Federal Theatre Project (1935-1939)

contexte & enjeux / context & issues

Émeline Jouve & Géraldine Prévot (dir.)

ISBN : 979-10-231-3034-8

Le *Federal Theatre Project* (*FTP*) constitue une aventure singulière dans l'histoire du théâtre américain, inédite à l'époque et jamais réitérée sous cette forme. Dirigé pendant ses quatre années d'existence, de 1935 à 1939, par l'autrice, dramaturge et metteure en scène Hallie Flanagan, il s'inscrit dans l'ensemble des mesures mises en place par l'administration Roosevelt dans le cadre du programme du *New Deal*, au sein de la *Work Progress Administration* (*WPA*) dirigée par Harry Hopkins. Federal Theatre Project *(1935-1939) : contexte et enjeux* constitue la première étude française d'envergure sur cette période essentielle de l'histoire du théâtre américain. En mêlant approches transversales et études de cas, ce volume rassemblant les contributions de chercheuses, chercheurs et artistes se propose de mettre en lumière les angles morts et les figures oubliées de cette période de l'histoire théâtrale américaine, faisant le pari que ces oublis eux-mêmes racontent quelque chose de l'historiographie de cette période et, en retour, des regards contemporains que nous pouvons porter sur elle. L'ouvrage s'inscrit dans une perspective résolument transdisciplinaire, à l'image de ce que fut le *FTP*, en proposant des articles sur le théâtre à proprement parler mais aussi la musique et le cinéma.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) is a singular adventure in the history of American theater, unprecedented at the time and never repeated at such. Headed during its four years of existence, from 1935 to 1939, by the author, playwright and director Hallie Flanagan, it is part of the program set by the Roosevelt administration as part of the New Deal, within the Work Progress Administration (WPA) directed by Harry Hopkins. Federal Theatre Project *(1935-1939): Context and Issues* is the first French volume on this essential period in the history of American theater. By combining cross-disciplinary approaches and case studies, this volume, which brings together contributions from researchers and artists, aims to shed light on the blind spots and forgotten figures of this period of American theatrical history, considering that these omissions themselves tell us something about the historiography of this period and, in turn, about the contemporary views we can take on it. The book is resolutely transdisciplinary, as was the FTP, with articles on theater itself, but also on music and film.

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SORBONNE UNIVERSITÉ PRESSES
Paris

Ouvrage publié avec le concours de Sorbonne Université
et des unités de recherche CAS (Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès)
et HAR (Université de Paris-Nanterre)

Les SUP sont un service général de la faculté des lettres de Sorbonne Université

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Maquette et mise en page : Emmanuel Marc Dubois (Issigeac) / 3d2s (Paris)

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TROISIÈME PARTIE

Les *living newspapers*, d'hier à aujourd'hui

THE LIMITS OF TECHNOLOGY: ACTORS, NETWORKS, THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT, AND *POWER*

Michael Selmon
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Arthur Arent's 1937 drama *Power* was among the most successful productions of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). Admittedly, the play was an unlikely hit. Certainly its subject matter—a dramatization of the economic, social, and political conflicts underlying the efforts to bring electricity to Appalachia—was untraditional. And its scope was unusual as well, for it used 21 scenes with over 175 characters to tell the story of the newly created Tennessee Valley Authority. But it was the play's genre which most departed from the norm for, as a "Living Newspaper," this 90-minute drama used a documentary format, complete with extensive footnotes added to the written script. "All material from which this play was drawn," a "Special Note" to the New York production assured the public, "may be examined at the offices of the Living Newspaper upon application."[1]

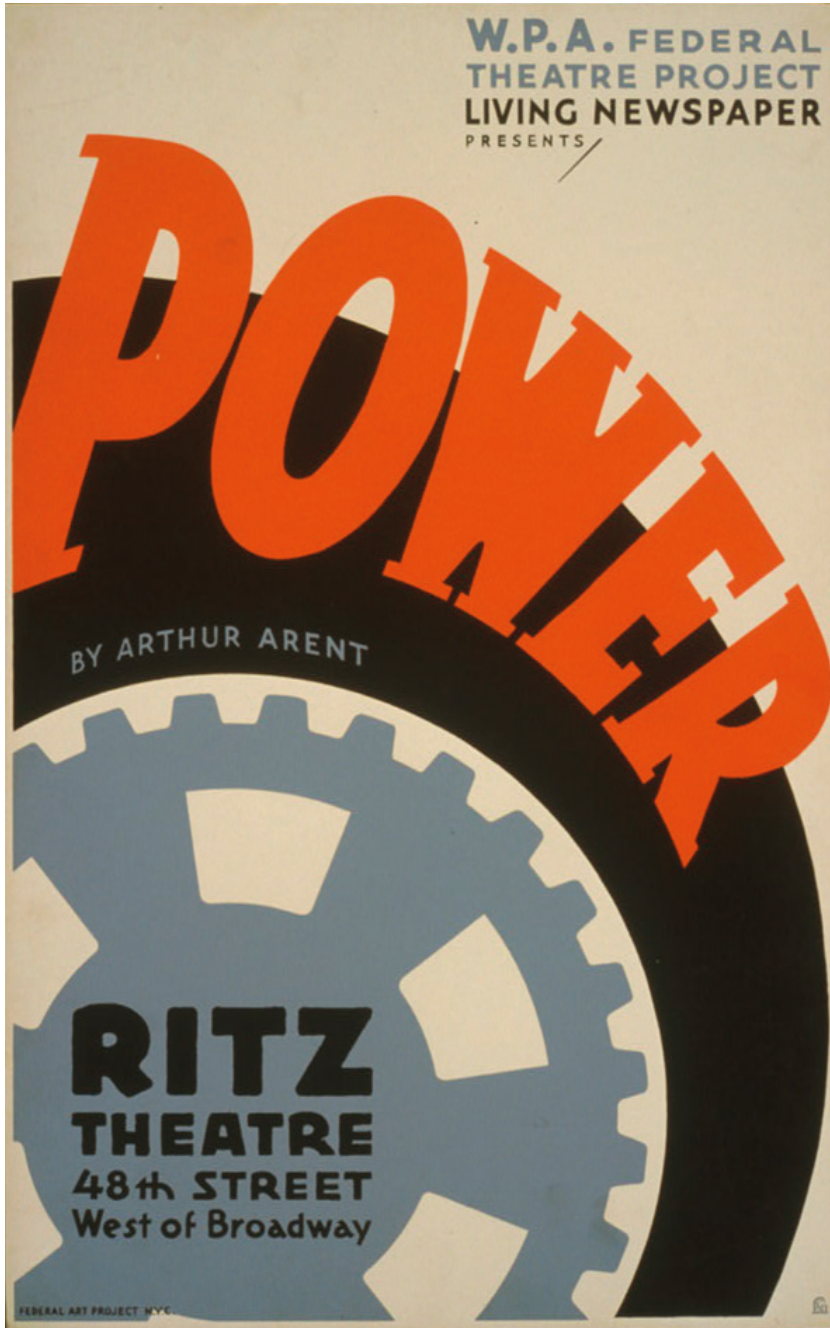
Despite its deviations from tradition—or perhaps because of them—*Power* garnered rave reviews. New York critics called it a "lively, vigorous and dramatic history" presented "with great theatrical effectiveness."[2] They commended the way *Power* used "the theatre brilliantly as a medium of expression;" celebrated its "swiftness" and "sureness;" and praised its actors for "the ingenious way they have of making the stark facts flare." *Power*, in short, was "one of the most exuberant shows in town;" its audience would be treated to "one of the most exhilarating and instructive evenings the theatre offers."[3]

Power was a box-office success as well, playing to audiences of nearly 100,000 in New York. Ironically, the fact that the Federal Theatre was an employment project limited the number of regional productions, for staging *Power* required enormous casts

1 New York Production Notebook 1, image 5 from the New York production of *Power* (Finding Aid Box 1054, Music Division, Library of Congress). *Power* was the fourth Living Newspaper production (see image 7).

2 The excerpts from the New York reviews are taken from page 4 of the Library of Congress Playbill for the Ritz Theatre's production of *Power*.

3 *Ibid.*



1. Poster for the 1937 New York production of *Power* (WPA Poster Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress).

and crews. The 1937 New York production, for instance, had 67 actors (**figs. 1-2**), and its 1938 revival featured 109 performers, with nearly as many working offstage;[4] even a regional staging like Seattle's had 81 performers and 119 in its total cast and crew.[5] Still, the four regional productions of *Power* also garnered strong reviews, with their audiences running well into the tens of thousands.[6] In short, the play was a hit, and in fact has aged well: to read *Power* even now is to be struck by its energy and wit, its engaging spectacle, and its inventive though bald propaganda.

2. The New York cast of *Power* ("'Power' #27," *Power (110 Photographs)*, image 80, Box 1228, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress).

Unfortunately for the FTP, the dramatic success of plays like *Power* would prove to be the project's undoing. Within two years, opponents would turn the analyses of class conflicts that fueled Living Newspapers against the FTP itself, using carefully scripted Congressional hearings to defund the project as a whole. This paper uses the

4 *Ibid*., pp.2-3; and Library of Congress, "FPC Productions of Power."

5 Barry B. Witham, "The Economic Structure of the Federal Theatre Project," in Ron Engle and Tice L. Miller (eds.), *The American Stage*, New York, Cambridge UP, 1993, p.203.

6 Hallie Flanagan's *Arena* notes that Seattle ticket sales totaled $4,000, which given ticket prices of ¢25 and ¢40 implies an audience between 10,000 and 16,000 in that city alone (New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940, p.306).

actor-network theory of Bruno Latour[7] to examine this bifurcated reception. It first

7 Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in general, and Latour's formulation of it in particular, have evolved extensively since the ideal was first developed in late 1970s works like Latour and Steve Woolgar's *Laboratory Life*. Latour's original formulations were grounded in close observations of the daily work of scientists. By the early 21st century, though, Latour would generalize ANT, presenting it as a program that redefines "sociology not as the 'science of the social', but as the *tracing of associations"* (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory,* Oxford, Oxford UP, p.5).

Three key ideas have been central to the theory throughout its development; each has a role in this paper's analysis. The first is the notion of a network. A network in its simplest form is not the highly complex set of connections found in technologies like a transit system or a computer network, but instead is something better visualized as a fisherman's net, a set of point-to-point links (p.132). In a network "resources are concentrated in a few places—the knots and the nodes—which are connected with one another—the links and the mesh: these connections transform the scattered resources into a net that may seem to extend everywhere" (*id., Science in Action,* Cambridge [MA], Harvard UP, 1987, p.180). While networks "necessitate the weaving together of a multitude of different elements," as long as the intertwining remains intact the enterprise can succeed, since like trains and electricity, "facts and machines … can go everywhere as long as the track along which they travel is not interrupted in the slightest" (pp.232, 250). When an interruption causes a move outside these networks, however, "complete chaos ensues."

The second key notion is the idea of an actor. In Latour's earliest studies, this role was played by scientists and engineers who "speak in the name of new allies that they have shaped and enrolled; representatives among other representatives, they add these unexpected resources to tip the balance of force in their favour" (p.259). Over time Latour generalized the notion to include any element, human or non-human, granted the ability to influence other elements in the network. This influence is not innate, but rather occurs when elements are "*associated* in such a way that they *make others do things"* (*Reassembling the Social, op.cit.,* p.107). Latour turns explicitly to theatre metaphors to explain the intertwining of actors and networks, noting that "it's never clear who and what is acting when we act since an actor on stage is never alone in acting" (p.46). Indeed, actors are so determined by their position within actor-networks that the two terms eventually coalesce, with Latour noting that an actor is "made to exist by its many ties: attachments are first, actors are second" (p.217).

Finally, Latour notes that a successful actor-network maintains a constant circulation of resources and reference. Key to this movement are the linked ideas of transformation and translation. For Latour transformation works on the semiotic level. Reference, rather than being a way of bridging the gap between words and world, is instead linked to a series of reversable transformations, with the term designating "*the quality of the chain in its entirety*" (*id., Pandora's Hope*, Cambridge [MA], Harvard UP, 1999, p.69). Chains of translation, "the work through which actors modify, displace, and translate their various and contradictory interests," function similarly (p.311). At the broadest level "Translating interests means at once offering new interpretations of these interests and channeling people in different directions"; the result of these processes

explores how a unique combination of off-stage infrastructures and on-stage aesthetics underwrote the success of *Power*, and by extension the success of the FTP. It closes by looking at how the enterprise failed, noting how the combination of resources that fueled the FTP's success created vulnerabilities that led to its demise.

In some ways, of course, such an analysis suggests a very old critique, a contemporary example of a tragic flaw. But this paper explores a modern twist on that tale, the way that the theatrical enterprise we see in *Power* ends up being analogous to the scientific enterprise that Bruno Latour describes in works like *Science in Action* or *Pandora's Hope*. In these works, Latour celebrates the efficacy of science even as he strips away its magic. The key, he argues, is to focus on the mechanisms that underlie the enterprise's growth: "every time you hear about a successful application of a science, look for the progressive extension of a network. Every time you hear about a failure of science, look for what part of which network has been punctured." [8]

MAKING CONNECTIONS: THE ROOTS OF THE LIVING NEWSPAPER

> Combine the newspaper and the theatre and to hell with the traditions of both.
> Morris Watson, "The Living Newspaper," 1936 [9]

The analytic approach Latour proposes for the study of science—his search for inflection points, the places where the network that provides resources to an enterprise either expands or is punctured—illuminates the theatre of *Power* as well. In part, this is because *Power*, despite predating Latour by decades, in fact enacts its own actor-network critique. [10] *Power*, on a basic level, is a simple play: telling the tale of how

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is that particular issues become "*solidly tied* to much larger ones ... so well tied indeed that threatening the former is tantamount to threatening the latter. Subtly woven and carefully thrown, this very fine net can be very useful at keeping groups in its meshes" (*Science in Action, op. cit.,* p.117).

8 *Ibid.*, p.249.

9 Morris Watson, "The Living Newspaper," *New Theater*, vol.3, no.6, 1936, p.8.

10 While Latour on occasion uses theatre imagery in his analyses of science, there is no evidence that he is familiar with Arent's play. Nonetheless, the convergence between *Power* and Latour's theories of science in action is not entirely coincidental. In particular, Latour argues in *Pandora's Hope* that physical properties normally considered the purview of science at times shape social enterprises as well: "The extension of networks of power in the electrical industry, in telecommunications, in transportation, is impossible to imagine without a massive mobilization of material

the Tennessee Valley Authority triumphed over private electrical companies, in many ways the play dramatizes a straightforward conflict between competing electrical grids. But Latour's actor-network approach works well with *Power* because Arent's play always had a larger aim, using the technology of the theatre to highlight the way America's electrical distribution system controlled social and economic access. *Power*, like the FTP in general, succeeded when it combined internal and external networks of support to fuel this critique; it failed when opponents were able to puncture these links.

Certainly the FTP, despite its later innovations, was built by expanding existing professional networks. Director Hallie Flanagan, for instance, was recruited because of her well-established reputation in the theatre community, including her work with documentary drama.[11] Flanagan's outreach to Elmer Rice solidified these links, for the commercial success of his 1914 drama *On Trial*, and the accolades accorded *The Adding Machine* (1923) and the Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Street Scene* (1929), made Rice a fixture of New York theatre.

These connections would prove crucial to the Living Newspaper, which like many innovations emerged as the solution to a problem. Admittedly, when Flanagan described the genre's origin, she chose to emphasize the spontaneity of the solution, telling how, in September 1935, she and Rice attended the New York production of *The Night of January 16th*. Afterwards:

> Elmer said that the play had convinced him that he should not take the directorship of the New York project. "Even with a cast that big, or twice that big, we couldn't make a dent in the hordes of people on the project. What would we do with 'em? We'd have to have twenty plays with 30 in each cast and then how could we get the sets built?" I said, "We wouldn't use them all in plays—we could do living newspapers. We could dramatize the news without expensive scenery—just living actors, light, music, movement. Elmer seized upon the idea, accepted the directorship for New York, secured the sponsorship of the Newspaper Guild and appointed Morris Watson to head the living newspaper.[12]

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entities. [...] [A] technical invention (electric lighting) led to the establishment (by Edison) of a corporation of unprecedented scale, its scope directly related to the physical properties of electrical networks." (*op. cit.*, p.204.)

11 Barry B. Witham, *The Federal Theatre Project*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2003, p.78.

12 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, pp.64-65. She first told an abbreviated version of the tale in her "Introduction" to Pierre de Rohan (ed), *Federal Theatre Plays*, New York, Random House, 1938, p.vii. When asked in 1967, Rice remembered the Living Newspaper's origins differently: "I hesitate to match my recollection against Hallie's, especially after thirty years. But as I remember it, The Living Newspaper project arose out of discussions between Morris Watson, head of the Newspaper Guild, and myself. He asked me if I couldn't do something for unemployed newspaper men. At first I couldn't

But while Flanagan downplayed the Living Newspaper's links to earlier theatre traditions, her inspiration had deep roots. Multiple critics have connected the genre with Soviet theatre, for instance;[13] Meyerhold made a particularly strong impression on Flanagan, though Rice found his theatre "a distinct disappointment."[14] Living Newspaper directors like Brett Warren, the New York director of *Power*, and Joseph Losey likewise were influenced by epic theatre traditions.[15] And Flanagan's suggestion to Rice that the new theatre operate "without expensive scenery—just living actors, light, music, movement" echoed her thinking about the early 1930s Workers' Theatre movement.[16]

Yet if European traditions lay the groundwork for the Living Newspaper, American professional networks provided the driving force. Arguably, Flanagan and Rice supplied the most crucial connection, for both provided input during the FTP's initial planning.[17] And both emphasized American links. Although some critics speculate that the FTP later downplayed Russian influences to forestall Congressional critics, as early as 1931 Flanagan emphasized that US theatres "must work out their own ideas and their own style."[18] Likewise Rice, despite his longstanding criticisms of US commercial

see how they would fit into a theatre project. But as we talked it over, the idea of doing a sort of animated newsreel evolved." (Dan Isaac, "Introduction", in "'Ethiopia:' The First 'Living Newspaper'," *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol.20, no.1, 1968, p.16.) Watson, who published the earliest account, supports Flanagan's timeline, reporting that he talked with Rice in October 1935, a month after Flanagan and Rice's first conversation (M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper," art.cit., p.8).

13 See, for instance, Douglas McDermott, "The Living Newspaper as a Dramatic Form," *Modern Drama*, vol.8, no.1, 1965, pp.83-94; John Fuegi, "Russian 'Epic Theatre' Experiments and the American Stage," *Minnesota Review*, vol.1, 1973, pp.102-112; Arnold Goldman, "Life and Death of the Living Newspaper Unit," *Theatre Quarterly*, vol.3, no.9, 1973, pp.69-83; and Colin Gardner, "The Losey-Moscow Connection: Experimental Soviet Theatre and the Living Newspaper," *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol.30, no.3, p.254.

14 J. Fuegi, "Russian 'Epic Theatre' Experiments," art.cit., pp.105-106; Elmer Rice, "As a Playwright Sees Russia," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1932, p.X2.

15 D. McDermott, "The Living Newspaper...," art.cit., pp.84-85; C. Gardner, "The Losey-Moscow Connection...," art.cit., p.254.

16 Hallie Flanagan, "A Theatre is Born," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, vol.15, no.11, 1931, pp.908, 911.

17 Elmer Rice summarizes these discussions in both "The Federal Theatre Hereabouts," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1936, p.X1; and *The Living Theatre*, New York, Harper, 1959, pp.148-153. The latter includes a spring 1935 letter to Harry Hopkins outlining Rice's ideas for the FTP.

18 A. Goldman, "Life and Death...," art.cit., p.69; C. Gardner, "The Losey-Moscow Connection...," art.cit., p.256; H. Flanagan, "A Theatre is Born," art.cit., p.909.

theatre, proposed that the FTP restore the infrastructure that fueled 19th-century American theatre, including regional companies and the travelling star system.[19]

And the Living Newspaper's writers were even more grounded in American traditions. Arthur Arent's prior theatre background consisted of writing sketches for the musical reviews of a Borscht Belt theatre;[20] when, in 1938, the Living Newspaper's popularity led to claims of international parentage, Arent dismissed the assertions with characteristic flair:

> As a matter of fact, it was only about a year ago that I learned that there had been anything like a Living Newspaper before ours. Then, as if to make up for two years of silence, it turned out that there had been not one, but several, predecessors. [...] But, and here's the point, I never seem to be able to locate anybody who saw one. Nor have I ever seen the script of any such production. And so, while admitting the possibility of a whole avalanche of predecessors, I deny their influence.[21]

Writing two years earlier, Morris Watson was even more blunt (**fig.3**): "Whatever the idea behind the Living Newspaper in the beginning, circumstances and influences of one kind or another have modified it. A literally rough estimate of it at the moment would be 'Combine the newspaper and the theatre and to hell with the traditions of both.'"[22]

Certainly the link to the Newspaper Guild proved crucial to the FTP network. Watson, who just weeks before had been fired by the Associated Press for his role in founding the Guild,[23] was of course well-connected with journalists and journalistic practices. These connections would bring some modest economic benefits, for the Newspaper Guild sponsored all early Living Newspaper productions.

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19 Elmer Rice, "Elmer Rice Says Farewell To Broadway," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1934, p.XI and p. X3; *id.*, "The Federal Theatre Hereabouts," art.cit., p.X1; *id.*, *The Living Theatre...*, *op.cit.*, pp.150-153. Tellingly, Rice did not mention a Living Newspaper in his letter to Hopkins; that idea took life only after discussions with Flanagan and Watson.

20 A. Goldman, "Life and Death...," art.cit., p.72.

21 Arthur Arent, "The Technique of the Living Newspaper," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, vol.22, no.11, 1938, p.820.

22 M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper," art.cit., p.8.

23 "Morris Watson, Newsman, Dies; Won Key Labor Law Test Case," *The New York Times*, February 13, 1972, p.62. Watson's appeal of his dismissal, which was decided in his favor by the Supreme Court in 1937, established the constitutionality of the National Labor Relations Act.

3. Morris Watson ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 2, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).[24]

Much more importantly, though, the Guild also provided an infrastructure. This in part was administrative: as Flanagan noted, the "staff of the Living Newspaper was set up like a large city daily, with editor-in-chief, managing editor, city editor, reporters and copyreaders."[25] But importing journalism's disciplinary infrastructure had aesthetic consequences as well, for the FTP's new cadre of reporters would bring to the theatre two key stylistic preferences. The first, as Brooks Atkinson noted in *The New York Times* review of *Power*, was a disciplinary inclination "[t]o shake the living daylights out of a thousand books, reports, newspaper and magazine articles."[26] Watson himself pointed to the second with his observation that the journalists "who edit the Living Newspaper are just telling the story for what it is worth."[27] He acknowledged that the resulting "combination of newspaper and topical review" at times "violates all the rules

24 The *Power* poster in the background of the photo is fig. 1; the "Buck Watson" on his hat links to *The New York Times* review (see n.27).

25 H. Flanagan, "Introduction," art. cit., p.vii.

26 Brooks Atkinson, "*Power* Produced by the Living Newspaper Under Federal Auspices," *The New York Times*, February 24, 1937, p.18.

27 M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper," art. cit., p.6.

of dramatic writing:" "That the scene should have a 'wallop' at the end may be a valid criticism. I'm not saying that it isn't. The usual news story is written with the punch at the top." But he quickly added that: "We newspapermen are newly wedded to the theatre. We have a lot to learn about each other. A dozen more editions should put us in step."[28] The *Times* review of *Power* confirmed this prediction, noting that "after an apprenticeship of one year" the Living Newspaper:

> [H]as learned how to use the theatre brilliantly as a medium of expression. If a lecture on the history, business methods and politics of electric light seems to you like a dull subject, you have only to see what the aggressive and versatile lads of the Living Newspaper can do when they have a regiment of actors on their hands and a battalion of theatre technicians. [...] The material for "Power" has been industriously assembled by the staff members of Morris Watson's disinterestedly insurgent Living Newspaper. They present "Power" with a list of accredited sources long enough to break your arm off.[29]

Adding journalism to the Federal Theatre Project's network of support, that is, did more than bring administrative and financial resources: it opened a stylistic exchange as well. This pattern—the FTP first linking to an external network to obtain resources, and then incorporating a technique derived from the link into works like the Living Newspapers—occurred on scales large and small. The footnotes of *Power,* for instance, were grounded in the discipline of journalism. But they had an aesthetic dimension too, a rhetorical power that over time would be manifest onstage through devices like *Power*'s "Loudspeaker" or the "Man Who Knows."[30] And reviewers praised this sensibility, lauding the way that in *Power*: "The unit of the piece is the fact; each fact is accurate (see the bibliography); and the author of the play, Arthur Arent, proves what journalists have always maintained—that an accurate fact carefully aimed may be as deadly as a bullet."[31]

The Living Newspaper's publicity campaigns likewise suggest the way that, as Latour would predict, linking theatre to other professional networks fueled the emerging genre's success. Carefully documented in FTP notebooks, the campaigns combine a sophisticated approach to media networks with impressive dramatic

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28 *Ibid.*

29 B. Atkinson, "*Power*...," art. cit., p.18.

30 Tellingly, Arthur Arent noted that the original plan for *Ethiopia* "was to use a teletype across the top of the proscenium;" when this "proved impracticable," a "loudspeaker was hurriedly requisitioned and it remains in use until this day." ("Technique...," art. cit., p.822.)

31 "Newspaper into Theater," *The Nation*, vol.144, no.10, 1937, p.256.

expertise. The "Method of attack" for the Seattle Production, for instance, included: "Speeches, advance ticket sales, special displays. Every type of organization: racial, social, political, labor; was covered."[32] Radio announcements supplemented these efforts, and "23 dramatic programs centered around 'Power' were put on the air;" in addition: "Stories, articles, pictures and every form of printable exploitation was used in Seattle's three dailies and 35 weeklies."[33]

Links to other networks shaped the FTP as well, for Flanagan worked tirelessly to maintain popular and political support. Of particular importance was her belief that the FTP should work "to extend the boundaries of theatre-going, to create a vigorous new audience, to make the theatre of value to more people."[34] This understanding quickly "pushed the Federal Theatre beyond its initial mandate of supplying jobs to out-of-work theatre professionals under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration."[35]

The need for political support had a similar aesthetic impact. This imperative was underscored by the closure of the initial Living Newspaper, *Ethiopia*, and Rice's subsequent resignation. Flanagan attempted to put a positive spin on the episode, describing Rice's decision as "a potent factor in keeping" the Federal Theatre "close to the line laid down by Harry Hopkins when at its inception he said that it was to be 'a free, adult, uncensored theatre.'"[36] But Flanagan's subsequent efforts to reign in the more politically active Living Newspapers inevitably impacted the genre's aesthetic, moving it toward plays that instead highlighted a "prevailing national faith in progress through technology, a belief shared by conservative defenders of capitalism and Populist Front leftists."[37] *Power* clearly manifest this belief.

Thus *Power* emerged from an amalgamation of practices imported from multiple networks of support. Predictably, at times these traditions clashed. Such conflicts were particularly visible in regional productions, since *Power*'s enormous cast and crew forced producers to bring all hands on deck. In Seattle, for instance, the local project could only mount the play by combining its previously segregated white and black performance troupes. The company's production notebook would later boast of this experiment's success, noting that the: "Class, racial, and professional lines of distinction

32 "Production Notebook from Seattle production of Power [2]," image 4 (Finding Aid Box 1058, *loc. cit.*).

33 *Ibid.*, images 8 and 7.

34 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, p.43.

35 Kurt Eisen, "Circulating Power: National Theatre as Public Utility in the Federal Theatre Project," *Theatre Symposium*, vol.9, 2001, p.29.

36 H. Flanagan, "Introduction," art. cit., pp.viii-ix.

37 K. Eisen, "Circulating Power...," art. cit., p.29. The passage discusses the controversies surrounding *Ethiopia* and *Injunction Granted.*

disappeared. White union stage hands ran one side of the stage in perfect co-ordination with colored non-union men working from the other."[38] But the vulnerabilities in this amalgamation were visible from the start, for integration initially faced internal resistance.[39] Moreover, the fractures would linger, and the charge of "mixing the races" would return in the hearings that ended the FTP's funding.[40]

Even less controversial decisions led to aesthetic clashes. Speaking for the writers, for instance, Morris Watson acknowledged "plenty of friendly conflict between those of us in the Living Newspaper who are of the fourth estate and those who are of the theatre."[41] And onstage the large cast sizes likewise ensured that performers came from a wide range of traditions; the resulting clashes could be serious. While Flanagan would boast how the Living Newspaper blended traditions ranging from Aristophanes and Shakespeare to Walt Disney,[42] on multiple occasions performers rejected the blend. Preparation for *Triple A Plowed Under*, for instance, ground to a halt when "we had one night at rehearsal a rebellion;" actors gave "impassioned speeches explaining why this swift, pantomimic, monosyllabic, factual document was not drama."[43] Flanagan first tried to mollify them by explaining that "people today are interested in facts, as evidenced by the enormous increase in circulation of daily newspapers and news sheets." But the cast was only satisfied when she reminded them of the play's links to traditional theatre, asking them to "withhold judgement [...] until we added two powerful elements which were an intrinsic part of the plan, the musical score and the light score."[44]

Power too faced such rebellions. The San Francisco director, for instance, described the play as "very poor" and complained that the "dry material" contained "no parts to interest the actors, nor to stir up the emotion of the audience;" reviews describing the San Francisco *Power* as "a propaganda play minus the excitement" suggest that that company's performances never overcame his doubts.[45] And Seattle reported a similar clash:

> Rehearsals of "Power" developed interesting clashes of opinion. To manage a cast from so small a project, Vaudevillians, Repertory, actors, costumers, janitors—in fact

38 "Production Notebook from Seattle production... [2]," art. cit., p.31.
39 B.B. Witham, *The Federal Theatre Project*, *op. cit.*, pp.80-81, and p.85.
40 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.,* p.361.
41 M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper," art. cit., p.8.
42 H. Flanagan, "Introduction," art. cit., p. xi.
43 *Ibid.*, p.ix.
44 *Ibid.*, pp.ix-x. Morris Watson, in "The Living Newspaper," recalls similar episodes occurring with the early review *1936* (art. cit., pp.7-8).
45 "Production Notebook from San Francisco production of Power," images 11 and 58 (Finding Aid Box 1056, Music Division, *loc. cit.*).

> neatly the entire white personnel were drafted. This curious conglomeration of talent, tradition and prejudice responded with a certain skepticism to the first playreading. General response: "This isn't a play at all—Lord knows what it is." But by fifth rehearsal, this conservative bloc was saying: "This is great stuff, and anyone who doesn't think so is so old fashioned."[46]

The production notebook goes on to report that: "Local audience reaction was very similar. For the first few scenes, each house appeared puzzled... After three scenes in, the audience would catch the rhythm and we never failed to close with at least four curtain calls."[47]

In short, the source of power in *Power* was an amalgamation of networks. The conjunction nurtured a work of genuine impact, with one Seattle reviewer arguing that: "The living newspaper, if 'Power' is at all representative of its genre, is capable of an epic sweep and a permanency beyond the timely situation it portrays."[48] In retrospect, of course, we can see places where the disparate traditions only partially combined, and future fault lines would emerge. But in 1937, these links underwrote impactful critique.

DEPLOYING POWER

> One aspect of the problem should be explained fully and completely in one scene and then forgotten, with the next scene going on to another point.
> Arthur Arent, "The Technique of the Living Newspaper," 1938[49]

46 "Production Notebook from Seattle production of Power [1]," image 19 (Finding Aid Box 1057, Music Division, *loc. cit.*).

47 *Ibid.*, image 20.

48 *The Seattle Town Crier* ("Production Notebook from Seattle production... [1]," art. cit., image 22). Other Seattle reviews were mixed. While a radio review noted that *Power* "raises the theatre completely out of the realm of mere amusement and gives it cultural and educational significance," the *Seattle Times* more ambiguously called *Power* "as fine a piece of overdone propaganda as ever trod the boards," noting that it "has the subtlety of a sledgehammer." The *Post Intelligencer* went further, denouncing *Power* as "a play only to the extent that it has numerous characters who speak lines" ("Production Notebook from Seattle production... [2]," art. cit., images 35, 32, and 34).

49 A. Arent, "Technique...," art. cit., p.824.

Predictably, *Power*'s stagecraft also reflects the amalgamation that led to the FTP. It was no coincidence that Flanagan begged the cast of *Triple A* to wait for music and lights before rendering judgements. Since funding guidelines limited non-personnel expenditures to 10% of the total cost, Living Newspaper sets and props were typically simple; Rice noted that "the machinery for spending [FTP] money imposes cruel limitations upon the operation of the project."[50] Conversely, the plays exploited those elements of stagecraft that were most dependent on personnel. Offstage, they used large crews and numerous musicians. And onstage, of course, the dramas relied on the fundamental icon of theatrical representation, the actor's body, which Flanagan argued should be "emphasized by light, seen from as many angles, massed with other bodies in as many formations as possible."[51]

The opening scene of *Power* demonstrates how firmly the play is grounded in this art. Fittingly, given that Arent would later cite "the use of projection as background" as one of *Power*'s key advances, the drama starts with an image projected on the front curtain—"*The Living Newspaper presents* Power. *The word 'Power' grows larger, the other words fade out.*"[52] The curtain rises, revealing "*two* ELECTRICIANS *and a* STAGE MANAGER *at a portable switchboard*;" a voice over the LOUDSPEAKER explains: "This is the switchboard of the Ritz Theatre. Through this board flows the electric power that amplifies my voice, that ventilates the theatre, and the power that lights this show." The STAGE MANAGER reinforces the point, "*picking up a fat cable*," as he adds: "It all comes through here." *Power*, in short, entangles its audience in electrical networks from the start.

Indeed, the purpose of the opening scene is to remind us that we already were entangled in these networks. Arent felt that Living Newspapers worked best when given an "episodic" construction "patterned closely on the revue;" in this approach, the "self-contained" scenes have:

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50 B.B. Witham, "Economic Structure," art.cit., p.201; E. Rice, "The Federal Theatre Hereabouts," art.cit., p.X1. Productions could partially overcome the funding limitations if community partners lent expensive items for temporary use of the set. Correspondence from the Seattle production of *Power,* for instance, notes that one sponsor lent "washing machines and some other electrical appliances to use for props" (B.B. Witham, *The Federal Theatre Project*, *op.cit.*, p.83).

51 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op.cit.*, p.321.

52 A. Arent, "Technique...," art.cit., p.835; *Power*, in Pierre de Rohan (ed), *Federal Theatre Plays, op.cit.*, pp.9-10. The plays in this volume are separately numbered; all page numbers refer to the *Power* section.

> [T]hree primary functions: 1, to say what has to be said; 2, to build to the scene's own natural climax; and 3, to build to the climax of the act curtain and the resolution of the play. [...] One aspect of the problem should be explained or dramatized fully and completely in one scene and then forgotten, with the next scene going on to another point.[53]

He would cite "the opening sequence of *Power*, which explains what would happen if our electricity were cut off," as a clear example "of making a point once and for all, clearly and dramatically."[54]

Fittingly, electricity plays a central role in the scene's critique. Onstage, spotlights come on sequentially, each focusing our sight, each accompanied by the LOUDSPEAKER's electronically amplified voice;[55] the portable switchboard remains visible, continuing to highlight the stage's dependence on power. Soon, simple props are added, each iconically pointing to the offstage world, each emphasizing that the theatre is not the only place where electricity governs experience. As the lighting becomes progressively brighter we see:

- a clothing factory where workers huddle over electronic sewing machines;
- a home where an elderly couple listen to music on the radio;
- a police radio operator directing cars from the station's switchboard;
- a hospital operating room illuminated in stark white light (**fig. 4**); and
- a street scene where traffic lights flash red and green.

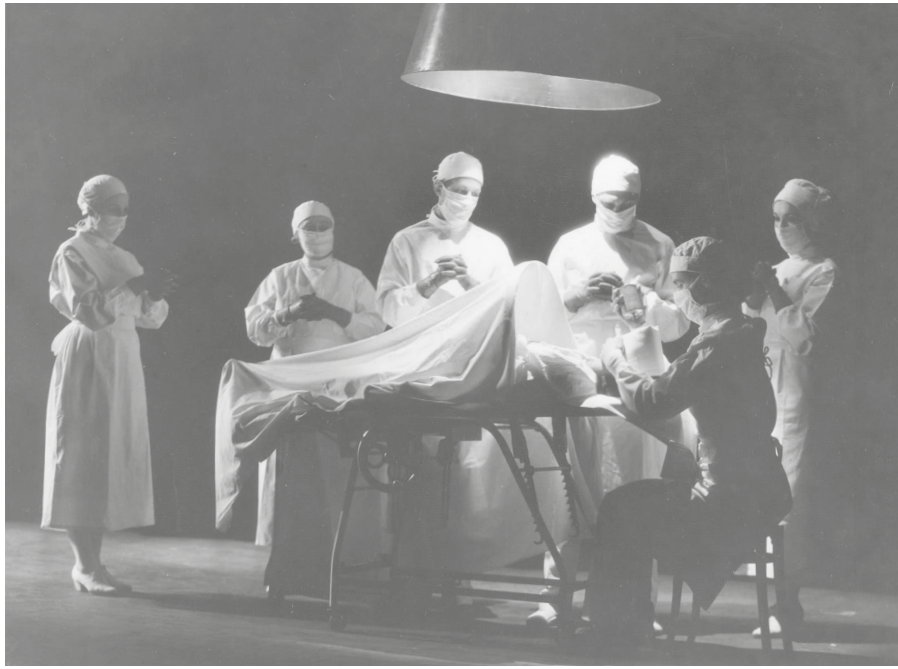
"Eighty-six hundred of these sentinels in New York City keep us from crashing our autos together, night and day," the LOUDSPEAKER informs us, and as: "*The traffic light flashes red and green rapidly*," the voice goes on to note "you flick on your lights in your home with power.... You heat your iron with Power. You clean with Power." "[The] *Lights come up on the various groups previously lit*," as the litany continues: "You curl your hair, you cook, you even shave, all with Power!"[56]

53 A. Arent, "Technique...," art. cit., p.824.

54 *Ibid.,* p.825.

55 Arent identified the way that the LOUDSPEAKER "began to take on individuality and coloration" as *Power*'s second major innovation (*ibid.*, pp.824-825).

56 *Id.*, *Power*, *op. cit.*, pp.11-12



4. *Power*, scene I.i: The Hospital Operating Room ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 2, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

And then, the auditorium plunges into blackout. A stunned silence ensues, as actors and spectators alike are suddenly cast outside the networks of power. "Flashlights, quick," a DOCTOR calls, and "[a] NURSE *comes running with two flashes. One is passed to another* NURSE*, and they both flash lights over the* DOCTOR*'s shoulder as he goes on with the operation. His assistant lights up with a third flash. They hold for a second, and all three flashlights go out*."[57] The isolation is uncomfortable and lasting. "*All characters in the remainder of this scene*," the stage directions tell us, "*light their own faces for the duration of their speeches, either with telephones having small flashlights in the mouthpieces, or with pocket flashes*." In short, in the opening aesthetic of *Power* form and content coincide, as the darkened audience watches the darkened performers struggle with a loss of power. In the modern world, the play reminds us, both onstage representation and offstage life depend on electrical networks, systems where, as both Latour and *Power* point out, corporate infrastructure and the physical properties of electricity have intertwined since Edison's day.[58]

57 A. Arent, *Power*, *op. cit.*, p.12.
58 Br. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, *op. cit.,* p.203.

5. *Power*, scene I.ii: Inventors ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 2, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

This strategy of highlighting networks by shifting the audience's perspective continues in the scenes that follow. Repeatedly lights, sound, actors, and props first make power visible onstage, then force the audience to experience what it is like to be outside these networks of power. Consider scene I.ii, "*Inventors*" (**fig.5**). The scene enacts the progress of science, as researchers from Faraday to Ohm to Edison share their legacy by passing inventions hand to hand. The chain is broken, however, at the end of the scene as businessmen surround Edison while clamoring for exclusive distribution rights. Next, scene I.iii, "*Kilowatt Hour*," shows the resulting isolation of the consumer and audience alike as an electrical company, its market guaranteed by monopoly status, bills for its services in kilowatt hours; the concept is so abstract that a befuddled CONSUMER onstage has no idea what it is until an ELECTRICIAN lowers a light with a blinding thousand watt bulb (**fig.6**).[59] Scene I.iv, *"Expansion*," highlights the growth of electrical distribution networks; Scene I.v, "*Park Bench—1907*," foregrounds a MAN who remains outside these new systems, unable to partake in the "wonderful age we

59 A. Arent, *Power*, *op. cit.,* p.21. In the New York production, the ELECTRICIAN's explanation was shifted to the MAN WHO KNOWS.

live in" because he has no access to electricity.[60] Each scene is, as Arent's aesthetic dictates, a separate episode with its own distinct point. Simultaneously, though, the scenes reinforce each other, building toward a larger end.

6. *Power*, scene I.vi: The Man Who Knows explains a kilowatt hour to the Consumer ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 1, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

The pattern of alternating portraits of consumers outside and inside the network continues throughout the play. Scene I.vii, "*Fair Profits*," starts by dramatizing an electrical executive's assertion that holding companies deserve "the credit for the great development of the electric light and power business;" when the concept of a holding company proves as abstruse as the earlier kilowatt hour, the "MAN WHO KNOWS" enters to illustrate the idea, ordering the stage crew to bring out a set of large blocks to represent the multiple corporations (**fig.7**). In a coup de théâtre, the pyramid of blocks he constructs to illustrate the complexity of their intertwined structures eventually towers over the actors onstage.[61]

60 *Ibid.*, p.25.

61 A. Arent, *Power*, *op. cit.*, p.29 and p.31. Arthur Goldman notes that, since Arent was hospitalized with pneumonia, Watson conceived the sequence with the stacked blocks; he later delighted in reminding Arent of this staging success ("Life and Death...," art. cit., n. 31, p.82).

An equally ingenious bit of staging concludes the scene. As Senators testify about corporations doing business with each other, an "*animated chart showing an octopus*" is projected on the scrim.[62] But when one Senator notes that "this puts a director in the *almost impossible position* of sitting across the table from himself," Arent makes the image come to life:

> *Lights come up on* Carmichael *seated at cut-out desk, right. Left of desk is an empty chair. During the following, flesh-pink light is on* Carmichael *when he sits at desk, which changes to steel-blue when he moves to chair, desk left. There is projected behind him a cartoon of a triple mirror.*[63]

And finally the next episode, "*Childish Questions*," returns to using blocks to make its point: "*Lights up on* Father *and* Daughter*, center. He is seated in chair; she is sitting on the floor playing with large alphabet blocks.*" "Do all the people need electricity?" the Daughter asks. "And does the company own what all the people need?" She drops her blocks as she exclaims: "Gee, Daddy; the people are awfully dumb" (**fig.8**).[64]

7. *Power*, scene I.vii: The Man Who Knows explains the meaning of "holding companies" ("Production Notebook from New York Production of *Power* [1]," image 41, Finding Aid Box 1057, Music Division, Library of Congress).

62 A. Arent, *Power*, *op. cit.*, p.33.
63 *Ibid.*, p.34.
64 *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

8. *Power*, scene I.viii: Daughter with blocks (*Power [110 Photographs]*, image 20, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Box 1228, Music Division, Library of Congress).

This insight about the need for collective action drives the remainder of the play. By the end of Act One, the people unite to form their own network of power, one explicitly associated with the newly created TVA: "*A parade of men and women comes on stage behind scrim, singing the TVA song. Many of them carry lanterns. Red, yellow and amber side lights pick up the parade. They circle the stage and continue the song until act curtain falls, which comes down on movie of second large waterfall.*"[65] The scene, Hallie Flanagan thought, used projected scenery "more successfully" than any prior Living Newspaper, spectacularly dramatizing the strength of individuals working together as they "struggle [...] to understand the natural, social, and economic forces" that surround them, "and to achieve through those forces, a better life for more people."[66] Tellingly, Flanagan located the scene's power in the conjunction of live theatre traditions with projected documentary images: "If you think such a struggle is undramatic," she would write, "reserve judgement until, through the roaring waterfalls and vast machines of *Power*, you see the torchlight procession of workers and hear them sing."[67] The dropped curtain then returns the focus to the audience's world, for: "[The] *Movie continues on front curtain until the end of film*."[68]

Act Two returns to this device, as: "*During overture of Act Two, a map of TVA territory is projected on house curtain*;"[69] we soon see the private electric companies combat the people's power. This time they seek to expand their networks to ensure that the Tennessee Valley market remains under their control. "We've got to open up the whole valley!" a company CHAIRMAN exclaims. "The government won't run lines parallel to anybody else's. *If we get in there first, that farm is ours!*"[70] Thus, by scene II.iv, "*Competition*," collective resistance gives way to individual struggles: while a FARMER orders linemen off his property by threatening to "sick the dog on you" (**fig.9**) and an OLD WOMAN with a gun drives off a second worker (**fig.10**), an illiterate COLORED MAN fairs less well, coerced by deceitful agents (**fig.11**).[71]

65 *Ibid.*, p.68.
66 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, p.184; *ead.*, "Introduction," art. cit., p. x.
67 *Ibid.*, pp.x-xi.
68 A. Arent, *Power*, *op. cit.*, p.6.
69 *Ibid.*, p.70.
70 *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.
71 *Ibid.*, pp.76-78.

9. *Power*, scene II.iv: A Farmer orders linemen off his property ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 2, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

10. *Power*, scene II.iv: An Old Woman with a gun drives a lineman of her property ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*", Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

11. *Power*, scene I.viii: An illiterate COLORED MAN is coerced into signing an electric contract ("Photographic Print from New York Production of *Power*," image 2, Finding Aid Box 1182, Music Division, Library of Congress).

The people's network temporarily regains power as the play nears its end, with the Supreme Court offering an initial victory for the TVA; in an echo of Act One, an "*impromptu parade*" breaks out, replete once more with "*red, blue, yellow and amber side-lights*."[72] Soon, though, a second court decision again threatens the project, and the reflection of Act One literally dims as the lights drop "*down to one-fourth*."[73] Eventually the side-lights "*come on to half*" as the ENSEMBLE lines up and steps toward the audience, collectively asking: "*What will the Supreme Court do?*" A "*huge question mark*" is projected on the scrim as the curtain falls, inviting the audience to face the question on their side of the stage.

But even as *Power* stages its network analysis, a subtle shift occurs. The drama repeatedly uses the power of electricity to critique those who monopolize such power, highlighting the way that even individuals linked to electric networks—the CONSUMER and the audience alike—finally are more controlled than empowered. In Act Two, though, the drama's critiques of offstage actions are increasingly grounded in onstage truths. Thus when a government lawyer, arguing before the Supreme Court

72 *Ibid.*, p.88.
73 *Ibid.*, p.91.

on behalf of the TVA, asks "Shall the power which belongs to the people be wasted?," almost immediately brief "*staccato scenes take place down stage*."[74] These "*flash backs*," a break with Arent's adage that an episode should be forgotten, directly echo lines from the close of Act One. Where once the play opposed electrical and corporate networks by documenting external sources, now it points to onstage reality to power its critique.

This is how technology works in *Power*, creating meaning by giving offstage references onstage presence, using external networks to support theatre production in a process analogous to Latour's *Science in Action*. Indeed, this exposure of underlying networks is central to the drama's goals. "The Living Newspaper," Flanagan noted in 1939, "from the first was concerned not with surface news, scandal, human interest stories, but rather with the conditions back of conditions."[75]

BREAKING THE LINKS: THE DEMISE OF THE FTP

> As the hearing broke up I thought suddenly how it all looked like a badly staged courtroom scene.
> Hallie Flanagan, *Arena*, 1940[76]

But if *Power* succeeded because it exemplified the science of the FTP stage, it arguably would fall victim to flaws inherent to this mode of understanding. "The scientific text is different from all other forms of narrative," Latour claims.[77] "It speaks of a referent, present in the text, in a form other than prose: a chart, diagram, equation, map, or sketch. Mobilizing its own internal referent, the scientific text carries within itself its own verification." Despite Latour's claim about the exclusivity of science, theatre in fact works similarly: it is the embodiment of iconic representation, always creating meaning by filling its stages with people and props.[78] As such, theatre too experiences the instability of reference that Latour describes:

> It seems that reference is not simply the act of pointing or a way of keeping, on the outside, some material guarantee for the truth of a statement; rather it is our way of

74 *Ibid*., pp.85-86; the "staccato scenes" echo pp.66-76.
75 H. Flanagan, "Introduction," art. cit., p.viii.
76 *Ead*.,, *Arena*, *op. cit*., p.344.
77 Br. Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, *op. cit*., p.56.
78 Compare this to the theatrical imagery Latour employs in *Pandora's Hope* as he attempts to describe the way that Louis Pasteur staged the discovery of fermentation (*ibid*., pp.127-133).

> keeping something *constant* through a series of transformations. Knowledge does not reflect a real external world that it resembles via mimesis, but rather a real interior world, the coherence and continuity of which it helps to ensure.[79]

The implication applies to the theatre as well. The power of performance ultimately is not derived by pointing to the outside world. The theatre's power comes instead from pointing to itself, from progressively reshaping material until it transforms external complexities into internally coherent understandings. *Power*, like other Living Newspapers, might begin with footnotes, but its climax depends on the sort of self-reference that we see in the "staccato scenes" of II.vi.

And *Power* exploits such self-reference repeatedly. Of course, elements of Act Two—the corporate boardrooms, the Supreme Court, and the race to string competing electric lines across Tennessee—still allude to the external world. But the devastating judgements that *Power* makes in its second act, the certainty it conveys about which actions are right and which are wrong, come about because Act One had already enacted similar situations on the stage. The decisive reference, that is, comes from the way the drama points to theatrical truths.

And here lies the Living Newspaper's fatal flaw: while it claims to be documentary, its aims exceed the protection that facts can provide. As Kurt Eisen has pointed out, social documentaries implicitly believe that the situations they depict can be altered: "The very act of documenting a social problem—whether in a photograph, an essay, or a script for the stage—presents that problem as a human construct and, therefore, as capable of a human solution."[80] While *Power*, like other Living Newspapers, attempted to create what Flanagan called "an authoritative dramatic treatment, at once historic and contemporary, of current problems,"[81] dramatic treatment cannot be authoritative if facts can be changed. Indeed, Arent noted out that even journalists had come to accept that the theatre required an "adroit manipulation" of quotes, a "pardonable skulduggery [*sic*] on the dramatist's part in which a direct quote was broken into many speeches."[82] Thus, in practice the factual grounding of *Power*—its extensive footnotes and lengthy bibliography, its files open to public inspection—was as much a sign of vulnerability as of strength, a defense against the hostile scrutiny the play expected to

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79 *Ibid.*, p.58. In practice, the resemblance of science to theatre is so close that it causes Latour some discomfort, and he at times tries to explain away the link (see *ibid.*, pp.115, 135).

80 K. Eisen, "Circulating Power...," art.cit., p.30.

81 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op.cit.*, p.65.

82 A. Arent, "Technique...," art.cit., p.822.

receive. At best, the play's specificity of reference temporarily masked the fact that the truths created in the laboratory of the theatre disappear when the power is unplugged.

Likewise, the truths created by drama can be overwritten by other scripts, a limit that Flanagan knew well. She recognized, for instance, that *Power*'s strong attendance would offer no protection against the FTP's opponents, for it was too easy to dismiss the crowds as the product of agitation or the FTP's well-orchestrated publicity campaigns. Indeed, a year earlier she had warned Morris Watson that: "The fact that *Injunction Granted* is drawing crowds does not help. Everyone knows that those crowds are being sent by their Unions."[83] Flanagan knew, that is, that FTP opponents chose to follow a different script, and that for them the power of the Federal Theatre was not a strength but a problem. Their solution would be to sever the FPC's networks of support, undo the links the FTP had forged.

Opportunities for such unravellings abounded. While the FTP incorporated journalists into their networks, the newspapers themselves remained outside, and Elmer Rice noted that "the powerful anti-Roosevelt press [...] lost no opportunity to denounce wastefulness, vote buying and what was quaintly called 'boondoggling';" likewise the incorporation of unemployed actors threatened "leaders of the professional theatre, who argued that the Project's performances at nominal prices were taking business away from them."[84] Flanagan herself similarly faced vociferous protests from FTP designers and scene workers who felt that her advocacy for projections and light threatened centuries of advances in scenery design.[85] And political divisions within the FTP creative team proved even more difficult to manage. Flanagan's protracted fight with Watson and Losey about the pro-labor politics of *Injunction Granted* was so fierce that Flanagan threatened to dismiss them both; while Losey eventually resigned, thirty-five years later he still spoke bitterly about the experience.[86]

Ironically, though, it was a different political theatre that proved the FTP's undoing. The carefully scripted performances that occurred in venues like Martin Dies' House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities, replete with charges of communism and un-American behavior, would invert the story the FTP sought to tell. Indeed, in a sequence that proved eerily similar to *Power*'s depiction of competing electrical networks, Congressional opponents in effect defeated the FPC by staging a theatre of

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83 Jane De Hart Mathews, *The Federal Theatre, 1935-1939*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1967, p.112.

84 E. Rice, *The Living Theatre*, *op. cit.*, pp.155-156.

85 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, pp.321-322.

86 J. Mathews, *The Federal Theatre...*, *op. cit.*, pp.109-113; A. Goldman, "Life and Death...," art. cit., p.76.

their own. Even Flanagan, despite still smarting from the defunding of the FTP, was able to recognize the parallel as she concluded *Arena*:

> It is probable that during the last four years more discussion of the theatre took place in the House and Senate and in congressional committees than in all the other years of our congressional history put together. Scenes from Federal Theatre plays were enacted on the floor of Congress; eloquent speeches were made for and against the theatre as an art and as an institution; Shakespeare came into discussion, and Marlowe, and Aristotle. A Senator who fought for Federal Theatre told me that months after that institution was ended, fights about its merits were still going on in congressional cloakrooms.[87]

Flanagan did not, however, fully recognize the logic of her opponents' attack. Despite her caution and political savvy, she failed to foresee what Latour makes clear: that when an enterprise—be it science, Living Newspapers, or Congressional hearings—is powered by the progressive expansion of networks, it never encourages dispassionate assessment. Instead, such an enterprise systematically works to ensure that all deliberations occur on unequal grounds.[88]

This truth caught Flanagan unprepared. In contrast, Watson sensed the political danger from the start, arguing, as early as 1936, that it would necessary to "divorce" the FTP from the WPA for Living Newspapers to grow, since: "So long as [the FTP] is a part of the WPA it will be subject to petty and unfair attacks from those reactionary forces which see red in every letter of relief."[89] But Flanagan thought that she could protect the FTP by steering a middle course that avoided giving "ammunition against the project."[90] To be fair, she worked at a significant disadvantage as she confronted the FTP's Congressional opponents, for the same networks of federal bureaucracy that brought the FTP its funding would ultimately censor her response to the Congressional threat. In particular, after she attempted to publicly counter early committee testimony, WPA officials informed Flanagan that "on no account was I to reply to these charges."[91] She eventually understood that: "Any agency like the W.P.A. which depends for its continued existence upon periodic appropriations wants to keep out of the papers."

Still, Flanagan's ultimate failing was that she expected a fair fight; her opponents would have none of it. She ends *Arena* with an account of the indignities she suffered as

87 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, p.333.
88 Compare Bruno Latour's discussion of scientific literature and laboratories in *Science in Action*, *op. cit.*, pp.45-79.
89 M. Watson, "The Living Newspaper," art. cit., p.33.
90 J. Mathews, *The Federal Theatre...*, *op. cit.*, p.112.
91 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, pp.335-336.

she attempted to get a fair hearing before the Dies committee: the lack of due process, the hostile questioning, the way her testimony was brushed aside, the way she was not allowed to give her closing statement or even enter it into the record.[92] For her:

> [The Dies committee] looked like a badly staged courtroom scene; it wasn't imposing enough for a congressional hearing on which the future of several thousand human beings depended. [...] Yet here was a Committee which for months had been actually trying a case against Federal Theatre, trying it behind closed doors, and giving one side only to the press. Out of a project employing thousands of people from coast to coast, the Committee had chosen arbitrarily to hear ten witnesses, all from New York City, and had refused arbitrarily to hear literally hundreds of others.[93]

In retrospect, of course, the incongruity makes sense. Far from being "badly staged," the Congressional hearings quite effectively gave the FTP's opponents an opportunity to reorient the networks the project had so carefully conjoined, appropriating them to the opponents' own ends.

Latour's adage that: "Every time you hear about a failure of science, look for what part of which network has been punctured" captures the strategy perfectly, for, one by one, the FTP's once-secure bullworks of support were undone.[94] Journalism, which the Living Newspaper had so successfully incorporated into the theatre's machinery, now worked against it as "the papers gave more and more space to the testimony of a few unqualified witnesses;" the FTP's networks of theatre professions were accused, to Flanagan's horror, "of being made up largely of non-relief amateurs;" even the internal references that fueled *Power*'s onstage success became a weapon: "[A] project which from first to last had stood on American principles of freedom, justice, and truth, was accused of being through its plays, its audiences, and its personnel, subversive, communistic, and indecent."[95] Limits on the number of witnesses before the Dies committee ensured that the enormous casts that *Power* used so effectively could not be deployed. Nor could large audiences and positive box-office revenue provide support. In the end, Flanagan was right when she wondered if the FTP's audience actually had counted against it, if Congressional critics feared what could happen when large numbers of people attended plays that highlighted issues of capital, class and race.[96]

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92 *Ibid.*, pp.337-344.
93 *Ibid.*, p.345.
94 Br. Latour, *Science in Action*, *op. cit.*, p.249.
95 H. Flanagan, *Arena*, *op. cit.*, pp.335-336.
96 *Ibid.*, p.361.

And finally, even the theatre's most powerful signifier, the body of the performer, was simply banished from the stage: "We don't want you back," a Congressman laughingly told Flanagan, "[y]ou're a tough witness."[97] Once all these supporting networks were dismissed, the FTP's fundamental lifeline, federal funding, lay bare. It too was easily severed during the compromises required in negotiating the final budget bill.[98]

But while the FTP's closure was permanent, decades later a delightful coda has begun to fill the space. Hallie Flanagan was devastated by her failure to deliver her closing brief to the Dies committee or to share it with the public afterwards.[99] But ironically, over time the same WPA bureaucracy that silenced Flanagan's response to her critics would ensure that her efforts were preserved, eventually transferring the FTP archives to Library of Congress control. Access to these physical documents was once limited, of course, by the restrictions of time and place. But with the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, the library began digitizing key records from *Power*. Now, through the Library of Congress' "Federal Theatre Project Collection," production documents can be readily accessed worldwide. It's a reminder that Latour's adage has a positive side, that the punctures which halt science can be repaired, and new distribution networks created. Our digital age, then, has at least partially restored the FTP's *Power*, and in fact has distributed archival productions far more widely than they were at the Federal Theatre Project's peak. It's an outcome that Flanagan doubtlessly would enjoy.

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98 *Ibid.*, pp.362-363.
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NOTICE

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Arent's 1937 Living Newspaper *Power* was among the Federal Theatre Project's most successful productions. This paper uses the actor-network theory of Bruno Latour to examine how the off-stage infrastructures and on-stage aesthetics that underwrote *Power*'s success eventually triggered its demise. Despite predating Latour by decades, *Power* enacts its own actor-network critique, using the theatre's technology to highlight the way social networks controlled access to America's electrical distribution system. The drama succeeded, the paper argues, by linking off-stage and on-stage networks of support; its failure came when opponents punctured these connections. The paper first examines the off-stage infrastructure that supported *Power*, particularly its links to earlier theatre networks. It next explores the on-stage aesthetic that developed as Arent used theatre technologies, especially technologies fueled by electricity, to critique the off-stage influence of corporate power. The paper closes by noting how the conjunction of networks that fueled *Power*'s success left it politically vulnerable.

Keywords

Arthur Arent, *Power*, Living Newspapers, Bruno Latour, actor-network theory

RÉSUMÉ

Le « Living Newspaper » *Power*, écrit par Arthur Arent et joué pour la première fois en 1937, figure parmi les productions les plus réussies du Federal Theatre Project. Dans cet article, la théorie de l'acteur-réseau de Bruno Latour est mobilisée pour examiner comment les infrastructures hors scène et l'esthétique sur scène, qui ont garanti le succès de *Power*, ont fini par causer sa disparition. Bien qu'il ait précédé Latour de plusieurs décennies, *Power* fait sa propre critique d'acteurs-réseaux, utilisant la technologie du théâtre pour mettre en évidence la façon dont les réseaux sociaux contrôlaient l'accès au système de distribution électrique américain. Le lien entre les réseaux de soutien sur et hors scène a garanti la réussite du drame ; son échec s'est produit lorsque les adversaires ont rompu ces connexions. L'article examine d'abord l'infrastructure hors scène qui a soutenu *Power*, en particulier ses liens avec les réseaux de théâtre antérieurs. Il explore ensuite l'esthétique sur scène qui se développait au fur et à mesure qu'Arent utilisait les technologies du théâtre, en particulier les technologies alimentées par l'électricité, pour critiquer l'influence hors scène du pouvoir d'entreprise. L'article conclut en expliquant pourquoi la conjonction des réseaux qui avaient alimenté le succès de *Power* l'a également rendu politiquement vulnérable.

Mots-clés

Arthur Arent, *Power*, *Living Newspapers*, Bruno Latour, théorie de l'acteur-réseau

CRÉDITS PHOTO

VISUELS DE COUVERTURE (TOUS DANS LE DOMAINE PUBLIC)

1. Hallie Flanagan, director of the WPA Federal Theatre Project. Created *ca* 1939. Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress.
2. Windrip adresses the crowd in a rally in the San Francisco Federal Theatre Project production of *It Can't Happen Here*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
3. Photograph of the New York production of *One-Third of a Nation*, a Living Newspaper play by the Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
4. « Continue WPA ! », Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library. « Federal Theatre Project » The New York Public Library Digital Collections.
5. Crowd outside Lafayette Theatre on opening night, Classical Theatre, « *Voodoo* » *Macbeth*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
6. Scene from the Federal Theatre Project production of O'Neill's *One-Act Plays of the Sea* at the Lafayette Theatre (Oct. 1937-Jan. 1938), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, New York Public Library, «Mr. Neil's Barn»The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

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La collection « e-Theatrum Mundi » considère le théâtre sous tous ses angles et dans tous ses états. Dans la continuité de la collection papier à laquelle elle est adossée, elle se veut un lieu de réflexion sur les diverses manifestations d'expression théâtrale à travers le monde, et rassemble des travaux de recherche sur l'écriture, le jeu, les pratiques et les formes scéniques, la mise en scène et le spectateur. Sa particularité est de proposer uniquement des volumes interdisciplinaires, en lien avec le Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le théâtre et les pratiques scéniques de Sorbonne Université (PRITEPS), dont elle reflète les activités. En croisant les angles d'approche, la collection vise à provoquer des confrontations fructueuses entre les scènes, les langues et les méthodologies, dans le domaine des études théâtrales.

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