

Gekidan Kaitaisha: Tokyo Ghetto/Orgie. Chapter Arts, Cardiff. 13-15 June.

There is a fine line between art and terrorism.

She chalked on the wall in English. "Let me rest in my dark grave". If only. How do we make peace with the litany of atrocities inscribed on the histories of nations? The manifest struggle with the sounds of the English language as she speaks the humiliating rhetoric of surrender after WW2, the legacy of acts that underscore the post-war reconstruction of Japan, told through old newsreels, architects' plans and fast cut video tracking of cityscapes.

The action is framed. I am bound to my seat. Yet the whole cannot be taken in at a glance. I am witness to intensely personal acts at the limits of the real in a landscape that has no depth of field. The processional rituals of everyday life are fast, strenuous and slow to the point of stasis. The

actors are just figures standing in a space.

The erotics of pain are a carefully constructed contract between the perpetrator and the recipient. Somehow the manifest complicity between the woman who offers herself up to be beaten and the man, who relentlessly slaps her until the welts come up, exhibits a delicacy which mitigates this flagrant demonstration of brutality. More disturbing, because it cannot be so easily reduced, is the humiliation of the woman, naked to her panty girdle, who resolutely and obsessively devours an entire raw cabbage while reciting the names of countries.

Gekidan Kaitasha translates as "theatre of deconstruction". This has a political edge. Tokyo Ghetto speaks from the position of exile, outside the mainstream. It enacts the small details of defiance and heroism that make up the fabric of ordinary life. In this poetics of the refugee the ghetto is no safe haven. It is a militant act of resistance.

Simon Thorne.

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