

Withering the State Machine

Lola Olufemi

What I did that was new was to prove:

- (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with the particular, historical phases in the development of production (historische Entwicklungsphasen der Produktion)*
- (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat,*
- (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.*

An excerpt from Karl Marx's letter to Weydemeyer dated March 5, 1852.¹

Olive knew that beyond accusations of division, the black woman's position could tell them something specific about the worker and racial capitalism. Every time they were dismissed in the meetings, something inside her broke. The movement was falling apart. But it was women that kept things alive on the ground – they worked with the lawyers to get brothers out of prison, to stop deportations in action; they ran the mutual aid networks, stocked the bookshop, facilitated the meetings. Yet their strategies were picked apart, their ideas whispered between brothers' speeches.

She didn't understand how everyone else slept so soundly at night, with so much wrong with the world. Sometimes the sky in London would settle into a black so thick, so dense, it was impossible to see through. Watching it roll over the city, she would think of the global chains that connected her to other anti-colonial movements across the world. She'd never felt more power than as a squatter, firmly in the centre of an organised, relentless communist movement. They were showing the people that things could be had for free. This world wasn't about how much you owed, or keeping your head down to avoid

¹ Marx, Karl (1975 [1852]): "Marx to Weydemeyer. Dated March 5, 1852." In: Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels (eds.) Selected Correspondence, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 669.

trouble. She remembered Lenin: So long as the state exists there is no freedom; when there is freedom, there will be no state.

An excerpt from 'Narrative consistency' in *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* written by Lola Olufemi, 2020.²

Figure 1: Sisters Uncut. Sarah Everard Demonstration, September 2021³



A thorough assessment of the conditions in which events, rebellions and class struggle arise and a belief that consciousness must be rooted, proceeding from *somewhere* or *something* external to the self, calls on us to remember that freedom is not an abstraction. Marxism holds that the task for those concerned with ending the immiseration of the working classes, should lay in undertaking forms of historical analysis that illuminate a path for action in the contemporary moment. The effects of thinking about freedom in this manner are many; there is no doubt that the tenets of historical materialism make freedom

² Olufemi, Lola (2021): *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, London: Hajar Press: 22–23.

³ See: Sisters Uncut (2021): "Sisters Uncut: 'Why We're Launching National Intervention Training after Sarah Everard's Kidnap by Cop", September 30, 2021 (<https://gal-dem.com/wayne-couzens-arrested-sarah-intervention/>).

attainable by uncovering the economic processes that govern social organisation over time, revealing how these processes might be jeopardized and then defeated. But a refusal to interrogate the conceptual power of 'History', how it flattens temporality into a stadal and linear teleology, risks turning freedom into a matter of prediction based on the immutability of the past and the historical narratives that produce it. This tendency erodes the need to remain flexible, expanding Marxist analysis and struggle in light of the racialised, gendered and other forms of unevenly distributed labour that occur in capitalist societies. It defangs those radical movements that seek redress for the workers crushed by these conditions.

I begin this intervention with three seemingly disconnected excerpts gathered from the detritus of 'History', all of which are concerned with forms of resistance against oppressive state forces and ultimately, I wager, the abolition of the state. Each narrates a form of principled struggle against the state apparatus that responds to the specificity of their material and temporal condition. Marx speaks to the processes through which a dictatorship of the proletariat is to be established, my fabulated account of the actions of Olive Morris attends to her role in challenging state hegemony as part of grassroots movements in London in the 1980s, and the image of organisers at a Sisters Uncut protest from 2021 represents the striking visual and aesthetic dimension of opposition to a carceral state.

Traditional Marxist approaches might designate the latter excerpts as insufficiently analytical, precisely because they concern revolutionary subjects whose analysis is inflected by critical understandings of race, gender and class but asking, 'how are Olive Morris, Sisters Uncut and Karl Marx related?' does two things. Firstly, it stays with abstraction, imagining that there might be some intangible connection (rooted in spirit, desire, what Marxists might refer to as mysticism) between these three entities, despite the different time periods in which they exist. It complicates the stadal Marxist dictum that all things must be neatly fixed inside of a History in order to be understood or capable of being analysed. This is not a new intervention; the particularity of this progressiveist approach has been explicitly rejected by Marxists throughout history, my intervention is aligned with Cedric Robinson and Rosa Luxemburg whose analysis of both History and temporality stressed the agency of revolutionary subjects to challenge and escape the strictures of these concepts, and insisted on the expansion and reappropriation of these terms against capitalist accumulation. If dialectical thought encourages an embrace of the tension and conflicts located inside any totality, then I extend this disobedience theoretically. I ask,

why think Marxism anew, when we could think it differently? Rather than attempting to read the actions of historical and contemporary feminist organisers like Olive Morris and Sisters Uncut in light of Marx's framework, I instead want to ask, would it be possible to make these actors speak to one another across time? I do so by grounding my analysis of these three different conjectures of political struggle through a reading of time as foregrounded by the creative character of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on History*. What new pedagogical and political implications might this dialogue have for those interested in the project of material transformation through thought, language and most importantly, action?

Using a materialist black feminist methodology and creative practice, I want to think with Marxism *against* the weight of History, rather than conceding it as the basis from which all things must be understood. I wager that, finding the connection between Olive Morris, Sisters Uncut and Marxist thought expressed through multiple actors (here Marx, Engels and Lenin) requires us, as dialectical thinkers, to shrug off the cloak of History, to loosen it ever so slightly and allow the past and present and future to collide. By 'History' I refer to the linear and sequential events of the past which are articulated through process, occurrence and historiography that seeks to impose a narrative that explains *what was then* and subsequently, *what is now*. I am interested in the power of traditional historiography to create a two-tier system of official and unofficial events and how the authority of narrative power – the ability to define historical record – is directly correlated to bourgeois ownership.

Evading 'History' in order to read the connections in political fervency between these subjects might produce a different orientation to materialist struggle, particularly the notion of the 'future' as a fixed entity that must be 'won' or 'secured' rather than a site that is produced and reproduced in the present. I hold, in line with Walter Benjamin, that there is value in understanding the task of historical materialism as related to what Beiner (1984) calls 'a redemptive relation to the past, rather than a question of what is to come.' Benjamin is remembered as one of the most creative Marxist thinkers precisely because his *Theses on History* marries the tenets of historical materialism with a theological impulse. This move interests me because of the creativity at its core: an inventiveness that unsettles the fixity of historicism. Whilst my own concerns shy away from theology, I'm interested in disobeying the tenants of historical materialism by behaving ambivalently to the rules of History, which seek to impose a chronology of events from which political material conditions emerge and are analysed. Instead, I enact a redemptive

relation to the past, by 'rescuing' Olive Morris from it and behaving as if it were possible for her to speak to Marx, Engels and Lenin and Sisters Uncut and for them to speak back.

To approach History in this manner is to critique the limitations it places on dialectical thinking and to resuscitate the affective dimensions of Marxism. As a practise based researcher and writer, I am interested in the promise of artistic approaches: how they can aid in defying capitalism by bringing a vitality and texture to resistance. Such a texture is dependent on continued experimentation with form as well as a belief in arts ability to shape political consciousness through affect. My intervention takes on an artistic character in order to emphasise the role of aesthetics in exercising the *impulse* to resist not to reaffirm a belief that artistic creation can in and of itself transform material conditions. New perspectives that claim to think through, with, against and beyond Marx frequently contend with the conferred authority of historical fact. It is a historical fact that Marx was a German man, who lived and whose works continue to provide the lifeblood for a number of ongoing theoretical and practical debates that drive class struggle against capitalist social relations. It is a historical fact that Olive Morris, South London resident, black communist and member of the Brixton Black Women's Group founded in 1973 produced knowledge that furthered Marxist thought as it pertained to the positions of black women workers in the United Kingdom. It is a historical fact that Sisters Uncut have been at the forefront of radical forms of feminist organising in the United Kingdom since 2014 and that, in challenging the corrosive effects of austerity and carceral state for working class women through direct action have provided a new way of thinking about what contemporary feminism is and *should be*.

Feminist, anti-racist, and queer approaches to Marxism alert us to the uneven, complex and differential nature of capitalist totality. They help investigate the affective impulses that make us want to analyze our conditions and fight back. They demonstrate that *everyone* has the potential to become a revolutionary subject. Understanding one of the core features of Marxism: which is to strike the heart of capitalist social and economic relations, to cede back the theoretical ground necessary to *change* History, not merely interpret it, first begins with a recognition of how History's weight can and does drag us down. It is not a contradiction to embrace the structural tenets of historical materialism whilst critiquing its approach to the past, as Benjamin did. It is also not a contradiction to insist that Marxism must continue to utilise and contend with creative methods in its analysis, paying close attention to the affective relations

they produce and embodied experiences of the quotidian which are ordered by temporal regimes. Creative experimentation with temporality in Marxist analysis might bring flight to materialist political struggle weighed down by History, enrich us, help us understand how and why we struggle and ensure we do not consign ourselves to the realm of defeat.

I have placed a short extract from Marx's letter to a friend alongside my own fictional speculation of events in the life of Olive Morris because following Wilkie, Savransky and Rosengarten (2017) I believe speculation can reorder the realm of the plausible, probable and the possible. I enact this comparison for the purposes of reading the two texts together even though they exist in different spatio-temporal locations. To strip them of their context is to extract them from historical time, the time of the event and bring them into an aporetic temporality capable of holding contradiction and tracing their affective impulses.

I remake Rizvana's Bradley's concept of 'representational aporia' (2015) which she uses to analyse how black womanhood – the specific configuration of race and gender – "challenges the prescribed limits of personhood, identity and humanity" (2015: 162) and repurpose it to think about the irreconcilability, puzzlement and doubt produced by temporal play. An aporetic temporality creates an internal irresolvability that challenges the hegemony of clock-time. Temporal play is an imaginative act. Reading 'fact' against 'fiction' in this way unsettles notions of the security of past, present and future as distinct temporal regimes that are integral to the concept of linear progress. This action reminds us that we can never exhaust the potential of the present, that the future can never be finished and that the past is not behind us.

Tracing the affective ripples that connect Olive Morris, Sisters Uncut and the tenets of Marxism is not an attempt to identify straightforward continuities, rather it acknowledges how placing archival material in an aporetic temporality can distort historical time. By 'historical time' I refer to a temporality whose organisation is dependent on world historical events and in light of modernity has come to be fixed in a straightforward past-present-future-chronology that moves in one direction, most famously theorised by Koselleck. In her work, Victoria Browne (2014), attempts to reconceptualise historical time, making the case that it is polytemporal – a "lived time" which surely moves in more than one direction" (2014: 2). I break with this reconceptualisation, to argue that the notion of historical time is underpinned by a Hegelian

teleological progression based on a colonial conception of 'World History' that must be abandoned entirely. In my analysis, the substance of History is not defined by a chronological temporality but rather by a temporality that oscillates, that is constantly on the move. It rejects the presentist thesis that all things are self-evident by attempting to enable temporal regimes to encroach on one another.

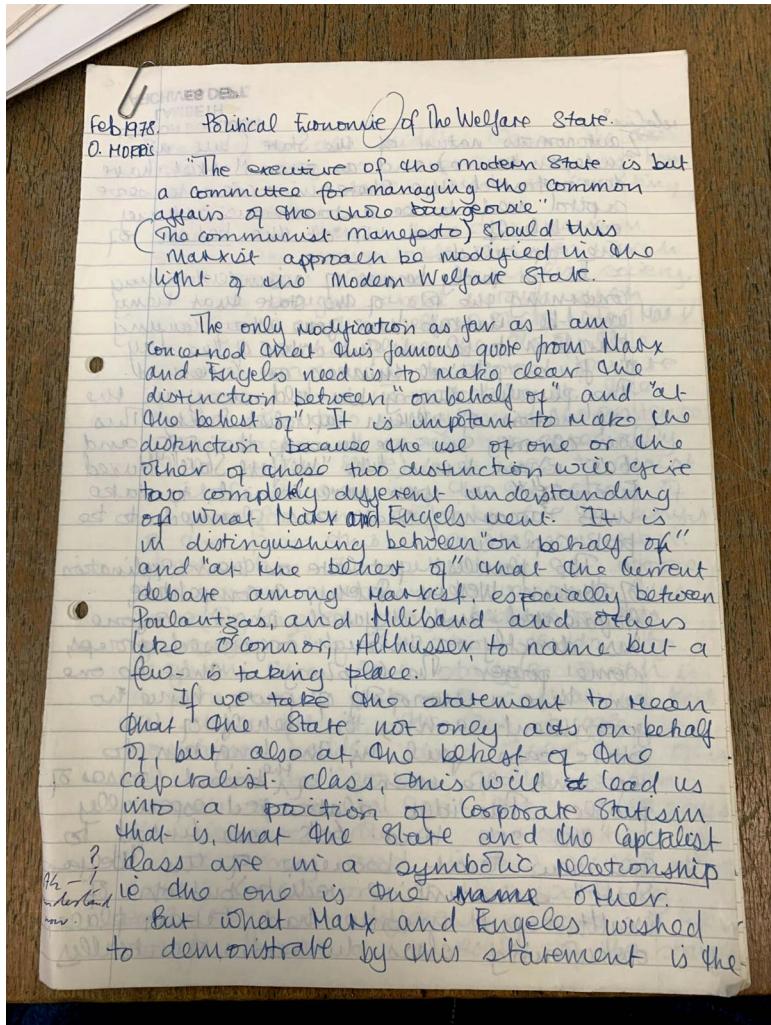
Constructing an aporetic temporality in which to place texts enables the tracing of connections to take place. I understand tracing as an affective technology which includes the use of speculation, fabulation, comparative visual and discourse analysis. This action helps elucidate flows, and non-linguistic intensities of feeling that connect these texts across time. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) argue that at its most anthropomorphic, affect theory relates to a "force" or forces of encounter. I am interested in the emotional aftermath of quotidian encounters with archival material, with the "accumulative *beside-ness*" (2010: 2) that affect theory intends to clarify. Ahmed (2010) writes that "affect is what sticks, what sustains and preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects" (2010: 29). Noting the strange lingerings of the 'past' in the 'present' and the role these lingerings play into the constitution of the future is pertinent in understanding where the desire to participate in material transformation emerges from. I understand archival material as part of a forcefield of relations, which have an impact on our understanding of the world, its limits and its possibilities. This forcefield of relations shapes our political will, as well as what is possible to conceive of for ourselves and others. In other words, the practice of identifying how Marxist thought seems to echo, reverberate and linger, of bringing Marx, Morris and Sisters Uncut into the same temporality and enabling them to face one another is connected to my contention that such a meeting has the power to cultivate the political desire to resist in myself as a researcher and in you, reader, for the purposes of sustaining grassroots movements.

The scope of my interest is the relationship between being *moved* by archival material and our desire, intention and capacity to materially resist violent conditions. I am interested in the rhythms, forces and modalities that come to define these encounters and how they warp temporality. In the space of my inquiry, I wish to imagine it were possible to rub Marx, Olive Morris and Sisters Uncut against one another, to loop them around each other affectively and theoretically. In order to avoid positioning Marxism as my theoretical starting point, tracing enables me to open up a hermeneutical window that understands radical theory as a thoroughly interdependent and circular endeavor. As

theory informs praxis, so the past and future bleed into the present, eliminating the linearity inherent to notions of 'beginning' and 'end.'

Hall et al. (1978) noted that race and gender are modalities through which proletarian life is lived, experienced and resisted, this claim fortifies Marxist thought, rather than diminishes it. I also propose tracing as a method because it enables me to question how accusations of the diminishment of class analysis reify orthodox Marxism as the origin point of political thought, so that everyone who comes after Marx must answer him as their predecessor, rather than address him as a comrade with whom they share temporal space. Tracing helps break down the often staid and totalising logic that analyses of race, gender, sexuality and/or colonialism are somehow corrosive to Marxist epistemologies by opening space for dialogue, dissent, lingering and repetition. Political struggle does not begin with Marx, nor do contemporary social movements simply adopt Marxist principles in this thing called 'the present' which is distinct from 'the past' in which this thinking originates. The relationship between Marx, Olive Morris and Sisters Uncut is reciprocal, I wager that they can and do touch and rub up against one another outside of a linear temporal landscape and that thinking Marxism differently requires us to remain attentive to the hapticality that is produced as a result.

Rather than begin with Marx, let us begin in Lambeth Archives in South London. Under the careful watch of archivists who remind me that the presence of pens, food and drinks are prohibited when handling the material, I come across an essay written by Olive Morris in February 1978, presumably for her undergraduate degree in Politics at Manchester University.

Figure 2: Olive Morris essay, February 1978⁴

4 This image was reproduced by kind permission of London Borough of Lambeth, Archives Department.

In this essay, she attempts to answer the question: "The executive of the modern state is a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie." (The Communist Manifesto) Should this Marxist approach be modified in light of the Modern Welfare State?" (Lambeth Archives, n.p., 2009)

Morris argues that the illusion of the so-called welfare state does not obscure the state's original function as a protector of private property or a guardian for the accumulation of capital.

The question then is how does Marxism explain the undisputable changes which have taken place in capitalist society, changes brought about through such channels as the welfare state? For Marx and the Marxist alike, the role of the state is primarily to protect private property and in protecting it, the state also has to legitimise the existence of this backboard ownership. Especially if (the state) continues to assist capital in enduring the extraction of surplus value from the majority for the benefit of the few – this is capitalism's main contradiction. (Lambeth, n.p., Archives, 2009)

In her analysis, the Keynesian welfare state is an ideologically harmonizing move from the bourgeoisie that makes piecemeal concessions to citizens whilst maintaining the fundamentally extractive and dispossessive nature of capitalism. Morris notes how the Welfare State is dependent on the exploited labour of workers from the former colonies. In line with social reproductionists, she also notes how women's care work within homes and state institutions such as hospitals and schools are crucial not only in the creation of workers but the maintenance of the state's ideological harmonizing mission. The implication of her analysis is that the state remains an obstructive force in the lives of workers and that material transformation might only occur when it is displaced via a proletarian revolution. Morris recognises the role of the state as the arbiter between classes and indicates that the destruction of this relationship is a necessity.

Following Morris, Marx and Engels similarly outlined the necessity of workers' antagonistic relationship to the state under capitalism. In *Anti-Duhring: Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science* (1987) Engels writes,

The proletariat seizes from state power and turns the means of production into state property to begin with. But thereby it abolishes itself as the proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, and also abolishes the state as state. (1987: 267)

With Morris, they point toward the necessity of seizing state power in order to bring about truly transformative political conditions for workers. Marx's reflections on the efforts of the Paris Commune are also pertinent here. In the preface of the 1872 edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, updated in light of the events at the Paris Commune, Marx and Engels remark that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." (2012: 103). Indeed, they implore their audience to understand that as-is, the state cannot be wielded on its own terms, its purpose must be first reconfigured. Marx and Engels argue that the culmination of class struggle is a dictatorship of the proletariat, which necessitates a withering away of the state as we know it. This withering away occurs in the proletarian command of the organisational aspects of the state, which is only a temporary stage in the movement towards a classless society. To perform an analysis that traces, is to note how the demand for the withering away of the state appears in both texts under different guises. If we attune our ears, we might hear the echoes of political desire embedded in analysis. Morris follows Marx and Engels by arguing that the Welfare State is simply a smokescreen which obscures the necessity of the state's destruction and then speaks back to them by incorporating an analysis of the exploitation of workers from former colonies in the maintenance of the British state, an undeveloped notion in Marx's political writing. Marx and Engels offer Morris a framework that enables her to further elucidate the intricacies of her material conditions as a black worker who is subject to oppressive conditions constituted and exacerbated by her racialisation and gendering. They pass ideas back and forth. By refusing to understand these texts using prevailing temporal logics, the two thinkers begin an exchange that builds:

For Marx and the Marxist alike, the role of the state is primarily to protect private property. The proletariat seizes from state power and turns the means of production into state property to begin with. Especially if (the state) continues to assist capital in enduring the extraction of surplus value."

The above is merely a textual representation of this exchange, but placing the texts inside of an aporetic temporality creates a new theoretical conjuncture in which the tenets of Marxism, expressed across the temporal divide coalesce, to form a different political and artistic imperative. This textual collaboration creates an affective resonance which indicates that resistant forces, though separated by temporal divides, are co-constitutive, made up of one another.

Morris' organising and determination to forge transnational links between radical struggles might also be read as a form of radical reciprocity with Marx. Coincidentally, I come across multiple photographs of her as a member of the student delegation of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding who visited China in 1977 in order to understand how communism had been built and sustained. In an article she wrote for *SPEAK OUT!*, the Brixton Black Women's Group newsletter, Olive examines the function of the Republic and the possibility of transforming conditions for the proletariat.

After the People's Republic was founded in 1949, the peasants were freed from exploitation of big landlords and a system of collective production began which over the years has gone through many stages. Today it takes the form of the People's Commune which combines all social activities. It organizes the running of small factories, schools, medical teams, clinics, cultural activities and of course, agriculture. The People's Commune has furthered the people's confidence in dealing with the job of planting, protecting and harvesting crops, guaranteeing food for the mass of Chinese people all year round. (Lambeth Archives, 2009)

The desire for the destruction of the capitalist state expressed in Morris' essays exists not merely as Marxism's successor but also as its companion. This political demand is testament to how Marxist principles might be echoed, remade, rearticulated and accumulate beside across the many years that separate Olive Morris from Marx and Engels. They neither eclipse nor are eclipsed by each other, rather in tracing the echoes that emanate from her work, Olive helps rescue Marxism from the tomb of the past, held together by linear historicity, by rearticulating a desire for the death of the state that was also expressed by her 'predecessors.' Morris revives Marx to accompany her; perhaps they speak in one voice, at different tones and registers, to say: **The withering away of the capitalist state is a necessity.** To return to the work of Victoria Browne (2013), Morris' contributions are part of a temporal loop, a Kierkegaardian mode of "recollecting forward" which can be understood as "a kind of echoing which does not passively repeat but actively transforms past and present simultaneously" (Jones 2009: 13). Political will scatters itself across temporal zones. Repetition, echoes, resurfacings occur because conferred authority of "History" has been displaced by an aporetic temporality. Morris' relationship to Marx can be distilled here precisely because another understanding of temporality enables us to recognise that they both write across History, driven by the fact that

the contest over power between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie has not yet been resolved. The desire for the state to wither contained in these archival documents emanates through an affective charge, reaches us in the here and now and strengthens our own imperative to resist as thinkers, readers and those invested in class struggle.

An organiser holds a banner outside of the courtroom. **MET POLICE: BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS** is messaging in line with Sisters Uncut's history of evocative imagery and rhetoric; it provides a direct critique of the carcerality of state power. The statement urges the public to reject the explanation by the MET Police communications office that the sitting police officer who murdered Sarah Everard in 2021 was an aberration, 'a lone officer' who was not representative of the police's function in society as whole. In light of the deaths and/or brutality inflicted on Cherry Groce, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman, Joy Gardner, Annabella Landsberg, Sarah Reed, Sarah Everard and many more, Sisters Uncut demand the wholesale withdrawal of consent to be policed. BECOME UNGOVERNABLE, they chant. In opposition to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) making its way through Parliament at the same time, they organise counter protests, cop-watch groups and set off hundreds of rape alarms outside White Chapel police station. They put forward an abolitionist vision for navigating carceral landscapes: **the police do not protect us, always and forever, we keep each other safe.**

Building on the work of Marx, Lenin writes: *A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But how can it be otherwise?* (2020:11) The purpose of reading this image alongside Lenin's interpretation of Marxism and Olive Morris's theoretical contribution is to underscore how the image orientates us towards that 'otherwise.' I read the image in question both as evidence of a political form of direct-action and as a form of enlivening cultural production. I understand the banner and the demand it displays to be part of a set of visual and aesthetic choices intended to denaturalise a police state. The image captures the moment that the cultural work comes into contact with the public. In this moment, there is a communication of political desire that mirrors and echoes Lenin and Morris. *But how can it be otherwise?* The image is an invitation for the onlooker to expand their own imaginative capacity.

If the state is propped up by police power (Lenin), we must remain aware of the illusion of the welfare state (Morris) and its withering is dependent on a dic-

tatorship of the proletariat (Engels), then contemporary calls for the abolition of policing represent an extension of the Marxist demand for the cultivation of working class power. **MET POLICE, BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS** might also be read as a call for the reconfiguration of the state, its seizure by the proletariat pending its dissolution.

In *Feminism Interrupted; Disrupting Power* (2020), I analysed the danger of liberalism's insistence on policing as a public good for the safety of women. The use of forms of direct action by feminist resistance groups such as Sisters Uncut illustrate how the cultivation of working class power is directly connected to and powered by the delegitimisation of policing through a critical analysis of its function as a mechanism of the state:

In the liberal feminist rationale, the police and prisons are necessary because they protect women from danger. They are necessary because without them, society would descend into chaos... but the police are deployed to do the state's bidding and are enmeshed in the oppressive consequences of this task. This is why, despite liberal feminism's insistence, increased numbers of women entering the police force can never transform its practice. State killings act as another mechanism to remove women from public life. (Olufemi 2020: 31)

I include this analysis with the aim of highlighting how the cultural object (in this instance, an image) provides visual representation of the groups recognition of the state's obsolescence, it is another avenue for the consideration of similar desires across temporal locations. Following Morris' elucidation of capitalist contradiction; reading the texts against one another propels us towards an analysis that understands how even the seemingly benevolent state, propped up by general anxieties about violence, is dangerous. The demand in the image implicitly instructs its audience to want more, it builds the desirous ground from which Marxist analysis proceeds by naming the violence of the state's institutions – and consolidating this claim with actions, mobilisations and skill-sharing that enable its audience to resist its hegemony in the present moment. The political imperative to transform the state as we know it is not displaced into a future that is won by virtue of obedience to a stadal historicism but rather found, rehearsed and enacted by way of temporal experimentation in the present moment.

If the image captures the "moment" that the political demand enters public space, Morris' archival essay is private evidence of the consolidation of a po-

litical standpoint, the texts produced by Marx, Engels and Lenin offer an enduring lens through which to read and rethink how capitalist domination expresses itself. When made to exist in the same temporality, the affective pull of these objects consolidates liberatory promise; they shore up prepersonal, non-conscious intensities that consolidate one another, producing an affinity and attachment to freedom as a realisable phenomena. If, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2017: 226) argues, freedom is a place – then the affective phenomena produced by experimentation with cultural material orientates us all in the direction of that place and asks us to locate it.

I want to end with a recognition that my attempt to trace affective echoes and the desires they produce, my brief experiment in recording what repeats, is not intended to fix that echo or repetition in place. I understand desire using Berlant's definition of it as 'a state of attachment and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object's specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it.' In this instance, the question is not if the object's specificity (the withering away of the state) is *obtainable* but how the cultural objects that come under my analysis becomes a receptacle for revolutionary needs and promises that are projected on to it. When I identify echoes, I am not arguing that Marx, Morris and Sisters Uncut share an unbroken vision or set of demands without dissent or disruption. I am suggesting that placing them in a different temporal space illuminates the way their approaches hold, speak back, enrich and contour one another and in turn can produce an affective orientation that reignites our desire to resist via material struggle.

These subjects relate *in spite* of their different temporal locations. Across action and text, in letters, essays and visual material – all three subjects express a desire for the state as we know it to give way, to wither and slowly die. The existence of the demands in this ephemera makes the possibility of enacting the state's disappearance tangible for their relative audiences and those who engage with their work across temporal divides. Thinking Marxism differently means embracing the role of ephemeral and creative methods in relation to Marxist critique; thinking with and against History – in order for this tension to extend forms of Marxist analysis related to the operation of the base and superstructure, the form of revolution, the historical development of capital and the nature of class struggle. What lingers in Morris and Sisters Uncut affirms and extends the ground on which Marxism is built. Their words and actions

put Marx to *good use*, sending reverberations that meet his words in 1852 and leave remnants of the future in it.

References

Ahmed, Sara (2010): "Happy Objects." In: Melissa Gregg/Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 29–51.

Beiner, Ronald (1984): "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History." In: *Political Theory* 12/3, pp. 423–434 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/191516>).

Bradley, Rizvana (2015): "Reinventing Capacity: Black Femininity's Lyrical Surplus and the Cinematic Limits of *12 Years a Slave*." In: *Black Camera* 7/1, pp. 162–178.

Browne, Victoria (2013): "Backlash, Repetition, Untimeliness: The Temporal Dynamics of Feminist Politics." In: *Hypatia* 28/4, pp. 905–920.

Browne, Victoria (2014): *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Gregg, Melissa/Seigworth. Gregory J eds. (2010): "An Inventory of Shimmers." In: Melissa Gregg/Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 1–4.

Hall, Stuart/Critcher, Chas/Jefferson, Tony/Clarke, John/Roberts, Brian (1978): *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London: Macmillan.

Jones, Rachel (2009): "Between Fractures and Folds: Battersby on Active Matter" and 'Others Within.' (Unpublished manuscript presented at Situated Selves conference at the University of Liverpool).

Kelley, Robin (2008): *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Boston: Beacon Press.

Lenin, Vladimir (2020): *The State and Revolution*, Paris: Foreign Languages Press.

Marx, Karl (1975 [1852]): "Marx to Weydemeyer Dated March 5, 1852." In: Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels (eds.), *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 669.

Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (1987): *Collected Works Volume 25: Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring. Dialectics of Nature*, New York: International Publishers.

Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (1975): *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (1992): *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marx, Karl/Engels, Friedrich (2012): "Preface to the German Edition of 1872." In: Jeffrey C. Isaac (eds.), *The Communist Manifesto*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Olufemi, Lola (2020): *Feminism Interrupted*, London: Pluto Press.

Olufemi, Lola (2021): *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*, London: Hajar Press, pp. 22–23.

Sisters Uncut (2021): "Sisters Uncut: Why We're Launching National Intervention Training after Sarah Everard's Kidnap by Cop", September 30, 2021 (<https://gal-dem.com/wayne-couzens-arrested-sarah-intervention/>).

Wilkie, Alex/Savranksy, Martin/Rosengarten, Marsha (eds.) (2017): *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Wilson Gilmore, Ruth (2017): "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence." In: Gaye Theresa Johnson/Alex Lubin (eds.), *Futures of Black Radicalism*, London: Verso, pp. 224–241.

Archives

Lambeth Archives, IV/279/1/11/1-30. 2009. Olive Morris Collection. Essays.

