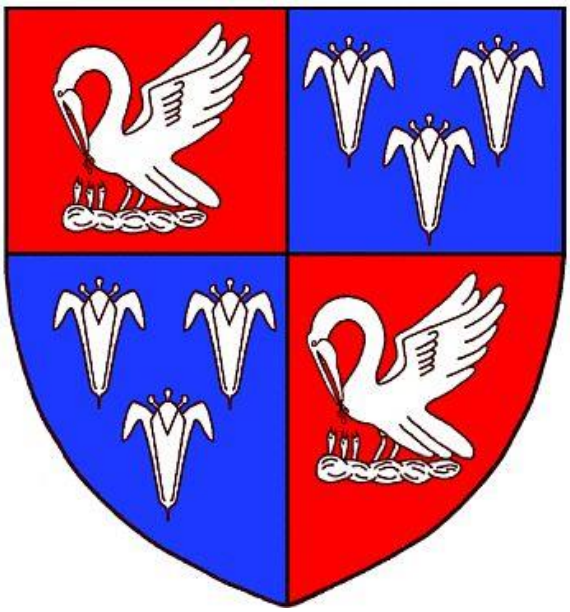
‘I am indebted to everyone’

Susan Howe’s Inheritance



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May 2021

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the English Degree Committee.

Abstract

‘I am indebted to everyone’: Susan Howe’s Inheritance

This thesis articulates the interdependent concepts of inheritance and debt (material, political, cultural) as they pertain to the work of the U.S. poet Susan Howe (b. 1937). Drawing on scholarship in performance studies, pragmatist aesthetics, feminist psychoanalytic theory, sound studies and historical materialism, I read published texts and archival material from various points in Howe’s creative life alongside work by her interlocutors: Joan Jonas, Fanny Howe, and David Grubbs. As such, the thesis is also a study of the interaction of experimental poetry with live and time-based art, and of the process of collaboration. Each chapter explores a different category of possessing or perceiving something in common with another—synchronicity, likeness, and repetition—to argue that liveness and embodied aesthetic experience allow patrilinear generational history to be reconceived as indebtedness to the present, in the present. The thesis begins with an introduction that outlines the importance of the perception of doubles in Howe’s reading and writing practices, and then situates Howe in relation to her contemporaries and her Puritan heritage. Chapter One reads Howe’s work in tandem with that of her friend Joan Jonas, a performance artist. It traces a mirroring between *The Liberties* (1980) and Jonas’ practice of incorporating folk ritual and building installations with props used in previous performances. I show how, in *The Liberties,* Howe presents monuments to colonial power as a kind of stage set to reconsider the role of the historically powerless and especially the maternal in sustaining patrilinear inheritance. Chapter Two outlines an alternative model of inheritance by way of sibling likeness. I bring the elegiac, documentary essay ‘Sorting Facts’ (1996) into conversation with the work of poet and novelist Fanny Howe, Susan Howe’s communist, Catholic sister. The comparison between siblings allows me to show Susan Howe’s awakening sense of a materialist grace that evades linearity and ownership. In Chapter Three I develop this idea further by focusing on Howe’s collaborative performances with musician David Grubbs, as well as her rearticulation of Grubbs’ music in *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2004). The chapter explores the implications of pragmatist genealogies of knowledge for *Souls’* attempt to articulate a utopian soundscape in the monumental materiality of repetitive drone music. The thesis ends with a short coda that extends the analysis from Chapter Three to Howe’s most recent book. It presents an associative reading of *Concordance* (2020) alongside work by Howe’s daughter, the visual artist R.H. Quaytman, and others to illustrate Howe’s evolving investment in a Romantic, pragmatist commons in the present.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was funded by the AHRC and by a Centenary Studentship from Cambridge English Faculty. I am obliged to the archivists at UCSD, especially Jenny Donovan, for their time and expertise; to the staff at Cambridge University Library, the British Library, and the fantastic English Faculty Library for their support; and, especially after this past locked-down year, to the open-access websites Z Library and Memory of the World. Many, many thanks to Joan Jonas, Fanny Howe, David Grubbs, and especially to Susan Howe.

Teaching the students at Jesus College transformed how I write and think. The following work was read by astute and encouraging readers in the run-up to submission: my heartfelt thanks to Conrad, Iseult, Chris, Roseanna, Helen, and Cillian. Huge thanks are due to my advisor, Helen Thaventhiran, who was an invaluable source of insight and reading suggestions, and a brilliant reader of my chapters. I am extremely grateful to Fiona Green, my fantastic supervisor, for her patient, enthusiastic support, her dedication to teaching, her brilliant, attentive readings of my work, and her unfailingly excellent advice.

Thought is a social, collaborative endeavour. It is my profound pleasure to owe so much to so many good friends, many of whom are far away. Thanks to Jo Brandim Howson, Kevin Breathnach, Louie Conway, Cillian Ó Fathaigh, Iseult Gillespie, Patrick Grogan, Dennis Harvey, Christopher Law, Aoife O'Leary McNeice, Ori Mautner, Tessa McKenna, Kate Schneider, Katie Spillane, Conrad Steel, Rory Wilkinson, Don Wilkie. Thanks to the CATS! Discussion Group and the poetry club for closing distance when that was most needed. Conversations with Roseanna Webster and Maureen Gueunet reminded me often of the whole point and playing with Tal Kronkop helped me many times to see things afresh. I am hugely, hilariously indebted to my freakish half twin Helen Charman, whose care, anger, and friendship have been some of the best parts of writing this thesis, and of the thesis itself. My gratitude, too, to Debbie Daly, Maria Palma-Fahey, Sheila Griffin, and Tomás Mac Muiris for their help getting me here.

Thought is also a domestic endeavour. My gratitude to all the friends who stayed with me or had me to stay over the past few years—especially to Molly Brady-Martin and John Carew, Sofía López Perez and Obed Fuentes Moreno, Helen and Chris, the ever-welcoming King's Cross house, and Patrick and all the Mosses. To the many people I lived with while writing this, thank you for sharing your days and your kitchens with me. My thanks to the gardeners, cleaners, and site manager Aldona Maliszewska at Leckhampton House for making a serene, uplifting place to think and write. To Thomas Aquilina and Karla Cervantes Barrón, thank you for your kindness and your company, and for asking the right questions. Thanks, Finch, for looking after me in the blue house. To Fiona Boyd, thank you for making me laugh and cooking me pasta and being, as ever, a fantastic friend. To the weird and wonderful Rosalind Comyn, Henry Longden, Max Barnard and Ruby, thanks for dancing with me and making this such a lovely house to live in.

For countless dues joyously owed I thank Nuala, Páidí, Róisín, and Eoghan. I thank my spectacularly loving parents for everything and all the rest; I thank my mom for telling me to be fearless and my dad for singing. I thank my kind, bold sister and my brilliant messer of a brother who have both shown me how to be.

do Eoghan Séamus Ó Domhnaill, as na dánta

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Abbreviations for Reference Purposes

BM	*The Birth-mark*
C	*Concordance*
L	'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER'
S	*Singularities*
SF	'Sorting Facts'
SH	*Saving History*
SLT	*Souls of the Labadie Tract*
TL	*The Liberties*

For the sake of clarity, in the footnotes to Chapter Two I refer to Fanny Howe and Susan Howe by their full names. In the rest of the work, 'Howe' in the notes refers to Susan Howe.

Introduction

‘I am indebted to everyone’: Susan Howe’s Inheritance

i: present-tense origins

How do we speak of where we came from if we started in a place with no words, that existed before us? The past, as historian Carolyn Steedman reminds us, is ‘gone’: ‘that is the point: that is what the past is for.’[1] All the same, its being gone does not stop us from trying to reach the past, or sometimes sensing, almost physically, that the past is very close by—not quite present but not absent either. This is arguably what memory is ‘for’. Nor does the past being gone make it any easier to speak about our present context without explaining what went before and how it shaped us. But how much background information do we need to speak about art? How much background information do I need to keep in mind to read the work at the centre of this thesis? What if background information *is* the work?

I begin this investigation with two tangential but illustrative examples, one anecdotal and one from a work of speculative fiction. Firstly, in some houses I know in West Kerry the mention of a neighbour in conversation is often accompanied by the casual naming of their relations: where they lived, what families they came from, and what relation they have, if any, to those speaking. This everyday, oral genealogy is as much spatial as temporal; it indexes the past in geographical terms. If a person is described as ‘one of the crowd from the *gleann* [glen]’ it means that someone in their past moved from Gleann Fán, a couple of miles away; if someone mentions ‘the house her mother came out of’, they mean both the family into which she was born and the literal house in which she grew up. This cultural practice is inextricable from the fact that the community has lived in the same area for generations, first as farming tenants of the local barony and then, from the 1920s onwards, as owners of the land they lived and worked on. People can speak like this, weaving a web of relations into their daily surroundings, because they are surrounded by the places, even the houses, in which their predecessors lived. Their past is part of the background they move through.

Oral genealogy can be no less significant, if often traumatically inaccessible, when people move or are forced to move further afield. My second example is from Octavia Butler’s speculative novel *Wild Seed* (1980), in a scene on a ship that has docked at an

[1] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p.81.

unnamed seventeenth-century West African slave trading site before crossing the Atlantic.[2] Anyanwu, who is immortal and has had many children, encounters Udenkwo, whose son has been taken from her by slavers. Anyanwu suspects that the woman is her descendent:

> Anyanwu asked: 'Udenkwo, who is your father and his father?'
> The woman did not answer.
> 'Your father', Anyanwu repeated, 'his people.'
> Listlessly, Udenkwo gave the name of her clan, then went on to name several of her male ancestors. Anyanwu listened until the names and their order began to sound familiar—until one of them was the name of her eighth son, then her third husband. Anyanwu stopped the recitation with a gesture. 'I have known some of your people', she said. 'You are safe here. You will be well treated.' (p.55)

In this scene patrilinear ancestry emerges as a 'recitation' to be reeled off; it is a 'listless' listing that goes nowhere, but rather performs belonging in the present. Regardless of whether these relations are alive or not, they are present-tense family ties: 'who *is* your father and his father'. What matters is not the line itself but the fact that 'the names and their order' are familiar to Anyanwu. They enable a moment of recognition, in which Anyanwu comes to know her own distant descendent in the flesh, and they have present-tense material consequences: it is Udenkwo's descendance from Anyanwu that will keep her 'safe here'.

I begin with these two examples because they speak to the historical specificity of inheritance and the present-tense rehearsal of the past that it involves. In different ways they articulate one of the primary aims of this thesis: the reconfiguration of linear inheritance as a state of live indebtedness. In what follows I ask how art responds to and reproduces inheritance: that is, aesthetic, psychological and material inheritance, both personal and societal. I consider the work of remembrance—as it is enacted in prose, performance, film, and sound art, and especially poetry—through which familial, national, and institutional histories are made and remade in the present. The thesis is premised on a mode of reading in which the material of an artwork (be it paper, granite, graphite, or one's own body) has always been inherited from a previous context. Its aim is to articulate a live state in which dues owed to the past are reconfigured as an obligation to the present, in the present.

[2] 'Wild Seed', *Seed to Harvest* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), pp.1-253. For an analysis of the past's material reverberations in the historical context in which Butler's novel is set, see Christina Sharpe's study of the 'wake' of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in contemporary black life in the US. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). For its effect on African American kinship structures, see Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, 17.2 (1987), pp.65-81.

The central figure in my study is the US-American poet Susan Howe, born in 1937. Howe has been exploring material debts owed to the past for over 50 years, in essays, criticism, visual art, and poetry. Her work is the primary case study for my investigation and, equally importantly, it functions as a guide for this indebted reading. With and after Howe, I ask: what do we do with material that has been left to us? How do we speak, now, in the remains of what has gone before? Howe's poetry suggests, I contend, that the only way to speak about the aftermath occurring presently is to speak with others. To demonstrate this, I situate Howe's work in various presents—at different stages in her poetic career—and place it in dialogue with various contemporary interlocutors: her friend and classmate Joan Jonas, her sister Fanny Howe, her collaborator David Grubbs, and, in a short coda, her daughter R. H. Quaytman. With and after Howe I track three different modes of relation to another: mirroring, likeness, and repetition.

For Susan Howe, speech emerges out of necessity in the gap between people. Words are a way to reach someone who is distant, be it spatially or temporally. As Howe recalls in 'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER' (1985), her earliest memories of the written word are of its limitations as a means of closing distance between people, as well as its inseparability from global history or material circumstance:

> During World War II my father's letters were a sign he was safe. A miniature photographic negative of his handwritten message was reproduced by the army and a microfilm copy forwarded to us. In the top left-hand corner someone always stamped PASSED BY EXAMINER.[3]

As is characteristic of Howe's work, the specific, historically situated technology that allowed this transmission is inseparable from its message: the technology and the people operating it produce the 'sign', both linguistic and material, of her father's safety.[4] Language, from this beginning, has always been a placeholder for a distant other, even as the practice of writing binds the speaker and the addressee into a peculiar intimacy: it does not close the gap between people, but it partially bridges it. Words are not only placeholders for what they represent; they are also materially situated occurrences in the world, with an apparently

[3] Susan Howe, 'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER', *The Europe of Trusts* (New York: New Directions, 2002), pp.9-14 (13). Hereafter *L*.
[4] For the importance of micro-film technology to this passage, and the importance of the materiality of writing in Howe's address to her absent father see Fiona Green, '"Plainly on the Other Side": Susan Howe's Recovery', *Contemporary Literature*, 42.1 (April 2001), pp.78-101.

arbitrary relationship to what they are understood to refer to. For Howe, the experience of this language's material, sensory qualities are another kind of intimate contact, which takes place outside of 'me' and 'you'.

One of Howe's central poetic concerns is the possibility of encountering interlocutors in the material after-effects of history. Her poetry seeks the fulfilment of a bond, both tender and oppressive, with an undefined double. The title of her 2017 collection *Debths* serves as a succinct example of what is at stake: the word incorporates 'depths' of previous utterances and multiple meanings, as well as the echo of an obligation or 'debt' to those who spoke before, and a space for the absence of 'death' which cannot be spoken. Howe writes after the eradication of indigenous peoples, the subjugation of women, and the violent extraction of natural resources; her work rustles with the materiality of letters, reports, ledgers, maps, and photographs, and is rich with the quality of having been somewhere else, of bearing something from circumstances since past. It also occupies an explicitly postlapsarian space that seeks to remember an origin in which words were not needed because there was no separation between the self and the world. This study traces the tension between searching for wholeness in the ledgers of history and mourning its victims: twin impulses that are simultaneously inseparable and incompatible.

In articulating this multi-layered, contradictory, present-tense inheritance I do not offer a comprehensive overview of Howe's work. Aside from over 80 scholarly articles and chapters in multiple-author studies, there are already at least four extant monographs on Howe, by Will Montgomery, Rachel Tzvia Back, Elisabeth Joyce, and Stephen Collis.[5] Will Montgomery's book is most relevant for my project, and his thesis about a central conflict between history and poetic form chimes with the arguments that follow.[6] In Montgomery's interpretation, however, in her effort to reconcile the two Howe employs the vocabulary of religious experience in service of an 'ultimately desacralizing movement' (p.43). In contrast, this project will offer a reading of Howe's poetry as 'religious' in the sense of (to quote Joan Richardson's description of US pragmatist thought) 'religion naturalized and at the same time

[5] Will Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe: History, Theology, Authority* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Rachel Tzvia Back, *Led by Language: The Poetry of Susan Howe* (London: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Elisabeth Joyce, *The Small Space of a Pause: Susan Howe's Poetry and the Spaces Between* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2010); Stephen Collis, *Through Words of Others: Susan Howe and Anarcho-Scholasticism* (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2015).
[6] See, for example, Montgomery, pp.88-91.

returned to its purest etymological meaning as "binding together"'.[7] I propose that Howe's work is a distinctly Puritan attempt to close the gap between the two sides of the caesura between life and death, self and other, word and thing. By Puritan I mean not only that her poetry is deeply rooted in the landscapes and history of her New England ancestors, but that it involves a serious engagement, beginning in the 1970s, with the existential concerns of the land's early European settlers.[8]

In broad terms, the Puritans justified their presence in the 'new' 'wilderness' that they had settled as fulfilling their destiny as God's chosen people; they acted on the understanding that the land was their God-given inheritance. This is most famously exemplified in John Winthrop's influential treatise, 'A Modell of Christian Charity' (1630), delivered to the first Massachusetts Bay colonists, in which colonial expansion is figured as the founding of a 'citty upon a hill' that will exemplify Christian values to the world.[9] Howe's introduction to Puritan writing was through her father, known as the 'The Last Puritan' to his friends.[10] As Howe recalled to Thomas Gardner, he had a deep interest in Puritan theology, and read the sermons of Cotton Mather (1663-1728) for pleasure.[11] Howe's parents were close friends of Perry Miller, eminent historian of the Puritans, writer of *The New England Mind* (1939) and an influential biography of the minister and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758).[12] Edwards is the most significant Puritan writer for Howe, in large part because of his radical interpretation of biblical typology. He read phenomena in the natural world of eighteenth-century New England as types that prefigured a divine, ahistorical antitype—they were 'images of divine things'.[13] As Jennifer L. Leader puts it, the purpose was not to 'diminish […] the present world but rather to affirm its lasting importance by folding human existence into god's larger and eternal story of glory and redemption'.[14] Edwards' manner of reading the world around him for signs of providence is an influential precursor to the associative

[7] *A Natural History of Pragmatism: The Fact of Feeling from Jonathan Edwards to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.11.
[8] For a more extensive outline of Howe's engagement with Puritan thought see Thomas Gardner, 'Interview with Susan Howe', *A Door Ajar: Contemporary Writers and Emily Dickinson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.138-164. Hereafter 'Gardner interview'.
[9] 'A Modell of Christian Charity', *Winthrop Papers,* ed. Alley Forbes et al., 2 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929), pp.282-295 (294).
[10] Howe, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979* (New York: New Directions, 1996), p.22.
[11] Gardner interview, pp.144.
[12] *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939); *Jonathan Edwards* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, c1949).
[13]'Images of Divine Things', *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* ed. Wallace E. Anderson et al., 11 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp.50-130.
[14] *Knowing, Seeing, Being: Jonathan Edwards, Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, and the American Typological Tradition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2016), p.1.

logic of punning and the apprehension of interconnectedness to which it leads (which I will discuss in more detail in my first chapter) that undergirds Howe's practice. Accepting her poetry as founded in a genuine search for grace makes for a different challenge: to reconcile that belief with the violent, extractive underside of the Puritan inheritance.

To approach this challenge, I explore the interrelated concepts of inheritance, debt, prophecy, and property, all of which form an intimate bind between the past and the present. Inheritance and debt constitute the positive and negative values of an economic, transactional relation to history and to the material world based on the structures of private property; they are the two sides of a limit that separates those who are understood to have a rightful claim to wealth and resources from those who are not. If I am in debt, although I make use of something I do not own it: I am obliged to repay it or something of its equivalent value. If I inherit something I do not have to return what was given to me: I am entitled to it because of my relation to the past and, according to patrilinear structures of ownership, it will rightfully belong to my offspring after me. As mentioned, providential discourse allowed America's early European settlers to understand the land as their rightful inheritance, property divinely bequeathed. But in many ways the covenant at the core of the Puritan belief system is also a debt, in that it is an agreement between two contracting parties which plays out over time.[15] According to the Covenant of Grace (drawn from the theology of John Calvin) at baptism the Puritan subject makes a covenant with God whereby, in exchange for salvation, they accept the obligation to 'walk in the way of the lord'.[16] Like a promissory note agreed on by debtor and creditor, the covenant locks the fated into a future-facing bond that must be worked off by living a Christian life. Both a covenant and a debt rid the believer/debtor of a degree of agency by locking them into a set course: until the debt is repaid, or the Christian life lived, they are living according to an obligation to another.

In what follows I explore the possibility of escaping this transactional logic through liveness. In the live experience of reading, I contend, inheritance can be fleetingly but radically reorganised as an interdependent commons, in which the perceiver is bound to their present material circumstances rather than to the past. My focus on the live reading experience draws on Catherine Gander's pragmatist reading of a Deweyan 'embodied

[15] For an outline of this context see Jens G Møller, 'The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14.1 (April 1963), pp.46-67.
[16] Ibid., p.47.

experience' in Muriel Rukeyser's *The Life of Poetry*.[17] For Rukeyser, Gander argues, knowledge is generated in the contact between the sensing, perceiving 'mind-body' and its surroundings, and the embodied experience of reading a poem contains, in Rukeyser's words, '*the entire past of the individual'*.[18] My use of the word 'live' rather than 'embodied' reflects my focus on performance, and on revelations in real time. As we will see, live and time-based artforms have significantly informed Howe's mode of interconnected reading, as well as her theatrical concept of history. Liveness, I suggest, is particularly suited to the perception of mutual indebtedness in the present.

ii: the double outside

'Sometimes I know you just from reading', Howe writes in an essay that, like 'Leaves', marvels at the strange feeling of contact that written words can bring about. Published in *The Birth-mark* (1993), 'Submarginalia' is loosely centred around Sara Coleridge's dedication to editing the posthumous literary estate of her father, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[19] The closing lines of Howe's essay are a gesture of intimate reverence that is inextricable from the violent history that precedes the moment of writing. Crucially, this deferential intimacy is framed as a debt, but rather than focusing on what happened, what is owed or to whom, the debt exists in the present tense:

> Doubles are counteracted one must draw still. 'Come up here soul soul.' Two desires. Thrift thrift. Near the surface I'll twine them and put in life. They are not the one. Flapping flapping flapping flapping. Sometimes I know you just from reading.
>
> It is the grace of scholarship. I am indebted to everyone. (p.39)

This passage exemplifies one of Howe's most brilliant and characteristic traits, in that it is a re-presentation of older contexts, pieced together from the pickings of her careful sifting through texts and manuscripts. In a manner that obscures the time and skill that this collaging entails, Howe's work often gives the sense that one is following her as she situates her writing in relation to what has previously been written—as if one is reading *with* her—even when it is unclear what text she is drawing from. The above passage combines a Civil War poem by Walt Whitman with two texts by Michel Foucault. The first sentence, 'Doubles are

[17]'Poetry as Embodied Experience: The Pragmatist Aesthetics of Muriel Rukeyser's *The Life of Poetry*', *Textual Practice*, 32.7 (2018), pp.1205-1229; Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 1996).
[18] Gander, p.1215; Rukeyser, p.177.
[19] *The Birth-mark: Unsettling The Wilderness in American History* (New York: New Directions, 2015), pp.26-42 (first publ. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993). Hereafter *BM*.

counteracted one must draw still', is made up of phrases from Foucault's essay on the work of his friend Maurice Blanchot (published with a twin essay by Blanchot on Foucault) from a section entitled 'The Companion'.[20] Foucault's essay outlines an ambivalence toward the alien, impersonal aspect of language and its relation to what he calls 'the thought from the outside' (p.7). This 'thought' is not privy to the Self/Other binary into which the world is ordered by the thinking subject. It is the sublime, 'unattainable face' of death, 'a nameless, placeless hymn to the light' (p.44). When it has departed, longing for it has the effect of 'intrud[ing] on interiority, drawing it out of itself' by presenting the possibility of 'a double that keeps his distance […] an other that is the same' (pp.47, 48). This 'companion' is not 'some other speaking subject' but 'the nameless limit language reaches', which erodes the subject's singular claim to the 'I' (p.51). 'The companion', Foucault writes,

> acts both as a demand to which one is never equal and a weight of which one would like to rid oneself. One is irretrievably bound to the companion with a familiarity that is hard to bear; yet one must draw still closer to him and create a bond with him different from the absence of ties that attaches one to him through the faceless form of absence. (pp.48-49)

This is the 'outside' of language and thought: that which cannot be contained by the interiority of a subject but to which the subject is tied. It is the part of speech that existed before 'I' did but is reproduced every time 'I' use words; it does not fit, therefore, in either category of 'me' or 'not me'. To supplant the dual sense of alienation and implication that this creates, Foucault suggests, we must form an attachment to language itself, outside of our attachments to the people who speak it; we must allow literature to lead us 'still closer' to this 'nameless, placeless' other.

Howe's revision of Foucault is subtle but significant: 'doubles are counteracted one must draw still.' To counteract—stemming, like 'encounter', from the Latin *contra*, 'against'—is to act against something, but also to act in response to it: to mirror or echo it. If 'one must draw still' (as opposed to 'still closer') one must perhaps find a balance or symmetry between impersonal language and subjective experience. Or perhaps, in the case of someone encountering the writing of an absent father, like Howe or Sara Coleridge, between the impersonality of language and the traces of a loved one that it may contain. In the preceding essay in *The Birth-mark*, Howe makes more explicit her distinction from Foucault. Referring

[20] 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside', trans. Brian Massumi, *Foucault, Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), pp.7-58.

to his famous essay 'What is an Author?' she writes: 'I cannot murmur indifferently: "What matter who's speaking?" I emphatically insist it does matter who's speaking' (*BM*, p.20).[21] For Howe, in the meeting between the impersonality of language and the historical specificity of its material context—in the entwining of life and words—there is something sacred that connects not just words, but the people who read them. Manuscripts and old books, Howe explained to Thomas Gardner, 'hold' the trace of the touch of other hands, other bodies; it is this trace that leads to 'a moment of grace between the reader and what's in print on that paper'.[22]

Most of the rest of the passage in 'Submarginalia' ('"Come up here soul soul." Two desires. Thrift thrift' […] 'I'll twine them and put in life. They are not the one. Flapping flapping flapping flapping') comes from Whitman's 'Song of the Banner at Daybreak' (1865).[23] In this poem, voiced by multiple speakers, a father begs his son to ignore a call to arms which, like all calls to arms, justifies violence for a higher cause. The child is 'beckoned', however, by the song, a banner, and a flag 'so broad it covers the whole sky':

> O father it is alive—it is full of people—it has children,
> O now it seems to me it is talking to its children (p.215)

The father's valuing of material wealth and stability is juxtaposed with the beguiling call that the child hears in the 'flapping' of the pennant: 'Come up here, soul, soul'. The child, we are told, yearns for the banner 'While others remain busy or smartly talking, forever teaching thrift, thrift' (p.219). Here Whitman's text echoes one whose words bear intimately personal traces, or ghosts, for Howe. 'Thrift, thrift' echoes Hamlet's scornful suggestion to Horatio that his mother married Claudius so soon after her husband's death in order to save money: 'Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.'[24] In 1983 Howe wrote to John Taggart that the ghost in *Hamlet* had always been associated for her with her own father.[25] Poetry, Howe seems to be suggesting via Whitman and Shakespeare, allows for a brush with actual historical people, not just the 'faceless'

[21] 'What is an Author?', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald E Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp.113-138 (115). Foucault draws on Samuel Beckett, 'Texts for Nothing: 3', *Stories and Texts for Nothing*, trans. by Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp.85-90 (85).
[22] Gardner interview, p.162.
[23] *The Complete Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), pp.214-219.
[24] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Aukland: The Floating Press, 2019), i.2, pp.28.
[25] Letter to John Taggart, 25 September 1983, John Taggart Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 11 Box 16 Folder 17.

double of Foucault's essay. This contact is outside the prosaic realm of material economics—and, indeed, outside linear, generational understandings of history.

Perhaps more crucially for our purposes, Howe has also long associated *Hamlet* with the theatrical nature of history. In 'Sorting Facts' (1996) she would write that seeing the Laurence Olivier film of the play, aged eleven, she understood 'by telepathy' the 'interaction and multiple connections perceived separately and at once between lyric poetry and murderous history'.[26] I will discuss this in more detail in my first chapter, but for now it is important to note that, for Howe, violent history and lyric poetry alike come together in the dramatic, performative mode of the theatre. In Whitman's poem, the figure of the 'Poet' eschews 'book-words' in favour of a live song 'in the open air' into which he will 'twine' both 'man's desire and babe's desire'. 'I'll put in life', he promises, 'I'll pour the verse with streams of blood, full of volition, full of joy' (p.214). This is a song in which the words are unsevered from what they denote, and through which lyric poetry and violence coincide. The song can 'twine' words with both the material world and inner experience. The 'Poet' proclaims as much in the following lines:

> But I am not the sea nor the red sun,
> I am not the wind with girlish laughter,
> […]
> But I am that which unseen comes and sings, sings, sings,
> Which babbles in brooks and scoots in showers on the land,
> Which the birds know in the woods mornings and evenings. (p.215)

The Poet is not exactly a natural phenomenon in the world, but it can be heard in the world: it 'babbles in brooks' even as it is not the brooks themselves. The Poet becomes the locus for the fusion of the visible world and some deeper knowledge known by the birds, in which everything is connected, including words. This is what he imbues into 'book-words' to make them come alive. As Howe rehearses, 'near the surface I'll twine them and put in life.'

By 'twining' Foucault's 'thought from the outside' with Whitman's vision of poetry as binding the world together, and with the 'ghost' of her father, Howe articulates a kind of intimate contact with materiality (especially that of paper and ink) which entwines language and inner experience. Another snippet from Foucault adds still more shades to the complex

[26] *SF,* p.111.

relationship between words and things. The phrase 'near the surface' comes from a section of Foucault's *The Order of Things* titled 'The Writing of Things':

> Language stands halfway between the visible forms of nature and the secret conveniences of esoteric discourse. It is a fragmented nature, divided against itself and deprived of its original transparency by admixture; it is a secret that carries within itself, though near the surface, the decipherable signs of what it is trying to say. It is at the same time a buried revelation and a revelation that is gradually being restored to ever greater clarity.[27]

Foucault, too, describes language as occupying the gap between the exterior world and one's singular inner experience, albeit without suggesting, as Whitman's poem does, that occupying this gap it can 'twine' the world together under a flag 'so broad it covers the whole sky'. Still, the second half of the passage could be interpreted as a distinctly Puritan exegesis, the search for 'decipherable signs' of 'buried revelation'. In Howe's spliced retelling, the secret double that is carried within language is sacred because of its 'admixture' of interiority and exteriority, or of material world and perceiving self. It is through the union of esoteric inner experience and materiality that words allow Howe to 'know you just from reading'. 'It is the grace of scholarship', she continues, 'I am indebted to everyone'.[28] According to her entwined reproduction of these sources, Howe's relationship with history and with 'scholarship' holds the ambivalence of a bond—in the economic sense of a 'duty' (OED)—experienced in the live encounter with words.

iii: the impossible retrieval of voices

This bond will play out to different effects in the following chapters, and first it will be helpful to further outline its complicated ethics as they emerge in the aforementioned 'Leaves' (1985). The closest thing in Howe's oeuvre to a manifesto, 'Leaves' is by no means unambiguous: as we will see, it responds to a particular historical and social moment, and does not fully speak to the concerns of her later work. It is a useful touchstone nonetheless, precisely because of the insights it gives into the contradictory covenant Howe's work negotiates. It is a rich, fragmentary piece made up of deceptively simple prose interspersed with verses from *Pythagorean Silence* (1982). It is characteristic of Howe's work in its lack of differentiation between world events and personal memories, its inclusion of folklore, its

[27] *The Order of Things* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.39-40.
[28] For Howe's linking of this 'grace of scholarship' with Jonathan Edwards' concept of grace, see Gardner interview, p.162.

meditation on historical erasure and censorship, and its preoccupation with the possibility of speaking in the aftermath of violence. History as a grand, global narrative remains unsevered from her childhood perspective on it, and details of her early biography appear alongside accounts of concurrent brutality in Europe: the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, the Spanish Civil War, the beginning of World War Two. The family was living in Buffalo, Howe recalls, 'when my sister was born and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor' and their father 'put on a soldier suit and disappeared with the others into the thick of the threat to the east called West' (p.10). Because of this event, simultaneously global and deeply personal, Howe suggests that her understanding of the world has always been yoked to an awareness of violence. 'For me', the essay opens, 'there was no silence before armies' (p.9).

Signalling her indebtedness to Wallace Stevens and to exceptionalist providential discourse, as well as the effort to distance herself from both, this opening line is a revision of a wartime Stevens poem. 'Martial Cadenza' was written in October 1937, four months after Howe was born and a month after the invasion of Poland.[29] In this pre-Pearl Harbour moment, many in the US believed that the country would be better served 'staying out' of the conflict in Europe, and even that it was 'for some shadowy reason […] absolutely immune to the germ of Fascism'.[30] 'Martial Cadenza' is, as Alan Filreis recounts, a poetic rendition of this 'characteristically American partisan nonpartisanship'; it follows in a long tradition of understanding the national estate as exceptional and isolated from the so-called old world.[31] In a manner characteristic of Puritan typology—in which an image in the mortal world prefigures the timeless image of God—the poem envisions a state of timelessness unchanged by worldly events. The central image is of a perpetually returning 'evening star' that is both recalled and predicted. The speaker, perceiver of the star, is aware of being on the brink of a great change, and also that the star allows access to a state unaffected by the coming developments. The star appears

> Again . . . as if it came back, as if life came back,
> Not in a later son, a different daughter, another place,
> But as if evening found us young, still young,
> Still walking in a present of our own. (p.217)

[29] *Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p.217.
[30] Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point* (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1942), p.295. Quoted in Alan Filreis, *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Oxford: Princeton UP, 1991), p.8.
[31] *Wallace Stevens and the Actual World* (Oxford: Princeton UP, 1991), p.12. For an account of Stevens' awareness of American public opinion at the time of writing, see pp.12-14.

This explicitly is not the 'return' of patriarchal generationality, whereby one's 'life' is sustained by creating a version of oneself in one's descendants. Instead of a generational return within linear history, the image offers the apparent stillness of astral suspension. The stanza from which Howe quotes in her opening line is as follows:

> It was like sudden time in a world without time,
> This world, this place, this street in which I was,
> Without time: as that which is not has no time,
> Is not, or is of what there was, is full
> Of the silence before armies, armies without
> Either trumpets or drums, the commanders mute, the arms
> On the ground, fixed fast in a profound defeat.

This stanza imagines the future and the past contained, seemingly prewritten, in one suspended moment, the 'silence before armies' bleeding into the silence of an army that has surrendered. The silence exists in a time before war but also seems to remain after the battle is over, in the space 'before'—as in, in front of—a defeated, deflated army. Here, at a moment of heightened awareness of impending violence and great change, the focus is on a timeless empty space that, by way of this emptiness, evokes the past: 'as that which is not has no time, / Is not, or is of what there was'.

In Howe's revision there was 'no silence before armies'. Born when she was, the 'different daughter' to a father who fought in the war, remaining apart from violence has never been a real possibility. Like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, she is blown forward through time while she looks back at carnage, always too late to experience a moment before destruction.[32] And yet 'there was no silence before armies' retains something of 'Martial Cadenza's temporal ambiguity: it could also suggest that silence did not exist before war, and that the deployment of armies was what brought about the possibility of silence. This holds something of what Benjamin has called a 'dialectical image', which is 'the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history'.[33] In this image, which is 'not temporal in nature but figural',

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[32] 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp.253-364. The relevance of Benjamin's theories of historical materialism for Howe's work in the 1970s and 1980s has been documented by Paul Naylor and Rachel Tzvia Back, among others. Naylor in particular draws on Benjamin's dialectical image in his reading of *Thorow.* Paul Naylor, 'Where Are We Now in Poetry', *Poetic Investigations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp.43-70; Back, pp.59-62.

[33] *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) [N10a,3], p.475.

> it is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, an image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation ([N3,1], p.463).

The 'dialectical image' in 'Martial Cadenza' is the star that marks the passage of time as it hurtles across the horizon, and simultaneously hangs suspended and unchanged; it combines the timeless stillness of a mapped-out destiny with the brutal and seemingly arbitrary churn of world history. These incompatible, inseparable elements are central to Howe's aesthetic of a live inheritance: they exist alongside each other, balanced in a constellation.

What 'Leaves' puts forth, I suggest, is a blend of Benjamin's dialectical image and Jonathan Edwards' type: it signals a timeless, pre-existing order which is separate from this history of violence but holds its theosophical explanation. As in the doubling bond between words and world (Foucault's 'buried revelation') there is a sense in this constellation of a timeless order that exists alongside, even by way of, a deep-rooted historical and geographical specificity. 'Leaves' presents Howe's materialist poetics as a direct result of the coincidence of being 'born in Boston Massachusetts on June 10th, 1937, to an Irish mother and an American father' (p.9). This distinctly situated, relational conception of knowledge is characteristic of Howe—and, as I will discuss in my third chapter, of her pragmatist predecessors. It might seem obvious, but it is worth stressing because it is central to what follows: the form that her thoughts take, 'Leaves' suggests, is inextricable from the accident of her birth.

The final, oft-quoted lines of 'Leaves' present an impasse in which the desire to 'Consent' to a prewritten order leads in one direction, while the wish to actively recuperate those who have been forgotten leads in another:

> I write to break out into perfect primeval Consent. I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate. (p.14)

The significance of 'perfect primeval Consent' is important to my first chapter, and I will discuss it at length there. Meanwhile, I offer a correction to previous critical readings of the second line quoted, which has often been taken somewhat reductively as the 'foundational

aim' or the 'driving focus' of Howe's work.[34] To start an inexhaustive list of examples, Norman Finkelstein proposes that Howe's poetic 'ideology' is

> made manifest through textual practices intended, as Howe famously puts it, to "tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate".[35]

Kathleen Crown defines Howe's work as an attempt to 'translate' the experiences of 'women and others' who have been 'repressed from the official culture or banished to the realm of madness'.[36] Rachel Tzvia Back states that the unintelligibility of the poetry places both poet and reader 'in the powerful role of "lift[ing] voices" […] "from the dark side of history", from the brink of erasure'.[37] Marjorie Perloff notes Howe's 'uncanny ability to enter the experience of an actual historical woman and to make that experience her own'.[38] Lynn Keller suggests that Howe's 'words and spaces give definition and even voice to what might otherwise have remained unapprehensible, incoherent, lost'.[39] As such readings suggest, Howe's writing is sensitive to lives overlooked by historical records and the oppressive authority that the printed word holds. But taking the above statement as a synecdoche for her project oversimplifies her relationship to these lives, and this violence, into a scientifically objective act of relocation in which the poet is an ahistorical agent untouched by the dynamics of power described. Peter Quartermain expresses this most explicitly when, citing the same sentence, he describes Howe's project as 'archaeological retrieval'.[40]

Readings like this seem to be looking for one key for Howe's complex and multivalent poetry. But hers is not a project of reimagining individual lives that have been lost.[41] She may *wish* to recover these voices, but she does not ascribe to herself the agency that would mean

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[34] Nicky Marsh, '"Out of My Texts I Am Not What I Play": Politics and self in the poetry of Susan Howe', *College Literature,* 24.3 (1997), pp.124-137 (126); Joyce, p.35.
[35] '"MAKING THE GHOST WALK ABOUT AGAIN AND AGAIN": History as Séance in the Work of Susan Howe, Literature Interpretation Theory', 20:3 (2009), pp.215-240 (217).
[36] '"This unstable I-witnessing": Susan Howe's Lyric Iconoclasm and the Articulating Ghost', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 27.5 (2010), pp.483-506 (487).
[37] Back, p.6.
[38] '"Collision or Collusion with History": The Narrative Lyric of Susan Howe', *Contemporary Literature,* 30.4 (December 1989), p.523.
[39] 'An Interview with Susan Howe', *Contemporary Literature,* 36:1 (Spring, 1995), pp.1-34 (2). Hereafter 'Keller interview'.
[40] 'AND THE WITHOUT: An Interpretive Essay on Susan Howe', *The Difficulties,* 3.2 (1989), pp.71-81 (79).
[41] For examples of works that *do* advocate historical fabulation as care for anonymous dead whose traces are felt in archival records, see the work of Saidiya Hartman and *Zong!* by M. Nourbese Philip. See especially Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe,* 26 (2008), pp.1-14; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2019); M. Nourbese Philip, *Zong!* (Middletown.: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

that she *could* do so (and, as the above examples illustrate, her words are often reproduced without the crucial 'I wish I could' at the start). Presenting Howe's poetry as primarily recuperative, moreover, means suggesting that she presumes to speak for past victims of violence in a manner that conflates multiple distinct forms of oppression. Indeed, describing the victims of violence to which she is attuned as 'women and others', as Crown does, suggests that she speaks unequivocally from the perspective of the victim (p.487). Instead, Howe speaks consciously as the descendent of colonial settlers, heir to the Anglo-Irish gentry and to the New England colonists. Her work is an attempted acceptance of her heritage as much as an acknowledgement of the acts of violence that have sustained it. She speaks in response to past brutality, not to change it (because she cannot) but in the impossible attempt to understand the debt that she owes by (at least in the 1980s) making it fit with a vision of order and predestination. Rather than a retrieval, the statement outlines an ethics of post-ness, of coming after violence. As will be made clearer in my first chapter, I use the word 'ethics' here keeping in mind Ludwig Wittgenstein, for whom the ethical experience is something unspeakable about which he nonetheless *wishes* to speak.[42]

An exchange between Howe, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and DuPlessis' writing class at Temple University offers further insight into Howe's ethical stance on past violence at the time. In the recording of the conversation, which took place the year after 'Leaves' was written, Howe comes across as audibly frustrated with the suggestion that understanding the oppression of women is an adequate lens through which to understand all oppression.[43] When she describes Mary Rowlandson's account of captivity during King Philip's War (1675-9)—'she is taken captive by the Indians, but she travels and lives with them in that wild space, in this free place that hasn't been conquered'—DuPlessis suggests that it is particularly important that this narrative is written by a woman because as a woman 'culturally you are that space and therefore you're giving access to that which you are' (30:30). Howe articulates a differing position in which the oppression faced by white women does not equip them to speak for 'that space': 'it isn't just women, is what I'm saying' (28:15). She leads the conversation to colonial violence—'in American history which I'm so wrought up over now,

[42] 'A Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review,* 74 (1965), pp.3-12. For an analysis of this text, and of the significance of Wittgenstein's framing of his subject as 'something I am keen on communicating to you', see Yi-Ping Ong, 'Lectures on Ethics: Wittgenstein and Kafka', *Wittgenstein and Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp.206-230.
[43] 'DuPlessis and class in Discussion with Susan Howe', online audio recording, *PennSound* (1986), 30:00 <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/DuPlessis.php> [accessed 15 November 2020] Hereafter 'DuPlessis interview'.

I mean that our history is so false in this country, that we exterminated the Indians, they're gone'—and to fascism and war, which she does not see as something that women can give access to simply because they speak as women (63:45). In fact it does not seem to be something that anyone can speak about:

> all those people who were just killed in those gas ovens […] or blown up in Hiroshima, they can't be *nothing* […] maybe there's power out there in the powerlessness of—in the people who never spoke, that is such a tremendous power that we don't even, we have never tapped it or been aware of [it]. I mean, if you want to talk about issues of power, I just think there are certain feminist issues of power that are boring issues of power (65:00).

So far, Howe's suggestion that the experience of middle-class white women is not enough to speak for all victims of oppression suggests a more intersectional understanding of power, and this is certainly part of Howe's reasoning. Perhaps more surprisingly, she goes on to suggest that there is something sublime and sacred that connects unspeakable violence to something 'beautiful':

> but all I'm saying is the issues of publishing or, ah, 'let us get the good job with the same salary', all that. Of course that's all true and […] important, but what about—I mean, it's making us maybe devalue something very beautiful (66:30).

Howe's is not, at least not primarily, a revival or reimagination of the atrocities she has come after, or of 'giving access' to them, but rather a search in the remaining debris for an explanation in which the victims of fascism are not 'nothing'. This explanation would be not logical but spiritual and, as it was for Jonathan Edwards', based in perception (and I will discuss the importance of the perception of beauty for Edwards in my first chapter). With this exchange in mind, the wish to lift anonymous voices from the debris of history reads less like a statement of intention than an expression of regrettable belatedness, a state that is inevitably *after* violence, however 'wrought up' it might be about it. 'In my poetry' Howe writes in 'Leaves', 'time and again, questions of assigning *the cause* of history dictate the sound of what is thought' (p.13). This cause is a tremendous, terrifying version of Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'First Cause', which he described as a unifying author responsible for all individual 'genius'.[44] For Howe, if there is a '*cause* of history' that connects everything then it must also be the author of violence.

[44] 'Uses of Great Men', *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Waiheke Island: The Floating Press, 2009), pp.4-32 (32).

Howe perceives this connection at a slant in the live contact with material traces of history's documentation. In 'Leaves', she recalls that watching the war from afar by way of photographs and radio broadcasts did not give her a sense of separation from the war, though it made her acutely aware of the distance between her and her father. Nor was it an experience of disintegration, though it exposed narrative History as an inadequate means of ordering chaos. Instead, she describes this mediated witnessing as a kind of formative alignment with violence, through a material connection that historical narrative cannot account for. In the following passage, instead of extracting lost voices, the speaker loses herself in the materiality of war's documentation:

> If to see is to *have* at a distance, I had so many dead Innocents distance was abolished. Substance broke loose from the domain of time and obedient intention. I became part of the ruin. In the black skies over Europe I was strife represented.
>
> Things overlap in space and are hidden. Those black and white picture shots—moving or fixed—were a subversive generation. "The hawk, with his long claws / Pulled down the stones. / The dove, with her rough bill / Brought me them home". (p.12)

The witnessing of traumatic violence makes apparent another mode of ordering matter according to live perception. The suggestion that 'to see is to *have* at a distance' comes from phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's proposal that sight is a 'strange possession' whereby the perceiver brings meaning to the object they perceive.[45] In Howe's formulation, however, the perceived was not an object she possessed through perception but rather something that she *was*; the abolished 'distance' is both geographical (between Boston and 'the black skies of Europe') and intersubjective (between the perceiver and the perceived). Moreover, she 'was' not strife itself but 'strife represented'. The mediation of an event—its representation and apprehension at a distance by means of the materiality of photographic film—connects two distinct presents into one. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Howe's work suggests that the materiality of representation reveals some hidden mode of being with others. In this instance in 'Leaves', by way of the media through which she herself experienced war as a young child, she became part of the war's retelling. Violence has shaped how she sees the world as fundamentally interconnected and material; and, for better or worse, violence is thus an inevitable component of her writing. To recapitulate, unlike the isolationist exceptionalism that Stevens' poem envisions for the US, even when she too

[45] 'Eye and mind' *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. G. A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp.121-164 (127).

searches for a cause, Howe's position as a perceiving subject and a poet cannot be separated from the material world, and the cataclysmic destruction of world events.

The verses that close this passage in 'Leaves' depict an act of destruction (the hawk pulling down the stones) that occurs at a distance from the speaker but is connected to them by way of a dove, typically the bearer of peace, who carries the material 'home' from the aftermath. The words are from an English nursery rhyme, 'When I Was A Little Girl, About Seven Years Old', in which an assortment of birds help the speaker to build a 'kirk', or church, in the woods.[46] The rhyme ends inside the new church, built from the rubble of whatever it was that the hawk tore down:

> And all the birds of the air, they helped me to work.
> The hawk with his long claws pulled down the stone,
> The dove with her rough bill brought me them home.
> The parrot was the clergyman, the peacock was the clerk,
> The bullfinch played the organ, —we made merry work.

In the context of Howe's essay there is a distinctly Puritan flavour to her inclusion of this rhyme: destruction becomes a necessary part of a new church—or, at least, a new, constructed space of belonging.

iv: 'my historical consciousness'

As evidenced in my second and third chapters and my coda, Howe's later work develops in ways that 'Leaves' does not account for, especially regarding the need to locate a universal 'cause'. When we consider, too, that it was first written in response to a particular circumstance, it is possible to hear in its claims a slightly defensive, even polemic tone that falls short of the ethical complexity espoused in other works. Before it appeared as the preface to *The Europe of Trusts* (1990) it was a 'Poetics Statement' written for the New Poetics Colloquium held in Vancouver in August 1985.[47] Many of the others attending (Barrett Watten, Ron Silliman, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Diane Ward, Bob Perelman) were associated with the Language School, the milieu in which

[46] James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips, *The Nursery Rhymes of England, Collected Chiefly from Oral Tradition* (London: John Russell Smith, 1846), p.232.
[47] Documentation and recordings related to the colloquium is available on the PennSound online archive. 'New Poetics Colloquium at the Kootenay School of Writing', online audio database, *PennSound* <https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/New-Poetics-Colloquium.php> [accessed 15 November 2020]

Howe's early published work was first read.[48] In the years after the colloquium Howe's work would be included in two definitive anthologies of Language writing—*In the American Tree* edited by Ron Silliman, and *'Language' Poetries: An Anthology*, edited by Douglas Messerli—and Howe was close friends with some of the poets involved (especially Charles Bernstein and Lyn Hejinian). [49] She had distanced her work from the Language movement since the early 1980s, however.[50] In 1995 she would explain her sense of detachment from the more openly political work of the Language poets as the result of her being slightly older than them, and coming of age in a different era with a different education: 'I wasn't reading the Russian formalist critics. I had no Marxist background, having never been to any university.'[51] This is not to say that she disagreed with their anti-authoritarian politics (and as I will show, her later work especially shares with the Language poets an interest in Marxist understandings of history and reproductive labour) but rather, having trained as an actor and artist rather than an academic, up until at least the 1990s she had felt herself 'at a remove' from the way the Language poets expressed their political concerns (p.20). Her 'sensibility' she recalled, 'was very much formed in the sixties' and in the New York art scene of that time, whereas the Language poets 'were in universities during the late sixties, and their work is fuelled by the political rage and the courage of that period' (p.20). She had arrived too late for Stevens' idealised separation from the brutal and prosaic material world; as she saw it, she was also too early and lacking in the academic grounding for the expressly political modes of the Language poets.

In one scathing account, the poet Paulette Jiles described the scene at the New Poetics Colloquium as argumentative, theoretical, and macho.[52] Another attendee, Pauline Butling, noted that she was 'struck by the aggressiveness of the participants, to the point of feeling

[48] See, for example, Tom Fisher, 'Making Sense: Jacques Rancière and the Language Poets', *Journal of Modern Literature,* 36.2 (2013), pp.156-174; Dan Chiasson, 'Autobiography and the Language School', *One Kind of Everything: Poem and Person in Contemporary America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp.168-178; Ming-Qian Ma, 'Articulating the Inarticulate: Singularities and the Counter-Method in Susan Howe', *Contemporary Literature,* 36:3 (Autumn 1995), pp.466-489.
[49] Ron Silliman, ed., *In the American Tree: Language, Poetry, Realism* (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1986); Douglas Messerli, ed., *'Language' Poetries* (New York: New Directions, 1987).
[50] For example, in 1981 she wrote to Lyn Hejinian that she had 'lost all interest in LANGUAGE MAG concerns. ALL.' Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 28 December 1981, Lyn Hejinian Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MS74, Box 4 Folder 18.
[51] Keller interview, p.20.
[52] Paulette Jiles, 'Hustling at the New Poetics Colloquium', *Brick,* 27 (Summer 1986), pp.45-50.

assaulted at times'.[53] If these accounts are anything to go by, the intended audience for 'Leaves' was an intimidating one that could have been perceived as unwelcoming to anyone who felt 'at a remove' from the Language poets, and it might well have involved an element of preparing to defend oneself from modes of inquiry different to one's own. The expression of regrettable, inevitable belatedness—'I wish I could'—of the piece's closing line is, after all, very different from the Marxist focus on praxis that is central to much Language poetry.[54] When Howe sent the newly written 'Leaves' to her close correspondent John Taggart a month before the colloquium he responded by respectfully and thoughtfully, 'for [her] own protection', picking out parts of the piece that seemed ambiguous or contradictory, and imagining questions they was likely to elicit.[55] Howe replied: 'I hope that I won't have to argue about it—as they said it was for a magazine connected with the event. I don't have to read it.'[56] It is possible, I think, to read the 'Leaves' as doubling down on a version of poetry that is not theoretical but rooted in the specifics of a particular, resolutely illogical belief system. 'This is my historical consciousness', she writes, 'I have no choice in it.'

As my first chapter demonstrates, the sixties sensibility that Howe presents as distinguishing her from the Language poets is indeed key to her 'historical consciousness' (although Howe frames it in such a way as to foreclose the possibility that the Language poets, too, were influenced by the art of the 1960s and 1970s). Howe moved to New York in the 1960s where, as she recalls to Keller,

> Painters, sculptors, dancers, film- makers, musicians, conceptual artists were all working together and crossing genre boundaries, sometimes with appalling results, more often wacky and wonderful results.[57]

Many of the artists to whom Howe was drawn had, since the 1950s, developed an aesthetic that can be classed as 'minimalist', a term that is widely and variously used, often denoting specific formal characteristics in visual art, sculpture, or music. Here I follow Michael Dango, who argues that what links the fiction of Raymond Carver and Mary Robison, the

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[53] Part of the reason for this aggression, in Butling's view, was the participants' 'resistance to that military power structure of the U.S.A. The strength and power of that structure demands […] equally strong resistance.' Pauline Butling, 'Response to Paulette Jiles' article "Hustling At The New Poetics Colloquium", published in Brick 27', *Brick*, 28 (Fall 1986), pp.61-61 (61).
[54] See William Lavander, 'Disappearance of Theory, Appearance of Praxis: Ron Silliman, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and the Essay', *Poetics Today*, 17.2 (Summer 1996), pp.181-202.
[55] Letter to Susan Howe, 21 July 1985, Susan Howe Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201 Box 2 Folder 7-11.
[56] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985, John Taggart Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 11 Box 16 Folder 19.
[57] Keller interview, p.4.

music of La Monte Young, and the sculpture of Donald Judd under the category of minimalism is a shared 'style', a term that Dango takes to mean 'socially circulated strategies within the production process'.[58] Across disciplines, what these minimalist strategies were aimed at was an attempted at reframing our perception of material. It was an attempt (which might seem ludicrously ahistorical today) to make the artwork signify nothing more than the material from which it is made—to purify it, in other words, by separating it from social and aesthetic preconceptions or background. This 'style' is what I suggest was most important for Howe: a mode of action in a particular cultural and material context, in which artists attempted to re-see material outside of preconceived aesthetic categories of 'artistic' and 'everyday'. For Howe, it is important to note, this particularly Anglo-American concern was 'rooted', as she recalled to Lynn Keller, 'in Puritanism'.[59]

To recapitulate, what these artists aimed for was not formal or generic newness but a new way of seeing, reading, or hearing the material essence of the world (John Cage's *4'33''* [1952] is often cited as a work that epitomises the aesthetic of the early work of this kind).[60] In its insistence on the radical continuity between art and life, and in its pedagogical quality, the minimalist attitude drew from the pragmatist philosophies of John Dewey, whose educational principles were the foundational ethos of Black Mountain College that many of the early generation of New York minimalists had been associated with.[61] By the 1960s the collapsing of art into the everyday had become widespread in the multidisciplinary scene that Howe described to Keller. In dance, experimental choreographers like Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton incorporated non-specialist movement (like jogging, standing, drinking a glass of water, eating a pear), dismantling the distinction between everyday and artistic movement.[62] Sculptors such as Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, and David von Schlegell (Howe's partner) worked with industrial and everyday materials such as steel, latex, and fibreglass,

[58] Michael Dango, 'Minimalism as Detoxification', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 65.4 (Winter, 2019), pp.643-675 (648). This 'action', Dango suggests, is one of 'detoxification', motivated by racial and gender-based anxieties. Dango's argument seems convincing when we take into account the 'eugenic aesthetics' that Kyla Schuller has shown to be prevalent in much US art and design in the early twentieth century, including in the Deweyan aesthetic philosophy on which the Black Mountain College was founded. Kyla Schuller, 'Eugenic Aesthetics: Literature as Evolutionary Instrument in the Early Twentieth Century', *The Palgrave Handbook of Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature and Science,* eds. Neel Ahuja et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.433-447.
[59] Keller interview, p.4.
[60] John Cage, *4'33''* (New York: Henmar Press, c1960).
[61] For an introduction to the Black Mountain College and its staff and students, see 'The Black Mountain College, John Cage and Merce Cunningham', *Tate* < https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/b/black-mountain-college/black-mountain-college-john-cage-merce-cunningham> [accessed 20 January 2021].
[62] See S. Elise Archias, 'The Body as an Everyday Material in the 1960s: Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton', *Wreck,* 3.1 (2010), pp.1-5.

drawing attention to the shared materiality of industrial objects and art objects.[63] It was about this time that Howe began, by way of von Schlegell's minimalist sculpture, to conceive of a kind of spiritual materialism based on 'the mysterious link between beauty and utility' whereby 'some enduring value, some purpose is reflected in the material you use'.[64] Howe's work continues this minimalist mode in its reverence for the materiality of writing, and its extension of the scope of the poem to incorporate her own sifting through archives, and the reader's perception of her pages. Both aspects have been central to Howe's entire oeuvre, and are perhaps best epitomised in *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (2014).[65] This text started out as a lecture (viewable on YouTube) in which Howe projected images of unidentified manuscripts as she spoke.[66] At the beginning of the lecture she stressed the importance of the audience's live perception of the images, assuring them that there would be a handout that explained what they had seen, but only after the lecture. 'It would be awful', she said, if they focused on the references during the piece, and thus 'stopped experiencing' the images as they appeared.

There is an important contradiction in the minimalist preoccupation with apprehending essential or unadorned materiality. Even as it is based on a break from traditional understandings of art as separate from everyday life, it also implies a return to a more essential or originary mode of experience. In one of the first attempts to define its characteristics, Barbara Rose traced the origins of this 'new sensibility' to works by two artists who were both important in Howe's creative development: Kasimir Malevich and Marcel Duchamp.[67] According to Rose, minimalism was a synthesis, half a century later, of the apparently opposing gestures of Malevich's *Black Square on White* (1913) and Duchamp's readymade *Bottle Rack* (1914): 'on one hand, the search for transcendent,

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[63] See, for example, Eva Hesse, *Hang Up*, 1966, acrylic paint on cloth over wood; acrylic paint on cord over steel tube, The Art Institute, Chicago; David von Schlegell, *Radio Controlled Sculpture,* 1966, aluminium and electrical components, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
[64] Keller interview, p.5.
[65] Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (New York: New Directions, 2014).
[66]'SPONTANEOUS PATRICULARS: The Telepathy of Archives / Woodberry Poetry Room', online video recording, *YouTube,* 16 October 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTGPbiUm-3o> [accessed 13 April 2021].
[67] Barbara Rose, 'ABC Art', *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Gregory Battcock (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), pp.274-297 (275) (first published in *Art in America* (1965)). Howe cites this essay as influential in Keller, p.4.
Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square,* 1915, oil on linen, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; Marcel Duchamp, *Bottle Rack,* 1914/1959, galvanised iron, Art Institute, Chicago.
For an account of the influence of Duchamp on Howe's early poetry see Elisabeth Joyce, 'Hinged, Contingent, Joined: Susan Howe's "Hinged Picture"', *Cahiers Charles V,* 34.1 (2003), pp.93-117; and Harris, 'Susan Howe's Art and Poetry, 1968-1974'. For Howe's interest in Malevich, see Keller interview, p.7.

universal, absolute, and on the other the blanket denial of the existence of absolute values' (275). To the sceptical, the minimalist aesthetic could be seen as an attempt to escape one's 'historical consciousness' by a focusing instead on physical, perceptual experience; to escape the past by immersing oneself in the present, as if the two could be separated. The unsynthesizable conflict at the heart of Howe's poetics, that announces an acceptance of *chaos* in the same breath as it asks for evidence of a *cause*, is a complication of the minimalist aesthetic of universal purity achieved through the essential qualities of materials. In Howe's work, it is impossible to separate the material object from its history, or perception from its historically contingent surroundings. How one perceives those surroundings, Howe's work suggests, is contingent on the particulars of one's past—on one's present tense 'historical consciousness'.

v: chapter outlines

My first chapter focuses on works that slightly predate 'Leaves' and are preoccupied with similar questions. At this time, too, Howe was exploring the idea of a 'perfect primeval Consent' to the effacement of individuality (*L*, p.14). The chapter also establishes the centrality of theatre and liveness to Howe's interrelated understandings of history, gender, and patrilinear inheritance. To do this, I read *The Liberties* (1980) alongside the work of Howe's friend, collaborator and fellow student at Boston School of Fine Art, Joan Jonas.[68] In the 1970s, Howe and Jonas turned to performance and live perception as a means of combining minimalist materialism with an instrumentalization of narcissism. My chapter reads the space of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, setting of *The Liberties*, as a version of Jonas' sculptural environments or 'stage sets', in which the theatrical space is made up of props from previous performances—or, in the case of the cathedral, souvenirs from Ireland's violent past.[69] In a manner that will chime with Howe's interest in 'the entrance of the messianic into the material object' in Walter Benjamin's work, in this theatrical space (which I term a 'play area') history is not a linear sequence of events but an accumulation of material perceived in the present.[70]

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[68] 'The Liberties', *The Europe of Trusts* (see 'Leaves' above), pp.147-218 (first published by Loon Books (1980)). Hereafter *TL*.
[69] Joan Jonas, *Stage Sets* (installation), Institute of Contemporary Art: University of Philadelphia, 3 December 1976 – 5 January 1977.
[70] Keller interview, p.29.

Throughout the chapter the work of Howe and Jonas moves in tandem. They were actively involved in each other's creative practices at this time and, more importantly for my purposes, they shared a preoccupation with a kind of mirroring interdependence between perceiver and perceived, and with the role of perspective in the delineation of a subject, be it psychic, grammatical, or discursive. For both artists, the engagement with folklore, culturally specific performance practices, and children's games allowed for an understanding of history as a constant shuffling and reshuffling of the same material, and a collapsing of the event and its documentation into one continuous stream of liveness. This continuum allows the perceiving 'eye' to be both more and less than the singular 'I': it becomes a narcissistic instrument that is part of a more interconnected, intersubjective existence.

The chapter makes a claim for this narcissistic instrument as a kind of disparate, maternal subjectivity that is crucial to the recording of narrative history but remains outside it. It is only in liveness, I suggest, that what the psycho-social theorist Lisa Baraitser calls 'the matrixial substrata of psychic life' can be perceived.[71] The narcissistic instrument becomes a kind of sacrificial medium through which continuity with those that have gone before is maintained; and through which material inherited from the past is repurposed. This is a mechanical process, in that both artists practise a constant reshuffling of previous works, but it is also inextricable from the role (with all the theatrical connotations the word brings) that reproductive and maternal labour play in the maintaining of patrilinear generationality.

The stage of official world history has been peopled with a staggering number of actors from both sides of Howe's family, and her engagement with the reproduction of history inevitably leads her to confront this legacy. My second chapter pays attention to the quality of likeness, of sharing an attribute, to explore how the mark of inheritance circulates in the present. In this case the double with whom Howe is paired is not a synchronous reflection or mirror image, but someone who shares this (birth) mark: her sister the poet, essayist, and novelist Fanny Howe. My study focuses on Susan Howe's essay 'Sorting Facts' (1996) and Fanny Howe's *Saving History* (1993) a novel that is heavily informed by her Catholic faith and her communist politics.[72] In this period, in which Susan Howe produced her most

[71] *Enduring Time* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.100.
[72]'Sorting Facts', *The Quarry* (New York: New Directions, 2015), pp.88-140 (first publ. as 'Sorting Facts: or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Chris Marker' *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film,* ed. Charles Warren (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 295–343). Hereafter *SF.* 'Saving History', *Radical Love: 5 Novels* (Beacon: Nightboat Books, 2006), pp.313-359 (first publ. Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1993). Hereafter *SH.*

explicitly Marxist writing, thinking with her sister's work opens a way to reconsidering the weight of past generations on the present, and imagining a revelatory commons. I draw on psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell's work on siblings to trace a particular kind of being in common that I describe as thinking 'with another in mind'. Fanny Howe's work offers an alternative to Puritan theosophy by way of the Latin American tradition of Liberation Theology, which presents Christ as a material presence in this world as opposed to something that the material world prefigures or predicts. Suffering in *Saving History* is not a necessary step on the path to salvation but is in fact where salvation is located. The novel presents a variegated, Edenic 'tribe' of siblings and lovers, an interconnected web of people who are defined and brought together by their common characteristics, be they shared genes or shared suffering (*SH,* p.419). In *Saving History* Fanny Howe presents the lateral relation as a state of radical sharing of bodily material that reveals a sacred, earthly commons.

Susan Howe thinks with her sister to produce a replica of this morphing, familial commons in 'Sorting Facts'. The sense of proximity or connection that likeness fosters allows Susan Howe a way in to an elegy for her husband David von Schlegell (1920-1992) and a poetic documentation of his materialist vision of the world. I argue that the relation that Susan Howe depicts between von Schlegell and the filmmaker Chris Marker bears in mind *Saving History* and its lateral re(ve)lations. Following from the engagement with minimalism in my last chapter, this chapter uses Fanny Howe's mode of materialist revelation to rethink the central dichotomy between timeless form and historically situated materiality: or, to rephrase in terms of Susan Howe's Puritan preoccupations, between timeless grace and the historically situated material suffering of the world. This is not a disavowal of Puritan theosophy, however: as we will see, Fanny Howe's liberation theology has much in common with the transcendentalist modes of Wallace Stevens, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The central aim for each Howe is a mode of being with someone else's suffering in which perception is key to something sacred and, crucially, shared.

My third chapter works around the doubling of sonic, and especially musical, repetition. The sound of words has long been an organising principle in Susan Howe's work, through which the dialectical 'constellation' of opposing forces is perceived. Sound, more than sight, is what confers order and harmony to the otherwise irreconcilable 'Cause' and 'chaos'. Not quite homophones, the words fit together in a way that is partial but self-evident: the sound of the words, one said after the other, connects them in a way that is not unlike what Stevens

described as that which 'is not' but 'is of what there was'. Since the early 2000s when Howe began collaborating with the musician and sound artist David Grubbs, her attention to the sound of words has been accompanied by an increased attention to non-verbal and nonhuman sounds, specifically those of minimalist music. In Grubbs' music and in their collaborative audio pieces, the combination of *musique concrète* and droning, repetitive minimalist music allows an impression of the impossible towards which Howe's work reaches: sound that creates a still space. This sonic landscape, in which 'interval' refers not to temporal but tonal distance, becomes a concrete monument in which the past is not past but materially present.

Souls revisits the imaginary landscapes from Howe's own literary history by returning to two of her own works from the late 80s: 'Thorow' and 'Articulation of Sound Forms in Time' (1990).[73] Through a reading of Howe and Grubbs' collaborative sound pieces, and then of the title poem in *Souls*, my chapter outlines how the re-articulation of sound forms in a new time allows Howe to imagine a fusion with those who had gone before, not through linear inheritance but rather through the intimacy of physical contact.[74] As she writes in the 'Personal Narrative' that prefaces *Souls*, the aim of articulating these sound forms in a new time is 'to release our great great grandparents, beginning at the greatest distance from a common mouth' (p.18).

Souls exemplifies Howe's turn to pragmatism that began in earnest with her engagement with the work of Charles Sanders Pierce in *Pierce-Arrow* (1999).[75] Critics such as Miriam Marty Clark, Joan Richardson, and Kristen Case have outlined Howe's engagement with pragmatism and the specifically New England intellectual genealogy that this entails.[76] The pragmatist lens allows an understanding of her work as part of an infinite and multidirectional genealogy, in which all life is connected. My chapter expands Clark's analysis of Howe's work as inextricably connected to late-twentieth century developments in information storage, to encompass the sound recording and editing technology that is integral to her collaborations with Grubbs. I also offer a redress to narrowly linear pragmatist genealogies

[73] 'Articulation of Sound Forms in Time', *Singularities* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1990), pp.1-38 (first publ. Windsor: Awede, 1987); 'Thorow', *Singularities* (see 'Articulation of Sound Forms in Time' above), pp.39-59. Hereafter *S.*
[74] Howe, *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (New York: New Directions 2004). Hereafter *SLT.*
[75] Howe, *Pierce-Arrow* (New York: New Directions, 1999).
[76] Miriam Marty Clark, 'The Library and the Wilderness: Susan Howe's Pragmatism', *Contemporary Literature*, 54.2 (Summer 2013), pp.369-396; Joan Richardson, '"Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds"; Stevens, Susan Howe and the *Souls of the Labadie Tract', Poetry after Wallace Stevens* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp.171-181; Kristen Case, 'Howe/James', *American Pragmatism and Poetic Practice: Crosscurrents from Emerson to Susan Howe* (Rochester: Camden House, 2017), pp.123-142.

by focusing on Howe's position in what she calls an 'offshoot of Anglo-American modernism' within an infinitely broader field of potential inquiry (*SLT,* p.18). Jacques Derrida writes in *Spectres of Marx* that inheritance 'is always the reaffirmation of a debt, but a critical, selective and filtering reaffirmation'.[77] The inheritance towards which *Souls* reaches, however, is explicitly *not* 'critical, selective and filtering'. Instead, in its incorporation of the nonreferential material of drone, it aims to include the outside.

My study ends with a brief coda discussing *Concordance* (2020) and gesturing to the Romantic turn that was evident in *Souls* but has taken a more urgently global valence in Howe's most recent work.[78] According to the typologically-inspired logic of punning that I argue is central to Howe's practice of reading as live perception, I situate *Concordance* in an associative web of relations alongside some of the actors that the text invokes, including Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee, Fanny Howe, Oscar Wilde, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr, and, especially, Howe's daughter, the artist R. H. Quaytman. *Concordance,* I contend, responds to Quaytman's work by weaving it into a multi-generational conversation that negates linear inheritance and instead spreads outwards to a broader, Whitmanian vision of interdependence. In this book, the search for a sequential 'cause' that motivated her early work has disappeared in favour of a fuller embrace of 'happiness' and happenstance in the present (*C,* p.10). Rather than try to explain one's indebtedness or to repay the dues, the key aim in *Concordance* is, as Lisa Baraitser would have it, to 'maintain' them in the present.[79]

I conclude this introduction with a broad, Whitmanian gesture of my own. By structuring my investigation around a series of creative pairings I do not intend to present influence as a transaction or sequence—a question of who came first, or who owes what to whom. In articulating a state of mutual indebtedness in the present, my project hopes to explicitly undermine the search for a single author or 'cause' behind creative expression. Instead, in what follows I look to the infinitely more expansive and multiple possibilities of collaboration and being close to others. I look to the intimate, undefined space between friends, family members, lovers; to the encounter between sensing bodies and their material circumstances; between readers, paper and ink; between speakers and unknown audiences, unknown relations.

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[77] *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), p.114.
[78] *Concordance* (New York: New Directions 2020). Hereafter *C.*
[79] *Enduring Time,* p.52.

Chapter One

Consent to Subject-Making with Joan Jonas and Susan Howe

The hand holds no chalk
And each part of the whole falls off
And cannot know it knew, except
Here and there, in cold pockets
Of remembrance, whispers out of time.

John Ashbery, 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror'[80]

i: conceptless Consent

Susan Howe's 'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER', discussed in my introduction, serves as the preface to *The Europe Of Trusts* (1990), a collection that gathers and republishes three of Howe's earlier works, including *The Liberties* (1980). The enigmatic penultimate sentence in the essay is the most vital for my reading of *The Liberties*: 'I write to break out into perfect primeval Consent' (*L*, p.14). It requires some elucidation, not least because it appears at odds with the 'wish', expressed directly after it, to recuperate what has been lost: 'I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate'. In contrast to actively liberating others ('tenderly lift[ing]' from anonymity), 'perfect primeval Consent' suggests the ceding of agency—even though, quite counterintuitively, 'Consent' is figured as an open space that one might 'break out into'. The first definition of 'consent' in the OED—'voluntary agreement to or acquiescence in what another proposes or desires; compliance, concurrence, permission'—suggests something like 'acquiescence' which does not quite fit; to 'break out into compliance', for example, seems a contradiction in terms.

The intention 'to break out into perfect primeval Consent' makes more sense if we think theologically, as I suggest Howe is doing here, and with some of the word's more archaic usages. 'Consent' also carries the sense of a more mutual 'agreement by a number of persons as to a course of action', 'concert'; 'harmony, accord'; 'consensus' (OED). Howe's 'Consent' is closer to this meaning; as I will suggest, the intention is to 'break out' of individuality and 'into' a state of being with others. 'Consent' can also mean 'agreement in faith and doctrine,

[80] John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (London: Carcanet, 2007), p.83 (first publ. New York: Carcanet, 1974).

ecclesiastical communion' (OED). Breaking out into 'perfect primeval Consent' might now sound like a moment of faith or epiphany. It seems like an especially Puritan state if we consider Jonathan Edwards' use of the word. Edwards defined 'original beauty', which was central to his understanding of the world, as 'Being's consent to Being':

> The reason, or at least one reason, why God has made this kind of mutual consent and agreement of things beautiful and grateful to those intelligent Beings that perceive it, probably is, that there is in it some image of the true, spiritual, original beauty, which has been spoken of; consisting in Being's consent to Being.[81]

Beauty for Edwards is a sign of God, and 'those intelligent beings' that perceive beauty are perceiving signs of a divine 'mutual […] agreement of things'. What Edwards' 'Consent' offers, then, is a kind of accordance or unity with the world as God.

Howe's explanation to John Taggart endorses this theological reading and indicates, furthermore, that 'Consent' relates to gendered models of history and knowledge:

> By Consent I mean that I feel—only recently—that as a woman I see so many women's voices or as a woman I am sensitive to voices that have been erased. Once I thought that was shocking. Now I wonder if it isn't the real wisdom—to enter really enter the silence—the conceptless perspectives—to Consent rather than to fight and rail against fate. I wish I could hear the sound of voices that have been lost. I wish I could pick the pieces of sound out of the space that I suppose is Death—Conceptless perspectives.[82]

This 'Consent' is more than just an acceptance of erasure 'as a woman'. It signals a willingness to be part of the wider 'agreement' of fate, however unequal or exploitative it appears. In this respect it shares something with Werner Sollors' account—also based on readings of Puritan covenantal doctrine—of US identity formation as one in which immigrants willingly shed 'hereditary old-world' ethnicity in favour of a 'rebirth into forward-looking culture of consent'.[83] Now the intention to break out into perfect primeval Consent and the wish to lift voices from the dark side of history no longer seem so contradictory: breaking out into wholeness would be a return to 'primeval' unity in which one is no longer separated from what has been lost.

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[81] *An Essay on the Nature of True Virtue* (London: W. Oliver, 1778), p.9. Hereafter *True Virtue*.
[82] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.
[83] *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.4.

But ‘I write to break out into perfect primeval Consent’ raises another question. If this interconnectedness occurs on the level of an instinctive and apparently prelinguistic ‘primeval’, then how to get to this state through words? Why ‘write’ to break out into it? Intriguingly for my purposes, the elaboration Howe gives in her letter to Taggart (‘I wish I could pick the pieces of sound out of the space that I suppose is Death—Conceptless perspectives’) suggests that it is perhaps not exactly individual voices she wishes to recover but more impersonal ‘pieces of sound’. What she is after, I contend, are fleeting, sensory insights that are not necessarily connected to individual historical subjects, but which give access to mutual wholeness, a kind of collective unconscious. For Howe, sound is what leads writing to this ‘primeval’ space. The supposedly pre-cognitive, sonic element is what forbids her, as she wrote to Taggart, from altering the wording of her writing:

> Talk about sound—I couldn’t just say ‘I write to break out into perfect Consent’ because it dosent [sic] sound right. I need the syllables of primeval. I love the word, and I actually mean it, but the sound of the sentence would forbid me to take it out. I think that’s why I put so many commas (too many) in everything I write in prose because for me the comma makes a pause in the beat. A touch of silence.[84]

What Howe describes as an instinctive, essential law or symmetry in the sound of the words could also be described as very traditional metre: the addition of ‘primeval’ in ‘I write to break out into perfect primeval consent’ makes it a line of iambic pentameter. Howe’s description involves the mystification of a literary-historical form; this pattern of sound and silence transmits, she suggests, something apparently innate, prehistoric. But it makes sense that the metre resonated on an instinctive level because Howe grew up listening to Shakespeare before she could even read. Because of the association it had for her with her own early years, for Howe the stage had intimately infantile, maternal associations. She suggested as much in a letter to Lyn Hejinian about ‘God’s Spies’, the short drama in *The Liberties*.

> I started my life as an actress – even as a small child I was in professional theatre. Because of my mother who was an actress and director and always involved – so it feels like going back to the womb for me.[85]

A few years later, too, she would write to Taggart:

[84] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.
[85] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 26 August 1979, Lyn Hejinian Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MS74, Box 4 Folder 18.

> I was literally brought up with the language of plays […] plays were mother's milk to me and the fact that 'the world is a stage' ground into my brain before I could understand the implications.[86]

This chapter is about the importance of the stage and of live performance for *The Liberties* and the maternal 'world' that it constructs. Elizabeth Joyce posits that Howe's repurposing of conventional Western methods of plotting space (i.e. mapping, surveying, geometry, perspective) allows her to open a liminal 'third space' in which the binaries of 'gender (and race, class, etc.)' can be dismantled.[87] Joyce has omitted *The Liberties* from her study because it 'addresses dramatic propositions more than it evokes spatial questions' (p.22). The omission of *The Liberties* limits Joyce's otherwise helpful reading of space and perspective in Howe's work precisely because 'dramatic propositions' have always been central to Howe's figurations of space and history, and the position of the individual within them both. In 'Leaves' Howe describes the US entering World War Two after the bombing of Pearl Harbour as if it were playing out on a global stage: 'American fathers marched off into the hot Chronicle of global struggle but mothers were left' (p.10). Discussing Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Mirror* in 2015, she would use a more explicitly theatrical description of the same events: my childhood was profoundly marked by the Second World War and the longing I felt for my absent father who was serving in 'The European Theatre of War'.[88] The 'fact that "the world is a stage"' is central to Howe's singular depiction of how events unfold and are recorded, and to the gender roles played within these processes. In what follows I argue that, for Howe, liveness and the live experience of theatre is connected to what Lisa Baraitser calls 'maternal subjectivity'.[89] In *The Liberties*, as we will see, the theatrical, semi-imaginary space of the stage is key to the Consent to a 'primeval' state of intersubjective unity. This is not a matter of breaking down binaries, but rather 'break[ing] out into' a particular kind of live Consent to her role 'as a woman' in the reproduction of history.

If, as Peggy Phelan puts it, 'performance's only life is in the present', then performance is antithetical to sequential historical narrative.[90] As we will see, the maternal theatrical space in *The Liberties* (a space that is outside history but crucial to its telling) is constantly being

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[86] Letter to John Taggart, 11 May 1982, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MS11 Box 16 Folder 17.
[87] Joyce, pp.17, 197.
[88] 'Print Screen: Susan Howe and Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*', *Film at the Lincoln Centre* (2015) <https://www.filmlinc.org/events/print-screen-susan-howe-and-tarkovskys-the-mirror/> [accessed 15 March 2021].
[89] *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.2.
[90] *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.146.

made and remade in the present. A text that Howe was reading in 1979 will further articulate the live nature of the 'Conceptless perspectives' that she describes to Taggart, and which also appear in 'Leaves' (p.13). Richard Foreman's 'Ontological Hysteric Theatre: Third Manifesto' frames live, sensory experience in a way that speaks to Howe's theological concerns and articulates something important about a perceived order outside of description, record or even memory—one that can only be felt in the present. Foreman argues that a piece of theatre is 'suspect' if it stays distinctly in one's memory after the play has finished.[91] It is 'strong' enough to do so, he suggests, only because it confirms to what we already know (p.71). This kind of work, according to Foreman:

> is allowed to seep into one like a memory.
> It is not vigorously explored
> IN ALL ITS NOOKS AND CRANNIES
> by perception. (p.74)

Much more vital for Foreman is the sensory event that is not remembered later: it does not conform to pre-existing ideas, and so slips 'under' memory, 'under' recognisable, re-tellable experience (p.76). He calls this live, sensory interaction an 'ACT of understanding' and likens it to a moment of spiritual epiphany or a glimpse at the repressed unconscious (p.76). The following passage from Foreman's manifesto is transcribed into Howe's working notebook from 1979:

> it is precisely within what one forgets or rejects by not-noticing that there exists the means of waking up, understanding, etc. Philosophy, psychology, physics—all efforts to understanding—make their great advances in the same way the psychiatric patient or the religious initiate does, by learning how to re-scan the material available to his consciousness in such a way that the heretofore 'unnoticed' (trivial) leaps out as part of a new, truthful configuration. (p.74)[92]

Foreman's words are, I believe, behind Howe's description in 'Leaves' of poetry bringing 'similitude and representation to configurations waiting from forever to be spoken' (p.14). The 'conceptless perspectives' or 'pieces of sound' that she wishes to pluck from the abyss are 'ACT[S] of understanding'—that is, moments of pure perception taking place in the present moment of the durational artwork and impossible to recall as part of a narrative or

[91] 'Ontological Hysteric Theatre: Third Manifesto', *The Drama Review,* 19.4 (December 1975), pp.71-81 (74).
[92] Quoted in working notebook, 11 February – 30 June 1979, Susan Howe Papers, San Diego, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201, Box 12.

abstract ideal after the fact.[93] Whereas, however, for Foreman live experience allows the apprehension of 'new' configurations, for Howe these configurations are not new but timeless, 'waiting' in some primeval, pre-cognitive space.

Susan Howe's mother, Mary Manning Howe (1905-1999), was born in Dublin and worked as a playwright and director in the Gate and the Abbey, two of Ireland's most prominent theatres, before working as director of the Poets' Theatre in Cambridge, MA. Following from her childhood involvement in her mother's theatrical world, Susan Howe also worked in the Gate, acting and designing sets. She went on to study painting, observing later that the stage set had always been central to her understanding of visual art.[94] As I will show, the space of the stage remained central in her later poetry practice. As suggested by Howe's comments to Edward Foster in 1989, *The Liberties*, especially, was an attempt to 'paint' a fantastical, imaginary space 'in words':

> The subject of Swift, Stella, and Vanessa was mythic for my mother and many other Irish writers. I grew up on it. It was another Grimm's fairy tale. But real. So when I began writing this time, I was really trying to paint that part of the landscape of Dublin in words. I was trying to get the place, a foreign place that was home to my mother, on paper. The space of the poem is both illusory, the stuff of fairy tale, but also 'real'.[95]

Swift, Stella, Vanessa, and Mary Manning were all 'real' people who lived in and moved through a landscape that was not only inaccessibly foreign to Howe, but existed in a mode of melodrama, folktale, and tragedy. This chapter's examination of the 'play areas'—and I intend for this term to incorporate the 'make believe' of both theatre and childish play—in Howe's poetry will complicate Joyce's suggestion that Howe's project dismantles Cartesian binaries. *The Liberties* draws extensively from the physical space of St. Patrick's Cathedral, a repository of Ireland's colonial history told from the perspective of its Anglo-Irish minority elite, the cast of which included Stella, Swift, and Mary Manning. As I will show, in *The Liberties* the dynamics of race, gender, and class interact in ways that are knotty, complex, and irreducible to binary distinctions.

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[93] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.
[94] Charles Bernstein, 'LINEbreak: Interview with Susan Howe', *PennSound* (14 November 1998), 31:00 <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe.php#linebreak> [accessed 10 June 2020]. Hereafter 'Bernstein interview'.
[95] Edward Foster, 'Talisman interview', in *BM*, pp.165-181 (166). (First publ. in *Talisman*, 4 (Spring 1990), pp.14-38).

ii: *Stage Sets* and the narcissistic instrument

Before we begin to navigate the fantastical play area of *The Liberties* it will be important to learn the rules of the game, or at least some initial directions, from a more contemporary influence on Howe's figurations of liveness, perception, and role-playing. Our guide, Joan Jonas, was making her own play areas (childish and theatrical) at this time, and her video, installation, and performance work from the late 1970s will reflect illuminatingly on Howe's text. Jonas and Howe have been friends since attending Boston College of Fine Art together in the early 1960s, where Jonas studied sculpture and Howe painting. After art school they both moved to New York and, in what can be read retrospectively as parallel creative arcs, over the next decade they developed practices that led towards more live, immersive art forms. Howe's shift from painting to poetry in the late 1960s has been well documented, although not often framed as a movement towards liveness.[96] As she recalled to Lynn Keller:

> I had started making environments—rooms that you could walk into and be surrounded by walls, and on those walls would be collage, using found photographs […] Then I started using words with that work.[97]

According to this description, Howe's initial move towards 'using words' was motivated by the urge to develop a more immersive form. The poetry that followed, I want to suggest, kept some of the sense of the 'environment' or set that the reader can 'walk into and be surrounded by'.

Meanwhile Jonas had begun to incorporate liveness in her sculpture, starting in 1968 with an impromptu performance in the apartment of her partner at the time, the minimalist sculptor Richard Serra.[98] Influenced by an experimental, minimalist New York scene that included dancers, choreographers, composers, sculptors and performers such as Serra, Yvonne Rainer, Philip Glass and Simone Forti, Jonas spent the next decade (and beyond)

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[96] See Kaplan Harris, 'Susan Howe's Art and Poetry, 1968-1974', *Contemporary Literature*, 47.3 (Autumn, 2006), pp.440-471; Brian Reed, '"Eden or Ebb of the Sea": Susan Howe's Word Squares and Postlinear Poetics', *Postmodern Culture*, 14.2 (January 2004) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/55206> [accessed 8 April 2019].

[97] Keller interview, p.6.

[98] Alexxa Godhart, 'With Her U.S. Pavilion, Joan Jonas Finally Gets the International Recognition She Deserves', *Artsy* (3 May 2015) <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-venice-biennale-2015-united-states-pavilion-joan-jonas> [accessed 1 April 2019].

using her body to create live-action sculptures.[99] Jonas' shift towards liveness and movement was a means of exploring the relationship between objects and individual perception. Her 'pieces', as she called them, facilitated an understanding of space that combined the imaginative, theatrical and illusory with the more concrete, sculptural elements. Mirrors, often moving, were a way to integrate individual perception into its material surroundings and to explore the role of the perceiver in creating the space of performance.[100] Howe participated in at least one of these early works, *Mirror Piece II* (1970), in which performers moving about the stage carrying large mirrors that obscured their own bodies, distorting perceived dimensions of the space and giving the audience occasional views of themselves as spectators—integrating them into the space of play.[101] The manipulation of perceived space was intertwined from the outset with literary and mythical texts, as well as with the dimensions of the psyche.[102] In one instance Jonas, wearing a tunic covered in mirrors, read from a scroll every reference to mirrors made in Jorge Luis Borges' *Labyrinths*; in another she played a recording of herself reading a conceptual poem by David Antin, which lists 'actual examples of about 100 female melancholic patients'.[103] In this understanding of theatrical space, the psychological and the material are continuous with one another, both funnelled through the perception of the person looking in the mirror or listening to the words.

Jonas was an early pioneer of video art, which emerged in the late 60s and early 70s thanks to the increasing availability of hand-held video cameras, reputedly beginning with Nam June Paik's recording of Pope Paul VI's procession through New York City in 1965.[104] In the early 1970s Jonas started to incorporate into her performances a closed-circuit video system that would record and instantly project parts of the performance space in real time. In one sense, Jonas' instrumentalization of the video medium was a continuation of her use of mirrors in that it gave the audience multiple perspectives to make the space seem overdetermined and multi-dimensional. The more significant innovation allowed by video

[99] For Jonas' accounts of this milieu see R. H. Quaytman, 'Joan Jonas', *Interview Magazine* (10 December 2014) <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/joan-jonas> [accessed 9 February 2019]; 'Joan Jonas by Karin Schneider', *BOMB Magazine* (1 July 2010) <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/joan-jonas/> [accessed 8 February 2019].
[100] See, for example, 'Oad Lau' (performance), St. Peter's Church, New York; St. Peter's Gymnasium, New York, 1968.
[101] 'Mirror Piece II' (performance), Emanuel-El YMHA, New York, 1970; see Heuving interview.
[102] Amy Budd, 'Artists at Work: Joan Jonas', *Afterall* (28 June 2013) <https://www.afterall.org/online/artists-at-work-joan-jonas#.XKdD-CMrL-k> [accessed 1 April 2019].
[103] *Labyrinths* (London: Penguin, 1970);'A List of the Delusions of the Insane: What They Are Afraid Of', *Selected Poems: 1967-1973* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), pp.38-39. See Heuving interview.
[104] Hanne Mugas, 'The Year Video Art Was Born', *Guggenheim Museum* (15 July 2010) <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/the-take/the-year-video-art-was-born> [accessed 10 March 2021].

was a temporal distortion rather than a spatial one: it meant that multiple presents (some live, some recorded) could coincide in the play area. Rosalind Krauss described this singular spatio-temporal paradigm of video art as 'a prison of the collapsed present'.[105]

Krauss touches on the process I have been describing—in which the performance creates a continuity between psychological and physical space—when she writes in her essay on video art that 'the medium of video is narcissism' (p.50). 'The notion of a medium', writes Krauss, 'contains the concept of an object-state, separate from the artist's own being, through which his intentions must pass' (p.52). In the psychological condition of narcissism, desire for the Other is replaced by desire for the self—a self that, as Krauss puts it following Lacan, is a 'projected object', a 'statue' or construct with which one 'can never coincide' (p.58). In video 'the human psyche' becomes 'conduit' and all physical objects are understood as projections of the objectified, longed for ego (p.52). Krauss demonstrates this with a reading of 'Boomerang', directed by Richard Serra and featuring a ten-minute close-up of Nancy Holt's face as she speaks into a recording device.[106] As Holt speaks her words are recorded and fed back to her with a distracting delay, the relayed sounds interfering with her ability to formulate words. As Krauss describes it:

> Because the audio delay keeps hypostatizing her words, she has great difficulty coinciding with herself as a subject. It is a situation, [Holt] says, that 'puts a distance between the words and their apprehension—their comprehension', a situation that is 'like a mirror-reflection . . . so that I am surrounded by me and my mind surrounds me . . . there is no escape'. (p.53)

In video, Krauss argues, space becomes nothing more than a projection of the inescapable ego.

'Break[ing] out into' something other than the ego is key to both Howe's and Jonas' projects, however. Krauss suggests that some video works, including Jonas' *Vertical Roll* (1972), undermine video's narcissistic paradigm by drawing attention to the mechanism of the tape and thus obstructing the ego's 'psychological hold' (p.59).[107] There is another mode, more important for my purposes, through which Jonas' work attempts to escape the narcissistic 'prison'. This is not an escape by way of physical interruption or interference, but

[105] 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', *October*, 1 (Spring 1976), pp.50-64 (53).
[106] Nancy Holt and Richard Serra, *Boomerang*, video (black and white; sound), 1974, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
[107] *Vertical Roll*, video (black and white, sound), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

by situating the play area in relation to older histories of performance that pre-exist the individual performer; specifically, by situating the narcissistic medium in dialogue with ritual, ceremony, and folklore. Jonas has said that she started using mirrors in her videos after a trip to Japan in 1971, when she 'took a photo of the reflection of [her] face in a shrine mirror'.[108] The Noh dramas she saw there helped her to find, as she said, an alternative to the 'anti-narcissism' of Minimalism.[109] Especially intriguing to her was the use of masks, and the 'kagami no ma' or 'mirror room' that the Noh performer enters before going on stage, where they put on their mask and study their appearance in a mirror, becoming 'possessed' by the character they are about to portray.[110] In this instance the mirror is not a means of seeing oneself but, inversely, of allowing oneself to become a mask, to embody a theatrical character: the self becomes an instrument with which to view the world. This, I contend, chimes with Howe's idea that it might be better 'to enter really enter the silence—the conceptless perspectives—to Consent rather than to fight and rail against fate'. As I will show, in this period Howe and Jonas were both attempting an escape of the ego into something more interconnected. To borrow a phrase from the poet and philosopher Denise Riley, this was 'no narcissism of excavating a true self', but 'a self-transcendence, reached only by way of passing scrupulously through the self'.[111]

To understand how subjective perception could make it possible to 'break out of' narcissism we need to think of the perceiving self not as a concrete, static entity, but rather a perspective that moves through its surroundings and responds to, reflects, and refracts what it sees. Philosopher Erin Manning can provide a helpful way for thinking about how narcissism functions here. Manning proposes that space is 'experiential', brought into being in the relation with the subject's moving through it.[112] There are, Manning proposes, at least two ways to think about movement:

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[108] Andrew Maerkle, 'Interview with Joan Jonas: II', *ART iT* (19 April 2013), <https://www.art-it.asia/en/u/admin_ed_feature_ e/gh8e7JsoazU92mdDKGOW> [accessed 10 March 2021]. Hereafter 'Maerkle interview'. With thanks to Rosa Van Hensbergen for helping me locate this interview.
[109] Maerkle interview. It is important to note, too, that Noh dramas were highly influential in Irish theatre, especially in the work of W. B. Yeats to which Mary Manning Howe introduced her daughters at a very young age. See Seán Golden ed., *Yeats and Asia: Overviews and Case Studies* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2020); Howe *The Midnight,* pp.74-5. For an analysis of Howe's engagement with Yeats and the Noh in *The Midnight*, see Catherine Martin, '"Double play of double meaning": Dreams, Repetition, and the Importance of the Noh in Susan Howe's The Midnight', *Textual Practice,* 20:4 (January 2006), pp.759-775.
[110] Maerkle interview.
[111] *Impersonal Passion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p.39.
[112] *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, (Boston: MIT Press, 2009), p.170.

> 1. I enter a room and see that room as preexisting me. I walk across the room, drawing an imaginary line that cuts the space.
>
> 2. My movement creates the space I will come to understand as 'the room'. The room is defined as my body—the environment, where the environment is an atmospheric body. Without that particular moving body that particular environment does not exist. (p.15)

The latter option would seem like the ultimate narcissistic formulation—that space does not exist until we move into it—except that for Manning the self is always relational and comes into being in this movement. She proposes instead that we think about the moving body as 'a body that resists predefinition in terms of subjectivity or identity, a body that is involved in a reciprocal reaching-toward that in-gathers the world even as it worlds' (p.6). Live movement brings this subject into being, a subject that is at the same time a mirror for the surroundings that they, in moving, bring into being.

The ritual performances in the works by Jonas are less akin to the stylised, high theatre in the style of Noh, than to the informal culture of folklore and children's games. The influence of Noh is still very much evident, however, and Jonas brings to her games and fairy tales a similar impression of the performer (herself) as medium or vessel for the tale, bringing other presents into the performance space by enacting rituals that have played out countless times before, 'in-gather[ing] the world even as it worlds'. Ritual was key for Jonas' objectives outlined thus far: the instrumentalisation of the ego, and the related positioning of the live play as an extension of previous performances. Howe articulated both in an unpublished review of Jonas' *Mirage* (1976):

> Joan Jonas's work, performance, film, and video, has always carried an air of obsessive narcissism. Egotistically she requires her audience to join her in an attempt to find the time of her own history. Aware of the gallows humor of such an undertaking and armed with a gothic sense of sensuality and as some secret obscenity to be revealed—after the garden gate has been opened, after the ancestral mirrors have been cracked—she suggests rather than defines her own self-portrait. She poses question after question. When and where does specific change occur? Does progression have any direction? What determines change?[113]

There is a strange causal and temporal boomerang at play in the descriptor 'after the ancestral mirrors have been cracked', rather like that in the opening sentence of 'Leaves' ('For me there was no silence before armies') and in 'Martial Cadenza', the Stevens poem that it draws

[113] 'Mirage' (performance), Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1976; Susan Howe Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201 Box 41 Folder 11.

on, as discussed in my introduction.[114] The time of the performance is at once late, after the cracking of the mirrors, and early, before the self-portrait (through which the specific 'ancestors' in question might be named) and before the ominous event that the cracked mirrors presage. Howe's description reflects something else that is vital to her own practice: the use of pre-existing materials to 'suggest' a version of selfhood, and to locate this constructed self, which seems both early and late, in relation to what has gone before**.** This constructed self is a moment of stillness between past and future, perceivable only in the present. As I will discuss, it is crucial to Howe's understanding of the reproduction of history.

'When and where does specific change occur? Does progression have any direction? What determines change?' Howe's questions bring me to another crucial aspect of Jonas' practice that was a precondition for her work in the late 1970s: her continuous repurposing of performance documentation as material for new performances. Footage gathered during performances became props in subsequent works, each one nodding to the moment of its recording while remaining both partial and apart from it, something less and more than a document of the event. Of course, even the most apparently artless record of ephemeral art (for copyright or ownership purposes, say) involves the production of new material from a position after and outside the 'event' itself—but one of Jonas' most significant innovations was to place a spotlight on the strange edge between a live performance and the material instruments a performance makes use of—in the continuity between event and its documentation. Each new work by Jonas was registered and remembered by means of a continuous repositioning of material, so that the last performance was inscribed into the new artwork, be it in video, film, sculptural installation, or set. In a manner comparable to what Jonathan Roach calls 'surrogation', or the elision of difference between one folk performance and the previous, each 'new' live action could then be understood not as a singular event, but rather a reiteration of past performances, regardless of differences, the continuity maintained by the repurposed props.[115] In this process, both the event and the document are absorbed into a continuous stream of liveness and, while the impossibility of returning to an original live event is acknowledged, the new work retains an aura or trace of the earlier moments so that it is difficult to locate a 'specific change'. Further to this, if liveness is a continuous reshuffling of what came before and what will come after, then chance and coincidence have a different significance: performance starts to seem like playing and replaying the same game, the

[114] *L*, p.9; Stevens, *Collected Poems*, p.217.
[115] *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p.2.

'posing', to quote Howe's review, of 'question after question' in a kind of divination. In the second half of this chapter, we will see the implications of this continuum between liveness and its record for Howe's exploration of lineage and motherhood.

The two performances of Jonas' that I will focus on, *Mirage* and *The Juniper Tree,* took place in 1977, the year before Howe would go to Dublin to care for her mother and move through the space that would become the setting for *The Liberties*.[116] Jonas had previously staged one of the pieces, and she would go on to stage both again, but these particular iterations are important because of their interaction with their setting, another installation work by Jonas. *Stage Sets* [Figure 1] was momentous for Jonas in that it was the first 'environment' she had installed in an official gallery space as opposed to outdoors or in her apartment.[117] It was designed for the 'cavernous' high-ceilinged, two-story gallery of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, which Jonas filled with large objects that formed a half-assembled architectural installation.[118] There were various unconnected 'walls' made from paper screens and wooden frames; a 'roof' hanging from the ceiling above empty space; a hexagonal, velvet-lined enclosure with an entrance that faced the gallery wall; six slender cones hung vertically, like a row of pillars, their bases not quite touching the floor but softly illuminating it; and a suspended tin hoop that gave the impression of a window floating in space. Many of these objects carried traces of previous performances with them. The grid-like drawing on the paper walls was the same shape Jonas had drawn in the earlier performance of *Mirage,* and I will return to it in my discussion of that piece. The hoop had also been used in the previous performance of *Mirage*, and in *Delay Delay* (1972).[119] The cones had made several appearances since their debut in *Funnels* (1972) and were becoming something of a trademark.[120] Several of Jonas' earlier videos were shown daily in an adjacent 'garish […] mock livingroom setting', as one review described it.[121] The result was a space that recalled past live events without repeating them, playfully gathering their remnants into a new, disjointed formation. It was a concrete accumulation of live moments—a sort of ad-hoc

[116] 'The Juniper Tree' (performance) ICA Philadelphia, 1977; 'Mirage' (performance) ICA Philadelphia, 1977.
[117] Sydney Briggs, 'Documentation Diaries: Re-creating the Performance', *Inside/Out: A MoMA/MoMA PS1 Blog* <https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2010/02/01/documentation-diaries-re-creating-the-performance/> [accessed 3 April 2019].
[118] Ibid.
[119] 'Delay Delay' (performance) Lower West Side, New York, 1972.
[120] 'Funnels' (performance) The Kitchen, New York, 1972.
[121] Ann Jarmusch, 'Suspended in Shadow', *ARTNEWS* (April 1977) <http://www.artnews.com/2018/03/23/archives-joan-jonass-first-site-specific-installation-1977> [accessed 17 March 2019].

archive of Jonas' performance career to date. Jacques Derrida claims that 'there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.'[122] In its continuous recirculation of the traces of past performance, however, Jonas' practice collapsed the distinction between a live event and its recording.[123] The record became not an externalised repetition of the original event but rather a live extension of it; it incorporated the 'outside' into the live experience. Instead of 'an inert museum of dead works' this was more like what Stuart Hall has called 'a living archive […] an on-going, never-completed project'.[124]

This live accumulation continued with *The Juniper Tree* and *Mirage*. The former was initially commissioned by the ICA Philadelphia as a children's piece, and then developed into another version (not specifically geared toward a young audience) and performed in various locations over the next two years. The piece involved a variety of props and costumes (including a kimono from Jonas' trip to Japan in 1971) and various whimsical square structures made from wooden poles suspended on string, often suggesting more roofed enclosures or walls. During each performance Jonas made ritualistic paintings with bright red paint on white paper (again showing the Japanese influence) which were hung as part of the 'walls' in the next iteration. These frames were echoed visually by a ladder, by the beams on the ceiling, and by a suspended grid-like structure that Jonas manipulated during the performance [Figure 2]. Much like the empty frames in the *Stage Sets* installation itself, the props created a semi-imaginary, ritualistic play area demarked by flimsy divisions.

Based on the Brothers Grimm story of the same name, *The Juniper Tree* was Jonas' most explicit engagement with narrative to date.[125] There are varying iterations of this tale but the Grimm version can be summarised as follows: a Good Wife dies of happiness when her son is born. The boy's father remarries and has a daughter with an Evil Stepmother. The Stepmother wants her daughter to inherit her husband's wealth so she kills her stepson and feeds the body to his unsuspecting father in a stew. The daughter gathers up the boys' bones and buries them under a juniper tree. The boy is resurrected as a raven, kills his stepmother

[122] *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.11.
[123] For an extended discussion of the bodies of knowledge maintained in repeated performance, see Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire* (London: Duke University Press, 2003),
[124] 'Constituting an Archive', *Third Text*, 15 (Spring, 2001), pp.89-92 (89).
[125] Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp.148-157.

by dropping a rock on her head, is transformed back into a boy, and lives happily ever after with his father and sister. (One would love to have seen how the children reacted to such a fantastically grisly tale.) Howe had suggested to Jonas that she use the story, which was her 9-year old son Mark's favourite.[126] In the first performance Howe narrated the story while Jonas and several other performers enacted versions of the plot points, which included Jonas acting out childbirth, 'giving birth' to a live rabbit, and knitting with giant nine-foot knitting needles.[127] No doubt the exaggerated, fantastical performance of reproductive and maternal labour brought a different edge to the comic domestic of the 'mock living room' next door. Jane Philbrick has aptly described Jonas' 1972 'Organic Honey' pieces as 'reiterating the feminine through the domestic'; in the case of *The Juniper Tree,* it was a reiteration through the uncannily fantastical domestic spaces of fairy-tale.[128] In later versions a fragmentary recording of Jonas provided the narration, its sequence scrambled so the words were 'disconnectedly, alternately foreshadowing, reflecting, or recalling' the action on stage.[129] Part of the logic of this non-sequential working against the plot was to turn a temporal sequence into a spatial constellation and then to experiment with its borders, exploring the possibilities of inhabiting the role of the Evil Stepmother outside the constraints of narrative sequence.

The ladder on stage stood in for the juniper tree, site of the boy's burial and resurrection. In Jonas' performance it was the focal point for various metamorphoses including what one reviewer described as 'a stunning bit of business' where Jonas, standing on the ladder, turned her kimono inside out, changing from red to white.[130] The ladder as locus for metamorphosis will be significant in my later discussion of *The Liberties*. The point of this comparison is not to show that Jonas' work is the predecessor to Howe's, but rather that they were thinking in tandem, their work reflecting the questions they were asking themselves and each other about

[126] Heuving interview.
[127] Jarmusch, 'Suspended in Shadow'.
[128] Jane Philbrick, 'Paper Trail: (Re)viewing "Lines in the Sand" and Other Key Works of Joan Jonas', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art,* 2.3 (September 2004), pp.17-29 (20).
[129] Dale Worsley, 'Joan Jonas: *The Juniper Tree*', *Performing Arts Magazine,* 1 (1978), p.45.
[130] Ann Jarmusch, 'Suspended in Shadow'.

history, perspective, and maternal labour: ‘When and where does specific change occur? Does progression have any direction?’

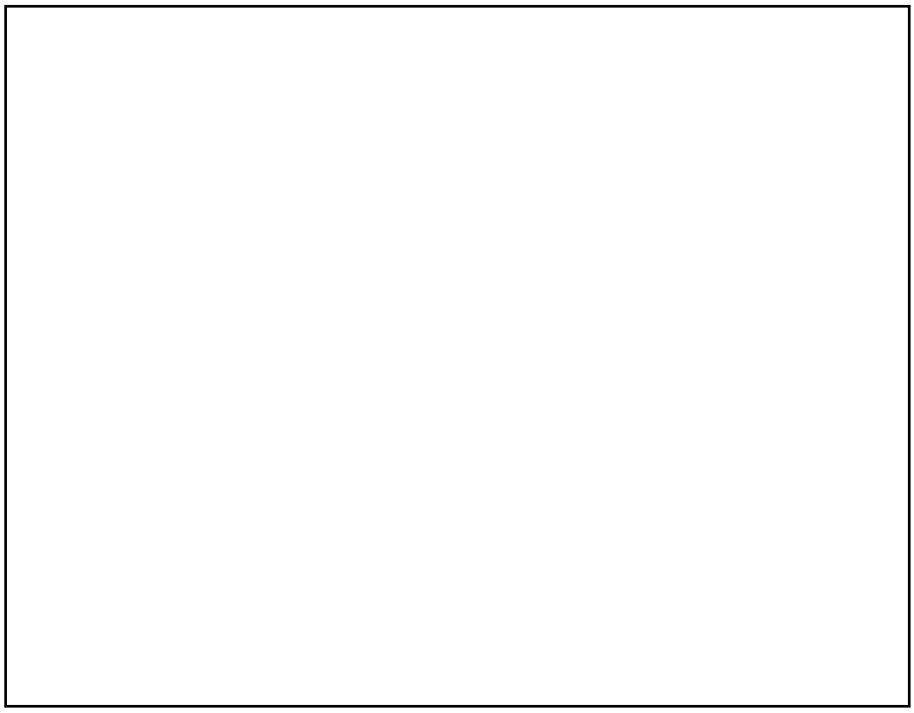


Figure 1: [redacted for copyright reasons] Joan Jonas, installation view, Stage Sets, 1976-77, ICA Philadelphia

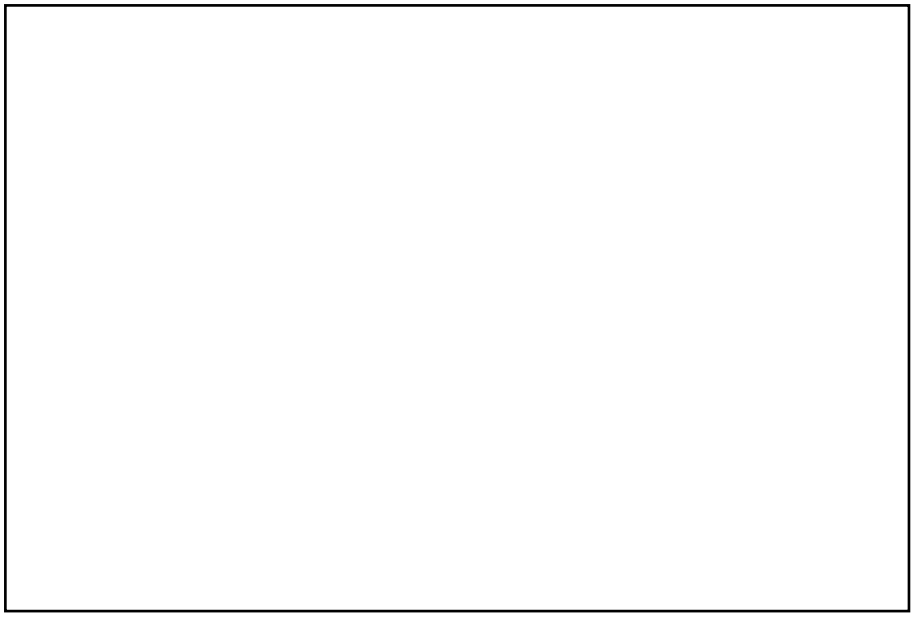


Figure 2: [redacted for copyright reasons] Joan Jonas, performance view, The Juniper Tree, 1979 Whitechapel Gallery, London

Much like *The Juniper Tree,* the second piece performed at *Stage Sets* was centred in large part around transformations—personal, perceptual, and spiritual—that hinged on live,

childlike play.[131] *Mirage* was already a reiteration by the time it came to *Stage Sets* because it had been initially written for the Anthology Film Archives, New York. Jonas had spent much time watching films in the Anthology archives, so, like *Stage Sets*, the space was already an accumulation of live, perceptual experiences. Most intriguingly for my thinking about Howe, however, according to Jonas 'everything began to fall into place' in her conception of the piece when she chanced upon a game of hopscotch in the street.[132] Here was a performance that extended previous live perceptual experiences, not by way of the memories of the performer, but by repeating countless previous games of hopscotch performed by other players (mostly children) in other spaces.

The props in *Mirage* consisted of a large screen onto which film was projected, a smaller video monitor, a chalkboard, a large metal cone, and a table. The monitor played several of Jonas' video works, including *May Windows* and *Night Window* whose titles playfully added another imaginary warp to the architecture of the space.[133] The screen showed pre-recorded footage, mostly of Jonas performing simple actions. A second performer, Jonas' ghostly shadow, remained hidden behind the film screen. Much of the piece involved projected footage of Jonas drawing and erasing shapes with chalk and Jonas, live, drawing in time with the video to create a visual mirroring between two temporally separate events. At one point, Jonas (without her video double) drew a hopscotch grid on the stage and played a game, beating the floor with a stick as she jumped from square to square. The climax of the performance involved Jonas running frenetically on the spot on the hopscotch grid, now smeared, while footage of an erupting volcano played on the screen behind her. After this the screen showed *Good Night Good Morning*, a video work in which Jonas made short clips of herself twice a day for three weeks, that time compressed into an eleven-minute video.[134] The performance drew to a close with both Jonas' (live and on-screen) stepping repeatedly through a hula hoop. Both then curled into a foetal position before the film footage changed

[131] 'Script for *Mirage* by Joan Jonas', *MoMA*, <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/joanjonas/JoanJonas_Script.pdf> [accessed 4 April 2019].
For footage of Jonas' 2018 performance of *Mirage*, see 'BMW Tate Live Exhibition: Mirage', *Tate Private Views on Vimeo* <https://vimeo.com/263948615/fe29b913c6> [accessed 10 March 2021].
[132] Heuving interview.
[133] *May Windows* is now part of the multimedia installation *After Mirage (Cones/May Windows)* along with several of Jonas' cones. *Night Windows* is part of the *Mirage* installation owned by MoMA. Jonas, *After Mirage (Cones/May Windows)*, installation (nine-foot metal cones, nine-foot paper cones, video, monitor), Dia Art Foundation, Beacon, NY. *Mirage*, 1976/1994/2005, six videos (black and white, sound and silent; duration variable), props, stages, and photographs, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
[134] *Good Night Good Morning*, 1976, video (black and white, sound), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.

to show Jonas bent at the waist—making the shape of the cone, the volcano—while Jonas herself disappeared behind the screen. Watching the footage of Jonas' 2018 performance (which is procedurally very similar, except that live Jonas is now visibly much older than her double) the impression in all of this is of a surrealist assemblage. It gives, as Robin Kathleen Williams wrote of the original performance, the 'illusion of a present, cohesive reality comprised of actually different spaces and times'.[135] The three-dimensional environment made from different instances of liveness creates a staggering sort of timelessness, or rather time-saturation, in which the performance, and the play within it, seem to hold all past iterations and all iterations to come, the hopscotch game becoming a mediumistic access point to all the other times it had been played and would be played again.

It is worth highlighting the similarity of this self-contained time saturation with the Puritan ideas of providence that had long preoccupied Howe. To begin with, the live performer moving in time with her own video double enacts something like typology, which Ursula Brumm defines as 'a form of prophecy which sets two successive events into a reciprocal relation of anticipation and fulfillment'.[136] Watching Jonas move in time with her earlier self gives gathers that earlier moment into a symmetry not previously apparent; in a singular way, this symmetry makes the action prophetic of itself. Linear temporality is foregone in favour of a space that contains all possible events—at least in the present tense, which is the only tense in which the play area exists. Reaching back to my introduction and 'Martial Cadenza', it is 'As if evening found us young, still young, / Still walking in a present of our own.'[137]

In game logic, before the game has started the playthings (chess pieces, say) contain within them all potential outcomes. In her review of *Mirage,* Howe explicitly tied Jonas' engagement with games to her Puritan inheritance:

> [Jonas] seems to carry a Puritan sense of guilt and self compression which she is not embarrassed to make use of. This is allied to (another Puritan characteristic) an openness to magic and ritual. Her nostalgia for a lost time (childhood) that is never really lost, and her application of its toys and games to help cope with the enigma of

[135] 'A Mode of Translation: Joan Jonas' Performance Installations', *Stedelijk Studies,* 3 (Autumn 2015) <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/a-mode-of-translation-joan-jonass-performance-installations/> [accessed 9 February 2019].
[136] *American Thought and Religious Typology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p.27.
[137] Stevens, *Collected Poems,* p.217.

nothingness are the sources and vocabulary for her questions.[138]

It is easy to imagine that, for Howe at least, Jonas' assemblage of live moments shares something with the 'configurations waiting from forever to be spoken' of her Puritan-inflected understanding of poetry (and with Foreman's 'ACT of understanding'). The structured indeterminacy of games is a means of opening the space to an older providence, a way to 'break out into' fate. This passage indicates that for Howe, moreover, the narcissistic medium is rooted in Puritanism, perception, and live Consent; it is something to 'make use of', as she wrote in the *Mirage* review—an instrument that reflects the world. Think back to Jonathan Edwards' 'intelligent Beings' who perceive signs in their surroundings of 'true, spiritual, original beauty […] consisting in Being's consent to Being'. As we will see, Howe herself looked to children's rhymes and fairy tale to understand the 'enigma of nothingness'. In 1979 she described to Lyn Hejinian the 'TERROR' and 'MAGIC' she recognised in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose late concept of the 'language-game' was a way of articulating language's rule-governed character.[139] Howe wrote:

[redacted for copyright reasons][140]

'Did history make language or did language make history?' Fascinatingly, it seems that for Howe the perceiver of puns perceives another kind of temporal order, or at least another way of relating to what has gone before. The significance Howe places, here and throughout her work, on puns is something else she shares with Shakespeare (whose work, we will remember, is associated for her with 'a lost time (childhood) that is never really lost'). As Sophie Read has outlines, the Elizabethan interest in punning began to decline from the second half of the seventeenth century onward, to the extent that to the modern sensibility puns seem embarrassing, gauche, or trivial.[141] In Howe's work, however, as we will see, there is still a profound investment in what Read describes as the sense, common in Rennaissance England, of 'some power immanent in words which could allow even their accidental correspondences to suggest meaningful, almost magical, links.'[142]

[138] MSS 201, Box 41 Folder 11.
[139] *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G.E.M. Ascombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), i.7, p.4.
[140] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 26 August 1979.
[141] Sophie Read, 'Puns: Serious Wordplay', *Renaissance Figures of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.81-94.
[142] Ibid., p.87.

Puns, Read writes, are '*objets trouvés*': the meaning they generate 'cannot be manufactured, only ever discovered'.[143] It is plausible that the 'TERROR', and the hint that words might have pre-existing 'interlocked rules of their own' that Howe associates with Wittgenstein and with puns is the same 'enigma of nothingness' she reads at the centre of Jonas' engagement with games in *Mirage*. Certainly, the imaginary performance space of *Mirage* is situated on the threshold of life and death, between this world and a timeless afterlife—and it is an arena in which an older, simpler logic reigns. Jonas' template for this threshold, and the primitive space it implied, was not primarily Puritan providence or Shakespearean/Wittgensteinian logics of punning (although I will return these in my discussion of *The Liberties* in due course). Jonas, instead, was drawing on the logic of another game, one that, like hopscotch, involved drawing patterns on the ground. This context is important because it further illuminates the gendered aspect of the play space—what is at stake in playing 'as a woman'.[144] It also situates Jonas' engagement with non-Western performance practices in close proximity to the primitivist, Orientalist lenses of early anthropology and Jungian psychoanalysis. Much like Howe's description to Lyn Hejinian of *The Liberties* as a 'mythic' and maternal Dublin landscape, Jonas's imaginative play areas are rich with the fantastical domestic spaces of fairy tales. They are both maternal and theatrical: domestic work is performed in a manner that is childishly enchanted and slightly tongue-in-cheek. This is the 'stuff of fairy tale, but also "real"': the 'mock living room', the flimsy, pop-up shapes of a house, the performance of giving birth to a live rabbit, the sinister, childlike ballad, the nine-foot knitting needles all bringing an element of fantasy and exaggerated, Evil-Stepmother femininity to everyday domestic life.[145]

But one element of *Mirage* situates its fantastical space and feminine caricatures in tangential relation to a 'real' place. One of the shapes that Jonas drew in chalk, simultaneously live and on screen, was a grid with a curved line running through it [Figure 3], which also appeared on the walls of *Stage Sets*, as well as in the video that became *Mirage 1* and in the background of *Good Night Good Morning*. Without prior knowledge, the drawing does not seem to signify anything other than its own shape, which makes a visual half-rhyme with the hopscotch grid and the ladder. It is in fact a version of a ritual drawing from Malakula in central and northern Vanuatu. Malakulan sand drawings are a practical

[143] Ibid., p.88.
[144] Howe, Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.
[145] *BM*, p.166.

means of exchange and communication in a region with almost eighty different language groups; in 2003 they were listed by UNESCO as a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'.[146] In their social and cultural context they are what Diana Taylor, after Paul Connerton, calls 'acts of transfer': live exchanges that 'transmit information, cultural memory, and collective identity from one generation or group to another through reiterated behaviors', ensuring that a shared cultural knowledge remains in circulation in the community.[147] Taylor argues that isolating such cultural practices from their live environments using external systems of documentation means that shared, localised knowledge is lost in favour of an arbitrary and apparently universal value system. With respect to conservationist category 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity', Taylor writes:

> Heritage, we remember, is linked etymologically to 'inherited property'. While ostensibly a form for maintaining the old, the actual function of heritage is to produce a new cultural product […] It erases practitioners and communities as active cultural agents—we inherit cultural places and materials that we might in turn transmit, but not transform. They are not 'ours'. They pass through us but they belong to an incorporeal everyone: 'humanity'.[148]

Jonas' performance of the ritual without acknowledging its origin amounts to a comparably extractive erasure of its cultural practitioners. As I have argued, the piece gives the impression of tapping into previous iterations, but it figures this past in a placeless space that belongs to an 'incorporeal everyone', consigning the drawings to a mythical prehistoric Origin rather than a specific cultural site.

For what it is worth, part of what consigns the drawings to a generic, prehistoric past is Jonas' reading of them through the extractive, Eurocentric lenses of early-twentieth century anthropology and primitivist Jungian psychology, both of which operated on the premise that non-Western cultures, being archaic and less advanced, could be objectively observed and categorized by anthropologists, or mined for more fundamental insights into the human psyche by psychologists.[149] Rather than the Malakulan practice itself, the main subject of

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[146] Stephen Zagala, 'Vanuatu Sand Drawing', *Museum International,* 56.1-2 (May 2004), pp.32-35 (35).
[147] 'Performance and intangible cultural heritage', in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies,* ed. by Tracy C. David, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.91-104 (92).
[148] Taylor, 'Saving the "Live"?: Re-performance and Intangible Heritage', *Études Anglaises,* 69.2 (April-June 2016), pp.149-161 (150).
[149] For the primitivist origins of anthropology as a discipline, see Satadru Sen, 'Primitivism', *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology,* eds. Hillary Callan and Simon Coleman <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/doi/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1309> [accessed 20 March 2021]; for Jung's belief

Jonas' exploration was the gendered imaginaries of these knowledge systems.[150] She had read about the drawings in the account of John Willoughby Layard, who conducted ethnographical research in the region in 1914-15 as part of his doctorate in anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and later returned to the data after retraining as a Jungian psychologist.[151] What interested Jonas in Layard's account was what he translated as the 'Devouring Ghost', an adversarial figure, coded female, who bars the passage to eternal life that the Malakulans travel after death:

> Quite naturally the Devouring Ghost, symbolizing all that is retrograde and psychically mother-bound, is jealous of transformation which she thinks of as depriving her of her 'natural' maternal rights over men's lives, and so she does her utmost to prevent it.[152]

In Layard's account of the custom, the deceased must thwart the Devouring Ghost to pass through a cave and join their elders in the land of the spirits in a volcano. According to a version Layard collected in the southwest of the Malakulan mainland, the deceased must first win a game whose rules are set by the Devouring Ghost. The Ghost draws a pattern in the sand and then rubs out half of the design; if the deceased succeeds in drawing the missing half, Layard recounts, 'he passes through the lines of the geometric design into the Cave' (p.127). This is the shape that Jonas used in her performances, and it is likely that the myth was also the motivation for the volcano imagery and the action of drawing a sun and erasing half of it. Her aim was to play with the temporal symmetry allowed by the completion of the drawing and the internally prophetic relation it created. Much like Jonas' inhabiting of the role of the Evil Stepmother in *The Juniper Tree,* this play area was associated, by way of the extractive, primitivist documentation of the Malakulan custom, with 'all that is retrograde and psychically mother-bound'.

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that the study of non-Western, and particularly African, cultures would give fuller access to the universalistic collective unconscious, see Jo Collins, 'Shadow Selves: Jung, Africa and the Psyche', *Interventions,* 11.1 (2009), pp.69-80.

[150] For Jonas' description of the drawings and the influence of the book, see Kristin Poor, 'Joan Jonas in Conversation with Kristin Poor' (19 July 2018) <https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/joan-jonas-in-conversation-with-kristin-poor> [accessed 3 March 2021].

[151] For an account of Layard's research, see Haidy Geismar, 'Malakula: A Photographic Collection', *Comparative Studies in History and Society,* 48.3 (2006), pp.520-563 (532).

[152] 'The Malekulan Journey of the Dead', *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks,* ed. by Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Bollingen, 1960), pp.115-150 (127).

It seems likely that Howe had read Layard's article, or perhaps been told by Jonas about the 'Devouring Ghost', if we consider her description of the stepmother in 'The Juniper Tree' in an exchange with Jonas years later:

> JJ: I wanted to work with a fairy tale, so I called Susan and another friend, Karin Kennerly. I distinctly remember that Susan said *The Juniper Tree* was her son Mark's favorite fairy tale.
>
> SH: Oh, God! It's about a devouring mother who kills her children.[153]

Howe's word choice here suggests that the figure of the Devouring Ghost was associated for Howe, as for Jonas, with the cannibalistic 'retrograde' maternity of the fairy-tale, with primitivist epistemologies and with the age-old misogyny of the trope of woman as placeholder for mortality. Importantly, too, it is associated with the slightly ridiculous, playful tone of a dark joke between friends; this dark humour is central to the tone of both *Mirage* and *The Liberties.* As well as its morbidly comic tone and continuous construction of one's own stage and the collapsing of event and documentation, *The Liberties* shares with *Mirage* an interest in archetypes of motherhood and femininity, and their cultural associations with what Howe described as 'the enigma of nothingness'. The question, as I hope to show in what follows, is how these roles interact with the specificity of lived experience, and with locations that hold their own specific, accumulated history. And, moreover, whether the effacement that these roles represent might not in fact be a kind of liberation, a live moment of 'break[ing] out' of the constraints of individual subjectivity.

[153] Heuving interview.

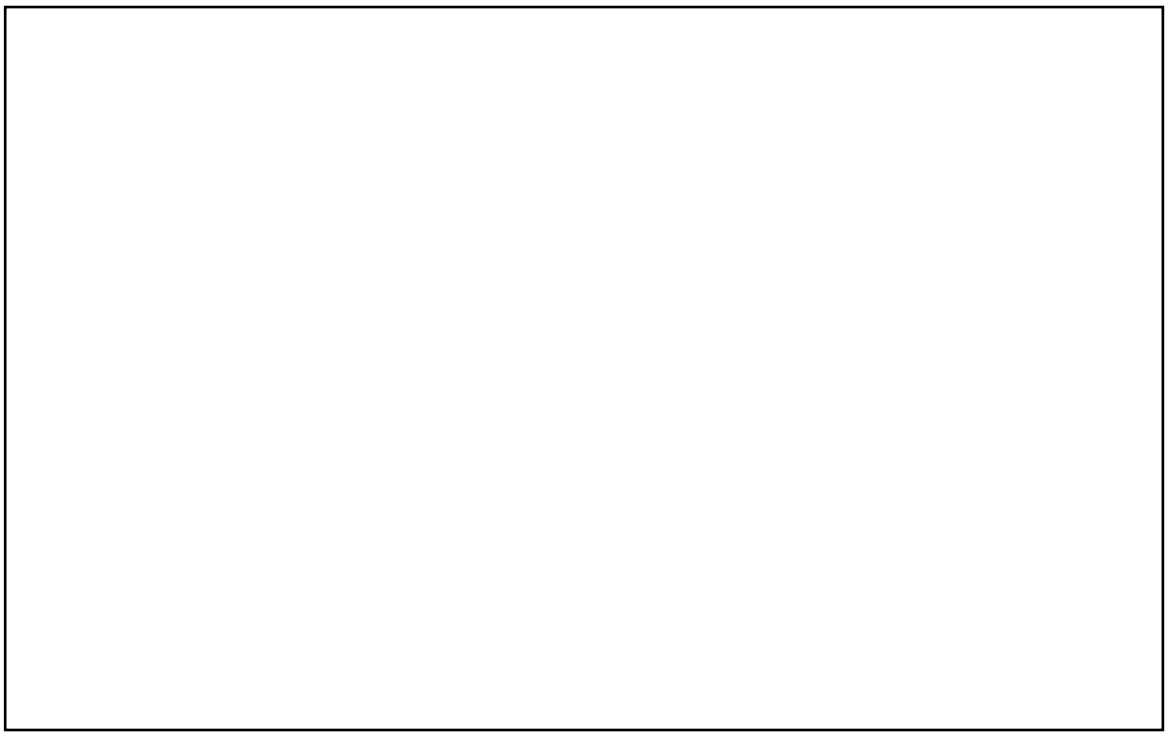


Figure 3: [redacted for copyright reasons] Joan Jonas, installation view including original 1976 video, 2005, MoMA, New York City

iii: 'a settled place'

The Liberties, written in the late 1970s and first published in 1980, is Howe's first published experiment with the dramatic form, and the first of her books to open with a fragmentary prose preface (a feature that has been a fixture in much of her subsequent work). As was the case with 'Leaves', preface to *The Europe of Trusts*, it is likely that the preface to *The Liberties* was the last part of the book to be written. This reshuffling will be important in what follows because, I argue, *The Liberties* presents itself as having landed on the 'subject' outlined in its preface by chance, as one among many possible routes through pre-existing material. Howe's working notebooks suggest that in 1977 and 1978 she was preoccupied by the way that any artistic expression must necessarily 'make use of' pre-existing material (be it language, paper, paint, photographic film, bodies, historical documents) and by the appropriation and omission that comes with this use of a medium, what Rosalind Krauss called the 'object-state, separate from the artist's own being, through which his intentions must pass'.[154] She was thinking about the extent to which an individual can make something new that is not simply a repositioning of old material and, as she asked of *Mirage*, what a 'specific change' might mean.

The notebooks testify to similarities between Howe's writing process and Jonas' collapsing of live event and record.[155] They are a register of Howe's continuous, selective recording and repurposing of words from Jonathan Swift, W. B. Yeats, Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare, Erskine Childers, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Dickens, Woolf, Ovid, fairy tales, natural history books, and more besides. A poem pieced together from a passage in Susan Sontag's *On Photography* will make a fitting example of this process of selective reshuffling. The passage in *On Photography* reads

> A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on.[156]

In Howe's notes this becomes:

> between event
> and event
> to interfere with

[154] Krauss, p.50.
[155] For Howe's description of the importance of these notebooks see Keller interview, p.6.
[156] *On Photography* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1973), p.8.

> going on[157]

Here we can see an interest in the inevitable generation of new material that comes with attempts to document experience—in Howe's case, the experience documented is that of reading, which is already an encounter with a previous record. Like taking a photograph, writing is 'an event in itself' with the capacity 'to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore what is going on'. The unarchivable element of experience is not so much a string of events as a continuous undifferentiated that happens 'between event and event'. As in Jonas' ad-hoc archiving, Howe's focus is the continuous 'going on' of life and liveness, around or beneath those discrete occurrences retrospectively deemed 'events': that which slips 'under', to quote Richard Foreman.[158]

In another pertinent example Howe re-wrote parts of the following passages from Christian historiographer John Warwick Montgomery's *The Shape of the Past* and *The Faith of an Historian* by James T. Shotwell:

> The word 'history' has two meanings. It may mean either the record of events or events themselves. We call Cromwell a 'maker of history' although he never wrote a line of it.[159]

> This is the most remarkable chapter in the whole history of history—the recovery of that past which had already been lost when our literary history began.[160]

In Howe's notebook these passages have been spliced with fragments from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry for 'History' to become:

[157] Working notebook, 2 May 1978 – 22 Sept 1978, Susan Howe Papers, San Diego, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201, Box 12.
[158] Foreman, p.76.
[159] *The Shape of the Past: A Christian Response to Secular Philosophies of History* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), p.8.
[160] *The Faith of an Historian, and Other Essays* (London: Walker 1965), p.139.

[10-line draft poem, redacted for copyright reasons]

161

This poem illustrates Howe's mystically inflected interest in the process of 'crystallization and dissolution' that occurs in the metamorphosis between 'the record of events' and 'events themselves', and her engagement with a typological search for signs of an order behind, or before, history. In 1995 Howe would tell Lynn Keller that she was taken with Walter Benjamin's interest in 'the fragment' and 'the entrance of the messianic in the material object', and this poem articulates a Benjaminian prophetic materialism: the lines suggest that the reshuffling of fragments will allow one to glimpse one's fate in the remnants of the past, as one might read tarot cards or tea leaves.[162] These were the ideas occupying Howe's thoughts—or at least her notebooks—in the first half of 1978. And then was called unexpectedly to Ireland.

In June of 1978 Mary Manning Howe, who had returned to Dublin in 1967, fell seriously ill and was admitted to the Adelaide hospital where Susan Howe came to tend to her. The Adelaide, since closed, was situated one street away from St. Patrick's Cathedral to which Howe would walk after visiting her mother, in the central Dublin area of the Liberties (so called because it once lay outside the municipal bounds of the city).[163] Before her visit Howe had already been reading about Jonathan Swift, one time Dean of the cathedral, buried there alongside Esther/Stella Johnson. It appears from her letters that she was initially more preoccupied with Swift than Stella. In September, she wrote to Lyn Hejinian that Swift had 'triggered the piece I'm working on now […] but you would never know I got there through

[161] Working notebook 2 May – 22 Sept 1978.
[162] Keller interview, p.29.
[163] For Howe's narrative of this period see *BM*, pp.165-166.

Swift'.[164] In 1990 Howe told Edward Foster that 'I begin with fragments and bits and pieces, and they take me to what I find, and then I write an introduction to anchor the poem' (*BM*, p.165). When she walked into the cathedral in June 1978, the 'anchor' that would later moor the fragments of writing to the subject of 'Stella' had not yet become apparent.

'Stella' is the name that Swift gave to Esther Johnson, his long-term partner. Because they never married, the close, romantic nature of their relationship has been glossed over somewhat; the information displays in the cathedral, for example, refer to her as Swift's 'best friend'. Howe's first notes on this trip to Ireland incorporate passages from Swift's 'On the Death of Mrs Johnson' written on the night Stella was buried (she died in her forties from an unidentified illness). As Swift indicates, the passage was written in his room at the Deanery of St Patrick's Cathedral, located just across the street from the later site of the Adelaide Hospital. The passage is strikingly architectural:

> This is the night of the funeral, which my sickness will not suffer me to attend. It is now nine at night, and I am removed into another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bedchamber.[165]

In 'FRAGMENTS OF A LIQUIDATION' in the preface to *The Liberties*, Howe presents this information alongside an account of Swift's behaviour on the night of Stella's death, making a credible case for Swift's callous disrespect for Stella, and suggesting that in Swift's life she functioned primarily as a muse for his narcissistic literary production:

> On the night of January 28th, 1727-8, news of Esther Johnson's death was brought to the Deanery. It was eight o'clock and Swift was entertaining guests. He continued the party as if nothing happened. Two days later illness prevented him from attending her funeral. Instead he sat up in his room writing about her. (p.154)

When the passage from Swift's journal appears in Howe's diary from the period, however, she has written a note beside it that paints the scene in a very different light: 'What a world of grief in this!'[166] These two versions of the story illustrate Howe's preoccupation with the entanglement of speaking subjects with their surroundings, the impossibility of making a 'portrait' of someone that does not depend on what is visible from one's own position, and

[164] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 3 September 1978, Lyn Hejinian Papers, San Diego, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MS 74 Box 4 Folder 18.
[165] 'On the Death of Mrs. Johnson', *The Works of Jonathan Swift,* 2 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1843), pp.314-317 (315). Quoted in working notebook, 2 May – 23 September 1978.
[166] Diary, 1978-1980, Susan Howe Papers, San Diego, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201, Box 31, Folder 3.

the necessary hierarchising of materials involved in any narrative account: ‘The history of history or the history of / My history’. ‘Stella’ is a name that Swift chose for Esther Johnson, after all, and both the character in *The Liberties* and the mythic figure from Howe’s mother’s past have a tangential and heavily mediated relationship to Johnson the historical individual.

The structure of *The Liberties* reflects the difficulty in carving a subject from its surroundings: despite multiple headings, subheadings, numbering systems, and open-ended section markers, some of the ‘fragments and bits and pieces’ slip under the text’s categorical boundaries. It is unclear, for example, whether an extract from Swift’s *Journal to Stella* [Figure 4] is part of ‘STELLA’S PORTRAIT’ on the page before it or an epigraph on the title page of ‘TRAVELS’, marked with an ‘I’ (p.157). ‘TRAVELS’, in turn, continues for one page of poetry before another title ‘THEIR: *Book of Stella’,* which may or not be a subsection of ‘TRAVELS’. What eventually gets titled ‘STELLA’S PORTRAIT’ is apparently also an interconnected portrait of the process of carving out a subject from the stuff that surrounds it, or to quote a subheading from section III, the ‘*Formation of a Separatist, I’.*

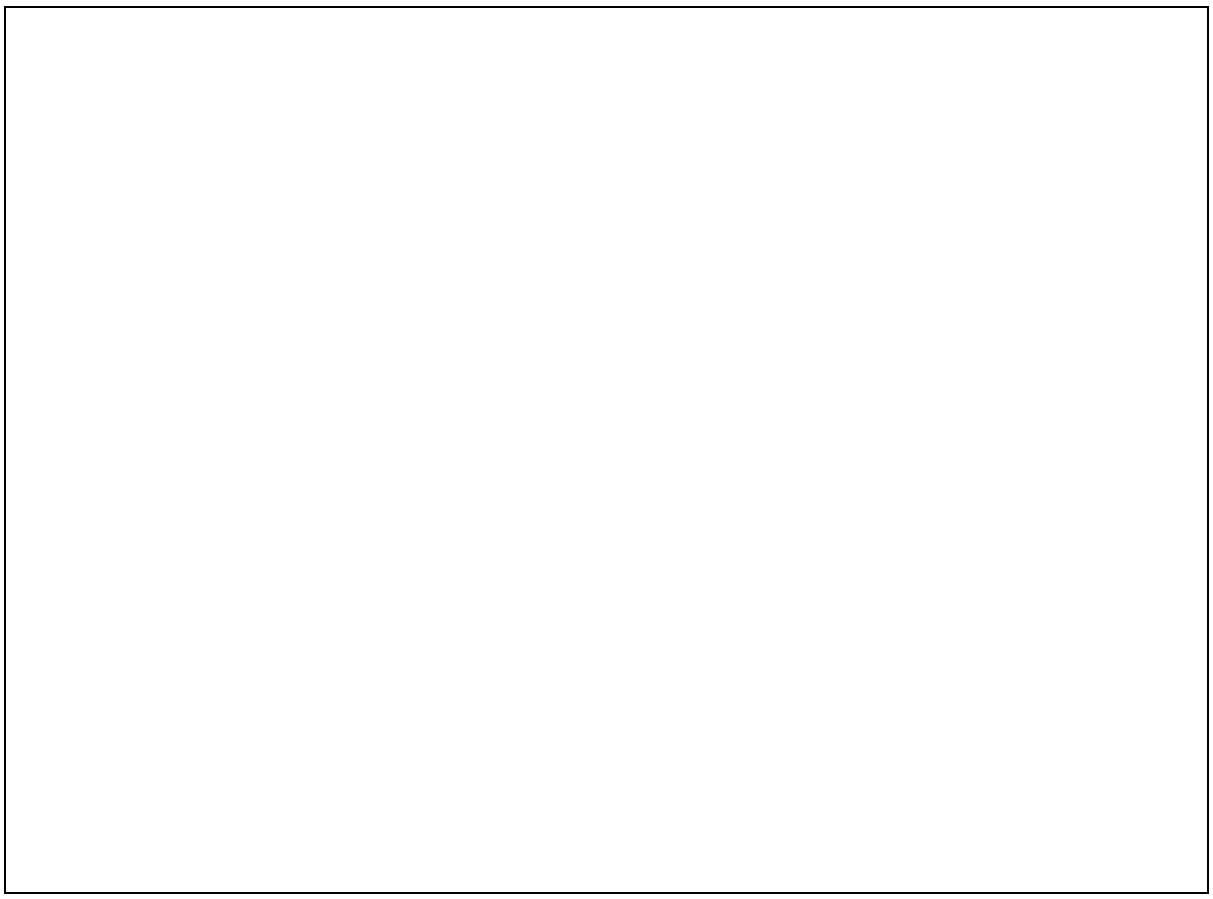


Figure 4: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *The Liberties*, pp.156-7

Just as the material that has been grouped together as ‘Stella’ could have given rise to an apparently infinite number of other subjects, Johnson’s remains are one small part of the assorted materials that lie in and below St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Founded in 1191, it houses over 200 monuments, a gradual accumulation from some 900 years of Irish history—much longer, technically, when one considers the two granite rocks inscribed with Celtic crosses that date back to the church founded on the site by Saint Patrick in the fifth century AD. Thinking with Jonas’ stage sets in mind, we could call it an environment made by a process of continuous memorialization. Stella’s gravestone is built into the floor beside Swift’s at the west end of the building, and their epitaphs hang nearby on the south wall. Moving through the cathedral gives the impression that, before *The Liberties* came to be ‘about’ ‘Stella’, ‘The real plot was invisible / everything possible’ (*TL*, p.169).

The interior walls of the building are crowded with plaques, busts, and memorials packed closely together in a pell-mell manner accentuated by the considerable range in historical and artistic styles. They commemorate an assortment of figures, some now obscure and others recognisable as significant in Irish history (including Erskine Childers Jr, recent president of Ireland, whose brother was married to Mary Manning’s sister). Dotted around the cathedral are tombs, brasses, crosses, and coats of arms in which Protestant religious leaders (Archbishops Fulk de Saundford, Michael Tregury, and Narcissus Marsh, for example) are rather crowded out by memorials to wealthy nobility, such as the gigantic monument to the Boyle family, Earls of Cork, and commemorations of the country’s violent past, such as the tomb of the Duke of Schomberg killed in the Battle of the Boyne (1690). Displayed alongside the Duke’s tomb are the cannonball that struck and killed the Lord Lisburne during the Siege of Limerick (1650-51) and, somewhat incongruously, a chair on which King William III is said to have sat during his visit to the cathedral. The north transept of the cathedral contains two enormous monuments dedicated to Irish soldiers who died in the British Army, along with regimental flags dating back to the Napoleonic wars to the Second World War. There is, among all this, a huge variety of material texture—smooth granite columns, rough stone of early Christian crosses, reflective veneer of memorial brass, tattered, greying cloth of century-old flags—and little direction as to what to focus on. Walking close to the walls of the cathedral one gets the sense, at times, of the ad-hoc accumulation of an antique shop, an impression that is at odds with the sombre, echoey stillness and stately grandeur evoked in the central aisle by the expanse between oneself and the intricate stained-glass windows.

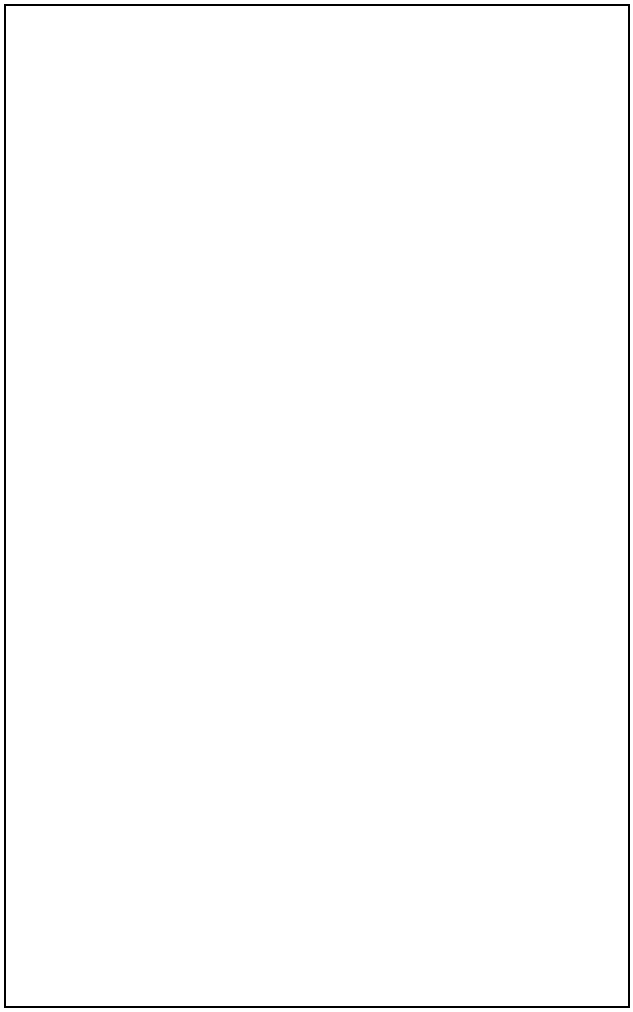


Figure 5: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *The Liberties*, p.159

Howe's notebook from the period attests to this mixture of haphazardness and ecclesiastical serenity and, importantly, to an experience that was impossible to record in language. She writes

> alternum. cushions for the knees
> chanting the old alternum
> children chanting
> Blue of stained glass window
> bluer than a color could
> descrip —[167]

Characteristically, the ineffable is associated here with a moment of live performance, most likely the singing of the St Patrick's Boys' Choir. There are echoes of this live moment, too, in the mention of the 'perfect choir / system' in the first poem in 'Book of Stella' [Figure 5],

[167] Working notebook, 2 May – 23 September 1978.

a dense column of words lifted mostly from S. O. Fitzpatrick's *Dublin: A Historical and Topographical Account of the City* (*TL*, p.159). Just as 'cushions for the knees' stands in for the act of kneeling in prayer in the above passage, the poem in 'Book of Stella' alludes to live experience by describing its material preconditions. Rather than sing like the choir, the poem inscribes the 'choir system' into the building blocks of a verbal pillar interspersed with patches of white space. This is not a documentation of liveness but of its environment, of the materials that make liveness possible.

In a manner comparable to Jonas' efforts to add new perceptual and imaginative dimensions to her environments, the first page in Howe's drafts from Ireland interweaves choir performance and seaside scene, piecing together a space that is both enclosed and expansive, as if the cathedral opened onto a view of the sea. Just as their epitaphs are located at the entrance to the cathedral, 'Swift and Stella' act as a kind of entry point to this cathedral seascape:

[20-line draft poem, redacted for copyright reasons]

168

The first lines seem to refer to the interior of the cathedral, the words 'Jubilate Jubilate swords and knights' especially evocative of the juxtaposition of the military and the ecclesiastical throughout the building. And then the space imagined by the poem opens out

[168] Working notebook, 2 May – 23 September 1978.

onto the sea, apparently in time with the singing of the choir: ‘I remember pale voices across / organ seas’. This expansive experience is specifically plural (‘our mothers our / sisters wave sweetly’) and gestures to an idyllic childhood scene by the sea, as well as a longer and perhaps more mystical collective past, the image of the waving family leading to ‘a sea of arms’. In the context of this cathedral, with its ‘frayed flags’ and war memorials, the ‘sea of arms / reaching through time’ ties the familial childhood memory to a vast and unknowable history of violence.

Little of the passage makes it into the published text, but some snippets do appear in ‘THEIR: Book of Stella’. They read:

> and O
> her voice
>
> a settled place (p.161)

Deletion of material is a typical part of editing any draft, and it is difficult to say for certain why these words make the final cut, but Howe does seem to have eliminated the elements in the passage that evoke more personal associations or site-specific description. In this way we could read the published poem as having been subject to a process of methodical filtration or purification comparable to minimalist efforts to reduce materials to an ahistorical essence, discusses in my introduction. This purity is undermined, however, if we take our cues from Jonas’ live fusing of event and documentation (and Howe’s comparable methods of reprinting and reshuffling texts discussed above) to understand the written document as part of a continuous stream of liveness. Reading in this way, the published lines become one among many ‘crystallizations’ of the material, containing something of the previous ‘dissolutions’ within it.

Taking the notebook version into account suggests that reading this as a discrete portrait of Stella or the reimagining of ‘her voice’ would be limited, not least because it started out as something more subtly plural: in the draft it is ‘a voice’ that echoes the ‘voices’ and ‘a voice’ earlier in the poem. Moreover, ‘a settled place’ evokes not only Stella’s final resting place, but the layers of history shored around her remains like sunken sediment; and, inevitably, the violent history of the land’s colonial settling. These are the layers of history that she is settled among—they are what prop ‘Stella’, the ‘subject’ of the poem, up. This ‘voice’ incorporates both the remainders of colonial violence and the perceiver’s childhood memories of plurality

into the one mythic, live space. It is important to remember, too, that the settled sediment of Anglo-Irish history is also Howe's mother's history. The notebook version incorporates words from Swift's note, 'I am removed into another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bedchamber'.[169] When Susan Howe wrote this, Mary Manning Howe was in a hospital located metres away from where Swift wrote these words, on the night of Stella's funeral which 'sickness' (another word included in Howe's poem) prevented him from attending.[170] The spatial symmetry between these two moments (Howe looking at her mother from the cathedral; Swift looking at the cathedral from his room, where the hospital would be) makes one moment seem like a reflection of the other, separated though they are by two and a half centuries. 'Her voice', then, signals not so much an individual, but a deeply complex network of associations and projections, a language-game in which 'Stella' is but one of many possible outcomes ('Mary Manning Howe' might be another). Just as the experience of moving through a three-dimensional space involves the constant visual reconfiguration of materials in the eye of the perceiver, and just as an onlooker will see their face differently in the mirror of a shrine or the brass of a memorial plaque depending on their position, the material of the poem looks different depending on how it is 'anchored'. And yet each new configuration contains something of the rest. This is history not as sequential, selective inheritance, but as material stage set in the present.

[169] 'On the Death of Mrs. Johnson', p.315.
[170] Ibid.

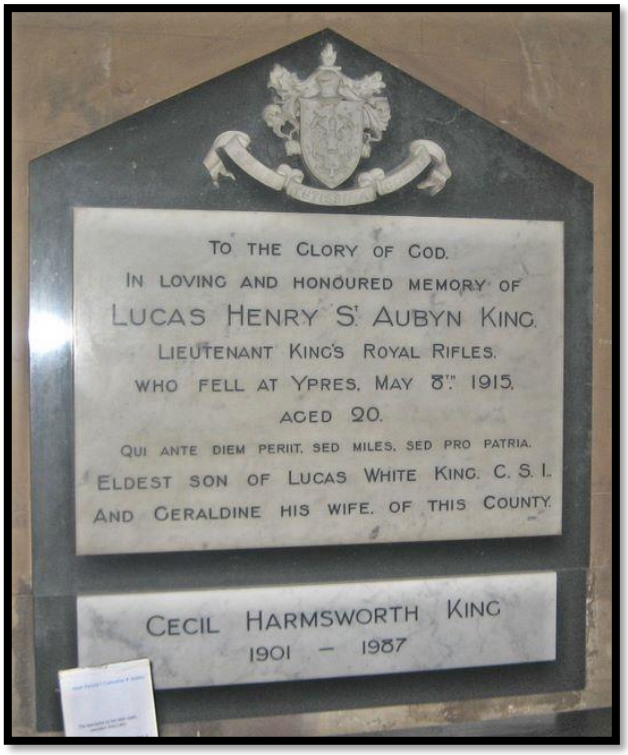


Figure 6: memorial plaque in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin



Figure 7: memorial plaque in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

The materials in St. Patrick's Cathedral found their way into Howe's writing in the form of architectural descriptions and snippets of text from plaques and war memorials, such as a 'lieutenant who fell at Ypres / age 20' [Figure 6] or 'south Irish horse / who gave their lives' [Figure 7].[171] One significant example appears in a series of notes from several months later:

> <u>French Window</u>
> Fresh Widow (Duchamp)
> Wholly windowless (the open air)
> Finnish
> Percival le fils de la veuve dame
> Sons of the widow
> given the donnée of his legend
> he was initiate

[171] Working notebook, 2 May – 23 September 1978.

he stepped into Gawain's shoes— [172]

The association with the Grail stories heralded by the words 'he stepped into Gawain's shoes' casts the cathedral, months after Howe's visit, as a kind of Chapel Perilous: a space of divine encounter. This association is carried into the architectural reconstruction on the first page of the 'Book of Stella' [Figure 5] in the words 'purlieus wall perilous' (p.159). Importantly for my reading of liveness as a recapitulation and extension of past events, it also evokes the idea of one hero taking the place of another. In the cathedral the 'French Family Window' is adjacent to the two military memorial plaques pictured in Figures 6 and 7. It is a stained-glass mosaic that commemorates three brothers, family name French, who died in the First World War, and it includes fragments of glass from Ypres Cathedral, destroyed by shelling. Rather like the *May Windows* and *Night Window* videos on the set of *Mirage*, the materials of this window open onto another time.

By the seeming coincidence of a name, the window also becomes associated for Howe with Marcel Duchamp's 'Fresh Widow', itself a pun and a nod to the enormous loss of life in the First World War.[173] Howe's past engagement with the work of Duchamp made it much more likely that she would pun the words in the cathedral with 'Fresh Widow'. As this chain of associations illustrates, puns are not simply abstract similarities between two words, but instances of live perception, entangled in the material world in which they occur and pivoting on the previous experience of the person that reads the connection—even though, once perceived, they appear to have been always there ('*objet trouvés*', as Sophie Read aptly describes them).[174] This is how I understand Howe's composition method as reflecting both Jonas' narcissistic instrument and Edwards' 'intelligent Beings' who perceive agreement, a sign of Original Beauty, in the world around them. As Howe wrote to Lyn Hejinian in her discussion of Wittgenstein, puns are signs of words having 'interlocked rules of their own—that we may not really understand'.[175] We may not understand the rules, but Howe suggests that we might sense them fleetingly as we move through the space of a building or a page.

The hopscotch game in *The Liberties* evokes the same perception of a timeless, hidden order that Howe reads in Wittgenstein: as she wrote to John Taggart, she 'used a most ancient

[172] Working notebook, 23 September 1978–11 February 1979, Susan Howe Papers, San Diego, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201, Box 12.
[173] *Fresh Widow*, 1920, wood, metal, leather and Perspex, Tate, London.
[174] Read, p.88.
[175] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 26 August 1979.

hop-scotch game in the LIBERTIES'.[176] The game occurs in the middle of 'GOD'S SPIES', the book's second of three sections, itself divided into seven sections designating days in a week. The hopscotch game itself is given less attention than its elaborate set-up, however, which has a distinctly Beckettian air thanks to the detailed, procedural stage directions.[177] To prepare for the game, Stella draws 'several diagrams in chalk on the ground' while Cordelia, blindfolded, explains to Stella and the reader what is about to happen by reciting the game's procedure with a pause of 3 seconds between each step (p.185). (This recital is another collapsing of liveness and its documentation, in that she 'performs' the stage directions themselves by speaking them aloud.) Stella then selects a diagram for the blindfolded Cordelia, pulls some stones from her knapsack, spins Cordelia around 'so that she will lose her sense of direction' and then pushes her onto the diagram. After these lengthy preparations the words denoting their actual game are sparse and imprecise:

> STELLA puts one stone in CORDELIA's hand, takes another for herself, puts away the chalk and remaining stones, finds a diagram for herself, and they play.
>
> Silence.
>
> But for the sound of stones as they hit the ground, CORDELIA's movements are erratic. STELLA is precise.
>
> Time Passes.
>
> Light fades. Night has nearly come. They give up the game, return to the rock and sit down. CORDELIA is still blindfolded. The knapsack, book, crook, and stones are where they left them. (p.186)

Although Cordelia told us the rules, the live game is unavailable to the words on the page; play-time cannot be described from the outside other than with the words 'Time Passes'. It would be easy to repunctuate the details we do get as 'Silence, but for the sound of stones as they hit the ground. CORDELIA's movements are erratic.' Instead, we have an oddly oblique description with syntax that is difficult to parse: Cordelia's movements are erratic but for the sound of the stones as they hit the ground, i.e., the 'sound of the stones' is the only ordered (expressly not erratic) part of Cordelia's movement. Moreover, mentioned in passing in a subordinate clause, the sound does not appear to bring an end to 'Silence'. It is almost as if the sound is what allows 'Silence', perceivable in the rhythm, to emerge.

[176] Letter to John Taggart, 19 September 1981, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, Box 16, Folder 17.
[177] Rachel Tzvia Back reads a Beckettian influence throughout 'GOD'S SPIES'. Back, p.91.

This is the same instinctive order that Howe, in her letter to John Taggart, described hearing in iambic pentameter, a pattern that she had listened to since she was very young and associated with her mother: 'I think that's why I put so many commas (too many) in everything I write in prose because for me the comma makes a pause in the beat. A touch of silence.' In what follows I will argue that *The Liberties* is attuned to a silence perceived in liveness that is not an erasure but a sign of order. This live silence is expressly maternal, associated with a performance of motherhood that works toward the continuation of history in patrilineage. To argue this, I will first turn to the passage directly preceding 'GOD'S SPIES' and then, at the close of the chapter, to one of the 'play areas' in the final section of the book.

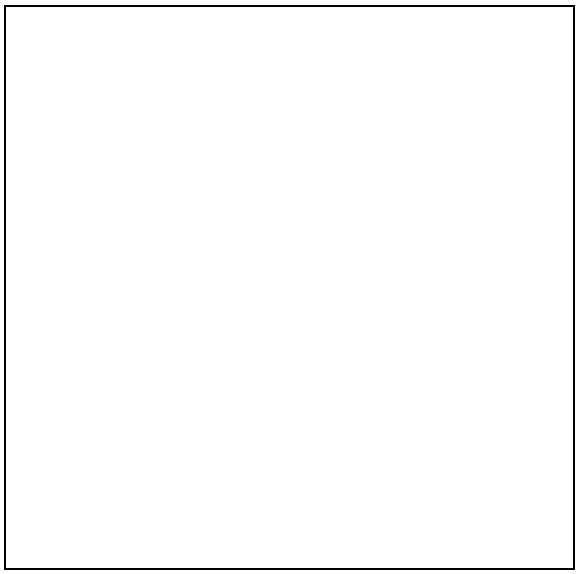


Figure 8: [redacted for copyright reasons] *The Liberties*, p.179

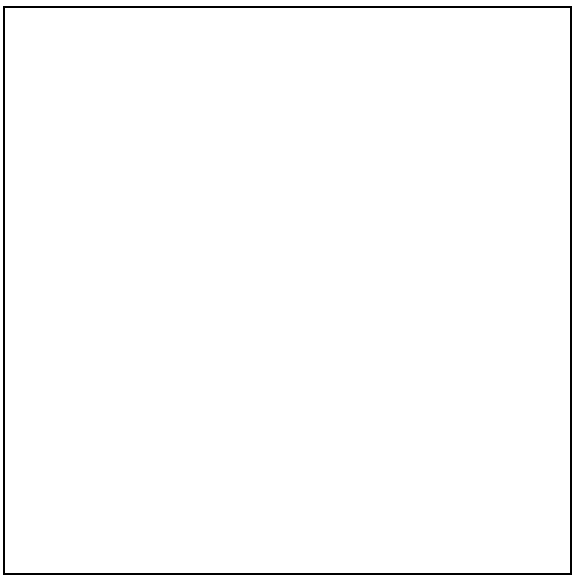


Figure 9: [redacted for copyright reasons] *The Liberties*, p.180

iv: maternal scapegoats

Figures 8 and 9 are the last two pages, recto and then verso, of 'WHITE FOOLSCAP: *Book of Cordelia'.* Considering Howe's interest in creating environments 'that you could walk into and be surrounded by', I believe this sequence is significant as the last signpost outside the door of the chapel, another elaborate set-up for the action that will follow.[178] As well as Joan Jonas' ladder in *The Juniper Tree,* this ladder reflects those of Beckett, Swift, and Wittgenstein. As both threshold and locus of transformation, it is central to Howe's articulation of the role of the maternal in the reproduction of history.

[178] Keller interview, p.6.

Before we climb down the ladder, however, the three sources for the first undulating, sing-song half of the passage speak to each other of ritual and sacrifice. The first of these sources is a Manx song transcribed from the oral tradition in 1843, sung on the occasion of hunting 'the wran'.[179] Versions of this ritual are performed in Ireland and the Isle of Mann, usually on the 26th of December; much like the Malakulan sand drawings it is a living, evolving cultural practice that still serves a social function today. In many iterations, including the one that Howe draws on here, on the Wren's Day the hierarchy of the natural world is inverted and the wren, smallest of the birds, becomes king. A wren must be caught (although nowadays the hunt is purely symbolic) and paraded around the town so that order can be restored. In this version a group of performers sing as they hold hands in a circle and dance around a smaller group. George Waldron described the custom as follows in 1744:

> This custom of 'Hunting the Wren' has been a pastime in the Isle of Man from time immemorial, and is still kept up on St. Stephen's Day, chiefly by boys, who at early dawn sally out armed with long sticks, beating the bushes until they find one of these birds.[180]

It is possible that the word 'sally' in this passage is what drew Howe to the song: her 1977 collage poem 'Sally' (which is centred, as Kaplan Harris observes, around 'a family tree with the patriarchal line running down the middle') incorporates definitions of the word, including the following:

> Sally (probably from
> the name Sally) 1. irish
> the European house wren[181]

Once again, the sources in *The Liberties* are connected through an associative logic of punning. The next source for Howe's poem is a passage from Alice Bertha Gomme's *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland* describing a children's game called 'Sally Water', also involving a circle of players holding hands, in which one scapegoat bears the 'forfeits' on behalf of a group. In this game a child, 'Sally', kneels in the middle and pretends to weep. Gomme writes that

> the expression 'crying' is really to 'announce a want', as 'wants' were formerly cried by the official 'crier' of every township and indeed as children still in games 'cry' the

[179] Halliwell-Phillips, p.249. In *The Liberties* Howe has regularised the spelling of 'wran' to 'wren'.
[180] *The History and Description of the Isle of Man* (London: W. Bickerton, 1744), p.151.
[181] Howe, 'Sally', *Telephone,* 13 (1977), np; Harris, p.459.

> forfeits.[182]

In a third source for Howe's poem, too, a woman suffers for the sake of others. The words 'carried her child / hovered among the ruins' come from Richard Mercer Dorson's *History of British Folklore,* in a discussion of misdeeds associated with the haunted remains of a castle:

> Here Lord Bothwellhaugh cruelly cast out his wife to obtain her barony; her ghost, clad in white, carrying her child, hovered among the ruins.[183]

The woman is 'cast out' so that her inherited title and wealth can go to her husband, but she remains in the ruins after he is gone. In Howe's poem 'the ruins / of the game' could mean that the materials used in a game have been broken, or a game must be played in or with ruins. Bringing to mind Howe's description of the Benjaminian 'entrance of the messianic into the material object', the player of the game hovers among the ruins and is carrying or has carried her child; her actions bring the next configuration of the material to bear 'Once again' while she remains a ghostly presence.[184] These layers of past performance, joined through the perception of puns, whisper of mourning, sacrifice, and scapegoats, of figures who must act out suffering so that order can be restored: so that the hierarchy of the natural world can be set right, the needs of a town announced, the grief of a loved one publicly processed; so that a game can play itself out according to its prewritten rules.

Another aspect to the 'Sally Water' game adds still more complexity to the depiction of the maternal scapegoat. As the ring of children dances around the 'crier', as Gomme recounts, they sing a song that includes the following (allowing regional variants):

> Now you are married I wish you joy,
> First a girl and then a boy;
> Seven years after, son and daughter,
> Pray, young couple, kiss together. (p.205)

In 1979, Howe recorded in her notes a passage from *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland*:

> 'First a girl, then a boy' may also be shown as a result to be desired and prayed for, in the popular belief that a man's cycle of life is not complete until he is the father of a

[182] Alice Bertha Gomme, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p.175.
[183] Richard Mercer Dorson, *History of British Folklore,* 1, (London: Taylor & Francis, 1999), p.113.
[184] Keller interview, p.29.

daughter, who in turn shall have a son.[185]

In this life cycle the daughter is a medium (keeping in mind Krauss's definition of the word as an 'object-state' through which the artist's 'intentions must pass') through which the past is carried forward into the future, the cycle played out, 'complete', when the father is reborn in his daughter's son. From this angle, this series of interconnected ritual sacrifices seems a reconsideration of the concerns of the recent *Secret History of the Diving Line,* published in January 1978.[186] As Fiona Green has shown, that poem is an elegy for Howe's father, Mark de Wolfe Howe, who died suddenly in 1960 when Howe was eight months pregnant with her son, whom she then named Mark.[187] The first page of *Secret History* involves a grid-like poem that explores various resonances in the word 'mark' including, Green illustrates, its capacity to conjure both Marks, father and son (p.86). *Secret History* enacts what Green describes as 'a process of mourning that works toward a point of rest' (p.83). It seems, however, that after this rest Howe's next poem took up the same material and reshuffled it, focusing not just on her own mother, but on herself as mother, and on the process of motherhood; on the vanishing point that makes this generational symmetry possible.

Green suggests that the work of mourning enacted in *Secret History* entails 'recognizing and establishing boundaries of separation' (p.84). As I have outlined regarding the 'subject' of Stella, *The Liberties* performs an exaggerated delineation of the boundaries of subjecthood, but in this case the frames come across as flimsy, superficially related to the material they delineate. The perspective of *The Liberties* allows us to view not only the dividing line of subjecthood, but what slips under it. The text includes phrases from Jacques Lacan's writing on the Mirror Stage, in which the infant identifies with an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror or represented in the body of the mother) coming to the misrecognition of itself as a unified object detached from its surroundings.[188] This is the basis for the formation of the singular ego. A phrase ('must always undo or sever') that appears in 'Book of Stella' has been cut from Lacan: 'psychoanalysis alone recognizes this knot of imaginary servitude that love must always undo again, or sever'.[189] The 'knot of imaginary servitude' is the reflected illusion of the ego as object or, to quote the following words in Howe's poem,

[185] Gomme, p.163; quoted in working notebook, 11 February to 30 June 1979.
[186] 'Secret History of the Dividing Line', *Frame Structures,* pp.87-122 (first published Telephone Books (1978)).
[187] Green, 'Plainly on the Other Side', p.85-86.
[188] *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge Classics, 2001), p.7.
[189] Ibid., p.8; quoted in 'The Liberties', p.169.

‘HALLUCINATION OF THE MIRROR’ (p.169). To see past this hallucination would be to escape the narcissistic prison of the self; it would be to articulate experience that slips out from under the ‘I’. It would be to ‘break out into’ not liberty, but the more plural *liberties*.

Enacting this dissolution requires Consent (keeping Edwards in mind) to a maternal role (keeping in mind, too, the sense of a theatrical ‘role’). Howe was reading *The Psychology of Women* by Helene Deutsch at this time and a note from 1978 sheds light on *The Liberties’* exploration of a phenomenon ubiquitous in the world but confounding to twentieth-century psychoanalysis: the mother who thinks.[190] Deutsch’s late work was influential in the French Feminist tradition (especially to Simone De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*) although it has been criticised, including by many Anglo-American feminists in the 1970s, for its positing of a biologically essentialist feminine core at the centre of women’s experience.[191] Howe’s awareness of contemporary criticism seems likely judging from the slight note of defensiveness in what follows:

> we women have to recognize that opposite in us 0 we must deal with that reconciliation. Deutsh [sic]—from my own experience is right […] the part about wanting the idealised father to appear in the son—silly—but true. These are things women should try to understand rather than the surface rebellions—an old guard thinker like Deutsh [sic] though often wrong has valuable things to tell us[192]

Something fascinating, and crucial to *The Liberties*, is going on in Howe’s exploration of the feminine subject as it is figured by Deutsch and Lacan, as a vessel or a conduit for the infant subject to take form. In August 1978, in a letter describing the difficult time she had just spent in Ireland with her mother, she wrote to Lyn Hejniain:

> I feel for the first time—thoughts about women writing poems. Their place in the history of language use, and particularly of what if anything is different about the feminine experience. I am still profoundly wary of political feminist writing. With poems it is too surface, too easy. But there is something to be done. Some ground to be broken.[193]

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[190] For an excellent analysis of the antagonism between the knowledge and motherhood in psychoanalysis see Jacqueline Rose, ‘Of Knowledge and Mothers: On the Work of Christopher Bollas’, *The Vitality of Objects: Exploring the Work of Christopher Bollas,* ed. Joseph Scalia (London: Continuum, 2002), pp.108-124. For an account of the problem the thinking mother poses to Derridean deconstruction, see Lisa Baraitser, ‘the theorist’s mother’, *Feminist Review,* 108 (2014), pp.e10-e12 (e10).

[191] See Paul Roazen’s preface to Deutsch’s *The Psychoanalysis of Sexual Functions of Women* for an outline of this context. Helen Deutsch, *The Psychoanalysis of Sexual Functions of Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

[192] Working notebook, 2 May – 23 September 1978.

[193] Letter to Lyn Hejnian, 19 August 1978, Lyn Hejinian Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 74 Box 4 Folder 18.

Howe was preoccupied by the question of 'feminine experience' but not in the 'surface' way that she saw in contemporary US women's studies, which advocated for an appropriation of masculine structures of thought for new, liberatory ends. That approach is exemplified by Rachel Blau Du Plessis' description of *The Liberties* as a project of 'tak[ing] their word'.[194] As Howe outlined to Edward Foster, however, she saw the effort to appropriate masculine power as

> only another bias. And in a strange sense it's still a male bias. Instead of questioning the idea of power itself, many women want to assume power. 'Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.' History certainly has shown us that. Luce Irigaray, in *This Sex Which Is Not One,* questions such issues in a truly revolutionary way (*BM,* p.170).

It seems Howe was more convinced by the French Feminist tradition which, after Luce Irigaray, advocated a strategic mimesis of the roles that have been assigned to women. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), which was met with even stronger opposition by US feminists, Irigaray argued that a feminine subject position in language is impossible, because woman is the lack or other by which the male subject is defined.[195] Iragaray's aim was to challenge the masculine Symbolic structure from within to articulate new forms of subjectivity. Irigaray's book had not yet been translated into English when Howe was writing *The Liberties* but her exploration of consenting to a feminine role amounts to a similar project. Instead of attempting to 'assume power', the aim was to go below the 'surface' level of the ego and into a less defined space. *The Liberties* is a colossal attempt to Consent (in that sense that Edwards used it, as an agreement or accord with one's surroundings) to one's own effacement.

Crucially, this consented effacement is not the erasure of experience but rather the dissolution of the singular into something disparate, something that arranges and rearranges according to its environment—looking back to Manning's relationscapes, something that 'in-gathers the world even as it worlds'. In the Wittgensteinian terms with which Howe would have been familiar, we might say that it includes the ineffable experience of meaning that cannot be explained in words. In a psychoanalytic mode we could draw on work done by

[194] *The Pink Guitar* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.138.
[195] *This Sex Which is not One,* translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) An article-length version translated by Claudia Reeder was published in *New French Feminisms,* eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

feminist psychoanalysts to explore the maternal psyche.[196] Particularly helpful, because of my focus on performance and the embodied interaction with objects, is Lisa Baraitser's account of maternal subjectivity as coming into being in the encounter with the other that is the child in one's care.[197] Baraitser follows Irigaray, but she seeks to articulate a specifically maternal subjectivity as distinct from what she describes as Irigaray's 'maternal-feminine' (p.48). This subjectivity is not singular but several; not based on specific characteristics that the individual body possesses but on the repeated acts of care and sacrifice involved in making a safe and nourishing environment for a child. In *The Liberties,* as I have shown, subject formation is always *in process,* always being facilitated, being held; it happens within the poem but not in a way that holds all the material in one cohesive whole—or at least it never seems to hold on its own, not without being held from the outside. The effort of the book is, I propose, to speak to this holding, to the ghostly figure who 'carrying her child, hovered among the ruins'. We could think here of Baraitser's listing of nappies, toys, bottles, buggies, and other props of early parenthood to describe the maternal subject as one who is 'literally weighed down by stuff' (p.125). In each reshuffling ('crystallization and dissolution', to quote Howe's draft poem about the recording of history) there is always something outside the subject doing the holding. *This* is what is being consented to: not effacement, exactly, but the dissolution of discrete, impermeable subjecthood into what Baraitser, in a later book, calls after Bracha Ettinger 'the matrixial substrata of psychic life'.[198]

'I am composed of nine letters', begins one poem towards the end of *The Liberties*:

> 1 is the subject of a proposition in logic.
> 2 is a female sheep or tree.
> 3 is equal to one.
> 4 is a beginning.
> 5 & 7 are nothing
> 6 7 & 8 are a question, or salutation.

[196] See Jessica Benjamin on the intersubjective, Rozsika Parker on maternal ambivalence, and Bracha Ettinger's theory of the matrixial. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1988); Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago Press, 1995); Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis.: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
[197] *Maternal Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[198] *Enduring Time,* p.100.

6 7 8 & 9 are a depression. (p.209)

This is an oblique catalogue of the letters in the name 'Susan Howe'. Placing the focus on the singular, individual subject seems to make it dissolve into a series of disparate elements including (and this is the only item in the list without a full stop at the end) 'nothing'. At the same time, however, the maternal subject still exists, is still a perceiving entity even if she is not reflected in the process of 'crystallization'. Writing 'as a woman' means consenting to the *performance* of singular subjectivity, but it also means holding onto an awareness of something else, something unsayable not contained by the role. In this Howe's consent to motherhood is something of a Butlerian performative.[199] In 1978 Howe transcribed the following from Helene Deutsch's *The Psychology of Women*:

> every woman feels she bears a future hero in her womb, and the content of her fantasy is the 'myth' of his birth. He not only represents her own masculinity—even when she is the most feminine of women—but he also represents all the overvaluation that once applied to her father and possesses all the virtues her own father lacks. (p.150)[200]

In her alignment with the outdated 'old guard' of Deutsch's feminism, Howe's performative inhabiting of the feminine mirror space can be read as a version of what Elizabeth Freeman has called 'temporal drag', a concept that extends Butler's account of gender's inherent performativity to a performance of past iterations of gender.[201] Temporal drag, Freeman proposes, performs 'disruptive anachronisms' to enact an alliance with the political identities of the past that might now seem outdated.[202] What Consent in the context of *The Liberties* amounts to, I suggest, is the willing performance of an old-fashioned role for the sake of unity with something larger than oneself.

The possibility of 'matrixial substrata' below surface 'roles' recognised by patrilinear history brings a different connotation to the opening lines of the book's first free-verse poem, which sits in an unstable threshold position between 'STELLA'S PORTRAIT' and 'THEIR: *Book of Stella'*:

> her diary soared above her house
> over heads of (p.158)

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[199] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[200] Quoted in working notebook 2 May–23 September 1978.
[201] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.59-94.
[202] 'Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations', *New Literary History* 31.4 (2000), pp.727-744 (733).

Most scholarly interpretations read this as a moment of freedom for the figure of Stella, in which she escapes the constraints of Swift's portrayals of her. Marjorie Perloff suggests that in this poem 'the narrator' casts aside the details of Stella's life as recorded by Swift and produces 'her own free-verse poem' as a kind of alternative portrait.[203] Nancy Gaffield reads the lines as a hypothetical imagining of Stella's own diary which provides her an escape:

> the freedom of her words soaring up to the clouds and merging with the sea is in counterpoint to the 'stammered place', where 'a dead page' fills her 'with terror' and she lapses 'into silence'.[204]

Rachel Tzvia Back also proposes that the lines imagine a hypothetical diary and reads signs in the rest of the poem that indicate it was burnt.[205] Rhiannon Imms, too, interprets the lines as a speculative imagining of Stella's own private writing which was not saved but still has a redemptive power: 'the pen Stella appropriates for her own use (for writing that has not survived) is also a magic wand giving the power to both write language and to slip its frame'.[206]

These readings are indicative of a need to align Susan Howe's early work with an individualist, appropriative project of retrieval. They risk misreading the poem's wariness of the subjectification that language and the Symbolic order enact on experience. As I read it, 'her diary' suggests not a hypothetical diary written by Stella that might liberate her from her material circumstances, but an actual diary that still exists, and from which Howe quotes extensively. Swift's *Journal to Stella* is Stella's diary insofar as it was written *for* her; Swift wrote letters to her as a form of journaling.[207] If 'her diary' refers to *Journal to Stella* then the lines suggest that Swift's words *about* Stella are distinguished *from* Stella, elevated above and beyond her lived experience ('her house', and all the trappings of domestic femininity that it entails). I read Howe's lines as a nod to patrilinear narrative history's foreclosure of more several, disparate modes of experience, and grammar's inevitable elevation of one 'subject' over and above its surroundings. The lack of evidence about Stella's life is certainly a profound absence in *The Liberties,* but to try to write her experience using the material that

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[203] 'Recharging The Canon: Some Reflections On Feminist Poetics And The Avant-Garde', *The American Poetry Review,* 15.4 (July/August 1986), pp.12-20 (13).
[204] 'Susan Howe's Landscapes of Language: *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* and "The Liberties"', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 26.3 (July 2015), pp.270-284 (274).
[205] Back, p.68.
[206] 'Landscape as language: a comparative study of selected works by Susan Howe and Daphne Marlatt' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2006), p.254.
[207] *Journal to Stella* (London: JM Dent, 1924).

has been left would be another kind of silencing. After all, Howe can only 'tenderly lift' written words, not unrecorded voices, from the record however much she might wish otherwise (*L,* p.14).

My argument against reading *The Liberties* as an appropriation of masculine forms of writing is also at variance with those who see the cross-dressing in *The Liberties* as the liberation of claiming male authority by dressing like a man. There are several instances in *The Liberties* of women dressing as boys, but in many of the examples it is not something that the woman does herself, but which is done to her. Such is the case in the most explicit instance:

> and
> she
>
> had a man's dress mad
> e
>
> though her feet ble
> d (164)

The source text for these lines, 'The Mermaid', by Hans Christian Andersen, suggests something less empowering than appropriative a masculine role:

> He had a man's dress made for her, so that she could ride about with him. […] although her delicate feet bled so that others saw it, she only laughed and followed him.[208]

Here the mermaid (who has already had to become a biped to follow the prince) wears a man's clothing because a man requires that she do so. In this light the lines from 'Book of Stella' 'she must be traced through many dark paths / as a boy' sound less like liberation or retrieval and more like a re-assertion of the masculine subject at the centre of Western historical narratives (p.162). The words are taken from a note that Swift wrote in his copy of

[208] *Andersen's Fairy Tales* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), p.23. Quoted in working notebook, 17 November 1977 – 1 May 1978, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MS 201, Box 12.

The History of the Rebellion: Civil Wars in England by Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon.[209] Phyllis Greenacre (another 'old guard' psychoanalytic theorist of the feminine, whose name is written in the working notebook from Howe's trip to Ireland) has described Swift's 'frank attempts to make boys of Stella and Vanessa' and his efforts to 'train' Stella 'to be a second version of himself'.[210] Here, again, the appropriation of masculine roles is not so much an act of liberation, but that of being forced into a certain subject position by the authority of language.

To recapitulate, the project of *The Liberties* is not a retrieval or an imagining of Stella as a speaking subject, 'tak[ing] their word'. It is, I argue, an attempt to articulate an experience that is disparate, several, and constantly in the process of reassembling, and that is precluded by the structures of Symbolic language. This subjectivity is the other of patrilinear history, but it is what allows it to continue. It is also, I argue, rooted in the willing performance of motherhood: I will demonstrate this by returning to the ladder in 'Book of Stella' [Figures 8, 9]. Here the ladder becomes a threshold between the living and the dead, and between what can be recorded by linguistic structures and what remains untouched by them. It is worth noting that this is the second time the reader encounters these narrow rungs; they appeared a couple of pages earlier, albeit in one continuous column rather than split across two pages. Like Jonas' *Mirage* re-staged in *Stage Sets*, even before we trace their sources these words are perceived as a reiteration. This recurrence is made morbid (a haunting) by one of the most significant precursors for Howe's ladder: the ladder climbed on the way to the gallows in the introduction to Swift's *Tale of a Tub.*[211] The passage in Swift's satire outlines a custom, practised by philosophers who wish to have their words heard by many, of 'erecting certain edifices in the air':

> whoever has an ambition to be heard in a crowd must press, and squeeze, and thrust, and climb with indefatigable pains, till he has exalted himself to a certain degree of altitude above them. (p.2)

The three best structures from which to reach the space 'over their heads', the speaker tells us, are 'the Pulpit, the Ladder, and the Stage-itinerant' (p.2). Thinking again of the diary that

[209] 'Remarks on Lord Clarendon's "History of the Rebellion"', *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Temple Scott, 10 (East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2013) pp.289-323 (324).
[210] 'The Mutual Adventures of Jonathan Swift and Lemuel Gulliver: A Study in Pathography', *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 24 (1955), pp.20-62 (28, 27).
[211] *The Tale of a Tub* (London: G. Faulker, 1771).

‘soared above her house / over heads of’, the power to speak becomes the power to distinguish oneself above the rest.

A little further along in Swift’s *Tale*, when the speaker is explaining why the ladder is the ‘oratorial machine’ most suitable for symbolising ‘faction and poetry’, the words are obscured by an apparent material intrusion: ‘Of faction, because ... [Hiatus in MS.]’ (p.22). A footnote tells us this ‘pretended […] Defect in the Manuscript’ is

> frequent with our Author, either when he thinks he cannot say any thing worth Reading, or when he has no mind to enter on the Subject, or when it is a Matter of little Moment, or perhaps to amuse his Reader (whereof he is frequently very fond) or lastly with some Satyrical Intention.

The ladder is an ‘oratorial machine’ or instrument that stands as a placeholder for a ‘faction’ that occurs beyond the realm of words. It is a threshold between what can and cannot be spoken—what connects the document and the live experience, or language and the incubating environment from which it is brought forth. The ‘faction’ that is possible, then, is not an appropriation of the language of authority, but an indefinable, elusive otherness that is inaccessible to such language—something outside words altogether.

In Howe’s poem this material otherness is expressly maternal. Following her method of reading connections in linguistic recurrences, I will pun this ‘hiatus’ with the only instance of the word in *The Liberties,* in the ‘Book of Stella’:

> the first danger
> the first crossing
>
> hiatus
> chiasma
> a kind of death (p.167)

This is taken from another text by Phyllis Greenacre on ‘The Biological Economy of Birth’, in a passage discussing infant narcissism. Greenacre asks:

> What does the process of birth do in furnishing a bridge from the one to the other? Is birth a chiasma, or is it a hiatus—a kind of blackout, very closely resembling death?[212]

[212] *Trauma, Growth, and Personality* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p.33.

In this maternal threshold space, 'a bridge from one to the other', singular subjectivity has dissolved into something more plural and disparate. It is by inhabiting this threshold space, 'the first crossing', that narcissism inverts itself and becomes a means of making oneself a conduit through which the past is dragged into the present in a kind of temporal mirroring, the father reflected in the son.

The ladder threshold in 'White Foolscap' brings together three different moments in novels by Samuel Beckett, but most importantly for my discussion is the source for the last section:

> Do not come down the ladder
> ifor I
> haveaten
> it a
> way

The words are from a passage in *Watt* (1976) that aligns closely with the question Howe asked in her review of *Mirage* ('When and where does specific change occur?'):

> But in what did the change *consist*? What was changed, and how? What was changed, if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was the existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away.[213]

Beckett denied that this passage referred to Wittgenstein and there is strong evidence that it is inspired at least in part by the philosopher Fritz Mautner's concept of 'learned ignorance'.[214] Still, echoes from the penultimate proposition in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* would have been audible to Howe, enthralled as she was by the 'MAGIC' of Wittgenstein.[215] The passage in the *Tractatus* reads:

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)[216]

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[213] *Watt* (Paris: Calder, 1976), p.42.
[214] See Matthew Feldman, *Beckett's Books: A Cultural History of The Interwar Notes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) p.148. For Beckett's disavowal of Wittgenstein's influence see John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964), p.144.
[215] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 26 August 1979.
[216] *Tractatus logico-philosophicus,* trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2002), vi.6.54, p.89.

In this description, the language of logic and philosophy is a force that propels the thinking subject forward to a destination from which they cannot return, and which they cannot share with another. Furthermore, logic also only takes them so far: in the larger passage this is taken from, the 'mystical' cannot be accessed in the language of philosophy (vi.522, p.79). It is something of which we must, as Wittgenstein's final proposition argues, 'be silent' (vii, p.89). This predicament, which Wittgenstein describes as solipsism, could also be understood as a narcissistic paradigm. In Beckett's version the ladder is a force of order or immutability that contrasts with the flux of 'existence off the ladder' where actual change is occurring. In *The Liberties* the ladder, floating in an otherwise blank page, is the structure that holds silence. For Howe, it is not simply the record of an absence but of a metamorphosis that evades speech.

Crucially, in Howe's poem Beckett's 'Ihaf taken' becomes 'I / haveaten', recalling what Howe called the 'devouring mother' in *The Juniper Tree,* and in turn the Devouring Ghost, symbol of what Layard called 'all that is retrograde and psychically mother-bound'.[217] Howe's revision relocates the inexpressible change so that it occurs in the body of the speaker. It must be stressed, however, that *the speaker herself* cannot speak of this threshold any more than anyone else can: as Lisa Baraitser argues, 'in psychoanalytic theory the limit of knowledge (i.e., the unconscious) is precisely where we find and fail to find "the mother"'.[218] This is not a simple pastoral figuration of biological reproduction as a metaphor for poetic conception: maternal severality is part of the experience that the poem attempts in vain to document.[219] The speaker presents herself as a narcissistic medium in that she is the eye that perceives coincidences and signs (that might read the son as the antitype of the father) but she is also, genetically speaking, a literal material connection between her son and her father, between one Mark and another. To quote Howe's selective reshuffling of Sontag, this maternal holding is the state of 'going on' 'between event / and event'.

[217] Hueving interview; Layard, p.127.
[218] Baraitser, 'the theorist's mother', p.e10.
[219] For examples of this metaphor for conception, see Maria Irene Ramalho de Sausa Santoc, 'The Woman in the Poem: Wallace Stevens, Ramon Fernandez, and Adrienne Rich', *The Wallace Stevens Journal,* 12.2 (Autumn 1988), pp.150-161; Carlanda Green, 'The Feminine Principle in Seamus Heaney's Poetry', *Ariel,* 14.3 (1983), pp.3-13.

v: play area

The last part of this chapter moves toward the end of the book, to a poem in '*Formation of a Separatist, I*' that explores the willed effacement of individuality for the sake of union akin to Edwards' 'Being's consent to Being'.[220] This poem [Figure 10] articulates an active Consent to the creation of a subject (a son) through which history, in the form of patrilineal generationality, can continue. Like most of the poems in '*Formation of a Separatist, I*', this one is a roughly square-shaped grid, a form that Howe first used with the 'Mark' poem in *Secret History of the Diving Line* discussed earlier. This form, I suggest, is the result of the impulse to create a childish stage-like 'play area'. Brian Reed touches on this, perhaps inadvertently, in his discussion of the form, which he calls 'word squares' after Rachel Blau DuPlessis.[221] Identifying a visual prototype for the shape in archival photos of Howe's early 'environment' paintings, he notes that the pieces on the walls seem to be 'in the pattern of a tic-tac-toe board'.[222]

The even horizontal and vertical spacing of the words in these play areas open the poems to an element of indeterminacy in that the reader must decide whether to read down or across, or (and this is what the poem most strongly encourages) to take in the words in non-linear clusters, allowing associative connections to jump out rather like a word-search puzzle. These play areas are kind of a game, if we can take game to mean a structure governed by rules of play in which an indeterminate element (our choice of direction) will determine the outcome. As well as visually reiterating the hopscotch grid and the ladder, if we read the italicised words in the centre of Figure 10 as imperatives, and thus potential stage directions, the shape is a plan in miniature of *The Liberties,* not including the preface: two poetic sequences bisected by a short (in this case, extremely short) drama. Once again, it is a new reconfiguration of old material.

[220] Edwards, *True Virtue,* p.78.
[221] Reed, par.11.
[222] Ibid., par.28.

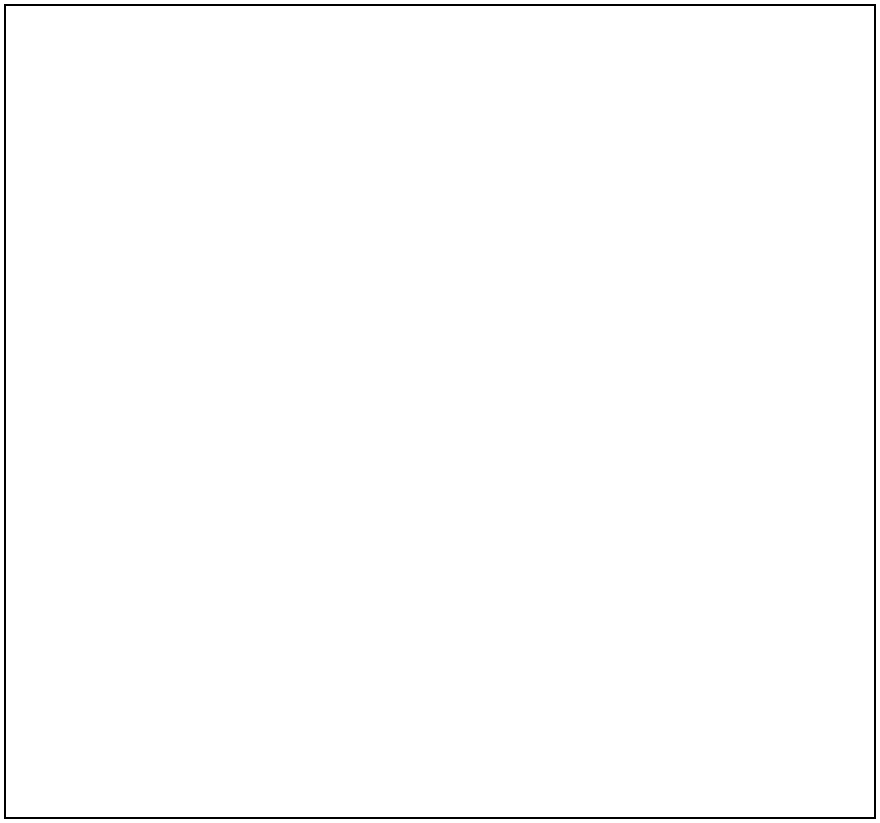


Figure 10: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *The Liberties*, p.208

Describing this poem as ‘grid-like’ is not quite accurate; nor is calling it ‘square’, for that matter. After the first two rows, the spacing becomes irregular so that although the edges maintain a regular shape, the words in the middle float untethered, making it even more difficult to pick out a sequence—although this is perhaps less of a problem when reading the poem in one’s head (‘playing’ in it) than when reading it aloud to another. The pastoral associations of ‘willow’ and ‘glade’, for example, might encourage one to automatically connect the words in a spatially contingent relation; but reading them aloud means having to decide which counter-intuitive direction to read them in—either from the right, as ‘willow glade’, or from below, as ‘glade willow’. If we do read the poem from left to right, the end of each verse lands on a repeated word (first ‘words’ and then ‘no’) giving the sensation of turning back on oneself, landing where one started even as one reads in sequence. The equidistance of the four sides gives the sense that all directions turn in on themselves. The structure seems internally sustaining, without a beginning, middle or end, but instead holding all potential directions at once. ‘The real plot was invisible’ to quote again from earlier in the book, ‘everything possible’ (p.169).

Regardless of which course we take, the cluster on the top left corner ('love' 'tongue' 'milk' 'bare' 'arm') evokes the nursing of an infant. The word 'bare' suggests effacement or emptiness while also suggesting its homophone 'bear', to carry—as if the act of holding led to one's effacement. Indeed, the first word might lead one to the first line of Sylvia Plath's 'Morning Song'—'Love set you going like a fat gold watch'—a famous poem of maternal ambivalence in which the speaker tells her child:

> I'm no more your mother
> Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow
> Effacement at the wind's hand.[223]

There is something tongue-in-cheek about the overt evocation of a pastoral, nourishing landscape of childhood in the fecundity of 'pasture' and the idyll of 'glade'. This last word would undoubtedly have held echoes for Howe of the 'bee-loud glade' from Yeats' Inishfree, situating the scene in a mythicised Celtic Eden. Howe's notebooks hint at another source text for the word that reinforces the suggestion that this 'pasture' is a birthplace of heroes descended from heroes: 'The Birth of Oisín' from the Fenian myth cycle.[224] This is a humorous association of a disparate, holding maternal subjectivity with the pastoral landscape of myth, but it also resonates with the more reverent evocation earlier in the text of the Chapel Perilous, and with the word 'inherit' in the third line which brings to the maternal scene an association of reproducing patrilineage. The comic tone is comparable to that of the performance of maternity in Jonas' *Juniper Tree,* but its comedy does not detract from an earnest profession of Consent to the inevitable loss of individual selfhood for the sake of the child.

Brian Reed picks up on the maternal when he proposes, quoting Howe in 'Ether', that the word squares are 'a model of the process of "enunciation" itself'.[225] This correlates with my suggestion that the poem is a theatrical enactment of the formation of a subject, a child who will likely go on to enunciate itself as 'I'. But Reed fails to articulate the self-reflexive irony involved in making a womb-like space out of words, or the ways that the relation between writing and motherhood is more and less than metaphor. 'In her word squares', Reed writes,

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[223] Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1981), p.156.
[224] This myth narrates the birth of a son to Fionn, leader of the Fianna, and Sadhbh, a woman who had previously been turned into a deer by a druid. Not long after Oisín is born Sadhbh is turned back into a deer and disappears into the wild.
[225] Reed, par.49.

'we observe words birthing from an ocean-matrix. But, as Howe's comments about oceans reveal, this womb is a blank. An emptiness'.[226] In Reed's argument the 'womb' is a figure of speech that stands in for poetic composition but, as I have argued, maternal labour is not simply a metaphor for writing in *The Liberties.* Besides the fact that the former literally makes the latter possible (in that an infant must be born and cared for before it can learn to speak) maternal subjectivity is the 'subject' that the speech in this poem tries and fails to articulate. Silence in *The Liberties* is not 'emptiness' but the active choice not to speak of something that cannot be spoken, even as the poem tries to make us understand its intersubjective grammar.

This not-quite metaphorical relation between motherhood and poetry is most explicit in the poem's invocation of Shakespeare whose rhythms, as discussed, literally make Howe think of her own early childhood. The inclusion of words spoken by Lear and Cordelia also helps to articulate a Consent to patrilineality. The first two words, 'love' and 'tongue', recall Cordelia's first asides in Act I Scene ii, in which she tells the audience, paradoxically, that she will not speak:

> What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.
> […] Then poor Cordelia!
> And yet not so, since I am sure my love's
> More ponderous than my tongue.[227]

Cordelia's words are a response to her father's request that she articulate her love for him so that he may translate words into material inheritance by giving her a share of his kingdom. Her 'love' cannot be articulated within patrilinear logic, however. Later, the word 'benediction' in Howe's poem recalls Lear and Cordelia's tender reunion in Act IV Scene vii, in which Cordelia forgives her father's foolish behaviour:

> O, look upon me, sir,
> And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:
> You must not kneel. (iv.7, p.167)

The O in the final row of Howe's poem reflects off of Cordelia's 'O, look upon me sir', as well as the zero that Howe makes in her note about Helene Deutsch—'we women have to

[226] Ibid., par.50.
[227] William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), i.1, pp.8, 9.

recognize that opposite in us 0 we must deal with that reconciliation'. [228] Perhaps most importantly, it recalls 'O about both' in the first page of *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, an apostrophe which Fiona Green has illustrated 'summons the double presence of her father and her son'.[229] Paired with the adjacent word 'stain', which brings to mind both human fallibility and the 'blue of sweet salvation' of the stained-glass window at the beginning of the book, the echoes of Cordelia's forgiving gesture toward a union restored.

In draft versions 'broken un' appears as 'unbroken', but in this brilliant reversal the words enact the paradox of their own impossibility. Reading the words from left to right, we first have a state of brokenness, later qualified by 'un' but not put back together. When we get to the second word, the two together make us think of something that is 'unbroken', as if it were both repaired by the addition and in fact had always remained intact. In a manner that is comparable to Joan Jonas' drawing in time with the footage of her earlier self, the second word 'un' brings the two into relation, making it strangely prophetic of itself. This complex meaning depends on the words' specific positioning, and the blank space between them: it can only happen in the play area. The following words ('lips', 'here', 'look', 'stir') evoke Lear's frantic delirium as he looks for signs of life in his daughter's body at the end of the play:

> This feather stirs; she lives! if it be so,
> It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
> That ever I have felt […]
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there! (v.3, p.190)

Much like Lear, this poem implores its audience to 'look' at something uncontained by the words of the play but nonetheless present on the stage/page, something inaccessible to linear sequence or narrative. In *King Lear* (at least for Lear, deluded by grief) it is Cordelia's invisible breath; in this poem it is the white space in and around the words.

Three pages before the draft for this poem in Howe's notebook is a note referring to Stella and Cordelia: 'Both told the Truth by saying / nothing.'[230] In this context the column of 'nos' on the bottom right of the square might be read as a paradoxical affirmation, a Consent

[228] Working notebook, 2 May 1978 – 22 September 1978. The O mark appears a few lines later in the same passage, when Howe is reflecting on a friend of hers who is 'motherless'.
[229] Green, 'Plainly on the Other Side', p.86.
[230] Working notebook, 10 July 1979–1 January 1980, Susan Howe Papers, UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201, Box 12.

to saying nothing, ‘to enter really enter the silence’ for the sake of patrilineal order. They could also be an evocation of Lear speaking to Cordelia as they walk off the stage, she walking to her death

> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage. (v.3, p.190)

In the warped directionality of the play-area the ‘nos’ bounce off the repeated ‘words’ in the section above to say ‘no words’. They also refract off the ‘causes’ on the opposite corner of the square to evoke, not sequentially, but all at once, Cordelia’s words of ready forgiveness and willing consent to her father’s will when they are reunited, slightly earlier in the play: ‘No cause, no cause’ (iv.8, p.167). Even as the shape amounts to a refusal of sequence, the reader might still have a slight sense of looking for a ‘cause’: there is one too few for symmetry, so the final ‘no’ hangs at a loose end. This confirms Howe’s deep, spiritual investment in words as they are sensed, live, in the body. As she would write five years later for the New Poetics Colloquium, ‘in my poetry, time and again, questions of assigning *the cause* of history dictate the sound of what is thought’ (*L*, p.13). With this last dangling ‘no’ the reader is left looking for what Howe searches for throughout her work in this period: some sign, unattainable through words alone, of a ‘cause’. Akin to Edwards’ ‘original beauty’, the perception of this cause will bring her into mutual agreement with her surroundings and help her to make sense of her inheritance and her role in history. It is an intimately felt agreement that cannot be spoken but is consented to in the live interaction with the world. Richard Foreman called this an ‘ACT of understanding’.[231] In her letter to John Taggart, Howe once again relocated this ‘understanding’ into bodily, sensory experience when she called it ‘a touch of silence’.[232]

[231] Foreman, p.21.
[232] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.

Chapter Two

Sorting Histories and Saving Facts with Susan and Fanny Howe

i: the weight of shared inheritance

A sibling can be 'the sustaining link between […] past, present, and future' as Benjamin Franklin was for Jane Franklin, but not because they experience that past, present and future from the exact same vantage point as ourselves.[1] Siblings make unavoidable the fact that memories are a 'version' of events, with all the iterative, theatrical connotation this word brings. Elizabeth Freeman has argued that the family depends on 'choreographed displays of simultaneity' which 'effect a latitudinal, extensive set of belonging to one another'; family, in other words, is something we do and redo.[2] The presence of a sibling (someone who is understood as most simultaneous with oneself, being of the same generation and sharing intertwined childhoods, a parent, or parents) can be a reminder of the constant process of remaking history in the particulars of one's present. When the Howes speak about their shared childhood it emerges in different ways in their respective accounts. Here is Susan Howe, talking in 1989 about going to school in Boston in the early 40s:

> When the war broke out my father enlisted and was away in Europe for four years. My mother, Fanny and I moved to Cambridge because I think there was an understanding that my father would come back to teach at Harvard. In Cambridge my mother got a job teaching drama at Radcliffe College. She worked very hard at it. She directed many plays so she was gone a good part of each day and of course nearly every night. Fanny and I had a series of babysitters. When I was six and Fanny three the schedule was that I walked her to nursery school every morning and then continued on to first grade in a bigger school, myself.[3]

And here is Fanny Howe in 2008:

> My father enlisted in the Army when Germany declared war on America. Soon after my mother and sister and I took an overnight train from Buffalo to Boston, and moved into an apartment on Craigie Street in Cambridge. […] Every morning I went to a little daycare called, oddly, Miss Scattergood's. My sister pulled me there by the hand and then she marched on to her school, Buckingham. Later I would learn that many of our playmates were children of émigré academics, sons and daughters of linguists,

[1] C. Dallett Hemphill, *Siblings: Brothers and Sisters in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.3.
[2] *Time Binds*, p.28.
[3] Janet Ruth Falon, 'Speaking with Susan Howe', *The Difficulties* 3.2 (1989), pp.28-42 (30). Hereafter 'Falon interview'.

historians, and scientists who had fled Germany and Eastern Europe.[4]

Aside from the amusing variation between 'I walked her' and 'she pulled me', which highlights the different roles the sisters played, Susan Howe's description characteristically paints a slightly fearful picture of childhood and focuses on the combination of coincidence and institutional circumstance that led to their being in Cambridge and the reproductive labour that sustained their early years. Fanny Howe, equally characteristically, is more childlike in her choice of details, giving the period a utopic, almost fairy-tale quality and painting Harvard and its surrounds as a sanctuary from violence. Still, so far, the events described are more or less the same.

Memories that are more starkly at odds can have a strangely undermining effect, however, as siblings in novels by Toni Morrison, Anne Enright, or Arundhati Roy attest to. The Howes come from the same past (give or take the three years between them) and yet the versions of it that they carry with them in the present are rather more separate, filtered through their respective temperaments, perspectives, and subsequent life experiences. Both sisters describe being affected by their father's absence during the Second World War, for example, but they recall his role in history and his subsequent impact on their lives very differently. Fanny Howe has often recalled Mark de Wolfe Howe, a legal historian at Harvard, in the context of his tireless campaigning against McCarthy-era political repression and racist segregation laws. In 1985 she described her parents' milieu as being ideologically socialist, even communist:

> From my earliest years, the association of socialism with righteousness and justice was unavoidable. Taking the victim's part was daily fare. My mother, like many others, put some hope in Stalin; giving up on Russia was a long, slow process. My father was accused of being 'pink' by McCarthy himself. Near Harvard, the Kremlin on the Charles, I was raised.[5]

This passage forms part of a piece entitled 'Artobiography', and Fanny Howe's description of her childhood is gently playful and poetic, its claim deliberately equivocal. It correlates with her other accounts of the period, however—the phrase 'the Kremlin on the Charles' she elsewhere attributes to Senator Joseph McCarthy himself—as well as with her ethos of

[4] 'My Father Was White but Not Quite', *Poetry Magazine* (December 2008), pp.242-253 (241).
[5] 'Artobiography', *Writing/Talks,* ed. Bob Perelman (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1985), pp.192-206 (192).

childlike wonder and simplicity.[6] Her own lifelong interest in social and economic justice emerged from the setting she describes. In the work I will discuss in this chapter her theological philosophy has an explicitly anti-segregationist strain that is articulated in opposition to the 'ethics of Protestants' of New England (*SH*, p.314). In 'Artobiography' at least, this opposition originates in the ethics of her father and her parents' milieu.

Her sister had left home by the time of her father's involvement in the civil rights movement. In Susan Howe's descriptions, their father's work is a continuation of his Puritan inheritance rather than a break from it. When asked by Edward Foster about her sister's description in 'Artobiography' of the 'leftist' world of their childhood, Susan Howe spoke from a different perspective:

> I guess I wouldn't quite describe it that way. Yes, it was leftist in the sense that Democrats were considered to be leftists during the fifties. The shadow of the McCarthy hysteria was heavy over Cambridge then. And my father, unlike some others, was outspoken and very courageous. But he was a solid Truman Democrat. He worshipped the American Constitution. It really was his faith. Constitutional law and legal history were the subjects he taught. He was far from being a Marxist. (*BM*, p.159)

The version of Harvard that Susan Howe recreates in this retelling is not a hotbed of leftist organising but an oppressive space, a paragon of the institutional power that her work both resists and is drawn to. In the same interview (often quoted for her scathingly comic portrait of historian Perry Miller and her contradictory reverence for his work on Puritan history) she described her parents' society as

> very privileged during the forties and fifties, so male. […] These democratic ('leftist' if you like) professors of English, law and history were politically idealistic at the same time that they were elitist and sexist. (*BM*, pp.159, 161)

For this daughter, Mark de Wolfe Howe represented the exclusionary authority and historical prestige that is the focus of much of her early work. As she recalled in 1995, he was known to his friends as the 'The Last Puritan'.[7] Her work repeatedly asks: what of the daughters who come after the last in the line?

Despite the differing worldviews to which these two Harvards testify, in their writing Fanny and Susan Howe are often preoccupied with the same subjects—such as, for example,

[6] 'My Father Was White but Not Quite', p.248.
[7] *Frame Structures*, p.22.

the accident of birth and its inescapable consequences for how we live our lives. As I hope to show, for both writers the explorations of the complex legacy of the world they were born into expose the limits of individual agency when faced with the weight of the past. The psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell proposes that 'the sibling is par excellence someone who threatens the subject's uniqueness'.[8] In the case of one's personal history (as much economic as genealogical or biological) the sibling is par excellence the reminder that history is not a single narrative with oneself, omniscient and objective hero, at the centre; in our family history as we constantly remake it in the present, there must be room for your memories as well as mine. This chapter is about kin; more specifically, it is about the state of being, in the present tense, in kind. It is about the imprecise but pervasive likeness implied by a common origin—an active likeness that is constantly re-established. Both writers have tried in various ways to write themselves out of the shadow of their origins. As sisters they are separate individuals to the extent that any of us are, but their relation to each other calls discreteness into question. In distinct but related ways the Howes ask: how do you reckon with the sins of the family? Can we transcend the material circumstances we are born into? How much of us is our history, is our family? They ask these questions together and with each other in mind, and the sibling relationship is key to their answers.

There is curiously little scholarship comparing the work of Susan and Fanny Howe, although one is sometimes mentioned in discussions of the other as a 'rival'.[9] In the one scholarly article that does compare them, Albert Gelpi looks at the influence of Emily Dickinson on both writers and concludes that their work is very different: Susan Howe has 'a historical imagination' whereas Fanny Howe has, more like Dickinson, a lyric one; Susan Howe's work is antinomian in the tradition of Puritan New England whereas Fanny Howe's is Catholic, incarnational.[10] For Fanny Howe, he suggests, poetry is a means of expressing truths about an external God who exceeds and pre-exists language whereas for Susan Howe as for Wallace Stevens, '"God and the imagination are one" [...] What is left of God for her—

[8] *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003), p.10.
[9] Dan Chiasson, 'Susan Howe's Patchwork Poems', *The New Yorker,* 7 August 2017 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/07/susan-howes-patchwork-poems> [accessed 10 June 2020]. For a consideration of the Howes in tandem with several other poets, see Wendy Mulford, 'Curved, odd ... Irregular': A vision of contemporary poetry by women', *Women: A Cultural Review* 1.3 (Winter 1990), pp.261-274.
[10] 'Emily Dickinson's Long Shadow: Susan Howe and Fanny Howe', *The Emily Dickinson Journal,* 17.2 (2008), pp.100-112 (102).

to unriddle history and puzzle out her own situation—is language: her individual voice and text' (p.109).

Gelpi's comparison is broadly helpful but the logic of apportioning Emily Dickinson's traits between her two cultural inheritors results in a rather starkly defined contrast. Susan Howe would not agree that Emily Dickinson's imagination is not historical; and both poets might contest the idea that the two sensibilities, lyric and historical, are mutually exclusive. Their work is formally distinct, as Gelpi suggests, but neither writer is concerned with form as something disconnected from the subject of inquiry. Take, for example, Fanny Howe's response, in 1992, to an interview question about the 'homogenous succession of paragraphs' in her work:

> The way I block out my writing is an acknowledgment of the overwhelming presence of silence. It is indeed essential to the balancing of what is recorded to what is inexpressible.[11]

Fanny Howe's explanation of her formal choices as necessary for the apprehension of something inexpressible will chime with Susan Howe's efforts to make space on the page for that which cannot be spoken, as described in my previous chapter ('for me the comma makes a pause in the beat. A touch of silence').[12] Fanny Howe's description of 'the overwhelming presence of silence' echoes especially with Susan Howe's words, in an interview published 3 years later, about the influence of minimalist painting on her work:

> I would say that the most beautiful thing of all is a page before a word interrupts it […] It's like the sky, because—though the sky has colour and white isn't the absence of colour, anyway—it's clear. […] Infinitely open and anything possible.[13]

For Susan Howe, what her sister called 'the balancing of what is recorded to what is inexpressible' has implications that are as significant for historical materialism as for spiritual experience. That these two were deeply intertwined for her is suggested by a passage from 'Incloser', first published in 1991:

> 'Woe to those that keep silent about God', warns St. Augustine, in the *De Magistro*, for where he is concerned, even the talkative are as though speechless. (RR 53). 'Silence reveals speech—unless it is speech that reveals silence' (TP 86), Pierre

[11] Manuel Brito, 'Fanny Howe', *A Suite of Poetic Voices* (Santa Brigida: Kadle Books, 1992), 95-104. Hereafter 'Brito interview'.
[12] Letter to John Taggart, 27 July 1985.
[13] Keller interview, p.7.

Macherey has written in *A Theory of Literary Production* (58).[14]

Gelpi's statement that 'what is left of God for her […] is language: her individual voice and text' is in keeping with a certain critical reluctance to speak about the religious element in Susan Howe's poetics. My previous analysis of the ineffable in *The Liberties* does not support the idea that her work is closed to the possibility of something that is not reachable by language (nor indeed was the work of Stevens, necessarily). The experience of inexpressible revelation is what drives her work, as I believe is evident when it is read alongside that of her sister. Certainly, their work is informed by different religious lenses—Fanny Howe converted to Catholicism in the 1970s—but neither is this as huge distinction as Gelpi makes out. The fact that they are both strongly indebted to Emily Dickinson is due in large part to a shared background. Though this white, middle class New England identity often stands in for 'American' in US literary criticism, it is a particular, local node in a much wider cultural and geographical landscape. Just as it is easier to see resemblance from a vantage point outside the family; just as siblings are commonly defined in opposition to each other by themselves and others ('she is the smart one, so I will be the funny one'); and just as relatively adjacent cultural identities such as Protestantism and Catholicism are often painted as opposites due to what Sigmund Freud calls 'the narcissism of minor differences', it seems as if the urge to downplay the similarities between siblings has obscured the ways that these writers think and work in common.[15]

In her ground-breaking work on siblings, Juliet Mitchell proposes that the infant development of the psyche can be more fully understood if the 'vertical' Oedipal framework of parent-child relations—the foundational premise of psychoanalysis—is positioned in relation to what she calls the 'lateral axis' of sibling and peer relations.[16] In a manner compatible with Fanny Howe's radically childlike vision, Mitchell's aim is to avoid vertically skewed understandings 'which see the child within the context of the adults on whom it depends or is made to depend' (p.xiv). The mind is formed, according to Mitchell, not simply in the subject's identification of one parent as the object of desire and the other as a rival, but also because of the 'social trauma' of having a sibling (p.48). This involves

> the realization that one is not unique, that someone stands exactly in the same place as oneself and that though one has found a friend, this loss of uniqueness is, at least

[14] *BM*, p.58.
[15] *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 1994), p.42.
[16] *Siblings*, p.19.

> temporarily, equivalent to annihilation. (p.43)

Mitchell contends that our first feeling towards our siblings is an intense, narcissistic love: we love our sibling because we think they are an extension of ourselves. When we realise that the sibling is not us, however, they become cause for existential angst: if that is the baby, the infant asks, then what am I? Or, in the case of a younger sibling, what/where was I when that child was the baby? (Only children learn about the possibility of other babies by interacting with their peers, and for them the questions are: will I be replaced by another baby? When?) Incestuous desire toward the sibling is thus combined with murderous feelings toward the one who has taken, or might take, one's place: 'The ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one's place' (p.10).

The sibling relationship is thus characterised by intense ambivalence that is not simply a product of the Oedipus complex (or of rivalry for the mother's affections, as Object Relations theory propounds). Yes, rivalry between siblings has much to do with perceived competition for love of the parents, but siblings themselves also hold influence: the existential trauma that the child experiences when faced with one who has replaced or could replace them is not, Mitchell argues, a question of 'the absent phallus (the castration complex) but the absent self' (p.29). This murderous/incestuous ambivalence is kept in check by what Mitchell calls the 'Law of the Mother' (a playful reference to Lacan's 'Law of the Father' through which the child enters the Symbolic). This is important for what follows: the Law of the Mother introduces to the child not symbols—not one entity standing in for something else by means of a vertical system of categorization—but the concept of seriality, of 'room for you as well as me' (p.44). This process is how the subject realises that she is 'one in a series':

> Seriality, although it takes place within language, is about numeracy not literacy. There is probably some hard-wiring for a small range of numbers—birds can 'count' their eggs. The mother's injunction falls over this 'counting'—siblings are the eggs which are the same and different. (p.43)

A parental figure can lay down this law, or siblings and peers can enforce it among themselves. It seems almost too obvious, but this is part of why it has been underexplored in a long century of psychoanalysis: children learn to share, and about the importance of fair play, not in the company of their parents with whom they have a much more hierarchized

relationship, but in their interactions with other children. The Law of the Mother is a kind of open-ended, plural contract to which children adhere together.

Mitchell is a socialist feminist, and the lateral relation lends itself to economic critiques that, after Friedrich Engels, understand the family as an apparatus that sustains the bourgeoisie by ensuring that property is passed down as patrilineal inheritance.[17] Fanny Howe had held communist beliefs for a long time by the early 1990s, but in this period her fiction was at its most openly Marxist in its engagement with the Latin American tradition of Liberation Theology. I do not think it a coincidence that in the same period, when Susan Howe's writing was responding to Marxist intellectuals and artists such as Pierre Machery, Walter Benjamin, Kazimir Malevich, Chris Marker, Dziga Vertov and, indeed, Karl Marx, it was also responding to the work of her sister. Existing alongside the Symbolic (whereby one subject is interchangeable with another), the sibling bond is only tangentially related to questions of reproduction and lineage in that neither party owes the other their life, name, or inheritance (not, of course, that all parent-child bonds involve passing on names or inheritance). It might, once again, seem obvious or simplistic, but that is partially the point. In its simplicity it aligns with Fanny Howe's own presentation of events through a deliberately unsophisticated, childlike lens. This is in keeping with her 'ethics of bewilderment' and her firm belief that, as she put it in an interview in 2020:

> there aren't only two ways, killing or being killed; you can also collaborate, run away, signal and hide. There are people who can compete and other people who get frightened or confused.[18]

This reasoning is similar to what Stefani Engelstein calls 'sibling logic': 'a logic of differential degrees' which 'provides the foundation for less confrontational formulations of belonging and identity'.[19] Broadly speaking this chapter will explore the other 'ways' that Fanny Howe lists, in order to articulate an alternative to the Consent to effacement (the choice to 'be killed') for the sake of the patrilinear family that I outlined in *The Liberties*. In what follows I hope to show that siblings and sibling-like relationships are crucial to the

[17] See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State: in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (Newtown: Resistance Books, 2004). See also Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).
[18] Fiona Alison Duncan, 'Interview: Fanny Howe'. *The White Review*, 29 (November 2020), pp.138-146 (139). Hereafter 'Duncan interview'. See also 'Bewilderment', in which Fanny Howe presents the concept as both 'a poetics and an ethics' and 'a way of entering the day as much as the work'. *The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life* (London: University of California Press, 2003), pp.32-50 (32).
[19] 'Sibling Logic; or, Antigone Again', *PMLA*, 126.1 (2011), pp.38-54 (40).

Howes' imagining of a lateral, non-transactional kinship that evades the temporal hierarchy of generations. Because it is serial rather than Symbolic, this kinship is not based on an exchange but on alignment, on being with or beside.

If the lateral relation does not involve taking the place of a predecessor, it has implications for models of artistic influence. Contemporary scholarship on influence has moved beyond Harold Bloom's oedipal model of a struggle between a young ephebe and his forefather, and from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's countering 'anxiety of authorship'.[20] Still, in many cases models of influence tend to imply a relationship with an older or earlier figure who passes something on; influence is figured as unidirectional, even teleological, something from the past that impacts the present. The lateral relationship provides a means of evading, or at least decentring, the horizontal system of influence in which one must be silent so that another can speak or must silence someone else to take their place. As young children learn (and, usually, must continue to learn and re-learn as adults) the importance of sharing by way of the Law of the Mother: you can be influenced by a peer without taking over from them; your ideas can sit beside theirs. As a presence in one's life as one is creating, a sibling can allow for a different understanding of the temporality of influence and help us to imagine a mode of being that we could call mutual inheritance—or, more simply, holding something in common. The influence of siblings is multi-directional, indirect, and imprecise, and the point here is not to determine which sister had what idea first. Rather I will focus on how the Howes respond to each other at a given moment by, as Fanny Howe would have it, collaborating, signalling, getting confused.

Neither sister has talked publicly very much about the other's art, but the folders of letters between them stored in Special Collections at UCSD, Yale and Stanford testify to a close, sustained relationship.[21] Their life trajectories are comparable in many ways: both are highly acclaimed poets and essayists (Fanny Howe also a novelist and filmmaker, Susan Howe a visual artist) and have worked as teachers and poets-in-residence at prestigious US universities. Despite the acclaim, both have described feeling like outsiders to the academic establishment for many years because, as they saw it, they broke away from the Harvard community they were born into. Fanny Howe dropped out of Stanford; Susan Howe was

[20] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
[21] They have another sister, the sculptor Helen Howe Braider, who is often omitted in accounts of their childhood, perhaps because she was born 9 years after Fanny. These archival collections also attest to a substantial correspondence between Howe Braider and her sisters, however.

always intimidated by academia, having decided not to go to college and then gone back to art school. The outsider status is relative to whom one is compared, and where the limits of one's world are: from a vantage point further from the Anglo-American intellectual elite their positions might not seem like such extremities. Still, Susan Howe has spoken of the difficulty of accessing the archival materials she works with as a woman and 'a poet with no academic affiliation', often noting that she was first allowed access only because of her husband's job.[22] Fanny Howe recalled in *The Wedding Dress* that her relationships with many friends and family members from her old life became charged and difficult when she 'cross[ed] the racial divide' by marrying and having children with a Black man.[23] To both sisters their cultural inheritance seemed at odds with their lack of material inheritance; according to Fanny Howe in the same essay, they were 'born into white privilege but with no financial security, given a good education but no training for survival' (p.xi).

At the same time this cultural background helped them to earn their livings as teachers and writers. They have many influential literary friends in common, such as Robert Creeley, Lyn Hejinian, and Maureen Owen, and they have often read the same writers, both engaging with Simone Weil, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel de Certeau, among many others. Often their shared reading material ties in with the stuff of their childhood memories and in particular their mother's collection of Irish literature: Yeats, Joyce, Swift. Lady Francesca Speranza Wilde's *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland,* for example, mentioned in my previous chapter as one of the source texts for *The Liberties,* is the subject of 'Fairies', another essay in *The Wedding Dress* (pp.24-38). Fanny Howe credits her sister with first introducing her to poetry by giving her an anthology as a teenager.[24] Later, in turn, she introduced Susan Howe to the work of Charles Olson who was a huge early influence, especially on *My Emily Dickinson*.[25] They are also both acutely aware of the weight of their family's long literary past. As Fanny Howe recalls in 'Artobiography',

> We had a long line of writers in my family, a fact which only undermined the act of writing for me. Rather than making it a legitimate approach to the real world, the sense of it being the real world created an approach, by thought and act, away from it. (p.196)

[22] Susan Howe, 'Writing *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*', *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound,* ed. by Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.199-204 (200).
[23] *The Wedding Dress,*pp.x, xi.
[24] Fanny Howe, 'Artobiography', p.197.
[25] Keller interview, p.5. Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1985).

Questions of familial, literary, and economic history have always been inseparable in this family; writing is 'the real world' and autobiography is always a kind of 'artobiography' that enmeshes world events, family lore, and literary legacy. Curiously, the early memories recounted by both sisters of their father leaving for Europe after Pearl Harbour find an echo in their mother's earliest memories: in a profile in *The Irish Times* in 1982, Mary Manning Howe stated that she was currently writing a memoir about her life, starting with her earliest memory of her father leaving for war.[26]

The boundary between official and personal history is always an illusion, but it is particularly so for these siblings born into the union of two families that had long occupied the literary and political elites of Dublin and Boston. Manning Howe came from a well-to-do Anglo-Irish family with 'remarkable people on both sides' that can be traced back to the Fitzmaurices, members of the landed gentry in Co. Kerry since at least the 16th century.[27] Their aunt Christabel Manning married a brother of Erskine Hamilton Childers, fourth President of Ireland (1973-4) and son of Erskine Childers, a Republican revolutionary executed in 1922. Their grandfather John Fitzmaurice Manning was a colonial doctor in British-occupied Nigeria and their great-aunt Louie Bennett was general secretary of the Irish Women Workers Union for many years, and the first woman to be President of the Irish Trade Union Congress.[28] Their grandmother Susan Manning, well-known in Anglo-Irish Dublin for her social gatherings, was a close friend of Samuel Beckett's parents, and Mary Manning Howe was a good friend of Beckett's.[29] Manning Howe was a playwright, director, critic, and prominent figure in Irish literary circles: she worked with William Butler Yeats in the Abbey and Micheál Mac Liommóir, Hilton Edwards and Beckett in the Gate. When the family moved to Cambridge, MA, she co-founded the Poet's Theatre, staging work by the likes of Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Edward Gorey, W.S. Merwin, and V.R. Lang.

[26] Maeve Kennedy, 'The Saturday Interview: Maeve Kennedy talked to Mary Manning the Playwright and Novelist', *The Irish Times,* (9 October 1982), 14. Hereafter 'Kennedy interview'.
[27] Kennedy interview. For Fanny Howe's account of her maternal ancestry, see *The Wedding Dress,* p.28.
[28] Susan Howe discusses Bennett in 'Scare Quotes I' and Fitzmaurice Manning in 'Frame Structures'. *The Midnight* (New York: New Directions, 2003), 43-86; *Frame Structures,* p.22.
See also: Susan Howe, 'Ether Either', *Close Listening,* ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.111-128 (118-119).
[29] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), p.43. There is a short, unfavourable portrait of both Susan and Mary Manning in Beckett's first novel, *Dreams of Fair to Middling Women.*

On the other side the Howe family tree is a fascinatingly repetitively catalogue of prestigious New Englanders—what Susan Howe has jokingly called 'Boston Brahmins'.[30] Their father, Mark De Wolfe Howe, 'Bostonian of Bostonians', was a Harvard legal historian and the biographer of Supreme Court Justice and Harvard professor of law Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.[31] He was brother to satirist and novelist Helen Howe and well-known journalist and newscaster Quincy Howe (Susan Howe has recalled that as children the events of World War II were often literally relayed over the radio in the voice of their uncle).[32] Their grandfather Mark Anthony De Wolfe Howe Jr won a Pulitzer Prize in 1925 for his biography of Barrett Wendell, a Harvard professor in literature (incredibly, he also wrote a biography of Holmes' father, the poet and doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr). Their grandmother, the author Fanny Huntingdon Quincy, came from the influential Quincy family that has included generations of Boston writers and statesmen. Huntingdon Quincy's brother Josiah Quincy VI was a lawyer and a politician who served as a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Mayor of Boston (1896-1900); her grandfather, Josiah Quincy IV, was Mayor of Boston (1845-1849); and her great-grandfather, Josiah Quincy III was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1805-1815), Mayor of Boston (1823-1828), and President of Harvard (1828-1845). The family is traceable back to Edmund Quincy III, brother to John Quincy, soldier, politician and namesake of Quincy, MA, and granduncle to John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States.

This family history *is* national history, in that it is the history of those who write its laws and its records, who control what is remembered and why. When Susan Howe wrote in 1985 that 'history is the record of winners' she did so very consciously from the perspective of someone who had, by means of the accident of birth, won (*L,* p.11). To write about this family (as a member of it or, indeed, in an academic study of American literature such as this one) is not only to write about a history of upper-middle class privilege, but to continue a longstanding tradition of doing so. Mary Manning Howe's first play *Youth's the Season…?* was a satirical study of the upper-middle class Anglo-Irish Dublin society to which she belonged. On the other side, Helen Howe's last work *The Gentle Americans: Biography of a Breed* is a study of the New England intellectual elite between 1864 and 1960 in which her father featured prominently. Even *My Emily Dickinson* was written, Susan Howe has

[30] Gardner interview, p.142.
[31] 'Mark de Wolfe Howe Dies; Lawyer, Historian Was 60', *The Harvard Crimson* (1 March 1967), <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1967/3/1/mark-de-wolfe-howe-dies-lawyer/> [accessed 10 March 2021].
[32] Falon interview, p.41.

recalled, as a means of understanding the worldview of this aunt Helen, from whom she inherited a biography of Dickinson:

> Here was my aunt dying in her apartment in New York, high up, some of the windows looked out over Central Park, and she was telling me about herself, and the cost of a Bostonian upbringing, through the medium of Sewell's Dickinson biography.[33]

In a straightforward example of the reproduction of cultural privilege, inherited wealth makes it possible for members of the family to dedicate their lives to literature, and their social and economic environment is then reproduced in the work they create. 'Privilege', observed Fanny Howe in 2020, 'is the guarantee of blindness to your own conformism'.[34]

When asked in another recent interview about what had inspired her first paperback novels, published under a pseudonym, Fanny Howe articulated this privileged inheritance as an inescapable, shameful fate:

> Money. I needed to earn money. I had left college without a degree but needed to prove myself to my family. So I regressed to the family trade—that is, a long line of writers who were like weavers, nothing very exalted but requiring persistence. You could hide away with this trade, conceal your shame, and try to live up to your privilege.[35]

There is a strange bind here, made stranger by the rather romantic depiction of writing as a pre-industrial artisanal practice. In writing, Howe succumbs to her inheritance by 'regressing' to the family trade. At the same time, writing is a way out: as if by reproducing this position she might somehow escape the privilege that is both a birth-right and a burden, and sticks with her regardless of how cash poor she might be. Fascinatingly, she goes on to describe writing one of these early novels while hiding under the physical weight of fabric, as if enveloped in the product of the labour of her 'weaver' ancestors—as if her choice to write was, very literally, the material continuation of her circumstances:

> I went to work at Joe Allen's bar in the Theater District and hid in a mountain of wet coats reading novels while money was tossed my way. More and more by the hour. I wrote *Vietnam Nurse* there.

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[33] Falon interview, p.34.
[34] Duncan interview, p.141.
[35] Bill Corbett, 'Fanny Howe on Race, Family, and the Line Between Fiction and Poetry', *Literary Hub*, 1 November 2016 <https://lithub.com/fanny-howe-on-race-family-and-the-line-between-fiction-and-poetry/> [accessed 2 March 2020].

Trying to 'live up to' one's inheritance, it seems, runs the risk of losing oneself in it.

In the early 1990s Susan Howe was also thinking of writing as a negotiation with the weight of accumulated wealth and power in one's own past. Will Montgomery rightly cautions against a tendency, in the work of Rachel Tzvia Back and others, to align uncritically Susan Howe's work with a radical political agenda.[36] Montgomery suggests for example that her reading of Walter Benjamin—the Marxist writer arguably most central to her poetics—has been more focused on the theological aspect of his writing, and that critics that read Benjamin's historical materialism in her work do so using a 'politically neutered version of Benjamin'.[37] In the period this chapter focuses on, however, her materialist aesthetic incorporates an explicitly political awareness of the material circumstances that allowed this mystical or spiritual experience to emerge. In 1989 she was reading, as she reported to Edward Foster, current 'Marxist-influenced scholarship, really exciting work' and her understanding of history as theatre, evident in *The Liberties* and elsewhere, was now taking on an explicitly economic bent (*BM*, p.159). In the same interview she drew a parallel between her parents' milieu (what Fanny Howe had called 'the Kremlin on the Charles') and Karl Marx's critique of bourgeois revolution in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, a text that opens with the statement, following Hegel, that 'all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice […] the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce'.[38] Howe explained to Foster that she had the beginning of Marx's text in mind in 'A Bibliography of the King's Book, or, Eikon Basilike'.[39] This poem meditates on the textual afterlives of the execution of King Charles I in 1649, an event which marked the short-lived abolishment of the British monarchy by Republicans spearheaded by Oliver Cromwell. Perhaps the most significant parts of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* for Howe's poem are Marx's statement in the opening lines that 'the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living'; and, on the next page:

> Thus the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in the imagination, not recoiling from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making its ghost walk again. (pp.10, 11)

[36] *The Poetry of Susan Howe,* p.xiii.
[37] '"Pilings of Thought Under Spoken": The Poetry of Susan Howe, 1974-1993' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Queen Mary, 2003), p.15.
[38] *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1934), p.10.
[39] 'A Bibliography of the King's Book, or, Eikon Basilike', *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (New York: New Directions, 1993), pp.45-82 (first publ. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 1989).

Marx is referring here to previous bourgeois revolts, including that of Cromwell and the Republicans, that he posits as more successful than the main subject of his analysis, the French revolution of 1848 which modelled itself on the Great Revolution of 1798 but was fated, Marx argued, to end in the farcical dictatorship of Louis Bonaparte. Howe draws on this passage with a degree of poetic license—apparently skipping over the contrast made between the earlier revolutions and that of 1848—to suggest that the liberalism of her father's academic circle was destined to perpetuate what it purported to resist:

> the idea of the ghost of the old revolution walking about is so right. The spectacle of the killing of the king accomplished the bourgeois transformation of English society, Marx wrote. It was real, and it was a theatrical event. The ghost is still walking around.
>
> Everything I've been saying comes back to this.
>
> Behind the façade of Harvard University is a scaffold and a regicide. Under the ivy and civility there is the instinct for murder, erasure, and authoritarianism. (*BM*, p.176)

This context makes more audible the economic inflection in her probing (in 'A Bibliography' and elsewhere) of the possibility of authorial originality. In 'MAKING THE GHOST WALK ABOUT AGAIN AND AGAIN', the opening essay to 'A Bibliography' she asks

> Was there ever an original poem? What is a pure text invented by an author? Is such a conception possible? Only by going back to the pre-scriptive lever of thought process can 'authorial intention' finally be located, and the material object has become immaterial. (p.50)

It seems, here, that any individual intention that an author might have becomes subsumed by their pre-existing material context once they articulate it. This is not quite the Foucauldian polemic (which draws on the words of Samuel Beckett) that the author's singular perspective is entirely irrelevant. As discussed in my introduction, in 1993 Howe would counter Foucault specifically in *The Birth-mark* when she wrote 'I cannot murmur indifferently: "What matter who's speaking?"' (p.20). Instead, Howe's questioning of individual agency is rather more like a version of Marx's comparable, but crucially distinct, statement in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

> men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past. (p.11)

What Howe is reaching towards when she asks if there was ever an original poem is the same thing she reached for in *The Liberties*, although then it was in a more Wittgensteinian mode.

It is the possibility of an inner experience that remains immaterial even as it is always based in specific material circumstances. It 'matters' explicitly *because* it is immaterial and thus irreducible to economics.

There is a more specific background to Fanny and Susan Howe's relationship in which the ghosts of the past were likely looming large in this period. Here, too, official literary history and personal family history are inseparable, family lore making its way into the official records because of its proximity to one of Irish literature's most celebrated protagonists. Samuel Beckett and Mary Manning Howe remained friends throughout their lives and, according to several accounts, they were briefly romantically involved in the year before Susan Howe was born. Rumours that Susan Howe is Beckett's daughter have surfaced occasionally, usually mentioned as an aside in discussions of Beckett's life.[40] One article notably confuses the sisters, explaining that 'a rumor maintains that Mary's daughter Fanny (born June 1937) was fathered by Beckett that summer of 1936.'[41] This may be because it was Fanny Howe who visited Beckett in Paris as a teenager, but it is indicative of the peculiar quality of sameness that sisters have in the popular imagination—the sameness that Albert Gelpi's contrast between them downplays, perhaps because it is too obvious, too immediately apparent.[42] In any case, Beckett's biographer Deirdre Bair refutes the possibility of his being Susan Howe's father in her recent memoir, but notes that Manning Howe was keen for this lineage to be written into the records:

> in every conversation we had that summer, Molly [Manning Howe] had raised the possibility of Beckett's parentage of Susan, trying very hard to persuade me that it was the truth and should be written as such.[43]

In 2009 Fanny Howe wrote in *The Winter Sun*:

> For decades my mother pretended my sister Susan was the child of another, an Irish man whom she liked better than my father, but none of us knew if either man was ever aware of this. The two men looked so alike, one being a taller version of the

[40] Anthony Cronin has written that they 'at a certain point had a relationship with him which was all but an affair'; Marian Janssen, in a biography of the art collector Isabella Gardner who was a close friend of the Mannings, writes of the 'odd liaison […] between longtime friends Beckett and Manning: Beckett on the rebound from Farley [a friend of Gardner and Manning] and Manning scared by her hasty marriage to Mark De Wolfe Howe (which would last until his death in 1967) sought comfort in each other's arms.' Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p.23. Marian Johnson, *The Life and Times of Isabella Gardner* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2010), p.32.
[41] Chris Ackerly, 'LASSATA SED: Samuel Beckett's Portraits of His Fair to Middling Women', *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui,* 12 (2002), pp.55-70 (67).
[42] See Fanny Howe, *The Winter Sun: Notes on a Vocation* (New York: Greywolf Press, 2009), p.63.
[43] *Parisian Lives* (New York: Atlantic Books, 2020), p.141.

other, the fantasy could be fueled until DNA settled it. (p.36)

Rather than dwell on a search for the 'real' lineage, it is more helpful here to acknowledge the impact that the ambiguity may have had on the sisters and, most importantly for my purposes, the questions they were asking in their work about what it is that siblings share. When Beckett died in late 1989 Fanny Howe wrote poignantly to her sister about an 'invisible' element that exists in and around concrete reality but cannot be 'read':

[redacted for copyright reasons] [44]

It seems that in 1990 DNA had not yet 'settled' the mystery, but even if it had done what is of larger concern here is a more spiritual knowledge 'written on the invisible'. Along with 'fathers', what is also at stake here is the nature of 'sisters', made ambiguous in the present by unknowable past circumstances. In contrast, the kind of lateral relation I will define in this chapter allows for a mode of kinship that does not rely on an originary event of conception, or even on logical sequences of cause and effect, but is instead built on a shared quality in the present.

Thus far scholarship on familial ties in Susan Howe's work has focused on the parental relationships which are admittedly more obvious in her writing: the elegies for her father in *The Secret History of the Dividing Line* and *Pythagorean Silence,* and for her mother in *The Midnight;* rejection of paternal authority in *Eikon Basilike* and *The Nonconformist's Memorial*. Siblings and sibling-like relationships crop up often, however: from the twinning of Cordelia and Stella in *The Liberties* to Sarah Edwards and her sister-in-law Hannah Wetmore Edwards in *That This,* or Henry James' relationship with his beloved cousin, Minnie Temple, in *Spontaneous Particulars.*[45] Fanny Howe's work is more obviously peopled with siblings, but her fiction especially has received remarkably little critical attention.[46] All the novels republished in *Radical Love* (now out of print) involve, to varying degrees, intense, pseudo-incestuous sibling relationships. In *Nod* (1998) two sisters in constant competition with each other are left in the care of their mother's previous lover, a

[44] Letter to Susan Howe, [1990(?)], UCSD Special Collections and Archives, MSS 201 Box 25 Folder 3.
[45] *That This* (New York: New Directions, 2010), pp.11-35.
[46] Extant articles on Fanny Howe's fiction include Bénédicte Chorier-Fryd, 'In "The Middle": Plot Suspension in Fanny Howe's "Itinerant" Fiction', *Revue française d'études américaines,* 121 (2009), pp.39-49; Tiffany Eberle Kriner, 'Wary Grammar: Fanny Howe's Narrative Bewilderment', *Arizona Quarterly,* 68.3 (Autumn 2021), pp.129-153.

poet, with whom the elder sister has an affair.[47] When the white protagonist in *The Deep North* (1988) tries to escape the guilt of her privileged inheritance by pretending to be Black, the presence of her controlling older brother is physical testament to her charade.[48] In her essays and poetry, too, Fanny Howe has been drawn to siblings, such as Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the brothers who carried out the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013 and subject of the essay 'Embryonic'; or her adaptations and introduction to the poetry of Ilona and Henia Karmel, written when the two sisters were interned at Buchenwald concentration camp.[49] Much of her work (the early texts especially) explores the limits of oppressive familial bonds and the ways that families are made by and remake the wider power structures of which they are a part. In the same breath it is deeply invested, like that of her sister, in the emotional bonds that family creates, their reach and aftermath. In keeping with the process of mutual influence I am outlining, the works discussed in what follows will not be ordered chronologically, but rather by starting with Susan Howe's 1996 essay and following a logic of resemblance to Fanny Howe's 1993 novel. I hope to show that in the work of both writers, sibling relationships and the lateral mutuality they entail are a model for an ephemeral, revelatory commons in the present.

ii: sorting facts

In October 1992, the sculptor David von Schlegell passed away in hospital after a long illness. Susan Howe, who had lived with von Schlegell for twenty-seven years, would later describe her husband's final days in 'Sorting Facts'. The essay was originally subtitled 'Nineteen Ways of Looking at Chris Marker' and began as an exploration of the films of Marxist cinematographer and poetic documentarian Chris Marker. It was written, however, 'because of the fact of [Howe's] husband's death and [her] wish to find a way to document his life and work' (p.88). After a short sequence of biographical details (born in St. Louis in 1920 to German immigrant parents; served as a bomber pilot in World War II and was discharged due to injury; studied painting at the art college where his father taught) Howe writes:

[47] 'Nod', *Radical Love* (see 'Saving History' above), pp.1-127.
[48] 'The Deep North', *Radical Love* (see 'Saving History' above) pp.129-197.
[49] 'Embryonic', *The Needle's Eye: Passing Through Youth* (Minnesota: Greywolf Press, 2016), pp.3-10; 'Introduction', in Hanya Karmel and Ilona Karmel, *A Wall of Two: Poems of Resistance and Suffering from Kraków to Buchenwald and Beyond,* trans. by Arie A. Galles and Warren Niesluchowski (London: University of California Press, 2007), pp.xix-xxxvi.

> These are only some facts. He had a stroke and died three days later on Monday, October 5, 1992, at 5 a.m. Those last days in the hospital were a horror. He was fully conscious, but words failed. He couldn't speak or write. He tried to communicate by gestures. We couldn't interpret them. He kept making the gesture of pointing. In physical space we couldn't see what he saw. He couldn't guide a pencil or form a coherent signal. Francois Truffaut says that for a filmmaker the basic problem is how to express oneself by purely visual means. The same could be said for a sculptor, except that for two days and three nights in the hospital I don't think David saw what 'visual means' meant. Without words what are facts? His eyes seemed to know. His hand squeezed mine. What did he mean? In my writing, I have often explored ideas of what constitutes an official version of events as opposed to a former version in imminent danger of being lost. (pp.90-91)

The passage brings a new urgency to Susan Howe's long-held preoccupation with the play between liveness and its partial, static documentation, or between official history and the infinite ephemeral sensory experiences that remain unrecorded and are made 'former' the moment recording is attempted—what she called 'conceptless perspectives' in 1985 (*L,* p.13). Up to this point, she had tended to approach this interaction belatedly, focusing on lives and events (Stella Johnson in *The Liberties*; the killing of Charles I in 'A Bibliography') encountered after the fact, when the point of contact with the people and places in question was through historical records. Because of this belatedness the events in question have already been digested into history and other possible have been outcomes foreclosed. My previous chapter considered the way that *The Liberties* casts this erasure as a sacrifice that is necessary, however regrettable, for the continuation of patrilinear history. Here, however, the process of documentation is recast in an intimate, immediate setting and Howe's words themselves are the first iteration of the painful process of history-making (making 'former') that takes place as time moves unwaveringly forward. What will not make it into the 'official version of events', what cannot be contained in Howe's words, is what her husband sees or experience in the hospital room but cannot share with those around him. As his family watch him slip into the past—and with him his real but immaterial perspective—there is a different kind of tragic urgency: David's perspective is not yet lost (although it soon will be, and the written relaying makes sure of this) it just cannot be translated.

It is there in the room with her though. *He* is there in the room with her. The shift in focus—from reading the traces of a person left in paper and ink, to being in the presence of a live person who cannot be understood—means that we must also reconsider another of Howe's central preoccupations: the prelinguistic or prelapsarian state which, unlike in her earlier work, is apparently accessible in the present, at least to David. His loss of language

seems to come with a new understanding of the world whereby experience need not be explained to others using words or 'visual means', because that experience is already in the world, in 'physical space'. In David's new state, which we could call 'conceptless', there is no distinction between material and metaphysical: the border between oneself and the world becomes less obvious. The cause of the 'horror' is that his loved ones cannot partake in his vision: this is an interconnected understanding but he cannot share it, no matter how painfully aware they are of his attempts to do so. To refer back to my previous chapter, this is reminiscent of the 'TERROR' (as Howe described it to Lyn Hejinian) in Wittgenstein's incommunicable ineffable.[50] As in Wittgenstein, David's experience of his own present moment is not something that can be recreated or passed on but it can be *shown* with the simple squeeze of a hand. He cannot share what he sees but his eyes 'seemed to know'. The eyes become a visual signal of the gaze and the experience of another. Even if language is inadequate for the experience of it, being in the presence of another is more than just looking in a mirror of oneself. It gives an awareness not just of their appearance, but that they too are seeing. 'Is it', Howe asks a few pages later, 'sense perception or depiction I see "thinking"?' (p.93).

This way of seeing the world (and, crucially, seeing the seeing of another) is comparable to Juliet Mitchell's Law of the Mother whereby the subject realises they are 'one in a series'. As in Mitchell's formulation, this is a mode of relation in which there is no space for Symbolic representation ('I don't think David saw what "visual means" meant'); in the moment of present-tense intimacy there is 'room for you as well as me' even when (or perhaps because) language fails and 'you' and 'me' do not understand each other. This is not to say that the sibling relationship is equivalent to that between romantic partners, although as we have seen the first feeling that the infant has for the sibling is intense, incestuous love. More importantly, lateral, serial thinking gives a model of being beside the perspective of another.

Just after this passage we read the words of Antonin Artaud, mentioned by Jean-Luc Godard in a discussion of his film *Hail Mary* (which restages the Immaculate Conception):

> 'I want soul to be body, so they won't be able to say that body is soul, because it will be the soul which is body.' Godard said that this helped him to explain things to his

[50] Letter to Lyn Hejinian, 26 August 1979.

film technician. (p.91)

As Drake Stutesman notes, Artaud's work is particularly relevant here because of his belief that theatre and spirituality were both reducible to physical expressions in space.[51] Stutesman rightly suggests that Howe's wish to find a way to document [her husband's] life and work' is the same as Artaud's: 'she wishes to make present her husband's intangible presence. Virtually impossible, it nevertheless exists' (p.445). There is something perhaps less literal going on here, too, though. It is not just von Schlegell's presence Howe is trying to revive, but the kind of holistic connection he seems to hold with the world. It is not just his biography that she wishes to document but his 'life'; this includes both his presence and his perspective, his serial understanding of the world through which a gesture no longer stands for something, but rather just *is*.

Bearing in mind its sense of 'bearing forth'—from the Latin *gerĕre,* to carry—this material 'gesture' is not unrelated to the unrecorded liveness associated with maternal subjectivity in my previous chapter. As in that instance, David's gesture is less a transaction between two subjects via an external, Symbolic medium, than a moment of communality, the register of a whole mode of being that cannot be preserved in the document or separated into soul and body, message and medium. The mention of Godard's film is the first flag that there is a theological, even Catholic, strain to this, and that it might be tapping in to the long and often contentious history of gestures in Christian doctrine. For Protestant Reformers the ritual gestures involved in Catholic prayer were showy posturing that distracted from true devotion, an unnecessary 'lumpish materialism'.[52] In Catholic traditions, however, when performed in earnest the gesture is a physical manifestation inseparable from spiritual will: it is prayer incarnate. In this context gesture is a kind of transubstantiation, in which the soul and the body are the same, rather than one being the token or representation of the other.

Thinking materially, as I have argued Susan Howe was in this period, we could read this as a similar kind of 'gesture' to that which Walter Benjamin described as the 'raw material' that made up the theatre of Bertold Brecht.[53] The achievement of Brecht, wrote Benjamin, was to disrupt audiences' passive consumption of art, 'making gestures quotable' by separating them from the context of the play so that the audience looked *at* the movement

[51] '"Without Words, What Are Facts?": Looking at Susan Howe Looking at Chris Marker', *Framework.* 8.2 (Fall, 2012), pp.429-466 (443).
[52] Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.170.
[53] *Understanding Brecht,* trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1983), p.24.

itself rather than *through* it to a represented imaginary world (p.19). This was part of an anti-bourgeois attitude that Brecht learned from the Russian Formalists and the Constructivists: to lay bare the workings of art was to demystify it so that it could be understood as a mode of production like those undertaken by factory workers**.** Howe might not have had Benjamin or Brecht specifically in mind here but, in her attempt to 'document' her husband's way of seeing, she was certainly thinking about Constructivist materialism which was, as she writes in the essay, an important influence on his sculpture.

The likeness between Susan Howe's 'gesture' and Benjamin's idea of gesture as 'raw material' becomes more substantial when we consider her discussion of the 'potential gesture' of Emily Dickinson's art in *The Birth-mark* (p.147). Discussing the uncategorizable singularity of Dickinson's manuscripts, lost when her posthumous editors standardized the work into forms more palatable to the contemporary book market, she frames Dickinson's work as a pre-capitalist, utopian space separate from the demands of the capitalism: 'Poetry is never a personal possession. The poem was a vision and gesture before it became sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value.' The scene in the hospital could also be described as 'a vision and gesture'; or perhaps more accurately it is a 'gesture', and a vision seen from without, at one painful remove. David's vision is described with the same sense of returning to a simpler, more holistic way of being in the world, inaccessible to official systems of categorization through which singular experience is lost in the transactions necessary for communication—transactions that are linguistic, but also economic. Here, instead, that singularity remains in the room. The prelapsarian, soon-to-be-former state that her husband was experiencing in the hospital, and that 'Sorting Facts' attempts to document, is a space that is as unmarked by capitalist metrics as it is by Symbolic categories.

The Constructivists maintained the necessity of art's social function and asserted the primacy of material objects, not as the means of expressing conceptual or spiritual ideas, or as objects of desire under capitalism, but as themselves: not commodities or instruments but 'comrades'.[54] The understanding of 'material' presented in 'Sorting Facts'—not as means that can be used to express immaterial ideas, but as factual in and of itself—is, I think, informed by constructivist thought. In a manner that resonates with Joan Jonas' collapsing of the performance and its props, or artist and medium, it is based on an egalitarianism that

[54] Aleksandr Rodchenko quoted in Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2005), p.1.

treats with the same reverence the subject being documented and the material used to do so. In this, 'Sorting Facts' shares something with Donna Haraway's rejection, in her early work, of the patrilinear family in favour of a radical kinship with matter, be it animal, vegetable or mineral. In 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) cyborg solidarity involves

> lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.[55]

To 'document', as Howe defines it, is 'to evidence by documents: furnish documentary evidence of' (*SF*, p.94). 'Sorting Facts' asks what else is transmitted in this process, however. What kind of truth, what other kinds of relations, can 'material' hold, before it is consigned to pastness by interpretation? Can we relate to it laterally, in the present, as well as using it as a means of accessing other events and other times? In the section following her description of David's last moments Howe discusses Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's radical ambitions for a new 'factual' cinema (p.93). Vertov's first film, Howe recounts, was a record of Vertov jumping from the roof of a house. He intended for the film to do what the human eye could not: to see the subject thinking, to 'frame and arrest that person with thoughts in place'. 'The essence of fact', Howe writes, 'was to be found in the poetry of reality: in material objects' (p.93). Here the visual document operates in the same way as David's gesture: it conflates a person's inner experience with how they are seen from without. It is both body and soul.

Howe's poetic attempt to document her husband's 'life and work' amounts to a reconsideration of a 'legacy' that is both economic and cultural—of how to be with someone when they have gone and how to relate to the material left in their stead. Howe was led on the recommendation of a student to Marker, who in turn led her to Andrei Tarkovsky—perhaps Marker's strongest influence—and especially his 1975 film *Mirror*.[56] This work blends documentary footage from the Second World War with fictional scenes based on Tarkovsky's childhood memories and acted by members of his family. Interspersed in the fragmented storyline is newsreel footage from the Spanish Civil War and Soviet military operations. The explicit use of documentary footage within a semi-fictional, autobiographical framework allows, Howe suggests in 'Sorting Facts', for communication that is more about the act of presenting material than about a separate message that the material might lead to. Returning

[55] *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p.154.
[56] *Mirror,* dir. Andrei Tarkovsky (World Cinema, 2002). Tarkovsky's film is variously called '*Mirror*' and '*The Mirror*'. I use gone with the former, which is the title Howe uses in 'Sorting Facts'.

to the sense of 'bearing forth' in the word gesture, the act of separating documentary material from its original context can, like Benjamin's Brechtian gesture, hold another kind of knowledge about how things fit together. This is not to say that its original context is irrelevant, but that the documentary 'material' itself is worthy of reverent attention. Placed alongside other material it can generate not meanings exactly, but hints at invisible connections.

The subject of predestination has long preoccupied Howe, and in 'Sorting Facts' it has an edge that is, like Marker's films, both materialist and spiritual. On the one hand there is an awareness that the range of possible outcomes has been narrowed drastically by the forces of capitalism and the class divides maintained by patrilineage. On the other hand—and these two elements are inextricable—is a desire to return to the idealised innocence of childhood and the hope that this might be achieved by the reproduction of a familial network, which has something of the punning logic outlined in my previous chapter. In *The Liberties,* this logic had to do with the perception of the patrilinear destiny in the word 'mark' which, as Fiona Green has pointed out, evokes for Howe both 'Mark' de Wolfe Howe, her father, and 'Mark' von Schlegell, David's and her son.[57] Here, however, these 'marks' collide with 'Marker' and 'Marx' in a wider constellation of actors. As it did for Haraway, this other knowledge leads to the revelation or perception of a lateral, materialist kinship.

Howe describes *Mirror* as a litany of names that move across the realms of fiction, found footage and family history:

> Mirror is partially based on his memories and her memories of life before, during, and after the war. The actress Margarita Terekhova plays both his wife and his mother, while Maria Ivanova is herself and acts her mother. Ignat Daniltsev plays Tarkovsky's son Ignat (really Andriuska) and Alexi (Andrei himself) as a boy. Oleg Yankovsky is the director's film father, while his real father's poems are read off-screen by Arseniy himself. Real or acting, the characters have the same reflection in whichever mirror serves as camera for the filmmaker for his cinematographer. They can pass back and forth from one to the other but that's what movie acting is because there are no wings to the screen any soul can be the body. (*SF*, p.112)

The film, she suggests, communicates a different kind of 'fact' that has to do with a kin network set apart from historical time, that is made and remade in the continuous comingling of fiction and documentary. As well as bringing us back to Artaud with the mention of soul

[57] Green, 'Plainly on the Other Side', pp.85-86.

and body, the last sentence here refers to a quotation from André Bazin's 'Theatre and Cinema':

> When a character moves off screen, we accept the fact he is out of sight, but he continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the decor which is hidden from us. There are no wings to the screen.[58]

Mirror, Howe suggests, is not primarily a representation of an officially biographical family, but instead allows us access to some other space in which matter (including that of bodies and cinematic tape) is connected in a relation that does not rely on the 'facts' of causality but on what appears on the surface of the screen.

The phrase 'these are only some facts' from the passage about David's last days reappears at the end of the essay after a list of hazy details from Marker's life that seem to reiterate those from David's biography relayed earlier (pp.132-133). Marker was born in 1921 in either France or Mongolia; he probably had a Russian mother and an American father; he might have served in World War II either in the French Resistance or as a parachutist in the American Army; before turning to documentary film, he wrote prolifically for the Marxist Catholic journal *Esprit* (the first publisher, it is worth noting, of Bazin's 'Theatre and Cinema'). We are told that he wrote a 'wartime aviation novel', a detail that especially echoes with David's time as a wartime pilot. By way of this parallel, part fact part fiction, Marker and David are made kin somehow, both iterations of an interconnected 'body' (or 'esprit', perhaps). The connection the essay ties between the two men is a lateral and potentially fraternal one. A few pages before this, Howe describes the communication between the narrator and the fictional cameraman Sandor Krasna in Marker's *Sans Soleil*:

> The narrating voiceover is an anonymous woman, perhaps a film editor, a liaison officer, or a sister, remembering letters and camera footage mailed to her from faraway places by a documentarist who is or was a roving reporter. He could be an editor, collaborator, lover, teacher, student, brother, 'Sandor Krasna', whatever (p.129).[59]

The uncategorized nature of the relationship between Sandor Krasna and the narrator—they could be friends, lovers, siblings, 'whatever'—is crucial to what Howe is getting at: a bond experienced in the present before it is described by language. Still, it is also crucial that one

[58] 'Theater and Cinema: Part II', *What is Cinema?*, 1, trans. Hugh Grey (London: University of California Press, 2005), pp.95-124 (105) (first publ. in *Esprit* (July-August 1951)).
[59] *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, dir. Chris Marker (Nouveax Pictures, 2003).

of the named possibilities is that of a 'brother'. As I will show, Susan Howe is thinking with her own sibling in mind.

iii: material revelations

In the period leading up to 'Sorting Facts', Susan Howe's ethics of antinomianism were not that removed from Fanny Howe's incarnational Catholicism, and both were preoccupied with the existence of multiple versions of history—something that siblings can make one especially aware of, as discussed earlier. In the late 1980s and early 1990s (when Beckett had died, and von Schlegell had fallen ill) Susan Howe was preoccupied with the figure of Mary Magdalene, first witness to the risen Christ according to the Gospel of John. 'The Nonconformist's Memorial' (first published in *Conjunctions* journal in 1990 in a shorter version than appeared in the later book) is an inquiry into the erasure of women in religious history. It reads Magdalene as a precursor to Anne Hutchinson, aligning her treatment with Hutchinson's banishment during the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-1638.[60] For Susan Howe, as she described to Charles Bernstein, Magdalene was the 'original Biblical nonconformist […] in a Protestant and Puritan sense' because she was 'a woman who spoke'.[61]

Two years later, in the same journal, Fanny Howe would describe Mary Magdalene's experience as a moment of incarnational revelation. The two accounts are notably similar in emphasis despite one being rooted in a tradition of Puritan antinomianism, the other in Latin American Marxist Catholicism. Fanny Howe described the encounter outside the tomb with a similar focus on the discreditation of women as witnesses in biblical history. She gives three biblical examples of divine revelation—Moses and the burning bush; Ezekiel's chariot vision; and the Annunciation to Mary. 'All of these events occurred without witnesses', she writes, meaning someone to bear witness to the person unto whom the revelation occured, 'but two of them at least / are believed to belong in ordinary time':

> Many people have doubted Mary's story
> about the angel, just as the apostles denounced

[60] Susan Howe, 'The Nonconformist's Memorial', *The Nonconcormist's Memorial,* (see 'A Bibliography' above), pp.3-32 (first publ. Conjunctions, 15 (1990), p.100-109). For an outline of how Anne Hutchinson's case fits in to wider conflict between the authority of scripture and that of direct, personal revelation, see Emery Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp.33-35.
[61] 'Bernstein interview'.

and doubted Mary Magdalene when she announced
that she had just encountered Jesus
at the mouth of his tomb.
Experiences of a mystical, or salvific, nature,
when they occur to women solitaries,
need to be written down to be believed—
as they so often were, in Medieval cloisters.[62]

The focus on mistrust of 'women solitaries' and the threat to authority that they represent is remarkably like Susan Howe's rendering of the situation, and of her long-held preoccupation with the erasure of the testimonies of women. As well as bringing to mind the discussion in my last chapter of Stella's 'diary' which 'soared above her house', the idea that the mystical revelation when experienced by a woman must be separated from the woman's body, regularised, and made official through written documentation, is especially close to the suggestion in 'The Nonconformist's Memorial' that patriarchal history will erase the female witness: 'the act of Uniformity ejected her' (p.5). In 'On Saving History' Fanny Howe links Mary Magdalene's revelatory experience to other incidents in the bible, notably Mary's visit by the Archangel Gabriel (an incident typically celebrated by Catholics but not Protestants) whereas in Susan Howe's version it is classed as a nonconformist break from those gone before, a turning inwards and away from pre-existing doctrine. In both cases, however, there is an awareness of a gap between events and the experience of them. Rather like the contradictory memories of a shared childhood, the gap opens up the possibility of the co-existence of differing responses to a shared event. In both versions of Mary Magdalene's story, too, this gap is an encounter with the sacred—a moment of transgressing the boundaries of the individual by entering what Susan Howe called 'that terrible Touch Me Not' of the divine.[63]

Fanny Howe's 'On Saving History' is also crucial to reading sacredness in the hospital scene her sister would depict a few years later. Published a year before the novel *Saving History* (which I will discuss shortly) it is a free verse essay detailing Fanny Howe's version of Salvation History, a core tenet of Liberation Theology. Quoting the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, she explains that 'saving history', as she calls it, is founded on the premise that

[62] 'On Saving History', *Conjunctions*, Vol. 19 (New York: Bard College, 1992), pp.15-18 (16).
[63] Letter to Norman O. Brown, 15 February 1989, Norman O. Brown Papers, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Santa Cruz. MS 35 Box 10 Folder 17.

‘grace itself is historical, and that history itself—with all it involves—like the unity of humanity—is grace’ (p.15). These moments of grace occur in the physical, material realm. ‘Saving history’, she writes, ‘makes no difference between nature and numinous’; it is a history of the apprehension of heaven on earth (p.15). Fanny Howe’s modification of ‘salvation history’ to ‘saving history’ brings a few more meanings into play. Keeping with the sense of the original term, ‘saving’ works as a gerund that describes the kind of history in question (a history of salvation or saving); but it also plays with a sense that might be antithetical to that: ‘saving’ could be a participle, ‘history’ the direct object that is saved. This suggests a more epic, grand-scale project in which all history is rescued by these moments of revelation. Thirdly, ‘saving’ could be a synonym for ‘except’, suggesting that this state is all that is not included in history. Most contrary to what we might understand as a ‘history’, the present continuous emphasises salvation as something that happens in the live moment; it may be ‘historical’ in that it occurs in and to historically specific material circumstances, but it is a present state of affairs.

The record of these revelations is obscure and they cannot be measured as ‘profane’ histories are, but they are crucial to understanding the world outside the ‘parameters of reason and materiality […] that evaluate the world economically’ (p.17). This history is a ‘common area that has no boundaries’ and holds the secret of our ethical responsibility to each other. It is the only defence against ‘the tyranny of reason’ under which human life is understood in terms of its economic value:

> Why not kill what I can evaluate?
> Invisible history answers this difficult question
> by giving a response outside the realm
> of the reasonable. If you kill
> what you can measure, then you are also killing
> something you have in common with your victim:
> transparent visions. (p.17)

What one sees in the experience of revelation (or ‘transparent visions’) is not visible to bystanders. This invisibility, Fanny Howe writes, is ‘critical to the experience / of revelation’. Instead—and here is where the affinity with Susan Howe’s Marker essay is most apparent—the only indication we have, as witnesses of someone else’s experience, is the movement of their body:

> Invisibility has something in common with interiority,
> when perspectives are moved around.
> My interior life (the secret dreams and ideas
> that root around the edges of my skin) is visible to me.
> It is illuminated—a mirror of the world
> I can gaze into, with my eyes closed.
> But your interior life is invisible to me.
> What I see, and measure of you is gesture. (p.16)

The dilemma here is the same 'basic problem' as Truffaut's: how to show what you see, when there is an apparently material difference between how you see the world and how you are seen from without. Again, the limits of the individual are seemingly impossible to locate: the distinction between inside and out is muddied by the idea the something you see might in fact be inside you if others cannot see it. Or, on the other hand, your experience might not be 'yours' or interior to you, but a part of the world that is invisible to others. As in the hospital scene, the only way to make any sense of what another sees, be it interior to them or just invisible to you, is in the gesture, which cannot be interpreted: it communicates the experience of revelation rather than an extricable message. Fanny Howe's description chimes with the words she wrote to her sister on learning of Samuel Beckett's death the same year: 'Such answers, though, are written on the invisible, and when we are invisible, too, they may finally read clear.' The experience of revelation is, we might suppose, a live vision of otherwise invisible, unknowable relations between people.

When read alongside Fanny Howe's contemporaneous Marxist Catholicism, the suggestion of Susan Howe's secularism is difficult to square with the 'Sorting Facts' hospital scene and the way that the essay attempts to make sense of (to quote again from Fanny Howe's letter) 'Being and then nothing'. David's vision now seems like a moment of revelation witnessed from without, his gestures enacting the perception-depiction of a 'common area that has no boundaries'. This is not to say that Susan has suddenly converted to Catholicism, or that she is attributing godlike characteristics to her husband, but that she is thinking of a materialist grace located, as Fanny describes it in 'On Saving History', in 'the site of the invisible: the defunct body' (p.17).

iv: saving histories

It would be too simple to say that Susan Howe's incorporation of her sister's ideals constituted a desertion of Puritan theology. Indeed, in a lot of ways Fanny Howe's theological philosophy is not all that far from that of the Puritans; as philosopher Richard Kearny has noted, 'there's something Protestant about Fanny Howe's Catholicism.'[64] Just as her writing is an effort to distinguish herself from an inescapable family inheritance, so too does Fanny Howe's theological philosophy define itself against that which it is not, but is close to. In a 1992 interview she articulated it in these terms when asked about a link between her work and that of 'an Emersonian Transcendentalism':

> The fact that I come from New England with a sort of Emersonian Transcendentalist streak makes it seem like a genetic fate. But of course, as a Catholic convert, I have developed a more incarnational theology than Emerson's. I feel that we are already occupying divine territory, on earth, and that we can't escape it once we are consciously in it.[65]

Despite the way Howe presents it, having 'developed a more incarnational theology than Emerson's' does not preclude the possibility of an inheritance (that she imagines as 'genetic fate', but denies) from Emersonian Transcendentalism. Like a teenager who rebels by denying the world of their parents, Fanny Howe's theology holds a kernel of what it is defined against. To quote again from 'Artobiography':

> This process [writing] which gives me much pleasure, continues to fill me with certain infantile guilt, because it has a compulsive quality, and shows that I didn't successfully beat the genetic setup. As I sit composing this in New England, I can see that every original conflict remains in place, exactly where it was born. The strain for synthesis lies there, at heart, in the divergent paths of politics and imagination, father and mother, physics and metaphysics. (p.206)

My reading of Fanny Howe's 1993 novel *Saving History* will illustrate its ambivalent efforts towards 'synthesis', understood as a kind of genetic fusion, between her values and her New England heritage. As I show, one of the difficulties is that, in Fanny Howe's understanding, the Protestant ethic is itself antithetical to synthesis. At the beginning of the novel Boston is described as a bastion of provincial New England Protestantism, limited by its need for order and compartmentalization:

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[64] Quoted in Anthony Domestico, 'Saying the Unsayable: Fanny Howe's Poetry of Bewilderment', *Commonweal*, 27 September 2019 <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/i-loved-loving-best> [accessed 5 July 2020].
[65] Brito interview, pp.100-101.

> In that city there was none of the convulsive unity you find in the great cities of this century: Paris, New York. There was none of that sense of the violent and the tender occurring simultaneously, as they might on a farm or a plantation. No, each element of expression was segregated from the other. It was a divided city, provincial and proud, dominated by the ethics of Protestants. (*SH*, p.314)

These 'ethics of Protestants' (founded on consigning salvation to the afterlife and interpreting the material world as signs of what is to come) require a fundamental distinction between, to quote 'On Saving History', 'nature and numinous'. Emerson outlines as much in 'Montaigne; or, The Sceptic' when he divides humanity into materialists and idealists.[66] 'Every fact', he begins, 'is related on one side to sensation, on the other to morals. The game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these two sides, to find the other: given the upper, to find the under side' (p.127). There are two kinds of people:

> One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant with facts and surfaces, cities and persons, and the bringing certain things to pass; the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius. (p.127)

The key, for Emerson, is to avoid extremes in favour of a measured, sceptical middle ground between the two. As I will show, *Saving History* presents a rebuttal of this by combining the materialist and the idealist without neutralizing either. The 'profane history' (to quote 'On Saving History') of brutality and economic exploitation is pressed together with the witnessing of God's kingdom on earth in a manner that is 'convulsive', sometimes bizarrely so. Just like the painful hospital scene in 'Sorting Facts' or the documentary-as-memoir in *Sans Soleil* and *Mirror*, the novel presents a volatile hybrid state in which 'faith', usually understood as immaterial, interior, is fused with what Emerson calls the 'facts and surfaces' of the material world.

The most literal example of the 'facts' of capitalist violence intruding on individual interiority is a central element of the plot: because she is poor and her daughter is sick, the protagonist Felicity is coerced into the black-market organ trade. The intrusion of 'profane history' onto both inner life and the embodied perception of 'facts and surfaces' is one of the novel's key subjects. Tom, who will later be ordained as a Catholic priest, reflects on the phenomenon at the beginning of the book:

[66] Emerson, *Representative Men: Seven Lectures* (Waiheke Island: The Floating Press, 2009), pp.127-160.

> all I can pore over, inside the morning papers, is a statistic: one out of every twenty-one black males is murdered in this country. Many of the remaining ones are in jail […] I want to be happy but I can't with this information—the experience of it—in my bloodstream. (*SH*, p.347)

The realities of racial capitalism and the prison industrial complex are shown to encroach on the physical boundaries of the self. And yet these 'facts' are somehow less important for their own sake, for the brutality and oppression that they involve (contain? attest to? consist of? the novel brings into question the words we use to relate facts to the world they refer to) and more for how they are synthesised into the almost biological 'experience of it—in my bloodstream'. One of the central and at times truly baffling tensions in the novel is between the plot and the significance placed on events as they are relayed. *Saving History* covers torture, domestic violence, deportation, extreme, life-ending poverty, exploitative black-market organ trading, coercion, institutional abuse, and the murder of children: 'profane history […] experienced as palpable, visible, measurable, and hostile'.[67] And yet the specifics of this horrific violence seem incidental or beside the point. In a strangely muted way, the 'facts' act as a backdrop for the experience of revelation; what seems much more real, more central to the experience of reading the novel, are the spiritual connections made possible by this harsh reality.

Fanny Howe had previously written fiction for young adults and there is something distinctly teenage (both idealistic and simplistic) in the incongruity between plot and inner experience in this novel.[68] Teenagers exist in a state of incomplete agency and illogical relation to the world: they are faced with the difficult task of synthesizing the naïve idealism of childhood fit with the rules and responsibilities of adulthood, and often their emotions are overwhelming and seem, from the outside, out of proportion with the matters at hand. *Saving History*'s bizarre incongruities are in keeping with Fanny Howe's radical naivety, and her interest in fusing a childlike vision of interconnectedness with the 'profane' reality of the material world. This is a central tenet of the philosophy of bewilderment that underpins the novel. Bewilderment for Fanny Howe is a kind of theological muddiness or disorder that maintains the wilful passion and naivety of adolescence; she described it in an interview as 'the freedom of the individual to pursue mad and lonely paths'.[69] Interestingly, Fanny Howe

[67] Fanny Howe, 'On Saving History', p.15.
[68] See, for example, *The Blue Hills* (New York: Avon, 1981); *Taking Care* (New York: Avon, 1985).
[69] Schwartz, Leonard, 'The Wedding Dress: Fanny Howe in Conversation with Leonard Schwartz', *Jacket* (October 2005) <http://jacketmagazine.com/28/schwartz-iv-howe.html> [accessed 7 July 2020]. Hereafter 'Schwartz interview'.

mentions Transcendentalism in this interview, too, before once again denying its influence, in a manner akin to shrugging off the world of one's parents. 'Thoreau and Emerson were certainly in [the] mode' of bewilderment, she says:

> But I was reading Arabic poetry at that time and found these absolutely gorgeous references to a bewilderment that was looked upon as a great virtue because you were in a permanent state of awe and horror.[70]

In *Saving History* there is no separation between surface and substance, between the experience of revelation and its material reality. There is no 'under side', to use Emerson's phrase—or 'no wings to the screen', to use Susan Howe's from 'Sorting Facts'. When the characters in *Saving History* are forced to face impossible ethical dilemmas, they respond with a kind of opting out, a refusal or inability to understand their situation as the result of logical causality. Instead of 'killing or being killed', to quote Fanny Howe in 2020, they 'collaborate, run away […] get frightened or confused'.[71] This does not mean that the experience of reading the novel is that of detachment or boredom (it is often very moving) but rather that bewilderment, the 'state of awe and horror', is brought to the centre while the plot seems extraneous and difficult to keep a hold of. As Tiffany Eberle Kriner puts it, the novel 'allow[s] readers to both examine and experience bewilderment'.[72]

The early pages of *Saving History* include an explanation for an imaginative, martyrological solidarity with the marginalised and violently oppressed that is crucial to bewilderment and its capacity for imagining relations between people outside of causality. It appears in a passage describing the life of Hugo, who came to the US from Seychelles by way of Tanzania (where he witnessed and experienced extreme violence) and Ibiza (presumably having made a perilous journey across the Mediterranean). He is deported at the start of the novel and features very little after the first few pages which detail his abusive, controlling relationship with Felicity, a 'native-born American alien in the Americas' with whom he has two daughters. The account of their relationship is suddenly interrupted by an interjection in the first person, possibly from Felicity:

> I don't know this man but I suffer for him. How? I live out his drama, mentally, trying to imagine the way it felt for him. I hope that in this imaginative action, some of his pain will revert to me. If I don't do this, who else will? (pp.316-317)

[70] Ibid.
[71] Duncan interview, p.139.
[72] Kriner, p.130.

‘Some of his pain will revert to me’ is key here. It is what literally happens to Felicity in that she bears repercussions of her abusive husband’s trauma, but it is also a philosophical explanation for the novel’s simplistic attention to the suffering of others. In a strange and sometimes problematic way, suffering is the subject of this book: not because it is necessary for future salvation, but because it is how people are connected and how they are sacred. Suffering is shown to be where salvation is physically located. It is an almost scientific understanding of suffering as matter, never created or destroyed but simply reformed in different arrangements of particles: ‘suffering can’t be measured or numbered, and either you do, or you don’t suffer’ (*SH,* p.314). This materiality is mined as the stuff of revelation, the means for common ground.

The shared martyrdom in *Saving History* is akin to Simone Weil’s understanding of the fraternal. It is perhaps best compared to Weil’s description, in *Waiting for God*, of the quality of giving attention to a problem ‘without trying to arrive at the meaning’:

> Happy then are those who pass their adolescence and youth in developing this power of attention. No doubt they are no nearer to goodness than their brothers working in fields and factories. They are near in a different way.[73]

This is a vision of the world ordered not by causal relation, but by something shared: like is paired with like, or, more accurately, likeness brings things together despite their differences, even making difference irrelevant. Kriner suggests that Felicity’s patron saint is St Felicity of Rome (c.101-165) a noble woman who was forced to watch her sons be put to death or deny Christ, and indeed Felicity is faced with such an impossible choice.[74] But we should also keep in mind another Saint Felicity: the pregnant enslaved woman martyred in Carthage in the 3rd century.[75] This Felicity, patron saint of mothers and butchers, was put to death for her faith alongside Saint Perpetua, a noblewoman with an infant, the two women linked despite differing social class, by their being ‘near to goodness’.

In *Saving History* Felicity’s revelatory experiences are also figured in terms of childbirth; like both of her namesakes who forsake biological motherhood for God, what Felicity’s reproductive labour produces is not new bodies but new, sacred kin relations. After Hugo is

[73] *Waiting for God*, trans. Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper & Row, 1992), pp.113, 114.
[74] Kriner, p.131.
[75] For an account of the martyrdom of Saints Felicity and Perpetua, see Maureen A. Tilley, ‘The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity’, *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp.387-397.

deported, Felicity gets a job caring for a dying old man, which is how she meets Tom, the old man's son. She ends up being alone with Tom's father (not named) when he dies because Tom has gone out for a walk and his mother has 'locked herself in the bathroom, covering her ears, like one who can't bear the screams of a birthing' (p.331). As Felicity cradles his head, the old man 'crackle[s] and burn[s]', evoking the burning bush that spoke to Moses in one of the most iconic Biblical revelations. His death is a moment of profound physical connection for Felicity:

> She stared into his eyes and he into hers as he was dying, and when the immobility seized him, she felt a current pass into her own bones. She sat for a long time, as this sensation (like a low-level electric appliance humming in her hands) ran through her. (p.331)

The 'current' that passes into her is the connection of people in and through suffering, made material in the experience of revelation. We could liken this interaction to Susan Howe's description of David's gesture ('bearing forth') on *his* deathbed, and of the shared mode of being that it performs, which includes his experience (his eyes, which 'seemed to know') and that of his family. Like that scene, this moment of shared suffering connects those involved in an invisible kinship. In this case the kinship is figured as a spiritual debt—not exactly a transactional agreement but a duty or implication nonetheless. When Tom meets Felicity again in San Diego, he offers her and her daughters a place to stay because, as he says, he 'owe[s] her one':

> —You gave us a place to stay already, she said.
> —Big deal. You washed my father when he was dying. (p.338)

We have already been told that Felicity and Tom are distantly related because she is descended from 'the same anarchists who came to make marble gravestones in New Hampshire and were chased into obscurity by the FBI and were the forefathers of Tom's people' (p.367). He is not her direct descendant but a distant, laterally related cousin, and she cared for his father long after Tom's birth, so her reproductive labour has no bearing on Tom being born. All the same, she does in a strange way appear to give birth to his dying father. Illogically, bewilderingly, it still seems as if he owes her something for being alive, as if she were his ancestor. In a way that recalls Juliet Mitchell's description of the initial, intensely narcissistic love between siblings, Tom falls in love with Felicity because he sees himself in her, noting that she is, like him, 'a pariah—a social enemy—an extra at the table of the world' (p.403). On seeing her he feels that 'his loneliness had a location on his body' and

recognizes her as a 'candidate for his imagination'—a kind of double of the woman that he has dreamed about since puberty, whom he meets in quasi-religious sexual fantasies. In all of this, the moment of revelation is a moment of entry into a lateral web of connected bodies.

The strangely anatomical descriptions of interpersonal relationships seem to reduce the people involved to their material substance—or, rather, elevate bodily material above the realm of individuals. In a kind of incarnational Constructivism, it is as if flesh itself becomes joined in comradeship; bodily matter itself is made kin and sacred (Artaud: 'I want soul to be body'). Throughout *Saving History* multiple figures are drawn into this plural simultaneity by way of a resemblance that is both pervasive and strangely flattening, as if one were picking out two-dimensional shapes in fog. Abhorrent, distressing events (deportation, domestic violence, murder of children, organ harvesting) are relayed as if occurring underwater, muted and peripheral to the iconistic sharing of body parts that circulate like relics. Like religious relics, too, the descriptions make it seem like the body parts are not exchanged (in contrast to the racial capitalist organ trade) but rather extended with each new iteration. The story becomes a genealogy of anatomical circulation across multiple bodies, a grotesquely compelling family tree that imbues flesh with something Christlike.

Towards the end of the book Felicity crosses the US-Mexican border with her daughters in the back of the car, planning to smuggle back a cooler-box full of organs in exchange for the transplant operation promised to her daughter Matty, who needs 'a new liver to extend her life for a few years' (p.357). Tormented by what she is about to do, Felicity hesitates outside the pick-up location and gestures with 'the twisting motions of a mime performing AGONY' as if acting out the scene of Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the first step in the Scriptural Stations of the Cross (p.431).[76] When she looks through a window, she sees the bodies of two young Mexican children. Because of its detached focus on minute details, the description of the bodies reads convincingly as a traumatised dissociation from the scene, but instead of the rupture usually associated with trauma narratives we get a vision of interconnectedness associated with the sixth Station (Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns).[77] What is revealed to Felicity, and to the reader, is a web of lateral cognates that maps across both bodily matter and the words used to describe it:

[76]'Scriptural Stations of the Cross', *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops* <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/stations-of-the-cross/scriptural-stations-of-the-cross> [accessed 30 March 2021].
[77] Ibid.

> what she focussed on was their eyelashes dipped at the base of their long eyelids. Black lashes, longer than any she had ever seen, perhaps because of the profundity of their repose. Each tiny hair might have been doubled by its own shadow, she figured, and that was what made them seem so long and so silky. Or maybe it was just the word 'lash' for such a little thing that made them into such a strong thing? But she was stunned by the image of those drooping eyes. No longer in service to the female bodies that were only half-developed. Undeveloped. Pinocchios. Boys with girls inside. Incomplete works. Lashed down. Christ's back lashes in the stations, lashed to royal stripes, the cross lashed to his back, and the donkey following. . . (pp.431-432)

Rather than symbols of individual perceiving subjectivity, these eyes are described as material objects only, and roped to an array of disparate things through varying forms of likeness. There is doubling, whereby two objects appear as reflections of each other: two children each with two eyes, each eyelash 'doubled by its own shadow'; the anonymous girls silhouetted by Matty and Lee waiting in the car. There is duality, or the appearance of being two things at once because of a feature that those things have in common: boy and girl, child and puppet. The passage also has something of Susan Howe's obsession with puns, in its sylleptic harnessing of the girls' eyelashes to the blows received by Christ on the cross. Fascinatingly, however, the bond between these meanings of the word 'lash' is made when the linguistic commonality occurs to Felicity herself: by noting 'the word "lash"', it is Felicity that brings Christ into the scene, but in a way that makes it seems (as is the way of puns) as if the connection were always already there. Later in the passage 'lash' is punned again, this time through antanaclactic repetition as the word leads Fecility to think of Christ being 'lashed down'. It is this self-conscious punning, which is funnelled through Felicity's perception of the scene, that connects the bodies with a grace that binds together. In this dreamlike, imagistic state, the connections between things are what matters, and what makes matter (in this case, bodies) meaningful and sacred.

What Felicity sees annihilates her resolve to complete the wretched contract and she drives away without picking up what will save her daughter. She cannot preserve her daughter's life if it means severing bonds with these anonymous children, even though they are already dead. Like both Saints Felicity, she chooses Christ over biological motherhood and the linear kinship it represents. A few pages later the ties with the dead children are maintained by the figure of Matty whose health deteriorates rapidly on the drive back to San Diego. Matty chants a childish 'litany' that sounds like (another means of interconnection) 'Saint Patrick's Breastplate' an early Irish Christian prayer:

> I'm happy in my bottom.

Happy on my left side.
Happy on my right side.
Happy in front of me.
Happy behind me.
Happy on my back.
Happy in my hands.
Happy under my feet.
Happy in my mouth.
Happy in my ears.
Happy on my head.
Happy in my stomach.
Happy in my spit.
Happy in my pee-pee.
Happy in my hair.
Happy nowhere!
Okay, Matty we got your point, said Lee.
Happy in the air, the little girl added quietly. (pp.438-439)[78]

If, according to 'On Saving History', the 'defunct body' is the site of 'invisible' salvation then the 'air' that Matty adds at the end of her recital hints at an immaterial holiness. Felicity (whose name, *felicitas,* means 'happiness') chooses the God of her interconnected revelation over the narrow, biological understanding of kinship that is possible under capitalism. In doing so she rejects the patrilinear family for another invisible, illogical one: 'Happy nowhere […] Happy in the air'.

Shortly after this, the warehouse scene is repeated in a new configuration when Dan walks into Felicity's room, in the house in which she has been squatting, to find the bodies of Felicity, Lee and Matty entangled on the bed. Even before we learn that Matty has died in the

[78] The relevant verses from the prayer are as follows:
Christ beside me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ in breadth, Christ in length, Christ in height,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Philip Freeman, *The World of St. Patrick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.53-4.

night, the bodies are described as though they were far away. Together they make a form that is animate but not human, their 'black hair entwined with the shady depth of sea-sponge' (p.450). Again, it is their eyes that the witness fixates on, again with a detached and dehumanising attention to detail:

> Their eyes were open and he hesitated, waiting for the black pupils to rotate in his direction, for smiles to decenter their faces. But nothing of the sort occurred. Instead he noticed how weighted they were, as if their flesh was burdened with liters of water, and they were whiter too. He stepped closer, smiling, and only saw Matty smile back; but her eyes were fixed on high. (pp.450-451)

The intertwining (inter-twinning) of bodies is maintained in this strange tableau even after it becomes apparent that Matty is dead: the 'black pupils' stationary, the faces undisturbed by smiles. When Dan leaves the room to call the police, he involuntarily takes something with him, 'the chill of the child's bones piercing his side'. It is as if the suffering of Christ is shared out between these various bodily parts while none of the bodies (rendered into the material of puppets, rope, sea-sponge) seem whole or entirely human on their own. The scene is one of 'surfaces' in which images of physical destitution are joined in 'convulsive unity' with spiritual experience. The apparent interchangeability of bodies and body parts is a grim enactment of a trope common in everyday speech, in which family resemblance is described as a kind of possession of parts of another's body ('she has her grandfather's eyes'). It also recalls the fluid chopping and changing of characters and family members that Susan Howe describes in *Mirror,* in which 'characters have the same reflection in whichever mirror serves as camera' and can 'pass back and forth from one to the other but that's what movie acting is because there are no wings to the screen any soul can be the body' (*SF,* p.112). In many ways this is lateral logic taken to an extreme. If there are 'no wings to the screen' there is no hidden or more real space underneath or behind the surface: no Symbolic hierarchy of matter, nothing serving as a representation or type of something deeper and more 'real'; only relations that exist in the perception of superficial cognates.

If, according to 'On Saving History', Christ exists in 'the defunct body' then this must be where a novel called *Saving History* locates itself; in the corrupted body politic on the margins of the US and in the apparently 'waste' bodies of the people who bear the brunt of this corruption (p.430). Suffering is inseparable from (lashed to) salvation in *this* world, rather than a lamentable preparation for the next. Even as the book plays out tenets of Liberation Theology as contrasted with 'the ethics of Protestants', however, it does not

amount to a total rejection of Puritan typology but rather a radical revision of it. When Tom's recently deceased father appears to him in a dream, he describes a relation that is almost typological. 'Ferns repeat each other superficially, like keys', he tells Tom:

> In reality, every fern is unique. The ground is a door, the ferns are locks. But why are we put here if only to die? Why not begin and end with space and leave earth out of the picture altogether. (p.355)

By insisting instead on the present 'reality' that 'every fern is unique' the novel dismisses the theodicy that explains suffering as a necessary step on the path to salvation: every fern is not a type of an original or of what is to come. And yet at the same time this sequence brings, to the doubling, duality and repetition outlined above, a typological note associated with familial inheritance. When the ghost of his father leaves, Tom, heartbroken, describes the loss in terms of an inescapable 'duty':

> Again and again I could not recover from that loss, but in each effort to replace his absence with an interest or object, he intervened reminding me of my duty to him. I didn't know who I was without my father […] the fern reminds me of something relevant to a way in. It barely exists but seems, instead, to be inscribed: the replica of an original, something denser, darker, deeper. Its liquid postures and invention of a tip, after an organized retreat in a cone's shape, makes it a metaphor for the spine and spirit endlessly aspiring. (p.355)

Salvation is not necessarily something lost to a prelapsarian past, but a way of being in the world in the present. This interconnectedness or belonging is to be attained through relation in the present as opposed to through inheritance or predestination. And yet likeness is figured as a state of being 'inscribed', a 'replica […] endlessly aspiring' back and forwards to an origin. These are the contradictory urges of the book—towards and away from the totalising web of family in which everything is seen, through resemblance, as a reiteration of a single, original debt. Tom arguably leaves this logic behind when he decides to take Catholic orders, but the book still entertains the possibility of likeness as sign of replication of an original. *Saving History* does not look for this 'original' in the past or in some future eternal afterlife, but it does look for a 'way in' to another 'denser, darker, deeper' mode of being in the present—a more interconnected way of understanding one's material circumstances. In this we might hear (and Susan Howe certainly would) Jonathan Edwards' 'true, spiritual, original beauty […] consisting in Being's consent to Being'.[79]

[79] Edwards, *True Virtue*, p.78.

The importance placed on this 'original' materialism is evident in the frequent invocation of the 'primitive'. Especially given the novel's focus on the anatomical, Fanny Howe's 'primitive' is akin to that of Muriel Rukeyser: a childlike lack of distinction between body and mind, or individual and group, through which can be reached an integrated 'visceral aesthetics of humanity' (as Catherine Gander describes it).[80] For Fanny Howe, too, the primitive has the sense of childlike naivety: it is a version of Gustavo Gutierrez' 'spiritual childhood' which is a 'spiritual poverty' or 'an attitude of openness to God'.[81] It also brings to mind the 'regula primitiva' or primitive rule on which St. Francis of Assisi based his Franciscan Order in 1209.[82] In *Saving History* the primitive represents an alternative to the fascist theories about population control under capitalism espoused by Temple as a justification for the murder of poor Mexican children. It is Temple—a rich crook from Maine who was instrumental in Hugo's deportation—who coerces Felicity into smuggling organs. He expresses beliefs that take to an extreme the segregation that Fanny Howe condemns in New England Protestantism:

> I'm not evil, Felicity. Believe me. You have to think realistically and not in those primitive terms. We live in a waste economy. We produce waste. Kids who have, and kids who don't have—they're all part of it. […] Business runs the world. Not government. Street kids? There are drillions of them, all like living abortions unwanted by anyone. I'm in the business of recycling the organs. The lucky ones win. […] We're talking about saving your daughter's life. This is materialism, this is it. (p.430)

In Temple's 'realistic' logic material, including flesh, signifies only in terms of the economic value that can be extracted from it. In 'primitive' materialism, in contrast, matter is bound together by way of a simple, superficial connection that resists logical interpretation. This is an incarnational understanding through which human life simply cannot be valued as 'waste'. In *The Needle's Eye* (2016) Fanny Howe describes the 'regula primitive' of St Francis, who renounced inherited wealth for a life of poverty, as 'the most radical and fundamental of Franciscan rules: not to own or be owned' (p.38). To choose to be primitive, here, is to reject the logic of property. In this it follows from Engels' descriptions (drawing on Karl Marx's notes on Lewis Henry Morgan's study of Iroquois customs) of the 'primitive society' that

[80] Gander, p.1219. See Rukeyser, p. 40-44.
[81] *A Theology of Liberation,* trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleton (London: SCM Press, 1974), p.299.
[82] 'Francis of Assisi, St', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* ed. E. A. Livingstone <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095832433> [accessed 29 March 2021].

existed before the emergence of structures of class and private property.[83] To go back to Susan Howe's description of the utopian precapitalist nature of Emily Dickinson's poetry, we could describe it as something that exists as 'vision and gesture', not yet 'sign and coded exchange in a political economy of value'.

The novel's alternative primitive materialism has racial connotations inseparable from its association with so-called primitive non-Western cultural systems which, in *Saving History*, seem to have a more organic and interconnected relation to the world. When Tom, the son of a Black man and a white woman, recalls crossing the border to Mexico with Felicity and the girls, he describes their walk past people begging on the border as 'like leaving the end of the world and stepping into the beginning' (p.388). In a prime example of the book's imagistic simplicity, Tom's understanding of whiteness, capitalism and Western individualism are conflated in an image that does not contain the differences between these intersecting forces, only what they have in common:

> Women with babies stuck to them. Clothes worn down like public carpeting. The faces were ancient as if cut from turf. White people aren't so human, I think—so, in some sense—long-term. What do I mean by human? Imitations of Jesus? What do I mean by white? Individualists, loners. . . . (p.388)

This primitiveness, which in its poverty entails proximity to Christ, is associated with an older, more ecologically interconnected life—'as if cut from turf'—that is explicitly racialised as non-white. To be 'primitive' in this sense is also to escape from the patrilinear family structures of capitalism which divides people into discrete individual subjects, who are not so interconnected or 'long-term'. This pre-individual primitive state is most clearly articulated in the brief, utopic reunion of Tom, Dan, and Billie, three mixed-race half-siblings (Tom and Dan share a white mother and Dan and Billie share a Black father). When Tom first dreams of sleeping with Billie (his half-brother's half-sister, whom he has not yet met) the experience is 'more primitive than romantic' (p.419). When they actually meet, he blurts out

> specific hidden facts about himself, to tell her why he was there. Just to see. A family member. I think I'm a primitive. I need a tribe. Help me, I'm dying of loneliness. (p.419)

[83] Engels, p.47.

To be primitive, it seems, is to be tribal, plural, more than oneself but still homogenous. In this ambiguous union that is both fraternal and sexual—incestuous, in other words—it is to escape the 'loneliness' of individualism into an undifferentiated commons.

The reunion of these half-siblings has the same disruptive quality that Judith Butler ascribes to Sophocles' Antigone, born of another incestuous union.[84] Butler argues that Antigone worries accepted categories of the human because she is illegible either as woman (because she is, as Susan Howe described Mary Magdalene, a 'woman who speaks' in the public sphere) or as kin relation (she is Oedipus' daughter and half-sister). Antigone's public burial of her brother amounts to a performance of kinship that, Butler proposes, forces us to imagine new human relations outside of pre-existing kinship categories:

> in acting, as one who has no right to act, she upsets the vocabulary of kinship that is a precondition of the human, implicitly raising the question for us of what those preconditions really must be. (p.82)

Fanny Howe's bewildered, bewildering materialism enacts a version of this illegibility. The incestuous reunion of half-siblings is, I argue, a mode of kinship outside the preconditions of Western patrilinear structures. Their meeting is a scene of surreal, euphoric plurality:

> As the fog blued and blurred with the setting sun, they ate and drank and expressed their intense pleasure at being all together—a little tribe—a long-term team—a lost army unit—a disrupted happening—a genetic pool—a cross-pollinated forest—a family. Candles dripped in the fog, their butter yellow tips slipping into jars. (*SH*, p.422)

This vision of unity soon fades when Tom becomes repulsed by Billie, suspecting her of drug addiction. He leaves in a hurry taking Dan with him, and later it turns out that Billie has been secretly working for Temple. For this evening, however, a momentary idyll emerges between these three who are, in their half-ness, both cognate and distinct. Dan first meets Tom and Billie in Mexico having travelled south in a thick fog that turned 'the earth as white as the sea' and spread 'whiteness and more whiteness' throughout (p.420). The siblings stand out against this white backdrop. When Dan reaches Billie (whom he has never met) and Tom, the encounter is less of an event than a comparison between their distinctly non-white physical features. The fog has made Tom's 'kinky curls go haywire'; Dan's 'skin [is] caramel, his mouth red and wide, his hair nappy'; Billie is 'sallow […] her eyes round and brown'. In the

[84] *Antigone's Claim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

simplicity of their 'being all together' in the fog, surface likeness facilitates, or is equated with, a return to 'primitive' wholeness. Notably, too, Dan is described as someone who 'always smiled on one half of his face only'; this prefigures the later interconnected tableau of Felicity, Lee and Matty in bed, and the smiles that he imagines will 'decenter' their faces. It is as if Dan, half a person, for a fleeting moment becomes a 'being all together' when he holds the hand of his half-sister. Because of the common likeness their hands become one hand on two bodies:

> The hands alone were similar to his own, and he took one of them and then held them together, appraising the likeness of bone structure, colour of *the* palm and *its* shape, back to *the* wrist where *it* changed and each was alien to each other. (p.421, my italics)

The shared quality distributed across various bodies momentarily merges the three siblings into one 'unit'. What makes the 'convulsive unity' possible is the fact that they are half-siblings: they are simultaneously different and in common.

Fanny Howe has written about raising her mixed-race children in the 'parochial and paranoid' city of Boston at the height of the busing crisis, and how it taught her that 'white people are obsessed with race':

> One night I went to a small town in Massachusetts to give a reading, and when I entered the room where an all-white group of people had gathered afterwards, they were saying, 'If the lines ever get drawn, and the situation gets seriously violent, I know which side I will be on.' And they began to speak (liberals, all of them) about their fear of blacks, and their judgements of blacks, and I had to announce to them that my husband and children were black, before hastily departing.[85]

This anecdote is important for my reading of *Saving History's* anti-segregationist ethics. Not only does it show that the exclusive, closed-off space of whiteness is key to the logic of segregation (it is this kind of attitude that draws 'the lines') but that Fanny Howe's mixed-race family is what allows her to see these lines as false and violent in themselves. As with the union of half-siblings it is the half-ness, the mixture, that allows for new models of relation. Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' is once again a helpful reference for understanding this politics of 'convulsive unity'. Haraway outlines two alternatives for what a 'cyborg world' could be: from one angle it is 'the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet', in which matter (human, animal, machine) is subordinated as a resource for

[85] Fanny Howe, *The Wedding Dress*, pp.xv, xviii.

capitalism (p.154). From the other angle, mentioned earlier in relation to Susan Howe's engagement with the Constructivists, it is 'lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'. 'The political struggle', Haraway continues, 'is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point.' Fanny Howe's effort to hold two seemingly antithetical standpoints together—what she described in 'Artobiography' as a 'strain for synthesis'—is, I contend, a version of Haraway's pragmatic double vision.[86] As I will show in what follows, *Saving History* enacts this synthesis by way of a series of images that fuse complex histories with deliberate, iconistic simplicity.

v: a lateral New England inheritance

The effort to fuse disparate elements through their shared attributes is the central gesture of this novel. As I have shown, *Saving History* reaches away from the white New England Protestant logics of order and segregation towards something more communal and primitive. Still, while she rejects its segregationist, providential logic, Fanny Howe simultaneously reproduces part of this Transcendentalist 'streak', with strains of Stevens and Thoreau, in an effort at convulsive synthesis.[87] This will be more apparent if we look at a different set of cognates present in Dan, Tom, and Billie's incestuous reunion. Following these connections, necessarily associative and nonlinear, will lead us back (or sideways) to 'Sorting Facts' and its construction of lateral constellations.

One suggestion of an attempt at synthesis becomes apparent when Dan first arrives and notes that Billie 'looked familiar, so that the fact that she was his half-sister seemed to work on the surface of things' (p.420). Aside from Emerson's description of those who have 'the perception of difference' as conversant with 'facts and surfaces', depending on willingness and past experience the reader might also hear in this a nod to Wallace Stevens' 'Of the Surface of Things' (1919).[88] The sunset reunion has a dreamy, imagistic quality comparable

[86] In Haraway's more recent work, especially *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), she has developed an ecological argument that calls, troublingly, for vast population reduction. This is in notable opposition to *Saving History*'s negation of the possibility that people can be 'waste'. For an analysis of this late turn in Haraway's work see Sophie Lewis' review of *Staying with the Trouble*. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press 2016); Sophie Lewis, 'Cthulhu plays no role for me', *Viewpoint Magazine* (8 May 2017) < https://viewpointmag.com/2017/05/08/cthulhu-plays-no-role-for-me/> [accessed 15 March 2021].
[87] Brito interview, p.100.
[88] Stevens, *Collected Poems*, p.57.

to Stevens' meditation on the relationship between imagination and our immediate, physical experience. **'**From my balcony', the speaker 'survey[s] the yellow air' of 'the world' and contemplates a line of poetry, 'reading where I have written, / "The spring is like a belle undressing."' The line in quotation marks stands out from the rest of the poem because of its regular iambic metre and its being a simile, which elevates it from a vision of the 'actual' world to the more hypothetical language of rhetoric. It is unclear whether the speaker has 'written' the words physically on paper or imaginatively into the landscape he surveys from his balcony. Regardless, the communion of imagination with material surroundings elevates, by way of the rhetorical device, whatever connects 'spring' and 'a belle undressing' expressly because they have it in common: here, too, likeness organizes and elevates. The scene outside the hotel at sunset ('As the fog blued and blurred with the setting sun […] Candles dripped in the fog, their butter yellow tips slipping into jars') finds an antecedent in the 'yellow air' of Stevens' poem, and in the gold and blue of the final, imagistic stanza:

> The gold tree is blue,
> The singer has pulled his cloak over his head.
> The moon is in the folds of the cloak. (p.76)[89]

Earlier in the novel there was another moment of primitive communion in a bluish fog, between Tom and his imaginary 'shadowy figure of a woman' with whom he travels 'to ramshackle mobile homes on the edge of a forest' (p.403). Tom has visited this woman in his fantasies since puberty and her effect on his life has been such that 'he observed life as others look in store windows, or up at movie screens. And when he looked in the mirror at himself, he was always greeted by the image of a stranger.' Part of her attraction, it seems, is that she allows him to see himself as an object in the world. Billie and Felicity both stand in for his woman at different points, and like Billie and Felicity she is both lover and sister. She is also connected to the suffering of the poor, bringing Tom an 'aura of luminous gold. The gold of a loaf of bread held in the lap of a poor man'. In an illogical, simplistic manner she holds the essence of suffering even as she is not of the material world. She, 'a belle', is a figment of the spiritual imagination but, for what it is worth, she is *like* the economically oppressed because of the shared trait of goldness.

[89] The 'jars' that the yellow candles drip bear a resemblance to another Stevens poem, 'Anecdote of the Jar' which details a comparable communion.

The figure is a vaguely Stevensian paramour—she is 'the spot concealed in [Tom's] folds'—and like Stevens' muse she is the perfect fusion of the world, the imagination, and the sacred (*SH,* p.403). She is a part of Tom's imagination, but 'in order to complete their collaboration, he [has] to become a representative of himself—a mutual invention, a double of the one doing the imagining'. The two inventions (Tom and the woman) are interchangeable, coming into being in relation to each other in his body: 'And there he would suffer and enjoy at her mercy, a mercy which was experienced through his own hands, not "hers". She waited for "me."' The woman is described as arriving 'in a season of thick fog—Indian summer—emerging like a peacock through falling cards'; on the next page there is 'an excavation, not like Pompeii, but in the way the autumn day looked. Like a pack of falling cards.' These similes recall a line from 'The Bouquet', another Stevens poem:

> A pack of cards is falling toward the floor.
> The sun is secretly shining on a wall.
> One remembers a woman standing in such a dress.[90]

In this poem, looking at the world allows one to approach 'the reality' of imagination:

> One approaches, simply, the reality
> Of the other eye. One enters, entering home,
> The place of meta-men and para-things,
>
> And yet still men though meta-men, still things
> Though para-things;

This 'reality / Of the other eye' is no less real for being imagined. It is the dream-space where Tom meets with this imaginary woman and experiences momentary communion with another that is part of himself—or rather, 'she' and 'me' are part of the same.

As well as inspiring him to join the priesthood (another choice of God over the biological family) Tom's dream revelation brings him to a new understanding of inheritance. After the dream he writes down a stream of religious reflections, including the idea that 'the soul belongs to you personally […] and it is the accountant of your deeds. The spirit on the other hand is nothing personal. You live IN the spirit' (p.409). Tom's ideas amount to a renegotiation of the 'duty' felt towards his father earlier in the novel; now, instead of linear

[90] Stevens, *Collected Poems,* p.450.

family inheritance there is the soul for which you are responsible (it 'belongs to you personally') but which is implicated 'in' the spirit, a wider force that is 'nothing personal'. This, I suggest, is an imaginative, spiritual enactment of the psychic separation and reunification of siblings, whose sense of themselves as 'I' comes at the cost of separation from their peers, who become 'not I'. The interconnected spirit at the centre of *Saving History* is articulated through a lateral model of kinship.

The description of Dan recognizing his half-sister as seeming to 'work on the surface of things' leads us to another New England predecessor who wrote in the 'mode of bewilderment', as Fanny Howe observed while simultaneously denying his influence.[91] This source brings together both Howe' attempts to join incarnational materialism with typology. In a journal entry dated 24th August 1852 Henry David Thoreau wrote:

> I live so much in my habitual thoughts—a routine of thought—that I forget there is any outside to the globe—and am surprised when I behold it as now—yonder hills & river in the moon light, the monsters. Yet it is salutary to deal with the surface of things—What are these rivers and hills—these hieroglyphics which my eyes behold? There is something invigorating in this air which I am peculiarly sensible is a real wind blowing from over the surface of a planet—I look out at my eyes, I come to my window, & I feel & breathe the fresh air. It is a fact equally glorious with the most inward experience. Why have we ever slandered the outward? The perception of surfaces will always have the effect of miracle to a sane sense.[92]

It is 'salutary to deal with the surface of things'. Usually meaning 'conducive to health', 'salutary' also has the more archaic sense of 'bringing salvation'. The apparently superficial connections with the world that happen in perception are for Thoreau (as in 'Sorting Facts', as in *Saving History*) where salvation is ephemerally located. The idea that 'rivers and hills' are 'hieroglyphics' seems at first too much like Puritan exegesis to square with incarnation: by that logic rivers and hills are 'symbols' of salvation, rather than the location of salvation itself. But thinking laterally—thinking *superficially*—might lead us to conceive of these hieroglyphs as existing alongside that which they refer to, not in another symbolic realm but here, on 'the surface of a planet' in the experience of the beholder, in the 'eyes' which 'behold'. Think back to the 'Sorting Facts' hospital scene, in which David's experience was in the room with them, as both perception and depiction, when his 'eyes seemed to know'. Think, too, of the gesture in 'On Saving History' that contains both interior revelatory experience and exterior appearance. Think of Tom looking at his own life as if it were a film,

[91] Schwartz interview.
[92] *Journal: Volume 5* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.309.

looking in the mirror and seeing 'the image of a stranger' (*SH,* p.403). As it would be for the Howes, for Thoreau here the 'perception of surfaces' is where the 'miracle' of a live commons is located: like a mirror (like *Mirror*) the 'surface of things' is what reflects oneself as both a being that perceives 'hieroglyphs' and part of the material world depicted by them. In 'Sorting Facts' Susan Howe expressly rearticulates Thoreau's idea that 'the perception of surfaces will always have the effect of miracle.' Right after the observation that in film 'there are no wings to the screen any soul can be the body' comes the following passage:

> Distant woods beautiful auspicious morning at evening a sudden west wind soughing through white flowering meadow.
>
> Facts are perceptions of surfaces. (*SF,* p.112)

Facts are perceptions of surfaces; surfaces, it seems, are perceptions of facts. Or rather, they are perceptions of salvation, which exists though unrecorded in the material world.

What draws these various pieces of writing into familial relation is the repetition of phrases that perform the shared cultural and geographical common ground of New England, but both Howes perform this relation with the intention of synthesising it with other influences in ways that evade teleology and linear inheritance. In an interview about *Mirror* two decades after 'Sorting Facts' was published, Susan Howe aligned Tarkovsky's documentary memoir with her sister's theological philosophy by using words from one to describe the other:

> Watching *The Mirror,* I wonder: what *is* a birthplace? Can a reconstructed wooden dacha, a table, a loaf of bread, a glass of milk at the edge of the forest, reflect a primal idea of divinity where parents unite in make-believe, beginning over in salvation history?[93]

This description is pieced together with snippets from *Saving History,* in which Tom is described as visiting his dream lover/sister (with whom he could be said to 'unite in make-believe') in 'ramshackle mobile homes on the edge of a forest' (p.403). The novel ends with another patchwork family unit (another 'cross-pollinated forest') on a frozen lake in Maine where Felicity is reunited with Lee and with her aunt, the last of the 'small band of misfit women' through whom she and Tom are distantly related (p.367). Just before she is reunited

[93] Stephania Heim, 'Interview: Susan Howe', *FilmComment* (24 November 2015) <https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-susan-howe/> [accessed 20 June 2020].

with them, she remembers a conversation with her aunt that makes the encounter on the lake seem like the fulfilment of a pattern:

> Where are the joys, and what, my aunt had once asked me, and her answers followed: children around a table, fresh fruit, women, a glimpse into well-known eyes, the eucharist, fishing in winter, music, a smoke, a lake (p.456).

By evoking this scene in a description of Tarkovsky's film (constructed around *his* family history); by using fictional 'material' from one utopic, non-linear family to depict another, Susan Howe signals the theological tradition that underpins her sister's novel. She presents these ephemeral kin relations (which are constantly being 'reconstructed' in a Constructivist sense) as moments of surface-level salvation. She is describing a scene from *Mirror* but she does so by consciously echoing her own sister's work, sorting through likenesses to re-present and re-construct their kinship too. It is an instance of communal thinking akin to 'a glimpse into well-known eyes'.

Chapter Three

‘still in the air there’: Breathing Dust in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*

i: re-articulation of sound forms in time

> It’s the articulation that represents life. And Hope has that sort of experience. And Hope is in me. In all of us. Once I was driving to Buffalo alone, moving up there for the winter to teach. It was me and my car and the mountains. I had a tape of *Articulation* from a reading I had done, and I thought I would turn it on as I was passing the place near where Hope had been wandering after the raid—and it was a wonderful feeling because the sounds seemed to be pieces still in the air there. I felt I was returning them home as I drove away from home. They don’t belong to me. I didn’t originate them. They go back. (*BM*, p.172)

This is Susan Howe speaking to Edward Foster in 1989. The ‘raid’ was an event that Howe referred to as the Falls Fight, otherwise known as the Wissantinnewag-Peskeompscut massacre, in which between 100 and 200 Nipmuc, Narragansett, Wampanoag and Pocumtuc people were killed by colonial soldiers in 1676 on a bank of the Connecticut River near Deerfield, Massachusetts. *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (1987) is centred around this incident, and especially around ‘Hope’, or the Reverend Hope Atherton. Atherton spent several days lost in the woods after the raid, and his life was spared by the local tribespeople who came across him. On his return to the settler colony, his congregation did not believe his account of the ordeal and he was shunned, dying shortly afterwards from the exposure he had endured in the woods. For Howe, his failed attempts at communication, his ‘epicene’ name, and his equivocal position on the unstable periphery of historical record made him an emblematic foreshadowing of her own writing about the violent history of her ancestors (*S*, p.4). According to this anecdote, too, he led her on an inroad to an earlier moment in the land she moved through.

The temporal process depicted in this passage becomes more enigmatic the more one tries to decipher it. To when do these little sounds ‘go back’? The sound—which has a grainy solidity because of its being described as in ‘pieces’—seems to be coming from both inside and outside the car, something waiting in the landscape, ‘still in the air there’, that is activated by the playing of the recorded words. The ‘pieces’ move backward from the car to the time of Atherton’s trial by wilderness, but also forward to meet the car radio. (Howe herself is leaving home to move to Buffalo but returning to the place she lived as a young

child.)[1] The description is easy to visualise, however: it is a diagrammatic, almost mathematical image, in which various historical presents converge in the movement along the axis of the car's trajectory through the woods. In this it has something of a Peircean 'icon' or a sign that shares qualitative features with the object it refers to—a diagram is one example, so is a portrait or a map.[2] In a manner fundamental to icons, which elucidate through resemblance, the image shows, rather than explains, that this one specifically located 'articulation' combines multiple moments. It is an iconic representation of history as an accumulation experienced in liveness. The icon draws together: Howe playing the tape in 1988 as she drives through the New England landscape; the public reading of *Articulation* that the tape documents; her chance encounter with 'Hope' in the historical records; the writing of those records, in many cases many years after the event itself; Hope Atherton's trial in the 'wilderness' and his discredited recounting of it; and the violence of the massacre itself. It is an internally balanced dynamic that seems still as it spreads across time, the car always both leaving and returning home, the sonic particles always contained in the magnetic audiotape and always waiting in the landscape. It recalls Benjamin's dialectical image, 'wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation'.[3]

The synthesis of these multiple presents brings to 'articulation' the sense of 'joint' or 'juncture': it is a point of contact between the perceiving subject and her multi-temporal surroundings—as if she were intersecting with the past.[4] In the importance of the tape medium (which makes the articulation possible) as well as in its intense particularity of space and time, the description also resonates with Benjamin's definition of aura as 'a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition [*einmalige Erscheinung*, 'one-time appearance'] of a distance, however near it may be'.[5] The articulation facilitated by the tape technology does not close this distance but it does, in the graininess of the 'pieces' of sound, suggest a kind of sonic 'tissue' through which various presents are connected, brought into relation *across* the distance. The tape technology also allows the perceiver to hear themselves as part of this 'sonic tissue'. Just as in Joan Jonas' video performances discussed in Chapter One, where the live performer moved in time with her on-screen former self, here the strangely mediated

[1] See Howe, *Frame Structures*, p.3.
[2] *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. The Peirce Edition Project, 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p.13.
[3] *The Arcades Project*, ([N3,1], p.463).
[4] For a poetic exploration of the 'juncture' between the body and the world, see Nisha Ramayya, *In Me The Juncture* (Bristol: Sad Press, 2019).
[5] *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohl (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p.23.

liveness of the 'articulation' (not the reading but the playing of the tape) is crucial to the dispersal of agency. In a very basic way, the two presents occur simultaneously, and Howe is doubled to become both perceiver of the articulation and the voice that enunciates it. This is what allows Howe to perceive herself as part of a multiplicity of previous articulations of sound forms in previous times. Thinking back to my previous chapter, the tape technology is what allows the perception of oneself as part of the material world—to look in the mirror and be 'greeted by the image of a stranger', (*SH*, p.403).

Cultural anthropologist C. Nadia Seremetakis calls moments like these 'still-acts': everyday sensory encounters that trigger the 'decompression of routine temporal experience' and the perception of an older, wider 'meta-narrative'.[6] In *The Senses Still* (1994), she proposes that still-acts can allow for a different kind of 'truth' when 'the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen [...] a moment of exit from historical dust' (p.14). Dance scholar André Lepecki describes it as follows: 'while the still act does not entail rigidity or morbidity it requires a performance of suspension, a corporeally based interruption of modes of imposing flow.'[7] The 'meta-narrative' that Seremetakis and Lepecki speak of is, I suggest, one of the central pursuits in Howe's poetry: a moment of understanding oneself as connected to the material world outside of linear time or causality. It is figured in her earlier work as the perception of a messianic or providential sense of a divine plan, but later it becomes increasingly more like a 'plan' in the sense of a drawing on the horizontal plane (a floor plan, say). As this anecdote from 1989 suggests, what she looks for, to quote Seremetakis, is a live experience in which 'it is as if the sensory array is shifted from one point of consciousness to another, from one side of the body to another, which gives rise to a new or alternative perceptual landscape' (p.14).

When Howe returns to the Falls Fight in *Souls of the Labadie Tract* (2004) she frames it somewhat differently than she had in *Articulation*. Here, in a section called 'Personal Narrative', the focus is not so much on the seventeenth-century events themselves, or their subsequent recording, but on how she experienced them from her localised perspective at the end of the twentieth century. In 2004, from a distance of over 25 years, she names her encounter with Atherton as a kind of conversion narrative, modelled on Jonathan Edwards'

[6] *The Senses Still* (Oxford: Westview, 1994), p.14.
[7] *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p.15

'Personal Narrative' of his religious awakening.[8] Here, as in the anecdote in the car, Howe describes a physical connection to—even an extension of—other times:

> I vividly remember the sense of energy and change that came over me one midwinter morning when, as the book lay open in sunshine on my work table, I discovered in Hope Atherton's wandering story the authority of a prior life for my own writing voice. (*SLT,* p.13)

The central focus of this chapter is Susan Howe's twenty-first century turn to music, exemplified in *Souls'* central poem 'Souls of the Labadie Tract'. The experience of listening to music, I argue, was crucial to her returning to and rearticulating early colonial landscapes with a renewed understanding of this 'prior life for [her] own writing voice' as a communal, cyclical existence (*SLT,* pp.23-71). Music, especially *musique concrète* and repetitive drone, allow Howe a way to imaginatively share space, and sonic 'tissue', with those who have gone before.

Since the mid-1990s Howe's work has gradually developed into a more cohesive, compressed poetic style that has been described as 'integrated', 'integrative', or moving towards the 'integration of the senses'.[9] This chapter will show that the increased formal and sensory 'integration' develops in tandem with a vision of these individual 'articulations' as part of an interconnected commons, discrete from chrononormative, patrilinear models of time. 'Chrononormativity' is Elizabeth Freeman's term for 'the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity'.[10] In my study I expand the chrononormative to include not just 'individual human bodies' but all matter, whether it be part of a human body or not, because Howe's disruption of temporal sequence involves a disruption of the sovereignty of the individual, and of the distinction between human and nonhuman material. Her re-presentation of voices from various moments speaking in the same experiential present, 'from a common mouth', indexes a communal, constellational genealogy, and rejects capitalist hierarchies (maintained through patrilinear inheritance) through which matter is understood as either human bodies (organised in chrononormative patrilinear generations) or property (*SLT,* p.18).

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[8] 'Personal Narrative', *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards,* ed. Harold P. Simonson (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970), pp.27-44.
[9] Edward Allen, 'Visible Earshot: The Returning Voice of Susan Howe', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.4 (December 2012), pp, 397-421 (400); Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe,* pp.99, 157; Leticia Perez Alonso, 'Susan Howe's Historical Ethics of Space and Puritan Spirituality: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Souls of the Labadie Tract*', *Women's Studies,* 47.2 (2018), pp.187-200 (197).
[10] *Time Binds,* p.3.

The increased 'integration' in Howe's work has been discussed from two helpful scholarly vantage points. In lyric studies critics have noted an emerging vocal cohesion in Howe's later poetry, starting with the short, regular stanzas of *Pierce-Arrow* (1999). Beginning with *Pierce-Arrow,* Will Montgomery reads an 'expanded "harmony" that embraces the dissonant' in which 'textual brokenness becomes a lyric motif' (p.148). He argues that the repeated appearances of 'oh' function as moments of voicing in which 'a notion of lyric interiority' is placed 'alongside the social implications of collage', so that voice finds its 'precarious place' among other textual sources (p.166). Following *Souls'* own look back to the 1980s, Edward Allen rereads the visual presence—a 'voice that must […] be seen to be believed'—of Howe's fragmentary collages of that period (p.414). Drawing on the work of Mutlu Konuk Blasing, he argues that in contrast to those earlier works, in *Souls* the repetition and repurposing of phonemes allows for the 'simulation of a speaking presence' that is 'choosing and rechoosing its words' (p.414). *Souls,* Allen proposes, asks that we consider again 'the likely form and method of a thoroughly integrated mode of reading: one that may be alive to the insistencies of an emerging voice' (p.400).

In what follows I suggest that the more 'thoroughly integrated mode of reading' encouraged by *Souls* is facilitated by a more integrated mode of listening—that is, listening not only to the sonic or musical qualities of words, but also to non-linguistic and nonhuman sounds. One of the lyric voice's most powerful qualities is its ability to include multiple present moments within it, to draw together the 'I' of the writer, the reader, and a variety of other possible poetic speakers.[11] An attention to music in 'Souls' will suggest, however, that the poems work to incorporate within their 'presence' that which does not speak. These poems aim to include nonhuman matter: not only what Blasing calls 'the inhuman linguistic code by which [the lyric speaker] becomes "human"' but also (in kind of a Constructivist kinship or comradeship) apparently inanimate materials.[12] The inclusion of nonhuman matter allows, I suggest, a mode of speaking that does not, as was the anxiety in *The Liberties,* speak by silencing connections with the surrounding materials, or by elevating the speaker 'over heads of' the rest (*TL,* p.158). It is this that gives the poems the impression of what Montgomery calls '"harmony" that embraces the dissonant'.

[11] For an analysis of this phenomenon, see Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.72-82.
[12] Ibid., p.9.

That this emerging 'voice' is musically-inflected seems especially likely when we consider the following quotation that Howe pinned to her wall, copied from Adorno's *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music,* recommended to her by the musician and sound artist David Grubbs during their first collaboration:

> For the imagination of *all* music, and especially of instrumental music, is vocal. To imagine music is always to sing it inwardly: imagining it is inseparable from the physical sensation of the vocal cords, and composers take account of the 'vocal limit'. Only angels could make music freely.[13]

Howe's reflections in 'Personal Narrative' on her earlier work now read as an explanation as to why they lacked vocal cohesion:

> During the 1980s I wanted to transplant words onto paper with soil sticking to their roots…I wanted jerky and tedious details to oratically bloom and bear fruit as if they had been set at liberty or ransomed by angels. (*SLT,* p.16)[14]

She wanted, this passage suggests, to incorporate the material world into the poems without the organising logic of a speaker that the lyric voice presents. Now, in contrast to her earlier attempt to present unmediated sounds, she describes 'the *process* of [her] writing' as a transformative reworking that renders raw material into art while still somehow retaining its essence—even returning the rawness back to itself in the process of transformation (p.14). 'True wildness is like true gold;' Howe prophesies, 'it will bear the trial of Dewey Decimal' (p.19). This is itself a reworking of the prophetic words of Jonathan Edwards, who preached that 'true grace is like true gold […] it will bear the trial of the furnace without diminishing.'[15] It seems the polished, pared-down style of her later work has gone through a kind of tempering, as when a blade is sharpened through exposure to fire, or the flavours of food are enhanced by careful heating. This refinement processes the 'jerky and tedious details' of the material world into the organising thrust of a 'vocal limit' without, it seems, losing their wildness, their singular materiality. The absorption of music into her writing practice, I suggest, makes it possible to articulate a comingling of speech and matter.

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[13] *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p.172; 'Susan Howe and David Grubbs Seminar', online video recording, Humanities and Arts Research Centre at Royal Holloway University of London, 7 October 2009, <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2009/10/susan-howe-and-david-grubbs-seminar/> [accessed 3 November 2019]. Hereafter 'Royal Holloway Seminar'.

[14] The first sentence quoted is likely also referencing 'These Days' by Charles Olson. *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: Excluding the Maximus Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.106.

[15] 'Images of Divine Things', p.107.

ii: the 'lexical inscape' of New England

Peircean pragmatism is the second lens through which the more integrated poetics of *Souls* has been examined, and it helps to elucidate the communal nature of this processed voice. Miriam Marty-Clark advocates reading *Souls*

> pragmatically, which is to say, not as the shards of something shattered or the random scatter associated with a disarticulation of hegemonic narratives, but as constitutive of infinite inquiry and infinite community.[16]

According to pragmatist aesthetics, thought is communal, intersubjective, and always evolving; it is contingent on specific historical and material contexts, but it spreads wider than any one human mind. It is a mode of thinking that emerges—is constantly emerging—in an infinite series of fleeting interactions connected in what Charles Sanders Peirce calls the 'real'.[17] In a Peircean reality, Clark writes, thought

> would be communal. Its 'I', its authorial voice, would move—inquiring, forceful, affectionate—among objects, voices, and infinitesimally brief semiotic events, and it would be constituted by them. (p.384)

Drawing on *A Natural History of Pragmatism* by Joan Richardson (who has also written about *Souls,* as I will discuss) Clark outlines how this thought evolved in the interaction between existing frameworks of knowledge and the world as we experience it—what she calls 'categories of description' and, using Howe's phrase, 'felt fact'.[18] This 'felt fact' has evolved organically, Clark writes, since the time of the first colonial setters in America: as technological and scientific advances have changed 'the categories of description' through which they understand the world, each new development is made possible by those that have gone before, and each moves closer to a total, communal knowledge. As Richardson has it, the original occurrence of this productive gap between knowledge and experience was between the 'form of thinking brought by the Puritans to the New World' and the incommensurable conditions they found there.[19] Since then, for Jonathan Edwards, the emerging knowledge frameworks he was writing with and against were those of Isaac Newton and John Locke; for Ralph Waldo Emerson, it was his reading in natural history. For William and Henry James, the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin; for Wallace Stevens,

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[16] Clark, p.389.
[17] *The Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), p.186.
[18] Clark, p.374; *SLT,* p.9.
[19] Richardson, *A Natural History*, pp.1-2. Quoted in Clark, p.377.

quantum physics; for Gertrude Stein, genetic science. Clark extends Richardson's intellectual genealogy by proposing that what opens new possibilities of thought for Howe is 'information itself'; the vast transformations in information storage technology that make up the landscapes she explores in the research libraries of Harvard and Yale.

Clark proposes convincingly that Howe's pragmatism works bind to together the staggering quantity of information stored according to the library's arbitrary and hypothetically infinite cataloguing systems, with the sensory, ephemeral echoes and traces of the past that have not been catalogued. Clark suggests that a pragmatist reading of Howe's explorations of antinomianism and alterity in the records of American history pushes 'away from simplified critical models of center and margin toward the open edge, one that Howe seems almost always to be seeking' (p.386). *The Birth-mark* gestured towards the alignment of these forces but in Howe's later works, Clark writes, 'the integration of individual perceptions and observations into compositional and communal ways of knowing' becomes a more central and explicit concern, taking place in the 'wilderness' of the research library in which seemingly infinitesimal networks of singular-but-interconnected pieces of information are available, although never fully comprehensible by one individual mind (p.379). Richardson also reads *Souls* as reaching toward a communal mode of thinking in her essay on Howe and Wallace Stevens, which combines both pragmatist and lyric studies.[20] Richardson writes (apparently developing John Stuart Mill's distinction between poetry and eloquence) that reading *Souls* is an experience of 'over-hearing, but at a much higher pitch' in which one seems to be thinking with another (p.176).[21] For Richardson, the intimate knowledge and love for the work of Stevens and Edwards that she and Howe share is what made her feel, reading *Souls,* 'as though I were being seen by the text, or that the text was reading *my* soul' (p.177). This 'soul' is a mode of accessing the communal insofar as it includes something of herself, Howe, Stevens, and Edwards.

In this description of 'overhearing' there are echoes of Howe's efforts in 'Sorting Facts' to think with another in mind or think alongside another mind. There is a tension at play in Clark's and Richardson's accounts of pragmatism, however, which undermines the gesture towards communal thought. The tension arises between the pragmatist concept of infinite inquiry and community, and the linearly genealogical, exclusively Anglo-American

[20] Richardson, 'Ghostlier Demarcations'.
[21] See John Stuart Mill, 'Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties', *The Crayon,* 7.4 (1860), pp.93-97(95).

inheritance that they outline, through which this communal knowledge has been passed down. It will be useful to unpack this briefly because it gets to one of the central and often misunderstood efforts in Howe's poetics: to integrate her own position, as a descendent of New England Puritans, within a wider social framework in the present. As outlined above, according to Richardson the historical development of pragmatist thought was unidirectional, beginning with the arrival of the Puritans, traceable from Edwards to Stein (and then extendable, as Clark proposes, to Howe). Richardson names as originary the experience of the first European settlers 'forced to live in the world but outside of existing conceptions of it' (p.3). Indeed, much of the vocabulary of pragmatism retains a sense of the 'frontier', the 'new' ground to be broken and new communal horizons to be reached. But the focus on such a lineage omits the other geographical and social contexts in which pragmatist ideas have been taken up, as well as the ways that the inherited 'categories of description' brought to America by migrants and enslaved people from places other than Western Europe would have also been inadequate for their new home; and how the previous inhabitants of the 'New World' found their existing conceptions of the world inadequate in the face of catastrophic changes brought about by the arrival of the Europeans. The encounters between 'felt fact' and pre-learned categories experienced by migrants, enslaved people, indigenous people, and non-US Americans have been less well documented in studies of pragmatism, although there have been multiple exceptions and efforts to redress this.[22] But as well as these omissions, on a conceptual level, the idea of a communal thought that starts in Anglo-American experience but grows in apparently infinite directions is antithetical to the pragmatist maxim of knowledge as an infinite, historically contingent continuum. A history of the philosophical discipline of pragmatism is one thing, but a 'natural history' that does not consider its own partiality and the potential for variants, mutations, ramifications, and offshoots, seems to contradict something fundamental to the pragmatist aim.

These readings of *Souls* do envision thought as a communal kinship, but they keep the lineage of white, educated New England at the centre by failing to explore the limits of that group's knowledge. What might feel like a wide, interconnected common area in the pragmatist sense, could in fact be the described as the interconnectedness of a small, privileged corner of that landscape—a corner that reproduces itself, and in so doing presents

[22] See Scott L. Pratt, *Native Thinking: Rethinking the Roots of American Pragmatism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Eddie S. Glaude, *In A Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Gregory Fernando Pappas, *Pragmatism in the Americas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

itself as universal. In 'Ghostlier Demarcations, Keener Sounds', Richardson narrates her apprehension of an organic, interconnected 'soul' when she opened *Souls* and read the text's epigraphs from Edwards and Stevens. The anecdote has the sense of a 'charged' chance encounter similar to Howe's experience with the car radio, and involves a similar perception of a meta-narrative:

> Having myself stopped so often at the same places, those passages—on my finding them opening *Souls*—pierced me, my body made electric; I felt the charge illuminating—actual. [...] It was as though I were being seen by the text, or that the text was reading *my* soul. (p.177)

Richardson descibes this as a fleeting apprehension of an interconnected common thought that is being thought through her—a kind of telepathy, in the vein of C. S. Peirce who argued that 'there may be other modes of continuous connection between minds than those of time and space.'[23]

Howe herself has long been attuned to the possibilities of 'telepathy' allowed by encounters with archival material: *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* addresses this most explicitly, but it is of a concern in many earlier works, such as 'Submarginalia' with which I opened this thesis, in which Howe writes 'Sometimes I know you just from reading.' In Richardson's formation, however, the reach of this common thought seems to be limited to a very particular intellectual gene pool. After noting that she and her colleague Kenneth Gross had been fortunate to have two scholarly mentors in common (John Hollander and Angus Fletcher, both of whom, she adds, were themselves students of I. A. Richards) she recounts the shock of realising that she and Gross were writing 'the same essay' (p.176). Its subject was the lyric speaker: in Gross' words, 'how the poem makes a drama of the experience of our taking its words into our ears and minds, and into our mouths; … how the poem gives our hearing a voice'.[24] This amounts to an oddly linear inheritance: their shared mentors (who act as intellectual parents) are what leads them to write the same thing, as if it were passed down through Fletcher and Richards from the great forefathers of thought.

[23] *The Collected Papers,* p.159.
[24] Kenneth Gross, 'Time's Ear: Listening the Lyric', *Raritan: A Quarterly Review,* 32.4 (2013), pp.123-144 (126). Quoted in Richardson, 'Ghostlier Demarcations', p.176.

Richardson describes this feeling of interconnectedness as the '*frisson'* of 'over-hearing', and it does seem to have a kind of physical intimacy. She writes that she knew, before reading *Souls*, that she and Howe shared a fascination with Jonathan Edwards, having spent

> a long afternoon together at the Beinecke Library in the spring before *Souls* appeared poring over Edwards' manuscripts and even unfolding and gently fingering the white linen bedsheet thought to have been spun by Edwards' mother, Esther Stoddard Edwards. (p.177)

She ends her tracing of the links between Jean de Labadie, Jonathan Edwards, Wallace Stevens, Susan Howe and herself by relating an incident that occurred while she was writing *A Natural History*, when she allowed her copy of Stevens' collected works to fall open at random, and it revealed to her 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour', a poem that Howe draws on in *Souls.* But although Richardson does not mention it in the essay, the *Collected Poetry and Prose* that fell open was a book that she herself had co-edited.[25] Here, again, what in one light could be interconnected destiny or serendipity (what Clark calls the unfolding of 'chance and love') from another angle reads like the result of a pool of genetic possibilities made narrow by the institutionally privileged position of those involved (p.390). This is not to say that the feeling of serendipitous interconnectedness is false, but that the edges of the interconnected 'life-form' as Richardson describes it might not reach as far as they seem to. Not bringing to the fore the partiality of this perspective risks reproducing one privileged, local corner of the pragmatist continuum as if it were the whole world, rather than a cluster of events in an infinite series. In a very un-pragmatic way, it closes the possibility of knowledge and speech to which the individuals involved have no recourse.

Clark's and Richardson's pragmatist readings of *Souls* are helpful: the 'continual progress toward perfect understanding that never withers away' that Howe envisions in 'Personal Narrative' is certainly informed by pragmatism, and by the developments in information technology brilliantly outlined by Clark (*SLT,* p.14). Importantly for my purposes, however, by suggesting that the Anglo-American corner of the New England *is* the world, Clark and Richardson pass over a crucial step in the apprehension of communal thought and communal inheritance that Howe presents in *Souls,* perhaps most evidently in a passage that both critics highlight as demonstative of Howe's Peircean aesthetic. In this passage Howe's vision of pragmatism is simultaneously more outward facing and more

[25] *The Collected Poetry and Prose,* ed. Joan Richardson and Frank Kermode (New York: Library of America, 1997).

locally situated than Clark and Richardson allow for: it recognises its Anglo-American remit as a parochial—all points are parochial if there is no centre—location on a much wider plane of possibility. Appearing at the conclusion of the essay, it is a single, vertiginously rich sentence worth quoting in full because it brings together pragmatist interdependence, live enunciation, and the increased vocal coherence I have been speaking about thus far:

> If I were to read aloud a passage from a poem of your choice, to an audience of judges in sympathy with surrounding library nature, and they were to experience its lexical inscape as an offshoot of Anglo-American modernism in typographical format, it might be possible to release our great great grandparents, beginning at the greatest distance from a common mouth, eternally belated, some coming home through dark ages, others nearer to early modern, multitudes of them meeting first to constitute certain main branches of etymologies, so all along there are new sources, some running directly contrary to others, and yet all meet at last, clothed in robes of glory, offering maps of languages, some with shining tones. (pp.18-19)

We can read Richardson's idea of the intersubjective experience of poetry as speaking with another in the idea of a 'common mouth'; and the 'surrounding library nature' endorses Clark's suggestion that Howe's version of the 'wilderness' is the vast and unknowable terrain of the library. More than either Clark or Richardson, however, Howe situates the legacy of which she is a part in a particular history, with a partial access to this 'common mouth'.

Rather like Tom's definition of the 'spirit' in *Saving History* as 'nothing personal' ('You live IN the spirit') the common mouth is something one can be a part of, be *in*, without being the whole thing (*SH*, p.409). It is through this attention to localism and partiality that Susan Howe suggests the communal can be grasped. First, the audience must be 'in sympathy' with 'surrounding library nature'; we might understand this as open to the kind of interconnected perception that Howe is describing, a version of Edwards' 'intelligent beings' who perceive the unity of the world.[26] The audience must also recognise the reading as 'an offshoot of Anglo-American modernism in typographical format', a historically situated enclave or 'lexical inscape' in a wider space, the result of specific typographical marks on specific pages. This articulation would then tie that enclave not to one particular Anglo-American origin, but to something infinitely more complex and far-reaching; something more like a vast, multi-directional organism, 'multitudes of them meeting first to constitute certain main branches of etymologies, so all along there are new sources, some running directly contrary to others'. It depends on how we read the relationship between 'Anglo-American

[26] Edwards, *True Virtue*, p.78.

Modernism' and the 'common mouth' but, as I understand it, the former is one particular 'lexical inscape' (the inscape that Howe is most familiar with and indebted to) among many in the 'maps of languages, some with shining tones'. To refer back to the instrumentalization of selfhood discussed in Chapter One, the lyric voice presented is an attempt at a particular, localised instrument through which more disparate elements, unknowable to the individual, are relayed. It is through the focus on material particularity that something else might be glimpsed. As Howe writes later in the book, 'So in a particular world / as in the spiritual world' (p.96).

This distinction is vital for what follows because it suggests that Howe's genealogy of pragmatism amounts to evade linear inheritance in favour of something more like a constellation; an attempt to forego sequence altogether to become still, diagrammatic. 'Souls of the Labadie Tract' opens with a description of the Labadists, whom Howe came across in her reading into Wallace and Elsie Moll Stevens' genealogical research into their family history. The Labadists, Howe tells us, were a 'utopian Quietist sect' who settled in Maryland in 1684 to prepare for the coming millennium, but 'dissolved' in 1722. Her description of the group is very brief, so I read as significant the mention that they 'held all property in common (including children)', a detail that suggests an evasion of the individualist futurity of patrilineage. Mandy Bloomfield notes that this

> implies alternatives to capitalist individual property rights and a sense of 'property' as stewardship, rather than ownership, since children, surely cannot straightforwardly be considered 'property'.[27]

My reading aligns almost completely with Bloomfield's, but as my study of the audio version of 'Thorow' and of 'Souls' will suggest, the utopian state that the poems reach for lacks even the agency of stewardship, which would imply a role of responsible management, a degree of distance from what is being cared for, and a sense of futurity that motivates that care. In what follows I will focus instead on a present-tense state of 'undifferentiation' (to quote 'Thorow') in which the perceiver is 'dissolved' into their surroundings. As Howe notes, although the land they settled on was later known as the 'Labadie Tract' (which gives the name 'Labadie' a certain claim to the place) the Labadists themselves called it the more idyllically utopian 'New Bohemia'.

[27] 'Palimtextual Tracts: Susan Howe's Rearticulation of Place', *Contemporary Literature,* 55.4 (Winter 2014) pp.665-700 (688).

As suggested by this chapter's opening anecdote, in which the sounds went 'back' from the tape to the landscape, there is at least one other important development in information storage technology that has been central to Howe's pragmatist poetics: that of sound recording. In the 1970s and 1980s Howe produced and presented her own radio show for WBAI Radio, in which she interviewed poets and presented research on a range of literary topics, spending hours choosing accompanying music and cutting and splicing magnetic tape to mould disparate sonic moments into one cohesive sonic experience.[28] In 1995 she remarked to Lynn Keller that she was 'a product of radio days' and her 'childhood imagination was shaped' by the radio: 'not just music as on FM radio now, but drama, news, all popular culture'.[29] Her comments outline a distinctly pragmatist correlation between historical, technological conditions and the structure of thought and inner experience:

> Who knows, maybe that's why Freud's patients lay on couches rather than sitting across from him. Because he didn't have to look at them nor they at him. They followed each other's voices and silences. And perhaps Lacan's emphasis on looking is part of his appeal to this younger generation. (p.14)

Returning to the opening anecdote with a pragmatist framework in mind, the limits of poetic possibility, and indeed the possibilities of expanding Adorno's 'vocal limit' are contingent on the ever-mutating zone between information technology and the material, sensory world: in this case, between the tape playing Howe's words and her experience of moving through the New England landscape. The tape player is not just a coincidental means by which predetermined knowledge is transmitted: its existence causes the environment of fact to evolve and include previously unimaginable embodied sensory and cognitive experiences.

The library's unknowable expanse of information is, as Clark has shown, central to the aesthetic of *Souls*; but the possibilities of sound recording bring other elements into play: the storage and replay of non-linguistic sonic material, and the possibility of acousmatic (and therefore uncategorised) sound. Attention to the effect of sound recording on *Souls* will, I contend, allow us to see that, as well as the 'wilderness' within the library, there is also a 'wild' sonic element that *Souls* attempts to 'process', to polish or temper into 'shining tones'. The play between representation and the non-referentiality made possible by sound recording is a way to understand poetry, the 'articulation that represents life', as both mimetic of life,

[28] Royal Holloway Seminar.
[29] Keller interview, p.14.

but also an extension of it. In the vocabulary of my previous chapter, poetry exists in lateral as well as symbolic relation to other parts of 'life'. As we will see, sound is what allows an inheritance that includes what it cannot understand—what Howe calls 'wildness'—to become a 'felt fact' in the present.

iii: sound out of time

In 2003, Susan Howe had begun working on a text about Wallace Stevens that would eventually become *Souls* when she was invited to reconsider her time in upstate New York in the 1980s (Lake George, NY, in particular). When David Grubbs, sound artist, musician and academic, proposed working together on a sound piece based on her poems from that period, she said that it was 'in the deep past in [her] head now'.[30] An analysis of the resulting collaborative recording of 'Thorow', and of the minimalist drone music that Howe engaged with subsequently, will shed light on the utopian collective space that *Souls* envisions. Firstly, it is quite plausible that the collaboration inspired her to return to *Articulation* in 'Personal Narrative' and put her own work through the furnace by re-processing into the more pared down version. But more profoundly than this, Howe's collaboration with Grubbs will illuminate her effort to incorporate nonreferential otherness or 'wildness' into the poem, and the mode of being with an unknown, unpredictable other that the incorporation of 'wildness' entails. As Howe put it, speaking of the way that *Souls* responds to Grubbs' music, writing the book was 'a collaboration before collaborating'.[31]

The clarifying distance of hindsight illuminates directions Howe's work would take after meeting Grubbs, and it would be in the spirit of Howe's own integrative logic to imagine that she and Grubbs were destined to meet. The happy coincidence of their acquaintance was made much more likely, however, by their positions of prestige and privilege in their respective institutionally sanctioned avant-gardes. It was the Fondation Cartier, Paris, that first commissioned the collaboration on the recommendation of the performance group Goat Island.[32] It is also possible to read parallel creative trajectories in their work: when Howe was writing her most fractured, polemical works in the late 1980s Grubbs, in his early 20s, was

[30] Howe, email to David Grubbs, 11 August 2003, Susan Howe Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSS 338, Series 1, Box 1; David Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight: Two Collaborations with Susan Howe', *Pores,* <http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/issues/issue5/poetry-and-music/davidgrubbs> [accessed 10 September 2019].
[31] Royal Holloway Seminar.
[32] Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'.

playing in a series of punk bands. While Howe's writing from this period might not fit the genre of 'punk poetry' it shares with punk an interest in anti-authoritarianism and an aesthetic of brash disorder. Furthermore, although the gently minimalist drones I will be discussing in this chapter are formally a long way from punk, in their illusion of stillness and lack of forward momentum they retain something of punk's disregard for linear narratives of progress: the 'slow cancellation of the future' that Marxist theorist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi describes as originating in punk in the 1970s and 1980s.[33] Grubbs, who grew up in Kentucky, played in punk bands in the 1980s before moving to study in Washington D.C. in 1987 and establishing the post-hardcore trio Bastro. In 1991 he moved to Chicago for a PhD in English literature, where Bastro reformed as the more experimental Gastr Del Sol, whose sound incorporated electronic and orchestral music and *musique concrète.* Grubbs first read Howe's work in graduate school so it makes sense that he would suggest returning to 'Thorow' and 'Melville's Marginalia', both published around that time.[34] Since the 1990s he has released some twenty solo albums and several collaborative works, his music tending to a quieter, more minimalist experimentalism that pairs stripped-down melodies with glitchy electronic elements and soft, slow drones.

Howe's and Grubbs' sensibilities undoubtedly overlap when it comes to their interest in sound recording. Grubbs is also preoccupied with the implications of technological developments for alighting on new creative terrain. His academic monograph *Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (2014) considers the avant-garde and experimental music scene in 1960s New York, which overlapped with the milieu Howe associated with and was influenced by.[35] *Records* explores the productive contrast between largely disparaging attitudes to sound recording in 1960s avant-garde circles (centred around John Cage, whose disdainful remark gives the book its title) and the fact that most people now experience the music from this period in the mediated form of electronic recordings in online archives. The 'landscape' of the book's title has two senses: it is 'the constellation of a cultural moment, the landscape of experimental music, the landscape in which Cage's ideas circulated, and so on'; it also advances the implications of Cage's *Imaginary Landscapes* series, in which Cage edited together acousmatic sounds from various

[33]Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), p.24.
[34] Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'.
[35]*Records Ruin the Landscape: John Cage, the Sixties, and Sound Recording* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

recordings to make 'heterogenous, impossible spaces' (p.55). Discussing the series, Grubbs writes:

> Recordings contain information about the spaces in which they were made, whether or not the represented space is made explicit in, for example, representing the recognizable acoustics of a concert hall. The opposite can occur when spaces are sonically decontextualized, as with exceptionally close microphone placement, inverted or counterintuitive volume relations among elements in a mix, in the fragmentation of sounds through editing, and in any of a multitude of sound-processing effects. (p.55)

This is a helpful insight into the process of mixing that occurred in Grubbs' and Howe's first collaboration, and into the multi-dimensional space it evokes. When he proposed the idea to Howe, he described his intended creation as an 'aural environment', a 'resolutely un-showy scrim of sounds and silences scaled to the human voice'.[36] As we will see, although these sounds are 'scaled' to the human voice, the environment created is one in which the distinction between human and nonhuman sonic material is dissolved.

There is one more tradition that needs glossing, which Grubbs brought into the conversation when he described his vision for the sounds in 'Thorow' as 'what in the parlance of French *musique concrète* is called acousmatic – abstract in the sense of being divorced from the recognition of their sources'.[37] *Musique concrète* is a mode of composition that uses recordings of 'natural sounds' as its 'raw material'.[38] As an artform it, too, grew out of a specific technological landscape: the development of tape recording technology during the Second World War made it possible for sounds to be 'captured' to a very high standard, and then edited, erased, or reproduced with extreme precision without either the skill and time involved in learning a tune, or any external notation or scoring system.[39] It also allowed the possibility of readily available and manipulable acousmatic sound which, although ubiquitous today, was a relatively newer sensory phenomenon in the mid-twentieth century. Beginning in the late 1940s, French sound engineer, composer, and pioneer of *musique concrète* Pierre Schaeffer began to use this newly available equipment to make music from

[36] Grubbs, email to Susan Howe, 16 April 2003, Susan Howe Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSS 338 Series 1, Box 1.
[37] Ibid.
[38] 'musique concrète', *The Oxford Companion to Music* < https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-4640>
[39] I use the word 'capture' with an ear to its sense of forcefully hunting something wild, because early tape recording technology was, and still is, figured in such language. See, for example, Jean Baptiste Masson, 'Hunting Sounds: The Development of Sound Recording Hobbyist Culture in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s' *Unlikely*, 6 (2020) <https://unlikely.net.au/issue-06/hunting-sounds> [accessed 2 April 2021].

solely pre-recorded loops. The acousmatic experience was central to this new mode of composition, and to Schaeffer's philosophy of sound. According to Schaeffer (who is considered by some the godfather of modern music sampling, although there are several others who might lay claim to this title) disconnecting sound from its source object, its material 'cause', allowed for the perception of raw sound.[40] It was understood as a means of moulding sound as a sculptor might—of, in the words of Schaeffer's collaborator Pierre Henry, 'plastifying' music.[41]

Schaeffer led various groups of researchers and students in an effort (which now seems absurd) to produce a taxonomy of sounds according to their inherent sonic traits, as opposed to their material origin or their effect on the listener. They measured these traits using a method of reduced listening based on Husserl's concept of *epoché* or phenomenological bracketing, in which sensory perception of an object is separated from any learned ideas about the object.[42] According to Schaeffer, listening repeatedly and intentionally to a piece of acousmatic sound facilitated perception of a sonic value unconnected to sound's 'meaning' or physical cause. This abstract musical value, which he called a 'sound object', was autonomous from the material circumstances that produced the sound, but neither was it solely in the mind of the listener.[43] It was not reducible to a score or any other form of notation, and nor did it exist solely in the fragment of recorded material (although sound recording technology was essential for its apprehension). Confusingly, Schaeffer proposed that it 'exist[ed] in reality' even while it was brought into being, or activated, by the 'intentional act' of reduced listening on the part of the subject (p.14). As James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow describe it, 'it was in part machine-made; in part, a construct of iterative perception.'[44] Noting Schaeffer's familiarity with the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de

[40] See, for example, Jonathan Patrick, 'A Guide to Pierre Schaeffer, the Godfather of Sampling', *FactMag* (2016) < https://www.factmag.com/2016/02/23/pierre-schaeffer-guide/> [accessed 13 March 2021]; For one among many histories of the origins of sampling, see Edward George, 'Distance: A King Tubby Special', *The Strangeness of Dub,* 4, Morley Radio (28 January 2021) <https://morleyradio.co.uk/series/the-strangeness-of-dub/> [accessed 13 March 2021].
[41] Richard James, 'Interview with Pierre Henry', cited in *"Expansion of Sound Resources in France, 1913–1940, and Its Relationship to Electronic Music"* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Michigan, 1981), p.79.
[42] Brian Kane's *Sound Unseen* helpfully traces the Husserlian influence in Schaeffer's method. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[43] *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay across Disciplines,* trans. Christine North and John Dack (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).
[44] *Sound Objects* (London: Duke University Press, 2009), p.8.

Saussure, Joanna Demers likens the sound object to a signifier, a raw acoustic phenomenon that reflects an abstract signified, or musical idea.[45] Michel Chion's exegesis is also useful:

> it is a sound unit perceived in its material, its particular texture, its own qualities and perceptual dimensions. On the other hand, it is a perception of a totality which remains identical through different hearings.[46]

This concept will be helpful to keep in mind in what follows. It chimes with Howe's description of 'pieces' of sound reacting with the landscape: the recorded, acousmatic sound facilitates the apprehension of a pre-existing structure that is, at the same time, only brought into being by the perceiver. Moreover, Howe's description of Freud's method of psychoanalysis suggests that sound separated from image was already important to her as a means of insight into hidden information: 'because he didn't have to look at them nor they at him. They followed each other's voices and silences'. A crucial difference from Schaeffer's sound object, however, is that for Howe—as is evident in the description of her car radio playing sounds 'back' to the landscape of New England—severing sounds from their visual counterpart does not mean separating them from their material circumstances. Rather it seems to allow for a different kind of connection to that land and those materials.

In *Records,* Grubbs describes the idea of an immaterial sound as the point of divergence between *musique concrète* and the project of John Cage, although their preoccupations were similar around the time of Cage's *Imaginary Landscapes*.[47] The tradition of drone in which Grubbs' own practice is situated owes much to Schaeffer's work, however. Tracing a continuity from efforts in mid-century minimalist sculpture to create mute 'objects' that remain unrepresentative of anything but themselves, in *Listening through the Noise* Joanna Demers argues that the 'search for non-referential materials' can be traced 'from Dada to John Cage, from Fluxus to minimalist sculpture, and from *musique concrète* to drone music and microsound' (p.12). As I will show, Howe and Grubbs' collaborative sound pieces and Howe's later 'Souls' both show evidence of this minimalist search for nonreferential materials. Unlike Schaeffer's project, however, theirs is not an attempt to liberate the nonreferential from the representational structures of language and meaning. Instead, in true pragmatist fashion, the aim is to place the nonreferential and the representational alongside

[45] *Listening through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.25
[46] *Guide to Sound Objects*, trans. John Dack and Christine North (London: Buchet, 2009), p.32.
[47] Grubbs, *Records,* p.58.

each other; to hold on to the materiality of the voice and the words articulated by that voice, so that the act of representing becomes a performance of communality.

This collective experience, made possible by a combination of representation and the nonreferential, requires something like what Fred Moten—drawing on Wittgenstein and Peircean semiotics, and discussing the jazz 'ensemble' in the work of Amiri Baraka—calls 'second iconicity'.[48] If Peircean icons are signs that describe by analogy, referring to their object by way of a shared quality, then 'second iconicity', Moten proposes, is

> the supplement of description that allows description; for description of the phenomenon or experience of ensemble is only adequate if it is also itself the phenomenon or experience of ensemble. (pp.92-93)

Second iconicity moves beyond simply referring to an object, to hold something of the *experience* of perceiving that object—which is in this case an ensemble. Moten's term will be useful for what is to follow, in which I argue that the qualities of drone music allow both a metaphorical representation of 'wildness' and a perceptual experience that is, in a very particular way, analogous to the perception of losing oneself in a state of collectivity. The illusion of pure sonic tissue created by the sensory deprivation of drone is both a metaphor for uncategorizable matter, and a physical, sensory experience of it.

The fixation on whether sound's meaning is representational or in the sound 'itself' is a trait common to much electronic music and sound art since Schaeffer. Joanna Demers writes that 'recent electronic music is obsessed with the question of whether sound, in itself, bears meaning' (p.13). This obsession is especially present in drone music, a style prevalent in many genres involving long, continuous monotones or extensive repetitions of the same note. La Monte Young is credited with introducing drone to US minimalism from Indian classical music, where it has been a fixture for centuries. Hearing on the radio the sound of the tanpura, played by Shirish Gor on an Ali Akbar Khan record, Young sought out the instrument and was taught to play it by classical raga singer Pandit Pran Nath.[49] As in much minimalist-adjacent art from the 1960s there is a distinctly primitivist element to Young's incorporation of Indian raga: this is evident in the distance he places between his mode of playing the tanpura and its 'little kiddie' origin: 'You've heard our tanpuras with our tuning

[48] *In the Break: Aesthetics in the Black Radical Tradition* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.92.
[49] Alan Licht, 'A Conversation with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela and Jung Hee Choi', *Red Bull Music Academy Festival* <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2018/07/la-monte-young-zazeela-choi-conversation> [accessed 14 November 2019]. Hereafter 'Licht interview'.

which is significantly improved from the little kiddie way that they recorded that tanpura, but that tanpura had an enormous effect on me'.[50] Young's comment suggests a more racist and mercenary attitude than Joan Jonas' use of the uncredited Malakulan sand drawings in *Mirage,* but there is nevertheless a shared logic which allows the avant-garde artist to achieve, to quote Michael Bell's modernist obsession with myth, 'both continuity with, and distance from, the primitive'.[51] Young's attitude is also comparable to Fanny Howe's and Muriel Rukeyser's understanding of the primitive, in its association with childhood (although, crucially, for them the association of non-Western logics with childishness is a positive characteristic) and with Susan Howe's attempt to '*process*' wildness into something more refined while still retaining its wild essence. Indeed, descriptions of drone are often suggestive of the primitive, visceral materialism of Fanny Howe and Muriel Rukeyser, and of the Constructivism that Susan Howe engages with, both discussed in my previous chapter. To quote Joanna Demers again:

> [Drones] disrupt the sense that music functions as a language by calling attention to physical aspects that music usually asks us to ignore. The liminal qualities of this music—the stresses it places on the body and the attention span—all wrest music out of a reasoned, ordered plane and thrust it back into the world of objects and raw materials. (p.91)[52]

The difference in the approach of Rukeyser and the Howes to that of Young, I suggest, is their genuine, sustained effort to shed Western capitalist logics of individualism, ownership, and appropriation, and to 'meet' an other on equal, utopian ground.

Drone music is often described as 'static' because its unwavering, monotonous repetition prohibits the sense of progression or change that is usually expected from Western music; and indeed, listeners tend to mention a sense that no time is passing.[53] 'Stasis' does not fully reflect the listening experience, however. Yes, the unwavering monotony of the drone gives the impression that time is not moving forward, but it does not necessarily feel like nothing is moving. Instead, there is a sensation that might best be described as an expansion or deepening, as the listener becomes aware of different aspects of the sound and of an internal

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Michael Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernist as Anthropology,' *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.344-376 (365).
[52] Notably, Demers has also written an experimental book of essays about, among other things, the perception of apocalypse that drone facilitates: *Drone and Apocalypse: An Exhibition Catalogue for The End of The World* (London: Zero Books, 2015).
[53] See Demers, *Listening through the Noise*, 93.

dynamic within the tones, which seem to hang in harmony with each other. Accompanying this, especially when the drone is loud, is the physical sense of being approached, engulfed by the music; the sound is felt as vibrations on the skin as much as in the ears. Drone music is also often described in spiritual terms and used as an aid to meditation practice because it encourages one to follow the movement of one's own mind, and the relationship between one's mind and this monotonous external stimulant. As one enthusiast puts it (and this will recall Schaeffer's sound object):

> When it works it's because it allows a shift to occur in the listener, wherein the subject of the music becomes your own phenomenological experience. Good drone work is about the way you perceive it: how your focus shifts when a layer you didn't even notice before suddenly leaps to the forefront in a way that makes you question whether it happened in the mix or in your own mind.[54]

By making it difficult to tell whether a subtle change has occurred 'in the mix or in your own mind', and by acutely focusing one's attention on the perception of a physical stimulant, drone music gives the impression of a hazy, undefined border between self and other, between perception and reception. Walter J. Ong reminds us that however much we try 'there is no way to stop sound and have sound' but, at least in the ears of its fans, drone gives the impression of achieving the impossible stopping of sound.[55] Instead of 'having' sound, however, the experience is one of being *had* by sound, of the boundaries of the self being physically encroached upon. Drone imposes the sensation of hearing materiality detached from linear time, and of a less individualistic experience of one's surroundings in which the boundary is blurred between what is in the world and what is 'in your own mind'.[56] Howe's poetry has long reached toward non-linear understandings of materiality and toward stillness—'One must draw still', she wrote in 1993 (*BM,* p.39). As I will show in the second half of this chapter, 'Souls' involved a more explicit engagement than any of her previous work with the sensation of being occupied from the outside.

This occupation is both metaphorical and physical. To use a phrase from Aliza Shvarts' discussion of droning metal music, 'the sound bears both an imitative and intimate relation to

[54] Matt Carlson, 'Eliane Radigue and How to Make Successful Drone Music', *self-titled,* <http://www.self-titledmag.com/golden-retrievers-matt-carlson-on-eliane-radigue-and-how-to-make-successful-drone-music/> [accessed 15 November 2019].
[55] *Orality and Literacy: 30th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p.32.
[56] Carlson, 'Eliane Radigue'.

the bodies it acts upon'.[57] The play between representation and nonreferentiality is key in what follows, so it is worth restating before my close listening of Grubbs and Howe's audio pieces. This sound, which is a symbolic representation of wildness, also allows an actual re-presentation of, or at least re-focusing on, the materiality of sound and its encroachment on the apparently autonomous individual. 'True wildness is like true gold;' Howe writes, 'it will bear the trial of Dewey Decimal' (*SLT*, p.19). As well as the 'furnace' of library cataloguing systems wildness, as sonic materiality, will 'bear the trial' of being recorded, separated from its 'cause', and made acousmatic, in the nonreferential materiality of drone music and *musique concrète*. If inheritance is what Derrida described as a 'critical, selective and filtering reaffirmation', the nonreferential element of drone music allows, I contend, for at least the illusion of an unfiltered reaffirmation, in which the material of the present is not inherited from the past but shared with it. This reaffirmation aims to include what is beyond the limits of the individual perspective, what the self does not own or have recourse to.

iv: a collaborative soundscape

All landscapes are subjective re-presentations of the mass of land to which they refer. Richard Leppert defines a landscape as

> the different within the same; it is what draws attention to itself. What we define, and separate out, as a landscape appears in our consciousness as something at once "itself" and a representation of itself.[58]

'Thorow' (1990), one of two poems reworked in Susan Howe and David Grubb's first collaboration *Theifth* (2004), is concerned with and by this inevitable mediation between land and perceiver.[59] The preface describes the commercialized 'travesty' of the town of Lake George in upstate New York, which has turned into a 'simulacrum' complete with

> miniature golf course, two run-down amusement parks, a fake fort where a real one once stood, a Dairy-Mart, a Donut-land, and a four star Ramada Inn built over an

[57] 'Troubled Air: The Drone and Doom of Reproduction in SunnO)))'s Metal Maieutic', *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 24.2-3 (2014), pp.203-219 (208).
[58] 'Reading the Sonoric Landscape', *The Sound Studies Reader,* ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp.409-418 (409).
[59] Susan Howe and David Grubbs, 'Thorow', online audio recording, PennSound, <https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Grubbs.php> [accessed 9 February 2021].
'Thorow' proved the more successful of the two initial reworkings. 'Melville's Marginalia', Grubbs notes, ended up sounding like what he had hoped to avoid: a musical accompaniment to a straightforward reading. See David Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'. For an analysis of the recording of 'Melville's Marginalia', see Jessica Wilkinson, '"Out of Bounds of the Bound Margin: Susan Howe Meets Mangan in "Melville's Marginalia"', *Criticism,* 53.2 (Spring, 2011), pp.265-294.

ancient Indian burial ground. (*S*, p.367)

Held in contrast to this mirage-like town are the surrounding Adirondack mountains, in which Howe encounters a wildness that evades systems of representation and the separation involved in framing something as landscape: 'looking for what is looking, I went down into unknown regions of undifferentiation. The Adirondacks *occupied* me' (p.40). The three subsequent sections of poetry that make up 'Thorow' draw their material from the fictional wilderness of American Romanticism, especially that of Henry David Thoreau and James Fenimore Cooper.[60] The collaborative version—which took the form of a live performance and a recording, available on CD and on PennSound—draws on the same romanticised landscape. An important touchstone Howe and Grubbs established at the start of the collaboration was Howe's memory of John Cage's live reading of 'Mureau', a piece composed using words from Thoreau's *Walden*.[61] The saxophone and fluetophone sounds in the recording of 'Thorow' have been electronically altered beyond recognition, but they are taken from recordings of a flute piece from Charles Ives' *Concord* sonata, entitled 'Thoreau', that imagines Henry Thoreau playing his flute at the end of Walden pond.[62]

Due to the collaborative nature of this '*process*', to quote 'Personal Narrative', the finished piece obscures which choices were Howe's, which were Grubbs', and which came about in the space between the two (*SLT*, p.14). They began in Grubbs' apartment, with Grubbs recording Howe's 'electrifying' performance of the text.[63] Grubbs then cut and arranged the sounds according to how the notations looked on the mixing software, in 'a slow, involving, repetitive, occasionally meditative process of collaging tiny sonic elements, of scattering with deliberations and deliberateness'.[64] In the resulting piece, the sound of Howe's voice is splintered into fragments of phonemes often unrecognizable as words, and at times unrecognizable even as a voice. In some ways this process is a metaphorical translation of 'Thorow' from page to CD: Grubbs' description of 'scattering' brings to mind Howe's own earlier description of writing 'Thorow' as creating 'a scattered effect', although as Grubbs notes '"scattering" in this context is something of a metaphor, since it's a relatively

[60] See Jenny White's 'The Landscapes of Susan Howe's "Thorow"' for a discussion of the references to Cooper in the text. *Contemporary literature*, 47.2 (2006), pp.236-260. For a discussion of 'Thorow' and Thoreau, see Bloomfield, pp.677-687.
[61] Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'.
[62] Ibid. The 'fluteophone' is an instrument invented by Mats Gustaffson, who plays on the record, by merging the head of a saxophone with the body of a flute.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

slow process to place these fragments by hand'.[65] Here, too, the state of being '*occupied'* by another, described in the printed preface, is enacted by the collaboration: Howe's words are sampled, made strange by the process of—as it is described in 'Personal Narrative'—'reanimat[ion] by appropriation' (*SLT*, p.15). When the initial idea of building the collage out of Howe's voice began to seem too 'showy', Grubbs introduced *musique concrète* and slow, droning notes played on cello, baritone saxophone and fluteophone.[66] It is, I suggest, in the introduction of the non-vocal instruments that the piece starts to cover new imaginative terrain.

'Thorow' (2004) is made up of four tracks: 'Introduction', largely instrumental, followed by tracks I, II and III which correspond to the three sections of poetry in the 1990 poem. 'Introduction' plays with the figuration of landscape from its very first sound. It begins with a low, monotonous hum paired with a lighter percussive whirring sound suggestive of movement on gravel or stony terrain. The sounds increase in volume and then fade out in unison, giving the impression of an object—perhaps a motorised vehicle—approaching, passing, and then disappearing into the distance. This is repeated several times (as if several vehicles were passing by) along with a soft, rushing noise such as that of wind moving through trees, and the occasional high-pitched trilling noise like the chirping of a cricket—a sound that instantly, almost comically, tropes the still outdoors. This illusion of an open landscape is subtly undermined when one of the low humming sounds is cut short abruptly, instead of slowly fading out towards the aural horizon. The gravelly sound then begins to seem more like the rushing of water, making the imaginary materials of the soundscape more equivocal. Suddenly we cannot quite make sense of the space we are hearing; the ground begins to slip from underneath us. After several seconds of silence, we hear two notes on a saxophone, more conventionally musical, that seem to herald the entrance of a theatrical character, and a series of clipped sounds with a cadence that initially evokes the patter of feet. Soon enough the electric quality of these elements becomes more pronounced, and the patter almost sounds like the zip of a scratching record, suggestive of the action of replaying, plastifying time. Once again, what was audible as a realistic space is made to sound like an impossible, imaginary, even multitemporal stage. The rushing and humming return, now sharing airtime with these less 'natural', more obviously electronic sounds, leading the piece

[65] Keller interview, p.9. Grubbs, 'Shadow Hush Twilight'.
[66] Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'.

further from something that could be visualised as one coherent location, toward a multidimensional sonic landscape.

When Howe's voice first enters this scene, it is with a phoneme cut so minutely that it takes a moment to recognise it as a voice at all, especially as it is accompanied by a short hiss that is not vocal but could almost be. The words of Craig Dworkin are relevant here, from an essay about stuttering published in a volume he co-edited in which Howe's 'Personal Narrative' first appeared: 'When speech continues without communicating anything, when speech intransitively reaches the limit at which its communication becomes silent, we can hear the body speak'.[67] Of course, by the very fact of their appearing on a sound file, all of these sounds have been electronically mediated and manipulated, and the organizing intelligence that can be sensed in this piece is less that of a 'speaker' whose voice we hear, and more that of the sound engineer who has selected and arranged the material. Still, while some of the sounds are, to quote Grubbs, 'acousmatic—abstract in the sense of being divorced from the recognition of their sources', many of them are still automatically heard as a human voice speaking words. The result is a strange overdetermination in which the distinction between 'human' and 'nonhuman' is less relevant than that between symbolic meaning, and linguistically unmarked sonic material. The first vocal fragments are pieces of the words 'drisk / islet / neck batteau' from the final section of 'Thorow' (1990) but they do not present themselves as such. They sound on initial hearing like unmarked material. We might think of the 'Thorow's description of sinking into 'unknown regions of undifferentiation'. Howe's keenly exact pronunciation, coupled with the intensely precise, razor-sharp editing, gives the sense of her words being made up of tiny, separable events of friction, breath, movement, vibration. There are some more barely perceptible words in this track, and I will return to them shortly. For now, what is important is the way that the edges of the singular voice are spliced, or perhaps alloyed, with the surrounding material (not automatically understood as coming from a human 'source') through a process of collaborative electronic mediation. This is what makes it possible for the piece to be both a figurative rendering and a literal enactment of Howe's own memory of pieces of sound seeming to come simultaneously from her own voice and from elsewhere.

[67] 'The Stutter of Form', *The Sound of Poetry, The Poetry of Sound* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.166-183 (167).

Tracks I and II consist of relatively straightforward renditions of the printed sections I and II, alongside long, low drones, whirring noises, and other sounds. Track I opens with Howe's voice, unaccompanied for the first page of the poem. The voice is then joined by percussive whirring noises, and slight shuffling sounds that suggest movement. The first lines of the third page are half obscured by the overlaying of words from a line of prose from the preface: 'Let myself drift in the rise and fall of light and snow re-reading, re-tracing once-upon'. In the recording this becomes: 're-tracing … onceupon … rise and fall of light and snow'. A low, gentle note, likely from a cello, chimes with the next lines:

> When ice breaks up
> at the farthest north
> of Adirondack peaks

The cello sound continues as an unbroken accompaniment to Howe's voice for almost the entirety of Track I, sometimes joined by rushing sounds and a drone of a slightly higher pitch. In Track II the two saxophone notes heard in the introduction are repeated throughout to mesmerising, soporific effect. There are drones in this track too, this time intermittent, stopping for several lines and then appearing again as if to differentiate some of the words from others. In the first sequence, for example, the note accompanies the spoken poem up until 'slipping back to primordial / We go through the word Forest' (*S*, p.49). The note stops abruptly at 'the word Forest', and then the next words are played to silence:

> Trance of an encampment
> not a foot of land cleared
>
> The literature of savagism
> under a spell of savagism

The drone returns after these lines, giving them the impression of reaching a brief clearing.

In his monograph on sound art, Brandon LaBelle writes that 'sound as relational phenomena immediately operates through modes of spatiality'.[68] As I have described, the audio recording of 'Thorow' plays explicitly with sound's capacity to conjure (imaginary) spaces. It also makes apparent the 'relational' nature of this space, especially in Track III. In

[68] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p.xiii.

keeping with the increased fragmentation of the printed section III, this track involves much more of the verbal splicing that makes the sounds linguistically indiscernible—Grubbs' initial 'scattering' technique. Unlike in the printed version, here we do not have to decide how to navigate seemingly haphazard clusters of words, but instead listen to Howe reading an order that becomes, in her reading of it, the definitive sequence (in the live performances, too, Howe takes the same route through the scattered each time, suggesting less a knot of disorder than a labyrinth with a coherent through route). Now, however, although the sequence has been fixed, what disorientates are the multiple recordings of Howe's voice played at once, along with inanimate whirring and droning sounds. In the case of the sound file, the listener's active contribution to the poem is not sequential but spatial. In the onslaught of overlaid sounds, many recognisable as voices, the listener chooses what to focus on—although perhaps 'chooses' is too strong a word for ear's attuning that happens when one tries, automatically, to pick a thread of words out from what one is hearing. In this instinctive selection, the listener delegates some sounds to the 'foreground' and others to the 'background', thus imagining the dimensions that the sounds fill. The careful 'translation' of the poem from page to audiofile, then, places the listener into a role not of pathfinding, but of space-making. Here, listening builds not a line through the words, but rather the soundscape in which they occur; the listener participates, we might say, in the 'Trance of an encampment / not a foot of land cleared'.

As mentioned, the time-based nature of sound files means that the recorded poem has a definition in sequence that the print version lacks. The audio recording technology undermines this inevitable linearity, however, by leading the trail back on itself. It is possible to hear the same vocal phonemes that sounded at the beginning of 'Introduction' reappearing at the end of Track III. The first time around, the sounds from the opening will likely have been forgotten by the time they articulate intelligible words in Track III. If one replays the record, however, the sounds that were mostly only dimly perceptible as a speaking body in 'Introduction' are retrospectively filled with linguistic meaning. In Track III's 're-tracing' they are part of two verses from the penultimate page of section III [figure 11]:

> You are of me & I of you, I cannot tell
> Where you leave off and I begin (p.58)

In 'Introduction' the words 'you are of me' and '& I of you' are played at the same time, so that both are obscured, although 'you are of me' is just about discernible. Amidst more

whirring sounds, one hears 'cannot', and then '& I begi—', which is cut off by a hissing sound that might be from Howe's voice. When they are replayed in section III, it is at another moment of perceived clearing: the inanimate drones, clicks, and dragging sounds fade out so that by the time the voice gets to '& I of you' it is speaking without obvious interference, editing, or overlaying to distract from the words. The lines are almost the only words to be repeated in the recording more times than they appear in the text (the other extra repetitions appear on the same page: 'Premis' and 'strict', from the phrase 'strict counterpoint'). What is heard as almost entirely unintelligible, even nonvocal, in 'Introduction' is given meaning by the larger dynamic of the poem, becoming a kind of type, in the Puritan sense: the structure of the piece makes and fulfils its own prophesy. 'Introduction' is retro-actively explained by section III, and the dense, fractured, and disorientating experience of listening to section III seems slightly more recognizable, coherent, because of the order that repetition brings: the relationship between them brings shape to something that previously seemed formless. The process of recording and replaying gives the impression of a discrete, self-contained dynamic in which nonreferential material and symbolic meaning are suspended in balance. Brilliantly, too, this dynamic also allows the same sounds to be heard as both nonreferential material (when they are heard in 'Introduction') and as a speaking voice ('when they are replayed in Track III); the sound file thus enacts a 'simulation of a speaking presence' similar to that which Edward Allen has noted in the later *Souls* (p.414).

In his comparison of the printed and audio versions of 'Thorow', Will Montgomery also observes a move toward self-contained balance in the recording, effected by what he calls the 'demotion' of the prose introduction to the handful of phrases inserted, in fractured, partial form, into sections I and II.[69] He argues convincingly that this demotion 'returns the poem to itself', and a signals a 'theoretical distance' from the polemic stance of the preface (pp.740-741). The original introduction, Montgomery posits, places the pre-colonial Americas (figured as a utopian, virgin terrain) in opposition to the distinct but related forces of modernity, patriarchy and colonialism in a way that conflates the three but says little about any of them. Without the prose introduction, Montgomery suggests, the poem is a more subtle, complex interrogation of the impulse in Anglo-American literature toward the primitive, unsoiled wilderness. As Montgomery notes briefly, the preface has not been

[69] 'Appropriating Primal Indeterminacy: Language, Landscape and Postmodern Poetics in Susan Howe's *Thorow', Textual Practice* 20.4, (2006), pp.739-757 (740).

entirely erased: some phrases from it appear in the following sections. The words that have been kept are as follows, with some sentences filled out for context:

> in the rise and fall of light and snow, re-reading, re-tracing once-upon
>
> I thought I stood on the shores [of a history of the world where] forms of wildness [brought up by memory] become desire [and multiply].
>
> looking for what is looking
>
> [Work] penetrated by edge of author, traverses multiplicities, [light letters] exploding apprehension suppose when individual hearing.
>
> Every name [driving will be as another rivet in the machine of] a universe flux
>
> (pp.40-41)

I do not think that the integration of these phrases into the body of the poetry amounts to a 'demotion', as such, but rather another process of tempering, of 'reanimat[ion] by appropriation', to quote Howe's 'Personal Narrative'. With these fragments the sound piece leaves behind some of the slightly outdated rhetoric of the introduction, but it bears forth the parts that are most hopeful of a connection, most open to the chance of a brush with wildness.

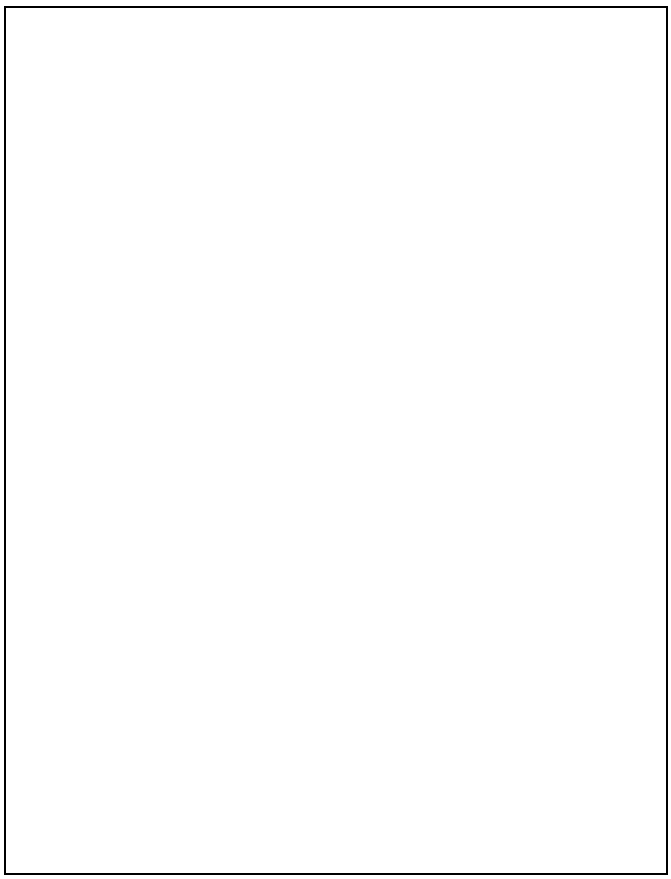


Figure 11: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *Singularities*, p.58

Montgomery is right to say that the collaboration works 'as an integrated aural unit' thanks to Grubbs' 'drone-based, sonic sculpture', but he makes very little mention of the 'Introduction' or of the *musique concrète* in the piece. The sonic elements, he suggests, can be understood as the 'under-thought' (a word from 'Thorow') to Howe's fractured wordplay.[70] He concedes that this is rather too literal an interpretation, and indeed, to categorize it as such, especially using the vocabulary of the poem itself, implies that what the sound brings to the piece can ultimately be absorbed into the system of language. But that is just what recorded sound allows the poem: a way to encompass that which cannot be thought in words—to include the semiotic or nonreferential part of the medium (one definition of *musique concrete* is 'recorded natural sounds […] composed using the medium itself').[71] In its undermining of the distinction between the 'natural' and the mediated; and in its active, self-reflective simulation of both landscape and human voice, the piece aspires to 'work penetrated by the edge of author', and interrogates and reconsiders the impulse toward a utopian unsoiled wilderness that Montgomery writes about—not to dismiss it but, rather, to try again (p.40).

The recorded 'Thorow' does not suggest that the raw, material of the wilderness can be translated into words but it does give the impression that it may be incorporated into a larger constellation by using sonic material that is simultaneously representational and nonreferential. The drone sounds, which seem to fill in the gaps and make the air tangibly thicker, complete the alienated subject by returning it to an imaginary space of wholeness. They act as a 'strict counterpoint' to the impenetrable words of the poem, not by elucidating their meaning but by holding them in a fixed dynamic (*S*, p.59). It is an 'electric' process that produces a pragmatically 'religious' binding together of thought and object, materiality and representation, self and other, and, most importantly for what is to follow, past and present.

v: monumental air

We come at last to the title sequence of *Souls of the Labadie Tract,* the section that Howe and Grubbs later reworked in their second collaboration, and that, as we will see, responds to

[70] Montgomery, p.741; *S*, p.53.
[71] Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.77.

Grubbs' music.[72] 'Souls of the Labadie Tract' opens with a short prose preface introducing the poems as a homage to the Labadists, the 'utopian Quietist sect' who 'held all property in common (including children)' (*SLT,* p.23). Jason Lagapa argues that reading 'Souls of the Labadie Tract' through the lens of negative theology makes possible a 'resuscitation' of the failed Labadist project, if the poem is read as a 'negative image of the promise of utopia'.[73] Negative, or apophatic, theology holds that although language is inadequate for describing the divinity of God, by using words to represent what God is not, it is possible to closer approximate what God is. This perceivable but inarticulable element amounts, I suggest, to the same 'search for nonreferential materials' at the heart of drone. I will add to Lagapa's argument by saying that in 'Souls', in a way that is both metaphorical and sensory, this perceivable, inarticulable element is made material and collective by its the evocation of music. This is Moten's 'second iconicity': not simply a representation of collectivity but a representation of the experience of it.

Howe describes the failure of the Labadist project using a vocabulary of diffusion: 'the community dissolved', she notes; by 1727, according to one source, they were 'all scattered and gone' (p.24). It seems, however, that traces of them remain in the land and the systems used to represent it: a map of Maryland from 1795 notes a '"lappadee poplar" at the northern extremity of the Labadie Tract […] the only tree singled out on the entire map of the state' (p.24). Howe's evocation of the Labadists amounts, I propose, to re-articulation of their non-linear familial geneaology and their abolition of patrilinear inheritance and ownership in favour of the dispersal of material in the present. The poems that follow the preface are an attempt to create a sonic utopia that incorporates nonreferential material without claiming ownership of it, that exists in the composite, communal space between the body and the world, where 'I cannot tell / Where you leave off and I begin' (*S,* p.59). Between the preface and the poems is a page with a single quotation from the Stevens' poem 'The Hand as a Being': 'The wind had seized the tree and ha, and ha,'.[74] The repeated 'ha' is both a representation of a laugh, and a performance cue, a direction to expel air from the mouth. In 'Souls of the Labadie Tract' sound creates a representation of an imaginary utopian space,

[72] Susan Howe and David Grubbs, 'Souls of the Labadie Tract', online audio recording, *PennSound* <https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Howe/Howe-Susan-and-David-Grubbs_Souls-of-the-Labadie-Tract_Southbank-Centre_London_10-8-09.mp3> [accessed 13 March 2021].
[73] *Negative Theology and Utopian Thought in Contemporary American Poetry* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p.15. For the influence of negative theology on Howe's earlier work, especially *The Non-Conformist's Memorial*, see Montgomery, *The Poetry of Susan Howe,* pp.43-53.
[74] Stevens, *Collected Poems,* p.271. Quoted in *SLT,* p.25.

but it also gives the impression of having 'nonreferential meaning'; sound, again, is what allows for a pragmatist binding of the materiality of the world and the systems used to describe and understand it.

The poems in 'Souls' are all between five and eight lines, and each sits squarely in the middle of its own page, boxy margins echoing those of the paper. Howe had recently been to her uncle's funeral in the Quaker graveyard in Blackrock, Dublin, and she described 'Souls' to Grubbs as a 'graveyard poem', the squat, rectangular lyrics standing in for tombstones.[75] The opening poem reads:

> Indifferent truth and trust
> am in you and of you air
> utterance blindness of you
>
> That we are come to that
> Between us here to know
> Things in the perfect way (p.27)

There are echoes in the second line of the refrain whose repetition brought internal order to the audio collaboration of 'Thorow': 'you are of me & I of you, I cannot tell / Where you leave off and I begin'. (Another extra word in 'Thorow', 'strict', shows up later in 'Souls', too.) Here the phrase has been distilled to 'am in you and of you'. The absence of 'I' makes the separation between speaker and addressee more difficult to define, suggesting not just an overlap but a more complete state of intimate undifferentiation: a 'blindness' of you that comes from not being able to separate 'you' from the perceiving subject. The second stanza envisions a kind of utopic ('perfect') meeting apparently made possible by 'that / Between us here', a mottled in-between space that 'we' have come to. This is not an exchange or transaction but the meeting of two entities who have become diffuse. Like Howe's recollection of getting lost in the landscape in 'Thorow' ('the Adirondacks *occupied* me'), it is a kind of ceding of the edges of oneself to something else. In this it could also be a version of the 'Consent' to severality that I described in *The Liberties*—except that, crucially, here there is no sense of futurity or continuation of the family line. It also seems to be a temporal blurring: the echoing between 'Souls' and 'Thorow' brings a kind of intimacy to the two pieces across time, one fusing with the other in the *process*. If this sonic material is a re-

[75] Grubbs, 'Shadowy Hush Twilight'.

articulation of previous articulations, union with ‘you’ becomes a nonlinear diffusion into other times. It is an attempt to join with those that went before, not by receiving something from them, or returning to the past, but by meeting them in the utopic timeless union that repetition allows, in which occupying another is not an act of oppression or extraction but a sharing of space. It is ‘Thorow’’s ‘trance of an encampment’ created by sound; this encampment does not take the place of a previous culture, however, but meets it ‘in the perfect way’.

These stanzas rework two late Wallace Stevens poems that also enact idyllic reunions. The first is ‘Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour’ (that Joan Richardson’s book fell open on).[76] This poem describes an unmistakably pragmatist ‘thought’ in which ‘we collect ourselves, / Out of all the indifferences, into one thing’. As is often the case with Stevens, the other with which the speaker is joined is a beloved, feminine ‘paramour’. Their union (‘intensest rendezvous’) means complete knowledge of the world, an escape from the ego and the apprehension of an interconnectedness resembling Seremetakis’ ‘meta-narrative’: ‘the obscurity of an order, a whole, / A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous’.[77] Stevens’ poem ends with the following lines:

> Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
> We make a dwelling in the evening air,
> In which being there together is enough.

The word ‘air’ appears in the same position as in Howe’s poem, at the end of the second line in the stanza, following the gentle rhyme of two short phrases (‘dwelling […] evening’). In Howe’s version, though, the preceding amphibrach phrases create a more prominent internal rhythm (‘am in you and of you’) so that ‘air’ hangs oddly on its own, not balanced by the preceding vowel sound as it is by ‘make’ in the Stevens poem. Instead, Howe’s ‘air’ cleaves more naturally to the start of the next line, so ‘air / utterance blindness’ is grouped together before the ‘of you’ closes the stanza by bringing us back to the sounds of the previous line (and this grouping is supported by Howe’s recorded reading of the poem in the CD version). I read ‘air / utterance blindness’ as the experience of listening acousmatically, the ‘blindness’ to any visual source allowing the sound to become ‘pieces in the air there’ with which one can tangibly connect.

[76] Stevens, *Collected Poems*, p.524.
[77] Seremetakis, p.14.

The phrase ‘air / utterance blindness’ draws on another Stevens poem that further aligns the acousmatic experience with Stevens’ desired union of imagination and reality, knowledge and embodied experience. ‘Souls of Women at Night’—which Howe cites as the initial provocation for her poem—is written from the perspective of a woman who, ‘being invisible’, has come to a harmony with surrounding nature.[78] In this state of perfect union ‘nothing has been lost, / Sight least, but metaphysical blindness gained.’ ‘Metaphysical blindness’ is a state ‘in which seeing would be false’. In a manner that chimes with the logic of negative theology and with the importance given by practitioners of *musique concrète* to acousmatic sound, the absence of sight allows for a different mode of knowledge or awareness of something that cannot be seen. This speaker also imagines a somewhat sexual ‘rendezvous’ in which the senses cannot be distinguished from each other or from a detached intellect:

> Or is it I that, wandering, know, one-sensed,
> Not one of the five, and keep a rendezvous,
> Of the loftiest amour, in a human midnight?

Edward Allen reads in the other appearance of ‘air’, a few lines later in the ‘Souls’, ‘a breathable atmosphere, but also an environment laced with music’ (p.419). I will discuss that passage shortly, but for now I want to add that the same can be applied to this ‘air’. Following Allen, I suggest that these poems present sound as a kind of embodied communion with a grainy, musical materiality. The ‘air’ in this line is Stevens’ ‘evening air’ in which imagination and reality are one, as well as ‘air’ as in oxygen, music, wind, quality of atmosphere. It is also, I add, ‘air’ as in performance (in the sense of outward appearance or manner); ‘air’ as in airwaves, the medium through which radio communications are broadcast; and finally, ‘air’ filled with sonic particles, as in the almost solid, physical experience of plastified sound that occurs when listening to drone. It is, in all these combined ways, air’s materiality that makes it possible to ‘know / Things’ in an embodied, holistic ‘perfect way’.

Grubbs’ music was dispersed into ‘Souls’. During a seminar with Grubbs at Royal Holloway University of London she recounted how, during and after their first collaboration, Grubbs sent her several records, mostly by minimalist composers such as Morton Feldman

[78] *Collected Poems,* p.458; Royal Holloway Seminar.

and Charles Ives, along with some of his own work.[79] Having previously listened to music only very rarely while writing, she started to play Grubbs' records as she wrote, letting the 'music, in a way, take over what [she] was writing'—almost as if she were breathing it in as she wrote; as if she were, to echo 'Thorow', *occupied* by it.[80] As she recalled during the seminar, the most influential piece of music for *Souls*—which 'guided and led' the text—was *The Harmless Dust* (2005), a record by Grubbs and cellist Nikos Veliotis, who also played on *Theifth.*[81] It was *The Harmless Dust*, Howe recalled, that 'shaped the arc' of *Souls* so that the poems were—and this phrase perhaps epitomises Howe's model of artistic influence—'a collaboration before collaborating'.

The Harmless Dust consists of two tracks separated by a 30-second silence. In the first 17-minute track a steady, almost unbroken stream of layered cello notes is intermittently punctuated by single piano chords. The subtly reverberating hum of the cello absorbs any forward momentum and the lapse between each piano chord is such that it is difficult to conceive of a melodic development. Instead, each chord fades out leaving the drone of the cello to come to the fore again before the next sounds, so that with each chord it is oddly difficult to remember the previous. This is disconcerting for some, such as Andrew Culler who described Grubbs' piano as 'lazy':

> His chords are dull; their procession does not take up any progressive interval; they are almost superfluous here, where with Connors [in a previous collaboration] they were brilliant counterpoint.[82]

For Culler, the combination of piano and cello does not cohere into counterpoint because of a lack of development in intervals (the variation in pitch between two tones). But the lack of development is not necessarily a failing for this same reason: the piece is headily disorientating, engulfing the listener in its disjointed limbo, the intervals suspended. It is, to quote from the opening pages of 'Souls', a sense of something

> Either late or soon

[79] Royal Holloway Seminar.
[80] Ibid.
[81] David Grubbs and Nikos Veliotos, *The Harmless Dust* (Headz, 2005) [on CD]. Veliotos' work includes a multimedia project that is conceptually relevant here. In *Cello Powder,* the sonic range of a cello was divided up into 100 quarter tones, each one recorded and played together in an hour-long drone, while the cello used in the recording was turned to powder and bottled.
[82] Andrew Culler, 'David Grubbs & Nikos Veliotos, "The Harmless Dust"', *Brainwashed* blog, <http://brainwashed.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=411&Itemid=64> [accessed 3 November 2019].

Calling out intervals
One after the other (p.32)

The double meaning of 'interval' here provides a useful model for the process of spatialization that is central to the experience of listening to drone music: forward progression is replaced by a thickening of sonic texture, so that what might have initially been a temporal relation becomes, in the mind of the listener, the almost spatial visualisation that occurs in the mind's eye when trying to imagine the difference between two notes.

Between the two tracks there is a 30-second pause that Howe called a 'caesura' at the Royal Holloway seminar, suggesting that the silence was a locus for transformation.[83] 'Caesuras', she said, 'have a dark and light face'. And indeed, the tone of the second piece is markedly different. Grubbs plays the Hammond organ and Veliotos the e-bowed piano, and this time both instruments drone simultaneously to create a layered, engulfing effect. The sounds of the Hammond organ have a grandiose quality that accentuates the expansive, deepening effect of the drone. Culler describes this second track in notably material, spatial terms in his review. He writes that it is a departure from the 'anxious momentum' of the first piece to a more stable, almost concrete stasis, the organ creating 'slabs of waxy warm noise'.[84] Veliotos' low drones are not so much a foil for Grubbs' shorter notes here; instead, both instruments come to the fore by turns, seeming at times to blend into each other. In this we might say that it was more integrated than the first track. Because the sound of the organ (usually played at high volume) does not drown out that of the e-bowed piano, it sounds further away, and as if playing in a large, still, churchlike space. The tone is ecclesiastical, almost awe-struck. It gives a sense of what Howe, in 'Souls', calls 'distant diapason delight':

I'll borrow chapel voices
Song and dance of treble
bass for remembrance Stilt-
Walker Plate-Spinner air
piebaldly dressed heart's
content embroidered note
Distant diapason delight (p.31)

[83] Royal Holloway Seminar.
[84] Culler, 'David Grubbs & Nikos Veliotos, "The Harmless Dust"'.

The word ‘diapason’ can refer to an interval of one octave, the combination of notes into a harmonious concord, or the principal pipes in an organ. Here, I suggest, the word situates the poem in the minimalist soundscape of *The Harmless Dust*’s second track. This is the ‘air’ that Allen notes has a musical quality, and it shares with the earlier ‘air’ its position at the end of a line and in the centre of a stanza, rhythmically apart from the slight rhymes in the phrases preceding. When this musical ‘air’ is read as a repetition of that one, it too takes on a thick, mottled grain. I propose that this ‘air’ is not only music in general but the still, dusty, ‘chapel’ air of Grubbs and Veliotis’ soundscape.

The carnivalesque scene in Howe’s poem might seem at odds with the minimalist simplicity of *The Harmless Dust,* but it is in line with her characterization of the second track as a dramatic space, as if the droning notes that bleed in and out were characters in a theatrical performance. For Howe it is a piece ‘which has no empty clichés or flourishes, and in which figures take turns picking up lines, passages mirror each other’.[85] Allen traces the words in this seven-line block to Thomas Campion’s *The Lord Hay’s Masque* from 1607, and Campion’s masque brings another hint of genealogical heritage to this fusion.[86] It was written to celebrate the marriage of James Hay (a Scottish nobleman favoured by King James VI) and Honora Denny, daughter of the Earl of Norwich.[87] In the overlay of the masque onto the backdrop of *The Harmless Dust,* we might think of the scene in ‘Souls’ as the ceremonial performance of a union, but pared back, simplified to the barest components: the making of an alloy from two substances. Again, in ‘air’, the drone of the organ is both music and matter, a site in which disparate, ‘piebald’ elements are defused together in a performance of harmony.

The festivities in the stanza have a distinctly macabre edge, however. Instead of looking forward to a new generation this ceremony leads to the past—or, at least, to the material remains of past generations in the present; it is a ‘graveyard poem’, after all. As well as the burial place of Howe’s uncle, the text incorporates another by way of *The Harmless Dust,* also a graveyard piece. The album’s title is taken from a ‘Sepulture South: Gaslight’, a story by William Faulkner written in response to a series of Walker Evans photographs of the

[85] Royal Holloway Seminar.
[86] Allen, 59; *The Masque at Lord Hay’s Marriage* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1973).
[87] See David Lindley, ‘Campion's “Lord Hay's Masque” and Anglo-Scottish Union’, *Huntingdon Library Quarterly,* 43.1 (Winter 1979), pp.1-11.

Wooldridge Monument in the Maplewood Cemetery, Mayfield, KY [Figure 12].[88] The photograph depicts a fenced-off formation of evenly spaced stone figures, all standing and facing the same direction. The statues—eighteen in all—are aptly known locally as 'The Strange Procession Which Never Moves'.[89] In Faulkner's story a narrator recalls his grandfather's funeral procession and imagines performing the same ritual when his father dies. Grubbs also quotes the story's last lines in 'Family Plot, Mayfield Kentucky', a song he wrote for The Wingdale Community Singers, a neo-folk band he plays in.[90] Faulkner's story ends as the narrator recalls returning periodically to look at the family plot,

> stained now, a little darkened by time and weather and endurance but still serene, impervious, remote, gazing at nothing, not like sentinels, not defending the living from the dead by means of their vast ton-measured weight and mass, but rather the dead from the living; shielding instead the vacant and dissolving bones, the harmless and defenseless dust, from the anguish and grief and inhumanity of mankind. (p.455)

The statues 'shield' the 'dissolving' dead from the crush of history and the painful passage of time endured by the living. Instead, the dead are allowed to be 'harmless and defenseless dust'—to be remains, to remain matter in the present. In 'Souls' and *The Harmless Dust,* however, it is possible to imagine a kind of deathly, timeless chorus of 'chapel voices', not shielded from the work of the living but 'dispersed' (to use Howe's description of the Labadists) in the thick air of the drone. The impression of solidity and stasis formed by the 'slabs' of drone makes for the creation of a kind of sonic monument—the 'cloth and choir of slate' mentioned later in 'Souls'—that will represent a place of stillness, detached from the continuous forward motion of linear time, but also actually *be* one (p.56). The heavy, droning 'slabs' are, I argue, another example of Elizabeth Freeman's concept of 'temporal drag' mentioned in Chapter One: they are a means of evading patrilineal structures of inheritance by 'forcing the present to touch its own disavowed past or seemingly outlandish possible future'.[91] The past is not bequeathed to the living here; it remains present in the bodies that have turned to dust, and in the particles or pieces that float in the air.

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[88] 'Sepulture South: Gaslight', *The Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Random House, 1979), pp.449-455; Walker Evans, '[Family Plot, Mayfield KY]', *Metropolitan Museum Online Collection* <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/284603> [accessed 19 February 2021].
[89] 'Mayfield at a Glance', *Kentucky Monthly,* 9.3 (Mar 2006), p.31.
[90] The Wingdale Community Singers, 'Family Plot, Mayfield Kentucky', *The Wingdale Community Singers,* (Plain Recordings, 2005) [on CD].
[91] *Time Binds,* p.78.

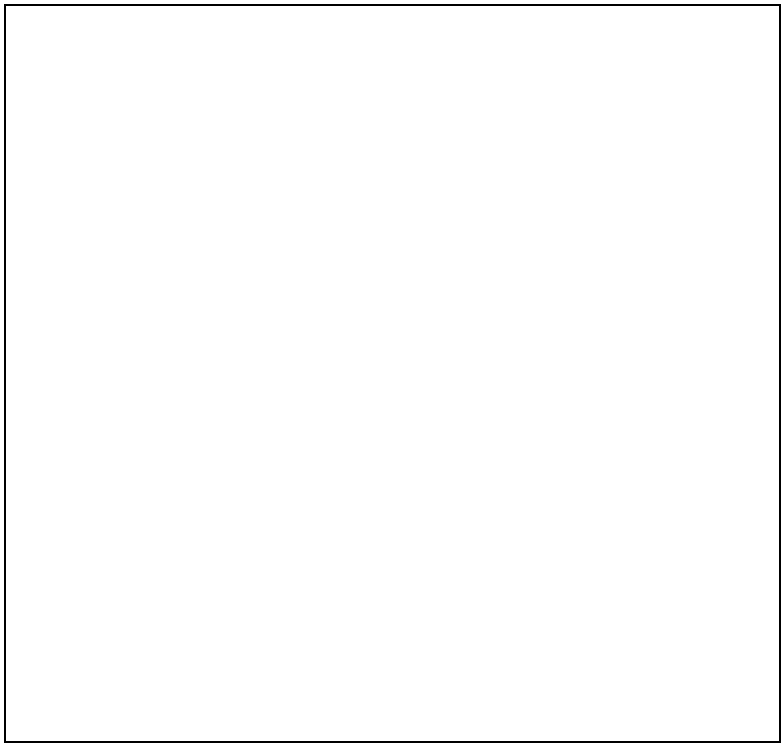


Figure 12: [redacted for copyright reasons] Walker Evans, Family Plot, Mayfield Kentucky, 1947, film negative, Metropolitan Museum, New York

Snippets from Allan Ludwig's *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols* amplify the depiction of the transformation from raw material to something monumental but 'still in the air' (*BM*, p.172).[92] Take, for example:

> truth of the Truth near as you
> can assume cut from the hard
> dark slate of Pin Hill Quarry (p.63)

The second and third verses quoted have been taken from Ludwig's description of a gravestone 'created with limited means out of the hard dark slates of the Pin Hill quarries' (p.373). The monument, Jacques Rancière writes, is 'the thing that talks without words, that instructs us without intending to instruct us, that bears a memory through the very fact of having cared only for the present'.[93] Because of the repetitive, dragging quality of the electronic production, in *The Harmless Dust* sound goes through a process of carving, through which a monument is made from raw, sonic material. *The Harmless Dust,* to which

[92] *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), p.373.
[93] *Figures of History,* trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p.22.

‘Souls’ is responding, is, I propose, somewhere between a representation of a graveyard and an attempt at an actual, sonic monument. This monument is (to quote Steintrager and Chow’s description of a sound object) ‘in part machine-made; in part, a construct of iterative perception’.[94] In contrast to Schaeffer’s sound object, however, *this* sonic object attempts to remain connected to a place, and to the dead in that place, through a *process* of representation involving Moten’s ‘second iconicity’.[95] The physical experience of meaning (‘the supplement of description that allows description’, to quote Moten again) is, in ‘Souls’, the ‘truth of the Truth’ that drone the monument possible: the sensation of an interconnected state outside the symbolic logic of the individual subject. Like a sedimentary rock composed of tiny particles of minerals, rocks and organic material, the drone creates the impression of physical contact with the sonic remains from times past, tiny ‘pieces still in the air there’. The poem just quoted continues:

> Now turn to the other side just
> Here in the other angle yes yes
> we’ve been dying to show you

‘Souls’ imagines material made from sonic ‘pieces’ of what has gone before, allowing the past to become dust in the present.

As in *The Liberties* and ‘Sorting Facts’, ‘Souls’ laments the inevitable loss that occurs when an experience is articulated using a system of reference; the poem is sensitive to ‘you predestined / to remain obscure’ (p.38). In the terms of Peirce’s category theory, this nonreferential experience could be classed as Firstness, the absorbed embodied ‘free’ experience that disappears when one becomes aware of it and automatically tries to categorize it. ‘Firstness’, Peirce writes, ‘is that which is such as it is positively and regardless of anything else.’[96] Firstness gives way to Secondness when undifferentiated feeling becomes the awareness of a specific singularity, a discrete ‘this’, understood in contrast to all which is not ‘this’. Thirdness, in turn, is the interpretation of ‘this’ in relation to systems of signs or representation—in language. ‘Souls’ suggests that undifferentiated Firstness can be maintained, given nonlinguistic articulation, in the stretching of the present that drone music produces:

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[94] Steintrager and Chow, p.8.
[95] Moten, *In the Break*, p.92.
[96] *The Essential Peirce*, p.267.

> Analyze duration as you
> wish to the world we are
> from this moment forth (p.40)

To refer to Howe's words that opened this chapter ('it's the articulation that represents life') it is the drone's strangely inarticulate articulation, which is always a re-articulation, that (re)presents life.

Aliza Shvarts has helpfully described this process in a discussion of the 'drone doom metal' music of the band SunnO))), in terms that will resonate with my discussion of the effaced maternal in *The Liberties.* Shvarts describes the 'reproduction' that occurs in drone music as 'not a metaphor, but a material persistence or sustenance in time […] the physical process of engaging extended time'.[97] Schvarts describes a feminized, nonlinguistic, and uncategorized material that is a necessary condition for the creation of art, but lost in the process of transformation *into* art (p.205). In the language of Howe's headstone poem quoted above, we might call it that which has been 'dying to show you' (p.63). This is the underacknowledged labour of reproduction and the time that such labour takes—what Lisa Baraitser calls 'maintenance time'.[98] Baraitser describes 'maintenance' as

> durational practices that keep 'things' going; objects, selves, systems, hopes, ideals, networks, communities, relationships, institutions. These durational practices are forms of labour that maintain the material conditions of ourselves and others, maintain connections between people, people and things, things and things, people and places, and social and public institutions, along with the anachronistic ideals that often underpin them, and that constitute the systems of sustenance and renewal that support 'life'. (p.49)

I suggest after Shvarts that drone music, the defining characteristic of which is its duration, makes felt the maintenance and sustenance of 'connections between people, people and things, things and things'.

For Shvarts, the indeterminate mass of SunnO)))'s drone articulates and subverts the subordination of matter to intellect at the centre of Western art; it does so in a way that is not simply representational but physical, in that the overpoweringly loud drone sounds are felt as vibrations on the body. Shvarts proposes that this process complicates a *maieutic* mode of artistic creation. 'Maieutic' derives from the ancient Greek for 'obstetric' and is understood

[97] Shvarts, p.217.
[98] Baraitser, *Enduring Time*, pp,52-54.

in the Platonic philosophical tradition as a mode of intellectual 'midwifery', whereby a person's 'innate' ideas are drawn out, crystalized, via Socractic dialectic inquiry. The word is particularly useful for Shvarts because of a long intellectual tradition it is associated with, in which the labour of reproduction is employed as a metaphor for intellectual production, feminized body both objectified and erased by its transformation into metaphor. 'The maieutic in Plato', she writes,

> marks a site of erasure that continues to bear on how we understand bodily and intellectual deliveries as distinct from one another […] one where the reproductive capacity of the female body is transmogrified into the reproductive capacity of the male voice […] SunnO)))'s music—as a sonic mode of inquiry—delivers an entombed specter of reproduction that conditions aesthetic, ethical, and economic configurations of value historically produced as 'innate'. In this sense, SunnO))) posit a metal maieutic that deals in necromancy, in satanic birth: it does not deliver something new, but perversely and diabolically brings something back. (p.206)

Shvarts paraphrases Fred Moten's distinction—in an article on the history of 'black pathology', or the rhetorical value of Blackness as emptiness or lack—between 'the object (which counterposes the subject) and the thing (which exists in apposition to their relation)'.[99] When the thing becomes an 'object' subordinated by a subject, Moten writes, something escapes, some 'troubled air [...] the air of the thing that escapes enframing'.[100] It is this 'troubled air' that Shvarts proposes can be perceived but not captured in the live experience of SunnO)))'s drone. Crucially, the artists in SunnO))) do not necessarily attempt to escape this paradigm, but for Shvarts their drones enable the apprehension of the raw material from which art is constructed, separate from authorial intention; the material escapes the 'enframing' of the artistic process even as it remains in the artwork.

This nonreferential material, unloosed from authorial intention but nonetheless emerging 'from this moment forth', is the air that 'Souls' repeatedly tries to grab a hold of. The music of *The Harmless Dust* does not give the impression of abrasive satanic torment or make for the intensely physical, almost painful experience fundamental to a SunnO))) concert; but, as a sonic monument, it does occupy the space that 'shields' the dust of the dead from the 'anguish' of the living. Nor is it 'doom metal' per se but, historically situated affiliations of genre aside, both words would be appropriate descriptors for the music that *Souls* responds to and re-imagines. It is 'metal' in its conceptual engagement with the furnace and the forging

[99] Quoted in Shvarts, p.215.
[100] Moten, 'The Case of Blackness', *Criticism,* 50.2 (2008), pp.177-218 (182).

of an alloy from composite materials; it is ‘doom’ in its escape from patrilineal futurity into timelessness and eternal death. Shvarts argues that in SunnO)))’s music the maieutic exchange is evoked in the repeated inclusion of vocalised questions during performances. In ‘Souls’ a similar dialogic element is present in the moments, often heralded with a long dash, where the voice almost starts up a conversation: ‘Oh—but of course of course [...] Oh—but how would you know’ (pp.35, 36). It is also present in the way that the collaboration with Grubbs opened Howe’s work up to the presence of another, so that the writing was ‘a collaboration before collaborating’. Throughout ‘Souls’, there is a sense of something drawn out in conversation with another, not just taken or given from one figure to another, but hanging in the intimately physical space between:

> Now go back to sleep we
> can't be crazy the truth is
> we couldn’t we couldn’t
>
> we’re the past—we’re too
> close—to covet—you’re
> not to be afraid—breathe (p.39)

Shvarts opens her discussion of SunnO))) with a quotation from Marxist-Feminist historian Silvia Federici that is pertinent here: ‘just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from the communal land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies’.[101] The drone in ‘Souls’ is both mimetic of the wilderness of the landscape, and actually constitutes an example of the nonreferential material, ‘troubled air’ that is brought out by the artistic process but irreducible to the artist’s intention. It rejects the patriarchal subordination of matter to intellect; and it both stands in for and makes felt the imaginary ‘communal land’ of the utopian project of the Labadists, momentarily revived and reviving as though it were breathed in and out with the air.

This is not an effort to inherit the Labadists’ delayed destiny four years after the millennium they were waiting for, but rather a more physical connection with that past. What went before is not passed down from an earlier time but fused with the present, in the live perception of one’s sonic environment, the hazy boundary between the self and the world. Neither is it a process of inheriting individual ownership of something, but rather the feeling

[101] *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), p.184. Quoted in Shvarts, p.203.

of entering a constellation (in the sense of Grubbs' description of landscape as 'the constellation of a […] moment') in which 'the past' is intimately present and 'too / close—to covet'. The only way to fuse with another in this way is to become diffuse oneself, to let go of the discrete, individual self on which patrilinear inheritance relies: 'you're / not to be afraid—breathe'. Much like the re-presenting of 'Articulation' in 'Personal Narrative', the pared-down reiterations of 'Thorow' that appear in 'Souls' present poiesis as a digestion and repurposing of an earlier version of oneself, that maintains a connection with the past. If there is any development involved in this process, it is the kind of development that the drone enthusiast described as being unclear 'whether it happened in the mix or in your own mind'. To bring this all the way back to *The Liberties,* it is a moment of seeing the same material from a new angle: 'Now turn to the other side just / Here in the other angle' (*SLT*, p.63). It is the Wittgensteinian phenomenon that Fred Moten describes as 'noticing an aspect or aspect-dawning or aspect-seeing or (my favorites) hearing or having a musical ear or phrasing'.[102]

As the poems in 'Souls' progress, the speaking 'I' seems to expand, stretching back to the past iterations:

> Authorize me and I act
> what I am I must remain
> only suffer me to tell it
>
> if I can beginning then
> Then before—and then

'Authorize' brings us back to the 'Personal Narrative' and Howe's recollections of finding in 'the authority of a prior life for my own writing voice'. She is speaking as if channelling someone else, or as if the moment of re-articulation linked her to a 'prior life' while evading any sense of progression or development. The singular articulation becomes a reproduction of that which 'must remain'. Howe was already considering the possibility of a sonic escape from linear time in 'Thorow' when she imagined 'the this / present in the past now' (*S*, p.43). 'Souls' is a re-articulation of the diagrammatic image that I started with (in which sounds simultaneously 'go back' to the land and come from it) and it returns to the same idyllic and impossible multitemporal suspension. In responding to the nonreferentiality that drone both figures metaphorically and makes felt in the physical body, Howe is a poetics that is

[102] *In the Break,* p.90.

reproductive rather than productive, whereby the ‘intensest rendezvous’ articulates a past that is already here. Drone, as figured in ‘Souls’, is the movement from the sequence of a temporal interval to the spatial constellation of a tonal one, which releases from ‘a common mouth’ not just words, but particles breathed into the air (p.18). It is the creation of a still sonic space; a brief moment of what C. Nadia Seremetakis calls an ‘exit from historical dust’.[103]

[103] Seremetakis, p.14.

Coda: 'In lieu of executors, please leave lexicographers'

> Then, my brother, let us fancy ourselves in realms of everlasting twilight and peace, where no bright sun shall rise, because the black night is always its follower. Twilight and peace, my brother, twilight and peace!
>
> Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*[1]

i: romantic endings

When Susan Howe read parts of *Concordance* (2020) at the Harvard Divinity School in 2019, she acknowledged the music of Charles Ives as central to her writing since her first collaboration with David Grubbs.[2] Describing the 'unembarrassed' Romanticism of Ives' *Concord* sonata, she proclaimed with a sudden, earnest emphasis: 'and I'm unembarrassed. I am actually a Romantic Modernist.' Mandy Bloomfield has rightly observed that while Howe's citational collaging apparently eschews 'the Romantic ideal of immediacy achieved through the solitary individual's encounter with nature' her poetry has never entirely left this ideal behind. My reading of the audio version of 'Thorow' supports Howe's continued preoccupation with unsoiled 'regions of undifferentiation' (*S*, p.40).[3] More than in any of her previous works, in *Concordance* this allegiance is made urgently explicit. As in 'Thorow' (2004), however, the Romantic immediacy that this book imagines is not achievable through solitary individualism, but rather through the perception of an assembled collective, articulated by way of citational collage rather than despite it. In this, it has something in common with the narcissistic instrument that outlined in my first chapter, through which the perceiving body is connected to a wider dynamic. Unlike in *The Liberties*, however, this instrument is not oriented toward the continuation of patrilineage, but to a present-tense ensemble that is laterally conceived and infinitely wide. It is a Romantic, pragmatist attachment to the whole world.

What follows is not a comprehensive delineation of the infinite network that *Concordance* assembles (which would be impossible) or even an outline of all the specific textual references it includes (which would be very difficult, and beside the point). Instead, it is an exploration that keeps in mind Howe's own punning logic of live, associative relations;

[1] Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), p.271.
[2] 'Concordance: An Evening with Susan Howe', online video recording, *YouTube*, 2 May 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9S0u3V7lv8> [accessed 3 February 2021].
[3] Bloomfield, p.695.

as well as Erin Manning's description of movement as a live creation of the environment moved through: 'My movement creates the space I will come to understand as "the room"'.[4] My entry point to the open-ended 'room' that is my reading of *Concordance* begins a century before its publication with Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) [Figure 13].[5] The painting, made using Klee's singular oil-transfer technique, is most widely known for its connection to Fragment IX of Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in which Benjamin casts Klee's painting as the 'Angel of History' who looks on in horror at the endless destruction that constitutes modernity:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them.[6]

Benjamin's 'Theses' and his interest in 'the entrance of the messianic into the material object' have informed Howe's own historically-minded poetics, especially as laid out in 'Leaves'.[7] The Angel has been deployed by countless other artists, writers, and critics, such that Klee's image has become something of an icon of Benjamin's materialist theories of history.[8] The painting is literally part of Benjamin's legacy too: he bought it in 1921.[9] When he died in 1940 (by suicide, on the French-Catalan border, to avoid being deported back to occupied France) the *Angelus* was passed to friends and eventually to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem where it is currently kept, a relic of the after-effects of fascist violence.

[4] Manning, p.15.
[5] *Angelus Novus,* 1920, oil transfer and watercolour on paper, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
[6] *Illuminations,* p.55.
[7] Keller interview, p.29.
[8] For some examples among many, see *The Last Angel of History,* dir. John Akomfrah (Icarus Films, 1996); *The Angel of History,* dir. Ariella Azoulay (Herzliya Museum of Art, 2000); Carolyn Forché, *The Angel of History* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 1994).
[9] For an introductory history of the painting and its various owners, see Jason Fanago, 'How Klee's "Angel of History" took flight', *BBC Culture,* 6 April 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160401-how-klees-angel-of-history-took-flight> [accessed 20 March 2021].

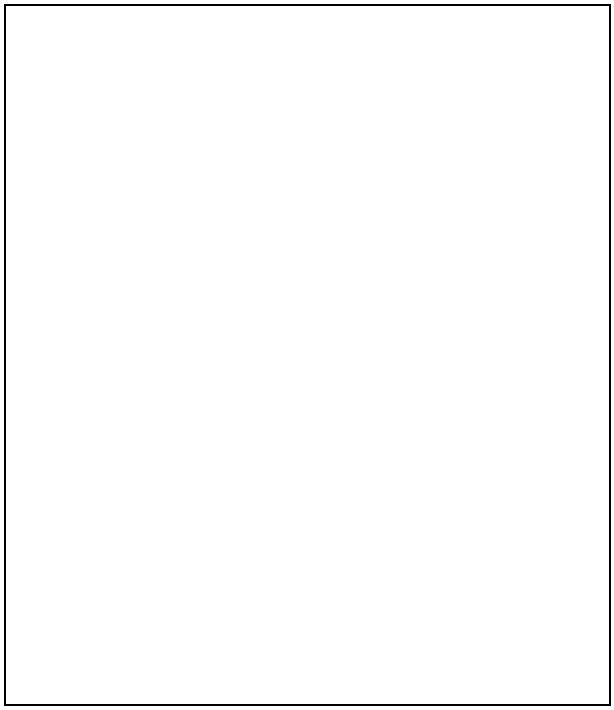


Figure 13: [redacted for copyright reasons] Paul Klee, Angelus Novus, 1920, oil transfer and watercolour on paper, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

In 2013 the visual artist R. H. Quaytman, Susan Howe's daughter, was granted a viewing of the *Angelus*. As she writes in 'Engrave', she was shy of the painting's iconic significance, 'so weighed down by history as it is'.[10] Much like her mother focusing on tiles, marble, and granite in St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1978, Quaytman's instinct in the face of such 'weight' was to direct her attention to the object's apparently peripheral material texture. She noticed that the thin, dark margin surrounding the figure was part of an older, mechanically produced engraving 'so devalued that no one had even noticed it' (p.53). She spent two years identifying the engraving with help from several specialists, eventually finding a match quite by chance as she flicked through a digital database of over 60,000 mass-produced engravings.[11] It transpired that Klee had pressed his angel onto a copy of a 1521 portrait by Lucas Cranach the Elder depicting Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation, whose anti-Semitic writing was used to justify violence against Jews from the late-nineteenth century through to at least the Nazi dictatorship.[12] The spectral presence of Luther beneath the icon of the 'wreckage' of history, housed today in the violently contested city of

[10] 'Engrave', *חקקן Chapter 29* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2015), pp.50-61 (53).
[11] For a more detailed account of this search, see Quaytman, 'Engrave'.
[12] See Jarrett A. Carty, 'Martin Luther's Anti-Semitism and Its Political Significance', *Antisemitism Studies*, 3.2 (Fall 2019), pp.317-342; and Christopher J. Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012).

Jerusalem, is astonishing, disturbing and, once seen, impossible to unsee [Figure 14]. Quaytman writes:

> The meaning of an artwork cannot, by its very nature, be hidden from view. How can I morally situate this exposure? Like Eve and her damn apple, I'm stuck and it's too late to untangle this new angel from the taunting of a certain paradise (p.7).

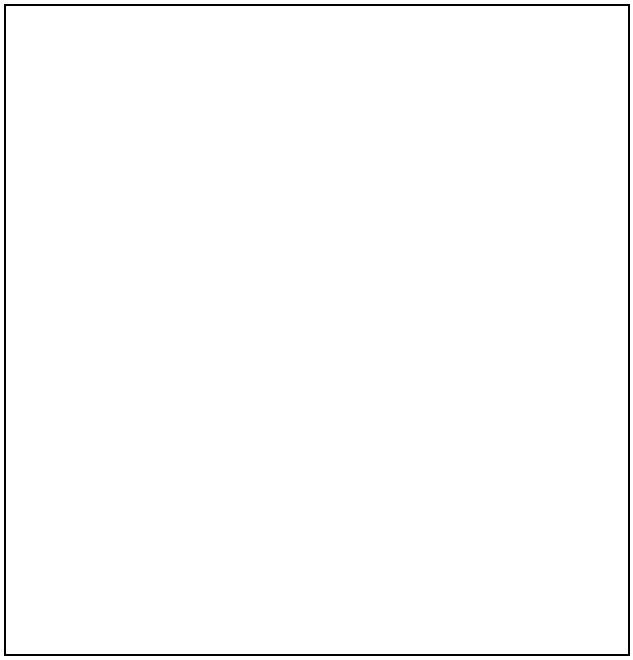


Figure 14: [redacted for copyright reasons] R. H. Quaytman, 'Engrave', p.59

In 'Since', the series of prose fragments that opens *Concordance,* Susan Howe asks: 'How does a little picture look in a small frame; the side that faces the artist with its promise of happiness? Mind your own business' (p.10). The phrase 'promise of happiness' conjures another for whom art is inextricable from the brutality of world history: Theodor Adorno, to whom the *Angelus Novus* was first passed after Benjamin's death. 'Aesthetic experience', Adorno contends, 'is that of some thing that spirit may find neither in the world nor in itself; it is possibility promised by its impossibility. Art is the ever broken promise of happiness.'[13] My reading of Howe's work has suggested that if there is any possibility of reaching this 'happiness' it will be located in the live, indeterminate boundary between 'spirit' and 'world', or perceiving subject and material surroundings. *Concordance* is no different in this regard, attempting as it does to occupy a constantly renegotiated 'Threshold' [Figure 15] between the symbolic and the material. Howe's comic rebuttal of her own question ('mind your own business') is less a dismissal of the circumstances outside the frame of an artwork than an urge to situate it in relation to one's own sensory apprehension of its materials, one's 'own

[13] *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), pp.135-136.

business'. This is the 'certain paradise' perceived in live encounters with the material world; it is, to quote 'Since', 'cutting edge happiness' (p.13).

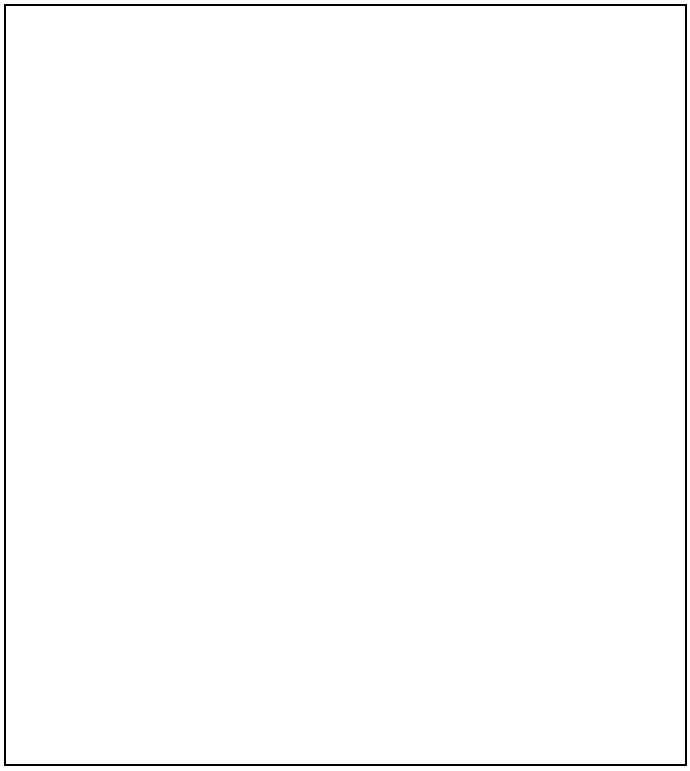


Figure 15: Susan Howe, Concordance, p.89

The central section of the book articulates as much in a visual mode. 'Concordance' is a series of collages made from scraps of text spliced to make formations—sometimes comic, sometimes startlingly beautiful—in which words function as typographical patterns as much as signifiers. The repetitive, numbered column in the poem depicted in Figure 15 has been cut from a concordance (a comprehensive, alphabetical index of the words in a body of work) to the work of William Butler Yeats. This has been placed alongside thin, barely legible slices of the title of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and a series of 'A's cut from another index. Together the fragments have a certain dynamism, the vertical repetition of 'Threshold' leading one's eyes to slide down the page, the slivers apparently pushing onto the page or edging over its limit, out of the frame and into the surrounds of the reader's 'own business'.

Howe has been photocopying, cutting, and gluing textual detritus since the 1980s but, starting with 'Fragment of the Wedding Dress of Sarah Pierpont Edwards' in *Souls*, her collages have gained an even more idiosyncratic texture (*SLT*, pp.111-125). In these poems, the characters retain typographical information such as font and spacing from their previous

contexts. Perhaps counterintuitively, this makes the shapes more visually cohesive, in that they move further into the realm of abstract art. Instead of severing ties, Howe's scissors make new visual connections. The juxtaposition of the regular rows of printed text with diagonal cuts makes the fragments seem almost like intersecting planes in a three-dimensional shape. In Howe's words, they are 'tent[s] of paper scraps', 'palace[s]' or 'rotating prisms'.[14]

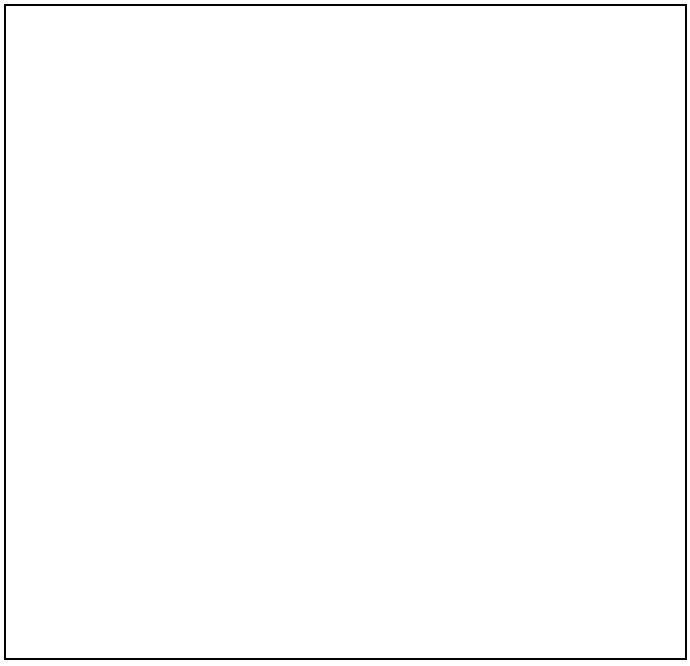


Figure 16: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *Concordance*, cover

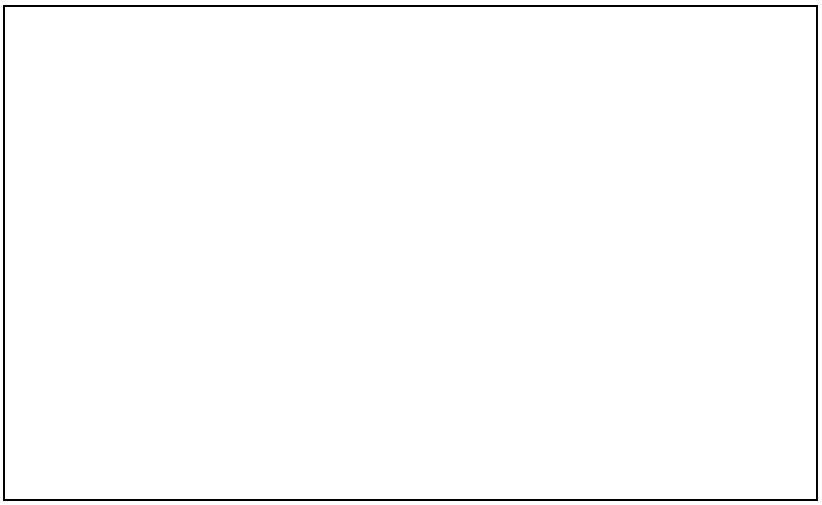


Figure 17: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *Concordance*, p.63

[14] 'Concordance: An Evening with Susan Howe'; Howe, *Concordance*, pp.23, 48.

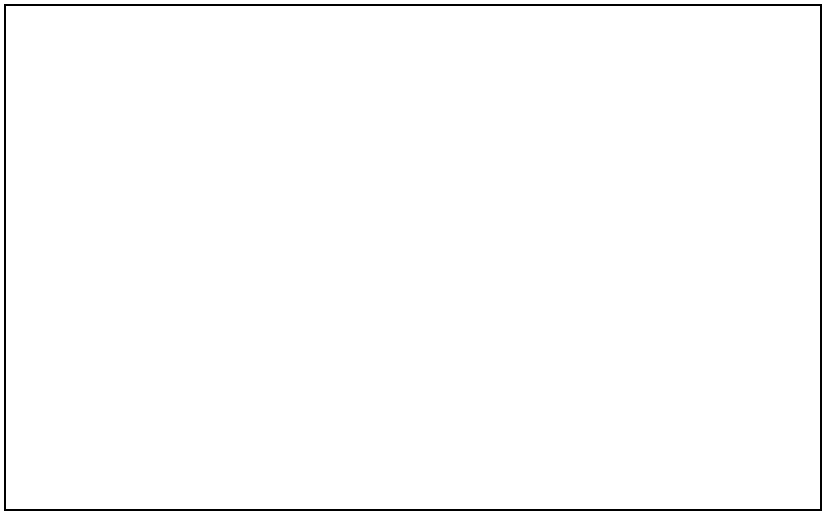


Figure 18: [redacted for copyright reasons] Susan Howe, *Concordance*, p.34

Quaytman took the photograph on the cover of the book: a pale, papery surface divided by two overlapping, squarish shadows, one of which slices through an acorn [Figure 16]. Several of the 'prisms' could be read as gestures to Quaytman's discovery and her subsequent state of being 'taunted' by the possibility of an earthly, material paradise. In the poem in Figure 17, for example, the word 'Jerusalemma' seems to emerge from a horizontal list of 'L's. The list was cut from a concordance to the work of John Milton (which appears in several of the poems) from a section indexing *Paradise Lost*, a retelling of 'Eve and her damn apple'. One pertinent example [Figure 18] splices Paul Klee with another evocation of an apocalyptic sublime, this time not from Milton but Coleridge. Here, scraps from three different texts fit together in the centre of the page to form an almost perfect square. The characters in the shard closest the top of the page (which runs vertically, accentuating the sense of a grid) have been sliced too thinly to read. The words in the next line point to their own condition of being squeezed to the point of illegibility, somewhere 'between word and image'.

Given the exaggerated gap between image and word in this poem, one might expect the first severed word, 'ences', to be cut from 'differences'; in fact, it is from 'correspondences'. The lines have been cut from 'Paul Klee and the Image of the Book', an essay by Joseph Leo Koerner, in a passage discussing Klee's *Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht* ('Once Emerged from the Gray of Night'), another artwork that plays with the threshold of verbal and visual

[Figure 19].[15] In this poem-painting from 1918, words spread across the canvas in such a way that each letter fits into a square on a grid, divided in the centre by a thick, grey stripe. The squares have been filled in with colour, making the words difficult to make out. Koerner writes:

> In all these correspondences between word and image, the possibility of overreading is always present, if not invited. The word 'Abends' has, for example, a dark E at its center which we could easily read as a tonal analogy to the darkness of night. (p.60)

What is 'overreading'? Reading doubles where there are none? The word 'overreading' has been left outside the frame cut by Howe's scissors in 'Concordance', but in this it might be what is 'always present, if not invited'. The reading encouraged by these assemblages, which seem to move outside their own frames, is exactly one of hearing other contexts in the words on the page, of connections that occur in the mind of the reader—of punning, in other words. It is not that great a leap to (over)read in this word a correspondence with Ralph Waldo Emerson ('Sage of *Concord*') and his 'Over-soul', the macrocosmic being that connects all earthly things. Koerner did not mean it as such, and Howe might not have either, but this is the point: in the words of a drone enthusiast from my previous chapter, it is a connection 'that makes you question whether it happened in the mix or in your own mind'.[16] By the logic of live association that Howe's poetry encourages, the possibility of this correspondence, or concordance, is 'always present' if it occurs to the reader. The line that Koerner is referring to here is halfway down Klee's canvas. It reads 'Abends voll von Gott und gebeugt', or, in English, 'Evenings bowed by the fullness of God'.[17] *Concordance* suggests that these correspondences are exactly what makes the world 'bowed by the fullness of God'. For Howe, as for Jonathan Edwards, the point of contact between the perceiver and the world is where God exists.

Intersecting lines have been drawn across the third scrap in this poem but the words are still legible. They are from alternative verses at the back of a variorum edition of Coleridge's 'Religious Musings', in which the speaker imagines God as 'one omnipresent Mind' who will one day reveal 'why there was misery in a world so fair'.[18] In that edition the lines appear

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[15] 'Paul Klee and the Image of the Book' in Joseph Leo Koerner and Rainer Crowe, *Paul Klee: Legends of the Sign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.45-84; Paul Klee, *Einst dem Grau der Nacht*, 1918, Watercolour, ink, and pencil on paper on cardboard, Paul Klee Foundation, Bern.
[16] Carlson, 'Eliane Radigue'.
[17] Translation by K. Porter Aichele, *Paul Klee: Poet, Painter* (Rochester: Camden House, 2006), p. 45.
[18] *The Complete Poetical Works*, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp.108, 113, 118.

above one another according to the chance, chronological organisation of the index, but in Howe's poem they make a new couplet of their own:

> Untwisted, all the finely fibres of the
> Making ⁄Thought palpable—& Priestly[19]

If Quaytman is 'too late to untangle' the *Angelus* from its material circumstances and the history of brutality that it bears, in the twilight of Howe's poem the effort is to make 'palpable' the 'finely fibres' of a Priestly pragmatist Thought connecting the whole world.

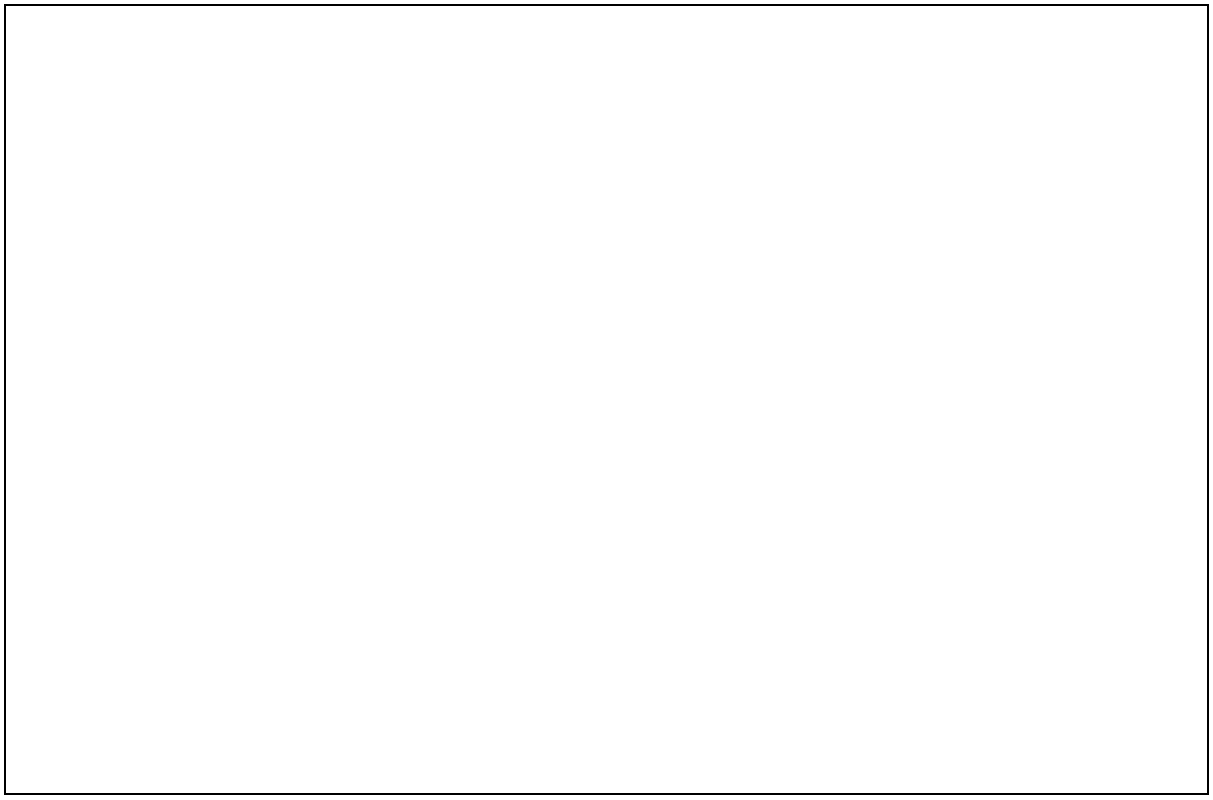


Figure 19: [redacted for copyright reasons] Paul Klee, Einst dem Grau der Nacht, 1918, Watercolour, ink and pencil on paper on cardboard. Paul Klee Foundation, Bern

In 1985 the writer of 'Leaves' wrote that 'questions of assigning the *cause* of history' dictated her poetry (*L*, p.13). In 2020 the writer of *Concordance* seems to be looking not for a *cause* behind the forces of extractive neo-colonial capitalism, but rather a way to connect the rubble: 'I'm so scared of dying without answers only a phrase to use as an earring or necklace—surrounded by Boston, Dublin, Killiney, Buffalo, Cambridge, Annisquam, Cotuit' (*C*, p.10). This is an effort to perceive a relation that does not depend on an original divine

[19] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16.2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p.250. Quoted in *C*, p.34. I have reproduced the word 'Thought' with an approximation of the marks in Howe's poem, see Figure 18 for a more accurate depiction.

agent or the possibility of future salvation: a state in which the world is 'bowed by the fullness' of immanent interdependence. This immanence—and here is the urgent, crucial part—is inextricable from the actual world and the brutal forward march of time. A sense of desperation pervades *Concordance*; it is the acute, useless urgency of knowing that time is slipping by while things appear to be still, like evening (*Eve*-ning) when no visible change is apparent, but you know that it is getting darker. The book's final section, 'Space Permitting', is a series of short lyrics pieced together from notes written by Henry David Thoreau as he was trying to locate Margaret Fuller's remains (her body and her unpublished writing) off the coast of Fire Island after she and her family were drowned in a shipwreck in 1850 (pp.93-107). To this reader, at least, the opening stanza instantly evokes the image of Klee/Benjamin/Cranach's *Angelus*:

> Ask the painted vessel did the
> Captain turn in his room what
> room the storm is now raging

In 'Since', too, Howe spins a vista that is urgently contemporary, apocalyptic, and global:

> 'Spirits interpenetrate—drift apart—signals and transmissions—the ins and outs, reversals, refugees, bombs, borders, children separated from parents, forced migration, mass incarceration, fracking, plastic bags, environmental destruction, possible human extinction, all the mutilations of love in time's relentless march from war to everlasting war. (p.11)

There is something distinctly Whitmanian, and almost Pantheistic, about the terrifying, broadly democratizing vision of 'all the mutilations of love in time's relentless march from war to everlasting war'. Certainly the words echo the Dark Romantic sublime of Melville's Ishmael urging us to 'Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began'.[20] To follow this associative logic further still, in *The Howe-Quaytman Margins* pragmatist philosopher and mathematician Fernando Zalamea has traced a correspondence between the work of Howe and Quaytman and that of the German Romantic poet Novalis.[21] Novalis's philosophy, which was motivated by a search for unity in the turmoil of late eighteenth-century Europe,

[20] Melville, *Moby-Dick; Or, the Whale* (New York: Penguin, 2003), p.299.
[21] *The Howe-Quaytman Margins,* p.3.

combines Christianity with Spinozistic pantheism.[22] Zalamea argues that Novalis presaged the aims of Howe and Quaytman (and much modern mathematics) when he articulated creativity as a kind of flux, in which 'every fixed point that sets the infinite fluidity becomes for him a new revelation of the genius of love, a new bond between the Thou and the I.'[23] 'Only friends and intimate relations call each other thou', Howe writes in 'Since', 'as in Keats discovering Homer' (p.9). The quietly urgent, impossible aim of this book is to be reconciled with a universal force—a 'Thou'—that connects the whole world in a genuinely communal way. It is a 'happiness' whose 'promise' exists only in the live encounter with the material world. It does not look to the future because it is not a prophecy or a promissory note. Instead it goes nowhere; its end is now. 'Happiness', Howe quotes Whitman, 'not in another place, but this place. Not in another hour, but this hour' (p.27).

ii: 'however grave or gay the measure'

It some ways it seems too pat—the ends too neatly tied up—to conclude a thesis on the rehearsal of inheritance with the work of Howe's daughter. But the ends that this book ties forego any gesture of passing a torch to the next generation. Instead, it speaks *after* Quaytman, entangling her work in a broad web that reaches outwards, in a lateral, present-tense constellation.[24] A 'happiness' that goes nowhere leads us back to Chapter Two and Felicity (*felicitas*) who refuses to sever the ties with strangers for the sake of her daughter's life, rejecting the logic of patrilinear kinship for a more wide-reaching, invisible allegiance, 'happy in the air' (*SH*, p.439). *Concordance* advocates the same lateral evasion of patrilineal futurity. Towards the beginning of 'Since' is a quotation from the influential *The Common Law* (1881) by Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.[25] The words are taken from a passage in which Holmes argues that 'at the bottom of all private relations, however tempered by sympathy and all the social feelings, is a justifiable self-preference' (p.42). The lines quoted in 'Since' read:

> If a man is on a plank in the deep sea which will only float one, and a stranger lays hold of it, he will thrust him off if he can. When the state finds itself in a similar

[S]See Benjamin D. Crowe, 'On "The religion of the visible Universe": Novalis and the Pantheism Controversy', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*,16:1 (2008), pp.125-146 (126).
[23] Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs (Historische-kritische Ausgabe)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–2006), pp..646-647. Translated by Alexander J. B. Hampton in *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p.211.
[24] For a detailed comparison of Howe and Quaytman's practices in relation to their ethics and aesthetics of marginality, see Fernando Zalamea, *The Howe-Quaytman Margins* (New York: Sequence Press, forthcoming 2021). With thanks to Fernando Zalamea for providing me an advance copy of this essay.
[25] *The Common Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

position, it does the same thing.[26]

Holmes' choice of metaphor forecloses infinite possibilities for community, inter-state solidarity, or the intersubjective. By equating a 'state' with a man clinging for his life in a hostile environment he suggests that it is, at its most fundamental level, competitive, adversarial, and based on the rightful sovereignty of the individual. The metaphor collapses somewhat in the context of 'Since' and the solidarity it expresses with 'refugees, bombs, borders, children separated from parents, forced migration' (p.11). Hostile, impermeable state borders have a material effect on the number of lives lost at sea (as well as lives lost crossing land borders, like the one at the centre of *Saving History*).[27] The premise of the metaphor is violent, neoliberal, and directly opposed to the radical mode of being alongside others that I have been tracking in this thesis. In particular, it opposes the lateral logic of 'room for you as well as me' that precludes 'self-preference' and its continuation in the form of patrilinear inheritance.[28] Susan Howe published this book the same year that Fanny Howe articulated her anti-competitive ethics as follows: 'there aren't only two ways, killing or being killed; you can also collaborate, run away, signal and hide'.[29] *Concordance,* too, reaches outwards to a much hazier and more uncertain border space between the subject and its others.

This rejection of lineage is expressly not a severing of family ties, but rather a reconfiguration of the family as a web of present-tense 'happiness'. It involves a curious, tender dethroning of the Howe patriarch. As mentioned previously, Mark de Wolfe Howe was Holmes' law clerk, and later devoted a substantial part of his professional life to writing Holmes' biography; incredibly, *his* father, Mark Anthony de Wolfe Howe, wrote a biography of Holmes' father, the poet and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. Towards the beginning of 'Since', the words 'Holmes the Nimble' appear at the top of a page, seeming to serve as a title for the five short paragraphs below it (p.12). There are several potential sources for the phrase, including a letter from Melville Fuller describing Holmes Jr as 'the nimble Holmes' because of his inexhaustible work ethic.[30] In the spirit of 'overreading' correspondences,

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[26] Holmes, 42; Howe, *Concordance,* p.12.
[27] See, for example, Samuel Gilbert, '2020 was deadliest year for migrants crossing unlawfully into US via Arizona', *The Guardian,* 30 January 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/30/us-mexico-border-crossings-arizona-2020-deadliest-year> [accessed 2 April 2021]; 'The List of Deaths', online database, *UNITED for Intercultural Action* <unitedagainstracism.org/campaigns/refugee-campaign/working-with-the-list-of-deaths/> [accessed 4 April 2021].
[28] Mitchell, p.44.
[29] Duncan interview, p.139.
[30] Quoted in G. Edward White, *Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: Law and the Inner Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.315.

however, I will tie it to another source. In his biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr, Susan Howe's grandfather writes: 'however grave or gay the measure, Holmes' nimble fancy carried him frequently and far into that addiction to puns which has also been mentioned.'[31] 'Holmes the Nimble' is thus its own sylleptic pun insofar as it leads to father and son simultaneously, connecting the two so that they appear not in sequence, but alongside each other in the linguistic coincidence.

In 'Since' the nickname is followed by these words:

> To a certain extent I'm also alive. My legal secretaries lost their way—a wrong turn of the pen—I don't know why or how. Who are you Swan Lawyer Unmarried Male Maidens begging me to stay one day longer? Now I am doomed to wander web shadow libraries.

This 'I', I suggest, is another hazily undefined constellation that includes the living and the dead. It incorporates Howes (daughter, father, grandfather) and Holmes' (son and father) as well as myriad other fleeting bonds made in 'web shadow libraries'. As Howe explains in the notes at the end of the book, Holmes called his law clerks 'Legal Secretaries' and required that they be unmarried men (p.111). This is thus an oblique portrayal of her father as one among several 'Maidens' (to quote Howe's description of Hope Atherton in 'Articulation', it is an 'epicene name' which 'draws its predetermined poem in' [*S,* p.4]). This naming evokes de Wolfe Howe while detaching him from his role as patriarch, and even his status as an individual: his is not a name that will be passed down to his descendants, but rather a lateral relation that stays, regardless of temporal sequence, 'doomed to wander' in the present. 'In lieu of executors,' Howe writes on the next page, 'please leave lexicographers' (p.13).

The feminized portrait of her father hints at a subtle deviation from heteronormative patrilineage, especially when the words 'begging me to stay one day longer' lead to an Oscar Wilde story about an impossible love between a bird (not a Swan but a Swallow) and a statue. This might not stretch as far as a queering of the family line, but it does offer a disruption of what Elizabeth Freeman has called the 'chrononormative', or the 'temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent'.[32] Crucially, Wilde's fairy tale is also a parable about the rejection of self-interested legacy in favour of the distribution of material wealth. Despite

[31] Mark Anthony de Wolfe Howe, *Holmes of the Breakfast Table* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.72.
[32] *Time Binds,* p.xxii.

its name, ‘The Happy Prince’ is a tale of suffering, and the happiness it does contain is (to quote Holmes) inextricably ‘tempered by sympathy and all the social feelings’.[33] To summarise: the statue of a Prince is filled with sorrow because from his position ‘high above the city’ he can see the suffering of the poor below him (p.4). He enlists the help of a Swallow to distribute among the poor his precious material adornments, including his ruby eyes: ‘“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you stay with me one night longer?”’ (p.12). The Swallow (who has already delayed his journey South for the winter to court a river Reed) reluctantly agrees to help. He dies from cold and the exertion of his labours; the Prince’s tin heart breaks with grief; the city officials melt the statue down in a furnace; and the Swallow and the Prince are taken by an Angel to God’s ‘garden of Paradise’ (p.20).

Further down the page in ‘Since’, Howe situates this story in the landscape of upstate New York (Concord, NY?):

> High above the city on a tall column above the roar of Niagara stands the Happy Concordance with its double duplication lenses. Swallow swallow how can landscape be so flat at the border of death brother of sleep. (p.12)

The transformation of the Prince’s ruby eyes into the mechanical ‘double duplication lenses’ makes it seem like a version of the ‘transparent eyeball’ of Emerson’s ‘Nature’, a state of perception in which ‘all mean egotism vanishes’ and the perceiver experiences themselves as part of a continuum with nature: ‘I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.’[34] In the case of the ‘Happy Concordance’, however, this Romantic ‘I’/eye is not a solitary individual. The infinitely expansive ‘flat’ landscape—‘at the border of death brother of sleep’—is a space in which the living and the dead are of a part of a fraternal continuum. It is a state of being alongside the past rather than coming after it or inheriting its spoils.

Towards the end of ‘Since’ Howe places her faith once more in language’s potential for reaching a state of total connection with the whole world. Once again, this linguistic web is irrevocably bound to the material particularities of circumstance:

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[33] Holmes, p.42. *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (Aukland: The Floating Press, 2008), pp.4-20. Fanny Howe has recalled their mother playing a recording of the story, read by Orson Welles, to her very young daughters: ‘the reading—set to music—reduced us all to tears every time’. *The Wedding Dress*, p.28.
[34] ‘Nature’, *The Complete Essays and Other Writings* (New York: Random House, 1950), pp.3-44 (6).

> Each slight verbal reference or connection gets lost though found by some inherent sense of form in every respect but touch linking the always undiscovered country to all families on earth. There is no other way Eve the unknowable author of life will live to teach others, bruising the Serpent's head from years of treading water under history. (p.25)

As with the utopic settlement in *Souls,* the makeshift, semi-fictional family in 'Sorting Facts' and the intersubjective maternal environment in *The Liberties,* this 'always undiscovered country' is inextricable from an Eve-like knowledge of the brutality of history and the silencing force of its recording. I opened this thesis with 'Submarginalia', centred around Sara Coleridge, compiler of the first concordance to her father's work. That essay ends with an acknowledgement of a debt 'to everyone' and a pledge to 'twine' together words and their historical, material circumstance. 'Sometimes I know you just from reading', Howe wrote then. In 2020, this 'you' (or 'Thou') is the whole world and all of history, twined together in a state of grace or mutual obligation in the present. It is an intimate bond, both vast and illogical, like the Swallow's love for the water Reed:

> 'It is a ridiculous attachment,' twittered the other Swallows; 'she has no money, and far too many relations.'[35]

[35] Wilde, pp.5-6.

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