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Marie-Dominique Garnier



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Salience and Blindness: A Haptic Hike on Gins Mountain

A Reading of Madeline Gins's *Helen Keller or Arakawa*

Marie-Dominique Garnier

“What are mountains? (...) As I walk them they
walk me.”

Helen Keller Or Arakawa¹

- ¹ In 1994 Madeline Gins published an essay enigmatically titled *Helen Keller Or Arakawa*, linking two names in a transbiographical chain, in disregard of identities and of the assumed non-exchangeability of the proper. The first of these names, the American deaf and blind author, lecturer and activist Helen Keller, famous for having met in her lifetime Mark Twain, Thomas Edison and John Kennedy², is regrettably almost totally ignored in the French speaking world, where only one of her books has been translated in a publication destined to younger audiences³. The second name, the painter and architect Arakawa who emigrated from Japan to New York in 1963 and, in partnership with Madeline Gins, conceived and built lofts in Mitaka⁴, an architectural park in Yoro (Japan) and Bioscleave House in Long Island, is even less known, as are his paintings and his written works, only partially translated and presented in specialized contributions earmarked as philosophy and aesthetics rather than as textbooks taught in architecture departments. As yet untranslated in French⁵, this essay is, however, riveted to a translating principle: it seeks to transmit or get across into the language of the sighted an alternatively perceived world, premised on the alternative form of perception shared by an artist and a blind woman. The two names in the title of the essay compose a series, a chain of individuals implying a transgeneric, cross-gender, transcultural and transhistorical approach, as well as an encounter between sight deprivation and its opposite – the hyper-sight or far-sight of an artist. Perceptual capture no longer presupposes a subject versus object-world binary, nor does it grant any value to the metaphor of the “environment”, which stages a controlling subject at the centre of an implicit circle. Seen through Helen Keller’s blind point of “view” as well as from Arakawa’s angle, whose paintings and perceptive mode involve the concept of “blankness” (a term to which I shall return), salience constitutes a key

notion on more than one score, relevant not only to language and the ecology of dwelling and walking, but also to the mere condition of being alive, as a fact and factor of bare life. The alter-perception developed in such a text entails, so to speak, an alter-textuality, an “embossed” or relief map of writing which cannot make sense or give “rise” to sense unless reading becomes an active procedure, a practice involving, for example, the projection and reconstruction of geomorphisms inaccessible to the blinded subject – as well as to anyone “in the blind”, readers included. Madeline Gins literally makes a “mountain” of what she has to say and to write.

- 2 *Helen Keller Or Arakawa* was published at the juncture of two salient moments in Gins and Arakawa’s artistic, poetic and architectural production. The essay follows the illustrated art-science research project of *The Mechanim of Meaning* (1963-1973) which addressed codes of perceptual automaticity and questioned the way meaning sallies forth, and the architectural project of *Reversible Destiny* (1990-2010). Through architecture, Arakawa and Gins seek to involve the body and to renew the perceiving subject, to rescue it from subjectivity and its hegemonic position in an environment, a term to which they have substituted the more diffuse, atmospheric and a-centric term “surround”. The subject, in this novel approach, is rephrased as the “architectural body”⁶ and its relation to the outside rethought in terms of “bioscleave”⁷, a term which insists on a continuum, “within” which a body ceases to be perceived as independent from what is “around”. Bioscleave implies a post-identitarian ecology, already at work in their first manifesto: “No More Passive Reading. No Identities Hold. Neutralize Subjectivity. Ego Drowns”⁸. It should be noted that the notion of “cleaving”, subsumed within what they call “bioscleave”, must be taken to imply a severing as much as a gathering or pasting. Semantically reversible, the verb is a tool for traversing or straddling binary oppositions.
- 3 It is as a deaf and blind locutor that Helen Keller, recreated by Madeline Gins, introduces the notion of “pointed surround” to refer to mountains. Unseen, perceived as dense but blank, the mountains constitute a backdrop against which a salient line of thinking and writing can be followed. In such a frame of thought terms such as “backdrop” cease to be of any avail – and so does the term “frame”. A “blank” mountain or generic, invisible Mount Blank, in Gins’s writing, remains to be captured from a non-oculocentric perspective. Like Arakawa’s bottomless, background-free, blank paintings, the “blank” vision of a blind person calls for a non-optic, haptic reconstruction by a writing based on relief, elevation or projection from a plane surface. A relief can be envisaged as a building block, but also as a fracturing point from which to question every single representation-oriented term – terms still current, for example, within “non-representational theory”⁹ and its assumptions. In the many obstacles to reading disseminated across Gins’s text, such as, for example, the use of reversible gerunds, of auxiliaries invented as substitutes for “to be”, deemed inadequate; of a bevy of Japanese terms graphically conveying the semantics of displacement, built on the shinnyu radical 止, or of a long list of th- words imported from Old English as purveyors of tactile effects, the linguistic notion of saliency takes on a new “relief”, a word to be taken both as a formal, spatial projection and as a remain, a remainder, a residuum stubbornly resisting categorisation and annexation. Revised in the blind, revised in a blurred context in which landscape and writing, blind and hyper-perceiving subjects overlap, in which the graphic encounters the geo- in the haptic mode, saliency is reinterrogated and thought afresh. Imaged in Gins’s writing,

Keller becomes a builder of “sites” (a phonetic and conceptual substitute for sight), in which mountains constitute a portable case-study: how does a blind person perceive mountains, without resorting to a language seeped in oculocentric frames of thinking? How does blindness affect the concept of salience? What salient sensorial asperities accompany the reading of a space perceived or felt as traversing rather than circling the subject? The salient elements in Madeline Gins’s orography are part of a haptic composition where binary oppositions have ceased to operate, where foreground/background, ground/figure no longer apply, nor any of the metaphors imported from the seeing world. As early as the book’s first paragraph, the concept of form is disavowed in one sentence in which is inscribed the loss of formal guidelines: “Form rubs its antlers against trees of not much”. Form, abstract as much as animalized, is literally rubbing its non-antlers to non-trees. Readers will be baffled by the reanimation of the inanimate, as by its syntax, free of articles. Life and abstraction find themselves conjoined in a continuum, in a “cleaving” world built on what is “separeunited”¹⁰.

- 4 For the sake of “clarity”, this essay on “Gins Mountain” follows a pattern which runs against the grain of the book itself. It begins by locating and analyzing the main passages in which mountains “appear”, before questioning their relation to the concept of salience in linguistics. The next two parts address the stylistic production of “micro-saliences” in the context of the blind perception of Helen Keller on the one hand, and, on other, of William Prescott – the blind cartographer whose relief mapping of the Andes cordillera appears in Madeline Gins’s text together with other quotations by blind authors¹¹. The last part attempts to think afresh the concept of salience in terms of “failience”, understood as a serendipitous bifurcation or fertile failure, a mobile line rather than a static point or dot, a faultline, a slopeline.

Landscapes without a view

- 5 *Helen Keller or Arakawa* invents a new tongue in its very title. By definition a title constitutes a salient element, a line of sight or a focal point engineered to draw hands or eyes. But this title plays against type and requires to be explored as an early step towards identifying forms of salience or micro-salience which no longer pertain to a local, static approach, but respond to a mobile, line-oriented way of thinking. First, the alignment or serialization of two proper names through the adverb “or” breaks away with the logic of proper names, which are, by definition, non-permutable. A second disorienting feature rests on that particle “or” which keeps returning in the book, for example in the chapter title “Or Mountains Or Lines”, and again, later in the book, in the form of an invasive particle which colonizes the entire phonetic texture of the last chapter, filled with or-sounding words used to reconstruct the sound of breaking surf on a “talking” beach¹². Readers are confronted to a loss of orientation from the very first gesture of opening the book, as the name of Arakawa appears on the back of the cover, as if to inverse the direction of reading from right to left: *Arakawa or Helen Keller*. The salient element in the title, the “or” pivot, reads at once as a minor detail and as the cornerstone of the book’s entire logic, of its evening-out principle of equivalence and permutability. The exchangeability of onomastic (and, later, spatial) polarities finds its temporal echo in the fact that Keller and Arakawa never belonged to the same time or space. The second opening paragraph confirms the putting in place of a new

form of contemporaneousness, premised on a supple time scheme which refuses to follow calendar-time:

I was definitely born on July 6, 1936, or it may have been June 27, 1880, or was it actually November 7, 1941?¹³

- 6 Dates, here, are not being levelled out, evened out of existence, but reinscribed as salient points in a series according to a distributive, accretive principle.
- 7 The use of “or” generates a new language economy in which names retain supple boundary-lines and deliver their “affordances” or projected contours, to borrow James Gibson’s term¹⁴. Gins’s or-bound, or-oriented writing founds, as it were, a novel orography, backed up on orography in the classic sense, on condition one gives the particle “or” enough leeway to travel across languages – through English, Greek (ὄρος, hill or mountain), and, punningly, French (or, gold). Thinking serially, in terms of singularities allows for a new chain of thoughts, a mountainous chain. The “o” pivot is the cornerstone on which is built Chapter 16 “Or Mountains Or Lines”, in which real mountains are referenced and introduced in the context of their perception by blind subjects. “Or”, in this chapter, operates as a pass, as a saddle-point, in other words as both hollowed out and brought into relief, as a relieved and relieving, metastable particle which gains prominence by its ability to introduce in language the scandal of reversibility. The “or” touching the proper name performs both as a salient zone and as a break-up point, as a collapse of the onomastic system and of identity-based logic. Here is a “chain” of people, individuals and yet non-individuals, trans-individuals. This title begs for a rethinking of the subject as a multiplicity, or, in other words, as a range or ridge. Four chapters in the book bear specifically on mountains: “See-Through Landscape”, the narrative of a mountain hike in the Scottish Highlands; “Or Mountains or Lines”; “Off the Mountains onto Crowded Vacancies”, and “The Texture of Distance at Point-blank” – the last two, less descriptive and more allusive, will not be considered in what follows.
- 8 In the first of these, the mountain range of the Cuillin in the Isle of Skye, in particular the Sgurr Dearg, gives the text its matter-of-fact, concrete setting. In it takes place a pedagogical exercise, a conversation intended to teach blind Helen, and for that matter any non-informed reader, why the sky is blue. The mountain and its rarefied air provide an apt decorum in which to deliver a lecture in particle physics and to explain which wave length is reflected by this or that molecule or positron. But what is being developed in these pages is, above all, a theory of the “non-figure”, adapted to the blind condition which Helen Keller shares with readers lacking expertise in physics. One finds, in particular, a critique of gestaltism:

The figure, it is agreed upon, is there when a form takes stable shape in front of a ground, but the non-figure – this was to replace gradually all figure – or nearly – would not be the opposite of shape or form: it would not be an uncertain chaos in which one would find one’s self submerged in an agitated disorder. The non-figure would be elsewhere. To desire a different order of congruence out beyond the signs¹⁵.
- 9 Parts of the narrative are drawn from Keller’s own writings, interspersed with excerpts from *The Moon Endureth* by John Buchan. After being taught some physics (digitally, through a series of taps in the palm of her hand), Keller-the-character perceives the blue of sky on her own terms: “to all my extremities I sent shore-lapping accuracies of sky. I was putting the sky in place”¹⁶. In this chapter, as in Chapter I titled “Thinking Field”, thinking must be seized through an “environment” or a “thinking field” rather

than through a thinking subject: “thinking” belongs to the long list of reversible gerunds (both passive and active) in Gins’s essay. Such a use of the gerund constitutes a locus of syntactic saliency, a saddle point of reversibility through which the opposite polarities of subject and object are no longer available for distinction.

- 10 The second chapter in which the perception of mountains in the blind is addressed is largely devoted to a trail narrative by Helen Keller and her companion Ann Sullivan, and more specifically to the words they choose to describe peaks, “imaged” in a strange phrase by Keller, a phrase in which clouds, compared to upside down flowers, caress the mountain tops. One word (“cap”), followed by the verb “to cap off”, serves as an elemental building block in the production of the whole range. The construction, Keller argues, requires what she terms “effusion”, a landscape being for her (and by extension, for us) inaccessible without affect, without trading in affects. Conversely, an affect reads as a landscape: “the perceptions and feelings of others stand out for me as amongst the strongest landscapes I’ll ever know”. The paradoxical language Gins invents for her blind character follows a ridgeline between impossible notions: effusion, abstraction. Like a painting by Arakawa, a mountain is made up of “blankness” and lines: “consider ‘mountain’ as the limit case of vertical accretion, or the capping off of verticality”¹⁷. The same vagueness is used to express the perception of distance by the blind: “In the blind, either there’s no distance or all of distance (...) Distance forms as vaporous, horizontally projected-out mountains”¹⁸. Distances are flattened out mountains, pertaining to an inexact or “vaporous” geometry – to a surround. The entire chapter harbours a systematic typographic enhancement, to which I shall return: every single « in », whether prepositional or adverbial, is italicized. From one “in” to the next, doubt sets in as to where exactly the container, the place or the inside, if any, are located. What sallies forth in italics has truck and trade with hollowness, the bottomlessness of meaning. Every “in” is spatially built as a combination of geometry and effusion.
- 11 What follows from this initial survey is that such a text challenges a number of assumptions about saliency. Its definition by Gilles Col, for example, as a general “mechanism” at work “in human cognition, like categorization, perceptual invariance, gestaltist compositionality or hierarchical sequential composition”¹⁹ proves inapplicable here. Any “hierarchical” or gestaltist approach which posits the emergence of an object against a background involves a binary conceptual frame: foreground versus background, top versus bottom, which is of no avail in the context of impaired sight.
- 12 Gins’s essay is an invitation to revisit saliency by taking into consideration the other half of its etymology, in which it turns out to be a close relative of *salire* and the saltatorial: of leaping, jumping. Etymologically, saliency leaps: its propensity to sally/to jet forth may apply equally well to a strongly beating pulse, to a salient point in mathematics, to what erupts or, in architecture, projects or dovetails. In French as in Latin, the noun points to two verbs: *sailier/saillir*, and *salire/saltare*, which tend to blur the edges of the notion and render it labile. As shown in a terminological study by Catherine Schnedeker, the “variable geometry” of the term makes it straddle several domains of application – cognition, linguistics, and the “real” – to the effect that the notion becomes “loose”²⁰. System failure of a concept? The same article pursues its inquiry following in the tracks of Frédéric Landragin who approaches the opposition “ground/figure” as “related to a specific philosophical conception”, namely that of

“Gestalt”, usually translated as “form”. But what one reads in the open-ended concluding sentence invalidates the previous oppositional reading grid:

It seems difficult (to us) to determine the figure/ground oppositions at work here in a consistent way, so intricate are the ins and out of salience taken in its aforementioned narrow sense, so entangled salience is with every other opposition under consideration.²¹

- 13 One of the assumptions of gestaltism that “a figure is always perceived against a background”²² cannot be received from a Keller-Gins “viewpoint”, which rests on another definition of non-visual perception and does not validate a top-down appraisal of situations. No barrier separates the oppositions valid in the seeing world: near and far, thick and thin, left and right... In a chapter devoted to Keller’s fictive of what she experienced as the spectator of a play, where everything is a matter of mental reconstruction, Gins resorts to a singular touch-tongue, to a language that seeks to level out and dismiss gaps in order to recreate, for the reader, the strangeness of a world devoid of visual beacons, a world without ground or figure. When Keller-Gins goes to the theatre, the “ground” or “background” glides forward at the speed of a play on word: “[it] comes back around (...) fully the center of my forming”: the background has moved “back around”, so as to position itself at the “center of forming”, which differs from a center – the center of my forming being a decentered word formation, branching out into two opposite acceptations, passive and active, of the -ing form. What becomes a salience, a form of readability, must be constructed by a forming subject, a subject who produces as much as he/she is produced by its milieu. The foreground can hardly be distinguished from the body of the observer: “Foreground wants to draw near to forehead (...) It is in front of me. It is the front of me. These are distinctions I have to work very hard to make”²³. Devoid of any salient visual point, devoid of form and gestalt, this non-“sighted” world is not however devoid of perceiving; it craves for forming-salience, such as the raised dots of Braille, the use of italics or of unstable gerunds: elements which Gins’s writing invites into language as so many lexical, syntactic and graphic singularities. In this phenomenology of a novel kind, subject to the condition of deafness and blindness, other points of salience emerge for which the figure/ground opposition is no longer relevant. Mountains, in this phenomenology, perform as “forming blank”: blankness takes shape in the very process of shaping the observer.
- 14 Mountains beg to be paradoxically addressed, therefore, as complications or perturbations of the salient model: in other words as cases enabling the reformulation of salience into its body-double – here termed “failience”: the failure or collapse of procedures of referential stabilisation in discourse, the introduction of scale changes, as, for example, in the case of the “mountain” of Reversible Destiny at Yoro Park, Japan (to which I shall return in conclusion). Uneven, bumpy floors and the concomitant unbalancing of bodies are some of the more tangible effects of Arakawa-Gins’s architecture, whose “architectural bodies” are prompted to trip and fall from one salient point to the next. “Blank”, one of the more salient terms in Gins’s essay, applies both to the “void” of Arakawa’s painting and to its opposite, the darkness of blind Keller (a “blank” screen for example, translates as “écran noir” in French). The book’s succession of chapters composes a non-chronological series layered like a labile collection of “plateaus”²⁴, with scenes lifted from the life of Helen Keller (her mountain hikes, her trips to Japan, the narrative of how she acquired language, her childhood games, her architectural impressions as a blind perceiver), juxtaposed to aesthetic

commentaries of Arakawa's paintings (referenced in the margins but invisible), excerpts from his notebook ("The Sharing of Nameless") and analyses of perception in the blind, resulting in a diffuse ensemble in which readers are left to find their own bearings. Mountains abound, either as citations imported from John Buchan's *The Moon Endureth*, as extracts from William Prescott's mapping of the Andes cordillera, as musings on the concept of void in the vicinity of Mont Blanc, or as analyses of the perceptual regime under which Cézanne painted the Montagne Sainte-Victoire.

Braille salience or "blank" salience

- 15 *Helen Keller or Arakawa* qualifies in more than one way as a book of "saliences", from the dots in fake Braille on the dustcover, the debossed points on the hardcover, its frequent use of typographic and lexical inventivity, its conceptual vocabulary ("blank", "cleaving") engineered in order to describe blind perception, and the incomprehensible K's or cases in its strange title. Passages thematizing mountains also constitute a salient element – both obvious and obscure, strikingly visible and yet striking through or destabilising every oculocentric certainty. Salient points, here, in their different guises, seek to challenge binaries, to find a way out of what Jane Bennett has described as the "hylemorphic" model, based on an opposition between matter and form. As in the "vibrating" world Bennett analyzes in *Vibrant Matter*, the relation between body and space, observer and mountain in Madeline Gins's essay is an "activeness that is not quite bodily and not quite spatial"²⁵. An important consequence follows for the concept of "salience": the logic of the singular point or raised dot in Braille writing is set in motion, rendered active. A dot, for Madeline Gins, is a living dot, not a static element. The opening paragraph of chapter 3, "The First Little Brick of Substance" (in which the additional phrase "of substance" embraces two possible meanings, both material –a real brick– and abstract: a brick that matters) begins by stressing the plasticity of the concept of point, articulated on the sense that a point contains and is "contained" by a perception, and that therefore its scope is much wider than its apparent size. Included in the estimation of its dimensions are the "size and scope of the original container, that is, perceiver and world". Gins adds: "no point exists such that it is non-living"²⁶. An example is given a few paragraphs later when Keller describes how in daily life she takes hold of those salient points known as door knobs: "Not an impassive door this. The area around the door is me, part of me, but also a separate welcoming committee of all motion"²⁷. A similar process of quickening applies to Braille dots, described as having "communicative" resources, as being able to speak, map a network and generate a rhizome:

Only a blind man could have realized the great communicative power of a raised dot or point. Louis Braille's finger could always attend to several raised dots at once (...) the blind person's finger has a greater number of tactile-kinaesthetic foci than does the sighted person's²⁸.

- 16 A point, in other words, leads to a line, a gestalt-free line: a line is tactile as much as kinaesthetic. Forms, lines, contours, colours, can be projected at will: "I could make a screen, blank, of any color I liked (...) After that, no world Gestalt could stump me".²⁹ The theory of the non-figure, quoted in the previous section, must therefore be revised in a non-gestaltist context.

- 17 The chapter titled “What is Spacetime?” addresses space in terms of “forming blank”, resulting in a supple, expandable resketching of the world. The use of the gerund is a salient feature of Gins’s writing, which, in order to track Keller’s (and Arakawa’s) blank worlds more closely, endeavors to discard any trace of segmentation or sequencing, to the advantage of plasticity: any “forming blank” must be read both as a taking form and as form-giving, as a generative force from which form sallies forth. Similarly, what is “blank”, what fails to catch anything perceptually and therefore draws a blank in matters of perceptive capture, finds itself reversed in (French) translation – capsizing as “black” rather than blank in some phrases. The salient “-ing” forms in the text, able to function both as objective and subjective genitives, contribute to the becoming-tactile, the becoming-haptic, the increasing tentativity of reading, which no longer boils down to a screening of figures singled out against a background, but as a ceaseless search for salient points, both abstract and living, which signal and beckon without necessarily behaving as signifiers or semiotic data. It is in this chapter that the Mont Blanc is introduced as a landmark from which to begin to interrogate scales of perception: “for all we know, to a different intelligence from ours the top of Mont Blanc may be as crowded as Times Square, and as loud”³⁰. The suppression of the figure/ground distinction is addressed in Jean-François Lyotard’s essay on Arakawa, this book being the only aesthetic and philosophical French “reception” of the work, largely untranslated in French: “Figure and ground change places”. What is brought into prominence by Lyotard is not what is presented, but how it is presented – focalisation and its paratactic rendering:

Besides. It is the paradox of paratax: to focalise what is off the focus point, besides ; to make oneself available for what is left aside during focalisation. Parataxis is a stylistic turn: one juxtaposes instead of ranking³¹.

- 18 If Gins’s arduous style strives to achieve counter-focalisation, so does her own analysis of the prose of the blind historian William Prescott in the chapter titled “Or Mountains Or Lines”.

The salient line of the Andes Cordillera

- 19 Mountains return more extensively in the same chapter 16, in which a specific stylistic research is carried out to fit the narrative of a trail hike told from a non-seeing angle. It is not only a matter of meeting the challenge of describing what remains unseen, in the blind, but above all of ascertaining what affects and shapes, near and far, a body placed in a mountainous surround. The chapter opens on a stylistic detail: on Helen Keller’s own word choice in her description of how mountains have affected her during a hike, a word choice which differs from the phrase formerly used by her friend and educator Ann Sullivan, whose words Keller generally takes up and recirculates. The mountain experience generates differing styles in each writer. For Ann Sullivan, sight-impaired but not blind, the narrative lyrically recounts how “the clouds had touched the mountains softly like beautiful flowers”. The words are taken up with slight changes in Keller’s letter to her mother, whom Helen asks if she too would like to take a trip to the mountains – “if she too would like to see the high mountains and beautiful cloud caps”. Keller justifies her use of “caps” by adding that she had, several days ahead of the hike, been busy making preparations: “I had for several days been considering all manner of caps on things”. She notes, furthermore, that her choice of metaphor followed a

circuitous path involving, against all odds, mushroom “caps”, a modest protuberance endowed with a rather paradoxical form of “salience”:

Peaks were no longer being, as you had put it, touched softly by clouds that were like beautiful flowers, for these clouds had been fully transformed into upside-down flowers; but in an instant all these now maimed and poked-by-mountain-peak flowers had become mushroom caps. No sooner had this happened than I recalled that out in the world these mushroom caps were supposed to be out-and-out clouds. And in this way did I come up with, I believe, my little secondhand invention: the expression “beautiful cloud caps”. (...) Put a few thoughts together about mountain, and you’ll have a mountain. But I prefer to go on from there. For my construction, I need a little mountain air and I may need some actual contact with a bit of mountainous rock, maybe not. The material I make use of for the constructing of my mountain: from first to last it’s your (Annie’s) effusiveness about this mountain, and about, I guess, mountainousness in general. Then I look for terms suggesting tall and let these signify up, around, and about.

I read and reread the mountainousness of your impression and reveled in this pointed surround.³²

- 20 Alongside the use of monosyllabic terms referring to geomorphisms (*peak/rock*), which one might assume would be the terms endowed with the greatest salience, backed up by the force of brevity and of plosive consonants, what infiltrates the Keller-voice is, on the contrary, a double system juxtaposing on the one hand abstract polysyllables (“mountainousness”, “effusiveness”) and short directional adverbs: up, around, about, articulated on the verb “to signify”, to the effect that it immediately becomes an active verb endowed with a near-telluric engendering power. An object of modest dimensions (a mushroom cap) is put to the task of describing a mountain, whose material quality undergoes in the process a form of dematerialization, a becoming-virtual. The mountain is redefined by the oxymoronic formula: “pointed surround”, which implies both a peaked and atmospheric, diffuse materiality. In Keller’s world, revised by Gins, mountain is none but writing: it is “style” itself. Her mountain is built from an invisible material partly made of the “mountainousness” of an “impression”.
- 21 A mountain is in other words assembled by “montage”: it is a mounting together of abstract propositions, adverbs of place and adverbially modified verbs (“to signify up, around and about”). A similar moment of writing surfaces up further in the text, where the approach of William Prescott’s cordillera as described in his *Conquest of Peru* calls forth a rugged tongue made up of sallying points and yet voided of substance, rendered infinitely pliable.
- 22 As a specialist in the history of the conquest of Peru and Mexico who became blind by accident, William Prescott never had any first hand knowledge of his area of specialisation. He captured mountains as a cartographer, by envisioning them as an assemblage, a montage of lines. The line rather than the point is the foundation of his “cordillera”, readable from the tip of one’s fingers, a ridgeline as much as a line or paragraph of writing:

It is as a cartographer that the blinded Prescott wields much of his prose, using, more often than not, lines to pin down mountains. Prescott constructs the Andes thus: “A strip of land, rarely exceeding twenty leagues, runs along the coast, and is hemmed in through its whole extent by a colossal range of mountains which, advancing from the Straits of Magellan, reaches its highest elevation – indeed the highest on the American continent – about the seventeenth degree south, and, after crossing the line, gradually subsides into hills of inconsiderable magnitude, as it enters the Isthmus of Panama.... Arranged sometimes in a single line, though more

frequently *in* two or three lines running parallel or obliquely to each other, they seem to the voyager on the ocean but one continuous chain; while the huge volcanoes, which to the inhabitants of the tableland look like solitary and independent masses, appear to him only like so many peaks of the same vast and magnificent range”.³³

- 23 The typographic salience of the italicized “*in*’s”, here as in the rest of the chapter, both raises and questions an apparently minor discursive detail, almost as imperceptible as the coordinating particle “or” in the book’s title. Whether prepositions or adverbs, those “*in*’s” function as minimal operators of insertion into a container: as integrators or incorporators into a supporting milieu. However, that very milieu is being queried. In the same chapter a blind child recounts how, sensorially, he experiments a contact with a hollowed-out object: the child runs his or her fingers on the metallic gridded cover of a heater: “Here, he cried out, is something with a great many holes *in* it”. The blind child, in other words, brings out a space made up of non-spaces, a collection of holes, on which rests “a most elusive ‘*in*’”³⁴. The narrator adds: “although no ‘*in*’ such as the child implies exists to be found, the concept ‘*in*’ does nevertheless, in the same context, remain fully operative for the sense of touch”. Here “*in*” constitutes a tactile hollow, a debossed salience. Just as an “inside” may very well be an “outside”, a salience can turn out to be a hole, a faultline or a “failience”, once revised from a haptic, non-optic logic. It is a kind of salience which is at home in a “blank”, borderless space, devoid of ground and of figure. Such apparent lacks in fact lack nothing: they are supporting faultlines, gaping on the illimited.
- 24 Not only do mountains become lines in Madeline Gins’s rereading of William Prescott: they move and constitute a mobile multiplicity. Prescott’s text is peppered with verbs of motion: his Andes “hem in” a strip of land which “runs” along the coast, then “cross” the Equator before entering the Isthmus of Panama. Pulled in their forward stride, volcanoes follow suit and join them to form a multitude, not so much a range or chain as a “mob”, a mobile pack, to take up Elias Canetti’s opposition³⁵. Here, as in the case of Helen Keller’s paradoxically virtual and yet real³⁶ scaffoldings of “cloudy” mountains, the blind historian turned cartographer choses to resist form in his stylistic rendition of mountains, to which he substitutes lines and their power of abstraction and action. The mountain chain exists as a force of traction as much as of abstraction: it has become a trait, a tracing and tractating force. Prescott’s orography amounts, in other words, to running the tip of one finger along a virtual ridgeline in order to extract a line out of it, a mountainous trait destined to become a line of writing. Once aligned, the cordillera becomes a supple and mobile resource from which plasticity can be derived. It is in other words through abstraction that the mountain is made salient: through the production of an exact images. A serial, tactile, non formal “salience” emerges from the following paragraph in which the mountain is (dis)figured as a plastic formation which anyone can play and replay in his or her own terms:
- Describing places in this manner robs them of any place to be *in*. The overly specific descriptions would jolt readers out of whatever Mexico or Peru they’d managed to construct for themselves by means of the rest of the narrative. There exists no world such as that which Prescott speaks of, only lines. How could one become immersed in the precise South America Prescott thinks to evoke. The mountain-image is but a map. But this might increase in airiness and expand to assume much the same proportions as a mountain perceived.³⁷
- 25 Once it has become a line, a mountain ceases to be part of a territory or terrain in which to become immersed: it turns into a map. Its salience collects the force of

intensive “traits” or leaps, to recall one of the etymologie of the term^v– it jumps across the Equator, crosses a frontier, striates. Just as mobile and nebulous as Keller’s multidimensional, effusive “mountainousness”, it becomes, through Gins’s writing, a supple and atmospheric formation. The lines – “only lines” – enabling the mounting together of the Andes cordillera by Prescott will resurface in a painting by Arakawa (*Next to the Last*, 1966-1967) as life-lines.

- 26 Besides resorting to typographic salience, i.e. to the disorienting use of italics for every “in”, the chapter also provides an interesting case of syntactic salience. To recall Cézanne’s encounter with the Sainte-Victoire mountain, a reversible gerund is used: a swiveling passive/active construction syntactically upholds a line of “sight” in painting. The mountain perceives; the mountain peirces through the canvas after taking a detour through the painter’s own p(i)erception:

Cézanne found that the mountain for him to paint was not the one that stood supposedly at some distance in front of him but the mountain as he perceived it. Could he paint the perceiving of the mountain? (...) His lines derive from other lines (lines of sight) which are as if kite strings to an existing mountain³⁸.

- 27 The lines in painting, the salient lines couched on canvas, are not separable from the lines of sight: the text materializes them as kite strings linking the canvas to the mountain. The presence of these cords, or lines (rather than points), is the very condition of their salience in painting; the condition of their pictorial efficacy, in other words of their force of abstraction and traction on the world/on the mountain. Drawing (or painting) literally draws, exerts traction:

To draw anything less than you know could be the depiction amounts to not drawing fully upon yourself. This is the way the line must be drawn: nowhere in the making of the line must the will flag (...) ³⁹.

- 28 “To draw” is placed here on a semantic ridge line. Its salience depends on a metastable positioning between two prongs in a forking system: drawing a mountain (on a canvas), drawing a mountain (towards oneself, but also tapping one’s own resources, pulling oneself up). A similar hesitation may affect the reading of the gerund form in “the making of the line”, which may fall on either side of a ridge opposing passive and active voices: making a line, being made in the process of making a line.

- 29 Mountains return at the end of the chapter, in an aside in Helen Keller’s voice: their salience, this time, has become purely tactile and rather counter-intuitive. What is at stake, this time, is a change of scale, concomitant to the transformation of peaks into relief maps, and to a new form of reversibility or metastability:

It is not that I would resent having to carry all the visual load of mighty mountains, but that is something that I have been spared, for none of this is carted to me. Then what are mountains to me? I feel their great heights of almost two inches sometimes on topographical maps.

An aside: I wonder why the depths of the seas and streams on such maps are not carved out as carefully and given to be as deep as the mountain masses are so concernedly afforded and granted their great heights. Rubber topographical maps would allow the blind to push down lightly *into* the crevice *within* which lies a stream or to plunge full fist *into* the sea ».

A different aside: how surprising to find so great a number of countries to be –how to put this? – thick with mountains.

What are mountains? Wordy or worded creatures, apparently they want nothing less than their due. As we go up them and bat against their sides, they thin the air cool and fresh. As I walk them, they walk me⁴⁰.

- 30 This passage performs mountains or “mountainousness” by mustering a number of stylistic procedures which exploit paradoxical ways of constructing and reading their object: although immensity is “almost two inches high”, the scale reduction here has no impact on saliency, which does not pertain to the visible but to the affective and the tactile. In the first paragraph, a graphic line is inscribing a literal trail of M-words, thus marking visual/tactile literal equivalents or substitutes for a chain of peaks: these have become available to the reading finger or to the haptic eye, in phrases such as “mighty mountains”, “mountains to me”, or “mountain masses”. When Keller-Gins calls for innovative, flexible maps made of a pliable material which would also provide hollow equivalents of river beds and oceanic pits, more salient features emerge on the page – more “in’s”, which leave the reader faced with a semantic conundrum: the bodies they put in relation are out of proportion, as is the impulse “to plunge full fist into the sea”. Each time, the discomfort rests on the sense of being contained by what is limitless (the ocean, a pitfall, a gaping hole). After a thematic inversion (pits instead of peaks, reliefs into hollowed out surfaces), more graphic effects sally forth: another spate of repeated initials can be spotted in the last paragraph, this time in the series of W-words that launch the contours of inverted mountains: wordy, worded, want, walk. The last sentence also inverts the subject/object polarities through a transitive adaptation of the verb “to walk”, the effect of which is to cancel the separation between the two sides of this long drawn-out reverie on what connects “me” to “mountains”, “mountains” to “me”: “as I walk them, they walk me”.
- 31 Gins’s salient, graphic and syntactic forms of inversion find an echo in the preceding juxtaposition of adjectives pulling in opposite semantic directions. On the one hand, in the language of the non-seeing person, mountains “thicken” the surface of the earth (described as “thick with mountains”, in a phrase made to sound deliberately ham-handed and inadequate). On the other hand, one line further, the mountains suddenly side with what is thin and rarefied: they have become “thin” rather than “thick”. Where does the line of separation run? Where is the contour, where is the ridgeline? Nowhere: the limit has become a limitrophy, a thickening process of accretion (“*trophein*”: to thicken, in Greek).
- 32 New salient, mountainous lines occur at the end of the chapter, this time imported from the Scottish Highlands near Loch Duich. An errant line runs through them:
- They charged and ran through in a relentless race for what trophy I know not...
Countless ranges each with a separate course – at least the mountains know where they are going⁴¹.
- 33 The mountain has become a “range”, the name for a massive multiplicity which, in English, harbours a mobile radical, an accelerating verbal trait which the text brings up into relief in more than one instance; in the series containing the *charged/ran/race/course* variables, something is being complicit in the extraction of a racing, running mode from within the name of a mountain ran/ge.
- 34 One of the constant features in Gins and Arakawa’s aesthetics is to question the hegemonic position of the subject, to redirect it as body or “eco-body” into its milieu (rather than into the debatable metaphor of the environment). What is salient “sallies” forth, (partly) assuming a quasi-living status. The term “line” is made to come as close as possible to “life” in Gins’s analysis⁴² of a painting by Arakawa, which depicts (or depicts) the Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci’s painting. The ridgeline formed by the characters gathered around the table delineates a quasi-range, a mountainous

formation which motion renders salient: the line is in the process of gaining speed or “spin”:

Something like the spin a pitcher puts to a curve ball has been put on this outline. Or should I say *in*? Grab an event by its outline. The line rises up from behind the mountain chain of characters around the table. (...) the line of sight, joining forces, as it must, with this horizon of individual entities but united beings, crests – is continually cresting – as a delineating lifeline to, or odorlessly subliminal umbilical cord for, if you like – well hardly! – all those once gathered here. Much of the conscious atmospheric has been rolled back and up and *into* this line that rises up; and the rest is the viewer’s perceiving as that meanders through the light and blank areas guided by those few lines able to stand for the whole fixed but unbounded⁴³.

- 35 What saliently jets out in this paragraph pertains to an uncertain limitrophy, a “cleaving”, a cusp line of semantic hesitation between two meanings of “to cleave”, unity or separation. What may be read here as art criticism pure and simple in fact coordinates domains which are rarely brought up together: physics and the graphic arts, philosophy and the life sciences. Arakawa’s *Last Supper* metamorphoses into an improbable scene of trans-birthing through the life-giving power of a line, a salient lifeline in more than one sense. The drafted line sallies forth into quasi-3D animation, to the effect that it performs both as cordillera and as umbilical cord, giving birth to a post-human chain. The line and its sallying force are distributed on either side of what cannot possibly be separated – to wit, a line of (non-) separation between what is salient (what pertains to crest/cresting) and the “rest” – what remains proper to the perception of the observer or by-stander. “Crest” and “rest” thus form the two indistinguishable sides or slopes of this sallying line. There is, in other words, no mountain without “relief”, a slippery term which it is interesting to read for its salience: in French as in English, the term is far from offering a smooth ride; it bifurcates into, on the one hand, what projects from a surface into prominence, and therefore reaches a certain status, and, on the other hand, into mere crumbs, worthless remains and remainders. What is “salient” incorporates the perception of the observer, including his or her own perceptual flaws.

Failience

- 36 Blind Helen Keller hooks her line of perception to salient points which cannot be reduced to a collection of raised points of Braille, or to the use of digital alphabet and to lip-reading: a far-reaching world of salience runs under her fingers, in which “salience” is much more than a series of bumps passively gathered. It is a matter of linguistic projection and inventiveness, for example in the transitive use of “to walk” in the phrase “as I walk them they walk me”. This novel form of transitivity opens onto the possibility of retranslating things anew: of connecting, transitively, the “subjects” and the “objects” of the world. What is “salient” here implies something else, another non-linguistic face or facet which resists understanding and may be termed provisionally “failience”: the failure to formulate, “in light of” a language ridden with visibility, whatever data can be gleaned from the non-seeing (yet perceiving) world. Gins’s singular writing gets it across through forms of “salience”: typographic games, abstract verbs newly-fitted with adverbial particles conveying motion and in the process creating quasi-tactile contours of meaning. Just as, to quote Helen Keller, “the mountain walks me”, Madeline Gins’s salient writing is an invitation to invert the

relation between reader and text: the page becomes active, creates, modulates and changes its readers, throws them off-kilter as efficiently as a steep mountain slope, or an outing on the bumpy terrain of Yoro Park in Japan, will throw them off. Arakawa et Gins have, most concretely, embedded points of saliency in every one of their architectural projects, in the theme park at Yoro, in the 2008 Bioscleave House on Long Island, or on the Mitaka Lofts in the suburbs of Tokyo, inscribed “to the memory of Helen Keller”. Common to these constructions is the use of slopy, bumpy ground or floor, in other words the creation of counter-affordances: invitations to trip and fall, to lose balance and gain it, built it anew. Their architecture aims at having immediate, hands-on effect on the body, which it refuses to merely “environ”: in it the body becomes a longing, a hunting for points of saliency and experimentation, just like the (arduous) reading of Madeline Gins’s *Helen Keller* or Arakawa is a quest for salient typographical, lexical and syntactic marks. The bright color scheme, the steep and bumpy floors of Gins and Arakawa’s bio-architecture are stylistically translated into the reversible gerunds and italicized adverbs of place/non-place which send readers fumbling along Gins’s text, not unlike how Helen Keller finds herself confronted to the salient spots of a soundless, figure-less, image-less continuum. Put to the test of blindness, saliency may thus be reformulated in terms of « failiency »: the knack for tripping, for inventing flexible maps figuring hollowed-out debossed river beds and ocean pits. The mountain is a montage, from which, once confronted to a tactile approach, oculocentric thinking can only come a cropper. From a tactile and anexact end, the “perception of the environment”, to take up the title of Tim Ingold’s book, now becomes readable as a reversible genitive in which the doing, the active process belongs to the operator metaphorically termed « environment ». Affordance, in other terms, to bring up the term used by William Gibson to draw the active contours of objects, ceases to behave as a passive, unilateral nudge or “invitation”. The word can about-face into its opposite, turn into a body-double or a counter-affordance, not necessarily in the sense of an obstacle but in the physical, geographic sense of its radical: into a pass, a ridge or a ford – a place of crossing.

- 37 This haptic hike on “Gins Mountain”⁴⁴ has attempted to leap across disciplines, between writing and geo-graphy, between poetic prose and linguistics. A real summit named Gins Mountain does exist in Aunstralia – it is unhikable and as rugged as Madeline Gins’s poetic and philosophical text. Such a writing is not amenable to the theoretical terrain of NRT ou “non-representational theory”, for it does not position itself so much “against” as outside the field of representation. It also escapes, to some extent, the approach of the visible and the invisible by Merleau-Ponty who turns vision into a immersive form of touch, in his unfinished last work. There, however, a “subject” remains, an interiority largely absent from Gins’s thinking of/from the outside, an outside she seeks to bring into language. In a 2008 interview for *The New York Times*, Madeline Gins compared life on the steep floors of Bioscleave House to climbing: “it is so like mountain-climbing”. Vertical poles in lieu of walking sticks fall from the ceiling, in this mountain of a house in which blindness and the great outdoors rub elbows, forming a joint becoming.

Bioscleave House, Long Island , USA⁴⁵Photo : Eric Striffler.⁴⁶

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NOTES

1. Madeline Gins, *Helen Keller or Arakawa*, Burning Books: Santa Fe, 1994. Abbreviated as *HKoA* hereafter. To be published in french soon, translated by the author of this article.
2. Helen Keller (1880-1968) became blind and deaf in infancy as a consequence of a disease, at the age of 19 months. She was educated by Ann Sullivan and published her autobiography at age 22. She studied at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass., and founded the *Helen Keller International* association in 1951.
3. Helen Keller, *Histoire de ma vie*, Paris, Petite bibliothèque Payot, 2001 ; *The Story of My Life*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1914.
4. The Mitaka Lofts in the suburb of Tokyo, inscribed “to the memory of Helen Keller” are habitat machines conceived to reeducate the body along tactile lines, through loss of balance and improvised ways out of it. <http://curious-places.blogspot.ch/2011/02/reversible-destiny-lofts-tokyo-japan.html>, accessed 11/11/2015.
5. Excerpts from Arakawa’s conceptual vocabulary can be found in Jean-François Lyotard’s essay on the painter in *Que Peindre?* Paris: Hermann, 1985.
6. *The Architectural Body*, op. cit. Among the examples given, one finds that of a “tent” projected by the bodies who inhabit it and thus change its contours at will –a tent from which arise concepts of “tentative” and “tentativeness”. The tent can be found at the following url accessed 13/3/2016: <http://www.reversibledestiny.org/#!the-architectural-body-hypothesis-%e2%96%91%e2%96%91the-sited-awareness-hypothesis>

7. The term “bioscleave” describes the life-extending device/house built on Long Island. Bioscleave, surround and the “architectural body” can be understood as related to the term *Umwelt* developed by J. von Uexküll and revisited by Tim Ingold in *The Perception of the Environment*, Routledge, 2000, p. 176.
8. The quotation appears on one of the panels exhibited during the “Reversible Destiny, Arakawa/Gins” art show at the Guggenheim-SoHo, 25 June-31 August 1997; see also *The Mechanism of Meaning*, 1988, revised edition [1979], New York, Abbeville Press, p. 10.
9. See for example Hannah Macpherson’s article, “Non-Representational Approaches to Body-Landscape Relations”, *Geographic Compass* 4/1 (2010): 1-13, which addresses NRT through the lens of disability. Non-representational theory draws from a rich philosophical library among which phenomenology and post-structuralism stand in good stead – from Merleau-Ponty to Deleuze. Thrift mentions the « half second delay between stimulus and response » during which the body would be a space of « bare life », shapable, in other words, by its environment (p. 5).
10. Adapted from Hélène Cixous’s French portmanteau word “*séparéuni*”, the term attempts to translate both facets of “to cleave”. The adjective “*séparéuni*” appears for example in the French original of *Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal scenes*, tr. Beverley Bie Brahic, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006; *Les rêveries de la femme sauvage*, Paris: Galilée, 2000, p. 69.
11. The blind poet and friend of Helen Keller Clarence Hill is mentioned, among other blind writers quoted by Gins. His poem “The Mountain to the Pine” appears in Chapter 16 in an agnostic rewriting of the original (“The Agnostic Mountain Speaks”), *HKoA*, *op. cit.*, p. 151-152.
12. Here is an example: “Or wrenching torque or twister orbit grown core runner coordinate. Or torsion or. Or deformation or. Contour. More particles gravel roar lore (...)”, *HKoA*, p. 289.
13. *HKoA*, p. 1.
14. James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New York and London, Psychology Press, [1979], 2015, p. 119 and fol.
15. *HKoA*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
17. *HKoA*, p. 142.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
19. Gilles Col, “Focalisation, saillance et instruction de construction du sens”, in *Focalisation(s), saillance dans les langues: lexique, syntaxe, prosodie*, dir. Paul Cappeau et Sylvie Hanotte, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012, p. 108. Translation mine: “un mécanisme” général “à l’œuvre dans la cognition humaine, comme la catégorisation, l’invariance perceptive, la compositionnalité gestaltiste ou bien encore la composition séquentielle hiérarchique”.
20. Catherine Schnedeker, “La notion de saillance: problèmes définitoires et avatars”, in O. Inkova, *Saillance. Aspects linguistiques et communicatifs de la mise en évidence dans un texte*, vol.1 Besançon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2011, pp. 23-42 (p. 38); translation mine.
21. Frederic Landragin, “Sur les aspects multicritères et multidimensionnels de la saillance”, in *Focalisations (s)*, *op. cit.* p. 42. Translation mine.
22. “Il y a toujours perception d’une forme sur un fond”, Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Être et le Néant: Essai d’ontologie phénoménologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 44. Translation mine.
23. *HKoA*, p. 273.
24. I borrow the term from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, 1980; *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
25. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke U. Press, Durham and London, 2010, p. 55-56.
26. *HKoA*, p. 17-18.
27. *HKoA*, p. 162.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
29. *HKoA*, p. 55.

30. HKoA, p. 84.
31. Jean-François. Lyotard, *Que peindre?*, op. cit. p. 124. “A côté ; c’est le paradoxe de la parataxe: focaliser à côté du focus. Se rendre sensible à ce qui est mis en marge quand on focalise. La parataxe est un tour de style: on juxtapose au lieu d’ordonner”. Translation mine.
32. HKoA, p. 141.
33. HKoA, p. 146.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
35. See Elias Canetti, *Masse et puissance (Masse und Macht)*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960 ; the English translation as *Crowds and Power* (tr. C. Stewart, 1962) narrows down the force of the title. The word “meute”, mob or pack, derives from the Latin *movita*, mobility, movement (p.101). “Moved” and re-moved, the chain becomes, at it were, “unleashed”, set at large.
36. A similar case of dematerialisation may be found in a text by Elisée Reclus, *The History of A Mountain*, tr. B. Ness and L. John, New York: Harper and Brothers, 188 ; “These enormous masses, mountains piled above mountains, have passed away like clouds swept along the sky by the wind” (p. 48).
37. KHoA, p. 146-147.
38. HKoA, p. 137.
39. HKoA, p. 149.
40. HKoA, p. 150-151.
41. HKoA, p. 153.
42. Arakawa, *Next to the Last*, 1969-1971; page accessed on 20/11/2015: http://www.artnet.com/artists/arakawa/next-to-the-last_vUTzKCorAF58IgeMde5A2
43. HKoA, p. 149.
44. The “real” Gins Mountain in Australia can be seen on the following page, accessed 30/11/2015: <http://www.donsmaps.com/images12/grattai2.jpg>
45. <http://www.spoon-tamago.com/2008/04/11/arakawa-gins-architecture/>
46. www.striffler.com

ABSTRACTS

This paper attempts to follow an improbable ridge line between architecture, geography and linguistics, between the optic and haptic ends of the concept of salience, through a reading of *Helen Keller Or Arakawa*, Madeline Gins’s 1994 essay-cum-joint-biography partly devoted to “salience” approached through the blind figure of Helen Keller (1880-1968). In a chapter titled “Or Mountains Or Lines”, prominent features envisaged from a sighted perception give way, under the condition of blindness, to saddle-points, swivel-areas and moments of stylistic tentativeness when words and/or syntax begins to fail. Salience, revisited through Keller’s apprehension of mountains as vaporous and mobile masses, leads to tentativeness in writing and to what I here call “failience” in discourse: the failure to stabilise discursive referents, the unsettling reversibility of syntactic lines based, for example, on the swivel-point of an “-ing” form. At work in Gins’s writing is the invention of a cathectic, tactile grasp of the world through language. In order to ease access to a “faulty” perception, Gins invites her readers to transit through the writing of blind cartographer William Prescott, in particular through his “tactile”, linear mapping of the Andes Cordillera, approached as a mobile rhizome rather than as a

collection of fixed, “raised” points. Mapping, under conditions of blindness, implies wander lines as much as lines of (thin) air.

INDEX

Keywords: saliency, blindness, Helen Keller, William Prescott, failiency, Madeline Gins, haptic

AUTHOR

MARIE-DOMINIQUE GARNIER

Université de Paris 8 - UFR Textes et sociétés

UMR 8238 Laboratoire d'études de genre et de sexualité (LEGS)

maridogarnier@gmail.com