

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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RETURNING ONE KIND OF KISS WITH A KISS-OFF

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It turns out, a kiss is never just a kiss.



Ruby Washington/The New York Times

"Reusable Parts/Endless Love": Roger Prince at Danspace Project in this work, by Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, which responds to another dance, Tino Sehgal's "Kiss," with a decidedly nonheterosexual view.

In 2010 the interdisciplinary artists Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly became fascinated by Tino Sehgal's "Kiss," a slow-motion loop of choreography for two embracing dancers that was then being performed at the Guggenheim Museum.

Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly set out to learn the sequence of movements, dictating what they saw into their cellphones and even staging their own kiss using same-sex couples instead of the male-female casting that the original "Kiss" required. Mr. Sehgal's stipulation sparked a certain amount of ire within the New York performance world; a video response by Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly (who are also romantic partners) was titled "You Call This Progress?," a play on Mr. Sehgal's main work then at the Guggenheim, "This Progress."

Now comes "Reusable Parts/Endless Love," a beautifully built and thought-provoking performance installation by Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly that had its premiere on Thursday at Danspace Project, and that draws from both Mr. Sehgal's "Kiss" and "You Call This Progress?" In their program notes Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly describe "Reusable Parts/Endless Love" as "a tonic to an earlier work of ours, which was itself a response."

But if the work proposes an alternative to the politics implied (or avoided by) Mr. Sehgal's "Kiss," it also reveals a new set of biases and hierarchies; it's not as easy to step outside your worldview as the lengthy program notes suggest.

The layers build up and up, tangling on paper and in the performance. Doing away with fixed seating and incorporating large, rolling partitions, which are moved periodically throughout the

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installation to reconfigure the theater and to disrupt sight lines, the artists have transformed St.

Mark's Church in the East Village into a space for catch-as-catch-can interactive experiences. Throughout the 75-minute show viewers, who are invited to roam freely throughout the space, must keep moving if they want to stay close to the action — or get out of its way. Six performers follow Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly's Guggenheim script, responding to its every garble and interruption in restless skeins of movement that send them through luscious spirals, freeze them in awkward balances and leave them splayed and spent on the floor.

In addition to the moving screens a delicate grid of wires floats in the air above the action; the idea of transmission, and how faulty it can be, is everywhere reinforced, as is the question of who is granted access to what. (Trent Wolbe is the sound engineer, Marcus Doshi the scenic and lighting designer.)

The audience is sometimes privy to the movement score. At other times it comes to the performers through large yellow headsets, which add to your sense of them as transmitters, often isolated ones. Unlike Mr. Sehgal's dancers, these often perform by themselves, morphing between the male and female roles and kissing themselves (a palm, a forearm) instead of a partner.

Their movement is fast and voluptuous and, when the performers do come together, they alternate among multiple partners, suggesting multidirectional avenues for desire, for exchange, for intimacy, for control.

The sexuality on display in "Reusable Parts/Endless Love" is decidedly nonheterosexual. It is also markedly masculine. The compelling cast of six includes Todd McQuade, Roger Prince and Mr. Kelly (Mr. Gerard doesn't perform) and three transgender artists: Devynn Emory, Niv Acosta and Yve Laris Cohen, all of whom identify as "he" with the exception of Devynn Emory, who uses "they."

It is a curious move by Mr. Gerard and Mr. Kelly: Responding to a perceived bias in one artist's work, they create an oppositional but similarly narrow norm. "A new world is closer than we think," their program notes announce. Perhaps. But here still is the current one, ever evolving and ever stuck.

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