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The Newest Wave

"Here Comes The Fringe" by Steve Lawson, in *Horizon* (June 1978), 381 West Center Court, Marion, Ohio 43302.

A "Third Wave" of audacious and innovative British playwrights is beginning to make its mark on the English theater. These writers—Stephen Poliakoff, Barrie Keefe, Snoo Wilson, Steve Gooch—were spawned in small, makeshift theaters that have sprung up in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Sheffield, and Liverpool as well as in London.

"Young, committed, and astonishingly prolific," the Third Wave dramatists, says Lawson, literary manager of the Williamstown (Mass.) Theater Festival, "reject conventional drawing-room comedy and psychological drama in favor of using the stage as a forum for political and cultural issues" (e.g., the struggle for human dignity and fulfillment in an urban society still ruled by outmoded convention and notions of class). Their inspiration comes from the movies, rock music, and sick humor of today's pop culture.

Third Wave plays deal heavily in violence, alienation, and the distortion of man by his environment. Lawson says it is unlikely that the new playwrights would have flourished without the proliferation of English theaters dedicated to experimental works and without the new freedom bestowed by Parliament in 1968 when it abolished the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship.

Typical of the new works is Poliakoff's *Strawberry Fields*, which takes place almost entirely on a British highway and depicts two young right-wingers determined to restore Britain to a previous condition of purity. Whether such plays will win wide and lasting audience acceptance remains to be seen. But they have already made an impact, says Lawson, "by extending their drama beyond the fringe, beyond naturalism, beyond conventional plot lines and into new historical, political, and colloquial areas."

From Agitation to Auto-Destruction

"Art and Anarchism" by John A. Walker, in *Art and Artists* (May 1978), Hansom Books, P.O. Box 294, 2 & 4 Old Pye St., off Strutton Ground, Victoria St., London SW1P 2LR.

The anarchist of the popular imagination is a bomb-throwing madman bent on destroying authority through mindless terror. In fact, anarchism as a political philosophy (buttressed by a substantial literature) influenced late-19th-century European thought far more strongly than its main ideological rival, Marxism. The principal anarchist philosophers—William Godwin, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Max Stirner, and Prince Pëtr Kropotkin—believed in a self-governing society made

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up of small communes where power was decentralized and people would spurn the accumulation of private property.

Many important artists and art critics of the day—Gustave Courbet, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Proudhon, Paul Signac—endorsed the social objectives of anarchism, says art historian Walker. Bourgeois hostility and the declining status of the artist, after the demise of aristocratic patronage and the invention of photography, combined to convince many artists that the anarchist vision promised greater financial security while satisfying their own deep commitment to “individual autonomy, independence, and freedom.”

In anarchist theory, art played a number of roles, including agitation, propaganda, social criticism, and fund-raising. But despite their saturation with anarchist thought, neither the 19th-century impressionists and post-impressionists nor the 20th-century Dadaists truly married art and anarchist ideology.

Not until German artist Gustav Metzger invented “auto-destructive” art in the 1950s did anarchism come close to producing an authentic artistic statement. By spraying acid on stretched nylon, Metzger created art that destroyed itself in the very act of creation. In using violence creatively without producing a commodity for the marketplace, Walker argues, Metzger attained the elusive unity of art and politics that earlier anarchists had sought.

Feeding Culture May Imperil Art

“Centrality Without Philosophy: The Crisis In The Arts” by Joseph Wesley Zeigler, in *New York Affairs* (vol. 4, no. 4, 1978), New York University, Graduate School of Public Administration, 4 Washington Square North, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Soaring attendance figures for dance and symphony concerts and theater, opera, and museum events, combined with increased public funding, have produced a major change in the arts in America. Since 1966 the number of U.S. professional resident dance companies has grown from 10 to 70; the number of professional (nonprofit) theater ensembles has quadrupled (to 450). Appropriations by the states for the arts have risen from \$4 to \$70 million, and for fiscal year 1979 President Carter has budgeted \$150 million for the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts.

Despite, and because of, this massive growth, writes Zeigler, a consultant to arts institutions, the arts revolution has reached a turning point. While subsidized “expansion” and “decentralization” have spawned cultural hubs in Cincinnati, Milwaukee, Houston, Toledo, and many other cities, thinly dispersed federal funding has forced some arts groups like the Joffrey Ballet to curtail their programs. The New York City Ballet and Opera companies have come close to extinction, and at least one major cultural arena, New York’s City Center, has all but shut down—“a victim of its own expansion,” Ziegler writes.