

Graphic display dazzles senses

DANCE

Aether

By Lucy Guerin. Lucy Guerin Inc. North Melbourne Town Hall, March 15. Tickets: \$15-\$21. Bookings: (03) 9685 5111. Until March 27.

THERE'S an irony about Lucy Guerin's use of archaic spelling for the title of her new dance work, *Aether*. It elicits connotations of pure air, stars and eternity from classical or romantic literature and metaphysics.

But there is little room for romanticising here as Guerin plunges her audience into an entirely contemporary world informed by modern astronomy and bombarded by information of every kind. The ensuing overload is not a mere syndrome but an epidemic.

What seems an innocuous beginning — five dancers sitting among shreds of newspaper, folding it into pellets and strange shapes — is soon disturbed by sensations of invasion and disorientation.

This is first manifested in Michaela French's motion graphics: faded, lolly-coloured text and circuit boards against a pale acid-green ground. With sudden shifts in Gerald Mair's sound score, the dancers rise and articulate swift connections with their arms across their torsos — like brain synapses — and execute complex, multi-dimensional trajectories to the ends of their limbs.

In the audience, eyes dart from text to bodies, to single words, while the text mushrooms and spills across the space, in tune with noisy, mechanistic sound, colonising the dancers' bodies.

And just when you think you can't



Text messages: Dancers make connections in Lucy Guerin's highly creative *Aether*

handle any more — the electronic imagery soon loses theatrical value — enter lighting artist Keith Tucker. His wonderful projected light throws a soft glow over the space and a long band of light at the back, as dancers settle into ingeniously crafted duets, using small points, like fingertips or shoulders, to connect. Crackly excerpts from *La Traviata* help to highlight the body's desire, and capacity, to make a direct personal impact — not replicating strings of information — although isolation, futility and diffidence appear too.

At this point Guerin and the dancers reach into startling new territory, combining wordless vocalising — open-throated, muffled, high-pitched whinnying — and a mix of robotic gestures and rubbery facial

expressions to generate *Aether*'s most compelling section. Dancers control one another with economical robotic gestures — folding, twisting, lifting and dumping in many wacky ways.

Guerin's humour is delicious here, but it's underscored with sadness. Anthony Hamilton is a loser among a bunch of youngsters. They stare at him dispassionately as he launches into an extravagant aria of frustration for body and voice, trying to be noticed, understood. It is a masterly, saddening dance of desperation, a stand-out among the stunning finesse and daring displayed by such a champion as Byron Perry, and by Kirstie McCracken, Kyle Kremerskothen and Lee Serle.

Lee Christofis