READING ROOM:
Experiments in posture / movement / comprehension.

JONDI KEANE / ALAN PROHM
SHAUN GALLAGHER / THEO LOTZ

A SPECIAL EVENT AT THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL
ARAKAWA AND GINS: ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY
CONFERENCE / CONGRESS

SLOUGH FOUNDATION & THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA,
Philadelphia PA, USA
April 4-6, 2008
SPECIAL THANKS TO: Aaron Levy, Arakawa and Madeline Gins. In addition:

Jondi Keane would like to thank Arts Queensland for their support, Vanessa Keane, and Daniel Mate.

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Shaun Gallagher and Theo Lotz would like to thank the Institute of Humanities and Digital Research for their support.

To celebrate the work of Arakawa and Madeline Gins, the READING ROOM will do more than put their books on display for the public. It will offer specially designed pointers on how to read them as what the authors call an architectural body. A series of posture- and movement-specific reading situations will be staged to help visitors sense for themselves how their activity as bodies and persons reading relates to the enigmatic action of understanding the texts. The space of the text and of thinking, so often dissociated from the space of the person doing these things, gets produced through bodily interaction with environment. By highlighting certain readily/perceptual phenomena that make this point, the READING ROOM aims to present the texts of Arakawa and Gins in the same spirit of body-wide exploration to which the entirety of their project testifies.

Not an Arakawa & Gins information centre for third-person observers, the READING ROOM will instead set up certain experiments in which the reader will simultaneously be both subject of the study and beneficiary of the findings. These situations will be on view throughout the conference, and at a special event the collaborators will be on hand to enact the featured reading experiences, walking people through them and discussing the approach used in this project, and its implications. Above all the READING ROOM provides an impetus and pretext for fruitful interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration on questions raised by the works and writings of Arakawa and Gins. Jondi Keane, initiator and organiser has invited Alan Prohm a theorist and practitioner of experimental poetics and Prof. Shaun Gallagher, a prominent philosopher of cognitive science and his colleague Theo Lotz to form the core collaborative team, to work together, each from different fields of study, to create the READING ROOM.
The team is in no way trying to duplicate the procedural architecture of Arakawa and Gins. Rather, by focusing on the texts and exploring the communal nature of devising, the aim is to build tools for embodied reading, in which landing sites and landing site configuration, key processes of body-wide attention in Arakawa and Gins' work, become self-evident and immediately fruitful as ways of registering the bodily spatial activity involved in reading.

"It is the nature of the thinking field to move and investigate behaviour using points of position and of suppositions. Here is a world of complete tentativity." (Gins 1994: 12)

**COLLABORATION TEAM BIODATA:**

**Jondi Keane**, PhD, is an arts practitioner, critical thinker and Senior Lecturer at Griffith University in Australia. For over 25 he has presented work the USA, UK, Europe and AUS. In 1992, he was a founding member of the interdisciplinary collaborative performance group Co M-S-K. His doctoral thesis, "Arakawa and Gins: The Practice of Embodied Cognition" has led to other writings on embodiment, practice-led research and the contribution of the arts to the study of perception and action.

Alan Prohm, PhD is a poetics research artist based in Helsinki and Berlin. His work focuses on the spatial, embodied nature of meaning and understanding. He teaches on topics of experimental, visual and architectural poetics and has taught a seminar/studio on Arakawa and Gins procedural architecture at the University of Helsinki and at Helsinki's University of Art and Design. He is currently pursuing independent projects to evolve and graphically a phenomenological/biotopological poetics of visual and full-spatial reading.

**Shaun Gallagher** is Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at the University of Central Florida, and Research Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at the University of Hertfordshire. His most recent project include *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2005) and, with Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (Routledge, 2007).

**Theo Lotz** is an artist and gallery director at University of Central Florida working with his colleague, Shaun Gallagher on the READING ROOM.

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**JOND KEANE**

"A coordinating skill as much as a process, reading can of course have no self-critical dimension; when it tries to read itself it vanishes" (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 87).

Reading perpetuates the mind-body split more that any other activity because we have learned to minimise its body-wide affects and treat linguistic events as a remove (unlike speech which impinges upon our awareness of sound's dependence upon the shared conditions of enunciation to a greater extent). The READING ROOM experiments attempt to disentangle the numerous perception & action cycles involved in reading. To this end, texts from Arakawa and Gins' works have been selected because they construct situations in which a person may well be experiencing the sensations and modalities of reading that the passages describe.

Rather than attempting to isolate the mechanism by which a person either reads or looks at a text, these three experiments emphasise the connections between posture, movement and comprehension by providing opportunities to engage with text as environmental information. The aim of these experiments is to stretch the capabilities of the organism-person towards their multimodal potential by dispersing text in such a way as to hold open the fine grained densities within and across the organism-person-surround.
JONDI KEANE

From an ecological perspective, all actions are supported by the environment. By working directly on features of the environment, AG approach change in the 'organism that persons' indirectly. The tactically posed environmental features challenge the organism' commitment to closure and expand its co-selective possibilities. Circumventions of this type begin with the acknowledgement of perception as action (Noe 2004) from which a diagrammatic mode of engagement can emerge that links body-wide sensing with the act of constructing even the most abstract relationships.

A practice of embodied cognition, operating at the scale of co-selection and co-construction of the everyday, prepares an 'organism that persons' to work communally on the "bodily movements most conducive to an optimal tentative constructing towards a holding in place and the discursive sequences that best constrain them" (2002:59). The connections and disconnections, which the acts of reading highlight, point to the areas of daily research that still require re-entry with the goal of guiding the spontaneous emergence of neural patterns in every possible direction.

DIRECTIONS for Sitting >> Horizontal text
Sit comfortably. Wrap your feet around the legs of the chair. Keep the lower part of your body stationary and hips facing forwards. Turning from the torso and the neck, follow the text. Pay particular attention to the movement of your torso. How does turning one way or the other augment, detract or otherwise affect your reading and comprehension.


DIRECTIONS for Standing >> Vertical text
Step onto the gravel. Move forwards and backwards, bending and stretching, turning round to follow the sequenced texts. Keep track of how the changes in posture affect your ability to hold yourself in a constant relation to the text and in relation to the sites produced through its contents. Pay particular attention to footing and balance and the points at which you move physically rather than adjust the texts mentally.

Texts for Standing taken from Gins (1994) Helen or Keller or Arakawa

DIRECTIONS for Reclining >> mirror text
Lie down on the seesaw bed and get comfortable. Find the fulcrum point at which you begin to balance. To tilt the seesaw, gently bend one or both legs, lift arms, or contract the muscles of your torso. Read the upside-down texts directly from the reclining position and read the backwards texts in the mirror. Pay particular attention to your ability to coordinate the sensation required for posture control with the sensations prompted by and involved in the task of reading.

ALAN PROHM

Landing Tracking: Visual-Perceptual Landing Sites

Upon entering a room, a person begins dispersing perceptual landing sites to record its features. One may not know what one first noticed, where one's reading of one's surroundings began, but one of course must and does begin somewhere.  Architectural Body p.18

In this piece, the audience is invited to view/read a series of Arakawa and Gins texts/scenes, and to try recording for each one exactly where they dispersed the visual-perceptual landing sites (visual-perceptual attention) that constitute their grasp of it. The exercise gives some inkling of the patchy and groping nature of our perception, before the imaging pours in to apparently fill the gaps, "a gloss instrumental in its coming to seem that nothing has escaped attention." An easy and intuitive introduction to the observation and interpretation of landing site configurations, Landing Tracking provides a basic lesson in biopolitics

The methodology used here was developed by Alan Prohm and Dr. Barbara Tversky for an empirical study in 2002. Findings from that study were then applied to the development of a phenomenological reception theory of visual reading in Prohm's dissertation, Visual Poetics: Meaning Space from Mallarmé to Metalheart (Stanford, 2004).

ALAN PROHM

EMRD: Eye Movements for Reversing Destiny

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a clinically proven therapeutic technique that harnesses the integrating function of lateral eye movements to help resolve troubling experiences and open the mind to new possibilities. In this technique, developed by Francine Shapiro, PhD, and practiced by trained psychotherapists, the patient brings to mind a troubling memory, thought or sensation (the "target"), and "reprocesses" it using back and forth eye movements that spread the processing more broadly over both brain hemispheres. Commonly used for victims of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), the technique offers the possibility of breaking the closed loop of a debilitating traumatic memory and writing an alternate ending to the trauma narrative. Eye movement therapies on the EMDR model are also used for the simpler benefits of cognitive balance and body-mind integration.

EMRD offers you a chance to practice the cognitive-somatic equilibration made possible by eye movements, and to apply this to the reading of two sentences encapsulating basic principles of the Reversible Destiny project.

The difference:

EMDR: "We will all die sooner or later... Therefore, in dealing with disease and the possibility, or certainty, of death, targeting the fear itself is one of the most constructive uses of EMDR."  
Francine Shapiro, PhD, inventor of EMDR

EMRD: "We will all die sooner or later... This thought itself represents the prime traumatic memory, and the ideal target for reprocessing. In dealing with the possibility, or certainty, of death, targeting the certainty is one of the most constructive uses of EMDR."  
An organism that persons eyeing other possibilities
ALAN PRHOM

Word Rain: Biotopological Reading Room

Legend: for “construal” read “personing”

When the speaker speaks at the rostrum, enunciated words are made to fly, they bounce off her, stream forward and fall back to her face and body.

Word Rain, 1969

...no matter how concrete and palpable she might judge her body to be, all that she happens as spills out and overflows as tributaries/trajectories/massenergy conduits of knowing and non-knowing that land there where attention alights; that is, for herself, an organism that persons will always be only organized and redistributing gatherings of landing sites.

Making Dying Illegal, 2006

The Biotopological Reading Room provides room for a biotopological reading of Madeline Gins’ 1969 work of roomy biotopological reading.

Word Rain, 1969

Speaking about platforms, in the almost physical sense, I rested on at least three.

Being oblivious to any aspect of what is happening would be unthinkable for a biotopologist.

Making Dying Illegal, 2006

SHAUN GALLAGHER & THEO LOTZ

1. Text through blinds

[1 perceive an object from] a certain typical orientation. This privileged perception ensures the unity of the perceptual process and draws it into all other appearances. For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself.... An oblique position of the object in relation to me is not measured by the angle which it forms with the plane of my face, but felt as a lack of balance, as an unequal distribution of its influences upon me.... This is because each posture of my body is for me, immediately, the power of achieving a certain spectacle, and because each spectacle is what it is for me in a certain kinaesthetic situation. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception).

On the line which lies between my eyes and the horizon, the first plane forever hides all the others, and if from side to side I think I see things spread out in order before me, it is because they do not completely hide each other. We are always on this side of space or beyond it entirely. It is never the case that things really are one behind the other. The fact that things overlap or are hidden does not enter into their definition, and expresses only my incomprehensible solidarity with one of them – my body. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eye and Mind)
2. LARGE SENTENCE

Most studies of vision fail to recognize the tactile and kinaesthetic components of the "view" or to take into consideration the degree to which vision is not purely visual. ... Seen objects are viewed as having particular textures and the seeing, inasmuch as it is part of a world, must also be associated with, we propose, some degree of atmospheric kinaesthesia. Furthermore, since the one who sees subsists, to some extent, within what she sees, all types of landing sites can be said to be active within vision.

(Gins and Arakawa, "Landing Site(s)," Reversible Destiny)

Arakawa and Gins: panel 15.5 from the section 'Meaning and Intelligence', Mechanism of Meaning series 1963- series (1963–1973 with section 16 added in 1996)

RESPONSES / FEEDBACK

The team invites you to respond to the collection of experiments or comment on specific reading situations.

Please email responses to:
Jondi Keane: j.keane@griffith.edu.au
Alan Prohm: a.prohm@uiah.fi, or Alan.Prohm@taik.fi
Shaun Gallagher: gallaghr@mail.ucf.edu
Theo Lotz: t.lotz@mail.ucf.edu

OR

Tear this page and leave comments at the Slought Foundation for the collaboration team.

COMMENTS:

YOUR EMAIL CONTACT:
READNG ROOM
KEANE, PROHM, GALLAGHER, LOTZ

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