

Complications of contemporary communication

DANCE REVIEW AETHER

Lucy Guerin Company, North Melbourne Town Hall, until March 27
Chloe Smethurst Reviewer

THERE are two very distinct halves to *Aether*. The first is intensely dense and complex, with streams of information looping back over each other until it becomes impossible to absorb in one sitting.

The dancers are surrounded by trails of torn and scrunched newspaper that run between them like visible lines of communication. Kirstie McCracken sits upright as her disembodied, creepy, scrambling fingers explore her body. Her hands occasionally pause, as though extracting data from her, before scuttling on to the next juncture.

The choreography continues in this vein, as the dancers randomly meet and disconnect

from each other. Their movements escalate from balletic stiffness combined with compulsive twitching, like a video stuck on pause, through to spiralling leaps and dynamic partnering work.

At one point they join hands in a turbulent knot that imitates cells multiplying. Even while physically connected they appear as discrete bytes of information, lacking even eye contact with each other.

Michaela French's motion graphics design substantially contributes to the chaos. Images, formulas, rehearsal notes and a million fragments of data gradually overwhelm the dancers and performance space.

The accompanying sound is digital and atmospheric. At times it seemed that composer Gerald Mair had recorded sound inside an internet server, capturing the traffic of information, uploading, downloading, compacting and



Dancers from the Lucy Guerin Company perform *Aether*.

expanding. Guerin's concentration on contemporary means of communication is rather inorganic, yet the overall effect is of a cybernetic organism with digital veins, connecting synapses and vibrating blood cells.

This is science-fiction dance, yet the impersonal information overload rings uncomfortably true to real life.

The second-half of the performance could not have been

more different from the first. Clearing away the projector screen, newspaper clutter and recorded sound, the dancers begin a series of disjointed physical-theatre type skits, almost entirely abandoning dance.

Here Guerin tries to focus on the difficulties we have in relating to each other. There are priceless sequences, such as Byron Perry and Kyle Kremerskothen's hydraulic vacuum duet, complete with appropriate sound effects, and Antony Hamilton's humorous, plasticine-man conversation with an equally mobile Perry.

Yet overall the second section was too slow, awkwardly directed and overly long. While a valid experiment, it could not compare with the refined and detailed first section.

Aether is cleanly executed and charismatically performed, but above all, it features remarkable artists presenting some fantastic choreography.