

Detroit Book Trip Holiday

Richard Centing

1968

Detroit is not a great city for bookstores like the large publishing centers of New York and Chicago. but there are interesting stores here with a wide variety of material. As the ads say, find their names in the Yellow Pages under "Book Dealers-Retail.

After you get bored with looking for reading material at Hudson's and Doubleday's, where the choices are limited to new books and classics, take some time to explore the many specialty and used book stores. If you want old comics, Afro-American books, Marxist literature, underground publications, or good old smut...they are available in Detroit, and a trip (many trips!) to some of the following stores will reward you with stimulating hours of browsing and gassing with bookmen who have personalities. Patience will produce the book for which you are looking.

Another benefit of off-beat book hunting is the crazy neighborhoods you visit, those dangerous, beautifully dilapidated, ethnic pockets and time-worn scenes which Urban Necessity will eradicate for banks and parking lots. It has always seemed more enjoyable to me to be able to walk out of a store with some great book and find a non-plastic, non-chain restaurant to relax in, crack the book, dig the people and swing free. The book is alive; the Electric Prophets have not killed it!

FANTASIA

Able-Man Book Shop (9324 Jos Campau, Hamtramck) is a weird place that sells old comic books, newspapers, magazines, dime novels, Big-Little books, movie stills, science fiction, old postcards and anything else that may fall out of the rubble of crumbling boxes. The annual "Detroit Triple Fan Fair" of comic art and science fiction is organized by this store and the collectors associated with the owner.

I love to wander through this shop and see the old mags like Educational Comics (E.C.s) *Weird Science-Fantasy* (1953), with beautiful drawings of space machines and futuristic cities that make the movie *2001* look like a cheap imitation. There are also a series of books that are reprinting famous comics like *The Spirit*, for those that cannot afford the highly-priced originals. It is possible to spend hundreds on old superhero comics like "Superman". Were there any black superheroes?

The impact of popular culture on the present age is enormous, and Able-Man's is one of the few places that might be regarded as a museum of the popular arts.

BLACK BOOKS

Black is gold, says a sign at Vaughn's Book Store (12123 Dexter), where Ed Vaughn and Polly Rawls run a shop specializing in Afro-American History. The store also functions as a center for black nationalist activities. Ed Vaughn organized the first Black Arts Convention in 1965.

Vaughn said he has never been hassled by anyone in his riot zone location, except the white police who smashed his store to pieces during the 1967 uprising.

Active in local politics, Vaughn is also President of the Black Star Co-op, a food store for those who cannot afford the local gougers. Besides books and periodicals by and about black people, the store has records and African clothes, jewelry, etc. An 11" x 14" painting of a Black Christ is also available.

SMUT

Hard core? I'll say. The only thing left to the imagination is a straight on shot of the interior of the anus (and we all know what that looks like, don't we). The centerspreads in these mags and books are Playmates with the legs wide open.

The Uptown Book Store (16541 Woodward, Highland Park) has the biggest selection of smut in Michigan, but it is hard to use "selection" for such a variety of mags with such a repetitious subject. The titles all begin to blur after a while, as do the bodies, and Sunny Nude Camper and Camper Nude and Sunny Camper Nude became indistinguishable. Perhaps the nudist code is right: "social nudism is, without a doubt, one of the major deterrents to lust".

The new nudity (the musical Hair, bralessness, Marat's bare buttocks) has come a long way since William Blake used to take tea nude in his garden.

Yet the sexual experience is almost impossible to portray in any medium, and photography (as strange as it seems) appears to be the least adequate. When I saw Warhol's movie "Kiss" it struck me how difficult it is to express the emotion shared by two people in any love exchange. His film was nothing but dozens of long shots of people kissing. Watching people kiss is boring.

Another large Smut store is Midtown Books (2515 Woodward), sharing the same stairs as the Silver Shack (2517 Woodward), which is the largest used book store in town. The owner of the Midtown says smut has been more widely available in the last three years than ever before.

THE LOST WORKER

Before I went over to Global Books, Inc., near Wayne State, I stopped at Johnny's Restaurant around the corner on Warren for one of their Greek salads. While I was eating, a hippie was wandering around begging for money for an order of french fries (shades of the Irish potato famine!). Begging by hippies is common in the East Village in New York, but rather unique in Detroit in its open panhandling form. What struck me as funny-absurd was that one of the men who refused him was a black man in worker's clothes reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. The black man put down the hippie with a disgusted look, and returned to his search for...what?: dignity, independence, employment, self-respect (shades of Black Emersonianism!). It seemed a nice vignette to think about on the walk over to Global Books.

Global Books Inc. (4835 Woodward, Suite 210, one flight up), is a socialist and Marxist bookstore. When I called up for the hours their employee said the line sounded tapped. So what? Everyone's line is tapped. This is the only place in town with a large collection of periodicals from foreign communist parties (many from Africa), publications from Hanoi. books of socialist publishers, the Moscow News, and translations of Russian writers from the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow.

The struggle for the worker is the forgotten revolution in America. Global Books has an old-fashioned atmosphere about it, like a picture of a workers' study hall set up during a miners strike in the '30s. In America in 1968, we see Resurrection City and the poor kicked out of Washington, D.C.! What happened to the labor movement?

I thought of Gorki Park in Moscow, which I visited in 1966, with the pictures on display of the workmen who built some new school; of a film I saw there of the Revolution of 1917 which impressed me with its footage that was nothing but a montage of thousands and thousands of identification papers taken from communists who died for

the Revolution, anonymous now, sad faces in a government photograph. They must have had a dream, those lost workmen.

UNDERGROUND

The best store for underground publications is now Mixed Media, (5704 Cass at Palmer), since the transfer of The Trans-Love Store to Ann Arbor. Modern rock music plays while you shop for records, posters and books on contemporary culture.

SAMARJIAN

Charles Samarjian, owner of Books Limited (4708 Cass at Forest), is a kind of institution in the Detroit book world. Highly opinionated and vocal, he may get nasty with one customer while playing his game, Who Is This Man?, with another. Says he hates the west side of Detroit. Turns off some people, but most find him a stimulating gadfly with an undisputed in-depth knowledge of books. He has a branch at 11610 Whittier.

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