

# Record Companies Drag Their Feet

LESLIE LABOWITZ/WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (WAWAW)  
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On August 30, 1977, Tuesday morning between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. at the site of a billboard of the rock group Kiss in L.A., California, a media event---Record Companies Drag Their Feet---was presented in the form of a performance and press conference. The event was a collaborative effort between Leslie Labowitz and Women Against Violence Against Women, an activist organization working to stop the use of images of physical and sexual violence against women in mass media. Participating in the event were women connected with the Woman's Building, L.A. Women's Video Center and local women in the L.A. community of various ethnic, age and professional differences.

Record Companies Drag Their Feet as a performance was designed to communicate to a mass audience through mass media, primarily TV news broadcasts. Record album covers and the social responsibility of the recording industry provided the theme and story that attempted to make the connection between media images of women and the rising condition of violence against women in the real world. Graphic images were specifically set up for a particular number of shots and staged in such a way as to make it easy for the camera crews to shoot. Shot Sheets and explanatory information about the performance were given out to the media at the site so that misinterpretation would be avoided.

The set was at the site of the huge Kiss billboard so that the already present billboard became part of the set. The set was composed of: the Kiss billboard, a counter billboard of statistics on rape, and a simulated record company executive's office in front of it. The office was complete with a large gold record at the entrance to the office and a long gold desk with a secretary sitting and typing on an IBM typewriter as one visually entered the office. On the desk were telephones, stacks of money, album covers and buckets with red paint in them. The "Big Button," the recording industry's symbol of power, sat proudly on the desk.

The record company executives were metaphorically portrayed by images of roosters. The roosters began the event by driving up and down Sunset Boulevard in a gold convertible until the arrival of the media. At that time they drove up to the site and entered the performance set. They simultaneously performed cliches of roosters--proud, strutting, arrogant--and executives--talking on the phones, counting money, making advances to the secretary, shining the gold record. They took their places behind the desk and held up offensive record album covers and nodded approvingly to the media.

Four women entered the set and were marked with an X across their bodies by an anonymous figure. The women tore off the X and threw them at the audience as a symbol of refusing victimization. One woman at a time would make an attempt to communicate with the roosters. After being ignored she held up a sign with a statement on it: I WISH THE MEDIA WOULDN'T INSULT, Demean, DEHUMANIZE ME BY THEIR IMAGES. As the roosters continued to ignore her she turned her sign over and exposed a photo blow-up of an offensive record cover. Using the red paint from one of the buckets she painted across it: THIS IS A CRIME AGAINST WOMEN. At this point the roosters would accidentally spill a bucket of red paint over the money and desk. The red paint represented "blood money" made by the commercialization of sexually violent images of women. The roosters played in the red paint, smearing it on each other as the three other women repeated the performance with different gestures and signs. Twelve women of different ages and ethnic groups including two small children unrolled a banner across the set that said: DON'T SUPPORT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN---BOYCOTT. They then proceeded to drape the entire set with the banner enclosing the three roosters. The press conference took place in front of this last image.

The processing of the information of the events was filtered through the mass media. It was covered by Channels 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13 locally, and nationally received about four to five minutes of news time on each station. The collaborative notion was extended to include those in the media who experienced the event and connected to it by representing it in a news broadcast. Those newscasters who are visually represented in the final newscast as shown on TV become actual performers in the event. --Leslie Labowitz

**Leslie Labowitz • WAWAW**