

**MIMEO INSURRECTION:
THE SIXTIES UNDERGROUND PRESS AND THE LONG, HOT SUMMERS OF
RIOTS**

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores a network of authors associated with the overlapping print culture phenomena known as the Mimeo Revolution and the underground press, and the literary responses to 1960s riots in American cities intended to further insurrection. These riots, known colloquially as “long, hot summers,” precipitated a new vision of insurrection independent from traditional institutions like parties and unions. Likewise, the underground press operated independently, cheaply printing do-it-yourself publications for the counterculture and social movements. I focus on a set of contributors to the underground press who belonged to autonomous projects but found common ground in their interest in the riots: Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts Movement; Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker; Diane di Prima and the Diggers; and the Black Panther Party. I trace their influence on one another and their impact on the broader literary world, notably including Chester Himes. Through archival research, I map an anarchistic network of writer/rioters—that crisscrosses 1960s social movements and the counterculture—cultivating a range of genres, styles, and literary responses to the riots. I argue that these interrelated authors discovered, in the scale and dynamism of the riot, the possibility to envision the world otherwise. Their work invokes a new utopian vision based on the riots’ decentralized crowd, autonomous organization, and spontaneous rebellion. This dissertation proposes that we read these authors as attempting to contribute to the riots of the 1960s in the hopes of advancing toward a liberated future.

Introduction

Lacking a basis for solidarity, proletarians found it difficult to convince their co-workers to risk their jobs for the greater good by going on strike. The working class was a class that tended to express itself not by striking, but by rioting.

—Endnotes

This dissertation explores a network of authors associated with the overlapping print culture phenomena known as the Mimeo Revolution and the underground press, and the literary responses to 1960s riots in American cities intended to further insurrection. Where do we find literature during an insurrection? For many, the possibility of an insurrection growing out of the riots in the 1960s meant it was time to put down the pen and, as the slogan went, “pick up the gun.” Historically, the anarchist tradition in particular had emphasized political action over writing. Prolific late 19th and early 20th century anarchist writers like Mikhail Bakunin and Errico Malatesta devoted significant portion of their writing to extolling the virtues of deeds over mere words. Articulating a common anarchist sentiment, Bakunin advised his comrades that “we must spread our principles, not with words *but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda.*” Yet despite this stress on the deed, would-be insurrectionaries continued to produce writing and what could be called “literature” throughout uprisings. The 1960s witnessed a notable boom of insurrectionary literature circulating in the growing independent print culture explored in this dissertation. In fact, this dissertation relies on the relative permanence of published material that captured the

actions and visions of insurrectionaries participating in ephemeral riots. The archives of newspapers, fliers and other publications printed during the insurrectionary upheaval are one of the main sources of historical memory for the experiences of this period. Beyond historical memory, this dissertation explores the interplay between these texts and their political context, arguing for the role of writing in an insurrectionary moment. The authors that I examine, notably including Amiri Baraka, Diane di Prima, Black Mask, the Black Panthers, and Chester Himes, register the insurrectionary upheaval, explore possible responses to it, and envision potential futures.

I focus on the so-called “long, hot summers” of riots in the 1960s because they precipitated a new vision of insurrection relatively independent from traditional institutions like parties and unions. Over the course of the 1960s, American cities experienced hundreds of riots, characterized by large-scale decentralized and broadly spontaneous actions. These events shaped the imaginary of the social movement and countercultural writers of the period. While the social movements of the 1960s have been thoroughly explored in both scholarship and more generally in popular culture, it is rare that these riots receive serious treatment. The relationship of rioting to literature has been especially neglected. Literary studies of social movements frequently rely on the formal organizations, which is understandable since their archives and records are generally more complete and better preserved.¹ However, there is also a tendency among scholars to deemphasize the riots in favor of more legible and respectable organizations.

¹ Availability of materials cannot completely account for the choices of scholars, who choose among the available resources to construct a specific narrative or tendency.

The tendency to emphasize the history of formal organizations continues despite contemporary trends towards informal organization in social movements. Social movements have become less reliant on membership organizations, and increasingly have been informally organized in a manner closer to riots. In the past year, we have witnessed an upsurge of decentralized street protests in the global context, notably in Hong Kong, Chile, Haiti, Sudan, and France.² This recent wave of protests has led some of the media to describe 2019 “the year of the street protest,” and invited comparisons to the 1960s.³ The year 1968 has become a shorthand for a global political crisis, caused by many of the protests and political insurgencies climaxing simultaneously. George Katsiaficas points out that, despite this global character, the uprisings of 1968 are often studied separately based on identity categories, or nations (xiv). My work falls short in this area too, focusing almost entirely on events in the United States in part from language barriers and the proximity of archives. However, within the United States, there is a rich history of complex organizational compositions that transcend national or typical political identity. In just the past 20 years, heterogeneous social movements gathered under the banners of

Histories of these interrelated print cultures have taken different forms: James Smethurst explores the Black Arts Movement through its connections to communist organizing, John McMillian focuses on the role of Students for Democratic Society in the evolution of the underground press, Steve Clay and Rodney Phillips emphasize how the Beats and coterie poets laid the groundwork for the Mimeo Revolution.

² For further information, see “Austerity On Fire: A Global Guide To Where It’s Going Down,” a run-down of important uprisings on an anarchist news website *It’s Going Down*. Other remarkable mobilizations have taken place in India, Spain, the Czech Republic, Russia, Malta, Algeria, Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon.

³ “The year of street protests” appears to have been a description coined by *Financial Times* in an article of the same name.

Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, and anti-globalization. Looking further back to the 1960s, my focus on American riots allows me to explore in depth the complex composition of overlapping network of groups and writers that exceeds and exhausts analysis through any singular identity lens.

My research into the underground press and Mimeo Revolution—the independent do-it-yourself publications of the counterculture and social movements reliant on mimeographs and similar machines that provided cheap printing—reveals a network of riot-inspired authors whose interrelated work defies traditional modes of organization and political representation. I explore the writing of the underground press, which is rarely limited to conventional journalism, in relation to adjacent creative output, including poems, plays, novels, and other interventions. I connect these works through a literary history that traces informal and sometimes unexpected ties between individuals, and organizations. The network that I uncover resembles the movement that Kristin Ross investigates in France’s May ’68, which “swept away categorical territories and social definitions, and achieved unforeseen alliances and synchronicities between social sectors and between very diverse people working together to conduct their affairs collectively” (*May ’68* 7). The networks of writers involved in the underground press crisscrosses the conventional historical distinctions, blending poets and politicians, intersecting counterculture and social movement. It connects Black Nationalists, Marxists and anarchists. Just as the current and ongoing movements in Hong Kong and France cannot be reduced to any unifying symbol, be it yellow vests, yellow helmets, black masks, or umbrellas, I argue that we would be amiss to make an absolute distinction between

insurrectionaries wearing beads from those wearing berets. Among the writers that I explore, their literary networks resemble the composition of a riot: the crowd.

Scholars have provided innovative frameworks for conceptualizing the crowds within uprisings to varying degrees of success.⁴ In the wake of the 1960s uprisings, theorists have attempted to conceptualize social movements in terms of networks, rather than organizations. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani argue that the networks of “social movements are not organizations, not even of a peculiar kind” (25). Primarily, social movements form through the circulation of resources and coordinated action, which according to Della Porta and Diani, establishes a collective identity (21-22). However, the riots of the 1960s are marked not so much by coalescing of a new identity as the disintegration of a dominant paradigm — the industrial worker.

Faced with the disintegration of collective identities resulting from the waning of workers’ movement organizations, theorists put forward new models to conceptualize their social movements. The concept of the “multitude,” as described by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, has gained much traction in recent decades. According to Negri and Hardt, the multitude names the development of social movements based on a network rather than an organization, originating in the decentralizing tendencies of guerrilla struggles of the 1960s (74-77). In a similar vein, Paolo Virno opposes the concept of “the people,” mediated by the centripetal pull of the nation-state into a “body politic,” to the

⁴ Historically, scholarship on crowds bears the stamp of non-participant observers who tend to mystify their subject. The notoriously elusive crowd has been mystified by crowd psychology’s dubious theories like “herd mentality” that treats the unmediated loss of individuality as a threat.

centrifugal multitude that transforms “the One to the Many” (42). There is a danger in representing this “many” in an abstract unifying term like “multitude.” This danger is highlighted by Negri’s critics in the journal *Tiqqun*, who prefer the term “multiplicity” to describe their collective experiments.⁵ Whether one prefers multitude or multiplicity, these theoretical constructs rely on an abstract conceptualization that glosses over the particularities found in these networks. I am indebted to the theories that have facilitated a rethinking of crowds in social movements, but I do not commit to any of them in this dissertation.

Instead, my literary history delves into archival research to trace the numerous, complex relationships between authors inspired by riots. Their social movement networks tended toward some of the primary characteristics of riots: autonomous, decentralized, and spontaneous collaborations. My work takes seriously these collaborations — both in print and on the street — as important sites of self-organization. This self-organization is rich with cross-collaborations that also maintain their independent character, and agency. Thus, the literature of the underground press documents the interlocking networks within the rise of autonomous “[e]thnic groups, neighborhood movements, feminism, various ‘countercultural’ or alternative life-style groups, rank-and-file labor dissidence, student movements, single-issue movements” that Fredric Jameson laments as a sign of disunity in the Left (39). In the riot and the writings presented here, these “incommensurable” groups and movements discover moments of collaboration without sacrificing their

⁵ *Tiqqun*’s formulation of multiplicity, although plural, seems to be based on Giorgio Agamben’s “whatever singularity,” as collective rejection of identity in the abstract.

autonomy for unity. Additionally, these identities and groupings are often the result of the conditions they struggle against and the riot provides an opportunity, as Selma James puts it, “[t]o be liberated from them (or through them)” (96). I propose that anarchist theory is best equipped to explore these networks in a way that respects the autonomy and self-organization of individuals and groups involved. The concept of anarchism, in the context of an academic dissertation, will require some explanation.

An Anarchist Method?

Anarchism has not had a linear or orthogenetic history proceeding from some father-figure to maturity and subsequent decline. To the contrary, since anarchism describes diverse theories as well as social movements, it has developed in many places and at several points in time as a complex exchange and interchange between historical processes and cultures of ideas.

—Cedric Robinson

Since anarchy has long been associated with a lawless, political disorder, there is an intrinsic elective affinity between the concept of anarchism and riots. As a political theory, anarchism poses itself against legal structure and hierarchical order, and more positively as a politics of self-organization and free association. The anarchists’ affinity for riots is traceable to its history as a social movement appearing in the 19th century. At this point, prominent anarchists advocated spontaneous rebellion, and participated in numerous insurrections, from armed uprisings to targeted assassinations. Despite this long history, anarchism is rarely discussed in academia, and little understood outside of social movements (not to mention within them). Anarchism causes further problems for scholars because its lack of central, hierarchical organization resists conventional

categorization of academic disciplines. There is no single anarchist tradition to trace. At the same time, distinct anarchist tendencies have, within social movements and small press publications, consistently come into contact and cross-pollinated.

However, speaking in general terms: anarchism is distinguished by its opposition to the State, including the strategy of taking state power and organizational forms understood to reproduce political hierarchies. In general, the primary difference among anarchist tendencies comes from the extent to which anarchists engage in conventional organizations and political coalitions that aim to pressure (or replace) the government. The tendency that had the most affinity for the 1960s riots and, therefore, the one central to this dissertation, is called “insurrectionary anarchism.” I propose we can use the insights of insurrectionary anarchism to examine the rioters of the 1960s.

In recent anarchist writing, anarchism is commonly divided into two camps, insurrectionary anarchism and social anarchism. It should be said that the term insurrectionary anarchism has only become popular since the 1970s and applied retroactively. However, it names longstanding divisions between anarchists involved in conventional organizations like unions and those who, for the most part, operated outside of them. In *Unruly Equality*, Andrew Cornell gives a detailed breakdown of the histories that differentiate insurrectionary anarchists and social anarchists, beginning with the split between syndicalists in the union movement and individualists, taking matters into their own hands. Cornell offers a third category as well, “bohemian” anarchists more attuned to lifestyle issues like artistic expression and sexual freedom (ch. 1). His characterization of these tendencies is indebted to Murray Bookchin, who groups the individualists and

bohemians together under the banner of “lifestyle anarchism.” In his influential essay, “Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm,” Bookchin conflates individualist anarchists (epitomized by the lone wolf bomber) with what he considers to be the aberrant, shocking but ultimately apolitical lifestyles of bohemian anarchists. Bookchin offers the 1960s anarchist street fighters, the Motherfuckers (an important group for this dissertation), as his primary model for the lifestylist tendency that he identifies. Ultimately, Bookchin identifies the primary flaw in lifestyle anarchism as their anti-collective individualism. However, as Cornell points out, one of the primary theorists of early insurrectionary anarchism, Luigi Galleani, was not an individualist. As an insurrectionary, Galleani still opposed formal organizations (ch. 1). Cornell is correct in asserting the suspicion of formal organizations as the underlying principle uniting the individualists, bohemians, and street fighters as insurrectionaries.

However, we need to be careful not to make an absolute distinction between insurrectionary anarchists and social anarchists. My choice to foreground insurrectionary anarchism stems from their interest in mass action, namely insurrection. As a decentralized mass action, an insurrection does not belong to any one ideological tendency. It is important to remember that insurrections were broadly understood to be part of the syndicalist strategy. While these social anarchists prioritized building their unions, the general strike would be complimented and reinforced by an insurrection (but perhaps not a riot) taken up by the strikers.⁶ We can find this mutualistic relationship

⁶ Georges Sorel’s *Reflections on Violence* was an important touchstone for the insurrectionary tradition within syndicalism.

between insurrection and strike across a variety of sources in the 1960s.⁷ Therefore, it should not surprise us that when we examine closely the history of insurrectionary anarchists that we find collaboration with social anarchists, even in the actions that one might assume to be the acts of a “lone wolf.” It is not always clear who is responsible for underground actions, but there are examples that provide astonishing overlap among groups. For instance, the infamous 1914 Lexington Avenue explosion, a failed plan to assassinate John D. Rockefeller, killed two members of the Anarchist Black Cross (Charles Berg and Carl Hanson) and one member of the syndicalist International Workers of the World (Arthur Caron). The bombs were stored at the home of Louise Berger, an editor of Emma Goldman’s so-called “bohemian” newspaper *Mother Earth*.⁸ This plot exposes the underlying connections between anarchists, who, in theory, had opposing strategic commitments, but, in practice, worked together for the sake of anarchist actions. Far from the stereotype of the isolated lone wolf, five-thousand people attended a rally to mourn these bombers’ deaths.

The reason I emphasize insurrectionary anarchism is not necessarily to find rioters fitting that ideological description. One of the major strengths of insurrectionary

⁷ The May ’68 events in France are famous example of this mutualism. See Kristin Ross *May ’68 and its Afterlives*.

⁸ For an account of these events, see Paul Avrich’s *Anarchist Voices* (110-128). Cornell uses *Mother Earth* as an example of an anarchist publication invested in lifestyle issues, but, with its diverse content, this newsletter could easily be described as an example of individualist anarchism or anarchist-communism. Alejandro de Acosta reminds us that the bohemian lifestyle was not always easily separated from the anarchist bomber. He explores the life of Félix Fénéon, the art critic, “anarchist dandy,” and accused terrorist (98-9).

anarchism is its openness to and sympathy for the many uncategorized, ideologically unaffiliated, and autonomous rioters. While formal organizations remain important to the networks that I study, historians who center their contributions all too often fall into familiar traps of the politics of representation and respectability. For example, in an otherwise rich history of anarchism, Cornell's choice to privilege social anarchism is motivated by his desire to disassociate anarchism from "an ill-considered, youthful rebelliousness" in favor of "a sophisticated theoretical tradition and international social movement." Cornell ignores the danger in characterizing a social movement by its sophistication. This characterization relies on an appeal to normative respectability that risks falling into a "no true Scotsman" fallacy. By making sophistication the criteria for anarchism, this framework excludes any contributions from participants that do not meet this standard. As a result, even when Cornell's history of anarchism explores the less respectable history of street fighters like the Motherfuckers, there is little attention to the climate set by the riots shaping the actions of anarchist organizations. Insurrectionary anarchism, by contrast, disregards the argument for the sophistication of anarchist organizations in favor of highlighting the agency of rioters.

From this perspective, the social anarchist tradition is understood as part of the 20th Century Workers' Movement failed strategy of appealing to respectability politics. It is, of course, not only insurrectionary anarchists who have noted this problem. More recently, communist theorists in the journal *Endnotes* have pointed out that the Left appeal to the norms of capitalist society was grounded in a socially constructed concept of a universal industrial worker, whose success hinged on continued rise in industrial

productivity. The predicted universalization of the industrial worker failed to ever completely materialize and, furthermore, deindustrialization and an economic downturn verified it was merely a phantom (although one not easily exorcised). In response, *Endnotes* and other adherents to “communization” theory embraced riots.⁹ Yet, for these communist theorists, the departure of social movements from a programmatic strategy resulted from the historic shifts accompanying deindustrialization. These developments mostly followed the period of my study. The agency of rioters can be easily eclipsed in a scale that concentrates on these global economic forces. While the communization current has been attentive to the growth of riots, these theorists concentrate on global trends that set the pace for riots. These ‘macro’ trends are prioritized, for the most part, over the activity and visions of individual rioters. Insurrectionary anarchists, on the other hand, seek out the conditions for insurrection among potential rioters. This focus makes this tendency, in my view, particularly sensitized to emergent forms of rebellion. The defining characteristic of insurrectionary anarchists can be identified as follows: an unconditional and invariant support of unmediated and immediate insurrection. Or as Alfredo Bonanno succinctly put it, “We are insurrectionalist anarchists . . . because rather than wait, we have decided to proceed to action, even if the time is not ripe”

(*Insurrectional Project*).

The framework of insurrectionary anarchism does not, in itself, prevent us from hierarchizing social movements or riots. There remains both the possibility of a sectarian viewpoint that privileges the self-identified anarchists, reproducing Cornell’s argument

⁹ “History of Separation” in *Endnotes 4* is particularly useful here.

for “sophistication” but in different terms and, relatedly, the paradox of assigning hierarchical value to the actions that are viewed as the most radically anarchistic. In the 1960s, this problem within the anarchist current was identified by the Situationist Guy Debord. Debord recognized that there was a concealed authoritarianism in anarchist history, both in the vanguardism of anarchist actions and their ideological conviction, which set them intellectually above others (49). Compounding this problem, scholars and activists have pointed out that anarchism tends to reflect the European values and identity from which this milieu grew. Cedric Robinson argues that, despite the anarchists’ apparent rejection of the institutions of society like the State, they tended to accept the social order outside these institutions. As he bluntly puts it, anarchists revolted against the State “not because it was a structure whose social function was alien, but because it was redundant.” Robinson points out that anarchists imagined that the social order would continue to exist in “in the form of institutions and structures which had no explicit political character” (215). While Robinson recognizes that the insurrectionary tendency was less susceptible to this critique, he points out that they historically responded to the problem of social order by imagining they could remove its hierarchical dimension or otherwise suspend a direct confrontation with it (180). Anarchists thinking through how to uproot this social order, particularly its implication in racism and racialized structures, have termed the anarchist social movement emerging from European political values “Big A Anarchism.”

In contrast, anarchist scholars have explored what they call “little *a* anarchism” that decenters the activity of white Eurocentric anarchists, while advancing the concept of

anarchism. In *Decolonizing Anarchism*, Maia Ramnath contrasts the “big A” indebted to “key ideological debates in the mid-nineteenth century and factional rivalries” within European social movements to the “small *a* anarchism” defined by: “a recurrent tendency or orientation—with the stress on movement in a direction, not a perfected condition—toward more dispersed and less concentrated power; less top-down hierarchy and more self-determination through bottom-up participation; liberty and equality seen as directly rather than inversely proportional” (6-7). Ramnath views anarchism not as a movement of specific (often white) militants, but a tendency toward anarchy. Since anarchy is not a static, achieved state but a direction of movement Ramnath makes anarchism into more of a methodology or practice than an ideology held by select people. Ramnath’s account is reminiscent of what insurrectionary anarchist Alfredo Bonanno calls the “anarchist tension” or “a tension, not a realization” (*Anarchist Tension*). I am indebted to Ramnath and others for developing a methodology that allows us to explore the anarchistic tendency among unaffiliated or non-anarchists in social movements and mass uprisings.

However, I adopt this “anarchist methodology” under the condition that it includes and even emphasizes the insights of insurrectionary anarchism. Principally, insurrectionary anarchism emphasizes a method for disrupting the social order, not “prefiguring” a new society. When outlining an anarchist method, it is far too easy to reduce anarchism to the normative and respectable framework critiqued above, and far too difficult to pin down a universal set of criteria for anarchism. A popular definition of “little *a* anarchism” comes from the anarchist writers David Graeber and Andrej Grubačić, who distill anarchism’s “core principles” into “decentralization, voluntary

association, mutual aid, the network model, and above all, the rejection of any idea that the end justifies the means.” Anarchists committed to prefigurative politics take this last claim, that there is no distinction between ends and means, as an absolute. They argue that it is the basis of anarchism. It is hard to see how, in this case, a riot could be considered anarchistic at all, no matter how small the “a.” It is difficult to imagine that the rioters’ basic means—vandalism, sabotage, sniping, street fighting—automatically represent the ends they desire. It is true that anarchism, in general, refuses organizational forms that reproduce the hierarchy that they oppose. While this specific means, the organizational group, can be said to resemble, or even “prefigure” revolutionary ends, the concept of prefiguration does not universally apply to all anarchist tactics, most of which are pragmatic. Moreover, there is a long anarchist current that rejects the blueprint-model of utopian thinking. As the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta put it in 1891, “We are no more prophets than other men, and should we pretend to give an official solution to all the problems that will arise in the life of the future society, we should have indeed a curious idea of the abolition of government” (*Anarchy*).¹⁰ Even within the European anarchist tradition, we can find an anarchism that does not rely on prefiguration for the basis of exclusion and inclusion. On the other hand, the remaining core principles Graeber and Grubačić outline are still useful. These characteristics are broadly accepted

¹⁰ Malatesta is usually categorized as a social anarchist. This sentiment was shared across the aisle by anti-organizationists like Luigi Galleani who asserted, as Andrew Cornell points out, “that revolutionaries could not and should not predict the form that postrevolutionary social structures would take until after the event itself” (ch. 1).

characteristics of anarchist movement and allow for an anarchist methodology of the riots.

An anarchist methodology capable of addressing and recognizing the agency of rioters stems from anarchist belief in decentralized networks of autonomous groups. We can see this anarchist methodology functioning in history, such as with anarchists' positive reception of the "dangerous classes," or the so-called lumpenproletariat. Traditionally, the Left has understood the term lumpenproletariat to name the unemployed, destitute population and an adjacent criminal economy. In short, the lumpenproletariat consisted of groups which have commonly been regarded with suspicion by the Worker's Movement attempting to construct a respectable identity. The social movements of the 20th century inherited this negative attitude toward the lumpenproletariat from Karl Marx. Marx himself was more specific in his definition and reasons. In this well-known description, Marx cobbles together the lumpenproletariat as a list:

Alongside decayed roué's with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, along-side ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaus*, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars-in short, the whole indefinite, dis-integrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term *la bohème*. (75)

As Hal Draper points out, the lumpenproletariat consists not of the unemployed, who are potential workers in waiting, so much as social groups with no clear place in capitalist society (471). Moreover, as Peter Stallybrass stresses, the disintegrated lumpenproletariat is unlike other class categories in its resistance to a unified representation (72-80). Marx

must, by necessity, rely on a list to illustrate this quasi-category. Whereas Marx believed that the lumpenproletariat's disintegrated and inoperable character explained why poor people might "betray" the revolution of the otherwise united proletariat, anarchists persisted in organizing with this sector of the population. Marx's distrust of the lumpenproletariat only increased with their endorsement as a key political agent by political rivals like anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (Draper 466).

An insurrectionary anarchist perspective builds on Bakunin's approval of the lumpenproletariat by exploring the agency of the "dangerous classes" and societal sectors that do not fit neatly into a declining worker identity. However, the insurrectionary potential of these groups is not grounded in their unstable identity under capitalism, as unemployed or as criminal. This is not simple illegalism, although criminality is often its beginning—but in their ability to revolt against Capital. In short, they riot. The flicker of the riot might not be evident in Marx's description of "*la bohème*" above, but it was clear to Marx. By the time of his writing, bohemia had already taken on the romantic connotation of starving artists, while maintaining earlier associations with nomadic Romani people and vagabonds, perceived as unattached to social structures (Stallybrass 83). Therefore, Bohemia and, by extension, the lumpenproletariat were not just lists of groups but a social environment where artists mingled with outlaws and outcasts. These disparate groups congregated in areas of cheap rents that enabled their irregular lifestyles (Draper 472). In his research on the poetry of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin points out that, in the taverns at the nexus of these mixed social environments, one would find the "professional" political conspirator. Since the professional conspirator was in fact

without a profession, they frequented the same poor areas to work full time on the revolution (46-7). On closer examination, Marx's fear of this conspirator's influence on the counterculture forming in bohemia could help explain his distrust of the lumpenproletariat. The conspirator's version of revolution is too close to an unmediated riot: "They embrace . . . riots that are to be the more miraculous and surprising the less rational their foundation . . . and they profoundly despise the more theoretical enlightenment of the workers regarding their class interests" (qtd. in Benjamin 48).¹¹ Where Marx saw only conspiracy, the insurrectionary anarchists would identify a potential for self-organization, outside the guidance of the "enlightened" leadership.

This dissertation takes the theoretical insights of an insurrectionary anarchist tendency and brings them to bear on the insurrections taking place in the mid-20th century. By the 1960s, the concept of the lumpenproletariat had undergone a reevaluation. This reevaluation took a more hopeful view of their political potential, evident in the work of Frantz Fanon. Responding to trends in the mid-century in decolonizing movements, Fanon argued that the "classless idlers" that made up the lumpenproletariat fought "like stout working men" (104). The "profession" of the conspirator was communalized among the lumpenproletariat in the form of self-organization. Decolonization and Black Liberation movements made it common sense in this period to reconsider the role of capitalist society's outcasts and their autonomous actions. This is not to say that Marx was not correct in his historical observations of the

¹¹ I preserve Walter Benjamin's translation over the more common translation of this passage because he chooses the term "riot" over "revolt," which better captures Marx's concerns about spontaneity.

potentially reactionary elements in this crowd. It is not only liberatory forces that use the tactics of the riot. If this dissertation concentrated on the race riots of white supremacists, it would require a modified framework.¹² However, in the present framework, the lumpenproletariat finds its 20th century American parallel in the Black rioters of the long, hot summers and in the various configurations of “street people” taking inspiration from them in their contemporary bohemia.¹³ To understand them, we require a clearer analysis of the historical context of the violent upheaval of the 1960s.

¹² It is possible to trace a different line from Marx, for example, to interpret the lumpenproletariat not as the poor and criminalized but a reactionary tendency within these groups. For example, white supremacist gangs and even the Mafia bear a resemblance to the descriptions of the lumpenproletariat. In this light, we can be more sympathetic to Bakunin’s admission later in life that he had romanticized the outlaws (Stallybrass 89). Countering Stallybrass’s claims, Nicholas Thoburn has argued that the lumpenproletariat’s primary trait is the formation of reactionary identities. He argues that they are first and foremost “modes of political composition. Despite the literary excess and the proliferation of names, Marx’s lumpenproletariat describes a mode of composition . . . but to turn inwards towards an affirmation of its own autonomous and present identity. . . even as it looks like difference” (*Deleuze, Marx, and Politics* 67). This may be true theoretically and closer to the spirit of Marx’s original point, but the history of the term tells a different story, linking it closely to the “irregular lifestyles” of the criminalized and extreme poor.

¹³ The category, street people, shares with the lumpenproletariat a resistance to unified categorization. While descriptions of bohemian neighborhoods often reduced their inhabitants to “hippies,” the term street people implied a more heterogeneous composition. The Yippie Stew Albert and the former Black panther William Lee Brent both sum up the composition of this new social environment in lists: hippies, flower children, free-love advocates, draft dodgers, runaways, college dropouts (Albert 37; Brent 112). We might add other identities to this list, particularly queer ones.

Long, Hot Summers

“The condemnation of terrorism,” Buenaventura said into the mike, “is not a condemnation of insurrection but a call to insurrection.”

—Jean-Patrick Manchette

It is the violence of the riot that makes it elusive to history. The category of violence, outside of the history of conventional warfare, tends to flatten and homogenize historical events. The historical blind spot extends not just to the complex actions of rioters but to surrounding movements. Most noticeably, the affiliation between Black Power and riots has contributed to what Robin D.G. Kelley has called “a general conspiracy of silence against the most radical elements of the black freedom movement” (*Freedom Dreams* 62). This silence is not contained to the Black Power groups. It includes any sector of 1960s social movements implicated in the violence of the so-called “bad sixties” (Elbaum 9). The beginning of the “bad sixties” is usually marked by the uprisings of the second half of the decade. However, this periodization ignores the continuities with—often by ignoring the violence of—the early 1960s. The groups and authors that I explore more often than not have connections to the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement. This dissertation makes what might seem like strange connections between movements known for pacifism and opposition to war to the violence of the riots. However, these major movements of the 1960s have been substantially covered and are not my focus. Instead, this dissertation examines the ideas and creations of authors invested in the intricacies and complexities of the riots, as participants.

In the United States, the good sixties/bad sixties periodization roughly maps onto the distinction between Civil Rights movement and the Black Power movement. In earlier scholarship, Black Power not only represented the “bad sixties” characterized by riots and violence. The rise of Black Power also provided a declension narrative to explain the disillusionment and decline of Civil Rights. More recently, scholars like Jacqueline Dowd Hall have provided an alternative framework known as the “Long Civil Rights Movement.” This framework emphasizes continuities within Black Liberation movements. For one, this expansive perspective reminds us that Black Power held no monopoly on violence. Beyond Black Power groups, the Civil Rights movement mobilized its own armed self-defense contingents (Cha-Jua and Lang 276). While lauding the Long Civil Rights scholars for challenging the reductionist characterization of Black Power as “violent,” Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang argue that the Long Civil Rights narrative glosses over the distinctive traits of Black Power. Specifically, they claim the Black Power era witnessed the ascendancy of a politics of self-determination (277).¹⁴ This politics of autonomy, according to Peniel Joseph, was grounded not in spontaneous riots but sustained community organizing (774). Joseph summarizes the recent wave of Black Power scholarship, framing it within the transformation and evolution of American democracy (775). From this perspective, my focus on the riots could appear to reproduce what Joseph identifies as the media’s preoccupation with

¹⁴ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang point out that both camps, Civil Rights and Black Power, used a range of tactics from arms to elections. Ultimately, it was the differing aims of these tactics, integration or self-determination, that distinguished them (276)

militancy and violence (756). In my view, Joseph's concern for the edifying effects of Black Power community organizing does not sufficiently challenge the "bad sixties" narrative. Instead, he appeals to its terms. However, my dissertation is not intended to be a contribution to the new Black Power studies or Black Studies. While my work explores many individuals and groups involved in Black Liberation, I explore their writing within the context of revolutionary movements, broadly understood, with affinities for anarchism.¹⁵

Beyond anarchism, Marxists and Black Nationalists have offered important contributions to theories of riots, invaluable to our understanding of the features and prevalence of 1960s riots. We cannot easily distinguish riots from large-scale protests, especially 1960s protests characterized by direct (rather than symbolic) action and disobedient opposition to the law. If riots cannot claim to be the sole provider of illegal, confrontational action, neither can they claim a monopoly on violence. Marxist theorist Joshua Clover attempts to disentangle the riot from other violent tactics like those used by strikers. Clover argues that the primary characteristics of the riot can be isolated in contrast to the strike. The distinguishing characteristic of a riot is its location, outside of the workplace in the "sphere of circulation," where rioters act outside of the role as

¹⁵ Here, I am Borrowing from Sean Bonney's formulation for his study of Amiri Baraka: "Although the thesis argues out of the poetics of the Black Liberation Movement, I do not consider it to be a contribution to Black Studies. My idea is that the convulsions that Baraka's work went through as his political commitments gained in intensity are roughly applicable to any number of revolutionary moments" (10). Several recent studies have explored 1960s American revolutionary movements in this broader context, tracing the networks beyond the usual categories. These notably include Laura Pulido's *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left*, Andy Cornell's *Unruly Equality*, Anthony Ashbolt's *A Cultural History of the Radical Sixties in the San Francisco Bay Area*.

workers. The theoretical distance between the rioter and the worker helps explain why riots became increasingly popular in the 1960s in communities with high unemployment. Riots were increasingly common for communities suffering the effects of deindustrialization, that is among people already cast out of their role as workers. In my view, the rioters' distance from the unifying identity of the worker also helps us understand the emphasis on autonomy, beyond traditional Workers' Movement organizations, in the underground press.

My work emphasizes the autonomy, spontaneity and the unmediated agency of rioters, but this emphasis does not mean ignoring the theoretical perspective developed by rioters with ideological perspectives that emphasized the riots' organization. The most predominant among these was Black Nationalism. It was not uncommon among Black Nationalists to reject the basic terms I am using; the preferred term for the riot was "rebellion" or "insurrection." These terms were used to distinguish riots from its negative connotations of an unplanned or "mindless" reaction. The 1960s riots were frequently a spontaneous response to a catalyzing event, usually an incident of police brutality. However, the frequency, number of participants, and evolving tactical complexity of the riots indicate planning and underlying organization. The Black Nationalist Muhammad Ahmad cites statistics of 329 "important rebellions" in 247 cities with 52,629 people arrested between 1964 and 1968 (329). Peter Levy gives a slightly more generous estimate, extending the dates from 1963 to 1972, at 750 revolts in 525 cities, 54 of which took place in after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (1; 153). In the Watts alone, Gerald Horne claims that the 1965 riot mobilized approximately 35,000 "active

rioters” and an additional 72,000 spectators (3). There were signs of various forms of tactical organizing despite a dearth of leadership, including strategic targeting of property, coordination between vandals and the masses of looters, and hand signs used to pass through the conflict unharmed (Horne 3; 58-70).¹⁶ A library that opened during the riots reported an incredible number of requests for books on explosives (Horne 67). Tactics developed in Watts were emulated by future riots in Newark, Detroit, and other cities (Horne 42). The rioters selective targeted commercial areas and other sites of circulation, as Clover’s analysis anticipates, but many participants understood their “rebellion” in mainly political not economic terms.

The Black Nationalists interpreted targeted attacks on economic sites, looting and property destruction, in terms of guerrilla warfare. The guerrilla warfare framework became popular among a variety of Black Nationalist tendencies based on the global wave of decolonization struggles. Black Nationalists hoped to replicate the successful conflicts on the African continent and the ongoing war in Vietnam in the American context. Some advocates of guerrilla warfare contrasted their decolonial rebellion with Marxist and traditional anti-capitalist interpretations.¹⁷ Gerald Horne argues that Black Nationalism grew in cities like Los Angeles in the void left by the suppression of

¹⁶ Rioters followed what appears to be a procedure: carloads of vandals smashed the windows of a store, different groups (numbering in the 1000s in some areas) then looted the store, still others then burned it to the ground. Frequently, rioters destroyed a store’s credit records before burning the building (66-70).

¹⁷ Others, of course, viewed decolonization as an anti-capitalist movement, including the Black Nationalists in RAM.

Communist organizations during the Red Scare (42). In this context, he establishes that the Black Nationalists provided a level of strategic planning to the riots with guerrilla warfare tactics imported from the decolonization struggles that they admired. The mobile tactics and presence of snipers—shooting at helicopters and planes—confirms the influence of guerrillas (Horne 64-66).¹⁸ A study by the founder of Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), Muhammad Ahmad, examines RAM's effort to spread guerrilla warfare. In 1965, RAM-affiliates mobilized to create a Black Nationalist Army active in various neighborhoods during the Watts riot. The next year, the Black Nationalist Army made another appearance in Cleveland, confronting the police. An anonymous RAM member recalls the Hough riot as the community rising up in support of these guerrillas. In preparation for the following summer, RAM headed to Detroit to encourage street fighting, but not necessarily to recruit to their guerrilla army (Stanford 67-8). It is this last point, that the riot extends beyond and transcends the guerrilla organization, that I argue tells us the most about the character of riots. The riot can include guerrillas and their tactics, but it is bigger than them.

Revolutionaries often refer to the broader context that included the clandestine and anonymous organizing of both guerrilla and rioter as the underground. Beyond clandestine militants themselves, I include in the underground the mesh of informal

¹⁸ This development was not lost on the revolutionaries who followed. On guerrilla tactics used against police helicopters, the 16-year-old Jonathan Jackson argued that "The pig who will get up in one of those things is as stupidly suicidal as a duck trying to outfly a charge of 12-gauge shot. The fierce and beautiful Cong shoot down a couple dozen of the very biggest and best 'copters Yankee invention can produce every week. These things that the pigs use are toys, sitting ducks" (qtd. in Jackson 21).

relationships that facilitated their activity and exceeded any belonging to a known group. Gaidi Faraj, following Geronimo ji Jaga, describes this sphere of activity the “infrastructure” of social movements, distinguished from the superstructure provided by formal organizations like the Black Panthers (120).¹⁹ The underground, then, can describe not just the clandestine combatant but the surrounding culture of what Fred Moten calls “insurgent social life” (“Do Black Lives Matter?”).²⁰ The name “underground press” refers to this clandestine activity. The content of many underground publications, like RAM’s *Black America*, were oriented to underground activity. However, the name is somewhat of a misnomer since these papers—signed, published and distributed in public—were more often than not “aboveground” activity. While the underground press was not clandestine, it can be understood as an outgrowth of underground culture.

In the shared underground environment, the guerrilla in a riot becomes part of the riot. Undoubtedly, guerrilla warfare was a massive influence, strengthening and shaping the particular character of the riots in the 1960s. Yet, the rioters’ adoption of guerrilla tactics resulted from the peculiar nature of the riot—its capacity to incorporate

¹⁹ Faraj traces the infrastructure of Black Liberation movements back to slavery: “During slavery, the superstructure was the abolitionist organizations and newspapers. Harriet Tubman, on the other hand, worked on the infrastructure. The network of friendly houses, hideouts in barns, and other aspects of the underground railroad made up the infrastructure that Geronimo considered his work to be a continuation of” (147). See the diagram in chapter one for an example of the complexity of the underlying connections this infrastructure can support.

²⁰ Moten, in conversation with Robin Kelley, argues that even the Civil Rights movement “was not a mass movement” but “a vast proliferation of local insurgencies” that never “depended upon the magic sovereign power of any figure called an organizer” (“Do Black Lives Matter?”).

generalizable tactics into its network. Guerrilla warfare, likewise, is defined by the guerrilla's flexibility and ability to make do with what is at hand. In fact, we might be able to argue that the urban guerrillas absorbed the tactics of the riot. Anecdotally, Ahmad tells us that General Giap, who planned the Tet Offensive, told RAM Chairman Robert F. Williams that they took the idea of going into the city from the Detroit riots (Stanford 72). However, the guerrilla is ultimately defined by their specialization in warfare and their relationship to a chain of command. The guerrilla might share two of the key features of the rioter that Clover identifies, both operating outside the workplace and the shared identity of a worker. Yet, the riot always exceeds the framework offered by the guerrilla. Horne reminds us that the rioters picked up "anything that could be thrown" (56).²¹ In virtually the same way, some rioters pick up guerrilla tactics. As a mass, spontaneous event, the riot exceeds conventional frameworks, even defines itself against restrictive framing. From this perspective, the primary function of nascent Black Nationalism in the riot was not its unifying program. Instead, it functioned as a refusal of established political channels and the leadership of the Civil Rights organizations.²²

The insurrectionary tradition brings to this analysis a perspective that distinguishes the generalized conflict of the riot from warfare, even guerrilla warfare. While not disavowing armed struggle, Alfredo Bonanno argues for a "do it yourself"

²¹ Horne is quoting an *LA Times* Journalist.

²² In Los Angeles, there were no mass organizations promoting the Black Nationalism that Horne argues animated the riots (with the exception of the religious organization, the Nation of Islam). Black Nationalist political organizations grew from the ashes of the Watts riots, notably the coalition called the Black Congress.

method that refuses all specialized roles and, above all, professional military (*Armed Joy*). The collective Os Cangaceiros add that de-specialized conflict often requires adopting the tools and techniques readily available to everyone, notably sabotage and vandalism. While urban guerrillas flourished, the Autonomists involved in Italy's '77 Movement developed a critique of warfare that favored mass insurrection. Taking an anti-war position, Lucio Castellano argues that, within a generalized revolt:

the critique of war is also the critique of peace, which war produces and reproduces internally, and it is critique of that part of society which is always armed in order to guarantee peace . . . the '77 Movement was the field of battle of fiercely opposed political groups—some militant, others pacifist: within this view, organizations of diverse natures – some created for war, others for peace – disputed the political space among themselves. (230)

Castellano argues for a composite model of insurrection where roles are not fixed, and violence is neither rejected nor monopolized by a militarized group. Although this vision of insurrection embraces violence, it resists war.

The insurrectionary anarchist vision recognizes how a riot can generalize and distribute violence through crowds, rather than accruing the capacity for violence in an organization designed for warfare. Anarchists traditionally viewed an attack on social peace as an appropriate means to protest war, which summed up in the early 20th Century slogan “insurrection rather than war!”²³ Explaining this response at the outbreak of the first World War, the anarchist publication *Mother Earth* issued a statement declaring:

²³ Not all anarchists were on the same page. In an article for *The Blast* titled “Pro-Government Anarchists,” Errico Malatesta ridiculed Petr Kropotkin and other anarchists supporting their government’s war efforts. Malatesta polemicized against these wayward comrades, arguing that “Anarchists . . . owe it to themselves to protest against this attempt to implicate Anarchism in the continuance of a ferocious slaughter” (3).

"War will last as long as capitalism and government last" (181).²⁴ In the context of the 1960s antiwar movement, the urban guerrilla extended and escalated the resistance witnessed in the riots. As Dan Berger reminds us, the urban guerrillas were not initially understood as a specialized military force, since their tactics were popularly used. There were hundreds of acts of "sabotage and terrorism" in the late 1960s, increasing in number each year (21). In a report to the Senate committee, first deputy Attorney General Charles O'Brien reported twenty-seven incendiary incidents at schools in the first three months of 1969 in Los Angeles alone. He wryly remarked, "I doubt if there were that many fires in schools in Saigon during the Tet offensive" (*Riots* 5490). Understandably, many urban guerrillas in the 1960s began with the premise that they would be part of a mass insurrection. But inasmuch as they specialized as military units, it did not last. The Red Army Faction, for example, eventually realized that their actions required them to avoid the omnipresent surveillance in public organizing (81). An anarchist guerrilla, Bommi Baumann, points out that guerrillas attained vanguard status through taking the most extreme action, but it was these extremes that isolated them as a specialized military (22). In the vanguard, the urban guerrilla smoothly transitioned from insurrectionary to isolated terrorist.

A riot is certainly violent, but it is a particular mode of distributed violence. The wave of riots in the 1960s that became known as "long, hot summers" was an escalation

²⁴ Regrettably, this slogan came into English through the translation of the works of Gustave Hervé, who like fellow syndicalists Edmondo Rossoni and Alceste de Amris, by the end of World War I when the insurrections failed to materialize, abandoned syndicalism in favor of fascism.

of riots to the scale of a social movement. To an extent, we can distinguish between these riots and other social movements in the 1960s. Yet, this distinction does not rest on the level of violence so much as their autonomy from formal organizations. This autonomy allowed rioters to embrace tactics (street fighting, sabotage, vandalism, looting) without legitimizing them as nonviolent, self-defense or part of a program. This marks the riot as different from the strike, which can be violent but never random. What makes the violence in riots appear random is due in part to the shift in setting, as the struggle moves outside of the confines of the factory into the streets. Moreover, in the streets and at a distance from formal organizations, the rioter encounters crowds with heterogeneous intentions. This dissertation does not attempt to cover the thousands of heterogeneous visions circulating in the riot. Instead, it focuses on a relatively specific, if expansive, network of writers involved in the print culture of the underground press and Mimeo Revolution. What the rioters/writers that I focus on had in common was their shared understanding that the riots augured a revolution. In the scale and dynamism of the riot, these writers discovered the possibility to vision the world otherwise. In order to understand what they contributed as writers, we need to turn to the print culture itself.

What to Do in a Riot

“Bernadette,” she said, “I’ve been in some other world.”

“Grace, calm down,” I said though she didn’t seem the least bit nervous, it was me who was having hard heart palpitations, “What world?”

—Bernadette Mayer

The authors discussed in this dissertation glimpsed a new world in the fires of the riot, which they tried to both represent and contribute to in their writing. This dissertation

examines a wide network of writers and publishers involved in a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) print culture in the 1960s. Yet, this wide network of authors still cannot speak for the tens of thousands involved in the riots. I narrow my focus to a network of authors rooted in an insurrectionary perspective that the riots in the streets were a road to revolution. This revolutionary vision was utopian but not in the conventional sense of mapping an idealized alternative. There was no sign of a perfected community, what William Morris describes as an “epoch of rest,” in the riots. Rather, they developed an apocalyptic vision—what Karl Mannheim called “chiliastic”—that discovered possibilities unleashed in the destructive conflicts of the present.²⁵ Concentrating on the present, these authors used their DIY publications to respond and contribute to the events happening around them. Appropriately, the newspaper became the dominant medium, but the contents were never restricted to reporting on events. The popular format known as the underground press included news articles alongside poems, comics, manifestos, plus other forms and genres. The insurrectionaries involved in these publications sought to make their works participate in the riotous culture, in whatever genre was best suited to the task at hand.

I trace connections between the multi-genre DIY journalism of the underground press and the explosion of self-publishing in countercultural literary milieu known as the Mimeo Revolution. “Mimeo Insurrection” as a title refers to the cross-pollination of primarily cultural producers associated with mimeographed magazines and the insurrectionary politics found in sectors of the underground press. The histories of these

²⁵ Mannheim describes the chiliasts relationship to time: “For the real Chiliast, the present becomes the breach through which what was previously inward bursts out suddenly, takes hold of the outer world and transforms it” (193).

print culture trends are rarely discussed in unison, despite their overlapping origins. There are important historical distinctions: the underground press principally grew through coverage of the New Left and Black Liberation protest cultures. Whereas the Mimeo Revolution blossomed in the counterculture, primarily recording the voices and controversial lifestyles of Beats and hippies. An exceptional early history of the underground press, published in a 1967 issue of *Playboy*, makes the connection between the two publishing phenomena explicit, tracing the emergence of the underground press to the turn to editorializing in mimeographed poetry magazines. Both Ed Sanders' *Fuck You! A Magazine for the Arts* and Diane di Prima and Amiri Baraka's *Floating Bear* began covering and commenting on the rise in protests several years before the mid-60s wave of underground newspapers (Brackman 151). *Playboy* singles out the anarchist publication *Resurgence*, a literary publication with an insurrectionary perspective that fully transitioned to political content (Brackman 152). These kinds of crossovers blended political and creative concerns in hybrid genres. This dissertation argues that the authors at this peculiar intersection of counterculture and insurrection were unusually attuned to the revolutionary potential of the riots.

To be clear, the unique contribution of these authors was not as rioters but writers. They were writers who, unlike most, recognized the agency and potential of rioters. The riots were not contingent on the contributions of the underground press, although writers identified with the rioters' rebelliousness and tried to participate. While not everyone involved in the Mimeo Revolution or the underground press sympathized with the riots, we can outline the factors that attracted potential sympathizers. The first is, like the riots,

these print cultures depended on a decentralized understanding of agency. There was never a single organ of the poets and politicians but a network. The Mimeo Revolution's network predates the underground press. In some cases, they provided the distributional infrastructure for later political newspapers. For the poets, the Mimeo Revolution provided a platform for the milieu forming in the counterculture of the Beats. As Daniel Kane argues, DIY mimeograph magazines continued the community-building in print that the "resuscitation of community-based oral reading" had accomplished socially (xvii). The Mimeo Revolution relied on the mimeograph and other cheap forms of printing that gave the Beat community and its followers direct control over their publishing (Clay et al 14).²⁶ While the technology for cheap printing had existed for decades, the Mimeo Revolution adopted it in order to make publishing readily available to anyone.

In this way, the Mimeo Revolution built on the countercultural experiments of earlier avant-garde and Modernist little magazines. The Mimeo Revolution built on this print culture and decentralized it, expanding their networks through cheap publishing. A similar confluence of radical politics and experimental aesthetics can be found in the more professional looking little magazines of the previous generation like *Blast*, *Masses*, *Mother Earth*, and *Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution*. A thread of Surrealist influence, in particular, runs throughout the writing discussed in this dissertation. Yet, whereas Surrealist publications were intended as organs for revolutionary movements, it

²⁶ While named after the cheap, accessible reproduction made available by the mimeograph, more than half of the publications in the Mimeo Revolution were not produced on this specific machine (Clay et al 15).

was rare for any of the publications in the Mimeo Revolution or the underground press to exercise such hegemonic influence. The height of *Black Panther*'s influence in the late 1960s was a possible exception. Yet, as discussed in chapter four, even the Panthers did not maintain a centralized character. The decentralization of this print culture encouraged a wide variety of topics and positions, many of which were outside mainstream social standards.

Another factor that drew riot sympathizers to the Mimeo Revolution was the print culture's involvement in publishing rebellious and often illegal material. While not all mimeographed magazines championed the riots, these publications flourished as an outlet for illicit and iconoclastic writing. Mimeograph magazines tapped into the drug culture and the sexual revolution, regularly flouted censorship laws and frequently faced legal prosecution for obscenity. While their content may have been viewed as anti-social by mainstream society, these publications provided a sense of belonging for likeminded readers. *Fuck You!* editor Ed Sanders contrasts the mimeographed magazines to mainstream media as a forum where contributors and readers could "bust out of monolithic culture" and "discover one another" (Brackman 83). Coming together around proscribed content, this readership found that seemingly cultural issues were, through their prohibition, politicized. The Mimeo Revolution laid the groundwork for the underground press, which continued to examine culture as a form of political rebellion.

The underground press advanced a more politicized perspective, while maintaining the Mimeo Revolution's investment in unconventional subjects. The underground press's mixture of political topics like protests and cultural topics like drugs

and sexuality undermined the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate subject matter. By undermining the idea of legitimate subjects, the underground press introduces another factor that attracted riot sympathizers by opening the possibility of treating riots as serious political actions. The growth of riots corresponded to the rise of the underground press. For some poets involved in the Mimeo Revolution like Amiri Baraka and Diane di Prima, events such as the Harlem and Watts riots signaled a new stage in their political involvement, encouraging them to expand their activity.

The political commitments of contributors to the underground press shaped its evolution and organization. As the underground press expanded, their publishers formed more formal networks such as Underground Press Syndicate and Liberation News Service, which John McMillian has described as a “radical alternative to the Associated Press” (83). More than this, these networks modeled the kind of decentralized organizing found in social movements. As Blake Slonecker highlights, these heterogeneous networks further integrated political organizing and personal liberation, but not without conflict (41). Although working within a shared network, participants in the underground press differed on whether strategy should be based on the utopian potential of their alternative organizational models or directly focused on creating an uprising. Despite these differences, the underground press generally agreed that their publications were not traditional reporting. Rather, these publications operated as unconventional sites of political struggle. If riots challenged the legitimized political paradigms of elections and unions, taking politics out of the parliament or the factory into the street, then the underground press imagined it could join them in the streets as writers.

The underground press embraced the concept of the writer as a participant in an uprising. While media conventions dictate an objective, unbiased approach, the underground press practiced its antithesis. They prided themselves on their involvement in the actions they covered. For instance, John McMillian points out that, during the Columbia University occupation of 1968, Liberation News Service embedded their reporters in the occupied school buildings (106). Until recently, little attention has been given to the unique perspective that this practice provided for the social movements of the 1960s. Seminal studies by John McMillian and Blake Sloneker have covered the broad networks of the underground press. More recently, scholars have begun to look at specific publications, like Christopher Tinson's work on *Liberator*. As a result, we now have more access to the individuals on the front lines of 1960s social movements and their unconventional understanding of the role of writing. My work greatly benefits from these trailblazing studies, adding further archival research to foreground the insurrectionary current that embraced some of the most extreme and controversial uprisings of the 1960s.

My research aims to recapture the utopian vision of these chiliastic writers. This can be a difficult task in the contemporary context, a period that Mark Fisher has characterized as "capitalist realism." The present phase of capitalism, he argues, simultaneously negates the utopian alternatives of the past and reifies all its cultural artifacts as commodities. As a result, we live in a time when it is not only difficult to imagine a world without capitalism, but to even imagine the forms of struggle that could bring about its end. For the writers I examine, the riots represented a moment, as Kristin

Ross suggests, when this revolutionary imaginary “enter[ed] vividly into the figurability of the present” (*Communal Luxury*).²⁷ The insurrectionaries writing for the underground press responded to the “figurability” of the riot in variety of genres. Thus, this dissertation will look at works ranging from political tracts to poetry to plays to novels. None of these genres have a monopoly on the utopian impulse of the riot. In fact, it is arguable that the writer-participant concept presents a challenge to specialization in writing altogether. It privileges active engagement over literary values of authorship. Although heterogeneous, the works in this study have a shared understanding of the utopian potential of riots. What strikes me as most characteristic of their utopian vision is that it is not based on imagining an idealized better world. Instead, they imagine the capacity and ability to struggle for one.

Moreover, the authors discussed here were not content to use their writing to articulate the utopian characteristics of the riot. They also strove to write in ways that contributed to the riot. Just as not all tactics find their place in a riot, writing—I am tempted to say, especially writing—does not always contribute to a riot. It would be a mistake to view the heterogeneous genres of this study as an argument for the riotous nature of diverse writing. Most writing about riots are missing two attributes shared by all my subjects: 1) the authors believed in an imminent revolution that separated their work from its commodity form of the commercial newspaper and 2) they wrote and published work in a way that was meant to contribute to insurrectionary action. Christina Kiaer’s

²⁷ Ross is referring to the figurability of the Paris Commune. I am applying her idea to the riots.

work on the “socialist objects” of the Russian Revolution is illuminating here. She defines “socialist objects” as the works produced in anticipation of the end of capitalism, which were reconceptualized outside of commodity form as “objects-as-comrades” (1-4). Building on Kiaer, Nicholas Thoburn has applied this idea to art books, refashioning the concept as “communist objects.” Thoburn argues that this print culture operates against both property and utility (“Communist Objects” 1). Both of these theorists are useful in thinking about the potential of print culture beyond the commodity form. The question I want to consider is: can we imagine an insurrectionary object that transforms the “object-as-comrade” into “comrade-at-arms,” a literature armed in a riot? Insurrectionaries active in the underground press attempted to answer this question with a variety of experiments, including the aforementioned embedded reporting, traditional propaganda, performances as public disruptions, poems-as-instructions, poster formats and rapid-response leafleting. Beyond these utilitarian contributions to the riot, the insurrectionaries also provided what we might call more literary responses.

I want to stress that I understand the literary aspect of these works not in contrast to their practical use in the riot but as a supplement to it. What these writings offer in terms of literature, they offer to our understanding of the riot in their role as participants. This includes the most speculative writing that pictures a future where the tactics of the riot—sabotage, street fighting, clandestine maneuvers—are generalized. In this study, the exception that proved the rule is the work of Chester Himes. Himes (at least to my knowledge) was neither a rioter nor a writer for the underground press. Yet, his vision of a successful insurrection is inspired by both. Speculative writing is one clear way writers

explored the potential accomplishments and obstacles of the riot. Speculative works explored strategic questions that sometimes require reflection, such as the role of leaders, organizations, and spontaneity. In addition to future projections, other works incorporate aspects of fantasy, folklore and ritual to consider ways of life outside of current social conditions and modalities of representation. The techniques used in these works sometimes operate as an alienation device to disrupt habitual patterns of representation. At other times, they begin to outline unrepresented or even unrepresentable experiences and dreams. As a result, the poems, plays, and articles that I study often challenge us to rethink not only the relationship between writing and revolution but also our basic assumptions about representation.

The insurrectionaries' literary experiments in the underground press refuse traditional concepts of representation (with their basis in classification and identification) without turning to anti-representation. The relationship between identity and representation is closely aligned with surveillance, a practice that Simone Browne in *Dark Matters* reminds us has historically been integral to slavery, anti-blackness and an oppressive racial order. Moreover, for insurrectionaries, one of the primary obstacles for rebellion is surveillance. This is why clandestine practices play an important role in much of the authors examined here. The anarchist challenge to representational politics and the leadership's ability to speak for a constituency adds an additional wrinkle to the problem of representation. According to Jesse Cohn, the anarchist tradition's response to the problems of representation "is something more and other than mere antirepresentationalism" (14). Rather than reject all modes of representation, Jesse Cohn

and Nadja Millner-Larsen have both explored how anarchist artists and writers attempted to represent an “ontology of change” (35). Likewise, I explore the possibility of representing insurrection through different modes. Di Prima’s and Himes’s emphasize action over character in their work, which should be understood as attempts to negotiate the insurrection’s resistance to the conventions of representation. For similar reasons, Baraka employs theatrical techniques that draw attention to sounds instead of sights.

These insurrectionary writers render the utopia that they discover in the riot without defaulting to a predetermined (revolutionary) subject. Instead, these writers composed works that sketched the emergence of rebellious crowds through allegory, black humor, gothic metaphors, and collage. The subject of these works, in the terms of poetry, is more often not a lyric “I” but a collective “we.” In this dissertation, I explore the rough contours and volatile compositions of this “we,” as it emerges in response to riots. My work in this area is indebted to a host of new scholars, such as Kay Gabriel, Amy De’ath, Nat Raha and Sam Solomon, who have investigated the poetry landscape in the wake of the Poetry Wars. Chris Chen and Timothy Kreiner position the Poetry Wars as a “cultural proxy” to the street movements of the 1960s, picking up where they left off. The Wars in question describe the debates that pitted experimental poetry against lyric. The former attempted to establish itself as anti-capitalist on the basis that “experimental formalisms sabotage the smooth reproduction of class belonging greased by lyric modes” (28). Chen and Kreiner point out that theorists of the lyric mode presume a model of poetry as “a mimetic expression of the experiences of coherent, singular-speaking subjects” (30). This critique of lyric poetry and the conflict in general explored aesthetics

and formal solutions to political problems, a politics of form. In contrast, my work takes for granted that the utopian impulse of insurrectionaries can be expressed in multiple forms and genres.²⁸ Lyric like other genres can exceed the traditional limits set on it; as Juliana Spahr discovers in the work of Bernadette Mayer, the lyric can produce “collective and connective spaces” (99). The works that I study articulate the collectivity of a riotous crowd.

I argue that it is in the crowd’s potential to revolt that these authors discovered a cartography of utopia. They mapped this utopian vision in the underground press, which more than any other source chronicled the riots and rebellions of the 1960s from the perspective of the participants. The ambitions of these participants went beyond recording the events to contributing to the revolt, continuing it by other means and pushing for the next flare up. It is these texts contributions to an unfolding of revolt, delineating the means and possibilities of resistance, that made them utopian. In this way, the underground press’s utopian vision was not a programmatic blueprint for a future society. Instead, it is utopian in its articulation of how the riots contained the means to make a revolution. Ultimately, their revolution never materialized, and their movements were repressed. These texts are one of the main remnants of their efforts. In the archives,

²⁸ In his introduction to the poetry collection *Campfires of Resistance*, Todd Gitlin introduces another important category, the “political poem.” He establishes that, for most people, political poetry “summons up dusty echoes of blank barking words” as the political poet uses “the poor poem as a kind of loudspeaker system” (xiii-xiv). Neither experimental nor lyric, the political poem is the stereotypical slogan in verse form. In contradistinction, Gitlin argues that the poems collected in his volume represent the diversity of social movement poetry, which he does not reduce to any particular style. Gitlin collects poems based on their context and relationship to social movements rather than their adherence to form.

there are materials that record social movements without a literary or cultural bent. However, the literary works tend to explore the composition of revolutionary movements in a way that complicate the representative figures and narratives of more conventional sources. Simply put, literature can offer an alternative perspective from that of political leadership. What the literature takes from the riot is a model for togetherness, a way of being together in conflict, and imagining themselves otherwise.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation explores the literary history of a wide network that included Amiri Baraka, Diane di Prima, Black Mask, Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker and the Black Panthers. I have established the basic principles of selection for the subjects of this dissertation: contributors to the underground press who discovered a revolutionary potential in the riots in American cities taking place in the 1960s. I have chosen authors whose works were inspired by their participation in the riots (with the aforementioned exception of Chester Himes). All of these authors worked within a literary tradition invested in the relationship between writing and revolutionary politics. Many of them, including Himes, could trace a lineage to the revolutionary writers of the historical avant-garde, especially Surrealism.²⁹ While these authors draw on a rich tradition of the intersection of revolution and literature, their work is particularly shaped by an understanding of the riots as a new possibility for revolutionary activity. This

²⁹ See Franklin Rosemont and Robin D.G. Kelley's *Black, Brown, & Beige* for further connections between Surrealism and Black Liberation movement writers.

understanding comes from their participation and also the theorization of the riots by groups like Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). RAM's influence weaves its way through this study through literary and personal connections in the Black Arts Movement, the Diggers, and the Black Panthers. Since my work depends on the mutual influence of political writing and literature (by writers who refused strict roles), I explore a wide variety of different texts, including plays, poems, novels, fliers, political tracts, manifestoes, and journalism.

Several factors have narrowed my focus by necessity. I have chosen to center the work of relatively well-known authors as entry points for each chapter, respectively Baraka, di Prima, Kenneth Koch, and Himes. This concession to the canon might seem counterintuitive considering the framework of the study provided above, which emphasizes the decentralized crowd over literary prestige. I have made this “deal with the devil” for three reasons: 1) these authors provide the coherence of a locus, a guide through an otherwise labyrinthine network, 2) their work is well-preserved and readily accessible compared to fellow rioters and 3) I find their writing to be an exemplary articulation of the convergence of literature and insurrectionary politics (with the useful exception of Koch, who operates as a foil to the lesser known Black Mask). My research has been further limited by geographic restrictions. I have concentrated on authors located in the centers of 1960s insurrectionary activity, namely New York and San Francisco. Yet, as participants in social movements and DIY print culture, these writers were nodes in a broader network. It is this shared political context, rather than any agreed upon ideology, that connects these figures. Even within the limits I have set for myself,

there is a wide range of “little *a* anarchists.” This dissertation includes insurrectionaries with a relative diversity of political, gender, sexual, and racial identities. Below, I will provide a short chapter summary, an explanation for the importance of their inclusion, and introduce how they build on/complicate the framework provided in this introduction.

Chapter one examines Amiri Baraka and the milieu of militants who formed the Black Arts Movement (BAM). The would-be guerrillas involved in BAM were early adopters of the riot as a revolutionary strategy and they explored how their art, particularly theater, could contribute to the riot’s ungovernability. BAM participants developed projects and institutions—including poetry journals, newspapers, and social centers—as sites for building a revolutionary Black Nationalism. Autonomous groups proliferated in the mid-60s, laying the groundwork for the Black Power era by creating a diverse network including artists and writers. I trace this network to demonstrate that, far from a unified Nationalist ideology, BAM added to the political eclecticism of their literary milieu. In BAM’s literary work, Black Nationalist dogma was secondary to the creative potential of spontaneous rebellion, exemplified by sublimated anger of musicians. Moreover, I explore how BAM’s insurrectionary tendency came close to anarchism, both politically and socially. Politically, BAM’s project incorporated an anarchistic interest in the autonomy of small groups, spontaneous rebellion, and horizontal insurrection. Socially, BAM’s milieu was not distant from the anarchists, with whom they shared social spaces and artistic projects. This is not to say that Baraka and his comrades were secretly anarchists, nor do I mean to diminish differences and even fierce disagreements with their anarchist contemporaries. This study uncovers how BAM

wove an anarchist thread through their Black Nationalist projects, helping to reshape the anarchist tradition. I examine BAM for its contributions to an anti-Eurocentric tendency in this tradition, sometimes known as Black Anarchism.

Chapter two examines overlapping anarchist groups, Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker, that both took inspiration from BAM and the riots. Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker are best remembered in anarchist circles as the countercultural militants that translated the Spanish Civil War concept of the affinity group—a small, tightknit organization, independent of any social movement leadership—into a protest tactic for street fighting. The concept of the affinity group resonated with anarchists because it facilitated spontaneous decisions, allowing protesters to abandon the march route and riot. I investigate the inception and adaptation of this protest formation in the earlier group, Black Mask. Black Mask came out of the same New York anarchist milieu that produced their successor, Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker, but were more involved in literary and art practice, publishing an eponymous mimeograph magazine. The beginnings of the affinity group can be found not only in their protest experiences but, significantly, in their confrontations with their literary milieu, especially the poets known as the New York School. I argue that the anarchist small group coalesced in this conflict at an infamous disruption of a poetry reading. Black Mask's investment in the riot clashed with their contemporaries' concern for peaceful coexistence based on universal participation. This distinction illustrated the typical anarchist position vis-à-vis broader groups, what insurrectionaries refer to as the "active minority." These anarchists' minority position within their cultural milieu informed their approach to broader social

movements and protest culture, guiding their adoption of the affinity group form. I track the development of the affinity group from its unexpected literary origins to consider both how the 1960s riots impacted literary milieus and how the outcome of a literary conflict contributed to the riots.

Chapter three examines the work of Diane di Prima as she drifted into the orbit of the anarchist milieu and joined the San Francisco Diggers. By focusing on her time with the Diggers, I complicate both the conventional understanding of di Prima's work, generally classified as Beat poetry, and the Diggers' activism, remembered for their nonviolent theatrics and providing free food and clothing. Di Prima and the Diggers shared insurrectionary aspirations, which shaped the content and form of di Prima's series of poems, *The Revolutionary Letters*. This series provides a synthesis of countercultural lifestylism and insurrection that speaks to Di Prima and the Diggers' experience. For instance, Di Prima's poems foreground reproductive labor like cooking and other forms of housework, pushing for an exploration of gender and feminist concerns not as a site of work but as part of an insurrection. Whereas many of her feminist contemporaries insisted on the inclusion of the home in the category of workplace, reevaluating the home as a legitimate site for addressing labor conditions, di Prima asks us to consider the home as an important site within the riots. Di Prima's work expand the scope of a riot to include individuals, groups, and activity often missed in these events. Simultaneously, riots transformed both the activity within and concept of the home. The Diggers' communal experiments, often seen as a retreat from political commitments, should be understood in relation to the riots' impact on home life. Di

Prima's Digger home formed part of an anarchist network that, at least for a time, included communes involved in a diverse array of tactics.

Chapter four examines the impact of the Black Panthers on Chester Himes's Harlem Detective Series. The final novel in the series, *Plan B*, depicts a successful insurrection that explicitly references the Black Panther Party. However, Himes's insurrectionary vision draws on a history of the Black Panthers that is radically different than the conventional timeline. For the most part, historians of the Black Panther Party focus on the central organization and programs designed by the highly visible leadership. In contrast, Himes directs our gaze to the underground. The underground organizing of the Black Panthers was clandestine, decentralized, relatively autonomous from the public leaders like Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, with underground lines of affiliation to their rivals, RAM. Chapter four accumulates the preliminary materials for this as-yet untold history in order to understand the underground organization depicted in Chester Himes's *Plan B*. The decentralized Black Panther network generated a vision of insurrection that aided Himes in reframing the basic tenants of the detective genre: the police as protagonists. In the *Black Panther* newspaper, the police were depicted as unheroic and inhuman pigs in order to provoke a shared desire to resist the police. *Plan B*'s sympathy for the anti-police underground forces a shift in genre, from detective fiction to what I call anti-police fiction. Chester Himes's anti-police fiction indexes the reach of the 1960s riots beyond the Mimeo Revolution and the underground press, and demonstrates their broader impact on literature.

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Chapter 1

INSURRECTIONARY CATECHISM: ANARCHISM IN THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

“Anarchism” is a misnomer, really, to describe a set of politics that challenges the necessity of systems and structures that we presume to be necessarily like the state itself, with hierarchical and authoritarian governance

— William C. Anderson and Zoé Samudzi

What does it do to our understanding of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) to name aspects of it “anarchist”? Although it might technically be a misnomer, I provisionally label these aspects of BAM “anarchist” to illuminate neglected characteristics and connections to anti-authoritarian thought in its historical development. In the 1970s, several prominent people associated with Black Liberation struggles of the previous decade, notably including Kuwasi Balagoon, Ashanti Alston, and Lorenzo Komboa’Ervin, openly embraced anarchism.¹ These anarchists frequently shared their disenchantment with the Black Panther Party, which led them to a critique of its hierarchical structure. The origins of this tendency, often called “Black Anarchism,” can be traced to the splits within the Black Panther Party and the formation of autonomous

¹ There were, of course, Black anarchists before the 1970s, most famously the orator Lucy Parsons. However, Parsons was only retroactively placed in the context of Black Anarchism as a political tendency.

cells known as the Black Liberation Army (discussed in chapter four).² In this chapter, we will trace this anarchist tendency to earlier developments that anticipated Black Anarchism. For this purpose, we turn to the development of BAM in the early 1960s rather than the Black Panthers (although the absolute distinction between them, we will see, is somewhat overstated).³ Since BAM has been seen as more closely aligned with a Black cultural nationalist project than the insurrectionary project of the Panthers, it can seem like an unlikely candidate for a discussion on anarchism. I argue that despite BAM's commitment to a nationalist project antithetical to anarchism, there was an emergent anarchism informing and shaping their work.

BAM's commitment to nationalism is well documented, but it is also complicated. Recent scholarship has untangled some of this complexity by examining in depth the specific organizations, political alignments, and works that constituted this movement.⁴ This scholarship has helped decentralize the development of BAM and,

² In most cases, members of the Black Liberation Army that advocated anarchism discovered this movement and ideology in prison. Anarchists like Kuwasi Balagoon developed their political analysis in prison study groups. In this context, anarchist literature was often supplied by prison support groups like Anarchist Black Cross (212). Moreover, as Akinyele Umoja points out, the capture of these underground guerrilla fighters was sometimes the first occasion they had to speak to the public and address their political development in many years (215). Despite the tragic circumstances, these conditions enabled the development and clarification of this anarchist tendency.

³ Many of these future anarchists were part of the New York City chapters of the Black Panthers, which was more tolerant of cultural nationalist practices than their West Coast counterparts, as made evident by their Africanized names.

⁴ Recent books examining early Black Arts publications have been particularly useful for complicating the emergence of BAM in an eclectic field of ideas and practices. David

particularly the trailblazing theoretical work of Fred Moten, reassesses central figures like Amiri Baraka. In *In the Break*, Moten forcefully argues that “Baraka is not reducible to nationalism” (130). In Baraka’s *Black Art*, Moten discovers an indebtedness to a kind of improvisation that is “on the one hand, anarchic and ungrounded, opening a critique of traditions and Tradition, and on the other hand, no simple and naive, unplanned and nonhistorically driven, inscription” (*In the Break* 64). Moten places Baraka’s artistic improvisation, his anarchic critique of tradition, in the history of what Cedric Robinson calls the Black Radical Tradition.⁵ For Robinson, the Black Radical Tradition provides a broader framework than Black Nationalism to understand the ideas of Black Liberation struggles and also develops through an engagement with and critique of Marxism. In his forward to Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, Robin D. G. Kelley asks, “Are there other avenues besides Marxism that have brought Black radical intellectuals face to face with the Black Radical Tradition?” (xxi). For Kelley, the answer is surrealism, another art tradition irreducible to its Marxist commitments. Anarchism, for the most part, only appears in *Black Marxism* as a pejorative for unruly forms of capitalism.⁶ However,

Grundy’s work on *Umbra* and Christopher M. Tinson’s work on *Liberator* are two notable examples.

⁵ It should be remembered that Robinson was at one time not far removed from the network studied in this chapter. Kelley points out that Robinson was a member of Donald Warden’s Afro-American Association in the 1960s, which placed him in close proximity to the Black Arts journal *Soulbook*, Revolutionary Action Movement and the Black Panther Party (xv-xvi).

⁶ Although not identified as such, Kelley relies on the anarchists of the Chicago Surrealist group to define surrealism. The Chicago Surrealists describe surrealism in typically anarchist terms as “the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination and love. . . . [It] is

Kelley opens the door to anarchism by asking the question. Moten follows up by making the theoretical link between BAM and anarchism. In this chapter, I build on Moten's theoretical contribution by providing a literary history of the overlap between BAM, the Black Radical Tradition, and anarchism.

There are risks involved in a literary history of BAM that centers anarchism, not least the possibility of undermining BAM's turn away from white ideology. Furthermore, this chapter, like Moten, concentrates on the work of Baraka, which risks reproducing the tokenism that has made him an exceptional and dominant figure in the canon. In addition to the problems from the perspective of BAM, this study also encounters problems from the point of view of anarchism. While anarchists are often sympathetic to the struggles for autonomy found in national liberation movements, they are vehemently opposed to the accompanying ideology of nationalism. They view nationalism as an alienated form of this struggle used to control and channel it into government (Bonanno and Weir 1). As far back as 1937, Rudolph Rocker argued that cultural nationalism was merely a "fig-leaf" for political nationalism (qtd. in Bonanno and Weir 33).⁷ However, any history of

above all a revolutionary movement" (qtd. in Robinson xxi). The Surrealists were not primarily anarchists and only began to embrace this movement openly in the 1950s. It is telling, then, that Kelley relies on this later definition from 1960s anarchists rather than choosing a Marxist alternative. Thus, we could argue that Kelley brings anarchism into the conversation of the Black Radical Tradition but in disguise.

⁷ The germ of this critique of cultural nationalism can be discovered much farther back in the classic anarchist texts of Mikhail Bakunin, who argued against a nationalist ideology that puts: "one's own country at the center of the world" (qtd. in Bonanno and Weir 30). In this way, the critique of nationalism is the logical extension of Bakunin's rejection of the State. Rocker's main contribution was to implicate *cultural* nationalism in this critique.

the 1960s that accepts this dichotomy between anarchism and Black Nationalism risks constructing anarchism as entirely white, and obscuring BAM with a monolithic Black Nationalism.

Rather than an isolated Black Nationalist tendency, BAM was the product of a broad insurrectionary milieu involved in the arts. As members of this art world grew more militant, they rejected the politics and culture that they associated with white and European traditions. Yet, this distancing from the white-dominated art world brought them, at least initially, in closer alignment with anarchists. This chapter traces the history of BAM's early development, from 1960 to 1967, following Baraka's movements and contextualizing his activities in insurrectionary networks and the larger collective project of BAM.⁸ In addition to their relationship to self-described anarchists, BAM developed an anarchistic component to their ideology and art. Their activities emphasized anarchist principles of autonomy, spontaneity, and mass insurrection. Like the authors of the recent book, *As Black as Resistance*, I suggest that it is less important to identify Black Liberation struggles with a specific anarchist ideology than it is to recover "a form of organization reflecting that tendency" (45). In BAM, we find not only an anarchist form of organizing, but an anarchistic form of literary composition. Both features influenced their anarchist contemporaries and provide the seeds for Black Anarchism.

⁸ My intent, in part, is to flesh out the history that Moten points us toward, an anarchist history of BAM. In his work, Moten concentrates on Baraka's transitional period between Beat and Black Nationalist from 1962-1966. By extending the dates to 1960 to 1967, I hope to a) demonstrate the continuities between Baraka's Beat politics and BAM and b) arrive at his full-fledged Nationalist work to examine its relationship to anarchism.

Once we begin to explore the intricacy of BAM's organization, it can be difficult to see the forest for the trees. The familiar institutions, once decentered, appear alongside a broader insurrectionary milieu consisting of a multitude of groups with complex connections and overlaps, illustrated in the diagram below, "A Black Arts 'Forest.'" Admittedly, the history that privileges the aboveground institutions like Black Arts Theatre and School (BARTS) has a clearer narrative arc: Baraka responded to the assassination of Malcolm X by abandoning his apolitical and predominantly white literary milieu and establishing an all-Black theater in Harlem. This narrative of Baraka's Black Nationalist conversion, however, diminishes or outright ignores his earlier involvement in political groups like On Guard. Moreover, this narrative reduces pre-BARTS projects like Umbra to precursors of Baraka's projects rather than contributors to BAM in their own right. If we include Umbra and their diverse milieu (including underground activity) in the history of BAM, a different, richer narrative emerges. This narrative might be more difficult to follow, but it accounts for the insurrectionary character of BAM. Outside of the institutions, BAM consisted of temporary groups, informal organizations, and individuals collaborating on political actions, short-run newspapers, and artistic projects (along the lines of the friend network discussed in chapter three). In this broader historical narrative, a little discussed figure like Walter Bowe highlights the continuity between the early '60s activism of On Guard, the proto-Black Power guerrilla tactics of Black Liberation Front, and BAM.⁹ At the same time,

⁹ On Guard's founder Calvin Hicks conjures Bowe in a few choice words: "And Walter Bowe you may remember from a event when the United States government accused him

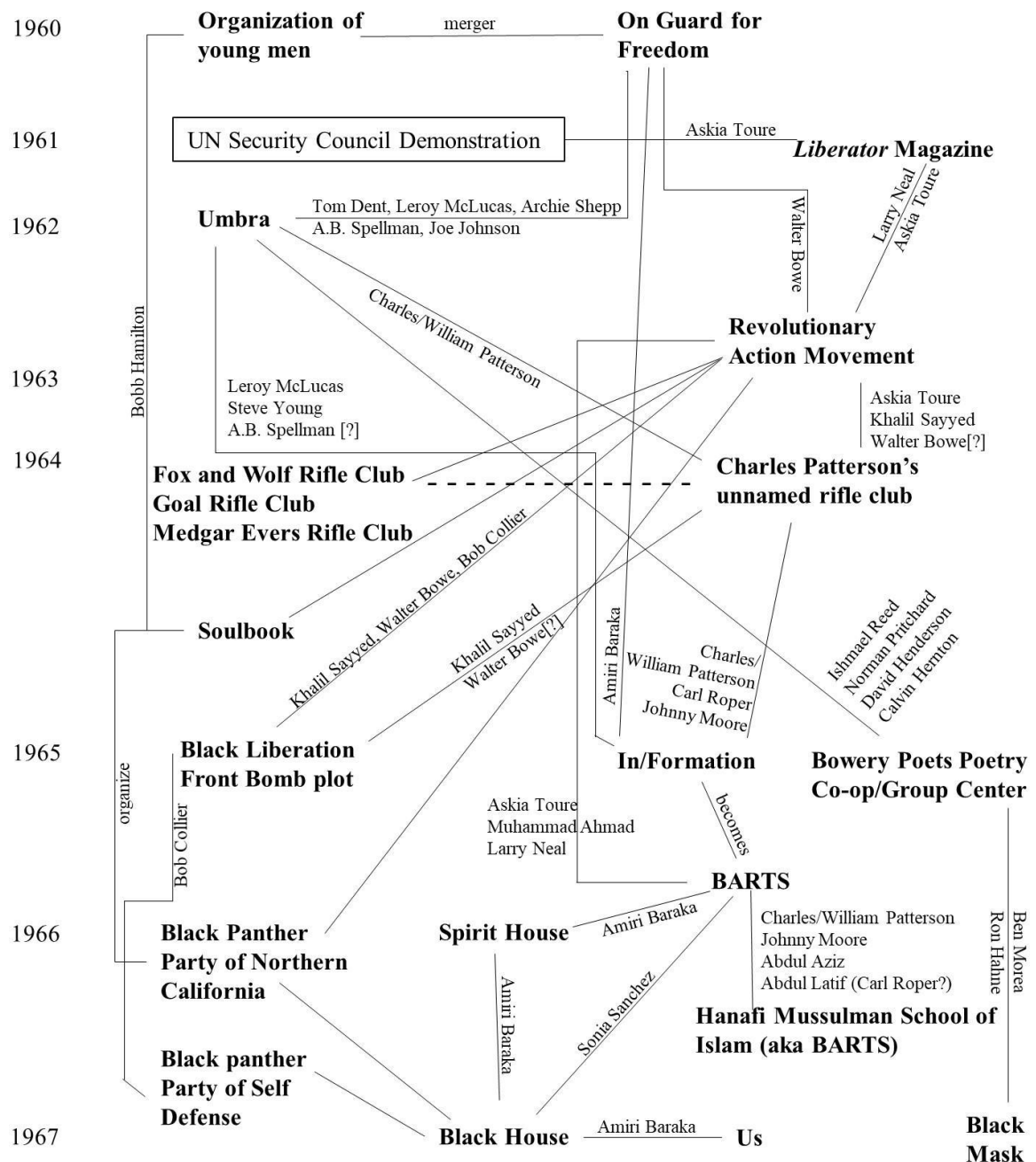


Figure 1: A Black Arts "Forest"

and two other people of threatening or planning to blow up the Statue of Liberty, and the Liberty Bell, and the Washington Monument. Well, that was Walter Bowe" (The HistoryMakers).

this historical framework traces the proliferation of distinct groups—from small rifle clubs, rogue Black Muslim sects, splinter guerrilla cells, to competing Black Panther factions—and highlights that autonomy was an essential characteristic of BAM. The diagram above is by no means a comprehensive list of the autonomous and numerous BAM-affiliated groups (indeed, it does not include all the groups mentioned in this chapter), but it provides a visual of BAM’s anarchistic organization.

While the continuities are complex and the groups autonomous, we can group this history of BAM in this diagram into four periods, each of which are explored here with a literary orientation: 1. (1960-1963) the early activism of this generation of militants, which I explore alongside Askia Touré’s poem “Song of Fire,” 2. (1964) the proliferation of rifle clubs and the Harlem riot, which I explore alongside Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman*, 3. (1965-1966) the opening of BARTS and the Bowery Poets’ Co-op in the aftermath of the riots. I explore the former alongside Charles Patterson’s *Black Ice* and the latter alongside Calvin Hernton’s “Jitterbugging in the Streets,” and 4. (1967) the development of a Black Power network in advance of the Long, Hot Summer of 1967, which I explore alongside Amiri Baraka’s *Slave Ship*. We will begin with the early activism of Amiri Baraka and his cohort of militants.

Blood Brothers

What is the relation between Lumumba's surplus lyricism—its lyrical disruption of the politics of meaning, of democracy as the politics of meaning—and anarchization? Everything

– Fred Moten

What distinguished BAM was the intentional development of a Black point of reference within cultural production, which challenged Eurocentric art and literature usually under the banner of Black Nationalism. BAM's early development took the form of readings, publications, performances, and, eventually, an institution — the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School. If we accept more recent periodization that includes early '60s formations like *On Guard for Freedom* and *Umbra* as part of BAM rather than predecessors, then BAM in this context is best understood as a process, or an approach to culture. For the early innovators of BAM, the central concern was connecting a militant politics with Black culture. This included connecting to the Black Nationalist milieu in Harlem, which predated BAM by decades. But it also included reevaluating Black popular culture as an expression and extension of the revolt taking place in the Southern States, in Northern ghettos, and across the ocean in decolonizing African countries. Of the various forms of Black culture being produced, music in particular had a privileged position. Yet, it is not in song but in BAM's writing on music that their process of recovering Black revolt in culture becomes most explicit. BAM's early thoughts on music found in Baraka's books and plays and also underground magazines like *Liberator*, *Black America*, and *Umbra*, set out to recover a concept of revolt encrypted in popular music. While they connect this revolt to a new Black Nationalism that they associated with decolonizers like Patrice Lumumba, they simultaneously put forward a form of

revolt independent of any nation, ideology, or organization. If a song by the singer Martha Reeves or the jazz musician Charlie Parker can be interpreted (as it was by BAM writers) as inspiring a riot, then revolt must be autonomous. This valorization of the autonomous revolt of musicians paralleled the proliferation of autonomous Black Nationalist-oriented groups in the early 1960s, who attempted to spread rebellion without relying on a unifying organization.

In the early 1960s, these small, autonomous groups frequently drew their numbers from Black artists and writers embedded in the Lower East Side of New York. Initially, BAM writers shared space with the Beat Generation and New York School poets. As we will see, the Black Nationalist milieu generally used “anarchist” as a dismissive, pejorative term. Nevertheless, the poets and artists among them were intimately familiar with self-identified anarchists. In 1961, Baraka co-founded *Floating Bear* with the anarchist Diane di Prima, a mimeographed poetry magazine that published anarchist-affiliated poets like Robert Duncan, John Wieners, Philip Lamantia, and Lenore Kandel (*Floating Bear* is discussed in detail in chapter three). However, it was not through anarchism that Baraka engaged in political action. One of the most pivotal actions for the development of BAM in this period was a demonstration at the UN Security Council, taking place the same month as the first issue of *Floating Bear*, in response to the murder of Patrice Lumumba. For this action, Baraka turned to his autonomous group the Organization of Young Men (OYM).

Baraka’s involvement in OYM should be a reminder of his and other BAM participants’ early politicization that predates the conventional periodization. Five years

before the establishment of their first institution, the Black Arts Theatre and School (BARTS), OYM brought together a mixture of writers, musicians, and visual artists in an all-Black revolutionary organization. While not artistically oriented, it included many future Umbra members (Archie Shepp, Leroy McLucas, Steve Cannon, and Joe Johnson) and others (theorist Harold Cruse and the musician Walter Bowie).¹⁰ OYM was formed after Baraka's July 1960 trip to Cuba, which he recalls as "a turning point in my life" (*Autobiography* 243). It was on this trip he met fellow OYM member Harold Cruse, whose theory of Revolutionary Nationalism would help shape Black Power, and Robert F. Williams, an icon of self-defense organizing and future chairman of Revolutionary Action Movement. In addition to these important connections, Baraka remembers the Cuba trip as an experience that jostled him to action ("Cuba Libre").¹¹ What the Cuban Revolution and Robert F. Williams had in common was a belief in the potential of small, autonomous groups.¹² Inspired by this experience, Baraka and Cruse formed OYM. Cruse was less enamored with Williams and small groups, but still foregrounded autonomy in

¹⁰ For more background on OYM, see David Grundy's *Black Arts Poetry Machine*, James Smethurst *Black Arts Movement*, and Amiri Baraka's *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*.

¹¹ In his essay reflecting on the trip, Baraka remarks on his identity as a rebel poet and its insufficiency in the face of the Cuban revolution, writing that "The rebels among us have become merely people like myself who grow beards and will not participate in politics." He recounts an experience where a Cuban chided him for his lack of action despite his theoretical agreement, calling him "cowardly bourgeois individualist" ("Cuba Libre").

¹² During his exile in Cuba, Robert F. Williams promoted the small guerrilla group for Black Liberation organizing in his paper, *The Crusader*. In *Revolution in the Revolution?*, Regis Debray would elaborate "foco theory" based on the Cuban Revolution, cementing the idea for many militants that insurrection would be fomented by small bands engaging in guerrilla warfare.

the Black Nationalist coalition he envisioned, especially autonomy from communists (“Revolutionary Nationalism” 80-96). Although OYM did not have anarchism as a reference point, its differences with communist parties and its emphasis on autonomy had much in common with the anarchist tradition.

At the UN Security Council demonstration, all the militant groups that assembled to protest related to Black Nationalism but not in the same way. The groups, many newly formed, were autonomous and decentralized. A member of the Harlem Writers’ Guild, John Henrik Clarke called it “the new Afro-American nationalism” in an article that outlined the informal network or quasi-federation that descended on the UN Security Council. One thing they all had in common was their non-affiliation with the communist organizations of the Old Left.¹³ Indeed, long time stalwarts of the Communist Party like Paul Robeson were said to have been turned away from participating in the demonstration (Smethurst 174). What unified these groups was the news released two days before confirming that the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba had been executed. More locally, Robert F. Williams had given his final speech of his visit to Harlem that winter in a Harlem street rally the night before the demonstration (Tyson). The visit of this early advocate for armed self-defense was cited by one of the demonstration’s participants, Richard Gibson of the Liberation Committee for Africa, as the inspiration

¹³ Calvin Hicks later described the politics of these groups in Robinson’s terms, Black Marxism (Grundy 39).

for this action (Tinson 18).¹⁴ However, it would be hard to locate a single inspiration among the diverse Black Nationalist groups listed by Clarke, including the Nation of Islam, their rivals the Muslim Brotherhood, James Lawson's United African Nationalist Movement, Carlos Cook's African Nationalist Pioneer Movement, and a variety of unaffiliated Black Nationalists who usually gathered at Lewis Michaux's bookstore (286-288).¹⁵ Despite this fragmented composition of splinters groups within his own milieu, Clarke claims that what attracted him to Lumumba was hearing the leader's "unswerving demand for centralism" (286). Perhaps the "surplus lyricism" that Moten identifies in Lumumba's radio addresses found its corresponding form in the anarchization of his proto-Black Anarchist supporters in America (*Black and Blur* 21).

Yet, this demonstration led to unity among groups to a limited extent. After the demonstration, Baraka's OYM merged with another participating organization On Guard for Freedom. Like OYM, On Guard was an all-Black activist organization (although not all men). Also like OYM, it primarily consisting of writers and artists. It was founded by members of the Harlem Writers' Guild, Calvin Hicks and Sarah Wright, and its members generally lived in the center of artistic life, the Lower East Side (Smethurst 118-9). Hicks

¹⁴ Gibson was also a co-founder of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and organized the trip that brought Baraka and Cruse to Cuba. For details, see Baraka's "Cuba Libre."

¹⁵ This is only a partial list of the groups named by Clarke. Others include Benjamin Gibbons' Universal African Nationalist Movement, Abby Lincoln's Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage, and a bevy of splinters from Marcus Garvey's UNIA (The Garvey Club, United Sons and Daughters of Africa; and the First Africa Corps). Unrelated to the protest, Clarke also touches on the Black Nationalism of voodoo cults and the Yoruba Temple. It is interesting that Clarke sets up Harlem as one unifying factor among Black Nationalist groups and yet begins his list with the Nation of Islam, headquartered in Chicago.

was an experienced activist crucial to many of the organizations of this period, including the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and Monroe Defense Committee which supported Robert F. Williams. Through these organizations, Hicks and On Guard had a deeper connection to Black activism in Harlem (Smethurst 119). As a result, Baraka recognized On Guard as a stronger organization (*Autobiography* 249). Although On Guard was also a writing project working on a newspaper, Baraka encountered them as activists in a confrontational demonstration. On February 15th, the demonstrators entered the UN Security Council Gallery, which was, as David Grundy points out, in walking distance from many of their homes in the Lower East Side (39). Described as a riot by Clarke, demonstrators threw shoes at the speakers, while outside picket lines fought police. Baraka was in the picket lines with Mae Mallory and Calvin Hicks of On Guard where they were attacked by police and arrested.¹⁶ Thus, their alliance was forged through shared action. On the same picket line, Baraka also met the poet Askia Touré, who he did not realize was a fellow writer (*Autobiography* 268). After the riot, Touré became a contributor to Liberation Committee for Africa's new magazine *Liberator*, which had appeared around the same time as the first issue of *On Guard* and *Floating Bear*.¹⁷

¹⁶ Hicks and Baraka had already been acquainted through their mutual friend, Walter Bowe. Baraka claims that they were pointed out to the police by a fellow Black Nationalist, James Lawson, which speaks to the sometimes-hostile differences between groups (*Autobiography* 267).

¹⁷ Although not a Black Nationalist publication, there is a case to be made for its contribution to building the network. For example, di Prima and Baraka were famously arrested in October 1961 on obscenity charges based on two works in issue #9. Authorities were alerted to this issue because one of the recipients was the poet Harold Carrington, in prison at the time. Baraka and Carrington had developed a correspondence

While Baraka's Black Nationalist organizing doubled as a network of writers, the Nation of Islam (NOI), ostensibly a religious group, represented the mass organization that Black Nationalists sought to create. By 1962, On Guard had grown to include a number of people who were central to BAM, including the OYM members mentioned above, as well as Nanny Bowe and Tom Dent. However, it was still a small group consisting mainly of writers, artists, and musicians compared to NOI, a national organization formed over thirty years earlier. NOI membership had massively increased with the popularity of the Harlem chapter's leader, Malcolm X.¹⁸ Yet, Malcolm X, who was noticeably absent from the UN Security Council demonstration, was not as impressive to Black militants in the arena of political action. Commentators at *Liberator* observed that Malcolm X "must reconcile his militant talk with the non-militant action of his followers" (Watts 3). According to Walter Bowe, On Guard considered Malcolm X's understanding of organizational form as "light years behind" (qtd. in Wood 176). Yet, it is not clear what kind of organizational form On Guard aspired to develop since its short period of growth ended with its dissolution the next year. Members of On Guard went separate ways, rediscovering small autonomous groups.

Some of the former On Guard members went on to be involved in groups that specialized in writing, namely the Society of Umbra. As David Grundy notes, On Guard

that went well beyond poetry into discussions of revolutionary politics. In one letter, Carrington cautioned Baraka "don't destroy country, wait til i get out, i find lumumba & we do it for you" (qtd. in Nielsen 85). Tragically and likely unbeknownst to Carrington, Lumumba was already dead when he penned this letter.

¹⁸ According to Manning Marable, membership went from 1200 in 1953, around the time of Malcolm X's parole, to somewhere between fifty and seventy-five thousand by 1961.

dissolved in part due to the desire of members like Tom Dent, Leroy McLucas, Joe Johnson, and Archie Shepp for a creative outlet (45). Although On Guard had been to some extent a writing project, the group only published two newspapers in the two years of their existence (Dent, “Umbra Days” 105). The paper focused on issues affecting Harlem and other Black communities and Black Liberation struggles in the United States, as well as on the African continent. While other former members focused on activist projects dedicated to these struggles like the Monroe Defense Committee, Dent and his comrades set out to develop a creative project with other Black writers. They found these others performing in the Lower East Side poetry scene, starting with the poet Calvin Hernton. Hernton brought in another local reader, David Henderson, with whom Hernton was living in 1962 (Dent, “Umbra Days” 106). From this beginning, a group formed through Friday night workshops attended by former On Guard writers, Lloyd Henderson, Albert Haynes, and Henderson’s childhood friend Charles (Charmy) Patterson. Too young for On Guard but closely affiliated through the Monroe Committee for Defense, Lorenzo Thomas was also quickly drawn into the orbit of Umbra. Similarly, Askia Toure, who Baraka knew from the UN picket lines, became central to this new group. Baraka claims to only have discovered Umbra after it ended and insists that he remained politically unaffiliated in this period (*Autobiography* 268-9).

Through the Umbra workshops, these poets developed an autonomous Black Nationalist tendency. Yet, Umbra is often situated as proto-BAM and, as a result, pre-Black Nationalism, no doubt in part because of its inclusion of white members, Art Berger and Nora Hicks, and the project’s relationship to the Lower East Side poetry

milieu. Umbra's inclusion of white members and proximity to white-dominated poetry readings needs to be considered in contrast to Dent's claim that Umbra poets "were interested in a group that could meet our needs as black writers" ("Umbra Days" 106). In recent scholarship, Umbra's incongruous position in Black Arts has been interpreted in a number of ways. Scholars have, in turns, emphasized Umbra's distinct cosmopolitan character (Panish), the individual style of the writers (Grundy), Umbra's rupture with the past (Oren), its continuity with the broader Left (Smethurst), and its connections to New York School poets (Kane).¹⁹

The latter assessment, while historically accurate, has the tendency of obscuring Umbra's Black Nationalism in precisely the place where it is most evident. For Daniel Kane, Umbra's distinctive interest in Black politics makes them "necessary voices in a poetic community that may otherwise have lacked a volatile, subversive, and self-critiquing mechanism . . . The Umbra poets filled that gap in the Lower East Side poetic community of the 1960s." (90). As Eben Y. Wood rightly points out, Kane's reduction of Umbra's politics to filling a gap in a preexisting community and ideology "reproduces the very technical condition against which Umbra and its journal were posed" (36). Umbra is better understood as an attempt to develop an opposition to white culture (what Wood calls the "normative frame") through literary means, which they put on full display

¹⁹ Looking further back, we can include Aldon Nielsen's analysis of Umbra in *Black Chant* as the beginnings of a Black postmodernism.

in their confrontational street readings that doubled as political protests.²⁰ The Society of Umbra pulled from the surrounding milieu of poets, but it was posed against the “normative frame” of the dominant white culture, and not a stop-gap. In short, the Umbra workshops were an exercise in autonomy.

It is through their creative activities, their poetry as protest, that Umbra comes closest to traditional anarchists. So far, we have seen how Umbra, as a Black Arts group, emerged within a network of autonomous Black Nationalist groups. Whereas the anarchism of these groups was largely figurative, Umbra’s connection to anarchism through the anarchist group Black Mask was literal. In the months prior to the start of the Umbra workshops, Dent and others interested in political art attended meetings set up by the artist Aldo Tambellini. Tambellini’s home, a storefront studio, was across the street from Dent’s apartment where the Umbra workshops eventually took place. The two had known each other from Dent’s time at Syracuse University and both were interested in developing an artistic group involved in political protest (Dent, “Umbra Days” 106). The organization that Tambellini eventually set up was called Group Center, and included the future founders of the anarchist group Black Mask, Ben Morea and Ron Hahne (the subject of chapter two). While not an explicitly anarchist organization, Group Center introduced Morea and Hahne to anarchism via their art practice. Their initiation began with a discussion-based event with the Living Theatre called “Revolution as Alternative”

²⁰ An example of this protest format is a 1963 street reading in support of Mae Mallory, described in an article in *Masses and Mainstream* by Art Berger. David Grundy refers to this article as “the first major piece to appear on the workshop” (57).

in 1962 (Millner-Larsen 12). This workshop was held around the time future Umbra members were attending meetings with Group Center, but Dent and his comrades decided Tambellini's ambitions were "too broad and vague" ("Umbra Days" 106).²¹

Despite the divergence of the two groups, they remained in close contact, especially since both frequented the same neighborhood center for artists and poets, Stanley Tolkin's bar (Dent, "Umbra Days" 106; Hernton, "A Personal Recounting" 581; Millner-Larsen 158). In fact, Art Berger credits Tambellini for setting up Umbra's first show, Post-Umbra, several of these poets would later collaborate closely with Group Center (discussed in the next section). While Umbra was not, as Kane implies, filling a gap in the poetic community, their autonomous group formed within an informal network. This network brought them into contact with others interested in how literature and art could be used for political action. What brought them so close to the anarchists in Group Center, in my estimation, was their shared interest in autonomous groups acting outside of the mainstream activist organizations and circulating informally in their artistic milieu.

Due to its workshop-based structure, Umbra's politics and even its membership are somewhat difficult to pin down. While mainly unified by the workshops, the participants eventually put out two editions of *Umbra* magazine, which registers a developing tendency of Black Nationalism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, participants

²¹ Other accounts provide different reasons for their split with Tambellini. In interviews archived at the Schomburg, Dent gives the simple explanation that Tambellini was not a poet. Art Berger claims that Tambellini suspected Askia Touré of sleeping with his wife. More seriously, Hernton recalls that he disliked Tambellini for his mistreatment of his wife.

disagreed on the political ideology of the group. In an interview, a member of the group Jane Pointdexter said: “I don’t think they had some ideology that they uniformly adhered to.” Reflecting on the group, Baraka concurs, contrasting the Pan-Africanist Touré to Dent, who he calls a progressive democrat. Perhaps the most apt description is “eclectic,” a term Harold Cruse used to characterize *Liberator* (the other publication that Touré was involved in at the time) but which could equally have been said of this indeterminate and evolving politics of *Umbra*.²² However, the editors of *Umbra* refused any confusion between their eclecticism and haphazardness. For them, *Umbra* had a “definite orientation”: 1) the experience of being Negro, especially in America; and 2) that quality of human awareness often termed ‘social consciousness’” (“Forward” 3). What could be mistaken for political confusion by Cruse, for the editors, was a sign that their poetry was not mere propaganda (3-4). Their eclecticism was a further sign of their autonomy from the activist organizations that would use their work as an instrument for their campaign.

In their poems, a similar eclecticism emerges, pulling from different cultural and political traditions for imagery. Although Touré is usually described as the most politically developed Nationalist of the group, his “Song of Fire” mixes revolutionary vision with a series of religious symbols. Appearing in the second issue of *Umbra* in December 1963, the poem responds to the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The piece opens with the image of “shattered Sunday Schools,” followed by imagery of divine vengeance originating from multiple sources, including

²² *Liberator* not only had overlapping contributors with *Umbra*. It was also the first publication to review *Umbra* in the April 1963 issue.

Buddha, Allah, and the Yoruba god Shango. It is as if Touré is assembling an international politics through fragments of poetic imagery. As a vehicle for poetry, *Umbra* allows for this assemblage in a single piece that sister publications like *Liberator* can only accomplish through the bibliographic codes of layout. Ultimately, the poem is more iconoclastic than politically generative as the lines that follow describe an apocalyptic vision where the sky fills with blood and fire consumes the world. In the third part of the poem, the lyric “I” makes a sudden appearance, ending the vision and returning the reader to the pre-apocalyptic present:

Here I stand - at twenty-five . . .
An angry, fiery man - awaiting Nature's call
to act out
my deadly hour upon the Western Stage. (Snellings 18)

Touré uses the lyric “I” to situate the poet in relationship to the revolution. The poet is a visionary who exclaims “all/fall down” and a militant waiting to be called to action (Snellings 18). For Touré, the visionary poet can assemble and compose a Black Nationalist militancy from different traditions, but the militant will ultimately be destructive, an almost anarchistic nihilist.

Touré’s nihilism went counter to the programmatic ideas of Harold Cruse, the former On Guard theorist who coined the term “revolutionary nationalism.” Cruse’s concept of “revolutionary nationalism” had been foundational to the political organization to which Touré belonged, Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). RAM formed in 1962, taking Cruse’s “revolutionary nationalist” concept of Black people as an oppressed as its starting point (Stanford 76). By August of 1963, RAM, headquartered in Philadelphia, had expanded into decentralized cells called the Black Liberation Front (the

decentralization of RAM is discussed further in chapter four). RAM-affiliated organizations existed in several major cities, including New York. More so than Cruse, RAM looked to the leadership of Robert F. Williams in exile. Like Williams, RAM developed armed self-defense groups, and criticized the nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement. At this time, Cruse, like Touré, was a contributor to *Liberator*, where he took Touré and RAM's mentor to task. In a four-part series, "Rebellion or Revolution?" beginning in October 1963, Cruse argued that Williams only appeared as revolutionary because of the militancy and intensity of his rebellion. Williams' armed approach might be different from the nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement. However, Cruse argued that this former-NAACP leader's goals were still indistinguishable from integration. Furthermore, Cruse claimed we need to distinguish rebellion from revolution precisely by goals. The young rebels like Touré that took inspiration from Williams "adventuristic" model were missing an important ingredient — a revolutionary vision. Cruse's use of "adventuristic," often a synonym for anarchist is telling. For Cruse, revolution needed to be guided by select people who cultivated a revolutionary program. Developing this program, according to Cruse, should be the role of cultural producers like Touré. After the appearance of this series, *Liberator* devoted increasing amounts of space to cultural concerns.

Although RAM and Cruse had different visions of revolutionary nationalism, both understood the importance of culture to their politics. For RAM, this meant assigning members of their cadre to cultural projects, including Umbra, *Liberator* and later the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School. Cruse viewed these projects as eclectic and

lacking a sufficient revolutionary program.²³ To Cruse, the cultural field was an opportunity for Black Nationalists because cultural productions could be used to develop a “conceptual framework” to unify the competing tendencies in the movement. Moreover, he considered cultural sites a soft target in America for political intervention (“Rebellion or Revolution?: Part III” 14). Cruse’s program for revolution was basically positive: the development of unified art organizations for Black artists and attempt to socialize cultural institutions as public owned (“Part III” 14; “Part IV” 15). Umbra, to my knowledge, did not push for this kind of programmatic change. Yet, they developed an informal organization that drew from different areas of the arts. In their publication, they published work representative the Lower East Side avant-garde, political poetry like Touré’s song of fire, and even a Robert F. Williams’ poem in traditional verse.²⁴ Their performances, which included Archie Shepp and Bill Dixon playing jazz, were even more culturally eclectic (Nielsen 114). For RAM, Umbra represented an opportunity to organize with other Black militants and develop a Black Nationalist vision, however heterogeneous. Whether their existence as a distinct group with a Black Nationalist agenda was a boon to revolutionary movements or a threat to Umbra’s autonomy is up for debate.

²³ James Smethurst notes that RAM might be the only Black Power organization that assigned members to work with cultural groups as their primary task (170-1).

²⁴ Jon Panish describes this poem as comparatively “uninspired” and reliant on “pedestrian end-stopped rhymes” (62-3). Whatever its artistic merit, it demonstrates a confluence of political network and editorial choices. Art Berger goes so far as to say Williams “was part of Umbra” (Interview).

Political differences eventually led to Umbra's demise as a group with conflicts peaking during the production of their second issue. Editing of the second issue was fraught with conflict over the inclusion of a poem critical of John F. Kennedy, who had been assassinated only weeks before. The poem by Ray Durem was ultimately excluded from the issue but without resolution between factions. Ishmael Reed, a member of Umbra at this point, dismissively describes the dissident faction as "cultural nationalists" consisting of RAM members Askia Touré and Albert Haynes, Umbra co-founder Charles Patterson and his brother William (Reed, "Introduction").²⁵ As we will see, these cultural nationalists were by no means unified. Moreover, the division into factions was complicated by the fact that at least some of the "cultural nationalists" that Reed criticizes in his retrospective were living with him at the time (Oren 246). Nevertheless, the conflict escalated. While accounts vary, most agree that Umbra treasurer Norman Pritchard was "kidnapped" so that the dissidents could take control of Umbra's funds (Nielsen 130).²⁶ This attempted coup all but ended the project, and the Black Nationalists involved eventually moved out of Reed's place and to Harlem to join Baraka. Meanwhile, Baraka's move to Harlem was initiated by his involvement in an autonomous group that included many of the dissident members of Umbra, called In/Formation.

²⁵ The term "cultural nationalist" had by the time of Reed's writing (1970) was loaded with connotations related to the conflict between the revolutionary nationalists in the Black Panther Party and the cultural nationalists of US organization. The members of RAM, at least, would be more accurately described as revolutionary nationalists, but I will complicate this distinction when I discuss US in section three.

²⁶ Reed and Pritchard both joined after issue one (Panish 53). It is unclear if the term kidnapped is appropriate. Nielsen suggests Pritchard may have participated in a feigned kidnapping, making his relationship to the warring factions all the more ambiguous.

It is difficult to track Baraka's political development that led to the creation of In/Formation because of the secretive nature of underground and informal organizing. After On Guard, Baraka was not a member of a formal organization for some time. While not an activist, Baraka was still invested in the political questions that had guided his time with On Guard. His major outlet for these politics in the period between On Guard and In/Formation seems to be his writing and his literary career took off in this period with the publishing of *Blues People*. However, as we saw with Umbra's close relationship to RAM, dedication to literary pursuits did not mean isolation from political developments. Indeed, Baraka's *Blues People* was what drew the attention of Umbra poets Calvin Hernton and Ishmael Reed, who Baraka remembers accosting him at the Five Spot, the latter saying "I like your prose. I don't like your poetry" in a challenging tone (*Autobiography* 267-8). This confrontational attitude was indicative of what Baraka called "distinctly militant kind of black" appearing in the area. As an example of this militancy, Baraka describes his first meeting with another Umbra poet Charles Patterson, his brother William, and Johnny Moore. Baraka recounts confronting the group at a party after William broke the nose of jazz drummer Sunny Murray. Despite this initial altercation, the Pattersons and Johnny Moore, along with Baraka, would later become the core of In/Formation. Although it is not entirely clear what these militants were involved in before In/Formation beyond indiscriminate fighting, the initial steps of organizing the group were made informally—closer to underground organizing than activism. It is no

wonder that Baraka gives these figures pseudonyms in the *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*.²⁷

There is a way to read *Blues People* that anticipates Baraka's formation of a "secret organization" with these militants in the aftermath of Umbra. This perspective hinges on recognizing Baraka's interest in how Black culture, like Black militancy, can operate through a hidden revolt. In an interview with Michel Oren, Baraka makes a direct connection between his interests in activism and art:

I was always interested in Expressionism and Surrealism and I think the reason was to really try to get below the surface of things . . . the Civil Rights Movement, it's the same thing essentially, trying to get below the surface of things, trying to get below the norm, the everyday, the status quo . . . All of those various things, the Organization of Young Men, or On Guard or Umbra, were all attempts to go past the given, go past what's supposed to be accepted and acceptable. (1)

For Baraka, there was a subterranean connection between social movements and art precisely because they both investigated hidden aspects of culture. Turning to Black cultural production in *Blues People*, Baraka interprets spirituals, blues, and jazz as microcosms of Black experience in America (L. Jones xii). He turns to music specifically because it is an art form independent of artifacts, and therefore contains aspects of African culture that survived the destructive experience of the Atlantic Slave Trade (L. Jones 16). According to Baraka, this music not only carried hidden aspects of African culture, it still held the potential to communicate forbidden desires or incite rebellion (L.

²⁷ According to Ishmael Reed, William and Charles Patterson are the characters referred to as Tong and Shammy Hackensack respectively ("LeRoi Jones" 19). I speculate that their friend Jimmy Lesser was the Pattersons' close associate, Johnny Moore. Baraka puns on "more."

Jones 19-21).²⁸ The hidden double meaning of music is reminiscent of how Baraka describes his relationship to activism with On Guard: “It was as if I had two distinct lives, one a politically oriented life, with a distinct set of people I knew and talked to, the other the artsy bohemian life of the Village” (*Autobiography* 249). Whether or not he continued his political involvement in the wake of On Guard, his investment in Black Nationalist movements was held at a remove from his white art world. This might explain why Baraka’s politics are always in the background in his ex-wife Hettie Jones’ descriptions of him in her memoir up until the mid-’60s. It is telling that when she describes his political radicalization, it is in response to the arrival of Revolutionary Action Movement in New York.

While not a cell of RAM, In/Formation emerged during an upswing of similarly inclined autonomous groups, galvanized by the evolving politics of Malcolm X. In the period between the dissolution of On Guard and the appearance of In/Formation, Malcolm X had apparently travelled some of the “light years” of distance that separated him from the organizing of Black Nationalists. The contradiction between his militant rhetoric and his activism-adverse organization, the Nation of Islam (NOI), reached an impasse when Malcolm X spoke critically of John F. Kennedy in the wake of his assassination. As Askia Touré notes, Malcolm X’s problems with NOI paralleled the split in Umbra, eventually leading to Malcolm’s suspension and subsequent break with the organization (Interview). When Malcolm X split with NOI in March 1964, RAM called

²⁸ Baraka cites the suppression of African drums used to incite revolt as a notable example of white people recognizing the subversive potential of African music (L. Jones 19).

an emergency meeting with their decentralized cells in the Black Liberation Front and their supporters to develop a movement response (Stanford 97). At the inception of RAM in 1962, Malcolm had advised the fledgling group that they organize autonomously from NOI rather than joining it (Stanford 78). In the speeches that followed his break with NOI, “A Declaration of Independence” and the famous “The Ballot or the Bullet,” Malcolm advocated a similar autonomous organizing, specifically the formation of rifle clubs (discussed in chapter four). In response, RAM affiliates in Detroit, Cleveland, and elsewhere formed their own rifle clubs.

At least one of these rifle club included members of Umbra, who used the club for paramilitary training and as an organizing platform for Black Arts. In his unpublished memoir, Charles Patterson goes so far as to say that the historical narrative that centers Baraka is a myth and Black Arts arose out of the split in Umbra and the subsequent formation of this unnamed rifle club (“Black Arts” 1).²⁹ The rifle club included, according to Patterson, himself, his brother William, Askia Touré, Johnny Moore, Carl Roper, Khaleel Sayyed, Walter Best, and Saladin. This list of names represents an important intersection between early Black Arts and insurrectionary organizing. The Pattersons and Touré were both involved in Umbra and joined Moore and Roper (along with Baraka) in organizing BARTS. The others are more difficult to place, but it becomes clearer if we assume Patterson incorrectly wrote Walter Best when he meant Walter

²⁹ The opening chapter of his memoir was sent to Ishmael Reed with a note saying “this would set some souls on fire.” It is unclear if Patterson completed his memoir.

Bowe. If Bowe is the correct name, Patterson's rifle club was composed of the founders of BARTS and two of the would-be bombers of the RAM-affiliated Black Liberation Front (discussed further in the next section).³⁰ Patterson makes no distinction between the artists and militants when claiming this organization laid the groundwork for BARTS. Up until a point, his narrative tracks with Baraka's, which also traces BARTS to a rifle club, In/Formation, that included Patterson but not RAM. What Patterson thought of In/Formation is difficult to say since his unfinished memoir cuts off at the point where his group met Baraka at the aforementioned party.

According to Hettie Jones, Baraka became familiar with RAM just after publishing *Blues People*, when a copy of RAM's mimeographed *Black America* arrived along with a photograph of RAM leader Muhammad Ahmad being violently arrested by police. She remembers thinking that "I'd heard [Baraka] shifting gears. Those who risked more than the mimeograph were *right*—and they were new" (214). Ahmad himself arrived in New York soon after, along with RAM member Larry Neal. While Baraka may have been inspired by this new underground formation, he recalls that Ahmad and Neal attended initial meetings of In/Formation, but declined to join when Baraka proposed it should be a paramilitary organization. Baraka makes no mention of the existence of

³⁰ Saladin who is given no last name is harder to place. Saladin Muhammad's name comes up in connection with Revolutionary Action Movement. However, I speculate that this Saladin could be Saladin Shakur, a close associate of Malcolm X. This Saladin was the father of the future founder of Harlem Black Panthers, Lumumba Shakur, and a mentor to many Panthers in the New York chapter (Balagoon). Since Kuwasi Balagoon was a member of this chapter, Saladin might be a direct connection between Black Anarchism and the history of RAM's rifle clubs discussed here.

Patterson's rifle club prior to his involvement and including RAM members, although the core group of In/Formation had several of the same members. This core included Cornelius Suares, Clarence Franklin, Steve Young former Umbra members Leroy McLucas, the Pattersons, and their friend Johnny Moore.³¹ According to Baraka, Neal and Ahmad were already part of their own RAM cell that included Touré (*Autobiography* 290). As a result, In/Formation became an additional and autonomous group among the wave of such in the wake of Malcolm's departure from NOI.

The Black militancy represented by the newly independent Malcolm X was spreading centrifugally in 1964. As complicated as RAM's network of rifle clubs appears, the militant organizing that led to the Harlem riot was far more nebulous. Although nebulous, it is worth sketching an example of this centrifugal process since both the development of In/Formation and the production of one of Baraka's most important works, *The Dutchman*, depend on this broader context. One month after Malcolm X first made his "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech, *the New York Times* began a series of articles alleging the existence of an anti-white gang in Harlem called the Blood Brothers, training in karate on rooftops and emulating Malcolm X in their speech. This gang were said to disavow affiliation with NOI, but, the journalist, Junius Griffin makes

³¹ Steve Young was listed as staff for In/Formation's unpublished newspaper and there are clues that he is the member of the group that Baraka gives the pseudonym Dave Knight. The *In/Formation* staff also had non-core members, including A.B. Spellman, who is likely C.D. in Baraka's *Autobiography* (described as close to the core but "straddling the fence"), Marion Brown, Carl. L Roper, and On Guard founder Calvin Hicks. The paper includes a piece from Robert F. Williams' *Crusader* and another by Larry Neal, "the Year Ahead, the Year Behind," which among other things advocates that "'Hip' revolutionary nationalist elements" create independent institutions (6). Soon after, Neal would collaborate with members of In/Formation in establishing BARTS.

sure to point out, that Malcolm X had recently left NOI to begin his own organization (“Whites are Target” 43). While Griffin does not directly implicate Malcolm by conflating this new organization with the Blood Brothers, he implies that Malcolm’s influence is behind a recent wave of murders, going so far as to claim Blood Brothers earn the right to an “X” in their name by killing someone (“Grand Jury” 61). The Harlem Six, the most famous case of alleged Blood Brothers, were indicted for the death of Margit Sugar. These six youths were suspects for their earlier involvement in the “Little Fruit Stand riot.” While the existence of a unified gang called the Blood Brothers was likely a media invention, this small riot speaks to a growing rebellion in Harlem that anticipated the riots that summer. Likewise, I suggest that the paraphernalia, trainings, and widespread references to Malcolm/NOI recorded by reporters, in fact, registers the informal distribution of dissident Black Muslim influence outside of the NOI. This distribution of NOI teachings and Malcolmite militancy led to the formation of the Five Percent Nation that year by a former NOI martial arts instructor, Clarence 13X. Beyond specific organizations, we could look to the crowds chanting “We want Malcolm” during the Harlem riot in July (Stanford 63).

It is this underground diffusion of Malcolmite groups that not only laid the groundwork for *In/Formation* but also characterize two important plays from the period, Baraka’s *The Dutchman* and James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mister Charlie*. Debuting just weeks after *the Dutchman* in April 1964, Baraka called *Blues* “one of the great theater

experiences of my life” (*Autobiography* 275).³² Even though he was not considered a Black Nationalist, Baldwin’s depiction of the young Richard Henry perfectly captured “the Malcolm type” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 275). Although loosely based on the lynching of Emmett Till, Baldwin is careful to connect his protagonist to Harlem and the growing militant rhetoric found there, as seen in this dialogue with his mother:

Richard: And the only way the black man’s going to get any power is to drive all the white men into the sea.
Mother Henry: You’re going to make yourself sick. You’re going to make yourself sick with hatred.
Richard: No, not. I’m going to make myself well. I’m going to make myself well with hatred—what do you think of that? (Act I).

Richard Henry does not summon Malcolm X as much as he anticipates his youthful followers, the so-called “hate gang,” the Blood Brothers. Baldwin’s staging of this “Malcolm type” is reminiscent of Malcolm X’s response when questioned if the semi-mythical Blood Brothers existed: “the question is, if they don’t exist, should they exist? Not do they exist, should they exist?” (“The Harlem ‘Hate-Gang’ Scare” 66). While Baraka does not mention Malcolm in relation to *Dutchman*, there is an implied comparison between the plays. We can read Clay in *Dutchman* as representing this “Malcolm type” as well.

In *Dutchman*, the Malcolm type is a poet not a militant, but that reveals a deeper parallel. The play follows a young Black bohemian named Clay, with no political affiliations to speak of, as he rides the subway. On the train, he is approached by a white

³² Baraka remembers *Blues* opening before *Dutchman* in February. However, *Blues* debuted on April 23rd and *Dutchman* on March 25th. Of course, it is possible Baraka saw an earlier rehearsal.

bohemian woman and, throughout the course of the play, she escalates from flirtation to a racially-charged fight. Famously, Clay responds to this provocation with a lecture about white people's relationship to Black music: "They say, 'I love Bessie Smith' and don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, 'Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.' Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she's saying, and very plainly, 'Kiss my black ass'" (*Dutchman*). Almost as if he is picking up where Baraka left off in *Blues People*, Clay outlines a hidden meaning to blues music. Baldwin reveals this same secret of the blues through the words of Richard Henry's father, Meridian, who in the titular moment of the play explains to his white friend that this music is an expression of his rage. Following this line of thought, Clay returns to the connection to poetry, claiming that he writes in place of killing. Black poets follow the same substitutional logic as musicians "If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors." Likewise, the poet's craft of making metaphors and other poetic devices are understood to be disguises for the kind of militancy and violence a Malcolmite openly expresses. By putting these words in the mouth of a poet and the songs of Bessie Smith, Baraka distributes this form of agency widely.

Specifically, *Dutchman* represents this Malcolmite militancy in its most dispersed and antipolitical form, the riot. It is tempting to read this play as an allegory for Baraka's political development and his imminent departure from the Lower East Side to set up BARTS in Harlem. The problem with this reading is not only that its premature, predating BARTS by almost a year. It ignores Baraka's previous political development

outlined above. Baraka was not the naïve apolitical poet that the play depicts Clay as. What is new for Baraka in 1964 is the growing network of autonomous groups and militants not necessarily aligned with a political organization. This is why it is significant that Baraka puts the Malcolmite rhetoric in the mouth of an unaffiliated poet and imagines the same rebellion in popular musicians. Rebellion in *Dutchman* is autonomous and decentralized. Like the riot to come, conflict spills out into public spaces like subway trains. Although it ends tragically for Clay, this young poet first imagines a “all these blues people” in an apocalyptic vision that recalls Touré poem, “Song of Freedom.” A rebellion of poets and musicians, a rebellion of an entire culture, implies a rebellion without clear leaders or centralization. Not long after the play’s debut and the arrests of so-called Blood Brothers, Harlem would witness one of the first of many rebellions in the 1960s that followed this anarchistic pattern.

It was in during that summer that Baraka created In/Formation, the organization that would create the first project universally recognized as part of Black Arts, BARTS. In/Formation and, by proxy, BARTS did not arise ex nihilo, nor did they simply build on organizations that came before them. They both arose out of a wave of autonomous organizing that generated an environment of militancy under the flag of Black Nationalism. Yet, there was something anarchistic about this nationalists’ emphasis on autonomy and decentralization. Autonomy is not enough to call these Black Nationalists groups anarchists, although called anarchists they were, at least as an accusation. To understand the basis of this accusation, we need to turn to the development of BARTS. At its most basic, BARTS relationship to anarchism results from the legacy of the Harlem

riot, and the revalorization of spontaneity that accompanied it. BARTS tried to infuse this spontaneous rebellion in Harlem through the development of what they name the Black Arts.

The Black Nationalists Meet the Anarchists Downtown

After the names of ‘Federalists’ and ‘Anti-authoritarians’ had been used for some time by these federations the name of ‘anarchists’, which their adversaries insisted upon applying to them, prevailed, and finally it was revendedicated.

—Petr Kropotkin

On Guard and Umbra had primarily been organized around writing projects, even if their contributors were also activists and revolutionaries in addition to journalists and poets. BARTS was In/Formation’s ambitious project to set up a multi-use social space in the heart of Harlem, which would require the group to move out of the Lower East Side and run the operations of a building. At its core, BARTS was a collective project. It is usually associated with Amiri Baraka, but it should be understood as emerging out of the network of autonomous groups described above. Moreover, BARTS forms within the context of rising rebellion exemplified by the Harlem riot. It is easy to miss BARTS’ connection to the riot since the riot was characterized by apparently spontaneous and mobile action. In contrast, BARTS was, at least on the surface, an institution in a fixed site. To get below the surface, we need only turn to BARTS engagement in ephemeral and performance-based art. This includes theater, especially the public performances, but also BARTS broader public art and use of public space. BARTS’ concern for non-artifact art forms, which resist the commodity form, finds a basis in their Black Nationalist ideology, particularly their analysis of the primacy of Black music. If the expressions of

Black musicians could anticipate the autonomous action of their small groups, their improvisational virtuosity could model the direct action of the riot. Through Black Art performances, BARTS strove to go beyond their specific institution, reproducing the insurrectionary energy of the previous year's riot.

While In/Formation set the stage for BARTS, other Black Nationalist groups continued to develop their own response to the growing sense of rebellion inspired by the riot. Members of RAM worked in tandem with In/Formation to organize BARTS, while continuing their underground organizing. Although deciding to opt out of Baraka's core group, RAM members Muhammad Ahmad, Larry Neal and Askia Touré still played an essential role that is often downplayed. Baraka contributes to this confusion, claiming he did not know they were part of RAM (despite his partner's, Hettie Jones' claim that Ahmad sent him *Black America*). In his account, they are characterized as assistants and counselors (*Autobiography* 289-296).³³ Recent scholarship, especially the work of James Smethurst, has clarified their relationship, demonstrating the importance of their counsel to shaping BARTS.³⁴ Moreover, Neal and Touré organized a precursor to BARTS, a poetry reading series in Harlem with the Uptown Writers Group, and RAM assigned Neal

³³ Ahmad and Neal were new arrivals to New York, but, as stated above, Baraka had known Touré since 1961.

³⁴ Smethurst argues that "the essays of RAM members, particularly Neal, Touré, and Ahmad, in *Liberator* in the mid-1960s (after Neal's move to New York in 1964) significantly defined the ideological field of the Black Arts movement" (171). According to Smethurst, Ahmad claimed that Baraka consulted him about how to respond to Malcolm X's death and Ahmad directed him to start a cultural wing of the movement (171). Larry Neal characterizes Baraka's politics at this point as pre-nationalist and "anarchist" (15)

to work at BARTS when it opened (Smethurst 171). Outside of their cultural organizing, cells in RAM's Black Liberation Front network were escalating their guerrilla tactics. Perhaps this helps explain the secrecy surrounding RAM's activities and relationships.

According to Baraka, In/Formation was also a secret organization, but it had a public presence through poetry readings. A reading in early 1965 at St. Mark's Playhouse in the Lower East Side showcased In/Formation poetry, including readings by Baraka, the Patterson brothers, Leroy McLucas, Steve Young, and Marion Brown. Many of these poets had been on the "cultural nationalist" side of the split in Umbra. While none of these poets were, to my knowledge, members of RAM, the inclusion of the poet Nanny Bowe on the roster points in their direction. Her partner and former On Guard member, Walter Bowe, would be arrested within weeks of the reading for his part in a plan to blow up the Statue of Liberty and other national monuments. While this failed attack was exceptionally sensational, many Black Nationalists were involved in underground organizing. By 1965, according to Imari Obadele, "The underground movement had begun. It began in New York, you saw the brothers with the rifles, as well as the torches" (Salaam and Obadele).³⁵ Bowe was arrested with two other members of his cell, Bob

³⁵ Obadele was a Malcolmite known as Richard Henry at this time, a possible inspiration for the name of Baldwin's protagonist in *Blues*. He was the president of the organization Group of Advanced Leadership (GOAL) in Detroit. GOAL was one of the organizations to form rifle clubs in response to Malcolm X's call. In 1965, they held regular meetings for the Fox and Wolf Hunt Club, of which he was president (*Hearings* 1415). According to Obadele, the dissolution of GOAL led to his time involved in underground activity with no formal association until the formation of the Malcolm X Society, and subsequently, the Republic of New Afrika (Salaam and Obadele).

Collier and Khaleel Sayyed, a member of Charles Patterson's rifle club.³⁶ In addition to these autonomous activities, Sayyed had been sent by RAM into Malcolm X's newly formed Organization of African American Unity to develop a security wing (Stanford 106). Bowe, Collier, and Sayyed's cell of the Black Liberation Front was infiltrated by an undercover police officer who helped plan the bombing and coordinated their arrest before it was executed ("360 F.2d 1"). In this hostile and dangerous climate, In/Formation's poetry reading was one of the main public spaces where these underground militants gathered together.

In addition to readings, underground newspapers like RAM's *Black America* were essential for an analysis of the riots and other rebellions that connected poets to underground militants. Although, as Smethurst points out, *Black America* had little to say about culture (170), we know that Baraka was a reader of the publication, and it was influential on developing the broader Black Nationalist strategy. What *Black America* can tell us about Black Arts lies in the connection it makes between spontaneous direct actions and a history of Black revolt. In a *Black America* article titled "We Can Win," Ahmad lays out the history of slave revolts in America to encourage direct action. He re-envisions Nat Turner's rebellion as a model for contemporary struggle, arguing that "[c]ontrary to what most white historians would have us believe, the Turner revolt was . . . well coordinated and planned" (2). He uses the example of Turner to convince his readers that Black militants do not require state-of-the-art weaponry to overthrow the government and that, in fact, this might be the weakness in the current system:

³⁶ As mentioned above, it is likely Bowe was a member of Patterson's rifle club.

What we must understand is that 'Charlie's' system runs like an IBM machine. But an IBM machine has a weakness, and that weakness is its complexity. Put something in the workplace in an IBM machine and it's finished for a long time. And so it is with this racist, imperialist system. Without mass communications and rapid transportation, this system is through. (2)

For Ahmad, this strategy is intended to create "mass chaos," not positive institutions, far removed from the artistic projects of some of his readership (1). Yet, from a certain point of view, his recovery of Black history can be seen as part of the cultural project. In this vein, Ahmad addresses his readers as "blood brothers and sisters" to remind them of their shared history (and perhaps of the semi-mythical Harlem gang).³⁷ By arguing that this strategy of chaos comes from a shared Black history, Ahmad makes the case for a tradition of spontaneous direct action. If slave revolts were not reckless or random, but part of their shared patrimony, so too can be other forms of chaos, like the riot or the BLF bombing plot.

It is RAM's endorsement of chaos that made the originator of revolutionary nationalism, Harold Cruse, label them anarchists. Anarchist is often used as in a pejorative sense for people perceived as chaotic or unruly; however, Cruse's use has more depth than a common insult or political caricature. In *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Cruse reflects on the new development in Black Nationalism in the 1960s

³⁷ The same issue of *Black America* contains an article called "Long, Hot Summer" by Askia Touré predicting a summer of rebellion. *Black America*'s editors point out that the article was written in June before the riots in Harlem, Brooklyn, Rochester, Patterson and Elisabeth (13). Around this time, the media had begun to refer to the possibility of a "long, hot summer" because of a rise of crime perpetrated against white people by Black New Yorkers, which many had attributed earlier to the blood brothers gang. See for example, the June 28, 1964 article "New York: A Long Hot Summer of Racial Trouble" in the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*.

and discovers what he calls a Black Bakuninism tendency within revolutionary nationalism. His reference to historical anarchists such as Bakunin and Nechaev when discussing RAM and the BLF bomb plot demonstrates his sophisticated and historically grounded use of the term anarchist (*Crisis* 383). Cruse argues these revolutionary nationalists arrived at anarchism when they chose to go “beyond the mere armed self defense of Robert Williams,” who he thought of as a particularly militant reformist. (*Crisis* 365). Rather than Williams, Cruse finds the roots of these revolutionaries in what he calls “the accumulated history of incompetent methods” (*Crisis* 14). While RAM saw the slave revolts as their precursors, Cruse places them in the lineage of anarchist bombers and insurrectionaries of the turn of the 20th century Russia (*Crisis* 383).³⁸ However, RAM’s flaw is not merely following a white anarchist tradition, according to Cruse.

The problem with the anarchist tendency in revolutionary nationalism was “anarchists” like RAM lacked a positive project, particularly cultural institutions. Consequently, BARTS represented an alternative to RAM’s nihilism in Cruse’s view. As a revolutionary nationalist based in New York and teacher at BARTS, Cruse was

³⁸ Although Cruse sometimes uses anarchist interchangeably with “adventurist,” he does not turn to Vladimir Lenin (who popularized the term to describe anarchists), but Albert Camus for his main source on Russian anarchists. In *The Rebel*, Camus criticizes the Russian anarchists for their nihilist and individualist politics that he describes in terms of a peculiar dialectic: “These are the conclusions of individualism in revolt. The individual cannot accept history as it is. He must destroy reality, not collaborate with it, in order to affirm his own existence. ‘Negation is my god, as reality formerly was’” (153).

intimately familiar with In/Formation and RAM's milieu.³⁹ Cruse traces the roots of the problems in the new Black Nationalism back much earlier to his time organizing with On Guard, which he claims ignored proposals for economic programs in favor of protest actions (*Crisis* 366-7). Moreover, he found *Liberator* ideologically incoherent and accused it of political "eclecticism" (Tinson 132). The accusation of eclecticism was likely due to these Black Nationalists' close relationship with communists, not anarchists. For example, the BLF's co-defendants, whom they met in Cuba, were Quebecois supporters of the (Marxist-Leninist) Front de Liberation du Quebec. However, Cruse's focus on economic programs likely comes from his own early political evolution with the Communist Party USA. James Smethurst argues that, although Cruse's work with *Liberator* intentionally broke with the Old Left, his thought was still shaped by Marxism (132).⁴⁰ The decisive distinction between these factions was not their proximity to white ideology, but their antithetical position of the role of cultural institutions like BARTS. For Cruse, BARTS was on the side of a positive project, an alternative culture, but, for RAM, culture was still allied with insurrection.

While working with BARTS, Askia Touré wrote an article for *Liberator*, "Keep on Pushin': Rhythm and Blues as a Weapon," that fused his ideas on culture with

³⁹ According to some members of Umbra, Cruse began working on *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* as early as 1961, while still involved with On Guard for Freedom. See the interviews with Oren. For discussions of his relationship to BARTS, see Jerry Watts' *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual Reconsidered*.

⁴⁰ Like much recent scholarship, Smethurst has emphasized the continuities between 1960s Civil Rights and Black Power movements and the Old Left. In other places, Smethurst de-emphasizes Cruse's break with the CPUSA and refers to Cruse as a "bridge" to the Old Left (273).

insurrection. In this article, Touré examines rhythm and blues as the latest development in Black music, which he argues is the root of Black culture. Channeling Baraka in *Blues People* and Nat Turner equally, his starting point is spirituals, which he understands as disguised messages for “resistance, escape, or revolt” (86). Touré also anticipates Baraka’s next book on jazz, *Black Music*, arguing that developments in music are expressive of a Black experience with a consistent attitude, what Baraka calls “the changing same.” For Touré, the changing tastes in music are consistent expressions of precarity and adaptation, repression and revolt. His focus is not jazz but rhythm and blues, yet his description makes rhythm and blues as much of an improvisation as jazz. Furthermore, he argues for the importance of rhythm and blues to the Civil Rights movement and the recent riots. These are no mere pop songs; in Touré’s view, the “Same Old Song” becomes a marching song for “Black Armies” in the Watts riot and “Dancing in the Streets” is “the Riot-song that symbolized Harlem, Philly, Brooklyn, Rochester, Patterson, Elizabeth,” the riots of 1964 (88). Along with this list of riots, he memorializes a list of significant figures: “For Dinah Washington, Sam Cooke, Nat Cole, Eric Dolphy, James Chaney, James Powell, Medgar Evers, Brother Malcolm, Leon Ameer, Walter Bowe, Khaleel Sayyed, Robert Collier” (89). Not all the figures are dead, but the rollcall makes them martyrs to a shared cause. The list traces a line from rhythm and blues artists to Civil Rights icons through James Powell, whose death sparked the Harlem riot, to the BLF bombers, on trial at the time.

Touré’s essay provides insurrectionary hermeneutics of rhythm and blues songs, and, at the same time, the essay acts as an example of poetic improvisation that merges

culture and insurrection. Part prose and part poem, “Keep on Pushin’” is both a discussion of Black Arts and a work of it. The hermeneutics that discovers revolt in rhythm and blues and discovers a creative improvisation in pop song formula is complimented by Touré’s poetics that place these songs in the insurrection called for in “Song of Fire”:

Rhythm and Blues is merging with the Revolutionary Dynamism of COLTRANE of ERIC DOLPHY of BROTHER MALCOLM of YOUNG BLACGUERRILLAS STRIKING DEEP INTO THE HEARTLAND OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE. The Fire is spreading, the Fire is spreading, the Fire made from the merging of dynamic Black Music (Rhythm and Blues, Jazz), with politics (GUERRILLA WARFARE). (89)

Touré assembles a diverse ensemble of musicians and revolutionaries, either playing together or fighting together. His hermeneutics of rhythm and blues can also be understood as an improvisation, making something new. This process, I contend, is similar to what the so-called Black Bakuninists have done with revolutionary nationalism, interpreting it and radicalizing it.⁴¹ While Cruse’s revolutionary nationalism seeks a cultural form to anchor it, these revolutionary nationalists turn whatever they touch, theory or art, into a weapon for mobile guerrilla warfare.⁴²

⁴¹ Cruse’s revolutionary nationalism anticipates this process since his theory hinges on the radicalization of Black Nationalism. He traces his ideas to the conservative program of Booker T. Washington, followed by the more radical “Back to Africa” program of Garvey, and arriving at his own revolutionary perspective. It is any wonder that RAM would reach their own radical reading of this history?

⁴² Touré observes that songs are already turning away from classic themes of love, toward what he ambiguously calls “ways” and “things.” These things are only defined by comparison, but it is clear he does not mean artifacts or commodities. Notably, he calls these things “bombs,” which invites comparisons between songs and the BLF. More

When the Black Nationalists in the Lower East Side moved to Harlem and set up BARTS, they were attempting to bring their insurrectionary energy into the neighborhood through theater and music. The bombing campaign by the BLF had failed before it began. A week later, Malcolm X, whose break with NOI had inspired hope in his leadership, was assassinated. Since Sayyed was involved in organizing with Malcolm, Ahmed has interpreted these events as interrelated, a sequence of cause and effect (Stanford 107).⁴³ RAM members Larry Neal and Herman Ferguson were in attendance at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem when Malcolm X was shot (Woodard 62).⁴⁴ Baraka and In/Formation were attending a book party in the Lower East Side where Leroy McLucas brought the news (Baraka, *Autobiography* 293). The next day, they announced their intent to move to Harlem and open BARTS (Woodard 64). In a manifesto, “Revolutionary Theatre,” read just days before the announcement, Baraka ironically invites the white middle class in his audience to join him: “DO YOU WANT TO SEE PEOPLE REALLY DANCING AND SINGING??? ALL OF YOU GO UP TO HARLEM AND GET YOURSELF KILLED. THERE WILL BE DANCING AND

ambiguously, he describes it as “black magic,” which reminds us of the more common definition of “black arts” prior to this movement (89).

⁴³ The repression in that period continued with RAM leader Donald Freeman’s indictment by a grand jury and consequent firing from his job at a Cleveland Junior High School. According to Ahmad, others who had recently travelled to Cuba were subpoenaed by a grand jury in New York (Stanford 112).

⁴⁴ For Ferguson’s relationship to Malcolm X and RAM, see his memoir *An Unlikely Warrior*, co-written with Iyaluua Ferguson.

SINGING, THEN, FOR REAL!” (2).⁴⁵ This is a glimpse, however exaggerated by irony, of what Baraka expected to find lurking beneath the surface of Harlem’s culture.

This tongue-in-cheek gesture signaled Baraka and In/Formation’s departure from white audiences as they planned a Black Nationalist project, their friends from the now-defunct Society of Umbra maintained a more complicated relationship to the Lower East Side poetry scene. The Umbra poets on the other side of the split from the so-called “cultural nationalists” underwent further political radicalization in response to the riots as well. Their experiences brought them closer not only to Black Nationalists but to anarchists. Since the Lower East Side scene was concentrated around neighborhood institutions like Stanley Tolkin’s bar, Umbra was never that far from the anarchists they met through Aldo Tambellini and Group Center. In 1964, the anarchist milieu grew, evolving from informal conversations at Stanley’s followed by a study group at the loft of anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin, and an anarchist organization called the New York Federation of Anarchists (Biehl, ch. 5). Although the 43-year-old Bookchin was a veteran organizer, most of the new anarchists were young people from a post-Beat bohemian counterculture. Shared countercultural values led the future Black Mask member Allan Hoffman to set up a commune, where the anarchists held communal dinners and hosted events.⁴⁶ This commune was located a few blocks north of Tambellini and Tom Dent and

⁴⁵ “Revolutionary Theater” was not printed in the *Liberator* until July, 1965. However, the essay was initially commissioned by *The New York Times* in December 1964, and ultimately rejected. In the recording Baraka dates his ideas to “circa January 1965.”

⁴⁶ Joy Gardner describes this space as more of a community meeting space than communal living. While not perhaps not technically a commune, I retain Janet Biehl’s

in the apartment below Umbra poet, David Henderson. When a popular poetry venue, Café Le Metro, began to have licensing issues, Henderson and these anarchists began to host regular readings at the commune, known as the Bowery Poets' Co-op (Biehl, ch. 5). This new venue became both a poetry institution and a hub that brought together Black Nationalists and anarchists.

Among these young anarchists, a new insurrectionary current was forming, evident in their underground publications where they developed their ideas. The New York Federation of Anarchists study group ventured into pirate publishing, stealing paper and printing Wilhelm Reich's banned book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, for free (Biehl, ch. 5). A mimeograph magazine, called *Good Soup*, was printed at the commune (Biehl, ch. 5). In the broader milieu, anarchists were active in the Mimeo Revolution, printing various anarchist papers. A small group of young New York anarchists calling themselves Resurgence Youth Movement began printing their contribution, *Resurgence*, in the fall of 1964. In their first issue, they examined the youth fighting in the streets and rooftops during the Harlem riot, "with whatever weapons they could find, including the traditional insurrectionist weapon, the Molotov cocktail." They believed that "[t]his resistance to the armed authority of the State, which broke out spontaneously . . . should be heralded and praised rather than condemned" (Dix and Fenderson). In addition to local efforts, New York anarchists contributed to anarchist publications outside the city, notably including the similarly minded *Rebel Worker* in New York, which also printed a

term for the space to denote the countercultural sensibilities that animated their shared meals and events.

favorable report on the Harlem riot. In the same issue, *Rebel Worker* published one of its most famous pieces, “Mods, Rockers, and Revolution,” which extended this insurrectionary perspective to the growing rock and roll subculture. Consciously or not, the anarchist author Franklin Rosemont echoes Touré’s Black Nationalist assessment of Martha and the Vandella’s “Dancing in the Street,” interpreting this pop song in terms of spontaneous rebellion rather than pop formula, a sign of “the refusal to submit to routinized bureaucratic pressures” (131). For Rosemont, the massive popularity of rock and roll and its appropriation by British bands was a sign that spontaneous insurrection was catching on outside of the riots.

To a significant extent, the spread of insurrectionary thought goes against the trend of developing radical institutions like the Bowery Poets’ Co-op and BARTS. The fact that these institutions can be tied to the flourishing of a 1960s insurrectionary tendency poses somewhat of a paradox, at least within the anarchist tradition. For those anarchists who advocate mass organizing, insurrectionary is synonymous with anti-institution.⁴⁷ This distinction between mass organizing anarchists and insurrectionaries

⁴⁷ As discussed in the introduction, it is much easier to identify the parameters of pro-organization anarchists than the insurrectionaries. Here, the characteristics of the distinction have been drawn from Andrew Cornell’s *Unruly Equality*. Cornell’s categories are based to a great extent on the book *Black Flame*, written by two self-proclaimed “mass anarchists.” The authors contrast their anarchist tradition with an insurrectionary alternative that viewed “movements like unions are willing or unwitting bulwarks of the existing order, and that formal organisations are authoritarian” (Van der Walt and Schmidt 20). A shadow has been cast over their work as a result of the revelations that one of its authors, Michael Schmidt, was secretly involved in white nationalist organizing. While the other author, Lucien Van der Walt, has claimed that most of the work of *Black Flame* came from him not Schmidt, the book’s framework suffers not only from Schmidt’s contribution, but their dismissive bias against

can be traced back to anarchist interest in individualism, especially Karl Marx's contemporary Max Stirner. Stirner argues that revolution should be distinguished from insurrection because "[t]he revolution is aimed at new *arrangements*, while the insurrection leads us to no longer *let* ourselves be arranged, but rather to arrange ourselves, and sets no radiant hopes on "institutions" (201). Historically, this anti-institutionalism did not just resonate with individualists, but took root in differing insurrectionary anarchist thought, including the "anti-organizational" Galleanists. In the pages of the Italian-language anarchist newspaper, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, Luigi Galleani popularized spontaneous action as an alternative to the formal organizations of the trade union movement among Italian American anarchists carrying out a bombing campaign in the early 20th century (Cornell, ch. 1-2).⁴⁸ The new wave of anarchists in the 1960s carried on this suspicion of institutions, preferring spontaneous uprisings to formal organizations. However, many anarchists found themselves participating in formal institutions through their art, literary, and countercultural practices.

insurrectionaries. Nonetheless, I maintain this distinction because Cornell's book, even while privileging mass organizing, makes a strong case for a nebulous but identifiable insurrectionary tradition, exploring it relatively in depth.

⁴⁸ Although I am focusing on anarchist struggle in the United States, Galleani was born in Italy and died there after being deported. He continued to publish *Cronaca Sovversiva* in Italy for some time despite the fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. An insurrectionary anarchist tradition flourished in Italy, particularly in the 1970s, perhaps epitomized by the writings of Alfredo Bonanno. Like Galleani, Bonanno criticizes permanent institutions in his writing, arguing for temporary organizations that promote "self-management of the struggle, permanent conflictuality and attack on the class enemy" (13).

The overlapping informal networks of anarchists and Black Nationalists adds an additional wrinkle of complexity to this history. Art and literary-oriented institutions like the Bowery Poets' Co-op existed within and subordinate to their broader informal networks, which for some time still included the Black Nationalists developing BAM. While their friends worked to open BARTS, some of the former Umbra poets involved in the Bowery Poets' Co-op collaborated with Group Center on multimedia performances, the first of which was called "Black." By the mid-60s, Tambellini had established himself in the vanguard of multimedia art (Millner-Larsen 77). His multimedia practice allowed for unique collaborations and improvisation like "Black," which included readings by Ishmael Reed and Norman Pritchard.⁴⁹ Pritchard and Reed were not directly involved in establishing BARTS but were close to the members of In/Formation now going under the name "Black Arts." Reed lived with Askia Touré and the Patterson brothers in the Lower East Side before their departure for Harlem.⁵⁰ Not long after, Reed and other former Umbra poets joined In/Formation on stage for a reading at the Off-Broadway venue,

⁴⁹ According to Nadja Millner-Larsen, "'Black' involved dancer Carla Blank, and readings by Umbra poets Norman Pritchard and Ishmael Reed with Tambellini himself interacting with the 'lumagram' slides. 'Black' would ultimately develop into an extended work-in-progress through a series of performances with different participants" (77).

⁵⁰ Reed's relationship with Touré and the Pattersons complicates the idea of a "split" in Umbra over Black Nationalism. It is difficult to position him on one side or the other of the split. Indeed, he claims that he and his roommate Charles Patterson ended the conflict with the Umbra editors by returning their records taken from Norman Pritchard (Zamir 1138). As for Pritchard, Michel Oren suggests he collaborated with the Black Nationalist faction, allowing himself to be "kidnapped" along with his records as Umbra treasurer (Oren 174). Understandably, Reed refuses the absolute distinction between Umbra members as Black Nationalist or not. According to Reed, there were Black Nationalists on both sides of the split (Zamir 1138).

Actor's Playhouse. This event, hosted by Charles Patterson, brought together poets who had, on the surface, went their separate ways after Umbra split over their differences on the question of Black Nationalism. Both tendencies were represented with Lorenzo Thomas, David Henderson, and Calvin Hernton reading alongside Albert Haynes, Larry Neal, Steve Young, and Amiri Baraka (Riley 19). From a perspective that privileges their institutional affiliation, these poets would usually be placed in opposing projects, the Black Nationalist BARTS and the anarchistic Bowery Poets' Co-op. This shared stage reminds us that the initial context for BAM was not a clean break or a specific institution, but a network of venues, bars, and homes that served as hubs for cross-collaboration.

This is not to suggest that Black Arts poets had a congenial relationship with all these venues or their audiences. For insurrectionaries like Patterson, collaboration was not divorced from conflict. Hence, he opened the reading at the Actor's Playhouse with the proclamation that he hoped the performances would "run you out of the theater" (qtd. in Riley 19). Patterson's threat was intended for dramatic effect, but conflict sometimes accompanied poetry readings in this period. Most famously, the former Umbra poets who remained in the Lower East Side after the establishment of BARTS found themselves in violent melee at one of the dominant poetry venues, Café Le Metro. Accounts of the incident vary, and even its precise date is disputed. Michel Oren claims it happened in March 1965 (170), whereas Daniel Kane places it in the fall (54). Yet, the incident is illustrative of a growing conflictuality in the poetry world. Even though popular poetry venues like Le Metro had played an important role by initially bringing these poets together, Lorenzo Thomas characterizes their readings as "hijackings," suggesting a

confrontational atmosphere (qtd. in Kane 80). These hostilities increased when the proprietor of Le Metro, Moe Margules, began to use his venue to promote the Republican Presidential candidate and notable opponent to Civil Rights Act, Barry Goldwater (Kane 54). By 1965, political arguments between Umbra poets and Margules were common and, on at least one occasion turned violent.⁵¹ In this racially-charged altercation, Tom Dent was attacked, and Ishmael Reed came to his defense (Zamir 1135). For many poets, this spelled the end of readings at Le Metro solidified by Reed's scathing article on Le Metro in the premiere issue of *East Village Other*. The alternative provided by Bowery Poets' Co-op was the *coup de grace*.⁵² Importantly, this anarchist hub evolved not from increased emphasis on institutionalization, but from a growing conflictual atmosphere within poetry institutions.

We can speculate that this poetry hub incubated a growing insurrectionary tendency in the Lower East Side that included both anarchists and Black Power poets. While there is little record of the readings at the Co-op, signs of this confluence appear in Group Center's continued collaborations with former Umbra contributors. Among these, the collaborative multimedia performance "Black Zero" at the Bridge Theatre has been described in relative detail by Nadja Millner-Larsen. "Black Zero" demonstrates a shared

⁵¹ According to Reed, this was not the first occurrence of violence. He claims Margules went "after Archie Shepp with a meat cleaver [and] cane whipp[ed] Don Harrimann" ("Poetry Place Protest" 4).

⁵² Reed's article announces the end of Café Le Metro and proclaims the Bowery Poets' Co-op the successor of the readings. However, he admits that certain poets continued to read at Le Metro after the fight, whom he unfavorably compares to, among other things, Nazi-collaborators ("Poetry Place Protest" 4).

interest among the performers in the riotous energy of the long, hot summers. Like the previous performances in the series, “Black Zero” produced an aesthetic environment through video and audio improvisation. While drawing on techniques from both, the artists claimed “It is not a play. It is not a ‘Happening’....It is a bombardment of the senses” (qtd. in Millner-Larsen 84). This “bombardment of the senses” included Tambellini’s “lumagrams” projected on the walls, a dancer in a white gasmask, Ben Morea and Ron Hahne’s “clamorous machines,” free jazz by Archie Shepp and others, and Calvin Hernton reading poetry (Millner-Larsen 84-85, 155). Hahne and Morea, who would soon form the anarchist group Black Mask, used their “clamorous machines” to improvise with the jazz musicians. This sound can hardly be considered music; the machines used a drill on a cheese grater or a vacuum cleaner to produce noise that has been compared to a machine-gun (Millner-Larsen 84, 155). The resulting cacophony likely resulted in something resembling the noise of a conflict or a riot, a comparison reinforced by Hernton’s reading of “Jitterbugging in the Street,” his poem about the Harlem riot. Hernton, too, brings up “MachineGunFire!” making it all one word like an additional sound (280). In this environment, the soundscape would not be background to the poem but rather the poem an additional sound increasing the riotous energy of the performance. In the cacophony, one might hear a Black Arts poetic voice that seems to chime with the insurrectionary anarchist taste for the riot.

Hernton’s poem invites us to ask: what if anarchists didn’t so much influence Black Arts but rather the Black Arts brought attention to riots among anarchists? It is tempting to think of the riots as inherently the purview of insurrectionary anarchists, but,

in actuality, the young Lower East Side anarchists had little direct experience with riots in these early stages of their development.⁵³ While Hernton lived in the same neighborhood as the anarchists, his poem attempts to mediate the experiences of Harlemites for a predominantly white audience at the Bridge Theatre. The poem is structured through a series of negations, as the speaker seems to respond to a list of unspoken assumptions. This series culminates with a direct address to the audience in the second person: “You say there is violence in Harlem . . . I say there is no ‘violence’ in Harlem. / There is TERROR in Harlem!” (282). The “you” only sees the riots from a distance and understands what appears on the surface: the violence of rioters. The poem, on the other hand, looks into (as Baraka put it) what is “below the surface of things.” Hernton sets up his archaeological view of the riot by describing rioters as “jitterbugging,” which invites a Black Arts interpretation of this “dance” akin to his BAM contemporaries’ hermeneutics of pop music. If rioting is dancing, Hernton reminds us that the music is a history of terror inflicted on Black people. Rioters dance to a cacophony not unlike Black Zero:

To ten thousand rounds of ammunition
 To waterhoses, electric prods, phallic sticks
 hound dogs, black boots stepping in soft places
 of the body . . . (280)

⁵³ In her work on Group Center and Aldo Tambellini, Millner-Larsen asks us to consider another dimension of this relationship. Specifically, she points out that “little attention has been paid to the way in which [Tambellini’s] work interfaced with racial politics or the rise of the Black Arts Movement in New York” and takes on the task of untangling his “complex and often problematic relationship to blackness and the Black Arts Movement” (77).

Hernton follows Baraka and Touré by introducing a popular trend with origins in Black culture in order to highlight the connection between culture and political oppression. Furthermore, Hernton chooses an outdated dance. By 1965, jitterbugging, with its roots in Swing, was far from the free jazz or rock and roll enjoyed by the Lower East Side art world. For a hip audience, this dated reference provokes a disavowal, preparing the audience to reject this artifact of the 1950s, and explore the riot moving beneath the surface. In this poem's exploration of root causes, the budding anarchists would find a rationale for rioting. Yet, Hernton did not compose poetry only for anarchists or white audiences.

"Jitterbugging in the Streets" is, in other ways, clearly a Black Arts poem. For one, the published version addresses the poem to a fellow Black poet by name, Ishmael Reed. By addressing the poem "to Ishmael Reed," the reader can dis-indentify with the "you" of the poem, observing the ignorant/white addressees with ironic distance. This reading of the poem prioritizes its connection to the growing body of cultural production and interpretation within BAM, discussed above. Specifically, Hernton's poem responds to BAM's interpretation of "Dancing in the Streets," as a decoded version of the song, literalizing its connection to the riot. Furthermore, he connects the Harlem riot to the broader Black experience:

In the belly
 of a Harlem youth shot down by a coward crouched
 behind an outlaw's badge—
Mississippi
Georgia
Tennessee, Alabama
Your mother your father your brothers, sisters, wives
 and daughters

Up and down the hot land . . . (282)

Like Martha and the Vandellas, Hernton's poem is "calling out around the world," or at least to Black America, and connecting the riot to the broader Black Liberation struggle. It attempts to transcend his position in the Lower East Side. It is clear Hernton wants his poem to travel beyond the confines of the Gate Theatre or Bowery Poets' Co-op, and join the "dance" in the streets. Before its reading with Group Center, the poem had already circulated in a journal aptly named *Streets*.⁵⁴ Moreover, his work spread by its inclusion in the repertoire of local Black actors like Roscoe Lee Brown (Hernton, "Umbra" 582). In fact, Tom Dent initially discovered Hernton's work through Brown's recitation at a Harlem performance (circa 1959) organized by Langston Hughes' secretary, Raoul Abdul, before the formation of On Guard (Dent, "Umbra Days" 105).⁵⁵ In the years leading up to BARTS, Hernton's words found their way beyond the Lower East Side to Harlem and BAM.

Hernton and other former Umbra poets also made their way to BARTS. While only a few became part of the formal organization, many of them became key ingredients to the evolving concept of Black Arts and Black Nationalism. BARTS distinguished itself by hosting content that, as Harry Justin Elam puts it, was "by, for, and about black

⁵⁴ *Streets* was a radical literary magazine published in the Lower East Side. Issue two includes Hernton's poem alongside writing by Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Amiri Baraka. Baraka's contribution, "Three Movements and a Coda," was republished by anarchists, including Group Center's Ben Morea, in their paper *Guerrilla*, discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁵ Dent includes this event along with the formation of On Guard for Freedom as one of the origin points for Umbra ("Umbra Days" 105).

people” (2). At some productions, BARTS excluded white audiences and critics (Elam 43). However, this should not be misunderstood as resulting in political unity since even self-described Black Nationalists were in competition in Harlem. This often-volatile mix demonstrated, as Baraka commented in retrospect, that “‘Black’ is not an ideology” in itself (qtd. in Diggs Colbert 197). BARTS attracted the attention of members of the Nation of Islam and its splinters, orthodox Garveyists like Eddie “Porkchop” Davis, neo-Garveyists like Carlos A. Cooks, idiosyncratic thinkers like Harold Cruse, traditionalists like the Yoruba Temple, and forward-thinking afrofuturists like Sun Ra, to name just a few (Baraka, *Autobiography* 316; Neal 18). As mentioned before, RAM remained close to the core of BARTS and Larry Neal was assigned to work with them (Smethurst 171). Aside from politicians, Neal claims that “any black poet of any significance read in [BARTS poetry] readings. Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, Calvin Hernton . . . Although, if you talk to Ishmael Reed today, he might try to give you the impression that he wasn't there” (Neal18). Reed and others’ desire to distance themselves from BARTS retroactively, often along ideological grounds, has left us with a more static and monolithic image of BARTS. On closer inspection, BARTS was dynamic, heterogeneous, and prone to spontaneous outbursts that spilled out on the streets. No wonder that the older, orthodox Black Nationalists regarded BARTS, which debuted through street parades through Harlem, as “an invasion” (Neal 18).

The establishment of BARTS was less like opening a theater venue than an event that, at least temporarily, reshaped the neighborhood. While BARTS only operated for a short period of time, the daily operations were hectic. As both a theater and a school,

BARTS supplied regular programming for the neighborhood in their building at 130th street and Lenox avenue. As Baraka recalls, much of the programming brought them into highly visible places in the neighborhood:

Every day that summer, we sent four or five trucks out with improvised stages that painter Joe Overstreet thought up, four banquet tables held together with clamps. Music, Drama, Poetry, Dance, with one truck with easels for the daily exhibition of graphic arts, all over Harlem. We performed in parks, vacant lots, playgrounds, Project Spaces, on the sidewalks, in the streets, alleyways . . .”
(*Digging* 255)

Their opening parade down 125th street was only a prelude, a demonstration of their process-based practice. BARTS was never confined to a specific location but rather they performed “Each night [at] a different location, five nights, sometimes six, a week” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 307). That summer, while Watts burned on the opposite coast, Harlem remained relatively peaceful but not silent. By taking over public space for what we must imagine as disruptive and militant performances, BARTS can be seen as an attempt to continue the riot by other means. Yet, the performers were not content with cultural interventions. When the blackout hit New York City in November, Baraka and his comrades circled the neighborhood in a truck mounted with a loudspeaker—much like the “jazzmobiles” they used for outdoor performances—to encourage their neighbors to take action, announcing “Now's the time . . . They can't see you. Rip these stores off. Take everything. Come on out and get it!” (Baraka, *Autobiography* 323).

It is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between this incitation to riot and the performance of Black militancy in their plays. The spontaneity of their plays does not allow for an easy distinction between act and simulation. The case of the blackout is a classic case of a speech-act, demanding action but also taking part by inciting it. Even

though Baraka admits that the rioters were already looting by the time they made their announcement, no one would argue that they were merely representing the action. When it comes to their plays, for example, *Black Ice*, a play written by In/Formation's Charles Patterson and co-directed by Calvin Hernton (Grundy 5), the line blurs. While downtown Hernton read his poem "Jitterbugging in the Streets" with anarchists inspired by the riots, uptown he helped with *Black Ice*, a play meant to inspire revolt. The affinity of the play with the riot is clearest in an anecdote from Baraka about a singular performance: "One evening we sent [Charles Patterson]⁵⁶ with a pistol chasing one of the characters in *Black Ice*. The bloods seeing a brother with a gun chasing somebody who looked like a white man made a crowd instantly, and the show began!" (*Autobiography* 307). This promotional technique relied on the spontaneity of the crowd and their (potentially volatile) participation. The crowd was channeled into a theater audience but not before first responding to an incitation to something else.

Black Ice explores the atmosphere left in the wake of the Harlem riot to consider new militant possibilities opening up. Elam points out that this play "reflected and benefited from the surrounding atmosphere of urgency and upheaval" (38). More than this, the play represents an attempt to make theater take action and contribute to an ongoing revolt. Patterson does not represent the mood of the riot as much as he contemplates what the play can offer the rioters. The play opens in what appears to be a futuristic setting, long after the riot and in the midst of a guerrilla war not unlike Chester

⁵⁶ Baraka uses the potentially derisive pseudonym "Shammy" derived from Patterson's real nickname, Charmy.

Himes's *Plan B* (discussed in chapter four). However, the play is set in the here-and-now or, as the opening puts it, "[t]he time is the present" (559). This presentism is complicated by the fact that the one-act play takes place after the arrest of a fictional Black Nationalist leader, John Chambers, has attempted to overthrow the government, and picks up with a guerrilla cell in the last stages of their plan to free him. By the time we meet the guerrillas, they have killed two cops and kidnapped a congressman to trade for their leader. The play gives us a glimpse of action at a much higher level of intensity and ambition than the riot, as if to provide advice on possible next steps.

The cell's orderly plan could be read in contrast to (or a refinement of) the spontaneous chaos of the riot. The play, however, does not allow this easy contrast and opts instead to dramatize the conflicting tendencies within the growing movement. For example, the play offers the audience the fantasy of an organized escalation, but the cell's murder of two police is presented as an unplanned "accident" (559). Likewise, a cell member admits that the plan to trade the kidnapped congressman for John Chambers is unlikely to succeed. It seems inevitable that they will be forced to kill the congressman instead, yet, this act might itself be successful in its own way. A guerrilla tells the congressman that "[y]our death should step up the pace of the revolution. Another page will be written, and we will have entered yet one more phase" (560). Patterson leaves open the question of whether this is a more desirable outcome than their leader's freedom. As a result, there are two competing readings of the play, one that advocates a sophisticated plan similar to (or better than) the guerrillas' and one that argues for the value of spontaneous direct action. What the theatrical space provides is more nuanced

than instructions; the play works within the aftermath of the riot to work out the possibilities and complications. This complexity is exemplified by the trope of the displaced leader, guiding the spirit of their plan but incapable of managing their spontaneous actions at a distance.

In reality, the problem of leadership plagued BARTS, leading to fracturing and the ultimate demise of the project by the end of the winter. Baraka was initially the default “charismatic leader” of the project, but what little unity surrounded his leadership very quickly dissolved. The militants who came together around the concept of Black Arts grew increasingly distanced over religio-political tendencies. Art was never completely unifying since at least two key BARTS members, Abdul Aziz and Abdul Latif, were not involved in the artistic mission. Political tensions existed between different sects of Marxists and Muslims from the beginning, and only sharpened over time. The core group broke apart and BARTS became home to several decentralized factions, none of which were interested in an anarchistic horizontalism. Members of Baraka’s core group, formerly In/Formation, split into two camps, Johnny Moore and Charles Patterson identified with NOI whereas his brother William Patterson formed a dissident Muslim faction with Aziz, Latif, and others. This dissident sect would eventually name themselves Hanafi Muslims, a newly emerging tendency led by Aziz’s father-in-law and ex-NOI National Secretary Hamaas Abdul Khaalis. As Baraka highlights, it is not clear if Moore and William Patterson were official members of NOI at this time, or if they represent another dissident Black Muslim faction (*Autobiography* 300-1). Members of RAM ended up warring with both new factions and labeled these

dissident Black Muslims “anarchists,” repeating the pattern of ascribing this epithet to political opponents (Touré, Interview).

On closer examination, it is not the Patterson brothers’ anarchistic politics but their patriarchal behavior that created the most problems in BARTS. Certainly, the development of the Hanafi faction drove a wedge in the group and Baraka, suspecting William wanted to take the reins of leadership, left the group for Newark, New Jersey, by the end of 1965 (*Autobiography* 301). Fearing reprisals for his departure, Baraka carried a sawed-off shotgun whenever he returned to the city (*Autobiography* 327). Conflicts grew more intense between BARTS participants after his departure, especially after *Liberator* published a memorial issue for Malcolm X on the one-year anniversary of his death. RAM were ardent supporters of Malcolm X and Touré and Neal were contributing editors of *Liberator*, leading to further animosity with the rival Black Muslim factions (Touré, “Black Arts and Cultural Revolution”). According to Touré, this precipitated a coup in the BARTS in which the self-proclaimed “Captain Johnny Moore, and Captain Charles Patterson of the NOI” pulled guns on him. Touré departed from New York soon after and his apartment was bombed (“Black Arts and Cultural Revolution”).⁵⁷ While Touré identifies this as the “breaking point,” he claims his initial problems with Moore and Patterson stemmed from their treatment of women in the space (“Black Arts and Cultural Revolution”). Likewise, William Patterson was known for misogyny, including taking issue with Baraka’s sister having a position of power at BARTS and, even before

⁵⁷ Fortunately for Touré, he came to the meeting with two former bodyguards of Malcolm X, Albert Uthman and the poet John Ferris, who were able to diffuse the situation (Touré, “Black Arts and Cultural Revolution”).

BARTS opened, slapping Barbara Ann Teer, the star of the play that he was meant to direct (Baraka, *Autobiography* 299). The conflicts in the space culminated when Johnny Moore shot Larry Neal in the leg because, according to Reed, Charles Patterson grew possessive of a woman (“LeRoi Jones” 19).⁵⁸ An anarchist perspective might identify a shared source for both this sectarian jockeying for power and this toxic environment of misogyny: a commitment to hierarchy.

The lack of women in the groups discussed thus far reminds us of the rampant sexism within Black Arts organizing. Many women played important roles in the development of BAM—Touré names Sonia Sanchez, Barbara Hamilton, Barbara Carter, Kimako Baraka, and Kelley Marie Berry as some of the women involved in BARTS—but they were not as often recognized as part of the hierarchy (“Black Arts and Cultural Revolution”). Their exclusion might not be as evident in a play like *Black Ice*, in which Charles Patterson has the sole woman character complete the mission by killing the congressman (565). Yet, even here, her role as guerrilla is subordinate to housework: earlier in the play, before taking up the gun, she is ordered to serve the men drinks (561). We could read Sonia Sanchez’s 1968 play *The Bronx is Next* as a satirical response to this patriarchal arrangement. The men in her play all have names conspicuously similar to key figures in BARTS. The women in the play, sarcastically named “Old Sister” and “Black Bitch,” are the inadvertent victims to the militants’ badly-conceived plan. Interestingly,

⁵⁸ Reed also claims it was Charles not William who assaulted Teer, which is possible since he was more involved in theater (“Leroi Jones” 19).

Sanchez's name-game implicates both RAM faction (Neal and Touré) and the NOI faction (Moore and Patterson) in the same sexist behavior and failed guerrilla strategy.⁵⁹

BARTS unraveled quickly after the altercation with Larry Neal. However, it should be remembered that for roughly 1/3 of BARTS' year-long existence it was under the Pattersons' control. According to FBI documents, they may have even renamed the project to "Hanafi Mussulman School of Islam" (FBI 6). While there is little evidence of continued performances after Baraka left, the space was still active. When police raided BARTS after Neal fingered Patterson and Moore, they discovered guns, a pipe bomb, and a shooting range in the basement. A posted notice that the range would be inspected by "Khan, the leader" suggests further organization in the space. Baraka assumes that the shooting range was the work of Charles Patterson (*Autobiography* 329).⁶⁰ Yet, it is unclear if he or William should be identified as "Khan." It is possible that Charles resolved the friction with the Hanafi faction, since, after his arrest, this group attempted

⁵⁹ La Donna Forsgren points out that Sanchez denies any relation between these fictional characters and the actual members of BARTS. It is hard to believe Sanchez expects us to believe it is a coincidence that her characters have such similar names Roland (Askia Touré aka Roland Snellings), Larry (Neal), Charles (Patterson), and Jimmy (Johnny Moore/Baraka's Jimmy Lesser). Of course, it is possible this coincidence is just meaningless or arbitrary. In fact, Forsgren identifies Jimmy as Jimmy Garrett, opening up the possibility of other interpretations. Garrett, to my knowledge, was not involved in BARTS and was acquainted with Sanchez later through her time in San Francisco.

⁶⁰ It is entirely possible that Khan was William Patterson's nickname. The pseudonym that Baraka uses in his *Autobiography*, Tong, might imply this nickname. Yet, it is not clear if William was involved in these events or ever fully embraced the Hanafi tradition. It was his faction that took up this banner and came to his brother's aid but, in accounts of these events, there is no sign of him. Oren claims he was hospitalized with a nervous breakdown around this time (248). Another remote possibility is that Khan refers to the head of the Hanafis, Hamaas Abdul Khaalis.

an armed bank robbery to raise money for the arrestees. Unfortunately for them, they too were quickly arrested. This failed bank robbery is best understood not as one haphazard incident but a further sign of BARTS involvement in underground organizing. After all, this failure was not uncharacteristic of underground organizing in the period; as Imari Obadele points out, “nobody [in the underground] seemed to know how to rob a bank decently” (Salaam and Obadele). Yet, this lack of funds and mounting criminal charges had an adverse impact on their ability to run BARTS and it soon closed its doors. Predictably, BARTS became collateral damage to an insurrectionary strategy that valued spontaneous direct action over institutional longevity.

In the history of BAM, BARTS catalyzing role often appears as an ephemeral blip of an ultimately failed attempt to create a lasting institution. However, if we slow down the narrative, as we did here, to examine the intricacies of this hectic year, a different picture emerges. Instead of a specific institution devoted to developing Black Arts, BARTS appears as the name for a relatively prolonged attempt by artists, inspired by the riots, to make their creative works operate in tandem with spontaneous direct action. In content, these works invoked the riots to explore their possibilities and, in form, they spilled out across the city as disruptive performances. Not confined to a neighborhood or an ideology, they overlapped with the anarchists with whom they shared an affinity for autonomy, spontaneity, and insurrection. From a shared insurrectionary perspective, BARTS’s major flaw was not its inability to coalesce a lasting institution. Even the setbacks from their underground actions could be recuperated as fruitful experiments in the modality of the riot. What I and their critics label the “anarchistic” aspects of BARTS

were, in this light, generative. What was indisputably detrimental to their strategy was the competition for hierarchical power, particularly its misogynistic manifestations and the turning inward of conflict resulting in the dissolution of any mutualistic coordination. In his future projects, Baraka would attempt to create unity through a clearer hierarchical structure. From a strictly anarchist perspective, he tried to solve the problems inherent to hierarchy through more stringent hierarchy. Yet, even at his most hierarchical and most nationalistic, there is a latent anarchism. This anarchistic quality is particularly evident in his 1967 play, *Slave Ship*, which provides a vision of successful and collaborative insurrection. While early BAM had qualities that chimed with anarchist autonomy and spontaneity, in *Slave Ship*, we see these two qualities give rise to third (latently anarchist) principle, generalized insurrection.

The New Ark Riot

Slave Ship was written just before the Newark rebellion, and its impending explosion is the heat you feel.

—Amiri Baraka

While *Slave Ship*'s montage of events covers settings ranging from the transatlantic slave trade to slave rebellions and the Civil Rights Movement in the American South, Baraka places the play in the context of the Newark riot of 1967, which took place not long after the play's composition (*Motion* 12). The Newark riot, taking place between July 12th and July 17th, was one of two largest riots (alongside Detroit) of the "Long, Hot Summer of 1967," a year that saw widespread rioting across 149 American cities. When Baraka was arrested during the events, he became one of the best-

known rioters of the period.⁶¹ As we have established above, Baraka's extensive history with urban riots and the politics surrounding them went back years before. His play's claim to the riot was less of a forecast than a sign of continuity that connected his experiences in New York with Newark. However, Baraka was not based in Newark for the entire period leading up to the riot. In fact, he taught in San Francisco that spring, arriving back in Newark just in time for the "explosion." It was in San Francisco that Baraka was introduced to an expanding network of radicals shaping the politics of Black Power, including Black Arts West, US, and the Black Panthers. I argue that Baraka's expanding view of Black Power informs the rebellion found in *Slave Ship*. Furthermore, this generalized rebellion resists a reductive interpretation of Baraka's politics as homogenous or dogmatic, instead shifts the focus to the dynamic network informing Baraka's Black Power period. In this network, I retrieve an anarchistic vision of generalized insurrection, spreading in Black Power's insurrectionary groups that resonates with *Slave Ship* and BAM.

If the Watts riots had not already made it clear, the summer of 1966 signaled that the growing militant politics would not be confined to central locations like New York City. This growing militancy was exemplified by Kwame Ture famously calling for "Black Power" in Greenwood, Mississippi during a speech in June. The location of this declaration for Black Power may have fueled its popularity, since Greenwood was where RAM members Muhammad Ahmad and Askia Touré visited two years earlier to organize

⁶¹ Baraka's name is arguably more synonymous with the Newark riot than John Smith, the cab driver whose beating at the hands of the police sparked the rebellion.

a “black nationalist self-defense project” in the spirit of the Deacons of Defense (Stanford 93). By 1966, Touré had relocated to Atlanta to work with Ture’s organization, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). There, he would help draft their infamous Black Power position paper, published in selections that summer in *the New York Times*.⁶² Other RAM members (Ahmed Evans and Ali Khan) were active that summer in Cleveland at the Black Power social center the Jomo Freedom Kenyatta (JFK) House and during the Hough riots which they saw as an opportunity to “test guerrilla warfare” (Stanford 68). For Baraka, the Hough riots confirmed that the Civil Rights Movement was conceding to a new Black Power model (*Autobiography* 350). Meanwhile, in New York, Larry Neal began the first chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) inspired by SNCC’s experiment with the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (the decentralized character of the BPP is further discussed in chapter four). Ture spread the message of Black Power through frequent travel that summer, including a visit to Newark where he was a featured speaker at the Afro-American Festival of the Arts organized by Baraka as his first major act upon moving to Newark (Baraka, *Autobiography* 335).

In Newark, Baraka built on the vision of a local Black Arts social center that he began with BARTS and made ties with a broader Black Power network. This organizing laid the groundwork for the production of *Slave Ship*. In 1966, Baraka created the BARTS-like Spirit House in a three-story building near downtown Newark, which

⁶² *The New York Times* used the position paper as evidence that the new Black Power position within SNCC was planned in advance since the paper was written in the winter before Ture’s speech (Roberts 1). However, the position paper was not official policy of SNCC.

operated as Baraka's home, a poetry venue, theater, and gathering place (Baraka, *Autobiography* 335-350). Additionally, the Spirit House put out an underground newspaper chronicling events in Newark (Baraka, *Autobiography* 344). Through Spirit House, Newark became a locus of Black Power, visited by other key figures including Maulana Karenga, leader of US in Los Angeles, and Jimmy Garrett, head of the Black Student Union at San Francisco State University. Baraka's increased connections to West Coast hubs of Black Power were central to his evolving understanding of Black Arts as a movement. Therefore, it is necessary for us to briefly turn to the history of BAM and Black Arts West in California.

Like BARTS, Black Arts West (BAW) was the result of writers, mainly brought together by the print culture of the underground press and the desire to establish institutions. One of the first of their attempts was the Black Arts West Theatre, established in 1966 on Fillmore street in San Francisco. The founders of this theater, Marvin X, Hurriyah Asar, and Ed Bullins, came together in a milieu based in BAM journals like *Soulbook*, *Journal of Black Poetry*, and *Black Dialogue*.⁶³ Although BAM's origin is usually located at BARTS in Harlem, James Smethurst argues that these California-based print publications were "some of the most important national institutions of the movement" (13). Their print culture helped bind writers together across the country, especially making ties between the major coastal cities. For example, Bobb Hamilton, formerly of *On Guard* and BARTS, became the San Francisco-based

⁶³ Marvin X, in particular, was an editor for *Black Dialogue*.

Soulbook's "east coast representative," while remaining in the Lower East Side.

Simultaneously, this print culture drew people together and allowed for the proliferation of small groups, many of which splintered from broad-base groups like Afro-American Association. By the time Baraka arrived in the California, San Francisco was home to a chapter of RAM, the BPP claimed Oakland as its headquarters, and US organization was helping build the Black Congress in Los Angeles. The Black Arts West Theater's proximity to this print culture and political milieu reminds us that Black Arts West was more than a venue, it was part of a dynamic movement.

While not anarchists, this cluster of autonomous groups had a relationship—if a vexed one—to anarchism. The conflicting approaches to anarchism was perhaps most concentrated in the project that superseded the Black Arts Theater West, the Black House. It owed its existence to the partnership of the Black Arts West Theater founders with an emerging literary talent, Eldridge Cleaver, just released from prison.⁶⁴ Like Spirit House in Newark, this space functioned as a home for these writers, a venue, and gathering space. The Black House was a central meeting place for the Black Power milieu and hosted both some of the most important alliances of the period, as well as its greatest conflicts. Situated in walking distance from the hippie neighborhood, Haight-Ashbury, they were in close proximity to the anarchists known as the Diggers (discussed at length in chapter three). While anarchism was far from the most important point of contention in the Black House, their relationship to these anarchists is illustrative of their

⁶⁴ In fact, Marvin X initially met Cleaver while he was still in San Quentin, when the editorial board of *Black Dialogue* visited the prison (Smethurst 282).

interdependence and mutual influence. For example, Roy Ballard, a member of RAM-affiliated Black Panther Party of Northern California, joined the Diggers and opened his own version of a free store, called “the Black Man’s Free Store.” Ballard’s rivals in Oakland’s Black Panther Party of Self Defense relied on the Diggers to print the first issues of their newspaper. Furthermore, it has been speculated that the Black Panther Free Breakfast for Children programs were inspired by the Diggers’ free projects (Hodgdon, ch. 1).⁶⁵

Beyond this mutual aid, these rival factions meeting in the Black House shared an interest in, to a limited extent, anarchist theory, which they applied in their own unorthodox way. The ensuing ideological battles among Black Power groups—especially their painting of rivals as anarchists or tools of white groups—sometimes obscures their history with anarchist thought. After opening his free store, Ballard was relentlessly mocked by his former Black Panther group in their paper, *Black Power*, for suggesting that the Diggers could benefit their movement by getting the hippies to riot. Their rival faction in Oakland were careful not to implicate themselves too deeply with a predominantly white anarchist organization. Huey Newton refers to the Diggers obliquely as a “hippie underground mimeographing outfit in San Francisco” (142). However, the Oakland Panthers printed and sold a classic anarchist text with a cover design by the

⁶⁵ Tim Hodgdon bases this claim on the account of Black Panther Chief of Staff, David Hilliard. In *This Side of Glory*, Hilliard fondly remembers the Digger Emmett Grogan’s regular deliveries of free food to the Panther headquarters (Hilliard and Cole 150). Later, he recalls the development of the Breakfast for Children program, springing from several points of origin: “The program grows naturally from our new lives—Emmett Grogan’s [sic] free food baskets, the need now to feed our own kids, our desire to show the community we do something more than shoot it out with cops”(Hilliard and Cole 211).

artist Emory Douglas, *Revolutionary Catechism* by Sergey Nechaev. Newton, who believed this work was authored by Mikhail Bakunin, credits it as one of the sources for his concept of “revolutionary suicide,” a justification for risking death for the movement (5). Cleaver, who in the introduction to the BPP printing calls Bakunin “the epitome of an activism,” discovered the *Revolutionary Catechism* in the 1950s long before joining the Panthers and considered it his “bible” (31).⁶⁶ It is not clear how or why this anarchist text circulated in Black Liberation circles. Nevertheless, it certainly seems to have influenced other militants as well, particularly RAM, who plagiarized it for one of their internal documents to promote organizational discipline, “Duties of the Black Guard.”⁶⁷ While its application was unorthodox, anarchism was one of the political threads binding these Black Power and BAM groups together.

In 1967, the Black House represented an opportunity for these nascent insurrectionary organizations to find each other. When Baraka looked West that spring, he would have seen his expanding network converging in a concentrated point at the

⁶⁶ According to Cleaver in *Soul on Ice*, he discovered this text while studying the history of socialism in prison shortly after the death of Emmett Till. This was Cleaver’s first adult prison sentence and he credits his reading of Nechaev for inspiring the attitude of “ruthlessness” that he practiced thereafter. Although he does not make a direct connection, he implies that his perverse interpretation of the “ruthlessness” of this anarchist classic led him to become a rapist. He describes his time between prison sentences in terms borrowed from anarchism “I had stepped outside of the white man’s law . . . I became a law unto myself” and “[r]ape was an insurrectionary act” (32-3). When Cleaver opened the Black House, he had recently been paroled from prison for rape charges and financed the project with the advance from this book.

⁶⁷ *Revolutionary Catechism* is plagiarized word-for-word except where the word “revolutionary” is replaced with “black guard,” “comrades” for “brothers,” and, more significantly, the term “State” substituted for the more abstract term “enemy.”

Black House. This concentration of forces occurred on the stage and, to an extent, their collaborations began there. For example, the Oakland BPP leader Bobby Seale acted in Black House founders' early plays (Smethurst 283). Furthermore, when Baraka came to San Francisco he made the Black House his headquarters and enlisted the BPP artist Emory Douglas for set design (Baraka, *Autobiography* 350). Baraka recalls that armed Black Panthers provided security for poetry readings at the Black House (*Autobiography* 353). Performance theorist Mike Sell describes BAM and the BPP's approaches to the arts as diametrically opposed (233). Indeed, the differences between participants in the Black House infamously led to the expulsion of non-BPP residents, mainly artists, and public attacks on their cultural nationalism (Smethurst 283). However, the decisive reasons for the split in the Black House are clouded by the polemics that accompanied them ever since.⁶⁸ Moreover, their approaches to theater seems far from clear opposites.

⁶⁸ The eviction of Marvin X and his associates from the Black House is usually understood as part of the Oakland Black Panthers growing animosity toward "cultural nationalists." However, political differences and rivalries were complicated and sometimes entangled with personal problems. After all, the Black House was a collective home. Marvin X's faction took issue with Cleaver's romantic relationship with his white lawyer, Beverly Axelrod. According to Baraka, this relationship was further complicated by Cleaver dating one of the performers who rehearsed at the Black House, who became pregnant (*Autobiography* 354-5). On a more political note, the Oakland Black Panthers were simultaneously clashing with their rivals in the Black Panther Party of Northern California, ultimately leading to the dissolution of this faction. Both groups used and collaborated in the Black House, but the Oakland faction ultimately decided there could only be one Black Panther Party. In their writing, the Oakland Panthers attribute their problems with their rival faction to their hypocrisy concerning armed self-defense. Bobby Seale labels this group the "Paper Panthers," deriding them as "cultural nationalists" and mere "intellectuals" (113-25). Yet, we should be careful not to reduce history to the polemics of a dominant group. Muhammed Ahmad, for example, claims that the RAM-affiliated Black Panthers of Northern California objected to what they considered unnecessary provocation of openly carrying guns in armed patrols (Stanford

In fact, Marvin X takes credit for the Panthers distinctive street protests, writing “I did teach Huey simple street theatre which the Panthers executed to the max, with their costumes and political rhetoric” (ch. 3). Even if there were incompatible differences in style, the Black House offers a glimpse of a missed opportunity for coordinating them into a diversity of tactics for their shared insurrectionary movement.

We can read Baraka’s *Slave Ship* as channeling this potential insurrectionary movement before the Black House self-destructed. *Slave Ship* was written before Baraka visited the Black House, but similarly grasps the spirit of an expanding Black Power network in concentrated space. However, *Slave Ship* presents insurrection in a relatively romantic form that could be described as anarchistic, especially in comparison to the reality of rival factions competing for leadership that Baraka would soon become intimately acquainted with when he visited the Black House. I will turn to the play’s simulated insurrection shortly but first it is important to acknowledge that Baraka’s unusual stage directions creates the anarchistic conditions for its success. For one, Baraka’s script, or what he called “a long note to the actors,” is remarkably short even for a one act play, which acts as an invitation for improvisation (*Motion* 11). This collaboration between dramatist and performers extends to the audience who Baraka aimed to draw into the performance by keeping the theater in darkness through much of the play and permeating the space with strong smells (*Slave Ship* 132). Baraka wanted to create what he called a “total atmos-feeling,” simulating the experience of the slave ship

122-3). I discuss the complex makeup of the Black Panther phenomenon further in chapter four.

for the audience and the crew reciprocally. In its most famous production, the 1969 performance at the Theatre-in-the-Church, the director and set designer transformed the stage into a cross-section of a ship that rocked back-and-forth (Elam 77). Furthermore, the stands were designed to be uncomfortably cramped and the actors used the entire theater as a performance space, turning them into an extension of the stage (Elam 78). The play created an environment of participation, shared experience, and spontaneity.

This last, the sense of spontaneity, generates an anticipation for the play's concluding insurrection and, conversely, reminds the audience of the precarity and oppression of the slave ship in the play's opening. The play roots the destructive spontaneity of the riot in this history of precarity, but it is not presented as simple question of cause-and-effect. That the insurrection and slave ship occupy the same space does not necessarily conflate them as much as it arranges a microcosm, or "ark," of Black history in the interior of the hold. Whereas the plays surrounding BARTS sought to take theater into the insurrection brewing in the streets, *Slave Ship* performs the inverse operation drawing this action into the relatively static environment of the theater. This way a broad swathe of tumultuous experiences can coexist, making nonlinear connections in the historical narrative possible. As a result, *Slave Ship* operates outside of linearity in a kind of mythical time. *Slave Ship*'s mythical time turns the specified local action into an allegory or as the subtitle of the play suggests, "a historical pageant." Baraka believed it was important to recover the past or at least the intensity of feeling experienced in the past (*Motion* 11). Ultimately, *Slave Ship* is interested in feelings not exploring the details of historical events in a traditional realist mode. For example, when the play briefly turns

to Nat Turner's rebellion, it is not to mine these events for overlooked strategic ideas. Instead, the events are performed entirely in darkness—with the revealing exception of the rebellion's betrayal by an informant—invoking the “atmos-feeling” of insurrection rather than its particulars. This lack of delineation, I argue, is what allows Turner's insurrection to foreshadow the current growing one, drawing the Black Power movement, as a whole, into its orbit.

If the play, as I suggest, stages not just the energy of the imminent Newark riot but the network of Black Power factions, it does so in terms of a leaderless revolt. There is little if any figurative representation of protest or resistance until the end of the play. Up until that point, resistance is registered through dissonant and portentous sound, screams, drums and noises reminiscent of BAM collaborations with Group Center. *Slave Ship*'s phonic dissonance creates an atmosphere of open improvisation and collaboration, accentuated by the soundtrack provided by jazz musicians. Beyond the reference to Nat Turner, there is little sense of representatives or leadership on stage. In contrast, the promotional material, notably including a detailed illustration for the review in *Negro Digest*, represents the performance figuratively. However, the only likeness of a “leader” in the *Negro Digest* illustration is the severed head of what appears to be Martin Luther King Jr. (62). In the play, this severed head belongs to an unnamed preacher who collaborates with the enemies of the Black Liberation Movement, represented by an off-stage “white voice.” Thus, the only semblance of a leader is understood as a traitor, who can only be said to be part of the rebellion by provoking it. Allegorically, his death at the hands of the rebels is the death of this form of leadership, marking the opening of an

insurrection set in the present. There is no Nat Turner leading the play's final insurrection.

The insurrection at the end of *Slave Ship* is mobilized through song and dance. The play draws on the insurrectionary vision of the Black Power movement but locates the insurrection's impetus in culture, which is to say within the purview of BAM. However, the play does not replace a political leadership with a cultural one. Instead, the play deploys these cultural techniques to generalize the riotous energy in a decentralized fashion within a broader context that encompasses the audience. Moreover, the play decenters the artist in the song and dance, turning it into a ritual. In the climax of the play, a chant summons the people to rebel, "[I]ike dead people rising" (143).⁶⁹ This closing ritual recalls the common understanding of "black arts" as primarily a form of magic, and not an art in the commodified "art object" sense. Mike Sell highlights the anti-artifact or process-based practice of BAM, which resists the spectacle of white capitalist society. Furthermore, this practice can equally remind us of how BAM makes available the possibility of a leaderless revolt. The chant turns into a song:

When we gonna rise up, brother
When we gonna rise above the sun
I mean, when we gonna lift our heads and voices
When we gonna show the world who we really are (143)

The subjective "I" in these lines is misleading since the stage directions call for all to sing (143). In a play set mainly in darkness, the emphasis on the visual ("show the world")

⁶⁹ Curiously, the chant begins without words in a Buddhist-like "om" (143). This is one of several notable similarities between aspects of this play and Askia Touré "Song of Fire," which contains a similar combination of references discussed above.

seems strange at first. As they sing, however, the lights begin to rise showing the cast “in the slave ship in Miracles’/Temptations’ dancing line” (144). This reference to rhythm and blues realizes the synthesis of music and riot that Askia Touré and Baraka had envisioned. According to the stage directions, the dancers encourage audience participation, bringing them into the dance. Adding to this mix, a cast member must throw the preacher’s severed head among the dancers at the precise moment, clearly echoing Baraka’s “Revolutionary Theatre”, when the “dancing starts for real” (145).

The reality of this dancing as insurrection is mitigated by its context in the theater. While the theater allows for an allegorical microcosm of the Black Power movement and some audience participation, it is still relatively divorced from the action in the street. However, performances of the play were sometimes accompanied by a riotous response. Kalamu ya Salaam recounts that the audience were “ready to revolt” after a performance of the play in Greenville, Mississippi (Bailey et al 28), and Cheryl Finley points out that the audience practically destroyed the stage in Europe (144). Meanwhile, the real-life correlate that inspired Baraka in this period, the Black House’s *mélange* of groups fell apart while Baraka was visiting California that spring, preempting a broad-base coalition in the Black Power movement. Baraka was out of town, visiting the US organization in Los Angeles, and while he was gone a “strange thing had happened”, namely Cleaver and the BPP removing the artists from the space (Baraka, *Autobiography* 358). Not long after, Baraka returned to Newark, where the riot erupted seemingly without the direction of any faction of the Black Power leadership. Baraka describes the riot in terms that summon up

Slave Ship, remarking that the rioters “were like dancers whirling around and through the flames” (*Autobiography* 368). He was arrested on the first night of rioting.

After the Newark riot, Baraka became deeply involved in a milieu centered around the US organization, which, in many ways, epitomized the hierarchical and authoritarian tendency in “cultural nationalism” through the leadership of Maulana Karenga. Baraka became part of the leadership, taking the title Imamu, meaning “spiritual leader.” According to Komozi Woodard, it was not until this period that Baraka became an effective leader in the movement (51). The US organization’s emphasis on culture, developed around a cult of personality, had been used to distinguish them not just from BAM’s insurrectionary tendency but from revolutionary organizing altogether. While I do not have the space to detail the history of US here, it is important to note that this distinction has been overstated. Like the Black Panthers, US organized an underground paramilitary that “bank robberies, raids of armories, the development of explosive materials and devices, and so on. Those involved in the US underground were motivated by a drive to raise funds for the organization and prepare for a coming apocalyptic Black confrontation with the government, led by US” (Brown 90). Clayborne Carson adds that Karenga, in conversation, told him that he wanted US to be the cultural arm of the Black Panther-SNCC alliance (viii). What Carson calls a “lost opportunity” was the result of growing divisions between BAM and Black Power groups, heralded by the Black House eviction. These divisions culminated in a deadly shootout between US

and the BPP. However, it is important to remember that, beneath their polemical battles, many of these groups had emerged with a shared vision of insurrection.⁷⁰

By 1968, Baraka had developed a different vision for Black Nationalism far removed from insurrection. When the next wave of riots broke out after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Baraka's Newark-based United Brothers argued against rioting (Woodard 97). This opposition to rioting came from the belief that the Black Nationalists could gain political power through electoral means in Newark. Baraka even went so far as to hold a joint press conference to denounce rioting with a Newark police detective and a leader of a white racist vigilante group, which one underground paper ironically called "his first public step toward an alliance with a group of whites" (Garson 1). Baraka blamed rioting on instigators in "white-led, so called radical groups" (Garson 1). In later years, Baraka admitted that "to be on such a television program was asinine" (*Autobiography* 384). Even at the time, Baraka remained ambivalent about this electoral strategy, arguing that: "The elections would be beginning, but we cannot trust elections. We must trust to the building of strong Black forces . . . But we must move to take over the cities, elections or not" ("Newark" 81). It was not as if Baraka—like the "white voice" in *Slave Ship* who mishears "revolt" for "vote" (139)—mistook elections for rebellion. More accurately, he was still following Malcolm X's call for "the ballot or the

⁷⁰ Furthermore, the splits were never as decisive as they seem. Scot Brown overviews the unexpected similarities of US and the BPP in his book-length study, *Fighting for US*. Besides the similar praxis, there are countless overlaps and collaborations between so-called cultural nationalists and revolutionary nationalist. Even with the Black House split, Baraka points out the evicted artists held a benefit for the BPP soon after (*Autobiography* 359). Over a year later, Emory Douglas cited Baraka's work as an example of the revolutionary art prescribed by the Panthers in "Revolutionary Art / Black Liberation."

bullet” and, this time, chose the ballot. The insurrectionary vision in BAM literature like *Slave Ship* transcends the alternatives posed by any leadership, whether Malcolm, Karenga, or Baraka. In these works, we can glimpse a nonhierarchical vision of insurrection. BAM is by no means anarchist, but its insurrectionary vision holds open the possibility of an anarchist interpretation.

Conclusion

I’ve been working on an essay about Amiri Baraka, trying to explain the idea that if you turn the surrealist image - defined by Aimé Césaire as a “means of reaching the infinite” - if you turn that inside out what you will find is that phrase from Baraka: “the magic words are up against the wall motherfucker.”

—Sean Bonney

My interpretation of BAM is an attempt to recover the emergent anarchistic forms and practices in this movement. The literary works, in particular, make space for anarchism in their exploration of political uncertainties, spontaneous improvisation, and collaborative compositions. Still, it is their political organizing in the name of Black Nationalism that set the stage for the autonomy, spontaneous rebellion, and decentralized networks. Later developments in BAM, including Baraka’s involvement in US, could be explored for continuing anarchistic developments in, for example, their ideal of “communalism.” Furthermore, elements of BAM could be rightly understood as precursors to the “Black Anarchism” of the former Black Panthers like Ervin, Balagun, and Alston. These anarchists build on BAM and Black Power’s fight against white supremacy and extend it to fighting for an egalitarian, nonhierarchical society. Through anarchism, Alston arrives at insights about nationalism with universal relevance: “Black

anarchists and anti-authoritarian revolutionaries understand the limitations of nationalism in terms of its historical sexism [and] hierarchy” (73-4). Although BAM reproduced much of the sexism and hierarchy Alston identifies, we can understand them as precursors to a “Black Anarchism.” Black Anarchism is oriented to an emancipatory Black Radical Tradition, rather than a Eurocentric social movement. This “small *a* anarchism” has been essential to the Black Anarchist tendency, found in 21st century organizations like the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement.⁷¹ While I have identified important and complex overlaps between BAM and the broader anarchist movement, it is important to recognize that BAM and other Black Power militants contributed their own autonomous, insurrectionary practices and concepts. In fact, we can point to how BAM’s concept of insurrection helped transform segments of the anarchist milieu.

In the next chapter, I explore two of the principle anarchist groups taking inspiration from Baraka and developing new innovations, Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker (or the Motherfuckers). These overlapping anarchist formations had roots in Group Center, who, as mentioned above, collaborated closely with Umbra. Similarly, Black Mask made ties with Baraka and Larry Neal, finding common ground in BARTS militant theater. A principle member of Black Mask, Dan Georgakas, remembers that BAM and Black Mask “planned some joint ventures that never materialized”

⁷¹ Not to be confused with the similarly named 1960s organization, *Revolutionary Action Movement*, discussed in detail in this dissertation. For a discussion of Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement’s politics in relationship to the “small *a* anarchism” in the Black Radical Tradition, see the episode of *It’s Going Down* podcast “A Discussion On The Growth Of Black & Anti-Colonial Anarchist Formations.”

(McIntyre 159).⁷² After the Newark riot, Black Mask members became part of the activist network supporting Baraka through his legal battles.⁷³ Their artistic response to Baraka's sentencing was to stage a provocative intervention, firing blanks at the poet Kenneth Koch during his reading.⁷⁴ Not long after, a new anarchist organization, the Motherfuckers, formed, taking their name from the final line of the poem read by the judge during Baraka's sentencing: up against the wall, motherfucker. While they felt this close affinity to Baraka and BAM, the Motherfuckers entered insurrectionary activity by popularizing a specifically anarchist organizing form, the affinity group. The affinity group privileged decentralized, autonomous groups, allowing them to skirt the conflicts of competing for leadership that characterized BAM. These anarchists did not, however,

⁷² Georgakas is careful to point out that "It wasn't like we were a bunch of white guys looking to ape or follow the Black Movement. It was more the case that we were angry and looking around to find other angry people. We weren't interested in being a support group" (McIntyre 159).

⁷³ In a letter intended to organize legal defense for Baraka, Dan Georgakas circulated a contact list of potential allies, including the phone numbers of fellow Black Mask members, Ben Morea and Allen Van Newkirk. Other members of the art and literary community were also included on the list, notably, a central figure in the New York School of Poetry, Ann Waldman.

⁷⁴ There are indications that Baraka would have appreciated Black Mask's choice of targets despite his friendship with Koch. Baraka sent Koch a hostile postcard in 1965. The front had a picture of a Black man praying, surrounded by alligators. On the back, Baraka wrote to Koch: "Better start saying your prayers if you think you can spend your time playing chess while millions struggle! Love LeRoi 2X" (Letter to Kenneth Koch). It's unclear if Baraka's signature, an obvious reference to NOI chosen names, represents an intermediate stage between his identity as LeRoi Jones and his self-designation as Amiri Baraka. To my knowledge, this is the only instance of this signature. The signature and message to Koch could be a bit of role-play, or it could be an example of Baraka's growing militancy.

sidestep conflict in general. In fact, as we will see, the affinity group crystallizes in conflict with the surrounding artistic and political milieu.

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Chapter 2

THE POETICS OF AFFINITY GROUPS: BLACK MASK, UP AGAINST THE WALL/MOTHERFUCKER, AND THE LIMITS OF UNIVERSAL PARTICIPATION

“The stores are deserted . . . Many of their windows were broken early in the morning by a roving band of anarchists—the dreaded “Black Block”—shouting slogans and concealing their faces in bandannas. I recognize them. They’re the modern day Motherfuckers, reveling in the sound of broken glass.”

—Osha Neumann

“The black bloc was a loosely organized cluster of affinity groups and individuals who roamed around downtown, pulled this way by a vulnerable and significant storefront and that way by the sight of a police formation.”

—ACME Collective, N30 Black Bloc Communique

It wasn’t until 1999 that many people noticed what had been happening at protests. That November, a large group converged in Seattle to disrupt the World Trade Organization meeting — memorably including a contingent forming a black bloc. This black bloc—consisting of approximately two hundred people smashing storefronts and damaging police cars—was one of the first of its kind to receive any notice in the American context.¹ The distinctive tactic of wearing all black clothes and masks to hide

¹ In *Who is Afraid of the Black Blocs*, Francis Dupuis-Deri points out that the widespread media coverage of the Seattle World Trade Organization protests helped spread some of the main characteristics of the black bloc: black clothes, masks, and property destruction (33). While the media noted the more visible signs of the black bloc, it is still up to Dupuis-Deri to explain the internal structure of the bloc: informal and egalitarian affinity groups that privileged close friendship over formal organization (38). I will return to the significance of friendship in the next chapter.

their identity was imported from Europe, specifically the Autonomist squatting and antifascist movements in Germany.² While this disguise was the tactic that allowed demonstrators to act with less fear of reprisal in the aftermath of demonstrations, another and less remarked upon tactical form was required as the building block of this autonomous, nonhierarchical, and unpredictable action: the affinity group. The small and tightly-knit affinity group was the preferred grouping for anarchists responding to the call for the day of action “organized in a non-hierarchical way, as a DECENTRALIZED AND INFORMAL NETWORK of autonomous groups” (N30 Collective). The concept of affinity groups, despite their lack of notoriety, had been in circulation among demonstrators long before the appearance of the black bloc in America or Europe.

As a result of murky historical memory, it was long forgotten that the affinity group was first popularized as a tactic for demonstrators among anarchists in the United States in the 1960s. In the participant documents of the Seattle black bloc, *The Black Bloc Papers*, a demonstrator, David Van Deusen, traces the affinity group to a non-anarchist group in the 1960s, the relatively well-documented Weather Faction of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (10). In the pre-underground phase, SDS’s Weather Faction (later known as the Weather Underground) organized confrontational street demonstrations. The most infamous was the “Days of Rage” in Chicago 1969. According to former Weather member David Gilbert, these “small units allow[ed] for greater mobility and initiative if/when the demonstration gets raucous, and can be a way to carry

² For more on the origins of the black bloc tactic, see Geronimo, *Fire and Flames: A History of the German Autonomist Movement*.

out different tasks if it's a situation where people are going to move around police barricades or break windows at government or corporate buildings" (98). In his retrospective on the Seattle black bloc, Van Deusen remarks on the unlikely origins of this popular anarchist formation in the infamously hierarchical Weather Faction, who organized their affinity groups around a cell structure with a tight chain of command (Van Deusen et al 29).³ It is probable that other anarchists forming black blocs were familiar with and sympathetic to the tactics of this well-known organization despite their antithetical positions on hierarchical organizing. What was less acknowledged or known in the early days of this anarchist resurgence in the late 1990s was that the Weather Faction was following the example of their anarchist contemporaries, who initially popularized the concept of affinity groups in ephemeral leaflets and underground publications like *Rat Subterranean News*, *The Berkeley Barb*, and *Barricade*. These publications clarify that the affinity group was originally popularized not by the Weather Faction but by Lower East Side anarchists, involved in the overlapping groups Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker.⁴

³ Van Deusen claims one of the first American black bloc's expressed political sympathy with the Weather Faction at a demonstration in a 1996 demonstration against the Democratic National Convention: "For this bloc of 50 the first stop was the former sight of the statue commemorating the police who were killed at the Haymarket incident in 1886. The statue was blown up by the Weathermen to open the Days of Rage in 1969, and blown up again by the Weather Underground in 1970. There the protesters spent several minutes paying respects to their comrades in struggle who came before" ("The Black Bloc Against Bill Clinton").

⁴ There was a direct line of influence and even some overlap with the Weather Faction. While organizationally distinct groups, members of Weather Faction frequented the Lower East Side spaces organized by the Motherfuckers and joined in their actions.

There is not a lot of literature discussed in this chapter. The affinity groups developed by Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker were more at home in the protests organized by New Left groups like SDS than in literary circles. However, it was in the literary circle, not the New Left, that their affinity groups took form. I explore the affinity group's poetic genesis and evolution in the experimental literary communities of 1960s New York's Lower East Side, associated with the New York School of Poetry. The New York School, Daniel Kane argues, used collaborative poetry readings and mimeographed magazines to build a sense of community (xiv-xvii). By democratizing poetic creation, the New York School poets forged a literary equivalent to SDS's experiments in participatory democracy. Participation was a defining feature of avant-garde poetry in the 1960s, shaping an aesthetic that Juliana Spahr points out "is not individualistic . . . but rather anarchically communal" (*Everybody's Autonomy* 60). This anarchic communalism followed broader art trends that supplanted the individual artist

Before joining the Weather Underground, Jeff Jones and Jonathan Lerner both spent time with the Motherfuckers. Lerner claims that "the first discussion [Jones] ever participated in about establishing a secret, armed organization took place at Ben [Morea, founder of the Motherfuckers]'s place around that time. 'I was torn, as I always was torn, between politics and mayhem,' Jeff recalled. But instead, a loose and very public group was formed—part agitprop commando and part street-fighting squad, which included Jeff, Phoebe, me, and others from SDS—that became known as the Motherfuckers" (J. Lerner 27). What Lerner calls a street-fighting squad is likely a more expansive group than the affinity group known as the Motherfuckers, and it is unclear if Lerner was considered a member by the core group. Former-Motherfucker Osha Neumann admits that student activists were drawn to the Motherfuckers, but he holds back on including them in the group (*Up Against the Wall* 57). Similarly, former-Motherfucker Ben Morea claims that their influence on Weather Faction was mediated by his close friend in the Weather Faction, J.J. (aka John Jacobs) (Personal Interview).

with collaborators in what Claire Bishop has termed “participatory art.” Bishop poses participatory art as an alternative paradigm to understanding 20th century artistic innovation as social and theatrical, epitomized by the practices of Black Mask’s friend Jean-Jacques Lebel (Happenings), and their erstwhile comrades the Situationist International (“constructed situations”) (3-4).⁵ As anarchistic as participatory art might be, the anarchists in Black Mask developed their practice in contrast to their literary and artistic contemporaries. They forged an affinity group, a smaller group within and against the larger participatory community of the New York School.

Thus, the origins of the affinity group as a protest tactic can be rediscovered at the intersection between the New Left and countercultural poets and their shared participatory ideal. However, the affinity group emerges not through collaboration but conflict, both between former poets and activists and, initially, within the poetry world itself. Both Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker (hereafter shortened to the Motherfuckers) drew their membership from artistic communities, forming a small insurrectionary anarchist current within the broader counterculture. As anarchists, their marginal position was reflective of the common arrangement within social movements, in which anarchists are frequently what Alfredo Bonanno calls an “active minority” (13).

Bonanno and other insurrectionary anarchists argue that anarchists should embrace this

⁵ Both Lebel’s and the Situationists’ relationship to participatory art is complicated by their later renouncement of these art practices in favor of political action. According to Bishop, Lebel understood the Happenings not in contradistinction to political action, but that the aims of these artistic experiments were fulfilled by the insurrectionary tactics of France’s May ’68. She remarks that “[i]t is telling that after May ’68 Lebel ceased to make Happenings, considering them to have been achieved in the occupations, barricades and protests” (103).

minority position, rather than attempting to build or take the reins of a mass movement (14). Likewise, this is the position that Black Mask took up in the bohemian world of the Lower East Side, neither striving to lead the avant-garde (as individual artistic geniuses) nor conforming to its community (as participatory artists). Instead, Black Mask began a campaign of increasingly conflictual interventions in the art world, culminating in their best-known action, a theatrical “assassination,” using a real gun but loaded with blanks, at a poetry reading of New York school poet Ken Koch (discussed in detail below).

Without mentioning Black Mask by name, Daniel Kane describes this event as “a particularly radical manifestation” of the participatory poetry, seemingly unaware of the group behind the action, or their anarchist challenge to the participatory model that he champions (172). This was one of the final actions taken by Black Mask, who at this point stood on the threshold between poetic performance art and political direct action.

Black Mask’s actions as an “active minority” in the poetry world, I argue, produced the framework for the Motherfuckers’ affinity group model, which these anarchists introduced to street protests. The Motherfuckers picked up where Black Mask left off, building on the experiences of their experiences in the art world to take up a similar interventional style within New Left social movements. As outsiders to the New Left’s mass organizations like SDS, the Motherfuckers spread the concept of the affinity group as an attempt to intervene and re-shape these struggles along anarchist lines. The affinity groups, characterized by its small, horizontal, leaderless structure, privileged close relationships and informal, decentralized networks over traditional institutions. As they insist in their discussion of the affinity group, “What we have called the de-structuring of

organization is not merely a proposal to create a particular structure . . . but is designed to show the relation of all organization to its base & to insure control at the bottom” (Hahne and Morea 112). By introducing the affinity group to social movements as an organizing model that worked against hierarchical structure, the Motherfuckers directly contested the existence of mass organizations rather than offering an alternative outside of them. As we will see, the Motherfuckers did not promote their model through conventional mass organizing but through a creative and confrontational practice that followed the patterns set by Black Mask. If there is, as I argue, a continuity between the Motherfuckers’ turn to affinity groups and their experiences with poets, it is the result of Black Mask’s confrontational stance toward poets that attempted to bring the insurrectionary spirit of the long, hot summers into the centers of culture.

Who is an Affinity Group?

In other words, shall we cure the evils of democracy by more democracy, or shall we cut the Gordian knot of popular government with the sword of dictatorship?

My answer is neither the one nor the other. I am against dictatorship and Fascism as I am opposed to parliamentary regimes and so-called political democracy.

—Emma Goldman

If we miss the link to Black Mask, the history of the affinity group can appear like a purely political innovation by activists. As students of anarchist history, the Motherfuckers adapted the small fighting units or *grupo de afinidad* from the Spanish Civil War into the affinity group to turn protests into riots. While the Motherfuckers took inspiration from the militant anarchist tradition, they were also responding practically to

the contemporary struggles taking place in American streets. They realized that contemporary conditions, especially the developments in police crowd control, required new forms of organizing (Hahne and Morea 111). Moreover, as anarchist activists, they desired a form of political organizing that would be “characterized by a structural looseness which guarantees the identity and self-determination of each affinity group” (Hahne and Morea 128). Yet, the Motherfuckers’ differences from the political approaches of New Left organizations like SDS goes beyond their affiliation with the politics of anarchism or social movements and, moreover, only becomes clear when we include their experiences with art, literature, and the counterculture.⁶ These connections become clearer if we begin this history with the Motherfuckers’ direct predecessor, the artists and poets involved in Black Mask.

It is no coincidence that the affinity groups find their origins among artists and poets, particularly those who ultimately rejected their artistic roles. Their early desire to go beyond art and literature – to take up a marginal and antagonistic stance within a community – informs their desire to go beyond the organizational forms of the New Left, to cherish the autonomy of the decentralized small group, and to create something new. Their preference for the self-determination of the small group positioned them to reveal and critique what both poets and activists share as an underlying culture: the participatory model. Located at the intersection of 1960s art and politics, Black Mask’s proto-affinity

⁶ The distinction between a political anarchism and the Motherfuckers’ engagement with culture relates to the discussion of Murray Bookchin’s distinction between social anarchism and lifestyle anarchism in the introduction.

group developed a critique of the illusion of full participation within the New York School of Poetry.

Black Mask's relationship to the broader poetry world was informed by their anarchistic antagonism with authority and society, which differs greatly from the participatory model prevalent in both countercultural and political milieus. While political organizing based on "affinity" suggests a convivial social dynamic, conflict was central to Black Mask's approach to group formation. On October 10th, 1966, Black Mask announced their formation in a demonstration shutting down the Museum for Modern Art, where they described their motivations in this simile: "Like the streets of Watts we burn with revolution" (Hahne and Morea 5). In this way, Black Mask took the riots as the model for their identity.

In contradistinction, the prevalent model of group identity in the broader community was rooted in ideals of direct democracy.⁷ Both the New York School poets in the Mimeo Revolution and SDS in the New Left shared an interest in the politics of participation.⁸ At first glance, this shared interest appears to be the effect of the

⁷ The prevalence of direct democracy can be understood as a form of prefigurative politics. For more on prefigurative politics, see Carl Boggs who coined the term in *Radical America* and Wini Breines who developed *Community and Organization*. Breines begins her exploration of prefigurative politics with a slogan popular with the affinity groups in Berkeley, "the issue is not the issue" (18). However, for these 60s anarchists, the slogan simply called for militants to join small groups that fight for liberation rather than campaigning for the demands of traditional organizations (Hahne and Morea 119).

⁸ For a more mainstream account of SDS and its development, see Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties* and Kirkpatrick Sale's *SDS*.

increasing influence of SDS and the antiwar movement, politicizing the cultural workers in the art and literary world. However, the reverse is true; the participatory model was the result of artistic themes impacting the 1960s political framework, developing a political tendency Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello call the “artistic critique.” As Jasper Bernes argues, it would be wrong to overstate the agency of artists in shaping the political landscape—poets and artists did not create this new political model or rebellion—but they did help to articulate new goals (9). Following Boltanski and Chiapello, Bernes explains how the social movements of the 1960s began to use aesthetic categories to describe their problems and desires. In social movement spaces, the alienation, authority, and monotony of work was posed against creative and active participation, invoking the quasi-utopian experiences available in participatory art, such as Happenings (9-11). The founders of Black Mask, Ben Morea and Ron Hahne, were veterans of participatory art from their time in Group Center and their involvement in experimental art spaces like the Bridge Theatre (discussed in the previous chapter). By the mid-1960s, however, Hahne and Morea concluded that participatory art was insufficient and Black Mask was formed to go in the direction of rioters toward political conflict. Yet, Black Mask’s continued interaction with these participatory experiments can still be instructive, helping to “map the impasses” that they needed to eventually overcome.⁹

⁹ I am drawing on Jo Isaacson’s discussion of later countercultural development, namely punk. She argues that punk could not overcome capitalist social relations, but it did delineate the obstacles that need to be overcome. Drawing on Lauren Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism,” Isaacson understands the utopian spirit of countercultures to be a potential obstacle in that the counterculture affirms its own group identity as somehow outside capitalism or able to overcome it. However, she finds the negativity in punk

Black Mask's move away from the art world around Group Center did not immediately immerse them in social movements. Initially, it appears to have brought them closer to literary circles. Through their mimeograph broadside also called *Black Mask*, this anarchist group became closely aligned with the burgeoning scenes of the Underground Press and Mimeo Revolution, then dominated by the counterculture poets in the New York School. The New York School scene was a fertile (if combative) context for testing out Black Mask's new group identity, since these poets were experimenting in poetic collaboration. As Daniel Kane argues, the poetry community created a welcoming space for social networking for poets attempting to create poems that emphasized orality, improvisation, and collaboration. Even the mimeograph poetry magazines circulating these works, Kane argues, registered the orality of readings through multi-sized fonts, including handwriting, and layouts that visualized how the poems sounded (37). This collaborative aesthetic shaped the poetic voice. For example, Juliana Spahr identifies that, in New York School poet Bernadette Mayer's poems, the traditional lyric "I" evolves into a collective speaker of the poem, where "the subject is no longer individual," but grounded in a community ("Love Scattered" 101-104).¹⁰ In "Everybody Sleeps in Royal

subculture to be somewhat exceptional. According to Isaacson, punk develops a "utopian negation that necessarily fails, and in doing so succeeds in mapping the impasses that must be known in order to one day be surmounted" (ch. 2).

¹⁰ In her book *Everybody's Autonomy*, Spahr extends this collectivity in poetry to the participation of the reader and argues that poetic traits of the New York School and others incite reader participation. For example, she suggests that poetic fragmentation can encourage interpretation of autonomous readers (41). She insists that reader-response can constitute an "anarchic rebellion" (12).

Blue Satin Sheets like Cucumbers in a Box of Snow,” Mayer provides us with a utopian vision of the poetic “we”:

(Since the revolution, accomplished pacifically, all artists
Live on large sufficient farms in the city with other poor people
All of whom now have plenty of food shelter health services & libraries).
After breakfast we go to work on books and farms in libraries & fields
We read the news (The Times is revolutionary), we put on shows. (16)

Although this poem describes a utopian future, Mayer’s descriptions, like much utopian literature, registers contemporary struggles and their priorities, particularly the importance of publishing, performance, and the collaborative “we” in the poem.

Moreover, this collaborative “we” is the root of her belief in the possibility of a pacifist revolution. The spirit of polite collaboration was a central practice for the poets of the 60s in the Lower East Side, grounding their political vision in a participatory community. In their writing, Black Mask deploys the participatory “we” but with a markedly different effect.

In Black Mask’s work, the collective “we” is defined in conflict, through accomplices and antagonisms. The anarchist tradition, particularly the insurrectionary tendency, has always demonstrated suspicion of collective thinking, and embraced individualism over and above any collective identity. Far too often, anarchist individualism gets conflated with atomization and isolation, whereas anarchist thinkers like Emma Goldman have long distinguished anarchism from this common misconception. In her classic essay, “The Individual, Society, and the State,” she argues vehemently against the “rugged individualism” promoted by powerful elites and the corresponding form of collectivity in the modern state, blaming its hierarchical structure

for creating atomized individualism (121).¹¹ Against this individualism, she promotes a concept of the individual based on voluntary cooperation, through which people discover freedom and individuality through “continuous conflict” with the State (112-118).¹² The “we” invoked by Black Mask needs to be understood in the context of the anarchist tradition based on individual freedom, voluntary association, and conflict. Thus, in their first text, the announcement of their formation continues with a collective call to arms: “We assault your Gods ... We sing of your death... The guerrilla, the blacks, the men of the future, we are all at your heels. Goddamn your culture, your science, your art... The world is rising against your oppression. There are men at the gates seeking a new world” (Hahne and Morea 5). The subject of these lines, the “we” of Black Mask, is thrown in sharp relief by the cultural landscape that they opposed. Through opposition, Black Mask positions themselves against the dominant culture, but joining with an entire “world” of allies. Despite the invocation of a “world,” these allies do not completely dissolve into this mediating body but remain a list of potential rebels: “the guerrilla, the blacks . . . ”

¹¹ Goldman anticipates what Guy Debord will call the “unity-in-separation” made possible by “the society of the spectacle,” which unifies people through extreme alienation, mediating social relations through images.

¹² I turn to Goldman via Julianna Spahr, who employs Goldman to explore the dynamic of anarchic reader-writer relationships. Relatedly, Spahr turns to Samuel Delany for an alternative model for social relationships, who “usefully juxtaposes contact (what he calls those arbitrary moments of connection that occur in urban areas and cross race, ethnic, and class divisions) and networking (which is professional and noninclusive)” (“Love Scattered” 110). Contact, as Spahr describes it, allows for connections between different people without subsuming them into a hegemonic group. What both Goldman and Spahr provide is a model for social relations that resist the oceanic impulse of many utopian movements. This, in turn, exposes the potential oppression in seemingly liberatory frameworks like individualism as well as network theories like Negri and Hardt’s “multitude.”

(Hahne and Morea 5). Black Mask no more tries to represent them than lead them or follow them. As anarchists, Black Mask envision rebellion in terms of voluntary association and decentralization even as they form a collective “we” for their actions. Their actions will allow them to fight alongside their allies and, as we will see, extend the fight to spaces familiar to them: culture and art. It was only a matter of time before these artists-turned-revolutionary writers would attract others, particularly likeminded poets.

These poets were attracted to Black Mask through a shared disillusionment with the limits of creative practice. The fact that Black Mask refused the role of a membership-based organization, recruiting the masses, likely appealed to the countercultural poets as well, who were used to creative autonomy. As discussed in the previous chapter, these former members of the intermedia art collective, Group Center, were no strangers to the poetry world, since their communal houses like the Bowery Co-op and collective spaces like the Torch Bookstore were important meeting places for the Lower East Side milieu, most notably members of Umbra. Just as Group Center attracted the collaboration of Umbra poets, the Black Mask action at the MOMA drew the attention of new collaborators. The first was the poet Dan Georgakas, who, not long after the appearance of issue 1 of *Black Mask*, sought out the group and joined their ranks, replacing a short-lived member, Everett Shapiro. Black Mask’s openness to new members from the poetry world did not represent a shift from their antagonistic stance toward the broader cultural community—they remained a tightly knit and antagonistic proto-affinity group. In their rejection of the participatory politics in favor of anarchist conflict, Black Mask brought the anarchist struggle against authority into a cultural

sphere. Rather than prefiguring a cultural alternative existing within contemporary capitalism, they attempted to proliferate a conflict already erupting in urban streets across the artistic spheres of life. Black Mask wanted to expose the limitations of the participatory model in the New York School of Poetry by testing the limits of its all-inclusive participation. The initial result was that they discovered the potential of small groups to act as a “de-structuring force,” acting against the homogenizing tendency within these countercultural communities.

The Cultural Front

It was a small group, and it remained small. Part of the reason it remained small is because nobody in the larger groups agreed with us.

—Ben Morea

It might seem strange that Black Mask attack on cultural hierarchy eventually led them to set their sights on the New York School poets. These poets were themselves marginal, countercultural, and attempting to disrupt societal conventions. Beyond their similar sensibilities, Black Mask was, in practice, a consistent contributor to the Mimeo Revolution with their titular four-page broadside magazine and adjacent publications including *Guerrilla* and *Good Soup*. What drew these anarchists to the Mimeo Revolution was likely the same values that drew fellow anarchist and poet Diane di Prima (discussed in the next chapter): their creative autonomy that refused the rule of law, especially obscenity laws. *Black Mask* contributor Allan Hoffman published an early poem in the first issue of the mimeographed classic, *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*,

whose title alone invoked the romantic image of the “outlaw.”¹³ Despite the rebelliousness of the Mimeo Revolution, Black Mask still proved to be too invested in provocation to fit neatly into this poetic community. Yet, it is in their literary encounters—even if only in how it isolated and alienated them—that we can most clearly see their development into an affinity group. The rare instances that Black Mask has received scholarly attention have been in the field of Art History. These scholars place their writing and actions within the art traditions of the avant-garde: multimedia Happenings, guerilla interventions, and participatory art.¹⁴ While these artistic trends were important, these scholars risk missing the significance of the small group’s nonconformity and antipathy by fitting Black Mask too neatly into the field. By highlighting Black Mask’s writing and, by proxy, bringing them more clearly into relation with writers, we can make their differences and clashes explicit.

The members of Black Mask were not “outside agitators” in the Mimeo Revolution, infiltrating it from the anarchist milieu.¹⁵ They were heavily involved in an

¹³ A mimeographed magazine on colored paper, *Fuck You/a magazine of the arts*, as the title suggests, was not afraid to mix poetry with sexually explicit material, including queer topics. Daniel Kane chronicles the “outlaw” culture of the Mimeo Revolution and their various run-ins with the police, including Ed Sanders’ *Fuck You*, Amiri Baraka and Diane Di Prima’s *Floating Bear* and others (60-61). My thanks to Gavin Grindon, whose research uncovered this connection, pointing out that Hoffman’s “Hymn to Amun-Ra Sanders” was published in *Fuck You* in the February 1962 issue (Grindon 207).

¹⁴ For scholarship on Black Mask in the field of Art History, see the work of Nadja Millner-Larsen, Gavin Grindon, Conor Hannan, and David A. J. Murrieta Flores.

¹⁵ Studies of the New York School tend to separate political poetry or adherents to the revolutionary strains of the avant-garde tradition from the apolitical or experimental poetics of the 1960s (see, for example, Mark Silverberg’s work). For scholars of this

anarchist network that included their comrades Walter Coughy and Jonathan Leake's Resurgence Youth Movement and the broader East Side Anarchists (centered around Murray Bookchin and the Torch Bookstore). Despite these relationships, Black Mask was basically the black sheep of the political milieu because of their background in cultural production. Ben Morea remembers that, as a result of their differences with the more authoritarian political organizations and being "too radical" for the counterculture, the artists and poets gathering around Black Mask "were somewhat alone," even if Morea admits "we actually enjoyed that role" (Personal Interview). Black Mask courted this ambiguous identity on the threshold between these two worlds, in order to experiment in political antagonisms within a specifically cultural field—a field usually understood as outside of politics. In their explanation of the MOMA action, Black Mask defended themselves against criticisms from fellow anarchists, who expressed skepticism at their focus on art museums. It took some effort to explain to Seattle anarchist Louise Crowley that their attack on an art museum was not meant to convince others to do the same: "no where do we say that others should start here, or for that matter that they should abandon their present course to join us, in fact quite to the contrary we state that we are going to join them, by 'opening another front'" (Hahne and Morea 6). Thus, Black Mask understood the cultural front as a specialized terrain of struggle specific to their skillset.

period, the New Left and "movement poetry" was a different network and genre altogether (see Todd Gitlin's *Campfires of the Resistance* for a collection of typical movement poetry). As a result of this separation, Black Mask's forays into the experimental poetry world could easily be seen as a literary correlate of political "entryism," paralleling Progressive Labor's involvement in SDS. However, Black Mask were known participants in the nebulous world of the Mimeo Revolution.

Although Crowley found it difficult to understand their choice of targets, this interchange was the first sign of Black Mask being heard outside of their narrow Lower East Side milieu. In the aftermath of their action against the epicenter of the art world, the MOMA, an influx of writers contacted Black Mask, causing them to simultaneously expand beyond the confines of the art world and, conversely, contract to a kernel of likeminded militants: an affinity group *avant la lettre*.

The next stage in their development came when anarchists heard of Black Mask's activity and, unlike Crowley, felt an affinity for it. As previously mentioned, the poet Dan Georgakas was the first to find them. Georgakas moved to New York from Detroit where he was already involved in actions that resonated with Black Mask. He and another poet, Allen Van Newkirk, had founded a group called The League of Revolutionary Poets. As Georgakas describes it in a letter, the League's purpose was to "combine politics with poetry-in-happening—action events," including provocative poetry readings and letter writings as well as political theater like mock trials and effigies (Letter, 23 Aug. 1966). Georgakas's letter anticipates escalation, writing "[w]e seek creative vandalism" (Letter, 23 Aug. 1966).¹⁶ His actions seemed to be escalating along similar lines as Black Mask, both participating in similar hybrids of political theater and protest. With Georgakas and 25 others, they would march on Wall Street in early 1967, holding signs to rename it "War street" and dressed entirely in black, including masks. Georgakas authored the

¹⁶ Some of the earlier actions like poetry readings seem relatively tame compared to the actions he describes following this call to creative vandalism: "Today I read a foul story in Village Voice. Wiped my ass with it and sent it in to the paper. I am getting a squirt gun and will fill it with paint. Shoot when ready . . . DADA lives. SURREALISM returns" (Letter, 23 Aug. 1966).

communique for the action but he was not the only member of the League to take part in Black Mask's actions. Van Newkirk also joined their inner circle and may be one of the masked people. The photo on the cover of issue 4 of *Black Mask* shows a small crowd that resembles the black bloc.

Black Mask remained committed to an anarchist decentralization as they grew and evolved. Regardless of their qualms with other artists and poets, the networks of the Mimeo Revolution provided them with an alternative to mass political organizations. At first, Black Mask distributed their broadside solely by hand, selling their paper to a local audience in the Lower East Side. Georgakas brought with him experience in distribution and subscription-based sales (Grindon 185). Through international distribution and travel, Black Mask came into contact with groups endeavoring in similar projects and made ties that were strengthened by social connections.¹⁷ Bruce Elwell, a close associate of Black Mask, introduced Black Mask to the Situationist International via the Chicago Surrealists (Grindon 185). By the second issue of *Black Mask*, the group had become familiar with enough potential comrades involved in underground publishing to include “excerpts from groups which seem to be moving in the same direction” (Hahne and Morea 13). Their excerpts included the Resurgence Youth Movement in New York, Situationist International in Paris, *Heatwave* in London, and the *Rebel Worker* put out by the Chicago

¹⁷ Gavin Grindon notes the significance of Bruce Elwell's travels to meet the Chicago Surrealists and Tony Verlaan's student exchange, who brought Black Mask into contact with European thinkers, especially the Situationists (185). David Wise includes the travels of himself and Anne Ryder from England to New York in the summer of 1967 in this formative moment.

Surrealists (Hahne and Morea 13-15).¹⁸ Additionally, Georgakas brought with him from Detroit the influence of the rogue Trotskyite Johnson-Forest tendency and the critique of bureaucracy found in the pages of their magazine *Correspondence*.¹⁹ Against the bureaucracy of Leftist institutions, Black Mask was forming a virtual anarchist federation of anarchist and ultraleft authors.

While the organizing methods and structure of these autonomous groups varied, Black Mask at least was internally nonhierarchical. Georgakas claims “[a]ll decision making was absolutely collective” (Grindon 185). Theoretically, their anti-hierarchical stance meant that each person’s agency was valued, in contrast to popular arguments on the Left about what social category constituted the true revolutionary subject or vanguard, although it excluded non-revolutionaries. Unsurprisingly, this stance attracted other would-be revolutionaries. A 1967 text, “Culture and Revolution,” was signed by

¹⁸ They make a note that this was not meant to be a complete listing of their tendency. Among the people who soon fell into Black Mask’s orbit were the circle involved in the British magazine *Icteric*, including Stuart and Dave Wise, and John Myers. Many of the people involved in *Icteric* would remain aligned with their comrades in New York, forming the affinity group King Mob around the same time Black Mask was superseded by the Motherfuckers. For more on the history of *Icteric* and King Mob, see Dave Wise’s *King Mob: A Critical Hidden History*.

¹⁹ *Correspondence* published one of Georgakas’s first poems. In his book, *Unruly Equality*, Andrew Cornell traces the influence of Socialisme ou Barbarie and James’ Facing Reality collective on the insurrectionary anarchism of Black Mask and Up Against the Wall Motherfucker. Additionally, he refers to the influential British group Solidarity and the Chicago Surrealists’ *Rebel Worker*, particularly their reevaluation of the spheres outside of the factory (ch. 8). Although the Chicago Surrealists and Black Mask both found precedence for their revolutionary cultural activity in the historical avant-garde, they had these more recent political theorists to thank for their critique of bureaucratic and institutional forms in social movements.

twelve collaborators and did not include regular contributors Dan Georgakas and Allan Hoffman. Surrounded by likeminded thinkers, Black Mask began to promote their own, although non-exclusive, revolutionary subject: the creative man. In *Black Mask #4*, they define creative men as a kind of revolutionary in opposition to artists and anti-artists (Hahne and Morea 22). Over several articles, Black Mask developed the concept of creative men in opposition to countercultural celebrities, including the iconic poet Allen Ginsberg, who Ben Morea derisively called a “salesman” (Hahne and Morea 30). Although Morea considered himself Ginsberg’s friend,²⁰ he began to define a revolutionary concept of creativity in opposition to poets who made a career of their work. Morea argued that these “poets clamor at the gates of the university while the real poets are in the streets crying ‘Burn, Baby, Burn’” (Hahne and Morea 30). Morea invokes the slogan of the Watts riot as indicative of a revolutionary poetry in contrast to the hierarchy of poetic taste located in the university. Thus, he aligns the “creative man” with the iconoclastic rioter.²¹ Characteristically, Black Mask’s radical understanding of creativity is defined in conflict with the broader culture.

²⁰ In an interview, Morea remembers being friends with several New York School poets and close to Allen Ginsberg, although he admits he personally did not have much to do with the literary or poetry world (Personal Interview).

²¹ This is not to say that Black Mask saw themselves as a mere addition to an already growing list of potential revolutionary subjects. In their essay “The New Proletariat,” they criticize the notion of “white radicals” who would manipulate “black bodies” to fight for them and likewise the guerrilla who fights but only in a small unit separate from the masses (Hahne and Morea 53-4). Although the small guerrilla unit anticipates their advocacy of affinity groups, they reject what they consider the isolation of a tactic as a form of fetishization. For them, the guerrilla amounts to the reification or “thingifying” of revolution based on the dogmatic adherence to books, namely Régis Debray’s *The*

Black Mask's coupled their call to join the worldwide revolution with the hostility and militancy that confined them to a small group. This hostility can be acutely felt when they discuss poetry. For example, Dan Georgakas's contribution to the concept of the "creative man" appears in an article called "Poetry Comes Out of the Barrel of the Gun," where he takes aim at the poetry world with the line "Creative man does not entertain or shock the bourgeoisie. He destroys them!" (Hahne and Morea 31). Georgakas's suspicion of poetry as entertainment and his hostility to poets as entertainers is echoed in the text "Culture and Revolution". As mentioned, this document was signed by twelve Black Mask affiliates.²² "Culture and Revolution" is a blistering invective against contemporary culture from beginning to end that co-signer David Wise recalls as a "OTT [over the top] bloodthirsty manifesto." The authors compile a list of targets that often hit close to home, including Dada, Surrealism, pop art, happening, free verse, "guru" writers like Ginsberg

Revolution in the Revolution? and Mao's Red Book. I will return to the problem that mediation and reification poses for Black Mask in their own publications later in the essay.

²² Since Black Mask was somewhat nebulous, the signatories could be said to all be members of Black Mask, but, at this time, they had attracted people better known for their membership in other groups. Tony and Carol Verlaan would go on to form the Council for the Liberation of Daily Life; Anne Ryder, David and Stuart Wise later formed King Mob and were, at the time, contributors to *Icteric* as was another signatory, John Myers. See David Wise *King Mob: A Critical Hidden History* and Nadja Milner-Larsen *Up Against the Real* for a history of these relationships. Here, they join Black Mask associates consisting of Ron Hahne, Yvonne de Nigris, Ben and Janice Morea, and Everett Shapiro. I have been unable to track down the affiliations of another co-signer, Jenny Dicken (Hahne and Morea 55).

and Timothy Leary, and the underground press.²³ Black Mask recognizes that the counterculture can be easily coopted as an industry for elites to enjoy and “[t]herefore it is not enough to institute a revolution of style and content (which only perpetuates the culture by giving it new blood): the culture itself must be destroyed. For no matter how dissident the revolt, the bourgeoisie enjoys it; it creates subjects for his magazine culture - he absorbs the scene without living it” (Hahne and Morea 55). The authors’ dismissal of revolutions “in style and content” refers to the predominant trends in visual art and experimental poetry practiced by the creative people in their direct vicinity, the Lower East Side. Instead of taking the building of their new contacts list to reinforce their position within the burgeoning Mimeo Revolution, Black Mask maps out the limits and contradictions of this industry, openly conspiring for its destruction. This hostility inoculates them against the cooptation or commercialization of their rebellion that they imagine coming from acceptance in the broader counterculture, which was attracting the

²³ In many ways, this list resembles classic avant-garde manifestos like those found in the Vorticist magazine, *Blast*, except that Black Mask focuses narrowly on cultural products close to them rather than the society at large that Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound’s manifesto “blasts” into oblivion. Yet, as Jill Richards argues in “Model Citizens and Millenarian Subjects,” *Blast* dramatically changes its tone when discussing the actions of a contemporary political group, the suffragettes (7). The manifesto’s indiscriminate attack on society turns into a conservative defense of culture and art from these presumed “comrades” currently in the streets destroying things. The authors of *Blast* worry that, from a lack of aesthetic feeling, the suffragettes “might someday destroy a good picture by accident” (qtd. in Richards 7). Although *Blast* presents itself in terms of a radical movement at odds with contemporary values, when they are confronted with women involved in political struggle, they quickly become guardians of culture under the pretense that these women are incapable of comprehending that which they destroy. One of the authors, Ben Morea, admitted in conversation to only discovering *Blast* and the Vorticists much later in life (Personal Interview).

attention of commercial industry. As a small group, they can claim the authenticity of their revolt.

Black Mask's commitment to fighting on the "cultural front" has important ramifications for their relationship to protest movements. Both their affinity for unconventional political subjects ("creative men") and the adversity of their small group brings them into closer alignment with the rioters than the institutional Left. Moreover, Black Mask's cultural front deemphasizes the Left's traditional site of struggle, the factory. When Black Mask adds the "creative man" to a list of potential rioters, they are implicitly ignoring the factory and the worker in favor of the street. In fact, they call for a new proletarian identity based on the "non-worker" (Hahne and Morea 53). The focus on the streets, the unemployed, and non-unitary identity place Black Mask's analysis in the tradition of the Lumpenproletariat. As described in the introduction, the Lumpenproletariat is commonly described by a listing of traits and groupings rather than a unified identity. Like the rioter, this category allows for the proliferation of small autonomous groupings acting in concert.

It is unfortunate that Black Mask's intervention into the debates around identity in social movements did not bring up gender. While Black Masks describe a political sphere outside the domain of labor (traditionally coded male), the description of themselves as specifically creative *men* forecloses the possibility of discussing women and feminists. In their debate with the anarchist-feminist Louise Crowley, neither side brings up the question of gender even though their discussion of rioters and culture concerns the

gendered domain of reproductive labor.²⁴ Although references to “the creative spirit of man” suggest that Black Mask is using the sexist term “man” in an obsolete, gender-neutral variation (Hahne and Morea 5-7), their usage in the context of experimenting with identity deserves pause. It is important to note that they develop the significance of the “street” while ignoring the more feminized space, often defined in opposition to the factory: the home. I will return to the home in the riot in the next chapter.

Black Mask’s political project was more successful in determining the power of the small group than developing an anarchistic federation. While they connected with likeminded writers and publishers, their continued rebellion put them at odds even with their comrades. As we will see later, Black Mask’s taste for autonomous small groups ultimately shattered any semblance of a federation. Moreover, their interest in street action took them well beyond their initial interest in an avant-garde inspired merger of art and everyday life. This was by design. In Black Mask’s view, it was far too easy for avant-garde experiments to be coopted into a canon of tradition, as they argued happened to their predecessors Dada and the Surrealists. According to the co-signers of their “Culture and Revolution” manifesto, the hierarchies within art and literary world could

²⁴ One obvious place to consider the role of gender in Black Mask’s history is the work and life of Valerie Solanas, who was close to Ben Morea. However, Solanas is too complicated of a figure to deal with properly here. The significance of her *Scum Manifesto* to early Radical Feminists and Solanas’s derogatory statements toward trans people have implicated her in the development of a Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERFs). While I concur that Solanas takes up reprehensible arguments, it is difficult to assess SCUM’s relationship to TERFs because of its literary style filled with hyperbole, vitriol, and black humor. As concerns Black Mask, when Solanas shot Andy Warhol, Morea was one of the first public supporters of her attentat (McIntyre, “Up Against the Wall”).

only be undone by a social revolution that dismantles the political-economic system that produces hierarchy (Hahne and Morea 55). When Black Mask lashed out at the commodification of the counterculture, it was only the beginning.

The process of radicalization that set them apart from the popular poets and artists would eventually implicate even their small group. Since they opposed the “degeneracy” that turned creativity into “object art,” the form of the underground newspaper continued to present its own internal contradictions for Black Mask. In the conclusion of the manifesto, they warn that “we ourselves must not fall into the trap. Either we are propelled to action or it is meaningless” (Hahne and Morea 55). While providing a necessary outlet for their collaborative writing and controversial views, *Black Mask* could be understood as another art object, no different than New York School titles like *Fuck You*. In the months that followed, Black Mask increasingly abandoned traditional media in favor of actions in the street.²⁵ In less than a year, they would abandon their publication. The small group around *Black Mask* would be negated and superseded by the Motherfuckers. But this is getting ahead of ourselves. Before taking this step, Black Mask took action against the New York School, posing a challenge to the participatory poetics within their collaborative setting. If the New York School’s utopian horizon of universal participation could be found in collaborative poetry, then Black Mask set out to expose its limits through the disruption of a poetry reading.

²⁵ This includes breaking into the Pentagon at a demonstration, which I will discuss in section five of this chapter.

The Dada Attentat

. . . she told me Burdmoore was a motherfucker.

“He seems nice,” I said.

“I mean *the* Motherfuckers,” she said, “They were a political street gang. Late sixties. They went around pretending to assassinate people with toy guns.”

—Rachel Kushner²⁶

If participation in the New York School poetry world was universal, then Black Mask’s 1968 intervention at Ken Koch’s reading at the Poetry Project, the mock “assassination” of Koch, could conceivably be understood as a creative addition to Koch’s poem by audacious collaborators. In one of the only literary treatments of this incident, Daniel Kane attempts exactly this reading of Black Mask-Koch, describing Black Mask’s actions—namely shooting blanks at the poet mid-poem—as “a particularly radical manifestation” of the audience participation common at the Poetry Project at this time (171).²⁷ I attempt to follow Kane’s suggestion to its logical conclusion by “close reading” the intervention as part of the poem but only to establish the limits of participatory poetry. Black Mask’s assassination of Koch ultimately demonstrates the irony—even the absurdity—of including their actions in Koch’s poem, since their aims are incommensurable. The poem that Black Mask interrupts, Ken Koch’s “To My

²⁶ Burdmoore Model, Kushner’s fictionalized Motherfucker is likely meant to be a composite character. However, his initials, BM, and the reference to the mock assassination make Ben Morea the likely point of reference. As we will see, the conflation of Black Mask’s theatrical intervention from the Motherfuckers’ actions has important ramifications.

²⁷ Kane does not name Black Mask as the organization behind this action and it is unclear if he is familiar with the group. By treating Black Mask as individual and unaffiliated poets, Kane’s recounting of events reduces these anarchists to particularly raucous affiliates of the New York School. Their belonging to a distinct anarchist formation, Black Mask, helps make sense of their antagonistic relationship to their fellow poets.

Audience,” depends on a nonconflictual relationship between poet and audience, invoking their shared space and insider understanding. Black Mask’s intervention was specifically calculated to disrupt this relationship by introducing conflict.

Although the poets involved in Black Mask were sometimes participants in the Lower East Side readings, Black Mask drew the line at inviting successful and “bourgeois” poets like Ken Koch to participate. For Black Mask, Ken Koch’s participation was not politically neutral but required their intervention to expose a conflict that lay dormant. The poets involved with the Poetry Project were mainly part of the “second generation” of the New York School, embedded in the Lower East Side and attached to this neighborhood’s reputation for radicalism.²⁸ Kane’s history of the Poetry Project reveals two interlinked but competing tendencies in the neighborhood. In 1966, the Lower East Side poets began congregating at Saint Mark’s Church after the dissolution of other venues like Café Le Metro (discussed in the previous chapter), around the same time that 1000s of dropouts and hippies entered the neighborhood. Initially, the resulting environment of crash pads, love-ins and drug culture gave the Poetry Project “the reputation as a radical space” (Kane 124-5). However, by 1968, Kane concedes that the atmosphere had changed, as rents increased from the influx of hippies and the area became welcoming to more upscale clientele (125). Black Mask was still a small group but, as members of the Motherfuckers, they would soon become crucial to keeping the counterculture thriving as an anarchistic network based on mutual aid. As for

²⁸ Kane distinguishes between the first-generation New York School poets like Frank O’Hara, John Ashberry and Koch, who generally were not attached to the Lower East Side like their younger and less established followers of the second generation.

the Poetry Project, it maintained its reputation as part of this radical space for the most part. At the same time, it was not uncommon to for Upper East Side socialites to frequent the poetry readings, driven to the Lower East Side in limousines (174).²⁹ It was this evolving context that drew both Ken Koch and Black Mask to the Poetry Project on January 10th, 1968.

For Black Mask, another key piece of context was the sentencing of Amiri Baraka less than a week before, on January 4th. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both Baraka's arrest during the Newark riot in the summer of 1967 and subsequent convicted for the possession of a firearm was forcefully protested within the anarchist milieu. Black Mask continued to turn to Baraka's role in the riots for inspiration and members eventually took the name of their new group, Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker, from the Baraka poem, "Black People," that was read by the judge during his conviction. For the anarchist poets involved in Black Mask, Baraka's legal conviction exposed that participatory poetry did not sufficiently challenge the establishment. The fact that Baraka began the process of distancing himself from white poets in the Lower East Side three

²⁹ This shared environment was not without conflict. Andrei Codrescu recalls encountering the Motherfuckers with Ted Berrigan, a fixture of the Lower East Side poetry scene. Codrescu caricatures the Motherfuckers as the self-appointed "cops of the neighborhood." Led by "Bing Mort" (an obvious pseudonym for Ben Morea), the Motherfuckers appear with "LSD" written on their forehead to designate them as part of the Lower East Side Self Defense project. When Berrigan spots Mort, he blurts out "kill *that* guy" to Codrescu (172). Codrescu, takes artistic license with timeline in his memoirs placing this event before the Koch action, in which he took part, and the dissolution of Black Mask. Since he does not establish any connection between the two groups, it is hard to ascertain what informed his negative opinion of Morea's post-Black Mask organizing.

years earlier informed Black Mask's view of their contemporaries. Moreover, the Poetry Project's connection to the older successful poets of the New York School, like Koch, then a Columbia professor, in a period when a radicalized poet like Baraka distanced himself from both, emphasized for Black Mask the depoliticized nature of participatory model. In response to Baraka's riot conviction, Black Mask hoped to bring something of the spirit of the Newark riot into the poetry show.³⁰

Black Mask's plan cast themselves and Koch into opposing sides in a conflict. They secretly plotted to turn the poetry reading into a piece of political theater that would demonstrate how they understood the role of poetry. This role was summed up in the fliers they printed with an image of Baraka during his arrest with the caption "Poetry is Revolution." At least three poets took part in the action. The central poet of Black Mask, Dan Georgakas, had by 1968 begun to drift away from the group and the Lower East Side but was present for this.³¹ At the same time, other poets were drifting closer to Black Mask, including Allen Van Newkirk and Andrei Codrescu. By this time, Van Newkirk, Georgakas's former comrade from The League of Revolutionary Poets had moved in

³⁰ Black Mask articulated their belief that the conflict generated by the riots was already present in their description of the Newark riots. Placing the riots in an anarchist tradition, they quote the classic anarchist Malatesta who wrote "Conflict may be open or latent; but it always exists since the government does not pay attention to discontent and popular resistance except when it is faced with the danger of insurrection" (qtd. in Hahne and Morea 40). Commenting on Malatesta's words in the riot's aftermath, Black Mask writes "And so the words of this Italian anarchist become real again forty years later -in Newark N.J. We must begin to realize that these are no longer riots but rather as Gov. Hughes claimed, acts of "insurrection" - and we must act accordingly" (Hahne and Morea 40).

³¹ Although Georgakas took part in this action, he found his attention veering toward the struggle against the military junta in Greece (Email Interview).

with him in New York (Grindon 191). He also stayed with Andrei Codrescu, a contributor to Van Newkirk's Detroit based underground magazine *Guerrilla* (Codrescu 174). Both were active in a group called the Artists and Writers' Militia, likely an offshoot of the League, which partnered with Black Mask during this period (Grindon 191). Codrescu describes the event as a plan concocted by Van Newkirk to "politicize" the New York School (174). For Ben Morea, this politicization functioned by forcing people "to decide 'Do I belong with this group of people or this one?'" (Hahne and Morea 157). Taking sides was crafted into their theatrical intervention in basically allegorical terms. According to Morea, Koch represented everything wrong with poetry, "Koch was a symbol to us of this totally bourgeois, dandy world" whereas Allan Van Newkirk "looked like the classic image of the bomb throwing anarchist . . . the anarchist incarnate" (Hahne and Morea 157).³² Thus, Black Mask set the two poets to play against each other as if they were Manichean adversaries.

The interactive-theatrical quality of Black Mask's plot opens up the possibility of reading it as an artistic collaboration with Koch. For the event, Van Newkirk wore a long trench coat concealing his gun and, with his height and unkempt hair, he looked "impressively sinister" (Neumann 55). The conspirators took their places mainly in the balcony section, where they could hide as members of the audience until the time came to

³² As Osha Neumann clarifies, Van Newkirk invoked the image of the anarchist that comes to us from the 19th century (*Up Against the Wall* 55). Ironically, this image of a bedraggled and often gaunt anarchist bomber emerges from the same *fin de siècle* iconography (that is, the imagery of decadence) that shapes our understanding of the dandy. In the popular imagination, the two are not necessarily opposites. For a notable intersection of the two, see Alejandro de Acosta's study of Félix Fénéon in "Fénéon Novels."

participate. After all, participatory art does not require foreknowledge of the participants. Happenings, a popular example in the period, depended on the spontaneous interactions of the audience-participants with the artistic environment. Since both Group Center and the League of Revolutionary Poets took up practices resembling Happenings, we could even say Black Mask recruited from veterans of these spontaneous and participatory experiments. In the realm of poetry, collaborative poems also drew on the spontaneous input of the creative audience attracted to open readings. Only the week before the Koch “assassination,” the poet John Wieners’ reading at the Poetry Project on January 3rd involved an extended discussion with the audience concerning a line mid-poem and, ultimately, an impromptu and collaborative revision. Daniel Kane draws attention to the context of this reading on the eve of Baraka’s sentencing, referred to by the night’s host Allen Ginsberg, which furthers the connection Kane is drawing between participatory poetry and Black Mask’s intervention (171). However, the fact that the Poetry Project’s preliminary response to Baraka’s sentencing was followed by a congenial and collaborative discussion only strengthens the contrast between their usual participatory practice and the following week’s intervention. Black Mask’s intervention might have been creative and spontaneous, but this collaboration was not all inclusive.

Koch catered the poem to the Poetry Project, invoking the communal feeling he expected to encounter in the Lower East Side. The benign title of the poem, “To My Audience,” certainly does not suggest anything but an amicable relationship between bohemian audience and bourgeois poet. Koch wrote the poem specifically for the event at the Poetry Project, which suggests that he embraced the spirit of spontaneity and

collaborative response dominant in this environment. The poem's opening captures the organic, congenial formation of a shared identity promised in Koch's address. Koch began with descriptions of audience that invoked the spontaneous chance associations of automatic writing:

My audience of camel dung and fig newtons
My audience of hats, and how shall I address my audience
Of New York green frock bats. Are you sure there is an audience?
I won't go in if there's no audience.³³

The absurd combination of images in these lines invokes a surreal sense of humor to amuse the tastes of New York School poets, who were indebted to the surrealist tradition. A question — “Are you sure there is an audience?” — troubles the presumed collectivity of the event. However, a recording of the reading puts this question into perspective: the audience laughs. Any anxiety produced by the distance between author and audience created by this question was immediately resolved with this jovial and, importantly, appropriate audience contribution. This sets Koch up to mock his elite status as an established poet that requires an audience of spectators. The laughter serves to remind us of the friendly, “in-the-know” familiarity of the setting. Thus, Koch summons up the division between poet and audience — only to wave it away.

³³ My reconstruction of the poem relies mainly on the recording on the CD included with Daniel Kane's *All Poet's Welcome*. Additionally, I have made use of Kane's description of the recording (172-3) and his interviews with Ken Koch and attendees, Lewis Warsh and Ron Padgett, who were in the front row. Although my interpretation of the poem differs significantly from Kane, I am indebted to his research and his observation that Koch's skepticism toward poetry readings inspired his “surrealist cartoonlike” depiction of his audience (172).

Koch's strange imagery addresses an audience of likeminded participants. The Poetry Project audience comes into relief through a contrast with ordinary spectators, the indifferent citizens:

He feeds bats to the indifferent citizens.
These are good but those others are poison.
Did you know there's different kinds of bats?
One bat the blue bat is poison;
another bat the yellow bat is worth its weight in gold.

The "indifferent citizens" are spectators that passively enjoy things without participating, who only appreciate the surreal imagery of the bat as something to consume. This non-participant group is implicitly contrasted with Koch's audience by the question "Did you know...?" Koch's questioning seems to call to an audience that responds actively to surreal poetry. However, this question remains rhetorical since Koch answers it without taking a breath. Whether the audience could properly be said to participate or if they are, in fact, passively witnessing a comedy show remains in question.

Hypothetically, any audience contribution should be considered an integral part of the poem. Koch wrote this poem for this specific context and it does not seem to have appeared subsequently in print. The only copy of the poem that I have been able to locate is a recording that includes Black Mask's interruption. In whatever way that the poem was transformed by this incident, whatever it became, there is no untainted, original poem outside of it. "To My Audience" takes a dramatic turn away from the poet's jokes and audience laughter when Black Mask takes the stage, answering the implied call to participate in Koch's questions but changing the tenor. At the end of the following line "morpheus sleeps, mercury or Murphy," Koch's reading was suddenly interrupted by

Van Newkirk, who had snuck up on stage, yelling out “Stop!” followed by gunshots fired at close range (Kane 172). It was as if Black Mask timed their attack to interrupt Koch just as he launched into virtual re-enactment of John Wieners’ collaboration the previous week over rewording. We could read these lines as if Koch was only feigning to ask the audience to decide between “mercury or Murphy” and the audience protested with gunshots. However, Black Mask refuses to operate on the terms set by the Poetry Project. They are not demanding “true” universal participation in a reading that only offers illusory gestures toward it. Instead, they are calling into question the possibility, even the desirability, of this participatory model.

Black Mask’s interruption is not part of the poem but the end of it. This is not to say it was the conclusion of the poem but rather it was the act that made “To My Audience” an incomplete, unsuccessful poem, brought to a halt. The audience did not know what to think. The initial audience response was not unified, it was confused. On the one hand, the audience was familiar with the potential abrasiveness of experimental participatory art. The poet Ron Padgett noticed right away that Koch was not shot, and that the shooter wore a memorable “Dostoevskyan overcoat” (qtd. in Kane 172). Therefore, he claims that, although he “jumped,” he could immediately place this loud disruption in the recognizable framework of participatory art. Through Padgett’s retelling, we could believe that this action did not depart from Morea’s experiments in abrasive soundscapes, discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the action too closely resembled another non-artistic 1960s trend, the recurrent political

assassinations.³⁴ Kane astutely points to this political climate as a contributing factor to Koch's reaction, who Padgett describes as also "jumping" (qtd. in Kane 172), Codrescu remembers Koch turning "very white" (174), and Morea remembers Koch fainting (Hahne and Morea 157). No matter the response, Koch would not be allowed to continue the poem.

As the intervention continued, the illusion of collaboration between Black Mask and Ken Koch dissolved. Codrescu, Morea, and others threw fliers emblazoned with Baraka's photo and the words "Poetry is Revolution" from the balcony, shouting political slogans, according to Padgett (Kane 172).³⁵ Van Newkirk's supporters in the back made

³⁴ Less familiar to the audience, although alluded to by the reference to Dostoyevsky, was the context of anarchist history, specifically the 19th century Russian nihilist and fin-de-siècle European anarchist preference for "propaganda of the deed" and the "attentat." The term attentat has a long history as a description of anarchist tactics that classically refers to assassinations, like those of President William McKinley and the Archduke Ferdinand. More generally, the term can be applied to anarchist practices typified by spontaneity and an adherence to direct action. In essence, anarchist attentats are distinguished by their commitment to action without recourse to persuading the masses or waiting for proper conditions. More recently, the nihilist-anarchist journal *Attentat* redefines the term to include "an act, any act really, that does not concern itself with cause-and-effect but with inspiration" (158). This redefinition signals an expansion of the anarchist tactic informed by the events that redefined anarchism in recent history.

³⁵ In the fictionalized autobiography *An Involuntary Genius*, Codrescu admits to being around as Van Newkirk planned the action, but he does not claim to have taken part. It is Ron Padgett who claims to have realized later that Codrescu threw the flyers. Codrescu describes the climate in which the action took place in terms that invoke the basis of the tension between Black Mask and Koch, writing "it was a blissful time in which the danger and the humor of America were still in some sort of precarious balance" (152). Embracing both humor and danger, Codrescu describes his own debut on the Poetry Project stage in the third person: "He began by pulling his gun out of his coat, putting it on the lectern, and saying 'This is my first poem!'" (154). He was subsequently arrested on his way home on gun charges and relied on poetry readings, including one at the Poetry Project, to raise his bail money.

it clear to Koch's audience that this was not done in collaboration with the poet. The flyer and political chanting, theoretically, reminded the audience of the additional layer of context, the riot. From the stage, Koch caught the reference to Baraka's arrest. After a brief pause and still sounding shaken, he manages to joke "that was – uh – a benefit shooting." The audience's delayed response of small chuckles momentarily recuperates the intervention into Koch's performance, another in his series of witticisms. After this brief nod to Baraka, he begins the poem where he left off with "Mercury or Morpheus is coming up to him." This time he reveals that "yes, it's Murphy." He gets no further into the poem, interrupting himself to read the flier aloud. For a period of time, Black Mask's political speech, their invocation of the riot, threatens to eclipse the poetry reading.

Koch's attempt to regain control from the stage, and re-center his role as performer, comes at the expense of poetry. Koch recaptures his audience with more humor, gesturing to their setting at the Poetry Project, located in Saint Mark's Church. Taking on the role of priest, he jokes "Now I don't want the congregation to get upset about these hijinks." After the audience laughs appropriately at being referred to as a congregation, Koch gets serious and gives a miniature sermon:

these young people have a very fine cause they are working for and this seems to be - uh – Leroi. Now I don't think the judge should have put Leroi in jail because he wrote a poem. And, if that's the point these people wanted to make, they could have made it in a better way, it seems to me. So why don't you stop interrupting the reading?

This final question is more forcefully delivered than the rhetorical ones in the poem, but before he utters the word "stop" Black Mask begins shouting something not captured by the recording. Koch, no longer interested in negotiating this interruption or asking

questions, grows impatient and gives a clear command “scram!” Van Newkirk responds with “fuck you!” Koch is ultimately forced out of the role of poet, even in its most “radical” participatory sense.

It is Van Newkirk who reintroduces the literary component of this action. In the din, he is heard declaring that he is “a surrealist with a gun.” This hearkens back to the poem’s dependence on Surrealist chance that, in this moment, comes head-to-head with a variant of surrealism grounded in political radicalism. Van Newkirk invokes the Surrealist Manifesto’s claim that the height of surrealist practice is firing at random into a crowded street. Thus, Van Newkirk offers an alternate armed poetic tradition, a poetry of action not readings, a poetry that comes from the barrel of a gun. What follows is no longer a poem but a back-and-forth shouting match that reorients the role of the audience. They can no longer be the inclusive audience invoked by the title of Koch’s poem in any straightforward way. Members of the audience begin calling for Black Mask to “get out,” a sentiment which Koch echoes. The audience’s initial assumptions of good natured and politically neutral collaboration, facilitated by a level of chance allotted to collaboration, gave way under this pressure.

Koch’s reading could only resume once Black Mask departed. Before leaving, Van Newkirk took one last stab at clarifying their message by shouting the slogan “revolution, the only solution!” In his invocation of revolution, Van Newkirk rejects the terms that Koch used to interpret their actions. Black Mask was not protesting Baraka’s imprisonment or the judicial bias against Baraka as a writer. They were not distancing poetry from Baraka’s participation in the riot but calling attention to the poetry of this

kind of revolt. Predictably, this line of argument was not well received. Koch responded to Van Newkirk with a sneering repetition of the word “revolution,” accompanied by laughter and clapping from the audience. With this applause, Black Mask exited, and Koch then returned to his set, beginning a new poem. Van Newkirk’s belief that they could politicize the Poetry Project, transforming the participatory poetry scene into a revolutionary force, appears in retrospect as a clear example of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism.” However, the breakdown in communication between Koch, Black Mask, and the Poetry Project audience more clearly demonstrates Black Mask’s effect than anything persuasively said. Although Black Mask was overly optimistic in the revolutionary potential of these poets, they forced the hand of a utopian impulse — exposing the bluff of universal participation.

Black Mask’s alternative model to the openness of participatory poetry was being open to conflict. Their conflictual approach was on display in their communique released after Koch’s reading, where they argue that “We must use the poetic act to destroy poetry (as object/spectacle). POETRY IS REVOLUTION” (“The Assassination”). Black Mask targets poetry itself, or at least poetry as it is usually conceived. The parenthesis qualifying the poetry that they oppose as “object/spectacle” reinforces their critique of the commodified poetry world rather than exempting aspects of it. In the aftermath of this action, Black Mask does not pretend to have politicized the poetry audience. If there is an implicit “artistic critique” of spectators, it is entirely negative.³⁶ This negativity is

³⁶ It is as if Black Mask sensed that the aims of participatory poetry would be recuperated and eventually “become essential parts of the restructuring undertaken by capitalists to improve profitability” (Bernes 17).

reinforced in their citation of Baraka's "Revolutionary Theatre" in the epigraph of the communique: "we must make an art that will function so as to call down the actual wrath of world spirit. We are witch doctors and assassins This is a theater of assault. The play that will split the heavens for us will be called 'The Destruction of America'" (qtd. in "The Assassination"). In Black Mask's communique, the call for artistic participation has transmogrified into a destructive force. By invoking Baraka's "assassins" as the model for their anarchist attentat, Black Mask locates a poetic tradition within the assault on commodity culture.

The appearance of the next issue of *Guerrilla* in the form of a poster rather than a traditional newspaper must be understood in the context of this suspicion of the commodification of poetry. Although made in rejection of the poetry world, *Guerrilla* took up the poster format from the practices of poets, notably Broadside Press. Georgakas had experimented with this form before joining Black Mask, publishing with Broadside Press, exploring the idea of "poetry as public rather than private" (Grindon 184). Thus, *Guerrilla*'s choice of the poster format was an immanent critique of conventional poetry, even the underground press, which could be understood as too private, too commodified.³⁷ The poster is accredited to both anarchist groups involved in the Koch action, Black Mask and Artists and Writers Militia, and reproduces the image and slogan,

³⁷ Ironically, a copy of this issue currently goes for \$444 on Abebooks: <https://www.abebooks.com/Poetry-Revolution-Guerrilla-Free-Newspaper-Streets/30258247562/bd>

“Poetry is Revolution,” from the flier.³⁸ In the article “Does Leroi Jones Ask Less of Us,” Van Newkirk offers further analysis on this slogan with a short call to poets to abandon their “university posts, government grants, & the rest” for revolution. The article is accompanied with information for both Huey Newton’s and Baraka’s defense funds, whom Van Newkirk provides as evidence for the need for revolution. Next to Van Newkirk’s article is a poem by Baraka, which is titled “Three Movements and a Coda” but is laid out to appear as if its name is “Poetry is Revolution.” As a poster, this issue of *Guerrilla* brings poetry together with the American insurrections of the late 60s in a format that can directly “take the streets.”

Although the poster format allows *Guerrilla* to take the streets and reach a broader public sphere, its main target audience is still the literary world. Both the genres and the content are directed at this audience. Complimenting Van Newkirk’s directive to poets, the Baraka poem instructs a poetry audience on how to riot:

Came running out of the drugstore window with
an electric alarm clock, and then dropped the motherfucker
and broke it. Go get something else. Take everything in there.
Look in the cash register. TAKE THE MONEY. TAKE THE MONEY. YEH.
TAKE IT ALL. YOU DON’T HAVE TO CLOSE THE DRAWER. COME ON
MAN, I SAW A TAPE RECORDER BACK THERE. (L. Jones, “Three
Movements”)

³⁸ While earlier issues of *Guerrilla* were published by Artist Workshop Press in Detroit, this issue was the first to appear after Van Newkirk’s move to New York. The Detroit issues were designed by a team associated with the Artist Workshop Press, headed by the graphic designer Gary Grimshaw. For the New York debut issue, Black Mask’s Ben Morea claims that he did the layout, which could explain its departure in style (Personal Interview).

Any poets reading this piece would appreciate the choice of the image of the alarm clock: the alarm juxtaposed with a store whose security has been breached and the clock breaking as if symbolically disconnecting from the rationalized workday. Moreover, Baraka offers a crash course in looting a store for a poetry audience likely inexperienced in rioting. For Black Mask, this poem provides a radical alternative to Koch's humorous style witnessed recently at the Poetry Project. However, it is not merely the content that makes poetry a revolution.

Guerrilla's citation of Baraka as a model to emulate goes beyond the content of his poems. As in Black Mask's communique's reference to "Revolutionary Theatre," Baraka's poem is meant to remind readers of Baraka's involvement in the Newark riots.³⁹ Drawing on the riots, Baraka's writing in this period often describes a role for literature that verges on rioting. Baraka's revolutionary theater is not, for example, plays about revolutions. Likewise, for these anarchists, the slogan "poetry is revolution" refuses a literary interpretation that would read their assassination of Koch as a play in free verse or poetry performance, whose content was a collaborative poem composed political statements. In "Black Art," Baraka envisioned a role for poetry that went beyond making political messages, calling for poems that "shoot / guns" (302). For Black Mask, pace Baraka, the confrontational, disruptive form of the action was its poetic form. Baraka's

³⁹ It is unclear if Baraka was involved in the publication of his poem in *Guerrilla*. Previously, Baraka was approached by Black Mask to publish his work. Specifically, Baraka had declined publish his "Black Dada Nihilismus" because it had been already published elsewhere (Grindon 208). This suggests they would not have published it without his permission. "Three Movements and a Coda" was previously published alongside Calvin Hernton's "Jitterbugging in the Streets" in the literary magazine *Streets*.

vision for poetry in “Black Art” would continue to influence the members of Black Mask after its dissolution, The final line of the poem provided the name for the successive group, Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker.

The “shooting” of Ken Koch was an important transitional moment for those contributors to *Black Mask* and *Guerrilla* that would go on to create this anarchist affinity group. Reflecting on the Koch assassination in her dissertation on Black Mask and Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker, *Up Against the Real*, Nadja Millner-Larsen claims that Baraka’s “Black Art” was “an inspiration notably forgotten by UAW/MF [Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker] in their recollections of the event” (267). The problem with Millner-Larsen’s account is she attributes the Koch assassination to the wrong group, describing it as a Motherfucker action rather than Black Mask.⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, the Motherfuckers’ forgetfulness regarding this event can be partially attributed to this confusion. More importantly, this confusion shapes Millner-Larsen’s analysis of the event, claiming it: “symbolizes the demand that poetry leap off the page and into the street to become direct action itself” (268). Since one of the distinguishing features between Black Mask and the Motherfuckers is their “leap off the page and into the street,” her interpretation seems a bit premature. Whereas the Motherfuckers concentrated their efforts in the daily life of the streets, Black Mask, in this action, confronted the poetry world, as part of their attempt to extend the riot into the cultural sphere. Although it was a failure as an attempt to rouse the poets into taking sides in a political confrontation, the “assassination” of Koch, in its failure, at the very least delineated this poetry sphere, exposing its limits as a

⁴⁰ This tracks with Kushner’s conflation of the two groups in the epigraph to this section.

revolutionary horizon. Correspondingly, the action solidified these anarchists as a small group clearly distinct from the oceanic, utopian impulse of participatory poetry. By testing the limits of participatory politics and being cast out, Black Mask solidified their identity as a small group, whose power would be tapped in the creation of affinity groups.

Into the Streets

We would start riots, get arrested, start another one to protest our arrest, and get arrested again.

—Osha Neumann, *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*

You have noticed by now that BLACK MASK is no longer arriving - the last issue being #10 (April-May '68) - 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 ...
—Ben Morea⁴¹

It was with the slogan “into the streets” that Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker announced their transition away from Black Mask. However, the activities of Black Mask were not confined to the enclaves of art and poetry. In order to understand the transition from small groups of anarchist writers and artists to affinity groups, we will need to explore their relationship to political protest and social movements. While Black Mask concentrated their efforts on opening what they called a “cultural front,” they were in no way so preoccupied with these actions to miss out on the developments in the 1960s protest culture. Likewise, the Motherfuckers did not abandon writing for protest but instead dragged the mimeograph with them as they joined the social uprisings of '68.

⁴¹ It seems the Motherfuckers were already very active at this point. Morea continues “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” (Hahne and Morea 86).

Black Mask's pre-Motherfucker involvement in protest culture is an important piece of the history of affinity groups. For this piece, we need to return to events that took place before the Koch assassination, and trace a parallel trajectory in the streets. While Black Mask developed a confrontational small group in the political sphere, they simultaneously cut their teeth in revolutionary anarchist organizing at antiwar demonstrations.

Antiwar protesters were not necessarily a distinct group from poets and other writers. This is fortunate, since we often rely on the texts of these participant-authors for history that was otherwise ignored by historians. For Black Mask's early protest experience, we can turn to a poem. In the poem "Curse of the Earth Magician on a Metal Land," Marge Piercy memorializes the actions of the Revolutionary Contingent during April 15th, 1967 demonstration against the war:

we tied up midtown Manhattan for half an hour,
the Revolutionary Contingent and Harlem,
but it did not happen
because it was not reported in any newspaper.
The riot squad was waiting at the bottom of 42nd Street
to disperse us into uncertain memory (218)

The Revolutionary Contingent, according to the Trotskyist *Spartacist* newspaper, was made up of fifteen to twenty groups including "the Committee for Independent Political Action, Free School of New York, U.S. Committee to Aid the NLF-SV, Spartacist League, ACFI, Communist Party USA-Marxist-Leninist, Black Mask, Resurgence Youth Movement and IWW" ("Anti-War" 5). Many of these groups were populated by communists, but the last three named, including Black Mask, were primarily anarchist. These small anarchist groups were unlikely to receive mainstream coverage. Yet, Piercy

must be employing some irony in her proclamation that their action “was not reported in any newspaper” since the poem appeared in underground newspapers like SDS’s *Caw!*.⁴² Even in newspapers, these radical activists relied on unconventional means like poems to capture the spirit of their protest. Despite their lack of mainstream success, Georgakas recalls this demonstration as the closest Black Mask got to their goal of bringing together New York’s anti-authoritarians (McIntyre, “Conversation” 160). Significant to the development of affinity groups, both their success at bringing people together, and ability to disrupt the city (they “tied up midtown Manhattan”) depended on the Revolutionary Contingent breaking off from a much larger protest march.

Rather than seeing their smallness of their march as an inability to direct the crowd, Black Mask decided that this action could represent the beginning of a new tactic, which they called the breakaway march. The larger April 15th demonstration was organized by the Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (or “The Mobe”), who brought out hundreds of thousands of protesters and famous speakers like Martin Luther King, Jr. In contrast, the Revolutionary Contingent numbered about 250 people, many of whom were not Georgakas’s anti-authoritarians. Although the anarchist presence was small, they were among the first in the crowd to break off from the larger march to join the contingent marching from Harlem. The Harlem protesters mentioned by Piercy were brought together by the Black United Action Front, another relatively little

⁴² Admittedly, Piercy’s poem did not appear in *Caw* until the following year, when the demonstration was no longer “news.”

known but militant coalition.⁴³ In the pages of *Black Mask*, Janice Morea describes the militancy that she observed:

[T]he Harlem contingent is spotted making their way down Central Park West. They would not take the legal parade route, but would march down Seventh Avenue instead, minus police, barricades, or parade permit. Screams from the park – ‘We’re joining them!’ Thousands of people break the parade line and begin running out of the park - jumping benches, fences, knocking over pedestrians. The militant spirit of the blacks has caught on!

Down Fifty-ninth Street, revolutionary banners, NLF flags, black flags. The crowd of eight to ten thousand breaks into a mad stampede - they realize they have the streets! (the peaceniks and bourgeoisie wait impotently in Central Park, unaware of those who have broken the line). (Hahne and Morea 39)

Although the crowd consists of two diverse coalitions and others, Janice Morea sees this event through an anti-authoritarian lens.⁴⁴ For *Black Mask*, this is the same anti-

⁴³ BUAF was relatively small compared to the Mobe demonstration but was likely much larger than the Revolutionary Contingent. Very little has been written on the BUAF and it is therefore difficult to estimate numbers but there appears to have been a sizeable Harlem contingent mobilized that day. The efforts to bring BUAF into the antiwar demonstration was principally organized by Percy Gilmer and Omar Ahmed (of Brooklyn and East River CORE respectively) and Paul Brooks and Paul Boutelle of the Mobe (Hall 217).

⁴⁴ Often, the turn to disruptive protests and street fighting in the 1960s are coded as masculine or masculinist. The centrality of Janice Morea’s thoughts in this process should warn us against this kind of essentialism. However, it is important to remember that the organizations of this period were not immune to the patriarchal assumptions and gender coding of physical action and violence. These problems did not go unnoticed at the time, as seen by the socialist feminist Gloria Martin’s analysis in the context of the Pentagon and Stop the Draft Week actions, “Women, Organize Your Own Fighting Forces.” Martin argues that the “so-called role of women should be the same as men’s” (10). A related article in the same issue of *The Movement*, Karen Koonan and Bobbi Cleciorka reflect on their participation in the Oakland action, concluding that “[i]n the face of possible violence by cops there was no need and no time to worry about women acting like men” (11). In her memoir of this period, Cathy Wilkerson remembers that, despite the men using this event as an opportunity to explore new forms of masculinity, there were many women fighting back at Oakland Induction Center, throwing back tear

authoritarian lens that will interpret Black rebels (through the words of the anarchist Errico Malatesta) as no longer participating in a riot but an “insurrection” (Hahne and Morea 40). She does not emphasize the leadership of the Black contingent that inspired people to “break the parade line” as much as a militant spirit that inspires a diverse group. The line that binds them to the peaceniks and the bourgeoisie has been broken, undoing the planned parade. Thus, Black Mask was already championing the potential of relatively small autonomous protest groups almost a year before the Motherfuckers first action.⁴⁵

Although based on a march of thousands, the breakaway, as Black Mask conceives it, is a rejection of group hierarchy and homogeneity. While it remains significant that the Harlemites are in the front, they are followed by “the revolutionary contingent, anarchists and some not even aware that they have *broken away* from the mildness and futility of ‘demonstrations’” (Hahne and Morea 39, my emphasis). The breakaway’s character as autonomous and anti-hierarchical is understood in opposition to the larger demonstration, leading Morea to conclude “they are no longer a demonstration” (Hahne and Morea 39). Instead, she links them to far-off mobilizations like the Zengakuren in Japan, discussed below. Her term “broken away” takes on great significance in the editor’s commentary on the article, who explicitly names it as an

gas canisters, rocks, letting air out of police cruisers, building barricades, and setting fires (144).

⁴⁵ Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker formed in February, 1968, a month after the Koch assassination. Their first action was the “culture exchange” on February 12th where they brought trash from the Lower East Side during the garbage strike and dumped it on the steps of the Lincoln Center. This event was filmed by Newsreel in a film called *Garbage*.

“account of the break-away” march. In this formalization of the tactic, the breakaway is defined by both a physical and conceptual break, “first by leaving the prescribed route and second by leaving the concept of ‘symbolic’ protest” (Hahne and Morea 40). For the editor, the disruption caused by the breakaway was an example of “resistance,” distinguishable from symbolic protest. Once identified as a potential anarchist tactic, Black Mask could attempt to reproduce it.

Black Mask planned to implement the autonomous breakaway march that they gleaned from the April 15th mobilization in the next big antiwar mobilization, the march on the Pentagon on October 21st, 1967. To flesh out their vision of a breakaway demonstration, Black Mask returned to its similarity to popular demonstrations taking place among the Zengakuren, an anarchistic student movement in Japan. The Zengakuren’s militant confrontational marches, characterized by spiraling crowds armed with bamboo poles centrifugally launching into police lines, were known as the “Snake Dance” in the underground press. Although the Snake Dance was documented in the underground press, most of the organizing for the breakaway happened in person.⁴⁶ In the

⁴⁶ There is evidence of a print culture surrounding the popularization of this tactic as well. In a 1968 hearing with the Subcommittee on Un-American Activities, the committee addressed David Dellinger, one of the Chicago 7, concerning the plans for a “Snake Dance” at the Pentagon demonstration of the previous year. The committee refers to a document written by the Revolutionary Contingent titled “Another demonstration,” which reads

Up until now the peace movement has been operating within the rules of the system, co-operating with establishment restrictions and predictable, controllable demonstrations, paying lip service to the myth that these mass protests will change U.S. policies.

weeks leading up to the Pentagon demonstration, Ben Morea visited friends and comrades to encourage them to take part in the Revolutionary Contingent's action, showing up at the SDS office carrying two bamboo poles (T. Jones 137).⁴⁷ Former SDS and Weather Underground member Cathy Wilkerson remembers Morea as previously challenging the student activists with the model of Revolutionary Action Movement's attempted bombing of the Statue of Liberty (discussed in chapter one).⁴⁸ Although the

The mounting frustration in the peace movement is caused not only by the fact that the war has not been stopped, but also by the growing identification with liberation struggles in the world today.

A radical new form of protest is needed as a next step in the U.S. peace movement. One example of this type of protest is the Snake Dance, used in Japan by the Zengakuren (student organization), which enables the protesters to take over the streets and control their own demonstration.

The *Snake Dance* is made up of successive rows of about fifteen people abreast, with arms linked. Once in action it weaves and sways, maintaining a running pace. It is an easily learned formation which is difficult to break up because of its speed and tightness, and because the Snake Dance can change direction spontaneously and immediately. . . . All independents and groups interested in a militant form of protest will gather at the Reflecting Pool, by the Lincoln Memorial. (qtd. in United States Congress 2775)

⁴⁷ This account comes from Thai Jones, son of Morea's friend, former SDS and Weather leader Jeff Jones.

⁴⁸ Along with RAM, Wilkerson and Jones' connection to Weather Underground act as a reminder that the divide between protest tactics and guerrilla warfare was not always clear. Morea's attraction to the Zengakuren was likely enflamed by the visit from a member of the organization that fall. According to Morea, this Japanese student went on to join Che Guevara in Bolivia and perished with him (Personal Interview). On a related note, Kirkpatrick Sale describes the formation of a Revolutionary Contingent in New York that year as a way to enlist people to fight into guerrilla campaigns in Guatemala, Columbia, and Venezuela (348). There is no evidence that this Revolutionary Contingent bears any relation to the protest contingent that included Black Mask or the fate of this member of the Zengakuren. However, it is important to keep in mind that these tendencies coexist and inform one another. My argument is that affinity groups in the 1960s are defined by their context within mass demonstrations and transformation into a

student activists were drawn to Morea's vision, they ultimately decided against endorsing his plan.

Despite this lack of endorsement, a breakaway demonstration took place at the Pentagon demonstration that anticipated the affinity group structure of the Motherfuckers. In the end, Morea did not lead the demonstration into a Zengakuren Snake Dance, but a diffuse anarchist influence in the antiwar movement resulted in anarchic tactics at the Pentagon. As Greg Calvert remembers it, "adventurism was in the air" (Grele and Calvert 237).⁴⁹ Morea's initial plan was a breakaway from the Pentagon that would head downtown to smash up the commercial districts (T. Jones 137; Wilkerson 145), Calvert, who lived with Morea's main contact in SDS Jeff Jones in the Lower East Side at the time, remembers that this plan was initially discussed in New York and continued to be debated at the SDS house in Washington, D.C. In this space set up by Cathy Wilkerson, various options were discussed, including the Yippie Jerry Rubin's suggestion to block the freeways, the possibility of disrupting traffic downtown, as well as Morea's more militant confrontation scenario (Grele and Calvert 244). Ultimately, the argument that won out was that everyone would go to the Pentagon for

protest tactic, but the inventors of protest tactics sometimes had connections to other modes of struggles like guerrilla warfare.

⁴⁹ For an example of a similar development, see the Stop the Draft Week taking place almost simultaneously on the other coast at the Oakland Induction Center. For the demonstration, organizers handed out a manual for what they framed as a "new kind of demonstration" (qtd. in Segal 7). SNCC's paper *The Movement* dedicated this entire issue to the events and detailed the actions taken by protesters experimenting with small group "mobile tactics." Through articles, photographs, and maps, the newspaper virtually provides an additional manual for this kind of action.

the sake of “unity” (Grele and Calvert 246). However, Calvert admits that small skirmishes downtown did take place, with Wilkerson herself taking part by spray painting buses. At the main protest, the unity was broken by the breakaway of the Revolutionary Contingent, brandishing bamboo poles and charging the steps of the Pentagon (Grele and Calvert 247).⁵⁰ The breakaway did not use the spiraling formation of the Snake Dance. Nevertheless, they were able to bypass the armed guard and briefly break into the Pentagon. The success of this action was predicated on the autonomy of confrontational small groups.

While Black Mask experimented with the autonomy that they discovered in contemporary Black Power organizing and the confrontational protest tactics of the Japanese Zengakuren, the third and most analogous ingredient for the development of their affinity group came from anarchist history, specifically the Spanish Civil War. Ben Morea was a student of anarchist history from his time in the Liberation League, as was a fellow member of the League, Murray Bookchin. Bookchin’s apartment was a center of New York anarchism, where both younger anarchists and older anarchists, including

⁵⁰ According to Norman Mailer, the Revolutionary Contingent was so disunified it was hardly a group: “the Revolutionary Contingent . . . had been unable to function together because of many arguments on the proper style of their militancy, i.e. whether to use Vietcong flags or some of the specialized techniques of Japanese student such as snake dances for breaking through police lines. Once, the Revolutionary Contingent had consisted of the Committee to Aid the National Liberation Front, the Black Mask, and other high-fragmentation sects, but now no alliance was left other than their agreement to work together at the Pentagon” (275). As a result, it is better understood as a bloc of affinity groups. The actions of this bloc recall Louise Crowley’s initial reaction to Black Mask’s closing the MOMA; she scribbled in the margins of her copy of their leaflet “why mess with this - close the War Plants, or *the Pentagon* or City Hall, or the Precinct Station” (Hahne and Morea 5, my emphasis).

veterans of the Spanish Civil War, met and debated history and strategy. Through his study group, Bookchin attempted to develop a traditional anarchist federation centered around the publication *Anarchos*, although several of its contributors were moving closer to the counterculture. Their countercultural ties included experimental forms of living, including the rural commune, Cold Mountain Farm.⁵¹ Moreover, a former member of Black Mask, Tony Verlaan, recruited two members of the federation into the Situationist International. It was at a transitional moment that the New York anarchist milieu met with one of the mentors of the New Left and counterculture, Herbert Marcuse, following a talk he gave at the School of Visual Arts. According to Eve Hinderer, it was in the ensuing argument that Bookchin suggested adopting the anarchist forms developed in the Spanish Civil war of small fighting units called *grupo de afinidad*, prompting Morea to pronounce they would have to translate it into English first.⁵² By translating this term to affinity group, Morea began the process of adapting the affinity group to the American context. Beyond giving it an English name, the American anarchists' main contribution to

⁵¹ For a history of this commune, see Joyce Gardner *Cold Mountain Farm*.

⁵² Hinderer actually uses the term *aficionado* not *afinidad* but this must be a misremembrance on her part or on Bookchin's. There is some irony that Morea perceived English to be a prerequisite for American adoption of the term since the Motherfuckers ultimately end up in New Mexico with Reies Tijerina's Alianzistas, attempting to assist a Chicano armed insurrection, before they ultimately disbanded (Neumann, *Up Against the Wall* 126).

the affinity group was updating it from a military unit to the 1960s countercultural context of volatile street protests.⁵³

Black Mask's concentration on protest culture quickly caused tension among former supporters and cost them former allies, notably among the Situationist International (SI). Not long after the Pentagon demonstration, Raoul Vaneigem of the SI visited New York City, leading to a rift between the two groups that has been much discussed.⁵⁴ The exact reasons for this break are difficult to trace and Situationist founder Guy Debord commented that their "divergences with them are numerous" (Letter, 14 Dec. 1967). From the outset, Vaneigem refused to meet with Ben Morea after meeting Allan Hoffman, whose countercultural mysticism he found unsavory. For Vaneigem, Morea's problematic association to this mystical counterculture was confirmed by a communique Black Mask cosigned by Hoffman after the Pentagon demonstration. The pamphlet reads: "White radical activity may yet create its own Newark and Detroit . . . This has nothing to do with moral witness, peaceful demonstration or even resistance – this is aggression [sic], the beginning of revolutionary struggle. The peace movement is dead. At least death is on our

⁵³ As the anarchist historian Mark Bray points out in *Translating Anarchy*, the term *grupo de afinidad* predates the Spanish Civil War, initially describing an underground cell. In the 19th Century, the *grupo de afinidad* was the name for the anarchist version of the tightly-knit clandestine political group. The only difference being they were organized non-hierarchically. Thus, the hallmark of the affinity group has always been a small group organized non-hierarchically but it has undergone several permutations based the mode of anarchist engagement in a particular historical context. As with most anarchist innovations, it is misleading to attribute them to a specific creator or originator.

⁵⁴ Inasmuch as Black Mask has received scholarly attention, much of it has been focused on their relationship to the better-known SI. For an examination of Black Mask's influence on SI, see Sam Cooper's *Situationist International in Britain*.

side” (Black Mask and Totalists). For Black Mask, the antiwar protest signaled the beginning of a new revolutionary practice. Nadja Millner-Larsen rightly points out that Vaneigem’s adverse reaction to Black Mask was less about their relationship to mysticism than the relationship between theory and practice, that is to say, Ben Morea’s activism (224-233).⁵⁵ In response, Ben Morea criticized Debord for investing too much in theory and proclaimed that “we are not too militant, we are not yet militant enough” (qtd. in Millner-Larsen 262). With this letter, Morea signaled the distance he intended to take from the world of theory and writing.

Ultimately, the quasi-federation that Black Mask established among likeminded underground publications disintegrated. In retrospect, we can see that what was at stake went beyond guilt-by-association or militancy but a different concept of organization. There is no sign SI ever saw their organization as capable of participating in an anarchistic federation. In the fragmentation that followed their split with Black Mask, the Situationists wrote to their comrades in New York associated with Black Mask, clarifying the Situationist structure as a unified group: “The existing situationist movement is not a federation of autonomous groups, but a single internationalist grouping of autonomous *individuals* who cooperate in a coherent manner” (Debord, Letter, 14 Dec.

⁵⁵ In a letter to Morea, Debord is careful to explain that his opposition to this text does not represent an opposition to demonstrations as such. Rather he sees the flier as proof that Morea works closely with the mystical Hoffman and, furthermore, he points out that “[o]n a tactical level, you would seem to overemphasising head-on activism as a be-all & end-all. Naturally, we are opposed neither to demonstrations nor to violence” (Letter, 5 Dec. 1967). To Debord, it was a matter of emphasis and association.

1967). This correspondence was intended to clarify that the members of the New York anarchist milieu and the Council for the Liberation of Everyday Life, such as Bruce Elwell, Robert Chasse, and Tony Verlaan,⁵⁶ who desired entrance into the SI needed to commit fully and distance themselves from Black Mask. Significantly, this commitment is contingent on relinquishing autonomy for the sake of the unity of the SI. What this points out is that a principle divergence between SI and the anarchists, namely their opposition to the decentralized autonomy of small groups. After the break with SI, the members of Black Mask were more isolated as a small group, but they soon dissolved into the Motherfucker affinity group.

While the Motherfuckers were a small, local group, they were active in a diverse set of spheres. They distanced themselves further from the poetry world than Black Mask yet remained active in cultural aspects of life. Like the Diggers (discussed in chapter three), they set up free stores, crash pads, and were creative in their direct actions. For example, their first action was dumping garbage piled up in the Lower East Side at the Lincoln Center.⁵⁷ These early actions included new comrades like the painter and Herbert Marcuse's anarchist stepson Osha Neumann. Neumann and many of Motherfuckers came

⁵⁶ Verlaan's history with SI precedes his time in New York. He was present at the occupation of the University of Strasbourg and translated the text *On the Poverty of Student Life*, a text collaboratively written by Strasbourg students and the SI, into English. Texts from the first issue of *Black Mask* also appeared in Strasbourg during the occupation, which makes it an important site for the connection between the groups (Grindon 204). Verlaan's translations of SI texts was an important point of contention between him and Debord since Debord thought they were terrible (Letter, 14 Dec. 1967).

⁵⁷ Several actions bear resemblance to artistic Happenings, such as a community "Shit-in" where the Motherfuckers brought a real toilet down St. Mark's Place (Neumann, *Up Against the Wall* 95).

from artistic and literary backgrounds. By 1968, they were drawn to the militant actions happening in the Lower East Side. The Motherfuckers became increasingly involved in politics, from riots in their neighborhood, to forming a non-student chapter of SDS, and participating in the occupation of Columbia university. These actions made their way into the print culture of the underground press in the form of mimeographed flyers, posters, communiques, and counterculture newspapers.

Even when focused on the protest culture, the Motherfuckers continued to address cultural concerns, which positioned them as a bridge between the counterculture and the New Left.⁵⁸ They saw themselves as a militant arm of the former, and an anarchist intervention into the latter. Their indebtedness to their poetic heritage was on display when they signed their work with their full name, Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker, taken from an Amiri Baraka poem (“Black People!”) complete with the decorative slash borrowed from the New York School.⁵⁹ Building on the print experiments of newspaper-

⁵⁸ The Motherfuckers relationship to the pacifism in the hippie counterculture is too complex to go into here. It is important to note that they used their militancy to make and defend spaces for the counterculture. This includes an occupation of the concert hall, Filmore East, and cutting the fences at Woodstock festival. They advocated armed self-defense within the hippie community, under the banner of “Armed Love,” and practiced it themselves. Ben Morea was arrested in a stabbing incident in Boston where he traveled to defend the hippies being attacked by army veterans.

⁵⁹ The slogan or battle cry “Up Against the Wall Motherfucker” grew in popularity and can be heard chanted in Newsreel’s film of the Columbia occupation. The slash has an equally intriguing history. Daniel Kane associates the various contractions employed by the New York School with Ezra Pound but quotes Ishmael Reed on the slash “We thought that using slashes and “wd” instead of “would” was experimental writing. I finally asked Joel Oppenheimer, who was well known for this, why he used slashes instead of apostrophes and he told me that it was because he was a typesetter and the typesetting machine had no apostrophes. So I guess it wasn’t all that avant garde after all”

posters, the Motherfuckers continued to innovate in their publishing by producing ephemeral “street sheets” of the day’s news and removable-poster-centerfolds for *Rat Subterranean News*. At times, their affinity group went so far as to roll a typewriter through the Lower East Side to produce their publication, the *News from the Street* (Casey 52-3). Beyond chronicling the events happening in the Lower East Side, the Motherfuckers’ literature explained, developed and spread the notion of the affinity group.

Through a combination of street presence and underground publications, the Motherfuckers spread their concept of the affinity group. Their own affinity group swelled to about fifteen people with many taking Motherfucker for their surname: Charlie Motherfucker, Mark Motherfucker, Travis Motherfucker, et cetera (Neumann, *Up Against the Wall* 57).⁶⁰ Around this nucleus formed a small network composed of dropouts, neighborhood Puerto Rican youth, and others. Some of these others formed their own autonomous organizations, such as the Wine Group for Freedom (Wine Nation) composed of “winos. A women’s ancillary group, led by Charlie Motherfucker’s partner Carole Motherfucker, focused on cooking the feasts held in the courtyard of St. Mark’s

(Kane 8). The connection between the New York School and the Motherfuckers use of a decorative slash seems particularly complicated in this light.

⁶⁰ It is difficult to ascertain precise numbers since it was a somewhat nebulous group. Ben Morea called this informal network “the family,” which is fitting for their quasi-tribal adoption of the Motherfucker name (Personal Interview). Other than Ben Morea and the four names listed above, the Motherfucker affinity group included the aforementioned Osha Neumann and Allan Hoffman as well as Johnny Sundstrom, and Dick Motherfucker [Richard Lee]. This last member was based in Texas, making him more likely part of their extended “family” than part of their tight-knit affinity group.

church and occasionally holding their own separate demonstrations (Neumann, *Up Against the Wall* 57-8). According to Osha Neumann, the Motherfuckers' demonstrations increasingly moved away from sites of culture and focused on the broader political sphere or what they called "the System" (*Up Against the Wall* 66). This diffusion of activity frequently took the form of riots, which, as the epigraph describes, led to arrests to which the Motherfuckers responded by organizing more riots. Their organizing headquarters was a storefront on 9th street across from Tomsons' Square Park where they kept their Gestetner machine used to produce fliers for their continuous cycle of actions and spread their political analysis (Neumann, *Up Against the Wall* 69-72). Thus, riots and ephemera were the basis for their political organizing, both acting in concert and contributing to decentralization. As one Motherfucker statement says, "Affinity groups exist within a revolutionary organization, but cannot be organized" (Hahne and Morea 121). The affinity group form caught on in the local anarchist milieu, drawing in their longtime comrade from Resurgence Youth Movement, Jonathan Leake. Although the quasi-international federation described earlier had long dissolved, Jonathan Leake recalls that in this period of growth these locally-based affinity groups were able to come together and hold their own demonstrations, including a display of international solidarity for the attempted assassination of the German revolutionary Rudi Dutschke in April 1968 (81).⁶¹ In 1968, the affinity group became the basic building block (and in their writing, the central protagonist) for the Motherfuckers for their involvement political action.

⁶¹ Leake grew increasingly estranged from anarchism. His group, Resurgence Youth Movement, and its publication *Resurgence* were central to the early stages of this wave of

The affinity group form became all the more important as the Motherfuckers came to identify with a pre-established “revolutionary organization,” SDS. The Motherfuckers applied to be a chapter of SDS in February 1968, despite their anti-organizational proclivities and disregard for the student movement. In their writing, they overtly described their intention to transform the student movement:

the student is shit . . . The function of the student movement is not to make demands on the university, but to destroy the existence of the ‘student’ as a social role and as a character structure. YOU MUST DESTROY THE STUDENT WITHIN YOU. (Hahne and Morea 119)

The anarchist affinity group represented an opposing “character structure” to the student, the former predicated on the latter’s negation. The Motherfuckers did not join the student movement as students, but as countercultural anarchists who used this organizational form as a kind of canvas or stage to demonstrate their de-structuring force.

The Motherfuckers’ combination of countercultural antics and anarchist politics resulted in a volatile mixture in the context of SDS, intended to disrupt normal procedures and disintegrate the structure of the organization. They regularly participated in and disrupted regional conferences. Shortly after the formation of the Motherfuckers, the affinity group traveled to the SDS Regional Convention in Lexington, Kentucky on

insurrectionary anarchists. He brought with him into the anarchist milieu a connection to youth gang culture and he likely introduced the anarchists to the Baron Lords that Gavin Grindon claims taught the Motherfuckers karate (191). Since a full-run of *Resurgence* is rare, it is difficult to ascertain what role it played in the evolution of affinity groups. The “Guerrilla Manifesto” in 1966 argues against the present political organizations and for spontaneous action of autonomous groups. This could be interpreted as introducing affinity groups *avant la lettre*. By the late 1960s, he adopted a Maoist ideology and later became a follower of Lyndon Larouche (Nutmeg Books).

March 10th, 1968 where their participation amounted to an intervention parallel to the Koch assassination in a political setting. Significantly, the Motherfuckers did not resort to guns or threats. Instead, they interrupted the meetings with performances. For example, they held an impromptu martial art display on stage, chopping a brick and using it as a metaphor for their anarchist position, saying they would smash both capitalism and the State (Gitlin 240). If this performance simulated political violence, it did so for poetic effect.

It should be said that their poetic interventions were not meant to halt SDS's organizing; rather, they represented the Motherfuckers' vision for SDS's longevity. For the Motherfuckers, the continued success of SDS as a revolutionary organization required a focus on self-defense and resistance to hierarchical, centralized structure. In East Lansing, at the National Convention of SDS in June 1968, the Motherfuckers made a concerted effort to push their vision. This included relatively conventional practices like workshops like "Self-Defense and Internal Security," where they proposed that: "If SDS is to survive organizationally, it must at some time deal with this structurally (defense committees). At this time all members must become aware of tactics which might in the future save them from getting busted (over the head and/or into jail)" (qtd. in Hedgehog).⁶² The wording of this proposal compliments their proposal for people to organize based on affinity groups, which they distributed at the convention on a flier with a provocative, countercultural image of three people engaged in oral sex (Gitlin 234). The

⁶² This quotation comes from a report written by an agent who attended the convention on behalf of John Rees's National Goals, Inc, which Hedgehog refers to as a "private spook organization." For the original report, see *FOIA: National Goals, Inc.*

flier contextualizes affinity groups as responding to the need for political forms “that are tenacious enough to resist repression; forms which can grow secretly, learning to manifest themselves in a large variety of ways, lest their mode of operation be co-opted by the opposition, or they be simply smashed” (Hahne and Morea 111). Despite the reference to free love in the image, the argument of the flier is almost entirely practical, even when discussing their countercultural vision of revolution:

The political revolution can only serve to change the form in which hierarchical power is distributed – while our task must be to form a new cultural whole in which social control is returned to the people – a social revolution that will change the content of everyday life, as well as its structure. For us socialism & its forms of hierarchical organization must be abolished along w/bourgeois parliaments & democracies, so that no mere political form be allowed to impose itself on the content of a much more complex & multifarious life. (Hahne and Morea 111-112)

While the flier describes their desire for an alternate political vision against hierarchy and social control, it was their disruptive participation at the convention that demonstrated these desires. Dressed in black and carrying black flags, their series of disruptive performances included holding mock wedding to analogize and ridicule relationship between the student and worker. They nominated a wastebasket in an election against Bernardine Dohrn and Mike Klonsky, candidates running uncontested (Sale 462-8). According to John O’Brien, “the wastebasket did pretty well.” Overall, the Motherfuckers attempted to call attention to the shortcomings of the bureaucratic

structure of the SDS, arguing by way of poetics rather than conforming to the practices of participatory democracy.⁶³

If the Koch assassination can be understood as disrupting poetry with politics, here we see the Motherfuckers doing the inverse. It is fitting that the Motherfuckers' Chapter Report for the convention came in the form of a poem. The Report that Osha Neumann describes in his memoir "the urgency and the anarchy of the streets" crystallized into "a succinct expression" of reveals more upon close reading (*Up Against the Wall* 89). Certainly, the poem was indicative of the Motherfuckers shift away from theoretical language and lengthy prose found in the publications of previous groups like Black Mask.⁶⁴ Yet, this deceptively simple language becomes more complex when it finds its way into the most formulaic of genres, the bureaucratic report set in verse:

CHAPTER REPORT ON THE S.D.S.

⁶³ It should be noted that not all of their proposals were entirely symbolic protests or unsuccessful within the convention's democratic process. According to Kirkpatrick Sale, a proposal by the Motherfuckers "that SDS drink more wine and do less talking" in support of the California grape strikers was passed at the convention (417).

⁶⁴ The Motherfuckers' comrades in England, the anarchist group King Mob, argued that the linguistic shift from Black Mask's artistically oriented broadsheet to the Motherfuckers' street language paralleled their shift in media to "of grotty gestetnered leaflets, obscene broadsheets, posters, comics, slogans, spraycan graffiti, banners, chants, songs, tomtom tattoos, was a 'a new revolutionary *language*'" (10). King Mob provides examples of both styles: "In the first place, they started to write in the language of the streets. What, a few months before, had been 'The poverty against which man has been constantly struggling Is not merely the poverty of material goods; In fact, in industrially advanced countries the disappearance of material poverty has revealed the poverty of existence itself' became 'Your community represents death. You eat dead food. You live dead lives. You fuck dead women. Everything about you is dead... The struggle is for real life...'" (10). While most of this example seems to be cribbed from an interview with Ben Morea at a press conference with members of the underground press, notably including representatives of SDS, it is interesting to note that Morea's speech does greatly reflect the style of the Motherfuckers' prose (Hahne and Morea 95).

REDIONAL COUNCIL OF MARCH 10
 A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL
 IS A BOTTLE FILLED WITH
 THREE PARTS KEROSENE
 AND ONE PART MOTOR OIL
 IT IS CAPPED
 AND WRAPPED
 WITH COTTON
 SOAKED WITH GASOLINE
 TO USE —
 LIGHT COTTON
 THROW BOTTLE
 FIRE AND EXPLOSION OCCUR
 ON IMPACT WITH TARGET

A WHITE RADICAL
 IS THREE PARTS BULLSHIT
 AND ONE PART HESITATION
 IT IS NOT REVOLUTIONARY
 AND SHOULD NOT BE
 STOCKPILED
 AT THIS TIME
 Respectfully submitted
 UP AGAINST THE WALL
 MOTHERFUCKER (Hahne and Morea 141)

The rhythmically chosen line-breaks split up the name of the group, drawing attention to poetic origin of their name, normally indicated by a slash in their signed manifestos.⁶⁵

While the lexicon might be minimal, the Motherfuckers embraced poetry in contrast to the bureaucratic language of “white radicals” that they address in the Chapter Report. Not only does the poetic line undermine the bureaucratic form of the report, the poem allows for juxtapositions that produce a complex set of relations.

⁶⁵ Although the line is taken from an actual poem, Amiri Baraka’s “Black People,” the line break does not appear in this position in the original poem. This line break is the Motherfuckers’ invention, preserving the poetic origin through a reference to this device.

The Motherfuckers express their complex relationship to SDS through a simple juxtaposition. The tension in the juxtaposition is accomplished by the Motherfuckers' rejection of straightforward contrast between their group and SDS. Instead of contrasting SDS with the Motherfuckers, they contrast the "white radical" identity with a Molotov cocktail. The reader might be tempted to see the Molotov cocktail as a stand-in for the Motherfuckers, but it is more complicated. If the Molotov cocktail represents anything beyond political violence, it is poetry. The unlikely contrast between activists and an incendiary device, between one type of person and a type of object, invites us to think about the role of language. This response is a common reaction to poetry but not bureaucratic reports.

Put another way, the Molotov cocktail reminds the reader of the relationship between words and action. While the student activist might be comfortable with words, even provocative ones, the Motherfuckers sense that they are less inclined to break from bureaucratic habit and structure. The poem not only defies the norms of bureaucracy in its line breaks and jarring juxtapositions—which ensure it cannot be read as a report—it also encourages action. The explicit instructions on how to make a Molotov cocktail—fill it with three-parts kerosene and one-part motor oil—could be taken literally and applied. Rather than a report on an event, we have an instruction manual for future ones. It is likely the Motherfuckers intended for the reader to use this information., Consequently, they provide directions not just for their manufacture but how to use them ("light cotton/throw bottle). As Osha Neumann attests, the students were "often suitably

impressed by our militancy” and “SDS organizers made pilgrimages to their crashpads” (*Up Against the Wall* 90).

The Report is not conventional poetry, but an example of what the anarchists meant by “poetry is revolution.” The poem was meant to take part in a larger political process, transforming the SDS. As I explained at the beginning of the chapter, the spread of affinity groups was intimately tied to their proposal for “de-structuring” of mass organizations like SDS.⁶⁶ They envisioned a nonhierarchical SDS controlled by decentralized, autonomous small groups (Hahne and Morea 112).⁶⁷ While a segment of SDS was impressed by the Motherfuckers, their proposal was not taken seriously. The Chapter Report should be understood as a barbed response to their reception by the white radicals. Hence, we could read the reference to Molotov cocktails in the Chapter Report as a metaphor for this de-structuring, or even the lines as representative of this centrifugal decomposition. However, the Motherfuckers emphasis on action asks us to read this poem in the context of broader process of their revolutionary struggle. This explains why the poem ultimately offers a recipe (not unlike those that we find in Diane di Prima’s

⁶⁶ In an interview with Ian McIntyre, Ben Morea explains their motivation for intervening in SDS: “We saw that SDS was becoming a real force for change and that all these traditional left groups and Maoists like Progressive Labor were trying to take it over and control its direction. We thought it was important for other kinds of people, like us, to get involved and show the students that there were many choices, many ways they could go” (“Conversation” 164). They wanted to present an anarchist alternative to the SDS as it fell under the influence of more authoritarian groups.

⁶⁷ Although the flier was handed out at the National Convention, it does not address SDS by name. I rely here on their Convention proposal, “Destructuring of SDS,” reproduced in the FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover’s “A Study of Marxist Revolutionary Violence” (297). This suggests that the FBI took the proposal more seriously than the SDS.

poems discussed in the next chapter). Indeed, their Convention proposal itself, “Deconstructing of SDS,” also privileged suggestions for actions over organizational structure. It offers motivational chestnuts like “[t]he buildings are yours for the burning” (qtd. Hoover 297). The actions they describe are generalizable, independent on SDS’s organizational structure, they could be taken up autonomously. As a former SDS leader Mark Rudd recently revealed, a friend of the Motherfuckers, J.J. (John Jacobs), was responsible for setting a fire in Hamilton Hall, during the Columbia occupation (Castellucci).⁶⁸

Beyond this singular and extreme act, the Columbia occupation in general veered closer to the Motherfuckers’ political vision than the Conventions. Taking place in the interval between the Rudi Dutschke demonstration mentioned above and the National Convention (and less than three weeks after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.), the Columbia occupation was a high-water mark for the insurrectionary tendency within the New Left.⁶⁹ The occupation brought together a variety of practices that interested the

⁶⁸ Although the building itself was not burned, Rudd claims J.J. was responsible for the destruction of the files of Orest A. Ranum, including his notes for a textbook on early modern European history (Castellucci). According to the Motherfucker John Sundstrom, it was J.J. who asked the Motherfuckers to join occupation, telling them “We need your help” (“Hundreds of Pairs” 375). Other iconoclastic and irreverent acts were proposed by Ben Morea during the occupation, including assaulting professors, holding off the police by slashing expensive paintings, and putting the university’s collection of Chinese porcelain on the barricades (Hahne and Morea 109). This last was a reference to Bakunin’s tactic during the Paris Commune, drawing on a long tradition of anarchist revolt against the State and culture.

⁶⁹ For accounts of the Columbia Occupation see Jeremy L. Avorn’s *Up Against the Ivy Wall* and the recent collection *A Time to Stir*.

Motherfuckers, including street fighting with both right wing students and police, and a decentralized organization across five barricaded buildings. During the Motherfuckers' trek through these buildings over the week-long occupation, they discovered the embryonic form of a network of revolutionary communes. They began the occupation in Hamilton Hall, then helped occupy Low Library and eventually settled in Math, which Osha Neumann claims they transformed into "a reasonable facsimile of a Lower East Side crash pad" (*Up Against the Wall* 81-2).⁷⁰ The former-Black Mask members of the Motherfuckers must have taken some delight in the irony of transforming Ken Koch's workplace into their incubation chamber for anarchist small groups.

In this insurrectionary climate, the Motherfuckers vision gained a kind of traction that it never could in the bureaucratic atmosphere of the conventions. The concept of de-structuring the SDS never captured the imagination of the organized, nor did it go away; At the next year's National Convention, the Motherfuckers' old comrade Murray Bookchin proposed a "Radical Decentralist Project," again encouraging the SDS chapters restructure as affinity groups in May of 1969 (Biehl, ch. 8 n54).⁷¹ In the meantime, the concept of affinity groups continued to spread. Characteristically, the concept was most prominent in

⁷⁰ Sundstrom describes the Motherfuckers' contribution in terms of reinforcing the occupation's defenses. Th Motherfuckers taught students self-defense and reinforced the barricades ("Hundreds of Pairs" 377-8).

⁷¹ See also "Post-Scarcity Society: the American perspective and the SDS." Bookchin's and the Motherfuckers appear to have had a relationship of mutual influence in this period, and the development of affinity groups might be best understood, in anarchist terms, as a decentralized project that included both the Motherfuckers and Bookchin's anarchist federation.

periods of conflict, developing in opposition to mass organizations. Post-Columbia, the Motherfuckers experienced a new stage in which small groups proliferated, even if they continued to exist in contrast to—not as a de-structuring of—mass organizations. The revolutionary organization as a network of affinity groups remained utopian fantasy. But, as utopian fantasy, the affinity group developed a poetic form that exceeded the material effects of the revolutionaries on the barricades. This poetic form is registered in the print culture of the groups in the Motherfuckers' social networks that they came to refer to as the International Werewolf Conspiracy.

A Barricade that Opens the Way

What's that barricade doing there?
its symbolic
of what?
a barricade.⁷²

The International Werewolf Conspiracy was the name the Motherfuckers gave to their expanding network of affinity groups, but it was also the name for a speculative organization of the affinity groups, which was never realized. Their network's material existence consisted of small affinity groups, geographically scattered, engaging in volatile confrontations in their local area. The name International Werewolf Conspiracy (IWWC) first appears in fliers distributed in the wake of the occupation of Columbia

⁷² In "Liberated Territory," Anthony Ashbolt suggests that this conversation, appearing first in the *San Francisco Express Times* in an article by Wayne Collins, "Berkeley Movement is Out of Sight," is possibly apocryphal. The conversation ostensibly took place during a student occupation on the Berkeley campus in 1968, and was in reference to the flimsy barricades that they erected (Ashbolt 118).

University (Hahne and Morea 119). The notoriety of the Motherfuckers grew over the summer of 1968 through their relatively high-profile involvement in direct actions, acting as a kind of signal flare for anarchists. However, the spread of the affinity group depended on an anarchist print culture with features of poetry, fiction, and the counterculture all working to develop the small group as the protagonist of anarchist action. This eclectic print culture proved appropriate for the informality, malleability, and creativity that the small group brought to demonstration. While each small, local group had its own identity, they could begin to imagine how they existed together by turning to a figure to represent their collectivity: the werewolf.

While retaining the small group form, the Motherfuckers aspired to spread their ideas through their writing and publishing. According to Ben Morea, the Motherfuckers in New York grew to include four or five associated affinity groups, each made up of about five people (Personal Interview). A popular definition for these early affinity groups was a “street gang with analysis,” an analogy Osha Neumann coined. Neumann, reflecting on this reputation as a street gang, admits that “in some ways it was aspirational, I mean we wanted to have that kind of tightness, that relation to violence, and the command of the streets in some way — the control of the streets” (Personal Interview). Not all of their organizational models exemplified this desire for tight control, but they all maintained this aspiration to go beyond their current form.

For their wider network, the Motherfuckers turned to analogies with a fluid, nebulous character: a commune, a tribe, and Morea’s preferred nomenclature, the

family.⁷³ By 1968, there was more than one “family” in the Lower East Side, the Motherfuckers and the STP Family, as well as other affinity groups in other boroughs, like the Brooklyn Commune.⁷⁴ Affinity groups cropped up in geographically dispersed places. Further up the coast, there appeared an affinity group called the Boston Freeman. Across the pond, the Motherfuckers’ English comrades broke with the Situationist International and formed the affinity group King Mob.⁷⁵ An enigmatic and possibly nomadic group connected to the Motherfuckers called the Flower Cong made an

⁷³ Describing the process of group formation, Morea embraces ambiguity, saying “there’s this amorphous, this flow. A lot of people don’t see it that way” (Personal Interview). The “flow” of group formation that Morea refers to chimes with the countercultural philosophy of life that he subscribed to at the time, a kind of process ontology: “All I’m trying to say is that we believe in a total way of living. Let me explain this to you. It might seem a little metaphysical. There is an energy which is living, life. If you block that energy, it’s going to knock you down. If you allow the energy to pass through you, good. Now we have that energy. If you come in front of me and try to prevent me from living, to prevent me from flowing, then I’m going to knock you down. If you just allow me to live, and allow my energy to pass, then good” (Hahne and Morea 95).

⁷⁴ The individuals in the STP family similarly adopted names within their pseudo-familial relations: ex. John Kirkland (STP John), Gary White (STP Bishop) and Bryan Spencer (Little Brother) (Turner).

⁷⁵ One leaflet lists groups associated with the IWWC as Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, Al Paredon Hijo de Puta (a Spanish variation of the name), Berkeley commune, Boston Freeman, Church of the New Reality (southwest), and the October 15th movement, the Flower Cong, and “you” (Hahne and Morea 125). This last suggests the aspirational and open-ended nature of the organization. It should also be noted that other small groups were forming, using the term “affinity group,” which were not part of the informal networks of the IWWC, and not necessarily non-hierarchical. This includes groups inspired by the Motherfuckers but closely aligned with Marxist-Leninism or Maoism, like the Jesse James Gang and other early Weathermen groupuscules.

appearance at the Chicago Democratic National Convention protests.⁷⁶ It is not surprising that with such amorphous and spontaneous transformations of their group composition that the Motherfuckers eventually turned to the werewolf to imagine their collective identity.

The final piece for the formation of the IWWC network came from the West Coast where small groups had already been forming, independently of the Motherfuckers. After the Long, Hot Summer of 1967, antiwar activists on the West Coast were experimenting in the possibilities of small autonomous groups. Just one day before the Pentagon demonstration, Berkeley students and their comrades staged demonstrations at an Oakland Induction Center for Stop the Draft Week, erecting barricades and mobilizing in small, mobile street fighting units.⁷⁷ These small groups, organizing on the Black Panthers' doorstep, predictably drew on the concept of urban guerrillas popular within the Panther movement (discussed in chapter four). It wasn't until the antiwar student activists teamed up with the counterculture anarchists the following spring that these small groups were framed as anti-authoritarian formation.⁷⁸ This is a good reminder that

⁷⁶ It is unclear where the Flower Cong was actually based. It may have been an early attempt at naming the broader network, since the Berkeley Barb reports the Flower Cong takeover of Grand Central Station in June, 1968 ("What Happens to Hippie When Cops Beat Him Bad"), and locates them again in Boston when Morea was arrested for stabbing a marine ("Pigs Stick Flower Cong for Marine Knifings"). A reporter for *The Village Voice* sighted this "particularly well organized and effective" contingent at the 1968 DNC in Chicago (S. Lerner 77).

⁷⁷ For an account of these events, see *The Movement*, November 1967.

⁷⁸ For a West Coast theoretical examination of small groups that does not use the East Coast Motherfuckers as its reference point, see Marvin Garson's "Revolutionary Gangs."

the anarchists did not invent the idea of operating in small groups. By formalizing this small group structure as the affinity group, they articulated its anti-authoritarian potential, emphasizing its autonomy from the mass organizers. This autonomy was on full display in the riots on Berkeley's Telegraph avenue in the spring of 1968.

The Berkeley rioters drew on the anarchist imaginary of the Motherfuckers for their tactical formation and anti-authoritarian approach of affinity groups. Although the small, mobile groups that appeared in Oakland the year before emerged out of the usual New Left and student activist milieu, the concept of anti-authoritarian affinity groups caught on with the "street people" who hung out on Telegraph avenue. These "street people" were a segment of the counterculture centered around a group that tabled outside of Cody's Books. Like the Motherfuckers' concept of tribe or family, the term "street people" named a nebulous, unclassifiable group phenomenon, emerging in the counterculture. *Time* magazine described the street people as a collection of groups, "an amorphous assemblage of hippies, yippies, students, and others falling into no classification" ("Protest" 27). It was a term used to distinguish them from the more institutional elements of the New Left and counterculture, while maintaining their heterogeneous character.⁷⁹ In the Bay Area, specifically, the street people were known for

This article appeared just days before affinity groups engaged in street fighting on Telegraph avenue on June 28th, 1968.

⁷⁹ The term was often used in the era and in retrospectives without any clarification. It can easily be mistaken to mean the homeless of a given area and there was no doubt overlap. However, whenever the term is defined it is distinguished by its heterogeneity. For example, Stew Albert remembers the Bay Area street people being composed of runaways, college dropouts, and draft dodgers (37). Anthony Ashbolt remarks that they

their militancy (Ashbolt 129). In June, this militant set of small groups showed up to a protest organized in solidarity with French students by the Young Socialist Alliance and transformed it into a riot, erecting barricades on the avenue (Ashbolt 130). These rioters refused the leadership of the protest organizers and operated as affinity groups. The best known were the Delaware Affinity Group, 8th and Castro Gang, and Persian Fuckers. After the riot, they declared themselves the Berkeley Commune, and began printing a Motherfucker-esque poster-newspaper called *Barricade*.

Berkeley's street people were a perfect conduit for anarchist ideas that spread through their network and continued to challenge the institutional Left. Over the summer, Telegraph Avenue continued to be a flashpoint for riots and confrontations with the police. During these events, the street people put forward their own tactics and, moreover, forwarded their vision for revolutionary politics at Leftist meetings. The affinity groups disrupted meetings in an attempt to "break down the parliamentary forms," proclaiming in suitably countercultural terms that "fantasy will be at war with society" (Farber 67-9). To intervene in the New Left, the Berkeley Commune even started their own SDS chapter with the provocative name, the Molotov Cocktail Party. Although the New Left leadership perceived these disruptions as a threat, a central figure of the Berkeley Commune, the "Persian Fucker" Haj Razavi's speeches at these meetings were met with some sympathy. He was able to capture the imagination of at least some of the attendees by arguing that "vision not slogans were necessary" (Farber 73). When the

fit the descriptions of the "classic lumpenproletariat" except that they were recognized as "agent[s] of change" (129).

Berkeley Commune occasionally put forward slogans, they were not framed as political demands; a popular slogan was “Liberate Berkeley.” *Barricade*’s vision of a Berkeley commune and a liberated Berkeley refused any rigid formal order. As street people, their concept of the commune was not confined to a particular home or institution. Instead, it was predicated on liberating the neighborhood from the police.⁸⁰

The writings of the street people synthesized the spirit of the riots with an emerging anarchist vision of politics. After the riot on Telegraph avenue, a special Fourth of July issue of the Motherfuckers’ “Newspaper of the Streets” appeared in Berkeley proclaiming that “Watts was the beginning of our revolution.” This publication points to the presence of New York Motherfuckers visiting Berkeley during these events. Beyond the presence of the New York affinity group, the local groups reproduced Motherfucker writing in their publications that forwarded an anarchist politics. Like the Black Mask-affiliated issues of *Guerrilla*, *Barricade* appeared in the poster form (*Guerrilla* had also relocated to the Bay Area). The layout of *Barricade* included cut-ups, collages, and other avant-garde techniques reminiscent of calligrams.⁸¹ In one issue, the words “Strike Anywhere” appear along the border and the word “fire” is constructed from cut out blocks of typewritten text on the background of photographs of graffiti and protests and

⁸⁰ According to the *Berkeley Barb*, the Berkeley Commune was not the name of a collective home, but the commune named the people who were willing to fight. More broadly, the name was “also used for the generic term for the whole street people thing” (3).

⁸¹ For a study of the importance of Calligrams and Concrete Poetry to the politically oriented sections of the avant-garde, see David W. Seaman’s *Concrete Poetry in France*.

détourned images. This composition draws on the avant-garde techniques that inspired Black Mask in order to represent the Berkeley Commune's militant and anti-structural identity. Thus, they bring the conflictual aesthetic of the art and literary world into their political organizing. The chaotic effect of the collage anticipates the metamorphic hybridity that the Motherfuckers discover in the figure of the werewolf.

When these affinity groups signed their writing with the collective name International Werewolf Conspiracy, it represented a successful realization of the Motherfuckers' anarchist vision, while pointing beyond it. Like the Motherfuckers, IWWC developed in response to a perceived need for an alternative to the mass organizations of the New Left. Yet, the true adversary was always the capitalist system or "the Establishment." Haj Razavi defines the Establishment as "not a person or personality but a machine" made up of "highly efficient instruments" set to eliminate the radicals (Razavi and Edwards).⁸² With his depersonalized understanding of the Establishment, a machinic antagonist, sets up the IWWC to develop in their writing a depersonalized protagonist to oppose it (thus, the werewolf/establishment dichotomy operates similarly to the panther/pig dichotomy discussed in chapter four).

The IWWC's aspiration to develop a network powerful enough to confront the system, for the most part, existed as fiction. The network itself was based on

⁸² Razavi actually uses the word "extremists" to contrast with the establishment that operates as the self-appointed "just measure, the balance." He argues that his recent arrest for supposedly bombing the transmission tower of Pacific Gas and Electric Co is part of the establishment's conspiracy to frame up a handful of white and brown activists in order to avoid the charge of racism while attacking the Black Panthers (Razavi and Edwards).

interpersonal connections and not fundamentally grounded by their print culture since a list of the Motherfuckers travels in the summer of 1968 would greatly reflect the locations of new affinity groups. A text called “The Myth Killer” signed by the Motherfuckers in New York, the Berkeley Commune, the Boston Freeman, the Church of the New Reality (Southwest), October 15th Movement, the Flower Cong and even a Spanish-language Al Paredon Hija de Puta, all under the banner of the IWWC. This list of existing groups ends on an aspirational note with “and You” (Hahne and Morea 125). The disparate affinity groups and the potential future ones relied on the print culture like this text to express their political identity. Taking it one step further, Neumann argues that “the International Werewolf Conspiracy was really a fiction; it was more of a media creation. It never actually existed in any real way” (Personal Interview).⁸³ The importance of fiction was not underestimated by the Motherfuckers, who referred to themselves in Surrealist terms as “the vanguard of fantasy” and their broader organization as “further from reality but closer to existence” (Hahne and Morea 109, 137). In its fictional form, the affinity group network extended beyond the actually existing groups, taking on the contours of an anarchist utopian fantasy.

The Motherfuckers expressed their utopian fantasy in what might seem a surprising genre, the Gothic. Although the Gothic makes sense for a group claiming the figure of the werewolf, the genre’s features do not immediately summon to mind an

⁸³ Although less pessimistic, Morea mostly agrees: “So the IWWC was us, Berkeley, Boston, Texas, wherever there were affinity groups that actually were associated. . . . There was no organization” (Personal Interview). The international conspiracy was fantasy.

association with utopian literature. The link between the Gothic novel and Utopian literature has been underexplored — even though there is a clear historical parallel between the emergence of the Gothic and revolution. The Surrealist Andre Breton read the traditional Gothic novel as the literary version of the French Revolution, registering in fantastic descriptions the psychological changes accompanying the upheaval (Rosemont 196). Breton argued that the fantastic elements of the Gothic could account for “a disparity between the reality of social change and its ideal configuration,” expressing the latent not the manifest content of the period (Darie 145). For the Motherfuckers, whose origins were in New York’s avant-garde scene heavily indebted to Surrealism, it is likely they turned to the Gothic for similar reasons. In a text called “A Motherfucker is a Werewolf,” they make a claim for a Gothic utopia with: “The future of our struggle is the future of fear. FEAR!!” They justify their embrace of fear by explaining they mean: “The fear of free love. fear of not working. fear of youth” (Hahne and Morea 122). While these qualities are all more legible aspirations and qualities, it is the Gothic fear that stands out.

The IWWC’s werewolf seems strange, in part, because the monster is conventionally the antagonist in Gothic literature. In the writing of the IWWC, we are asked to identify with the monster as protagonist, even as an emblem of the revolutionary potential of the counterculture. To describe this revolutionary potential, the IWWC eschews the conventional imagery of the peaceful flower child for the werewolf. The Motherfuckers’ comrades in England, the affinity group King Mob, recognized the appropriateness of the Gothic genre for the IWWC, which they described as “an occult network of resistance” (King Mob 12). The IWWC could not depend on conventional

models in order to develop a network of affinity groups within the counterculture and outside of the New Left institutions. Their network strove for the hybridity, the amorphousness, and, indeed, the threat summoned up by the werewolf. Moreover, the werewolf, while supernatural, draws on a Gothic language of the streets — pulling from classic folk tales and the pulp fiction of street vendors. Hence, “A Motherfucker is a Werewolf” proceeds in the form of a modern folktale:

We drink the magic potion and become the spectre that haunts Amerika. We are the WEREWOLVES baying at the moon and tearing at the fat. Fangs sharpened, Claws dripping. We are not afraid. We create fear. (the Pig wanders from his sty . . . and the wolves descend). (Hahne and Morea 122)

Although there is no sign of the social harmony often associated with utopian dreams, the werewolf story represents the IWWC’s utopian desire for an imminent revolution. Rather than a programmatic utopian blueprint for the future common among formal political organizations, this utopian vision is appropriate to informal affinity groups, with its emphasis on open-ended conflict. The IWWC presents this fear and conflict engendered by this gothic figure as desirable and voluntary.

Their version of the werewolf tale describes a monstrous transformation on a voluntary basis. Specifically, the IWWC describes their transmogrification as the result of choosing to drink a magic potion. An audience versed in werewolf cinema might wonder at this choice, since in contemporary popular culture one becomes a werewolf by a bite. The IWWC’s consumption of magic potions is clearly a reference to the drugs of the counterculture. By contextualizing their identity in the drug culture, the IWWC makes space for anarchist affinity groups within the lifestyle experiments percolating outside of the mainstream. While the notion of revolution of autonomous small groups might seem

intimidating, they seem to ask, is it that different from experimenting in drugs or other forms of nonconformity?

Through magic and drugs, the IWWC taps into an historical tradition, grounding their affinity groups in the folklore of heretics and witchcraft. In folklore, there is a plethora of ways to voluntarily transform into a werewolf that predates the predominance of the stories of the werewolf bite.⁸⁴ The IWWC's magic potion, specifically, draws on a countercultural history based in alternative (if semi-mythical) social organizations, such as medieval werewolf cults and the witch's covens. While we do not have the space to explore these groupings in depth, the work of Marxist theorist Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* demonstrates how the idea of witchcraft covens developed as propaganda against alternative forms of social organization.⁸⁵ By embracing witchcraft, the IWWC reclaims this body of folklore as a utopian vision of rebellious collectivity.

In the IWWC's Gothic tale, the monstrous protagonist is a collective one, even if it characterized as antisocial. The collectivity offered by the affinity groups stands in opposition to the basic emblems of contemporary society, like the family. The IWWC describes their countercultural offensive as "striking terror into the vacant hearts of the plastic Mother & pig-faced Father" (Hahne and Morea 122). For the IWWC, the family

⁸⁴ The common procedures to become a werewolf in folklore and werewolf trials include: the infamous bite from a werewolf, a magical curse or divine punishment, drinking from a puddle stepped in by a werewolf, wearing a wolfskin or, especially, a belt or girdle made from a wolf, drinking ale after a specific ritual, anointment. Often these methods come with the additional pact with the devil.

⁸⁵ Furthermore, Federici finds a connection between accusations of witchcraft and shapeshifting (194).

epitomizes the consumer society (plastic) and the forces of order (the pig) in contrast to the children who “grow hair and fangs and leave home to run with the wolves” (Hahne and Morea 123). This Gothic story equates the metamorphosis of the children with becoming a hippy with their controversial long hair. Through Gothic exaggeration, this lifestyle choice portends the parent’s loss of a generation of children. Turning children against parents, the IWWC envisions the counterculture as a force capable of preventing mainstream society from reproducing itself. Moreover, their Gothic story implies the werewolves and children engage in cannibalism, an act often associated with witchcraft. This seems to be in accord with Federici’s linking of witchcraft to its challenge to the social reproduction of society.⁸⁶ The IWWC pushes the counterculture to be more than their long hair, more than lifestyle choices, envisioning a kind of shapeshifting that breaks from the social order.

In their Gothic tale, werewolves represent a social alternative founded on a network, rather than a specific or homogenous organization. In their final documents, the IWWC sketch out the possibility of a non-institutional and antiauthoritarian alternative not yet realized. Without a real-world model of affinity-based network, they rely on the Gothic to project a non-existent organizational form, which they call by the esoteric name: conspiracy. Through a story about a werewolf attack on a small town, they imagine this conspiracy growing through the coming together of autonomous groups, represented by the sounds of wolves: “In the distance a wolf howls, and another one answers, and another,

⁸⁶ Indeed, the magic potions used for the witch’s flight and metamorphosis were commonly believed to contain the flesh of children.

and another, and soon the night is filled with the roar of howling wolves. The sounds merge into a chaotic chorus as the wolves gather together under the fullness of the moon” (Hahne and Morea 123). The howls in this passage stand in for the clandestine practices of affinity groups, linking one another into a network. The Gothic genre provides the terms to describe the development of a conspiracy without revealing their secrets.

Even without explicitly describing an organizational structure, the description of the werewolf conspiracy makes plain that these groups are not to dissolve into a broader organization. The phrase “and another one answers, and another, and another” reminds us that the IWWC is constituted by small, independent units: a multiplicity. This multiplicity is brought together by their autonomy and antagonism, their “chaotic chorus.” The werewolf howls are a metaphor for the coming together of affinity groups.

The affinity group can be understood as the protagonist of this Gothic Story in the texts of the IWWC. The Gothic story endows the affinity group with a futurity, a projection into unknown territory. In the print culture of the IWWC, the Gothic conspiracy suggests a utopian dream in the form of a nightmare. If it is common in fiction that dystopias resemble utopias at the outset, it is also true that sometimes a utopian vision can look like a dystopia. While not quite dystopian, the IWWC’s embrace of the Gothic stems from their interest in the weirdness of the counterculture and its unknown future. They sign the leaflet with a dramatic flourish, defining their identity: “The worst fear is the fear of the unknown and we are the unknown...” (Hahne and Morea 123). By claiming the unknown, they refuse any model or blueprint for creating their future together. They will be brought together by spontaneous and clandestine practices that

emerge from the experiments of the counterculture. Documents like “A Motherfucker is a Werewolf” both express this countercultural sensibility in their style and attempt to push affinity groups beyond their present formation and network. The IWWC emerges in the denouement of the Motherfuckers, a period that saw their retreat from political conflict and immersion in countercultural communes. But these final texts promise a different conclusion. In these fantasies, their retreat becomes just another form of travel or revolutionary adventurism.

Conclusion

That’s right. The best thing we can do is fan out around the country and be our own selves.

—Murray Mednick⁸⁷

By the end of 1969, the Motherfuckers had abandoned the Lower East Side, and begun to explore the landscape of the Back to the Land Movement in the Southwest. Many of the early affinity groups associated with the IWWC traded in urban street fighting for rural communes. Yet, the destiny of these participants in affinity groups would be different from the concept of the affinity group. It is as if the authors of the affinity group and their texts went in different directions, diverging almost immediately as the concept began to travel through the underground press. The concept was adapted

⁸⁷ Medick’s play *The Deer Kill* was an off-off Broadway production by the experimental theater company, Theatre Genesis, about three fictional Motherfuckers. The play follows their travels through the Back to the Land Movement, after their exodus from the Lower East Side. It opened in May 1970 and was performed in the same location as Black Mask’s mock shooting of Ken Koch, St. Mark’s Church. For more on *The Deer Kill* and Theatre Genesis, see Stephen J. Bottoms, *Playing Underground*.

for new contexts, first by the Motherfuckers' former SDS comrades in the Weather Faction. As I discussed in the introduction, the Weathermen drew on the street fighting formation while adding a hierarchical chain of command. Affinity groups continued to form within more anarchistic circles as well, as Morea's friend and anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin helped popularize the concept in his 1969 text *Listen, Marxist!* Bookchin's account of the affinity groups emphasized nonhierarchical organizing, while diminishing the Motherfuckers' emphasis on confrontation. Bookchin's downplay of confrontation catered to the ideals of pacifism still popular in the counterculture. If the affinity group in the Weather Faction's hands became all street fighting, the pacifists, on the contrary, shaped the affinity group into an alternative to urban guerrillas, exploring its possibility for horizontal organization. While Weather's flirtation with affinity groups was a short-lived prelude to underground guerrilla cells, the pacifist version of the affinity group was taken up in the 1970s and 80s by the anti-nuclear movement organizations like the Clamshell Alliance. This movement required pacifist trainings to keep their autonomous groups from confrontations.⁸⁸ For this reason, it was not until the introduction of anonymous black blocs in North America that the affinity group structure definitively broke from this kind of organizational structure, and rediscovered the possibilities of small group confrontations. Since the introduction of the black bloc, confrontational affinity groups have been a continuous feature of street protests in the anti-globalization, Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and antifascist movements.

⁸⁸ For more on this stage of affinity group organizing, see Andrew Cornell's *Oppose and Propose*. In the 1970s, the concept of the affinity group synthesized with the theories of participatory democracy that it once opposed.

The writing of the Motherfuckers played a key role in spreading the concept of the affinity groups. Their distinctive style left open the possibility of the continued transformation of the concept. Their writing reminds us of what made the affinity groups distinct (an anti-authoritarian organization), what made them work (an autonomous initiative), and what helped them spread (a countercultural imaginary). This last feature — their literary exploration of magic and unusual forms of sociality — should not be taken as mere metaphor for a form of political organization. The Gothic weirdness of the werewolf imagery registers the counterculture's interest in the power of magic and alternate states of consciousness. The anarchists in the counterculture continued to explore the possibilities of alternative worldviews and ways of life in the communes. For the Motherfuckers, the affinity group was the just the beginning of their communal experiments. By living together, the affinity groups, created for street protests, began to transform the home.⁸⁹ In the next chapter, we will use the life and work of Diane di Prima to investigate how the anarchists approached the communes, not as a retreat from revolution but a new revolutionary way of life.

⁸⁹ According to Johnny Sundstrom, the affinity groups grew more communal over time. At some point, the Motherfuckers made it a requirement that their affinity group live together, and share resources (Osha Neumann and Ben Morea were the exceptions). Sundstrom understands this development as an extension of the security culture of the small group. A police infiltrator could finagle their way into the Motherfuckers' affinity group but would meet further obstacles when the group required them to live in a crashpad and share all their money (Personal Interview). Their crashpad was an outgrowth of the affinity group, and the embryonic form of their communes.

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Chapter 3

LETTERS TO FRIENDS: THE COMMUNAL HOME IN DIANE DI PRIMA'S REVOLUTIONARY LETTERS

REVOLUTIONARY LETTER #41

Revolution: a turning, as the earth
turns, among planets, as the sun
turns round some (darker) star, the galaxy
describes a yin-yang spiral in the aether, we turn
from dark to light, turn
faces of pain & fear, the dawn
awash among them.

If the Motherfuckers' visions of werewolves and magic (discussed at the end of the previous chapter) seems strange to us now, it should remind us that the 1960s counterculture was not just experimenting in art and politics. The counterculture aimed at overhauling everyday lifestyles and interpersonal relationships based on unorthodox ideas, including the occult and a rejection of social convention. Among histories of 1960s militants, unorthodox beliefs and lifestyles get downplayed in the name of exploring more practical concerns like the impact of protests and the structure of formal organization. For the anarchists, this emphasis on the standards of practicality is detrimental since it excludes much of their activity that lies outside the formal grouping and a successful campaign for reforms. It may be that in order to include the nebulous networks and informal activity of the anarchists in our view of the 1960s, we will also have to include the often strange (and potentially absurd) frameworks of these anarchists.

What we will find, I speculate, is that by including the supernatural, we will also have more opportunity to study sites of struggle that get excluded as mundane. For example, this chapter looks at the home in the context of insurrection. The otherwise ordinary setting of the home undergoes a radical transformation in the hands of one of most prolific anarchist poets of the era, Diane di Prima. I argue that Diane di Prima's poetry clears a space for the home in the insurrectionary moment of the late 1960s, "alchemically" transforming the home from a domestic space into an unorthodox space with a revolutionary potential.

Di Prima's home in this period was not an ordinary place. To bring the counterculture in relief, let's begin at an extreme: Diane di Prima on a remote commune in Northern California called Black Bear Ranch. Di Prima wrote the poem in the epigraph, one of her *Revolutionary Letters*, in her home in the hayloft on this commune. In the hayloft, she was hiding out two fugitives from the law, known associates of Ann Arbor's White Panther Party. The commune consisted of members and former members of various other anarchist groups, notably the Motherfuckers from New York City and the San Francisco Diggers. In one of her more cryptic poems in *Revolutionary Letters*, di Prima mixes together an eclectic brew of spiritual and natural imagery: alchemical aether, Zen ying-yang, and witchcraft combine as revolutionary forces. Di Prima's unorthodox spiritual beliefs, cobbled together from different sources, follow from the counterculture experiment in new lifestyles and, moreover, parallel the eclecticism of the anarchist milieu. The anarchist milieu exceeds the militant specializing in political activism and depends on eclectic groups participating in a variety of activity. Or, as di Prima put it in

an earlier Revolutionary Letter, “NO ONE WAY WORKS, it will take all of us/shoving at the thing from all sides/to bring it down” (“Revolutionary Letter #8” 17). While the Motherfuckers’ attempt to create an anarchist network coast-to-coast, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was never fully realized, di Prima’s poems were written in communal homes that continued to actualize this vision.

Diane di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters* need to be understood in the context of anarchist activity in which they were written, especially that of the California anarchist group known as the Diggers. *The Letters* are a series of poems begun in the late-1960s that take as their subject the insurrectionary activity of the time. They have since become touchstones for many in radical and anarchist milieus despite (or as a result of) never finding a place in literary canon.¹ This continued circulation of her work with little scholarly attention results in her poems becoming decontextualized from the people and events that inspired them. We can trace the *Revolutionary Letters* back to their inception to the guerrilla theater that the Diggers established, bringing political and interventional art to the city streets. It was this format that convinced di Prima to write the poems in their characteristic style, clearly worded instructions and reflections on the process of revolution. The precise details of her recollections and imagery are taken from her direct experiences working with the Diggers. Many of the lines can better be understood with

¹ Touchstones are hard to establish through a few examples, especially since her poetry circulates on social media, which is difficult to track. However, it is not uncommon to find her poems reproduced in anarchist publishing like the journal *Baedan* or the Philadelphia anarchist newspaper, *Anathema*. Communist and anarchist poets cite her work as influential, too. Most notably, the poets who publish through Commune Editions, such as Wendy Trevino and Joshua Clover, have written poems in the style of *Revolutionary Letters*.

more knowledge of the Diggers' history and actions. Not to mention that the Letters provide a fresh and perhaps shocking perspective on the nature of the Diggers actions in a revolutionary context. However, it would be a mistake to reduce di Prima's poems or the Diggers to the activity of a formal organization. As we will see, the Diggers and di Prima's work is best understood within a network of friends. Friendship, I suggest, is a better model for understanding anarchist movements than formal organization and the logic of representative groups. Di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* are Digger-in-origin, but they are *letters to friends*. This chapter will use these poems to help us trace the outline of this anarchist network, demonstrating the role the poems played in joining it together.

I will explore the period where the anarchist milieu expanded to include elements of the growing Women's Liberation Movement and, as a result, turned to a renewed focus on the home. As is well known, the Women's Liberation Movement, at the beginning of "second wave feminism," brought attention to the spaces of activity where "women's work" took place. These feminists brought attention to these spaces in order to organize, take action and alter the makeup of "feminized labor." Within di Prima's network of friends, the anarchists' sights were set beyond today's popular demands of redistributing domestic labor or "breaking glass ceilings" in the office.² Their anarchist

² In the recent *Feminism of the 99%: A Manifesto*, the authors claim that corporate or "lean in" feminism, epitomized by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, should be understood in contrast to the militant feminism that they advocate. This manifesto acts as a reminder that the feminist movement is not unified on issues but offers choices and trajectories. They argue that the choice offered by corporate feminism "permits professional-managerial women to *lean in* precisely by enabling them to lean on the poorly paid migrant women to whom they subcontract their caregiving and housework" (Arruzza et al. 11–12). In contrast, they promote a tradition of feminism that refuses to

goals could be glimpsed in their militant takeover of office spaces, especially those of the underground press, and their experiments in communal living that disrupted notions of the nuclear family. However, as experiments, it should be remembered that these anarchists did not achieve their revolutionary ends; feminist office spaces and hippie communes were no substitutes for utopia or anarchy. Yet, anarchist activity in the Women's Liberation Movement brought gendered labor and the home into the insurrection, ensuring that these spaces were recognized as sites of struggle.

Recollections of Life as a Woman in the Beat Generation

One is prepared for friendship, not for friends. And sometimes not even for friendship, but at least we try: usually we flail in the darkness, a darkness that's not foreign to us, a darkness that comes from inside us and meshes with a purely external reality, with the darkness of certain gestures, certain shadows that we once thought were familiar and that in fact are as strange as a dinosaur.

—Roberto Bolaño

Diane di Prima might seem like an unlikely candidate to use to trace the networks of autonomous and anonymous anarchists. For one, she is generally considered a poet, rather than a political figure. Her status as a relatively famous poet (in comparison to her anarchist friends at least) risks eclipsing the very thing I mean to study, the anti-representational, non-hierarchical, and insurrectionary dynamic of anarchist organization found in the communal home. Moreover, her status as a poet comes mainly from her reputation as being the woman among the Beat Generation, a reputation she solidified by writing the popular *Memoirs of a Beatnik* at the same time as her early *Revolutionary*

act as the “handmaiden” of capitalism and, instead, concentrates on bringing about its demise.

Letters. Hence, there were two images of Diane di Prima emerging and competing in the late 1960s: beatnik poet and anarchist militant. Through her literary output, di Prima simultaneously memorialized her past for posterity and experimented with a new role as revolutionary. If it was a contest, in popular culture and literary studies, the former undoubtedly won. Yet, it would be a mistake to miss the anarchist in di Prima's earlier life with the Beat Generation. Her experiences with the Beat Generation laid the groundwork for the anarchist projects that she explored later. By tracing di Prima to the broader anarchist milieu, we can avoid singling her out as a token woman writing Beat poetry. Her work, after all, is oriented to collectives, to friendships, particularly those that challenge the status quo. This rebellious character is where the Beats intersect with the anarchists, going beyond literary coterie and becoming a political threat.

If the Beats are recognized as anarchistic, their anarchism is usually found in their reputation for constant travel.³ The nomadic lifestyle documented in Jack Kerouac's *On*

³ Generally speaking, the Beats were not political militants engaged in an anarchist movement. Despite the fact that few Beats were activists, anarchism had a major impact on the Beat milieu. In 1946, inspired by anarchist publications in New York like *Retort* and *Why?*, the California poets Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, and Philip Lamantia organized an informal anarchist study group called the Libertarian Circle in San Francisco that even produced a literary magazine called *The Ark* (Cornell, ch. 6). On the other coast, New Yorker artists and poets sometimes frequented the meetings of the Libertarian League, a more traditional anarchist study group with less in common with the Beats. Closer to the Beats were the Living Theater, an anarchist theater company, based in New York. One thing the Living Theater had in common with many of the Beat anarchists was pacifism. There were many reasons pacifism appealed to their milieu—including the post-war political climate—but the pacifism in this anarchist tendency likely appealed to their role as artists and writers. Although these anarchist—for the most part—chose to focus on writing rather than the social movements of the 1950s, the political current left its mark on the Beat Generation. Andrew Cornell points out that three anarchists (Philip Whalen, Philip Lamantia, and Gary Snyder) read at the Six

the Road or Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" are testaments to the Beat Generation's refusal of conformity and the nine-to-five world of work. Despite this protest against conformity, the canonical work of the Beats all-too-often depends on traditional gender roles. One could go so far as to say that travel in Beat literature is coded as masculine, contingent on the exclusion or desertion of women.⁴ As a woman, Diane di Prima's status as a Beat is fraught. As a lifelong poet, she is marginalized in this group and simultaneously tokenized as a Beat woman.⁵ On top of this, she traveled infrequently in comparison to her contemporaries. Her Beat period was mainly spent in New York City with a brief time spent in California, mainly around Los Angeles, where she complains she did little

Gallery, the event that regularly cited as both the inauguration of the San Francisco Renaissance and the arrival of the Beat Generation in popular culture. Moreover, the center of Beat publishing, City Lights bookstore was co-founded by Peter Martin, the son of the famous Italian anarchist Carlo Tresca, and distributed rare anarchist newspapers (Cornell, ch. 6). Thus, the Beats were a milieu contaminated with anarchism from the outset. In "Disengagement: the Art of the Beat Generation," Kenneth Rexroth points out that Beats generally did not call themselves anarchists despite its influence. Their reasoning was, ironically, an anarchist one: they opposed labels and adherence to doctrine. Di Prima was particularly receptive to anarchism since her anarchist grandfather had been a friend of Tresca. Yet, it was not until the late-1960s that she, along with other anarchist leaning Beats, became fixtures in street protests.

⁴ This is not to say that Beat literature does not include domestic space, only that it is not normally its subject. For an important exception, see the Robert Frank film *Pull My Daisy*, which makes a Beat apartment its primary setting and subject.

⁵ While the vast majority of work on the Beat Generation centers the canonical men (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, et al), there are notable exceptions, including the essay collection *Women who Wore Black* and the anthology *Women of the Beat Generation*.

writing (Di Prima, *Recollections* 334).⁶ In contrast to the stereotype of Beat writing, di Prima's writing privileges life at home.

In di Prima's account of the Beat era, home is not separate from the friend network that Beat's found in travel. The home is one of the places where encounters developed into friendship. In her memoir of this period, *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*, di Prima offers a vivid depiction of her Beat home:

All these things and folks and many others were in and out of my house, my world: we wrote collaborative plays to pass the evenings, or collaged together at Jimmy's house . . . [We] shared food, money, books, successes and disappointments, and sometimes lovers. We hung out in painting studios, rehearsal spaces, music rooms, and dug each other's work while we contemplated our own. And nobody told me that it would ever stop (274).

In her description, di Prima emphasizes the collective, shared world of friends engaged in creative activity. Her home reads like a crossroads in this growing network that contributed to their creations. Her friends' travels regularly lead to her home, where the "endless interweavings" of her network grew to include Kerouac, Ginsberg, and importantly, Amiri Baraka (*Recollections* 181, 186). As these relations deepened and changed, di Prima recognized that these friendships amounted to "a way of life"

⁶ Di Prima frequently describes her travels as turning points in her narrative of this period. She does not travel often in the late-50s and early 60s but these travels often lead her to big decisions. She seems to take the moment of travel to make major decisions or transitions. However, her travels are not a "way of life" and end relatively quickly with a return to home or moving into a new one.

(*Recollections* 181).⁷ Her recollections of these friendships provide an opportunity to re-examine the gendered organization of the Beat era.

Di Prima's resistance to any formal organization is complemented by her embrace of friendship as a "way of life." In her *Recollections*, di Prima stakes out her identity as a Beat woman, a queer, and anarchist, while abjuring membership in any formal or representative organization. We could speculate that this aversion to organization has contributed to her limited reception and obscure legacy, but it fits her identity as a nonconformist.⁸ She readily admits that she wanted to participate, even in these early years, in an attack on the "establishment," but she was always suspicious of the organizations at the forefront of activism (216). It is difficult to imagine a political organization capable of including the numerous, complex friendships that di Prima describes in her memoirs,⁹ but it is particularly her queer friendships that stand outside the New Left infrastructure. I will briefly discuss the limited role of the New Left in gay liberation, particularly the Stonewall riots, later in this chapter. Suffice to say, in the years before Stonewall, it was all the more important for a queer community to find support

⁷ Di Prima, in fact, first describes her friendships as a "way of life" in the negative as she loses one network in the wake of dramatic shifts of the birth of her first child. However, it becomes immediately apparent that this change led to her new and expanded network as she becomes acquainted with the Beat milieu via Allen Ginsberg.

⁸ The canonical Beats, Burroughs, Kerouac, Ginsberg et al, also held an aversion to formal political organizations but arguably the canon, de facto, provides them with one through their definitive classification as *the* Beats.

⁹ She summarizes: "in those days, there were so many friendships, so rich and complex. Complicated and full of intrigue" (*Recollections* 272).

and encouragement outside of the mainstream of formal organizations. Di Prima remembers her early queer identity as nontraditional even by the standards of the day. For example, she was someone who “dressed like a dyke” but was neither butch nor femme (*Recollections* 188).¹⁰ Her descriptions of queer relationships blend together the categories of lovers and friendships to the point that she sometimes only mentions her friends were also lovers much later in the narrative (*Recollections* 193). Under these circumstances, di Prima’s friendships offer an alternative model to a political organization. As the space where these relationships took shape, her home functions as the infrastructure for an informal anti-establishment way of life based on queer friendship.

¹⁰ Since di Prima did not readily fit into a queer identity category, some commenters have ignored or even undermined her relationship to queerness. Regrettably, one of her closest companions in this period, Amiri Baraka, contributes to this problem. In his *Autobiography of Leroy Jones*, he writes that di Prima “talked theoretically about the gay life” but she was always with a man, particularly gay ones (236). Complicating this, Baraka may be one of the queer men he refers to. José Esteban Muñoz claims that di Prima “outs” Baraka as bisexual in *Recollections* (88). Yet, di Prima’s remarks on Baraka’s sexuality remain brief and vague. She says of Baraka’s other lovers only that they were “both men and women I assumed,” and heavily implying one of them was Frank O’Hara (220-1).

Baraka’s questioning of di Prima’s sexuality is exactly the tendency that Foucault, in “Friendship as a Way of Life,” suggests we should distrust. Foucault argues that “[t]he problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but rather to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships . . . The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship” (Foucault 135–36). I will return to Foucault’s argument later in this chapter. While the *Recollections* can be read to some extent as di Prima re-claiming an identity as queer (and anarchist), it rarely focuses on gay sex. The exception is her love affair with a woman named Bonnie that prompts her to reminisce about other romantic relationships with women (193-4).

Di Prima's aversion to formal organizations did not prevent her from investing her time at the Phoenix bookstore, where she worked for years.¹¹ She was hired by a fellow anarchist, the owner, Larry Wallrich.¹² The Phoenix Bookstore was not an openly political organization, but it was defined by its place in an anti-establishment network. The bookstore provided not only a source of revenue for this network, it provided a meeting place and occasionally a place to stay.¹³ In *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, di Prima describes the store's amenities: "The store came with a kitchen in the back, complete with stove and refrigerator, and there was an army cot to set up in the middle of the back room, where one could sleep in comparative luxury" (84).¹⁴ As such, the store operated

¹¹ Located in Greenwich Village, at the time at 18 Cornelia street and later moved to Jones street.

¹² Di Prima describes Wallrich as an anarchist but qualifies this label in the context of the time: his anarchism was characteristic of "everything that word meant at the cusp of the 1960s" and came with "all the frustration of the 50s, looking for an outlet" (*Recollections* 216).

¹³ Even when there for business, the economic relationship could take a back seat to the experience of social intimacy. Amiri Baraka remembers that "[s]elling books to the Phoenix was always like a visit to a friend" ("The Phoenix is" 24). Likewise, Ed Sanders remembers the Phoenix as a place where he met new people involved in the Mimeo Revolution. Specifically, he met Ted Berrigan at the Phoenix because both writers used the mimeograph at the store to print copies of their magazines, respectively *Fuck You!* and *C Magazine* ("The Phoenix is" 34). Di Prima printed *Floating Bear* on the same mimeograph.

¹⁴ In *Memoirs of the Beatnik*, she refers to the Phoenix Bookstore by the pseudonym "Quixote." The bookstore is recognizable by its home-like layout described elsewhere. For example, former owner Bob Wilson recalls the "small two burner gas stove" where he made dinner between customers during the busy evenings. Attesting to the sociability of the store, he tells an anecdote in which Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlofsky visited and did his dishes for him when he was too busy to get to them ("The Phoenix Rising" 11).

as a home-away-from home for di Prima's friends to meet, eat, sleep, and find ways to participate in the nascent political struggles of the early 1960s. Since the bookstore's specialization in first editions included the small press publications of her and her friends, it became the obvious place for them to congregate (Di Prima, *Recollections* 215). Moreover, the literary world was pulled into an adversarial relationship to the law through the continuing censorship trials of the era, instantiated by the trial of her friend Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*.¹⁵ For di Prima, the illegality of certain books was instructive: "The fact that I was already breaking the law, whenever I pulled a copy of *Our Lady of the Flowers* out of its hiding place in the lower drawer of the desk and gave it to a Phoenix customer, set us up to *do what we saw fit* in all circumstances. In a sense, the bookstore was a training ground" (*Recollections* 216).

In the early 1960s, di Prima found her training ground in a bookstore that led her and her friends into political rebellion. In an article colorfully titled "Fuzz's Progress," di Prima chronicles months of legal repression in the art world that took place in 1964. The artists she mentions, with the notable exception of Amiri Baraka, are predominantly white and uninvolved in political organizing. Di Prima ends the article by contemplating the possibilities of what provoked the police and arrives at that conclusion that it was the subversive content of their work not its obscenity. She suggests that the repression was the result of these artists' determination "to utilize fully materials which their elders readied for them; among these are politics, drugs, homosexuality and what Susan Sontag

¹⁵ For more information on this trial, see *Howl on Trial*.

has termed ‘intersexuality’” (“Fuzz’s Progress” 465).¹⁶ More than obscene content, di Prima describes a way of life, particularly queer life, that was being criminalized through the censorship of art. This repression had the inverse effect of generating a network of artists aligned against censorship laws. This response points to a continuity between di Prima’s activities in the early 1960s with the Beats and her later work with the Diggers, from the Howl trial to the Digger poet Lenore Kandel’s *Love Book*.¹⁷ The political repression of this emerging lifestyle, particularly concerning gender and sexuality, thus, led to a politicization of their network. In other words, their network transformed and grew into an informal anarchist one based on illegalism.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sontag uses this term “intersexuality” in an article on Jack Smith’s film *Flaming Creatures*, which is one of the works di Prima lists as targeted by censors. Sontag argues that *Flaming Creatures* “is much more about intersexuality than homosexuality.” The distinction she is drawing is between depictions of homosexual love and what she notices in Smith’s film: “one cannot easily tell which are men and which are women. These are ‘creatures,’ flaming out in intersexual, polymorphous joy” (376). Thus, di Prima and Sontag use the term intersexuality differently from its contemporary meaning, applying it as a synonym for nonbinary gender or gender nonconformity.

¹⁷ Kandel was a Digger poet whose *Love Book* was the cause of a 1966 raid at the Psychedelic Shop and City Lights, Ginsberg’s publishers who were raided in 1957 for *Howl*. Another Digger, Peter Coyote, describes the 1966 raid in his memoir *Sleeping Where I Fall*, and, like di Prima, comes to the conclusion that it was not necessarily the obscenity of the material that led to its censorship but an attack on the counterculture (116).

¹⁸ I am using the term “illegalism” loosely to cover a political tendency constituted by resisting the rule of law, but it is, in fact, an identifiable anarchist strain. The first bank robbers to famously use cars as getaway vehicles were illegalist anarchists, the Bonnot Gang. For more on the Bonnot Gang and illegalism, see the “Illegalism” section of *Disruptive Elements*.

As these friends became more politically active, their relationships extended beyond the social world of the Beats, participating in an anarchistic network with connection to the Black Liberation movement. Di Prima's friendships with artists in New York's East Village seem quite distant from the Black Liberation struggles discussed in other chapters, but their anti-establishment values brought their activity closer than is usually acknowledged. The wave of repression that di Prima captured in "Fuzz's Progress" took place just before the Harlem riot, but the Phoenix Bookstore milieu had connections to Black Liberation in the years before that. The bookstore itself was often a locus of illegalist and anarchist activity. Besides selling censored books, the backroom could be used to hide people or weapons. For one, di Prima mentions the British Beat and Situationist Alexander Trocchi using the backroom as a transitory home and hideout, sleeping in the cot, as the atmosphere grew more political. But it wasn't just literary friends benefiting from the backroom.¹⁹ An unnamed Black artist visited the backroom occasionally to pick up the arms hidden in the cot to deliver down south around the time Robert F. Williams was organizing self-defense teams against the KKK (Di Prima,

¹⁹ Trocchi's stay is only the most famous incident of someone sleeping in the backroom. In *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, di Prima states that there was a "junkie" named Luke Taylor staying at the Phoenix when she first started working there. While di Prima admits that she added scenes to satisfy her publisher's desire for "MORE SEX," it is unlikely that she fabricated this encounter entirely (137). Since the *Memoirs* are somewhat fictionalized, it is possible that Luke is a pseudonym for Trocchi. Yet, considering that the narrative takes place years before Trocchi took refuge in the Phoenix, it is likely a different guest who happens to share the same drug habit. It is also likely that di Prima would run into more than one guest in a bookstore that has a cot.

Recollections 215).²⁰ If there is any remaining doubt that di Prima was involved in arming the Black Liberation movement, she recounts a story in which she bought hand grenade shells for Amiri Baraka in 1960. Baraka, she remembers, had just narrowly escaped his first political action with a group of ten others.²¹ Di Prima was able to procure the grenades by wearing a Chanel dress that, in contrast to her usual queer look, made her “invisible” (*Recollections* 243). She was invisible because she was not Black but also because, in her Chanel dress, she appeared straight.

Her costume change facilitates a relatively minor act of rebellion, but it is one that gives an image in negative of how her lifestyle was a form of rebellion. Di Prima’s lifestyle in a queer and rebellious literary world brought her closer and closer to revolutionary action without ever straying too far from home. As we will see later, this ability to hide one’s identity is essential for the kind of political organizing she takes on, especially harboring fugitives in her home. While her home was at a remove from the riots in Harlem and far from any armed struggle in the South, it was practically a microcosm for the broader literary underground forming in this period. Her place in this literary underground positioned her to respond to the riots and uprisings happening

²⁰ Williams was a poet and could be, I suppose, rightfully described as a literary friend as well, if the guns were indeed meant for him as di Prima implies. However, Monroe, North Carolina and fighting the KKK was still a long way away from the East Village art scene. For background on Williams’ organizing in Monroe, see *Negroes with Guns*.

²¹ Di Prima does not name the group but, considering the date (1960), we can speculate that it is related to the Organization of Young Men. The action fails because one of the members “talked” to the police, but it is not stated what the intended action was or whether it required hand grenades. Judging by the language and context, di Prima does not seem to be referring to a symbolic protest march or picket.

around her. Moreover, the literary underground had a role to play in developing a network of people criminalized by their racial and sexual identity. For di Prima's circle, this criminalization led directly to a coterie of poets becoming anarchists. Di Prima's writing on her politicization helps articulate how her anarchism connects the public to the private, the interpersonal and the home. These networks of connections can be found in her poems and her publishing, especially her mimeographed magazine *Floating Bear* discussed in the next section. But her connection to anarchism also forced her to recognize the limits of writing, publishing and what poetry could do.

Mailing Lists

at its best a book
of poems is just a book
of poems that gives readers
a heads-up that a brick
thrown at a bank window
might bounce back
so they might want to use
a bat or hammer
& wear gloves
– Wendy Trevino ²²

²² This poetic tweet was responding to a post by the poet Sam Sax who made the provocative claim “at its best a book/of poems is just a brick thrown/through a bank window” (Sax). This follows Trevino's skeptical response to the efficacy of “literary activism.” See, for example, the collaborative letter “Responding to ‘What is Literary Activism?’” Drawing the parallel between brick and poem closer in a review for *Commune* magazine, “Poetry is Not Revolution,” Xari Rivera Maya channels Trevino, declaring “poetry is not a brick through a window; but it is kind of like throwing a brick at a window, because usually the brick just bounces off and doesn't break jack shit” (103).

Throughout the 1960s, Diane di Prima experimented with what poetry can do for social movements and the counterculture. Mainly, her poetry connected her to a milieu, both literary and political. Thus, her life as a writer played a significant role in making and mapping connections within that milieu as it developed into a (predominantly) anarchist network. In a literal sense, it was her mailing list for *Floating Bear* that was the central means for creating and maintaining this network. Since *Floating Bear* was entirely a mail order magazine, her friends and potential comrades received each other's work like letters and consciously contributed writing with this intent. According to di Prima, Charles Olson described his experience of contributing to the magazine in exactly these terms: "It was like writing a letter to a bunch of friends" (Di Prima and Baraka x). It could be said that di Prima organized her political network via poetry from her home. In this case, her home was also a workplace, since this is where she wrote and laid out her magazine with friends, such as her early co-editor Amiri Baraka. Like her workplace at the Phoenix Bookstore, her homelife, too, functioned as a training ground that prepared her for the long, hot summers of uprisings. Unlike Baraka, di Prima did not find herself in the streets during the riots, at least not immediately. She continued to write from home, but her writing reflected the political developments in the streets. The content of the poems, as we will see when we turn to the *Revolutionary Letters*, and not just their distribution in mailing lists, mapped out the actions of friends, their decentralized points of conflict, demonstrating a role for poetry in the riots. But they also marked the limits of writing as di Prima considered what other role she might take in the uprisings. In her

work, di Prima contemplated what writing *can't do*, which demarcated what writing can do.

One thing writing can do is get you arrested. The warrant for di Prima's arrest came in 1961 with the ninth issue of *Floating Bear*. Amiri Baraka had already been arrested on obscenity charges when his house was raided that morning.²³ The FBI made the arrest because *Floating Bear* was distributing writing deemed to be obscene to their mailing list, which included prisoners (Di Prima, *Recollections* 270).²⁴ This arrest anticipated the wave of repression of the arts discussed above but it also foreshadowed the more explicitly political repression that the underground press experienced in the late 1960s. Obscenity laws at that time allowed pornography to proliferate; yet members of the underground press were targeted by authorities, which they argued was due to their political positions. Obscenity charges were just one of the minor offenses that authorities used to target their political adversaries; others targeted their lifestyle choices, especially drug use.²⁵ There is a continuity between the repression that di Prima witnesses in Beat

²³ In *The Autobiography of Leroy Jones*, Amiri Baraka remembers that the police almost arrested his wife Hettie Jones as well in the heat of the raid. He suggests that the FBI's animosity toward her was based on their interracial marriage (251). For her part, Hettie Jones claims she was "really relieved" to find out that the raid was just for an obscenity charge when it could have been something more serious (H. Jones 144). This famous arrest was not exceptional but predictable in the political climate.

²⁴ The offending pieces were segments of William Burrough's *Naked Lunch* and Amiri Baraka's *The System of Dante's Hell*. The prisoner in question was the poet Harold Carrington, long time correspondent and reader of Baraka's publications. For a discussion on the influence of these publications on the development of Carrington's writings while locked up, see Aldon Lynn Nielsen's *Black Chant*. Carrington died in July 1964 and his chapbook *Drive suite* was published posthumously in 1972.

²⁵ See John McMillian's *Smoking Typewriters*.

countercultural and later political agitation, which only escalates as police use the counterculture as a pretext for counterinsurgency. This shared experience connected them but not as much as their shared vision for a better world.

The mailing list of *Floating Bear* was intended to connect a creative milieu, but the magazine participated in the anarchistic political milieu of the 1960s as well. The issues of *Floating Bear* that functioned, as I argue, following Olson's suggestion, as a compilation of letters between friends eventually turned toward the political uprisings. These "letters" were written in the cutting edge, experimental poetry and prose that was popular in Beat circles, which makes their take on the political climate far less clear than a communique or manifesto. The bimonthly mimeographed magazine included a brief header followed by poetry, drama, and prose with no introduction, which left little room for political framing.²⁶ It wasn't until the Newark riot of 1967 that *Floating Bear* directly and explicitly addressed the political climate. Up until then, the politics of the magazine were felt through literary experimentation and explicit content, not political agitation.

The November 1967 issue includes a press conference from the Newark Black Survival

²⁶ A notable exception is Baraka's review of Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*, a seminal collection of writings from their milieu, in issue 2, 1961. In the review, Baraka discusses the Black Liberation struggles in the South, critiques nonviolence, and makes an indirect reference to Robert F. Williams' armed self-defense project. Baraka was, as already mentioned, involved in the Monroe Defense Committee and other activism. In issue 5 contains a letter from Baraka addressed to Diane di Prima, in which he expresses his ambition for *Floating Bear* as "An attempt to get in on the very rhythms of my self ... &, of course, in whatever blank community we aspire to , as peers" ("Diane..." 41). In my view, this letter envisions *Floating Bear* as something beyond a poetry magazine and anticipates innovations like the politicization of the "Notices" section. At the time, he was co-editor but left by issue #27 in 1963.

Committee, discussing the riot. Moreover, the “Notices” section of the magazine includes political content beyond the usual calls for submissions, advertisements for related books and upcoming performances (474-7).²⁷ For example, the advertisements for other publications includes *Guerrilla*, the anarchist newspaper discussed in the previous chapter, and provides updates about the arrests of Detroit anarchists related to *Guerrilla*, particularly the White Panther John Sinclair. These updates are complemented by details concerning former-editor Amiri Baraka’s 1967 arrest for his part in the Newark riot (477). Later issues cover a growing network, including the Black Panthers. The explicitly political content in *Floating Bear*, unlike the *Revolutionary Letters*, came in the form of direct prose. This is not to say that the *Revolutionary Letters* are akin to the notices and report-backs in their unambiguous analysis, although these poems share traits with these genres that I will explore in the next section. What di Prima was trying to accomplish in poetry was stranger.

Di Prima’s political poetry describes not just the circumstances of her political milieu but struggles to envision what they are trying to do. The poems can grasp the ambiguity and embryonic form of their goals. A perfect example of this quality can be found in a poem she wrote after the long, hot summers, her time with the Diggers, and her early *Revolutionary Letters*: “Letter to John Wieners (on his 37th Birthday).” Although by no means a “revolutionary” letter, this more personal letter depicts the

²⁷ One could argue that the consistent calls for money in the “Notices” and updates about their trial were also political content but the distinction I am making is between explicit and implicit.

shared vision of di Prima and her friend John Wieners. Wieners was a poet who, like di Prima, became involved in an anarchist milieu.²⁸ In the 1960s, Wieners was a regular subscriber and contributor to *Floating Bear* and even guest edited an issue in 1966.²⁹ The “Letter” written in 1971, attests to di Prima and Wieners’ lasting friendship and the receding events of the 1960s. It begins:

Dear John, we are old now
& we have not
any of us, done whatever it was
we set out to do, in the glow of the
blue-white crystals, in the shadow
of the black leather drapes. (251)

Unlike di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters*, this letter is specifically addressed and takes her friend as its subject, reminding us that her use of the letter form denotes friendship.

Beyond that definite address, the poem is cryptic. Although her declaration of old age is clearly half-in-jest, it points to a loss that is not fully recoverable. What is lost is that which “we set out to do.” The “we” includes di Prima and Wieners but also their friends and comrades, “any of us.” By multiplying the audience, she opens up multiple possible goals or perspectives on that goal—it could be understood in strictly countercultural terms or political ones. Di Prima chooses not to define what the “it” was. The following lines appear to put their experiences in countercultural terms with imagery of crystals and

²⁸ Wieners’ milieu was more predominantly queer and centered around the underground press publication *Fag Rag*. For more on Wieners and *Fag Rag*, see Nat Raha’s work, especially “A Queer Excess: The Supplication of John Wieners.”

²⁹ Issue #32, February 1966. This came out in a period when the *Bear* was published sporadically. The previous issue was June 1965 and the following issue appeared the next February 1967.

strange decorations (leather drapes). Rather than limit the possible interpretations, I read this imagery as both insider-referencing and referring to their potential as anarchist visionaries. Di Prima refers to shared signs, likely possessions, the crystals and leather drapes, demonstrating an intimate knowledge of the details of her friend's life. In the poem, household decorations become symbols of intimate friendship.³⁰ They are also metonyms for intimate spaces, specifically the home. For a time, Wieners lived in the same neighborhood as di Prima, receiving a mail order *Floating Bear* from an address around the corner.³¹ Yet, none of this imagery is mundane—not even for the counterculture—in this poem. Instead, the home takes on the aura of the lost political movement in the form of an occult vision.

Ultimately, di Prima envisions her friends' struggles as an accomplishment. At first, it is as if she is using her friends' possessions to see into the past or scrying (another use for crystals), to recover what they lost in their social movement and only seeing a hazy, negative image. However, her recollections are not entirely negative. She follows her regrets for their inability to achieve their ambitions with what they did accomplish: "But we have/done something, drawn some line/across the sky, 267etstream/a monument/to our bewilderment, our hope/at a black crossroads that that glistened/like jet

³⁰ I am speculating about one of them owning crystals but my speculations about Wieners' leather drapes are confirmed by di Prima in her *Recollections*. She describes Wieners living in a "speed-den" around the corner from her house with "fake leather drapes" (272).

³¹ In the digital archive of *Floating Bear* on RealityStudio, Wieners address is listed as Milton MA 1961-2. Wieners lived in Massachusetts when he initially began receiving *Floating Bear*. Since it was a mail order-only publication, I speculate that he continued to receive it by mail when he moved to New York.

in our hands, a deathrite we saw thru” (251). In this volte, di Prima names their accomplishments as an ambiguous “something” not far or distinguishable from the “whatever” they failed to do. The lines that should clarify what she means by “something” appear to describe a magic ritual rather than a protest: drawing lines, at a crossroads, a death-rite. Di Prima’s use of ritualistic imagery stands in for their revolutionary activity but it does not clarify what happened. In fact, her images provoke “bewilderment.” However, the imagery provokes more than confusion; di Prima follows bewilderment with hope. Where do we locate hope in this confusion? It should be remembered that confusion suggests comingling, a connectivity. In the end, di Prima argues what they made were connections, a constellation of them or “that milky way we made” (251). This is a social way of life described in revolutionary and poetic terms.

The vision of revolution that di Prima presents in this poem does not separate itself from the poetic act. It is not just any poetry that can capture of revolutionary movement for di Prima but a specific idea of poetry, rooted in magic ritual and surrealism. Di Prima’s relationship to surrealism requires some explanation, since those only familiar with the *Revolutionary Letters* might miss her indebtedness, not to mention that her surrealism might be different from the most common form. The common definition of surrealism is taken from Andre Breton’s 1924 *Surrealist Manifesto*: “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought”

(26). While automatism was certainly popular with poets and occultists alike,³² this definition emphasizes a specific practice and style that would not apply to di Prima. Di Prima discovered surrealism by a different route, initially through the films of Jean Cocteau. This is her reaction to viewing *Blood of a Poet* in high school: “I saw for the first time that everything was possible. On the canvas, the page . . . It was Magick I found, in the dark . . . A gift straight from him to me . . . Some way to play with reality, bend it to your will” (*Recollections* 83).³³ In the strange imagery of Cocteau’s films, di Prima makes a direct link to magic and, moreover, to the possibility of social change. It is significant that, for Breton, this aspect of their movement was anarchist—not necessarily Cocteau himself but the aspect of surrealism that sought new possibilities beyond social or conventional restraints. As Breton writes, “It was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism first recognized itself, well before defining itself, when it was still only a free association among individuals rejecting the social and moral constraints of the day, spontaneously and in their entirety” (“Black Mirror” 128).³⁴ Breton’s “black mirror” anticipates di Prima’s interest in scrying, which adds yet another layer of meaning for the

³² A notable practitioner of automatism was Austin Osman Spare, an artist and one of the most important occult thinkers of the 20th century.

³³ Her terms chime with her reading of John Keats’ “negative capability,” which was her main influence at the time. But this wording appears to be the specific way she consistently describes Cocteau’s surrealist imagery. For example, here is how she describes the Living Theater’s production of Cocteau work: “the theatre was the place where almost anything could happen” (*Recollections* 145).

³⁴ This declaration is Breton’s admission of the anarchist roots of Surrealism, which predated their better-known affiliation with Communism.

crystals in her poem. The crystals are more than an insider-reference and symbol for the intimacy of friends; they are sodalite crystals known as the Poet's stone, an occult tool representing creativity.³⁵ If this poem is about, as I suggest, the connectivity of her poet friends when they join a shared anarchist milieu, poetry still plays a role in what connects them. If thinking the home in terms of a network of friends allowed di Prima to see the home anew, she still required her poetic imagination to see the quotidian as part of revolutionary change. She turns to surrealism for a way to reorganize waking life beyond habit and social convention. Yet, it is not the surrealism that endorsed the Communist Party but a surrealism that privileges the possibilities of dreams and magic.

Although di Prima can trace her history with surrealism to high school, she experienced a series of turning points that altered her relationship to poetry and anarchism in the mid-1960s. These experiences led her to engage with social movements in her writing and, eventually, write the *Revolutionary Letters*. Some of these turning points were common markers for her generation, even if they are not always recognized now; the first one was taking LSD. Di Prima's experience with acid began in 1964.³⁶ It is

³⁵ Admittedly, this is my speculation. However, I think it is the most likely guess.

³⁶ Di Prima was hardly alone in her discovery of LSD that year. Timothy Leary's *Psychedelic Experience* was published not long after, which pushed for the panpsychic goal of "ego-loss." Despite the popularity of his slogan "tune in, turn on, drop out," Leary is generally remembered as apolitical. His brand of psychedelia always had its critics among the radicals, including Black Mask, who in 1967 chided him on his response to the political situation with "Maybe you can 'Turn-On' and forget it, but we can't" (Hahne and Morea 30). However, Leary's relationship to the politics of the era are nothing if not complicated. He became increasingly sympathetic to the revolutionaries of the late 1960s, especially after the Weather Underground broke him out of prison and snuck him out of the country to live (briefly) with Eldridge Cleaver in Algeria. In a post-escape interview,

easy to forget that psychedelic drugs played a central role in 1960s revolutionary movements' utopian vision of sociality, the typical experience of psychedelics inspiring a sense of interconnectivity.³⁷ It is not that we forget that drugs were part of the counterculture; rather, we too easily dismiss them as merely countercultural instead of seeing them as part of what the theorist Mark Fisher has called "the spectre of a world which could be free" ("Acid Communism"). Fisher argues that the past forty years of political-economic trends, commonly known as "neoliberalism," is more than an effort to restructure society but "is best understood as a project aimed at destroying — to the point

he recounted his recommendations to his rescuers: "my advice to the Weathermen when we left was that they should not continue bombing ROTCs, that they should escalate the violence, they should start hijacking planes, they should kidnap prominent sports figures and television and Hollywood people in order to free Bobby Seale and in order to free John Sinclair" (Leary and Bennett 26). Although it is doubtful that they heeded his advice, this exchange points to Leary's investment in revolutionary social movements. His commitment proved to be short-lived. When he was re-arrested, he became an informer for the FBI (Lee and Shlain 210). Many former friends and supporters were disillusioned by this turn, including Allen Ginsberg who ironically inquired if the turncoat Leary was "finally manifesting an alchemical transformation of consciousness?" (Fosburgh 84).

³⁷ For example, the Motherfuckers' leaflet "Acid Armed Consciousness" claims "Our weapons are our lives flowing together living together merging constantly/We are one. We are one" (Hahne and Morea 132). The oceanic impulse of acid made "we are one" a kind of political slogan of the era. The musician Ian Whitcomb recalls that "acid wasn't just a private pleasure . . . it could unite the world . . . LSD said, 'We are one'" (251). Likewise, di Prima's first acid trip inspired a vision of oneness that she struggled to explain to her friends: "I tried to tell him about the flames that all matter was . . . *A wedding of order and chaos. Seamless*" (*Recollections* 374-5). The potential of psychedelics for rethinking our social connections was so prevalent that it led Michel Foucault to ask, "what is the experience of drugs if not this: to erase limits, to reject divisions, to put away all prohibitions, and then ask oneself the question, what has become of knowledge?" For a history of the convergence of psychedelics and social movements, see Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams*.

of making them unthinkable — the experiments in democratic socialism and libertarian communism that were efflorescing at the end of the Sixties and the beginning of the Seventies” (“Acid Communism”).³⁸ I would only add anarchism to the list.

In fact, this process of forgetting is what di Prima dramatizes in her “Letter,” at the end of the 1960s. Even though these experiments were still at a relatively high point and yet to be recuperated, di Prima’s poem senses their immanent dissolution and even the accompanying amnesia.³⁹ “I no longer remember,” she claims in the poem although it is not entirely true. What is lost is the feeling of what was possible not the facts of what happened.⁴⁰ In an early draft of the poem, she associates this feeling with coming down

³⁸ This argument comes from the introduction to an unpublished book called *Acid Communism* by Mark Fisher. Fisher died before completing it. For an overview on recent scholarship taking up this concept, see “Turn On, Tune In, Rise Up: Acid Against Austerity,” an article in *Commune* magazine by Emma Stam.

³⁹ I risk falling into the trap that periodizes all these experiments as happening in the 1960s. Mark Fisher reminds us that “The Seventies was a period of struggle and transition, in which the meaning and legacy of the previous decade was one of the crucial battlegrounds.” It is only because of the recuperation of the 1960s social movements as intriguing and ultimately failed experiments that this period is shrunk to a digestible decade. However, di Prima experienced an early onset of pessimism in the 1970s. In an unpublished Revolutionary Letter, she responds to the changing times: “How many times now am I asked—/Do you, sisters, ask me—/where do I stand now, what do I see, what/new word/For this new time, time of blackness/Why am I silent?/I am silent because I see no hope.” No year was provided but—based on its numerical designation (#44) and placement in her diary (*San Francisco Notebook 1*)—it was likely written at the end of 1970.

⁴⁰ The alternative to this feeling of utopian hope, Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism,” which is summed up with the adage “It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” This quote is often attributed to either Fredric Jameson or Slavoj Žižek.

“after a night of tripping.”⁴¹ Her experiences in the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s are, by proxy, characterized as an acid trip. Acid not only reinforced her surrealist sense of interconnectivity; it led di Prima to abandon New York and move temporarily to her first commune at Timothy Leary’s mansion in Millbrook.⁴²

In her new home in a somewhat remote village, di Prima continued to explore the relationship between changing consciousness and the social movements attempting to change the world. The next turning point for di Prima was more personally specific to her esoteric study: her reading of the alchemist Paracelsus. In 1965, di Prima was solicited for \$200 to write an introduction to a new edition of Paracelsus work. Since she had never encountered his work before, she was surprised to find “that Paracelsus would change forever my way of seeing the world” (*Recollections* 422). In her *Recollections*, di Prima has little to add to this assessment, other than to explain that she “recognized” alchemy, intuitively, when she encountered it (422). The introduction to Paracelsus’s work that she wrote the Fall before moving to Millbrook was published anonymously and received little attention. Yet, it is key to understanding di Prima’s approach to poetry in the late 1960s. Di Prima relates the details of this 16th century alchemist’s life, this “greatest of western mystics,” in terms reminiscent of the Beats, as if she discovers a

⁴¹ Found in her diaries, January 8th, 1971 (*San Francisco Notebook 1*).

⁴² Her previous homes had communal aspects but were not properly communes. She commonly had roommates, friends as neighbors, and lived in “bohemian” areas. Even after her kids were born, when she mainly lived with family, her house still hosted “whoever was working for the [Poet’s] theatre or the press and had no place to stay” (“Phoenix Memories” 32).

historical equivalent to Allen Ginsberg's "best minds of our generation": "writing his best works only when his career was in ruins" (v). We can almost imagine Paracelsus as one of di Prima's friends. He is described as a vagabond, whose travels invariably placed him dead center of the social revolts re-shaping Europe in his day (vi-vii).⁴³ Di Prima suggests that this is not happenstance but the result of his relationship to the world as an alchemist.

In Paracelsus's alchemy, di Prima discovers a new relationship between writing and changing the world. Alchemy, she argues, cannot be reduced to proto-chemistry nor is the strange language of alchemy allegorical for common procedures or experiences. Instead of rationalizing Paracelsus's occult thought, di Prima delves into the "doctrine of correspondence, indeed the identity of the inner and outer worlds" (vii). What she means by "identity" becomes clearer when she argues that

[Paracelsus] is not, as we would fain believe, speaking figuratively. He means exactly and literally what he says. The whole of modern criticism has as its aim the softening of the statements of poets, alchemists, philosophers, into something symbolical and therefore twice removed and digestible without effort and without faith. It is a conspiracy to render harmless the words of those who would not be silenced. (ix)

Alchemy does not only teach di Prima about the composition of the world, it provides her with insight into the role of language and, as a result, poetry. Di Prima takes from Paracelsus a belief in the entanglement of all things, including language.⁴⁴ As a result, she does not see language as merely representative, or "twice removed" in the Platonic

⁴³ Significantly, Paracelsus's life intersects with not just student revolts but peasant revolts, a hybrid composition of struggle with echoes in the 1960s.

⁴⁴ Di Prima compares alchemy to the Zen Buddhism that she was studying contemporaneously. Both provided a vision of nature in flux, a unity with spontaneous generation, the "void" in a "sea of consciousness" ("Paracelsus" vi).

sense. For her, a poetic device, like an alchemical design, can be transformative of the material world because they are part of the same interconnected world. If anything, poetry contributes to our understanding of the connection between inner and outer worlds. This worldview must seem strange to anyone thinking of poetry in terms of representation, but it is useful to di Prima, who is thinking of poetry in terms of revolution. The idea of correspondences gives poetry a place—not representing the world as given but—in changing the world. This change is contingent on understanding the world as in interconnected flux and rebelling against the status quo. Di Prima’s poetry is, as a result, informed by a revolutionary sensibility that connects inner and outer worlds—this is what allows her to identify the interdependence, the unity, of the home and the street in an insurrection discussed later in this chapter. For now, it is important to understand that di Prima’s alchemical understanding of poetry allowed her to see her writing within the process of making change, of revolution.

It is all the more surprising, then, that her next major turning point was coming to terms with the limits of poetry and writing in a revolutionary struggle. This turning point was the result of events that impacted her somewhat indirectly, since the events happened within the Black Liberation movement of 1966 and 1967. Specifically, di Prima locates the limits of her writing projects in the ousting of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. The coup d’état that removed Nkrumah from power was broadly understood within 1960s left-wing social movements as backed by the American government and orchestrated by the CIA.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Decolonization in Ghana was far removed from di Prima’s experiences, but she was, as mentioned earlier, connected to the protests in America by way of Amiri Baraka. The

Therefore, the coup was understood within the context of the ongoing Black Liberation struggles in America, which were becoming more riotous with each passing summer. In March 1966, Di Prima responded to Nkrumah's downfall in a poem, "Goodbye Nkrumah," that expressed the limits to her efforts:

When the radio told me there was dancing in the streets,
I knew we had engineered another coup;
Bought off another army. And I wondered
what the boys at the Black Arts Theatre were saying
and sent them my love, and my help, which they would not
accept (145)

Di Prima's poem undermines the official narrative with the ironic use of "dancing in the streets." In this case, the song "Dancing in the Streets" does not refer secretly to the long, hot summers of riots, as it did for the Black Arts Movement, discussed in the first chapter. The anthem of riots is used ironically against Black Liberation to address the faux-rebellion being "engineered" in Ghana. Since these events were mediated and distorted by the radio, the speaker seeks out a more authentic response in the Black Arts Theatre (BARTS). Consequently, she addresses this letter-like poem not to the Nkrumah of the title but Baraka's comrades. But no connection is found there since they, understandably, do not accept help from a white poet:

Why should they? It's their war, all I can do is wait
Is not put detergents in the washingmachine, so the soil will still
be productive
when the black men, or the Chinese, come to cultivate it. (145)

events that led di Prima to rethink the possibilities of poetry can be characterized as Baraka's experiences or her experiences with Baraka (see chapter 1 for details of Baraka's experiences). While African decolonization was distant from American militants, the American government was implicated in the ensuing coups and assassinations. *In Dark Days in Ghana*, Kwame Nkrumah noted the American involvement in coups taking place in Africa (50).

Di Prima directly connects BARTS to events in Africa, but alchemical interconnectivity finds an obstacle or chasm between the white writer and the Black Arts. Although di Prima still finds a place within revolutionary activity, it is a limited/indirect role and one squarely placed in the home. In this case, the home is hardly collective; it is isolating.

By setting out the limits of ordinary activity, this poem dramatizes the need to engage differently and more directly with revolution. The feeling of isolation that in the domestic sphere that di Prima describes pushes her to overhaul her role, especially in the realm of writing. Later in the poem, she envisions breaking out of the writing routine and her domestic space:

a few of us tried it, we tried to stop it with printing
we tried to protect you with mimeograph machines
green posters LUMUMBA LIVES flooded Harlem in those days
well, the best thing to do with a mimeograph is to drop it
from a five story window, on the head of a cop (146)

This stanza draws a correlation between Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba in order to build on previous lessons. Once again, African decolonization is connected to activity in Harlem, referring to the campaign in 1961 that connected Baraka to his future BARTS comrades. Di Prima highlights the limited role of printing and writing, focusing on the posters that were made to circulate their message. The detail that the posters were green points to their origin in the networks of the Mimeo Revolution; colored paper was common in this subculture, whether for aesthetic reasons or because they relied on whatever was at hand. However, the poem reminds us that a print subculture was incapable of realizing the changes they sought. Nkrumah's downfall was proof of the limitations of their efforts. Like the Motherfuckers, di Prima is pushed to militancy by her

relationship to and frustrating distance from revolutionary potential of Black Liberation struggles. Frustrated, di Prima envisions a mimeograph as a projectile, simultaneously discarding this obsolete machine and discovering a new response to the political conditions.

The transformation of the mimeograph in this poem illustrates di Prima's mid-1960s turning point. Yet, it would be a mistake to read it solely in the conventional terms of a poetic device: metaphor or metonymy. I argue that it goes beyond these conventions by manifesting the poetic vision inspired by surrealism, acid, and alchemy. On the one hand, the mimeograph has the qualities of an ordinary poetic device, figuratively representing di Prima's transition from writer to militant. The mimeograph is thrown away, discarded, along with her limited role as writer, and simultaneously thrown in her new direction, toward confrontation. On the other hand, we can read the mimeograph as weapon, literally. Inspired by the riots, di Prima finds household items to take up for the fight in the streets below. Although somewhat hyperbolic, the mimeograph could be pragmatic advice of "what to do" if you are a writer in a riot. This pragmatism is the common "Georgic" reading of di Prima's *Revolutionary Letters* discussed further below, but it does not grasp the strangeness of the image. What makes this mimeograph act like a poetic symbol is its magical transformation from one state to another, for di Prima, an alchemical process. As a result, the mimeograph is more than a representation of a kind of militancy, it is a surreal dream image, which the poet attempts to actualize. Thus, the mimeograph can signify the limits of poetry, on its own, and gesture at a continued role

for poetry within revolutionary action. Moreover, it suggests a role for the home, as a staging area for this action.

Di Prima's trajectory as an anarchist is an important reminder that revolution is not done in isolation, by revolutionary writers. Her work with *Floating Bear* laid the groundwork for her involvement in revolutionary social movements by building a network of other politically engaged writers and artists related to the Beat Generation. This network developed a new sensibility—through art, psychedelics, and related practices—that shaped how they understood sociality, social movements, and social change. Di Prima's interest in political change took her beyond her art networks, even as it exposed the limits of her practice. In particular, her interest in Black Liberation movements showed her the boundaries of her involvement, while, at the same time, pushing her past the Beats into an anarchist movement inspired by the riots. We will explore this anarchist network in the next section with a particular focus on di Prima's main connection and point of reference for the *Revolutionary Letters*, the San Francisco Diggers. The *Letters* build on the breakthrough in "Goodbye Nkrumah," mixing practical advice with strange and often surreal imagery. The surreal imagery merges political aspirations with everyday objects of the home in an attempt to find a role for poetry in enacting social change. However, at this point, di Prima realized that writing could not create a revolution, no matter how much magical power she attributed to words. The power of poems was rediscovered in her commitment to an anarchist social movement, in which her *Revolutionary Letters* circulated. As such, the poems should be understood as just one artifact circulating in a collective struggle. Among their contributions, as we will

see, was the poems' ability to delineate the connections within that collective struggle, particularly connecting the action in the street to activity in the home. But the delineation in the poems, as in "Goodbye Nkrumah," also necessarily includes demarcating limits. In the end, a poem can show us the window and the mimeograph—even describe what to do with it—but it will be up to the anarchists to throw it at the cop. What di Prima's pre-*Revolutionary Letters* poems demonstrate is that insight like this are more likely to emerge in a communal setting. *The Letters*, by the same token, recognize that it takes a communal home to realize that domestic spaces can take part in this action.

Free S.F. or Burn It

"Life on the West has been good to me. Maybe I'll write about some of it sometime."

– Diane di Prima⁴⁶

In the spring of 1968, shortly after the Holy Week Uprisings that, on the West Coast, claimed the life of the Black Panther Little Bobby Hutton,⁴⁷ Diane di Prima visited

⁴⁶ Di Prima defers telling the details of her time in California on other occasions as well. In an introductory essay to Lenore Kandel's works, she describes the meeting Kandel on a visit to San Francisco that led her to move there: "In two months I returned to stay—but that is another story" ("Invitation" xv). In an afterward added to *Memoirs of a Beatnik* in 1987, she refers to a "work in progress" called the *California Book*. To my knowledge, this work has never been published and is not available in any public archive. She gives a brief synopsis of this period and leaves off at the point where she left for Black Bear Ranch with the words "All that is another story" (138). One of the goals of this chapter is to begin to tell this story.

⁴⁷ The Holy Week Uprisings were a crucial if neglected series of riots and conflicts for the revolutionary movements of 1968 in the American context. The Holy Week Uprisings in April 1968 involved urban revolts in 54 cities following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Peter Levy calls it "the greatest wave of social unrest since the civil war" (153).

the San Francisco Diggers before eventually moving there. At this time, the Diggers called the new phase in their evolution the “Free City Collective” to signify their expanding networks. This development coincided with a summer of volatile activity in the Bay Area, some of which was discussed in the previous chapter, including the riots on Telegraph avenue instigated by the Motherfucker-aligned Berkeley Commune. In the spring and summer of 1968, the commune-oriented counterculture found itself in the midst of a growing urban rebellion. Di Prima’s *Revolutionary Letters* are marked by her closeness to that rebellion. She reflected on this situation in “Revolutionary Letter #53: San Francisco Note”:

I think I'll stay on this
earthquake fault near this
still-active volcano . . .
 while the
streets burn up & the
rocks fly & pepper gas
lays us out
 cause
that's where my friends are . . . (68)⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In her “Inaugural Address” as the San Francisco Poet Laureate, Di Prima states that she wrote this poem at the beginning of the American bombing campaign in Cambodia, which would place its composition around March 18, 1969. However, the order of poems in the published text suggests that it came later, after her time at Black Bear and return to Tassajara and San Francisco. Furthermore, she claims she wrote it on her way to a demonstration, which, if it was a demonstration against this bombing campaign, would have to have been much later. The underground press did not begin publishing articles about the actions taken over the Cambodian border—despite Nixon’s denials—until the summer of 1970, which seems like a more accurate date. See, for example, “Credibility Gap in Cambodia,” *The Short Times*, August 8th, 1970 (3). This context gives this poem a bit more distance for reflection on her experiences in San Francisco.

In this poem, di Prima expresses her commitment to her home in San Francisco and, it is implied, the riots. Tellingly, she is willing to stay in burning streets with projectiles because “that’s where my friends are.” Although begun in earlier, it was among her friends in California that the *Revolutionary Letters* project took off. By the term “friends,” we should be reminded that her milieu was never reducible to a single group like the Diggers. Likewise, the Diggers’ project needs to be understood in this broader milieu of friends that includes the autonomous affinity groups physically confronting the police. In 1968, di Prima and the Diggers were part of an anarchist network that, rather than a formal organization based on membership, was based in friends with communal homes. In this section, I reconstruct di Prima’s less published history through archival and dispersed sources to place her in the context of the Diggers.⁴⁹ Moreover, I place the Diggers in a broader context of the uprisings in the street, putting emphasis on the fact that a communal home, too, is in the street. This proximity brought di Prima’s anarchist poetry into a new relationship to anarchist action.

It is impossible to pinpoint the moment when di Prima became part of an insurrectionary movement or an anarchist milieu. However, her temporary return to New

⁴⁹ I sometimes include the *Revolutionary Letters* as historical sources as well. However, this use of the poems is not simply a biographical reading. Di Prima’s poems draw consistently on her life experiences, making it easy to slip into equating her with the speaker of the poem. In contrast, Benjamin Noys provides a reading of the poems that depersonalizes the speaker of the poem altogether, characterizing the speaker as “Revolution” itself. My reading is less abstract. My method is to take into account the multiple experiences and perspectives that inform and inspire the poems—not Revolution but revolutionaries. As a result, I see the speaker as a kind of avatar for di Prima’s friends.

York City just days before the Newark riot of 1967 set in motion that a series of events that would see her living with the Diggers by the next summer. Some factors were already in place. In his memoirs, the New York anarchist Jonathan Leake claims that, in 1966, he and the milieu around the anarchist bookstore, the Torch, were allowed to stay at di Prima's house near the store (61). She returned to the turmoil of the nearby riots, making a temporary home at the Hotel Albert (Gibson 80).⁵⁰ Over the winter, besides helping support Baraka's legal struggles, di Prima began experimenting with direct, simple poetry to express her revolutionary aspirations, writing the first two *Revolutionary Letters*. Not long after these two were completed, she had an opportunity to read them in an appropriate setting. In response to the Holy Week Uprising following the death of Martin Luther King, the poet Sam Abrams rented a flatbed truck to take to the streets of the Lower East Side and Spanish Harlem with folk singers and other performers (Gibson 83).⁵¹ With just a truck, generator and microphone, Abrams' produced a kind of guerrilla theater. Di Prima joined this traveling performance and became inspired by the

⁵⁰ Although New York in 1968 was relatively unscathed by the riots, there were urban revolts following the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Harlem. Assata Shakur remembers considering joining in the burning and looting upon hearing of his assassination but deciding against this avenue of action. She summarizes: "It crosses my mind: i want to win. I don't want to rebel, i want to win" (195). Shakur joined the Black Panther Party before splitting with them to join the Black Liberation Army discussed in the following chapter.

⁵¹ The exact time frame of Abrams' event is unclear. In an interview in 1996, di Prima erroneously cites 1967 as the year this happened (Schwartz). At other times, she suggests that the flatbed truck experience inspired her to write the *Revolutionary Letters*. However, in an interview with *Magma Poetry*, she admits that "the first couple weren't written with guerrilla theatre in mind, but by the time I had found that voice and done two then the flat-bed truck came along" ("The Movement of the Mind").

possibilities. Weeks later, she was reading her *Revolutionary Letters* on the steps of San Francisco's City Hall with the Diggers.

Di Prima discovered that the new possibilities of guerrilla theater poetry readings also exposed obstacles in her writing process. She realized very quickly that her writing needed to be clearer, more practical. Di Prima was no stranger to the problem of language and audience, since even her early work was invested in exploring the possibilities for street slang. When she put together her first book, her friends tried to convince her that, because of the slang, "Nobody's going to understand it in 10 years" (Meltzer 8).⁵² Less than 10 years later, she had the opposite problem; her poems were not yet "street poems." She gives the example of invoking "Lumumba Lives," as she did in "Goodbye Nkrumah" discussed above, realizing "by '68 the people on the street didn't remember who Lamumba [sic] was" ("The Movement of the Mind"). On the back of a flatbed truck, she needed a poetic language that directly drew on the vernacular and experiences of her audiences in the streets. This "street" sensibility can be found in her published writing of the period too: the April 1968 issue of *Floating Bear* announces a new structure for future issues, expecting to reduce the literary *Bear* by half its subscribers and beginning a separate publication for "survival news" to be called "Brain of Pooh" (138). It is implied that the latter part of this plan will alleviate not just the burden of too many subscribers

⁵² In *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, she states the problem as manifesting immediately: "I put together *This Kind of Bird Flies Backward*, my first book of poems, and Pete and Leslie solemnly assured me that it could not be published because no one would understand a word of the street slang." (125). In this account, she would not have to wait ten years for readers to be confused by her language. However, she claims she was also almost immediately vindicated by the appearance and popularity of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (127).

but the problem that the magazine had become, by 1968, “too fat” (138). Although the bulk of the issue was still typical (not “street”) poetry, the additional weight of “survival news” can be felt in the “Notices” section. The “Notices” frequently contains detailed instructions such as “A good thing to know is to fill your bathtub at the first sign of a riot. They turned off the water in Newark for a whole day during the last year's uprisings” (137). Clearly, di Prima needed an outlet to incorporate the ideas that she was taking from the riots.

The *Revolutionary Letters* became the medium for di Prima’s interest in street action and carried her revolutionary aspirations. The Survival Bulletin never materialized.⁵³ However, this was not her only outlet. Around the same time as the appearance of *Floating Bear* #34, di Prima penned “Revolutionary Letter #3,” which begins:

store water; make a point of filling your bathtub
at the first news of trouble: they turned off the water
in the 4th ward for a whole day during the Newark riots;
or better yet make a habit
of keeping the tub clean and full when not in use
change this once a day, it should be good enough
for washing, flushing toilets when necessary
and cooking, in a pinch... (9)

⁵³ I could only locate one publication that took up the banner of *Brain of Pooh* and it cannot be characterized as a survival bulletin. It is an anonymous poem called “Notes on the Summer Solstice” printed as a newsletter attributed to di Prima and her partner Grant Fisher. It appeared over a year after this issue of *Floating Bear*, around the same time that the *Floating Bear* printed its final issue. Di Prima shortly thereafter moved to Black Bear Ranch and abandoned her print shop in San Francisco, the Poet’s Press.

This “Letter” has all the hallmarks of the influence of guerrilla theater: direct language and clear references. It also explicitly interpolates the knowledge taken from the riots—the second-hand experiences of Newark are transformed into poetic instructions for future audiences.⁵⁴ Significantly, the information shared in this poem is the same tidbit she shared in the “Notices” in *Floating Bear*. In her thesis, Sharon Gibson suggests that the material that was earmarked for the Survival Bulletins found a different home in the *Revolutionary Letters* (84). Yet, there is something more than instructions for storing water in these lines. When di Prima transposes these instructions into poems, she never quite commits to Georgic pragmatism. Instead of a survival manual, she chooses one of the strangest anecdotes from the riot, which provides her with a surreal image: the full and unused bathtub. It is perhaps strange, in part, because it is an image of a home in the riot rather than the street. An ordinary and domestic object is transformed by its relationship to the riot, becoming something unusual. For di Prima, the home is a potentially revolutionary and, therefore, uncanny place.

The Diggers recognized this potentiality in di Prima, drawing on her work for their revolutionary project even before she did. When di Prima traveled to San Francisco in the spring of 1968, she was warmly received by this anarchist collective, who took inspiration from her poems. In her diaries, di Prima records meeting the Digger Peter Berg “who laid on the wait of my words.” He explained, for example, that “When you wrote a lullaby to your baby and told her we’d live in cloisters, the young girls, like my

⁵⁴ It is highly likely that this information came from Baraka.

wife, that read your stuff took it seriously. You said we'd live in the cloisters, we'll live in the cloisters" (*Notebooks*).⁵⁵ Thus, the Diggers, particularly the women, developed their project, at least partially, based on hermeneutics of her poetry. The cloister imagery in question came from her early Beat work, the first of her "More or Less Love Poems" in *Dinners & Nightmares*, "Lullaby," that begins:

Sleep lad
lie easy
now don't you moan
once every flip of this world goes upside down
and we'll live in the cloisters
bye and bye (103)

It is not surprising that the Diggers would be drawn to this chiliastic imagery of a "world turned upside down." Moreover, the subsequent lines offer alluring glimpses of utopian transformations of spaces, quasi-primitivist lifestyles, and leisurely artistic activity.

The Diggers' interpretation of this poem reads these strange images as instructions: go live in cloisters. Taking cloisters at face value as monastic homes, they imagine living communally, outside of normal society. They uncover the hidden meaning in these lines by reading it literally. However, there is one problem in reading it literally and, as Berg's words imply, biographically: di Prima didn't have a son at the time. While I think it is fair to read this speaker as an avatar for di Prima, a closer reading of the poem shows that the receiver of the poem, the "lad," is not her child but her friend. The poem describes a variety of places of activity other than cloisters, notably "we'll give your ballet/at the plaza fountain/I'll jam till dawn/at the opera house" (103). Each stanza

⁵⁵ See the entries for April in *Diane di Prima Notebooks, April 1968-17 December 1970*.

describes a different place transformed by their inhabitation of it and repurposed for their shared creative practice. The reference to ballet suggests the “lad” is her friend, the dancer Freddie Herko, who lived upstairs from her in New York. Thus, the poem is, on closer inspection, about extending her quasi-communal home to include these other spaces, which are all presently art institutions (the Frick Museum, the Opera House). The poem’s utopian vision transforms these institutions into homes, including the cloisters. The cloisters are, therefore, more likely the MET cloisters rather than the homes the Diggers imagined. Simply put, the Diggers likely missed how weird the “instructions” to “go live in cloisters” were. When Peter Berg said “your writing helped bring all this about” (“Inaugural Address” 5), he recognized a role for poetry in modeling their revolutionary project, but limited her vision to the domestic world. But di Prima wanted a world turned upside down not just a world apart. While di Prima did not realize the potential of her writing to inspire revolutionary action in 1961, her vision of communal life was always situated in a revolution that extended beyond the restrictions of the conventional home.

Her interest in revolutionizing the broader culture brought her in even closer alignment with the Diggers. The Diggers that di Prima met in the spring of 1968 had evolved since their beginnings in the fall of 1966, but they had never been limited to a single practice. Often, the history of the Diggers is relegated to the realm of theater. This designation is not an accident since founding members met through the San Francisco Mime Troupe and regularly describe the Diggers as an extension of guerrilla theater. For example, Peter Berg once defined their activities in these terms: “We were doing a piece

of theater called the Diggers” (qtd. in Martin 86). While it can be fruitful to see the Diggers through the lens of participatory theater, it can also be reductive, particularly when this lens obscures their relationship to anarchism. Although not all the Diggers labeled themselves as anarchists, it was the anarchist aims of insurrection and mutual aid that underpin their network more than theater. Besides the core group that founded the Diggers, their networks immediately included various participants from the anarchist-leaning subculture in the Bay Area, many of whom were initially drawn to the poetry of the Beats. The Diggers were not a membership-based group but central participants, such as Lenore Kandel,⁵⁶ Bill Fritsch,⁵⁷ Chester Anderson,⁵⁸ and Peter Berg himself⁵⁹ had frequented the anarchistic Beat community in North Beach in their youth, centered around City Lights Books and Co-existence Bagel Shop. The lineage between the Haight-Ashbury-based Diggers and the North Beach Beat scene reminds us that the mutual aid

⁵⁶ Lenore Kandel was a poet writing in San Francisco, living at the Zen-aligned East-West house before her time with the Diggers. The East-West house was located in what is now Japantown, on the outskirts of North Beach. It is memorialized in Jack Kerouac’s *Big Sur*. Through this shared milieu, other poets became associated with the Diggers, notably Kirby Doyle and, of course, di Prima.

⁵⁷ Bill Fritsch was an early acquaintance of Richard Marley, one of the founders of Black Bear Ranch. Before Fritsch joined the Diggers and became Kandel’s partner, he had a long history in San Francisco’s subculture. Specifically, he was an armed robber who spent his free time in North Beach (Coyote 114-5).

⁵⁸ Chester Anderson was a Beat writer based in Greenwich Village and spent time in the North Beach Beat community before moving to the Haight in 1967. For more on Anderson, see Evan Carlson’s thesis *Outrageous Pamphleteers*.

⁵⁹ In an interview, Peter Berg recalls hitchhiking to San Francisco in 1954 to meet the Beats in North Beach. He returned to the city 10 years later by freight train (Berg).

networks and subculture that the Diggers developed did not emerge from the theater but the streets and communal homes of radical artists.⁶⁰ The anarchistic project of the Diggers was an outgrowth of radical artists attempting to use their alternative lifestyles to survive and change a hostile society.⁶¹

Years before di Prima met the Diggers, they were following a similar trajectory from artists to revolutionaries. Like di Prima, the urban uprisings were the catalyst for this shift. Rather than locating the Diggers' origins in experimental theater, an early Diggers communique claims that "The Diggers were born in the Haight-Ashbury the night Matthew Johnson was killed at Hunter's Point" (JAS 3). While this origin story is not entirely accurate, it speaks to the significance of the riots that occurred that fall in the nearby Fillmore neighborhood. The Diggers, at least two of them, had already announced

⁶⁰ I take the description of the North Beach community as anarchistic and engaged in mutual aid from the Chicago Surrealist Franklin Rosemont's recollection. Rosemont describes North Beach in terms that anticipate the Diggers' response to the Haight-Ashbury hippie phenomenon: "Despite battles with landlords, harassment by tourists, and mounting police terror, the Beats and their allies—old-time hoboes, jazz musicians, oyster pirates, prostitutes, drug-addicts, winos, homosexuals, bums and other outcasts—maintained a vital community based on mutual aid" (9-10). This description is also useful in reminding us that these communities were never reducible to a single group, whether Beat or Digger. The reliance on listing places this composition in direct line with the terms used to describe the lumpenproletariat (see introduction).

⁶¹ It would be a mistake to characterize their lifestyles based on only their best-known artistic practices. While di Prima and Kandel shared an identity as Beat poets, they initially bonded over dreams, magic, and visions. Di Prima recounts how she had endured months without being able to dream until meeting Kandel who provided herbs, candles, and incense to remedy the situation ("Invitation" xiii). Di Prima and Kandel routinely shared information and experiences with psychedelic drugs, ritual, and healing. According to di Prima, Kandel was the person people turned to for this kind of advice and healing ("Invitation" xiv).

their existence, signing and circulating handbills in the week before the riot.⁶² One in particular, the sarcastic “Take a Cop to Dinner” demonstrated their animosity toward the police that characterized their response to the riot and the ensuing police curfew. The Diggers’ response was in the antinomian spirit of the Protestant radicals from whom they took their name: ignore the curfew. While other groups scrambled to work around the curfew or protest it, the Diggers counseled that people should just disobey it.⁶³ The Digger Emmett Grogan briefly considered escalating his disobedience to outright confrontation and constructed some Molotov cocktails that he chose not to use.⁶⁴ Instead of this immediate confrontation, the Diggers’ response to the riots was setting up daily free food, the practice that made them famous (Grogan 245-7). While the Diggers pre-existed the riot as a writing project, it was these events that led to their successful anarchist network and practice.

In 1966, the Diggers’ project began through daily servings of food and quickly developed into a neighborhood-wide project that included free stores and free places to

⁶² According to Emmett Grogan, these early Diggers Papers were put out by him and his friend Billy Murcott. Therefore, the Diggers’ name pre-existed the riot but not much else. See *Ringlovevio* for details (237-239).

⁶³ It would be a mistake to interpret this disobedience as passive acceptance or naïve romanticism. The Diggers were knowingly and actively taking a side just using a different strategy than the traditional Left. Allen Cohen remembers that the signs advocating this strategy read “Disobey the Fascist Curfew” (qtd. in Hodgdon, ch. 1 n.18). Tim Hodgdon wonders if this makes their stance indistinguishable from the Left. However, an antinomian disobedience should be clearly distinguishable from a strategy of protest, which relies on authorities to listen to demands (ch. 1, n.18).

⁶⁴ Grogan, it appears, feared this action would result in police retaliation against black communities and “decided it wasn’t their play to make” (Grogan 243).

stay. In other words, the Diggers created an anarchist space by bringing housework into the streets. They emerged as a revolutionary group that fall around the same time the Black Panther Party for Self Defense was beginning to organize across the San Francisco Bay. Through their primary activity of holding servings for up to hundred people in Panhandle park, the Diggers were able to meet and connect with numerous potential comrades, who then took on Digger tasks. Tim Hodgdon names Bill Fritsch and some of the Digger women as mainly responsible for keeping the free food going. Meanwhile, other Diggers opened up free stores and “crash pads” that became hubs of their networks.⁶⁵ By 1967, they were able to use these networks to organize countercultural events and regular protests, frequently shutting down Haight street (Hodgdon, ch. 1). Thus, the Diggers began to flex their muscles, taking control of circulation in their neighborhood, redirecting resources to put them to their own ends—to make them free.

As an increasing amount of people came to Haight Ashbury to join the counterculture, the Diggers were at the center of a struggle to aid newcomers and build a community based on their philosophy of keeping things “free.” Print culture was always at the heart of their efforts, as their main source of communication was the mimeographed Digger Papers. By 1967, the Diggers had a publishing arm called the Communication Company that continued to circulate their words and helped coordinate the circulation of resources. The so-called Summer of Love threatened to make this

⁶⁵ The first free store, the “Free Frame of Reference,” was at 1762 Page street was opened on December 3, 1966. It lasted three weeks before being closed by the city. The second opened on January 8, 1967 at 520 Frederick and was condemned by the city February 8. The final store at 901 Cole street, called “A Trip Without a Ticket,” opened in March. For details, see Tim Hodgdon’s *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*.

problem all that much worse. As Alice Echols points out, people had left North Beach to come to the Haight because rents had gone up (21). By the Summer of Love, the problems caused by an influx of people to the Haight looked much worse than anything the North Beach had experienced. As spring approached, the Diggers joined the Council for the Summer of Love to prepare for the influx of 1000s of new people (Echols 44). Additionally, they used their print material to outsource their resource-sharing activity. The “Free Bread” leaflet was a recipe with instructions for baking bread in coffee cans, encouraging others to make and give away free bread (Martin 100).⁶⁶ The Diggers wanted to make sure that others would contribute to the system of mutual aid without depending on the core group.

Inspired by the Diggers, di Prima contributed similar instructions in poetic form that she could read at Digger events. In the second stanza of “Revolutionary Letter #3,” she follows her instructions for how to store water in a riot with ideas for storing food, which reads like a grocery list:

with 20 lb brown rice
20 lb whole wheat flour
10 lb cornmeal
10 lb good beans — kidney or soy
5 lb sea salt
2 qts good oil
dried fruit and nuts
add nutrients and a sense of luxury
to this diet, a squash or coconut
in a cool place in your pad will keep six months (9)

⁶⁶ The leaflet read: “Please take this recipe home and start making bread. The only stipulation is that you always give it away” (qtd. in Martin 100).

This kind of knowledge promotes autonomy, so that even in dire conditions, the audience can be prepared. Moreover, the combination of ingredients has elements of a recipe: add coconut for taste. This is likely one of the poems di Prima read at San Francisco City Hall when she visited and met the Diggers that spring with Peter Coyote accompanying her on guitar. The Diggers had been holding events at City Hall as part of their attempt to push for a “free city,” which they presented outside City Hall with their “Modest Proposal.” They called for empty city-owned buildings to be handed over for their use, surplus material resources be distributed, resources to be provided for a free press and celebrations, and parks be open without restrictions.⁶⁷ Besides poetry readings, there were guerrilla theater skits, songs, free food and Digger Papers handed out (Martin 101; Di Prima “Inaugural Address” 7; *Newsreal*). Di Prima was one of many friends recruited into the Diggers to help spread their message, with poems containing instructions for a new free way of life.

The Diggers’ “Free City” was not dependent on City Hall accepting their demands nor was it envisioned as a Digger takeover of San Francisco. Rather, it was envisioned as an anarchistic decentralization of power taking place within a broader insurrection. The Free City Collective, as they were increasingly known, were more nebulous than the Diggers. Diane di Prima was “recruited” into a milieu who saw themselves as one of many future Free Cities

composed of Free Families (e.g., in San Francisco: Diggers, Black Panthers, Provos, Mission Rebels and various revolutionist gangs and communes) who

⁶⁷ A copy of the Modest Proposal can be viewed at the online Digger Archives: <http://www.diggers.org/freecity/freenews1.html>

establish and maintain services that provide a base of freedom for autonomous groups to carry out their programs without having to hassle for food, printing facilities, transportation, mechanics, money, housing, working space, clothes, machinery, trucks, etc. (“Post Competitive” 15)

Instead of recruiting members for specific formal organization, their vision included a network of autonomous groups.⁶⁸ Their imaginative fantasy involved expanding their practice (“The Free Food Gang”) to coordinate with others who could provide other kinds of resources, many of which began to materialize (ex. free mechanic). From the kernel of their friend group, the Diggers wanted to grow a city-wide informal insurrectionary organization.

While the Diggers wanted to create a model for other cities, their plan in no way limited itself to modeling a better world. It is easy to be distracted by the Diggers’ utopian language and see their project as entirely engaged in prefigurative politics. In fact, many historians and a few Diggers have retrospectively described these projects in prefigurative terms, interpreting their actions as demonstrating an already existing free world rather than fighting for one. John Storey attributes this interpretation to the Digger Peter Coyote with his description of their practice as “assuming freedom” (Storey 88; Coyote 78). Di Prima’s diaries tell a different story. This description of her visit is much more pragmatic and insurrectionary than prefigurative:

We took off for Lenore’s.

Where talk of Free City-free food-free pads-no standstill here things better and worse than a year ago-Haight St. anonymous and commercial . . . [Bill] Fritsch and I talked. Yippies evilness. Free S.F. or burn it. All kinds [sic] plans and proposals. Arm and plan to split but do this in front. O.K. Sounds solid and

⁶⁸ This chimes with di Prima’s description of her milieu consisting of “Diggers, Panthers, Zennies, out-riders, and rebels of all sorts” (“Inaugural Address” 6).

good. They do know what's going down. They do know. They do know.
(*Notebooks*)⁶⁹

The Diggers who said “Free S.F. or burn it” were much closer to their roots in the Hunters Point riot than the retrospective histories suggest. It was not just Fritsch speaking like this either. In a description of the City Hall protest in the *Berkeley Barb*, a guitar player with an uncanny likeness to Peter Coyote tells an attentive crowd “this city is going to turn or it's going to burn” (“Those Free City Blues” 6).⁷⁰ The fact that the Diggers were already arming contradicts with the idea that it was either/or, the city is freed or burning. In di Prima's repetition of “they do know” we can hear the Diggers allaying her fears that they were naively utopian or unprepared for the conflicts to come.⁷¹ A different image emerges in di Prima's diaries than the common description of a theater group acting as if the revolution had already been won. Instead, we see the Diggers within an insurrectionary tradition.

When di Prima moved to San Francisco not long after this visit, she moved into the center of this insurrectionary activity in the Panhandle. Her communal home became

⁶⁹ See the entries for April in *Diane di Prima Notebooks, April 1968-17 December 1970*.

⁷⁰ The unnamed person is described as a handsome young man singing and strumming guitar. While not very precise, Coyote is often remembered as the attractive man with a guitar in this period. Di Prima, in her diaries, likely refers to him when she describes a “beautiful boy with guitar” at City Hall. Later, she points out that Coyote played guitar to accompany her poems (“Inaugural Address” 7).

⁷¹ On the other hand, di Prima was skeptical of Fritsch's impatience and conviction that “We have to have it now or the city will burn.” Her impression was “He was passionate, if (I thought) a little vague” (“Invitation” xv). She preferred his partner Kandel's more level-headed approach that acknowledged that the revolution would not happen overnight.

a central hub within the expanding network. This motley crew of anarchists, including other recent transplants Beats-turned-communards, Motherfuckers-in-exile from New York, White Panthers and anarchist affinity groups fleeing Ann Arbor. This composition further complicates the stereotypical view of the Diggers as theatrical hippies, pacifists, or lifestyle alternativists. Without a more nuanced understanding of the Diggers and their milieu, di Prima's poetry would seem to come out of nowhere. Reading her poems in context of the Diggers, many readers would wonder why she strayed from the topic of free food or why so many of the figures in her poems are on the run from the law. Her revolutionary aspirations—with lines like “there are those who can tell you/how to make molotov cocktails, flamethrowers,/bombs whatever/you might be needing” (“Revolutionary Letter #7” 15)—are indebted to an all-but-forgotten dream of insurrection that she shared with the Diggers. However, we should be careful not to overstate her interest in armed conflict. After all, the same poem reminds the reader that “the guns/will not win this one, they are/ an incidental part of the action/which we better damn well be good at” (“Revolutionary Letter #7” 16). It is important to emphasize the armed conflict that gets excluded in histories of the Diggers, but di Prima's emphasis remained on the role of the home in this insurrection. Perhaps it is this focus that makes her poetry more attuned to the question of gender within the internal dynamics of the movement. By centering the communal home that anchored the insurrectionaries, di Prima's poems provide a window into the gender roles in the insurrection.

Toward a Queer Insurrection

The hell of capitalism is the firm, not the fact that the firm has a boss.

—Amadeo Bordiga

It is no secret that the revolutionaries in the 1960s generally reproduced the gender roles of patriarchal society with the leadership frequently relegating women to secretarial work or housework. Di Prima's concentration on the significance of the home in revolutionary movements should be understood as combatting the sexist distinction between woman and revolutionary. The Diggers fell into this sexism in their vision of the Free City that imagined militants as "a tight gang of brothers" that made sure there was space "available for chicks to sew dresses" ("Post-Competitive" 15).⁷² In di Prima's poems, women are not separated from the action by their activity in the home. On the contrary, the home is understood as directly connected to the action in the street and a crucial part of the reproduction of struggles. However, it would be a mistake to interpret di Prima's position as merely reevaluating housework as important to social movements without attacking the underlying structure that constitutes the home as the space of feminized labor reproducing capitalist society. Di Prima's home is not a traditional home viewed in a better light, nor is it merely a process of adding the home to existing sites of struggle, making clear the connection between the riot and housework. The home is transformed by its participation in revolutionary struggles. More concretely, di Prima's Digger homes take part in the communal experiments of the 1960s, developing a

⁷² Significantly, later versions of this text modify this wording to be "a tight gang of brothers (and sisters)." See for example, "Alternate Society" in *The Seed* (March 1969) and the reproduction of this text in Grogan's *Ringolevio* (470).

collective way of living together that aids in insurrectionary actions. In her poetry, di Prima chronicles this way of life and, furthermore, foresees—in the fires of the insurrection—future possibilities and necessities for the home.

Di Prima's communal home was unconventional even by Diggers' standards. Her passage into the Digger milieu contributed more than a single Beat poet. After her visit to San Francisco in the spring of 1968, she returned to New York City to prepare for her move, inviting her friends along for the journey. The musician John Braden—the lover of di Prima's current husband Alan Marlowe—flew out to San Francisco and found them a house on Oak Street for 300\$ per month. By New York standards, the house was enormous with fourteen rooms, an in-law apartment, a yard, and a two-car garage. Di Prima's VW van was packed with rifles and typewriters gifted to her at a going-away party, musical instruments, pets, a few of her kids, and fourteen of her new housemates that would fill the fourteen rooms (Meltzer 19; Di Prima, "Inaugural Address" 1; Di Prima, *Memoirs* 135).⁷³ The trip was funded by what di Prima obliquely refers to as "creative financing spurred on by the many assassinations," linking this plan indirectly to the looting and riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. ("Inaugural Address" 6).⁷⁴ Reinforcing the continuity between this move and the riots, the VW van

⁷³ In regard to her going-away gifts, di Prima wryly remarks that "People decided that's what I needed, so at my going-away party they gave me rifles and electric typewriters" (Meltzer 19).

⁷⁴ In the somewhat fictionalized *Memoirs of a Beatnik*, di Prima claims the van itself was bought with credit (135).

was driven by the anarchist Allan Van Newkirk, discussed in the previous chapter for his tenure with Black Mask, who was, according to Peter Berg, evading a gun possession charge from the Newark riot (Berg).⁷⁵ Di Prima arrived by plane with the rest of her family, moving into a house made up of at least one Detroit anarchist, no less than two of her husband's gay lovers, and an assortment of other people new to the Digger milieu (*Memoirs* 135). Including di Prima, at least four of the fourteen communards were queer, setting them apart from the normative heterosexuality ascribed to most Diggers. The Diggers opened their door to a single Beat poet and received a queer friend group, which enriched the heterogeneity of their expanding milieu.

As such, di Prima's friends played a part in the re-composition of this anarchist milieu as it expanded and projected during the Free City project. Her newly founded communal house was immediately drafted into Digger projects, employing the VW van to deliver free food to twenty-five urban communes twice a week, plus a free fish run on Saturday mornings (Meltzer 19; Di Prima, "Inaugural Address" 7). The Diggers' "free bank" was installed on top of her fridge ("Inaugural Address" 9) and the Diggers soon sent new friends to stay with them, including two couples with seven kids put up in their dining room.⁷⁶ Di Prima understood this way of life as actualizing her dreams, describing

⁷⁵ The exact details of this charge are hazy and, considering the similarities, Berg could be confusing the details with Amiri Baraka's case. In either case, Van Newkirk did end up in Canada, as Berg describes, evading charges in the United States. Van Newkirk did not stay in California long; in a 1969 letter, di Prima reports that he was living in a commune in Vermont.

⁷⁶ Di Prima refers to "a great bevy of new-found California friends had also moved in, some invited and some not." According to di Prima, some "friends" were less welcome,

this experience in contrast to life as a poet: “where I came of age as a poet, one wrote one’s dreams, but didn’t try to make them happen. To bring about what *could be*” (“Inaugural Address” 1). Thus, di Prima understood her socially reproductive labor—housework, food systems, etc.—not entirely as reproducing her current milieu but in terms of their possibility of producing something new, a way of life that “could be.”

Moreover, her work with the Diggers stands in contrast to her profession as a writer just as much as homemaker. She understandably complained that she was the only member of her household of fourteen adults with an income. It was not just the men; no one else worked including an unnamed gay woman with ten years office experience (*Memoirs* 135). Despite this onus of responsibility, di Prima’s descriptions of this period focus on the developing network of connections, including Diggers, fellow poets, White and Black Panthers, biker clubs, and Zen practitioners (Di Prima, “Inaugural Address” 6; Meltzer 20). Her Zen practice seems to have determined her schedule more than writing: she describes going to bed by ten o’clock to make it to the Zen Center in the morning, while her friends “danced in boots on the dining room table, or held war conferences: where to put the children when the shooting starts” (*Memoirs* 136). Her communal home privileged an experimental and revolutionary lifestyle—queer friendships, in Foucault’s terms, in a “multiplicity of relationships” (135)—over traditional work.

especially one man who drew attention to their house with his side-hustle in armed hold ups and persisted in cleaning his gun behind her head while she tried to write (*Memoirs* 136).

While it is unclear how many communal homes in this network identified as queer in any way, di Prima's friends were certainly not alone. The writer Irving Rosenthal had preceded di Prima when he returned to San Francisco from New York in 1967 to start a commune with his partner Hibiscus.⁷⁷ The commune was known variously as Sutter Street, Friends of Perfection, or Kaliflower commune after the name of their publication, which, at its height, was delivered to three hundred communal homes in the Bay Area.⁷⁸ In 1969, Hibiscus formed the famous queer performance group, the Cockettes, with other members associated with Kaliflower commune, eventually moving into their own commune dedicated to the group.⁷⁹ That being said, a queer way of life breaking down of traditional, normative relationships and roles was more a speculative

⁷⁷ Rosenthal had more in common with di Prima than San Francisco communes. In the late 1950s, he published Beat writers in the *Chicago Review* and, like di Prima, was censored for publishing parts of *Naked Lunch*. He had further troubles with obscenity trials after leaving this position, for his little magazine *Big Table*, which also published di Prima. He spent time in New York in periods that overlapped with di Prima, where they were more than likely acquainted, before moving to San Francisco (Roth 197). Incidentally, Hibiscus was famously photographed in 1967 at the anti-war Pentagon demonstration discussed in the previous chapter, placing a flower in a soldier's gun. This protest was likely a stop on Hibiscus and Rosenthal's way to California.

⁷⁸ Kaliflower was the ultimate outcome of Rosenthal's plan to start a publishing commune in San Francisco to give young people an alternative activity to hard drugs (Roth 197). It was printed in the Free Print Shop located in the basement of the commune (Roth 198).

⁷⁹ For an account of communes associated with the Cockettes, see the documentary *The Cockettes*. In "Play as World-making," Benjamin Shepard points out that the costumes for the Cockettes came from Rosenthal's "drag room" (180).

possibility than actuality for the Diggers' milieu.⁸⁰ A queer feminism was something that "could be" growing within the network of connections of revolutionary communal homes that remained for the time being heteronormative.

There is a danger, however, in assuming that revolutionary relationships emerge directly out of increased connections. It is not enough for di Prima to make connections, from the home to the street, or Diggers to feminists or a queer community. This is particularly important to keep in mind since one of the main functions of the home in both di Prima's poems and Digger actions was to keep fugitives hidden and sheltered from the outside. Both conceptually and strategically, not all connections are good. For example, the popular hippie concept that "we are all one" can prove to be homogenizing, calling for unity to a presumed normative subject. Likewise, connections between inside and outside activity can expose the private to the public view. These two cases might seem to be only abstractly related, but they find shared ideological terrain in what Andrew Culp names "connectivism," or the assumption that an organizational logic of increased connection, such as we see currently with the internet, increases one's capacity

⁸⁰ Ten years later, in *The Faggots and their Friends*, Larry Mitchell continues this line of speculation and imagines a neighborhood like the Haight but where the communes are explicitly queer. Mitchell himself was a member of the gay commune, Lavender Hill, near Ithaca New York, but this literary work depicts a network of communes with a much broader scope. His vision of a neighborhood of queer communes is quasi-utopian, while accepting that "the faggots and their friends are still not free" (epigraph). Despite their continued struggle, the communards in the book are able to maintain multiple houses "filled with friends" (88). Each of these houses on the "Pansy Path," including Angel Flesh, Horney Heaven, the Rising Sons, Gay as a Goose, the Boys in the Backroom, the Elegant City, and the No-Name Tribe, are described as having their own unique character while maintaining close lines of connections and friendships with one another (82-88).

or power.⁸¹ On the contrary, the Diggers' dream of living together in communal homes was contingent on breaking from the social order: their connections were also a disconnection from society. Furthermore, their ability to stay together was contingent on their capacity to keep one another hidden from the police. In "Revolutionary Letter #14," Diane di Prima states it plainly:

Are you prepared
to hide someone in your home indefinitely
say, two to six weeks, you going out
for food, etc., so he never
hits the street, to keep your friends away
coolly, so they ask no questions (26)

In this poem, di Prima clearly demarcates the outside world from the home through the roles of people in the poem. A fugitive hides from the street, in this case a synecdoche for surveilled spaces. Conversely, the role of the addressee of the Letter, to obtain food, demonstrates their differential ability to traverse those spaces. Di Prima is likely drawing on events in her communal home and translating this experience into a poetic lesson. In an interview, she describes the various militants who came in and out of the Oak Street commune, including Diggers, Black Panthers, and White Panthers, some taking refuge

⁸¹ There is a quasi-anarchist assumption that interconnected networks are nonhierarchical, inasmuch as they are horizontal. The case of the internet reminds us that networks can still be subject to power arrangements and can be controlled by decentralized protocols (Galloway). Decentralization in this case does not mean what anarchists mean. In *Dark Deleuze*, Andrew Culp's aim is to remind us that the optimistic vision for the future often invoked in the name of Gilles Deleuze's rhizomes has been spoiled in the intervening years since Deleuze proposed the model. This pseudo-utopian connectivism has since been taken up by such economic giants as Google.

there while the FBI looked for them (Meltzer 20).⁸² While one can assume the fugitive in the poem hides from the authorities because of their participation in insurrectionary actions, the home has to play a distinct and, most importantly, separate role in order to aid the fugitive. Notably, even friends need to be kept separate.

The concept of “friendship as a way of life” can be too abstract, obfuscating the separations based on identity, particularly gender. Conversely, di Prima’s poems explicitly refer to gender but they sometimes take gender roles as given without completely challenging them. Certainly, the gender roles in *The Revolutionary Letters* are not limited to tradition or convention, since they deal with scenarios occurring in a revolutionary movement. For example, di Prima was a mother of five children⁸³ and the Letters neither ignore motherhood nor imply that it is the sole or primary role for women in the revolution. However, the poems occasionally lapse into specialized roles and instructions directed by gender. In these cases, gender can act as a constraint to revolutionary change ostensibly permitted by the communal home. Even revolutionary roles can appear to be determined by gender as for example in the case of early versions of “Revolutionary Letter #14” that address the poem “(especially for chicks”) (3). Di Prima’s inquiry – “are you prepared?” –is directed specifically at women but there are signs that gender roles break down. She continues asking her reader if they are prepared

⁸² Characteristically, she does not name any of the White or Black Panthers who spent time at the Oak Street commune. It is even possible that these visitors were not full-fledged members of these organizations but only known affiliates.

⁸³ Di Prima’s children when she moved to San Francisco were Jeanne and Dominique di Prima, and Alex and Tara Marlowe. Her fifth child, Rudi di Prima, was born a few years later.

to nurse
him, or her, as necessary, to know
'first aid' and healing (not to freak out
at the sight of torn or half-cooked flesh) (26)

The "him or her" in this passage refers to someone in the action without assuming the gender of the person on the front line. True, the poem's address assumes that the "you"/the caretaker who nurses will be a woman, but it is significant that later editions of the poem drop the dedication to the "chicks." It is likely that di Prima reconsidered her assumptions about gender roles as she gained more experience. In this early Letter, di Prima was one of the relatively inexperienced militants that the poem addresses from the perspective of her friends in the Diggers (aka the "speaker" of the poem). Although she had some preparation in this area at the Phoenix Bookstore, her time with the Diggers provided ample experience hiding people out, dealing with the FBI, and running them across borders (Di Prima, *Recollections* 424; Di Prima, *Memoirs* 138; Meltzer 20). Her growing experience inevitably meant encountering individuals with relationships to gender (even her heterosexual partner Grant Fisher, discussed later) that challenged her assumptions.

Di Prima was not just making direct connections. Through the underground press, di Prima's poetry was encountering a broader public, which she took as an opportunity to warn them of the dangers of being too public. The summer that she moved to San Francisco, she began publishing her poems through the underground newspaper syndicated, Liberation News Service (LNS), which sent packages to two hundred associated newspapers ("Inaugural Address" 7). Formed in 1967, by the summer of 1968, LNS had grown to a national organization that essentially amalgamated the underground

press (Slonecker 30). The first fifteen of her *Revolutionary Letters* were published through LNS in addition to appearing in a collection put out by the White Panthers in Detroit to fundraise for John Sinclair and another printed by the Diggers' Communication Company. She was inspired by the Diggers to try to put something out daily and, with the use of their mimeograph, she could contribute to their broadsides to make a thousand copies for the public everyday ("By Any Means Necessary" 204).⁸⁴ But she drew a sharp distinction between the publicness of her writing and the kind of action that these poems called for.⁸⁵ In "Revolutionary Letter #14," she continues to add to situations that require preparation and secrecy:

to pass him on at the right time to the next
station, to cross the canadian border,
with a child
so that the three of you
look like one family, no questions asked
or fewer, to stash letters, guns, or bombs
forget about them
till they are called for, to KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT (26)

⁸⁴ Her publications with the Diggers including these Revolutionary Letters were all done in the Diggers spirit of "free." She did not make any money from sending these letters to LNS ("By Any Means Necessary" 196). Instead, she worked on writing and publishing *Memoirs of a Beatnik* in order to make money for her communal home (Raskin). *Floating Bear* felt the repercussions of this lack of income. Di Prima published a final issue, known as the San Francisco issue, in July 1969 before handing off manuscripts to the publisher of Intrepid for a one-off collaborative issue.

⁸⁵ As mentioned earlier, her milieu was also well aware of the kind of repression that their writing could invite. Her involvement with the Diggers only reinforced this awareness. She suspected the underground press was being targeted by COINTELPRO and discussed alternative ideas of setting up spaces to collect news and keep people in contact. Even their homes would be too vulnerable since they could easily be raided ("By Any Means Necessary" 206).

The home is only the first staging area in hiding someone out, a waystation for escape. One hides inside, almost paradoxically, in order to create new paths and nonlinear connections. Likewise, there is a comparable discrepancy between the explicit instructions for secret plans and the direct, accessible poetry about staying quiet. That freedom comes from personal restraint (hiding, silence) makes it a transformational process, a metamorphosis—like the underground pressure that forms a diamond—rather than a linear path. Part of being prepared, for this poem, is keeping a distance from one’s public persona and their identity. The simile in “look like a family” implies that there is an actual identity that is non-nuclear, that forms these alternative relationships in secret and outside of convention, communally. In the communal home, the conventional household becomes, like di Prima’s Chanel dress that made her appear straight, another disguise.

For her queer audience, in particular, these instructions might seem like choosing to stay in the closet. Certainly, there were many in her milieu, even just in LNS, that were willing to stay in the closet.⁸⁶ Although the *Revolutionary Letters* do not directly deal with queer sexuality, there were others in the milieu who soon would. While the Stonewall riots were not the origin of queer movements in the United States, they were pivotal and continue to be instructive for considering the constellation of concepts we

⁸⁶ The founders of LNS, Ray Mungo and Marshall Bloom, were both queer. A central staff member, Allen Young, became heavily involved in the Gay Liberation Front after the Stonewall riots in 1969. Blake Slonecker describes all three as “closeted” in 1968. Mungo came out following Bloom’s suicide in 1969, which was provoked by FBI harassment that focused in part on his sexuality (Slonecker 66).

have been examining (friendship, the home, queer feminism, and anarchy). Much has been written on and debated concerning who was involved in these riots, but its significance derives from a primarily queer group, notably trans women of color, rioting in response to a police raid on a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn.⁸⁷ Jim Fouratt, co-founder of the anarchist group the Yippies (who incidentally originally based themselves on the Diggers), happened to be in the area. Although not a patron of the Stonewall Inn, Fouratt was one of many in the queer community to be in the leaderless crowd during the Stonewall riots. Fouratt's experience at Stonewall motivated him to help found a new group, the Gay Liberation Front, which would bring many queer people into the social movement, including his roommate Allen Young of LNS who came to Stonewall at Fouratt's request (Fouratt and Schulman 27).⁸⁸ At the time of the riots, Fouratt had great

⁸⁷ Although all accounts agree on the riots beginning in response to a police raid, various sources make claims on who was involved and what role they had. Some of the most comprehensive histories like Martin Duberman's *Stonewall* and David Carter's book of the same name have been challenged for their inaccuracies. For example, Jim Fouratt told his interviewer, Sarah Schulman, that "I loathed this David Carter and that horrible book that he has written" (26-27). However, these books containing many firsthand accounts continue to be important resources for historians, particularly since many other histories of social movements of the 1960s sideline Stonewall and Gay Liberation. Yet, at times, sources provide contradicting claims. See, for example, the short overview of firsthand accounts in Morgan M. Page's recent article, "It Doesn't Matter Who Threw the First Brick at Stonewall." I tend to agree with Page that it doesn't matter who threw the first brick. We will see, however, that the composition of the crowd is significant for our purposes.

⁸⁸ Although there was a network of militants with connections to the underground press fueling gay liberation, LNS had little to with the immediate aftermath of Stonewall. Slonecker claims that "Even nine months after the Stonewall Inn riots, LNS had not yet covered the nascent gay liberation movement. Nor had Young come out of the closet" (114).

difficulty trying to get his friends in the New Left social movements, who were mainly straight, to show up to support the riots. In an interview, he recounted his attempt: “I go to the corner to the telephone, and I call up all my radical friends and say, ‘You’ve got to come here, it’s going to be —’ And not one of them would come” (Fouratt and Schulman 26-27). While the complaint that there was insufficient support from militants is not new, Fouratt goes on to cite groups that did come, including lesbians from the burgeoning Women’s Liberation Movement and the Motherfuckers, who he identifies as the primary bottle throwers in the riot (Fouratt and Schulman 28).⁸⁹ In addition to the Motherfuckers, the anarchist milieu had a hand in spreading the word about the events because of their placement in the underground press. A reporter only identified as “Tom” published a recap of the riot in the anarchist-leaning newspaper, *Rat Subterranean News*, called

⁸⁹ Fouratt further claims he approached the Motherfuckers and “I said, ‘If you are going to throw bottles’ — because you have all these gay people that said that they threw bottles and beat up cops, and it did not happen. I’m sure to them, subjectively, they thought it happened, but it did not happen. ‘You’ve got to go to the front of the line, because these people in the front of the line have no idea what to do if the police will do.’ So I stayed in the back with them, trying to stop them from throwing the bottles. And we would get people to run down different streets. When I say it was organized, we knew how to keep the police—Because many of us had political experience being in the street—So we had people running at all different streets. People just had a good time” (Fouratt and Schulman 28-9). Fouratt is not implying that the Motherfuckers “threw the first brick” at Stonewall, since he places their arrival on the second night, but he is attributing a disproportionate amount of the action to predominantly white and straight anarchists. Other sources usually attribute much of the street fighting to queer people, especially trans women. What is important for our purposes is that Fouratt identifies a network of friends, including the presence of anarchists, increasing the crowd and contributing to strategy.

“Queen Power.”⁹⁰ The rioters and their friends would soon add their own publications to the growing list of underground newspapers, including *Come Out* and *Fag Rag*, which John Wieners regularly contributed to. Di Prima’s call for insurrection in her poems needs to be placed in this context.

By the summer of 1969, the broader context included insurrectionary queer organizations with heavy involvement in the underground press. Sometimes this involvement included internal revolts against friends and comrades, which manifested in occupations and takeovers of underground newspaper offices. “[O]ccupy—take over take over” was reportedly a chant that went up during the Stonewall riots (“Queen Power” 6).⁹¹ As a tactic, occupations had been given traction by the mobilizations for France’s May ’68 events and, closer to home, the Columbia University occupation in New York made famous by LNS.⁹² In the final installment of her initial 1968 run of *Revolutionary Letters*, di Prima makes the connection between these events and the media:

When you seize Columbia, when you

⁹⁰ Although “Tom” argues for the significance of the events, it is not clear how seriously the rest of the *Rat* staff took the article. The accompanying drawing shows a person with sideburns and makeup saying “Up Againtht the Wall,” imitating a lisp to parody the popular slogan with gay caricature (“Queen Power” 6).

⁹¹ Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) developed out of a five-day takeover of Weinstein Hall at New York University in 1970, organized in support of the Christopher Street Liberation Committee (Cohen 112). The Committee were comprised of the original organizers of Gay Pride parades on the anniversary of the Stonewall riots. The founders of STAR, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, were veterans of the riots and members of the GLF. One of their primary projects was to create a communal home for 15 to 25 affiliates of STAR (Cohen 131).

⁹² While the events themselves were noteworthy, Slonecker claims it was LNS that turned the Columbia occupation into a movement “touchstone” (28).

seize Paris, take
the media, tell the people what you're doing
what you're up to and why and how you mean
to do it, how they can help ("Revolutionary Letter #15" 27)

Di Prima reminds her rebellious audience that they could grow their list of friends if they included the media in their list of occupations. Although she likely means the mainstream media in this case, the underground press sometimes required similarly extreme measures, especially when it came to feminist movements, to get the word out. While people were in Christopher street for the Stonewall riots, di Prima was helping the staff of the *Berkeley Barb* layout their *Barb on Strike* issue, a takeover prompted at least in part by the owner's sexist publishing practices.⁹³

The *Barb* takeover and eventual splinter into *The Berkeley Tribe* was one of many takeovers of popular underground newspapers over the next year. The *Tribe* itself was taken over by feminists in 1970. We could read these takeovers as a way of taking di Prima's advice in "Revolutionary Letter #15." One of the most famous takeovers was a feminist coup at *Rat Subterranean News*, notably including members of the anarchist-affiliated Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH). WITCH was a feminist group with origins in the Yippies and friends/"sister organization" to the Motherfuckers,⁹⁴ that drew on the imagery and ritual of witchcraft to perform direct

⁹³ She briefly refers to this event in a diary entry for July 15, 1969.

⁹⁴ The White Panther Pun Plamondon describes WITCH as the Motherfuckers' sister organization (124). However, the two groups shared no formal affiliation, to my knowledge, beyond friendship. For a brief history of WITCH, see Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*.

actions or what they called “zaps.” When they helped forcefully take over the *Rat*, WITCH members contributed their editorial skills and memorable content, such as Robin Morgan’s “Goodbye to All That” (6-7).⁹⁵ Another contribution celebrates the feminist and *Rat* staff member Jane Alpert, who went underground shortly after the takeover to avoid trial, with a full-page letter “Dear Jane, You left the water running. love, the Rat Collective. P.S. All Power to the Underground” (28). This message is a reminder that these networks were made up of not just comrades or even friends but also roommates in communal homes.⁹⁶ While it might seem strange that friends would take over a public institution like *Rat* at the same time another friend went underground to hide from the public eye, both follow a similar basic logic of action laid out by di Prima: “take what you need” (“Revolutionary Letter #15” 27). There is no contradiction between the spaces of the underground and media—or between “KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT” or “take/the

⁹⁵ Robin Morgan’s relationship to queer feminism is contradictory. As a founding member of WITCH, she contributed to a confrontational and militant lesbian feminist movement. However, she later became an enemy of trans women when she publicly attacked Beth Elliott at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference. This incident is often seen as a pivotal split between queer feminists and what has become known as trans exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs).

⁹⁶ This nod to communal living should be understood as figurative. Alpert was living alone before skipping bail and going underground. When she first met her co-conspirator and partner, Sam Melville, they talked of commune living and his intentions to buy land (Alpert 109). However, they lived together with another heterosexual couple, which was hardly a commune in the conventional sense, even if we include their downstairs neighbor who they considered part the “East Eleventh Street family” (Alpert 131). Robin Morgan, who likely penned the note in the *Rat*, offered Alpert money, encouragement, and help with her disguise, in the spirit of communalism, when Alpert went underground. But it was not until Alpert stayed briefly on a commune in Northern California with two of the staff of the *Berkeley Tribe*, during her frequently nomadic time underground, that she first experienced this way of life in any strict sense (Alpert 265).

media”—in terms of “taking what you need,” since each are based on the situation and need. The feminists involved in what became known as the Women’s LibeRATion, were less concerned with using the newspaper to increase representation of women—or even emerging as a coherently formal group with the ability to represent women—than appearing as a network of friends tied to the unrepresentable underground. Di Prima follows this call to take what you need by ending the poem with the quote “it’s free/ because it’s yours,” the Diggers slogan initially taken up for their free food events (27). This ending brings the broader context of occupations into the shared strategy of free food rooted in the communal homes of the Diggers. The communal homes shaped themselves to these varying needs, synthesizing the underground with their more public experiments in collectivity.

1960s experiments in communal living have helped reconceptualize the home in ways that have reverberated in feminist debates of the decades since. Although the late 1960s saw a resurgence of interest in communes, the idea was, of course, not new.⁹⁷ One could argue that communal living is latent within the home as a separate (yet interdependent) sphere of activity from the market, where people share resources, usually with their family. It is not surprising that, in times of increased social struggle, people have extended the shared economy of the home to their comrades and allies.⁹⁸ This

⁹⁷ For a history of commune movements, see Laurence Veysey’s *The Communal Experience*. Additionally, Timothy Miller’s *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* is useful in this regard, particularly the opening chapters.

⁹⁸ In their essay “Without Reserves,” Salar Mohandesi and Emma Teitelmen point out that “the household, of course, has always had a contradictory existence. On the one

potentiality of the home has led feminists, such as Silvia Federici, to identify the home as the basis for new liberatory forms of collective life. There is a danger, however, in valorizing the home as it normally functions under capitalism. As the collective Endnotes responds to Federici, a self-organized home that still functions as usual might merely be “a self-organisation of the abject, of what no one else is willing to do.” A feminist project that neglects to challenge the makeup of the home, focusing solely on self-organization as an end in itself, risks reproducing the same labor conditions and gender roles of the system it opposes. Federici herself already pointed to this limitation when considering the then-new emerging Gay Liberation movements and observed that “*homosexuality is workers’ control of production, not the end of work*” (15).⁹⁹

For di Prima, it was not enough that she left her husband, Alan Marlowe, to join an alternative community in a Digger commune; she wanted to reimagine the home transformed into a weapon against the current system. In the final Revolutionary Letter of

hand, capitalism depends heavily on the household to replenish labor power and reproduce gendered hierarchies. On the other hand, as a site of mutual aid, income pooling, and the accumulation of vital reserves, the household, though always changing, has proven vital to the survival of the working class.” Furthermore, they observe that hobos in the 1930s had a similar process of sharing that extended to create an alternative way of life in “hobo jungles.”

⁹⁹ For Federici, the Wages for Housework campaign that she helped organize was, at its heart, a challenge to the naturalization of women’s work—that feminized labor was “a natural attribute of our female physique and personality”—making clear that housework was not inevitably feminized but the result of a labor condition. For recent feminist theory that is also anti-work, see Kathi Weeks’s *The Problem with Work* and much of the material in the recent *Social Reproduction Theory* collection edited by Tithi Bhattacharya.

her initial run in 1968, she describes a relationship to home that is prepared for confrontation:

Know every way
out of your house, where it goes, every alley
on the block, which back yards connect, which walls
are scalable, which bushes
will hold a man.
Construct at least one man-sized hiding place
in your walls ("Revolutionary Letter #15)

In the direction "know every way," we can hear an echo of the earlier Letter's "no one way works," pointing to the open-endedness of her designs for the home. The home is not a single place: it's a complex. Di Prima, always the occultist, recognizes the home as a container for secrets, a secret/puzzle box, with hidden components of the underground. The home keeps imperceptible connections to neighbors, a complex of hidden chambers and secret passages. It makes for an uncanny home.

The Digger communes provoked a poetic derangement of expectations and were renovated with deregulated designs. A former neighbor of di Prima, a resident of Underhouse commune named Nailcakes, describes their neighborhood in terms that expand on di Prima's poem:

Underhouse had three entries to it. Two on Cole facing the house where Kitten lived. (Whitehouse). Underhouse was the first doorway of the last building on the block before you crossed over to PanhandlePark.. The doorway leading to underhouse, Had two entries, the first door was nailed so shut a battering ram couldnt break it down. from the inside when you walked in the wall was tore down between the two entry ways. One leading upstairs over underhouse. Upstairs was refered to as Upperhouse . . . Now in the same building the next doorway lead to upper whitehouse (not to be confused with Whitehouse across the St) There were two doorways there too. The second of which was the one to upperwhitehouse . . . There was an excape route connecting Upperhouse with upper whitehouse. The Attic where the other door lead is where the Black Panthers lived and I never saw anyone even go in there or come out. Downstairs

was the name of the flat in the building that was facing the panhandle, it was street level . . . There was an underground tunnel that ran across the st over to White House and then many more escape routes once in the back yard, which could take you to two direction. One was up and over fences through White house then hop over to Page St House. The other way was out the back yard of Underhouse over the fences and through one house and over to the other page st house . . . (shameless_heifer)¹⁰⁰

This lengthy description provides an even more complex picture of the tangle of connections, escape routes, and barriers that constituted these urban communes. In addition to physically reconstructing their homes along defensive lines, the design of Digger homes required visionary reimagining of domestic space inspired by insurrectionary use. Confirming that they were used, Nailcakes offers a personal anecdote, concerning the escape route from di Prima's former house (which she calls the "Blue House"). Specifically, she describes evading the authorities after illegally retrieving her children from child protection services.¹⁰¹ By the time of this event, di Prima had already departed her Oak street commune, realizing that even this elaborate

¹⁰⁰ This description comes from a post by a "super moderator" with the alias shameless-heifer on the message board Hip Forums, which once served as a forum for reuniting former communards. shameless-heifer identified herself as going by the name Nailcakes during her time in the communes centered around the Church of the Good Earth. By 1970, the Oak street house had been folded into the Good Earth's growing network of communes.

¹⁰¹ Nailcakes provides context: "I hadda use the escape route from Blue House on Oak where Stacy lived when the law dawgs came to capture the nortorious Nailcakes when me and another sister whet n broke Jomie out of Child Haven after the big bust came down and they took EVERY ONE to City Prison and took my boy to CH" (shameless_heifer). She claims that, after the armed "jailbreak," the police followed them back to the Blue House where they used the escape route: "out the back window we went. We flew over fences and into a window that led to Toothless Jimmys and Dorys house further up Cole St." (shameless_heifer).

system of escape routes was insufficient when the FBI began continuously making daily calls (*Memoirs* 138). The next logical step was to move to a remote rural commune, following the trend known as the Back-to-the-Land Movement, which di Prima followed when she relocated to Black Bear Ranch in the fall of 1969.

The rural commune promised new friendships and a renewed composition of the insurrectionary movement promoted by the Diggers. Black Bear Ranch was the most remote of the growing network of communes, which increasingly included rural land projects in Northern California like the Red House in Forest Knolls and another in Olema (Hodgdon 45). As the Diggers drifted into rural areas, their “Free City” collective adopted the less urban and more expansive sounding name “the Free Family” (Coyote 130).¹⁰² Communards from various places and groups fell into these rural communes, looking for a new avenue for insurrection or a place to hide out.¹⁰³ Former Motherfuckers

¹⁰² Coyote describes the growing communal atmosphere: “A good deal of the time was spent visiting one another at these family houses: Willard Street, Carl Street, the Red House, Black Bear Ranch, Olema, Salmon River, the Bakery, Trinidad House, Garberville, Arcata, and Willits. By the time this chain of camps was established, we had begun to refer to ourselves as ‘the Free Family’ as often as ‘the Diggers’” (130)

¹⁰³ In *West of Eden*, Jesse Drew describes Black Bear Ranch as “an ideal hideaway.” The Ranch was exceptionally remote and had no electricity, running water, or telephone. An FBI report describes the commune as 125 people living on a logging road in “an extremely mountainous area in southwestern Siskiyou County, California, which is immediately adjacent to the State of Oregon” (qtd. in Drew). This created a difficult situation for the authorities since “[t]heir traditional spy techniques, telescopes and nightvision from neighboring buildings, wiretapping telephone lines, and tampering with the mail were worthless in the wilderness. Unfortunately for the FBI, to get to know the residents and the visitors, one had to be physically present, a daunting task for outsiders to communal life” (Drew).

Osha Neumann, Mark Motherfucker, and Creek¹⁰⁴ all found their way to Black Bear Ranch as did affiliates of Revolutionary Action Movement and the Black Panthers.¹⁰⁵ Initially, the more insurrectionary elements of the commune envisioned Black Bear as a guerrilla base. One of the founders, Bill Fritsch's old friend, Richard Marley, pictured the commune in the mold of Fidel Castro's and Che Guevara's strategy: the Free Family reimagined as the small guerrilla band or foco (Berman). In contrast, his wife Elsa was guided by a mystical vision she had of an artist colony (Monkerud 24). For her part, di Prima began to imagine remote locations where insurrectionaries flourished and found one another, feeling that there was

nowhere we can go but they are waiting for us
no exile where we will not hear welcome home
'good morning brother, let me work with you
goodmorning sister, let me
fight by your side' ("Revolutionary Letter #29" 42)

¹⁰⁴ Creek was part of the group of Motherfuckers who moved West to California while others remained in New Mexico. Initially, they formed an urban commune in San Francisco known as Armed Love (Monkerud 35). Among other things including operating a Free Store, Armed Love commune continued the debate about armed self-defense in the counterculture, some of which is recorded in the pages of *Kaliflower*. Creek lived at Diane di Prima's old house on Oak Street, which had become part of the Good Earth commune (Monkerud 35).

¹⁰⁵ The Black Liberation militants that came to Black Bear included members of the Oakland Direct Action Committee (ODAC) and Ray Ballard of the Black Man's Free Store. A founding member of RAM's Black Panther Party of Northern California, Ballard was deeply associated with the Diggers. However, their separate and secretive guerrilla training activities soon led to hostilities on the commune and a short, armed standoff with the other Diggers (Monkerud 79). Despite this conflict, two members of ODAC, Kenny Rogers and Calvin Donley stayed in the commune, although they remained critical of tendencies within the commune that they viewed as escapist (Monkerud 82). Chapter four deals with the decentralization of the various groups that constituted the Black Panther Party.

As more friends joined them on the commune, the visions of its purpose multiplied. To a large extent, Richard Marley had to come to terms with the new and not so revolutionary vision of the many hippies taking up residence. Rather than revolutionaries prepared for training, he discovered “some of those people didn’t even have shoes!” (Monkerud 24). But even the residents that arrived at Black Bear to continue the revolution, like di Prima and Marley, did not always see eye-to-eye.

The rural commune at Black Bear Ranch did not provide sufficient opportunities for revolutionary activity but it did highlight an internal conflict within the movement around housework and gender roles. On the ranch, communards quickly discovered that subsistence and daily chores were more often the central concern rather than fighting the system.¹⁰⁶ Yet, as di Prima learned, the fighting continued. Di Prima was embroiled in conflict as soon as she arrived at Black Bear, since residents were mad that she moved with two men in a commune culture where women were expected to both bring in money and do housework. Moreover, the fact that the men she brought to the commune insisted on doing household chores like chopping wood and carrying water only enflamed the problem (Meltzer 21). Men, after all, were expected to focus on hunting and these men did not conform to the gender roles. The men in question were di Prima’s new partner Grant Fisher and Bob Thorsen, both members of an anarchist affinity group in Detroit known as the Liberty Street Gang (Plamondon 156). At Black Bear, all three were known

¹⁰⁶ As Creek put it, “Some would say the essence of those early commune years was about art or style, about politics or spiritual growth, but I was there the winters of 1968, 1969, and more. We all knew that Black Bear was about food” (Monkerud 12).

by pseudonyms—Lucy Fur, Lou C Fir, Lou Sefur—a situation that a fellow anarchist, Creek, remarks “seemed normal at the time” (Monkerud 36)—since di Prima was still active in hiding people out. At least these anarchists’ behavior better fit di Prima’s egalitarian vision of brothers who were ready to “work with you” (“Revolutionary Letter #29” 42).¹⁰⁷

Di Prima found moments of possibility in her new friendships on the commune. For a brief and formative period, the rural communes were a source of inspiration that led her to consider alternatives to urban life and ask “can we/make it under the sky again, in moving tribes/that settle, build, move on and build again” (Revolutionary Letter #33” 46). Even with the realities of Black Bear’s operations, di Prima still had moments of utopian hope, particularly with the arrival of the fugitive White Panther leader Pun Plamondon. Grant Fisher and Bob Thorson were both already friends with Plamondon and assisted in finding him a place at Black Bear to hide. By fall 1969, Plamondon was “underground” and on the run to evade questioning for the bombing of a CIA office in Detroit. While Plamondon’s White Panthers were not anarchists, there was enough connection between groups that Thorson and Fisher were wanted for questioning too. Plamondon had turned to the anarchists, including the Motherfuckers, to find his way via the underground to Black Bear.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, he was already in touch with di Prima,

¹⁰⁷ According to di Prima, Fisher was upset by the men’s reaction to his nonconformity to gender roles, but di Prima enforced the arrangement, telling him he could leave if he did not want to do work (Meltzer 21).

¹⁰⁸ In his memoir, Plamondon admits that a Motherfucker was central to the network that got him to Black Bear. The Motherfucker he describes appears to be a composite

having published a White Panther edition of her *Revolutionary Letters* to raise legal aid money for another White Panther leader, John Sinclair (Plamondon 156). It was Plamondon's underground network that seems to be the inspiration for di Prima's growing revolutionary vision in poems that increasingly focused on mapping the connections between struggles ("Revolutionary Letter #37") and the corresponding destruction of capitalist infrastructure: downed power and telephone lines ("Revolutionary Letter #40"); exploding fuel lines and automobiles repurposed as flower pots ("Revolutionary Letter #34"). Di Prima's interest in the destruction of circulation infrastructure crisscrossing the country was only paralleled by her hope that Plamondon's network represented a revolution spreading in its place. In addition to the re-radicalization of Black Bear, she imagined her new role as aiding these fugitives to spread revolution on the run: "If Lance [aka Pun Plamondon] and Genie [Parker, his partner] went to Canada – it would be possible for me to raise loot + get him + Genie set up in a commune on some heavy front where they could receive fugitives from the USA, and train guerrilla troops for fighting in the mountains here" (*Notebooks*, 18 Nov.

character named Barretta. Earlier in the memoir, Barretta is the name given to a New York Motherfucker at the center of an altercation with a slumlord. By the description, it seems to be a pseudonym for Ben Morea and Plamondon even slips and refers to him as "Ben" at one point (126). However, it is unlikely that Morea was the Motherfucker Plamondon meets again in the Bay Area since Morea was active in New Mexico at this time. Barretta is likely a name Plamondon uses for anonymous Motherfuckers. Di Prima points out that another central Motherfucker, Allen Hoffman, did assist with some of the plan, helping Plamondon's partner Genie Parker, aka "The Prez" or "Nancy," navigate the Bay Area (*Notebooks*, 17 Nov. 1969).

1969).¹⁰⁹ Despite her conflicts over gender roles in the commune, she was at times able to imagine it as part of her revolutionary vision.

When Plamondon and Parker departed on bad terms with the commune, di Prima was incapable of maintaining this optimism. Since harboring fugitives is, as di Prima advised, something for which one must be prepared, Plamondon and Parker predictably wore out their welcome with some of the Black Bear communards. For some, Plamondon was too much risk for a commune already stretched thin by state repression to the point that it became the women's role to deal with visits from the authorities while men hid in the woods (Plamondon 149). Yet, it was a man, Richard Marley, who ultimately took on the leadership role of telling di Prima to send Plamondon away.¹¹⁰ This conflict was compounded by existing gender role problems. Not long after, di Prima recounts Marley criticizing Grant Fisher for letting di Prima "harbor" him and "castrating" him into becoming a caretaker (*Notebooks*, 17 Dec. 1969). Thus, the issue of harboring fugitives

¹⁰⁹ Di Prima was particularly hopeful about the influence Parker could have had on the commune. She speculated that there would have been a continued upsurge of "newsletters and readings: turning on the ranch more and more (as it had been going)" with Plamondon. If they had been allowed to stay, di Prima believed they could together "radicaliz[e] the county as [Bob] Thorson once put it" (*Notebooks*, 18 Nov. 1969). The revolutionary optimism di Prima rediscovered at the arrival of Plamondon can be heard in the poem that opened this chapter, written at that time.

¹¹⁰ Di Prima conceded that Richard Marley had a point in criticizing Plamondon, who, Marley argued, should not have taken a high-risk action without the proper organizational support from the White Panthers. Whether or not Plamondon was following the best political strategy, di Prima reasoned "I wasn't helping Lance [Plamondon] because of the soundness of his politics – but because he was a friend." Moreover, she pointed out, even if Plamondon left, other fugitives would continue to come to Black Bear Ranch, looking for support from their friend, di Prima (*Notebooks*, 8 Dec. 1969).

became conflated with the issue of conforming to gender roles. Yet, even when di Prima took on feminized labor, she was assailed by the men for her methods. According to Elsa Marley, di Prima was the target of the men's ire around the same time for daring to give disposable diapers as a Christmas gift to the women to reduce some of their childcare labor (La Rosa).¹¹¹ All these things added up resulting in di Prima's disenchantment with Black Bear Ranch and, at least for a time, the revolutionary movement altogether. Rather than contributing to hypothetical guerrilla camp in Canada, di Prima decided to focus on esoteric study, especially magic and Buddhism (*Notebooks*, 7 Dec. 1969).¹¹² By the spring of 1970, di Prima left the Digger commune and moved to the Tassajara Zen Center.

The conflicts, especially around gender, did not cease with the departure of di Prima and her friends from Black Bear Ranch. The presence of the ongoing Women's Liberation Movement was felt in remote communes like Black Bear. When feminists like Harriet Beinfeld arrived at Black Bear, she initially found women "devoted to their men," who, not long after, refused submissive roles (Berman). According to another Black Bear resident, Mahaj Seeger, there was also a presence of single women who autonomously

¹¹¹ In contrast, Elsa Marley points out that "the women really loved her" (La Rosa).

¹¹² In her diary, di Prima does not initially mention a renewed focus on Buddhism, only magic. She recounts a conversation with Genie Parker in which "I told her it was the thing w/ Lance [aka Plamondon] more than anything – watching the Ranch be unwilling to handle that – that made me realize that engaging in active Revolution at this point is engaging in suicide. Made me realize of the 2 paths the one I had better take is the path of study, especially study of magick or healing – forget activity in the streets, the writing of newsletters, etc" (*Notebooks*, 7 Dec. 1969). Although she doesn't mention Buddhism, her move to the Zen Center implies that she understood it as part of her "path of study."

took up activities considered the responsibility of men, like the construction of domes for residences (Berman). Although men on the commune were resistant to these changes, at least one neighbor to the commune, a non-communard named Hoss, remembers finding it easier to work with the women and introduced some to new skills (Berman). As women challenged the gender division of labor, a kind of “women’s revolution” took place at Black Bear. Despite the fact that they were far removed from urban struggles, forms of revolutionary change still proved possible internally within their communes. While di Prima believed that there was “nowhere we can go” that she would not find revolutionary comrades, it might be equally said that there was no escape from internal conflict. If anything, the communes provided a concentrated space to stage conflicts around gender that held out the promise of a resolution beyond a rearrangement of labor. When feminists broke down the gender divisions in the commune, the goal was never simply to divvy out tasks differently. It was in the hopes of forging a new communal way of living.

Conclusion

As di Prima knew, a communal way of life, ultimately, would have required—more than her poetic vision or communal homes—a revolution that was not yet forthcoming. After Black Bear, di Prima decided to focus on study, but she continues to this day to write her Revolutionary Letters. Even though the Letters as a series has outlasted most projects that can be attributed to the Diggers (notably, the commune at Black Bear Ranch still exists), the network of friends that superseded the Diggers as a recognizable organization continued to provide material for the Letters. Her experiences

with revolutionaries inform the lessons of newer poems, in which she warns readers to “choose/yr battles . . . you have only/so much/ammunition” (“Revolutionary Letter #109”). Di Prima’s revolutionary friends can still be said to be the subject or, figuratively, the “speaker” of these poems. Yet, it should be clear that the poems were never invested in representing social movements as much as forging advantageous and sometimes subterranean lines of connection, like the one between the home and the street. Di Prima’s insightfulness was not necessarily diminished by her turn away from an active role and toward esoteric study. After all, as an unorthodox thinker, she believes magic has real effects.¹¹³ For those revolutionaries who remain active in the streets, these poems continue to remind them that their homes, too, will need to undergo an “alchemical” transformation.

The Diggers experiment in revolutionary communal homes remained localized for the most part to California and a predominantly white milieu. Although restricted to the West Coast, their network of communal homes welcomed and sheltered anarchists and revolutionaries from across the country, strengthening the underground resistance. To a great extent, they were able to transcend the local organization, known as the Diggers, and form a crucial part of a decentralized movement based primarily on friendship. At the same time, others were building their own decentralized formations that proved to have varying degrees of success and longevity. One of the most notable organizations of the period, the Black Panther Party is rarely studied for their decentralization and relationship

¹¹³ In regards to learning magic, she reminds her audience, “Don’t be ‘surprised’ when it works” (“Revolutionary Letter #16” 59).

to the underground. The Party's powerful imagery of heroic leadership and legacy of top-down decision-making often eclipses the ways in which their structure and accomplishments depended on decentralized groups entrenched in underground organizing. In the next chapter, I will explore this neglected dimension of the Panthers in relation to Chester Himes's depiction of a successful Black Liberation movement in the novel *Plan B*.

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Chapter 4

GUTBUCKET: THE BLACK PANTHERS' PIG IN CHESTER HIMES'S *PLAN B*

They played real blues. Gradually, the New York cabarets began to hear more of the real pure jazz and blues by musicians from Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, etc. What they played was more expressive than had been heard in New York to that time. You could only hear the blues and real jazz in the gutbucket cabarets where the lower class went. The term 'gutbucket' came from the chitterlings bucket. Chitterlings are the guts of a hog and the practice used to be to take a bucket to the slaughterhouse and get a bucket of guts. Therefore, anything real low down was called gutbucket.

—Garvin Bushell

In Chester Himes's unfinished final novel of his Harlem detective series, *Plan B*, an underground organization secretly foments a Black uprising through a front group called Chitterlings, Inc. As the name suggests, Chitterlings, Inc. specializes in the mass distribution of chitterlings, a popular meal made from pig guts. The name of this chapter, gutbucket, was originally the term for the actual bucket people would take to the slaughterhouse to collect guts for their chitterlings. As a cheap part of the animal, chitterlings were one of the many ingredients in the development of "soul food" and became a popular dish for African Americans in the South while maintaining a reputation as low culture. As a result, Himes's use of the chitterling can be understood as an allusion to low culture but one imbued with desire and appetite. In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka quotes the jazz musician Garvin Bushell, who explains that the chitterling gutbucket became synonymous with something "low down," the meaning extending to include the

gutbucket cabarets, where one could hear the “real jazz” (110). Thus, gutbucket came to connote both low reputation and authenticity. For Himes, Chitterlings, Inc. encapsulates the appeal of authentic low culture.

The appeal of chitterlings in *Plan B* parallels the desire for a successful Black Power uprising among the lower class and grassroots of the Black Panther Party. Himes literalizes this analogy by having his fictional chitterlings company, Chitterlings, Inc., secretly distribute guns to impoverished areas. In the novel, these arms are widely distributed without formal recruitment to arm the grassroots for insurrection. This convoluted strategy takes a contradiction in the Black Panthers Party as a starting point: their drive toward a hierarchical and iconic leadership versus their rapid expansion and popularization of grassroots direct action inspired by the riots. The Black Panthers’ direct action model emerged from their response to the police, the paradigmatic form of this response being armed self-defense against police patrols. This tactic was initially popularized by the Black Panther chapter operating locally in Oakland, California, in 1966, and is often understood as the instantiating form of action that led to the emergence of the Black Panther national organization. However, recent histories and archival research reveal a much more complex picture of the Panthers, with multiple sites of origin and development. Himes was notoriously critical of the leadership of Black Power groups, but *Plan B* expresses the hopes he placed in grassroots resistance to the police.

From the outset, Himes’s detective series struggles with an internal resentment toward racist policing, often at odds with the genre. However, the earlier novels held out hope for police reform through his Black detective protagonists (albeit as anti-heroes).

These anti-heroes were not able to sustain their existence through the Black Power period, however, as Himes brought his Harlem Cycle to an end. The plan for his unfinished novel concluded with the death of his protagonists. While Himes was working on this novel, the Black Panthers were at the forefront of Black Liberation groups bringing attention to the problem of the police. The success of their anti-police campaign was marked by the growing popularity of their depiction of the police as pigs. Interestingly, Chester Himes never uses the term pig to reference police, even though it had become a popular epithet for the police precisely among the types of characters he was known to depict, the black lower classes. Still, the concept of the pig haunts the text throughout, particularly through the plot led by Chitterlings, Inc, alluding to the desire for pig guts as an analogy for confrontations with the police. In these confrontations, much like the Panthers' depiction of pigs, the novel thoroughly dehumanizes the traditional protagonist of the detective genre, the police.

The detective novel itself is a kind of gutbucket, a low culture genre that Himes uses to appeal to the insurgent Black Power culture. Despite its police protagonists, the detective fiction has traditionally dominated the pulp tradition popular with the lower classes. In the 1960s, detective fiction was making significant inroads with Black audiences through publishers like Holloway House. Yet, Himes's attempt to construct a detective novel responding to the rising insurgency of the Black Power era led to an impasse. Himes works within a genre that depends on the detective protagonist and, simultaneously, targets an audience informed by the Black Panthers' decimating criticism of the police. Building on the Panthers' criticism of the police, *Plan B* explores the

possible methods for attacking police and fleshes out a vision for defeating them in combat. In doing so, Himes inverted the fundamental feature of the detective genre by making the police the antagonists of the last novel in his detective series. As a result of this inversion, *Plan B* ceases to be detective fiction, becoming an “anti-police fiction” able to incorporate the insurgent and lumpen desire for “pig” guts.

I read Chester Himes’s anti-police novel allegorically, unpacking several levels of meaning in his use of chitterlings: first, I will illustrate how the Chitterlings, Inc. plot represents grassroots organizing; then, I will establish the desire for pig guts as a metaphor for attacks on police; finally, I will argue that this disreputable “soul food” gestures at a metanarrative in the novel. The chitterlings in *Plan B* references the “low down” status of the detective genre while the plot of Chitterlings, Inc. narrativizes the evolution of the anti-police genre. This chapter explores the development of an anti-police genre through the speculative fantasies of a Black-led revolution in both the work of Chester Himes and his Black Power contemporaries, especially those associated with the Black Panther Party. Himes’s novel both critiques and fulfills the Black Panthers vision by literally and directly putting guns in the hands of his lumpen characters.

Himes’s allusion to the Black Panthers in *Plan B* cannot be understood by looking at the popular depiction of the Black Panthers. Histories of the Panthers that emphasize formal leadership and representative icons make the Panther-like fantasy of *Plan B* practically illegible. As a corrective, this chapter will retell the well-known history of the Party with an anarchist methodology, emphasizing decentralization of the grassroots over representational leadership. Although I will decenter the political

organizing of the Oakland-based cadre normally attributed with the development of the Panthers, there is one indisputable contribution made by the central headquarters: their publication of the *Black Panther* newspaper, which supplied the disparate and semi-autonomous groups with a sense of political unity and identity. Most importantly for my purposes, the *Black Panther* newspaper forcefully developed the criticism of the police through the reimagining of cops as pigs. With the pig, the *Black Panther* newspaper provided a popular and adaptable image perfect for spreading the critique of the police through heterogeneous and decentralized channels. The pig, as a result, travelled beyond the limited strategy of the central leadership into the hands of the grassroots (in search of a new weapon) and Chester Himes (in search of a new genre). It is the imagery of pigs, I argue, that forced Chester Himes to reevaluate his own depiction of police officers in *Plan B*.

Disappearing the Leader

Is there no valid language for Chaos? Or does Chaos only produce a sort of language that reduces and annihilates? Does its echo recede into a sabir of sabirs at the level of a roar?

—Edouard Glissant

The influence of the Black Panthers in *Plan B* might not be immediately recognizable to the casual reader. Himes does not rely on the typical uniform to signify Black Power militants, such as leather jackets, afros, and berets, nor does he apply his talent in caricature to a rendition of the police as pig.¹ The characters in *Plan B* might be

¹ For scholarship that explores the visual style and art of the Black Panthers, see Erika Doss “Imaging the Panthers.”

equally grotesque as the *Black Panther* newspaper comics but their identities are more elusive and surreal. The mastermind of *Plan B*'s uprising, Tomsson Black, briefly appears in Panther garb early in the novel, "[c]utting a splendid figure in his black leather beret and jacket" (88). Yet, this brief description is contrasted with Tomsson's disappointment with the Panthers poor training in self-defense (88). His disillusionment and departure from the Panthers set in motion an alternative strategy based on clandestine organizing. Operating covertly, the insurrectionaries in *Plan B* shirk the theatrics and icons of public organizations. The novel's interest in the practicalities of organizing over image compliments its investment in elusive, clandestine characters like Tomsson. These features suggest that Black militants of *Plan B* are more likely based on rioters than the well-known leaders of the Black Panthers. *Plan B* is inspired by the historical phenomenon known as the Black Panthers, but its protagonists resemble the rank-and-file Panther found in the riots not those found in the Panther headquarters.

Himes relationship to the Black Panthers and the riots was never straightforward, and I want to be careful to distinguish between what inspired Himes and what drew his critical attention. For Himes, the Black Panthers had potential, but they also had critical flaws. In his opening to the novel that preceded *Plan B*, titled *Blind Man with a Pistol*, he called out "our loudmouthed leaders urging our vulnerable soul brothers on to getting themselves killed" and he added that "all unorganized violence is like a blind man with a pistol." His criticism was certainly aimed at the Panthers, but it also seems to implicate the rioters en masse, as unorganized violence.

What Himes gains from the riots is an understanding of the potential success of decentralized, autonomous actions that did not rely on publicity. In fact, one might say that these kinds of actions defy representation, since they do not provide a point of focus, a unified message, or representatives. Himes's novel channels this representational difficulty, attempting to imagine an experimental form that might grasp the phenomenon of riot-like action. Furthermore, he uses *Plan B* to imagine how things might go differently, especially if the militants could cease relying on conventional media. His novel, then, provides an alternative to conventional media reliant on representatives seeking to speak for the militants. *Plan B* attempts to provide a literary outlet for actors and actions that thrive on autonomy and opacity. To understand what Himes is doing in this novel, then, it is important for us to explore the underground networks rather than the televised revolutions—and therefore to focus on the question so often at the center of detective fiction, that of visibility.

For Himes, the defining characteristic of the black rioters is their invisibility. In an article only recently published for the first time in English, Himes reflects on rioting in the wake of the Long, Hot Summer of 1967, attempting to provide some explanation for his readers in France:

In order to understand anything about the riot in Newark, New Jersey, one must approach it from the position of total ignorance. One must dismiss every preconception, such as the “objective” reportage of all the world's press, along with the actual sight of American Negro tourists walking down the Champs Elysee, eating in expensive restaurants, living in expensive hotels, seemingly intelligent, educated, prosperous, looking happy and satisfied.

Because the black people who are rioting in Newark, along with those who rioted in Watts in 1965 and those who rioted in Cleveland in 1966, and those who rioted in Cincinnati, Boston, Buffalo and in other American cities earlier this year, are invisible. They are never seen until they lie bloody and dead from a

policeman's bullet on the hot dirty pavement of a Ghetto street. ("On the Use" 473).

Himes's appeal that his readers "dismiss every preconception" is more than a critique of the media distortions or the French reader's limited knowledge of America. He asks that the reader suspend judgment and discard the classifications that mediate our experience. By evacuating their assumptions, the reader is left with an absence that Himes refuses to fill. Rather than argue that the rioter looks different than the Black tourist in France, he argues that the rioters are invisible. As a result, the reader is denied the possibility of a pluralist inclusion of this figure; they cannot simply taxonomize the differences and reclassify them. Moreover, Himes proceeds to offer us a glimpse of the residents of these American cities but simultaneously reminds the reader that they have historically only been made visible, by the police, as corpses. This visceral and disturbing image places the curious reader, endeavoring to visualize Black rioters, on the side of the police. This description is reminiscent of Fred Moten's claim that "The mark of invisibility is a visible, racial mark; invisibility has visibility at its heart. To be invisible is to be seen, instantly and fascinatingly recognized as unrecognizable, as the abject" (68). Himes does not provide the easy representational argument that the reader expects: the riots are the result of the inattention to the awful conditions and suffering of the urban black population in the United States, which can be remedied through better representation.

Since visibility is equated with the death of these invisible subjects, the riots in Himes's work substitute as a visual language of the unseen.²

As a result of his complex engagement with visibility, Himes's understanding of the proper organization of Black Power groups is unconventional. When Himes refers to the Panthers and others as dangerously unorganized, he does not mean to undermine militancy itself as too dangerous. It may come as a surprise to some readers, but he was most vocally opposed to the strategies commonly considered signs of organizational success, specifically activism that garners media attention. He argued that

All the so-called leaders of the black people in the United States are effectively neutralised by publicity. I have never fully endorsed the black movements, although I have supported both the Black Muslims – I was a friend of Malcolm X – and the Panthers. I don't think they will succeed because they are too used to publicity, and a successful revolution must be planned with secrecy, security. (Fabre and Skinner 102)

In short, Himes was adamant that the “revolution would not be televised.” He admits his longtime support for Panther-like militancy stretching back to his relationship to Malcolm X, but he wanted to envision a different mode of organization. As an alternative, he proposed that “there is no reason why 100,000 blacks armed with automatic rifles couldn't literally go underground, into the subways and basements of Manhattan—and take over” (Fabre and Skinner 102).³ Likewise, there is no reason that

² I am intentionally interpolating Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous adage that “a riot is the language of the unheard.”

³ Intriguingly, his analysis of the situation echoes almost word-for-word, the crime story memoirist Iceberg Slim: “Since the Panthers have so much moxie . . . why didn't they go underground and form a completely secret organization...?” (qtd. in Gifford, ch. 8). Perhaps it is Slim's literary background that leads him to this fantasy, verging on an

the Black Panther could not be the symbol for this underground, once we distance the symbol from the iconic, highly visible leadership of the Black Panther Party.

In order to understand the Panthers-like characters in Himes's novel, we need to complicate our understanding of the Black Panthers' formation and composition. The development of the organizations that bear the Black Panther name and the associated media icons are normally treated as inextricable from the leadership of the Oakland chapter that chartered a national organization. For most people, the Black Panther Party was introduced into popular consciousness through iconic images such as Huey P. Newton posing on a wicker chair, disciplined ranks of black-clad Panthers in lines holding up fists, et cetera. Most scholars center the development of the party around a central group composed of well-known leadership, including Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, David Hilliard and Elaine Brown. According to this history, these figures took up the call for Black Power in 1966 and set about to produce a vanguard party whose humble origins in monitoring police patrols developed by 1969 into a revolutionary organization acting as the vanguard for both Black Power and the broader New Left. As a result, historians reinforce a hierarchical history of this period with a small central committee directing a powerful and singular organization: a vanguard within a vanguard. While the writing of the Panther leadership confirms this

apocalyptic subgenre shared by many other novelists of his time. Slim was not as critical of the riots as Himes and, in fact, died during the Los Angeles riots of 1992 believing that the revolution had indeed begun. For scholarship that places *Plan B* and other works that I call anti-police fiction in an apocalyptic genre, see Julie A. Fiorelli's "Imagination Run Riot: Apocalyptic Race-War Novels of the late 1960s."

history, their role needs to be contextualized in the broader history of Black Liberation struggles.⁴ What would a history of the Black Panther Party look like if we decentered Huey P. Newton? How can we better understand Himes's work by shedding light on the more anarchistic network that underpinned the Black Panther Party's iconic images? What alternative form of protagonism could this decentralization offer us?

It should be noted that the mastermind of the clandestine strategy in Himes's *Plan B*, Tomsson Black, serves as a leader for Black Liberation. However, he does not neatly fit the category of protagonist or represent a typical leader. Himes's Harlem Cycle already has protagonists, the detectives Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, who remain the expected candidates for this role at the beginning of the novel. Initially, the story unfolds, following the formula of the detective novel, through their investigation of Tomsson's revolutionary conspiracy, which remains in the shadows, a mystery to be solved. I will return to the procedure of the police investigation and resolution of this mystery later in the chapter, but here it is important to keep in mind that Himes is drawing on models of political organizing that rely on underground organization. Black operates in public as a former-Panther running Chitterlings, Inc., while his insurrectionary activity takes place underground. While Black recalls the iconic leadership of the Black Panthers, the structure of political organizing to which we must turn cannot be represented by a figurehead. Instead, Tomsson Black serves as the visible aboveground growth that only

⁴ For analysis of the Black Panther Party from the leadership, see Huey P. Newton's *Revolutionary Suicide*, Bobby Seale's *Seize the Time*, David Hilliard's *This Side of Glory*, and Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power*. For a more nuanced and critical take, see former Black Panther Field Marshall Donald Cox's recent memoir.

hints at a complex root system below. We must treat representatives like Tomsson Black as indicative of a broader and hidden network from which Himes drew inspiration.

There are literary models for Himes's depiction of Tomsson Black's ambivalent relationship to leadership. Indeed, authors drawing on Black Liberation movements have consistently posed the question of leadership's relationship to the masses. In *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, Erica Edwards examines novels from the Civil Rights era that illustrate the complex role of visibility in this relationship. She argues that novels like *A Different Drummer* dramatize a "vanishing spectacle" of leadership, narrativizing the disappearance of a figurehead (106). Through this technique, Civil Rights fiction challenges the dominant historical narrative that focuses on a single charismatic leader (Edwards xv).⁵ Moreover, I suggest that this challenge to the politics of representation de-individualizes the protagonist of social movements, opening up the possibility of thinking of collective protagonists unhindered by personification in a single leader. Pre-Civil Rights fiction offers perhaps the best-known prototype for imagining an underground protagonist: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Although the un-named protagonist is "invisible" precisely because of white society's inability to recognize him as a singular human being, his retreat to the underground is contrasted with the overt political responses of aspiring leaders. The underground setting of the bookending scenes of the novel confirm the protagonist's status as a kind of protagonist found in genre

⁵ Edwards goes further, arguing that *A Different Drummer* highlights the way in which the historical narrative is dominated by white frameworks for understanding Black struggle. The white characters in the novel fixate on a Black leader who fits "their preferred model for making sense of their social reality" rather than performing a leadership role in action of the story (Edwards 105).

fiction. In these brief scenes, Ellison shifts to a Gothic tone, reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, that conjures a fantastical world. In this genre setting, the reader is offered a brief glimpse of an alternate political sphere, the underground.

The concept of the underground does not fit easily into the historical narrative that separates Black Power from other movements like Civil Rights. A recent wave of historians, like Jacqueline Hall, ask us to place the Civil Rights Movement within a longer timeline of planning and action. Hall argues that a Long Civil Rights Movement framework can help us better understand this movement as part of a long historical process. Long Civil Rights Movement scholars extend our view back to the Black Liberation struggles within the workers' movement of the 1930s and forward, incorporating the Black Power period. In the "short" Civil Rights narrative (as I discussed in the introduction), Black Power is positioned as a cataclysmic climax or rupture that brings the massive grassroots organizing to a halt. When Black Power is described at all, it is characterized as a turn to violence and militancy that ended the progress of the Civil Rights Movement. However, the strong distinction between these two periods must rely on the differences between formal organizations and their public presentation.⁶ Publicly, revolutionary Black Power and integrationist Civil Rights groups clearly distinguished

⁶ As mentioned in the introduction, Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang warn, there is a danger of losing important distinctions in completely subsuming Black Power into the Long Civil Rights framework. For our purposes, it would be obfuscating to classify *Plan B* as a Civil Rights novel and completely disregard the impact of public organizing by the Black Panther Party on the political imaginary that frames Himes's story. Public groups like the Black Panthers drew attention to the possibilities of militancy and directed attention to the development of underground struggles in ways not possible within a Civil Rights framework.

their messages and approach, but they both relied on overlapping networks of informal organizing and relationships. There is a continuous, hidden history within this network of underground organizing—what Geronimo ji Jaga calls “infrastructure”—that contributed to Black Liberation struggles (Faraj 120).

If we are to grasp the role of the Black Panthers in Himes’s novel, we need to unearth at least some aspect of the underground, but we must do so with caution. There is a real danger in attempting to make the underground legible to history. This enduring danger for the participants, especially the looming threat of legal repercussions, is the main justification for the continued absence of these invisible activities from the narrative of this period. Both Akinyele Umoja and Gaidi Faraj, the main historians of the Black Liberation Army (an underground military offshoot of the Panthers), warn against the possibility of incriminating participants for past activities through research. In this section, I will reconstruct the networks that bridged Black Liberation organizations and the underground, but necessary lacunae will be left in place. By participating in clandestine actions, the underground has demanded what Edouard Glissant calls “the right to opacity,” which I will try to respect (189). Following Glissant, I also acknowledge that this opacity constitutes a “poetics of relation” that informs my understanding of the Black Panthers as a rhizomatic rather than hierarchical organization. Traditional scholarship would not only endanger its subjects in an attempt to expose all the details, but it would also distort the identity and composition of this networked organizing by privileging representative and legible frameworks.

Although there remains an invisible and unknowable element that constitutes the underground, there is a traceable historical arc. Faraj traces underground organizing in Black Liberation movements back to slavery, especially the underground railroad. In the twentieth century, political organizations such as the African Blood Brotherhood more clearly prefigure the Black Panthers with an aboveground public presence but modeled on the secret society. However, the underground should not be foremost understood as a structural component of a known organization. Rather, it is more closely related to the mutual aid networks described by Danielle McGuire in *At the Dark End of the Street*, which provided assistance and defense for Black women threatened with rape before the creation of any formal Civil Rights organization. However, the underground is no more confined to the pre-history of Civil Rights organizations than it is the result of their dissolution. Underground organizing extends beyond these categories and underlies the emergence of visible, public groups. From the point of view of the underground, the emergence of the Black Panthers often looks remarkably different than the history viewed through the eyes of its established leadership.

History from the Underground Up

There was considerable comment that the people were leaderless but this was not true; the newspapers contradicted themselves by saying the youth were leading. Therefore the leaders in Los Angeles were the ghetto youth. These same youth who emerged to lead the struggle in L.A. are constantly categorized as criminal by the white society and are proven to be the most feared element among our people. The L.A. insurrection once again exposes the bankruptcy of the “responsible” leadership of the civil rights establishment.

– RAM

In 1971, the Black Panther Party had a public split that was understood as the final break between factions supporting the formerly imprisoned leader Huey Newton and the leader-in-exile Eldridge Cleaver. Histories of the Black Panthers have been similarly split by their allegiances to, sympathies for, or emphasis on one faction or the other. My emphasis on the underground would likely place this work in the Cleaver camp, because of his longer-standing commitment to armed struggle, but I would like to present a history unaligned to any specific leader. This history would take into account Himes's criticism of the Black Panther leadership and privilege the Panthers' informal clandestine networks. By taking the underground as the precondition of the Panthers, we can begin to reexamine their history and structure. Since most histories of the Panthers fall into the age-old trap of emphasizing (or in some cases criticizing) "great men," a retelling of this history is in order. This retelling will take some time and will risk swinging the pendulum too far the other way, diminishing the role of the usual protagonists like Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, and Huey Newton. This retelling will use an anarchist methodology that highlights decentralized and autonomous groupings rather than representative leadership, which might seem inapplicable to groups invested in creating vanguard leadership. Moreover, as noted above, it is both dangerous and difficult to completely rely on the underground for history, since ultimately this story requires identifiable characters. However, I hope to find a balance between the formal and informal tendencies of this history by examining multiple groups and historical threads that led to the Black Panthers.

As a result, this history will privilege the organizing efforts of a pre-Panther groups such as Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) as potential source material for Himes's writing. Building on chapter one's discussion of RAM, we can see how the underground took on a specific character in the 1960s, evolving under the sign of the guerrilla. The guerrilla warfare model not only served as a strategy for attacking an enemy, it encouraged Black militants to obscure their identities and actions. Black militants were subject to increased policing within the context of increasing riots. Police sought to capture rioters, literally, in criminal proceedings and, figuratively, by dominating the discourse and framing riots as an issue of law and order.⁷ RAM countered this discourse by naming the riots "urban guerrilla warfare." By calling them urban guerrillas, RAM made the rioters' politically legible and, simultaneously, reinforced their clandestine character.

Rychetta Watkins points to the complicated nature of the guerrilla's character and its resonance in literature. Her analysis of Black Power fiction uncovers a connection between the guerrilla and DuBoisian second sight. She demonstrates that the DuBoisian ability to see without being seen evolves in novels about Black guerrillas, such as Sam Greenlee's *Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Watkins highlights that the protagonist of *Spook Who Sat by the Door*, Dan Freeman—in contrast to Ellison's *Invisible Man*—accepts his invisibility as a strength (121). Greenlee's desire to represent the power of invisibility is

⁷ "Law and Order" politics experienced their ascendance throughout this period. Barry Goldwater established this tendency in his run for president in the same year as the Harlem riots and Nixon continued it with his successful run in 1969. Another veteran of '60s anti-riot politics, Ronald Reagan, continued this tradition in his time in office, essentially installing this framework permanently in American politics.

potentially undermined by the centrality of Freeman as an iconic guerrilla leader. Despite his claim to invisibility, Freeman could easily be read as the iconic role model, a heroic leader in the Panther mold. In fact, Dan Freeman might be a historical reference to one of RAM's founders, Don Freeman. However, Greenlee's character resists this mimetic reading. His name suggests a personification not an individual: Dan Freeman as the archetypal free-man. It is "Easter egg" clues like this one that invite the reader to treat the anti-police genre like a mystery novel, but those looking for a single hero or "culprit" will be frustrated in their attempts.

It is difficult to trace Himes's sources for his depiction of an underground Black Liberation army because the underground, by definition, keep their histories hidden. Further complicating this problem, underground armies themselves often have multiple origin points. For example, RAM's focus on guerrilla warfare can be traced to Robert F. Williams's armed defense against the Ku Klux Klan and, also, Malcolm X's well-publicized call for the formation of armed groups (discussed in chapter one).⁸ Moreover, these leaders did not spontaneously come up with the idea of self-defense. RAM looked to pre-Civil Rights Movement models like Marcus Garvey's African Legion and the African Blood Brotherhood (Stanford 28-30).⁹ Aside from historical forerunners, some of

⁸ The organization of "rifle clubs" associated with Malcolm X appears on the surface far removed from guerrilla tactics, but it should be remembered that his propositions for armed struggle were often in reference to the Mau Mau in Kenya.

⁹ Although not a likely source of inspiration, pacifists like Martin Luther King Jr. at times employed armed guards for their protection and, despite the difference in ideologies, it should be noted that many self-defense groups performed similar tasks during the Black Power period.

RAM's contemporaries advocated and practiced armed self-defense, which could have influenced Himes. Groups like the Mau Mau Society (a splintered from the Nation of Islam), the Communist Party USA, and Progressive Labor's Harlem Defense Council added to a general atmosphere of armed self-defense that could have inspired Himes's novel.¹⁰ RAM is my principle model for understanding the guerrillas in *Plan B*, but even this organization cannot be reduced to a unified or homogenous identity. RAM emerged within a network of Black Liberation militants, initially affiliated through the underground that inspired *Plan B*'s plot and structure.

Through their publication *Black America*, RAM intentionally developed a national network of likeminded organizations that included Afro-American Association in San Francisco, Detroit-based UHURU, and the poetry collective Umbra (discussed at length in chapter one). RAM's diverse network consisted of political cadres, student organizations, and armed self-defense groups and more clandestine paramilitary groups under the umbrella of the Black Liberation Front (BLF). The BLF drew on the various groups that developed in the early 1960s in response to Malcolm X's call for the formation of rifle clubs and taking inspiration from the legacy of Black Nationalism in Northern cities (Stanford 103-112). The 1964 break between Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam (NOI) fractured NOI, leading to the creation of renegade Black Muslim groups,

¹⁰ Progressive Labor split with CPUSA to form their own party in 1962. For more on the various armed groups appearing in the mid-60s, see *Subversive Influences*. Although these groups often took dichotomous positions on the tactic of rioting and the goals of Black Liberation, they all demonstrated clear interest in the formation of armed groups and the concept of self-defense.

some of whom like the Five Percent Nation fell into the orbit of RAM (Stanford 118).¹¹ UHURU in Detroit formed the Fox and Wolf hunt club and Louis Robinson formed the Medgar Evers Rifle Club in Cleveland.¹² At various intervals, RAM attempted to align these groups under a central leadership with the figurehead of the exiled Robert F. Williams.

Although RAM was a relatively lesser known group, they prefigured the Black Panther Party through their development of a national organization that connected an emerging militant and armed insurrectionary tendency. Historically, their organizing was eclipsed by the much broader and mediatized Civil Rights organizations. To make matters more confusing, RAM maintained a strict separation of aboveground and underground activity that led them to set up front groups similar to those described in the anti-police novel *Black Commandos*.¹³ While the secret leader of the novel's Black commandos is an incredible combination of superhero and folk hero that transcends any real-world model, the novel presents much more familiar Civil Rights-style organizations acting as front groups for the commandos. Ironically, the front group in the novel is named the Black Liberation Front, the actual name of RAM's underground army. We can only speculate whether the author consciously chose to reference RAM, but it does

¹¹ Groups like the so-called Blood Brothers, discussed in chapter one, a network of youth borrowing the trappings of NOI, and the Five Percenters should be understood as the effects of NOI influence exceeding the parameters formal organization. Himes's *Real Cool Killers* satirizes this phenomenon.

¹² For first-person accounts of these developments, see Lewis G. Robinson's *Making of a Man* and Don Freeman's *Reflections of a Resolute Radical*.

¹³ The novel is attributed to the pseudonym Julian Moreau.

follow a similar pattern of leaving clues as *Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Again, anti-police fiction invites sleuthing while frustrating solutions.

While neither RAM nor the Black Liberation Front achieved anything close to the feats of their literary correlates like the Black commandos, it would be a mistake to discount their activity throughout the 1960s. This must be stated with the caveat that it is difficult to gauge the achievements of a clandestine organization. On the one hand, the Black Liberation Front is best known for a failure: the failed plot to blow up the Statue of Liberty (discussed in chapter one). In his history of RAM, the scholar Robin Kelley makes the dubious claim that RAM was an entirely theoretical outfit dedicated to writing about political violence but not acting on it (80).¹⁴ The historical record, police reports, and RAM leader Muhammad Ahmad's account in his MA thesis all refute Kelley's claim. In the summer of 1964, a series of riots swept across Philadelphia, New York, and elsewhere, marking the first of many large-scale urban uprisings within the Civil Rights period (i.e. since 1943). Ahmad indicates that the paramilitary wing of Malcolm X's fledgling organization, including RAM, responded by actively participating in the events of the summer of 1964. Without going into incriminating detail, Ahmad states that, during the Harlem riot, the "Brooklyn RAM cadre went into revolutionary action"

¹⁴ Kelley writes, "It should be clear that RAM members never attempted to implement Williams's military strategies, and they never engaged police or anyone else in an armed confrontation. They only wrote about it. In print, at least, RAM's official position was that a guerrilla war was not only possible but could be won in ninety days" (80).

(Stanford 103).¹⁵ This event helped them prepare for their role in subsequent riots, beginning with the 1965 Watts riot the following summer (Stanford 115). Over the rest of the decade, RAM members were drawn into the explosive events, often taking place in their neighborhoods (Stanford 64-131). After the Watts riot, RAM groups virtually competed to create “another ‘Watts’” in order to “test guerrilla warfare,” resulting in their contributions to the 1966 Hough riots (qtd. in Stanford 67). Much of the activity of this period is buried in the past, but it is possible to recognize the achievements of RAM’s organizing in the subsequent popularity of Black Power groups like the Black Panther Party.

It is tempting at this point to add RAM leadership to the list of well-known figures developing the Black Power Movement and certainly recent scholarship has done much to improve their status and legacy in this timeline.¹⁶ However, this scholarship tends to merely add RAM to the timeline while leaving the chronology and theoretical framework for understanding this period relatively untouched. In contrast to this trend, RAM offers us the opportunity to reevaluate the development of militant organizations by highlighting the decentralized leadership of youth. RAM became one of the first groups

¹⁵ Among the tactics that Ahmad openly describes are graffiti calling for street fighting, arming the self-defense group called the Black Guards, and making a nationwide call for rebellions (Stanford 68, 123-4). It should be noted that the HUAC congressional meetings mainly laid blame on Progressive Labor but acknowledged that Ahmad and others had recently been arrested for the attempt to assassinate Civil Rights leaders Roy Wilkins and among their charges were role in the riots.

¹⁶ In recent years, scholars frequently point out RAM’s understated influence on Black Power and the Black Panthers. See, for example, the work of Robin D.G. Kelley in *Freedom Dreams* and Peniel Joseph *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour*.

to advocate for the significance of youth and street gangs taking part in the riots (Stanford 89). The riots demonstrated the viability of much of RAM's strategy but, at the same time, these events exposed the limit of their control of events, which exceeded the direction of any leadership. Reflecting on the events in Watts, RAM reevaluated their organizational structure to better include the potential of spontaneous urban uprisings. In their publication *Los Angeles War Cry*, they came to terms with the fact that the masses of youth, not a revolutionary cadre, led the riots (4). This discovery likely influenced RAM's approach to future conflicts. For example, RAM's strategy in Detroit was to organize potential guerrillas without recruiting them formerly into RAM: "They were only requested to participate and get down in their neighborhoods in the summer" (Stanford 69). This strategy was fortuitous since much of RAM's leadership ended up in prison before the Detroit riots. Consequently, the leaders missed the Long, Hot Summer of 1967, which witnessed some of the most explosive and widespread riots in American history.¹⁷ The preemptive arrests of RAM's leadership were likely the basis for Kelley's claim that RAM did not participate in the riots. FBI accounts confirm Kelley's stance, claiming that RAM was neutralized during this period.¹⁸ However, RAM's involvement

¹⁷ Before their arrest, the mainstream press began a series of exposés, claiming RAM was "plotting a war on whitey," and blaming a failure of leadership among Civil Rights groups that opened the door to "extremists" (Sackett 100). The publication of these articles spurred police raids on RAM leadership in Philadelphia and New York City in June, which led to charges of conspiracy to riot, to poison police officers, and to assassinate moderate Civil Rights leaders. The undercover agent responsible for these arrests provides his account of the events in his memoir, *Eric-83*.

¹⁸ An FBI memo from J. Edgar Hoover in 1968 summarized Philadelphia police intervention in the summer of 1967, claiming that RAM "were arrested on every possible

in preparing and training for the riots seems indisputable even though these events took on an anti-authoritarian, decentralized character. RAM's involvement in the riots exceeded their leadership.

RAM's contributions to the early evolution of the Black Panther Party demonstrates the rhizomatic character of the Black Liberation movement. RAM formed a chapter of the Black Panther Party in Harlem with the blessing of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in early summer of 1966. This Harlem chapter was the first organization claiming the BPP name in a Northern city (Stanford 119-121). In the South, Kwame Ture spearheaded the SNCC-affiliate Lowndes County Freedom Organization, founded in 1965. They were known colloquially as the Black Panther Party because they used a black panther as their symbol. Much has been written on the Southern antecedent of the Oakland Black Panthers.¹⁹ Even as this history has grown more nuanced, little attention has been given to the numerous organizations taking the Black Panther name in the summer of 1966.

Not long after RAM gained the endorsement of SNCC to spread the model of an all-Black political party called the Black Panther Party, there were signs of chapters forming in multiple locations. For example, some sources attributed the 1966 Hough riots

charge until they could no longer make bail. As a result RAM leaders spent most of the summer in jail and no violence traceable to RAM took place" (qtd. in Carson 263). In Philadelphia, these raids were ordered by then Police Commissioner and future mayor of Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo.

¹⁹ For a recent book, see Hasan Kwame Jeffries' *Bloody Lowndes*.

in Cleveland to a newly formed “Black Panther gang.”²⁰ A few historians suggest members of UHURU began a Black Panther Party as early as 1966 in Detroit and there was certainly evidence of Black Panther presence in the Detroit riots the next year (Stanford 121; Rahman 185). The Los Angeles Black Panther Political Party and San Francisco’s Black Panthers of Northern California were better known and are frequently included in the histories of the Black Panthers because of their open rivalry with the Oakland-based group.²¹ Both of these West Coast chapters had direct ties to RAM. Throughout 1966, the symbol of the Black Panther circulated in RAM’s network as an archetype for the burgeoning Black Power movement.

Despite the acknowledgement of these rival, dispersed groups, historians have not attempted to complicate the narrative of the formation of the Panther Party, choosing to centralize the Oakland chapter and the beginnings of a cohesive organization. In the Panthers’ early stages, it was far from cohesive. Over the summer, chapters appeared in virtually every city previously occupied by RAM cadre (Stanford 121). According to former Chicago Panther Bob Brown, Black Panther chapters appeared in every city with

²⁰ A 1966 newspaper article “Negro Leader Predicts More Riots” reported that RAM-affiliate Harllee Jones denied any knowledge of a Black Panther gang in Cleveland (5).

²¹ See Bloom and Martin’s *Black Against Empire* on the Los Angeles Panthers dissolution after their rivalry with Bunchy Carter’s newly formed group and Oakland Black Panthers rivalry with the so-called “Paper Panthers” in San Francisco (94-95, 145). In many histories of the BPP, the centrality of Newton leads to strenuous formulations such as the formation of the “first chapter” of the BPP in Los Angeles, whose first act, paradoxically, is to force the pre-existing RAM-linked BPP chapter to close up shop (Spencer 73).

SNCC cadre for the next two years.²² None of these chapters had formal membership in the Oakland-based group until the summer of 1968, when it began chartering chapters and branches. Therefore, for two years, the Black Panther Party was replicated and syndicated rather than a centralized organization. Admittedly, 1968 was the year when the Black Panther Party experienced rapid growth and became a national organization, but its early development through this diffuse groundwork needs to be studied further. For our purposes, it is essential to recognize that the BPP, from the outset, exceeded the leadership of any particular group.

The symbol of the Black Panther surfaced as a legible sign, standing in for the amorphous organization taking place in the underground. RAM's Black Panther Party first appeared as the name of a front group with murky connections to other established Black Power groups. For example, a SNCC rally in August 1966 featured speeches by SNCC's Kwame Ture and RAM's Muhammad Ahmad, who was described, in this case, as head of the Harlem Branch of the Black Panther Party (Bloom and Martin 43). This rally took place three months before the Black Power conference in Berkeley that is commonly cited as the inaugurating event of the Oakland-based Black Panther Party. At the SNCC event, the speakers were less interested in recruiting for party membership than advocating self-defense and the decentralized tactics of the riots. Ahmad went so far as to argue that the United States "could be brought down to its knees with a rag and some gasoline and a bottle" (qtd. in Bloom and Martin 43). According to Bloom and

²² In a 2013 public lecture, Bob Brown points out that "The history of the Panther party has not really been told yet . . . certainly not in its fullness" and adds that "the Panther was a cat. Cats very seldom have one kitten. Cats have litters."

Martin, some scholars claim that the Oakland chapter was initially a chapter in this SNCC network (413n95). Although they were organized autonomously, the Oakland-based Black Panther Party for Self Defense emerged out of a milieu shared with SNCC and RAM. Indeed, Bobby Seale, the founder of the Oakland chapter had been affiliated with RAM.²³ But considering the Panther basis in the autonomous action of rioters, it would be misleading to replace Seale or Newton with Ahmad or Ture as the originators of the Panthers.

It is my contention that no single cadre is solely responsible for the historical phenomenon known as the Black Panthers; however, by beginning with the contribution of RAM, we can decenter icons like Huey Newton. Newton's Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPPSD) is the oft-cited exception to what Robin Kelley has called "a general conspiracy of silence against the most radical elements of the black freedom movement" (62). That scholars break this silence when discussing the history of the

²³ In his memoir *Seize the Time*, Bobby Seale admits to his membership in the West Coast chapter of the RAM underground. Huey Newton additionally claims that Seale tried to gain Newton admittance into the group, but his membership was declined by the RAM leadership (ch. 10). Seale's tumultuous relationship to RAM led to his expulsion from the group soon after. However, both Newton and Seale subsequently joined Soul Students Advisory Council (SSAC), a student activist group, which was populated by many of the same RAM members (Seale 24-34). Newton goes so far as to name it a RAM front organization. Newton and Seale left the group (accounts vary on whether they were expelled or left voluntarily) before they created their chapter of the BPP. Thus, the BPPSD had no direct connection to the RAM chapters at the moment of formation. Yet, it wasn't long before they were to come into contact. In Seale's account, Newton was initially sympathetic to the other BPP and willing to consider joining forces when they met BPPNC leader Ray Ballard (113). However, it wasn't until when they met to plan actions together that Seale realized their membership was made up of the familiar faces from the RAM underground (115). Much of the history around this relationship and its eventual demise is obscured by polemics about cultural nationalism and questioning one another's revolutionary commitments.

BPPSD is certainly due in part to their emphasis on self-defense over guerrilla offense. Yet, the “self-defense” modifier in their title is a reminder that they were not the only group claiming this name. When the Oakland chapter grew into a national organization, they dropped this modifier, but they initially distinguished themselves from other organizations by their focus on self-defense and, specifically, their patrols. As Bloom and Martin point out, several months before the BPPSD patrols began, the SNCC paper, *The Movement*, reported on the activities of the Community Alert Patrol (CAP) in Watts. Members of CAP, “Brother Lennie” and “Brother Crook” spent the summer following the Watts riots monitoring the police in the neighborhood to prevent another incident of police brutality. They patrolled the neighborhood in a car with the Black Panther logo on the side (Bloom and Martin 39-41). From CAP, the BPPSD took an emphasis on self-defense that, although shocking to a public accustomed to Civil Rights pacifism, presented itself as more palatable than RAM’s riots and guerrilla warfare. This emphasis on public displays of self-defense distinguished the Black Panthers in Oakland by sparking controversy. While controversial, the BPPSD could make claims for this tactic’s legitimacy within a normative framework as self-defense, in a manner unavailable to the guerrilla tactics espoused by RAM. The self-defense program made the BPPSD stand out in the crowd of Black Panther-aspirants, but we should be careful not to attribute even this minor twist to the genius of a specific leadership—it was a concept already in the air.

BPPSD’s attempt to standardize and consolidate their chapter’s ideology as hegemonic should be understood in its context of increased organizational decentralization. As the BPPSD expanded, the chapter attempted to claim ownership of

the concept of a Black Panther Party. The initial Oakland-chapter expanded by cobbling together their organization from existing groups. Befitting their mythology of an authentic Black Power organization, the Panthers drew membership from the gangs in impoverished Black neighborhoods.²⁴ But they also developed through their relationship to other Bay Area Black Panther chapters. Although they were not technically part of the same organization, the BPPSD's first activities were co-organized with the BPPNC. Their early collaborations notably included working together as the security for Malcolm X's widow, Betty Shabazz. While working security for Betty Shabazz, the BPPSD recruited one of their most important leaders, Eldridge Cleaver (Bloom and Martin 56). The Oakland Panthers spread in part by forcibly replacing competing groups: first, the armed BPPSD confronted the BPPNC, convincing them to change their name (Bloom and Martin 94-5); second, the Los Angeles Black Panther Political Party met a similar end when Bunchy Carter announced his chapter as the "only" BPP with a barely veiled threat (Bloom and Martin 145).²⁵ But not all the groups were eliminated; others were

²⁴ Famously, the creation of the Los Angeles chapter absorbed the former Slausons gang through its leader, Bunchy Carter (Bloom and Martin 144).

²⁵ It is interesting that despite this virtual turf war over a name that these groups are rarely treated as credible challengers to the Oakland-centric narrative. Kwame Ture recounts that he was called to the Bay Area to settle the dispute between up to 10 different groups claiming the moniker. At the time, he remembers the BPPSD as a particularly small group with only two members/representatives (Huey Newton and Bobby Seale). Although he was unable to make any headway in resolving the various claims to the title, he recounts that the next time he went to the Bay Area there was only one group left claiming this name, Newton and Seale's. In his version of events, none of the other groups were willing to escalate into a gun battle over the use of this name (475-77). For his part, Bunchy Carter did not easily accept Huey Newton's leadership either. According

absorbed, such as the Oakland Direct Action Committee. When the BPPSD began their chapter, ODAC was another autonomous group claiming the Black Panther model based on their leader's, Mark Comfort, direct connection to SNCC and the original "Black Panther Party," the Lowndes County Freedom Organization.²⁶ Comfort's group became involved in actions with BPPSD, like their famous 1967 protest at the Sacramento legislature. Unlike groups openly using the Black Panther Party name, Comfort's group never became rivals with the BPPSD and instead operated alongside them (Spencer 22-51).²⁷ Thus, the BPPSD built its organization through both competition and the cobbling together of relatively decentralized groups.

to Eldridge Cleaver, Bunchy had to be convinced to join the party despite his reservations about the leadership (115).

²⁶ Mark Comfort was one the SNCC activists who traveled to Alabama to help organize with the LCFO. In Kwame Ture's account, he was there to help with the armed paramilitary wing of the movement not directly involved in the party's electoral politics (Carmichael 475-6).

²⁷ It is unclear whether or not ODAC ever became official members of Newton and Seale's Black Panther Party. Robin Spencer describes Comfort as a "key local ally" (51). According to Diane Fujino, Black Panther Richard Aoki claimed ODAC merged with the Panthers. He added that "[i]f we look at this militarily, this is a big plus because ODAC had probably as many people, maybe more than the party had at that particular time. We got all of Oakland locked up, and a little part of Berkeley" (144). In 1967, the FBI also viewed ODAC as part of the Party. An informant reported that there were branches in Oakland, North Richmond, East Oakland, San Francisco, and Berkeley (Fujino 348n49). Berkeley was headed by Aoki and North Richmond was ostensibly Comfort's branch. The San Francisco chapter, began by Donald Cox in the summer of 1967, was also part of this early, local growth. However, it seems Comfort understood their relationship differently, claiming that ODAC "more or less worked with [the BPP] to help them get started" (qtd.in Fujino 349n52). For the most part, ODAC likely understood itself as autonomous from Seale and Newton and also maintained ties with members of the RAM-affiliated BPPNC. In 1969, they helped coordinate with Ray Ballard to set up a training outpost at the Diggers commune, Black Bear Ranch (Monkerud 79-82).

The complications between central leadership and the dispersed chapters only grew as the BPPSD attempted to charter the multiple organizations that had cropped up into a single BPP national organization. The BPP in Oakland became one of the best-known representatives of Black Power organizing when one of their first members, Bobby Hutton, was killed by police during the nation-wide Holy Week uprisings that occurred in April 1968 (Bloom and Martin 145-160). By this time, the BPPSD had become well-known due to their campaign to free Huey Newton, who was imprisoned on charges of shooting a cop in October 1967.²⁸ There were already multiple Black Panther chapters prior to 1968, but the multiplication of new BPP groups was unprecedented. That summer dozens of groups organized new chapters, many of which looked directly to the Oakland leadership for approval. Seale took up the charge to charter groups from Seattle to New York to Chicago, triggering the formation of Oakland BPP's national organization.²⁹ However, this process was not as straightforward as it seems, since, for one, not all new groups were accepted. Groups like the Alabama Black Liberation Front, "modeled on what its members knew of the Black Panther Party," was one group that was rejected (Widell 136). Although they were not accepted as an official branch, their

²⁸ Newton was accused of killing officer John Frey. Elaine Brown reports that Bunchy Carter announced the formation of his Los Angeles chapter by proclaiming that Newton had "dealt with the pig" and "set the example" for future Black Power militants (125).

²⁹ According to Bloom and Martin, this burst of organizing spawned chapters in "at least seventeen other cities by the end of the year, including Albany, Bakersfield, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Long Beach, Newark, Omaha, Peekskill, Philadelphia, Richmond, Sacramento, and San Diego" (159).

similarity to the BPP led to the Party offering them guidance, connections, and sending copies of *Black Panther* to sell (Widell 159). Thus, the BPP's influence radiated in a nonlinear fashion.

The haphazard and spontaneous development of the national BPP was in many ways characteristic of a newly formed organization, but the successful development of the BPP was more characteristic of a networked social movement than a singular institution. When we examine the various chapters and their relationship to Oakland, the picture that emerges is a network and not the usual top-down formal organization that historians have preferred. The few scholars who study the disparate groups rather than focusing on the Oakland leadership are forced to concede, like Judson L. Jeffries, that “the BPP was much more than an organization, it was a cultural and political happening, a movement” (*The Black Panther Party* 6). Scholarship on local chapters undermines the notion of a top-down control. Yet, these scholars still rely heavily on the authority of the Oakland chapter since they rarely research groups that were not officially chartered into the national organization. The three-volume project edited by Judson L. Jeffries chronicling the local chapters of the BPP “has deliberately focused only on official Black Panther Party branches and chapters” (*The Black Panther Party* 4).³⁰ Once chartered groups completed their minimal training, their contact with the Oakland office mainly

³⁰ Jeffries has edited a three-book series that covers some of the local chapters of the BPP, *Comrades, On the Ground*, and *The Black Panthers in a City Near you*. In addition to this series, Yohuru Williams and Jama Yazerow's *Liberated Territory* have added to this focus on local chapters. Gaidi Faraj's work on the Black Liberation Army also provides key insights into the Kansas City, New York and Los Angeles BPP.

consisted of newspaper sales.³¹ There was little oversight concerning growth of each branch and the process of becoming a Panther “varied considerably, in different places, at different times, and from individual to individual” (Lazerow 94). Usually, it took a complaint for the Oakland leadership to send representatives to inspect a party branch and, in some cases, shut them down.

The BPP’s rapid expansion led to a moratorium on membership in 1969, and new groups were not officially chartered as BPP. Yet, the Panthers’ development continued to show signs of complex and ever-changing networks. That summer, the BPP initiated a new structure with the creation of National Committee to Combat Fascism (NCCF). This new coalition meant that groups seeking to become Panthers were enlisted instead as NCCFs, becoming part of a Panther coalition that included non-Black allies as white people could join NCCFs but not the BPP (Nissim-Sabbat 104).³² The growth of the NCCF also happened alongside a series of purges that left many self-identified Panthers without an official organization. As Yohuru Williams argues,

Although designed to bring the organization under tighter control, the BPP purges had two unintended consequences. First, they created a roving population of Panthers in search of legitimate chapters or branches to join, which heightened confusion within the organization. Second, they increased the number of Panther “wannabe” outfits by stripping them of their ties to the national office in Oakland, California. (20)

³¹ For example, members of the Kansas City chapter remember very little contact with the National Office (Anderson 106).

³² The BPP’s top-down structure was more complicated than most observers recognize. The central committee directed the regional chapters and the regional chapters were in charge of city branches. The hierarchy also included the NCCFs below the branches and beneath the NCCF were information centers. Despite this rigorous structure, most groups were basically similar in day-to-day operations, revealing a more horizontal franchising of a BPP model rather than a strict chain of command (Dyson et al 222).

These unofficial Panthers did not always join NCCFs and often insisted on their identity as Panthers with or without sanctioning. Many viewed the NCCFs as probationary chapters and, indeed, the ones that lasted into the 1970s were often given full-party status (Rhodes and Jeffries 140). Yet, NCCF members did not wait for official status to claim the Panther identity and, considering the frequent reportage of Black Panthers in cities with only NCCFs, neither did the communities to which they belonged. In the period from 1968 to 1972, a variety of organizations claimed the Black Panther moniker, imitated the Panther program and followed the Panther model, all with differing relationships to the national headquarters. These diverse relationships formed, as Jeffries suggests, a Black Panther *movement* rather than a unified party.³³

Admittedly, social movements more often than not rely on and include political organizations, but they cannot be reduced to them. As discussed in the introduction, social movement theorists Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani claim that “social movements are not organizations, not even of a peculiar kind,” but rather they “are networks which may either include formal organizations or not, depending on shifting circumstances” (25). As an example, we can look at the Detroit NCCF, who began as a Black Panther organization with the mentorship of members of UHURU (now part of

³³ Yohuru Williams and Jama Lazerow, whose volume of work on local chapters appeared around the same time as Jeffries’s *Comrades*, also use this term, arguing that “When viewed especially in its late 1960s and early 1970s incarnation, the BPP was not simply an organization, but a movement—in the range of people the Panthers attracted and absorbed, in the individuals and even entire groups who identified with the Panther style and ideology, and in the way entire communities became swept up in Panther causes and programs” (33).

DRUM). These members already had ties to the earlier iteration of the Black Panthers through their participation in RAM. The RAM-affiliated cadre mentored these Black Panthers in order to create a youth group that could funnel members into their industrial labor organizations (Rhodes and Jeffries 138).³⁴ At least one former SNCC member in this fledgling group stated that their relationship with the BPP began by default: SNCC attempted to merge with the BPP in 1968, which led many SNCC members to assume that they were automatically part of the BPP (Rhodes and Jeffries 137). The SNCC members learned otherwise in 1969, long after this merger failed, when BPP members visited the city to let them know they were not a chapter. They were, however, chartered as an NCCF during this visit and charged with helping the military operations of the BPP. The Detroit NCCF were later given official BPP status in 1971 (Rhodes and Jeffries 139-140). According to a history that emphasizes the official institutional structure, and despite this evidence to the contrary, there was no BPP in Detroit in the 1960s. This assessment would likely come as a surprise to affiliates of RAM operating under the title of the Black Panther Party since 1966.

The official narrative of formal organizations is better suited to historical representation than an amorphous and decentralized mass of participants, but Black Panther history would be diminished—and at times incomprehensible—without including

³⁴ Indeed, as I suggested earlier, their comrades likely already ran a BPP chapter affiliated with RAM as early as 1966. Further research is necessary to unravel the relationship between RAM and this new iteration of a national BPP based in Oakland but there are signs that cities with RAM cadre often had difficulties integrating into the national organization. For more information on the Detroit BPP, see Joel P. Rhodes and Judson P. Jeffries' "Motor City Panthers" and Ahmad A. Rahman's "Marching Blind."

its broader network. The informal networks that produced the social movements of the Black Power period force us to come to terms with the limitations of representational politics and narratives. The history of RAM's, SNCC's, and the NCCFs' contributions to the Black Panther movement widens our scope of the terrain by decentering the Oakland leadership in the narrative. In the end, a history of these groups can only gesture at the informal networks of actors and hint at the clandestine groups in the underground, operating under the sign of the panther. While we will never have a complete picture of this movement, knowing that its more complex context pushes us toward a clearer theoretical and historical framework for the underground that inspired Chester Himes.

Identifying Detectives

I know they are detectives because they look like detectives.

— Assata Shakur

If one major obstacle to our reading of *Plan B* is recognizing the more invisible, underground Black militants in the common image of the Black Panthers, a perhaps more obvious problem is Himes's depiction of the police. *Plan B* was, after all, to be the final installment of Himes's successful series of detective novels with Black police as the protagonists. In contrast, the Black Panthers thought it was essential to create art that delegitimized the police, even dehumanized them as pigs. Indeed, their depiction of police as pigs became a unifying symbol, linking together the decentralized Panthers and

their allies against a shared enemy.³⁵ In 1967, when the Panthers were developing the iconography of the police-pig in the artwork of the *Black Panther* newspaper, Chester Himes was beginning to write *Plan B*. This novel would attempt to incorporate much of the Black Panthers critique of the police, but Chester Himes's difficulties with the police began much earlier. In fact, Himes's literary career began while he was in prison for armed robbery (Jackson, ch. 4). With this early influence, Himes's writing consistently engaged with issues of racism in conjunction with policing. As I will demonstrate, his analysis of the role of the police developed over time, eventually reaching the explosive conclusion in *Plan B*. *Plan B* is the culmination (and the supersession) of Himes's analysis of the police.

By examining Himes's depiction of police in his Harlem Detective series, we can track how the Black Liberation movement shaped the development of his analysis and his relationship to the detective genre. This requires some examination of the earlier novels in the series to contextualize *Plan B*. The first novel in the series, *A Rage in Harlem*,³⁶

³⁵ There has been much speculation on the origin of this imagery and the equation of police and pig. Although the term "pig" has been a longstanding insult, my research suggests that the Panthers originated the use of this epithet as a popular insult for police. There is an earlier instance: The Bow Street Runners in England were called pigs, but this usage seems to be geographically and temporally constrained to 19th Century London. It wasn't until the pig became a recurring image in the *Black Panther* newspaper that this insult caught on internationally. The origins are quite circumstantial. While one might assume that they popularized this insult from local street slang, its origins were based directly in the production of the newspaper. In an interview, Barbara Axelrod recalls that she provided the first image of a pig to fill a blank space in the layout to which they added "support your local police" to make it fit the issue (Payne, Disc 3). Huey P. Newton recalls this slogan as appearing on the postcard, but this seems unlikely.

³⁶ Aka *For Love of Imabelle*.

introduces us to “the famous Harlem detective-team of Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones,” two neighborhood cops “assigned to keep order” at the Savoy Ballroom (ch. 8). As with many hardboiled detectives, they are presented as deeply entrenched in and of the community. Himes centers the series on these two cops as heroes, establishing himself firmly in the detective genre. However, the detective genre must undergo some contortions to include these two as protagonists. Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are out of the ordinary as fictional police since their community in question is the Black community in Harlem.

The protagonism of two fictional black detectives does not mark a break with the detective genre but its continuing evolution. As Ernest Mandel argues, the detective genre transformed with the political and economic times. The classic detectives of the 19th century were rarely “men of the crowd,” and were instead harvested from the elite intelligentsia. Mandel reminds us that the detectives in Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and their contemporaries were not even police (15). In fact, the private detective’s superior methods are contrasted with the clumsy investigations of the professionals. The growing complexity within 20th century cities, especially that of organized crime, corresponds to the development of a professionalized detective in this genre. This development gives rise to the hardboiled detective subgenre with a protagonist whose business is detection and operates out of an office (Mandel 36). As Mandel points out, “It is impossible to imagine Hercule Poirot . . . battling the Mafia” (34). Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones are Himes’s alternative to the classic detective. These hardboiled

successors to the classic detective are up for the task of battling the criminals in Harlem. But with new developments come new contradictions.

Himes does not shy away from the contradictory status of Coffin Ed and Grave Digger: Black heroes who are also cops. Cop heroes seem an unlikely choice for the Civil Rights era. By the time Himes began writing the series, the Civil Rights Movement had already thrown up some of its own heroes into the public eye, none of whom were police. Civil Rights heroes were generally activists like Martin Luther King Jr. More importantly for our purposes, Malcolm X had already made a name for himself in Harlem, recruiting for Temple No. 7. In 1957, the year between Himes's first and second novel, Malcolm X made his first notorious foray in the activist world as part of a protest outside a Harlem police station. The popularity of the Nation of Islam and their antagonism with the police does not go unnoticed in *Grave Digger* and *Coffin Ed*'s fictional Harlem, as their antagonists in the second novel of the series, *Real Cool Killers*, are a group called the Real Cool Moslems. *Coffin Ed* and *Grave Digger* reveal the "Moslems" in the novel to be teenage gangsters using Muslim disguises (ch. 3). This revelation could be a jab at the ascendant Nation of Islam, but the adolescents better fit the description of renegade youth organizations proliferating a few years later. At the same time that RAM was translating Malcolm's teachings into revolutionary rifle clubs, a variety of youth gangs and splinter groups took up the banner as well.³⁷ Himes's novel anticipates with some trepidation the

³⁷ See chapter one, where I discuss the development of anarchic formations of renegade Muslims, such as the legendary Blood Brothers, the Five Percent Nation, and the early Hanafi in Harlem.

spread of Malcolm X's teachings into the Harlem youth subcultures. In this instance, Himes responds to Black Power by treating it as a criminal conspiracy to be unmasked. One might be tempted here to view the Harlem detectives as an orderly alternative to the subversive possibilities of Malcolm's followers, but Himes never makes it this simple.

Himes upsets the visible legibility and iconography of the police in his novels by regularly unmasking uniformed police as disguised criminals. Police disguises are a common trope in the Harlem Cycle, which Himes exploits to complicate the identity of the police. In *All Shot Up*,³⁸ for example, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed interrogate witnesses to a heist, who claim the criminals were police. The detectives ask how they identified the suspects as police, and whether it was by their uniform, to which a witness responds, "How else would I know if they looked like cops?" (29). But the witness immediately begins to backpedal, since the detectives are not wearing uniforms, explaining that "I don't mean you, suh . . . everyone around here knows you is the *man*, no matter what you wears" (29). The witness's confidence in his assessment of Grave Digger and Coffin Ed's reputation as recognizably police is questionable, however, since race is clearly one of the markers of a cop for the Harlemites. Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are exceptional in a city full of white cops. When pressed on what the white cop-thief looked like, the witness answers, tautologically, "he looked like a cop" (29). The detectives' own role as cops and heroes is destabilized by both a thief passing as a cop and the fact that most cops are white. In *All Shot Up*, Himes makes it difficult to assess

³⁸ *All Shot Up* is usually listed as the 5th novel in the series but it came out only a year after the second. It appears that Himes published three of the nine Harlem Detective novels that year. *All Shot Up* was preceded by *Crazy Kill* and possibly *Big Gold Dream*.

what demarcates and defines the cop/hero role. By this point in the interrogation, it becomes clear that the witnesses are likely misdirecting the detectives but that does not help clarify the distinction between cops and thieves. If anything, it displaces the reader's identification with the police, causing us to sympathize with the clever tricksters against the forces of law and order.

By shifting our sympathies to the detective's antagonists, Himes draws on some of the techniques of the crime novel genre. Indeed, the Harlem Detective series, including *Plan B*, can be (and sometimes are) classified as crime novels rather than detective fiction. However, this classification misses the influence of the Black Panthers' criticism of the police and how that shapes Himes's writing over time. The crime novel is not characterized by a role reversal between police and criminal, despite what one might assume. While the crime novel transforms the typical antagonist of the detective story, aka the criminal, into the protagonist, this transformation does not affect the police in the same way. In the crime novel, the police are to be evaded and do not take the place of the antagonist.³⁹ The antagonist role is instead filled by other criminals or, in rare instances, criminal-cops or rogue cops-gone-bad. A prime example of this characterization can be found in the semi-autobiographical novels of Iceberg Slim, such as *Pimp*, which were

³⁹ There are other novels that I would include in the burgeoning anti-police genre that are much more conservative in this regard. Take for example Donald Goines' *Kenyatta Series*, where the protagonist heads up an organization similar to the Black Panther Party. The story follows *Kenyatta* as he develops and trains his organization while dealing with violence in the community. While the racist police are not the principle antagonists to *Kenyatta*, they operate as an obstacle to *Kenyatta's* attempt to rid his community of drugs and other violent offenders. *Kenyatta* is not that far removed from the kind of vigilantism associated with hardboiled detectives, just with a different moral code.

enormously influential around the same time as Himes was writing *Plan B*. Himes remains interested in the police even as the reader's sympathies shift away from them; he wants us to observe the effect of this transition on police. In Himes's novel *The Heat's On*,⁴⁰ the reader can already experience the effects of these shifting sympathies and hear them in the protagonist's own words. Coffin Ed confesses that:

What hurts me most about this business is the attitude of the public towards cops like me and Digger. Folks just don't want to believe what we're trying to do is make a decent peaceful city for people to live in, and we're going about it the best way we know how. People think we enjoy being tough, shooting people and knocking them in the head (174).

In the midst of this description of gratuitous violence, the reader is invited to pity Coffin Ed, while simultaneously balking at the police brutality. Himes uses humor and irony to point to the contradictory character of his detectives. These detectives simultaneously represent the heroic potentiality for a safer, racially inclusive world and the institutional repression associated with the police.

Most of the detective series was written before the late 1960s Black Power period. Himes published *The Heat's On* in 1961, although it didn't appear in the United States until 1966 during the Black Power era. After a flurry of publications in the late '50s and early '60s, Himes's writing slowed. The next two installments to the Detective Series appeared after gaps of several years and the final installment, *Plan B*, would wait until 1983 for a posthumous and incomplete publication. The cultural association between the series and the burgeoning Black Power movement arose more from their distribution in English than Himes's direct engagement. However, we can track how the issues

⁴⁰ Aka *Come Back Charleston Blue*.

articulated in Himes's early novels, which anticipate concerns of the Black Power period, play out in his final three additions to the series. The next novel in the series, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, appeared on the eve of the urban rebellions, just months before the Harlem riot in 1964.

Himes pushes his detectives to engage with the concerns of this growing Black militancy by keeping them in the center of the action in his later novels. The plot of *Cotton Comes to Harlem* places Himes's detectives in the center of a growing riot. While the influence of Black Nationalist organizing is more pronounced and legible in *Cotton* than earlier novels like *Real Cool Killers*, Himes does not express any more sympathy for these Black Nationalists than he did for the latter novel's Real Cool Moslems. Once again, Black Nationalism in *Cotton* is unmasked as a criminal enterprise. The riot itself is treated in the same terms, a criminal conspiracy, secretly organized by unseen hands. It seems strange that Himes interprets the organization of the riot as marker of its criminality since, as established earlier, he later openly promoted organization by clandestine groups.

In *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, Himes makes a last valiant effort to champion his police as heroes and symbols even of an alternative model of Black empowerment. In this novel, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed not only solve the perplexing case, they expose predatory groups exploiting the Harlem community, including retrograde Southern right-wing interests. Furthermore, when they explain it to their captain, Coffin Ed openly criticizes white racists. In an indirect reference to the ongoing HUAC meetings investigating Black movements under the guise of anticommunism, Coffin Ed explains

that the mysterious Colonel Calhoun opposed the Back-to-Africa movement as “un-American.” Their captain responds sarcastically, saying “I suppose he thought it was the American thing to do to rob those colored people out of their money” and Coffin Ed can only agree (221).⁴¹ In this concluding dialogue of the novel, we get an early glimpse of the structural critique of society that will pervade his final novels.

Himes’s increased radicalization, evident in final two Harlem Detective novels, resulted from the shifting political climate in the Black Power period. The Black Panthers are still distantly on the horizon at the time of *Cotton*’s publication, but Himes’s critical lens anticipates their arrival. When Himes takes jabs at antiquated forms of Black Nationalism, the police hierarchy, and the white supremacists, he grows closer to the analysis of this emergent Black Power. The Panthers channeled the riotous energy that Himes describes into a radical attack of American institutions that singled out the police. We can sense the Black Power movement in the early detective fiction of Himes, but he was eventually able to channel this influence into the detective genre. As the Black Power era progressed, Himes was unable to remain within the boundaries of detective fiction.

⁴¹ Grave Digger responds in what Himes calls an attempt to pacify the argument “He intended to give them back the money if they went south and picked cotton for a year or so. He’s a benevolent man.” Grave Digger’s conciliatory tone can only be heard if the reader ignores the sarcasm.

If I had all these Books

And don't call me Judas.

— John Shaft

Himes's 1969 *Blind Man with a Pistol* is definitively shaped by the riots that punctuated the Black Power era. This influence results in a dramatic shift in character and genre from his previous novels in the series. By engaging the riots more directly, Himes comes face-to-face with the underground of Black Liberation that gave birth to the Black Panthers. Even fictionalized, the underground exceeds the formulaic unmasking found in Himes's earlier novels. In *Blind Man with a Pistol*, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger find themselves investigating an all-too-elusive target; in the riots, the detectives meet their match. They can police the leadership of the riots—even provide their usual insights into the corruption of this leadership—but the widespread impulse to riot is not as easily circumscribed. It is as if, when they encounter the riots, the detectives encounter the contradictions within their coherent role and discrete identity as police. Even Himes admits that *Blind Man* was “not a detective story,” but rather “a wild sort of ‘psychedelic,’—if that is how it is spelled—novel about Harlem in the grip of crime, riots, fantasies, and such,—in fact a number of wild scenes held together only by the ambience” (qtd. in Jackson, ch. 15). This psychedelic narrative provides a kaleidoscopic view of the detective story and its setting in the riots. In *Blind Man* Himes defies the detective formula and dissects it, opening the Harlem Cycle to protean transformations.

The formula for Himes's detective fiction begins to break down around the resolution of the crime. Unlike classic detective fiction, the mystery in Himes's *Blind Man* is never revealed through a rational and objective eye—there are explanations, but

they are hardly omniscient. The detective novel traditionally narrativizes the police gaze, which works much like surveillance as it functions in both day-to-day life and in order to support broader institutions and systems. The surveillance of Black communities, for instance, is intimately tied to the racial order of white supremacy. Surveillance of Black people participates in what Simone Browne calls a “racializing surveillance,” the social construction bounded by race and reifying race (Browne 8). Thus, the very notion of detection in Black communities is inextricable from a racial ordering based on discrimination and police brutality. The riot breaks this order because it is a form of disorganization. This disorder can be felt in Himes’s fictionalizing of the riots, leaving the detectives to investigate something as elusive as the underground. This is why *Blind Man with a Pistol* is not really a detective novel; if anything, it narrativizes the departure from this genre. In this way, Himes follows the trends of the time, inching toward what became known as postmodern fiction.

The 1960s witnessed a resurgence of interest in the genres Himes was working in, beginning in film under the rubric of film noir. Although our focus is literature not film, it is important to introduce the French concept of noir since it will orient the subsequent claims. In France, noir (which literally translates to black) is not a subgenre of the detective genre but a supergenre that includes many of the genres that Himes’s work employs: crime fiction, mystery, black humor, the gothic, horror, etc. This connotation of noir explains why his detective novels were included in Gallimard’s *Serie Noire*. As opposed to anglophone understandings of detective genre, noir facilitates connections between the traditionally rational detective plot and other forms of mystery. It does not

imply, as the English detective genre does, that the detective must be a hero, or the mystery must be solved. The French awareness of this interplay of genre can at least partially explain why French film noir, like much postmodern fiction, consciously played with tropes through knowing winks and ironic subversions. The detectives in these films often seem self-aware of their own tropological status. At least one detective in this period expressed this newfound awareness as self-hatred.⁴² The postmodern detective's self-awareness often becomes an obstacle to the rational and objective resolution of a crime. This narrative strategy is similar to Himes's final Harlem Detective series.

The ever-elusive mystery in Himes's *Blind Man* follows a trend of upending the tropes of detective fiction, sometimes called antidetective or metaphysical detective fiction, to political ends. What have been called antidetective stories by William Spanos are characterized by their rejection of the narrative closure of the classic detective story (Merivale and Sweeney 3).⁴³ In *Detecting Texts*, Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth

⁴² Here I am referring to the underrated French New Wave film, *Flic Story*. *Flic Story*, in spite of its metadetective name (in English, the title translates to the all-to-blunt *Cop Story*), was actually based on a memoir. The detective, Roger Borniche, recalls an interrogation where he confronted a criminal who refused to testify against his friends. Confronted with this predicament, Borniche considers that "And I knew his profession of faith was sincere. Nevertheless, he had to work for me. Even at the cost of making me hate myself" (133). In the memoir, Borniche is reflecting on the cruelty of persuading someone to break the trust of their friends. But the film plays it so that the detective admits to this self-hatred during the interrogation. By dramatizing this feeling, the film troubles the viewers identification with the cop as hero. If you view the detective as the antagonist in *Flic Story*, it could be classified as an anti-police film.

⁴³ The word classic likely hides more than it illuminates, since there are important variations that I do not have space to explore. *Detecting Texts* makes distinctions between the 19th century positivist detection of Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie's puzzles, and the episodic detection of hardboiled authors like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond

Sweeney prefer the classification of “metaphysical detective” stories to antidetective, since, they argue, these stories never completely negate the genre as implied by the name “antidetective” (3). Himes’s progenitors (Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov) and contemporaries (Alain Robbe-Grillet, Thomas Pynchon) explore the same terrain as generic detective fiction—the difference is only that instead of solving the puzzle, they find themselves lost in the labyrinth (Merivale and Sweeney 5-10). The labyrinthine structures in these narratives reflect the postmodern interest in relativism and subjectivity over objective truth. While the detective genre appears to hinge on objective truth (solving a crime), these theorists propose an alternative reading of detective fiction that privileges self-exploration over the crime. As an alternate reading rather than a mode of writing, this genre could potentially include everything from Edgar Allan Poe to Paul Auster (Merivale and Sweeney 1). Therefore, the metaphysical detective story fits snugly in the detective tradition while still shifting our perspective on it. The term antidetective story suggests a more radical departure, a narrative that turns against the protagonist. By turning against the detective, the antidetective genre can register not just theoretical concerns but political shifts, namely the shifting attitudes toward police.

Himes’s *Blind Man with a Pistol* can be best understood within the framework of the antidetective story, marking a break from detective fiction. The novel goes beyond questioning the tropes of the detective series to undermining the role of the police

Chandler (Merivale and Sweeney 4). But even when crimes are solved by different processes, the crimes are ultimately solved by the protagonists, bringing the story to closure.

altogether.⁴⁴ As the only novel by Himes published at the height of the Black Power period, it represents a direct response to contemporary events. The opening murder is committed by a man with the words “BLACK POWER” written across his fez in all caps, introducing this concept to the series (28). The heroes, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger do not arrive on the scene for another chapter. The narrative, in the meantime, jumps to a demonstration that precedes the murder investigation (39-42). Demonstrations and riots, rather than the murder investigation, provide the engine for the narrative. Moreover, the demonstrations multiply to the degree that their source eludes the police. An integrated March for Brotherhood, a Panther-eque Black Power paramilitary, and to Black Cultural Nationalists from the Temple of Black Jesus all compete for space in the streets.⁴⁵ The detectives are sidelined from the narrative—appearing in less than half of the first ten chapters—as Himes explores a variety of political tendencies active in street protests. In this novel, Himes opens up the possibility that the resolution does not ultimately rely on the detectives as the only alternative to the social disorder.

⁴⁴ In the more extreme variations of the antidetective story, the detectives are forced to investigate themselves as they are implicated in the crime. Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Les Gommages* might be the most famous example. A related progenitor is the “Wrong Man,” in which the principle narrative device is a wrongfully accused protagonist. These Hitchcockian narratives express an anxiety about *being policed* even as the protagonist must become an amateur detective to correct the mistakes of the institutional authorities. For a discussion of these kinds of stories, see Stanley Cavell’s “North by Northwest.”

⁴⁵ The Temple of Black Jesus is possibly a reference to the Detroit activists mentioned earlier. One of the members of UHURU and the rifle clubs, Glanton Dowdell, famously painted a large mural of a black Madonna for Reverend Albert Cleage, a Detroit religious leader and politician. See Melanee Harvey’s “Black Power and Black Madonna: Charting the Aesthetic Influence of Rev. Albert Cleage, Glanton Dowdell & the Shrine of the Black Madonna, #1.”

In *Blind Man*, Himes explores the Black Power movement for answers to social problems, but, for the most part, he satirizes it. Himes identifies and ridicules the protesters in the novel, who represent in fiction the spectrum of 1960s protest movements, from integrationists to cultural nationalists to the Panthers. Himes' interest in the Black Power movement did not water down his cynicism. Each of these groups are portrayed as irreparably flawed, with incoherent ideologies, and, for the most part, criminal fronts. For example, the Integrated Brotherhood brings in marches from outside Harlem, the white people among them prepared to "quickly don black faces in an emergency" (34). Despite the organization's promotion of fraternal love, their leader, Marcus McKenzie, has "no tolerance" for the people who live in the neighborhood (35). Their rivals in the Panther-esque Black Power group are revealed to be raising funds for a shady figure in a Cadillac limousine (66). This limousine switches its banner from Black Power to Brotherhood, depending on the context (69). Yet, despite this appearance of a sophisticated criminal operation, *Blind Man* ultimately depicts protest culture as incurably disorganized.

Himes depicts this disorganization through the metaphor of the titular blind man. In the preface to the novel, he explicitly addresses the problems of contemporary movements, criticizing the "loudmouthed leaders urging our vulnerable soul brothers on to getting killed." Himes compares this strategy to an anecdote from a friend who described a conflict with a blind man on a train who shot and killed an innocent bystander. Himes explains this incident is the origin story for the novel's title, arguing that riots and "all unorganized violence [are] like a blind man with a pistol." As

mentioned earlier, it is not the violence that irks Himes but the lack of organization. In the novel, a blind man with a pistol appears in the final pages, inciting a riot. The titular blind man is no political organizer. He accidentally starts a riot in a fit of rage that leads him to shoot at random in a subway (222-234). This character personifies the disorganized violence that Himes attributes to the Black Power movement. By personifying the Black Power Movement as an armed blind man, Himes invites us to read his work allegorically.

In fact, Himes's novel compels us to read it allegorically, since it is impossible to locate a literal culprit for the events. *Blind Man's* metanarrative unravels many of the conventions of the detective but never as clearly as in its refusal to solve the crime. Although the white police chief is insistent that the police uncover who caused the riot, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger can only provide a laundry list of social causes: lack of opportunity, poverty, and so on (193). However, traditional social causes cannot account for all the factors that the detectives witness:

But this new generation of colored youth with its spaceage behavior was the quantity x to them. What made them riot and taunt the white police on one hand, and compose poetry and dreams complex enough to throw a Harvard intellectual on the other? (214)

An emerging youth counterculture complicates the attempt to isolate a social issue or locate the individuals responsible. By implicating the growing counterculture, the scope of *Plan B* goes beyond the framework of a police investigation. In unpublished notes, Himes described his ambitious aim for this novel, to write a novel that could “accuse everyone of inhumanity” (qtd. in *Plan B* xi). As a result, the detective, as a policing institution and an investigative method, is ill-equipped to solve the problem. Although

Himes mocks the leadership of the Black Power movement, they are not held responsible for the events of the novel. They are merely, like the detectives, ill-equipped to solve the social problems that underly these events.

Yet, Himes leaves the door open for other possible solutions. In the search for potentialities, *Blind Man*'s metanarrative leads us to one last allegorical figure, Michael X. Michael X is clearly patterned on Malcolm X. The detectives encounter this figure in a Black Nationalist bookstore. This bookstore is based on Lewis Michaux's African National Memorial Bookstore, where Chester Himes met Malcolm X in 1961. According to Himes's biographer Lawrence Jackson, Malcolm X and Himes bonded over literature (Malcolm X had read Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* in prison) and discussed politics:

Wearing his sunglasses, Malcolm X shared the gory pictures of the slain Ronald Stokes⁴⁶ with Chester and [film-maker Pierre-Dominique] Gaisseau. Malcolm X and Chester discussed and agreed upon a new phenomenon uptown: syndicated drug sales, different from the prostitution and gambling that they both had known when they were young. "White syndicates control, encourage, and distribute" the drugs, Malcolm X said. (Jackson, ch. 13)

Malcolm X's assessment of white influence in Harlem matches, almost word-for-word, Michael X's opinion on Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's investigation: "As I understand it, headquarters thinks there's one person up here who's inciting these people to riot . . . There's Mister Big . . . He handles the narcotics and the graft and the prostitution and runs the numbers for the Syndicate—" (220). Michael X refuses to provide a specific identity for Mister Big. This resistance on Michael X's part should be read as a sign that

⁴⁶ Ronald Stokes was a NOI member killed by Los Angeles police in 1962.

Mister B is an allegorical or composite figure for white control in Harlem. However, the fact that Michael X provides a possible solution to the investigation suggests that he represents a potential model of Black leadership for Himes. However, Michael X is not a straightforward representation of a Harlemite political figure.

Since Malcolm X was dead four years by the appearance of *Blind Man*, Michael X represents an idea or ideal rather than a real person. It is suitable that Michael X appears in the bookstore, since Himes is resurrecting Malcolm X in the novel, postmortem, as an allegorical figure. *Blind Man*'s Michael X is a representation of the literary remnants of Malcolm X, a spiritual manifestation of the books documenting the life and beliefs of Malcolm X. Michael X is the most legitimate and sincere Black Power leader in the novel. In the corrupt world of Himes's novels, Michael X's unironic integrity is out of place. Himes represents existing tendencies in Black Nationalism and protest culture with black humor and absurdist caricature, but it is Michael X who is unrealistic in this context. The disorienting confusion of *Blind Man*'s riots contrasts sharply with Michael X's direct accusation of the white power structure in Harlem. He represents an ideal that transcends the world of *Blind Man* and an alternate, possible outcome that Himes's did not fully explore until *Plan B*.

In the final pages of *Blind Man*, the detectives also have a moment of clarity—operating as a metanarrative commentary—on their role as police. The detectives, surrounded by books, seem self-aware of their position as protagonists in a story. When gazing at all the books packed from floor to ceiling, Coffin Ed remarks that “if I had read all these books I wouldn't be a cop” (216). In Michael X's literary environment, Coffin

Ed glimpses himself from the point of view of a reader and there is a note of self-hatred in his observation. The reader cannot help but wonder if Himes was reflecting on his own role as a novelist: if he had been given the opportunity to delve into the tradition of Black Nationalist literature, perhaps he wouldn't have written stories starring the police.

To an extent, Himes's characteristic cynicism is abandoned in this final scene. He accomplishes this tonal shift by turning against his detectives and, temporarily, allowing the ghostly avatar of Malcolm X play the role of hero. While the novel by no means ends on an optimistic note, Himes seems to be leaving a revolutionary option open. Despite Himes's skepticism regarding the effectiveness of riots, his detectives do not find someone to blame for it or unmask a criminal. A Black Liberation perspective reorients the concerns of the novel away from the fictional detective's gaze. The substitution of a police investigation for a political outlook transforms *Blind Man* into an antidetective novel.⁴⁷ It is this politicization that Himes will take further in his final novel, *Plan B*, as it develops past the self-reflexive tropes of antidetective fiction into a more radical antipolice fiction. The allegorical self-questioning of the police in *Blind Man* set the stage for an antipolice novel, but it takes *Plan B* to realize this possibility.

⁴⁷ In my analysis of the politicized the detective story, I follow the example of Kristin Ross, whose *May 68 and its Afterlives* rescues the detective stories of 1968 from scholars who would reduce them to apolitical cultural artifacts (15). Ross reminds us that detective fiction is saturated with the political realities of police surveillance: "By following the traces left behind at that level of surveillance, the detective both exposes the way the state and police archives limit what is perceivable or knowable by the public, and names that limitation as the crime itself, the crime whose solution he sought" (45).

Kill the Cop Inside Your Head

Chester Himes: “You think I should have some police?”

Marcel Duhamel: “You can’t have a *policier* without police.”

Whereas Himes located a potential alternative outside the riots in a bookstore in *Blind Man*, *Plan B* discovers a new protagonist within the insurrectionary forces taking the streets. *Plan B* enters the spaces opened by *Blind Man*’s riots and explores its futurity. Once Himes removes the antagonists of *Blind Man*—the publicity-hungry leadership of Black Power groups who opportunistically benefit from the violence—he finds a potential protagonist already latent in the network of rioters. *Plan B*’s protagonist does not resemble the leadership of the historical Black Power groups that dominated the spotlight in Himes’s time. Instead, Himes offers readers a protagonist composed of the decentralized, half-hidden underground networks, those I discussed above but rarely ever appear in fiction. As the underground emerges as a potential protagonist made possible by the stepping back of corrupt Black Power leadership antagonists, there is a newly emptied antagonist position in *Plan B*. Himes fills this position with the police, reversing the relationship usually found in a detective novel and producing an anti-police novel.

If Himes’s upending of the detective tropes in *Blind Man* was disorienting, then *Plan B*’s outright assault on the police gradually obliterates the reader’s expectations. *Plan B* offers readers a new territory, where the traditional hero is villainized, and the crowd moves from background atmosphere to foregrounded protagonist. This is not an easy feat and does not happen immediately. Rather, Himes uses an experimental, nonlinear structure to remove his police protagonists. The novel follows a series of vignettes with no clear relationship, often slipping from the present to centuries past with

little warning. The police investigation is immediately put on hold in order for Himes to explore the history of slavery and the origins of Chitterlings, Inc. In addition to these temporal jumps, the tone of the novel shifts from hardboiled to black humor to a Sadean picaresque, bringing together a variety of the generic tropes that can be called noir. The temporal jumps are abrupt. *Plan B* returns from slave history to the murder investigation with no transition, practically midsentence: “The next to arrive were the crews from the police cruisers . . .” (40). These abrupt changes give the feeling that the detectives are already caught in the vortex of the riot. The investigation gets lost in the context of the nonlinear, nonhierarchical structure—the structure I associate with the underground.

The underground does not immediately replace the police as the protagonist of the novel. Instead, Himes slowly displaces the police from their role in a detective story undermining their investigation. As in *Blind Man*, the police’s investigative impulse is constantly frustrated, but in *Plan B* this happens through a slightly different technique and to a more radical end. In *Blind Man*, the detectives investigate a crime that is impossible to solve. In *Plan B*, there is a crime that no one can investigate. There is a culprit: a secret organization and even an “evil” mastermind, named Tomsson Black, hellbent on generating an insurrection through armed struggle. However, the novel resists the police procedure that would lead to Black. The investigation narrative has difficulty regaining its forward momentum after the historical digressions that interrupt it. As if battered by the whirlwind plot, Coffin Ed severely injures his leg offstage, during a plot digression. The narrator informs the reader that Coffin Ed fell into an open manhole—fell into the underground—and is taken off active duty (53-54). As we will see, police in *Plan*

B tend to come to more unfortunate ends to their investigations. Over the course of the novel, Himes removes, sometimes brutally, the police from their position as protagonists in the story. Even at the beginning of the novel, the role of the police is uncertain, since they cannot find a crime to solve.

Plan B begins with a murder that is all-too-quickly solved. The first chapter of *Plan B* was originally a short story called “Tang.” In “Tang,” the titular character her partner T-Bone fight over an M14 rifle that is anonymously delivered to their door. Ironically, it is the apolitical pimp T-Bone who receives an M14. It is his girlfriend, Tang, who immediately grasps the weapon’s revolutionary potential, exclaiming that the uprising is coming (6-9). The two fight over the gun and Tang is killed (10-12). In the context of *Plan B*, “Tang” presents two “crimes” for comparison: on the one hand, an ordinary, solvable crime perpetrated by Tang’s boyfriend, T-Bone. On the other, the urban, guerrilla-based, Black uprising that will be the focus of the novel. T-bone is a character who would fit in a crime novel by Iceberg Slim—the kind of criminal even the BPP criticized as anti-revolutionary. His character is so stereotypical and his crime so predictable that there is no mystery to investigate. When the novel picks up from the end of the short story, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger arrive on the scene, but it is clear to the reader that this incident is not the central mystery. The crime is solved immediately through witnesses and T-bone’s confession in the second chapter (13-18). The reader is left with the gun as the only remaining mystery.

Even the gun is not treated as a straightforward mystery to be solved. If anything, Grave Digger seems irrationally provoked by it rather than analytical. As he interrogates

T-Bone, his partner Coffin Ed notices Grave Digger's escalating emotions. He is obviously upset by T-Bone's history of pimping the murdered Tang. Moreover, Grave Digger seems particularly emotional about the fact T-Bone turned on Tang over the gun (17). Suddenly, Grave Digger cracks, shouting "you wasted her because she wanted to get free" before killing T-Bone (19). Grave Digger's words hint at his hidden sympathy for Black revolution. Tang's desire for freedom has a double meaning: freedom from her pimp/boyfriend T-Bone and freedom through an uprising. Grave Digger's sympathy for the latter foreshadows his volte-face at the end of the novel and the novel's anti-police position. This brutal slaying of T-Bone does not, however, make Grave Digger the villain of the novel.

This murder does not villainize or even criminalize Grave Digger; it merely confirms he is a cop—capable of brutality. At first, Grave Digger's superiors consider T-Bone's death justified, "an open and shut case self-defense" (43). This judgement is called into question, however, when the officers take issue with Coffin Ed's explanation that T-Bone attacked Grave Digger in a heroin fueled rage. Captain Brice disagrees on the details of this story "on purely technical grounds" (43). He is willing to accept the word of a fellow cop "whether it was true or not," yet, he wants to assert his expertise on drugs. Heroin, he argues, is a sedative, incapable of inducing rage (43). Consequently, Grave Digger is suspended from duty because his superiors want to exercise intellectual authority, not for any undue police brutality on his part (43). This suspension coincides with Coffin Ed's equally unheroic and unremarkable leave from active duty due to his injured leg. Thus, the murder of T-Bone is resolved, and, at the same time, the heroic

detectives are removed from further investigation into the mysterious gun. A quarter of the way into the story, there are two solved murders, no living criminals, and a mystery without an investigation. What becomes evident is that there is nothing, no particular crime, moving the novel's plot forward.

If anything could move the story forward in the traditional fashion, it would be the investigation of the gun. But the investigation of the gun stalls because of the racism of white police. The police recognize that the gun is strange, and the police laboratory confirms that the gun has no identifying features, neither fingerprints nor manufacturer marks (46). Figuratively, Himes implies that the guns requires an investigation into the mystery of identity. The white police are not interested in this question since the gun was sent to an ordinary Black man, who they deemed "incapable of assaulting white people" (47). Their racist assumption dismisses grassroots and lower-class Black people as serious threats out of hand. While Himes gives no reason to view T-Bone any differently, Tang's response to the gun should have given the authorities pause.

Tang had immediately recognized the threat the gun posed with an uncanny foreknowledge. Contemplating the gun, she remarks "that'll chop a white policeman two ways" (9). She never has the chance to use the gun herself, but the subsequent distribution of guns bears out her remark. The messenger continues to bring guns to other ordinary Black people and each delivery is almost immediately followed by an attack on the police. The cops that could have understood this pattern, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, are removed from this role for most of the novel. Instead, the novel provides police incapable of playing the role of investigator. As the characters' purposes unravel, readers

get the sense that the plot of this detective novel is not a case to be solved but a climax to be reached.

Grave Digger and Coffin Ed's leave from the force creates an opening for policing Harlem, which is filled by two white cops. The displacement of Himes's heroes by white cops expedites the process of transforming the conventional heroes of the detective novel into the antagonists of this anti-police story. Himes's turn against his heroes Grave Digger and Coffin Ed will take the rest of the novel to accomplish. In the meantime, the novel switches away from their point of view. Shortly after Coffin Ed and Grave Digger go on leave, a Black gunman surveilling the neighborhood from a tenement window catches their replacements—the new white police on their beat—in his sights. Initially the scene is described from the point of view of the white police, who see the squalor of an impoverished Harlem as their own personal entertainment. Himes sets up the scene like a staged performance with the police envisioning the Harlemites as potential theater performers. One white cop remarks, "If I could get those junkies to Capetown, I could make a fortune" (54). Suddenly, Himes shifts again to the point of view of a cop killer. An unseen shooter fires on the police and the windscreen of their police cruiser—the screen that secures and protects their perspective as audience—"exploded in a burst of iridescent safety glass" (55). The shooter reverses the exploitative, theatrical perspective onto the white cops. The narrator remarks on their deaths: "[i]f they found anything funny about this 'happening,' they never said" (55). As unwitting participants in a Happening, the police find themselves part of the spectacle for someone else's pleasure.

Himes dehumanizes the police through the sight lines of the shooter in order to disestablish their role as heroes. The fallen police are violently transformed, by machinegun fire that makes their corpses unrecognizable and grotesque. The dead police are not even given a possessive pronoun as the bullets transform their bodies, “pounding the drooping blonde heads into splinters of bone and blobs of soft grey tissue” (55). The shooter—both viewer and artist of the murderous spectacle—soon emerges, shouting “I done blowed them goldilocks back to whiteyland!” (55). The description makes light of the cops’ deaths through fairytale imagery. Moreover, the shooter depicts the police as inhabitants of the imaginary whiteyland. White cops are not from Harlem or anywhere familiar. The police are an alien presence.

The police reinforcements that arrive after the murder are described as literal aliens. Their bodies are conflated with their distinctive police vehicles, “their red eyes blinking like Martian space ships” (56). While initially Himes describes the incoming police as “avengers” of their two fallen comrades, this heroic imagery is détourned by the shooter who perceives them as “scavenger birds” (56-7). Himes play on words, sc/avenger, transmogrifies the police, from heroes into villains. The significance of this word play is even clearer in early drafts where Tomsson Black signs his packages of guns as the “Black Avenger” (“Plan B, A Synopsis” 2). With the arrival of reinforcements, the attack escalates. Police bodies are fully obliterated by the weapon, as they are “hit and destroyed and blown out of sight” (*Plan B* 59). Not only do any of the replacements for Grave Digger and Coffin Ed fail to achieve the status of hero, they are completely removed from view. Himes uses this process of dehumanization and obliteration to

remove the police from their normal position at the center of attention—as protagonists. Himes’s dehumanization technique is reminiscent of the Black Panthers’ “pig” epithet.

While the plot is unable to proceed through a police investigation, it builds with the police body count. As disturbing as this imagery can be, the novel’s narrator insists that the attack on police is a “commendable action” (56). For Himes, these attacks on police both play out a fantasy of successful Black revolution and, at the same time, sabotage the formula of the detective genre. Indeed, the former is contingent on the latter. Since the first victims of the uprising are Grave Digger and Coffin Ed’s replacements, we can read them as substitutional sacrifice for our heroes. However, it is just important to the story that first blood drawn be white cops. *Plan B* takes a much more nuanced approach to its former heroes, which I will explore in the next section. More importantly, we must attend to the question: if the cops are no longer the protagonists, who is?

The Protagonist of an Anti-Police Novel

I never saw any of them again—except the cops. No way has yet been invented to say goodbye to them.

—Raymond Chandler

Himes is careful to keep Grave Digger and Coffin Ed in sight as he develops the arc of the uprising. In contrast, the first shooter meets the same end as the police he was attacking, as his body too is made virtually unrecognizable except for his teeth (*Plan B* 66). Unlike the description of dead police, Himes recognizes, in this instance, the “horror” of his own description, one that “the mind cannot accept” (66). The reader was asked to identify with this new character as a new potential protagonist, a revolutionary,

only to have this identification uprooted by a violent end. What are we to make of this? I argue that this dramatizes the process of subverting the genre and creating a new one, one that attempts the near-impossible feat of a collective protagonist. The introduction of this gunman initially risked creating another criminal for the police to investigate or, at best, a public hero to rally around. The novel refuses either of these avenues and searches instead for a way to represent the collective energy of the underground. Grave Digger and Coffin Ed survive this bloodbath to act as the foil for this process, but they are not ultimately Himes's focus. They remain to give shape and form to the anti-police novel through a negation, while the true protagonist remains invisible. If we look closely, we see the outline for the protagonist of the anti-police novel, and it resembles underground revolutionaries like RAM.

Tomsson Black is an untraditional representative of Black Liberation struggles, particularly as he is depicted as a leader operating in secret and not in the public eye. The novel develops his character through a series of flashbacks, but they do not focus on him as an individual. As the obsolete detectives slip from the narrative, the plot loses the coherence of a police investigation and slips away from the present (or "near-future" setting). At first, the flashbacks seem less interested in locating the mastermind, Tomsson Black, than exploring American history, particularly slavery. Himes describes slave history in an absurdist fashion, tinged with Sadean noir, with the expansive goal of chronicling the origins of Tomsson Black's popular company, Chitterlings, Inc. To this end, Tomsson's background is first established through a description of the land where he will build his company. Before meeting Tomsson, we are introduced to the Harrison

farm, its history in slavery, and its legacy in a community with racist posses (68). The farm is the site of gruesome, realistic oppression, while at the same time, it is used to develop an allegorical character through noir tropes. An extended assault on the farm by marauding Union soldiers mainly serves to endow the Harrison Estate with the reputation of being haunted (30-38). The Gothic descriptions of this estate derealizes its specificity, transforming it into an emblem of American history, a Southern “anytown.” Tomsson Black has similar qualities.

The novel traces Tomsson’s family tree, only to subvert this genealogical exercise. After learning what seems like a great deal about pig farms, we expect to learn about the individual Tomsson. This expectation is not easily satisfied. Himes’s strategy is to provide a genealogy of Tomsson’s family extending back to slavery. We first learn the obvious: Tomsson Black is not his real name. Neither is it a revolutionary *nom de guerre*. In Himes’s typical example of black humor, Tomsson’s given name is George Washington Lincoln and we learn that the “black Lincolns had roots in slavery” (73). The first ancestor we meet is described in Gothic terms reminiscent of the Harrison farm: he is a slave named Moss who looks monstrous and performs in freakshows post-slavery. When freed from slavery, Moss takes the name Lincoln because it is the only name that he knows that doesn’t remind him of the slave system (74). After taking on this iconic name, he and his descendants likewise live archetypal lives, with experiences symbolic of the experiences of Jim Crow. The symbolism circumvents any sense of linear progress or logical development in their family tree. Instead, their names signal the contradictions of history: Tomsson’s father, Thomas Lincoln, is not named after Abraham Lincoln’s father.

He is named for the confederate, Stonewall Jackson. Tomsson himself is named after George Washington as an appeal to white sympathies rather than the more logical choice of Abraham (or his mother's preference for Frederick Douglass). Tomsson's identity is convoluted and riddled with historical contradictions.

Plan B's investigation of its criminal mastermind, when it finally begins, reveals an incoherent identity. Rather than a straightforward explanation, Himes's focus on absurd details like the fact that Tomsson does not get this nickname because his father was named Thomas. Himes insists that Tomsson was derived from his father's undeserved reputation as a subservient worker, aka an "Uncle Tom" (87). Tomsson is the son of an Uncle Tom. This last bit of black humor ultimately undermines the genealogy altogether. Tomsson's identity comes from his community's misconceptions not from any genealogical family trait. This maneuver is likely meant to be a commentary on the relationship between identity, biology, and history: in a racist society, Black identity is determined by social misconceptions rather than any facts. At the same time, Himes separates Tomsson's character from the history and attributes of a specific individual. If there is no hereditary cause for Tomsson's identity, perhaps he is not an individual in the ordinary sense. Himes deracinates Tomsson further through the nonfamilial surname, Black.

His last name, Black, quite clearly relates to his identity as a Black Power leader, although this signification is not explicit. In flashbacks, we learn that Tomsson was a member of the Black Panther Party. This acknowledgment of the Panthers demonstrates their direct influence on the novel, but Himes undermines Tomsson's indebtedness.

Tomsson does not need the Panthers to rebel or defend himself against the police. Before he meets the Panthers, he has already “nearly beat to death a white detective,” who was investigating his father’s murder (87). This attempted murder might be the only clue to Tomsson’s identity provided by his family genealogy: his anti-police past. Yet, even this inclination is not directly attributed to genetics or the official family history. The narrator points out that the strength he used to almost kill a cop with his bare hands comes from eating chitterlings, a taste for which he shared with his father (87). After this chitterling-fueled attack, Tomsson briefly goes underground, surfacing in Oakland and becomes a member of the Black Panther Party (87-88). As stated in the introduction, a taste for chitterlings is a metaphor for an affinity with the underground. Tomsson is not long in the Black Panthers before he becomes critical of its leadership and forms his own splinter group, called The Big Blacks. Although the novel does not spell this out, it is likely his naming of this organization that provides Tomsson with the surname Black. The brief description of his time with the Big Blacks describes them in remarkably similar terms as the Black Panthers: monitoring the police in a brutal slaying of an unarmed Black man (88). This similarity suggests that the Big Blacks are characterized less by Tomsson’s distinctive leadership than their decentralization, their autonomy from the Black Panthers.

There is a way to misread *Plan B*, taking it literally as the story of a singular mastermind who is able to position himself as the unifying leader of a Black uprising. In the literal reading, Tomsson is this leader, who starts out in the Black Panthers, then travels abroad to communist countries, becoming an expert in guerrilla warfare (88-91). Despite his revolutionary expertise, this heroic leader does not initially become the threat

to America. The State Department's explanation is "that blacks were both psychologically and emotionally incapable of organizing and conducting a coordinated action under the command of a single leader" (91) Ignoring the racist essentialism, Tomsson concurs that the problem is individualism, too many leaders and not enough followers (91-2). But what if this was not a problem to solve, with Tomsson as the protagonist, but a potential to explore? If we take Tomsson as a singular hero, he needs to unify the Black masses under his leadership. However, if we read Tomsson as a personification of the masses, an underground that structures the masses, Tomsson's journey represents an anarchistic model of uprising that doesn't depend on formal leadership. Tomsson's personification of the masses becomes clearer when we look at his actual strategy, the secret and free distribution of guns through a chitterling company.

Tomsson's strategy cannot be taken literally. If the absurdist tone of the novel did not already clue the reader in, then the absurdity of this strategy should. Tomsson's strategy rests on tricking billionaires into funding a non-profit chitterling company that will hire poor Black people to uplift them. Meanwhile, the company is used as a front to make and distribute untraceable weapons given out to ordinary and unsuspecting Black people on the street with a simple note. The absurdity of this plan becomes clear when comparing it to the contemporaneous *Spook Who Sat by the Door*. In *Spook*, the protagonist, Dan Freeman, uses similar skills of deception to become a CIA agent and learn counterinsurgency. Subsequently, Freeman masquerades as a respectable community advocate while secretly organizing a Black gang into urban guerrillas, who take advantage of a riot to launch a revolution (Greenlee, ch. 8). In short, their plan

follows the blueprint laid out by RAM. Like RAM, the gang uses ordinary and homemade weaponry like Molotov cocktails—or guns which they expropriate—rather than rely on anything sophisticated or expensive (Greenlee, ch. 12). In contrast, Tomsson relies almost exclusively on persuading rich people to fund his ambitions. These conversations give Himes an opportunity to flex his rhetorical powers of persuasion and deception, with dialogue full of double entendre. A key moment comes when Tomsson explains to a billionaire why it is necessary for the oppressed, without resources, to “start at the bottom, at the chitterling of the hog” (166). The irony of him making this speech while asking for millions of dollars cues us to read the passage figuratively. Literally, Tomsson wants to start a chitterling company to uplift Black workers but figuratively, he is describing a revolutionary plan built from the bottom up. He metaphorically describes a revolutionary organization based on ordinary people rather than rich or powerful figureheads. Tomsson lies to the billionaire about the details of this plan but, so too, Himes does not openly provide a blueprint for revolution. This novel is not a manual; the plan itself is still encrypted.

Plan B’s encrypted plot provides a literary form to otherwise clandestine activity. This activity delves deeper than the overt, historically documented activity of RAM, offering a representation of the underground. As I argued above, RAM offers us a glimpse of underground activity that, by nature, exceeds their representative abilities. As an organization rooted in the underground, they are the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, Himes’s depiction of a Black uprising in *Plan B* goes beyond representing the actual history of Black Liberation groups and attempts to depict the realization of the future goal

of Black Liberation itself. Within Black Liberation circles, something like Tomsson Black's plot existed as a fantasy or concept, which was known as the Black Liberation Army. There was a network of actual groups who claimed this title, but the Black Liberation Army cannot be reduced to the armed cadres in the underground. It is better understood as what Akinyele Umoja calls "movement concept," with roots in existing underground organizations but, moreover, an aspirational fantasy extending beyond the present (136).

Himes's novel attempts to give form to the concept of the Black Liberation Army without determining it as an identifiable (and hence policeable) subject. The first shooter in Tomsson's plan is not identified. The residents of the surrounding tenement houses (destroyed and damaged in the firefight) are detained and questioned to no avail. The investigation predictably goes nowhere since none of the residents "knew anything, had seen anything" (111). This lack of knowledge speaks to the clandestine nature of the attacks from the point of view of policing. Moreover, their witnesses' testimonies also demonstrate that the residents understand more than they let on. The residents describe this mysterious shooter "as though he had sprung full-grown from the walls of the tenement with a rifle in his hand. No one had the slightest idea why he would suddenly attack and kill white policemen, who had always been good and kind to black people" (111). Himes lays the irony on thick, reminding readers that his cops are rarely, if ever, kind. In this passage, Himes jokes that his characters cannot imagine why someone would kill cops when, as the novel established with Tang, everyone can. This joke invites

us to read for secondary meanings in this testimony, which we can find in the description of the shooter springing from tenement buildings.

The tenement buildings stand in, as a synecdoche, for the conditions of impoverishment in Harlem. These are the conditions that BLA member and theorist, Assata Shakur, argues produce the Black Liberation Army, claiming that “[t]here is, and always will be, until every Black man, woman, and child is free, a Black Liberation Army” (52). In the rare cases they discuss the BLA, historians describe it as a splinter from the Black Panthers, but participants in the BLA remind us that it was never reducible to a representative organization. Assata’s comrade Zayd Shakur insisted that the relationship was reversed with his formulation: “THE BLACK LIBERATION ARMY, to which the Black Panther Party belongs” (qtd. in Faraj 153). According to Assata, “The Black Liberation Army is not an organization: it goes beyond that. It is a concept, a people’s movement, an idea” (169). Moreover, she not only refrains from circumscribing the clandestine structure of the BLA, she claims it was made up of decentralized cells that could not be described in a conventional and uniform way (241-2).⁴⁸ In short, the BLA was anarchistic. From an anarchist perspective, Himes’s shooters, like Tomsson, represent an aspect of an unrepresentable underground network, implying an entire clandestine network in a “revolutionary armed movement” without implicating

⁴⁸ Assata describes her initial impressions of the BLA: “It was clear that the Black Liberation Army was not a centralized, organized group with a common leadership and chain of command. Instead, there were various organizations and collectives working out of different cities, and in some of the larger cities there were often several groups working independently of each other . . . It became evident almost from the very beginning that consolidation was not a good idea” (241-2).

them (Umoja 4). Himes does not investigate or expose the network—in fact, the network only exists speculatively as a movement concept.

Himes's anti-police novel invents a speculative protagonist that imagines a clandestine group identity for Black Liberation. Ultimately, *Plan B*'s protagonist goes beyond any historical model, escalating the conflict to apocalyptic proportions. The next big shoot out in the novel has a body count larger than any of the previous novels, not to mention any of the actions of the real-life Black Liberation Army. Moreover, the uprising implicates the entirety of the Black community, as the response of the authorities escalates well beyond local policing to something more fitting to the spy novel with its international scope. Himes imagines a series of events that destabilizes capitalist society and leads to Black men going underground en masse.⁴⁹ I am reminded of Eldridge Cleaver's claim that one of the signs of the Black Panthers' impact on the cultural imaginary was the sudden decrease of sales in the quintessential spy series, James Bond (75). It is conceivable that Himes was trying to fill that void with *Plan B* by offering an alternative. However, Himes characteristically does not emulate the realism or heroism of the spy genre, resorting instead to noir tropes of absurdism and surrealism, describing police bodies that "sprouted blood like gory fountains" (177). The police quite literally are transformed into the grotesque, gothic imagery of gargoyles. As for the Black insurgents, they become less visible, seen primarily through their effects on the underground architecture. Himes literalizes the underground as his Black insurgents

⁴⁹ A woman, Tang, is the first person to pick up the gun. However, Himes reverts to gender stereotypes when imagining the outcome of the uprising. Men take center stage as the active subjects.

sabotage the foundations of urban infrastructure from the sewers (185-89). However absurd, these scenes also map out strategic weak points, point to possible targets for attack, and as such emulate RAM's dreams of revolution. Himes describes the dreams of Black Power revolutionaries, fulfilling their visions in an appropriately dreamlike style.

Himes realizes a dream of Black Liberation through the anti-police novel, inventing a style and character for aspiring revolutionaries. However, he was unable to finish the novel within his lifetime. In the sparse criticism dealing with this novel, much has been made of its status as "unfinished."⁵⁰ In this chapter, I chose to treat the novel as a completed text, for the most part, rather than unfinished. The ending in the published version of *Plan B* is taken from Himes's detailed synopsis.⁵¹ It is only in the unfinished portion of the text that Grave Digger and Coffin Ed track down their primary suspect, the "black anarchist" Tomsson Black (195). Their ability to finally come face-to-face with a Black anarchist is contingent on their removal from the police force—they are fired for even suspecting this "Uncle Tom." The police find it impossible to get near to the origin of this uprising, which is not surprising since, by the final pages of the manuscript, they are overwhelmed by the uprising. Himes describes police encounters with the uprising in terms reminiscent of an artist molding raw material, their bodies willfully reshaped by

⁵⁰ For example, in their introduction to the English version of *Plan B*, Michel Fabre and Robert E. Skinner speculate that Himes "may have reached an ideological impasse" by killing off his police protagonists, these two "symbols of integration" (xxviii-xxix).

⁵¹ Kali Tal points out that "the book was substantially finished by 1971, with only minor changes in the ensuing years" (83). I follow Tal by treating *Plan B* as a (near) completed text.

insurgent guns “like gobs of putty, finely sculpted with red ink” (176). It is as if the uprising has creative control of the novel.

The uprising in the anti-police novel, as the name implies, radically disintegrates the representation of the police. The police’s fixed identity as police becomes malleable in the gruesome imagery of their bodies: “There were squashy bits of exploded viscera, stuffed intestines bursting with half-chewed ham and cabbage and rice and gravy, lying in the gutters like unfinished sausages before knotting” (177). In the description of police as sausages, we come full circle: Tomsson Black capitalizes on the taste for chitterlings to distribute guns, which are then used to treat the police as pig meat. Although the imagery is disturbing, it is quite effective at transforming the police into the Panthers’ pig. Himes’s absurd and “unfinished” narrative comes to a logical conclusion. The final pages of the synopsis draw back in the principle police protagonists, Himes’s original heroes Coffin Ed and Grave Digger.

Although Himes never explicitly uses the insult “pig” to refer to cops, he draws on related imagery to bring his vision of a Black uprising to a conclusion. The absurdity of the plan, the guns distributed through a Chitterlings company, begins to make sense when understood as a metaphor for invoking desire. Himes invokes a taboo desire: the destruction of the traditional heroes of detective novels, and the killing of police. The reader is asked to sympathize with the people who desire chitterlings and guns—chitterlings that are actually guns—and to accept as protagonists the people who see cops as pigs. In the second half of the novel, these protagonists move to the center of the narrative and, correspondingly, the uprising begins in earnest. This narrative strategy

demeans the traditional detective hero, both by sidelining Coffin Ed and Grave Digger and by the gruesome deaths of their colleagues. Once Himes debases the traditional detective hero, his former heroes, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, must return to the story to take on a new role as sacrificial pig. Their renewed search for the mastermind behind the attacks on the police becomes something other than the narrative arc of a detective novel. It becomes a movement toward the demise of the detectives—as if to fulfill the promise of their funereal names, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed. By the time the detectives meet Tomsson Black, the only thing left for the Black cops left to do is take a side. As cops in an anti-police story, the detectives will die no matter which side they take.

Although their status as police is problematized by their removal from the force, this is just another step toward their complete unseating as the heroes of the novel. Grave Digger and Coffin Ed take one last stab at the investigation by questioning Tomsson Black on his plan, only to learn what an anarchist would have known all along. Tomsson admits that he masterminded the uprising, which he named Plan B[lack]. He adds that he couldn't anticipate how people would take immediate action, and that "somehow [the plan] had gotten out of his control" (200). The police are undercut one last time in their search for a culprit, as Black admits that the events were beyond his scope. In these final moments, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are permitted to act out of character, outside of their role as police. Grave Digger attempts to join Tomsson, as was foreshadowed in his response to Tang's murder, and shoots his partner Coffin Ed who was threatening to kill Tomsson. In his final moments, Coffin Ed searches for an explanation from Grave Digger and gets the cryptic response "You can't kill, Black, man" (202). Without the commas,

the slang takes on a figurative meaning: Coffin Ed can't kill the black man. Tomsson Black is the metonymic of Blackness, not a specific leader but a group identity. Grave Digger identifies with this potential group identity, arguing he would "rather be dead than a subhuman" (202). But, ultimately, Himes will not permit him this humanistic fate, and Tomsson kills Grave Digger like any other cop. In a novel that dramatizes its process of unseating the police, there is no other conclusion possible. *Plan B* might be an "unfinished" novel, but it has a conclusion.

Conclusion

Plan B is an anti-police novel. It might still seem strange to argue for the existence of a genre without producing a canon of similar novels. I have, after all, only mentioned a few related titles—*Spook Who Sat by the Door*, *Black Commandos*, the Kenyatta Series—not to mention that my primary specimen of this genre is generally considered incomplete.⁵² It is possible to read *Plan B*'s unfinished ending as an impasse, resulting from Himes taking on too many risks: the ambitious transformation of the traditional protagonists into the novel's antagonists and the creation of new protagonists that are collective-yet-clandestine. Like Tomsson's plan, perhaps *Plan B* risks too much in its experiments without developing a clear picture of the outcome. The final line leaves reader with the uncertainty expressed by one of Tomsson's followers: "I hope you know

⁵² We could add to this list. For example, we could include the work of John A. Williams, *Sons of Darkness*, *Sons of Light*. If we stepped outside of the present medium and included music, we could find many anti-police narratives in hip hop music as well. But this is beside the point, since any list will seem relatively short and incapable of satisfying a demand—if there is one—for an anti-police genre.

what you're doing" (203). This abrupt ending could be taken as a sign of Himes's secret doubt or skepticism in the possibility of revolution. However, "hope" is key to the statement. Uncertainty and indeterminacy of hope are qualities we should expect to find in literature inspired by revolutionary social movements. These indeterminate qualities register the open-endedness of social change, the process of transforming literature to a form suitable for these new conditions, and, above all, the insurgent collectivity still operating clandestinely.

Himes's novel comes closest to producing what I am calling an anti-police novel, which develops a form of protagonism for the underground. *Plan B* might not have produced a genre in the sense of a trend that can easily take up a shelf in a bookstore, but it generates a form fit for expressing the desires and dreams of a revolutionary collective. Even in the fiction of the post-Ferguson (or Black Lives Matter) era, audience sympathy still tends to default to a traditional protagonist. Several Black Lives Matter-inspired films, for instance, invite audiences to view Black Liberation struggles through the eyes of law and order: CIA agent Everett Ross in *Black Panther*, officer Ron Stallworth in *BlacKkKlansman*, etc. To my knowledge, there has yet to appear a new wave of anti-police fiction in response to the movement known as Black Lives Matter. But a literature that breaks from the sympathy and protagonism usually afforded to police seems all the more necessary. Himes provides a model for what that might look like. Ultimately, the anti-police genre is—like the Black Liberation Army—an aspirational concept rather than a fully-fledged body of work. *Plan B* aspires to create a genre that is still urgently necessary.

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Epilogue

ISOLATION CELL

Over and over again, the ecstatic moment of revolt was met with repression even greater than what we had anticipated.

The fissure was not a place where we could live. We could not hold on to the new social forms we invented in the process of revolt.

—Jackie Wang

In the introduction, I made the debatable claim that writing—even literature—contributed to the riots of the 1960s. In this dissertation, I demonstrated ways that 1960s writers helped articulate a utopian impulse, elaborating a strategy of insurrection and a vision of revolution in their time. To argue that these visions are still urgently necessary, as I did in the conclusion of the final chapter, is more complicated. Now—fifty years later—we can see clearly in hindsight that these writers were involved in failed revolutions. The intense repression of revolutionary movements came at a high cost for many participants. During the five years of the most frequent rioting, 1964 to 1968, Muhammad Ahmad counts 220 people killed, 8,377 injured and 52,629 arrested (Stanford 62). This is likely underestimating; the Watts riot alone witnessed 34 “official” deaths and Gerald Horne speculates this number does not account for other known casualties (69). Peter Levy’s numbers for the highest point of rioting, 1967 to 1968, seems like a more accurate count: 125 killed, 7000 injured, and 45000 arrests (1). Still, these numbers do not include the insurrectionary actions of small groups or the

repercussions delivered after the riots. What these numbers can provide is an inoculation against romanticizing the riots of the past.

The discussion of 1960s insurrection should not fall into nostalgia that glosses over the gruesome details of its consequences. Moreover, we should take seriously the possibility that the writings discussed in this dissertation are, at times, better catalogued as part of the failure of insurrections rather than their accomplishments. For example, it is possible to view these insurrectionary writers as part of a vanguardist trend that demanded sacrifices for an ultimately ill-fated mission. However, it is equally important to reconsider past utopian projects in the face of our current and coming catastrophe, the pandemic and potential environmental collapse. The utopian dreams of these 1960s insurrectionaries may not have been enough to maintain the new social forms that they developed, but their writings can still inform the present about revolutionary possibilities. Ultimately, these writings weave a thread between us and utopian experiments that could inform our current situation. Yet, we must accept their resolute failure and the fifty years of history, recuperation and systemic restructuring that separates us from them. It would be a mistake to map their struggles onto the present, seeking continuities and comparisons while ignoring contrasts. The insurrectionaries' certainty of imminent revolution is categorically different than a contemporary perspective, which is precisely why I find it remarkable and worthy of further study. If we are to establish what these writings offer us, we must strain to catch a glimpse of their vision of a coming revolution—like squinting at a Magic Eye—through the clouds of an alternate history that could not fulfill these revolutionaries' dreams. Yet, first, we need to accept that this

alternate history is our own, nonrevolutionary timeline and, consequently, that we live in a time with a remarkably different perspective from insurrectionaries who foresaw, however briefly, imminent global revolution on the horizon.

To drive home this shift, let's turn to one final historical anecdote. In the fall of 1968, Bob Collier, a former member of the Black Liberation Front, resurfaced in the Lower East Side, appearing on stage at the Fillmore East, a concert venue. The Black Liberation Front, you may remember, was involved in a botched plan to bomb the Statue of Liberty several years earlier. Having served his sentence, Collier returned to revolutionary organizing taking part in an event organized by "Up Against the Wall Theatre," part of the Motherfuckers' hostile takeover and occupation of this concert venue.¹ Taking the stage alongside such counterculture luminaries as Yippie Abbie Hoffman, Collier was introduced as the representative of the Tompkins Square Community Center, the name of a squat occupied by affiliates of the Black Panthers and Young Lords. It was the eve of the 1968 election that would bring Richard Nixon to power. Collier's position was decisive: "it don't make no difference who you elect 'cause its gonna be the last time" (Erhlich 1). On this stage, we can glimpse a constellation of insurrectionary forces that I have been arranging: the chthonic line of affinity between proto-Black Power Revolutionary Action Movement and BAM, the insurrectionary counterculture experiments of the Motherfuckers and Diggers, and the Black Panthers understood as a social movement. The repression of this movement would be swift and

¹ For details of the Motherfuckers' takeover of this venue run by Bill Graham, see Osha Neumann's memoir, *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker* (104-111).

aggressive. Several months later, Collier was arrested as part of a conspiracy case, known as the Panther 21, accusing the New York Black Panthers of planning a coordinated bombing campaign. It is likely this plan was not a repeat of Collier's earlier attempt, but a plot hatched by the police and FBI to frame the Black Panthers.² Whether or not it was a frame-up, the vision Collier summoned of a final presidential campaign hinged on a revolutionary strategy not equipped to overcome the level of repression faced. Unfortunately, there have been more than a dozen presidential elections since this speech and another is on the horizon.

My dissertation gestures toward how the material produced under these radically different conditions could be relevant to our current cultural climate. Over the previous chapters, I have described how the experience of the riots shaped the thinking of insurrectionaries, transforming their worldview and work. Sometimes the influence of the riots transcended the stated goals of an artistic project. For example, I have illuminated an anarchist thread running through the literary and performative collaborations of the Black Arts Movement. Other times, the influence of the riots pushed authors beyond the parameters of a literary milieu. I illustrated this phenomenon through the poetic intervention of Black Mask, which helped crystallize the autonomous small organizations in protest marches known as affinity groups. Stirred by the turbulence of the riots, Diane

² For a more detailed look at the authorities' strategy to repress the Black Panthers, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall's *Agents of Repression* and Roz Payne's interviews with movement lawyers and former FBI agents available with AK Press' *What We Want, What We Believe*. PM Press has recently re-released the Panther 21's collective autobiography with a collection of essays and poetry as *Look for me in the Whirlwind: from the Panther 21 to 21st Century Revolutions*.

di Prima and the Diggers drew the home into their struggles and transformed seemingly mundane sites into psychedelic experiments in communal social forms. The Black Panthers attempted to move beyond rioting by developing a broader network, but their underground activities continued to inspire a vision of insurrectionary uprising that we find in Chester Himes's *Plan B*. All of these examples contain latent forms important for future developments: the anarchism of Black Arts that exceeds a nationalist program, the Black Anarchism that later emerged from within the Black Panther underground, the reemergence of Motherfucker-esque affinity groups in the black bloc, and the Diggers' yet-to-be-realized vision of a network of insurrectionary communal homes. These examples demonstrate how ideas generated in the underground press and adjacent literature contained potential strategies for the anarchist formations of their immediate future, however different it turned out to be than they imagined.

Admittedly, this study only covers a small segment of the 1960s underground and the underground press. Recent studies on the local chapters of the Black Panther Party are a significant development, and have been enormously useful for my research. Further work could be done to explore Black Panther Party's contemporaries and comrades in unofficial or non-Black Panther formations outside of major cities. Understudied 1960s groups like the Blackie Blacks and Black Gestapo in Wilmington, Delaware, supplied a Panther-esque insurrectionary militancy in that city without any direct ties to the Black Panthers.³ It is unknown whether they produced a print culture that allowed them to flesh

³ For research on Black Power in Wilmington, Delaware, see Andreas Schneider's *Delaware: The Politics of Urban Unrest* and the *Wilmington 1968 Sourcebook*.

out their visions or ambitions. Likewise, a study of anarchist groups outside of New York City and California is still necessary. I will shortly be adding the papers of an Austin-based Motherfucker, Richard Lee, to the collections at the Tamiment Library, and they would provide a good starting place to research anarchist activity in Austin. Moreover, anarchist groups and communes outside of the Digger/Motherfucker network have hardly been discussed in the current literature. The Black Anarchist tradition, in particular, has not been fully explored for connections to or origin points in 1960s movements. Correspondingly, the developments within Panther-adjacent movements, notably the Asian American Movement, contain similar confluences of counterculture and insurrectionary politics to be further explored. Researchers have only recently begun to examine the writings in the Asian American Movement publication, *Gidra*.⁴ The underground press still contains many unexplored avenues that brought together literary and social movements concerns.

In the present climate, there is no guarantee that the study of these past social movements can conjure their insurrectionary spirit or capture the fullness of their utopian visions. In fact, the intensive recuperation of social movement experiments over the past fifty years indicates the opposite: the study of anarchistic inventions of the 1960s divorces them from their riotous origins, intentionally providing a partial and decontextualized history. We find this recuperation of 1960s social movements at its

⁴ Laura Pulido's *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left* and Rychetta Watkins' *Black Power, Yellow Power, and the Making of Revolutionary Identities* would be good starting places for further investigation into this milieu's overlap with the Black Panthers.

most evident in business management and white-collar lifestyle trends.⁵ While business management seems an unlikely final destination for the countercultural and political rebellion, Jasper Bernes argues, pace Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, that “the various literary and artistic experimental cultures of the 1960s and 1970s helped to articulate, though certainly not to create, these new qualitative complaints and demands” that restructured white-collar life (9). Specifically, the “artistic critique” of the counterculture articulated a demand for autonomy and self-management against the alienation and hierarchy of work. Thus, even the iconoclastic experiments of a group like Situationist International can be said to contribute to the demand for a more participatory workplace (Bernes 15). While Bernes implies that his criticism is mainly leveled at the early artistic practices of the situationists, it is applicable to their insurrectionary period and that of their American comrades as well.

The networks and informal organizational forms of the anarchistic and insurrectionary tendencies of 1960s social movements did not escape this capitalist recuperation. Mark Fisher points out that capitalism’s seemingly infinite appetite for recuperation has transformed the characteristic traits of anarchist networks, such as spontaneity and flexibility, into “the very hallmarks of management in a post-Fordist, Control society” (28). We can discover this same pattern of recuperation in the works studied in this dissertation. In business settings, the term affinity group has recently

⁵ We should not immediately assume that this cooptation is entirely a betrayal or perversion of the intentions of the authors of the underground press. Not all authors in this milieu were averse to reformism or otherwise personally profiting from their social movements. To *détourner* a phrase from Walter Benjamin, these writers set foot in the marketplace—ostensibly to incite a riot, but in truth to find a buyer.

become fashionable. Initially appearing in offices to describe the formations of small groups based on gender or racial identity, the affinity groups, used interchangeably with “employee resource group,” are groups formed in the workplace based on a mutual interest or experience. While affinity groups have the appearance of an activist intervention in the office, they are endorsed by management as part of their program to support workplace diversity.⁶ Like affinity groups, communal living has been taken up among white-collar settings where they refer to their shared homes that allow office workers to live in increasingly gentrified areas as “co-living spaces.”⁷ Recuperation is, of course, not restricted to the anarchists; Black Power experiments have found a place in contemporary capitalist arrangements as well. The survival programs of the Black Panthers, especially the Free Breakfast for Children Program, intended to initiate socialistic relationships and grow support for their revolutionary project, are often touted as the prototype for Free Lunch programs in American schools.⁸ Once we take these projects out of their revolutionary contexts, we can see the legacy of Baraka’s Black Power program in his son, Ras Baraka, current mayor of Newark *sans* the utopian

⁶ For a brief description of workplace affinity groups, see Mishell Parreno Taylor’s “Today’s Affinity Groups: Risks and Rewards” and Alyse Kalish’s “How to Start an Affinity Group at Work, According to Real People Who Did It.”

⁷ Podshares (Podshare.com) are an extreme version of this trend in which Californians inhabit trendy areas, sleeping in bunkbeds with little to no privacy, costing around \$1200-\$1500/month. For a description of PodShares, see Anna Bahney’s article “This bunk bed is \$1,200 a month, privacy not included.” For co-living spaces, see Max Blau’s “Tired of Dirty Dishes and ‘Hacker Houses,’ Millennials Revamp Communal Living.”

⁸ For a brief analysis of the legacy of the Black Panther Breakfast Program, see Arielle Milkman’s “The Radical Origins of Free Breakfast for Children.”

aspirations. If anything, these examples remind us that we live in a radically different context from the experiments of the past. My nostalgia for utopian experiments whose conditions have long since melted into air can easily fall into the trap that Lauren Berlant has called “cruel optimism.” Since there is a growing chasm of time between our conditions and theirs, it may be time for us, as *Endnotes* suggests, “to cleave off the present from the past” (74).

Literary study, nonetheless, generally orients itself to the past and, in my experience, rarely makes value judgments on literature based on its usefulness to current social movements. While literary study is by no means politically neutral, literary scholars in the past few decades have not generally shared my interest in the role of writing in an insurrectionary upheaval. However, I do not consider my research interests outmoded; in fact, I find myself thinking of my work in terms of the future, where I imagine a renewed insurrectionary movement appearing on the horizon that reorients our disciplines. According to Walter Benjamin, the traditional problem with historical study is its selective process, which privileges continuity, fitting events neatly into the narrative of the present. He rightly perceived that this process was “meant to cover up the revolutionary moments in the occurrence of history The places where tradition breaks off—hence its peaks and crags, which offer footing one who would cross over them—it misses” (*Arcades Project* 474). An incomplete picture emerges, resulting from intentional historical exclusions. This incomplete history has led McKenzie Wark to argue that the problem of recuperation of social movement experiments like those of the Situationist International is that “the recuperation is so partial and incomplete. After all

the variables of the movement have been accounted for, they might lend themselves again to an agency that is at once critical and creative” (43). Likewise, Erica Hunt argues that Capital’s process of recuperation “also has the capacity to eat things that are in fact detrimental to its own interests. So, in fact, in that process of commodification of oppositional practices, it will also ingest something, I hope at least, that is really bad for it” (66). Following Benjamin, Wark, and Hunt, an insurrectionary literary history can counter the conventional historical narrative by providing a more complete picture. This more complete picture of the past would not cohere in a linear historical narrative but rather include the disjunctures and tangents of insurrectionary moments. Recuperation, thus, would be used against itself.

My work in this dissertation has been an attempt to contribute to this historical project with an important caveat. At every turn, I have tried to make clear that knowledge and self-expression were insufficient tools to undo the crises of capitalist society.

Benjamin, in my reading, concurs, writing in his famous passage of the “Work of Art” essay that

Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. (241)

Benjamin warns that fascism does not necessarily restrict all forms of expression; indeed, it can coexist—even encourage—opportunities for popular expression as long as they do not threaten property relations. In my view, this is where fascism intersects with a liberal freedom, which presents a false opposition. My reading of Benjamin bears upon the

current rise of fascism within ostensibly liberal democratic states. It is also important for understanding the thrust of this present study, where I have taken for granted Guy Debord's warning that "[n]o error has ever collapsed for lack of a good image The existing images only reinforce the existing lies." With this in mind, I have not set out to flesh out the literary canon with fresh voices but rather to present an anarchist concept of agency, distributed in networks, that escapes present classification systems and exists in tension with contemporary capitalist culture.

It is strange writing these last few lines from my COVID-19 "isolation cell," to reflect on the agency of the crowd in seclusion. The pandemic presents a completely new crisis—for my generation at least—that interrupts the naturalized rhythms of capitalist time, undermining our confidence in the continuity of the historical narrative. However, the quarantine results from a completely different kind of societal crisis than that precipitated by riots and insurrection. In the inverted world of the pandemic, the crowd appears as an inescapable nightmare and not an intoxicating dream of liberation. Everywhere we can hear the complaint, when will it get back to normal? Normal, in this case, means human contact, seeing strangers, frequenting cafes, stores, and workplaces—the everyday features that we have come to associate with social life. At no point prior was it more obvious that our conditions have become virtually unrecognizable from the perspective of social struggles of prior generations.

Yet, when we examine these past struggles closely—through the unconventional and rarefied sources found in archives, the memories of participants, and the underground press—there are, I believe, instructions for the future. In these sources, I have learned that

a liberatory tendency, a “little *a* anarchism,” can emerge in new rebellions in and against the stated goals of the participants. In the work of BAM, we can find a liberatory spirit that exceeds their political program, especially in their literary experiments. Literary circles, while steeped in apolitical or limited political models, can engender new political forms, not only through their collaboration but their conflicts. Social movements that ignore unconventional sites like poetry readings—that expect revolt to take place in classic terrain of the factory or the street—are also likely to miss the revolutionary possibilities of the home. In general, the insurrections of the 1960s remind us that the official organizations and their platforms will be the tip of the iceberg in an uprising. A history that singles out official groups, with a myopic focus on their public image, will all too easily miss the web of connections that entangles these groups in spontaneous and militant uprisings. The shape of uprisings emerging in the current pandemic will be particularly difficult to ascertain because of their comparatively non-public character, as people coordinate together while sheltering-in-place. In this moment, there are the beginnings of rent strikes, resource sharing, and other forms of self-organization by individuals invoking the classic anarchist concept of mutual aid, from their homes.⁹

Despite the eerily empty streets, these early stages of grassroots response are reminiscent

⁹ The anarchist Petr Kropotkin initially popularized mutual aid as a political strategy. Kropotkin argued that grassroots social support and resource sharing was an alternative to and historically antagonistic to the social order mediated by the State (and traditional State theory grounded in Hobbesian competition of the “war of each against all) (142-45). This anarchist concept has proliferated widely through social media groups in response to the pandemic and has even been invoked on Twitter by politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. However, it is unlikely that these politicians have much understanding of the revolutionary implications of their calls for mutual aid.

of the autonomous organizing of resources and spaces by the semi-clandestine networks of 1960s insurrectionaries. Whatever struggles emerge from the current climate, they could benefit from this widened scope of where to look and what to expect. Likewise, a literature that responds to the crisis facing us in this current pandemic, the ongoing catastrophe of a racist, patriarchal, capitalist society, or the coming environmental collapse will likely draw on the actions of insurrectionaries and their dreams that the current system can be brought to an end.

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