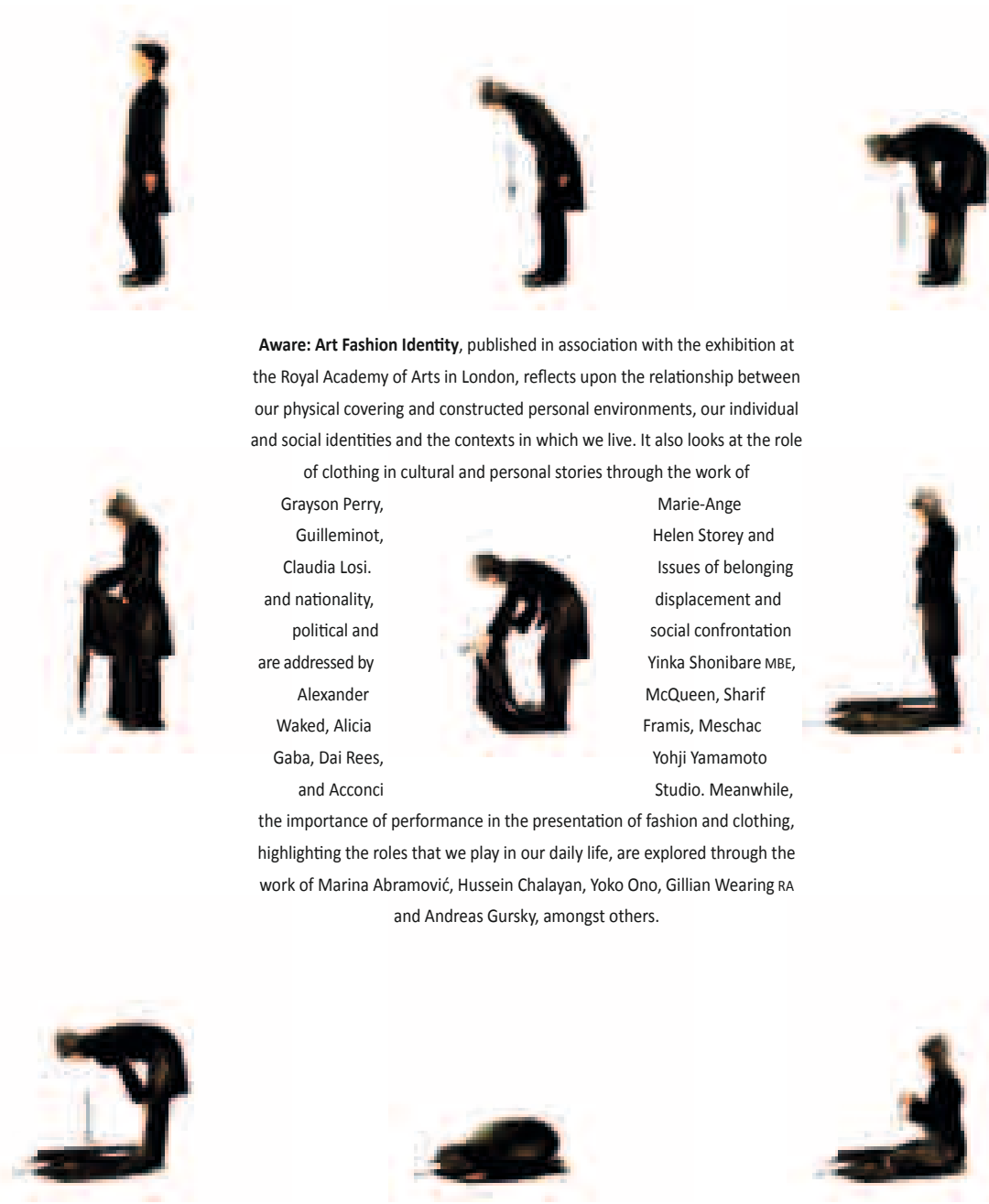


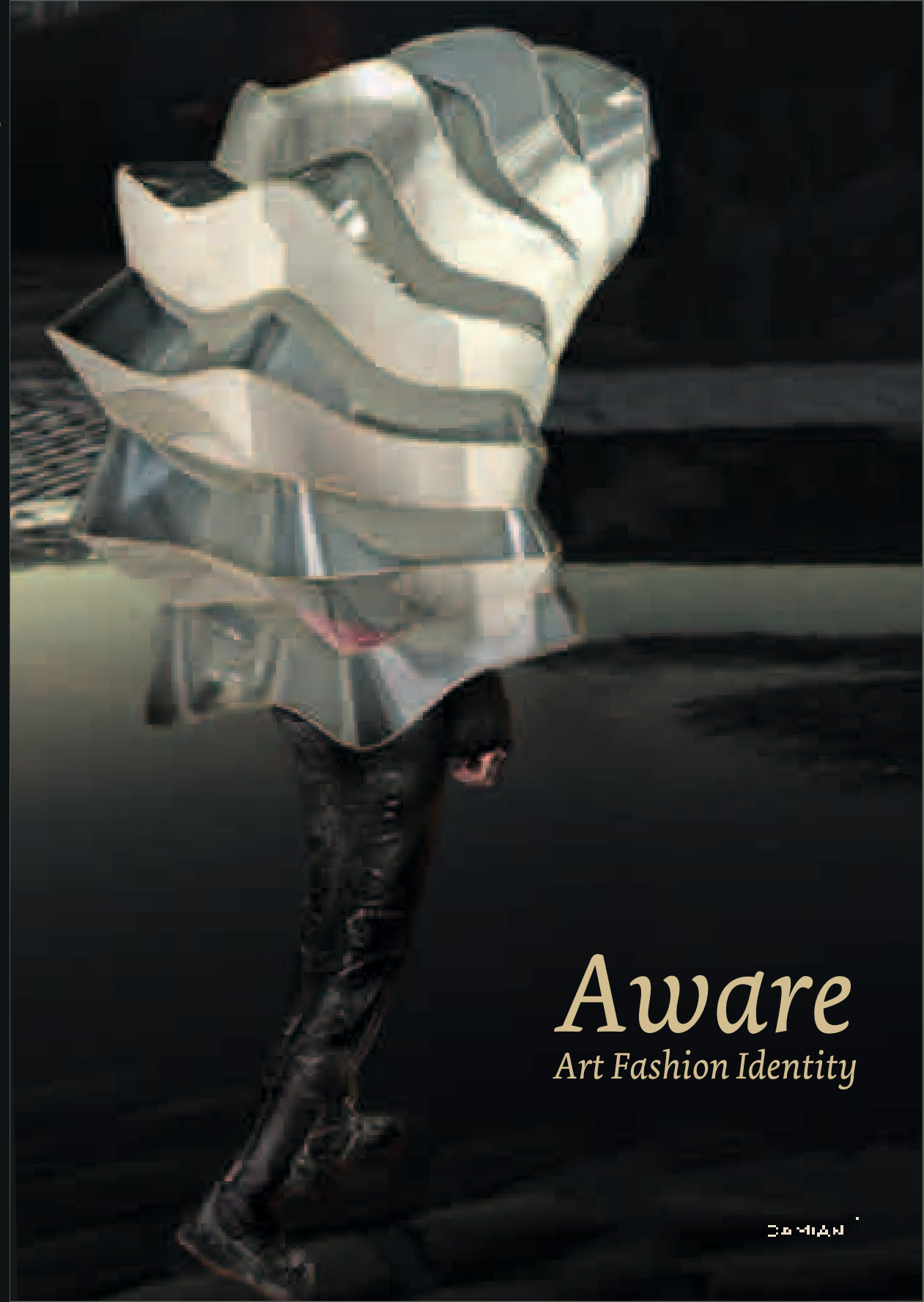
Marina Abramović  
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 Maja Bajević  
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 Hussein Chalayan  
 Alicia Framis  
 Meschac Gaba  
 Marie-Ange Guilleminot  
 Andreas Gursky  
 Mella Jaarsma  
 Kimsooja  
 Claudia Losi  
 Susie MacMurray  
 Marcello Maloberti  
 La Maison Martin Margiela  
 Alexander McQueen  
 Yoko Ono  
 Maria Papadimitriou  
 Grayson Perry  
 Dai Rees  
 Katerina Šedá  
 Cindy Sherman Hon RA  
 Yinka Shonibare MBE  
 Helen Storey  
 Rosemarie Trockel  
 Sharif Waked  
 Gillian Wearing RA  
 Yohji Yamamoto  
 Andrea Zittel



**Aware: Art Fashion Identity**, published in association with the exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, reflects upon the relationship between our physical covering and constructed personal environments, our individual and social identities and the contexts in which we live. It also looks at the role of clothing in cultural and personal stories through the work of Grayson Perry, Marie-Ange Guilleminot, Helen Storey and Claudia Losi. Issues of belonging and nationality, displacement and social confrontation are addressed by Yinka Shonibare MBE, Alexander McQueen, Sharif Waked, Alicia Framis, Meschac Gaba, Dai Rees, Yohji Yamamoto and Acconci Studio. Meanwhile, the importance of performance in the presentation of fashion and clothing, highlighting the roles that we play in our daily life, are explored through the work of Marina Abramović, Hussein Chalayan, Yoko Ono, Gillian Wearing RA and Andreas Gursky, amongst others.

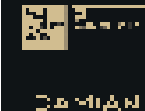


**Aware**  
 Art Fashion Identity



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Front cover: Acconci Studio, *Umbruffla*, 2005–10. Silk, chiffon, radiant film, cotton thread, boning, 114.3 x 152.4 x 114.3 cm.  
Courtesy Acconci Studio (Vito Acconci, Francis Bitonti, Loke Chan, Pablo Kohan, Eduardo Marquez, Dario Nunez, Garrett Ricciardi)  
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Back cover: Azra Akšamija, *Nomadic Mosque*, 2005  
Textile and photographs, 160 x 50 x 30 cm.  
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GSK Contemporary  
**Aware**  
Art Fashion Identity

## Questioning Identity

BY LUCY ORTA

'GSK Contemporary – Aware: Art Fashion Identity' has evolved out of a deep necessity to expand the definition and role that clothing plays within our society. It has taken almost twenty years of questioning and research (and a lot of frustration) finally to bring together a series of fellow artists and designers who share the same dedication to agitating the definition of fashion and demonstrate that clothing is a powerful instrument for communication that we have a tendency to choose, use and discard too arbitrarily.

The questions I began posing were generated by an uncomfortable doubt in my successful career as a young fashion designer and, not withstanding, linked directly to the economic decline throughout the early 1990s. The first Gulf War, followed

swiftly by a stock market crash as well as mass unemployment leading to general social unrest, stood in stark contrast to the superfluous fashion we had been observing in the extravagant catwalk shows. Along with a group of similarly disheartened designers I began searching for alternative means of expressing the deep changes that were taking place in society. Our focus for redefining the role of clothing was directed towards basic needs, such as protection, survival shelter and cocooning: some examples that come to mind are the Final Home by Kosuke Tsumura for Issey Miyake, which are parkas stuffed with newspaper for heat conservation, Vexed Generation's muffled jackets and C.P. Company's transformable shelters.

I began spending less time in the Parisian couture houses fitting beautiful models with exquisite dresses, and more time in my partner's artist-studio, sketching Utopian responses to these fundamental needs. Among some of these early drawings we find the *Habitent*, a domed tent that converts in a matter of seconds into a waterproof cape; *Ambulatory Survival Sac*,

Lucy Orta, *Refuge Wear – Habitent*, 1992.  
Aluminium-coated polyamide, polar fleece, telescopic aluminium poles, whistle, lantern, 125 x 125 x 125 cm



a sleeping bag that divides into two parts – a jacket and rucksack; and *Mobile Cocoon*, reflecting on basic survival strategies such as mobility, warmth, protection from harsh elements – refuge from an increasing alien and hostile society. Not having much success with these proposals within the fashion world, I gravitated closer to the Parisian contemporary art scene, and my ‘prototype’ *Refuge Wear* sculptures were immediately exhibited to much acclaim in a number of venues, including the Galerie Anne de Villepoix (1992), the ‘Art: Foncion Sociale!’ (Art: Social Function!), which was held inside Le Corbusier’s Cité de Refuge Salvation Army homeless hostel (1993), and ‘Ateliers 94’ at the Modern Art Museum Paris (1994).

Around the same time a young avant-garde fashion scene was emerging from Holland and Belgium, diverting attention away from the élite Parisian couture. These

designers presented their work in non-traditional catwalk venues in Paris and coincidentally Martin Margiela at Le Cité de Refuge (1992) and Victor and Rolf in the Modern Art Museum (1994). Within this truly exciting design context my practice as a contemporary visual artist was to develop out of frustration at the established system – staging an impromptu *Refuge Wear Intervention* (demonstration) outside the entrance to the Carré du Louvre catwalk shows and some abandoned squats around Paris simultaneously – into a longer and deeper enquiry into the communicative aspects of clothing that reflected on notions of visibility/invisibility; the role fashion plays in the construction of individual and collective identities; and how we can harness the power that clothing exerts on us through its extreme diversity and universality in ways that can alter our daily actions or even, perhaps,



Lucy Orta, *Refuge Wear*  
City Interventions, 1993–8.  
Original Lambda colour  
photographs, 200 x 290 cm

change society. In this short introduction to such a vast and fascinating subject I would like to touch upon some of the themes which merit special attention.

You may wonder how clothes can make us think differently about society and how fashion can possibly transform lives. Perhaps these two examples can inform us.

Andrea Zittel is an artist who has devised a large body of her work around the function her clothing plays within her life, right down to daily chores such as cleaning and cooking. She creates a garment for each occasion so the shape and the materials are carefully considered using handcrafted and traditional methods to construct each one. A garment is literally spun directly from the wool on the sheep’s back, felted and moulded into the shape of a dress. The dress is not just a dress, nor is it just an apron! It’s a holistic view on life and presents a special consideration for sustainable living. It could be described as a total manifestation of life = creativity, and thus emanates beautifully from the theories of Joseph Beuys.

The *Identity + Refuge* workshop I organised in 1995 with residents from the Salvation Army hostel in Paris demonstrates how fashion plays an important role in re-assuming an identity within society, after circumstances may have resulted in its loss or deprivation. What began life as a simple customisation project – whereby we altered and arranged the second-hand garments distributed to each of the residents arriving in the shelter – evolved into a truly visionary couture project. Using basic transformation techniques, the residents designed and

created an innovative collection of women’s wear, which developed their creative skills, built confidence and reconstructed a psychology through the therapy of creating. On seeing the designs emerge from the makeshift cutting room we had sequestered in the laundry room of the Salvation Army, more members of the hostel became involved and together we were able to renovate all kinds of discarded items of furniture, lamps and household objects. These formed the backdrop to a catwalk show staged during Paris Fashion Week, to the acclaim of many journalists. These kinds of sustainable fashion initiatives are more and more frequent, some with great long-term benefits, such as the social enterprise Fine Cell Work which helps to rehabilitate prisoners by giving them the opportunity to earn and save money as well as the chance to rebuild their lives through craft and achievement.



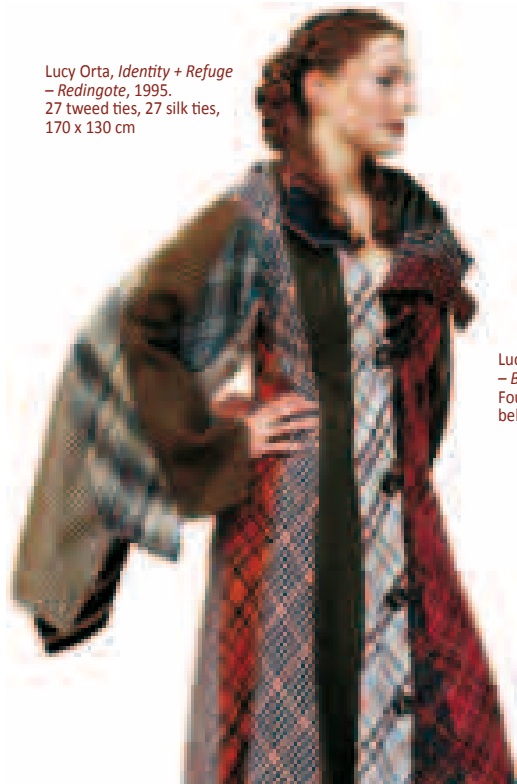
Lucy Orta, *Identity + Refuge*, 1995–6.  
Workshop and catwalk at  
Le Cité de Refuge, Salvation  
Army Paris and New York

In the work of artists such as Kimsooja, Andreas Gursky, Yinka Shonibare and Azra Akšamija, our understanding of clothes as markers of social/group differences or manifestations of individual pseudo-differences are challenged. In Claudia Losi's *Balena Project*, or my ongoing *Nexus Architecture*, clothing becomes the medium through which social links and bonds are made manifest, both literally and metaphorically. The links of zippers and channels, while enhancing the uniformity of the workers' overalls, create androgynous shapes that defy classification by the usual social markers and attempt to give form to the social, not the individual body. As fashion sociologist Dr Joanne Entwistle states: 'Instead of differences, we are offered a powerful vision of possible, momentary collectives or networks of being whose connections are rendered visible and

visceral in time and space.<sup>1</sup>

One of my deep preoccupations has been the relationship between clothing and communication. In the nineteenth century itinerant salesmen wore their numerous goods in sculptural forms: accumulations of brooms or baskets were piled into reeling towers, not dissimilar to the work of Mella Jaarsma. Even today, the sandwich men along Oxford Street wear their advertising boards enticing us to visit Sushi bars or yet another cell phone outlet. But text messages on clothing can be of a different nature; in some cases it can be disturbing, attracting us inexorably (just as packaging attracts customers) towards problems that are continually avoided by this consumer society. Philosopher and urban theorist Paul Virilio has remarked on the 'prophetic dimension' of *Refuge Wear* and *Nexus Architecture*, and he goes on to say: 'It is an acknowledged fact that our society has a packaging mentality which goes hand-in-hand with marketing and mobility. Packaging has a dual role: its prime role is to facilitate transport, and its secondary role is to facilitate the message. In Lucy Orta's work, clothes are no longer

Lucy Orta, *Identity + Refuge* – Redingote, 1995.  
27 tweed ties, 27 silk ties,  
170 x 130 cm



Lucy Orta, *Identity + Refuge* – Belt miniskirt, 1995.  
Four vinyl and four leather  
belts, 60 x 50 cm



1 Entwistle, J., 'Refuge Wear and Nexus Architecture' in 9th 'Havana Biennial' exhibition catalogue 2006



Lucy Orta, *Nexus Architecture x 50*  
*Intervention Köln*, 2001.  
Lambda colour  
photograph, 150 x 120 cm



perceived as a mere covering close to the body, as a second skin, but also as a form of packaging, in other words, half-way between architecture and dress. We know that there are several skins: underwear, the clothes themselves, and the overcoat. We could continue this onion-layer approach by saying that after the overcoat there is the sleeping bag, that after the sleeping bag comes the tent, that after the tent comes the container ... Clothes emancipate themselves, expand to try to become a house, a pneumatic raft ... The garment becomes more than mere clothing; it is a vehicle, a survival vehicle certainly but also a vehicle which protects against anonymity.<sup>2</sup>

The theme of survival has been an important area of research as it touches upon both the personal and the global – the individual and the collective body. In the series *Life Guard* and *Survival Kit* there is an

<sup>2</sup> Virilio, P., *Lucy Orta*, Contemporary Artist series, Phaidon Press London, 2003

explicit reference to the tools and objects of emergency rescue missions, such as the harnesses in the drop-parachutes utilised by humanitarian expeditions to rapidly distribute vital supplies, or inflatable life jackets for sea rescue. These artworks also become objects of textual communication, silkscreen-printed with slogans and words onto their surfaces, often incorporating flags from different nations and functional and symbolic objects. The *Survival Kit* refers both to physical/ material survival and symbolically to the spiritual needs of man, such as the recovery of a lost social dimension of solidarity.

In the seminar 'Vêtement et Sociétés' (Clothing and Society) in the former Museum of Mankind in Paris, ethnologist Yves Delaporte compared clothing to language, which we can analyse in two ways: either it is a pure metaphor, serving as an expression, or it is an affirmation that aspires to a deeper

scientific analysis. In the latter case we are encouraged to question and reflect on the scientific proof of this hypothesis.<sup>3</sup> To cut a very long discussion short, the originality of language is that it is communicative, structured and full of signs and meaning, so comparatively clothing (or rather fashion) also contains a combination of all of these. Professor Delaporte also goes on to explain that perhaps this is due to the lack of ethnographic study using the tools and methods of semiotics. It is true to say that the academic study of fashion is relatively young and we have a lot of ground to cover if we are to convince the consumer society that fashion is more than a bulging wardrobe. In my other role as Professor of Art Fashion and the Environment at London College of Fashion, I hope the non-exhaustive selection of artists and their work that we are presenting in 'Aware: Art Fashion Identity' will provoke us, even just a little, to look and think about clothing differently.

<sup>3</sup> Delaporte, Y., *L'Ethnographie* n° 92-93-94, 'Vêtement et sociétés', *L'Entretemps*, 1984



Lucy Orta, *Nexus Architecture Intervention Johannesburg Biennale, 1997*. Lambda colour photograph, 120 x 150 cm



Lucy + Jorge Orta, *Life Line – Survival Kit, 2008–09*. Steel frame, laminated Lambda photograph, piping, two taps, various fabrics, silkscreen print, webbing, two floats, buoys, two flasks, whistle, rope, 100 x 100 x 3 cm

Lucy Orta, *Refuge Wear Intervention London East End, 1998*. Original Lambda colour photograph, 150 x 120 cm