

Lucy Guerin Sends Signals. Dancer! Do You Copy?

By Deborah Jowitt

Tuesday, September 22nd 2009 at 4:27pm



Lucy Guerin's *Corridor*
(left, Kyle Kremerskothen; center, Laura Levitus).

Details:

Lucy Guerin Inc.

Baryshnikov Arts Center

September 16 through 20

Dancers learn movement by copying someone who's demonstrating it. They follow verbal directions about how to perform it. They're not the only ones who learn certain necessary moves through imitation and verbal commands, although written instructions are common in many of life's transactions. Do I need to mention that the connections between the transmitter and the receiver are fragile and often yield imperfect results? (Pardon me, sir, your arm seems to have been misinformed.)

In the icily brilliant, yet tempestuously unstable world of Lucy Guerin's *Corridor*, such disjunctions are the guiding force. As if to channel the flow of information, the Australian choreographer (who worked in New York for seven years during the 1990s) confined the piece to the long strip of gray flooring that gives the work its title. Designer Donald Holt further limited the area by standing mirrored panels at either end. In the Baryshnikov Art Center's Howard Gilman Performance Space, we spectators sit in single rows, one along each side of the narrow set—so close to the action that we seem to read the dance as a scroll. Lighting designer Keith Tucker emphasized the linearity of the "stage" by hanging a row of large lamps above it and augmenting these with two unusual light boxes on wheels that are moved along behind us.

The six remarkable, unforgettable performers rise from among the spectators one by one, cued by their ringing cell phones, and amble around, chatting quietly, until Kyle Kremerskothen begins to unhinge his body, wobble, falter, and thrust his limbs around. Ranged along the corridor, the others start doing similar things; they're mostly assertive and stiff, with little, isolated collapses here and jolts there, yet they give an impression of oiliness in the joints, of bodies and limbs that can suddenly appear boneless.

They're also watchful. It's obvious that Laura Levitus, standing near Kremerskothen, is "learning" the moves from scrutinizing him, but it's harder to discern that Kirstie McCracken, at one end of the pathway is keeping her eye on Lee Serle, who's way down at the opposite end—past the first pair,

plus Byron Perry and Harriet Ritchie. The effect—unison that's not quite unison—is very unsettling. But that's nothing to the slippage between what Serle is saying into a mic as he walks down the line describing what he thinks each person is doing; a lot of the time, he speaks a split second ahead of what he sees. In another sequence, dancers face each other in pairs, but they look beyond their partners to someone else's partner for movement cues. At this point, Haco's subtle sound design (which sometimes offers a quiet babble of voices and, once, a song that begins "I'm in the shower alone") dwindles into a light, dry ticking.

The movement becomes stranger and stranger, as the dancers begin to travel through space. Big movements segue into almost dainty steps; shudders quiet down into finger flicks. Extreme expressions fly onto these people's faces the way the movements seem to alight on their bodies and move on.

Desire—for love, for beauty—underlies some of their games. While Perry dances down the corridor, the five others crawl after him, reading in rhythm from papers that they push along; the topic is improved health and appearance and everything that one can do to achieve it. In an eerie tango between feeling and structure, Serle recites his needs to those at the opposite end of the strip, but he's connected to an i-pod, which is, presumably, enlightening him as to his heart's desires. These progress from "I wish they would copy me" through "I wish they would die for me" to "I wish they would read my mind." His friends comply as best they can.

After this, Perry launches into the wildest dance of the evening—molded by who knows what urges and shifting emotions—crabbed, bestial, sprawling, uncertain, elated, with one unforgettable jump and dive. At the opposite end of the dynamic spectrum, Ritchie and McCracken stand side by side and, in impeccable rhythmic unison, spit out a rapid litany of little gestures and facial expressions.

Just when your head is swimming with all the out-of-sync twinned meanings, Guerin offers another metaphor in the form of a spectacle. The screens are transparent as well as reflective, and the lighting reveals Kremerskothen behind them at one end of the set. Wearing what resembles a white lab coat, he stands near a "tree" bearing huge luminous white kites. As he wheels it in, you realize that these are paper garments for the others, draped over lights. Once dressed, the dancers divide into couples and, in various idiosyncratic ways, wrangle one another's limbs in and out of the garments; now the music is the sound of crackling and ripping. Our clothes are *not* ourselves.

In the end, the game gets boosted up a dangerous notch, and the emotional heat becomes almost palpable. Kremerskothen argues on his cell phone that "now isn't really a good time for me to do that" and warns the caller that these people have reached their limit. He keeps on talking, but the sound system is taken over by a roar that gradually increases in volume and a slow, blurry male voice. Now the commands cross the fine line between the barely possible and the impossible. "Really feel pain," the speaker says. "Stop producing saliva." "Become younger." "Be the universe." After a while, one by one, the dancers drop out of this hopeless ordeal, shed their paper skins, and leave. The sound cuts out, and the room goes black.

The company's Baryshnikov Arts Center engagement is over. The good news is that another work by Guerin, her 2006 *Structure and Sadness*, will be presented at Dance Theater Workshop October 1 through 3.



September 19, 2009

DANCE REVIEW | LUCY GUERIN INC.

This Catwalk Isn't Meant for Cats, or for Walking

By ROSLYN SULCAS

Abstract dance is more like a poem or a work of abstract art than like a story. Images, ideas and associations conjured by the dancing bodies can float up and hang loosely in your mind as you watch; how they cohere and the evocative power they assume is one measure of how successful a piece is.

In most cases finding a specific meaning or message seems unimportant; it's likely, in any event, that a finished dance bears only a loose connection to the set of ideas that a choreographer began with.

In Lucy Guerin's "Corridor," which opened at the Baryshnikov Arts Center on Wednesday night, the relationship between intent and outcome seemed tighter. As the title suggests, the piece is set on a long catwalk of sorts, framed on either side by a row of chairs for the audience and mirrored screens at either end. The dancers — three men, three women — emerge from those rows, first one chatting self-absorbedly on his cellphone, then the others, until all are pacing up and down the stage, absorbed in their own private worlds.

Eventually the first man (Kyle Kremerskothen) begins to make twitchy, jerky arm movements as he talks, and the others imitate him, eventually pocketing their phones in favor of this wordless, physical communication. Pairs of dancers, facing one another from opposite sides of the long space, begin to copy one another with precise, idiosyncratic movements; arms lashing away from the body and pulling back, body dipping and ducking to the sides, the torso occasionally contracting spasmodically.

Later Lee Serle walks from one dancer to another, describing what he or she is doing ("She's putting on a mask"; "He's jumping up and down"). Still later each man proceeds to give each woman choreographic instructions ("Your arm is resting on a body of water"; "Your fingers have a life of their own, doing evil things").

Instructions play a big part in "Corridor": Mr. Serle, his voice transformed electronically into a rough burble, offers wishes that the dancers enact; all crawl along the floor robotically reciting instructions ("Treat yourself to a tummy tuck") and laughing manically. They go on to move through the space with earphones, perhaps responding to commands. Toward the end a disembodied horror-movie voice offers impossible dictates: "Stop your blood flowing"; "Become younger."

After a while this relentless extrapolation of the idea of communication in physical and verbal forms begins to feel schematic — as if Ms. Guerin did have a specific idea about the meaning of her dance at the outset and has played it out in a series of formal variations, pinning us to the message of the work rather than its imaginative power.

"Corridor" is nonetheless an intriguing piece. Its soundscape (by Haco) is subtle, its lighting (by Keith Tucker) powerful, its visual effects often striking — particularly at the end, when the dancers don stiff, papery white garments (by Susie Gerraty) that they crumple and twist. The dancing is delivered with dynamic precision and commitment. But the work remains at once opaque and literal, never liberating us from the uneasy sense that a particular meaning

arks, undiscovered.

Lucy Guerin Inc. performs through Sunday at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 West 37th Street, Clinton; (212) 68-4444, smarttix.com.

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

InfiniteBody

Eva Yaa Asantewaa's wayward blog about dance and whatever!

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2009

Guerin instructs at BAC

OMG! These dancers are doing *two* shows per night of *this...?!*

In *Corridor*--a roughly hour-long piece from 2008, given its US premiere at **Baryshnikov Art Center**--**Lucy Guerin** asks a lot of her performers, members of the Melbourne-based **Lucy Guerin Inc.** All we, her audience, have to do is sit there in two single rows of chairs flanking the long sides of a runway and tuck away our feet and our belongings, since dancers can scarily lunge our way or hurtle by very close to our toes. We do have to shift our gaze back and forth, seeking the next outbreak of imagery--which can feel strained--but if ever there were a dance in non-traditional theater space that kept viewers in their place, this is it. We start off with a distinct THEM-and-US feeling.

Occasionally, some dancers roll a light panel behind our chairs from one end of the room to the other. It's kind of an MRI experience, at least, visually; it doesn't quite achieve a full-on claustrophobic feel, and I don't know if Guerin intended it to do so. But it does give you a sense of being hemmed in and controlled by alien machinery you don't really grok.

At the sneakily-timed onset of the piece, one and gradually all of the six dancers--secretly embedded within the audience--answer ringing cellphones, rise and aimlessly stroll the corridor while conversing with their callers. All looks reasonably normal until one fellow's facial expressions, movements and gestures take on an odd cast that gets odder still. The Ministry of Silly Walks lives!

If the dancers' shoulders were hangers, their bodies would be suits of clothes wagging and flapping in strong gusts of wind.

One guy picks up a cordless mic and offers capsule descriptions of some facet of each dancer's appearance and moves: "She's wearing a little bit of lipstick. She's giving a kick to the side. His shirt is very stripey." This segues into pairings of one dancer with a talker

who calls out instructions like--my favorite--"Do snake. Do serpent. Do snake. Do serpent." Guerin then experiments with having the partners in each pair mirror each other's movements.

A stream of little things spliced together with precision and creepiness, *Corridor* is totally abstract yet resonant with powerful, cartoonish imagery--like slapstick without contact, like wild rebounds from invisible sites of impact. The dancers' superior agility of motion and mood, and their physical abandon and courage, particularly in a few outrageous solos, will exhilarate and terrify you. And you're so close, why, when bodies slam to the floor, you feel it in your own bones, but you have to just sit there and take it.

The final segment, it seems to me, zooms the dancers out of the realm of the personal. A distorted voice from on high now issues the instructions, and these call for global and cosmic missions more appropriate to angels or supermen than men. One by one, the dancers drop the shell-like robes they'd donned and quietly leave the space.

It seems like death. Or it could be a refusal to engage with the instructions. Or maybe it's both. The lights go off, and we're left with only the space's glaring-red EXIT signs to stare at. Brilliant. The final instruction.

Corridor continues its BAC run tonight at 6:30 and 8:30 and concludes with a 5pm performance tomorrow, Sunday. Space is very limited. Call 212-868-4444 or purchase tickets online [here](#).

Lucy Guerin Inc. will present a 2006 work, *Structure and Sadness*, at **Dance Theater Workshop**, October 1-3 (7:30pm). For information and ticketing, click [here](#).