

In a series of all night talks, in the fall of 1981, in the kitchen of Sandro Dernini's, in the East 6<sup>th</sup> Street, between Avenue A and First Avenue, in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, with Giancarlo Schiaffini and other two Italian musicians, Antonello Neri and Massimo Cohen, the seminal idea of Plexus came out. By discussing on existing limitations of expression for contemporary experimental art works within cultural institutions, they envisioned a new format of an independent multi-arts space in which artists could have the freedom to express their researches, free to have their open critical dialogues, without filters, limitations, pressures, mediators (art critics, dealers, agents, etc.) from the art system. They felt, as a survival need, that it was necessary for "the artist in the first person" to create their own channels of communication, with their definitions or no definitions, in order to survive from the interferences of the art market.



Giancarlo Schiaffini, Rome 1997

Sandro Dernini, New York 1981, photo by Lynne Kanter

Schiaffini, Neri and Cohen were performing at the *Center for Italian Contemporary Culture* at New York University, directed by Sandro Dernini, a former biochemist at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and cultural organizer for many years in Italy, who had collaborated with Schiaffini and his group *Nuove Forme Sonore* since mid 70's, at *Spazio A*, an alternative cultural space in Cagliari, Sardinia, member of the L.I.A.C.A. (Italian League Alternative Cultural Associations).

The Italian experience



L.I.A.C.A. Event for Freedom of Expression  
Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome 1976, photo by  
Beppe Forli



Contemporary Music Program by Nuove Forme  
Sonore, dedicated to Giacinto Scelsi, at Spazio A,  
Cagliari (Sardinia) 1979, artwork by Gaetano  
Brundu

In that particular historical political context of the 70's with in Italy Red Brigades and strong civil society and students protests, the *L.I.A.C.A.*, based in Rome, was very active in defending the freedom of expression, against the police's repression closing most of all alternative cultural spaces as sites of political dissent. It was constituted in 1976, in a press conference held at the *Filmstudio* on March 9, after that in Naples several cultural spaces were closet by the police. It was made initially by *AIACE*, *Filmstudio*, *Teatro in Trastevere*, *l'Occhio L'Orecchio La Bocca*, *Politecnico*, *Alberico*, *Beat 72*, *La Maddalena*, *Mago d'Oz*, *il Sabelli*, *La Comune*, *Cento Fiori L'Officina*, *il Murales*, all based in Rome, *Obraz Cineclub* in Milan and *Spazio A* in Cagliari.

#### Freedom of Expression



Dominot



Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome 1976, photos by Beppe Forli



Daniela Gara

In order to raise attention on the lost of freedom of expression, *L.I.A.C.A.* in the summer of 1976 staged an outdoor happening in Rome, in piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere. The *L.I.A.C.A.* had the very important seminal role in the birth of the *Roman Summer*, a cultural program by the City of Rome, built on the experience of the outdoor film festival *Massenzio*, held in the Roman imperial fora, for the first time, in 1977 by *AIACE*, *Filmstudio70*, *l'Occhio L'Orecchio La Bocca*, and *Politecnico*. In December of 1979, at *Il Cielo*, a performance space managed by Romano Rocchi, a group of *L.I.A.C.A.* members, following an idea of Giovanna Ducrot developed from Sandro Dernini's home ritual games, organized the controversial event *The Slaves Cultural Market Show*, where participants starting from Maurizio Millenotti, Rossella Manfredi, Flavio Merkel, Paola Muzzi sold themselves as slaves in an auction open to the general public.

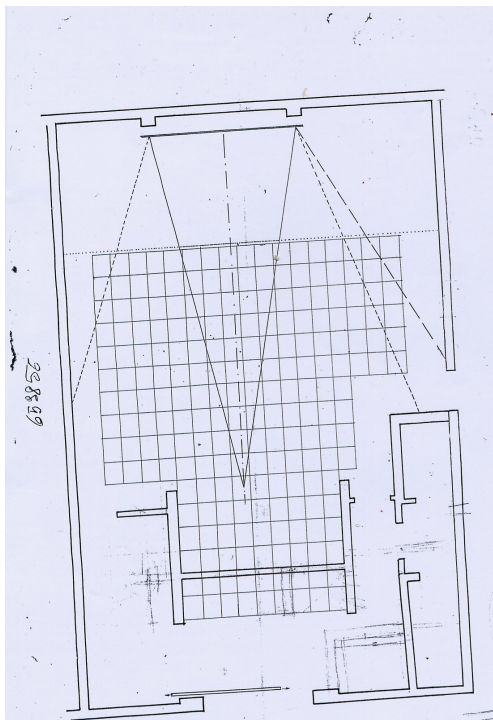


## Freedom of Expression



Performance by Claudio Mapelli and Romano Rocchi, Trastevere- Rome 1976, photos by Beppe Forlì

## The Historical Italian Alternative Cultural Experience of the L.I.A.C.A.



Architectural plan of Spazio A  
Cagliari (Sardinia) 1976 by Piernicola Cocco



Gianni Romoli, Stelio Fiorenza, Massimo Vincenti  
Flavio Merkel, Paola Muzzi, Sandra Montagna  
Giovanna Ducrot, Sandro Dernini, Cristina Torelli  
Rome 2002

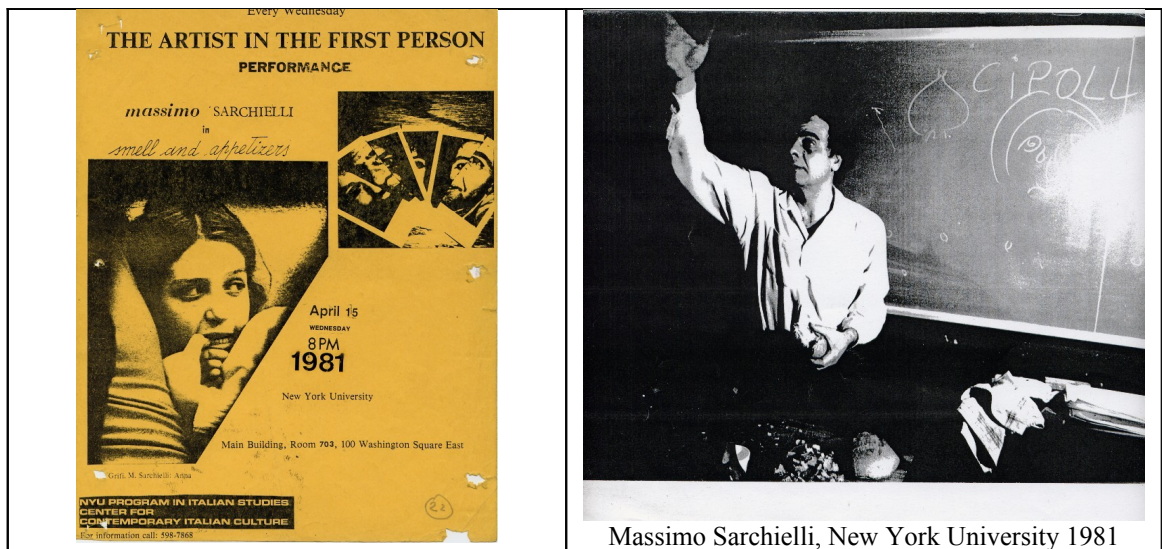
## L.I.A.C.A. Historical Players



Gianni Romoli, Stelio Fiorenza, Massimo Vincenti, Sandro Dernini, Flavio Merkel, Paola Muzzi  
Giovanna Ducrot, Sandra Montagna, Cristina Torelli, Rome 2000

Coming from this experience, Sandro Dernini moved in New York in early 1980 and with Luigi Ballerini, director of the NYU Italian Studies Program, he conceived and produced the creation of the NYU Center for Italian Contemporary Culture which was opened in the fall 1980 seeking “*to foster the outstanding and representative, rather than the expected and faddish, thus to ensure to develop, over time, a rounded picture of the Italian culture.*” One of the first program presented was called *The Artist in the First Person*, it was an “open window” for contemporary Italian artists operating in New York, with very little or no support from the Italian Cultural Institute, facilitating them with direct contacts with NYU departments in the field of theatre, cinema, dance, visual arts and with the New York art community. Each event was conceived with the artist as independent coproducer of it. The program was opened by the performance of Massimo Sarchielli, cooking his “pappa al pomodoro” to introduce to the audience the Italian cultural flavour through which to view his videotape *Anna*, made as a video reality show with Alberto Griffi, in Rome in the 70’s.

#### The Artist in the First Person



Massimo Sarchielli, New York University 1981

After several divergent positions how to manage the Centre in relationship to the Italian Cultural Institute as well as to the NYU French Department where it was hosted, Sandro Dernini decided to resign from NYU and to accept the invitation by two Italian architects, Roberto Brambilla and Gianni Longo, to create a new cultural center into a loft of 7.000 sq.ft., at 530 West 25th. Street, in the Chelsea neighbourhood of New York, which was part of a larger real estate complex under development by them. He resigned from New York University and asked Richard Flood, an art critic and at that time also book editor and managing editor of Art Forum Magazine to join them and the project came up: a performance space with maximum flexibility to foster an international network of dreamers and realists, theoreticians and pragmatists.

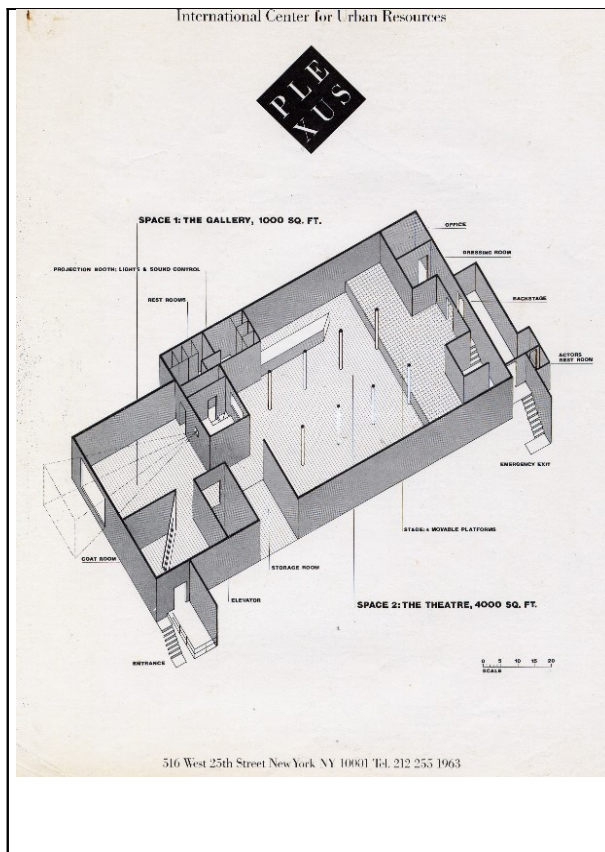


The name of “Plexus” came out later from a research conducted by a professional marketing firm to identify the proper name and the Plexus logo was made by Fred Troller, one of the best logo designer in New York. In June of 1982, the row loft of Plexus space was presented with a big party, conceived by Sandro Dernini as a modern sacrifice dedicated to the modern gods of the modern cities. Richard Flood wrote its statement of mission.

Plexus Performance Space Design

Plexus Statement of Mission





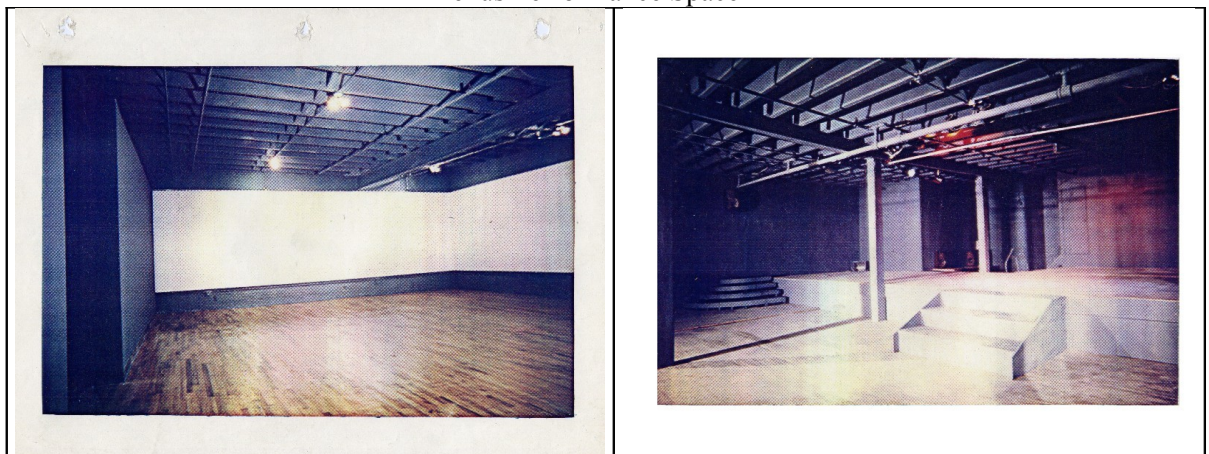
*Plexus is about the city - any city, every city. It is about the wonder of a skyline that won't stop climbing and a blanket of pollution that can't stop spreading. It's about an atmosphere that swell culture and swallows real estate. It's about a dream that is as illogical as soft watches and as seductive as the promise of immortality. Plexus is dedicated to the preposition that all cities are not created equal, only the people who inhabit them. It is further committed to the proposition that the people of cities are creative survivalists who refuse and acknowledge the laws of nature and who glory in adversity. There is, in the collective heart of the people of the cities, a wild, unrelenting thirst for the impossible contradictions that make them simultaneous victims and victors.*

Richard Flood, New York,  
1982

530 West 25 St., Chelsea, New York 1982

Shortly after it, Richard Flood ended his collaboration after he verified that was no intention from Brambilla and Longo to support the renovation of the raw loft in order to allow the starting of Plexus activities. Sandro Dernini in order to continue asked John Hanti and Louis Tropea, two club organizers, to join Plexus in the work of the renovation with the agreement to be able to run there also a club activity in the night. Most of the renovation work in the loft was done with them and in few months the gallery room and the flexible performance area with four mobile stages was finished.

#### Plexus Performance Space



530 West 25 St., Chelsea, New York 1983

On December 31, for new year eve, with the big party “*The Garden of Fuzz*”, featuring Ann Magnuson and John Sex, the space was open to the public as a club.

#### Plexus Performance Space



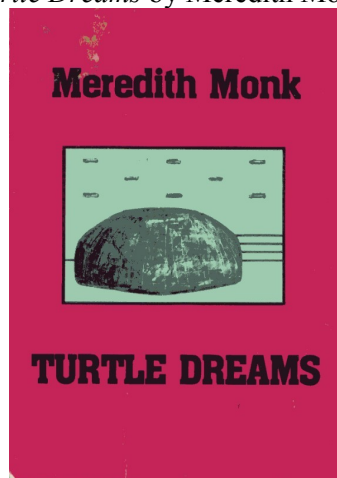
Sandro Dernini

530 West 25 St., Chelsea, New York 1983, photo Lynne Kanter

The club had very short life, the day after the new year eve party because of the complaints from the neighbourhood its activity was shut down by Brambilla & Longo and John Hanti and Luis Tropea left.

In February 1983, it was held a preview opening with a dance performance "*Hair*" by Marika, an Estonian artist, and, finally, on April 19, under the name of Plexus International Center for Urban Resources Inc., a non profit organization, the performance space was inaugurated by the world premiere of "*Turtle Dreams*" by Meredith Monk, presented as a multimedia excursion performance into a cabaret.

*Turtle Dreams* by Meredith Monk



*Pavlov* by Charles Guarino



Plexus Performance Space, 530 West 25 St., Chelsea, New York 1983

After it, Plexus spring program featured: "*Cathode Cruel*" and "*Birth*", a new music and theatre performance by Fiction Music Theatre and Susan Landau; "*Disorder/Discipline/Future*", an art performance and 365 postcards exhibition by Gianfranco Mantegna; "*Pavlov*", a theatre performance by Charles Guarino; "*Boomba*" and "*Mission Impossible*", theatre performances by Ily Huemer; "*Spectre Nymph*" and "*Living Set*", an dance performance by Ellen Fisher; Electronic Art Ensemble; Virg Dzurinko; "*Commedia dell'Arte*" by Mimoteatromovimento; "*Bagman Theater*" by Peter Muny; and "*Labyrinth*", an art installation and performance by Paolo Buggiani.

Labyrinth by Paolo Buggiani



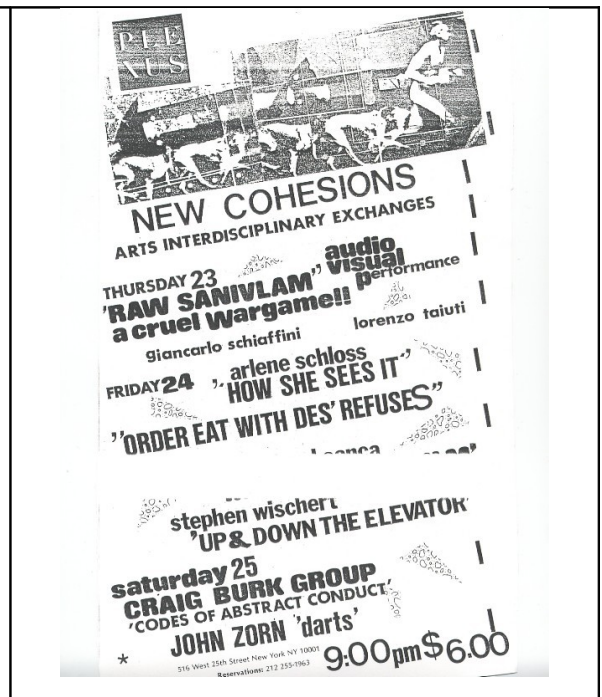


Plexus Performance Space, New York 1983, photo by P. Buggiani

After it, with Arleen Schloss, an experimental multimedia artist who was running A's, a very innovative alternative space on Bowery and Broome Street, Sandro Dernini organized *New Cohesions*, a multi-media program, featuring: *Raw Sanivlam*, a *Cruel WarGame*, an audiovisual performance by Giancarlo Schiaffini and Lorenzo Taiuti; *How She Sees It*, an art performance by Arleen Schloss; *Order Eat with Des's Refuses*, an art performance coordinated by Michael Kean; *Moving Still Film*, a film screening by Richard Sanca; *Up & Down the Elevator*, an art performance by Stephen Wischert; *Codes of Abstract Conduct*, a new music performance by Craig Burk Group; *Darts*, a new music performance by John Zorn.



Arleen Schloss, New York 1997



Plexus Performance Program, New York 1983

In June 1983, Roberto Brambilla and Gianni Longo left Plexus decided to stop their partnership in Plexus and therefore they asked to Sandro Dernini to pay for the space a very high rent, 2500 dollar per month, if he wanted to continue running Plexus activity in the loft. He took this economic risk and he became the legal representative of Plexus International Center for Urban Resources Inc., a non profit organization.



In the summer, Sandro Dernini produced *Babylon Breakdown Babylon*, 3 day of Reggae Festival, presented in collaboration with Black Nile Production, featuring: Mojanya, Thomas Pinnock, Calabash, Kwame & Jahpan, Dreaklock Chronicle, and Mutabaruka.

*Babylon Breakdown Babylon*

A CELEBRATION OF  
THE CROSS CULTURAL  
CONNECTIONS OF THE CITY

# BREAKDOWN BABYLON

**PLEXUS**  
INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
FOR URBAN  
RESOURCES AND  
**BLACK NILE**  
PRODUCTIONS  
PRESENT:

## BREAKDOWN

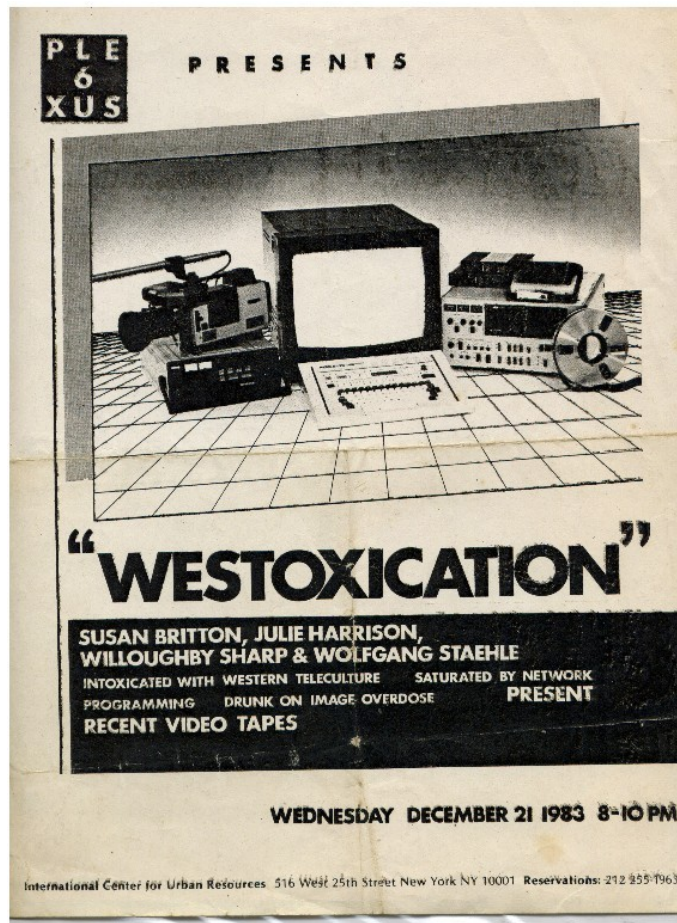
FRI. JULY 22	SAT. JULY 23	SUN. JULY 24
9pm FILM SERIES "The Lion & The Tyrant: The Italian Invasion of Ethiopia" Social Injustice in Britain "Blood & Go Run" "Black Britannica" Mutabaruka	1-4pm Move Your Dancin' Feet Reggae Dance Workshop w/Thomas Pinnock (Adm. \$4.00)	1-3pm Move Your Dancin' Feet Reggae Dance Workshop w/Thomas Pinnock (Adm. \$4.00)
10pm CHOREOCEPTION "Black Woman Sweet, Ebi" (Part I) Featuring Dyane Hamey, Pamela Penfiter, Amaniyee Payne, Cheryl Byron, Tanjah	2-4pm EYE TOGRAPHY (Open) Moving Pictures With Mastering by Chester Higgins, Kwame Brathwaite, Jim Belfon, Keith Morrison, Delroy Davis, Sam Asher, Steve Bernan	3-5pm The Pickney Players Children's Workshop (Adm. \$2.00)
11pm LIVE BAND - MOJANYA "The Purpose of Unity"	9pm "ONE DROP": The Origin of Reggae A Soundplate Salute (1978-1983)	5pm Messages With Movement "Immigrant Blues" "South Africa Blowup" Featuring Thomas Pinnock, Amaniyee Payne, Glen Singh "The Root of Dance"
12am DISC DAWTA	10pm DREADLOCK CHRONICLE 10:30pm "Black Woman Sweet, Ebi" (Part II) Poetry & Motion Featuring Bernadine Jennings	6pm LIVE BAND - KWAME ("Follow I") & JAH PAN
	11pm LIVE BAND - SPECIAL GUEST 1am DISC DAWTA	11pm MUTABARUKA "Whey Mi Belong?"
		12am SOUND REASONING 1am CHANT AWAY

**A REGGAE REALITY**

**PLEXUS ♦ 516 West 25th Street, New York City Tel: 255-1963**  
General Admission \$10.00 Except Where Specifically Noted. Food/Refreshments & Culturally Fine Arts On Sale

In the fall, with Mitch Ross as master of ceremony as well as promoter with Silvie Texier, Sandro Dernini produced a new multimedia art cabaret, *Plexus 6 A Zone for the Next Zone*, featuring among other performances: *Taking Off*, an environmental painting by Pierre Dorion, Myrian La Plante and Aude Simard; *The Third X-35 Hour Show* by VAP Rafael and Arnold Wechsler ; Rockercise: Rap+Breakers; Punkballet; *Fire in Progress* by Tracy Sherman; Stuart Sharp; Helene Guattary and Patrice Casanova; Joel-Sokolov; *Fight Pain and Win* by Doug Rowe; *Salome* by Maroon Azuri; and *Westoxication*, recent videos by Willoughby Sharp, Susan Britton, Julie Harrison and Wolfgang Staehle.

# Westoxication



# Salomè by Maroon Azuri



Plexus Performance Space, New York 1983, Photo by L. Kanter