

Arakawa and Madeline Gins
The Poetic Jump

Arts and Letters
September 26, 2026–February 7, 2027

Dear Arakawa and Madeline,

It's been almost a year since I woke up at the *Reversible Destiny Lofts* in Mitaka. All my conversations there turned to you, and as each day passed, I became fixated on the routines you inscribed in the space. The most startling discovery was what you call the loft's "sculpted, pliable closets," poles that I attached to the multicolored eye hooks you scattered across the ceiling, every day draping my clothes upon them to form a forest. It was this cascading form, somehow both alien and beloved, that made me believe I could follow your maxim and "learn how not to die."

During my stay at the loft, I followed as many of your "Directions for Use" as I felt able; I dismissed disbelief. In the middle of the night, I practiced #9 (*At least once a day, amble through the apartment in total darkness.*), my feet moving slowly over the uneven floor, arms outstretched to catch myself in case I fell. (I did!) That experience somehow made #12 possible (*Interact with the floor so as to produce sunlight.*). Producing sunlight, I discovered, was an affective orientation to my surroundings. Mornings were for #23 (*Use your loft's brightly colored shaped volumes to increase your ability to remember things and events.*); writing without direction in the bright yellow bowl-shaped room, memories appeared. I began to think of that space as the living room. "Living Room." I see why that phrase interested you. If you consider the words literally, they become a metaphor. Is that what you mean by #16 (*Treat each room as if it were you yourself, as if it were a direct extension of you.*)?¹

Sometimes I tell people that *Reversible Destiny* is a work of speculative fiction. Many have rightly interpreted it as a philosophical project, engaging with all manner of paradoxes related to metaphysics, epistemology, ontology, phenomenology, semiotics. Philosophy became the scaffolding for what you wanted to do: dissolve the subject and unmoor consciousness from the individual. God, how difficult it is not to get lost in words that hold far *too much* when I am thinking of you. This is a symptom. Freud identified the symptom as that which escapes repression, comparing it to "a foreign body which was keeping up a constant succession of stimuli and reactions in the tissue in which it was embedded."² You wanted to create art that does this, art that is stimulating, reactive, and embedded. Madeline, as you once wrote, a symptomatic art is one that can "nudge (us, the viewer) towards change."³ And wasn't it only after meeting each other that all this began to cohere? As if love can make visible the fear that lurks behind everything: the fear of death.

If this is true, then you were each other's opening to another story, one that could move backward. I am a bit surprised, Madeline, by how clearly you write about this in your essay "Towards the Fictional Contexts of Nonfiction." You describe Arakawa's paintings, his suggestions, and his kindness as what allowed you to transition away from the giant fiction of the "I." Arakawa, I find the same impulse in your painting *Name's Birthday (A Couple)* (1967). Part diagram, part floor plan of a bedroom, the painting brings us to what I imagine is the place where you both slept each night on Houston Street. In this intimate space, you thwart our expectation for words to communicate certainty. In one panel, words function as signs for things that exist in the real space of your bedroom. In the next, those signs are replaced by numbers without logic or consistency. What are we supposed to infer?

Out of frustration, I began to ignore this part of the painting and discovered that the rest of it displays the primary symbols from Plato's allegory of the cave: the shadows at the base, the celestial turning of the moon at the top, and the sun streaming in through the second window. You show us each phase of ignorance and truth. Your directive seems the same as Plato's: Question belief, embrace the unknown. Isn't that what the bedroom, where we dream and have sex, is for? For both of you, philosophical questions and the inhabited questions of life were one and the same.

At first, you were consumed with the question of meaning. Not long after you met in 1963, you began to work on your "exercise-joke" paintings, *The Mechanism of Meaning* (1963–71, 1978, 1988, 1996). Then, by the late 1980s, installations and architecture became the answer to your search for art that constantly stimulates and dislodges us, literally knocking us off balance. In all your projects, whatever form they took, you discovered that the artistic act produced a way of living that did not end. That's why we are with you today. Me the viewer. You the reader. It's the same process that allowed you, Madeline, to merge Arakawa with someone you both admired in your novel qua biography, *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994). Just another life.

If there's one thing I hope people will take from the exhibition, it's to learn from your search for experiences that undo. In the 1960s and '70s, you were part of a group of artists and poets who developed aesthetic strategies that could break down the separation between art and life. This is a sensibility art history sometimes labels "postmodern," meaning art that stages a collapse between subject and object, viewer and artwork. Might this be what love does? So much of your work makes me think of one of my favorite books, Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*. Through an almost endless parade of terms, he describes how the state of amorous reverie consumes language, creating a totalizing blankness. "To try to write love is to confront the *muck* of language: that region of hysteria where language is both *too much* and *too little*, excessive . . . and impoverished," Barthes writes.⁴ You understood that to love is to create meaning everywhere. It is also to lose meaning, discover nonsense, embrace reversibility. It is not a utopia, just a small everyday horizon of possibility.

One morning this past June, I walked by a couple saying their goodbyes outside Port Authority. They were both blind, and instead of the typical loving send-off we've learned to perform, they slowly touched their hands over each other's faces. Fingers grazed eyebrows, fell down to lips, swept sideways to ears. It was one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. I realized that your whole project existed in that moment. Your wordplay, your phenomenological investigations of life through diagrams, your humor, your firmly held belief that humans could overcome death—that was all born out of private moments I do not have access to. Your art is the residue of these moments. Love might be the only Reversible Destiny project we have. What other response is there to the incomprehensible brevity of existence?

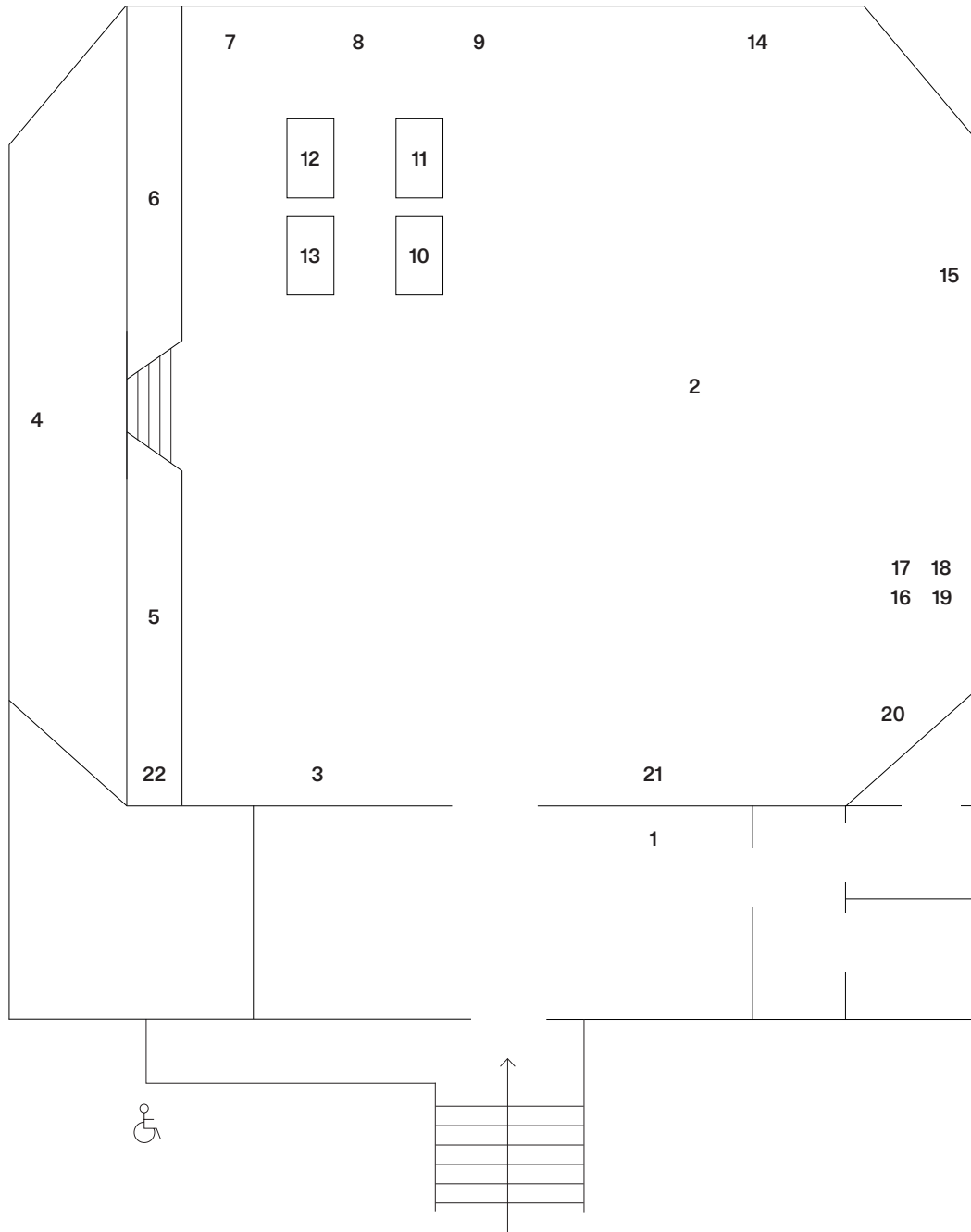
Yours in the *reversible destiny* mode,
Noa Wesley

1. Anyone who stays at the *Reversible Destiny Lofts—Mitaka (In Memory of Helen Keller)* is given "Directions for Use," a set of thirty-one cards with instructions Arakawa and Gins wrote to guide the loft's inhabitants.
2. Sigmund Freud, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XX (1925–1926)* (Hogarth Press, 1959), 98.
3. Madeline Gins wrote this phrase to describe the aims of her and Arakawa's collaborative suite of paintings, *The Mechanism of Meaning*, in "Towards Non-Fictional Contexts for Fiction," n.d. A readable copy of this manuscript can be found in the exhibition.
4. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 99.

Enter with Caution

This exhibition includes interactive structures: a dimly lit enclosed space with an uneven floor and sharp corners, a steeply inclined ramp with a slick surface, and an elevated platform without guardrails. You are responsible for evaluating your own risk and that of any minor in your care before proceeding. Please enter with caution and follow all posted signage and staff instructions.

Vestibule and North Gallery



1. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
From Mechanism of Meaning (Presentation of Ambiguous Zones of a Lemon), 1971
Acrylic and marker on canvas
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York

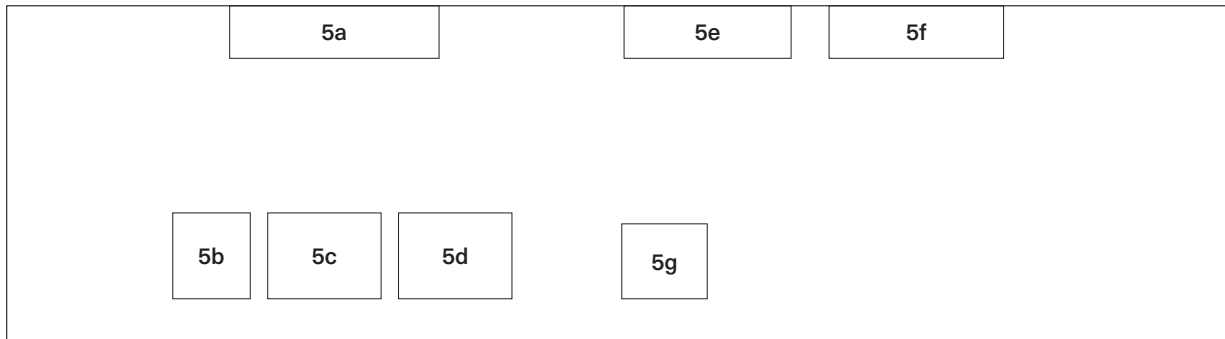
“Meaning,” Arakawa and Madeline Gins write, “might be thought of as the desire to think something—anything—through; the will to make sense out of the ever-present fog of not-quite knowing; the recognition of nonsense.” This expansive pursuit of meaning is what drove their longest collaboration, a suite of eighty paintings titled *The Mechanism of Meaning* (1963–71, 1978, 1988, 1996), which they began shortly after they met. This painting is related to one of the nineteen chapters that structured the project, *Presentations of Ambiguous Zones*, and shows, with their characteristic playfulness, how difficult it is to say what a lemon really is.
2. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Ubiquitous Site X, 1987–91/2026
Mixed media

By the late 1980s, Arakawa and Madeline Gins began to work in three-dimensional space, creating installations that trigger a heightened engagement of the senses. Like the permanent structures that would follow, their installations are designed to constantly challenge “the attitude of pursuing comfort blindly.” This installation, built for and exhibited in a retrospective of Arakawa’s work in Japan (*Constructing the Perceiver*, 1991), shares many characteristics with the duo’s architectural projects, including its bright colors and uneven terrain. In a poster for *Ubiquitous Site X*, Arakawa and Gins suggest that, when traversing the installation, “the forming of spacetime is so close you can almost smell it.”
3. Arakawa
Infant Mirror No. 2, 1988–89
Acrylic and pencil on canvas with mixed media panels mounted on ramp
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
4. Arakawa
Name’s Birthday (A Couple), 1967
Oil, acrylic, and pencil on canvas
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
7. Arakawa
Look at It, 1968–69
Photo emulsion, acrylic, and marker on linen
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
8. Arakawa
The Communicating Vases, 1964–65
Oil, acrylic, marker, pencil, colored pencil, and plastic sheeting on canvas
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
9. Arakawa
Explosion No. 2, 1968
Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
14. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Study for Perceptual Landing Sites (I), c. 1980s
Acrylic and pencil on paper

Arakawa and Madeline Gins believed that Helen Keller, who became a member of Arts and Letters in 1933, was a paradigm for what an artist must be; as a deaf-blind person, Keller had to wake up every day and remake the world. “She [had] to create the room, her shoes, her everything,” Gins once said. In this drawing, Keller’s silhouetted figure models how a landing site acts on the body so that “the self is constantly reborn.” The equation-like notation of this process mirrors poems Gins wrote in the late 1960s—just one illustration of Gins’s assertion that “poetry is the basis of all philosophical thought and all possibility of constructing life on any terms.”
15. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Drawing for Container of Perceiving (Museum of Place), 1984
Acrylic, pencil, and colored pencil on paper
16. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Screen-Valve, 1985–87
Graphite on paper
17. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Screen-Valve, 1985–87
Graphite and acrylic on paper
18. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Screen-Valve, 1985–87
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
19. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Screen-Valve, 1985–87
Graphite and silver marker on paper
20. Arakawa
Why Not (A Serenade of Eschatological Ecology), 1969
16mm film transferred to digital video, sound; 110 minutes

Written and directed by Arakawa
Narrative by Madeline Gins
Music by Toshi Ichiyanagi
21. Arakawa
NO! Says the Room, 1972
Acrylic, marker, and pencil on canvas
Courtesy of Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York and Castelli Gallery, New York
22. Madeline Gins
“Towards Non-Fictional Contexts for Fiction,” n.d.
Facsimile

Platform (left)



5a. Arakawa

X-Ray of a Diagram, 1969

Silk screen on mylar, artist proof

5f. Arakawa

Recipe (Taste It), 1968

Color silk screen on paper

5b. Madeline Gins

Word Rain (Or a Discursive

Introduction to the Philosophical

Investigations of G,R,E,T,A, G,A,R,B,O,

It Says), novel published by

Grossman Publishers, New York,

English edition, 1969

Collection of Alan Cravitz

and Shashi Caudill, Chicago

5g. Arakawa and Madeline Gins in front

of *Name's Birthday (A Couple)*, n.d.

Black-and-white photograph

5c. Madeline Gins

Word Rain (Or a Discursive

Introduction to the Philosophical

Investigations of G,R,E,T,A,

G,A,R,B,O, It Says), novel published

by Grossman Publishers, New York,

English edition, 1969

Hardcover book

5d. Arakawa

Look at It, 1968

Ink, pen, and collage on paper

5e. Arakawa and Madeline Gins

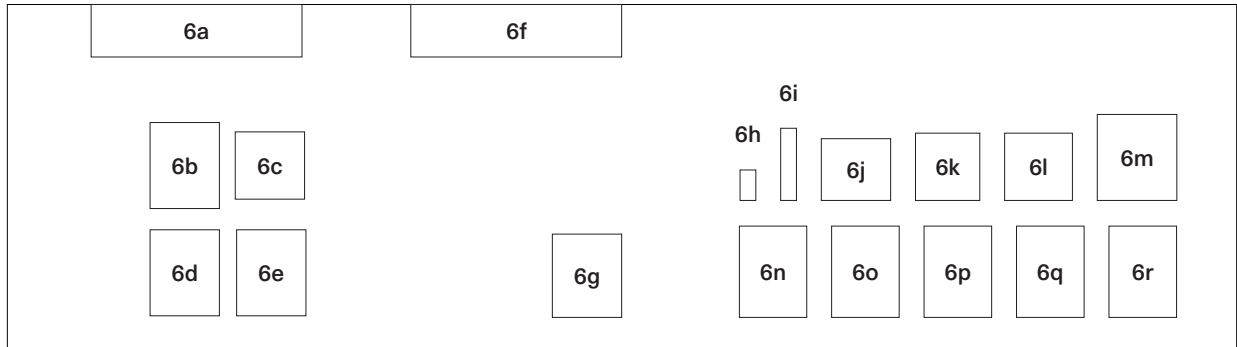
Poster for *Arakawa: Presence*

or the Third Person exhibition

at Dwan Gallery, 1967

Offset lithograph

Platform (right)



6a. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Drawing for Bridge of Reversible Destiny, 1989
Pencil and collage on vellum

6b. Portrait of Arakawa and Madeline Gins seated at a desk at 124 West Houston Street with *Reversible Destiny: Arakawa/Gins* (1997), 2000
Photo: Dimitris Yeros
Black-and-white photograph

6c. Portrait of Arakawa and Madeline Gins in front of posters and hats hanging at 124 West Houston Street, 1984. Photo: Hans Namuth
Color photograph

6d. Madeline Gins
"Reversible Destiny" unpublished poem, c. 1990s
Ink on paper

6e. Madeline Gins
Page from unpublished manuscript *Alive Forever, Not If, but When*, 2013
Ink on paper

6f. Arakawa
Untitled (To Madeline Gins), 1967
Oil on mirror

6g. Madeline Gins
"Birthday Poem for Arakawa," n.d.
Pen on paper

6h. Photo booth image of Madeline Gins and Arakawa, c. 1960s
Black-and-white photo booth photograph

6i. Photo booth strip of Madeline Gins and Arakawa, n.d.
Black-and-white photo booth photographs

6j. Arakawa and Madeline Gins sitting at the table at 124 West Houston Street, n.d.
Black-and-white photograph

6k. Madeline Gins walking through 124 West Houston Street with a cutout of Arakawa, n.d. Photo: Terrance McCrary
Black-and-white photograph

6l. Madeline Gins and Arakawa at a temple in Kyoto, 1979
Black-and-white photograph

6m. Madeline Gins and Arakawa in front of the poster $A + B = C$, n.d.
Black-and-white photograph

6n. Madeline Gins
"Untitled," n.d.
Ink and silver pen on paper

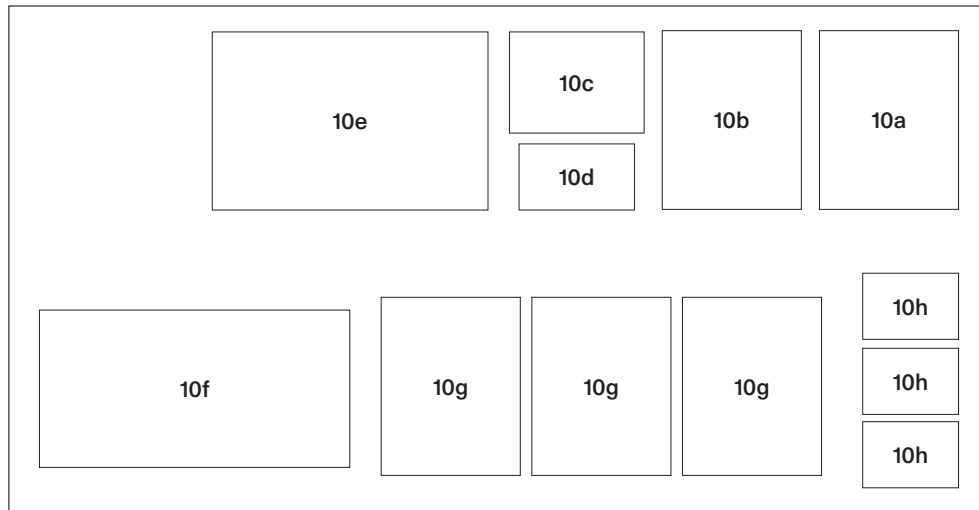
6o. Arakawa or Madeline Gins
"Note to Madeline," n.d.
Ink on paper

6p. Madeline Gins
"How Do I Love Thee," n.d.
Ink on paper

6q. Madeline Gins
"To Arakawa," n.d.
Ink on paper

6r. Madeline Gins
"The Expression of Anger," n.d.
Ink on paper

MISTAKE



Sometime after Arakawa completed the 1969 film *Why Not (A Serenade of Eschatological Ecology)*, an early collaboration with Madeline Gins, he penned a manifesto-like text titled “On Everything and Film: Why Not.” A reflection on his work, its reception, and the role of the artist, the text begins provocatively with the declaration, “History is a mistake.” His answer to that statement is not exactly to correct the mistake of history but to use art to envision a society that “begins to make sense (or purposeful nonsense) [in which] I will fit anywhere and everyone will fit in art.” He continues, “Why not try. Why not try everything.” The eerie and erotic film, set in the couple’s apartment in New York, is just one example of what “why not” might look like: A study of death or the end of all things.

The word *mistake* appeared as a motif in Arakawa’s paintings as early as 1965 and would continue to be used throughout his oeuvre. In the announcement for his 1969 exhibition at Dwan Gallery in New York, he refers to all of his paintings as “Mistakes for Sale.” During that show, a painting bearing the inscription “IF POSSIBLE STEAL ANY ONE OF THESE DRAWINGS INCLUDING THIS SENTENCE” was stolen by a group of Rutgers students. Although Arakawa never imagined the painting would actually be stolen, these “accidental collaborators” (i.e., mistaken ones) added meaning to the work, just as Arakawa and Gins believed any “mistake” would do. Gins

practiced this in her poetry by using an *X* or ~~crossing out~~ words to leave a visible residue of the mistake on the page. As Gins and Arakawa both knew well, our lives are full of mistakes. When brought into focus, a mistake reveals our thinking process. Creating a “mistake” in art was a way for the duo to try everything.

10a. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Script for the uncompleted film
The Grand Mistake, c. 1970s
Printed matter

10b. Madeline Gins
“Secret,” n.d.
Ink on paper

10c. Invitation card for Arakawa’s
exhibition at Galerie van de Loo,
Munich, 1972
Printed matter

10d. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
in front of *Sculpting* (1971), n.d.
Black-and-white photograph

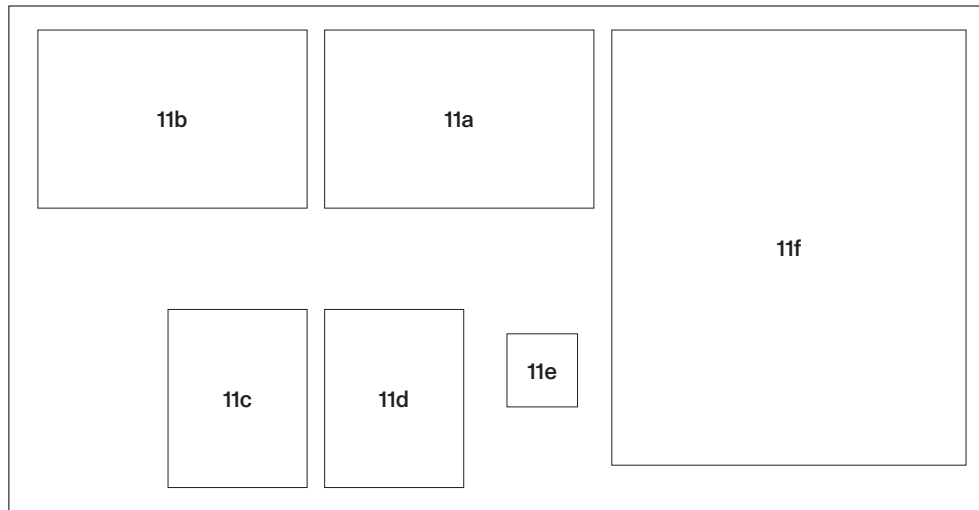
10e. Kathe Gregory, Marilyn Landis,
Russel F. Lewis, David Crane,
and Scott R. Kahn
Stolen, artist’s book published by
Color Lithographers, Dwan Gallery,
and Multiples, Inc., New York, 1970
Softcover book

10f. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
The Mechanism of Meaning
(*Work in Progress, 1963–1971*), artist’s
book published by Bruckmann
Verlag, Munich, special edition, 1971
Hardcover book

10g. Arakawa
“On Everything and Film: Why Not,”
n.d.
Three typescript manuscript pages

10h. Film stills from *Why Not (A Serenade of Eschatological Ecology)*, c. 1969
Three black-and-white photographs

STREET WORKS



In 1969, a group of artists and poets in New York—the core members being Vito Acconci, Scott Burton, Eduardo Costa, Bernadette Mayer, John Perreault, Marjorie Strider, and Hannah Weiner—got together to stage actions in the street. There were five editions of *Street Works*, with an expansive roster of participants who agreed that, as Perreault put it, “the street could be both the context and content for art that was ephemeral, dematerialized, and not easily commercialized.” Many of the actions were quite quotidian: Hannah Weiner waited to meet Hannah Weiner, a psychotherapist she found in the phone book; Acconci picked a random person on the street and followed them until they entered a building (*Following Piece* [1969]); Anne Waldman roller-skated down Fifth Avenue giving out poems; Burton dressed as a woman and nobody noticed; Lil Picard bought some people beer at a bar.

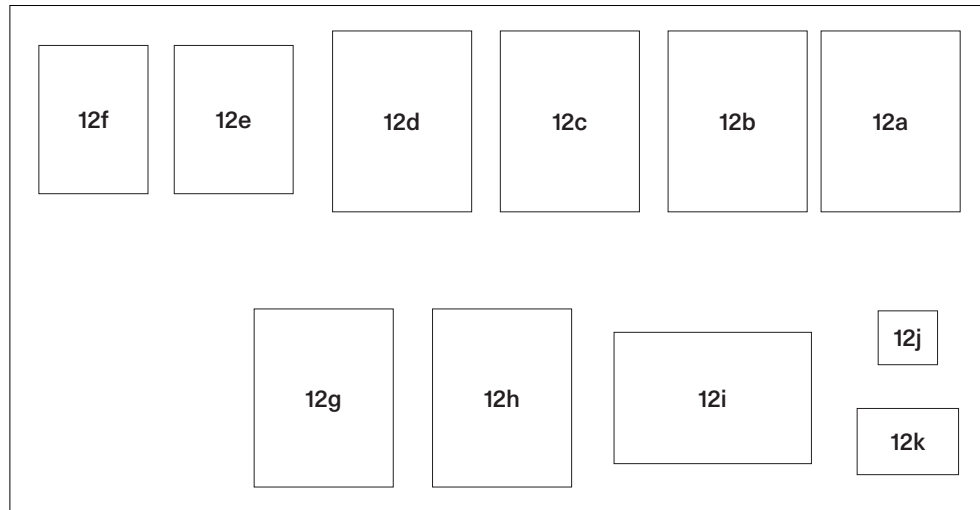
Most of the *Street Works* were not documented. The best record of these events can be found in a supplement to an issue of *0 to 9*, a publication Mayer and Acconci created for the collision of minimalism, conceptual art, and poetry. The supplement includes documentation of one of Arakawa’s diagrams of a house, painted on a plastic sheet and placed on the street, and Madeline Gins’s fill-in-the-blank solicitation for her *Group Novel*, which she describes as “an exploration of the nature of consciousness.”

Records indicate that Arakawa participated in all five *Street Works* and Gins in at least two, though accounts of what was planned and what actually happened remain foggy. For instance, Arakawa planned to create a replica of the Empire State Building for *Street Works IV*. However, Perreault’s report of this event describes an action the couple staged from a parked car, beckoning to passersby to give them folded white handkerchiefs.

- 11a. Documentation of Arakawa’s *Street Works* performance in “Street Works Supplement,” *0 to 9*, no. 6, edited by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, 1969
Staple-bound mimeographed booklet
Collection of Alan Cravitz and Shashi Caudill, Chicago
- 11b. Documentation of Madeline Gins’s *Group Novel* performance for *Street Works*, in “Street Works Supplement,” *0 to 9*, no. 6, edited by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, 1969
Two photocopied pages, facsimile
Permission of the Estate of John Perreault
- 11c. Flyer for *Street Works I*, addressed to La Monte Young, 1969
Printed matter
Collection of Alan Cravitz and Shashi Caudill, Chicago

- 11d. Press release for *Street Works IV* with “A Statement by the Coordinators” by Hannah Weiner, Marjorie Strider, and John Perreault, 1969
Printed matter
Collection of Alan Cravitz and Shashi Caudill, Chicago
- 11e. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Material from *Street Works IV* performance, 1969
Handkerchief, exhibition copy
- 11f. Poster for *Street Works IV*, 1969
Printed matter
Collection of Alan Cravitz and Shashi Caudill, Chicago

BLANK



Arakawa and Madeline Gins liked “to leave blanks” in their projects. It was a mode of working that invited participation. They began to use the term *Blank* in the late 1960s, though efforts to stage its characteristics of incompleteness and emptiness appeared even earlier, such as in Gins’s fill-in-the-blank poems or Arakawa’s telegrammed statement on the open-ended nature of his paintings.

By 1977, the duo had developed Blank into a theory of consciousness. That year, the couple published “Properties of Blank” in an issue of the French art and literary magazine *Derrière le Miroir* devoted to a suite of Arakawa’s *Blank* paintings. Their text, dominated by a series of quotes from philosophers, writers, and scientists, names Blank as “a station for our senses.” Neither a void nor a tabula rasa, “[Blank] is what fills emptiness,” a process, they tell us, analogous to the formation of the subject. The magazine’s back cover displays a graphic drawing by Arakawa that diagrams his and Gins’s belief that Blank, the nonaction of self-understanding, arises out of some combination of “feeling and thinking.” The arrows moving through an overlaid outline of a heart and brain illustrate a selected quotation by the German philosopher Hermann Lotze: “They (individual souls) are gifted with the strange capacity, which no knowledge can further explain, of feeling and knowing themselves as active centers

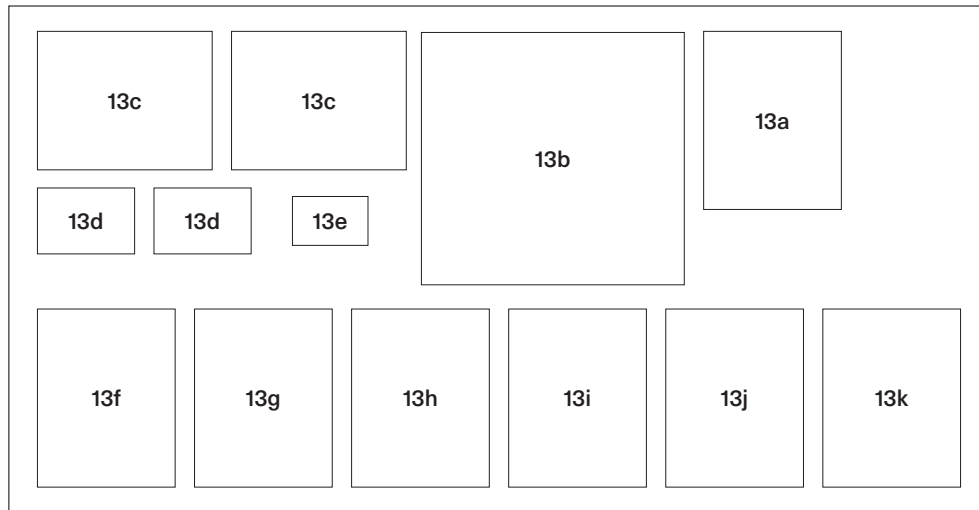
of a life which goes out from them.” That is Blank. That is existence.

These philosophies of Blank informed the couple’s Reversible Destiny Architecture. They posited that places of dislocation and surprise could allow humans to become conscious of Blank, or the indefiniteness of being. For Gins, Blank also developed into an experimental mode of fictionalized biography in which the subject was no longer unitary or coherent, as in “Brief Autobiography of a Non-Existent,” a text in her book *What the President Will Say and Do!!* (1984), and *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994).

- 12a. Arakawa
Back cover of *Arakawa: Derrière Le Miroir*, no. 223, published by Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1977
Softcover book
- 12b. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
“Properties of Blank,” in *Arakawa: Derrière Le Miroir*, no. 223, published by Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1977
Softcover book
- 12c. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Page from text about “Blank,” n.d.
Pen on paper
- 12d. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Text about “Blank,” n.d.
Ink on paper

- 12e. Madeline Gins
Helen Keller or Arakawa, novel published by Burning Books, Santa Fe, English edition, 1994
Hardcover book
- 12f. Madeline Gins
Helen Keller or Arakawa, novel published by Shinshokan, Tokyo, Japanese edition, 2010
Hardcover book
- 12g. Madeline Gins
Poem beginning “Only on paper like this do...,” n.d.
Ink on paper
- 12h. Madeline Gins
“ANYTHING SPECIFICALLY,” 1968
Ink on paper
- 12i. Madeline Gins
“Brief Autobiography of a Non-Existent,” in *What the President Will Say and Do!!*, book published by Station Hill Press, New York, 1984
Hardcover book
- 12j. Madeline Gins
International Identity Cards, c. October 2001
Printed matter
- 12k. Invitation card for *Arakawa* at Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1964
Printed matter

CLEAVE



Much of Madeline Gins's poetry has a funny way of making words fall apart by sticking them together. Take "CREASE GREASE," one of her list poems, in which phrases like "NIBBLED REFLECTIONS" and "REVERSED SWALLOW" join two words in somewhat nonsensical ways to produce a surprising image or physical sensation. This approach models Arakawa and Gins's expansive use of the term *cleave*, which became a key concept in much of their work, including *The Mechanism of Meaning* and their architectural projects. They embraced *cleave* because it is a contronym, a word that contains two opposing meanings; it means both "to split or divide" and "to stick or cling." When you read Gins's poetry or gaze at Arakawa's contradictory paintings, you find *cleave* in action. They seemed to want to fashion the whole world as a contronym, as if living itself could become a word with two meanings.

In 2008, they completed *Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)*, a residential building located in East Hampton, New York. One of the six architectural projects they constructed in the United States and Japan, the house, as their playful press release announces, was meant to cause "ubiquitous incessant cleaving on an enormous number of scales of action." The name of the house makes use of a new term, *bioscleave*, which they introduced in their book *Architectural Body* (2002) to describe an

environment structured by perpetual tentativeness and reinvention. To reverse aging with architecture, they made wordplay a physical procedure. In their buildings and installations, your whole body is meant to move lightly and realize the pun. It is why their constructions look like playgrounds: Living forever, like smashing words together, is child's play.

13a. Madeline Gins
"Cleaving," n.d.
Ink on paper

13b. Arakawa and Madeline Gins
Untitled, n.d.
Twenty-four flash cards with typed text from a set of forty-two

13c. Press release and promotional materials for *Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)*, 2008
Two printed pages

13d. Postcards with renderings of *Bioscleave House (Lifespan Extending Villa)*, 1999
Printed matter

13e. Madeline Gins's business card for the Reversible Destiny Foundation, c. 1990s–2000s
Printed matter

13f. Madeline Gins
Poem beginning "AFFECT IS ALWAYS IN BLUE....," n.d.
Ink on paper

13g. Arakawa
Is as It, n.d.
Pen on paper

13h. Madeline Gins
"Good Afternoon, Poetics," n.d.
Ink and pen on paper

13i. Madeline Gins
"CREASE GREASE," n.d.
Ink on paper

13j. Madeline Gins
"THE GEOMETRIC PUSH," n.d.
Ink on paper

13k. Madeline Gins
"TO CLEAVE— TO THINK— TO NAME," n.d.
Ink and pen on paper

Unless otherwise noted, works are courtesy of the Reversible Destiny Foundation, New York

Arakawa (b. 1936, Nagoya, Japan; d. 2010, New York, NY) first began drawing as a child after his neighbor, an artist who was married to a doctor, told him it was essential to his dream of becoming a physician. This early study allowed Arakawa to move to Tokyo in the mid-1950s for a short stint at art school. After dropping out, he became a key participant in the Japanese avant-garde, including the politically radical art collective known as the Neo-Dada Organizers, which staged exhibitions, performances, and protests. He rose to prominence in that milieu with his coffin-shaped *Kan'oke* sculptures, works that resonated powerfully in post-Hiroshima Japan. Around this time, Arakawa decided he would live forever, and the influential poet and art critic Shūzō Takiguchi encouraged him to move to New York to meet Marcel Duchamp and discuss his ideas. Arakawa arrived in New York in 1961 with little money, a book of Stéphane Mallarmé's poetry, and Duchamp's phone number. With Duchamp's friendship, he quickly became enmeshed in the New York avant-garde and began exhibiting his "diagram paintings" with Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf and with Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles and New York. In 1962, he met Madeline Gins at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, and the pair began a lifelong personal and creative partnership. Arakawa exhibited panels from *The Mechanism of Meaning* (1963–71, 1978, 1988, 1996), a large suite of paintings he started developing with Gins shortly after they met, at the Japan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1970) and Documenta 6 (1977), among other exhibitions. In the 1980s, Arakawa and Gins turned their attention toward architecture, and his paintings took on an increasingly environmental character with floor components that required the viewer to engage their entire body. In the remaining decades of his life, he devoted himself to "procedural architecture" and worked with Gins to complete six permanent sites in Japan and the United States where one could "learn how not to die."

Madeline Gins (b. 1941, New York, NY; d. 2014, New York, NY) grew up in a small village on Long Island that was shaped by the influx of young families who moved there after World War II. At eighteen, she moved to New York City to attend Barnard College, where she studied East Asian art and religion and completed a thesis on the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness. In 1962, she met Arakawa at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, and the pair began a lifelong personal and creative partnership. Their collaboration started with *The Mechanism of Meaning* (1963–71, 1978, 1988, 1996), though they also created films and performances during their first decade together. In 1969, Gins published *Word Rain (Or a Discursive Introduction to the Philosophical Investigations of G,R,E,T,A, G,A,R,B,O, It Says)*, an experimental novel in which an unnamed woman sits and reads a manuscript in her friend's apartment. She went on to publish two other experimental books—*What the President Will Say and Do!!* (1984) and *Helen Keller or Arakawa* (1994)—that demonstrated her idea that an essay could be fiction and fiction could be poetry. In the 1980s, Gins and Arakawa shifted their focus to architecture, and her writing became more philosophical as the duo developed their theory of "procedural architecture." Many of Gins's collaborations with Arakawa were exhibited under her husband's name, and their first coauthored exhibition was held at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York, where they created a labyrinthine installation that visitors navigated in total darkness (*Stuttering God*, 1990). With Arakawa, Gins created six permanent architectural sites in Japan and the United States where one could "learn how not to die." After Arakawa's death, Gins remained committed to their Reversible Destiny project, completing the unpublished manuscript *Alive Forever, Not If, but When* and an installation at Dover Street Market in New York (*Biotopological Scale-Juggling Escalator*, 2013).

Arakawa and Madeline Gins: The Poetic Jump is curated by Noa Wesley, Assistant Curator.

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