

The Theater of Tensions

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Introduction

When I first started writing plays, I filled my plays with as many characters as I thought they needed – twenty or thirty, if necessary. Then I joined the Dallas-Fort Worth Playwrights Alliance, and I was told by those who actually had direct theater experience that I should never write plays that require more than four to six actors, who could play multiple parts, so long as there was no overlap. After that, I began writing plays where one only needed four to six actors.

Why was I told to cut back on the number of required actors? There's no explicit artistic reason (other than, perhaps, a crowded stage, which no one mentioned). No, the reason was economic: actors are expensive and people pay the same ticket price whether two or twenty people perform. Thus, playwrights must take this economic point into consideration if they are going to write plays that will get produced. The economic order thus affects the very structure of plays and, thus, of the literary order itself. If one wants a work with more characters, one has to consider either avoiding overlaps, so actors can do double (or triple) duty, or whether or not one wants to write a screenplay instead. With a screenplay one increases the odds of having the money to pay actors, though one likely decreases the odds of having the work produced. I stated above that economics affects the number of actors, and thus characters, one can have, but the situation is more complex than that. The emergence of film in the artistic order affected theater greatly, including pulling away theatergoers, meaning less money for theater actors. Television made the situation even worse. Both new media have affected the structure of plays, encouraging playwrights to create works that would work on the stage only, and not on the big (or little) screen. No doubt this is why we ended up with many of the experiments of late Modernism, including the plays of Beckett. Who would watch a woman in a pile of sand for two hours in the cinema? Yet, people did (and do) show up to see such a performance on the stage.

Those who attend the theater could be considered a subculture, and thus of marginal interest. But in truth, they are no more (or less) a subculture than are those who prefer shopping at a high-end grocery store like Central Market over Kroger or Wal-Mart are a subculture. In the same way that everyone is (directly or indirectly) a grocery shopper and, as such, necessarily participate in the economic order, everyone is a consumer of stories, be they told in person, viewed on T.V. or in the cinema or at a theater, or read in a book, and, as such, necessarily participate in the literary (and, by extension, the artistic) order. We value stories, and will seek them out in a variety of forms. This is as true now as it was for our tribal ancestors – the only difference between the two being that we now in fact have many more options of how we get our stories, from T.V., cinema, online, theater, novels, short stories, or epic poems.

The reason I chose to investigate theaters over other organizations in the artistic order is that, while most other artistic organizations clearly overlap the economic and artistic orders – i.e., television, cinema, and book publishing – theater also overlaps the philanthropic order and (perhaps more strongly than many other artistic organizations – publically-funded museums excepted) the democratic order. As such, the tensions in theaters have many more dimensions than most other artistic organizations. One would think having to satisfy so many conflicting values would tear such organizations apart. This fact may in part explain why there are so few theaters, and why many are so short-lived. Yet the fact that many do survive suggests such a delicate balance is far from impossible. Thus, theaters should be of particular interest to anyone interested in how organizations must and can negotiate the various values of a variety of orders.

Theaters are organizations on the borderlands of several spontaneous orders. Economic considerations affect everything from the structure of the plays themselves to the ways in which the theaters are run. As one of the arts, theater enjoys considerable public support – placing it firmly in the philanthropic and democratic orders. There are a number of those who do not want mere economic considerations to dictate the success of theater as an art (and, thus, of theater as an institution). This means that “public” or “community” values necessarily come into play. Most people like to show support for the arts because they believe it has public value. At the same time, they want the content of the plays performed to represent those values.

All of this is part and parcel of what one should expect to find in a Hayekian spontaneous order. Indeed, Tyler Cowen argues that Hayekian spontaneous order decentralization “implies that we should have many decentralized sources for producing and evaluating ideas. This may or may not imply laissez-faire, depending on the institutional setting” (2006: 21). Various funding sources are bound to aid in the discovery process – in discovering new

playwrights, actors, directors, ways of running theaters, etc. Cowen argues that the way the American government indirectly funds arts is better than either direct funding (central planning) or pure laissez-faire. Whether or not the latter is true (as the arts were often funded at least in part through philanthropic means, though certainly theaters have historically proven their ability to survive in the market, as cinema and TV do now), Cowen certainly makes a strong case against direct funding only, and a not unreasonable case for indirect support through tax policy and the ability to create non-profit organizations.

An Institution on the Borderlands

Theaters exist in several overlapping spontaneous orders. As places where plays are performed by actors, they are clearly in the artistic order. In the United States, most if not all theaters are also nonprofit corporations. This puts them in the spontaneous orders of philanthropy, the market (insofar as theaters try to get people to pay), and the democratic order (because of their nonprofit status, and insofar as a given theater may receive government money). Since different emergent processes are coordinated by different rules biased towards different values (diZerega 1997), and contemporary theaters exist in at least four spontaneous orders at once, the tensions in theaters must be particularly strong. Is it possible for any theater to act in ways harmonious with the principles underlying all of these emergent orders? Can they coordinate them all? Do some theaters do so better than others? Why, and what are the consequences? What, if anything, can be done about improving coordination?

For this paper, I decided to interview those who run the local (Dallas, TX) theaters about the kinds of tensions among the competing values of each of the spontaneous orders in which they have to negotiate. One benefit of this approach was that I would be able to tap into the local knowledge held by those who are running or have run theaters in the Dallas area. As a result, the specific democratic orders under consideration are those of Dallas and nearby suburbs, Dallas County, Texas, and the United States, as well as the specific urban order of the Dallas metropolitan area. More, this paper will investigate how the values inherent in artistic production interact with market values, philanthropic values, and democratic values. Thus I will also be making use of work done by Hayek on the economic order as well as more recent work done on both philanthropy and democratic governance as spontaneous orders, focusing on the values promoted by them. But first, let us discuss theaters as organizations, then do a quick survey of the spontaneous orders in question, and the values promoted in each, before moving on to what I would consider to be preliminary data (due to the small number of respondents) that is

nevertheless suggestive of the situations theaters find themselves in, and how they deal with those situations.

The Theater Organization

While the interactions within a theater are complex, each theater itself has an organizational hierarchical structure, meaning it has top-down organization. The producer runs and likely owns the theater, which is more likely than not to be a nonprofit organization (a 501(c)3 in the U.S.). The producer may be the director as well, or there may be a separate director – who may or may not be the playwright. The producer may also be a playwright, but even if they are, most plays are written by external playwrights. The playwright in many cases may be asked if they want to direct the work or even act in it. Of course, once the play is accepted, one must find actors as well as a director. There are also likely to be stage hands, including lighting and sound specialists, and set designers. The producer may be all of these as well, depending on expertise and funding. There are also playwright/acting troupes who work with local theaters to present their work. These are all part of the theatrical order (a subset of the artistic order), but not necessarily part of theaters as organizations.

All of these complex and overlapping duties come about because of the financial limitations one finds in running a theater. You cannot always afford to hire who you need, so many things must be done yourself. These situations arise mostly in small, private theaters, while large public ones (such as the Wylie Theater, recently opened in Dallas) and university theaters (where there are plenty of students to teach on the job) do show the kinds of job specialization more typically found in the economy at large. In this sense, the small theaters more resemble small businesses, where the business owner has to be able to do everything, at least until the business gets big enough to be able to hire more people. Small theaters rarely get so large.

Indeed, theaters are not typical small businesses. If they were, we would have fewer of them. Few if any in the theater business are in it to make money. Most are nonprofits in no small part because, if they had to rely on sales for income, there would probably end up being only one or two theaters per city, and they would only perform shows like “The Lion King.” And we do indeed see few such theaters. Most theaters also rely on donations, both private and public, to keep their doors open. And many can only do so for a few years.

If theaters are constantly struggling, and rarely if ever get beyond the small company stage, then why do it? Money is an important, but secondary, influence on those who consider themselves to be working primarily in the artistic order, and this includes theater owners. Theater owners aren’t in it for

the money. They are in it for the art. They are in the artistic order first and foremost. Their fellow artists' acknowledgement of them as an artist of note, not money, is their most important systemic resource. In this sense, the arts resemble the scientific order, where scientific reputation is the coin of the realm. Both the arts and science are in the gift economy (which I will discuss in detail below), suggesting that reputation may be the systemic resource of all spontaneous orders in the gift economy. In the case of theater, the theater owner gains in reputation by putting on plays other artists consider to be of high artistic merit. This attracts the attention of actors and playwrights and other potential artistic staff. As a result, the quality of performances can go up, further improving reputation. Insofar as this fills seats, it also affects the economics of the theater. In this sense, the artistic order and the economic order may find themselves not in conflict, but in cooperation.

Theater owners love theater, and they want to keep it alive. It is the same motivation behind barely profitable art galleries and those who organize poetry readings without the thought of monetary compensation crossing their minds. However, to keep a theater open, you have to pay the mortgage, the water bill, the electricity bill, and whatever staff positions you cannot get volunteers for. And unless you are independently wealthy, you have to support yourself as well. Sometimes that requires getting a second job, since your theater cannot afford to pay you anything. Running a theater is often quite literally a labor of love. As diZerega (1997) notes, "I can participate in the market order without primarily seeking money, and be successful by my own standard. However, to the extent that I lose money, my ability to influence the market order fades." Being successful by their own standards is true of the attitude of most theater owners, but so is the problem of influencing the market order. Market demands, however, are often offset by donations and government grants – which push theaters into the philanthropic and democratic spontaneous orders, and the demands of those orders, as well. However, this fact only complicates matters, since the support from added orders also means the values of those orders must also now be taken into consideration as well.

Thus theaters exist in a realm of tensions among the demands of each spontaneous order. Although theater owners want to focus on the art, foreign values, such as those of the market and democracy, necessarily intrude. As I noted in the introduction, and will note too in the section on the democratic order, this has real consequences for the structure of plays and what will be performed. The values and demands of the other orders have to be dealt with, even while it is important that they not dominate the values and demands of the artistic values, because, as diZerega (1997) observes, "An organization which consistently fails in its tasks, and is perceived to do so, will not long survive, since a minimal success on its part is necessary for it to be a means for

its members to attain their own ends.” In the end, it is the artists involved who matter. Yes, the audience matters too, but without the artists, what can the audience come to see? And what else is the audience coming to see but the work of the artists?

The Artistic Order

The most obvious order theater is found in is that of the artistic order (Camplin 2010)¹. Artistic production can be considered to constitute a spontaneous order because, like other spontaneous orders, it requires equality of status among agents, freedom of entry and exit, rules of procedure, organizations that aid in coordination, and products (Camplin 2010). It is a tradition which stands between the instinct to create art and artistic reasoning – “logically, psychologically, and temporally” (Hayek 1988: 23). One can easily argue that there are a variety of artistic orders, including the literary, visual, and musical – but theater should be considered to be most fully in the artistic order as a whole, as each of these elements (music being the variable element) are present in theater productions. As such, one should expect theaters to emphasize artistic values, such as aesthetics, acceptance by the art world (Fenner 2005), artistic creativity, and the creation and sharing of the subjective world views created by the individual artists. Naturally many of these come into conflict with the values of the other orders. I may want to have a play with fifteen actors, but economic considerations intrude, and make me reimagine the piece with six.

Some may make the argument that what I am referring to as an artistic order is really just culture. However, according to Hayek, culture is essentially an unintended consequence of our various actions in our various spontaneous orders.

It does not make sense to apply the standards of conscious conduct to those unintended consequences of individual action which all the truly social represents, except by eliminating the unintended---which would mean eliminating all that we call culture. (Hayek 1973: 33)

Culture, in the sense of prevailing customs, is thus a result of human action, but not of human design, in much the same way as our spontaneous social orders. One can thus have an artistic order which is itself not the culture per se, but whose products participate in the culture, and which necessarily are founded in and on that culture. The other orders are similarly both founded on and contribute to the culture (Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 2000) – and thus, the spontaneous orders of any given civil society have a common cultural

foundation, to which they contribute. Culture contributes to the patterns which emerge in each spontaneous order, which interact to give rise to the complex civil society, which in turn affects the patterns which emerge in each spontaneous order, whose spillover effects in turn constitute the culture. To say this is a complex set of feedback loops is an understatement.

Like other spontaneous orders, the artistic order has rules, some of which are themselves “spontaneous,” others of which are made (Hayek 1973: 46). The rules of composition, of storytelling, etc. are “independent of purpose” within the order, and apply “to an unknown and indeterminable number of persons and instances” (1973: 50), resulting in an “abstract order, the particular or concrete content of which is not known or foreseen by anyone” (50). There is no single mind coordinating, say, the poets, to create a particular style or content at any given time – yet, patterns of form and content do emerge, in the form of common styles and movements (surrealism, magical realism, New Formalism, etc.). Yet journals, for example, act as organizations which help poets coordinate their actions. New Formalists can, for example, read and publish in *Measure*, which works to organize and coordinate their efforts as New Formalist poets. Further, the community of artists does not constitute a hierarchy (53), but is a scale-free network in which each pursues their own individual aims, but does so with collective benefits (the spillover effects of the arts are considerable, most obviously within the artistic order, but also for civil society) (55).

Like other spontaneous orders, the artistic order is made up of individuals and, as already noted above, organizations (Hayek 1973: 46). One could in fact argue that the art of theater is itself dependent upon the existence of theaters as organizations. Are we going to write plays without playhouses? Publishing houses allow poets and novelists to reach much broader audiences. Thus, for artists, “organization is the most powerful method of effective coordination because it enables us to adapt the resulting order much more fully to our wishes” than we could alone (1973: 46). Competing theaters, for example, create the conditions for a discovery process (Hayek 1984) in which plays are selected for performance. One theater may pass on your play, while another accepts it. The variety of tastes inherent in a variety of theaters and theater owners creates more opportunities for more playwrights, actors, directors, etc. than if there were but one theater (or a single source of funding, since the one who pays the piper calls the tune). This increased variety creates more opportunities for the audiences as well. Maximalists and minimalists can get what they want. And if most audience members like a certain kind of play, more playhouses will put on such plays, even as one playhouse may find success in a minority niche. The fact that the arts are a spontaneous order is what allows such patterns to emerge.

The Economic Order

Those familiar with the work of F.A. Hayek on spontaneous orders (1973; 1988) are familiar with his arguments regarding the nature of the economic order. This complex network structure is the most efficient way of communicating economic information (just as the network structure of the artistic order is the most efficient way of communicating artistic information). The values promoted by the economic order include efficiency, profitability, creativity, and entrepreneurial discovery. If “Efficiency in the economizing sense of employing minimum means to attain maximum ends” (diZerega 1989) is applied to theaters, we can see where problems can arise. Certainly lack of money forces theaters to economize, as already observed. Theaters have to pay the rent or mortgage, the water, sewage, electric and phone bills, just like every other organization, and these bills have to be paid before one can buy equipment, things for sets, and costumes, and pay actors, directors, producers, and stage hands. All of these costs are economizing, and this economizing affects the very structure and content of the plays, the things that can be done on stage, etc.

Now, as any formalist poet will tell you, the existence of arbitrary restrictions doesn't necessarily harm artistic production, and may in fact force one to be more creative and inventive than one would otherwise have been. Economic competition is a discovery procedure, meaning theaters are able to discover new ways of doing things precisely because they are competing economically. This is one of the main drivers of innovation in theaters. Good theater managers, who are able to put on shows people enjoy, and do so as economically and creatively as possible, are thus more often than not rewarded by the economic order. On the other hand, not all rules are good, and too many rules can stifle creativity. Also, it is hard to price plays, because the value of the play is not merely economic, but must take economics into consideration. The arts also has a strange phenomenon in which if you price too low, patrons think the work is not valuable, and you will thus lose patrons. On the other hand, if you want to attract more people, you want to keep prices low enough to attract more people, while covering costs.

Do the values promoted by the economic order stifle or benefit the arts? If artistic production alone is considered, there is little question that the American system, at least, is hardly stifling (Cowen 2006). This does not mean that theaters do not often struggle, as they certainly do. And if one concentrated on this or that theater or set of theaters, it would be easy to make the case that the economic order is primarily destructive of theaters. However, if we look at the theater sector as a whole, what we see is a dynamic,

evolutionary process at work, similar to that found in for-profit organizations, with many lasting a few seasons, far fewer theaters lasting up to a decade, and a tiny handful lasting many decades. This is known as a power law distribution, and such patterns are found in all self-organizing systems, and are in fact indicative of a healthy order. This is at least circumstantial evidence that the economic order is, as noted above, hardly stifling.

The Philanthropic Order

Many theaters in the United States are nonprofit organizations – specifically, 501(c)3's. This puts them firmly in the philanthropic order. “Philanthropy” of course means “love of mankind.” Eugene F. Miller (2004: 97) points out that the earliest known use of the term was in Aeschylus’s tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, and refers to the reason why Prometheus gave mankind the gifts of fire, the arts, and hope and philanthropy, as Frederick Turner observes, promotes goodness, truth, and beauty (2005: 32). This connection to the promotion of beauty means it should not be surprising that theaters are in the philanthropic order. Indeed, those who run theaters see themselves as trying to provide a gift of beauty to mankind, because of their love of both theater and people, the latter of whom they think will live better lives if they experience theater.

The U.S. government’s interest in promoting private philanthropy through the creation of 501(c)3’s allows such organizations to receive private donations and government grants. Those who receive government grants also find themselves in the democratic order, as the receipt of government money always comes with requirements and regulations. Private donations, of course, are not themselves without strings. It is not uncommon for people to donate money with something specific in mind. Maybe they want a theater to perform more Shakespeare, and they donate the money with the requirement that it be used for Shakespeare productions. This puts theater owners in the position of deciding whether or not they want to give up some of their creative direction to a wealthy donor. In other words, the fact that philanthropy is a gift economy (Turner 2005) does not mean the givers give without wanting something in return. Often the donor is still buying something, even if what they are buying is for many more people than just themselves. The results can be problematic, whether public or private, as Turner observes:

For many years, the National Endowment for the Arts, as I have argued, helped to freeze the high culture of our country in a contrarian and outdated modernist paradigm under the guise of promoting postmodernist experimentation; and it was abetted in this endeavor by

private foundations such as the Ford, the Guggenheim, and the Rockefeller. Artists who wanted to explore other directions, such as classical form in poetry, drawing, fiction, drama, and music, were effectively stifled and censored in the name of “diversity” and “experiment.” (2005: 43)

Certainly not everyone who gives money is coercive this way, but we should not be surprised when people give money to promote their narrow values under the guise of their being public values. Thus, the values of philanthropy seem to be similar to those of the democratic order in their being community values, though there is also an individualistic element in which ones are promoted by any given private philanthropy. Individual preference for particular public values, or the desire to make their own preferences into public values, seems to be central to private philanthropy. This is central to the reasons why people both give money as they do, and to why they start nonprofit organizations, such as theaters.²

The Democratic Order

Gus diZerega (1989) argues that democracy as a spontaneous order “is based upon consent over community values and practices” and that much democratic debate “appeals to our sense of justice, charity, or public values.” One of these public values is freedom of speech, which is simultaneously necessary for the democratic order (as well as other orders, especially the artistic order). Another is freedom of assembly, which is also necessary for theaters to exist. Further, Russell Berman notes the close relation between the literary and democratic orders when he argues that literature contributes to the very creation of the democratic order:

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)

And, he argues, this is especially true of theater:

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)

In this sense, theater is necessarily in the democratic order (and given the response of one who did not receive government money, but felt he was contributing to the democratic order, as we will see below, this is indeed likely felt by theater owners). Further, as Cowen observes, theaters are non-profits, whose tax exempt status acts as an indirect subsidy (2006: 31). Such a legal status means nonprofit theaters are necessarily in the democratic order. As noted in the previous section, precisely because theaters are philanthropic organizations, community values and practices are taken into consideration even if government money is not accepted, for the simple fact that if you do not take these values into consideration, you will fail to attract donations. More than that, the perception that theaters are part of the democratic/philanthropic order means that failing to take public values into consideration means you will also fail to attract an audience. To give a personal example of the latter phenomenon, I submitted a play to a theater in Ft. Worth, TX, which was turned down precisely because the people running the theater, though they said they loved the play, were concerned that it would upset the Ft. Worth audience (it was a satire titled “Hef’s Bunnies,” which alone should explain their concern). Thus, community values too affect what plays are performed. A play that is not performed cannot affect the literary order – and thus the democratic order (and philanthropic order) affects the literary/artistic order, including its content and its evolution.

Insofar as theaters receive public money, there are those in the community who will feel just in opposing the performance of plays that they may tolerate in the form of a film played at an art movie house. The more directly government funds theaters, the more likely we are to have people imposing their community values on the theater. As Tyler Cowen observes,

If some artworks make our society worse [as many from the time of Plato on have argued], the externalities argument suggests that we should discourage them. We could censor them or at least make them more costly through legal means. Once we accept the premise that the government should be involved in the arts directly, it is a short step from “good art, encourage,” to “bad art, discourage.” (2006: 29)

He then points out that this is a logical outcome of the fact that “The very case for direct subsidies requires that government can tell good art from bad with reasonable facility” (29), a statement that in fact masks the further problem that it is not “government,” but someone who works for a government organization that will have to make such decisions. Who do we want in charge of such decisions? A postmodern neo-Marxist? A libertarian literary Darwinist? A nihilistic absurdist? Even having a panel does not solve the problem, because you still have to make such decisions. Further, these people would then face considerable community pressure, driving them to make mostly conservative decisions because it causes the least trouble. Which is why the few areas in the arts that do receive direct government subsidies are safe, conservative performances (Cowen 2006: 28). Indeed, direct subsidies of “classic theater companies,” which may include various “Shakespeare in the Park” theaters are relatively uncontroversial because the classics are widely appreciated – or, at least, one can convince a large number of people that such performances should be preserved. Thus the inherent conservatism of government direct subsidies is less of a problem here – mostly because the classics have been depoliticized by time.

Mises, too, observed the effect democratic values have on plays: “In our day it is out of the question to parody on the stage the powers that be. No disrespectful reflection on labor unions, cooperatives, government-operated enterprises, budget deficits and other features of the welfare state is tolerated” (1954/2006: 34-5). Whether this is because of democratic values or because most playwrights, producers, and directors are left-leaning enough as to not want (or even think) to show disrespect toward “labor unions, cooperatives, government-operated enterprises, budget deficits and other features of the welfare state” – or, possibly, a feedback loop between the two that work to reinforce each other – is up for debate.

Results of the Interviews

My decision to conduct interviews was inspired by Emily Chamlee-Wright’s article on “Qualitative Methods and the Pursuit of Economic Understanding” (2010). I sent out e-mail requests for participation in the project, along with the questionnaires, to nineteen theaters, but received only three responses, from Jac Adler at Theater Three, Brad McEntire at Audacity Theater Lab, and Tim Shane at Dallas Hub Theater. This hardly makes for a scientific sample, but since I received similar answers, it likely does at least give a sense of what are perceived to be the values theater owners have to take into consideration when running a theater. I asked questions regarding business model, sources of funding/income, corporate structure, and the values they

saw the theater serving/promoting. The business models of Theater Three and Dallas Hub Theater were pretty standard for theaters, with a pair of stages (most have one or two) able to house one or two productions a week. Theater Three also has a board of directors that serves without compensation, as is typical of 501(c)3's. Audacity Theater Lab is more unusual. They describe themselves as a collective where all artists are members in equal standing, though "For purposes of dealing with other theatres and the press we have an unofficial 'Artistic Director' and a 'Managing Director.'" All three theaters received the majority of their income from ticket sales (70-80%), with around 20% from private and corporate donations. Only Theater Three received any government funding, which amounted to only 5% of their budget. This is consistent with the overall national trend: "In the United States, direct government support accounts for no more than 5 percent of the total budget of nonprofit arts organizations" (Cowen 2006: 32). Nevertheless, although the Hub Theater never received any government money, Tim Shane said he thought of his theater as serving/promoting democratic values, whether it be the local values of Dallas, Texas values (which Shane identified as "pride" and "pioneering"), or American values. Brad McEntire argued that theater was "a public art form," and thus necessarily served community values. This suggests that democratic values are not necessarily associated with institutional government per se, but rather with local community values. The pressure of these values exists whether or not there are democratic institutions adding to the pressure, though there is little doubt that those who wish to promote their democratic values are more able to do so through such institutions (that being one of the purposes of institutions in a spontaneous order, to help people achieve their goals and realize their values).

All three theaters also gave similar answers regarding the values promoted in other spontaneous orders. For the artistic order, all three argued that their theaters quite literally gave artists a stage on which to demonstrate their artistic talents. Tim Shane summed up the artistic goals of all three theaters: "Supporting new work, experimenting with old work, being an artistic incubator, creating the "artrepreneur", assisting with personal growth in addition to artistic growth. Bridging the gap of 20th century and 21st century artistic expectations." For the economic order, Shane identified efficiency or, "being able to do so much with nothing or very little," but also, along with McEntire, stressed entrepreneurship. Adler, on the other hand, emphasized externalities, how Theater Three brought in business for local restaurants, and how paying their artists encouraged them to stay local and become "citizen artists," which of course contributes, again, to the democratic order. Dallas also has a dinner theater, Pocket Sandwich Theater, that is able to do a great deal (as is obvious from the sets and the fact that they have plays with more than 4-6

actors) because the profits from the food subsidize the theater. Most theaters do not take this approach, though, sticking with theater as the single source of income. Finally, Shane argued that the combinations of resourcefulness, innovation, and collaboration were what allowed him to negotiate among the diverse values promoted by the arts, the economy, philanthropy, and the community to bring new plays to the stage. As he said, “it never works the same way twice,” so you have to remain open to possible solutions.

It is unfortunate that I could not get more participation in the time I had to get the interviews done in, but I nevertheless believe that the information I was able to get from the interviews I did receive was able to give some insight into the issues facing theaters as institutions existing in the ecotone (the borderland of two or more spontaneous orders) of so many different spontaneous orders. Even without government funding, the theaters all felt like they contributed to and had to deal with community values. And of course, since they received most of their funds from ticket sales, they were forced to economize to create their plays.

Conclusions

I have separated out the different orders to help make the differences clear. However, it is true that, overall, as Tyler Cowen (2006) argues, nonprofit and for-profit sectors are in fact deeply intertwined and together contribute financially to the artistic order. Whether it is through direct or indirect subsidies, the democratic order is a strong contributor to the financial support of the arts, including theater. Community values also affect the content of plays as much as do the values promoted by the economic order – the economic order affects the number of actors one can have, but the democratic order affects the thematic content and what is acceptable to stage. One has to give in to enough of the community’s values to get a large enough audience to come to the theater and give up their money to keep the theater running. One can challenge the audience, including their values, but not too much.

One of the spontaneous orders I have not mentioned is that of the educational order – an order which has not received much if any attention from spontaneous orders scholars. Nevertheless, the educational order has had a great deal of influence on theater, from the fact that high schools through universities stage plays to the fact that creative writing, play writing, acting, directing, etc. classes are offered at the university level. As Cowen observes, “the public university system was not designed to employ artists and musicians, although it has ended up serving that purpose” (2006: 46). This is of course true of theater as well. The fact that one can go to college to major in such theatrical fields, and the fact that one can become a professor of such fields,

surely affects theaters themselves as institutions. Had I received answers from the university theaters, I could have looked at this area more closely. As it stands, the effects on theaters as institutions remain to be investigated.

While many have asked how it is we are to “reconcile economic and aesthetic values” (Cowen 2006: 3), those who look to government have typically failed to ask how, if government is involved, we are to reconcile public and aesthetic values. And we have seen that private philanthropy does not negate the need to take community values into consideration. As we have seen, the fact is theaters have to figure out how to reconcile all three sets of values. These values impose what are essentially external rules onto the artistic order, which theaters as organizations have to help everyone involved negotiate.

The fact that external rules get imposed on an order is not inherently problematic. Literature falls into the artistic order, but is certainly – almost by definition – powerfully influenced by the linguistic order. An English-language play must follow the rules of English grammar and syntax (or violate those rules within the context of those rules) for the play to succeed within the artistic order. This is hardly an onerous restriction upon poetic artistry. However, the demands of poetry in turn affect the way the language is used, and can even affect the evolution of the linguistic order within which the work and is written. Milton, for example, used Latin syntax, which affected both the direction of English poetry and the evolution of the English language itself. This demonstrates the bidirectional nature of the influence spontaneous orders can have on each other. So when I point out, for example, that the market order imposes an actor-number restriction on a play (a separate issue from the narrative-imposed character requirements, which are part of the artistic order’s rules), that is not to argue that this is necessarily problematic. Good rules can in fact generate many more moves in a game – be it economic, or an art work – and thus create complexity. Whether this market-imposed rule is a good one can be debated, to be sure, but that normative debate is beside the point of a paper such as this, which is to point out that the rule exists, and to try to understand why.

Theaters have to face the fact that they have “to give consumers what they want” (Cowen 2006:4), while at the same time, giving the community what it wants, as well as trying to discover and create works that will “last the ages,” meaning they have “intrinsic value.” Naturally, “Often art consumers do not know what they want until it is before them” (Cowen 2006: 10), but this is true of all consumers (who knew they wanted an iPod before it was invented?). Thus, the audience helps theaters discover the next great play. The problem is, what happens if there is a major performance of a play that nobody wants to see? Does the theater go the way of all other small businesses that produce a product nobody wants? Do we really want theaters to be this much in the

economic order? Or are we just sheltering theater owners from their bad decisions when we subsidize them, directly or indirectly?

As noted in the introduction, the fact that people do think the arts are valuable enough to want them protected, to some degree, from purely economic considerations suggests that the above questions are mostly academic. While I may think the arts are better off without government involvement, the fact that many see support of the arts as a public value suggests we will never rid ourselves of such support and, thus, we should, perhaps, look to “second best” solutions such as those proposed by Tyler Cowen.

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Notes

¹ And on the specific literary order, see also Cantor & Cox 2010 and, though he does not use the term “spontaneous order,” Berman 2007.

² Philanthropy as a spontaneous order is developed in the *Conversations on Philanthropy* series, Lenore Ealy, ed.

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