Architecture and Poetic Efficacy
Part 1: Architectural Poetics

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Abstract: This paper examines the notion "architectural poetics" as it applies to the work of Arakawa and Gins. It seeks a critical grounding for the term in the artists' concept of a "built discourse" and in an understanding of spatial meaning as the semiotic field supplying that discourse. It explores the literary and poetic background of A+G's Reversible Destiny project, tracing the different phases of their development as a path towards an amplified presentation and a heightened efficacy. Finally, it evaluates the relevance of their current (architectural) strategies and priorities to a certain lineage of modern and contemporary poets, assessing to what extent their architectural poetics remains poetics in the sense a poet would mean it.

Keywords: Architecture, poetry, poetics, architectural poetics, efficacy, spatial meaning, built discourse.

Je crois que pour etre bien l'homme, la nature en pensant, il faut penser de tout son corps.[*]

Mallarmé

First off, might not the world exist so that everyone may turn into an architect?[**]

Gins and Arakawa

1. Architectural Poetics

Parallels between the architecture of Arakawa and Gins and the poetics of Mallarmé have been noted in many places, despite what would seem a natural resistance to thinking the physicality of Reversible Destiny constructions and the evanescences of Symbolism in a single thought. But a similar tension is of course internal to Arakawa and Gins' own work, and troubles (or activates) the dialectical path any receiver or participant must take in confronting it; a movement between often elliptical texts and the published models they comment on, or between theoretical tracts or instructions for use and the physical, visitable sites they aim to purpose. In seeking the maximal thought, Mallarmé was forced back (or through) onto the materiality of thinking and language, just as in aiming to think concretely Arakawa and Gins continue to rely heavily (or rather, with loft) on writing of a very determined abstractness and poetic projection. The problem of the relation between texts and built structures in the work of A+G is certainly the dramatically amplified grandchild of a problematizing of sense first ventured in the visual poetry and book theory of Mallarmé. But whereas with Mallarmé the paradox is an etherealist project that must fall back on a concrete poetics to achieve its aims, with A+G the paradox is somewhat inverted, a concrete, embodied practice that continues to rely on precision indeterminacies and suggestiveness in the language that intends it.

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[*] *'I believe that to be truly human, nature thinking, one must think with the whole body.'*
[**] It was Mallarmé who wrote: "Tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre" ('Everything in the world exists to end up as a book').

Literary parallels of this sort, and there are others, might be enough to justify using the term "architectural poetics" to categorize the recent work of Arakawa and Gins, though without some clarification it is not obvious that the term is an appropriate one. It is unclear where the term first surfaced, though as a notion it seems to have taken root with the "Transgressing Boundaries" conference at Salamanca in 2000, where a number of the papers later collected in the important volume, *Architectures of Poetry*[1], were first presented. Alternately we can point to Steve McCaffery's online "North American Centre for Interdisciplinary Poetics", which went up in 2001, becoming the term's most visible and status-conferring address; an address at which, as was also the case with the *Architectures of Poetry* publication, Arakawa and Gins are distinguishable as the tenants who receive the most guests.

Interestingly, however, Arakawa and Gins themselves never seem to touch the term. The publication of their *Architectural Body* under Charles Bernstein's and Hank Lazer's "Modern and Contemporary Poetics" imprint at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa (2000), and on the rear cover of that book the short list of predecessors which includes Alexander Pope and Rimbaud, (though also Leibniz and Dogen), are perhaps as far as they go in embracing a designation that clearly attaches to them from without. The question I want to ask here is whether it sticks. What substance does the concept have beyond the novel provocation of its grounding analogy? And is it useful? Either for classifying the work of Arakawa and Gins, or any other work one might judge similar, or for answering the more important and interesting question: "How does it work?" Reversible Destiny, I mean. The not dying.

The term is obviously of some use in expressing the cross-over nature of the decades-long project that brought us Reversible Destiny (the promise) and procedural architecture (the practice), a project that began in painting and poetry, or in what for the sake of simplicity we can label this way, and eventually became architecture. Usefully, it serves also to acknowledge the continuity of the project, which did not so much switch media as concentrate and amplify, continuing an original intuition to its (para-)logical extreme and according to its practical requirements. And finally, it serves to mark the difference of this project, which stands out as distinct in its methods and motivating ideas from most everything else happening in architecture. But "poetic" as a label of praise or distinction within architecture is equally a lever for separation and dismissal, and already here we see where the term will lose its desirability. On the one hand, having chosen architecture as the truly efficacious means, it is no use to go on being called poets, and even within literary or artistic discourse it defeats the purpose of having migrated along this path, if the new landscape continues to be measured according to old coordinates.

If we are going to make use of the term in discussing Arakawa and Gins, it is important to insist on a couple of qualifications. First, we should de-link the idea of an architectural poetics from any expectation that there could or must also be an associated poetry. Poetry can be thought as architectural (and architecture as poetic) in many ways, describing just as many zones of hybridity in which the term "architectural poetics" may be of different uses. But, though I don't discount the possibility of a rigorously defined, intermedial poetry of architecture, this is not what we are dealing with here. Instead, for this work and for many other projects that fall under the loose and recent designation "architectural poetics", we must think poetics as an organizing principle or motivation perhaps characteristically found in poetry, and certainly genealogically grounded in it, but in a real and practical sense independent of literary means or of a literary background on the part of its practitioners. Thus we can think of poetics as a technics of meaning experience mediated through discursive sign systems. Poetics in this sense can be a something applied at work by poets or architects, by gardeners or weathermen, and is necessarily "parapoetics" in the sense Steve McCaffery gives the term[2], not a blending of poetry with other media, but a contamination of its creative/critical principle into other discourses. I would only add to McCaffery's formulation

a qualification I think he allows, namely that this spreading need not originate from poetry as an emission, but can move also from within the target discourse as an ingestion.

Sufficiently rarified and transposed, poetics may indeed prove a useful optic through which to explore the A+G project. Yet if the term must be loosened from its genealogical root in order to apply cross-modally, it must also be focused and tightened within its new context if it is to retain any analytic power. The chief difficulty in tracking the poetic as a principle, either into poetry's hybrid unions (intermedia) or along poetics' migratory transgressions (parapoetics), is the difficulty of tracking languaging as a vital role that must be re-filled within each new context. As a term, "visual poetry" means very little without an argument as to how the visuals themselves take up some portion of the language-like function involved in doing poetry.[3] And "architectural poetics" is similarly crippled without an explanation of what discursive base architecture can offer to host the contaminant foreign principle.

2. Spatial Meaning Built Discourse

On this point Gins and Arakawa do go an important step further towards accommodating the label architectural poetics. In a key section of the "Procedural Architecture" chapter of *Architectural Body*, they elaborate their idea of a "closely argued built discourse", and do so precisely in terms that substantiate the analogic parallel with a verbal poetics. They write:

> It is by relying on juxtaposed repeatable and re-combinable items that verbal discourse, with great sleight of mouth (or hand), encompasses and presents sequentially considered events. Modularly constructed areas and the architectural procedures they engender will be the juxtaposed repeatable and re-combinable items of a built discourse. (56,57)

They put significant effort into substantiating this parallel, carefully arguing that their architecture *is* discourse, where they could simply have invoked the looser metaphor of an "architectural language" and moved on. Their argument involves pointing to the systems of differences they mobilize both in the structure and appearance of spaces and in the "information states" these produce in the visitor as awareness. Contrasts between comparable units within the "closely argued" environments, and concomitantly between comparable sensory-motor and interpretive responses in the visitors, underwrite the capacity for inflection, for pointing out intended particulars within the field of features and occurrences and specifying them as the objects of an enunciation that has its own modes of deixis and reference to rely on. Experiencing a range of perceptible variables in an architectural surround would correspondingly articulate the range of perceptual and movement responses as a space of implicature, or in G+A's own terms "thrillingly yield a spectrum of body-wide knowing capable of physically manifesting cause and result or warrant and inference." (58)

> Discursive sequences of tactically posed surrounds, constructed as built propositions, marshal existing logical connectives and position newly invented ones into the "real," steering, regulating, and guiding interactions between body and bioscleave through three-dimensional THEREFOREs, BUTs, ORs, ANDs, and built-up WHATEVERs. (58,59)

From the perspective of linguistics or discourse theory, this parallel is still only sketchily drawn, but from the perspective of a strategizing of artistic means the commitment is clear. They are investing in a speculative analogy that will establish their architecture as a discourse, as a kind of building that shares certain crucial capacities with language. This becomes even clearer at the next level of resolution, where they state directly that architectural procedures[4] have the place of words in this discourse: distinct, repeatable elements with specific or general import, "conveying" experiences as unitary moments in recombinable patterns.[5] The tactically posed surrounds, then, which group procedure-eliciting structures into the experiential sequencing from which meanings emerge, amount to the built discourse's "phrases, sentences, paragraphs and texts".

The discourse Gins and Arakawa are concerned to establish relocates their previous efforts at reference and expression into an alternate field of meaning resources, one as we will see that has important implications for the efficacy of the communication they are attempting. What can be done with words and the vast syntactic infrastructure laid down to support their semantics is not the same as what can be done with walls and volumes and the presiding logics of bodily orientation and geographic suggestion. But the inverse is also true, and it is in the positive capacities of these modes of meaning that the artists have seen fit to invest the evolving poetics of their project. We can refer to the field of resources underwriting built discourse in general as a field of *spatial meaning*, distinct both from the lexical field underwriting verbal discourse and from any framing of a system of meanings based on the nominal identity and use of objects, though both of these also play a role in the total meaning experience of their architecture. Spatial meaning represents the specific novelty and challenge of an architectural poetics, in that any serious use of that term requires us to account for how a something called poetics can be done in the spatial medium proper to architecture.

Precisely what meaning content attributable to spatial modes of presentation or reception could be said to correspond to a phrase or a paragraph, and what precision of enunciation would justify identifying anything as the spatial equivalent of a sentence, it would be very difficult to say. And Gins and Arakawa don't. Attempting to would quickly strain the analogy beyond its usefulness, and certainly detract from the project of discovering and applying the resources of spatial meaning, resources whose value consists precisely in the sub-lexical and proto- (or ultra-) semantic traction they exert on the bodymind of architectural "readers". Having once established the idea of a built discourse, they do not return in this or other writings (so far) to further insist on the linguistic parallel, nor do linguistic terms take up a regular place in the terminology of procedural architecture. Within the larger argument of *Architectural Body*, the built discourse section seems to have served the purpose of an important thinking through of the critical, communicative basis of their practice, which as they explain it counts on a capacity to advance hypotheses, communicate observations, and ultimately effect targeted kinds of transformation in those who engage its products. And since their theorizing involves not just the identification of a communicative base, but also the elaboration of specific, counter-conventional forms and devices (architectural procedures) aimed at producing particular effects, the larger theory served by this investment in a semiotic grounding clearly amounts to a poetics, in both loose and rigorous senses of that word.

3. Poetry and Efficacy

This discourse, built as it is, if it isn't doing poetry what is it? Not poetry, because what it produces are not poems in any conventional sense. Yet it does operate a communication, is a writing, and a communication carried out "poetically" by certain important standards. The know-how behind this is a poetics, then, in several senses. These senses are loose enough to accommodate, without distortion, a serious usage of the term "architectural poetics", and yet robust enough to mean something useful when we allege that Gins and Arakawa have one. I think we can reasonably say that what they do, or the theory for it, is in fact as clear an instance as we could hope to find of this elusive, unlikely thing. But the poetics we are dealing with in their architecture will not be recognized in its genres and forms, but more likely in a certain approach to the question of efficacy. Just as for Kant the aesthetic decides itself from the non-art crafts on the principle of "purposefulness without purpose", for Arakawa and Gins the art of their practice has a lot to do with the particular twist it plays on functionality. What Arakawa and Gins's discourse targets is not a lyricism but first an efficacy, achieved through communication, though that claim to efficacy has a lyricism of its own. What their project has of "poetic", I would say, has primarily to do with the para-logical arc (or spiral) its acts of communication take. While at one pole this angling is performed in literarily-trained, philosophical English, at another the communication propagates in and through matter, building materials, to effect changes at the most elemental levels of our

embodiment and of our wiring for personhood. In their newest project, the "*Reversible Destiny* HOTEL", the last work they foresee completing in their lifetime[6], they envision lodgings for transient architectural bodies, given to a form of "architectural meditation" which will "in short order have you 'talking' for your great benefit with your own genes" ("*REVERSIBLE DESTINY* HOTEL" project description, Spring 2006).

If there were any doubt remaining as to the legitimacy of bringing this discourse and the communication it serves under the rubric of poetics, right where they draw the architecture-language parallel most tightly they go yet one step further, and actually refer to their constructions as poems:

> "Surely, as well, tactically posed surrounds will factor out as those poems that have ever eluded poets, poems through which those of us who wish to can save our own necks, poems that could only heretofore be intimated by an insufficiently procedural bioscleave." (57)

If I have read carefully, this is the only place in *Architectural Body*, and one of only a few in all of their architectural writings, where cognates of the word "poetry" appear, and here four times in one sentence. The sentence seems to contradict my earlier assertion. If Nagi's Ryoanji or Yoro or the Mitaka appartments will factor out as poems, then certainly their creators are poets, and what they do is poetry, architectural poetry. But where Gins and Arakawa are fully literal about calling their mode of building a discourse, and both need and defend the implications of that claim, I think their calling their buildings "poems" here serves a more strictly rhetorical purpose. It even hints of being a nod towards those who launched the discourse on architectural poetics at Salamanca and the NACIP, a nod that both takes up the terms of that discussion and redirects it. Because, what they identify their constructions with are precisely poems that have never existed, poems of a kind intimated but never accomplished in the history of poetry as such, poems categorically beyond the reach of poets.

The distance separating poetry as traditionally (even experimentally) conceived and what Arakawa and Gins are doing now is described precisely by the path they took to get there. What they believe they are able to make as architects, what they hope already to have made, if these factor out as poems, factor out as those poems that had previously eluded them as well. For before they were architects they were, at least in part, poets. Madeline Gins' experimental writings in *Word Rain* (1969), *Intend* (1973/78), and *What the President Will Say and Do* (1984)), the script of their jointly authored film, *For Example (A Critique of Never)* (1971) and the philosophical "lyrics" of their *Pour ne pas mourir/To Not to Die* (1987) can be identified quite unproblematically as poetic texts. *Word Rain* (1969), for example, Gins' brilliant first book, is identified as a novel but is experimental, self-reflexive, even lyrical enough to qualify as poetry by many standards, and clearly deserves to be seen as one of the gems of 20th Century experimental literature. Even Arakawa's early painting and their long-run joint work *The Mechanism of Meaning* (1969-1988), have been received in certain cases as poetry[7], and have had some influence in literary circles. So the logic behind their move into architecture, and behind their decision sometime around 1988 to commit exclusively to architecture, should articulate quite precisely what's different about the new practice that suddenly makes this marvelous, elusive and neck-saving kind of poem achievable.

The logic of that movement, as I suggested earlier, is a logic of increasing efficacy. Between *Word Rain* and the full-blown Reversible Destiny constructions, it is possible to trace a substantial continuity of themes and strategies; what changes most notably is the scale of sensory impact in the presentation. *Word Rain*, to start there, takes the process of reading as narrative premise for a playful, disorienting and hyper-reflexive rehearsal of the process of reading itself. It does with verbal reading much of what the later architecture will do with orientation and the construal of physical spaces. The narrator, who is constantly addressing the reader in the first person, is herself a reader interminably working her way through a manuscript that may well be the manuscript of *Word Rain* itself, though through prominent

and frequent quotation it always seems she is reading something else, a something else we are of course reading with her. As she reads we are led to confuse not only her "I" with ours, but also all the frames required for keeping the world of the manuscript distinct from the world of the narrator, one usage of a multivalent word from the others, perceptions of the narrator's physical surroundings from her perceptions of the inner, mental environment of reading, her reading from her thinking, and her reading from her thinking about reading. Furthermore the act of reading is depicted as something intensively physical, both in bodily terms (sweat, eye movements, indigestion, sitting posture, the positioning of furniture in the room, the smell of paper) and in the palpability of the material metaphors she deploys to narrate the inner workings of reading (waft, platform, quay, rostrum, ropy gas shavings, fibers, and of course the word rain).

In these themes and strategies we can see much of what is kept as the migration proceeds from literary text to verbal-visual panels and then to architecture. The invention of puzzles to force awareness and active claiming of the processes of meaning making, the interest in making the embodied, sited nature of thought and awareness not only apparent but inescapably felt, the tactic of systematically canceling and contradicting one set of frames or interpretive/orientational hypotheses by another, the mixing and conflictual address of different sensory/cognitive modalities, the interest to track attention (and with it contextualization) in its instantaneous, category-collapsing movement across scales, the long-range strategy to neutralize subjectivity, even the central theory of landing sites, which emerges in the 90's to undergird their emerging architectural body theory but is already present in 1969 in the metaphor of platforms. These amount to core interests and concerns that are not displaced by the move from one set of means to another, but rather motivate it. Separated from the specifically literary enterprise of an experimental novel, or from the painterly enterprise of Arakawa's work during the same period, they reveal themselves as facets of a poetics that can continue to animate works designed for different modes of presentation. And as the pedagogical/transformational import of these themes and strategies clarifies for both Arakawa and Gins, ultimately becoming the earnest of their radical proposal that not dying is an attainable outcome of what had formerly passed for aesthetic contemplation, they gain the clarity of a critical standard for evaluating the available artistic means according to efficacy.

Of Arakawa's foundational large-format philosophical paintings, and of the abstract graphical language they feature, Madeline Gins writes in *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994): "Jottings and memos having to do with what anything in the world consists of should be made large, even enterable" (*Helen Keller*, 89). With embodiment a key to unpuzzling the puzzles these paintings present, efficacy clearly correlates with scale and perceptual immersiveness. This principle also serves to explain Gins' own participation in the *Mechanism of Meaning* project, where her writerly strategies of provoking reflexive awareness in the reader meet Arakawa's painterly ones, and are retooled with a fuller range of meaning materials (graphics, images, textures, objects, gadgets) and a mode of presentation on large-scale canvas panels that are literally and necessarily *enterable* texts. And while this project may still be the best-known phase of their work, and continues to serve them as a core fund of conceptual formulations, the 3rd and final published edition of the panels from 1988 ends with a "Review and Self-Criticism" and with architectural drawings that express their conclusion that even this project has proven its insufficiency. They say the need they feel to shift results from a reconceptualizing of their project, and from a redefining of what they had been after all along. Before, they strove to produce "a model of thought", after to construct a "field of sensibility" (*Mechanism* 6), requiring them to expand the dimensionality both of their presentation and of the participation they expect and illicit from the "reader".

This field of sensibility and the art/construction that will serve it, because of the philosophical issues concerned, but also because of the transformative efficacy desired, is necessarily architectural, and architecture is seen as the inevitable next step in a presentational logic that

had previously committed them to over-sized painting and mixed-media works. In *Architectural Body* we read an updating of the earlier formulation concerning Arakawa's paintings:

> We contend that philosophical puzzles cannot be solved short of a thorough architectural reworking. It is necessary to track how a world comes to be organized in the vicinity of the human organism. Questions need to be asked in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree way. Context is all, and all contexts lead to the architectural context, newly conceived. (*Body* xiv)

In the introduction to *Architectural Body*, we read that architecture is the human race's "greatest tool for learning how not to die", and so it is the obvious and only choice of medium for a project that conceives this as its goal and meaning. It is also, a little less obviously, the medium in which the true ambition of poetry is to be realized, and for the same reason. This claim, which is what that provocative sentence equating tactically posed surrounds with poems amounts to, asks us to locate the unfulfilled dream of all poets in the project of not dying. It will probably not be long before someone, responding to this provocation, will write the history of poetry as the pre-history of Reversible Destiny; a project half completed in the tradition that reads literature as the history of lamenting death. All I propose to do in the space remaining is to suggest how the core themes and strategies of Arakawa and Gins's (now architectural) project, their (architectural) poetics, connect to core ambitions of modern poetry, and how those in turn can be linked to the project of reversible destiny, and the peculiar efficacy it seeks. Then we can start asking how it works.[8]

4. Efficacy's Legacies

The theme of reflexive awareness is our *fil conducteur* here, our connecting thread. As I said, it represents a core continuity of their project from *Word Rain* and the early paintings, through *The Mechanism of Meaning*, and on to the most recent formulations of their architectural theory. What they write of projected reversible destiny parks within future reversible destiny cities may stand here as a slogan for their whole body of reader-resistant, reader-enhancing work since the beginning:

> "Comfort is no longer a factor. That it might take several hours to go from one room to another in a reversible destiny house is of no importance as long as the sensibility of the person traversing the room flowers and catches on itself in transit" (*Reversible* 241).

This formulation lands their theorizing of reading and its epiphanic rewards in direct line with the key literary precedents. For Mallarmé, too, awareness of awareness was the motivating theme and the object of his technical innovations. For him the reflexive epiphany made possible through the mobilization of a language reflecting language, of devices of disappearance enabling a poem like *Un coup de dés* to mean nothing but meaning, was what remained of mystical ambition in an age beyond the death of God and the Christian promise. The hope motivating his poetry and informing his poetics was that of a revelation of the Word through words, of Logos as a principle of cosmic and cognitive order palpably manifest in the logic and patterning of meanings achieved through poetry, "à fin qu'un jour … le Verbe apparaisse derrière son moyen du langage, rendu à la physique et à la physiologie, comme un Principe, dégagé, adequat au Temps et à l'Idée. ('in order that one day… the Word may appear from behind its medium of language, delivered into physics and physiology, as a Principle, extricated, adequate to Time and the Idea') (*Igitur* 384). Minus some of the hieratic tone, but without substantial distortion, we could name this Principle "the mechanism of meaning", especially as that re-incarnates more physiologically in the sited awareness of an architectural body, of a thinking with the whole body as Mallarmé himself intimated. Like Arakawa and Gins, Mallarmé was after a model of thought that emerged as a field of sensibility.

The literary legacy of concern to observe the workings of consciousness connects back to even more distant roots in the past of experimental poetry. With Wordsworth, for example, at the height of the romantic poetics, a poet's introspection onto the function of his own mind claimed status as the epic narrative of its ((post-)revolutionary) age, promising, in line with the romantic logic, the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth through powers inherent in the perceptual processes. Scrutiny into the mechanism of meaning as that manifested particularly in the phenomena of subjective coloring and symbolic communion emerged during the romantic period as a concern that would prove nearly permanent in Western poetry thereafter. And central to that ongoing concern is fascination with the transformative efficacy attributed to adjustments to sentience; for example Blake: "The eye altering alters all". As language was ascribed the capacity to sharpen and shift perception, allowing an experience to have its transformative impact, poetry was credited with the power of altering concrete realities. Where Wordsworth or Blake or Shelley dreamed the changing of earthly regimes and human society, another strain of this logic invested in hopes of – no need to phrase it differently – not dying. Such canonical poetic moments as the Ancient Mariner's vision of the sea snakes in Coleridge's poem, or the effortful epiphany of his "Dejection: an Ode", or the despondent Keats' encounter with the nightingale in that other famous ode, are all moments where the poet's ever-threatening destiny of death by despair and loss of meaning is reversed in the clarity and penetration of a simple perception. Rilke's requiem for the suicide Wolgang von Kalkreuth and Sylvia Plath's "Black Rook in Rainy Weather" show how robustly the poetics of this salvational efficacy continue up to more recent times.

                                        had someone occupied,
        occupied in the inmost of his being,
        but quietly met you on your dumb departure
        to do this deed; had even something led you
        to take your journey past some wakeful workshop
        where men were hammering and day achieving
        simple reality; had there been room
        enough in your full gaze to let the image
        even of a toiling beetle find admittance:
        you would have read the script whose characters
        you'd slowly graved into yourself since childhood,
        trying from time to time whether a sentence
        might be formed: alas, it seemed unmeaning.

                                        – O ancient curse of poets!
        Being sorry for themselves instead of saying,
        for ever passing judgement on their feeling
        instead of shaping it …   Invalids,
        using a language full of woefulness
        to tell us where it hurts, instead of sternly
        transmuting into words those selves of theirs,
        as imperturbable cathedral carvers
        transposed themselves into the constant stone.
                That would have been salvation. Had you once
        perceived how fate may pass into a verse
        and not come back, how, once in, it turns image,
        nothing but image, …
        you would have persevered.
                                        But this is petty,
        thinking of what was not….

        Who talks of victory? To endure is all.

                (Rainer Maria Rilke, from "Elegy for Wolfgang von Kalkreuth", tr. J.B. Leishman)

It is some continuance of these metaphysics that informs the more formally radical tradition of literary experimentalism that links Gins and Arakawa back to the late Mallarmé by way of Language poetry and the early modern avant-garde. The notion articulated famously by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, that "the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group"[9], informs a tactics of poetic innovation that sees in radical play with language a radical leverage for changing reality by way of the intervening mentality of human beings. Viktor Shklovsky's seminal "Art as Technique" (1917) plays the role of linking the revolutionary romantic logic of freshness of perception with the 20th Century (constructivist) task of resiting artistic effort and innovation in the technical means of art production, so in this case in the constructive mechanics of language itself. The promises of the romantic model of poetic efficacy could be said to turn largely on the role of the image, enabled by an enhanced perception, to *stand for* something whose power is effective inherently. The image, perceived adequately for it to function in its capacity as symbol, thus transmits something (real) into reality by means of an appearance. The experimental modernist model, by contrast, where that can be distinguished from the romantic model which persists, identifies reality as merely a mode of appearance, and ascribes to the mechanics that mediate appearance an efficacy over the production of reality. While Shklovsky, like Imagism in its way, is still concerned with enhancing perception of the image, the instrumentalization of poetic language to which he contributes is part of a branching that seeks transformational efficacy not in the power of an image to "bring about" some reality, but in the possibilities of modulating reality through affecting the mechanics of its constitution via appearances. As strategies for poetic efficacy the one model invests in semantics, the other in syntax; the one in meaningful objects, the other in meaning systems.

The apotheosis of this latter model, certainly relative to our purpose of contextualizing the poetics of Arakawa and Gins' architecture, is to be found in the writing of the "Language" poets. Language poetry is the immediate literary fact that conditions reception of their work since the 80's as poetry or poetry-related[10], though individually and as a team they start before Language and pursue the overlapping concerns within a critically distinct framework. Despite the differences, considering parallels with the Language movement offers us useful ways of understanding how the poetics that persists in their architecture compares (in terms of priorities and strategies) to poetry proper. But also, contextualizing their poetics this way may provide useful assistance in coming to understand the fabulous, by now notorious claim of reversible destiny. That claim, rather more than any oddness in the fact that they are applying their poetics in/as architecture, is the thing that sets Arakawa and Gins so far apart from all the other poets and artists we might relate them to. And yet I think the same basic claim is alive in the background theory and in the metaphysical unconscious of the poets they leave behind. Heirs to both romantic and constructivist dreams of efficacy, to Coleridge and Shklovsky, the Language writers cannot help but mix a little semiotic millennialism in with their rigorous formal experimenting, and in one way of seeing things, Arakawa and Gins are only taking this latency to its fullest explicit conclusions.

Language writing claims and is ascribed many "liberatory" properties. At the same time it is often accused of being academic and esoteric. Where its claims to a liberatory impact outstrip its obvious social and political relevance, I would say, is where the efficacies it seeks to mobilize are most clearly parallel to those of Arakawa and Gins. In defining the paratactic "new sentence" he sees as emblematic of Language writing, for example, Ron Silliman specifies its function of disrupting readerly procedures of semantic integration so as to draw attention to those procedures themselves, to the mean*ing* where the meant is never confirmed.[11] In the essay "Migratory Meaning", Silliman examines devices that effect an equivalent disruption at semantic levels below that of the full sentence, and goes on to generalize the use of such devices as the defining poetic strategy of his generation[12]. The strategy as he defines it consists in deploying semantic elements that project reference frames for an eventual integration that is then systematically frustrated by the failure of subsequent elements to confirm those frames, and by the new, contradictory frames they project instead.

Taken a little bit out of context, Silliman's technical description of these devices might easily be mistaken for an explanation of the disorientation effects allegedly experienced in a Reversible Destiny construction. Both strategies deploy elements that illicit expectations and the tentative projection of frames promising a coherent integration of subsequent elements, and both focus the tools of their craft on destabilizing each frame in turn so that no integration is possible beyond the sheer continuity of attention and effort at construal.

What Lyn Hejinian, in an analysis closely parallel to Silliman's, calls "the rejection of closure"[13] is a widespread poetic priority of Language (and of its precedents and post-scripts), with more than a superficial similarity to the architectural-poetic priorities of Arakawa and Gins. In line with the experimental-modernist model of efficacy I referred to above, rejecting closure can be understood not merely as isolating a new range of poetic effects in the play of disjunctive language, but as intervening in the mode of reality-formation over which language presides. Semantic closure is of course not just the end of a certain kind of reading experience; it is also a core engrained coping device for knowing the world and acting within it. Refusing the readerly demand for closure, learning to leave coherence and determinate integration suspended, is seen not merely as a source of alternatives to the apparent, objectionable coherences in which reality currently manifests to us, but even more significantly as a way of intervening in that reality by retraining the cognitive mechanisms we apply or don't apply to its formation. This is the efficacy on which Language writing's more esoteric claims to relevance rest, and if language truly plays the constitutive role Language writers tend to ascribe to it, and if literary reading/writing are effective means of retooling the mechanisms of constitution, then their writing might truly be expected to change things.

Rejection of closure, called by another name, lies at the heart of the poetics which Arakawa and Gins transport into, and develop as architecture. Their name for it is "tentativeness", which in some of their writings appears as *the* key to the trick or promise of not dying:

> "staying current with bioscleave, remaining alive as part of it, involves keeping pace with the tentativeness it brings to bear…". (*Body* 49)

Elsewhere they make the same point more directly, calling tentativeness "authoritative for human life". Authoritative for human life, therefore, tentativeness is at the heart of their poetics understood both as their tool-kit of devices and techniques, and in the sense of the meaning experiences their work targets. Only, where the postmodernism of Language poetry risks applying indeterminacy to little purpose beyond supply of a few by-now standardized "Language" styles, in the trans-humanism of Arakawa and Gins it points the way straight to not dying.

The devices Arakawa and Gins employ in targeting tentativeness parallel the literary devices of Language writing, of experimental poetics in its Language moment, as does the analysis suggesting these devices could prove efficacious in changing life and the world we co-constitute. These devices, architecturally applied, are "poetic" not only by virtue of this family resemblance with experimental literature, nor just because at least one of the artists used to do poetry. Rather they and the project they are applied in are poetic also because they share something fundamentally "linguistic" with the poetics of poets who use words. Devices produce effects (perceptual, emotional), and you have aesthetics. Devices produce meanings, and those meanings string into tactically constructed patterns, and you have poetics. The architectural devices applied in Reversible Destiny buildings operate not only on the spatial *feeling* of a surround, the values of volume, angle and placement as they interface us in the sensory array, but also on the spatial *meaning*, on the implicature effected percept by percept as body encounters construction. Percepts accrue not merely to a shifting whole of presentness (image or atmosphere), but impinge also into the process, into our articulate and systematized construal of the space as space, our reading it. If feeling and meaning involve separable levels of cognitive response, and this is disputable, there is a use to distinguishing

aesthetics from poetics, and in view of this divide the "art" of Arakawa and Gins' architecture, the "technics" that diverges it from conventional functionality to deliver a surplus of meaning or a twist, a meta-level meaning about meaning in general, would have to be considered a poetics. Because this poetics is being applied in architecture, and could not be applied in language alone, it is proper to call it an architectural poetics.

Viewed this way, the architecture of A+G's built works is (or involves) a poetics in the same sense that a writer's design-activity and know-how are a poetics. But if there is an evolution, there is an exponential leap, and these poetics are not equivalent. A+G ascribe an efficacy to their built constructions that steps them and their communication a whole scale beyond writing in the sheer potential of the mediality. While A+G have left, in the course of their development, (strictly) literary practice behind, this persists not just in habits of thought and language, but more by design in their positioning of their new modes as in fact the culmination of literary experiment. They do not make this claim directly, and as artists they are strikingly uninvested in the detailing of any literary, or even artistic legacies (linkage to Duchamp being the prominent exception), yet to think their (current) relation to literary poetics is to acknowledge that the architectural (poetic) efficacies they claim for their work put them a substantial step beyond literature along the path of one of literature's own favorite self-fabled development narratives, that of an increasing efficacy in poetic means. Poetics as a cousin to rhetoric has sought the key to total medial efficacy since its dawnings, along trajectories traced by the magical or rationalist, religious or constructivist logics of efficacy that have underpinned it at various stages. Wordsworth's "lyrical ballads" experiment and Imagism are both knots in the rope connecting A+G to a core longing of European poetics in the modern period. The theory inherited along these literary root-lines, and along root-lines that branch equally through the visual art and design cultures informing Arakawa's practice, involves a transformation soteriology that has never been phrased so largely, claimed so explicitly and formally evolved towards, as in the work of Arakawa and Gins. What remains vague aesthetic mysticism in Mallarmé and critical-theoretical assertion in Language poetry, stands out in strange brash explicitness as this architectural theory and practice claiming a key to not dying.

Whether I am right to project Reversible Destiny back as a latency into the developmental desire of experimental literary practice, whether G+A's statement about tactically posed surrounds being the poems that have always eluded poets is support enough for me to do so, may still need deciding. But that an epochal step must be acknowledged between the main currents of experimental poetics and this practice, I think this is clear. How these unprecedented claims to efficacy are taken, and to what extent the works for which they are made are successful at fulfilling them, these are other questions. As an aesthetic strategy to operate a transformational efficacy, though, we can say that Arakawa and Gins' Reversible Destiny architecture has reset the bar for claims of efficacy in "poetic" practice. The parallelism relating their architecture to experimental verbal poetries, however close, diverges on one fundamental point that, apparently, makes all the difference. Without making an independent evaluation of the efficacy of Language writing to change reality, we can read Arakawa and Gins' project as a rejection, on principle, of any such claim. In their view the true poem of the overcoming of dying, the poem they claim all poets are after, will continue to elude those who rely on language's limited efficacies to achieve this ultimate of all outcomes. Only the body – that which does/is the living, as opposed to that which articulates it and describes – presents a medial base broad and deep enough to change life in the one way they claim every poet, and person, really wants.

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[1] *Architectures of Poetry*, ed. María Eugenia Díaz Sánchez and Craig Douglas Dworkin. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004.
[2] Steve McCaffery, "Parapoetics and the Architectural Leap", in *Architectures of Poetry*.

[3] I lay out one version of this argument in my article "Resources for a Poetics of Visual Poetry" in *Orientations: Time/Image/Word/Space*. ed. Claus Clüver, Véronique Plesch, and Leo Hoek. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, and in my dissertation, *Visual Poetics: Meaning Space from Mallarmé to Metalheart* (Stanford, 2004).

[4] An architectural procedure is both the movement-coordinating or orientating response of a bodymind to a tactically constructed space, and the affordance that space presents for calling forth that response. Architectural procedures, of which the "disperse to contrast" and "tentativeness cradling" procedures are the most established, are the central functional elements in A+G's architectural strategy. "An architectural procedure is a tool, and so too is the architectural surround into which it gets embedded" (*Interfaces* 18).

[5] Identifying architectural procedures with words seems misleading in at least this respect, that they are not the visible, legible elements of a built construction, but the invisible, potential construal responses supplied by the visitor/reader. Formulations concerning architectural procedures, therefore, would benefit from an articulation of the signifier-signified type.

[6] In a telephone conversation between New York and Helsinki, December 26, 2005, Madeline Gins mentioned that this hotel would probably be the last project they accomplished in their life-times.

[7] For example in the *Poetry Plastique* exhibition of visual poetry curated by Jay Sanders and Charles Bernstein; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York City, 2000.

[8] Part 2 of this essay, entitled "Spatial Meaning / Poetic Mechanism", will address this question intensively.

[9] Edward Sapir, quoted by Benjamin Whorf in "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behaviour to Language", in *Language, Thought, and Reality*.

[10] Witness Charles Bernstein's ongoing witness to their work, reviewing *The Mechanism of Meaning* for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in 1971, devoting a substantial essay to Arakawa's painting, "Words and Pictures", collected in *Content's Dream*, interviewing Madeline Gins for the *Linebreak* audio series, and including their work in the visual poetry exhibition *Poetry Plastique,* curated together with Jay Sanders in 2000. Other language poets who have written about their work include Steve McCaffery, Nick Piombino, and Hank Laser.

[11] Ron Silliman. *The New Sentence*. New York: Roof Books, 1995.

[12] Ron Silliman, "Migratory Meaning", in *The New Sentence*.

[13] Lyn Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure", (first published in *Poetics Journal 4*, 1984), repr. in *Onward: Contemporary Poetry & Poetics*, ed. Peter Baker. New York: Peter Lang, 1996