

AGxKANSAI 2022 Panel: ANOTHER KIND OF KNOWING

FINAL TALK NOTES – Alan Prohm

ON PROCEDURAL ARCHITECTURE AND EFFICACY in the Work of Arakawa and Gins

prerecorded video

GREETING

Hello, Welcome. Thank you for joining this conference and taking the time to view this talk – one of 3 in the panel, *Another Kind of Knowing* – on Arakawa and Gins

I want to again thank the organizers of the conference, Prof. Mimura and the Studies Program at Kansai University and Prof. Ono of the Kyoto University of the Arts, who also curated the exhibition. Also, of course, Momoyo Homma of the Reversible Destiny Foundation, as well as ST Luk and the team at the archives in New York for help in our research. As I said in my introductory words, this event is a great contribution to the study of Arakawa and Gins, and to the realisation of the potential of their work in the 21st Century, so we're very pleased to be invited and it's great to be part.

INTRO

The title of my talk is: ON **PROCEDURAL ARCHITECTURE AND EFFICACY** in the work of Arakawa and Gins

The Context, as I said, is the Book Project w/ Don Byrd and Jondi Keane, *Another Way of Knowing: on Arakawa and Gins*

My Focus will be on Procedural Architecture, as a/their unique proposition in the history of art, architecture and philosophy.

The Question I will be asking is the question of Efficacy - how can we approach the question of efficacy in the work of Arakawa and Gins, the question of how it could or does work?

Note: my talk can be taken as an overview or fractal miniature of the chapter I am researching and writing for the book.

It is structured in 4 parts:

- 1** - A+G's **TURN** to Architecture
- 2** - The **CLAIM** of Procedural Architecture
- 3** - The **EFFICACY** of procedurality
- 4** - On Measure and **METHOD** for use-testing procedural architecture

TURN

Motivated to counteract any possible trend to reductionism in the reception of Arakawa and Gins' work, it is **helpful to "enter" their work at a or as a TURN** roughly, a turn "to architecture" - though as we will see there is more to the story when we get into it.

In relation to their career, it is a turn in **mediality**, from a painting and poetry (roughly) to structurally conceived and actually built architecture.

Behind this turn, because behind their thinking on mediality, lies a critique of the modality and mediality of Western logocentric rationalism since the 17th century. This is a longer footnote, - instead I would point you to Don Byrd's presentation, where he goes into this in greater depth. Suffice it to say, A+G's orientation towards their choice of media and mediality, as artists/thinkers, is one carrying a critique of western Rationalism, a structure of knowledge that excludes the body, its key informant and variable, from all its equations.

Important to note: **not for a style or a genre**

the turn in fact brought on a loss of understanding and support in the artworld, as appreciators were not always able to follow them through these turns/this turning

rather **for an efficacy!** - an efficacy they identified in architecture and sought to realize and actualize

This efficacy is embedded for them in energetic potentials inherent between personing bodies (organisms that person) and the physical surround (Bioscleave, in their terms). Viewed in this way, it's an obvious move to want to employ as much physical surround as possible, as intensively as feasible, in an enunciation aiming at addressing the user/participant/person body-wide. Western aesthetics sets its claims primarily, traditionally, on an efficacy of the aesthetic, enshrining a basically unidirectional, perception-centered model of the aesthetic exchange in modern art movements. The procedural position of Arakawa and Gins' new aesthetics recognizes this (perception) **is just one leg of the relay**. Viewed in the terminology of **perception-action cycles**, which re-integrates these two legs, both in the game of procedural efficacy in architecture. This new, doubled horizon of aesthetic events is an obvious attractor for an art aiming at impact! Even just from a calculation of the available surface area - architecture offers more access to/interaction with readers/viewers/participants. This multiplied by the possible materialities and affordances for use and movement that architecture can bring to bear, shows that no "medium" or "genre" can do more in terms of these potentials for activation and inter-activation with persons, becoming through the having and using of bodies, what Arakawa and Gins also call "organisms that person in action".

Along with the efficacy promised in the architecture they end up pursuing, there is a philosophical priority at work, seeing the "more" mediality and "more" materiality of architecture as a corrective to myopic, logo- and ocular-centric biases that have defined much of Western cultural history since at least the 17th Century.

1990 Up until now, the difficulty has been that IN A WORLD DOMINATED BY VERBAL DISCOURSE, BODY, THE BODY OF THE SPEAKER AND THAT OF THE LISTENER, so narrowly addressed, if addressed at all, was kept forever hidden behind the procession of words being spoken. Similarly, with primarily visual discourse the viewer (or maker) together with his/her viewing (forming) process, WAS OFF TO ONE SIDE, beside the fact, obscured by a series of successive views. - Press release *Building Sensoriums* Exhibition Feldman Gallery 1990

Their **turn** was to put the body front and center - because it is more effective, and because they are asking philosophical questions which they believed need to be asked this way.

The TURN they make with their work can and must also be viewed **in a relation to art history**, especially avant-garde and experimental art history, as a history of turns - a complex striation/sequence, defined by moves, claims and positionings made in relation to other or prior movements, projects, styles, schools, genres etc.

With their movement into *architecture* Arakawa and Gins make an event in the disciplinary art history of painting and poetry by leaving, or superceding the genre and discipline confines. With their claim to and development of *procedural architecture* - as a field (meadow) and new horizon of practice - they propose something "New to the 21st Century", promising a turn even over and beyond architecture in its cutting-edge form (cf. *Anywhere* 1992)

So, to do best justice to the complexity/multiplicity and committed extra-disciplinarity of Arakawa and Gins' work, it is helpful/important to approach it as turning, as a turning in the genre and media disciplinarity they practiced and as a turning in the epoch of artistic endeavor, art-(beyond-art) historically, architecture, "but in a new way". (cf. *Anywhere* article, 1992)

To begin plotting this out on a timeline, we can say the turn to architecture takes up the 1980's, "building" on impulses and insights from the *Mechanism of Meaning*, published in three editions 1971, 1979 and 1988. It is the period in the background of, and then after, the MoM, crystallizing in the space of their project for a bridge to be built over the Moselle river at Epinal, France, entitled "The Process in Question".

If we want to deep-dive on this point of the turning in their work, even as we acknowledge again that it is neither linear nor sequential, we can look at one chapter, added to the 3rd reedition of MoM in 1988 as "Ch. 16 Review and Self Criticism", as a uniquely informative text. This document contains as suggestively as any other the active germ culture of Arakawa and Gins' procedural architecture, expressing at the moment of its emergence into the body of their published and exhibited work. It caps this crowning documentation of their major work so far with a declaration that they are going further, and with a taste of what that beyond will entail. Hingeing their career between the grafical / literary and the architectural, the text describes and presages what was to come as procedural architecture and the reversible destiny project in terms that could not be understood at that time, before the

concrete design and building that came in the 90's and 2000's to give it form. This chapter, added to be the final/anti-final chapter of *Mechanism of Meaning*, enacts for readers the emergence of architecture as the point and potential of their work. It does so in a language and sketches that still stay shy of a solid concreteness, relying on suggestive, in places resonantly metaphoric, writing, finely balanced and interwoven with the drawings, dominated by grids and fine mesh in a pencil graphite line.

The visual poetics of this text, while strikingly new and distinct in its published context, carries on with a writing practice (largely Madeline's) previously seen in the books "Word Rain" (1969), the long poem "Intend" (1973), "What the President will Says and Do" (1984), her piece for Boundary 2 "...from Essay on Multi-Dimensional Architecture" in 1985 and the co-authored *To Not to Die* (1987) to which it is stylistically and thematically a close continuation. Similarly, the chapter draws on geometrical researches and devices from Arakawa's paintings, and from the *Mechanism of Meaning* panels, to fuel the conceptual production behind the drawings in this new chapter and this new and unique in their work style of drawing. The near-lyrical writing and the conceptual drawing, however, are here together in service to a concrete project, which the reader would not necessarily know was concrete (i.e. planned to be really built), at least until a few pages in where a drawing of the proposed bridge fills one two-page spread - and even there, with the witty, suggestive lyricism in the names of details, for much of the text, the project could easily seem more poetry than building plan.

What the deeper continuities of this apparently disruptive, disjunctive work shows, is that the architecture that they turn to is in fact something prior to architecture, something they were already able to actively engage in as painter/poets, but which they were now to approach also concretely as architects. Arakawa was already doing architecture in his painting, and not incidentally, and Madeline was already from early on constructing theory for architecture in her writing (see esp. *Word Rain*). This is an important point, because it is what will also lead them to supercede the architecture of their time once they get into it, going beyond it because the disciplinary confines were never the consideration, only the fundamental questioning they now feel can only be done as architecture. Architecture as built practice became the means of doing the architecture that was already underway in the wall-sized canvases, tilted floor-panels, occasional attached objects, and a literary practice unrivaled in its discernment, performance and description of the

mental-bodily processes that constitute space and architecture for the individual - an architecture here still only at the conceptual level.

The step to built architecture is made, I would say, with the first constructed installation structures from the Epinal bridge project (e.g. Perceptual Landing Sites (1)). What at this early juncture, and in the first exhibitions where this work was shown, (e.g. Tokyo/Kyoto in 1991) was just a step, a possibly momentary shift of focus in the practice of dynamic and medially experimental artists, and could just as easily have been mistaken for poetry, is legitimated beyond all doubt in its seriousness and longevity with the constructions at Yoro, Nagi, Mitaka and East Hampton. As we can see in this useful and beautiful text devoted to their turning to architecture, however, architecture emerges in the work of Arakawa and Gins as the **ostentation** of a subtler, more infinitesimal mode of architectural investigation already at the core of their practice before. This is perhaps the point behind one cryptic sentence in this text on p.103:

“Can we have a new level of “ostensivity” at last?!”

CLAIMS

A+G's work, as a movement within/across/through medial and genre fields, can be discerned and mapped in a series of claims they make in and with it. Claims to certain terrains and positions within the art field (what I'll call **positional claims**), but also **propositional claims**, claims *about* the architecture, their architecture in particular, and what it can do.

The claiming they made that makes us today talk about their work in terms of the architecture can be found through the 1980's and into the 1990's - in a few different degrees of explication (I would say) or ostentation. For example, ...

There are places where we can see them claiming what they are doing and interested in as architecture

Claim: ARCHITECTURE

e.g.

1988 We want to form a container that will serve as Proving Ground—a proving ground for all that which constitutes a person as s/he perceives. ... We cannot yet predict how complex the structure of that container, or those containers, which could accomplish

this will have to be. In any event, the perceiver must become her/himself as if soft wax, pushing easily past any grid of rationality, ...

"Preface" to 3rd re-edition of *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Abbeyville Press 1988

1990 ...there shall be constructed places that will afford to perceiving, to the projected array, a set of matching (to it) contact points of potential landing sites for the moulding or containing of it (the act of perceiving) as a whole.

Press release from exhibition at Ronald Feldman Gallery Building Sensoriums 1990

1992 ... Constructions that are architectural, but architectural in a new way, must be worked out for surrounding and containing in noticeable ways what, until now, only implied or suggested the site of a person.

"Person as Site with Respect to a Tentative Constructed Plan" in *Anywhere* journal, New York: Anyone Corporation 1992

Then, in certain places we see them coming to specify this "other kind" of architecture as "procedural", by way of "process" and other formulations:

Claim: PROCEDURAL ARCHITECTURE

e.g.

1994 Tentative constructed plans will provide the species with a process architecture by which it may exceed its limits.

Arakawa and Madeline Gins, Architecture: Sites of Reversible Destiny,
London: Academy Editions 1994 p.23

2 - Then, at another level we can see them formulating claiming of a propositional sort - about this architecture - what is is and can do

Claim: Architecture answers philosophical questions

e.g.

1985 An event must be enlarged upon until it becomes correctly recorded in relation to all the rest - neither over- nor under-emphasized. To enlarge an event and properly record its occurrence, and, in so doing, keep texture thoroughly afloat at large, there must be extensive re-incisions into the skin/scaffolding of the understanding. So much for not just standing idly about. An agile scaffolding made of ratchets.... " p. 97

Madeline Gins, "from Essay on Multi-Dimensional Architecture", *Boundary 2* Fall 85/ Winter 86 p.97

1992 These constructions will be tentative constructed plans in respect to which a person will know herself as site.

"Person as Site with Respect to a Tentative Constructed Plan" in *Anywhere* journal, New York: Anyone Corporation 1992

1988 To make the usual architectural anonymity of domestic life as an extension of body become diagrammatically perceivable.

"Ch. 16 - Review and Self-Criticism" in 3rd re-edition of *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Abbeyville Press 1988

Claim: Architecture activates/extends/creates body

e.g.

1994 - The proper function of these dwellings will be to augment the bodies of their inhabitants.

Arakawa and Madeline Gins, Architecture: Sites of Reversible Destiny, London: Academy Editions 1994 p.23

1994? - No more passive architecture!
from one of the texts between 1988 and 1994

1988 - After a while, out of a continuing dissymmetry that, as s/he moves, the observer inserts into the context of a supersymmetry, and out, as well, of that set of unmet anticipations resulting from one's having continually not found

oneself where one might automatically expect oneself to be, a body or a field, an artificial Doppelgänger, may take shape.”

“Ch. 16 - Review and Self-Criticism” in 3rd re-edition of *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Abbeyville Press 1988 p.145

1988 - The corrugations and indents suggest to the viewer numerous, possible landing strips upon which the viewing could come to rest ... Jagged, raised planes jutting out at oblique angles from brightly painted dips and hollows cause there to be in the viewer, through an accelerating of the accumulating and compounding of his/her viewing, frequent déjà-vus.

“Ch. 16 - Review and Self-Criticism” in 3rd re-edition of *The Mechanism of Meaning*, Abbeyville Press 1988 p.106

Claim: Architecture can reverse destiny - mortality

e.g.

1990 ... These places have the potential to act as reversible sites of phenomena.

Press release from exhibition at the Feldman Gallery Building Sensoriums 1990

1994 ... Here is a way of reversing the seemingly irreversible destiny of the modern subject. The structures through which we create worlds are not our eternal destiny. Though we are thrown into existence in such a way that conformity to a previously constituted symbolic order is unavoidable, the codes that condition perception and cognition are open to deliberate transformation.

The limits of perception are not absolute but are a function of an historically determined code that can be changed. To reform perception is to transform the architecture of the I. Since the world is not merely given but is constructed by the activity of the subject, the recoding of the I is the recreation of the world.

1994 *Helen Keller or Arakawa* - Chapter: "Brave Light, subtitled: "Form and Function for the Deafblind or An Introduction to a Projective-Envelope Architecture of Light"

The apogee (but not end) of Arakawa and Gins' claim-staking, was of course in 1997 with their Guggenheim exhibition and their large format catalogue with the title, *We Have Decided Not to Die*. By this point, their claim to be doing architecture, and the claim to have a particular, more powerful approach, "procedural architecture", are established. With this event, the claim in its third degree, the claim of reversibility through architecture, *gets* established. Everything still only implicitly and emergently architectural in the graphic and literary production of the 1980's is here now explicitly and fully architectural up to the urban scale, with Nagi (1992-94) and Yoro (1995) presented as built works; and Sensorium City (Tokyo Bay) as a project in planning that, like *The Process and Question*, was never built yet informed and gave the frame for a longer creative period.

To cap the historical portion of this overview, I can point to the last page of the catalogue they published with the Guggenheim exhibition in 1997. This page establishes and positions Arakawa and Gins' claim relative to the claims made by two dominant figures of architectural modernism LeCorbusier and Mies van der Rohe:

Claims compared

Forms of Function

- LeCorbusier - *Villa Savoie* - For (Super-Human) Comfort
- van der Rohe - *Farnsworth House* - For the Sake of a Universal Spacetime
- Arakawa&Gins - *Critical Resemblances House* - For the Sake of Determining the Extent of the Site of a Person

To slightly elucidate this complete reframing of the notion of function in procedural architecture, I can point to a short text appearing elsewhere in the catalogue, in relation to the Tokyo Bay project, Sensorium City. It can well serve as a manifesto on procedural architecture:

Comfort is no longer a factor. That it might take several hours to go from one room to another in a reversible destiny house is of no

importance so long as the sensibility of the person traversing the room flowers and catches onto itself in transit.

EFFICACY

1994 - Here is a way of reversing the seemingly irreversible destiny of the modern subject. The structures through which we create worlds are not our eternal destiny. Though we are thrown into existence in such a way that conformity to a previously constituted symbolic order is unavoidable, the codes that condition perception and cognition are open to deliberate transformation. (*Helen Keller or Arakawa* Ch. XXV "Brave Light"; an essay on architecture for the deafblind; p. 250-251)

But the rhetorical confrontation of variant claims is not the point of staking out territory (and new territory) in architecture for Arakawa and Gins. As I said of the medial turn/turning in their work in general, it wasn't for the sake of achieving a style or participating in a genre - it was in pursuit and for the sake of an efficacy, an efficacy they sought in architecture, an efficacy they ended up discovering viz. inventing, in/as procedural architecture.

What is this efficacy? Procedural efficacy, or the efficacy of procedures? On what grounds can they claim the effects the architecture could have or should have? How can claims to efficacy be evaluated?

What is the chain/vector of explanation behind this paradigm of efficacy - what forces, mechanisms, conditions etc are aligned, implicitly or explicitly, to explain the projected effects? What plausibility can an explanation like this give to a claim of effect or impact?

These are central questions of my research and writing in our book project, the challenge I'm taking on there and hopefully, what I'll have something new to say about in the book. Here of course, I can only fly over the discussion. I am also eager to learn from others who have thoughts on these topics, so please do be in touch.

One answer, to the question of efficacy in the work of Arakawa and Gins - the compactest I know of is: landing sites

1994 - In the final count, it is the landing sites that, in conjunction with constructions specifically made to augment them, will lead the way to a constructed (artificial?) eternity. p23. AD

Fundamental change will not come about by chance meetings with unusual landing site configurations; instead what is required is constant contact with configurations capable of spinning one about in one's tracks. ... Not knowing what it is that lives makes determining what it is that dies impossible. p.23 AD

to rephrase that in our own words, I would venture:

landing sites, multiplied, multiply the surface of reentry in events (eventning) - increasing the chances of reversing becomings.

Or, one step compacter, we could try to lay out the sequence:

landing (perceptual or/and imaging; dimensionalizing): configuring:
coordinating: performance of procedures: eventning: personing: repeat

To explore this proposition - the core proposition of procedural architecture - approximately adequately needs more space. But there is a thought experiment that can give us, I think, an order of magnitude.

Landing sites

Simple multiplication

1994 -

Number and complexity of landing site configurations are directly proportional to intricacy and extent of path or terrain.
p. 77 Academy Editions 1994

1988

The corrugations and indents **suggest to the viewer numerous, possible landing strips upon which the viewing could come to rest** ... Jagged, raised planes jutting out at oblique angles from brightly painted dips and hollows **cause there to be** in the viewer, through an accelerating of the accumulating and compounding of his/her viewing, **frequent déjà-vus**.

"Ch. 16 Review and Self-Criticism" in Mechanism of Meaning 3rd Edition 1988 p.106

Exponential potentiation

1994 -

Each turn in the path and each rounding of a bend in an ellipse has the TRIPLE EFFECT of **prompting a particular sequence of kinaesthetic landing site configurations** coincidental with **an arising of that sequence in memory** and a **replay of the sequence in bodily memory**.

p. 76 Academy Editions 1994

Method

How can we approach this question of efficacy - which Arakawa and Gins suggest comes down to landing sites?

One thing that can help is a **good comparison**

Like their "Forms of Function" board, we could imagine a provocative juxtaposition with renowned architects of postmodernism, their contemporaries. This reveals their positioning relative to a forefront of their age - and in fact there is a particularly opportune comparison to make with two representatives of "deconstructivism", Peter Eisenman and Daniel Libeskind. Each presents an examples with striking superficial similarities but that reveal equally the chasm in commitment to the body in their productions of space. The comparison shows how much further procedural architecture goes than deconstruction in theorizing and building for the effects it claims, in knowing what its building is doing with the body. The juxtaposition shows a significant asymmetry between modernist/postmodernist architecture and procedural architecture in their theorizing and building for the body, and still today it is difficult to find a treatment of space or architecture that captures a percentile what procedural architecture, thinking space in service of the architectural body, can capture. (cf. *Architectural Body* 2002).

Our board claiming a position for procedural architecture up against deconstruction, its contemporary, would look like this:

FORMS OF EFFECT

Peter Eisenmann - Holocaust Memorial - to signify anxiety and disorientation

Daniel Libeskind - Garden of Exile/Jewish Museum Berlin - to signify disorientation and dislocation

Arakawa and Gins - Critical Resemblances House - to reverse the destiny to be mortal

Methodologically we can conduct the comparison on progressive levels.

1 - We can start by comparing forms in the different works

They each use similar, even strikingly similar, formal devices:

Eisenmann: Forest of Stelae; Libeskind: Tilted Labyrinth, Elevated Planters; A+G: terrain; colliding walls; entrances upon entrances; superimposed labyrinths, multiple horizons ...

2 - then we can compare claims made for the effects of these forms

Eisenmann - source: - claim: ... - regime of efficacy: semiotics/anti-semiotics

Libeskind - source: - claim: ... - regime of efficacy: hermeneutics/phenomenology

Arakawa and Gins - source: - claim: ... - regime of efficacy: architectural embodiment/procedurality/landing sites
(still being researched)

3 - then, and this is where it gets interesting, we can compare the Experience (use/reception) of these forms in BIOTOPOLOGICAL terms, i.e. in terms of landing sites and procedurality.

What is the Metric for this?

How can we measure/Count/Confirm claims of effect or impact based on landing/landing sites/landing site configurations?

Step 1 - Diagramming and recording

We believe that the resolving of these matters requires the construction of complex measuring and tracking devices, constructions by which to gain perspective on human functioning and separate out its component factors. A+G 2002ⁱ

3 main resources:

- 1 - their diagramming (what they tried)
- 2 - layering of/thinking with their diagramming
- 3 - developing/applying other diagrammings:
 - phase-space (cf. Martin Rosenberg)
 - life space topology (Kurt Lewin)
 - and new tools for diagramming (what we can do beyond it)

That, as I said, is where we can start. From there we can hope to move to a fruitful analysis and reporting on the basis of this data. This is where I am starting/continuing to start, now with this book project, but also with proposals I'm developing for an **immersive architectural body tracking project** - using 3D-Video and body-mounted motion-capture in a VR modelling environment - a methodology that could allow us to observe, quantify and qualitatively analyse the landing site activity of organisms that person in action in tactically posed (i.e. procedural) surrounds. I would love to work together with others interested in this research, and look forward to meeting in the live session on Sunday March 13 at 2pm Japanese time.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for listening and watching. I hope you also see the videos by Don Byrd and Jondi Keane that together make up the panel **Another Kind of Knowing**, based on our book project together **Another Kind of Knowing - on Arakawa and Gins**.

I look forward to questions and to a lively discussion on Sunday.

Bye for now

END

ⁱ Madeline Gins and Arakawa. *Architectural Body*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, p13.