

CHAPTER III

STRATEGIES OF INTERPRETATION

In this chapter the researcher identifies and organizes the primary sources of this inquiry. He describes the field of research and employed interpretative procedures, from an emic or “insider” point of view, as well as from an etic or "outsider" model of reference, in identifying and interpreting ideas, texts, images, underlying themes relating one to the other. The field of inquiry as is seen as an essentially non-stop event, developing in time, but nevertheless a process of moving from misunderstandings to a multicultural understanding.

The artist as researcher

The model of the “artist as researcher,” for Ecker in "The Artist as Researcher: The Role of the Artist in Advancing Living Traditions in Art" is an underdetermined conceptual model depending upon its particular cultural context which determines the model’s unique features, while sharing some common features. The researcher from 1986 to 1993 studied the model of “the artist as researcher“ outlined by Ecker in his seminars and courses on “Living Traditions in Art”, at New York University.

As part of his training the “artist as researcher” learned to write narrative insider accounts of his experience following the phenomenological procedures described by Ecker in "Instituting Qualitative Evaluation in the Arts":

Time One. Duration of consciousness of the intentional object in the phenomenal field as it appears prior to reflection....

Time Two. Duration of reflection upon the experience had in Time One for the purpose of clarifying whatever qualities, meanings, structures were perceived or had....

Editing. Meta-critical analysis of phenomenological descriptions which adopts a system of marks for the sake of avoiding extensive re-writing....
(17)

Edward M. Bruner in his essay "Ethnography as Narrative," published in The Anthropology of Experience, claims that an important role in reinforcing this group solidarity is played by the storytelling within the groups themselves. He extends the notion of "ethnography as discourse, as a genre of storytelling."

Stories makes meaning. They operate at the level of semantics in addition to vocabulary and syntax. Just as a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, culture change, too, almost by definition, takes the form of a sequence with a past, a present, and a future. Our predicament in ethnographic studies of change is that all we have before us is the present, the contemporary scene, and by one means or another we must situate that present in a time sequence....when we talk of gathering or collecting the data as if it were like ripe fruit waiting to be picked, or when we talk of our special anthropological methodologies for reconstructing the past, as if the present were not equally constructed. (140-141)

Ecker describes in "Toward a Phenomenology of Artistic Processes and the Expansion of Living Traditions in Art" his initial experience as an apprentice knifemaker.

By reviewing my shop notes and Woody's detailed "chalk-talks, and by listening to the tape-recording of our lengthy discussions, I was able to reflect upon my initial experiences as an apprentice knifemaker. What became clear is that my own concentration and purpose were the controlling factors at each stage in the process. (78)

Ecker, by describing his apprenticeship, underlines also the important correlation of "subject-and-object" which is fundamental in the understanding of "Plexus Black Box."

The correlation of subject-and-object underlies all of man's ways of being-in-the-world. Hence, to acknowledge the *human* nature of aesthetic inquiry and its domain is at once to free research in art from the false

objective/subjective dichotomy assumed in Western institutions that separate scientific activities from artistic activities. (83-84)

Marvin Harris argues with Kenneth L. Pike in Emics and Etics. The Insider/Outsider Debate on the distinction between subjective and objective as insider/outsider point of view:

Participants can be both subjective and objective, and observers can be both subjective and objective. But the discrimination between emic and etic modes depends strictly on the operations employed by the observer. Participants other than those trained as observers or carefully coached in etic concepts by observers cannot provide etic descriptions of their social lives. (50)

Barzun and Graff in The Modern Researcher further argue that the historical verification method of records is governed by probability which is made by subjectivity. They describes an objective judgment as “one made by testing in all ways possible one’s subjective impressions, so as to arrive at a knowledge of objects.” (184) They also argue how there a misunderstanding on the common notion of subjectivity that needs to be cleared up, as well as in this study the artist as researcher felt the need to verify and support the validity of his and others subjective data, collected in the field research, as it was pointed out in The Modern Researcher:

In loose speech “subjectivity” has come to mean “one person’s opinion,” usually odd or false; whereas “objective” is taken to mean “what everybody agrees on,” or correct opinion....This common belief is quite mistaken.

“Subjective” and “objective” properly apply not to persons and opinions but to sensations and judgment. Every person, that is, every living subject, is necessarily subjective in all his sensations. But some of his subjective sensations are of objects, others of himself, or “subject.” Your toothache is said to be subjective because it occurs within you as a feeling subject....Now only the tooth is real-hence the tendency to believe that an object is somehow “more real,” that is, more lasting, more public, than a purely subjective impression. But objects themselves are known only by subjects-persons-so the distinction is not clear-cut, much less a test of reality. (183)

Ecker in "Introduction: Instituting Qualitative Evaluation in the Arts"

points out the misleading notion of subjectivity in art:

“You can’t research art; it’s all subjective! As with any research effort, we must begin by identifying the general problem, which arises out of the widespread belief that subjectivity defines the arts while objectivity defines the sciences. It is the question of the cognitive status of the arts disciplines and whether knowledge-claims can be grounded directly in artistic and aesthetic phenomena as we experience them. Vehement denials of the very possibility are readily found in a survey of the literature. The positivists’ dogma that “whatever exists, exists in some degree, and therefore can be measured,” represents one historical source and provides comfort to those who would equate objectivity with quantification. (A less extreme rejection was printed out on a computer card that was given to me years ago: “if it can’t be measured it’s art, and to hell with it.” (9)

The “artist as researcher” was aware, also for his previous scientific training, of the deep relationship among object, subject and the interference of instrument of observation managed by the subject. In New York, in 1985 he visualized this interrelationship between object and subject in a Plexus art event Goya Time: New York 1985, where 23 artists performed 23 different interpretations of the same subject-object: La Maja. Always in New York, in 1986, he started to perform a series of phenomenological events, “Eating Art,” underlying the phenomenological object-subject correlation. In 1987 during a phenomenological experimental inquiry, Do you think it is possible to eat Andy Warhol if you are eating a Campbell Soup Can?, he has an insight of the object-subject phenomenological correlation as he describes in his following quote from one of his field research’s notes:

There was half moon when I came back at home after my phenomenological experience. It was 2:10 am. It was for me very hard to accept that bracketing out of relevance my and friends of mine believes was a possible reality in which I could be in the

case. I did and I learned something that I refused to do within my friends and my life: to step out and to watch them-us.

Who was them-us? Who was “them?” Who was “me?”

The researcher in his notes used, with phenomenological intention, the hyphen between different words, to underline this correlation between object and subject.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in "Phenomenology as a Way of Illuminating Dance" points out this particular linguistic use as a particular mode of Phenomenology. Regarding the hyphen's use she argues that “phenomenology reflects on the meaning of the hyphen between subject and object or between subject and world, a hyphen that indicates the primordial moment at which subject and object have not yet become separate.” (130) She further describes the use of the word “lived”.

A final example might be given to crystallize even more finely the nature of a phenomenological account. Suppose we wished to gain insight into the nature of the human body in dance. We would not begin by seeing the body within an already imposed framework: the body as a bearer of signs; the body as a thing to be manipulated, trained, or whipped into shape; or the body as the agent of aesthetic behavior. Phenomenologists have elaborated this original, pristine body, this preobjective or preobjectivized body. They call it the lived body. If we want to capture the essence of the lived body in the experience of dance, then we would go back to the lived experience of dance itself, for it is there and only there that might discover the way or ways in which the lived body appears in dance. (133)

The main discovery made by the researcher was that phenomenology was addressed to gain results from the field of experience rather than to explain the method that was applied to achieve the results.

Sheets-Johnstone in Phenomenology as a Way of Illuminating Dance describes the phenomenological approach as a pragmatic one:

...our concerns and evaluations would then be with the results of the method, not with the methodological system itself. We are otherwise either talking about the phenomenological method at an abstract level, a

level many steps removed from the actual doing of phenomenology, since most probably we have not engaged in phenomenological research or attempted a phenomenological analysis ourselves and have therefore never actually experienced the method;...(140)

The researcher participated "in the first person" in Plexus activities since 1982 in the role of one of the founders as well as artist, under the name of Plexus 23s. Therefore as Plexus 23s had his own "stock of knowledge at hand", as Alfred Schutz points out, which allowed him to have access to other historical Plexus participants, and to know locations of records and relics of the project.

The artist as researcher started his field research from his consciousness of "being there" in a Heidegger's sense to be an insider in the project under inquiry. The following is an example of a note made by him from the field research:

23s report n. ? + 34, November 6, 1994 AD, 10:25 am,
Cagliari, Monteurpino.

Defining the coordinates of references of the journey.

"MI-DENTRO-MI-FUORI" (myself-inside-myself-outside).

This quote from Cicci Borghi's art work recalled to me the David Ecker's paper at "Art and Science Today: The Role of Imagination": "On this experiment, we discover that neither you nor I, nor artists, scientists, psychologists, logicians--nobody-- is free to imagine, remember, depict, portray, represent, photograph, measure, or simply observe an object that is both blue and not-blue". Like I cannot see myself at the same time as a lived insider as well as a lived outsider of the project under study.

Therefore I'll be first of all, scholarly, scientifically, artistically, who I am Plexus 23s, a lived insider of the living project "Plexus Black Box." This was-is a result of my phenomenological deconstruction process in progress of the image (A1).

10:45 am

East-West, NYU ICASA Forum, 1986; Micro and Macro, NYU ICASA Forum, 1985.

As well as Franco Meloni, physicist, wrote from an inside horizon of Plexus event, I experienced my emotions's oxide-reductions of experiencing art.

"Eating Art" is-was a metaphoric concept to describe the phenomenological consciousness of the artist as researcher as a biologist experiencing art as an oxide-reduction reaction. (Like a cold nuclear atomic reaction inside my lived body.) 11 am.

“Il peso del” (the weight of) Dr. Dernini to carry the Well Being Reconciliation Project: “TOUCH-IT-DETACH.-IT”

I am learning, anyway, in 8 years of phenomenology to suspend my beliefs to reduce my phenomenological experience. Therefore I’ll describe the outside from an outside insider point view, recalling “the Debate EMIC and ETIC,” and the complexity of the project under study within the context of the Well Being and Reconciliation project, made within my critical difficulties and personal family circumstances -

Rodolfo (my 4 year old son) is protesting that he wants to use this pen that I am using just right now! 11.47am.

The following one is an other example of his phenomenological notes, made on May 14, 1993, at 3:30 PM, in David Ecker’s NYU Office, and signed as Plexus 23s. The report is a short speed-up of the presentation made as part of a collective presentation on Monday, May 3, 1993, with Perry Walker, Ava Hsueh , and Luis Vergara, from 7:00 to 8:00 PM, in room 405 of the Barney Building, in David Ecker’s Phenomenology in Art last class.

In 1986 , 23 PLEXUS friends played the role of the “social world” as a mirror through which it was only possible to see my refracted self portrait. I was a refracted vision of the social world. The horizon or context of the world places “the setting-into-work of truth” in which the work of art functions. Each phenomenological reduction or analysis of an art work has its own historical world related to the particular time and space on which the analysis is taking place. “It is true or not” was one of my phenomenological questions when on February 18, 1987, at Patrizia Anichini Gallery, 7 East 20th Street, New York, as a continuation field research of my 1986 NYU course E90.2605, Phenomenology and the Arts, I phenomenologically inquired 13 artists with “Do you think it is possible to eat Andy Warhol if you eat a Campbell soup?”

I kept notes of my field research on “Eating Art” in a series of logo books. These logo books gave me the frame on which I practised the epoche’, the forestructure of my first interpretation, again and again to be phenomenologically reduced as part of my ongoing PLEXUS process of human experience.

As an artist/researcher I started a series of logo-books made by images and texts related to my in the first person ‘Eating Art’ experience .

My interpretation as an active performing act goes beyond form or syntax and ordinary language. In classroom, through appreciative attitude of all participants we tried to create an aesthetic phenomenological experience by transforming an ordinary class into an artistic environment, and then as

an act of consciousness, moving back and forth through it, we performed our epoche' in progress.

At the entrance of the class, "We declare this is our/your epoche' in progress while we-you are here" was written on the black board, on which a T-shirt with written "I think therefore I am fish" was hanging on the wall....

His phenomenological reports and notes from the field allowed the researcher to practice a continuous phenomenological exercise by writing notes of his experience with Plexus and of his student experience at New York University, working at the same time as graduate assistant, before, at the I.C.A.S.A., (International Center for Advance Studies in Arts) at New York University, and, then, at NYU Summer Institute of Living Traditions in Art, made in collaboration with I.S.A.L.T.A.(International Society for the Advancement of Living Traditions in Art).

This training allowed him to become more familiar with the current issues in art, which turned out to be very useful in his understanding of the artistic, cultural, and institutional context in which "Plexus Black Box" originated and how it was positioned within the "artworld." He kept during all his field research a skeptically suspicious attitude regarding his possibility of suspending his beliefs, while again and again he restarted his phenomenological reduction by bracketing out again pre-reflective meanings. The phenomenological notes and logbooks took by the researcher from 1986 to the present were used by him to keep an attentive consciousness upon learning to describe not only what was appearing in his experience but also how it appeared.

Sheets-Johnstone in "Phenomenology as a Way of Illuminating Dance" underlines the need to search out a special language in describing a phenomenological experience in order to be able to "capture precisely the quality of the thing as it is experienced." (132) She further states that:

To arrive at essential descriptions one needs to transcend habitual formulations of the object or phenomenon; one must come to grips linguistically with the phenomenon as it gives itself in experience. This means forging a new language that captures precisely the quality-the physiognomy-of the phenomenon in question. (135)

The researcher tries to place himself consciously inside and outside the artistic center or centers of “Plexus Black Box,” he was conscious that to do it and to describe his ongoing-living-experience as it was/is lived was a hard task, something which at the same time changed his earlier perceptions and provided him with new outside and inside views. Ecker in "The Possibility of a Multicultural Art Education" describes this kind of change of perception:

What I have learned is that placing oneself in an artistic center of another culture inevitably changes not only one’s earlier perceptions of that culture and its arts but also provides a new “outside” view of one’s own culture, art, and art education. (18)

Field Research

The researcher, from the beginnings of his study in 1986, has collected and organized in chronological order all Plexus documents available to him as a founder and as an active member of Plexus, 23S. He photocopied documents in a chronological order, without any classification, and packaged them in 13 booklets, one per year from 1982 to 1993, and another one with records related to the cultural context from which Plexus originated.

Then, following the distinction, proposed by Barzun and Graff in The Modern Researcher, between records as intentional transmitters of fact and relics as unpremeditated transmitters of fact ((166), the researcher organized chronologically categories of records and relics as follows:

Written records: Press releases; announcements; newsletters; pamphlets and publications; diaries and reports; catalogues; slides, photos, negatives.

Oral records: anecdotes and tales; recordings in various forms (videotape, audiotape, etc.).

Relics: artifacts; memorabilia, legal and business documents; letters, notes.

The researcher applied systematically historical methodological verification procedures described by Barzun and Graff (109 -144) to verify names and dates and attributions to sources and to guide him with a methodological historical criticism during his contemporary art archaeological research in writing his narrative historical reconstruction of the facts related to “Plexus Black Box”.

The historical method ascertains the truth by means of common sense. When that sense is systematically applied, it becomes a stronger and sharper instrument than is usually found at work in daily life. It shows a closer attention to detail and a stouter hold on consecutiveness and order. The exercise of these capacities turns into a new power by which new intellectual possessions may be acquired (168).

The complete collection made by the researcher of all Plexus editorial records such as booklets, newsletters, pamphlets, shows presentations, press releases, from 1982 to the present, was submitted to the procedures of verification and then became a primary source with participant’s recollections for the identification of the primary sources of the study.

Often in this study and in the title reference is made to a "black box." From 1989 to the present in Plexus events, “Plexus Black Boxes” are used metaphorically or literally, in which case they could held some or many objects made for various events. Sometimes a “Plexus Black Box” did not hold any items, but simply symbolized the items which after years of activities became too numerous to be contained and carried or transported to the various places where Plexus events were held. “Plexus Black Box” appeared in many places. In time

it became a symbol which contained the memory of the past events or the history of past events of Plexus.

During his field research he proceed as follows:

Step 1.

In the spring 1994, at the Alfa Diallo's House of Originals, in the Lower East Side of New York, a group combining curators and participants of the closing event of "Plexus Black Box" met with the artist as researcher to open the two boxes that had been deposited at Alfa Diallo's on November 12, 1993, from the Rosenberg Gallery event, and to identify their related items.

The procedure was as follows:

1. Each items was marked with a white round label and numbered.
2. A name of reference was also assigned to each item.
3. The list of items, their number and name was recorded by the researcher.

Step 2

The researcher sent a letter to a group of Plexus participants, following the delimitation of the study, asking for their collaboration, copy of the letter is attached in the appendix B. After few weeks, the researcher contacted them to supply a full explanation of the purpose of his request. Plexus members recollections gathered were either in written or in recorded interviews. In the case of the recorded interviews, the artist as researcher took care that these were transcribed and translated from their original language in the case of Italian and Senegalese recollections. These transcriptions were approved and also in some cases re-edited by each individual before he could proceed further in his following interpretative procedures. Within the deadline of 1994, indicated in his letter requesting collaboration, he received few written recollections.

In November of 1994, with the assistance of a member of his Dissertation Committee, Prof. Angiola Churchill, he was able to pull off a series of sessions of oral recollections by N.Y. participants. These oral recollections from tapes were then transcribed.

Also it became evident the infeasibility to proceed to the accomplishment of the second step, the organization of a panel discussion forum with participants, after the gathering of all their recollections, as it was stated in his letter requesting collaboration, see full text in the appendix B. This second step was therefore drop out by him.

He sent back to all participants their transcripts in 1994 and in 1995, receiving few approval and editing within a period of a year. Recollections by Plexus participants are fully reported in the appendix E and some example of the deconstructionist "double reading" model employed by the researcher is reported in chapter IV and in his close reading in chapter VI as emic accounts of the project under study.

From the summer 1994 to the end of 1996, the artist as researcher travelled around the various locations such as New York, Rome, Cagliari, Carloforte (Sardinia), Dakar, and Amsterdam, to examine all available plexus records and relics and to collect what it was possible to collect or to document what was not possible to remove from the premises. All records examined and/or collected were not specifically related to the project under study. He studied the collection of records and relics, item by item, to determine how texts, images, objects, symbols, related consistently to the ongoing project under study.

The researcher examined Plexus records at the following sources: on board of the Elisabeth boat, in Carloforte; at Franco Meloni's computer at the University of Cagliari; at Gaetano Brundu's Plexus Storage in Cagliari; at Anna

Saba's in Cagliari; at Giancarlo Schiaffini's and Fabrizio Bertuccioli's in Rome; at Assane M'Baye's and Youssouph Traore's Club Litteraire David Diop in Dakar; at Willem Brugman's and Frans Evers in Amsterdam.

In this step of the field research, the researcher viewed 3153 pictures, 3888 negatives, 75 videotapes and 25 audiotapes.

The researcher viewed methodologically all video tapes like doing a insider phenomenological experience. In Time 1, the artist as researcher attended the view as well as fully possible conscious of his double identity of participant as well as of perceiver, as an "outsider" as well as an "insider" of the "recorded" art experience. In Time 2, after few minutes of silent reflection, the artist as researcher wrote a description of his aesthetic experience of these screenings, tape per tape. In Time 3, with a color code blue for an "editing" procedure, the artist as researcher marked what from the Time 2 of interviews or written recollections he considered to be relevant, following Schutz's system of relevances, for his further "speed-up" displacement of descriptions of experiences. Ecker describes the "editing" and "the speed-up" procedures in "Introduction: Instituting Qualitative Evaluation in the Arts":

Editing: meta-critical analysis of phenomenological descriptions which adopts a system of marks for the sake of avoiding extensive re-writing. (17)

Speed-up: tendency or strategy of individuals in an industrial and technological society to perceive or judge human behavior in terms of the clock-time required to accomplish a specified task; e.g. the measure of productivity, intelligence, creativity, or goodness. In academic and artistic contexts the "speed-up" is operative when stipulated meanings or scientific explanations displace experiences and descriptions of experiences because they are quicker. (18)

From the fall 1994 to the summer 1996, the researcher with a stock of knowledge at hand examined all collected records and notebooks of his field

research. Because of the great quantity of records accumulated over 12 years, it became evident that it would be totally impractical to classify all them. He reduced the numbering of the records under study to the items of the two boxes, (A) and (B) sealed as closing act of the Rosenberg Gallery event on November '93 because these items were considered by his stock of knowledge at hand inclusive of all other records and relics related to the study. The researcher applied in the beginning a phenomenological deconstruction approach, starting with a close reading of the first item of the box A, labelled A1 at Alfa Diallo's 1994 inventory. A1 was a marginal photo, outside the box, on its covering plastic strip.

Figure 2

Plexus Black Box Item A1: Plexus Compressionist Art Process Example



G. Chaikin, G. Schiaffini, and Colombina, Rome, 1991, Photo by Plexus 23s.

After his close reading of A1, the researcher begun to deconstruct phenomenologically all relevant recall images, identified from his 1994 phenomenological notebook in order to identify relevant features and invariables. The researcher in the summer 1996 interrupted his close reading process of individual fragments of “Plexus Black Box” because he realized that the method was not proper to describe the whole art project.

Step 3

The researcher outlined his field research procedures in his notebook with time and space in which the procedure took place. He identified relevances and placed them in chronological order. These relevances were related to “Plexus Black Box” in different ways. The first appearance of the name “Plexus Black Box” was identified in the occasion of the artopera of 1992 Cristoforo Colombo: Viaggio nel Pianeta Arte, at the Metateatro, in Rome, in 1989.

The name "Plexus Black Box" was referred both to an artifact as well as to an idea. Later, more containers holding records and relics of historical events were made as components of several Plexus art events.

While the full chronology of Plexus activities is reported in the Appendix C, the researcher outlined a short chronology of events that were identified and verified during the field research as directly pertinent to the project under study, while a full chronology of Plexus activities is reported in Appendix C. This short following chronology has the aim to facilitate the "outsider" reader to understand emic narratives reported in following chapters.

In 1978, in Rome, at Il Cielo performance space, Art Slaves Auction Show, an cultural event organized by LIACA for cultural freedom in Italy.

In 1981, in New York, at New York University, The Artist in the First Person, a cultural program presented by the Italian Center for Contemporary Culture of New York University and produced by the artists.

In 1984, in New York, in the middle of East 6th Street, between Avenue A and B, in the Lower East Side. In Order to Survive, a community art event, performed by hundred artists.

In 1985, in New York, at CUANDO Community Cultural Center, Goya Time, New York, 1985, the first Plexus artopera, performed by hundred artists.

In 1985, In New York, at CUANDO, Purgatorio Show, in the Night of No Moon, a collaborative event presented as a open call for the future international community cultural house in New York, performed by 350 artists.

In 1986, in New York, at CUANDO, Eve, an Art Opera, about Escape for Donna Purgatorius from 1986 Anno Domini by the Multinational Chain Gang of Downtown N.Y., second artopera, performed by 220 artists.

In 1987, in Gavoi, in Sardinia, Il Serpente di Pietra, (The Serpent of Stone), the first International art event of Plexus presented as an art co-opera, performed by 160 artists.

In 1988, in New York, Rome, Carloforte, Dakar, Plexus Art Slavery Manifesto, a series of group photo shots, performed by hundreds of artists gathering together. It was concluded with a street parade from Dakar to the island of Goree, inside the House of the Slaves, where was staged a public presentation of the Plexus project to open a Art World Bank in Goree.

In 1988, New York, Cagliari, Carloforte, Dakar, The Serpent, a series of performance, interconnected performed as a single travelling event, in five acts, starting from New York, at CUANDO and performed at New York University as an interactive happening Il Viaggio del Serpente. Its third act was on board of

Elisabeth boat in Carloforte and the fourth one Tradizione e Modernita' was in Cagliari, (Sardinia) and ended in the House of the Slaves in Goree, Dakar.

In March of 1989, in New York, the 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium was established by a group of representatives of Universities, cultural and community organizations.

In March of 1989, in New York, at CUANDO, in the Lower East Side, Repatriation of Art Into the Community, a Plexus-CUANDO event was staged as an report to the community from 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium.

In April of 1989, in New York, at Rivington School, in the Lower East Side, Repatriation of Art Into the Community, a Plexus-CUANDO event was staged as report to the community from the Columbus Consortium.

In May of 1989, in New York, at Nada School, in the Lower East Side, Repatriation of Art Into the Community, a Plexus-CUANDO event was staged as third report to the community from 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium.

In May of 1989, in New York, at the Institute of Computer Arts, School of Visual Arts, The Departure of An Art Human Shuttle For Freedom Journeying to the Realm of a New Planet called Time-Art, an performance on-line art event , staging the departure of the 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium for Italy.

In June of 1989, in Cagliari, at the University Department of Physics it was performed as a happening the arrival of the Plexus Art Shuttle.

In July of 1989, in Rome, at the Metateatro, 1992 Cristoforo Colombo: Viaggio nel Pianeta Arte, an artopera, staged the first historical presentation of "Plexus Black Box" as an artifact as well as an idea.

In February of 1990, in Rome, at the Metateatro, 1992 Cristoforo Colombo: Viaggio nel Pianeta Arte, within "Plexus Black Box" staged the departure of the "Equipaggio Telematico" (Telematic Team.)

In May of 1990, in Amsterdam, in a park, Plexus Black Box Ethno-Reality and Plexus Black Hole Ethno-Reality are performed as a "modular construction" event.

In June of 1990, in Rome at the Ridotto del Colosseo, 1992 Cristoforo Colombo: Viaggio nel Pianeta Arte, Part III: Plexus Black Box, is performed as an art coopera.

In July of 1990, in Rome, at the Metateatro, Plexus Black Box a Multicultural Data Bank for the Caravella dell'Arte, is held as a round table.

In July of 1990, in Carloforte, in Sardinia, Elisabeth, La Caravella dell'Arte, a performance, staged the first presentation of the project "The Well Being in the XXI Century."

In December of 1990 in Rome, at the Teatro in Trastevere, 1992 Cristoforo Colombo Viaggio nel Pianeta Arte: part IV, a performance, staging the presentation of "Plexus Black Box" project to Mons. Dante Balboni, a Vatican art scholar.

In July of 1991, in Carloforte, in Sardinia, on board the Elisabeth boat, it was performed the presentation of the program of the Well Being in the XXI Century Symposium.

In November of 1991, in Cagliari, "Plexus International Storage" is opened.

In October of 1992, in Carloforte, Columbus Reconciliation Forum on "The Well Being in the XXI Century," by the 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium.

In December of 1992, in New York, at the Barney Building of New York University, In Order to Survive, The Voyage of the Elisabeth, a collaborative art

event, staged as a report to the community from the 1992 Christopher Columbus Consortium.

In October of 1993, in New York, at St. John the Divine Cathedral, Marconi Columbus Open Call for the Well Being in the XXI Century, an art collaborative event.

In October of 1993, in New York, at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, The Repatriation of Art into the Community, a collaborative art event.

In November of 1993, in New York, at the Rosenberg Gallery of New York University, A Contract to be Negotiated: Columbus Egg, The Living Plexus Black Box of "The Voyage of the Elisabeth," an art installation in progress, within a 2 week program of art events.

After November of 1993, "Plexus Black Box," as an ongoing travelling art project, was performed in many events which are fully reported in Appendix C.

Following the model of "the artist as researcher" he developed the outlined glossary of the most frequent concepts used by Plexus participants, reported in Chapter I, as a practical tool as it is pointed out by Ecker in "New Directions for Art and Art Criticism from a Multicultural Perspective,"

A practical corrective strategy that my students and I employ as artist-researchers in our investigations of living traditions around the world is to develop a glossary of terms in the language of the master artist/artisan/craftsperson of a particular tradition. (5)

Procedures of Interpretation

The researcher started his hermeneutical phenomenological investigation by applying the 4 operational rules described by Don Ihde in Experimental Phenomenology. An Introduction. First, as an artist-researcher he fully attended and described his own experience of "Plexus Black Box" and of the others's

participants. Second, he delimited the focus of the field of experience, following Idhe's second operational rule, by framing within his "insider" Plexus experience. The third rule by Idhe followed by him was to avoid any kind of hierarchic understanding of the field of experience by the *horizontalization* of all phenomena of experiences of "Plexus Black Box". This procedure prevented him to take too fast decisions in relation the hierarchic values of some features as more important or fundamental than others. As fourth procedure he looked for the invariants of the experience as essential features of the study in order to understand the directional shape of experience, "the intentionality," the correlation of what he experienced with how he experienced it, "the mode of being experienced." The stratification model of the five different levels of discourse proposed by Ecker and Kaelin in "The Limits of Aesthetic Inquiry: A Guide to Educational Research" is applied by the researcher to screen and to identify all different levels of discourse in "Plexus Black Box" in looking for invariants. The procedural steps followed by the artist as researcher are the following:

1. He experienced "Plexus Black Box" and he perceived the recollections of other Plexus participants as a lived experience of it;
2. He made a reflection upon his experience and upon the other ones, noting what was relevant following the system of relevances, described by Alfred Schutz in Reflections on the Problem of Relevances;

The researcher moved from the bottom of the stratification, "Plexus Black Box," as an event, to the top of the ladder, to its meta-theoretical conceptual framework.

The researcher started his interpretative procedures by underlining in his field research notes with a yellow or blue color mark if that note was relevant for his experience, experienced as an artifact or as an art performance/event, which it

is placed by Ecker and Kaelin at the bottom of their taxonomy. What he believed for his stock of knowledge at hand was related to a metatheoretical level, at the top of the ladder-schema made by Ecker and Kaelin, he marked instead with a red color code. This procedure facilitated later his identification and understanding of the invariants as overlapping meaningful underlying themes of the study reported in Chapter VI.

He analyzed as topical relevances the images and texts emerged during the epoché he made during his field research experience by following the system of relevances proposed by Alfred Schutz in Reflections on the Problem of Relevances, in terms of their referential adequacy. Those relevances which he claims to be well-grounded in his stock of knowledge at hand, after verifications with other Plexus participants, were by him re-casted in order to be further investigated. The stock of knowledge at hand of the researcher as interpreter, as sedimentation of various previous experiences, determined his system of interpretational, topical and motivational relevances, from which depended his capacity to reflect from more than his own immediate cultural point of view. The autobiographical system of relevances of the researcher, who was conscious of prevailing “lived” presence, at any moment of his interpretational procedures, guided his “interest” in making decisions regarding the investigation and, in turn by bringing inside marginal materials from the background, determines the horizon of the thematic hermeneutical field of the study.

The researcher was conscious of his “actual interest” as Plexus 23s at the margins of the field, while he was performing “artificially” the system of relevances, and in turn his motivation created the structurization of a “voluntary” thematic center and of its surrounding horizontal margins.

The "actual interest" of the researcher as an "insider," Plexus 23s, while giving acknowledgment to the limits of the level of his investigation, allowed him to define a borderline of a part of "Plexus Black Box" to be placed under question.

Schutz points out that all questions are interrelated with the other and that there are not isolated questions, and those hidden in the margin of the field, may turn to be in the ongoing process of reflection topically relevant of the thematic center or *kernel*. The researcher in order to *grasp as such* prevailing "lived" presence in his "insider" experience within his etic preparatory procedures, performed a series of artificial voluntary acts of reflection through which he should experience "Plexus Black Box" from more than one single horizon and look for intrinsic relevant structures. His Plexus 23s' motivational relevances lead him to learn how to act on his interpretative decisions understood as sedimentation of previous experiences which constituted the system of his topical relevances, which in turn led the system of interpretative relevances on which the artist as researcher built his interpretative choice, resolving artificially his initial doubt to have a true and correct interpretation. The researcher, by not having a privileged position upon which to start to build his system of relevances, but experiencing all together not separated chronologically, gained freedom from previous sedimentations, by performing a continuous shifting from his initial artificial move, the deconstruction of the first item (A1). He modified gradually his horizontal interpretations, coming from each main topic chosen at that moment from the turn of his thematic kernel, which was modified continuously by his shifting system of interpretational relevances. He created in this way different observational conditions, which in turn allowed him to have new additional interpretatively relevant material. This shifting process was followed by the researcher until when, the problem at hand was sufficiently clarified, and he

solved his suspicion or doubt of the correctness of his “insider” emic procedures. He applied the insider's stock of knowledge at hand in a “step-by-step analysis” to predelineate the lines of his inquiry by selecting as his first artificial delimitation or determination of the segment of his experiences of the project under study, the lived experience of Plexus 23s, which allowed him to assume that kind of necessary “counterpoint structure” and “artificial split” of the unity of his personality, described by Schutz.

Figure 3

Plexus 23s Compressionist Double Reading Example



The artist as researcher looking at a photo of him as Plexus 23s.
Photo by Lynne Kanter, New York, 1986.

Each reader has his/her own angle of interpretation depending upon his/her personality, education, and culture. Even if we can achieve distance, Gadamer states that “we actually interpret an interpretation.” Gadamer points out the collapse of the horizon of interpretation in his essay “Composition and Interpretation,” within The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays, and argues that:

We may well ask whether we can interpret such ambiguity except by revealing that ambiguity. This brings us right back to our question concerning the particular connection between composition and interpretation within the overall relationship between the activity of interpretation and the activity of artistic creation. Art demands interpretation because of its inexhaustible ambiguity. It cannot be satisfactorily translated in terms of conceptual knowledge. (69)

Within the context of the pluralistic perspectives of the contemporary philosophy of art, which is further marked for Gadamer, in spite of tireless efforts to discover the definitive word of interpretation, by the renunciation of certainty of an “objectively” interpreted experience, the researcher deconstructed “insiders” accounts and papers, reported in Chapter IV and in Appendix D, as revealing multicultural sources of a pluralistic understanding of “Plexus Black Box” against a single dominant position of interpretation of it.

The researcher employed the “double” and “bifurcated writing” described by Jacques Derrida, as part of his strategy of interpretation, placing at the margins of the “insiders” accounts his interpretation. In clarifying how this “double” operates, within a deconstructed system, Derrida in Positions explains:

By means of this double, and precisely stratified, dislodged and dislodging, writing, we must also mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new “concept,” a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime. If this interval, this bifurcated writing, can be inscribed only in a bifurcated writing (and this holds first of all for a new

concept of writing, that *simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, *and* releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field), then it can only be marked in what I would call a *grouped* textual field: in the last analysis it is impossible to *point* it out, for a unilinear text, or a punctual *position*, an operation signed by a single author, are all by definition incapable of practicing this interval. (42)

Figure 4

Plexus "Bifurcated" Reading Example



G. Schiaffini and M. Serino “appointing” themselves in the photo of the Metateatro Group Shot, Rome, 1988, photo by the researcher.