

“A Motherfucker is a Werewolf”: Gang Identity and Avant-Garde Rebellion in Up Against the Wall Motherfucker and the International Werewolf Conspiracy (1968–1970)

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Abstract: In late 1968, a collective from the Lower East Side of New York City started to distribute self-published pamphlets and magazines that outlined the operations of what Alan W. Moore has called an “art gang”. Based upon a redefinition of identity to serve a radical anti-capitalist purpose, the avant-garde group Up Against the Wall Motherfucker (UAWMF) and one of its splinter successors, the International Werewolf Conspiracy (IWWC), articulated an intuitive discourse about how to alter the existing conditions of the world. Against the nationalist notions of what it meant to be ‘American’, they mobilized a collage of images that included Native Americans, hippie aesthetics, and futurist-inspired militancy. Along with the development of the organizational concept of “affinity group”, UAWMF attempted to redefine the American identity as an individual and collective category, its hybrid cut-up resulting, at first, in the ‘motherfucker’ as an honor-bound member of a gang and, finally, as a monster represented by the figure of the werewolf. At first, the ‘motherfucker’ attempted to enact an open confrontation with the nation state, tying identity to a certain territory and a certain people, but after police crackdowns on gang activity led to the dissolution of UAWMF, some of its ex-members reformulated the confrontation in conspiratorial terms. The IWWC described its members as revolutionaries in disguise, coming to involve the body in the transformation of an identity whose key elements would be fundamentally opposed to those given by society. This essay will focus on the critiques implied in redefining the identity of an “American” within the framework of avant-garde rejection of society at large, tracing the different implications and limitations of creating a new identity wholly opposed to capitalism.

1. Introduction

A poem published anonymously under the name of “henry”, as mass demonstrations were surreptitiously called by New York radicals around 1968 (Neumann 2008, p. 216) read: “When the vast body moves thru battlefield streets/it

walks on many legs/hungry cells and angry bellys [sic] [...]/this body knows and aches, this body/will suffer to be chained no more!" ("henry/uaw-mf", 1968) The poem accompanied a collage of three flies encircled as if under a microscope, the biggest one sporting the talon of a bird of prey instead of a back leg (Figure 1).



Figure 1. "henry/uaw-mf", Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

The body of the community formed by the protest is a hybrid, monstrous one, its repulsive awakening a powerful image of how the collective associated with "henry", "uaw-mf" (Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, hereon UAWMF), wanted to be seen. By exploiting the disgust and sickness associated with common flies, the image and the text produce a distinct othering. It does not rely on the

conciliatory humanist tactics usually adopted by moderate factions of protests, which normally attempt to generate empathy with onlookers. Humanizing demands and appealing to reason are not among this group's concerns, which tend instead towards a confrontation that sets them entirely apart from whoever does not identify with monsters. This blockade against the empathy of the onlooker works as a firm division of "us" and "them", drawing a line between the body of the monster and the body of the human—its hybridity does not result in the Leviathan, a homogeneous social organism, but its opposite, with multiple "hungry cells and angry bellys" that have no unitary form.

UAWMF continually sought to reaffirm the line between "us" and "them", articulating their position through images of the American society's dregs. They connected as many semiotic elements as possible of what the group deemed America to be afraid, and, thus, what the American identity rejected as not belonging. The very first step in this process was, on one side, the practical considerations of forming an anti-capitalist, artistically inclined collective and, on the other, a question raised by one of the group's founders, Ben Morea, which can be formulated thusly: "what does it mean to be an *American radical*?" (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13) (emphasis mine). Based in New York City, the first step of the process meant theorizing and adopting organizational forms that would be apt not only to the urban environment but, specifically, to the neighborhood from which the group would operate. The second step meant crafting an identity that would distinguish it from the institutionally viable, even polite, manners of identification of most anti-capitalist organizations. Against the class-based nodal points of unions or the social-role-based ones of student bodies, UAWMF developed a vitalist solution that focused on the lived experience of members, on the transformation of their bodies into monstrous weapons of war, on the attachment of their selves to a particular time and place and to each other. Therefore, the very shape of their collective, which is to say their aesthetics, was channeled through the anarchist concept of the affinity group into an intimate relationship that politically is best described as a *gang*. While Alan W. Moore refers to "art gangs" as collectives in which a flow of resistant and protective cultural formations that shift shape in accordance to changes in artists' lives (Moore 2011, p. 3), he leaves out the criminal, violent element commonly associated with the term.¹ UAWMF not only parted from resistance to capitalism and protection of their

¹ He also avoids defining more exactly what an "art gang" would consist of. Throughout his book, he wields the concept in an aesthetic manner, more than a sociological one, to refer more to the rebellious image of the groups he overviews than the composition of their relationships. The purpose of this essay is to reintroduce, in a limited manner, said relationship between the aesthetic and the social, through the medium of the political. In the case of UAWMF, this is seen in their conception of the affinity group, which is mobilized as a *gang*, as the threat of a criminal social entity, in the neighborhood of the Lower East Side, New York.

own while attempting to “make a living”, they also continually performed symbolic and material violence upon capitalism and its identifying signs, conceiving of their position towards them as all-out war. Thus, UAWMF as such resists the “art” part of the “art gang” notion, inasmuch as they rejected entirely the institution of art while emphasizing the potential for an aesthetico-political engagement with capitalism in the very streets of New York as a gang. This position developed from the previous iteration of the group, called Black Mask, founded around 1966, which understood their practices as a move away from the institutions of art and the identity of the artist. They produced various texts and performances in the anarchist milieu that emerged in that decade, coming to organize protests, political spaces and programs to support the activist community (Grindon 2014, p. 4).

The magazine produced by Black Mask attempted, in general terms, to re-draw a link between art and politics, affirming an avant-garde concept for which the work of art became a tool to think about and modify present conditions of existence. Aesthetics was no longer a realm separate from political activity and, in fact, the practice of revolution would have to begin from the very body of the individual, from which follows the body of the community. The last number of the magazine produced by Black Mask, for instance, contained two texts that “argued for the inseparability of any kind of revolutionary practice or thought from embodied experience (Millner-Larsen 2014).

This is the launching point from which UAWMF articulated its own position in late 1967–early 1968. Settling in the Lower East Side of New York, one of the poorest communities in the city at the time, and from which the group evolved its various identifying signifiers, they came to be known as “the Motherfuckers”² and later on “the Family”. Art, in this sense, is key to the ideas at play in UAWMF’s discourse, and the images that they produced serve the purpose of *enacting* said ideas into the political field. Although their aesthetic is heterogeneous, there is a clear purpose to unify as many elements as possible into an identity that does not rely upon social status or professionalization (what Black Mask did for “artist”). Its practical implications meant establishing a tight-knit community of opposition to the sorts of selves produced by capitalism.

Pressure from the city authorities (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 46) meant, however, that UAWMF had to dissolve (McIntyre 2006) and, by 1969, they had to devise new approaches to the openness of an identity meant to link every monster of society. The group’s heterogeneity meant that various other sorts of identities emerged

² Throughout this essay, I sometimes use the singular form of “Motherfuckers” to signal the point at which the group identity is applied at an individual level. When “Motherfucker” is used, it means the individual member of the “Motherfuckers”.

(with subgroups that had names such as “Winos for Freedom” (Grindon 2014, p. 21), but one of the most aesthetically powerful mutations of the UAWMF identity was that of the International Werewolf Conspiracy (IWWC). Playing with the figure of union internationalism (IWW—Industrial Workers of the World), the IWWC developed a conspiratorial version of the Motherfucker (“A Motherfucker is a Werewolf!”) that no longer needed the territorial and communitarian associations or attachments that the group had previously upheld, opting instead for a Gothic, phantasmal image that synthesized presence and absence. It simply flipped the open monstrosity of the UAWMF community into the sinister and the uncanny, channeling the confrontation from the certainty of territorial gang warfare into the uncertainty of a conspiracy biding its time to strike.

The counter-cultural context in which UAWMF formed was rich in avant-garde and activist groups sourced in what is historiographically understood as the New Left. Among them, one of the most prominent was the Yippies, who, through the interpretations and analysis of media by figures such as Abbie Hoffman, added a spectacular dimension to their practices. The issue of the historical role and immense growth of the culture industry after the second World War was a common thread to the various movements of the 1960s in the Western hemisphere, whether more politically conventional, like the Students for a Democratic Society in the US, or more avant-garde in nature, like the Situationist International in France. In New York, the Yippies’ engagement with this issue led to an interventionist practice, in which “pseudo-events” were organized for the purpose of maximum media representation and reproduction (Joselit 2002, pp. 63–64). Inscribed under the general purpose of speaking truth to power while promoting its destruction, on one side, and revealing its repressive mechanisms to a mass public, on the other, the Yippies’ practices were nonetheless at constant odds with their revolutionary principles. As Joselit put it: “if the yippies change the message of the commercial by selling revolution instead of soap or automobiles, they nonetheless risk leaving the structure of the network TV intact.” (Joselit 2002, p. 67) It is possible to make an analogy here within the terms of the history of the left, as a tension between reform and revolution, the risk of being appropriated vs. the fulfillment of revolutionary appropriation. Connected through New York’s burgeoning radical network (Grindon 2014, p. 19), the Yippies and UAWMF collided over the role of the media, with the latter preferring an underground approach. In it, an international mirror of “straight” society was developed by counter-cultural movements, creating press organisms and networks that avoided the gaze of mainstream media. UAWMF openly rejected the Yippie strategy, beginning with the un-printable quality of the collective’s name, an act noted by Abbie Hoffman himself (Grindon 2014, p. 38). In this sense, the group chose to focus on revolutionary activity *from* the underground (instead of *on air*, the way the Yippies would have it) and “into the streets”, as their initial communiqué stated

(Hahne and Morea 2011, p. 86). Their mainstream media presence was null, while their underground media presence was full of activity, mostly thanks to their constant publications in *Rat Subterranean News*, as seen below. In this sense, this article follows Grindon (2014) in saying that even though their reach was limited, UAWMF did have an important impact on their context regarding radical activist social movements (Grindon 2014, p. 34), more widely affirming the necessary reflection for art history beyond the professional limits of the institutions of art.

This essay overviews the paths taken by UAWMF in this endeavor to constitute American radicalism through gang identity. First, it overviews its conceptions as a “warrior clan”, the organizational form of which attempts to appropriate the family structure by replacing each member’s surname with “Motherfucker” (hence their also becoming known as “The Family”). Finally, it overviews the group’s derivation into the IWWC’s monstrously-oriented forms of uncanny identification. The objective is to outline their engagement with the American identity in order to appropriate and re-produce it. Because revolution was something to be incarnated by every individual but supported in common, UAWMF’s approach was to question the fundamental associations of what it meant to be American as an everyday, communal practice. Their solution was, as is explained further on, to dislodge the settler-colonial meanings of the nationalist view on Americans’ relationship to nature. Instead, they offered a new anchor in the *radical* image of the Native American. However, their aesthetic move towards that new identity was mediated by primitivism, common to the avant-gardes of the 20th century, which meant a problematic play of appropriation towards said image. The form of this new identity as an everyday practice could not follow, of course, the patterns of the nation-state, nor could it be associated with any traditionally organized body politic or historical agent, a trait shared more generally with the New Left’s positioning against both camps of the Cold War. Thus, they rejected labor entities and historical figures like that of the proletariat as much as they rejected capitalism at large. The role of the gang is here central, which, through the concept of the affinity group, aided in the hollowing out of the meanings of “family”. The reformulated “Family”, characterized with primitivist notions and the potential for (gang) violence in the streets, gave the (American) identity of the Motherfucker a core form of association in practice. As is analyzed below, these issues are all reflected in the images and texts produced by the collective. The essay ends with the dissolution of the American radical into something else, when the group disbanded, with one of its founders, Ben Morea, going on to create the IWWC. Even though it also attempted to formulate a new identity as a response to new conditions for practice, the impossibility of the group’s continued operations in New York led to it simply withering away.

2. The Affinity Group as a Warrior Tribe

The basic concept for UAWMF's organization was that of the affinity group. Adapted by Morea and others from the anarchist milieu, it was defined by UAWMF as the

coming-together out of mutual need or desire: cohesive historical groups unite out of the share of necessities of the struggle for survival, while dreaming of the possibility of love. [. . .] The immediate need is for mutual desire to manifest itself as the organization for revolutionary struggle, for a new technological organization of resources, a new distribution of wealth, re-establishment of ecological principles [. . .], to create a whole new complex of free relations between people, that can satisfy all our complex needs for change & our consuming desire to be new & to be whole.³ (UAWMF 1968)

Aligned with a romantic and avant-garde view of the opposition between fragmentation and unity, the affinity group is here projected as a form that shifts with the needs of revolution, a tool in the overcoming of separation and the old. The revolutionary principle that guides this form of organization already draws a political line of "us" and "them", a line that was aestheticized by UAWMF as an identity rooted, first, on the loyalty of commitment to a group, second, to the group's belonging to a certain land, and lastly, on the opposition to fragmentation. The romanticism at the root of these three elements led Ben Morea to link their struggle to that of Native Americans. "Socially and politically", he stated, "I related to the Native American as the origin of the American identity" (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13), *rooting* the answer of what it meant to be an American *radical* in a historical oppression viewed from a romantic perspective. Through images such as the *Armed Love/Love Armed* pamphlet, which juxtaposes a 19th century portrait of Geronimo⁴ with a target and a skull and bones collage, along with a text that portrays the UAWMF community as one that "destroys middle-class Amerikan values as it strives to create life's totality"⁵ (Armed Love 1968), UAWMF developed a set of romanticized,

³ It is interesting to note how the main components of an affinity group, namely, members' deep knowledge of each other, a relatively small scale of operation, and the communization of both living and of objectives, somewhat mirror the components of the gang form.

⁴ Geronimo (1829–1909) was an Apache leader who led a thirty-year war against both Mexico and the US (1851–1885). He was infamous for his military achievements against forces deemed superior, earning him a fierce reputation that would endure even after his imprisonment in the US in 1887.

⁵ The deliberate misspelling of the country's name was a common refrain among US radicals of the 1960s, possibly popularized by the Yippies. Another version, used by black radicals, read "Amerikkka", which directly referenced the white supremacist organization, the KKK, as an integral component of the country's identity. In the case of the single "k" version, it represents a "Germanization" of the

*primitivist*⁶ associations for their organization (Figure 2). This inherently problematic approach not only ignores the plight of contemporary Native Americans within the settler-colonial dynamics of capitalism, it also conceptualizes the ‘Native American’ as a singular, totalizing category that ignores the politicization of distinct cultures themselves in their historical relationship to the US state(s). As Caitlin Casey put it,

Native Americans’ supposed authenticity and willingness to fight for their culture attracted the Motherfuckers, but the Motherfuckers’ understanding of actual Native Americans was simplistic and even cartoonish. In a 1968 interview, Morea asserted that American Indians had “a nonviolent community. ... There was little fighting between themselves.” When contradicted by the reporter—“But they had extensive tribal wars. American history verifies that”—Morea immediately changed the subject.⁷ (Casey 2017, p. 174)

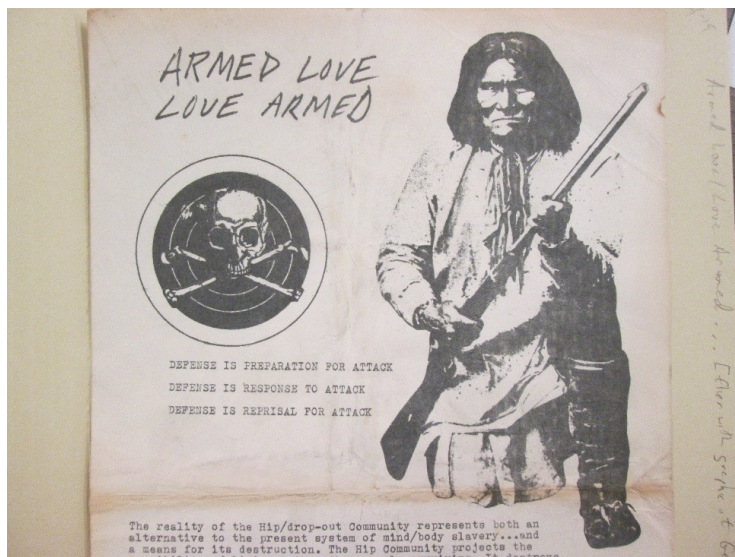


Figure 2. “Armed Love”, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

country’s name, easily (perhaps even lazily) associating it to Nazism. Given UAWMF’s continual characterization of the US as a fascist country, this interpretation is apt. (Vinen 2018, p. 32)

⁶ This is arguably the legacy of modernism and avant-garde movements, but also a generalized cultural position by the mid-twentieth century in the US and Europe.

⁷ Casey misses the opportunity to point this out, but it is significant that the interviewer insists on the point by means of the descriptor of “American history”. Morea’s evasion might have been related to this particular issue; regardless, the significance resides in an unwitting admittance that there is indeed a discursive struggle taking place over the meaning of “American” itself.

The whitewashed,⁸ Westernized version of Morea's 'Native American' continues the primitivist practices of the avant-garde, which enact a double movement: to reaffirm the civilization/barbarism divide in Enlightened anthropological terms, in which the civilized has a history and the primitive does not, and invert the value of such a divide, resulting in a positive vision of the primitive over the civilized. However, this positive vision only masks the conceptual burdens that it attempts to invert, in the sense that it ultimately denies autonomy to that which is being represented. UAWMF's 'Native American' follows this same pattern, erasing and unifying the complexities of many cultures into an image that lingers *out of history*, and which consequently emerges from *nature* instead of culture.

This is emphasized in the description of the historical projection that UAWMF make for the affinity group, which is intuitively born from nature (even natural law): "[it] is a pre-organization force, it represents the drive out of which organization is formed" (UAWMF 1968). It also has a pre-modern history: "in so-called 'primitive' unitary societies the affinity group attempts to balance a complexity so thorough that it approaches totality." (UAWMF 1968) The resulting identity rests upon a certain primitivist idealism that claims for itself a root that grows in the shadow of American history, an alternative path towards the *American* that rejects the liberal-democratic order and its purportedly false ways of making community. Instead of a liberal-institutional dichotomy between individuality and state, which creates a distant, self-interested citizen ("Amerikan values" (UAWMF 1968)), this alternative community offers a dialectical solution that allows individuality to flourish *in* the practice of mutual aid, of "mutual need and desire" (UAWMF 1968), creating relationships so close that the group becomes a *totality*. Furthermore, UAWMF pitches the community as one inherently at siege, philosophically staging their confrontation with capitalism as one between life and death, where life is an avant-garde force:

Those who seek to engage us in a debate between violence and non-violence are creating a false argument. The real struggle is between Life and Death. Establishment murder and passive acceptance of being murdered are both forms of death. Our non-violent Love and the violent Defense of our

⁸ Almost all of the 'core members' of the group were white, with Latinos and blacks following (Neumann 2008, p. 59), perhaps solely due to the group's positioning in the Lower East Side of New York. UAWMF's anti-racism depended on the overarching concept of the "Hip Community", of the Motherfucker coming to erase any and all traces of past identities, including those codified as racial. This romanticized identification fails, however, to account for the specificities of race relations within the group, as is common to attempts to replace racial categories with national ones, and which share the same romantic root of community and identity-building as UAWMF.

community are the true expressions of nature and life – destroying what is old and rotten to make way for what is new. (Armed Love 1968)

A manifesto entitled “From the old reality comes the new”, published in *Rat Subterranean News* in 1969, explores the anthropological concepts that UAWMF intuitively crafted as the basis of their identity (Figure 3). The drawings are a primitivist collage of US Native American designs, and they serve the purpose of aestheticizing each concept: In the family, “each being stands separately, but not alone”; the tribe encircles the familial body that makes its first letter as “those who realize a similar identity”; the community derives into a mythological snake that collects “families, communes and tribes within one local geographical space”; finally, the people is an abstract composition of circles within circles that encompass the entire cosmos—“the identity as a people”. This final evolution of an identity that is coextensive with the world is represented by the drawing of a horned figure that holds feathers in both hands and which stands right in the middle of the definition.

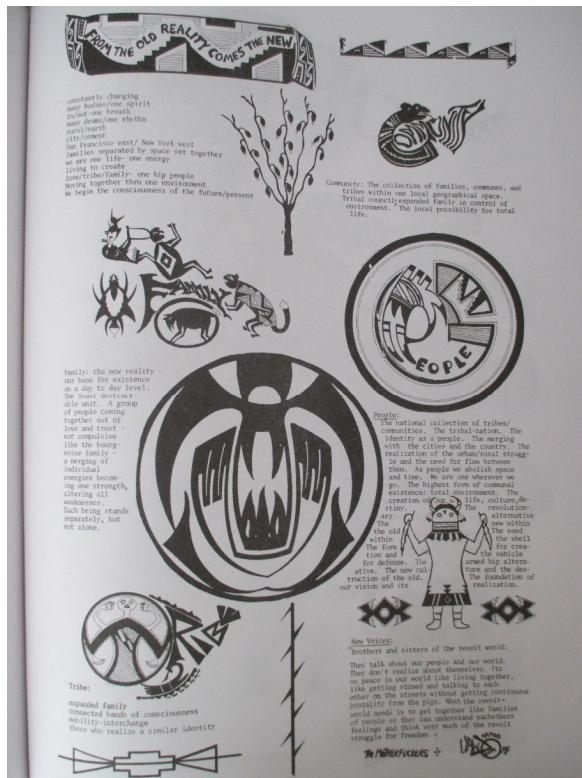


Figure 3. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, no. 1, March 14–21, Fales Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

The American identity that the group is attempting to hollow out is the Enlightened, Jeffersonian view of a pastoral, rural people that, with the advent of nationalism and ideas such as that of “Manifest Destiny”, veered towards the domination of nature. The tensions added by Romanticism positioned the “American” as an individualist whose relationship to nature was ambivalent, inasmuch as it was both spiritual and rational (Yoder 1973, p. 707). The wilderness as both idealization and space of expansion underlined the colonial aspects of this identity, under which Romantics like Emerson claimed to be *natives* (Yoder 1973, p. 708). UAWMF’s response, mediated by primitivism, is to give the wilderness a voice, to invert the American identity and conceive of it not as the product of an isolated white individual whose reign over nature is both sublime and material, but the product of a collective, harmonious relationship anchored on the *original* inhabitants of the country.

The horned figure was featured in another spread in *Rat* magazine, signaled as a warrior and paired with what appears to be a shaman (Figure 4). The image illustrates a quote from the book *Black Elk Speaks* (1932), a recompilation of oral accounts by an Oglala Lakota holy man, made by John G. Neihardt, a poet from Illinois. It depicts a ritual that mixes North and Mesoamerican iconography in a primitivist manner; the tree of life and the animals feed into a rainbow that fills both humans with color. The gesture intuitively and *naturally* unites them by means of a ritual in which the world is not made, controlled, or mastered but understood as the sheer potential for creativity—“‘Take this,’ he said. ‘It is the power to make live [sic] and it is yours.’ Now he had a bow in his hands. ‘Take this,’ he said. ‘it is the power to destroy, and it is yours.’” (*Rat* 1969, pp. 12–13) The dialectic of life and death becomes a dialectic of love and hatred as it traverses the ritual of familial union, transforming its role as an oppressive, economic entity into a political association for freedom that sees in destruction and creation a necessary duality for life. Aligned with the idea of self-defense and the siege of the “natural” community by capitalism, these people breed warriors: “I was attracted to the holy warrior”, said Ben Morea. “I coined the term ‘armed love’. Because you know we were theoretically part of the ‘love generation’, yet we were warriors.” (Kugelberg 2014, p. 13) The identity of the Motherfucker as a warrior, through images such as these, comes to include a bodily discipline that does not necessarily distinguish between the practice of love and the practice of war. Osha Neumann, who joined UAWMF in 1967, later said that Ben Morea would inscribe in the organization a code of honor forged in ‘the code of the street’ and struggles with the police. It was a code that would create in members an aggressive, exclusionary demand for loyalty that “knew no boundaries” (Neumann 2008, p. 56) and that equated ‘family’ dynamics with those of a gang. It is significant that, played out in the streets, these dynamics and the aesthetic ideals that informed them did follow the conceptions of “turf” and rivalry between groups frowned-upon by legality. According to Calhoun, the Motherfuckers struck a truce with a biker gang

that wanted to take over the Lower East Side by dividing the area into territories and arguing that “we represent the people already here” (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 34). Towards the state, the collective projected a menacing image of unity, a violent entity without qualms about confronting the police. In the neighborhood, their practice attempted to support mutual aid networks and a protective stance; the aesthetics are *armed*, the politics are *love*.



Figure 4. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, no. 18, September 10–23, Fales Archive, New York, 1969, p. 12–13. Used with permission.

Warfare framed as one between life and death, nature and capitalism, became one of the core elements of the UAWMF identity, and its conjunction was perhaps best represented by one of the pages in their (only) magazine (Figure 5), the first line of which read: “My utopia is an environment that works so well that we can run wild in it.” (UAWMF 1968) The phrase’s position suggests it being enunciated by the animal, one that not only speaks but is repressed by an environment from which it is now menacingly emerging. “Until our most fantastic demands are met, fantasy will be at war with society”, the text continues, describing fantasy as an ideological infection meant to spread amongst every current organization under capitalism as the final cycle of life (which begins in the street as “urban guerrilla warfare”, moves through the office, the home, and the government and, returning to the streets, “its victory is inevitable”—thus all cycles end with it). The text doubles as war propaganda in avant-garde fashion, declaring that “we are the vanguard of fantasy” and that “where we live is liberated territory in which fantasy moves/about freely at all hours of the day, from which it mounts/its attacks on occupied territory.” (UAWMF 1968) This vanguard disarticulates environments as they are, waging a war on a

realism implicitly defined as the lack of a future, a lack of alternatives, a civilizational ordering that allows no wildness and therefore no imagination. Animality is here weaponized while the community is equated with fantasy, suggesting that existence itself could become an affront to capitalist society by daring not only to run wild but to run free in a territory no longer under its control. Wilderness, then, is the source of the American radical's voice, opposed to the civilizational tone of the American identity as produced by capitalism. It is a voice that speaks directly by pulling down, so to speak, concepts like "vanguard" or "liberated territory" into the communicative urgency of the street. The wilderness it portrays is not the idealized nature of the Romantics, but the material fragmentation of the modern(ist) city. This language is meant to produce threat and confusion to whoever does not belong, while simultaneously affirming the sense of belonging of those who would use it, attached always, in this case, to the people of the Lower East Side.

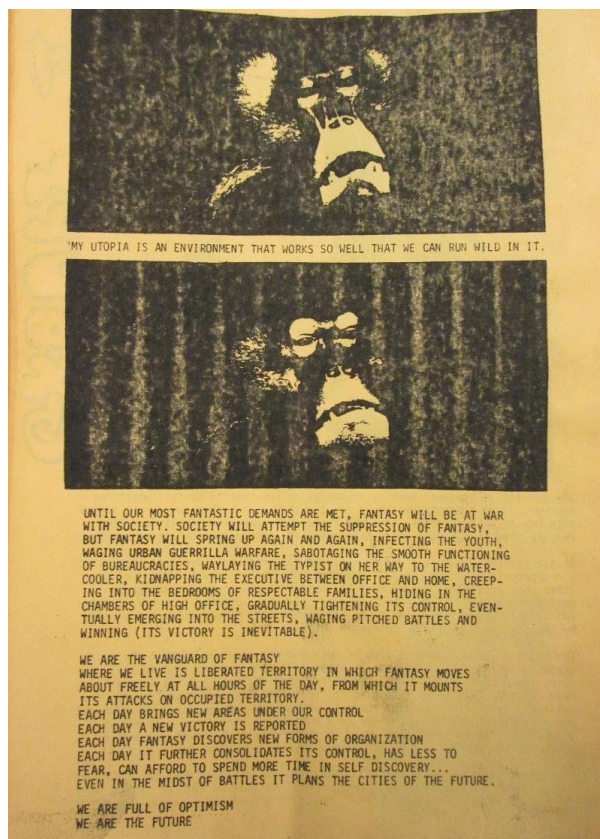


Figure 5. Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

3. Into the Streets

The affinity group as a wild warrior tribe, a gang attached to a land and a people, was mobilized by UAWMF in a way that amalgamated individuality and group identity, first and foremost through the 'Family name'. To be a Motherfucker required a warrior's individual training and skill, crucial to the metaphorical (and masculinist) gathering of resources that more concretely meant pillaging commodities in "enemy territory"; the family structure appropriated by UAWMF simultaneously worked like a network of fail-safes destined to, for example, raise money for the imprisoned, run 'free stores' in which all items (sometimes stolen, sometimes donated) were gifted away to whoever needed them, and to establish community sub-organizations that sought to give concreteness to the idea of a "liberated territory". In principle, every member fulfilled the same role, to contribute to the needs and desires of the group, and when context demanded it that role was modified by aesthetics into a political stance. In other words, the role is modified by sensory experiences (a police siren, a middle-class suit, etc.) into offensive/defensive codes that intertwine. This weaving together represents the idea that "perhaps the closest we ever came to a unifying purpose as a group (hindsight) was the often articulated and seldom completely defined attempt to achieve the Ultimate Synthesis of IMAGE & CONTENT." (J.S., 1992) In contrast to the false claims of capitalist society, in which image and content remain separate, UAWMF attempted to do away with the alienation said distance brings. Thus, the affinity group, via the Family, became a set of relations that rejected blood in the name of commitment, economic ties in the name of political ones, and private property in the name of communal property. By giving each member the same, familial surname, the community's identity became a boon (of belonging), a responsibility, and a representation in which image (the body of the member) deeply connects to content (the body of the community). Its function is analogical, and an act of one is an act of many and vice versa: Individual and collective cannot be separated, and the alienation integral to common (capitalist) American identity comes to an end. In its place, a *radical* American comes to be, emphasizing the federative qualities of *original* American societies, organic, and whole (Casey 2017, p. 173).⁹

Just as the regular economy is mobilized for war and with it the family unit, so the 'Family', in its formulation as affinity group, becomes part of an armed effort of self-defense in which the weaponized beings of the members represent the very first line of battle in a field that is first and foremost ideological. The image of the affinity group is emblematic (Figure 6). Not only is it openly sexual, it also presents an ambivalent three-directional fulfillment of desire. It invites the viewer to participate

⁹ From the point of view, of course, of primitivist idealization.

in a sexuality that has aesthetically broken through the various configurations of the family form of the 1960s, whether in its incipient stage of the heterosexual couple or its later development into a family unit that ought to reproduce itself. In this sense, the woman that stands comes to replace male verticality, at least in her casual demeanor as she glances downwards with a barely visible smile, evoking modernist paintings in which “deviated” sexualities are suggested by means of bodies and eyes that meet the spectator with the challenge of *decadence*. Nevertheless, the egalitarian discourse of the group clashed with their actual sexual practices, in which “the position of women [. . .] left much to be desired.” (G.A.N. 1969) Women “played a distinctly ancillary role” (Neumann 2008, p. 58): The objectification of the women in the image of the affinity group, much more prominent than that of the man, suggests this masculinist approach in which equality comes to be discursively displayed but not actually practiced. Against the group’s attempts to bridge politics and aesthetics, in the case of gender relations, it firmly remained in the aesthetic field, affirming both patriarchal and heteronormative positions. That is why the *image* of decadence is here more important than the actual practice of equal relationships: it *represents* a tear in the instrumental aspect of the family as an ideological factory that perpetuates itself, and it (merely) depicts community as fluid in accordance to each member’s needs and desires. This idea about the subverted family that nevertheless maintains patriarchal relationships is not only, in general terms, indicated by the primarily virile associations of the appropriated Native American images. The back of the only magazine produced by the collective (Figure 7) reproduces an image of an armed, white family; while not necessarily so, the presupposition of it being a family is confirmed by the classical referents of the family portrait in commercial photography. Even though the woman is at the very center of the frame, holding the assault rifle at a menacing angle, and the face of the man is lost in the xerox ink, this particular appropriation of the family portrait format does not really challenge the terms of the format itself. The children’s alignment (and in the case of the left one, attachment) with the woman as the man stands back simply re-conceptualizes traditional gender roles in which women are *naturally* bound to infants, and in which the father’s stance signals the protective aura of masculinity over the family. It is a literalized version of “love armed/armed love”, but instead of the principles of the affinity group it attempts to install in the family, it aesthetically reaffirms old gender dynamics. The decadence at which this image points is, like that of the affinity group, a virility-inclined incoherence of a life in which identities shift, as seen in the next image (Figure 8).



Figure 6. *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

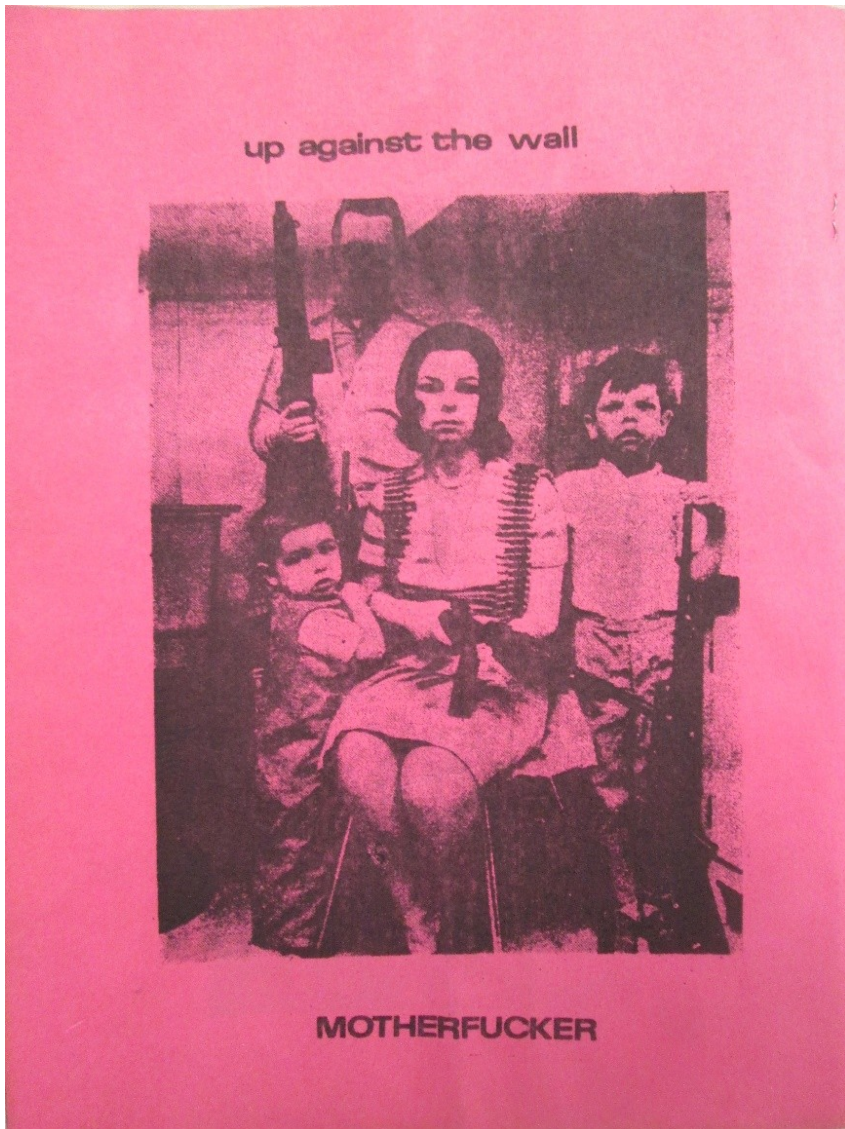


Figure 7. *Up Against the Wall Motherfucker*, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

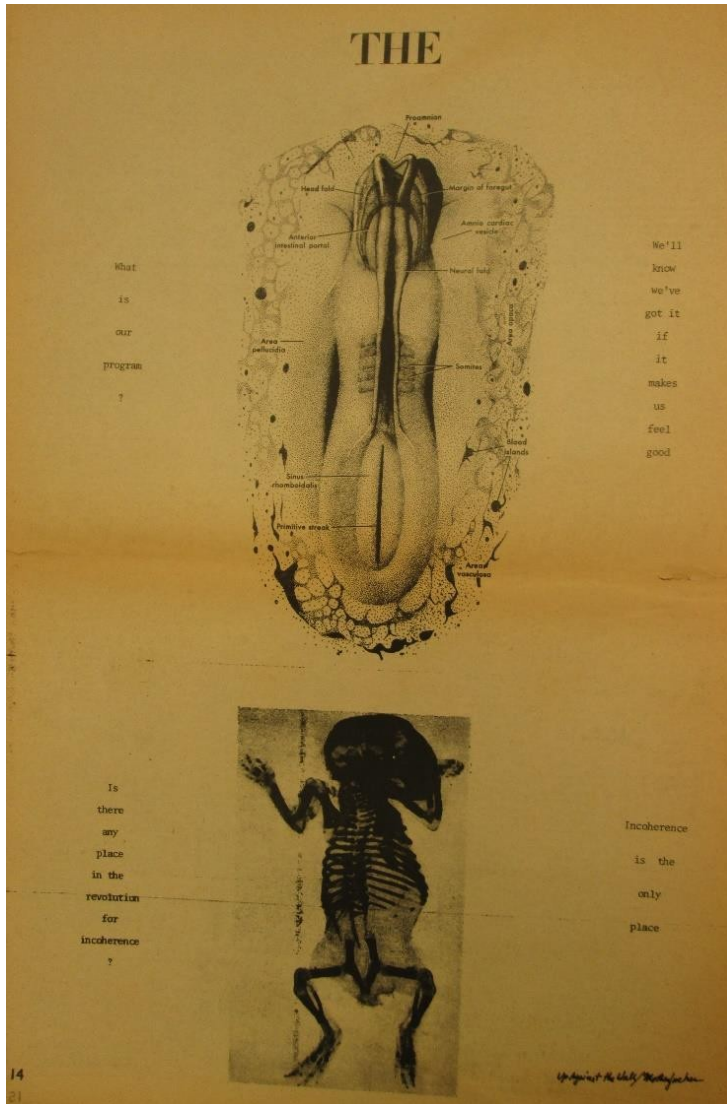


Figure 8. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 1, no. 17, September 20–October 3, Fales Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

Two very specific questions (“What is our program?” and “Is there any place in the revolution for incoherence?”) (UAWMF 1968) find their answers mediated by two images of life at its barest—the embryo and the X-ray of a newborn child. Between them, there is no narrative beyond a leap in cellular evolution, two steps of the same being that remain, visually at least, disconnected in spite of a well-charted course. The program, as the Yippies would have it, was either “rhetoric”

(Hoffman 1970, p. 137) or none, simply because the movement was made coherent in/by *media*: “we are living TV ads, movies.” (Hoffman 1970, p. 84) For UAWMF, in contrast, the program is purely intuitive, purely erotic, and “incoherence is the only place” revolution can begin. Progress becomes obsolete as a framework for politics and economics, favoring instead the decadence of eroticism, the decadence of a creativity that is simultaneously individualistic and communistic, untied from the media spectacle. Unlike the family, the Family as an affinity group is deeply incoherent, leading to a situation in which “except for our core group, it was never entirely clear who was and was not a Motherfucker. [. . .] If you spent enough time with us, and you wished to be a Motherfucker, and participated in our actions, you became part of the family.” (Neumann 2008, p. 58) The coherence of sexual repression, then, is set against the incoherence of sexual liberation, of shifting partnerships that in principle implied the ‘natural’ stability of the affinity group, which ultimately allows for a true exercise of democracy. Of course, the sexual liberation actually practiced by the group, against the suggestions of its egalitarian discourse, was male-dominated. The ambiguity of the image of the affinity group devolves into an image not of women *in* power but of women *as* power. The masculinist identity of the Motherfucker rejects every kind of structural demarcation, even if the name of ‘family’ is used; on one side, it is not something to be born into, just as it is something that is not strictly given, but something into which the person *becomes* by means of (virile) revolutionary action. Whatever the gender, to be a Motherfucker is to become a *man*, and to embrace the heteropatriarchal associations of a public liberty exercised thanks to the private survival of traditional gender roles.¹⁰ Even then, it is not entirely clear how exactly it is that one becomes a Motherfucker, which is why the monstrous nature of the community described by the poem and the insect image mentioned in the Introduction is perhaps the best (or only) resource to give better sense to its identity.

4. The International Werewolf Conspiracy

“The INTERNATIONAL WEREWOLF CONSPIRACY is the Hip Revolutionary Community in Action”, says a spread in *Rat*, adding that it is “insanely hungry for the chance to discover how to live, and rabid for the blood and guts of the honkies and pigs who infect everything they see with the plague of living death”

¹⁰ The critique made by G.A.N and Osha Neumann of the group’s actual sexual practices reveals that the group remained clearly within the confused confines of the counter-culture at large, in which sex became subsumed to an expression of rebellion easily co-optable by the (heterosexual) family form: open relationships, unstable partnerships (as a straightforward inversion of its repressed instance, adultery), and other relations that never lead to a community, preventing its political configuration from the start.

(*Rat* 1968). The spread (Figure 9), titled “The Myth Killer”, presents a series of elements associated with the idea of a revolutionary underground and a violence that could no longer be exerted within the terms of an open declaration of war and “occupied territories”. As the New York authorities cracked down on gang activity and protests in late 1968, the Motherfuckers were dispersed, their membership suffering considerably, and their various sub-organizations being abandoned over the first months of 1969. The pride of their impact in the Lower East Side and of having successfully constituted a revolutionary collective gave way to something far more ambiguous, focused more on absence than on presence. The militant, openly confrontational images of the UAWMF magazine gave way to dungeons, killers, images of death, and pop-cultural allusions to monstrosity. Where UAWMF was the result of a series of victories that can be traced all the way back to Black Mask’s activism since 1966, the IWWC was the result of defeat, of having to re-calibrate the terms of the collective as wider, plural, more expansive, and without a *physical* presence. The shadows from which the IWWC operated promoted a Gothic shift in self-representation, enacting a new identity anchored to haunting places in which it attempts to spread like a contagion.

“Wherever we are the Hip Community exists” (*Rat* 1968), the IWWC claims, suggesting both a displacement of the community and its opposite, its simultaneous existence and non-existence. Territory no longer plays the role it had for UAWMF as one of the classical keys of open warfare: “the place doesn’t matter”, and “we cannot allow the man to define us or our space” (*Rat* 1968). And yet, “we must create the hip revolutionary community” (*Rat* 1968), the text continues, opposing the portrayal of hippies in media and the participation of the culture industry in defining what the IWWC calls “Hip Revolution” (*Rat* 1968), undermining the strength with which the first claim is made. This ambiguity is faintly resolved by dissociating the collective from a specific place, turning territory into a psychedelic extension of a communal self: “WHAT’S REAL TO US IS SPACE TO SURVIVE” (*Rat* 1968). Territory, in this sense, becomes an aesthetic-political field instead of a purely politico-economic one, codified by the myth the collective now vows to kill. “We must develop our own standard of beauty” (*Rat* 1968), declares the monster, effecting the relativization implied in destroying the coherence, the unitary nature, of the myth that is “Bullshit Amerika”, who “has been defining what we do and who we are”, “everywhere we turn”. The spread ends with an appropriation of the most famous phrase in *The Communist Manifesto*,¹¹ proclaiming: “WEREWOLVES OF THE WORLD, JOIN THE FEAST” (*Rat* 1968). The idea of a “Bullshit Amerika” works here still as an ambiguous

¹¹ The first English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, approved by Friedrich Engels in 1888, and which has been kept for most re-editions of the text up until now, translates its final phrase as “Working Men of All Countries, Unite!” (Marx and Engels 2005, p. 258). However, a popularized version that changes

sign, suggesting both that there might be an authentic America and that there might be no possibility for reconciliation with the American identity. It would be the latter, however, that would be emphasized in later images.

WE DON'T DEGRADE OUR OWN STANDARDS OF BEAUTY

THE MYTH KILLER

The Hip Community exists because we have abandoned the institutions of this so-called society: home/family, school, job, army, etc. We are all runaways. Wherever we are the Hip Community exists: the street, the pad, the park, the subways-all night, the padabays, the coffee shops, Out's Spa - the place doesn't matter.

Considering the many levels and the tremendous ability of the hip community, in order to survive, and survival is what we are concerned with, there must be link ups. There must be focal points in each city where our community can base itself.

What's real to us is dinner in our stomachs
What's real to us is music we can dance to
What's real to us are all those things that are necessary for a living community, for a fighting community: karate classes, ball and defence funds, Anti-Pig Militia, communal meals, crash pads, communes . . .

WHAT'S REAL TO US IS SPACE TO SURVIVE.
What's real to us is to feel, to fuck, to dance, to sing, to take dope, to "turn up and down, shaggy haired, fang-toothed with everything hanging out.
To survive in America as a total human being is revolutionary.

Hip is living, really living, and to live in America IS A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY DEATH.

As the threat of our community grows repression becomes greater and the need for survival space becomes more urgent.

We can not allow the man to define us or our space. Forcibly we turn Hellshit America has been defining what we do and who we are. We have allowed the media, the record companies, the psychedelic merchandisers and the suburban imitators to tell us what the "Hip Revolution" is all about - NO MORE.

We must now launch a total assault on every form of repression that seeks to limit our existence and our possibilities. Centralizing our lives means creating total freedom BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.

We must create the hip revolutionary community We must destroy America because it has nothing to offer us but death.

ALL I KNOW IS KILL ME!
WANT SOME THAT-MASSIVE PAIN?

The rest of his childhood he spent in hiding... he was an unpopular kid.

The INTERNATIONAL WEREWOLF CONSPIRACY is the Hip Revolutionary Community in Action. Insanely hungry for the chance to discover how to live, and rabid for the blood and guts of the hankies and pigs who infect everything they see with the plague of living death.

WEREWOLVES OF THE WORLD, JOIN THE PARTY.

International Werewolf Conspiracy

Up Against The Wall/OPPRESSORS
Al Pacino: Hijo de Puta
Wendy: Conner
Boston: Freeman
Church of the New Reality (Southwest)
October: IS Movement
Pleaser: Ours
and You

Figure 9. *Rat Subterranean News*, n/v, n/n, November 15–28, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1968. Used with permission.

the phrasing to "Workers of the World, Unite!" became a common political slogan in English-speaking countries in the 20th century, which is the version the IWWC modified.

The theme of the monster consuming its enemy in a festive moment of revelry recurs in the imagery of the IWWC, and in one of its contributions to *Rat* magazine, the community, the “us”, is depicted as a hairy cyclopean giant, barbarous and “primitive” as it roasts some diminutive men (“them”) (Figure 10). “AMERIKAN CORPORATE CULTURE WEARING ‘HIP’ MASK PIMPING OUR MUSIC/CULTURE/LIFE FOR ITS PIGMEAT”, the text reads, “RIP AWAY AMERIKAN MASK/WE ARE ROASTING!” (*Rat* 1969). The monster represents here a possibility of action, the coalition of a multiplicity of communities that, originating in the wild, can come together into an enormous force that is able to destroy those who wish to recuperate them in the name of capitalism. Signed as Armed Love, IWWC, and UAWMF, it signals an organizational heterogeneity that did not necessarily mean different groups, and yet it works to make it seem like there are many at play. They all have the same objective: to destroy the “Amerikan mask” in a grotesque, disgusting dinner in which the monster adopts a relaxed pose as the flesh of the two impaled humans chars—to rip away the mask is to maim the body of society, to rip it in the most visceral sense of the word. “MEDIA/TRUTH/GUNS” becomes the basis for the roast, mirroring “MUSIC/CULTURE/LIFE” as their weaponized form, as the battlefields where the identity of the American (equated to Nazism by means of the swastika) is to be revealed as pure deceit, and therefore crushed. It is no longer possible to be an *American radical*, because America is fascism itself and, thus, the new identity cannot be attached to a specific place and people; it must be radically heterogeneous, monstrously incoherent, and truthfully ambiguous—not a mask but a multiple way of being. “We related to the idea of the werewolf” said Ben Morea, “meaning the human who changes to his true nature, which is animal” (Kugelberg 2014, p. 14).

The IWWC produced a manifesto, also signed by UAWMF, in which this multiple identity, this true nature, is described in simple terms: “A MOTHERFUCKER IS A WEREWOLF” (*Rat* 1969) (Figure 11). The drawn face of the werewolf irrupts the page as the phrase slithers from its bone-filled mouth; the pop Gothicism of the image, its messy textures, and its darkened photographs of a nude hairy man in tow subvert the clarity and wild colorfulness of the American radical. The warrior, the affinity group, war (politics), and aesthetics (collective and individual images of self) acquire new meanings in the face of a monstrous force; strength (physical and ‘spiritual’), violence, and the self as society’s Other come to the fore, while self-defense, territory, and tribal forms of understanding affinity subside into the background. These last three parts come to be replaced by elements born of new configurations, giving way to the menace of the de-territorialization implied in conspiracy, and an animal affinity.



Figure 10. *Rat Subterranean News*, vol. 2, n/n, August 12–26, Fales Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

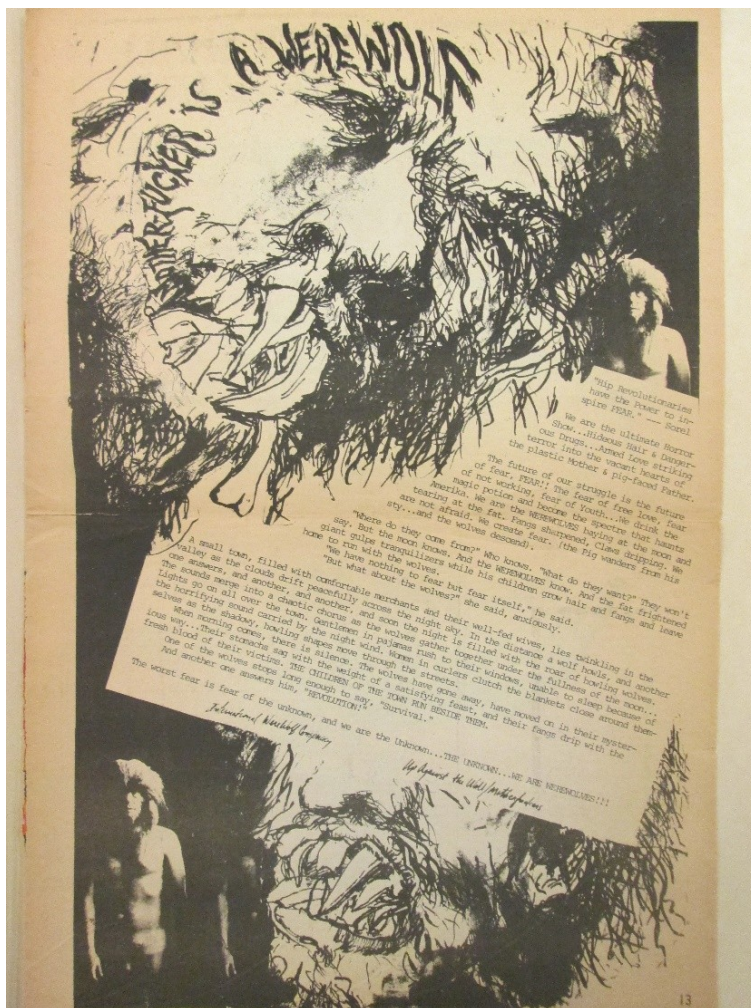


Figure 11. *Rat Subterranean News*, n/v, n/n, Tamiment and Robert Wagner Archive, New York, 1969. Used with permission.

The warrior's re-signification is perhaps the most radical, because (he) has left the 'holiness' of honor and the defense of an overt way of life behind, transforming into an 'unholy' beast whose allegiances lie with those who share a hidden life based on a supernatural relation with the environment. This supernatural relation is grounded upon the uncertainty of identifying the werewolf, at the core of which is a fundamental lack to be filled only by revolutionary practice. Werewolves cannot be identified in daylight, nor can they identify amongst themselves (after all, in the context of late 1968, to look like a hippie was to invite police harassment) except in the act of coming together, temporarily, within the frame of contingent

revolutionary action. The warrior provides a political definition of “us” and “them”, whereas his transformation into a beast dissolves said definition by hiding it within, by dis-articulating the aesthetics with which the enemy visualizes (or hears) him: “when morning comes, there is silence.” The affinity group disperses, becoming an inner configuration that constantly connects the monster’s individual, isolated existence to a whole that only comes to make sense under specific augurs that to those who are not ‘hip’ mean horror, but to those who are, mean “it is time” (for action, planning, etc.). The very vagueness of such a concept obscures the previous disciplinarity of UAWMF’s organization, leaving it open to a collectivity that relies on an infectious imaginary that can or cannot be realized.

As for war and aesthetics, they are brought together and transformed by means of the esoteric, turning them into the basic signifiers for mystery and violent death. The first victim of the manifesto is Georges Sorel, whose text is mangled; what is perhaps the original quote, in the context of how social sectors exert influence on governments, states that “the workers have no money but they have at their disposal a far more effective means of action—they can inspire fear [. . .].” (Sorel 1999, p. 60) The IWWC’s version, that “Hip Revolutionaries have the Power to inspire FEAR”, does away with the phrase’s wider context by integrating it in the word ‘Power’, and the replacement of the workers with ‘Hip Revolutionaries’ adds to it the focus previously developed by UAWMF regarding the ‘dregs of society’.¹² This appropriation of the Sorel quote reflects a way of reading that attempts to infect the text with the same lycanthropy that the ‘new’ Motherfucker carries in his or her blood, grasping at basic idea and re-identifying it with a new context. The environment also becomes infected, ravaging it from within, transforming it each night into a fantasy of total decline, as the short story that closes the manifesto shows. It reformulates “the night”, the “night wind”, and “distance” into signals of an uncertainty so deep that incomprehension is the only possible reaction for a mind that is neither ‘hip’ nor ‘revolutionary’, thus creating “fear”. This fantasy of a nature alive and willing captures the IWWC at the moment of dispersal of its members and the mythological articulation it needed to deploy in order to keep itself from falling apart. This political intent attempts to establish an indeterminacy that in the end, while having the same origin, contravenes the radically visible activism of UAWMF. By transferring the battle-lines to conspiratorial terms, it reflects Cold War paranoia and portrays the group as an empty signifier aesthetically charged enough to invite spectators/the non-hip to fill it with their pathological subjections to contemporary

¹² In Marxist terms, the equivalent would be “lumpenproletariat”. “We were always politically related to the IWW, but it was an old form of militancy based on the worker. We were from the non-worker generation, so to speak, but we liked the IWW.” (Kugelberg 2014, p. 14).

ideology, with their incomprehension generating uncertainty and fear—“Where do they come from? Who knows. ‘What do they want?’ They won’t say.” (Rat 1969) This new identity cannot be armed in the same way it was before. It cannot be ‘dressed for war’ like the holy warriors of the Family, nor can it be nurtured in the communality of the affinity group. Instead, as the image of the naked werewolf shows, it is an evolution of those ideas into a form that gives primacy to a nude body of aggression, a performance of “the Unknown” understood as a pervasive supernatural force deeply embedded in a relationship with nature configured around a myth. In this case, that myth is the Cold War narrative of apocalypse brought about by a revolutionary enemy within. Hence, the werewolf¹³ arises as a phantasmatic contradiction, killing myths by consuming them (“their stomachs sag with the weight of a satisfying feast”) while remaining a myth themselves. And a myth they would remain: by the end of 1969, both groups had withered away, and founders like Ben Morea had gone into hiding, away from New York.

5. Conclusion

Starting with the concept of the affinity group, UAWMF developed a critique of American identity through the appropriation of Native American imagery, attempting to distinguish itself from what it saw as the individualist, consumerist, egoistic, authoritarian bases of being American. It proposed an idiosyncratic anthropology that re-functionalized the family to serve a purpose other than social reproduction of capitalist relationships, promoting an image of free sexuality that enacted the principle of “coming together according to mutual Need and Desire”. By means of an avant-garde, revolutionary primitivism, UAWMF granted the Motherfucker a “warrior” element that was paired with the idea of “self-defense”, and which was also tied to the politics-by-other-means notion of attachment to a territory and a people, which doubled as the image of a gang. The “war of fantasy” waged by UAWMF was a conflict implicitly viewed as the retaliation of the state of nature against capitalism, of wildness and animality striking back to destroy civilization. Due to police action against gangs in general (Calhoun 2016, Chapter 17, para. 46),

¹³ Among the archived letters about the group available in the Tamiment and Wagner Archive, there is an interesting side-note by a former member solely identified as “Jonathan S.” In the letter, he suggests that the IWWC was increasingly focused on violence, beginning with the concept of the werewolf itself. “I remember a violent argument I had with Ben [Morea] about suing the “werewolf” designation, since this was also the chosen tag for post WW-II Nazi youth cells in Germany.” (J.S., 1994) Certainly, there was a “werewolf” plan launched in 1944 as an attempt to articulate a “resistance force” in German territory occupied by the Allies. It did not achieve much, but it did wage a media war by means of a propaganda radio station called “Radio Werewolf”. In an eerie parallel, it phantasmatically created a threat that held no actual power, but that did disturb the occupation forces with ghostly threats. (Fritz 2004).

that presence achieved by UAWMF was dispersed. By 1969 the group had shifted tactics and started identifying in new ways.¹⁴ One of the most significant was the IWWC, which gave the Motherfucker a series of new elements that did not need “a territory” or even “a people”: It only needed a conspiratorially-built system of signs whose revolutionary intent would cause fear in the enemy. The Motherfucker as a werewolf was split by the need to preserve an oppositional essence and destroy the “Amerikan mask” of fascism, but also to remain camouflaged—undetected in society until the right time (the “night” of revolution) would come to reveal itself as a monster all along. This self-presented monstrosity was, nevertheless, an important idea since the first few actions by the group, as evidenced by the “henry” poem and its accompanying image of gigantic flies.

It is important to emphasize that this process articulates the crossing between art, politics, and social movements, and that it is impossible to separate any of them from the group’s activities. Even though at times it seemed like solely a political project, aesthetics and images continuously played an important role in answering the question of what it was to *live* in opposition to capitalism. UAWMF was born from the artistic collectivity of Black Mask and remained, even in the last moments the IWWC—inextricably tied to aesthetic concepts that modified, time and again, the identity of the Motherfucker. Ultimately, however, such an identity relied on the primitivist erasure of contemporary Native Americans, and sustained patriarchal relations in the private practices of the group and heteronormative positions regarding group composition; in other words, it relied on the exclusion of Native American, feminist, and queer challenges to identity-building.

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¹⁴ As noted by Grindon, UAWMF splintered into various subgroups, including the IWWC. By that time, only Ben Morea and a few others like Jonathan Leake remained. After its short publication run, the IWWC also dispersed and Morea moved away from New York. He settled somewhere in New Mexico, where he remained for the next 40 years, only recently emerging again to give a few interviews to scholars and activists like Grindon, and to participate in the re-enactment of a few artworks he made before founding UAWMF.

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