

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the widely shared preconceptions, contemporary American drama did not lose its tradition of engaged theatre and has been an active participant in the collective search for alternatives to the neoliberal status quo. The theoretical section opens with a brief overview of the current state of the hegemonic order and attempts to provide a comprehensible background to why the phrase, “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”, has come to be considered axiomatic. From here, it moves on to the shift in the ongoing anti-capitalist debate and the contributions that have been made to it by global theatres. In order to unlock the critical potential of the American stage, the thesis adopts a theoretical framework that draws primarily on two studies. The first one is uncertain commons’ 2013 *Speculate This!*, which argues for re-engaging the very idea of the future, foreclosed on all fronts today, by switching from the mode of “firmative speculation”, actively utilized by neoliberalism for its reproduction of power, to “affirmative speculation”, which refuses to close the horizons on what else we might potentially become. The way to achieve it is borrowed from Lauren Berlant’s 2023 *On the Inconvenience of Other People* that focuses on the idea of “unlearning” our attachments to what we think binds us to life and organizes our world. The analytical part focuses on six dramatic works: Annie Baker’s *The Flick* (2013), Quiara Alegría Hudes’s “Elliot Trilogy”: *Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue* (2006) and *Water by the Spoonful* (2012), Young Jean Lee’s *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* (2007), Jackie Sibblies Drury’s *Fairview* (2018), and Wallace Shawn’s *Grasses of a Thousand Colors* (2009). Each chapter dedicated to a separate foundational structure of neoliberalism (individualism and entrepreneurship, racialised subject, and the binary Nature/Society) seeks to identify a recurrent

scenario, where the structure is unlearned enough to make space for affirmative speculations on the alternative, if only on the level of an episode.

Key Words

Contemporary American drama

Twenty-first-century American drama

Political theatre

Affirmative speculations

Firmative speculations

Neoliberalism