

## **“Red Beard, Red Beard”, a human choral – Theatre**

In Gennevilliers, amateur actors play the counterparts of the projected film of Kurosawa, “Barberousse”

**Rene Solis – LIBERATION: Friday April 18, 2008**

**Red Beard, Red Beard** inspired by the film “Barberousse”, of Akira Kurosawa, by John Malpede. Theatre de Gennevilliers (93). Fri. 19:00, Sat. 20:30 and Sun. 15:00 Until April 20. Reservations. : 01 41 32 26 26.

Go to the theatre to see a film on a television? Absurd? This is what the American director John Malpede proposes every evening to the spectators at the Theatre of Gennevilliers. The stage has been cut into four zones. The audience is divided into the same number of groups, and they seat themselves in front of a TV of normal size. On the program: “Red Beard” of Kurosawa. The film is shown in Japanese without subtitles. Sitting face-to-face with the public, on each side of the screen, ten actors are ready to speak the lines of their Japanese counterparts in French. Sometimes, they rise and mime simultaneously the action of the film. Three times during the performance, the actors rotate from one zone of the stage to the next. Red Beard, Red Beard (literally “Barberousse, Barberousse”), thus mobilizes forty actors.

Why so many people and what does the theatre add to the film? At first sight, nothing: the power of the images doesn't seem to need any comment; especially when the aesthetics of the film are so strong. All dressed in black, the interpreters are amateur actors recruited for this occasion in Gennevilliers and Ivry-sur-Seine. Neither their diction nor their gestures are very assured. However, as the evening advances, it releases a particular force, like an unexpected echo of the film. The solitary emotions of the spectator, evoked by the story of Red Beard, a doctor dedicated to saving the poor in the midst of darkness, mix with the feeling of being part of a collective adventure.

The actors, with their imperfections, their strangeness even – one of the groups, where the American actors participate, performs in English – give body not to the images of film, but to the idea of community. That is decidedly the primary ambition of Malpede. As the founder of Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) in 1985, he works mainly with homeless people of the district of Skid Row. And always gives a political and social dimension to the performances which he creates with them. “The theatre”, he says, “is located at the intersection of many social problems. We give the news of the front to those who are in the back. We give an account of the life of the damned and the bruised to the inhabitants of Normalville.”

Simplicity – even simple-ness – of the form imagined around Red Beard is accompanied by a great scenic rigor and implies a good sense of rhythm, to avoid any de-synchronization between images and translation. Despite the limitations of the performers and their gestural ability: interpreted by amateurs, Red Beard/Red Beard is very much a professional performance. In this performance, the film of Kurosawa acts as a talisman, so that, all that is touched by Red Beard is invested with grace, or at least, definitely, with a form of dignity.