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Black Mask & Up Against the Wall Motherfucker

The Story of a small, underground 1960s revolutionary
group in New York City

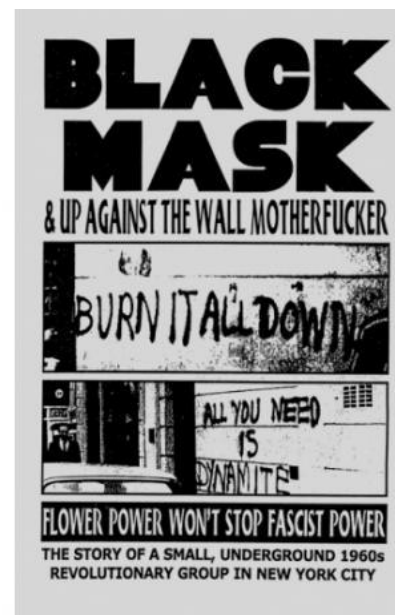
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the *first* major level of inhibition, of character and body armour. One's sense of an enormous underlying manic-depressive swing with the Motherfuckers would seem to confirm Reich's claim that the fundamental question is one of reconnecting on a far, far deeper level - on the level of the id, on the level of *primordial* energy - and let's hope it is a slightly more serene and ineluctable trip. That case of the Mothers raises the question of the aims, imperative and pitfalls of a revolutionary affinity group. Behind a hard, imaginative, and identifiable front, an occult network of resistance. Along with breaking through to the deepest and most intoxicating levels of our real selves, a nonstop and intelligible harassment of the prevailing organisation of reality. War, therapy, community. No part of the project can be separated from the others. But these are practical problems, and they can never be solved on a big table covered with pieces of paper. *'FULL STEAM AHEAD THROUGH THE SHIT'*
NECHAEV

THE END

Flower Power Won't Stop Fascist Power

The Story of a small, underground 1960s revolutionary group in New York City

DESTROY THE MUSEUMS. OUR STRUGGLE CANNOT BE HUNG ON WALLS. A NEW SPIRIT IS RISING. LIKE THE STREETS OF WATTS WE BURN WITH REVOLUTION... October 10, 1966. A handful of young guys and girls, having stalked up from New York's Lower East Side scattering leaflets calling for the closure of the Museum of Modern Art, are stopped just outside the Museum entrance by a whole phalanx of cops and crashbarriers. The story had leaked, and the cops, on the ball as ever, had sensed a new and very real type of threat months before anyone else: the cops at least have got it clear Just whose side Art is on... The Director of the Museum (largest collection of Dada in the world) out on the steps, wringing his hands, almost in tears, only too anxious to please: "Why are you doing this? We haven't done anything..." The group, unheard of before this, called BLACK MASK... Next, early one morning, black balaclava hoods pulled down to their eyes, cracked rictus skulls skewered on stakes, BLACK MASK, swollen to 15, marched from Canal Street down Lower Broadway to Wall Street. Throwaways reading *Traders in stocks and bones shriek for New Frontiers... Bull markets of murder deal in a stock exchange of death... WALL STREET IS WAR STREET..* The cops and the overdressed corporation errandboys plain dumbfounded; the only people to get really uptight were, predictably enough, alas, a group of straight proles who showed up... A relative flop, all in all. Too much sub-Committee of 100 stuff - Grosvenor Square = Genocide Square, etc. In fact all BLACK MASK's early experiments with Provo-type tactics were far more trenchant and original when applied to the culture scene. It was official 'experimental' art rather than official leftwing politics that they'd broken out of. And they loathed its guts...

That first year BLACK MASK seized every possible opportunity of fucking up culture. They moved in at a moment's notice and improvised as they went along. They heckled, disrupted and generally sabotaged dozens of art congresses, lectures, exhibitions, happenings... For a group that hailed Futurism and Dada as its only forebears this type of shit was diametrically opposed to the permanent, multi-dimensional revolutionising of immediate experience demanded by all the highpoints of modern art: *See what you can make with a cathedral And a little dynamite*. Probably their most notorious escapade was the wrecking of the 3-day marathon seminar on Modern Art sponsored by the Loeb Student Centre. Howls of ART IS DEAD, BURN THE MUSEUMS, BABY, and POETRY IS REVOLUTION. Tables kicked over, windows smashed, scuffles breaking out. Larry Rivers roughed up a bit in the best Futurist manner. The theoretical dimension - "Fuck off, you cunt" - equally worthy of the occasion. Reaction wasn't slow to follow. In fact it was the one systematic attempt the official avantgarde made to deal with them that allowed BLACK MASK to pull off their neatest single coup. A panel of experts on Futurism, Dada and Surrealism advertised a 'Trap for Black Mask' throughout the Underground (sic) press: a souped-up panel discussion on the true revolutionary meaning of modern art, a bait to which they imagined, correctly BLACK MASK was bound to rise. They also imagined, far less happily, that their own erudition and wit was such that BLACK MASK could only be put down, really hard, once and for all. BLACK MASK excelled themselves. They ran off thousands of passably well printed "Invitations to a free party - free sounds, free food, free booze - same time same place as the ambush, and handed them out to the hardest bastards they could find in Harlem and the Lower East Side a few hours before the fun was due to start. The ambush was riddled like a colander. All night really uptight black and white down-and-outs were hammering on the doors, intermittently crashing them and furiously demanding their free food, drink and women...

with the wild laughter of real aggression against a real enemy. And their extemporisation has paid off as a catalyst: in the realm of *atmospherics* they have changed the tenor not only of the whole post-Flower-Power underground but also of SDS. And there is still a great deal to be done in this field. The positive aspects of the major hallucinogens, for example, is still submerged under the sales talk of the '67 psychedelic merchants. Their rudimentary deconditioning, partial ego-dissolving properties and stripping bare of the social structuring of perception - these have still to be appropriated by revolutionaries and put into terms of 'practical sensual activity' (Marx). But the role of catalyst has its drawbacks, and the group has now reached a turning-point. With the International Werewolf Conspiracy there is both an attempt to grapple with the problems of a large-scale decentralised network, and an unequivocal desire to get at least a major part of the whole organisation well out of the limelight. Personal audacity is of the greatest possible value in ending this bloody nightmare - is it me or them that's insane? - in parading what one really feels - but putting the finger on oneself the *whole time* can only end up with the bastards sitting outside your door all day, setting you up for a five year stretch. Some of the least cool Motherfuckers are beginning to disappear from the front line - disappearing to reappear with a changed name, a changed address, a changed persona. One day a scruffy wlldeyed git, the next a flashy executive with aerosol DMT in his briefcase, and a week later a mildmannered union official quietly fucking up the union comptometer... The whole vast problem of structuring open and closed organisation. The depersonalisation and anonymity of bureaucratic civilisation is the jungle of the urban guerrilla...

At the same time the Motherfuckers seem to feel a marked dissatisfaction - viz. the acid - with their previous reduction of *therapy* - and, for Christ's sake, what else is it all about? - to open violence, violence pure and simple. Obviously violence has an enormous abre-active power, but as Reich underlined time after time, a flood of pleasure, anxiety and fury merely indicates the sweeping aside of

run over a cop. Arrests a girl trying to get up bail to get out the others arrested... the police are coming down heavy on motherfuckers...

By the end of the summer their hard core was up on countless criminal charges, with penalties ranging from 10 days to 10 years - the worst of which was late July when Ben Morea was done for having knifed a couple of servicemen - a Marine and an airman - who along with some 20 odd other rightminded citizens had cornered 4 of the Motherfuckers in a Boston backalley and laid into them with bricks and clubs. His trial opened in November and is still going on at this minute... The paranoia the whole time, and no paranoia like New York paranoia. The uproar, the filth and neon, the sense of being trapped. Politics or dope it feels like they could come and get you at any time. Telephone bugged, with a transmitter picking up sounds all over the apartment. Smoking over the bog seat with one hand on the handle. People scared of even being seen around with you. And the Motherfuckers looning around spitting at every cop they happened to come across on the street. When the heat really began to move in a lot of them split New York City. They travelled from one end of the States to the other, fucking up things from Alaska to New Mexico and trying to link the various people they made contact with. Attempts to let up a nationwide network of guerrilla cells were put together during this period. Rounded off by the formation of the I.W.W.C. *The Interational Werewolf Conspiracy* - trade joke on the I.W.W. - which more or less brings it up to now...

A very few points. The Motherfuckers are the *classic* 'left-wing adventurists' - that old alibi of the straight revolutionary, and his dam against the visceral revolt in himself. Acting within a new and completely unexplored theatre of operations - *community* as opposed to *factory* organisation and strife - and exposing themselves 100% to police victimisation, they have galvanised a vast area of the American scene. They shit on the 'tactical' ruminations of the usual leftwing arseholes (only 'adventurists' are *entitled* to talk tactics) and pop the balloon of the Maoists' straightfaced absurdities

The interpretation of Dada was correct by even the strictest academic standards - hadn't Huelsenbeck written, so long before, *Dada is a club?* - all the same the scandal resulted In BLACK MASK being ostracised right along the line. Artists couldn't understand the politics, politicians couldn't understand the art and neither could stomach the violence. The group was dealt with by the normal avantgarde techniques of repression: silence in the media, prurient whispers of fascism over the vernissage cocktails. Not that BLACK MASK wasn't pretty damn unrecognisable when it hit In late 1966. The two original animators of the group, Ron Hahne and Ben Morea, were kids straight off the streets, not middleclass dropouts. Morea had Deen mixed up with the delinquent street gangs, been on H and done a stretch In Sing-Sing before he turned to painting and discovered the Futurists. This background allowed them to get through to Futurism straight away - to the real Futurism, science, elegance and violence, the most purely delinquent of all 20th century art spearheads. Not the art of a Soffici or a Boccioni but the post-artistic *way of life* of a Marinetti ... Marinetti beating up Wyndham Lewis in an allnight urinal and hanging him up on some adjacent spiked railings by his coat collar... Marinetti imprisoning 8 bevy of wealthy culture-vultures in a belltent and driving his motorbike over it full throttle time after time ... Marinetti, even at the end, at one of Mussolini's galas, kicking over a banquet table on top of Hitler, just to show that he really couldn't give a fuck ...

They grasped, almost intuitively, the crux of the 1910-1925 art crisis: that the *content* of modern art, the vision of a *totally* recreated world stemming from the first Romantics, was potentially the most vitriolic attack on bourgeois civilisation ever made; while, on the contrary, its FORM straitjacketed it within a purely reactionary role. Taken literally it is dynamite. Taken culturally it is one of the system's main supports. *Kubla Khan* can be taken and used as a metaphor, a blueprint, of a *real* paradise; *Kubla Khan* can be taken and used as a fantasy, a means of evading the real hell in which we live, a compensation for it. Everything depends on whether it

is related to one's own everyday life or whether it is related to the labyrinth of our Byzantine culture, where no road leads to Xanadu. The quick of the 20th century cultural crisis: *creativity must break free of all its previous letters and forms; it must stop being the creation of a separated and imaginary world and become the transformation of real experience itself.* Thus Tzars: *'Life and Art Are One. The modern artist does not paint, he creates directly.'* This Is why BLACK MASK was more advanced than the relatively more sophisticated 'Rebel Worker' or 'Resurgence Youth Movement', or, for that matter, the great Marcuse himself. From the start they demanded *complete identity of theory and practice* and really tried, whatever their fuck-ups, to create an organisation In line with this.

Which at the time left only one force with which they could identify: the post-Watts BLACKS. Only the Blacks; rejection of *everything* was as high-handed and demonic as their own. Only the Blacks were in a position where they had to really DO something, not just sit on their arses and talk. BLACK MASK, along with the French Situationists, were the only whites at the time who really grasped the *revolutionary* feeling coming to the boil in the US 'race' riots: understood that there was a really *positive* content to the looting, arson and tentative gunplay, sensed the real joy and affirmation in what the whole Left shrugged off as complete nihilism. They quoted a couple of newspaper clippings: *'At times, amidst the scenes of riot and destruction that made parts of the city look like a battlefield, there was an almost carnival atmosphere.'* "New York Times; 16/7/67 and *'Said Governor Hughes after a tour of the riot-blighted streets... "The things that repelled me the most was the holiday atmosphere... It's like laughing at a funeral."*"Time' 21/7/67. One reporter from Detroit described suddenly seeing a huge bunch of gladoil skipping through the rubble. As it passed a 7 or 8 year old negro kid poked his head out of the middle. "I'm a sec maniac" he yelled and disappeared among the gutted building. What is this if not the consummation of modern art; its death and rebirth: DADA! And what 20th century avantgarde vision of Utopian architecture can

and the personality gone, the present and the body found, all the senses called into play. If you want to find yourself, get lost ... Violence seemed the only shock brusque enough to snap dissidents out of their trance and its dream syntax: a karate-trained Dadaist commando actually fighting in the gutter is enough to complete the demoralisation of any intellectual, whether it's Ayler or Georg Simmel he's pickled in. 'Revolution in dreams / Revolution in books / Revolution in cars / Revolution in advertising / But everywhere *repression...* Your biggest enemy is your ARSE / Pick it up / Let it move...' INERTIA IS THE REAL ENEMY.

As the summer drew on they entered the realm of revolutionary folklore. Their enthusiasm for any kind of hardware left all but the most rabid Panthers looking sallow - Huey Newton's 'If you don't believe in lead, you're already dead' much quoted - and most of the shooting on the white scene last summer was inevitably Motherfuckers. Not only were they responsible for the sporadic, apparently Hippy rooftop sniping at cops on the Lower East Side, but they were also toting the guns and cocktails on the Berkeley and Haight-Ashbury barricades.

September, they blew up the Berkeley water supply as a reprisal raid for Chicago. They were the unknown terrorists who since January have, deep in the country, at the dead of night, been dynamiting California's electricity grid (electricity, the basis of the real power that keeps the machine running... without it nothing can work... black anarchy...). UP AGAINST THE WALL / MOTHERFUCKER began to pay for the notoriety: *Did a good nites work pig did / Got his rocks off swinging clubs after being frustrated all Friday / Arrests a member of UP AGAINST THE WALL" MOTHERFUCKER for standing on the street. Charge: conspiracy In the 4th degree. Arrests a girl for protesting his arrest. Arrests a Yippee for standing on the street corner: Charge: disorderly conduct. Arrests 8 people on Sixth Street for trying to block the street to traffic after a kid was hit by a car. Arrests a guy carrying a drum for carrying a drum. Arrests a guy for backing up his car after getting 4 tickets. Charge: trying to*

can graffiti, banners, chants, songs, tomtom tattoos. Sculpture, music, literature, all forms dissolved and regained their unity. Trails of slime and giant footprints meandered through back-alleys. Snakes with propaganda painted along their backs. Dogs and rabbits with similar tags... And the cops trying to round them up... with nets... But even the most inflammatory smutsheet remains trapped within the official definition of 'communication'. The scene, wrote the Mothers, 'Is now going through a process of polarisation - those who want to continue the media 'blow-out' and those who want to blow out the media'. For communication if it is to have any meaning at all can only be inter-change and interplay between people, a dialogue, while all the mass media, however mixed, *work by definition in one direction only*. They are a broadcast, a show, 'a spectacle that can only be *consumed* by a *passive* spectator'. Novel, film or symphony, you can't talk back to any of them. And what communication can there be when one can never reply? Sweet fuck all, comrade, sweet fuck all. What passes as communication is in fact the installation of total non-communication, of passivity, isolation and abstraction - the media are the material expression of participation in non-participatory society.

The whole crock of shit comes down to the *a priori* assumption that communication is a matter of talking. It's nothing of the sort - it's a matter of *acting*, of acting *together*. The Motherfuckers' real importance was that they were trying to create this new revolutionary language - at once Lautreamont's *poetry made by everyone* and Boehme's *sensual speech*. Language as the self expression of the whole body. Language as collective action. This is why they got away so much on riots: riots, probably the first significant breakthrough in mass communication since Marconi. Communication is a group project and adventure - a shared predicament, dangerous, illegal - a world suddenly tense, expectant and tonic, a situation whose outcome depends solely on the verve and audacity of one's own intervention. Riot, like love, gives a brief taste of real surreality: the moment everything totters on the brink, the past

hold a candle to the barbaric, almost elemental splendour of Detroit in flames? Playing with fire - purely aristocratic philosophy. Nero beggared by a mob of semi-illiterate teenage nigras. Notwithstanding which they still couldn't break through the mistrust, on any expect the most personal basis, of the Blacks of '67. They were stuck with the whites and, moreover, though they defined their own goal as 'a form of action which transcends the separation between art and politics', they were lumbered with precisely this separation: with the culturally oriented Hippies and the politically oriented New Left.

While they were utterly disgusted by everything about Flower Power they recognised that, out of the whole white opposition, the dropouts were the group potentially closest to them. They too had rebelled, In however half-arsed a way, against the *whole* of life as it is. BLACK MASK completely agreed with their basic conviction that work was to be avoided at any cost, that the American dream was so much crap and that life should be devoted exclusively to experiment with the perimeters of lived experience: to a new, post-industrial *life-style*. Stirring up the Hippies meant really laying into the whole Flower Power scene. In England, the Black Hand Gang are the best critics of Hippiedom: '*In the desperate passivity of a 'groovy' pad, the hell crawls down the walls and across the floor. The silent circle in the candlelight pretends to be absorbed. Without success. The nightmare of consumption consumes the consumer. You don't smoke the hash, the hash smokes you. The record on the box makes sure that nobody sings or dances... And suddenly the whole non-communication, the whole malaise and sense of being lost in the middle of nowhere snaps into focus: the 'underground' is just another range of consumer goods, of articles whose non-participatory consumption follows the same rules in Betsy Coed as in Notting Hill: passivity and through passivity, isolation. What is happening? Sweet fuck all is happening. The latest goods and the latest poses are being exhibited, envied, bought and exhibited again. As the Situationists have said, IT'S ALL A SHOW. A show that can only go on because*

everyone pretends to be enjoying it - because everyone thinks that he alone is the total misfit. Conformity is a reign of terror. The Beatles, Zappa, the Crazy World of Arthur Brown. Shit, the lot of it, products like these mark nothing more than the furthest frontiers yet of consumer society. Its most gratuitous, decadent and self-destructive production. Its most snobbish pre-release. And no more than its pre-release. What is today the opium of the rebel will tomorrow be the opium of every normal slob in the street. Reynold's Tobacco Gold. Corporation Ten Congo has already patented every variety of pot. Twenty Acapulco Gold. Ten Congo Brown. They'll be in the vending machines yet, along with the ontology and bubble-gum' From 'Songs of the Black Hand Gang', 'Hapt' 8.

BLACK MASK's agitation snapped into sharper focus: showing the Hippies that their refusal to work was, however unconsciously, a perfectly accurate assessment of the freedom which could be granted by automation and cybernation today - the eradication of all forms of involuntary labour - the creation of a civilisation based on free creativity, on PLAY - that their fundamentally Utopian vision could, if only it were taken seriously and no longer etherialised as drug and culture fantasy, become one of the most highly explosive forces in play today. The Lower East Side was plastered in hiding with flyposters and littered with throwaways: *WE CONDEMN Timothy Leary. Not for new ideas but for organised religion. Not for expanding the mind but for limiting the revolution. Allen Ginsberg. For embracing Johnson in the face of death. For giving 'Time-Life Inc.' a safe rebel. For leading youth away from the revolution. USCO. For adding new lights to old art. For a new media with the same message.* With Detroit and Newark, BLACK MASK decided to hold street meetings on the Lower East Side. They were a mixed success. They muscled in on local community meetings in Tomkins Square Park, but they were really just too much. The local community leadership was more interested in getting progressively minded, College-boy cops to come along and 'help', rather than getting mixed up with a bunch of rabid anarchists. The majority of the Hippies were stili

was black a century before the Third World. And Lucifer, Prince of Morning, right in the dawn of time.

They also closed in on one of the richest sources feeding the ghetto and which any ghetto organisation must embrace: *the school and university system.* They systematically freaked out all the SDS summits they could get to; they wreaked havoc on the various attempts made to bureaucratise the New York Teachers Strike. In both cases they used the same Durruti-like tactics of pulling together the extremists they attracted and then leaving them to organise their own scene themselves. Their most notorious intervention was during the occupation of Columbia. Electricity put out of commission, then some really swashbuckling radio dropout over the university's own broadcasting system. Successful attempts to involve the local Black and Puerto Rican youth gangs and to take the confrontation right out of its piddling academic context. Their last suggestions, during the actual fighting with the police, of covering the front of the barricades with the choicest items from the university's collection of ceramic and old masters (headline: *Police-man Smashes Art Treasure!*) finally got them kicked out...

But perhaps the most radical aspect of all they did during the summer of '68 can be seen as their faltering but persistent attempt to create a new form of self expression beyond art and politics: a new revolutionary *language.* 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...' From the Situationist SALON down to Skid Row. Form changed along with style. The spare, slightly Puritanical BLACK MASK switched into a stabbing crossfire of grotty gestetnered leaflets, obscene broadsheets, posters, comics, slogans, spray-

to ward off the chill police heat it was calling forth. They tried to infiltrate the local social services, to use them as a front to shelter real militancy which, as it grew in strength, could afford to shatter them and expose the purely repressive role they play. They became embroiled in tenants' struggles: rent strikes and the idea of street and block committees. They helped set up a number of crashpads. They tried to turn *hustling* - dog eating dog - into more organised libertarian forms of *crime*: working out steady illegal supplies of everything from food and medical supplies to actual hardware... Here as elsewhere coherent *self-defense* proved inseparable from actual *aggression*...

They stepped up the typical ghetto tension over public use of what are nominally public places: turned them into a combat zone, a field *polarising* all those who blunder into them. 'True friendship is made on the battlefield'. Raids on the Fillmore East Theatre are going on at the moment: 'mobs of longhaired gits regularly smashing their way in, reasserting its new name *The Warehouse* and using it as a community centre, with free food and drink, music, dancing, getting stoned, discussion of tactics, organisation, free karate classes, etc. Moreover, their initial zeroing in on one specific area, far from becoming stultifying, getting them stuck in a blind alley. lead naturally through more and more far flung connections along a sketchy but thoroughly real national network. The ghetto is fast becoming one of the most vital nerve centres of this feverish doomed society. Crooks, middleclass culture dropouts, immigrants and workingclass delinquent street gangs all put right on the same intolerable spot. Not only did alliances with other dropout communities all over the States spring up, but for the first time a group of young whites really got across to the Blacks; were accepted as having identical interests. This coalition reached the point of Eldridge Cleaver offering the Vice-Presidency of the Black Panthers to one of the Motherfuckers - and appreciating being turned down. Politics is shit, man, deadpanned the Mothers. Anarchy realised it

grooving on the dreary vision of the 'Barb' and the 'Oracle' and felt much the same way. Specific groups like New York Provo actually went so far as to denounce BLACK MASK to the cops...

At the same time they tried, desperately to snap the usual New Left rent-a-crowd militants out of their inertia: to get beyond counting arseholes. Intellectually they lashed out at the whole Vietnam and Third World industries, at the condition of mass hypnosis they sustained. Time after time they plugged the fact that the only effect of Issue politics In general - and those regarding the other side of the planet in particular - is to distract everyone's attention away from the terrible fucking state they are in themselves. 'The whole Third World bit has come to be no more than the crudest *monopolisation of the the meaning of the word poverty*. Poverty is only allowed to mean hunger, disease, exposure, etc. - the poverty of imperialistic exploitation or of the last remaining pockets of 19th century western industrial poverty - while the atrocious *modern poverty* of the over-developed countries - this . sexual and general energy/pleasure frustration produced by a totally self-destructive and antl-life economy, these universal conditions of passivity, isolation, boredom, nausea and general crack-up in every direction - this poverty has become something completely intangible. The idiot Left has allowed the specific objective phenomena of *modern social alienation* to be passed over In terms of purely subjective neurosis. Practically, they tried to *turn demons into riots*. To turn everyone on to the complete shit of everything, the cars, the buildings, the goods for sale, every aspect of their immediate experience. To turn them on to the physical excitement and euphoria of actually fighting it all, fighting It fully, here and now, fighting it with their hands not only their minds. To turn everyone on to the fact that the only possible value, or pleasure today, the only way to really get across to anyone else, to oneself, Is to join together to combat the whole of reality. TO TURN THEM ON TO REVOLUTIONARY VIOLENCE.



"These smut sheets, are today's Molotov cocktails thrown at respectability and decency in our nation... They encourage depravity and irresponsibility, and they nurture a breakdown in the continued capacity of the government to conduct an orderly and constitutional society." Rep. Joe Pool (House Un-American Activities Committee)

crowd and the cops defending them ... They printed invitations from one of the major ghetto stores offering, at a specified time on 8 specified day, as many free goods as their customers could carry away, 50 of the Motherfuckers setting the ball rolling... They had been training in karate for over a year and had further refined their street tactics with hot copies of the National Guard manual 'How To Deal With Civil Disorders' (particularly attracted to the idea of unleashing Alsatiains with handgrenades strapped to them). They were terrifying when actually in action. They would break out of the main body of demonstrators like greased lightning, smashing windows, kicking over trashcans and road signs, firing anything that would burn, setting off a series of intersection traffic jams to disperse standard cop dispersion procedure, and then pick them off one by one. They waded in using karate chops, brandishing knives and slashing with bicycle chains strapped to their wrists, screaming UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERFUCKER... they baptised this mercurial street guerrilla DIAL-A-PIG or IF YOU'RE TAKING TWO STEPS BACK / FOR EVERY STEP FORWARD / TURN AROUND / AND GO THE OTHER WAY...

Their basic tactic in all was sticking their neck right out - then trying to work with anyone attracted by their extremism. In this way they hoped to pull the most desperate elements of the Lower East Side together: to create an embryo community. They hustled the bread to set up a 'free store', *The Rathole*, run less along trad Digger lines - the latter having been written off long since as a mere 'hip Salvation Army' - than as a general coordination and meeting point for both the Motherfuckers (by now 30 hard core with a further 300 in and around) and anyone else who cared to fall by. An experiment in reoccupying a fraction of the land that has been stolen from us. A move to erode the whole *system of isolation* that is the basis of hierarchical power - a grid system holding itself together by holding us apart - all the objective aspects of which are unified and summed up *concretely* in the structure of the city. Irradiating from this they tried to reinforce the dropout's new belligerence and

They were the perfect catalyst. Numbers grew fast, and as they did their activity really took off: became permanent, polymorphous, *a revolutionary life-style*. They threw off a thousand gags to precipitate the crisis at the heart of the modern ghetto - its oscillation between groovy zonked-out *reservation* and *real underground focus*, sensual, communal and aggressive - to build up general iconoclasm and agitation. In a more systematic manner than anyone before them, ATMOSPHERICS: revolutionary technique designed to exacerbate the contradiction between what people *apparently* feel and what they *really* feel: to invert all the symbols and stereotypes in any given area. They 'shot' (with blanks, alas) the 'poet' Kenneth Koch as he was giving a reading in a local church to what he actually referred to as his 'congregation'... They lumbered an entire lavatory down to St. Marks Place and held a community 'shit-in' which proved highly popular until a squad of infuriated; blushing, highly Protestant fuzz arrived and, perfect symbolical end of a perfect symbolical evening, literally beat it to pieces with their nightsticks... They triggered off militant demonstrations outside the precinct nick every time anyone was busted for drugs (at the same time spacing out the more inane heads and dealers all over town in search of phantasmal deals they had set up). They infiltrated the kitchens of the most fashionable arty cafes and bars, spiking the more expensive drinks and dishes with an assortment of drugs, violent emetics, sleepers, hallucinogens... A couple actually having to shut...

They spearheaded the city's first real Hippy riot (during which they fought their way through a throng of cops guarding a squad car in which one of the Motherfuckers was locked, wrenched the lock, freed him and all got away)... They organised some 400 Lower East Side dropouts in the storming of the Museum of Modern Art for putting on an exhibition 'Dada, Surrealism and their heritage' (heritage being the usual crock, Rauschenberg, Funk et al). Struggling, disheveled and distinctly unbeautiful people screaming obscenities, hurling paint, flour and smoke bombs at the First Night

BLACK MASK saw themselves as a catalyst: a small, tightly-knit guerrilla unit, its tactics preplanned, its objective to precipitate a state of mass hypnosis into a Reichian outburst of anxiety, anger and festivity. They began to be in and around SDS and were one of the groups most involved in the initial experiment with *mobile tactics* - the first steps towards any future urban *guerrilla* - taking place at that time. The first time they were involved practically in illustrating the enormous tactical superiority of small autonomous groups over huge remote-controlled crowds was during the big Dean Rusk demo organised by SDS in November: roving bands blocked the main traffic intersections, took confrontation right off the area designated by the cops, jumped isolated cops they'd lured down sidestreets, etc.

The 'mill-in' at Macy's (a huge department store) during the Christmas shopping rush was even more effective. Large numbers of people, either alone or in small groups, flooded the store at its peak hour. None of them looked like demonstrators, and they were free to impersonate normal shoppers, floorwalkers and staff in various configurations. They moved goods around in a businesslike way. They soiled, broke, stole and gave them away. Half-starved dogs and cats were let loose in the food department. A hysterical buzzard flew around the china section smashing more and more hideous crockery as equally hysterical salesgirls either tried to catch or escape from it. Decoys with flags and banners planted themselves in the middle of groups of straight middle-class shoppers who were promptly roughed up and hustled outside by cops and floorwalkers. Utter chaos... With hindsight one could say that it was at about this time, winter 67/68 that the whole atmosphere of the States began to change. A longtime underground process began to break: out into the open. And, as Burroughs remarks somewhere, whatever it is that has seeped and crawled its way out is enough to make an ambulance attendant puke. Perhaps even 18 months ago it was possible to have some illusions. Not any more, not with suburban housewives practising in the rifle-range, not with cops

patrolling every subway train. America is on the brink of a disintegration unparalleled since the collapse of the Middle Ages. And, in this cardhouse world, its fall will almost certainly flip the rest of the planet over with it: global night and fire.

To specify in terms of the 'avant-garde', the 'youth revolt', or whatever. Politically the fiasco of the huge Whitehall demos in December (panavision version of the October 27 panto in London) not only spell out the futility of mass demonstrations in general but also that their futility couldn't solely be put down to their tactics. The New Left was reduced to zero. Even the pretense of an avant-garde subculture folded up, and really folded up, at much the same time. It wasn't even nihilistic or vapid any more. It just wasn't anything at all any more. Just another commodity, like lilacs or beans on toast. And we all know about the last days of the drug scene - the twilight of the garlanded TWA expense-account shamans, behaviourist luses and Calcutta airport hustlers trying to make the big time; the soft drugs gone about as soft as putty; then the speed scene, the looning and first killings... The West Coast now the kids all on speed and most everyone coming else smacked out just for a bit of peace...

A civilisation coming down the House of Usher and its slow motion fall sweeping all forms of experience into one - *'Because when the smack begins to flow / I really don't care any more / About all the tensions in this town / And all the politicians making crazy sounds / And everybody putting everybody else down / And all the dead bodies piled up around.'* This convergence is a *real* process and has expressed itself concretely in the *formation of the GHETTO*. The ghetto: an ambiguous and dialectical phenomenon *par excellence*. Negatively it stands for the dissolution of everything. It's no transitional experimental station or enclave: no Tangier, no Big Sur. It's pure hell. One window, one door, four walls. A dead end. The ghetto: the place you go when there's nothing else left to do, when there's nowhere else left to go. The prison without bars. The loony

bin so big no one can even see its there. Backrooms and endless night. Neurosis, Inertia. The abyss opens... the horror. the horror...

Yet, at the same time, dissidence becoming conscious, an organisational problem, a problem of actual city space. Isolated individuals gathering into a mob, a mob in a distinctly desperate and ugly mood, and gathering permanently, everyday, so it can't be busted that easily just for loitering. A state of mind claiming its own real space, its physical interplay and thus, oddly enough, the first step towards a revolutionary concept of the city, of life together: a Heaven built in Hell's despite. The ghettoisation of the young white dropout allowed BLACK MASK to grapple, concretely, with this upsurge of a qualitatively different revolt which has been rising clearly for at least 5 years now, a revolt without a name, 'youth revolt', 'dropout', 'new lumpen', what you will. At last this new revolt became tangible: the Lower East Side in early '68 was a potentially revolutionary COMMUNITY...

BLACK MASK - whose real axis was still essentially abstract and ethereal: a magazine - dissolved itself and a hard core of some 20 odd people reformed as the Lower East Side SDS chapter(!): UP AGAINST THE WALL MOTHERFUCKER... AND INTO THE TRASHCAN... The first thing they really got their teeth into was the Lower East Side Garbage Strike. As a metaphor the giant rat-infested heaps of rotting garbage were a godsend: now no one could, or would, shift the shit out of sight any more. Not only were they up against the wall - they were, quite literally, in the trashcan. From street to street they fired the spread-eagled mounds, drank and danced round them and when the firemen finally arrived (there was a big Firemen's Strike at the same time) climbed on to the tenement roofs (roofs, like sewers, major unpatrolled zones) and lobbed bricks, slates and anything else to hand down on them to cries of 'black-legs'. Unwashed and ragged, dancing, singing, hammering tomtoms, they ferried load after load of muck via the subway and dumped it in glossy uptown Rockefeller Plaza...