

SHIT

WE ARE OUTLAWS!

THERE IS NO LONGER ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEORY AND ACTION



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BLIND EYES  
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# Poetry Written in Gasoline: Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker

Gavin Grindon

Let a way of life  
Numb whole sectors of mankind  
And only half-stroked thoughts of  
Something should be done  
Are nodded over tea.  
Now,  
so late  
we only hope  
that others dare  
those things  
we thought  
too bold.<sup>1</sup>

Black Mask were a loose collective that emerged on the Lower East Side of New York in 1966, transitioning from 1967 into another larger, more open group, Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, also known as the Motherfuckers or (later) the Family, whose activities continued until 1969. Their history has been little examined, but the ideas, socially engaged art forms and aesthetics developed by these two groups set the terms of what would later be called activist-art, and more generally influenced social movement cultures from the 1970s onwards.<sup>2</sup> Most significantly, their work was also a key point of conjunction between activist social movements and the artistic avant-garde. Black Mask/Up Against the Wall Motherfucker self-consciously reclaimed the radical legacy of dada and surrealism in ways which set them drastically at odds with the institutional academic and art-world reception of the avant-garde in New York in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> As I argue below, these groups represent a neglected moment of the ‘communization of the avant-garde’ in which radical dadaist and surrealist ideas and practices are woven through the actually existing social movement cultures of the 1960s and allied particularly to anarchist political organizations and direct action in North America. The history of this moment and its lasting influence in contemporary activist-art casts a critical light on the debate around the legacies and successes of the avant-garde’s revolutionary ambitions.

In March 1968 the exhibition ‘Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage’ arrived at the New York Museum of Modern Art. It embodied a formalist and evolutionary narrative of art history, presenting abstract expressionism and pop as the legacy of surrealism. Counter to this institutional inscription a radical reiteration of dada and

**Detail from UATWFMF,  
Untitled, Berkeley Barb, 11–18  
October 1968, p. 13 (plate 17).**

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surrealism swiftly emerged. Firstly, ex-surrealist critic Nicolas Calas and curator Gene Swenson criticized the exhibition's political lacunae.<sup>4</sup> Two adverts appeared in the *Village Voice* newspaper 'dedicated to the lost but not forgotten spirit of Dada and Surrealism', calling for a protest on the opening night.<sup>5</sup> Tensions were high following the 'Yip In' in Grand Central Station the previous week, in which a crowd of 3,000 countercultural youths was violently dispersed by police. The MoMA protest on 25 March was joined by around 300 people, including the Chicago Surrealists, the Yippies and Black Mask/Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, who – their reputation preceding them – ensured the gallery was protected by crash barriers and a tactical police unit.<sup>6</sup> Some snuck inside with live chickens and stink bombs. *The New York Post* reported that the chickens were duly arrested. Inside, Dalí admitted 'we are now part of the establishment', but endorsed the protests: 'Dada and Surrealism still live, they still have teeth.'<sup>7</sup> Countercultural publications agreed, with *The Village Voice* opining that 'the only real Dada was provided ... across the street', and others proclaimed that: 'Dada is very much alive today. It exists in the happenings [and] Digger Free Stores ... Black Mask and Diggers is equivalent to the radical revolutionary rantings and ravings of Dada.'<sup>8</sup>

Ben Morea of Black Mask had regularly attended talks on dada, surrealism and contemporary art in New York, frequently becoming 'so outraged that he would stand up and deliver a speech denouncing all, often bringing the event to an abrupt and unruly end'.<sup>9</sup> Morea conducted such an intervention at a three-day event accompanying MoMA's show, 'Dada, Surrealism, A Symposium', publicized as 'an enquiry into the fundamental premises, art forms and contemporary relevance of Dada and Surrealism', and held at the CUNY Graduate Division on 26–28 March. The symposium featured Calas, Hilton Kramer and other prestigious critics and historians.<sup>10</sup> Following Morea's interruptions, Black Mask were invited to officially debate these speakers but declined. Black Mask member Dan Georgakas recalled:

Ron, Ben and I didn't like the panellists and felt an engagement on their terms would confirm their status as cultural gurus or trend setters . . . Sort of like letting a third-party candidate sit with the real candidates. Nor did we want to go on their turf.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after, they orchestrated the disruption of the opening of a Hans Arp exhibition at the blue chip, proto-pop Sidney Janis Gallery on East 57th Street which closely accompanied the MoMA show:

We did not want to look like we were retreating. We discussed it and came up with what we thought was a direct action response. We printed flyer invitations to a party with booze and music but that no one would be allowed entry if he or she did not have a noise maker and some kind of mask or costume. They were not handed out to the homeless on the Bowery but at corners in the East Village, the Village proper and our usual 8th Street–6th Avenue spot. In short, we tried to appeal to those people we always appealed to, where we did our other Black Mask stuff. There was indeed a big turnout that would have filled the gallery at least twice. People filled the stairs to the gallery and assumed the louder you were, the more likely you were to gain admittance. When no one was let in, there was considerable anger and noise. Fearing a riot, the gallery called the police. We considered the event a success.<sup>12</sup>

Kramer was prompted to acerbically criticize the ‘illusions’ of young people in his review of MoMA’s show, while for his part Calas continued to trouble over surrealism’s radical legacy.<sup>13</sup>

Black Mask are central to this marginal yet disquieting moment in the historicization of dada and surrealism. Adrian Henri’s *Environments and Happenings* (1974) opens by listing one of their actions as among ‘the most important images in twentieth century art’ alongside work by Yves Klein, Allan Kaprow, Christo Yavacheff and Claes Oldenburg.<sup>14</sup> But they became almost completely absent from histories of political art in the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> A partial recovery in the 1990s, amidst a wave of writing about the Situationist International and their milieu, was heavily reliant on a single source composed of a mythologizing account of the group and cut-and-pasted sections of Black Mask’s eponymous journal.<sup>16</sup>

Moving beyond this sparse, mythological account of the group requires bringing together interviews and fragments across multiple archives. Kristin Ross has noted in regard to accounts of the May 1968 events in Paris that these have tended to be reduced to a merely cultural ‘explosion’, a romantic myth eviscerated of its everyday political basis. There is certainly a similar danger of reductive recuperation in an art-focused history of Black Mask/Motherfuckers. However, an art-historical account makes it possible to demonstrate the crucial impact of arts groups in the growth and success of social movements, and counters the elision of their role which can occur in political histories and social movement studies.

### **The Communization of the Avant-Garde**

Black Mask were central to a particular radical, mass-cultural reception of dada and surrealism in the 1960s. They articulated dada and surrealism’s heroic claims for a revolutionary art, deploying them as a new political language which they used to describe the new practices they and others in their milieu had adopted which mixed art with direct action. Centrally, they framed their practices as an exodus from the identity of the ‘artist’ and from art institutions. Rather than working within the institutions and circuits followed by art professionals, Black Mask produced texts, graphics and performances within the networks of the new anarchist and left-communist movements emerging in the 1960s. They also organized protests, established spaces for political meetings and free accommodation, and ran various community activist support programmes. Refusing to differentiate between their ‘artistic’ and ‘political’ work, they described all of these practices as acts of creative labour.

Black Mask’s reception of dada and surrealism took place as part of a wider reiteration of avant-garde terms, texts and images by a milieu of other related groups such as the Chicago Surrealists, Amsterdam Provos, San Francisco Diggers, Yippies, Situationist International (and Second Situationist International), and King Mob. The journal and flyers of these groups often cited and debated surrealist and dadaist themes and ideas. An early Provo flyer sets out their concerns: ‘What is anarchism? – De Sade. – Dada.’<sup>17</sup> Dada and surrealist texts were also printed in translation in many of their journals, not only in Black Mask but also in the Chicago Surrealists’ *Rebel Worker*; the UK’s *Icteric*, *Heatwave* and *King Mob*; and notably a special ‘Surrealism in Service of Revolution’ issue of *Radical America*, the journal of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).<sup>18</sup>

Itself written in 1968, Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* framed surrealism and dada in strong terms as a refusal of art’s autonomous status. Further, he argued that the work of Andy Warhol and others constituted a neo-avant-garde that repeated this gesture within the form of autonomous art, in ‘a manifestation that is void of sense’.<sup>19</sup> Hal Foster, one of several critics engaging with Bürger’s seminal argument, instead set out a theory of the neo-avant-garde as a series of artistic and critical returns, each of which

re-constitutes and re-imagines what the avant-garde was at the same time as they evoke it as point of origin, value and authenticity.<sup>20</sup> This prompts a question as to the specific nature of Black Mask's own evocation and reception of the avant-garde. While its members were promiscuous in trying their hand at monochromes, junk aesthetics, montage and performance, their key borrowing was not formal but theoretical. They attempted to revive the idea of the avant-garde as an authentic and heroic rupture, in which art aimed to transform both everyday life and social relations. In this, their vision of surrealism and dada shared the investments of Bürger and the Situationist International, though they were not initially aware of either.<sup>21</sup> However, while their understanding relied – ironically – on the mythological account of the avant-garde established by art institutions and academics themselves, theirs was for the most part an outsider's reception. Morea, for example, studied the avant-garde in art therapy during drug rehabilitation and in subsequent independent study visits to the New York Public Library. This entailed a complex dynamic of attraction and repulsion to authenticity for the group which I follow below, involving a contrary rejection of the 'false' role of the professional artist; a defence of the 'true' meaning of dada and surrealism; and a search for the most authentic, direct political action accompanied by the construction of a base, gritty, phallogentric aesthetic of lumpen 'realness'.<sup>22</sup>

Against Bürger's melancholy account of the neo-avant-garde as the failure of the avant-garde's revolutionary ambitions, it is possible to identify an alternative narrative of a radical neo-avant-garde in which those ambitions live on and find fulfilment. This also means looking beyond Foster's re-validation of the term 'neo-avant-garde' in as far as it is associated with the institutional, commercial art practices of the 1960s that Bürger and his interlocutors share as case studies. Instead, outside the institutional and commercial production of art, it is possible to identify a radical neo-avant-garde in the work of Black Mask and their milieu. This radical neo-avant-garde milieu conducted a 'communization of the avant-garde'.<sup>23</sup> I use the term communization to point to the mass-cultural dissemination and reception of dada and surrealist texts, images and ideas among social movements in the 1960s. But more than this, I intend it to indicate how the work of Black Mask and others not only remobilized avant-garde aesthetics and language, but did so as part of a set of new cultural-political practices which constituted an artistic experiment with traditional mass cultural forms of social movement action (such as the demonstration march or the mass blockade). Taking place first among anarchist and broadly autonomous tendencies within Western social movements, the 'arts of protest' took an avant-garde turn, in new, experimental and creative forms of contestation such as the political happening. Although a novel perspective within art history, this argument has already been made by some social historians.<sup>24</sup> As I will argue below, many of the 'experimental' or 'activist-art' practices that Black Mask and their milieu were involved in were widely adopted and emerged as normalized forms of social movement action. This radical neo-avant-garde's activist-art practices may have been initially marginal, but they became, for some aspects of Western activist social movements, what protests commonly looked and felt like.

These developments were underwritten by broader social changes. As theorists from the autonomist Marxist tradition have argued, private and cultural areas of life became more central to Western capitalist production in this period.<sup>25</sup> In many industries work became increasingly culturally and aesthetically inflected (requiring greater autonomy; social and emotional skills; and an increasing emphasis on communication, participation and collaboration) and wholly cultural work also became more economically central (in a shift towards service work, image-production and branding over industrial production). One effect of these shifts was that social

practices (and language) associated with artistic production increasingly converged with those of other forms of labouring activity. Workers were increasingly expected to be 'creative'. As social movements organized on this new terrain, the aesthetic quotient of their contestation also increased. In this context, these activist-art groups' appropriation of surrealist demands to 'change life' were no longer utopian or isolated proposals, but spoke to the possibilities and pitfalls of these new social conditions.

In Notebook IV of his *Grundrisse*, Marx uses the term 'general intellect'<sup>26</sup> to describe the aggregate social skills and knowledge of the working class as a key factor in the production of capitalism. More recent autonomist theorists have used the term to argue that this knowledge and skill is also embodied in the production of other social relations antagonistic to capitalism, such as the cultures of social movements.<sup>27</sup> In their radical neo-avant-garde claims for art and revolution, and in their accompanying activist-art practices, groups like Black Mask influentially rework the avant-garde iteration of the autonomy of art-as-a-value as a language for general intellect's antagonism to capital.<sup>28</sup> Their neo-avant-garde redeployment of dadaist and surrealist artistic tactics served as a political language for imagining the other identities and ways of living which now seemed possible. In this situation, the 'aestheticization of politics' was not, as in Walter Benjamin's famous formulation, a catastrophe, but a site of radical potential.<sup>29</sup>

### Exodus from Art

As their founding action in 1966, Black Mask had also organized a happening-demonstration against MoMA. They issued a pamphlet announcing that on Monday 10 October 1966, at 12.30, they were going to close the Museum of Modern Art: 'We sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS . . . Our struggle cannot be hung on walls.'<sup>30</sup> This led to two saw-horses across the entrance and 'a nervous and shifty-eyed mob of plain-clothed and uniformed policemen and newsmen [and] one FBI man with a small Japanese camera'.<sup>31</sup> All that was left was for the three, dressed in black, to walk up to the closed doors and open a canvas sign, reading 'Closed' and distribute more copies



1 Black Mask, *Museum Closed*, 1966. Print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.

2 Installation view of *Quantum II*, A. M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1965. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.



of the flyer (plate 1). In November, they began issuing an eponymous journal, explaining their action. Although aspects of their position were anticipated by others, this was a key conceptual moment that would influence many other groups. Black Mask framed their artistic participation in social movement culture not as an entry into the plenty of communal production, but as exodus or disappearance. Rejecting the institutions of art, they described their activity as something positioned specifically outside and against the 'centre' of the museum. Their particular aesthetics were also novel and influential. Against the common surrealist-tinged joy and love of the countercultural and art milieus of the period, their neo-dada action emphasized stark negation and excess.

An oft-repeated claim is that Black Mask formed from the New York Surrealist Group and the American Anarchist Group.<sup>32</sup> Neither group existed.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the group's origin lies in an earlier collective based on the Lower East Side called Group Center. While Greenwich Village was a solid bourgeois enclave by the 1960s, the Lower East Side provided a cheap alternative for young bohemians and a swarm of runaway teenagers, who became the latest immigrants to the area in a long history from early Italian, Irish, German, Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish waves to black and more recent Puerto Rican communities.<sup>34</sup> The area, boxed in by public housing projects, was one of the city's poorest slums. Racism, racketeering, drug use, illness and unemployment were common. Such demographics condensed the tensions of the growing oppositional mood of the country, with regard to the military draft and oppression of women and people of colour. As a result, the tone of its countercultural art and politics tended to be harder-edged than that of, for example, San Francisco. In 1961, the artist Aldo Tambellini moved to a storefront at 217 East 2nd Street, and in 1962 formed Group Center with Elsa Tambellini, Don Snyder and Ron Hahne, who had arrived in New York from LA. In 1964 Morea, a jazz vibraphonist, came into their circle:

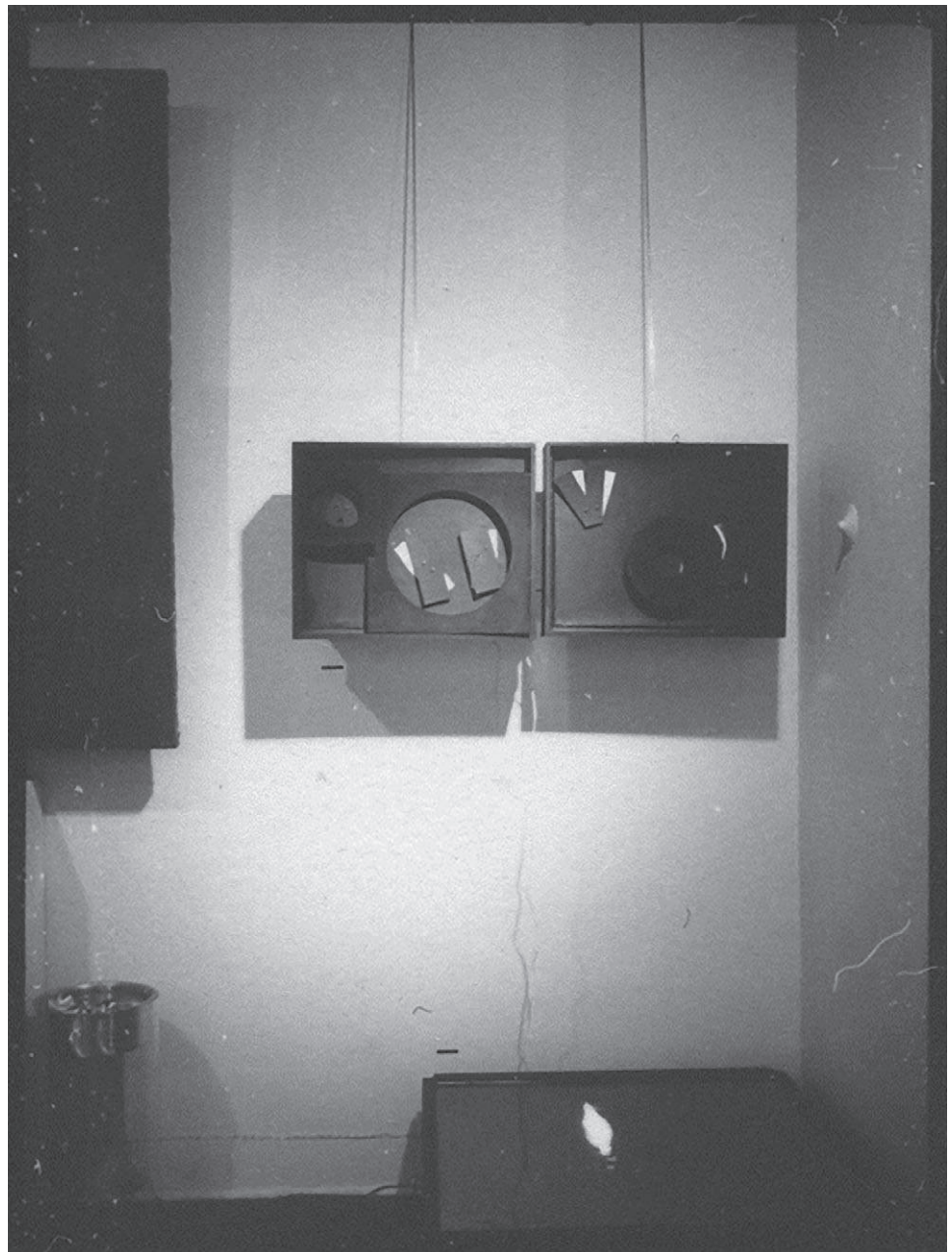
I had been involved in jazz during my drug addiction days. I was a musician and every time I got out of jail I went back around the jazz world and got re-addicted . . . When I finally kicked for the last time . . . they put me in the prison hospital . . . in Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan . . . There was an occupational therapist who befriended me . . . She was an art therapist, so I started painting.<sup>35</sup>



The Tambellinis, Don Snyder, Ron Hahne and Ben Morea became the core of the group. Jackie Cassen and Peter Martinez joined later and they rented a space in a synagogue on Forsyth Street. They echoed the form of Tenth Street gallery co-ops like The Brata, which Aldo Tambellini had been a member of since 1959. Unlike these co-ops, they placed their work into their local community context, positioning themselves against the fashionable art world. Drawing collaborators across the arts, they defined their goals:

A community of the arts . . . Our common bond is not an aesthetic creed but the recognition that . . . in a commercial system dependent upon a constantly expanding market . . . the integrity of the creative individual is destroyed.<sup>36</sup>

From 1961 Aldo Tambellini published *The Screw*, a mimeographed magazine published in six issues, featuring tracts such as 'Fuck the Tastemaker': 'Wall Street is making our art, the galleries are making our art . . . the critics are making our art. WHERE THE



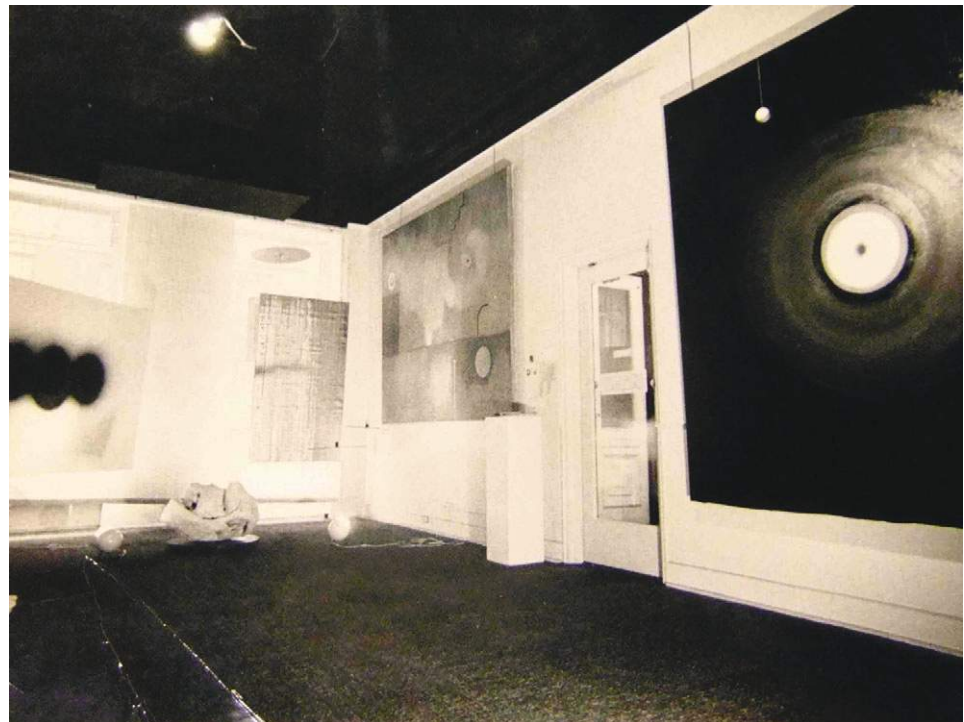
**3 Installation view of *Quantum II*, A. M. Sachs Gallery, New York, 1965. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.**



HELL IS THE ARTIST?'<sup>37</sup> Following 'The Event of the Screw', a protest against MoMA on 12 July 1962, Tambellini tended to be ostracized by curators and dealers. But Group Center aspired to an alternative community. They continued to antagonize art institutions. One night, disguised as workmen, they haunted the pavement outside several uptown galleries with spray-paint-stencil circles about two feet in diameter containing the word 'centrifuge'.<sup>38</sup> Another evening, they covered the Lower East Side in posters reading 'Revolution', which they found almost all defaced the next day. They also continued their own work and attended demonstrations together. Their logo, a linear circle with a dot at its centre, linked the formal themes of their work to their critique of the gravitational 'centre' of the art world – 'bringing the public to the studio because it is there that genesis does in fact take place' – in so-called 'centrifuge' events and exhibitions.<sup>39</sup> They organized a local two-week arts festival in association with the Lower East Side Neighbourhood Association in the grounds of St Mark's church, an outdoor sculpture show in June 1963 and a group exhibition in 1964, the first loft show in SoHo.<sup>40</sup>

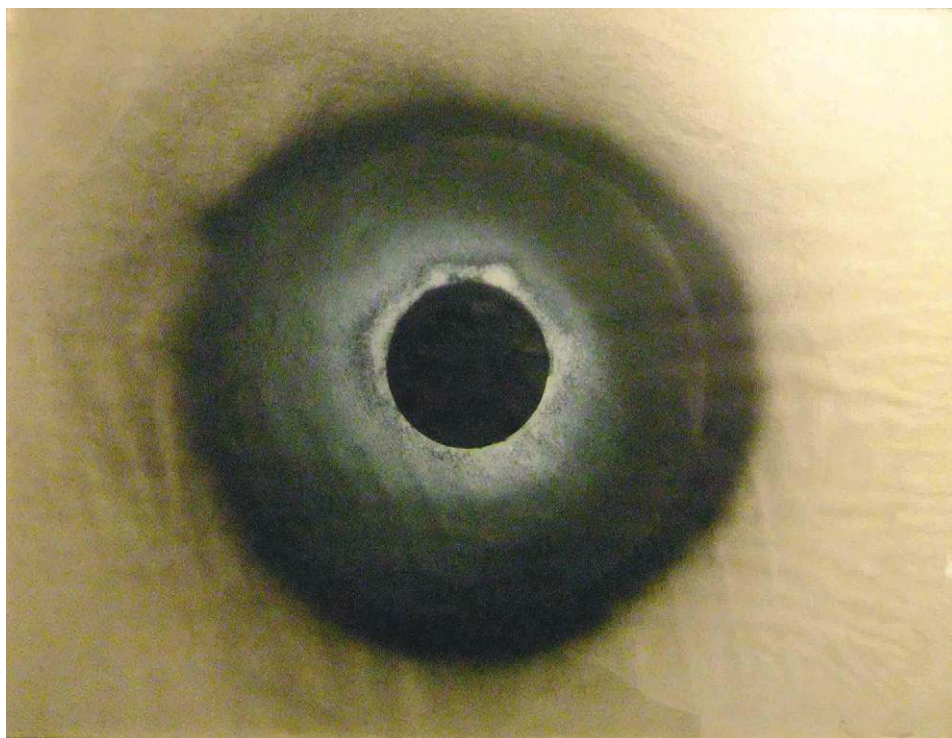
The height of their visibility began with two shows on Madison Avenue, Quantum I (Noah Goldowsky Gallery, from 6 December 1964) and Quantum II (AM Sachs Gallery, 5 January 1965) (plate 2, plate 3 and plate 4). Aldo Tambellini curated, focusing on monochromes and displaying Group Center's work alongside works by Group Zero, Ad Reinhardt, Louise Bourgeois, Peter Agostini, George Rickey, Chuck Hinman, Bill Tokeshi, Ruth Vodicka, Ilise Greenstein, Charles Mingus Jr and borrowing Irene Rice Pereira's 1952 *Shooting Stars* from the Metropolitan Museum. Though situating themselves within a broad range of post-war formal experiment, the group did not make Black Mask's later strong claims on the legacy of dada and surrealism.

Quantum included Tambellini's circular monochromes such as 'Echo', a 4.3 × 2m painting which would also feature in the later performance *Black 2*.<sup>41</sup> The show featured poetry 'written in spiral and circular forms on silver discs suspended and turning, hung from the ceiling by strings'.<sup>42</sup> One report recalls, 'Lights blink on and off, discs



4 Installation view of *Quantum I*, Noah Goldowsky Gallery, New York, 1964. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.

5 Ben Morea, *Untitled*, 1965.  
Acrylic on paper, 34 × 43 cm.  
Private Collection. Photo:  
Author.



rotate, canvases with moving panels alter their shapes and color . . . the meeting of technological concepts with those of art'.<sup>43</sup> Reviews describe now-lost work:

Ron Hahne's large paintings are imaginary landscapes, with soft pines atmospherically rendered in earthen reds, blues and greens. Within this ambiguous, almost submarine space he places hard-edged circles in primary colours, as well as an occasional dotted arrow or stairstep drawing, so that the final effect is rather Miro-esque . . . Benn Morea wants to show light emanating from darkness. His 'V-Box, I-Boc' has two adjoining wallhanging boxes painted black. Projecting cutout forms in the shape of circles, Vs, and bars jiggle electrically, revealing identical white forms behind. The mechanical device remains subordinate to the pictorial composition. He also shows two black floor boxes, about 30 inches square and one foot high. The top of each box is a black and white oil on paper, placed between two sheets of Lucite illuminated by a lightbulb inside.<sup>44</sup>

Tambellini's paintings combined minimal monochrome composition with gestural sweeps and heavily layered paint in circular, splattered images which built up a repertoire of symbolic associations both cosmic and corporeal, contemplative and visceral. Morea turned to black paintings at the time of the Quantum show. Morea's paintings were influenced by both Tambellini's work and Pollock, sharing the same generative associations, such as his (lost) 1964 *Beginning* and *untitled* (1965) (plate 5).<sup>45</sup>

Quantum situated Group Center between American abstract painting and European collectives like ZERO or the GRAV with whom they shared an interest in technological advance, participation and public presentation. But while Otto Peine and Heinz Mack of ZERO's references were coolly philosophical, Tambellini's passionate brushstrokes remained closer to American abstract expressionism's vitalism and transcendent sublimity, albeit framed as a 'primitive' total art that was accessible, vernacular and

popular.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Reinhardt's 'last paintings', Tambellini retained a representational focus on black as content, embodying themes of ontological plenitude and potential through visual associations with new technologically produced images of biological and cosmic origins. This notion of totality as a pre-artistic cultural plenitude lay behind the group's rejection of art's institutionalization. He debated Reinhardt on the meaning of their respective monochrome paintings, 'He deals with black as an essential concept . . . I wish to destroy all that . . . to get rid of art as art':

Black to me is like a beginning . . . I am not discussing black as a tradition or non-tradition in painting or as having anything to do with pigment or as an opposition to colour . . . Black is the beginning of everything, which the art concept is not . . . totality, the oneness of all.<sup>47</sup>

### Black Zero

Seeing their work as that of 'primitives of a new era', Group Center began to place their abstract monochromes within a wide social milieu outside the art world. In a series of 'electromedia events' they attempted an exodus from the spaces and normative experiences of art. Concurrent with the Quantum exhibitions, the group organized Black Zero. It was the last of a series of three mixed-media events, following *Black* and *Black 2*, each performed multiple times beginning on 6 January 1965 and successively developing 'a work in progress which continued to grow through each performance'.<sup>48</sup> As it grew, it incorporated Cecil McBee, Herby Lewis and Bill Dixon's jazz playing; amplified cello; video tapes on TV monitors; a weather balloon used as a screen; and sometimes a dancer. Black Zero occurred first at a rented space on 434 Lafayette St, as part of the Filmmaker's Cinematheque New Cinema Festival 1 on 10–18 November 1965<sup>49</sup> and was re-performed a number of times.<sup>50</sup> There are a few brief contemporary accounts of the performance.<sup>51</sup> Aldo and Elsa Tambellini painted and marked projection slides and unprocessed film, which they called Lumagrams; Hahne operated a 'Spiral Machine' and Morea 'Clamorous Machines', made of saws and grinders, while Bill Dixon and Allan Silva improvised jazz and Calvin Hernton read his poem 'Jitterbugging in the Street'.<sup>52</sup> They projected onto a slowly inflating weather balloon, until it burst at the peak of the performance. Group Center conceptualized these events as additive and expansive: an 'expanded cinema'. They argued, 'it is not a play. It is not a happening. It is a fusion of different arts.'<sup>53</sup> Gruen's *New Bohemia* wryly noted 'these young people are verbose but inarticulate, and wide schism exists between the quality of their creations and that of their writing thereon.'<sup>54</sup>

Black Zero animated Group Center's circular monochromes and moved them from two-dimensional representation into environmental space. It has been variously argued that abstraction prompted the emergence of happenings and process-based work.<sup>55</sup> This was certainly the case for Group Center. This transition was often framed by its proponents as a liberatory or even revolutionary move from passive spectatorship to active participation. Such work also appears to relate to later countercultural light shows and their accompanying drug-fuelled liberation of the senses. In fact, the echoes of Black Zero in the 1966 San Francisco 'Trips Festival' (which combined free LSD, light shows, performances and rock music) and in Andy Warhol's 1966–67 series of multimedia events with the Velvet Underground at the Dom nightclub in New York, 'The Exploding Plastic Inevitable,' are not accidental.<sup>56</sup> Cassen was experimenting with circular dual-projections for Black Zero when Rudi Stern met her during a 1964 rehearsal at the Gate Theatre. She left Group Center to



collaborate with him in producing projections and psychedelic visuals for both the above events under the name 'The Theater of Light'.

This transition to 'environments', and particularly to constructing environments which attempted a phenomenological disorientation of the senses, also echoed the work of the GRAV. Larry Busbea has argued of GRAV that this 'liberatory' disorientation was ironically 'coercive and conditioning'.<sup>57</sup> This same paradox was especially acute in Black Zero's oppressive monochrome assault. Black Zero's formal dialectical tension between disorienting participation as either shock of liberation or coercive integration is important, but it was paralleled by a broader organizational tension between participation in art institutions and community/social movement participation. A close reading of Black Zero in terms of both these tensions reveals it to be a key transitional artwork for the emergence of Black Mask.

This movement towards social engagement can be traced in Group Center's focus on the peripheral matter of the material props supporting their images (the marked slides, the projection space, the eye), which moved at speed towards an even wider focus on the 'expanded field' of art's social 'support system'.<sup>58</sup>

The projections, which were blank slides scratched and painted, literally highlighted and focused on the phenomenological objecthood of the film slides that created these images. Projecting onto a three-dimensional balloon as well as onto bodies and multiple screens additionally drew attention to their aesthetic effect as taking place not upon an illusionistic screen, but produced materially by the space of projection itself. The bodies in this space, projected over and through, produced the images. The cosmic and microscopic aesthetics of their images were made intelligible here by an immersive technological extension of the effect of their paintings and light boxes into social space and collective experience. In fact, the work fundamentally functioned using the vital and motive materiality of the eye itself. Rather than projecting perspectival illusions of content, its animated black and white flashes create an aesthetic effect inside of and relying upon the eye's material reaction to being overwhelmed by bright light. The intense, oppressive displacement resulting was regularly described as 'bombardment': 'Harsh contrasts between light and dark... noise and silence ... The eyes can't cope with the data and the sense of space goes vague, meanwhile wild sounds have deadened the space of time.'<sup>59</sup>

This phenomenological movement into social space and experience was paralleled thematically. In what exegesis of their paintings and projections they offered, the common tropes of abstraction's embodied vitalism, in titles which associated their monochromatic ovoid shapes and sprays of white with eggs, zygotes and protozoa, were paired with relatively novel outer-space associations of voids, galaxies, moons and stars, bringing out the similarity between these and the new black and white images being produced by space exploration. In each case, circular monochromes spoke hopefully of human expansion and paralleled the work of Lucio Fontana and others.<sup>60</sup> But while in still light boxes or paintings such images seem serene and reflective in isolation, they took on a new character when multiplied and projected in quick succession, becoming an abstract frenzy. The ambiguity between a psychedelic light show and a torturous sensory bombardment was paralleled thematically. The environment evoked both the nascent psychedelic exploration of 'inner space'; post-war technology's sudden and dramatic expansion into space travel; but also push-button mass slaughter (with the 1962 Cuban missile crisis in recent memory) and the further immiserating transformation of industrial work. While Tambellini's visuals suggest new natures uncovered by machine exploration, and the cosmic experience of a 'new (space) man',<sup>61</sup> Hahne and Morea's

machines accompanied the overwhelming visuals with a hard, dissonant industrial sonic clamour, evoking military bombardment or an oppressive factory machine environment. The experience became a bad trip, an assault on the viewer. Hernton's jazz poetry, on the 1964 Harlem riots, added a specific narrative to this millennial bombardment:

The rage of a hopeless people jitterbugging in the streets to ten thousand rounds of ammunition, to water hoses, electrical prods, flailing sticks, hound dogs, black boots stepping in soft places of the body.<sup>62</sup>

Millennial tension grew throughout the performance as the weather balloon was over-inflated until it burst, a nuclear full stop, yet also perhaps evoking Langston Hughes' 1951 jazz-poem 'Harlem': 'What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / Like a raisin in the sun? ... Or does it explode?'<sup>63</sup>

In accelerating these contradictions towards a final rupture, Black Zero anticipated a coming split in the group. Developing this millennial concern with anxiety about looming nuclear war and black working-class riots, Hahne and Morea left Group Center to found Black Mask. They were initially joined by Everett Shapiro. Black Mask would slowly move towards a notion of revolutionary art for which it was not enough to be environmentally immersive or to simply be in public space, but which increasingly became part of the social networks of activist social movements.

6 Cover of *Black Mask*, no. 2, December 1966. Print on paper, 25.5 × 33 cm. Private Collection. Photo: Tamiment Library.



## DESTROY THE MUSEUMS

The name was inspired not just by Group Center's aesthetics, but by its coincidence with the anarchist flag and, according to Morea, his reading of translated excerpts of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in the radical press, published in full in

English in 1967 (the apparent 'blackface' reversal of the book's title is clearly problematic. I will return to the issue of the group's racial politics in more depth below). Focusing ever more on art's institutional, social supports, the new group was indebted to Group Center's confrontational monochrome aesthetics and associations with totality, technology, a 'new man' and revolt, but would rework them as they engaged more thoroughly with radical theory and social movements. Influenced principally by the Situationist International's dialectical framing, Black Mask moved from Black Zero's concern with the expanded field of art's supports to a loud negation of art and a search for alternative supports. A theoretical negation of art became a way to articulate a political scream of refusal.<sup>64</sup> Morea had been producing large thirty- to forty-inch black canvases in his East Broadway loft, but by autumn 1967 he abandoned painting entirely. Only a few of these earlier paintings still exist. The cover of *Black Mask* 2 (plate 6) placed a call to 'fuse fractionalized struggles into ... Total Revolution', beneath an image of a total solar eclipse, recalling and recasting these paintings and the projections of Black Zero.<sup>65</sup> Black Mask argued: 'We are neither artists, nor anti-artists.

We are creative men – revolutionaries. As creative men we are dedicated to building a new society . . . the false concept of art cannot contain us.’<sup>66</sup> Morea left his artist’s space, keeping only one of his black paintings from this period. ‘[Ron] and I more or less removed ourselves from Aldo’s multimedia shows. It wasn’t a hostile break . . . It was just, we evolved.’<sup>67</sup> They kept in touch with Tambellini, visiting him at the Gate Theatre, which he established for avant-garde film and performance.

Alongside the Common Ground coffee shop, Murray Bookchin’s apartment was an early key hub for the group.<sup>68</sup> Bookchin lived on the first floor of a Bowery Park housing co-op, and Morea was drawn into a circle of avant-gardists and radicals who met there for discussions. Through them he met an older generation of anarchists involved in the Libertarian League, including not only Paul Goodman but also Vincent Titus and Russell Blackwell, who had fought in the Durruti Column during the Spanish Civil War. Morea’s interest in both the interwar avant-garde (which he began to study in hospital in 1963, and soon after in regular visits to the New York Public Library) and anarchism (firstly in reading Mikhail Bakunin, and then in meetings with Bookchin’s circle) developed in this period. He met Nicolas Calas in New York, corresponded with Richard Huelsenbeck and published appreciations of Berlin Dada.<sup>69</sup> One of the group’s first theoretical statements, ‘Art and Revolution’, closes quoting André Breton, ‘authentic art goes hand-in-hand with revolutionary activity . . . [the young] will solve the problems we have not solved.’<sup>70</sup> He also knew Henry Flynt who had demonstrated against MoMA in 1963 with a call to ‘DEMOLISH THE MUSEUMS’ and lectured against art and ‘serious culture’ into 1966, but the pair were not close.<sup>71</sup> By all accounts Morea was an imposing figure, always dressed in black, outspoken and articulate but with the argot of a street hoodlum. Bookchin reported, ‘they look like a bunch of pirates’ but conceded, ‘I admire Ben’s courage . . . his revolutionary integrity . . . he has far more shrewdness and more theoretical capacity than he is usually given credit for.’<sup>72</sup>

Morea’s personality led the group and informed its sense of identity. Hahne was quieter, but no less central. Black Mask member Dan Georgakas recalls:

Ron was less ideological than we were but very committed to his art. During that 1966–67 period, he was fully engaged in all major decisions and actions. He was quiet but equal. He was closer to Ben due to their art and he never wrote anything that I can remember – a visual guy . . . It was a matter of personality not commitment.<sup>73</sup>

After issue one of *Black Mask*, Everett Shapiro drifted from the group but hearing about the event and Ben’s haranguing of abstract expressionists, Dan Georgakas joined them. For some time the three made up its core. At university in Detroit in the late 1950s, Georgakas became involved with post-Beat poetry and the Johnson-Forrest Tendency, a left-Communist discussion and publishing group led by Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace Lee Boggs and CLR James.<sup>74</sup> Their magazine, *Correspondence*, published his first poems. He worked in Italy and Greece in 1964–65 as an assistant to Roberto Giammanco, and became close to the proto-autonomist groups *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaia*, as well as to Swiss poetry journal *Poesie Vivante*, working with the son of the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret, Christopher Péret. Publishing in the US and Europe across political journals such as *Progressive Labor*, *Ramparts* and *Minority of One* as well as a wealth of little poetry magazines, Georgakas moved to New York in autumn 1966.<sup>75</sup>



In 1964, while Morea and Hahne were in Group Center, Georgakas had pursued his own avant-garde experiment with art's social form, 'I was intrigued by broadsides that could be pasted on walls or whatever . . . poetry as public rather than private.'<sup>76</sup> The first of these, *Harlem*, appeared in 1964 (plate 7). The second in 1965, co-published by Broadside Press, also featured poetry by Melvin Tolson. The poems grasped direct action through the lens of modernist poetry, but his reference points were English as well as Continental: 'I came to feel that [Ezra] Pound's make-it-new must extend to every sphere of our thinking and doing.'<sup>77</sup> The symbolist focus on alienation through formal fragmentation is turned to a political appreciation of illegality and direct action:

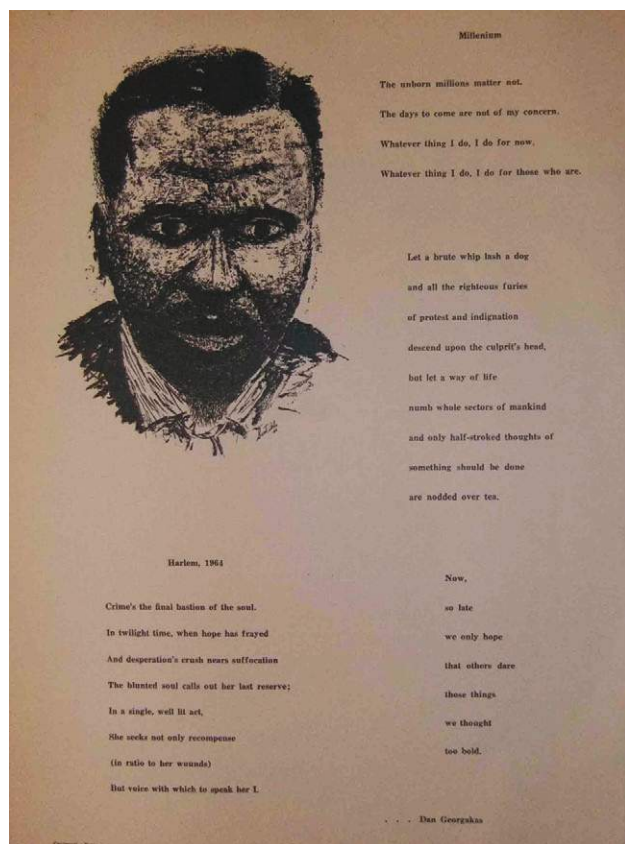
Crime's the final bastion of the soul.  
In twilight time, when hope has frayed  
And desperation's crush nears suffocation  
The blunted soul calls out her last reserve;  
In a single, well lit act,  
She seeks not only recompense  
(in ratio to her wounds)  
But voice with which to speak her I.<sup>78</sup>

In the last lines of his poem 'Millennium' (above), after a bitter attack on political passivity – whose tentative metre, rounded vowels and juxtaposition of stalled change and banal beverages echo T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock* – the poem's structure breaks down as action looms, as if anticipating Black Mask's turn to the 'poetry' of action. Another text, *Manifesto for the Grey Generation*, published in August 1966 with Frederike Poessnecker and Carl Wiessner, imagined itself 'a hostile sequel to every kind of writing'.<sup>79</sup> Borrowing its title from the 'Uranium Willy' chapter of William Burroughs' 1964 *Nova Express*, it anticipates Georgakas' move towards Black Mask when it argues, 'Literature must be social! . . . We need a language that fucks.'<sup>80</sup> The manifesto takes the form of an automatic text which attempts to link literature to political actions such as a Greek 'reverse strike', in which people illegally built a highway while resisting the police, after the government failed to build one. On another occasion in New York, a poem attacking Pound, under a large drawing by Nick Sperakis, was pasted overnight on the doors of poets who had celebrated him:

Allan and I have founded a group called The League of Revolutionary Poets . . .  
We combine politics with poetry-in-happening–action events. Example: . . .  
Aug 7th we attended the Festival of People at Artists Workshop, and held a  
mock trial . . . of love-dove poems, which angered many [of] . . . The Grey  
Generation. I want to go to the opening night of the Opera when all the  
shitheads are there, and hurl anti-war poems from the galleries when the war-  
criminals enter. DADA lives. SURREALISM returns.<sup>81</sup>

As this demonstrates, Georgakas like Morea was drawn towards a revival of dada and surrealism as a means to culturally articulate a radical political position opposed to capitalism and war, and opposed to an institutionalized bourgeois culture which they saw as tacitly supporting both.

Allan Hoffman, a college dropout, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) organizer, poet and anarchist interested in 'eastern mysticism' and 'existential revolutionism', joined Black Mask after participating in Bookchin's Anarchos group and opening The



**7 Dan Georgakas, *Harlem/Millennium*, 1965. Print on card, 84 × 59 cm. Private Collection. Photo: Author.**

Torch bookstore with him on 9th street.<sup>82</sup> His magazine, *Good Soup*, founded with Bookchin and Paul Spencer, was an eclectic, culturally oriented anarchist mimeograph published out of the Bowery Bets co-op on 2nd Street. He and Georgakas had independently been part of the milieu of avant-garde poets making and exchanging mimeographed magazines during the 1960s.<sup>83</sup> Bruce Elwell introduced him to Morea. He would leave and rejoin the group, maintaining a turbulent friendship.<sup>84</sup> Although very clear on its critical positions, the group's membership was relatively open and not exclusive, and Hoffman and Georgakas continued writing elsewhere.

Bruce Elwell and Robert Chasse associated with Bookchin after involvement with the Bread and Puppets Theatre and the Trotskyist *Contemporary Issues*. In 1965 Chicago, Elwell encountered situationist texts translated by the Chicago Surrealists and these, along with Tony Verlaan (on a student exchange between Strasbourg and Juniata College in March 1967), helped bring situationist ideas into their circle. Bob Ernstthal, of Bread and Puppets and *Good Soup*, was also close.<sup>85</sup> Georgakas recalls, 'All decision-making was absolutely collective. Ben came up with lots of the ideas but he was never authoritarian.'<sup>86</sup>

The magazine ran to ten issues between November 1966 and May 1968, initially distributed by hand in Greenwich Village on the corner of 6th and 8th streets. At Morea's suggestion, there was intentionally no subscription address so that its distribution was purely spontaneous, 'getting Black Mask was de facto a cultural event'.<sup>87</sup> But as winter made this a less attractive option, and with Georgakas' experience in little magazines, they built a base of readers through subscription and through radical art and poetry distributors. Although *Black Mask* appeared among other publications of the 'mimeograph revolution' of new alternative media in the 1960s, its content sat between little poetry magazines such as *Floating Bear* and political newspapers such as *Fifth Estate*. It was also printed rather than mimeographed, a decision that made it stand out, guided by Morea's enthusiasm for the bold monochromatic aesthetics of dada and futurist publications. *Black Mask's* layouts were collectively produced, with particular focus on the cover: 'We thought of the cover being very important, as an art form' (see plate 6 and plate 12).<sup>88</sup>

### Dissident Situationism

*Black Mask's* radical neo-avant-garde perspective and its exodus from art were, in part, a rough-and-ready appropriation of the ideas of the French Situationist International concerning the supersession of art. The reframing of Group Center's notions of totality and of a new man in terms of social totality, total revolution and a new radical subjectivity were principally a result of an encounter with the Situationist International's concept of 'totality', which they would have perhaps encountered first in *The Totality for Kids*, a US translation of the writing of situationist Raoul Vaneigem.

*Black Mask* came into direct contact with the Situationist International through Bookchin, Verlaan and the group Guy Debord briefly called the 'English Situationists'

(T. J. Clark, Donald Nicholson Smith, Charles Radcliffe, Dave and Stuart Wise). Yet Black Mask were excluded from the Situationist International, without having ever agreed to join, under deeply acrimonious circumstances in what is alternately called the Vaneigem affair or the Morea affair. Unpicking what actually occurred involves balancing the different accounts of the story told by the multitude of letters expressing anger and confusion between the various parties involved. Vaneigem travelled to New York to visit potential situationists there, but refused to meet Morea:

Murray raised the question of meeting Ben Morea, and Raoul offered a critique of pure activism. Ben asked why in spite of all this he would not meet. He replied he had seen Allan [Hoffman], and that it was clear after ten minutes that he wasn't worth any time.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, Chassel, Elwell and Verlaan had begun to distance themselves from Black Mask, instead seeking affiliation with the Situationist International. The situationists wrote to Morea, calling Hoffman 'a mystical shithead', and concluding 'there were no Situationists in the US. Now there are (Chasse and Verlaan)'.<sup>90</sup> The English situationists wrote to Paris for explanation and were accused of doubting Vaneigem's 'excellence'. Refusing to break contact with Morea they were also excluded.<sup>91</sup>

It appears that there was some chicanery involved on the part of both the Situationist International and Chasse and Elwell, who finally joined them. Nicholson-Smith and Grey wrote to Bookchin that Vaneigem made his decision before meeting Hoffman. Someone had distanced his attitude, and 'someone, somewhere is lying'.<sup>92</sup> A letter from Morea directs blame at Chasse and Elwell.<sup>93</sup> In a 2010 essay, Charles Radcliffe reviewed events, blaming Vaneigem for gross distortion. Vaneigem didn't speak English or know the New York scene and was, in Radcliffe's view, 'a Belgian recluse who had no practical [activist] experience at all and whose practical experience was entirely dwarfed by Morea's'.<sup>94</sup> Bookchin's account agrees. He argues Vaneigem was simply frightened of the group's brash militancy, as his critique of them as 'Christian martyrs . . . does not explain the panic, which was rooted in cowardice'.<sup>95</sup>

The situationists' charge of mysticism against Black Mask can be understood by looking at the use of a concept that was central to both groups: totality. For the situationists this was a rigorously materialist concept rooted in dialectical Marxism.<sup>96</sup> Their accusation of 'mysticism' was a byword for being both politically misleading and a philosophically confused idealist. Hoffman, meanwhile, wrote abstract poetry under the pseudonym of the The Totalist, using totality as a term for spiritual unity: 'Dissolution beginning so that finally union may take place . . . We surrender to yr charms, mere dabblers in mysterious reality.'<sup>97</sup> His 'totality' was also informed by his move towards ecological perspectives, working closely with Bookchin who was developing his theories of 'social ecology'.<sup>98</sup>

As for the other members of Black Mask, while the situationist notion of totality was prominent in their writing, their use of the term had developed independently in Group Center and preceded contact with the situationists. Moreover, cosmic or psychedelic uses of the term 'totality' were already common in artistic and countercultural milieus in 1960s New York more widely. Black Mask absorbed and employed situationist ideas loosely, as sympathetic to their existing attempt to connect cultural production to social movements. Unlike the situationists, Black Mask did not attempt ideological unity.<sup>99</sup> In fact, after the journal *PoetMeat* printed an essay on 'total revolution' next to Georgakas' 'The Kleptic Poet' (which also appears in *Black Mask* 1), Morea attacked their mystical interpretation of Black Mask's ideas:<sup>100</sup>



On the one hand you speak of revolution and anarchism but then turn to Buddhism . . . You rightfully speak of ‘transcending . . . [the] revolutionary objective as change of leaders’, etc but then speak of the avant-garde poets’ role as . . . ‘priest and guru’. (We say rather as revolutionary and creative-worker).<sup>101</sup>

While the situationists and Black Mask were certainly at odds in terms of their use of the notion of totality, Vaneigem’s fear of their down-and-dirty, chaotic grassroots activism seems the key factor in the situationists’ rejection of Black Mask. Black Mask were too totalizing in their militancy, rather than not total enough, for the situationists.

In this respect, we might term Black Mask ‘dissident’ situationists, to draw a historical parallel with the description of ‘dissident’ surrealists such as those, who like George Bataille, were excluded from the surrealist group for pursuing a heretical, excessive interpretation of its ideals.<sup>102</sup> Black Mask were certainly in one sense an ‘old enemy from within’ for the situationists.<sup>103</sup> The situationists were attracted to the idea of an American group using their theories and practising militant activism, but were alarmed by the reality of its foreign cultural forms, abrasive personalities and risks of violence. The situationists had fantasized about a violent ‘festival’ embodying a total negation of capitalism on the part of a black lumpenproletariat. Echoing the situationists’ analysis of the 1965 Watts riots as revolution-as-festival, Black Mask 7 offered a reflection on the 1967 Newark riots.<sup>104</sup> But Black Mask’s attempt to practically embody such a lumpen group proved too much. Black Mask’s more fluid notion of totality did not pose the ideological problem of a developing ‘total’ dialectical-materialist perspective and practice but instead prioritized action over theory, moving directly into the expansive ‘dark matter’ of street-level activist cultures.<sup>105</sup> For them ‘totality’, a term by turns dialectical, vitalist and mystical, was one way to describe the political authenticity they found in direct action and a lumpen, street-level identity.

It is worth pausing to consider their adoption of an identity focused on radical political authenticity. Their aesthetic concern with blackness and their growing political concern with total realness (in terms of personal radical-political commitment) were overdetermined in a simultaneous concern with echoing ‘authentic’ racially black political radicalism. The appropriation by white radicals of the discourse of black political authenticity developed by groups such as the Black Panthers is as deeply problematic as it was common in this period.<sup>106</sup> Putting on a ‘black mask’, the group increasingly sought to echo the style and organization of the Black Panthers, albeit tuned instead to white working-class culture and sub-cultures. They increasingly berated ‘white radicals’ (defining them as ‘three parts bullshit and one part hesitation’) and would take a new name that, as I will explore below, was lifted from an Amiri Baraka poem. Though often problematic in imagery and representation, this was more an honest, if at times clumsily fetishizing, attempt to build solidarity than an appropriation. It was certainly seen that way by the Panthers themselves. Morea was the only white person offered honorary membership of the Black Panther Party, by Bobby Seale, and was asked to run for Vice-President of the US in 1968 by Eldridge Cleaver, who ran for president with the Peace and Freedom Party. He respectfully declined both.<sup>107</sup> As this suggests, they were far more in step with black radical movements than most on the left at the time. Georgakas, though he had left the group by 1967, would also later write an authoritative history of Detroit’s revolutionary black workers. At the time, a telling essay by Morea shows them working through these issues and exploring the composition of the new movements of the 1960s through the idea of ‘nigger as class’.<sup>108</sup>

**Is it Not Time to Admit that Hate as Well as Love Redeems the World?<sup>109</sup>**

Between February 1967 and May 1968, Black Mask became a wider group that became known as Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker. This transformation began with Angry Arts Week, a programme of anti-Vietnam war events in New York initiated by Artists and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam and organized collectively by cultural workers on the Lower East Side from 29 January to 5 February 1967.<sup>110</sup> The Diggers and future members of the Art Workers' Coalition were involved in the final events, but Neumann notes a lack of successful career artists in the organizing meetings.<sup>111</sup> The initial call 'to make our protest not through rallies or marches but through work in our own field' and the potential role of art vis-à-vis social movements was hotly debated. Jonah Ruskin recalls a debate between Morea and Abbie Hoffman on oppositional art, and Hoffman later criticized the whole idea, 'demanding that artists do antiwar art is like demanding that chefs cook antiwar food'.<sup>112</sup> Black Mask contributed to the collective 'Collage of Indignation', a 120-ft long canvas with multiple contributors produced at the Loeb Student Center, spelling the word 'REVOLUTION' in huge letters.<sup>113</sup> Georgakas and Allan Hoffman participated in poets' events, joining one of two poets' caravans that toured the city on 13 January in a float decorated with images of war victims. He recalled, 'One of these events was in the high numbers on Broadway where there were lots of exile Cubans. That ended in a bit of shoving and punching.'<sup>114</sup> Georgakas left for Greece in summer 1967, becoming involved with resistance to the Junta. Hahne also drifted away from the group.

During Angry Arts week a group including Black Mask members began to meet which would become the Motherfuckers. They were joined by Tom Neumann, the stepson of Herbert Marcuse, who had dropped out of college and moved to New York to become an artist and worked as a reviewer for *Art News*. Frustrated with what he saw as the arbitrary formalist fashions of various abstract or pop tendencies, he turned inwards, producing a now-lost private *Merzbau* of negation in his apartment:

Huge grotesque collages of scabrous junk scavenged on night-time strolls through the lower East Side, pee-stained mattresses, discarded women's undergarments, old shoes, cigarette butts, broken dolls, all glued together with melted wax.<sup>115</sup>

Abandoning this solitary sculptural work, he began collaborating with the new group. Following Black Mask's critique, he saw: 'a break with identifying ourselves as artists, for an expanded conception of politics in which action, imagination and confrontation were central. Neither did we understand what we were doing as street theatre.'<sup>116</sup> Whereas Morea, with no formal intellectual background, carved out a sophisticated theoretical position debating publicly with major figures in art and politics, Neumann also saw a break with what he saw as the passive critiques of his stepfather. Meanwhile Bookchin remembered Hoffman becoming 'even more than Ben the "theoretician" of the Motherfuckers'.<sup>117</sup>

Issue 10 of *Black Mask* in April/May 1968 was to be the last. In a letter to subscribers asking for financial support, the group announced their decision to give up on publishing and focus on direct action. This was partly a situationist-inflected move into the 'real' of action, but also a result of practical pressures:

The reason is a direct result of our theory – The movement must be real or it will not be. Now the call is INTO THE STREETS . . . The group which has transcended BLACK MASK, namely UP AGAINST THE WALL/

MOTHERFUCKERS, is facing 48 criminal charges with penalties ranging from 10 days to 10 years.<sup>118</sup>

The new group's numbers swelled with varied personalities around a core operating out of a network of crash pads, free stores and the Common Ground coffee shop. Their focus shifted not just toward direct action, but towards a confrontational militancy that matched and extended Black Mask's confrontational aesthetics. They turned away from both the affirmative aesthetics and non-violence of other political happenings, instead proposing – in Hoffman's coinage – 'Armed Love'.<sup>119</sup> Sited among



**8 Black Mask/UATWMF, We Propose a Culture Exchange, 1968. Printed paper flyer, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambelini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.**



the poorest and most marginal communities on the Lower East Side, they echoed the Black Panthers' criticisms: 'When the police come into the ghetto to shoot us down in the streets, you can help us fight the police by throwing flowers at them.'<sup>120</sup> As in the slang 'like a motherfucker', their name signalled a rise in intensity. The name also revealed that their move towards total revolution still bore the weight of aesthetic associations of sublime blackness and negation. They understood their entry into movements not just as exodus but as insensible, excessive and abject. There are few mainstream reports of them. As Abbie Hoffman noted, 'their name could not be printed'.<sup>121</sup> Becoming known as simply the Motherfuckers or The Family, they also sometimes signalled their wild class politics and mythological status by signing their montages and illustrations Armed Love Commune, Obscene Anarchist International or IWW – International Werewolf Conspiracy.<sup>122</sup> In February 1968 at SDS's New York University regional conference they were recognized as the only non-student chapter, while their street connections led to sub-groups such as Winos for Freedom.<sup>123</sup>

Their cultural-political opposition between cleanliness and filth was set in place from the group's first 'signed' action, again focused on a cultural institution. Lincoln Center was New York's first large-scale planned use of the arts as a catalyst for gentrification, ushering in ten years of aggressive redevelopment. Georgakas' poem 'Empire City' focused on the tensions of the project:

The permanent state of your personality  
Which arrogantly assumes  
... that certain neighbourhoods must exist  
Glass littered and garbage heaped  
Because your Lincoln Center  
Is carbon of Mussolini's EUR  
... However much your museums seek apotheosis  
Of capitalist realism via ersatz dada fads  
Neither they  
Nor your reformist mayors  
Nor your Malcolm executioners  
Can defuse the bombs  
Your unconscious hands have set  
Which even now commence to detonate.<sup>124</sup>

This division of class and culture was exemplified during the 1968 garbage collection strike. Rubbish piled up on the Lower East Side, prompting garbage dumping protests, while Lincoln Center remained clean.<sup>125</sup> A *Village Voice* report documents debates between Black Mask/Motherfuckers and a community clean-up project.<sup>126</sup> Caught between community care and strikebreaking, Black Mask/Motherfuckers collected garbage and dumped it at Lincoln Center, releasing a flyer, 'We Propose a Culture Exchange: Garbage for Garbage', just after Lincoln's birthday.<sup>127</sup> In a film documenting the action, the group rail against 'sterile palaces of culture, in a world made filthy by America'.<sup>128</sup> A montage on the back of the flyer by Morea dramatically figures the confrontation, piling tons of rubbish onto an orchestra (plate 8).

### The Simplest Surrealist Act

A number of such actions against cultural events mark the period of transition from Black Mask to the Motherfuckers. An earlier disturbance of an academic symposium on 2 November 1967, 'The Artist as Social Critic', bears their mark. It was part of the

New School Wollman Gallery's exhibition *Protest and Hope*, 'a commentary on civil rights and Vietnam'.<sup>129</sup> The *Village Voice* reported:

Some younger listeners became very critical about the show. They thought that today, artists have better and newer means to express their anger and dissent than to paint works in any of the styles of uptown establishment business-Art-Industry. They can go out into the streets or use intermedia.<sup>130</sup>

Another prior action, just before the final issue of *Black Mask* appeared (and collaborating with 'Artists and Writers Militia': Allan Van Newkirk, Andrei Codrescu and others), similarly attacked the depoliticization of establishment institutions, and led the group to adopt their new name. During the summer 1967 Newark revolt, the radical black poet LeRoi Jones (who later changed his name to Amiri Baraka) was injured, arrested and charged with unlawful possession of a firearm, convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to over two years' imprisonment. Jones' poem 'Black Dada Nihilismus' already placed him close to *Black Mask*'s approach,<sup>131</sup> but during the trial, his poem 'Black People' was used as evidence against him. It included the line 'Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers, this is a stick up'.<sup>132</sup>

On January 10 1968 Kenneth Koch, a friend of the abstract expressionists and a poet who argued that poetry is not political, was due to give a reading at the Poetry Project hosted by St Mark's Church. During a reading of 'to my audience', Newkirk – tall and thin and the most imposing member of the group – stalked up the aisle dressed in black, lifted a pistol, shouted 'Koch!', and fired two blanks at him. King Mob's account has the bourgeois Koch fainting with fright, but other accounts which do not recognize *Black Mask* as the interventionists are modest. Ron Padgett's eyewitness account has Koch 'lurching'.<sup>133</sup> An audio recording of the event registers a thud but also Koch recovering to answer shouts from the group, first paternally suggesting better ways to protest and then losing his temper: 'Surrealist with a gun, get out of here / fuck you! / Scram! . . . Revolution? . . . Grow up!'<sup>134</sup> Andrei Codrescu and Morea meanwhile threw into the air copies of a flyer designed by Morea, reading 'Poetry is Revolution'. The line echoed Baraka's claim in his 1965 poem 'Black Art' that 'We want poems that kill'. *Black Mask*'s phrase recalls the Black Panthers' reiteration of Mao's *Problems of War and Strategy*. They famously argued, 'political power does not flow from the sleeve of a dashiki, political power flows from the barrel of a gun!' In *Black Mask* 4 Georgakas wrote an essay, 'Poetry comes out of the barrel of a gun', reworking this phrase against the self-congratulatory cultural 'radicalism' of the Beats and abstract expressionists, instead asserting culture as a weapon of political struggle. The flyer was reprinted as the cover of issue 2:1 of Newkirk's 'newspaper of the streets', *Guerrilla*, printed from January 1967 by the Detroit Artists' Workshop. Newkirk had organized a few events in Detroit with Georgakas, and had stayed with him in New York.

*Guerrilla* places *Black Mask*'s bold modernist typography inside a complementary cut-and-paste format echoing the Black Panther Party Newspaper's typesetting. As these overlaps suggest, *Black Mask* was becoming an even more open, fluid group and their influence spread. A *Guerrilla* letter to subscribers in 1968 asks for funds for its reinvention as a 'journal of radical culture' to pair theory and reports on guerrilla warfare in Vietnam with contemporary poems and audio recordings of Vietnamese guerrilla songs. This *Black Mask* action also anticipated another propagandist assassination of an artist. On 3 June 1968 Valerie Solanas shot Andy Warhol and Mario Amaya. Morea had often accommodated Solanos and the two were close friends. The film *I Shot Andy Warhol* shows 'Mark' giving Solanos the gun and the two as lovers, but Morea recalls only that

one day she asked him what would happen if she shot someone. After her arrest, he staged a protest celebrating her act as the 'true vengeance of Dada'.<sup>135</sup>

### Serve the People

The Motherfuckers moved towards increasingly unmediated and confrontational actions, but were often anti-strategic. They argued, 'We do not understand cause and effect. We must do what we do because it is right, not because it works.'<sup>136</sup> On one occasion, Neumann, sitting at a desk with a typewriter, was pushed through the Lower East Side on a flatbed truck while he wrote anything shouted at him, disseminating spontaneous 'street news'. On another they carried a ceramic toilet to St Mark's Place to hold a 'shit in', which ended with the police smashing the toilet with nightsticks. Their disruptions expanded from art events to SDS, New Left, counterculture, music and event sports meetings.<sup>137</sup> With the French radical poet Jean-Jacques Lebel accompanying them, they cut the fence at Woodstock festival, and joined the occupation of Columbia University.<sup>138</sup> During the 15 April 1967 Mass Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, they developed a strategy of breaking away from large demonstrations' permitted routes. They joined this with property damage or pushing through police lines by force, learning karate from one of the Baron Lords. Members of the militant Japanese student organization the Zengakuren also visited the group, and in the run-up to the 1967 March on the Pentagon, Morea visited the SDS offices with a bamboo pole the Zengakuren used battling police, and proposed a breakaway march that would trash downtown office buildings.<sup>139</sup> In the event, joined by some visiting Zengakuren, six of them broke into the Pentagon but were pushed out in scuffles after four minutes.<sup>140</sup> These developments were framed by their earlier language of vital immediacy, not to mention machismo. In Morea's words, 'I don't like violence, but at the same time, if we are attacked, we won't submit . . . I don't consider that violence. I consider that living.'<sup>141</sup>

The term 'affinity group', now common in Western direct-action social movements, was first coined by the group. Marcuse spoke at the School of Visual Arts on 8 March 1967, and Morea challenged his vision of art's saving qualities.<sup>142</sup> Afterwards they met at Bookchin's apartment with others including Russell Blackwell. Blackwell and Bookchin discussed how the anarchist militias in the Spanish Civil War, including the Friends of Durruti (of which Blackwell had been a member), were organized principally around groups of *compañeros*, with Bookchin suggesting it as a contemporary model. Morea anglicized the term while Neumann offered a sloganeering definition: 'a street gang with an analysis'.<sup>143</sup> The model spread mimetically.<sup>144</sup> By Mayday 1971, the largest civil disobedience action in American history, with 14,000 arrests, attempted to shut down Washington using a mass of affinity groups each blocking an intersection.

The Motherfuckers moved towards autonomous institutions and infrastructures, inspired by both the Diggers and Black Panthers. They carried out neighbourhood patrols following and watching the police, sometimes armed with knives or bike chains. They occasionally de-arrested people (interrupting an arrest and rescuing the arrestee). They called themselves ACID (Action Committee for Immediate Defense) or ESSO (East Side Service Organization).<sup>145</sup> They also set up free stores, six crash pads which they dubbed 'rat holes', free food programmes, occasional free clinics and legal services, all funded mostly by donations. They also fought for free spaces in Tompkins Square Park, the Fillmore, and elsewhere.<sup>146</sup> Morea recalls one incidence of being offered excess yoghurt from a Lower East Side factory and the group shoplifting a domestic fridge to carry it, carried sideways filled to the brim; on another occasion they produced window-stickers

for shops to announce that they supported ESSO, but were arrested for extortion. At one Digger 'free' event they contributed a table of free guns. During ongoing confrontations over a protest-occupation of Boston Common, Morea was charged with stabbing two servicemen who attacked the crowd, but was acquitted in court.<sup>147</sup>

### Black Zero to Black Bloc: The Figuration of Militancy

Despite disavowing 'art' for 'action', the Motherfuckers continued to produce images publicly in a series of political posters, in which their rising commitment to risk was accompanied by an intensified neo-dada negation. Often montages, the images were collectively produced in the RAT office, mostly in black and red ink, and printed by offset lithography along with the RAT newspaper, with different members taking the lead on different images. They insisted on total independent control of the pages and

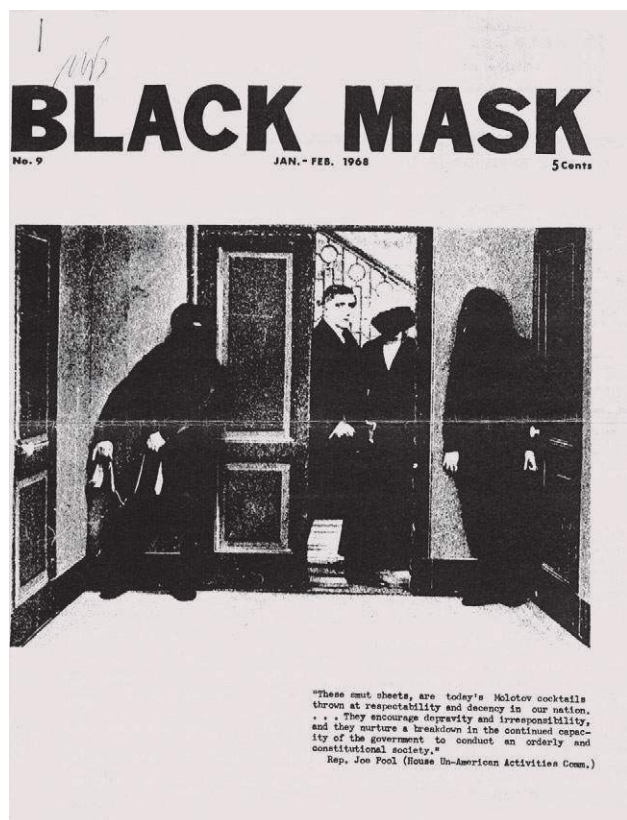


9 LeRoy Henderson, *Black Mask*, 10 February 1967. Photograph, 27.94 × 35.56 cm. Private Collection. Photo: © LeRoy Henderson.

10 Steven Greaves, *Occupy Wall Street Protest*, 20 September 2011. Digital photograph. Private Collection. Photo: © Steven Greaves.







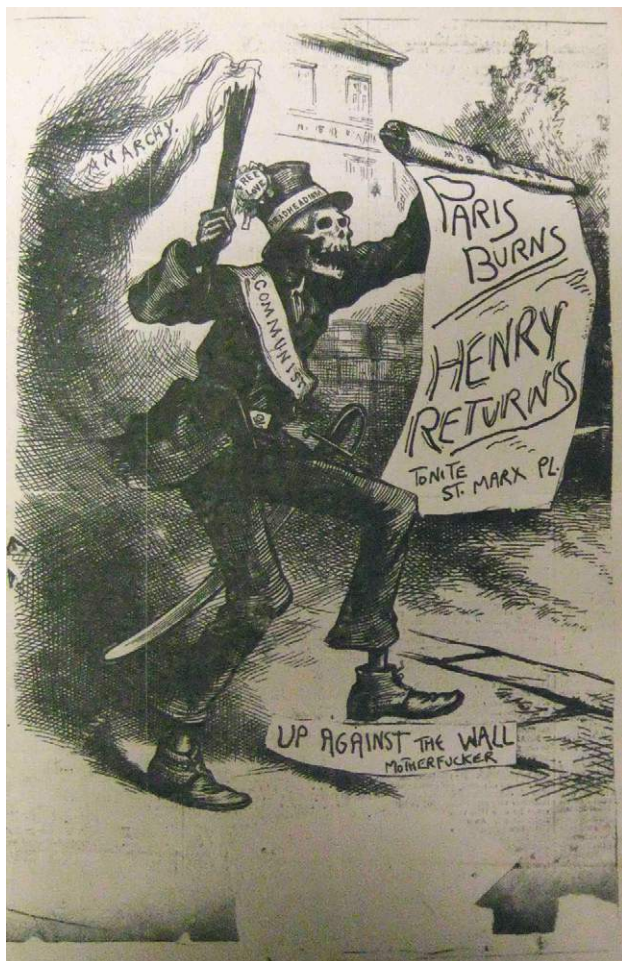
collective authorship: 'They would ... take five hundred of them and glue them up all over the Lower East Side ... parts of Jersey and Brooklyn.'<sup>148</sup> The Motherfuckers' demands chimed with Panther Minister for Culture Emory Douglas' position that radical art take place within movements, 'to draw revolutionary things, we must shoot and/or be ready to shoot when the time comes ... The Ghetto itself is the gallery ... pasted on the walls.'<sup>149</sup> Yet though they seemed to return to a traditional form of 'political art', the prints offered no specific propagandist position. Instead, in prints such as 'The Outlaw Page' (see plate 15), they were often rough, barked montages which imagined a new activist identity.

The aesthetic of these posters was rooted in one of Black Mask's founding performances. In the first week of February 1967, twenty-five masked men marched on Wall Street, handing out a statement that they were renaming it 'War Street' (plate 9). Echoing Digger processions such as the Death of Money, this was more sombre and threatening, taking place in winter with balaclavas, skulls and a bold banner echoing the magazine's typeface.<sup>150</sup> Though 'Wall Street' was a common epithet for capitalist businesses, a conceptual march against the street itself – rather than a specific business – was novel, presaging later attempts to use the street as a broad target of protest to reframe debates (plate 10). Most notably, this was the first use of collective, masked-up black dress during a demonstration in an urban centre among Western social movements, and significantly was in this instance not a disguise but a projected militant identity. Not only does the erasure of bodies and identity emphasize that only action counts, echoing Huey Newton's 'revolutionary suicide', but they mythologized themselves as a haunting spectre through a use of masks and skulls which would persist in their imagery. They even made ironic reference to this process by including a fabricated quote – 'Hip revolutionaries have the power to inspire FEAR' – from Georges Sorel, the controversial French modernist philosopher whose writing on myth and defence of violence is associated with both syndicalism and fascism.<sup>151</sup> As this style (later often with helmets rather than balaclavas, and drawing on the Panthers' leather-jacketed look) was combined with the tactics of breakaway groups, police confrontation and property damage, the group anticipated, and perhaps indirectly influenced, the style and tactics of later 'black bloc' groups which emerged en masse among 1980s German autumem.<sup>152</sup>

11 Larry Fink, *Black Mask*, 10 February 1967. Photograph, 27.94 × 35.56 cm. Private Collection. Photo: © Larry Fink.

12 Cover of *Black Mask*, no. 9, January/February 1968. Print on paper, 25.5 × 33 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambelini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.

13 UATWMF, *Untitled*, 1968. Print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambelini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.



One photograph of the action, unprinted in any contemporary reports, is curiously framed from inside a shop window (plate 11).<sup>153</sup> It highlights a division between agency and commodification: passive commodities sit with the viewer, looking through the glass at the black-clad marchers breaking the spell of capital. Yet it also raises the issue of gendered agency, as the static passivity of the window display is that of women's handbags, hats and shoes. Moreover, the photography reverses the gaze, queerly framing the marchers themselves in the street through the shop window, as if to portentously suggest an alternative fetishization of their militant agency. Indeed, their imagination of 'Total Man' in these posters and actions was to prove an influential but problematic activist identity.<sup>154</sup> The now-familiar image of protest in these photographs has a surprising modernist source. Their self-presentation echoes a still, reproduced in *Black Mask* 9, from Louis Feuillade's film *Fantômas vs Juve* (1913) (plate 12). The still was perhaps taken from Sheldon Renan's book *The Underground Film* (1967), which notes that it inspired the surrealists.<sup>155</sup> *Black Mask* shared the surrealist enthusiasm for this anti-hero representing impossible sovereignty – both aristocratic and criminal, powerful and subaltern. Robin Walz has drawn out the surrealists' enthusiasm for and appropriation of *Fantômas* as a pulp figure through whom they could celebrate and raise up the dual transgressions of political subversion and lumpen filth.<sup>156</sup> Later, the Motherfuckers' countercultural revolt, regularly characterized by the media as filthy and juvenile, was lent a heroic aura by this icon of avant-garde refusal.

Another montage also asserts a new radical identity. Like the skull of their Wall Street March, it recalls the image 'Dada Death' in the 1920 *Dada Almanach*, which had been reprinted in New York in 1966 (plate 13). The montage at first glance seems to be what the situationists termed a *detournement*, in which added elements (typically captions) redirect the meaning of an image.<sup>157</sup> Yet all of the textual elements (bar the main slogan 'Paris Burns, Henry Returns, Tonite St. Marx Place' and the signature scroll) are not inserted elements but original to the drawing: An 1888 Thomas Nast cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* attacking Dennis Kearney of the radical Working Men's Party. Drawn with the Paris Commune in recent memory and the Haymarket affair a few years away, the drawing represents Kearney's political movement as a *danse macabre* bringing communism, anarchy, mob law and free love to America.<sup>158</sup> The image was perhaps appropriated from one of two editions of Nast's prints published in 1967–68 (another of Nast's skeleton images was also used in the *East Village Other* issue on Angry Arts Week).<sup>159</sup> Rather than a *detournement* it is a readymade in which a reactionary image of social movement is reiterated upside-down, inviting us to join the dance. Another version of this montage transforms this lone figure into a dancing mob (plate 14). This and several other posters are signed 'Henry'. The name had several meanings. 'Henry' was a firecracker let off at demonstrations,



when the police asked who did that, they would be told it was 'Henry'. Police began asking around after 'Henry', a suspicious new militant. It was also, at times, the group's code for a fight with the police. It also recalls Émile Henry, an early practitioner of propaganda-by-deed who bombed a Parisian cafe in 1894, claiming that bourgeois cultural life was not innocent and should be attacked.<sup>160</sup> The poster might suggest the Motherfuckers saw something of Henry's spirit in recent May 1968 events in Paris.<sup>161</sup>

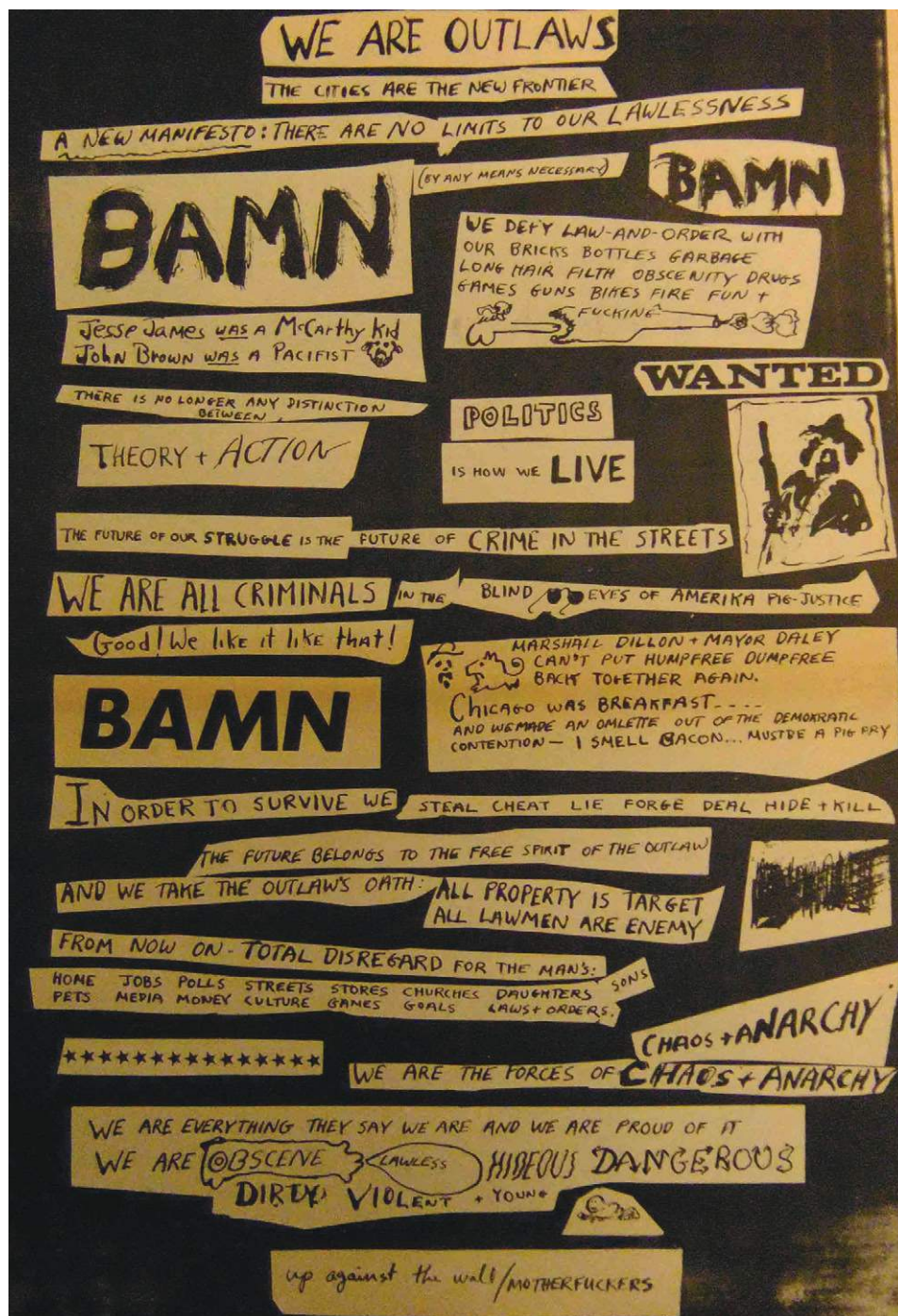
The logic of all these montages is most clearly articulated in 'The Outlaw Page' (plate 15), which like the montage above appeared elsewhere in a second version



14 UATWMF, Untitled, RAT,  
4-17 October 1968, p. 15.  
Microfilm image (made  
1971) of print on paper, 34 x  
43 cm. Lost. Wooster, OH:  
Underground Newspaper  
Collection, Bell and Howell.  
Photo: Underground Press  
Syndicate.



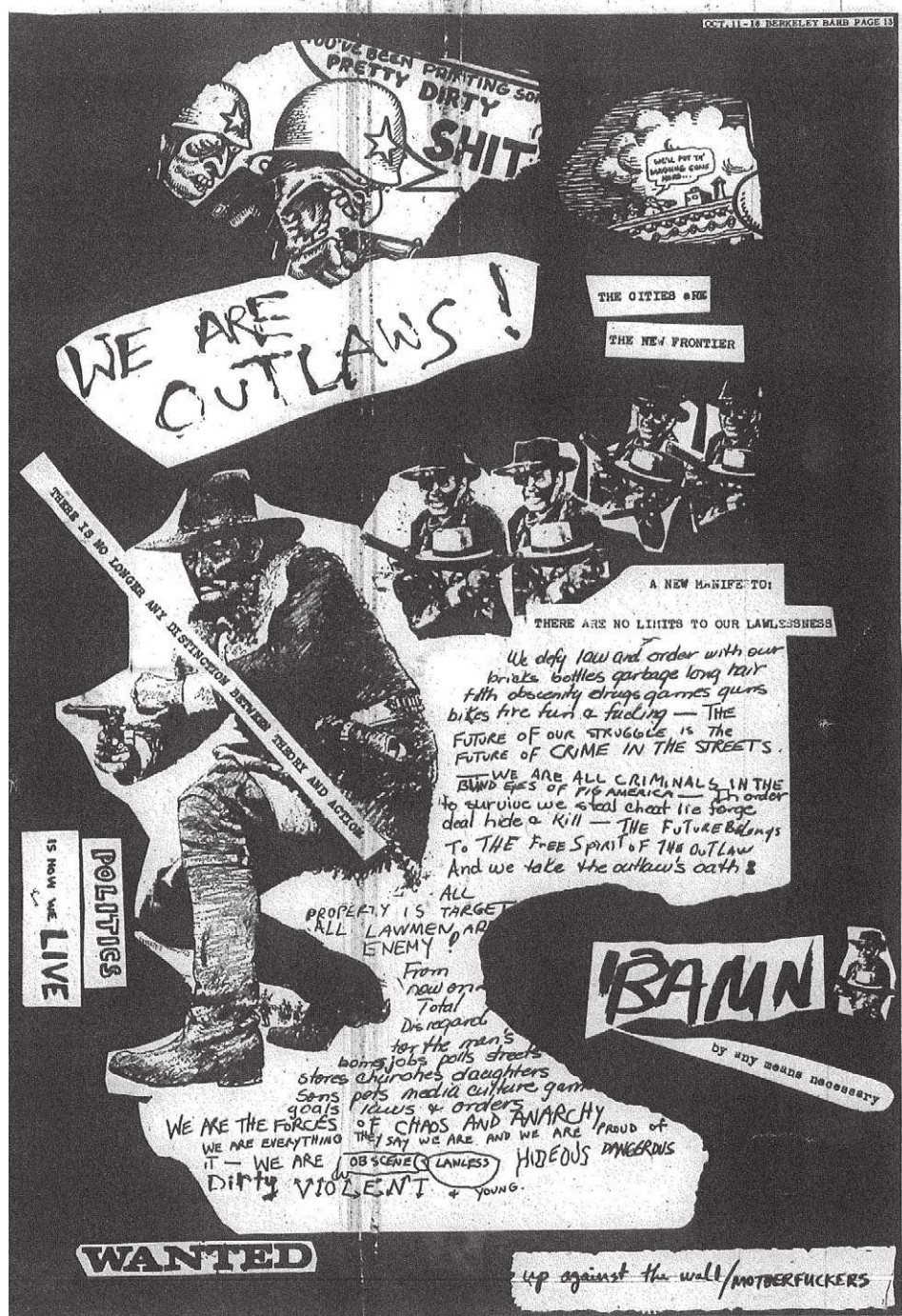
15 UATWMF, 'The Outlaw Page', RAT, 6–19 September 1968, p. 7. Print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Downtown Collection, Fales Library, NYU. Photo: Author.



which adds a multiplied figure to create a gang, in this case a gun-toting outlaw (plate 16). According to Neumann, it was produced mainly by another Motherfucker, John Sundstrom. It identifies itself as a manifesto, and is perhaps the most popular and influential of their posters.<sup>162</sup> This poster was archetypal in that it addressed no specific issues and issued no imperatives. Instead its montage poetically expresses a spectral militant identity, seducing the viewer to join its siren call to exodus. Like many of their other posters (plate 17), it adopts a position which bluntly confronts and attacks the viewer. Beginning with a comic-book shot at the viewer themselves, the montage is hastily made and deliberately artisan. Torn edges, scrawled handwriting and 'automatic' sexual doodles are laid amongst unevenly placed typed text.



16 UATWMF, Untitled, Berkeley Barb, 11–18 October 1968, p. 13. Microfilm image (made 1971) of print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. Lost. Wooster, OH: Underground Newspaper Collection, Bell and Howell. Photo: Underground Press Syndicate.



Black Mask had argued that capital was violence, but protesters are 'always the only people to be associated with it'.<sup>163</sup> The montages' aesthetic response is so be it — 'we are everything you say we are' — appropriating and compiling multiple negative images of social movements amid images of death, fire, phalluses, guns and destruction as a paradoxically powerful self-representation. Not only did their visual rejection of reason, order, progress and individual achievement offer a possible aesthetic corollary to an anarchist rejection of liberal values, but the affective power of these fearful images is appropriated for its seductive force. The montage identifies with and compounds social and psychological figures of abjection: criminals, violence, genitals, dirt, the lower social classes.<sup>164</sup> But for the Motherfuckers, their



combination in montage is a way to visualize the eruption of a real, total anti-authoritarian political agency. The montage's visual negation is, ironically, an attempt to represent an identity which valued action over representation.

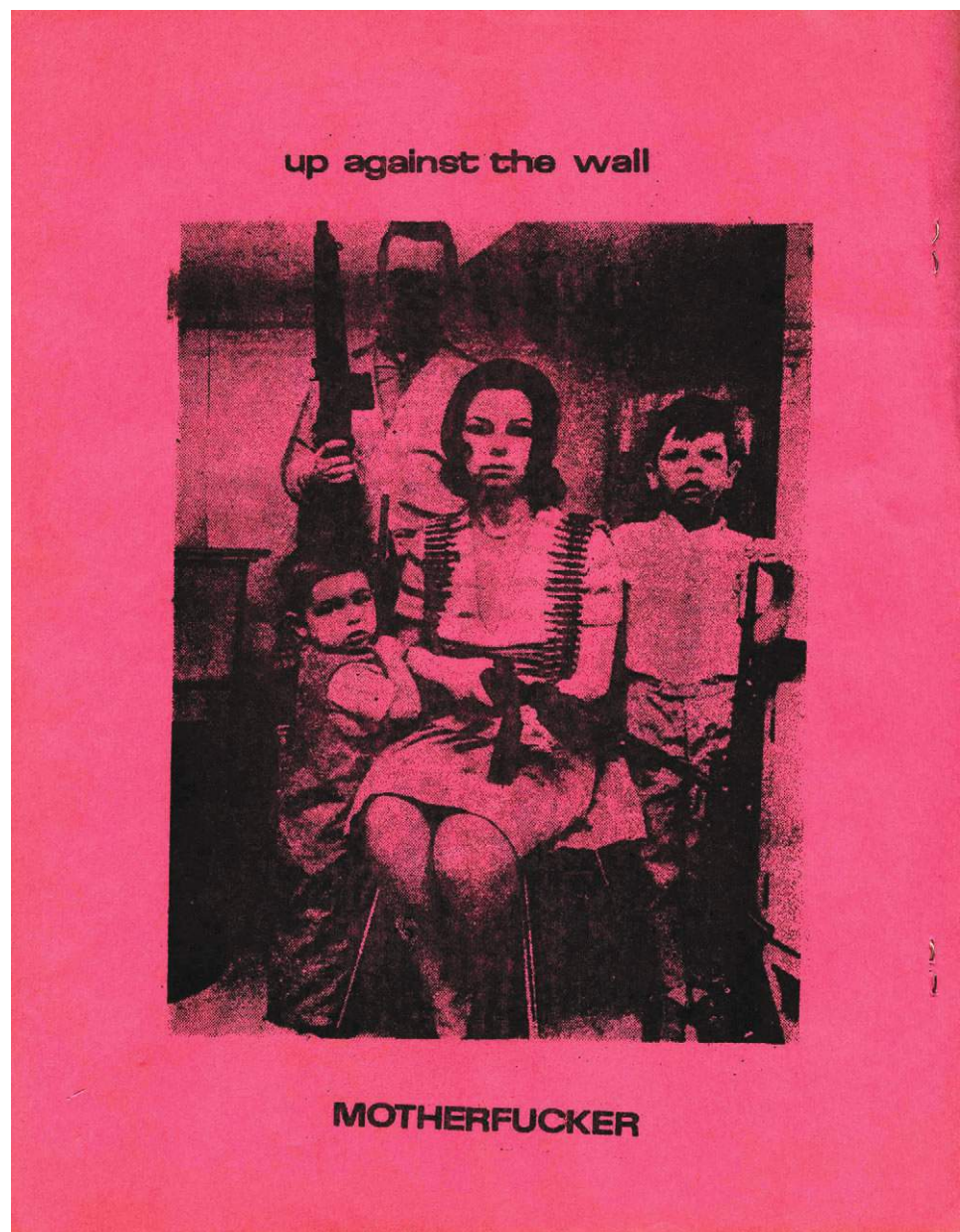
This tactic has two notable precedents. Firstly, it was a visual equivalent to the listing of 'outsiders' common in texts by Black Mask and others, which attempted to grasp the composition and identity of the new 1960s social movements beyond a traditional 'working-class' agent.<sup>165</sup> Typical of these was the Amsterdam Provos' account of a new 'Provotariat' composed of 'anarchists, provos, beatniks, pleiners ... pacifists ... charlatans, philosophers ... homos, happeners, vegetarians, syndicalists ...'.<sup>166</sup> These attempts in turn recall Marx's own much earlier use of listing to define and exclude an abject 'lumpenproletariat' from his definition of the working class.<sup>167</sup> However, this montage reworks this attempt to imagine a political agent through the surrealist tactic, detailed by Simon Baker, of composing an alternative pantheon of outsiders, from de Sade to the Bonnot Gang, which established a mythological ancestry for surrealism.<sup>168</sup> The Motherfuckers' own construction of a mythological identity used this avant-garde tactic to place them at the forefront of a 'hip' political vanguard equivalent to the Black Panthers' role in the black community.

This montage resituated both Fantômas' European aristocratic criminal and the Black Panthers' Maoist fetishization of the gun via the more familiar American anti-hero of the masked male outlaw, the cowboy gone native. The images grasp after a sense of radical authenticity grounded in associations with black working-class and Native American cultures as much as in macho phallocentricism. Female members wrote and signed some Black Mask articles, but in either group rarely found roles outside domestic worker or girlfriend. Among the Lower East Side's cross-section of dropouts, bohemians and urban poor, the Motherfuckers sought a white equivalent of the Panthers or Young Lords' organizational basis in youth street gangs, and these posters prospected for a collective identity for such a group. To this end, defining themselves as 'a street gang with an analysis', they also represented themselves as an anti-capitalist posse or an urban



17 Black Mask/UATWMF, *Your Government Has Fallen*, c. 1967–68. Print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.

Wild Bunch. Eric Hobsbawm's 1959 book *Primitive Rebels* had opened up a debate that 'social bandits' represented precursors to the cultural and affinity-based political agency of 1960s new social movements, and that even urban gangs might be seen as modern social bandits.<sup>169</sup> Georgakas' 'The Kleptic Poets' in *Black Mask* 1, criticizing the formal limits of anti-war poetry, invoked a precedential Greek fusion of art and banditry. The Klefts, known through their songs, were social bandits who played an important role in the nineteenth-century Greek revolution. Other Motherfucker posters combined images of Native American militancy with those of the Hells Angels and Black Panthers, who had already begun to use the term 'urban guerrilla'. If collating these images of cultural and political authenticity could be considered a problematic appropriation, then they were sometimes otherwise so. One graphic (plate 18) presents a portrait of an armed family. The image was sourced from the Black Panther Party Newspaper, but the image's original subtitle identifies them as a racist Southern family arming themselves 'for the outright slaughter of innocent black citizens'.<sup>170</sup>



**18** Back page of *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, c. 1968. Print on card, 30 × 21 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambelini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library

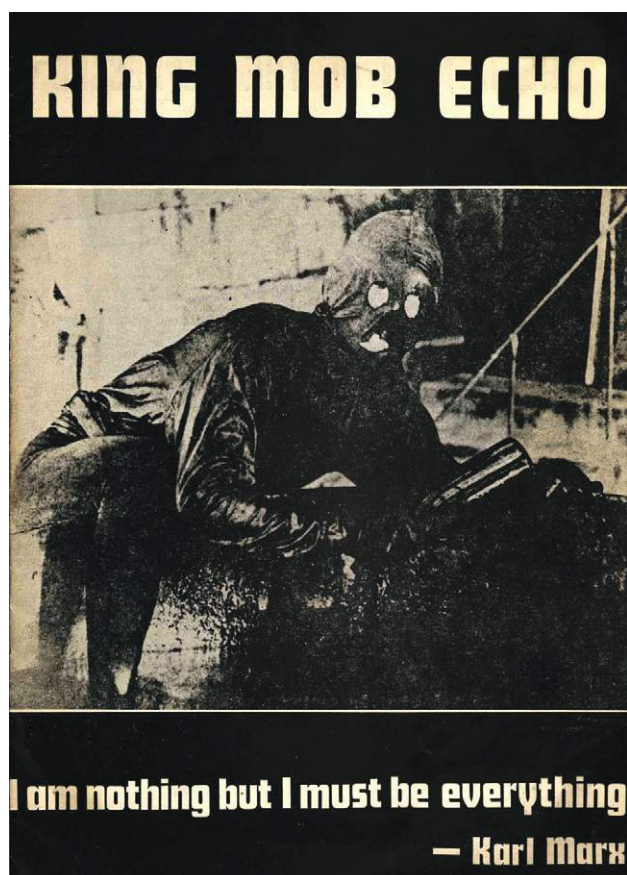


19 Spain Rodriguez, 'Acid, Agent of Lower East Side Defense', RAT, 13 December 1968–12 January 1969, p. 6. Print on paper, 30 × 21 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambelini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.



The Motherfuckers' figuration of a militant identity diffused rapidly. Two examples are particularly relevant. Spain Rodriguez's 'Trashman' was a regular comic strip in the *East Village Other* from July 1967 into 1970, and later elsewhere. Trashman was a leftist reworking of a Jack Kirby-style superhero, resisting a near-future fascist America. Trashman, shouting 'Up Against the Wall...', not only looked and dressed like Morea, but was characterized by extreme violent intensity and an association between transgressive urban filth and revolutionary power.<sup>171</sup> He perhaps even took his name from the Motherfuckers' first action. He was also drawn in the image of the Road Vultures MC bikers which Spain had belonged to, the Panthers, and the Zig Zag Man tobacco advertisement, which the Motherfuckers also appropriated.<sup>172</sup> Spain even produced original work for the





20 King Mob, cover of *King Mob Echo*, no. 1, April 1968. Print on paper, 68 x 86 cm. London, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: Author.

group, representing Trashman fighting a serviceman (plate 19).<sup>173</sup> The comic's mythologized leftist heroics certainly reflect on the group, but its absolute, eroticized machismo evokes other ambiguities latent in the Motherfuckers' representational tactics. Neumann's diaries, filled with sadomasochistic political fantasies, also hint at violent, even homoerotic, sexual tensions.<sup>174</sup>

These ambiguities continue in a later image by the group King Mob (plate 20), comprising some of the earlier 'English Situationists'. The name 'King Mob' found an English historical precedent for Black Mask's imaginary. It appropriated in positive terms a phrase which was a popular but ambivalent among seventeenth-century pamphleteers and journalists: 'his majesty king mob'. The phrase embodies anxieties about mass sovereignty using terms analogous to the King of Misrule and the omen of a King Rat, indicating both terrible power and hopeless abjection. It also gave a title to Christopher Hibbert's history of the Gordon Riots, appropriated by this group as an English example of the 'revolution-as-festival' which the situationists had located in Watts and Black Mask found in Newark.<sup>175</sup> Their publication *King Mob Echo* was often made up of cut-and-pasted elements of *Black*

*Mask*. But one original image, also taken from *Fantômas vs Juve*, seems to condense the Motherfuckers' multiple figurations of total negation into a single image (see plate 20).<sup>176</sup> This time, the caption accompanying the figure is a simple *détournement*. The lone figure transforms a quotation from Marx. For Marx, the speaker of 'I am nothing' was a collective 'I', the working class, to whom he attributed the perspective of totality. But placed here it appears to be an individuated address and demand, directed from the figure to the viewer. The phrase's appeal to collective historical change becomes an excessive vitalist demand. This ambiguity extends into the image, where *Fantômas* looks at the camera, one leg awkwardly stepping into a vat, as if caught in the act. His mask slips down clownishly over his features. In the film, this is a pathetic moment in which he is hiding in the vat from a gang of police detectives, but in *King Mob*'s grainy reproduction, his mask becomes the most basic approximation of subjectivity, three crude holes, white against black, with one barely visible misplaced human eye distorting even that ordered faciality. Though barely a human subject, he addresses the viewer intently, crouched for action with a bottle, as if raising a Molotov cocktail. Rather than hiding, he seems emerging, having bided his time like Marx's old mole.<sup>177</sup> Now it is the viewer caught in the blank headlights of impending violence. In the next, final scene of the film he destroys the police pursuing him, raising both arms in joy as he watches the building they are in explode.

This millennial imaginary of escalating militancy reflected unsustainable group micropolitics. One part of their security culture was to 'raise the level of commitment' and risk excluding hangers-on and infiltrators.<sup>178</sup> They criticized others such as SDS for failure to drop out of institutions and become full-time militants. But their reified stress on 'action' became exclusive and exhausting. Bookchin observed

at the time that ‘what troubled me profoundly was the likelihood that revolutionary expectations among radical young people were outpacing reality.’<sup>179</sup> In the wake of the assassinations of black movement leaders and increased monitoring, infiltration and disruption of social movements by the FBI and police, up to and including political assassinations, Morea left his heavily padlocked artist’s loft at 20 East Broadway and disappeared from art and social movements, living on horseback in Colorado’s mountains for five years, later working as a lumberjack and horse-trainer and joining the Ute tribe’s animism. Following their millennial logic, and after the Kent State shootings, other Motherfuckers lived off the land in New Mexico until as late as 1976, briefly renaming themselves the Banditos when they realized the Motherfuckers might be hard to explain to the locals. A few remained in the city, and RAT montages continued appearing until 1969, but much of the Family dissipated to Black Bear and other rural communes.<sup>180</sup>

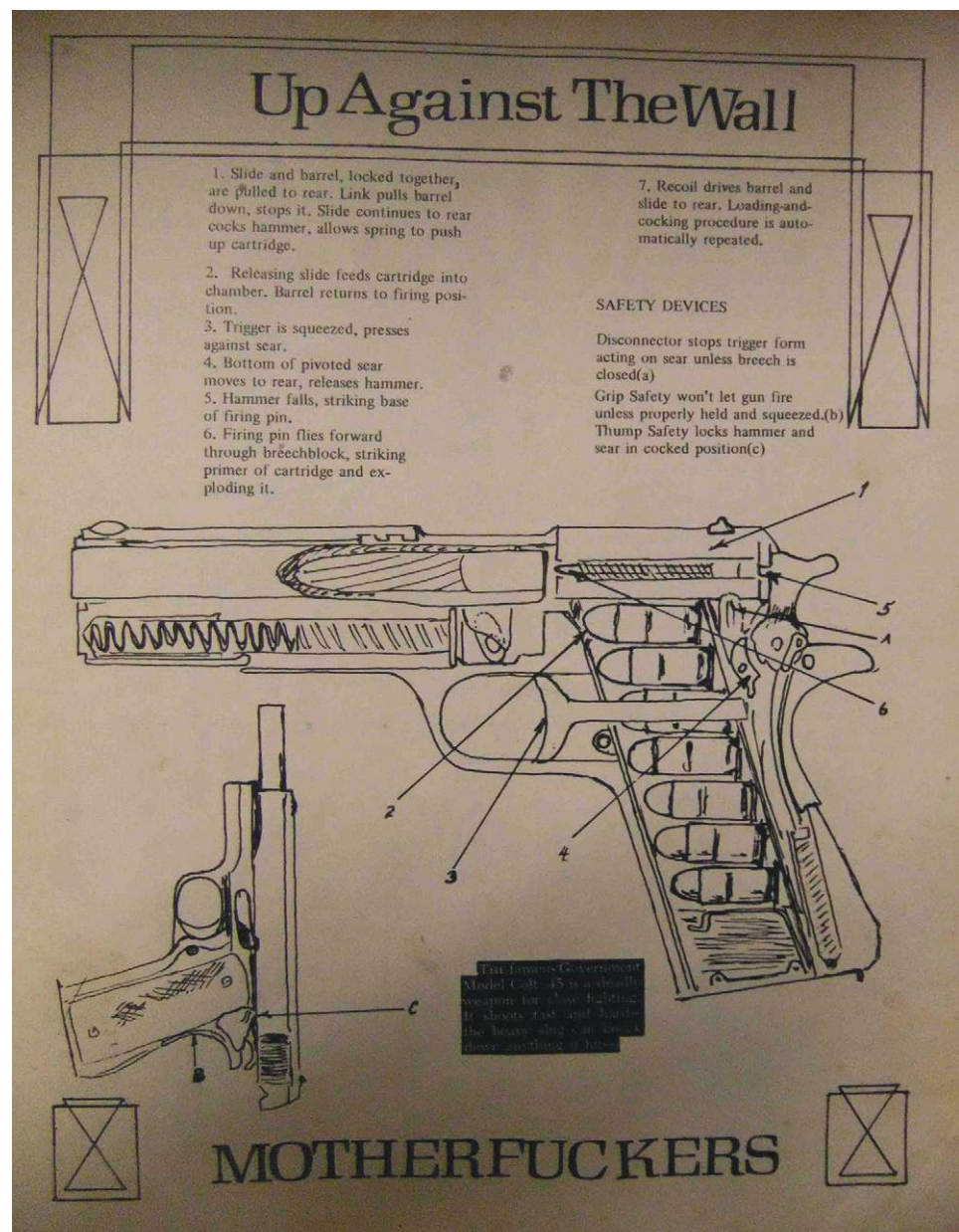
### **Conclusion: Fight Foul. Life is Real.**

The specific organizations Black Mask/Up Against the Wall Motherfucker initiated did not last, but their aesthetic and theoretical legacy was considerable both for artists and social movements. Firstly, their theoretical framing of authentic revolutionary art as an exodus from art institutions in order to take direct action immediately impacted on other artists, including debates around the Destruction in Art Symposium, Jean-Jacques Lebel’s *poésie directe*, and the Art Workers’ Coalition.<sup>181</sup> Black Mask/Motherfuckers’ direct actions against cultural spaces directly presaged the more famous actions of the Art Workers’ Coalition from 1969, who argued ‘The trustees of the museum direct NBC and . . . General Motors . . . it is these art-loving, culturally committed trustees . . . who are waging the war in Vietnam.’<sup>182</sup> Their aesthetics even more directly anticipated the style of direct actions carried out by the Art Workers’ Coalition sub-group, the Guerrilla Art Action Group who paraphrase the Motherfuckers, ‘Yesterday Watts, today Columbia, tomorrow, museums.’<sup>183</sup>

The conception of exodus also had wider artistic resonance. Lucy Lippard, close to many political art groups in the Motherfuckers’ wake, would influentially describe conceptual art as an exodus from art’s institutions, albeit of a different sort. Later, in the 1990s, Black Mask’s conception of exodus, and of social activity as an art form, provided a key precedent for turns to socially engaged art.<sup>184</sup> Even into the present, these have remained a common lens through which to understand socially engaged art.<sup>185</sup> Meanwhile, aesthetically, the Motherfuckers’ gritty monochrome montages directly preceded and influenced many punk-associated artists from the 1970s onwards, especially as the availability of cheap photocopying grew.<sup>186</sup>

However, Black Mask/Motherfuckers’ greatest impact was doubtless on the cultures of activist social movements. In immediate terms, their particular militant aesthetic and rhetoric was influential into the 1970s. The group’s name spread quickly throughout various movements as a slogan.<sup>187</sup> They were central to the propagation of political happenings, but also to the formation of the Weather Underground. Bookchin argued that the Motherfuckers exerted ‘enormous influence’ on the SDS members who created the Weathermen.<sup>188</sup> Several Weathermen had even been part of the Family. Its practices (notably the Days of Rage direct actions in October 1969 in Chicago), theory, language and visuals echoed the Motherfuckers’ militant style, rhetoric and collective ‘family’ organization. One issue of *Fire!* (a transitional SDS-Weathermen publication) reuses the Motherfuckers’ dancing skeleton montage, and the stylistic resonances continue in *Otowatomie*, the Weather Underground’s official periodical.<sup>189</sup> Celebratory images of guns became common in Motherfucker graphics

(plate 21), sometimes accompanied by text ironically montaged from the then-ubiquitous Famous Artists School advert, 'we're looking for people who like to draw'. Such imagery, and the punning *détournement*, continued in the Weather Underground-associated slogan, 'piece now'. More troublingly the Crazies, a 1968–70 New York hybrid imitation of the Motherfuckers and the Yippies, were led by 'Prince Crazy' George Demmerle – actually an FBI-paid provocateur and informant.<sup>190</sup> It is also arguable that they had an immediate impact on the aesthetic composition of the May 1968 events in France. The Motherfuckers are cited by Lebel as an example he and other occupiers of the Odeon Theatre sought to emulate.<sup>191</sup> Meanwhile Black Mask member Verlaan was central to the Strasbourg student 'scandal'. The radical students elected to Strasbourg University student union in November 1966, before publishing the situationists' *On the Poverty of Student Life* first reprinted the cover of Black Mask 1 on the front of *Nouvelles*, the union's newspaper.<sup>192</sup> Their impact on popular music, meanwhile, is well documented.<sup>193</sup>



21 UATWMF, Untitled, c. 1968–69. Print on paper, 34 × 43 cm. New York: Ben Morea and Aldo Tambellini Art and Anarchy in New York Collection, Tamiment Library, NYU. Photo: Tamiment Library.



Black Mask's cultural-political experiments with affinity groups, free spaces, and creative forms of direct action persist to this day as now-standard activist practices, albeit refined and reshaped by the needs and experiences of different movements since the 1970s.<sup>194</sup> Secondly, their emphasis on dada and surrealism's affinity with radical politics, especially with creative direct action, has had lasting influence among social movements. Discussions of surrealism can be found in anarchist journals into the present (and especially in the 1990s with the reprinting of some of Black Mask/Motherfuckers and situationist material); and many activist-art groups practising creative direct action continue to claim surrealism and dada's legacy.<sup>195</sup>

Kristin Ross, referring to events in France, has counselled against the incorporation of '1968' into a liberal consensus that frames it as a bright, utopian but ultimately failed radical moment undone by the 1980s.<sup>196</sup> While it's true that Black Mask/Motherfuckers' moment was – if influential – short-lived and limited in some ways, an easy narrative arc ending in either celebration or condemnation must be resisted.<sup>197</sup> Instead, a history of these groups grounded in social movements inevitably involves first destabilizing the institutionally established aesthetic categories and authorial hierarchies often found in art-historical representation. Second, it involves a tacit critical reflection on the limits of theoretical claims for the political agency or value of professional and gallery-based art. More productively, it might prompt us to examine how, in the conditions of the present, creative 'artistic' labour might yet be politically recomposed otherwise.

#### Notes

**I am grateful for interviews with and/or access to the personal archives of Dan Georgakas; Johan Kugelberg; Ben Morea; Osha Neumann; Donald Nicholson-Smith (via Mayday Rooms); Sean Stewart and Aldo Tambellini.**

- 1 Dan Georgakas, *Millennium*, poster, c. 1964.
- 2 The term activist-art in its present popular usage arises first in the late 1980s in New York in the writings of Lucy Lippard, Nina Felshin and others as a very broad term for 'political art' of various forms and contexts. I use the term in a more precise historicized sense to describe art immediately linked to or part of the activism of social movements, and specifically to the anarchist strategy of direct action, the practice of which is the etymological root of the word 'activism'. Black Mask/Motherfuckers' work is central to the popularization of activist-art practices in this latter sense, but also influences Western socially engaged and political art more broadly. Nina Felshin, ed., *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, San Francisco, CA, 1995; Lucy Lippard, *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*, New York, 1984. I also use 'social movement' in its technical sociological sense, as referring to large, informal and non-institutional groups of people acting on political and social issues. Coined by Rudolf Heberle, it has been given numerous emphases of meaning since. I take the specific term 'social movement cultures' from Josh McPhee and Dara Greenwald's identification of, and emphasis on, social movements as sites of cultural value. Rudolf Heberle, *Social Movements*, New York, 1951; Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, London, 1989; Mario Diani, 'The concept of social movement', *Sociological Review*, 40: 1, 1992, 1–25; Josh McPhee and Dara Greenwald, *Signs of Change: Social Movement Cultures 1960s to Now*, Oakland, CA, 2010.
- 3 Understanding this particular reclamation of dada and surrealism requires a critical account of a neo-avant-garde trajectory which departs from the mostly institutional terms of existing debates on the politics and legacy of the avant-garde. On this debate, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Manchester, 1984; Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, Cambridge, MA, 2003; Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, MA, 1996; Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA, 1985; David Hopkins, ed., *Neo-Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam/New York, 2006.
- 4 Nicholas Calas, 'Surrealist heritage?', *Arts Magazine*, 42: 5, March 1968, 24.
- 5 *The Village Voice*, 21 March 1968, 20. Huelsenbeck later voiced the same criticism of the show, that dada was not just an 'art movement'. Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, Berkeley, CA, 1991, 186.
- 6 'Hippies protest at dada preview', *New York Times*, 26 March 1968, 21; 'Dada at MoMA', *Newsweek*, 8 April 1968, 'Hippies put on a museum show', *New York Post*, 26 March 1968; 'The politicization of avant-garde', *Art In America*, November 1971, n.p.; 'Oh dada, poor dada, MoMA's hanging you', *Village Voice*, 28 March 1968, 12. This latter account notes a split between Swenson's collective (*The Transformation*, also comprising John Perreault and Gregory Battcock) and more radical tendencies, 'Swenson . . . even pointed us out to the police'. Swenson had written to MoMA's director, 'we only wish to complement the opening and recreate the spirit of Dada'. Swenson to Bates Lowry, 19 March 1968. Swenson offers his account in 'The corporate structure of the American art world', *New York Free Press*, 1: 18, 25 April 1968, 9. Other *Transformation* members were also 'contrary to some of the activist happenings which seek a confrontation'. 'Dada knows best', *Village Voice*, 4 April 1968, 4. The Chicago Surrealists met the exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago with their own counter-exhibition and continued disruption. Ron Sakolsky, ed., *Surrealist Subversions*, New York, 2002, 67; 'Protestors of dada show make ironic contribution', *Chicago Tribune*, 27 November 1968.
- 7 'Dada at MOMA', 132, 'Museums: The hobbyhorse rides again', *Time*, 5 April 1968, 84.
- 8 'More dada than dada', *Village Voice*, 11 April 1968; Charles Giuliano, 'Dada', *Avatar*, New York, 29 March, 1968. See also Jacob Dobson, 'Politics of dada', *Chicago Seed*, c. March 1968. The protest was also debated in the letters page of London's *Art and Artists*, August 1968.
- 9 Dan Georgakas, interview with author, 25 March 2010.
- 10 Grace Glueck, 'A rainy taxi, a tea cup of fur', *New York Times*, 24 March 1968, 20.
- 11 Georgakas, interview.
- 12 Georgakas, interview. King Mob's version has them roughing up Larry Rivers (which Georgakas does not recall happening, 'at least physically') at LOEB Student Center, being consequently challenged to a debate at another gallery via an advert in the *Village Voice*. No such advert exists. Georgakas recalls the challenge was made only verbally, while Morea

- recalls the invitation to debate at the symposium itself and later gallery disruption as two separate events. *King Mob Echo*, 3, 1969, 2–3; interviews.
- 13 Calas, 'Surrealism hits back', *Arts Magazine*, 42, May 1968, 23; 'Power and flowers', *Arts Magazine*, 42, December–January 1968, 11.
  - 14 Adrian Henri, *Total Art*, London, 1972, 7.
  - 15 They had quite disappeared by the time of Irving Sandler, 'The artist as political activist', *American Art* of the 1960s, New York, 1988, 293–300.
  - 16 *King Mob Echo*, 3, 1969, n.p.; Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, London, 1988; Ron Hahne and Ben Morea, *Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker: The Incomplete Works of Ron Hahne, Ben Morea and the Black Mask Group*, Edinburgh, 1992.
  - 17 Provo flyer, 25 May 1965.
  - 18 The Chicago Surrealists were central here, hosting texts by André Breton, René Daumal, Benjamin Péret, Kenneth Patchen and others. Later, Herbert Marcuse's most sustained engagement with surrealism occurred through them. Marcuse, 'Letters to Chicago Surrealists', *Arsenal*, 4, 1989, n.p.; *Radical America: Surrealism in the Service of Revolution*, New York, January 1970; *Heatwave 2*, London, 1966; Breton and Riviera, 'Towards a free revolutionary art', *Guerrilla*, 1: 1, n.p.
  - 19 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Manchester, 1984, 61.
  - 20 Hal Foster 'What's neo about the neo-avant-garde?', *October*, 10, Autumn 1994, 5–32.
  - 21 They would later engage with the Situationist International. Bürger and the situationists were also not aware of each other, despite their similar analyses. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'The Situationist International, surrealism, and the difficult fusion of art and politics', *Oxford Art Journal*, 27: 3, 2004, 365–87.
  - 22 This dynamic of attraction and repulsion regarding artistic authenticity might be characterized as close to what John Roberts terms the 'suspensive tension' of the revolutionary 'pathos' of the historic avant-garde. This tension in *Black Mask* is also, as I will discuss below, bound up with their links to the Situationist International, who share such a tension. John Roberts, 'Revolutionary pathos, negation, and the suspensive avant-garde', *New Literary History*, 41: 4, 2010.
  - 23 On communization, see Benjamin Noys, ed., *Communization and its Discontents*, London, 2011.
  - 24 'European autonomous movements have embodied principles first introduced by artists . . . The cumulative effect of dozens of collectives transforming regional culture and daily life along the lines of aesthetic avant-gardes.' George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics*, Edinburgh, 2006, 230.
  - 25 This process began to be analysed most famously from the 1950s by Italian Operaist Marxists as 'social work' or 'socialized work', but is most familiar now in more contemporary analyses of affective, biopolitical, cognitive or immaterial labour. Mario Tronti, 'Workers and capital', *Telos*, 14, 1972, 25–62; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA, 2000. This process broadens and accelerates after the 1960s, but my argument runs counter to that of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, who theorize an autonomous, fully formed 'artistic critique' of capitalism which is then fully recuperated by new forms of capitalist management. This artistic critique is precisely the neo-avant-garde perspective popularized by *Black Mask* and their milieu. I argue that this perspective is not autonomous but historically reliant on existing capitalist forms of labour. It is also not fully or permanently enclosed by 'participatory' management models. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London, 2007.
  - 26 Karl Marx, 'Notebook IV', *Grundrisse*, London, 1973, 638.
  - 27 Paolo Virno, 'Virtuosity and revolution: The political theory of exodus', in Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minnesota, MN, 2006; Carlo Vercellone, 'From formal subsumption to general intellect: Elements for a Marxist reading of the thesis of cognitive capitalism', *Historical Materialism*, 15, 2007, 13–36.
  - 28 'The autonomy of art-as-a-value' refers to a specific ideological articulation of art's autonomy by the avant-garde which I have argued for elsewhere. Grindon, 'Surrealism, dada and the refusal of work', *Oxford Art Journal*, 34: 1, 2011.
  - 29 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', *Illuminations*, New York, 2007, 242.
  - 30 *Black Mask* 1, November 1966, 1.
  - 31 'Black Mask', *WIN*, 2: 19, 1966, 20; 'Black Mask lashes new establishment', *East Village Other*, 4: 8, February 1967, 4.
  - 32 The claim first appears in Henri's *Total Art*, 176, citing *Rolling Stone*, 14 October, 1971. The citation is erroneous.
  - 33 During 1964, Murray Bookchin was at the heart of several attempts to bring together different generations and groups of anarchists: the 1964–67 New York Federation of Anarchists and from 1967, Anarchos. Their meetings as a discussion circle went under the more informal 'East Side Anarchist Group'.
  - 34 The crash pads which the Motherfuckers, among others, established to protect these teenagers are described unsympathetically in 'Runaway Kids', *Life*, 3 November 1967, 19–29. Beyond hysterical news articles, Motherfucker and Digger activism had an impact on youth homelessness at a national policy level. Karen Staller, *Runaways: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped Today's Practices and Policies*, New York, 2006.
  - 35 Morea interviewed in Sean Stewart, *On the Ground*, Oakland, CA, 2011, 14.
  - 36 THE CENTER, flyer, c. 1964.
  - 37 'Fuck the tastemaker', *The Screw: A Newsletter of Social Consciousness*, 4, Fall 1962, 2; *The Screw*, 1, March/April 1962, 1.
  - 38 'Theater journal', *Village Voice*, 23 December, 1965, 19–20.
  - 39 THE CENTER, Calendar of Events, February–May 1962.
  - 40 'Downtown artists have a coming out', *New York Post*, 12 June 1963, 8.
  - 41 'Rebellion in art form', *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 June 1965, n.p.
  - 42 Aldo Tambellini, interview 6 July 2011.
  - 43 'Art review', *New York Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1965, n.p.
  - 44 'Art', *Village Voice*, 14 January 1965, 18; 'Galleries – A critical guide', *New York Herald Tribune*, 6 January 1965, n.p.
  - 45 A low-resolution image of Morea's 1964 92 x 92cm oil painting *Beginning* can be found in *Tenth Mary Washington Annual Exhibition of Modern Art*, Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia in Fredericksburg, Fredericksburg, 1965.
  - 46 'the zero signifies "nothing" while its form, the circle, suggests "everything"'. Stephen Petersen on ZERO, *Space Age Aesthetics*, University Park, PA, 2009, 203.
  - 47 'Black', *Arts Canada*, October 1967, 5–6.
  - 48 Tambellini, interview.
  - 49 *Village Voice*, 11 November 1965, 12, 22; 9 December 1965, 20–2, 91.
  - 50 Including the Bridge Theatre, 15–16 December 1965; New York Beyond Cinema Festival, 1965; *Intermedia '68*. It was recently re-performed in New York at Performa09 and at Tate Modern, 2012.
  - 51 Jeremy Heymsfeld, 'Space World in "Black Zero"', *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, 16 December 1965, n.p. Kostebretz, 'The discovery of alternative theatre', *Perspectives of New Music*, 27: 1, 1989, 128–72; *Arts Magazine*, 41, May 1967, n.p.; Danielle Goldman, *I Want to be Ready*, Ann Arbor, MI, 2010, 61; Ben Young, ed., *Dixonia: A Bio-Discography of Bill Dixon*, Westport, CT, 1998, 88.
  - 52 *News From the Bridge*, 23 November, 1967, n.p. Aldo met Tom Dent at Syracuse University and the UMBRA poets, especially Ishmael Reed, Roland Snelling and Calvin Hernton were close, as were jazz musicians Freddy Red, Bill Dixon and Allan Silva. Their participation is recalled in Dent, 'UMBRA days', *Black American Literature Forum*, 14: 3, 1980, 105–8.
  - 53 Group Center, Press Release, 23 November 1965; Group Center, Press Release, 7 June 1965, 18–21. They had participated in Mekas' November 1965 Expanded Cinema Festival.
  - 54 John Gruen, *The New Bohemia*, Chicago, IL, 1965, 111.
  - 55 Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, New York, 1994, 243–320; Kaprow, 'The legacy of Jackson Pollock', *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Berkeley, CA, 1993, 1–9.
  - 56 See Branden W. Joseph, 'My mind split open: Andy Warhol's exploding plastic inevitable', *Grey Room*, 8, 2002, 80–107.
  - 57 Larry Busbea, 'Kineticism-Spectacle-Environment', *October*, 144, Spring 2013, 92–144, 111.
  - 58 Shannon Jackson, *Social Works*, New York, 2011, 83.
  - 59 Group Center Statement, 1965, 'Theater journal', *Village Voice*, 23 December 1965, 20.
  - 60 Stephen Petersen, *Space Age Aesthetics*, University Park, PA, 2009.
  - 61 *Arts Canada*, October 1967, 6.
  - 62 Calvin C. Hernton, 'Jitterbugging in the streets', *New Jazz Poets*, LP, New York, 1967.
  - 63 Langston Hughes, 'Montage of a dream deferred: Harlem', *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Volume 3*, Columbia, MO, 2001, 74.

- 64 John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, London, 2002; Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions*, New York, 2011.
- 65 Morea also perhaps owed something to Tambellini's temperament, who on one occasion physically threw a racist reporter out of a show. Dan Rose, 'Sculptor hunts junk for fierce forms. Sleeps with his work. Fights critics', *New York Herald Tribune*, 9 November 1961, n.p.; Tambellini, interview.
- 66 'Art and revolution', *Black Mask* 3, January 1967, 3.
- 67 Morea in Stewart, *On the Ground*, 16.
- 68 Bookchin, 'When everything was possible', *Journal of Surrealism*, 9–10, Winter 1991, 1–7; *Anarchism, Marxism and the Future of the Left: Interviews and Essays*, Edinburgh and San Francisco, CA, 1999, 83.
- 69 'Huelsenbeck, who I communicated with quite a bit. But never met. At that point he was an older Professional. (Psychiatry). I treated him with deference.' Morea, interview, 16 September 2009; 'Berlin dada', *Black Mask* 10, April/May 1968, 3.
- 70 'Art and revolution', *Black Mask* 3, 3. The quotation comes to them via Chicago Surrealist Franklin Rosemont, likely in an issue of *Rebel Worker*. Breton, 'Interview with Halo-noviny', in Franklin Rosemont, ed., *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings by Andre Breton*, New York, 1978, 142.
- 71 Henry Flynt, 'Down with art', *Blueprint For A Higher Civilization*, Milan, 1975, 63–6. Flynt organized a series of protests against cultural institutions, but considered them disasters. See Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise*, Berkeley, CA, 2011, 68.
- 72 'What was that name again?', *Freedom*, 29 June 1968, n.p. Bookchin to Charles Radcliffe, 1968 letter cited in Radcliffe, unpublished essay, 2010.
- 73 Dan Georgakas, interview.
- 74 Georgakas, *My Detroit*, New York, 2006, 213–16, 226–9.
- 75 *My Own Mag*, *Klactoveedsedsteen*, *Kauri*, *Hanging Loose*, *Wormwood Review*, *Avalanche*, *Crucible*, *Insurgent*, *Iconoclare*, *Hellenic Review*, *Trace* and others. See John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America*, Oxford, 2011.
- 76 Georgakas, interview.
- 77 Georgakas, *And All Living Things Their Children*, Blackburn, 1970, n.p.
- 78 Georgakas, 'Harlem', Untitled Poster, c. 1965.
- 79 Claude Pelieu, 'Post-scriptum to the Manifesto for the Grey Generation', *Klacto*, 1: 5, 5. A review of the manifesto also appears in *Ole*, 7, 1967, 36–7.
- 80 Georgakas et al., *Manifesto for the Grey Generation*, Heidelberg, 1966, 1–2.
- 81 Georgakas to Malay Roychoudhury, 23 August 1966.
- 82 Bookchin to Laurence Veysey, 1972, 2.
- 83 I have retained the term 'avant-garde' rather than 'neo-avant-garde' in referring to 1950s–60s New York poetry. Literary scholars' discussions of Beat, New York School or Black Arts Movements poets do not tend to engage with the art-historical 'neo-avant-garde' debate and retain the term 'avant garde', often merely indicating formal experiment. Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s*, Berkeley, CA, 2003; David Lehman, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*, New York, 1998.
- 84 His 'Hymn to Amun-Ra Sanders' appeared in *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*, 1, February 1962, 11.
- 85 Stefan Brecht, *Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppets Theatre* vol. 1, London, 1988, 221.
- 86 Georgakas, interview.
- 87 Georgakas, interview.
- 88 Morea, interview.
- 89 Unsigned to 'Bernard', 15 December 1967.
- 90 Guy Debord, Chris Grey, Mustafa Khayati, Donald Nicholson Smith to Morea, 5 December 1967. Chase and Elwell resisted this particular claim to membership, accusing the SI of making relations in New York worse. Chase, Elwell, Verlaan to Debord, 10 December 1967.
- 91 Vermorel offers another account at odds with these letters but whose spirit is at least convincing. Debord, excited to meet a hyper-militant group of street-fighters, travelled to London to find Dave and Stuart Wise drinking McEwans Export and watching *Match of the Day*, and left in a rage. Fred Vermorel, *Sex Pistols*, London, 1978, 222–3.
- 92 Nicholson-Smith and Grey to Bookchin, 13 December 1967.
- 93 Morea to Nicholson-Smith, 27 November 1967.
- 94 Charles Radcliffe, Unpublished essay, 2010, 6. Chase and Elwell were excluded in 1970, publishing critiques of the SI and *Black Mask*. In 1973, Jan Hoerlick, excluded alongside Verlaan from their 'American Situationist International', critiqued all parties. Chase and Elwell, *A Field Study in the Dwindling Force of Cognition, Where it is Least Expected: A Critique of the Situationist International International as a Revolutionary Organisation*, New York, February–March 1970; The Council for the Liberation of Daily Life (Chasse), *The Power of Negative Thinking, or Robin Hood Rides Again*, New York, April 1968; Jan Hoerlick, 'The practice of truth: The crisis of the SI', *Diversion*, 1, June 1973, 47–50.
- 95 Bookchin, interview with Max Blechman, in Blechman's notebook, n.p.
- 96 See Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, Berkeley, CA, 1984.
- 97 Allan Hoffman, 'Tonight's totality, 2/67', *Songs of Savagery*, New York, 1967, n.p.
- 98 Allan Hoffman, 'Earth life reclamation', *Good Times*, 3: 22, 1970.
- 99 Bookchin notes that initially Hoffman and Morea found it impossible to be civil. Ben 'discounted the emerging "counterculture" and drug freaks as "petty bourgeois". He advanced a "proletarian" position of unity between working class youth and blacks.' Bookchin to Laurence Veysey, 1972, 3.
- 100 David Cunliffe, 'THE TOTAL REVOLUTION: A manifesto, statement of intent and beyond', *PoetMeat*, 12, Autumn 1966, 4–8.
- 101 Morea, David Cunliffe, George Dowden, Chris Torrance, 'The total revolution: A continuing debate', *PoetMeat*, 13, Spring 1967, 15–20.
- 102 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1988, 129.
- 103 Georges Bataille, 'On the Subject of Slumbers (1946)', *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, London, 1994, 49.
- 104 *Black Mask* 7, August–September 1967, 2. The situationists' essay, *The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy*, had been translated in the UK and US in December 1965.
- 105 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter*, London, 2010.
- 106 On black authenticity, see Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, Durham, NC, 2003.
- 107 Georgakas, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, Cambridge, MA, 1998. The offers were made at a 1968 meeting in California, admittedly in a moment when the Black Panthers were struggling for alliances.
- 108 See also his developed version of this position: Morea, 'The issue is not the issue', *Journal of the Resistance*, 2: 2, October 1968, n.p. These paralleled SDS 'Praxis Axis' debates on the New Working Class.
- 109 Georgakas, 'San Francisco', *Three Red Stars*, New York, 1975, 41. Georgakas recalls that this line was printed on a placard held by a group, led by a character known as the Persian Fucker, who sat out permanently on rugs on Telegraph Avenue, San Francisco. Another Georgakas poem is printed, credited incorrectly to Hajj, 'The Persian Fucker', in *Liberation News Service*, 117, 9 November 1968, 2, which associates him with the radical Berkeley Commune.
- 110 On this group, Julie Ault, *Alternative Art, New York 1965–1985*, Minneapolis, MN, 2002, 17.
- 111 Osha Neumann, *Up Against the Wall Motherf\*cker*, New York, 2008, 43; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, New York, 1989, 222–32. The 1968 documentary *Last Summer Won't Happen* features footage of Neumann as a Motherfucker.
- 112 Jonah Ruskin, *For the Hell of It*, Berkeley, CA, 1998, 74; Abbie Hoffman, *Village Voice*, 9 February 1967, 5. Other accounts of the week can be found in Clayton Patterson, ed. *Resistance*, New York, 2006; and Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, Manchester, 2000.
- 113 Rudolf Baranik, 'The week of angry arts: Against the war in Vietnam', Unpublished report, New York, 1967 [PAD/D archive]; Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent*, 114.
- 114 Georgakas, interview.
- 115 Neumann, *Up Against the Wall*, 7.
- 116 Osha Neumann, interview, 12 June 2010.
- 117 Bookchin to Laurence Veysey, 1972, 3.
- 118 *Black Mask*, Letter to Subscribers, 1968.
- 119 According to Bookchin. Morea contends he coined the term.
- 120 Stokey Carmichael, in Sol Stern, 'America's Black Guerrillas', *Ramparts*, 6: 2, 1967, 26. BM critique the Yippies and others in *East Village Other*, 8 June 1968, 6; 'Cinemarevolution', *RAT*, 20–27 February 1968, 22.
- 121 Abbie Hoffman, interviewed in Marty Jizer, *Abbie Hoffman: American Rebel*, New Brunswick, NJ, 1992, 131. Mass media references censored their 'certain unprintable name'. 'Hippie threats win a theatre', *New York Times*, 24 October 1968; *The National Guardian*, 23 November 1968, n.p.

- 122 This term sometimes referred to a wider circle of supporters and supported. 'The Family', WIN, unnumbered, December 1968, 4–5.
- 123 Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, Chapter Report on the SDS Regional Council of March 10, 1968.
- 124 Georgakas, 'Empire City', in Ron Schrieber, ed., 31 *New American Poets*, New York, 1969, 61.
- 125 'Garbage protest closes five blocks', *New York Times*, 7 February 1968, 35.
- 126 'Sweep-out on 3rd Street: Garbage is their bag', *Village Voice*, 13: 18, 15 February 1968, n.p.
- 127 A government report suggests the action was also planned to coincide with Lincoln's birthday. 'Extent of Subversion in the New Left, Testimony of Robert J Thorns (and others)', Hearings, Ninety-first Congress, Second Session, Parts 4–5, 1970, US Govt Printing Office, 556.
- 128 Newsreel, *Garbage*, film, New York, 1968. This conceptual opposition of dirt and cleanliness was sustained in the Guerrilla Art Action Group's spilling of blood at museums whose trustees supported the war on Vietnam; and even in recent actions by Liberate Tate spilling oil inside the BP-sponsored gallery.
- 129 Paul Mocsanyi, 'Foreword', *Protest and Hope*, New York, 1967, 2.
- 130 'Art', *East Village Other*, 3: 1, 15–30 November 1967, 18.
- 131 He had been invited to print in *Black Mask* but declined, as it had been reprinted too many times already.
- 132 *Evergreen Review*, 1967. Upstairs from Bookchin's apartment there had been regular meetings of poets associated with *Umbra*, a black poetry magazine with radical tendencies, one faction of which, headed by Jones, would split with a radical separatist agenda to establish itself in Harlem. *Black Mask* didn't have contact with *UMBRA*, but Georgakas notes they contacted Larry Neal, close to Baraka.
- 133 Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome*, Berkeley, CA, 2003, 171–3; Andrei Codrescu, *An Involuntary Genius in America's Shoes*, Boston, MA, 2001, 151–4.
- 134 Kenneth Koch, 'To my audience', *All Poets Welcome*, CD, New York, 2003.
- 135 *Plastic Man vs. the Sweet Assassin*, flyer. A re-enactment appears in the screenplay, Ary Harron and Daniel Minahan, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, New York, 1996, 150.
- 136 Dan Georgakas, 'Letter, Jan 25, 1967', *Open Skull*, 1, 1967, 25.
- 137 The two most key of these interventions were at the Fillmore East rock club and the 1968 SDS Convention. The first was reported in *Rolling Stone* (reprinted in the *Black Mask Incomplete Works* collection) and various underground newspapers. Paul Nelson, 'Fillmore East vs. The East Village', *The Age of Paranoia*, New York, 1971; 'Up Against the Wall Theatre', WIN, 4: 20, 12–13. The second is detailed from various perspectives in Neumann's autobiography; *Progressive Labour*, 6, 1967, 111; Allan Young and Susan Adelman, 'A newer new left', *Liberation News Service*, 111, 16 October 1968, 8; Miriam Bokser, 'New York's Lower East Side', *Liberation News Service*, 122, 27 November 1968, 10; Tom Milstein, 'New vs. left in the SDS', in Terence Cook and Patrick Morgan, eds, *Participatory Democracy*, San Francisco, CA, 1971, 200; Allan Adelson, *SDS*, New York, 1972, 228.
- 138 Joel Makower, *Woodstock: The Oral History*, New York, 2009, 153. They attempted to use the university's art collection as barricade material, inspired by an anecdotal tactic (which Morea no doubt heard from Sam Dolgoff) in which Bakunin suggested putting Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* on the Dresden Rathaus in 1849 to dissuade a counter-attack.
- 139 Thai Jones, *A Radical Line*, New York, 2004, 137; Cathy Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun*, New York, 2011, 145.
- 140 'Guards repulse war protestors at the Pentagon', *New York Times*, 22 October 1967.
- 141 'Motherfucker Against the Wall', *RAT*, 1: 25, 15–28 November 1968, 9.
- 142 Marcuse, 'Art in the one-dimensional society', *Arts Magazine*, May 1967.
- 143 Morea, interview; 'Affinity Groups', flyer, 1968; *RAT*, unnumbered, 9–11 August 1968, 10–11.
- 144 The term 'affinity group' stuck, but the model merged with the 'small action group' and consensus decision making approaches popularized by Movement for a New Society. Virginia Coover et al., *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*, New York, 1978.
- 145 'Ben Morea of Black Mask tried to rescue someone who was conducting an involuntary investigation of police brutality and was charged . . . The helmet he was wearing got cracked in the process . . . Tom Neumann of the East Side Service Organization arrived swathed in blood-soaked bandages.' Paul Krassner, 'Society: The diamond ball', *Ramparts*, 6: 8, March 1968, 20; also Jones, *A Radical Line*, 182–4.
- Bookchin recalls they were rarely armed on their nightly patrols of the Lower East Side, but nonetheless courageous in confronting police.
- 146 'The youthquake and the shook-up park', *Village Voice*, 8 June 1967, 1–21.
- 147 'Uproar on common laid to NY group', *Boston Globe*, 24 July 1968; 'Ben Morea: Silhouette', *Harvard Crimson*, 4 October 1968; 'Motherfucker acquitted', *New Left Notes*, 4: 3, 22 January 1969, 2; 'Ben Morea free', *RAY*, 1: 26, 1969, 5; Michael Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, Chapel Hill, NC, 2003, 305. The case is also detailed by Mark Kramer across several issues of *Liberation News Service*.
- 148 Jeff Shero Nightbyrd, in Stewart, *On The Ground*, 62. In 1968 UATWMF issued a mimeographed journal compiling some of these posters.
- 149 Emory Douglas, 'Position paper #1 on revolutionary art', *Black Panther*, 20 October 1968, 5.
- 150 The march is documented in *Black Mask* 3 and 4; *Berkeley Barb*, 4: 8, 25 February 1967, 1; Don Newton, 'Black Mask', WIN, 3: 4, 24 February 1967, 5.
- 151 *A Motherfucker is a Werewolf*, poster, drawn by Neumann, text by Morea. The reference is a partly ironic response to direct criticisms of *Black Mask* and the SI as 'Sorellian', in for example *The Campaigner*, September 1968, n.p., and the more widely aimed critiques of Irving Horowitz, who later published *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason*, Carbondale, IL, 1968.
- 152 This connection is unlikely to be direct and confirming or tracing it, for example through the zines of German autonomist culture, would require further research. See Geronimo, *Fire and Flames*, Oakland, CA, 2012; A. K. Thompson, *Black Bloc, White Riot*, Edinburgh, 2010.
- 153 The march was photographed by both Larry Fink and LeRoy Henderson.
- 154 *Black Mask* 10, April–May 1968, 3. It is likely that their source for this 'total man' is Norman O. Brown or Marcuse rather than Henri Lefebvre.
- 155 Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*, New York, 1967, 55. The still is incorrectly credited to Feuillade's serial *Les Vampires*. My thanks to James Boaden for this reference.
- 156 Robin Walz, *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris*, Berkeley, CA, 2000.
- 157 'Detournement as negation and prelude, Internationale Situationniste #3, December 1959', *Situationist International Anthology*, Berkley, CA, 1995, 55.
- 158 Thomas Nast, 'Social science solved, the modern Archimedes: Eureka! Eureka! Constant Vigilance Committee is the price of liberty in San Francisco', *Harper's Weekly*, 10 April 1880, 1.
- 159 Merton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast*, New York, 1968; J. Chal Vinson, *Thomas Nast*, Athens, GA, 1967; *East Village Other* 2: 5, 1–15 February, 1967.
- 160 See Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin Siècle France*, Lincoln, NE, 1989.
- 161 The earliest print of this image might be that in *RAT*, 1–14 June 1968, 4.
- 162 *RAT*, 6–19 September 1968, 7; reworked in *Berkeley Barb*, 11–18 October 1968, 13. The poster's text was adapted as lyrics in Jefferson Airplane's 1970 song 'We Can Be Together', perhaps passed to them by 'political adviser' Charles Radcliffe. UAWMF similarly influenced MC5, who played a benefit gig for Morea's court costs.
- 163 'Harlem Six', *Black Mask* 6, May/June 1967, 4.
- 164 On psychological and social abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York, 1982; and Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, London, 2013.
- 165 'The new proletariat', *Black Mask* 8, 2; 'The new proletariat', *Black Mask* 10, 4.
- 166 *Provo*, 13, 1.
- 167 Peter Stallybrass, 'Marx and Heterogeneity: Thinking the Lumpenproletariat', *Representations*, 31, 1990, 69–95.
- 168 Simon Baker, *Surrealism, History and Revolution*, Oxford, 2007, 107–46.
- 169 Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, New York, 1959.
- 170 *Black Panther*, 2: 1, 4 May 1968, 2.
- 171 Spain Rodriguez, *Trashman Lives!*, London, 1997, 6.
- 172 'Armed love', *RAT*, unnumbered, 24–30 January 1969, n.p.
- 173 'ACID AGENT OF Lower-East Side Defense', *RAT*, unnumbered, 13 December–12 January 1969, 6; *Liberation News Service*, 125, 12 December 1968, 3.
- 174 Neumann, *Up Against the Wall*, 50.
- 175 'Rioting . . . offered them . . . an opportunity to get their own back on society in a wild, exciting, satisfying orgy of destruction.' Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob*, Stroud, 2004, 91.



- 176 This image first appears in Nicole Vedrès, *Images de Cinema Francais*, Paris, 1945. Interestingly, both Fantômas images were used in noting the films' influence on Magritte. José Vovelle, 'Magritte et le Cinema', *Cahiers Dada Surréalisme*, 4, 1968, 101; Suzi Gablik, *Magritte*, London, 1970.
- 177 'And when [the revolution] has accomplished this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from her seat and exult: Well has thou grubbed, old mole!' Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chicago, IL, 1907, 69. On the figure of the 'old mole' in Marx, see Peter Stallybrass, 'Well grubbed old mole: Marx, Hamlet, and the (un)fixing of representation', *Cultural Studies*, 12: 2, 1998.
- 178 John Gray to Max Blechman, 30 April 1993.
- 179 Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, New York, 1971, xxiii.
- 180 'Commune move in', *RAT*, 2: 15, July 1969, 11; Allan Hoffman, 'Manifesto of the Rural Commune Movement', *Good Times*, c. 1968, n.p.; Veysey, *The Communal Experience*, Chicago, 1978, 189–90.
- 181 Their links to DIAS are borne out in *Destruction in Art Symposium*, Press Release, 27 April 1966; Letter from Lebel, *East Village Other*, 22–28 March 1968; Saul Gottlieb, 'Yesterday Whitehall, tomorrow the Finch Museum', *East Village Other*, 3: 18, 5 April 1968, 12–13.
- 182 AWC leaflet, cited in Amy Schlegel 'My Lai: We lie, they die', *Third Text*, 31, 1995, 58–9. On AWC, see Julia Bryant-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, Berkeley, CA, 2011.
- 183 GAAG: *The Guerilla Art Action Group 1969–1976*, New York, 1978; Rafael Ortiz, *Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche*, New York, 1988.
- 184 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, Berkeley, CA, 2004, 125, 'Coming soon: Next week: Art art', *East Village Other*, 2: 3, 1–15 January 1967, 12; 'Social activity is an art form: The ideology of failure', *East Village Other*, 2: 9, 1–15 April 1967, 3.
- 185 Suzanne Lacey, *Leaving Art*, Durham, NC, 2010; Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, Boston, MA, 2012; David Joselit, *After Art*, Princeton, NJ, 2012; Alana Jelinek, *This is Not Art: Activism and Other 'Not-Art'*, London, 2013.
- 186 This was most notably the case with British punk and activist graphic art. The Motherfuckers' images were mediated by King Mob's reprints and reworkings, preceding the work of Jamie Reid, Gee Vaucher and Peter Kennard. Meanwhile among US anarchist prints, UATWMF montages were also reprinted in Fredy Perlman's *Black and Red* in 1968–69 before Perlman's own detournement-inspired montages, 'We Called a Strike and No One Came' and 'The Commodity Speaks!'
- 187 For example, as a title for an anti-military magazine produced by American soldiers in Berlin, and by feminists at home, *Newsreel, Up Against the Wall*, Miss America, film, 1968.
- 188 Bookchin to Vesey, 1972, 5.
- 189 Students for a Democratic Society, *Fire!*, 1: 3, 6 December 1969, 2.
- 190 David Bonner, 'Remembering George Demmerle: Portrait of a police informer', *Counterpunch*, 15: 7, October 2008, 11.
- 191 Lebel, 'Notes on political street theatre', *TDR*, 13: 4, 1969, 112.
- 192 *Nouvelles: Strasbourg Association Générales d'Étudiants, Union Nationale des Étudiants de France*, 16 November 1966. This same issue also contains an essay on their relation to the Provos and Heatwave, and notice of the founding of the Society for the Rehabilitation of Karl Marx and Ravachol.
- 193 See notes 161 and 185 above. Beyond their occupation of Bill Graham's Fillmore East music venue to establish a free night and cutting the fence at Woodstock for mass free entry, they remained close to jazz musicians such as John Gruntfest, whose *First Manifesto* bears their influence. John Gruntfest, *First Manifesto*, Bolinas, 1971; Paul Nelson, 'Fillmore East vs. the East Village: Rolling Stone report', *Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, Oakland, CA, 2011, 144–50.
- 194 Some of these cultural histories are traced in Catherine Flood and Gavin Grindon, 'Introduction', *Disobedient Objects*, London, 2014, 7–25.
- 195 This 1990s resurgence reaches its apex in Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, New York, 1991. Some of these activist-art groups are documented in Gavin Grindon, 'Second wave situationism', *Fifth Estate*, 380, 2009.
- 196 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago, IL, 2008.
- 197 It is beyond the practical constraints of this account, and I have only pointed towards it, but there is more critical work to be done on the issues of race, gender and sexuality in both groups.