

## **Title, Exist and Dwell**

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Art in its essence is not a social action and does not have in itself any humanitarian, immediate or direct aims. Art is a magnifying glass which allows reality to be read. It is a microscope that penetrates into the cellular structure of reality. By exposing the molecular chain, with its irregularities and imperfections, it causes the contradictions which are found under the skin of indifference to explode. In this way art becomes a form of foresight and denunciation.

Louise Bourgeois names her cycle of works realized since 1989 "cells." The metaphor is powerful and direct; the word "cell" makes us think of a prison, but equally so it evokes the biological body. Cells are a part of the human body; they are at the origin of its being, its feelings, its emotions and its sufferings. Thus, they speak the language of the body. There are also cells of habitation. The relationship between people and their habitat is formed in this metaphorical cell. Living and being become a single and unique life experience. These two concepts belong intimately to the reality of our humanity, of our bodies made of limbs and of flesh and blood. The term "cell" is also used to indicate political and social groups; groups of people cemented together by the same ideals, convictions and striking power. They represent a social context struggling for change.

The historical, social and geographical context, that is to say the reality, in which the artist intervenes takes on a certain importance when it is the subject of vision; it is a "cell," and in being so, is a part of the body. Contemporary art is therefore situated outside museums and galleries, in connection with the body. It can be found in the street, in places and "non-places," those places of transit as defined by the sociologist Marc Augé. In future large metropolises will no longer be seeking to hide their increasingly multi-cultural natures. On the contrary, they are being displayed. In Paris, the area of Barbès has become an obligatory passage where hairstyles and fashions from Africa are in evidence. The shops emit the odours of spices and mint tea, the sounds of their music and hardware. Several races merge together in the same street. Races are no longer assimilated to a place, a space or a district, but to skin colour and a certain way of dressing and styling hair.

Nomadism through necessity, through mental tension, through sentimental disposition, has become the new contemporary condition. The nomad does not have a fixed home, but temporary habitats. As with a garment, the refuge, the cell, is worn displaying identity and belonging through appearances and rituals of the body. A modern person's dimension is the body. Martin Heidegger, in his essay entitled "Inhabit, Think" writes: "The aim of building is to inhabit. But what does building signify? In high German the ancient word for bauen (to build) is buan and means to inhabit, to dwell.... To inhabit means to be a mortal being on earth... If we listen to what language tells us about the word bauen, to build, we learn two things: to build is, in essence, to inhabit; to inhabit is the way in which mortal beings exist on earth."<sup>1</sup> So, to inhabit does not imply in itself a

home, but the simple fact that one dwells on this earth. A reflection on architecture is therefore originally linked to people and their corporeality.

It is the relationship between bodies that form sociality. In social and political situations of crisis and conflict where the conventions of belonging to a territory are erased, art once more starts to operate around the body and its relationships, the being within his or her human dignity, which signifies “to think” as well as to build and to inhabit.

Lygia Clark and her companion Hélio Oiticica worked in post-colonial Brazil, a country where colonial oppression was replaced by the dictatorship of consumption, where the politics of multi-nationals, new forces of powerful and tyrannical domination fought against a return to the original conditions. Their works dealing with the body and “the being on Brazilian earth”, which were materialized in perceptive garments created in order to connect individuals through the intermediary of touch, in refuge garments and in collective hats, were exercises for freedom. They were anti-imperialist movements. As they worked around issues of the body, they both explicitly made reference to “anthropagy”, theorized by Oswald de Andrade: they assimilated elements of the dominant culture in order to be able to juxtapose them, by integrating them, to fragments of their aboriginal culture. Their work was organic in the measure that there was a relationship with the body and with animism that accentuates the corporal perception to the point of ecstasy. It was a work, which being in correlation with the body, was equally linked to the fact of being on earth and therefore to inhabiting, as well as to architecture which is the first manifestation of human existence on earth.

Lucy Orta also builds clothing/architecture, imagined, developed and sewn with the care worthy of haute couture. Her works are conceived not only as refuges, but also as “transobjects”, that is to say instruments of relation between her way of being on earth and those of others she comes across. The garments/habitats can be assembled in the manner of modular architecture, reconstructing the cord linking people back to their original cell and securing a sense of belonging; recreating these “cell” chains — both organic and living spaces — which are the first forms of reality. And as Lucy Orta intervenes in multi-cultural metropoli, her “transhabits” become the link between individuals belonging to different tribes; between homeless individuals who live in the Heideggerian sense, where they exist on earth. This is the tent of migrating peoples. The garment delimits the surroundings of the body and marks out a territory. By allowing a person to reappropriate the notion of living in relation to the notion of being, the garments/habitats, Lucy Orta’s “vêtements scaphandre” /urban armour, have — indirectly — a political and social role in a society which still conceives the housing of marginal peoples as confinement, ghettoization and deprivation, through the precaution of this way of being completely on earth, where people express themselves within their dignity of “being”.

1 Construire Abitare Pensare, from *Pensieri e Discorsi*, 1927.