

February 12, 2011

Perth Now

<http://www.perthnow.com.au/entertainment/dance-production-leaves-news-addicts-satisfied/story-fn7xakaw-1226004948410>

Review by Jan Hallam

DANCE PRODUCTION LEAVES NEWS ADDICTS SATISFIED

What a fascinating, funny and fraught piece of work is Lucy Guerin's contemporary dance production, *Human Interest Story*.

How daring and challenging, too, as it attempts with the language of movement to communicate the very complex relationship the media has on our lives.

Journalists think about these issues every moment of their working lives – how first words then photographs, then moving images and now digital media represent a series of narratives.

Guerin has trumped the lot of us with this searing expose that shows, by physical expression, what we as consumers of media internalise without a second thought.

It starts off brightly enough as the six-person ensemble sit up tall as automaton newsreaders eyeing the autocue and rolling out the stories of turmoil and conflict from around the world. And there's no shortage of material.

A clever device that can be updated every time the piece is performed giving it new traction.

There's even trustworthy newsreader Anton Enus there on the flat screen with a catalogue of silly stories, yes, dogs are involved, that seem to be a staple in our current news diet. Stories so silly, so banal they serve to animate even the dullest among us.

The audience is treated to the lot – from the news bulletin to the kids' page. It's fun and the talented dance communicators – Stephanie Lake, Alisdair Macindoe, Talitha Mason, Harriet Ritchie, Stuart Shugg and Jessica Wong – appear to be having a ball.

Then, like every good story, there's a twist, the necessary tension and surprise to stop it from becoming tomorrow's fish and chip wrapper.

Guerin turns the piece on its head as the newsmakers begin to watch the newswatchers.

Yeah, here it comes, all that French philosophical stuff that makes your eyes sting.

This is the most powerful moment of the production, when the physical art communicated so much more and far more eloquently than a ream of words ever could.

Macindoe, the most physically imposing of the dances, is literally stuffed with screwed up newspapers.



DANCE: ALISDAIR MACINDOE AND HARRIET RITCHIE STAR IN *HUMAN INTEREST STORY*. PICTURE: NICOLE CLEARY.

The five other dancers shove newspaper in his jocks, his trousers, the legs of his trousers, up his T-shirt, in the sleeves of his T-shirt, everywhere, until he stood there like some comic-book hero whose steroids went horribly wrong.

Overstuffed with the nightly news, the headlines that screech, the stories of tragedy, triumph, banality and significance – all there in this one bloated consumer totally defeated by the sheer volume of news.

How on earth can any of us discover what is important with all this white noise?

Plenty of questions, and no answers, of course, but hours worth of quiet contemplation afterwards.

In another wonderful post-modern twist, Guerin plays fast and loose with characterisation, so a performer may pop out of character and be themselves any tick of the clock.

Stephanie Lake takes a bathroom pit-stop (probably scripted), so she calmly exited the stage down the front stairs into the auditorium and left by Door 1. The stage was frozen, the audience was frozen barre a few nervous giggles. Very Pirandello, very funny!

And then two senior women in the front row thought that was probably the end of their night and followed Lake out.

Set-up or spontaneous? It was fabulous regardless. Our lives still do really belong to us.

Bravo, Lucy Guerin.

July 26, 2010

The Australian

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/step-this-way-in-response-to-the-news/story-e6frg8po-1225896750089>

Review by Eamonn Kelly

STEP THIS WAY IN RESPONSE TO THE NEWS

MASS media news amplifies and alters the rhythms of daily life

It provides grand, exotic narratives of collective perception and authorised meaning that contrast uneasily with the modest and often mundane features of individual human existence.

This is the central conceit behind Lucy Guerin's substantial new dance work, Human Interest Story.

Structurally, the work creates a triptych of progressive abstraction: the first section parodying news-telling conventions, the second offering metaphorical representation of news consumption, and the third a visceral and sometimes unsettling choreographic expression of information deluge and sensory overload.

Against a minimalist set design by Chunky Move artistic director Gideon Obarzanek, these conceptual divisions are supported by Paula Levis's costume design and Paul Jackson's lighting shifts.

Pyjama-style outfits suggest the casual domestic context in which the evening news is typically encountered.

As darker themes emerge, pyjamas make way for camouflage fatigues and stark, geometric lighting.

Finally, as artifice is stripped down to raw abstraction, plain dancing blacks suffice as costume while the stage is lit with angular slashes of bright illumination.

Much of the dance vocabulary is familiar Guerin, invariably brief choreographic ideas oscillating between three key stylistic elements: weightless yet swift and highly detailed upper body fluidity, precise and highly rhythmic shifts between fixed geometric arm and head placements, and intricate footwork patterns repeated with obsessive agitation.

The first, comedic section relies on self-deprecating performer dialogue and satirical depiction of generic newsreader mannerisms. This is light entertainment: once the dancers stop talking, movement becomes the main focus and the work transforms into stimulating dance theatre.

The second section is visually arresting and highly inventive. The six dancers lay newspaper sheets in careful rows before percussively scrunching them into balls, mimicking with them the actions of beating hearts, and then stuffing them inside one dancer's costume to create a helpless Dali-esque figure: bulging with apparent malformations and violently maltreated by the other dancers.

The final section opens with a stunningly executed solo by Harriet Ritchie, in which frenzied fragments of choreography throw the dancer about in a convulsive, possessed manner until she is left a sobbing, shaking wreck.

Beyond this, the work starts losing focus, the choreography lingering at length over ideas that are quickly apprehended: split focus between pop culture and events of dire human consequence, information delivered in vast quantity but without meaning, and violent, voyeuristic sensory assault.

Nevertheless, this is overall a topical, evocative and entertaining work, cleverly conceived, clearly expressed, and performed with precision and conviction.

HUMAN INTEREST STORY
LUCY GUERIN INC. CHOREOGRAPHY BY LUCY GUERIN. MERLYN THEATRE, CUB
MALTHOUSE, MELBOURNE. UNTIL SUNDAY.

July 26, 2010

The Age

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/dance/human-interest-story-20100725-10qgp.htm>

Review by Chloe Smethurst

HUMAN INTEREST STORY

Lucy Guerin Inc, Malthouse Theatre, until August 1

INFORMATION overload has been an ongoing concern for choreographer Lucy Guerin. *In Human Interest Story*, she focuses specifically on news media and its effects.

As in much of Guerin's recent work, this piece combines movement with spoken word. Microphones amplify the dancers' voices and breathing, which are then merged with Jethro Woodward's adroit sound design.

Real news items are plundered; violent images from political unrest in Iran, pleas for help from Haitian earthquake victims, to incite an emotional response that reverberates through the bodies on stage. There is no linear narrative, yet through carefully constructed and abstracted scenes, a powerful cumulative effect develops.

The media is portrayed as omnipresent, available at all hours and inseparable from daily life. One dancer's quasimilitary costume is stuffed with newspaper, transforming him into something between a gridiron player and a kyphosis sufferer. As the news gets under his skin, he becomes grotesque, his movement deformed until it ends in brutality, which then becomes another event to be spectated.

Literal references to newsreader mannerisms and MTV posturing are combined with virtuosic dance and masterful dramatic timing. A hulking tank in the background is never directly referred to, but adds to the tension and sense that we are besieged by information, yet often powerless to do anything about the distant events we witness.

Lighter moments make the experience enjoyable as well as enthralling. SBS newsreader Anton Enus makes a guest appearance, before Harriet Ritchie presents a live bulletin, describing the situation in her best Sandra Sully voice.

Ritchie and Stephanie Lake stand out among the well-rehearsed young ensemble. Lake has a magnetic stage presence, while Ritchie is one of the most outstanding dancers working in Melbourne.

Guerin's combination of understated drama, unique movement vocabulary and sleek staging make this story compulsory viewing.



NEWS IS TRANSFORMATIVE IN LUCY GUERIN'S *HUMAN INTEREST STORY*.

July 27, 2010

<http://www.artshub.com.au/au/newsPrint.asp?sld=181826>, The Australian Arts Portal

Review by Sarah Adams

LUCY GUERIN'S HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

It's chaotic, it's interconnected fast-paced synapses of information flicking to and fro. It is current affairs and news and sometimes it needs to be interpreted in an abstract way because otherwise we are prone to stiff methodical analysis that lacks the feeling often present in the stories we see. This is why *Human Interest Stories*, the latest work by choreographer Lucy Guerin currently showing at the Malthouse theatre, uses dance to interpret the way that we emotionally react to global stories that are often tragic, but still presented to us through that cold clear shield of the television screen.

Human Interest Stories was an idea that partly began with the Black Saturday disaster and the notion that Victorians had prior to the event that we were immune from those large scale tragedies that seemed to only affect other countries. Then suddenly there they were, those names and faces, friends of friends, people we knew. It was a global scale disaster, but we felt it on a personal level. Finally we were the news.

It was a wakeup call for Victorians, who had become so used to the constant barrage of tweets, texts and television that we became immune to their content. This is something that Guerin has tried to capture in her choreography as well as the rhythm of disaster and contrast to the media in what has been called her "most ambitious work to date."

Guerin's *Structure and Sadness* proved a major highlight at the Malthouse in 2006 and told the story of the collapse of the Westgate Bridge. ArtsHub asked Guerin if there was something about this sort of chaotic and frantic situation that lent itself to dance? "The clash of chaos and order is something that I really enjoy working with," she said. "I've been involved with very formal constructs in dance but I also love to destroy them and I think that actually technology and the media are a kind of way that these two things come together because it's so in one sense, defined and controlled, but it's really contrasting with this dangerous kind of messy world that it's portraying so it gives me both aspects to work with in dance."

Guerin told ArtsHub that she hasn't intended for the work to be a critique of the media, "It's not political in any way, I guess it's just more what sort of skills do we need or how do we manage this amount of information and the emotional impact that they have."

"I think increasingly I've wanted my dance works to connect with, for want of a better word, the real world. I don't use dance in a mimetic way. I don't think that dance can think about these events in a way that say a film, or a book or language can, it's not kind of an art form that can communicate factual details very well."



But how can you tell a story through dance without simply re-enacting it? With this work, Guerin has used spoken word and media to flip our perspective about what is newsworthy and hopefully will enable us to question the way that we react to the news. She says, "I think that I'm still looking for a way to connect with daily experiences of people and I think that what that can offer is this much more complex multilayered experience that works on a number of levels, visual and intellectual and emotional and sort of synthesizes into a more whole experience for a viewer."

Guerin had the dancers write journals every day for half an hour detailing their mundane experiences for the day. Boring details like what they had for dinner, what they did with friends, highly personal and specific events and hardly newsworthy. As a way of turning contexts inside out they had Anton Enus from SBS World News read out some of the journals, turning stories we would never hear into media and shaping it into a news context – the famous voice of Enus will certainly help with the impact of what is an innovative way of looking at the media.

Becoming lost within your own personal stories, like the ones that Enus reads, is something that happens to all of us. Nevertheless, Keeping abreast of current affairs can be a difficult thing to maintain, and Guerin admits that there is a certain amount of guilt that is associated with not knowing what is going on, "I do find it hard to find the time to do that but also I just get involved in various projects of my own, or my work, or family life and I can neglect what's going on and I think this causes a certain amount of anxiety if I feel that I'm losing touch with what's happening."

In a way this work aims to capture some of that anxiety, the not knowing, the coming absorption in our own personal narrative, but also the flippant disregard we have when consuming news, a disregard not borne out of cold hearts but borne out of necessity. One cannot form these emotional attachments to the plight of every human in the world, but one is constantly aware of it.

Especially in these times of "twitterverse" and where 24 hours is a millennia in terms of how fast news stories can change and evolve, a dance piece is an interesting way of exploring our reactions on an poignant and abstract level, allowing bodies to express our flicking, whirring and constantly moving minds.

And finally Guerin says that she hopes that, "People will recognise themselves and their experience in relation to receiving news and current events and I always hope in my works that people will have some formal realisation about themselves and their lives and I think that's quite a big ask but that's what I'm aiming for."

July 29, 2010

Australian Stage

<http://www.australianstage.com.au/201007293728/reviews/melbourne/human-interest-story-%7C-lucy-guerin-inc.html>

Review by Stephanie Glickman

HUMAN INTEREST STORY | LUCY GUERIN INC

Over the recent years, Lucy Guerin has been filtering more and more of the personal into her abstracted virtuosic vocabulary. *Human Interest Story* is probably the farthest yet that she has come in this direction. Its subject is the deluge of information that the media hits us with everyday – newspaper, news feeds and Twitter alerts that talk of wars, environmental collapse and natural disasters - and how those horrific and heavy subjects inform our everyday lives that are so removed from such grand scale chaos.

Just like the life size army tanker that remains dimly lit upstage behind the dancers (set designed by Gideon Obarzanek), the information is incessant and even when it's not talked about, it's hovering like a grey cloud in the background. Guerin successfully creates a tension between the micro and the macro, the mundane and the grandiose, requiring her dancers to oscillate between text and pure movement, humour and horror, mannered gesture and seemingly out of control aggression.

The cast of six take it all in stride, convincingly going to dark places and just as adroitly reveling in the lighter side of the material – celebrity gossip, work anecdotes, mindless chatter. Seated in a line facing an oversized television screen, they mono-dimensionally talk and gesture news reports, flicking heads side to side or slipping off balance in dispassionate ways. They are equally assured in crisp, detailed duets that require one to manipulate the other with workmanlike-precision, punctuated only by the occasional bounce or slow run. When conversation shifts to Stephanie Lake, she doesn't have thoughts about Julia Gillard's climate change policy, but can ramble comfortably about her kids' dinner. Flopping around in a sloppy solo dance, she articulates her answers in a lack luster, slow paced drawl.

It's these sorts of back and forth scenarios between personal and public, highlighted by a guest appearance (via the television) by newsreader Anton Enus giving us the latest breaking news in the dancers' own lives that propel *Human Interest Story* through its 70 minutes. Jethro Woodward's sound score, in which white noise mixes with pop and rock, drives the action with its constant presence that is sometimes an overt barrage and other times barely there.

By the time the work shifts into its final section - dancers in simple black outfits and sharp, diagonal lights (lighting by Paul Jackson) chopping the stage up with long shards of illumination, the work turns purely abstract. Initiated by a convulsing solo by Harriet Ritchie, the dance feels totally frenetic, yet there is no question that the dancers are in complete control. Duets form and dissolve, arms and bodies fly; there is a bit of trashy rock dancing, a lot of darting and whip-sharp arms – perhaps an evocation of the anar-



PHOTO JEFF BUSBY

chy of war or a society out of control, or perhaps just the frustration of the individual, a cog in the relentless stream.

Guerin leaves this ambiguous, which works within the context of what has already evolved. Unlike the coolness, at times the (intentional) dispassion of the earlier material, this last section hits a nerve – it's visceral and emotional, occasionally spine tingling, bringing some real humanness into the whole *Human Interest Story* conceit.

It's not just the choreography that excels here though – each and every one of the dancers is right there in the moment, going somewhere far beyond their personal comfort zone. Ritchie, in particular, is so phenomenal that at times it's impossible to stop watching her and Stuart Shugg reveals a feistiness never seen before.

LUCY GUERIN INC PRESENTS HUMAN INTEREST STORY
VENUE: MERLYN THEATRE | THE CUB MALTHOUSE, 113 STURT STREET
SOUTHBANK VIC
DATES: 23 JULY – 1 AUGUST. TUESDAY @ 6.30PM, WEDNESDAY –
SATURDAY @ 7.30PM, SUNDAY 1 AUGUST @ 5PM.
MATINEE: SATURDAY 31 JULY @ 2PM
TICKETS: \$23 – \$49 + BOOKING FEE
BOOKINGS: WWW.MALTHOUSETHEATRE.COM.AU | 03 9685 5111

August 2, 2010

<http://www.artshub.com.au/au/newsPrint.asp?sld=181862>, The Australian Arts Portal

Review by Merle Hathaway



HUMAN INTEREST AT THE MALTHOUSE

Lucy Guerin's latest work, *Human Interest* at the Malthouse is just what one seeks in contemporary dance: a treat for eyes, ears and brain; funny, frightening and so energetic, it left me exhausted.

This work takes further an earlier work *Aether* and explores the overwhelming news media.

Six dancers, discreetly wired for sound, provided sound and dialogue, becoming in turn automaton newsreaders, riotous crowds, pop singers, complete with replays. In a memorable double pas de deux – two dancers manipulated a compliant object-other, wrapping, folding and twisting while carrying on an oblivious conversation. The stark black stage was dominated from the rear by the menace of the APC tank, so barely visible initially that I thought it was a projected image.

The work was divided into three sections, delineated by costume and mood changes. The first, with dancers in happy colourful prints, and a large plasma screen, acting out news stories and mimicking the quirks of television newsreaders, made the audience laugh out loud. And SBS newsreader, Anton Enus delivered deadpan trivial news items.

The second section saw the dancers in speckled grey costumes, and only the sounds of scrunched, torn and squeezed newspaper, and speaker static. The dancing of Alisdair Macindo was particularly impressive, especially in his final mutated form.

The final movement saw menace turned to panic in a superb solo by Harriet Richie. The work became more abstract, without dialogue, and using recorded music, highlighting contrasts of white arms and stark black costumes, light and shadows. And throughout the whole piece, elegant, sinuous, beautifully synchronised and disciplined movement.

A thoroughly satisfying and thought-provoking piece, beautifully executed.

HUMAN INTEREST STORY
THE MALTHOUSE
CHOREOGRAPHED BY: LUCY GUERIN
SET DESIGNER: GIDEON OBARZANEK

THE TROUBLE WITH THE NEWS

A GROUP OF RELAXED YOUNG PERFORMERS WATCH A LARGE TV SCREEN, CASUALLY OBSESSED BY WHAT THEY SEE AND HEAR AS JOSTLING NEWS STORIES OSCILLATE BETWEEN, ON THE ONE HAND, THE DAILY HORRORS OF WAR, MASS STARVATION, INTERCEPTED ASYLUM SEEKERS AND, ON THE OTHER, 'HUMAN INTEREST' STORIES, BUT WITHOUT DISTINCTION—THE NEWS AS ENTERTAINMENT. IT'S ALL HUMAN INTEREST, AND YOU CAN CHATTER ABOUT IT AND, HERE, DANCE TO IT.

The rhythms of news broadcasting appear to infect these people, knocking them slightly off-kilter and stimulating excited physical responses: sign language-like gesturing and tightly patterned, exquisite dance moves in twos and threes with unusual manipulations. But the sense of mutual pleasure is interrupted: one of their number (Stephanie Lake) wanders to one side: "Steph, what are you doing?" "Just doing a bit of a dancing." Unlike the others, her dance is loosely lyrical, introspective, less highly articulated. A motif takes shape as Lake peels away again and again—her head in an everyday reverie...children to look after, food...It's a motif of attempted separation that will return darkly when the work moves to its conclusion. As the news worsens (the massive fires in Russia) and simultaneously grows sillier (Anton Enus from SBS World News Australia plays himself in a pre-recorded episode), the group dance as one, eyes on the screen, its pull evident in the almost involuntary drag of arms that lead.

As our eyes adjust we see upstage an army tank, the only substantial design element, an ominous full-scale presence. As a series of increasingly grim images unfold, the sense of imminent war or crushed resistance grows—not that the dancers pay any attention to the tank or confront or dance on it, although I expect them to at any moment. They inhabit, save for Lake's sidestepping, an apparent closed circuit. Sunny coloured costumes are replaced by black and white outfits.

However, while Lake's 'dissidence'—"just dancing"—is tolerated, a sole male (Alisdair Macindoe) is soon assaulted by his fellows in a darkening, dimly lit world. Slowly and neatly, they lay out rows of newspaper pages and then stuff them into the man's clothing until he is swollen and bulging like the Elephant Man, disabled, an object to be played with, spun on the spot, high, low and crouching, faster and faster... knocked down, left to empty himself of news. As in Guerin's *Structure and Sadness* (2009) the power of dance as installation is felt—design as integral, neither mere backdrop nor frame.

If the paper man episode amplifies the sense of news as not merely absorbed and embodied but also brutally inculcated, then another episode takes the earlier notion of news danced to and meaning-

lessly 'interpreted' a step further. Again, as if taking its cue from performance art, this episode is painfully durational: a woman (Harriet Ritchie) dances in a strict diagonal of low, yellowish light, any movement she makes along it, staccato leaps and spins, always resolving in a thumping, bouncing on the spot with no apparent counter-release to ease the appalling jolts. We no longer hear the noise of news; it's as if the damage has already been done and here are the selfharming symptoms.

A group of dancers forms upstage, tangled, gesticulating, travelling forward in a rush, on the edge of violence, but returning and repeating the same action compulsively. One of them is Lake. As earlier, she breaks from the pattern. She combs her hair. She rejoins the group. The action resumes. Lake breaks away, this time leaving the auditorium—we hear her asked, "How's the show going." She returns, but this time is locked into the pattern—no escape. Meanwhile another group, on a parallel line, appears to "just dance."

If this motif of 'just dancing' looks like a temporary reprieve from the horrors and the absurdities of the news, or even a kind of freedom, the show's final image is not reassuring. The dancers cluster tightly

in golden light upstage, the tank looming behind. Some gesture rhetorically, like politicians, one plays air guitar, others look up as if in awe, but there is nothing transcendent in the image, no-one breaking from the crowd or differentiated from it. No dancing.

It's difficult to do justice to *Human Interest Story* from one viewing, to describe the significant role of Jethro Woodward's gritty score or to be sure that one's reading of this theme-driven but viscerally realised work is adequate, although the unexpectedly blunt ending appears to mesh with Guerin's apparent pessimism. Although the early representations of the flattening of affect by the news seem protracted, *Human Interest Story* moves dynamically from everyday states in which we can recognise ourselves into a deeply disturbing, ever-darkening embodiment, both literal and metaphorical, of the traps set us by the contradictions of the news media. Lucy Guerin, as ever, has created a work at once cerebral and emotional, a dream turned memorable nightmare. It's apt that *Human Interest Story* is part of Company B Belvoir's mainstage program for 2011 in Sydney. That's great news.

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LUCY GUERIN INC, HUMAN INTEREST STORY, CHOREOGRAPHER LUCY GUERIN, PERFORMERS STEPHANIE LAKE, ALISDAIR MACINDOE, TALITHA MASLIN, HARRIET RITCHIE, STUART SHUGG, JESSICA WONG, SET DESIGN GIDEON OBARZANEK, REALISING DESIGNER ANNA CORDINGLEY, COSTUMES PAULA LEVIS, LIGHTING PAUL JACKSON, COMPOSER, SOUND DESIGNER JETHRO WOODWARD; A MALHOUSE THEATRE, LUCY GUERIN INC & PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL COMMISSION; MERLYN THEATRE, MALHOUSE THEATRE, MELBOURNE, JULY 23–AUG 1



HUMAN INTEREST STORY, LUCY GUERIN INC. PHOTOS JEFF BUSBY