To engage with these texts of Arakawa and Gins, 'EXERT YOURSELF IN WHOLLY OTHER WAYS' An Introduction to Arakawa and Gins Dr Jondi Keane Arakawa and Gins make outrageous claims. They state that blank is the most productive state, that a person can think/​do two things at once, that we have entirely misunderstood the relationship of organism to person to environment, that we can reconfigure our senses to make many more senses and that we can join them in declaring ‘We have decided not to die’. Must their discourse take the shape of puzzling statements and enigmatic questions? If you answer ‘yes’, then you will have already recognised the importance of construction, material processes and situated dynamics. The very operations of change depend upon the perceptions and actions that hold identity boundaries in place. To modulate the rates and types of change, systems that automatically control homeostasis and equilibrium must be shaken loose. By this logic, the form a question takes should not carry forward the structure it is attempting to dislodge. Not only is their discourse labyrinthine, Arakawa and Gins propose we must literally build questions (procedural architecture) that challenge and disorient historically constructed and habitually guarded body schemas. The value of Arakawa and Gins’ declarations resides not in the plausibility of the claim but in the modes of engagement they initiate.

The two Arakawa and Gins texts printed here already suppose the mind–body split to have been resolved and dissolved (embodiment). Consistent with research in evolutionary theory, self-organisation and ecological psychology, they go further to imply that the embodied (mindbody) person is no longer be considered separate from her/his environment, hence mindbodyenvironment or organism-person-surround. Let’s follow this line of argument for a moment. If the organism and the environment co-select features that reinforce their respective development, and if the way to change an organism is to make different selections in its environment, then a person who is aware of this reciprocity would be able to track previous interactions and anticipate ways to open and deregulate them. Arakawa and Gins call the process by which a person can anticipate habitual, automatic and ritualised modes of perception/action and guide the reconfiguration of modes of sensing procedural architecture. To challenge identity boundaries is to challenge the solidity of meaning and value. Once we step into these waters, Arakawa and Gins would say we are in a world of complete tentativeness.

To engage with these texts of Arakawa and Gins, you must allow the words to impact upon all bodily and assembly of architectural modes of activity. ‘Here and There Within Reversible Destiny City’ describes a built environment in which the breakdown of fixed identity is already part of the environmental structure and the use of landing site configurations and procedural knowing is already the nitty-gritty practice of everyday life. ‘Invention and Assembly of Architectural Procedures’ is more instructional — more like a guide to exploration of the biotopology that exists across identity boundaries and across scales of action. Like the assembly instructions for a new DVD player or a flat-pack chair, or the directions for using a new car, the words are of no use unless you connect, build or drive the thing. In this case, a newly formed tool, ‘organism that persons’ or ‘body-environment’, is the thing that must be test driven. The instructions seem straightforward, but it is not easy to: 1. identify a purpose and decide on an X that will ‘decrease one’s ultimate cluelessness’; 2. select the best option for X according to the post-human objective; 3. name the outcome; 4. imagine a set of action that would realise the outcome; 5. consider how a built-environment might call forth these actions; 6. evaluate whether it can be built; 7. re-enter the potential procedure and; 8. produce a set of instructions for the procedure you have just devised. This can continue in an endless recursion and participate in the autopoietic realisation of living.

The seemingly outrageous declarations of Arakawa and Gins are in fact very practical and tactical approaches that result from the implications of contemporary research seriously. No cheating. No omissions. No holds barred. All holds tentative. When we ask ‘What is going on?’ or ‘What does it mean to assign value?’ Arakawa and Gins would propose that the answer must come from ‘exerting yourself in wholly other ways’, preferably with procedural intent.

Arakawa and Gins have produced: body-sized cognitive puzzles, installations, built-environments, parks, houses, apartments/hotels, think-tank retirement communities, small town and cities, books and other discursive sequences such as ‘Directions for Use’

Arakawa and Gins coordinate research from: phenomenology, linguistic analysis, art criticism, urban studies, poetry, design, sociology, neuroscience, biotechnologies, cognitive science, contemporary physics, embryology, evolutionary theory, ecology, architecture and built environment.

Authors of note who have written about Arakawa and Gins include: Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Italo Calvino, Arthur Danto, George Lakoff, Mark Taylor, Andrew Benjamin, Charles Bernstein, Shun Gallagher, Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Jean-Michel Rabaté, among many others.

Key notions in Arakawa and Gins’ project include: organism that persons, architectural body, reversible destiny, ubiquitous site, sited awareness, the shape of awareness, landing sites, landing site configurations, procedures and procedural architecture, perceptual knowing, tentativeness, tactically posed surrounds, indirectness, parlaying indirectness, non-ironic irony, biotopology, atmospheric intricateness and other terminological conjunctions that open up body-wide modes of investigation. A glossary of terms appears in their latest book, Making Dying Illegal.