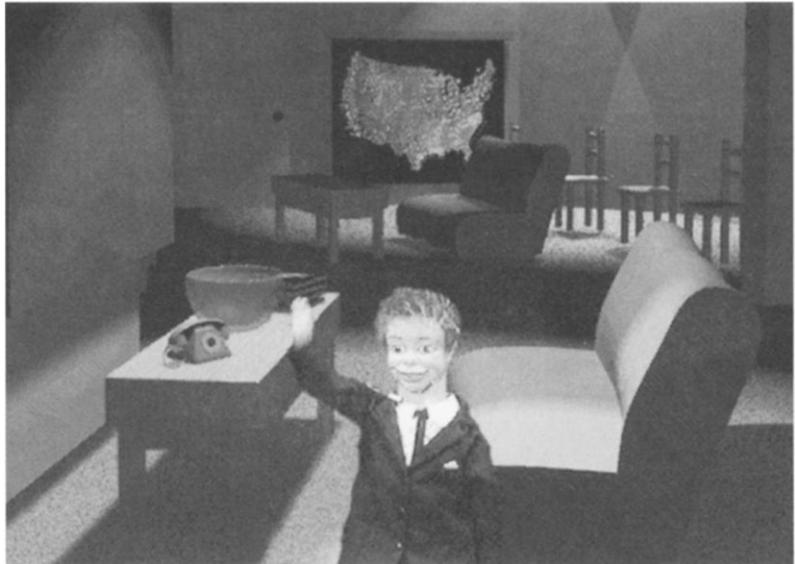


# Laurie Anderson for Dummies

Jon McKenzie

1. The dummy, a ventriloquist puppet of Laurie Anderson, greets visitors in the greenroom of the Puppet Motel and shows off the space. (Image from Puppet Motel CD-ROM; screen grab by Jon McKenzie)



If language is a virus from outer space, performance is its downlink in the United States—and Laurie Anderson one of its most uncanny transmitters.

Since the late 1960s, Anderson's homey yet alien work has been short-circuiting the often great divides between street talk and philosophy, popular culture and experimental art, everyday life and its electronic ghost. Her preferred medium: an electric body in which gestures, stories, and songs mix with synthesizers, video projections, printed matter, and, most recently, personal computers. Over the years, this electric body has grown in crystalline fashion, its fractal structure reiterating and recombining simple components into diversifying assemblages. In 1974, Anderson performed *Duets on Ice* on the streets of New York, standing in skates with blades frozen in ice and playing cowboy songs on the Self-Playing Violin—an instrument whose music unwinds from magnetic tape loops. Twenty years later, this small bit haunts the edges of her latest media blitz, a storm of coordinated releases that include a worldwide tour of *The Nerve Bible*, two music CDs, a retrospective book, a proposal for a

public memorial, an interactive CD-ROM (with Hsin-Chien Huang), and a homepage on the World Wide Web. Blown out of proportion by her corporate sponsors, her media blitz forms one monstrous performance—in the many different senses this term has taken on in the United States.

Anderson's performance art samples elements from such genres of cultural performance as storytelling, theatre, ritual, dance, music, popular entertainment, and sports. Over her career, she has mixed the autobiographical with the historical and, using one to filter the other, has built an idiosyncratic collection of words, sounds, gestures, and images downloaded from various social archives, especially that of the United States. In its widest sense, cultural performance is the embodiment of such social archives, the restoration and transformation of historical forces in living behavior. Anderson's singularity, however, resides in two things. First, she supplements living behavior with film, video, tape, synthesizers, and computers to enhance the building and playback of her idiosyncratic archive. Through her electric body, she connects cultural performance to other performances, such as those of high performance computer systems. Second, she plugs her electric body into corporations, here specifically, Warner Bros. Records, HarperCollins, and Voyager, who mass produce her work and in turn plug her through various media blitzes. Through such corporate bodies, she thus links up with the language game of bureaucratic performance: profitability and cost-effectiveness, market shares and public relations, downsizings and reengineerings. The twists of her work lie in the path she cuts across these three terrains of performance: cultural, technological, and bureaucratic.

What follows is an untimely guide<sup>1</sup> to Anderson's latest media blitz, one that tracks its movement across these performances while also mapping a more general stratum of performative power and knowledge. The guide focuses on a series of sites from her recent work by investigating links within and between them. As each site is already linked to other sites, this guide is hypertextual: it generates links within links, sites within sites. Designed as a hyperguide, it may be used while navigating Anderson's performance, listening to her CDs, reading her books, playing her CD-ROM, or visiting her homepage.

### *The Nerve Bible, the Angel of History, and Other Stormy Missiles*

On the evening of 7 April 1995, I take a subway to see *The Nerve Bible* at New York's Neil Simon Theatre. The performance opens with a site dominated by a huge red I-beam structure that runs horizontally across the front of the space; leading back away from this beam is a pathway. Upon a smoky stage bathed in blue and red light, Anderson enters stage right rear and walks to the pathway. With a fast gesture she cues three projection screens in from the wings. They slide quickly across the I-beam to conceal the pathway and most of the stage, leaving but a narrow space. Video of a book burning in reverse time appears on screen, superimposed by the title, *The Nerve Bible*. Moments later, Anderson enters again on the narrow stage. She wears the drum suit: a white flight suit fitted with sensors which her striking gestures activate to cue both sounds ("The time is eight o'clock and one second...") and images (clocks, alarms, flashing lights). Moving to center stage, where the I-beam and pathway cross, she utters these words:

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. (1995a)

Billed as Anderson's first major performance in five years, *The Nerve Bible* has been building on the cultural horizon for some time. A version of it premiered as *Stories from the Nerve Bible* at Expo '92 in Seville and toured Spain, Germany, and Israel that same year. In 1994, Anderson toured the U.S. and Europe, reading from her book, also titled *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective, 1972-1992* (1994a).

This reading was the most low-tech show I've ever done. I sat on the stage with keyboards, digital effects machines, a violin and a twenty-four input mixing console and mixed the sound myself. There were no visuals, no cues except the ones I'd invent on the spot. Without all the effects of a multi-media show, it became a kind of mental movie.  
 (Anderson 1995b)

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In recombining components, Anderson's task lies less in placing her body in History than in linking up with certain "No Bodies" blown aside by its Storm.

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An audio CD of her reading at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre was released in early 1995 as *The Ugly One with the Jewels and Other Stories*, a few months after *Bright Red*, a CD of studio work produced by Brian Eno. The full-scale *Nerve Bible* began touring the U.S. in the spring of 1995. During this tour, video clips recorded after each show in its greenroom were downloadable from Anderson's site on the World Wide Web, to be replayed in the interactive CD-ROM *Puppet Motel*.

*The Nerve Bible* site is dominated by an I-beam and a pathway. Let's freeze the frame on this configuration and examine some of its links. Anderson writes:

The pathway is at a right angle to the I-beam and I think of this as a kind of x-y axis that is crucial to the texts. To me, and probably no one else, this T shape represents two types of time: time you can change and time that you can't. That's why the image from Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History* is introduced on the pathway. (1995c)

This angel departs from Benjamin's messianic missive, "Theses 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 homogeneous, empty flow, and revolutionary time as that "filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" (1969:261).<sup>2</sup> Regarding the latter, Benjamin wrote:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a

monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. (1969:262–63)

Significantly, the tension of the “Theses” themselves resides in the particular constellation of Benjamin’s thought, the constellation of historical materialism and messianic Judaism: the revolutionary “time of the now” is “shot through with Messianic chips.” Benjamin ends the “Theses” by writing: “We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. [...] This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (1969:264).

“The time is eight o’clock and one second, the time is eight o’clock and two seconds [...].”

If we seem frozen here at the gate of *The Nerve Bible*, seized by Anderson’s citation of Benjamin, it’s because Anderson has described *The Nerve Bible* as a “retrospective of the future.” By reading over and recombining bits of her own body of work, Anderson looks back over the debris of U.S. history while lighting out for unknown territories. As with her other major productions, *The Nerve Bible* engages ritual, music, dance, and many other genres of cultural performance. But it is storytelling that most clearly guides Anderson’s flight path, storytelling rooted in the spiritual plains of midwestern America.

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.<sup>3</sup>

For those speaking her language, such fabulous twists are the odd encounters, coincidental insights, and logical paradoxes that punctuate *The Nerve Bible*. In this fable, twists create moments in which the two axes of time—the time you can change and the time you cannot—overlap one another. Benjamin sought to unleash monads or “flashes” by montaging images and texts of 19th-century Europe; Anderson’s revelatory twists emerge from the sedimentation of late-20th-century America, the ambient setting for all her work. “*Stories from the Nerve Bible* is also a series of landscapes. I’ve tried many times to picture the United States, which is also a background for everything my work is about: memory, language, technology, politics, utopia, power, men and women” (1994a:7).

In the Bible Belt, where Anderson learned to tell stories, the most nerve-racking storms are those which produce tornadoes or twisters—dark, funnel-shaped clouds that drop from the sky and cut across the landscape. Some performances of *Stories from the Nerve Bible* actually staged a 20-foot twister.<sup>4</sup> Anderson’s stormy stories unleash twisters that challenge the great Storm of History, the stories of Progress, of Salvation, and of that quintessentially American epic, Manifest Destiny.<sup>5</sup> *The Nerve Bible* generates its revelatory twists through the image-music-text format Anderson developed in *Americans on the Move* (1979) and *United States, Parts I–IV* (1983). Large projected video and still images dwarf her body onstage as she surveys the debris of recent U.S. history. Cutting across its archive, she tells anecdotes and sings songs through synthesized and regular microphones, “dances” in the drum suit, and plays sounds and music on violin, guitar, and synthesizer console. Anderson selects visual, audio, musical, and gestural components from her database of



2. Laurie Anderson's stormy stories unleash twisters that challenge the great Storm of History, the stories of Progress, of Salvation, and of that quintessentially American epic, Manifest Destiny. (Photo by Jeffrey Mayer)

cultural performances and recombines them into new constellations, a strategy that informs both performance and book: “[B]ecause many of the themes are recurrent, I have shuffled things around so that sometimes the image from a performance in 1992 accompanies a text from the early ’70s” (1994a:7).

In recombining components, Anderson’s task lies less in placing her body in History than in linking up with certain “No Bodies” blown aside by its Storm. She sketches the concept of “nerve bible” as a freakish self-portrait while also speaking of these No Bodies.

What I mean by the “nerve bible” is, of course, the body, and this book is my way of looking for something, of frisking myself, like looking for keys. Parts of the body appear and disappear throughout the book adding up to a kind of self-portrait, although not a very naturalistic one. This portrait most resembles that drawing in medical books of the human body called “The Sensory Homunculus,” a depiction of the relative proportions of the sensory neurons as they’re represented in the brain. And it’s a kind of freakish, emaciated elf with ears the size of cars and an enormous mouth. But the bodies I relate to the most are the No Bodies. I’ve written many songs and stories for these “people.” They have no names, no histories. They’re outside of time and place and they are the ones who truly speak for me. (1994a:7)

These No Bodies “speak” in the twists of her performance. Though out of time and out of place, their stories emerge from *The Nerve Bible*’s mixture of old and new elements, elements emitted as Anderson crosses the two axes of time that structure its site. Benjamin wrote that the cultural treasures of a society “owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents

who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1969:256). The study of cultural performance that has emerged in the United States focuses precisely on reading such documents archived in those bodies marginalized by History: women and people of color, gays and lesbians, the poor and the homeless. Admitting that she had politically "slept through the 1980s," Anderson now lets these bodies speak more frequently in her stories, and they emit an alien atmosphere for her autobiographical tales.

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By linking games and sites into constellations, Anderson uses the twists and paradoxes of her stories to point out the language games of the "New World Order" darkening our horizons.

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*The Nerve Bible* consists of approximately 45 stories, themselves assembled into two long segments separated by an intermission. Although one can gather these stories into many constellations, let's continue our way through *The Nerve Bible* by following the Biblical missives of this site. They guide us from midwestern storms to those raging over other sites. The opening sequence of the burning book and Storm of History connects up with a reading of "The End of the World" ("When I think about the future I think about my grandmother. She was a Southern Baptist, a Holy Roller, and she had a very clear idea about the future and of how the world would end in fire, like in Revelations" [1995b]) and Harold Bloom's book *The Story of J* ("[...] there is the recent theory that a woman, the mysterious 'J,' wrote much of the Old Testament, but only because God was portrayed in these books as unfathomable, patriarchal, tyrannical, and inconsistent, the way presumably only a woman would write about a man" [1995b]). In the first part of *The Nerve Bible*, Anderson juxtaposes these biblical bits with the fires blowing in from a related weather system: Desert Storm, the U.S. military operation in the 1991 Gulf War. This storm involved other flying objects, namely Tomahawk, Scud, and Patriot missiles which, having been captured on video and stored in the American cultural archive, now fly across the screens of *The Nerve Bible*. She replays in-flight video of U.S. missiles closing in on Iraqi sites as well as images of the missile-filled Baghdad sky. The spiritual plains of the midwest and mideast cross in the song "Night in Baghdad," which recites CNN anchor Bernard Shaw's report of Desert Storm from the window of his hotel room:

Oh it's so beautiful, it's like the Fourth of July  
 It's like a Christmas tree, it's like fireflies  
 On a summer night. (1994b)

In "The Story Teller," an essay on oral and literary storytelling, Benjamin put the aim of the storyteller in this way: it is not to report the essence of a thing, but to sink "the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (1969:91–92). Mediating in media, through media, Anderson sinks the oral and literary traditions into her electric body in order to investigate electronic storytelling.

For me, electronics have always been connected to storytelling. Maybe because storytelling began when people used to sit around fires and because

fire is magic, compelling and dangerous. We are transfixed by its light and by its destructive power. Electronics are modern fires. (1994a:175)

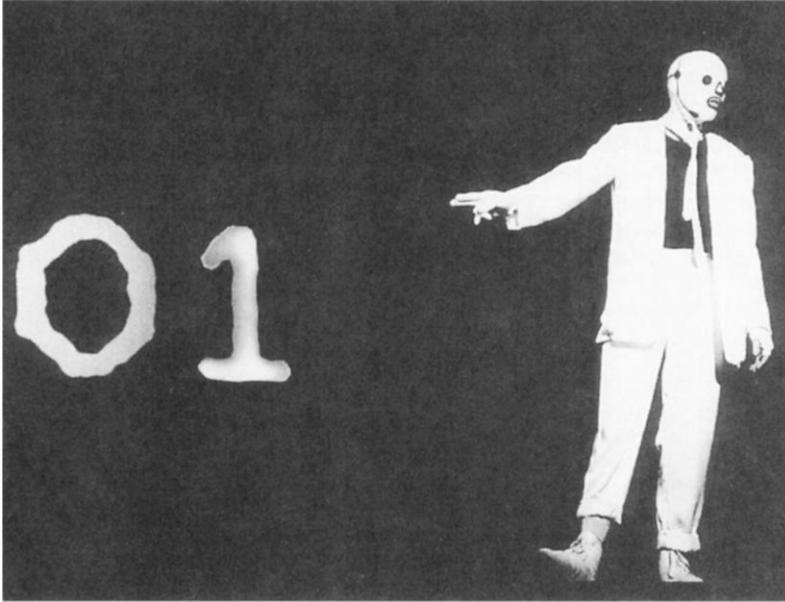
“Night in Baghdad” replays a story from what Anderson calls the Super Bowl coverage of the Gulf War, a reporting frenzy so caught up in the Desert Storm of History that it overshoot the little stories of life and death. This song investigates the handprints left by one electronic storyteller, and by recombining the anchor’s traces, lays down other tracks. Instead of reporting from some exterior site, Anderson mediates in the news anchor’s coverage by channeling exterior sites through the interior circuits of her electric body, a body performing (as) *The Nerve Bible*. “The strangest thing about performing *Stories from the Nerve Bible* in Israel was the show in Tel Aviv. On the screen, there were pictures of buildings that had been blown up in the Gulf War. These buildings had been only blocks away from the theatre” (1994a:279). The tracks in *The Nerve Bible* are tracks of an immense electric body, a body telling stories of No Bodies and laying down tracks that smoke with the firings of sensory neurons and electronic circuitry.

The second part of *The Nerve Bible* links its angels and missiles to a constellation of stories that concern storms raging in the virtual atmosphere of cyberspace. One story contains a joke aimed at a rumor Anderson picked up on the Internet: The Vatican had been bought out by Microsoft and issued a statement saying, “We’ve had icons for 2,000 years: They’ve only had them a few years.” Up on the screens, World Wide Web addresses flash by, as well as this text: “One world, one operating system.” Anderson comments that with the right numbers and codes, one can check local weather conditions on the World Wide Web. This constellation flickered faintly in *The Nerve Bible*, as if the spectacle unfolding in the Neil Simon Theatre could only point toward an entirely different dimension of performance—that of cyberspace. To link up with this dimension, we must travel to other sites in Anderson’s media storm. As we will see, the Storm of Progress, though seeming to drive technological developments, has been displaced through digital matrices. If Benjamin’s angelic trajectory crossed messianic Judaism with historical materialism, Anderson’s flight plan mixes evangelical Christianity with games played by other philosophical investigators.

### *The Language Game of the Future: Perform—or else!*

While channel-surfing in the TV Room of *Puppet Motel*, I come across an old cartoon favorite, a Laurie Anderson comic strip animated to music. A man with a broken leg stands in a room; a written command hangs over him: “Throw away that crutch!” He does, and falls to the ground. And there he is again, standing now with a broken arm added to his injuries. But still he’s ordered to “Throw away that crutch!” He does and falls to the ground. Again he comes back, leg in cast, arm in sling, head now bandaged. “Throw away that crutch!” He does and falls down. This time, however, he doesn’t come back. All that’s left is an empty room, the music, and the order “Throw away that crutch!—Rev. Ike.” The animation is looped, so it keeps repeating, over and over.

The cartoon appeared in linear form in *United States: Parts I–IV* with the song “If You Can’t Talk About It, Point to It (for Ludwig Wittgenstein and Reverend Ike).”<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein never had his own TV show, but his later works read as numbered shooting scripts for performance art: “50.) Imagine how a child might be trained in the practice of ‘narration of past events.’ He is first trained in asking for certain things (as it were, in giving orders [...])” (1958:105). In *The Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein sought to ground a



3. "I think we should get rid of the value judgments attached to these two numbers and recognise that to be a zero is no better, no worse, than to be number one. Because what we are actually looking at here are the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age." (Photo by Les Fincher; courtesy of Laurie Anderson)

philosophy of language upon everyday speech, arguing that conceptual meaning arises from discrete uses of language, uses which must be studied—or rather played—as games. To study the presuppositions guiding our use of concepts, Wittgenstein invented hundreds of "language games" or thought experiments. He also played language itself as a game, or rather as a maze of language games, all ruled by presuppositions more implicit than explicit, more loose than rigid, presuppositions he investigated, philosophically speaking, as child's play.

We are unable clearly to circumscribe the concepts we use; not because we don't know their real definition, but because there is no real "definition" to them. To suppose that there must be would be like supposing that whenever children play with a ball they play a game according to strict rules. (1958:25)

Such implicit and loose rules cannot be stated directly, but they can be shown, because for Wittgenstein language is composed of both linguistic and nonlinguistic practices. Indeed, language games imply life forms: "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (1968:19). Wittgenstein made up his lively games with words and pictures (cartoon faces, arrows, cubes, tables, squiggly lines, and so on), as well as with gestures. If he couldn't talk about something, he pointed to it, alluded to it, suggested it in graphic terms: "56.) Let us now have the case of a description of the future, a forecast" (1958:107).<sup>7</sup>

Decades after Wittgenstein's death, Anderson will channel his gamey spirit through performance art, video, film, television, and interactive CD-ROM—mediums in tune with his audiovisual *Philosophical Investigations*, a text she studied in the late 1960s while attending Barnard College.<sup>8</sup> Her stories function as multimedia language games that not only document past injustices, but also read the emerging rules of electronic societies. She plays different games at different sites, and no one site states these rules outright; rather, by linking games and sites into constellations, she uses the twists and paradoxes of her

stories to point out the language games of the “New World Order” darkening our horizons.<sup>9</sup>

Let’s fly through another constellation in Anderson’s media storm: Checking into the room “Night Flight” from the CD-ROM *Puppet Motel*, let us imagine a performer (you perhaps), who connects the stars of a night sky into different patterns: an airplane, eyeglasses, a flashlight, an ice skate—each opening onto other sites. Between sites, intertitles flash by, in this case a truth table composed of two columns labeled “inputs” and “outputs,” and filled with rows of “1”s and “0”s. The performer then thumbs through *Stories from the Nerve Bible* and scans a photo of Anderson pointing at these digits and reciting “Lower Mathematics” while wearing a tight white jumpsuit and her even tighter “Sharkey” mask: “To be a zero means to be a nobody, a has-been, a ziltch. On the other hand, just about everyone wants to be number one. To be number one means to be a winner, top of the heap, the acme. And there seems to be a strange kind of national obsession with this particular number” (1994a:135). The performer next plays back “The Language of the Future” from Anderson’s performance at the 1978 Nova convention: “JUMP OUT OF THE PLANE./THERE IS NO/PILOT./YOU ARE NOT ALONE./ This is the language/of the on-again/off-again/future./And/it is digital” (1994a:149). Finally, the performer inserts the CD *Bright Red* into a player and selects the song “The Puppet Motel”: “And all the puppets in this digital jail/ They’re runnin’ around in a frenzy in search of the Holy Grail./ They’re havin’ virtual sex./ They’re eatin’ virtual food./ No wonder these puppets are in such a lousy mood” (1994b). As this constellation of sites suggests, Anderson’s electric body is a body of resistors that checks the flow of electronic power. Philip Auslander has written that Anderson, unlike performance artists of the 1960s, does not seek to transgress the emerging electronic order from some external location; rather, her works resist that order by inhabiting it (1992). Digitized through CD-ROMs, CDs, and other electronic media, she plays the same digital games differently. Resistance in 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. From “Lower Mathematics”: “I think we should get rid of the value judgments attached to these two numbers and recognize that to be a zero is no better, no worse, than to be number one. Because what we are actually looking at here are the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age” (1994a:135). In the language game of the future, there is no pilot, no Progress, only the on-again, off-again switching between different sites of power and knowledge. The old language game of power, that of the Storm of Progress, has given way to another: the digital game which rules everything from music and images to missiles and surveillance systems.

Another channeler of Wittgenstein has also plugged his language games into the electronic matrices of “1”s and “0”s. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard reports on the legitimation of power and knowledge in computerized societies:

There are many language games—a heterogeneity of language particles. They only give rise to institutions in patches [...]. The decision makers, however, attempt to manage these clouds of sociality according to input/output matrices, following a logic which implies that their matrices are commensurable and that the whole is determinable. They allocate our lives for the growth of power. (1984:xxiv)

Lyotard’s reading is important here for two reasons: first, he analyzes the breakdown of “grand narratives” (Progress, Liberation, Revolution) in legiti-

mizing both power and knowledge; second, he names the emerging language game of legitimation “performativity”:

In matters of social justice and of scientific truth alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system’s performance—efficiency. The application of this criteria to all of our games necessarily entails a certain level of terror, whether soft or hard: be operational (that is, commensurable) or disappear. (xxiv)<sup>10</sup>

Performativity is the language game of the future, a game already ringing us up over modem lines, fax machines, and satellite dishes. In this sense, performance can be understood in terms of what Michel Foucault called a stratum of power and knowledge. This “performance stratum” began forming in the U.S. shortly after the Second World War, but its world wide web of effects remains under frantic construction. The order of the performance stratum is deceptively simple: “Perform or else—you’re a No Body!”

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Resistance in 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.

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Herein lies the singularity of Laurie Anderson/performance: 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. In the language games of organizational management, performance is used not only to design and then evaluate and market technologies, but also to manage the work of individuals, production teams, departments, and entire business and governmental bureaucracies. There are high-performance managers, high-performance task forces, high-performance organizations.

The interface of these two games—of technical efficiency and bureaucratic profitability—defines the postmodern condition of the performance stratum. 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. Here’s another account of what counts in “1”s and “0”s:

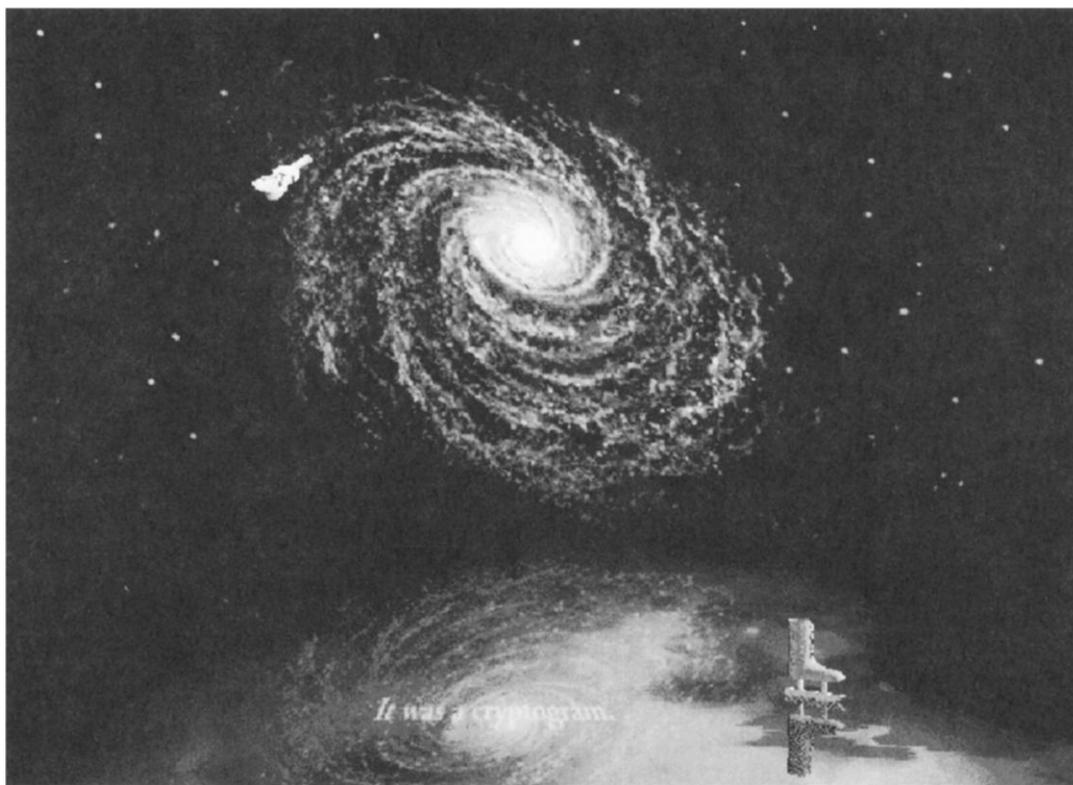
Well I walked uptown and I saw a sign that said:  
Today’s lecture Big Science and Little Men.

So I walked in and there were all these salesmen and a big pile of electronics. And they were singing: “Phase Lock Loop. Neurological Bonding. Video Disc.” They were singing: “We’re gonna link you up.” They said, “Let’s look at it this way: Picture a Christmas tree with lots of little sparkly lights, and each light is totally separate, but they’re all sort of hanging off the same wire. Get the picture?” And I said: “Count me out!” And they said: “We’ve got your number.” And I said: “Count me out. You gotta count me out!” (Anderson 1984)

### *Puppet Motel: Interfacing Laurel and Laurie*

4. In 1974, Anderson performed Duets on Ice on the streets of New York, standing in skates with blades frozen in ice and playing cowboy songs on the Self-Playing Violin. Twenty years later, this small bit haunts the edges of her latest media blitz. (Image from Puppet Motel CD-ROM; screen grab by Jon McKenzie)

The performance opens on a site dominated by a large red structure, two parallel I-beams heading off toward a dark vanishing point. Music comes up, haunted with crashes and cathedrals. On the left beam, a small cube rolls over and over in place; above that, large chalky logos slowly appear and dissolve upon a moving wall of riveted gray steel; on the right beam, white curtains caress an open window frame as a breeze blows in from a vast cloudy sky. Below the beams, on a horizontal plane, revolve the faces of two clocks. Their black hands sweep by, and a voice intones, “The time is eight o’clock and one second. The time is eight o’clock and two seconds. The time is eight o’clock and three seconds.” I point at one of the cartoon logos—an ice skate—and move my finger. Suddenly, darkness swallows the site, and it is replaced, moments later, by another. Strings come up on a lone and empty skate rotating slowly on a frozen lake; just below its surface rests another violin, while overhead a night sky churns a storm of revolving stars. I move my hand, the skate cuts across the storm seized in a mirror of ice; Anderson begins to speak. It’s a story about her grandmother’s death, the one that begins:



I remember the day my grandmother died. I went for a walk out on a lake.  
 I saw a lot of ducks. As I got closer, I saw that the ducks didn't fly away.  
 As I got even closer, I saw that their feet were frozen in the ice.

As this story unfolds, the silhouette of a duck crosses the horizon, like some target that's wandered off from a theme-park shooting gallery. The story unwinds, and the violin slowly rises through the ice, up into the air and then into the celestial storm. White text appears in the ice, "I got your letter. It was a cryptogram." Soon a frozen face lights up nearby. I skate over to it, and the site goes black.

This performance opened in my living room early on the morning of 8 April 1995. Hours after I saw *The Nerve Bible*, I opened Anderson's *Puppet Motel* (purchased at the performance) and loaded it onto my Macintosh. *Puppet Motel* is Anderson's first voyage into the emerging medium of interactive CD-ROM, yet by the time you read this, it may have become something of a classic, for though the CD-ROM industry has marketed hundreds of multimedia titles in the past several years, few have gathered much critical attention—or sales—and fewer still have gathered both. *Puppet Motel* may count among the latter. Cocreated with programmer Hsin-Chien Huang and produced by Voyager, the leading CD-ROM company in the U.S., it is an interactive tour de force, both conceptually and technically. And through a sophisticated marketing strategy, one that involves reciprocal tie-ins with other elements of Anderson's media storm, it was for a brief time one of the hottest selling CD-ROMs in the U.S. Though only released for the Macintosh platform, *Puppet Motel* may well be what the record *O Superman* (1981) was to *Americans on the Move*—a spinoff that crosses over into a hit (*O Superman* reached number two on the British music charts in 1981). While this record disseminated Anderson's words and music to target audiences other than the aficionados of the avantgarde, CD-ROM technology plays back not only her stories and songs, but also her gestures, drawings, writings, videos, and performances. Because of the relative youth of the interactive CD-ROM medium, *Puppet Motel* could impact its future direction in a way that *O Superman* could not have done with vinyl, an established analog medium whose days were already numbered by "1" and "0," that is, by digital CDs.

In *Computers as Theatre*, Brenda Laurel charts a future of interactive digital technologies in which theatre plays as important a role as computer science:

Designing human-computer experience isn't about building a better desktop. It's about creating imaginary worlds that have a special relationship to reality—worlds in which we can extend, amplify, and enrich our own capabilities to think, feel, and act. [...T]he theatrical domain can help us in this task. (1993:32–33)

Laurel's insight may be on target: human-computer interface needn't be dominated by the performative values of efficiency and profitability, and theatre can offer strategic alternatives to it. Yet her mission consists of theorizing interactivity in terms of representation, specifically the aesthetics of Aristotle's *Poetics*. She translates into the realm of interface design his six dramatic elements (spectacle, melody, language, character, thought, and plot) and his four causes (material, formal, efficient, and teleological). For Laurel, coherency of action and the resulting cathartic pleasure define the representational criteria of any human-computer interface design. Within the language games of our hyperguide, however, interactivity may be recast as the linking of cultural and technological performance. Cultural performance provides a more conductive relay for interface design than does theatre alone, for its games also include

folklore, ritual, popular entertainment, dance, and so on. And performance artists, in particular, have repeatedly launched explicit and practical critiques of Aristotelian aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> From “For Lenin (for Tape Bow Violin)”: “Aesthetics is the ethics of the few. Ethics is the aesthetics of the fu.....ture (1994a:94).

Anderson’s stories function as allegories in a Benjaminian or Kafkan sense: they emit signifying bits guided not by a transcendent signified or a referential reality but by immanent social forces that affect everybody and No Body—forces frozen in genders, sexualities, classes, races, nationalities, and religions.<sup>12</sup> As with her other works, *Puppet Motel* does not theorize the everyday; rather it makes theory everyday. Its actions fragmented and nonlinear, its pleasures as cathartic as cathartic, *Puppet Motel* does not represent some grand narrative, but generates a disjunctive series of games that allow players to creatively investigate the performance stratum as it operates through their lives. And by channeling music, voices, gestures, and images through electronic circuits, Anderson’s body of resistors plugs these games directly into the interface between cultural and technological performance. This interface—interactivity “itself”—finds its allegorical outlet throughout *Puppet Motel*, sometimes on a wall, sometimes floating in space, sometimes frozen in ice. It is a plug face, a power socket, a female mug shot of the electric body. “I’ve always thought that women make excellent social critics. We can look at situations, especially those involving power, and size them up fairly well; since we don’t have much authority ourselves, we don’t have that much to lose” (1994a:261).

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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.

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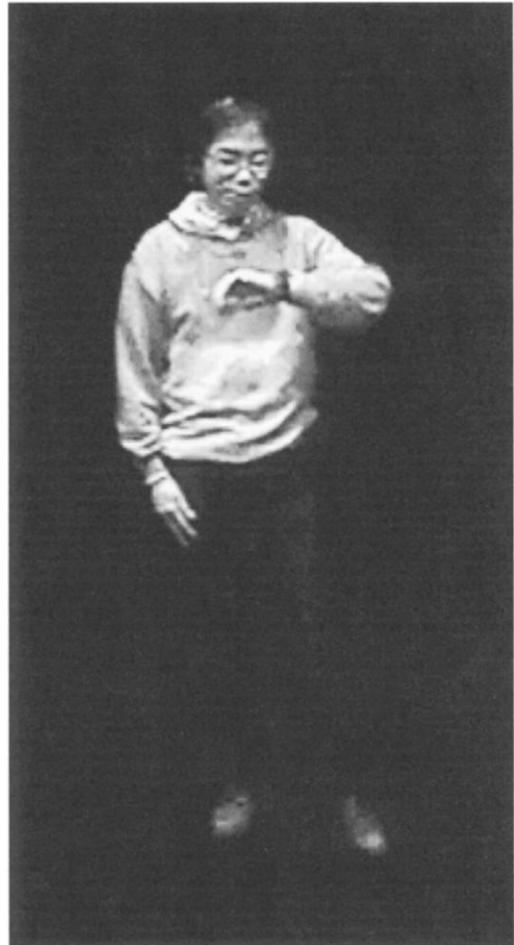
Programmer Hsin-Chien Huang takes full advantage of the electronic dramaturgy already at work in Anderson’s performance art. Anderson collaborated with Huang to transpose elements from her archive into the electronic space of CD-ROMs.<sup>13</sup> An allegory of the maze of computer networks and social communities that compose cyberspace, *Puppet Motel* contains a series of rooms connected, first of all, by a hallway. After signing in, a guest enters the motel through the Hall of Time, with its two I-beams, its two clocks, and some 21 pulsing logos which, when selected with the mouse, lead to different rooms. These rooms include the Ice Rink, the Planetarium, and the TV Room, as well as the Breakfast Room, the Psychiatrist’s Office, the Acupuncturist, the Anechoic Chamber, the Aquarium, and, of course, the Motel Room (complete with lamp, clock, radio, TV, vibrating bed, minibar, cheap motel painting, and a window—all of which are interactive). Each site is linked hypertextually or hypergraphically to other sites. Clicking on a plug face in a room returns one to the Hall of Time with its wall of logos. Hitting the escape key anywhere at anytime takes one to the Attic, a cluttered space filled with objects which have likewise “escaped” from different rooms, different language games. The Hall of Time and the Attic thus both function as metasites linked to most of the motel’s rooms. By playing the language games, a guest learns the network of links indexed by different logos and objects. Some rooms, however, can only be entered by “wormholes,” secret passages that link one room to another.

While *The Nerve Bible* interfaces cultural and technological performance by putting electronic technologies onstage, *Puppet Motel* does so by inscribing the stage within the computer. Selecting the I-beam in the Attic, for instance, takes one to The Stage, a virtual *Nerve Bible* set. A QuickTime movie<sup>14</sup> of Anderson begins, and she walks around describing the set's T design and its two axes of time. Several other QuickTime movies of Anderson can be played here, as well as one of Hsin-Chien Huang, who says "Today is December 17, 1994. I have only one month to finish, so time is of the essence: I'd better get back to work." The Stage contains several wormholes, one of which leads to a virtual greenroom of *The Nerve Bible* tour. The Dummy, a ventriloquist puppet of Anderson, greets visitors and shows off the space. Here one may check out a map of the U.S. tour, read some promotional material about her CDs, try out Mac Makeup (a virtual cosmetic kit), play QuickTime movies downloaded from Anderson's website, and even browse through Huang's programming script for *Puppet Motel*.

All the rooms in *Puppet Motel* function as discrete performance sites where a guest may play language games from Anderson's archive. Here, in this interface of cultural and technological performance, the guest is the performer. There are no detailed navigation instructions, though *Puppet Motel: A Guide*, a small text packaged with the CD-ROM, does offer a few hints, such as "Seek sources of light and reflection. They can transform your experience and offer alternative realities" and "notice when your mouse cursor changes. This will indicate that some unknown possibility awaits you when you click." Some of the rooms' games involve listening to songs, reading stories, or watching QuickTime movies. In these games, the interactivity is relatively low, since once the guest has initiated a bit, she or he performs as an audience member. Other games, however, position the guest as a more productive performer. Significantly, these games all involve other technologies, virtual machines rendered on-screen. In the Cutting Room, for instance, a guest can use the mouse to operate a video editing console, combining audio and video clips into a music video. In the Writing Room, one can utilize the keyboard to type a letter to a lost love, rewrite the first chapter of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, or even write a novel. And in a room called the Love Line, the guest can use a microphone to record messages. Through these "interfaces within interfaces," *Puppet Motel* plugs into the guest's practical knowledge of analog technologies and displaces it within the computer's digital space. In this sense, *Puppet Motel* also functions as a guide to recombinant production strategies: it shows one how to rework technical skills as well as preexisting cultural materials.

The machines housed in *Puppet Motel* also point toward something else, namely, that the computer is itself a recombinant performer that reworks bits and pieces of other technological performances. The analogical performances of editing machines, typewriters, microphones, radios, record players, televisions, cameras, and so on are not represented on the computer; rather, as evidenced by keyboards, monitors, scanners, and programs such as Director, *Puppet Motel*

5. Hsin-Chien Huang, in a *Puppet Motel* QuickTime movie: "Today is December 17, 1994. I have only one month to finish, so time is of the essence. I'd better get back to work." (Image from *Puppet Motel* CD-ROM; screen grab by Jon McKenzie)



points to the computer's incorporation of other machines into its own technological performance. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Phone Room, which houses the telephonic language games. Here guests can access a virtual answering machine programmed with several options. Anderson's voice intones: "If you'd like to leave a message, press 1. If you'd like go somewhere you haven't been before, press 2. If you'd like a list of options, press 3. If you'd like to leave a message on the Internet, press 4."

Pressing the number 4 shows why *Puppet Motel* is an immanent rather than transcendent allegory of cyberspace. Pressing 4 shuts down the CD-ROM program, dials up a modem line, and links up to the World Wide Web.<sup>15</sup> By pressing 4, the guest checks out and goes "home."

I came home today  
 And both our cars were gone  
 And there were all these pink flamingos  
 Arranged in star patterns all over the lawn.  
 And then I went into the kitchen  
 And it looked like a tornado had hit  
 And then I realized  
 I was in the wrong house.<sup>16</sup>

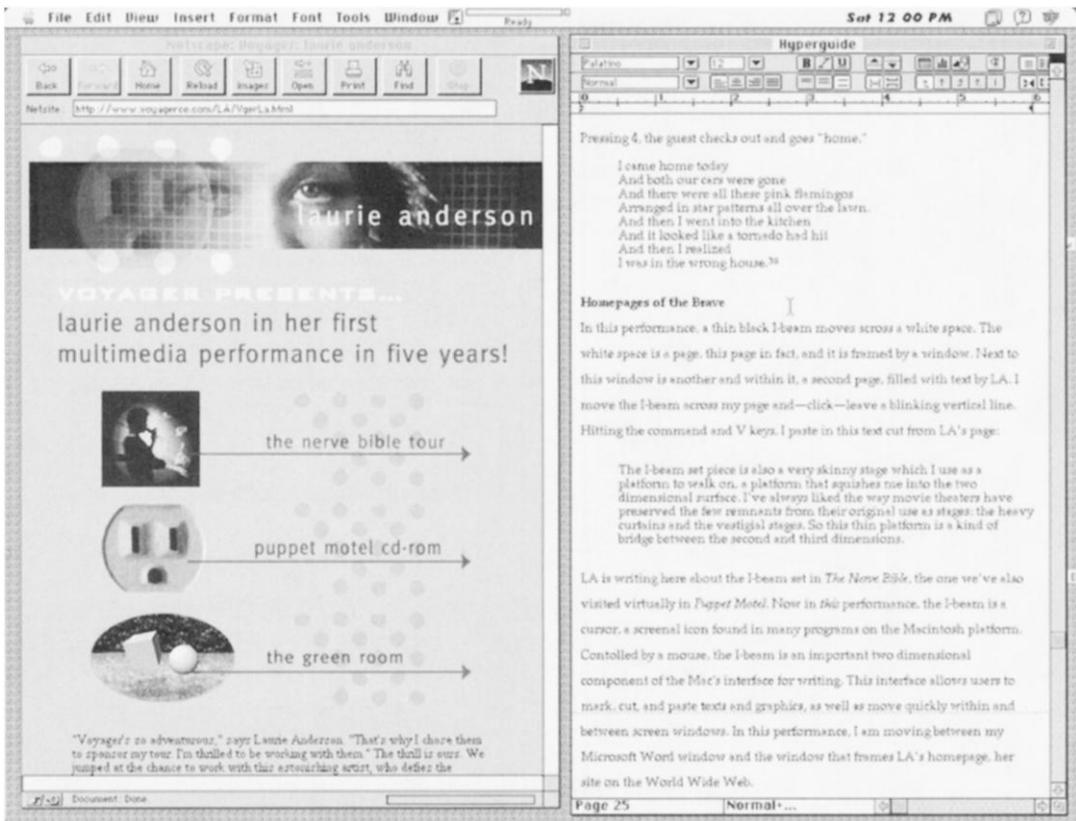
### *Homepages of the Brave*

In this performance, a thin black I-beam moves across a white space. The white space is a page, this page in fact, and it is framed by a window. Next to this window is another and within it, a second page, filled with text by Anderson. I move the I-beam across my page and—click—leave a blinking vertical line. Hitting the Command and V keys, I paste in this text cut from Anderson's page:

The I-beam set piece is also a very skinny stage which I use as a platform to walk on, a platform that squishes me into the two dimensional surface. I've always liked the way movie theatres have preserved the few remnants from their original use as stages: the heavy curtains and the vestigial stages. So this thin platform is a kind of bridge between the second and third dimensions. (1995c)

Anderson is writing here about the I-beam set in *The Nerve Bible*, the one we've also visited virtually in *Puppet Motel*. Now in *this* performance, the I-beam is a cursor, a screenal icon found in many programs on the Macintosh platform. Controlled by a mouse, the I-beam is an important two-dimensional component of the Mac's interface for writing. This interface allows users to mark, cut, and paste texts and graphics, as well as move quickly within and between screen windows. In this performance, I am moving between my Microsoft Word window and the window that frames Anderson's homepage, her site on the World Wide Web.

The homepage is another element of Anderson's media blitz, another flight into the future, one that relays her electric body to an increasing sophisticated electronic audience. As part of its marketing of *The Nerve Bible* and *Puppet Motel*, Voyager set up this website in early 1995, linking it to its own homepage. Located at <http://www.voyagerco.com/LA/VgerLa.html>, Anderson's website allows those with web navigators to visit other pages and access information about current Anderson projects, download files, order the CD-ROM, and send e-mail messages. The site has changed several times since it first opened; new pages have been added and others removed. (In fact,



6. (Screen grab by Jon McKenzie)

some of the pages described here have already disappeared, and no doubt others will be removed and new ones added by the time this text is published.) The primary links on the homepage are “The Nerve Bible Tour,” “Puppet Motel CD-ROM,” and “The Green Room.” “The Nerve Bible Tour” page contains schedules of its U.S. and European shows. The “Puppet Motel CD-ROM” pages contain downloadable excerpts, screen shots, citations from critical reviews, as well as hints from Voyager and from users themselves. Visitors can also e-mail in hints. “The Green Room” page has evolved significantly since its first posting and now has five primary links. Two lead to a U.S. and a European greenroom; during the U.S. tour of *The Nerve Bible*, visitors could download video taken from the actual greenrooms in each city of the tour. During the European tour, one could read entries from Anderson’s journal, short reflections about each show. Other links on the “Green Room” page are “The Stage,” with a drawing and descriptions of the set; “Events,” with links to other outside sites concerning recent or upcoming Anderson events; and “Real World,” with Anderson’s description of a long-term collaborative project with Peter Gabriel and Brian Eno.

Throughout Anderson’s website, there are links to other, outside sites, those whose web addresses appear in the second half of *The Nerve Bible*. At one time, Anderson’s Voyager website contained “Laurie’s Hot List.” Much like the Hall of Time and The Attic in *Puppet Motel*, this red hot list functioned as a metasite by linking together a host of other sites. Hot lists have become an important genre on the Web, allowing users to find and tour websites guided by the idiosyncracies, research, and programming of other

travelers. Anderson's list linked up to some 20 sites, including the "Homepage of the Brave," a website created by a fan of Anderson, Jim Davies (1995). "Homepage of the Brave" (located at <http://www.c3.lanl.gov:8080/cgi/jimmyd/quoter?home>) rivals the homepage set up by Voyager and has also evolved significantly since it opened, becoming more graphically oriented. "Homepage of the Brave" contains downloadable images of Anderson, a history of her performances, a discography, a biography, a bibliography of articles by and about Anderson, artwork and poetry inspired by her, and even a version of Anderson's hot list. Online travelers can browse an archive of informal performance reviews and interpretations contributed by other Anderson fans and can even add their own by attaching files to the site. Davies has linked his site to other websites developed by fans, such as John Gluck's "Laurie Anderson FAQ" (Frequently Asked Questions) and Phil Trubey's "Laurie Anderson Info Site." Through these several Homepages of the Brave—Anderson sites set up by Voyager and by fans—her electric body performs through the virtual community that passes through. Arriving from all parts of the globe, visitors—fans, friends, customers, critics, strangers—check in to see what's up, perhaps leave a message, and then check out.

We have seen that *Puppet Motel* interfaces cultural and technological performances and functions as an immanent allegory of the networks and communities that comprise the Internet. This allegory is immanent in that it connects directly to the Web: the various Homepages of the Brave are just a few more of its rooms, with other language games and links to innumerable other rooms. With respect to this expansive motel, however, Anderson also has certain longstanding reservations.

Now about the residents of the Puppet Motel  
 They're more than a little spooky  
 And most of them are mean. They're running the numbers  
 They're playing cops and robbers  
 Down in the dungeons inside their machines. (1994b)

Let's follow these reservations through another constellation of sites. Davies' "Homepage of the Brave" links up to both Voyager and to Warner Bros. Records, which provides its own downloadable files, audio tracks from Anderson's CD *Bright Red*. The Warners Bros. site in turn has links to sites at Tower Records, Noteworthy Music, and CDnow, from which one can check out Anderson's other music CDs and, by using the I-beam cursor, even fill out an order form and make a purchase. This constellation of websites shows that Anderson's electric body not only interfaces the language games of cultural and technological performance, but also of bureaucratic performance. This is a language game that she has been learning to play for two decades, making reservations all along the way. In *Stories from the Nerve Bible*, she writes:

[R]ecords involve companies and my relationship with corporations has always been difficult. 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. (1994a:57)<sup>17</sup>

Bureaucratic performance is the language game of big money, and it is run by the numerical values of profitability, cost-effectiveness, and optimization. Long hardwired to the digital matrices of technological performance, bureaucratic performance is now storming the Internet. Business, educational, and governmental computer systems have for decades been linked by telephone and other communication lines. With the hookup of personal computers and modems in the past few years, millions of individuals have begun roadtesting their machines on “The Information Superhighway” or the “Info Bahn.” As of 1995, over 100,000 people, for instance, have visited the homepage of the National Performance Review (<http://www.npr.gov/>), an ongoing evaluation of the performance of federal agencies. Competition for the U.S. online audience has become incredibly fierce, with more and more organizations racing to deliver the virtual goods. By the end of 1995, America Online, Compuserve, Prodigy, and a host of smaller computer servers in the U.S. had begun selling access to the Internet, increasing the traffic on the Info Bahn by several fold. The atmosphere has become heated by highly publicized mergers—and aborted mergers—between telephone, cable, computer, and entertainment companies, as well as by legislative debates over how to regulate the emerging cyberspace, one in which television, telephone, computer, and audio systems converge toward an unnamed technology of the future. Visitors will have to pay to stay at this puppet motel, a motel located at the intersections of cultural, technological, and bureaucratic performance.

On the Voyager homepage, two of the downloadable files are of the Dummy from *Puppet Motel*. The Dummy is a puppet taken from the cultural performance of ventriloquy, and though it looks a bit like Anderson, it is significant that she calls it “Dummy.”<sup>18</sup> There are also puppets in the language game of technological performance: proxie performers or screenal figures that “stand in” for their users. On the Internet, some puppets, like those found in MOOs and MUDs,<sup>19</sup> feign being controlled by keyboards, mice, and other corporeal interfaces. Other electronic puppets, however, such as those roaming the credit histories stored in financial institutions, are pulled by more impersonal, corporate strings. These puppets are tied tightly to bureaucratic performance, a language game that makes for some difficult listening. With respect to her own entrance into this game, Anderson describes what happened after “signing an eight record deal granting Warner Bros. 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’” (1994a:155). In the language game of avantgarde cultural performance, “selling out” means becoming a corporate puppet, a dummy of bureaucratic performance “in perpetuity throughout the universe.” Anderson continues: “It took me quite a while to understand, but finally I realized this judgment was totally consistent. The avant-garde in the late ’70s was extremely protective of its own ideas, territory, and privilege. I myself had benefitted from this attitude. I had been supported and protected by this network” (155).

Signing the record contract, Anderson risked straining her ties to this network’s support and protection, for the interface between cultural and bureaucratic performances is a stormy one. By the 1980s, however, several



7. In *Stories from the Nerve Bible* Anderson published this altered version of an American Express ad she did in the 1980s. Significantly, no credit is given for this image. (Courtesy of Laurie Anderson)

American artists, such as Spalding Gray, Eric Bogosian, and Sandra Bernhard, also began to cross over (see Auslander 1992). In her own way, Anderson has incorporated cultural performance into bureaucratic performance, and vice versa. She has learned to sell stories and to tell stories about “selling out.” And she has done all this through technological performance. For sold out audiences at her 1983 performance of *United States*, Anderson stood under a giant projection of the Warner Bros. logo and, mike in hand, told this tale:

Well I was out in L.A. 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!” (1994a:146)

Crucial to Anderson’s electric body, with its plug face, its power resistors, and its puppetry, have been its adaptors, the mechanisms through which this body goes against the flow while going with it. In the 1980s, Anderson railed against private property and did an ad for American Express. In the 1990s, she sings of digital prisons and goes online with this plug, posted by Voyager on her homepage: “‘Voyager’s an adventurous company,’ says Laurie Anderson, ‘and that’s why I chose them to sponsor my tour. I’m thrilled to be working with them.’ The thrill is ours” (Anderson 1995c). Through this plugging and unplugging, Anderson incessantly adapts her resistors to the conflicting rules of the different games of performance.

Such adaptive resistance guides Anderson’s media storm as it expands through the Internet, a sociotechnical atmosphere churning with technological and bureaucratic performances. This storm contains many risks—that of appropriation, reterritorialization, and cries that she has “sold out”—but these risks define not so much the limits of her cultural performance but its postmodern condition. Perhaps more than any other performer, Anderson has used the twists of her stories to investigate links between the different games unfolding on the performance stratum: not only games of knowledge and power, of big science and little men, but also of adaptors, resistors, No Bodies. If language is a virus from outer space, LA PERFORMANCE is online with uncanny linkups to the future. “But ‘Stories from the Nerve Bible’ is about the future, and it didn’t have any answers, only questions.”

### Notes

1. This text was composed in mid-1995. Since then, the Laurie Anderson pages at the Voyager website have changed substantially: just another example of the different temporalities of print and electronic media. I have not updated my references to Voyager’s site for one simple reason: I am interested in how her work engages the marketing practice of media blitzes. On another front: after establishing itself as the premiere American CD-ROM company, Voyager has recently shifted its focus away from CD-ROMs and is now concentrating on projects related to the Web.
2. Benjamin’s angelic figures take off from Paul Klee’s painting, “Angelus Novus,” and Gerhard Scholem’s poem, “Gruss von Angelus.”
3. Selection from a 1991 interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg reprinted in *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective, 1972–1992* (1994a:137).
4. The tornado was designed by Ned Kahn and consisted of dry ice blown into a funnel shape by jets of air.
5. During the 19th century, the term “Manifest Destiny” was used in the U.S. to justify

- the westward expansion of the nation's territorial landscape. Connecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts was seen as this country's "manifest destiny," a project that can now be read as evidencing a certain manifest density in American social thought.
6. In her 1977 *Juke Box* show at New York's Holly Solomon Gallery, Anderson installed a juke box containing 24 titles, among them "If You Can't Talk About It, Point to It (For Screamin' Jay Hawkins and Ludwig Wittgenstein)."
  7. Wittgenstein was also a bit of a wandering mystic; Jewish by descent, he carried Tolstoy's adaptation of the Gospels with him throughout the First World War and became known as "the man with the Gospel" (see Schulte 1992:5).
  8. Paula Maricola's chronology of Anderson reads: "1966-69: Attends Barnard College. Receives B.A. in art history, graduating magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa. [...] Important reading includes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*" (1983:63).
  9. Such anticipatory reading skills have been noted in reference to another author cited by Anderson, Franz Kafka, whose aphorism of leopards breaking into a temple she reworks in "It Was Up in the Mountains" from *United States: Parts I-IV* (1983). Kafka's aphorism appears in "Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope and the True Way," published in *The Great Wall of China* (1946). On Kafka as reader of future social formations, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986).
  10. Lyotard's text is often cited by English speaking theorists of postmodern performance art; however, rarely do they mention Lyotard's concept of performativity, much less attempt to link it to performance art. See Nick Kaye's exemplary *Postmodernism and Performance* (1994).
  11. I follow this argument in relation to virtual reality technologies in "Virtual Reality: Performance, Immersion, and the Thaw" (1994:83-106).
  12. For an excellent related discussion, see Craig Owens's "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism: Part 2" (1980:58-80). This impulse challenges anyone writing "about" Anderson, for she inscribes the critical scene, its own allegorical impulse, within her work (see the section "Art, The Critics, and You" in *Stories from the Nerve Bible* [1994a:94-97]).
  13. Huang wrote the program for *Puppet Motel* using Macromedia Director, whose Lingo programming language revolves around "events," "movie scripts," "cast members," and "puppets." As these terms suggest, Director itself links the language games of cultural and technological performance.
  14. A digital "video" format used in multimedia.
  15. Assuming, of course, that one has the appropriate hardware and browser software.
  16. From "Talk Normal" (1985) reprinted in *Stories from the Nerve Bible: A Retrospective, 1972-1992* (1994a:199).
  17. We might note here that another oil company, Phillips Petroleum, now promotes itself as "The Performance Company."
  18. One might link this Dummy, while listening to Anderson's song "O Superman," to the ape that mimics the protagonist of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as well as to the question posed at the end of the philosopher's autobiography, *Ecce Homo*: "Have I been understood?" (1979).
  19. Multi-Object Oriented; Multi-User Dungeon.

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