

# The Spontaneous Orders of the Arts

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**Abstract:** Like other complex adaptive systems (CAS), any given work of art is complex, is a discovery process, makes use of rules, relies on the knowledge and insight of the artist, and evolved through feedback from others artists and the artist's audience. The same could be said of an artist's history of work, and of the arts as a system. More, if spontaneous orders require equality of status among agents, freedom of entry and exit, and rules of procedure, then it seems that the arts qualify as a social spontaneous order. With the specific example of literature, we also see that with the emergence of the literary spontaneous order, the foundations for the other liberal spontaneous orders – the free market and democracy in particular – are laid.

**Key Words:** literature, the arts, complex adaptive system (CAS), spontaneous order, self-organization, system, liberal, democracy, catallaxy

## I. Introduction

F. A. Hayek identifies complex, evolving, large-scale social networks as spontaneous orders. Such networks comprise both the larger social order – which he identifies as the extended order – as well as many other social orders embedded in the extended order, including the catallaxy (his preferred term for the free market economy), the moral order, the legal order (especially in the case of English common law), language, science, and money (which he considers to be “the least satisfactorily developed of all spontaneously grown formations” due to the extent of top-down interference (1991: 103)). To this incomplete list, which could include the World Wide Web and the philanthropic gift economy, I would add the artistic order – or, perhaps more accurately, the musical, literary, visual arts, etc. orders. In this paper I shall argue that each of the arts is itself a spontaneous order, and that we can come to a clearer understanding of art history, the origins of works of art, and how artists create if we understand the arts as such an order. Due to the fact that I am primarily trained in literary analysis, I shall focus on the literary spontaneous order, though many of the arguments I make about literature will be similar to those one could make about the other arts.

Here I shall use several terms: scale-free networks, spontaneous order, self-organizing (critical) systems, and complex adaptive systems (CAS). The last two terms are essentially interchangeable, while scale-free networks describe the architecture of the last three. When talking about self-organizing systems, we are talking about networks of elements with bonds that form and break, strengthen and weaken over time. These include biochemical systems (cells), cellular systems (organisms), neural systems (brains), and organismal systems (ecosystems). In “Predicting the Behavior of Techno-Social Systems,” Alessandro Vespignani observes:

A large body of work has shown that most real-world networks exhibit dynamic self-organization (that is, they become more complicated over time without the intervention of outside forces) and are statistically very heterogeneous; these characteristics are typically hallmarks of complex systems. (2009: 427)

Networks have nodes and edges. The “edges” are the system’s links or bonds, and have different strengths. They vary in kind from one self-organizing system to another. The “nodes” in complex adaptive social systems typically consist of humans, institutions, and products (broadly defined). Networks show non-random features, resulting in scale-free properties. More, according to Albert-László Barabási, “two mechanisms, growth and preferential attachment, are the underlying causes of scale-free networks” (2009: 412). More will be said later about both mechanisms.

## II. Artistic Production and Spontaneous Order

Spontaneous orders require equality of status among agents, freedom of entry and exit, and rules of procedure— elements which make them different from other complex adaptive systems. Indeed, spontaneous orders seem to be emergent from the CAS's they evolved from, taking on entirely new features. They are complex, discovery processes (they grow and diversify), use abstract rules rather than commands, are decentralized – meaning, they rely on “local knowledge and personal insight” (diZerega: 1), and achieve coordination through feedback. One could define the arts the same way. Any given work of art is complex, is a discovery process, makes use of rules, relies on the knowledge and insight of the artist, and evolved through feedback from others artists and the artist's audience. The same could be said of an artist's history of work, and of the arts as a system. There are, of course, works which are simple, repeat what is already known, follow a strict formula created by a central authority, which require no knowledge other than technical skill, require no insight to produce the work, and which are impervious to feedback – such as the formulae for propaganda, paint by number, and for pulp romance novels.

So art *qua* art (versus propaganda or kitsch), as we can see, can be defined in the same way as other spontaneous orders. Thus, the present system of art production is a spontaneous order. This has not always been the case, but it has certainly increasingly become the case in the West since the Renaissance, when the arts were increasingly decoupled from religion and royal patronage, both of which affected artistic production and content.

Spontaneous orders are made of individuals, and institutions which help coordinate individuals' actions within the order. In the catallaxy, the institutions include corporations and other businesses. In science, the institutions include universities, corporations, and government labs. In the arts, we have universities, publishing houses, production studios, bookstores, music stores, galleries, museums, theatres, T.V., cinemas, concerts, book clubs, and poetry readings, to name a few. Some of these are also institutions in other orders. Bookstores, for example, are in both the literature order and the catallaxy – which is to say, in their ecotone<sup>2</sup>. The presence of ecotonal institutions such as bookstores affect literary production, including literary content. Catallactic publishing houses and bookstores encourage the production of popular works. Of course, those popular works may be the works of Charles Dickens, whose mastery arose precisely because of the feedback he experienced by having his works serialized (see Cantor 2009). Less mainstream new works can find their homes in publishing houses subsidized by universities and government (in public universities, of course, those two overlap) and various institutions. Many

nonprofits exist precisely to support and promote the arts. Indeed, the presence of so many different outlets for art works – including the internet now – has allowed for a proliferation of art works, artists, and styles unlike the world has ever seen.

The idea that the arts are a spontaneous order is not original with me. Paul Cantor has produced a great deal of recent work based precisely on the assumption that literature is a spontaneous order. His work, based on the economics of Mises and Hayek, is intended as a corrective to the dominance of Marxist critiques of literary production. As such, I cannot recommend his work enough. Also, Russell Berman, though he does not use the term, essentially argues in *Fiction Sets you Free* that Western literature is a spontaneous order.<sup>3</sup>

Cantor argues that we need to understand the artist contrary to both how the Marxists view the artist, as a culture worker swept along by the great impersonal forces of history and society (12) whose works are “the product of some kind of collaborative effort in which the individuality of the artist dissolves in a web of socioeconomic relations” (16), and how the Romantics viewed the artist, as a solitary genius who creates works which are “a perfect unity, unified in conception in a single consciousness and unified in execution by a single hand in an unbroken act of sustained inspiration” whose “artistic integrity, and hence art can only be tainted by contact with the world of commerce” (89) or, indeed, by contact with (“interference” by) any other aspect of the world – two seemingly opposing world views that nevertheless end up agreeing in a “top-down” teleological world view. Cantor argues, rather, that the artist is an evolving person in an evolving world whose works evolve within the social artistic network. The artist may be a genius, but he is a genius within a historical and social network, creating works that “may betray evidence of contingency and even lack of advance planning in its formation and yet still maintain an overall aesthetic integrity,” influenced by feedback (including market feedback) and various forms of collaboration (89). The artist is embedded in various spontaneous orders, and those network connections contribute to the work’s creation, though the filtering, application of style, etc. are developed within the individual artist, and reflects his genius. That genius, though, is one of transformation of what is, and not the creation of works *ex nihilo*.<sup>4</sup>

Russell Berman argues that Western literature evolved into “autonomous literature,” a spontaneous order, due to its foundations in Biblical and ancient Greek literature – the agonal struggle between these world views that constitutes the founding paradox of Western culture. Out of this comes Western notions of individuality, which in turn give rise to artistic autonomy, liberal democracy, and the market economy – that is, it contributes to the emergence of other spontaneous social orders. Like in other orders, artistic

autonomy develops over time, gradually decoupling artistic production from religion and other social orders. As a result, “literary autonomy grew and responded to changing contexts, literary and otherwise, just as it drew on its contemporary material and language use” (xi), until it resulted in “the capacity of a text to resist reduction to an external reality, while aspiring to an internal formal coherence” (xi-xii).

The same can be said of the other artistic orders. Indeed, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we saw this become explicit as literature increasingly came to be about literature, paintings came to be about painting and increasingly abstract, music came to be about music in the investigations in atonal music and the 12-tone row, etc. My examples also point to the problems people can have with living in spontaneous orders. However, Berman observes, “The programmatic separation of literature from society – the autonomy of this form of imaginative language use – is precisely the path that allows literature to contribute to society through the elaboration of individuality” (xii). The more alienated literature becomes from society, the more it contributes to society. A specific example of this paradox is an article in the journal Psychological Science by Travis Proulx and Steven J. Heine, where they show evidence that reading absurdist literature leads readers to being able to recognize more complex patterns (2009). This paradox results in greater complexity – which is one of the main features of spontaneous orders. This separation is also necessary for spontaneous orders to emerge out of society, and it deeply benefits the members of society who participate in these orders. The catallaxy, being impersonal, feels alienating, but it also greatly benefits every member of society, increasing wealth for everyone, even if that wealth is necessarily unevenly distributed. The reason it feels alienating is that we evolved in a tribal setting, meaning we are adapted to having our behaviors regulated by known others rather than by unknown others and impersonal rules and forces. In the same way, we are more comfortable as a species chit-chatting and telling stories face-to-face, receiving immediate feedback, which lets us know whether or not we should retell the story in the future. However,

The written work is the foundation of literary autonomy. Once written down, the text achieves a certain stability and a greater capacity for distribution. It thereby escapes the conformist pressures of the homeostatic adjustment processes from performer-audience interaction that burden oral performances.  
(Berman: xvii)

With oral performance, we are also restricted to a limited number of retold stories, as the storytellers have to memorize the stories and perform them. While more personal, such a situation, reinforced by homeostatic feedback, limits creativity. With the advent of writing, we have the original, permanently

set, which allows storytellers the freedom to do variations that result in truly new stories: The Odyssey becomes The Aeneid becomes Don Quixote becomes James Joyce's Ulysses. But this is an evolutionary newness, not a radical newness, embodying the evolutionary view, which "is based on the insight that the result of the experimentation of many generations may embody more experience than any one man possesses" (Hayek 1978: 62). Literary evolution resembles Hayek's description of common law, where legal precedents (like literary works) become permanent markers of where changes were made in the system. Similarly, we see many minor precedents (minor works of literature), and a few major precedents (major works of literature) in a power law distribution – a rule necessarily found in all self-organizing systems.

In Reinventing the Sacred, Stuart Kauffman observes that "Like the biosphere, the "econosphere" is a self-consistently co-constructing whole, persistently evolving, with small and large extinctions of old ways of making a living" (150). The growth of the economic web "is self-amplifying, or autocatalytic" and "is positively correlated with economic diversity. The more diverse the economic web, the easier is the creation of still further novelty" (151). He argues that all robust self-organized critical systems are maximally creative, entering what he calls the "adjacent possible." By definition, what emerges in the adjacent possible is impossible to predict. Art and literature behave the same way, pushing into the adjacent possible, creating novel forms in an unpredictable fashion. Kauffman observes that this is a universal feature of self-organizing critical systems:

We seem to confront in technological evolution a ceaseless creativity, because the adjacent possible affords ever new niches, because present goods can be used for novel purposes and hence afford new economic niches, and because via novel functionalities, almost certainly seen and seized upon non-algorithmically, we invade the adjacent possible. This economic evolution, like that of the biosphere and of human culture and history, is part of the endless creativity in the universe. (175)

When robust – meaning bonds are made and broken according to the system's internal logic, and not by external forces – spontaneous orders are also maximally creative. As Frank Schweiter, *et al* observe in "Economic Networks: The New Challenges,"

If the loss of links pushes the network efficiency down and environmental volatility up past some critical level, the strongly homogeneous network structure will break down into a sparse, hierarchical structure, . . . and is accompanied with a breakdown in network efficiency. (423)

This does not mean systems don't influence each other in non-ecotonal ways. They certainly do. But a system overly regulated – or outright controlled – by some external entity will lose bonds, lose efficiency, and become sparse and hierarchical. This explains why strongly interventionist or outright socialist economies become inefficient and rigidly hierarchical. But if we allow links to form according to the internal logic of the system,

When deciding where to link, new nodes prefer to attach to the more connected nodes, a process known as preferential attachment. Thanks to growth and preferential attachment, a rich-gets-richer process is observed, which means that the highly connected nodes acquire more links than those that are less connected, leading to the natural emergence of a few highly connected hubs. (Barabási: 412 fig. 1)

We see this in economies, where this phenomenon is often lamented and considered a failure in the system, but we also see it in the arts. In fact, this goes a long way toward giving a natural explanation of canonization – certainly one that does not require a conspiracy of bourgeois European men, as too many Marxist, postcolonial, and feminist theorists are wont to claim. A writer, deciding what to read, prefers to read those works already widely read, including those that have influenced other works. By doing so, the writer enters into the “dialogue” of literature.

Since one has only so much time in life, it makes sense to preferentially read works tradition has recognized as valuable. But in doing so, the same works get read, creating similar influences, passing on similar traits. The Iliad and, as already observed, The Odyssey get reproduced over and over in Western literature. One could imagine creating a literary influence network where the nodes are authors and/or works and the edges are the degrees of influence. Such a network would be a scale-free network, meaning there is no rigid hierarchy, and no matter what scale of time or space one uses, the patterns of connections will look the same. If we were to look at a reading network for the present day in the U.S., we would see a similar pattern as what we would see if we viewed one for Western literature over the past 2000 years. Pick any 1 year, 10 year, 100 year, or 1000 year span, pick any place you wish, and the patterns will be similar. The only differences would be in what names went in what nodes. But the patterns would remain the same. A fractal geometry would emerge, with strange attractors forming among certain works that exhibit the most influence on future literature.

No matter what the temporal or spatial criteria used, the same elements and values create the edges: style(s), content, characters, plots, etc. Such things draw readers and, especially, literary writers back to the same works over and over. The more a work is read by writers, the more writers read that work, and

the more influence on literature that work has. Less read works do not of course lose readers (except literally, when readers die), even if they gain few if any more. The rich get richer, but the poor either stay the same or get richer slower, as fewer links are made, are less strong, and/or come slower. Relative to the already-highly-linked rich, however, the poor appear to be poorer, even if they are richer in absolute terms. For literary studies, this might suggest that paying attention to “minor” works could prove fruitful. The links among major works are easy to trace. The Odyssey to The Aeneid to Don Quixote to Joyce’s Ulysses links are obvious. But what of minor, or even mid-level works? Don Quixote is more widely read than the works of Chretien de Troyes or the various Romances which followed – but Cervantes’ masterpiece is impossible without these works. More, if you’ve read any of the Medieval Romances Cervantes lists in Don Quixote (particularly in Chapter VI), or even Chretien’s works, his novel is much funnier.

### III. Genes to Memes to Spontaneous Orders to Reason

F. A. Hayek observes that “custom and tradition stand *between* instinct and reason – logically, psychologically, temporally” (1991: 23). One’s thinking may be rational within one society’s customs and traditions, having evolved within them, but it may in fact be irrational in another. This is also true among spontaneous orders. (Neither claim denies there is a rationality that encompasses the plurality of rationalities – but only points out the fact that we have yet to discover what this rationality would be like, focusing as we have on only one or two kinds.) Different rationalities arise in different orders – rationalities which, when used appropriately, can act as “immanent criticism” wherein we recommend tinkering-improvements within the system (69). The moral order gives us moral reasoning; the literary order gives us literary criticism; the legal order gives us legal reasoning; the scientific order gives us scientific reasoning; the catallaxy gives us economic reasoning. Out of our emotional and instinctual foundations, within the emergence of our spontaneous orders, our various rationalities emerge, with which we can critique our social orders – but only properly, when the right reason is used. We encounter problems when we try to apply the rationality of one order to that of another, criticizing a system based on values and reasoning alien to that system. Many rightly consider criticizing science according to literary theories ridiculous (which does not prevent it from happening), but consider using scientific reasoning to critique the arts or the economy as perfectly sensible. This is the source of much “moral” criticism of the catallaxy, where moral reasoning, appropriate for the moral order but not the catallaxy, is used to critique it.

The relationship between rationality as immanent criticism and the various spontaneous social orders is something Hayek mostly gets right. However, Hayek is only partially correct when it comes to the relationship between our instincts and our various social orders. He says that beyond our biologically evolved instincts and our socially emergent reason is “cultural and moral evolution, evolution of the extended order, which is, on the one hand . . . , beyond instinct and often opposed to it, and which is, on the other hand . . . , incapable of being created or designed by reason” (21). He seems to understand our spontaneous social orders as beyond our instincts, uninfluenced by and no longer tethered to them. What seems to actually be the case, as we shall see, is that different orders emphasize or deemphasize different sets of instincts. Oppositions can and do arise because all too often human instincts occur in oppositional pairs, creating the kinds of paradoxes necessary for complex social behaviors to emerge. So how do we go from instincts to spontaneous orders to immanent criticism?

To grossly oversimplify things, the complex of genes, regulatory (epigenetic) patterns, and biochemical environment work together in complex interactions to create the different cell types and, in the brain, the complex neural-glial/astrocyte complex whose architecture gives rise to our instincts and behaviors. We should understand our instincts as strange attractors in the brain that affect adaptive behaviors, constraining those behaviors, but not actually causing those behaviors. Our instincts thus act like the rules of the sonnet – they are generative and creative, but not causative.

Another set of rules our brains create for us to follow involve the creation of memes. In The Evolving Self, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says memes emerge “When the human nervous system reacts to an experience” (120). Memes contain “behavioral instructions that are passed from one generation to the next, social artifacts, and value-laden symbols that glue together social systems” (Beck and Cowan 1996: 31). They are the bonds of their complex adaptive social system(s). Memes emerge, evolve, undergo natural selection and, as a consequence, may even go extinct. They are self-organizing, self-replicating strange attractors which contribute to the creation of the physical particulars, of the physical entities which make up the material portion of any given complex adaptive system.

A particular example will help. Among the many human instincts is the Westermarck effect, which makes us feel sexual repulsion toward those with whom we were raised in our first six years. The base meme is the incest taboo, which is a morals meme. We see variations on this taboo: prohibitions against marrying cousins in some cultures, but not in others. In the legal order, we find laws prohibiting incest – which also vary from place to place. This instinct also contributes to the content of a great deal of literature, some of the more

famous being Sophocles' Oedipus tyrannus, Euripides' Hippolytus, and Shakespeare's Hamlet, which imaginatively investigate the boundaries of the incest taboo. This is a particularly important aspect of literature because, "imaginative literature contributes to the long-term civilizing process by fostering a capacity to project alternatives to any given context" (Berman: xiii). Literature imaginatively investigates what-if scenarios in a safe play-space, allowing people to test their memetic boundaries, to see how things will turn out before such transformed memes are released into the real world to transform its appropriate social system(s) – in the case of the incest taboo, the moral and legal systems. Is falling in love with your stepson incest, as Hippolytus claims? We Americans frown on it morally, to be sure, but it is not illegal in the U.S. system for the two to marry. Thus, two different judgements from two different systems.

This suggests that complex adaptive social systems, including spontaneous orders, do not fully decouple from the instincts. Different orders may in part differ due to their being derived from one set of instincts rather than another, contributing to the evolution of the memes that emerge from those instincts. Cultural memes such as the practice of minor marriage in Southeast Asia are weakened and are likely destined for extinction precisely because they conflict with instincts like the Westermarck effect. To the extent that a meme both reinforces one or several instincts, without coming into conflict with any, and contributes to the creation of a more complex social order, ensuring the order's continued existence, that meme itself has an increased likelihood of survival.

Autonomous literature emerges out of a complex of instincts, including language, ritual, narrative, mimesis, and rhythm, and technologies such as writing (Berman points out the importance of alphabetic writing creating citizenship over ideographic writing creating "an exclusive readership caste" to the development of autonomous literature and, thus, to various spontaneous orders in the West (xvii-xviii)), paper and printing, and, more recently, the Internet. Literature emerges from and contributes to, but is separate from, the language spontaneous order. It has a similar relationship to language as the legal order has to the moral order. As moral behavior is first instinctual (all social animals behave ethically, according to their societies), giving rise to the moral order, and then to a legal order that gains partial autonomy from the moral order (as observed, above), the narrative and symbolic instincts give rise, with a wide enough repertoire of sounds, to the language order, which in turn gives rise to the literary order that gains partial autonomy from the language order. Experiments in the literary order contribute to the language order, but not all experiments take – which may be one definition of "failed literature." One difference that makes a difference is that, unlike the language and moral

orders, the literary and legal orders went through stages of small-group control that affect their ongoing reception. With the exception of the French, for a brief period in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, few have tried to impose order on any given language (and the experiment with a more “orderly” language, Esperanto, is also a failure, from an evolutionary perspective) – but censors of all stripes have attempted to impose order on literature. In both cases we can find examples of immanent criticism – in language, this ranges from grammar mavens to those pushing political correctness; in literature, it includes the whole panoply of literary theories and critics – but it is only the liberal spontaneous orders which face outright attacks. The enemies of the liberal arts, democracy, capitalism, and science are the same.

#### IV. The Liberal Arts are Liberal

It may seem redundant to say the liberal arts are liberal, except that too many forget the original meaning of the term in both cases. The liberal arts – including art, literature, philosophy, architecture, and music – were termed “liberal” precisely because they were supposed to liberate those who learned from and participated in them. Those educated in the liberal arts became of the same status through their learning, rather than through accidents of birth. Royal courts were full of such educated men. As education became increasingly accessible to – and accessed by – everyone, the conditions were created for the emergence of society as a spontaneous order and, at the same time, the emergence of society as a spontaneous order made it necessary that more people receive a liberal education. As diZerega, paraphrasing Hayek (1978: 30), says, “Emergent processes are the institutional expression of liberalism’s most general principles: respect for individuality and equality of status” (3). These emergent processes in turn encourage the expression of such principles. Further, the liberal arts contributed to the historical development of the kind of people who could then act as the foundations for society as a spontaneous rather than a controlled order. In particular, autonomous literature “contributes to the dynamism of the civilizational process . . . because literature – in the figure of the creative author, the paradigm of the fictional character, and the reader in front of the book – is the milieu in which creative and thoughtful individuals are nurtured” (Berman: 116). In fact, Berman argues that literary autonomy results in a social-historical development arc toward democracy and capitalism (xx), which is to say, the spontaneous order of literature provides the groundwork for other spontaneous orders to emerge. In the case of democracy, Berman observes that

literature is democratic because it calls forth a reader as an imaginative and thinking individual, invited into a process of

interpretive freedom and reflection and because the literary works themselves carry within them, constitutively and formally, reflections on the problem of imaginative individuality facing the social pressures that work against independence. Literature provides an aesthetic experience that contributes to the suppleness of mind of the democratic citizen, while also displaying the inherent tension in democracy between individual integrity and community pressure. (158)

If ethics involves the creation and maintenance of good social bonds, and if extensive bond-formation is necessary for spontaneous social orders to emerge, and if living well in such an order involves imagination, the capability for rational criticism, and ethical behavior, then the liberal arts are vital to the creation and maintenance of spontaneous social orders, as “it is through the aesthetic education of reading that the individual cultivates a capacity for imagination, for criticism, for alterative sensibilities and therefore for an amplified, not a lessened, ethical participation in the world. Literature therefore democratizes” (160). As do the other arts, for similar reasons.

In other words, if you want to undermine spontaneous social orders and turn them into controlled orders, first undermine literary autonomy – indeed, all the liberal arts, whether architecture or philosophy. Devalue the liberal arts, make students hate them, destroy the reading and viewing public and, before long, the very foundations of the spontaneous social order will be destroyed, and the extended order with it.

Thus, the health of the more recent spontaneous orders – democracy, the catallaxy, and even science – depend on the health of the liberal arts. And not just broadly. Specific elements within an order have different, though related, effects. Berman points out that literature in general affects the social order, but he also observes that specific genres affect it in different ways. He, again, gives the example of democracy:

Dramatic literature, in its convening of the community, tends toward decisive activism, while the novel, with its focus on individual interiority among a polyphony of characters and addressed to the private reader, tends toward a dispersion of power. The former resonates with democracy per se, the mobilized public, the latter with liberalism and the lives of individuals. (164)

Indeed, it is no accident that the modern European novel (which includes American novelists, both North and South, and increasingly peoples from non-Western cultures influenced by that tradition) arose at the same time the philosophy of liberalism was on the rise – or that the first such novel,

Cervantes' Don Quixote, specifically made fun of the medieval, royalist world view.

The interaction with other spontaneous social orders involves not just democracy, but the catallaxy as well. But "The economics of literature are . . . not to be found primarily in the manner in which this or that work portrays the capitalist, the worker, or the merchant, but rather in the shifting configurations of imagined abundance, the subjectivity of taste, and the imperative of judgement" (Berman: 186). This indeed points to the inner tension created by some works of literature, as many literary authors in their works take a specifically anti-market stance. On the one hand, the work as a work of autonomous literature influences the reader in the direction of supporting the catallaxy; on the other, the specific content cannot be said to be uninfluential on the reader's thinking. However, it seems that ideological content does indeed have little effect – or, when it is the aspect having the effect, the work loses status as literature.

A good example is Upton Sinclair's novel The Jungle, the content of which resulted in the creation of the Food and Drug Administration. This was hardly the effect Sinclair, an avowed Marxist, had hoped for, since it was the conditions for the workers he was concerned with. The Jungle is rarely if ever read as literature; it is far more often read as a cultural-historical artifact that had a political effect. Thus, it does not exist as autonomous literature. Indeed, any work that is overly topical will lose its status this way, being anchored in its own time and place, acting as a cultural-historical artifact, of little interest to anyone but historians. This is one way in which a work may fail to participate in the spontaneous order of autonomous literature. Equally problematic are cultural, New Historical, and Marxist approaches, which insist on viewing a work of art in its "particular historical moment," seeing it as mere "cultural work of cultural production," and thus as economic activity (Cantor: 16). Avoiding the pitfalls of topicality (while retaining its individuality by occurring in a particular time and place), autonomous literature avoids the problem of tearing the reader in two. Note that Sinclair's liberal readers ignored his anti-liberal message, managing to find instead a way to use it to try to improve the liberal order.

Autonomous literature, then, creates readers able to best participate in the market economy because the reader must choose among alternative interpretations of a text, and

That structure of individual choice is at the basis of the category of taste, which arises through literature but which allows the reader to participate in economic choice more broadly. Economic choice is, ultimately, a selection, based in part on taste, among

various options of consumption, unlike the political choice that entails a need for decisive action (Berman: 187) and therefore one solution. Indeed, those who call for “one choice,” to be given only by the government, are, as we can see here, no different from those who insist on one, true, “literalist” reading of the Bible – which really only ever means *their* interpretation. There is little difference between the literalist one-true-understanding of the Bible, or of any other text, and those who support the enforced creation of monopolies. Monopolies on meaning and monopolies held or favored by governments have the same intellectual origins. They are atavistic and unliberal. But autonomous literature, as a differentiated institution of Western society, contributes to the dissemination of capitalist behavior . . . because the basic categories that constitute literature – imagination, taste, and judgement – are themselves indispensable sources for capitalist psychology: the drive to imagine, coupled to a facility for evaluation. (Berman: 201)

This is how autonomous literature contributes to the creation of the conditions for the other spontaneous orders. The autonomous literary artist, the engaged citizen, and the innovative entrepreneur thus are of one imagination all compact (Berman: 188), a position also taken by Paul Cantor, who says the entrepreneur is “Like an artist, he is a visionary, a risk taker, and a pioneer, and if he is to be successful, he will generally be found running counter to the crowd, or at least ahead of it” (21). In the end, autonomous literature contributes to the development and maintenance of the liberal society precisely because it contributes to the creation of the kind of people able to prosper in spontaneous social orders:

Literature, as political, appeals to the reader to make a choice in order to decide on action, but it also disperses that action by allowing for the multiplicity of readers who make up the public. Literature, as economic, appeals to the reader to deliberate and select, but it also invokes the imaginative creativity that is constitutive of any dynamic economic enterprise. (Berman: 188)

Liberty – attained through the emergence of spontaneous social orders – is impossible without the liberal arts.

## V. Conclusion

I have made the argument that each of the arts, using literature as a particular example, constitute their own spontaneous orders. If spontaneous orders are emergent from complex adaptive social systems, the arts are likely to be one of the earliest spontaneous orders, emerging in Europe in the

Renaissance as the arts decoupled from the Catholic church and, perhaps having emerged for a few centuries in ancient Greece and lasting into the Roman Empire until subsumed under Catholic doctrine. If the latter is true, we can see just how fragile spontaneous orders are. When any system must be in the service of some other system, it cannot become a spontaneous order – or remain one for long.

Certainly I think one can make a strong case for the contemporary arts being spontaneous orders. There is no special class of artists – anyone can become an artist, broadly understood. Thus, there is freedom of entry and exit. More, the audience for the arts is much more broadly constituted now than ever. Widespread literacy makes fiction and poetry available to almost anyone, and radio, television, and film make songs and acted stories available to anyone at any time. The internet has only contributed to this, eliminating the need to go through gatekeepers – anyone can have a blog or web site containing their poetry, fiction, songs, performances, images, etc. Nevertheless, to be identified as a particular work of art, that work had to be produced by an artist following procedural rules – rules which evolved and are evolving through audience feedback.

Thus, it seems that the arts have become almost ideal examples of spontaneous orders. Many other spontaneous orders, including the economy, are in reality mixed types. Thus, the study of the arts as they are currently being practiced would benefit those studying spontaneous orders precisely because they are examples of the purest type. Having become spontaneous orders, the liberal arts have become even more liberal. Indeed, as I have argued along with Russell Berman, the arts are the very foundation of liberal inquiry. It seems unlikely liberalism as a world view can continue without its foundations – yet, the liberal arts remain the most neglected order for liberal theorists to investigate. But without the values Berman demonstrates the literary order, for example, to have, no other spontaneous order is even possible. As Percy Bysshe Shelley observed in “A Defense of Poetry,” “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” This is a fact that cannot and should not be ignored any longer in spontaneous order research.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Troy Camplin is an independent scholar and award-winning playwright living in Richardson, TX

<sup>2</sup> The idea of the ecotone as a borderland between spontaneous order ecosystems was developed by Richard Gunderman in “Orders and Borders in Philanthropy: The Fruitfulness of the Ecotone,” presented at the Second Conference on Emergent Order and Society, 2008. Gunderman argues that spontaneous order social systems have borders, where methods and values overlap. These borders,

like those of ecosystem ecotones (such as the jungle-savannah ecotone), are creative and dangerous places, where new species emerge and go extinct with great rapidity.

<sup>3</sup> In private correspondence, Berman in fact confirmed that this was, in fact, what he was arguing, and that he had been reading a great deal of Hayek at the time he was writing his book.

<sup>4</sup> As a poet, short story writer, and playwright myself, I can affirm that Cantor is right and the Romantics are wrong on this. More specifically, this myth they promulgated was primarily for self-promotion. As with all successful geniuses, they all worked very hard at their craft.

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