
Open Wide, Come Inside:

Laughter, Composure and Architectural Play. Film Script.

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(Script text is the voice of Pia Ednie-Brown, unless otherwise identified).

SCENE 1: Introduction.

The video that you are about to see is set up as a mock episode of the Australian children's television show *Play School*. [1] I decided to use the video format of the conference to explore ideas in ways that I would be unlikely to do otherwise.

I chose *Play School* as a model in the hope that it would tickle Arakawa and Gins' notion of 'reversible destiny' by taking the grown-up academic scenario into a childhood scene. More importantly, it becomes part of a proposition about the importance of PLAY as a mode of activity integral to Arakawa and Gins' idea of *procedural architecture*.

I am also trying to set up a condition that might intensify a requirement to ride a line between being in control and out-of-control, between sense and non-sense, between holding together and falling apart. Aiming to ride this line calls upon a kind of virtuosity, that I have argued elsewhere has profound ethical implications, that I call 'the art of emergence,' or ethico-aesthetic know-how (Ednie-Brown 2008). Arakawa and Gins are primo virtuosos at the art of emergence.

Both play and the art of emergence are related to laughter. Laughter is an emergent eruption that arises when two or more inconsistencies co-inhabit an event, such that the ground of social conduct, on which our behaviours dance to collectively recognised forms, is destabilized. In laughing we *acknowledge* that destabilization (as we are thrown by coexistent incompatibilities within the moment), while at the same time finding a corporeal re-grounding as we reconnect into the rhythmic shudders of our organismic lives.

In shared laughter, we together forge this shuddering-regrounding-connection, in what I see as an affective, extra-body-wide diagramming of *bioscleave*. Much of this presentation is about what Madeline Gins discusses as “an open set of dynamics” - for which laughter provides one very palpable physical diagramming.

So, I am hoping that this video will make you laugh, and that you will become an embodied, affective diagram of the ideas I am trying to convey.

For this academic context the playful form of this presentation has certainly been a risk... But then, inhabiting the architecture of A+G tends to mean a perpetual risk of falling.

On that note, let's make the leap. It's time to go and play...

SCENE 2: Architectural Play School.



Start Play School music... fade in image to hand puppet and scene...

Hello. Welcome to *Architectural Play School*.

(turning to hand puppet):

Elbisrever [2] and I ... oh look at you Elbisrever ... *(removes fluff caught in hand puppets eyes)*

We have been playing in the *Plastic Futures* [3] house, haven't we? It's lots of fun in there. We've been waiting for you to come, though, because what we've been wanting to do today is play another game called the *Biotopological Scale Juggling Procedure*, [4] haven't we Elbisrever?

(Elbisrever nods)

But the thing is, we need to wait for our friends Arakawa and Madeline Gins to arrive, but they should be here very soon.

Do you like this house? It doesn't look like a normal house does it? It's much better. You'll find out why later. Wait until you see inside.

Oh, what's that noise? I can hear something... what is that?

(turns to pull a crochet object from behind)

Oh look - look at that Elbisrever! I wonder what it is? It's amazing. Look, there's a little tag. What does it say? This is a Hyperbolic Evolution Accelerator. It says it works as a perpetual motion machine, though it's not really a 'machine' but rather an *organism-person-environment dynamic*.

It's a *dynamic*, Elbisrever. *(Elbisrever nods)*

It says it's a three-part cleavage that plaits infinite strands of hairy connection into an open loop. Amazing.

Look, you are right, Elbisrever, it's Madeline! There is Madeline in there...
Oh Madeline, you are already playing the *Biotopological Scale Juggling Procedure*.
She's in there everyone, come and have a look, come and meet her...

SCENE 3: Scale-Model Madeline.



Everyone, meet Madeline Gins. Arakawa is in there too, but at the moment he is invisible. Being experts at architectural procedures they are able to fold into Blank, into the white reservoir of possibilities.

Madeline, we've been playing with the open ended *Plastic Futures* house. We're hoping you can help take everyone watching at home inside to play with the house as well, and to do this as a kind of *architectural procedure*, because you are so good at that. We want to use it as an *architectural surround*, a collective *landing site*, or a *tactically posed surround*. Now these are all terms you use. Sometimes you call them *terminological junctions*... But Madeline, what we're wondering, first off, is if these terms are all about manipulating systems of perception?

Sound file of Madeline Gins speaking, from Slought Foundation symposium:

"Perception closes it and it's a word and comes in. Clunk. We want to open it. We want to open it and we want to have a sense, as I said before, of bioscleave. We want a set of dynamics. Each of these terms, which are approximative, rigorous abstractions, hold open a set of dynamics. And then we don't name into it any further until it comes to us. We proceed. Otherwise, our race just sits around and pens texts and then croaks" (Arakawa et al. 2007).

Ok, so this is a very important idea: that of holding *open* a set of dynamics.

SCENE 4: 'How to Tell Stories to Children'



So let's think about this idea of an *open set of dynamics* a bit more, before we enter the open-ended *Plastic Futures* house as a way of exploring further.

Firstly, what is a 'dynamic'?

I am going to read you something from a little story that helps me to think about what a 'dynamic' is. Maybe while I read, you could get out a pen and paper and draw a diagram of a dynamic? Could you do that?

Great.

The story is by Miranda July, and it's in a book called

No one belongs here more than you

Which is a little bit like saying 'open wide, come inside' isn't it?

Inside is a story called 'How to Tell Stories to Children.'

The story is about a family who have a lot of trouble getting on, and who eventually go to see a therapist to try to sort through their problems.

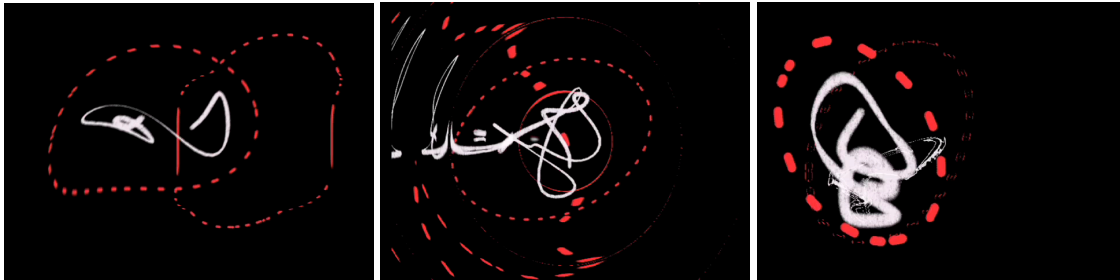
After their first session, a girl in the story comments that the therapist (and I quote) ...

... suggested that the dynamic had served each of us well. Something in the way he said this gave me the feeling that the dynamic was moving on, perhaps down the block, where it would serve some other confused family. And we would be left dynamic-less, four people alone with all the wrong feelings for one another. (July 2007: 189)

(overlay of diagram animation starts coming forward...)

I think that little scene in the story paints a clear picture of a 'dynamic' as an entity, almost unto itself, but primarily as something that holds different entities together, like some quality of connection that puts things into play, in certain unspeakable, habitual ways.

Scene 5: Inhabiting an Open Set of Dynamics.



This quality of connection, this dynamic, is held open in the work of Arakawa and Gins in order to allow for and encourage the dynamic to change and evolve into a new creature. Perhaps A+G are like bioenergetic therapists engaged in the task of prodding old, stuck architectural problems into play, such that (like in Miranda July's story) the dynamic leaps into its own creaturely shape, wriggling free of its servitude, so that it no longer 'serves' confused families, but is an acknowledged life of the family. Their prodding gives outline to an open dynamic of the organism-person-environment – which is both a truly complex family dynamic, and a creature unto itself. If we are organisms that person, the organism-person-environment is an organism that creates. It is both something we are part of, and something unto itself – it is a three-part cleavage that plaits infinite strands of hairy connection into an open loop.

This open set of dynamics is the diagrammatic basis of the architecture of all of Arakawa and Gins' work. ... be it their poetry, their ideas, their stories, their drawings, paintings and of course, their built environments.

In all cases, they ask us to *inhabit* an open set of dynamics.

And this is what we do every time we open-endedly play a game. When we enter into worlds that we create as we are inside them, we are doing just that: inhabiting an open set of dynamics.

So, rather than architectural design being simply about creating shelter, comfort, protection and form – it is about PLAY – its about configuring environments that elicit states of play.

Scene 6: Starting to Make a House.



We might start, for instance, by emptying blocks on the floor and starting to make a house.

This kind of play could be one step toward configuring environments in which both things and ourselves might head towards a reversible destiny...

I am going to play with the blocks and talk for a while about the architecture of Arakawa and Gins... while Madeline takes you now into the *Plastic Futures* house...

SCENE 7: Architecture that Tickles



The task in making an environment is to prod the emergent organism-persons-environment dynamic into the creaturely life that it can be, because only when we feel this creaturely life can we enter into relationship with this thing that we are always, already part of.

And in entering into relationship with this creaturely dynamic, we work with the fact of it being an always unfinished product, of being a complex puzzle that can't so much be solved or known definitively, but played with, that *must* be played with in an *on-going* way.

As designers, the issue is how we purposefully configure an open set of dynamics that puts things into play. Arakawa and Madeline Gins talk about this act of "a tentative constructing towards a holding in place" (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 23). This tentative, holding in-place-but-open allows, as Madeline suggested earlier, for "it to come" forward, to not force this dynamic into the world, but to elicit it, our relationship with it as both separate to us, and something we are integral to.

So how does the architecture of Arakawa and Gins do this? Jondi Keane gave a clue in a presentation at the last Arakawa and Gins conference. He is talking about being at their Yoro Park:

(sound of Jondi Keane speaking, from Slought Foundation presentation)

"When I was walking around and there was other people in the Park, there were two kinds of sounds that you heard. One was *uuuhh!* and the other was laughter, just uncontrollable laughter ... and this was wonderful because people were either about to break their leg, or they were just so happy to death that this was so weird

and they couldn't quite stand upright. This was lovely – this seems to me to be an appropriate organismic response to the kinds of perceptual things they were experiencing.” (Keane 2008)

As Jondi suggests there, the gaps and the laughter were linked to *falling*, and this involved real, physical falling and potential broken legs, but it also connects, or resonates with falling of different kinds. Arakawa and Gins aim to throw us off balance, starting with the suggestion that deciding not to die is a possibility (which throws most people at least a little bit), and moving into enumerated tactics across different media to productively destabilize our habitualised certainties.

But perhaps this laughter also indicates how their architecture *tickles us*. The sociologist Jack Katz has described “the sensation of the tickle” as:

the product of a focus on the thin line between doing and being done, between the body as lived from within and as acted upon from without, between the body given three-dimensional awareness through physical interaction and the body effaced by its use in collective symbolic interaction. (Katz 1999: 342)

When we manage to walk this thin line, along the tightrope of an art of emergence, one cannot be anywhere other than here and now. But this present is multiple and complex, and the architecture of Arakawa and Gins prompts us to slip in and out of these multiply present dynamics. It is the tickle of these slippages that does the work. But they can only do so much, they can only offer the opportunity to be tickled. Whether you laugh or not, depends upon your willingness to inhabit their architecture, in all its forms.

It's open wide. So come inside...

Scene 8: Make Me.



Bleed into scene of young child playing with blocks:

“ ...its so, so, so, so beautiful... hey look that’s the house in there.

Come and sit down with me. Make me.

Come and sit down with me and give me some more blocks...”

Notes

[1] According to Wikipedia, this is “the longest-running children’s show in Australia, and the second longest running children’s show in the world.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Play_School_\(Australian_TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Play_School_(Australian_TV_series)). The current *Play School* web site is: <http://www.abc.net.au/abcforkids/sites/playschool>.

[2] The name of the hand puppet, Elbisrever, is ‘reversible’ backwards.

[3] Props used in this video, namely the flexible cardboard model, the white fluffy material and the crocheted model in which the scale figurine appears, were part of a design research studio and its installation exhibition outcome called *Plastic Futures* (Victorian State of Design Festival, Built Systems/2040 City, 2009). Scene 7 footage is an excerpt from the recordings of one part of that exhibition/installation: an interactive installation in which visitors could move a small web camera with a scale figurine attached through a model/landscape. The image seen through the camera was projected very large on a surface in from of the model/landscape and visitor moving the camera. As such, one was experiencing the small-scale model and the large-scale immersive experience at

the same time, becoming an action with some affinity to how I understand Arakawa and Gins' *Biotopological Scale Juggling Procedure*.

[4] This is one of the architectural procedures designed by Arakawa and Gins. See Gins and Arakawa 2006: 196.

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