

CHAPTER V

A CLOSE READING OF PLEXUS BLACK BOX

Plexus Black Box was described by the insider Mitch Ross as follows:

None knows what it is and what they are doing with it. But it allows all Plexus people to feel part of that culture and to make their own definition of it, which is fine because more information goes into and more information has to be defined.

At the end of this inquiry, in coherence with his applied deconstructionist strategies, Sandro Dernini applied a “closing reading” approach to report “direct quotes” from accounts by Plexus insiders, identified relevant through his hermeneutical procedures, offering in this way a multiplicity of levels of understandings grounded in intersubjective beliefs, supported by evidences publicly accessible. Within this multifacet perspective, he presented “insider” accounts as primary sources for an “emic” understanding of *Plexus Black Box*.

Following this “bottom-up” methodology and applying the Ecker’s model of “the artists as researcher,” Dernini gave relevance to accounts made by “insider” artists, usually considered *too much subjective*, and, therefore, reported in appendices of academic works as marginal references. His “bottom-up” study, validated by shared intersubjective beliefs, was made to reinforce the scientific legitimacy of the “emic” knowledge, still underestimated in the academic community. Only a marginal relevance is traditionally given in the Academy to *subjective* accounts made by “insiders” respect to *objective* reports conducted by “outsider” observers.

Combining hermeneutical and deconstructionist strategies, this aesthetic investigation tried to overwhelm the notion of “autonomous art” by means of a more complex interdependent art environment.

Artists from the *margins* of the so called “artworld” consciously participated in this inquiry. This collective “emic” understanding, bridging theory and practice, permitted to look at *Plexus Black Box* from many “inside” and “outside” points of view. All together, these different perceptions provided Sandro Dernini with a “refracted” social lens, a necessary methodological tool through which he could look at the complex of components related to the international and community-based nature of the art project under his investigation.

Dernini was conscious of the interference of his inquiry on the “normal” life of Plexus and of its natural evolution, as well as on his “insider” identity of Plexus 23s and Plexus International coordinator.

Plexus Black Box never was fully closed, but its “re-opening” for academic reasons let many participants to be aware of what was contained, including their own experiences.

It allowed them to express their concerns about “inside” and “outside” positions, expressed and collected during the inquiry.

As an “outsider” observer and as well as a Plexus “insider,” Dernini was aware that the task that he had to accomplish in his inquiry was among the most “contorted” ones, as Derrida argued, because of the risk of the Western critique of the values of subjectivity and objectivity. Employed deconstructionist strategies allowed Dernini to grasp during his overall hermeneutical process an “emic” understanding of the real possibility to have “insider” participants “participating” together with him in presenting their interpretations.

Hans-Georg Gadamer named “an interpretative participation¹” the process of interpretation, in which, as an “insider,” the interpreter participates with her/his own specific historical angle of interpretation.

In the critical hermeneutical process performed by Dernini, “insider” interpretative participations, collectively gathered, evolved into a global interconnected participation with *Plexus Black Box*, the object/subject of the study, not anymore perceived just as a passive body waiting on the anatomical table to be sectioned “alive” for academic investigations.

NYU Academic Art Investigation on Plexus Black Box



Conceptual image by Sandro Dernini, New York, 1987.

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, p. 64, 1984.

The perennial issue of the interdependent relation between object and subject was raised up by Plexus since 1985, with its first artopera *Goya Time 1985 New York*, with multiplex interpretation of the same object/subject *La Maja*. Then, it was stressed again in the 1986 Plexus artopera *Eve*, with hundreds of artists as art slaves chained together and with their artworks, as a statement against any kind of separation between artists, artworks, and community.

The “emic” knowledge produced by the study reinforced the beliefs of Plexus participants by making them more conscious to be members of an ongoing international collaborative effort. This new emerging awareness allowed insiders to move themselves from their individual misunderstandings toward a collective overall understanding of the multifacets nature of Plexus. This collective “emic” knowledge, provided by a gathering of different insider understandings, strengthened at the same time the study and the object of the study, re-activating *Plexus Black Box* to re-emerge after years of frozen performances and activities.

During this inquiry, relevant elements re-emerged from *Plexus Black Box* in a serendipitous manner.

In any case, there is an element of surprise inherent to the newly emergent and unanticipated relevances which supersede and cover the former set. Merton has applied the term “serendipity” to this phenomenon. It originated in the fact that all of our anticipations are necessarily empty unless fulfilled or annihilated by the subsequent events.²

Plexus Black Box showed many different conscious and unconscious facets, some immediately present, others “dormant.”

To begin with, not all the elements of the stock of knowledge are simply stored away for further use. Some are not “dormant” although it can be said that they are neutralized in a particular way. Some of these elements are permanently present and never released from grip, although they are not present within the kernel of the thematic field of consciousness, but always present in its margin.³

The non static layers of Dernini’s actual interest as Plexus 23s on which his “insider” understanding was coming and going through, during his interpretational process, were further increased by his “close reading” of all Plexus “insider” recollections.

As our static analysis of the structure of our stock of knowledge will show, we carry along at any time a certain number of elements of our knowledge not consistent in themselves and not compatible with one other. This is so, on the one hand, because we live simultaneously on different level of reality, and on the other, because by our autobiographical situation we are involved with different layers of our personality (even in that sector of the world on which we bestow, for the time being, an accent of reality.)⁴

² Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevances*, p. 113, 1970.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

This inquiry conducted by an “insider” became an active component of a Plexus self-reflective understanding learning process of Plexus participants, who moving from the margins of the kernel of *Plexus Black Box* supplied Dernini with the necessary information to identify, at the metalevel of the Ecker and Kaelin's taxonomy, a survival metatheoretical tendency in Plexus, which allowed margins to be centers and viceversa within an endless creative process.

This Plexus survival metatheoretical shifting tendency was not easy to be identified, because of the open shifting multi facet nature of the ongoing art project under investigation. By applying the Alfred Schutz's system of relevances, through a close reading of “insider” accounts, he identified the underlying theme *In Order to Survive* as the Plexus survival metatheoretical unifying ground on which many artists have converged together.

Of paramount relevance for understanding Plexus survival community-based cultural identity was the open call *In Order to Survive* launched out by Willian Parker, in 1984, in New York, on the occasion of a community event, held in the middle of East Sixth Street, addressed to stop the gentrification of the Lower East Side.

"We cannot separate the starving child from the starving musician, both things are caused by the same thing capitalism, racism and the putting of military spending ahead of human rights. The situation of the artist is a reflection of America's whole attitude toward life and creativity."

There was a period during the 1960's in which John Coltrane, Malcolm X, Duke Ellington, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Bill Dixon, Sun Ra, Martin Luther King and Albert Ayler were all alive and active.

Avant garde jazz contemporary improvised music coming out of the Afro-American was at a peak of creativity and motion. ABC Impulse was recording Coltrane and Archie Shepp, ESP Disk was recording the music of Albert Ayler, Sunny Murray, Sonny Simmons, Giuseppi Logan, Noah Howard, Frank Wright, Marion Brown, Henry Grimes, Alan Silva and many other exponents of the music. Blue Note and Prestige Records were recording Andrew Hill, Eric Dolphy, Sam Rivers, Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry among others.

Radio stations such as WLIB now called BLS and WRVR which now plays pop music were both playing jazz 24 hours a day including some of the new music of Coltrane, Shepp, Ayler, and Ornette Coleman.

There was energy in the air as people marched and protested in the north and south demanding human rights, demanding that the senseless killing in Vietnam stop. Simultaneously, like musicians before them the avant garde became aware of the necessity to break away from tradition business practices. Like musicians lives being in the hand of producers and nightclubs owners who only wish to make money and exploit the musician. The musicians began to produce their own concerts and put out their own records in order to gain more control over their lives.

The Jazz Composers' Guild formed by Bill Dixon was one of the first musicians' organization in the 60's to deal with the self determination of the artist. Other efforts had been made by Charles Mingus, Sun Ra as they both had produced their own concerts and records in the 50's. To follow was the A.A.C.M. (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) formed about a year after the Jazz Composers' Guild, and Milford Graves, Don Pullen, record company SRP (Self Reliance Program).

Musicians got together with poets to put out a magazine called the Crickett, all the articles were written by poets and musicians themselves. It was edited by Imanu Baraka, Larry Neal, A.B. Spellman, advisors on the magazine were

Milford Graves, Cecil Taylor and Sun Ra. Contributors included Roger Riggins, Stanley Crouch, Albert Ayler, and Ishmael Reed. The motto was "black Music in Evolution."

Just as the music and the movement began to break ground establishing itself, several things happened: Malcolm X was assassinated, Martin Luther King was assassinated, John Coltrane died, British rock and roll began to change the music industry. Not only could record be sold they could sell posters, books, wigs, dolls, and thousands of electric guitars to the youth of America. They promoted and pushed rock music as the real thing yet when these rock stars were interviewed they would say always cite jazz or blues as the origin of rock. Also at this time there was a sudden increase in the availability of drugs in the black community. Every apparent gain as a result of the civil rights movement was not given up without fight. All gains were achieved because America had a gun to its head. To question, to speak of change was never willingly allowed the 60's movement was so strong that it couldn't be denied. They could silence a few poets but they couldn't silence an entire nation. The 1970's was a period of tranquilization. There was no mass movement to continue the motion set forth by the 60's, it was a ten year period of systematically silencing and discouraging the truth. Poets were made to feel like criminals; people were going back in time because it seemed easier than going forward. Record companies began only to record safe music, musicians began to water down their music.

The C.I.A. and F.B.I. had files on the music they knew who was going along with the program, those who bought cars and played electric music and those whose politics were considered a threat to the existing inertia. The neglect of the poor, the neglect of the arts is no accident, this country is sustained by killing off all that is beautiful, that deals with reality. They will go to any lengths to hold back the truth, to prevent the individual from hearing and seeing his or her own vision of life. Some people are controlled by neglect while other are controlled by making them stars.

As the 80's arrived this fire music that talked about revolution and healing had almost vanished only a few musicians continue to play and develop it. The sleepiness of the 70's gave birth to a new electronic age of computers and video machines. Where ever human energy could be saved it was popular music lost what little identity it had. In listening to today's pop music it's hard to tell whether the group is male or female, black or white, synthesizers have replaced living musicians. We have all been desensitized people walk around in dazes sitting back while these blood thirsty gangsters have free reign of the country and of the people's lives.

Our food source, our housing source are owned and operated by power hungry people who do not have our best interest in mind, they only wish to make a profit. All of this is not new knowledge, it has been said many times before, the message must be constantly repeated, intellectual knowledge of the problems is not enough, we must feel the blade piercing the hearts of all that are oppressed, jailed, starved and murdered by these criminals who call themselves leaders who act in the name of peace and democracy. Since we have little we must band together pulling all our little resources to form a base in which to work. We must learn from all the mistakes of the past dropping any selfish notions in order for this movement to succeed, in order for it to take root and begin to grow.

We must ask the questions why am I an artist? Why do I play music? What is the ultimate goal? Am I playing with the same spirit that I played with 10 years ago or have I just become more technically proficient?

The idea is to cultivate an audience by performing as much as possible on a continuous basis, not waiting to be offered work rather creating work. Uniting with all those who hear. Those who are willing to go all the way. We must put pressure on those with power to give some of it up (picketing, boycotts, petitions, what ever it takes) and finally we must define ourselves and not be defined by others.

We must take control of our lives, building a solid foundation for the future.

Cultural identity and artistic re-appropriation were relevant clues for an effective “multicultural” understanding of *Plexus Black Box*, surviving from “outsider” cultural interventions.

In “The Politics of Aesthetic Inquiry,” David Ecker pointed out how current “multicultural” approaches lost “credibility” by turning out to be, after all, “monoculture” context-bound concepts.

Global debates over human rights have sensitized groups and individuals to resist intervention by outsiders as a bid for domination. In turn, curators, collectors, critics, artists, ethnographers, educators and other professionals are becoming increasingly self-conscious about the appropriation of cultural material. Today, even aesthetic contemplation at a distance is questioned...Art educators, of course, are caught up in the debate. Professed objectivity (now read “political neutrality”) in the name of one or another scientific or humanistic method of inquiry has lost credibility....First, the issue of objectivity. In our efforts to promote and practice a multicultural approach to art in the schools, there is an underlying problem that, as far as I know, has gone unrecognized in the fields of aesthetics and art education....to understand the arts of another culture would seem to require that we identify not only the similarities and differences between that culture and our own, but also that we make explicit the *basis* for such comparisons. Failure to do so would seem to obviate any knowledge-claims resulting from such comparative inquiry. The problem, then, is this: *Any* basis we select will itself be culture-bound. That is, our efforts at cross-cultural understanding we have already compromised the outcome....by reducing one culture to the terms of another. Our “multicultural” approach to the arts turns out to be monocultural after all. ⁵

David Ecker as an “insider” of the project under inquiry played a seminal role in the growing of a general sense of confidence and genuine understanding among Plexus participants of different background. His “emic” knowledge, gained *in the first person* on the field research of this study as a Plexus participant as well as chairperson of the NYU Dissertation Committee of this Ph. D. study, offered an unique way to know, from “inside” and “outside,” the project under inquiry, as he pointed out as an “insider” in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A.

I was not part of the original group which started Plexus. I was introduced to Plexus through Angiola Churchill and I served as adviser of Sandro Dernini. At certain point in 1990, I got involved because of my interest in the living traditions of art in Sardinia and since then I have participated in 3-4 Plexus events. Plexus for me is a coalition of artists, engaged in different ways with many divergent modes with art, coming together to work on short term projects without any unifying agreement on political or philosophical meanings on Plexus, without any unifying terms beforehand. Over this time my grasp of events ranged from a total misunderstanding or a total confusion completely not understanding or a total confusion of what is happening just like everybody else to some sense of direction and that is what you can expect from it. Periodically everybody felt confused and each role got confused. On other occasions I felt I understood what was happening.

⁵ David W. Ecker, “The Politics of Aesthetic Inquiry”, *Journal of Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Research in Art Education*, p. 7, 1991.

A Strategic Survival by Art Withdrawing

The insider David Boyle described in his paper *La Scatola Nera* (The Black Box), fully reported in Appendix A, how the project under study originated in 1989.

At the finish of July, we commenced a comforting phase of auto-analysis that was made possible by the relative confinement of the Plexus movement within the scatola nera (black box). The confinement is accomplished by utilizing the material residue of the movement that we call documentation in a ritual manner. Until this decisive moment/action the Plexus movement was following the traditional path into history, but by this action which constitutes an intervention in the process, we choose our point from which to address history. The traditional path included a gradual abandonment of active interest in the movement. Founding members of the movement cited dissatisfaction with the shift within the movement away from new ideas. The action taken by the remaining elements of the movement to place the movement in a sort of stasis to facilitate analysis represents a sort of retrospective consensus.

The insider Franco Meloni in a note to David Ecker, fully reported in Appendix A, recalled how *Plexus Black Box* had been created "in order to survive."

In a sense, PLEXUS means connections and transmission of knowledge. In particular, remembering once more the absolute necessity to connect our places of work by computer electronic mail, I want to continue to play with the Black Box. First of all, we must give a definition of it. The Black Box has been created in order to survive. To survive against the complexity of the problems that made uncontrolled the route toward a common goal. To survive against the egoism of many of the participants to the project. To survive against the responsibility of the ambitious target, more or less future. To survive against the fragmentation of the different objectives of PLEXUS. In this way, the Black Box, represents a quiet place created to discuss the situation according to a scientific method. But, is it possible to do it? Clearly not.

Plexus Black Box, as an intentional strategic survival art action, was conceived to foster new exchanges among Plexus artists through his "withdrawing" action.

The insider Fabrizio Bertuccioli in his paper *The Artist in the First Person*, fully reported in Appendix A, conceptualized the art withdrawing as a survival model for the reinvention of exchanges between homogeneous and heterogeneous spheres.

Withdrawing in order to exchange. The social composition of a freely composed world is a behavioural system that relates the homogeneous and the heterogeneous. The homogeneous is the world of industrial production, wherein economy is the model which determines relationships. The production of exchange is therein reduced to zero and a loss of possible values is determined, the model imposing itself on the heterogeneous through a refusal to communicate which create marginality and impoverishment. Withdrawing, getting estranged from that model is an attempt to turn this poverty into wealth. Art as the realm of "gratuitous" is the invention of possibilities of free withdrawal and the production of acts, events, objects, etc... through which an exchange is reinvented between unrelated and heterogeneous spheres, that of the useful and that of the useless (play). The reinvention of exchange between these spheres, the re-establishing of a relationship between homogeneous and heterogeneous, allows us to identify values which are necessary for the survival of any civilization. This is the work engaged in by artists as utopian producers of the "gratuitous," a work for which too often they have to pay the price. To

deny marginality as a chance for enriching the exchange between those heterogeneous who withdraw from the dominant homogeneous, to propose an attitude toward the programming and production of projects which actually amount to denying the chance itself, is a crime against freedom and against a freely composed world, before than a crime against creativity and art. Reinventing the locations of art is an operative element in this marginality. When one sees a piece of art in a place that is already "valorized," in a place already assigned to art, everything one sees acquires "authority," becomes important, and exchange becomes impossible. When, instead, one sees it simply just like that, in an ordinary place, without the prop of the 'appropriate' place and surroundings, one finds it easier to criticize, one is forced into a relationship with it. It is the capacity to perceive normality as opposed to the expectation of an extraordinary event, which, in most the cases, is just a prefabricated display. The production of use value consists in the attribution of sense to the world of signs and objects which man produces for man (play). Art is where it is, not what it is.

Fabrizio Bertuccioli further pointed out:

Why is man an exemplary citizen as long as he lives in noise, but becomes a rebel as soon as he sets about listening to himself? The live TV news becomes the only acknowledged reality in the world. The individual must make himself fitting and predictable if he hopes for a place in a world where every fantasy has found its justification. An event is accepted only if its presentation cancels the risks that preceded it. Since art in itself is experiment and research, it is the attest way to experiment and research in any field (it is the natural place for such activities). The artist as research scientist must become the critic of fame. Artistic production must be capable of doing away with 'the opposition between wealth and poverty,' the opposition between the abstract and the concrete in the human condition. Whoever engages in art-making has to adopt toward the present time the attitude implied by the concept of the artistic work's gratuitousness. Art is the "need to exercise humanity" without hoping for fame, without falling into worry about the future and into anxiety to succeed, to grow attached to a piece of work, to suffer the limitations of reason, to lose sight of life. An attitude of gratuitous expense is the first form taken by the imagination of wealth, its source, while giving up living, storing, and saving up are its contrary. The artist today mustn't work for the 'art business' only, mustn't make use of his imagination only in the making of his work. He has to use it also in his everyday life, determining new relationships which are coherent with his spirit, with his inner life, thus accepting other people's creative energies as well as his own. Only starting from a way of making which is not ruled by the laws of the production of goods, which is beyond the condition imposed by a culture that models every human activity on economy, and that on this model has moulded every form of production, invention, communication, socialization, and formation of personal identity, only starting from a way of making which is gratuitous from the point of view of these laws it will become possible to reinvent the 'location of art.' Only starting from this condition it will become possible to identify a new wealth which is unity inside the person between bodily and spiritual being and unity among people, and to imagine the life of a society which is free from fear and freely composed. Then, maybe, something will be born that we could feel like calling art. It is thus necessary that artists, 'withdrawing,' work in first person as producers of themselves and of their own projects, grouping themselves into a society in which each artist is present with his own identity, his own credit line, and his own product, giving body to the heterogeneous which invites dialogue with the homogeneous (which would like art to be industrial production and the artist a follower of orders: star system) on the results of the ongoing and ever changing research, thus setting in motion a dynamics of behaviours and relationships from which new life sparks.

The insider Gaetano Brundu described in his recollection, reported partially in Appendix A, the escaping of Plexus from the art system of the artworld as a methodological necessity for the survival grow of Plexus.

Plexus has often given the impression of escaping from the system of art and its codes of communication. So therefore it is difficult to identify its relationships with the problematics of contemporary art. If we can find the problem and if we can see at which level of involvement and understanding, we can distinguish between objective and subjective relationships. Furthermore Plexus is widely innovative (but is it?), the problem can be rather finding what distinguishes the surrounding environment, so we need to define the intrinsic characteristics. And for this reason I think that it is still not arrived the time, because to close Plexus in a label, it is to declare its end. Or would be only the end of its evolving age? This can be something we can think about over the next few months. There is still the fact, rather evident, that many manifestations of Plexus express themselves in a sense of inadequateness, a sort of unprotected lackness compare with the communication in act within the system of art. A little like as a ship of fools, like a balloon without a router going around the sky. But this can be the element that gives its originality. In this fragile and instable limit between folly and genius, between instinct and historical awareness, between excellent flights and falls to the levels of jerks or of pigs, it has played the defining, the destiny, and identity of Plexus.

Gaetano Brundu further pointed out:

Its exit from the system could be important. But how many people are aware about it? How many see the methodological necessity in it? Somebody might fall back often into the temptation of finding a way to get in to the system, a way to "success;" and this is what I meant before about the jerks...To exit from the system could be a methodological tool (and it can be also a praxis) that can modify and help Plexus grow in reference to the same system; and in the final analysis it could help that same system grow. If I have to make a reference for Plexus about the problematic issues of contemporary art, I wouldn't even know which components to exactly mention. We could speak about "Ephemeral Art," Narrative Art; but also visionary sensibility, that is a characterization that is not only contemporary. In the history of Plexus there is a lot of Conceptual Art but it is only a component part. And so: what can we connect the metaphor of Plexus Art Cooperas and of other events? to the Carnival in Rio? Or furthermore: what sense does it have to attribute, to what connect the frequent jumps of sloppy and irrational acts, at the limits of craziness? to the first Dada? Plexus produces the event but produces also the object, that which in the Storage we called relics. Certainly Plexus has been quite inclined toward "the event;" characterized by (it seems to me) the escape from reason by some of the players.

Ursula Meyer in *Conceptual Art* foresaw in "the withdrawal of art" a way "to restore art to artists."

The shift from object to concept denotes disdain for the notion of commodities - the sacred cow of this culture. Conceptual artists, propose a professional commitment that restores art to artists, rather than to "money vendors. The withdrawal of art into itself may be its saving grace. In the same sense that science is for scientists, and philosophy is for philosophers, art is for artists.⁶

Plexus Black Box was conceptualized as a strategic survival tactic for Plexus to resist through its historic collapse as it has happened to many avant-garde art movements.

⁶ Ursula Meyers, *Conceptual Art*, p. xx, 1972.

The intentional artistic “freezing” of activities by giving more time for self-reflective understandings has reinforced Plexus participants’ beliefs and helped members to become aware of the historical avant-garde art identity of Plexus, made by its long continuous activity, started in 1982, against the usual historical shortness of many artists.

A gimmick, a mere novelty, exhausts itself quickly, often helped along by minor artists who recognize its capacity for easy adaptation. It is frequently alarming to find out what work does not survive a short period like five years, which artists can go no farther with their one original idea.⁷

Art theories have played a critical role in the success and the failure of many historical art movements and raised the question of whether art still has a future as part of a progressive linear history, as Arthur Danto pointed out in “The End of Art.”

Just think of the dazzling succession of art-movements in our century: Fauvism, the Cubism, Futurism, Vorticism, Synchronism, Abstractionism, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop, Op, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Conceptualism, Photorealism, Abstract Reason, Neo-Expressionism - simply to list some of the more familiar ones. Fauvism lasted about two years, and there was a time when a whole period of art history seemed destined to endure about five months, or half a season. Creativity at that time seemed more to consist in making a period than in making a work. The imperative of art were virtually historical imperatives: Make an art-historical period! and success consisted in producing an accepted innovation. If you were successful, you had the monopoly on producing works on one else could, since no one else had made the period with which you and perhaps a few collaborators were from now on to be identified....And each period required a certain amount of quite complex theory in order that the often very minimal objects could be transacted onto the plane of art.⁸

⁷ Lucy Lippard, *Changing. Essays in Art Criticism*, p. 29, 1971.

⁸ Arthur Danto, “The End of Art”, p. 29, 1984.



Fred Floyd, Ivan Dalla Tana, David Ecker, Butch Morris, A. Lindsay, Lower East Side, NYC, 1993.

Repatriation of Art into the Community: The Artist in the First Person

Since 1988, the Door of No Return at the House of the Slaves in the island of Goree, off Dakar, Senegal, became the Plexus symbolic harbour for *the repatriation of art into the community*. In 1993, in New York, the exit of two containers from the NYU Rosenberg Gallery, as closing act of the last event under inquiry in this study, was conceptualized and intentionally performed as a symbolic “repatriation” of the *Plexus Black Box* going back to its Lower East Side Community.

The concept of the *repatriation of art into the community* was of paramount relevance for understanding the community-based identity of *Plexus Black Box* project. Its aims was the reinforcement of artists' beliefs in the community on the possibility to bring back *art* at home, complete with its cultural and economic value, to reactivate a participatory healing *well being* sustainable development process. Plexus foresaw also in the “repatriation of art” an ethical and aesthetic route correction in the human use of the human being resources, a vital condition for the survival and advancement of the humankind.

The community-based setting of Plexus in the Lower East Side of New York City and in the Medina of Dakar were relevant in the development of an active participation and serious interest by many “insiders” in the Plexus “repatriation” by revitalizing their

sense of cultural identity. In the '80s, also American anthropologists working abroad shifted their focus at home, creating in ethnographic projects a new trend called "the repatriation of anthropology."

The reasons for this trend that we call repatriation are multiple. There is less funding for social-science research, especially for ethnography abroad, the practical applications of which are not apparent. Host societies, protective of their nationalisms, have complicated the acquisition of research permits. And there is indeed a growing awareness in anthropology that the functions of ethnography at home are as compelling and legitimate as they have been abroad. Fears that the subject of anthropology, the exotic other, is disappearing have proved groundless: distinctive cultural variation is where you find it, and is often more important to document at home than abroad. There are many modes in which anthropology is repatriating itself. These include providing ethnographic data designed for administrative policy and, in the interest of social reform, alerting the public to problems of society's victims and disadvantaged.⁹

The insider Jose Rodriguez foresaw through a social praxis within the community the possibility for "the artist in the first person" to regain the power of self definition, as he described in his presentation *The Voyage of the Elisabeth: Cultural Navigation and the Community*, fully reported in Appendix A.

The artist in the first person is the possibility of regaining the power of defining the artistic creation by the artist and as such by eliminating the condition of commodity to their creation. And most important the artist in the first person is defining his creation as a cultural production. This ethical action is only possible through a social praxis within the community. This social praxis of the artist allows the community to start defining. The community won't be defined by an image and delimited by the dominant structures. This possibility of the community to define itself allows the community to redefine their self-esteem and to determine their own cultural production. Also, this auto definition will allow the community to regain the possibility of knowledge. Not a knowledge base in the domination of nature and as such a relation based in the domination of one subject to another, but a knowledge based in enhancing the creative subject. Been the subject of a creative entity allows the community to develop a communicative consciousness and overcome their role of slaves of the dominant structures.

Jose Rodriguez further argued how "art defines the community and the artist defines his community and the community defines art."

PLEXUS has a goal something called "cultural navigation" and what is trying to do in all these ten years is to make a bridge between those different cultures and also make to see the artist as a person of the community and not to see the artist production within his cultural context. The Artists in the first person are the main concern. Plexus also try to points out that the living tradition is what defines community. Art defines the community and the artist defines his community and the community defines art and this has been Plexus's reason to build in Lower East Side the collaboration with CUANDO. The collaboration started in 1985 and it began to develop an international house of cultures of

⁹ George Marcus and Michael M. Fischer, *Anthropology as a Cultural Critique. An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, 113, 1986.

CUANDO where different cultures come together and try to understand each other.

In his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, the insider Josè Rodriguez described the relationship of Plexus with the Community and its development, which he identified in three main phases.

From the Portorican cultural tradition from which I come from, I was educated that the artists are the first voices speaking on behalf of the community, and that the artists are not separated from the community in which they belong. The artists are significant components of their society. The different communities and artists, involved in the history of Plexus, were both interactive significant components of the Plexus development. In a historical grounding of Plexus, there are certain elements which have to be established to understand how Plexus Black Box became a metaphor of the cultural growing of Plexus as a community-based art organization. In the Plexus historical growing it is possible to identify different phases of development.

The first phase started in the end of 1981, in New York, when Sandro Dernini, Giancarlo Schiaffini and other Italian artists, thought to create a loose organization with the idea to open a space in which the artists "in the first person" could be the coproducers of their own art activities. This original idea took shape in 1982, in a performance space in the Chelsea area of New York, named Plexus, dedicated to the interaction of the different art forms of expression, without any necessary involvement of the community, on the traditional model art for the sake of art.

The second phase began in 1984 when Plexus, lost his performance space, and moved in the Lower East Side of New York, at the Shuttle Theater. In the Lower East Side it was a radical cultural and social tradition through which Plexus began its second phase. This second stage could be named the Plexus art-opera phase as a collective art form of expression to perform collectively their egocentric ideas. It was still part of the autonomous concept of art but started to get involved with people from the community like Sarah Farley, a local leader of an homesteaders community, Miguel Pinero and Miguel Algarin, originators of the Nuyoricans Poets Café and Williams Parker, leader of Sound Unity a large community jazz collective. They were groups with a different history and expressing the alienation of their community in their own languages and defending their presence in the struggle of the Lower East Side under a heavy cultural and real estate gentrification pressure. This encounter started to change the entire personality of Plexus by understanding that art was not only about their individual art expression but to integrate their art forms into the community life in which they were placed.

This move Plexus to grow in a third phase which it was called "co-operas" in which, in 1987-1988, the artists started to think also in collective art forms. Plexus was forced to start to develop what the historical art avant-garde left to be developed in the direction of the relation between power and community. This development brings to this last recent phase of Plexus, started in 1989 to the present, which it is called the reconciliation stage, in which Plexus got involved in politics with academic institutions. In this context, the concept of Plexus Black Box grew as an educational community-based art project, in a broader cultural sense, creating channels of communication among different communities involved in Plexus activities to express their art experiences in connecting themselves with other cultural diversities and to educate the young generations in this multicultural diversity to understand what is art within and out their own culture, and to accept that the world, the society and any community is made by a diversity of many kind groups or cultural experiences. It will help to define themselves.

The role of Plexus Black Box is to expose, to integrate all aspects of the society, art is one of these as well as science and technology. The concept of Plexus Black Box is a growing concept of a scientific system build in an institutional academic setting which is integrating artistic and cultural experiences in the community met

during its growing. The knowledge of one is integrated into the knowledge of other one.

In contrast with the view of art as commodity, as argued by David Ecker, the concept of “the artist in the first person” as well as the model of “the artist as researcher” were closely linked in reinforcing both the role of the artist in the community.

We realized that we needed socio-economic models derived from elements drawn from the culture of a region and responsive to its special needs and values. Thus art viewed as entertainment, as a measure of social status, or as an investment by the New York Artworld would seem to require a capitalistic model featuring supply and demand, private ownership, and so on. Contrast this view of art as commodity with traditional views of art as sacred and secular performances of making and doing that reinforces continuity and solidarity in the group.¹⁰

In Plexus, artistic and economic powers were closely linked to the concept of “the artist in the first person,” as Jose Rodriguez further pointed out in his paper “*The Voyage of the Elisabeth: Cultural Navigation and the Community*,” fully reported in Appendix A.

The Artist in the first person is a concept evolving from the following facts: that the perception of an autonomous art is a fallacy of the rationality of the Modern era. This “autonomous art” instead of negating the condition of artistic creativity as another commodity in reality is confirming this condition of commodity. As such the artistic production is another artifact named by the dominant structures of power and as such the artistic creation becomes an object of possession of the dominant power. As the dominant structures have this power also they determine and define what is to be considered “art.” By such action the dominant structures eliminated two fundamentals elements of the artistic creativity - the artistic production as a reflection of the social praxis and as a cultural production. By this power the dominant structures are able to define in terms of “high” and “low” culture, “civilized” and “savage” culture. And most importantly this definition is a detriment for the cultural production of the society.

To a great extent, Rodriguez stressed that by “overcoming the relation of master-slave, the artist in the first person and the community are able to start to participate in making their own definition.” *Plexus Art Slavery Manifesto*, one of the relevant items of *Plexus Black Box*, was conceptualized as a statement against the interference of the Artworld in the creative art process pushing the emerging of “artists in the third person” willing to produce artworks following submissively the artmarket’s need and will. The Plexus concept of “the artist in the first person” underlined the identity of the artist as the creator as well as the producer of her/his own cultural art products. The tendency of artists to not rethink their role as also producers was pointed out by Walter Benjamin in “The Author as Producer.”

¹⁰ David W. Ecker, “The Artist as Researcher: The Role of the Artist in Advancing Living Traditions in Art”, p. 5, 1990.

It has been one of the decisive processes of the last ten years in Germany that a considerable proportion of its productive minds, under the pressure of economic conditions, have passed through a revolutionary development in their attitudes, without being able simultaneously to rethink their own work, their relation to the means of production, their technique, in a really revolutionary way. I am speaking, as you see, of the so-called left-wing intellectuals, and will limit myself to the bourgeois left. In Germany the leading politico-literary movements of the last decade have emanated from this left-wing intelligentsia. I shall mention two of them, Activism and New Matter-of-factness, to show with these examples that a political tendency, however revolutionary it may seem, has a counterrevolutionary function as the writer feels his solidarity with the proletariat only in his attitudes not as a producer.¹¹

The intellectual responsibility of *the artist in the first person* as a cultural producer was a relevant issue in *Plexus Black Box* as pointed out by the insider José Rodríguez in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A.

Plexus Black Box has its roots in the historical art avant-gardes, in the surrealistic ideas of Antonin Artaud, and in the concept of a responsibility of the artists as intellectuals in the transformation of the society by Antonio Gramsci.

Antonio Gramsci and his conception on the social responsibility of intellectuals and the role of the artists in the struggle for a new culture was connected to the struggling of *Plexus Black Box's* reality, on the occasion of its first presentation within the Plexus artopera 1992 *Christopher Columbus: Voyage in the Planet of Art*.

It seems evident that, to be precise, one should speak of a struggle for a 'new culture' and not for a 'new art' (in the immediate sense). To be precise, perhaps it cannot even be said that the struggle is for a new artistic content apart from form because content cannot be considered abstractly, in separation from form. To fight for a new art would mean to fight to create new individual artists, which is absurd since artists cannot be created artificially. One must speak of a struggle for a new culture, that is, for a new moral life that cannot but be intimately connected to a new intuition of life, until it becomes a new way of feeling and seeing reality and, therefore, a world intimately ingrained in 'possible artists' and 'possible works of art'. Although one cannot artificially create individual artists, this does not therefore means that the new cultural world which one is fighting, by stirring up passions and human warmth, does not necessarily stir up 'new artists.'¹²

Through *Plexus Black Box*, many artists got together thinking for self-determination, within a broader social vision of art, as Micaela Serino pointed out in her recollection, fully reported in Appendix A.

Finally I was hearing speaking of social problems, injustices, difficulties, within an environment not specifically political! Artist in the first person against the slavery of art (of political parties or of lobbies), for freedom of expression and for safeguarding and recovering cultures and arts on the way of extinction. A metaphoric art journey toward freedom/liberation that brought us to the creation

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, p. 300-301, 1984.

¹² David Forgacs *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, p. 395, 1988.

of an International Art Fund in the Maison des Esclaves in Goree/Dakar. A place, dramatically signed by blood, would be instead reanimated by a different thought of a creative movement. Naturally, within a world where the lords of economy are the same of the lords of war (at that time we did not hear yet words such as neo-liberalism, globalization, etc.), our idea was inevitably slowed down by the lack of money....

Because the artist in the first person has with difficulty access to the “sacred” places of the art economy. Not feeling myself among them who have opposed excellent elaborations of thought to theoretical-practical difficulties, I decided to oppose my simple being of artist in the first person by “minting,” just to say, with a little pinch of provocation, the money of Plexus.

With this act, I wanted to bring back the level of communication between the North and the South of the world on the same plane. The direct exchange (opera = money = opera) without any superiority or inferiority. I started with the Italian liras, taking as a cue the dollar by Anita Steckel that expressed (with the images of a penis) how much the high power was of an exclusive male control. But I wanted go further behind my/our beliefs and feminist protests, so that all could take a global dimension, as then it showed itself.

Plexonian Money



Artwork by Micaela Serino, Rome, 1991.

The Plexus development as an “international cartel” of artists in the first person associated together as independent producers was conceptualized by the insider Rolando Politi in his proposal *Plexus International as a Sweat Equity Cartel*, fully reported in Appendix A.

Plexus International as a “Sweat Equity Cartel of Art” is a beautiful creative tool for a partnership of “the artists in the first person” to exchange his own work without filters or barriers. The “Open Market” eventually will recognize the Cartel, particularly when the issue is the international debt of the Third World vs. the First World, and the role of the artists in the first person for a world route correction in the use of human resources. The currency unit of exchange in the cartel is the “Plexonian” which is equivalent to one ECU (European Currency Unit), one dollar is about one and half ECU. The Plexonian was designed by Micaela Serino in Rome in 1988 as her contribution to the development of the “Plexus Black Bag” project. The Plexonian money will be printed in a limited edition to support the Cartel and the voyage of the Elisabeth from Sardinia to Gorée, Dakar. The Plexonians will be certified by Plexus International Storage and delivered to Plexus Dakar in order to be presented to the Minister of Culture of Senegal for the approval of the Government in support of the Plexus project of the opening of Plexus World Art Bank in Gorée, Dakar. To get some amount of

Plexonians it is necessary to donate to the Plexus Cartel of "Sweat Equity" an equivalent amount of value in labour or art works, in reference to building the Art Bank. Example: Sandro, Plexus 23s, buys a "Robotcap 3," an original certified Plexus art work by Rolando, Plexus 43, for 1000 Plexonians. "Robotcap 3" will receive the certificate of original Plexus work by Plexus International Storage after the Storage has received from Plexus 43 all documentation of that specific art work and verified with the monitoring unit that the member has full credit for what presented as true source of it. Plexus 23s has available an amount of Plexonians against a quantity of labour made by him in support of the Cartel's activities. Plexus 23s pays in cash 1000 Plexonians to Plexus 43. Rolando will have credit inside the network of the Cartel to buy for an amount of 1000 Plexonians a quantity of products or labours listed in the "Plexus Black Bag," the shopping tool for the members of the cartel and diffused through internet within the "Plexus Black Box." Plexus members will receive a plastic card membership with a personal ID. number, which will allow to have access to the Cartel's activities and to receive the last news with a list of the new works offered and of what was sold, with relative bids (quotations) in Plexonian currency.

Rolando Politi clarified his concept of Plexus as a "cartel" in his text *Plexus International Network*, fully reported in Appendix A.

Plexus International Network is the tool we use to create "value" and is available only to Plexus members. Einstein theorised: "Energy is neither created nor destroyed, it is only transferred" and you as the artist in the first person must initially invest "creative time" measured with "sweat equity" into the network and reinvest the "values" (Plexonian money) received for the initial work back into the network. You and each and every member keeps on reinvesting into the Web until such time as your work is demanded by the outside market and you decide to exchange (sell) it for hard currency (real money). At this point in time your work leaves the network and you give to Plexus a % of the hard currency. (Sometimes, there could be as many as three layers of commissions of % to be involved in this selling process). These commissions from the different entities involved will be in exchange for the value created by the network in launching your work. Plexus Art Bank, in Gorée, Dakar, will issue the Plexonian money in exchange of a 1% or 2% commission of its face value. One Plexonian will be equivalent to a hard currency. Plexus Black Bag, in Rome, is the marketing arm of the network and will receive a commission to be determined individually and when "works" are sold for hard currency through this arm. Plexus International Passport, in New York, is the newsletter of the network. In each issue, the newsletter will list works offered and sold including the list of their latest Plexonian value. This system will work like the "Bid/Ask System" used in all the counter financial markets. It is important to remember that between members you can only trade in Plexonians, no hard currency. Continuous trade between members is therefore always encouraged. Obviously any work will have ultimately a realistic chance to be sold in the outside market if it achieves a magical balance between inside and outside market dynamics. It is important to remember also that you as "the artist in the first person" do really and truly control the entire toy mechanism. Trades and contributions of sweat equity and creative time will also be printed in this newsletter.

Plexus International Storage, in Cagliari, Sardinia, will certify and document your work as true and original. It will act as a screening agent. Documents and works can periodically be used to organize shows and travelling exhibitions. In essence the Storage will act as a promotional tool to generate interest and value. These four bodies are the major pillars upon which this international network can be built. You can leave the network at any time. Just do not renew your membership and removed your work from the Storage and therefore from "Plexus Black Bag". You cannot however have back the value of your sweat equity contribution out of the network in Plexonian or in hard currency. You will leave it as your contribution to the network while you were member enjoying all benefits that such a membership brought to you.

Rolando Politi further described in his *Plexus Art Cartel*, fully reported in Appendix A, how to organize the *Plexus Cartel* of artists in the first person through a Plexus network system to “put in direct contact sellers and buyers.”

...organize Plexus like a Club Card Carring. The Board is international, legalize it in Switzerland, Panama or Bahamas. Information is electronic (Hard copy optional) through an Art/Science Network Your Board invests into the frame, the cards, etc. Plexus Board is not-for profit, because you are fostering a science and culture co-operation network. In other words what it costs you to set the system is what you should ask for from a variety of “fund benefactors.” The Plexus Card Members must pay a fee - to gain access to the network. The artist in the First Person must make an investment just like investments are made in paper and pencils, but you must give them something better than Xerox copies and loose sheets. You will be successful in selling many plastic Plexus Cards, once you organize the information subjects for quick access. Now here is the Big Point. You as the Plexus Board must establish an international legal and copyright monitoring unit. The information should be accepted in the bank unless it is screened (copyright) and verified to be the true and original source of that specific artist/scientist in the first person. You will get the trust of the card members by establishing such a unit. Also if any work is sold as a result of the network, Plexus is entitled to a % of the profit (agreement to be signed before one becomes a card member). Also events staged as a result of Plexus Networking must have the Plexus name clearly in evidence. You don't want a fee for events because you are needed to generate sales and they may show profits or losses. But you are entitled to fee for sales of work by the artist in the first person. Your Network will put in direct contact sellers and buyers.

The insider Andrea Portas described in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, how in Plexus while there was a convergence in social goals shared by participants, there were also many divergent individual positions.

I worked in these years to bring forward the idea of an art free from ties with the market, that it is concerned mainly to re-sew the tugs with the social tissue with which I shared Plexus goals, if often also I disagreed on some attitudes...

Plexus: Out of the Gallery. I have already mentioned to the relationship of open conflict that Plexus has brought forward against the selling system of the artworks (Art System). Plexus has often denied the dialogue with the artmarket in the attempt to find different strategies from those of the multinational art societies that mainly operate their choices on the basis of financial needs, secure like they are that the economic factor and of profit is of main importance in the world of visual arts too. To break these schemes the contemporary artist feels the need to look for an alternative audience different from that which usually attends the centers of power and of art consumption like public and private galleries, even if this may imply and implies the growing of economic problems and of maintenance for the artist himself. This way of acting which from some years is followed by different international artists, it is known as "Out of the Gallery" movement and it consists in the coherent choice to show the work of art in places not exactly in accordance with their fruition. Out of the Gallery, far away from the centers of power, art may return to speak of themes of social interest and of popular involvement, it can start to breathe pure air, to live of its own light.

Plexus: Strategies for an Upcoming Future. The retrieval of these issues, without that these are resolved through cunning operations of apparent breakdown, the reopening of the borders of the group, the loyalty of purposes and the unity in the choices, are very important for the future of Plexus. Many times the decisions are made by few and this had made the detachment of many artists, who felt excluded and kept out. It will be important afterwards to re-sew the tugs made by too many interferences and intrusions by few who created confusion and little professionally, and above all the coherence of choices and

purposes; it is necessary to arrive to the point in which the organization and the improvisation touch each other and they complete themselves in each other.

The Plexus concern of a free democratic exchange among artists and how it should be organized was clearly stated by the insider Luigi Mazzarelli in an open letter addressed to Sandro Dernini, partially reported in Appendix A.

The hard experience of Thelema taught me that when a specific community of intellectuals and artists who sets, as essential support to their own relationships, a "freedom request," they must know to develop at the same time a balanced form of organization (or not organization) if they do not like to have painful experiences. It is not easy. From "the Manifesto of the Communist Party" of 1848 to the freedom requests of the student's cultural revolutions of 1968, the need of free human exchange, in the concreteness of its own historical development, repeated one thousand times under diverted directions the centrality of the patriarchal organization from which it tried to get free. There is a reason of course in this fatal repetition of the historical experience. Probably the need to channel creative energies of community members and to counterbalance together centrifugal pushes made up by libidinal impulses and or by individuals' power addressed unwarily to the ruin of the cohesion and of the collective projectuality of the community, it brings fatally to the opponent side. In other words a balanced form of coexistence between CENTRALITY and FREEDOM, from the point of the organizative view, does not have a satisfactory answer in history. This should let understand to have not too many illusions when this problem again shows itself: we know that also a non organization under any title shows up itself may generate monstrosity not less than a centralized organization. About this point it should be opportune to discuss for long time in the group, we should force ourselves to have a constant reference to our praxis to not allow ourselves to go out of the roads more or less by purely verbal suggestions contained inevitably in the hypothesis package of the departure. And nevertheless, there is no doubts, the request of freedom is an essential condition of how art poses itself and to which anyway it is necessary to give space. To re-propose with strength this need, Plexus is right.

The insider Alfa Diallo in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, highlighted the collective vision of the African concept of *One on One*: *"the idea of "One on One" was always there in Africa. It is a collective vision. The understanding of this idea is the coming together 2 o more people and this is very important to be understood."* Alfa Diallo's poems were relevant in understanding the Plexus community-based positionament in Africa, within its symbolic setting in the Door of No Return of the House of the Slaves in the Island of Goree and in the Medina of Dakar, in Senegal.

The Box poem of Alfa Diallo was placed on top of George Chaikin's *Haddamard Matrix* blueprint at the entrance of the last *Plexus Black Box* event under inquiry in this study, held in 1993 at the NYU Rosenberg Gallery, as a statement of fighting for self-determination.

The Box by Alfa Diallo

Don't you cry
Because they are killing
Our brothers and sisters
All you are expected to do is
Not give up the fight

You are the voice of
The living and the dead
See that
You carry on the fight
Can't you hear people cry
They want your help
You may spend
A life-time fighting for liberation
There is nothing you can do about that
No running away
Join the fight
Don't turn your back
Your forefathers died
Fighting for self-determination
Don't turn your back
Because this is your turn
Your time to get out of
The Box.

The active roles played by contemporary African artists in understanding “our living world” was pointed out by the insider Okechukwu Odita in his paper *Map of Knowledge-360°*, partially reported in Appendix A, in which he pointed out “the art as a sum total of human knowledge and experience.”

The main point of a future art historical knowledge is rather simple in essence yet profound in implications: art history to be practiced by professional academicians will occur within a contemporary art context—art historical knowledge tied to the study of contemporary artists rather than the Old Masters. By attempting to come to grips with contemporary basis of art historians’ theories and activities, a study of practicing contemporary artists may lead to greater self-understanding. In this respect, the future art historical knowledge shares a goal similar to Aldous Huxley’s (*Brave New World*) attempt to develop a futuristic view of man. In attempting to sketch the beginning of an art history of the 21st century, it is of value to consider the study of visual art within the framework of contemporary artists’ activities, their visual sources as a profound human knowledge and experience, and their contributions through problem solving of current issues, to the development of contemporary history of art as a discipline. After setting forth a conceptual scheme, as afforded by a brief consideration of the contemporary artists, the case can be made for an art history of the 21st century. To give some credence to what is being advocated, three areas within the study of contemporary art will be considered for purposes of identifying some of the underlying art historical basis of the future: contemporary artists at work, the visual issues of their art, and the dissemination of the knowledge and experience of their activities through search, research and discovery. African Artists’ Roles. Traditional African art issues, such as those presented in the *Map of Knowledge-360°*, reveal what disputes the traditional artists have about their society. Also, the contemporary art issues, such as the ones identified in the *MK-360°*: item 20, are explicit of what the contemporary artists value as major issues of their time. These traditional and contemporary issues of African art would then provide a strong theoretical basis for the study of works of art. Since these issues are internal rather than external evidence of work of art, an art historical methodology finally evolves: that which discourages the investigation of art from external sources only. Rather it stresses the analysis of a work of art, first, to understand the issue and then work outwards with external sources to show the art as a sum total of human knowledge and experience. The identified issues in Odita’s *Map of Knowledge-*

360° are therefore distinctive affirmations of African artists' active roles in the daily problems of their time as well as our living world.¹³

Lucy Lippard, arguing against the false notion of democracy in art, claimed that the elusive subject of multiculturalism was built from a Western theoretical point of view of art depending upon the notion of "Quality," which was used as "bludgeon" on the side of the homogeneity in power against the "socalled minorities that just haven't got it yet."

Ethnocentrism in the arts is balanced on a notion of Quality that "transcends boundaries" – and is identifiable only by those in power. According to this lofty view, racism has nothing to do with art; Quality will prevail; socalled minorities just haven't got it yet. The notion of Quality has been the most effective bludgeon on the side of homogeneity in the modernist and postmodernist periods, despite twenty-five years of attempted revisionism.

Lippard further claimed that it was a more difficult task for art critics and aestheticians to cross-culturally look at art, because Art in the '90s no longer was operating in a context of order, but rather in a context of disorder.

The conventional notion of good taste with which many of us were raised and educated was based on an illusion of social order that is no longer possible (or desirable) to believe in. We now look at art within the context of disorder - a far more difficult task than following institutionalized regulations. Time and again, artists of colour and women determined to revise the notion of Quality into something more open, with more integrity, have been fended off from the mainstream strongholds by this garlic-and-cross strategy. Time and again I have been asked, after lecturing about this material, "But you can't really think this is Quality?"¹⁴

Notion of Quality



Seni MBaye, Dakar, 1988.

¹³ Okechukwu E. Oditia. *A Guide to Oditia's Map of Knowledge-360°, Study Research Practice on Traditional/Contemporary African Art*, p. 32-33, 1991.

¹⁴ Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*, p. 7, 1990.

An Open Social Ritual Multi-Arts Form: Plexus Art Co-Opera

Our performances, yours and mine,
Appropriate time and being
As a singular encounter.
Time gives presence,
And Immediacy,
Gliding on sensuous surfaces
Melds polarities into significances
Creating words never known before.
Presencing gives Time
By withdrawing it;
Unconcealment slips
Into the secrecy of silence.
We perform in our own arenas
Urgently aware of unawareness,
Promise is but the other side of nothingness--
Infinity's umbilical cord to Being
Severed by the incessant presencing of finitude.
We perform and the world becomes--
We are "the worlding of the world."¹⁵

Performing arts were relevant in understanding Plexus art process but, as John Gilbert argued, to identify "performing arts" was an "ambiguous" task.

To be sure, 'performing arts' is an arbitrary and ambiguous category. Certainly within the structure of academia and other institutions such as Lincoln Center, the 'performing arts' have been given a certain identity based on some assumption that there is some common ground which links these very diverse media. The 'common ground' may be more one of economic survival rather than a compelling philosophic or aesthetic basis. If asked to identify the performing arts, we often respond by naming music, dance, and drama (or, as some insist, theatre), and then qualify these distinctions with such terms as musical theatre, opera, ballet, modern dance, etc. Such groupings although perhaps practical for certain institutional settings, hardly suffice in defining or identifying the 'performing arts.'.. Furthermore, 'performing arts' becomes even more ambiguous when this century has seen the development of "performance art," as a concern of a domain sometimes referred to as the visual or plastic arts.¹⁶

John Gilbert further pointed out:

The "working of the work" in the performing arts is extremely complex. It is complex because we have difficulty in resolving how a work exists apart from its performance (if, indeed, it does). However, the "working of the work" of the work in a forming-through its medium in the continual presencing and withdrawing of the work. We experience the work in its dynamic disclosure which resonates in the resonance of a performance, we are sometimes stunned by the awesomeness of the experience.¹⁷

The insider Giancarlo Schiaffini in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, described Plexus art form as a "summa" of different kinds of performing arts. Schiaffini

¹⁵ John Gilbert, *Qualitative Evaluation in the Arts*. Vol. 2., p. 61, 1984.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 62-63.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

further described *Plexus Black Box* as “an improvised container interconnecting what is inside with what is outside,” allowing further unknown links of any kind artistic nature, creating “a quite big interaction” among participants.

I worked with many different realities in the field of art and Plexus may be is one of the most complex, one of the most universal, in Plexus we find so many different kinds of performances of art, actions and exhibitions, which is important as a kind of summa of all works since the Living Theatre, Cage, all schools of improviser art. So we have Plexus, may be, as a big container, just in the sense of not a neutral container but of something which can contain several different artforms, performing arts, a container which is in relationship with what is contained and allows to cross, to link different realities, different musicians, performers, different facts, which may be never do otherwise. Plexus performances were so rich in interrelations among all elements playing and involved which was just not a collection of different form of art or players, with different languages, minds, and from different art fields and characters like painters, theatre players, musicians, singers, poets, dancers, videomen, but inside there was a big cohesion, a quite big interaction and relationship among participants, which was born there in the action and it was not planned from us in advance.

The insider Butch Morris in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, described his performing collaboration through which Plexus *art opera* came out as a new artform.

...which lead to my definition of Plexus Black Box as a multidisciplinary way for vary kind of artforms to work together and for different artists to collaborate together. My first performing association with Plexus was with *Goya's Time* in 1985 and during this process came out the theory of the art opera which characterized Plexus collaboration. It was characterized by multiplex levels of perspectives of the event and its particular surroundings open to be followed in all possible direction by the audience. The result became a cooperative art product of a collective imagination. Plexus artform was truly about understanding a particular moment in time and history. What was new in this artform is a significant individual collective art expression of different vision of the same idea as it was in *Goya's Time* presented by 23 visual artists. The artists working with each other were the big new artform in Plexus at the significant level of what they produced.

These multiplex levels of perspective were expressions of the presence in Plexus of numerous different individual experiences and many diverse geo-social cultural environments. The insider Maria Pia Marsala described in her recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, the Plexus art process as an open fully interactive performing act, creating before, during, and after the event, new interactive materials for the next Plexus event.

Plexus was an occasion for an artistic experience of confrontation with the others participants, performing and acting human life, within the whole context of life. My participation was an improvisation performance in which I played with all my emotions and impressions in a stage within a closed space, aware of the Scheckner Theory on performance. It was difficult for me to express artistically, in a harmonic way, myself as an artist, as I had learned until that moment as dancer and actress. There was no stage direction, there was no support of any kind to help us, to express ourselves. On stage everybody, as artists in the first

person, performed their own personalities as acting characters, often in conflicts with others' one, representing the complex theme "The Voyage in the Planet of Art" as an interaction of different human beings with different points of view. Fully interactive were our meetings, before and after the show, with everybody, journalists, artists, scientists, writers, curious, to discuss their and our opinions about how to arrive to "Pianeta Arte" as the only meaningful way to understand what we were doing there. We had several hard discussions and usual characteristics conflicts among all us, but these tensions created new energy, materials for interacting with that show, which we developed in the Plexus events performed in 1990 and in 1991, and since the recent ones.

Maria Pia Marsala further described her experience with *Plexus Black Box* as made by performances of material, immaterial, and surrealistic elements.

I would like to recall as a meaningful part of my continuous experience with Plexus Black Box, from its opening performance in 1989, in Rome, at Metateatro, until to its closing in 1993, in New York, at the Rosenberg Gallery, that in Plexus there are not visible elements which oblige you/us to use intuition to feel them. Like for example, when in 1989 at Metateatro Plexus Black Box hold surreally a music note played by Giancarlo Schiaffini inside a container representing Plexus Black Box. Then, all of us moved through "la porta del cuore" (the door of the hearth) with the magic word: "I am" and by saying our own names. We ended that performance by a liberatory laugh presenting to the audience a Plexus Campbell Soup Can as an artwork.

In his paper *A Note about the Plexus Art Operas*, fully reported in Appendix A, the insider Stephen DiLauro described Plexus *art operas* as made by an extremely low budget, "equivalent of a Trappist monk's annual wages."

As a poet and showman nothing in my life to date brings such vivid and passionate recollections as the time of the Plexus art operas, "Goya Time," "Purgatorio," "Eve." Though the names of all the artists who contributed to these productions are listed within this volume, certain individuals participated in such a big way that I feel compelled to mention them here: Lawrence "Butch" Morris, il maestro; Gretta Safferty; Anita Steckel; Cowboy Ray Kelly, captain of the art slave ship; Miguel Algarin; Lenny Horowitz; Albert DiMartino; David Boyle; Joe Strand; Paolo Buggiani; Willoughby Sharp; and Sandro Dernini, art director extraordinaire. I have seen tempers flare, heard voices raised watched lust blossom and fade, enjoyed outstanding music, observed brilliant bursts of energy and artistic achievement and enjoyed the finished product - spectacles that are unique in the history of opera. One of the most amazing aspects of these operas is the extremely low budget on which they were produced. That such bursts of creative output were underwritten by a budget about the equivalent of a Trappist monk's annual wages attests to the dedication everyone involved brought to bear.

Stephen DiLauro as Plexus dramaturge further described in *The Closing of Plexus Black Box*, fully reported in Appendix A, the level of creativity made by a variety of participants that characterized Plexus *art operas* and *art co-operas*.

Nothing as vibrant as these shows has ever been mounted before or since. Costumed players, orchestras, choral groups, singers, performance artists, ballets and visual artists all came together to celebrate freedom of communication. As the Plexus dramaturgh and impresario, I was repeatedly amazed at the levels of creativity and energy that went into these shows.

Exploring myth and history through artistic interpretation brought to life the theories of Antonin Artaud in a manner that perhaps even he never envisioned. Plexus art operas, or art co-operas as some called them, had a way of making the artists involved reach beyond themselves. The creation of a new form of expression required art slaves who would execute these art operas regardless of market considerations.

In Plexus *art operas* as well as in *art co-operas* hundreds of artists gathered together to perform a theme in which dance, theatre, musical performance and visual arts were all combined together in a new emerging art form, *the art opera*, as Stephen DiLauro argued in his paper *Plexus Opera*, fully reported in Appendix A.

What is Plexus? This is a question I am often asked. The answer evolves as Plexus itself evolves. The "official" answer, as put forth by Dr. Sandro Dernini, founder of Plexus International, is that "Plexus is an international cartel of independent producers working in the first person." Be that as it may, Plexus at time has appeared to some observers to be no more than a series of opportunities for group photos. For me, though, Plexus is beautiful chaos from which new names, new faces, and a new art form is emerging - the art opera. These performance spectacles are, perhaps without originally intending to be, the realization of Antonin Artaud's theories for a Theatre of Cruelty - a theatre in which masks, dance, music and shamanistic ritual take precedence over "text."

The insider Franco Meloni in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, pointed out how in Plexus "the scripts weren't always respected" and how to deal with the game of defining *Plexus Black Box* it was necessary to shift from one single point view to a fleet of horizons.

PLEXUS had the useful characteristics for a research with joyful aspects. We played without well knowing which the stakes were, and there always are. We had to look for personifications to be followed in order to cover a role. The scripts weren't always respected. The subject was fleetingly indefinite. The scientific matrix was proved by many rationality peaks. Acting in history - either capital or small letter - we could feel the possible implications. The different potential openings regarded problems thought in solitude but discussed between many. And all of this, unavoidably, seen with eyes more and more tired of human errors. We needed greater synthesis efforts in order to define PLEXUS. Art and Science was not enough, Freedom was imperfectly vague, Artist "in the first person" made one think at barren personalism, Antilibretto brought back necessarily to previous experiments. But the accidental or wanted interaction with others forced to change the relations with the outside, or the inside, that regarded us. The solicitations were strong, but had to be supported both by a credibility and by a continued research of transforming stimulus. "Now the game was seen from the inside. In the series of fleeting focalizations of Plexus, it seemed necessary a further definition of one's own outlook on the problem. Having necessarily to put together scientific concepts with Art images, it seemed inevitable to run back to the one period of human history about which judgements agree on estimation of values: the Renaissance. It was possible because of the genetic connections to identify in the problem of the Flagellation paving reconstruction a way to deal, in an apparently operative way, with the combination of different cultures. Not being enough Piero, we wanted further on to represent one's vision of the problem with a kind of stamp what would define PLEXUS once for all: KB In W. The operation seemed completed, the explanation left to others."

Franco Meloni further argued about the impossibility of defining Plexus because of its open structure.

The definitions are always incomplete. To imply in equations concepts that regard multiple interactions requires an ability of synthesis, and a comprehension that usually is out of the normal experiences. Physics teaches that simplicity, refinement and wealth of some formulas causes an almost sensual pleasure in dimly seeing the route that had determined its concise completeness. It would be as looking at a river's mouth, while going up the water-course to the source and seeing the reflection of every single wave. The problems are always very complex and it demonstrates a human but not always verified need, wanting to delimitate them in enclosures rationally or schematically defined. Plexus is consequently hardly definable. The interaction is complicated by the presence of necessary and fundamental human factors. If it is difficult to give order to the atoms, it is incredibly more complex to deal with feelings. And Plexus is full of these. It is impossible to analyse it from the inside. The position in the scenery requires that a physicist - after all a man of science - expresses itself according to schemes that the others are expecting from him. In this situation, forced to explain tangibly my role, I had necessarily to give the clearest possible idea of the reason why I was interested in PLEXUS and above all the way I thought about it. Avoiding an abused broadcast-fascinating language, I thought that entropy could be used: an image-creating-image happily used many times in physics. Once more a concept apparently known is used to introduce the problem. Like other times entropy is useful to lead the way to reasoning that will later develop along routes before unforeseeable. Then in a particular scenery - and here the explanations would get entangled in skeins of the previous experiences - we enunciate the equality between a thermodynamically important quantity - a real solid bridge between the microscopic and the macroscopic - and a movement that involves different competencies and interests. Very nice picture. But unsatisfactory. For many reasons: because the definition is good for closed systems; because the molecules don't think and people do; because it is impossible to measure the thermodynamic probability of a dynamic system with a variable density outside a laboratory. But, even if the formula is not true, it is interesting to see its limits and the possible alterations, or only the criticism. The system is not closed, and it would be absurd if it was....The metastructures refer to the research of new box opening combinations connected tighter and tighter in a continuous research that finds its reason from the same existence of complexity. But it is true, and I believe so, that the most important thing is the way and not the goal, the discussion of formulas, of codification, of definitions, is after all more important than the subject of the research itself. The Art & Science does not exist, but it is fundamental to talk about it. Plexus is a box, more or less big, contained in another one distinguished with difficulty from it. Nobody knows its exact dimension, but it is possible that its entropy, and its energy also, is potentially very big. The connections are more important of the content. PLEXUS as entropy and therefore as information. Piero della Francesca as the vision of the Global Man.

The insider Frans Evers described in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, his experience in Rome and the complex social art context in which Plexus was placed.

I have a very good memory of the Metatheatre because there was a very vibrant atmosphere which showed that there was an audience for this which really became very interested to learn what it was all about. I remember Sandro giving a speech about the painter explaining about his painting and some other people commenting on his work and there I gave this contribution about the Berlin Wall and the colours coming off and the sound of this very strange double iconoclastic process as I described it. I was very intrigued that such a quite

complicated but very realistic social story because this only had happened a few months before was so good to communicate with the Italian audience who had gathered there and that, for me, gave the kind of rewards that there is in a much larger field a new awareness of aesthetics arising in which the arts are related in one way or other to what's happening socially and the social dynamics are so enormous nowadays that you hardly are aware of the intensity. That we will only see when things are slowing down again and become freezing which maybe happen in a number of years but I expect that this kind of dynamic probably still goes on for another ten or fifteen years at least. So we don't know in what processes we are involved. Therefore I found it very interesting to be faced with Plexus which was one of the few art forms still wanting to try to make visible one of the waves in the ocean of Willem.

The insider Lorenzo Pace in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, described *Plexus Black Box* as a "philosophical concept" that brought many people together, with different backgrounds, with no need to understand fully its contents.

I never understood the concept but I knew that it was right and he was inspired to participate in Plexus which relates people with other ethnic background all together. When we went in Sardinia in 1987, we were more than 200 artists and scientists from all over the world and from all arts fields, with different views. It was a great and complex experience. It was my first time that I was in Sardinia and I was fascinated by that its nature, its history and culture. Plexus is a vary experience made in many different spaces and times during the last ten years. Plexus was able to bring so many people with different political vision to reflect together upon the impact of Columbus on the Americans as an issue of reconciliation among all of us as human beings and not only as an issue of conflict. Plexus was able to create multilayer communication links among artists with different backgrounds. "Plexus Black Box" is a philosophical concept in which I feel to be related with the others Plexus artists without to understand fully its real contents, because it is not so important to understand everything but to feel positive about it and to go for it and through it. My experience about Plexus, made in ten years, allows myself to say that I know that everything that does not make sense, beyond the scene, later goes in focus. It is not necessary for an artist to have everything in a logical sequential form, but to feel good about and to have fun. But Plexus, also in formal sense as for example in the event made with Franco Meloni at the University of Cagliari, was able to accomplish also more structured institutional expectations. Plexus art events were able to make sense from no sense.

The insider Ray Kelly argued in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, that art is a way of life, "air without wires," "liquid forms vs. square lines."

We have to go into nature, to work in different areas behind abstract structures in painting, in sculpture, in architecture, in times and future spaces. Bucky Fuller inspired me by putting together art and science forms in packaging structures, with energy, with language. Art is a way of life, it is a way of understanding. Art is something else from money, and from what bullshit is presented usually. Art is the future which can't be controlled. It is in the air without wires. Art is free. The artists are part of the structure which the power system is trying to push out. Liquid forms vs. square lines.

The David Ecker as an "insider" in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, by recalling Charles Ives's described *Plexus Black Box* as made by fragments and contingencies.

If you look at Plexus Black Box you have fragments and segments something like Ives's piece. But the expectation they made up creates a whole of all, a total. Expectation in postmodern thought is full projections of how the things are in the world and it is very close to everyday life which is made up of fragments and contingencies. This is Plexus and it is only about contingencies, not planned, but incidental. It looks like total confusion from an outsider view but it is not, and one thing is related to the other one and there is so much energy that every thing gets done spontaneously. Social chaos is fairly typical event of Plexus, made up of acts and gestures performed by distinguished and not distinguished artists and scientists, depending upon the circumstances under which they perform.

For David Ecker "art is the ability to transcend a time-space, a place, and literally makes a ritual that which reinforces the value and beliefs of the group." This ritual reinforcement process in Plexus art opera was described by the insider Barnaby Ruhe in his paper *Plexus*, fully reported in Appendix A, as an evolving art action.

Plexus is the shaman journey along the lines of Van Gennep's Rites of Passage's format. That is, the Plexus art opera is an evolving art action that engages in three distinct phases: the first phases the identification and dialogue with the Norm or status quo, embracing the system of art logic even as the embrace is deadly. The second phase is the "dematerialization" of our constellation of concepts surrounding art activity; this phase is what Victor Turner calls the "liminal" phase where roles reverse, definitions are tossed back into the air, confusion reigns around blazing ambiguities functioning like a Rorschach blot, and artists dive in with no clear functions delineated. At first the second phase seems like just so much nonsense, like acts of desperation. The third phase is the rematerialization around the Plexus metaphor. Like a pearl formed around an irritating grain of sand, Plexus sets up a metaphor that engages art activity without precise directives. You have to be there: Artists congregate because of a sensed "communitas" and mill about when the directives are clearly unclear. At some undetermined moment, the mob coheres into congruity.

The concept of "*communitas*," pointed out by Barnaby Ruhe as part of the Plexus community-based art process, was clarified by Victor Turner in *The Anthropology of Performance*.

Extreme individualism only understands a part of man. Extreme collectivism only understands man as a part. *Communitas* is the implicit law of wholeness arising out of relations between totalities. But *communitas* is intrinsically dynamic, never quite being realized. It is not being realized precisely because individuals and collectivities try to impose their cognitive schemata on one another. The process of striving toward and resistance against the fulfilment of the natural law of *communitas* necessitates that the unit of history and of anthropology (which takes into account the sociocultural schemata) and also the unit of their analysis is drama, not culture or archive. And certainly not structural relationship. Structure is always ancillary to, dependent on, secreted from process. And performances, particularly dramatic performances, are the manifestations par excellence of human social process.¹⁸

The insider George Chaikin described in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, the ritual role performed by the documentation in *Plexus Black Box* as a unifying element in reinforcing collective participation.

¹⁸ Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, p. 84, 1986.

What is the Plexus Black Box and what is its function? Ritual is very important in the understanding of it by giving continuity and connecting one activity to another one. Initially I did not like ritual but after I participated more in these activities I understood that the ritual of documentation became a significant part of Plexus by keeping in it the life of the community and bringing people together. The ritual activities of the documentation became a form of collective joint participation in which each one gave up something in order to share in a global participation which turned to become a contemporary art form. These ritual activities of Plexus Black Box which easily could be characterized as chaotic activities turned into a kind of art form which ended by also documenting the unity and coherence of all this chaos. Plexus Black Box became in the end the unifying element of a collective participation in which the photo of that moment was the key ritual element of a documentation for Plexus own history.

George Chaikin further described in his recollection *Plexus Black Box* process as a democratic collaborative art form, shifting, in time and space, in a non linear and non rational way, with no hierarchic structure.

It is difficult for collaborative art group endeavours to have space in old traditional exhibitions where only one person gets usually credit as the creator. Recently there is a move toward more democratic forms where all people are participating in the making decisions process. My feeling of "Plexus Black Box" is that there is a continuous shift of what is in the box and why. I believe that its relevance was more related with whom in that moment was participating and from the circumstances. My participation was made not under any hierarchy, because it switches always in time and space....

I participated without understanding what I was doing with the belief that others were understanding. Over years, as the process recurs, in retrospect, I began to understand what was happening. Sometime I did not know what and why something was happening but, later on, it made sense. The Plexus process is a not linear activity and less rationale, which the coherence appears only after the fact. After my experience over the years I know that there is not a need to get every "i" dotted and cross every "t" in terms of understanding it. and you will understand it only after you let yourself participating into it. This is because you will understand it only after you let yourself participate in it. In Plexus the question of the balance between leadership and democracy was not relevant, and I believe myself to be a profoundly democratic person. I believe also that Plexus is a coherent democratic structure because it has not a hierarchic structure. Sandro covers his role of orchestrating it on a basis of a democratic participation. Everybody has his/her own point view and with different art forms in which not everybody is interested in it.

Within *Plexus Black Box*, the ritual of art allowed experiences overcoming separation among participants with different backgrounds and allowed them to come together crossing different disciplines and cultures, without exactly knowing for what they were going together, as Hans-Georg Gadamer argued.

Furthermore, it is a community in which we are gathered together for something, although no one can say exactly for what it is that we have come together. It is no accident that this experience resembles that of art, since celebration has its own specific kinds of representation.¹⁹

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 40, 1986.

The insider Miguel Algarin in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, described the volume of the free artists' participation in Plexus group shots events, not planned in advance, as the aesthetic image of Plexus *art operas* and *art co-operas*.

The aesthetic image of Plexus is the volume of the artists' free participation in mass events such as the group shots in which a hundred artists gathered together in the middle of East Sixth Street just for a photo. The occasion in Plexus is the aesthetic sense, making an occasion into a happening and reflecting on that for its historical value. This is what I saw in Plexus, it plans its own historical value. The art operas were occasions where an enormous amount of work was made to collect a huge quantity of players together and then the event either works or does not work. When it works, we all contribute to an idea which is itself in the making not made but "making." In that way the value of the aesthetics of Plexus is creating artistic concepts that hit emotions.

The concept of co-opera was described by the insider Rolando Politi as interaction of two or more artists in the first person.

Coopera concept: Artists in the first person create art works and mail them cross continents to other artists for their interventions. Interactions of two or more interventions create a coopera and can be created globally...At some point when the music stops... the originals are collected in one location for exhibition and then the exhibit travels linking all participating artists across continents....

The insider Arturo Lindsay in his report, from Plexus Black Box round table, held in Rome in 1990, fully reported in Appendix A, described the formation of a "plexus" within the overall development process of Plexus.

ART PLEXUS The communication which takes place between two or more artists form what is called a *Plexus*. Sometimes a *Plexus* is formed by the primary branch (*Sandro*) - as a *Co-Opera*, a *Purgatorio Show*, or a *Christopher Columbus Project* - and occasionally by *local Plexuses*, as in the plexuses formed in *Amsterdam, Dakar, New York, Rome, Sardinia, Milano, and soon Atlanta*. In the formation of a plexus the component *artists* divide, then join, and again subdivide in such a complex manner that the individual *events* become interlaced most intricately, so that each branch leaving a plexus may contain filaments from each of the primary *aesthetic* trunks which form it. In the formation also of a smaller plexuses at the periphery of the body there is a free interchange of *artists*. In each case, however, the individual *artist* remains separate and distinct, *maintaining his/her own identity*, and do not inoculate with one another, *losing their individuality*.

In Plexus events, conceptualized since 1986 as global art events, the art form of the *Plexus art opera* evolved, through *Plexus compressionist process*, into the format of the *Plexus art co-opera*. *Plexus artopera* was conceived as a multi arts format based upon an improvised interaction of many art forms, made by a conducted improvisation, through a modular construction process, following a "*libretto*" made by one or more authors. Instead, *Plexus art co-opera* was developed as a multi arts format based upon *Plexus compressionist art process*, upon a modular construction process of individual art

contributions converging into a collective “antilibretto,” mutually made by collective understandings, imaginations and emotions.

Plexus Compressionist Art Process

What you feel and see is your own creation. We have created a new interactive art movement. We are called PLEXUS. I am labelling it: “Mytho-Compressionism.”

This book represents, in a flat compressed version, the hopes, visions, poetry, music, dreams of hundreds of artists. This book represents a small scale version, a special history of four operas. These Co-Operas were and are the personal visions of Art History, of Francisco Goya, of Purgatory, of Mythology transformed into a simultaneous Tableau. Here, we have compressed history, recreated mythology. Time has speed up and there is no time left for aesthetic distance between the artist as performer and the Art Observer. In these simultaneous Co-Operas we have destroyed this distance, and they in turn interact, creating a new operatic form. We have extended the compass of vision to include the former observer as participant. We are user friendly. Use us or lose us. We are all independent thinker and dreamer collating our collective visions collaboratively. Please experience us wisely and with an open heart. This is open ART.

This quote by the insider Leonard Horowitz, from his paper *Introduction to Plexus: Recall 1, Passport for Purgatorio*, reported in Appendix A, was relevant to understand *Plexus Black Box* “compressionist” art process, compressing past, present and future. This Plexus process of interactive compression and expansion of time was conceptualized in Horowitz’s paper *Compressionism*, fully reported in Appendix A.

I first experienced ‘compressionisme’ in the Spring of 1985, where I was suddenly engulfed by a “Total Theatre” environmental spectacular Opera called “Goya Time,” a continuous and extremely compressed dramatization of three paintings by Francisco Goya: “The Nude Maja,” “The Royal Family,” and “The Eight of May.” This avant garde “Co-opera” was conceived, produced and directed by Dr. Sandro Dernini, an accomplished biologist from the island of Sardinia, in collaboration with Greta Sarfaty and Lawrence “Butch” Morris. By dramatizing these three Goya painting and having this cast of Goya costumed artists literally run through the audience, it destroyed the normal sense of separation of staged theatre, since all at once you were not only the observer, but a participant. In order to really catch the total and unexpected actions taking place, one had to constantly shift one’s view from the Royal family on the balcony and further physically follow their descent through the amazed milling crowd below. The Royal Family pushed their way through the packed gymnasium, past thirty artists doing their simultaneous versions of the Nude Maja, and brushed past me, almost knocking me down. The whole spectacle was tied together and totally reified by modular music created and conducted and orchestrated by Butch Morris and further amplified by the dancing of Gloria McLean and company. The whole Opera lasted an hour chronologicallybut...psychologically seemed to be over in ten minutes. So we can say that because of the concept and the simulsensuous presentation, that there was an intense compression of time, of events, of experience, of total unexpectedness... If we have been subconsciously influenced by the motion picture (and now television), as I believe we all are, then the obvious differences between the Plexus process and especially any of Wilsons masterpieces (Einstein on the Beach) is that Robert Wilson's oeuvre has a strong sense of slowed motion and

Plexus has the quality of Pixillation, of jump cut, of extreme compression. A Polish mathematician, Klaus Wyborny, working in Hamburg, Germany, a number of years ago (and using a timing device on his camera), automatically pixillated frames from *Citizen Kane* and compressed this famous film into three minutes! The result is a very short film that compresses the images to the extent that the people disappear and the images are transformed into an atomic type mushroom cloud with a peculiar black dot that seems like an insect flying in and out of the cloud. This is a transformation of the original classic into a totally abstract process and sculptural vision. And that has been the Plexus process, whether we have dealt with the theme of Dante's Purgatorio, with the symbolic universal Serpent and with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

For Lenny Horowitz, *Plexus Compressionism Process* was "a quick shorthand, is jazz compressed in a magic music art form, is no time to move, is a nanosecond, is one plus one equals three, is speed up time, is a creative process, is Plexus process, is a computer chip, is a critical mass, is yang no ying." He further described *Plexus compressionism process* in a note to David Ecker, fully reported in Appendix A.

Compressionisme is caused by time speeded up in our unconsciousness. We are constantly compressing and fusing new forms, larger yet more complex forms from old ones. Modern art fuses the conscious with the unconscious so impression plus reification plus process are added to the dynamics of art. It is a new fused form. Picasso, using this new form fused the past with the present. We now have so much information that we are compressing it digitally into tiny computer chips capable of scoring billions of bits of info on a tiny compressed chip. All art forms are compressions, in that they use a unique shorthand to arrive at their metaforms. A 4 line haiku can express eternity. One plus one equals three. The plexus process is to combine, fuse these art forms. So we are fusing fusions, compressing compressions into a larger, more complex, more powerful network.

The insider David Boyle pointed out in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, how the compressionism process originated in Plexus as a new art form, "where documentation stops and art begins."

Plexus as an art movement contributed to the integration of different uses of art media in new art forms, actively extending the point where documentation stops and art begins. As in the case of the Plexus tradition to make photos called group shots which turned into an art form. It was Leonard Horowitz who pioneered this Plexus compressionist use of the photo of the photo. In each event, Plexus members assembled together for large photos, like family picnic photos. Groups of Plexus artists answering the open call were photographed together. These "group shots" became bigger and bigger. By 1988 Plexus artists were intentionally holding up the photos of the previous group shots while creating new group shots. These photos were then brought to subsequent group shots achieving the effect a group of people holding a group shot which was holding a group shot and so on. Producing the effect of compressing into one photo content with a lens could be amplified again.

A Compressionist Double Reading



Micaela Serino and Giancarlo Schiaffini "appointing" themselves, Rome, 1988.

Plexus *compressionistic* art process of "*photos of the photos in the photos of previous events in which there were other photos in the photos, etc.,*" was described by the insider Lynne Kanter in her recollection, reported in Chapter III, as the seed process through which Plexus art altar installations and ritual art performances developed as new works of art.

Plexus artists compressed within *Plexus Black Box* numerous accounts of their artistic processes as well as they performed internalization of Plexus records and relics into the formal structure of their art works.

The "*internalization*" of the document into the work of art accomplished by conceptualist artists, through the use of photography as a "memory device" to carry information related to the overall social cultural context of the artwork, was pointed out by Robert C. Morgan in *Conceptual Art. An American Perspective*.

The problems of documentation in Conceptual Art cannot be solved simply by understanding how they exist as primary information. Often a document will stand as a reference to something other than itself. A photograph, for example, may exist solely on a referential level without any aesthetic value of its own. The referent becomes the idea, core or nexus of the piece-not encapsulated by any regard for material "permanence." Another type of document may exist not solely for its referential value but for its component value as well. In this case, the document exists within the context of a particular semiotic system.²⁰

Robert Morgan further pointed out the significance of theoretical statements by conceptualist artists.

Rather than presenting the viewer with an object or series of objects to contemplate in terms of formal-visual structure, the conceptualist presented statements to be read usually accompanied by various documents which were intended as supportive evidence within some idea-based schema or system. Given this approach, it could be said that the negation of the art object was an attempt to bring the raw material of everyday life back into the context of the art experience.²¹

²⁰ Robert C. Morgan, *Conceptual Art. An American Perspective*, p. 44-45, 1994.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Plexus Art Books



Artworks by Anna Saba, Cagliari (Sardinia), 1988 - 1992.

The insider Anna Saba internalized Plexus documentation and relics into new works of art, encompassing large quantity of quotations of quotations as well as metaphors related to Plexus history, as she described in her recollection, fully reported in Appendix A.

In the Plexus movement I used many kinds of materials. Plexus helped me to look at different species of artistic activities. The use of the metaphor was the best tool to overcome the limits due to different languages. And this refers not only to the etymological sense of the word. I gave my contribution to the visibility of Plexus with many works dedicated to the documentation of the various phases of the trail of the multimedia movement. Presently, the seven (and here too the metaphor is present) sculptures - books draw a part of the common history.

Plexus photos of photos in other photos performed within Plexus events to be documented as works of art were conceived as quotations of quotations of other Plexus quotations were relevant components in understanding Plexus *compressionist* art process as direct quotes of it, as Nelson Goodman argued in *Ways of Worldmaking*.

Then a photograph may actually contain a duplicate of a second photograph; and the first, if it also refers to the second through showing it as in a frame, etc., might then be said to quote it directly.²²

The re-opening in 1994 of *Plexus Black Box* allowed the increase of the resonance of the Plexus *compressionist* process, generating more vitality, strength and resistance for emerging individual identities, within Plexus network, and, at the same time, producing new creative energies through a "modular construction," as it was described by the insider Willem Brugman in his recollection of fully reported in Chapter III.

A modular construction, as it happened to take place in the art cooperas, there were so many different individuals coming from many different fields and specialties that had to be organized in time and space, and they had to be organized also in a story telling way so a modular construction is an organizational principle by which every fragment, every subject, every object that takes part in the total generic energy explosion and is guaranteed its own

²² Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 48, 1978.

identity. I maybe can only say it in a more poetic or esoteric sense, if a drop of water joins the ocean, it does not loose its characteristics. This is the principal of modular construction whatever effort or excess energy spent in the process will find its constructive expression of possibilities in the overall work. Well, a modular construction is a facilitating process that allows the individual energies to pass through and to gather a purity of energy which maybe can be approached by talking about light.

Modular construction allowed Plexus *compressionist* art process to operate by assuring respect for each individual artist identity. The insider Frans Evers described further in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, how the modular construction process allowed a multi-cultural perspective, with no dominant view, and acknowledged all different individual participant identities, within a concept of “total theatre” as well as of “total energy.”

Modular construction starts with an acknowledgment of all the elements that are involved in a process, very detailed, very specific acknowledgment. If I am allowed to use the metaphor of cooking here...when you start cooking you will go into the kitchen and you need a stove you might need an oven you need a light you need gas or you need wood. Then you have to get the ingredients that you will start cooking with, and then you have to get your pots and pans you have to get spoons and so forth. And, within the analogy of the kitchen, you can say the modular construction starts with the preparation of all the different ingredients that you need. In our case, and today that hasn't changed much the modular construction takes place in liminal space: in a space which is in between- because we don't own this space. We actually don't even hire this space- we use this space for a limited time. So - I've made a metaphor about cooking- about the kitchen- the acknowledgment of all the different ingredients now, the next thing that is more than ever important, when you look at modular construction from a multi cultural perspective- it means that whatever the contribution is going to be from whatever perspective its coming no perspective can be dominant...all the perspectives have to exist simultaneously. So modular construction, now in the 90's also involves synthesis of all the different ingredients and also involves synchronicity. I think that what has happened in the past ten years is that a modular construction is now more than ever possible to understand if you use the concept of synesthesia....that all the senses , together, create an extra sense experience and this is the objective of a modular construction....that if you put all these different layers together, in a transparent way by which you superimpose them on top of one another so that space and time gets shared by all the individuals so that the individual does not loose its characteristics, but joins larger energy fields. My particular interest is that modular constructions work on a psychic plane of peoples. So these collaborations take place under modular construction brings us in a way back to concepts of total theatre- to concepts of total energy- or to “Gesamtkunstwerk” which is a concept that is borrowed from music theater- perhaps especially Wagner- but other people were active in that as well. So the modular construction has gone into any space and any time.

Plexus *compressionist* process, through modular construction, created a complex community-based art environment in which particular and general components, individual identities and communities issues were represented and compressed together, within “*One plus One*” synergetic perception of the historical Plexus whole

reality, as the insider Sandro Dernini claimed in his paper *Sgusi Kunto Kosta Plexus?* (I beg your pardon, how much cost Plexus?)

One plus One equals Two. This does not apply to Plexus. In Plexus One plus One are synergetic and they create a causal interaction producing an additional value. Plexus is synergetic, it is living matter. But this is another story, look at "Physics of the Matter," "Aesthetics," and "Cybernetics." One plus One equals History of Art, which Art? Plexus Art! How the value of an art work is made? The cultural value is given by a basic economic law of demand and supply. The exchange value is modified by speculative operations of collectors and dealers who invest on that particular artist or, better, art movement. It gives more speculative opportunities in order to swell up the exchange of prices. "Il Cambio di Rotta" (The Change of Route) for Plexus could be to sum its cultural value with a new exchange value. For example, through limited editions of art works, "Plexus Money," "Plexus Stamps," "Plexus Certified Checks." For such purpose it is necessary to switch the exchange route with the market. Instead to be collectors and dealers to speculate on artists, Plexus should choose and invest on collectors and dealers like Franco Girina, who in the first person historically believed in Plexus without speculations, in order then that they will turn to the market their additional values, made artificially - scientifically. How much is the value today of the art works given in 1987 to the collector Girina as value exchange to print the "Passport for Plexus Serpent"? Surely more than before. One plus One equals History and to the establishment of a credit line for the International Art Community of Plexus.

Against the Slavery of Art "Isms"

Plexus, like other avant-garde historical art movements, took position against the trend of "isms" in modern and postmodern art history, but its unique provocative non Western move was to shift its artistic focus from the New York Artworld to the House of the Slaves of Goree, off Dakar, declared historical landmark by UNESCO, to locate symbolically a new *World Art Bank*, produced directly by the artists as independent producers. It was conceptualized as a statement against the slavery of art from the artmarket as well as a change of route toward a new geography of art. By setting its own art stage outside the Western Artworld, Plexus international strategic move was to identify the *Door of No Return* of the House of the Slaves in Goree as its symbolic historical site from where to start a *Repatriation of Art into the Community*, passing through the bronze age Nuraghic Mediterranean culture of Sardinia and the European political cultural context of Italy of the '70s.

Since 1988, the Door of No Return of the House of the Slaves became the symbolical site to renegotiate a new contract of art aesthetical, and ethical stage from where Plexus was performing its community-based artist identification claim as a challenge against the notion that the artistic identification was conferred to the artist only by the Artworld. Therefore, thus situated within the modern and postmodern debate, Plexus was challenging the hierarchical Western notion of *Artworld*.

Current financial reports from art auction houses showed art works just as exclusive and expensive commodity symbols traded against high money, like gold, diamonds or

stock exchange bonds. Art theories, definitions, categories and labels from the Artworld became essential for the high level economic transformation of artworks into money. The Artworld by conferring the labelling of “art,” at the same time, became heavy dependent from money and power creating in turn a kind of “art slavery”.

The insider Miguel Algarin in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter IV, called for attention for the risk that artists as an *elite* should be taken away from their community, if, he stressed, “we do not plant our feet on the sidewalk.” In the Lower East Side community of New York City, Plexus staged in 1986 the artopera *Eve* in which hundreds artists together performed the escaping of a metaphoric art slaves ship from the Artworld control. It was a statement for sweat equity, as the insider Lenny Horowitz stated in the *Eve*'s presentation, full text reported in Appendix A.

....Eve takes place on a mythological art slaves ship and is performed by more than 200 contemporary artists handcuffed together in an journey between reality and fantasy ending when.... Eve sits between Adam and God in the Sistine Chapel....The Marlboro robot arrives with the key words: 99 cents for a 200 artists Art Opera created and produced by all the artists together to establish an international art Community Credit Line and to establish SWEAT EQUITYNext fall the art slaves shuttle ship will cross the international sea to arrive in the bronze age of Sardinia in the summer 1987.

In 1987, Plexus art slaves ship, travelling through reality and mythology, landed in the Nuraghic culture of Sardinia, where in the megalithic sanctuary of Sa Itria, near Gavoi, it was staged the art coopera *Il Serpente di Pietra* (The Serpent of Stone), performed by 160 artists and presented as the first international art slaves market show made in contemporary history, conceived as a “challenge-game-show” on the Artworld's star system, as it was described by the insider Sandro Dernini in his paper *The Artist in the First Person*, fully reported in Appendix A.

160 artists of 23 different nationalities, that on July 4, 1987 arrived in the sanctuary of Sa Itria in Sardinia, were the real protagonists ‘in the first person’ of Plexus art co-opera n° 4, *Il Serpente di Pietra*. This event was organized as the first international art slaves market show, produced and managed by the artist in the first person. It took form in the confrontation, collision, encounter between all players of this Plexus ‘challenge-game-show’ on the star system of the art market. It was played by two teams mainly: A) the co-authors of ‘the anti-libretto’ for an art co-opera, made as a unitary and compressed presentation of the synchronized collective deconstruction of the serpent. B) The authors of ‘the libretto’ for an art opera as a modular and selective construction of individual art-works. The stake was the apple of the art star system. The supreme judge was the Serpent. In the atelier des arts that came first and built *Il Serpente di Pietra* Plexus interacted with the time-space of Sa Itria, a megalithic sanctuary, ten miles far from Gavoi (a small village at the center of the island of Sardinia, Italy), and with the times-spaces of the 160 artists speaking different languages and codes. The artist in the first person became the absolute winner of this Plexus game, playing as slave and working as artist, free indeed to express itself without curators, mediators and critics.

Sadie Plant in *The Most Radical Gesture. The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* described the European political and cultural context in the '70s and in the '80s,

after the French students' revolt in 1968, and the Italian Red Brigades in the '70s. She connected together all the XX Century's avant-garde art movements, by having in common the same need of freedom as well as to be in charge of their identity and history.

The situationists adopted some aspects of the forms of organization developed by their avant-garde predecessors. Together with the internationalism and eclecticism of Dada, the internal discipline exercised by the surrealists was carried into the SI where it served the primary purpose of constituting a group in control of its own destiny, a movement impossible to define in terms other than its own. The SI resisted all attempt to institutionalise its theory as an ideological "ism", and insisted that the group should have nothing in common with the hierarchical power, no matter what form it may take.²³

To understand how *Plexus Art Slavery Manifesto* originated in the '80s, relevant was to know the Italian historical avant-garde background of Plexus 23s coming from the provocative cultural slave market show organized for freedom of expression in the '70s, in Rome, by the L.I.A.C.A.

In the '80s, at the *Door of No Return* of the House of the Slaves of Goree in Senegal, Plexus started to stress out the risk for the artists to become slaves of the hierarchic star system of the Artworld, made by theories, isms, labels, categories and definitions, coming from its Western concept of "art." The Plexus provocative symbolic association of the tragic slavery history with the art market exploitation was initially strongly criticized inside Plexus through an *Open Call*, published in *Plexus Newsletter*, fully reported in Appendix A, and signed by Frank Shifreen, Lorenzo Pace, Larry Stanley, Hope Carr, Joi Huckaby, as members of the board of directors of Plexus International Art Urban Forum inc.

We resent the use of slave images in any literature, promotional material or propaganda when the use of such images results in the trivialization or simplification of the real African slave experience. More often than not, the Plexus literature, posters, flyers and invitation (a considerable amount) use images of slaves in bondage or in transit as cargo. It is offensive to trivialize history for the sake of artistic argument. Slavery and images of slavery are not merely metaphors. Slavery is the real experience of many hundreds of thousands of people. One cannot use a historical or current event as a vehicle for information without considering certain larger implications and slavery is central to both the American and African experiences. Certainly, there are similarities between the art market and the slave market, that in a disturbing way art has been reduced to a commodity like slaves: something to be bought and sold. However, there is a difference between comparison and equation. If Plexus as a movement stands for freedom of art, freedom of interdisciplinary communication, and freedom of the artists in the first person, then these political tenets must be conveyed without demonstrating the all too common patronising air of most radical/liberal movements. Evoking images of slaves without, or at least acknowledging, the impact is objectionable. Before certain metaphors are used in any Plexus propaganda such use should be examined and the producer

²³ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture. The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*, p. 81, 1992.

of such propaganda should first consider the potential social ramifications the use of that image may have.

The Plexus setting in the House of the Slaves of Goree and in Dakar was stressed by the insider Assane MBaye in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, as a reconciliation move between North and South.

The events in which I participated within the project of Plexus International are in effect multiple and different, both in idea and in action, realized with many difficulties, without money, with hard and very limited wealth from our side....Dakar-Plexus behind to be a strategic point between North and South and New York, Sardinia, Rome, Amsterdam, Dakar-Plexus movement goes to bring its serpent with a large "S." Goree is the symbol of a suffering history, the slavery and the Negro trade made the opening of the Atlantic sea and the invention of the "New World." All has begin from this, (door without return) today, as you say, we want to pass the limits of space-time, in the research of new dimensions throughout the ocean of art with new means of communication and of science...In the House of the Slaves, Goree, on August 26, 1988, we launched an open letter to the artists of the world to announce the arrival of the ship of the slaves of art which was previewed from December 23, 1988, to January 3, 1989. In the context of this encounter the artists have been invited to participate to the realization of the Art Co-Opera N. 5 "The Electromagnetic Serpent Ningki-Nangka and the Exile of Cheik Ahmadou Bamba", a synchronized and simultaneous presentation of art and science. It will be realized under the form of a parade spectacle in the island of Goree, in occasion of the second event of Plexus International, with a ritual ceremony made by the recovery of the sculpture of Arturo Lindsay, buried in the sacred land of Goree. It will give a great homage to the memory of the Diaspora, against racism and in the name of freedom of art. We wait with a great hope the international fund of art under the flag of universal reconciliation and we wait the arrival of the real ship of the former slaves of art on board the Elisabeth.

Intentionally, Plexus conceptualized its *Art Slavery Manifesto* and its provocative proposal of the opening of a World Art Bank at the *Door of No Return* of the House of the Slaves in the island of Gorée, Senegal, as a challenging creative move made outside the geography of the Western Artworld. On August 30 of 1988, at the House of the Slaves in the island of Goree, Dakar, *Plexus Art Slavery Manifesto* was presented internationally with an *Open Letter to All Artists of the World*, fully reported in Appendix A, to promote the renegotiation of a new contract of art.

After the first international event of the "Slaves of Art" in Sardinia, Italy, on July 4, 1987, with the participation of 160 artists from 23 nationalities; after the departure of the metaphoric trip in the history and mythology of "The Ship of the Slaves of Art," from New York on February 1986; there will be a second international event for the artists as independent producers in view of a debate on the Redefinition of Art and the research of a new kind of art contract, as a concrete expression according to the interests of the artists....In the island of Gorée, in the House of the Slaves, the final act will be performed as a homage to the freedom of the Human Being. The outcomes of this event will be reported to the world.

Therefore, Plexus International launches a call for all artists of the world to come to Dakar, from December 23, 1988, to January 3, 1989, to contribute to the opening of a credit line in favour of the International Art Community through the creation of an Art World Bank.

In January of 1989, at the Agit Art space in Dakar, on the occasion of the presentation to the press of the Plexus World Art Bank project, Dernini by recalling the sale at Sotheby's auction of Van Gogh's *Irises* for 53.9 million dollars showed to the Senegal Minister Aliasse Ba the latest reports on extraordinary high prices paid for artworks at the most important auction houses. Then, by recalling the Marcel Duchamp's provocative appointing of a "urinal" as a work of art, Dernini presented, full of Plexonian art money bills, a Plexus Campbell's soup can as a work of art.

Eating Art



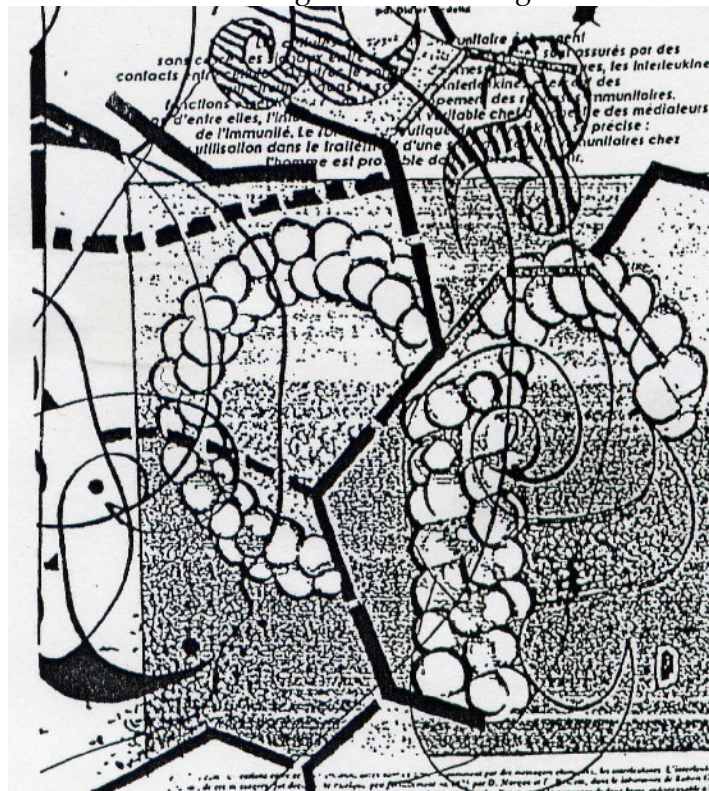
Artwork by Sandro Dernini, graphics by Ram Studio, New York 1988, photo Daniele Comelli.

Eating Art

On the sail of the Plexus toy boat *Libertè de l'Art*, the insider Gaetano Brundu painted his *moustache* symbol as a creative representation of the immunological cellular messenger Interleukine2. He described his creative genesis of certain forms and images in his recollection, partially reported in Appendix A.

In the middle of the 80's came the encounter with the Interleukin 2 or better with the image of its molecular model elaborated in the laboratories of the University of Paris VI and published in the monthly French journal *La Recherche* in the May 1986. That image, made by Rimsky e Norris, represents one of the plausible configurations of the IL2 (Interleukin 2) in the space...The image of that model of IL2 I have put next that of my "baffo" (moustache), they have interacted in various ways in my pages,...The general title of my operation was the same title of the article of *La Recherche*: "Les Messengers de l'Immunité."

Immunological Art Messengers



Artwork by Gaetano Brundu, Cagliari, 1986.

I was intrigued enough by those images very similar to mine "baffo," that appears suddenly on the panorama of science, connected to the mechanisms of immunity that are inner most mechanisms in defence of the organism. Also there a sign of strong vitality that I believe is at the bottom of the mystery of life and of the survival of beings and of species. The mystery of my fantasy solidified the animal pregerminal vitality and the intimate defence found themselves in my creative work, in my fantasy over a distance of years. From an other side I was intrigued by the same mystery that took care of the genesis of certain forms and images, the encounter between gesture from which was born my first moustache and the systematic methodology of scientific research that brought me the "plausible" model of that molecule. So my problem, as an artist in the first person, a solitary artist but a careful one, (so I believe), to what was happening in the world, in that of effects and of dreams, particularly in that of science

that in certain moments I do not know in which part to connect myself, between reality and fantasy. The problem tied to the mystery of genesis of forms, but also of a questioning of its subtle links to life that unify in time and space, aspects and ways of the existing which usually look without any connections between them. Naturally, as artist, neither this time did I feel bound to illustrate a theorem or some laws given prior or outside from my specific creativity; I was interested to go ahead with a process, an artistic process without even knowing the outcome. In this process intervened my way, also technical, to be an artist, the formal consolidated and fine games made over ten years above all through drawings, the consciousness of my particular collocation within the system of art. As an example of a drawing, I can remember that "Flight and Flights" that you know well because in 1976 we used for the poster of the concert of Scelsi that you organized at Spazio A. Therefore those two images, "the moustache" and IL2 interacted in the context of my drawing, and those marks derived from the quick gesture, from the sense of space that put in act familiar dynamics to me; they interacted with my history as an artist and with the intent of creating works of art, of constructing a new universe, of rhythms, of forms and sensibility.

Aesthetics in the late 80s, with the re-emerging role of art as a re-connected entity with the outside natural and social world, as result of the postmodern attack to the "autonomous art," has challenged also human capacities in dealing with multicultural changes of perception and values. The insider Sandro Dernini in his paper *The Metaphor as a Travelling Factory*, fully reported in Appendix A, pointed out the metaphoric relationship of art as food.

Art should not be considered only an exclusive 'commodity symbol' for commercial trade, but a 'food' for our nourishment, a compression of high 'know how,' not exclusive, not expensive, to fly with our bodymachine outside limits and borders of rational worlds and controlled markets. The metaphor is an ultra-rapid integrated communication system. It works with nanoseconds (billionths of a second), the time-scale with which today our logic computers are operating. One nanosecond is so fast that it exists before its rational thought. The metaphoric language of art can let us cross the boundaries of specialist fields, working by concatenated structures. Time-space, art, science, history, can only be compressed in a continuum in evolution, never consumed, only imperfectly perceived through their developments and jumps of discontinuity, as a serpent eating its tail act as self nourishment, which does not disappear consuming itself, but transforms itself continuously, recycling its matter. Not understanding and not accepting our common nature, and at the same time diversity, created an antagonism that took root in all different levels of our everyday life individually and collectively. The loss of freedom for the diversity to cohabit with the homogeneous more organized majority has been the cause of conflicts between different worlds, with the continuous attempt at predominance by one identity over the other: the stronger over the weaker, the more rational over the less or a-rational, the white over the black or red, the richer over the poorer and Adam over Eve. Against this antagonism the pluralism of the Serpent metaphor has been deconstructed by Plexus to defend Human Rights against any discrimination, selection, racism and Apartheid... Therefore, Plexus art co-opera, as an art project, is consumed by human beings (artists and audience) and this consumption causes cultural and physiological reactions affecting their metabolism, and interacting between them and interlacing with the biocultural evolution. There is always an interaction between culture and nature. May be art is the gene 'nonsense' of our genetic evolution and Plexus can be the image of a researcher of the invisible, where however the invisible is a word and a world of modern science. The metaphor for its pluralistic interpretations is used by Plexus project as the 'travelling factory' for its multi-lateral recall products. Plexus uses rational and a-rational methodologies in a coloured framework of global vision and relativity to try to

discover in which panorama the art co-opera, at the same time object and subject, is moving. For the 90's Plexus art co-opera should be considered as a materialized metaphor, and art should be produced, consumed and loved as a dematerialized food to recall our ancestral memory.

Dernini further claimed for Plexus the identity of a sociobiological mutant in evolution, helped by the metaphor of art to see further than optical possibility, like the dolphins, mammalian like the humans, were already doing with their electromagnetic sonar.

Official history with its ages and schools is not the measure of reality. The human being has modified with culture the rules of history, of its own natural evolution. To know the future is also to look back to the past, to arrive at the sources of our common roots, where the game of the metaphor can contain the memory of our lost ancestors. The metaphor of art can help us to see beyond the optical and rational horizon, Plexus can be considered as a mutant following its sociobiological evolution as a dolphin, member of our common class of mammalian that sees by means of its bio-electromagnetic sonar.

In his paper *Solar Plexus*, fully reported in Appendix A, Dernini further claimed that there was sociobiological crossing over between art and biology.

The human being is made by a physical integrated system, a socio-biological organism absorbing and transforming "energy," that provides necessary ionic charges for its biochemical reactions. These ionic charges effect the recombination of many conductive chemicals in solution in the human body, during the physiological metabolism process from "Matter-Food" into "Matter-Energy." The ionic recombination supply necessary conditions for the human being to exist and to think. Through networks of differentiated cells in communication together by interactive systems (Plexus or Chakras) this "Energy" is responsible of the biological information and its genetic transmission. The human being like the physical world, with all its animate and inanimate realities, is made in space and time by ionic transformations of differentiated states of "Energy-Matter." Our and their diversity in forms and behaviours in only a phenomenological effect of the relativism of the atomic crystal configuration on which the micro and macro realm of our reality is built. The human being's whole life is time-factored by energy configurations and transformations of the ionic crystal mask of "Matter," from computer silicon chips to the physiological sodium pump of human cellular membranes, from snow to rocks of mountains, from chromosome's DNA to skeleton bones, from eating to moving, from thinking to conversation. Through "Art" as "Energy-Information", we may develop its own socio-biological evolutive communication system to perceive, beyond our current optical rational limits, the immunological code of more evolved information biological systems, such as the electromagnetic dolphin's sonar, mammalian beings like us.

Aesthetics in the 80's became also a sociobiological realm of investigation and a critical issue in the philosophical debate upon the free will of the human being with respect to the supposed determinism of cognitive sociobiology. Edward Wilson argued in *Biofilia* that "art" was a living structure born from the environmental interaction between biology and culture, "a device for exploration and discovery" which, like a human mind, grows by absorbing parts of the culture in existence.

AT THE MOMENT the spark ignites, when intuition and metaphor are all-important, the artist most closely resembles the scientist. But he does not then press on toward natural law and self-dissolution transference of images and control of emotions in others....The mind is biologically prone to discursive communication that expands thought. Mankind, in Richard Rorty's expression, is the poetic species. The symbols of art, music, and language freight power well beyond their outward and literal meanings. So each one also condenses large quantities of information. Just as mathematical equations allow us to move swiftly across large amounts of knowledge and spring into the unknown, the symbols of art gather human experience into novel forms in order to evoke a more intense perception in others. Human beings live — literally live, if life is equated with the mind - by symbols, particularly words, because the brain is constructed to process information almost exclusively in their terms. I have spoken of art as a device for exploration and discovery. Its practitioners and expert observers, whose authorities are beyond question, have stressed other functions as well.²⁴

Eve Vaterlaus highlighted in her recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, the relationship among, art process, problem solving and artists controlling factors.

This piece was technically difficult, if simple in concept. The photo blueprints were so large that they had to be exposed in the dark at a great distance for very long periods of time in order to print. I had to completely darken my entire loft for about a week and live with the ongoing exposures of my images, which supplied the only light. Then, when it came time to install the images, printed on fragile blueprint paper, in the pool I found that the walls were continually damp from condensation and it was difficult to stick them up, but I did find a solution. This piece was very satisfying in every way, beginning with shooting the photos, through solving the execution, the final look of the piece, and it was completely new work for me....Thus, my experiences with Plexus always demanded growth and change and new achievements in my work, as well as growth through meeting and working with large gangs of artists I would not have otherwise met.

David Ecker described the artistic process as a *problem solving* method and art as an affair of intelligence in qualitative ordering.

Just as the law of logic are the controls by which theoretical symbols are arranged in scientific inquiry, so these pervasive qualities act as *controls* -directive criteria – by which component qualities are arranged in the artistic process. The artist utilizes qualitative method to arrange the qualitative means toward qualitative ends. Art, therefore, is an affair of intelligence – it is intelligence in qualitative ordering. The arts can now be seen as *specialized* products of qualitative intelligence.²⁵

Ecker further pointed out intelligence as an “affair of experience,” a creative activity of ordering “means to ends.”

Intelligence, as here conceived, is the procedure of ordering means to ends; it involves purpose and control. Intelligence is always an affair of experience; it is a dynamic process which arises from past experience; it acts significantly to modify the

²⁴ Edward O. Wilson, *Biofilia*, p. 74, 1985.

²⁵ David W. Ecker, “The Artistic Process as Qualitative Problem Solving”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism* 21/3, p. 287, 1963.

context of present experience; and it is assessed in terms of its consequences in future experience. It is, then, a reconstructive, creative activity whereby presents materials (alternative means) are selected and rejected on the basis of whether they will secure anticipated futures (selected ends).²⁶

Ecker further clarified the conception of intelligence:

The conception of intelligence, which is equated with cognitive activity, is usually joined with the idea that reasoning at its best is a means by which man can get to know reality, the nature of the good, higher truths, or God. This "absolute knowledge," valued as the most worthy of human goals or ends, is to be achieved by dialectical, deductive or a priori methods of discursive thought. But whatever spiritual values are obtained by this kind of thought are more than offset by the notorious failure of these dialectical methods to solve the insistent and demanding problems of men-the problem of survival in the face of the vicissitudes of nature, as well as the problems of associative living. In striking contrast are the enormous successes of the empirical method and procedures of modern science in solving many of the problems of this world, among them the control of disease, maintenance of a food supply and adequate shelter-even the problem of national defense, where the most abstract of the physical sciences have practical bearings on human affairs. Thus scientific knowledge is instrumental; it is valued as a *means* rather as an ultimate end.²⁷

John Dewey in *Art as Experience* pointed out the significant value of the purpose's capacity "to overcome and utilize resistance, to administer materials," which fitted fully with the intentional purpose that originated *Plexus Black Box*. Dewey further clarified the significance of purpose as a controlling factor, by an individual transforming imaginative material into the matter of a work of art, leading to the integration of object and subject.

The significance of purpose as a controlling factor in both production and appreciation is often missed because purpose is identified with pious wish and what is sometimes called a motive. A purpose exists only in terms of subject matter....Purpose is this identification in action. Its operation in and through objective conditions is a test of its genuineness; the capacity of the purpose to overcome and utilize resistance, to administer materials,...²⁸

The insider Paolo Maltese described metaphorically in his paper *An Infinite Serpent*, fully reported in Appendix A, Plexus like "an infinite serpent rising up to the tree of knowledge, renewing unity and consistence to self-conscious and common research."

PLEXUS is therefore a metaphor in which observations, analyses, discussions, reflections, actions, pilot-shows, stretched to encourage the continuation of research, all come together, and like an infinite serpent rising up to tree of knowledge, renews unity and consistence to self-conscious and common research. In this way, by adventuring into mists of metaphor, myth and archetypes, one is brought closer to the mysterious since the metaphor is enemy of appearance, is the damp earth, and is the roots. Behind it lays the mystery of the future, the continuation of imaginary threads still be defined and fully

²⁶ David W. Ecker, "Development of Qualitative Intelligence", p. 173, 1971.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 276-277, 1980.

elaborated, as PLEXUS looks for. Thus, PLEXUS project does not set itself easy objectives, so in an Event of such vast size as that of Gavoi (Sardinia), and based on very ambitious goals, (but also still very uncertain), the danger of rhetoric,

indefiniteness and superficiality continually remain a possible trap.

The insider Franco Meloni in his paper *Paradox*, fully reported in Appendix A, gave a description how Plexus was fostering connections between different domain of knowledge and increasing creative concepts and connective sensations.

Any serious consideration of PLEXUS must take into account the distinction between the objective reality, which is independent of any theory, and the physical concepts with which the theory operates.* A. Einstein, B. Podolsky and N. Rosen, Physical Rev. 47, 777 (1935)

* (Physical Theory, in the original...)

Why to use a fundamental article at the basis of the unsolved questionable dispute between the probabilistic exponents of the Copenhagen School, and the deterministic scientists, Einstein *et al.*, to introduce a discussion concerning PLEXUS? To gain credibility, for example. And because of the intimate fashion that I see looking to problems involving few definite positions and many possible developments able to augment our desire to implement connections between different domains of knowledge. The most exciting and sometime appealing question I have ever heard in these two years of activity in PLEXUS concerns my position as scientific entity in the not-ever-clear artistic movement. Generally, - What is PLEXUS? and what is your position in it? - is a very intriguing statement, mainly because of the complexity of the answer. I have tried many times to avoid a clear definition, but a night, forced by Sandro, a kind of equation came out in the form: $PLEXUS = k_B \ln \Omega$.

There is a strong influence in this late-night output due to my old love for Boltzmann and for the implication that the true formula, where $PLEXUS = S$, the entropy of the system, had for the developments of Physics in many directions. It is very easy to connect the statement to many concepts in some way related to PLEXUS:

- i) there is the sense of the whole system as composed by separate but important parts: the artist in the first person;
- ii) there is the answer concerning the system as open or not, and the consequent entropy increment, with or without critical filters;
- iii) there is the close connection with the freedom of and in communication, Shannon relations of 1948 defining information as the difference of entropy before and after a message, and PLEXUS concerns also information;
- iv) there is in general the relationship between order and disorder;
- v) there is something of artistic in the definition of non-deterministic entities, in a sense exciting as von Neuman said on the term entropy related to information: "...no one knows what entropy really is, so in a debate you will always have the advantage";
- vi) PLEXUS needs creative concepts, and with logical Ralston matrices also a little of statistical mechanics may aid to increase the number of connective sensations among us.

The insider George Chaikin in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, described his interest on mechanism of perception and how through he started his participation in Plexus with the objective to facilitate face to face communications among people.

My initial understanding of Plexus Black Box through my participation, made by the art work, the Haddamard Matrix retina, a device for image compression, for reducing information, was to facilitate face to face communications among

artists all over the world....My relationship with Plexus started in 1985 on the occasion of the memorial for the death of Ralston Farina, a performing artist. Through Willoughby Sharp I met Plexus in that occasion at CUANDO. Time was gravity for Ralston holding him down. The concept of "time-art" was that art was

related to time. In 1985 I showed at CUANDO a large copy of the Haddamard Matrix dedicated to Ralston; in 1986 I started the mass-production of 1000 copies of it to be distributed to the audience at CUANDO through the air fan of Ralston. In 1987 I produced an interactive telecommunication art event with Willoughby Sharp. In the same year I participated in the Symposium on the Dematerialization of Art, held at NYU-ICASA where I produced several hundred copies of my Haddamard Matrix drawing and distributed them by leaving them on the chairs of the audience. A journalist, from the audience asked to me why it was art, when it was not looked at like it was expected to be, in some customary way. In 1988 I faxed it from NYU to Sardinia. Most of what I did was engaged with the memory of Ralston Farina and to mechanisms of perception. I am interested in studies on aesthetic perception and divine proportion. The ultimate objective of my participation in Plexus was to facilitate communications among people, and I started to realize how I could use my model of vision, based on the sunflower model, to reduce a great quantity of information in the process of telecommunication broadcasting.

In Dakar, the insider Youssouph Traore described in his presentation, fully reported in Appendix A, Plexus as an experimental project of interaction between artists and scientists, stimulating mutual cooperation and critical dialogue among all participants.

Plexus is a project of an international structure of communication for artists and scientists interested in the interaction of art and science within the everyday life. Born in 1982 in New York, Plexus has evolved considerably in the realm of the experimental and interdisciplinary research. Since 1985, it never stopped to stimulate the mutual process of artistic and scientific cooperation. Cooperation realized by the critic dialogue without barriers, with also the use of the new communication technologies. Next to these practical aspects, Plexus has other dimensions more or less complex, place for reflection, and for information.

The insider Sandro Dernini in his paper *The Metaphor as a Travelling Factory* pointed out how in Plexus art co-operas the metaphor was used as multi-category framework bridging art and science as well as knowledge and unconsciousness.

The metaphoric language of art can be used efficaciously as an international and interdisciplinary system for a more qualified information and education if synchronized with modern science and coloured with universal myths. Plexus art co-opera uses the metaphor as a multi-category framework, as a crossing over between knowledge and unconsciousness.

The artistic activity as a mode of biological adaptation was claimed by Morse Peckham, a mode of adaptation of the human organism to a non-human environment, in which "art operates as a disjunctive category," through discontinuity and chaos, exercising our modes of perception.

Art, as an adaptational mechanism, is reinforcement of the ability to be aware of the disparity between behavioural pattern and the demands consequent upon the interaction with the environment. Art is rehearsal for those real situations in

which it is vital for our survival to endure cognitive tension, to refuse the comforts of validation by effective congruence when such validation is inappropriate because too vital interests are at stake; art is the reinforcement of the capacity to endure disorientation so that a real and significant problem may emerge.²⁹

In Plexus art process, participants and environment were interdependent, from each other as well as from the whole environment in which Plexus event, conceived as art co-opera, was taking place, as a necessary ecological condition for a unified survival of participants and environment. Plexus art co-opera process linked participant artists as interdependent individual systems sharing together a common patrimony, as it was pointed out by the insider Sandro Dernini in his *The Metaphor as a Travelling Factory*.

In Plexus, in which the artist in the first person coexists as an individual system with other systems, there is a common patrimony which is shared collectively, and the artist has to be aware of the interdependence of each in the modular construction of Plexus art co-opera.

Plexus participants were interactive members of an "informational network," that by retroactive driving feedbacks was sharing survival "metamessages" among its participants, within an "ecological mind system," as Gregory Bateson claimed in *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*.

Therefore, if B is going to deal with A's indication, it is absolutely necessary that B knows what those indications mean. Thus, there comes into existence another class of information, which B must assimilate, to tell B about the coding of messages or indications coming from A. Messages of this class will be, not about A or B, but about the coding of messages. They will be of a different logical type. I will call them metamessages.³⁰

Chet Bowers in *Implications of Gregory Bateson's Ideas for a Semiotic of Art Education* pointed out that Bateson by linking the individual to the whole environment, in which she or he was part, challenged the anthropocentric Western culture and opened a radical new way of understanding art, in which "art" was not anymore a "simple expression of the individual's inner mental state, but a significant part of a system or ecology of relationships." He pointed out further that "we can begin to shift the focus of attention from the plenitude of individual self-expression to the plenitude of relationships that we share with each other and other life forms and to start to understand how the image of the self as an autonomous individual has contributed to the non recognition of the larger informational network that constitutes the person's relations with other people and the natural environment."

Through *Plexus Black Box*, made by a plenitude of interrelated contributions, Plexus participants started to perceive themselves part of a broader informational network

²⁹ Morse Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos*, p. 314, 1965.

³⁰ Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, p. 115, 1979.

bridging together different experiences. John Dewey in *Art as Experience* claimed that when works of art from different cultures meet together it enlarges experience.

Nevertheless, when the art of another culture enters into attitudes that determine our experience genuine continuity is effected. Our own experience does not thereby lose its individuality but it takes unto itself and weds elements that expand its significance. A community and continuity that do not exist physically are created.³¹

The need of new metaphors and new languages was claimed by John Gilbert.

We will need new metaphors to shape our understanding of performance, for performance is explained perhaps a little too easily as the surface of the work which changes in relation to the deep counters. We may need to come to a deepening of our own understanding of depth counters as they relate to specific media. While Heidegger pointed to the poet as thinker, the time has come for the artists as thinker to articulate new metaphors and new languages. This is, I submit, precisely what they are doing as they perform their art--that is form-it-through to its existence in its medium.³²

The insider Willem Brugman in his recollection, fully reported in Chapter III, foresaw coming in Plexus the time for the artist as thinker to articulate new languages and metaphors.

We have to think about the area in the beginning of the century by which music, dance and theatre as a music theatre concept came together. We have to make sure that Black Box will tell us after what had happened, what dramatic event had happened up to the point of the present that life would continue that certain things are and will be preserved.

The insider Antonello Dessi in his announcement *Multiples of Black*, fully reported in Appendix A, described as a metaphoric journey his Plexus installation.

...is a metaphoric journey through spatial metaphors of the West. Inside, there are inserted main knot points of Western culture. At the entrance, there is positioned the Mediterranean mother with two umbilical cords, one toward the top and the other toward the bottom. Objects of Plexus Storage and of Plexus Black Box are channelled metamorphosed toward the symbolic representation of death.

"Art" as a shareable lived experience was pointed out by Lucy Lippard as relevant in the foundation of a social vision within new emerging multicultural perceptions.

One's own lived experience, respectfully related to that of others, remains for me the best foundation for social vision, of which art is a significant part. Personal association, education, political and environmental contexts, class and ethnic backgrounds, value systems and market values, all exert their pressures on the interaction between eye, mind, and image. In fact, cross-cultural perception demands the repudiation of many unquestioned, socially received criteria and the exhumation of truly "personal" tastes. It is not easy to get people to think for

³¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 336, 1980.

³² John Gilbert, *Qualitative Evaluation in the Arts*, p. 77, 1984.

themselves when it comes to art because the field has become mystified to the point where many people doubt and are even embarrassed by their own responses; artists themselves have become separated from their audiences and controlled by the values of those who buy their work.³³

The metaphoric concept of *Eating Art*, within *Plexus Black Box* art process, allowed dialogues and interdisciplinary exchanges among participants, bringing the community and the academy closer together, by linking the notion of “art” as a culture-bound aesthetic experience, to the concept of “well being” as a multicultural paradigm enhancing the quality of life in the community. The conceptualization of “Art” as “a human resource for a sustainable development” evolved in Plexus in the late ‘90s, related not only to its incredible high money value, but, and first of all, to its evolutionary capacity to modify human evolution and increase humankind well being.

Well-Being in the XXI Century

The last *Plexus Black Box* event under this inquiry, held in 1993 at the NYU Rosenberg Gallery, was focused on the theme of “Art, Well Being and Reconciliation” with the purpose to develop channels of communication and collaboration between the New York University and Lower East Side cultural and artists organizations. This Plexus event was focused to issues of multiculturalism in art, within the NYU course *Current Issues in Art Education*, conducted by David Ecker.

David Ecker in his paper *Cultural Navigation*, fully reported in Appendix A, raised the claim that it was imperative to bring artistic and aesthetic dimensions into the vision of a new model of “well being.”

The nutritional, social, ethical, and economic aspects of well-being will undoubtedly receive critical attention in the proceedings of the Forum. But the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of life as we live it must figure in any formulation of a comprehensive vision of well-being. The arts make visible our cultural identity and diversity, and provide a direct measure of the vitality of the culture in which a particular art object or event is embedded. It follows that the arts and their living traditions have a special role to play in the relation to the well-being of the members of each of the cultures of the world.

David Ecker underlined how the model of “the artist as researcher” affected many NYU students in regards to their consciousness of the survival of their own cultural and artistic traditions.

While these students come to New York University to learn how to become artists and art educators in the modern world, many of them return to their places of origin with a reawakened consciousness of their own art traditions, a strengthened sense of purpose, and a deeply felt need for cultural renewal.³⁴

³³ Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessing. New Art in a Multicultural America*, p. 7-8, 1990.

³⁴ David W. Ecker, “The Artist as Researcher: The Role of the Artist in Advancing Living Traditions”, p. 3, 1990.

David Ecker further pointed out how this reawakening of consciousness was directly related to the well-being of the artists within their own community.

The felt need to preserve the meanings of a tradition in modern life is directly proportional to the loss of spiritual and material well-being of the artists and artisans sustaining an indigenous culture.³⁵

The position of the Rosenberg Gallery, in the NYU Barney Building, in the Lower East Side was strategically used to facilitate a broader participation from the community, including some radical activists. It was very complex and hard because of the diversity of positions, from one side the homogeneous institutional academic system and to the other side the heterogeneous community complex.

The insider Frank Pio in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A, pointed out Plexus difficulties in bridging the community and the academy during the Plexus event at the NYU Rosenberg Gallery.

I co-curated the last Plexus Black Box show at Rosenberg Gallery and my role was to organize the spiritual ritual elements of the show. My participation was also to re-activate the spiritual components of the Plexus Black Box which were lacking in strength and my pieces on the Madonna and Angels was about it. I like to recall the opening ritual of the show in which the most important part was the ritual aspect of it. Most people did not understand initially so many texts. The ritual to take everybody outside. Plexus Black Box was about all this information and about Sandro's dissertation. Plexus as community-based art organization was dealing with "Plexus Black Box" on the issue of the reconciliation through art in the community. Plexus Well Being and Reconciliation is some how for my interpretation a way to communicate, to create a dialogue how we can interact together around the world. My vision was related to universal aspects of the planet as it was stated by Marshall McLuhan. The "Plexus Black Box" was brought back to the community to avoid to continue to be contaminated by the academic institution because there were no interests of dialogue with the Lower East Side Community. The students of current issues in art education were invited to participate in the show and to discuss what they experienced there. It became an issue of current issue of art education because of its institutional standard setting. The cards of curriculum game were placed in the show as introduction to an art community-based art education program.

During this two weeks, curated by the researcher and Frank Pio, it was explored the possibility to build bridges between the university and the multicultural community of the Lower East Side by developing a community-based art education project and increasing interactive dialogue between artists, students, teachers, community activists, and city commissioners. Its aim was to reinforce the role of the artist as a cultural producer in the community, who through her/his aesthetic experience was setting impact in the quality of life, with a sense of broader "*well being*" as it was stated in the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

definition of "health" by the World Health Organization: "*health is the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*"

With the development of the 1992 *Columbus Open Call of Reconciliation for the Well Being in the XXI Century*, Plexus has made a contribution toward the advancement of the Well Being in the XXI Century, by promoting a creative approach for a route correction in the use of the human resources, document fully reported in Appendix B.

Therefore we issue an OPEN CALL for the development of creative approaches to the empowerment of the individual and of the community. We need alternative visions to attain the ROUTE CORRECTION necessary to bring about the true meaning of the CALL FOR RECONCILIATION and WELL BEING in the XXIst Century.

In 1995, within *Navigating Global Cultures*, an experimental collaboration between the Commission on Experimental Aesthetics of the New York University School of Education and the Interdepartmental Well Being Centre of the University of Cagliari, *Plexus Black Box* served as the creative platform for the launching from the Elisabeth boat, anchored in the harbour of Cagliari, of the *Marconi Open Call for the Well Being in the XXI Century*, fully reported in Appendix B.

We are a single, interdependent, world-wide specie.
Whether we like it or not,
We are intimately bound up with each other around the earth.
East and west, north and south,
Our fate is linked together.
Thus, a global view of human health is more essential now than ever before.

The insider Franco Meloni, as coordinator of the Interdepartmental Well Centre of the University of Cagliari, in his paper *Global Navigations*, fully reported in Appendix A, pointed out how Plexus was foreseen as a creative route bridging art and science to arrive to the well being.

Global Navigations. A name that inspires spaces, borders and possible targets. A name that represents a step in the evolution of an attempt to compare different cultures and peoples. Any of them with a proper character, to obtain a vision more complete to solve some problems always present with their fascinating complexity. The big discovers and the reached aims make confident in a possible progress of all the social components through a progressive improvement of our way of living. But if an insight of the new poverty fixes one dollar as a daily resource of billion people today, with which false security is it possible to face the solution of an equal distribution of the richness when enormous differences concern the lives of a lot of people. The methods, the weapons the determinate will to act can and must come from the right components though of as critical consciousness of the society. First among them the University, for the knowledge that should represent and for the mixing of cultural relationships that could realise.

Art should have the same importance if we think that only with a complete connection of reasons and feelings it is possible to realise unthinkable projects. For Art and Science is written on the main entrance of the Cooper Union School of Architecture in New York, and the memory goes to the speech about the freedom of slaves by Abraham Lincoln. In the same sense of this speech,

supported by reason for a fair human cause, the research trail of the right instruments to modify and to interpret the reality around us must be based on a scenario that can change name, and from PLEXUS we can arrive to Well Being, but must maintain coherently the route that through tracings in the mind and in the time not always linear, takes to the definition of the proper responsible role in the life.

Plexus Black Box became a creative framework to reopen informal local and international channels of communication, among individuals, young artists and masters, students and teachers, in separated communities of different cultures, as the insider Josè Rodriguez pointed out in his recollection, fully reported in Appendix A

In this context, the concept of Plexus Black Box grew as an educational community-based art project, in a broader cultural sense, creating channels of communication among different communities involved in Plexus activities to express their art experiences in connecting themselves with other cultural diversities and to educate the young generations in this multicultural diversity to understand what is art within and out their own culture, and to accept that the world, the society and any community is made by a diversity of many kind groups or cultural experiences. It will help to define themselves. The role of Plexus Black Box is to expose, to integrate all aspects of the society, art is one of these as well as science and technology. The concept of Plexus Black Box is a growing concept of a scientific system build in an institutional academic setting which is integrating artistic and cultural experiences in the community met during its growing. The knowledge of one is integrated into the knowledge of other one.

Jose Rodriguez further argued in his paper *The Voyage of the Elisabeth, Cultural Navigation and Community: Art Reconciliation and Well Being*, fully reported in Appendix A, on the survival need of a redefinition of a new multicultural synthesis, as a new paradigm for a new model of vision of well being in the XXI Century.

The Artist in the First Person and its praxis within the community insurance's the possibility of naming and defining the cultural production. The possibility of reconciliation among individuals and cultures is only possible through a reality base on multiplicity and diversity. The only way in which this diversity may reconcile is within the bridge of the cultural navigation. Multiplicity-diversity: pluralism is the only possibility of freedom! Freedom that defines the subject as the Permanent becoming as the possibility of a synthesis of the diversity. This cultural synthesis is the concretization of the well being for our present and for the possibility of the next Century. The Well Being is possible as far as the artist and its community are able to develop and create a new cultural synthesis.

The Insider Paolo Maltese in his paper *An Infinite Serpent*, fully reported in Appendix A, by arguing on Plexus art slaves event held in Gavoi, Sardinia, pointed out claims the need to reflect how Plexus and its interdisciplinary dialogue could turn into "History."

At this point Cicero springs to my mind, who used to ask himself, how soothsayers managed not to laugh when they met each other. The Gavoi opportunity has been useful, useful because it allowed contacts and feed-backs between artists who came from different areas, and who did not know each other. Among these were the inhabitants of Gavoi, a town in the centre of the Barbagia of Sardinia that accepted what could be defined as being - for Gavoi - a

challenge. It was an important occasion for the inhabitant of Gavoi to reflect on what to do in the future, just as for PLEXUS to find proof for an interdisciplinary dialogue, got out from the usual artistic contexts (and scientific). This is the point I should like to emphasise: that what happened in Gavoi could become "History," in other words it could be the catalyst of reflections for everybody, for PLEXUS, thoughts which in their turn produce more thoughts and future realities for everyone, all in a continual spiral (the serpent), toward a future growth which is "History."

Final Remarks

Sandro Dernini identified non feasible to conclude his study with "*one-point perspective*" understanding but with a multi-perspective "emic" understanding of *Plexus Black Box*.

At the end of his inquiry, the interpretation of *Plexus Black Box* was presented by Dernini not as a conclusion, but as an open contribution to a critical aesthetic discourse. It was made with the aim to move from a misunderstanding of the interwoven aesthetics of *Plexus Black Box* to its understanding as an open art form related to the complexity of the contemporary art debate.

The inquiry at its beginning questioned the objective validity of insider accounts and related "emic" procedures. At the end of the study, the intense participation of insiders, who have sustained Dernini in his long efforts, allowed marginal components of the study, hidden or isolated in the margin of the field research, to arrive to the kernel or thematic center of the inquiry.

From the artificial manipulation and split of the unity of the identities conducted by Dernini, it originated that kind of critical contribution that was expected to be produced by a scholarly conducted research.

To stress that was no one-point conclusion in his study, Dernini intentionally ended it with the openness of the non Western act of reflection of the insider Kre MBaye, fully reported in Appendix A.

Plexus is a tendency in direction of the universal of the civilization. It is a way to put together all people, it is a tendency to watch what happens in this planet with a consciousness of what happens, with no separation between the world and the human being. Plexus is not an organization, it is more about a philosophy, a thought, a proposition, a view on how we deal with the issue of the human being. It is a tendency in direction of the unity, against any definitions or classifications which make separations. Without unity, in the respect of the diversity and quality of the human being, there is not democracy.

The Voyage Continues



Artwork by Kre MBaye, Dakar, 1986.