Susan Howe's Landscapes of Language: *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* and *The Liberties*

In 1985 Susan Howe declared that she wished to '…tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate' (Howe 1990b: 14). In this statement, Howe projects an alternative world which, while desirable, she recognises is impossible. Instead, as Montgomery claims, 'she is organizing a lyric poetry of history around this transaction between the dead and the living' (Montgomery 2006: 623). Her 'trail' leads her away from the I-centred poetry that was prevalent in American confessional poetry and into history, myth and language, 'all three, it should be added, as informed by an urgent, if highly individual, feminist perspective' (Perloff 1985: 299). Howe, the 'library cormorant' (Keller 1995:28) absorbs her cultural heritage and writes it anew.

Amongst the predominately white Anglo-Saxon male Language writers with whom she is often associated, Howe remains one of the most important poets of that movement. Her work, like theirs, engages with the materiality of the word and adopts many of the same strategies: defamiliarization and extreme fragmentation at the morphemic, lexical and syntactic levels. However, she goes beyond these writers in negotiating the intersection of the personal and historical. Her preoccupation is with what lies hidden; to discover this, she probes inside history and its documents to reveal those without a language, without a voice.

Susan Howe's work is marked by the desire to be present in and to interrogate the discourses in which her poetry is shaped, particularly history. This desire is apparent in her prefatory statement to *Singularities*: 'I assume Hope Atherton's excursion for an emblem foreshadowing a Poet's abolished limitations in our demythologized fantasy of

Manifest Destiny' (Howe 1990c: 4). Howe aims anachronistically to reinterpret Manifest Destiny—the expansionist impulse that was borne out of the belief that the new Americans would take the forest and redeem the old world—in order to expose its illusory qualities.[i] To do so, she takes up the persona of Atherton as a pictorial and symbolical (though imperfect) representation, a 'foreshadow'. By adopting his 'excursion' (a journey, a running outward, an escape from confinement, and digression in route and in discourse), Howe as a poet is able to annul the sense of entitlement that Manifest Destiny has conferred. Reading and re-reading her sources, Howe's aim is to breathe new life into them, to recognise 'an other voice', to 'attempt to hear and speak it' (Howe 1990a: 192). Re-reading, and then re-writing these sources is a way to address issues such as: 'Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence?' (Howe 1985: 11) Her method is to 'release the coils and complications of Saying's assertion' and thereby enact 'an enunciative clearing' (Howe 1985: 11-12; 1993: 136). The word 'enunciative' is more than a synonym for articulation; Howe's project is to make a public declaration. The word 'clearing' relates not only to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in terms of the pioneers who cleared the land as they moved westwards, but also to the removal of obstructions in order to elucidate. For Howe, one of these obstructions is syntax. It is impossible to return to the vantage point from which this history emerged; thus, the erasure of syntax can be seen as an erasure of origin.

The territory that Howe occupies is 17th century New England; she positions words in the woods,[ii] or language in the wilderness and engages the poem as a 'contained social space' in order to reveal the 'secret' that is the myth that forms a nation's foundations. In a similar way to Charles Olson adopting the persona of Maximus, Howe adopts the persona of Hope Atherton (1646-1677) as the 'artist [poet] in America'[iii] (Howe 1990c: 4). Like Olson, Susan Howe is powered by a rage to know, but whereas

Olson turned to history as well as other discourses in the conviction that there exists a way through language to arrive at a state of knowing, Howe develops a different trajectory, one which acknowledges that 'the content is the process' (Howe 1993: 166) or, as Cixous puts it: 'There is no closure, it doesn't stop' (Cixous 1989: 53). History cannot recover the whole truth; neither can writing, but by putting pressure on language, there is something a poet can do that a historian cannot in terms of clearing the field. Howe takes the concept of the open field not as the place experience enters, but as the experience(r) itself/herself: Hope/Howe.

There is a large body of critical work on Howe, including work by Marjorie Perloff, Rachel Tzvia Back, Rachel Blau du Plessis, Linda Reinfeld, Lynn Keller, William Montgomery, Stephen Collis and Peter Nicholls. There is also a large body of essays on poetics and praxis by Susan Howe, including some information about her method and intentions with regard to the poetry considered below. This article takes the view that a different set of tools is required to orient ourselves to what some writers refer to as 'post-linear poetry'. I call upon stylistics, in particular schema theory (Schank and Abelson 1977; Cook 1994), in order to create a dialectic between close analysis and context that will lead to a more nuanced sense of the way that Howe repositions language in the wilderness. Stylistics involves the systematic collection of data about the language of a text in order to draw new inferences or to support existing perspectives, thereby establishing connections between linguistic form and literary effect. I shall take as example texts Howe's 'The Liberties' and *Singularities*, in particular, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time.* These works have been described by Collis as part of 'Howe's continuing excursus on the American literary wilderness' (Collis 2004).

The Matter of Syntax: 'The Liberties'

The matter of syntax is fundamental to Howe's process. Her exploration of the landscapes of language began in 'The Liberties'. first published in 1983, and later re-published in *The Europe of Trusts* (Howe 1990b).[iv] This long poem contains a preface; Section I with 'THEIR/*Book of Stella* and 'WHITE FOOLSCAP/*Book of Cordelia*'; Section II with '*God's Spies*; and Section III. It is primarily concerned with two women situated in the margin of history. It re-envisages Hester Johnson (Stella) and Cordelia from Shakespeare's *King Lear,* yet it is also a memorial to Howe's Irish grandmother, Susan Manning, after whom Howe was named. As in *Articulation*, here too '[p]ast historical figures are spectral to the writing self', but here 'their stories are 'framed through the trope of Ireland' (Vickery 2000: 179-80). In order to show that Howe's 'content is the process', I quote in full the opening poem, which appears just prior to Section I of 'The Liberties'. This analysis will reveal not only the way that Howe dissects syntax, but that she does so in order to interrogate the source of linguistic power in its various guises, as well as to locate the missing:

her diary soared above her house

over heads of

those clouds
are billows below
spume
white
tossed this way
or that

wild geese in a stammered place
athwart and sundered
for the sea rose and sheets clapped at sky
and sleep the straggler led the predator away
(Say, *Stella,* feel you no Content
Reflecting on a Life well spent?)
Bedevikke bedl

bedevilled by a printer's error
the sight of a dead page filled her with terror
garbled version
page in her coffin….
Do those dots mean that the speaker lapsed
into silence?

Often I hear Romans murmuring
I think of them lying dead in their graves. (Howe 1990b: 158)
The author thanks New Directions for their permission to reprint this extract.

This poem introduces Jonathan Swift's amanuensis, Stella, born Hester Johnson in March 1680. In the preface 'FRAGMENTS OF A LIQUIDATION', Howe tells us that Stella met Swift at the age of eight, and he became her tutor. She then spent twenty-eight years of her life as his scribe and servant until her death. She had no official role in his life, and Swift, a bachelor, never asked her to marry him as far as we know. Whether she kept a diary or not is unknown, but Howe imagines there to be one. 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'. This is signalled by the 'clouds' being both the grammatical object of a prepositional phrase and the subject of a new clause: 'clouds are billows'. Silencing is at the core of Howe's work; it appears first in the preface of *The Europe of Trusts*, 'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER: For me there was no silence before armies'—and again at the end as personalised pronouncement—'I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate' (Howe 1990b: 9, 14).

There is a lack of agency in this 23-line poem quoted above, the sole example being a medium agent: the 'dead page' which 'filled her [Stella/Howe] with terror'. Howe has enclosed in brackets a quotation from Swift's poem 'Stella's Birthday March 13, 1726'—('Say, *Stella,* feel you no Content / Reflecting on a Life well spent?')—but by placing the vocative 'Stella' in italics, Howe recasts it as a patronizing taunt. The unknown word

‘Bedevikke’ suggests ‘bedeck’, which means ‘to adorn’, or ‘bedet’: ‘a horseman’s boy employed to carry his bags’, or ‘bedevil’: ‘to treat diabolically, with ribaldry or abuse’(*The Oxford English Dictionary* 2008), and seems to imply her inferior role in Swift’s life. The final two lines are set apart both spatially and syntactically from the rest of the poem, as they are punctuated as a sentence with an initial capital letter. This material is cast in a different register, with a self-referential first-person pronoun and an assertion of closure, but what precisely is asserted is ambiguous.

Significantly, a preponderance of prepositional modifiers, especially locative, establishes place as a topic of concern. These prepositions also aid in giving the reader a mental picture or schema in which to locate Stella and measure her minor impact against that of Jonathan Swift. Of the 14 prepositional phrases used, half express location: ‘above her house’, ‘over heads’, ‘in a stammered place’, ‘at sky’, ‘in her coffin’, ‘into silence’, ‘in their graves’. Most significant are the prepositions of containment (in/into): ‘in a stammered place’, ‘in her coffin’, ‘into silence’, ‘in their graves’. These prepositions of containment struggle against those that semantically imply a change of location—‘above’, ‘over’, ‘below’—but containment, or enclosure, predominates. Moreover, there is a semantic field foregrounding the struggle with language: ‘stammer’, ‘sheets clapped’, ‘a printer’s error’, ‘a dead page’, a ‘garbled version’, an ellipsis and lapsing into silence.

Foregrounding through Linguistic Deviation

Semantic deviation appears from the opening line—‘Her diary soared above her house’—which presents the first conceptual metaphor in the poem.[v] It is based on the dual notion that ‘words are birds’ and ‘writing is up’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). It evokes Claudius’ line from *Hamlet*—‘My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go’ (Shakespeare: Act III, Scene 3)--and is one of many

bird references in the long poem. It is also one of many Shakespearean references (Wells and Taylor 1999: 675). Another semantic deviation occurs in lines 9-10): 'wild geese in a stammered place / athwart and sundered'. The term 'wild geese' was widely understood in Swift's time to refer to the Irishmen who fought as exiles in continental European wars, scores of whom died in such conflicts. These 'wild geese' were in reality 'athwart', as Stella is, following Swift around Ireland. The image of the sheets clapping at the sky suggest the wings of the departing birds, but also could refer to bedding hung out to dry and therefore imply women's domestic roles. Back interprets these sheets to mean the ashes of paper, suggesting that Stella's diary, if it existed, was burnt (Back 2002: 68). The juxtaposition of 'stammered' and 'place' is a deviant collocation, creating mild dissonance, as the verb 'stammer' requires a human agent; however, the reader conflates this reference with Stella, due to phonological parallelism. Importantly, the phrase links Howe's two central concerns: language and place. Thus, Howe's landscape of language allows for trains of associations to arise from linguistic units in order to accrue, expand, and revise.

Language and its [mis]appropriation: *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*

Articulation of Sound Forms in Time was first published in 1987 as a chapbook and later re-published in *Singularities*, together with *Thorow* and *Scattering As Behavior Toward Risk* (Howe 1990c). The title, *Singularities*, derives from mathematics, as Howe explains:

> The singularity…is the point where there is a sudden change to something completely else….It's a chaotic point…predation and capture…I thought this was both a metaphor for Europeans arriving on this continent…and a way of describing these poems of mine. They are singular works on pages, and grouped together, they fracture language; they are charged (Howe 1993: 173).

Articulation comprises three sections: the first is the prose account of 'The Falls Fight', in which Howe announces her aim in the work; the second, 'Hope Atherton's

Wanderings', is purportedly Hope's fractured account of his wandering through the wilderness. However, as a captivity narrative, it is a discredited account. We are told in an extract from a letter dated 8 June 1781, which appears prior to the second section, that Hope was never captured by the Native Americans, who were 'afraid and ran from him' (Howe 1990c: 5). The account certainly reads like the tale of someone 'beside himself'; however, in the final poem of the section, he seems to be restored. Section three, 'Taking the Forest', comprises 25 'articulations' or poems, which look conventional on the page (many are ordered into neat couplets), yet semantically 'broken and made strange by the history it seeks to articulate' (Reinfeld 1992: 127). As in section two, in section three also the final poem offers a lyric, first-person, consolidated account which has grown out of the previous incoherent testimonies of those banished or lost in the American wilderness. The individual poems in both sections, however, quickly cast off historical discourse. Ultimately the work is not about history, it is about how language has been misappropriated by history/his story. Hovering between sense and nonsense, the fractures reveal what has been hidden in those discourses that place primacy on coherence.

In both 'The Liberties,' as discussed earlier, and *Articulation*, Howe explores the possibilities embedded in a name—here 'Hope' Atherton, where Hope is normally a woman's name. In the preface to the poems, Howe reminds us that '[i]n our culture Hope is a name we give women' (Howe 1990c: 4). Schultz asserts that: 'As if by fiat, she begins an American epic of reduction and reconstruction through a simple linguistic sex-change operation.... "Hope" for the American poet…becomes a feminine aspiration' (Schultz 1994). With the substitution of a single letter, Hope becomes Howe. While, as a name, Hope is a proper noun, as a common noun it can refer both to the 'expectation of something desired', but also to 'a piece of enclosed land in the midst of fens or marshes or of waste land generally' (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 2008). Such landscapes are

significant to Howe; they enable her to write against the pastoral tradition in order to explore issues of settlement and misappropriation, both of land and of language. Howe's entanglement with historical narratives relates to the late 20th century concern in American poetry about those who appropriate language as enclosure—to thwart, to silence, to liquidate or remove from historical record. In *The Birth-mark*, Howe writes:

> I am trying to understand what went wrong when the first Europeans stepped on shore here…Isn't it bitterly ironic that many of them were fleeing the first devastation caused by the enclosure laws in Britain, and the first thing they did here was to put up fences (Howe 1993: 164).

For Howe, the matter of enclosure is also a feminist issue, as evidenced by her interest in captivity narrative. She writes in relation to the Puritan Mary Rowlandson that even 'the beautiful Connecticut River is just another barrier to get across. Rowlandson's apprehension of nature is an endless ambiguous enclosure' (Howe 1993: 96).[vi] Howe's move is to penetrate the language of enclosure, to get to the interior. In *Articulation*, there is a cryptic reference to 'M' and 'R' in poems three and four of 'Hope Atherton's Wanderings', which Vickery sees as 'iconic ciphers of identity' referring to Mary Rowlandson (Vickery 2000: 185). In a 1985 article she wrote for *Temblor*, Howe states that such narratives as Mary Rowlandson's are 'a microcosm of colonial imperialist history, and a prophecy of our contemporary repudiation of alterity, anonymity, darkness' (Howe 1993: 89). Using prosopopoeia (the rhetorical device of speaking as another person), she rescues the lost or disenfranchised; she even rescues language itself. Her aim is to reflect the subject (be it Stella in 'The Liberties' or Hope Atherton and Mary Rowlandson in *Articulation*) not as a subject of alienation, but as an exemplar of what can be called 'the pre-reflective dimension of experience'[vii] (Mildenberg 2008: 261). By foregrounding these historic personae as reflective subjects, Howe's pre-reflective self hovers in the background. Howe's pre-reflective self then is experienced by the reader

through the subject-personae without any conscious reflection on herself. As I will show, these are key aspects of Howe's linguistic radicalism.

'Taking the Forest': A Radical Poetic Praxis

The resistance to syntactical and logical closure in Howe's poems exemplifies a radical poetic praxis, particularly in the third section of *Articulation.* In a sense, it could be said that, in this section, Howe abandons history because she abandons discourse. Here is the first of 25 poems which comprise this section:

1 Corruptible *f*irst *f*igure
2 Bright armies *w*olves *w*arriors steers

3 scorned *w*arning *c*aptive *c*ompulsion

4 *L*ove *l*eads to edge
5 Prog*ress* of *se*lf into illusion

6 *Sa*me and not the *sa*me
7 Cherubim int*one* their *own* litany

8 Universal separation
9 –Dist*ant* coher*ent* rational system

10 Vault l*i*nes d*i*vergence
11 At*om* keyst*on*e

12 *P*armenides *p*rohibition
13 End of *p*assageway *p*erceive surrounding

14 Consciousnes*s* grasp*s* its *s*ubject
15 *S*tumbling phenomenology

16 *i*nf*i*n*i*te m*i*scalculation of h*i*story

17 Great men *th*icker *th*an *their* stories
18 *s*itting and *s*tanding

19 to mark *s*un*s* rising and *s*etting
20 Ridge*s* of *s*and rising *on on*e a*no*ther

21 Mathematics of continua

22 *f*athomless in*f*initesimal *f*raction
23 *s*abbatical *s*afety beyond *s*even

24 Empty arms *c*loud *c*ounterfeit

25 antecedent terror stretched to a whisper (Howe 1990c*:* 17; emphasis mine)

The author thanks Wesleyan University Press for their permission to reprint this extract.

On the page, the poem looks conventional, but when we examine it more closely, we see that it is not. Who is speaking? The text is marked by absent referents, ambiguous syntactical relationships, virtual non-existence of articles, absence of a subject/speaker, but, as my italicizing demonstrates, sound matters. Alliteration, assonance and consonance are used as devices to form the poem's soundscape. Howe creates what Back terms a 'sphere of sound' (Back 2002: 48); sound repetition is played off against syntactic 'stuttering'. Note the frequent clusters with strong sound patterning: alliteration ('first figure'; 'wolves warriors'; 'thicker than their'), assonance ('on one another'), slant rhyme ('Distant coherent') and consonance ('warriors steers'). Syntactically, these are not sentences broken into lines; instead, we have lines comprised almost exclusively of phrases or other fragmentary elements. The phrase is Howe's unit. Missing in all but three of the lines (or possibly four—line 10 is ambiguous) is the clause, with a subject and a predicate. By removing the verbs, Howe is getting rid of tense and aspects—those functional elements of language that situate it in a diachronic-logical position from which context can be processed and understood. However, the phonetic patterning weaves a kind of coherence into the text, and the reader may begin to perceive through what Montgomery calls 'the gradual accumulation of small utterances' some semblance of meaning (Montgomery 2006: 628). For example, a trace template forms in the reader's mind by hearing the repetitions of particular patterns of sound, such as the consonance of

‘Distant’ and ‘coherent’ (line 9), and the alliteration of ‘Parmenides prohibition’ with ‘End of passageway perceive’ (lines 12-13). The phrase ‘fathomless infinitestimal fraction’ (line 22) suggests that western rational systems of thought (the semantic fields of ‘Taking the Forest’ embrace philosophy, mathematics and architecture) have led to separation and destruction, a ‘terror stretched to a whisper’ (line 25). The alliterative phoneme ð of ‘Great men thicker than their stories’ (line.17) associates with the common phrase ‘thick as thieves’, alluding to Section II of ‘The Liberties’. ’God’s Spies’, where Cordelia and Stella utter:

> TOGETHER: Robbery.
> TOGETHER: They murdered each other.
> TOGETHER: Of course. Always.
> TOGETHER: Wide of the mark. (Howe 1990b: 188)

It is useful to investigate this innovative writing with reference to cognitive features through the perspective known as cognitive poetics, particularly schema theory, which emphasises the primacy of the reader in the experience of literary reading. Cognitive poetics offers insights into both the psychological and linguistic aspects of literary reading, shifting the focus from interpretation—whether that of the author or that of the critic—to the basis of these aspects in textuality. Textuality concerns both the material text as object, but also the connections the reader makes between stylistic features and felt experience. The complex interplay between word and grammar, world and ideology evident in these poems is connected to Language writing and contemporary verse culture more generally, and cognitive poetics offers the potential to account for the effects of the syntactic experimentation and ideologies of this writing.

Schema Theory: Reading through Cognitive Poetics

Schema theory is based on the assumption that we make sense of new experiences based on pre-existing ones. Schema refers to background knowledge that each person possesses in regard to people, places, situations and events. Schema theory was developed by artificial intelligence research and psychology. Schank and Abelson developed the notion of 'script' to account for the way memory retains knowledge of familiar events (Schank and Abelson 1977). Scripts are structures that contain a sequence of events in a particular context. They define particular situations with which we are familiar, and thus are crucial in providing connectivity. They are based on specific, detailed knowledge about situations we have experienced and stored. When a text makes reference to a familiar script, all the reader need do is fill in the missing parts. However, problems may arise when a reader lacks the world knowledge to make these connections, or when the connectors (for example, syntax) are missing. The smooth operation of scripts can be blocked by interferences or distractions, which may prevent normal continuation of a script, in which case the reader may try to supply the missing connective information, tolerate the error and carry on, or abandon the activity. Language poetry, generally, challenges this smooth operation.

In Schank and Abelson's framework, a script is a specific but accessible framework of knowledge, whereby readers will share knowledge related to a particular schema. A reader might activate a 'predator/captive' schema in order to make sense of the text. As mentioned earlier, the poetic persona in *Articulation* is constructed as captive (Hope Atherton, Mary Rowlandson). The use of the present tense throughout 'Taking the Forest' indicates the time of events, while simultaneously highlighting the persona's perception of them. Definite reference, used sparingly, reflects the personal nature of the discourse situation and primarily introduces referents which are 'given' for the poetic

persona but ‘new’ for the reader. Definite reference tends to relate to elements of the schema concerned with location (the sky, the house, the woods, the hill) and thus forms the background. Taken together, the definite noun phrases indicate schema which are active for the poetic persona and which readers need to activate.

In the opening poem of ‘Taking the Forest’ quoted above, a semantic field is formed with reference to thinking—‘Distant coherent rational system’, ‘Parmenides prohibition’, ‘Consciousness grasps its subject’, ‘Stumbling phenomenology’—and mathematics: ‘infinite miscalculation’, ‘Mathematics of continua’, ‘fathomless infinitesimal fraction’. Taken together, these suggest that phenomenological understanding has been hidden by the dominance of scientific and mathematical practices. These associative chains are foregrounded and connect the personae of the poem to themes and concerns.

The settings and events in ‘Taking the Forest’ to some extent can be accommodated within the schema model. Descriptions of the physical scene evoke the passage of time—‘suns rising and setting’ (poem 1)--and location—‘Mountains pitched over to westward’ (poem 3). Social relationship is evoked with reference to ‘Great men’ and ‘warriors’ (poem 1), ‘spectators’ (poem 5), ‘messengers’ and ‘sharpshooters’ (poem 7), ‘captive’ (poem 11) and ‘Assassin’ (poem 12). Political entities are evoked by ‘Commonwealths’ (poem 5) where ‘Latin ends and French begins’ (poem 22). The goal, if one can be identified, might be to ‘prosper our journey’ (poem 4). The main function of schemata is for readers to form predictions about what is likely to occur. So, while these details may facilitate the activation of a ‘journey’ schema with predator/captive roles, the absence of syntactic connectors frustrates the reader’s ability to infer what is not explicit. Consequently, while Schank and Abelson’s model of script can be used to show how the

instantiation of such knowledge can help us to process the text, the text itself does not submit easily to such measures.

As we have seen, *Articulation* depends on the activation of schemata having to do with history, voicing and conceptualizing. The poem evokes an incongruous configuration of schemata, and therefore projects a complex and unstable view of reality. The people and events in the poem can be related to each other on the basis of shared knowledge. Howe establishes the persona of Hope Atherton, but she also connects Hope's story to a female entity or entities—'the artist in America' in the first section--which we might read as Howe herself. As readers, we try to connect these scenes to a larger structure. Moreover, Hope as a captive evokes other captivity narratives, specifically that of Mary Rowlandson, who is alluded to here. In 'Taking the Forest' the word 'face' appears often: 'Shuttle face lost' (poem 2);'by face to know helm' (poem 3); 'Face of the voice of speech' (poem 3;'Puck's face of earth' (poem 5);'Smoke faces separate' (poem 6);'Face to visible sense gathers moss' (poem 12);'Face to fringe of itself' (poem 13) 'Face answers to face' (poem 16); 'Face seen in a landscape once' (poem 24). These faces share a particular setting, a wilderness. They also mostly share a social role as women and mothers: 'Mothers from their windows look' (poem 2); Sarah and Rachel and 'Straw mother' (poem 4); 'Mother my name' (poem 8); 'Mother and maiden' (poem 9); 'Eve or Embla' (poem 18); 'Little figure of mother' (poem 24); 'she is and the way She was' (poem 24). Further activation of our knowledge of the text world may help us to identify the 'goals' or connections between these women who populate the poem. Sarah and Rachel are biblical figures, whose contribution was motherhood—giving birth to sons. Rachel experienced a long period of barrenness before giving birth to her sons, before 'God opened her womb' (Genesis 29:31). Embla, like Eve, is the first mother in Norse mythology; her name means elm and she is associated with woods/trees. Besides

Mary Rowlandson, the other significant historical female presence is Anne Hutchinson, a Puritan spiritual advisor who participated in the Antinomian Controversy. Anne Hutchinson, Howe writes in *The Birth-mark,* was 'banished by the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, then murdered in the natural wilderness by history' (Howe 1993: 4).

The final poem in 'Hope Atherton's Wanderings', discussed earlier, invites the reader to perceive parallels between real people and events and other areas of experience, particularly 'the artist in America'. Howe as poet, then, achieves what the historian cannot. By fracturing the language in which history is written, she fractures the myth history conceals and reveals the hidden voices.

Conclusion

One of the enduring features of Language writing is that it invites the reader to be a co-participant. The theories and methods of stylistics offer one route for the reader to engage with this poetry. It makes the implicit explicit; it reveals what is at stake. By suspending the connection between words, Howe seems to suggest we might do better, if we can, to reflect on what experience itself presents to us. In particular, Howe's *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* is a radical reflection upon the gaps of history and the silence which surrounds language. It is a phenomenological project in which Howe reduces things to their essence. Phenomenology deals with the intentionality of experience. Intentionality is the distinguishing property of mental phenomena being directed upon an object, either real or imaginary. The word 'intentionality' shares an etymology with the Latin *intendere animum in* ('aiming the mind'), and *intendere arcum in*, ('aiming as of an arrow from a bow') (Carman 2008: 32). In the original 1987 Awede edition of *Articulation*, the title page contains an illustration with a circle made of two red, double-tipped arrows that do not join. Howe, it would seem, is signalling by this that

the accounts of the events historians have supplied have been wide of the mark. In his writings on phenomenology Merleau-Ponty perceives intentional content 'not as representation, but as a kind of bodily "sense" or "direction" (sens) toward the world' (Carman 2008: 32). Howe, then, shifts the reader's understanding from the world of fact to that of essence. Meaning is not inherent in a text, but is created in the relationship between the reader and the text. It is a dynamic process that happens between the writing and the reading, in the voicing and the gesture of the page. As Merleau-Ponty writes, 'The meaning occurs at the intersection, in the interval between words' (Mearleau-Ponty 1960: 41) By seeking to articulate pre-reflective experience that is implicit, first-order awareness rather than second-order cognition, Howe constructs a dialectic of 'perceptual meaning' versus 'language meaning'. Reducing language to its elemental parts discloses what has been hidden: the reader perceives pre-reflective experience before conscious reflection takes over through the certainties of syntax and the activation of familiar schema. In this way, Howe over-writes the notion of 'Manifest Destiny': she fractures and re-contextualizes the discourse of dominance in order to insert oppositional perspectives.

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[i] The phrase 'Manifest Destiny' itself was not coined until 1845, when John O'Sullivan described it as 'the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence….' ('Manifest Destiny' *1992*The sense in which Howe is using it is nevertheless an accurate description in terms of the early expansionist policies in the Revolutionary period.

[ii] Howe's early poem, 'Pythagorean Silence,' opens with a reference to the wood (Howe 1990b:17). It also alludes to Ovid's Daphne, who is turned into a tree in order to avoid Apollo's attentions. Moreover, as Montgomery notes, a number of modernist poets including Pound, Eliot and H.D. use the tree as a motif (Montgomery 2006: 617).

[iii] In 'Projective Verse' Olson addresses the issue of the line in relation to the breath and the performing body. He does not really address the issue of syntax, other than to say that grammar is 'inherited', a convention which must be broken, that tense must be 'kicked around anew' in order to endow a poem with a greater sense of immediacy, and that the sentence itself is 'lightning, as passage of force from subject to object', the 'VERB between two nouns' (Allen 1999: 386-394). What Howe does is to remove even the verb, and hence tense; there is therefore nothing between two nouns, thus enacting a clearing.

[iv] 'The Liberties' appears in the 1990 *The Europe of Trusts* together with 'Pythagorean Silence', 'Defenestration of Prague' and a preface, which is a statement of poetics titled 'THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER'. This article uses this 1990 edition.

[v] Semantic deviation is when meaning relations are logically inconsistent or paradoxical in some way.

[vi] Parts of Howe's essay 'The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs Mary Rowlandson' were published in 1985 and later re-published in *The Birth-mark* (1993).
[vii] Mildenberg is writing on Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*. However, there are many parallels between Stein and Howe in their experiments with the formal qualities of language, and what motivates these.

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