

Detroit: A Progress Report

Harvey Ovshinsky

1966

After closing the office on Plum Street and selling my last "Sterilize LBJ" button, I walked downtown where the old Vanguard Theatre used to be. It provided a few minutes of indecision because two skin-flicks were playing and I had already seen one.

The last time I was in the Vanguard was two years ago. I remember seeing THE FIREBUGS there. THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH was good too, and e. e. Cummings' HE did a pretty neat job of stoning (all twenty members of) the audience.

As I paid my buck fifty and entered the plush lobby of the GEM theater, I immediately began missing something. There always used to be a bearded man walking back and forth in the lobby or the balcony. I think he was the manager but I also recall him working the lights during THE EGG. The only man with a beard now was pasted on a wall advertising DAYS OF SIN, NIGHTS OF NYMPHOMANIA. He was raping some chick with a glandular problem.

I survived the first film only because I was horny. It didn't matter that all the naked women were past forty and all the guys were gay. The fellow down the aisle from me wasn't a dirty old man, but he bared through it.

The seats had been upholstered with bright red stuff as was the carpeting. This made me sad because the money spent on all of it could have easily carried the VANGUARD people through another winter. They might have survived and carried it on, but there were more dirty old men and horny editors than people wanting to see good drama.

The VANGUARD didn't have the breasts and buttocks or the red carpeting. But there was a girl named Viola who was magnificent and an old man who played the judge in THE EGG. I think he's dead.

Despite all of this, I still dig Detroit. If Common Council wants to spend two billion dollars for an Olympic Stadium but can't afford the Vanguard, then Mel Ravitz is a fink and I won't vote for him. But all the people who just didn't give a damn are still not giving.

People come down to Plum Street and tell me that Detroit has needed something like this and it's about time we had an Old Town or Gaslight Square.

Bullshit.

God isn't dead, he just doesn't want to get involved. And neither did Detroit when the Vanguard sent out pleas for money. Hundreds of people each week spend fifty cents for underground buttons and clever bumperstickers. They'll pay three dollars a set to hear Chuck and Jonie Mitchell at the Wisdom Tooth on Plum Street. And after nite-capping at Darbys, people flock down to Plum to stare at the inner city and the hippies that will never come.

Detroit needs a lot of things, but an Olympic Stadium and Plum Street isn't the answer.

It needs a newspaper.

The Fifth Estate has been around for nearly a year. Our circulation has jumped to 5000 and we sell a lot of bumperstickers.

Our answer to the fourth estate is reporting what could be happening in Detroit if people knew where to find it.

It'll take more than a bi-weekly newspaper to fill the void in Detroit. There's an Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) that brings all the other 'counter newspapers' together and our office is expanding into a book store. It's our

hope to be the Detroit outlet for underground and radical newspapers, magazines and books. We'll still have the bumperstickers and the buttons, but we'll also sell posters and good records. THE MUSIC WORLD is dead so we will try to stock some of their discs. I'm hoping that the Fifth Estate book store doesn't suffer the same fate as the Vanguard, because of the book store goes, so goes the newspaper. Our new address is 923 Plum Street, second floor. The opening is September 24 and 25.

We have thirteen newsstands in the city and papers are selling at BOOK WORLD near the Wayne Campus, PAPERBACKS UNLIMITED on Woodward near Five Mile, Monrow Music on Livernois and Seven, BOB MARSHAL'S BOOKS in Ann Arbor and THE ARTIST'S WORKSHOP at John Lodge and Warren.

We'll be having more benefits like the Right-Wing Film Phantasthagoria, and we're working on bringing in Tim Leary in October, Plans for a literary magazine are beginning to develop and we've been approached to start a combination coffee-movie house, the purpose being to fill the coffeehouse gap, I guess. There's so many gaps in this city and so many ideas, but getting the money is something else.

fifth Estate

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