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Theatre as community. New drama from Finland in the tradition of Bertolt Brecht

“I believe that community no longer exists today. [...] Everything has disintegrated into thousands of pieces. Yet you can find a temporary community with theatre.” Finnish theatre director and playwright Kristian Smeds describes theatre as one of the few places where it is still possible to experience community today. In fact, theatre is extremely popular in Finland. Since Finnish theatre has experienced a wave of new drama at the beginning of the 21st century, audience numbers have even further increased. Finnish dramatists, aiming to contribute to a “repoliticization of the contemporary Finnish society”, as theatre researcher Hanna Helavuori puts it, nowadays create plays which touch today’s social problems and discuss political developments. In search of ways to both speak critically about societal issues and to overcome realism in their plays, many of them recur to the methods of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre such as alienation effects and a dialectic representation of conflicts. Examples of this new writing style grounded in Brechtian thinking are the works of Juha Jokela, Mika Myllyaho, Emilia Pöyhönen and Esa Leskinen. With their work these dramatists aim to establish Finnish theatre as a place for critical discourse again, thus enabling the audience to take part in the life of society.

Niklas Füllner, born 1983, studied Theatre Research and English Literature and Culture in Bayreuth, Bochum and Helsinki. In July 2014 he will receive his PhD at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Ruhr University Bochum where he has been also working as a lecturer. For his research project *Brecht’s dramatic tradition in the contemporary political drama in Finland* he was awarded a three-year scholarship by the Faculty of Philology of the Ruhr University Bochum in October 2010. Niklas Füllner has presented his research project at conferences at the universities of Munich, Germany, and Tampere, Finland. He is now working as a lecturer at the Centre of Fine Arts of Ruhr University Bochum.