
Arakawa and Gins:

The Organism-Person-Environment Process

Eugene T. Gendlin,
University of Chicago

1. Personing

On the first page of their book *Architectural Body*, Arakawa and Gins say, “The organism we are speaking of *persons* the world” (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 1; my emphasis). My italics are to point out that “persons” is a verb here.

The book begins:

...born into a new territory, and that territory is myself as organism. There is no place to go but here. Each organism that persons finds the new territory that is itself, and, having found it, adjusts it. . . . An organism-person-environment has given birth to an organism-person-environment .The organism we are speaking of persons the world... (Gins and Arakawa, 2002:1)

The “personing” and the body are not the same thing but they are also not different. Arakawa and Gins do not begin with the three separate things usually meant by “body,” “person,” and “environment.” Their “environment” does not consist of unitized entities filling an external space. Their “organism-environment” is not the body-structure. They don’t begin with things that are already observed and thought about. The three were not first separate and then combined. Their hyphenated birthing is first.

This “*inging*” (as I call the birthing process) is not merely the sequence of birthed events (the contents). I will talk about this inging process.

Arakawa and Gins recognize no line between the bodily and the “higher” functions such as perceiving, imagining, thinking, and building. The body relates directly to the universe: “Surely there has never been a sufficiently diversified approach to the study of the body in relation to the universe ...” (Arakawa and Gins in Govan,1997: 313).

Arakawa and Gins’s creations are attempts to provide an access to the inging, so that we, too, can create in it, and speak from it as they do here. In these new uses, the words acquire new meanings. This shows that the nature of language and the body is such that we need never be captured by the already-existing meanings, patterns, phrases, and concepts.

Ongoing process is fresh organizing, not organized just within categories. This is a major agreement between Arakawa and Gins and my philosophy. Only within the category “father” does it follow that there “*must be*” a child. Any real father is *a much more intricate happening*, never just cramped in categories.

Of course the stable (repeatable) units and parts are indispensable for technology. Six billion people could not live on the planet without technology. But the units and parts are derivative, made and re-made; they are not the given. We must keep a set of *explicit* units steady (or, more exactly, change them slowly over the years), but we can also recognize the ever-fresh intricacy of *experiencing*. We are the inging, and that is a different *kind of order*.

2. The inging process is not the contents

Arakawa and Gins call the contents of inging “landing sites”:

[...] a person proceeds by registering a “this here” and a “that there” and a “more of this here”. . .fielding her surroundings. Whatever comes up in the course of this fielding should be considered a *landing site* (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 7, my emphasis).

[.] anything, a whiff of something . . . (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 9).

Landing sites are not discrete units. They have an intricate inter-overlapping organization. But they are not separate things, which only then overlap. They “overlap” before some of them are separate.

Landing sites abound within landing sites. The corner of a desk can be taken as a full-fledged landing site, even while subsisting as part of the desk as a whole. (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 9).

One kind is imagined landing sites: “Imaging landing sites . . . determine the measure of *things to be*.” (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 13, my emphasis). They are a kind of future that is here now. The already organized multiplicity is also still open for further inging.

But what kind of order is this? Many originally overlap, intricately organized *and* are *also* still open, implying but not determining its future.

Since I am a philosopher, not an artist, I ask about this *kind* of order. I articulate it beyond what Arakawa and Gins say but not beyond what their sayings imply. It is not an order of already-determined things and places. Neither is it simply indeterminate. We are not designing in a void. The inging always re-generates, but it is not arbitrary, not just anything at all. *We are a very precise kind of ordering which is also an opening for further ordering*. The body-environment process carries itself forward. This is a more intricate kind of order than the kind that consists of already determined units in categories with logical relations, the kind of order that is currently still being assumed as the given.

The inging is a multiplicity of inter-dependent “units” that *could* be separated out but have never been separate. A few of these interdependent possibilities actually occur as we go. Most of “them” evolve in the going *without ever existing separately*.

Recognizing this order opens new possibilities. Every problem can seem insoluble, every situation can seem determined, if we take it to consist of discrete unitized factors. But no situation is actually made just of those.

But if the inging process is actually first, what is its source? Arakawa and Gins say, "Surely imaging capability derives from a mobile and sculpted medium of locatings . . . kinaesthetic and tactile landing sites, *the human body.*" (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 13, my emphasis)

The kinaesthetic and tactile locating *is* the body, more primordial than vision, earlier than perceiving something that is not us. But how can bodies have landing sites without perceiving?

In my philosophy this is explained as the earliest kind of body-process, an *organic "symbolizing"* by primitive organisms. If body-environment is one process how can it have objects ("landing sites") without perception? Here is how it can:

When some aspects of the environment go missing, then the *whole* body-environment process cannot happen. If the organism doesn't die, if some life process does continue, then the body-environment process differentiates itself into what continues and what does not. Later, when the missing environmental aspects return, the stopped processes resume, and the observer marvels at how the organism "recognizes" its "object."

The observer perceives the object, but to the organism it "*means*" the body-environment process it resumes. *The resumed process "organically symbolizes" without perceptions.*

In my use here the word "symbolize" acquires a new (more basic) meaning. Our human bodies also symbolize in this direct organic-environmental way, more basically than with perceptions or representations, although in humans those are always implicit as well. Our "higher" functions are not separate; they always involve the organic symbolizing process. That is why our perceptions and cognitions *implicitly involve* so much more than if we take them just as the forms before us.

And once they have formed, they continue to function implicitly even when we don't have them as such. And they develop further while they are functioning implicitly. That is why our thoughts from yesterday may contain more in the morning.

Every new behavior and cognition expands the whole body's implicit functioning, and then new thoughts, new phrases and actions can arise from the expanded implicit process in turn. This reciprocal development has happened throughout human history, but now we can systematically employ the reciprocity. If we can access the implicit bodily functioning, and if we move back and forth between concepts and implicit intricacy, they expand each other reciprocally.

Some of our lives and situations are perceived before us; more in them consists of meanings, and messages from miles away. We live all our situations with our bodies. Thinking and sensations are special processes that involve organic symbolizing.

On the basis of organic symbolizing my philosophy formulates a derivation of behavior and then of cognition as two kinds of body process that involve "turning" on itself, "having" itself. The plant does not *turn* so as to *have* (perceive) its doing; it does not behave *in* its perceptions as animals do. And humans have a further "turning" and having, so as to "behave" *in* cognized "situations."

And then—one more turn: Turning to have and think *in* the specific implicit intricacy.

Philosophy always attempts to grasp its own thinking. Whatever topic it seems to be about (such as science, art, society, language), philosophy always concerns how such a thing as that topic can come to be and be thought *about*. Philosophy is not really about anything. It is about the about.

But philosophy has not usually grasped the thinking. The many different answers since ancient times seemed always to be just concepts again, not the *thinking*, just products.

But if we also *think with the implicit intricacy directly*, we mean more than just the concepts. We can let them refer to their own emergence-from the implicit inging. They may be about a lot of other things as well, but what they say can refer to their own coming. As they come to us we can let them speak also about the coming. Their saying can instance the process of their coming [1].

For example, Arakawa and Gins *are personing* in their use of “an organism that persons.” So “persons” can mean *this*. We needn’t first define it; rather we can define it from here. Then we don’t reduce the “inging” to a mere concept of inging. On the contrary, we can also take the old concepts as referring to the bodily implicit intricacy which they bring along.

In *A Process Model* (Gendlin 1997), there is a conceptual model that incorporates the relation between experiencing and formed forms, between “ing” and “ed.” In the new model nothing just “is.” Every *occurring* is also an *implying* of further occurring. The implying is in the occurring; there is no separated implying. The implying changes *in the environmental occurring* so as to imply a further occurring. Or, we can say that occurring changes the implying to imply a next occurring. That is what we call a “process.” This is a new kind of model, but there can soon be better ones of this kind.

The conflicting philosophies and theories are different ways of carrying the implicit intricacy forward. We don’t try to resolve the conflicts because we don’t think them only as concepts; rather we look for what they make emerge in the experienced intricacy. We can have all those discoveries; only their abstract implications contradict. There is no relativism between ways that reveal, expand and carry forward this specific implicit intricacy. In this way we can use all models, theories, and approaches. We don’t adopt *them*, rather only what they make emerge from the specific intricacy of this situation in which we are

working. Each model implicitly enriches it, and it is always still open to further implying.

Arakawa and Gins recommend

[...]that nonresolvable issues be kept on hold – fluidly and flexibly on hold – right out there in the world where they occur . . . open still further to yield additional information about what is at issue. (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 22)

In thinking the implicit intricacy directly, we find more intricate phrases and concepts coming, as well as more specific actions that reveal the implicit intricacy of the situation. Small moves can come: for example, making some phone call or having a bit of interaction with someone. Doing those does not solve the problem but can reveal the territory in much greater detail. Similarly in thinking; I say more about this below.

When we refer directly to the ongoing process then concepts and phrases don't box us in. They don't just mean themselves; they mean *this specific implicit intricacy*.

Now we must discuss how to gain access to the specific intricacy of each different situation.

3. Access

Where is the implicit intricacy? It is embodied. We find it in the body sensing itself from inside.

Arakawa and Gins can be misunderstood just as concretizing contradictions to interrupt our comfortable mental maps. They speak of “[...] a path with built-in contradictions, a path that contradicts itself” (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 87). But their art does much more than contradict and interrupt.

The aim of their structures is to let *us* discover that *we* can access and create in-and-from this intricacy. And they do this by building a structure that forces us to use our bodies even to enter and then to move in it.

Bodily inserting every last finger of herself . . . she curls past what bars the way, bodily threading through . . . neck curving around an obstacle, head part of a different curve, midsection pulled in, one leg striding forward and the other positioned with a bent knee (Gins and Arakawa 2002: 90).

Sitting in my living room, I can imagine moving that glass door with its nine little sections into the middle of the room. I would see the fireplace through the grid of those little windows. And that shelf of slanting books, how would it look through those little glass sections?

When I only imagine this, what I perceive remains the same, but it all changes when I get up, or move a little. I can never walk into the room that I see from here. But Arakawa and Gins build (for example) a three-dimensional room structured in accord with two views, *both* from one spot *and* from the ceiling. In their creations there are several paths to go from any spot. Each requires ducking, twisting, and feeling our way around the other pathways. As we move and enact some series of actually occurring body-environment events (“landing sites”), we grasp that we *are* the process of eventing the environment. We are not caught in one mere “is.” We are the *inging process*.

The access to which Arakawa and Gins point is through perceiving, imagining, and building, but they apply their theories to all human activity. I provide access through the ongoing process of speaking, thinking, and acting in situations. We can easily discover this access when someone asks us (or we ask ourselves), “What were you getting at by saying (or doing) that, just now? *Can you say more?*” These last four words immediately let us sense the implicit more. A whole chain comes, one thing after another. We find the implicit sourcing involved in anything we said or did. “*Can you say more*” opens an access to the specific implicit intricacy, always many many things.

We can also have a more direct access to these many things together – “all that” – by *turning* to attend in the middle of the body. From merely experiencing we deliberately turn to pointing, sensing and having “*this*” bodily experiencing. We can point to the bodily-experiencing as “*this*,” whether large or a tiny sub-aspect.

Thinking and feeling are bodily too, but if we let go of *what* we think and already feel, if we refer to the whole situation as “*all that*,” we find that each situation makes a different quality in the middle of the body, something like heavy, jumpy, tight, or expansive – *this* quality.

At the first moment nothing may seem to be there in the middle of the body, just lunch or coffee, but after some seconds of bodily attention there is a specific bodily quality *of this situation*, “*all that*.” (We call this a “*felt sense*”). If we keep touching this quality – it opens!! “Oh, *that’s* what this is!!” And then further little steps: “Oh, it’s more exactly *that*.” And “Oh, *that*.” Many little steps come. We find how the body has been living that situation, and in the finding it develops further. It uncramps. Now it stretches out. Even if what we find is troubling, this process of finding it is a physical relief, an exhale, “Ahhh...”

The bodily quality and the bodily “ahhh...” show that action and cognition are bodily processes. We can access how the body lives each situation and each statement.

Our worldwide network (www.focusing.org) teaches this practice of accessing; we call it “Focusing.” A second practice called “TAE” (Thinking at the Edge) lets new phrases and categories come from the Focusing.

The implicit intricacy is never arbitrary, never just invented. The implicit order of any “*this*” is *more precise* than an order of already-formed units can be. You can observe how precise it is when you are sitting with a felt sense that you can’t yet express. Sentences come to you, but you reject them: “No, that’s not exactly what I mean.” You cannot say what you *do* mean, but that is because it is *more precise* than what these sentences say.

At last one comes that says this, but we don't take it just as a statement. We need not lose the implicit intricacy. On the contrary, *this* statement helps us to hold on to *this* precise implicit intricacy. There can always be other ways of carrying forward, but even one is valuable and hard to get.

4. No capture

We need never remain captured within the existing concepts, perceptions, interpretations, and phrases. My philosophy turns to derive new terms in which to think about the nature of bodies, language, and situations such that this is possible. Language is far from being just a system of fixed phrases. From a specific intricacy quite new phrases can come, new metaphorical sentences that surprise us.

Arakawa and Gins certainly write in this way, actually fielding, siting, adjusting, birthing or holding open. They write directly from the intricacy. We may not like or even understand their phrases, but we cannot take the words in the old way. If we do understand at all, we understand them in a way that instances the inging of which they speak.

We can invite and permit the coming of new phrases directly from a felt sense. When we have difficulty it is usually because something cannot be articulated within the existing categories and patterns. Only fresh "crazy" (metaphorical) phrases can go beyond those.

In new phrases the words acquire new meanings. We discover that words are never just captured in old uses and meanings. They *bring* their old meanings, yes, but these can expand and change in new phrases [2].

New metaphorical phrases also bring new patterns. Those are not combinations of old patterns. A new pattern is incipient before we can say it.

For example, after experiencing TAE in class, a child asks: “But *am* I my body, or do I *have* a body?” We answer, “Oh, I see, neither ‘am’ nor ‘have’ fits this. You and your body are not two things, and yet not just the same thing either. Stick with how you have it *right there*, what lets you know that neither fits. *That* can let you say something new. It might sound a little odd. What would you say?”

We are teaching TAE. The children love it because it lets them discover that they themselves can think. Focusing shows them where inside them new thoughts can come, and how to let new phrases come. TAE also shows how to articulate a new pattern from a new phrase. For some adult professionals, later steps of TAE go on to lead to logically interrelated terms—a formulated theory. It all comes from the specific intricacy, which you are-and-have, *right there*.

The implicitly intricate process is an implying of next steps. It is much more highly organized than any *deliberate deciding*. Of course we never want to obscure or preclude it by arbitrary inventing. I urge letting the steps come from the body’s implying *first*, then exercising choices as needed. And then again see freshly what comes in the body.

Notes

[1] See the “iofi principle” in Gendlin 1997.

[2] See Gendlin 2009.

References

Gendlin, Eugene T. *A Process Model*. New York: The Focusing Institute, 1997. Also available at <http://www.focusing.org/process.html>.

Gendlin, Eugene T. *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1997.

Eugene T. Gendlin. “Arakawa and Gins: The Organism-Person-Environment Process.” *Inflexions* 6, “Arakawa and Gins” (January 2013). 222-233.
www.inflexions.org

Gendlin, Eugene T. "What First and Third Person Processes Really Are." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16.10-12 (2009): 332-62.

Also available at http://www.focusing.org/first_and_third.

Gins, Madeline and Arakawa. *Architectural Body*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002.

Govan, Michael, Shusaku Arakawa, and Madeline Gins. *Reversible Destiny: We Have Decided Not to Die*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1997.