

Upagainstthewall Bill Graham!

Dan McCauslin

1968

NEW YORK (LNS)—Tuesday night, Oct. 22, the inmates of the Lower East Side, inspired by Julian Beck's Living Theater and led by Up Against the Wall Motherfucker, laid cultural claim to the Fillmore East. They needed the space, a motherfucker leaflet declared, "To survive, grow freaky, breathe, love, struggle and turn on." Graham said over his dead body, Julian Beck said right on and the rest of the script of that real, living theater can be summed up by this exchange:

GRAHAM: If you want free theater, you'll have to pay for it.

MOTHERFUCKER: We've paid for it with our lives!

AUDIENCE: Graham sucks money! Graham sucks money!

Graham wanted a program: he wanted Control. Threats scared him; they hurt his pride; but he finally agreed to a trial run—a community meeting to decide what would be done with the space every week.

Wednesday at eight, a happy, hairy horde was devouring free food in the lobby and Bill Graham, frowning like a camel, squatted on the Fillmore stage next to his conception of a community meeting—six plastic chairs behind a folding table with mikes, glasses and a pitcher of water. But H₂O was nobody's trip and when a representative from the Wine Group for Freedom began disassembling the PTA setup, Graham split for his office.

Mike cords tangled into the audience and motherfuckers told how Graham had barred their bands and mimeo. Then the musicians took over and bongos, flutes, harmonicas, saxophones and guitars sang over complaints about busts, pleas for the musicians to move to the back of the theater.

Out in the lobby a case of Cracker Jack and some lemonade got liberated. People walked around, pigs guarded the balconies and fire inspectors inspected. Like the scene the week before that inspired it, Wednesday night was chaotic.

Without authority, panels, leaders or programs, 500 of the most independent and alienated people in New York were trying to find the way to create a revolutionary community and free space to maintain it. Any plans they did make would be irrelevant if Graham did reassert his property rights and exclude them. They needed a place to organize a revolution and it looked like they needed a revolution to get the place.

A program committee was sent to negotiate with Graham. They waited outside his office while he delivered a tirade to the press. "You know what I have to do for the community. Not morals, what I have to do. ZILCH? At eight o'clock I opened the gates to the zoo and what happened? A constant boozier got up and... I will not b pushed. I will not crawl. No one will take anything. This is not a State theater and as tong as it belongs to me..." His features sag with fury and fatigue but he finally agrees to meet "representatives of the community" Thursday afternoon, again to put his OK on their program.

(Thursday's negotiations with Graham proved futile. He absolutely refused to allow the Lower East Side Community one free night a week.)

Out in the theater a loose plan evolved. There will be some music, some films. A map of the theater will be posted in the lobby and workshops can be planned and plotted there. Graham probably will get some kind of program and maybe his fiat will give the hip community a space.

The man's overreaction every time space is claimed shows how badly he wants it denied. The Fillmore is the third skirmish in the New York battle for space. The Yippies tried it first for a few hours in the main hall of Grand Central last spring and waves of cops waded into the crowd.

In the spring at Columbia people had a little more time. They were in some buildings over a week and the communes that developed in Math, Avery and Fayerweather were the positive and tangible developments in the revolt.

The Fillmore is desperately needed for the growth of a hip community in New York. There is now just no place for people to come together and ask each other about the shape of a new freedom.

fifth Estate

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