



Photo by MIYAUCHI Katsuo

DRAMA: Tokyo Ghetto and the art of the post mainstream

This may be the future of theatre

IT IS difficult to have a peaceful post-show drink these days without an earnest debate on the state of crisis in the theatre and, one might say, hardly without good reason: an awful lot of theatre is plain boring – and irrelevant.

So we need reminding that theatre doesn't have to be so – or consist of plays in the usual sense, or characters, or plot, most of which is done better on TV.

Gordana Vnuk, the new theatre programmer at Chapter Arts Centre is one who talks of "post-mainstream theatre" and I guess you couldn't get a better example than Tokyo Ghetto, the latest in Cardiff's Japanese theatre season, from Gekidan Kaitaisha.

The Chapter Theatre space has been transformed so that the audi-

REVIEW
Tokyo Ghetto
Chapter Arts, Cardiff

ence sits along one side, with two TV monitor screens facing, a larger screen at one end, and initially two women in underwear on pedestals with heads bandaged.

First a wraith-like woman enters and moves silently around, then a fourth woman comes and sits with her back to us and a man in a sombre dark suit kneels and beats out a rhythm on her bare back.

His hands slap relentlessly so that her flesh turns purple and then he turns around, opens her legs and repeats the incessant rhythmic slapping on her thighs.

It is one of the most haunting images I have witnessed in the theatre, and I can understand why audiences have intervened and angrily disrupted the spectacle.

It is the first of a stream of usually wordless scenes that are mesmerising, haunting, disturbing, and the monitor screens show footage of, for example, samurai swordsmen and Japan's post-war humiliation and heritage, documentation of a society that seems both to create and yet be separate from much of what we see live before us.

The performance is clearly about power as well as culture, and the relationship between the two.

But if theatre has a future, then I suspect we have seen it here.

DAVID ADAMS