idea journal

co-constructing body-environments

vol. 17, no. 02

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the journal of IDEA: the interior design + interior architecture educators' association

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(b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

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co-constructing body-environments: provocation

Presenters at *Body of Knowledge: Art and Embodied Cognition Conference* (*BoK2019* hosted by Deakin University, Melbourne, June 2019) are invited to submit contributions to a special issue of idea journal "Co-Constructing Body-Environments" to be published in December 2020. The aim of the special issue is to extend the current discussions of art as a process of social cognition and to address the gap between descriptions of embodied cognition and the co-construction of lived experience.

We ask for papers, developed from the presentations delivered at the conference, that focus on interdisciplinary connections and on findings arising from intersections across research practices that involve art and theories of cognition. In particular, papers should emphasize how spatial art and design research approaches have enabled the articulation of a complex understanding of environments, spaces and experiences. This could involve the spatial distribution of cultural, organisational and conceptual structures and relationships, as well as the surrounding design features.

Contributions may address the questions raised at the conference and explore:

+ How do art and spatial practices increase the potential for knowledge transfer and celebrate diverse forms of embodied expertise?
+ How the examination of cultures of practice, Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity, neurodiversity, disability and social justice issues?
+ How the art and spatial practices may contribute to research perspectives from contemporary cognitive neuroscience and the philosophy of mind?
+ The dynamic between an organism and its surroundings for example: How does art and design shift the way knowledge and thinking processes are acquired, extended and distributed?
+ How art and design practices demonstrate the ways different forms of acquiring and producing knowledge intersect?

These and other initial provocations for the conference can be found on the conference web-site: https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/bok2019/cfp/.

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in this issue

introduction: unknowingly, a threshold-crossing movement

Julieanna Preston
Executive Editor
idea journal

It is in this special issue that the editorial board holds true to our promise to expand the horizons and readership of *idea journal* while reaching out to associated and adjacent art, design and performance practices and drawing connections to seemingly distant disciplines. The articles in this issue have provenance in a 2019 conference event, Bodies of Knowledge (BOK), which was guided by a similar interdisciplinary ethos. With an emphasis on cultures of practice and communities of practitioners that offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity/neurodiversity and disability, this conference, and this subsequent journal issue, aim to increase knowledge transfer between diverse forms of embodied expertise, in particular, between neuroscience and enactive theories of cognition.

This brief description suggests that there are shared issues, subjects and activities that have the potential of generating new understanding in cross-, inter- and trans-disciplinary affiliations and collaborations. My experience in these modes of inquiry points to the importance of identifying what is shared and what is not amongst vocabulary, concepts, pedagogies and methods. Holding these confluences and diverges without resorting to strict definition, competition or judgement of right and wrong often affords greater understanding and empathy amongst individuals to shape a collective that is diverse in its outlooks, and hopefully, curious as to what it generates together because of that diversity.

cite as:
Preston, Julieanna. 'Introduction: Unknowingly, a threshold-crossing movement,' *idea journal* 17, no. 02 (2020): 08 – 12, https://doi.org/10.37113/ij.v17i02.412.

The breadth of the knowledge bases represented within this issue necessitated that the peer reviewer list expanded once again like the previous issue. It was in the process of identifying reviewers with appropriate expertise that the various synapses between scholarly and artistic practices became evident. It is these synapses that shape sturdy bridges between the journal's existing readership, which is predominantly academics and students in interior design, interior architecture, spatial design and architecture, and the wide range of independent scholars and practitioners, academics, and students attracted to BOK's thematic call for papers, performative lectures and exhibitions. At the risk of being reductive to the complexity and nuances in the research to follow, I suggest that the following terms and concerns are central to this issue, aptly inferred by its title, 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments': spatiality; subjectivity; phenomenology; processual and procedural practice; artistic research; critical reflection; body: experience. All of these are frequent to research and practice specific to interiors. In this issue, however, we find how these terms and concerns are situated and employed in other fields, in other ways and for other purposes.

This is healthy exercise. To stretch one's reach, literally and metaphorically is to travel the distance between the me and the you, to be willingly open to what might eventuate. Imagine shaking the hand of a stranger—a somatic experience known to register peaceful intent, respect, courage, warmth, pressure, humour, nervous energy, and so much more. This threshold-crossing movement is embodied and spatial; it draws on a multitude of small yet complex communication sparks well before verbal impulses ensue. This significant bodily gesture sets the tone for what might or could happen. Based on my understanding of the research presented in 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments,' I propose that this is a procedure in the Gins and Arakawa sense that integrates theory and practice as a hypothesis for 'questioning all possible ways to observe the body-environment in order to transform it.'[01] I call this as *unknowingly*—a process that takes the risk of not knowing, not being able to predict or predetermine, something akin to the spectrum of 'throwing caution to the wind' and 'sailing close to

the wind'. My use of the word 'unknowingly' embraces intuition where direct access to unconscious knowledge and pattern-recognition, unconscious cognition, inner sensing and insight have the ability to understand something without any need for conscious reasoning. Instinct. The word *unknowingly* also affords me to invoke the 'unknowing' element of this interaction—to not know, to not be aware of, to not have all the information (as if that was possible)— an acknowledgement of human humility. I borrow and adapt this facet of unknowingly from twentieth-century British writer Alan Watts:

> This I don't know, is the same thing as, I love. I let go. I don't try to force or control. It's the same thing as humility. If you think that you understand Brahman, you do not understand. And you have yet to be instructed further. If you know that you do not understand, then you truly understand.[02]

Unknowingly also allows me to reference 'un' as a tactic of learning that suspends the engrained additive model of learning. Though I could refer to many other scholarly sources to fuel this concept, here I am indebted to Canadian author Scott H. Young's pithy advice on how to un-learn:

> This is the view that what we think we know about the world is a veneer of sense-making atop a much deeper strangeness. The things we think we know, we often don't. The ideas, philosophies and truths that guide our lives may be convenient approximations, but often the more accurate picture is a lot stranger and more interesting.[03]

In his encouragement to unlearn—dive into strangeness, sacrifice certainty, boldly expose oneself to randomness, mental discomfort, instability, to radically rethink that place/ your place/ our place, suspend aversions to mystery—Young's examples from science remind us that:

Subatomic particles aren't billiard balls, but strange, complex-valued wavefunctions. Bodies aren't vital fluids and animating impulses, but trillions of cells, each more complex than any machine humans have invented. Minds aren't unified loci of consciousness, but the process of countless synapses firing in incredible patterns.[04]

Figure 01:
Meeting the horizon; A still image from Shore Variations, a 2018 film by Claudia Kappenberg that reimagines *Waning*, a 2016 live art performance by Julieanna Preston. https://vimeo.com/user11308386.

In like manner to the *BOK2019* conference which was staged as a temporally infused knowledge-transfer event across several days, venues, geographies and disciplines, I too, ingested the materials submitted for this issue in this spirit of unknowingly. The process was creative, critical, intuitive, generative and reflective—all those buzz words of contemporary research—yet charged with substantial respect and curiosity for whatever unfolded, even if it went against the grain of what I had learned previously. For artists, designers, architects, musicians, and performers reading this journal issue, especially academics and students, this territory of inquiry may feel familiar to the creative experience and the increasing demands (and desires) to account for how one knows what one knows in the institutional setting. 'Explain yourself,' as the review or assessment criteria often states. If you are faced having to annotate your creative practice or to critically reflect on aspects that are so embedded in your making that you are unaware of them, I encourage you to look amongst the pages of this journal issue for examples of how others have grappled with that task such that the process is a space of coming to unknow and know, unknowingly.

There are a few people I would like to acknowledge before you read further. First, huge gratitude to the generosity of the peer reviewers, for the time and creative energy of guest editors Jondi Keane, Rea Dennis and Meghan Kelly (who have made the process so enjoyable and professional), for the expertise of the journal's copy editor Christina Houen and Graphic Designer Jo Bailey, and to AADR for helping to expand the journal's horizons.

Okay, readers, shake hands, consider yourself introduced, welcome into the *idea journal* house, and let's share a very scrumptious meal.

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I am forever grateful for what life in Aotearoa/ New Zealand brings. With roots stretching across the oceans to North America, Sweden, Wales and Croatia, I make my home between Kāpiti Island and the Tararua Ranges, and in Te Whanganui-A-Tara/ Wellington. I acknowledge the privilege that comes with being educated, employed, female and Pākehā, and the prejudices and injustices that colonialism has and continues to weigh on this land and its indigenous people. I am committed to on-going learning and practicing of Kaupapa Māori.

notes

01 Jondi Keane, 'An Arakawa and Gins Experimental Teaching Space; A Feasibilty Study,' *INFLeXions* 6 (2012), accessed 29 October 2020, http://www.inflexions.org/n6_keane.html.

02 Alan Watts, *Creating Who You Are* (Video) (n.d.), accessed 29 October 2020, https://vimeo.com/76888920.

03 Scott H. Young, 'The Art of Unlearning' (2018), accessed 29 October 2020, https://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2018/04/12/the-art-of-unlearning/.

04 Young, 'The Art of Unlearning.'

embodied aporia: exploring the potentials for posing questions through architecture

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abstract
Through shifts in scale, as illustrated in creative spatial practices, affinities can be drawn out between persons and architectures that lead to encounters with forms and materials as both familiar and strange. Such encounters hold potential for developing sensitivity to the forces at play between body and surroundings, and the identification of separate bodies can be shifted to identification with, and as part of, an ecology of bodies. Using examples from artist-architects Shusaku Arakawa and Madeline Gins alongside art historical examples of Minimalist sculpture, lines of connection are drawn between disparate practices in order to illustrate a continuity of questioning the body directly through the construction of environments. These spatial practices evidence that certain questions are best posed by architecture, as questions which cannot be posed through language can be posed through other methods. Strategies for increasing this sensitivity are parsed out towards the identification of a particular form of embodied doubt, a lived puzzlement felt body wide.

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architecture, art, minimalism, new materialism, affordances

architectural questioning of the body

In our day to day comings and goings, we move through and around built structures made primarily of inanimate, non-living materials. Through these movements, through sensation, we make selections that lead to actions and change. What an environment affords the body effects changes in that body, as it is through our sense modalities and in their coordination that we immediately take in an environment and select actions in response. We can recognize within our own embodied experience of built environments a shared quality of embodiment in architectural elements, a presence not unlike a human body, and qualities shared by both persons and surroundings. This recognition of commonalities may lay the foundation for a dialogue with other bodies both human and non-human, and such a dialogue may reveal to us particularities about our own embodiment in both the extension and the limits of our bodies, as we take part in the world's co-creation. My belief is that raising such questions can eventuate new forms of relation between person and built surroundings as well as a reconsideration of the importance of this relationship in how we identify and position ourselves as part of the world.

embodied experience of minimalist sculptures

In searching for what is common to people, objects, and architecture, I believe that methods of practicing art which champion what is shared between them can help to draw out the relations that connect and entangle them. Both artistic and architectural spatial practices offer insight into the dynamic between (the human) organism and its surroundings. Among the many art historical precedents that develop a dialogue between human and non-human bodies, the works and writings of the Minimalists propose a bodily relation between person, art object and architectural surroundings. Minimalist sculptures such as those created by Robert Morris or Tony Smith present large geometric forms made out of industrial materials. Cubes of steel or mirrored surfaces, or white rectangular forms placed in gallery environments, afford a peculiar encounter. The experience of being a part of such a work of Minimalist art is an experience of encounter, particularly a bodily encounter. Contemporary art critic Claire Bishop writes:

> As we walk around a Minimalist sculpture, two phenomena are prompted. Firstly, the work heightens our awareness of the relationship between itself and the space in which it is shown—the proportions of the gallery, its height, width, colour and light; secondly, the work throws our attention back onto our process of perceiving it—the size and weight of our body as it circumnavigates the sculpture. These effects arise as a direct result of the work's literalism—that is, its literal (non-symbolic and non-expressive) use of materials—and its preference for reduced and simple forms, both of which prevent psychological absorption and redirect our attention to external considerations.[01]

Bishop illustrates in this description the particular kind of encounter engendered by the Minimalist sculpture: a bodily encounter with a voluminous form through walking around it, materially relating to it. The Minimalists found a quality of experience that could be drawn out through such bodily encounters in a simultaneous phenomenological reflection on one's relation to the object and the relation of the object to the surrounding architecture.

What is significant in the works of Minimalist sculpture is the transformative notion of expansion beyond the physical boundaries of the sculptural object into the relationship between object and person and the surrounding space. These relationships are the artwork, and as a result the artwork is no longer just an object. Rather, the object is simply one part of the artwork. Morris describes the transition towards new relations that can be brought about by the encounter with a Minimalist sculpture. He writes: 'the object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less self-important. By taking its place as a term among others, the object does not fade off into some bland, neutral, generalized, or otherwise retiring shape.'[02] This positioning of the artwork as no more than one 'term among others' marks a change in the relationship between person and artwork towards a relationship that is less hierarchical and perhaps more horizontal. The meaning of Minimalist artworks is derived from a triangulation of relationships between the art object, the viewer, and the surrounding architectural environment. This focus on the relationships that exist in the space between the three elements creates an opening for the development of a particular form of art. This new relationship is markedly different from what was offered by the preceding sculptural movement of Abstract Expressionism, which sought to create works that were independent of surroundings and people viewing them. Whereas in abstract expressionist sculptures, relations between elements within the sculpture (between the formal gestures of the sculpture's parts) would create meaning, Minimalist sculptures began to relate to more than just themselves. Art critic Rosalind Krauss writes, 'Minimalist sculptors began with a procedure for declaring the externality of meaning. As we saw, these artists reacted against a sculptural illusionism which converts one material into the signifier for another: stone, for example, into flesh—an illusionism that withdraws the sculptural object from literal space and places it in a metaphorical one.'[03]

Morris posits that there is no artwork without a person.[04] He writes, 'It is just this distance between object and subject that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary.'[05] This extended situation is transformative in the field of sculpture as the viewer is included into the work of art in order for it to have meaning.[06] This is different from saying that a work derives its meaning from a human subject that perceives it and reflects upon what the artist might hope to communicate through it. Rather, there is no (Minimalist) artwork without the human viewer. This inclusion of the viewer in the artwork is further explained:

> The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision [....] It is in some way more reflexive, because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.[07]

relations between bodies

This movement away from internal to external, or inclusive relationships, opens the possibility for becoming aware of both the sculpture, or object, as one term among others, but also of ourselves as one term among others. Are the embodied relations between ourselves and the things that we are surrounded by, this bodily dialogue we take part in, clarified and made more apparent through such an encounter? What comes to the fore of attention is the relationship a person has with these other 'things', these environments and elements that a person is surrounded by and takes up as affective material agencies. The Minimalists' projects give historical precedent for such a practice, working in a way that make apparent operative and affective relationships between what were considered to be independent entities by adding their plain, geometrical forms into an existing architectural environment.

In regards to the relationship to the surrounding space, Morris writes, 'the space of the room itself is a structuring factor both in its cubic shape and in terms of the kinds of compression different sized and proportioned rooms can effect upon the object-subject terms.[...] The total space is hopefully altered in certain desired ways by the presence of the object.'[08] This statement outlines this expansion of relation to be one not limited to a single subject, but rather to both person and the room which surrounds the sculpture. Returning to Bishop's description of the experience of a Minimalist sculpture, it is both a phenomenological process of reflecting on our sensorial experience of one's own body in relation to the object as well as how this object relates to its architectural surroundings that evokes a consideration of the complexity of relations occurring within this event.

A prominent art critic of the era, Michael Fried, found this work problematic as it was, in his opinion, 'theatrical' in what he described as its bodily presence. An encounter with such work, which he called 'literalist' rather than 'minimalist', was like an encounter with another person. He writes,

> ...being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person [....] Second, the entities or beings encountered in everyday experience in terms that most closely approach the literalist ideals of the nonrelational, the unitary and the holistic are other persons.[09]

Although Fried did not agree with the decisions made by the Minimalist sculptors, his understanding and description of the encounter follows both the writings of Minimalist sculptors such as Morris and Smith, and critics who appreciated this work such as Krauss.

The idea that the encounter with a Minimalist sculpture is in some way similar to an encounter with another person is a curious comparison but could reveal an aspect of the kind of relations that such work seeks to generate. This encounter with a voluminous material (a steel cube, for example) instigates a bodily relation to another body, or perhaps to another person, as Fried suggests. This bodily interaction that relates in some way to an interaction with another person is certainly a particular type of interaction that these artists sought to engender. Tony Smith's artwork Die (1962) was a six-foot steel cube. In 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2', Morris begins with a dialogue between an unnamed interlocutor (presumably Morris himself) and Tony Smith:

> Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?
>
> A: I was not making a monument.
>
> Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?
>
> A: I was not making an object.
>
> – Tony Smith's replies to questions about his six-foot steel cube.[10]

Figure 01:
Tony Smith, *Die* 1962. © Tony Smith/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Cliff1066, creative commons license 2.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode.

Morris continues to describe the importance of the human scale of Minimalist work: 'In the perception of relative size, the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. One knows immediately what is smaller and what is larger than himself.'[11] The selection of a particular size to elicit a particular response through the relation to a human body presents both the sculpture and person as bodies that share an inherent condition. Furthermore, Fried's comment about the scale of the works being similar to the 'presence of a person' becomes more apt. Fried continues with this discussion, stating that

> a kind of latent or hidden naturalism, indeed anthropomorphism, lies at the core of literalist theory and practice.

> The concept of presence all but says as much, though rarely so nakedly as in Tony Smith's statement, 'I didn't think of them [...] as sculptures but as presences of a sort.'[12]

Setting aside Fried's use of this anthropomorphic presence towards his critique of this work as 'theatrical', this similarity of relation, marking the object as having the qualities (or at least *a* quality) of a person, calls into question the difference between the bodies that take part in this encounter, including the surroundings. That there is an aspect of oneself present in the art object relates to Fried's criticism of the anthropomorphic presence inherent within a Minimalist work. Perhaps through the selection of particular scales of objects and scales of relationships that become more horizontal between person, art object and architectural surroundings, we are given the opportunity to begin to see these certain aspects of ourselves present in these other bodies.

the body and built surroundings

The otherness of the material, be it steel, wood, glass or plastic, is somehow reduced through the engagement with the sculpture within a given environment. This encounter becomes less one of contrast and otherness and instead one of similarity, be it through the scale of the object or through the horizontality of position established through the expansive inclusion of person and surroundings as part of this artwork. Krauss, in extending her analysis of Minimalist sculptures in connection with the Land Art works that followed soon after, writes,

> The abstractness of minimalism, makes it less easy to recognize the human body in those works and therefore less easy to project ourselves into the space of that sculpture with all of our settled prejudices left intact. Yet our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture—even when a work is made of several hundred tons of earth.[13]

Krauss clarifies what bodily experience she believes to be the subject of the sculpture in an earlier passage:

> Morris's work addresses itself to the meaning projected by our own bodies [....] He is suggesting that the picture of the self as a contained whole (transparent only to itself and the truths which it is capable of constituting) crumbles before the act of connecting with other selves and other minds.[14]

Such an experience may cast into doubt a conception of difference between our human bodies and the body of the sculpture, perhaps also our difference from the architectural surroundings. As Krauss writes, it is our bodies and our experience of them that becomes the subject of these encounters with Minimalist works, and as such this doubt is likely to be an embodied experience.

This recognition of similarity between formally and materially distinct bodies is an idea presented by Jane Bennett in her discussion of the 'thrill of an aesthetic experience' of an artwork. Bennett writes:

> The thrill may also involve something like recognition. By this I mean an uncanny feeling of being in the presence of an aspect of oneself – a non- or not-quite-human aspect that is nevertheless intrinsic to one's flesh and blood and bones – also present in the body of another.[15]

This common ground between person and thing, can draw out what they share, and seeing a thing such as an architectural object or Minimalist sculpture in the way that a person might see another person could make apparent an aspect of this relationship between body and architecture that goes otherwise unnoticed. Making this apparent can make us, as Bennett writes, 'more sensitive to real forces that previously operated below the threshold of reflective attention.'[16] Such an encounter as one with a work of Minimalist sculpture can begin to call attention to a particular aspect of the relationship between body and built surroundings. It should be noted that Bennett's New Materialist philosophy follows from Baruch Spinoza's concept of 'conative bodies' and Bruno Latour's 'actor-network theory,' both of which are particularly distinct from the phenomenological philosophies (Merleau-Ponty in particular) that inspired the Minimalists and early installation artists (e.g. West Coast Light and Space movement). However, Bennett's writing is often self-reflexive towards her own material experiences of the world, and as such shares an embodied process of introspection and reflection with the Minimalists. Furthermore, the Minimalists' keen focus on materials and their effects (or agency) departs from phenomenological philosophy and instead parallels the more contemporary philosophy of the New Materialists.

Figure 02:
Robert Morris, installation at Dia: *Beacon* (long-term collection). © Robert Morris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Bill Jacopson Studio, New York. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York.

Beyond our encounters with exhibitions of Minimalist sculptures, the built objects and architectures that we encounter in our everyday comings and goings, made of steel, concrete, wood and glass, might be reconsidered as bodily presences similar to our own bodies in the way that we encounter and engage with them. The recognition of a personhood within a steel cube or plywood geometric form, as found in an engagement with a minimalist sculpture, may be also a recognition of an objecthood within ourselves. Here Bennett's contemporary philosophical position offers perspective on this extension, as she writes,

> ...one of the things that a thing can do is expose the presence of a thingness internal to the human, to reveal the animistic presence of an "it" internal to the "I". The self that acknowledges its thingness is paradoxically a body with newly activated sensory capacities – including the power to detect the presence of material agency.[17]

This engagement with a 'thing,' an art object, employs such embodied sensory capacities in a way that evinces a kind of bodily language which may allow for a dialogue between bodies. Recognizing the material agency of said art object and its relational extension into the built environment leads to questions of what this agency might do. If I take part in an embodied relationship with a Minimalist sculpture and by extension its immediate architectural surrounding, what change does it effect in me and I in them? If I am changed by what surrounds me at any given moment, I would certainly be more considerate of what I surround myself with.

Bennett continues this line of thought towards understanding the human body as inherently connected with its surroundings. She writes, 'This is not a world divided into active subjects and useful, decorative, or commodified objects but of bodies (human and nonhuman) striving to enhance their power of activity by forming alliances with other bodies.'[18] Seeing oneself as taking part in the objects, architecture, and material surroundings rather than observing them at some distance, has consequences for how our own bodies or persons are defined and identified. A self-image of independence, of the skin as the boundary of oneself, is cast into doubt.

This particular doubt of bodily limits is further developed and articulated in the architectural practice of Arakawa and Gins and their theory of the architectural body, which defines a human as an entity that is a continuously changing set of relations between body and architecture. This moves one step further from Bennett's claim of a human body occurring as part of an assemblage to a body being ontologically coextensive with what surrounds it. Their constructions aim to evoke a recognition of this coextensive condition, perhaps similarly to both the minimalists' recognition of the personhood or bodily presence of an object, or Bennett's recognition of our condition of being 'things.' This idea that the body and surrounding architecture are coextensive may be seen as implausible, considering the material differences between human physiology, inanimate sculptures, and architectural constructions. Yet the relationship that Arakawa and Gins outline between body and built surroundings is that there can be no clear separation between architectural surrounds and the human body. They write, 'the Architectural Body Hypothesis/Sited Awareness Hypothesis [...] would have it that a person [can] never be considered apart from her surroundings. It announces the indivisibility of seemingly separable fields of bioscleave: a person and an architectural surround.'[19] This indivisibility that requires a redefinition of what is a human body leads to the potential for aspects of an architectural surrounding to be taken up

by a person, and in this way included in this emergent architectural body.

posing questions through architecture

Sensing and perceiving through any and all sense modalities, Arakawa and Gins argue that 'a person positions herself within her surroundings by taking her surroundings up as her sited awareness.'[20] This demands some form of direct conveyance, as the sensations and perceptions seem not to be mediated before such an inclusive extension, which echoes the environmental psychologist J. J. Gibson's theory of affordances. He writes, 'The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill [....] It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.'[21] To perceive an environment is to perceive what it affords, and in this way '"values" and "meanings" of things in the environment can be directly perceived.'[22]

Arakawa and Gins write that they see this 'complimentarity' in Gibson as dualistic, and state that, with their idea of the architectural body: 'we deny to an organism that persons properties apart from and independent of an environment.'[23] Despite this ontological disagreement, the quality of being direct as outlined by Gibson is key here to understanding what Arakawa and Gins call indivisibility between architecture and body, and towards understanding this dialogue between body and built surroundings. This directness of perception suggests that there is no process of consideration of what might be afforded by the environment; it is taken up through behaviours carried out. A flat surface that is rigid affords support, and so affords behaviours such as standing and walking. This does not involve a reflection or classification, this perception is immediate: 'You do not have to classify and label things in order to perceive what they afford.'[24] Just as a person immediately knows what is smaller or larger in scale than oneself, so too does a person immediately perceive what interactions can be carried out with one's surroundings. However, this immediacy lends itself to sub- or non-conscious engagements as this process of embodied dialogue and interaction withdraws below the threshold of attention.

Elliptical Field: Site of Reversible Destiny in Yoro Park (Gifu, Japan) by Arakawa and Gins, involves various constructions built to create situations for making possible the emergence and recognition of an architectural body. One construction was named the *Critical Resemblances House*, made up of wall segments that create three levels of overlapping labyrinths. In discussing their work on the ideas explored in a series of iterations that include *Elliptical Field* and *Critical Resemblances House*.

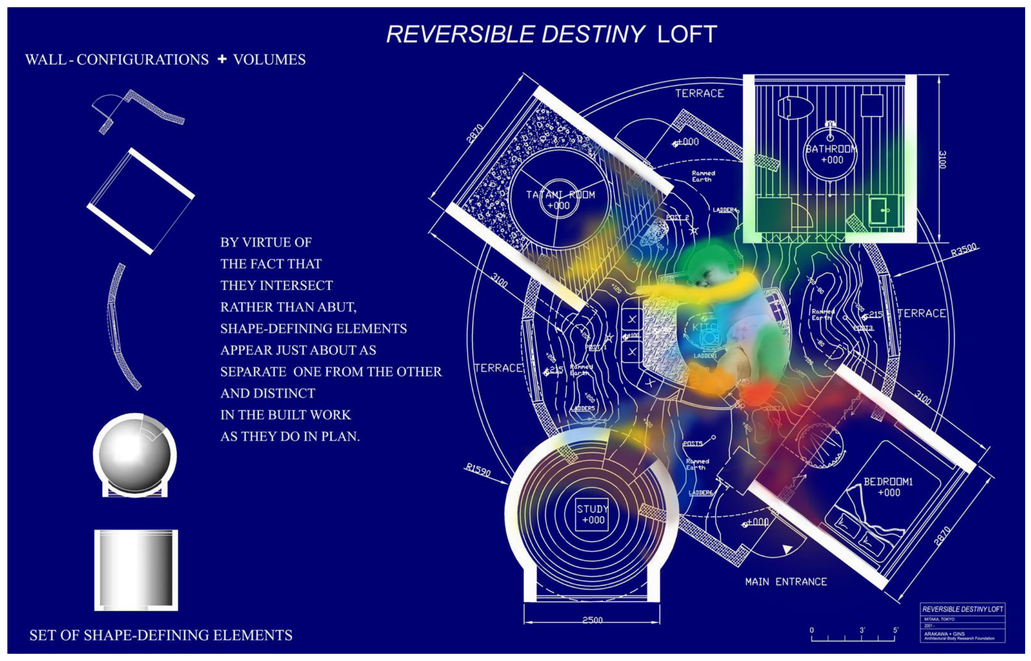
> Neither blocking the view nor significantly limiting it, the multilevel labyrinth helps people get a grip on getting hold of taking a hold of the all-over-the-place architectural body. Within it, it will become possible to hold on longer to what would otherwise be, say, merely a fleeting thought as to what that which is over there in the distance might be.[25]

In holding on to a fleeting thought, instances of interaction between body and surroundings that might otherwise not be given sufficient attention can be carefully considered, questioned, and perhaps articulated more clearly. Such an articulation may move beyond simply recognizing the ways that we affect and are affected by our surroundings in a form of embodied dialogue and allow a direction for the dialogue to follow.

In their *Reversible Destiny Lofts* in Mitaka (Tokyo, Japan), a residential apartment is presented as a device through which a person can come to know better their relationship to architectural surroundings. This architecture inflects actions taken by residents towards establishing a sense of doubt that can lead to change and potentially a reinvention. It is through living with the architectural environment, being a kind of test subject for a person's own investigation into living as an architectural body, that questions are raised.

> These lofts [...] put fruitfully into question all that goes on within them, they steer residents to examine minutely the actions they take and to reconsider and, as it were, recalibrate their equanimity and self-possession, causing them to doubt themselves long enough to find a way to reinvent themselves. These tactically posed architectural volumes put human organisms on the track of why they are as they are.[26]

In this way, such an embodied engagement with built surroundings that engenders doubt may be described as questions posed by architecture.



Figures 03 and 04:
Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Reversible Destiny Loft*, Mitaka, Tokyo, Japan. Photo by Masataka Nakano, © 2005 Estate of Madeline Gins. Architectural plan © 2017 Estate of Madeline Gins. Both reproduced with permission of the Estate of Madeline Gins.

Such questions have a particular capacity to afford the opportunity to hold onto a fleeting thought. Language-based questions have limitations that architectural questions avoid. They write, 'questions that query the degree to which persons are surroundings-bound need to be posed by actually erecting measuring frames around them.'[27] This raises the question: How does architecture ask?
To say that it speaks to the body is to obfuscate through metaphor, as architecture does not have a voice to speak with in the way that a human body does. If not through language-based discourse, what relation between architecture and body might afford the conveyance of a question from one to the other?

This questioning is meant to take place in the process of living, in this instance in these lofts and by the actions taken by the inhabitants: 'the architectural surroundings themselves, by virtue of how they are formed, pose questions directly to the body.'[28] As in Gibson's theory of affordances, a directness is key. The process of bodily sensation to an embodied perception and leading to action takes place at a speed such that it cannot be verbalized. The language or medium of this embodied dialogue is in affect and in the change of behaviours and actions. The questions that can address this relationship between body and architecture, what connects them as indivisible, need to be posed through architecture rather than through language. Translating the lived experience of interacting with an architectural environment into words would not be sufficient to parsing out the immense extent of what is happening within that interaction. The speed at which we experience the world, and at which we fall into habitual patterns of movement and relation in a kind of automaticity that begins before we know it is happening, closes doors that might otherwise be prised open. What is presented by Arakawa and Gins are particular methods for finding these doors and then building architectural surrounds that might help us open them a bit wider, potentially to pass through them. At the very least, building in a certain way can allow us to step into the threshold so that we might consider whether crossing through would be a beneficial step.

If the questions are posed in the space and action of living, in the moment of interaction between body and architecture and across sense modalities, what kinds of answers might be brought forward? Arakawa and Gins write,

> The body can yield answers through that which it subsists as, through the whole of itself, inclusive of its sequences of actions and the surroundings into which, in a variety of ways, it extends itself. The investigative work that can yield answers cannot be done in the abstract; it must, on the contrary, be done on-site where living happens.[29]

This form of questioning can lead to responses that take up surroundings without reflective distance, and such acts can lead to changes that would not come about through reflection. It is this potential for change that may eventuate new forms of this relationship between body and built surroundings.

This on-site investigative work results in embodied resolutions articulated through living that respond to the affordances of the architectural surroundings. Posing questions through architecture could evoke answers different from those for questions posed in speech or writing Arakawa and Gins write, 'A person who is held in the grip of language alone will have lost touch with many other scales of action vital to her existence.'[30] The benefit of this type of question may be in the active or lived form that the answers take, in that they might affect a more immediate change.

This ongoing process that tends to take place below the threshold of consciousness comes to our attention in moments when the coordination of our senses is disrupted, when the continuous flow of quotidian well-practiced (often automatic) acts is thrown off-balance. Engaging with a Minimalist sculpture gives rise to doubt about the differences between body and sculptural object. Another lived moment of doubt is the instance of feeling lost.[31] Disorientation is felt body-wide, when our sense modalities are out of conjunction. It is particularly vision and proprioception that co-function towards orientation. Bringing our process of orientation to the fore of consciousness, such an experience may begin to reveal the ongoing coordination present in a dialogue between body and environment. This moment of disorientation offers an opportunity for developing a different relationship to the surroundings we are with, and greater awareness of the form of embodiment present in such an event. I would like to posit that in an event of dissonance, an architectural surrounding poses a question to the body, a question that can only be answered through more effortful and conscious coordination. As there are often situations in which an experience of disorientation or destabilisation comes about through sense failure or lack of sense coordination, the body will right itself and restabilise, reorient, in order to continue with its habitual intentions. To invoke a shift that would open up new potentials for action, the question must be held open long enough for recomposition to begin. Returning to the idea of holding onto a fleeting thought, particular art or architectural designs of built surroundings might offer a disorientating experience that can be held onto and held open.

personal experiences of embodied encounters

In 2007 I had the chance to visit one of Arakawa and Gins's buildings, the *Bioscleave House* on Long Island, NY. It was still under construction, but most of the work had been completed. The undulating floor presented a landscape not at all floor-like, more of a landscape reminiscent of desert sand dunes. The contrasting colours of the walls and the vertical steel poles that ran floor to ceiling (of differing diameter) created a visual environment which did not allow for a stable impression. Walking around the space I noticed the floor plan of the building displayed throughout the house, for example as the dining table, on the ceiling of the main living area as a skylight, and on the ceiling of the bathroom. What I experienced was at the same time a destabilisation and a continual

process of orientation with reference to these plans, mapping myself into them and attempting to abstract that mapping into my experience of the environment. This crossed my proprioceptive sense of moving around the environment with a cognitive process of locating myself on the displayed floor plan, resulting in a feeling of being off-balance and a bit disoriented. In describing his own experience of the *Bioscleave House*, artist and researcher Jondi Keane wrote,

> [T]he disruptions I experienced in Bioscleave House were made more acute, resembling sea-sickness of a land lover alongside the excitement of a flaneur in a self-organizing city. My struggle to identify the indicators responsible for my unbalance, dysmorphia and lack of orientation hinted at the insufficient coordination I possessed for dealing with new learning conditions. Uncertain boundaries and inconsistent points of reference left me no choice other than to assemble alternative modes of measure and engagement.[32]

These disruptions, effecting a disorientation and unbalance, lead to a situation of doubt, and it is this puzzlement that asks questions. The questions may be multiple, and may be at first imprecise, but they begin to be addressed through some form of change, in Keane's case in finding alternative modes of measure and engagement. Keane's account illustrates that his interaction with this particular environment left him no choice but to answer, changing his 'modes of measure and engagement.'[33]

Figure 05:
Madeline Gins and Arakawa, *Bioscleave House*, Long Island, NY. Photo by Bob Bowen, © 2008 Estate of Madeline Gins. Architectural plan © 2017 Estate of Madeline Gins. Both reproduced with permission of the Estate of Madeline Gins.

What this suggests is that the questions posed by architecture will put a person in a position where continuing without change is untenable. In that moment of disorientation, this event might be described as an embodied aporia, a physical sense of puzzlement that is lived; an internal contradiction, a feeling of doubt, and an impasse as one cannot continue in that same direction or with that same flow of directed intention.

In my peripatetic presentation at the *Body of Knowledge Conference* 2019 (upon which this paper expands), I led a small group of participants through a convoluted and disorienting journey in and around buildings on the Deakin University Burwood campus. In order to ensure that those at the back of the group could hear my talk, I livestreamed the presentation on YouTube via my laptop.[34] There was of course a delay between my live utterances and those streamed on mobile phones, which added to the disorientation. Furthermore, the signal failed in at least one location of the campus, creating further disorientation as well as adding a degree of confusion to the archived video documentation. All of these overlays were intended to instigate a disjunction between proprioception, vision, audition and cognition, in order to raise questions about how such an embodied experience of walking and listening reveals the mechanisms and limits of our sense coordination.

Remaining within the immediacy of such moments or events holds us back from rushing to a complete, reoriented position, or to a brushing away of this embodied doubt.

Figures 06, 07 and 08:
Photo and video documentation of peripatetic presentation at *Body of Knowledge Conference* 2019. Photos by Chris Cottrell, © Scott Andrew Elliott. Video by Scott Andrew Elliott: https://youtu.be/t-2xQYspRXw

It means to withhold at least momentarily from closing down on the sense of disorientation, and to be attentive to what potentials might be present. Or perhaps it means to simply be attentive to what senses are being activated, to what is happening experientially in that instance before fully coordinating the different sense dimensions into a coherent image of self and world. This process of reorientation is important for us moving around and participating in events, but perhaps to be more tentative in our act of perception—to refrain from ending that process—offers a generative potential.

an aporetic dialogue between bodies

Doubt about what is the extent of one's own body and about the capacity to be affected by surroundings can begin to reveal an entanglement of relations taking place in our encounters with architecture. The person-like presence of a minimalist sculpture begins to allow for a recognition of certain dialogical relations between body and architectural surroundings that goes otherwise unnoticed, as they engender encounters that develop sensitivity to similarities between bodies and surroundings. Finding a shared quality of being, an embodied quality, with such inanimate objects reveals a degree of our own thingness. This may instigate doubt of our own particular independence as beings, and the importance of certain physical relations with our embodied experience of the world. Creative spatial practices can amplify this doubt through the design and construction of architecture and artworks that poses questions directly to the body. Through manipulating cross-sense coordination that engenders sensorial dissonance, or feeling lost, an architectural invocation of embodied aporia offers a moment for critical reflection on our habitual ways of relating-to our surroundings, holding open a door for us to redirect and recast this ongoing processual relationship. These forms of embodied dialogue with the non-living things surrounding us demonstrate the ongoing process of individuation and identification as a body. The identity, sense of difference from other bodies, extension into surroundings to differing degrees, and sense of my relation to the surroundings and my place among them is in continuous flux. We live as bodies only as a process, continually redefining ourselves through these embodied engagements. This embodied aporia may come about in rare moments, but it is revelatory of a constant state of uncertainty, precarity, and change as an ontological condition for embodied beings.

author biography

Scott Andrew Elliott is a Canadian artist and independent researcher. His work examines the interstices between art and architecture through both theoretical propositions and built works. This work aims to parse out the ways architectural environments or installations can be designed towards questioning our human relationship to built surroundings. He has lectured and exhibited in Canada, Finland, Estonia and Australia, and completed his PhD at RMIT University. His recent academic publications have speculated on how bodily change can arise through aesthetic encounters with built surroundings through investigations into art historical and literary examples.

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