

Cultured swallowing of crap

Last Rehearsal for the Generation: a settling of accounts between “independent artists” and their grotesque replicants from the “institutionalized” future is primarily a direct confrontation with the current cultural politics.

Via Negativa’s Last Rehearsal for the Generation is so far the most forceful guerrilla action undertaken by the “independent” actors (Marko Mandić, Katarina Stegnar, Gregor Zorc and director Bojan Jablanovec); it was announced already with their public relations gesture – but that is where it stays. With an uncompromising cast from the main national theatre, more precisely (Mala) Drama, they vocally and clearly position themselves against “current” cultural politics that subordinates culture to market forces, competition and economic investment opportunities, and they vocally and clearly desist from collaborating with this “radical encroachment into the life of collaborators”. The occupation of the cultural space that is to ensue (paradoxically with the consent of Drama) amounts to an existentially uncertain confrontation with their replicants from the “institutionalized” future (the mentioned performers as centenarians are being played by three “Drama” actors – Boris Mihalj, Veronika Drovc and Matija Rozman), who are planted as “ticking bombs” in historic costumes and with grotesque masks.

All that follows is a representation of art that is torn between self-extinction, the spouting of anger over a miserable future, competitive images from the popular culture spectacle and self-martyrdom in their performative persistence; all underlined by an ever more uncertain, self-questioning, even self-accusing, relationship with its (own) “cultural” doing and the nagging thought of what, if anything, still remains of culture. They bring us close to the idea of our best-selling philosopher that we should place a bomb under the seats of “culture representatives” for a cultural day, while cleverly using this for underlining the impotence of an explosive climax. Another “cultural event” in town which is confronted with, in its characteristic performative long drawn-out fashion, a brutal and empty framework of the “spectacle”, while the audience are confronted with their (own) end, the demise of man and culture: there’s going to be no sequel; “this is it!” (and this is where the performance ends).

The excessive Marko Mandić, incisively harsh and indomitable Katarina Stegnar and likeably anecdotal Gregor Zorc, each in their distinctive manner spouting anger or self-ironical witticisms out of indescribable existential “horror” that is primarily theirs (and their mirror replicants). Serving us various cultural “crap” (pop leitmotif of the mentioned philosopher) that we would prefer to brush away as far as possible is best described by Via Negativa’s performative fad that constantly tries to attribute this theoretical “crap” to the audience that swallows it in a cultured manner. This critical narrative about positions in the theatrical machinery is so total and determining that it does not require the answer of the spectator at all (and so is nonetheless theatre-like?). The continuation will not have anything special about it, they tell us congenially in advance: for artistic distinction they have ran out of film.

The full awareness of being in a position where your hands are tied, and where you are collaborating (against your will) in this game of executioners and victims is far from being naïve in this performance; if anything this production of “cultural usurpation” plays on it. However, the “all-knowingness of the performance” contains within it a devious safety valve against real risk-taking and confrontation with the “other”. Above all, the production problematizes the existing theatrical machinery ad nauseam (as the prompter places the words of others into their mouths) and they resist the role of tied-up puppets in the hands of a “cultural” dictate – whether through the more subtle classical repertoire of rejected mimicry or the performance of the naked body. But the galled personal fights between the usurpers and the hostages of culture, the slippery public representatives/agents of this “common enemy” and “those represented”, between the parts and the real people (who finally end up exchanging the parts), becomes outwardly ever more confused – which does in fact reflect the actual state of things, but still the performance from here onwards loses a certain clarity and sharpness of its initial position. The image of hostages in cultural institutions however remains accessible via the direct broadcasting on the web for the home spectator as well.