

**ARTS & LETTERS**

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.

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Public funding may "breed culture," but it may also "imperil art." New York City, for example, recently launched a program to pay 300 artists \$10,000 each, plus other benefits, for one year's work. To many people, this sounds utopian; to others, like *New York Times* critic Hilton Kramer, it is an indiscriminating "welfare program for artists" that encourages mediocrity.

Will future government-assisted growth emphasize quantity or quality? Will public funding reward popularity or original talent? Better management alone will not solve the crisis in the arts, Zeigler warns, for the problem is above all one of leadership and philosophy. What are needed are visionary men and women—artists and managers—who want to inspire the best the arts have to offer.

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**OTHER NATIONS**


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*That Noisy Isle*

"Will There Always Be An England?" by William Haley, in *The American Scholar* (Summer 1978), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

England has fallen from its imperial heights as rapidly as any nation in history. Prime Minister James Callaghan's Labor Party government currently faces grave labor agitation and economic woes, friction with its European Common Market partners, and pressure to give autonomy to Scotland and Wales.

But, although Britain seems to be teetering on the brink of ruin, it will survive, says Haley, former director-general of the BBC and editor of *The Times* of London.

The English are still making important adjustments. They are renegotiating the social contract against a background of rapid social reform that "proved false to its promises and damaging in its effects," Haley writes. Nationalization of major industries and health services at the end of World War II resulted in bureaucratic waste and inefficiency.

Today, Britain experiences iconoclasm and dissent, exacerbated by the nation's rapid decline in world power. Authority is no longer trusted; the masses of people feel that the "professionals" have let them down. Big labor, "the most powerful organized force in the land," is frequently disruptive; the unions lack internal cohesion and cannot always control their own members.

But the questioning of established values is not new; Britain's adversary system of law and politics reflects a "national passion for argument," says Haley. What has changed is the scale of debate, thanks to the expanded role of press, radio, and television. Britain "is an isle full of noises." What is really happening, he suggests, is that "a healthy skeptical English democracy is seeking to establish new foundations."