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There and Back Again: A Journey Through the Regional Theatre Movement in the
United States

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Theater Studies

2009

Abstract

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Throughout the 20th century, American nonprofit theater grew rapidly throughout the United States away from New York. Generally referred to as the “Regional Theatre Movement,” this growth provided artists an abundance of jobs and provided audiences new opportunities to experience theater. This investigation looks at what major resources were provided to theater artists during this time, and how they shaped American nonprofit theater into what it is today. The four major resources examined are the Ford Foundation and its Division of Humanities and the Arts, Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panel Report, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Ford Foundation began funding theater artists whose theater companies were housed in buildings and had ensembles of actors who worked in those companies, thereby institutionalizing the theater. Theatre Communications Group, borne out of the Ford Foundation, provided further support by unifying theater artists across the country and giving them a voice, both with audiences and also in the United States government. The panel report promoted the needs of theater artists to the American public and addressed the concerns of various constituencies (i.e. corporations, individuals, etc.) And the National Endowment for the Arts was a test for how effectively these previous initiatives had altered the public’s fundamental opinion of the arts: that the arts are only for the elite, and that the arts must be useful in order to be valued. The conclusion of this investigation is that due to the business model set by the Ford Foundation and propagated by TCG, this paradigm failed to be completely shifted, and as a result, American nonprofit theater is highly successful, yet is still lacking in providing sufficient support for individual artists such as actors, directors, playwrights, and designers.

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Acknowledgements

To Pat – for always keeping your eye on me, making sure I was always growing, and for the countless hours you made yourself available to me during this process. Our discussions and journey together was my favorite part.

To Alex and Gillian – for always believing in me, and never once believing my own opinions about myself.

To Christine – for telling me, “That’s not an argument,” and for helping me become a better writer.

To Mom – for your much-needed hugs and shoulder massages.

To Dad – for teaching me how to see the hole in the donut.

To Lucy – for our late-night text-messaging bonanzas in libraries across town from each other.

To Brian – for being younger than me so I wasn’t always the only kid living at home this year.

To Sallie – for my possibility of being proud, accomplished, and inspired.

To Michael – for telling me, “Do what you can with the limits you have,” and for being my mentor, my teacher, and my friend.

To everyone else – for your love, your friendship, your support, and your smiles.

And last, but not least, to Emilyya and Casey – for giving me the internship that inspired this great project. I have loved every minute of it.

A special acknowledgement:

To the men and women who began what is now known as the Regional Theatre Movement:

Thank you. For your passion, for your courage, for your audacity and your devotion to what you knew in your hearts was possible. For giving America a chance to participate – to breathe, create, and be enlivened by theater. For giving me and millions of others across the nation a place to go and find ourselves. For giving us a gift we didn't even know to ask for.

To the men and women who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that American theater is alive, thriving, and the best it can be:

Thank you. For continuing a legacy of boldness, beauty, and community. For your dedication to a vision, for your dedication to your dreams and for following your heart. For inspiring us as a nation to never quit, to make sure the show goes on, and to seek to discover our own humanity. To seek an understanding of the universal in the quest to understand the individual.

In times of great difficulty, we are reminded of our humanity. And it is then that we are once again given the chance to remake ourselves, to invent and re-discover who we are, and what we are for. In times of hardship, remember why you do what you do, and the answers will become clear.

I love you all madly.

Christie Pettitt-Schieber

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Ford Foundation	10
Theatre Communications Group	21
The Rockefeller Panel Report	31
National Endowment for the Arts	42
Conclusion	55
Appendix A	64
Works Cited	65

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1: New Theaters Made in the Twentieth Century.....3

Figure 2: Amount Awarded to Theaters by the Ford Foundation.....19

Introduction

Where We Are, Where We've Been, and Where We're Going

In June, 2008, the members of Theatre Communications Group, a national service organization for American nonprofit theater, convened in Denver, Colorado for their annual conference. The topic was *Theatre at the Center* and it was run in conjunction with the National Performing Arts Convention. For five days, hundreds of theater artists discussed the current state of affairs in the world of nonprofit theater, illuminating issues ranging from best practices to arts advocacy to new play development. Theater professionals from all across the nation united under one roof for their cause: the success of nonprofit theater in the United States.

Fifty years ago, no such conference or forum existed for the sole purpose of bringing people together to support national theater, nor was there an organization with the means or potential to create such a conference. Even if there had been such a conference back then, only a small handful of theaters existed to send representation to it.

At the conference, each conversation seemed to have an underlying question: “How well are we doing?” Problems and best practices were shared throughout the five-day event, as the status of American nonprofit theater, or “regional theater,” was debated; the overarching question, however, would appear to an outsider to be a curiosity as to how, on the whole, professional nonprofit theater is doing.

To assess the present, one must compare it to the past, and while the past does not determine the future, it certainly shapes the present. Thus, to fully understand the current state of affairs in American nonprofit theater, one must have a temporally broad view of

the industry. Theatre Communications Group produces *Theatre Facts*, an annual fiscal review of American nonprofit theater, but the scope of the information in this report is not broad enough. With the rapid growth of technology, a five-year window may be sufficient for some aspects of American theater companies' health report. For other aspects, however, a ten- or even twenty-year window is required.

For the purposes of a true reality check, it would be useful to go back as far as possible. In this case, as far back as the beginning of the United States as a nation. Nonprofit theater, however, did not exist until federal tax laws created the nonprofit status in 1913. Logically, this would make 1913 the starting point of an investigation into the growth of nonprofit theater. After this year, the search begins for the catalysts that made American nonprofit theater what it is today. However, to provide the context in which these catalysts occurred, it is also necessary to take a look, though cursory, at American nonprofit theater during the period from just before the Revolutionary War to the Second World War.

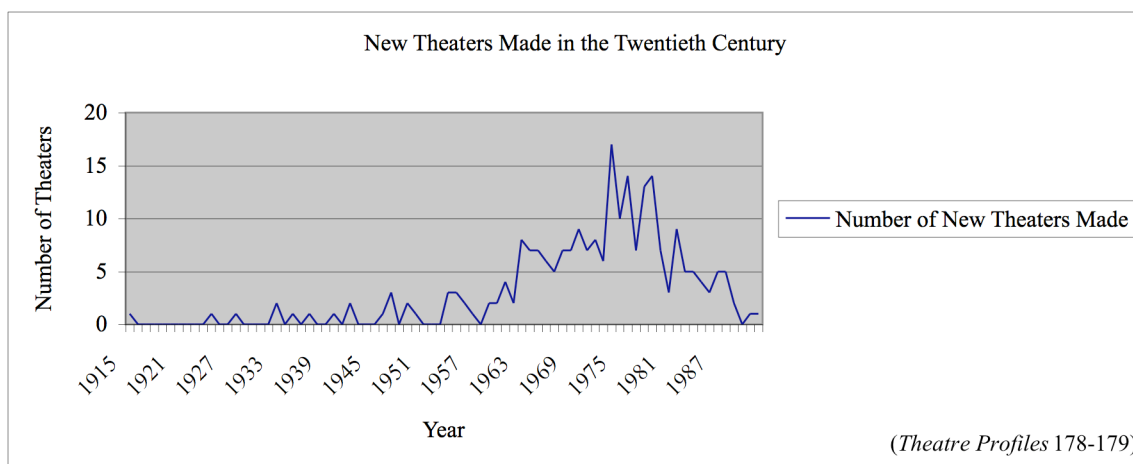
The phenomenon to be explored is the rapid growth of nonprofit professional theater in a geographic direction away from New York throughout the 20th century. (See Figure 1.) It was known as the “Regional Theatre Movement¹,” though the type of theater that title refers to has little to do with the geographic characteristics of the works presented. “Regional theater,” rather, refers to nonprofit professional theater in the United States. At first, it referred to theater outside New York, however nonprofit

¹ When referring to the movement and used as a proper noun, theater is generally spelled with the British “-re” ending. When referring to the concept and used as a common noun, it is generally spelled with the American “-er” ending. This paper will follow these general rules of usage.

professional theaters now form an important part of the New York theater scene as well, and are still referred to as regional theaters.

The movement did not evolve slowly or without intent; it grew exponentially over the course of a couple decades, booming to become a full-fledged industry. This rapid growth leads one to ask, what caused this change? What happened, and why? Was it simply a product of the right circumstances, or were there other factors involved? Were these factors interrelated or disparate? This investigation aims to pinpoint the most significant resources provided to theater artists, those that seemed to catalyze the growth of the field and were crucial factors in transforming American nonprofit theater. Through an analysis of the circumstances in which these initiatives were created, their objectives, their positive and negative impacts, and their relationship to each other, one can gain a better understanding of the path that has been forged, the problems encountered, and the issues that still remain today.

Figure 1.



The United States' religious legacy has affected the arts for almost four hundred years, since the Puritans first arrived in 1620. In Europe, the aristocracy were historically the greatest patrons of the arts, however this upper echelon of citizens was not well-

established in the New World, where the Puritans had first settled and reigned. Additionally, “the lack of a tradition of royal patronage combined with a strong Puritan tradition helps to explain the almost total absence of government support for the performing arts in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America” (Montias 293). The United States government was also originally created to “insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, [and] promote the general Welfare,” (The U.S. Constitution) a responsibility that did not initially include consideration of the arts, resulting in a gap between the common good and the arts. Ultimately, in 18th- and 19th-century United States, arts funding and resources were provided based on the art’s utility. In Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous discourse, *Democracy in America* (1863), he asserted that Americans “will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful” (Tocqueville 56). He describes the Puritan aesthetic as “simple in its forms, austere and almost harsh in its principles” with a naturally unfavorable attitude towards the fine arts (Tocqueville 159). This attitude has been propagated by generation after generation, which has made it difficult to make a case for supporting the arts in the United States. Well into the 20th century, William H. Sullivan, president of The American Assembly, confirmed Tocqueville’s analysis, saying, “As a nation that has taken pride in pragmatism, the United States has always found it rather difficult to establish the proper place for the arts in its constellation of public values” (Sullivan *vii*). The struggle between pragmatism and the arts thus became the fundamental obstacle to providing resources to artists.

A main cause of the scarcity of the arts in colonial United States was the lack of human resources available. Nation-building initially left little funding for the arts, but as

the colonies became a sovereign country, this began to change. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, in particular, were very committed to the arts, though they had insufficient backing from Congress, which was apprehensive about the prospect of supporting what it considered to be elitism. The arts, traditionally only considered for the upper class, were deemed inappropriate for funding. According to theater historian Joseph W. Zeigler, “Standards and styles in the arts were set by an elite. That elite lost its monopoly on political power with the advent of social democracy. . . The majority of citizens, to whom that power passed, then dismissed esthetics as the pastime of an outmoded aristocracy” (*Regional Theatre* 3).

While some individual politicians advocated for the arts, the government, on the whole, did not. The first bill for a federal council for the arts did not come until 1877 and it did not survive the Congressional process. The government only shifted its views with presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft who created the Council of Fine Arts and Commission of Fine Arts, respectively. These groups, however, were mainly concerned with the arts in Washington, D.C. The new commission was specifically created to prevent the federal government from wasting taxpayer funds on bad art in the capital. The members of the commission, effectively, were the U.S. government’s art critics. During Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, the commission was given the final say on all federal art purchases. But that was the extent of the federal government’s involvement with art.

American theater, meanwhile, began to be supported by individual citizens such as Otto Kahn, who made the first attempt at theater philanthropy in 1909. Kahn set a precedent with his work: he built new theaters, supported individual artists, and also had

to balance the public attitude towards the arts with his commitment to furthering theater in America (Schanke 25). With the help of other magnates such as J.P. Morgan, William K. Vanderbilt, and Harry Payne Whitney, Kahn built a new playhouse called “New Theater,” which was the epitome of “democratic idealism” in the arts (25). Kahn’s theater differed from Broadway in that he ran his theater “for the sake of art only and not in any way for the sake of profit” (25). While this was an important endeavor, New Theater ultimately failed due to the venue’s physical construction: it was very expensive to build and its acoustics were abysmal (25). It closed after two seasons, and critics condemned it for being too big for modern drama. Robert Schanke, professor emeritus of theater at Central College, Iowa, asserts that, “in a short time, the New Theatre left funding confidence in lasting shambles” (26). Philanthropists had provided a big, institutional building at a time when smaller, more intimate spaces were needed (Schanke 25). Thus, while theater was finally being given resources, the resources provided were wholly unconnected with what the artists needed. Meanwhile, the public continued to be averse to giving taxpayer funds to the arts. Kahn, however, continued to fund numerous projects over many years, including a theater troupe led by Jacques Copeau, which, according to *Theater Arts Magazine*, resulted in advancing “the case for fusing dance and movement in the training of American actors” (Schanke 28). Kahn also funded individual actors and actresses and paid much of the rent for various playhouses and companies in residence. Publicly, he was criticized for bringing in too many foreign plays, but he also supported many American works. According to Schanke, Kahn defended himself against this criticism by trying to “get people to think of him as an amateur, which was at once a self-effacing signal to theater professionals and an

acknowledgement that aristocratic pretensions posed problems for American egalitarianism” (32). Kahn’s vision for theater, however, was still at the effect of the legacy of the Puritans even 150 years after the American Revolution. In 1930, when he made one of his last contributions to the Macdougall Street Playhouse, the question of funding for the theater was still under contention (32).

The federal government finally entered the debate in the 20th century with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and new tax laws. The Works Progress Administration was designed to provide Americans with jobs during the Great Depression of the 1930s, including jobs in the arts. The Federal Theater Project (FTP) alone established over 14,000 jobs for actors, designers, and technicians, who produced shows for over 25 million people (Zeigler 6). The program, however, was less interested in content and more interested in job creation, which led to much controversy regarding the experimental nature of new plays during this time. The artists, led by Hallie Flanagan, director of the Federal Theatre Project, wanted new experimental theaters, plays focusing on local and national topics, and to incorporate other disciplines in productions. The ties between the artist and the patron, however, led to a great deal of controversy, the largest over the production of Mark Blitzstein’s *The Cradle Will Rock* in 1937. On opening night, federal authorities shut down the production on the basis of its pro-labor content, forcing them to find another performance space (“Culture Shock”). According to Zeigler, “The opening of *The Cradle Will Rock* became a symbol of WPA artists’ fight for independence from government bureaucracy and interference” (*Regional Theatre* 7-8). Due to the controversial nature of the FTP, when the government passed a bill granting another \$1.75 billion to the Works Progress Administration arts projects,

none was allocated for the Federal Theatre Project. The FTP fiasco directly influenced future government funding for theater. According to Michael Straight, former deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (1969-77), the long-term impact of the Federal Theatre Project was that “[artists] became antagonistic to public funding of the arts and delayed its reemergence for almost thirty years” (Zeigler 8), until the appearance of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Nonetheless, a fundamental change in American values was already manifest in law. The tax laws of 1913 and 1916, which created the nonprofit tax code, allowed theater to redefine itself in the United States. Theater could now also exist for the sake of art, rather than solely for investors to profit. Patrons following in Otto Kahn’s footsteps would now be rewarded for donating to the arts through tax breaks. With this charity status, the arts were institutionalized as a viable industry through the federal government and deemed worthy of tax deductions. Taxpayers also began to be allowed to deduct charitable donations from their income taxes which, while not specifically directed at the arts, nor recognized by President Wilson or Congress as particularly significant moments in the history of arts in the United States (Lowry 3), nonetheless benefited the arts immensely. Tax benefits for individuals and corporations have continued to be one of the major factors in theater philanthropy, as will be shown in the following chapters.

After a century and a half of building a nation and an identity, the questions still remain: have Americans found a way to balance the useful and the beautiful? Has the belief that art is only for the elite been dispelled? Clearly, these are the two issues that must be dealt with for theater in the United States to grow. Given that it *has* grown over the last sixty years, what structures or initiatives had the biggest impact on these two

issues? In the subsequent analysis, four initiatives will be examined: the Ford Foundation, Theatre Communications Group, Inc., the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panel Report, and the National Endowment for the Arts. These four had diverse impacts on the field, and have broadened, deepened, and enriched the American nonprofit theater industry in the years since they were formed. If one examines these initiatives, one can arrive at an answer to the status of the aforementioned key elements, and one that is sufficiently well-rounded to say, “This is the answer.” This investigation will seek that answer, and look for what might be the next step.

The Ford Foundation

The Grandfather of Regional Theater

A major result of the Tax Reform Act of 1913 was the birth of family foundations. Wealthy Americans established these foundations to assist them in giving to charity by doing so through an endowed foundation. In such institutions, the donor is generally the chairman of the board, and the foundation's staff manages and invests the donor's money. An important by-product of this process is that the wealthy then determine much of the cultural policy in the United States by deciding who receives funding and why. This is culturally consistent for the United States, given the historical belief that the arts are for the elite and should only be supported by them. Historically, the wealthy have been the only citizens with the leisure time to enjoy the arts and the financial means to develop an aesthetic taste for the arts. The arts were seen as something to be enjoyed by the elite, and thus if the elite wished to contribute money to the arts, the general public found that acceptable. However, this structure maintained the arts as an elitist pastime, leaving professional theater artists without guarantee of steady employment, restricting the availability of theater to the average citizen, and limiting the growth of the art form. The Ford Foundation's Division of Humanities and the Arts was the first initiative to attempt to remedy this situation, and it did so by shaping the arts as a business into an institution. The arts operating as businesses became the model according to which everything afterwards was created, and while much was accomplished, the price paid was that of greater artistic excellence.

Founded in 1936, the Ford Foundation (hereafter referred to as "the Foundation") was created to donate the preponderance of the Ford family's money in order to alleviate

the tax burden on the inheritance of Henry and Edsel Ford's children. The Foundation's mission was, and still is, to "strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement" ("Welcome") and their humanitarian work spanned not only to the United States but also internationally. Before the 1950s, their work focused on the sciences, a reflection of what most research was being conducted in at the time. However, mid-century their focus shifted dramatically after the hiring of W. McNeil Lowry. Lowry originally started at the Foundation as an assistant but quickly moved up to the position of assistant in the Education Program. Having worked in a small newspaper for several years, he had a background in journalism, and loved the theater (Anderson 177). In November of 1955, Lowry made a proposal to the Board that forever altered theater funding in the United States. Lowry submitted a memorandum in which he argued that "The support of cultural affairs is obviously of importance to the strength and health of any society" (Lowry "Program" 1). Lowry's vision was that the Foundation should begin a cultural program of \$82 million, including \$10 million for a National Repertory Theater and \$1 million for a Foreign and Intercultural Theater (16). Lowry argued that "the humanities and the arts exist not merely as an adornment to society but as the repository of some of its most essential wisdom and of a good part of its moral fiber" (1). The Trustees of the Foundation approved his proposal, and the offspring was a new initiative for the Ford Foundation, called the Division of Humanities and the Arts (DHA).

The objective of the Division of the Humanities and the Arts was four-fold, and encompassed a wide range of goals relating to the development of the arts in The United States. It included

the creative development of individual talents; stimulation of experiments, demonstrations, and studies helping to clarify objectives, set standards, or open new avenues in the arts and humanities; preparation of the economic and social positions of the arts and of the artist in America today; and encouragement of scholarship and scholarly projects basic to the Humanities generally rather than to specialized fields. (Ford 1957 18)

The foundation knew little about the actual state of the arts, so the first set of grants were selected based on two criteria: that they would either provide data about the field or have a “pervasive effect throughout the art” (19). The first grant to a theater company, the Cleveland Play House, was a grant that met both criteria. The oldest extant theater company in the United States, founded in 1915, the Cleveland Play House was given \$130,000, and took on “the development of talented actors and extending professional theater to the small towns of the Middle West” (19).

The Ford Foundation’s first grants were to the Cleveland Playhouse, to the Minneapolis School of Art, the American Music Center, and the Experimental Opera Theatre of America (19). The Foundation was lauded for its vision in public policy (Parmenter). The grants also assisted with the construction of Lincoln Center, their most publicized contribution at the time. Beginning with \$2.5 million, and continuing with another \$10 million in 1958 (“Arts Center”), the Foundation joined John D. Rockefeller III’s visionary project for a performing arts center in New York. According to the *New York Times*, the \$12.5 million gift was “not only the greatest to the center from any one agency, but also the largest ever made by the Ford Foundation to a cultural institution” (“Arts Center”). Clearly, the Foundation had developed a new commitment to culture, a commitment from which theater would greatly benefit over the next fifty years.

The Foundation's shift in philanthropic focus was met with a great deal of positive press. Howard Taubman, renowned *New York Times* drama critic from 1960 to 1966 (Gale Research), called the Cleveland Play House grant "enlightening," while another commented that the Division of the Humanities and the Arts was overall an "interesting and stimulating" idea, one that showed philanthropy as no longer "sentimental...but a planned investment in some aspects of contemporary life" ("Ford Fine Arts"). Furthermore, "the idea of an initial survey to see where emphasis can best be placed is, therefore, intelligent and welcome" (*ibid*). Of paramount importance is that the responses show the Foundation's vision and policy were clearly in line with what artists truly needed at the time (Taubman "Money"). Prior to the Cleveland Play House and the Lincoln center grants, the Foundation had given grants to every "regionally accredited, privately supported, four-year" American university and college to increase faculty salaries (Ford 1967 31). In his analysis of the new arts grants, Taubman applauds the Foundation for not giving the arts this same type of grant:

This [type of grant] would have been the easy solution; it could have been accomplished swiftly and dramatically...For a comparatively short term, symphonic & operatic organizations throughout the land, for example, might have been able to cover all their deficits. They might have been able to face at least one season with their books comfortably in balance. (Taubman "Money")

Short-term results, however, did not match the Foundation's objectives. Thanks to the vision of Lowry and others, the grants focused on improving artistic quality rather than indiscriminately spending money to solve the problems. In the 1958 annual report, the Foundation stated that "The forms taken by this direct aid to individuals are as varied as the problems of the particular creative fields for which they are designed" (Ford 1958

33), showing extensive forethought. Grants focused on strategically developing individual talent, in order to increase the quality of artists' work.

The initial impact of the Foundation's grants on American nonprofit theater was the expansion of ensemble, or "repertory" theaters: groups of actors who work together year-round. The Ford Foundation saw ensemble theaters as the source of "many...significant artistic accomplishments in theater" (Ford 1960 48). While such groups flourished in Europe, their growth was stunted in the United States due to the economics of nonprofit theater (48). After Lowry's trip to Europe in 1957 (Anderson 180), he was convinced that ensemble theaters were the strongest form of professional theater. Ensemble theater, he argued, both supports artists over an entire season, and creates higher quality art. In 1960, the Foundation gave a total of \$559,000 to four theater companies to assess if there was sufficient support for repertory theater from both audiences and artists. In all cases, the money was used to pay high-quality actors a weekly salary in order to create a company that met "high repertory standards" (49). Forty actors, ten for each theater, were selected for the experiment. All were originally from New York, though only ten were given funding to remain there. The rest were sent out across the United States to work in other cities. The foundation considered the project a "test of the actors' commitment – particularly of those thirty who decide to leave New York" (49). The grant was designed to simultaneously encourage higher-quality productions, and also test the artists' willingness to move outside New York.

In these early years of the DHA, the Foundation collaborated with experts in the field in a whole new way. A critical move was incorporating research into the Foundation's initial grants. It gave individual artists and theater companies the resources

they typically did not have access to, as they did not themselves have the means or time to conduct research. The information gathered from conferences and the grants formed a foundation of knowledge about the field, upon which artists could later build. Most importantly, the foundation saw itself as merely an enabler for those with the knowledge to solve the problems. As stated in the 1957 annual report's "Review of the Year," the Foundation made grants that "do no more than underwrite the time and talent of individuals and institutions capable of organizing and pioneering the search for answers to the problems that confront society" (5). Thus the Division of Humanities and the Arts began with a clear intent to involve the leaders of American nonprofit theater in the growth of the field. Furthermore, in 1957, the Foundation stated that it "expects to call frequently upon consultants and specialists throughout the country for advice" (Ford 17). In practice, this objective manifested itself in the form of Lowry's extensive network of "very personal and multifaceted relationships" (Anderson 182), and the panels that oversaw the grant disbursement. According to Sheila McNerney Anderson, "Lowry and his staff were the first people outside of the arts community or the academy to solicit artists' and arts administrators' thoughts and opinions about the role of the arts in American culture" (Anderson 181). In addition, Lowry implemented the tradition of peer-reviewed grants, inviting artists to be on the panels to determine who received the Foundation's funds. This gave the experiments and demonstrations legitimacy by drawing on the long-standing tradition of peer-review in many scientific professions. Lowry also maintained that this allowed artists to be certain their work was judged by their peers, not someone outside the industry, and to be certain that someone truly cared about their work (Anderson 181).

Understanding that some theater artists had already discovered improved practices, and that together they could creatively solve other problems, the Ford Foundation saw this individual excellence being fostered through artists studying and working together. One example of this commitment was a grant program administered in 1959, in which eight teams of designers and architects were selected to design playhouses, in order to research possibilities for new venues for productions in the United States. This program, called the Ideal Theater program, was a direct result of a two-day conference held by the Ford Foundation and moderated by McNeil Lowry in April, 1959. The participants of the conference convened without an agenda; Lowry said, “We sought simply to relate people and information” (Larkin 7). Over the two days a persistent theme was the lack of physical spaces for theatrical productions. After much discussion, the Foundation realized they could not accomplish everything the artists requested, but they could support the progression of American theater with experiments and demonstrations. The design of new venues was one such program. They selected theater designers and architects, and paired them in teams to design new playhouses. The partnership between designers and architects was rare—“something they did not always enjoy in actual building projects,” according to Lowry (7). Funded by the Foundation grant, both sides could design “without the pressure of economic or administrative factors, which often reduce one’s original objectives” (7). Though the Ford Foundation could not actually build eight new playhouses, they commissioned these playhouse designs to inject the industry with new ideas, to stir up creative thought. These designs were then displayed through the American Federation of Arts as a two-year traveling exhibition.

What emerged was an innovative view of performance spaces. In the final publication of the designs resulting from this endeavor, Peter Larkin, a stage designer, wrote that all eight teams “tacitly agree that the two-dimensional proscenium theater is a thing of the past, and they look for new theater performance experiences in three dimensions” (Larkin 9). The theaters designed addressed the issues of the time in incredibly forward-thinking ways. For example, one of the teams took the discord of the time between theater and film and incorporated the two together in the design. Most of the designers made the venues highly adaptable to allow for performance of both presentational and representational plays. The program was a success, as it supported individual artists and also had a wide impact on the field. According to Pietro Belluschi, one of the architects, not only did this program provide “highly creative architects [the opportunity]...to give form to ideas which have been long fermenting in their minds” but also began to give what were then known as “community theaters,” a term later replaced with “regional theaters,” ideas for new possibilities in performance spaces. “Many community theaters with limited resources,” he wrote, “may profit by the study of these prototypes and [see] how they can achieve maximum flexibility within their financial means” (11), thus continuing to take theater from its status as “elite” to one that transcends all socioeconomic and geographic boundaries.

However, there was also a downside to this research. The information was so widely dispersed that many theaters built after 1964 began to look the same. Most of the stages designed in the 1960s were thrust stages, and, regardless of the impact on new play development, these stages have not been updated since. Thus, while this experiment

opened up new ways of thinking about performance space, it also created a homogenized theater space.

Though the Division of Humanities and Arts focused on meeting the needs of artists, its impact was not without negative side effects. In addition to the theater design project, another major downside to the funding was that theater companies tended to model their business structure after those that had received funding. This model generally meant the theater was run by an artistic director and a managing director (or producing-artistic director who had responsibilities of both), and had an administrative staff for development, marketing, promotions, finances, and education and outreach. All theaters also had a board of directors. Most importantly, however, most theaters had an actual building or space they used. According to Zeigler, in the effort to win grants, many theater companies “tended to homogenize and codify,” thereby reducing the diversity of types of companies in the country (*Regional Theatre* 184). He credits this, however, not to the Foundation, but rather to “the persuasive power of Ford support,” likening it to a spell that many theater artists fell under. This homogenization became a common theme in the ultimate impacts of the Foundation’s philanthropy. While the organization did much good, its selection of grant recipients shaped the Regional Theater Movement in a particular way, which played an integral role in the development of theater as it exists today. Zeigler’s analysis, however, places all responsibility on the artists, essentially blaming them for compromising their craft for a grant to keep themselves financially afloat. Furthermore, his brief analysis is the only of its kind – no other major source of information on the Ford Foundation or the Regional Theater Movement provides any analysis as to the negative consequences of this new resource of

funding. This is clearly a missing element in the research already conducted on the Regional Theatre Movement.

Figure 2.

Theater	Amount Awarded
Alley Theatre	\$3,500,000
Arena Stage	\$2,659,450
American Conservatory Theatre	\$2,395,000
Mummers Theatre	\$1,785,000
Guthrie Theater	\$1,207,000
APA-Phoenix	\$900,000
American Shakespeare Festival	\$699,800
Mark Taper Forum*	\$500,000
Actors Theatre of Louisville	\$360,000
Trinity Square	\$357,606
Playhouse in the Park	\$350,000
Center Stage	\$320,545
Seattle Repertory Theatre	\$305,240
Washington Theatre Club	\$250,000
Hartford Stage Company	\$239,650
Actor's Workshop	\$197,000
Milwaukee Repertory Theater**	\$100,000

* *Originally awarded to predecessor, Theatre Group, UCLA*

** *Awarded to predecessor, Fred Miller Theatre
(Zeigler, *Regional Theatre* 183)*

The major effect of the Ford Foundation's vision of American theater was the development of theater institutions. The Ford Foundation provided funding for seventeen theater venues during its first years (see Figure 2), and as a result, theater professionals had a consistent place to work. Institutions, however, require significant management, upkeep, and funds to stay alive. Maintaining these institutions thus became the focus of the nonprofit professional theater industry: build theaters, so theater artists have a place to work and audiences have a place to experience theater. Peter Zeisler, in the TCG Oral

History project, describes the most extreme downside to theater caused by developing institutions. “It had been done, really, at the expense of the artistic advancement, because [resources] had all gone to the institution up until that point” (Zeisler “Preserving the Legacy”). On the one hand, institutions or homes have provided a central, stable, physical location for theater to exist. On the other hand, running a building requires a huge amount of both financial and human resources. Not having a regular home for the theater company, however, could lead to reduced audience loyalty, and a decreased power in branding the theater’s product. Thus, having an institution could be both beneficial and detrimental to the art form. Consequently, the choice is then between having a larger audience and having a higher quality product, and only a few brilliant theater companies have managed to find a happy middle ground.

The Ford Foundation continues to make grants to theaters to this day, though it is not as prominent in the nonprofit theater industry as it was in the 1960s. Today, the primary organization devoted to the progression of American non-profit theater is Theatre Communications Group, which was started by the Ford Foundation. This group has continued the public policy of the Ford Foundation while attempting to correct some of the homogenization created by the Foundation. Without the work of the Foundation and W. McNeil Lowry, the Regional Theater Movement would not have been what it was, for better or for worse. In 1957, a small handful of theaters existed nationwide. Fifty years later, thanks to the vision of Lowry and the Ford Foundation, over one thousand theaters comprise a diverse, nationwide theater community that shares information and knowledge with ease.

Theatre Communications Group

The Voice of Regional Theater

Shortly after the Ford Foundation began its grant programs, it became clear that it would not be able to handle the sheer volume of work involved in supporting the management and maintenance of these new theaters. So, in 1961, Lowry created Theatre Communications Group (TCG). TCG became the way to pass the torch of supporting the ongoing work of nonprofit theater from the larger Ford Foundation to a smaller, more artist-driven organization. For American nonprofit theater, TCG has been quite possibly its most precious asset; without the efforts of those in TCG, the regional theater movement might have just been a good idea. TCG took American nonprofit professional theater from the mind of an individual to a movement. The movement, however, while it had great successes, also had fundamental limitations. TCG provided the vision to guide the Regional Theatre Movement as it progressed, and supported it with resources to encourage its growth in the direction of that vision.

Theatre Communications Group was formed out of the need W. McNeil Lowry saw from the conference in April, 1959, and was quintessentially his contribution. Peter Zeisler, long-time executive director of TCG, commented that “Forming TCG was really a natural extension of Mac himself – he *was* theatre’s communications groupie!” (Zeisler “Preserving”) Zelda Fichandler of Arena Stage and the TCG Board President from 1993-1995, agrees, saying that

Mac Lowry, as he always did—and he should be given constant credit and a badge in heaven for what he did—put his finger on the fact that we were all operating separately, as if the others didn’t exist, and that we had information to share with each other, and that we could cause to speed up what seemed to be going to be, a renaissance of the idea of company theatres in different

communities having permanence and a continuing dialogue with its audience, with their audiences (Fichandler).

Indeed, Lowry and his staff noted that “One of the most obvious factors revealed by [our] staffwork in the American theatre...is the inadequacy of communications or the absence of common objectives” (Lowry 25). He saw the need for new theaters, however, that he concluded would only arise and succeed if their directors had some way of understanding the experiences of their predecessors. The goal of improving communication, thus, was to “practically assist the American theatre to reach its main goal – the higher development of the theatre art in the United States” (26). Bearing these objectives in mind, Lowry formed a four-year program to establish Theatre Communications Group.

In the beginning, TCG was administered by the Goodman School of the Art Institute of Chicago and had an advisory board. The first advisory board consisted mainly of participants from the 1959 Ford Foundation conference: Nina Vance, Zelda Fichandler, Jules Irving, Theodore Hoffman, John Reich, Lowell Lees, Mack Scism, Newell Tarrant, Roger Stevens, Alan Schneider, Nan Martin, Geraldine Page, Pat Brown, and Michael Ellis. Ted Hoffman was Chairman of the Board. A short time later, Peter Zeisler and Oliver Rea joined the organization, after they co-founded the Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota with Sir Tyrone Guthrie. Two years later, the organization incorporated itself as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization at the request of the Ford Foundation, at which point it truly became a company for artists, by artists, and began making a larger impact on the regional theater movement.

TCG was in accordance with the Ford Foundation paradigms of regional repertory institutions and theater as a business. Each program was crafted with the objective to

“‘improve standards’ in production, administration, and the training of personnel” (Zeigler 184). The first programs addressed the most urgent needs at the time in the theater industry: increasing communication between artists to establish best-practices and to problem-solve, holding regional castings to find and employ actors, and increasing audiences through subscription ticket sales.

The Visitation Program was the answer to the need for better communication between artists. With small travel stipends, leaders of the various regional theaters could visit each other to study a particular practice, or to understand how to do something better. Regional castings were designed to make it easier for directors outside New York to audition actors from New York, and for actors outside New York to have a centralized location to audition for regional theaters. The long-term goal, according to Mabry, was to make TCG “a place performers can call and get all information on theater and community conditions elsewhere” to encourage the spread of theater across the country (Shepard 15). The Visitation Program and casting ideas were culled directly from the 1959 two-day conference, and the decision to hire Danny Newman, the nation’s expert in subscription ticket sales, as a consultant was made in TCG’s very first meeting in Washington, D.C. in 1961 (Lowry *Movement* 26-27).

Through these and other programs, including an annual newsletter, Lowry maintained that “the increased communication we had stimulated among directors and managers of theaters, and their sharing of services through Theatre Communications Group, had helped to focus a resident theatre movement in the United States” (Lowry *Movement* 28). TCG was flourishing and was now inundated with requests for assistance. Theater artists were emerging everywhere. Zelda Fichandler wrote, “What has really

caused the flowering of our own work this year has been the discovery of a few creative talents” (28). As TCG grappled with how best to address the diverse needs of theaters at different stages of development, they chose a route directly in line with the Ford Foundation model.

As a small, flexible organization run by artists with a commitment to quality over quantity, TCG’s resources have always been limited. In 1967, TCG made the critical decision to limit its services to only a select group of theaters, furthering the homogenization of theaters in following the business model used by those chosen for TCG’s support. Though at the time it had a record-high thirty-five members, leaders such as Michael Mabry and Oliver Rea realized it could not sustain adequate support for all of these theaters. Howard Taubman, the *New York Times* drama critic, described some of the theaters as “poor excuses for theaters...eager to follow current fashions...but neither productions nor administrations have measured up” (Taubman “Resident”). Thus, TCG attempted to eliminate the theaters of poorer quality, and give others who were struggling an ideal to work towards. TCG selected thirteen theaters to support across the country: Alley Theatre (Houston), Arena Stage (Washington, DC), APA-Phoenix (Arizona), Center Theater Group (Los Angeles), Front Street Theatre (Memphis), Goodman Memorial Theatre (Chicago), Lincoln Center Repertory (New York), Milwaukee Repertory (Wisconsin), Minnesota Theatre Company (Minnesota), Mummies Theater (Oklahoma), Playhouse in the Park (Cincinnati), Seattle Repertory Theatre (Washington), and Trinity Square Playhouse (Rhode Island). All but Front Street Theatre are still currently operating. These theaters met the criteria of being both of high artistic quality and, more importantly, operating on the business model that TCG wanted to

promote. This business model was the same fostered by the Ford Foundation, and the same that is now the primary model for nonprofit theater.

TCG's lasting contribution to the field has been to unify theater artists across the United States, and to give them a voice. It has brought theater artists together, both physically through conferences and meetings, and metaphorically through defining common goals. TCG has always had its finger on the pulse of American nonprofit professional theater by having conversations with people in the field and then crafting grant programs and initiatives based on what has been needed. In 1977, for example, TCG joined forces with the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Association of American Dance Companies, the American Symphony Orchestra League, and OPERA America to give artists a political voice through the American Arts Alliance for the purpose of lobbying for the arts in Washington, D.C. Peter Zeisler of TCG and John Crosby of OPERA America were the two men who began forming the alliance in 1975. The American Arts Alliance was unprecedented, as it not only gave theater artists a representative voice with the federal government, but also decisively unified all artists. The initiative garnered positive media attention, as one *New York Times* reporter noted, "Their alliance is unusual in that it joins four performing arts groups, not heretofore noted for their mutual cooperation, with a visual arts organization, a happy move in view of the museums' superior legislative influence" (Glueck). Furthermore, members of Congress encouraged the alliance. The group still exists today, and this year changed its name to the Performing Arts Alliance.

As the Regional Theatre Movement grew, TCG's role became more important, as it also set priorities for the field. Following in the model set by the Ford Foundation,

TCG sought to support and train arts managers to run the new theater institutions. Support for the managers, however, quickly took precedent over the evolution of the art form, as understanding how to run a theater like a business was the most urgent need. Unfortunately, this happened to the detriment of the growth of the art itself. TCG has always walked a fine line between supporting the artists through the institution, and only supporting the institution, and this was clearly demonstrated at a conference held at Yale University in 1976.

Conferences and meetings have always been major elements of TCG's yearly calendar. In June of 1976, Theatre Communications Group held a conference at Yale University that was in many ways identical to the 2008 TCG Annual Conference in Denver. The representation sent from over 100 nonprofit professional theaters was almost completely comprised of arts managers, such as artistic directors, managing directors, and board members, all of whom were at the conference to learn how to better support their theater. Robert Brustein, then-director of the Yale Repertory Theater and dean of the Yale School of Drama, reported on the conference for the *New York Times*. Over the course of the four-day conference, he observed that the participants had an "almost obsessive preoccupation with money" and that while the conference was supposedly on "artistic issues," "its real subject was image-building" (Brustein). The panel discussions were on subjects like subscriptions, fundraising, marketing, branding, and arts advocacy. Essentially, the conference was on the topics necessary to discuss if one is building an arts institution as a business in a market that does not fully understand its product.

Brustein's article received much backlash from his peers and friends. In the

“Letters” section of the *New York Times* two weeks later, Peter Zeisler, Edith Markson of the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, Donald Shoenbaum of The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, and Robert Kalfin of Chelsea Theater Center in Brooklyn, New York, wrote letters to the editor refuting Brustein’s assertions that discussions of artistic quality in the nonprofit professional theater had been completely dismissed during the conference. Zeisler argued that “223 participants representing America’s nonprofit professional theater would [not] waste their time and money” to discuss image-building (Zeisler, Letter). Schoenbaum defended the need to address managerial concerns, because they “include providing audiences and funds which allow the performing artist to function creatively” (Schoenbaum). Markson contended that TCG “established a new awareness and communication among people working in this field,” a primary goal of TCG (Markson). Finally, Kalfin maintained that “an almost evangelical movement of solidarity among dissimilar artists began in New Haven” (Kalfin).

The critical element that was missing from this conference, and would be missing from conferences for the next thirty years, was representation for the artists themselves. While most of the attendees identified as artists, their primary role was as managers, and those that worked solely as actors, designers, and directors were missing from the conference. Thus, the voice of the artist was coming from artists of the past, and those that felt they spoke on behalf of the artist. This is not to discredit the work done to build institutions for theater artists to work in, or to discount the efforts of those 223 participants to build a viable theater industry that could not only provide financial support for its artists, but also provide an educated audience. These efforts provided the absolutely essential base to build upon. Unfortunately, however, TCG and its

constituents had to spend so much time educating their audience and patrons, they could not focus all of their attention *directly* on the artists. So, it is true, they were addressing the artists' needs by getting an audience for them to play to, and an educated one at that. But it simply meant that there were not enough resources (time, personnel, funding) to spend on the artists. A theater might, for example, have enough funds and staff members to use on either audience building or an artist in residence, but not both. So they would have to make a choice, and in that choice, set a precedent for what their priority is and what they are willing to sacrifice.

To that end, one of the most significant contributions TCG has made has been with its grant programs. Specifically designed to meet the needs of theater artists, the programs are often set up to put an artist in residency at a theater, or to develop and keep excellent artists in the field. Starting with the Visitation Program, TCG has had a number of grant programs throughout the years, including the Career Designers and Directors Program, the Travel Grants given in conjunction with the International Theatre Institute, the Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights. Following the example set by the relationship between TCG and the Ford Foundation, other major funders have given money to TCG to then re-grant to the artists, including the AT&T Foundation, MetLife, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. TCG has been the major proponent for artist-based support, particularly with its artist-in-residency programs. Most recently, the MetLife Foundation has started a program with TCG called "A-Ha! Think It, Do It" to fund ideas and creative projects that would be outside a theater's normal activity. Each of these programs has been crafted to move nonprofit professional theater in a forward direction, especially the A-Ha! program. This grant in particular has begun to bridge the

gap between administrators and artists, primarily by encouraging administrative creativity, and recognizing that at the heart of any staff member is an artist.

Twenty years after the Ford Foundation began the Division of Humanities and the Arts, the Regional Theatre Movement had taken hold and was beginning to be noticed. In 1978, TCG's *Theatre Profiles* listed 152 theaters nationwide, a 52% increase from two years prior, and 71% increase from four years prior (Eder). Only one-third were in New York, and almost 90% of those started after 1960 (Eder). Richard Eder, a journalist for the *New York Times*, wrote an article in which he asserted that while "New York remains the head and heart of American theater...the growing theater movement around the country is providing a pair of sturdy and useful legs" (Eder). Citing the work of most of the thirteen theaters supported by TCG, Eder asserts that regional theater is beneficial for New York because it often develops new plays and in many cases has developed excellent acting companies. Eder further asserts that

The value of the serious theater around the country does not lie only in the material it originates, or in the superlative accomplishments of its most gifted groups. . .The latest edition of Theater Profiles...listed nearly 40 Shakespeare productions, more than 30 by Tennessee Williams, 25 Brechts, [and] 21 Chekhovs (Eder)

thus displaying a commitment to the classics as well.

Over the course of the next thirty years, the Regional Theatre Movement continued to grow through the efforts of TCG and others, and soon, articles such as Eder's were no longer uncommon. In any city, one can see a touring Broadway play, or a play by a group of college friends who have started their own company, or something in between. Though the shortcomings of TCG's work are now clear, the legacy of TCG is that the American nonprofit professional theater industry today has many structures in

place to support artists and managers alike, with funding that not only supports theater artists financially, but does so in a way that promotes artistic excellence. Playing both the role of the visionary and the mouthpiece of theater artists across the United States, TCG's staff has worked tirelessly over the years to provide any and every resource that a theater artist might need to continue their work. If TCG could not provide it directly, it found the person or organization that could, continually researching and learning in order to empower theater artists not just in New York or Chicago or Los Angeles but in Tucson, Omaha, and Portland. The nonprofit professional American theater industry owes much to Theatre Communications Group and its work. That is to say, it owes much to the individuals who, in the beginning, not only ran their own theaters but also ran TCG, supporting themselves until the movement was big enough that more McNeil Lowrys were born and could take over the work. TCG has provided the industry with a unified voice, and whenever a new vision is cast for theater in the United States, it will be fully supported by TCG.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panel Report
The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects

“There is a tendency on the part of leaders of arts organizations to assume that anyone who is moderately perceptive will understand the significance of the arts. This is a poor assumption.”

-Rockefeller Panel Report

As the nonprofit professional theater industry began to unify and grow, the lack of information on the arts, the public, and the relationship between the two became increasingly obvious, and it became clear that what was needed was more research. To that end, in 1964 the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a prominent private foundation, undertook the task of assessing, analyzing, and promoting the state of the arts in the United States. The Fund was started similarly to the Ford Foundation: for the six children of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to be able to “share a source of advice and research on charitable activities and combine some of their philanthropies to better effect” (“About the Fund”). The Fund brought together a panel of 44 participants from a myriad of backgrounds, including artists, politicians, and businessmen, and over the course of eighty hours at five two-day meetings (Rockefeller x), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund published the seminal work, *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*. The Rockefeller Panel Report provided the first bridge between the arts and the public, a necessary resource for the relationship between the two to grow and evolve.

At 236 pages, this was the first in-depth research conducted on the arts. With clear, logical explanations in defense of the arts, it provides an articulate argument for who, what, and how the arts should best be supported in the United States. The report critiques every facet of the arts industry at a critical moment in history, as theater and

other performing arts are beginning to spread across the country, and publicizes the artists' needs, while simultaneously acknowledging the public's perspective and concerns about those needs. Most importantly, the report highlights the gaps between the artists' perception and the public's perception of the arts in the United States, and points out the effects of these gaps. Fundamentally, the Rockefeller panel report asserts that the progression of theater and other performing arts is not simply the evolution of the art form; rather, it is also the ongoing relationship with the public, how well through time the artist and the public understand each other. The panel report differed from the research conducted through the Ford Foundation grants, like the Ideal Theater initiative and the two-day conference with artists in 1959, in that the report took a more outside-in perspective. Focusing on the public perception of the arts, the report analyzed how the various facets of that perception posed problems or hindered the growth of the arts in the United States. The report also suggested ways the arts can help themselves by changing public perception. Thus, while the report makes many suggestions as to how to improve the performing arts in the United States, this investigation will primarily focus on the impact the report had on shaping and furthering the growth of the performing arts inside the model of arts as businesses set by the Ford Foundation.

While this report primarily discusses the performing arts in general, its points are critical to the question of the state of theater today, because it illuminates problems from the beginning of the Regional Theatre Movement. Fundamental to understanding why the American nonprofit professional theater industry looks the way it does today is having an understanding of what was seen to be a problem in the beginning, and to understand that what exists today is an "answer" or growth in the direction of an answer

to those problems. Thus, while most of this chapter will refer to the arts in general, the problems and suggestions examined are those that profoundly shaped the theater industry into what it is today.

First and foremost, the report addresses the old paradigm of thinking about the arts: the seeming incongruity of the arts and democracy. The panel boldly states, “We are seeking to demonstrate that there is no incompatibility between democracy and high artistic standards. And we are seeking to do so on a grand scale” (6). “Grand scale” is no understatement: the panel challenges the very core of the old paradigm, of the arts as only for the elite, and boldly states that:

the arts are not for a privileged few but for the many...their place is not on the periphery of society but at its center...they are not just a form of recreation but are of central importance to our well-being and happiness. In the panel’s view, this status will not be widely achieved unless artistic excellence is the constant goal of every artist and every arts organization, and mediocrity is recognized as the ever-present enemy of true progress in the development of the arts (11-12).

Starting from there, making that statement in the first chapter, the report then points out the gaps and challenges the assumptions in the new paradigm of art for the masses.

Part of the reason for the existence of the report is its argument that the arts need an “intelligent and understanding audience,” meaning an audience educated about the arts (5). Previously, primarily the elite and wealthy were those educated about aesthetics and the arts. The report, however, argues that everyone must have this understanding in order for the arts to truly thrive. The panel asserts that:

If an audience cannot appreciate the magnificent and continuing dialogue that makes the artist relate to the present as well as the past, then there is little hope that a work of art will arouse the sense of drama and conflict without which art ceases to be a living, vital matter and deteriorates to something merely “appreciated” (5).

Thus the panel here asserts that artists need their audience to meet them on their terms, and bring a conscious understanding to the artistic work. The artists, however, are responsible for providing that education to the audience, and likewise the report challenges the audience to support the artist. In the report, this came to be called “Building Greater Appreciation,” to which they devoted a full chapter. In this chapter, they state that

It is not enough to have strong performing arts institutions...there must also be a sizable public prepared through education, both formal and informal, to receive aesthetic pleasure from their efforts and eager to join in the attempt to enhance the nation's cultural life (183).

This drive for a larger audience with a greater appreciation thus molded and shaped the growth of the arts for the next fifty years.

The panel's main point from the perspective of the public is that the arts are a consumable product, and the public wants to know what the product's value is. The public has a desire to know what the benefit of the arts will be for them, and to have this communicated to them in a way they understand. The panel asserts that this is a typically American notion, and that “it is very much in the American character to demand such proofs” (6). The benefit to the public, however, is not often clearly communicated, because of the mentality that artists have of their work. Artists “know” the value of the arts, and are “firm in the conviction that art is its own reward” (6). Furthermore, they feel that art is “inevitably degraded if it is justified in secondary or utilitarian terms” (6). Artists, then, have difficulty offering the public the information it requires before supporting and patronizing the arts, leading to under-supported artists and arts organizations.

The panel report attempts to fill in some of this gap with justifications and evidence for why Americans should support the arts, and does so on several different levels. Acknowledging the answers an artist might give, such as making “society [and] its individual members...wiser and happier – inwardly healthier, outwardly more alive,” the report offers other perspectives that might appeal to a variety of different people and communities (6). The first point the panel makes is one that W. McNeil Lowry made as well: that the arts were, in the 1960s, greatly overlooked as the nation pressed on with research in science and technology (7), and were necessary to balance this scientific development. The panel’s second point is that the arts assist with the image of Americans internationally, thereby “increasing international understanding” and “counter[ing] the widespread view that the United States is interested in little except material values” (8). Finally, the panel argues that the arts are necessary for people to be able to deal with their humanity, and to be able to find ways to cope with things that happen in their life. A critical aspect of these three points is that they all deal with the universal affect of the arts, and how they can positively impact *any* American’s life. Furthermore, the panel likens the arts to other respected aspects of American life: the necessity of constantly improving scientific knowledge, the patriotic desire to have a positive image abroad, and the basic human need to have something to help cope with life, much like what religion provides.

Throughout the rest of the report, the panel makes recommendations inside the new paradigm that the Ford Foundation began, promoting the needs of institutionalized arts and the arts as a business. As such, one of the most influential recommendations was that of the need for trained arts managers. Arts administrators, with the advent of the arts

institutions, were suddenly in high demand, and none had any formal training in the field. Responsible for the business side of the organization, they held a crucial role in the growth of the establishment. Recognizing the various roles of a general manager as distinct from the any other position in the organization, the report suggests that not only is it “of great importance” (165) that there be more managers, but that these managers be trained. “It must be recognized that arts administration cannot be left to improvement on such a modest scale, or to trial and error, or to the hope that somehow sufficient information will pass from one person to another” (166). This recommendation greatly influenced the direction of another major resource, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), to be discussed in depth in the next chapter. In 1965, the National Council for the Arts, the committee responsible for reviewing the grant applications selected for NEA funding by the peer-review panels, resolved to “take on the responsibility for improving the leadership and administration of institutions in the Arts,” and immediately made it a priority to fund the hiring of trained arts managers. According to Richard A. Peterson, a cultural policy expert, “The professionalization of arts managers was one of the recommendations of the Rockefeller Panel Report that...was influential in shaping the structure of the National Endowment of the Arts. The need to upgrade the managerial skills of arts managers was a continuing theme through the 1970s” (Wallis 174). Indeed, in the first annual report published by the NEA in 1965, the National Council for the Arts stated that “one of the greatest needs of arts organizations is able administrators” (NEA 1964-1965 18).

The other watershed recommendation was that corporations make significant increases in their financial contributions to the arts. According to the panel report,

corporations contributed “\$536 million, or one percent of their taxable income of \$51.3 billion” (Rockefeller 82). Out of 100 corporations surveyed, only fifty-five percent gave to the arts, and “about half of these gave less than one percent of their total contributions to the arts” (83). The panel then commenced to outline the reasons why corporations should give: in their assessment, corporations stand to gain loyal, satisfied employees who have something to do with their increasing leisure time; tourists are attracted to the city for the arts, who then patronize local businesses; and the report argues that an individual businessman should simply support the arts out of his desire to see his community flourish.

The most powerful statement on why corporations should contribute to the arts, however, comes directly from an unidentified president of a corporation. He states:

We are in a world competition for survival, and if we do not meet the requirements of a free society to support education, culture, medicine, welfare, etcetera, we will give the rest of the world one good reason to put us in the category of a second-rate nation...the large corporations in this country have the funds to meet the challenge and our government has given them the green light. (90)

This statement brilliantly puts corporate contributions into the perspective of executives who want to thrive in an increasingly international environment. The significance, as this president points out, is not in the quantity of funding provided to the arts, but rather in what that funding represents: a commitment to culture in the United States and a commitment to making the United States a nation with values that include supporting the arts.

A major characteristic of the report is a good balance between placing the responsibility for the relationship between artists and the public on the shoulders of both parties, and the challenges in the chapter on corporate funding is no different. The panel

challenges the artists to take a greater initiative in promoting the value of the arts to funders, as well as approaching corporations with similar objectives and markets. Corporations, meanwhile, must make the arts a philanthropic priority which, the panel asserts, is less likely without research, and three percent of corporations surveyed for the report had obtained or conducted research into the possibility of supporting the arts (87).

The report further argues that corporations at the time used only a small portion of their allotted tax deduction, and that in addition to fiscal support, arts organizations could greatly benefit from the managerial expertise of corporate executives. Individual employees in corporations are also encouraged to give back to the community when they work in a local branch of a national or international company. “This is particularly important now,” the panel argues, “when mergers have often dried up corporate support at the community level because the parent organization does not see its opportunity to serve the community in which its affiliates do business” (91). This places the responsibility of the corporation in the hands of not only higher-up executives but also the individual employees. The effect of this is much like the regional theater movement itself: it makes all individuals, regardless of their position or the size of their company, responsible for advancing the arts.

As a direct result of the recommendations for corporation to contribute more to the arts, David Rockefeller formed the Business Committee for the Arts, Inc. (BCA) two years later, with a mission to “ensure that the arts flourish in America by encouraging, inspiring and stimulating businesses to support the arts in the workplace, in education and in the community” (“About BCA”). Over the next few decades, corporations increased their support for the arts, and began to advocate within themselves to continue supporting

the arts. In 1988, James E. Burke, chairman and chief executive officer of Johnson & Johnson, an international healthcare company, gave a speech at the 1988 National Arts Convention. Titled “Public Service: The Winning Edge in Business,” Burke spoke to both businesses and artists, arguing that the benefits of the arts, from the perspective of corporations, is a higher quality of life in the community, an enhanced public image, economic growth, an incentive for the highest quality employees, and a way to sell more products (Burke 52). Furthermore, Burke explains to artists that they must bear in mind “the essential importance of public service in our enterprise system” (53) thus continuing the Rockefeller Brothers Fund assertion that patronage is as much the responsibility of artists as of the funders.

Perhaps the most lasting contribution the Rockefeller Brothers Fund made was its suggestion that the arts need more research. During the second half of the twentieth century, several organizations published reports on the state of the arts, including Phillip Morris and the Americans for the Arts, and the Wallace Foundation. Each subsequent report has provided critical knowledge to both the arts and its supporters in the struggle to understand one another. Interestingly, the most recent study, funded by the Wallace Foundation and conducted by the RAND Corporation, re-focused the debate about the benefits of the arts, investigating the intrinsic benefits of the arts, rather than the economic benefits. Most importantly, the wealth of knowledge in these reports could not be procured by individual arts organizations – a theater, for example, could not take the time, energy, and money to conduct this research. Yet the theaters use the information in the reports in their grant applications and use it to inform their promotional campaigns. These reports play a fundamental role in establishing a clear picture of the current state of

affairs, and provide an ongoing, flexible resource that is useful and can aid American nonprofit theater no matter the circumstances.

Upon publication, the arguments and ideas set forth in the Rockefeller Panel Report became part of the rhetoric used to promote and obtain funding for the arts in the United States. Funders, businessmen, politicians, and private citizens now had easy access to educating themselves as to the fundamental needs of performing artists of various disciplines, and could support and provide resources to the artists based on these needs. As stated in the Foreword, the panel intended for this report to be “a challenge, not an answer” (Rockefeller Brothers Fund v). And indeed, few answers were provided. The panel began by acknowledging that, “Only in our time have we begun to recognize the arts as a community concern” (v). The panel thus saw a need to continue to educate the public, and did so by informing the public about the artists’ needs. The report began with a commitment to art for art’s sake, following Otto Kahn’s groundbreaking endeavors in the first half of the century, and carefully addressed the concerns of each group of potential patrons. For example, the report begins with the most basic needs for the creative mind: time for the creative process. “That [the artist] should have time is of the essence, and thus far we have not, generally speaking, been overly generous in helping our artists find it” (4-5). Artists also need a place for their finished work to be presented, as well as financial stability during the rehearsal and production periods. The power of the panel report lies in its ability to promote both the more obvious needs of artists and also the more counter-intuitive things, such as time for artists to relax. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund panel report marked a critical point in American culture and in

the Regional Theatre Movement, as now artists and their patrons had concrete, well-researched evidence to use to make a powerful case for the arts.

The National Endowment for the Arts
The Big Test: Did We Succeed?

The final piece of the model for today's theater to be considered here was the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Begun in 1965 during Lyndon B. Johnson's administration, the NEA symbolized the final attempt to prove to American citizens the necessity of the arts through their usefulness. Refuting the mentality that de Tocqueville saw during his visit to the United States, the NEA tested the business model as the way to have both the "useful" and the "beautiful" created by the Ford Foundation, furthered by Theatre Communications Group, and promoted by the Rockefeller Panel Report. The NEA, in effect, institutionalized the relationship between all of the public and the arts, because every taxpaying citizen's money was used to fund the arts, regardless of whether a taxpayer attended a performing arts production. The NEA also made a lasting contribution that only it could make: financial support to continue and, in some cases, create state arts councils, which led to an infrastructure throughout the nation to support the arts. The NEA assisted with the decentralization of the arts by funding the arts in small towns and cities across the United States. It also decentralized the main source of funding away from the elite by using taxpayer funds, though it did not itself become the main source of funding. Both of these efforts brought the arts directly into the public's homes and wallets, turning up the volume on the conversation in the United States between artists and their communities. This funding led to more opportunities for artists to make a career out of their craft, more funding from other contributors, and led to more opportunities for the public to have access to the arts in their communities. A critical downside was that it increased the number of problems artists and the public had to deal

with, since there was no precedent for government funding. The importance of the NEA, however, was not how much money it gave to the arts, but rather what it symbolized: a radical shift from the belief that art was for the elite to having easily accessible art for the masses. Yet given the nature of the problems the NEA overcame during its initial years and has since come up against, however, one can argue that while significant progress has been made, ultimately the attempt to shift the nation's underlying mentality on the arts has failed.

Historically unprecedented, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson accomplished what James Buchanan, William Taft, and Franklin D. Roosevelt could not: a lasting federal government agency devoted to the arts (Henderson 1-2). With the NEA and its parent organization, the National Foundation for the Arts and Humanities, the federal government was committing itself to supporting the arts for art's sake, unlike the Works Progress Administration projects, which were primarily aimed at creating jobs.

The NEA is most commonly known as the brainchild of President John F. Kennedy, who picked up where his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had left off in his State of the Union Address, in which he asserted that "The Federal Government should give official recognition of the importance of the arts and other cultural activities" (Henderson 2). Having grown up with extensive exposure to the arts, Kennedy stated in a speech at Amherst College on October 25, 1963, that he saw "little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist" and that he envisioned a nation that would "steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and...steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens" ("About Us"). As Joseph Zeigler points out, Kennedy was always focused "not on arts

institutions, but on individual artists,” which set the stage for future programs in the NEA (*Arts in Crisis* 14). It would also seem that Kennedy belonged to the elite that was previously the primary class privy to being educated about the arts, and was now in a position to impart that appreciation on the nation. Assigning August Heckscher the role of Special Consultant on the Arts in 1962, Kennedy entrusted him with the task of assessing the current programs and policies affecting the arts (Henderson 2). Though Kennedy was assassinated before he could bring his idea to fruition, the NEA was a distinctly Kennedy-era proposal.

The Rockefeller Panel Report directly influenced the direction the NEA took when it was born. Livingston Biddle, Jr., who drafted the proposal for the NEA and was later chairman of the Endowment from 1977-1981, noted in his book, *Our Government and the Arts*, that as he wrote the proposal for the Endowment, he was “surrounded by material garnered from a variety of sources. There were studies now from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, from the Ford Foundation... Comprehensive figures were in relatively short supply then so we delighted in this kind of detail” (Biddle 266). The influence from the panel report was also evident in the NEA’s consistent push for more arts funding from corporations, foundations, and individual citizens, as well as a commitment to training arts managers. At the first meeting, the National Council on the Arts stated that it

believes that one of the greatest needs of arts organizations is able administrators. It was recommended, therefore, that the Council cooperate with the Arts and Humanities Branch in the U.S. Office of Education in efforts to develop formal arts administration courses.” (NEA 1964-1965 18)

In addition, the National Council declared that its two primary objectives were “enlarging

audience participation in the Arts, and (providing) opportunities for wider professional activities and training” (15-16). Thus, the NEA began with the momentum of the work done so far by the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. However, due to the nature of the federal government, the NEA quickly ran into obstacles that it would spend the next forty years attempting to overcome.

An intrinsic problem of federal government spending is that giving public funds to any individual calls into question the importance of the “common good” versus “the individual,” regardless of whether the program is in the arts, housing, healthcare, or any other social program. In the arts, giving public funds assumes, regardless of intent, a universally-accepted aesthetic, especially in regards to excellence and appropriateness of content. The advent, however, of federal arts funding also indicated a shift in public opinion: it is significant that the majority of people not only supported and demanded a government agency for the arts, but were also willing to tolerate controversy and contentious discussions on the arts at the national level. Much of the old attitude on the arts was quickly changing with the rapid spread of theater outside New York and away from Broadway, enough so that the NEA could gain support in Congress and be passed into law.

Passing the NEA into law, however, was not without difficulties. The structure of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, was critical to the initial success of the agency, precisely because of American popular opinion on the arts. The National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities encompasses both the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, each of which has a National Council of 26 private

citizens, appointed by the president, who report to the chairman of their respective Endowments. Zeigler asserts that the primary reason the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act was able to pass was because the Humanities were included. “The arts were still suspect to many people,” says Zeigler. “But the humanities, with their concentration in higher education, were easier to approve” (*Arts in Crisis* 16). Donna Binkiewicz, author of *Federalizing the Muse*, confirms this, saying that, “Combining the arts and humanities provided a means of linking the arts more directly to national education” (Binkiewicz 79). Thus, the arts were still not credible enough to receive their own agency without a “buddy” agency with greater standing in the eyes of the American public. While this was a relatively minor hurdle, it was indicative of the extent to which the public attitude had not yet shifted.

As the NEA institutionalized the arts into the government, the arts then had to confront other government priorities. The inseparability of the NEA from other sectors of the government has principally impacted both the agency’s financial capacity for funding and the artists’ participation with the government. Given that the arts are not the federal government’s primary concern, the appropriations have always been hotly debated, especially during times of war or economic strife. Proving the necessity of the arts during the Vietnam War was particularly difficult, and led to the NEA’s first appropriations being half of what they were supposed to be. Promised to be \$5 million, plus \$2.75 million for State arts councils, the actual starting amount of the NEA, was only \$2.5 million, plus \$34,308 for the State arts councils (Zeigler, *Arts in Crisis* 19). This discrepancy became a trend for each subsequent year: In 1967, Johnson requested \$32 million for the Endowment, and was given \$4 million (20). Republican

Congressman Bow of Ohio summed up the major reason behind the minimal allowance for the arts, asserting that, “Certainly at this time there is not a soul on this floor who does not realize that we are at war...we cannot have guns and butter. And this Endowment is guns with strawberry shortcake covered with whipped cream and a cherry on top” (20). The tension between the federal government’s responsibilities domestically and internationally was thus an issue from the inception of the NEA and has strained the government’s ability to support the arts.

Conversely, the inextricable link between the NEA and the United States government’s foreign policy has, from the very beginning, created abrasion between artists and their federal funders. In 1965, for example, just prior to the birth of the NEA, President Johnson and the First Lady held a Festival of Arts at the White House and invited artists of both visual and performing arts backgrounds. Many attended, however many also declined, primarily in protest to the growing Vietnam War. According to Zeigler, the festival was “a disaster. When a president made a special effort to acknowledge the value of the arts, he was scorned and rejected by the artists themselves” (18). *New York Times* reporter Howard Taubman summed it up perfectly, saying:

The festival, it was felt, underlined the difficulties and advantages of bringing about direct communication between the President and the intellectual and artistic community...the White House is accustomed to the protocol of ceremonial occasions, and creative artists in particular are intent on searching their hearts and speaking out. (Taubman “Arts”)

In retrospect, the Festival of the Arts debacle was seen as a display of the Johnsons’ and the government’s grace and generosity, and the artists’ ingratitude and inability to be diplomatic in the name of the arts. The events of the Festival of the Arts demonstrated a

clear disconnect between what the NEA was attempting to accomplish, and what the artists' sentiments were about the government.

From the beginning of the NEA, the grants and programs have been centered on artistic excellence and the individual artist. Unlike the Ford Foundation, which primarily gave grants to establish regional theater companies, the NEA's initial grants were given to institutions for the purpose of helping that institution support individual artists. The mission of the National Endowment for the Arts is that it is "a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education" ("At A Glance"). The grants made to theater artists were in line with this mission, and theater consistently received either the highest or second-highest amount of annual funding from the NEA in the first five years, receiving a total of \$6,299,819 between 1966-1970. The first grants given to theater artists were to the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA) to assist in its ability to "offer information, employment services, and the advice of staff specialists to theatre groups in the western and southern regions of the country" and \$175,000 for the purpose of expanding the number of productions of new American plays (NEA 1966 49). In 1967, through the NEA's Resident Professional Theatre Program, fourteen theaters in thirteen cities received a total of \$383,500 to "increase salaries of certain actors the company could not otherwise keep and to attract additional actors" (NEA 1967 45). The grants assisted resident professional theater companies in attracting and paying the highest quality actors and directors in an effort to "[enable] the theatres to develop artistically through the engaging of better and larger acting companies and guest directors" (NEA 1967 45). The following year, eighteen theaters, several of which

received grants in 1967, received a total of \$300,000. The program's objectives were further developed to include assisting in "growth and development of a decentralized American professional theatre through the strengthening of existing companies" and the NEA acknowledged in its annual report that "there has been increasing recognition...that the professional resident theatre...cannot operate without a deficit and therefore must be permanently supported" (NEA 1968 52). This program increased in funding by 55% the following year, as twenty-four theaters in sixteen states were assisted with a total of \$465,500 from this program alone.

It is important to note, however, that for the most part, the same theaters were receiving funding each year. Between 1967-1970, 54% of theaters that received funding received it three out of those four initial years of the Endowment (NEA 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970). In addition, many of those theater companies were run by participants in the 1959 Ford Foundation conference, such as Nina Vance, Zelda Fichandler, and John Reich, and were some of the thirteen theaters selected for support by TCG, such as Alley Theatre, Arena Stage, Milwaukee Repertory, Playhouse in the Park, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Trinity Square Playhouse. The NEA also funded Center Theater Group and the Goodman Memorial Theatre, recipients of TCG support, though only in two of the four years.

Thus, the NEA followed the trend of funding those "approved" by McNeil Lowry and the Ford Foundation to receive support and be nurtured. In turn, the NEA's choice to fund a theater gave that particular theater a "seal of approval," which other funders, especially corporations, used to determine to whom they would give money. In the first ten years of the NEA, from 1967-1976, corporate giving to the arts increased by over

1000%, leaping from \$22 million to \$221 million. Zeigler attributes this to the fact that “many corporations looked to NEA as both justifier and sometimes collaborator in funding arts activities in their market areas” (*Arts in Crisis* 64). Corporations, however, were not the only funding bodies encouraged by the NEA. In 1967, Chairman Roger Stevens pushed for a more “cooperative effort...[including] private enterprise, foundations, State and municipal support, regional organizations, and individual contributions” (NEA 1967 1). By the following year, he confidently stated that the “\$8.6 million Federal investment in support of the arts...brought over \$27 million into Endowment-supported programs and projects from other sources” (NEA 1968 3). Nevertheless, he maintained that while it was a good start, it was still insufficient to fully support the arts.

The NEA was successful in many ways, however its failure to shift public opinion on the arts lies in the NEA’s ability to satisfactorily handle problems with the public and the artists’ expectations as to what would be deemed appropriate content to be funded. The use of public funds to support the arts has led to much controversy with certain works of art, because the relationship between the public and the artist is fundamentally still the same. The ability to prove the necessity or usefulness of art in the United States is precarious, and anything that might attack an aspect of American culture that is more established will not be permitted. Questions of appropriateness and decency have been in and around the NEA since its inception, and at one point almost ended the agency. With hundreds of millions of taxpayers, the federal government has had the enormous task of continually maintaining artistic excellence while addressing the myriad individual opinions and personal values, and clearly, not everyone agrees.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the NEA came up against all of its intrinsic limitations and demonstrated its weakness in adapting to changes in American culture. In the late 1980s, the Christian Right began to gain popularity and became much more vocal about ensuring the existence of family values in the United States. As conservative opinions grew louder and gained momentum, the decisions of the peer-review panel in theater were overturned by the National Council for the Arts, due to their controversial nature, and due to the lack of support from prominent conservatives in Congress. In particular, four individuals were denied grants that the peer-review panel for theater unanimously chose them for, and the ensuing political turmoil became known as the case of “the NEA Four.” Karen Finley, John Fleck, Holly Hughes, and Tim Miller, all past recipients of individual grants from the NEA, were selected for funding from the NEA in 1990. The National Council for the Arts, however, overturned the peer panel’s selection for these individuals on the basis of the homosexual content of their work, and set off a series of events that almost closed the Endowment entirely.

The responses from all involved in the controversy were, in a word, loud. After unsuccessfully overturning the decision, the four artists filed Federal lawsuits. Other artists, outraged at the act of censorship, refused almost one-half million dollars in grant funding (*Zeigler Arts in Crisis* 115). Renowned artists such as Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim refused to accept the National Medal of the Arts, the highest national award given to artists. In Congress, representatives and senators, regardless of whether they agreed with the decision, were preparing to debate whether or not to keep the Endowment open, given the massive controversy.

With this fiasco, the Endowment came up against each of its limitations. Much of the controversy had to do with an “anti-obscenity” clause written into the NEA’s grant contracts, which not only complicated the matter, but also extended the life of the ordeal because of the lengthy Federal legal process to determine the constitutionality of the clause. Furthermore, while the goal of the NEA was to support works of art based on their artistic merit, the work of the NEA Four was deemed political in nature and thus unworthy of funding, and artists saw that as contrary to their purpose in the United States. Peter Zeisler wrote in *American Theatre* magazine that year, “Art isn’t political because of a label, a theory or a rejected grant application; art is political because it has the power to change lives” (“Decent”). A federal judge finally ruled that

The government may well be able to put restrictions on who it subsidizes, and how it subsidizes, but once the government moves to subsidize, it cannot do so in a manner that carries with it a level of vagueness that violates the First and Fifth Amendments. (*Zeigler Arts in Crisis* 117)

Additionally, the NEA had, at this point, extensive influence over other public and private support for the arts, and the Rockefeller Foundation argued that “Although the NEA budget may appear small...NEA funding decisions and NEA policy exercise a most powerful influence—an influence far beyond the dollar amounts involved” (116). Thus, the question of closing the NEA was not simply a matter of losing one funding source; it was a matter of losing a funding source that influenced all other sources, and could very easily have caused the collapse of the system of support for the arts in the United States.

In response, Theatre Communications Group lobbied and advocated for the artists, and the removal of the obscenity pledge. With 162 nonprofit professional theaters and 69 prominent theatre artists behind them, Theatre Communications Group had a formidable presence in the debate. Moreover, the reaction of theater artists showed how

much the artists expected the audience to meet them on their terms, as TCG encouraged theater professionals to be bolder than ever now that their work was being given more media coverage. In the process of building and evolving a relationship between the public and the artists, the NEA Four controversy and the period from 1989-1991 was the most volatile.

The NEA, as an initiative, was a success in that it has provided an extensive amount of money for the arts, contributed to the development of new theaters in the Regional Theatre Movement, and decentralized the arts from New York to Middle America. It pushed the bounds of what Americans considered appropriate for the Federal government and for their taxes, and survived a major crisis. However, the NEA still has its vulnerabilities, largely stemming from its ability to function as a funding body while remaining a government entity. The process of changing a policy, for example, is not simply a matter of convening a meeting; it often requires Congressional approval, and, as in the case of the NEA Four, could require a federal court of appeals. Many still question whether or not the United States government should fund the arts. This is the wrong question to ask, though, because it only leads to a “yes” or a “no” with which few are ever satisfied. The more constructive question to ask is, “Is the relationship between the public and the artist strong enough to be able to support a government funding body?” It seems that perhaps, in the 1960s, creating the NEA may have been a bit premature; the momentum behind the cultural boom was not adequate enough to support the rocky road ahead, and people were unprepared to deal with the less mainstream aspects of the arts. Yet, had the NEA not been created, the funding bodies would have remained those of the wealthy elite, and many significant sources of financial support, such as corporate

funding, would not have grown as rapidly as it did. The NEA could have waited, and simply joined the ranks of other funders. However, by taking the lead, state arts councils grew and the public attitude towards the arts shifted more radically than it would have otherwise. By decentralizing and multiplying the support for the arts, the NEA both altered and tested the relationship between the public and the artists, and, like all relationships, it has had its honeymoon period, its near-breakups, and everything in between.

Conclusion

The Answer, and More Questions

The Ford Foundation, Theatre Communications Group, the Rockefeller Panel Report, and the National Endowment for the Arts were clearly major contributors to the Regional Theatre Movement in America. The Ford Foundation set up the model according to which all resources afterwards were provided to theater artists. Subsequently, TCG took over the lead role in finding and providing resources to theater artists, and was a much more adaptable organization, able to truly unify and represent theater artists in the United States. Once unified, theater artists and their needs were promoted to the general public through the Rockefeller Panel Report, which also encouraged both performing artists and the public to seek to understand one another in order for the arts to flourish. Once the public had a better understanding of the arts, the conversation regarding the arts was finally open to the idea of government funding, and the National Endowment for the Arts became a test for the status of the relationship between the arts and the public. No other initiatives or resources during this time had such a significant impact on nonprofit professional theater in The United States. Not only were these four influential, but they were also interrelated and directly led to and affected each other. Other resources have been provided to the nonprofit theater industry since the National Endowment for the Arts was created, however these initial four resources laid the foundation of the model according to which all later resources were provided. Furthermore, most of the later resources were simply more sources of funds or other studies on the economic impact of the arts. None of the later sources were as

groundbreaking as these four, because after them, the ground had been broken, and it was simply a matter of digging deeper.

Other resources, however, did help the Regional Theater Movement grow in specific ways. One thing that could have been included, for example, was the Twentieth Century Fund report by William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, entitled *The Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*. This study paralleled the Rockefeller Panel Report, and provided research on the economic benefits and effects of the arts. It impacted how the arts are researched and studied today, and furthered the economic case that has been commonly used to defend the arts since the 1960s. The report also helped shape what resources are provided to the arts, so artists have resources that can be defended in economic terms, such as audience building, marketing, and job employment. Further research could be conducted on this report and the Rockefeller report by matching those studies with recent studies, and fully assessing the extent to which the problems laid out in those reports have been solved.

Part of the hypothesis of this investigation was also the question, were there other factors that led to this movement, or did it happen simply because of the circumstances? As shown in this research, the circumstances were helpful, but the critical element was visionary leadership. Beginning with W. McNeil Lowry, each of the four initiatives had an individual or few individuals leading the way: Lowry for the Ford Foundation, Peter Zeisler at TCG, the group of panelists for the Rockefeller report (especially Nancy Hanks, who would later become the second Chairman of the NEA), and Livingston Biddle and Claiborne Pell who led Congress in passing the bill for the NEA. These individuals saw the future of nonprofit professional theater and the arts in the United

States, and worked tirelessly to craft and push that vision forward. As a result, the Regional Theater Movement grew from the minds of a few individuals to a large group to what is now an army of people, working to promote and support regional theater.

Now that an army exists to support, defend, and advocate for regional theater, the question is, can an army of many minds create a new vision for the industry? Given the nature of groups, most likely, an individual or small group will emerge with a vision for the next chapter of the story of nonprofit theater in the United States. Perhaps, however, that has already begun to happen. In 2005, the RAND Corporation, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, published a study promoting the intrinsic benefits of the arts, and the public effects of the benefits that are experienced on an individual, private level. This perspective on the arts is a sharp contrast to the usual study of the economic benefits of the arts. In the arts community, it was hailed as a turning point in the right direction. Yet it went largely unnoticed with the general public; a quick search for newspaper articles on the topic turned up no results, indicating that perhaps, studies have become so common, they are no longer news.

More promising is the work being done on Richard Florida's idea of the Creative Class, and the newer centers for cultural policy, such as the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University. The University of Florida and New York University also have centers and departments for art and public policy, indicating a need for education on the subject. These centers may well be the source of the next vision for the arts in the United States: the mission of the Curb Center is that it is "dedicated to designing a new road map for cultural policy in America" ("Home"). This would also follow the trend of individuals leading the way, as the work of the Curb

Center is primarily the work of Bill Ivey (also a Chairman of the NEA from 1998-2001), Steven Tepper, Paula Cleggett, and Elizabeth Long Lingo (“Staff”). Regardless of where it emerges from, however, once a vision is crafted and put forward, the work will be to get the already-existing army behind that vision. While that task may be challenging, fortunately the nonprofit theater industry has a means to accomplish that through Theatre Communications Group. TCG has the means to quickly and effectively provide strong leadership and represent the many voices in the field, and will certainly play a crucial role in the next phase of nonprofit theater in the United States.

Clearly, in the old model of nonprofit theater, an extensive effort has been made to educate the audience, per the Rockefeller report’s challenge that an “intelligent audience” is requisite for the growth of regional theater. As demonstrated with the Yale conference in 1976, however, this has left theaters little time or resources to be focused on anything else. This raises the question, who else could undertake this work of educating the American public? Studies conducted over the past few decades have, like the Rockefeller report, assisted in establishing the reasons one should attend a theater production. Common sense, however, would say that these studies are most likely not read by anyone who does not currently have an interest in theater. Thus, theater artists are still obliged to persuade the public to their productions. Another possibility would be for the school boards and administrators to take over outreach and education programs, to educate young people about the value of the arts. Schools, however, are notoriously under-funded, and the arts are often last priority. Many theater companies attempt to fill in the gap by engaging young people through outreach and school programs, which leads to another future research question: To what extent do outreach and school programs help

or hinder theater artists? It would seem that theater companies and theater artists spend a large amount of time on outreach and school programs, with actors doing matinee performances and taking their work to the school, and theater administrators applying for grants to fund the programs and working with school administrators to create an effective program. To what extent do these programs lead to larger, more educated audiences? Conversely, to what extent do these programs increase or decrease the quality of the productions? Some research now exists on the effect of theater on the students, however research as to the impacts on a theater company efforts to build educated audiences would be beneficial, especially at this point in time. The amount of energy spent over the last fifty years on building audience appreciation has been enormous; it is time to evaluate how effective those efforts have truly been, not just conduct a marketing survey of a theater's audience.

Perhaps a new model for nonprofit theater could come from a new model of funding. The same method applied to the industry as a whole could be applied just to funders. Historically, those that have funded theater are royalty and the church, who, one could say, have four common characteristics: power, wealth, authority, and respect. In the United States, the groups with those four qualities are foundations, corporations, and the government. Right now, nonprofit theaters receive funding from a mixture of those sources. What would happen if any one of those funding sources was the sole source? What would be the advantages and disadvantages? Each has extensive financial resources, though the government has considerably less than foundations or corporations. Likewise, foundations and corporations have public approval generally spend the money wherever they would like, whereas the government must always be responsible for public

opinion, and the bureaucratic processes inherent in the government make it a highly inflexible organization. The government, however, would be the most likely of the three to ensure minority and underprivileged groups have the same access to theater as other groups. Foundations also have other endeavors they want and need to pursue. Likewise, corporations have their own priorities, such as their brand and their product, that influences who they fund. However, this could be a blessing in disguise. Businesses generally fund theaters with mission statements and purposes that match the business. What if a business that normally gives grants to the same theater companies every year simply became the sole funder of that company? The business would not have any say in the artistic direction of the theater, but might have sole promotional rights and would be financially responsible for the theater. The value in studying the potential of this model is that it would prove the economic impact of theater by inextricably linking a theater company to a business. Thus, however the theater is doing, one would be able to directly see how the economic health of the theater influences the business, and the economic impacts of theater could be more concretely proved.

A half-century after the meeting between W. McNeil Lowry and the Board of Trustees of the Ford Foundation, the relationship between the artist and the public in the United States has clearly shifted. In regards to the two critical issues, the need to make the beautiful more useful and the belief that art is only for the elite, much progress has been made, and the nonprofit theater in America is thriving as a result. With the advent of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the geographic decentralization of theater from New York across the nation, artists have taken ground in changing the public's view of the arts as primarily for the wealthy. However, theater artists are still struggling to

maintain a sufficient audience base, and still encounter the challenge of obtaining adequate funding. Thus, it seems that some part of the equation in the relationship between the arts and the public has yet to progress. As the NEA tested this relationship, it seems the piece that has not been resolved is not the mentality that the arts are only for the elite, given that after that understanding of the arts was broken down piece by piece, it proved to be just a façade. Consequently, while it was previously seen as a core issue, it has now been pushed far enough out of the way that Americans can see the truth: that the fundamental issue that must be dealt with is the idea that the beautiful must be useful.

Knowing that, one can see that ultimately, if the goal of the Regional Theatre Movement was to break down and break through the old attitude towards theater in the United States, it failed. That mind-set was not eradicated. What *did* happen was that the bounds of this mentality were pushed as far as they could go. In that process, an extraordinary amount was accomplished: Last year, corporations contributed an average of over \$300,000 per corporation to nonprofit professional theaters, and the average theater received support from 34 corporations (TCG *Theatre Facts* 10). In a recent Google search, one can now obtain an arts management masters degree in twenty-one states and Puerto Rico. University students nationwide can now earn a degree in Theater Studies, and go on to receive a masters degree in almost every facet of the craft. Theatre Communications Group now has an entire department for Management Services, which provides resources and training for arts managers. In short, theater artists can now communicate with and learn from each other in myriad ways and with ease.

Thus, even with the mistakes made and the misdirection in prioritizing the institution over the artist, the growth of theater out of New York had to happen this way.

Every facet of the old mentality had to be explored and challenged. Every possibility for theater to grow in the old mentality had to be attempted. Now that every nook and cranny has been uncovered, the fundamental issue is clear. As a result, theater artists and their supporters now have a chance to step outside the box and perhaps take a different route. Much of the current way of doing things, in which institutions are run as businesses, works. So the next shift may be more subtle. Nevertheless, whatever direction theater goes next, it needs to be in the direction of the artist. With all of this focus on increasing funding and supporting managers, however, nonprofit theater has yet to adequately support the actors and designers themselves. Theater in the United States now has beautiful theaters and gorgeous performance venues, with highly trained, dedicated artistic and managing directors, but still faces basic issues such as adequate compensation and rehearsal time for actors and support for new playwrights. As far back as 1986, Peter Zeisler noted that “Perhaps most important of all, we need—we must find—ways to nurture our artists through that creative gestation period known as rehearsal” (Zeisler *Foreword ix*). Twenty-two years later, in 2008, monologist Mike Daisey performed his show, *How Theater Failed America*, in which he berates the American theater community for failing to support artists. He argues that American nonprofit theater is so focused on branding, marketing, and running theater as a business, that America has lost the actual art of theater.

American nonprofit theater needs new goals. The challenges posed by the Rockefeller Panel Report have been met or are being met. The arts need new goals, and theater should be the one to set them. Theater is the leader of the arts in the United States. Its basis in language allows it to be altered more easily and to change with the

environment of its audience more seamlessly. Of the keynote speakers at the National Performing Arts Convention in 2008, two of the five were from theater: Bill Rauch, Artistic Director of Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Anna Deveare Smith, a playwright and actor. The industry has reached the point at which it needs to be reinvented; to keep dealing with theater and the arts from the perspectives of the 1960s is to simply maintain the status quo. A new vision must be created, and new goals set within that vision. First and foremost, that vision must be truly based on the artist, with funding supporting artistic excellence, not theater as an institution. It could be said that after fifty years, theater has largely been taken out of the hands of artists in the name of supporting the arts, and the individual artist has been forgotten. The cultural focus has been taken away from those performing and creating a world with the audience, and from what truly matters to the audience: the experience of the theater. The ultimate impact is that there is now not only a serious concern for the sustainability of theater, but also for the quality of theater. So wherever nonprofit theater goes next, and in every endeavor henceforth, it must be in the direction of supporting, providing for, and cherishing America's artists.

Appendix A

Initiative	Important Year(s)	Pros	Cons
The Ford Foundation: Division of Humanities and the Arts	1957-1970	Launched the Regional Theatre Movement: funded new theaters across the country, gave theater artists jobs, and gave audiences everywhere more opportunities to experience theater. Set the model for theaters to run as businesses.	The business model restricted funding to only those theaters that had an institution and good business practices; led to a decreased focus on the individual artist and the art form and increased focus on audience development and marketing the theater.
Theatre Communications Group	1961-present	United the American nonprofit theater community and gave it a voice to the American public and the U.S. government; has provided many new services and grants for theaters	Has continued to fall short in finding ways to support theaters in supporting their individual artists and give them a voice
Rockefeller Brothers Fund Panel Report	1965	Promoted the needs of the performing arts and performing artists to the general public, and addressed concerns the public might have regarding those needs; greatly improved the relationship between the public and the arts.	Also promoted the arts as a business and primarily addressed the public's concerns by using the economic impact of the arts; set the precedent for defending the arts in this mindset for the rest of the century.
National Endowment for the Arts	1965-1971, 1990-1992	Decentralized funding from the elite (i.e. family foundations) to state governments. Also helped decentralized theater from New York to cities across the country. Influenced other funders to contribute more to the arts.	Cumbersome organization due to government ties: cannot shift quickly with public opinion, and must cater to the majority because it uses tax money for funding.

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