2018

STRUGGLING TOWARD AN AMERICAN NATIONAL THEATRE

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Rhetoric, Theory and Culture

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2018

This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture.

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I dedicate this work to my parents who first introduced me to the wonders of live theatre, who instilled in me a love for learning, and who encouraged me to pursue my dreams no matter how impossible they seemed.

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Acknowledgements

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my committee, Dr. Jennifer Slack, Dr. Patricia Sotirin, Dr. Stefka Hristova, and Lisa Johnson de Gordillo for their vast knowledge, their generous spirits, and their infinite patience.

Abstract

The United States is conspicuously lacking in a large-scale government subsidy program for the arts and has never established a National Theatre. This makes us unique among most developed nations in the world as well as among many developing countries that established national theatres early in their burgeoning histories, and it begs the question: why has government support of the cultural life of the nation never been a priority in the U.S.? One notable exception to this can be found in considering the work accomplished by the Federal Arts Projects created under the auspices of the Work Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s. The policies enacted by the Roosevelt administration to address the crippling social and economic issues of the day signaled a profound shift in the ways in which the government responded to the needs of the people and resulted in the development of a new and sweeping form of federally funded welfare relief that extended to white collar workers and artists. Contested on political and economic grounds, the social welfare programs of the New Deal were the source of much debate, but none more so than the Federal Theatre Project (FTP).

Using a cultural studies approach and the theory of articulation I consider the complexity of the FTP from a perspective that appreciates its transitory nature while also considering the multi-dimensionality of the project, thus providing a much richer way to analyze what articulations between social practices can teach us about larger questions of power and resistance. My intention is to challenge the perception of the FTP as either a failed attempt at a government supported theatre project or a model to be replicated but rather to consider how engagement in the process of struggle led to FTP innovations that can inform the future development of a National Theatre in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

The United States does not have a National Theatre and this is significant. It is significant because the absence of such a theatre reveals much about the complexity of the ongoing struggle between the government (as patron) and the arts in this country. And it is this ongoing struggle that has come to characterize attempts to fulfill the dream of building a National Theatre in the United States.

In considering the concept "National Theatre" I concede that there are as many subtleties in definition and design as there are unique national theatre programs scattered throughout the world. There are, however, two characteristics of any national theatre that I argue must be present in order for the program to be considered a true "National Theatre." First, a National Theatre program must enjoy government involvement in its founding or administration. Second, a National Theatre must be funded, at least in large part, by the government (in the U.S. the expectation would be that this subsidy come from the federal government and not be left to the individual states). This general descriptor is broad enough to encompass a number of national theatre arrangements but insists on this level of government support and subsidy in order to be considered a true "National Theatre." I provide these criteria as they play a central role in contextualizing one of the most significant and ongoing aspects of the struggle to build a national theatre program in the U.S.: the challenging relationship between the government and the arts world, particularly in terms of support and subsidy for an American National Theatre.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) (1935-1939), which was founded under the auspices of Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives in the 1930s, is the closet the U.S. has come to creating a "national theatre" program that would meet the two identified criteria. And, the FTP was in its scope and in its innovation a remarkable representation of what a national theatre in the U.S. could achieve. The FTP had the capacity to reach audiences representing a significant cross-section of the country, many of whom had never before experienced live theatre, and to innovate in ways that advanced the work of the theatre artistically and technically. These achievements were only made possible, however,

through a rather unorthodox funding arrangement conceived during a period of crisis and designed to meet specific economic and social needs.

The U.S. government's first foray into large-scale funding for the arts came not in the form of an arts council or granting institution but rather in the form of work relief for out-of-work artists who had been impacted by the economic devastation of the Great Depression. And, it was this contingent connection of work relief to theatre that would represent a significant site of struggle for both the FTP, during its short but fruitful history, as well as for attempts to establish a national theatre program in the United States in the decades following.

As I show, in terms of the contributions made to the development of a national theatre program in the U.S. the FTP is generally characterized in one of two ways: on the one hand, the FTP is held up as a model to emulate and on the other hand is treated as a failed attempt to transcend its origins to become a more permanent cultural fixture. It is my contention that neither of these characterizations, in their insistence on fixing the FTP as either success or failure, allows us to more fully explore the contributions the FTP actually made to a more nuanced understanding of what a uniquely American National Theatre could look like. These characterizations also underestimate the role that the articulation of work relief to theatre played in the development of those contributing innovations.

I contend that the legacy of the FTP, in terms of its contributions to the imagining of a national theatre program in the United States, is best understood not by assigning characteristics of success or failure to the project but rather by considering the ongoing struggle to negotiate tensions between practices, actors, and beliefs. In exploring these struggles I answer the central question: How is the process of struggle fundamental to informing the FTPs contributions to the future development of an American National Theatre? It will only be by considering the innovations of the FTP within the context of the larger struggle to create a uniquely American National Theatre that we will be able to more fully appreciate the project's contributions.

An American National Theatre

In an interview with Broadway and television producer Bonnie Nelson Schwartz (2003) for her book *Voices from the Federal Theatre*[1] oral historian and author Studs Terkel questioned why the United States was lacking in its development of a government supported theatre:

> Why don't we have a national theatre? Of course we should have a national theatre. We don't because we're still primitive in that respect. We're still haunted by the phrase Government. We're America. We're a land of individuals. We still think, By God, I can get that brass ring, and if I don't, it's my fault. Of course we need a national theatre. We need government aid whenever there's need for it (pp. 53-54).

Terkel, who worked on Roosevelt's New Deal Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Writers Project (FWP) during the 1930s,[2] is center of target in his summary of the main conflict that plagued the government sponsored arts projects of the 1930s, and in particular the Federal Theatre Project, as they attempted to reconcile the general attitude of many Americans as related to both government support of the arts and the deeply ingrained belief in American individualism and self-sufficiency. And it was this very struggle between government subsidy and the arts that began with the articulation of work relief and theatre that created a space within which the FTP at times acquiesced and at times actively resisted as it developed new ways to consider the problem of building a theatre program in the United States that had the potential to serve a wide and varied audience.

In considering the role of the FTP in the development of a national theatre program in the U.S., situating the FTP within the larger context of "national theatres" will be beneficial. To begin, two points must be made clear at the outset. First, due to the fluid

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[1] *Voices from the Federal Theatre* was developed as a companion piece to the public television special *Who Killed the Federal Theatre?*

[2] During the 1930s, Terkel was hired to work on the WPA's Federal Writers Project (FWP) in their radio division which afforded him the opportunity to branch out into radio performance and news reporting. His work with the FWP also afforded him access to the work of the WPA's Federal Theatre Project (FTP) which in later years was the subject of several of his interviews, most notably in his book *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (1970) and *Hope Dies Last: Keeping the Faith in Troubled Times* (2003).

nature of national theatres - their founding often during times of crisis or upheaval, their alignment with shifting political and economic agendas, their manner of subsidy, and their relationship to the government and the people – it is difficult to speak about a universal national theatre "model." Despite this lack of a cohesive "model" against which to measure the innovations of the FTP, there do exist characteristics that have come to be associated with national theatres throughout the world and that have, for those in the U.S. considering the national theatre question, emerged as practices that will not serve an American national theatre well. As I show, these characteristics include a theatre program that would advance a commitment to producing works that promote paternalism and nationalism and that favor "high art" provided to audiences in privileged spaces. The FTP fought against these widely accepted tenets throughout its short history but it was within the context of its challenges around navigating the complexities of a theatre program funded with work relief dollars that the FTP was able to struggle, resist, and implement change.

In considering what a uniquely American national theatre that pushed against widely adopted national theatre characteristics including paternalism, nationalism, "high art," and privileged space might look like, Lauren Kruger (1992) in *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimation in England, France, and America* asserts that rather than promoting the adoption of a national theatre located in an urban center and accessible to only a privileged few, an argument could instead be made for the establishment of "*federated* theatres whose national standing might no longer exclusively depend on the mass presence of the national audience in one place, but which might include a national federation of local audiences" (p. 5). This notion of decentralization was unique, but proved to be beneficial for the FTP as it developed its theatre program for a new national audience.

Novelist and literary critic R.C. Reynolds (1986), in *Stage Left: The Development of the American Social Drama in the Thirties*, explains his view of the FTP phenomenon being made possible by a "social atmosphere in which art and political commitment were intimately interrelated" but goes on to say that it was also this interrelationship that was ultimately "responsible for ending the largest and most successful attempt at establishing

a national theatre in the history of American drama" (pp. 80-81). Reynolds is referring to innovations that the FTP was able to make within and due to the confines of being funded as a work relief program. The form in which the funding came made it essential that the FTP innovate in ways that came to be seen as posing a threat to the very structure under which they were funded.

Hallie Flanagan (1940), FTP national director from 1935-1939, in reflecting on the scope of performances provided by the FTP's St. Louis Vaudeville troupe observed, "Certainly such performances and such audiences are the antithesis of our usual conception of theatre – metropolitan productions attended by the privileged and affluent few" (p. 174). Robert Schnitzer, who served as Delaware's State Director and Deputy Director of the FTP from 1936 to 1939, observed: "For a nation like this, centralized theatre makes very little sense. To have a company in Washington or New York which now and then goes out traveling into the field is not for us . . . Here we're so diverse and geographically dispersed that it's impossible to think of a national theatre for America" (quoted in Schwartz, 2003, p. 119). And theatre critic Burns Mantle, in an April 1938 *New York Daily News* article observed, " . . . someday, when we quit thinking vaguely of a national theatre as a marble building housing a golden-voiced stock company, and begin to think of it, as we should, in terms of a circuit of national theatre units, the condition will be corrected" (quoted in Flanagan, 1940, p. 323).

For those associated with the theatre in the United States and considering the question of development of a national theatre, the conception of an American national theatre program clearly includes the production of works that would speak in local and regional voices, that would embrace the relationship between art and political commitment, and that would be available for consumption by audiences in a wide geographic area but that would eschew the trappings associated with "high art" including privileged theatre spaces reserved for wealthy patrons able to access metropolitan centers. Creating such a program within the confines of available subsidy has continued to characterize the central conflict in the development of an American national theatre program. That the FTP was able to realize such a theatre program was only made possible

due to the use of work relief dollars for its subsidy – a "model" which is unlikely to be emulated.

Second, it must be understood that the FTP was not created by the Roosevelt administration to be or to become a national theatre despite the hope by many in artistic and political circles that it would develop along those lines. And, although the FTP was not designed to fill the role of American National Theatre, there is still value in situating it among various other attempts to build a national theatre program in the U.S. both before and after the New Deal era as doing so provides insight into the struggles the project faced and the forces the project resisted in its development of what is now considered to be a version of a national theatre program unique to the United States.

Because there is no replicable "model" upon which to base the development of a national theatre program, each nation must struggle with defining the structure that best suits their political, economic, social, and artistic needs. When situating the FTP within the context of attempts to develop a national theatre program in the U.S. one site of struggle that must be analyzed centers around identity. The FTP was first and foremost a work relief project, but because the project also insisted on the production of works that were considered to be of high quality artistically, there was very often conflict over the project's central focus and therefore its identity. Indeed, the struggle over what the FTP was and should be plagued the project throughout its short history.

Throughout the FTP's lifetime there were attempts to reconcile the identity of the project as either a work relief effort or as an artistic endeavor meant to enhance the cultural life of the nation. The FTP's fluid identity did at times provide opportunities for the project to resist the rigid rules under which it existed; but ultimately this crisis of identity proved to be detrimental to the FTP's continued governmental support. In *Bread and Circuses: A Study of the Federal Theatre*, published two years into the FTP's life, Willson Whitman[3] (1937) noted, "The Federal Theatre was not founded because the government felt that the time had come to start a national theatre to provide cultural

[3] Whitman notes in the *Bread and Circuses* bibliography that "No books on the Federal Theatre, other than this one, have appeared, Books on other aspects of the theatre referred to in this writing are mentioned in the text." This work, published just two years after the founding of the FTP and two years prior to its closing, provided a unique perspective on the project as it developed.

opportunities for people unable to afford a Theatre Guild subscription, or to set up a yardstick for commercial entertainment. It owes its existence to the assumption that actors must eat" (p. 9). Similarly, Danielle Fox, art historian, (2001) in a chapter titled "Art" appearing in Maxwell's *Culture Works: The Political Economy of Culture* observed:

> The earliest government arts programs were driven by the political and economic requirements of the moment, with the support of artists and their work evolving as almost a fortuitous by-product. Historians are fond of celebrating the impact that the New Deal arts programs of the 1930s had on the establishment of a professional art-world network in the United States, but the government's goal in establishing these programs was to reduce unemployment levels – not to celebrate artistic creativity for its own sake. (p. 25)

Indeed the government's explicit goal was first and foremost to meet an economic and social need and this goal was upheld by FTP leadership even as they struggled to balance relief and artistic output.

Those most closely connected to the FTP were continually asked to explain their position on the central purpose of the project – work relief versus high quality theatrical production – and despite the clarity with which they detailed the precedence that relief was to take over artistic output, the conflict over purpose grew and presented what would become a significant site of struggle. "When preparing to testify before Representative Martin Dies and the House Committee on Un-American Activities about the FTP in 1938-1939," Theatre studies scholar Elizabeth Osborne (2011) relates, "Flanagan defined her goals as follows: 'give employment to needy theatre professionals in socially useful projects which will rehabilitate them, conserve their skills, and at the same time, bring to thousands of American citizens not hitherto able to afford theatre-going, a planned theatrical program, national in scope, regional in emphasis, and American in democratic attitude'" (p.6). These public assertions that relief for unemployed workers was emphasized over artistic output did little to quell the controversy.

Flanagan understood the political imperative of assuring the taxpaying public of the need for government support of artists in the form of work relief. In her recounting of

the history of the FTP in *Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre,* Flanagan (1940) she contradicted the fact that during the HUAC hearings, "although much of the testimony on behalf of the project pointed to the desirability of making permanent some of the values found in Federal Theatre," (p. 357) the project always had as its primary mandate to provide relief and employment to out-of-work theatre professionals. In fact, during her December 6, 1938 testimony before HUAC, Hallie Flanagan was asked by Joe Starnes of Alabama about the FTP's potential to develop into a National Theatre Project:

> MR. STARNES: Did you later, in December of 1937, appear before a Congressional Committee and advocate the establishment of the National Theater Project?
>
> MRS. FLANAGAN: I never did. I appeared before the Congressional Committee called, I believe, by Congressman [William] Sirovich, at his request, and at the order of my superior officers, Mrs. [Ellen] Woodward and Mr. Hopkins I presented a brief explaining the whole conception and development of the project, and that brief, gentlemen, is also appended in my record. At that time I never advocated the National Theater Project; nor have I –
>
> MR. STARNES: You never advocated it?
>
> MRS. FLANAGAN: I have never advocated it. I have never even referred to the Federal Theater as a national theater. (Bentley, 2002, p. 9)

But despite the insistence on the part of those on the project that the purpose of the FTP was first and foremost to provide work relief, there persisted the hope among many in artistic circles of the day that the project would transcend its origins to become a more permanent cultural fixture.

The press, in particular, reported widely on the FTP's potential to meet the need for an American national theatre program. On December 31, 1935, The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on a speech given by T.W. Stevens, regional director of the stage project branch of the federal Works Progress Administration, in which he spoke about a potential future for the FTP:

> "Permanence is one of the objectives of the federal theatre plan," said Thomas Wood Stevens . . . in an address yesterday before the National Theatre

> conference, in the Stevens hotel. "Relief work of course, is now our primary purpose," said Mr. Stevens, "but when it has come to an end we hope to have accomplished something for the drama that will survive under federal aid. . . Mr. Stevens called attention to subsidies granted by European governments to dramatic art and remarked that while the system may not be adaptable to American life, this country may develop its own methods for governmental fostering of the legitimate drama with the work of the present federal bureau as background (Lasting Federal Aid Stage).

Similarly, theatre critic Burns Mantle, writing in 1936 on the fate of the FTP, acknowledged the short life expectancy of the project but still speculated about the possibilities for continuation of the project's work beyond the need for work relief:

> That the federal theatre project is one day going to end, we all know. The government is in the business of subsidizing entertainment for a short time only, shorter under the Republicans, longer it may be, under the Democrats. However, the end is coming. But do any of us know what is to follow? Will the various states, or a considerable number of them having witnessed how this plan made life in their cities more attractive for large numbers of their restless people, decide to capitalize on this growing popularity for cheap entertainment? Will separate municipalities decide to add it to their educational budgets as something that is, or may become, as important a public libraries and art galleries? Is this particular section of relief history in the making to be the forerunner of such a marvelous extension of all national theatre dreams as would be quite beyond the vision of men? Or will it all be fed into the hoppers of final adjustment in another few months and forgotten (Mantle, July 5, 1936)?

Drama critic Robert Garland reporting in the *World-Telegram* on May 2, 1936 shared the sentiments of many when he observed that:

> Now that spring has come to stay it is possible to look back on one of the most significant dramatic seasons in many a year. And, upon further reflection, it is interesting to note that one of the elements contributing to its significance was WPA Federal Theatre. A great many people regard the Federal Theatre as an

> expedient for giving employment to theatre workers during an interim of idleness and hard times. A great many more people believe that this idleness and these hard times are far from transient, that a large number of theatricians will be in need of employment for quite some time to come. It is these last named, these, to my way of thinking, level-headed Gloomy Guses who see a possibility of converting the government's emergency showshop into a permanent institution similar to the Ministries of Fine Arts which exist in almost every civilized nation in the world. Most of these Gloomy Guses are within the Federal Theatre itself. These level-headed ones believe that the Federal Theatre could become a serious and helpful adjunct to the established commercial theatre, supplying it with novelty, personnel, talent and a constant source of new life and vigor. The influence of at least one WPA show is already visible in a production now on Broadway. More are apt to follow (Summary of Press Criticisms).

Burns Mantle reporting on the 1937 National Theatre Convention hosted by the newly formed American Theatre council commented on the views of playwright Clifford Odets, a convention attendee:

> Clifford Odets, who used to be a playwright himself, believes the federal theatre may well represent the 'future of the theatre.' 'Responsible people should nourish its growth,' insists Clifford, who would have Hallie Flanagan, the director of the federal theatre, who has done such wonders in the establishment of the foundation for a true national theatre, inspire the convention to demand an increase in place of a decrease of the federal budget for the continuance of the WPA adventure in show business (May 16, 1937).

It should be clear that the FTP's conflicted identity was the direct result of the government's first foray into large scale subsidy of the arts coming in the form of work relief. This articulation between work relief and theatre and the resulting constellation of contingent connections contributed to the creation of a theatre program that showed so much potential on the one hand and was so feared on the other. Speaking about the FTP, Schwartz (2003) observed: "The first attempt in history to subsidize serious American theatre with federal funds was treated by Congress with the same hostility, maliciousness,

and fear that were later to surround the National Endowment for the Arts. . . one that brought fine theatre to a new audience of millions of Americans, fell victim to narrow and bigoted minds" (p. xix).

Award winning writer Susan Quinn (2008), quoting Brooks Atkinson[4], echoes these sentiments and determines that,

> Perhaps Brooks Atkinson was right to conclude that a permanent, government-sponsored theatre is an impossibility in America. 'To the official mind in general,' he noted, 'the theatre looks dangerous and depraved. Everything it does looks in advance like a threat against established institutions and standards of decency.' And that, Hallie Flanagan would surely say, is exactly as it should be. And yet, for a brief time in our history, Americans had a vibrant national theatre almost by accident. What began as a relief project, without big names or a grand theatre found a vast new audience, ready to laugh and cry and cheer and hiss and even, dangerously, to think. (pp. 283-284).

The notion that the FTP innovated to the extent that it did "almost by accident" says much about the contingency of the relationships that characterized the project.

The relationship between work relief funding and a theatre project expected to re-train out of work theatre people while also producing work worthy of government support is central to critiquing the direction taken by the FTP. Outside the economic, political, and social crises of the 1930s it is very unlikely that an artistic undertaking of this sort would be supported with funds earmarked for what is essentially a form of welfare. And yet, in this historical moment, work relief and the theatre were joined for a time and it was, I assert, this contingent articulation that allowed the FTP to create what has the potential to inform the development of a version of a national theatre unique to the United States. Simply providing government subsidy for a new theatre project would most likely have met with issues of control over content, location, and staffing; however, the innovations, connection to community, scope, and reach accomplished by the FTP

[4] Atkinson was a theatre critic for the New York Times from 1925 – 1960 and frequently reviewed FTP productions and the overall contributions of the Project.

were made possible through an unlikely relationship between two disparate forces, relief and theatre, joined contingently during a moment of crisis.

Setting the Stage

It is often during times of crisis that the arts emerge as a soothing balm, a tool by which to make sense of conflict, a source of beauty, an entertaining escape, and a catalyst for change. The theatre, like all of the arts, embodies these possibilities and provides opportunities for audiences to experience the world in new and challenging ways, for actors to experiment with new forms, and for patrons of the arts to engage in projects that have the potential to shape the future. Indeed, in times of crisis the arts provide a place from which to explore our greatest, and most contradictory, fears and hopes about the future.

Periods of crisis and conflict very often impact a nation's sense of well-being and its perception of self, resulting in a very real need to try to make sense of what the crisis means to citizens both personally and collectively. Art that is produced during such periods has the potential to not only guide people through difficult times but to also provide future generations with clues as to how the crisis was both understood and addressed. The arts, therefore, become a creative witness to crisis and conflict and an active agent in eventual change.

The United States entered the 1930s in economic crisis, the decade was fraught with conflict over social issues, and at decade's end the country stood on the brink of another World War. The excesses of the 1920s quickly vanished with the stock market crash of 1929 and along with them went any hope of attaining the American Dream; survival became the focus for many and the nation struggled to find its footing in this new paradigm. The shift in policy between Hoover's belief that economic relief should be the responsibility of the private sector and Roosevelt's complex "alphabet soup" of federally funded relief projects signaled a shift in the ways in which government oversight of the welfare of the people (and the economy in general) was conducted; in essence, Roosevelt's New Deal redefined the role of government in American life. The 1930s represent a very specific moment in time, a crisis of sweeping magnitude sandwiched between a paralyzing economic event that resulted in fully one quarter of all

wage earners in the nation becoming unemployed, and a war that re-invigorated the economy and made many of the innovations of the New Deal obsolete.

Great strides toward addressing the social and economic effects of the Depression were made during Roosevelt's first term in office; however, it was in 1935 that programs and policies were implemented that had the potential to change the relationship between government and the people forever. These included the Wagner Act, which allowed workers to unionize and bargain collectively for improved wages and conditions, the Social Security Act, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA). With the establishment of the WPA, unemployed workers were provided with jobs that positively impacted the country's infrastructure in the form of public works including highways, bridges, schools, and parks. When the Roosevelt administration, under the auspices of the WPA, envisioned a relief program for artists, white collar, and intellectual workers who had never previously been considered eligible for or worthy of relief, the relief offered did not come in the form of the dole, but rather as an opportunity for artists to work in their fields and to bring, often for the first time, the arts to communities across the country:

> This program arose from the coincidence, fortuitous or providential, of two ideas: (1) that in time of need the artist, no less than the manual worker, is entitled to employment as an artist at the public expense: and (2) that the arts, no less than business, agriculture, and labor, are and should be the immediate concern of the ideal commonwealth. (McDonald, 1969, p. ix).

It was in this contingent articulation of two ideas and their enactment that the federal government of the United States created the Federal Arts Projects, and it was also in this articulation of ideas that the struggle over the fate of one of the projects began.

Federal Project Number One or Federal One was the name given to the arts projects funded under the WPA; Federal One, the largest of the WPA programs, was comprised of the Historical Records Survey (originally part of the Federal Writers' Project), the Federal Writers' Project, the Federal Arts Project, the Federal Music Project, and the Federal Theatre Project. In envisioning the work to be accomplished by the FTP one of the overarching goals of those theatre artists assigned to administer the project -

national FTP director Hallie Flanagan in particular - was to create a theatre so integral to community life that it would transcend the need for relief to become part of the cultural life of the nation; not a "national theatre" in the way in which that concept was understood at the time, but a theatre program that would reach deeply into America to affect diverse audiences in new ways.

In many ways, the confluence of circumstances in 1930s America and the foundation laid by the FTP provided fertile ground for the establishment of the sort of federation of theatres envisioned by Flanagan; they would represent the regional interests of a diverse audience, they would present works with educational and therapeutic benefits, they would eschew the traditional paternalistic nationalism that defined many national theatres in other countries in favor of producing works that would help audiences to develop a deeper understanding of real issues affecting their everyday lives, and they would not be located exclusively in urban centers and available only to a select segment of the population, but rather would speak in local dialects and occupy non-traditional places and spaces. How realistic was the development of such a theatre from the FTP's seeds, however, when the FTP's existence was, first and foremost, as a social welfare and economic relief effort?

Re-working the Script

During the 1930s with the increasing popularity of motion pictures, audiences were introduced to a film trope that has endured for decades and that highlights one of the general misconceptions about the theatre and the complexities of mounting a full theatrical production. The "Let's Put on a Show" trope, made most popular in Garland and Rooney films released during the late 1930s and early 1940s, but seen by audiences during the WPA years in films like the Astaire and Rogers romantic comedy *Follow the Fleet* from 1936, suggests that mounting a play or musical is as easy as gathering up some friends and securing use of an empty barn; and with nothing but unbridled enthusiasm (and a few great Irving Berlin tunes) a production is staged that is so good it raises enough money to save the day/the orphanage/the General's ski lodge in Vermont.

Now, of course I am not suggesting that there existed a widespread belief that theatrical production was as simple as this. Rather, I use this example to highlight a

generally limited understanding of the myriad institutions, practices, values, affects, representations, and experiences and the contingent relationships between them that make up the work of theatre. I would argue that a deeper understanding and contextualization of this work, the work of theatre, is essential in analyzing the Federal Theatre Project's trajectory, for it is within this richness and complexity that we will be able to identify sites of struggle, inequitable relations of power, and potentials for change.

Most notably missing from past analyses is consideration of the ways in which the government structure imposed on the FTP in the form of WPA rules, regulations, and restrictions were the very forces which served as the catalyst for the FTP to adapt in ways that allowed many of the project's innovations to be realized. Without the prohibitive economic structure demanded by a government sponsored relief project, the FTP may never have developed the Living Newspapers, which were, in their most basic imagining, a way to employ the greatest number of actors in a single production. Similarly, difficulties around securing theatre space provided an impetus for the FTP to look beyond the traditional and to create entertainments that did not rely on a these spaces for their success. Indeed, these productions reached an even greater audience by breaking down barriers that often excluded many from the experience of live theatre.

I argue that it was in fact this constant tension that existed between the WPA (as representative of the "patron") and the FTP that, rather than being the cause of the FTP's demise, was in fact essential to the development of the FTP's particular imagining of a "national theatre" program. As the FTP continued to adapt itself to the increasing level of oversight imposed by the WPA, it was those very adaptations that allowed for the creation of a unique theatre program that the government could not tolerate in its potential scope and influence.

New Relationships Forged

Analysis of the innovations developed as part of a theatrical undertaking with the depth and scope of the FTP is certainly ambitious enough; however, in order to really tell the story of the project's legacy, another constellation of articulations between practices, relationships, affects, beliefs, and institutions must also be considered within the larger context. The Federal Theatre did not operate autonomously, but rather was born of a need

to put unemployed theatre professionals back to work in their fields of expertise with funding and oversight provided by the federal government in the form of the WPA. In this attempt to create one uniform structure from two very diverse and complex sets of practices, a number of contradictions, instabilities, and crises were manifest; it is at these sites of struggle that we can begin to analyze the contingent connections that were created and that account for the innovations born of resistance and change.

I show that this unlikely pairing of the arts and work relief is worthy of further consideration so that the legacy of this social, cultural, political, and economic experiment, the FTP, is seen as neither a model to be emulated nor a wholesale failure but rather as a series of negotiations between non-necessary linkages that through struggle, resistance, and change provided insight into what a national theatre program in the United States could strive to be.

The complexity of the project must be considered from a perspective that appreciates its transitory nature while also considering the multi-dimensionality of providing federally funded work relief to artists during a time of economic depression and political upheaval; this perspective provides us with a much richer way to analyze what such articulations between these elements can teach us about larger questions of power, struggle, resistance, and ultimately change and how these forces shape the ways in which we experience the theatre.

Artistic work produced by the FTP and innovated within (and often in resistance to) the confines of a governmental funding structure in fact had widespread social and cultural significance. Through the negotiation of struggles on many levels, the FTP opened up diverse audiences to live theatre as not only a form of entertainment but also a tool for education and a therapeutic intervention, and allowed communities to find their own cultural voice and to share that voice with a wider audience which in turn enriched the entire nation. This is the FTP's legacy.

A Cultural Studies Approach

The New Deal relief projects were time-bound, born of necessity as a way to address a national epidemic of poverty and unemployment, and the arts programs in particular were not designed to transcend the crisis to emerge as permanent cultural

fixtures but rather to deal with an immediate but ever evolving problem. Therefore, the use of articulation to analyze the social, economic, political, and cultural struggles faced by the FTP as a relief program is well suited to consider the fluid nature of the relationship between government, the arts, and the people during the New Deal era. To this end, I consider the articulations that account for the effects the FTP had on workers, audiences, and communities and I explore forces and sites of struggle that played a role in defining new spaces and audiences.

By utilizing a cultural studies approach a richer description of what occurred and that does not insist on fixing the work of the FTP as either successful model or failed attempt, is possible. In addition, an analysis utilizing the concepts of articulation and sites of struggle will provide further insight into whether possibilities for a national theatre in the U.S. still exist or whether the FTP, and subsequent attempts to revive the idea of an American national theatre, signal a struggle between the arts and government that can never be satisfactorily resolved to the extent required to make a national theatre feasible. Indeed, in our current historical moment the very idea of a "national theatre" is problematic due to the inherent risks in trying to create a national theatre program that speaks to all of the nation's citizens in diverse voices and on matters of import to their lives amidst a political, social, and economic climate that continues to divide rather than unite.

But, it's been 80 years . . .

For those readers who have been doing the math, you may be asking yourselves what does a short-lived, controversial, attempt at a federally funded theatre/relief program from a by-gone era 80 years in the past have to do with, well, anything more than its place as a footnote in the history of 1930s America? This a valid question; and a question for which I provide a compelling answer. The Federal Theatre Project was about much more than unemployment or the relationship between the government and the arts or social welfare taken individually. I demonstrate that it was about all of these things, their contingent relationships to each other and to other practices, institutions, and affects that make up everyday life. Further, an analysis of these articulations reveals ways that, to this day, certain practices are privileged and others are not, certain groups are

empowered or disenfranchised, and certain ideologies become reified. It is my hope that these revelations will open up possibilities for resistance and change.

To this end, in chapter one I consider the methods employed in my analysis of the FTP. I explain the theory of articulation and consider sites of struggle and highlight why they provide the best framework within which to explore the central themes of my research.

In chapter two I provide an overview of the concept "national theatre" and discuss how this concept has been manifest in different places and at different times but keeping in mind that this is not a fixed, but rather a fluid concept. I explore the role of patronage as it relates to the national theatre concept and consider how operative assumptions about the work of the national theatre have shaped the "model" in ways that were actively resisted by the FTP.

In chapter three I consider a number of attempts to develop a national theatre in the United States prior to and following the period during which the FTP existed. This consideration represents an attempt to identify the contingent characteristics of these attempts that contributed to their failures. Identifying these characteristics is essential to understanding the innovations credited to the FTP and how they represent a departure from the received view of the national theatre structure that I argue will be essential to the development of any viable national theatre program in the United States.

In chapter four I contextualize the development of the Federal Theatre Project that considers the ways in which the FTP responded to the rules and regulations imposed by the WPA and the ways in which the WPA responded in turn, to highlight relations of power, sites of struggle, practices that resisted disarticulation and rearticulation, and possibilities for change.

In chapter five I consider the specific innovations made by the FTP in resistance to elements of a more "traditional" national theatre program including: paternalism, nationalism and governmentality, "high" art, and privileged space. These significant changes to what were, at the time, widely accepted characteristics of many of the existing national theatre programs in Europe are considered in order to highlight the departure of

the FTP's version of a national theatre program from the more accepted "model" – changes that make the FTP's vision of a national theatre for the United States unique.

I conclude by considering the unlikelihood of the U.S. developing a national theatre and consider the barriers to this project that still exist. I focus specifically on the continued struggle to secure adequate and sustainable government funding for the purpose of creating theatre that will be far-reaching in its scope and innovative in its artistry.

Research of this nature draws upon both primary and secondary sources for support and clarification. As relates to the use of primary sources, I must acknowledge a reliance on the personal record and official documents left by FTP director Hallie Flanagan. Flanagan's unique perspective is invaluable in providing an overview of the full project. I do concede that Flanagan's is but one perspective, however, and I hope to have successfully included alternative points of view in order to provide a balanced picture of the FTP and its work.

In the case of the FTP, the contingent structure of the relationship between the project and the government, due to the central articulation of work relief to theatre, created a space for resistance. It is this space and the consideration of the many fluid relationships that existed therein that is lacking in past analyses of the FTP and its development of a new way to consider a national theatre program in the U.S. My goal is to challenge the received view of what a national theatre could and should be as well as to show how the FTP was able to lay the groundwork for a national theatre that can begin to address the cultural needs of the United States in organization and scope. I explore what the FTP innovated as a direct result of its dual purpose as a work relief and arts project, the lessons learned from this first foray into federal funding of the arts, and the potential for a rearticulation of those aspects of the project that stymied forward motion in the 1930s. I also show that much of what the FTP innovated has since been widely adopted by national theatres throughout the world, but that the most important innovations made by the FTP would not have been possible were it not for the contingent pairing of the arts and work relief during a specific period of national crisis.

CHAPTER ONE

Articulation

The theory of articulation plays a central role in my analysis of the FTP's reimagining of a national theatre program in the United States. To begin, it is essential to understand how the term "articulation" is used in the context of a cultural studies analysis. Stuart Hall (2016) provides clarification: "By 'articulation,' I mean the form of a connection or link that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time." He goes on to add, "an articulation has to be positively sustained by specific processes; it is not 'eternal' but has constantly to be renewed. It can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown (disarticulated), leading to old linkages being dissolved and new connections (rearticulations) being forged" (p. 121). It was this very linkage between two different elements and its endurance, for a time, that created a space within which the FTP negotiated possibilities for a unique type of national theatre program.

Articulation insists on the consideration of relations of correspondence as well as non-correspondence/no necessary correspondence (no necessary correspondence refers to the fact that the conditions of social relations and practices can be represented in any number of different ways) and contradiction and thorough exploration of the temporarily constituted unities that illuminate relations of power. The concept of articulation resists binary distinctions between objects, people, and practices and rather focuses on the productive tensions that are revealed when considering the relationship between, for example, difference and unity. It is not elements themselves that have political or ideological sway but rather the political and ideological dimensions are to be found in the ways in which these elements are contextualized, articulated, organized. It becomes an infinitely more productive project to consider the ways in which disparate elements are articulated together in a contingent unity than to focus only on the dichotomy between the ways in which they are either different or similar.

When FDR, under his New Deal work relief projects, suggested the inclusion of white collar workers and artists as relief recipients the circumstances of the Depression

made possible this contingent and completely unique phenomenon - two disparate systems, variously linked temporarily to their own specific but not necessary actors, practices, institutions, and discourses, brought together for a moment in time by historical circumstance. And as unusual a pairing as this may seem, the U.S. government became, for a time, a theatrical producer with actors, stagehands, musicians, costumers, designers, and other artists becoming in one sense "employees" of that same government: a situation that was incomprehensible to many in 1930s America.

The idea of relief was, in and of itself, distasteful to many Americas who shared the sentiments of Mrs. Laura Manning of Pleasantville N.J. Mrs. Manning wrote to President Roosevelt in April 1935 following a Fireside Chat[5] during which the President spoke about his plans for the provision of work relief:

> Your talk over the radio Sunday night plainly shows your complete ignorance as to present conditions, in other words, you say that you are dealing out that enormous sum of money, borrowed to finance the Work Relief Bill, to the most irresponsible, lazy, dishonest and shiftless group of people in the U.S.A.
>
> The people who have the decency and pride to get along without relief, even though they have had to go far in debt and even lose the roof over their head, will get no help or consideration. I refer to the taxpayers, principly [sic], and to the old people, who will never be able to regain their great loss, while the lowest, possibly the least deserving element among our people get help.
>
> For God's sake, I beg of you, consider what you do. (Levine & Levine, 2010, p. 143)

Mrs. Manning expressed the sentiments of many as related to the provision of work relief and the status of relief workers as irresponsible, lazy, dishonest, and shiftless. Relief itself was a contested concept; the inclusion of artists and intellectuals on the relief rolls complicated the issue even further.

[5] The Fireside Chats were a series of thirty radio addresses FDR made to the American people between March 12, 1933 and June 12, 1944. The Fireside Chats covered topics of import to the public and were characterized by their informal and conversational tone.

In the Fireside Chat to which Mrs. Manning refers, Roosevelt detailed his six fundamental principles for work relief:

> (1) The projects should be useful.
>
> (2) Projects shall be of a nature that a considerable proportion of the money spent will go into wages for labor.
>
> (3) Projects will be sought which promise ultimate return to the Federal Treasury of a considerable proportion of the costs.
>
> (4) Funds allotted for each project should be actually and promptly spent and not held over until later years.
>
> (5) In all cases projects must be of a character to give employment to those on the relief rolls.
>
> (6) Projects will be allocated to localities or relief areas in relation to the number of workers on relief rolls in those areas. (Roosevelt, "Fireside Chat" April 28, 1935)

The WPA, however, took things one step further by not only providing work relief to improve the nation's infrastructure, which had already met with resistance, but by providing relief to "white collar" workers, which included artists and intellectuals, as well. Journalist Michael Hiltzik (2011) in *The New Deal: A Modern History* describes the issue with white collar relief: "The problem was that government funding of intellectual endeavors was qualitatively very different from paying people to perform physical labor. A man wielding a shovel or driving a bulldozer, whether for the meanest of sewer lines or the grandest edifice, was creating a legacy that any taxpayer or politician could comprehend" (p. 286). Hiltzik goes on to explain that, "the progress of an airport construction project could be measured in cubic yards of concrete poured, but judging the quality or utility of a musical performance, public mural, or entry in a guidebook was purely subjective" (p. 287). And it was this linkage that caused conflict over the arts projects in particular.

Roosevelt's first principle for work relief was that it should be useful; however, convincing the American people and indeed often many in government that providing

work relief to artists created projects that were "useful" was a hard sell. The status of any artist as relief recipient had the effect of marginalizing them and their work – those artists on relief could not possibly be talented because if they were they would have jobs in the commercial theatre and not be in need of relief. And in turn, these out-of-work actors could not possibly produce theatre of any quality and therefore spending government funds on artistic endeavors was nothing but a waste. In the 1930s the highest quality theatrical endeavors were to be found in the commercial theatre and the pinnacle of commercial theatre was Broadway.

Then, as now, the commercial theatre, and Broadway in particular, has held its place among elite institutions, a position it has maintained through high ticket prices and its use of privileged spaces; making the experience of a commercially produced show out of reach for many economically, geographically, and socially. Paring this perceived beacon of highbrow culture with down-and-outers on the work relief roles created tensions that would be continually negotiated throughout the life of the FTP.

In 1930s America, perceptions about the role of the theatre as an extravagance and the status of relief workers as lazy and irresponsible prevailed. During the Depression, that very specific historical moment, the theatre was seen by most as a luxury rather than a necessity. And those individuals on the relief rolls were still viewed by many as the responsibility of charity and social service organizations rather than the government and seen, through the lens of America's belief in independence and self-sufficiency, as a burden to society. To provide these ne're-do-wells with government funding to produce, of all things, art was a novel concept to be sure. It was, however, this articulation of work relief to theatre that was central to the FTP being able to develop in unique and innovative ways.

The temporary unity created by linking theatre to work relief during the Depression was sustained, for a time, in order to meet a particular economic need. As Hall suggests, however, circumstances eventually changed and the non-necessary connection between work relief and theatre was disarticulated as many workers whose existence had been reliant on work relief were enlisted in the war effort as the economic needs of the nation become rearticulated.

Applying the concept of articulation to the project here opens up consideration of government subsidy of the arts in 1930s America. While work relief as subsidy for the arts can be reduced to a merely economic understanding of the relationship that resulted from this particular connection in this particular historical moment, articulation insists on uncovering the contingent linkages among practices, actors, affects, and beliefs as a means to understand what Slack and Wise (2015) call the "movement and flow of relationships within which things are created and animated" (p. 153). Therefore, we instead consider the idea and practice of work relief for white collar and intellectual workers (and theatre professionals in particular) during the 1930s to be linked to not only the economic exchange of work relief funds for artistic production but also to the political backlash connected to Roosevelt's New Deal policies; the wide-spread belief in an American sense of self-sufficiency; technological unemployment and its effect on artists; the influence of labor unions; the stigmatization of relief recipients; the expanded concept of "audience;" the role of governmental policies and procedures; the rise of emergent cultural voices; the fear of Communist infiltration of American institutions; the convening of the House Un-American Activities Committee; the marginalization of women and minorities. It must be understood that this is in no way an exhaustive list and that with each new contingent linkage that is identified, several can be introduced.

It Can't Happen Here

It Can't Happen Here, a novel written by Sinclair Lewis, was published in 1935. Focusing on the rise to power of fictional politician Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, who is elected President of the United States after defeating Franklin Roosevelt; *It Can't Happen Here* imagines a future in which the promise of a return to "traditional" values devolves into totalitarian rule. Nick Taylor (2008) in his book *American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA,* identifies the novel's central theme: "fascism need not be imposed through an outside military takeover; it could arrive when well-meaning citizens fail to defend essential freedoms," a theme which proved to be very timely as former governor and U.S. Senator Huey Long of Louisiana prepared to run for the U.S. presidency and Hitler was gaining power in Germany.

The success of the novel and the timeliness of the themes led to MGM securing the movie rights to *It Can't Happen Here;* a film version was never made, however, for a variety of reasons including the controversial nature of the subject matter and the complex relationships that characterized the motion picture industry during the 1930s. Lewis also received offers from commercial theatre producers to mount a stage production of the novel; in the end he chose to allow the FTP to produce a stage version of *It Can't Happen Here* because of the scope of the project and the potential for the play to receive national attention. The unique way in which the FTP approached production of *It Can't Happen Here* plays an important role in the project's legacy and highlights the ways in which, in effort to provide provocative theatre to a wide and diverse audience, contingent contexts were constituted.

Although the decision around how best to approach the FTP production of *It Can't Happen Here* is credited to various members of the FTP administrative staff, the responsibility for ensuring that plans were carried out fell to FTP workers across the country. In the true spirit of experimentation and in an effort to highlight the scope of the FTP's reach, *It Can't Happen Here* was presented in twenty-one theatres in seventeen states simultaneously on the evening of October 27, 1936. The journey to the final production provides a useful way to strategically map the articulations between values, beliefs, actors, and practices that organize their context.

In the case of *It Can't Happen Here,* Sinclair Lewis and John C. (Jack) Moffitt, a young studio screenwriter for Paramount, collaborated on the adaptation of the novel for the stage; a process which by all accounts was a drama in its own right. Although re-writes were still being provided to the various FTP theatre companies well into the period reserved for final rehearsals, in the end each participating FTP theatre was working from the same script. The diverse ways in which each production was realized, however, supported FTP national director Hallie Flanagan's observation that "the play was produced by polygenesis" (Flanagan, 1940, p. 115) and that whether the experiment were ultimately a success or failure, "it was worth the risk to find out how the play, without benefit of imitation, would look in various cities, and how it would be received by various audiences" (Flanagan, 1940, p. 120). The assumption was not that the script

would dictate the context in which the play was realized but rather the ways in which each FTP theatre articulated various practices, beliefs, values, and social groups to each other and to the script in contingent and non-necessary ways would constitute the context.

In each case, the individual productions connected in diverse but contingent ways, for example, set design, acting style, directorial vision, performance space, and even language articulated between values, beliefs, and experiences, to reveal something momentary about the community's and audience's relationship to the subject matter of the play. Brown and O'Conner (1978) in *Free, Adult, Uncensored: The Living History of the Federal Theatre Project* noted: "Many of the productions were localized. In Birmingham, for instance, the production was done in the style of a southern political rally – noisy, festive, and bombastic. The theatre boxes were used for two scenes and the orators spoke to the audience, as well as the other actors. The Negro production[6] in Seattle and the Spanish translation in Tampa, emphasized the effect of a white dictatorship on minority groups" (p. 64). And the ways in which the script was contextualized in each unique production impacted audiences in profound ways. H.L. Fishel, administrative assistant for the FTP Play Bureau recalled:

> In New York, we opened on that same night, one production in Yiddish, two productions in English. I saw the first act in English, left, and saw the second act in Yiddish. The reason why the Yiddish business was so important was that we were beginning to get all the refugees from Austria and Germany – the Jewish refugees – at this time. At the Yiddish theatre opening, there were two or three people that fainted. They were identifying . . . (quoted in Brown and O'Connor, 1978, p. 61).

These brief examples demonstrate how, working from the same script, the articulations that were made among practices specific to each FTP site created multiple identities each organizing a context; these identities were not fixed, however, and could have been articulated in different ways to organize different contexts. This work of contextualization is the project of cultural studies.

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[6] The Negro Theatre Project was the name given to the unit of the FTP highlighting the work of African-American theatre professionals.

Lawrence Grossberg (2010) in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense,* asserts that "cultural studies can be seen as a contextual analysis of how contexts are (or even better how a specific context is) made, challenged, unmade, changed, remade, etc. as structures of power and domination" (p. 23). He provides further clarification about the work of cultural studies in his article *Does Cultural Studies Have Futures? Should It? (Or What's the Matter with New York)* when he explains that cultural studies uses a radically contextualist framework "to avoid reproducing the very sorts of universalisms (and essentialisms) that all too often characterize the dominant practices of knowledge production, and that have contributed (perhaps unintentionally) to making the very relations of domination, inequality and suffering that cultural studies desires to change. Cultural studies seeks to embrace complexity and contingency, and to avoid the many faces and forms of reductionism" (Grossberg, 2006, p. 2). And, as I show, in working to understand how within this complexity and through these contingencies contexts are made, challenged, and unmade the theory of articulation is employed.

In certain cases, there are those articulated elements that resist disarticulation and the potential for new meaning; these elements form what is known as lines of tendential force. Lines of tendential force describe those articulations that are held tightly in place by multiple interests and forces that have particularly enduring reach; they become more or less "fixed." (Hall, 1986, p. 55). Those elements that become historically embedded/structured are much more difficult to disarticulate. Despite their tenacity, these historically embedded elements are, however, useful in tracing the ways in which the ideological formations of a particular group or society have been developed historically and can also help to predict whether related struggles may continue to move along similar lines.

Struggle

Slack and Wise (2015) explain that "articulation is not just a noun: a description of connection already forged. It is also a verb: it is the work of articulating, of making connections of constructing unities; and disarticulating is the work of breaking connections of deconstructing unities" (p. 154). They go on to clarify that it is this "work of articulating" that cultural studies emphasizes: "The choice of the word 'work' is

purposeful; in fact the term ‘struggle’ is often used to describe this work. Articulating connections (or disarticulating them) is not always easy, and there are almost always competing interests engaged in a struggle (whether consciously or not) to articulate alternatively” (Slack and Wise, 2015, p. 154). It is important to understand that struggle takes place on many different fronts and that the sites of struggle between opposing forces and ideologies are the territory for negotiation between dominant and emerging structures of power; however, as Grossberg (2010) points out, “the sites, goals, and forms of struggle can be understood only after one has done the work of constructing the context so as to better understand the relations of power” (p. 28). As I show, in the case of the FTP and the articulation of work relief to theatre, struggle is expressed as tension and negotiation between the bureaucratic requirements of a government funded relief effort and the desire of the artist to innovate.

Utilizing a cultural studies approach we are able to examine cultural practices to discover their relation to systems of power and control. Uncovering these relations of power leads to the identification of sites of struggle and these struggles are the key to locating ruptures that can become a catalyst to effect change. This is never an either/or proposition but rather a recognition that in any social formation there exist tensions between, for example, domination and liberation. Extending this example, Sociologist Steven Dubin (1987) in *Bureaucratizing the Muse: Public Funds and the Cultural Worker,* observes: “It is not a matter of freedom or control, but how much of each can be discerned in a concrete situation,” and goes on to ask of the situation under the WPA work relief programs, “were the relative amounts of these elements similar or dissimilar from the conditions these artists would have been confronting had they been working under alternative arrangements during these times (the 1930s)” (p. 156)? This becomes an important question in our analysis as I argue that the articulation of work relief and the theatre and the context that central articulation exposed created contradictions and tensions that opened a space for resistance. Or, as post-colonial studies scholar Homi Bhabha (1990) characterized resistance: “. . . a turning of boundaries and limits into the

in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (p. 4).

Cultural studies research is premised on the idea that social practices are constituted by groups, individuals, and institutions. These practices are organized through struggle on a historical plane and must be analyzed as sites of struggle rather than just events on a timeline. The practices are never fixed but rather continue their engagement within relations of power and resist definition and appropriation of their historical use to reify current social issues.

The establishment (government as patron) feared a loss of control over the New Deal arts projects as they were perceived, and rightly so, as having the power to question the establishment in very public ways. Studs Terkel recalled: "that, in a sense, is what [the thirties Right] worried about, not revolution – just the fact they were losing power over things" (quoted in Schwartz, 2003, p. 52). So, how then does the dominant culture ensure control?

In the case of the FTP and its struggle with the government over control of the project's theatrical output, various forms of censorship (both imposed from within and from without) were employed to silence emergent voices that in turn resisted suppression. In terms of the struggle for control, this silencing of voices through "censorship" was the government's most powerful weapon but was also the site of the FTP's most rigorous resistance.

In an interview with Studs Terkel (1986) for *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, Hiram (Chub) Sherman recounts his experiences with the FTP and one of the more notable ways in which censorship on the project was carried out:

> One of the marvelous things about the Federal Theatre, it wasn't bound by commercial standards. It could take on poetic drama and do it. An experimental theatre. The Living Newspaper made for terribly exciting productions. Yet it was theatre by bureaucracy. Everything had to go to a higher authority. There were endless chits to be approved. There were comic and wasteful moments all over the country. But it was forward thinking in so many ways. It anticipated some of

> today's problems. The Unit I was in was integrated. We did Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Mephistopheles was played by a Negro, Jack Carter. Orson Welles played Faustus. Our next production was *Cradle Will Rock*, words and music by Marc Blitzstein. And we rehearsed those eight hours a day. We worked every moment, and sometimes we worked overtime because we loved it. *Cradle Will Rock* was for its day a revolutionary piece. It was an attack on big business and the corruption involved. It was done a la Brecht. We had it fully rehearsed. On opening night, when the audience was assembling in the street, we found the doors of the Maxine Elliott closed. They wouldn't admit the audience because of an edict from Washington that this was revolutionary fare. And we would have no performance. Somebody had sent down the word. (pp. 364-365)

In actual fact the edict that came down from Washington was not nearly as overt as Sherman suggests. Instead, Washington, citing budgetary constraints, placed a temporary ban on the production of any new works that just happened to coincide with the planned opening of *The Cradle Will Rock.*

> Six days before opening night, Flanagan received word from Washington that budget cuts and personnel changes were to be made in the Federal Theatre Project and that no plays should open that month. Flanagan understood the ban as censorship. 'Don't be afraid when people tell you this is a play of protest. Of course it's a protest against dirt, disease, human misery,' she said at the time. 'If in giving great plays of the past as greatly as we can give them, and if in making people laugh which we certainly want to do, we can't also protest – as Harry Hopkins is protesting and as President Roosevelt is protesting – against some of the evils of this country of ours, then we do not deserve the chance put into our hands. Here is one necessity for our theatre – that it help reshape our American life.' (Ponce, 2003)

The way in which the FTP resisted this attempt to silence the emergent voices of the proletariat and has become the stuff of FTP legend and was chronicled in Tim Robbins' 1999 film *Cradle Will Rock.* Howard Pollack (2012), in his biography of *The Cradle Will*

Rock composer Marc Blitzstein, relates the events surrounding the opening of the FTP's production of the opera on June 16, 1937:

> When the company arrived at the Maxine Elliott's on June 16, they found the theatre padlocked and manned by WPA security guards, who allowed access within, but not the removal of anything deemed government property, including costumes, props, and music. Gathering in Houseman's makeshift basement office in the ladies' powder room with a telephone at their disposal, the production team elected to go forward with the opera at some other venue; but they faced several problems over and above the loss of scenery and costumes. First, finding an available theatre at the last minute proved difficult. In addition, Actors' Equity Association refused to allow the actors of a production prepared by the Federal Theatre, many of whom had no Equity card, to appear on a commercial stage, while the musicians' union, Local 802, decided that the orchestra players at their current salaries, could perform their parts on stage in a concert version of the work, but not in the pit. "So there we were," recalled Blitzstein, "in the position of having a production without a theatre, actors who could not appear on stage and musicians who could appear nowhere else – enough to make the stoutest enthusiast admit defeat and give up." (pp. 175-176)

Houseman and *The Cradle Will Rock* composer and cast did not admit defeat but rather found a means by which to circumvent the edict from Washington as well as those provisions imposed by the local unions and to bring the performance to crowd of nearly 2,000 at the Venice Theatre. Houseman proposed that Blitzstein play the score on a piano to be placed center stage and the actors, scattered among the audience members, perform from the house. Pollack continues his retelling of the events of the evening:

> The performance finally began at about 9:45. Houseman explained the circumstances that had brought them there; Welles, positioned at a desk at the side of the stage, set the action, as he would intermittently throughout the evening; and Blitzstein, in shirt sleeves and suspenders on this mild June night, began to sing the "Moll's Lament." A few lines into the song, in one of the most riveting

> moments in the history of the American theatre, the young, slender Olive Stanton, seated in a loge box, began to sing along, taking over the number as Feder illuminated her with his follow spot. Commented Houseman, "It must have taken almost superhuman courage for an inexperienced performer . . . to stand up before two thousand people, in an ill-placed and terribly exposed location, and start a show with a difficult song to the accompaniment of a piano that was more than fifty feet away. Add to this that she was a relief worker, wholly dependent on her weekly WPA check, and that she held no political views whatsoever." (p. 177)

Following its auspicious opening night, *The Cradle Will Rock* went on to a two week run as a commercial enterprise funded by private donors; it was never produced under the official auspices of the FTP.

The Cradle Will Rock episode provides us with a very useful example of the ways in which tensions over power and control can be analyzed in service of locating those ruptures that allow for change to occur. For, as Foucault (1994) points out, it "would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape" (p. 347). *The Cradle Will Rock* and the ensuing palaver highlight the work of both censorship and resistance to being silenced but as we have seen, the censorship in this case was imposed both from without as well as from within. Dubin (1987), speaking about the role played by gatekeepers in intellectual and artistic realms, points out that "awareness of such processes leads to self-regulation on the part of artists and intellectuals" (p. 158). In the case of *The Cradle Will Rock,* both the government as patron and the FTP as administrator played gatekeeping roles.

The government used economics (budget cuts and personnel changes) to justify their silencing of The *Cradle Will Rock,* despite a great deal of speculation about the real motivation behind the edict. Quinn (2008) in *Furious Improvisation* relates Hallie Flanagan's reaction to the circumstances surrounding *The Cradle Will Rock.* In a letter written (but never sent) to Harry Hopkins, Flanagan says: "The censoring of *The Cradle Will Rock* . . . was a tragic mistake in the history of the Federal Theatre . . . We spent seven months and thousands of dollars on it, and sold 25,000 seats in advance. Then in

spite of my protest, the whole thing was stopped. I pointed out that if it was stopped we would lose Houseman and Welles, my two most valuable assets . . . In spite of that the censorship went through" (p. 184). And the FTP did lose Houseman and Welles who departed shortly after *The Cradle Will Rock* incident to found their Mercury Theatre.

The fact that after the temporary ban on the opening of new productions had expired and the cast of *The Cradle Will Rock* returned to the WPA rolls the show was still not picked-up by the FTP leads to some speculation around the project's role as gatekeeper as well. Flanagan's protest over the perceived governmental censorship of *The Cradle Will Rock* is well documented; however, the FTP was also prudent in the battles they pursued sometimes to the detriment of the works produced. It was the FTP workers themselves that resisted the censorship imposed from above. Sporn (1995) observes that there are "problematics facing an official arts patronage that functions within the parameters of a representative political system allied to special-interest privilege, hierarchical arrangement, and social inequality. . . " he goes on to point out that under this system, "those most victimized are the individual artists, art collectives, and publics whose art forms and subjects fall outside the preferences of dominant culture and conventional political views" (pp. 163-164).

I provide this example of the *The Cradle Will Rock* incident as a way to illustrate the contested interests engaged in struggle and negotiation around the practice of censorship. The articulation of political critique to performance became articulated to fear of an informed public and resulted in the injunction against the production in the guise of cost cutting measures. But even these connections did not endure as the injunction was lifted allowing productions that critiqued the social and economic conditions of the period to continue. This fear of the power that the FTP possessed to rouse the masses however would remain a site of struggle throughout the project's history.

As I have shown, articulation insists on the need to contextualize rather than formalize. Articulation's insistence on contextualization allows for the consideration of multiple aspects of a question within multiple domains - theoretical, material, political - and provides a process whereby relationships can be mapped and considered temporally

and spatially, in order to identify slippages that provide opportunities for change. Cultural studies provides the theoretical and methodological means to explore those aspects of culture and the lived experiences of cultural subjects that have been ignored, marginalized, or silenced. The concept of articulation provides a framework through which to consider art in terms of the political interests that shape the field and how these interests are related to struggles for power.

In chapter two the theory of articulation will be employed to uncover the ways in which the concept "national theatre" is contextualized. In each imagining of "national theatre," analysis of the contingent connections that constitute the context and the ways in which these connections are articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated provide insight into relations of power and those elements that resist change over time.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualizing National Theatre

To consider what distinguishes the FTP from other attempts to develop a large scale subsidized theatre program in the United States and how the innovations of the FTP may be used to inform work toward development of an American national theatre this chapter begins with a consideration of what is meant by "national theatre." Past discussions of the FTP as "national theatre" rarely include an analysis of what exactly it means to be a "national theatre," what historically comprised the concept "national theatre" or what practices employed throughout much of the world today suggest about what a national theatre could or should be. These operative assumptions – what I call the received views - of the role of the national theatre in the cultural life of a nation deserve attention as it is against these views that the FTP fought so vehemently as it struggled to establish its unique identity.

Any discussion of the role of a national theatre in the life of the nation and the people and of the development of such a theatre will benefit from careful contextualization in order to uncover those actors, practices, beliefs, and economies that contingently connect to make up the national theatre constellation. It is crucial to the argument around the FTP's relationship to the construction of an American national theatre program to understand that the concept "national theatre" is fluid and manifests itself in myriad different ways depending upon countless points of contingent connection.

Central to the analysis of the concept of "national theatre" must be the acknowledgment that in our contemporary parlance, a fixed definition of this cultural formation is not possible as each national theatre is uniquely constructed and continually in flux. This being said, there exists a loosely defined but widely accepted conception of "national theatre." According to Nadine Holdsworth (2010), professor of theatre and performance studies at the University of Warwick, the national theatre is commonly conceived of as "a high profile building in a capital city brimming with civic pride and cultural prominence, producing works by national playwrights and theatre-makers in shows that exude high production values because of their sizable government subsidies" (p. 27). It was in part the struggle between this very conception and the program

envisioned by the FTP that made possible many of the innovations that were realized during the FTPs short history.

S.E. Wilmer, Professor Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin and former Head of the School of Drama, Film and Music, on consideration of the development of a national theatre in *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories* (2004), points out that "each National Theatre was unique in that it reflected a specific originating moment, location, set of goals, language, history, and mythology, as well as the idiosyncratic beliefs of its individual founding members" (p. 9). But even these founding principles were and continue to be constantly subject to changing national economies, boundaries, and ideologies and are disrupted by conflict and crisis.

The relationship that has developed between theatre and nation in terms of the theatre's role in reinforcing national identities and ideologies has most often been called into service during watershed moments in national life. Indeed, "the vast majority of theatre practices that engage with the nation, directly or obliquely, do so to respond to moments of rupture, crisis, or conflict" (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 6). It is in this very connection to moments of crisis that we shall see evidence of the work of theatre in providing access to the in-between spaces that allow for negotiation of national identity and political authority. "The theatre can act as a public forum in which the audience scrutinizes and evaluates political rhetoric and assess the validity of representations of national identity. The theatre can serve as a microcosm of the national community, passing judgement on images of itself" (Wilmer, 2004, p. 2). The development of this public forum, however, particularly as it relates to national theatres, or those theatres subsidized by a governing system, is indeed a testament to the fluidity of the "national theatre" concept.

To begin it would seem prudent to make a distinction between theatre that is subsidized, and for our purposes here, subsidized by government, and those theatres whose aim it is to make a profit from the work produced. This distinction is important to make because the means and methods of production vary widely between theatrical works developed under these differing funding structures. Most important, theatre produced under a system of subsidy often has opportunities to explore innovations in

writing, acting, design, and style due to the fact that these aspects of production are directly related to "success;" however, success is no longer defined by profit as it is in a commercial enterprise. This is not to imply that commercial theatre does not advance new and innovative works and production methods, but rather to say that in the world of commercial theatre this is a much riskier enterprise due to the negotiations that must occur between the artistic need to innovate and the economic need to turn a profit. A theatre disarticulated from profit is opened to multiple new trajectories.

The theatre-world has been identified with some form of both the church and the state as well as to the patronage of private citizens for millennia. The ancient Greeks enjoyed a robust tradition of theatrical production that honored the gods, elevated patrons, and allowed some measure of control over cultural output by the city-state government. Similarly, the tradition in Europe during the middle ages included church patronage of a series of Mystery plays that provided the audience with an education in the teachings of the Bible.

It was not until 1680, however, with Louis XIV's founding of the Comédie Française that the concept of the national theatre was first realized. "The origins of national theatres, as we understand them today, are in the court theatres of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the material theatrical culture of the nation reflected the interests of those in power. There was little room for democratic principles in these buildings, let alone dissent" (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 28). The Comédie Française provided a model for other European monarchies to establish theatrical companies of their own for the express purpose of perpetuating "high art" and thereby the cultural values of the elite while maintaining the status quo. These national cultural enterprises were in no way encouraged to critique the system from whence they received their patronage.

As the national theatre concept was more widely adopted, the perceived work of the national theatre in the cultural life of the nation also began to adapt to the changing needs of those in power. This included a move toward promoting who and what those in power deemed to be the nation's best playwrights and works that spoke in voices that more readily promoted feelings of nationalism rather than merely re-producing the

"classics," and in extending the experience of national theatre to a broader audience for the purpose of instilling and reinforcing national values. But despite these extensions of the work of the national theatre, at the heart of the construct still lay the desire to use the theatre to maintain the power structure and to instruct the people in the national ideology. Theatre was an ideal medium to accomplish these tasks due to the fact that it could change and evolve with the changing nature and needs of the nation. National theatres in Europe continued to develop along this trajectory well into the early 20th century.

During the second half of the 20th century, following political crises in Asia and Africa that resulted in the creation of a number of newly independent nations, there was resurgence in the founding of national theatres meant to meet the cultural needs of people seeking a sense of identity in a new political and national paradigm. Many of these attempts at reproducing what had been primarily a European model, however, floundered due to challenges they faced in disarticulating their new identity from the culture of the colonizer to create truly indigenous art. National theatres founded during the 1950s and 1960s in Egypt, Korea, and Senegal, for example, struggled to make the national theatre their own and a representation of their emerging national identity separate from the colonizer. As the sense of nationhood developed and the cultural needs of the nation became clearer, however, a number of flourishing national theatres were established including: The National Theatre of Egypt, the Duro Ladipo National Theatre in Nigeria, and Ghana's Drama Studio. Other well-established national theatres include the Habimah Theatre in Israel, the Bejing People's Theatre in China, the Chilean National Theatre, and the Turkish State Theatre and Conservatory (Huberman, et al, 1997, p. 205).

Clearly the fluidity of the national theatre concept and the changing nature of the needs of those in power have impacted the ways in which national theatres have developed over time and place. Each national theatre identity is constructed by the articulations that are made and re-made between a place, a set of practices, and a set of values. The work of articulation in organizing the context helps us to understand the relations of power and the competing interests that both empower and disempower possibilities within the context. In each national theatre program identity is always in flux

and contexts are continually challenged by possibilities for alternative articulations to be made.

Conspicuously missing from this list of countries with established national theatres is the United States. Wilmer (2002) suggests that this may be due in part to the ways in which the American identity has been constructed:

> Unlike the nations of Europe that could claim development of a national spirit through a common history, folklore, literature, ethnicity, language, etc., America′s common identity needed to be more artificially constructed because of its diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages and customs. Despite severe social prejudice, a hierarchical social structure and legalized forms of social discrimination, some of the factors that were represented as uniting the country were the English language, the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, and the common dream of prosperity founded on notions of liberty equality and free enterprise. (p. 10)

In reality the tensions between dominant cultural ideals and the diverse values customs, and beliefs of "the masses" represented a significant site of struggle.

Theatre in the United States

Theatre in the U.S. can be traced back to the 1750's when theatrical companies were established in New York and Philadelphia. Still under a stringent Puritan influence, theatre in other colonies did not generally survive more than a few short seasons before clashes with the church closed down productions. Around this time the colonies also enjoyed the works of professional acting companies from England; however, these companies too met with challenges to securing venues in which to perform as well as in being granted the appropriate permissions and licenses (Davis, 1993, pp. 18-29). There persisted an attitude in the colonies that carried over from Shakespeare's England that articulated actors to thieves and rogues of the worst kind resulting in actors often being characterized as a negative influence on the moral development of the community.

With independence from England came a new interest in the development of American theatre companies, and although these companies still primarily produced the classics and in particular favored Shakespeare, the availability of live theatrical

performances began to spread to areas that had never before experienced live theatre. By the mid-1800s, with westward expansion, American theatre had reached San Francisco. It was also during this period that the "star system" began to take hold in the U.S., with well-known actors traveling to various cities to perform as a means to increase revenues for theatres that were at the time primarily commercial concerns (Williams, 1998, pp. 310-311).

The history of world theatre is marked by numerous riots and social protests and for millennia the theatre served as a catalyst for politicized conduct to be acted out by audience members off the stage and in the streets. One similar event in the history of theatre in the U.S. proved to be pivotal in terms of future class divisions observed in theatres throughout New York but which became commonplace throughout the nation. On May 10, 1849, a riot broke out inside and outside New York's Astor Place Theatre over rival performances of *Macbeth* scheduled for that evening. Controversy over rival productions of the same show being produced on the same evening is not itself so surprising; what was surprising was the complexity of the rivalry and the profound legacy of the event.

The role of Macbeth was to be played that evening by American actor Edwin Forrest at the Broadway Theatre, which drew a more "popular: audience; and at the elite Astor Place Theatre by British actor William Charles Macready, a favorite of New York's carriage trade. Promoted as a contest for supremacy over New York between the English and the Americans, the national and class lines that were drawn that evening resulted in 10,000 people gathering outside the Astor Place Theatre in a protest that soon erupted into violence; the melee lasted for over 20 hours before the crowd was subdued. In the end, 20 people were dead and over 100 more had been injured (McConachie, 2006).

This event polarized the New York theatre which became further divided along class and cultural lines that ensured access to the classics, Shakespeare, and opera for the wealthy and what were considered lower forms of entertainment, variety and music-hall shows, for the working class and the poor. Although this demarcation along class lines was not fixed, it did hold sufficient sway for a time and was replicated outside of the New

York theatre as a way for those in power to maintain control, at least in terms of access to certain cultural productions.

By the early 20th century, the commercial theatre was firmly entrenched as part of American cultural life with the New York theatre at its center. By this time university and community theatres had also become an important part of the cultural life of the nation. In contrast to the commercial theatre, the more community-based theatre programs still relied on some form of patronage to sustain them. Throughout almost 200 years of development, however, the American theatre still remained articulated to one of the nation's guiding principles, at least in terms of its economics, a belief in the importance of individuals and institutions having the ability to "stand on their own" and to support their work without assistance from the government. This deeply held belief in self-sufficiency continues to complicate the relationship between theatre and nation in the U.S. as we continue to challenge the ways in which forms of patronage, artistic quality, and commercial success are articulated to audience access to theatrical productions.

Patronage, Control, and Governmental Responsibility for Culture

The model for state patronage of the arts comes from those many European nations where the responsibility for patronage passed from the crown to the state and in many cases to local government. Because the United States has no tradition of state sponsorship for the arts for the first 176 years of our history, we instead embraced a philosophy of self-determination and individualism that excluded the use of public funds for most cultural endeavors, at least on any large scale. But there are salient reasons for public subsidy of the arts which our national aversion to government involvement, at least in certain cases, ignores.

Richard Eyre, director of the National Theatre in the UK from 1987 to 1997, summed up some of the more fundamental reasons that the theatre needs and benefits from subsidy: "Subsidy allows a theatre to break free from the constraints of profit-making and to do works that can't or won't be done in a commercial theatre, to explore previously unexplored methods of production, and to ensure that the theatre is affordable to a broad section of the populace thereby extending the possibility of democratizing the audience and enfranchising those who can't afford to pay commercial theatre prices"

(quoted in Schwartz, 2003, p. 199). Along with these benefits, however, comes the potential for the subsidized theatre to become a force for the wide dissemination of information on social, political, and economic issues which, in the case of government as patron, opens up the possibility for criticism of the very "hand that feeds you." Again, Richard Eyre, speaking specifically of the Federal Theatre in the U.S., which he acknowledges "had no precedent and has had no successors," says, "if you believe in government funding, then you have to accept that you are creating an agency that is endowing people with funds that may boomerang . . . it's an absolute inevitability if you endow art, any good art is in some sense criticism. They are licensing the jester, at best" (quoted in Schwartz, 2003 p. 197). Despite this potential for the development of works that may be critical of the very structures that founded them, there was a sense during the period leading up to the New Deal Era that the time was right for the government to play a more central role in the cultural life of the nation.

Holger Cahill, who would eventually become national director of the WPAs Federal Art Project, said of the period, "government subsidy was the next logical step in the development of American art, not an art which would be an occasional unrelated accompaniment to everyday existence, but a functioning part of national life" (quoted in Flanagan, 1940, p. 18). It was the contingent connection that was forged between the arts and economic relief during the Depression that allowed this next logical step to be taken.

As a result of Franklin Roosevelt advocating for the extended role of governmental involvement in the lives of the people, the United States experienced a period of subsidy for the arts on a grand scale. As Governor of New York, Roosevelt had already embraced the need for government to take greater responsibility for the welfare of the people, which in the case of artists meant taking on the role of patron. In an August 1931 address before a special session of the New York legislature, FDR made known his views on the role of government in ensuring the welfare of the people:

> Our government is not the master but the creature of the people. The duty of the state toward its citizens is the duty of the servant to its master. One of these duties of the state is that of caring for those of its citizens who find themselves the victims of such adverse circumstances as makes them unable to obtain even the

> necessities for mere existence without the aid of others. To these unfortunate citizens aid must be extended by government - not as a matter of charity but as a social duty. (Taylor, 2008, p. 98)

When the U.S. government did finally enter the world of patronage for the arts it was on a scale the likes of which the world had never before seen. And it took a form that would become the source of an enduring struggle for identity on the part of the arts projects as they endeavored to reconcile whether they were cultural programs or work projects.

In the case of the WPA and the projects under Federal One, the traditional role of patron - the provision of funds to arts organizations or individual artists - was replaced by a model whereby the federal government managed a series of projects and directly employed the artists to carry these projects to completion. Paul Sporn, in *Against Itself: The Federal Theatre and Writers' Projects in the Midwest* (1995), observed that "the economic goal, making jobs for the unemployed until prosperity returned, continued to be the key factor motivating Washington politicians and local bureaucrats, and it illustrates the firm grip the *laissez-faire* principle had on officials in matters of cultural and esthetic affairs" (p. 49). The tenacity of the *laissez-faire* principle provides an excellent example of what Hall termed lines of tendential force. Despite ongoing efforts to rearticulate this noninterventionist attitude toward cultural affairs, particularly in terms of economic support for cultural projects, given a situation in which the dual purposes of relief *and* quality cultural production could be accomplished, those in power deferred to the ideologically imbedded position of noninterference. Articulations between a boot-strap mentality, a belief in self-sufficiency, a fear of government intervention, and capitalist ideology combined to create a context within which the *laissez-faire* principle enjoyed a sustained position of power. The FTP found itself fully engaged in this ongoing struggle to negotiate the tensions between control and freedom and to identify the ruptures that would allow for change to occur. The concept of patronage and the control over financial support of the arts was a particularly contested issue.

One traditionally accepted role of the arts patron is to identify those artists with the potential to make a contribution and then to provide them with the resources they need to produce their work. This process is facilitated by a patron who is informed about

the work but who also maintains a distance, allowing the artist the freedom to create. In reality, however, as Schwartz (2003) highlights, "there are few patrons of the arts, least of all the government, who have been able to refrain from meddling in the conduct of the artists they support, especially when their work has a high political profile" (p. xiii). In as highly charged a political environment as existed during the New Deal era it was unlikely that government subsidies of the arts would not lead to struggles over control that manifest in some sort of suppression, such as censorship, if the interests of the government were perceived to be threatened.

From an economic perspective, the struggle between patron and artist is summed up nicely by Richard Eyre: "The hardest thing for governments, for patrons of any form, is to accept that if you're funding an art form, there is absolutely no guarantee that what you fund will be good. You cannot legislate quality or talent, and that's at the heart of the problem. People want linear equations. They want to be able to say, 'We put in X million dollars; we got this out the other end'" (quoted in Schwartz, 2003, p. 200). For the WPA this concept became even more complex when the arts projects were placed alongside the projects that dealt with infrastructure such as roads and public buildings. In the case of these projects there existed the ability to propose linear equations: the investment of X million into a project that employed X number of laborers could reasonably be expected to produce the anticipated final product and that it would be "good." These same standards could not possibly be placed on projects in the arts with the same anticipated outcomes and this is where expectations and communication between patron and artist often broke down. But when the FTP did produce something that was considered so "good" as to be returned to the commercial theatre the WPA often balked, preferring to keep hit shows on the government rolls and thereby essentially defeating the expressed purpose of the enterprise.

Indeed, in the opinion of HUAC, if too few private patrons existed for the number of artists in need of patronage, it was logical to assume that there were just too many artists (McKinzie, 1973 p. 159). In House discussions regarding the creation of a bureau of fine arts, Representative Dewey Short of Missouri shared the contention that "every grade school graduate knew . . . that good art emerged from suffering artists, while

'subsidized art is no art at all'" (McKinzie, 1973, p. 154). The problem was larger than this, however, and in reality many of the attacks made against the Federal Arts Projects were more concerned with the expanding role of government that seemed to be created as part and parcel of New Deal policies. There is much truth in Gary Larson's (1983) supposition that "the transition from individualized cultural *laissez-faire* to the collective expression of the WPA was simply too abrupt for the nation to make easily. Were it not for the general flux of the times, when social engineering was permitted, the New Deal arts projects would never have taken place" (p. 224). But the New Deal arts projects did take place and an important part of their legacy lies in highlighting the struggles inherent in successfully navigating the fluid relationship between government as patron and the arts.

In a January 25, 1936 column in the *New York Times*, theatre critic and FTP supporter Brooks Atkinson summed up the patronage issue by saying, "What we know now is that a free theatre cannot be a government enterprise" (quoted in Quinn 2008, p. 69). Although Atkinson's assessment of the issue assumes a fixed relationship that we know does not exist, it is true that this tug-of-war between free artistic expression and the desire of the patron/government to control artistic output continues to be a central issue in controversies between today's NEA and NEH and contemporary artists.

Resisting the Traditional "Model"

The idea of the national theatre has evolved over time and continues to do so; however, in the period leading up to the 1930s, we are able to identify a few commonly accepted views of the work or characteristics of a national theatre that the FTP actively resisted in its creation of a new paradigm. This resistance, in most instances, was likely undertaken as a means to produce the best possible theatre within the confines of two disparate organizational systems but resulted in innovations that have endured and are still used today. As Wilmer (2008) observes, national theatres often owed the impetus for their creation to multiple objectives: "most national theatres arose in reaction to a dominant culture imposed from without; they were a means of protest as well as of preserving what were considered to be the salient features of the oppressed group" (p. 2). In the case of the FTP, the WPA, as representative of the government, embodies the

values of the dominant culture. Out of work actors in turn "protest" imposed rules and regulations while endeavoring to preserve their craft.

This struggle between the FTP and the WPA required the FTP to creatively address issues related to actors, audiences, and production processes that resulted in the development of a new theatre program that had the potential to develop into an American national theatre. There have always been concerns related to the prevailing national theatre "models" and although each national theatre was and is unique in its fluid composition, key questions regarding representation, voice, and material needed to be addressed. Holdsworth (2010) has identified the most salient of these questions:

> Are national theatres representative of the winder populace in terms of the key identifiers of age, race, regionality and class? If they are not, can we regard them as national theatres? And what about the material that appears on the stages of national theatres? What and whom does a national theatre represent? Whose stories are told, and why are these stories that a nation needs to narrate? How many national citizens can a national theatre credibly claim to reach given its location, repertoire and cost? (p. 35)

It was these very questions that the FTP began to answer as it created a theatre program that actively resisted some of the more widely accepted characteristics that were common to many of the national theatres that served as representative during the period.

The FTP was designed by Hallie Flanagan and others on the project not to emulate national theatres in the European tradition, in which artists were representatives of the government, but rather to create a national federation of theatres that could reach a broader audience and that could speak in their voices. But the FTP did become to some extent a representative of the government as soon as the funding for the project was released from the public coffers; and it was this expectation of representation that the FTP fought against. Despite the fact that the funds were, for all intents and purposes, coming from "the people" it was not with the people's voice that the FTP was allowed to speak. It is the age-old dilemma of any arts endeavor that enjoys public support: how to successfully navigate the tension between the artists' right to free, creative expression and the political realities that are tethered to the use of public funds. Which leads to the even

bigger questions and sites of struggle: Should art that is publicly funded and art that is funded through private sources be held to the same standards in terms of quality and content? And, do there exist artistic endeavors that should not enjoy patronage by the state and should only be encouraged through the use of private support? To whom does it fall to make such judgments? Is it appropriate for the government to "dictate" the tastes of the people as commonly controversial issues such as religion, sexuality, race, and politics become the topics of artistic production? Should any art to which the average taxpayer objects be excluded from public support? And what then of the artists' sensibilities in terms of form and content?

As a means to address some of these issues and to maintain control over cultural output, national theatres in the European tradition focused on recruiting artists considered to be at the top of their profession for the purpose of representing the government, or focused on controlling content thereby creating a government vehicle for instruction of the masses. These widely accepted and utilized national theatre programs often shared a focus on promoting nationalism and developing citizenship, encouraging the production of "high art" often performed in privileged spaces, and adopting the paternalistic stance that the state knows what is best for the people. These characteristics are by no means specific to all national theatres nor are they fixed for all time or immune to rearticulation. However, during the 1930s a prevailing perception of the work of a governmentally funded theatre did include the belief that the government as patron had the right to shape the work of a state sponsored theatre and it's "workers" in service of supporting dominant cultural beliefs and enforcing the cultural norms of those in power.

In chapter three I show how the characteristics of established national theatre programs in other countries that had resisted disarticulation and rearticulation (for example use of privileged space and commitment to "high" art) were replicated in attempts to establish an American national theatre. The national theatre concept is situated within specific contexts both prior to and following the New Deal era allowing for the identification of characteristics of these attempts that contributed to their failure. Identifying sites of struggle is essential to understanding the innovations credited to the FTP and how they represent a departure from the received view of the national theatre

structure. The central articulation of work relief to theatre and the creation and disassembling of unities and connections will also be fundamental to this understanding.

CHAPTER THREE

Attempts to Create an American National Theatre Program – Pre-New Deal Era

Although the U.S. has never succeeded in establishing a national theatre, it should not be assumed that there have never been attempts to do so; some of these attempts bordered on the purely whimsical while others represented well-developed plans put forth by well-respected representatives of the government or the theatre world. What all of these attempts shared in common, however, was a proposed design that would perpetuate one or more of the national theatre characteristics which the FTP resisted adopting – paternalism, nationalism and governmentality, "high" art, and privileged space – and a funding structure that would make resistance to the desires of the patron challenging.

In an article titled "Two Actors Advocate National Theatre" and published in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* on June 2, 1901, actor and playwright Leo Ditrichstein and Wilton Lackaye, stage and later silent film actor, advocated for the creation of a national theatre in the United States. Their views in favor of the creation of a national theatre, laid out side-by-side in the *Tribune*, argue on one hand that after a period of patronage the theatre model proposed could become self-sustaining:

> A national theatre endowed by a man of the refinement and honest art purpose of Mr. Henry L. Higginson[7] of Boston would do as much for the cause of drama as the magnificent Boston Symphony Orchestra has done for music in this country. It ought to be conducted on a large and generous plan. The repertoire ought to include old as well as modern plays of all nations and the bill should be changed nightly so that everybody could find a morsel to his taste in the menu of the week. I declare that a theatre of this description could be made a paying venture after two or three seasons. . . (p. 43)

And, on the other hand argued that the theatre is just as deserving of endowment as all of the other arts that have enjoyed such patronage:

> The news that Andrew Carnegie had in mind to add to his efforts for education in library endowment by subsidizing a national theatre seems to have aroused a deal

[7] Higginson was the founder and for many years the sole patron of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

> of amusement. Why? Is there any effort in education or art that has not felt the need and asked the help of endowment? (p. 43)

Interestingly, neither of these proposed models of subsidy request or require governmental funding for what Ditrichstein and Lackaye are calling a "national theatre," which certainly runs counter to the funding arrangement that is usually associated with a theatre program endowed with the right to use the title "national" theatre. And as we will continue to discover, the funding structure does matter.

Although support of the projects proposed by Ditrichstein and Lackaye does not include governmental involvement, the "models" they propose do serve to perpetuate some of the identified national theatre characteristics eschewed by the FTP, in particular the need to provide "high' art to the privileged classes. Lackaye's argument in particular advocates for the creation of a theatre that will provide new and more refined entertainments in contrast to the fare offered to the common masses by the commercial theatre. He promotes an endowed theatre so that artistically it can rise above the need to turn a profit which he equates with the production of "low" art.

> The actor is the only artist to whom you say: "Cultivate beauty and the advancement of art at your own expense, for pure love, but in competition with the sordid commercial huckster who knows no criterion but coin, no scruples which may not be silenced by the jingle of silver decoyed to the box office by pandering to the lowest tastes." (p. 43)

Lackaye goes on to add:

> We all remember when the Boston orchestra was called 'a rich man's luxury' and 'Higginson's folly.' Now it is not only the finest organization of its kind in music but also the best paying. Why should a theatrical experiment not turn out as well? If it should, the phrase 'Shakespeare spells ruin' then will cease to be a truism and a reproach. The best class of our theatre-goers will be brought back to the playhouse from which they have been driven by triviality, indecency, and inability. Then the comic-critic cult of flippant jest mongers will cease to exist. (p. 43)

Lackaye and Ditrichstein imagined a theatrical program that would return the theatre to those best equipped to appreciate Shakespeare and other offerings typically thought to be the particular purview of the privileged classes. This perspective articulates what is assumed to be the appropriate audience for a "national theatre" program in America to a particular social class and marginalizes the commercial and the popular as second-rate and not representative of the best the American theatre has to offer.

It should also be clear from this example that what it means to be a national theatre in the United States is problematic in its lack of definition. Early examples of attempts to establish a national theatre in this country, however, serve to further highlight this issue in their varied approaches to the development of an American national theatre program. We have already established that "national theatre" is itself a fluid concept because of the constantly changing nature of the relationship between the nation, the arts, and the people, but we must keep in mind that at a minimum a national theatre will enjoy the involvement of the government in the founding or administration and the financial subsidy of the theatre program.

A brief piece that appeared in *The San Francisco Call* on November 19, 1905 titled "National Theatre Promised" details a speech given by actor Richard Mansfield during which he outlines plans for the establishment of a national theatre. The paper reported: "The news . . . that $2,000,000 has been raised for the erection of a building to house a national theater in New York will be hailed with pleasure by all lovers of art and well-wishers of the stage" (p. 22). Mansfield, however, advocated for a plan that would expand the scope of the proposed national theatre program by creating theatre space in both New York and Chicago:

> When Mr. Mansfield was speaking to the densely crowded Music Hall in Chicago he told his audience that he had come to the conclusion that a national theatre should have its home not only in New York or in Chicago, but in both cities. That is, the New York building should have its duplicate in Chicago, and the season should be divided between the two, so that each should have its endowed theatre. (p. 22)

While a positive step in terms of recognizing the importance of providing access to the theatre to audiences outside of the country's theatrical center in New York, Mansfield's plan still focused on the siting of a national theatre program in major urban centers thereby excluding those audiences geographically or economically unable to access theatre in a metropolitan area.

Mansfield's plan included another aspect that, although very specific and rather unusual, exemplifies a characteristic common to national theatre programs, that of a sort of paternalism that uses the theatre to regulate the conduct of individuals. In Mansfield's case he envisioned a national theatre that would serve as a model to improve the speech of Americans who attended the theatre. What Mansfield had to say about the role of the national theatre in improving citizens' manner of speech appeared in May of 1906 in an *Atlantic Monthly* article titled "Man and the Actor." A section of the article titled "A National Theatre" is worth quoting at length as it highlights the articulation of the role of the theatre to the practice of paternalism, a connection that ran counter to what the FTP envisioned for its national theater program:

> What could not be done for the people of this land, were we to have a great and recognised theatre! Consider our speech, and our manner of speech! Consider our voices, and the production of our voices! Consider the pronunciation of words, and the curious use of vowels! Let us say we have an established theatre, to which you come not only for your pleasure, but for your education. Of what immense advantage this would be if behind its presiding officer there stood a board of literary directors, composed of such men as William Winter, Howells, Edward Everett Hale, and Aldrich, and others equally fine, and the presidents of the great universities. These men might well decide how the American language should be spoken in the great American theatre, and we should then have an authority in this country at last for the pronunciation of certain words . . . And the voice! The education of the American speaking voice is I am sure all will agree, of immense importance. It is difficult to love, or to continue to endure, a woman who shrieks at you; a high-pitched, nasal, stringy voice is not calculated to charm. This established theatre of which we dream should teach men and women how to talk;

> and how splendid it would be for future generations if it should become characteristic of American men and women to speak in soft and beautifully modulated tones! (http://www.authorama.com/19th-century-actor-autobiographies-9.html)

Presumably, Mansfield believed that national theatre centers in New York and Chicago would not only serve to entertain but would also endeavor, through modeling the proper diction and tone in theatrical works, to eliminate all traces of the New York dialect and the Midwestern "quack." This proposed national theatre program would also employ the intellectual elite to regulate the language itself by suggesting a standardized pronunciation for words that this august body identified as needing standardization. Most troubling about this national theatre design are the relations of power at play between producers and consumers, and the unwitting consent of audience members as their very use of the language was to be manipulated by the works being presented on stage.

In 1922, a proposal for the establishment of a national theatre, to be located in New York and controlled by the New York Producing Managers' Association (PMA), was suggested by playwright Augustus Thomas. Here again, the use of the label "national theatre" is not in keeping with those fundamental elements usually thought to be associated with national theatre programs, and control over the proposed enterprise by a group of commercial theatre managers further complicates the relationship between the theatre and the people by disarticulating national theatre from government as patron and representative of the people. And, the PMA's relationship with actors and their union – Actors' Equity Association (AEA) – makes the suggestion of the PMA controlling a "national theatre" even more surprising.

The PMA played a significant role in the 1919 actors' strike as the organization that negotiated with AEA on behalf of the producing managers of the Theatre Syndicate and the Shuberts. These rival theatrical management trusts, in their drive to control the "legitimate" theatre in the U.S., adopted business practices that resulted in deteriorating working conditions for actors. AEA moved to adopt a standard contract process for actors; however, the managers were unwilling to give up control over terms of employment which led to a strike. AEA was successful in having their demands met and

in the process "secured the right to bargain collectively on behalf of the men and women of the U.S. stage . . ." (Holmes, 2006, pp. 13-14) That the PMA was seen as being the appropriate organization to nurture a national theatre program so soon after this major conflict with actors and AEA again begs the question, how was the concept of a "national theatre" being defined?

In a December 24, 1922 syndicated article titled "One National Theatre Proposed; Million Drama Lovers Need More," theatre critic Burns Mantle acknowledges the limitations of a national theatre that only serves New York audiences and outlines what he envisions a partnership between local theatre and the PMA could accomplish:

> If, without the cooperation of so powerful an organization as the producers' association hundreds of dramatic stock companies do even now eke out an existence what could they not do if –
>
> 1. They were taken over by the citizens of their respective communities and subsidized, their seasons being guaranteed by a subscription sale of seats;
> 2. The organization of their companies was arranged through the Producing Managers' association and the directors of a parent national theatre in New York; and
> 3. Their local direction and repertories determined by a community directorate, aided by the directors of the parent theatre?
>
> With a parent theatre to emulate, and the Producing Managers' association, which controls all the current Broadway plays and all the original manuscripts being considered for production, back of them, these community theatres would have access to the greatest supply of plays, native and foreign, in existence. And with a local directorate working in cooperation with a New York committee they could absolutely control the character of entertainment offered in their respective communities. (Mantle, 1922, p. D1)

While much of what Mantle suggests moves the proposed national theatre program closer to a structure that reaches into communities and opens the experience of live theatre to a wider American audience; the relationship between these community entities and the "parent theatre" in New York raises some concerns.

The notion of a "parent theatre" is not, in and of itself, entirely problematic; however, when that "parent theatre" is a commercial enterprise and it is suggested that being emulated and exerting control will be within its purview, one must wonder if what is proposed is not the creation of a national theatre but rather merely a thinly veiled attempt for the PMA to extend its hold over the theatre business. Also of concern is the assumption that the New York theatre is the standard for all theatre in America, and that those theatre amateurs and professionals in local communities would not, without the guidance of the New York theatre, have the expertise to control the character of entertainment being offered on local stages. This arrangement clearly articulates the commercial New York stage to artistic quality and assumes that local theatres do not have the capacity to produce work worthy of consumption by local audiences without "parental" guidance.

American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA)

On July 5, 1935 President Roosevelt signed the charter that incorporated the American National Theatre and Academy. ANTA was created for the purpose of being America's National Theatre and as per Public Law 74-199, under which it was incorporated; ANTA's purposes were intended to embrace the following:

(a) The presentation of theatrical productions of the highest type;
(b) The stimulation of public interest in the drama as an art belonging both to the theatre and to literature and thereby to be enjoyed both on the stage and in the study;
(c) The advancement of interest in the drama throughout the United States of America by furthering the production of the best plays, interpreted by the best actors at minimum cost;
(d) The further development of the study of drama of the present and past in our universities, colleges, schools, and elsewhere;
(e) The sponsoring, encouraging, and development of the art and technique of the theatre through a school within the National Academy (The Statutes at Large, p. 458).

The ANTA charter outlined purposes for the program that were sufficient in scope to provide a foundation for the development of a national theatre similar to those enjoyed by nations in Europe and elsewhere. Unlike the national theatre programs in other countries, however, Congress did not earmark any government funding for ANTA but rather chartered ANTA as a nonprofit corporation.

According to theatre historian Ken Bloom in *Broadway: An Encyclopedia* (2013) the lack of federal funding for ANTA was by design:

> The founders of ANTA were determined to limit government control. To avoid any problems with censorship, ANTA was structured to receive no government funds. The founders knew that such an undertaking would be expensive and could never show a profit. So the organization was made nonprofit, enabling it to solicit funds from individuals and corporations. (p. 18)

The articulation of government funding to censorship is one relationship that has, at least in the U.S., defied disarticulation and has come to play a significant role in government funding for all of the arts in this country. In the case of ANTA, setting up a national theatre without the financial support of the government seriously handicapped the program's ability to develop along its intended trajectory.

Although chartered in 1935, because of ANTA's funding structure and due to the unique economic conditions of both the Depression and WWII, the program did not begin to produce shows until 1947. In addition to struggles related to funding, ANTA also suffered from the fallout surrounding the very public closure of the Federal Theatre Project just as the program was trying to get off the ground. However, despite these initial setbacks, in 1945 when Robert Breen took over as managing director of ANTA and began a collaboration with Robert Porterfield the two devised a plan to establish The National Theatre Foundation which would endeavor to raise a 40 to 50 million dollar endowment. It was proposed that the interest from this endowment would be used to fund theatre work throughout the country (Breen and Porterfield to ANTA Members, 1945). Breen and Porterfield also saw the need to open ANTA to the possibility of accepting government funds but still endeavoring to ensure autonomy from government involvement. Governmental support of the plan (financial or otherwise) was not

forthcoming; neither was private support sufficient to make the plan for The National Theatre Foundation viable.

In the 1950s ANTA attempted to implement the Forty-Theatre Circuit Plan which by design involved regional theatres in locations throughout the country but the development of which did not include consultation with any regional theatre professionals. In his *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage,* author Joseph Wesley Zeigler (1977) outlines the basic design of the Forty-Theatre Circuit Plan:

> The ANTA plan was not designed to create locally operated theatres but instead a touring circuit of productions mounted in four far-flung "talent centers": New York, Chicago, San Francisco or Los Angeles, and a southwestern city such as Dallas or Houston. Each of the four centers would hire actors and technicians locally. Each would produce ten plays simultaneously, and the resulting forty productions would then be toured. . . The plan provided for 1,600 playing weeks during each season. With eight performances per week, and an average of 1,000 patrons per performance, up to 12,800,000 patrons could be accommodated. (p. 127)

The plan appeared in the December 1955 edition of *Theatre Arts* magazine with the hope that theatre professionals and others reading the article would be clamoring to help make the project a reality; these collaborators never materialized and the plan progressed no further.

ANTA's last major attempt to establish itself as America's National Theatre came in the 1970s when "ANTA joined with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as a co-producer of the new National Theatre Company under the direction of Peter Sellars (Bloom, 2013, p. 19). Sellars' MacArthur Fellows Biography from 1983 describes his directorial style thus: "Sellars draws upon movements as diverse as symbolism, futurism, constructivism, cubism, expressionism, dadaism, and surrealism. As a director, he has moved away from plot and linear action, toward abstraction and spectacle in combination with older, more visual forms" (Sellars, 1983, MacArthur Foundation). It was this avant-garde style that Bloom suggests may have contributed to the failure of the National Theatre Company: "The Company concentrated on epic (in length and theme)

productions staged with Sellars' usual disregard for the author's intent and audience patience. The Company was a dismal failure and faded without a trace after wasting millions of dollars" (p. 19).

Although the original ANTA charter detailed a program full of promise, failed attempts to establish itself as America's National Theatre and a funding structure inappropriate to the needs of the program plagued ANTA throughout its existence. Its founding mere months before the WPA's Federal Arts Programs also played a significant role in ANTA's history and had the FTP not been so publicly scrutinized for its perceived left-leaning tendencies, perhaps ANTA's formative years may have been more productive.

Attempts to Create an American National Theatre Program – Post-New Deal Era

The failure of the Federal Theatre Project to transcend its origins and the languishing of the ANTA did not deter theatre folk, and indeed some government folk as well, from continued attempts to establish a national theatre in the U.S. The next attempt came in the form of a bill presented to Congress by New York Senator Irving Ives and Representative Jacob K. Javits, also from New York, calling "upon President Truman to convene an assembly in Washington, out of which would emerge a new organization to develop the national theatre" (Zeigler, 1977, p. 126). The Ives/Javits bill called for consideration of the development of a national theatre and national opera and ballet and acknowledged the ANTA charter but also pointed out the fact that ANTA had yet to implement a national theatre program. The bill did not include a plan for developing the aforementioned national arts institutions but rather called for the assembly, to be convened by Truman, to devise an appropriate strategy. The bill never progressed beyond committee.

Billy Rose, Broadway producer, theatre owner and lyricist had occasion to pen an article on the introduction of the Ives/Javits bill that provides some valuable insight into the relationship between government and the arts at the time:

> When you're traveling, it's always a kick to get your mitts on a copy of the home-town newspaper, and so, when the stewardess on the Pan-Am Clipper to Tokyo handed me a New York Herald Tribune, I buried my head in it as if it were a

> growler of suds. After casing pages 1 and 2, I automatically turned to the theatre section and there my optics collided with an item which left me a little airsick: Congressman Javits had a bill before the eighty-first Congress authorizing the president to spend up to $250,000 in assembling a group to work out a plan for a national theatre, opera and ballet. When I showed the squib to Eleanor, her comment was, "Fat chance that has of getting by the politicians." (Rose, 1949)

Rose goes on to detail efforts to subsidize and support national theatre programs in countries throughout Europe despite the financial situation many of these counties found themselves in after the war. He then turns to the Soviet Union and the fears over a national theatre in the U.S. becoming a tool for propaganda, which leads him to a commentary on the WPA and the FTP in particular:

> A more potent argument against the Javits bill is that we financed a national theatre once before, the W.P.A. Federal Theatre, and that a good many of the stars in this ill-starred venture turned out to be members of the Communist party. How, some of our legislators have asked, do we make certain that the proposed national theatre doesn't run true to Cominform?[8] Well, today there exists a carefully documented list of all the card-holders and over-the-edge fellow travelers who have operated in the various art forms for the past 10 years, and who might try to muscle in on a new national set-up. (Rose, 1949)

The ways in which the FTP had been connected to Communism continued to plague attempts to build a national theatre program throughout the years when the threat of communist infiltration of American institutions was still of great concern. And although the Ives/Javits bill never progressed beyond the very initial stages, the complexities of a government supported and subsidized national theatre program and the myriad relationships such an undertaking represented were not lost on Billy Rose and by extension his readers.

The 1980s saw a new series of attempts to build a national theatre program of one sort or another. A proposal by Actors' Equity required a $1 billion commitment of government funding to support a plan that was compared to the FTP in its potential

[8] Communist Information Bureau

scope. Reporting for the *New York Times* on November 15, 1983, Samuel G. Freedman wrote "The Actor's Equity Plan is the third proposal for a national theatre to be introduced recently. It follows those by the producer Joseph Papp to create a national theatre on Broadway, and by Roger L. Stevens to begin a national theatre at the Kennedy Center in Washington" (p. 11). Freedman goes on to say of the Actors' Equity proposal:

> Actors' Equity cited as its model the Federal Theatre project, which employed 10,000 artists and played to 30 million people between 1935 and 1939. Like that project . . . the national theatre would operate throughout the country and would stress indigenous American works. It would be overseen by a board, with a majority of its members from performing arts unions and a minority from the general public. Unlike the Federal Theatre, the Actors' Equity plan calls for union wages to be paid to all participants and for permanent legislation establishing the theatre to be enacted by Congress. (p. 11)

Although none of these proposed plans resulted in the establishment of a permanent national theatre program, these examples do serve to highlight an important fact: the national theatre "model" that suggests a theatre program housed in an urban center, although not ideal in terms of democratizing the theatre and making it available to all citizens, is much more cost effective than a program reflective of the FTP structure. Indeed, Freedman supposed that the Actors' Equity plan which included a budget all of which would come from government sources was 100 times more costly than the Papp or the Stevens proposals (p. 11). Funding these proposed projects continues to be a central issue.

The most recent notable attempt to establish a national theatre in the U.S. was the 2003 founding of the 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt American National Theatre (ANT). ANT first gained notoriety when it vied for space in the redevelopment project at ground zero in Lower Manhattan. Proposing the inclusion of a three-stage theatre complex with a $170 million price tag, the ANT was not selected for inclusion at the ground zero site, but has since gone on to develop a number of readings and productions that have been staged at various locations throughout Manhattan. The ANT has as part of its founding vision the following:

> With its clearly defined and responsible mission, The American National Theatre seeks to be an active partner in the creative life of New York and the nation. Its plan speaks to the cultural, educational, economic, and social needs of both, while creating for Manhattan an institution of international significance. A cultural flagship of New York, The American National Theatre will offer audiences, other non-profit and commercial producers one central location for new theatrical work representing the best to be found in the United States. (www.AmericanNationalTheatre.org)

Although the ANT seeks to be a partner in the creative life of the nation, all evidence would suggest that most efforts of the organization are focused on New York and New York audiences. In fairness, due to the volume of tourists that frequent New York each year, the ANT *may* reach audiences of a wide geographic composition, but if that is the case it is more a happy accident than the result of any design.

Here too we have a program calling itself a national theatre but without benefit of government support or subsidy. Interestingly, the ANT website highlights the fact that "On March 12, 2013, The United States Patent and Trademark office granted The ANT the exclusive right to the name 'The American National Theatre'" (www.AmericanNationalTheatre.org). Trademarking a name, however, is very different than being granted the distinction of representing the government as its national theatre.

It appears as though the ANT is still in existence; however, the last advertised production was in the fall of 2016. The organization's website and social media accounts do not seem to have been updated since October of 2016 and the ANT only has 329 followers on its Facebook page. While the less than timely information found on these electronic resources is not proof positive of the ANT's current status, it is safe to assume that while the organization is still alive it may not be thriving.

This brief overview of the various attempts to establish a national theatre program here in the U.S. was provided in order to situate the FTP within the larger context of an American National Theatre as well as to highlight two salient points. First, it should be clear that the U.S. has no shared set of characteristics that help one to understand the "national theatre" concept. It is true that "national theatre" is a fluid concept due the

changing nature of governments, nations, and the arts; however, it is counterproductive to the development of an American national theatre program to have no boundaries within which such a program should fit. As I have already suggested, at a minimum a national theatre program should include governmental involvement in the support and subsidy of the program.

Second, the audience for a truly national theatre must extend beyond the boundaries of an urban center to include those theatre patrons from areas far outside the reach of a metropolis. In order for this to occur we must find ways to resist the notion that "good" art is only to be found in cities and we must disarticulate rural or un-educated or popular from culturally void so that we can begin to appreciate the richness of the relationships that can be developed through the rearticulation of emergent voices to the theatre craft.

I have provided a brief overview of both the national theatre "model" as well as attempts to develop a national theatre program in the U.S. In chapter four I consider the ways in which the FTP negotiated struggles related to its dual identity as artistic undertaking and work relief project.

CHAPTER FOUR

We let out these works on the vote of the people

The Federal Theatre Project was the object of much speculation and criticism, some praise, and ultimately condemnation from the moment of its birth through its arguably untimely demise four years later. The FTP captured the imagination of researchers and journalists and became the subject of books, research projects, Congressional briefs, and hundreds of thousands of lines of media copy all of which provided insight into the workings of the project, the resounding successes, the seemingly endless obstacles, and consideration of the reasons behind the project's failure to transcend its origins as a relief effort by transforming into some version of a "national theatre." In order to begin to understand the context within which the FTP developed as it did, it will be useful to consider a brief overview of the U.S. government's entrance into the dual worlds of art and relief - two worlds which had previously been the purview of the private sector and which had not been connected in any significant way.

The years leading up to Roosevelt's presidency were characterized by New Era political philosophy which defined the role of the central government in addressing the social ills of the nation and essentially denied or at least limited this role. Harding, who rallied the people around his anti-progressive campaign for "normalcy," Coolidge in his devotion to *laissez-faire* economics, and Hoover's commitment to government-business cooperation all in their own way placed the responsibility for human welfare and health on local governments and charitable institutions. The introduction of Roosevelt's New Deal policies began to define the new role that government would play in the lives of the people as well as the role the government would (or at least could) play in the cultural life of the nation.

Many of the programs and policies that were introduced under the New Deal had been tested and refined in New York during FDR's tenure as governor. Roosevelt won his 1928 gubernatorial bid and took office on January 1, 1929; during his two terms as New York's governor he instituted sweeping economic and political changes, worked to clean up the corruption that defined New York City politics at the time, advocated for affordable electric power, instituted prison reforms, and provided tax relief for struggling

farmers. His greatest challenges came, however, in addressing the devastating impact of the Stock Market Crash of 1929.

The effects of the Stock Market Crash on the working public in New York State were abundantly clear by early1930, just months after the crash occurred. As unemployment numbers rose to unprecedented levels, it quickly became evident that private charities and public social service agencies did not possess the resources, human or financial, to deal with the growing needs of the unemployed. Roosevelt believed that in cases such as these, it was the responsibility of government to intervene on behalf of the people to alleviate suffering and to provide relief. Roosevelt did not believe in just providing relief, however, but also in alleviating the suffering that comes with the loss of self-respect.

In early 1931 Roosevelt introduced legislation that would allow for New York to provide emergency relief to workers in the form of direct or home relief. Eventually funding was funneled into work relief and the unemployed were put to work on specific public works projects. Roosevelt was committed to the idea of providing workers with employment that would enhance the common good rather than merely placing workers on the dole which he felt stripped them of their dignity. Harry Hopkins, a social worker from Iowa, who was, at the time, serving as head of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association was tasked with heading this newly formed initiative, known as the New York Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), as its first executive director (J. Hopkins, 2011).

The selection of Hopkins to head the newly formed TERA would prove to be significant to the ways in which work relief was viewed as well as the ways in which relief workers were received. Because Hopkins enjoyed an intimate knowledge of the world of social work, he was able to emphasize the necessity of the work relief efforts not merely from an economic and political perspective, but also from a human perspective, while also helping social workers to understand that government subsidy of work relief would have an impact on the ways in which the social work field addressed the needs of the poor and unemployed. His perspective on the value of providing meaningful work over merely providing relief in the form of the dole helped to establish the framework

around which the arts projects would later be built, a framework that emphasized the work of artists as a necessity for not only the artists themselves but also for society as a whole; this idea of art as a necessity stood in significant contrast to the long held belief of many in government, but also of members of the general public, that the arts were a luxury and certainly not of import particularly in times of crisis.

The initial TERA appropriation was $20 million and the program officially commenced on October 1, 1931. Hopkins, like Roosevelt, was an advocate of work relief rather than direct relief of the sort provided under previous systems such as the Home Relief Bureau. In his experience, Hopkins had found that "most people would rather work than take handouts. A paycheck from work didn't feel like charity, with the shame that it conferred. It was better still if the work actually built something" (Taylor, 2008, pp. 98-99). And build something it did - during the first two years of TERAs existence, road construction projects accounted for 40% of work relief spending. By March of 1932, 80,000 people had been placed in jobs that included not only construction work but also work for clerical and professional workers and teachers and which included jobs for the many women who were heads of household. TERA also created an arts program that was designed to address the needs of unemployed workers living in an artist's colony in upstate Woodstock, NY. Creating a funding model that would be replicated later on a national scale, 85% of funding was used for wages with the remaining 15% going toward materials and maintenance costs (J. Hopkins, 2011).

In November of 1932 Roosevelt was elected President; he took office in early 1933. On March 21, 1933, he proposed to Congress his plans to provide $500 million in federal relief to the states by utilizing unspent Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds; he further outlined a plan whereby the funds would be overseen and distributed by a centralized federal relief administration. The Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) was signed into law on May 12, 1933 and Roosevelt offered the position of federal relief administrator to Harry Hopkins (Deeben, 2012).

The National Conference of Social Work held their annual conference in Detroit in June of 1933 and Harry Hopkins was on the agenda to deliver a speech titled *The Developing National Program of Relief.* It was through this speech that Hopkins

introduced the social work community to the new ways the government would take responsibility for the welfare of the poor and unemployed, a role that historically had been reserved almost exclusively for private social service agencies. Hopkins further acknowledged the new role that social workers had begun to play as administrators of public welfare funds and the ways in which that role would change as part of New Deal policies.

Although FERA was only newly established, there were elements of this early Hopkins speech that embodied the tensions that would plague government sponsored work relief throughout the history of FERA and later the WPA. Hopkins (1933) began his remarks by acknowledging the changing face of relief recipients; "We are now dealing with people of all classes. It is no longer a matter of unemployables and chronic dependents, but of your friends and mine who are involved in this" (p. 65). Hopkins continued by highlighting the shifting role of social workers within the new paradigm created by the Depression but concluded by emphasizing that "our job is to see that the unemployed get relief, not to develop a great social-work agency throughout the United States" (H. Hopkins, 1933, p. 71). This statement was prophetic in that throughout the history of the WPA arts programs in particular there was continued struggle over whether the government was providing employment relief or doing social work.

During this pivotal speech, Hopkins also made a statement that revealed another important struggle that would be played out in the coming decades related to welfare policy; he suggested that the welfare of the American people was the direct obligation of the federal government and that distributing relief funds through private charities and local governmental bodies would no longer be the norm. For better or worse, the responsibility for welfare and welfare policy became the responsibility of the federal government with all of the complexities that entailed.

The federal government's foray into the world of welfare relief also came with a caveat from President Roosevelt; relief, he said, "had to be immediate, adequate, and dispensed without regard for politics" and those dispensing relief funds were never to "ask whether a person needing relief is a Republican, Democrat, Socialist, or anything else" (Taylor, 2008, p. 102). This policy, although clearly a recognition of the critical

importance of the federal government's focus on equity in the distribution of relief funds (and focusing specifically on need in ways that private charities were not required to), was to become central to the struggle between the government and the Federal Theatre Project, in particular as charges of Communist infiltration of the project were being leveled.

One of the greatest fears on the part of those in the government and in business during this time of economic uncertainty was the real threat of a developing revolution brought on by unemployment and widespread poverty. Those individuals finding themselves in a subordinated position with few options for redress have been known to turn to violence; similarly those in positions of power seeking to maintain the status quo have used violence to keep the subordinated under control. Indeed, the twentieth century produced many examples of those perceived to be the less affluent elements of society rising up against the capitalist elite in an effort to address the economic inequities caused as the dominant culture exercised its power as a means of maintaining a privileged status. With over 25 percent of the American labor force (approximately 12 million people) unemployed by 1932 and more being laid off each day, the kind of uprising that Marx predicted was a real concern among certain segments of society. And so the New Deal relief programs that sought to address issues of unemployment and poverty through both direct relief and the creation of jobs were seen by many in power as a means of also quelling the populace.

The Emergency Relief Appropriation Act was passed in April of 1935 and provided both funding and broad governmental power to enact unemployment relief nationwide under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which replaced FERA. The WPA would take the lead in job creation for both infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and public buildings, as well as recognizing the economic needs of white collar and intellectual workers and also creating jobs for them in their fields of expertise. By mandate the WPA was to provide relief only to *employables* who were already on their state's relief rolls; these individuals were to be provided with work *within their own skills and trades;* and anyone deemed to be *unemployable* was returned to state care and in most cases received direct relief (Flanagan, 1940, p. 16). This new

paradigm signaled a significant shift in the treatment of relief recipients by recognizing for the first time that in addition to the benefits to communities of large scale work projects, providing the unemployed with work rather than the dole also preserved their dignity and sense of self-worth. Donald S. Howard (1943), who was charged with conducting research commissioned by the Russell Sage Foundation for the work titled *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy*, observed that:

> Refusal of relief is no real answer to the problem of pauperization since it only substitutes for relief - receiving an even more demoralizing experience – resourcelessness and destitution. Nevertheless, the likelihood of impairing morale and initiative through relief-giving is recognized as a very real danger. Relief administrators have therefore sought ways in which needed relief might be administered so as to do as little harm to individuals aided. (p. 48)

In a 1935 address to Congress Roosevelt recognized the ill-effects of providing assistance that seemed to the recipient like a hand-out: "... to dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit" and contrasted this to the work relief programs that he advocated for as a means of preserving the dignity of the unemployed: "... we must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination" (quoted in Quinn, 2008, p. 11). The ways in which the identities of those on relief were variously constructed during the Depression is important to understanding the ongoing tensions that characterized the problematic of work relief. The changing nature of relief itself (work relief/the dole) and how it was thought to effect the worker; the changing face of work relief (blue collar/white collar) and how this expanded conception of the work relief recipient changed the ways in which relief itself was understood; and the shift in source of relief (private social welfare agencies/the government) and how this signaled a change in the very notion of responsibility in terms of the welfare of the people.

In August of 1935, FDR ordered the creation of the Federal Arts Projects to provide work relief to unemployed artists, musicians, writers, and theatre workers. This focus on including white collar workers as recipients of relief was unprecedented and

proved to be cause for much controversy in a nation that still clung to a boot strap mentality that dictated self-sufficiency and a fierce independence. There existed some organizational structure around providing work relief in the form of large infrastructure projects; however, a new structure needed to be created around white collar projects which again, had no precedent and which were fundamentally controversial due to the prevailing view that many of these projects were a luxury rather than a necessity. The newly created Federal Arts Projects would become the testing ground for understanding the fledgling and often contested role of the federal government in the artistic and cultural life of the nation.

Harry Hopkins, who continued in his role as federal relief administrator with the transition from FERA to the WPA, was charged with identifying individuals to head the federal arts projects, which were collectively known as Federal Project Number One or Federal One. In a move that would prove to be especially significant for the Federal Theatre Project but ultimately controversial in theatre circles, Hopkins offered leadership of the FTP to Hallie Flanagan, a college theatre professor at Vassar and an old friend from Iowa. Despite Flanagan's impressive credentials - first woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship, which she used to study theatre production abroad, and director of the Experimental Theatre at Vassar College - there was much discussion of her status as an "amateur" and her lack of experience working in the commercial theatre. The very notion of "a government run theatre, supervised by an 'amateur' college professor and peopled with unemployed 'actors,' who might or might not qualify for welfare" (Witham, 2003, p. 3) was the topic of much debate both inside and outside of established theatre circles. For Hopkins, and indeed for Eleanor Roosevelt, who was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the arts projects, Flanagan's lack of connection to the commercial theatre and her focus instead on the importance of theatre that spoke with a native voice and that employed experimental methods considered too risky for the commercial theatre made her the ideal choice to head the new FTP.

In her preliminary plan for the FTP, sent to Washington on August 17, 1935, Flanagan outlined the following premises:

That re-employment of theatre people now on relief rolls is the primary aim.

> That this re-employment shall be in theatre enterprises offering dramatic entertainment either free or at low cost. That whenever possible regional theatre developing native plays and original methods of production shall be encouraged. (Flanagan, 1940, p. 29)

Elements of Flanagan's plan were a result of her collaboration with other regional and university theatre professionals as well as plans that had begun to be developed by the National Theatre Conference (NTC) in 1933. According to historian Jane Dehart Mathews (1967), the NTC had identified as one of their areas of focus in the 1920s and 1930s to "come together to form a permanent national theatre representing the ultimate reform of a commercial enterprise" (p. 26), presumably referring to the Broadway machine that had taken over the theatre-world of the era.

During the years following WW I and leading up the Great Depression the theatre profession had undergone a great many changes due to the rise of the cinema, the changing nature of the commercial theatre, and the resulting displacement of theatre workers and theatrical performance methods. The resulting displacements were due primarily to innovations that resulted in "technological unemployment" and the loss of interest in certain theatrical forms. As more and more theatres were converted into movie houses, this change signaled the decline in road companies and the death of stock and vaudeville. These changes not only impacted performers, but also stagehands and technicians and even musicians. With fewer options for local and regional performances provided by road companies and the like and the increase in admission costs for commercial theatre productions - for those audience members living in areas where commercial theatre productions were even available - these changes significantly impacted audiences as well.

Mathews (1967) described the state of the commercial theatre pre-Depression saying:

> . . . the commercial theatre had succumbed to the monopolistic, profit-making devices which were a part of the economic revolution transforming America. The list of such practices was long: gambling in theatres as real estate; syndicates fostering a cross-country touring system; a monopoly booking system; the 'star'

> system; long-run shows that destroyed repertory; type casting that stifled an actor's development; the staging of the 'tried and true' rather than the work of a new playwright with ideas. The result was predictable - an art stumbling toward maturity had been transformed into a primarily commercial enterprise. (p. 23)

In comparison to the well-established theatrical traditions in Europe and Asia, theatre in the United States during the early twentieth century was a relatively young enterprise that was still searching for its unique identity. The competition for audiences and income created by the rise in the movie industry forced the American theatre in a direction that would have a lasting impact on the future development of the form.

According to Flanagan (1940), Elmer Rice, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright and the FTPs first New York Director, also expressed concern over the direction in which the American theatre was being led:

> . . . the quantity production of the movies had reduced the theatre economically to the status of a handicraft in an era of excellent factory goods . . . The theatre as a business, he (Rice) believed, was destined to become increasingly a subsidiary of the gigantic cinema interests; but as an art and a means of community enrichment the theatre might, under government sponsorship, come to play a part of importance in the life of our country. (pp. 54-55)

The rise of cinema had disrupted the social system to which the theatre formerly belonged. The "carriage trade," and the elite audiences that had once set the theatre apart socially and economically, were a thing of the past.

But in its search for direction, Rice felt that with a renewed focus on a theatre that spoke in voice unique to the United States in its rich diversity and that reached new communities and audiences by being freed from traditional economic constraints, a federally funded enterprise might be viable. Rice's association with the FTP was short lived, however, as he resigned his Directorship of the New York project in 1936 in protest over government censorship of a Living Newspaper production titled *Ethiopia*[9] (Browder, 1998, p. 122).

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[9] *Ethiopia* was never produced due to controversy over the representation of Haile Selassie and the inclusion of speeches by Roosevelt and Mussolini.

In beginning to formulate a plan for the direction the FTP would take within this newly established social, economic, and political paradigm, Flanagan called upon input from her home state of Iowa. E.C. Mabie, longtime head of what would become the Department of Theatre Arts at The University of Iowa, in his document *A Plan for the Organization of Regional Theatres in the U.S.*, laid out what was to become the aim of the FTP:

> To set up theatres that have possibilities of growing into social institutions in the communities in which they are located and thus to provide possible future employment for at least some of those who now present an immediate and acute problem to the government . . . and to lay the foundation for the development of a truly creative theatre in the United States with outstanding producing centers in each of the regions which have common interests as a result of geography, language, origins, history, tradition, custom, occupations of the people. (Flanagan, 1940, p. 23)

In this plan we already see the dual objectives that were to characterize one of the central tensions that the FTP sought to navigate throughout its history, that being the desire to create a regional network of theatres with an anti-commercial orientation that would showcase the best of the art form that the country had to offer and the need to provide employment for out of work theatre professionals in order to solve an immediate and acute governmental problem.

A common concern consistently leveled against the entire FTP enterprise focused on the "low" quality of performer that was certain to be found on relief. A talented performer, one whose talent equaled the price of admission, surely already had employment. Although the theatre profession had been hit doubly hard by both the general economic downturn and the rise in technological unemployment due to the growing popularity of radio and the movies, still white collar and professional workers were held to a different standard than blue collar and manual laborers who did not have to continually justify their need for economic assistance and whose relief measures were not tied to their "performance." As a result, Flanagan was responsible not only for providing relief in the form of employment for out of work theatre professionals, but also for

creating a theatre worthy of government funding, and in her view, of using the opportunity to build a national theatre and culture.

Flanagan had a vision for the FTP and articulated this vision through the Artistic Policy she outlined for the work of the FTP but also, and importantly, she had a vision for the way in which theatre professionals on the relief rolls would be viewed as part of her overall artistic vision. Flanagan (1940) believed that "unemployed theatre people wanted to work, and that millions of Americans would enjoy the results of this work, if it could be offered free or at prices they could pay" (p.45). She further asserted that the FTP would treat its workers as any theatre professional would be treated and would not stigmatize them due to their need for public relief. And finally, she believed that "any theatre sponsored by the government of the United States should do no plays of a cheap or vulgar nature but only such plays as the government could stand behind in a planned theatre program national in scope, regional in emphasis, and democratic in allowing each local unit freedom under these general principles" (p. 45). Fueled by this vision, Flanagan set out to create a theatre that would meet the needs of a workforce desperate for paid employment while also engaging an audience starved for cultural contact – all within the confines of burdensome government bureaucracy.

Flanagan envisioned the establishment of five regional theatre centers to be located in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and possibly Boston and New Orleans. Each of these theatre centers would house a professional company and serve as a training center for actors. The professional company in residence at the center would produce new plays as well as performing selections from a classical repertory. Each center would also furnish a touring company whose task it would be to take productions out to smaller theatres in the region. Another vital part of the FTP program would be to work in conjunction with local university and civic theatres in an attempt to create a catalogue of dramatic literature specific to each region. Eventually the FTP regional theatres would include centers for the research and writing of original, regionally specific dramatic literature.

The fundamental notion behind the FTP plan was to create strong regional theatres that would meet the specific artistic needs of their area but that would at the same

time be part of a national federation of theatres. The benefit of this union of regional theatres would be to allow each theatre to learn from the experiences of the others while at the same time creating a better American theatre. This would be accomplished by setting unified standards and guidelines to which each regional theatre would adhere. It was on this foundation that Flanagan and her regional directors built the FTP.

The first step in the building of this new federation of theaters was to develop a plan for the production of relevant theatre projects. As Flanagan told FTP workers: "Our most urgent task is to make our theatre worthy of its audience. It is of no value whatever to stimulate theatre-going unless, once inside our doors, our audience sees something which has some vital connection with their own lives and their own immediate problems" (Mathews, 1967, p. 89). This type of socially relevant theatre was an integral part of Flanagan's work at Vassar and she had every intention of continuing to promote it through the work of the FTP.

Hopkins too had a vision for the FTP that he shared in an oft quoted policy statement that would become a significant site of struggle during the project's final years. Famously promising a theatre that would be free, adult, and uncensored, Hopkins suggested that it was possible for a government run theatre to escape the inevitability of censorship that would come to stifle the FTP's creative output. He did, in the early days, have very high hopes for the project. Hopkins saw the FTP as an alternative to commercial theatre offerings; led by a theatre professional from outside the commercial theatre world and utilizing a decentralized model which Hopkins felt may lend itself to the establishment of a national theatre, he envisioned an undertaking that could produce socially and politically relevant theatre while also maintaining the highest artistic standards. But to imagine that such a theatre, subsidized by public funds, could also remain free from censorship would prove to be naive at best. And the tensions that developed over what the FTP perceived as censorship and what the WPA called "selection" would play a pivotal role in the creation of new works and new production methods.

One of the most significant innovations of the FTP, the Living Newspaper, would also become the most widely censored. Cultural critic J. W. Krutch (1957) held up the

style of documentary theatre utilized by the Living Newspaper as "a novel experiment in an age when playwrights were still trying to 'fictionalize' history, economics or current events; when they were not content to present their information and arguments pure and straight, but tried to slip them in between the lines of a conventional play" (p. 282). Flanagan advocated for a new theatrical form that would allow for the honest exploration of relevant social issues. In the Living Newspaper such a form was created.

The idea for the Living Newspaper unit of the FTP is credited to Hallie Flanagan and Elmer Rice, then New York City project director. Both Flanagan and Rice saw the Living Newspaper model as a way to utilize the talents of the greatest number of actors while also getting the most for their WPA dollars. They also hoped it would become a showcase for the dramatization of topical subject matter. It was Elmer Rice who suggested the inclusion of the Newspaper Guild in this new theatrical undertaking; Morris Watson, Newspaper Guild vice-president, was put in charge of the Living Newspaper's staff of writers and researchers. It was the job of these unemployed newspaper people to gather the information to be used in the writing of each production and to ensure that the texts of each production were fully and accurately documented.

The Living Newspapers utilized a specific formula for the development of new works. The idea was to create a "committed documentary that informed the audience of the size, nature and origin of a social problem, and then call for specific action to solve it . . . most of the plays ended with exhortations demanding specific legislative or judicial action" (O'Connor and Brown, 1978, pp. 10-12). As mentioned, each play was thoroughly documented; however, because the Living Newspapers were meant to make the public aware of particular social issues, O'Connor and Brown (1978) point out that "they did have an editorial slant: personal problems were caused by social conditions; the lack of housing, food or electricity was the result of a private enterprise system that exploited human needs" (pp. 11-12). This infusion of factual information into a strong dramatic structure served to create an intellectually rigorous piece of theatre that, due to both the form employed and the content included, came to be viewed by opponents of the New Deal arts projects as dangerous and inflammatory.

Another vital but experimental aspect of the FTP that caused controversy was the establishment of special units within the project that were designed to appeal to a particular audience. They were generally concerned with presenting productions of significance to a particular ethnic group in that group's first language or vernacular. Through these units plays were produced in French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Yiddish in theatres all over the country.

It was in this spirit of providing opportunities for diverse voices to be heard and for theatre professionals from diverse backgrounds to participate fully in the work of the FTP that the idea for the Negro theatre units was conceived. Through a survey conducted in 1931 it was discovered that of the 25,000 unemployed theatre professionals in the United States, 3,000 of them were black. During the initial organizational meetings before the FTP began operations, renowned black actress Rose McClendon looked at the unemployment figures and suggested the creation of separate Negro units under the project's umbrella. It was her hope that these units would be encouraged to produce plays on black themes in the black vernacular and would utilize black performers and technicians. Although the Federal Theatre policy ensured that all qualified theatre professionals be allowed access to any of the positions within the FTP (which was the case throughout the history of the project), it was agreed that separate Negro units which would specifically encourage the development of black artists would be a great asset to the project and to the American theatre (Frost, 2013, p. 19).

In June 1937 the FTP passed a regulation which "made it mandatory that there be racial representation in all national planning" (Hill, 1980, p. 42). This did not occur; however, the FTP did move forward and began sketching out preliminary plans for the inclusion of several Negro units in each region of the country. The first major task facing the FTP with regard to the Negro units was whether to enlist white or black directors. It was Rose McClendon who once again provided much needed insight: "McClendon reasoned that most blacks were performers and hadn't had enough training or experience in directing or design to be effective" (Fraden, 1996, p. 96). It was decided that after a designated apprenticeship period under various white directors, the black staff would have gained the necessary experience and skills to assume leadership of the units. The

FTP took McClendon's advice and eventually the opportunities provided by the project encouraged the development of a cadre of very fine black directors.

The twenty Negro units that existed throughout the country between 1935 and 1939 were widely known for their high quality productions. This recognition signaled "the general public's acceptance of these minority members as worthy contributors to the cultural life of the nation" (Hill, 1980, p. 38). There were those, however, that took exception to the democratic and inclusive stance of the FTP which had always encouraged interaction between blacks and whites on the project on a professional as well as social level. Blacks and whites were encouraged to work together and many of the plays produced by the Negro units reflected this attitude of equality. Although audiences were willing to accept the contributions of black artists on their artistic merit, too many critics and those with a political agenda to advance were quick to associate this spirit of unity with Communist ideology.

Like the Negro Theatre units, the Children's Theatre units were designed to reach an audience not previously targeted by the commercial theatre. As plans were being made for the structure of the FTP, Hallie Flanagan noted that the Soviet Union was then producing works devoted specifically to children. It was her contention that that Federal Theatre should, likewise, contribute to the education of the nation. Not only were the plays developed by the Children's Theatre units educational and entertaining, but they also served to cultivate a new audience of future theater-goers who would one day pay for theatrical entertainment.

All of the major cities that had Federal Theatre units also had a Children's Theatre unit. Each Children's Theatre unit employed a staff devoted specifically to script development utilizing familiar folk and fairy tales as well as children's classics. As the Children's Theatre grew in popularity, some of the units were also encouraged to develop original scripts. In an effort to provide a legitimate service to schools and educators and to produce a truly didactic fare for the nation′s children, the Children's Theatre units sought the counsel and advice of educators, police welfare groups, and service clubs in their play selection. In New York a team of trained psychologists was on hand to assess

the success of the productions in terms of what the average school child was learning from the theatre.

The Children's Theatre units in many cities also worked closely with the schools by providing the instructions and materials for teachers to do schoolroom adaptations of some plays in which the large casts afforded an opportunity for all of the children in the class to participate. During a time when theatre was considered a luxury, the commercial theatre did not waste efforts on children's plays or work with the schools, but they recognized the value of the FTP taking on this role.

Despite these and many other innovations made by the FTP, the New Deal Arts projects have been described as "anomalous contingency plans developed during a national crisis" (Larson, 1983, p. 221) that had little hope of transcending the crisis to become permanent, federally funded cultural programs. Indeed in January of 1938, when Congressman John Coffee, a Democrat from Washington State, and Senator Claude Pepper, a Florida Democrat, proposed what would come to be known as the Coffee-Pepper Bill (aka the Federal Arts Bill) and that called for the establishment of a Bureau of Fine Arts as a way to continue the work of the Federal Arts Projects, the scheme was inherently handicapped by the fact that no model for the proposed level of direct governmental involvement in the arts (on the federal level) existed (Quinn, 2008, p. 221). The only precedent to date were the relief measures of the WPA designed as a way to employ the unemployed, not to create a federally funded and sustainable national cultural program.

Also hindering the Coffee-Pepper Bill was the fact that the same year it was proposed, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) under the leadership of committee chairman Martin Dies from Texas launched a very public investigation into the federal arts programs and their reported ties to Communism, their encouragement of racial mixing, and the alleged controversial content of many of the works produced. Of specific interest to the Dies Committee were the FTP and the Federal Writers Project - the two most visible and debated of the arts projects.

HUAC was comprised of seven men; John J. Dempsey, a Democrat from New Mexico and a supporter of New Deal policies but somewhat indifferent; Arthur D.

Healey, a Massachusetts Democrat and strong supporter of the New Deal; two conservative Democrats, Joseph Starnes of Alabama and Harold G. Mosier of Ohio; J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey and Noah M. Mason, both staunch Republicans; and Chairman Martin Dies.

On July 26, 1938, J. Parnell Thomas issued a widely publicized statement, in which he charged,

> It is apparent from the startling evidence received thus far that the Federal Theatre Project not only is serving as a branch of the communistic organization but is also one more link in the vast and unparalleled New Deal propaganda machine. (Mathews, 1967, p. 199)

It was not until August of 1938 that the Committee officially convened to begin their investigations; however, it was clear from Thomas' statement that one or more of the investigators were predisposed to believe the worst of the FTP.

Thomas called the first witness against the FTP on August 19, 1938. In the days that followed, ten former FTP employees and others once associated with the project came forward to testify. They all seemed to agree that the Federal Theatre had close ties to the Communist-dominated Worker's Alliance,[10] that the project only produced plays with a Communist message because these plays would appeal to the FTP audiences that were comprised mostly of Communists, and that most of the project administrators were Communists and Hallie Flanagan herself had strong ties to Soviet Russia (Flanagan, 1940, p. 338). All of this testimony was nationally publicized and soon captured the attention of a nation that waited to learn the fate of the Federal Theatre.

As the testimony continued, several people associated with the project became suspicious of the Committee's choice of witnesses. Although the Federal Theatre employed thousands of people in dozens of cities across the country, all of the witnesses called to testify were from New York. No project officials or theatre experts were called, and hundreds of people from the theatre world and on the project who requested

[10] Founded in 1934 by the Socialist Party of America, the Worker's Alliance was a political organization that endeavored to mobilize unemployed workers. Later affiliated with the Communist Party USA, the Worker's Alliance organized on behalf of WPA workers.

permission to give testimony were denied. And yet, the newspapers continued to give space to the testimony given by the Committee's select witnesses.

Flanagan repeatedly asked the WPA to allow her to answer the charges of the witnesses through statements to the press. The WPA repeatedly denied her requests telling her that they had nothing to be concerned about and that it would all blow over in time. Flanagan was not convinced and could not sit idly by as the FTP's reputation was damaged daily by the bad press generated by the HUAC hearings. In an attempt to counter the harmful press she released an account of the Federal Theatre's future production plans which appeared in the Sunday *New York Times.* She also published and distributed her annual report in the hope that the FTP's record would speak for itself.

In September of 1938, when HUAC launched an investigation of the Federal Writers Project (FWP) as well, the WPA finally intervened. The WPA requested that the National Directors of the FTP and FWP be allowed to testify on behalf of their respective projects. In early November Roosevelt delivered a message in which he let his dismay over the methods being employed by HUAC be known. This condemnation prompted the Committee to answer the WPA's request and to set a date in early December to hear Flanagan's testimony; however, just days before she was to testify Flanagan learned that the WPA intended instead to allow Ellen Woodward, Director of the Women's and Professional Projects of the WPA, to deliver prepared briefs on behalf of the FTP and FWP.

Ellen Woodward went before the Committee on December 5, 1938 and although she did her best to address the charges against the projects, it soon became obvious that she did not possess sufficient knowledge of the specifics sought by the Committee (Flanagan, 1940, p. 340). On December 6, 1938 Hallie Flanagan was finally called to testify. The Committee was mainly interested in her testimony on three contested aspects of the FTP and its operations; her personal affiliations, Communist activity on the FTP, and the production of "socially significant" plays. It should be noted, however, records show that no members of the Committee ever saw any of the productions that were under examination.

Although Flanagan was finally allowed an opportunity to appear before the Committee, midway through her testimony she was interrupted by Martin Dies' call for a lunch recess; she was never given the opportunity to finish. Although she was assured that a brief she had also prepared for the Committee would be made public with the transcripts from the hearings, this did not occur (Bentley, 2002, pp. 6-47).

When, on January 3, 1939, Martin Dies presented the new Congress with a report detailing his investigations, the inquiry into the Communist leanings of the Federal Theatre was summed up in one paragraph:

> We heard some of the employees and former employees of the Federal Theatre Project in New York. These witnesses testified that Communistic activities have been carried on in the Federal Theatre Project for a long time; that Communist meetings have been held on the project during work hours; that Communist literature has been distributed on the project from time to time, and that Communist posters have been pinned on the official bulletin board; that all of these activities have been carried on in the premises of the Federal Theatre Project and during the very time the employees were paid to work. It is also clear that certain employees felt under compulsion to join the Worker's Alliance in order to retain their jobs. (Dies, 1963, p. 249)

Although Dies and the Committee chose to drop all charges of Communist involvement by management and audiences, and charges of Communist propaganda in FTP productions, the months of bad press and the linking of the Federal Theatre to the Worker's Alliance would be enough to signal the end of the government supported project.

In March of 1939 a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee held hearings on a new relief bill. The subcommittee, under the Chairmanship of Representative Clifton A. Woodrum of Virginia, was mostly unsympathetic to the FTP and held sessions similar to those of the Dies Committee when considering continuation of funding for FTP activities. In the end, Woodrum moved to eliminate further funding for the FTP under the new bill. The Senate Appropriations Committee, however,

recommended continued funding for the Federal Theatre Project (Flanagan, 1940, pp. 352-353).

In a final attempt to save the Federal Theatre, an impressive list of producers, directors, playwrights, musicians and composers, and actors and actresses from both Hollywood and Broadway, wrote letters, sent telegrams, made appeals in the press and on the radio, and traveled to Washington to try to rally support. Though touching and well-intentioned, their interventions were ineffective; on June 30, 1939 an Act of Congress effectively abolished the Federal Theatre, as of that day.

The Federal Theatre was sacrificed to save other relief programs and because it had become a representation of some of the more unpopular characteristics of the Roosevelt administration: "it cost money; it represented labor unions, old and new; it did not bar aliens or members of minority parties" (Flanagan, 1940, p. 347). Roosevelt signed the bill because he "had little choice; a veto would have ended the whole relief program on the next day. While signing the bill, Roosevelt remarked, 'This singles out a special group of professional people for work in their profession. It is discrimination of the worst type'" (O'Connor and Brown, 1978, pp. 34-35).

During the life of the WPA, 1935-1943, the project spent $10,500,000,000 and employed 8,500,000 people. 1939 marked the last year in the WPA's life prior to "defense prosperity" (the economic upturn created by military production), which altered the need for relief and shifted the focus of large scale projects from infrastructure to preparations for war. Still, during 1939 nearly 15% of the total U.S. population was benefitting from public relief - in all more than 19 million people per month received either home relief or benefitted from work projects (Howard, 1943, p. 30). The Federal Arts Projects themselves were historic in their sheer scope: "at their peak, between 1935 and 1938, the arts initiatives of the New Deal were the largest public arts program in the history of the world (administered by the largest work relief program ever conceived and implemented, the WPA). More than 40,000 artists were directly employed by the government" (Cummings, 1991, pp. 41-42). Despite these impressive accomplishments, it should be clear; however, that the arts projects were a product of circumstance born of

the temporary unity created by the articulation of work relief to the arts and that the future of the projects was always to be a tenuous one.

With the new economic situation created by the coming world war, the WPA's economic reason to exist ceased to be. The WPA was created to deal with an economic emergency and to ensure the wellbeing of those most affected by the Depression. This mandate, which ensured the WPA's articulation to a transitory political, economic, and cultural situation, also made possible from the outset the likelihood that with the changing national climate the work of the WPA would have an expiration date. Within this fluid arrangement there was little to suggest that the projects under the WPA's auspices would be carried on with federal funding, at least not in their original form.

The legacy of the FTP is more complicated than this, however. As previously highlighted, the FTP's role in the development of a national theatre program for the United States is not an either/or proposition - the project's legacy is not one of failure nor is it useful to hold up the FTP as a wholesale model to be emulated - rather the legacy of the FTP lies in those innovations born of the FTP's struggle over its identity. The FTP did fail to transcend its origins as a work relief program to become a permanent cultural fixture, and the nature of the FTP as a work relief program and funded under that structure precludes the FTP model from wholesale adoption in the creation of an American National Theatre but that does not mean that the groundwork laid by the project did not have far-reaching effects.

Failure to Transcend

Speculation has always surrounded the Federal Theatre Project's failure to transcend its origins and to evolve in some way into a more permanent cultural fixture as well as an opportunity for the federal government to more fully embrace its relationship to the cultural life of the people. Critiques of the project, its structure, its relationship to the political, economic and cultural life of the nation, and conjecture about its future were seen as early as 1937 with Willson Whitman's *Bread and Circuses.* The project and specific aspects of its fate have continued to be of interest to FTP scholars (Brown,

Whitman, Mathews), FTP and WPA staff writing from first-hand experience (Flanagan, Hopkins) and even experts on federal relief policy (McDonald, Howard).

The fact that the FTP failed to transcend its origins is undisputed and taken as a mere fact does little to extend our understanding of the struggles that ultimately led to the project's closing but that also created spaces for resistance and innovation. In order to fully explore how the FTPs innovations can inform future work toward development of an American national theatre we must first understand those factors that contributed to the project's inability to move beyond its existence as a relief effort.

The sites of struggle that contributed to the project's demise fall into three camps, although none of these can be seen to be mutually exclusive of the others, they are: the political, and specifically the FTP's supposed ties to Communism; the economic, most often considered in the context of the difficulty in defining the FTP as a relief project first and foremost, but also cries of competition that were eventually heard from the commercial theatre; and the cultural or artistic, focused most particularly on the value of art in a time of crisis and whether art should be seen as a necessity or the luxury that it always been considered.

Political

The Hearst press in its vehement opposition to New Deal politics is just one example of the media coverage that played a central role in whipping up the frenzy around the FTP's ties to communist groups and as a disseminator of communist propaganda. Publications such as Hearst's *New York Journal-American* reported daily on the HUAC investigation of the FTP and continually suggested connections between the Soviet Union and the New Deal and pointed to the dangerous precedent set by using public money to promote what they contended were communist ideals. It was even suggested that the Hearst Press planted spies within the ranks of the FTP as a way to gather information to discredit the project. And the Hearst press was not alone in this: "zealous conservatives used Federal One as a proxy for the entire New Deal. But that was only one manifestation of the political establishment's uneasiness with the concept of paying workers to create culture rather than to assemble bricks and mortar" (Hiltzik,

2011, p. 288) and of the myriad struggles connected to assessing the value of cultural productions against the value of roads, schools, and bridges.

Most often referenced when considering the FTP's supposed ties to Communism was the content of many of the plays produced, particularly the Living Newspapers; Flanagan's oft cited support of the innovative theatre-craft coming out of the Soviet Union and of her visit to the Soviet theatres during her time as a Guggenheim Fellow; and, perhaps most significantly, the FTPs connection to labor unions thought to espouse Communist ideals, specifically the Workers' Alliance and the City Projects Council.

The Workers' Alliance was established in 1934 and was known for representing the interests of unemployed workers who were on relief as well as those workers provided with employment under the WPA. The City Projects Council was a division of the Workers' Alliance that focused its efforts on white-collar workers that were not represented by another professional union. For the most part, professional theatre workers were members of trade unions or professional organizations; however, there were notable exceptions including Jewish and Negro actors and actors just starting out in the field that may only have experience in unorganized undertakings such as summer stock (Flanagan, 1940, p. 55).

Because the Workers' Alliance leadership was open about their affiliations with the Communist Party and due to their penchant for very vocal and disruptive demonstrations, including a number of work stoppages and strikes, the connection between the FTP and the Workers' Alliance became a site of struggle in the fight to keep the project alive. Despite the fact that the FTP dealt amicably with scores of unions, the Workers' Alliance, by its use of very visible tactics including petitions, alarmist flyers, and picket lines, garnered the attention of those that would use the reputation of the Workers' Alliance to smear the FTP.

One of the most damning charges leveled against the FTP in relation to its association with the Workers' Alliance was the assertion that in order to be hired by the FTP a worker was often coerced into joining the union and thereby supporting the Communist ideology it promoted. It was also suggested that those nonprofessionals that

were already members of the Workers' Alliance were often favored for FTP employment over professionals that belonged to other professional associations.

In an effort to address charges of Communist activities on the project, particularly in relation to its association with the Workers' Alliance, WPA leadership and legal counsel created a brief that asserted:

> . . . no person chosen for any policy-making post of Federal Theatre was a Communist; that the politics of relief persons were not legally subject to our scrutiny; that we had no way of knowing whether the Workers' Alliance was, as the Committee alleged, a Communist Front organization; but that in any case the large majority of Federal Theatre workers did not belong to the Workers' Alliance because they were under the jurisdiction of theatrical organizations that forbade other union affiliations. (Flanagan, 1940, pp. 338-339)

Despite these assurances and other evidence including affidavits provided by project personnel, in the end the Committee came to the following conclusion, "we are convinced that a rather large number of the employees on the Federal Theatre are either members of the Communist Party or are sympathetic with the Communist Party. It is also clear that certain employees felt under compulsion to join the Workers' Alliance in order to retain their jobs" (Flanagan, 1940, p. 347). The issues surrounding the questionable tactics and affiliations of the Workers' Alliance were only a small part of a much larger issue that is often overlooked in its full complexity when considering the political tensions that contributed to the FTP's demise.

In many ways the FTP represented a microcosm of New Deal policies that were unfavorable in many circles. The project invested money in providing employment for relief workers; this new relationship between the government and the people stood in direct contrast to the closely held American ideal of self-sufficiency and fierce independence. The FTP did not discriminate against minorities or foreign-born citizens and indeed embraced and showcased the rich cultural diversity added to the theatre through full inclusion of all theatre professionals and a diversity of voices. And finally, despite the freedoms provided to employees to organize under the Wagner Act, the indictment of the Workers' Alliance as a significant contributor to the abolishment of the

FTP fails to take into consideration the existing ban on union membership for many minority workers by the more established trade unions and professional organizations which left minority workers with few other choices than to join the Workers' Alliance. Had such a ban not been imposed, the Workers' Alliance may not have been able to play such a significant role.

Economic

Writing in 1937, Whitman observed that the very existence of the FTP is "due to the distressing failure of private industry to employ actors or to give the public low-priced plays" (Whitman, p. 26). And it was indeed, for all practical purposes, a theatre founded less on artistic merit and more on economic necessity. Yet, throughout its turbulent history, the FTP managed to produce theatre of such high quality that cries of competition could be heard from commercial producers from very early on.

Much was made of the FTP as a competitor to the commercial theatre, an issue that was compounded by the fact that the FTP was a government funded project. For many, "it was unthinkable that the federal government should be allowed to manufacture a product in direct competition to private industry and then sell it at a price that undercut the going market rate" (Witham, 1937, p. 33). But, as Eyre argues, "subsidized theatre is an artificial economy. You create an economy which breeds success and which allows for failure. A government can justify it by saying, 'In the end you are pursuing something which is for the value of all, for the collective good'" (Schwartz, 2003, p. 200). But this spirit of the collective good was not shared by all and the tensions between the commercial theatre and the FTP would be negotiated in surprising ways.

The theatre was then, and still is, a business, and the basic measure of any success in business is monetary gain. But, as Eyre points out, the subsidized theatre is able to work outside many of the constraints imposed upon a business venture whose objective it is to make money. There is a certain amount of risk necessary in any successful business venture; however, theatrical producers of the New Deal era had already been hard hit by the rise of the film industry prior to the economic downturn of the Depression which further impacted their box office receipts. They were in no position to try out the works of new playwrights or to experiment with new technical innovations.

The FTP, however, was in the ideal position to be innovative in its offerings as its existence did not depend on its ability to generate profit. In fact, when the FTP did eventually and inevitably begin to turn a profit, much controversy over how the funds were to be expended ensued. FTP leadership felt that the proceeds should be put back into the Project to cover the materials costs not funded by the WPA (90% of all WPA funding went to pay the salaries of relief workers with the remaining 10% available to support all of the other various aspects related to mounting a theatrical production); WPA leadership felt the money should be returned to the government to be used elsewhere. During its short history, the FTP generated approximately 2 million dollars in revenue for the government.

Although the FTP was not mandated to make a profit, on the several occasions on which the commercial theatre offered to take over a successful, revenue generating production, thereby potentially returning actors and other theatre professionals to work in private industry (the specific objective of the work relief programs), the WPA was reluctant to relinquish control over "a hit" show. A perfect example was that of the *Swing Mikado,* an adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado,* conceived and produced by the Chicago Negro Theatre Unit of the FTP. The production proved to be such a success that early in the show's run the FTPs Midwest regional director, John McGee, requested permission to take the show over with funding raised privately, thus fulfilling the WPA's mandate to return relief workers to employment in private industry; the WPA denied his request. Offers to take over the show came from the commercial theatre as well, most notably from theatre and film producer Michael Todd who wanted to move the show to Broadway. After being refused by the WPA, Todd created his own, more lavish (and mainstream) version of the show and titled it the *Hot Mikado;* he also secured the talents of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson to star in his production. Todd's production was a commercial success (Fraden, 1996, pp. 187-195).

Further blurring the lines between the FTP as relief project and a theatrical undertaking and another by-product of the artificial economy created by a subsidized arts project was the fact that due to its ability to produce works that pushed the envelope artistically and thematically, the FTP was seen as being in conflict with its identity as a

representative of the government. “In a sense the Project became the scapegoat for all leftist social drama of the decade, not because it was more radical than the others, but because its social statements were more than a little critical of existing governmental and capitalistic institutions, and especially because those statements were being financed with tax dollars” (Reynolds, 1986, p. 80). It is these complexities created by this artificial economy that are often overlooked or underemphasized when considering the economic reasons behind the FTP’s demise.

Artistic/Cultural

A new word came into vogue during the New Deal era - *boondoggle.* The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the term boondoggle as: *“*an expensive and wasteful project usually paid for with public money.*”* The term’s exact origin is disputed; however, during the 1930s the concept was closely associated with the WPA relief projects, and the arts projects in particular which were seen as not only primarily politically motivated but more significantly as wasteful. This struggle between the FTP, the government, and the people over the value of the artistic/cultural as either luxury or necessity was on-going and served to highlight the fact that whether during a time of economic crisis or not, the average citizen considered subsidized art (and especially publicly funded art) to be boondoggling.

Holdsworth (2010), shares Flanagan’s sentiments about the important role the theatre could play in the life of the nation: “If the government is concerned with making its people better citizens and individuals, then it should concern itself more with theatre. Not theatre as a luxury, but as a necessity” (p. xv). Flanagan was steadfast in her belief that the theatre was a powerful tool for educating, enlightening, and empowering the populace, and not merely a form of entertainment. And despite all evidence that pointed to the intrinsic value of the theatre to a nation in crisis, the conflict between necessity and luxury raged on throughout the project’s history.

Compounding the issues surrounding the value of the arts during a time of crisis was the question of standards; if the government was committed to subsidizing the arts projects, and thereby acknowledging their necessity at least to some degree, it was vital that the works produced be of the highest caliber to best reflect the fact that public funds

were being well spent on quality work. There exists, however, in this line of thinking, an inherent conflict faced by the WPA and the FTP: how to balance the needs of those out of work theatre professionals employed by the FTP against exceptions of the government benefactor to produce high quality shows worthy of the use of public funds. Indeed, one of the charges leveled against the arts projects was that "a federal program . . . by lowering standards and artificially stimulating the arts market, could only produce that kind of cultural 'inflation' that plagued the WPA" (Larson, 1983, p. 22). The conundrum is clear: was the FTP a relief project concerned primarily with providing employment or a network of regional theatres concerned primarily with producing high quality entertainment for the masses?

These two mandates are in direct conflict with each other on a variety of levels: Could actors with sufficient talent and experience to produce high quality works be found on relief rolls (and did there exist a preconception about people on relief being less qualified than their gainfully employed counterparts)? Could a full theatrical production be successfully mounted on a mere 10% of the project's budget? Could the organizational structure of a government relief agency align in any useful way with the structure of a theatre program (the FTP was essentially a decentralized theatre/relief program administered and funded by a centralized government agency)? Although the tensions between relief and culture, necessity and luxury, are often cited as a contributing factor in the failure of the project to transcend its origins, the intricacies of this struggle, the ways in which the FTP resisted this dichotomy, and the impact that this resistance had on FTP workers and audiences is often overlooked.

Legacy of the Failure to Transcend

There were important questions that were never asked, or if asked, never fully considered, about what it really meant for the FTP to transcend its moment of creation and what that transcendence would have forced the nation to face about its relationship to the arts, to government subsidy, and to relief. For example: What role do the arts play in a democratic society? With respect to the arts, what role, if any, should government play? And if the government is to play a role in the arts, how does that role extend to public funding of the arts? Was it the FTP that failed to live up to its mandate or was it the

government that abandoned the FTP when controversy arose? Or did the FTP die a natural death, one that was predestined, built into its very DNA by virtue of the rapidly changing context within which it existed? And if built in, who was it that built it? Was the FTP prevented from incorporating the changes that were occurring in the country into its structure by the constraints of its reality as a relief project? Because the project's government sponsors could not change the world upon which the FTP so sharply reflected, they instead endeavored to change the FTP into something more controllable; it was, however, the project's freedom to invent and innovate that made it unique.

The catalyst for all of the resulting tensions, innovations, negotiations, and creations was the FTP and WPA coming together and forging a temporary relationship between two undervalued entities, unemployed relief recipients and the theatre, in order to meet an economic need. But this was only one of an innumerable number of contingent connections that were formed, disconnected, and changed in various ways that led to the creation of a new national theatre ideal.

In chapter five I consider specific innovations made by the FTP that laid the groundwork for the development of a national theatre program in the United States that has the potential to reflect some of the best of what they FTP imagined. And, I show that these innovations were only possible within the context of the troublesome dual identity of the FTP as work relief project and artistic undertaking.

CHAPTER FIVE

Control, Resistance, and Rearticulation

The articulation of a sweeping government bureaucracy to the multifaceted organization of the theatre resulted in the creation of a temporary unity. Those articulated elements that joined to create this unity were not fixed for all time but rather were engaged in struggles to create new and different articulations. How the FTP negotiated those struggles, however, is the real story behind the development of a new and innovative way of imagining the concept of "national theatre" that had the potential to address the particular artistic needs of a nation as culturally diverse and geographically vast as the United States. I would argue, however, that it was by the very act of creatively addressing the struggles created by the government structure that was imposed on the theatre project that the FTP staff and administrators developed theatre perceived to be so dangerous by members of Congress, members of the press, and indeed members of HUAC, that it had to be very publicly investigated and eliminated.

The WPA established two unique types of projects that each operated under specific criteria that dictated their organizational structure. McKinzie (1973) identifies the characteristics of what were considered "federal projects" as opposed to those designated "non-federal projects." "Federal projects required no local 'sponsor,' undertook work which ordinarily would go undone, and received a larger part of their instructions from WPA officials in Washington. The projects for artists, writers, actors, and musicians were designated 'federal' projects . . ." (p. 77). Under the organizational structure associated with federal projects, the FTP established an arrangement that included supervisory staff at the federal, regional, state, and city/local levels. The WPA also employed a structure that paralleled that of the FTP but did not necessarily complement the FTP's structure in terms of lines of communication and control.

What Flanagan envisioned for the FTP from the beginning was a decentralized collection of regional and local theatres that would be reflective of the voices and character of the regions they represented. She also understood, from the beginning, that although the FTP would receive government subsidy, because of its unique designation as work relief program, it would not develop in the ways that national theatre programs

she had studied in Europe had developed but would take on a character designed to meet the needs of the vast and varied audience to be found throughout the United States. In *Arena,* Flanagan (1940) recalls her vision for the FTP:

> The general policy and program would be outlined in Washington, but the carrying out, with modifications dictated by local conditions, would rest with the states. It was not a national theatre in the European sense of a group of artists chosen to represent the government. It was never referred to by me as a national theatre, though critics increasingly spoke of it as such. It was rather a federation of theatres. That was the origin and meaning of its name. (p. 23)

The struggle faced by the FTP became clear: how to carry out Flanagan's vision of a decentralized federation of theatres under the structure required by the government for those projects receiving subsidy. Especially cumbersome and challenging to manage were the arrangements related to financial control of the projects and the division of oversight between the WPA and FTP.

Flanagan, as national director of the FTP, was accountable to Ellen Woodward who oversaw Professional and Service Projects for the WPA, the division under which the federal arts project fell. Flanagan oversaw a deputy national director who took charge of procedural matters and general project administration, and an associate director who dealt with more logistical issues related to matters such as equipment, personnel, and royalties. Initially, the FTP structure included the appointment of regional directors in thirteen distinct regions with New York City comprising its own region (McDonald, 1969, pp. 505-506). Over time, as it became clear that due to a lack of professional theatre people in need of relief or due to conflicts at the state and local levels some of the regions or local areas would not thrive, the regional roster was reduced to the West, Midwest, South, Northeast, and East Regions with city directors also placed in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The individuals appointed to these regional and city directorships dealt with regional and state WPA officials in order to get a number of things accomplished including: play approval, theatre usage, identification of theatre professionals eligible for relief, and financial oversight; and these relationships ranged from collegial and collaborative to overtly hostile.

Osborne (2011) provides an excellent overview of the issues created by the dual organizational structures employed by the FTP and WPA:

> The vast bureaucracy required by the federal government of the FTP was often challenging for administrators as they struggled to open theatrical productions. As a subsection of Federal One, the FTP was categorized as a Professional and Service Project and under the jurisdiction of the WPA. For the FTP, this meant each individual WPA director oversaw the expenditures of each FTP unit in his or her state. However, since WPA architect and head Harry Hopkins famously assured Flanagan that the WPA would be "free, adult, and uncensored," the state WPA directors had little control over the hiring of personnel, programming decisions, or general activities. This arrangement, which gave the WPA fiscal responsibility but little power over programming, set the stage for a litany of conflicts between state WPA directors and their FTP administrators, not the least of which arose when theatre projects attempted to loan equipment or personnel across state lines or take productions on tours outside of the state. For those FTP units that enjoyed respectful relationships with their state WPA directors, the benefits of smooth administration abounded; conversely, the unlucky FTP units that endured poor relationships with their WPA directors saw productions inexplicably censored and activities scuttled, and battled myriad bureaucratic irritations ranging from slow travel reimbursements to the surprise removal of all their typewriters. (p. 4)

Clearly federal funding came with specific limitations: the ways in which money could be spent were strictly prescribed, the administration of day-to-day operations were cumbersome and bureaucratic, and as with any patron, the WPA felt entitled to censor anything it judged to be inappropriate or not the best reflection of the government.

Consideration of these organizational structures is important as it was against the rules and regulations associated with these structures that the FTP struggled. And it was these struggles that opened up space for the rearticulation of ideas, practices, and beliefs about what a national theatre in the United States could be that would distinguish it from the received view of a "national theatre" that prevailed at the time. The FTP existed only

because of the central articulation of work relief to theatre and although the economics of that relationship precluded the continuation of the project beyond the nation's need for work relief, that same connection made it possible for the FTP to conceive of a national theatre program that in a number of key ways reimagined the traditional "model."

Resisting the Traditional National Theatre Paradigm

The FTP did not set out to create a new "model" for an American national theatre, or any such model that would transcend the moment of need to become a permanently subsidized national project. The articulation of work relief and the theatre, however, served to open up places where, in addressing the tensions inherent in such an unlikely pairing, the FTP could resist following old examples into the creation of a theatre that would only serve to maintain the cultural status quo. Although, as I have discussed, there is no fixed national theatre definition or model and national theatres themselves are constantly in flux as new articulations are forged and others are disarticulated and rearticulated in new ways. In the particular historical moment during which the FTP was created, there did exist practices, beliefs, and ideas common to national theatre programs in Europe especially that had resisted disarticulation over time. It was in working through the struggles that arose when work relief and arts were articulated that the FTP found both the freedom to innovate and the need to resist.

In considering the myriad ways in which the FTP and the WPA engaged in a relationship of give and take throughout their pairing, as well as the ways in which the FTP engaged in reinterpretation and rearticulation as a means to fulfill both employment needs and artistic expectations, it will be useful to narrow the scope of elements under consideration somewhat. Because I argue that the central articulation of work relief and theatre led to circumstances that opened up spaces for disarticulation and rearticulation to occur, I have chosen to focus on changes the FTP was able to realize as related to four of the national theatre characteristics that had resisted disarticulation up to that point: paternalism, nationalism and governmentality, the value placed on "high" art, and the use of privileged spaces.

It is essential to keep in mind as we move through the analysis of these arenas of struggle that none of them is in any way fixed and that they are all articulated to each

other in various ways to make up the ways in which the concept of "national theatre" was realized. Therefore, when a disarticulation and rearticulation occurs, the map of articulations that forms the context changes; it is in constant flux. Ruptures that open up opportunities to effect change ultimately create a ripple effect that can alter the path of an entire social formation. Utilizing articulation theory to map the connections and resulting relations of power and spaces for resistance allows for a re-imagining of the role played by paternalism, nationalism and governmentality, "high" art, and privileged space as part of the received view of the national theatre in the 1930s. It was through this reimagining that the FTP was able to create a new idea of what a national theatre could be that better met the particular needs of their mandated purpose as well as those of a diverse audience in the United States.

Paternalism

National theatres educate as well as entertain and this tendency toward education has resisted change over time. In general the national theatre's ability to provide instruction has been seen as positive; however, it does open up the possibility for a benevolent but intrusive "father," in the form of the State, to both support and dictate the work to be produced. In the oldest model of arts patronage, this relationship was often played out between the wealthy patron and the destitute artist who become beholden to their benevolent father to finance the work. But the artist soon found that along with financial support came this father-figure's perceived right to meddle in artistic affairs in particular with regard to content. This relationship was somewhat altered with the rise of the middle class and the social reversal that resulted. The WPA, however, seems to have returned to this antiquated model as the father-figure became instead an actual employer of artists who found themselves on the relief rolls: the wealthy patron and the destitute artist. The FTP in turn found itself struggling to create art within the confines of the top-down structure of paternalism as opposed to the bottom-up structure of collectivism that was much more in keeping with the organizational structure of work in the theatre. "No doubt the view from the top down has provided us with a great deal of information. But in an industrialized nation such as ours, operating under capitalism and its system of disparities in power distribution and social relations, the view from the top down

primarily focuses on the works of the dominant culture and leaves the cultures emerging among the industrial work force deep in shadows" (Sporn, 1995, p. 23). This tension between the need for the dominant culture to maintain the status quo and the need of the working class to emerge as a valuable contributor to the larger culture represented an important site of struggle and negotiation.

It is essential to acknowledge the paternalism inherent in any sort of government relief effort; however, the move from direct relief, which provided financial assistance without expectation that the recipients have particular responsibilities related to the receipt of funds, to work relief, that did at least provide opportunities for recipients to engage in useful work projects in exchange for financial assistance, represented a small improvement to the process. As "employer" of those who found themselves destitute during the 1930s and as creator of jobs for these individuals, the WPA could never fully escape the role of benevolent father. The main tension between the WPA and the FTP in this regard was related to one of the ways in which paternalism had played out in the established national theatres in Europe: as benefactor providing subsidy to the national theatre, the government saw it as their responsibility to control what was in the best interest of their "dependents" by limiting their freedom.

In its most utilitarian sense, the theatre is often seen as a means to reinforce dominant cultural values and as a diversion offered to the masses as a way to control the potential for revolution during times of crisis. In order to accomplish these tasks, however, there must exist an element of control that runs counter to the very essence of creation. Dubin (1987) highlights the central issue:

> Lurking behind any proposal for the public funding of artists lies the crucial concern: to what extent will the artists and their production be controlled? In a sphere of activity in which the "freedom to" is touted as central, this exposes an extremely sensitive nerve. The apprehension which accompanies that acceptance of employee status by artists goes to the heart of an important matter – in what ways will such artists have to relinquish authority they might otherwise have to determine the form, style, and content of their work? (p. 156)

This level of control over artistic output was not only exerted from without but also from within the FTP itself. The National Play Advisory Board, which had as its mandate to essentially "vet" those plays which were acceptable and appropriate for local production, was also the arm of the FTP that monitored productions in progress and had the authority to suspend further performances of plays deemed to elicit negative responses from local project partners and community leaders. And several productions were indeed suspended based on fears around perceived consequences including being a risk to national security, potentially inciteful, or critical of the government (Dubin, 1987, p. 162). These suspensions were imposed early in the project's history; however, and despite the relative care and attentiveness to political concerns with which the FTP continued to proceed throughout its history, as the project developed, resistance to the paternalistic controls from without and from within increased.

One of the most significant ways in which the FTP was able to navigate the tensions that characterized the paternalistic stance of the WPA was in its commitment to removing barriers that separated workers and audiences alike by class, gender, and race. As previously discussed, those theatre professionals that found themselves unemployed during the 1930s were hailed as "down-and-outers" and rarely afforded the respect they deserved as specialists in their field. For women and minorities, this lack of deference to their professionalism was multiplied tenfold. For the WPA, as representative of the government, maintaining the status quo in terms of keeping classes and races segregated and keeping women in subordinate positions was in the best interest of the people and ensured order.

Racial segregation and class divisions had been significant features of theatre-going in the U.S. since its introduction. Distinctions along class lines in particular had also featured prominently in the European national theatres and held sway during the period under consideration. When the theatre became articulated to work relief, however, FTP leadership recognized an opportunity to change the current paradigm by using the very policy under which governmental relief programs operated. Mathews (1967) explains the prohibitions against discrimination that were integral to federal relief policy: ". . . no discrimination against the non-union worker on relief. Other forms of

discrimination – race, creed, color, political activities, or party affiliation – had been specifically forbidden by the Relief Act itself" (p. 36). During the early years of the project, the federal policy also included a prohibition against discriminating on the basis of alien status.

Had the FTP not been bound by the policies of the Relief Act it is likely that the strides they made in breaking down barriers between race, class, and gender would have been much less significant. As it was, the FTP employed an "enlightened race policy: Black performers would receive equal pay for equal work, and audiences for all Federal Theatre performances would be integrated" (Quinn, 2008, p. 99); by virtue of its identification as a government project eschewed sexual discrimination and ensured that women took on key leadership roles (Whitman, 1937, p. 110); and the FTP encouraged improved relationships between the middle and working classes rather than promoting class hatred (Bittitta and Witham, 1982, p. 229). Ironically, in disarticulating race, gender, and class from the dominant cultural policies and paternalism of the period a space was opened for the new FTP polices around equity to become articulated to communism. This relationship, real or imagined, became central to the HUAC investigation of the FTP.

One of the central charges leveled against the FTP by HUAC included "that blacks and whites on the project fraternized 'like Communists' in pursuit of social equality and race mixing" (Taylor, 2008, p. 410). Much of the focus on the changing relationship between race, class, and gender and the equating of these changes with a growing communist threat originated with Martin Dies, HUAC Chairman. Mathews (1967) relates that Dies, ". . . fearful for his particular concept of Americanism in a troubled era, tended to regard any expression of discontent within the 'existing order' on the part of labor, the Negro, the farmer, the 'intelligentsia,' and indeed any segment of American society, as an expression of 'class consciousness' – a first step toward communism" (p. 234). The discontent with the status quo displayed in the policies adopted by the FTP around discrimination played a pivotal role in the project's eventual demise.

Here we have a first example of one of the ways in which the FTP's success in enacting change that could not be tolerated by those in power contributed to its eventual demise. In attempting to reconcile the rationale behind this intolerance for change, Flanagan wondered if, in fact, those charged with investigating the project ". . . were spurred by fear of a more literate public educated by plays on current events such as the Living Newspaper, or by fear of better understanding between blacks and whites, because many politicians found thinking people a risk" (Taylor, 2008, p. 434). And, a thinking public striving for equality had little use for a "father-figure" dictating its needs and impeding its freedom; a thinking public was a dangerous thing indeed. It was in the development of this thinking public that we also see what would come to be perceived as a threat to the nationalism that had been a cornerstone of the received view of the national theatre.

Nationalism and Governmentality

National theatres in Europe have long had as a mandate (whether spoken or merely understood) to instill the values of citizenship in the people. As American studies scholar Ann Larabee (1999) observes, "the citizen is a performative identity, constructed and deployed in social institutions that only grant agency to this type of actor. Hence, theatre can serve to enact the appropriate citizen identity for an audience that is then expected to reconstruct itself according to these conventions" (p. 125). Through the theatre it was believed that those less politically aware could be transformed into educated voters and participants in the democratic process. "Countless groups and individuals in the United States since its colonial founding have looked to culture as a means to achieve hegemony, or to influence the population to embrace a given set of political, ideological, or social constructs deemed 'American'" (Gainor, 1999, p. 8). But herein lies the problem: by looking at a government sponsored continuation of the FTP beyond its life as a relief project, as many had hoped would happen, did the architects of the plan doom it to failure?

Can a theatre, or any cultural project for that matter, that is supported with public funds avoid the desire of those in power to use this medium of expression to bolster the national identity when historically we have seen that, as Wilmer (2002) tells us, "the

search for a stable and coherent national identity can only be successful at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions and contradictions - differences of class, race, gender, religion, etc." (p. 3). Indeed, in order to create a theatre versed in a "national discourse," which voices are most likely to be silenced?

In beginning to understand how the national theatre is used as a means to bolster a national identity, particularly during times of crisis, and the ways in which the state attempts to exercise control over the masses in support of this effort, a consideration of the relationship between culture and aesthetics, economics, politics and governing in everyday life is useful. This consideration must necessarily begin with an understanding of the concept governmentality. Governmentality can be seen as both the ways in which the state endeavors to produce citizens suited to maintaining state policies as well as those practices that are engaged to govern subjects. Governmental rationality, therefore, is a system which both individualizes and totalizes, exploring the ways in which individuals and populations are governed and also governable.

Let us now consider cultural institutions as the sites through which the art of governmentality came to be practiced using the museum and the theatre as examples. Within these cultural institutions the act of discipline is replaced by the creation of public spaces such as the museum and theatre which are frequented by individuals of all classes. These spaces provide opportunities for both the surveillance of large groups of individuals as well their education in the behavior appropriate for a "well-tempered" citizenry.

In considering the development of a "well-tempered" citizenry, citizenship is seen as both a political right and as a responsibility on the part of the individual to uphold a society's accepted standards of conduct in exchange for the privileges afforded by citizenship. And, the production of cultural citizenship was and is accomplished through techniques such as representation, surveillance, and routine utilized by both public and private institutions. Within these processes, clear distinctions are made between the aesthetic elites and the masses with the masses being those in need of instruction as to the behavior, habits, and ideals held by cultural citizens. Interestingly this process is often discussed in terms of assimilation; cultural assimilation of course referring to the ways in

which colonized peoples and subaltern groups are made to adopt the language, customs, ideology etc. of the dominant group. Adoption of an ethical disposition is the aim of the assimilative project and culture is the likely vehicle.

The received view of the role of nationalism and governmentality in constituting the "national theatre" relied on the production of "high' art and the use of privileged space in order to construct "well-tempered" citizens. Lloyd and Thomas (1998) offer an example of the work of governmentality accomplished in the lecture hall that can easily be translated to the theatre: the lecture hall/theatre "permits the simultaneous surveillance of multiple subjects and their simultaneous interpellation as individuals through their 'training' on the same elevated subject" (p. 20). This surveillance and training could be more easily accomplished under a model that dictated content and controlled performance space to create a unified experience in the service of rousing feelings of national pride and modeling behaviors appropriate for a civilized citizenry.

Holdsworth (2010) explains the connection between theatre and nation that was used as part of the national theatre models most prevalent during the 1930s:

> . . . we can think of theatre as something intrinsically connected to the nation because it enhances 'national' life by providing a space for shared civil discourse, entertainment, creativity, pleasure, and intellectual stimulation. Theatre, as a material, social, and cultural practice, offers the chance to explore national histories, behaviors, events, and preoccupations in a creative, communal realm that opens up potential for reflection and debate (p. 6).

When the state sponsored theatre, however, moves toward decentralization and shifts focus from instructing audiences in a "unified" nationalism to celebrating local voices, what does the resulting disruption to the power structure mean for the theatre as instrument of governmentality?

First let us consider the issue of identifying and defining a unified national identity in the United States during the 1930s. Wilmer (2002) provides a useful overview of the challenges faced by the U.S. in defining a collective identity:

> Unlike the nations of Europe that could claim organic development of a national spirit through a common history, folklore, literature, ethnicity, language, etc.,

> America's common identity needed to be more artificially constructed because of its diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages and customs. Despite severe social prejudice, a hierarchical social structure and legalized forms of social discrimination, some of the factors that were represented as uniting the country were the English language, the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, and the common dream of prosperity founded on notions of liberty, equality and free enterprise. (p. 10)

It should be obvious that by the 1930s these factors identified as representing unity were problematic in that they disregarded large segments of the population. As Mason (1999) points out, the model of America as monoculture has "given way to a multicultural or pluralistic paradigm, reflecting widespread recognition of increasing ethnic diversity and the first signs of the waning of the white majority" (p. 3). And although this new paradigm was in its infancy during the 1930s, the FTP sought to embrace the nation's rich diversity and tapestry of experience in its creation of a theatre model that would work to uncover those differences that had been suppressed through the process of favoring a program of national unity.

Due to the structure temporarily created through the articulation of work relief and the arts and the mandate of the federal arts programs to employ as many out of work artists as possible, what the FTP began to develop in its quest to establish theatre projects throughout the country was a grassroots effort to connect theatre and community in new ways. And as Witham (2003) observed, it was supposed to be this "'grass-roots' mentality that would enable many individual units eventually to coalesce into a truly National Theatre" (p. 50). The whole concept of grass roots organizing eschews top-down hierarchical structures and is generally of the people as opposed to of the elite. This coupled with the FTPs decentralized organization made it difficult for the project's government sponsor to utilize the productions created and the spaces occupied as instruments to bolster national feeling and to exert control over the masses.

What Flanagan (1940) envisioned from the beginning was local projects of the federal theatre collaborating with established educational, commercial, and community theatres as she believed that "the strength of such a union would be that each region could

develop its own drama in its own pattern; yet all regions could improve standards by pooling experiences, and all could decide mutually upon the lines of activity to be stressed" (p 22). This vision for the development of a federation of theatres further diffused the unity (whether organic or manufactured) which was crucial to the received view of the national theatre's program of control to succeed. And this decentralized model did hold sway in America for a time during the 1930s, a fact that wholly disrupted the power structure that had resisted disarticulation from its nationalistic agenda and had come to characterize governmentally subsidized theatre in Europe for centuries.

In exploiting the rupture in control that occurred when the FTP disarticulated the theatre from "high" art and privileged space and rearticulated it to the practices, beliefs, people, and spaces in local communities, the FTP also created an opportunity for the work of the project to critique a system with which the United States had come to be closely identified: capitalism. By moving the locus of identity and activity of the projects to local communities and into the hands of working people, the FTP shifted the focus from nationalism and governmentality to an exploration of those structures that were seen as oppressive thus subverting more traditional forms; the result was that the focus on national identity was replaced by a focus on class identity. This shift was most readily apparent in the works that were performed by unemployed theatre professionals for working class audiences thus creating a new, contingent unity that replaced the nationalist program. "Rather than glorifying the American dream of the (usually male) individual attaining success on his own," Wilmer (2002) points out, "many of the plays of the depression era represented the nation as consisting of working people uniting with one another to overcome the oppressive conditions created by the capitalist system" (p. 100). Nowhere was this new relationship between actor and audience more evident than in the ways in which the FTP resisted the devaluing of anything considered less than "high" art.

"High" Art

The Depression opened space for a significant change in the composition of the traditional audience for live theatre which also significantly impacted the content of theatrical productions. Prior to the Depression the theatre-going audiences, often referred

to as the carriage trade, were primarily composed of upper and middle class patrons that preferred the classics and other productions that were thought to be worthy of their superior intellectual and class standing. With the rise of motion pictures and radio and the economic hardships that resulted from the Depression, the audience composition for live theatre also shifted; theatres were now seeing more workers whose politics fell distinctly to the left and whose theatrical tastes ran less to the classics and more to plays dealing with contemporary issues that affected their lives.

The result was what could be referred to as the "commercialization of standards" (Whitman, 1937, p. 163); plays fell into two categories, those that were "good" and those that were "popular" (and often also cheap to produce). This distinction equated to belief that those audience members able to pay the higher prices for theatre were better educated and desirous of "good" theatre whereas those less well-heeled theatre-goers were content to pay for fare that was of a lower standard, with minstrel shows, burlesque, and vaudeville seen as examples of the lowest forms of theatre. And, as we have seen, the struggle over good/popular also extended to the very producers of theatre at the time particularly under the WPA as it was widely assumed that due to their temporary status as "relief workers" and thereby their articulation to the "working class", theatre professionals on the FTP could not possibly produce theatre of high quality.

As Stuart Hall (1981) in *Notes on Deconstructing "The Popular"* points out, however, the way in which the "popular" relates to the idea of "class" is very complex:

> The terms "class" and "popular" are deeply related but they are not absolutely interchangeable. The reason for that is obvious. There are no wholly separate "cultures" paradigmatically attached, in a relation of historical fixity, to specific "whole" classes – although there are clearly distinct and variable class-cultural formations. Class cultures tend to intersect and overlap in the same field of struggle. The term "popular" indicates this somewhat displaced relationship of culture to classes. More accurately, it refers to that alliance of classes and forces which constitute the "popular classes." The culture of the oppressed, the excluded classes: this is the area to which the term "popular" refers us. And the opposite side to that – the side with cultural power to decide what belongs and what does

> not – is, by definition, not another "whole" class, but that other alliance of classes, strata and social forces which constitute what is not "the people" and not the "popular classes": the culture of the power bloc." (p. 517)

Under consideration then is not a struggle between the classes, but rather, as Hall suggests "popular culture . . . is organized around the contradiction: the popular forces verses the power bloc" (p. 517). The FTP used the very structures that would limit it to producing "popular" entertainments to create a space within which to experiment with new forms and to reach new audiences with theatre that was both entertaining and didactic. In doing so, the FTP created a shift in what was seen to be the cultural domain of the power bloc by refusing to conflate "popular" and a particular class distinction and to open up the experience of live theatre to a diverse audience.

In an effort to challenge the power bloc and in a striving for some level of autonomy over the production and consumption of the work created by the FTP, the economic and political constraints that characterized key aspects of the project were called into service to help legitimize the direction away from "high" art taken by the FTP. This was made possible, in part, by the parameters placed on how the FTP could spend relief funds. Osborne (2011) explains,

> Since the FTP was, first and foremost, a relief agency, federal regulation stipulated that 90 percent of all funding go toward salaries of workers eligible for relief. . . . in most cases this left only 10 percent of the federal funds for publicity, costumes, scenery, equipment, space rentals, royalties, and the many other physical requirements of operating theatres. The salaries of non-relief workers for positions of special expertise, administration, or leadership would count toward the 10 percent as well. (p. 4)

It was indeed a case in which the economic constraints placed on the project opened the door for experimentation on a number of levels: play selection, set design, production methods, theatre space, and audience engagement, to name a few.

The FTP needed to devise ways in which to put the greatest number of people to work on productions that would be relatively inexpensive to produce and that would be appealing to a diverse audience. Fortuitously the arts in general and the theatre in

particular enjoy a long history of experimentation which often served to reflect historical conditions and which resulted from a resistance to perpetuating the status quo.

In order to meet the myriad needs of the project, the workers, the audience, and the WPA, it was necessary to move away from traditional theatrical models. One of the ways in which this was accomplished was by looking beyond Aristotelian practices to develop productions more in line with the tenets of Brecht's Epic theatre. The Aristotelean model, with its focus on plot, character, and Catharsis, relied too heavily on audiences connecting with an individual "hero" and following him/her on an emotional journey. The model did not easily allow for the use of large ensembles of actors, episodic plot development, or calls for social change that a project like the FTP needed to employ in order to best utilize the resources it was provided and to engage audiences that had been all but ignored by the mainstream theatre of the day.

The most provocative way in which the FTP addressed the need for new scripts and production techniques was in the development of the Living Newspapers. The Living Newspapers had roots in traditions including agit-prop theatre, the Soviet Blue Blouse, and various workers theatre movements. The living newspaper model had developed decades earlier to meet the needs of a specific segment of the proletariat in Russia. Dawson (1999) provides a brief overview of the development of the model:

> The 'living newspaper," as a new form of theatre, came into being after the Revolution of 1917 and was derivative of the "spoken newspaper." Because of the high percentage of illiteracy, the newspaper was read loudly to a gathered audience. The animation of "spoken newspaper" into "living newspaper" was gradual. The reading of the newspaper developed into the presentation of news by visualization (using posters on stage, staging diagrams and statistics), dramatization (monologue, dialogue, mass declamation and short sketches) and "musicalization" (news transformed into song). (p. 20)

The content, structure, purpose, theme, and audience for these productions made them suspect and effectively removed them from the realm of "high" art. In remembering the prevailing perception at the time Buttitta and Witham (1982) relate, ". . . we believed that most Americans had been taught to distrust a theatre which was 'political' or which

meddled with ideas that they had comfortably separated from their art and entertainment" (p. 103). These productions, although edifying for audiences, served to further complicate the relationship between "high" art and the "popular" and the audiences traditionally thought to be consumers of each.

The Living Newspapers created by the FTP initially came into being as a means to develop productions that could employ the greatest number of unemployed arts professionals. Take for example *Triple-A Plowed Under*, one of the first Living Newspapers to be successfully produced, which employed 100 actors, 70 writers, and 15 directors to produce a topically important show that took as its theme the need for the farmer and the consumer to unite for better incomes and cheaper food (O'Connor and Brown, 1978, p. 10). Living Newspapers like *Triple-A*, with their focus on explaining a pressing social issue using a documentary style that was thoroughly researched and documented and that employed technical innovations such as "multilevel sets, projections, loudspeakers, and an ironic juxtaposition of live stage image with cool and objective projected image" (Dawson, 1999 p. 20), strove to incite audiences to action, an aim in direct contrast to the Aristotelean objective of emotional Catharsis. And inciting the working classes to action around social issues that impacted their lives did not complement the view, held by those in power, of theatre as an instrument of control used to instill in the masses dominant cultural ideals.

As new modes of production continued to emerge and to provide opportunities to offer work to the largest number of individuals possible, the FTP also returned to forms of entertainment most certainly associated with "low" or "popular" culture. With the rise of the motion picture industry, vaudeville, stock companies, and traveling shows had decreased in popularity to the point of near extinction. The Depression, however, found vaudeville performers, circus acts, and puppeteers in need of work in large numbers due to the dual displacement they experienced. Ignoring the stigma associated with these "lower" forms of entertainment, the FTP brought back vaudeville, established a Federal Theatre Circus, reinvigorated the use of traveling companies (despite many struggles with the WPA over crossing state lines with government property), and brought marionette shows to rural audiences, many for the first time.

Although established commercial theatres had endeavored to eliminate these more "popular" forms of entertainment or to at least disarticulate them from what was considered "legitimate" theatre, the FTP infused the "popular" entertainments with new life. This was made possible, in part, by the complex nature of the relationship between "popular" and "class" that was made even more complex when considered within the context of Depression-era America. As class distinctions became increasingly blurred due to the rapidly changing social, economic, and political realities of the time, the FTP was able to use this instability in structure to introduce new audiences (from all social strata) to experimental forms of theatre and to elevate the "popular", and in so doing, the FTP helped to restore the dignity of performers who had been devalued and helped to destabilize the universalizing influence over taste held by the dominant class.

Privileged Space

One area of struggle related to the conception of a national theatre was "the question of whether a single theatre, normally in a national capital, can legitimately claim to serve as a theatre of and for the nation as a whole" (Holdsworth, 2010, pp. 34-35). The national theatre becomes equated with metropolitanism in its central, urban location and even the theatre building itself creates artificial class distinctions through its ticket pricing policies. Richard Hoggart (2004) in the article *High Arts and General Culture* discusses state subvention for Britain's Royal Opera House and the attitude of those in power as related to the use of the space itself:

> Those who defend the Royal Opera House's right to a substantial subvention from the state (whose effect is to do little more than put wealthy bums on seats at marginally reduced but still horrendously high prices) do not usually make the case on disinterested social grounds. They assume that since they pay so much in taxes they have a right to subventions for their favorite arts. The management hears the argument but seems not to take its measure or any countermeasure. It provides cheaper seats, available to most, way up near the ceiling, and thinks its duty done (p. 80).

This very simple example speaks volumes about the ways in which those with power perceive the appropriate use of space as related to government support of the arts. Despite

the fact that such support should have a democratizing effect on the arts and those who wish to experience the arts; in reality those already privileged members of society benefit further while those who are marginalized are relegated to space segregated by economics and by extension, "class".

In order to address these inequities and to begin to weave the theatre into the everyday lives of "the people" the FTP conceived of the relationship of the arts to the audience in new ways. As Victoria Grieve (2009) points out in *The Federal Arts Projects and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* the prevailing model of this relationship had been a cultural program "structured in accordance with elite notions of aesthetic hierarchy; 'art' meant 'fine art' that was to uplift and educate the masses, but it was removed from daily experience and widespread access;" she goes on to say that art was "to be appreciated from a polite and respectful distance" (p. 87). Flanagan (1940) asserted, however, that "theatre has never been greater than its audience, and in our own vast country the theatre should not consist exclusively of plays done for a few people, but should increasingly involve, through immediacy of theme and sometimes through actual participation, the people of the community" (pp. 111-112). To address this need for the theatre to be more fully engaged in the lives of the people and the community, the physical space in which audiences engaged with theatre also needed to be reimagined.

Flanagan was clear from the start as to the model she hoped to create with the FTP: a model that ideally would serve the diversity of the United States much better than would the traditional European model of the national theatre. "There was a difference, Hallie told her regional directors, between a federal and a national theatre. The word 'national' means a definite attempt at uniformity; an attempt to have one theatre expressive of one national point of view. The word 'federal' means . . . many theatres brought together not so much for purposes of control as for purposes of mutual benefit" (Quinn, 2008, p. 194). Taking into consideration the diversity to be found in the U.S. and the vast geography, the FTP provided a new model that had the potential to better meet the theatrical needs of the American people.

The development of this decentralized federation of theatres necessarily required that performances utilize spaces that fit the local project requirements as related to

economics, audience access, and production needs; a requirement that ran counter to the prevailing attitude of those in power about the appropriate spaces in which to experience the arts. This tension can be understood by considering Hall's (1981) structuring principle of 'the popular' which he describes as "the tensions and oppositions between what belongs to the central domain of the elite or dominant culture and the culture of the 'periphery'" (p. 514). Theatre spaces were often claimed as the domain of the dominant culture but the FTP destabilized this hold over "theatrical space" when they began performing in spaces that looked less like traditional theatres and more like the spaces in which everyday life (the life of those on the periphery) was conducted.

As Flanagan pointed out, one of aspects of the theatre that makes it so unique is the connections that can occur between actor and audience. Contact between these two groups in a live theatre setting is essential to the overall experience and something that can't be replicated by forms of entertainment reliant on technology for their dissemination or in spaces that create artificial barriers between audience and players and often within audiences themselves. Expansion of the theatre project beyond just metropolitan centers and out of traditional theatre spaces allowed for the development of local voices, the enfranchisement of the marginalized, and the critique of the relations of power used to instill dominant cultural values.

As the FTP once again used the restrictions placed on them by governmental policies and procedures to create opportunities to creatively address the needs of both workers and audiences, not only were new spaces in which live theatre could take place developed but new uses for theatre within communities and for the benefit of displaced and disenfranchised groups were discovered. In recalling the opportunities opened to the FTP when they were freed from the prescribed space of the fixed theatre building, with services provided instead to "camps, schools, churches and all sorts of civic, state, and federal institutions," Flanagan (1940) explained, "No work done on the Federal Theatre was more important potentially than in reformatories, hospitals, asylums, and prisons . . . It was not only a public service for which institutions were increasingly willing to pay, but it opened up the use of theatre as a therapeutic agency" (pp. 238-239). By merely looking beyond cultural norms and recognizing the possibilities for a theatre dis-

articulated from stage, seating, expectations about behavior, and assumptions about style, the FTP was able to bring performance to some of the country's most vulnerable and often forgotten citizens.

This freedom to meet audiences where they were and to be unburdened by the official expectations of what had come to represent the legitimate theatre of the time including language, structure, and content becomes especially important during times of crisis. In early 1937 an Ohio River flood impacted over one million people in four states. The WPA sent help to those affected with workers engaging in rescue operations and construction projects as well as serving meals and dealing with sanitation issues. The FTP sent performers: "In fourteen days, Federal Theatre played forty engagements to 14,660 flood sufferers" (Flanagan, 1940, p. 166). And despite frequent complaints leveled against the FTP for being a waste of the taxpayers' money, many agreed that it was "right that the theatre should be at the heart of government in this way" (Quinn, 2008, p. 135). Disarticulated from a privileged space, the FTP was able to build new audiences by utilizing the performance spaces they found or created in schools, squatter towns, recreation centers, Civilian Conservation Corps camps, churches, shelters, and soup kitchens. Performances in city parks also became very popular and more than any other setting embodied the spirit of community. The FTP even abandoned physical space entirely when on March 15, 1936 it inaugurated the Federal Theatre of the Air, a radio division of the project that reached over ten million listeners (WPA Radio Scripts).

Although it seems intuitive enough to provide theatre to people in places that are accessible and free from the constraints imposed by hierarchical relations of power, the control exerted over the arts by the "official" structures frequently dictated "appropriate" performance spaces. By embedding theatre into the everyday lives of audiences, the FTP was able to empower the disenfranchised by eliminating those distinctions that reproduced hegemonic structures.

Resisting the Tradition

I return to my original premise that although the FTP is still widely considered to be the closest the United States has come to developing a national theatre, the project should in no concrete way be considered a replicable model for the development of an

American national theatre today. The context within which the project was created and the funding structure under which it operated was specific to a moment of crisis. The articulation of work relief funding to the theatre and the resulting process of negotiation and struggle opened up spaces for experimentation and innovation that suggested a new way to consider the national theatre question in the United States and this, I argue, is the most important legacy left by the FTP.

Those working on the FTP took a situation fraught with conflict and found ways, through the construction of contexts, the analysis of relations of power, and the understanding of forms of struggle, to implement change that resulted in productions so successful and so feared that the project became a liability. Through their persistence and creativity, the FTP staff was able to navigate a rigid bureaucratic structure and negotiate compromises that allowed them to resist the adoption of exclusionary policies and procedures of their government patron that would have promoted a program characterized by paternalism, nationalism and governmentality, "high"art, and privileged space. And although the project was eventually abolished, as Hall (2016) reminds us, "you cannot enter into negotiation without knowing the ground you are working on and the possibilities and potential sites of victory, however small they may be. The moment of negotiation is also a moment of struggle and resistance. The fact that the other side is not going to be overthrown does not mean that important concessions and gains cannot be won" (p. 188). In the end, the government as patron was not overthrown; however, the concessions and gains won by the FTP in terms of redefining the role of the arts in everyday life, separating the "popular" from particular class distinctions, and using the rules and regulations of a government bureaucracy to challenge the received view of "national theatre" highlight the work of struggle in opening spaces for resistance and producing change.

CONCLUSION

The Federal Theatre Project was created as a mechanism whereby unemployed theatre professionals would be provided with work in their fields of expertise with a secondary aim of developing good quality productions that would be provided free of charge or at low cost to a wide audience throughout the country. And to varying degrees the project accomplished these aims. In truth, there was no real expectation that two undervalued entities like relief recipients and theatre could be successfully combined to meet an economic need and it was certainly not anticipated that this pairing would produce such unexpected results. In the end, of course, the FTP did not transcend its historical context or the moment of crisis to which it owed its existence, but it also did not fail, at least not in the traditional sense. In its short existence the FTP successfully resisted subordination to the prevailing view of the ideal theatre; as a result the project was labeled dangerous and eliminated. Despite the fact that "the people" still considered the arts a luxury and not an integral part of everyday life, the project brought live theatre to 25 million people, or 1/5 of the population, And, through its creation of an alternative national theatre "model" the FTP destabilized governmental control by empowering and educating the disenfranchised in their own best interests.

In each of these achievements we can trace a flow of articulations that help us to identify ways in which the work of the FTP affected relationships involving government and the arts. What we are left to contend with are relations of power that have shifted over time but that continue to impact the ways in which we view the arts and their ability to move people to action, the value we place on the arts, and the legacy, for the U.S. and theatres abroad, of the alterative national theatre program created by the FTP.

Although the concept of government subsidy for the arts in the United States has undergone several incarnations since the 1930s, it seems to have maintained its connection to a deeply-held suspicion of the motives of artists and the power of the arts to disrupt. Indeed, "the first attempt in history to subsidize serious American theatre with federal funds," Schwartz (2003) reminds us, "was treated by Congress with the same hostility, maliciousness and fear that were later to surround the National Endowment for the Arts, and a great idea, one that brought fine theatre to a new audience of millions of

Americans, fell victim to narrow and bigoted minds" (p. xix). This legacy of fear can be mapped out through the decades as time and again it became the rationale used to thwart arts subsidies. Brooks Atkinson, writing in the 1930s, labels the development of a permanent, government-sponsored theatre in America an impossibility: "To the official mind in general, the theatre looks dangerous and depraved. Everything it does looks in advance like a threat against established institutions and standards of decency" (quoted in Quinn 2008, p. 284). Key to Atkinson's observation is the identification of the "official mind," as this "official mind" holds the power to decide the social, economic and political fate of the arts and continues to articulate its fear of losing control to artists and artistic content.

During the post WWII era there continued to be little support for federal arts bills, a situation exacerbated, Cummings (1991) points out, by the fact that "in the late 1940s and early 1950s, another series of widely publicized Congressional investigations of arts figures for alleged subversive activities widened the gulf between government and the arts. During these years, in fact, many artists themselves were opposed to a larger federal government role in the arts" (p. 44). The fear instilled in artists over the continued suspicion and attacks further destabilized an already tenuous relationship between artist and potential patron.

The tension between artist and government continues to this day and is manifest in the struggle over control. The existing federally subsidized American arts institution, the National Endowment for the Arts, absorbs the brunt of this struggle as innovation and political daring are rarely rewarded by a cultural system that purports to stand for freedom of expression but blocks attempts at the artistic embodiment of that freedom.

A large part of the overarching issue resulting in continued tensions between government and the arts has much to do with the relationship between the arts and the general populace. In the 1930s, Reynolds (1986) suggests, playwrights "actually attempted to make art an instrument of the people, a spokesman for and arbiter of their problems, and hopefully a source of their ideas for change" (p. xxvi). However, when the FTP was in trouble and facing extinction, the people did not reciprocate by fighting to keep the project alive and to maintain the arts as a part of their everyday lives. This was

due in large part to the fact that the FTP had just begun to make theatre an integral part of the community and the people by incorporating local voices and local stories when the project was abolished; the people were just beginning to understand the vital role the arts could play in everyday life when that promise was taken away.

It is easy to place blame for the absence of the arts as an integral part of our communities, our schools, and our lives at the doorstep of those charged with its subsidy and to ask, as Levitt (1991) has, "Why is it that America's cultural institutions, managed by the most visible and influential business, academic, and social leaders, have been so ineffective in defining an arts agenda or persuading the legislative and executive branches that the arts and their survival are vital to our society" (pp. 26-27)? But instead we must ask ourselves, what do we value enough to fight for? We have considered the failings of the FTP and of the government and how both are implicated in our nation's current relationship with the arts, but how too have we failed? If we are not willing to insist that the arts be treated as a necessity of daily life (by us as well as by our government) and not merely an entertainment or distraction, then we share in the blame if the status quo is maintained.

This extends in particular to any future discussion of the desire for or necessity of a national theatre in the U.S. "If the United States ever does acquire a real national theatre, subsidized by the government, it will not be because any person has plotted and planned it, but because the people want it and are willing to pay for it" (Whitman, 1937, p. 128). I would argue that one of the reasons that the new theatre program developed by the FTP was not able to mature into an American national theatre was because the broader audience that would most benefit from it did not fight for it.

Although the U.S. was never able to put the program developed by the FTP into practice beyond the WPA years, the intervening decades have seen national theatres from around the world adopting many of the characteristics that allowed the FTP to accomplish all that it did. Most specifically, since the 1970s a number of national theatre programs in Western Europe have adopted decentralized systems of organization while others have focused on reaching neglected audiences in new regions of the country, creating works in the native languages of different ethnic groups, ensuring equal access to

the arts for all citizens, and adopting building-less models. And although decentralization is considered to be a costly proposition, vanMaanen and Wilmer (1998) point out that "with the rise of unemployment, subsidy to theatre has in some cases been seen as a way of reversing the trend by creating jobs in the leisure industry. Ironically, arts organizations, for example in Ireland, have asked for subsidy not on the grounds that theatre is cost effective, but because it is labor intensive and will therefore provide additional employment" (p. 36). And here, decades later and an ocean away, we discover a new historical conjuncture in which the theatre and unemployed workers have once again been articulated and with no FTP in sight to alleviate their suffering.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the work done in the United Sates by the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) on behalf of regional and residential theatres and theatre professionals. "LORT is the largest professional theatre association of its kind in the United States, with 75 member Theatres located in every major market in the U.S., including 30 states and the District of Columbia. LORT Theatres collectively issue more Equity contracts to actors than Broadway and commercial tours combined" (lort.org/who-we-are). This makes LORT, in its scope and influence, as close as the U.S. has come to developing the "federation" of theatres envisioned by Hallie Flanagan. As Zeigler points out: ". . . the American theatre has been decentralized, and the regional theatre has survived. There may not be much glamour in that, but there is a lot of simple magnificence" (p. 233). If the U.S. government ever did decide to provide adequate and sustainable funding to a national theatre program that could meet the needs of a large cross-section of the population, regional theatres have certainly laid the groundwork for such a program to be successful. There are, however, still a number of significant barriers to overcome.

An American National Theatre

I would very much like to say that the example afforded by the FTP is sufficient to provide the foundation for the development of a National Theatre in the United States but there still exist a great many barriers to this idea ever becoming a reality. If we consider the need for a national theatre to enjoy the involvement of the government in the founding or administration and financial subsidy of the program then I assert that it is

highly unlikely that the U.S. government will administer and fund a national theatre program the scope of which would be necessary for it to be truly national in its reach. The FTP funding structure was an anomaly, a fluke of circumstance that allowed funding for work relief to benefit the arts. Unless the government and arts organizations are extremely creative in their thinking about potential funding streams, an American National Theatre has little hope of reaching those most in need of being reached on the amount of funding that is traditionally reserved for the arts. And, as we have seen in numerous examples, private funding can rarely be secured at a sufficient and sustainable level.

Another significant barrier that would need to be overcome has to do with the relationship between patron and artist and issues of control. The FTP was able to overcome issues of control by virtue of the fact that the organizational structure of a work relief project provided certain openings which allowed for resistance and rearticulation of those unproductive policies related to, for example, race, class, and gender. Models adopted for support of the arts in the U.S. since WW II provide us with too many examples of the issues over control of artists and artistic output that are the result of the traditional government subsidy scheme utilized by entities like the National Endowment for the Arts.

The government and administrators of the national theatre program would also have to reconcile who they believe to be the theatre's intended audience and how they define "theatre professionals." As previously highlighted, an American National Theatre must aid in the disarticulation of rural or uneducated or popular from culturally void and must seek out and celebrate emergent voices. A national theatre that only looks to the "established" in both plays and players consents control to the dominant class and misses the opportunity to rearticulate "good" art to the traditionally disenfranchised as the FTP was able to do by giving actors on welfare the opportunity to show audiences that their economic situation did not dictate their level of talent, creativity, and professionalism.

An American National Theatre must endeavor to remain true to its artistic responsibility to critique the nation even as it accepted the government's patronage, it must be willing to use the theatre as a tool for education and endeavor to cultivate a

"thinking public." An American National Theatre must also resist a program that further marginalizes audiences through high ticket prices and use of privileged space or other barriers to access, and must recognize and resist any attempts to use the arts as a means to maintain the status quo or to exert undue influence over the populace. This final point is not a function of the national theatre that is available to citizens of every country, but in this country it is our right and our responsibility to question inequitable power structures and to effect change whenever possible. Through the theatre, this can be accomplished.

And finally, and perhaps the biggest barrier to the success of an American National Theatre program, the people would need to insist on the creation of a government sponsored theatre and would have to support the allocation of federal funds to sustain it. Until we, as a nation, recognize and embrace the importance of the arts to our everyday lives, the dream of an American National Theatre will remain a dream.

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