

Breaking Tradition: Reaching For The Avant-garde In Theatre For Young Audiences

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**BREAKING TRADITION:
REACHING FOR THE AVANT-GARDE IN THEATRE FOR YOUNG
AUDIENCES**

by

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B.F.A. Shenandoah University, 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to unearth the concept of breaking tradition in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in the United States by applying the avant-garde theory of Arnold Aronson as a lens through which to investigate the current development of US TYA. After formulating an approach in which to negotiate the concept of the avant-garde, I draft five tenets that currently define tradition in the field of US TYA. Situating these five tenets against Aronson's theoretical framework, I examine three contemporary US TYA plays from the past two centuries: *Black Butterfly*, *Hush: An Interview with America*, and *Atypical Boy*. Within these scripts, I probe for moments where these five tenets break to manifest possible tendencies toward the avant-garde. I then conclusively reflect and problematize these findings in order to raise questions about each script's relationship to the avant-garde and significance to the development of the field, ultimately provoking further discourse surrounding the role of avant-garde methodology within US TYA's current position and state of progression.

To Mom, Dad, MacKenzie, and Wiley, for never ceasing to believe, support, and encourage me
in my pursuit to follow my dreams.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Historically, movements of the avant-garde break boundaries; challenge the mainstream, ideals, and traditions. Throughout the centuries these movements help shape the development of performing and visual art across the world. In the United States, however, a fairly young and comparatively concentrated art form has yet to experience such a movement: Theatre for Young Audiences. As the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) continues rapid development nationally and globally, the current mainstream in American TYA remains firmly grounded in tradition, devoid of a predominant movement to break against traditional boundaries. This thesis investigates the notion of “breaking tradition” when applied to contemporary TYA in the United States. I aim to examine US TYA and its possible connections to the avant-garde by applying scholar Arnold Aronson’s study of the development of avant-garde theatre in the United States as a theoretical model for examining these traditions in which the field roots itself, as well as employ three pieces of contemporary dramatic literature in US TYA as a means for investigating these moments that may constitute as a break in tradition. Within this study, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of what role the avant-garde may play within US TYA, as well as explore the possibilities of a future movement toward the avant-garde based on the field’s current development.

In his book, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*, Aronson presents the evolution of the American avant-garde theatre movement (a period of approximately thirty years, 1950-1980) as influenced not only by the historical avant-garde activity in Europe, but also a combination of precise historical context, cultural explosion, and political worldview that

positioned the United States as primed for an avant-garde movement, or “breaking” of tradition.

(1). He further postulates that with these elements in place, a lengthy period of established tradition must present itself before even diminutive elements of an avant-garde can emerge.

Using Aronson’s theory as a framework, I will investigate TYA in the United States, surveying its historical development, specifically focusing on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in order to pinpoint five tenets that currently define tradition in the field. These tenets will provide the foundation for my exploration of precise moments in three US TYA scripts where established tradition has, or has not, been broken, and therefore uncover potential evidence for movement toward or away from the avant-garde.

To determine the connections present between American TYA and Aronson’s model of avant-garde theatre in the United States, I will apply Aronson’s model to US TYA, report, and reflect conclusively on my findings and reveal any relevant tensions that emerge from my research, complicating and questioning the conclusions that emerge. It is my hope that this thesis and will not only prove integral to my journey as a TYA practitioner in the United States, but also stimulate interest in a seemingly underdeveloped area of scholarly research in the field.

In the remainder of Chapter One, I aim to give the reader insight into my personal subject position and divulge the factors that triggered my interest to conduct research in both avant-garde theatre and US TYA. Chapter Two outlines the methodology and philosophical considerations pertaining to the overall design of my research study. Chapter Three presents Aronson’s model on the avant-garde as a guide and framework, through a review of key avant-garde literature as well as introduces my approach for navigating the term through an illustration of the key markers in which I characterize throughout my negotiation in this study. Chapter Four lays out my

proposed five tenets of tradition in US TYA that I determined based on a historical survey of TYA in the United States. Chapter Five details my assessment and analysis of possible moments in the three TYA plays *Black Butterfly*, *Hush: An Interview with America*, and *Atypical Boy* where tradition breaks and creates potential evidence of avant-garde tendencies. Finally, Chapter Six concludes with a conclusive reflection that summates the information presented in my findings and further questions, evaluates, and problematizes the relevance of this study in the larger context of the field.

To further discuss my research, the following working definitions provide insight and perspective into my understanding of key terms utilized throughout this project.¹

- Tradition: a long-established or inherited way of thinking or acting.
- Avant-garde: the advanced group in any field of study, especially in the arts, whose works are characterized chiefly by unorthodox and experimental methods, with the intention of affecting or altering perceptions, relations, and overall understanding of the world.

Background

As a first year graduate student with an undergraduate degree in Theatre for Youth, I enthusiastically entered my MFA program in Theatre for Young Audiences with a solid amount of knowledge and experience in the world of “Children’s Theatre.” Though established in my general understanding of the field, I sought increasingly deeper knowledge and refining of the specifics missing in my theatre training as an undergrad: theory, non-traditional methodologies, and an area of interest which came completely as a surprise: puppetry. Through class projects,

research, and conference attendance, I soon gained fresh passion and drive for the art of theatre through non-linear, non-traditional, non-verbal modes of communication on stage.

My continued pursuit and hunger for additional knowledge in each of these theatrical genres led me to specialized research studies in avant-garde theatre and puppetry, where I explored the world and art of historical avant-garde theatre in Europe, historical styles of puppetry used in performance art, along with theory and methodology based in interdisciplinary performance, as well as a study of experimental groups and artists like the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, Julie Taymor, and Meredith Monk, among others. My experience in scenic art and design added to this conglomeration of interests and resulted in further experimentation and exploration of each genre through a combination of image, collage, and puppetry with theatrical design as primary inspiration.

This smorgasbord of interests eventually began to meld and I soon applied my newly found fascinations in each of these arenas to my work in TYA through class projects, conference presentations, teaching opportunities with young people in the classroom and also in community based work. With my graduate school colleagues, I created a series of abstracted toy theatre performancesⁱⁱ that, after a showcase at the Orlando Puppet Festival and a presentation at the PSI #14 Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, eventually evolved into a devised scenic poem for young people combining the elements of toy theatre, theatrical design, digital media, and image. Though numerous moments of personal growth as a young theatre artist and scholar recurred during this time, I faced continual difficulty in locating research on professional artists, companies, performances, or scholarly publications in US TYA that highlighted or documented the experimental realms of performance and design.

In addition, my graduate residency at an Orlando based company, IBEX Puppetry, Inc., continued to fuel my curiosity regarding the avant-garde and its connections to young people, as I coordinated and directed the creation of large scale puppets for the 2008 Orlando Veteran's Day Parade and also assisted in programming for the (adult and family focused) 2008 Orlando Puppet Festival. During the festival, I observed (similar to my experiences in TYA) that the majority of puppet productions presented to adults utilized many elements and techniques derived from the avant-garde movements in my studies. The performances for young people, however, remained grounded in realistic, narrative, and often-didactic fairy tale based forms of traditional, literature driven theater that formed my training prior to graduate school.

The spring of my second year of graduate study produced my first encounter with more experimental productions for young audiences, when I received a scholarship to attend the 2008 International Performing Arts for Youth (IPAY) in Tampa, FL. The Showcase presented a myriad of International TYA companies and performance pieces, many of an interdisciplinary nature, incorporating elements of circus arts, puppetry, gymnastics, and other genres of visual and performing arts with theatre. I quickly gleaned that the type of work for young people I longed for in my research prevailed internationally, but only occurred sporadically in the US via touring international performance groups. Though I was thrilled at the opportunity to experience such a vast array of "alternative" types of performance (by my fairly naive US standards) for young people, I hoped to further understand why American TYA did not collectively accept or integrate these alternative performance methodologies, as well as document when and where these forms occurred, if they indeed existed within the US.

This research evolved as a culmination of my experiences at IPAY in 2008 and my graduate studies as I conducted research and received practical experience in applying the avant-garde and puppetry to my work. My practical experience, when combined with the lack of available theoretical research connecting the avant-garde to US TYA prompted this research. Through this study, I hope to present findings that will insight and prompt further dialogue as well as inspire creation and a broader base of acceptance for this type of work in the field that connects US TYA with the avant-garde.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The methodology I implemented for this study consisted of qualitative research strategies applied to a Social Constructivist worldview. In the third edition of *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, John W. Creswell presents the Constructivist Worldview as one in which individuals develop multiple subjective meanings of the world. These varied meanings allow research to explore complex views and open-ended questions. Constructivist researchers acknowledge their own backgrounds and allow its influence to shape their interpretation of data through personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Additionally, the Social Constructivist Worldview intends for the researcher to “make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have of the world around them” (Creswell 8). This particular methodology felt appropriate, especially considering the vast amount of fluidity and transparency surrounding a notion as complex as the avant-garde. Choosing a methodology that not only would acknowledge the plurality of the art form I examine, as well as provide space for acknowledgement of my subject position and the subject positions of others as additional influence on the outcomes of my research proved vastly important.

With this research methodology in place, I decided to implement a Historical Study as the most appropriate means of qualitative research strategy for my project. This process, as defined by J. Amos Hatch in his book *Qualitative Research in Education Settings*, involves the collection and analysis of unobtrusive data from a variety of secondary sources. For this particular project, these sources include texts, journal articles, published interviews, production reviews, video

clips, script analysis, online research, and informal discussion with experts in the field of US TYA. According to Hatch, the historiographer's primary objective remains to "examine potential sources of data for authenticity and accuracy, to make interpretations based on multiple data sources," weaving these into a "set of meaningful explanations" (25). This strategy served my need to research the American avant-garde theatre movement and survey available avant-garde literature separately from my research in the history of TYA in the United States, then layer Aronson's model and my personal approach to the avant-garde onto contemporary US TYA, with the ultimate goal as searching for "meaningful explanation" through the examination and analysis of three contemporary plays for avant-garde tendencies (Hatch 25).

Because my study resulted in several stages of research, I first examine the current canon of literature for avant-garde theatre, using Aronson's model as a lead piece of information as I navigate through the vast amount of material available in avant-garde canon. Then, I present Aronson's findings on the avant-garde as a foundational framework, and then explore its opposition and tradition through the following research questions:

- What, if anything, constitutes tradition in US TYA?
- What specific tenets compose tradition in US TYA?
- What cultural, historical, and political contexts have influenced ideas of tradition in US TYA?

With my theoretical lens and supporting sources established, along with these guiding questions, I move forward into the second phase of research to survey the historical development of Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States, analyzing in order to formulate five tenets of tradition that dictate US TYA's "mainstream." Then, aligning these five tenets of tradition

with my approach to the avant-garde, I search for and identify specific moments in three TYA scripts written within the last two centuries that challenge or break these five tenets. I then assess and analyze the results of this process to provide a context for the relationship between each script and the avant-garde.

In order to investigate and present a manageable amount of data in the overall scope of this study, I acknowledge upfront that this is not a comprehensive presentation in the history of Theatre for Young Audiences or avant-garde theatre. However, I strongly believe that illuminating and highlighting significant moments in the history of TYA in the United States within this study allows me to further question, complicate, connect, and problematize the role of the avant-garde in relation to the TYA field. As my study progressed, the initial set of research questions I posed prompted an additional, more specific set of guiding questions specifically related to the breaking of tradition in US TYA, focusing me toward the second phase of research:

- In these moments of breaking tradition, what (if any) formalized avant-garde tendencies and influences emerge?
- Is TYA in the United States at the cusp of developing its own avant-garde, or is this idea connected with Theatre for Young Audiences irrelevant?
- How does living and creating in a post-modern society complicate these ideas and questions that are based on a field and historical research developed prior to post-modernism?

Research Constraints

The largest research constraints I encountered in this study were time and accessibility to production documentation (video and performance texts) and historical information regarding the

history of US TYA. My research developed over a six to seven month period where I reviewed literature and gathered relevant historical sources. After informal consultations and discussion with Kim Peter Kovak, Producing Director of TYA at the Kennedy Center and Meghann Henry and Jeff Church of The Coterie Theatre, I concluded that my access to production materials, video documentation, and specific historical sources would be limited and then began another dialogue with my colleagues about researching contemporary US TYA scripts instead. As a result, I chose to move forward focusing solely on scripts as primary variables to analyze rather than production video or performance texts, in order to further narrow and define the boundaries of my project. This resulted in my selection of three plays written within the last two centuries in US TYA to analyze and examine against my research on the avant-garde for the final phase of my study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPROACH

In Chapter Three, I outline theoretical studies within the current canon of literature pertaining to the theatrical avant-garde. I first examine and introduce content from *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History*, by Arnold Aronson, the main text and theory that roots my study, and then provide an examination of additional literature relevant to Aronson's survey of avant-garde theatre in the United States. This review of literature on the avant-garde provides a foundation for my selection of Aronson's research as the main theoretical framework for my study, and additionally provides a display of current canon of literary offerings in the theatrical avant-garde.

Aronson and the American Avant-garde

In his definitive text *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, Aronson, renowned professor and researcher of the theatrical avant-garde in America, chronicles the emergence of the US avant-garde movement and presents a theoretical model justifying the birth and development of the movement, while also critically examining its origins through comparison to the historical avant-garde in Europe. Though Aronson's text presents a comprehensive historical survey of the US avant-garde movement in its entirety, for the purposes of this study my research focuses upon the contents of the first two chapters: *Origins of the Avant-garde* and *Theories and Foundations* (211).

In the book's opening chapter, Aronson questions why such a significant number of years passed (approximately sixty to seventy) prior to an avant-garde movement in the United

States (10). According to Aronson, the avant-garde movement in the US began in the 1950's after WWII, transpiring after (and ultimately largely influenced by) the European avant-garde movement during the nineteenth century. He interrogates the possible reasons for this delayed development, positing that no solid mainstream was established prior to this time, and therefore, no need arose for an adversarial position to emerge against traditional culture. Because of its inherent need for opposition, Aronson claims that the avant-garde cannot exist without “an established, dominant, culture—an ensconced and static culture” (10). He additionally states that:

There was a bold spirit of experimentation—a rebellion against the mainstream commercial system and the utter rejection of the status quo....it was an approach that rejected the beliefs and expectations of traditional audiences and radically altered both the aesthetic and the organizational basis upon which performance was created. (3)

Aronson theorizes that *in order for an avant-garde movement to emerge as an adversary to conventional theatrical practice, an element of “tradition” in conventional practice must first be firmly established*. This explicit statement becomes the crux and foundation for which the rest of my study will evolve, and also serves as the lens for which I view the current state of US TYA as my study progresses, as I work to uncover potential moments where TYA reaches for or exhibits avant-garde tendencies. Beyond this singular idea of established tradition or mainstream, Aronson also believes that the cultural, historical, and political landscape of a nation greatly contributes to the timeline of when opportunity for agitation burgeons:

For an avant-garde to emerge in the United States of America it was necessary to disrupt the central position of narrative in the American mythos, and for artists to take an oppositional stance to established culture. (14)

Additionally, by illuminating the many years before the movement when the United States maintained an overly idealistic culture, Aronson points out the necessity for an establishment of traditional theatrical practice in the United States prior to the emergence of the avant-garde (13). “The avant-garde theatre that emerged in the 1950s could not coexist within the larger framework because it had never been, in conception or execution, part of it. As composer and theoretician John Cage understood, the new spirit of experimentation was ‘not bound to the past [or] traditions’” (Aronson 4).

As he continues, Aronson delves into the ever-changing and challenging conversation of defining the avant-garde, with hopes that a definition will allow for further understanding of its origins. To interpret the avant-garde, Aronson emphasizes the importance of its relationship to “tradition.” This adversarial relationship between the avant-garde and tradition emerges over and over, an integral piece of his theory for the development of the US avant-garde movement:

Traditional ways of seeing are disrupted so that habitual patterns...are broken. A change in an individual’s attitudes, associations, or beliefs is effected not through a straightforward presentation of ideas but through a fundamental restructuring of perception and understanding. (Aronson 7)

This passage also highlights the notion of tradition as stemming from a variety of sources. Tradition’s definition stems from cultural, by political, or by historical contexts, and it is these multiple contexts in which I will continue to reflect upon throughout my project, relying

on Aronson's theory as a framework for interrogating the state of American TYA. Could Aronson's theory hold true when aligned with the context of US TYA's current cultural, historical, and political landscape? Has our field existed long enough for opposition to tradition to emerge?

In addition, Aronson also discusses an aesthetic breaking of tradition, a shift toward a more interdisciplinary approach to theatre. This shift causes the "traditional barriers between, dance, music, and art [begin] to crumble," leaving the fundamental notion of "what is theatre?" as the prominent, lingering question (Aronson 3, 7). Other forms of art became the "reference points" for art itself, as opposed to reality or the external in traditional theatre practice (Aronson 5). Avant-garde disrupts the "normal systems of communication-the recognition of signs" audiences use to recognize and categorize something as a theatrical event (Aronson 8). The semiotics of theatre skew and thwart against the "normal" signs that fit into the mind's category of "theatre." Aronson posits that liberation and enlightenment from tradition, in reaction to the breaking and shifting of the aforementioned elements all contributed to the changes in American theatre in the 1950s with the emergence of the avant-garde movement.

Theoretical discourse offered by earlier avant-garde theorists support Aronson, many of them influencing his thinking, perhaps by providing inspiration. Rennato Poggioli, author of *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, strongly emphasizes the important tension between tradition and the vanguard when he defines the term as "the extreme anti-classical reaction of the modern spirit," citing that classicism (Poggioli's equivalent to tradition) only operates "as a retrospective utopia, as a logical counterbalance to the futuristic utopia" (222, 231). Poggioli's theories, though markedly the earliest research on the subject, echo throughout the scholarly writings of those

who follow him and pave the way for the contemporary writings of avant-garde theorists David Graver and Gunter Berghaus, both who present additional evidence for the avant-garde's adversarial role and position against tradition, as well as a clear modality for articulating this relationship.

As he critically navigates early twentieth century drama to define the "anti-art" of the avant-garde, Graver postulates that "avant-garde works arise from an elaborate contention of traditions concerning the form and function of art" and positions avant-garde artists in an extreme stance, as "enemies of the current sociopolitical power structure" (2). From Graver's perspective, avant-garde artists always encounter "a marginal, adversarial relationship to the established (predominantly bourgeois) culture" (3). As he digs deeper into an exploration of the more radical contours of the avant-garde like "anti-art," total rejection of the establishment is evident, violent, and highly political in the most extreme aspect: "avant-garde art rejects such traditional ideas as those of order, intelligibility, and even success: art is supposed to become an experience—deliberately conducted---of failure and crisis" (Graver 8).

Similarly, Berghaus elects tradition as a defining characteristic of the avant-garde, and, like Graver, denotes a presence of aggression that pushes against the establishment. *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde*, a collection of writings based on a lecture series presented by Berghaus, outlines the emergence of the theatrical avant-garde in Europe with immense detail, contextualizing the historical avant-garde's connection to the emergence of the avant-garde in the United States. Berghaus presents this context succinctly and includes in-depth research on concept, theory, and practice of Europe's avant-garde movement, positing that the avant-garde must "denote the practice of *assaulting traditional authorities and cultural*

institutions” (fig. 1.3, 35). This added element of violence within opposition builds as he further emphasizes its adversarial tension: “Avant-garde artists oppose conventional concepts, values, and standards” (Berghaus, fig. 1.3, 35). As Berghaus categorizes the avant-garde artists who rebelled against convention, he points out again that “it was a characteristic trait of all avant-garde movements that their opposition to the established canons of art went hand in hand *with a battle against the guardians of tradition and social propriety*” (Berghaus 37).

In the remaining collections of avant-garde writings I surveyed, each author presented ideas supporting Aronson’s as they negotiated, discussed, and attempted to define the avant-garde. In *Performing Drama/Dramatizing Performance*, Vanden Heuvel describes historical avant-garde theatre as “explicit opposition of prevailing culture” (48). Scholars Cardullo and Knopf continue this sentiment and state that “on the surface, avant-garde may seem united in terms of what it is against: accepted social institutions and established artistic conventions, or the tastes and values of the ‘general public’ as that represents the existing order” (5). Similarly still, in an interview published in *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-garde’s* collection of articles and essays, Richard Schechner explains that the “avant-garde largely set itself against normative, mainstream, orthodox behaviors and values” (212). As editor, Harding continues his interview with Schechner and the conversation progresses to explore the relationship between the avant-garde and tradition spatially, positioning the two in a visual framework and focusing on the physical space between. “There are always boundaries, borders not to be crossed in the mainstream. And it is at those borders that the avant-garde operates” (Harding 212, 213). This mention of tangible space between tradition and the avant-garde continues as Harding rightfully mentions Richard Kostelantz’s characterization of the avant-garde as “establishing discernable

distance between itself and the mass of current practices” (7). The significance of Kostelantz’s statement complicates the notions of both tradition and the avant-garde by highlighting the spaces in between them, spaces of varying levels and degrees (a virtual sliding scale of grey area) of what constitutes ‘avant-garde vs. mainstream’ and in turn contributes to the vast fluidity of its nature as well as the complexities within its relationship to tradition.

Regardless of the time period, culture, or location in which the avant-garde movement occurs, my findings indicate that the majority of the literature available concerning the avant-garde mentions this idea of “established tradition as opponent” to the avant-garde, proving key to my study and affirming Aronson’s claims. In addition, the majority of my research consented that time, distance, aggressive, and often-violent connections between these opposing forces fuse to create an unyielding, adversarial tension. This fusion of these elements ultimately culminates in the creation of the intense oppositional relationship between the avant-garde and the mainstream of traditional culture.

Next, I outline in greater detail my approach to the term, specifically highlighting the characteristics and various dimensions as presently discussed in the current canon of avant-garde literature. I then follow my approach to the avant-garde with a discussion that creates a context for discussing tradition. Then, I conclude this section by expounding upon how these two approaches directly shape and influence my perspective as I move through a second phase of historical research in US TYA to detail what constitutes tradition in the field as well as my examination of US TYA plays.

Approaching the Avant-garde

The ultimate fluidity of the avant-garde's nature remains a major challenge for any researcher who attempts to categorize or define it. The avant-garde's contours thrive in grey areas; no concrete or fixed method for concretely distinguishing or discussing the notion exists due to its inherent subjectivity and flexible nature. James M. Harding, in his introduction to *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-garde*, highlights this evident irony in academia's continual attempt to solidify the avant-garde as he comments on the multitude and range of definitions presented within the contents of his book alone. "What is the avant-garde?" is not all together consistent with the answers that emerge from the essays themselves. That is perhaps as it should be. Definitions of the avant-garde are legion. They are tendentious, combative, and contested" (Harding 5).

Harding also states that the pliancy of the term and the debates surrounding it do create a positive result: "they signal an enduring resilience that the avant-garde has sustained in part by fluidity in definition" as well as its ability to not only attack establishment, but itself too, in order to survive and remain prosperous (Harding 5,6). This "constant state of rebellion" that many critics advocate the avant-garde maintains also continually evolves as does the definition itself, fueling a continual state of renewal for both, as the ideas of what it means to be in a "constant state of rebellion" perpetually evolve along with the notion of defining avant-garde (Harding 6). Harding, like Aronson, acknowledges the unfortunate stigma associated with types of performance that "pass as avant-garde today" by pointing out that the 'ever-evolving, sense of rebellion' aspect of the avant-garde actually helps in distinguishing the authentic from the more trendy, indiscriminant applications of the term (Harding 6).

Therefore, for this project, rather than attempt to add another definition of avant-garde to the seemingly unending tabulation, I acknowledge upfront the resilience surrounding the term's existence and strive to implement my research of many avant-garde theorists as a more pluralistic approach to the avant-garde for this project. Additionally, I aim to highlight this notion of multiplex within the avant-garde in order to create a clear vocabulary for which to articulate my analysis of the scripts I later examine for a potential 'reaching toward' or tendency of the avant-garde.

As it generates the framework for this study, I begin this approach to the avant-garde by examining Aronson's methods for negotiating the term, then follow with a discussion of characteristics or markers compiled from Aronson and others' writings of avant-garde theatre and art. I triangulate these characteristics with additional supporting data, in order to establish a solid foundation for each characteristic or marker. Then I implement each as variables to align against the established tenets of tradition in US TYA.

Aronson's Negotiation

Even in his preface to *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, Aronson acknowledges the often misinterpretation and unfortunate stigma attached to ideas of the avant-garde throughout history as the notion developed. He feels that the term avant-garde "has been applied indiscriminately, almost as an epithet, to a wider range of performance that falls outside the boundaries of naturalism or realism—that is, narrative, psychological, melodramatic theatre," and with his research proposes a more narrow definition through a close examination of its origin. (xi)

Beyond his crucial assessment that the avant-garde must position itself against established traditional culture, Aronson also feels that many fail to recognize that the avant-garde initially aimed to “transform society” and “[create] an idealistic world for the future” (6). Artists established themselves as the front line, marching forward with a “missionary zeal as well as a political and sociological implications” striving for innovation in the “cultural landscape” (Aronson 6). This “destruction of boundaries,” may be applied to any and all forms of the avant-garde (Aronson 21).

Characteristics or Markers of the Avant-garde

The following assemblage of characteristics I compiled that mark the avant-garde emerged mainly from my research of Aronson, but additionally reflect the views and research of Graver, Berghaus, Kirby, Poggioli, Vanden Heuval, Puchner, and Harding. These markers include: intrusion within the historic definition, duality within the political and aesthetic, the audience, semiotics, absence of narrative, interdisciplinary nature, practice before theory, and art manifestos.

Even the characteristic of “*intrusion*” *within the historic definition* of avant-garde finds itself in Poggioli’s first survey of the idea many centuries ago. He speaks of it as an “attempt to enlarge the frontiers” or to “invade other territories,” an important aspect of the avant-garde’s ability to manifest and expand not only in depth as an art form, but also in breadth (Poggioli 133). Michael Kirby, in *The Art of Time*, also emphasizes intrusion when pointing out the “historical directionality” of the term’s military roots. Kirby notes that the term advance guard suggests the presence of a rear guard, or a follower, which creates this directionality. This “impulse to

redefine, to contradict, to continue the sensed directionality of art as far as they are able” (Kirby 18, 19) parallels the invasive yet innovative elements present in Aronson’s discussion.

Gunter Berghaus, in defining the avant-garde, subscribes to this belief as well, stating that “avant-garde artists aim at absolute originality in their creations” and “operate in uncharted terrain with genuinely novel means of expression” to create works of art utterly different from others produced in the same time, “initially appreciated by only a small number of connoisseurs” (35). Berghaus’ approach, slightly different than that of Aronson’s, highlights an intrusiveness that emerges specifically for those of high culture. In addition to his definition, Berghaus creates three forms in which he states that the avant-garde’s initial conceptions emerged.ⁱⁱⁱ He also points out, similarly to Aronson, that not only does the artist possess the ability to perceive proximate change, but also visualizes how these changes “will affect society,” in turn placing art in a “visionary role” with the artist acting as “an instrument of change” (Berghaus 39, 40). I question if this idea of intrusion as a marker of the avant-garde applies to American TYA at present, given our current cultural context. Is the original, most historical, militant root that characterizes the avant-garde irrelevant or does it still apply?

The challenging *duality within the political and aesthetic* aspects of the avant-garde also remains a key characteristic. “The tensions and contradictions between art as a socially transformative tool and art as an aesthetic exploration would present an ongoing struggle for avant-garde artists” (Aronson 6). Must the avant-garde possess both of these characteristics to exist? Aronson feels that the avant-garde of the 1950s was rooted in both, but, that even without “specific political agenda, successful avant-garde theatre has political, social, and personal implications for its viewers” (Aronson 7). With this statement Aronson makes an important

point: that the choice itself (to create radical or avant-garde art that demonstrates anything “other” than tradition and actively opposes it) implies politics as well as personal and social significance, even if the content does not push a political agenda.

Understanding the relationship between the political and aesthetic elements that help us approach the avant-garde prove complex. Graver reports that throughout the history of avant-garde art, the pendulum between *politicized* and *aestheticized* avant-garde continually swings as the decades progress, seemingly never to land in one place. Art considered avant-garde in early nineteenth century Europe was politically charged, later making way for an avant-garde focused in aesthetics with the emerging of Symbolism at the end of the nineteenth century. Fast-forward to the eras of Futurism and Dadaism and aggressively politicized avant-garde takes over once again until aestheticized Surrealism takes the lead once more. (Graver 4, 5) While Graver acknowledges that many moments exist where the two types may overlap and intertwine, his terms create a distinct vocabulary for delineation and establish a clear relationship for the avant-garde’s political and aesthetic elements. Within this vocabulary, Graver delves further and introduces categories for politicized and aestheticized avant-garde.

Graver’s Categories of the Avant-garde:

- ***Partisan Art:*** politically tied, “engaged in criticizing the status quo,” interested in executing a utopian vision.
- ***Secessionist Art:*** art for art’s sake, “aesthetically innovative artists” that want to create art that does not affirm the dominant culture and “cannot be readily transformed into simple, pleasure giving commodities”

- **Engaged Art:** Artists with an “innovative aesthetic program” but who also have a futuristic and sociopolitical interest without ties to “practical partisan political applications” as a necessity for their art. “Using art to analyze and transform habits of thought and ideological prejudices rather than to incite enthusiasm for an immediate political goal.
- **Anti-art:** attacks the idea or some presuppositions of art: autonomy of work, craft in which raw material is manipulated, availability to the public.

(Graver 12-14)

The political and aesthetic elements of the avant-garde lead directly to another crucial marker: *the audience*. Aronson states “true avant-garde theatre must seek an essential change in audience perceptions, that, in turn, will have a profound impact on the relationship of the spectator to the world” (7). Avant-garde theatre pushes past tradition to challenge the learned behavior of passive participation. It breaks away from cultural tradition and theatrical ritual to obliterate accepted conduct the spectator normally enters into the experience with (9). “Ideas alone can be subsumed into a passive response, but the avant-garde requires engagement on some level” (7). This position of activity and engagement the audience experiences in avant-garde theatre leads to an alteration of perception, a cyclical relationship between the spectator and the purpose of the work that occurs. Audience as central figure in the participation and creation of the work remains a “key component of avant-garde art,” proving the importance and inseparability of ideology and performance in the whole of avant-garde art (Aronson 7, 25).

How does this marker (audience) affect the impact of potential avant-garde tendencies in American TYA, a field that serves such a specific demographic of audience?

The process of meaning making, or *semiotics*, also presents itself in an entirely different way in avant-garde theatre. It embeds the audience, continually asking for active involvement in a new process of meaning making, as traditional theatrical framing devices, communication systems, and recognizable signs and symbols become “thwarted or disrupted” (Aronson 7, 8). The audience’s *theatrical competence*^{iv}, a term denoted from Keir Elam, shifted “as new structures, strategies, and patterns were established,” and as a result “new understandings became possible and new forms emerged” (Aronson 8). Vanden Heuvel points out that the avant-garde also played with theatrical competence through the creation of innovative environments that “radicalized use of traditional dramatic elements” like language and setting. These produced parodies of traditional staging, naturalistic acting, as well as the total rejection of the dramatic text. Heuvel pronounces this total renunciation of script as the “single most radical and potentially subversive change effected” for the avant-garde during the 1960’s (Vanden Heuvel 33, 34, 60). In American TYA, what, if any, dramatic forms have emerged to push against audiences’ “theatrical competence”? As I proceed in my investigation of three US TYA scripts, I discuss the potential shift in theatrical competence that exists in relation to the field’s specific demographic based on the scripts I analyze.

The narrative, a major dramatic device that contributes to not only the dramatic text but also to theatrical competence in traditional theatre, aids in the creation of yet another characteristic of the avant-garde with the absence of its presence. A linear form of storytelling, the narrative holds fast as the one structural element to remain predominant in traditional

dramatic form, most noticeably in Western culture, through the majority of the twentieth century. In the United States, this proves especially true, where the narrative serves as “an illusionistic replication of the external world framed and placed in a context so as to convince the observer of its reality” (Aronson 10). Influenced by the writings of Gertrude Stein, Aronson postulates that because the narrative device became so commonplace, that it in turn lost some of its “power as an artistic tool” (Aronson 10). A need for disruption proves essential in achieving the shock and awe inherent in the avant-garde. Stein acknowledged that the audience brings with them many needs, “emotional and perceptual,” but those particular needs do not require that of a narrative (Aronson 10, 27).

Therefore, *absence of narrative* becomes a “primary underpinning of avant-garde” (Aronson 22). This type of theatre, not based in linear story, theme, or illusion, became so called non-literary theatre, lacking the ability to be read like classic literature. Non-literary, avant-garde theatre was “primarily formal, schematic, intellectually derived, and dependent upon aesthetic rather than visceral emotion” (Aronson 5). Vanden Heuval sees this lack of narrative as an attempt in which artists of the 1960s “circumvent[ed] the rational, intellectual aspect of traditionally literary drama,” not at all lacking intentions but as a calculated strategy to “replace it with a more intuitive, visceral, body-oriented performance theatre that would act as a celebration of life rather than a cerebralized slice of it.” (30)

Additionally, the melding of art forms, or an *interdisciplinary approach*, equally remains an integral characteristic of avant-garde art. As Aronson looks to the early champions of the historical avant-garde movement, Marcel DuChamp, John Cage, and Gertrude Stein, he notes that “typifying the avant-garde were the dual impulses to eliminate boundaries between art,

music, literature, and performance,” an impulse that engineered new art along with a new understanding for each of the art forms involved (20). John Cage’s also posited that each genre should not be independent of each other but strive to engage in equal “dialogue” amongst each other in order to “maintain its own identity and characteristics” (Aronson 21). This created a relationship made “of discrete elements in creative tension and dialogue” (Aronson 5). These elements engaged in dialogue together helped create the avant-garde theatre that emerged in New York during the 1950s, an “art in which the reference points were other forms of art” (Aronson 21).

Yet another marker that aids in identifying the avant-garde emerges from the non-traditional habit of *developing practice before theory*. Pioneers of both avant-garde movements in Europe and the United States like Duchamp, Stein, and Cage theorized through writings and manifestos *after* experimentation in practical form. Aronson points out that the avant-garde was the first to reverse this pattern in the history of the theatre. He states that “in most, if not all cases, intellectual idea preceded practice, and the theatre was built upon a theoretical foundation. The avant-garde, however, reversed this age-old process” (Aronson 20). In instances where US TYA breaks tradition, does practice indeed follow theory?

As a result of practice occurring prior to theory, a surge in the production of *art manifestos* also occurred during the development of the US avant-garde, echoing the pattern of its European counterpart. As Martin Puchner emphasizes in *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-garde*, art and political manifestos began to “spring up everywhere, articulating dissent, accusation, and resistance” (212). The political and cultural landscape of the time, combined with the explosion of avant-garde art, became a “powerful formula for the

manifesto” (Puchner 211). He maintains throughout the book the power and connection between the use of the manifesto and the development of avant-garde art, relaying that it intensely affects the studies of the avant-garde (6). What, if any, current writing in Theatre for Young Audiences stands out as a manifesto, and does this characteristic of the avant-garde apply to the current state of the field? I aim to apply this and all characteristics of the avant-garde to my examination of each US TYA script as I look for evidence of avant-garde tendencies.

Additionally, I would like to present an interesting component within the research on avant-garde theatre. In, *Not the Other Avant-garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-garde Performance*, editors James M. Harding and John Rouse compile a group of essays that confront all perspectives of previous research on the avant-garde. Harding and Rouse make a solid case for a shifting of perspective on future avant-garde research, citing that all previous notions and theories relating to avant-garde art hold a *Eurocentric cultural bias* based solely upon Western thinking and stand without acknowledgement of Non-European cultures’ role in the development of a global avant-garde. They petition for finding a *transnational* understanding that includes acknowledgement of the artistic innovations in other cultures, a theory that derives from the notions of postmodernism and border theory. Harding and Rouse feel that the entire field of avant-garde theory must move into a place that includes a “border” theory of multiple avant-gardes:

The most crucial revision of that paradigm... is the recognition of a plurality of edges devoid of an identifiable center, a plurality that the rectilinear center-to-edge/edge-to-center convention in scholarship on the

avant-garde has obscured. Here, a rethinking of the avant-garde can fruitfully begin with a move from a singular to plural notion of the edge. In simplest terms, that move necessitates that we conceptualize our notion of the vanguard within a theory of borders, and that we supplant the cutting edge with the rough edges of consternation... (24)

How does the discovery of this new perspective on the research methodology of the avant-garde affect my study and the approach to the avant-garde I present? It strongly supports my pluralistic approach to the avant-garde for this study, as well as creates awareness for avant-garde movements that exist throughout every culture. It additionally deepens my understanding of the importance of historiographical context, as I take on the role of historiographer in this study. While I do acknowledge this theory as a researcher and understand its value in a general context, I also question its specific relevance, as my study *is* purposefully based in Western culture (US), a country heavily influenced from the historical avant-garde in Europe presented from a Western perspective (my personal subject position as an American). I posit that this research may also aid me in solidifying my beliefs that an avant-garde movement in US TYA's future proves possible, as this belief emerged from an acknowledgement of multiple avant-gardes that currently move through our international community of TYA, (as many cultures outside of the US present and have long been presenting non-traditional work for young people) which exemplifies Harding and Rouse's idea of transnationalism.

A Context for Tradition

In a more succinct fashion, I present now a working definition for the term tradition that relates to this study. Though this word and ideology presents a slightly less controversial debate,

I believe it is equally as important to address, as an understanding of tradition becomes the basis for Aronson's theory and foundation for the second phase of my project as I gather the tenets that constitute tradition in Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States. As I began my research to gauge the writing available concerning tradition, inside the realm of theatre as well as outside, I realized the subject proved less concrete a topic that I initially thought. Just as with the avant-garde, although not nearly as charged as the debates surrounding it, different perspectives surrounding a definition of tradition emerged as well. The research that follows outlines the significance of the term and the contexts for which I will be applying in it when I align Aronson's theory against US TYA.

In the article "The Avant-garde Industry," Daryl Chin defines tradition as the entity that the avant-garde breaks apart from, again echoing Aronson's sentiment, as he argues that avant-garde literally cannot exist without it (59). Richard Schechner, in an interview from *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-garde*, refers to Chin's article as he answers the question, "What is Tradition?" while discussing its relationship to the avant-garde. Schechner states: "Tradition is etymologically related to the idea of trade. It means handing something down, taking something from an elder. Tradition suggests that whatever you are doing someone else did it before roughly in the same way. Certainly this can't be the avant-garde" (211, 212). He further points out that within his definition, the avant-garde, paradoxically, becomes a tradition itself, that not only does it rebel against authority, but rebels as art in the form of lineages, continually being passed down as time, art, and culture move forward (Harding 212). Harding's thought further complicates the relationship between tradition and the avant-garde, pointing out that they are not only connected by linear means, but are also connected cyclically. For when what was once seen

as the element that breaks tradition *becomes* the tradition, another element that breaks tradition, or the new avant-garde, must replace it.

Theatre director and contributing editor of “The Drama Review,” Eugenio Barba offers additional insight about the nature of tradition from an international theatre artist’s perspective. In his article, “The Essence of Theatre,” Barba deems the word tradition as “ambiguous” when describing those who founded theatrical tradition of the twentieth century, commenting that initially when we think of the word, we envision the receipt of something effortlessly thrown to us from the past (12). He urges, however, that when viewing tradition, theatre artists take a more active stance and regard tradition as “...the exercising of refusal. It is our retrospective look at the human beings, the craft, the very History that has preceded us [theatre artists] and from which we choose to distance ourselves through the continuity of our work.”

This idea of pushing away of our past in order to move forward while attempting to stay connected epitomizes the undeniable relationship between tradition and the avant-garde. Barbra continually stresses the importance of complicating the idea of tradition while also reflecting upon history in order to provide motivation toward a viable future:

To question ourselves about tradition means to reflect on the instinct of revolt that guided our first steps toward a horizon which today shuts us in, or which perhaps still incites us to keep on going as it grows ever more distant. It also means asking ourselves how to escape the voracity of the present, while holding on to this splinter of the past for which we alone represent the future. (22)

Barba also proposes that tradition possesses multiple dimensions, a plurality similar to the postmodern view of the existence of multiple avant-gardes:

There no longer exists one single theatre tradition, a central model to act as a means of orientation. The big bang generated small nomadic traditions whose genesis was the work of a totem, a reforming artist who combined a visionary power with technical solutions that put it into practice. (28)

Establishing a foundation in which to approach, articulate, and categorize the avant-garde, along with creating a starting point from which to view tradition allows a solid ground from which to scrutinize contemporary US TYA scripts and analyze their connections to the avant-garde. With Aronson's theoretical framework and characteristics of the avant-garde as a primary guide, and the additional theory and vocabulary of scholars like Graver and Berghaus as supplemental grounding, I move forward to outline the tenets of tradition in US TYA through historical survey, and examine what, if any, moments of breaking tradition exist in the last two centuries of TYA scripts in the United States.

CHAPTER FOUR: FIVE TENETS OF TRADITION IN AMERICAN TYA

Before beginning to examine examples of dramatic literature in the short history of American Theatre for Young Audiences that illustrate how the field may or may not touch the avant-garde, establishment of what constitutes tradition, or the mainstream in TYA proves crucial. In order to explore the origins of tradition in American TYA, I surveyed the canon of available historical documentation with the intent to understand what variables contributed to the foundations of the field. In addition, I scoured the myriad play anthologies available for young people in order to apprehend what reoccurring themes, ideologies, and performance structures surfaced through the current canon of scripts that permeate the field. In addition, I researched the work of current theorists, education researchers and practitioners in TYA, recognizing that the relationship between TYA and Education have culminated an interdependent relationship since the beginning of our history. This research presents what I believe to be the five most crucial elements that represent the current mainstream in American TYA.

Five Tenets of Tradition in American TYA

- Adaptations of Literature and Fairytales
- Linear Narrative Structure
- Script Driven Performance
- Educational and Social Objectives
- The Role (or lack thereof) of the Child as Audience

I will expound upon each tenet in the paragraphs that follow, exploring each as they relate to form, content, and function in the context of Theatre for Young Audiences throughout its history. I would like to acknowledge upfront the myriad reasons, including but not limited to cultural, political, and social influences that justify why these tenets have created the mainstream of TYA. This thesis will focus primarily on their existence and individual effect on the development of material written and presented for young people in the last two centuries and what (if anything) currently breaks this mainstream, rather than focus solely on examining why these particular elements exist in the current mainstream. I believe it is also important to note that while each tenet chosen possesses its own unique and distinct role in the creation of US TYA's mainstream, many facets of each tenet blur and seep into the others to create fluid relationships and malleable connections to each other, ironically similar to that of the blurred borders that surround theories of the avant-garde.

Tenet One: Adaptations of Literature and Fairytales

Since the incarnation of TYA in the early eighteenth century, the use of popular fairytales, folktales, and children's literature as source material permeates the canon of dramatic literature for young audiences. This early trend continues to saturate the field today, and although the amount of new plays produced each year continues to steadily grow (scripts that contribute original stories as well as "newer" adaptations of children's literature, fairy and folktales), this "genre" of script within US TYA persists to dominate the season line ups of leading professional theatres that produce and present productions for youth.

Evidence of this long-time mainstream of the field lies in nearly every play anthology for young people, historical record, and theoretical commentary from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries written in relation to TYA. Roger Bedard, veteran scholar of US TYA, addresses this particular tenet as he reports on the short history of US TYA in his introduction of the renowned anthology *Dramatic Literature for Children: A Century in Review* (2nd Ed.):

Most plays commercially produced during this time (late nineteenth century) were based on popular children's books or fairytales. This reliance on known and marketable material obviously met the monetary needs of the commercial stage; but it also set a precedent, and, for many decades after, playwrights rarely used original subjects for their children's plays (Bedard 9).

Other noted scholars and practitioners in the field from the last two decades support Bedard's sentiment. Orlin Corey, founder of the legendary Everyman Players and former Publisher of Anchorage Press Plays, too, found it important to note in his 1974 publication *Theatre for Children, Kid Stuff, or Theatre?* that "most of the better plays in the world repertoire for children are adaptations of folklore and legends enshrined in beloved literary works" (Corey 10). Moses Goldberg also follows suit in his most recent publication, *TYA: Essays on the Theatre for Young Audiences* (2008), and posits that the "collection of folk and fairytales that make up a significant portion of the dramatic literature for young children (under seven or eight) seem to come primarily from oral tradition" (Goldberg 113). These two references represent a small portion of myriad instances where research illustrates a continual trend of fairytales and literature adaptations monopolizing the field of TYA from its inception (early 1700s) through to the present day.

This precedent, set in motion by early practitioners and playwrights like Charles Stearns and Francis H. Burnett (a noted children's book author at the time), continued to prevail throughout the early 1900s. Stuart Walker of the Portmanteau Company "concentrated on adaptations of well-known literature," staging productions like Oscar Wilde's *Birthday of the Infanta*, while James Barrie's *Peter Pan* ran on Broadway in 1905 and became "one of the most widely known children's plays of the twentieth century" (Bedard 9). This momentum fueled itself most notably during the time of playwright Charlotte Chorpenning, whose plays are mostly "dramatizations of familiar fairy and folktales, written in a realistic style" (Bedard 19). Out of the thirty-one published original plays and collaborations, as listed in the historical chronicle of US TYA, *Spotlight on the Child*, twenty are adaptations of literature, folk, or fairytales. Chorpenning's contribution to US TYA play scripts, while entirely admirable, offering much in quality, content, and promotion of the developing canon of dramatic literature, equally contributed to the creation of the precedent which continues to feed the mainstream of TYA in the United States at present, (though we greatly delve into creating original stories as script) leaving a huge vacancy and void in the creation of alternate forms and structures in dramatic literature for young people beyond the mainstream.

In her groundbreaking work, *Theatre as a Medium for Children and Young People: Images and Observations*, Shifra Schonmann^{vi} illustrates the phenomena of this tenet in her discussion of the dependent yet turbulent relationship between theatre for young audiences and children's literature.^{vii} She asserts that because the field of children's literature was so strongly linked to education and "based its legitimacy on it," this aids in our understanding of the development of children's scripts, concluding that for this very reason, "until some thirty years

ago, most of the plays were based on books or oral stories adapted for the stage” (Schonmann 36).

Schonmann continues, pointing out the possible challenges that occur in the attempt to create dramatic literature from source material of a completely different medium. “...In children’s theatre the interpretation of the script takes on greater importance than in theatre for adults. This is crucial because most of the plays for children are based on children’s literature and not on scripts that were originally written for the stage.” She further points out that in the process of adapting literature for the stage that a multitude of interpretations-- from playwright, to director, to designers and to actors occur. Add those layers of interpretation over the original author’s work, then present the entire piece to an audience for yet additional interpretation, which does not always align with the already interpreted version each individual experiences prior to viewing its theatrical counterpart. “This chain of transformation in interpretation is a process that characterizes most of the children’s theatrical texts. This is to say, that since the process of translating a story into a play is most prevalent in Theatre for Young People (TYP); we need to be aware of the gaps between Children’s Literature and Theatre for Young Audiences. This awareness is critical for the development of TYP (Schonmann 38).^{viii}

Based on Schonmann’s observations, when the majority of scripts produced in contemporary US TYA continue to be adaptations (whether modern or classic) of fairytales, folktales and children’s literature, how does this affect the expansion of what constitutes dramatic literature in US TYA? What is absent from the theatrical experience for young people when a multi-translated, multi-interpreted version of a classic story is approached in traditional ways? As an undying lover of children’s literature, despite my equal love and passion for that of

the non-traditional, this particular research proved difficult for me to digest and critically examine.

Creating an awareness of the gaps between the worlds of children's literature and Theatre for Young Audiences that Schonmann speaks of is key to not only understanding the historical development of American TYA, but also key to our ability for extending beyond the traditional bounds that currently hold the field in a stagnant state of tradition. Schonmann's writings pushed me to question and consider the role of the script adaptation itself in relation to the macrocosm of US TYA. What is the true purpose of creating a dramatic text for young audiences that is adapted from works of literature? This question proved difficult for me to process, let alone articulate, not only because of my undying love for children's literature and its use in professional TYA, but also my knowledge of the looming commercial and educational mandates of producing literature adaptations in professional US TYA (the ever present tensions between education, didacticism, and artistic quality) that must be taken into consideration when producing a season for young audiences, another discussion which I will delve into (Education and US TYA) later in this chapter.

While Schonmann may question if the most appropriate place for children's literature adaptations is among the main stages of our seasons, I want to further complicate her notion by positing that the presentation of children's literature onstage does not pose a danger or drawback to the field, but rather that both danger and opportunity lie in the *approach*, how US TYA practitioners present it dramatically. What unorthodox (and therefore potentially avant-garde) and anomalous methods can we experiment with that will preserve and celebrate the experience of viewing literature theatrically without losing sight of the importance of the drama

as an individual art form that possesses unique methods for communication? Does this also constitute a shift in the definition of “what *is* narrative?” and how it is presented dramatically?

Tenet Two: Educational and Social Objectives

Age-old ties and obligations to educational and social objectives create the second tenet that contributes to creating tradition throughout the history of Theatre for Young Audiences in the US. Schonmann writes that “an important lesson we can learn from history is that, from the very beginning, the theatre for young people was invoked in an effort to educate children, sometimes even with no artistic pretensions at all” (35).

As Schonmann notes, educational and social objectives are the two variables responsible for motivating the field from the very onset, with writings like Charles Stearns’ *Dramatic Dialogues* and Alice Minnie Herts’ *Children’s Educational Theatre*. This tie to education intensifies as the history of US TYA develops, with programs created by Junior Leagues and Settlement Houses that introduced “child centered educational ideologies” at the end of the nineteenth century (van de Water 101). Even prior to these instances, theatrical activity in schools proved so common that Levy and Mahard, authors of the “Preliminary Checklist of Early Printed Plays in English, 1780-1855,” pronounced that we will “probably never know the true extent of theatrical activity in the American schools [between the 17th and 18th centuries] for performances and recitations of one kind or another were simply too common to be taken special note of” (Bedard 14).

In his article “Negotiating Marginalization: TYA and the Schools,” Roger Bedard points out not only the insistent educational objectives of early TYA practitioners, but also the social

objectives as well. Charles Stearns, the visionary schoolmaster and minister who utilized drama in his teachings throughout the eighteenth century, proclaimed the benefits of dialogue performances by reporting that they “not only improve the outward carriage of the students; but implant the most useful morals in them, and in the minds of their friends, who attend their performances” (Bedard, 14).

The use of education through theatrical recitation and performance continued to occur in the majority of homes and schools and set the precedent for the continued use of this “protectively marginalized” means of incorporating theatre-but-not-theatre (as actual “theatre” of the time was considered an evil vice by many) within the “sphere of education” (Bedard 14). This cultural divide clearly segregated parents and educators from professional theatre artists who seemed uninterested in re-examining their art through the lens of what might be appropriate performances for young people (Bedard 14).

The focus on educationally relevant and socially driven theatre for the young continued with Clare Tree Major’s Children’s Theatre (toured until 1954), that presented work that followed the scopes of classroom subject matter and also derived its source material directly from the suggestions of instructors themselves (Bedard 15). Occurring simultaneous to Major’s efforts was that of the infamous Junior Leagues of America (est. 1901), whose debutantes nominated theatre for children as their core element of community service. This action spread from the first leagues in Chicago and Boston to the spring of 1932 when one hundred and nine leagues participated in an aspect of “children’s theatre activity” (Bedard 40).

With the explosion of the non-profit regional theatre movement of more recent years (from the 1940’s to the present), most professional US TYA companies (and adult theatre

companies that produce TYA) exist largely through grants and private donations. These monies greatly dependent upon the existence of educational programming, and in some cases aid in the support of *all* the theatre's artistic endeavors, not just education. This contemporary habit of marking educational and social objectives as an integral and lucrative means in which to fund theatre contributes to further complicating the relationship between US TYA, education, and social objectives.

This tradition that the field must exhibit educational and social objectives was created and fueled greatly in part by the amateurs and educators who took on the roles as forefathers of TYA. Unfortunately, this criterion perpetuates the specific ideological needs of educational institutions and therefore creates a subservient relationship that paints US TYA as existing solely to serve "explicit education agendas" (Bedard 15). Because of these ties, the creation of what Bedard coins as "theatre-but-not-theatre" by amateurs and educators (not by professionals) marks the field's history with the stigma that "TYA companies (because they mainly work for and in the schools) produce theatre-but-not theatre" (Bedard 15). This clearly proves problematic, when artistic priorities and quality are compromised, and the "creation and apprehension of art" remains lost to pedagogical and practical objectives of the schools, as well as marginalize US TYA's identity and reputation within the larger realm of theatre (15). Schonmann posits that because these roots of TYA lie in a "strong belief of educational and socializing powers" that we still have yet to achieve harmony among "the artistic and the didactic" (33).

Examples of American TYA companies conforming to educational agendas remains widespread, with restrictions placed on script and performance length to cater school

transportation and scheduling, as well as content confinement and language limitations based on particular, institutions principles and foundations. The rampant and nearly mandatory use of supplementary “guide” resources: study guides, parent guides, teacher guides, or family guides, et. al, as support material for all productions constitutes perhaps the strongest of these indicators (Bedard 16).

Both Schonmann and Bedard acknowledge that finding balance within this delicate cultural dance proves key to the survival of TYA companies and the field alike, but equally advise against an identity constructed solely in and dependent upon education. Schonmann notes that a crucial part of US TYA’s difference from children’s literature and other forms of engagement for young people lies within its split in position between the theatrical and the educational world, and heeds the importance of careful negotiation between the two: “...[TYA] has to maintain a very delicate balance between them; it must consider artistic and aesthetic qualities, as well as pedagogic understanding” (40).

In their writings both scholars also encourage an identity created by an art form independent of education or social objectives that challenges traditional expectations between TYA and schools, and in fact, one that deliberately encourages a shift toward its disruption. Declaring this disruption as “free[ing] the children’s theatre from the tyranny of the didactic phase,” Schonmann also strongly advocates for the creation of fresh identity constructs in TYA. She petitions that “unless we see it as a special kind of art for its own sake and begin to identify its sign system” that we will be bound to this phase of didactics set in motion by adults “that has inhibited [TYA’s] growth over the last hundred years” (44).

To Bedard, this type of dismantling “could well lead to a much more diverse, educationally useful, and *artistically interesting* TYA field” (16). He envisions a field driven by ideologies of artists and theatres and not dictated by that of the schools, which could “challenge and free more theatres to construct identities beyond the schools as the single point of reference” (Bedard 16). He additionally points out that in an age where educational institutions’ focus and finances choose standardized testing and assessment over arts and culture, that this decline in funding for the arts could “force others to signify themselves quite differently and redefine their priorities outside of educational objectives.” Though at first glance this perspective might sound detrimental economically and practically, Bedard predicts that it could “open new possibilities for artistic exploration outside of the dominant education ideologies” (16).

Currently, the culture of education and US TYA dictate that we must hold to both education and aesthetic quality (in that order), but I posit that in order to further develop US TYA as a unique art form, we must shift how we currently define education and its role in US TYA. Our history remains rooted in *didactic* and *moralizing* educational experiences that provide “answers” for young people. How does this relationship change if we present an *aesthetic* education that raises questions for our young audiences, pushing them to find the answers? What are the potential changes that could occur if the artistic and aesthetic become equal priority to the educational components that drive US Theatre for Young Audiences? Schonmann defines this shift as the *non-educational educational experience*, where young people learn through the theatrical experience but the focus, rather than on learning, becomes one that produces the existential and transformational through openness and growth, resulting in “education at its best” (42, 43).

Tenet Three: Linear Narrative Structure

When examining the rapidly expanding canon of dramatic literature for young audiences, the majority of scripts continually offer (regardless of the play's content) a linear narrative structure, a pattern that reveals the third tenet of tradition in American TYA. Clearly, this tenet intersects with and remains undeniably tied to the fact that the majority of plays in the current canon are adaptations of fairytales and children's literature, most of which imitate their source material by emerging into US TYA through the linear narrative structure, but in dramatic form. New plays in the field with original content emerged as years progressed, some attempting to experiment within the safe boundaries of the linear narrative structure by dabbling with non-linear elements, techniques, or alternative forms. A clear absence of scripts or performance texts, however that completely break the bounds of this linear narrative currently exists. This "experimentation within" through the vehicle of stylistic choice dominates plays like Stephen Deitz's *Still Life with Iris*, where elements of surrealism, poetic language, and archetypal characters mingle with that of the linear narrative, or in Laurie Brooks' *The Wrestling Season*, a story based in linear structure about the struggles of high school teenagers that utilizes the symbolic setting and costumes of a high school wrestling match.

Significantly, Aronson discusses the same pattern in the development of the historical avant-garde in the US. Symbolic, expressionistic, and surrealistic tendencies crept into the writings of famous American playwrights like O'Neill, Miller, and Williams in the latter part of the twentieth century. "...Strindberg-like inner landscapes, dream sequences, flashbacks, poetic language, lyric realism, symbolic settings, and archetypal characters" all originated, "but all

these writers continued to work within a basically realistic framework and psychological character structure” (Aronson 2). Glimpses of the avant-garde presented themselves within emerging scripts, but “not as a basis for creating the plays” (3).

The current state of American TYA, which battles for survival in a society seeped in extreme commerce and a perpetual need for round the clock entertainment, eerily echoes that of Aronson’s pre-World War II era on Broadway, when the elements of a “radical European avant-garde” functioned as stylistic choices within the traditional framework of the American dramatist. The results of this cross breeding “remained within the establishment; Broadway welcomed every new generation and easily absorbed what changes or permutations each had to offer” (Aronson 3). This continual tug of war between art and commerce eventually spawned fresh, grassroots, radical, unpredictable, and often disturbing forms in American theatre at its extreme. Is US TYA primed for elements of the avant-garde to function as stylistic choices for scripts, similarly to the US’s pre avant-garde era on Broadway? If so, will this development send US TYA into the same spiral as American theatre, where eventually a movement of the avant-garde emerges?

Schonmann believes that truly examining the elements of form and content prove key to the emergence of fresh performance modes in the creation of productions for young audiences. Currently, according to Schonmann, “directors and actors enslave the style for the content. Thus, in the tension between form and content, content usually wins” (43). She stresses that in order to move into a place of new forms where artistic and aesthetic qualities thrive, we must cultivate both in order to achieve a forward, pioneering motion where new genres and forms will grow and advance the nature of what we may offer young audiences (Schonmann 43).

Tenet Four: Script Driven Performance

The fourth tenet driving the mainstream of American TYA lies in script driven performance. The tradition of producing dramatic literature adapted from fairytales and children's literature contributes greatly and proves highly influential to the dominance of script driven performance for young audiences in the United States. This method usually proves an economically sound decision and ready made scripts create a predictable, easily planned, and efficient timeline in a theatre's season. Rarely, though do producing companies in American TYA explore the possibilities available to them that lie beyond the process of the script driven performance.

The most frequently documented method of non-script driven performance is through the process of devising. Devising presents itself as a fairly common practice among contemporary adult theatre companies in the United States and as well as in contemporary TYA on the international level. *Devising* is defined for the purposes of this study as *collaborative theatre making in which the "text" comes to fruition through improvisation in order to create a theatrical production*. This methodology provides numerous possibilities for exploring alternative structures, forms, content, and function not possible in script based work (Henry 2).

Meghann Henry, Education Director at The Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, notes this particular tenet in her graduate thesis *Devising Dramaturgy: an Investigation into the art of Dramatic Composition when devising Theatre for Young Audiences*, stating "most theatre is based in the notion of collaboration, most commonly occurring through the collaborative work of directors, designers, and actors working together to produce a staged dramatic text by a playwright" (Henry 20). In her research on US TYA companies that practice devising, the

majority only exercised it as a tool in educational programming or as a method of presenting a “second stage series” in their seasons, not as a tactic for creating main stage productions (Henry 5). Based on this research Henry posits that “the United States as a whole is just beginning to embrace devising, and while it is often used in education settings, it has not yet been embraced by a majority of professionals” (Henry 5).

Seeking out justification for why devising proves less desirable an option for TYA companies in the United States, Henry sites Joan Shirle’s research on devising from her article, “Potholes in Devising,” which offers up multiple reasons for the lack of devised main stage productions in the United States. Shirle’s reasoning for this absence includes “The difficulties of devising outstanding work, the nonliterary nature of much devised theatre, which does not lend itself to the marketing of play scripts or reproduction by subsequent groups, and the timidity of producers and presenters in providing venues for devised work” (Henry 6).

A sharp contrast to the latter, is Henry’s report that in Shirle’s research, she discovered that companies in Europe continually use devising as a mode for creating main stage productions (for adults and young people), and that “many countries host theatre festivals that often present numerous devised works” (Henry 6). Through her research on the dramaturgy of devising for TYA, Henry challenges theatre practitioners in the United States to move past the tendency to produce script based performance, look beyond the riskiness of devising new work, and push through the capriciousness of the unknown end product, in the hopes that they will “reach out to [communities] of young people in exciting new ways by involving children in the process of telling the stories of their communities” (Henry 6).

Henry believes that if American TYA is up for the challenge of redefining their notions of “script,” a “performance text” must be included. This type of text often involves a recording of the devised performance, along with the creation of a text made up of stage directions, rehearsal videos, and lists of themed improvisations open for interpretation by others interested in reproducing it. Henry feels strongly that if more professional theatres in the US implement the devising process, it “could add more options in regard to style, form, and content to the current canon of [US] TYA plays” (Henry 6).

Schonmann notes similar observations in her query of writing for young audiences, pointing out that language proves only a single mode for communication, especially for those whose language experiences have not reached full development.

Most often, language experience is prior to content understanding because of the rhythmical aspects of the verse and because of plays on words. Literature uses words as the major source of raw material. In theatre, words are only one element among many others. That brings us back to the importance of writing, especially in theatre for children, original materials created specifically for the theatre, completely independent from a known story which blocks the autonomy of the creation. (41)

She goes on to point out that because of its uniqueness as an art form, that theatre allows for movement beyond that of the written form. After all, in theatre there lies much more than just an encounter with words: sight, smell, sound, touch, movement, mass. The theatrical form provides opportunity to connect with audiences through the creation of “complex relationship among different elements,” connections that challenge audiences through means beyond that of a scripted story (Schonmann 40).

I question, like Henry and Schonmann, why the majority of performances in US TYA in particular, stem from scripts, and not from original forms specifically tailored to the uniqueness of the art form in which we present. Does the theatrical language always necessitate expression based out of the written form? What are other methods of communicating through the language of theatre that move beyond traditional ideas of “script,” and, when choosing to utilize scripts, what structures and frameworks move beyond that of a traditional literature based structure? If we begin to explore devising and the use of non-scripted form and content in the work we create, I believe that a fresh space and new dimension for our more traditional desires, like the impulse to more theatrically interpret children’s literature and other theatrical genres in professional TYA productions can and will emerge.

Tenet Five: The Role (or lack thereof) of the Child as Audience

In Theatre for Young Audiences, the role of the child is that of a consumer. Unlike adult theatre, in which adults create theatre for adults (themselves), in TYA adults create theatre for children. This marked difference between audience (child) and creator (adult) hugely affects the myriad variables involved when creating art for young people. Schonmann elaborates on this point, noting that “new forms of children’s theatre should grow from the young people’s concerns; their own ways of seeing and knowing the world. The palpable tension is that in TYA adults write the plays, act and direct the performances, and choose the plays to be watched by the young audiences. So here we face a complicated situation in which the world of the young will always be constructed through the eyes of adults and their perceptions” (19, 20).

As audience members partaking in an art form created specifically for them, but interpreted and fully automated by their full-grown counterparts, young people enter into a world of theatre where choices made by adults fully dictate and guide their experience. Even through the simple task of ticket purchase, the question of “Who are we (TYA) *actually* selling the tickets to?” remains highly questionable. This overall concept may seem common and infantile at the surface, but deeper consideration proves key to understanding this tenet, one that remains greatly marked by absence in TYA: the voice of the child in the creation of a theatrical art form specifically designed for their experience and enlightenment.

Jenkins’s concern in *The Children’s Culture Reader*, highlighted in Schonmann’s study, addresses children’s minimal involvement in the creation of their culture due to the “exercise of adult authority over children” (47). This larger comment on child culture as a whole creates a direct connection to this idea that the young remain an absent voice in the involvement and creation of their own theatrical experiences. (47) Jonathan Levy, long-time scholar in the field of children’s theater, exerts that children watching theatre epitomize the term “captive audience,” as in most instances they quite literally “do not choose to come” (Schonmann 19). Schonmann, branching from Jenkin’s research, questions how involved children truly become in the creation of their own culture in general, even though “greater attention [is] given to children’s resistance to adult authority” in more contemporary times. (47)

Specifically in theatre, when the overarching expectations and objectives from a non-child perspective dominate, the possible result becomes a limited, adult constructed version of the child experience, rather than the creation of an art form based in the actual dreams and desires of those who occupy space in the audience and reside as the main spectators^{ix} (45). How

do we actively engage young people not only in the creation of their art, but also in their role as primary audience? If our theatrical forms in US TYA must break in order to move away from tradition, then I posit that the role of child as audience should follow. How do we fight current theatrical competencies and challenge passive audience formats in US TYA to fully engage and immerse young participants in the worlds we create onstage? What does a “position of activity and engagement” look like and how do we strive to alter audience perception so that a “cyclical relationship between the spectator and the purpose of the work” occur?

Beyond those adults who choose to create and present art for young people, the other adults who aid in the identity construction of children’s culture includes parents and educators, whom govern choices for their children on a daily basis. In the TYA Today Article, “Pushing the Envelope: Addressing Taboos in TYA,” Jeff Church of the Coterie Theatre labels these adults as “gatekeepers” when speaking of the problems that occur when TYA companies attempt to produce “controversial” material: “The problem is that children’s theatre is an industry built on people who don’t willingly buy a ticket” (Simons 5). This statement (and the entire article) also emphasizes the “familiar myth” of childhood innocence as safeguarded by adults, an illusion that still seems to dominate in American TYA when faced with the dilemma of choosing the work they create. Even in the current state of our advanced society, with the onslaught of twenty-four hour media footage and school violence as everyday occurrences, this stereotype that young peoples’ innocence must be protected still prevails in TYA throughout the United States and aids in the prevention of forward movement. Schonmann sets off a call to action in response to this fabrication that all practitioners of TYA should heed:

How can we fight this tendency? How can we liberate TYP from the domination of the adults and open the theatre for young audiences to issues that are in their own interest? Are there any theatre productions that offer us models of a children's culture that is progressive both in its form and its content? Is there a theatre that moves beyond mythical innocence and goes toward recognition of children's desires? (48 ,49)

It is also interesting to note that the article addresses Church's and other prominent TYA theatre directors' solutions for addressing said gatekeepers, but does not present any dialogue or raise questions in attempt to move into a space where the focus remains beyond that of "gatekeeper" and toward the voice of the child. Regardless of current issues, whether taboo subject matter, form, style, or content is concerned, an exploration of how adults can create an open space where the construction of the theatrical reality and decision-making depends on the input of young people feels like a mandatory "next step" for the future of American TYA. What does this "next step" look like? I believe that perhaps it involves young people in the devising or playwriting process, as well as their input in selection of content, structure, and form. Possibly an intervention to integrate this type of involvement with young people proves necessary on all levels, from the classroom to community-based work to the professional level. This call for fresh exploration with young people gripping the helm ensures not only a greater emphasis on the role of the child as primary patron, but also will simultaneously initiate a powerful means to break boundaries in terms of style, form, and content, as a newer, more progressive American TYA bursts forth.

These five tenets of tradition in American TYA typify the mainstream of work that embodies our field. They were selected to illuminate not only elements that make up the vast majority of work created for young people in the United States today, but also to equally highlight what areas remain clearly marked by absence in our field. Each tenet strongly resists the characteristics and markers of the avant-garde outlined in chapter three, and the current nature of each tenet stands poised and secure, unconscionable in US TYA's short, idle history, creating the "established, dominant, ensconced and static culture" Aronson suggests must first be set in place before a movement of the avant-garde can emerge (10). This foundation of the field remains only several centuries old and only now, as we move into the twenty-first century, can now begin to call this foundation the "established tradition" of US TYA. In the following chapter, I use this foundation of tradition in TYA to assess three contemporary works of dramatic literature for young audiences against Aronson's framework and my compilation of avant-garde markers to search for any signs of resistance, or avant-garde tendency toward these five tenets. If any resistance exists, as evidenced Aronson's theory, it will therefore constitute as evidence toward a "breaking" of tradition in American TYA.

CHAPTER FIVE: BREAKING TRADITION: THREE MOMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMATIC LITERATURE FOR YOUTH

As the final step in my research, I chose three scripts for young audiences that target upper elementary school, middle, and high school audiences. *Black Butterfly*, *Jaguar Girls*, *Piñata Women and Other Superhero Girls Like Me* by Luis Alfaro plays primarily for middle and high school audiences, as does *Atypical Boy* by Laurie Brooks, while *Hush: An Interview with America* targets upper elementary aged young people and up. I will examine and analyze each script according to the five tenets of tradition I established, as well as the characteristics of the avant-garde I outlined from Aronson, Berghaus, and Graver's theories in the first half of my research, in order to determine whether or not these pieces of dramatic literature chosen illustrate moments of breaking tradition in US TYA. Because my research timeline and financial constraints did not allow me to view a live or taped recording of each script, I provide additional insight and perspective through the use of production reviews, articles, study guides, and other secondary source material that pertain to each piece. I discuss each play with a particular focus on form and content within the context of professional Theatre for Young Audiences in order to provide evidence based on the above criterion that demonstrates a move toward or away from avant-garde tendencies.

***Black Butterfly* by Luis Alfaro**

The first of these three scripts, *Black Butterfly, Jaguar Girl, Piñata Woman, and Other Superhero Girls Like Me*, emerged from the Mark Taper Forum's P.L.A.Y (Performing for Los Angeles) in 1999. This urban theatre with contemporary programming for young people commissioned Latino playwright and Los Angeles native Luis Alfaro to create the script. Alfaro then gathered three L.A. poets, Alma Cervantes, Sandra Munoz, and Maricela Norte to write about their experiences as young Latina girls growing up in East Los Angeles. He then adapted their poetry into a script with the help of co-adapter Lisa Peterson, and the piece was performed not only at the Getty Center (a museum that houses a community outreach program) in Los Angeles, but also work shopped at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of ASSITEJ's 2000 One Theatre World Festival. It additionally toured to local middle and high schools in the greater Los Angeles area over the course of the following year. *Black Butterfly* was most recently performed at the Coterie Theatre in Kansas City in 2002, as only the second professional production of the script in the United States since its creation three years prior.

Black Butterfly follows the journey of five Latina girls growing up (they age from 12 to 16 during the course of the performance) amidst a backdrop of violence, crime, abuse, and tense family relationships against the backdrop of East Los Angeles. The story revolves around the central figure, Seidy (this name was later changed to reflect the names of the original cast members), a girl who has been assigned in class to keep a journal of poetry. Seidy claims that her "ordinary" life does not merit an exciting topic for writing poems. As she begins to write about the truth of her reality, four other characters emerge as the additional voices of Latina girls who also paint a picture of (through poetry and spoken verse) living and growing up in a similar

world. Eventually through the course of the play, this style of writing becomes “transformative for the young girls as the words travel through the characters’ memories, experiences, and desires” (Dicus, 422).

The plays’ content equally drives the honesty and rawness of the piece, portraying candidly moments of abuse, teen pregnancy, gang violence, image, and “cultural machismo,” all topics that clearly push against the grain of the more traditional TYA adaptation of a fairytale or popular children’s book (Walker 1). The frankness of the script, though, when compared with other more contemporary scripts in the field’s canon of dramatic literature, unfortunately, does not feel starkly different. Like Laurie Brook’s *The Wrestling Season* or Suzan Zeder’s *Doors*, a play about divorce that was rarely produced until ten years after its original publication (1980s), the inclusion of “edgy” material fits into the current status quo of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries and yet still does not reach a place that, according to my research quantifiers, entitles it as content that touches that of the avant-garde (Simons 4).

Additionally, I continue to observe that when TYA plays with “progressive content”^x aren’t readily produced until many years after their publication, (regardless of the reason) like Zeder’s play, the continued development of content progression is compromised, placing TYA’s timeline of content development (not even including the other aspects of development such as structure, form, genre, etc.) behind that of TYA outside the US, as well as adult theatre everywhere. This proves an ongoing challenge I have noted in the field that remains partly due to US TYA’s short history when compared with its international peers—the development continually lags behind, while the rest of International TYA/adult theatre moves forward. Therefore, the content that may qualify a script as “progressive” at the time cannot even bring

the field close to the realm of the avant-garde if theatres remain hesitant in producing work until years after a script is published. The scripts currently in existence weren't and aren't able to serve their purposes in moving the field forward without willing producers to realize the playwright's vision at the time the play is published. This lag in content development seems to be a contributing factor to the overwhelming stagnancy of progression in US TYA. Again, I would like to strongly reiterate that content proves only *one* of *multiple* factors that contribute to a script's status as avant-garde, "edgy" or "progressive" content alone, without additional presence of avant-garde elements (or the appearance of them within a traditional structure/form) *does not* qualify scripts with avant-garde status.

The portrayal of such a specific female demographic and cultural identity in *Black Butterfly*, however, remains an element of the script's content that *does* create uniqueness in content development for US TYA scripts. This creates an interesting tension, however, when examining this variable against the five tenets of tradition. Just as the content of *Black Butterfly* celebrates a unique cultural identity, social demographic, and age group (though playwrights like Jose Cruz Gonzalez also introduce this culture in US TYA for younger patrons) often absent from the majority in the canon of dramatic literature for young audiences, it's content simultaneously drives further forward the educational and social objectives tenet as a part of established tradition in US TYA.

When shifting from the content of *Black Butterfly* and critically examining the play's form and structure, more avant-garde tendencies move into the foreground. The piece's structure moves in short episodic vignettes that utilize not only drama but also poetry and spoken word pieces, which move toward a more "non-linear" structure, further removing *Black Butterfly's*

structure from the traditional TYA linear narrative. This form is reminiscent of the “compartmentalization” term John Kirby coined, when speaking of American avant-garde artist John Cage’s very first “unnamed piece” at Black Mountain College (NC, 1948). “Each unit is discrete and complete, and while the ideas or images contained in one compartment may influence the response to a subsequent unit, it is not crucial to its understanding or reception” (Aronson 38). *Black Butterfly* may be a rather loose representation of Kirby’s compartmentalization concept, as its subject matter clearly flows throughout all of the vignettes and the script’s order fits a very specific mold that contributes to the overall arch of the story. Alternately though, each segment definitely stands independent of the others without needing any additional scenes before or after to create comprehension or clarity. Due to this structural choice, each piece could stand-alone and be performed as individual pieces too.

The avant-garde characteristics of semiotic deconstruction and interdisciplinary performance reveal themselves as additional variables to consider in the framework of *Black Butterfly*, causing an additional tension with the traditional structural make up of dramatic literature for young audiences. The greatest indication of this reveals itself in the stage directions at the opening of the play, when Alfaro calls for a DJ to be mixing music live from upstage center, as well as “[remain] lit throughout the performance” (Alfaro 2). Though not an entirely unusual or particularly shocking image, the on stage presence of a live DJ throughout *Black Butterfly* toys with traditional semiotics of theatrical convention in American TYA, as most music in the traditional settings emerges from a live orchestra or pre-recorded music via sound systems. Adding to this skewing of traditional semiotics are the stage directions describing the scenery: multiple projection screens showing images of East L.A. that take place of a more

traditional, realistic set. The use of music, dance, spoken word, movement, dramatic dialogue, and multimedia woven together in *Black Butterfly* displays similar (but not fully embodied) interdisciplinary characteristics of avant-garde performances and happenings of the 1960s in America.

The most intense moment, however, in which *Black Butterfly* mingles with that of the avant-garde, occurs at the play's emotion filled climax, titled "How I Saved the Day." It is a story told in dramatic dialogue by all of the girls about a time when "she" rode the bus with her mother and two little brothers. They stand in the back of the crowded bus and overhear a lady "talking real mean to her daughter," also referred to as "this home girl" (Alfaro 32). The scene builds, with the crowd on the bus completely overhearing the mother publicly and verbally abuse the girl, but with everyone around them listening in silence and no one stepping in at her defense. While the girl is completely berated by her mother, the little girl onlooker notices a black butterfly tattoo on her arm that says "I'll Remember You"... As the chastising intensifies, the little girl onlooker closes her eyes as the scene transforms into a completely surrealistic, dreamlike sequence:

SEIDY: Now all I want to see is that little black tattoo on home girl's right shoulder. I close my eyes and feel something like black velvet covering all of me. When I open my eyes I can see my big, soft, black, velvety butterfly wings, they're mine.

(the actors begin to fly.)

SEIDY: I fly out the bus window up up up outside way past the big ol' red K in the K-MART sky. I fly higher and higher past all those things that make me feel

sad. I see that little girl through the bus window. I want her to open her eyes, look up and see me. When she finally does, she makes a big old smile when she sees her wings, and then she's outside and I see her lifting her sister up in the air. All of a sudden there's thousands of black butterflies in the sky, flying together, and we spell out...

ALL: I'll Remember You....

SEIDY: In big fancy letters in the sky so that all the kids who feel bad will look up and see us know that they can fly too. (*the actors return from flight*)

(Alfaro 33)

The scene ends with the principal character at the end of the school year writing to her mother about all the memories she has captured, confessing that she has written them for her. "Cause I want you to remember. Just want you to remember us."

The "Black Butterfly" moment for me proved the most powerful and moving scene in the entire script. I question what additional power and strength this piece might gain with more surreal moments inserted, whether through staging or through additional dialogue. Did the author only include one moment as a release of the tension built up in the previous scenes? How could this same tension still hold but with more surreal, dream-like sequences? I posit that the addition of more moments like the one indicated above, implemented in non-traditional, avant-garde forms could add even more dramatic tension and contrast to the portrayal of the journey of the adolescent Latinas in *Black Butterfly*. The metaphor and symbolism created within the structure of the girl morphing into a butterfly creates breathtaking imagery for audiences to grasp

and imprint in their minds, and allows for deep emotional connection through non-linear image and symbols.

Black Butterfly also presents political and social tension that rubs against traditional US TYA through identity politics. It stands as a proclamation for minority influence, asking the majority of our society (non-Latina young people in the US) to accept the views, behaviors and beliefs of young Latina culture, specifically of Latinas living in L.A. This political agenda is revealed throughout *Black Butterfly* as the cultural norms, values, and religious aspects of the young Latina are explored and celebrated through the use of poetry, spoken word, music, and dance.

In conclusion, based on my research in characterizing the avant-garde, and in establishing the mainstream of American TYA, I believe that *Black Butterfly* arguably contains multiple elements of the avant-garde. It breaks some tenets of tradition in American TYA through its structural makeup, interdisciplinary tactics, deconstruction of theatrical convention (though minimal), through original and non-literature based aspects of its content, and its political agenda. I remain unconvinced, however, that *Black Butterfly* constitutes enough breaking or disruption of tradition or by exhibiting enough characteristics of the avant-garde to fully label it as such. Though elements of untraditional TYA seep through, crucial aspects of the avant-garde remain absent. Though identity politics create an underlying theme throughout the script and show a small degree of disruption, there still lies no overwhelming evidence of *radical* intrusion in the content or structure of *Black Butterfly*. It additionally lacks any intense intrusive shift in the role of audience that would further contribute to placing it outside of the norm for US TYA. *Black Butterfly*, though exhibiting untraditional form and structure, as well as politicized content,

also does not present a *complete* absence of narrative, as it implements the character of Seidy as a driving linear force that carries its audience through her journey (though presented through non-linear poetic and aestheticized forms) from beginning to end.

Black Butterfly might qualify as moving toward Graver's *aestheticized and engaged art*, as the play's content does represent the opposite of dominant culture through its portrayal of Latina girls in America. This play also, according to Graver, uses "art to analyze and transform habits of thought and ideological prejudices" through highly stylized poetic language and progressive aesthetic framework when compared to the mainstream of offerings in the canon of dramatic literature for young people (13). When using Aronson's model as a guide, I continue to question how the process of categorization might be clarified. Is a clear method for labeling these plays even possible within the overtly fluid nature of the avant-garde? How much tradition must be broken in order to consider a performance avant-garde? Because *Black Butterfly*, for example, creates tension among three of the five tenets of tradition, did this script constitute enough of a break from tradition to set a precedent for movement toward the avant-garde in US TYA? This challenge is yet another example of the infinite amount of grey area that marks the territory surrounding the avant-garde, as speculation proves difficult due to its fluid nature. From a less quantitative perspective, *Black Butterfly* fits explicitly within my approach to the avant-garde, not falling into either end of the spectrum to be categorized as "extreme" or "mild" versions of it, but rather trickling through varying degrees of disruption and intrusion, exhibiting more intricate facets of the spaces between tradition and the avant-garde. These areas create difficulty in categorizing this play in a clear, concise manner, but in exchange for clarity, raise exciting questions about US TYA and its potential to reach toward the avant-garde.

***Hush: An Interview with America* by James Still**

The second play I examine for this study, *Hush: An Interview with America* by James Still was originally commissioned as a joint project between two professional theatres for young audiences, Childsplay of Arizona and Metro Theatre Company of St. Louis. The play's main character, Maggie, a quirky twelve-year old girl who is blind, suddenly "senses an unexplained presence" of an apple tree in her backyard. This stirs the interest of the local and eventually national press, after a news reporter, Jana creates a media frenzy surrounding Maggie's "vision" that causes quite an uproar in the quiet little town of Hush as well as test bond between Maggie and her father (Brenner 1).

Though it may seem primed to produce similar characteristics of "traditional" US TYA, out of the three plays I survey in this study, *Hush: An Interview With America* possesses the most overall variables that contribute to avant-garde tendencies when assessing it against the five tenets of tradition in US TYA. The content of *Hush* comments strongly on current sociopolitical issues of privacy and the notion of celebrity in a media saturated and news hungry culture in the United States, a cultural phenomenon that began its development during the time Still wrote *Hush*. Like *Black Butterfly*, this play also pushes hard against the mainstream aspect of TYA, which dictates literature adaptations and fairytales as basis for script creation. The juxtaposition of two opposing worlds, the quiet small town in Kansas and the information crazed, story hungry journalists and citizens from the outside that invade their laid back lifestyle upon the news of Maggie's vision, slam up against each other throughout the play's short, episodic scenes. *Hush* also does not hesitate to announce the real, yet violent news stories erupting throughout the

country during the mid-90s, another contrast to that of traditional TYA and closer in line with what Graver might categorize as an element of “politicized” avant-garde.

Still’s comments on society within the content of *Hush* further emphasize the aggressive nature of contemporary media and government by presenting it through symbolic action onstage. Also, by skewing the traditional theatrical notion of stage exits and entrances (which I discuss in greater detail when analyzing *Hush*’s structure), Jana, the news reporter, and an FBI agent exit enter only through the television set and microwave ovens instead. This action symbolizes the relationship between Maggie, her Father, and the powers of communication in their world through a visual illustration of the media’s descent. It additionally portrays the media and government as nonsensical through absurd physicality, as they use exaggerated movement to squeeze in and out of each scene in a visually ridiculous manner.

Amidst its social and political themes, *Hush* raises questions, rather than placing didactic answers or moral standards on the play’s content, which again moves away from the idea that TYA must project an educational or social objective. (This should not, however, be confused with social or political commentary, alternately a characteristic of the avant-garde) *Hush* specifically raises questions of personal identity through Maggie’s quest to understand her vision, the significance of the presence she feels in the backyard, and herself as she grows up. As the tornado of media explodes around her, Maggie’s father also questions his daughter’s identity, fearing the opinions the public has of her, as well as the image and twisted identity of Maggie that Jana and the media storm creates.

Through these characters, Still enlists great amounts of symbolism and expressionism, two avant-garde elements, to evoke the emotion and mood of the everyman’s experiences

through animal and ethereal, fantasy characters. These components remain extremely evident in Maggie and the Lion, the two most archetypal of characters (another avant-garde facet), each representing facets of society and undergo transformation by the end of their journey. The Lion, symbol of the outsider, the lost victim of society's corruption looking for escape, remains a continual presence throughout the course of the play, while Maggie, the symbol of childhood (and Eva, her vision, the source of her innocence and naivety) struggles to hold onto her personal voice and unique identity as the power of the outside world, represented by the media, descend upon her. In the last moment of the play, reunited with her father, as Maggie stops to gaze yet again into the sky, Frank implores of her:

Frank: Maggie? What is it? What do you see? (*Maggie smiles and shakes her head. She stares at the sky.*) Maggie? (*He looks at the sky*) Whatever you see—hold onto it. Hold it tight. Don't ever let go. (*Frank is behind Maggie holding onto her, holding tight, looking up at the sky.*) (*Maggie touches her heart and closes her eyes. She takes a step out, gently pulling away from her father, standing on her own*) (Jennings 428)

Still indicates through Frank's dialogue and symbolic action the importance of holding onto the innocence and memory of childhood as long as possible, even when we've experienced growth. Though he speaks and advises Maggie (and all children), it seems that his words become a powerful reminder for himself (and all adults), as he readies himself for Maggie to pull away, literally and symbolically, ready for what awaits her as a young adult.

Maggie and the Lion possess an interesting relationship and interaction throughout the play, representing the macrocosm of the tension and struggle between society and the individual.

Upon many of their surreal, ritualistic encounters, the two engage in a trance, dream-like sequence of movement, symbolic of her internal battle of growth as she moves from inward, childhood innocence into a space where she emotes outward, more present of the cruel realities that life brings as her worldview expands. And equally with the Lion, as he passes on his wisdom to Maggie at the close of the play, he transforms, able to step back and finally find his place, no longer in a struggle in his search for the unknown. Though symbolism is omnisciently present throughout *Hush*, the connection and relationship between Maggie and the Lion exemplify the non-linear technique powerfully.

Though the techniques Still uses throughout the content of *Hush* prove thought provoking and evident of avant-garde tendencies, the structure and form of the play illustrate even more elements characteristic of avant-garde drama. Like *Black Butterfly*, the story of *Hush* progresses in a linear fashion. However, Still presents this progression in short episodes with cryptic Brechtian titling like “J. Edgar Hoover Wore Dresses Under That Coat” and “Guns, the Pentagon, and Apple Pie” that create an unconventional structure when paired with traditional narrative (Jennings 404, 419). The titling of scenes (though it is unclear whether or not the playwright prefers them included during a performance or not), typical of Brecht’s epic theatre model, affectively foreshadows upcoming action and creates a feeling of aesthetic distance when read. Brechtian-esque techniques continue to weave throughout the rest of the play, as the FBI agent who directly addresses the audience (the only direct address in the entire script) expressing his stereotypical “Nip it in the bud” mentality when rearing “troublesome” children to Maggie’s father. Maggie’s continual use (again reminiscent of Brecht) of poem songs as a means of expression not only interrupts the action that surrounds her, but displays the interdisciplinary

nature of the avant-garde. Her poem songs, some in short sentences and others in verse, capture the essences of her emotional journey, through yet more symbolism representative of her plight (what begins as a playful rhyme scheme moves into wintery images of snowflakes, darkness, and cold, then evolves into a warmer place of happiness, tomorrow, and future) as she struggles to understand the situations she faces throughout the play.

Hush also inconsistently mixes theatrical style: naturalism in scenes between Frank, Maggie, and Jana with surrealism in scenes that employ voices from across the nation, seekers, and pilgrims that make political comments to elevate the hullabaloo created upon news of Maggie's vision, as well as with fantasy as statues come to life, animals dialogue with humans, and invisible beings appear. Each of these aspects challenges the audience's theatrical competence within the context of *Hush*'s structural makeup. More evidence of semiotic deconstruction occurs in the unexpected entrances and exits of the FBI Agent and Jana the news reporter (as mentioned earlier) as they leap from the microwave and television set to invade Frank and Maggie's peaceful world. Additionally, multiple moments exist where simultaneous action occurs, as indicated in the script by a format that displays stage directions and dialogue in two separate columns.

(In a full skirt with jeans underneath and boots, a potato chip bag on her head.)

(The Lion appears, out of breath, running. Stands nearby, as if holding his breath, listening to Maggie's story.)

Maggie: So: this girl wrote down her greatest most private thoughts with this invisible ink—secrets that filled an entire book. And hundreds of years later when somebody found it they thought it was nothing but a bunch of blank paper. *(Frank stares at Maggie)* (Jennings 400).

This use of simultaneous action onstage creates multiple landscapes in *Hush*, drawing from the avant-garde practices of artists like Gertrude Stein. The landscape, which requires total audience engagement and interaction, represents a “notion of theater [that] resists the traditional use of time and space in realistic narrative structure” (Listengarten and Knopf). Within a landscape the “realistic, representational space are sacrificed in favor of the simultaneous depiction of events from more than one time in a single space” (Listengarten and Knopf). While the entirety of *Hush* does not necessarily represent landscape drama, certainly the major moments of simultaneous action depicted draw from the avant-garde elements of the landscape.

The use of sound and movement as language additionally challenge the conventional tenets of American TYA by communicating in capacities beyond that of the scripted language. Maggie’s continual use of non-linguistic vocalization, combined with the ritualistic dances she creates in multiple instances creates a non-verbal mode for communication and expression. Vocalizations continue to connect Maggie and the Lion, offering the two a language and mode of communication that moves beyond the language of the other characters in the play. Through their exchange of roars, like the ritualistic dancing in which they engage, Maggie and the Lion communicate and connect on a deeper, intuitive level different than the characters around them. Their language of sound aids in illustrating the paths of their separate journeys mapping where the two join, part, linger, and move away. The recorded sound effects incorporated into the play clearly portray the stark contrast between the outside world and Hush, Kansas, semiotics speaking through sound rather than words or image as we hear the tinkling of wind chimes signifying the mysterious and playful world in which Maggie lives, the “loud noises from another part of the world,” and “the sounds of an angry riot” guiding us into the space of the

turbulent and agitated setting beyond Maggie's backyard (Jennings 399). Sound as language throughout *Hush* provides yet another characteristic that moves toward the world of the avant-garde.

Many aspects within the form and content of *Hush: An Interview with America* point the script toward the avant-garde in American TYA. Its specific sociopolitical commentary, overwhelming use of symbolism and expressionism, push to deconstruct theatrical competence in structure and form, as well as its rejection of educational and social objective through open ended questioning categorizes it as the play in this study that breaks the most tradition and resides closest to that of the avant-garde. Though this play exhibits more avant-garde characteristics than the other two examined, does this constitute it as a true avant-garde script in TYA, since it does not carry all attributes outlined in this study, or is *Hush* just another play utilizing many avant-garde techniques? When looking again to Graver for a category *Hush* might fall into, I found that its tendencies most closely aligned with a *politicized, partisan art*, as it clearly "criticizes the status quo" with its commentary of the American media, government, and the violent state the country faced during the time it was written (Graver 12).

I believe that as a script alone, *Hush* could be considered as moving toward the avant-garde, especially because, out of the three scripts analyzed, *Hush* surpasses both in avant-garde connections. However, depending on the production process, a live performance of this play could swing its pendulum back toward the naturalism that utilizes avant-garde technique, and therefore the outcome would obviously reside greatly on the director and production team. This reflection forced me to question how production choices affect the assessment of scripts in American TYA as avant-garde or not. Is my entire assessment irrelevant if the ultimate outcome

of the play so deeply relies on the production team, who ultimately chooses in what direction the production moves? What is the role of producing organizations in the creation of an avant-garde movement, and what is the role of the playwright? Should the script itself be what ultimately “leads” a director to consider a non-traditional approach? I posit that regardless of what the final result of the script becomes, that examination (in script and beyond) of “other,” whether it be script, production, artist, etc., in regard to pushing past the mainstream of US TYA proves crucial to the growth and development of the field because when following the historical development of the American avant-garde, the shift from linear to non-linear script proved a crucial element at the outset of the movement, followed later by emphasis on script interpretation, production choice, and movement away from the dramatic text completely.

***Atypical Boy* by Laurie Brooks**

The final play I examine in this study, *Atypical Boy* by Laurie Brooks, made its world premiere at the Coterie Theatre in Kansas City, Kansas on March 19, 2009. The play explores, in a comedic, fable-like fashion, a young boy’s struggle with a society that mandates conformity. After he fails tests “designed to make him fit in” and treatment centers that cannot “cure,” the society exile him into the Edge of the World. Shunned from everything he knows, a monster grows from within. Here he also meets Girl, another outsider, and Hugo, half monster half human, nearly consumed by his monsters. The Boy battles with both, searching for understanding and identity as the two present him with opposite perspectives of his options outside the society: embrace your differences or be consumed by the monsters within. At the height of the boy’s journey, the play stops abruptly and the cast invites the audience to

participate in a talkback to directly express their opinions about the Boy's plight directly to the Boy himself.

The obvious piece of content varying from other plays in the TYA canon, much like that of *Hush*, becomes the questions raised instead of questions answered for the audience throughout the course of the play. Though the play presents many overarching sociopolitical themes, again similarly to *Hush*, it does not provide a specific agenda or one solid solution to the conflict and questions the play raises. Out of the three scripts I analyzed for this study, *Atypical Boy* also closely aligns with Graver's specific avant-garde categorization of *aesthetized, engaged art*, mainly for its sociopolitical/futuristic content and unusual interruption of story through audience talkback, which I will delve into deeper through my observations of the play's structure. The script also illustrates characteristics of *engaged art* partly through its presentation of a play within a play by characters from a futuristic, "seemingly" utilitarian society.

In the opening, the Ordinary, the "director" of the tale (the script very specifically points out though, that this play's director "enables characters to tell the story," only punctuating the action and underscoring moments of action) offers to show the audience a story "Unembellished," "gentle tale-telling...and hard truth" with the use of his players (all identically dressed, though "nothing quite matches"), of a world that "developed a sophisticated set of rules that organized their way of life" (Brooks 2, 3). This "set of rules" includes thinking and acting alike, according to standards and performing to perfection. Brooks also emphasizes this conformist theme by stating in the playwright's notes that *Atypical Boy* "is a cautionary tale of a world that presents a comic anti-model of behavior. It is highly stylized and not intended to be realistic in any way" (Brooks 2).

Atypical Boy's content presents the idea of thinking toward the future as well as it continually pushes for its audience to also question their known understanding of society. What would a society look like that forces everyone to conform and shuns the ones who aren't able to? How close is our society to this model? What are the results of a society formed in this way? Is this an example of the way we want our society to progress? *Atypical Boy* does not just present a story for the audience to watch, but fully engages audience members by aggressively pursuing them with ominous and futuristically minded sociopolitical content and tough questions. The original, non-adapted content of the play, though obvious, also rubs against the tenets of tradition in TYA. Though it is a script driven performance, the original content of *Atypical Boy* separates it from the traditional adaptations of fairytales and children's literature that currently makes up the majority of the field.

Aside from the content, the structure of *Atypical Boy* presents an overwhelming amount of variables to consider when analyzing the play for avant-garde tendencies. First, the relationship established with the actors and the audience throughout the play challenges conventional notions of the audience's role. Even before the play begins, members of the ensemble move throughout the house during a pre-show "experience," attempting to assess the audience members levels of perfection in a "silent European clown fashion" (Brooks 2). The interactive element of this activity, requested by the playwright's notes in the script, along with her suggestion that all action be played as close to the audience as possible, immediately provides an invitation for the audience to take an active role in the piece. The play, staged in an arena style setting (at its world premiere at the Coterie Theatre) also helps meld the worlds of the audience and the actors, a traditional staging option in adult theatre, but lesser implemented in

US TYA. As the play begins, the main storyteller and leader of the ensemble, the Ordinary, becomes a direct connection between audience and action on stage. The Ordinary addresses the audience, breaking the fourth wall, and converses often with spectators. Brooks' pre-show experience for *Atypical Boy* also advances the alteration of theatrical competence, which, again, an element that proves highly characteristic of the avant-garde.

While the pre-show "experience" aspect of the play also does contribute to the avant-garde aspect of challenging the notion of "what is the role of audience?" in a non-traditional experience, the play simultaneously presents a very traditional aspect of Theatre for Young Audiences: the narrator. Ironically, though at one time in the development of theatre for adults "breaking the fourth wall" did break tradition, in Theatre for Young Audiences it remains a steadfast and true convention used from the inception of the field's history. I found this observation quite interesting, that in a script where nearly all elements of traditional structure were stripped away, Brooks chose to utilize a narrator to drive the story forward in *Atypical Boy*. It, however, does represent a much more non-traditional narrator, so to speak, as Brooks' description of the Ordinary poses him as "a modern day director, with one difference: In this play, the Ordinary enables the characters to tell the story, [and] directs and punctuates, the action with a percussion instrument," a far cry from the typical narrator in US TYA who often stands to the side of action onstage providing expository remarks, didactic commentary, comedic droll, and minimal interaction with other characters (Brooks 2). Employing such a tradition in a non-traditional way moves the character of the Ordinary closer in the direction of "breaking tradition" than not.

The audience talkback forum that appears mid-performance at the peak of the play's action prevails as the most obvious non-traditional aspect of *Atypical Boy*'s structure. A staple precept in Brooks' plays, this particular talkback differs in that it occurs before the play ends, and more specifically, right when the action reaches its climax. The Ordinary, again acting as the link between audience and actors, facilitates the discussion by stopping the action and asking questions the audience responds to by standing up or sitting down.

The act of a talkback forum embedded into a performance serves dual functions when examined through the lens of the avant-garde: it acts as an additional structural element that skews the audience's notion of theatre, as well as a variable that mandates a redefinition of the role of audience as direct participant. D.B. De Seca, theatre critic for KCMetropolis, who reviewed the world premiere of *Atypical Boy* at the Coterie Theatre, describes the effect of this convention not only as a renewed connection between audience and performer, but also as a kind of "freedom between play and audience" (2). De Seca even likens the connection to that of the "string breaking" moment in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, pointing out that even a small moment can "dissolve the barriers between audience and actor" (3). He additionally points the power found in such a bond, that it allows all participants to journey together through the world of the play with something at stake, fully involved in the decisions made on stage and "accountable for our actions through the lives of the characters onstage" (De Seca 3). I posit that the establishment of this connection between audience and performers through the mode of "embedded talkback" greatly contributes to the factors that place *Atypical Boy* extremely close to the realm of the avant-garde in TYA. It also solidifies a consistency of immersive audience

engagement as a theatrical convention throughout the piece that gradually builds, allowing more opportunity than the last for those watching to take full ownership of the characters' journey.

Interestingly enough, *Atypical Boy* also mimics *Hush* in its experimentation with language and some instances of its use begin to push against the boundaries of the traditional dramatic text in TYA. The use of gibberish and nonsense words appear throughout, moving beyond the medium of language's primary role to create meaning through the spoken word. Right from the outset, the ensemble communicates through a rhythmic, driving minimalist language in which they communicate with each other and The Ordinary and represent the "perfect" society in which the Boy lives. Their continual cadence, various patterns of the syllables "ta-rum," though indiscernible words, communicate through subtext, rhythm, and sound, to texture the action and emotion behind the story of the world the boy was born into, rather than using language in its traditional sense. They dually serve as a huge symbol of the strict and conformist characteristics of the community itself and provide a framework from which the rest of the story evolves.

While the ensemble marches forward, charging with their syllables of "ta-tums," the contrasting linguistic image emerges from the Boy, another effort by Brooks to define him as "other" in a world of "same" through language. The Boy's signature syllable, "La la la la" (along with similar variations of it throughout the script), evokes a much more sing-song quality, lacking structure and filled with fluidity and lyrical etherealness, first as the ensemble observes him, and later when he sings to his emerging "monster." This non-traditional language pattern continues when Boy encounters Hugo and he speaks his version of this syllable language: "La deed a eed a," an almost haunting warning of the evil Boy will face in Hugo. This cadence

quickly disappears, however, and replaced by a disturbing bout of shouts by the puppets that dominate Hugo's being, who repetitively chant negative mantras like "hate, hate hate," "failure, failure, failure," "fall, fall, fall," and "no excuses." This shift from syllable to word immediately plummets the audience back into a world where words create intense and striking meaning, to further aid in creating sympathy and pathos toward the character of Boy.

Brooks' experimentation with language continues further as the ensemble morphs into characters that retell the boy's journey. In a scene where the Boy attends school, the ensemble member playing the teacher speaks the entire scene in a skewed, highly stylized, and nonsensical (almost "Suessian") abstraction of the English language:

"ENSEMBLE MEMBER AS TEACHER: Morning good, beacons and grids.

Today in our cars we will escapade Biologia. Five-onetwothreefourfive- millennia of frongs provide for your learning enjoyment. Breathe and hear you me" (Brooks 12).

By playing with language in this scene Brooks gives the audience and the reader a moment to experience the world directly through the perspective of the Boy. By exposing us to the slow, confusing, muddled words of the teacher we further understand his miserable plight and are able to connect even deeper to his character and situation emotionally.

Not only does Brooks experiment with texture and depth of the written word, she creates a visual language through sound and as physical action throughout *Atypical Boy*. The boy speaks through visceral sound and guttural noises even from the moment he appears onstage as a baby (one of many moments portrayed puppets throughout the play^{xi}), growling and barking, snorting, and creating other odd noises, instantly demonstrating that his characteristics and skills

differ from that of the rest of his community. The sounds continue as he grows and become integral to his expression of emotion, particularly when he begins to grow his own monster after meeting Hugo and the Girl. This language of sound helps clearly illustrate the emotional journey of the boy, creating a clear outline of his feelings as an outsider and creating markers for the audience as he reaches major emotional arcs. They additionally connect him to the Girl, as he realizes others like him with similar characteristics exist. The similarity of sound language between the Boy and the Girl also solidifies and further emphasizes their connection to the audience. This auditory world filters through into each character's monsters as well, (also portrayed by multiple puppets) creating a cacophony of shrieks, howls, and eerie laughter as they attempt to overcome the heart of each individual to which they attach.

Language as physical action appears continually through the Boy's journey, and like the language through sound that Brooks creates, gives yet another mode of visual communication to follow through in the landscape of *Atypical Boy*. The most obvious and repetitive example of this appears continually throughout the story when the Boy's hands "dance." This physical action becomes symbolic of not only his difference from the others in his community, but also his inability to control or change his true nature. The poetry of the stage directions alone "*his hands dance*" creates a striking duality between the Boy's unique nature and constant frantic, nervous energy as he fights off conformity, as well as the monsters, which attempt to consume him later on. These simple and specific directions also exemplify one of many instances where Brooks creates moments through stage direction, which hold great potential for exciting interpretation of physical language onstage, especially in the repetition of them through the Boy's journey and then when he meets the Girl.

This language of physical action appears again, combined with the play's visual language, as the Boy distributes paper hearts to various participants in the story. The visual of the heart, while important, creates even more impact when combined with the various physical actions Brooks layered into each encounter with it as the Boy searches for recipients. In the seven times the Boy hands out a paper heart, first to an audience member, then to the Ensemble, and finally to the Girl, the hearts get accepted, tossed aside, ripped up, offered up a second and third time, and yanked back by the Boy himself. This smorgasbord of interactions with yet another extremely simple and juvenile, even ritualistic physicality melds the worlds of visual and physical language and comments on the many relationships and connections the boy makes, loses, and fights for throughout his journey. The simplicity and universality of the action, utilizing the physical and visual realms for articulation, allows an audience of varying age and experience to directly relate to the emotions buried within each physical gesture.

The experimentation of language in *Atypical Boy*, through the use of syllable, illogical gibberish, and subtext to convey meaning remains an important component aiding to move the script closer toward the realm of the avant-garde in American TYA. I believe Brooks' newest script proves an important contribution to the canon of American TYA dramatic literature, challenging the boundaries of what is tradition in American TYA and creating an opportunity to move toward the avant-garde.

CHAPTER SIX: BEYOND THE BREAKING: CONCLUSIONS

Through my study of the avant-garde and the idea of “breaking tradition” in Theatre for young audiences, I realized that most of the answers I gained stayed fairly true to the characteristics of the two terms that shaped my study: tradition and avant-garde. My research related to the examination of tradition in American TYA remained grounded and true to my experiences as a practitioner in the field, while research pertaining to that of the avant-garde and the idea of “breaking tradition” resulted in a much more fluid, flexible, and grey outcomes that raised more questions and prompted motivation toward additional research in the future.

Attempting to find connections between these two opposing, extremely archetypal subjects (tradition or mainstream vs. the avant-garde) proved challenging, but also provided interesting perspective on the growth and development as the field of US Theatre for Young Audiences looks beyond its traditional foundations. Utilizing the theory of Aronson, his predecessors, and the vocabulary of his colleagues as a lens drove the bulk of my research on the avant-garde and provided a clear and specific framework for comparison between the timelines of development in avant-garde theatre for adults in the United States and American TYA.

As I researched the history of US TYA, I noted that sufficient information and documentation of the late twentieth and twenty-first Centuries was readily available. However, many of these resources, due to the relatively short and concise history of the TYA field in the United States, were compiled and/or gathered by the same group of individuals, limiting the perspective and breadth in which I could view the history presented. If time permitted,

compiling interviews from a variety of TYA historians and respected scholars in the field (persons other than those represented in current offerings) may have added to a wider historiographical perspective for this study. Utilizing only secondary sources in my study did allow me, however, to keep a narrow focus on the overall scope as well as provide a specific and thorough analysis of the particular moments in TYA that I found relevant throughout my journey through the history of the field.

Upon reflecting on the project's structure, I do acknowledge that my choice to use only scripts to analyze the potential moments where tradition in US TYA breaks could prove problematic, as the use of a non-traditional means of dramatic text remains integral to the very essence of avant-garde theatre. However, this specificity in choice allowed me to narrow my focus, limit my variables, and therefore kept my results more manageable and clear, as well as establishes a vast springboard for future research projects in this realm. Due to various research constraints, I found it extremely difficult to locate video documentation or performance texts outlining devised pieces of US TYA (and little or any documented evidence of their existence) that fit the criteria for my analysis and were accessible to the public. However, as I researched the development of the avant-garde movement in the United States as well as its predecessor in Europe, I began to understand that although an important characteristic of the avant-garde was the rejection of the text itself, much of early avant-garde theatre emerged from written scripts, albeit it untraditional in style and form, then gradually moved away from using them at all. This ultimately aided in my decision to move forward with a selection of scripts rather than video taped productions and performance texts, as well as my conclusion that US TYA echoes this progression in its current state.

This piece of my research also led me to believe that not many, if any professional TYA Companies in the United States currently devise non-script based performance pieces for their main stage seasons, and that if they were, none of these works were being documented or made accessible to the public via written publications, performance texts, or video documentation. This realization led me to contact my colleague Meghann Henry, as well as Jeff Church, Artistic Director of The Coterie Theatre, and Kim Peter Kovak of the Kennedy Center, for further guidance on researching contemporary TYA scripts rather than documented performances. Henry's research in physical and devised theatre, along with Kovak's knowledge of new works for TYA and Church's familiarity with the Coterie's production history and objectives to produce contemporary, non-traditional productions led me to the three scripts chosen for examination in this study.

If I were to conduct this study again, however, without the research constraints I faced in this project, I would move in a different direction by contacting and interviewing Artistic Directors and other seasoned professionals in the field to further supplement my findings, along with performing site visits to view potential performance pieces in person. I believe I would also focus a second examination and research phase on devised performances in US TYA, in order to compare these two methods of non-traditional performance creation, in the effort to present dual perspectives on potential movement toward the avant-garde through script and non-script driven performance (as my research showed that the development of the historical avant-garde movement in the US exhibited a trend that moved from script driven to a non-script driven performance). Using only dramatic texts still proves somewhat limiting, despite the evidence above, especially if categorizing or comparing types of performance, since such a large

characteristic of the avant-garde emerges out of the notion of semiotic deconstruction, which includes the rejection of the dramatic text.

My study of the development of the historical avant-garde in the United States also aided me in viewing American TYA from a macrocosmic point of view. I believe that, based on my survey of the literature available in American TYA, my experience in the field, and the three scripts I examined, that many dramatic texts in our current canon draw on and incorporate elements of the avant-garde but do not yet allow it to become the fundamental ingredient for the script, much like the work of American playwrights O'Neill, Rice, Saroyan, and Williams created just prior to the explosion of the historical avant-garde in the United States. It is important to remember that as Aronson states, the avant-garde settled *within* scripts like those listed above, but did not serve "as a basis for creating the plays" (3).

I feel that evidence for this exists in the three scripts I examined for this study. All of the plays I analyzed used multiple elements of the avant-garde but the avant-garde itself was not a foundation for the scripts. I concluded that out of the three, *Hush* exhibited the most avant-garde tendencies overall. *Atypical Boy's* avant-garde presence remained most evident in its content, but still existed in a very traditional, linear structure. Within that structure many elements of tradition were challenged, such as the role of audience and use of language, but the true foundations of the play itself remained grounded in tradition and therefore could not be deemed as pure avant-garde. *Black Butterfly* challenged the semiotic notion of theatre by using an interdisciplinary approach to performance: poetry and spoken word amidst linear story, glimpses of surrealism, and the projected image. *Hush's* structure and form reaches toward the historical avant-garde movements of symbolism, with metaphor and symbol weaved within all its theatrical elements

and epic historical commentary. *Hush* additionally presents a combination of realistic and abstracted characters, simultaneous action, and elements of the landscape drama, but its content still remains grounded in traditional elements of story. *Hush* did break the most tradition in the sense of structure and form out of the three plays I examined, with its episodic structure, Brechtian use of titling, and symbolist nature, reminiscent of early European avant-garde plays like Maeterlinck's *Interior* or Lorca's *Blood Wedding*. I do acknowledge, however, that these three plays cannot represent the entire canon of dramatic literature in American TYA, and that they give us merely a small taste of what contemporary playwrights offer the young audiences they serve, and I am certain that there are plays with perhaps similar or more frequent avant-garde tendencies. My difficulty however, in finding even three plays that attempt to push the boundaries of tradition in US TYA should be noted as well, evidence that either the majority of TYA playwrights do not implement any of these non-traditional tendencies, or that if they are, their works are not being published, documented, or accepted in any form accessible to the public.

In American TYA, I feel that our urge to break tradition has only begun to break the surface, and that utilizing theories and frameworks of past development, such as Aronson's examination of the development of the historical avant-garde in the United States will aid us in moving our efforts forward as we expand the boundaries around what TYA in the United States looks like. However, because historical and political context play such a huge role in the development of a movement such as the avant-garde, I realized through this project how important acknowledgement and examination of context becomes when studying the development of any avant-garde movement in relation to US TYA. Our world differs greatly

from that of the time when the avant-garde first emerged in the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States (some might argue that it actually does not differ that greatly), and many additional variables exist, historically and politically. The type of audience we serve also differs greatly. I came to realize during this study that these variables drastically influence the landscape in terms of a possible avant-garde movement in American TYA, and even challenge the mere notion of ever making it possible.

The twenty first century American lives in a post-post modern society where the lines for everything have multiplied, blurring the borders of reality and truth with multiplicity and plurality in all aspects of academia. Inundated with technology, instant access to communication via the internet, social networking pages, and lightning fast cell phone applications, Americans young and old face a life filled with opportunities for constant communication. Post-modern performance evolved out of this culture, into contemporary German scholar Hans Lehmann's *post-dramatic theatre*^{xixiii}, expanding theatrical vocabulary into a realm that reaches beyond the dramatic text and into a new theatrical paradigm to employ techniques like the scenic poem, exploring the spaces in-between art, theatre, music, and dance, hyper naturalism, textscape, and intermediality. Where does the idea of an avant-garde movement in TYA fit into this ultra contemporary theatrical context?

Based on my investigation that used Aronson's theory as a frame, I believe that American TYA occurs within a complex post modern context that pushes the singularity of the historical avant-garde into more plural, contemporary avant-gardes. Will post-dramatic theatre impact and challenge the historic avant-garde characteristics that theatre artists may choose to implement into new works for young people in the United States (i.e. creating a scenic poem vs.

surrealism)? Will US TYA experience a period of these historical avant-garde characteristics first before reaching a post-dramatic era? Or will a combination of both or nothing emerge? Since American TYA's timeline of development resides far behind that of theatre for adults in the United States, will it follow the same line of development or will this timeline be infiltrated by outside variables and factors, including that of the specific audience we serve?

Within my particular project and the scripts I evaluated, it felt as though the moments of "breaking tradition" were greatly inspired by the historical avant-garde concepts that developed in the US avant-garde theatre movement, and I did not find evidence of a more contemporary use of post dramatic theatre. I believe that based on the current climate of our culture and economy, along with the role and current tension between funding TYA (and the rest of the performing arts) within our educational institutions, that US TYA is currently positioned to expand further beyond its traditional educational roots inside schools and move toward a more historical, "grassroots" phase, similar to that of the US avant-garde movement. In order to posit whether or not American TYA could fully develop into a phase of the post dramatic, echoing that of theatre for adults, would require additional research in the area of post dramatic theatre to assess its potential affects and influence on contemporary TYA scripts. However, following the basic pattern I have explored from the historical development of theatre for adults from traditional to avant-garde, it seems probable that a post dramatic movement would follow similarly in US TYA, obviously in a later timeline than that of adult theatre (just as in the potential for an avant-garde movement has happened later than its counterpart movement in adult theatre), as its gestation period dates further forward in time than theatre for adults in the United States.

In addition, I do feel that the evolution of contemporary theatre for adults can impact and drive the direction of a potential avant-garde movement in TYA, particularly due to the fact that many playwrights write for both genres of theatre and draw inspiration from the many types of work they create, despite the audiences they write for. I also believe that the development of an avant-garde movement in TYA depends greatly on how the role of the playwright continues to develop as our field grows and changes. Looking again to the development of the historical avant-garde in the United States for comparison, the role shifted from a “predominance of the playwright as primary creator to the increased role of other theater artists in creating” collaboratively in the latter half of the twentieth century as seen in the work of avant-garde artists like Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Tadush Kantor (Listengarten and Knopf, 2009). Therefore, as groups of artists and theatre companies in American TYA continue to evolve and closely collaborate; will our field similarly see this shift? Currently, the singular voice of the playwright dominates the dramatic literature canon in US TYA, but as more breaking of tradition occurs, will the role of the playwright indeed shift along with the idea of what is deemed as the “dramatic text” in our field? The need for continued documentation and research of the development of our field remains immense, as this type of research will only aid us in tracking what forms US TYA will take in the future as we move further beyond that of what we deem to be mainstream or tradition.

The difference in the audience we serve becomes the second major factor to consider when looking at Aronson’s model layered onto American TYA. Theatre for Young Audiences differs fundamentally because of the audience in which it targets: the child. Within this particular research project and context in mind, the basic question of relevance bubbled to the surface for

me as I stepped back to reflect upon my findings. Due to the specific audience targeted in TYA, is Aronson's model even relevant as a lens for examination at all?

In *Theatre as a Medium for Children and Young People*, Schonmann speaks explicitly of this particular conundrum as she explores how to tackle the differentiation between theatre for adults and theatre for young people, pointing out that with the "independent theater" of the 1960s, artists like Grotowski and Artaud experimented with the roles of audience and the removal of barriers between "art and life" (19). She questions this very notion in relation to children's theatre: "Could this direction also be acceptable for children's theatre?" subsequently answering no (Schonmann 19). "These theatrical attempts to convey meaning stemmed from the adults' worlds of knowing, struggling and wrestling with life. The new forms of children's theatre should grow from the young people's concerns, their own ways of seeing and knowing the world" (Schonmann 19, 20). The challenge, as Schonmann states, and as the rest of our field I believe also recognizes, is that adults, for a variety of reasons, must always be the primary leaders of this art form for children. This creates a complicated tension between TYA practitioners and their audience. How do we navigate this tension? Schonmann concludes her chapter on the boundaries between TYA and Adult theatre by positing how practitioners should strive to negotiate their work despite this complicated situation:

An audience composed of young people has special qualities that shape the conventional concepts about the art of theatre. Therefore it is not only a matter of adaptation to the art of the theatre for adults, and it is not a matter of 'being better' than adult's, rather it is a form of art for its own sake. It should develop its own poetic, aesthetic, and artistic forms. My understanding is that in order to be

meaningful, TYP should be exclusive from other forms of adult's theatre yet, at the same time, TYP should be inclusive of other forms of theatre. Out of this dialectical existence of the exclusive-inclusive ways of constructing meaning, Theatre for Young People should be able to grow and define its own nature of excitement to illuminate the theatrical event. (Schonmann 27)

What are the practical implications of Schonmann's writings? Should professional TYA companies begin to consult and employ young people with creative responsibility as they create their seasons and in the devising new works? Does the historical development of avant-garde theatre for adults in the United States give TYA practitioners in the United States at the very least a foundation from which to experiment and move forward from? How can this research on the avant-garde be combined with Schonmann's theory and practically applied in US TYA?

Based on my research in the theatrical avant-garde as well as Schonmann's theories of TYP, I believe that the use of an exclusive-inclusive methodology must be acknowledged, considered, and applied in US TYA as the field continues to develop. In order for American TYA to establish its own unique artistic forms, visual and linguistic vocabulary, and an aesthetic poetry beyond that of theatre for adults, I also believe that a wide-ranging foundational knowledge of all genres and styles of theatre, (including the avant-garde) can challenge our perspectives for what contemporary US TYA could look like. As a result of this research project, I now carry additional interests with me in regards to researching TYA and the avant-garde. Particularly, the results of this project challenge me to dive further into exploring the impact of applying forms of the avant-garde (in the US and globally) to US TYA, monitoring how it might affect the role of child as audience. I additionally wonder how research on the mind and

cognitive development of the child could aid or direct how we present theatre to young people. Based on my basic knowledge of psychology and cognitive development in children, I am curious if young people, because their thought patterns move in a more segmented, less linear modes, might be more accepting, open, and benefit from theatrical presentation that utilize non-linear, landscape, and other avant-garde techniques than adults. If so, then does research between the child as audience and children's cognitive development open additional possibilities for what and how we present to the child audience in US TYA?

I am additionally interested in monitoring and documenting the development of American TYA as it continues to move toward (or away from) a potential avant-garde movement. In light of my research on Schonmann, I am also curious to investigate methodologies for giving young people in their communities a voice in TYA at both the professional (performance driven) and community (process driven) levels.

In the professional theatre setting, does this take the form of class and workshop offerings that utilize avant-garde and non-traditional techniques? What results would form if these classes and workshops then move back into the professional world of theatrical production? Could this be a tool in which Education Departments in professional theatres will connect with schools and community organizations, as well as their patron base? Might utilizing avant-garde techniques to approach classic children's literature open new and exciting avenues for young people to individualize their theatrical experiences, rather than be directed into a specific interpretation of classic literature? How do professional theatres afford to take such risks financially, and what is the role and relationship between academic and professional TYA in this endeavor? Is there an opportunity for partnerships between the university and professional levels where space, time,

and energy for experimentation and research in production then transfer into the professional theatre setting?

From an administrative and managerial perspective, my research posed additional questions. How does the development of new form and rhetoric for US TYA affect funding? Many US TYA theatres cannot take the risk financially when producing non-traditional material, so how can theatres still have the option to produce this type of work without such huge risks involved? How might a piece of “avant-garde” work in US TYA be presented, with or without a performance text, to a granting institution, and in what ways can theatres document and archive their endeavors into this new realm? How does the TYA Playwright work to include the voice of young people in the creative process (beyond that of their own experiences as a young person and regardless of what forms the performance derives) and how do professional TYA theatres and production teams navigate this relationship? What new artistic forms and theatrical structures could potentially emerge as a result? Will we observe a surge in devised pieces and a blurring of role in production teams? My base inspiration for this research project culminated in experiencing International TYA. How does the exposure of US audiences to International TYA impact the types of work we create, and comparatively, where is the development of American TYA positioned in relationship to International TYA? As is evident, a multitude of questions and research avenues await further exploration in relation to TYA and its relation to the avant-garde.

This study has aided me greatly in understanding not only the development of avant-garde theatre in the United States, but its relation to the development of American TYA and how as a field, practitioners might be inspired to push the boundaries and directions of where American TYA moves in the future beyond that of the current mainstream, while holding onto a

respectful understanding of the importance in the establishment of tradition and its cyclical relation to that of the avant-garde. I am hopeful that through my work and research as an educator and artist that I, along with my students and colleagues, might be challenged and interested to explore deeper the edges of what we know as TYA in the United States, as well as manifest bravery and courageousness that propels each other further into a space of exclusive-inclusive methodology for creation as our field grows and changes.

I expect to see the fruits of this research present itself in the work that I create onstage, in community centers, at conferences, and in professional theatres that I come in contact with. I anticipate my future as a practitioner in this field to be filled with further discussions and examination of work that breaks tradition with Meghann Henry, Kim Peter Kovak, and Jeff Church about the role of the avant-garde, devising, and the child as audience in US TYA as all of our views evolve. I greatly look forward to spending time traveling in and out of the United States to experience and critically examine performance pieces that break tradition in TYA globally, as I challenge myself to define and document what US TYA looks like as it continues to develop. I strongly believe that if we continue to invite ourselves into these difficult and tumultuous spaces of the unknown we will challenge our field to press outward beyond the confines of US TYA's long and arduous, yet necessary history of tradition. I am confident that US TYA will soon break beyond its current boundaries to unveil a theatre for young people that is filled with sophistication, artistry, and unparalleled theatrical form, and in turn bestow the myriad voices of the young and their culture to the world.

APPENDIX: END NOTES

ⁱ I acknowledge that definitions of these terms vary greatly according to field and specific scholar, but also maintain that providing a clear foundation of my understanding of these terms from which to proceed proves crucial. Any changes or alterations in the following definitions will be noted as necessary, as I later delve specifically into various approaches to the avant-garde based on my research.

ⁱⁱ Abstracted toy theatre: an interdisciplinary form of performing/art with a focus in image that lives in the space between film and theatre, visual art and puppetry, and live and captured performance.

ⁱⁱⁱ Berhaus' three forms of the avant-garde:

- *Analysis*: the artist holds a critical mirror to society
- *Engagement*: the artist promotes active intervention and change
- *Forward Vision*: the artist projects an image of an emancipated society (Berghaus 38)

^{iv} *Theatrical competence* is "the ability to recognize that one is watching a performance" (Aronson 8).

^v These final two markers of the avant-garde, *practice before theory* and *art manifestos*, though extremely important to the characterization of my approach to the avant-garde, did not emerge during my application of this approach as I aligned each characteristic with the tenets of tradition in TYA to the scripts I analyzed, as both markers seem more likely to appear through broader study of the field's overall development rather than in the specific analyses of scripts. I did realize, however, through the journey of this project that these two markers did hold true in the timeline of my process for this thesis project, as the practical elements of my experimentation in the avant-garde emerged much before my attempt at theorizing them through the writing of this document. I hope to further investigate their specific connections to TYA in future projects and research.

^{vi} Though Schonmann's research stems from an international perspective on TYA, I felt that her observations speak to all forms of TYA and take a universal approach to many common limitations and challenges facing the field globally. Her text also brought a high degree of intellectual rigor and thought provoking questions unlike that of any research I found from scholars in US TYA, therefore proving an important and relevant contribution to this study, regardless of her affiliation from outside the US.

^{vii} The term "*children's literature*," when used throughout the remainder of this particular discussion, refers to adaptations of popular children's books, fairytales, and folktales.

^{viii} I include the rest of Schonmann's discussion of TYP and children's literature in chapter 6 in order to discuss and problematize her solutions to this current tension in TYA as apart of my conclusion.

^{ix} This role of the audience, to be clear, does not refer to the popular US TYA trend of *participation theatre*, but rather, move away from the objective to merely occupy or engage young people as the audience and includes the integration of deliberate aesthetic interactivity and total immersion into the theatrical experience.

^x The term "*progressive content*" for the purposes of this particular discussion is defined as contemporary or cutting-edge content that moves the field of US TYA forward, content that pushes toward breaking tradition.

^{xi} Though it may not constitute a large enough variable to be listed as a marker of the avant-garde, the use of puppets in avant-garde theatre prevails as an important element of avant-garde theatre throughout history.

^{xiii} *Post Dramatic Theatre* describes a post-post modern paradigm of theatre occurring since the end of the 1960s and serves as the next generation of the avant-garde. Post Dramatic Theatre is characterized by theatre that occurs "after drama," theatre that moves away from use of the dramatic text and toward a newer age of media, image, and sound, but also "includes the presence or resumption or continued working of older aesthetics" (Lehmann 27).

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