

from another. I started the paper with that, and we came out for the next ten years without a single break, sometimes with great difficulty.

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BEN MOREA

Black Mask, The Family
(Up Against the Wall/Motherfucker)

I had been involved with jazz during my drug addiction days. I was a musician and every time I got out of jail I went back around the jazz world and got readdicted. I was in prison several times, but when I finally kicked for the last time, I was in jail and I got very sick, so they put me in the prison hospital, which was one ward in Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan. In that prison hospital (which was some transition between prison and hospital; it was not a prison atmosphere, but yet it was segregated from the rest of the hospital) there was an occupational therapist that befriended me, a woman. She, for some reason, sensed that I had more potential than I had been utilizing, so she took it upon herself to really try to set me in a different direction, really help me to educate myself, give me the tools. She was an art therapist so I started painting. Besides studying different art movements

and philosophies, I became aware of a lot of the European art movements. After leaving the prison hospital (and I had vowed that I wasn't going to go back to drugs), I stayed away from the jazz world and, being a creative person, sought art as my artistic outlet.

Then I got involved with an art group. The person that originated this group, his name was Aldo Tambellini. One of his motivations was to bring art into the vernacular. We used to talk about primitive art. Primitive art was a total part of the life. So, in other words, they made masks as part of their spiritual world and carved their spoons, which were utilitarian items, but they were really artfully done. Their houses were really artfully done. Art was a total part of your life and culture, but in the west art became removed from life, and so one of his ideas was that we should break from that. Aldo developed these multimedia shows; they were the first multimedia shows done in America. He was a painter and sculptor, so he starting painting on slides and he would project those slides so the paintings were projected on the wall. While it was projected, we had a black poet that participated with us, Calvin Hernton, we had a jazz musician playing, and we had a dancer on occasion (modern dance like in the Twyla Tharp tradition). I created these sound machines out of everyday items, like saws and grinders, but I made them into musical entities. I became more interested in Surrealism and Dada, and I started to see the need for the written and verbal attack on western culture, à la Surrealism and Dada. Ron Hahne, this other artist who was part of

Los Angeles Free Press, vol. 2, no. 34 (1965). "At the Fifth Estate I was doing the paper, and people would come down almost every night from the coffee house to visit me." —Art Kunkin

BLA

No. 9



Aldo's group, agreed with me—so him and I started *Black Mask*.

Ron and I agreed: not only did we want to follow the direction of Surrealism and Dada, but we made it even more political. He and I more or less removed ourselves from Aldo's multimedia shows. It wasn't a hostile break . . . it was just, we evolved. So Ron and I did *Black Mask*. He and I worked on the layout and the visual. I was really the main editor and writer, but Ron went over everything with me, gave me his opinions. He and I worked on the covers, and we thought of the cover being very important, almost like a painting. We saw the cover as an artform.

At that time we worked in his apartment. Obviously he had a kitchen table, so we used that and would [do] layout [on it]. First we would sketch an idea, or I would suggest something and he would either agree or disagree and we would go further in our discussion. We did everything together. I would never say, "This is what we're doing." And he would never say, "This is what we're doing." We were also interested in Constructivism, and really interested in all the art movements of the modern twentieth century. We saw the layout as being an important tool, equal to the words. So we continued that for ten issues.

JOHN SINCLAIR

*Work, Change, whe're,
Fifth Estate, Warren Forest Sun,
Ann Arbor Sun, Guerrilla*

Detroit was what you would call a cultural backwater of the United States at that time. Nothing was happening, and it had no connection to the outside world, everything was all hidebound. So you got your inspirations from reading an underground paper. Well, before the underground papers, the small poetry presses (that's where I came out of) had an underground system of communications and a lot of that was through mimeograph publications (but [there were] also people who could pay for printers). This was really outside the mainstream and it was just poetry and maybe a little bit of arts coverage on the edges, but it was the same paradigm as far as independent producers of literature banding together, sending each other their stuff. That's how you found out what they were doing in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, and Vancouver. Then when the papers sprang up, they were even more au courant because they had news of what people were doing in several areas against the war, against the draft, for the civil rights movement, all that kind of stuff.

Harvey Ovshinsky was a high school student when I met him. He had started

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The Paper, vol. 2, no. 2 (1967). The Spike Drivers perform at a benefit for Harvey Ovshinsky's *Fifth Estate* newspaper.

Opposing page: *Berkeley Barb*, vol. 5, no. 5 (1967). The power of the Underground Press Syndicate. This photo was part of a full-page reprint in the *Berkeley Barb* of *Fifth Estate*'s coverage of Detroit Twelfth Street riots in the summer of 1967. Caption reads: "Fifth Estate co-editors Ovshinsky & Werbe interview looters as they window-shop at a cleaners at the corner of Trumbull and Forest. Photo by C.T. Walker."

EMORY DOUGLAS

The Black Panther

They had a place called the Black House here in San Francisco where a lot of cultural activity used to go on. Eldridge Cleaver used to rent the upstairs and all the cultural stuff went on downstairs (Marvin X was living downstairs). It was an old Victorian house in [the] Fillmore [district] above Divisadero on Broderick Street off of Sutter. One evening, I went through there and there wasn't any activity going on, but Bobby [Seale] and Huey [Newton] were there. They usually used to come over there to go up and talk with Eldridge because he had worked at *Ramparts* and they knew of his writings and they were trying to recruit him into the [Black Panther] Party to be the editor of the newspaper. So that evening when I came there, Bobby and Huey and Eldridge were downstairs sitting at the table having a conversation. I came in and Bobby said, "I'm working on the newspaper." This was our first newspaper, and I saw him just take it out of the typewriter. He had typed it on a legal-sized sheet of paper, and he was using his markers to do the masthead of it. Because I had been going to City College and took up commercial art, I had a kind of sense of what he was doing. I had materials from City College so I told him I could help, I could go home and get some of my materials and come back and maybe he could use them. He said, "OK." So I walked home, picked up my materials—rub-off type and all that kind of stuff—and came back. It took me about an hour, and when I came back they was surprised that I came back. They said, "Well, you

seem to be committed. You've been coming around and the whole bit. I'm finished with this one but we're going to start our newspaper and we want you to work on the paper. You'll be the Revolutionary Artist for the paper."

The first paper was April 2, 1967, the one that Bobby laid out. It was two legal-sized sheets of paper, typed on front and back, and then they would staple it together. It was done on a Xerox machine. Bobby and them had access to copy machines through these community service programs that they worked in so they printed them like that. They would just hand them out, give them out to folks. The first issue was about the Denzil Dowell murder by the Richmond police.

ABE PECK

Seed, Rat Subterranean News

When I was in Chicago I was a very avid reader of *The Realist*, Paul Krassner's magazine. Krassner, to me, was kind of the godfather of the underground press [because of] his attitude about Dadaism and [his] ability to laser into psychedelic mindset issues of how to think about politics and about government (even though it [*The Realist*] was printed on white paper and Paul was older and all that stuff). Anyhow, Paul had gotten mugged and wrote something in *The Realist* that he was looking to get out of New York City, and it said he was looking for a farm. I was living with a couple people, you know, hanging out with several people, and I volunteered this guy's farm without asking him first, of course. I wrote a psychedelic letter. I had got a lot of colored pens, and I had a Rapidograph, and I wrote—and this all sounds very

The Black Panther, vol. 2, no. 2 (1968).