

## **Title, Social Engineering**

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The staging of a social bond is the common denominator linking Lucy Orta's different projects and perfectly reflects her transverse approach to poetic expression. Lucy Orta lives in Paris and is married to Argentinean artist Jorge Orta. Trained as a fashion designer, she has, since 1992, brilliantly addressed issues of relational aesthetics, her principal field of intervention being the personal space of the individual fighting for survival in adverse conditions. Her Refuge Wear and Nexus Architecture interventions are effective tools in the struggle against exclusion and combine architecture, body art, street theatre, fashion, social therapy, formal poetry and ideological activism. The titles of her principal projects, which function both as social scenarios and art works, speak for themselves : Nexus Architecture, Refuge Wear, Modular Architecture, Commune Communicate, Citizen Platform.

A versatile artist, she has used her training as a fashion designer in the creation of Collective Wear, pieces of flexible, modular architecture which serve as genuine individual or collective survival shelters. These textile structures, instantly erected into corporal architecture using a system of pockets and zips, combine various synthetic fibres, technical weaves and natural materials on lightweight carbon fibre armatures. Lucy Orta's classic piece of shelter wear, "Habitent", created in 1992, is a waterproof jacket which converts into a shelter.

Lucy Orta's creations cater for the urban homeless as well as adventurous nature lovers with a taste for extreme conditions. Her shelter wear projects are designed to enable spontaneous interactive communication. Using the whole range of shelter wear, sensitizes one physically and emotionally to the problems of survival in underprivileged zones of the metropolitan jungle. Such prototypes have been exhibited at the Salvation Army Headquarters in Paris, 1993. For six years Lucy Orta's performances have demonstrated her tent wear garments and collective clothes in a wide range of environments in central Paris, the suburbs and in the Metro, and also at the Venice Biennale in 1995 and the Johannesburg Biennale in 1997. She works in the field, in the context of daily social promiscuity, weaving the delicate fibre of primary human communication.

The resulting creations, both poetic and functional, breathe new life into seemingly outmoded concepts of activism and social solidarity. One of her recent performances, at the Forum Saint-Eustache des Halles in Paris in March 1997, was entitled "All in One Basket : a reflection on hunger and food waste". The idea for the project came in summer 1996, when she saw television coverage of French farmers tipping trailers of fruit on to the roads in protest against European Community agricultural legislation. Profoundly disturbed by these images, Lucy Orta realised that on a less spectacular but daily level the Paris market traders were also dumping fruit and vegetables at the close of the markets. She decided something had to be done and this was what she came up with. A buffet was set up for passers-by in the Les Halles quarter of Paris, serving food thrown away at the close of the market and cooked in a mobile kitchen by the chef of a famous local restaurant. The event was a masterpiece of relational aesthetics, without the slightest hint of demagoguery. The people of Les Halles, rich and poor alike, instead of being invited to a soup kitchen, took part in a demonstration of gastronomic recycling. Clearly, nothing can hold back Lucy Orta's "relational" efforts and her ongoing work on new "survival kits", interactive structures and humanitarian projects. For someone with such an acute and determined sense of social responsibility, the problems are endless: Aids, famine, inter-tribal genocide, environmental causes, the fight against pollution of all kinds. The public immediately recognises the fundamental and their collective interest and utility. It is not by chance that Lucy Orta, during barely five years of intense activity, has commanded the attention of those Parisian art critics with a heightened awareness of the questions raised by contemporary problems : Philippe Piguet, Jean-Michel Ribettes, Jérôme Sans and Paul Virilio. In conclusion, I quote Paul Virilio : "I recall that art has its origins in the body : dance and theatre, war paint and tatoos. Lucy Orta's work struck me as a style of rock painting inscribed on the body".