CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE

Fifty years ago, in 1952, John Cage wrote his *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, a composition for twelve radios. During this four-minute piece, each radio was played by two musicians who executed a carefully detailed score, one turning the station selector, the other controlling the volume and tone knobs. These musicians were, as Cage said, like fishermen catching sounds .[1] Every sound they picked up was acceptable: the radio stations musical and other programmes as well as static noise or silence.

In musical experiments such as this, Cage was disturbingly indifferent to the actual sound of his music, but very much concerned with the perceptual relationship between composer, piece and audience. For him, music was never just sound, but an invitation to alter one s way of perceiving the world. Accordingly, it has not been through his music, but through his prose, where he could make explicit the didactic element of my work, as he put it, that Cage has exerted his greatest influence.[2]

Through his writing, his innovative conceptual compositions, and his experimental collaborations with painter Robert Rauschenberg and choreographer Merce Cunningham, Cage has become a pioneer of an aesthetic that wishes to include the listener s situation before and after a concert, daily experience with its heterogeneous stimuli. This has made him the leader of a musical movement and a model for the next generation of artists in every artistic discipline. Cage has become an icon: his name stands for an aesthetic of heterogeneity, complexity and undecidability, for artistic collaboration without forced submission under a master plan, for a renewal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that champions an attitude that Cage has called polyattentiveness [3].

It has been pointed out, in a comprehensive study on the American avant-garde since 1970, that David Byrne, together with composers like Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Brian Eno, has made substantial contributions to the artistic movement that modeled itself after Cage s idea of a new *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[4] And yet Byrne is first of all a rock star, singing songs that stand firmly within the tradition of rock, funk, or Latin music, songs designed to wrap concert audiences in the joys of recognition and of collective participation. Byrne was the songwriter, singer and main guitarist of the Talking Heads, a band that, from their recording debut in 1977 to their last album, released in 1988, was a popular success, met with admiration by most rock critics. Even though they never came close to the successes of, say, Michael Jackson, Madonna, or the Rolling Stones, the Talking Heads sold millions of albums and became a household name for most members of its generation. Many music stores still carry a few of their albums and Greatest Hits compilations. Whereas Cage insisted on conceptualized abstraction, Byrne s work appeals directly to the routines of mass media art, to the immediately recognized standards of pop songs, television and advertising. His work, both with and without the Talking Heads, may appear to be diametrically opposed to Cage s aesthetic.

The idea of this book is to unfold carefully, and in detail, what may appear at first glance to be a contradiction in Byrne s work: its full participation in the most accessible forms of popular art does not impede its respect for the heterogeneity advocated by Cage. Indeed, Byrne s work as a whole has a didactic and prosaic element, since Byrne consistently accompanies his work with theoretical reflections. While it fully acknowledges the desire for focused attention that governs so much of daily life, the wish for easily recognized forms, clear meanings and concentrated enthusiasm, it also explicitly thematizes the perceptive distortions and delusions which this desire often produces, filtering out many of reality s less desirable aspects. Byrne and the Talking Heads fully participated in the mythical stardom of rock and roll, yet managed for the greater part of their work not to succumb to this mythology, but to use it as a basis for a conceptual approach within the sphere of mass entertainment.

Guided by Byrne, the Talking Heads succeeded in combining the routines of rock with the polyattentive and reflexive attitude of art. This unlikely and difficult combination was made possible by the developments in New York s art scene around 1975. For one, there was a kinship between minimalism and structuralism in art and stripped-down and abstracted versions of rock and roll.[5] Just as important was, that a new generation of performance artists began to explore the typical forms of mass media entertainment, Hollywood movies, TV soap opera s and commercials, rock music and cabaret. This exploration produced cerebral and didactic works that looked beyond and beneath the attractive surface of entertain-

ment, as well as works that sought to combine the heightened sensibility of performance with the excitement and accessibility of entertainment.[6]

Over the last twenty-five years, Byrne has worked in several disciplines of mass media entertainment. Apart from making his mark in popular music, both with the Talking Heads and as a solo artist, he directed films and video clips; worked in theatre; showed photographs and objects in galleries and museums all over the world; hosted a weekly music show on television; founded his own distinctive record label; made scores for ballet, for feature films and for ethnographic documentaries; and published four books of photography. Moreover, in doing so, he has collaborated with many outstanding and innovative artists. In the field of performance theatre, a central influence on his work, Byrne has collaborated extensively with Robert Wilson, and also with Mabou Mines JoAnne Akalaitis, with Spalding Gray (of the Wooster Group), and with Meredith Monk. In filmmaking, Byrne has worked in different capacities, as producer, composer, advisor or director, with directors as different as Jonathan Demme, Jim Jarmusch, Bernardo Bertolucci, Philip Haas (who makes ethnographic documentaries) and experimental filmmaker Bruce Conner. In music, Byrne has worked with artists as different as Celia Cruz and Brian Eno, composer Philip Glass and funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell. His record label, Luaka Bop, presents bands from England and the U.S.A. next to singers and groups from Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela and Mexico as well as from Algeria, Angola, and South India. Even in graphic design, he has collaborated with a series of renowned mavericks, from Tibor Kalman to Stefan Sagmeister and David Carson. For good measure, one might add choreographers Twyla Tharp, Toni Basil, Suzushi Hanayagi and Wim Vandekeybus, ranging from theatrical ballet to street dance, Noh and surrealistic dance theatre. The variety of names, many of them stars in their own right, and of the associated ways of making art, is bewildering: almost as if they had been chosen to escape any single common denominator.

Decisive for the point of view of this book is, that Byrne has insisted throughout his career on clarifying the concepts that help to structure his work. He has collaborated with outstanding conceptual artists as different as Joseph Kosuth and Brian Eno, and has worked with academic specialists in the interdisciplinary field where ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology and art history meet and mingle. By gleaning the many conceptual references from Byrne s works, interviews and writings, it is possible to see his career, not just in the pragmatic terms of a successful artist who keeps broadening his range of activities, but as a process of ongoing artistic reflection. This makes it worthwhile to engage his work critically. This is done, first, by weaving its many theoretical references into a single tissue, an aesthetic of reflexive heterogeneity; and second, by comparing this new aesthetic to some crucial older developments in the philosophy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

An outline of David Byrne s work

David Byrne was born in Scotland in 1952. When he was two years old, his family emigrated to Canada, to resettle in the U.S.A., in Baltimore, when he was eight. After high school, he spent two years in art schools in Maryland and Rhose Island, where he experimented with conceptual art and performance art. Later, he moved to New York City, where he founded the Talking Heads with two friends from the Rhode Island School of Design, drummer Chris Frantz and bass player Tina Weymouth. They were soon joined by guitarist and keyboard player Jerry Harrison, an architecture student who had been in Jonathan Richman s band The Modern Lovers .

With the Talking Heads, Byrne wanted to make music that was meaningful in terms of American culture in general as well as in terms of New York s art world: the Talking Heads set out to be a rock band, but combined this with a conceptual approach. Two concerts they gave in The Kitchen in 1976 are significant: The Kitchen, at that time based in New York s SoHo district, was dedicated to the alternative performing arts, to experimental music, dance, theater, video, and performance art. In The Kitchen s catalogue for 1976, the Talking Heads described themselves as:

> a group of performing artists whose medium is rock-and-roll and the pursuant band organization and visual presentation. The original music and lyrics are structured within the commercial accessibility of rock-and-roll sound and contemporary, popular language. Lead singer Byrne relies on Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth to complete their anti-individualist stance as a group concept.[7]

As a point of departure, this attitude is directly opposed to the exclusive emphasis on emotion, self-expression and authenticity that are the very stock in trade of popular music. In 1992, remembering the original intentions of the Talking Heads, Byrne commented:

> Throw away all the paintings and art becomes a manifestation of an idea. So why not just write down the idea? A lot of pop music with its guitar and drum solos seemed to be superfluous to the idea of what the music was about. So why not strip it down and deal with the idea, which often seemed to be textural rather than narrative? A lot of pop music communicated by texture rather than by what the words were saying.[8]

Byrne sensed that there were certain assumptions that he shared with an important part of the New York art scene of those days. When the Talking Heads were playing at the downtown rock club CBGB s,

> I would be excited if some of the artists whose work I knew at the time showed up, whether it was Vito Acconci, or Joseph Kosuth, or Dennis Oppenheimer, Andy Warhol, these people were in the audience... it was somehow exciting, but I often didn t get to meet them. They were interested in

1 The Talking Heads, left to right: Jerry Harrison, David Byrne, Tina Weymouth, Chris Frantz. Photo by Mick Rock, from the inner sleeve of the 77 album

what we were doing musically, and I was interested in what they were doing in galleries and publications. There was some kind of connection.[9]

With the benefit of hindsight, one might conclude that the Talking Heads set out to investigate the conceptual structure of popular music, that complex meeting ground of the individual fantasy and desire, collective tradition and innovation, and the mass media. Their first album, 77 (1977) contained songs that projected a sense of maladaptation, played in the conventional rock song chorus-and-verse format. The band sounded so austere, Byrne s singing so distinctive and quaint, that the Talking Heads were often associated with punk s ostentatious protest against commercial pop.

For their next three albums, the band was joined by Brian Eno, who acted as their producer. Eno, a conceptual artist in his own right, aimed to make the many possibilities of the electronic sound recording studio into his own artistic medium. He was instrumental in showing the band how the recording process could be used to provide each element of music with its own aural quality, so that the very texture of the music might exude meaningful suggestions. The albums More Songs about Buildings and Food (1978) and Fear of Music (79) demonstrated this heightened sensibility. When Remain In Light (80) was issued, Byrne and Eno added a small bibliography to the handout for the press, mentioning books that analyzed art ranging from traditional African music, African sculpture and dance, to architecture in general to the matrix of the surrounding society. From

this moment onwards, it appears to have been at least as important to Byrne to explore different ways for reflecting on the meanings of music, as it was to him to further the growing popular success of the Talking Heads. Together with Brian Eno, he recorded My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1981), adding music to recordings of voices they found on American radio and on records. Byrne also made a score for an evening-length ballet, The Catherine Wheel (81). On this occasion he invited etnomusicologist John Chernoff, whose work on African music he had found highly inspiring, to join in the process of recording and composing music.

Because the songs of Remain In Light had been constructed in the studio, it was impossible for the Talking Heads to play that music live on stage. To overcome that, they asked a number of funk musicians to join them. This expanded the original white rock quartet to a black and white, male and female funk band of more than twice that number. This worked out quite well, and Byrne explained his enthusiasm for this new band in interviews:

> The feeling onstage is nothing at all like performing rock or pop songs, which relieves me greatly. I think some of the other musicians feel the same way. Spiritual is a sort of dangerous word to use because of the western definition of the word, but that is how I describe the music. A lot of spiritual music which has its roots in Africa is very exciting and people have a lot of fun dancing to it. It s casual, too There s just less of a feeling of a performer projecting his own ego to a crowd, which rock and roll seems to be about. For me, there s more of a feeling of community a group of people working and playing together. The kind of thing we re doing now deals with a different series of metaphors than pop music The nature of the music is to inspire a mystical communion among the musicians and the audience through repetitive rhythms and so on. On a good night, it can become a transcendent experience that is mainly to do with a lot of people feeling that they re locking together and fitting together into one thing which is very different from the other music. [10]

Byrne s songs on the next Talking Heads album, Speaking In Tongues (1983), explore these metaphors of mystical communion. When explaining these songs, Byrne referred to Carl Gustav Jung s concept of archetypal forms in a collective human unconscious, archetypes that may move people, and bring about a state of emotional transportation, resulting in a mythological experience of reality. To deepen his understanding of the ways in which popular music affect an audience, Byrne began to read books on comparative mythology, from Sir James Frazer and Jung to Joseph Campbell. In seven albums, and in as many years, he had not only become a rock star, but he had also gained a perspective on the meanings of music that could accommodate the technology of the modern recording studio as well as psychological archetypes and mythology, and that could accommodate the analytical bent of conceptual art next to insights from the field of cultural anthropology. This development is investigated more closely in chapter 2, Music as a mimetic arena .

The next chapter, Film and performance theatre , documents a shift of focus. The success of Talking Heads, often considered America s greatest band in the eighties, made it feasible for Byrne to explore the possibilities of film and video. More than records or concerts, film allowed him dramatize and document the cultural and spiritual functions of music; Byrne set out to apply ways of making art that had been developed in New York s performance theater. When he first came to New York, he was fascinated by this theater: Byrne has often mentioned Robert Wilson, Mabou Mines and the Wooster Group as decisive influences.

In this performance theater, music, dance and the architecture of the scene are as important as the narrative, the play of traditional European theatre. When a dramatic performance succeeds in braiding these elements, thereby creating a ritual totality, its elements can stand in for one another: narrative can turn into dance, scenographic changes transform the meaning of music. In 1983, when director Jonathan Demme approached the expanded Talking Heads with a proposal to make a film out of their concerts, Byrne grasped the opportunity. He developed a show that combined the energy of live performance with a dramatic choreography, lighting, and background projections. He explained about this film, Stop Making Sense :

> I d seen a lot of work that [director] JoAnne [Akalaitis] had done with Mabou Mines, and Lee Breuer, and other people and all those theatre people from late sixties and early seventies whose work was still very much happening in New York, which was very exciting for me, it was a way of putting things on stage that seemed kind of vibrant and exciting and alive. So it was an inspiration in making that kind of show, the inspiration came more from that kind of theatre. From Japanese theatre, from Eastern ideas of theatre and ritual, as opposed to rock and roll shows.[11]

Byrne also entered into collaborations with both Robert Wilson and Mabou Mines. He contributed music and lyrics to Robert Wilson s theatrical production The Knee Plays (1985), a piece that was originally developed to connect the many acts of Wilson s grandiose production the CIVIL warS . This twelve-hour play, comparable in scale to Wagnerian opera, combined mythical and historical motifs from all continents. It was conceived as an artistic companion piece to the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles, but in the end proved to be impossible to finance. The financially less demanding Knee Plays finally toured as an independent theater production. For Mabou Mines, Byrne provided a musical score for the film version of their play Dead End Kids: A Story of Nuclear Power (1986).
In 86, Byrne directed the feature film True Stories , a *Gesamtkunstwerk* of his own design. Set in Texas, the film portrays a series of members of a smalltown community, partly through documenting the use these characters make of popular songs. The result is part musical, part documentary on contemporary American culture. True Stories also brings together several influences from performance theatre: the film opens with a choreography by Meredith Monk; one of its actors

is the Wooster Group s core member Spalding Gray; and there are several references to the Judson Dance Theatre and to Robert Wilson.

In 1988, Byrne worked again with Wilson, now on a large-scale piece, The Forest . Byrne s idea for this music theatre, commissioned by the city of West Berlin, was to describe the industrialization and the romanticism of nineteenth century Germany by using the vocabulary and imagery of Gilgamesh, the world s oldest epic. The point was to demonstrate the presence of mythical forces in modern history. The plan was that Wilson would develop a theater version of the project, with music by Byrne and text by Heiner Müller, while Byrne would later make his own film version. In the end, however, he could not find enough financial backing, and the film could not be made. Byrne also tried to develop a script for a film titled Shango . This would be a dramatic love story about Santería, an Afro-American religion like Vodun, set in Haiti and San Francisco. Producer Ed Pressman described the problems with the screenplay: We went with a couple of writers, but the script was never satisfactory to David. When a more conventional writer s approach was brought that made it as a script and Zoetrope [Francis Ford Coppola s studio] liked it, David shied away. He kept trying to break the narrative. [12] Unable to find the money to realize his ideas in the cinema, Byrne introduced the working methods of performance theatre in a number of videoclips for Talking Heads songs. In the role of artistic advisor, Byrne also introduced his experimental approach to a television documentary about the Talking Heads, directed by British filmmaker Geoff Dunlop. Here, imagery from a Talking Heads concert is interlaced with ethnographic footage made in several cultures, showing foreign and exotic as well as contemporary American forms of ritual.

From 1988 onwards, Byrne s work shows an ethnographic and documentary interest. In that year, Byrne directed an anthropological documentary, Ilé Aiyé: The House of Life . This documentary, made for television, portrays Candomblé, a Brazilian religion that combines African animist practices, brought over by the slave trade, with Catholic mythology, brought by colonizers; music and dancing are central to its ceremonies. In 1990, Byrne provided soundtracks for four short documentary films by Philip Haas: A Young Man s Dream and A Woman s Secret about traditional sculpting in Madagascar and painting in Papua New Guinea, and The Giant Woman and The Lightning Man about two traditions of Australian Aboriginal painting. These films were part of Magiciens de la Terre , an influential exhibition in Paris Centre Georges Pompidou, presenting contemporary Western artists next to traditionally working artists from cultures all over the world. Chapter 4, titled Anthropology and Music , describes this in more detail.

In his songwriting, Byrne also entered a new phase. He recorded one more album with the Talking Heads, Naked (88). According to ethnomusicologist Chernoff, on this album the band mastered the idioms of African pop music more

truly than, for example, Paul Simon did on his Graceland album.[13] Following that accomplishment, Byrne further investigated African-derived music by recording and touring with an orchestra of New York-based Latin musicians, playing standard Latin dance formats. The ensuing album, Rei Momo , was among the first to appear on Byrne s own record label, called Luaka Bop. This label mostly presents popular songs that have come from a different mould than that of American and English pop: it has released compilations and new albums by artists from Brazil, Cuba and other Latin-American countries, as well as from Angola, Algeria, Cape Verde, and from Japan and South India. These recordings document the many strands of cultural cross-fertilization that have shaped popular music all over the world.

After Rei Momo , Byrne has recorded a series of solo albums: Uh-Oh (92); David Byrne (94); Feelings (97); and Look Into the Eyeball (2001). Recorded with many musicians and producers, and partaking freely of many different styles of popular music, these songs attempt to recreate specific individual moods without projecting a sense of ego. They are as sophisticated and hybrid as those of the Brazilian *Tropicalismo* songwriters Byrne admires and emulates: Caetano Veloso, Tom Zé, Gilberto Gil and others.

A chapter on photography and books completes the overview of Byrne s artistic production. In 1987, he contributed photos and an introduction to an art book: What The Songs Look Like: contemporary artists interpret Talking Heads songs (87). This book presents work by established artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Nam June Paik and Edward Ruscha, along with stars of the eighties art world like Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, and critically acclaimed artists such as James Casebere, Anne Turyn and William Wegman[14] next to Byrne s lyrics, together with work by illustrators, photographers, and even Studio Dumbar, a Dutch design firm. As artists are often very particular about the places where they show their work, this mixture is remarkable in itself.[15] Byrne also published a book to accompany his film True Stories . In this book, also titled True Stories he combined work of other photographers with his own photos, newspaper photos and clippings (the true stories that inspired the film) plus film stills and the script.

In 1989, Byrne published six photographs in Artforum: We Eat We Are Eaten. A project by David Byrne . The following year, he had an insert in the international art magazine Parkett , and took part in a small but prestigious exhibition that was curated by conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, Reproduced Authentic . These projects launched Byrne s career as an art photographer, exhibiting in galleries and museums all over the world.

Most interestingly, Byrne has produced books that combine photography with writing and graphic design. Compared to the forbidding cost of making feature films, such books are relatively cheap to produce; this form has allowed Byrne to

pursue his interest in cross-cultural comparative mythology and in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The first of his books, Strange Ritual (95) clearly shows the didactic element of Byrne s work. His photos are accompanied by musing remarks and theoretical outlines like these:

We spend our lives listening to ourselves, watching ourselves, seeing how we are reflected, how we are responded to by others, and then we fine tune ourselves in order to project accurately what it is we think we are.

Windows are mirrors through which we see ourselves reflected. Our view is coloured by our prejudices, history, and class. We see reflected our perceptions of the landscape, the skyline, the people on the street, the weather, and what they mean to us. Photographs are also mirrors. In them we see reflected our own internal biases, our own assumptions, our own presuppositions. Television is a mirror through which we see reflected our own internal culture, our personal lusts and fears, desires and hatreds. We see our concepts of knowledge what it is and is not what emotion is made of, and what constitutes feeling and what constitutes fact and where the difference lies. What we don t see is a reflection of our face, we see instead a reflection of our interior. An X-ray mirror.[16]

In Your Action World (1998) and The New Sins (2001), Byrne s theme is the process of sacralization and profanation in an environment that is full of stimuli from commercial sources like corporate reports and motivational pamphlets, the non-literature and non-art that makes up a great part of our daily experience. An exhibition titled The Wedding Party (98), combined photography with dressed objects or sculptures, focusing on the projection of human qualities on to objects, a process Byrne describes as beneficial:

We cannot be separated from the objects that surround us. They animate and imitate us just as much as we imitate objects and animate them. By breathing a soul into dead objects, we feel and understand that the world is truly alive, not just existing as an aggregate of dead objects and lifeless landscapes. [17]

And in 2001, Byrne functioned as curator of a small New York exhibition of political news photographs, Gesture, Posture, and Bad Attitude in Contemporary News Photography , in which he tried to show what he called the choreography of politics , the quotidian representation of authority and power through a repertoire of poses and gestures.

This overview of an unusually ambitious and effective body of work clearly documents a succession of conceptual influences. Throughout his career, Byrne has been influenced by a diversity of theorists, either in direct collaboration or, more often, by encountering theoretical concepts in the work of other artists. This rich theoretical material deserves a closer scrutiny. But before approaching these intellectual sources of Byrne s work, it is good to consider how that work has been interpreted by other authors: their work helps to provide a general orientation,

DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

Generally speaking, Byrne s work is an attempt to overcome the division between serious art and popular entertainment, and between the formal and the sensual, without neglecting the very real forces behind this division of the high and the low. In spite of this, a considerable part of the available literature on Byrne s work either deals just with the popular image of the Talking Heads, or interprets Byrne s work in terms of pre-arranged academic categories. However one-sided such interpretations may be, there is much to be learned from them, as long as their limitations are seen clearly.

The Talking Heads have been the subject of several fan books. In 1981, [Barry] Miles published Talking Heads , a quick compilation of interviews and photographs that has been described succinctly as smarter than the norm, primarily because of its subjects [18]. In 1986, Jerome Davis (pseudonym for an anonymous author plus several additional writers) published Talking Heads. A Biography . This book portrays the band members by threading together the recollections of a great many people who knew them; but as it fails to develop a perspective of its own, its many facts and anecdotes resemble an extended magazine article.[19] And in 2001, journalist and novelist David Bowman published a 400-page biography of the band, titled (in Britain): Fa fa fa fa fa fa. The Adventures of Talking Heads in the 20th Century (for the USA edition, the title was changed to This Must Be the Place). A single sentence from this book s introduction characterizes the ambition of its author: Just as the story of the Beatles can be reduced to a tale of the love/hate relationship between John and Yoko and Paul, the story of Talking Heads can be reduced to a similar equation between Tina [Weymouth, bass player of the Talking Heads] and David [Byrne]. [20] Over the course of the book, this greedy interest in personal affairs eclipses every artistic consideration. In this kind of biography, the attention that is paid to personal relationships outweighs the much more interesting relationship between an artwork, its maker and its audience.

Of course, a different approach is to be found in academic literature. There, Byrne and/or the Talking Heads have repeatedly been categorized under the label postmodernism . Examples of this can be found throughout the literature on cultural studies and the related philosophy: in the influential work of theorist Fredric Jameson[21], in a general survey of postmodernism, The Postmodern Turn by Steven Best and Douglas Kellner[22], as well as in the pages of the American Journal of Semiotics, where Byrne has been called the preeminent deconstructive artist , more so than Baudrillard [23]. However, these judgments tend to use Byrne s work as just another example within an argument that has its sources elsewhere, in a very specific interweaving of theoretical texts. As will be argued in greater detail in chapter 9, because of this they mostly overlook the concepts and reflections that

Byrne himself finds relevant for his work. These postmodern theorists also neglect the practical circumstances in which art is made, as well as the ways in which it is received and used by its audience, ways that also go beyond the textual. Even Dick Hebdidge s lengthy interpretation of Byrne s videoclip Road to Nowhere (1984) as an exemplary postmodern work only partially escapes these limitations. The entire concluding chapter of Hebdidge s Hiding in the Light (1988: pp. 233-44) is dedicated to an analysis of this clip, which Hebdidge fuses with his own philosophical insights. Hebdidge calls Byrne an organic intellectual of the airwaves [24], but neglects, without further explanation, Byrne s own theoretical understanding of pop music. Instead, Hebdidge refers to Barthes, Jameson and Bakhtin, familiar authors within the field of cultural studies.

The fan books mostly try to prolong the enjoyment of the Talking Heads music by furnishing it with an anecdotic background, and do not question the authenticity of the terms on which mass entertainment may be enjoyed. A large part of the academic comment is just as one-sided, as it suggests that the work can be interpreted adequately without engaging the terms in which it is enjoyed by the majority of its audience. But there have also been some studies which do take Byrne s work seriously on its own terms, and these books have much to offer. The most comprehensive is John Howell s David Byrne (1992), which contains a biographical and critical essay, as well as the most extensive interview with Byrne that I have come across. Working in New York as an art critic, Howell is adept at placing Byrne in the artistic contexts from which his work draws its impulses, the art world of SoHo and the music scene of New York. Musicologist John Rockwell, who used to combine the position of classical music critic for the New York Times with that of its chief rock critic, has repeatedly written about Byrne s music, comparing it to other forms of composing. This broad perspective is exemplified in the chapter on Talking Heads in his All American Music (1983). Last but not least, art historian Henry M. Sayre s The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970 (1989) emphatically gives Byrne s work a place in the collective artistic project that he finds in performative art, where Cagean heterogeneity is combined with a preference for the vernacular and for collaboration. Sayre devotes the epilogue of his book to Byrne s feature film True Stories (1986), describing it as a film about performance performance in everyday life, a vernacular *Gesamtkunstwerk*. [25].

In writing, I have also made use of a great number of interviews given by Byrne throughout his career[26], as well as his written statements in books, articles, and in the liner notes that accompany several albums. Many of Byrne s interviews may be considered to be a part of Byrne s artistic work. Of course, giving interviews is part of the job of a rock star, as much a way of communicating with an audience as making an album or performing live; but the fact that Byrne at one time added a list of relevant bibliographical references to a press release, in the hope that this

would enable journalists to ask more pertinent questions, shows his wish to use interviews as a mature medium.[27] Byrne has consistently used interviews to promote his own perspective on his work, often by emphasizing the importance of theoretical approaches. I have liberally combined these sources with information from the fan books, and with the insights of Sayre, Rockwell, and Howell. In the last part of this book, after giving a more detailed critique of the postmodern approach to Byrne s work, I propose an alternative approach, an attempt to do justice to its complicated poetics by giving equal attention to its mimetic and to its reflexive aspects, based on the conviction that these two are inseparable.

Susan Sontag s well-known essay Against Interpretation provides an excellent background against which to introduce this perspective on art. In her text, Sontag denounces those forms of interpretation that neglect the sensuous enjoyment of art, and explain the value and meaning of artworks only in terms of an external theoretical framework. She points out that In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling   By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comformable. [28] Her essay ends in a passionate plea: Interpretation takes the sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there. This cannot be taken for granted, now. Ours is a culture based on excess, on overproduction; the result is the steady loss of sharpness in our sensory experience. What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more   In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art. [29] Sontag argues in favor of an encompassing sensibility, as demonstrated in her One Culture and the New Sensibility [30], and at the same time in favor of rigorous formal criticism, since the formal qualities of art are also its sensuous qualities. The kind of interpretation that she opposes is the conscious illustration of a certain code, following predetermined rules[31] which in fact summarizes much of the work that is done in today s cultural studies.[32] Even while Sontag polemically opposes erotics to hermeneutics, in fact she combines the two.

A similar combination may result from emphasizing the importance of mimesis as much as that of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the term for formal criticism in a tradition that shall be traced, in the chapters on the poetics that underlies Byrne s work, from the speculative poets and aesthetic philosophers of early German Romanticism, through the pivotal work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, to such contemporary masters of reflexive anthropology as Bruno Latour, Arjun Appadurai, and Pierre Bourdieu. Mimesis refers, in the same tradition, not to the passive imitation of a preconceived idea, as in Plato, but to the sensitive response to a work of art, to the sensual, both productive and receptive changes of mood and attitude that are inseparable from a formal understanding. Compare

it to the experience of the first day in a new job, when one may ask of oneself not just: what can I make out of this opportunity, but also: who am I going to be in this new position? How will I be changed by this environment?

This is to say that I disagree with the following suggestion by Best and Kellner, who have connected Byrne to Sontag as follows:

> The title of the film Stop Making Sense by David Byrne and the Talking Heads enunciates the tendency of this [ludic, knowingly superficial] form of postmodern art, perhaps first articulated by Susan Sontag (1967), to seek pleasure in aesthetic forms and surfaces and to eschew systems of meaning, polysemic and multilayered complex artifacts that demand depth hermeneutics, and works that intend to make personal and political statements.[33]

Paying close attention to changing sensibilities as such may, contrary to this suggestion, be the only way to demonstrate how deeply relevant, both personal and political, a poetics can be. In this respect, David Bowman s journalistic ear for personal detail is to be preferred over Best and Kellner s academic schematizations: Bowman tells how, during a Talking Heads concert in 1982, Robert Wilson sat beside Susan Sontag, intellectual prima donna of Manhattan , watching David Byrne. After the show, Sontag came to meet Byrne and introduced him to Wilson: The theater director had never met anyone as instantly compatible as David. [34] This kind of smalltalk is illuminating if one looks beyond the personal to the artistic affinities between Byrne and Wilson. Wilson s theater productions are studies in perception, which in their turn have been made the subject of several academic interpretations: as the next section will suggest, it is worth while to compare Byrne s working methods to those of Robert Wilson.

Conceptual resources in Byrne s work

Byrne s work has been influenced by several strands of performance art, performance theatre, and conceptual art. In his art school years he showed an interest in the cutting edge of conceptual art: especially in the Art & Language movement that had been founded in 1968, simultaneously in England and New York. Byrne was fascinated by this work, and thought it was the ultimate in eliminating all the superfluous stuff in art and being left with nothing but the idea. [35]

The artists who formed Art & Language were determined to oppose the anti-intellectualism and the focus on heroic artistic personalities that had been associated with painting and sculpture during the 1950 s and 60 s. According to them, the expressive and perceptual aspects, the good looks of art, were overvalued to the detriment of the more abstract presuppositions that could be embodied in artworks. They undertook a Marxist-based critique of the gallery system, with its marketing and exploitation of the artistic personality, and tried to establish forms

of art production and distribution that would not fit the usual gallery-and-museum-system.

Art & Language was especially opposed to the traditional division of art from criticism. Instead of illusionist artworks, the group produced critical texts which combined a Marxist critique of society with a Wittgensteinian critique of language and representations.[36] Accordingly, the critical analysis of the consumption of art and culture was seen as the crucial task of the artist. Art, in this view, says nothing whatsoever about the personality of the artist; this is a likely source for the anti-individualist stance as a group concept which the Talking Heads embraced in their statement for The Kitchen.

Most relevant for Byrne s work was Joseph Kosuth, who at first was closely associated with Art & Language, but disengaged himself from the group by 1976, when he felt that it deteriorated into an orthodox marxist-leninist collective.[37] To distance himself from such straitlaced premises, Kosuth developed a wider theoretical perspective, as laid down in his essay The Artist as Anthropologist [38]. This text is a mosaic of quotations, derived from two sources. The first of these is Martin Jay s The Dialectical Imagination (1973), a historical account of the unorthodox and self-reflexive marxism of the so-called Frankfurt School philosophers: Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin. His second source was an article by cultural anthropologist Bob Scholte: Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology (1972). Scholte was part of a self-critical movement within anthropology that pointed to the many Western assumptions upon which anthropology has often been based, and stressed the need for a decolonization of anthropology.[39] Kosuth turned to Scholte s article to argue that art cannot give itself a foundation in the logical analysis of what it means to make art: instead, artists have to explicate, as part of our activities, the intentional process of constitutive reasoning which make both encounter and understanding possible , and thus to enter into a hermeneutic exploration.[40]

Byrne met another, second strand of conceptualism in the person of Brian Eno, who produced the Talking Heads records from 1978 until 80. Eno had studied at Ipswich Art School, taking part in an unconventional and interdisciplinary programme that encouraged art students to focus on the nature of creative behaviour, rather than drawing or painting. Pursuing this course, Eno combined cybernetics (the mathematical science of organization and control) and biological theories of evolution to explore creativity. In doing so, he focused not on the result, but on the process of making art, conceiving of this process in terms of a system that has to come to terms with random mutations within a demanding environment, by basing itself on a limited set of instructions. As Eno wrote in an article on Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts :

As the variety of the environment magnifies in both time and space, and as the structures that were thought to describe the operation of the world become progressively more unworkable, other concepts of organization must become current. These concepts will base themselves on the assumption of change rather than stasis, and on the assumption of probability rather than certainty. I believe that contemporary art is giving us the feel for this outlook.[41]

In accordance with this credo, Eno does not consider himself a musician in the conventional meaning of the word. Instead, he has made the recording studio itself, as well as the decisions made during the recording process, into his instruments. An application of this approach can be found in *Oblique Strategies*, written by Eno together with painter Peter Schmidt. *Oblique Strategies*, subtitled Over one hundred worthwhile dilemmas , consists of a box of more than one hundred playing cards, each of which states a dilemma that may come up in the making of a work of art. An artist might pick a card at random, as Eno has suggested, simply to bring the consciousness one has as a listener to one s consciousness as a composer to deal with things in a much more *studied* way. [42] Many of these statements encourage the artist to get rid of the narrow focus that often results from intense concentration under stressful circumstances (like working in an expensive recording studio), to trust in errors and unpredictable actions rather than to adhere strictly to a narrowly premeditated course of action. Some results of this approach can be heard on the first two albums of Roxy Music, the rock group of which Eno was a founding member, and on his later Ambient records, which present a music without emotional focus, open to drift and contemplation.

Eno likes to emphasize the human propensity to become accustomed to sounds, and to detect minute variations within monotonous repetitions. He compared the listening brain under such circumstances to the functioning of the eye of a frog: The frog s eye, unlike ours, is absolutely static, so that its retina rapidly becomes saturated from looking at a static situation and ceases to distinguish detail. However, the most minute change (movement) in the environment is thus considerably highlighted. So the frog disregards the common (unvarying, continuous) information and becomes more and more intensely aware of any changing (new) information. [43]

At the end of the 1970 s, Eno had established himself as the prime theoretician of rock[44] although it has been noted that ideas which look positively iconoclastic in the world of rock music were often common currency on the contemporary art scene, so that Eno s originality derives at least as much from the context in which he applied his ideas as from the ideas themselves.[45] His success as a record producer (for David Bowie, U2 and others) is based on his ability to apply conceptual insights to the continually evolving technology of the recording studio. A typical example of his manner of producing has been recounted by Talking Heads Tina Weymouth: The last time we sing Air [from the album Fear of Music], we

sing very breathy. Here s an instance where Brian Eno used a conventional piece of studio machinery to achieve an unconventional effect. Normally you record without Dolby and then add it. He did the opposite. He recorded *with* Dolby and then took it off after it was recorded, so that it sounded even more natural. [46]

New York s experimental performance theatre has been a third source of practical as well as theoretical insights for Byrne. The theoretical assumptions that feed into this theatre have been investigated by one of the most prominent scholars in this field: Richard Schechner, professor of performance studies at New York University and former director of New York s Performance Group . His work demonstrates a wide experience of traditional as well as experimental forms of both Western and non-Western theatre, together with insights in the performative aspects of such diverse social situations as rituals, ceremonies, theme parks and modern mass media. Central to his work is the notion that an actor playing a role is at the same time himself and not himself, I and not-I . There are many techniques to bring about this transformation from I to not-I, and many different cultural modes of dealing with the resulting mixture of real and performed identity. There are also many ways of training performers to achieve this transformation: this training can be predominantly physical (as for dancers), spiritual (for some priests) or psychological (for actors in the naturalistic strain of theater and filmmaking). The transformation from reality to performance can be dealt with as a social ritual, a religious ritual or a purely aesthetic ritual: avant-garde or performance theater often combines and contrasts two or more of these forms, e.g. by claiming social relevance for an aesthetic performance. Schechner s work demonstrates how forms of performance are important for every culture and in every walk of life, and may be called characteristic of human experience in general.

The theatre makers who influenced Byrne, and with whom he collaborated, like Wilson and Akalaitis, without exception focus their works on the interplay and the conflict of such different forms of performance. Wilson s proposal to make a theatrical counterpart for the Los Angeles Olympic Games (one of the world s most visible performance festivals, one might say) is but one example. Byrne s inquiry into the nature of musical performances has benefited considerably from such work. His music addresses a range of questions about the communicative nature of popular music: Is it the rhythm? Is it the ritual quality of the performance? A mythical communion of band and audience? A shared reservoir of archetypes? A form of theatre? A religious phenomenon? Is it culturally determined, or just the opposite, an inherent aspect of human nature? The example of performance theatre shows that one should not look for the answer in any single one of these aspects, but instead in the interaction and the conflicts between them.

The three artists and theorists I have singled out here, Kosuth, Eno and Schechner, are too different to be reduced to one single denominator; and each of

them in turn functions within a field of heterogeneous theoretical influences. By describing Byrne s music, films and photography within their original context, they will be shown to be the result of a continuing exchange with conceptual themes and traditions. To represent the different influences within Byrne s work, I have made ample use of quotations. These many snippets from books and interviews help to create a sense of the heterogeneity that is so characteristic of Byrne s work and concepts.

A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO PERFORMANCE

The second part of the book places Byrne s work within a wider horizon by elaborating the theories behind its comparative outlook. First, chapter 6 considers Byrne s interest in myths and rituals from different places, ages and cultures, and in the biological foundations of human behaviour. Byrne has often mentioned the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Gustav Jung as influential for his work; it is something he has in common with a lot of artists who started working in the 1960 s and 70 s. Jung and Campbell see myths as a general and formative aspect of human consciousness; but as will be shown, they have difficulties in applying this idea consistently to their contemporary societies.

By using Richard Schechner s theories, the role of myths in present, scientific and media-conscious society can be interpreted in considerable detail. In chapter 7, Byrne s work is compared to that of three outstanding makers of performance theatre in New York. A central strategy in the work of Robert Wilson, The Wooster Group and Laurie Anderson is the juxtaposition and confrontation of irreconcilable myths; against the background of their work, Byrne s attempts stand out more clearly.

Schechner has investigated ritual and performative aspects in several traditions, which means that his work blends into cultural anthropology. His interest in the dialectical tension between performance and reality has predisposed him to deal critically with assumptions of authenticity and objectivity. Schechner has noted that the method of participatory observation that is traditionally central to ethnographic fieldwork in fact creates a theatrical situation; acknowledging the truth in this observation, several cultural anthropologists have quoted both Schechner and makers of theatrical performance for their insight in the inescapable interweaving of several realisms. As Schechner writes about New York s performance theater, This kind of theater displays its ambivalence; it is explicitly reflexive. [47]

This is even more relevant when a performance incorporates elements from different cultures. Like Bob Scholte and Joseph Kosuth, Schechner tries to understand how using aesthetics interculturally relates directly to social theory.[48] Chapter 8 addresses this interrelation of anthropology and performance, to highlight the questions that accompany Byrne s attempts to combine popular music with

anthropology. Byrne s TV documentary about Candomblé, for example, was an attempt to make a film on a foreign culture that would be entirely visual and not translate the entire experience in Western terms [49]. Of course, such an attempt to capture and understand another cultural system raises a series of probing questions about the possibilities and paradoxes that are involved in translating experience from one culture to another. This is especially true when one of these cultures, the American, is so much more powerful than the other in terms of politics, money, and technology. Similar questions are raised explicitly in many of Byrne s works. Addressing these themes, several anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and art critics have directed criticism and praise at Byrne s work; their insights are discussed in chapter 8.

A POETICS OF REFLEXIVITY

Just as Byrne s work can be seen with greater clarity in the wider context of performance theory, a greater insight in its poetics can be provided by comparing it to a tradition of artistic and philosophical reflexivity. The third and last part of this book is an attempt to sketch such a tradition. Its point of departure is the insight that Joseph Kosuth s dictum being an artist means questioning the nature of art fully applies to Byrne. Through its polyattentive, heterogeneous, and collaborative qualities, Byrne s work advocates a specific sensibility. When the conceptual aspects of this sensibility are investigated and followed, it shows itself to be insistently reflexive. As an introduction to this reflexive sensibility, it may be compared to another essay by Susan Sontag, One Culture and the New Sensibility (1965), in which Sontag argues that the interplay of industrial technology and artistic developments results in the creation of a new sensibility:

> This new sensibility is rooted, as it must be, in *our* experience, experiences which are new in the history of humanity in extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene (both people and material commodities multiplying at a dizzying rate); in the availability of new sensations such as speed (physical speed, as in airplane travel; speed of images, as in the cinema); and in the pan-cultural perspective on the arts that is possible through the mass reproduction of art objects.[50]

In the creation of this new sensibility, art serves the function of modifying consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility; Sontag noted that in this light, the accepted distinction between high, serious art and low, popular culture appears extremely shallow[51]. She stresses that

> human sensory awareness has not merely a biology but a specific history, each culture placing a premium on certain senses and inhibiting others Here is where art (among other things) enters Western man may be said to have been undergoing a massive sensory anesthesia (a concomitant of the process that Max Weber calls bureaucratic rationalization) at least since the Industrial Revolu-

tion, with modern art functioning as a kind of shock therapy for both confounding and unclosing our senses.[52]

Of course, this historical and cross-cultural interest in changing sensibilities has its own tradition. To understand how Byrne s strategic location at the intersection of mass media, conceptualism, and reflexive anthropology helps to grasp the ongoing redistribution of sensibilities and of mimetic forces, his work must be considered against the background of this tradition.

My account of the concepts that are needed to think critically about sensibility, in combination with the development of new methods for making art, starts with the early German Romantics who were active from 1795 to 1801. These speculative poets, critics and thinkers, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel in particular, concentrated on the possibilities of combining artistic sensibility with philosophical reflexivity. They expressly wanted to do away with the established division between artistic creation and theoretical reflection, not only intermingling the arts with each other, which produced the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but also insisting that reflection is essential to art. A summary of this aesthetic will show the inner coherence of an aesthetic and artistic practice that values the general sensitization to experience over specialized expertise in the separate artforms. As the work of the early Romantics testifies, the general insight that sensibility has a historical dimension will easily lead to an interest in different mythologies and in the profusion of religious innovations. For all these reasons, the work of Schlegel and Novalis, known also as Jena romanticism, forms an excellent background for the further discussion of Byrne s mixture of conceptualism with both popular and serious sensibilities. An exposition of ideas that had already been fully developed before the nineteenth century, is also an antidote against the postmodern illusion that such hybrid mixtures are uniquely contemporary. The philosophical poetics of Novalis and Schlegel provides an analysis of the requirements of a form of reflexive interpretation that enhances one s subjective and mimetic sensibilities. In this respect, their poetics can be contrasted to the post-structuralist tendency to reduce all experience to the experience of text.

The early Romantic poetics also provides a fresh insight to the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno. Even though their work reflects the historical experience of the first half of the twentieth century, their attempts to understand modernity in terms of an ongoing confrontation between naturalism and symbolism, or between a spreading anaesthesia and a growing sensibility, remain influential today. The concept of criticism of Schlegel and Novalis was the subject of Benjamin s first major publication, his dissertation. His later critical essays on film, photography, storytelling and history, essays that, like The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936) have become canonical for later critics

and artists, are understood here as an attempt to renew the early Romantic tradition by applying its insights to later historical and aesthetic developments.

Novalis already reflected on the mass reproduction of art (at that time only of literature) in 1798. He knew that his own work was destined to end in the catalogues of book fairs, between the ever-increasing mass of printed works. But he took a positive view of the monstrous multiplication of the number of books, considering it to be a condition for an increased sensibility:

> Every man is capable of change without measure I would like to see in front of me a whole collection of books, covering the entire range of arts and sciences, as the product of my spirit. And this goes for everything. [Goethe s novel] Wilhelm Meister s Lehrjahre we now have only one we should have as many Lehrjahre, written in the same spirit, as possible the collective character development of all people who have ever lived.[53]

Benjamin wanted to illuminate the cultural production and reproduction of sensibility as much as possible. He acknowledged Goethe s insight that subjective experience resides in a shaded and turbid medium where knowledge can never completely overcome mythology, yet sided with the early Romantics demand for reflexive criticism within the medium of art. This aesthetic philosophy is the foundation of a great number of reflexive attempts in contemporary art; one may encounter Benjamin s texts in Laurie Anderson s performances and in Kosuth s museum shows, as well as in Byrne s work.

Adorno was Benjamin s first philosophical disciple. While he tended to be more critical of mass reproduced art than Benjamin, Adorno s writings on modern experience equally combine different artistic and philosophical strands into a reflexive *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Even though Adorno s musical insights are exclusively based in the German development of serious music from Beethoven to Schönberg, his philosophical concepts have influenced many recent studies on music, as diverse as essays on heavy metal in the 1970 s and on listening to Chinese popular music on a Walkman[54]. The theoretical efforts of Benjamin and Adorno have remained to be inspiring because they fully underwrite artistic attempts to make art more reflexive, and to produce more convincing *Gesamtkunstwerke*, while reflecting at the same time on the destructive historical effects of attempts to produce a society that resembles a homogeneous total artwork.

The works of Adorno and Benjamin are exceptional in their critical reflections on the aesthetic of daily experience. Time and again, in books such as Benjamin s Arcades Project and Adorno and Horkheimer s Dialectics of Enlightenment , they demonstrate how common sense is the result of the interaction of the separate senses with the surrounding cultural environment, which means that our immediate and natural sensibility is in fact the product of complex mediations, truly a second nature. Their philosophical work provides insight in the ways in which our sensibility mimetically copies the pressures and influences of society

and technology. Of course, Benjamin could not foresee how performance theater would take up influences that he championed, combining influences of Brecht and surrealism; Adorno could not have dreamt that John Cage, who at one time took lessons in composition with Arnold Schönberg, would become more influential than his teacher. The continuing interest in their historical work testifies to the topicality of its approach, questioning the aesthetic forces within contemporary society from within. But their insights demand to be updated. They could not foresee the developments in science and technology, in the electronic media, or the ongoing economic globalization, and their influence on the ways in which life is lived.

Because of the unique position of Byrne s work at the point where mass media intersect with artistic experiments and with cultural anthropology, an interpretation of Byrne s work and its conceptual dimensions has its place here. To develop this interpretation to its fullest extent, the final chapter of this book is an attempt to update the reflexive and anthropological turn in aesthetics that is found both in the early Romantics and in the work of Benjamin and Adorno. It considers three contemporary approaches to reflexive anthropology: Bruno Latour s anthropology of science; Pierre Bourdieu s reflexive anthropology of aesthetic distinctions; and Arjun Appadurai s account of the transcultural globalization of electronic mass media.

Latour describes how we, today, live in communities whose social bonds come from objects that have been fabricated in scientific laboratories, so that our sensibilities are challenged by growing networks of increasingly hybrid and heterogeneous elements. Pierre Bourdieu has argued that every aesthetic sensibility, whether it is tuned to serious and difficult artworks or to the immediate pleasures of entertainment, in fact corresponds to one s position in the social field, where it constructs a habitus, to use his terminology. Bourdieu has analyzed the habitus of television journalists to show that it often results in an unconscious collective effort at homogenisation and banalization. This, of course, is exactly what artistic attempts at heterogeneity and complexity stand opposed to. Appadurai, finally, describes the rapid worldwide flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations as introducing a growing instability in the production of modern sensibilities. He shows how internationally standardized media imagery is transformed locally to produce repertoires of irony, anger, humor, and resistance: processes that are reflected in much of Byrne s work.

The work of these three theorists can help to understand how the very fiber of our experience is interwoven with the work that goes on in distant electronic laboratories, where new models for experience are produced and tested. In an allegorical short story titled Lifestyle , Byrne wrote how the abstract has entered the concrete .[55] The truth of this implies that it is not exaggerated to surround a series of popsongs, films and photos with such an elaborate philosophical and theoreti-

cal framework. Every aspect of experience can be, and has been, subjected to experiment, conceptualized and reconceptualized, analyzed and allegorized. This does not mean that interpretation can replace the experience of art. However much a detour through theory and philosophy may lead away from its sensuousness, in the end it should add to its pleasures.

Chapter 1 | Introduction

1 See Sayre: The Object of Performance , p. 105.
2 My paraphrase of Rockwell: All American Music , p. 53-4.
3 Cf. Sayre: The Object of Performance , p. 106
4 Ibid., p. 113.
5 Rockwell: All American Music , p. 237.
6 Cf. Goldberg: Performance Art , p. 177.
7 Howell: David Byrne , p. 14. See pp. 11-14 of that book and Miles: Taking Heads , p. 18, for descriptions of these concerts. The full name of The Kitchen is: the Kitchen Centre for Video and Music; on its historical role, see Goldberg, p. 181.
8 Quoted in Howell: David Byrne , p. 47-8.
9 Byrne, interviewed by the author, 22 February 1999.
10 Miles: Talking Heads , p. 47-8.
11 Byrne, interviewed by the author, 22 February 1999.
12 Bowman: Fa fa fa fa fa fa , p. 344.
13 See ibid., p. 325.
14 In the same year, Casebere, Turyn, Wegman, Holzer and Kruger were also present, this time as writers and critics, in Blasted Allegories: anthology of writings by contemporary artists , published by New York s New Museum of Contemporary Art and the MIT Press.
15 I thank Rick Poynor for pointing this out to me.
16 Byrne: Strange Ritual , pages not numbered.
17 Byrne, quoted on a leaflet of the Aktionsforum Praterinsel , Munich, accompanying his 98 exhibition.
18 Rockwell: All American Music , p. 261.
19 Cf. Bowman: Fa fa fa fa fa fa , p. 365.
20 Ibid., p. 5.
21 See Gracyk: Rhythm and Noise , p. 220 ff. for sources and for a refutation of Jameson s argument. Jameson also mentions Talking Heads as an example of the postmodern on page 1 of his The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern .
22 Best and Kellner: The Postmodern Turn , pp. 34 and 89.
23 Schecter: Beyond the Text , p. 176.
24 Hebdidge: Hiding in the Light , p. 240.
25 Sayre: The Object of Performance , p. 266.
26 Apart from my own collection and a file lent to me by Rick Poynor, I have used the extensive site www.talking-heads.net.
27 Cf. Musician No. 32, April-May 1981, p. 46.
28 Sontag: Against Interpretation , p. 17.
29 Ibid., p. 23.

30 Ibid., p. 294-304.
31 Ibid., p. 15.
32 See for example Stuart Hall s article Encoding, Decoding , in During: The Cultural Studies Reader , p. 507-17.
33 Best and Kellner: The Postmodern Turn , p. 183. For contrast, compare Paul Rabinow: Representations Are Social facts , in Clifford and Marcus, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography , p. 254, where Rabinow alludes to Stop Making Sense (but without mentioning Byrne) in a densely argumented article on anthropological representations,
34 Bowman: Fa fa fa fa fa fa , p. 242-3.
35 Byrne, quoted in John Howell: David Byrne , p. 15.
36 Charles Harrison: Art & Language: Enkele condities en interesses van de eerste tien jaar in: Art & Language: de schilderijen , p. 12-3.
37 On the history of Art & Language and Kosuth, see: Gabriele Guercio, Introduction, especially note 15, in Kosuth: Art after Philosophy and After , p. xlii, and p. 127, note 2.
38 Kosuth: Art after Philosophy and After , p. 107-28.
39 Cf. Keesing: Cultural Anthropology , p. 537 f.
40 Kosuth, quoting Scholte, in Art after Philosophy and After , p. 119.
41 Quoted in Eno and Mills: More Dark than Shark , p. 76.
42 Ibid., p. 98.
43 Ibid., p. 43; cf. Sayre: The Object of Performance , p. 113-4.
44 A journalist s label, quoted by Rick Poynor, in Eno and Mills: More Dark than Shark , p. 72.
45 Rick Poynor, ibid., p. 40.
46 Quoted in Davis: Talking Heads , p. 101-2.
47 Schechner: Between Theater and Anthropology , p. 98.
48 Ibid., p. 14.
49 Bowman: Fa fa fa fa fa fa , p. 336.
50 Sontag: Against Interpretation , p. 296-7.
51 Ibid., p. 298.
52 Ibid., p. 302.
53 Novalis: Werke , p. 418 (Dialog 1, 1798). Author s translation of: Jeder Mensch ist ohne Maß veränderlich Ich möchte eine ganze Büchersammlung, aus allen Kunst- und Wissenschaftsarten, als Werk meines Geistes, vor mir sehn. Und so mit allen. [Goethe s novel] Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre haben wir jetzt allein wir sollten soviel Lehrjahre, in demselben Geist geschrieben, besitzen, als nur möglich wären die sämtlichen Lehrjahre aller Menschen, die je gelebt hätten . Novalis also compared Goethe to Wegdwood, who mass-reproduced Greek vases; see ibid., p. 409.
54 Straw: Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The case of heavy metal , and Chow: Listening Otherwise, Music Miniaturized: A different type of question about revolution . Both in During: The Cultural Studies Reader , pp. 451-61 and 462-76.
55 Byrne: Lifestyle , in: Strange Ritual (unnumbered).