

OBJECTIONS

(INCLUDING
LAURIE ANDERSON'S
OBJECT, OBJECTION,
OBJECTIVITY, 1973)

A collaboration by
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New York City, 1993

This collaboration between Laura Cottingham and Marlene McCarty is composed of three parts. This pamphlet is one. Three panels from Laurie Anderson's 1973 series Object, Objective, Objection comprise another. The third consists of 12,500 matchbooks that are being distributed from newsstands and coffee shops around New York City.

When asked to participate in a collaboration for the New Museum's exhibition "In Transit", we knew, because of our mutual investment in feminism, that we wanted to address how sexism contributes to "displacement and other forms of involuntary movement within the context of urban settings".¹ It is an obvious sociological truth that the physical and verbal abuse of women by men continually causes women to be "displaced": from homes, from jobs, from a place on the sidewalk. It is less obvious, perhaps, what this might have to do with art.

But a material relationship must exist between, for instance, the sexualized street harassment women encounter and the devaluation of women's work, art and other. If it's considered acceptable and usual for men to verbally denigrate women on the street, then why would the inside of homes, schools, offices, governments or museums be any different?

Laurie Anderson's Object, Objective, Objectivity, from 1973, is "about" the harassment by men that women regularly confront on the street. The full series, from which three were chosen by the artist to be presented within our project, consists of 14 photo and text panels. Conducted during the summer of 1973, Anderson's piece visually documents and verbally narrates encounters Anderson experienced in her neighborhood when various men called her various derogatory names and she responded: by taking their photographs. In its reliance on autobiographical material and its attempt to document, and in the process provide a resistance to, moments of sexism in everyday life, Anderson's is a quintessential '70s feminist piece. Its apparently mundane disruption of "the ordinary", its use of a simple photo-and-text format, and its general "non-art" quality also establish the work as a '70s conceptual piece—although the version the artist has produced for this exhibition, which is larger and more technically polished than the original, fairly reflects its passage through the production-sensitive '80s. In the title each of the three words, variations of the same root, is a subtle pun; its double-valence spins on its meaning accord-

ing to conceptualism versus its meaning according to feminism. For instance, within a conceptualist framework, "object" always refers to the "art object". But feminist nomenclature would assume here that "object" refers to "woman", i.e., that the entitlement men feel to verbally comment on the behavior and appearance of women is because male supremacy classifies women not as humans, like men, but as (male-owned) objects. A feminist read would also want to allow the first word to act, simultaneously, as a verb, to imply that the feminist/artist wants to object to her status, in art and on the street, as object.

It's because we, too, object to the conditions we face under male supremacy, within the culture industry and at street level, that we've titled our piece OBJECTIONS (including Laurie Anderson's Object, Objective, Objectivity, 1973). The names called out against us haven't changed in twenty years. We didn't feel the need to make a new "art object" because Anderson's already exists—and it's doubtful we, or anyone else, would ever get to see it if we didn't "curate" it here ourselves.²

Anderson's work, like the harassment it interrupts and documents, took place in the street. The third part of our project, 12,500 matchbooks, also uses the street as its primary site. Printed with five different texts, the matchbooks are being distributed, via newsstands and coffee shop counters, just as matches are customarily given away upon request and/or with the purchase of cigarettes. The texts are a response to one of the more common commercial uses of newsstand-distributed matchbooks in New York City today: as advertisements for prostitution ("escort services") and "phone sex". Usually offering telephone numbers composed of debased four-letter terms for female genitals, the prostitution and phone sex matchbooks are another form of sexualized harassment against women. Frequently they invoke the same terms men yell at women on the street.

Constructed in a question-and-answer format, the five texts on our matchbooks offer comments and commentary on a few social circumstances relevant to the subordination of women in contemporary American society. Unlike the "regular" matchbooks, which carry ads for driving schools, collectable stamps and other goods and services, including prostitution, our texts have nothing to sell.

1. From the press release for "In Transit".

2. Our awareness of Anderson's piece came from Lucy R. Lippard's From the Center: feminist essays on women's art (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), p. 102-103.