

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ARIADNE, A SOCIAL ART NETWORK: WORKING TOGETHER AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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In Los Angeles during the 1970s, cooperation between artists was frequent. Seeking new artistic languages, numerous artists elaborated collective artworks and established alternative spaces.¹ In addition, social movements, and particularly the feminist movements, gave an impetus to collaboration. By using consciousness-raising sessions which encouraged an artistic practice based on female experiences and the construction of a community of women artists, the feminist art education programs set up through the Feminist Art Program (FAP) and the Woman's Building were fundamental in the creation of women artists collectives.² In 1979, Angela Greene and Lynda Lyons co-organized *Working Together* at California State University, Los Angeles. The curators declared that collaboration was a driving force behind the artistic process. In their opinion, working

¹ See the exhibition catalog Alex Donis, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Linda Frye Burnham and al., *Collaboration Labs: Southern California Artists and the Artist Space Movement*, Santa Monica (CA), 18th Street Art Center, 2011. Ariadne: A Social Art Network was part of the exhibition.

² See Cheri Gaulke, "1 + 1 = 3: Art and Collaboration at the WB", in Meg Linton, and Sue Maberry, eds., *Doin' It In Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building* (Los Angeles: Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 26. The FAP was a teaching programme based on feminist pedagogy initiated by Judy Chicago at Fresno State College in 1970 and at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1971 in collaboration with Miriam Schapiro. The Woman's Building (1973-1991) put together several feminist organisations in Los Angeles, like the Feminist Studio Workshop (FSW), a feminist art education programme set up by Chicago, Sheila de Bretteville and Arlene Raven in 1973.

together undermined the myth of the solitary artist, stood against the elitism and narrowness of the art world, and encouraged artistic and political connections.³ Among the six women artists collectives exhibited,⁴ Ariadne: A Social Art Network was dedicated to generating and supporting art, activism, media and pedagogic projects on the theme of violence against women. From 1977 to 1982,⁵ the collaboration between Leslie Labowitz-Starus (born in 1946) and Suzanne Lacy (born in 1945) produced seven public performances and a series of events that brought together activists, artists, journalists and politicians: “As artists we work with the issue of violence as source material, using feminist ideology to shape forms necessary for changing culture. These forms involve the collective action of many women artists and non-artists, working to ‘break the silence’ and create solutions to violence.”⁶ Although, in a sense, Ariadne operated collectively within the framework of other collectives at the time, the project was, strictly speaking, a conceptual artwork that featured its collaborators’ explorations of the dematerialization of art and allowed others to participate in their visions of how to stop violence against women.⁷ For instance, several feminist media reform groups, such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) (1976) and Women Against Violence and Pornography in Media (WAVPM) (1976) were involved in Ariadne’s projects. The U.S. feminist activist and art community was relatively small, influences were mutual and shared, and theory evolved around the social effects of images of violence in the media.⁸

As its name suggests, Ariadne: A Social Art Network defined its work as linking artistic practice and social engagement: “closing the gap

³ “*Working Together* Press Release”, Double X Records, 1974-1988, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 1, folder 6 “Group Events Announcements and Reviews for Exhibitions”.

⁴ The other collectives were: Double X, Feminist Art Workers, Mother Art, The Waitresses, and Women of the Earth.

⁵ Ariadne functioned until 1981 and officially stopped its activities in 1982. See Sharon Irish, *Suzanne Lacy: Spaces Between* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 79.

⁶ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, “Evolution of a Feminist Art: Public Forms and Social Issue”, *Heresies: a Feminist Publication on Art and Politics* 2:2 (summer 1978), 76. This issue covered the theme of women and violence.

⁷ Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

⁸ See Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: the American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

between artists and community, artists and real life people and issues”.⁹ Ariadne was also connected to the concept of “new genre public art” defined by Lacy as “visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives [...]”¹⁰ In order to reach a large audience, Labowitz-Starus and Lacy used the media to spread alternative perspectives on violence and developed “feminist media strategies for political performance”, aligned with other performative activism like Greenpeace and Saul Alinsky’s protests.¹¹ Experimenting with cross-over strategies like the then evolving critique of television went side by side with formal artistic experimentation.¹² Ariadne promoted a distinction between two usages of media in their work, the media event and the public informational campaign:

The first is a one-time event designed specifically for TV newscasts, choreographed to control the content as it is distributed through the media. [...], [these events] serve as a very exciting and useful way to identify an issue or point of view about an issue for a large audience. A successful media event is one part of an overall strategy to influence public opinion, but it needs to be followed up with the in-depth information people will need to make knowledgeable choices. The public information campaign, a term used by public relations people, can do just that.¹³

Through the example of Ariadne, this paper will explore the interrelation between art, collaborative work and feminism, the way in which collaboration was used as an artistic strategy to expand feminist perspectives on violence against women. The first part will examine the origin and structure of the collaboration between Labowitz-Starus and Lacy. We will then focus on Ariadne’s public performance events coming under four headings: first, working against rape (*Three Weeks in May*, 1977; *In Mourning and In Rage*, 1977; *From Reverence to Rape to*

⁹ “Social Art Brochure”, in “Ariadne”, *Woman’s Building Records 1970-1992*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 14, folder 61, 1.

¹⁰ Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 19.

¹¹ Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

¹² Labowitz-Starus and Lacy were early proponents of media critique and intervention with artists such as Ant Farm, Nancy Buchanan, Chris Burden, and Ulysses Jenkins.

¹³ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, and Suzanne Lacy, “Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance”, in Douglas Kahn, and Diane Neumaier, eds., *Cultures in Contention* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985), 129.

Respect, 1978), then, working against images of violence (*Record Companies Drag Their Feet*, 1977; *Take Back The Night*, 1978), thirdly, working against community-based violence (*Making It Safe*, 1979), and finally, working against incest (*The Incest Awareness Project*, 1979).

Ariadne: A Social Art Network: “Expanding Self”

Even before the creation of Ariadne, Labowitz-Starus and Lacy were both moving, on the artistic and personal level, toward a more public form of art that included activism, feminism, interdisciplinism and a focus on the self in political and social context: “The ‘expanding self’ became a metaphor for the process of moving the boundaries of one’s identity outward to encompass other women, groups of women and eventually all people. Powerful feminist political art came from such personal and spiritual connection to the world.¹⁴”

Seeking to get rid of the social norms that affected both her life and her work, Labowitz-Starus put on her first feminist performance (*Menstruation-Wait*) in 1971 at the Otis Art Institute, where she graduated with an MFA in 1972. That year, she got a Fulbright fellowship to work for one year with Joseph Beuys in Dusseldorf. She stayed five years in Germany and developed her interest in public feminist performance under the influence of political artists and writers such as Walter Benjamin, Beuys, Bertolt Brecht, the Frankfurt School, and the German Expressionists.¹⁵ She formulated the model of a public political art form from five components: “collaboration with a political organization, use of the skilled artist as director/organizer, a focus on issues of current concern, use of the language of the audience addressed and economic accessibility of materials.¹⁶” She explained: “The performance would work on the level of public ritual, uniting participants and a mass audience in a spiritual bond that creates community by politicizing its members.¹⁷” In collaboration with political women’s collectives, she did a series of performances in relation to a specific feminist agenda of the time, *Paragraph 218* (1975) after the name of a bill about abortion. The performance intended to influence the German Supreme Court judges about to vote on the

¹⁴ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 78.

¹⁵ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

¹⁶ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 80.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

legalization of abortion.¹⁸ Labowitz-Starus conceived a strong visual imagery to put forward her feminist point of view. In Bonn, in front of City Hall, hundreds of men and women lit up the performance with torches. Three women, dressed in black, wearing pointed hoods and holding signs with 218 written on them, represented the judges, and more generally the patriarchal system. A woman shouted at them: “Why can’t anybody hear me?” Then, two women, in red hoods, wrapped her in white gauze, and some red paint was poured on her. Another woman brought a six-foot-long gold penis to the judges, who threw it down, breaking it as a final gesture of the refusal of oppression.¹⁹

In 1970, Lacy, then a psychology graduate student at Fresno State College, enrolled in the FAP.²⁰ She began audio-taping stories of women who had been raped, later joined by her mentor, Judy Chicago. She then followed Chicago to CalArts to enroll in the Feminist Design Program, set up by Sheila de Bretteville. There, Allan Kaprow encouraged her exploration of art-life and experiential performance.²¹ In 1972, with Chicago, Sandra Orgel and Aviva Rahmani, she created *Ablutions*, a performance on rape using recordings of rape as a soundtrack to a series of symbolic actions: a woman was bound with white gauze, two others bathed in tubs filled with eggs, blood and clay, and hundreds of beef kidneys were nailed into the wall. The artwork aimed at exposing hidden experiences of rape and at generating a public context allowing women to speak out. Important also was the healing dimension: “The act of making art somehow mitigated the pain of much of the experience with which we dealt.”²² In that year, she also published an artist’s book, *Rape Is*. In order to open it, the reader has to tear a red seal marked “RAPE”. Each pagespread is composed of the words “RAPE IS” and a description of an experience, going from the seemingly innocuous to the deadly, the whole drawing the picture of a culture of sexual violence. These two projects

¹⁸ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

¹⁹ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 78.

²⁰ Prior to the implementation of the FAP, Lacy and Faith Wilding had initiated a feminist discussion group at Fresno State College. See *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27*, Archives of American art, Smithsonian Institution, [online] <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-suzanne-lacy-12940> (consulted on 2 March 2016).

²¹ Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016. Chicago and Kaprow were also important influences for Labowitz-Starus. See Leslie Labowitz-Starus, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

²² Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 79.

were part of a strategy to disrupt myths about rape that had begun in the 1970s within the feminist movements, through, for instance, Susan Griffin's article *Rape: the All-American Crime* (1971) and Susan Brownmiller's book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975). Lacy wrote about that context:

While organizing consciousness-raising groups and teaching women's psychology as a graduate student in psychology I heard experiences that hinted at a dark undercurrent from childhood, about cars, about strangers, about what happened to some other little girl from another town. Not long after I began listening deeply I noticed it: every time a group of five or so women gathered, one of us had been raped. Or knew intimately someone who had. Meeting for the first time, in consciousness-raising groups and women's studies classes, we slowly began to speak of physical abuse, of sexual assault, of betrayal and shame.²³

Another significant performance where Lacy defined her interest in working with people outside the art world was *One Woman Shows* (1975). This performance's structure consists of a temporary community and a gallery show featuring individual women's self-representations. The artist reflected on the pedagogy of this work as important to women's art: "In our analyses of forms of oppression we had begun to realize that the separation of artist from society resulted in a neutralizing of the social power of art."²⁴

After three projects in 1977-78, Labowitz-Starus and Lacy refined their ideas and strategies and created Ariadne: A Social Art Network, initially planned to last three years. Its goal was to initiate and support a relevant artistic practice, feminist activism, media theory, and public awareness. Ariadne was an exploration of public ways of working with the artist's body, ideas that eventually helped develop public performance art and social practices. Since their meeting in 1977 during *Three Weeks in May*,

²³ Suzanne Lacy, "Times, Bones, and Art: Anatomy of a Decade", in Suzanne Lacy, and Moira Roth, *Leaving Art: Writings on Performance, Politics, and Publics, 1974-2007* (Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2010), 92. About the anti-rape movement and the Woman's Building, see also Vivien Green Fryd, "Ending the Silence", in Meg Linton, and Sue Maberry, eds., *op. cit.*, 159-170. The theme of rape was also explored by other artists, like Ana Mendieta and Faith Ringgold. See Sharon Irish, *op. cit.*, 35-36. See also Lucy R. Lippard, "Rape: Show and Tell", in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 243-247.

²⁴ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 81.

the artists had been deeply engaged in each other's work and the Ariadne project was the direct result of this close collaboration, and they included in Ariadne's realisations three prior works (*Three Weeks in May*, *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* and *In Mourning and In Rage*).²⁵

Intended for a broader public, Ariadne was conceived as an intermingling of theory and practice through three components: "Vision and Theory", "Education" and "Projects". "Vision and Theory" was a discussion platform on violence against women. The strategy was to encourage women from different communities and professions to work together to end violence²⁶ and to foster new art forms and critical writings. Through "Education", Ariadne offered classes, lectures and training programmes at the Woman's Building, as well as at other places. Finally, "Projects" was dedicated to the production of art events and their documentation.²⁷ Ariadne was not incorporated and was not an organisation, so it didn't have, for instance, a board of directors or annual budget. In the spirit of a performance artwork, the artists favoured flexibility: "We are trying to allow this 'organization' or network to develop organically, in line with the needs of its participants."²⁸

Working Together Against Rape

Activism, audience experience and interdisciplinism were central concerns among feminist artists at that time, and figured into Lacy's extended performance, *Three Weeks in May* (1977, May 8-28)²⁹. She had initially planned to site her work in an art gallery. She would have gone every day to the Los Angeles Police Department to extract the rape reports

²⁵ Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

²⁶ Labowitz-Starus explained: "We will be seeking out a variety of participants from women of all classes and races in an effort to forge a coherent political perspective which will inform our art." Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 88.

²⁷ "Ariadne: A Social Art Network: Organization", in "Ariadne: A Social Art Network, circa 1977-1979", *Woman's Building Records, 1970-1992*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, box 1, folder 16. Two videos, made by the L.A. Women's Center, document the performances *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* and *In Mourning and In Rage*.

²⁸ "Seasons Greetings From Ariadne: A Social Art Network, 23 December 1978", in "Ariadne", *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

²⁹ *Three Weeks in May* was partly re-enacted for Lacy's exhibition at Museo Pecci Milano in 2014. See Suzanne Lacy's Website, [online] <http://www.suzannelacy.com/recent-works/#/three-weeks-in-may-recreation/> (consulted on 4 March 2016).

from the prior day's crimes, and post them in the gallery. But she soon realised that this would not really impact the public. She decided to use the City Hall mall, located close to City Hall, on invitation from a friend's father who was head of Los Angeles City's Public Works Department.³⁰ Following Sheila de Bretteville's advice, Lacy finally mounted a large map of Los Angeles—a visual element that communicates directly with people—on which, every day, she stenciled in red letters “RAPE” on the relevant spots to locate the sexual assaults reported to the police.³¹ The map showed that there was no safe place for women. Indeed, the reports revealed that rape occurred anywhere and at any time; there was no “group” of women safe from it:

Rape is not sexual. Rape is an act of aggression of one class, men, against another, women. When women begin to recognize their identification with other women and to know that there is no woman free from the threat of sexual assault, when women recognize rape as an attempt to maintain the power imbalance between men and women, they will begin speaking out, fighting back, and changing attitudes and actions by showing one-half the world the reality of the other half.³²

But Lacy didn't want the project to highlight solely victimization. So, she made a second map showing the organisations that helped rape victims, thus focusing on solutions and empowerment.³³ As a shared platform for art and non-art actors, Lacy expanded the project by working out collaborations with other artists, organisations working against rape, and the City Council. She also appealed to media as a way to provide public education and listed Studio Watts Workshop and the Woman's Building as co-sponsors (although neither materially supported the work) as part of a strategy of engaging both anti-racist and feminist institutions. Along with Labowitz-Starus' four public performances *Myths of Rape*,³⁴

³⁰ The managers of the malls she had contacted were worried because they thought that the project could frighten consumers. See *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27, op. cit.*

³¹ More than ninety rapes were reported during the event. See “Three Weeks in May”, in “Art at the Woman's Building Statements”, *Woman's Building Records, 1970-1992, op. cit.*, box 14, folder 63.

³² Suzanne Lacy, “‘Three Weeks in May’: Speaking Out on Rape, a Political Art Piece”, *Frontiers: a Journal of Women's Studies* 2:1 (spring 1977): 67.

³³ *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27, op. cit.*

³⁴ These performances represented the ideas the artist formulated in Germany and have been re-performed four times since then by other activists and artists. See Leslie Labowitz-Starus, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

Anne Gauldin, Cheri Gaulke, Melissa Hoffman, Laurel Klick, Judith Loischild, Phranc, and Barbara Smith put on public and private performances (fig.1).³⁵ And Lacy herself created two distinct performances: a guerilla action (outlining a woman's body on street corners near where sexual assaults had been committed) and *She Who Would Fly*, an installation with live performers. The anti-rape organisations set up conferences, rape speak-outs and self-defence workshops. Politicians, through their participation and support, were valuable assets and gave credibility and relevance to the event—the City attorney, for instance, set up a press conference with the Deputy Mayor for the opening. Finally, by covering the event, journalists made the project visible to a large audience, turned rape into a public concern and so took part in the dismantling of myths about rape.³⁶

In Mourning and In Rage was Labowitz-Starus' and Lacy's first collaborative project. It came from their analysis of the media coverage of a series of rapes and murders committed in Los Angeles during the fall 1977. Without analysing the political dimension of the crimes or the way they were part of a climate that encouraged sexual violence, journalists intensified women's fears and their feeling of powerlessness. Unlike the crimes themselves, this sensationalist media coverage could be impacted by the kind of art they were producing. They designed the performance as a media event using the journalists invited as part of the artwork. They wanted to spread a feminist perspective on the crimes and the media's role in perpetrating myths.³⁷ The performance action would show women united, fighting back and controlling their lives.³⁸ The script started from the singular narratives of ten women victims and expanded to cover all forms of violence.

On 13 December 1977, a funeral procession led dozens of women from the Woman's Building to City Hall, where a hundred people were gathered.

³⁵ *Myths about Rape* by Leslie Labowitz (1977), performance, part of *Three Weeks in May* by Suzanne Lacy. Los Angeles City Hall Mall.

³⁶ The event programme was published in Suzanne Lacy, "'Three Weeks in May': Speaking Out on Rape, a Political Art Piece", *op. cit.*, 68-69.

³⁷ Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy, "'In Mourning and In Rage ...'", *Frontiers: a Journal of Women's Studies* 3:1 (spring 1978): 55. They were also invited to talk shows to express their position. See *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27, op. cit.*

³⁸ See the instructions of the performance: "Instructions for Hillside Strangler Memorial Event", *WAVAW Collection*, UCLA Library Digital Collections [online], <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewer/viewer.do?projectNo=136&arkId=21198/zz0017sh1p> (consulted on 3 April 2016).

One woman dressed in red and nine seven-foot-tall women veiled and clothed in black got out of the hearse. These imposing figures evoked the traditional mourners “not considered as a symbol of weakness, but strength which transforms itself to anger and rage providing the energy to bring about change.³⁹” Each of them spoke in memory of a specific form of abuse, from incest to domestic violence. After each statement, the rest of the group, forming a chorus on the steps of City Hall, chanted “In memory of our sisters—we fight back”, and the speaker received a red cloak as a symbol of anger. Two banners held by women behind them echoed the chorus. Then, the woman in red ended the performance, saying: “I am here for the rage of all women. I am here for women fighting back!” The aggressive dimension of the performance was the result of a discussion with the graphic designer and writer, Bia Lowe, and other women artists of the Woman’s Building: “They said that the mourning, the funeral appearance of the whole thing, was not an activist enough stance and didn’t underscore the rage that they felt [as victims of rape].⁴⁰” At the end of the performance, Lacy read a statement to the press and several City Councillors and the Deputy Mayor pledged their support. It included a list of three demands formulated in a meeting with women’s organisations about funding for neighbourhood protection programmes, mandatory self-defence in grammar schools, and a telephone emergency listing of rape hotline numbers. The performance ended with the song *Fight Back* by Holly Near, written for the event, and a self-defence workshop was organised the next Saturday.⁴¹

In Mourning and In Rage was both a ritual of shared pain and anger for Los Angeles feminists and a framework to foster more actions to end violence.⁴² The inclusion of women’s organisations and politicians was crucial as it positioned the performance with activists and public concerns and extended the effectiveness of the event.⁴³ In fact, the performance had

³⁹ “Statement: Memorial Event”, in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 62.

⁴⁰ *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27*, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ See the description and script of the performance in Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy, “In Mourning and In Rage ...”, *op. cit.*, 52-55. See also Suzanne, “In Mourning and In Rage (With Analysis Aforethought)”, in Suzanne Lacy, and Moira Roth, *op. cit.*, 64-71.

⁴² Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy, “In Mourning and In Rage ...”, *op. cit.*, 54.

⁴³ In the autumn of 1978, at the Woman’s Building, Labowitz-Starus and Lacy organised a reception to acknowledge the support of the participants in Ariadne (the activists Betty Brooks and Julia London, the journalists Patty Ecker, Sallie Fiske, Felicia Jeter, Ardie Ivy, Christine Lund, the City Councillors Dave Cunningham, Joy Picus, Pat Russell, and the Deputy Mayor Grace Davis) and to

direct repercussions, such as the transfer of ransom money for the capture of criminals to the setting up of free self-defence workshops.⁴⁴

In 1978, Claudia King, an art professor at the University of Nevada, contacted Labowitz-Starus and Lacy to organise a project in Las Vegas based on *Three Weeks in May*, which she had attended, “in response to women’s secrecy about rape, to provide information, to dispel myth, and to alleviate the guilt of the victim.”⁴⁵ The project, entitled *From Reverence to Rape to Respect*, was derived from film critic Molly Haskell’s book *From Reverence to Rape* (1974) in which she analysed the representations of women in films. Lacy explained: “Reverence presents an image of women as not human. It’s easy to objectify something that is not seen as human...and that leads to rape.”⁴⁶ The adding of “to Respect” pointed out that changing culture is possible by breaking the continuum between the idolisation and degradation of women and thus moving to self-determination.⁴⁷ Besides, acting in Las Vegas, where the objectification of women was—and is—very high, was particularly significant to Ariadne. The event also aimed at breaking down “the myth that Las Vegas has few rapes because sex is so available.”⁴⁸

Supported by the Nevada Humanities Committee, the event took place over ten days (22 April-1 May). The exhibition, *Trophies*, showed Lacy’s installation *There are Voices in the Desert* along with Nancy Buchanan’s and Kathy Hauffman’s performances at UNLV Gallery. Martha Rosler also created postcards and the Feminist Art Workers (Nancy Angelo, Vanalyne Green, Cheri Gaulke, Laurel Klick) organised *Traffic in Women: a Feminist Vehicle*, a bus tour performance from Los Angeles. Furthermore, Labowitz-Starus did several performances, such as *Rape is Everybody’s Concern*, which opened the event. The media performance was staged on Paradise Road in front of a large billboard designed by Deborah Feldman. On the poster “rape is: everybody’s concern” was

consolidate the network. See “Reception to Honor Past Supporters”, in “Ariadne: A Social Art Network, circa 1977-1979”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 85.

⁴⁵ “From Reverence to Rape to Respect Poster”, in “Ariadne: A Social Art Network, circa 1977-1979”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Denise Magnell, “Rape is Everybody’s Concern”, *Las Vegas Review Journal* (16 April 1978), in “Ariadne: A Social Art Network, circa 1977-1979”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ “From Reverence to Rape to Respect”, in “Art at the Woman’s Building Statements”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, and Suzanne Lacy, “Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance”, *op. cit.*, 131.

written in red letters on a black background. Below the billboard, several women, dressed in red, were tied by Labowitz-Starus (wearing black and blindfolded as an allegory of society's blindness) to signs about the myths of rape ("MYTH: If you resist, you will be killed" for instance). Then, the women freed themselves, crossed the message out, and replaced their signs with ones that described the realities of rape.⁴⁹ *From Reverence to Rape to Respect* also included discussions by humanities scholars and activists, debates, public events, and self-defence workshops. As with their previous projects, the artists also paid attention to media coverage and included journalists in the art event.⁵⁰

Working Together Against Images of Violence

On August 30, 1977, in Los Angeles, Labowitz-Starus and WAVAW organised *Record Companies Drag Their Feet*, a media event including a performance and a press conference. Extending the boycott of WEA (Warner, Elektra, Atlantic) launched by California NOW and WAVAW in December 1976, the performance emphasised the connection between the images of women in the music industry and the increase of violence in society. The boycott had started in reaction to the advertising campaign of the Rolling Stones' album *Black and Blue* (1976), a huge billboard displayed in Los Angeles that showed a woman bound and bruised, expressing sexual arousal "as if the rough physical treatment had wakened her desires and now she wanted more."⁵¹ The connection of female sexuality to violence was underlined by the slogan: "I'm *Black and Blue* from the Rolling Stones and I Love It!"

The media performance took place in front of Tower Records, on the Sunset Strip, whose facade exhibited large billboards promoting albums. On the day of the event, a billboard advertised the Kiss's last album (*Love Kiss*).⁵² Below this poster, a pastiche of a record company executive's office was installed. Three actresses, wearing rooster headpieces symbolising the arrogance of the executives, represented "The Big Button". They showed

⁴⁹ "Leslie Labowitz Discusses Activist Performance and the Media", Otis Art Institute, 2011 [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=362L2ff7F1c> (consulted on 03/04/2016).

⁵⁰ "From Reverence to Rape to Respect", *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Carolyn Bronstein, "No More *Black and Blue*: Women Against Violence Against Women and the Warner Communications Boycott, 1976-1979", *Violence Against Women* 4:14 (2008): 418.

⁵² The album cover represents the members of the band standing with a dozen women at their feet lying in passive poses.

off in a gold convertible until the arrival of the journalists, and then went to the office, parodying tasks associated to executives (like counting money and polishing a gold record). They sat behind the desk and showed the journalists several album covers glorifying images of violence against women. Beyond them, a counter-billboard completed the set. It showed in red the growing rate of rape in the U.S.: “The connection between the brutal images, the financial profits and sexual crimes was made.”⁵³

Then, four women came on stage. They were marked with an X which they removed and threw to the audience in order to signify their refusal of victimisation. Each of them tried, in vain, to draw the attention of the “roosters”. So, they raised a sign on which one could read: “I WISH THE MEDIA WOULDN’T INSULT, Demean, DEHUMANIZE ME BY THEIR IMAGES”. In reaction to the impassibility of the trio, they showed enlarged offensive images of album covers, and, with red paint, wrote on them: “THIS IS A CRIME AGAINST WOMEN” (fig.2).⁵⁴ At that time, the executives accidentally spilled a bucket of red paint, representing the “blood money” collected by marketing images of violence against women. Then, they began to play with the paint while the women tried to attract their attention. Finally, a group of women draped the scene with a banner saying “DON’T SUPPORT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN–BOYCOTT”.⁵⁵

Julia London and Joan Howarth of WAVAW explained the benefits of collaborating with artists: “The artists contributed skills to develop a powerful image and an event that would move people both emotionally and politically.”⁵⁶ They also pointed out that cooperation with activists sharpened the political consciousness of artists: “The artists learned about the structure and goals of the industry, strategies for change and how all of this affects them as artists and as women.”⁵⁷

In order to make sure the boycott reached a broad audience, the performance, which got local and national coverage, was specifically designed for the media: the stage was set up to allow shooting, and shot sheets and information were given out to the journalists.⁵⁸ *Record Companies Drag Their Feet* was a feminist appropriation of the media

⁵³ “Social Art Brochure”, *op. cit.*, 2.

⁵⁴ *Record Companies Drag their Feet*, Leslie Labowitz, media event in collaboration with WAVAW, (1977), Sunset Blvd.

⁵⁵ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, WAVAW, “Record Companies Drag Their Feet”, *High Performance*, 21, in “Ariadne: A Social Art Network, circa 1977-1979”, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, WAVAW, *op. cit.*

image: “Recognizing the power of mass media to affect public opinion and cultural stereotypes that in turn affect public policy and our everyday lives, Leslie and WAVAW tapped this power.⁵⁹”

In November 1978, Ariadne was invited to take part in the Feminist Perspectives on Pornography Conference organized by WAVPM in San Francisco. The Conference gathered thousands of women to develop a feminist analysis of pornography and to find strategies to fight against sexually violent images.⁶⁰ One of the first U.S. *Take Back the Night* marches took place during the Conference, expressing the will to turn public space into an area free of danger for women. Labowitz-Starus and Lacy asked other artists to take part in the event, which showed graphic works and performances by Judith Barry, Shoshona Dubiner, the Feminist Art Workers, Mary Linn Hughes, Barbara Margolies, Micki McGee, Motion (a collective of women artists from San Francisco), and Nina Wise.⁶¹ Labowitz-Starus’ 24-foot photo mural *A Woman’s Image of Mass Media* (1979) was also displayed in the entry hall of the conference auditorium; it juxtaposes images from Ariadne’s performances with images from media in order to visually underline the relationship between violence toward women and media behaviour (fig.3).⁶² And, with members of an Ariadne workshop at the Woman’s Building (Betsy Irons, Ann Klix, Monica Mayer, Rosemarie Prins), Labowitz-Starus and Lacy created a ritual performance and moving sculpture (a parade float) for the march by hundreds of conference participants in San Francisco’s pornography district. The marchers blocked the traffic to open the way for the float and loudly ululated to create a sound track as it passed by in the street. Twenty performers dressed in black followed the float that had two distinct sides. On the front of the float, a Madonna icon was lit by electric candles and adorned with offerings of flowers, and on the back, a three-headed lamb carcass, skinned, draped with feathers and pearls and placed

⁵⁹ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, Julia London, and Joan Howarth, *op. cit.*, 86.

⁶⁰ See, Laura Lederer, ed., *L’Envers de la nuit: les femmes contre la pornographie* (Montréal: Ed. du remue-ménage, 1983), 154. Susan Brownmiller, Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich were some of the conference speakers.

⁶¹ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, “Take Back the Night”, *High Performance*, 2:4 (winter 1979): 32-33. Also, a panel of women artists and theorists on feminist perspectives in art, female eroticism and pornography was set up by Judith Barry.

⁶² *A Woman’s Image of Mass Media*, (1979), photo mural 24’x8’ by Labowitz, made up of images from performances by Labowitz and Lacy of *Record Companies Drag their Feet* and *In Mourning and In Rage*.

on a scarlet cloth, had violent pornographic images pouring out of its gut: “the float made visual the paradoxical attitudes behind the reverence for the virgin and the rape of the whore.⁶³” Finally, the twenty performers moved forward, tore the images, and climbed on to the float to complete their destruction. Holly Near ended the performance by singing *Fight Back*.⁶⁴

Working Together Against Community-Based Violence

In 1979 (22 June-15 September), through Ariadne, Lacy organized *Making it Safe*, a project on violence against women in collaboration with Communitas, a community crime prevention organisation in Ocean Park, a Santa Monica neighbourhood. Prior to the series of events, Lacy and an artist team set up meetings with people from the community to define the content and public spaces for the work. Community organisers knew that strategies to mobilise neighbourhoods would never expose local violence, in particular domestic violence, as the issue was still generally unspoken and most organising included men as well as women. This project was an attempt to combine street level community development with an organised fight against sexual violence.⁶⁵

The Mayor of Santa Monica inaugurated the exhibition, displayed in the storefront windows of Main Street, and proclaimed the week of 18 August “Making It Safe Week”. The project also offered dinners, exchanges, readings, self-defence demonstrations and workshops. Many people (like Nellie Wong and Mitsuye Yamada) and anti-violence organisations (like Los Angeles Men’s Collective and Rape Crisis Center) were invited to participate in the project conceived as a framework for raising community awareness on the various topics of incest, media treatment, pornography representations and rape. By connecting different

⁶³ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, Suzanne Lacy, “Take Back the Night”, *op. cit.*, 34. Lamb was a symbol used many times by Lacy, like in the performance *She Who Would Fly* showed during *Three Weeks in May* (1977). In Christian iconography, it represents the collective sacrifice of Christ. See. Vivien Green Fryd, “Suzanne Lacy’s Three Weeks in May: Feminist Activist Performance Art as ‘Expanded Public Pedagogy’”, *NWSA Journal* 19:1 (spring 2007): 31.

⁶⁴ On the issue of media, Ariadne, in collaboration with Lois Lee, spokesperson of California Advocacy for Trollops (CAT), also organized a private screening of Paul Schrader’s movie *Hardcore* (1979) followed by a television debate aiming at promoting a feminist perspective on pornography. See *Oral History Interview with Suzanne Lacy, 1990 Mar. 16-Sept. 27, op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

forms of violence, the event allowed a broad understanding and a political analysis of the issue. *Making It Safe* ended with a huge potluck dinner and a candlelight march through the area. It also sparked a guerilla action against a cinema showing X-rated features that was covered with images of women carrying signs saying “Violence Is Not Sexy” and “We Are Not Sex Objects”.⁶⁶

Working Together Against Incest

Parallel to the slow evolution of public awareness of violence against women, each Ariadne project grew from the previous one, and from the work of other activists and scholars. *The Incest Awareness Project*, for instance, grew out of a speak-out on incest during *Making It Safe*.⁶⁷ In 1979, Ariadne, with the Gay Community Service Center (GCSC), supported this one-year project aimed at “mak[ing] incest a public issue; creat[ing] positive images of women moving out of victimization and having power over their lives; and effect[ing] social change by taking steps towards incest prevention and recovery.”⁶⁸ Ariadne, through the agency of Labowitz-Starus and along with Nancy Angelo, Leslie Belt, Merle Fishman, Paula Lombard and Linda Macaluso, handled media outreach, organised art therapy workshops and debates, and sponsored an exhibition and a video artwork, while the Women’s Information and Skills Project of the GCSC provided referrals to therapists, peer counselling and support groups, and developed a speakers bureau to educate about the issue of incest.⁶⁹

The Incest Awareness Project was conceived as a campaign to remove the taboo surrounding incest in order to eliminate it. Bia Lowe designed the logo of the project: a photomontage of a little girl painfully holding a globe above her head, superimposed with a family portrait, and a text saying: “Once upon a time she thought incest was something she had to carry around all by herself”.⁷⁰ The artist Terry Wolverton declared: “That was our message: the unspeakable can be spoken, there are others

⁶⁶ “Making it Safe Poster” and Suzanne Muchnic, “The Artist as Activist for Feminist Events”, *Los Angeles Times* (3 September 1979, in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

⁶⁷ Suzanne Lacy, email correspondence, 29 June 2016.

⁶⁸ “Incest” The Crime Nobody Talks About”, in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “The Incest Awareness Project Leaflet”, in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

available to hear it, and through speech healing can come.⁷¹” The project also aimed at breaking down the romantic stereotypes and mythologies of incest encouraged by the media.⁷²

The exhibition, *Bedtime Stories: Women Speak-Out About Incest*, shown at the Woman’s Building in the autumn of 1979, was one part of the project. The artists were presented as survivors of incest, which emphasised, as in previous Ariadne projects, the importance of moving out from victimization.⁷³ For some of them, the exhibition was the first opportunity they had to talk about the sexual abuse which they had undergone and to begin a healing process. The exhibition was divided in three sections representing the passage from victim to survivor: the secrecy surrounding incest, the effects of incest, and the strength of women survivors. For instance, Wolverton performed *In Silence, Secrets Turn To Lies / Secrets Shared Become Sacred Truths*, showing how the image of the “good girl” keeps the secret of incest hidden and forces one to lie.⁷⁴ A talk by Sandra Butler, author of *Conspiracy of Silence: the Trauma of Incest* (1978), and a debate on the theme were also planned. During the exhibition, Ariadne’s members and therapists were available for support, and a list of professionals drawn up by the GCSC was provided.⁷⁵ Ariadne also supported Angelo’s artwork *Equal Time in Equal Space* (1980). Reproducing the form of a consciousness-raising session, the video installation shows six women on individual monitors talking to each other about their personal histories of incest.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Ariadne: A Social Art Network was conceived by its authors as a durational artwork drawing on public engagement, from protest to media advocacy. Because of the breadth of these goals to build bridges between art and society, Ariadne was at its core interdisciplinary. It used the notion

⁷¹ Terry Wolverton, *Insurgent Muse: Life and Art at the Woman’s Building* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2002), 128.

⁷² Leslie Labowitz-Starus, in Elaine Woo, “Feminist Art Show Seeks to Bring Incest out of the Closet”, *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* (23 October 1979), in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

⁷³ “Bedtime Stories: Women Speak-Out About Incest”, in “Ariadne”, *op. cit.*, box 14, folder 61.

⁷⁴ Terry Wolverton, *op. cit.*, 130-131.

⁷⁵ “Bedtime Stories: Women Speak-Out About Incest”, *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ For more details, see Vivien Green Fryd, “Ending the Silence”, *op. cit.*, 170-176 and Terry Wolverton, *op. cit.*, 134-135.

of the collective as a conceptual framing for a comprehensive agenda that brought together a temporary and fluctuating community of activists, artists, journalists, and politicians to end violence against women. Labowitz-Starus and Lacy were expanding prominent themes in performance and conceptual art into the space of public discourse. By combining their skills, they worked with others to reach greater and more diverse audiences, to create new awareness, to increase the effectiveness of art activism, and to strengthen women's perspectives and position.

While their intent was demonstrably activist in orientation, the work was founded on astute media analysis and vanguard artistic concepts in dematerialisation and performance. Ariadne's projects were structured around powerful images using the communicating skills, both symbolic and visual, of artists in order to impact the spectators. As feminist artists and image-makers, Labowitz-Starus and Lacy deconstructed cultural images of women while creating a new archetype—the strong woman refusing to be a victim—in the hope of doing away with or at least diminishing real life violence against women.

Ariadne generated media interventions and productions, pedagogical activities, and public performance events which combined aesthetics and politics in a practice that predates much socially engaged art of today. Labowitz-Starus, Lacy and their co-workers used collaboration as an artistic strategy to communicate alternative perspectives on violence, echoing the art critic Lucy R. Lippard: “The collaborative aspect is particularly significant because artists involved with outreach have to learn to work with others before they can hope to be effective in larger contexts.⁷⁷” There is no doubt that Ariadne has elaborated a feminist model of political performance that could still be used in actions for social change.

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⁷⁷ Lucy R. Lippard, “Issue and Taboo”, *op. cit.*, 152.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3