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Architectural Practice of Person**

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**'Landing-sites' of Cosmopolitanism:  
Arakawa & Gins' architectural practice of person**

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## **‘Landing-sites’ of Cosmopolitanism: Arakawa & Gins’ architectural practice of person**

At the Sites of Cosmopolitanism Conference (Centre for Public culture and Idea, Griffith University, July 6-8, 2005) the notion of ‘openness’ was posited in many of the sessions as a type of engagement that would transform social relations, identity and the interaction of local and global interests (Delanty: keynote address). Cosmopolitan ‘openness’ would shift the site of our obligation to others back towards the relationship between an individual and the cosmological imagination. This shift renews the potential for transformation at two levels: at the mirco-level by transforming the imagined future and at the social level by transforming the codifications of communication. Professor Urry, in his keynote, characterised the cosmopolitan conditions as mobilities that develop the semiotic skills necessary for openness, but at the same time foster viewing-at-a-distance, which pushes us towards becoming tourists of our own culture.

Throughout the conference insightful discussion articulated the benefits and pitfalls of cosmopolitanism. However these discussions remained on a discursive and analytical level. Ideas, such as Profesor Delanty’s micro-reflexive and dialogic forms of self-understanding and self-problematisation, or Professor Urry’s auto, and mirco-mobilities were not offered as practices (ways to enact the relationship they observed) and instead panned out to be discursively reflexive positions applied at the level of the social and social analysis. The aim of this paper is to re-appropriate and re-connect these operations as embodied practices that construct and orient perception and action. I have selected the work of artists turned architects, Arakawa and Gins, to examine the way living bodies enact the relationship of local and global, the individual and the collective in the way that they enact the relationship between percepts and embodied attention.

Embodied action or embodiment presupposes the inseparability and false distinction of body and mind. This position which many neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists and social scientists, linguists, philosophers and arts practitioners espouse, posits that all nervous activity is cognition and that the different forms of cognition are distributed body-wide. In order to examine cosmopolitanism, we must examine the way persons

move within themselves from map-reader to path-finder (Urry), global to local, logic to tactic, encompassing percept to barest attention. Deleuze and Guattari in *What is Philosophy?* (1994) observe that:

Percepts can be telescopic or microscopic, giving characters and landscapes giant dimensions as if they were swollen by a life that no lived perception can attain – projected totalised images of relation and world (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 171).

By the late sixties, painter Arakawa and poet Madeline Gins had already decided to pool their resources and address the ‘swollen dimensions’ of life by concentrating on how, we as ‘organism-persons’ apportion our perception before the totalisation of images sets in and before regimes of thought discursively lay claim to knowledge. Consequently, they embarked on a transdisciplinary practice, which includes their individual works of paintings and books and transformed into the collective production books, installations, built environments, paintings-puzzles, earth works, houses, apartments, working plans for housing communities, small cities and most recently the *Museum of Living Bodies*. Their aim is to deregulate the interaction between body-wide activities, discursive sequences and our surroundings.

Openness, as an overview or a forest of encounters, provides no indication of how this conditional relationship may be realized. In this paper I have focused on Arakawa and Gins’ invention of a practice of attention called *landings sites*. This study and enactment of the processes of attention confronts the generalized imperative to be ‘open’ by accounting for bottom-up and top-down processing. In particular I will discuss how the practice of ‘landing sites’ aims to produce an ecology of inter-subjective interaction and communal devising by deploying the notion that all awareness is sited-awareness. This hypothesis suggests that attention and perceptual learning are situated and that by re-entering situations, informed with knowledge of body-wide sensing, we may interact with the co-evolution of the organism, person and environment. It is this aspect of constructing and building that is omitted from current architectural philosophy, material thinking, city planning and discussion of cosmopolitanism, which leaves us with historically determined bodies and habitual modes of embodiment.

It is the forming not the forms that A/G focus on which lead to different way of thinking about and constructing oneself as an observer. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle should have changed the stability of observation as either firmly exocentric or ego-centric. Arakawa and Gins, like other contemporary researchers such as Eugene Gendlin, advocate a first person science, one that can no longer isolate the scientific objective

observer from the phenomenological affective observer. The structures of our research activities interact with and produce the resulting spatiality of our world. They have devised *architectural procedures* to deregulate the construction of the observer, no longer isolated in the library, laboratory or studio and become daily researchers, the direct beneficiaries of knowledge, in-situ, where cosmopolitanism happens.

The question for building sites of cosmopolitanism -- sites of belonging constructed on principles of self-differentiating difference -- is not the consensus of measure by which to judge, but what do we need to account before we account for a subject, which bears upon the social question "What is it you observe when you observe value?" In contrast to current approaches in architecture and urban and environmental planning which are positioned as social intervention, Arakawa and Gins' project is to consider architecture as tactically posed surrounds which make self-invention both perceptible and open to conscious interaction.

In order to observe our own observation practices, Arakawa and Gins begin at the site where attention and conceptual activity come together in perceptual learning. It is here they begin dismantling the habitual configurations of person and his or her relation to the surround. To this end they act on the sited-awareness hypothesis to explore the initial events of 'pointing, electing, determining and considering that may be said to co-originate all sites' (Gins and Arakawa 2002:5). Because the 'sited-body lives as one site that is composed of many sites' (5) we may re-enter and explore the way the most minute attentions and the relationships (5-22). By noticing the most 'fleeting sensation of anything whatsoever' (6) it becomes possible to recognise how we are constructed as observers. The aim of landings sites is to 'make and keep explicit an otherwise hidden-in-plain-sight constant of awareness: all things and events have specific positionings' (7). It is in the exertions and movement of the body, even the slightest and most fleeting that architecture and the planning and structure of social space have their origin.

Arakawa and Gins propose that there are three ways to land as a site:

*Perceptual landing sites* that responds to a direct existent and reports on what presents itself. *Imaging landings sites* which respond diffusely and indirectly by generalising to whatever has not been processed by perceptual landing sites. *Dimensionalising landing sites* which respond narrowly and diffusely by combining the qualities of perceptual and

imaging sites and coordinates the direct responses with indirect ones, the formed with the formless (2002: 7,8).

For example, the multilevel labyrinth was constructed by Arakawa and Gins (in *Critical Resemblance House* and *Cleaving Wave House*: see below figures 1 & 2) to make it impossible not to notice how we respond to the environment and how we can reconfigure the relationships between modes of sensing and the connection of sites in the body, especially if a person must negotiate a labyrinth at each of three or more levels in the body.

Figure 1.

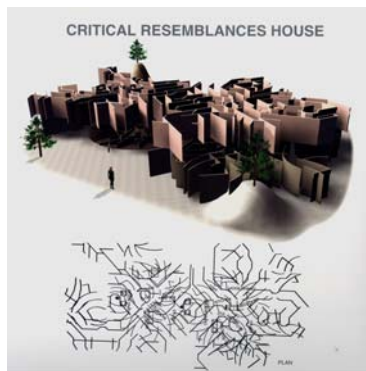


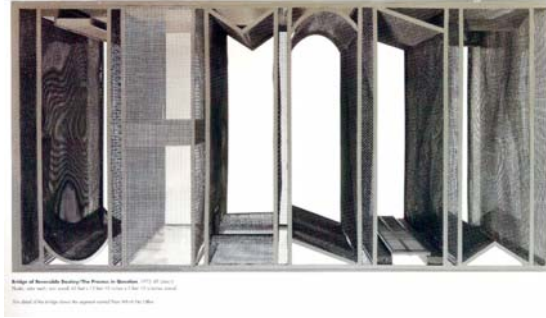
Figure 2.



Multi-level labyrinths which require a person to separate and re-connect landing sites within and across organism, person and surround.

The movement of these sites and new configuration of landing can be tracked as seen in this computer image of a 3D model. The relation between perceptual and imaging landings sties is made perceptible in a detail (see below) from *The Bridge of Reversible Destiny*. The bridge is made entirely of grided mesh steel. Each wall is made of two layers that for the wall. In each wall the distance between the two layers varies so that a person becomes aware of the way he or she sets a measure by establishing how to judge distance in this new environment. But with each wall providing different visual cues, the visual acuity comes under scrutiny and doubt which soon spreads to the other senses. Here the connection between perceptual, imaging and the dimensionised world are disrupted, dismantled and one must establish a different bodily measure which requires a different configuration of sensing, perception and conception.

Figure 3.



Detail of a room on *The Bridge of Reversible Destiny* with walls constructed of two layer of mesh steel.

Exemplars in reconfigured body-wide sites come from persons who have been forced to reconfigure their sensorium requiring forms of attention that change the shape of awareness and therefore the shape of the world. Extraordinary persons like Helen Keller, Karl Dalke or Ian Waterman show us how we underestimate the connection and configuration of our modes of sensing. By crossing modes of sensing, which landing sites constitute, it is possible to make the borders that delimit and maintain the identity of things perceptible and re-enterable.

Karl Dalke, the blind mathematician solved the topological polyomino puzzle concerning the borders of identically shaped territories, by visualising the pieces of the puzzle with texture and thickness. He was able to hold the visualisation over long period of time because in fact he transformed imaging landing sites -- the generalizing form of perceptual landing sites that you apply to areas of the world not in directly perceivable position such as the back side of a chair -- into perceptual landings site or what he called the 'false artifact' to which he attributed tactile qualities (2002: 15). This not only shows the relation between our ability to conceptual and applied understanding but also between the modes of perceiving which make the knowledge available.

For Helen Keller, thoughts and perceptions all have a direct and tactile sensory site. In this way space and spatial relationships, articulated objects and amorphous forms of atmosphere all have texture. Keller's ability to scale, measure and apportion the subtleties of texture, articulated the vast and untapped connection between senses and the environment. Arakawa and Gins understand the implications of coordinological skills as moving beyond the sensitive intake of the world to show is our tentative and profound participation emergence of forms. Gins book, *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994) reveals how constructing knowledge explicitly a bodily action. Gins asks:

Might there be an underlying basis for seeing and if so would this be detachable from the actual seeing of things? What I understand (and work with) as the basis of seeing consists of mindbody in its apportioning of itself and the rest of the world out into a thoroughly proprioceptive-kinaesthetic (and tactile) graphicality. It is the nature of the thinking field to move and instigate behaviour using points of position and supposition. Here is a world of complete tentativity (Gins 1994:12).

Gins goes on to point out that the texture of perceiving is not transparent and must adhere to some event no matter how briefly (13). Cleaving, the simultaneous movement of separating and bringing together, puts ‘an end to sterile coupling of things regardless of action and micro-events’ (279). We should not be too quick to think we know how Helen Keller exposes the erroneous categorization of sensing and reasoning facilities. ‘Not being able to see where the envelopes she projects in response to what she supposes to be there at hand, and unable to field containing volumes by sound, she cannot resolve her constructions into forms that end’ (241). This is of course not a shortcoming but her considerable expertise at working in an unbounded space, scaling events and mingling modes of sensing necessary for rigorous daily research.

Ian Waterman fell ill with a rare neurological disease that left him without the sense of touch. This included not only detection on the skin but skeletal and motor sensory apparatus for proprioception. His condition is called polyneuropathy and is described as deafferent because more than the loss of sensation, the illness affected access to his motor memory and to the emotional and affective qualities arising from touch and movement (Cole 1995: 138-151). Most remarkable is that Ian Waterman taught himself to walk. Since much of our touch is regulated and calibrated by vision, Waterman was able to learn to control all his movements, from eating to walking through his vision, hence the title of the book his doctor Jonathan Cole wrote about him, *Pride and the Daily Marathon* (1995). It is Waterman’s ability to dimensionalise his landing-site configurations by coordinating direct (perceptual) responses with indirect (imaging) responses to literally enact one of Arakawa and Gins’ architectural procedures: *tentative constructing towards a holding in place*. Waterman talks of his deafferent experience as creating an emotional void, shutting down his affect due to lack of touch. Touch becomes way we can understand the necessity of an ecology of landing sites, the connection of the body to its own modes of sensing and the way this impacts upon inter-subjectivity and the shape of interaction which becomes the social. In this regard we may rethink the social as the

spatiality that results from the interaction of communal devising and the collective imaginary based on the body-wide modes of sensing.

This approach contrasts with city-spaces derived from the exocentric viewpoint. As Ben Basin observes ‘Baudrillard’s view of the [twin] towers resound with Lefebvre’s notion of conceived space where space is reduced to a conception, as in blueprints and maps’ (Lefebvre 1999:287 in Basin 2005 manuscript:12). Communal spaces, which allow us to collectively explore the extent of the site of person, become the new task of architecture and architectural practice. Landing sites form the basis of Arakawa and Gins’ architectural procedures and become the palpable lived experience that constructs their large scale work. Hence, *The Museum of Living Bodies*, currently under negotiation to be built on a lower Manhattan site, (or alternatively on nearby Governor’s Island), draws upon thirty-five years of their collaborative daily practice and research into landing sites.

Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figures 4 & 5. Lower Manhattan site for Museum of Living bodies and view of Freedom Tower I relation to Statue of Liberty.

The design that was awarded the bid for the Ground Zero, Freedom Tower is a good example of the tendency in architecture to make materials, things and spatial relationships operate within a discursive system of meaning. Daniel Libeskind’s Freedom Tower, as Ben Basin has accurately observed, is image-oriented, symbolic and predominantly visual in the position it takes on the skyline and in relation to the Towers it commemorates. I would go further to suggest that it monumentalises the past perspectively and provides a logo for a brand of freedom based on nostalgia. Its functionality is symbolic function of cultural commodity. In this way material constructions are primarily photo-opportunities that have been wedded to conspicuous consumption. Basin’s critique deploys Lefebvre’s

notion of transparency. Transparency, according to Lefebvre, is the secret of the illusion of space that reveals, in its trick of smoke and mirrors, the result that is sought. The apparatus of power and knowledge that implies disclosure, in fact, conceals the social order more by showing only an abstract space (Lefebvre 1999: 287 in Basan:12 manuscript). Basan follows Lefebvre's argument further noting that concealment transparency achieves becomes the move that conflates material structure with abstract symbol. This is what Hugo considered the triumph of the Logos, when the visual is able to expel object values by positioning them at the site where 'abstract spaces use the façade of transparency to tuck away social relations and relation of production' Basan: 24). Basan's discussions of Lefebvre and Baudrillard reveal the importance of Arakawa and Gins' project that works against the isolation of the visual and the trend in architecture to construct the observer's subjectivity in the production of abstract space, a trend exemplified by Twin Towers and pushed to the extreme in the Freedom Tower.

Arakawa and Gins' *Museum of Living Bodies* is not a memorial but an architectural context for the living body, 'tumultuously alive with process' (*Museum of Living Bodies: a laboratory of Self-Invention*. dossier: unpaginated). It cannot be taken in as image at a glance from any one viewpoint and for that reason it is a community structure that requires bodily interaction rather than consumption at a distance though image or concept. In this regard the museum is an 'invitation to constructive action'. The *Museum of Living Bodies* presents systematic, reflective approach to the purpose of architecture which includes a Think Tank Retirement Community, a Toddler university, Reversible Destiny apartments, a Reversible Destiny Hotel Intelligence Room, Focusing institute, and Laboratory Luncheonette.

*Reversible Destiny* is the overarching goal of the project that for, Arakawa and Gins addresses the unethical assumption that we are required to be mortal. They address this complicity with a *crisis ethics*, 'a challenge to our species to reinvent itself and to desist from foreclosing on any possibility, even those judged to be impossible' (2002: xviii). This challenge is implemented in the applied research that analyses and reframes inquiry, reason and perception by literally constructing the features of activities and making them re-enterable.

Figure 6.



Figure 7.



The basic-generative unit is rotated by 90 degrees in successive placements in the *Museum of Living Bodies*.

The *Basic-Generative Unit* (see figure 6) provides an immediate room sized module which will set up critical resemblance when rotated, inverted, reversed – operations, that in relation to the initial unit, allow comparisons between landings sites, increase the number of landing sites and consequently the extent of the site of person (see figure 7). They use of the notion of critical resemblance and the labyrinthine path that connects interiority to exteriority as a way of re-thinking the identity designations among organism, person and surround. The delimitation of these identity borders aids in modelling the construction of movements that cleave, both separates and joins, the apportioning of sites of one's own body. The disruption that ensues from the dismantling of habitual modes of measure and apportionment can be followed by finding a perceptual, actual modes of reconfiguration based on the practice of landing sites and development of movement across modes of sensing. These two activities go in tandem and are developed only in surrounds that tactically aim to enlarge and attenuate the flow of perceptual information that is processed in automatic and habitually categorical ways.

In Conclusion, landing sties explore the actual sites where physiological and psychological structures and organisations interact. This is both pre-social and is what we need to consider before we account for a subject and it is post social in that this habituation is susceptible to training and tradition. Arakawa and Gins address the interaction of top-down and bottom-up processing and cognition by exploring how we may practice the coordination of these domains of activity, first by considering them as body-wide activities and second by considering them the subject of communal devising and the basis of the sustainability of social space. By constructing architecture that enacts

a continuous measure performed upon the perceptual systems and reapplied to events and things, we may change an 'organism that persons' into an 'architectural body' a functional being into procedural becoming. If Architecture continues to give priority to forms rather than forming, observation and image rather than constructing and heuristics, not only will we never avoid the institutionalised capture of perception but we will not be inclined to move from complicity with the function of change -- to deliberate interaction with types and rates of change.

'Openness' is a both a practical task and an overarching idea or plan. The practice of landing-sites builds a local activity that is non-prescriptive and heuristic, while *The Museum of Living Bodies* offers a global image in the shape of a concept of continuous embodied process. The relationships between these different scales of 'site' give form to the cosmopolitan citizen as an 'architectural body' (Gins and Arakawa 2002:2). In contrast to Professor Delanty's discursive self-problematism, Arakawa and Gins problematise the habitual processes that maintain the boundaries of self-identity. The justifiably concerns about the prescriptive dangers of practice must be judged against the danger of providing ideas which are subject to habitual processes of personal and interpersonal implementation. For Arakawa and Gins there is a crucial and critical difference between following a singular path of 'becoming' rather than reproducing and reiterating a plan for 'becoming'. The openness that cosmopolitan citizens exhibit is formed where microcosm meets macrocosm but at the site of 'person' where organism encounters environment and where top-down interacts with bottom-up processing in an 'architectural context, newly conceived' (Gins and Arakawa 2002:xiv).

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