

High & low : modern art and popular culture : six evenings of performance : Laurie Anderson ... [et al.]

Organized by RoseLee Goldberg

Date

1990

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

Exhibition URL

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1764

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.



HIGH & LOW
M O D E R N A R T
— **AND** —
POPULAR CULTURE

SIX EVENINGS OF PERFORMANCE

LAURIE ANDERSON

ERIC BOGOSIAN

BONGWATER

ANN MAGNUSON & KRAMER

DAVID CALE

BRIAN ENO

A Lecture

SPALDING GRAY

Organized by RoseLee Goldberg

This series is sponsored by AT&T.

Archive

MoMA

1559b



INTRODUCTION

The history of artists' performance in the twentieth century is also the history of this century's art and popular culture, and the points at which they meet. It begins with the Futurists, who, under the direction of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, published their first manifesto in 1909 in the most popular Parisian newspaper of the time, *Le Figaro*, and took aim at the public at large. Their eccentric and notorious performance evenings—called *serate* and staged at prominent theaters throughout Italy—were modeled on the part-carnival, part-cabaret variety theater, because, as Marinetti put it, variety theater was "anti-academic, primitive, and naive." Best of all, he said, it "destroys the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious, and the Sublime in Art with a capital A."

Prompted by the much publicized Futurist antics, the Dadaists and Surrealists, as well as students in the performance workshop at the Bauhaus, took over cabarets, cafés, and city parks in Zurich, Weimar, or Berlin for their sound poetry, light shows, noise music, and more formal demonstrations of art concerns, such as Bauhaus experiments with staging "figures in space." In the Soviet Union during the early twenties, the Constructivists created their avant-garde art intending mass appeal, and put it to work on special boats and trains carrying artists and performers to spread a new economic and political message to the largely illiterate rural population. Paradoxically, the meanings of these events were often quite difficult to grasp; nevertheless a relationship of sorts (albeit frequently confrontational) with the general public resulted.

From the fifties onward in the United States, this early history was built upon by artists from many disciplines; Trisha Brown, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Merce Cunningham, Philip Glass, Joan Jonas, Meredith Monk, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Wilson are just a few who have shaped contemporary art, music, dance, and theater in ways both sophisticated and polemical. Indeed, throughout the seventies, Performance art was the most visible of art forms, given that decade's emphasis on Conceptual art with its esoteric idealism. Consequently, by the late seventies one could refer to artists who worked almost exclusively in this live medium, leaving behind the early years when Performance had been a laboratory for young artists who later turned to painting and sculpture.

It was also the late seventies that witnessed the coming to town of the first fully fledged media generation. Nurtured on twenty-four-hour television and fast food, picture magazines and B movies, their graduation coincided with rock and roll's twenty-fifth anniversary, and with its ironic reincarnation, punk. The distinction between downtown alternative spaces, where Performance flourished, and downtown late-night clubs was blurred as the same artists alternated between the two. Then, in 1981 Laurie Anderson made her landmark crossing from Performance-art circuit to pop chart with "O Superman," a chanted, haunting high-tech ballad. This event riveted the attention of the general media to the energetic downtown scene, which so far had been covered by only a few adventurous contemporary-art and music critics. It was also a sign to the many artists who for years had been making work dealing specifically with media culture that at last a door had been opened.

The early eighties were marked, on the one hand, by a return to the traditional disciplines of painting and sculpture, and, on the other, by a large body of work concerned with inventing new images culled from the media through the inventive manipulation of photography. Inspired to a large extent by the vitality and high/low implications of the downtown scene, the stage was set for work that, with its apparent familiarity—it had the style of advertising and recycled icons from the popular culture—could attract a broad audience.

Completing this picture was a responsive press, which looked to these young writers, artists, and musicians for the cultural temperature of the times, epitomized by the media presidency of Ronald Reagan. They pursued the first lineup of celebrity Performance artists—Anderson, Eric Bogosian, Whoopi Goldberg, and Spalding Gray—only to discover a second, active in New York's East-Village club scene—David Cale, Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Ann Magnuson, and Michael Smith, among others. Casting directors stalked downtown Performance venues in search of the "downtown type" to play in a slew of hip art-world movies of the later eighties, such as *Legal Eagles*, *Looking for Mr. Right*, or *New York Stories*.

From the artists' point of view this attention made public work that had been developing for more than a decade. It was rather a case of the media catching up with what the artists had known all along. For them, David Byrne or Brian Eno had long since made successful crossovers from art world/new music to rock and roll and back again. For them also it was clear, and becoming more so, that while success in mass culture catapulted them out of the art world, it dropped them into an entirely separate state, belonging to neither. At first the question seemed to be how to make the crossover without losing the integrity and the protection of the art world, to explore new aesthetic forms. But it soon became obvious that they were creating a new language, and a new discipline, for this no-man's land. For while its boundaries are marked by "high art" and "popular culture," its geography is still being determined by these explorers.

Each of the artists participating in this series has a different story to tell as to her or his journey to this new territory. From art school, or from music or theater department, each has devised highly personal content and forms for their work; language, sound, visuals, environments, and high-tech equipment have been used in any number of combinations to create a variety of Performance "categories." Above all, each has used the umbrella of the art world at one point or another for the development of their oeuvres and for the refinement of their distinct personas that the popular media are still trying to fathom.

For these artists, appearing at The Museum of Modern Art as part of the exhibition "High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture" is in some sense a return to the fold for one night—to the intimate setting of a museum auditorium and also to a more analytic context. The question being asked is how does an artist function in the art world and in the world at large, or, as the Futurists and Robert Rauschenberg put it at different times, in the gap between art and life. For this series, each artist has responded to the question with intriguing samplings of work—lecture, monologue, band, interview—and, polemical as ever, their presentations embody the ongoing debate.

RoseLee Goldberg

LAURIE ANDERSON

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. The stories were a little weird but so are Texan stories. I remember that I felt a 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.

At the time, I also had a lot of problems with the economics of the art world. So much of it was about money. The collectors, curators, dealers, and critics presided over a system that was by nature extremely exclusive. Prices for the art they dealt with were often astronomical. And artists, even though many of them tried to resist this, were willing participants. Their art often ended up hanging in somebody's living room or as part of somebody's stock portfolio. Eventually the question comes up for every artist: Why really am I bothering to make art? And exactly who am I talking to?

Laurie Anderson. *Empty Places*.
Beacon Theater, New York. April
1990. (Photo: Ebet Roberts)



As a Performance artist I have the advantage of being able to see who I'm talking to. And this contact has been extremely important in the development of my work. As a member of the avant-garde, I was of course committed to making work that was as vivid, surprising and inventive as I could make it. On the other hand, I had very little interest in theory and analysis. It was crucial to me to try to cross this gap between myself and others in an immediate, sensual way.

Crossover had another meaning in the art world. It was short for sell-out. When I signed a contract with Warner Bros. records, other artists were very critical. At the time I was quite surprised by this reaction. One of my greatest hopes was that American artists could actually find ways to finally enter their own culture and I had hoped that other artists could share this goal. Granted, American pop culture is designed for the average twelve-year-old, and art looks pretty strange sometimes when it tries to wedge itself into pop music charts, television, and Broadway. But I love this kind of clash; I thrive on not fulfilling people's expectations.

While pop culture is pretty laissez-faire, the avant-garde is extremely protective of its own ideas, territory, and privilege. Eventually I learned to appreciate this. I myself had benefited from this; as a young artist I was supported by this network. The fact is, it's very hard to be an artist in the United States of America. Hard and getting harder. And the avant-garde is a safe place for artists to work out ideas that seem a bit peculiar to the general public (whoever they are).

As America gets more conservative, I find my own reactions to this are driving me further into the politics of pop culture. I want to know what the motor is, what is driving this culture further and further to the right. Consequently, much of the work has become political and engaged. I'm not even sure I'm an artist any more at all. More like a thinly disguised moralist. Now I know that this country certainly doesn't need yet another moralist. But I can't help it. The art that I like the most and the art that I aspire to make helps people live this life as well as possible. It is engaged in this world. And I am grateful to artists whose poems and paintings and music express this engagement. Maybe it's because I consider this a crisis situation for the arts in this country. At the moment I just don't feel I have the leisure to make art about art or even appreciate other people's efforts to do so.

For me, at this time, art must address the issues—sensually, emotionally, vividly, spiritually. This means being involved with the aspirations, lies, and dreams of what is so snobbishly called low culture.

L.A.

LAURIE ANDERSON

Born 1947, Chicago.

Mills College, Oakland, 1965–66.

Barnard College, New York, B.A. in art history, 1966–69.

Columbia University, New York, M.F.A. in sculpture, 1970–72.

Lives in New York City.

ERIC BOGOSIAN

When I was a teenager, a normal day could include listening to the Beatles, watching *The Mod Squad* or *The Beverly Hillbillies* on TV, performing in *Romeo and Juliet* at school, reading *Mad* magazine, and, in my spare time, reading Kafka or Dickens. I never thought there was anything inconsistent about what I was doing.

But when I got older I figured out that the "fine arts," as sophisticated forms of entertainment, encompass a different area of exhilaration than the popular arts. The popular arts focus on issues of sexuality and death ad infinitum, including courtship and illness and love and murder. The "fine arts," even when using love or mortality as a springboard, mostly explore the nature of existence, consciousness, spirituality, the decay of the spirit, and the fine points of morality.

A spectrum exists from the lowest of "low" culture (naked women mud-wrestling; troll dolls) to the highest of "high" culture (a church fresco by Fra Angelico; a Chopin nocturne). It's frustrating to find the exact point where "high" is separated from "low" because it's really all one thing. For example, you could argue that a Renaissance church fresco is "low" art because it was designed to make an impression on the "common man."

Today popular culture is synonymous with mass-media culture. And mass-media culture is strange stuff. Designed for consumption by millions, it is full of contradictions. Unlike a prehistoric cave painting or a folk dance or even a Neil Simon play, there is little about pure mass-media entertainment that is really cathartic or touching. Human concerns are not the foundation, rather technological concerns, searching for a lowest common denominator are the basis for the mass media. Mass-media entertainment excites for no real purpose, its nature is designed to be addictive, not fulfilling. It is built out of messages about behavior that in practice are very damaging to the people reading them.

Why is there a drug epidemic in the United States? Do you have to look any further than your own TV set? I don't. I grew up on TV, I know what it's like to be able to change my mood in two seconds flat. I know unrequited appetite. I know endless fantasy.

I see myself as a mass-media survivor, someone who is full of bad thinking because of all the attitudes that were injected into my brain all my life. Even today, I am being injected. When I pick up *People* magazine, or flip on MTV or see a film, or listen to a song, I am being injected, I am being manipulated.



Eric Bogosian. *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll*. Orpheus Theater, New York. February 1990. (Photo: Paula Court)

I'd like to think that reading Kafka, Dickens, and Shakespeare when I was young somehow inoculated me against the sheer madness of the media, but I know it didn't. Literature and fine art and theater (the "high arts") didn't protect me so much as make me aware of the effect the mass media was having on me. The fine arts set up a posture of reflexion, a looking-at-myself-looking-at-the-world stance. What I saw scared me and this has become the basis of my work: the conflict between the different personas within me, the conflict between the crude and the refined, the instinctual and the conscious.

Reflexivity is the great gift that "high" has to give us today. Underlying every work by Conrad or Shakespeare or van Gogh or Scorsese is the irrepressible need to examine, to understand, and ultimately to try to transcend the loneliness of being an individual by communicating and bringing together others in this understanding.

The mass media, in general, doesn't do this. Instead it feeds us the mental equivalent of a carcinogenic diet of salt and sugar and fat. Fed solely on what the mass media feeds us, our minds and souls become sick.

Since an artist has to address those issues churning within him, I address this conflict within me. I address the desires that move me through my life, fueled by years of listening and watching TV, movies, and recorded music. I address the consequences of my actions. And I seek a higher ground. Not a higher ground in the sense of a higher, snobbier, I'm-bored-I-need-something-stronger higher ground, but a higher ground that helps me reconcile my life with the world around me.

So my work seems to be both high and low at the same time. It is high in that it is reflexive; it is low in that it is bluntly entertaining. Occasionally this blend can even enter the mass media, come out the other end and affect many people. (Martin Scorsese's work is a good example.)

I'm not sure that my work can do this. Perhaps the next question I should address in a piece is why I would want it to.

© 1990 Eric Bogosian

ERIC BOGOSIAN

Born 1953, Woburn, Massachusetts.

University of Chicago, 1971-73.

Oberlin College, Ohio, degree in drama, 1973-75.

Moved to New York City, 1975.

Lives in New Jersey.

BONGWATER

ANN MAGNUSON & KRAMER

Whenever I'm confronted by the dialectics of the high art/low culture controversy, I am reminded of those old rusted tractors we used to get stuck behind on the winding back roads of pre-Interstate West Virginia. There we'd be, inching our way up and down the Allegheny foothills, lumbering behind some pokey farmer whose mind was on a wad of Mail Pouch tobacco and whose ass was holding up traffic for miles. It seemed like an eternity before we'd hit a stretch of passing lane and when we did, we'd shoot out like a load of buckshot flying over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we'd go.

This particular Grandma lived in Fairmont, a Mayberry kind of place where days were spent contemplating the swastikas on her Navajo rug and nights passed watching *Louisiana Hayride* and *Chiller Theatre*. In between I'd fixate on all the imported knickknacks on her mantelpiece, the most exotic being the porcelain (or was it ivory?) figurine of a Chinese warrior. He was engaged in a ferocious battle with a giant octopus and I used to stare at it for hours, daydreaming about the faraway place that could have produced such a cool thing.

When Grandma died we went back to clean out her house and one of the first things I reached for was that Chinese warrior. Fully expecting the delicacy and weight of fine china I was shocked to discover the lightness of plastic. Plastic!? How could this important piece of fine art be plastic? I felt betrayed. Robbed. Duped. I felt my entire childhood wither away just like Grandma's hollyhocks which no one bothered to water anymore. I think it was at that moment that I learned the true meaning of "irony."

I've been miserable ever since.

I also remember sitting around the old black-and-white set with the folks watching *Combat*. I must have been about seven years old. This particular episode featured a teenage, blue-eyed, blond German soldier who had been captured by Vic Morrow and his men. In a highly unusual move, this young "kraut" had been imbued with a shred of personality, a glimmer of humanity. Plus he was really cute. So when he was inevitably shot at the end, I became so upset that I had to shut myself in the bathroom where I sobbed torrents of guilty tears for "the enemy," harboring unceasing hatred for Sergeant Chip Saunders ever since.

ANN MAGNUSON

Born 1956, Charleston, West Virginia.

Denison University, Granville, Ohio, degree from Department of Theater and Cinema, 1978.

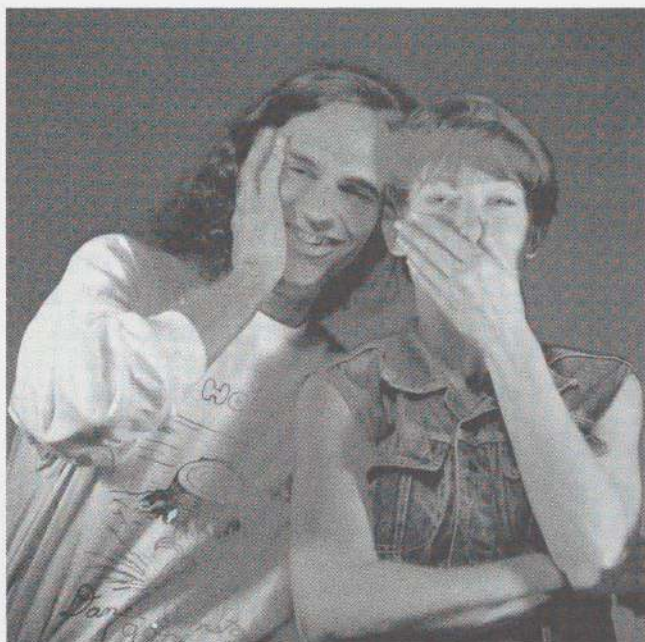
The British and European Studies Group, London, 1977.

Moved to New York; Internship with the Ensemble Studio Theater, 1978.

Lives in New York and Los Angeles.

Guernica is a great piece of art but *Combat* taught me early on how tragic war is. I loathed the production values of the miniseries *Roots* but I bet it reached more racists than *Porgy and Bess*. I laugh harder at Dick Van Dyke than anything by Aristophanes and I

get just as wet listening to Hendrix's *Axis: Bold as Love* as Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 25—both raise enough goosebumps to inspire me to jump over mountains and sleep with a battalion of Marines.



Ann Magnuson & Kramer. (Photo: Michael Lavine)

Yet nothing raises the hairs on the back of my neck faster than having my work described as a "spoof" of the American Dream. The American Dream means too much to me to merely "spoof" it. It can't *all* be as worthless and disposable as casually bandied-about words like "kitsch," "camp," and "parody" imply, can it? I could be wrong, but when I toured Loretta Lynn's Dude Ranch outside Nashville it seemed that just as much emotional investment had been made in her proudly displayed, prized Avon Collection as the Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Company has in van Gogh's *Sunflowers*.

Yeah, I know, most of pop culture is a bunch of shit. Just as plastic as my Grandma's figurine. But the funny thing about that Chinese warrior, I kept it all the same. He sits on my bookshelf now, still fighting the giant octopus and looking for all the world just like ivory. I know it's plastic but it still makes me daydream about things in faraway places.

Well, as it says on the decoupage cedar souvenir plaque we got from Carlsbad Caverns, "It ain't much but we call it home."

A.M.

KRAMER

Born 1958, New York.
Creative Music Studio, Woodstock, New York, 1978-80.
Establishes record label, Shimmy-Disc, 1987.
Lives in New York.

DAVID CALE

"You're gonna be as big as Peter Allen,"

the manageress of the Black Horse Public House, Walthamstow, in the East End of London assured me after I won "Performer of the Month" in the pub's Talent Night with my vocal rendition of "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered." The year before, I was singing with a rock band. This felt much better. I was seventeen. All that singing along with the records was at last paying off.

Growing up in England I had no connection whatsoever with the art world. But show business! That was another story. I didn't read a book the whole way through till I was in my early twenties. (*Barbra: The First Decade* doesn't count.) I wanted to be a singer. My family never read. The only literature in the house was *Horse and Hound* magazine. The only trace of art was the dinner mats with the Constable prints on them. I had been thrown out of school at sixteen with nothing but a strong inferiority complex. What would I want to have to do with art, that elite, intellectual, impenetrable thing that was for other people.

When I moved to New York I was still singing in clubs, and this eventually segued into the writing of my own songs, which worked its way into the reading of the words of the songs at poetry readings, which in turn led to performing the songs as dramatic monologues, still largely in the context of clubs, though the monologues were not really comical and were pretty out of place. In 1981 a friend took me to a benefit The Kitchen was having at Bond's Casino. For two nights practically everyone who was part of the Performance avant-garde was presented. The show was a revelation, though at the time I found the audience intimidating. It was the first time I'd seen Laurie Anderson perform and she, in particular, completely enthralled me. I'd never seen anything like it.

This is a long-winded way of saying I didn't start off in the art venues or Performance spaces, but I ended up finding a creative identity, nurturance, and a niche in them.

I have a strong aversion to analyzing my work or even talking about it. What I do is largely instinctive and emotional. I don't know what I'm doing half the time, but I also like that mystery, and am somewhat fierce in preserving it.

I'm not sure what is "high" and what is "low." What's more important to me is, is it any good? Does it affect you? Does it connect? Does it have life?

I'm not sure what constitutes "mainstream" either. I'm sure it shifts around all the time. Certainly boundaries are becoming fainter as less conventional artists become popular. Certainly the increasing popularity of the other people in this series has helped my work move into a broader context. The second full-length evening performance I ever did was reviewed in the *Times*, certainly partially as a result of Eric Bogosian and Spalding Gray.

DAVID CALE

**Born 1958, Luton, Bedfordshire, England.
Moved to New York, 1979.
Lives in New York.**

I'm not interested in playing to a select or specific audience. The wider the cross section of people the better. The economics of the art world are also dictating that support must come from other places as well. My last two shows were both performed with bands. I did just what I wanted artistically, but I lost money on both of them. Unfortunately I have to get realistic. I *need* to get a foothold in the mainstream, in order to continue to do what I do.

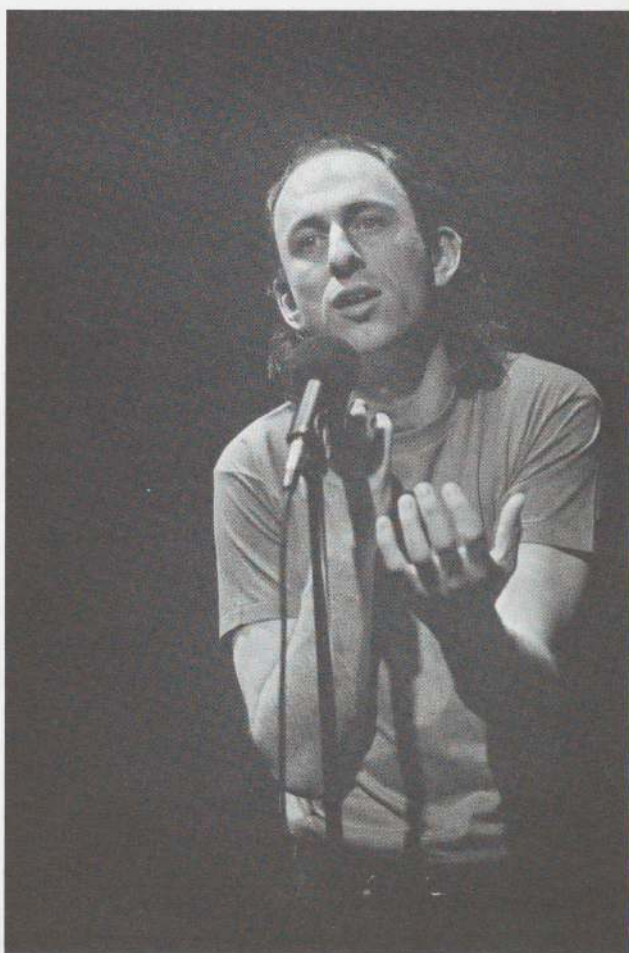
The notion of slipping between worlds has always appealed, as has the idea of not fitting in and shifting identities. It has its drawbacks. It's very isolated. There's no security on the outside. There's no map. No structure. (Some of these drawbacks double as pluses.) No support system. On the other hand sometimes you get to be treated like a strange guest or a quirky relative, and if you pull it off I guess there's a certain autonomy.

However, in the present climate of frightening conservatism, human and artistic repression, all artists have to weigh the advantage of reaching the widest possible audience against the necessity to take a strong moral stand.

Ultimately all I can do is try to express myself honestly and clearly and emotionally and present it in the same way and just "put it out." Wherever it lands, it lands. Whatever it is, it is. Que sera sera. I don't care whether it's "high" or "low" as long as it's not mediocre. I can't predict what's going to be popular. I can't write to please some fictitious audience. I can only try to satisfy myself and hope that maybe it affects other people.

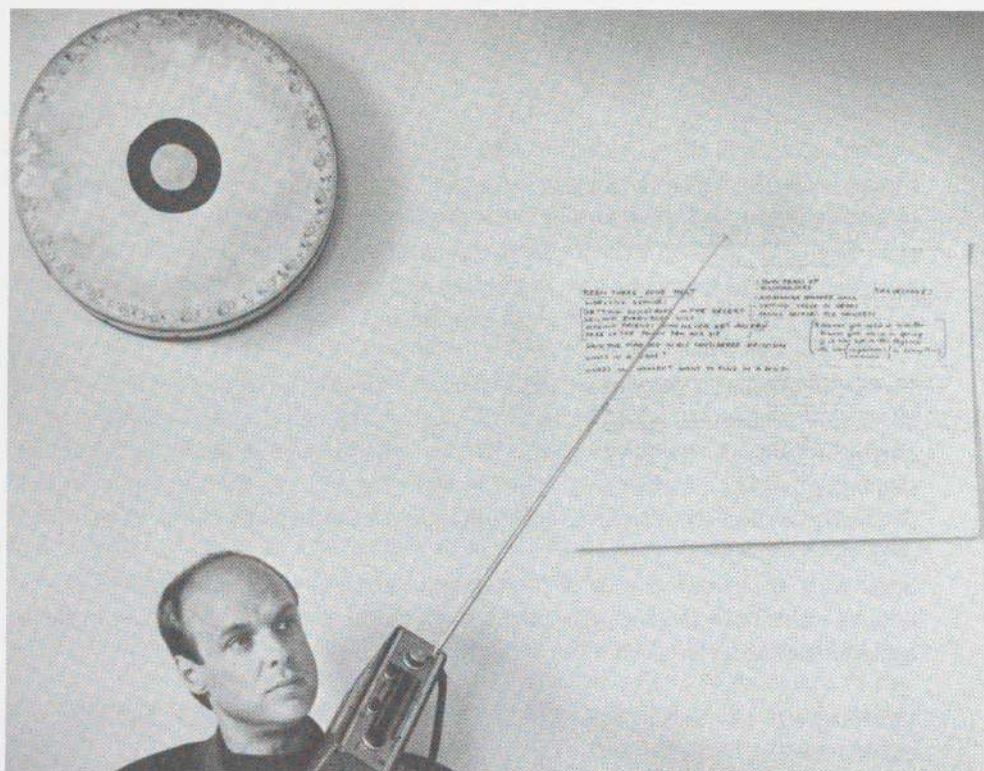
I remember reading an interview with Bruce Springsteen in which he said what he wanted in his shows was "to be human, to be spontaneous, to communicate." I always try to remember that before I go on.

D.C.



David Cale. *The Nature of Things*. Perry Street Theater, New York. March 1990. (Photo: Paula Court)

BRIAN ENO



Brian Eno. (Photo: Nick White)

The August 1989 issue of Keyboard Magazine carried a letter from Jeffrey Fayman criticizing a comment Brian Eno had made about classical music in a recent interview. Eno's response to Keyboard appears below (reprinted from Opal Information, no. 15, Winter/Spring 1990).

Jeffrey Fayman was quite right to criticize my "mindless arrogance" in dismissing classical music as a "dead fish." I must have been in a particularly anticlassical mood that day, for my feelings aren't normally quite that virulent. I do, however, feel a certain revulsion for the po-faced reverence that is conferred on classicism. Perhaps I should have related my comments more specifically to the European, and particularly English, classical music scene. We have a situation in Britain where fully 60% of the Arts Council budget is allocated to the Royal Opera House. The money that the Arts Council is so generously handing out is collected in taxes, from a population that does not, on the whole spend a lot of its time listening to opera. This redistribution of wealth (from the relatively poor to the relatively rich) is justified by the absolutely unquestionable social "value" that this wonderful form of yodelling is thought to confer upon us all.

I made the interview in question not long after I'd been listening to Aaron Neville singing down in New Orleans. I was stunned by the beauty of his voice and the complete originality of his singing style, and it struck me as just plain unfair that he would never get the type of attention (as a singer, a user of the voice) that even a mediocre opera singer might expect. There is a tremendous snobbery about classical music which must be a hangover from the time when culture was purportedly being made at the "highest" lev-

(White)

els of society, to filter down in debased and degenerate forms to the "lower" levels. Though I doubt that this model of cultural evolution ever had much validity, it is even less true now.

Although I accept Mr. Fayman's point that classical music is a "highly technical and fairly evolved art," it must be said that so are reggae, gospel, country, technopop and free jazz, not to mention pygmy polyphony, Brazilian samba, Algerian rai and all the other wonders of the musical world. Should we then discuss these too in the hushed tones that we reserve for classical music? Of course not. The fact that these "fairly evolved" forms of music are still evolving is precisely because people aren't frightened to express their opinions about them, to say "We're bored with doing it this way now. Let's try something else." The simplicity and directness of this attitude characterizes all living musics; its absence leaves fossils.

If I'd said in the interview that I didn't like reggae, for example, nobody would have paid much attention. If, on the other hand, I say that most Mozart bores me rigid, eyebrows are raised in horror and pity. Why do we take that little corner of the cultural universe so seriously, I wonder? Is it in fact so fragile that its own much vaunted strengths can't even defend it against a loudmouth like me?

B.E.

BRIAN ENO

Born 1948, East Anglia, Great Britain.

Studied Fine Arts at Ipswich and Winchester art schools, 1964-69.

Co-founder of British rock group Roxy Music, 1972.

Now active as a record maker, producer, and installation artist.

Lives in London.

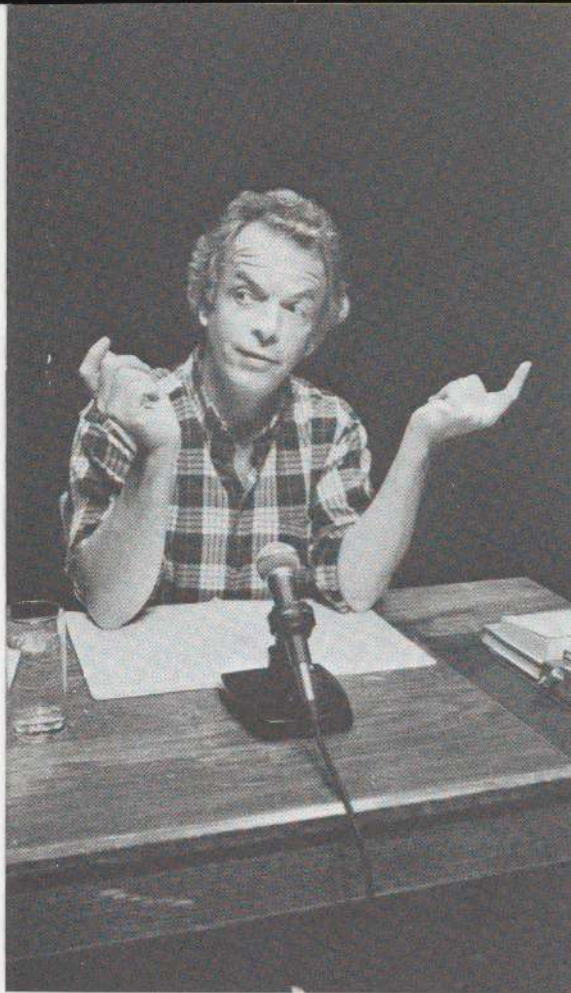
SPALDING GRAY

In 1977 Elizabeth Le Compte and I co-founded the Wooster Group, a downtown theater group that makes its home in the Performing Garage in SoHo. Although we had no formal manifesto, we had what I now think of as an unspoken dedication to the creation of alternative "art" theater. At the time our theater pieces were loosely based on my autobiography, which was, in the end, digested and transformed into a group spectacle. My actual life history was like the piece of dirty foreign substance, the irritant in the lining of an oyster around which grew our theatrical pearl. Elizabeth Le Compte, with her excellent creative eye, watched and shaped the growth of that pearl until it was ready to be cut out of its private place and put on public display. Our three pieces, *Three Places in Rhode Island*, that come out of that work were in my mind theatrical pearls.

Over the years, as I worked with the Wooster Group, I began to get more and more claustrophobic and wondered a lot about what was going on outside the walls of theatrical metaphor and of the Performing Garage. I had been working there for nine years and was beginning to feel like an art monk. I wanted out. So, in the summer of 1978 I said goodbye to the Wooster Group for a while and took a Greyhound bus across America. I sat in the front seat, right behind the driver, and watched America come at me. I felt reborn. I felt like a kid bunking school on a weekday. This was the first time I had experienced a world outside of group consciousness in years. I began listening to strangers talk out of the corner of my ear. I liked a lot of what I heard and it stayed with me.

In those days you could take a Greyhound bus cross-country for \$69 and get off at any stop and get back on whenever you wanted. I got off at Cheyenne because I liked the name of the town but quickly found that I didn't like the town as much as its name, so I hitchhiked on to Boulder. On the way, I got picked up by a recent Rumanian refugee and his eleven-year-old son. They had just moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, and invited me to stay with them. They lived in a modern tract house at the foot of the Rockies. The house had wall-to-wall carpeting but no furniture. Not even a TV. We went hiking together in the Rockies. We ate turkey TV dinners sitting cross-legged around candles on the living-room floor. I slept in a borrowed sleeping bag on the floor in an immaculately empty wall-to-wall carpeted bedroom upstairs. The following day I made it to Boulder, where I was taken in by friends at the Naropa Institute. My first night there, I was walking through the mall and came upon an open-microphone poetry reading where all were being encouraged to get up and express. I knew immediately that I had to get up and try something out and at last all dry-mouthed, nervous, and shaking I got up and spoke as fast as I could all that I could remember of my Greyhound trip from New York to Boulder. I had no idea how it was received. I had no idea that I had just created the first of a series of autobiographic monologues. All I knew was that I'd done something that felt absolutely right on for me.

Thinking about it over that summer I began to realize that part of why I left the Wooster Group was for aesthetic reasons and, using two of my favorite poets, Robert Lowell and Wallace Stevens, as aesthetic measuring blocks, I began to realize that Elizabeth Le Compte was working more like Wallace Stevens and I, more like Robert Lowell. Liz was trying to create a world of art that referred to itself whereas I was more interested in try-



Spalding Gray. *Terrors of Pleasure*. Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York. Serious Fun Festival, July 1989. (Photo: Paula Court)

ing to develop a kind of journalistic art form that I now refer to as "poetic journalism." I felt this was an art form that suited me well because it allowed me to venture out into what I had always feared, the profane world, with a new protective idea that, with the exception of my own death, no matter what happened, I would be able to tell a story about it. I had the clear sense that there would never be an event that was too overwhelming not to be able to redeem it through telling about it. My monologue form was born that summer in the outdoor mall in Boulder, Colorado, and for two years I took great pleasure in creating a number of autobiographical monologues.

Then in 1981 The Kitchen, a center for performing arts in SoHo, asked me to do a new work for them. I wanted to take this opportunity to do something different from my monologues. I thought about what was missing and quickly realized it was other people's stories. I was

getting bored with my own stories. I wanted to hear about the lives of others, so I decided to interview the audience. I chose a few people randomly in the lobby just before the performance and then called them up one at a time and talked with them about their lives. The idea of it was to get to know each of them for the first time publicly. The less I knew about them the better it went. It was my curiosity, and their response to my curiosity, that energized the event. Also, the fact the person being interviewed stepped out of the audience created a wonderful empathy, a kind of there-but-for-the-grace-of mood. I spent from twenty to forty minutes with each person and tried to work with them until I at last drew some personal story out of them, some anecdotal emblem of their lives. Something simple, personal, full of detail, and real. I was very high at the end of the evening. I realized that through personal storytelling we had bridged the isolated fragmentation of urban existence to create a kind of group history. It was funny, it was strong, it was good, it was real, it was healing.

I also realized I had a wonderful new form to work with and a nice balance to my monologues. I could now go on performing them and balance off the hazards of solipsism with my conversations with the audience. I have gone on to do that. Only recently have the conversations become more specialized. One year ago I was asked to contribute my talents to raise money for *Art Against AIDS* and I chose to do public interviews of people with AIDS. These interviews were done in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. They were extremely moving and powerful events, for the participants, the audience, and myself. Now I am bringing this form to The Museum of Modern Art, talking about art with New York City kids who have never ever really thought about art or even noticed it before.

SPALDING GRAY

**Born 1941, Providence.
Lives in New York.**

LAURIE ANDERSON's major work, *United States*, a seven-hour opus of song, narrative, and sleight of hand and eye, presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1983, was one of the first works of the 1980s to make the landmark crossing of the so-called high/low border. Comprising an amalgam of short visual and musical stories created over six years, and originally performed in art spaces such as The Kitchen in New York, it showed Anderson's uncanny ability to combine inventive electronic music, visual imagery, and her unique stage presence into works that communicated cultural politics to a very broad audience. Anderson has recorded a number of bestselling albums and composed the score for Jonathan Demme's film of Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* (1987). She has recently completed a national and international tour of a major new multimedia work titled *Empty Places* (with an accompanying album titled *Strange Angels*).

In the late seventies **ERIC BOGOSIAN** set a precedent for working on the "other side," moving from downtown Performance spaces like The Kitchen to solo evenings in clubs and discos like The Mudd Club and later PS 122. With Lenny Bruce and Brother Theodore among his early models, by the mid-eighties he had created a series of portraits of American male types in works such as *Drinking in America* (1985-86). The series, which extends up to his recent *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll*, amounts to a cumulative diatribe against an uncaring society, with a sharp political edge. Bogosian starred in his play *Talk Radio* and in the film version, directed by Oliver Stone. His work has received numerous grants and awards, including two Obies. He has appeared on broadcast television in Robert Altman's *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*, *AT&T Presents*, *Last Flight Out*, and on specials for cable and PBS devoted to his work.

DAVID CALE was born and raised in England and moved to New York in 1979, where he received his earliest support from Performance spaces such as PS 122 and The Kitchen. His work, which has maintained its intimate scale, also retains the quality of song-writing that was Cale's starting point. He has presented his performances, solo and with accompanying musicians, throughout the United States; he has won a 1986 Bessie Award, a 1989 National Endowment for the Arts Solo Performance Fellowship, and a 1990 Sundance Institute Writing Fellowship to develop his first screenplay, *The Big Kiss*. Excerpts from his show *Smooch Music* have been published in *Harper's* magazine. He has appeared in the films *Radio Days*, *Moon over Parador*, *Men Don't Leave*, and the upcoming *He Said, She Said*.

Having co-founded Roxy Music in 1972, **BRIAN ENO** emerged in the 1970s as a leading creative force, pioneering the notion of "ambient" music with his album *Discreet Music* (1975), establishing at the same time a unique position through his ability to cross back and forth between the rock-and-roll and classical worlds. As composer, synthesizer, producer, and philosopher, he has collaborated with musicians including Robert Fripp, David Bowie, and David Byrne as well as classical and experimental composers. He has written music for film and television soundtracks, and created video installations in a wide variety of public spaces and museums. Most recently he produced the Grammy Award-winning video "Joshua Tree" for U2.

In 1977 **SPALDING GRAY** co-founded the Wooster Group, an avant-garde theater group that has a permanent home at the Performing Garage in New York. There he first developed the autobiographical trilogy *Three Places in Rhode Island* and launched his distinctive and detailed monologues on life as lived by Spalding Gray that have taken him on the road across America, and to Australia and Europe. One of them, *Swimming to Cambodia*, won him an Obie Award and became a critically acclaimed film. Gray appeared as the Stage Manager in the recent revival of *Our Town*, and has been seen in the films *The Killing Fields*, *True Stories*, and *Beaches*, among others. He first began making pieces out of conversations with people from his audience while performing at The Kitchen in 1981, in *Interviewing the Audience*, and has since developed a body of work that involves similar collaborations with his viewers.

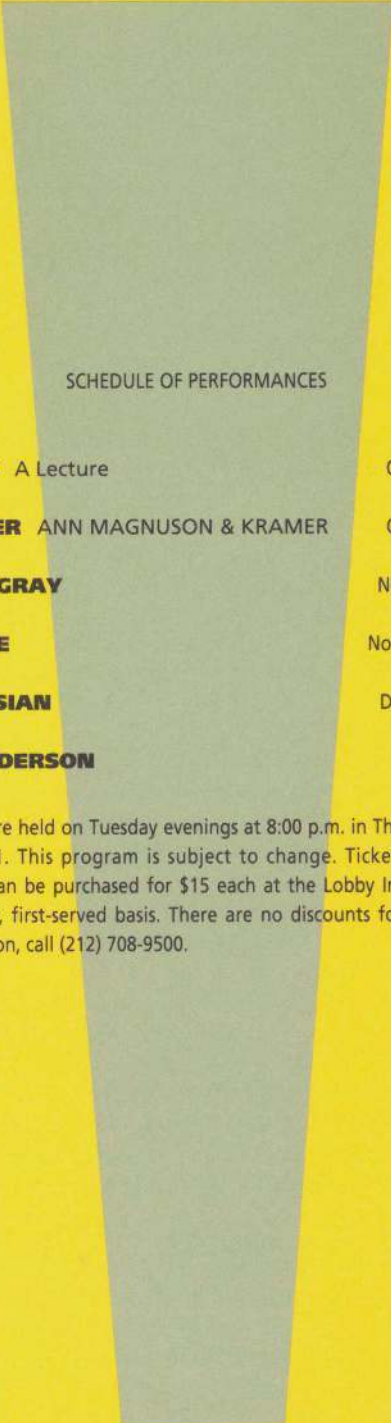
ANN MAGNUSON was an important force in the emergence of Lower East Side artists' venues in the 1980s, starting Club 57 on St. Mark's Place, where she created collaborative performance events as well as one-woman shows that captured the post-punk, alternative ethos of the times. Soon other clubs opened along the "alphabet avenues," providing a home for the new genre of artists' cabaret. At the same time she honed her skills as a comic performer and worked in galleries and theaters. A writer, actress and performer, she made a splash in Hollywood in *Making Mr. Right* among other films, and has since become familiar to television viewers as Catherine Hughes on the series *Anything But Love*. In 1986, Ann Magnuson formed the neo-new-music band Bongwater, with Kramer. She continues to perform solo in addition to appearing with Bongwater.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A very special thank you to Kirk Varnedoe for his deep understanding of the importance of "live art" in the high/low equation, and in the history of twentieth-century art. His commitment to bringing this work into The Museum of Modern Art adds immeasurably to the study of art history, its past and future. Indeed, this new dimension has also involved his wonderful staff in a very different administrative realm, since the preparations for live performance demand skills not usually called for in museums. Anne Umland headed the Museum's team with a professionalism and energy that have been a delight to witness. Heartfelt thanks to her, and to Jo Pike and Melanie Monios of Visitor Services, who have been involved in every aspect of this project. Thanks are also due to Jeanne Collins, Michael Hentges, Charles Kalinowski, James Leggio, and Susanna Stieff, along with the Museum projectionists and the lobby staff. A special note of appreciation to Mary Lea Bandy, and to AT&T for its generous sponsorship. My assistant, Nancy Corwin, was indispensable in holding together the many diverse aspects of planning this series.

Thanks, always, to the artists for their friendship, and for their extraordinary abilities to speak so many languages—languages of art and music, culture, politics, and desire.

RoseLee Goldberg



SCHEDULE OF PERFORMANCES

BRIAN ENO A Lecture	October 23, 1990
BONGWATER ANN MAGNUSON & KRAMER	October 30, 1990
SPALDING GRAY	November 6, 1990
DAVID CALE	November 20, 1990
ERIC BOGOSIAN	December 4, 1990
LAURIE ANDERSON	January 8, 1991

Performances are held on Tuesday evenings at 8:00 p.m. in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. This program is subject to change. Tickets to individual performances can be purchased for \$15 each at the Lobby Information Desk on a first-come, first-served basis. There are no discounts for Members. For more information, call (212) 708-9500.

