

Title, Intimate distances: Space, Society, Humanity and Hope – The Work of Lucy Orta

Author, Bradley Quinn

'Lucy Orta Body Architecture', Silke Schreiber Verlag, Munich, 2003 ISBN 3-88960-066-2

Many people just pass by the cardboard boxes and blanketed figures without a second glance, but not Lucy Orta. Refuting the premise that clothing and shelter should remain separate entities, Orta forges an unexpected alliance between fashion, architecture and art to transform our perception of urban nomads and give them visibility in the public sphere. "Art can react in many forms," Orta explained. "It can challenge our feelings about our selves and our bodies, and change our beliefs in the social structures and values around us. My work breaks down barriers between clothing and architecture to remove many of the limitations they represent, with the intention of eventually leading to some sort of transformation."¹

The garments-cum-shelters Orta creates are a potent response to the practical problems of foraging for an existence with no fixed abode. Through a series of installations, exhibitions and social interventions that put her prototypes to practical use, Orta has consistently addressed the social conditions that condemn individuals to an existence on the margins of society. The plight of disaster victims, political refugees, the elderly, the invisible, the poor and the socially disenfranchised are brought unequivocally into the foreground. The categorical denominations between them are seldom self-referential; they are designated according to the identities conferred onto those who fall outside the social order. Orta's work does not view the spaces outside this order as marginal, but interprets it an opportunity to broker a new set of urban connections. Her direct, unmediated engagement with urban space reflects the Situationists' stratagem of *détournement*, *dérive* and psychogeography, as she rethinks the interface between physical space and the aspects of society that determine its meaning for all.²

Although Orta's sculptures are made to be worn, they are no ordinary garments. Orta's point of departure from conventional fashion was her use of clothing to produce and define urban space, conceptually as well as materially. Recognizing fashion's potential to delineate degrees of separateness and individuality, Orta decided to expand its capacity to designate separate spheres and collective worlds for temporary habitation. While fashion is traditionally regarded as a statement of style over content and image over substance, Orta's work serves as its visual antithesis; she interprets clothing as a social commentary and injects it with a message of collective resistance. "My work is designed to provoke a conscious awareness of certain issues in society," she said. "But they function on many different levels: on a poetical level, on a metaphoric level, and on the level of social awareness." Using art as her medium, Orta charts the axis between buildings and garments, reclaiming both of them as sculptural, tactile and spatial expressions of society. By moving beyond their ability to provide protection, she amplifies their inherent power to communicate, negotiate social bonds and unite members of a community. Orta's work centers around the ephemeral nature of these social bonds, tracing their networks within the systems of habitation that create community and a sense of belonging. Orta's work is a reminder that the security and social inclusion so often taken for granted is tenuous and, like fashion itself, disconcertingly transitory.

In considering the role of the marginalized, Orta has identified an archetypal creation of contemporary society, an urban wanderer, whose role reflects the transiency of the city. Uncertain and directionless, their rambles through the urban landscape parallel the patterns of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, but constitute his exact opposite. The homeless wanderer is regarded as "other" – perhaps a figure rather than a persona – who represents the abnegation of the consumer-oriented values so inextricably linked to the urban landscape. "They go to shopping streets and commercial spaces to find the social interactions they need," Orta said. "It is in social space that the disenfranchised want to become visible and receive sustenance, participating in the urban fabric whether they are permitted a role in it or not."

Orta's affinity with the homeless was sparked by a series of workshops she initiated at a Salvation Army shelter in Paris, where she worked with the homeless to facilitate

renewed expressions of personality and this resulted in a series of catwalk shows (arguably the very first presentation of the reconstruction fashion aesthetic), that presented a collection made out of old and discarded garments as a commentary on the need to reclaim wasted material and abandoned spaces.⁴ By 1994, these sentiments had become encapsulated in Orta's signature wardrobe of protective shelters. These evolved into a series of interchangeable garments that linked wearers together by detachable cords to represent the collective body. Orta's work operates like a scalpel in social consciousness, peeling back the skin of indifference to expose the ruptures soothed by unawareness and indifference.

Refuge Wear continues to engage fashion with disciplines ranging from architecture and art to social regeneration and ideological activism. Orta began to conduct practical workshops and community activities that focus on individual identity, perceptions of the body and impressions of home.

Orta's community-oriented projects led her to identify the value of collective action and collaborative efforts. Although Refuge Wear pieces provided emergency housing for the dispossessed, they did not necessarily provide the solace and security of a community. As Orta expanded both the conceptual and physical frameworks of Refuge Wear, she conceived Nexus Architecture, a series of wearable garments that zip together to unite several people in a literal and symbolic link. Nexus Architecture is a manifestation of the philosophy underpinning the artist's entire practice, poetically acknowledging the interdependency of all members of society while hinting at the protection and psychological refuge provided by a physical enclosure. Orta acknowledges that individuals or small tribes of homeless people often form communities of their own – cardboard cities are often the most tangible example of these – but recognizes that they seldom empower the homeless with the means to move beyond them. In linking these groups to society at large, they can also maintain their existing bonds with each other and use them as a basis to improve their situation.

The concept of establishing a social network is developed more elaborately in Orta's Modular Architecture project, a forum she established to clothe, shelter and protect the wearers while joining them together to form a single, linked environment. Resembling flexible architectural components in their design, the units merge the solidarity afforded by Nexus Architecture with the utility of Refuge Wear. Individuals can attach links to share and circulate body heat, or use the system of pockets and zippers to create a single survival shelter by fully integrating four individual pieces. The pockets also function as containers for storing food, water and supplies, with their shared design facilitating the circulation of resources. The garments-cum-habitats can be removed and assembled in the manner of modular architecture, restoring in the inhabitants a secure sense of belonging. "The physical link weaves the social link," Orta explained. "There is a sense that these communities include – and are constructed by – individual, intimate spaces that are united in a homogeneous whole."

To alienate individuals from architectural structures is to render them homeless; their clothes disintegrating into rags is tantamount to social invisibility. Orta's designs relate the story of the tension between movement and stillness, between the visible and the invisible. Orta describes the plight of the urban homeless today as "tangible invisibility," but she finds the dispossessed nonetheless ever present; she follows them as they "literally melt and disappear into the margins and framework of the city," combating this act of social disappearance by rendering the invisible visible once more. Combining the vocabularies of art, fashion and architecture, Orta harnesses the visual power they project: "From a design perspective, seeing a suit that can transform into a tent-like structure is visually very interesting. It brings awareness to the person inside it. As an artist I define the visual aspects of the work to transmit a message from the wearer to onlookers or passers-by. Whether or not they have 'noticed' the homeless before, they can no longer ignore them when they wear the pieces I designed." Orta inscribes the fabrics with texts, symbols and images that recall tattoos, packaging or urban graffiti. "There is an ongoing dialogue in my work between the principles of design, social awareness and concepts of visibility. It brings issues into view."

Although the construction of enclosures is central to Orta's work, she operates beyond the confines and conventions of urban space to liberate the homeless from the disorientation of the street. In doing so, Orta operates in opposition to the political mandates that reassign the homeless to alternative sites of difference and "other" by merging public place, private space, architectural form and intimate apparel into a structure that can be inflected and interpreted in personal terms. The social and cultural conditions of location inform much of Orta's output, emphasizing the individual's right to occupy public space rather

than attempting to reintegrate them into the authoritarian structure that may have been the source of their alienation. For many homeless, it is the trauma suffered in institutions or domestic environments that has led to their existence outside them. Rather than condemning them to the confinement of the hostels and shelters they avoid, Orta reclaims spaces that address individuals' need to be accepted and nurtured on their own terms. But Orta is not merely producing a sense of individual space, she is producing an environment for living—albeit a transitory one. Paradoxically, Orta brought the invisible into view by giving them space in which to feel secure, a space they can consider to be “home.”

Rather than interpreting home as a stable base or fixed point, Orta represents it existentially as the act of dwelling, which she defines as a phenomenon of “being” in space rather than mediated specifically by place. Her way of thinking relates to that of scholars and philosophers from a wide range of disciplines, who evaluate geographical space as a social construction. Like the social sculptures Joseph Beuys created to effect social change, Orta liberates the idea of home from the confines of geographic place by utilizing the human's fundamental capacity to adapt to changes. As home is reconceived as a shared environment, the notion that it can be denied to outsiders is voided.

Martin Heidegger traced the concept of home back through its Old English and High German roots to equate “building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth,” and concluded that habitation was indistinguishable from human existence.⁵ Ironically, Heidegger's reflections on the built environment linked people to their corporeality, revealing that human existence is in itself a type of habitation. He regarded the occupation of bodily space to be driven by its compulsion to dwell on earth, and imbued with emotional attachments and meanings that extend far beyond the occupation of territory. Jacques Derrida interpreted such attachments as desire, identifying the idea of places and dwellings so universally longed for as the very locus of desire. When strong emotions manifest themselves in architecture, the dynamics of desire establish it as place and give it meaning.

To dwell is to be protected from the elements, but is also a mode of belonging. Being is as much an experience of the senses as it is a physicality; it is an encounter that unfolds through the meaning of touch and the exchange of glances. The visionary Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, who also interpreted the home in terms of sensation, wrote: “habitualisation devours work, clothes, furniture [. . .] and art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things.”⁶ Physical bonds in turn generate social ones, and Shklovsky's work recalls the intimacy of home that is denied those who dwell outside it. Orta interprets the spaces between the senses and the physicality of the body as an essential habitation, giving primacy to the feeling of “being” and belonging over bricks and mortar. As her interventions, workshops and exhibitions reveal, Orta's work speaks volumes about the intimacy of personal relationships.

Situations of crisis and conflict erase the conventions of belonging and territorial affinities. What remains is the integrity of the body and its relationship to other human beings, which Orta interprets as the literal and symbolic links that connect individuals to each other within a larger body of space. Such situations reflect the complex interactions between individuals and the spaces they occupy. Recalling the polemics of George Simmel, Orta explained: “Since to inhabit a space means to consider it part of one's body, clothes are fully entitled to become architectural dwellings, temporary shelters affording protection against cold and storms in the stopping-places on the long journey of human existence.”

Orta connects the design process to issues much wider than the individual. The twentieth century was characterized by migration on an unprecedented scale, and readings of its cultural history chart the reappraisal of space as the frequent shifts of individuals and whole populations resisted the habitualization of everyday dwelling. Although twenty-first century Europe is determined to open its borders, the continual flow of asylum seekers and other refugees is greeted with confinement and exclusion rather than acceptance and integration. Although Orta does not deliberately charge her work with political content, it manifests a critique of the political and social policies that marginalize “outsiders” and condemn them to a life of confinement, ghettoization and deprivation. By extending her work to the plight of refugees, Orta also highlights the instability of “home” as privacy, intimacy and security collapse. Home is also a site for the construction of the unstable and the unfamiliar.

In her struggle against exclusion, Orta continues to combine architecture, body art, fashion, social dynamics, ideological activism and even political agendas. Her work results from the collective force that fashion and architecture mediate, in many respects documenting the dynamics between them. Orta's structures capture the essence of fashion and

architecture, deploying the principles of both in her organization of space. Orta starts at the level of the body, providing protection for the marginalized human, drawing on the primeval textile shelters from which architecture evolved. While her work shows how architecture continues to be fashioned by its dependence on the human form, it also illustrates the extent to which this interdependence can constitute the critical difference between life and death. Yet, as her works delineate space around the body, they also imbue it with essential mobility, proposing a new paradigm of movable, modular architecture that could redefine future environments.

Orta's principal projects operate as spatial scenarios, works of art, architectural prototypes and interactive platforms. Their titles speak for themselves: Refuge Wear, Body Architecture, Nexus Architecture, The Connector Mobile Village, Modular Architecture, Citizen Platform and Commune Communicate. As these designs are considered in the sections that follow, the process of transformation they initiate unfolds against a vision in which distinctions between media break down. "The prototypes I have built are not designed to solve the growing problems our society is facing. However, they have brought to light certain problems and have opened up a debate which I hope will include as many people as possible." While Orta's work is not intended to provide a solution, it provokes an effective response.

Refuge Wear

From the outset, Orta's mission has been one of listening and participation: a formula she applies to every aspect of her work. Identifying the fear that many homeless people experience about living in a home or a shelter led Orta to consider how the street could be appropriated as an extension of the household. Sensing the individual's need to define an area of personal space within the urban matrix, Orta conceived Refuge Wear as a space in which the individual can seek solace as well as shelter. In this respect, each structure is also designed to designate a literal refuge, a place of seclusion, comfort and hope as well as a vehicle for survival.

Refuge Wear takes form at the level of the individual, linking and combining material, space and social action to bridge individual differences. Orta regards each piece as a carefully conceived artistic prototype designed with the potential to be produced to aid those in need of temporary and immediate clothing and shelter in crisis situations, however they are by no means functional industrial objects. Universal in scope, each piece of Refuge Wear confronts harsh realities on the very terrains where they exist—instigating a poetic redistribution of resources from the affluent to the dispossessed.

Refuge Wear garments are essentially textile structures that can instantly be transformed into corporeal architecture by using a system of pockets, zips and Velcro fasteners to stretch natural materials and technical weaves over lightweight carbon armatures that anchor the whole to the ground. The walls are constructed from high-performance fabrics or techno textiles that surround the body with a breathable membrane that functions like a second skin. The first garment in the Refuge Wear series was the "Habitent," a water- and windproof jacket incorporating a collapsible framework that provides the wearer with an efficient system of dress and shelter.

Parallels can be drawn between Orta's work and the art of the late Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, who examined the mutability of the body through its relationship to signifiers outside it. They created architectural structures similar to capes and banners for "habitation" in order to connect individuals through the intermediary of touch. The Parangolés, Oiticica's best-known works, were fabricated from textiles and plastics, in structures Oiticica conceived as clothes-cum-dwellings. The Parangolés were also commentaries on the individual's role in a collective experience as "a participant, transforming his own body into a support, in a ludic experience that becomes an expressive act."⁷ Like Heidegger, Clark and Oiticica structured their work according to a concept of body existence as dwelling or habitation, but specifically referenced the theory of "anthropagy" proposed by Oswald de Andrade. As an amplification of the body's structure, the Parangolés were also intended to represent architecture as the first manifestation of human existence on earth.

Each individual piece of Refuge Wear was designed as a personal environment that could be varied in accordance with weather conditions, social needs, necessity or urgency. The pockets were made to contain utilitarian supplies: water, food, medicine, clothing, portable stoves and documents. Further Refuge Wear prototypes were fabricated as personal environments in response to social conditions and could be converted according to need,

necessity or urgency. In the case of refugees, for example, Refuge Wear creates a sense of agency and sanctuary as the refugees struggle to mesh their domestic world with larger systems of political mandates. Within a camp or an emergency zone it marks a boundary between public and private domains. In practical terms the units provide shelter and protection, but the space inside them is a symbolic expression of intimate dwellings. Like a house, they encircle families or individuals with walls of defense, establish points of contact with the outside world and provide spaces that refugees can appropriate as their “home.”

As a response to the crises of the Gulf War, Orta began making Refuge Wear to address human suffering on a global scale. Unstable political environments, famine and war resulted in growing numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Orta produced a series of drawings to articulate suggestions for an emergency solution to the homelessness many of these people now faced. Based on drawings, Orta later fabricated the series of multipurpose shelters that she gave the generic title Refuge Wear, which could be comfortably worn as weatherproof clothing then transformed into simple pod-like or tent-like structures.

Refuge Wear went on to become synonymous with clothing and shelter made for extreme conditions. The prototypes had the potential to provide vital mobility and waterproof shelter for the Kurdish and Albanian refugee populations; to give temporary protection and shelter to the victims of natural disasters, such as the Kobe earthquake; to fulfill the needs of Serbian civilians in the wake of the NATO bombing; and, in their worst function, to serve as burial bags in the Rwandan genocide.

Orta’s remit to call attention to the problems of marginalized groups challenged the issue of social visibility, as she continued to stage a program of events related to Refuge Wear in urban centers. These interventions often cemented social solidarity as they focused awareness on the problems of homelessness, and fostered a drive to redress the issues. The events received critical acclaim in the art world, which dubbed them “relational aesthetics” because of their universal message and interactive nature.⁸ Orta regarded these public forums as her first “interventions”: “It’s about taking the art outside the institutional venue and into the street,” she said. “It’s also about developing a team and initiating ideas and seeing how they can develop afterwards, on their own in society.”

Body Architecture

Following her Refuge Wear interventions of 1992 and 1993, Orta expanded her protest of the predicament of disenfranchised individuals to encompass the larger problems of displaced communities. Her Body Architecture series developed with the protective principles of Refuge Wear in mind, but advocated interdependency rather than seeking individual solutions. Body Architecture heralded a new direction in Orta’s work; she shifted her focus away from the microcosm of the individual to the macrocosm of the community, from practical protective clothing to communal modular habitations. These garments interconnect the wearers as they attach to each other, embodying the principle of solidarity so central to Orta’s thinking.

Within the rubric of Body Architecture, Orta developed different prototypes that establish physical links between individuals, symbolizing the myriad ties that can be forged emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Some of the individual Body Architecture pieces she created resemble ski suits or overalls, others recall the hooded shapes of Refuge Wear. These are designed as modular units that can be combined in configurations of four to form a single construction. As four units are taken off the body and zipped together, they create a four-person tent that can be easily dismantled and rebuilt. Made of aluminum-coated polyamide and equipped with pockets and compartments, the tent is waterproof and aerodynamic, held in place by supporting posts and secured to the ground by pegs along its base. Other Body Architecture prototypes are connected to form Nexus Architecture interventions, detailed in the following section.

In its inherent abstractness, Body Architecture seems to have more resonance with the future than the present. It defines space with a quality that often seems to be transcendent and immaterial. Its hi-tech fabric domes and tent-like structures suggest physical and psychological refuge within a larger protective enclosure. As the various pieces zip together they constitute one membrane; the individuals meshed within it share resources, support and intelligence. Reflecting on its significance in a social context, the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio concluded that Body Architecture units constitute a metaphoric remedy for the problems facing society today: “The precarious nature of society is no longer that of the unemployed or the abandoned, but that of individuals socially alone. In the proximate vicinity

our families are falling apart. One's individual life depends on the warmth of the other. The warmth of one gives warmth to the other. The physical link weaves the social link."⁹

As Orta relates technical innovation to humanitarianism, her *Body Architecture* covers the same theoretical ground as Shigeru Ban's vision of habitation modules and Future Systems's proposals for temporary homeless shelters in London. The desire to create a sense of interrelatedness in space informed much of the Team X output, who clearly recognized the necessity of facilitating social unity within architectural space. Van Eyck's orphanage in Amsterdam achieved a similar dynamic of group cohesion and community solidarity through an interconnected sequence of domed family units, all united under a continuous roof.

That architecture can be considered as a potent influence on human behavior attests to the compelling roles that buildings have assumed in literature. The architectural entities described in Ayn Rand's allegorical masterpiece *The Fountainhead*, in Rem Koolhaas' urban thriller *Delirious New York* and in Stephen King's novel *The Shining* as the sepulchral confines of *The Overlook* hotel reveal architecture's ability to shape thoughts and stir emotions. Orta's work seems to represent architecture and human existence in equivocal terms, transacting a synergy between her structures and the bodies of its inhabitants. *Body Architecture* creates a kind of symbiosis between its wearers as they must rely on each other to make up the remaining parts of the whole. In an unexpected reversal, Orta is using architectural principles to dictate the behavior of the inhabitants rather than merely structuring it to serve individual needs.

While Orta interprets the body's architecture as an external surface, she also considers it to be part of a system of layers that envelop the body. Underwear, layers of outer clothing and anoraks continue to be expanded by additional surfaces: after the anorak comes the sleeping bag, followed by the tent, after which comes the container. "Fashion is essentially a system of many layers of protection in which we wrap or cocoon ourselves," Orta said. "Refuge Wear) hold the potential to define identity and our place in society." Viewing each outer surface of her work as a second skin, Orta transfers texts, symbols and images onto the fabric to voice statements of identity and solidarity, like personal sentiments and subcultural affinities expressed in tattooing.

In addition to its spatial coherence, *Body Architecture* also provides a framework in which individual narratives can be expressed textually. Texts and images are often a point of entry into the meaning of Orta's work, sometimes evocative of the logos and packaging of consumerism. Yet in their humanitarian meaning, Orta's graphics subvert the concept of branding. A brand is considered to be "a prefix; a qualifier of character," sentiments that also summarize the motives behind Orta's signature graphics and the messages they convey.¹⁰ Her graphics can be likened to advertising with nothing to sell, intended to provoke questions rather than propose solutions. They implant ideas into social consciousness to trigger spontaneous actions rather than achieve predetermined objectives. Orta breaks new ground to incite social and personal transformations, using physical, often intimate contact and voluntary participation rather than the dogma of slogans and brands.

The shifting codes of meaning captured in the intertextual manifestations of *Body Architecture* function as a recording device that captures and organizes cultural meanings over time. In forming a lo-tech record, they recall the predigital archives that served as depositories for the accumulation of time and knowledge, a system used by libraries, institutions, museums, academia and other centers of knowledge. Like these archives, fashion and architecture generally serve as objects that reflect culture and society. People congregate around them to examine and interpret their meaning. *Body Architecture*'s capacity to create an archive in itself reveals the inherent space for intellectual investigation it also creates.

Nexus Architecture

Of all Orta's projects, *Nexus Architecture* seems to be the most emblematic of her approach. More symbolic than functional, *Nexus Architecture* takes its name from "Nexus," meaning a link or a tie, or a linked series or group. The series is made up of individual outfits termed *Collective Wear* that recall the hooded bodysuits worn by Greenpeace activists during antinuclear protests. Unlike the Greenpeace suits, which were made to be worn separately, Orta's suits have attachable tubes of fabric that zipper the wearers together in a single garment.

Nexus Architecture is intended to function as an antidote to the type of social fragmentation described by the architectural theorist Neil Leach as “the placelessness of contemporary society.”¹¹ As “difference” is subsumed within a single totalizing vision, it can breed a certain intolerance to anything that does not conform to the same vision, promoting the marginalization of individuals even further. As parts of the city fragment and resemble a village, they break down the model for a unified urban fabric, dividing it into neighborhoods, which subsequently subdivide into autonomous units.

The individual units of Orta’s Nexus Architecture link the wearers together at the front and the back of the garments. The collective garment they form can include a few people or hundreds of them, forming a many-membered organism. Orta interprets the tubes of fabric connecting the individuals to one another as a literal representation of a “social link,” made visible to those outside the workshop as the participants tour the streets wearing it. Nexus Architecture interventions have been staged in Europe, the United States, South Africa, Bolivia and Mexico, joining together over one hundred people in a single column as they trek across the countryside or walk through the urban landscape. Worn in a performance at the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain in Paris, dancers used Nexus Architecture to demonstrate that the limits of an individual are not defined by the outermost layer of skin alone. Within its shared spaces, Collective Wear encourages physical contact and cooperation among its wearers, as well as an exploration of individual feeling and movement.

Part of Nexus Architecture’s expression of collectivism is manifested in events and workshops that compliment the interventions. These are typically planned to facilitate the sharing of skills or as a broadening of knowledge that brings people together to raise awareness of key issues. Nexus Architecture encourages the collaboration between marginalized social groups, which in the past have included migrant laborers, the homeless and inner city teenagers, and local participants. With a focus on forging interrelationships and new perceptions of personal and cultural identity, the collaborations redefine the way that diverse groups are able to communicate and interact with each other. Orta transports an established matrix from one workshop to the next, but draws on the local environment for the themes, materials and construction techniques used by the group. She creates a forum that enables the work to evolve as artists and participants establish a working relationship and an awareness of common concerns.

As part of her participation in the Second Johannesburg Biennale, Orta created a workshop that employed thirteen migrant laborers to produce their own Nexus links, leaving them free to make the aesthetic and planning decisions for their own suits, instilling a notion of individuality in each. She explained: “None of the participants knew how to sew at all but learned the skill during the course of the workshop. So it was about passing on a skill, how to make a garment, but at the same time making them aware of how they can work together as a team to create something and give them the possibility to manifest something. Afterwards the women took the initiative to find work using their sewing skills. In turn, they were able to teach the skill to other women, creating a continuous chain that illustrated the message behind the links perfectly.” The attachable appendages linked thirteen different individuals in a self-sufficient entity that signaled the power of the collective body over the isolation of the individual.

One of the Nexus workshops facilitated the transatlantic construction of a mobile shelter, bridging the diverse experiences of teenagers from the Arc-en-Ciel foster home in France with students from the Sonia Delaunay High School in France and adolescents from the Henry Street Settlement arts program on New York’s Lower East Side. These workshops did not include the public interventions of the Nexus actions, but focused on exploring the role of art as a collective activity that progressed with the active participation of each group. Each participant produced an individual panel of fabric that would be attached to the others and form the walls of the mobile shelter. Mirroring the collective body formed by the individuals linked together in the Collective Wear, the teenagers symbolically produced a collective entity that brought the individual members of these diverse groups into a collective whole. The success of this long-distance interaction later inspired Orta to develop “fluid architecture,” the interactive website that provides an international forum for people throughout the world to participate in the workshops, which is detailed further on in this text.¹²

Even after the garments are taken off, Nexus Architecture continues to suggest a possible model for living together in a communal formation that encourages individual expression and mutual support. Nexus Architecture reveals that the community is made up of individuals and that the individual, like an urban dwelling, is not an autonomous element, but

an entity rooted in its connection and interaction with the larger whole. The community of workshop participants is established through such connections, each enriching the individual and facilitating a sense of inclusion.

The Life Nexus Village Fête is an evolving architectural and social configuration that expands the collective principles underlying Orta's Body Architecture. Although these evolved through her experimentation with portable structures, the design does not allow the same degree of wearability that most of her other prototypes do. The installation comprises the aluminum-coated domes Orta refers to as Primary Structures, interconnected by Nexus extensions. Each dome has space for up to three people and room for folding tables, chairs or plinths. The Primary Structures are positioned in a hexagonal shape encircling a central space that provides a forum for community workshops. The hexagonal layout provides the structural axis from which further Primary Structures can radiate. These constructions, together with the participants, create the feel of a nomadic community, which Orta uses to create a dialogue among all members of the group.

The Nexus Architecture projects were also championed by Paul Virilio, who applauded their capacity to confront the disintegration of social bonds in today's society. For several decades Virilio had observed the gradual erosion of the family unit and the disappearance of what he describes as "humanitarian values." Virilio parallels this social decay to the disintegration of collective units, as the role of the individual begins to take precedence over humanitarian concerns: "[Orta] is designing collective wear at a time when divorces are on the increase. It is a sort of marriage via clothes, designed to prevent people from tearing themselves apart. It is extraordinary that, at a time when single-parent families are becoming the norm, Lucy Orta is designing collective wear where parents and children wear the same garment. This is like a metaphor symptomatic of the state of society."

Virilio's critique highlights some of the political dimensions of Orta's work. Although Orta is adamant that her work is not based on political protest, the social and spatial ordering expressed in her architectural structures could also serve as a model for a pluralistic, democratic Europe free from the issues of nationalism provoked by the European Union. It is surprising that such models are necessary at a time when humans celebrate the perception of freedom, emancipation and autonomy, but individuals appear to be regrouping in somewhat threatening configurations – evident in the phenomenon of street gangs, subversive cultures, fascist groups and terrorism.

Nexus Architecture units are inscribed with images and texts, yet voice a critique against brand culture and image making as they circulate in a society dominated by slogans and visual iconography. Echoing the textual features of Clark's Roupa corpo-roupa and Oiticica's Parangolés, Orta regards the exterior surfaces of the garments as a tabula rasa onto which she inscribes her signature communiqué.¹³ But whereas the Parangolés were imprinted with defiant expressions, such as "I embody revolt," "I am possessed" and "From adversity we live," Orta's work projects statements of empathy and solidarity.

The outer shell of Nexus Architecture sports images and texts to broadcast messages of their own, interpreting the communication potential inherent in all clothing as a form of visual and verbal packaging. One of the prototypes Orta showed at the Venice Biennale in 1995 featured the clear-cut statement: "Me, I've got a lot to say." Orta borrowed this expression from a participant in her first Identity + Refuge workshop. Each Nexus intervention includes this declaration, articulating that the wearer, whether marginalized by society or not, is claiming their right to voice individual views. As participants customize their individual outfits in Orta's workshops, they rediscover themselves by "writing" their identities. Such messages move beyond literary form, expressing in symbols the human angst that was previously passed over in silence.

Brand culture goes hand in hand with marketing and mobility, and packaging, the means of carrying the message to its destinations, has a dual role. The primary function of packaging is to facilitate transport, and its secondary role is a strategy to market the product. As the Nexus Architecture motifs convey information, they also adopt this approach. In the way that packaging draws consumers, Orta uses texts to draw members of society towards problems that are continually avoided.

Mobile Villages

When, in his introduction to Report on the City 1 and 2, Rem Koolhaas wrote, "there have been no new movements in urbanism since Team X and Archigram he had obviously not

heard of Lucy Orta. As her work continued to radiate beyond the individual and small collectives, Orta developed a system of flexible, modular structures that, like an architectural axis, are able to grow in size according to population. Unlike a series of buildings that would remain bound to a specific place, the Connector Mobile Village forms the basis of a mobile community. The work facilitates a modular social network in which individual units can be connected in a variety of configurations, forming sites for habitation, education or exhibitions. Individuals can attach and detach at will to join different parts of the community or reformulate the entire network. “I wanted to engage the individual Body Architecture units I call ‘Survival Sacs’ within the structure of an architectural hub to create a forum where individuals could gather and retreat to separate spaces when they need to,” Orta explained.

The Connector is an infrastructure that forms the basis of an architecture that is permanently evolving. Based on both independence and interdependence, it formalizes Orta’s concept of an open network for social space. Like the works in her Body Architecture series, the Connector Mobile Village is designed to promote inclusion and encourage community activities among groups as they work together on a specific project, or engage in leisure and recreational activities. In this respect the Connector is akin to the ancient Succoth—a tent erected in the midst of fields for the ritual feasting and celebrations following the harvest of crops. After the event is over, the Connector is disassembled and taken away by the participants. Its assembly and subsequent disassembly do not leave behind the sort of building waste or demolition debris typical of prefabricated housing—making the Connector a natural resource in itself.

Whether erected in an urban milieu or in the natural environment, the Connector Mobile Village doesn’t require that any changes are made to its surroundings. In the current drive towards systems of open architecture, the Connector echoes the principles of folding architecture as it blurs, blends and intermixes with garments, structures and the landscape. The use of textiles and the construction of home through the principles of architecture and the community it houses were placed into a theoretical context by Gottfried Semper, who interpreted the woven carpets hung from the frames of nomadic tents as early architecture. Although superseded by walls, these textiles have not been lost completely, for vestiges of their weaves can be observed in the patterns of brickwork and mosaics. The textile panels used in Orta’s work revive the fabric containers of early architecture, harking back to the essentially nomadic experience that bonded itinerant communities. The Communicator fabricates a physical container for both material and cultural content—engaging the wanderers directly and encouraging them to linger.

Orta’s Life Nexus Village Fête is also an architectural and social configuration that draws on the architectural principles expressed in the Communicator Mobile Village and the interconnectedness of Nexus Architecture. While these evolved through the principles of wearable garments, the designs are not fully wearable. The Life Nexus Village Fête comprises the Primary Structures mentioned above, inter-connected by Nexus extensions. The Primary Structures are positioned in a hexagonal shape encircling a central space (foyer) that provides a forum for community workshops. The hexagonal layout provide the structural axis from which further Primary Structures can radiate. These constructions, together with the participants, create the feel of a community festival, an atmosphere Orta generates to establish a dialogue within the group.

Beyond metaphors for connection, the Communicator also points towards modes of survival in the cases of social and demographic dislocation experienced by refugees. Orta responds with an environment that provides spaces for survival in private areas for sleeping, eating and washing, instantly creating a ready-made village. As the Connector produces a frame for spatial meaning, it also facilitates an environment for communication, support and solidarity. “It’s important that the nodes can adapt to include all members of a family, since large families may be split up in emergency shelters or social housing,” Orta said. “As the community travels they can take these shelters with them for as long as they need to. Hopefully they will represent the promise of a permanent home later on.”

“The Connector Mobile Village is also a means of keeping social units together,” Orta explained. “Like a family who can come together in the central node then sleep in their own Survival Sacs without disconnecting. That is very important for parents and children so that they aren’t separated.” Orta addresses the vulnerability of children living under extreme conditions by designating space to re-create the security and intimacy they had had in their own homes. Connector modules can be personalized by and for children with fabrics, textures and colors.

Orta is not alone in addressing the needs of humanity with mobile dwelling spaces. A range of American and European artists are basing their work on the “containerization” of living space, exploring the overlaps between architecture, urban planning and transitional systems to realize a fully self-sufficient and mobile social space. Joep van Lieshout’s projects, for example, roam from site to site in the guise of mobile help centers, whereas Krzysztof Wodiczko created a series of Homeless Vehicles to provide marginalized groups with a “street tool” that transports the basic necessities of a survival economy. Dré Wapenaar designs tents that function as lures, attracting a diverse range of people to gather inside and engage with a message of awareness. Alicia Framis, Tobias Rehberger, Jorge Pardo, Plamen Dejanov and Svetlana Heger also ground their art practice in the social dimensions of collective action and the understanding of itinerant communities. Like the goals of the Connector Mobile Village, their work aims to give marginalized groups a forum for public presence and speech, delivering the “platform” to people who are unable to reach centers of power.

Modular Architecture

Orta continues to move beyond the concept of an autonomous, separate self to give the individual refuge in the collective whole. Like the Connector Mobile Village, Modular Architecture addresses the individual’s need to share space and extend the warmth and security of one’s own space with others. “I wanted to explore the systems that encapsulate individual bodies, and challenge them with a system that connects and interconnects individuals,” Orta explained. “There is a sense that putting modules together unites people, making them aware they can exist as individuals but also as components of the whole.”

Modular Architecture units amplify fashion’s primary function as shelter, and signal fashion’s capacity to assume the functions of modern dwellings. It combines the communal principles of Body Architecture with the protective function of Refuge Wear. Modular Architecture consists of temporary, portable dwellings made up of individual sections, panels or units that can be combined to make a number of different forms, or simply worn as protective clothing. Square, triangular or rectangular in shape, individual panels can be joined and configured into several core designs: geometric domes or modular igloos are created by joining six or eight triangles, while four-sided panels can be fashioned into rectilinear cabins. Square panels can also be rolled into tubes to form the Nexus links between the Collective Wear suits.

Mirroring the principles of architectonic modularity, any one component can be removed and replaced without affecting the rest of the system. The individual pieces can be rearranged to transform one item into myriad designs, or whole panels replaced to alter the function of the piece. The Nexus links connect the igloos, domes and cabins and the wearers in a single system. In its functionality, the system observes the rules corresponding to the matrix of Western architecture, mirroring the Greek and Roman traditions that underpin the modules prevalent in modern architecture. Yet, workshop participants can determine the dimensions of Modular Architecture according to site-specific projects, breaking away from formal measurements and traditional techniques. “In moving beyond uniform heights and dimensions,” Orta explained, “Modular Architecture also addresses the concept of a universal, unchanging order of individual and social realities, and the extent to which these values continue to apply.”

The bodysuits included in Modular Architecture feature modules of body parts; that is, gloves, gloved sleeves and hoods that can be attached, unzipped and interchanged. Pockets and compartments can also assume the guise of modular components—facilitating the sharing of goods and resources once again. Ten modules can be zipped together into a single sleeping tube that circulates body heat as well as produces an expression of unity as they act as a single entity. Orta regards the wearer’s movements as those of a multifaceted mechanism, mirroring Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s theories on the mechanization of the body. In his theory of monadology, Leibniz described the body not as a machine in itself, but as a mechanism made up of many machines, considering organs and body parts as devices in themselves. A model for expression in contemporary aesthetics, the concept of the monad is viewed in terms of folds of space, movement and time, like the interrelatedness of the body and the Modular Architecture structures supporting it.

Orta staged a dance performance at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 1996 in conjunction with an installation of her work in the gallery. Ten dance professionals donned

Modular Architecture outfits and choreographed a mobile version of the installation as they moved through the gallery. As they probed the space of the gallery they also explored the spaces of the Modular Architecture, moving through the domes and cabins and investigating the spaces of the structures they were wearing. Arm modules were unzipped or extended as the dancers interrelated the architecture to the body and their bodies to one another. They articulated their collective body through its alignment with a painted grid covering the floor. The effect was that of expunging boundaries, for the dancers' movements dissolved the margins between the bodies and the architectural modules.

Modular Architecture highlights the potential to rethink many of the limitations of architecture as well as fashion. Conceiving modular systems of architecture offers inhabitants the means to expand and customize their environments, recalling the American inventor Richard Buckminster Fuller's vision of manufacturing whole rooms for the home that could be purchased and installed like appliances. Buildings would have greater potential to expand laterally without affecting the ground beneath them, and pre-equipped units could replace outmoded living areas. Likewise, garments can evolve to create self-controlled environments that provide the wearer with flexibility, holding the means to create whole wardrobes based on a system of modular segments that can be rearranged in myriad designs, or form panels that can function as modular sections. Worn-out modules can be renewed, and styles can easily be reconfigured by interchanging the modules. This could enable designers to offer customers the range of clothing combinations found in a large collection of separates, while manufacturing only several core designs. While the economics of mass production make it prohibitively expensive to manufacture small numbers of individual designs, producing large numbers of a small range reduces production costs considerably.

Accepting the rationale of Modular Architecture is to dismiss the belief in an unchanging order of relationships between individuals, societies and their environment. Orta has identified the fragmentations evident in the society around her, responding by creating a modular structure that redefines them as components in a universal system. It provides an architectural solution to the limitations of physical space while extending the body's mobility and potential to interact within larger systems. As a result, Modular Architecture holds the potential to redefine the boundaries between clothing and architecture, outlining a system that interprets garments as built environments in themselves that are also a part of a larger one.

Intervention

The workshops and interventions mentioned previously make strong statements about clothing, humanity, individuality and communality, but they are also intended to provide new forums for bringing people together. Critics often have difficulty finding a term that encapsulates the full range of Orta's practice, typically interpreting it as art installations, relational aesthetics, architectural prototypes or even fashion collections. While aspects of Orta's work can be explained in these terms, the very depth and breadth of her practice suggest a rejection of such categorical denominations of media and genre. It is the staging of the social bond itself that binds each project, threading through the concepts of refuge and solidarity to weave an interactive platform for participation and dialogue.

"My motivation is to communicate," Orta explained. "To communicate a new art form which can involve all sorts of genres, from performances, interventions and object-making to installations and multimedia. But at the same time, to bring to the fore some social awareness through the objects, dialogues or discussions." Orta achieves this by encouraging active participation from diverse members of the community, engaging with them in the same spot where she identifies the need for social change in the first place. Squatted buildings, shelters for the homeless, schools, universities, art galleries, theaters and even the street have become the locus for these events. Orta incorporates a range of diverse media, including food and clothing along with images, texts and sound recordings. Orta's "hands-on" method of social bonding gives a contemporary sense to the concepts of activism and social obligation that many activists previously regarded as outdated.

Orta explores the function of architecture and the purpose of clothing with unremitting persistence, re-examining the functions of the spaces contained within them. But while the Body Architecture projects create dwellings to reshape and redefine points of interaction between individuals, Orta recognizes the need to build relationships beyond them, extending her practice to spaces whose wearers are unlikely to don her garments. Examining the role of a restaurant or cafeteria reveals that its social function extends beyond its built structure—it is

the cultural practice of the meal that creates a space for interaction among the people it brings together. Staged beyond the confines of architecture, a meal can be transacted in the street or any public space to facilitate exchanges and interactions. Like the migrant workers who learned sewing skills and shared them with members of their community, Orta brings people together in the street in the hope that they will reforge the social bonds in the public spaces where they are needed most.

One of Orta's most acclaimed interventions did not feature garments or architecture, answering the body's need for sustenance instead. Entitled *All in One Basket: A Reflection on Hunger and Food Waste*, the intervention was held at the Forum Saint-Eustache des Halles in Paris in March 1997. Orta developed the idea the previous summer when she saw television news coverage of French farmers protesting against European Union agricultural legislation by tipping trailers of fruit onto highways. Disturbed by these images, Orta realized that, in a less dramatic manner, the Paris market traders also dumped fruit and vegetables at the end of every day. She responded by organizing the collection of leftover produce in the Les Halles quarter of Paris, and asking a celebrity chef to cook it. The food was served on a buffet and passers-by were invited to eat. The people of Les Halles, whether rich or poor, participated in a demonstration of gastronomic recycling and exchange.

The *All in One Basket* project led to Orta's incorporation of food into other projects. She demonstrated how emergency meals could be provided in times of crisis, in an event titled *70 x 7, The Meal*, staged at the Kunstraum gallery in Innsbruck, Austria. The project was, according to Orta, "the third act in a series of actions that bring the community together via the ritual of a meal thus creating links and engaging the lives of the broader community." Orta chose the title "*70 x 7*," which originates from a biblical context, because it is a symbol of the infinite. Her ambition is to transform the symbol into reality by organizing meals that could expand exponentially in divisions of seven to accommodate an infinite number of guests. *70 x 7* consists of an extendable seventy-meter tablecloth set with four hundred and ninety Limoges dinner plates manufactured specially for the work. The Kunstraum Innsbruck then organized a series of meals for multiples of seven guests, using surplus produce from local farmers.

Orta has held other relational works outdoors: in the cultural milieu of Tschumi's Parc de la Villette in Paris, in New York's SoHo district, where she staged a fashion show outside the Salvation Army on Spring Street, and outside the perimeter wall of a prison in Metz. For her Earth Day installation at Parc de la Villette, Orta constructed a mobile unit she dubbed *Citizen Platform* as a vehicle for gauging individual opinions on environmental concerns. By asking the park's visitors to write messages relating to the practice of recycling, Orta created a social response to an urgent ethical need. "*Citizen Platform* was set up to work more or less like *Nexus Architecture* does, but this time the participant was confronted with a mobile architecture made of metal rather than fabric and asked to engage with it through written communication rather than wearing it," she said. "It was also a follow-up to the food project at Les Halles where people discussed food wastage—another example of something that should be recycled but isn't."

As the park's visitors appreciated its landscaped green spaces and fresh air they were confronted with the reality that environmental awareness was essential to maintain it. The messages they wrote were preaddressed to the mayor of Paris, appealing for improved recycling programs throughout the city. The response was overwhelming—hundreds of messages were collected and passed on to the mayor's office as a demonstration of collective solidarity. Based on this initial success, the mobile unit will continue to travel the city until changes in the city's environmental policies have taken hold. The project drew awareness to the fact that each public area in the city has the potential to act as a platform, transforming a space that can represent the collective voice of the city.

In another intervention, Orta questioned what a forgotten coat hanging on a peg or an abandoned pair of shoes could tell about the person who wore them, and asked what they could mean to the next owner. Recalling Heidegger's insights into the origins and owners of the boots painted by Van Gogh, Orta considered the original source and future potentials of the discarded clothing she would recycle, giving new life to objects earmarked for disposal. It was in this context that Orta's intervention *Identity + Refuge* with the residents of the Salvation Army shelter in Paris was organized, whereby a sewing workshop was set up to recycle second-hand clothing. The shelter's storeroom housed a surplus of clothing that was transformed into new and original garments in the workshop, creating a tailor-made wardrobe for residents who otherwise had no choice but to salvage second-hand clothing for their own

use. When the workshop concluded, Orta organized a fashion show of the regenerated clothing, enlisting the participation of students from a local secondary school to model them.

One of the aims of the workshop had been to give residents the means to reclaim their self-esteem through the items they wore, giving them the capacity to create a wardrobe that they regarded as comfortable, appropriate and even fashionable. Orta encouraged the residents to reconsider their appearance and their individual roles in society, which she hoped would boost their self-esteem and help shape personal identity. The collective task also transmitted a message about human creativity: the garments made by the residents resulted from their own creative inspiration that they may not have realized existed previously. Performed with the tools and materials at hand rather than through mechanized production, the task of making the garments also constituted the sort of work-oriented creativity that Lévi-Strauss identified as bricolage.¹⁴ Bricolage also identifies the “events” that result when basic materials are transformed into more refined products, which in this case proved to be both the workshop established to convert rags into beautiful clothing and the self-awareness created among the residents. Lévi-Strauss argued that “to understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts,” identifying art in the spaces between creative production and technical skill.¹⁵ The concept of “art in the spaces” is a perfect metaphor for Orta’s interventions, which in this context revealed parallels between the new lease of life given to the abandoned clothing and the new lease of hope experienced by the residents.

The sewing workshop balanced structure and event, enjoining the physical act of making the works with the sensuous, bodily experience of wearing them. Through the garments, new visions of life were projected by the makers for the wearers, as if the old clothing represented ambitions not possible to relay by pen and paper, word or gesture. Lévi-Strauss identified such expressions as signs, maintaining that the bricoleur communicates in ciphers that infuse old materials with a new message. “Signs can be opposed to concepts,” he wrote, “signs allow and even require the interposing and incorporation of a certain amount of human culture into reality.”¹⁶ Likewise, these recycled garments are unique in their capacity to reveal much about the social conditions that necessitated their production in the first place.

Orta went on to create events that would bridge the gap between the confined residents of a penal institution and the free inhabitants of a nearby town, in a work titled *Commune Communicate*. Like the platform for discussion set up at La Villette, Orta created a dialogue among members of the public and the inmates at Metz Prison—a discourse between the inclusive group of society and the excluded “other.” “I wondered about the prisoners’ feelings of isolation and at the same time their rigid scrutiny by the prison administration,” Orta said. “The public world has little knowledge of their closed world. It was important to them that they communicate with the world outside.” Orta met the prisoners and discussed their daily routines, their feelings about the world outside and their hopes for the future. The prisoners designed a set of folding tables and suitcases that featured photographs of the prison environment: the patch of blue sky overhead interrupted by helicopter-deterrent wires, the rusted entry gates that had recently been set alight in a prison protest, the interior façade of the concrete prison wall and regulation clothing bearing the stamped logo of the prison.

The inmate’s communiqué was set up on the streets of Metz where passers-by could stop and listen to the recorded messages made by some of the prisoners to be broadcast to listeners outside, sending good wishes to the people of the town or lobbying for rights and reforms to the French penal system. The recordings enabled the listeners to visualize the prisoners’ perspectives and gain an understanding of their isolation. “Many of the passers-by sent messages back to the prison on postcards, expressing their support or their curiosity,” Orta said. “Back at the prison the messages were circulated among the inmates, who were happy to have direct communication with people in the town, which they received with nostalgia and humour, but sometimes with a little sadness too.” Although the prisoners were locked into their exclusion, the aim was for them not to lose their individuality in a collective mass. *Commune Communicate* helped some of them to rediscover, in the strength of the group, the spatial organization of society that continued to provide hope.

Fluid Architecture

There is nothing more cutting edge today than the pooling of minds into an immense, interdisciplinary collaboration. Cyberspace, as a realm of intersecting practices, produces a virtual space in which concepts can be represented digitally and presented on an interactive platform. The Internet’s wider technological role within material culture stimulates the potential

for new interactive formats, reflected in a gradual shift away from traditional methods of meeting in face-to-face forums. This practice is already widespread in design and architecture; now Orta is exploring new developments in multimedia technologies to launch her interactive platforms on the Internet. Web interactivity, though still dependent on photo-based media, makes this new information-based approach to her work possible.

Cyberspace has a revolutionary role that extends far beyond that of the workshop, intervention, seminar or gallery exhibition. Advances in technology enable Orta to engineer connections and interfaces that unite fashion and architecture within an art forum. Orta launched the "fluid architecture" web platform in 2002 as an adjunct to her "studio-orta" website to increase the scope of participation and take the scale of projects in a new direction altogether.¹⁷ Fluid architecture is a forum where art, architecture and fashion merge and interact with a range of ideas reflecting activism, philosophy, solidarity and communality. The site features elements of sculpture, intervention, performance, fashion and architecture, underpinned by a series of visual and textual narratives that reveals a synergy between them all.

Orta is not moving away from object-based practice, but reproducing key elements of her workshops and creating interactive displays and webcast exhibitions through her digital archives and digital film projections. The site constitutes a body of work in itself, using a variety of contemporary media to create a new visual language for communication and interaction. The website's interactive technology enables visitors to contribute in real time to a workshop being held in a different time zone, or just log on and observe the participants' progress and interaction. Use of the Internet and digital technology transcends the boundaries of time and space and overcomes the problems of geographical distance, making the projects accessible to more participants than could ever be done in a workshop. Visitors can also view video recordings of previous projects kept in the site's digital archive, read texts or listen to sound bytes. Visitors are encouraged to send messages to the participants or to each other, creating an editorial space where ideas, opinions and critical feedback are circulated.

The concept behind the site combines contemporary aesthetics and technological innovations in a multimedia environment that facilitates communication and exploration. "Fluid architecture is a work that is developed and advanced, but by no means finished," Orta explained in a seminar presentation made to the students and faculty of the London College of Fashion shortly after the site was launched. "It creates a continuous forum and an open network for participation and a positive critical interface." Orta also anticipates that the visitors' perceptions of her work will identify areas that parallel her practice or inspire new approaches to the issues she addresses. "I tend to think of it as an exchange process too, a site where constant change mimics the fluidity of the sort of concepts I'm working with," Orta explained. "There is a fluidity of shape and form that takes the workshops in new directions."

The site represents a body of infinite folds and surfaces that twist and weave through compressed time and space. As visitors access the home page and "unbuckle" its initial protocols, a series of origami folds open out, each segment representing different projects in Australia, France, The Netherlands and England. Once selected, each individual fold unpacks a virtual tour of a project or workshop, revealed cinematically through time-lapse photography accompanied by a soundtrack of participants' voices describing their experiences at the workshops or interventions. A fluid narrative of panoramas, people, places and projects is accompanied by ambient sounds, bringing written texts and moving images to the fore. The visitor engages with a simultaneous experience of reading, listening and watching that mirrors the dynamics of the workshops themselves. The website can also include experimental designs and works in progress, or showcase tangential projects that may not relate directly to a workshop or an intervention.

Making these projects interactive and available to the public reduces the traditional degree of separation between artist and spectator. Fluid architecture's interactive platform deliberately challenges the traditional concept of authorship, questioning the role of the artist as the work is enhanced and expanded by a range of contributors. Central to the site's methodology is the reversal of web visitors' role as passive spectators, transforming them into participants or users who coauthor the work through interaction with it. Orta's affinity with cyberspace heralds an exciting future in a landscape of visual technology as fluid architecture breaks with traditional systems of design and interaction. The website demonstrates how the traditionally separate entities of art, architecture and design are blurring in the virtual realm, just as they do in the real world.

In a body of work spanning more than a decade, Orta has created a unique genre that transcends the denominations of fashion, architecture and traditional art practice. She discusses, debates and rethinks the traditional principles of social structures, introducing new ideas that have a profound engagement with society, urban planning, cultural heritage and political and ecological policies. Her work reveals the extent to which perceptions of space play a crucial role in the construction of urban identity, whether it is condensed and compressed to serve individual needs or expanded to encompass the whole of society.

The common denominator linking Orta's different projects is the staging of a social bond. As she locates the points of isolation, indignity and indifference in urban society, Orta rethinks the principles of fashion and architecture and highlights their value as a platform for social responsibility. By using them as the starting point for the transformation of the individual and society, her work initiates social metamorphosis through unexpected media. Fusing the respective spaces of architecture and fashion with art, technology, philosophy and interactivity results in a series of actions and events that forges lasting connections between groups and individuals. The potency of her temporary environments signifies a shift in prerogative from the empowered to the disenfranchised, manifesting an awareness of individual needs that will have lasting effects long after their original construction is forgotten.

¹ Lucy Orta was interviewed by the author for his book *The Fashion of Architecture* (2003).

² See Guy Debord, "Theory of Dérive" (1955), in K. Knabb (ed.), *The Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1989).

⁴ Born in south Birmingham, England, in 1966, Orta has been active in Paris since 1991, where she now lives with her husband, the Argentinean artist Jorge Orta. Though based in Paris, she is a Professor at The London Institute and holds the Rootstein Hopkins Chair at the London College of Fashion, simultaneously heading the "Man & Humanity" master's degree program at the Design Academy Eindhoven, Holland. She remains active as an artist and exhibits her work in galleries and museums around the world.

⁵ Quoted in Jean Paul Bourdier et al. (eds.), *Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition* (New York: University Press of America, 1989), p. 40.

⁶ Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln, NA: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

⁷ Carlos Basualdo, *Hélio Oiticica: Quasi-Cinemas* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002) p. 140.

⁸ See Jen Budney, in *Process of Transformation* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1998).

⁹ Paul Virilio, *Refuge Wear* (Paris: Editions Jean Michel Place, 1996).

¹⁰ See Jane Pavitt (ed.), *Brand New* (London: V&A Publications, 2000).

¹¹ Neil Leach (ed.), *Architecture and Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 155.

¹² See www.studio-orta.com/fluidarchitecture.

¹³ Basualdo (note 6), p. 140.

¹⁴ See Claude Lèvi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁷ See www.studio-orta.com or www.fluidarchitecture.net.