

NEW AMERICAN THEATER IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

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Abstract: *Arguing that the “Age of Trump” may have begun in the United States well before Donald Trump’s election in late 2016, this article identifies five stylistic innovations in the work of a new generation of American playwrights. These innovations concern: 1) dialogue, rendered as simultaneous rather than sequential, and both spoken and silent; 2) identity, seen as naturally fluid, with fixed characters portrayed as trapped in oppression, and actors in confused states of personhood; 3) time & place, also fluid, with a given drama’s ostensible fictional setting made uncertain by the unpredictability inherent in performance; 4) speech, expressive of an amorphous collective spirit rather than an autonomous individual psyche; and 5) a critical parody of the self-deluding myths of both American and theatrical culture. Mac Wellman and Suzan Lori-Parks are proposed as innovators of a preceding generation whose work has influenced the present one, which includes playwrights such as Annie Baker, Sarah Burgess, Lucas Hnath, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Taylor Mac, Dominique Morisseau, Bruce Norris, Antoinette Nwandu, Robert O’Hara, Jackie Sibblies Drury, and Anne Washburn.*