

Dance

Lucy Guerin Inc's *Flux Job* is an existential evocation of lockdown, played out on the field of dance.

Alone together

Phillipa Rothfield

works in dance and philosophy on Wurundjeri land.

*Was I sleeping, while the others suffered?
Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake,
or think I do, what shall I say of today?*
– Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*

It begins as we do – as emergent, singular individuals. One by one they appear, lost in their thoughts, muttering and moving in fits and starts. There is no flow – motion is interrupted, the interruption itself interrupted. Kinetic impulses arise from all regions of the body as each dancer traverses a projected square of light, skirting its boundaries. Four distinct squares of light are ultimately occupied by all four dancers, alone together.

This isn't just a case of alienated being: the dancing is discombobulated. Although clearly choreographed and precisely executed, the overall effect is one of incoherence, of life unravelling. Perfectly reasonable moves – lunges, twists, spirals and jumps – become uncanny. Sigmund Freud wrote of the way dreams jumble elements of the everyday to produce a dreamscape troubled by unconscious rumblings. This atomised dancing likewise distorts recognisable movement to suggest something else bubbling beneath the surface. Is this social distancing or social isolation? What are we to each other or even to ourselves?

In this work, contemporary dance company Lucy Guerin Inc pays homage to the specific tenor and temporality of life under lockdown. *Flux Job* – danced by Amber McCartney, Geoffrey Watson, Lilian Steiner and Tra Mi Dinh – is itself locked down. Paul Lim's lighting is precisely calibrated, the dancing razor sharp. *Flux Job* is a powerful work, creating an event in which thought

confronts the existential limits of our time.

We are alone under lockdown. There is no us – until there is. Suddenly the group comes together, emphatically dancing in unison while a small, square searchlight hovers, monitoring their movement. This beam of light is threatening, policing an assertive and urgent conformity. What does it take to become the same? What are the qualities of sameness in this regulated sociality? The feeling is rushed, tensile but also effective and powerful. The dancers really cover ground – they are strong, expansive and limber. There is no time for questions here, no pause for thought. The unremitting pace embraces a capitalistic logic of relentless progress. Jethro Woodward's sound fills the space, gently urging forwards.

The dancers begin to shiver: gestures emerge, connections form, the beginnings of communication. What does this shivering mean? Shivering is a response to an outside. A kind of recoil, the shiver draws inwards. One dancer (McCartney) amplifies her own shiver, withdrawing to the edge of the space. She watches the action, like us. McCartney's orientation and consideration of the others offers a sense of observing rather than mere immersion. Slowly a mode of humanity is being assembled: from bare existence, through social conformity, to interaction and now perspective.

Not all is well. McCartney falls, again and again. The kinaesthetic competence displayed so far falls victim to gravity. She is apart, an outlier to the rhythms of the group, curling into herself. Lying on the ground, she is mesmerised by the roving square of light that plays with her edges. Although she recovers to rejoin the throng, we can no longer pretend everyone gets out alive.

Guerin's movement vocabulary has traces of ballet, subtle manifestations of the desire to turn out, to assemble the body through working the hip joint, the legs



Flux Job performed by Lucy Guerin Inc at Arts House, Melbourne. Gregory Lorenzutti

functioning as a mode of expression. Over the years she has drawn on a wide field of Western dance aesthetics to create a rich palette of movement syllables. The choreography of *Flux Job* is no different in that respect. There is a fine sense of kinaesthetic detail. The choreography is inventive, sharp, expressive but not emotive. There is a sort of indifference to the movement material that allows for a range of audience interpretations and interdisciplinary collaborations with light, music and text.

Equally, there is a clarity to the dancing, a legibility that gives the work the power to say what it wants to say. The resistance to flow, rhythm and easy grace gives the work an untimely character, of time suspended. This is amplified by a break created towards the end of the work, when the group re-entered the space and began setting up a row of make-up stations close to the audience. The visual palette becomes monochrome as the three dancers, now dressed in black, begin to trace their faces with light and dark make-up. An awkward dialogue begins. It is as if we have forgotten to socialise. Monologues gradually become snippets of conversation: banal, painful, surreal, random stories. Nothing prophetic, for we are in the midst of things.

I am reminded of a show I saw in the 1984 Adelaide Arts Festival. Directed by (former) Yugoslavian theatre-maker, Ljubiša Ristić, *1984 A.D.* began with a recitation of Aeschylus' *The Persians*. The first half of the show consisted of a Greek chorus performing zombie-like moves and robotic text, delivered without affect. People walked out. Then the performers began taking their make-up off in front of mirrors, chatting about the audience, how they felt, what they saw. A piece of theatre made during the Cold War, we were treated to the contrast between Soviet conformity and spontaneous eloquence. The thing I remember most is how that show ruptured the fourth wall, shifting gear into

real-time action. The casual proximity of the dancers in *Flux Job* similarly created a sense of rupture and transport.

The work concludes with its own Greek chorus, a conjoined corps de ballet traversing space and time. Dressed in black tunics, the sepia visual tones of this tableau are almost photographic, nostalgic. Perhaps this is why I imagine these performers as avatars of German Expressionism, a troupe of Mary Wigman dancers.

Flux Job is a work of time, our time, an existential evocation played out in the field of dance. My admiration for this dance lies in its ability to perform a rendition of life in another register, shifting the familiar into another domain. Neither dystopic nor nostalgic, the power of the work is to create an unvarnished sense of how things are while allowing space for thought. There is no ending, no resolution: just a pause as we pass through the doors to leave the space. ●

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