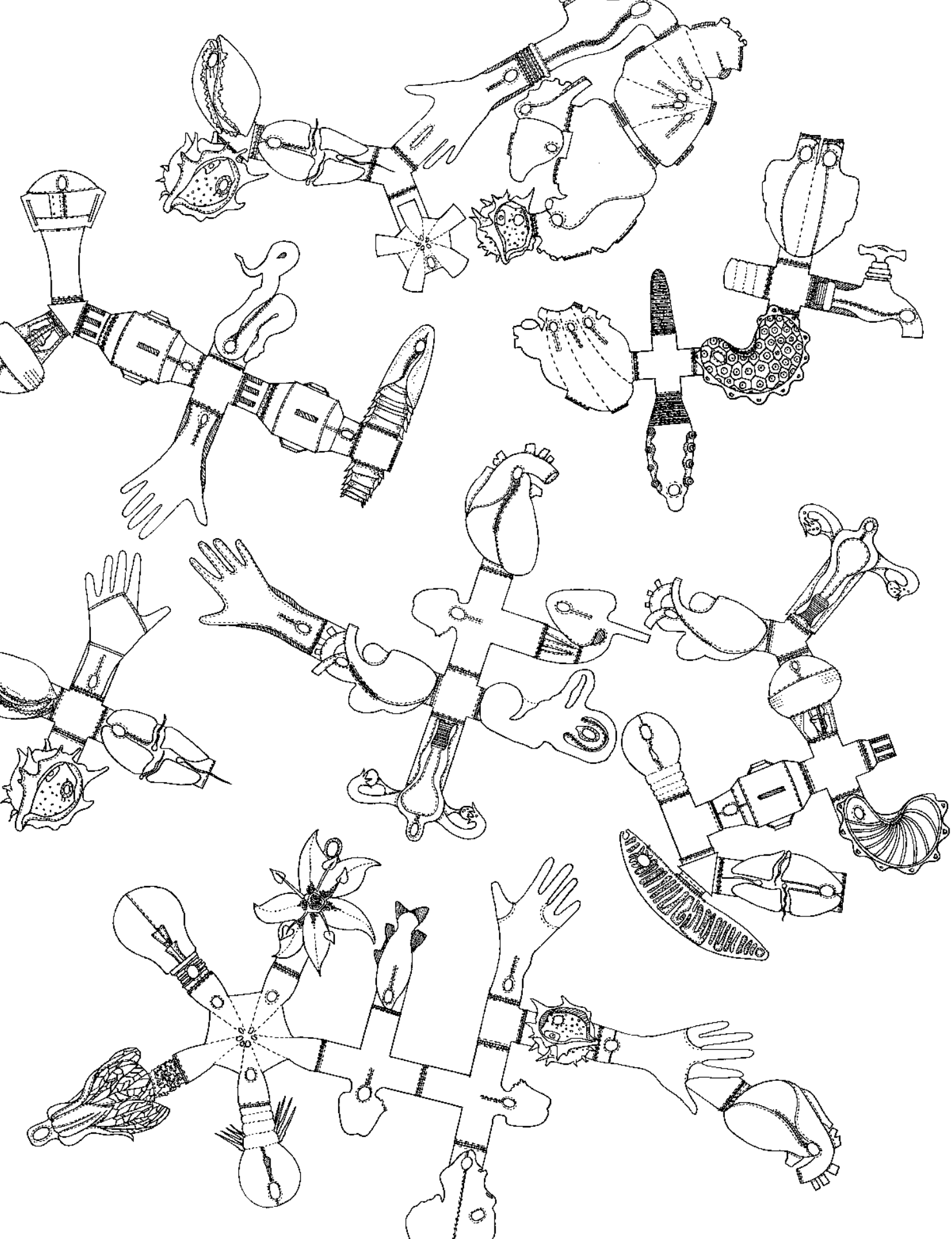




**LUCY
+ JORGE
ORTA**

**FOOD
WATER
LIFE**

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**Foreword:
If Only We Wanted To!**

Simonetta Carbonaro

Let us imagine, just for a second, that we will somehow manage to fix the current state of emergency and find a way to avoid collapsing into a greater economic depression before climate change becomes irreversible—before we run out of drinkable water and fossil fuels; before the unrest that arises because more than half of our world’s population is living in hunger, with no shelter or homeland, becomes stronger; and before we irrevocably lose our natural capital and the knowledge (and wisdom) necessary to come up with a balanced and fair way to produce and distribute our food, clothing, shelter, and wealth to each spot of our planet. Let us envision a true world of tomorrow, in which the distributed affordability of any commodity, of endless energy flows, of unlimited resources, will allow us to avoid making new feedstock-based materials and “birth-to-birth,” mass-market industrial products. I think that even if these things were to happen, we would still end up hitting a wall, simply because the infinite growth of material “stuff” is a dystopia! It would be an unsustainable development, not only because that kind of hyper-productive perpetual machine will end up impinging on our physical space (like Leonia, one of Italo Calvino’s “invisible cities,” destroyed under an avalanche of its own garbage), but because it will also invade our mental space. The fact is that our living spaces and our lifetimes are also finite and limited—nonrenewable resources.

Let’s get one thing straight: if there is a way out of our global emergency, it will come from cultural activists—like Lucy + Jorge Orta—who are willing, through their artwork, to wake people up from their coma-like acceptance of their current (and deeply damaged) ways of living. What we urgently need today is not only the design of new economic, political, and environmental policies, but above all cultural models that can profoundly and quickly change people’s habits and lifestyles. Studio Orta’s work is evidence of how art can change our way of looking at reality. Their work—centered on today’s scarcity of water, food, shelter, homelands, peace, and freedom—activates our critical thinking and sparks our imagination. It wakes us to the state of things by embracing us with conviviality. It shows us that the “sustainable thing” is not just about frugality, but a happy frugality. It goes beyond the repetitive compulsion of the unbearable lightness of *having* and shifts our scope to the significance of *being*.

The Ortas’ language goes beyond the self-referencing language used in many contemporary artworks. It speaks another language: the language of (aesth)ethics. When the language is other, so is the message, as Marshall McLuhan teaches us. The Ortas’ artworks emit, without making any audible sounds, messages so strong and loud that they seem to be attempting to crush our eardrums: “Peace Is Not the Absence of Armed Violence,” “I Destroy My Enemies When I Make Them My Friends,” “Are You Ready for the Worst?” and so on.

Studio Orta’s audience and commissioners are not from the business side of the art world. Lucy + Jorge Orta belong to the part

of the art world that is dedicated to social transformation and speaks to civil society, to human beings. They open people's eyes to the mythology that supports material growth based on the subjugation of nature and the marginalization of "others." They speak to those in the younger generations who are trying to liberate themselves from the straitjacket of packaged "free time," who join the Ortas' art expeditions to those parts of our world where producing art means witnessing what in reality is actually reality (and not the fiction of the mass media).

With their works, the Ortas present a perspective of the civil courage of a vast community of artists who are prepared to work in the field, hands-on, among the people—mixing it up in "marginal" communities, sharing experiences with the subcultures of those who live cheek-to-cheek with the affluent yet are in a state of ongoing emergency and/or discrimination. Furthermore, the Ortas' projects not only explore the "otherness" of those who are living through war, diaspora, destitution, or homelessness, but are also about those who live in a state of existential exile, of permanent terror, and the sense of anthropological alienation that is so common in our so-called advanced societies. This is art that makes us think about what remains of our western civilizations, based on a "excesscivilization."

Take Lucy + Jorge Orta's *Antarctica*, for example. This art venture is not just an intelligent and forceful provocation, it also creates an exciting new utopia in a forgotten landmass: the Antarctic. In 1959, countries representing two-thirds of humanity signed the Antarctic Treaty, which turned Earth's sixth continent into the only ideal place in the world. A nonplace that, perhaps due to its temperatures as low as -60° C, is so unfit for human life that it has become the only place on the planet that can be used only for peaceful purposes. It is a place where any degree of military involvement is prohibited, where there is freedom of scientific investigation and cooperation, where all nuclear energy production, all explosions, and all disposal of radioactive waste material is ruled out. This is where Studio Orta founded the Antarctic Village, the first symbolic settlement of the "nation of humanity." Here, a new generation of women and men will have the right to citizenship and a passport, which will allow them to travel freely. Each citizen of this nation of humanity will be requested in return to

"dedicate him or herself to fight all acts of barbarity, to fight intimidation and poverty, to support social progress, to protect the environment, and endangered species, to safeguard human dignity and defend the inalienable rights to liberty, justice and peace."

The Ortas' work urges us to reflect on our model for human progress and development, looking well beyond the standard parameters that prevail in these times of global economic and environmental crisis. Studio Orta's work embodies and heralds a true cultural transformation, where our objects of desire, and even our everyday gestures, become symbolic and cultural stepping-stones toward awareness. They point to deep cultural and social

transformation, from the current "culture of economy," which is driven by the mythology of quantity, to a new "economy of culture" compelled by the reality of quality.

In order to achieve this transformation, all our actions need to be questioned and reviewed, as does the balance between our Western lifestyles and our intracultural thought patterns, between our affluent, unsustainable way of life and a good, fair, and clean distribution of prosperity in the world. The Ortas call for a new economy of culture in which "culture" is no longer an abstract term, but a network of cultural actors who—like the many people that Studio Orta catalyzes—generate and disseminate the kind of communication and education that reveals the aesthetic side of ethics, finally allowing us to grasp how it really feels to be a citizen of a human nation and a fellow inhabitant of our blue planet.

Those who claim that such a transformation is impossible should first ask themselves if the current dogma of senseless, unlimited material growth still carries within it the prospect of well-being and the seed of a healthy future. If the answer is negative, a new course of action is needed. History has already witnessed some cultural (and artistic) movements that have dramatically changed the unfolding of time, such as Christianity, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. All these transformations have stemmed from what distinguishes our species from all others: our human mind and spirit.

There are no more excuses. If we were ready to trust the "invisible hand" of culture and the arts instead of the Ponzi-schemed hand of the financial markets, we could change our direction overnight. If we decided to use all the regenerative powers of our minds and spirits, we could set this new transformation in motion. It will clearly take time, but we have to start somewhere.

I have already forwarded my citizenship request to the Antarctic Village and obtained my World Passport, number 1004. Armed with fiery patience, I await the day when, together with many, many others, I will finally be entitled to show this same and shared document at every national border of this new world of ours.