
Made/line Gins or Arakawa in Trans-e-lation

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Ulysses means the circle of return, nostalgia, dwelling, the oikonomia. From this perspective, I would say that the architect of the next millennium – and of today already – will not be a Ulysses. (Derrida 1991: 45)

The sharing of nameless [1]

Made... line? An unregistered “made-line” or “becoming-line” waves from within a name which should, in all correctness, be left alone, unconstrained by the pressure to mean or make sense. What if, nevertheless, something in or out of a name insisted on making itself heard, or happened to click into place or into a “fiction of place”, twice? [2] Although “calling” names is under ban, some names will call, emit, or initiate an arc. Gins! Of all names, this one seems to agree to make an about-face and to send, in the process, a reversible s-i-g-n – a starting name. -Ings or Gins? An engineful construction, an articulate(d), mobile, motorized part in an “abstract machine” ready to overlap with other “abstract machines” or “bioscleaves,” with a gerund here and a sibilant there, and not a trace of that ancient, cumbersome, ontological particle “be.” As if the weight of “to be” had at long last been lifted off the shoulders of what “begins.”

In the source pages appended to *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, Madeline Gins describes her book as a “sharing of nameless,” after the reversible, flippable title

of Arakawa's 1984 etching. Although namelessness might, at face value, be taken (or mistaken) to refer to intertextuality, to the weaving of kindred voices and texts visiting Madeline Gins's volume – excerpts from Keller's diary, poems by Rimbaud, Dogen, translations of Ponge and others – the concept bifurcates to include, beyond citationality, the urge to resist the proper name. Rubbing elbows with what Deleuze and Guattari have conceptualized as collective agencings and post-individual haecceities, "the nameless" finds itself in translation, imported and accommodated in the opening paragraphs of *Helen Keller or Arakawa* [3] in the form of an "I" having metamorphosed into a "sky-of-an-I" (Gins 1994: 1-2). It is up to the reader/translator to take it from there, to enter *Helen Keller or Arakawa's* reinvented idiom, hewn in such a way as to travel the distance between "sky" to "I" and back. For blind Helen Keller-and/or-haptic-Arakawa, travelling happens on the spot (as well as to the dot, between the dots of Braille writing and pictured or diagrammed points).

Madeline Gins's post-subject, the "sky-of-an-I," initiates a nomadic, on-the-spot translation process from Standard English to Arakawa+Gins-English – an (entirely new) "A-G-E" or "agencing" of language. Not only does the new plastic and pliant compound displace the classic "I," the vowel-sized English subject: it attributes to it a new "fiction of place," a phonematic as well as capacious existence resting on a shared, stretchable diphthong, on an air-born or air-eddied, two-wheel micro-machine: I/sky. Translation at this stage is confronted to a fork in the road (and should take it), between semantic fidelity and a (perhaps higher) form of fidelity to the superior sound of a repeated diphthong, without which the apparatus would collapse. An equivalent sound-fiction or swiveling effect is called for – a place from which to extract and construct equivalent "meaning." [4]

Like Keller or Arakawa's expansive, atmospheric sky-of-an-I ("*bleu-de-je*" or "*aire-de-je*"), lines by Madeline Gins involve growth and endless possibilities of expansion through a process of entanglement or felting rather than as text-bound elements in a pattern of orthogonal weaving. Becoming-line (being "made-line") takes place on the outer regions of the specter of textuality, at a distance from

classic textual models involving binary oppositions and crisscrossing. Madeline Gins's "line," rather, proceeds as a nomadic anti-fabric, as an "aggregate of intrication" which "contrasts point by point with the space of fabric, (...) is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction (...) [and] does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 475-476). The nomadic material described as non-fabric by Deleuze and Guattari fits the non-subject, the "sky-of-an-I" as a perfect-fit garment, as a supple anti-fabric indexing "clothing and the house itself to the space of the outside, to the open smooth space in which the body moves" (476).

A Made-line Manifesto

It takes two, two different etymologies, to make a line, if one relies on the strangely dividing root of the word "line" according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "two words, ultimately of the same etymology, have coalesced 1° (...) **lino* (flax), linen 2) Middle English, *ligne* or *line* (originally linen thread)." A line has, in other words, flax and flexibility built into it. It exists in and as translation: in a state of actual trans/lation, local transiting or transduction between the two prongs of its etymology, "line" or "flax" (linen). How should one "translate" the flexible "lines" of Madeline Gins and Arakawa, given the fact that they seem both to invite and preempt translation? How does one translate a book-in-translation, one in which translation is elevated to the power of (at least) two? Madeline Gins's invitation in *Word Rain* to "read right read write" suggests, beyond homophony, the need to strike (at least) twice – to repeat, with a difference (Gins 1969: 1). Reading "right" implies being "flexible enough," as in the opening line of *KorA*, to enter an impossible volume, one which requires to be entered twice, not only "right" but right and left:

The afternoon has much to recommend it, including an all-inclusive atmosphere with evening, and a geometry that's flexible enough.
(Gins 1994: 1)

At first sight, such an opening could serve as a narrative incipit, as an exemplary piece of fine, tractable writing dutifully providing both a sense of time and, to some extent, place. After the possibly Mallarmean, faun-inviting or cultured

touch of the “afternoon,” emerges the faint suggestion of a luncheon offered in “all-inclusive” conditions, service included. Yet any reader will have more than one reason to suspect that something else is going on, that both life and something larger than life are invited into this opening sentence, which acts, literally, as an “opening,” incisive procedure: one that affects logos and its logic at its core. Although no character is introduced, a strangely breathing effect invades its avenues, prompted by the “atmosphere” which the sentence both conveys and exists as, carries and forms. The opening line happens literally as a double, etymological line, as a thread of flexible flax, bendable in more than one direction. Built into it are sound effects based on fricatives – the “afternoon,” “flexible enough” – which perform the flexible promise: two different spellings for one sound, once uttered, twice spelt: /f/ or /gh/.

Another soundtrack informs the syllables of Gins’s initial sentence, which, like Henry Miller’s weed grows in the middle and from its middle, in the clause inserted between commas. [5] What constitutes the phonetic building blocks of the syntagm: “including an all-inclusive atmosphere with evening” is an [in] or [ing] series, possibly signatory, forming an acoustic thread, a nasalized entranceway “in” or across the textual threshold: “including,” “inclusive,” “evening.” Thus paired, the two phonemes form a differential micro-pattern in which two nearly similar nasals, [in] and [ing] (alveolar versus velar nasal) occupy opposite sides of the “mechanism” of meaning. [6] The nasalized closure of [in] (an inclusion-prone phoneme) is turned inside out, in the case of “-ing.” As an open-ended syntactic contrivance, [ing] becomes the chiral, atmospheric opposite of [in]. [7] As Linda Pillière remarks in her stylistic analysis of *Architectural Body*, “the ‘ing’ form has the advantage of presenting an action imperfectly, as an open-ended process” (Pillière 2010: 212). A similar disparity occurs with the juxtaposition of including/evening, the verbal force of the first term having a tendency to curb or flex the second term and make it enter verbal territory (“evening,” as in “to even”). Against the sense of closure and inclusion, “ing” achieves an effacement of time and space limits, smoothing the striations of whatever frames or limits into an anexact, porous, open-ended stretch of spacetime. “Evening” does double duty, both as a marker of graphic reversibility

(in the palindromic “eve” with which the word begins) and as a general eraser of temporal boundaries. What time is it when the book begins? What date is it (a question left gaping by the second paragraph in which the birth dates of Madeline Gins, Helen Keller and Arakawa get scrambled)? When does *Keller* begin? Taking the name game a step further, doesn’t *Keller* stand eerily close to a purely syllabic, nonsensical French translation or (mistaken) rendering as *Quelle heure* (“What time”)? It would be wrong, however, to consider this opening sentence as a moment of blurring or of undecidability. A precise mathematical operation is going on from square one, an operation termed “evening”: making even, equating or equalizing, inventing a new algorithm in which afternoon is equivalent to evening, Keller to Gins and/or Arakawa, narrator to author or translator or “reador,” in a general pattern of hyper-translatability based on the operation of a single (core) particle “or.” A process of hyper-translation occurs between two (possibly three) varieties of “evening”: evening the noun, even/ing the verb (to even), and one or several species of eves or Eves. [8]

But a question remains: what about “geometry”? Not only is geometry one of the objects included in the sentence: the line itself behaves as the arranger or planner of a strange geometric deformation, wrapping the object it becomes and exists as. How can the “all-inclusive” become “included”? Nowhere is it logically receivable to include the all-inclusive, except within/without Gins and Arakawa coordinates. The first sentence in the book is engineered as a Klein bottle, a non-orientable volume in which left and right change places, a volume whose “all” or entirety insists on carrying a remainder – the “flexible enough.” In German, a “Klein bottle” or “*Klein Flasche*” also came into existence as an object-in-translation, having changed names as a consequence of mistranslation or misunderstanding – its name being a *Kleinsche Fläche* or “Klein surface,” which evolved, by mistake, into a “*Kleinsche Flasche*” or “Klein bottle” (one served, too, in inclusive conditions). [9]

A similar quasi-equation of the inclusive and the included is programmed in the chapter’s reversible title, *Thinking Field* (as well as in most of *KorA*’s reversibly-engineered or undecidable titles). Translating such lines involves taking into

account the “Klein” or reversibility factor – here as in a number of key-terms and syntactic turns in the “writing field” of Gins and Arakawa. Before *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, in *What the President Will Say and Do!!* (1984), Madeline Gins’s dedicatory address to Arakawa celebrates “the discoverer of the ‘Forming Blank’,” a quantum phrase whose status is reversibly active and passive.

“Forming blank” happens beneath or beyond the binary grid organized in terms of syntax and semantics. Properly speaking, the sense of connection and convergence implied by the notion of “syn/tax” is, in this instance, of no avail; neither do “semantics” help, the question being not so much that of meaning as the question of “how” sense is thrown off balance. “Forming blank” requires to be approached not as a “phrase” but as “line” belonging to a line-universe or a “Made-line Universe,” using “line” as a flexible or flaxy tool adapted to the topology of one-sided surfaces. *Blank* itself has next to nothing to do with whiteness, although it might pass off as whitish as a first approximation. It occurs throughout the Gins and Arakawa corpus and on the first page of *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, where it also does double duty:

Helen Keller. The main constant not to be forgotten is that two of my senses are perpetually down: for seeing and hearing, I –and any I of this variety – draw a blank every single time. (*KorA*: 3)

To “draw a blank” is imported from an early-modern game of lottery named, in French “*la blanque*” – after *bianco*, the Italian name of the same game. Whoever draws a “*blanque*” – a white ticket bearing no prize – loses. But to “draw” also demands to be taken in its graphic sense, in which case the game changes: loss becomes gain, the loss of aural and visual data metamorphoses into new ground and new background: into the condition of graphicality and of diagramming. Philologically, “blank” is a word with a hinge to it, akin to *bleak* – which oscillates between the polarities of *black* and *blank*. Nothing is blacker than the blankness of a blank computer screen – translated in French as “*un écran noir*” (a black screen). Similar folds form in the multiple acceptations of the verb “to draw”: 1) to pick a lottery ticket 2) to trace a line 3) to attract or extract air. A gale, draft, or “*vent*” (French for “wind”) blows through the cracks of the *event*.

Translation is mostly conceived as a one-way ticket leading from here to there, from a “source” to a “target” language. Rather than “target” anything, translating *Helen Keller or Arakawa* promotes a non-ballistic, nomadic form of translation – the term “nomadic” being used after Toynbee (and Deleuze and Guattari) to describe, contrary to what one might expect, what travels on the spot or “in place,” in an immobile fashion. In “trans/lating,” the “trans-” or “in-between” has, on other words, “taken on all the consistency” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 380). As an (auto-)translating book, *Helen Keller or Arakawa* grows from the particle “or” which thrives in its title before growing into a quasi-language of its own, vehicle-and-tenor all in one, liberated in the book’s “or”-studded final chapter “Critical Beach.” Meaning is a function of what happens in the “mean,” in the “middle” or “intermezzo” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 380).

In the following sentence from the opening chapter of *KorA*, in which a multiple, stranded-wire voice remembers “the many tales told to me, into me, so that I might form – for the sake of my forming – an abiding picture of the world” (*KorA*: 2), both “forming” and “abiding” occupy a labile “mean,” a limitrophic position of imbalance. An “abiding” picture designates or delineates both a lasting, durable image and a two-dimensional surface suddenly blown up to three-dimensional proportions, a volume in which to abide: a place of (nomadic) abode. Keller or Arakawa’s procedure is approached in terms which resort to an equally limitrophic, swiveling verb (as well as a “false” cognate according to French dictionaries), “to rally”: “I proceed to search out the rallying points of alignment” (*KorA*: 6). “Rally” entangles the quasi-transparent French *relier* (to link) to the less-straightforward sense of “to recover,” “to perk up,” or “to resuscitate.” To rally does not function here as a “pun,” as an ornate quibble puncturing or punctuating an otherwise serious discursive façade: a point, in Gins and Arakawa as in Deleuze and Guattari, is always a “point of alignment,” always and implacably on the verge of being translated into a line or a path. A path, in the language of Gins and Arakawa, retranslatable as a touch-and-tell, tactile tool or walk-through (to be followed, for example in the “Birds” chapter of *KorA*, in which the “phoneme” [th] takes over).

“Every ‘the’ is a translation”

“The,” the article on which *Helen Keller or Arakawa* opens, is everything but a determiner. If translating it involves no specific creativity, coming to grips with the full range of its effects implies a different, though quasi-identical, form of translation, i.e. literally taking a fast-forward jump to chapter 21 and its spate of cascading, /th/ phonemes (gone “morphemic”), or, alternately, jumping back to Madeline Gins’s *What the President Will Say and Do*, more specifically to its “Introduction to THE history of THE,” in which one reads: “Every THE is a translation” (Gins 1984: 144). The piece ends on: “a kiss to those who have finished this article,” where “article” points to the determiner as much as to the essay on the article. “Article” becomes a case of literal and lateral “*translatio*” rather than a mere pun or antanaclasis (the repetition of the same word taken in two different senses or more). It differs from antanaclasis by involving one, or two, many bodies. “The” is made to operate as a jack, as a connector retranslatable into a kiss – short-circuiting textual limitations and inventing a reader-writer-“kisser”-surround.

As a fiction of (common) place or a milieu in which to engineer an architectural body, “the” becomes a trading zone of tactile or haptic exchanges: open to indeterminacy and groping, rather than to the syntactic rules of grammatical determination.

It is on a similarly tactile determined/undetermined effect that *Making Dying Illegal* opens, with, for example, its disarmingly pair of adverbial props: “here, then”:

Here, then, is the kick-off assertion: The primary responsibility of any organism is *to be as precise as can be* in regard to that which she has arrived as on terra firma (terra fairly ferma). (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 27)

“Here, then”: the pair itself is as much a “kick-off assertion” as what it ushers in, leading the eye, graphically, to two more capitalized instances of “The”: one immediately in tow (“The primary responsibility”), and a previous, upper-case

occurrence used as a heading to: “The claim.” Both are graphically equipped with the T-square tool of the trade. But re-configuring architecture-as-life (as the knack to live on until indefinitely), requires no architect’s T -little or no orthogonality: it thrives, rather, on [th]’s. “The” and “then” are literally “as precise can be.” If T’s belong to *terra firma*, [th]’s pertain to the smooth, mixed medium of a “terra (fairly) ferma” – one growing in its pregnant, bracketed middle. One of the ways of translating the T-ridden title of an earlier work, *To Not To Die*, would be, therefore, to endeavor to harness a force equivalent to the voiceless dental plosive: to duplicate its blow. A faithful rendering as “*Pour ne pas mourir*” fails, to some extent, to capture the impetus of Gins’s locution (by placing on a level with what would be a defused version of it: “in order not to die” or “so as not to die”). [10]

To (K)Not to Translate

In the wake of Gins and Arakawa’s co-signed “kick-off assertion” (which cruises the middle distance between a sports metaphor and a lethal, bucket-kicking image), at least four linguistic layers and languages become entangled: 1) colloquial English (“here, then,” “kick-off”); 2) formal, Latin-based English (“assertion,” “primary responsibility”); 3) Latin, with and without English interferences (*terra fairly ferma*); 4) French, with the uses of “to arrive” in various syntactic guises (to arrive as/to arrive at/to arrive at having).

Confronted to a limitrophic language, one which haunts linguistic and semiotic borders, a translator’s task is, either, not to translate, or, tentatively, to “knot-translate.” *Knot-translating* walks the thin line from *To Not To Die* to *Making Dying Illegal* and back, following the “knots” found, for example, in *Biotopological Report # 6 A*:

The many knots cleave. Think of the directional rerouting that comes with a string’s, a cloth’s or an event fabric’s entering into a knot, succumbing to a knot. (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 83)

To “enter into a knot” or to “succumb to a knot” are ways of describing the *cleaving* process of translation, in which “cleaving” must be envisaged not so

only for its (folded) meaning but for its surface effects, its intervention in the fields of graphicality. “Knots,” here, are made to cleave procedurally, in the graphically perceptible bow of an initial K, as well as in the knotting-in-progress of three repeated genitives, attached and detached in “a string’s, a cloth’s, or an event fabric’s.”

Two K’s braid the title of *Helen Keller or Arakawa* into a loose, cleaving knot, positing an anexact equation between two variables, two nouns articulated around a core particle, sharing the same cutting/pasting phoneme. Disregarding the fact that “Keller” and “Arakawa” are proper nouns, both might have much to say in response to the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* comment that K-words signal “foreign words of recent adoption, many of them very imperfectly naturalized” and to the additional, stigmatizing reflection that words so equipped stand out as non-native and non-integrated: “the more recent tendency has been to favour the use of K [in some initial positions] (...) [in] non-English initial combinations (...) by which the uncouth or barbarous character of the words is more strongly suggested.” The K-entry then lists numerous cases of scientific formalizations based on the letter, among which: k, the quantum number determined by Niels Bohr in 1920; k, the letter representing thermal conductivity; K.E, for kinetic energy; k for kilo or one thousand. In the same translatory, roaming vein, Deleuze and Guattari’s collective agencings might aptly be renamed *K Plateaus*, suddenly relocated in the K-friendly environment of Keller or Arakawa’s myriad-keyed name(s) – while such judgmental adjectives as “uncouth” and “barbarous” stand out as cut-off points separating the questionable value judgment of a ruling “logos” from the possibilities of a nomadic letter.

Addressing as-if salient, projecting features in writing encourages a form of finger-reading or “interdigitatings” (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 99) based on the capture of data which “means” differently or differentially: by occupying the singular space of the “mean” or by being “in the mean,” the intermezzo or relay-position where weed or writing grows. One chapter of *Helen Keller or Arakawa* in particular, “The March of the Transitive,” activates reading as a form of tactual kinesis, as a discursive displacement following the “course” of a tail-shaped

Japanese ideogram, “shinnyu,” found at the “root” of *dori* (reason) as well as in the expression of transport or displacement: 運. An equal force of displacement affects the knotted, quasi-Brailled letter in the midst of the “uncouth” name of “Keller-or-Arakawa.” Its “imperfectly naturalized” K’s challenge the untouchability of the proper name, begging to digitally or graphically seized, therefore connected, in the process, to an outside or *nomos*. If a “person” is given the choice of becoming, after Gins and Arakawa, an “organism-that-persons,” one that is awarded an environment and is warded, guarded by it, a similar change can affect the proper name. Taking into account the fact that (some) names happen to be visited by “foreign” traits or nomadic lines, by forces blown in from without, a name become retranslatable as equivalent to a “nomos”: a “space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 371).

Touching names, proper names, is one of the blind spots of translation, which posits the untranslatability and the untouchability of the proper name. A name remains proper on condition that it is untouched. Two names here have ceased to behave as insulators, as if, to use a term from contemporary physics, a quenching effect had affected their status and brought about a sudden change of behavior: a quenching or k-quenching. The salient /k/’s that run from “Helen Keller” to “Arakawa” and back re-code gender and geopolitical divides into quasi-equations, in which woman or man, East or West, disability and hyper-perceptivity, two (name+surname) and one, [e]’s and [a]’s change places or do-se-do without loss.

If one pursues this touch-and-tell approach to reading and translating, Arakawa-the-name disseminates a palindromic particle from within its prolific core: a. k. a (“also known as”), a radical short-cut to the possibility of endless renaming, to nominal translation and reversals, to namelessness, collective enunciation, and mass invitations. At the non-sense-making surface of a proper name swivels a revolving door, akin, perhaps, to the reversible Stoic time of *aiôn* and retranslatable as the “fourth dimension” that Gilles Deleuze made famous in the *Logic of Sense* termed: “an incorporeal at the surface of things,” a “pure event

which insists or subsists in the proposition” (Deleuze 1990: 30). Alternately, borrowing from the end of *Making Dying Illegal*, one could add that if, in the Mitaka lofts, “the floor is a key-board that is in the process of being invented” (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 200), the lettered floor of this or that name reads, too, as a “k-board” in the process of being invented.

Cellar or Cellular

Another process of reversibility affects the “organism that persons” Helen Keller, mentioned twice at the end of *Making Dying Illegal* in Appendix D, in the “directions for use” addressed to the residents of Mitaka lofts – inscribed to her memory. A place of residence for Gins and Arakawa is either termed an “abode,” a “loft,” or a “dwelling” – never an “apartment.” Apartments have logically no reason to appear when the logic of apartness gives way, when nothing, literally, stands apart. A loft, on the other hand, is etymologically related to “lift,” an early-modern term for the sky, the atmosphere. To dwell, before meaning “to abide” or “to continue,” meant to perplex, to stun, to make giddy. A topological and syntactic about-face or swiveling positional change occurs in Appendix D:

- 1) “Produce movements and gestures through which to impart to a deafblind person, to Helen Keller, an over-all sense of the set of brightly colored shaped volumes within which you live.”
- 2) “For a couple of hours every month have the person your loft reconfigures you as be Helen Keller.” (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 201)

She occurs, in other words, both as object and subject, as a receiving end to whom gestures and movements are “imparted,” and as a becoming-subject-in-the-subjunctive, as a translated form of “you” reconfigured “as” Helen Keller, made poetically “uncouth” in the strange formation operating in a cloven yet cleaving juxtaposition: “as/be.” “You” undergoes a syntactic volte-face, both tutor and tutored.

A similar form of reversibility or translatability affects Keller-the-name. A “cellar” makes itself heard in its “uncouth” chinks, carrying and carried by an etymological “cell” – the monosyllable applied to a room, a dwelling place, a

receptacle, a compartment or cavity, or to a microscopic portion of protoplasm enclosed in a membrane. Keller lends itself to translation, forming one of the self-translating machines at work in Madeline Gins's book, as a cryptonym conveying, literally, a crypt, an underground "cellar" or dark (and soundproof) enclosure. Yet it is also a nomadic name that performs its own local commuting or commutating between several relays, phonetically equipped to form a strangely partial or metamorphic *k/l-eaving*, a consonant-based process. Keller cleaves, so to speak, in the act of being performed, sped up, or uttered, following Hamlet's advice, "trippingly on the tongue." In *translatio* the name welcomes a series of lateral displacements – agreeing, as it were, to be accelerated into a *clé* (a key, a connecting device), collated into a portable, cleaving exercise, reverse-engineered into a cellar, or metamorphosed into several French phonetic body-doubles: a feminine pronoun (*quelle?*), a mistaken question ("*quel air?*"), and much air and erring.

Keller is German for cellar, a word based on the original architecture of beer cellars composed of juxtaposed cells, small compartments or "*celliers*" in French. If one insists on treading unauthorized nominal ground, Keller-the-name articulates a dark space, an underground cellar of deafblindness, to the cellular poetics of a writing which follows a transversal trajectory and seeks to connect one cell to the next, one site to its neighbours. As *KorA*, which possibly translates a Greek *chora*, *Helen Keller or Arakawa* seems malleably programmed – endowed with a capacity for capaciousness, for accommodating impossible philosophic languages. *Khora*, the Greek word for place (found in Plato's *Timaeus*) is what Gins's title comes down to, by macaronic anagram, once reduced to its bare initials – a paradoxical reduction or rescaling which rubs elbows with unlimited expansiveness, and activates another form of translation.

Between *KorA* and *Chora*

One of the side-effects of endeavoring to translate *Helen Keller or Arakawa* into French is that a number of off-stage, background French voices make themselves heard in the process, voices imported from discontinuous areas of contemporary

thought and philosophy – among which the voices of Deleuze, Guattari, Derrida, and Cixous, forming what might be called a disparate agencing. One of Gins and Arakawa’s signature terms “cleaving” finds its simultaneous, near-automatic translation, for example, in the writing of Hélène Cixous, whose innovative writing regularly ransacks language to find unstable patterns and bottomless, reversible terms. If all fails, invention takes over, resulting in nonce creations, coinages or collages such as her “*séparéunir*” (to separeunite) which cleaves both ways. [11]

Helen Keller or Arakawa as KorA for short thrives on a borderland between languages – not only by incorporating foreign idioms ranging from Old Saxon to Sanskrit and Japanese, but also by proceeding as a multiplier, a generator of non-linear, diagrammatic formations and chance encounters. Its anagrammed core places it on a collision course with a Greek (false) twin or look-alike, the term “Chora,” a paradigm approached through a series of metaphors from Plato to Derrida and Kristeva, and recently explored by Gregory L. Ulmer. In *Timaeus* Plato adds a third kind of nature at the origin of creation, besides eternal ideas and their copies, a nature identified as “space” or as a “receptacle” whose character according to Derrida is “one of the least understood, most puzzling, most resistant to interpretation.” *Chora* appears in Plato’s description as a strange sieve or winnowing basket, both active and passive, which, when receiving the elements of creation “swaying unevenly hither and thither, was shaken by them, and by its motion again shook them” (*Timaeus* 52d-53a).

When asked to help conceive a pavilion for La Villette Park in Paris in 1985, in collaboration with Peter Eisenman’s design team, Derrida’s response was to ask the crew of architects to read Plato’s *Timaeus* and accommodate the notion of *chora* which, as Derrida explained in the first brainstorming session, “receives everything or gives place to everything but (...) has to be totally foreign, totally exterior to anything that it receives,” adding: “since it is absolutely blank, everything that is printed on it is automatically effaced. (...) Everything inscribed in it erases itself immediately, while remaining in it. It is thus an impossible surface” (Derrida, in Ulmer 1994: 65). [12] Derrida accounts for its impossibility

and “blankness” in terms akin with the logic of the first sentence of *Helen Keller or Arakawa*:

A structure of inclusion makes of the *included* fiction in a sense the theme of the prior fiction which is its *including* form, its capable container, let us say its receptacle. (Derrida 1987: 277)

Julia Kristeva borrows the same concept from Plato’s *Timaeus* “to denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases [...] Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and this specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm” (Kristeva 1984: 26). Kristeva is concerned with understanding how a poet or a “subject in process” (such as Mallarmé or Lautréamont) achieves what she calls a “transversal rhythmicity,” for which the “best metaphor,” she claims, “would not be the grammatical categories it redistributes, but rather a piece of music or a work of architecture” (126).

Gregory Ulmer’s search for a heuristics, a method or anti-method promoting a non-logical mode of reasoning, proposes to deconstruct linear paradigms and frontier-based metaphors for research – thus avoiding what he calls “associating method with colonial exploration” through a revision of the “frontier” into “*chora*” (Ulmer 1994: 31). What Ulmer terms “chorography” names the new paradigm based on “the logic of conduction” and on “choral words,” which function like words in dreams, as nodal points or “*Knotenpunkte*” – knots, or terminological junctions, in Gins and Arakawa terms:

Dreams are ‘laconic’, as is the dream itself in relation to its later interpretation. Condensation represents the ‘nodal point’ (*Knotenpunkt*) of the dream and will be like a railroad switch in the dream work, always allowing multiple interpretations. (Anthony Wilden, in Lacan 1968: 109)

To “locate the choral word” (Ulmer 1994: 226-227), Ulmer explains (following Derrida) that one must be attuned to coincidence, welcome emergent events such as the discovery of the term “choral” during sessions with Peter Eisenman:

My thematic suggestion – *chora* – led to Peter’s play – choral work. But it is evident that the thing is as independent in its existence as a piece of coral one might find along the seashore. (Derrida, in Ulmer 1994: 227)

How far is Derrida’s piece of flotsam and jetsam, the *objet trouvé* of seashore coral, from Madeline Gins’s own or-grown, littoral conversation in the last chapter of *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, “Critical Beach,” a multilingual conversation recording the voice of a beach answering (in an unheard-of, or-filled, or-grown tongue) the questions of a multiple subject-in-process? How far is Madeline Gins’s extraction and generation of “or’s” (from words) from Derrida’s musings on the Greek word for “place”? Prompted by Derrida’s fascination with a Greek term, Peter Eisenman responds to the “choric” effects of the “choral”: “For me it means corral as enclosure, coral as stone and coral as color, choral as a group musical work, and choral as *chora*” (Eisenman, in Ulmer 1994: 227). Three words stand out in Eisenman’s series as ill-assorted with the “space” of Arakawa and Gins: enclosure, stone, and sacred group singing. Equally ill-matched is “coral” which Eisenman reterritorializes and congeals into stone, in contradistinction to the way Derrida processes it (by dislocating it to the space of the “seashore”). The term “coral” is indeed heard as part of the voice of “Critical Beach” in such a way that it stands at a “critical” distance from Eisenman’s neo-formalist grasp of Chora-related terms – as appears at the end of the following excerpt:

Micro-orbs succored through abrasive strainers. Orbs numerous toward runner coordinate core. Non-torpor tenor or dormant forbidden oracular powder. Gritted grid more corporeal. Effort’s micro-operators. Torsion orifices ignoring four million or four billion minor other orbs. Vortices determining morphology of pre-formed neuter perforations. Rotated orthogonal coral-like corridors. Brocade of porosity by arbor. (Gins 1994: 290)

The “corridors,” the voice says, are “coral-like,” which is not quite the same as “coral” – a mineral arborescence as well as a skeletal formation. As to arborescences, they too appear in Gins’s text, but only after having undergone a sea-change (or, rather, a beach-change), in the sentence: “brocade of porosity by arbor.” Though close (and etymologically linked to the French *arbre* [tree]), an “arbor” is the main support or beam of a machine, or an axle or spindle on which

a wheel moves – which takes us in one short step from arborescences to the machinic.

No literal correspondence, in other words, can be traced – only what could be called a form of *chorespondence* between texts signaling to each other on either side of a divide – a divide named, on one side, *chora*, and *KorA* on the other. A quick search for possible ways of translating or adapting Plato’s (and Derrida’s) “*chora*” into Gins and Arakawa terms would yield an entire map of connectible notions such as “waiting texture” or “landing site.” A “*chora*” somehow beckons, pre-translated or as-if automatically translated, in the generative, choric letters of *KorA*. Just as, in the opening sentence of *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, the term “evening” pre-translates and pre-processes Derrida’s following comments on one of the key-words or “knots” of Hélène Cixous’s writing, namely her use of the syllable “eve,” included in “*rêve*” (dream) as in the name of her mother Eve:

“*Rêve* {*dream*}, there’s a vocable that finds itself joined in her work, via alliance or alloying, to the significance of syllables and values bigger and smaller than its own body, at once included and including, such as *réveil*, *évènement*, *revenir*, *revenant* {waking, event, to come back, revenant}, and, above all, *Eve*, the first woman and Hélène Cixous’s mother. In the English language (...) *eve* is also the hour of vigil, of watch-keeping, as in *evening*. We might also and *even* say that evening is the secret watching-over an act of writing, which gathers and shapes, dreams and reveals {*rêve et révèle*} this quasi-equation, this restless equating, this turbulent equalising, evening, that comes and goes between *rêve*, *Ève*, *évènement*, *éveil* and *réveil* {*dream*, *Eve*, *event*, *wake*, *waking*}. (Derrida 2006: 25)

Common to Madeline Gins and to Derrida-or-Hélène-Cixous (also a strange choric alliance or jointure) is the premise of an inside-out exchangeability of the inclusive and the included, the “choric” chance or choice of *evening* as an accommodating, pliant word-event. As to Derrida’s grammatological fascination for the “act of writing,” his restless pursuit or tracing (of) trace, and his understanding of *chora* in print-related terms –, one might add that that, too, is contained and echoed in *Helen Keller or Arakawa*’s digital composition, or in the “interdigitatings” of *Making Dying Illegal*.

A line of fault, however, seems to run between, on the one “hand,” a field of thought broadly described as post-phenomenological (in the wake of Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl) and, on the other hand, the heterogeneous, “classical” map or area on which Deleuze and Guattari have inscribed their array of names and concepts (from Stoicism and pre-Socratic philosophy to Hume, Kant, Bergson and Simondon among others). One way of negotiating or skirting the abyss is to envisage *Helen Keller* or *Arakawa* as a transducing or translating principle, as a recoding machine, a transcoder between one area of discourse (Cixous and Derrida) and the next (Deleuze and Guattari) – a “Gilles Deleuze or Derrida” machine, acknowledging the fact that a (desiring) machine, from a Deleuze and Guattari angle, only works by breaking down (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 286). Such a machine would not be an interpretation or semantic translation machine, one “whose function is to unmask, decode, and disambiguate x,” but an ambiguating, fuzzy-logic, many-core cloud computer (Caputo 2004: 53).

A phase change seems to affect the later writings of Derrida, particularly in the last book published in his lifetime, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (L'Animal que donc je suis)* – one in which the figure of Deleuze is quoted briefly among other dear departed, “close and present friends” (Derrida 2008: 23). Derrida’s last book is about finding “another logic of the limit,” a transgressive experience of adjacency or of what Derrida calls the “limitrophe”: “what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit.” Relying on the Greek appendix of a hybridized word (*trephe*, *trophos*, related to feeding, nursing, breeding, in Greek) Derrida adds: “Everything I’ll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, de-linearizing, folding and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. Moreover, the supposed first or literal sense of *trephe* is just that: to transform by thickening, for example in curdling milk” (Derrida 2008: 29).

Derrida’s perception of deconstruction as a limitrophic, “thickening” operation reads as a form of translation, as a displacement or relocation of philosophy onto

new “landing sites,” zones of stumbling progression and stammered or “curdling” enunciation. *Helen Keller or Arakawa* resurrects, for example, the word inspissation (Gins and Arakawa 1994: 204), imported from the Latin “*spissus*” (thick), akin to the French *épais* – in order to welcome “the thickness central to a sensibility.” Curdling or coalescing might aptly describe many lexical accretions or semi-solid, liquid-glass formations such as Gins and Arakawa’s “bioscleave,” “organism that persons,” “reversible destiny” or “elementary biotopology.” A thickening factor intervenes whenever the body acts as a body-double to language and shadows it or gum-shoes it, as it were: whenever “or,” for example, sits ambiguously halfway between a logical particle or discursive hinge and a body-related part: the mouth (*os, oris*, in Latin, as in orifice and oratory). At its most apparently abstract, such a language is at its most concrete. The concrete is what literally “grows” together, forming a concrescence or coalescence of mouths and receiving/emitting ends, an overriding of the “author” function by the reader/translator/“reador” function.

In and Out of the Alice Universe [13]

Helen Keller or Arakawa is “inside out” a translating book: a book both in and on translation, a reversible medium or assemblage involving literal trans-lation: displacements at top speed, hurled on the “sleigh” of “transleightion” whenever some line invites itself, shifting into the supra-linear, rhizoming mode. A snail’s pace, however, usually prevails.

An open conclusion to this reading of *Helen Keller or Arakawa* could be Lewis Carroll’s geometric narrative excerpted from *The Dynamics of a Particle* (1865):

“It was a lovely autumn evening, and the glorious effects of chromatic aberration were beginning to show themselves in the atmosphere as the earth evolved away from the great Western luminary, when two lines might have been observed wending their weary way across a plane superficies. The elder of the two had by long practice acquired the art, so painful to young and impulsive loci, of lying evenly between his extreme points; but the younger, in her girlish impetuosity, was ever longing to diverge and become a

hyperbola or some such romantic and boundless curve. They had lived and loved; fate and the intervening superficialities had hitherto kept them asunder, but this was no longer to be: a line had intersected them, making the two interior angles together less than two right angles. It was a moment never to be forgotten, and as they journeyed on a whisper thrilled along the superficialities in isochronous waves of sound: "Yes! We shall at length meet if continually produced." (Carroll 1996: 1016-1017)

"At length"? "Continually produced"? Aren't these at length the continually produced names-in-translation of a Madeline and a Gins?

Notes

[1] Arakawa and Gins 1988: 105.

[2] *Ibid.*, 103; see also Arakawa and Gins 1987: 8.

[3] Hereafter abbreviated to *KorA*.

[4] After numerous attempts, such as a (mistaken) "egociel," a neutral "je-ciel" or "ciel-de-je" (too close to "ciel-de-lit" or canopy in French) and an echoic but uncertain "bleu-du-je" (too close to Bataille's *Bleu du ciel*) the final choice turned out to be "aire-de-je" in which "aire" collapses "air" with "area" and recaptures "the area of I" found in Arakawa and Gins 1987: 36.

[5] "The weed exists only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas. It grows between, among others things" (Miller 1981: 53).

[6] In the Unicode phonetic alphabet, the engma symbol /ŋ/ used to figure the sound (a lowercase n with a protruding tails sliding to the left from the bottom right stem of the letter) might be said to translate, literally, the ideogrammatic shinnyu on which Chapter 26 on which *Helen Keller or Arakawa* rests.

[7] See Jean-Jacques Lecercle's article "ING" in the present issue of *Inflexions*.

[8] “Eve” both as name and syllable recurs in contemporary exchanges between French philosophers/writers Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, mostly in Derrida and Cixous “interdigitatings” (Gins and Arakawa 2006: 99) on the words “eve,” “rêve” and on the name of Cixous’s mother Eve; cf. below.

[9] Cf. Francis Bonahon, *Low-dimensional Geometry: From Euclidean Surfaces to Hyperbolic Knots*. Providence: American Mathematical Society, 2009.

[10] *Pour ne pas mourir*, trans. François Rosso. Other possibilities might include, in the tentative mode : *Pour n’être pas mort*, reverberating a possible « naître » (to be born), or the more colloquial: *Mourir jamais de la vie*.

[11] To translate “cleave,” however, another made-up verb, “colliver” has been preferred to “séparéunir.”

[12] Ulmer directs the reader to Jeffrey Kipnis’s then forthcoming *Choral Work*, (London: Architectural Association Publications), published since as *Chora L Work: Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida*. Ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leeser. New York: Monacelli Press. 1997.

[13] Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-orientable_wormhole: “In theoretical physics, an Alice universe is a hypothetical universe. What a Klein bottle is to a closed two-dimensional surface, an Alice universe is to a closed three-dimensional volume. An Alice universe can be considered to allow at least two topologically-distinct routes between any two points (it is doubly connected), and if one connection (or “handle”) is declared to be a “conventional” spatial connection, at least one other must be deemed to be a non-orientable wormhole connection. [...] As with a Möbius strip, once the two distinct connections have been made, we can no longer identify which connection is ‘normal’ and which is ‘reversed’ – the lack of a global definition for charge becomes a feature of the global geometry.”

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