

Archive and Artifact: Susan Howe's *factual telepathy*

by W. Scott Howard

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The essays collected in this volume are cross-genre hybrids of creative and critical enchantment with the multifaceted works of Susan Howe from 1969 to 2019. Through print and electronic, video and vinyl, manuscript and typescript, gallery installation and special collection media and methods, W. Scott Howard illuminates Howe's "invisible colliding phenomena" of folding floreate flare. Howard's prose modulates from lyrical invocations to theoretical discourses, becoming increasingly embedded in generative, unpredictable intersections among Howe's archives, artifacts, and factual telepathy. The book also includes an extensive interview with Susan Howe concerning chance and discipline in her poetics and praxis from *My Emily Dickinson* to *Debths*. Howard's writing moves within and against fields of study (mainly history, literature, and philosophy plus a few others here and there); across and through time periods (from the early modern to now), following a nonconformist's helical quest 'after' the poet's signal escapes.

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I've been reading and listening to Susan Howe for probably 30 years. Each of Howe's books has a particular resonance for me. But I must confess, that for all my admiration for what one of our greatest poets has been doing for at least four decades, I have often been bewildered at how to unravel Howe's exceedingly multi-layered and complex work. Thanks to W. Scott Howard, who has delved deeply and brilliantly into the prime materials Howe has used to create her unique poetry, I have been able to gather a much deeper understanding of what has informed the poet in her making, and her methods for reconstructing history, literature, philosophy and art in a myriad of poetical manners. Howard's exceedingly illuminating exposition of Howe's work is absolutely essential reading for anyone interested in Susan Howe or modernist poetics. Beyond that, it is itself a true work of art, a model of what literary criticism should be. — Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

W. Scott Howard captures the entire arc of Susan Howe's considerable and crucial body of work in this many-faceted, deeply researched study. Tracing the role of the meticulously ecstatic in Howe's dissolution and reconstruction of historic and literary particulars into new artifacts, he deftly negotiates the difficult line between reading Howe's work in relation to tradition and reading it autonomously, in relation only to its own terms. Just as all of Howe's work brings us into the quick of the moment in which history continues to be constructed, Howard's incisive tracking brings us into the quick of Howe's own contribution to that construction. — Cole Swensen

In his book-length study of Susan Howe's poetry and prose, W. Scott Howard investigates the wealth of criticism that has been devoted to Howe's work by skillfully considering what has been addressed well and why it has been so pertinent, but more importantly, what particular aspects of her work have been overlooked by previous criticism. An example of this approach is in his discussion of Howe's *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*. After an extensive review of what critics have argued, Howard states that "no one has yet even considered the possibility that Howe's engagement with the poem's historical sources engenders a critical reading of those very documents." Howard's canny and insightful approach has made it possible for him to see what the rest of us missed—that Howe might be critical of Atherton's historiographic treatment and might be embarking, therefore, on a mission of "restorative justice" in her poem. For this poem and for many others in Howe's oeuvre, Howard uses the breadth of his knowledge of history and a wide range of texts and carefully detailed archival materials to provide us with new approaches to these works, approaches that are considered and well-reasoned and will be essential for scholarship moving forward. — Elisabeth W. Joyce

Archive and Artifact is passionate criticism, driven by careful attention to the work of Susan Howe and reinforced by archival scholarship. W. Scott Howard is scrupulously alert to the many modes in which Howe's project of poetic documentary unfolds. At the centre of the book is an extended examination of Howe's crucial 1987 text, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*. Elsewhere - and unusually - Howard reflects on the experience of teaching Howe's poetry. He also discusses her recent multimedia works, her trajectory as a wayward scholar-poet, and her practice of "factual telepathy". In a long and illuminating interview, Howe's *Spontaneous Particulars* becomes the platform for wide-ranging reflections on her life and writing. Howard's *Archive and Artifact* is a book of "betweenness" that adeptly treads the lines between criticism and poetry, stillness and vagrancy, discipline and chance, objects and metaphysics. In the words of the book's subject, revoicing Williams: "Beauty is chance and there is a rigor in the quest."

— Will Montgomery