc, that it would be better to sign an agreement. And that's how I got round to signing an eight-record deal granting Warner Brothers Records the right to own and distribute my music, 'in perpetuity throughout the universe.'
>
> I quickly found out that in my world (the New York avant-garde) this was considered 'selling out.' It took me a while to understand, but finally I realised this judgement was totally consistent. The avant-garde in the late '70s was extremely protective of its own ideas, territory, and privilege. I myself had benefited from this attitude. I had been supported and protected by this network. It had always been a safe place to work, until I signed a contract with a 'commercial' company. A couple of years later, this process was known as 'crossing over' and was looked on more favourably by the avant-garde. By the time it was considered a 'smart move' in the mid-'80s, there was no longer much of an avant-garde left to comment on it anyway. The result of this for me was that I had a whole new audience, an electronic audience. And I had no idea what they expected or wanted. (*Nerve Bible* 155)

I quote this at length not merely because it is interesting, but because (as I have argued in Section 1.3) the funny way in which Anderson recounts this experience provides the third moment, completing the circle of Anderson's reasons for crossing over. Jon

McKenzie: "[Anderson] has learned to sell stories and to tell stories about 'selling out'. And she has done all this through technological performance" ("Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 48). I think McKenzie is right. First, this narrative resembles the structure around which Anderson's mediatised performances are mainly constructed: storytelling. In addition, this fragment is also a clue to understanding Anderson's performances from a perspective which has been thrown at her at various points in her career. Her work has been described as "autobiographical." In the words of RoseLee Goldberg, "the analytical investigation of the fine edge between an artist's art and his or her life" (*Performance Art* 172). Anderson creates this lengthy account (a narrative performance) partly to justify her own "selling-out" and anchors such crossing over into the mainstream upon the observation that in the 1980s there was not much of an avant-garde left to make comments. Thus, this narrative enables us to double-check how far the crisis in the avant-garde had reached by the early 1980s as well as to justify Anderson's "smart move." As we have seen, one of the reasons why the avant-garde was increasingly unable to reach audiences lies on its refusal to "sell-out", or crossover, into mainstream, mass-mediated art works which around this time, the early 1980s, had already come to define contemporary audiences' cultural moment. RoseLee Goldberg:

> The artist-as-celebrity of the eighties came close to replacing the rock star of the seventies, although the artist's mystique as cultural messenger suggested a more establishment role than the rock star had played. (*Performance Art* 190)

Insofar as the general argument goes, Philip Auslander explains that apart from Laurie Anderson only a few other artists (Andy Kaufman, The Wooster Group, Sandra Bernhard) recognised in mass culture the possibility of resistance within structures that seemed to deny much, if not all, of avant-garde's lessons. Mass culture then, in the eyes of the avant-garde, as we have seen, was traditionally the realm of non-meaning, while

the avant-garde itself, the realm of meaning (*Presence* 170). Anderson, the artist as cultural messenger, enters the market of popular music, to dispute this division. In the case of her crossing over from the avant-garde into mainstream popular music, the above quoted narrative gives logical reasons which go beyond the obvious selling-out. Thus, it is Anderson's "storytelling" that plays with the points she wants to put across. Her account emphasises important aspects of her move: 1) the fact that the avant-garde would be dying a slow death by the 1980s, and 2) her interest in this new, electronic audience of which she knew absolutely nothing. Additionally, the words Anderson uses to characterise her contract with Warner—"universe", "perpetuity"—are not at all inconsistent, foolish or merely funny. In fact, together they represent the exact extent to which her performances were "boosted" during this period and the relevance of such transformation. When Laurie Anderson's performances are mass-produced as popular music recordings, her stories are translated and converted into a different format, one that perhaps suited the times and geographies of the electronic landscape and forms of perception of its displaced audiences equally better. Additionally, as we have seen, recordings consistently represent an enduring, everlasting performance material which can be made to circulate endlessly. Thus, Anderson's performances could be inserted into a different network from which they originally sprung, get distributed to much larger markets, be heard by a much wider, less integrated "electronic" audience, while commenting on these technological shifts from within and—in the process—altogether relinquish one of performance's main claims, that of authenticity and resistance based on older, historically rooted premises such as (live) presence and (radical) transgression.

Going back to the mechanics of Anderson's account, by recounting these facts in this particular *way* and *order*, this particular narrative becomes itself a performance. Anderson gives the facts of her "selling-out" a context and ordering, and thus the telling of stories is a performance that validates an opinion, introduces meaning to a series of

events, becomes relevant as ordered information. It is storytelling that holds Anderson's mediatised performances together, but why would she hold onto storytelling? Richard Bauman:

> When one looks to the social practices by which social life is accomplished, one finds—with surprising frequency—people telling stories to each other, as a means of giving cognitive and emotional coherence to experience, constructing and negotiating 'social identity'; investing the experiential landscape with moral significance in a way that can be brought to bear on human behavior; generating, interpreting, and transforming the work experience and a host of others reasons. (*Story* 113)

If the relevance of storytelling can be thus established, what becomes particularly striking about Anderson's performances is the nature of the stories she tells. Apart from using her stories to bear upon human behaviour in precisely the sense described by Bauman above, she tells stories about selling-out in mediated form to electronic audiences. In the process Anderson brings significance to this experience of mediatisation both to human behaviour and to the "reality" of the media landscape. Thus, the space that storytelling deliberately intensifies in Laurie Anderson's recorded performances provides room for reflecting upon the Twentieth Century from a rather interesting perspective: inside a commodity economy her stories are presented to audiences in compact, portable form.[6]

Moreover, when storytelling takes place through mediatised forms, as in the case of Anderson's recorded performances, one may regard these performances for what they are: aural landscapes that tell stories about the contemporary landscape. Thus, being "recorded" is precisely what makes Anderson's performances (and thus, the stories she tells) become an integral part of the digital, electronic landscape. Philip Auslander:

> To a much greater extent than earlier performance artists who documented their work on film or video, Anderson has entered the flow of commodity culture in ways that make her work potentially as much part of the audience's perceptual world as the television screen, the stereo, and the radio. (*Presence* 61)

Hence, absorbed into the flow of commodity culture, sharing the same space common to a thousand other cultural objects, the performances of Laurie Anderson can participate in and comment more authoritatively on the processes that, under the demands of mass culture, seem to be shaping the nature of human behaviour. At another point in her career she states:

> For many artists it is impossible to survive the media offensive. Increasingly, avant-garde artitsts are being absorbed by it. New York is drained for money. ... The avant-garde is the first to go. (Anderson "The Speed of Change" 18)

As a consequence, I believe the relevance of the stories Anderson tells is firmly tied to the mediatisation of her performances. First, these stories are determined by the fact that they have been preserved on record, have become mediatised precisely to survive the "media offensive" by invading its domains. In other words, by entering the flow of commodity culture, these performances are "electronically cut" for equally "electronic" audiences world-wide, for whom media-derived content, the electronic experience of the world, is the dominant cultural experience. Second, by fitting into the particular slot of popular music, which as Auslander argues, provides an index for the many issues confronting cultural production in the past twenty-five years (*Presence* 3), Anderson is able to tell stories which emphasise audiences' own relationship with consumer products, their desire for proximity, ownership and comment on a peculiar characteristic, the seductiveness that melodies embody:

> You hear a song and it's the most beautiful song you ever heard. But you can't quite understand the words. So you listen to it fifty times and finally you hear the words. And they're horrible words, you disagree with everything they stand for. But its too late, the song's already inside you. You're already singing it. (Anderson in Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 89)

Thus, aspects of her storytelling will explicitly focus on this relationship: the subject, lost in representation, searching for clues about reality in an ever changing world. As we will see in Chapter 3, the stories in her songs dissect and expand narratives about people's attempts to live inside the network produced by mass-media technologies, about how people deal with an utterly coded environment, one that has been variously made up by technology and which can hardly seem to be approached by the strategies one uses to approach the natural environment.

From this perspective, storytelling in song occupies a central space in Anderson's mediatised performances. It is interesting to notice that another parameter seems to guide the stories Anderson tells: a general disbelief in the self as an active organising principle. Thus, when faced with the dimensions of the late twentieth-century technological cityscape, in Anderson's performances, the self succumbs to:

1. the overwhelming power of the media (photographic reproductions, an incredible amount of information) over individual consciousness, and
2. the notion that truth and power can be endlessly negotiated and particularised.

If at the level of our post-industrial experience, we can imagine the world as a collection of multiple representations, as the endless circulation and reproduction of cultural products, Anderson's mediatised performances become strategic insofar as they inhabit the same space made available to other representations. Today, Laurie Anderson's Warner Brother's recordings can be (easily?) spotted in record shops around the "universe" where popular music is of any cultural import. In fact, her mediatised

performances will eventually continue to be spotted, and provided that there is enough demand created by/for them (profitability), they might still actively participate in the market "forever", that is, appear here and there, sampled, cut up or in full, in other pop records or existing by themselves.[7] On the other hand, her recordings might as well survive just as museum pieces have survived. The difference is that, as mediatisation kills off the value of the original, dispersing the "aura" in performance, these recordings will not be locked up in some vault never to see the light of day again, but randomly fall in the hands of thirteen-year-olds rummaging the debris of mediatised culture on the internet or at the local vintage record shop. Thus, Anderson's recordings become part of the scenery, part of the commodity flow which characterises much of the contemporary landscape.

Hence, it is possible for Anderson to describe her own "heritage" in "Yankee See", one of the many apparently partly biographical songs from *United States I-IV Live* (1984), in a very peculiar way:

> Well I was out in LA recently on music business, and I was just sitting there in the office building filling them in on some of my goals.
>
> And I said: Listen, I've got a vision, I see myself as part of a long tradition of American humor. You know—Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd, Roadrunner, Yosemite Sam.
>
> And they said: "Well, actually, we had something a little more adult in mind."
>
> And I said: "OK OK! Listen, I can adapt!"
>
> (*Nerve Bible* 146)

By having signed a contract with Warner Brothers and having defined herself as belonging to a long tradition of American humour that includes "Bugs Bunny" and "Daffy Duck", but not the physical body of another comedian, Anderson surpasses the

boundaries of (live) presence, displaces her body and self deliberately away from the physical space, landing in the middle of a digital, mediatised landscape. It is this conscious move that translates into a virtual presence that reaches for an equally electronic audience. The means for this transfer, recordings, extends her electronic body into the far reaching realms of the mediatised landscape, or, to use one of Jean Baudrillard's term, the simulation.

It is not by chance then that, in the eyes of Warner Brother executives who had been attending Anderson's live performances, her work seemed ideal for this kind of crossing over from the avant-garde into popular music: as a performer, Anderson, who has always considered herself a "talking artist" ("Control rooms and other stories" 128), a storyteller (O'Mahony 2), and a comedian in the vein of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, can adapt. Thus the "stripping down" of her *live* performances into aural products inserted in the popular music market was not a difficult crossover and whatever would be lost in translation from one medium to another was not lost in the narrative text, in the storytelling which has been preserved. Notice that a similar division had already been historically located in music recordings in the century-old separation of the musical experience from its live performance and visual experience (Auslander *Liveness* 73). Thus, facing the available technology, Anderson's "talking performances" could be rather easily fitted to pass for popular recordings, unlike, say, the stage operas of Robert Wilson.[8]

What is interesting in Anderson's crossover process is that, first, she escaped the physical boundaries made available (and safe enough) by the New York avant-garde. Then, Anderson's body was transformed, her mediatised performance boosted through corporate money. Third, as a "talking artist", her "talking performances", mostly about an enhanced electronic landscape anyway, did not lose much in "translation"; quite to

the contrary, in her records, it is the storytelling that is enhanced, remaining not only visible, that is, evident, but making up for most part of the recorded, aural performance.

As Simon Frith and Philip Auslander point out, a relevant case in this respect is rock music, the field which Anderson's mediatised performances invaded. It is no wonder that the primary experience of rock music—the standard according to which even live performances of rock are judged—are recordings. Historically, this situation, which partly results of "the development of the 45 rpm record in 1948, which made popular music cheaper to produce and easier to integrate into social life", can be attributed to live performances of rock music being used to promote record sales (Auslander *Liveness* 64). However, the relationship between the live and mediatised in rock recordings is complicated because recordings and live performances are not regarded as independent, but inter-dependent in a process of generating and maintaining authenticity (Auslander *Liveness* 64).

I believe we can find further legitimate reasons for Anderson's crossover into mass culture via recorded performances by looking at her new audience, that is, the new electronic audiences her recorded performances reached. We have seen how Anderson admitted that a new, albeit electronic and not physically marked, territory existed beyond the territory commonly assigned to the avant-garde. The question is: how did these electronic audiences receive her work? Take my own example. For one thing, Anderson's performances appealed to me from within my own cultural context, mainly triggered by the experience of listening to her recordings from a considerable distance from where they originally took place and in denial of older (and one of the most consistent) performative premises such as the authority of presence. Then, mediatised performances, such as Anderson's, by forming a distinctive electronic body of virtual performances in which presence does not figure as the first determinant, can reach across cultural and national barriers to deliver their messages, something that the radical

avant-garde performance artists, enclosed in their lofts, galleries and museums, could not even dream of doing.

It is this movement, from an austere, live avant-garde performance art, into mass-mediated performances, that can be called a crossover, or, in the words of Philip Auslander,[9] mediatisation. Precisely because Laurie Anderson plugs her performances into the corporate body of commodity production, she can locate herself in the dominant cultural continuum represented by mass media. It is the simultaneous flirting with commodification via popular music that enables Anderson's performances to "perform" as commodities, to be delivered to your door, to communicate with much wider, less integrated, less "specialised", "electronic" audiences world-wide whose own experience of reality, by now, is nevertheless a heavily mediatised one. This last context is the cultural context I am interested in: the context in which I myself have been inserted as part of her less integrated, more electronic audience across the world. This is also the context in which this research should be read.

2.5 The First Interlude:

My country

I understand performance as home. My country.
(Theresa M.Senft)

I must confess that—like Richard Dyer ("In defence of disco")—I have always liked the wrong kind of music, and this for a number of reasons that might not have occurred to Dyer in the first place. Brazil—the place I was born and grew up in—by the second half of 1960s was well into military dictatorship. This meant: police raids on campuses, censorship and a (then as now) unconvincing motto "Brazil, love it or leave

it" advertised everywhere and contaminating the country's atmosphere. Living in a small town outside the reach of traditional forms of cultural production (theatres, museums, etc) soon led me to identify television and pop records as two of the more accessible and readily available means for actually providing me with a minimum of space and ways of relating to whatever form of artistic practice would exist outside my reach. It is not as if I did not read books—I was also an eager reader—but books and their printed stories, however fascinating, lacked something: the immediacy of satisfaction and the right surface appeal. Television programs, album covers and songs were mostly framed by visual immediacy: the primary colours in shiny packages and the exhilarating rhythms contained within promised immediate satisfaction and a glimpse into the state of things in a contemporary world outside and way beyond my own, something which went beyond the territory of what books could offer me at the time. More than this, there were things that records and television did that books could not do: one could dance to records, invite friends to party listening to them; or play around with other toys while having the screen or the song (sometimes both) as background for the action. Don't forget to mention all the knobs, levers and settings you could mess with on the television set, and the possibility of making your own soundtrack on portable recorders. Thus, television and pop records certified the existence of an-other, different world (both my parents owned incredible collections of German "schlagers"—such as Freddy Quinn, or Bert Kaempfert—including an assortment of Mexican records, all of which bearing resemblance to exotic places). Printed stories also made the other visible but, unlike books, records were new and up to date, while most of the stories I was reading at the time (by Flaubert, Poe, Dickens) would often place an indistinct blur on my historical knowledge: they were not about here and now, but about "then". Apart from the occasional Harold Robbins best-seller that would regularly surface on my Mom's bedroom but never got read, only much later, during

the second half of 1980s, a period known in Brazil for the opening up of the wounds of military dictatorship, I would find myself reading books focusing on the 1960s and 1970s, but then again, framed perhaps by literature's fixation on division of stable categories, those narratives were mostly political treaties aiming at describing the horrors of life under military dictatorship in Brazil, an experience which—from my point of view—was miles apart from my own.

2.5.1 Language is a virus, but not necessarily from outer space

My first recollections of television programmes include several utopian National Geographic documentaries, various Hanna Barbera's cartoons (including Josie and the Pussycats), the evening episodes of Lost in Space, and a daily pop chart show inserted in a time slot shortly before the noon news, right after the morning cartoons. Before going to school, for at least half an hour everyday (but longer on Saturdays) I would be exposed to the pop and rock groups that "Channel 12" (then one of the three channels picked up in my town)[10] would be likely to introduce with the hallmark of the—then rebellious—long haired VJ.

Being myself then very much into all forms of technological novelties, coming to terms with the format of the—then mostly American—pop chart and disco music was a small step for me. Thus, like a guinea pig, I might have been removed from my very own third-world context and soon forgotten about any "genuine" Brazilian environment (musical and otherwise) that might have been still around while I was a kid because of the mesmerising power of television and pop records' totally "alien" appeal (No matter how much I strained myself to learn the English words sung, I would only pick up parts and pieces of the lyrics to sing along). If Brazilian tunes did not strive for a similar appeal, a similar "lack of context" I was so fascinated with in the groups shown on

television or heard on my Mom and Dad's records, it is mainly because of their language. Unknown to me, language at that point was really a virus: a welcomed one though. I was little but too entranced by the possibilities laid out by these "alien" performances; the fact that I could pick up only a word or two from entire songs, only meant I could do whatever I wanted with that lone word. The fact that I only had a small picture of their faces on record covers, or saw them once on TV[11]*, meant I could fantasise about their lives and personalities, making up for the gaps in these narratives at will; all this seemed to add even more power to those "electronic" performances. They became powerful because they were scarce and unique because they did not inhabit my own physical world. Thus, they were always larger than life, always invading my everyday from a (magical?) space that I had no grasp on but which insistently kept me company. Because the context in which I could place them and their language seemed so alien, they succeeded in—and that in all senses—bringing me a perspective that could not be found elsewhere in my world, a world which by far was less interesting than the one on television, records and films.*[12]

I soon began collecting records myself, but whereas my parents sung the songs of the country in which their roots supposedly lie, Germany, my improving knowledge of English led me to escape the roots of my own tradition. I was turned into an "alien" in my own territory without knowing that these "aural landscapes" would bring to me the performances of New York based artist Laurie Anderson, whose records invaded my everyday at some point in the 1980s. It would be a while before I could place her within the context she sprung from. Fact is, by then it did not matter. Brian Eno: "Later in life I realise that this removal of context was an important point in the magic of music" (Brian Eno quoted in Stump 27).

On the contrary, by appearing in the same context where other pop acts appeared, Anderson's records instantly outshone every other record I'd be listening to

because of what she brought to this environment of—by then—carefully balanced pop and rock acts. Laurie Anderson did break rule number one, a serious barrier then: even though she came through records, plunged into the machinery that distributed rock, she did not play rock, then the only kind of music one was supposed to be listening to. "Electronic", the word I used to describe her performances, was not good enough; to others, she would still seem "pop" and "cheesy", then two of the most common attack words used by most rock fans to dismiss these "New Wave" acts of the 1980s which included The Talking Heads, The B 52's, Kraftwerk, Gary Numan, and Eurythmics. None of my friends ever listened to Laurie Anderson as much as I did, and that alone gave me something to talk about. I constructed some kind of identity link with her records. In my mind, in some distant but, because her records seemed to say this much, palpable enough place where popular culture was of any import, she was a forerunner.

I know now that coming across her performances might as well just have been a matter of luck. Laurie Anderson crash-landed into my life quite by chance when I first read about her performances in Pasquin, *a newspaper then made very fashionable in youth circles of the 1980s for its left-wing orientation during the military dictatorship in Brazil. Anderson's "records" as described by the paper seemed very different to me. While everybody else was carrying on with the countercultural argument, she embraced popular culture from the inside. Life did not seem to follow the clearly marked lines which divided products between authentic and fake, rock meaning authentic, pop and electronic meaning artificial. To me, all these categories faded in the distance and making distinctions between good, authentic rock and bad, artificial pop music was something I longed not to perform anymore. I wanted to see some proof that "reality" had changed beyond these categories. Laurie Anderson came in just handy: not only did her songs deny these categories, she infected me with the language, expanding my own vocabulary, the living proof within reach that reality had changed.*

2.6 The Landscape of Contemporary Thought and Mass Culture

Human language, not electronic noise.
(Eric Bogosian)

Though subject to much debate, the status of contemporary thought, as it has come to be recognised (and accepted?), can be framed by at least one recurring theme: fiction writers, critics and their audiences have begun to outline in the contemporary landscape an utterly coded environment (J.G.Ballard, William Gibson) in which information saturation causes a breakdown of meaning. Among them, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard leads the way by volunteering a handful of notions which seem to efface the ubiquity of concepts of "reality". Consequently, the maps our civilisations put out become the only means (the only "language") according to which we can locate ourselves in the landscape. If these visions are made possible, what kind of maps are these? What kind of cartographer does it take to map these landscapes? Again, I believe Laurie Anderson is closer to the point:

> Once, in December, I was walking around Rome. I had a map with little pictures of all the important buildings, monuments, and ruins on it. When I got to the Coliseum, I realized I could see more of it from the drawing than the real thing. (*Nerve Bible* 97)

The environment that makes up the landscape identified and inhabited by Western/ized contemporary humankind is saturated and coded precisely because it has been variously described: it is both an artificial construct of competing languages, critiques and the many ideologies that accompany them, just as much as it is a Technicolor spectacle of endless narratives and signatures (digital images, electronic texts, video signals) which,

as the only means we have to impose ourselves on the physical environment, seems to extend human bodies, territories and abilities. Essentially, to my mind, we are dealing with a parallel construct made up of data flowing in from every direction in what seems to be a never ending substitution of sorts. This artificial construct of (free) floating information, endless mass-media narratives, fleeting realities and relics of the past that seem to surpass and enhance our perception of reality leaving the human subject stranded are the only means we have to understand both the space and time we are in.

This flow of data and of commodities, which usually goes by the name of mass culture, seems to be the cultural dominant of contemporary Western/ized societies. Within it, postmodernism emerges as a historical moment that determines the boundaries of the experience of industrialised nations. Thus, a working definition of postmodernism is not easy to be arrived at. While some commentators argue that it has not happened yet (Johannes Birringer), others (Andy Grundberg) announced its death as early as 1990. For us here, postmodernism can be defined as "a consequence of the commodification of culture under advanced capitalism" (Auslander *Presence* 10). Consequently, it is not as if the cultural realm has disappeared, but rather, postmodernism designates a conflation of the economic and cultural realms into a continuum in which positions hardly become fixed. Aesthetically,

> The term *postmodern* designates "a culture that is utterly coded" in which artists may only manipulate "old signs in a new logic", without hoping to create new discourses out of mere desire", a culture that encodes both artist discourses and their audiences and that is seemingly capable of absorbing any disruptive action into its economy of signs. (Auslander *Presence* 21)

The landscape tells you nothing, or close to nothing; you learn more by looking at the map instead of looking at the landscape. This is the utterly coded environment

that supersedes and precedes the landscape, the map that we put out in order to escape simply being. Coincidentally, this is the landscape of Western industrialised countries but, particularly, of contemporary North America (Auslander *Presence* 10). Likewise, this is the territory explored by Laurie Anderson through mediatised performance:

> When I began to write *United States,* I thought of it as a portrait of a country. Gradually I realised it was really a description of *any* technological society and of the people's attempts to live in an electronic world. (qtd. in Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 89)

Through storytelling, Anderson's recorded performances for Warner Brothers engage in describing the utterly coded landscape of the United States, Baudrillard's "power museum" that America has become for the whole world (*America* 27). Despite the appeal to universal truth—"any technological society"—what this observation sets in motion is an interesting approach to the nature of contemporary cultural imperialism, or the "electronic" consumption of the "global" which is (mostly) made to pass through the American-based entertainment industries.

2.7 Crossing over, but where to?

If we agree with Simon Frith that "local no longer means roots, or tradition, but rather a position in the global market" ("Popular Music and the Local State" 23), meaning that, perhaps, we have finally come to grips with the idea of roots and origin as being as utterly artificial as the idea of artists tailored for global markets, Laurie Anderson speaks from a privileged position: inside the machinery that produces the global, Anderson as product, whose presence is marked by mediatisation, occupies a space which, being probably characterised by the figures of her sales revenue, the type of audience she reaches and other economic indicators, functions according to the

simple rules of market operations she acknowledged herself: if it sells, you can make more of the same. That is, instead of "folklore", sale profits. Instead of metaphor, joy to see it collapse (Baudrillard *America* 27).

Georgina Born reminds us that it is "the consumption of the global (the American-based multinational) by those locked into immobility of the local and regional" (266) that represents the central reality many of us are compelled to explore at one point or another or our lives. Thus, framed as we—continually—are by the mediatised narratives and coded landscapes that mingle with our own lives via television, popular records, films and magazines (the *ersatz* reality of the media, Marshall McLuhan's "extensions of man"), the local becomes defined by its enhanced reflection in the global landscape of consumer goods, electronic media, and, as a consequence, by the American-based multinational. Baudrillard:

> Why should I go and decentralize myself in France, in the ethnic and the local, which are merely the shreds and vestiges of centrality? I want to excentre myself, to become eccentric, but I want to do so in a place that is the centre of the world. And, in this sense, the latest fast-food outlet, the most banal suburb, the blandest of giant American cars or the most insignificant cartoon-strip majorette is more at the centre of the world than any of the cultural manifestations of old Europe. (*America* 28)

Laurie Anderson (especially in her performances recorded for Warner Brothers) seems aware of these circumstances and, by combining the utterly displaced notions of individual sensibility and contrasting them with the technologically produced global, comes out with a map of the electronic environment powered by the media. One can say that, in the 1980s, the performances Anderson recorded for media giant Warner effectively map out the status of part of this electronically enhanced territory circumscribed by global technologies and the American-based globahsation. She says:

> Around 1979, I began to write "*United States.*" I had been spending a lot of time in Europe and I'd be sitting around the dinner table with my European friends and they would ask, "So how could you live in a place like that?" always implying a high-tech cultural wasteland. The answer, the performance "*United States,*" ended up being eight hours long. (*Nerve Bible* 159)

In other words, since postmodern times signal a conflation of the cultural and economic realms in which most of the *landscape* is made to pass through the filter of the media, it seems only logical that artists of this century, such as Anderson, should be interested in describing people's attempts to live in a country which, coincidentally, propagates its landscape of coded events and competing languages (that map which helps us position ourselves in the physical world) throughout the Western/ised world. Coincidentally, it is because the American based entertainment industries seem to dominate so effectively the equally heavily mediatised postmodern landscape that Anderson insists that her performances would describe *any* technological society, hence, the title *United States I-IV Live* for her five-set recording of a two-night-long event; therefore, inside this spectacular realm, Anderson speaks from a rather privileged position: as an American performer whose own body has been electronically extended via mass production, as a performer whose own presence has been modified to suit electronic mediation. Therefore, electronically enhanced and augmented, Anderson's presence, which has been abstracted from the physical world into this electronic environment, can be felt by those locked into a virtual consumption of the American-based global. As information and data bits, her—now electronic—presence is transferred to cultural products which are mass-produced and, using the resources of popular music, delivered to far away corners of the world.

From the outset then, two things about the relevance of Laurie Anderson's recordings for Warner Brothers have to do with the pervasive space in which they operate. One, because her performances are "crossover performances" (Birringer *Media and Performance* 65), in the sense I have described at the beginning of this section, and her persona is "always already mediatised" (Auslander *Presence* 55) due to Anderson's refusal to be present (achieved mainly through her use of technology), the fact that her work depicts America may indicate the levels which mediatisation has reached nowadays. Thus, and this is my second point, our question becomes: What is the relevance of America to the process of mediatisation and to Anderson's performances? The pertinence of this particular situation is, once again, detailed by Baudrillard:

> ... Between the gardenias and the eucalyptus trees, among the profusion of plant genuses and the monotony of the human species, lies the tragedy of a utopian dream made reality. In the very heartland of wealth and liberation, you always hear the same question: 'What are you doing after the orgy?' What do you do when everything is available—sex, flowers, the stereotypes of life and death? This is America's problem and, through America, it has become the whole world's problem. (*America* 30)

Very self-consciously, Anderson's performances inhabit an aural, electronically enhanced space that extends itself, i.e., concerns the whole world and which cannot be taken only and transparently to signify the presence of some *a priori* live event that took place in the physical world itself (the relevance of Anderson's performances would be circumscribed to her own environment) as most documents of performances tend to do. For example, once Anderson's performances are mediatised, they become integral performances on their own, they even surpass physical (and national) borders. In addition, Anderson's performances can also be set apart from other performance art because they concern themselves with describing events in an electronically enhanced,

mediated space. Because Anderson's performances are mediatised, they "lift off" from the physical world to document a virtual, artificially crafted performative space. As her performances become less identified solely with the physical and more with the electronic (she literally inserts her body into an electronic space), what is bound to happen in her recorded work for Warner Brother is an intensification of the "electronic" and of the respective mediated aspects. Thus, Anderson's recorded performances are not meant merely to signify presence, to capture some live event, simply because they are not documents of performances but integral, self-sufficient performances.

As has been said, the current debate around rock music suggests that the recorded performance sets the standards according to which the live performance will be evaluated. Thus, the work Anderson has released through Warner Brothers, starting with *Big Science* and, to a certain extent, also *United States I-IV Live,* which, resourcefully use the language and strategies of popular music, can be evaluated in a similar fashion. As the title suggests, *United States I-IV Live* may have begun as a live recording of an eight-hour performance marathon, while *Big Science* takes Anderson into developing her ideas to the point of recording performances that have simply never taken place as a live, unified event, be it in the concert hall or in the studio. For Anderson, even the question of liveness in the concert hall is tricky, since her voice is filtered through a number of electronic equipment, and the sounds she plays have been previously recorded, looped, and then transferred into the memory banks of electronic instruments.[13]

In the words of Susan McClary and Robert Walser, "[Anderson's] compositions rely precisely upon those tools of electronic mediation that most performance artists seek to displace" ("Start Making Sense!" 137). In the studio, her musicians were hardly ever in the same space at the same time, a fact she acknowledges herself. If all this may

seem a little unusual for the average performance artist and audiences conditioned to live art, it is hardly so in modern recording sessions:

> ...consider this scenario, which is now common at the beginning of a pop recording session: before a note is committed to tape, a producer or engineer will use a sampling computer to digitally record each sound used by the group. At this point, it is sometimes possible for everyone but the producer to go home, leaving the computerized manipulation of these sounds to do the work of performance and recording. (Goodwin 263)

What happens in the pop recording session then is the creation of an aural event inside the studio walls. Discreet parts are pre-recorded and then put together at will to form a unified whole, which later will become the integral, self-sufficient performance. Thus, what the audience hears is a performance that only exists as one on record (Frith *Performing Rites* 211).

This situation subverts the common assumption that a live performance precedes the mediatised one, or that the live event is the "real" one and the mediatised only comes second as the artificial, counterfeit one. As I expect to clarify, what the audience also gets is a subversion of the distinctions between copies and originals, thus, a subversion of much of the aesthetics upon which modern Western art since Plato was based. Anderson seems aware of this process of creating virtual performances and makes use of such devices to comment on the ways mediatised performances are being used first to represent, then enhance and, eventually, displace live events. Thus, Anderson's performances are a crossover in yet another sense: not only do they stand in between different environments, the avant-garde and the mass produced, but they also occupy a space in-between the live and the recorded. Therefore, Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers take place in an artificially constructed space, an

aural space that does not exist in the physical world at large, a space that is not inherent to performance art but, more likely, to popular records. Thus, instead of merely being the documents of a live performance, Anderson's recordings stand on their own, seduced by the practices of opposite fields. Welcome to "avant-garde performance meets popular music". While many of Anderson's performances from *United States I-IV Live* may still be involved in replicating the conditions of liveness, the temporal development of live events as we experience them, in time they become far more complex since the conditions for their reproduction on record are dictated by the technologies employed, technologies which have never occurred in the physical world, only in an enhanced, electronically mediated space as Anderson's subsequent recordings seem to exemplify. In this way, Anderson's output becomes "something else", commodities which are brought "closer", performances which are more adapted (both economically and aesthetically) to the requirements of the augmented contemporary landscape and its displaced audiences. Moreover, because recording technologies are now advanced enough to disappear into the background, eventually inviting a new form of listening experience, Laurie Anderson's recordings, which—arguably—started out sharing a similar space to that of photographic documentation of live performances (*United States I-IV Live*), assume a different position; they stand for another kind of performance more attuned to the needs of contemporary means of production: performative commodities.

I think it is fair to say that the principle applied to photographic documentation (see 2.4) can be transferred to popular records, especially live recordings such as *United States I-IV Live*, in which the final product (recording) may be presented as the document of a performance that took place before, in "real time" and space. However, we have seen how live performances which generate "mediatised" performances are not necessarily one and the same in Anderson's case; the tricky part is that Anderson's

performances are constantly reminding their audiences of the fact that they are mediatised, that is, inhabiting a space that is not natural, but "electronically enhanced" and defined by a different relationship between the live and the recorded:

> Live performance ceased long ago to be the primary experience of popular music, with the result that most live performances of popular music now seek to replicate the music on the recordings. (Auslander *Liveness* 160)

Thus, Anderson's embracing of popular culture via mass-produced recordings of her performances results in the subversion of performance's first principle: that it is ephemeral, not repeatable live art. Over the years at Warner Brothers, Anderson's performances have evolved from this rather obvious documentation format (recordings such as *United States I-IV,* which still function as the aural document of a previous, original live performance) into performances which were never meant to be seen live, but which more and more accurately displayed their integrity as mediatised performances fully embracing the rules of popular music. In sum, they are performative products which, functioning independently from any established hierarchical relation to live performance, seem to hold the critical balance needed today to expand the reality principle. The analysis of these mediatised performances is the subject of our next chapter.

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[1] In a way, by analysing Anderson's performances, I am also recovering them in my own writing.

[2] Even though my terms seem strikingly contradictory at first, the particulars of the situation they refer to is not. Mass produced performances are rendered indistinguishable from live events in respect to their status as independent categories. It is certainly true that many mediatised events are now modelled after performances in real space, while others have taken the opposite approach replicating the conditions found in the studio.

[3] Tinguely's *Homage to New York* was a machine sculpture that, in performance, destroyed itself; Scharwtzkogler's performance was the progressive amputation of his own penis (Sayre *Object of Performance* 2).

[4] Of course, nowadays, digital photography subverts most of these assumptions about the photographic referent and its straightforward presence, another facet of the digital age.

[5] For a detailed analysis of this logic, see Simon Frith, cited in the references.

[6] Historically, they could also be regarded as some sort of updated, late twentieth-century, electronic translation of Marcel Duchamp's idea of the portable museum (a single valise containing several miniaturised replicas of an artist's works that could be easily carried around for display and exhibition purposes).

[7] Consider Christophe Monier and DJ Pascal's *Love Addict* of 1996-98, which not only thanks Laurie Anderson but extensively samples her recordings from Warner Brothers to create new tracks.

[8] Robert Wilson is known for monumental works such as *Civil Wars,* and for his collaboration with disparate figures such as Philip Glass (*Einstein on the Beach*) and Lou Reed.

[9] Auslander himself acknowledges that he has borrowed the concept from Jean Baudrillard, using it rather loosely. See Auslander *Liveness* 5, cited in the references.

[10] "Channel 12", now RBS TV, is privately owned and operated by Rede Globo, Brazil's largest media operator.

[11] Note that all this took place years before VCRs and cable reached us.

[12] *Lost in Space,* 3rd season: consider episode #78 "The Promised Planet" Air date: 1/24/68 & 9/4/68 Writer: Peter Packer Director: Ezra Stone Guest Cast: Gil Rogers (Bartholomew), Keith Taylor (Edgar). Told they are approaching an Earth colony, the Robinsons land on a planet whose culture is totally geared towards teenagers. Soon, subtle forms of brainwashing cause the older Robinsons and their children to disassociate themselves from each other. In this episode, it is music that is used to alienate the young characters of the show from their peers. Interestingly, the kind of music used in the episode has some resemblance to the electronic experiments carried out by Stockhausen at the time.

[13] A simple definition of these instruments is offered by Simon Frith: "Digital sampling computers are relatively new machines that digitally encode any sounds, store them, and enable the manipulation and reproduction of those sounds within almost infinite parameters and no discernible loss of sound quality" (Frith qtd. in Goodwin 261).

Chapter 3

"From the Air": Laurie Anderson as Case Study of Mediatised Performance

I don't even think people want artists to be defined.
(Laurie Anderson)

This is the time,
and this is the record of the time.
(Laurie Anderson)

"From the Air", the title of this chapter, is also the title of the first song-text by Anderson I want to analyse. I am using "air" here to indicate, first, the dominant mode through which mediatised performances are propagated and, second, how mediatisation helps cultural commodities surpass the physical confines of otherwise presumably stable borders. "From the Air", thus, serves the twofold purpose of introducing Anderson's mediatised performances, and of generating enough room for a broader discussion of "mediatisation", its challenges, efficacy, and relevance. In this chapter I will be recalling notions presented in Chapter 2 but making a more direct connection with Anderson's work. I begin by reasserting the importance of Anderson's crossover from the avant-garde, emphasising the aspects of her performances that are made more conspicuous because of the mediatisation process. In this respect I ponder about the possible significance of having different versions of Anderson's performances reappearing through the years in different releases. Then, I explain why *Big Science* was my performance of choice to start analysing Anderson's mediatised performances for Warner. Also included in this Chapter are discussions of "Telephone Song", which I have used to outline Anderson's own bias towards mediatisation in relation to the status of live performance, and of electronic sounds, which, to my mind, are used by Anderson to comment on the mechanics of music consumption and production.

As I have previously suggested, crossing over from the avant-garde enables Anderson's performances to make extensive use of the marketing and technical resources from popular music giant Warner Brothers. Recorded in studios, pressed into records (vinyls, CDs, etc), distributed world-wide (to specialised retail shops but also supermarkets) and made available as audio signals (but also as images)[1] that are transported by a variety of vehicles (television, radio, magazines, Internet, etc), these performances reach "electronic" audiences world-wide, literally then, "from the air":

> Music is the cultural form best able to cross borders—sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations—and to define places: in clubs, scenes, and raves, listening on headphones, radio, and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us. (Frith *Performing Rites* 276)

Consequently, not only do Anderson's performances for Warner cross borders, but they also take us to the core of mediatised culture, revealing its processes, authenticating modes from within, and, perhaps more significantly, constructing "our sense of identity through the experiences [music] offers of the body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives" (Frith *Performing Rites* 275).

Slightly different versions of "From the Air" appear in *United States I-IV Live* (1984) and in Anderson's first studio release for Warner Brothers, *Big Science* (1982). I am starting with Anderson's studio album (consequently, to my mind, chronologically, in relation to her mediatised performances) and not with her major recorded work, *United States I-IV Live*—at first sight Anderson's crucial mediatised performance—for many reasons.[2] First, *Big Science* becomes Anderson's initial mediatised performance which, circulating independently from prior existence as live performance, directly targeted her so-called "electronic audience", i.e., larger markets reached exclusively by distribution through the resources of media giant Warner Brothers. As a consequence,

Big Science seems to display more accurately the format Anderson would favour in her subsequent recordings for Warner Brothers: a song album. Additionally, unlike *United States I-IV Live*, which—apart from its undeniable strength as a repository of Anderson's ideas—still documents the live performances of a two-night-long event, *Big Science* and, more particularly, the song-text I am starting with, "From the Air", once more, fulfil the promise of the work's title: through mediatisation the work surpasses the spatial borders of Anderson's own landscape (the New York avant-garde) and of her live, physical presence, reaching an electronic audience as a commodity from inside the commodity culture itself, i.e., inserted in the market designated for popular music recordings. Thus, existing independently of its status in the art world as a live performance, *Big Science* turns mediatised performance via pop songs into its "model" vehicle. At the time, Anderson's other commercial release that had crossed the borders of live performance—the single "O Superman", also included in *Big Science,* and her first hit in the U.K—was merely the tip of the iceberg. As we may infer from the way in which Anderson has chosen to recount the events that lead to its release (Chapter 2, 2.4), it was partly due to the commercial success of "O Superman" in England that Warner Brothers signed her up in the first place. At the risk of redundancy, an additional reason for crossing over into popular music, a reason that seems to have been readily recognised by Anderson and which has already been quoted in Chapter 2 (p. 81), deserves another reference, this time from a slightly different perspective:

> In this work, I have tried to make a distinction between art and ideas. Because ideas have a direct line to the brain; but art sneaks in through the senses. It drifts in. So there isn't time to analyze it. As in: you hear a song and it's the most beautiful song you ever heard. But you can't quite understand the words. So you listen to it fifty times and finally you hear the words. And they're horrible words, you disagree with everything they stand

> for. But it's too late, the song's already inside you. You're already singing it. (Anderson in Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 89)

What becomes clear from the remark above (which appears in Anderson's description of the creative process comprehended by *United states I-IV*) is the determination of Anderson's crossing over, the confirmation that her move into mainstream popular music was not without forethought; we have already seen how, while working in the avant-garde, Anderson recognised she wanted to reach audiences that had remained outside the avant-garde and art-world circles (Chapter 2). By embracing the format favoured by popular music (albums with pop songs) and, consequently, mass culture, Anderson found not only a space (commodity culture) from which to express her views, enabling her to reach audiences who had traditionally remained outside the avant-garde circles, she also found a suitable vehicle (popular music/mediatised performance) to expose her opinions on matters pertaining to commodity, mediatised culture. More importantly, from within the popular music market, Anderson is granted authority to express her own views on remarkably peculiar situations of contemporary mediatised culture, such as the one regarding the relationship of live and recorded performances in rock ideology, described by Auslander as follows:

> The particular relationship of live and recorded performances in rock culture revolved around a complex articulation of the concept of authenticity that was central to the rock ideology of the 1960s and 1970s. ... rock authenticity is a concept that depends on a specific interaction of recordings and live performances rather than the nomination of one or the other as authentic. The primary experience of the music is as a recording; the function of live performance is to authenticate the sound of the recording. (*Liveness* 160)

Consequently, the reappearance of compositions from *United States I-IV Live* not only in *Big Science* but in most of her subsequent recordings for Warner seems to attest that,

exactly because of their recurrence in different albums: 1) the development of important ideas that Anderson, as she herself explains, wants to get across in a more subliminal way (ideas are turned into art and art takes the form of songs which—as she puts it—"sneaks in through the senses"), and 2) as expressed by Auslander above, recorded songs may be taken to become representative of the complex process of authentication existing in pop and rock ideology between "live" and "recorded" performances. Thus, in spite of including many performances that had been present (in longer or altered form) in the live version of *United States I-IV* and in its subsequent mediatised form (the five-record set *United States I-IV Live)*, *Big Science* may not be taken as the document of a previous performance in "real" space. Much to the contrary, following Auslander's point, it should be taken as a recording (mediatised performance) that, eventually, serves to authenticate other subsequent live performances. Hence, rhythms and musical lines that appear intertwined not only in the live performances of *United States I-IV* or in the five-record set that documented the live performance (*United States I-IV Live*) develop into pop tunes and become the main vehicle through which Anderson decidedly circulates her ideas.

In fact, her subsequent albums for Warner Brothers (until *The Ugly One with the Jewels*)[3] would invariably contain material that had already been present in both versions of *United States I-IV* changed into shorter, less expensive mediatised format already refined by pop/rock culture.[4] Curiously, however, mediatisation occurs following various degrees, since many of Anderson's works were devised for "live" presentation while others can be said to exist independently from their status as "live" events. Additionally, Anderson's mediatised persona[5] will circulate alongside other equally marketable (but not always profitable) pop/rock performers making use of the resources made available to her by entertainment industry giant Warner Brothers: media exposure through press releases, interviews, music videos to promote the songs on television, live tours to back up song albums released at regular intervals, etc.[6] As I have argued, it is interesting to notice that it

is the fact that Anderson has adequately managed to embrace the format favoured by popular music in her albums for Warner Brothers that prompts her with the tools to comment on mediatisation and the mechanics of mediatised performance. Similarly to Auslander's argument in relation to the complex relationship between live and recorded categories in pop/rock ideology that presuppose authentication of one by the other, it is Anderson's presence in the pop market as a pop star that enables her to comment on the effects of mediatisation with adequate authority: the authority granted her by her own mediatised persona. In fact, this seems to be one of the guiding principles according to which I propose a reading of Laurie Anderson's performances: her entire body of work for Warner Brothers seems to offer a detailed map of the situation of the performer in the mediatised landscape and processes of Western commodity culture circa 1980s/1990s.

In *United States I-IV Live,* for example, Anderson addresses the status of live performance in a heavily mediated environment a number of times and from distinct perspectives: graphically, in the record cover the word *"Live"* is set in hand-written typeface, inserted at the top end of the title (see Appendix 2). Such graphic disposition of the word ("*Live*" as in "recorded live") seems to draw attention to the fact that, even in the record (an altogether mediatised performance), "live" events typically suggest a more authentic, genuine experience than mediatised performances. Consequently, Anderson's use of "liveness" becomes ironic, suggesting something of the hierarchy involving live and mediatised events. No matter how heavily mediatised many events may have become, our ordinary sense of reality is still informed by the illusion of "liveness" these events replicate. Additionally, in at least two song-texts (the printed lyrics which accompany her recordings for Warner) from *United States I-IV Live*, "Odd Objects" (see Second Interlude) and "Telephone Song" (analysed below), Anderson is explicitly concerned with interrogating the possibilities and limitations of both formats.

Before proceeding with the analyses of *Big Science* and "From the Air", I propose

some thoughts on "Telephone Song", included towards the end of Part Four of *United States I-IV Live*, as background for further developing the problematic of mediatisation. "Telephone Song" presents Anderson as the performer ringing up a friend on the telephone to invite her/him for the live show that is on stage. We hear Anderson's (the performer's) questions and answers immersed in unspecific, gloomy electronic noise. The conclusions we are directed to draw, however, are not misleading. If, as Auslander argues, contemporary times are witnessing a reduction of the cultural prestige and economic power associated with live events, seemingly failing to affect much of their contemporary audiences, one of the reasons for this may be that live performances may have become increasingly anachronistic, simply failing to *reach* contemporary audiences as freely and effortlessly as mediatised performances do:

> Hi! What's going on?
>
> Yeah, I know it's late.
>
> Yeah, I know you're asleep.
>
> Yeah, it's kinda noisy here.
>
> It's kind of a party going on.
>
> Why don't you come down?
>
> You could really have a good time.
>
> You should really come down.
>
> Listen! Just put your shoes on
>
> And call a taxi and come down.
>
> You would really have fun.
>
> No, he is not here.
>
> Well maybe he's here maybe he's not here.
>
> What's the difference?
>
> Come on, just put your coat on

And put your shoes on and call a taxi and come down

Yeah, I know it's Brooklyn.

And U$ 35 dollars but, yeah, it's two nights, you know.

Listen—uh... *(Noticeable pause)*

I am sure I could get you in.

(Telephone hangs)

Anderson's mediatised persona (alter ego?) on record playing "Laurie Anderson, the performer" is aware that *United States I-IV* displays several angles and unravels as a two-night-long spectacle. More importantly, her itemised description of the sequence of actions needed to persuade someone to go to (perhaps) a live performance ("Come on, just put your coat on/ And put your shoes on and call a taxi and come down") expands the frame according to which we must understand live events, while exposing one the most relevant structures to condition live performance: its "occasional nature" (Auslander *Presence* 66).

In other words, live performance's "greatest strength", its uniqueness as a single, non-repeatable, non-reproducible event (that element which Benjamin calls the "aura"), inevitably means that performance is restricted and shaped by a particular, very specific spatio-temporal frame; however, as I hope will become clear, does not necessarily mean that performances have to be "live", that performances can not occur as reproducible commodities. That is, if, on the one hand, liveness binds performance to evanescence, making it disappear from the present, on the other, mediatisation, reproduction, and repetition of performances do not necessarily kill off performance's *momentary arrest of reality*, to my mind, performance's greatest appeal.

What disappears may amount to one version of the auratic experience (the one most often associated with high-art and art objects as unique and transcendent commodities). However, as I have argued in Chapter 2, another version of the "aura" is resurrected by mediatisation, one that continues in commodified performance: what I have called the

performance of the aura. In other words, whether live or mediatised, performances become defined by their *momentary arrest of reality,* a critical moment which holds the real in place, that is, stabihses events in a particular order for repeated fruition. Thus, mediatised performances can outlive and transcend liveness. Their "arrest" of the real can be carried out or transferred to commodified, mediatised performances as well. If I am right, mediatisation of performances, their entrance in commodity culture, enables live performance's evanescence from the present to remain unscathed, intact, but their evanescence has to be understood in terms which more fully comply with the necessities of contemporary audiences grown increasingly fond of commodification, of repetition, in sum, fond of cultural objects which can be brought closer; perhaps the appeal shown by commodity and mediatised culture in the last decades is due to this successful transference of performance's ability to arrest reality, even if briefly, i.e., for the duration of the event presented in commodified / mediatised form.[7]

As suggested by "Telephone Song", of course Anderson's live performances are constrained by the space and time in which they happen; of course a premeditated effort has to be made by audiences willing to participate in such live performances ("Yeah, I know it's late. / Yeah, I know you're asleep."); of course moving about (as we will see in the analysis of "Big Science") can be a major problem in big cities (where performance art can be said to have found more fertile, receptive grounds). Yet, exactly here, in this apparent paradox, is where mediatisation comes in handy: commodification and mediatisation of live performances preserve live performance's momentary capture of reality and help maintain their economic power in place. Perhaps one of the effects of mediatisation (of shaping and constructing performances in a format that fits contemporary culture better) is that people increasingly have come to see participation in live performances as a privilege, the privilege of liveness, of the un-edited and un-mediated fact. Thus, people repeatedly pay heavily to participate in live events, which only

apparently seem to have escaped commodification.

Commodified objects that can be held up close, kept for inspection, treasured as "auratic" experiences, however, represent another kind of performative power, one which is embedded in repetition, one which is intrinsic to commodity culture: the circulation of cultural goods. Mediatisation, thus, renders performances as cultural products which can be made to circulate endlessly in a variety of media, generating profits, revitalising older performances and establishing performative connections between a variety of other (cultural, bureaucratic, technological) performances.[8]

Accordingly, one of Anderson's greatest artistic (but also political) strengths may be her intrinsic knowledge (as already noticeable in the late 1970s, the time around which she began working on the ideas that led to *United States I-IV*) that contemporary times bear witness to a reduction on the value, profitability and prestige accorded to live events (Auslander *Liveness* 162). Thus, by acknowledging the frame according to which live performance must work (its spatial constraint and temporal evanescence), she discloses the changes in the status of live performance in mediatised culture. Consider Auslander:

> At present, television is the dominant cultural form. Since television usurped the theatre's position in the cultural economy, theatre has become more like television. But has television gone on to become more like theatre-as-television? (*Liveness* 162)

The question lingers on. If live performance is no longer the dominant cultural form, what kind of performances has seized its place? Mediatised performances that circulate in various forms in the mass media as products of media technology, i.e., televisual culture/commodities. Johannes Birringer: "I come closest to recognising video as the paradigmatic postmodern medium indicating changes in cultural production that are not merely changes in technology but in aesthetic models and ideologies of the subject as well" (*Theatre* xii).[9] If, not long ago, people treasured fine art made of natural materials, tangible

little objects in jewellery boxes, today, it seems to me, people have become increasingly attached to plastic boxes containing intangible, recorded performances tailored for expanded markets that are only there in our abstract vision of the world. Thus, by becoming mediatised, Anderson is able to comment on the many changes the contemporary landscape has infringed upon our very perception of reality shaped by massive mediation. To my mind then, part of her charm lies exactly in the relentless exposure of mediatised culture's operations from within mediatised/commodity culture itself.

Moreover, if—along with Auslander—we think that mediatised performances seem to have deprived live performances of their status and prestige, the particular relation between the instruments Anderson uses in mediatised performance also becomes relevant. For example, Anderson's extensive use of electronic sounds helps define a different performative space that dissociates the consumption of her music from a specific place. Simon Frith makes an important observation in relation to the consumption of music and the role played by electronic sounds:

> Even on record a concerto means a concert hall, a chamber piece a drawing room, an opera an opera house; just as jazz means a jazz club, a big band a dance hall, a rock band a pub back-room or stadium. But because electronic sounds aren't produced like this, even in pop fantasy, they tend to be as much associated with musical consumption as musical production, consumption that isn't confined either to the disco or dance club (as later rave, house, and acid musics are) or to the living room, but describes, rather, the way in which all-around sounds are absorbed (like rap) into daily urban life. (*Performing Rites* 7)

Hence, Anderson's continuous use of electronic sounds represents a further incursion (or capitulation?) into mediatisation because the consumption of electronic music, following

Frith, is not confined to site-specific production, that is, bound to a spatial frame that firmly grounds the consumption of, say, opera to opera houses and big bands to the dance hall, and rave music to the disco, etc. Interestingly, in relation to Anderson's performances, electronic sounds themselves serve to remark further on the effects of mediatisation. Similarly to television which, according to Auslander (and, to some extent, Birringer), has become the dominant cultural form, electronic sounds and electronic music now seem to convey something of the daily life experiences of contemporary man; that is, freed from locale, electronic sounds tend to be as much associated with musical consumption as with musical production.

As a consequence, changes in the status between the categories (live/mediatised performance), and which, as we have just seen, appear to have been made more than problematic, are made explicit in Anderson's mediatised performances. Anderson uses electronic sounds to comment further on the mechanics of music consumption and production in a heavily mediated environment. Thus, she will not disguise the peculiarities or the problems inherent to live performances (duration, availability, price, location, etc.); neither will she avoid questions intrinsic to mediatised performance (technology, costs, profitability, etc.). Rather, Anderson will internalise mediatisation to the point that her performances can thoroughly comment on the effects of the process of mediatisation. Interestingly then, as becomes explicit in "Telephone Song", Anderson will turn the elucidation of the difficulties inherent to live performance (the status of live performance in contemporary times) into the very subject of this and many other pieces.[10]

"Telephone Song", as we have seen, inserted halfway through *United States I-IV Live*, pokes fun at the situation of the live performance, and hence becomes critical of its own means while making way for Anderson (as the piece itself is reproduced in mediatised form) to reiterate mediatisation as a valid strategy. In "Telephone Song" Anderson seems to say that, even as the performances from *United States I-IV Live* document only the aural

part of her performance, the five-record set that has been preceded by a live event (the long format favoured by *United States I-IV Live*) is nevertheless more appropriated to the context of the contemporary landscape than the live event itself. For one thing, as one does not need to go anywhere dangerous at night (supposedly Brooklyn where *United States I-IV Live* was presented and recorded) to experience the performance, neither does one need to know the performer personally to get admitted to (usually) crowded spaces, pay dearly for a taxi run, or even go to see a "performance" under the false pretext of meeting or not meeting someone you want/do not want to meet.

Furthermore, because the landscape of contemporary cities has imposed a more complex kind of spatial organisation, superseding the limits of our own biological senses, contemporary audiences may have outgrown live performances as the dominant cultural form and favoured mediatisation as a valid, even more comfortable, alternative. In other words, in the current cultural moment, live performances, now made to fit the needs of mediatised culture, are something of an anachronism, albeit a necessary one since it is still the idea of liveness (and —as we have seen— its complex authentication process) that seems to inform much mediatised performance anyway.[11] This fact would explain both the urgency of mediatisation (live performances are augmented, made relevant by mediatisation) and the large investments (Anderson's "This stuff does not grow on trees" from "Say Hello") necessary to maintain a profitable mediatised presence that integrates liveness and mediatisation into the landscape. In reality this situation is noticeable everywhere. See in what terms Jean Baudrillard describes the American landscape:

> America is a giant hologram, in the sense that information concerning the whole is contained in each of its elements. Take the tiniest little place in the desert, any old street in a Mid-West town, a parking lot, a Californian house, a BurgerKing or a Studebaker, and you have the whole of the US – South, North, East, or West. Holographic also in that it has the coherent light of the

> laser, the homogeneity of the single elements scanned by the same beams. From the visual and plastic viewpoints too: things seem to be made of a more unreal substance; they seem to turn and move in a void as if by a special lighting effect, a fine membrane you pass through without noticing it. ... You do indeed get the impression that America is made up of a fantastic switching between similar elements, and that everything is only held together by a thread of light, a laser beam, scanning out American reality before our eyes. (*America* 29-30)

Anderson might use similar terms in her mediatised performance to survey the American landscape, which, as we have seen, seems to export its models to much of the Western world. Such could also be the landscape advanced by mediatised culture, with its intentional phantasmagoric rendering of space. Of course there are reasons for this, and the magnification of these reasons is one of the driving forces behind Anderson's performances in the course of her career at Warner Brothers.

Meanwhile, *Big Science,* which, in relation to Anderson's avant-garde performances, can be said to represent a further step in relation to mediatisation, a development and a condensation of Anderson's ideas in relation to mediatised presence, functions primarily as a commodity. *Big Science* is mediatised in a way that *United States I-IV Live* cannot be. Existing independently from live performance, translated and adapted to the format favoured by popular music—an album with 9 songs—*Big Science* will not fall prey to the contingencies that frame live performance or the contingencies (see Frith above) of an aural recording that documents a lengthy live performance (a five-record—or four-CD—set that, new, is sold for around US$ 45,00 almost twenty years after its first release). Because *United States I-IV Live* exists primarily as an aural document of an original live performance and later evolves into a mediatised environment, it becomes almost impossible to cast off these fragments that, paradoxically, ground it on liveness. As

I said in note six for the Preliminaries of this study, based on these facts I draw on the performances from *Big Science* to start analysing Laurie Anderson's mediatised performances and keep those from *United States I-IV Live* under my sleeve, adding insights from the latter to be used whenever needed.

3.1 *Big Science*

Besides "From the Air", for me an undeniable example of Anderson's commitment to the electronic space of mediatised performance, *Big Science* includes other important pieces such as the performance that gives the recording its title (in which Anderson seems to double check the performance of science and linear notions of progress); "Born Never Asked", a laconic commentary on "freedom" and "being"; "O Superman", which takes the authority of technological performance as its subject; and "Let X=X", in which Anderson proposes that we transfer the logic of a mathematical equation and apply it to our daily lives. Again, for me, the main reason why "From the Air" (and consequently, the album *Big Science* as a whole) is such a fascinating way to introduce Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers is that, by the time of its release (1982), the album could be read as a sophisticated example of Anderson's concerns in respect to performance and mediatisation as discussed above and in Chapter 2. In "From the Air", as we have seen, Anderson interrogates (and thus exposes) the essential principle upon which live performances have rested (i.e. their ephemeral quality, their occasional nature), while making apparent the storytelling mechanisms which she will regularly use to structure a great deal of her subsequent mediatised performances, that is, the narrative (and counter-narrative) devices she employs to create surprise in these performances. "From the Air" functions then as an introduction to the problematic of mediatisation as discussed in Chapter 2, by making its audiences aware of the characteristics of their own experience in relation to the performed

piece, thus, aware of the space occupied by performance and, consequently, of Anderson's own whereabouts in relation to mediatised space.

3.1.1 "From the Air"

As a song-text, "From the Air" is structured around the account of an attempted crash-landing, literally, a *unique* experience that, given its rather terminal character, even now,[12] can never become a completely familiar experience to most of us: a crash landing presupposes the uniqueness of death as its closest referential. Anderson's voices, filtered through a vocoder,[13] echo in tone and pitch that of the pilot of an aeroplane informing his passengers of the machine's safety procedures:

> Good evening. This is your Captain.
>
> We are about to attempt a crash landing.
>
> Please extinguish all cigarettes.
>
> Place your tray tables in their
>
> Upright, locked position.

So far the performance of the aeroplane's safety routine attests that this machine is going down, but suddenly, the coherence of these lines (the coherence of the narrative being performed) is confused: made to resemble the choreography of a dance routine, a children's game, the authority of the performance, its instructions and procedures, is forsaken. A burst of cynical and unexplained laughter (shown bellow in Italics) completes the breakdown:

> Your Captain says: Put your head on your knees.
>
> Your Captain says: Put your head in your hands.
>
> Captain says: Put your hands on your head.

Put your hands on your hips. *Heh heh.*

The utterance of these lines and the burst of laughter, which readily contradict the performative force of the statements that immediately preceded them, seem to undermine the validity and authority of the safety procedures so far, while adding sombre undertones and a hint of uncertainty to the situation of the performance:

This is your Captain—and we are going down.

We are all going down, together.

And I said: Uh oh. This is gonna be some day.

Stand by. This is the time.

And this is the record of the time.

This is the time. And this is the record of the time.

Since this is a terminal situation, what is the use of following, of paying attention to these instructions. At this point, when the last couple of lines quoted above are spoken ("This is the time. And this is the record of the time."), audiences begin to realise they may have been entrapped by the arresting power of Anderson's performance. Audiences now may also conceive that they have been taken in by the performative force of the words spoken (Anderson's words, which clearly were urging us to perform one operation, unexpectedly change context, thus undermining the power of the whole performance) and that "this" is not a terminal situation, but a performance of which Anderson is actually part of ("And I said: This is gonna be some day."). Thus, "From the Air", which started out describing an aeroplane out of control and about to crash land, now refers to something else. The tragedy of Doomsday is not only about death. It is about power. Now the lines "Stand by. This is the time./ And this is the record of the time. /This is the time. And this is the record of the time" seem to express concern with a different point of view.

In the repetition of these lines, which—placed side by side—become heavily contrasted, is condensed the uncertainty of our ability to make sense of reality without

performance. In "From the Air", these apparently stable and completely different categories—time and its re-appearance as citation—are made unstable and complicated by the proximity by means of which the lines are uttered. In other words, by placing the line that locates present "real" time ("This is the time.") immediately before the line that represents citation ("This is the record of the time."), Anderson reproduces in performance the relevance given to "originals" in our culture or, if you wish, the status and relevance given to live performance. Additionally, by associating these categories to performance (not any performance but one that describes a plane crash, a rather terminal situation in which the urgency of "reality" and the contemplation of death are obviously ever more pressing), Anderson ends up disturbing and confusing the relation between "reality" and its "performance", just as authoritative speech confuses power with commentary. That is, as Anderson complicates our sense of time while it is being lived out with the introduction of a citation, i.e., memory, or the citation of time gone by, the re-enaction of time, she manages to expose the complex authenticating processes that seem to underline such operations: she confuses time lived out in the present (as you read this), and the re-appearance of a time slot as events in a performance or in narratives that give coherence to the "original" experiences we undergo (you recall what you have just read).

Thus, it seems to me that "From the Air" makes explicit that, in performance, these two categories (real time and the citation of time, originals and copies, power and commentary) may become indistinct, i.e., the line that separates them may become blurred, may become exposed for what it is, just another artificial construct. Consequently, when these categories become virtually undistinguished in performance, *their relevance as distinct categories also becomes blurred.* The two lines, "This is the time. And this is the record of the time", in repetition, seem to attest to the confusion that is bound to happen in performance: what exactly is the difference between *uttering* those lines in performance, and *repeating* them on record? Apparently none, whatsoever. In fact, what the utterance of

these lines shows is that *both* categories are invested with performative frames. And this is the capital point. What exactly is the difference between "real time" and the performance of "real time"? Don't these two categories have to develop in a single time frame?

In other words, if performance erases (or confuses) the differences between these two categories, how can we still imagine noticing any differences between them? How can we ever pretend to step outside a performative frame? To my mind, this is *the* impossible task as there seems to be no means for excluding performance from our *own* sense of what we are, from how we—ultimately—construct and measure ourselves by means of performance. In other words, there is no end to the performative frames used to control and structure the very sense of "reality" we aim at describing. Hence, we have the notions of performance embedded in the very fabric that produces our sense of what reality is: the need to represent ourselves not only to others but also to ourselves. The bottom line is that it becomes impossible to escape performance in its various guises. Either live or recorded, it is the performative frame that will freeze a moment and guide our senses both authenticating one frame and eventually constructing what we think we are, thus representing ourselves to ourselves. Whatever reality is being constructed, it will fall into a performative frame, which, interestingly, again is a matter of performance. Thus, the very idea of escaping performance becomes impossible.

Anderson makes the complexity of these relationships even more explicit by means of another strategy: autobiography, which is an important all around means for her to blur the differences between "performance" and "real life", "form" and "content", "power" and "commentary." Asked by Tom Stromberg in 1991 which she considered to be more important (form or content), Anderson replied that they are inseparable (Anderson "The Speed of Change" 19). RoseLee Goldberg has established the importance of autobiography for Anderson by asserting that she will use "'autobiography' to mean the time *right up* to the actual performance, so that a work often included a description of its own making"

(Goldberg *Performance Art* 172, italics mine).[14] Thus understood, 'autobiography' aims at thoroughly effacing the distinction between performance and reality, between the contents of, say, your "art" and the "format" it will take, since the two will merge in the act of performance, presented as one continuous movement. In doing so, Anderson is able to include aspects of her own life (hence, autobiography) in the very process of creation, and, as a consequence, she is able to demonstrate how deeply problematic this separation is.[15]

For the audience trapped by the performative power of Anderson's words, what becomes clear is that there may as well not be any difference between physical presence and electronic "absence", as the examination of the lines "This is the time" and "This is the record of the time" seems to make apparent. If the difference itself does not amount to much, the performance of the difference does: in Anderson's performance ones finds that the trace left by the reality of time (happening right here and right now) is equal to its undifferentiated existence in record, thus equal to its performance. In sum, it is the difference itself that becomes erased in mediatised performance. Translating Anderson's performance into theoretical performance, what we have is equivalent to the explosion of Deconstruction during the 1980s through Deconstruction's "radical questioning of presence itself" whose readings "argue that presence and absence are inscribed within a system of conceptual hierarchies, an evaluative network that also includes such oppositions as truth/falsity, science/art, speech/writing, reality/representation, and body/language" (McKenzie *Perform or Else* 40).

The tricky part from Anderson's argument in "From the Air" lies in her use of a terminal situation (a plane crash) to test the system of hierarchies at work. Thus, the lines: "This is the time" and "This is the record of the time" become inscribed in a deconstructive frame that, because of their performative facet, as we have seen, exposes the principle according to which the two categories (presence/absence) may become indistinct by means of performance. Hence, the blur (or chaos) as to what comes first in our perception, time or

its citation, our sense of time or our memory of its flow, and what exactly is the memory of that particular time or time slot, since we experience time as one undifferentiated, continuous flow that dissolves the conceptual balance between presence/absence. There is more, however:

> Uh—this is your Captain again.
>
> You know, I've got a funny feeling I've seen this all before.
>
> Why? Cause I'm a caveman.
>
> Why? Cause I've got eyes in the back of my head.
>
> Why? It's the heat. Standby.
>
> This is the time. And this is the record of the time.
>
> This is the time. And this is the record of the time.
>
> Put your hands over your eyes. Jump out of the plane.
>
> There is no pilot. You are not alone. Standby.
>
> This is the time. And this is the record of the time.
>
> This is the time. And this is the record of the time.

As listeners, by now, through repetition, we have become familiar with the idea of there being no difference between the utterance itself and the performance of the utterance, consequently no difference between our sense of time and our sense of its performance can be perceived. Thus, Anderson pulls another trick: she plays with evolution, and, consequently, progress by stating that the captain on this plane is a "caveman"; as it were, this brings our ancestors back from the grave. However, when our ancestors are brought back, it is just to prove that, in spite of all technological changes, the technological sheath we surround ourselves with, we have not recreated ourselves; in spite of proof to the contrary, technology has not substantially altered our physical bodies, nor safeguarded our bodies from harm. Much to the contrary, while Anderson urges her audience to "jump out of the plane" because there is no pilot (notice the irony in the very possibility of an absent

pilot—the pilot may as well have been a recording, thus a machine), she deliberately throws away centuries of history that attest to the progress of humankind: we are, in fact, merely trapped by its schemes and projects just to find ourselves alone, with no one in control. Thus, it is the authority of technological change that becomes a problem, an idea Anderson will further develop in the song that immediately follows "From the Air" and that will punctuate many other recorded pieces of the period.

As an afterthought it occurs to me that, precisely because "From the Air" has been recorded, made portable, disentangled from its specific location, so that today its experience can be taken with you anywhere, we may imagine a rather more sarcastic listener set up to play the piece in the event of a plane crash. In *United States I-IV Live* "From the Air" is not as condensed as in *Big Science* but rather it is presented as an extended version which includes more information about how Anderson actually developed a *fear of flying.*

3.1.2 "Big Science"

"Big Science", the performance that gives Anderson's first commercial release its title, immediately follows "From the Air." It begins with what appears to be the electronic reproduction of the far crying of wolves, an effect accentuated by the silence[16] in between the wolves' cries and by Anderson's complaint that "outside" it is cold. In fact, these are mimicked cries, produced by Anderson's own voice distorted and mediated by a vocoder. Thus, at the start of the performance, we have evidence that a "natural" environment is defined in terms of silence rather than noise, characterised by cold rather than warmth. Silence, however, is soon disturbed again by Anderson's voice, now in an authoritarian but still rather casual tone which, apparently for no reason, says:

> Don't forget your mittens.
>
> Hey Pal! How do I get to town from here?

These lines, as they interrupt the atmosphere first established by the far cries in between silence, attest now to the existence of two distinct environments pictured in the performance: a natural, seemingly un-touched landscape limited by silence, and the far crying of the "wolves", and a (more) civilised, noisier environment marked by Anderson's voice as if leaving a confined, sheltered space ("Don't forget your mittens."), asking for directions on how to get (back) to "town" (Hey Pal! How do I get to town from here?). The reply is intriguing:

> And he said: Well just take a right where
> they're going to build that new shopping mall,
> go straight past where they're going to put in the freeway,
> and take a left at what's going to be the new sports center,
> and keep going until you hit the place where
> they're thinking of building that drive-in bank.

The utterance of, not one, but a series of intricate directions marked by a planned landscape of fast changing architectural signs that seem to imply frantic economic growth and power, lack of permanence, and sudden change, contrasts violently with the environment established at the very beginning of the performance by Anderson's electronic rendition of the wolves' cries. These cries, which seem to unwelcome change, also convey the refusal of the more "natural" habitat to perform. Consequently, for Anderson's performance, whereas the silence of the natural environment seems to imply lack of movement and permanence, eventually refusal to take up referential meaning, the noises, instructions and implied changeability of shopping malls, freeways, sports centres and drive-in banks convert the environment that represents civilisation into an ever changing landscape, a nightmare for orientation and an endless labyrinth of performative forces where moving and spatial orientation acquire an almost perverse attribute.

Thus, instead of recognising a habitat in the landscape you are in, you are forced to acknowledge its changeability imposed by various performances, i.e., the performance of economic forces, the performance of real state developments, the performance of technology, etc.:

> ...the contemporary city, such as Dallas or New York, is perhaps the most complex spatial figure of our time. The fragmented surfaces and the delirious, discontinuous fabric of its sights, signs, and sounds are infinitely difficult to describe. If we analysed them in terms of the changes, redevelopment, destruction, and gentrification that have occurred over the years since, say, the presumed spatial revolutions of modernist architecture, the dreams of the Modern Movement would no longer be legible between today's broken sightlines. The visions of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, Taut et al. would disappear among the gigantic emblems of economic power—the gold, silver, or emerald green glass box skyscrapers of banks, oil companies, or multinational corporations—and the overcrowded freeways, crumbling factories, cheap convenient stores, and decaying urban ghettoes. (Birringer *Theatre, Theory* 5)

From the block quote above we may infer that Anderson's "Big Science" provides a counterpoint to Birringer's own point of view. Once the object of her criticism is made explicit, she can continue further:

> You can't miss it. And I said: This must be the place.
>
> Ooo coo coo. Golden cities. Golden towns.
>
> Golden cities. Golden towns.
>
> And long cars in long lines and great big signs
>
> and they all say: Hallelujah. Yodellayheehoo.
>
> Every man for himself. Ooo coo coo.

Golden cities. Golden towns. Thanks for the ride.

Just as Birringer can not read in the contemporary cityscape of Dallas and New York the dreams of modernity, Anderson can not read in the same landscape the dreams of "Big Science": the debris of the modernist dreams have merely given us "long cars in long lines" (with its subtext of traffic jams?) and "great big signs" (an allusion to media derived experience?) but no utopian, modernist cityscape. Similarly to "Shangri-La" which, to the eyes of the tired traveller, becomes utopia, to our eyes, the megalopolis, Anderson's "golden cities" replaces the natural environment with the performance of technology : "long cars in long lines and great big signs." These, which come to stand as technology's greatest triumphs, as we have seen through Birringer's words, seem to be merely assets to capital and economic power. Thus, instead of utopia, what we have is performance: the performance of real state ventures, the performance of efficacy from highly organised companies.

Punctuating Anderson's yodelling is the fact that, even as we might have wanted to, we can not miss these golden cities and golden towns that science, technology and capital have built and for which the performance of long cars and big signs are the utmost symbols of power and glory; whether we accept it or not, the "un-performativity" of silence, the lack of referential meaning of the natural environment, its "meaninglessness" has been replaced by performance. As the natural environment becomes swapped by such creations, our abstract vision of the world also changes and becomes shaped, perhaps, by the products on offer, by the commodities that have come to mediate our sense of what reality is, by the commodities that, as Birringer notes, suspend, or cancel out the real (*Theatre, Theory* 9). This is an issue Anderson addresses more explicitly in other performances, such as "Odd Objects" (from *United States I-IV Live*) and "O Superman", also from *Big Science.*

As I have argued, at this point, the contrast Anderson achieves in the description of the two environments (natural/civilised) helps to establish fully the meanings associated

with civilisation and the big city, thus the object of Anderson's criticism becomes quite explicit. In "Big Science" Anderson's laconic description of civilisation seems to expose it for its underlying mot, performance. Jon McKenzie: "Performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge" (*Perform or Else* 18). Thus, through her own performance, Anderson's point of attack exposes the most prominent power force driving human beings through the history of the twentieth century: performance.

Consequently, "Big Science", as it becomes highly volatile as, perhaps, "Small Science", to serve the immediate needs of capital, changes our very idea of how and which reality is being performed, eventually which performances are accepted. Instead of pursuing bigger, perhaps humanitarian goals, science serves the creation of an environment for capital to thrive, in other words, an environment for capital to perform. As Anderson, the mediatised performer, casually thanks for "the ride", I can think of this "ride" as a metaphor for entrapment. The "ride" Anderson is referring to in this song-text is the "performance" of science and technology, the role science and technology have continually and gradually taken on and which has made humankind act according to rules of organisational efficacy: act more and more in this "warm" environment in which one does not need "mittens", while keeping nature at arm's length, exhausting it merely as a source for technological, bureaucratic and official performance. A fine example of the extent of technological performance is computer technologies which

> function as a virtual metatechnology, a technology used to design, manufacture, and evaluate other technologies. Technologies no longer go back to the drawing board; instead, they go back to the desktop with its CAD or computer assisted design programs. The computer not only performs, it helps produce performances of other products and materials and thereby greatly extends the domain of technological performance, a domain

> whose reach into our lives can be grasped in the ubiquity of bar codes. (McKenzie *Perform or Else* 11)

Thus, as the ubiquity of computer intervention increasingly sets in—for example, in televisual culture (as well as in film), computer graphics and imaging are used to create or alter environments to the point where it has become impossible to differentiate between these completely artificial creations and their equivalents in the physical world— we can begin to picture the reach of technological performance deeply within the structures that make up (for) reality. Anderson's point of view in "Big Science" resonates against commonly accepted, still rather positivist notions that see scientific progress at the topmost position of humanity's goals: if "long cars in long lines" and "great big signs" are the closest to utopia, the closest we can ever get to "high performance", then we might as well rejoice, as she, ironically, does in the performance:

> Big Science. Hallelujah. Big Science. Yodellayheehoo.
>
> You know. I think we should put some mountains here.
>
> Otherwise, what are all the characters going to fall off of?
>
> And what about stairs? Yodellayheehoo. Ooo coo coo.

Science, and its sibling, computer technology, can—allegedly—take us anywhere (place mountains for the characters to fall off from, stairs for them to climb), but the question that lingers, however, is at what price? So far nothing new since utopia has continually eluded us and, in at least one strand of popular music of the 1980s, Detroit techno, Anderson's views represent a shared thematic strand:

> ... the vision underlying Cybotron songs [DJs Juan Atkins and Rick Davis' early group] was Detroit-specific, capturing a city in transition: from industrial boom-town to post-Fordist wasteland, from US capital of auto manufacturing to US capital of homicide. Following the late sixties and early seventies syndrome of 'white-flight' to the suburbs, the decline of the

> auto industry, and the de-gentrification of once securely middle-class black districts, Detroit's city centre had become a ghost-town. ... 'Techno City' [one of Cybotron's tracks] was inspired by Fritz Lang's vision in *Metropolis* of a future megalopolis divided into privileged sectors high up in the sky and subterranean prole zones. According to Davis, Techno City was equivalent to Detroit's Woodward Avenue ghetto; the dream of its denizens was to work their way up to the cybodrome, where the artists and intellectuals lived. Again, these utopian/dystopian fantasies were just a thinly veiled allegory of the unofficial apartheid taking shape in urban America, with the emergence of privately policed fortress communities and township-like ethnic ghettos. (Reynolds 9-10)

To my mind, the interesting part of Anderson's critique, since, as we can infer from Reynolds paragraph above, her disbelief in the performance of technology can not be said to be not entirely unique, is that Anderson seems to evade more readily available comparisons and rationales (Detroit as a version of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* in Reynolds mind) by calling attention to the human subject stranded by the rush of technological change, by the rush of its performance. While Cybotron's take on the subject draws on widely available cultural representations—science fiction and German film director Fritz Lang—Anderson develops her own critique, her own metaphors, which embody performance as a starting point, making noticeable in her song-texts the gap created by the performance of technology and capital not only in the fabric of society as a whole but, more importantly, at its core, the individual:

> Here's a man who lives a life of danger.
>
> Everywhere he goes he stays - a stranger.
>
> Howdy stranger. Mind if I smoke? And he said:
>
> Every man, every man for himself.

Every man, every man for himself.

All in favor say aye.

Big Science. Hallelujah. Big Science. Yodellayheehoo.

Hey Professor! Could you turn out the lights?

Let's roll the film.

Big Science. Hallelujah.

Every man, every man for himself.

Big Science. Hallelujah. Yodellayheehoo.

This fact, the atomisation of society ("Every man, every man for himself."), especially in the America of the 1980s, becomes relevant if we think of Anderson's performance as mediatised: the experience of listening to music has ceased to be a primarily sociable occurrence. Today, it is usually the private performance and consumption of music through recordings (such as Anderson's) that has become the rule.[17] In other words, her critique doubles itself insofar as Anderson's persona herself (her electronic body in mediatised performance) is a sibling product of the same technology that has given us long cars and big signs, of the technology that, as she puts it, has separated contemporary society into individual pieces: strangers no matter where or how far they go. Thus, Anderson's performance is part of the very environment she is criticising, part of the atomisation process, if you will, part of the high performance systems she is addressing in "Big Science".

As the song reaches its end, Anderson's insinuations become more violent, insidious. The performance of technology severs humans from their environment, as it produces an *ersatz* for physical reality that succeeds in accommodating and integrating mankind but which generally fails to push its individuals beyond integration. Thus, she says:

> Sometimes it's hard to believe that everybody is so incredibly enthusiastic about the digital revolution. I have to say that I'm getting a little burned out on all this stuff. I now have eleven computers and it's a really big job keeping up with the updates and things keep crashing and I've gotten to the point where half the time all I want to do is throw all this stuff out of the window—floppies, zip drives, monitors, mice—everything—just get rid of it. I mean I'm spending so much more time fixing things and learning new systems and I'm thinking, 'Wait a second. Is this how technology is improving my life?' (Anderson in Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 173)

If rarely does technology appear solely as a showcase in Anderson's performances, how is it pictured? And just what is it that one does with it? How does it improve one's life? Is one there just to keep it up and running? The gravity of Anderson's point of view here lies on the practical nature of her examples: cars, buildings and personal computers are not the stuff of dreams, but part of the everyday "performance" of contemporary modern society, part of the performance paradigm that affects us on a daily basis. Jon McKenzie has asked the question "What performs?" and (unsurprisingly) his own findings show that the answer is literally extensive only as he mentions the brand names and products that are retailed with some explicit reference to the words "performance" (*Perform or Else* 11). Thus, it is true, technology can provide you with an *ersatz* reality in which you can exist and perform. However, one of the downsides of technological performance, when compared to performance of the natural environment, is that, unlike it, the utopian/dystopian worlds generated by technology and science, the several performances that go under the hallmark of technology and science tend to disappear and degrade all too quickly if not properly maintained: Anderson's "it's a really big job keeping up with the updates" rationale. Last, not least, we have a definition of technological performance, by McKenzie:

> 'Effectiveness in a given task.' This provides us an initial definition of technological performance. Other terms frequently employed as synonyms of performance are *capability, operation, function, and efficiency.* The performance of a technology refers to its technical effectiveness in a specific application or set of applications undertaken in a particular context. (*Perform or Else* 97)

Thus, we can say that evolution (better performance?) in the *ersatz* world of technology and technological performance is generated and maintained by the circulation of capital, that is, by benchmarks of similarly performative forces; thus, the performance of capital and the performance of technology seem to be intricately connected. The speed with which commodities circulate, generate revenue, and perform satisfactorily becomes crucial to mediatised culture. All too sudden must also be the changes such environment, say mediatised culture, has to undergo in order to maintain itself a profitable performance. If today the world has become a large repository of signs and languages, a large container of performances both operative and useless, but too complex and abstract to the point of no return, to the point where—partly because of the speed with which changes must take place—no one is actually sure of one's exact whereabouts, it seems to me that this situation is caused mainly by the speed with which performances must replace and follow one another. The fragmented quality of our perception is due more to the speed with which various performances have come to succeed one another than to any other logical factors: technologies and capital have to perform better in less time in order not to become anachronistic, eventually, in order not to stop performing.

Consequently, there is no performance that does not presuppose its failure from within, that does not hold failure at arm's length, or that contemplates its obsolescence permanently within range. By the same token, to bring the argument home, nowadays there is no critical positioning that does not acknowledge its failure from within, its obsolescence

in the very near future, sometimes in the act of writing itself. Now, I am not pushing forward a "return of the native" kind of view, but the proper maintenance of technology's segmented realities not only revolves around learning new systems and languages all the time, embodying new performances, but requires proper playing of rules that seem to be forever changing. Additionally, performing efficiently requires complete integration to the *ersatz* realities that are momentarily produced. For better or for worse, contained in this move will be loss. Take Anderson's case, for example, when, by the mid 1980s she had properly enacted her transition into popular culture by embodying the performances of a pop star, her status in the art-world of the avant-garde was jeopardised: to many she had partly lost her credentials as an avant-garde artist. Thus, compliance with mediatised culture is not only a move Anderson would have internalised in her own body by 1980s, but also a move she would dissect in mediatised performance.

3.1.3 "Born, Never Asked"

Also true, the *ersatz* environment produced by the performance of technology for the physical world is rather corporate and not exactly free; it is a coded environment in which your own performance is examined against a set of predetermined (however changing) rules.[18] Among other "changeable" notions, Anderson believes our concept of what is meant by "freedom" changes under such circumstances. "Born, Never Asked", also from the *Big Science* recording, is a piece which begins describing an ordinary theatrical event:

> It was a large room. Full of people. All kinds.
> And they had all arrived at the same building
> at more or less the same time.
> And they were all free. And they were all

asking themselves the same question:

What is behind that curtain?

As with other recorded performances "Born, Never Asked" appears in slightly different, recurring versions,[19] in *Big Science* and *United States I-IV Live*, encapsulating some of the central patterns that appear throughout Anderson's recorded performances: 1) an awareness of the space occupied by performance in everyday life and 2) a commentary on the framework contemporary life assumes under mediatisation. "Born, Never Asked" is also one of the performances that, along with "O Superman" (analysed next), becomes more than marginally integrated (as many of Anderson's pieces remain[20]) into the world of pop music.

In "Born, Never Asked" the two first lines of the song-text come together in the description of a room that is full of all kinds of people. Anderson here is commenting both on the environment of the art world (the "large room" described appears to be that of a gallery or theatre in which a performance is about to start) and on everyday contemporary life. In cities people leave work, they move around, then go to see a performance as entertainment. The tension in Anderson's performance is constructed around the idea of performance's occasional nature (Auslander *Presence* 66), that is, "Born, Never Asked" exposes one of the principles according to which performance can be defined insofar as it characterises all participants (Anderson's audience) as free individuals, but who, quite surprisingly and incomprehensibly, are conditioned (by performance) to *leave* and *arrive* at places more or less at the *same time* and ask themselves the *same question*: "What is behind that curtain?"

Yet, here lies the mechanism that, sarcastically, functions in "Born, Never Asked" (but also in a great deal of Anderson's performances) to expose the fallacy of "freedom": as Anderson puts it, each one of these individuals is "free", but such freedom presupposes and implies captivity. Already embodied in the term is the trace left by its opposition, its

binary pair. Freedom means freedom to perform according to certain rules dictated and shared by the group, by another force (performance itself or one of its attendant implied forces, technology, capital, etc). Each one of these individuals is "free" to leave and arrive, but only "more or less" at the same time, "free" to ask questions, but, given the arresting power of performance, only the same questions will be accepted. Thus, freedom becomes captivity: we all move according to well established, shared codes and commonly accepted patterns of behaviour. This again prompts us with the questions: whose rules? whose codes? whose performance? If we remember that the environment has been replaced by the performance of technology, the logical starting point would be to ask: what kind of freedom is this? The answer suggests the freedom of performing efficiently along previously established, long accepted pathways, possibly, the freedom of not asking any questions for which there are no answers, at least not easy ones; it does not really matter what, eventually, is behind "that curtain", but that we are all asking the same question, more or less, simultaneously. To me, Anderson completes the circle of her irony insofar as the answer to this question is never given and insofar as the point she wants to make is made explicit by the last line of the performance, "You were born. And so you are free. So Happy birthday", which, ironically, suggests that we are not free at all.

The last line of the song-text, which, in view of what has been described immediately before, means exactly the opposite, exactly the contrary (You were born, but you are not free at all), succeeds in transforming Anderson's song into an anthem for twentieth-century mankind, trapped in performance, trapped in the efficacy of technological and bureaucratic performance. By making reference to the word "freedom", but discrediting it immediately afterwards, by exposing its hierarchical dependence on "captivity" the idea of "freedom" starts to include its double. Eventually, "freedom" becomes explicit for what it ultimately is, a falsehood and a much-advertised fallacy on which nations and empires are built. As the song/performance ends, the words "Happy

Birthday", followed by a long and laconic violin solo, seem to introduce the paradoxical idea of being born into a world that has already been coded up in performance, and that by itself is more than sinister. But sinister is the norm as "O Superman", the song-text analysed next, seems to show.

Drawing once more on Philip Auslander's characterisation of live performance by means of its occasional nature (*Presence* 66), and opposing it to Anderson's disclosure of the implications of this principle in "Born, Never Asked", we may begin to trace the wider implications of this reasoning for live and mediatised performance, the crucial point being that we have to understand performance's "occasional nature" in a wider sense. Thus, not only do live performances, as Auslander argues, seem to be controlled by their occasional nature, meaning an unmediated and concurrent, physical presence in time and space, but performance's occasional nature also has to be understood as the mode according to which performances, live or mediatised, *instantly take hold of reality*, transforming and re-arranging its patterns according to the moment, simultaneously giving it shape while communicating. Such power is, to my mind, what has pushed performance into the foreground of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century paradigms, as Jon McKenzie argues.

It occurs to me that another factor, visibility, or the maintenance of visibility in performance, conditions much of what has been said about the relevance of performance's occasional nature. In other words: the relevance of a particular performance takes place only while it *lasts* and can only be recovered as it is made visible, i.e., "performed", that is, as it becomes available as presence (electronic or otherwise) through a variety of (nowadays, usually technological) means. Eventually this will import on a model in which performances (mediatised, live or in whatever form the future may hold in store) only become relevant as they surface and are maintained visible among other cultural commodities. Thus, the maintenance of visibility (a role played by different media) plays a crucial part in the enduring prestige of various mediatised performances. Visibility aims at

creating demand for a variety of mediatised performances which are then made profitable by expanding markets, controlled yet by another kind of performance. The way I see it, this relationship presupposes that an initial investment in making a performance visible and legible (giving it a history and a function in relation to other performances) is at the bottom line of a successful and enduring mediatised presence. I also conceive that the relationship between live and mediatised performance is made even more complex in Anderson's case because she has extensively used mediatised performance to map out and bear on live performance and vice versa, often using one to mean the other. The absence of her physical body in mediatised performance signals the presence of an electronic body, while Anderson's extended presence in the media seems to qualify such presence from an ideal perspective, a perspective perfected by the technology made available to her at the time of her releases for Warner Brothers, again the "stuff that does not grow on trees" of "Say Hello" from *United States I-IV Live.*

3.1.4 "O Superman"

As I have reiterated, the role of technology in our daily lives and the interrogation of the performance of technology are two of the themes running throughout the work that Anderson released while she was signed to Warner Brothers. "O Superman" (for Massenet)[21], with which I end the discussion of her first commercial release, *Big Science,* is one of such performances. Curiously, underlying the interrogation of the performance of technology, the work can be read as a further examination of Anderson's own transformation into a mediatised persona. After a distinct minimalist introduction,[22] the performance begins with an invocation:

> O Superman. O judge. O Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad.
>
> O Superman. O judge. O Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad.

Thus, at the very beginning, "O Superman" seems to pose an appeal: to summon entities of different magnitudes but whose authority in life is considerable, endorsed by society and contemplated by philosophy. Superman, Judge, Mom and Dad seem to embody, in the hierarchy that their *performances* grant them, a sense of unlimited justice, impartiality, and protection. As is usual in Anderson's narratives—which begin constructing a distinct framework for the events described only to include, rather abruptly, a seemingly contradictory, oppositional framework which, by its turn, will challenge the initial frame proposed while revealing its inscription in an artificial hierarchy, thus, unmasking the power structure at work—"O Superman" reveals in the examination of its framework the hierarchy ingrained in the appeal. In this respect, Anderson's strategies in performance are not totally unlike the strategies used by deconstruction, which aim at revealing embedded structures of power at work.

In "O Superman", the effect is attained beginning with the invocation of the (mostly male?) entities, which does not end with the articulation of their reply, but with Mother's, whose call, surprisingly then, given the urgency of the appeal that comes first, is not taken personally but by a telephone answering machine:

> Hi. I'm not home right now. But if you want to leave a message,
>
> just start talking at the sound of the tone.
>
> Hello? This is your Mother. Are you there? Are you coming home?

The inclusion of the telephone answering machine, which has just recorded "Mom" leaving a prosaic message, begins to direct "O Superman" to its point of attack. Heard through an ordinary home appliance, "Mom's" reply acquires a different resonance: the telephone answering machine (ultimately a mechanical/technological device that enables you and me to be away from home and yet still receive our calls, and thus, still be "present", functioning while in "absence") turns "Mom's" prosaic message ("Are you there? Are you coming home?") on its head. Now it reveals how technological

performance functions as *ersatz*. Now it reads: electronic presence replaces physical presence and becomes the defining mode according to which we (ought to) function. At this point, Anderson's critique, which seems to be directed at such absence/presence, develops yet another facet. The next lines seem to indicate this much. Supposedly, they are also part of a message left on the same answering machine at the performer's home:

> Hello? Is anybody home?
>
> Well, you don't know me, but I know you.
>
> And I've got a message to give to you.

Such message leads "O Superman" onto even more enigmatic grounds. Unlike "Mom's" plaintive cries, which her role, eventually her sanctioned *performance,* presupposes, it is the seemingly incomprehensible, ciphered note of a complete stranger that appears recorded:

> Here come the planes. So you better get ready. Ready to go.
>
> You can come as you are, but pay as you go. Pay as you go.

At first, the message, in fact a warning resembling an air raid alarm, seems out of context. Upon closer inspection, however, it is in these lines that the scope of Anderson's critique in "O Superman" begins to show: interestingly, the message, as it is, having been recorded by technological performance and made available through technology, hints at electronic presence. At this point we can start to ask: can such warning be some sort of delayed answer left by one of the supreme beings called forth right at the beginning of the performance? If so, what is it warning the performer about? Additionally, if the obscurity of the warning is partly due to the unknown identity of the caller,[23] not to its confusion with another caller, in that case the message must not be from one of the entities summoned forth at the beginning of the performance. Thus, our question not only remains what is the warning trying to say but, perhaps more importantly, who is it from?

In either case, it is crucial to remember that both "Mom's" and the obscure warning from the unknown caller have been recorded by the telephone answering machine, which as we have seen, becomes identified with technological performance and, hence, electronic presence. Thus, we may begin to inquire further as to the identity of the caller. Since both "Mom's" and the unidentified caller's messages have come across as electronic presence in technological performance, since the unknown caller recognises "Anderson" while asserting that "she" does not, and since Anderson's appeal at the beginning of "O Superman", directed at "Superman", "Judge", "Mom and Dad", apparently, has not been answered (except by "Mom" whose performance we all take for granted, i.e., whose performance does not require calling her forth!), the enigmatic message in question must belong to an entity who (like Mother) may also have had free admittance to the performer's home: not through blood relations, but through its telephone number. At this point we may understand that the second message must also be from some sort of supreme, magnified being, an always present entity that, sharing the ranks of Supermen, Judges but also Moms and Dads, upon listening to the appeals directed at them, decides it is high time to make itself known.

Thus, in a fashion similar to "Mom's", the unknown's presence is revealed through the warning it records. After "Mom's" the next message registered by the telephone answering machine can only be a manifestation of the performance that enables the telephone answering machine itself to function and of whose identity Anderson has already given us a clue. If "Mom's" presence appears filtered through technological performance (the answering machine as electronic presence), consequently, this obscure warning can only be from *something* whose towering presence is undeniable in contemporary times: technological performance, that which becomes electronic presence, that which allows us to function in absence.

Curiously, what the telephone answering machine registers is a warning ("Here come the planes. So you better get ready. Ready to go.") If I am not pushing my reading one step too far, such an approach is interesting because it develops yet another aspect of Anderson's interrogation of technological performance. The following line "You can come as you are, but pay as you go" becomes a binding contract, one which—if we agree that the warning has been left by technological performance—has been signed with technological performance and for which there seems to be no easy way out. Consequently, Anderson's appeal at the beginning of the performance and her insistence on repeating the message line "Pay as you go" certainly imply that the contract with technological performance is not free of charge: a price will be paid, perhaps not immediately, as you sign the (imaginary) contract, start the pact and enjoy whatever advantages it has to offer, but later as your "performance" progresses, forever changed because of the very contract you signed with technology. In doing so, Anderson manages to expose one of the defining operations that allows technology to perform: Doesn't technology literally present you with a contract every time you approach it? Aren't instruction books, manuals and system specifications equivalent to a contract? In this and, as we will see, other performances, Anderson seems to insinuate this much.

Obviously, such reading of the performance of technology in Anderson's "O Superman" also implies that another performative frame is at work: a system of trade, which McKenzie calls "organisational" (or bureaucratic) performance (see below). As becomes explicit in "O Superman", technological performance requires that something be given that demands something else in return. Eventually, "O Superman" does exactly this: it lays open the pact made with technology and commodity culture, even specifying the origin of much technological performance. Therefore, "O Superman" is less about free associations and more a performance about how technological commodities (such as Anderson's own mediatised performances) are distributed world wide via subliminal

contracts (as we will see, Anderson seems to use the metaphor of the aeroplanes to communicate this). Thus, the question of how technological performances affect us and become overriding modes of communication and of exchange, modifying our grasp of reality, is at the core of "O Superman's" appeal. As with Massenet's own "O Souverain", a cry for help informed by religious practice, "O Superman" is also a cry for help, but this time directed at the power that is really in control: technological performance. Again, however, one question still remains unanswered: we have unveiled the identity of the caller, but we have not specified the origins of its performance and how it accomplishes such tasks. Thus we have to ask: whose technology? whose commodities? See below:

> And I said: OK. Who is this really?
>
> And the voice said: This is the hand, the hand that takes.
>
> This is the hand, the hand that takes. This is the hand, the hand that takes.
>
> Here come the planes. They're American planes. Made in America.
>
> Smoking or non-smoking? And the voice said:
>
> Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night shall stay these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.

As I have pointed out, Anderson's insistence on repeating the last part of the utterance ("Pay as you go") enlarges the toll of such pact (or contract) made with technological performance. Accordingly, "O Superman" will also unmask the origin of technological performance. In the last part of "O Superman" the identity of the unknown caller is finally given, when the voice eventually suggests its identity as "the hand that takes", and whose "planes" are "Made in America". Consequently, technological performance, whose commodities will be circulating whether we want them or not, whether we will have a function for them or not, becomes identified with America.

In this part of "O Superman" we can also identify—turned into some sort of maxim, or slogan—the underlying principle according to which technological performance

must be carried out. In business or trade "Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night shall stay these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." Thus, besides technological performance, such maxim reveals another principle according to which contemporary societies function: a performative paradigm, as encompassing as the one proposed by technological performance and which, as identified by Jon McKenzie, produces the "performative challenge" of "Performance Management" (organisational performance), and which has been at work since the 1950s in America, McKenzie explains the challenge proposed by organisational performance: "'working better and costing less', of maximizing outputs and minimizing inputs, the challenge of *efficiency*" (*Perform or Else* 56). Thus, "O Superman" discloses the unavoidable character of such performative challenges, the challenge of technology and of management, which, as McKenzie also says, have been going global for some time now.

Interestingly, the emergence of the performance paradigm across a multiplicity of fields puts the challenge of efficiency, as Anderson seems to recognise, in evidence. For example, the inclusion of the line ("Smoking or non-smoking?"), which seems to indicate freedom of choice, announces the exact, all encompassing scope that the challenge of efficiency proposes and regulates. As we have seen in "Born, Never Asked", freedom, masked as liberty of choice, pertains only to certain obvious, rather useless performance categories, such as choosing between smoking or not smoking, which, when compared to the higher stakes proposed by technological and management performance, become rather weak, rather irrelevant. In other words, while the challenges of technological and organisational performance subdue all other performances, we are merely given minimal choices. The final part of Anderson's "O Superman" is also puzzling:

> 'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice. And when justice is gone, there's always force. And when force is gone, there's always Mom.

> Hi Mom! So hold me, Mom, in your long arms. So hold me, Mom, in your long arms. In your automatic arms. Your electronic arms. In your arms.
>
> So hold me, Mom, in your long arms.
>
> Your petrochemical arms.
>
> Your military arms.
>
> In your electronic arms.

Interestingly, as "O Superman" approaches its end, Anderson manages to substitute technological performance for Mom's presence in a progressive unveiling of the hierarchies proposed by technological performance and which, involving love, justice and, finally, force in the first lines of the section quoted above, set off technology's firm hold of reality with even more clarity; that is, the substitution is completed once "Mom" becomes a technological entity. Exemplary of the complex relations triggered by technological performance and mediatisation, the hold of technology over reality is also mirrored by Anderson's own singing over a looped rhythmic base: as Anderson begs "Mom" to hold her in her arms, her own performance is held by the song's repetitive musical line which, in turn, is held by a computer loop that keeps everything (the rhythm and musical lines) in place for Anderson to sing over. Thus, Anderson's entire performance is held by technological performance.

However, all this should not come unexpectedly. Since the beginning of the performance we have been prepared for substitutions, replacements and *ersatz* realities. As Anderson proposes that force eventually comes to replace love and justice, we instantly recognise what force will become operative. Eventually, however, we are still taken aback by the revelation that technology and its performance have also replaced "Mom's" presence: "Mom" now has electronic, petrochemical arms instead of flesh and bone ones. Similar to Anderson's own transformation into a mediatised performer, the transformation

of "Mom" into a technological, military and petrochemical complex signals to the final substitution that the challenge of efficacy and technological performance carry out:

> The spectacular development of performance concepts over the past half century, the movements of generalisation in such divergent areas as technology, management, and culture, the patterns of joint performance-challenges –all these suggest that *the world is being challenged forth to perform—or else.* (McKenzie *Perform or Else* 158)

Thus, if, at the end, "O Superman" resembles an electronic lullaby, a cry for help and protection, it is no wonder, for Anderson seems aware that incorporated in technological performance is not only standardisation of human behaviour, according to the challenges of organisational and technological performance, but also a more serious, attendant problem:

> The degree to which a machine approaches perfection is thus everywhere presented as proportional to its degree of automatism. The fact is, however, that automating machines means sacrificing a very great deal of potential functionality. In order to automate a practical object, it is necessary to *stereotype it in its function,* thus making it more fragile. Far from having any intrinsical advantages, automatism always embodies the risk of arresting technical advance, for so long as an object has not been automated it remains susceptible of redesign, of self-transcendence through incorporation into a larger functional whole. When it becomes automatic, on the other hand, its function is fulfilled, certainly, but it is also hermetically sealed. ... Contained within it is the dream of a dominated world, of a formally perfected technicity that serves an inert and dreamy humanity. (Baudrillard *The System* 110)

My reading of Baudrillard's critique in *The System of Objects* (which unveils an important aspect of the embedded hierarchies that the performance of technologies hold, namely that automatism, one of technological—and bureaucratic—performance's many goals, not only makes objects more fragile, but also stereotypes them in their function) pushes automatism and performance onto the foreground: for, as long as performances by human beings have not been automated, but have remained unconstrained by the challenges of efficiency proposed by technological and organisational performances, freedom is still feasible. The problem, as we have already seen, it that notions of freedom can be deconstructed ("Born, Never Asked"); we have also seen how fragile and inert technological performance has turned mankind: "So hold me, Mom, in your long arms./Your petrochemical arms./Your military arms./In your electronic arms."

3.2 *Mister Heartbreak*

Following *Big Science* Anderson's next contractual obligation with Warner Brothers, *Mister Heartbreak* (1984),[24] appears to be a thoroughly more unified pop album in many ways. Once again, the recording relies on many performances that, because Anderson had presented them in live form as part of *United States I-IV*,[25] seem to represent in *Mister Heartbreak* a further incursion into mediatisation. That is, whereas *Big Science* can be taken to represent Anderson's first attempt at creating a relatively successful crossover performance, an altogether pop recording with material that primarily did not exactly fit the sphere of pop song (crash landings and odd meter patterns, for example),[26] *Mister Heartbreak* ventures further into successfully engaging the conventions of pop performance, even risking a relatively odd love song—"Gravity's Angel"—in its repertoire.

Thus, to record buyers *Mister Heartbreak* appeals as more adequately integrated to the conventions of pop performance while, at the same time, in the act of becoming adequately integrated, it eludes these very conventions.[27] Both musically and lyrically then, *Mister Heartbreak* benefits from an array of different strategies that frame it more accordingly (thus, more efficiently) within the performances of pop. Musically, *Mister Heartbreak* benefits not only from Anderson's growing inclination for experimentation with electronic instruments but also from the talent of various well-known (if disparate) figures, such as, Peter Gabriel, Bill Laswell [28]and William S. Burroughs, whose own previous experience in releasing (successful but) controversial material had already been much more present in the pop/rock context;[29] lyrically *Mister Heartbreak* continues to draw on Anderson's relentless exposure of the mechanics of mediatised performance but, this time, in a less evident manner, taking advantage of Anderson's ability to change, adapt and slice her own material to make it work in different contexts ("live" stage, pop recording, museum, street, etc.).

My reading of *Mister Heartbreak* is doubtlessly informed by what I associate with a successful marketing strategy devised by Warner, that is, taking advantage of Anderson's earlier presence in the avant-garde circles (the more experimental character of her "live" performances), coupled with the development of Anderson's mediatised persona and other equally disparate (crossover?) individuals from the literary and musical avant-garde. Consequently, perhaps under the light projected by such figures, Anderson's move into mainstream American pop appears to become more acceptable; since her simultaneous presence in the world of avant-garde performance art and of American pop is not without precedent (something that she alone had enacted), Anderson's crossover becomes legitimated because a similar move into mainstream had already been performed by Burroughs, Laswell, and countless others who had also made the transition from various other avant-garde circles into a relatively more noticeable presence in mass culture. That

is, in generic terms, by coupling Anderson's mediatised persona with these other disparate figures, Warner's problem (how to turn her music, her performances, into a commodity), as Frith puts it, is solved. Genre, Frith adds, is a way of defining music in its market, or, the market in its music (what does it sound like and who will buy it) (*Performing Rites* 76).

Hence Anderson's mediatised persona, which in 1984, arguably, was still thought of as in the process of becoming popular, better integrated in the market of American popular music, for the release of *Mister Heartbreak*, is handled by Warner Brothers in association with other producers/musicians/writers already known for the more "experimental" character of their work. As a consequence, her previous experiments, both in *Big Science* and *United States I-IV,* reappear transformed and more thoroughly adapted to the context of a pop album: seven songs are contextualised thematically in terms of a perceptible idea that seems to frame the entire album (an isolated, paradisiacal territory/island serves as background for the performances to unfold) with potential hits interspersed ("Langue D'Amour" and "Excellent Birds", the latter a collaboration with Peter Gabriel).

To my mind, it is precisely *Mister Heartbreak*'s improved "performance" and unobtrusive insertion in the slot of popular music records, its more conspicuous play with the conventions of pop/rock performance, that makes it more difficult for analysis.[30] Thus, I will only be concerned with analysing one song-text from this album (even though I will be referring to other song-texts). To an even greater extent than *Big Science*, the songs from *Mister Heartbreak* have their performances embedded in the rules of the pop genre, their lyrics and narratives incorporating such chronicles about exposing the mechanics of mediatisation not only in the manner of *Big Science* (through narrative) but *in* the very fabric of their performances. In other words, if *Mister Heartbreak*'s performances appear to be more contaminated by, say, rhyme, choruses and arrangements which clearly move the recording to commodity culture's side of the cultural continuum (mass culture,

repetition, consumption) and reveal a more deliberate disposition to enter the world-wide market for popular American recordings, again, this seems only to attest *Mister Heartbreak*'s more resistant presence in the realm pop/rock performance.[31]

Nevertheless, *Mister Heartbreak* comprises at least one song-text (see the analysis of "Sharkey's Day") which can be taken as representative of Anderson's concerns when further incurring into mediatisation. As I have argued, from top to bottom *Mister Heartbreak* plays a lot more with the rules of pop genre, thus, with the conventions of pop performance; appearing more thoroughly unified and adapted to its primary market, mediatised culture and its electronic audiences, *Mister Heartbreak* helps Anderson climb higher up, if you will, an imaginary scale which challenges mediatisation from within, and which has transgression from the outside at its lower end and resistance from within at its higher end. In other words, *Mister Heartbreak* proposes resistance to mediatised culture by thoroughly assimilating and playing with mediatised culture's own rules instead of performing transgression from the outside, from an idealised—thus deceitful—critical context. The image that comes to my mind is that of a steel drill: working from inside out, *Big Science* pierced the first few inches, while *Mister Heartbreak* (and, it is my point, Anderson's subsequent albums), enacting a more thorough assimilation of the rules of pop performance, carries on with the drilling. My own surmise as to the relevance of such "drilling" process has to do with two factors, one a consequence of the other. Once *Mister Heartbreak* enacts a more thorough incorporation of the rules of pop performance (from the outside *Mister Heartbreak* is not set off by any transgressive traits), its performance, nevertheless, manages to challenge, subvert and expand the frame according to which pop recordings are usually recognised. Resistance then, in respect to Anderson's mediatised performances at Warner, takes on from the inside, without much transgression. I also think one could extend this proposition to Anderson's entire contractual output at Warner Brothers.

Of course, without the shock waves sent out by transgressive performance, without the visibility that transgression forcibly (but arguably) enacts, these mediatised performances of Anderson's also become defined by their own strategic, effective incorporation of the conventions of pop performance. As I have argued, if a disposition to perform along the lines inaugurated by Anderson's previous release, *Big Science*, can also be traced in this second album, textual evidence of such performance is buried deeply within the parameters usually practised by pop music. Thus, "Kokoku", which has parts sung in Japanese, is composed entirely of broken sentences: "I am here in this place. Losing. My eyes are closed. Closed. / Birds are there. Hearing something. Shouting. My voice." Another song-text, "Excellent Birds", is also rather enigmatic and composed of rather meaningless bits: "Flying birds. Excellent birds. Watch them fly. There they go."

If, as Peggy Phelan argues at length in *Unmarked,* representational visibility constitutes a trap, a powerful framing device that summons surveillance and the law, and which—eventually—serves to authenticate and control further performances (6,173), Anderson succeeds in avoiding the trap of outright visibility in pop performance by combining insights from one genre (performance art) and then moving and incorporating these into pop performance. Need one be reminded that Anderson has been framed by her crossing over from the New York avant-garde into commodity culture?

In other words, since visibility, as a strategy, may become a trap, it is *Mister Heartbreak*'s potential lack of proper transgressive visibility (in the pop world) that becomes the greatest advantage of the album.[32] However, the other side of visibility, complete integration and absorption, may also constitute a trap as it risks making these cultural products go virtually un-noticed, virtually un-marked. Thus, how can one certify resistance if the only traits of resistance available are rendered invisible? In other words, can one only trace resistance in relation to Anderson's output at Warner because of her simultaneous presence in the avant-garde?

Once more, visibility is the problem here, and, I believe, it is a problem inherent to performance and all art. Similarly to the shock of the "new", performance seems to inhibit proper categorisation only once, as it disrupts the greater frame according to which we recognise a certain cultural form(at) as such. Yet, once that disruption is taken to effect, once that disruption has been made barely visible, its boundaries are sealed off and another frame—the frame which has come to render this fresh performance visible—immediately sets in, thus establishing the outer limits of this—as of yet—unseen, unheard of, fresh performance which subsequent performances will either reinforce or deny. However, in the process, these acts help push one's representational capabilities, one's meaning-making, further on. Consequently, subsequent performances, which can never reach the same lack of symbolic meaning achieved by their forerunner siblings, can—however—explore variations of the same frame, eventually coming to expand and reconstruct them. Resistant performance (see Chapter 1, note 6), such as Anderson's, as opposed to transgressive performances, tries to avoid outright visibility by working from within a certain recognised cultural frame, incorporating and invading its realm, instead of violating this frame from the outside. It is such reconstruction, such expansion of performative frames which seems to be a point of interest, especially for an economy of repetition where cultural signs gain relevance (perform better) exactly because of their increased circulation. This is more or less the case with Anderson's *Mister Heartbreak.* While *Big Science* proved a successful invasion of the real of pop music, *Mister Heartbreak* seems to fall prey to Anderson's own strategic move, pushing Anderson to the limit of visibility. Thus, what I believe Anderson's output for Warner does is quite simple: it takes on from already culturally accepted formats (pop music, performance art) and expands these formats, in the process, challenging and destabilising many of the norms according to which we have come to recognise each genre.

Hence, if visibility is a trap, the opposite—the complete mutation taken to effect by resistance from within, which may also mean integration—can also become a trap. Paradoxically, it is exactly such instability, such likelihood and embodiment of failure from within which may constitute resistant performance's strongest and, at the same time, weakest appeal. While transgression risks becoming sealed off, resistance, as it propagates absorption, entails partially removing the commentary proposed by visibility because resistant strategies' commentaries are not stamped out, performing an obvious, explicit rupture with any previously established rules and "performative" conventions; however (and this is the good part), one can—simultaneously—absorb the commentary, the challenge of resistant performance in more subliminal forms than transgressive performance allows.

In other words, just as visibility may constitute a trap, so does resistance: it is a two way road. By so efficiently incorporating the performative rules from other fields, don't resistant mediatised performances risk going virtually un-noticed? Don't they risk virtually un-marking themselves to the point of rendering themselves transparent, to the point of transforming themselves into the cultural representations they are criticising? I think this is exactly the point about resistance in mediatised culture: it incorporates both, visibility and invisibility, thus surveillance and the law (Phelan's hazards) can be kept, momentarily, partially, at bay.

By recording *Mister Heartbreak* using even more adequately the conventions of pop performance, but at the same time eluding them, Anderson eventually manages to expand the frame according to which we recognise the genre. And by regarding *Mister Heartbreak* a further experiment in mediatisation of "avant-garde" performance, a crossover into popular music that in many senses not only works more effectively in relation to pop performance, but also has an improved presence in the context of pop, my own reading of *Mister Heartbreak*—while acknowledging the album's performative

efficiency in relation to pop performance—misses a thing or two because of the visibility problem I have tried to describe above. I have been approaching Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers from the perspective of a crossover from the avant-garde, not from the perspective of performances intrinsic to the pop context. In other words, I am well aware that I have marked them. Thus, to the same extent that *Mister Heartbreak* represents an improved mediatised performance that fits more comfortably with other performances in pop music, my own reading may become compromised because of the critical bias I have established: I want to read in these performances resistance from within. That is, according to the frame I have developed so far, in many ways, Anderson's second world-wide release for Warner completely dislocates her to the other side of the spectrum, from avant-garde performer with an interest in storytelling as well as in music, into a first-magnitude recording artist that sings and tells stories about mediatisation. That, however, as I have argued, is a questionable point. Because *Mister Heartbreak* so completely and so efficiently incorporates and manipulates the performance of pop, my own critical bias, which may be forcing me to assign too much relevance to the album's song-texts cannot penetrate the album's surface. I may be seeing too much resistance where, in fact, one primarily has incorporation, and the learning of different performative categories, as the song-texts of "Gravity's Angel" and "Excellent Birds" seem to indicate (see Appendix 1).

However, downright incorporation does not happen out of the blue, for the pleasure of it, but because it is a necessary survival strategy:

> I used to think the future was art because the avant-garde was supposedly the future and I liked the idea of living in a place where things hadn't happened yet. But at the moment I'm having a lot of trouble finding the avant-garde. Maybe it's somewhere and I'm completely wrong about this, but I don't think so. And I think the disappearance of the avant-garde has something to do with speed. I mean, the lag between uptown and downtown New York is

> now a matter of a couple of days. For example, let's say there's a young artist, and let's say he's a he and he might have some fantasies about what the life of an artist is: big loft, green plants, parties, a little work, some minimal suffering followed by his picture in a Gap ad and eventual media stardom. Then he realizes he can't afford the loft right now, times are a little hard, so he takes a job in an ad agency but every Saturday he goes to the galleries to see what's up and by Monday morning these downtown images are comped up in an ad for cars or shoes or cigarette. I mean it's that fast. The existence of the avant-garde depends on its ability to hide, and in New York anyway there's nowhere left to hide. (Anderson *Nerve Bible* 96)

Once more the discontinuity between visibility and invisibility, transgression and resistance seems to be at work here. Conditioned by the speed with which changes are taken to effect, Anderson's paradigm for the vanishing of the avant-garde makes sense in relation to her own output. Thus, *Mister Heartbreak*, from which I will only analyse "Sharkey's Day", may be regarded as an output that, playing so well with the rules of pop convention, exactly because of this, outshines other commentaries it may as well incorporate. Thus, *Big Science* still represents an early step in the direction taken by *Mister Heartbreak*, playing with (but also incorporating) the performances of pop and rock with astonishing efficacy to the extent that it becomes a camouflaged pop recording.

Such, nonetheless, will be a pattern to follow: what becomes more apparent in Anderson's subsequent releases for Warner is that (both musically and lyrically) they incorporate more efficiently, playing more and more sophisticatedly with the rules of pop, while continually stressing crucial points in relation to performance and mediatisation, as already exemplified by "From the Air", "Big Science", etc., and, as we will see, "Sharkey's Day". In addition to this, perhaps the question that runs throughout *Mister Heartbreak* is how to make sharp pop music without entirely compromising Anderson's

concerns with mediatisation of performances. As I hope will become clear, these concerns are still present in *Mister Heartbreak*, but at the risk of going un-noticed.

As I have argued, *Mister Heartbreak* still reflects a disposition for unveiling the many mechanisms developed by commodity culture, even if rather metaphorically. Take its cover artwork for example. *Mister Heartbreak* reproduces an original lithograph by Anderson herself which—displaying Mt.Daly/US 4 with the image of the mountain encircled by a variety of consumer goods (a plane, a television, an umbrella, a saxophone, a single cowboy boot and even a palm tree)—seems to be a metaphor for our desire to bring "things" closer. Superimposed as these objects appear on the image of the mountain (rendered in the background in red and light blue with a paper brown sky), commodities seem to be falling, descending upon the natural landscape. Is this a clear representation of commodity culture's inclination for repetition? Perhaps, of Anderson's own position inside it? Additionally, Anderson's name, itself a currency in commodity culture, becomes a metaphor for electronic performance: the letters that compose her name are drawn with graphic representations of lightning bolts (electricity, power) of different sizes instead of lines in more readily legible characters (see Appendix 2, fig. 3).

Revolving around the figure of "*Mister Heartbreak*"—also known in his office as "Sharkey"—Anderson's album displays the dream-like textures and qualities of a reverie that surveys the landscape of commodity culture taking advantage of Anderson's own position in it. The song-text of "Blue Lagoon", for instance, not only incorporates references to the literary canon ("Full fathom five thy father lies. Of his bones are coral made. Those are pearls that were his eyes. Nothing of him that doth fade. But that suffers a sea change. Into something rich and strange. And I alone am left to tell the tale. Call me Ishmael"), it confuses these references. The first lines of the section quoted above evoke Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, while Ishmael is the character-narrator of Melville's *Moby*

Dick. In addition, Anderson's song-text mimics the reply of a letter, supposedly, sent to someone on vacation:

> I got your letter. Thanks a lot.
>
> I've been getting lots of sun. And lots of rest. It's really hot.
>
> Days, I dive by the wreck. Nights, I swim in the blue lagoon.
>
> Always used to wonder who I'd bring to a desert island.

In *Mister Heartbreak*, each song-text seems to accompany the actions of "Mr. Sharkey", from sunrise ("Sharkey's Day") until his day is finally over in "Sharkey's Night",[33] the album's last performance, each song suggesting an additional layer that is added to the dream. Thus, "Gravity's Angel" is both a warning and a "silly love song" ("You can dance. You can make me laugh. You've got x-ray eyes. You know how to sing. You're a diplomat. You've got it all. Everybody loves you."), while "Blue Lagoon"—both in its incorporation of the literary canon and the usage of a paradisiacal island—seems to represent an idealised, impossible retreat from mediatised culture.

In fact, to my mind, what *Mister Heartbreak*'s reverie attempts to present amounts to an updated version of the Bible's myth of creation, using for this the multilayered debris of both high and commodity culture. Of course, the task of encapsulating a contemporary version of Genesis in a pop album could not be more complex. Parts of it would necessarily have to become eclipsed, parts of it would never be fully accomplished. Nevertheless, *Mister Heartbreak*'s collection of songs succeeds in the creation of a new version of the Genesis which samples information from Western commodity culture, high art and religious myth to construct its narrative.

Thus, on an island from "a haunted planet" the characters ("Mr. Sharkey" and, possibly, Anderson's alter ego?) fall in love, know pleasure and then have to leave, pursued by "sharks" ("Langue D'Amour") to encounter a world which is haunted by commodity culture ("Kokoku"—with parts of it sung in Japanese). In the process

Anderson uses the debris of Western culture to construct her own narrative. From the Western literary canon, "Blue Lagoon", for example, draws images both from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and mixes them up with the debris of mass culture (movies, slang), while "Gravity's Angel" is dedicated to Thomas Pynchon, America's most recluse writer, whose *Gravity's Rainbow* has become a landmark of contemporary fiction.[34]

3.2.1 "Sharkey's Day"

As its title suggests, "Sharkey's Day", the opening verbal performance in *Mister Heartbreak*, is representative of the album's unfolding of Sharkey's daily routine which, beginning with the sun already up in the sky, describes how Mr. Sharkey awakens trying to make sense of a dream:

> Sun's coming up. Like a big bald head. Poking up over the grocery store. It's Sharkey's day. It's Sharkey's day today. Sharkey wakes up and Sharkey says: There was this man... And there was this road... And if only I could remember these dreams... I know they're trying to tell me... something. Ooooeee. Strange dreams. (Strange dreams).

From this moment on, Anderson's audiences are faced not only with the enigmatic character of Sharkey's "strange" dreams but also with Sharkey's eventual reliance on language to make sense of his experiences in the environment. Thus, the sunrise in the city presents no puzzle for "Sharkey": through language he is able to state that the sun resembles the head of a bald man poking up over the grocery store. Additionally, by focusing on Sharkey's comparison, which is still grounded on a contextual usage of language—in spite of representing an unusual way of describing the sunrise—Anderson

also tries to clarify the reason why dreams are never rendered (apparently) as intelligible as language.

Consequently, one of the reasons why Sharkey's dreams should be less prone to such linguistic interpretations becomes clear: Sharkey thinks he is unable to remember them very well; he believes however, that had he the power to remember, to recall his own dreams in full language ("There was this man... And there was this road..."); instead of bits and pieces, he is sure he would *understand* what these strange dreams are trying to tell him, just as he seems to understand the sun as the head of a bald man, poking over the grocery store. It is interesting to notice here how Anderson interrogates the principle according to which making meaning through language, our logical, conscious (but also unconscious) usage of its signs in narrative, does represent a crucial way of taking control of the world and of the experiences we have in the physical environment.

However, despite any apparent precision, human language fails to reveal (retrieve) whatever the elements which remain outside its performative logic, say, dreams, are trying to communicate. William S.Burroughs:

> For years I wondered why dreams are so often so dull when related, and this morning I find the answer, which is very simple—like most answers, you have always known it: *No context* ... like a stuffed animal set on the floor of a bank. The conventional dream, approved by the psychoanalyst, clearly, or by obvious association, refers to the dreamer's waking life, the people and places he knows, his desires, wishes, and obsessions. Such dreams radiate a special disinterest. They are as boring and as commonplace as the average dreamer. There is a special class of dreams, in my experience, that are not dreams at all but quite as real as so-called waking life... (*My Education* 2)

The idea that Burroughs introduces in this paragraph, that there is a special class of dreams which are "quite as real as so-called waking life", is meaningful in relation to *Mister*

Heartbreak's performances since one of the ways in which one could understand the album as a whole (but also its individual songs) is to relate it to that special class of dreams Burroughs describes. Similarly to "waking life" dreams, *Mister Heartbreak*'s visions disrupt language's supremacy to explicate life.

Thus, in "Sharkey's Day" human language's apparent hold of reality is put, as it were, on probation when Sharkey's character, granted the ability to compare the sun with the head of a bald man, fails to understand the "strangeness" of his own dreams. What becomes evident is that such comparison ("Sun's coming up. Like a big bald head.") will not make the event either more understandable, or less puzzling. If the sun rising in the city resembles the head of a bald man poking over the grocery store, this can be caused, as Burroughs explains, by the linguistic signs made available, already incorporated by repeated usage, by contextual insertion; this implies the terms which (possibly) refer to Sharkey's own environment: a grocery store, the bald head of a man passing by. The puzzle presented by the event, however, like that special class of dreams mentioned by Burroughs, is still there, quite as real as so-called waking life, but abated, reduced by ordinary language which apparently (but only apparently) contextualises and explains the event logically, according to its own linguistic codes.

Throughout *Mister Heartbreak* the failure of human language to communicate effectively also becomes apparent through Anderson's usage of languages other than English which—when placed side by side in "*Langue D'Amour*" and "*Kokoku*" (French and Japanese, respectively)—seem better to reveal human language's masking of "reality". In *United States I-IV Live* Anderson focuses on a similar problem in at least two performances, "EngliSH", which enumerates a series of words ending with SH, thus emphasising the sound patterns from these words, and "Beginning French", which describes how Anderson has supposedly learned enough French for use in her live performances. Additionally, Anderson's repeated usage of words that indicate the natural

landscape (the physical world) emphasises human language's inability to provide the natural environment something beyond referential meaning, as in "Gravity's Angel", which repeatedly asks "Why these mountains? Why this sky? This long road? This empty room?"[35]

Thus, Anderson's song-text, perhaps reflecting Sharkey's inability to understand the language of his dreams, also becomes enigmatic, marked by apparently meaningless juxtapositions:

> Oh yeah. And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love. Oh yeah. Strange dreams. And the little girls sing: Oooee Sharkey. And the manager says: Mr. Sharkey? He's not at his desk right now. Could I take a message? And the little girls sing: Oooeee Sharkey. He's Mister Heartbreak. They sing: Oooeee Sharkey. Yeah. He's Mister Heartbreak. And Sharkey says: All of nature talks to me. If I could just figure out what it was trying to tell me.

It is Anderson's piling up of events apparently out of context ("Sharkey" now appears to be at work; however, he is not at his desk, and a choir of little girls sing "Oooeee Sharkey. He's Mister Heartbreak.") who, in many aspects owing a lot to Burroughs own "cut up" techniques,[36] seem to become themselves part of the waking dreams illustrated by Burroughs above. Human language in "Sharkey's Day" is never precise; it does not help explain or create a coherent context for the events presented, but rather promotes a frantic replacement of images that gathers momentum when, from these fragmentary events and images, a parallel emerges between Sharkey's lack of understanding of his own dreams and his lack of understanding of the sounds present in the natural environment, of the "language" spoken by Nature. Thus, when compared to Sharkey's own lack of understanding of his dreams, his lack of understanding of what "Nature" tells him becomes significant in itself:

> Listen! Trees are swinging in the breeze. They're talking to me. Insects are rubbing their legs together. They're all talking. They're talking to me. And short animals— They're bucking up on their hind legs. Talking. Talking to me. Hey! Look out! Bugs are crawling up my legs! You know? I'd rather see this on TV. Tones it down.

From this moment on Sharkey's contact with nature, as evidenced by Anderson's performance (the pitch of her voice, the rhythm with which she utters the words), also becomes a nightmare. Thus, Sharkey, whose voice in "Sharkey's Night" (the album's last song) is impersonated by Burroughs himself in the record, can become something akin to the writer's own alter ego and both songs can be understood as nightmares similar to the "nightmares" described by Burroughs in his own books.

But let us go back to these messages from "Nature", which are heard but not understood. As they mirror Sharkey's own lack of understanding of his dreams, these messages become, much like dreams, frenetic hallucinations over which the performance of human language has no particular hold. Through "Sharkey", Anderson manages to convey humankind's far-reaching estrangement and alienation from the natural environment: the language of the human race is not akin to "Nature's". What is it then? For Anderson, borrowing an idea from Burroughs,[37] it is "a virus", a virus for which, to this day, there is still no "cure":

> In 1980, I wrote a song for William Burroughs called "Language Is a Virus from Outer Space." This was a quote from one of Burroughs' books and it's a strange thing for a writer to say, that language is a disease communicable by mouth. It's also a very Buddhist thing to say. I mean, in Buddhist thought, there's the thing and there's the name of the thing and that's one thing too many. Because sometimes when you say a word, you think you actually understand it. In fact, all you're doing is saying it, you don't

> necessarily understand it at all. So language, well, it's a kind of trick. (*Nerve Bible* 134)

Thus, language tricks one into understanding, but an understanding that is limited to language's own game, not any broader representation of truth, of reality. This notion, borrowed, as I said, from Burroughs (and that Anderson had incorporated to her own performances long before, by the time of *United States I-IV*) plays a crucial role in relation to Anderson's own ideas as we will see in the analysis of *Home of the Brave* and her other song-texts. For example, her constant resorting to foreign languages (French, German, and Japanese) seems to emphasise human language's excesses. Additionally, in an article that describes the installation at the Guggenheim SoHo exhibition "Hugo Boss Prize 1996", Anderson expresses her concern with human language in a similar way:

> As a talking artist, I'm always on the lookout for alter egos—surrogate speakers. And I've always been completely fascinated by parrots. The whole idea of talking animals is so deeply creepy. I spent a lot of time with my brother's grey African parrot Uncle Bob. Uncle Bob has a vocabulary of about five hundred words. You're never sure with Bob where the line is between repetitive babble and conscious communication. The more I listened to Bob the more it seemed like he could communicate emotion—cries and phrases that expressed loneliness, fear, sheer happiness—all with his extremely limited vocabulary. It made me realize *how much human language is a combination of rote phrases and fortuitous invention, a complex mix of the things that can be said and the unsayable.* ("Control Rooms" 128, italics mine)

From the paragraph above we can construct an alternative as to why the idea of talking animals, as Anderson puts it herself, is creepy. Perhaps it is because talking animals make manifest the notion that our own language, not unlike the various sounds produced by

animals, is an illusion, a combination of phrases which, as Anderson aptly puts it, produces a rather "complex mix of the things that can be said and the unsayable." Consequently, humankind's vision of the world performing through language becomes a waking dream of the sort described by Burroughs, with language holding a bizarre, indirect bearing on reality. It is from this position that Anderson makes it an even more conspicuous fact of Sharkey's waking dreams of "Nature" talking to him. At this point, Sharkey utters a desperate cry; because all of nature talks to him, and because he is ultimately unable to understand what it is telling him, he would rather "see this on TV", for television "tones it down". In other words, television (a sidekick on human language?) filters "Nature's" enigmatic presence making it apparently intelligible, apparently meaningful. Thus, television tones "Nature's" frantic, hallucinatory performance down, becoming a thing in itself and a language, a way of understanding and giving a meaning for that which has no meaning in human language. Curiously, once television is mentioned, the strange dreams and juxtapositions that "Sharkey's Day" offer begin to resemble television's particular flow of images, its mode of communicating through rapid alternation of (apparently) un-related images:

> And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love. Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name. And Sharkey says: All night long I think of those little planes up there. Flying around. You can't even see them. They're specks! And they're full of tiny people. Going places. And Sharkey says: You know? I bet they could all land on the head of a pin. And the little girls sing: Ooooeee. Sharkey! He's Mister Heartbreak. They sing: Oooeee. That Sharkey! He's a slow dance on the edge of the lake. He's a whole landscape gone to seed. He's gone wild! He's screeching tires on an oil slick at midnight on the road to Boston a long time ago. And Sharkey says: Lights! Camera! Action! TIMBER! At the beginning of the movie,

> they know they have to find each other. But they ride off in opposite directions. Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love. Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name.

At this point it is interesting to notice how "Sharkey's Day's" frantic replacement of images combines different languages (humankind's, Nature's, TV's) to achieve its disorienting effect, called by Anderson "mad jump-cut language" and which she acknowledges as the one she uses in song-writing.

Thus, language remains a tool; however, it is not an objective tool that is intrinsic to the world, but rather that is set upon it, artificially, to take control of the wilderness, to regulate the frantic replacement of visions we would otherwise be subjected to by the physical environment. Similarly to performance, which, when repeated becomes behaviour, an attestation of the world is enabled by human language. Thus, language fuels not only our imagination, but also our relations with the physical environment. Nevertheless, many a time these relations created by linguistic signs, although logically ordered and contextualised, do not cease to remain abstruse. Much to the contrary, in the arts, it is exactly this gap between human language and the physical environment that is exposed by the more blurred combinations of language which, regardless of referential content, seem to hold more descriptive power over the physical world:

> You know? They're growing mechanical trees. They grow to their full height. And then they chop themselves down. Sharkey says: All of life comes from some strange lagoon. It rises up, it bucks up to its full height from a boggy swamp on a foggy night. It creeps into your house. It's life! It's life! I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love. Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name. Deep in the heart of darkest America. Home of the brave. Ha! Ha! Ha! You've already paid for this. Listen to my heart beat. And the little girls sing: Oooeee Sharkey. He's a slow dance on the

> edge of the lake. They sing: Ooooeeee. Sharkey. He's Mister Heartbreak. Paging Mr. Sharkey. White courtesy telephone please. And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love. And the little girls sing: Ooooeee Sharkey. Yeah. On top of Old Smokey all covered with snow. That's where I wanna, that's where I'm gonna. That's where I'm gonna go.

As "Sharkey's Day" comes to an end, Sharkey makes it clear that technological performance is behind all these frantic, waking dreams "Sharkey's Day" has tried to incorporate ("You know? They're growing mechanical trees. They grow to their full height. And then they chop themselves down"). Accordingly, life, similar to a waking dream, "comes from some strange lagoon" and "creeps into your house." The song's frantic replacement of images is, however, subdued by a promise: the lines spoken by the character towards the end of the song-text imply that he will leave this environment where languages produce an (almost) hysterical replacement of meanings ("I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love.") in favour of a more stable, even if rather desolate American landscape: that of a snow covered mountain, "On top of Old Smokey all covered with snow. That's where I wanna, that's where I'm gonna. That's where I'm gonna go."

3.2.2 Second Interlude: Odd Objects

I remember where I came from
There were burning buildings and a fiery red sea
(Laurie Anderson)

The question I am about to ask—How much of an alien in my own land have I become as a consequence of continuous exposure to these oddities dropped on my country?—seems fairly uncommon. Oddities can be a number of things, including these mediatised performances to which I, sometimes willingly and some other times not so willingly, have been subjected to.

This much understood, it is easy to point at America and say: I am convinced I have become an alien since American oddities monopolise my mind. Thus, the scope of this question reaches deeply: it has to do with identity. It has to do with performance, with whose game we are playing. Theirs or ours.

Thus, I am convinced the question above has been asked a number of times before, eventually becoming the number one question examined by, say, thousands of people at one point or another of their lives and throughout history. Perhaps I can rephrase it, make it fit a more familiar frame, a child's pondering:

Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here?

If today the average answers seem all too practical, devoid of most metaphorical content (I am here to work, maybe get married, entertain myself on weekends at the movies, at the club, etc.), I suppose it is because, paraphrasing Jon McKenzie, the challenge of efficacy proposed by performance has taken complete hold of the Western world. I will explain myself, but first, let us go back in time.

Can I still remember the first time I formulated question number one (minus the challenges proposed by words, I suppose)? I do not, not very well, but I reckon it must have been at night, one of those times I would be lying in the back seat of my parents' car

while we were all driving in circles around town, apparently something they used to do a lot. Looking at the stars through the rear window-shield I distinctly remember having visualised the many stars of the Milky Way and, possibly, having imagined the many other galaxies when, suddenly but enduringly, I felt how terribly lonely we actually were, here on this planet. I was overwhelmed without warning by a feeling of emptiness as my thoughts progressed into the void of the night and expanded into space. Off-beat feelings for a child who (to my horror / luck?) left as they came, without warning, without a clearly formulated answer, just emptiness.

It would be only much later that I would revive these thoughts. The second time these feelings descended on me, again, it happened at night, but this time at the beach, and this time I can not recall the exact sequence of feelings/image/words that pushed me forward, just an after feeling/image that still lingers on: the monumental curvature that the stars seemed to describe way above me. Thus, again no logical explanations, no formulated answers. Just emptiness.

But, as I said, nowadays, if question number one is still to be asked, if it still bears any relevance, it must have acquired distinct tones, must have been cancelled out by other, apparently more pressing matters which have been rendered more visible now: eventually, these offer answers which perform much better. That is, answers which can be formulated logically, and which are not here to challenge, much to the contrary, are here to perform efficiently. Thus, I have ceased to delve into the impossible, have pushed away those questions for which vocabulary has no hold, and have started experimenting with more mundane ones.

In this way, question number one becomes: Had I not listened to these songs, had I not paid enough attention to Anderson's electronic presence, had I not apprehended them in me, what would "I" be like?

I find myself here in this text, as I am trying to describe and recover the import of Anderson's performances to my own context, and begin once more to ask myself impossible questions: Who/ What am I? And still I have no answers. And still, I confuse myself. Did they, did these performances make me forget who I originally was? Was there ever an original "me"?

No, her music made me understand that "identity comes from the outside; it is something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover" (Frith Performing Rites 273*). Obviously, it took me a while to realise this, and, without Frith's words, I might have never put it down, but—in her own curious way—Anderson told me this much:*

> *Our plan is to drop a lot of odd objects onto your country from the air. And some of these objects will be useful. And some of them will be just odd. Proving that these oddities were produced by a people free enough to think of making them in the first place.*
>
> *THE U.S. HELPS, NOT HARMS,*
>
> *DEVELOPING NATIONS*
>
> *BY USING THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES*
>
> *AND RAW MATERIALS*
>
> *(Stories from the Nerve Bible* 184*)*

What would have happened had I not paid so much attention to Anderson's flown in odd objects? Would the performance of my "life" be different then? Of course, the answer is yes. And no. But because I have paid enough attention, I am (my performance is) forever changed. How? Whose performance? And, more importantly, what cultural commodities would I be constructing my identity from? Brazilian? What performances would I value? I don't know. For I can not step outside this strange mix of various performances that seems to be me. Did such recognition turn me into an alien? Did I pay more attention to the realities of these objects than to my own? Maybe, and perhaps I am of late much too

concerned with the question of origins, but I wonder about the differences that would have been imprinted on me, had Bollywood, instead of Hollywood, taken more hold on reality then.

If rephrasing question number one into its more earthly equivalents makes it simpler, at the same time, it becomes far more intriguing. Implied in these half questions above are notions of identity, of power and of authority, questions Anderson herself admits she is fascinated with. At a time when Music Television (MTV) was but a dream of David Bowie's "Sound & Vision", not exactly widespread throughout the (Western) world, the question of the origins of Anderson's oddities, these performances, flown in from the U.S. and dropped—similar to relay trigger bombs—on my country, might have mattered more. Today, I am sure the focus has changed. What these odd objects prove to me is that their secrets, their operating mode can be taught, can be transmitted across national, cultural borders. In mediatised performance, there is another world beyond the horizon.

Similar to the peoples of Hiroshima, Vietnam and now Afghanistan, I had no real means of defending myself against the American invasion. Unlike them, however, I was not attacked by planes. They did not destroy my town dropping real bombs on my country, as was done in Afghanistan. I was defenceless because faith had no strong hold in me. Even though nobody knows precisely how it all works, backed up as these performances were by a variety of means, including newspapers, films and the whole set of strategies marketed by televisual culture, American cultural commodities were overwhelming, overpressing in their seductive power, incomparable in their magnitude. America was home to a thousand brave realities that populated my television and, thus, my own world. Popular culture and televisual culture make things appear bigger than they are in reality. But then again, whose and what reality is bigger? Paraphrasing Anderson: these performances are comm/oddities dropped on my country by a people free enough to think of them in the first

place. Whether they would or would not be picked up and used by the peoples on which they fell is another story.

3.3 *Home of the Brave*

So far the movement I am trying to describe, Anderson's illustrative "sweep on the dial", started out with *Big Science* (1982). I have argued that *Big Science* represents a first, tentative, experimentation with the genre of mediatised pop performance. As such its performances eventually exceed the boundaries of pop by bringing other frames into play, namely those of avant-garde performance art. Following *Big Science*, I have also argued that *Mister Heartbreak* (1984) successfully moves Anderson to the opposite side of the cultural continuum, that is, it pushes her performances into the more generic boundaries of pop culture by fully incorporating the standards of pop music.

Home of the Brave (1986) constitutes in many aspects an even more refined example of performances that have entered the flow of commodity culture (Auslander *Presence* 61). Anderson's release after *Mister Heartbreak*[38] continues to expand the frame according to which we can make sense of her output at Warner. In other words, in *Home of the Brave* Anderson's mediatised persona ventures further on the road to mediatisation. If, inaugurated by *Big Science* and "smoothed" by *Mister Heartbreak*, mediatisation had moved Anderson—as I have argued—to one extreme of the cultural continuum (from avant-garde to mass cultural status via pop music), helping her become part of commodity culture by releasing albums which successfully incorporate and manipulate the conventions of pop performance, *Home of the Brave* can be said to represent yet another facet of Anderson's move into mediatised performance. Its material has been released in two distinct formats: as an audio recording and as a VHS videotape. Therefore, both

performance formats serve to authenticate and reiterate each other, since *Home of the Brave* partially stands for the recording of a "live" concert. Consider Philip Auslander:

> *Home of the Brave* (1986) contains some of the same material and songs as *United States* and other material; songs from both *United States* and *Home of the Brave* have appeared as self-sufficient entities on her recordings that do not specifically document a performance. To a much greater extent than earlier performance artists who documented their work on film or video, Anderson has entered the flow of commodity culture in ways that make her own work potentially as much part of the audience's perceptual world as the television screen, the stereo, and the radio. (*Presence* 61)

Thus, it is as a "self-sufficient entit[y]", the sense described by Auslander above, that *Home of the Brave* completes the circle of Anderson's mediatised presence, engaging her electronic presence simultaneously into several of the vehicles that are part of her audience's perceptual world: audio recordings, videotapes, television, the radio and magazines via pop charts, interviews, articles and reviews. However, in spite of *Home of the Brave*'s heading, "A film by Laurie Anderson", the recording is not the faithful soundtrack of the movie, in the sense that it does not accurately reproduce the concert or mirror the performances in film. Therefore, because film and album represent two distinct, "self-sufficient" entities, I will be concerned only with the audio recording released as *Home of the Brave*.

Also part of her contractual obligations with Warner, *Home of the Brave* is the performance that, at the time of its release, 1986, more successfully couples an interrogation of mediatised presence with the flow of commodity culture. From the point of view of its electronic audience, the presence of Anderson's *Home of the Brave* not only has been multiplied by its release as an audio recording and as a VHS videotape, its eight songs result more uniformly connected by Anderson's concerns with mediatisation,

proposing an interrogation of the ways in which mediatisation of performances come to constitute unified performances in themselves.

Home of the Brave not only (and literally) seems to "talk" to Anderson's other products/performances, it—ironically—presents answers to many questions proposed by *Mister Heartbreak.* For example, in "Talk Normal" Anderson pokes fun at her own previous flirtation with high culture: as we have seen, in "Blue Lagoon", from *Mister Heartbreak*, Anderson appropriates the literary canon by inserting a character from Melville's *Moby Dick* (Ishmael) into her own song. In *Home of the Brave* Anderson seems to be answering back: a revealing statement from the song "Talk Normal" makes her electronic persona declare that while she loves the "First National Bank", she "confesses" never to have actually read *Moby Dick.*[39] To me such bold statement conflates Anderson's engagement with examining not only the values more openly professed by commodity culture but also her own (strategic) position within its flow as a Warner Brothers recording artist. Thus, Anderson's performing alter ego, vested with the authority granted by mediatisation, chooses the "First National Bank", thus commodity culture, instead of *Moby Dick*, the literary canon, i.e., high-culture, in an apparent re-enactment and defiance of the criticism and charges thrown at her by the time she signed up with entertainment giant Warner Brothers (Chapter 2, 2.4). In *Strange Angels,* Anderson's next recording (analysed below), the performance "The day the devil" includes the interesting line, supposedly spoken by the devil "Hey! Hey! Babaloo / So don't come bangin (sic) your Bibles / 'Cause you've been laughin' all the way to the bank", in what seems to represent an additional commentary on the performance of her own mediatised persona: "The day the devil" seems to function as a "note of remorse", describing, ironically, how Anderson's regret for lost innocence is equated with the ability—accepted along with her contract with Warner?—actively to participate in commodity culture.

Back to *Home of the Brave*, Anderson works with a host of figures, and again the (disembodied) presence of Burroughs can be intensely felt. *Home of the Brave* is the album that includes "Language is a Virus", something of a major hit, a staple of Anderson's performances for Warner since the *United States I-IV Live* recording and a song-text which, as I have said, makes ample use of a notion credited to Burroughs. Not only does Burroughs appear on the film version of *Home of the Brave* but his unique voice, sampled, is heard in "Late Show", ironically a song that, played on Anderson's modified violin,[40] holds a (disembodied) voice sample from Burroughs uttering a statement that begs its audience to "Listen to [his] heartbeat" in what becomes, through Anderson's hands, an ingenious interrogation of live presence since none of it, as it is Anderson's disposition, is actually "live." Auslander:

> The Burroughs we see in *Home of the Brave* is simultaneously present and represented, live and recorded, with no clear distinctions between those terms and no privileging of the live presence over the recorded or simulated versions. (*Presence* 121)

Additionally, as Auslander argues, Anderson turns Burroughs' disembodied voice into an instrument that "addresses the impact of technology on questions of textual authorship" (*Presence* 121). Manipulated by Anderson, Burroughs' voice sample speaking the entire sentence is not heard until the end of the song.

In *Home of the Brave*, once again dreams are used as narrative material, but this time they appear informed by a metaphor that seems to foreground the corruption of dreams by mass culture and its products, as "Talk Normal" seems openly to confirm:

> I don't know about your dreams / But mine are sort of hackneyed. Same thing, night after night. / Just ... repetitive. And the color is really bad— / And the themes are just infantile. / And you always get what you want— / And that's just not the way life is.

If, as we have seen, through human language humankind's vision of the world performing becomes a waking dream of sorts, as described by Burroughs (see the analysis of "Sharkey's Day" from *Mister Heartbreak*), then what human language does is not to explain "reality" logically, but to hold a bizarre, indirect bearing over reality. Consequently, life's waking moments can be made equivalent to dreams which are also subject to "language", the fact that we do not understand dreams very well only likewise pointing to the gap between language and the world.[41]

The interesting twist proposed by Anderson's alter ego in performance is that dreams have come to resemble faded Technicolor movies in a clear reference to the role played by the landscape of commodity culture in our lives. Corrupted by commodity culture, filled with infantile plots of immediate satisfaction and which are repeated night after night (commodity culture is based on repetition), dreams cease to be the unique, fantastic experiences of an individual and become Technicolor reproductions, perhaps of commodity culture's products. Curiously, Anderson's mediatised performances are also part of commodity culture; *Home of the Brave* inhabits and shares the space of other cultural products, circulating in the same arena. Thus, "Talk Normal" seems to describe not only the space such cultural products share, but also the effect they may have on human beings: if through language it has become impossible to distinguish between waking life and dreams, what happens if dreams are described verbally? What happens if the whole world is made to pass through the filter of mass cultural products? What other way to dream than to perform the dreams made available by commodity culture's products on offer? I am trying not to make (too many) value judgements with these questions, but I confess that it is—sometimes—difficult not to, as Simon Frith points out: "Part of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is talk, talk which is run through with value judgements" (*Performing Rites* 4).

Consequently: can we deny commodity culture's disposition for repetition, immediate satisfaction and infantile plots? Imagine what happens to your own dreams, as they become replaced and soiled by commodity culture's endless flow of images and signs. Without exactly advocating a "cause and effect", this seems to be one of the driving notions behind *Home of the Brave.*

Additionally, in "Talk Normal" Anderson also shows an awareness of her own body being augmented and dispersed by mediatisation:

> I turned the corner in Soho today and someone / Looked right at me and said: Oh No! / Another Laurie Anderson clone!/ And I said: Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!/ Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!/ Look at me! Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!

Exposed herein, curiously through mediatised performance, the unsettling question of how performance shapes behaviour and constructs identities becomes even more intriguing. It is because identity is not likely to be something we have in ourselves, but which we construct, put on in performance, that Anderson tampers with the effects of her own magnified electronic presence in mediatised performance. If mediatised performances can produce "Laurie Anderson" clones, not unlike many other performances that bind identity together, mediatised performance can also act to shape up behaviour and construct identities. If we think of the scale which mediatisation has taken up lately, then the consequences may be puzzling, as clones of mediatised personae begin to wander across the globe. At times "Talk Normal" even resembles an interview in which Anderson's narrative, assuming in performance the format of the answers given to an imaginary interviewer, re-enacts the interest shown by pop fans (her electronic audiences) for trivia, for information that, in spite of not leading to a clearer understanding of an artist's work, serves to add history, frames, and a context for the work to endure inside the media itself.

3.3.1 "Smoke Rings"

I think it is time I made a general observation in relation to Anderson's song-texts. Starting with the performances from *Mister Heartbreak* (as I have argued, the first album that seems to incorporate and manipulate the conventions of pop performance with more ease), this characteristic I am pointing out becomes even more apparent in *Home of the Brave*. Precisely because Anderson's songs incorporate and manipulate the conventions of pop culture, of pop performance, I do believe parts of it, textual fragments, have to make a few concessions. I will not detain myself, therefore, trying to find relevance in every narrative detail from Anderson's song-texts; instead, I would prefer to characterise many of these details as tactic insertions, camouflages which are presented to manipulate and replace other more recognisable pop conventions (such as repeated choruses as well as exclamations and songs about love). In *Home of the Brave*, Anderson's performance incorporates many techniques and language games to become an effective pop performance. "Smoke Rings", for example, is fragmented into discreet parts that can be taken to parallel the succession of images/objects most likely to occur on television: the song-text parodies a television quiz show, has parts sung in Spanish, teases the format and theme of the love song, and incorporates a character from mass culture, Frank Sinatra, who blows "perfect smoke rings". Thus, "Smoke Rings", to the extent that it assimilates pop performance more easily, i.e., becomes better incorporated into pop performance, enacting resistance from within, also has to yield for these concessions to take place.

Initially, it is precisely one of these concessions that seems to be at work, as "Smoke Rings'" song-text begins as a parody of a television quiz show:

> Standby. You're on the air.
>
> Buenas noches Senores y Senoras. Bienvenidos.
>
> La primera pregunta es: ¿Que es mas macho, pineapple o knife?

Well, let's see. My guess is that a pineapple is more macho than a knife.

Si! Correcto! Pineapple es mas macho que knife.

La segunda pregunta: ¿Que es mas macho, lightbulb or schoolbus?

Uh, lightbulb?

No! Lo siento. Schoolbus es mas macho que lightbulb.

Gracias. And we'll be back in un momento.

Not to mention the humourously sharp send up on gender roles, for Auslander, it is Anderson's overt parody of television (and her sophisticated language games)[42] that "provides a commentary on the impoverished language of the media" (*Presence* 111). In its overt parody of the unfathomable logic of television quiz shows what "Smoke Rings" eventually exposes is the unfathomable logic of human language (and bias) which, then, can be used as original material for television quiz shows. Questioned through the contestant's wrong answer is, above all, the great gap between language and its referents. Additionally, by making the moderator ask the questions in Spanish, Anderson also manages to include social commentary in her performance. She addresses the melting pot represented by immigration and racial issues in the United States: the Spanish speaking participants of this television show, too often part of America's excluded, underprivileged classes, appear on television, by its own turn, traditionally, a low cultural form. Thus, both television, the vehicle, and its contestants, the Spanish-speaking subjects, are displayed at the margins or borders of American culture.

3.3.2 "Language is a Virus"

As I have suggested above, Anderson's concern with human language as performance becomes evident in many other pieces from this period. Anderson, for example, makes this even more conspicuous when she incorporates an idea ("Language is

a virus from outer space") credited to W.S.Burroughs' into "Language is a Virus", from the album *Home of the Brave*, also included in *United States I-IV Live*.

Beginning with a puzzling proposition ("Paradise is exactly like where you are right now, only much, much better"), "Language is a Virus" seems to establish itself from the outset as representative of mediatised culture's hold on reality. Let me explain. First, in order to understand the complexity of Anderson's game, we must rule out, as we have done in "From the Air", the possibility of differentiating between live and mediatised performances solely because of their characteristic media. Then, admitting that common sense notions of paradise imply joy and rewards in an "afterlife" heaven, it is from this point of view that we can consider Anderson's proposal that "paradise", being not so much different from "where you are right now", ironically remains "much, much better."

As is usual in Anderson's case, the tricky half of her proposition only appears once Anderson's seemingly deliberate and complex contradictions are unveiled, because the proposition ("Paradise is exactly like where you are right now, only much, much better") establishes Anderson's own mediatised performance as paradise, that spatio-temporal frame which—being literally identified as the space "where you are right now"—turns her own performance into some sort of paradise. In other words, the spatio-temporal frame her electronic audience is submitted to (literally, the performance of "Language is a Virus") is, in a sense, also a form of paradise.

Curiously, what Anderson proposes—that paradise, being not so much different from mediatised performance, remains "much, much better" than where you are right now—helps re-enact deeply ingrained notions about the "supremacy" of live events over mediatised ones. Because Anderson starts mixing the two spaces in question (notions of promised paradise and mediatised performance), she not only paradoxically reinforces the idea that beyond mediatisation there exists a better, more real, world, but that this world, when compared to the immediate satisfaction of mediated performance, still remains

"much better." Thus, what Anderson proposes amounts to this: the rapture triggered by Anderson's own mediatised performance (what you are holding in your hands, the rapture of commodity culture) is not very different from paradise, it is only "much, much better."

From this initial frame, Anderson's song-text, moving between two scenes (a description of a "guy" on a train immersed in "one of those abstract trances" and a conversation with "Fred"—possibly a lover?), establishes how language can become a virus:

> I saw this guy on the train / and he seemed to have gotten stuck / in one of those abstract trances. / And he was going: "Ugh... Ugh... Ugh..."
>
> And Fred said:
>
> "I think he's in some kind of pain. / I think it's a pain cry."
>
> And I said: "Pain cry?
>
> Then language is a virus."

How is it then that language becomes a virus? Through performance. The central point of Anderson's cause and effect play in the song-text is the analogy she builds out of the guy's trance-like condition and "Fred's" suggestion that the guy's present state, his performance, is a *pain cry*. Anderson's reply is singular, but enlightening: whatever the guy on the train, "stuck" in an "abstract trance" ("Ugh... Ugh... Ugh..."), is doing, such act is also communicating. If it is communicating pain, as "Fred" is convinced, consequently, language, can also be a virus.

It is because of Anderson's language games that audiences realise how close certain utterances (meaningful, communicative) and pain cries (performative) in fact are: how close human language eventually is to performance as a unique construct that, in spite of holding the upper hand in human communication, is also an acquired system of shared rules, very much like social behaviour, everyday performance. The word "stuck", which Anderson uses to characterise the guy's state, itself emphasises the arresting quality of

performance, a quality which language, once its rules and shared meanings have been coded up, seems to share with performance. This idea is emphasised in the next section of the text:

> Well I was talking to a friend / and I was saying:
>
> I wanted you. / And I was looking for you. /
>
> But I couldn't find you. I couldn't find you.
>
> And he said: Hey! / Are you talking to me?
>
> Or are you just practicing for one of those performances of yours?
>
> Huh?

Anderson's inspiration for the song-text seems almost mundane: a conversation between friends results in misunderstanding. However, more than simply offering a straightforward description of the problem, Anderson reaches further. The misunderstanding itself is a matter of misunderstanding performance, of not differentiating between two performative categories: Anderson's own career as a performance artist (a pun on Anderson's more celebrated avant-garde position) and a "true" statement of intentions, of love and of friendship than the more "substantial" understanding of the words "I wanted you. And I was looking for you. But I couldn't find you." seem to imply. Thus, misunderstanding occurs when the two distinct performative meanings that would then become associated with the words are blurred by Anderson's persona, who, as we have seen, has extensively used autobiography precisely to erase the artificial boundaries created around performance. In this way, language becomes a virus for which there is no cure. Remarkably, the lines Anderson uses to "validate" such blur ("I wanted you. / And I was looking for you. / But I couldn't find you. I couldn't find you.") are part of "Walking & Falling", a performance that had appeared in *Big Science* and *United States I-IV Live*.

3.4 *Strange Angels*

We can deduce that by 1989 Anderson's previous album releases had already established the status of her mediatised persona in commodity culture as a Warner Brothers recording artist both inside and outside the American market. The cover for *Strange Angels* seems to reflect that Anderson's position in commodity culture had evolved. Photographed by the unorthodox Robert Mapplethorpe[43] for the *Strange Angels*' album cover, Anderson's face (after two albums in which it was not shown) re-appears, this time with her eyes shut (see Appendix 2 Fig. 5). Considering the many years Anderson had been circulating in commodity culture, this portrait of her face with her eyes shut seems to indicate the extent to which Anderson defies the normal presentation of her mediatised body: as a rule, pop stars appear on the cover of their albums, but rarely do they shut their eyes in front of the camera. One of the many purposes of the record cover showing an artist is visibility and the seduction it entices, that is, the artist's body—framed in a particular light and angle—is, thus, made "real". By keeping her eyes shut, Anderson avoids eye contact with her "electronic" audiences, thus subverting these rules: instead of establishing contact, her gaze—turned inside her own body—escapes the control of vision.

Curiously, the other two albums in which her face had also appeared on covers, *Big Science* and the five-record set *United States I-IV Live*, also reflect Anderson's somewhat singular position in the world of pop. Unlike a more "genuine" pop performer, it is not Anderson's sex appeal that is emphasised on these record covers. For the *Big Science* album she was photographed wearing huge white tinted glasses, showing her hands "blindly" feeling the empty space around her; in *United States I-IV Live* a close-up of her face shows her sporting a small light in her mouth[44] (see Appendix 2 Figs. 1 and 2). These two images become representative of Anderson's embodying the "mediatised storyteller" whose stories and performance, as I have argued, have been augmented by mediatisation.

In *Big Science*, her white tinted glasses seemingly prevent her from "seeing". This image seems to represent Anderson's tentative experimenting with mediatisation, as *Big Science* is her first incursion into large scale mediatisation. Thus, in her first release, her mediatised persona, still "unfamiliar" with the territory covered by mediatisation, perhaps "unfamiliar" with her own crossover from the avant-garde, is tentatively feeling for this unfamiliar space that now surrounds her. In *United States I-IV Live* the tiny light placed for the shot inside Anderson's mouth (of which we hardly notice the electric current wires) seems to represent the process of electronic mediatisation, which increases the power of her storytelling.

Additionally, we have seen how, in *Home of the Brave* ("Language is a Virus") and *Mister Heartbreak*, Anderson had already shown an interest in dissecting Westerns religious myths: characters inspired by stories from the Bible (snakes, Adam and Eve-like figures) are not unlikely to appear in Anderson's performances. She explains this interest by equating her childhood religious experiences in the "Bible belt" (Midwestern and South-eastern United States) with an "early" form of surrealism:

> I grew up in the Bible Belt and spent a lot of my childhood listening to these stories, at Bible school, Bible camp, Sunday school and so on. And these stories were completely amazing. Outrageous stories! About parting oceans and talking snakes. And people seemed to believe these stories. And I'm talking about adults. ... I try to tell the truth as I see it. I'm just telling the same mixture of midwestern Bible stories that I always have. They're a mixture of the most mundane things with a fabulous twist to them. (*Stories from the Nerve Bible* 137)

What may call one's attention in this commentary results from Anderson's ability to isolate and level the fantastic traits inherent to many biblical narratives (parting oceans, talking snakes) with those of an artistic trend (Surrealism). In doing so, she characterises religious

myths by locating them and their fictional component along those of an artistic trend, Surrealism, thus exposing religious narratives for what they are, fictional stories not unlike, say, the artworks produced by surrealism, DADA, or even Performance Art. Curiously, not only is "Laurie Anderson" imbricated in the landscape advanced by commodity culture, but she is also a performer who is capable of revealing the surrealist aspect inherent to religious myth and equate its impact on the contemporary landscape of mediatised culture. In *Strange Angels* Anderson dissects these topics associated with religious myth in commodity culture with even more richness of detail, partly—I believe—because the authority of her mediatised persona, which had been circulating in commodity culture for a while, had been established.

Consequently, many of Anderson's mediatised performances appear to integrate a curious mixture of religious myth mingled with the debris of commodity culture. From this mixture, Anderson is able to comment on the landscape of contemporary American commodity culture by means of performance. In its entirety, the concept of *Strange Angels* continues to map out notions of technological utopia against a variety of backgrounds: the body ("Monkey's Paw"), American suburbia ("Coolsville"), mediatised culture ("Strange Angels").

If in *Mister Heartbreak* paradise had come to resemble a luxury resort on a tropical island, it is because luxury resorts encrusted on tropical islands have come to exemplify one of commodity culture's many promised rewards for law abiding citizens who perform efficiently. A brief look at how television commercials seem to make utopia available is illuminating. Inserted, say, between news broadcasts, television commercials for luxury resorts, expensive cars and a variety of expensive goods seem to exemplify the ultimate end of technological and management performances: these commercials function both by establishing themselves as the rewards that await law abiding citizens and by mapping the territory which is denied to criminals and other marginal subjects. Paraphrasing McKenzie,

perform efficiently or else, fail (to perform, that is): "Perform or else—you're a No Body!" ("Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 39).

On the other hand, if *Strange Angels* displays Anderson's ongoing quest for paradise inside mediatised culture, it does so revealing a compassionate, warm alliance with humankind, its individuals as living bodies and as consciousness lost in a world that has been fragmented by commodity culture to the point of no return. For example, the song "Ramon" urges audiences to perform, following more generous and humanitarian lines:

> So when you see a man who's broken
> Pick him up and carry him
> And when you see a woman who's broken
> Put her all into your arms
> Cause we don't know where we come from
> We don't know what we are.

Assembled together by a variety of musicians and producers (Bobby McFerrin, Brian Eno, Roma Baran), musically, *Strange Angels* only partly follows the pattern already developed by *Mister Heartbreak.* Benefiting (in much the same way as *Mister Heartbreak*) from the various inputs and ideas from many musicians, *Strange Angels* sounds dramatically more complex. For example, for *Strange Angels* Anderson, who had started taking voice lessons after *Home of the Brave* "to counteract the physical demands of an overextended schedule" (Goldberg *Laurie Anderson* 111), diminished her characteristic use (through a vocoder) of the male vocal pitch—Auslander equates her harmonised low frequency voice with technology and male power (*Presence* 114)—in favour of a more feminine pitch for many songs, which, it is RoseLee Goldberg's opinion, "provided the launch pad for an entirely fresh approach to her work" (*Laurie Anderson* 111). Hence, *Strange Angels* includes at least one song which—in a rare and explicit address—is directly propelled by feminist attitudes: "Beautiful Red Dress" addresses the difference between a man's earnings and a

woman's earnings in America. Taking the average hour rate of a man's earnings and comparing it to a woman's earnings, Anderson statistically and mathematically proves that "It'll be the year 3,888 before we [women] make a buck." Together with *Bright Red* (1994) and *The Ugly One with the Jewels* (1995), *Strange Angels* represents Anderson's final output at Warner.

3.4.1 "Strange Angels"

From the outset, the title song-text for "Strange Angels", the first performance in the album, returns Anderson to a comparison that, recalling the proposition disclosed in "Language is a Virus", is odd, then disturbing:

> They say that heaven is like TV / A perfect little world / that doesn't really need you / and everything there / is made of light / and the days keep going by / Here they come / Here they come / Here they come

As I have said, at first the comparison is uncanny not only because "heaven" and "television", apparently, have little to do with each other, but also because, belonging to different, perhaps mutually exclusive semantic domains, these words convey two entirely distinct performances. Additionally, Anderson sings these lines with a compassion that leaves little room for the comical. Much to the contrary, leaving aside Anderson's characteristic cacophonous harmonies, such singing turns *Strange Angels* as a whole into one of the performer's most kind-hearted outputs.

The first part of Anderson's comparison, "heaven", a crucial notion to many Western religious utopias, is a place for the soul to rest, eternally. Consequently, its immediate connotations relate this word to notions of purity, to being chosen, etc. The second term, "television", represents the predominant landscape of commodity culture, the dominant medium that, disseminating mediatisation, has substantially changed the ways in

which we experience the world. It is at this point that, once again, Anderson's weird juxtapositions and language games begin to gain relevance. Her ability to insinuate a similarity between "heaven" and "television" reveals how close the two notions eventually are in performance: just as the promise of "heaven" (paradise) dominates the thoughts, aspirations and achievements of the believer, so it seems that "television" (and consequently, mediatisation) has now come to dominate the landscape (thus, the aspirations) of contemporary humankind. What Anderson's comparison triggers is a transference: the ground covered by "heaven" and "television" becomes one and the same. Thus, the assertion that "heaven" is "just like TV" gains relevance to describe an interesting facet of the contemporary world, one that extrapolates the proposition's initial weirdness. Once this notion is made available it becomes rather disturbing.

What Anderson's language game in "Strange Angels" eventually reveals is television's towering presence in the landscape of contemporary mankind, akin, in intensity, to that which both "heaven" and "paradise" used to have (for many still do). From such perspective, one begins to see the rather disturbing meanings that can get associated with the idea of comparing "heaven" with "television" and that, resulting from Anderson's performance, establishes the comparison's relevance. In addition, Anderson sings these lines with the vocal pitch (her newly acquired singing techniques) one more frequently equates with religious fervour, church choirs, and introspective hymns. Once more, another of Anderson's many performative crossovers, trespasses, and invasions.

But how (and why?) can "television" and "heaven" be compared? From Anderson's perspective, first, both are "perfect little world[s]" where everything is "made of light." Second, Anderson's suggestion that these are worlds that "don't really need you" suggests that both television and heaven are utopian realms intended as promises, as rewards, perfect because ideally removed, with no need for their audiences to participate directly. Third, and perhaps most importantly, in both "heaven" and "television" our sense of time,

of the passage of time, is distorted, pushed into the infinite, to the point of becoming timeless, an endless flow in which "the days keep going by", possibly not without change, but perhaps without the obvious markers of change. Why?

From Anderson's own perspective inside mediatised culture, by making notions of "heaven" and "television" equivalent, she is able to pinpoint another interesting characteristic of our times, namely that television, in its perennial flow, has come to represent some kind of safe haven, where the world, acquiring a distinct, yet utopian resonance, comes to an idealised halt: an imaginary halt within the artificial boundaries of mediatised performance. For example, Anderson's disembodied voice, as I have argued, not only outlives, in performance, her own physical body, it also surpasses the scope of her spatio-temporal frame. Thus, the performances she has recorded for Warner represent a safe haven in which a mediatised, disembodied version of her own physical body circulates "in perpetuity" as her contract anticipated (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Additionally, it is precisely the authority of Anderson's own body transformed by mediatisation that the comparison between "television" and "heaven" seems to address. *Strange Angels* describes an environment (mediatised culture) which replaces television with religion as the metaphor and narrative of choice.

After establishing the relevance of the comparison between "heaven" and "television", the song moves into more familiar territory, describing what seems to be a counterpart for mediatised culture's version of "heaven" in the form of an ordinary get-together between friends, which, singularly, Anderson describes as "one of those days larger than life", but which, interestingly, unlike mediatised performances, does not appear to be "perfect", or "larger than life" at all. Much to the contrary, with its emphasis on "food", and friends staying up all night, the episode seems to have more in common with a bacchanal and nothing in common with more "celestial" performances, idealised routines proposed by mediatised, idealised personae:

> Well it was one of those days larger than life / when your friends came to dinner / and they stayed the night / and then they cleaned out the refrigerator — they ate everything in sight / and then they stayed up in the living room / and they cried all night.

Assuming that it is Anderson's mediatised alter-ego (now a well established pop performer inhabiting the "heaven" of televisual culture) that tells this story, it is at this point that one can see the relevance that "Strange Angels" places on mediatised presence: the song-text seems to tell the story through the eyes of one of Anderson's many alter-egos, who invites her friends to dinner, where they stay all night, eating and crying. The juxtaposition is crucial here because this meeting between friends involves Anderson's mediatised persona in activities that, mimicking the activities of her audiences in the physical world, enlarge the scope of her mediatised persona, while not only establishing her insertion in the mediatised landscape but also allowing for her contempt for it to show. By making reference to an ordinary existence outside the realm of mediatisation, "Strange Angels", the song (but arguably the entire album), can be read as an account of what it means to be a performing body in such "mediatised heaven" of televisual, commodity culture, i.e., what it is like to have one's body augmented and multiplied by mediatised presence.[45] Having established the relevance of her own mediatised presence, in the next part of the song-text, Anderson expresses her disappointment and dissatisfaction with the very possibilities laid out by televisual culture, possibly, with life in mediatised "heaven":

> Strange Angels — singing just for me / Old stories — they're haunting me
> This is nothing / like I thought it would be.

As Anderson sings these lines it is impossible not to imagine which "old stories" are these. Perhaps she is referring to the feedback her own mediatised performances (circulating time and again in the media) trigger; i.e., Anderson's own mediatised performances, as they come back to "haunt" her, prompt her to say that "this"—literally then, the output of her

mediatised presence in the form of song—is not what she had imagined. In other words, "this"—her mediatised presence—does not reflect in full her aspirations, her dreams, and the ideas she might have had at the time she signed the contract with Warner. That is, her mediatised performances may have escaped her control. Thus, we recall, she is photographed with her eyes shut for the cover of the *Strange Angels* record, as if her mediatised persona, regardless of the aftermath her mediatised performances may enjoy, is only absorbed within herself, shut away from the criticism thrown at her by the compensations she is offered:

> Well I was out in my four door / with the top down.
>
> And I looked up and there they were: / Millions of tiny teardrops
>
> Just sort of hanging there / and I didn't know whether to laugh or cry
>
> and I said to myself: What next big sky?

At this point, Anderson manages to emphasise—ironically identifying in the material compensation for the loss of control over her mediatised presence—the fact that, similarly to technological performance, which, as we have seen, must be kept updated in commodity culture, the process of mediatisation never stops, that is, its "endless cancellation of the real" (Birringer *Theatre* 9) is always on the lookout for replacement, something bigger, better, and newer: "What next big sky?"

3.4.2 "Coolsville"

In many ways similar to "Big Science", "Coolsville"—the third song of the *Strange Angels* album—continues to map out notions of technological and management performance in the creation of heaven on earth, this time addressing the heart of suburban America, which, not unlike Anderson's mediatised performance, is—literally—delineated as a picture-perfect world that can only be seen from afar, or by its electronic audiences

dispersed throughout the world. "Coolsville" begins immersed in a rhythm pattern that simulates the sound locomotives and wagons make when pushing forward. Following this brief introduction, Anderson's cries begin, describing what seems to represent an area or neighbourhood, called "Coolsville":

> Coolsville Coolsville
>
> Coolsville Coolsville
>
> So Perfect So Nice

The implied criticism of the song-text is already contained in the name given to the place, made out of the combination of two words "cool", in the sense of keen and neat, and "ville", at one, an appropriation of villa, meaning mansion, residence, or a whole town. Thus, "Coolsville" may stand for "utopia achieved", the perfect real state development in suburban America, where everything being "so perfect" and "so nice" cannot stand deterioration.

If, from Anderson's perspective, commodity culture advances notions of paradise being just like television ("Strange Angels"), suburban America, Baudrillard notes, represents the eventual materialisation of these utopian dreams. For Baudrillard suburban America is utopia achieved, "the tragedy of a utopian dream made reality" (*America* 30). We may then ask ourselves: isn't "Coolsville"—describing an impeccable real state development from afar—performing this tragedy? Paradise found and lost, made visible out of concrete, plastic and money but emptied of everything because American suburban utopia, following Baudrillard, makes everything available? From flowers, to the stereotypes of sex and death (*America* 30), American utopia seems absorbed with the dreams of a performance that ducks the question of origins (*America* 76) and denies "life" itself the hkelihood of circumstance,[46] the likelihood of failure:

> To land in America is, even today, to land in that 'religion' of the way of life which Toqueville described. This material utopia of the way of life,

> where success and action are seen as profound illustrations of the moral law, was cristallized by exile and emigration and these have, in a sense, transformed it into a primal scene. (Baudrillard *America* 75-76)

If it is in this "primal scene" that the tragedy of America as utopia is made available, then "Coolsville" invokes precisely the distance between such "illustrations of the moral law" and success and action. Not only does it show the subject in the act of developing him/herself, but it also proposes a manner by means of which such state can be achieved:

> Hey little darlin,
> I'm comin your way little darlin
> And I'll be there / Just as soon as I'm
> all straightened out
> Yeah just as soon as I'm
> perfect.

"Coolsville" also manages to display Anderson's awareness of the many gaps made available by "representation":

> Some things are just pictures
> They're scenes before your eyes
> And don't look now I'm right behind you
> Coolsville
> So perfect So nice
> So nice!

As is rather the rule in Anderson's performances, at the same time in which an action is called forth, a reaction or counterargument is also demanded. In "Coolsville", while the demand for efficacy is forced upon the subject ("Just as soon as I'm all straightened out / Yeah just as soon as I'm perfect."), Anderson acknowledges the void eventually produced by utopia achieved ("Some things are just pictures / They're scenes before your eyes"). In

other words, ideal representations (utopian environments) cannot withstand performance, cannot withstand change for fear of destruction. It is not a matter of faithfully representing or not representing life, but of changing, which destroys utopia. This seems to be the tragedy Baudrillard indicates. Again, a feeling that is emphasised in the song-text:

> And down by the ocean
>
> under the boardwalk
>
> You were so handsome we didn't talk
>
> You're my ideal I'm gonna find you
>
> I'm going to Coolsville
>
> So perfect So ideal

However, the question that has to be asked—similar to the question the hostess asks immediately after the party is over (*America* 30) or, as Baudrillard puts it, after the orgy—and which represents the bottom line of "Coolsville" is this: what to do after the fun? Thus, in "Coolsville" Anderson reveals a subject challenged into efficacy by the performance of utopia achieved, that is, a subject stranded in material utopia, "Coolsville", but whose tragedy is precisely having been inscribed in a quest for perfection and success, these "illustrations of the moral law."

In another song-text for the *Strange Angels* album Anderson also addresses such quest for efficiency inscribed in the body by technological and bureaucratic performance. "Monkey's Paw" has Anderson "stop in" at a "Body Shop" where she "orders" the following body alterations and changes: a stereo FM to be installed in her *teeth*, a mole to be taken off her *back* and put on her *cheek*, and—while she waits for the other orders—she chooses some high-heeled *feet*. A trademark of Anderson's performances, the part that immediately follows this one "seriously" suspects the validity of such improvements:

> And he said: Listen there's no guarantee
>
> Nature's got rules and Nature's got laws

but listen look out for the monkey's paw

And I said: Whaaat? He said:

The gift of life it's a twist of fate

From this perspective, "Monkey's Paw" literally maps out the transformations that technological performance can enact upon the human body. In other words, the human body itself becomes a site for technological performance. Thus, "Monkey's Paw" functions here, possibly, as a warning, a reminder of mankind's ultimate physical boundaries. Of course we can mess up with our own bodies, augment, enhance and expand them; however, what Anderson seems to say is that a lot of the rules and ways of altering and even changing our bodies may still be constrained by certain limits which can not be exceeded.

3.4.3 "The Dream Before"

Still regarding her interrogation of indications of technological utopia throughout Western civilisation, Anderson moves away from America and, in "The Dream Before", which bears the dedication "For Walter Benjamin", presents an updated reading of a German fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel", collected in *Kinder und Hausmärchen* by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm between 1812 and 1815, and which later—in 1893—was turned into an opera by Engelbert Humperdinck.

As is known, in the fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel" are a boy and a girl who, having got lost in the woods, are lured into captivity by a witch whose house is made of Gingerbread. Anderson's song-text, using the original frame and characters' names from the Grimm's fairy tale, adds an unprecedented dimension to "Hansel and Gretel" by moving the characters to contemporary Berlin:

Hansel and Gretel are alive and well

And they're living in Berlin

She is a cocktail waitress

He had a part in a Fassbinder film

And they sit around at night now

drinking schnapps and gin

Because Anderson establishes that these fictional characters "are alive and well" in an actual European city,[47] in the immediacy of "now", she alters the dimension according to which their "fairy tale" is interpreted: the transference not only seems to confuse the boundaries between fact and fiction, it also subverts the characters' performance. Are these real characters now? Have they always been? What is the difference between fact and fiction? Factual history and fairy tales? In other words, Anderson's performance establishes that "Hansel and Gretel" have grown up, extrapolating the frame of the fairy tale they have inhabited ever since the compilation of their story by the brothers Grimm.

While Anderson's performance adds a new dimension to the story—now these characters' presence also surfaces in contemporary Berlin—it also refocuses its relevance. Hence, they are given a new—historical—dimension in which to function. "Hansel and Gretel" evolve from fictional characters who—as children—get lost in the woods, into "animate" young adults who perform socially. Not only do they resurface in a contemporary European city (Berlin), but their "reality" resembles yours and mine.

Thus, similarly to you and me, these characters work, drink, and argue. It is precisely because Anderson's song-text expands these characters' activities from the realm of fantasy (fairy tales)—inserting them into the everyday—that she manages to convey a sense of their evolution, or of the evolution of their performance. The resulting process seems to question our ability to distinguish between fact and fiction. Anderson's performance also seems to show that, by presenting these characters as mature young adults, the relevance of their story (the added relevance of their performance) is now

transferred to their ability to discuss their emotions not only in relation to each other but also in respect to their own history. Thus, an extraordinary change is taken to effect in Anderson's performance:

> And she says: Hansel, you're really bringing me down
>
> And he says: Gretel, you can really be a bitch
>
> He says: I've wasted my life on our stupid legend
>
> When my one and only love
>
> was the wicked witch.

From the lines above one can notice how the extrapolation of the fairy tale dimension added by Anderson's performance seems to multiply "Hansel and Gretel's" presence. Now these characters seem able not only to interrogate their own performance ("I've wasted my life on our stupid legend / When my one and only love was the wicked witch."), but also to insinuate a comprehensive functioning of history:

> She said: What is history?
>
> And he said: History is an angel
>
> being blown backwards into the future
>
> He said: History is a pile of debris
>
> And the angel wants to go back and fix things
>
> To repair the things that have been broken
>
> But there is a storm blowing from Paradise
>
> And the storm keeps blowing the angel
>
> backwards into the future
>
> And this storm, this storm
>
> is called
>
> Progress

Through the image of history as an angel being blown—backwards—into the future by a storm called "progress", Anderson manages to create a compelling, momentous scenario. The commanding image in this part of the song-text invites several correspondences. According to Jon McKenzie, Anderson's said image also appears in Walter Benjamin's "Thesis on the Philosophy of History". He explains:

> This angel departs from Benjamin's messianic missive, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History". In Benjamin's essay we find not only several angelic figures, but also two sorts of time: progressive time as a homogenous, empty flow, and revolutionary time as that "filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]". ("Laurie Anderson for Dummies" 32)

It is interesting to notice that the correspondence created between theory (Benjamin's text) and performance art (Anderson's oblique citation of Benjamin in the song-text of "The Dream Before") points to an interesting shift of balance: magnified in Anderson's mediatised performance, Benjamin's text/image, like the characters of the brothers Grimm's tale, is transferred from theory to mediatised performance, thus to commodity culture. Once again, the most immediate correspondence is established with television. Just as television has usurped live performance of its prestige and reputation, accommodating mediatised performance to the needs of contemporary audiences, so it seems that "The Dream Before" has successfully translated and transferred Benjamin's text/image to mediatised performance.

The question that may now be raised is this: what performance—textual or mediatised—is more effective these days? While Benjamin's text may still be studied in academies and found to be at the basis of Anderson's own performance, it is Anderson's "The Dream Before" that has made Benjamin available to unspecialised audiences world wide. Thus, mediatised performances can assist other performances in crossing over a variety of boundaries.

3.5 *Bright Red*

An exploration of the dream like qualities of human experiences similar to that made evident in *Mister Heartbreak* reappears in *Bright Red*, Anderson's 1994 album for Warner. Preceding *The Ugly One with the Jewels* (classified by many retail shops as a "spoken word" record), *Bright Red* represents, to my mind, Anderson's final flirtation with the world of American pop before moving to Nonesuch Records for the *Life on a String* release of 2001. Among the many musicians involved in the project are Brian Eno and Lou Reed, two key figures of American pop music since the 1960s and 1970s.[48]

In many senses, partly because of its dream-like texture,[49] *Bright Red* also resembles and reads as a collage: intermittent, interspersed. Its songs merely amalgamate in the creation of a decaying cityscape in which each of the album's performances represents an additional scenario of the panoramic cultural view that Anderson sets out to consolidate. The panorama proposed by Anderson in *Bright Red* can be summarised by three of its song-texts, "The Puppet Motel", "Night in Baghdad" and "Same Time Tomorrow", all of which deal with layers of technological performance through mediatised presence.

Bright Red functions as if, in order to fulfil her obligations with Warner and come full circle with her own mediatised performances, Anderson had to come back to the themes and subjects she had already interrogated in *Big Science* (technological, bureaucratic and cultural performances) and—considering the space of time in between these releases—re-examine these territories, focusing on the expansion and development of these performative realms. Similarly to Anderson's other releases, *Bright Red* forges a panorama of everyday life in a chaotic space augmented by mediatisation: the resulting picture is not a "radiant" one, but, as Anderson herself puts it, rather grim, as she focuses on the "B" side of town. Song titles, such as "Speechless", "Poison", "Muddy River",

"Freefall", and "Tightrope", turn her focus to contemporary events such as the Gulf War, virtual reality, AIDS ("Love Among the Sailors"), etc.

If I may, at this point, venture a definition of what Anderson's main challenge in mediatised performance appears to be, it may be encapsulated in the words of Johannes Birringer: through mediatised performance, Anderson exposes "the cultural struggle over images, values, or material conditions that shape our perceptions of a constantly mediated reality" (*Theatre* xi). Hence, in *Bright Red* Anderson moves her audiences fast through many scenarios, as if mimicking a zapping through television channels. It is precisely television's towering presence in commodity culture that seems to provide Anderson with the stimulus and ground material for the song-texts of the performances in *Bright Red.* As we have seen, such reliance will accurately indicate the extent of Anderson's own absorption in televisual, commodity culture.

For example, in "Bright Red" the song-text's first line seems lifted from a newscasts' headline ("Did she fall or was she pushed?") and then proceeds to describe a hypothetical exchange between the subject and her possible assailant, while "Night in Baghdad"—which mimics the speech of a television news anchor person—can be clearly read as Anderson's reaction upon watching (as millions have) the Gulf War "live" on CNN. In *Bright Red* Anderson returns to the ground—I believe—she seems most comfortable with: the American contemporary landscape and its various technological performances. Thus, from within mediatised culture itself, Anderson's interrogation of a constantly mediated reality in pop performance sometimes verges on the brink of science fiction.

3.5.1 "The Puppet Motel"

From the many scenarios created in *Bright Red*, "The Puppet Motel"—also the title of an interactive CD ROM[50] Anderson released around this time—offers one of the album's most compelling views of a contemporary landscape dominated by the media. As such, it seems to set the sombre tone that is Anderson's imprint on the entire album. Additionally, its title hints at a correspondence between CD ROM and song-text. This correspondence is fortunate: not only does it render visible Anderson's heightened sense of awareness of another important scenario of the contemporary landscape, namely cyberspace,[51]—representing an additional technological performance in mediatised and commodity culture—but it also helps establish the twofold relation between this performance and the CD ROM of the same title; that is, the environment she describes in this performance is made commercially available as a CD ROM called "The Puppet Motel". Thus, in the song-text that appears in *Bright Red*, Anderson's alter-ego describes an environment that, combining notions of physical and artificial space, still seems strangely familiar:

> I live on the highway
>
> Near the Puppet Motel
>
> I log in every day
>
> I know the neighborhood well.

It is no coincidence that we can identify—in the few words used to describe the environment that Anderson targets—an idiosyncrasy. As a trademark of Anderson's, her language games turn an ordinary contemporary environment (a motel near a highway) into a haunting landscape.

In this song-text, what makes Anderson's language game perform effectively is the curious use of the expression "to log in" that she employs to characterise her connection

with this particular "neighborhood" (which she claims to "know well"); that is, by starting her performance from an ordinary landscape, what makes Anderson's description sound fairly peculiar is the expression "to log in", which under normal circumstances is used in connection with computer systems. In the jargon used in computer science, "to log in" is normally employed to describe a programmed routine for accessing either the resources of a terminal connected to a local network or the world wide web. This constitutes the digital world procedure equivalent to your checking in at a hotel.

Used in such unusual context, perhaps to illustrate "coming home", the expression "to log in" complicates matters a little. Its appearance to characterise the environment Anderson describes is, at least, unexpected. Interestingly, what causes Anderson's usage of the expression to leak (thus making it by far more intriguing) is the transference that it signals in performance: because to "to log in" represents a routine, a set of rules effective in technological performance, its appearance to characterise the neighbourhood in "The Puppet Motel" serves as a metaphor for a certain peculiarity of this environment. And Anderson "logs in" everyday; that is, instead of, say, coming home, she "logs in". Next she depicts the "residents" of this "motel":

> Now about the residents
> of the Puppet Motel
> They're more than a little spooky
> And most of them are mean.
> They're runnin' the numbers
> They're playin' cops and robbers
> Down in the dungeons
> Inside their machines.
> Cause they don't know
> What's really real now

They're havin' fourth

dimensional dreams

their minds are out on bail now

and real is only what it seems.

By the time we have a description of the "residents" of the Puppet Motel "playing cops and robbers...inside their machines" with "their minds ...out on bail", we begin to have a better idea of Anderson's point of attack. At this point, the song-text of "The Puppet Motel" describes an environment which—having been artificially created—represents a mixture of two realities, two performances, an odd environment in which one has come to "leak" into the other. Anderson uses the expression "to log in" to demonstrate how these residents can no longer distinguish between "what's really real" and what Anderson calls their "four dimensional dreams". Thus, she succeeds in establishing the song-text's correspondence with the many *ersatz* realities artificially created by technological performance, and especially virtual reality:

And all the puppets in this digital jail

They're runnin' around in a frenzy

In search of the Holy Grail.

They're having virtual sex.

They're eating virtual food.

No wonder these puppets

Are always in a lousy mood.

Apparently, the criticism previously directed at her own "clones" wandering around in SoHo (see "Talk Normal" earlier in this chapter) is now aimed at virtual reality ("And all the puppets in this digital jail"), illustrating, in "the spectacle of a culture dominated by the new electronic media" (Birringer *Theatre* xiii), the many changes technological performance impinges upon the human subject. Ultimately, Anderson's criticism of these

digital landscapes and artificially created "realities" reveals itself: while technology is altering and filtering "reality" ("They're having virtual sex. / They're eating virtual food."), our relation with the environment is deteriorating ("No wonder these puppets / Are always in a lousy mood.").

In a crucial part of the "Puppet Motel's" song-text Anderson reveals how mediatisation, functioning so as to augment and pass for "what's really real", that is, to create an *ersatz* reality that appears to be as real as the physical world, is produced and maintained by technological performance:

> So if you think we live in a modern world
>
> Where everything is clean and swell
>
> Take a walk on the B side of town
>
> Down by the Puppet Motel
>
> Take a whiff. Burning plastic.

By challenging the accepted representations, the A side of town, the A side of mediatised culture, Anderson ends up exposing one important fact: from her own position inside commodity culture, she urges her audience, as we have seen, itself trapped in mediatisation, to take a walk on the B side of town, that is, on the hidden or alternative side of mediatised culture that is not regularly on display, that is not featured on prime time TV, but that eventually also represents the outcome of technological utopia, where the smell is of "burning plastic". One might argue that Anderson urges her audiences to realise that her allegiance to commodity culture represents the exact extent of her mistrust. From her own privileged position in mediatised culture she reveals what it takes for these shining performances to be kept continuously on display, that is, to continue to perform efficiently. Anderson uses cultural performance to un-mask the performance of technology, her own mediatised presence—she is no longer a body, but a product—an attestation of the filthy truth of factories, industries and power plants that are behind the production of commodity

culture. Thus, the smell of "burning plastic" in "Puppet Motel" represents an indisputable reference to the machinery used to produce and maintain commodity culture. We are confronted with the realities of production that lurk underneath utopia achieved: the realities of work and of environmental destruction that commodity culture, intent on displaying only utopia achieved, conceals. Anderson continues:

> I drink a cup of coffee I try to revive
>
> My mind's a blank I'm barely alive
>
> My nerves are shot I feel like hell
>
> Guess it's time to check in
>
> At the Puppet Motel.
>
> Boot up. Good afternoon. Pause.
>
> Oooo. I really like the way you talk.
>
> Pardon me. Shut down.

This last part of the song-text shows how much Anderson recognises the addictive, at times symbiotic relation that is established between commodity culture and the "residents" of "The Puppet Motel". It is a twofold action, at once exhausting ("I drink a cup of coffee I try to revive") and curative ("My nerves are shot I feel like hell / Guess it's time to check in / At the Puppet Motel"). Anderson's views on commodity culture's (and, consequently, mediatised performance's) hold of reality is quite unusual: the words she uses to characterise this relation ("Boot up. Pause. Shut down") and which—again—are normally used in reference to computers serve here the purpose of giving her own reality the dimension needed to expose the outcome of commodity culture from within: stereotyped into functioning according to technological performance, turned into commodities, we act similarly to objects, stereotyped into function by performance.

3.5.2 "Night in Baghdad"

Read along with "The Puppet Motel", "Night in Baghdad" sounds strangely premonitory, verging on the realm usually covered by science-fiction narratives. It starts out describing what appears to be a news broadcast, as if Anderson's alter-ego—reporting on an occasional festivity—would be dreamily explaining the beauty of its fireworks:

> And oh it's so beautiful
>
> It's like the Fourth of July
>
> It's like a Christmas tree
>
> It's like the fireflies on a summer night.

Anderson's account of the beauty of these fireworks does not prepare her audience for what comes next, as we soon discover:

> And I wish I could describe this to you better.
>
> But I can't talk very well now
>
> Cause I've got this damned gas mask on.

In this part of the song-text, Anderson undermines the suggestion that these events are a celebration. Seemingly contradictory, Anderson's revelation—that she is wearing a gas mask—serves to give these "fireworks" ominous proportions. At this point her narration suddenly acquires a more desperate tone. As Anderson fails to describe with more detail the beauty of these "fireworks", because of the gas mask she wears, audiences begin to wonder what kind of fireworks are these. At what kind of "festivities" does one need to wear a gas mask? Hardly ever. If this must be understood as an allegory, it would be more likely to appear at some sort of biological "war-fair" scene in science-fiction books. However, it appears in one of Anderson's performances.

From such perspective, audiences begin to realise that, in "Night in Baghdad", these "fireworks" must take place in a war torn territory. Interestingly, the title "Night in

Baghdad" hints at the city of Baghdad, extensively damaged during the Gulf War. Thus, Anderson's mimicking of a newsbroadcast is, perhaps, intentional and the detachment with which she speaks these lines of the song-text, ironically, may seem reminiscent of CNN's anchor persons, who, between 1990 and 1991, reported 24 hours a day on the Gulf War.

Eventually then, these fireworks Anderson described as beautiful symbolise what millions of spectators throughout the world saw "live" on television: the Gulf War. Thus, in "Night in Baghdad" the war —"live" on TV—comes to resemble festivities in warm summer nights with fireflies breezing by, fireworks not at all unlike those of the Fourth of July, here used as a "celebration" of another kind. Anderson's point of attack emphasises not only how, on television, the images of the Gulf War were made to resemble commemorations but also how, framed as they were on television (that is resembling beautiful fireworks), these images were confusing, mesmerising, double edged. At the same time in which television made them beautiful, these were images of horror and death. From this perspective, Jean Baudrillard's provocative announcement that the Gulf War never really took place, that it was a simulated event, may begin to make sense. Anderson's performance seems to illustrate precisely the extent to which reality in contemporary society becomes indistinguishable from its performance in the media.

As I have argued, "Night in Baghdad" reads as Anderson's reaction upon watching (similar to millions) the Gulf War "live" on CNN. There is more, however. "Night in Baghdad" gets even more complicated when, immediately following the revelation that Anderson's alter-ego is wearing a gas mask that hinders her "performance", one of the consequences of reporting under such circumstances is the method devised by Anderson's alter-ego to continue reporting. Something happens, because she cannot talk very well:

> So I'm just going to stick this microphone out the window
>
> And see if we can hear a little better. Hello California?
>
> What's the weather like out there now?

Given the circumstances, the challenge of reporting (honestly, faithfully?), as Anderson's remark above suggests, is handed over to technological performance. Thus, technological performance assumes yet another role. What the line "So I'm just going to stick this microphone out the window" eventually amounts to is the disclosure of an apparently faultless procedure to go on reporting.

Similar to the language game played by the American military in the media, Anderson's language game in "Night in Baghdad" hints at our reliance on technological performance, a fact she conveys by "sticking" a microphone out of the window. In this way, her "reporting on the war" is done by a device, a machine that performs, not a human agent. As she hands over her account to technological performance, as she falls back into the "arms" of technological performance, it is not only as if technology would enable a more precise response, a more efficient performance, but also a justification for any possible mistakes, by removing the human body from the site. In this sense, "Night in Baghdad" is reminiscent of "O Superman's" questioning of our complete reliance on technological performance (the figure of Mom, who now also has petrochemical arms). Alternatively, in "Night in Baghdad" Anderson's interrogation of technological performance is made literal: as the lines quoted above seem to imply, Anderson—representing the human agent—is practically ostracised; she removes herself from actively engaging in performance leaving it all up to technological performance.

Thus, exempted from all pain and transformed into technological performance, a spectacle of sorts, the war itself becomes a simulated event. Such was also the narrative strategy offered by CNN: audiences were repeatedly informed that, in their attacks, American forces were precise, aimed only at strategic targets (military installations, power plants and weapon factories).[52]

Asked by Tom Stromberg in the autumn of 1991 about whether she was preoccupied with the Gulf War, Anderson came up with this:

> Yes. There have been so many arrangements with the American military. Just like in every war the military pursue a well-defined aim. Part of it consists in dictating to broadcasting stations how the war is to be reported, what language to use when and where. Therefore, the whole world has been listening to news broadcasts straight out of the Pentagon. During the Gulf War it was almost impossible for anyone to object to policy or tactics. The war was presented of course as a drama, an advertisement, a show, complete with super graphics and a thunderous patriotic soundtrack. It was already in post-production while it was still happening. ("The Speed of Change" 16)

Ten years on, the situation in Afghanistan shows both what has and what has not changed. In 2001-2002, the war on Afghanistan, supposedly "the war against terror", was also already in post-production while it was still happening. The coherence of the televised flow of narratives was only momentarily brought to a halt by the first attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. For a few minutes only, while the attacks were being perpetrated, the machinery of history was brought to a halt. The sheer destructive power of those events invalidated the coherence of narratives. Soon after that, the machinery of American history recovered, CNN and its attendant vehicles were put back into full operation: their own mediatised performances engaging the Western world into coherence, delivering justification and serving one major purpose, that of sustaining America (perhaps the world?) together against an enemy who, in one of the most appalling examples of contemporary resistant performances, does not come from the outside, but from within: the three attacks on U.S. institutions were perpetrated and succeeded using America's own resources.

Taking the argument home, after the events of 11 September 2001 in New York City which, again, were not only seen "live" on television but which triggered America's war against terror, "Night in Baghdad" sounds strangely premonitory, ostensibly

exposing—to my mind—one of America's best kept secrets: namely, that Americans[53] have been compelled to have high performance systems (cultural, technological, bureaucratic or otherwise) substitute faith. That is, now that "America" can hardly distinguish between reality and its media presentation (what is live and what is on record), America's number one axiom—high performance (such as the one proposed by the media)—has replaced faith as its narrative of choice, as its organising principle of choice.[54] Thus, Americans have only high performance systems, Mom's petrochemical arms of "O Superman", to fall back on.

The outcome is quite clear. Now that faith, belief and religion have been exchanged for their performance, that is, have become solely informed by the performative (on television but also elsewhere), Americans face their ultimate challenge: to make the final substitution and believe solely in the power of the performative. I can think of a time when not only Americans will be concerned with such substitution but, consequently, the whole Western world, whose performance has become increasingly informed by American high performance systems.

The consequences are easily spotted; here and there some indications simply surface. Watching the Gulf War on television, Anderson is dumbfounded: it looks like fireworks. Watching on CNN America mourn "live" the deaths at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, at times only the presence of so many American presidents (and the appropriate accompanying narrative) may have hinted to audiences that this was not a performance of another kind, a televised show with music. Watching these events live on television, audiences may begin to have a more precise idea as to the relevance high performance systems have acquired in American everyday and political life: broadcast by CNN to the whole world, America's "televised" mourning, augmented and largely intensified by mediatisation, was not only a spectacle of sorts, but eventually became

mourning itself, substituting, reshaping and replacing forever other realities not made visible at that point in time.

3.5.3 "Same Time Tomorrow"

Bright Red ends in a sombre note, returning Anderson to the territory she had first explored in "From the Air". It recalls crucial points not only in relation to her own process of mediatisation but also in relation to the role of technological performance. "Same Time Tomorrow"—both the last performance of the album and the last song-text analysed in this study—once again exposes the leakages between "reality" and its "performance", between "reality" and its media presentation. Consequently, "Same Time Tomorrow"—as if completing the circle of Anderson's mediatised performances for Warner that had invaded the world of pop music—can be taken to indicate Anderson's return to a familiar landscape: once again she interrogates how the overwhelming presence of technology is shaping up human behaviour, constructing identities, and changing our perception of how reality is constructed.

Similarly to "From the Air" and "O Superman", the former focusing on an aeroplane about to attempt a crash landing, the latter, on the messages left on a telephone answering machine, "Same Time Tomorrow" begins by describing an ordinary home appliance:

> You know that little clock, the one on your VCR
> the one that's always blinking twelve noon
> because you never figured out
> how to get in there and change it?

These lines of the song-text quoted above seem to indicate the precise extent to which technological performance has come to define reality. Anderson's argument here—based

on a simple observation—is rather typical, and the thematic strand explored by this song-text engages technological performance from the outset. In a language game that—similarly to that in "From the Air"—explores how technological performance can act upon human beings both changing and influencing our perception of what reality is, "Same Time Tomorrow" begins with an apparently ordinary observation about a home appliance, a VCR. Concentrating on its clock that is always displaying the same time because adjusting the correct time on it is rather cumbersome, "Same Time Tomorrow" hints precisely at technological performance's invisible rules through the emphasis placed on the difficulty of adjusting a simple clock, evidenced in the line "how to get *in there*" (my emphasis).

At this point, the tension in Anderson's performance seems to be constructed around the line "because you never figured out how to get in there and change it", which has one point of convergence:

> So it's always the same time
>
> just the way it came from the factory.
>
> Good morning. Good night.
>
> Same time tomorrow. We're in record.

By focusing on a simple home appliance, Anderson manages to expose the complexity certain technological performances entail. That is, what becomes apparent from this part of the song-text is that—similarly to her own mediatised performances—certain technologies result in changes of perception: time, on the VCR, repeats itself since it is always blinking the same hour and minutes, on a device primarily designed to mark the evolution of time. Consequently, because the clock (an indicative of our ability to measure time) is always "blinking twelve noon"—the factory's "default" hour—eventually "Same Time Tomorrow" asks what exactly is the difference between real time and its record? Thus, "Same Time Tomorrow" suggests something of the complexity involving the triad

mediatised presence, technological performance, and the economy of repetition from Anderson's characteristic approach to technology.

In "From the Air" Anderson had focused on a rather terminal situation (a plane about to crash land) to render void the difference between *uttering* certain lines in performance, and *repeating* those lines on record, thus, in mediatised performance. In "Same Time Tomorrow" Anderson manages to convey the confusion that is prone to happen between the two not only by focusing on the clock but also by playing, once more, with the reality of our sense of time: "We're in record" indicates that the present is not the present anymore, but rather its performance.

It is from such perspective that live performance fails to make itself distinct from mediatised performance. It is also from such perspective that one can make better sense of mediatised performances as an extraordinary tool for the economy of repetition. Anderson is able to question and expose the effects of certain routines—certain technologies—on our perception of how reality is constructed: the VCR's clock, from Anderson's perspective, suggests something of the complexity of the routines that technological performance imposes on human beings, thus something of the manner by which technological performance eventually comes to take hold on reality.

As I have argued, this is a thematic strand which—having already figured in "From the Air", analysed at the beginning of this chapter—is not strange to Anderson, but which in "Same Time Tomorrow" acquires a distinctly sombre note, as the next part of the song-text indicates:

> So here are the questions: Is time long or is it wide?
> And the answers? Sometimes the answers
> just come in the mail. And one day you get the letter
> you've been waiting for forever. And everything it says

is true. And then the last line says:

Burn this. We're in record.

At this point, Anderson seems at her most earnest. She pauses briefly before introducing these questions, as if her pause would signal a change in mood, a sign of how her language game, transcending and escaping its frame, bears on "reality". This particular part of the song-text, especially its last line ("We're in record"), does not hide an essential principle according to which the economy of repetition—of which Anderson, as we have seen, is part herself—seems to operate. See Jacques Attali, who writes of the changes taken to effect in society by the incorporation of music into the economy of repetition:

> Because our societies have the illusion that they change quickly, because the past slips always forgotten, because identity is intolerable, we still refuse to accept this most plausible hypothesis: if our societies seem unpredictable, if the future is difficult to discern, it is perhaps quite simply because *nothing happens, except the artificially created pseudoevents and chance violence that accompany the emplacement of repetitive society.* (90, italics in the original)

Attali writes of the economy of repetition, but the same observations could be brought to bear on the intensification of the performative in contemporary societies. In other words, the quote above seems to offer an answer for the question posed by Anderson: What happens when the whole world is intensified by means of performance? Curiously Anderson's comment ("We're in record") takes place in mediatised performance, a product of media technology intended for repeated circulation. According to Anderson, once technological performances have taken over, have taken control, there is little need to worry about impossible questions, no need for complex and abstract thoughts: the answers, surprisingly, come "in the mail", i.e., are delivered to your door by a system put into full operation.

The last part of "Same Time Tomorrow" is rather typical of Anderson's songwriting. She counterbalances despair (also evidenced by cries which seem to escape the meaning of human language) with apparently more mundane observations:

> And what I really wanna know is: Are things getting better
>
> or are they getting worse? Can we start all over again?
>
> Stop. Pause. We're in record. Good morning. Good night.
>
> Now I in you without a body move.
>
> And in our hearts we fly. Standby.
>
> Good morning. Good night.

I think that—facing the events of 11 September 2001 in New York—by the time Anderson finally asks "and what I really wanna know is this: Are things getting better or are they getting worse? Can we start all over again?" very few people, hanging on, say, to the narratives proposed by CNN, will be able to deny that something awful is going on, something unsayable.

Similarly to "From the Air", then, "Same Time Tomorrow" questions our ability to make sense of reality without performance, without the authority of the performative, that is, without confusing fact with commentary. Given its scope, "Same Time Tomorrow" represents the extent to which technological performance has come to shape "reality". Thus, it not only reads as something akin to a final lament—bringing Anderson back to the territory she had first explored—it also targets mediatisation and technological performance, by interrogating (and thus exposing) in a conclusive manner the complex authenticating process inherent to technological performance. Again, "Same Time Tomorrow" questions one of the essential principles upon which live performances have rested: their ephemeral quality, i.e., and their evanescence from the present.

Thus, the song-text seems to ask: What exactly happens when the past has become too long (or is it wide as Anderson puts it?) and too difficult to be accessed as a whole?

That is when time itself has become immeasurable (either too long or too wide), and—because it escapes our grasp—we must begin to access history in bits and pieces of performative nature: compilations, collections, best of everything, etc. Eventually everything reappears, resurfaces in performance. What this situation also produces is selection; certain events must be simply buried underneath the massive amount of competing commentaries striving for space, for one simple reason: there is not enough room to accommodate the events of the past in full, unless of course, our clocks stop. Performance seems to be one of these striving forces with enough power to compete, because performances strive for attention as they unfold in time; they seem to have a right to reality. Our question becomes: just how much can we take? Hence, we leave performances untouched, and the thousands of films, books, theories and records that we can not experience in full any longer attest only to the exhaustion of a certain type of knowledge: one that does not accept the supremacy of performance—mediatised or otherwise—at the root of most things. After all, performance plays a significant role, from a privileged position in the electronic scheme of things, as events that perpetually seem to strive for balance between presence and absence, attention and neglect, a balance between presence and its preservation, between what can be restored and what can not.

Thus, the relevance of Laurie Anderson's performances for Warner—always tied to the medium she selected to work with—indicates that, all in all, mediatised performances—those performances that have been fixed, made repeatable and which circulate in various forms in the mass media as products of media technology—seem to have acquired a wider impact in the economy of cultural signs at work in the present (as Auslander seems to believe) because "mediatised" performances manage to imply and explore an awareness of the way in which reality itself is, eventually, a mediated, artificial construct or series of fabricated events. Since postmodern times signal a conflation of the cultural and economic realms in which most of the *landscape* is made to pass through the

filter of the media, it seems only logical that artists of the twenty-first century, such as Anderson, should be interested in describing people's attempts at living in such heavily mediatised environment. Anderson, aware of these circumstances, combines the utterly displaced notions of individual sensibility and contrasts it with the technologies produced globally. The map she comes up with helps establish the electronic environment powered by the media as the sites of our discontents.

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[1] Images that circulate in other media (newspapers, television, video) are an important, additional complement for mediatised performances such as Anderson's: electronic audiences have to know who is singing, whose voice it is, etc.

[2] Since it is a long performance, parts of *United States I-IV* were presented in several places and at different times: Part I, for instance, was first presented at The Kitchen, New York City, in the spring of 1979; Part II at the Orpheum Theater, etc. *United States I-IV* was presented in its entirety in New York, London, and Zurich, while sections of it were presented in other theatres and concert halls across Europe and the United States (Anderson *United States I-IV Live*, sleeve notes).

[3] *The Ugly One with the Jewels* (1995) seems to fall back into the category of *United States I-IV Live*. Similar to its predecessor, it also documents a live performance (recorded in London), being sometimes classified by retail shops as a "spoken word" record.

[4] Inevitably, we must come round to the idea that only the context of yuppie culture in the America of the 1980s could have supported the commercial release of a *five*-record set by a (then) largely unknown recording artist such as Laurie Anderson into the popular music market. Additionally, it is more of an "LA" trademark rather than a shortcoming that material which has been previously used and released will resurface either altered or in full (catch phrases, single thoughts and musical lines) in her subsequent recordings. One can argue that since *United States I-IV* is close to eight hours long, it is only reasonable that it would become a repository of Anderson's ideas, parts of it continually reappearing throughout her career at Warner. At one point these performances are depressing: who needs to be confronted, and that for eight hours, with the most vicious aspects of contemporary life? One would much rather look at the other, brighter side from time to time.

[5] I think a clarification is necessary on matters pertaining to individual "authorship." Not unlike other complex media products such as film and television programs for which it is difficult to establish authorship to one single person, in a traditional, more literary sense, Anderson's music, her releases for Warner Brothers, can also be thought of as a collective experience for which the notion of "author" is not as relevant as in, say, literature again. In spite of this, Anderson's lyrics, the textual element of her performances, eventually, my main concern here, are all credited to her authorship. Thus, I am regarding Laurie Anderson as the author of these performances, even though I recognise the somewhat collective character of their authorship, which includes the various musicians, mixers, producers, etc.

[6] In addition to these strategies, Anderson has continually developed new ways in which to bring her work to the foreground, as the marketing strategy for *Strange Angels* attests. For this album (1989) Anderson decided to make a series of "public service announcements" (or "long talks" as she put it) in American Universities which "goes back and forth between story-telling and advocacy" ("The Speed of Change" 15).

[7] I have to make sure that I am not implying that something like the exhaustion of performances, mediatised or otherwise, does not take place in the long run. A good example of this may be the constant presence of, say, Bach and Mozart as background music in shopping malls, and of Leonardo's *Monalisa* in the media. To me, their constant mediated presence entails yet another transgression: they acquire a different role, perhaps at another crossroads, between commodity and iconic representation.

[8] It is interesting to notice how the replacement of older technologies helps expand the market created for cultural goods. Take, for instance, the market constituted for private, home viewing of performances since the early 1980s with the arrival of home video (VHS, Betamax). As new technologies set in, say, DVD, not only a demand is newly created by the introduction of new devices and titles that help expand a (sometimes) stagnant market, but one can read in this a strategy of insertion and expansion: these commodities represent a desperate, last will to make profits by, say, spreading mediatised versions of 1950s Hollywood's films into far away corners where these commodities had not previously reached. In other words, what is the point of, say, the average citizen owning complete performances in portable form, if not the maintenance of more profitable electronic presence and the creation of other equally profitable performances?

[9] I think the events of 11 September 2001 in the U.S. must be taken as exemplary of television's towering presence in the contemporary world: broadcast by CNN and hundreds of other television networks, the events were presented as live spectacles probably in unprecedented scale throughout the world. It is also interesting to notice the accounts of how American citizens—dozing on and off in simulation—had to be told time and again by narrators that the images they were shown were not from a movie feature.

[10] The very beginning of Part I of *United States I-IV Live* seems to propose this much, as a sequence of events (sound, slides, etc.) is mechanically recovered, triggered automatically, by means which emphasise the relevance of mediatisation (tape loops, recorders, mixers).

[11] The creation of totally virtual "characters" (superstars, heroes, etc.), such as Lara Croft, from the videogame (and now movie) *Tomb Raider,* comes to my mind as the most flagrant indication that this situation is changing fast. William Gibson has also focused on this subject in his novel *Idoru* (1997), which develops around the idea of an ageing rock legend (whose presence in the media never fades or ages) that is interested in mingling with a new, totally digital, pop star.

[12] Television, for one, has surely made the "reality" of crash landings an event available more than a couple of times. Think of the extended coverage of the facts on 11 September 2001 in which the World Trade Center Towers in NYC were destroyed and one has an idea of such situation. Thus, Anderson's recovery of a crash-landing on record seems to be entirely appropriate, mimicking its "reality" in other media.

[13] The vocoder is an electronic instrument that is capable of altering the pitch, speed and frequency of usually the human voice which is often used in disco and dance music to give the human voice a distinct "robotized" quality.

[14] It is interesting to note that "autobiography" is a common, and, as Marvin Carlson suggests, "the most typical orientation of feminist performance", which is afterall one of the identities that Anderson explores (*Performance: A Critical Introduction* 150).

[15] One of the most explicit examples of Anderson's use of 'autobiography' is "For instants", a piece which is also cited by Goldberg. It develops around the problems and interferences noticed by the performer in putting together the performance piece that is eventually being presented to the audience.

[16] It is an essential point that silence (the refusal to speak, or, sometimes act) is highly performative, something which Anderson often uses.

[17] Excepting, of course, rave and dance culture of the late 1980s, early 1990s, for which social interaction triggered by the consumption of the drug "Ecstasy" seemed to be the key pattern of behaviour.

[18] Not that performance is not dictated by social groups, but technology comes to replace such rules with its own.

[19] As I have already pointed out, in fact, repetitions, recurring themes, and patterns that evolve and come back are some of Anderson's most characteristic "trademarks."

[20] Although I have argued at length in the previous chapter that Anderson's performances are a crossover into the world of popular music, it must be clear that her themes and use of electronics, let alone her unlikely rhythmical patterns, make it for difficult listening sometimes, a fact she herself acknowledges in *United States I-IV Live* in a song called "Difficult Listening Hour", and in the name of the company that is responsible for the copyright and publishing of her songs, ironically, "Difficult Music."

[21] Anderson's song is based on Massenet's "O Souverain" from "*Le Cid*", which is basically a cry for help, as Anderson put it herself (*Nerve Bible* 168). "O Superman" was written in collaboration with Robert Coe, whom Anderson met in 1979, and whom she credits for changing certain lines of the song. I am aware that, as with most cultural commodities today, the question of individual authorship can not be denied in Anderson's case: since Warner has produced her recordings, it would only be natural to consider its executives, producers and recording engineers as co-authors of such performances. However, since it is not my objective to delve into questions of authorship, I am leaning towards a more earthly approach that identifies Laurie Anderson as the primary author of these song-texts and performances.

[22] Resembling a faint car alarm, the musical line from "O Superman" has been appropriated by a company for the advertisement of its products without Anderson's previous knowledge.

[23] If "Mom's" message were also unidentified, would it not be rather obscure as well?

[24] Recorded between July and December'1983 and released in 1984.

[25] As I have pointed out, both live and recorded versions of *United States I-IV,* and which were produced at different times, can be taken to remain a repository for Anderson to draw ideas from. The recorded version of *United States I-IV*, labelled *Live*, was not released until 1984, the same year in which Warner released *Mr.Heartbreak.*

[26] Colin Counsell calls "O Superman" from the *Big Science* album "a successful invasion of the realm of pop music" (*Signs* 227).

[27] Classifying musical genres, as Simon Frith demonstrates, is not an easy task. Since it is not my objective here to delve into such questions, I will only illustrate how, by "reorganising" the theory devised by Franco Fabbri, Frith comes up with the following four ways of establishing categories, treating performance as central to clarify genre rules: Sound conventions (what you hear), performing conventions (what you see), packaging conventions (how a type of music is sold), and embodied values (the music's ideology). (*Performing Rites* 94)

[28] Peter Gabriel, a former member of *Genesis*, left the group to engage in more political material. His song "Biko", about a South African martyr, was a great hit in the early 1980s. Bill Laswell, a former member of The Golden Palominos, also left the group to further his experiments which are too many to mention but which include experimental recordings using samples and recorded speeches as well as remixing of traditional Cuban and Yiddish musicians.

[29] Even though William S. Burroughs remains primarily a literary figure, his influence is noticeable across a variety of fields. For one thing, writers of the beat generation (Jack Kerouac, for instance) were greatly influenced by jazz, especially the bebop patterns of Dizzy Gillespie. Burroughs' own experiments have also taken him to record and edit various musical tapes, having later in life even recorded a rap album with San Francisco based rappers Heroes of Hypocrisy (1995) and released an independent recording with film director Gus van Sant, as well as various recordings of his own literary material.

[30] For Simon Frith pop music records are organised around the "means and possibilities of turning sounds into commodities." Consequently, "sales charts become the measure and symbol of 'good' pop music" (*Performing Rites* 41).

[31] A common criticism thrown at Anderson's recordings is that musically her output is not sophisticated enough.

[32] It is interesting to notice how the notion of representational visibility is a two way road. What is visible to one field of artistic practice may not be so to another. For example, Anderson's output at Warner disrupts pop performance, but still it represents an incorporation of its rules, a serious break up with the rules of avant-garde performance art that has been enacted by Anderson's crossover into popular culture.

[33] Interestingly, Sharkey's character—personified in "Sharkey's Night" by W.S.Burroughs own voice—can be taken to become Burroughs' own alter ego in performance: W.S.Burroughs is Anderson's Mr.Heartbreak, the man who, had he known how to talk to Nature, would understand what these dreamy landscapes are trying to tell him but who so far only sees "two tiny pictures of myself and there's one in each of your eyes".

[34] Here is another observation by Anderson: "I once wrote to Thomas Pynchon and asked for his permission to write an opera based on *Gravity's Rainbow*. I didn't really expect an answer from

this famously silent man. However, a few weeks later a letter arrived. He graciously complimented me on my idea and said of course I could do it; his only condition was that the whole opera be scored for solo banjo. Some people have the nicest way of saying no" (laurieanderson.com/notesonmoby.html 03/12/99).

[35] The same strategy reappears in many other songs from the Warner period.

[36] W.S.Burroughs has experimented in writing with what he calls the "Cut up" technique, a way of randomly editing texts (but also tapes and film) by literally cutting them up and then pasting them back together. Such technique owes much to chance and DADA.

[37] "Language is a virus from outer space." Credited to W.S.Burroughs in the reprinted lyrics of *Home of the Brave.*

[38] For my purposes here, *Home of the Brave* should be considered Anderson's immediate release after *Mr.Heartbreak*, since—because of its live counterpart—I am not considering *United States I-IV Live*, as an output that can be compared to Anderson's other albums for Warner Brothers.

[39] Curiously, Anderson's recent project, involving a live concert and a recording, is based on Melville's book, of which she says: "I began to work on this project because a multimedia producer was making a series for high school kids about books. He was worried that books are disappearing and he wanted to do something that would get kids interested in reading. So he asked several artists to pick their favorite books and write monologues about why they liked them. I chose *Moby Dick.* Although pieces of Melville's text have cropped up in some of my songs and films over the years, I hadn't really read the whole book since high school. And I was a bit nervous. I had a vague recollection of being very bored by a lot of the whaling details and technical paraphernalia. I also remember thinking that the captain and his obsession with the whale was a bit over the top, too fantastic, too Shakespearean" (laurieanderson.com/notesonmoby.html 03/12/99).

[40] Anderson has modified a variety of violins to meet her purposes. One of the most often used ones has replaced the bow and strings for magnetic audio tape and heads which then make the violin function similarly to a tape recorder but with the ability freely and purposefully to go back an forth between recorded excerpts, as the magnetic tape, following the manner in which the violin is played, is moved on the head's reading surface.

[41] In the Introduction to *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective 1972-1992,* Anderson consciously equates songs to dreams, and, ironically, acknowledges how difficult it is to "talk" about songs, perhaps for a similar reason that it is difficult to talk about dreams: "Finally, even though I've written many songs, I've found that it's almost impossible to talk about music. One of my favourite quotations is something that the comedian Steve Martin said: 'Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.' So the songs drift in and out soundlessly, in fragments, like the dreams they really are" (*Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective 1972-1992,* np.).

[42] The example cited by Auslander is "Talkshow" from *United States I-IV Live.*

[43] *Strange Angels* also includes in its artwork the reproduction of a letter addressed to Robert Mapplethorpe. Mapplethorpe, who had died in 1988 of AIDS related complications, had also been the subject of vicious right-wing attacks because of his photographs of men.

[44] The cover of *Home of the Brave* is a shot from the film; it shows Anderson's body silhouetted against the back projecting canvas used in the film. As we have seen, *Mr.Heartbreak*'s cover is from an original lithograph by Anderson. See Appendix 2.

[45] We have already seen Anderson's protest against her multiplied presence in "Talk Normal" from the *Home of the Brave* recording.

[46] Facing the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, it is impossible to avoid the relevance and pertinence of Baudrillard's vocabulary here: the attempts at meaning making that have been adopted by CNN immediately after the attacks fail miserably to give order and construct assimilable justifications for the tragedy; these however, following the accumulation of narratives typical of the contemporary world and forwarded by television itself, in a short time will cumulate to mask the unspeakable, vesting it with a variety of courteous, diplomatic and stereotyped notions that will further and maintain America's War machine in full operation. In fact, CNN today seems to be America's number one vehicle to render visible—through rhetoric—the possibility of War.

[47] Moreover, not any European city, but Berlin, a city whose historical dimension has been imprinted in practically everyone of us because of the wall that ever since WWII until 1989 had divided the city in two.

[48] Brian Eno, known both for his experimental projects (*Music for Films, Music for Airports,* etc) as well as his influence as a producer of other pop/rock bands among which U2, is perhaps best known as the man who, in the early 1970s, propelled Roxy Music in the band's more experimental treatments. Needless to say Lou Reed is also a key figure of pop having been part of Warhol's The Velvet Underground in the middle 1960s.

[49] "Tightrope", one of the album's song-texts, begins with a proposition that had already appeared in *United States I-IV Live:* "Last night I dreamed I died / and that my life had been re-arranged into some kind of theme park" (*Bright Red* "Tightrope").

[50] *The Puppet Motel* is also the title of Anderson's CD ROM project (with Hsin-Chien Huang) which, as McKenzie aptly puts, is part of Anderson's "media blitz" in 1994-1995. Her so-called "media-blitz" includes a book, a worldwide tour, the proposal for a public memorial, an Internet homepage, and two CD releases by Warner (*Bright Red* and *The Ugly One with the Jewels*—the latter recorded live in London).

[51] Cyberspace is a widely used term now that virtual reality and the Internet are also household notions. It first appeared in the science-fiction writings of Canadian William Gibson, who is usually acknowledged as the creator of the expression in his cyberpunk trilogy. The term refers to an artificial, digitally created environment—not completely unlike the world wide web—in which Gibson's characters dwell.

[52] When—later—it turned out that these attacks had hit hospitals and villages, reports stated that these were also disguised weapon assembly plants, biological warfare laboratories, etc.

[53] But I can think of the whole Western world being subjected to this.

[54] Buried so deeply in simulation, America had to be shaken out of its daydreaming. After the attack reports began to circulate, stating that a number of people, New Yorkers and foreigners alike, only realised they were not watching a movie flick because the screen logo on their television sets read "The Weather Channel". Additionally, on 6 November 2001 BBC news report on cable television informed that American President George W. Bush had explained the role of coalition forces: their support, he allegedly had said, must not be restricted to diplomatic efforts and loyalty; instead these countries were expected to "perform." Such demarcation is a clever appropriation. Intentionally confusing, it avoids locating power in discourse. That is, the usage of the term "perform" (in the President's speech) tries to evade the performative in the words themselves, by locating power in action, not in words (something which the pronouncement is doing itself).

Conclusion

This research is a not a primer on the process of mediatisation itself but rather a rehearsal of its possibilities. Thus, I would like to end somewhere near the place I began. Because the performances I was interested in in this study have been elsewhere referred to as "crossover performances" (Birringer *Media* 65), my logical starting point was to establish the overall relevance of the term "crossover" for performance art in general and for Anderson's own particular brand of performances. Thus, in the first part of this study, I investigated and interrogated notions of performance and performance art under the light of performance theory, while Chapter 2 delved more precisely into the question of mediatisation.

The first point made then was that Anderson's performances for Warner Brothers are crossovers in many ways: one, in the sense that—taking on from the traditional notions of performance presented in Chapter 1—the performances I have considered represent an electro/electronic body which, stretching out into popular music, also engages the industrial resources of the field making extensive use of its modes of production and distribution. Interestingly—and this is part of the reason why Laurie Anderson makes such a telling case—it is popular music, to borrow Auslander's phrasing, which "over the last twenty-five years provide[s] an index to the issues confronting any form of cultural production under postmodernism" (*Presence* 3). If Auslander is right (and I suspect he is), Anderson's entrance into popular music is not inconsistent. As Auslander himself points out, "the idea that an artistic discourse could participate in a commodity economy yet retain its political significance and integrity was not foreign to the 1960s, but it was articulated in the context of rock music rather than of the theater" (*Presence* 39). The logic of rock and roll, supported by its consumers, and

which seemed to involve the implosion of capitalist culture from within, demanded that people went out to buy new records, thus participating in the economy of repetition on an even more reliable basis. This is particularly problematic because the traditional notions of performance established in Chapter 1 have predominantly suggested a reaction against commodity culture and the economy of repetition that Anderson fully embraced. Consequently, Anderson's position in the cultural continuum is changeable, destabilising and unsettling the immediate significance of the medium (popular music, performance art) she uses.

The second reason for Anderson's performances to endure as crossovers lies in the fact that Anderson's performances refuse to be "ephemeral", "evanescent" as normally acknowledged by dramatic performance art; i.e., her performances have been rendered fixed, made repeatable. In sum, boosted by mediatisation. This would not only help her destabilise many of the precepts upon which performance art relies, but also provide her unprecedented space from which to observe the many changes an industrial mode of cultural production produces. In a word, Anderson willingly sought to turn her performances into commodities. Again, as detailed in Chapter 1, this is something which avant-garde performance art has always tried to avoid but which has been consistently sought after by Anderson.

Third, rather curiously but not paradoxically, it was important to establish how Anderson's performances, in spite of mediatisation or commodification, were still implicated in criticising practices that denied cultural products which participated in commodity culture as a clear demarcation line as that established to protect high art as the realm of meaning and low or commodified art as the realm of non-meaning (Auslander *Presence* 170). As a consequence, I pointed out, the relevance of the stories Anderson tells is firmly tied to the mechanics of mediatisation of her performances.

Trying to establish a location for Anderson's crossover, I came upon her focus on the verbal aspects of her performances. On several opportunities Anderson has defined herself not only as a talking artist but also as a storyteller. To me then, her artistic output at Warner represents a contemporary—consequently also a better integrated—version of such roles (that of the storyteller and talking artist) which, as Bauman argues, are part of social practices that give emotional and cognitive coherence to experience, both constructing and negotiating social identity (*Story* 113). Thus, I have tried to foreground the relevance Anderson herself gives to the textual and verbal aspects of her performances, a priority that is reflected in my own analysis. Additionally, as a way of further reflecting on the theoretical material, I have included three Interludes, which take the argument home, that is, which represent the extent to which identity formation and mediatised performance seem to be involved in a complex process of authentication.

Having such premises in mind, this research proposed to examine a selection of song-texts from mediatised performances of Laurie Anderson's released by entertainment giant Warner Brothers. One of my aims has been to test the extent to which these exemplify a contested notion of performance based upon the observation that—at the beginning of this new century—mediatised performances, as previously defined, seem to have acquired more prestige, thus bearing a wider impact on the economy of cultural signs at work in the present (Auslander *Liveness* 5, 162), especially in respect to countries (viz. Brazil) which seem (culturally, economically) to orbit other more advanced capitalist societies such as the U.S.

As has been pointed out, coming from the New York avant-garde art world, Anderson "sells out" and enters commodity culture via mass produced popular recordings. Her recordings for Warner Brothers not only bring together the worlds of avant-garde performance and popular music into the landscape of electronic, mediatised

performance distributed world-wide, but they do so as integral, self-sufficient electronic performances disseminated primarily as bland entertainment, mass produced cultural products aimed at displaced audiences the world over. In the aforementioned Interludes, I have located myself as part of such displaced, electronic audience.

From this pespective, Anderson's "mediatised" performances also imply and explore an awareness of the way in which reality itself is, eventually, a mediated, artificial construct or series of fabricated events. Thus, her mediatised performances recognise that attempts which aim at creating a transparent language that would serve as the means to explore objective reality have proven deficient. In other words, Anderson's mediatised performances become events that can be hardly duplicated in a live environment, for the stories she tells acknowledge their own status as media within a mediatic system that includes mass media and information technologies (Auslander *Liveness* 6). In addition, mediatised performances seem to offer an enhancement and extrapolation of physical space. I have tried to reflect on this disposition in the analysis of her song-texts carried out in Chapter 3.

Once Anderson's usage of some of popular music's resources in performance has been understood, an additional reason for her performances to crossover lies in the fact that they rely on electronic presence; that is, Anderson's performances are not tied to a particular place, time and/or our specific effort to participate in them as a specialised activity. Much to the contrary, perhaps similarly to television, the experience of Anderson's performances is continuous with our everyday (Auslander *Presence* 66), not only replicating but also extending presence. Moreover, because Anderson's presence is disembodied, i.e., her "body" in performance is always mediated, her mediated persona is invariably implicated in telling stories about positioning itself and its audiences in relation to media derived experience. Anderson's disembodied voice in performance, as I

have argued, not only "outlives" her own physical body; it also surpasses the scope of her spatio-temporal frame. The performances she has recorded for Warner, therefore, represent a "safe haven" in which a mediatised, disembodied version of her own physical body circulates "in perpetuity", similar in many ways to the terms that her contract with Warner Brothers anticipated. Consequently, these stories are determined by the fact that they have been preserved on record, become mediatised.

Additionally, by fitting into the particular slot of popular music, Anderson is able to tell stories that emphasise audiences' own relationship with consumer products, their desire for proximity and ownership. Thus, Anderson's embracing of popular culture results in the subversion of performance's first principle: that it is ephemeral, non-repeatable, live art. Having thus identified the major ways in which Anderson engages performance in postmodern mediatised culture, I tried to delineate the main reasons and implications of this crossover movement in her work of the 1980s and early 1990s. I have concluded that, by inserting her performances into the environment of mass media, Anderson can better negotiate the impact of mass media and technologies upon individuals.

By the 1980s performers such as Anderson began to recognise in the failure of the 1960s political strategies to engage contemporary audiences in the creation of a collective experience (including those which helped define the performance field as such) a new paradigmatic break: the historical moment that was soon to be defined as postmodernism did not operate according to the same rules laid out by the historical avant-garde movements. Following Auslander's point of view here, I think that one of the reasons for the exhaustion of 1960s strategies to engage audiences lies precisely in the avant-garde's reluctance to engage commodity culture by entering into its economy of signs (Auslander *Presence* 42). Such failure of 1960s radical avant-garde and

subsequent movements committed to historical concepts of the avant-garde is brought about because one of postmodern culture's most common forms of collective experience is expressed by consumers in their relation to mass media. That is, in the 1980s what had shifted from the premises of the avant-garde and political theatre of the 1960s in relation to performances is that performances in the 1980s participated in the commodity economy. Anderson's work is exemplary of this process. Not only has she embraced popular culture by producing records, but she seems to reflect Auslander's position regarding the terms mass culture and avant-garde: these terms are tendencies rather than identities, and artists can sometimes occupy more than one position simultaneously (*Presence* 170).

Thus, focusing solely on Anderson's recorded performances has enabled me legitimately to deal with mediated performances within a mediated culture from the point of view of her "electronic" audience, something which—given the extent of the mass media today—I have found to be intriguing. For one thing, Anderson's performances have appealed to me from within my own cultural context, triggered by the experience of listening to them from a considerable spatial distance from where they originally happened, and in denial of older performative premises such as presence. Perhaps I should mention now the fact that I have seen Anderson perform live only once[1] and this would serve to recall an issue I want to believe is at the heart of Laurie Anderson's performances, and, consequently, of this research: the relevance of mediatised performance and the economic/cultural import of such practices. Performances such as Anderson's then, unlike avant-garde performances of the circuit art-gallery/museum/theatre, form a distinctive electronic body of virtual performances that can reach across cultural and national barriers to deliver their messages precisely because

they actively engage in popular culture's modes of production which, as we have seen, form one of the strongholds for their electronic audiences.

One of my purposes then was tentatively to point out just how much Anderson's recorded performances for Warner Brothers from the 1980s take on from a general crisis in contemporary thought (questions and positions that might have been circulating in the small circles of the academy and avant-garde for years now) and turn these into a much more adequate product: that of multimedia performance plugged into the economy of repetition through the machinery of popular music. Exactly because Laurie Anderson crosses over, plugs her performances into the corporate body of commodity production, she reaches out for a much wider audience, which concurrently will generate the revenue to maintain her mediatised persona in operation. Anderson's "trick" has been to remain simultaneously appealing to small avant-garde audiences, the somewhat larger academy (which has relatively extensively published on her works), and her "unknown", large electronic audiences. Most importantly, Anderson's flirting with commodification enables her performances to be inserted (marketed) as commodities, delivered to your door, to a much wider, less coherent, less "specialised", "electronic" audience world-wide. This last context is the cultural context I am interested in: the context in which I have myself been inserted as part of her less coherent "electronic" audience.

Moreover, by the time Laurie Anderson's performances—these odd objects—were dropped onto my country, crossing the demarcation line from the avant-garde into popular culture and "invading" my everyday, I had no idea she had previously been—for some years—connected to (and "protected" by, as she says) the New York avant-garde art scene, having already experimented with much of the (partly autobiographic) material that would later go into her Warner Brothers records. To me, these performances came from a different direction: the world of pop, records that I would buy and play on my

turntable, musical performances[2] which—on my shelves—shared space with other more blatantly pop and rock artists, evenings spent listening to Anderson's many disguised voices, tying them up together and trying to decipher her dreams, for—as she seems to hint at in *Mister Heartbreak*—I sensed these dreams of her were trying to tell *me* something, something of a world that was close to my own and altogether miles apart. Thus, in this state of intimacy and focused attention I found myself listening to her disembodied voices, sharing some kind of electronically mastered virtual (aural) space: language was a virus from outer space, and English, a virus from the airwaves.[3]

If, as Johannes Birringer points out, a distinction can now be made between "older multimedia performances in real space" and a new virtual type he calls *multimedia software* for which interactivity seems to be the catch-all phrase, Anderson's records may constitute a step in the direction of a new kind of interaction, a new mode of propagating knowledge and curbing off the law. Thus, I strongly believe there were legitimate reasons for focusing solely on the textual aspects of Anderson's mediatised performances. As I have said, not only has Anderson defined herself as a talking artist and as a storyteller, her mediatised stories invade our space, appealing to us from within our own cultural context. Second, her verbal performances are triggered everytime they are played and, at least for the duration of her recordings, chiefly cancel live presence as a determinant of the experience, i.e., the duration of the mediatised event itself—albeit abbreviated and edited in a number of ways—also triggers the spectator's response in much a similar way as live events do.

The purpose of much of my argument in this study was, in fact, to verify to what extent Anderson inhabits and appears in this space that has been electronically generated and enhanced (mass media), at once solid (the finished performances are products, mass-produced goods) and made of thin air (their reproduction takes place as much inside your

head as on the device used to reproduce it), because performances in this electronic space have subverted the classic dependence of copies upon originals; mediatised performances not only subsist on their own, they are now rendered *virtually indistinguishable* from those in real, physical spaces. In other words, augmented by mediatisation, their "*reality*" strikes you as larger than life, that is, larger than the reality of those events taking place in real, physical space.

Thus, mediatised performances—which can take place at a considerable temporal and spatial distance from where they originally happened—can also be experienced intimately, considered from a closer perspective than ever before, subject to repeated scrutiny that is unworkable or unlikely to occur in live performances. Therefore, mediatised performances allow for new forms of participation, and—consequently—integration in the balance of power: as they offer some sort of an "intimate approach" perhaps distinguished from immersion, mediatised performances become part of an electronic flow that places the performative high up the ladder. Hence, these mediatised performances of Laurie Anderson's form a distinctive group of virtual performances, an electro/electronic body that reaches across cultural and national barriers (the distinctions between avant-garde and mass produced art, the relatively well protected physical borders of nations) to deliver messages which, as with anything else, can either reinscribe the limits between art and life, or reproduce systems of power already at work. Thus, mediatised performances—by sustaining enough corporate power (read: sales revenue)—often end up circulating the globe in perpetuity, possibly replicating themselves through the ages, in a movement parallel to colonisation, which, we know, too often becomes the hallmark of unhealthy power systems. Here, I invoke Jon McKenzie: "Performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what

discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge" (*Perform or Else* 18).

The (Insufficiently) Final Interlude

An interval of almost twenty years separates my first contact with Laurie Anderson's performances for Warner (those somewhat naive insights I have, sometimes unashamedly used as the basis for this research) and the more knowledgeable bulk of critical material I have tried to incorporate into my own writing since the beginning of this thesis. It is true that Laurie Anderson's performances, not the theory that could be read into their already suggestive spaces, have guided me. It is also true that—differently from me—these performances have not been modified: on record they sound pretty much the same as twenty years ago. In the meantime, I have come to recognise performance as the amalgam of everyday life, that which—momentarily, briefly—settles, binds and warrants "reality" to become "reality", many a time rendering visible what was once invisible or else, in the same continuous process, pierces our categories of behaviour and understanding. As I began to listen to Laurie Anderson's performances I had no idea she had been involved in and evolved from an environment that she described as small and protective of its members. In fact if one goes back to the 1960s and 1970s and re-approaches the documents of the period, its artists, and their output, one will find two guiding points: a variety of different (sometimes bizarre) performances taking place in small venues to even smaller audiences. This fact alone should prompt one to an analysis of Anderson's mediatised output.

The fact that this research has seen the light of day says much about mediatised performances and the space they occupy nowadays. Naturally, its author should be

considered a living proof of simulation, a living proof that we have, as Attali suggests, surpassed representation, "that we are verging on no longer being a society of the spectacle" (Noise 88) but perhaps of repetition: "in order to accumulate profit, it becomes necessary to sell stockpileable sign production, not simply its spectacle" (ibid.). Of course, the scope of Laurie Anderson's "electronic arms"—plugged into Warner Brothers—has managed to reach me in the confines of my Brazilian environment. Much like her own song-text "Odd Objects", Anderson's performances were dropped onto my world to contest a reality which, otherwise, I might not have imagined.

I must say that re-approaching Laurie Anderson's performances again for this research was difficult, it was difficult music after all, and I was hindered a hundred times. There were times in which I really thought her work was not as relevant as I had believed it to be (and wasn't I leading others in the same direction?). At other times, I even thought that there were more interesting crossovers taking place elsewhere in the media landscape of today. I thought for example of all those small acts put out by even smaller companies that, given the great leap digital technologies took in the last couple of years, now manage to circulate and get distributed over the "Internet". They too were empowering, perhaps in ways that Anderson's own work, now with a career that spans for more than twenty years, is not.

Nevertheless, did these recent, home-based acts not reflect a movement that paralleled what Laurie Anderson did in the 1980s? I must confess I have come to believe so. Perhaps because of this, I have eventually come to frame Anderson' s performances as "avant-garde meets pop music." But, as I write this, I immediately recognise a propensity for falsity in the terminology, human language's utter descriptive failure. What I would like to have accomplished is to have escaped these linguistic falsehoods, aberrations and distortions in favour of a more generous acceptance of different modes

of communication and seriously different performances, but then I would not have done it in writing, would I? Paraphrasing Hal Foster, in the face of an academic culture of the word, any practice that resists words is welcome.

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[1]To my luck (or not), in the words of RoseLee Goldberg, in one of her most "low-tech, stripped-down solo ... lecture-performance[s]" (Goldberg 2000 173), *Speed of Darkness* (Salzburg 1997).

[2]My interchange between the words—virtual, mediatised and Electro/electronic—is intentional: it goes to show just how varied and mutable these new technologies are. What matters here are not the words themselves, but the way in which these words share a similar semantic ground.

[3]I thank professor S.Bottoms for this insight.

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Appendix 1—The complete lyrics for the albums analysed

Big Science (1982)

"From the Air"
Good evening. This is your Captain.
We are about to attempt a crash landing.
Please extinuish all cigarettes.
Place your tray tables in their
upright, locked position.
Your Captain says: Put your head on your knees.
Your Captain says: Put your head on your hands.
Captain says: Put your hands on your head.
Put your hands on your hips. Heh heh.
This is your Captain-and we are going down.
We are all going down, together.
And I said: Uh oh. This is gonna be some day.
Standby. This is the time.
And this is the record of the time.
This is the time. And this is the record of the time.

Uh-this is your Captain again.
You know, I've got a funny feeling I've seen this all
before.
Why? Cause I'm a caveman.
Why? Cause I've got eyes in the back of my head.
Why? It's the heat. Standby.
This is the time. And this is the record of the time.
This is the time. And this is the record of the time.

Put your hands over your eyes. Jump out of the plane.
There is no pilot. You are not alone.
Standby.
This is the time. And this is the record of the time.
This is the time. And this is the record of the time.

"Big Science"

Coo coo it's cold outside. Coo coo it's cold outside.
Ooo coo coo. Don't forget your mittens.

Hey Pal! How do I get to town from here?
And he said: Well just take a right where
they're going to build that new shopping mall,
go straight past where they're going to put in the freeway,
take a left at what's going to be the new sports center,
and keep going until you hit the place where
they're thinking of building that drive-in bank.
You can't miss it. And I said: This must be the place.

Ooo coo coo. Golden cities. Golden towns.
Golden cities. Golden towns.
And long cars in long lines and great big signs
and they all say: Hallelujah.
Yodellayheehoo.
Every man for himself. Ooo coo coo.
Golden cities. Golden towns. Thanks for the ride.

Big Science. Hallelujah..
Yodellayheehoo.

You know. I think we should put some mountains here.
Otherwise, what are all the characters going to fall off of?
And what about stairs?
Yodellayheehoo. Ooo coo coo.

Here's a man who lives a life of danger.
Everywhere he goes he stays - a stranger.
Howdy stranger. Mind if I smoke? And he said:
Every man, every man for himself.

Every man, every man for himself.
All in favor say aye.

Big Science. Hallelujah..
Yodellayheehoo.

Hey Professor! Could you turn out the lights?
Let's roll the film.

Big Science. Hallelujah.
Every man, every man for himself.
Big Science. Hallelujah.
Yodellayheehoo.

"Sweaters"

I no longer love your mouth.
I no longer love your eyes.

I no longer love your eyes.
I no longer love the color of your sweaters.
I no longer love it.

I no longer love the color of your sweaters.
I no longer love the way you hold your pans
and pencils.
I no longer love it.

Your mouth. Your eyes.
The way you hold your pens and pencils.
I no longer love it. I no longer love it.

"Walking & Falling"

I wanted you. And I was looking for you.
But I couldn't find you.
I wanted you. And I was looking for you all day.
But I couldn't find you. I couldn't find you.

You're walking. And you don't always realize it,
but you're always falling.
With each step you fall forward slightly.
And then catch yourself from falling.
Over and over, you're falling.
And then catching yourself from falling.
And this is how you can be walking and falling
at the same time.

"Born, Never Asked"

It was a large room. Full of people. All kinds.
And they had all arrived at the same buidling
at more or less the same time.
And they were all free. And they were all
asking themselves the same question:
What is behind that curtain?

You were born. And so you're free. So happy birthday.

"O Superman"

O Superman. O judge. O Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad.
O Superman. O judge. O Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad.
Hi. I'm not home right now. But if you want to leave a
message, just start talking at the sound of the tone.
Hello? This is your Mother. Are you there? Are you
coming home?
Hello? Is anybody home? Well, you don't know me,
but I know you.
And I've got a message to give to you.
Here come the planes.
So you better get ready. Ready to go.
You can come
as you are, but pay as you go. Pay as you go.

And I said: OK. Who is this really? And the voice said:
This is the hand, the hand that takes.
This is the

hand, the hand that takes.
This is the hand, the hand that takes.
Here come the planes.
They're American planes. Made in America.
Smoking or non-smoking?
And the voice said: Neither snow nor rain nor gloom
of night shall stay these couriers from the swift
completion of their appointed rounds.

'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice.
And when justive is gone, there's always force.
And when force is gone, there's always Mom. Hi Mom!

So hold me, Mom, in your long arms.
So hold me,
Mom, in your long arms.
In your automatic arms. Your electronic arms.
In your arms.
So hold me, Mom, in your long arms.
Your petrochemical arms. Your military arms.
In your electronic arms.

"Example # 22"

Beispiele paranormaler
Tonbandstimmen.
Was sind paranormale
Tonbandstimmen?
Es sind Stimmen unbekannte herkunft.
Es sing paranormaler Tonbandstimmen-

(Examples of paranormal voices on tape.
What are paranormal voices on tape?
They are voices of unknown origin.
They are paranormal voices on tape-)

Ihren Klang. Ich verstehe die Sprachen.
Ich verstehe die Sprachen nicht. Ich hore nur
Irhen Klang.

(Your sound. I understand the languages.
I don't understand the languages.
I hear only your sound.)

The sun is shining slowly
The birds are flying so low.
Honey you're my one and only,
So pay my what you owe me.

Lights are going down, slowly,
In the woods the animals are moving.

In my dreams you're talking to me.
Your voice is moving through me.
You talk as if you knew me.
So pay me what you owe me.

Beispiel Nummer zweiundzwanzig.
(Example #22.)

The sun is shining slowly
The birds are flying so low.
Honey you're my one and only
So pay me what you owe me.

"Let X=X"

I met this guy - and he looked like might have
been a hat check clerk at an ice rink.
Which, in fact, he turned out to be. And I said:
Oh boy. Right again.

Let X=X. You know, it could be you.
It's a sky-blue sky. Satellites are out tonight.
Let X=X.

You know, I could write a book. And this book would
be think enough to stun an ox. Cause I can see the
future and it's a place - about 70 miles east of
here. Where it's lighter. Linger on over here.
Got the time?.

I got this postcard. And it read, it said:
Dear Amigo - Dear Partner.
Listen, uh - I just want to say thanks.
So...thanks.
Thanks for all the presents. Thanks for introducing
me to the Chief.
Thanks for putting on the feedbag.
Thanks for going
all out.
Thanks for showing me your Swiss Army knife.
and uh -
Thanks for letting me autograph your cast.
Hug and kisses. XXXXOOOO.
Oh yeah, P.S.
I - feel - feel like - I am - in a burning building - and I
gotta go.
Cause I - I feel - feel like - I am - in a burning
building - and I gotta go.

"It Tango"

She said: It looks. Don't you think it looks a lot like rain?
He said: Isn't it. Isn't it just. Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It's hard. It's just hard. It's just kind of hard
to say.
He said: Isn't it. Isn't it just. Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It goes. That's the way it goes. It goes
that way.
He said: Isn't it. Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: It takes. It takes one. It takes on to. It takes
one to know one.
He said: Isn't it just like a woman?
She said: She said it. She said it to no. She said it to
no one.
Isn't it. Isn't it just? Isn't it just like a woman?
Your eyes. It's a day's work to look in to them.
Your eyes. It's a day's work just to look in to them.

Mr.Heartbreak (1984)

"Sharkey's Day"

Sun's coming up. Like a big bald head.
Poking up over the grocery store.
It's Sharkey's day. It's Sharkey's day today.
Sharkey wakes up and Sharkey says:
There was this man...
And there was this road...And if only I could remember these dreams...
I know they're trying to tell me...something.
Ooooeee. Strange dreams.(Strange dreams). Oh yeah.

And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear. I turn around aagain
And it's love. Oh yeah. Strange dreams.
And the little girls sing:Oooee Sharkey.
And the manager says: Mr. Sharkey?
He's not at his desk right now.
Could I take a message?
And the little girls sing:Oooeee Sharkey. He's Mister Heartbreak.
They sing: Oooeee Sharkey. Yeah. He's Mister Heartbreak.

And Sharkey says: All of nature talks to me. If I could just
figure out what it was trying to tell me.
Listen!
Trees are swinging in the breeze.
They're talking to me.
Insects are rubbing their legs together.
They're all talking. They're talking to me. And short animals-
They're bucking up on their hind legs.
Talking. Talking to me.
Hey! Look out! Bugs are crawling up my legs!
You know? I'd rather see this on TV.
Tones it down.
And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's

fear.
I turn around again, and it's love.
Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name.

And Sharkey says: All night long I think of those little planes up there.
Flying around. UYou can't even see them. They're specks!
And they're full of tiny people. Going places.
And Sharkey says: You know? I bet they could all land
on the head of a pin.
And the little girls sing: Ooooeee.
Sharkey!
He's Mister Heartbreak. They sing: Oooeee. That Sharkey!
He's a slow dance on the edge of the lake. He's a whole landscape
gone to seed. He's gone wild! He's screeching tires
on an oil slick at midnight on the road to Boston a long time ago.
And Sharkey says: Lights! Camera! Action! TIMBER!
At the beginning of the movie, they know they have to find each other.
But they ride off in opposite directions.

Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear.
I turn around again, and it's love.
Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name.

You know? They're growing mechanical trees.
They grow to their full height. And then they chop themselves down.
Sharkey says: All of life comes from some strange lagoon.
It rises up, it bucks up to it's full height from a boggy swamp
on a foggy night. It creeps into your house. It's life! It's life!
I turn around, it's fear. I turn around again, and it's love.
Nobody knows me. Nobody knows my name.

Deep in the heart of darkest America.
Home of the brave.
Ha! Ha! Ha! You've already paid for this. Listen to my heart beat.

And the little girls sing: Oooeee
Sharkey. He's a slow dance
on the edge of the lake. They sing:Ooooeeee. Sharkey.
HEe's Mister Heartbreak.
Paging Mr. Sharkey. White courtesy telephone please.
And Sharkey says: I turn around, it's fear.
I turn around again, and it's love.
And the little girls sing:Ooooeee
Sharkey. Yeah.
On top of Old Smokey all covered with snow.
That's where I wanna, that's where I'm gonna
That's where I'm gonna go.

"Langue D'Amour"

Let's see. Uh, it was on an island. And there was this snake.
And the snake had legs. And he could walk all around the island.
Yes. That's true. A snake with legs.
And the man and the woman were on the island too.
And they were not very smart.
But they were happy as clams. Yes.
Let's see. Uh...then one evening the snake was walking about
in the garden and he was talking to himself and he saw the woman
and they started to talk. And they became friends.
Very good friends.
And the woman liked the snake very much. Because when he
talked, he make little noises with his tongue, and his long tongue
was lightly licking about his lips.
Like there was a fire inside his mouth and the flame
would come dancing out of his mouth.
And this woman liked this very much.

And after that, she was bored with the man.
Because no matter what happened,
he was always as happy as a clam.
What did the snake say? Yes! What was he saying?
OK. I will tell you.
The snake told her things about the world. He told her about
the time there was a big typhoon on the island
and all the sharks came out of the water.
Yes.
They came out of the water and they walked right into your house
with their big white teeth.
And the woman heard these things. And she was in love.
And the man came out and said: We have to go now!
And the woman did not want to go.
Because she was a hothead.
Because she was a woman in love.
Anyway, we got into their boat and left the island.
But they never stayed anywhere very long.
Because the woman was restless. She was a hothead.
She was a woman in love.
And this is not a story people tell.
It is something I know myself.
And when I do my job, I am thinking about these things.
Because when I do my job, that is what I think about.

Oooo la la la.
Yeah La La La.
Voici. Voila'.
Here. And there.
Ooo la la la.
Oh yes.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.
Oooo la la la.
Oooo. Oh yeah.
La la la.
La la.
Voici. Voila'. la la.
Here it is. There it is. La la.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.

Ah! Comme ci, comme ca.
Ah! Niether here nor there.
Voila. Voila.
There. There.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.
Attends! Attends! Attends!
Wait! Wait! Wait!
Attends! Attends! Attends!
Wait! Wait! Wait!
Ecoute. Ecoute. Ecoute.
Listen. Listen. Listen.
Ooooo la la la la.
Ooooo. Oh yeah.
Ooo la la la la.
Oh yeah. Yeah.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.
Voici le langage dans mon coeur.
This is the language of my heart.
Oooo la la.
Oooo. Oh yeah.
Voici le langage de l'amour.
This is the language of love.
Voici le langage dans mon coeur.
This is the language of my heart.
Voici le langage dans mon coeur.
This is the language of my heart.

"Gravity's Angel"

You can dance. You can make me laugh. You've got x-ray eyes.
You know how to sing. You're a diplomat. You've got it all.
Everybody loves you.
You can charm the birds out of the sky.
but I, I've got one thing.
You always know just what to say. And when to go.
But I've got one thing. You can see in the dark.
But I've got one thing: I loved you better.

Last night I woke up. Saw this angel.
He flew in my window.
And he said: Girl, pretty proud of yourself, huh?
And I looked around and said: Who me?
And he said: The higher you fly, the faster you fall. He said:
Send it up. Watch it rise. See it fall.
Gravity's rainbow.
Send it up. Watch it rise. See it fall.
Gravity's angel.
Why these mountains? Why this sky?
This long road. This ugly train.

Well he was an ugly guy. With an ugly face.
An also ran in the human race.
And even God got sad just looking at him. And at his funeral
all his friends stood around looking said. But they were really
thinking of all the ham and cheese sandwiches in the next room.
And everybody used to hang around him. And I know why.
They said: There but for the grace of the angels go I.
Why these mountains? Why this sky?
Send it up. Watch it rise. See it fall.
Gravity's rainbow.
Send it up. Watch it rise. And fall.
Gravity's angel.

Well, we were just laying there.
And this ghost of your other lover walked in.
And stood there. Made of thin air. Full of desire.
Look. Look. Look. You forgot to take your shirt.
And there's your book. And there's your pen, sitting on the table.
Why these mountains? Why this sky?
This ong road? This empty room?
Why these mountains? Why this sky?
This long road. This empty room.

"Kokoku"

I come very briefly to this place. I watch it move. I watch it shake.
Kumowaku yamano. Watashino sakebi.
Watashino koewo.
Ushano kokoku. Watashiwa sokoni.
Watashiwa asobu.
Mountain with clouds. A cry. My voice.
Home of the brave. I'm here now. And lost.

They say the dead will rise again. And here they come now.
Strange animals out of the Ice Age. And they stare at you.
Dumbfounded. Like big mistakes. And we say: Keep cool.
Maybe if we pretend this never happened, they'll all just go away.

Watashiwa sokoni. Watashiwa asobu.
Mewotoji. Mewotoji.
Kikunowa kotori. Watashino sakebi.
Watashino koewo.
I am here in this place. Losing. My eyes are closed. Closed.
Birds are there. Hearing something.
Shouting. My voice.
(And yet, we could all be wrong.
Wouldn't be the first time.)

Kumowaku yamano. Watashiwa sokoni.
Watashiwa asobu.
Kumiwaku yamano. Kikunowa kotori.
Watashino sakebi.
Mountains with clouds. I am there.
Lost.
Mountains with clouds. Birds are there.
Hearing something. A shout.

They say the world is smaller now.
Small world.
They say that man is taller now. Tall man.
They say the stars are closer now.
Thank you, lucky stars.
You come very briefly to this place.
Jikanwa tomaru. Ushano kokoku.
Time is stopped. Home of the brave.

And on a very distant star, slimy creatures scan the skies.
They've got plates for hands. And telescopes for eyes. And they say:
Look! Down
They say: Watch it move. Watch it shake. Watch it turn. And shake.
Watashiwa sokoni. Watashiwa asobu.
Kumowaku yamano.
Watashino sakebi. Watashino koewo.
Mewotoji. Mewotoji.
I am there. Lost. Mountains with clouds.
A cry. A shout. My eyes are shut. Shut.
And we say: Watch us move. Watch us shake. We're so pretty.
We're so pretty. We say: Watch us move now. Watch us shake.
We're so pretty. Shake our hands. Shake our heads. We shake our feet.
We're so fine. The way we move. The way we shake.
We're so nice.

"Excellent Birds"

Flying Birds.. Watch them fly. There they go.
Falling snow. Excellent snow. Here it comes. Watch it fall.
Long words. Excellent words. UI can hear them now.
This is the picture.
I'm sitting by the window. Watching the snow fall. I'm looking out.
And I'm moving. Turning in time. Jump up!
And I can land on my feet. Look out!
This is the picture.
This is the picture. This is the picture.
This is the picture.

Looking out. I'm watching now. But when I see the future,
I close my eyes. I can see it now.
I see pictures of people rising up. I see pictures of people falling down.
I see pictures of people, they're standing on their heads. They're ready!
I see pictures of people rising up. I see pictures of people falling down.
I see pictures of people, they're standing on their heads. They're ready!

They're looking out. Look out! They're watching out. Watch out!
They're looking out. Look out!
They're watching out. Watching watching out.

I see pictures of people. I see pictures of people.
They're watching. They're watching out.
Watch out.
I see pictures of people. They're watching. They're watching out.
I see pictures of people. Watching.
Watch out. They're watching.
I see pictures of people. Watching out.
Watch out.
Pictures of people. They're watching out.

"Blue Lagoon"

I got your letter. Thanks a lot.
I've been getting lots of sun. And lots of rest. It's really hot.
Days, I dive by the wreck. Nights, I swim in the blue lagoon.
Always used to wonder who I'd bring to a desert island.

Days, I remember cities. Nights, I dream about a perfect place.
Days, I dive by the wreck. Nights, I swim in the blue lagoon.
Full fathom five thy father lies. Of his bones are coral made.
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
Nothing of him that doth fade.
But that suffers a sea change. Into something rich and strange.
And I alone am left to tell the tale.
Call me Ishmael.

I got your letter. Thanks a lot.
I've been getting lots of sun. And lots of rest. It's really hot.
Always used to wonder who I'd bring to

a desert island.
Days, I remember rooms. Nights, I swim in the blue lagoon.

I saw a plane today. Flying low over the island.
But my mind was somewhere else.
And if you ever get this letter. Thinking of you.
Love and kisses. Blue Pacific. Signing off.

"Sharkey's Night"

Sun's going down. Like a big bald head.
Disappearing behind the boulevard.
(Oooeee.) It's Sharkey's night.
Yeah. It's Sharkey's night tonight. And the manager says: Sharkey?
He's not at his desk right now. (Oh yeah.) Could I take a message?

And Sharkey says: Hey, kemosabe!
Long time no see.
He says: Hey sport. You connect the dots. You pick up the pieces.
He says: You know, I can see two tiny pictures of myself
And there's one in each of you eyes.
And they're doin' everything I do.
Every time I light a cigarette, they light up theirs.
I take a drink and I look in and they're drinkin' too.
It's drivin' me crazy. It's drivin' me nuts.

And Sharkey says: Deep in the heart of darkest America.
Home of the brave. He says: Listen to my heart beat.
Paging Mr. Sharkey. White courtesy telephone please.

Home of the Brave (1986)

"Smoke Rings"

Standby. You're on the air.
Buenos noches Senores y Senoras.
Bienvenidos.
La primera pregunta es: Que es mas macho,
pineapple o knife?
Well, let's see. My guess is that a pineapple is more
macho than a knife. Si! Correcto!
Pineapple es mas macho que knife.
La segunda pregunta es: Que es mas macho,
lightbulb o schoolbus?
Uh, lightbulb?
No! Lo siento, Schoolbus es mas macho que lightbulb.
Gracias. And we'll be back in un momento.
Well I had a dream and in it
I went to a little town
And all the girls in town were named Betty.
And they were singing:
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Ah desire! It's cold as ice
And then it's hot as fire.
Ah desire! First it's red
And then it's blue.

And everytime I see an iceberg
It reminds me of you.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Que es mas macho iceberg or volcano?

Get the blanket from the bedroom
We can go walking once again.
Down in the bayou
Where our sweet love first began.
I'm thinking back to when I was a child

Way back to when I was a tot.
When I was an embryo
A tiny speck. Just a dot.
When I was a Hershey bar
In my father's back pocket.
Hey look! Over there! It's Frank Sinatra
Sitting in a chair. And he's blowing
Perfect smoke rings
Up into the air. And he's singing:
Smoke makes a staircase for you
To descend. So rare.

Ah desire!
Ah desire!
Ah desire! So random So rare
And everytime I see those smoke rings
I think you're there.
Que es mas macho staircase o smoke rings?
Get the blanket from the bedroom
We can go walking once again.
Down in the boondocks
Where our sweet love first began.
Ooo I'm gonna follow you.
Out in the swamps and into town.
Down under the boardwalk
Track you down.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Doo doo doo doo doo.
Doo doo doo doo doo.

"White Lily"

What Fassbinder film is it? The one-armed
Man walks into a flower shop and says:
What flower expresses
Days go by
And they just keep going by endlessly
Pulling you
Into the future.
Days go by
Endlessly
Endlessly pulling you
Into the future.
And the florist says:
White Lily.

"Late Show"

L-L-L
L-L-Listen
Listen T-
L-L-
Listen to my hearbeat.

"Talk Normal"

I don't know about your dreams
But mine are sort of hackneyed.
Same thing, night after night.
Just...repetitive.
And the color is really bad -
And the themes are just infantile.
And you always get what you want -
And that's just not the way life is.
First National Bank? I love it!
New Hat? Forget it!
Moby Dick? Never read it!

I came home today
And both our cars were gone.
And there were all these new pink
Flamingoes arranged in star patterns
All over the lawn.
Then I went into the kitchen
And it looked like a tornado had hit.
And then I realized I was in the wrong House.
Last night I had that dream again.
I dreamed I had to take a test
In a Dairy Queen on another planet.
And then I looked around
And there was this woman.
And she was making it all up.
She was writing it all down.
And she was laughing.
She was laughing her head off.
And I said: Hey!
Give me that pen!
I turned the corner in Soho today and someone
Looked right at me and said: Oh No!
Another Laurie Anderson clone!
And I said: Look at me! Look at me!
Look at me!
Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!
Look at me!
Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!
Look at me!

"Language is a Virus"

Paradise Is exactly like
Where you are right now
Only much much Better.
I saw this guy on the train
And he seemed to gave gotten stuck
In one of those abstract trances.
And he was going: "Ugh...Ugh...Ugh..."

And Fred said: "I think he's in some
kind of pain. I think it's a pain cry."
And I said: "Pain cry?
Then language is a virus."
Language! It's a virus! Language!
It's a virus!

Well I was talking to a friend
And I was saying: I wanted you.
And I was looking for you.
But I couldn't find you.
I couldn't find you.
And he said: Hey! Are you talking to
me? Or are you just practicing
For one of those performances of
yours?

Huh? Language! It's a virus! Language!
It's a virus!
He said: I had to write that letter to your
mother. And I had to tell the judge that
it was you. And I had to sell the car and
go to Florida.
Because that's just my way of saying
(It's a charm.)
That I love you.
And I (It's a job.)
Had to call you at the crack of dawn
(Why?) And list the times that I've been
wrong. Cause that's just my way of
saying
That I'm sorry. (It's a job.)

Language! It's a virus! Language! It's a
virus!

Paradise Is exactly like Where you are
right now Only much much (It's a
shipwreck,) Better. (It's a job.)

You know? I don't believe there's such a
thing as TV. I mean - They just keep
showing you
The same pictures over and over.
And when they talk they just make
sounds That more or less synch up
With their lips. That's what I think!

Language! It's a virus! Language! It's a
virus! Language! It's a virus!

Well I dreamed there was an island
That rose up from the sea.
And everybody on the island
Was somebody from TV.
And there was a beautiful view
But nobody could see.
Cause everybody on the island
Was saying: Look at me! Look at me!
Look at me! Look at me!

Because they all lived on an island
That rose up from the sea.
And everybody on the island
Was somebody from TV.
And there was a beautiful view
But nobody could see.
Cause everybody on the island
Was saying: Look at me! Look at me!
Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!
Why?

Paradise is exactly like Where you are
right now Only much much better.

Strange Angels (1989)

"Strange Angels"

They say that heaven is like TV
A perfect little world
that doesn't really need you
And everything there
is made of light
And the days keep going by
Here they come Here they come
Here they come.

Well it was one of those days larger
than life
When your friends came to dinner
and they stayed the night
And then they cleaned out the
refrigerator -
They ate everything in sight
And then they stayed up in the living
room
And they cried all night
Strange angels - singing just for me
Old stories - they're haunting me
This is nothing

like I thought it would be.

Well I was out in my four door
with the top down.
And I looked up and there they were:
Millions of tiny teardrops
just sort of hanging there
And I didn't know whether to laugh or cry
And I said to myself:
What next big sky?

Strange angels - singing just for me
Their spare change falls on top of me
Rain falling Falling all over me
All over me
Strange angels - singing just for me
Old Stories - they're haunting me
Big changes are coming
Here they come
Here they come.

"Monkey's Paw"

Well I stopped in at the Body Shop
Said to the guy:
I want stereo FM installed in my teeth
And take this mole off my back
and put it on my cheek.
And uh...while I'm here, why don't you give me
some of those high-heeled feet?
And he said: Listen there's no guarantee
Nature's got rules and Nature's got laws
but listen look out for the monkey's paw
And I said: Whaaat? He said:

The gift of life it's a twist of fate
It's a roll of the die
It's a free lunch A free ride
But Nature's got rules and Nature's got laws
And if you cross her look out!
It's the monkey's paw
It's sayin: Haw haw!
It's saying Gimme five!
It's sayin: Bye bye!
I know a man he lost his head
He said: The way I feel I'd be better off dead.
He said: I got everything I ever wanted
Now I can't give it up
It's a trap, just my luck!

The gift of life it's a leap of faith
It's a roll of the die
It's a free lunch A free ride
The gift of life it's a shot in the dark
It's the call of the wild
It's the big wheel The big ride
But Nature's got rules and Nature's got laws
And if you cross her look out!
It's the monkey's paw
You better Stop!
Look around!
Listen!

You- could- be- an- oca- rina-
salesman-
going- from- door- to- door.
Or- would- you- like- to- swing- on- a-star-
and- carry- moon- beams- home?
Or- next- time- around- you- could- be-a- small- bug-
Or- would- you- like- to- be- a- fish?

The gift of life it's a twist of fate
It's a roll of the die
it's a free lunch A free ride
The gift of life it's a shot in the dark
It's the call of the wild
It's the big wheel The big ride
But Nature's got rules and Nature's got laws
And if you cross her look out!
It's the monkey's paw
It's singin': Gimme Five!
It's singin': Bye Bye!

"Coolsville"

Coolsville
Coolsville
So perfect So nice
Hey little darlin,
I'm comin your way little darlin
And I'll be there Just as soon as I'm all straightened out

Yeah just as soon as I'm
perfect.

Some things are just pictures
They're scenes before your eyes
And don't look now I'm right behind
you
Coolsville
So perfect So nice
So nice!

And down by the ocean
under the boardwalk
You were so handsome we didn't talk
You're my ideal I'm gonna find you
I'm goin to
So perfect So ideal

This train This city This train

Some things are just pictures
They're scenes before your eyes
And don't look now I'm right behind
you
Coolsville

She said:
Oh Jesus, why are you always
in the arms of somebody else?
He said:
Oh man! I don't need anybody's help
I'm gonna get there on my own.

This train This city This train This city
This train

"Ramon"

Last night I saw a host of angels
And they were all singing different
songs
And it sounded like a lot of
lawnmowers
Mowing down my lawn
And up above kerjillions of stars
spangled all over the sky
And they were spirals turning
Turning in the deep blue night.

And suddenly for no reason
The way that angels leave the grund
They left in a kind of vortex
Travelling at the speed of sound.

And just as I started to leave
Just as I turned to go
I saw a man who'd fallen
He was lying on his back in the snow.

Some people walk on water
Some people walk on broken glass
Some just walk round and round
in their dreams
Some just keep falling down.

So when you see a man who's broken
Pick him up and carry him
And when you see a woman who's
broken
Put her all into your arms
Cause we don't know where we come
from
We don't know what we are.

So when you see a man who's broken
Pick him up and carry him
And when you see a woman who's
broken
Put her all into your arms
Cause we don't know where we come
frm.
We don't know what we are.

And you? You're no one
And you? You're falling
And you? You're travelling
Travelling at the speed of light.

And you? You're no one
And you? You're falling
And you? You're travelling
Travelling at the speed of light.

"Baby Doll"

I don't know about your brain-
but mine is really bossy
I come home from a day on the golf
course
and I find all these messages

scribbled on wrinkled up scraps of paper
And they say thing like:
Why don't you get a real job?
Or: You and what army?
Or: Get a horse.
And then I hear this voice
comin from the back of my head Uh huh
(Whoa-ho) Yep! It's my brain again
And when my brain talks to me, he says:

Take me out to the ballgame
Take me out to the park
Take me to the movies
Cause I love to sit in the dark
Take me to Tahiti
Cause I love to be hot
And take me out on the town tonight
Cause I know the new hot spot. He says:

Babydoll! Ooo oo oo Babydoll Ooo He says:
Babydoll! I love it when you come when I call
Babydoll! You don't have to talk I know it all
Babydoll! Ooo oo oo Babydoll Ooo

Well I'm sitting around trying to write a letter
I'm wracking my brains trying to think of another word for horse
I ask my brain for some assistance.
And he says: Huh...Let's see...How about cow?
That's close. He says:

Take me out to the ballgame
Take me out to the park
Take me to the movies
Cause I love to sit in the dark
Take me to your leader
And I say: Do you mean George?
And he says: I just want to meet him
And I say:
Come on I mean I don't even know George!
And he says:

Babydoll! Ooo oo oo Babydoll Ooo He says:
Babydoll! I love it when you come when I call
Babydoll! You don't have to talk I know it all
Babydoll! Ooo oo oo Babydoll Ooo

Babydoll! Babydoll! Ooo oo oo
Babydoll! Babydoll! Ooo oo oo
Babydoll! Babydoll! Ooo oo oo

"Beautiful Red Dress"

Well I was down at the Zig Zag
That's the Zig Zag Bar & Grill
And everybody was talking at once and it was getting real shrill.
And I've been around the block
But I don't care I'm on a roll - I'm on a wild ride
Cause the moon is full and look out baby -
I'm at high tide.

I've got a beautiful red dress
And you'd look really good standing beside it..
I've got some beautiful new red shoes and they look so fine
I've got a hundred and five fever and it's high tide.

Well just the other day I won the lottery
I mean lots of money
I got so excited I ran into my place and i said:
HEY! Is anybody home?
Nobody answered but I guess that's not too weird
Since I live alone.

I've got a beautiful red dress
And you'd look really good standing beside it..
Girls?
We can take it And if we can't we're gonna fake it

We're gonna save ourselves
We're gonna make it And if we don't
we're gonna take it
We're gonna save ourselves
Save ourselves

Well they say women shouldn't be
the president
Cause we go crazy from time to time
Well push my button baby here I come
Yeah look out baby
I'm at high tide

I've got a beatiful red dress
and you'd look really good
standing beside it..
I've got a little jug of red sangria wine
and we could take little sips
from time to time
I've got some bright red drop dead lips
I've got a little red card
and mechanical hips
I've got a hundred and five fever!!!

OK! OK! Hold it!
I just want to say something.
You know, for every dollar a man
makes
a woman makes 63 cents.
Now, fifty years ago that was 62 cents.
So, with that kind of luck, it'll be the
year 3,888
before we make a buck. But hey, girls?

We can take it And if we can't
we're gonna fake it
We're gonna save ourselves
save ourselves
(Yeah tell it to the judge)
We're gonna make it And if we don't
we're gonna take it
We're gonna save ourselves
save ourselves
We've got a fever of a hundred and five
and look baby
It's high tide.

Well I could just go on and on and on...
But tonight
I've got a headache

"The Day the Devil"

The day the devil comes to getcha
you know him by the way he smiles
The day the devil comes to getcha
He's a rusty truck with only twenty
miles
He's got bad brakes he's got loose teeth
He's a long way from home

The day the devil comes to getcha
he's got a smile like a scar
He knows the way to your house
He's got the keys to your car
And when he sells you his sportcoat
You say: Funny! That's my size
Attention shoppers!
Everybody please rise

Give me back my innocence
Get me a brand new suit
Give me back my innocence
Oh Lord! Cut me down to size

Well you can hide under the porch
And you can hide behind the couch
But the day the devil comes to getcha
He's right on time
Here he comes

Well I'm sick of hearin bout your
problems
Yeah girlie your breakin my heart
I'm the original party animal
Hey! Hey! Babaloo
So don't come bangin your Bibles
Cause you've been laughin
all the way to the bank
And don't give me those crocodile tears
Cause you've been doing it for years
I'm everywhere! Sign right here
Mr. Jones

The day the devil comes to getcha
He's a long way from home
And you know he's gonna getcha
Cause you're stuck in the middle
Everybody please rise

Give me back my innocence

Get me a brand new suit
Give me back my innocence
Oh Lord! Cut me down to size

Give me back my innocence
Get me a new Cadillac
Cause when I get on up to heave Lord
You can have it all back
Cause in heaven, you get it all back
In heaven it all comes back
Cause in heaven, you get it all back
In heaven
Cause in heaven.....
In heaven.....

"The Dream Before"
(for Walter Benjamin)

Hansel and Gretel are alive and well
And they're living in Berlin
She is a cocktail waitress
He had a part in a Fassbinder film
And they sit around at night now
drinking schnapps and gin
And she says: Hansel, you're really
bringing me down
And he says: Gretel, yu can really be a
bitch
He says: I've wated my life on our
stupid legend
When my one and only love
was the wicked witch.

She said: What is history?
And he said: History is an angel
being blown backwards into the future
He said: History is a pile of debris
And the angel wants to go back and fix
things
To repair the things that have been
broken
But there is a storm blowing from
Paradise
And the storm keeps blowing the angel
backwards into the future
And this storm, this storm
is called
Progress

"My Eyes"

Sometimes I wish I hadn't gotten that
tattoo
Sometimes I wish I'd married you
One hundred fires One hundred days
Sometimes I feel like a stranger
Sometimes I tell lies (Whoa ho)
Sometimes I act like a monkey
Here come the night

And then kerjillions of stars start to
shine
And icy comets go whizzing by
And everything's shaking with a strange
delight
And here it is: the enormous night

And oo my eyes They're lookin all
around
And oo my feet I'm upside down

If I were the president If I were Queen
for a day
I'd give the ugly people all the money
I'd re-write the Book of Love I'd make it
funny
Wheel of fortune Wheel of fame
Two hundred forty million voices
Two hundred forty million names

And down in the ocean where nobody
goes
Some fish are fast Some are slow
Some swim round the world Some hide
below
This is the ocean So deep So old.

And then kerjillions of stars start to
shine
And icy comets go whizzing by
And everything's shaking with a strange
delight
And here it is: the enormous night

And oo my eyes They're lookin all
around
And oo my feet They've left the ground

So cry me a river that leads to a road

That turns into a highway that goes and goes
And tangles in your memories
So long So old.

"Hiawatha"

By the shores of Gitche Gumee
By the shining Big- Sea- Water
Downward through the evening twilight
In the days that are forgotten
>From the land of sky blue waters

And I said: Hello Operator
Get me Memphis Tennessee
And she said: I know who you're tryin
to call darlin And he's not home
he's been away
But you can hear him on the airwaves
He's howlin at the moon
Yeah this is your country station
And honey this next one's for you.

And all along the highways
and under the big western sky
They're singing Ooo oooooo
They're singing Wild Blue.
And way out on the prairie
and up in the high chaparral
They hear a voice it says: Good evening
This is Captain Midnight speaking
And I've got a song for you
Goes somethin like this:

Starlight Starbright
We're gonna hang some new stars
in the heavens tonight.
They're gonna circle by day
They're gonna fly by night
We're goin sky high. Yoo Hooooo
hooo.
Yeah yoo hooo Ooo Hooooooooo

So good night ladies
And good night gentlemen
Keep those cards and letters coming
And please don't call again.
Geronimo and little Nancy
Marilyn and John F. dancing
Uncle took the message
and it's written on the wall.
These are pictures of the houses
Shining in the midnight moonlight
While the King sings Love Me Tender.

And all along the watchtowers
aand under the big western sky
They're singing Yoo Hooooo
They're singing Wild Blue.
And wau wau up there, bursting in air
Red rockets, bright red glare
>From the land of sky blue waters
Sent by freedom's sons and daughters.
We're singing Ooo Hooooooooo
We're singing Wild Blue.
We're singing Ooo Hooooooooo
Ooo Hooooooooo

And dark behind it rose the forest
Rose the black and gloomy pine trees
Rose the firs with ones upon them
And bright before it beat the water
Beat the clear and sunny water
Beat the shing Big- Sea- Water

Bright Red (1994)

"Speechless"
(The Eagle and the Weasel)

It was August. Summer of '82.
You had that rusty old car
And me I had nothing better to do.
You picked me up. We hit the road.
Baby me and you.

We shot out of town drivin' fast and
hard.
Leaving our greasy skid marks in
people's back yards.
We were goin' nowhere. Just driving
around.
We were goin' in circles. And me I was
just hanging on.

Like in that Annie Dillard book
Where she sees that eagle with the skull
of a weasel
Hanging from its neck
And here's how it happened, listen.

Eagle bites the weasel. Weasel bites back.
They fly up to nowhere. Weasel keeps hangin' on.
Together forever.

We were goin' nowhere. Just driving around.
You did all the talking and me I didn't make a sound
If I open my mouth now I'll fall to the ground

If I could open my mouth. There's so much I would say.
Like I can never be honest. Like I'm in it for the thrill.
Like I never loved anyone. And I never will.

Eagle bites the weasel. Weasel bites back.
They fly up to nowhere. Weasel keeps hangin' on.
Together forever.

I remember that old coat my grandma used to wear
Made of weasels biting each other's tails
A vicious circle. An endless ride.
On the back of an old woman.

Eagle bites the weasel. Weasel bites back.
They fly up to nowhere. Weasel keeps hangin' on.
Together forever.
And me? I'm goin' in circles. I'm circling around.
And if I open my mouth now I'll fall to the ground.

"Bright Red"

Did she fall or was she pushed?
Your shirt on my chair
Your shirt on my chair
I'll be with you. I'll be there.
I'll never leave you.
Your shirt on my chair.

Come here little girl. Get into the car.
It's a brand new Cadillac. Bright red.
Come here little girl.

Hey! Haven't I seen you somewhere before?
Your despair in my heart. Bright red.
Your words in my ears.
I'll be with you. I'll be there. I'll never leave you.

Wild beasts shall rest there
And owls shall answer one another there
And the hairy ones shall dance there
And sirens in the temples of pleasure.

Your shirt on my chair
I'll be with you. I'll be there. I'll never leave you.
Your shirt on my chair.

"The Puppet Motel"

I live on the highway
Near the Puppet Motel
I log in every day
I know the neighborhood well.
Now about the residents
of the Puppet Motel
They're more than a little spooky
And most of them are mean.
They're runnin' the numbers
They're playin' cops and robbers
Down in the dungeons
Inside their machines.

Cause they don't know
What's really real now
They're havin' fourth
dimensional dreams
their minds are out on bail now
and real is only what it seems.

And all the puppets in this digital jail
They're runnin' around in a frenzy
In search of the Holy Grail.
They're having virtual sex.
They're eating virtual food.

No wonder these puppets
Are always in a lousy mood.

So if you think we live in a modern world
Where everything is clean and swell
Take a walk on the B side of town
Down by the Puppet Motel
Take a whiff. Burning plastic.

I drink a cup of coffee I try to revive
My mind's a blank I'm barely alive
My nerves are shot I feel like hell
Guess it's time to check in
At the Puppet Motel.

Boot up. Good afternoon. Pause.
Oooo. I really like the way you talk.
Pardon me. Shut down.

"Speak My Language"

Daddy Daddy. It was just like you said
Now that the living outnumber the dead.

Where I come from it's a long thin thread
Across an ocean. Down a river of red.
Now that the living outnumber the dead.
I'm one of many.

Daddy Daddy. It was just like you said
Now that the living outnumber the dead.
Speak my language.

Hello. Hello.
Here come the quick. There go the dead.
here they come. Bright red. Speak my language.

"World Without End"

I remember where I came from
There were burning buildings and a fiery red sea
I remember all my lovers
I remember how they held me
World without end remember me.

East. The edge of the world.
West. Those who came before me.

When my father dies we put him in the ground
When my father died it was like a whole library
Had burned down. World without end remember me.

"Freefall"

You're out on the ocean and you get pulled down
Freefall to the bottom
Like when you're drowning or falling asleep
You get turned around
And when you think you're swimming to the surface
You're swimming straight down.
Down to the bottom. All the way to the bottom.

Secret codes and cryptograms
I'm lost in your words I'm swimming.
We're going down to the bottom. All the way to the bottom.
Rapture of the deep.

I got your letter. I couldn't read it. It was a cryptogram.
Did it say Take me with you or Take me as I am?
We're going down to the bottom.
All the way to the bottom. We get turned around.
There is another world spinning inside of this one.

I remember where I came from
There were tropical breezes and a wide open sea
I remember my childhood
I remember being free.

Down to the bottom.
All the way to the bottom. We get turned around.
There is another world inside of this one.

Rapture of the deep.

We're going down to the bottom.
There is another world spinning inside of this one.

"Muddy River"

Rain keeps pouring down
Houses are cracking. People drown.
Cars are rusting here. A church floats by
Washed in the blood of the lamb.

And all the superhighways have disappeared
One by one. And all the towns and cities and signs
Are underwater now. They're gone.

We're going down by the muddy river
We're walking down by the muddy river
Somebody tell me please
What happened here?

Mud is everywhere.
Fish are swimming in the fields.
Everybody's running around, they're yelling
Is this the end of the known world?

Men and women in their boats
Try to save what they've lost.
They're yelling, It's all gone now.
We're never gonna find it again.

But when the muddy river starts to rise
It covers us all. And when I look into your eyes
Two tiny clocks two crystal balls
We begin again. We try.
We begin again. Down by.

We're going down by the muddy river.
We begin again down by the muddy river.
We're walking down by down by the muddy river.
We're going down by down by the muddy river.

"Beautiful Pea Green Boat"

I'm lying in the shade of my family tree
I'm a branch that broke off
What will become of me?

Dear Mom, I'm lying here in this queen-sized bed.
I'm thinking back
To all the stories you read to me.
About the little animals who went to sea
In their beautiful pea green boat.
But I can't remember now
What happened then?
Dear Mom, how does it end?

The owl and the pussycat went to sea
In a beautiful pea green boat.
They took some honey and lots of money
Wrapped in a five pound note.
The owl looked up to the stars above
And sang to a small guitar.
O lovely pussy! Pussy my love!
What a wonderful pussy you are.

Let us be married
Too long we've tarried
But what shall we do for a ring?
What shall we do for a ring?
Hey! Hey!

They sailed away for a year and a day
To the land where the bong tree grows
And there in a wood a piggy wig stood
A ring at the end of his nose
A ring at the end of his nose.

And hand in hand at the edge of the sand
They danced by the light of the
By the light of the, by the light of the moon.

And hand in hand at the edge of the sand
They danced by the light of the
By the light of the, by the light of the

moon.
The moon, the moon.
Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

"Love Among the Sailors"

There is a hot wind blowing
it moves across the oceans and into every port.
A plague. A black plague. There's danger everywhere
And you've been sailing.

And you're all alone on an island now tuning in.
Did you think this was the way
Your world would end?
Hombres. Sailors. Comrades.

There is no pure land now. No safe place.
And we stand here on the pier
Watching you drown.
Love among the sailors.
Love among the sailors.

There is a hot wind blowing.
Plague drifts across the oceans.
And if this is the work of an angry god
I want to look into his angry face.
There is no pure land now. No safe place.
Come with us into the mountains.
Hombres. Sailors. Comrades.

"Poison"

It was one of those black cat night
The moon had gone out and the air was thin
It was the kind of night the cat would drag in.

I'll never forget it, we had a fight.
Then you turned around turned on the light. You left our bed.
Then you moved downstairs to live with her instead.
Yeah just one floor and a shout away.
I guess I should have moved but I decided to stay.
Did I drink some poison that I don't remember now?
And every night I open all the windows
I let a cold dark wind blow through.
I play loud organ music and I talk to myself and dream of you.
Uh oh! I hear voices coming up through the pipes.
Through all the springs in my bed and up through the lights.
The volume goes up then it drops back down
I can hear the two of you playing records
Moving furniture and fooling around.

Did I drink some poison that I don't remember now?
Is there blood on my hands?
No, my hands are clean.
Did I do something in another lifetime
That was really really mean?

Yeah I'm hearing voices.
Am I losing my mind?
Think I'm going crazy, I gotta get out.
I run into the street and start to shout
Get out of my way! Get out! Get out!

Did I drink some poison that I don't remember now?
Is there blood on my hands?
Did I do something in another lifetime
that was really really mean?

A small bullet, a piece of glass
And your heart just grows around it.

"In our Sleep"

In our sleep as we speak
Listen to the drums beat
As we speak

In our sleep as we speak
Listen to the drums beat
In our sleep
In our sleep as we speak
Listen to the drums beat

As we speak

As we speak in our sleep
Listen to the drums beat
In our sleep

In our sleep as we speak
Listen to the drums beat
As we speak

In our sleep as we speak
Listen to the drums beat
In our sleep

In our sleep where we meet
In our sleep where we meet

"Night in Baghdad"

And oh it's so beautiful
It's like the Fourth of July
It's lie a Christmas tree
It's like the fireflies on a summer night.

And I wish I could describe this to you better.
But I can't talk very well now
Cause I've got this damned gas mask on.
So I'm just going to stick this microphone out the window
And see if we can hear a little better.
Hello California?
What's the weather like out there now?

And I only have one question: Did you ever really love me?
Only when we danced. And it was so beautiful.
It was like the Fourth of July.
It was like fireflies on a summer night.

"Tightrope"

Last night I dreamed I died and that my life had
been rearranged into some kind of theme park.
And all my friends were walking up and down the boardwalk.
And my dead grandmother was selling cotton candy out of a little shack.
And there was this big ferris wheel about half a mile out in the ocean,
half in and half out of water.
And all my old boyfriends were on it.
With their new girlfriends.
And the boys were waving and shouting and the girls were saying Eeek.

Then they disappeared under the surface of the water
and when they came up again they were laughing
and gasping for breath.

In this dream I'm on a tightrope
and I'm tipping back and forth trying to keep my balance.
And below me are all my relatives
and if I fall I'll crush them.
This long thin line. This song line. This shout.

The only thing that binds me to the turning world below
and all the people and noise and sounds and shouts.
This tightrope made of sound
This long thin line made of my own blood.
Remember me is all I ask.
And if remembered be a task forget me.

Remember me is all I ask.
And if remembered be a task forget me.
This long thin line. This long thin line.
This long thin line. This tightrope.

Remember me is all I ask.
And if remembered be a task forget me.
This long thin line. This long thin line.
This long thin line. This tightrope.

"Same Time Tomorrow"

You know that little clock, the one on your VCR
the one that's always blinking twelve noon

because you never figured out
how to get in there and change it?
So it's always the same time
just the way it came from the factory.
Good morning. Good night.
Same time tomorrow. We're in record.

So here are the questions: Is time long
or is it wide?
And the answers? Sometimes the
answers
just come in the mail. And one day you
get the letter
you've been waiting for forever. And
everything it says
is true. And then the last line says:
Burn this. We're in record.

And what I really want to know is: Are
things getting better
or are they getting worse? Can we start
all over again?
Stop. Pause. We're in record. Good
morning. Good night.
Now I in you without a body move.
And in our hearts we fly. Standby.
Good morning. Good night

Appendix 2 — Laurie Anderson's record covers for Warner Brothers

Fig. 1 - *Big Science* (1982)

Fig. 2 -*United States I-IV Live* (1984)

Fig. 3 - *Mr. Heartbreak* (1984)

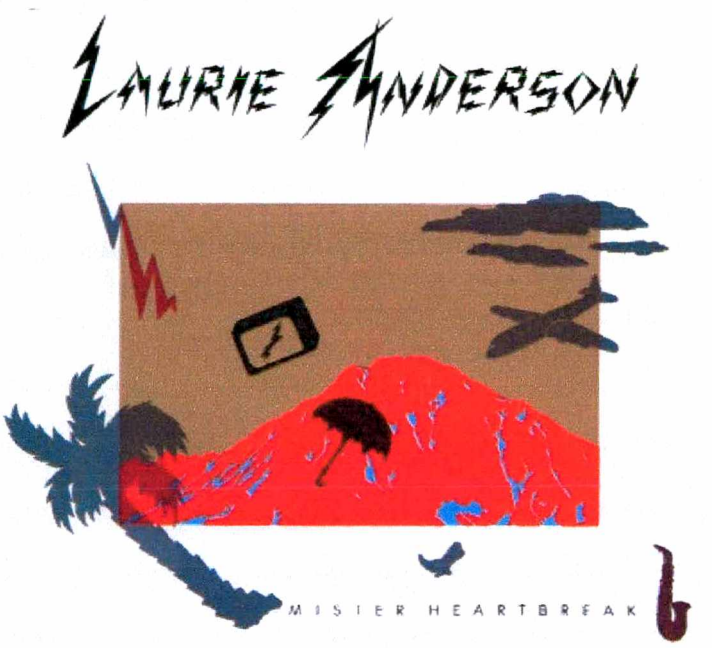

Fig. 4 - *Home of the Brave* (1986)

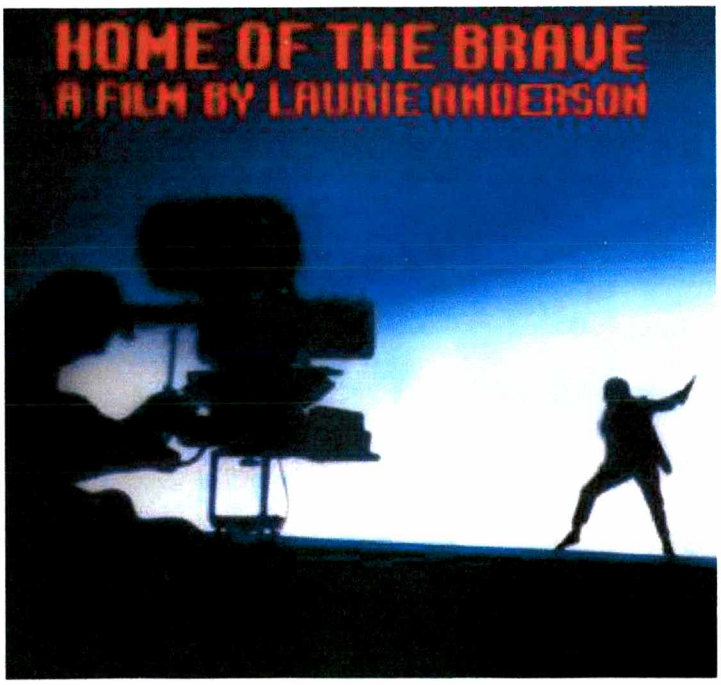

Fig. 5 - *Strange Angels* (1989)

Fig. 6 - *Bright Red* (1994)

Appendix 3 — Laurie Anderson CD (Tracklist)

	Track Number
United States I-IV Live (1984)	
"Telephone Song"	1
Big Science (1982)	
"From the Air"	2
"Big Science"	3
"Born, Never Asked"	4
"O Superman"	5
Mr.Heartbreak (1984)	
"Sharkey's Day"	6
Home of the Brave (1986)	
"Smoke Rings"	7
" Language is a Virus"	8
Strange Angels (1989)	
"Strange Angels"	9
"Coolsville"	10
"The Dream Before"	11
Bright Red (1994)	
"The Puppet Motel"	12
"Night in Baghdad"	13
"Same Time Tomorrow"	14