

Lucy Guerin Sends Signals. Dancer! Do You Copy?

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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.)



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

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.