

Katya Yaromina**The trials and tribulations of post-historical life or *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?***

Can “normalcy” lead to insanity? Yes, according to *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* produced by Münchner Kammerspiele and Susanne Kennedy.

The production and the eponymous film of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Michael Fengler explore the life of an average middle class person going through life unreflectively. He takes values, norms, and behaviours for granted. His unexamined life runs its course sustained by the sheer inertia. The protagonist of the play, Kurt, opts into the game of leading a “normal” (a post-historical, a Hegelian would say) existence, moving in “icy waters of egotistical calculation”.

And game it is, in Kennedy’s production: a video game where actors resemble non-playable characters with jerky movements and mechanical voices more than they do living people. Every action is punctuated with a computer-like voice announcing the location. Performers wear silicone masks hiding expressions of the human face. They don’t use speech either and instead just open their mouths to the sounds of recorded dialogues. Their movements and gestures are markedly robotic and non-expressive. The performers always keep distance from each other, avoiding intimate communication and remaining aloof in their emotional isolation. The performers are turned into puppets, statistical fictions, computer NPCs, social clichés, in undifferentiated and unremarkable alienated individuals. The space where the performance takes place is also de-individualized. It is closed, unchanging, inhospitable, and barren – just as the life that the characters lead. It is multiplied and reflected in the screen used as a curtain and in the screen that is a part of the *mise-en-scène*. The director’s use of space and the videos of amateur actors that are displayed during the performance make the audience to question the authenticity and reality of the play and of the video – and of their own life. Some episodes of the performance may appear to be overlong and dull. They are meant to be: the time is stretched to the extreme, conveying the feelings of monotony, boredom, and repetitiveness.

The use of masks and videos provides for unexpected and powerful moves towards the end of the performance. The close up of Herr R. stuns the viewer with the picture of the human eyes full of suffering looking through the silicone mask. The old lady from the video enters the stage and starts to dance confusing the borders between reality and make-belief even further.

Hailing from the de-politicized post-war Germany, Fassbinder’s film and Kennedy’s production uncover the hidden tension and meaninglessness of the bourgeois existence. It combines the left’s puzzlement with the stability of capitalist society and revulsion at its vulgarity, alienation, and monotony. One reason for this stability and inertia is that the exit option’s costs are prohibitively high. It is striking how formidable the discursive power of capitalism and its grip over the imagination are: the only conceivable exit from the “normal” life is insanity and death. Tolstoy’s Prince Andrey escapes the iron cage of rationality only when facing death under the sky of Austerlitz; Fassbinder’s and Kennedy’s hero enacts the catastrophe in his own life. The

answer that the artists give to the old Socratic question – “Does the unexamined life worth living?” - is a resounding “no”. For them, the real question is not why Herr R. runs amok but why not everyone does.