

Avery F. Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive: Letters from the Utopian Margins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 472 pp.

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In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

Ain't no such animal as an instant Guerilla.
Toni Cade Bambara, "On the Issue of Roles"

A central byproduct of Avery F. Gordon's *Hawthorn Archive*—named not after the mind that imagined *Young Goodman Brown*, but rather "a very old tree known for its longevity" and "favored by witches and those internationalists who celebrate the first of May"—are the challenges such archives wage against disciplinarity (2). *Crataegus*, the hawthorn—adorned with red-fruit haw-berries—in Gaelic indicates the entrance to the underworld. In Serbia, it is utilized to slay vampires. Its red-blooming mayflowers conjure associations with radical labor. Marking the border separating the living and dead makes it an auspicious marker of expansive utopia. "The Hawthorn Archive is something other than what we normally take an archive to be, different event from those radical archives whose purpose is precisely to decolonize the archive and its disciplinary functions" (xi). For Gordon, the utopian margin constitutes "a mode of living" organized in four main files: "the scandal of qualitative difference"; "a means of preparation"; "the exile of our longing"; and "perception of the subjectivity of the so-called object" (xi, 7, 113, 203, 279). Meditations include reflections on Herbert Marcuse, the work of Colin Dayan, Jorge Luis Borges on questions of scale and mapping, Critical Resistance and [Prison] Abolition, conversations with Céline Condorelli, the 1649 denunciation by the Diggers, a photographic meditation on Palestine by way of fossils, birds, twelfth-century Sufi poetry, the Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah, and the internationalist genealogy of the rally-cry "SEIZE THE TIME!"

In the shared spirit of blank pages concluding Raymond Williams's 1976 *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, the *Hawthorne Archive* is open ended, made to be infinitely supplemented, refiled, and reshuffled. I accept this invitation and add a recipe file. Tristram Hunt's 2009 biography of Engels combats the myth of austere communist ethos that shuns abundance by detailing how one of Engels's tasks in Manchester was procuring ingredients to make lobster salad: "For six months past I have not had a single opportunity to make use of my acknowledged gift for mixing a lobster salad—*quelle horreur*; it makes one quite rusty" (207).

Gordon commences her prefatory "Note about the [*Hawthorn*] Archive"—"an imaginary and real infrastructure for intellectual work"—by foregrounding the centrality of method as "an idiosyncratic methodology for a research-based writing practice"(v). Such distinctions encapsulate the twin properties of this voluminous endeavor: both infrastructure (imaginary and real) and method (idiosyncratic yet comprehensive enough to sustain "a research-based writing practice") constitute an ever-expanding, infinite whole. Politically, Gordon's massive effort is sustained by a commitment to consciousness as "being-in-difference" (from the inimitable Toni Cade Bambara) as both "political consciousness and a sensuous knowledge"(v). Gordon's work unfolds somewhere between the academic and the artistic. It problematizes the radical imagination's sense of utopian, refused here as merely "the future perfect no-place imagined as a little nation engineered by white middle-class reformers and people with homogenous populations without conflicts or complicated psychic lives" (vi). This isn't Michael Anderson's 1976 *Logan's Run*; itself, honest enough to signal how its utopian world view is premised on a control mechanism of obligatory ritualized death at the age of 30. Instead of presenting another variation on utopia, Gordon's work actively seek out the fissures, the spaces, the "little rooms for my family to breath" (pace Curtis Mayfield) in radical, revolutionary spaces—spaces more often than not inaugurated, sustained, and in conversation with Black Study. The expanse of the *Hawthorn Archive*, its commitment to framing its insights as provisional (clearing room for infinite expansion), resonates with Cedric J. Robinson's sense in his *Black Marxism* of the "integral totality of the people themselves": in motion, dynamic, and radical (to the root).

Gordon's utopian archive refuses limitation and breaks from the restrictions of a litany of preferred options: "the English craftsman William Morris but not the African American worker, the self-named 'Black Bolshevik' Harry Haywood; the philosopher Ernst Bloch's dreamy anticipations but not the writer and theorist C. L. R. James's philosophy of happiness." Gordon has a penchant for mining such sources of utopian insight as "instance[s] of marronage in the entire Americas," the Combahee River Collective, and Bambara's "in-the-here-and-now community studies," all shining examples of "fugitive moments of comprehension"(vii). The question of alternatives itself

is interrogated in Gordon's analytic, and no propriety is spared the rigor of critique. Gordon mobilizes resources and counterresources in order to propose ways of living differently. Riffing off of Hakim Bey's pirate-anarchism sense of TAZ ("temporary autonomous zones") and what I see (perhaps wrongly) not as Gordon's rejection of "the productivist ethos Marxism and socialist traditions have longed favored"; but rather, an unwillingness to be limited by such restrictions (viii). Gordon rehearses a "failure of form." Her black radical capaciousness constitutes a "utopian surplus as archive"(x). The traditional academic and artistic monographs are insufficient vessels for containing such a surplus.

What I found striking about Gordon's critical exploration of what Engels refers to as "utopian mish-mash" in his 1880 *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* is Gordon's good-willed generosity, in the form of an aside about "Marx's General," Hunt's appellation (66). In her critique of the "qualitative difference" Marx and Engels employ in delineating the utopian from the scientific, she indicates a hesitancy in piling on more fashionable opprobrium against Herr Engels, who is unfairly caricatured by many self-styled radical intellectuals for everything from his so-called investment in the "dialectics of nature" to the discursively dry expository style of the second volume of Marx's *Capital*, compiled after Marx's death.

Engels's tactical philosophical-political insistence that political programs and attendant philosophical world views are disciplined by the actuality of both labor and struggle get conflated by lesser and less radical minds than Gordon's with the variety of twentieth-century self-professed "scientific" socialisms, whether as state theory or philosopher's credo. The bulk of contemporary scholars cannot seem to grant Engels the speculative, imaginative, thought-experiments (utopian, at that) they chastise him for foreclosing (Frantz Fanon, a notable exception). While waging her critique of Engels's 1880 pamphlet, Gordon (honorably) expresses an unwillingness "to hold [Engels] responsible for only popularizing a collaborative idea not only because Marx had a lot to do with it but also because Engels was always having to be responsible for him" (66). Even more poignantly, Gordon generously demonstrates how Engels's lived life was animated by a poetic verve, an embrace of collectivity (his immersion in Irish working class communities) that a science/utopia distinction cannot accurately account for. Gordon's insight here is a hallmark of a top-shelf radical mind.

In *The Hawthorn Archive's* file on a 1982 conversation between Bambara and Key Bonetti of the American Audio Prose Library, the author of *The Salt Eaters* refuses the designation of "utopian writer" and is attuned here to the critical work of genre. Satire, for Bambara, implies a "certain kind of sneering temperament, and that's a little removed from me" (35). She expresses her weariness with the generic properties and presumptive logic of

utopian literature because the genre (1) necessitates a convergence of assumptions between writer and reader (what she calls a shared “vision”); (2) constitutes a failure to look at what Bambara lauds as “process”; and finally (3) posits a future oriented vision that isn’t linked sufficiently to memory (35). The labor that is formative in constructing the guerilla as one of many figures of militancy is bound to the historical—a slow, sublimating build-up, shunning creation in an instant.

In Bambara’s historical dialectic (consider her meditation on intergenerational African American tensions and love in “My Man Bovanne”), the “new society [is framed] as part of a historical continuum”(35). Gordon’s commentary commences with analyzing later lines of *The Salt Eaters*: “Don’t you want to be free?” and “What are you going to do to be free?,” along with “FACE UP TO WHAT’S KILLING YOU,” connecting such proclamations to the novel’s infamous first line: “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well” (37, 43). Such a re-ordering, for this reviewer, forced me to fundamentally rethink how *The Salt Eaters* frames and reframes its critical understanding of reparative process. Gordon’s progression of analysis moves from assertion in the form of a question, to militant imperative, to the novel’s fundamental first question.

Borges’s “On the Exactitude in Science” issues a warning against the hubris of thinking territorial cartography can be exhaustive, achieve scale, and finally, cohere to the amplitude of both lived space, human creativity and the desire to know. Territorial cartography is never just that. Borges’s parable pinpoints the fallacy of (complete) coverage. Gordon’s *Hawthorn Archive* internalizes such cautionary warning: it’s file cabinets are bottomless and insights consistently wide enough to incorporate Borges, Engels, Bambara, and others. For such a feat, our only appropriate response is gratitude.