

Kristian Smeds's *Mental Finland*: The European Subject and the Political

Kristian Smeds's *Mental Finland* premiered in the administrative capital of the European Union, at the Royal Flemish Theatre in Brussels, Belgium, traveling to the appointed "cultural capitals" of 2009 and beyond. A multilingual and multiethnic event, combining classical, popular, and mass-media aesthetics, *Mental Finland* strategically troubles theatrical, national, and "European" acts of ethical/moral/identitarian bonding. Considering how languages, imagery, and the institutions of theatre shape the performance of liberal humanist and neoliberal Europe, a Europe that still produces and marginalizes alterity as the price of (politicized) belonging, *Mental Finland* marks the stage's distance from an untroubled mimesis of instrumental representation, using performance both to *defamiliarize* and to *other* habitual patterns of seeing and the domesticated "truth" they produce. Indeed, Smeds's *mise-en-scène* both exploits and counters the dialectics of Brechtian aesthetics, in which the surface is governed by a concealed ideological structure precisely reversing it, in which what is *seen* is the opposite of what is *true*: exclusion onstage registers as venal inclusion elsewhere. Sidestepping the strictly binary dialectic of Brechtian performance (empathy/demonstration) and the determined futurity it may enable, Smeds uses a range of figurative and constellational assemblages to de/reorient the subject of identitarian performance, reimagining a spectatorial subjectivization sustainable for an equitable Europe still in the process of becoming.

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