

Adam Linder

KUNSTHALLE BASEL

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FOR SOME TIME NOW, the term *choreography* has been used in association with a range of practices external to dance itself, activities that span a wide array of aesthetic and social actions involving the body, language, architecture, and the institution—one thinks of Xavier Le Roy, Tino Sehgal, or Anne Imhof. Adam Linder, who was classically trained at the Royal Ballet in London, makes work that fits firmly within this expanded definition. Since 2013, he has been providing exhibition spaces with his “Services,” choreographed works that he and his dancers execute under contractual agreement. Most recently, at Kunsthalle Basel, Linder presented *Service No. 5: Dare to Keep Kids off Naturalism*, an eight-part performance involving dancers Leah Katz, Justin F. Kennedy, Noha Ramadan, and Stephen Thompson (and curated by Elena Filipovic). The contract was printed in large, bold letters, and one copy was on display at the entrance to the exhibition. Among other things, this document stipulated that the four performers would dance for some sixty-five hours, over a period of three weeks, for 231 euros per hour. The agreement, which was binding for both parties, incorporated a dimension of institutional critique into performance art. Written in legalese, it was not a manifesto like

Yvonne Rainer’s *No Manifesto* of 1965, which called for a form of dance drained of theater. In fact, it asserted that theatricality is precisely what dance needs: The “saccharine universality” of recent performance art—“the dominance of ‘authentic’ social interactions, de-skilled techniques, pared-down bodily adornment (everyday clothes) and breaches of performer-audience relations,” as the contract put it—necessitates a return to “anti-naturalism”: in other words, to theater.

What does this theatricality look like? As audiences entered the kunsthalle, they heard a simple musical score by Steffen Martin, which followed the visitors as they entered the gallery space where Linder staged his performance. In Basel, nearly all the props—the bicycle pump the dancers used to inflate balloon-like lances, the plastic bottle they drank from, the folding chairs they sat on, even the rope that cordoned off certain areas—were painted white, seemingly enveloped by the gallery’s blank walls. The light itself was a subtle mixture of natural and artificial, giving off a cold effect like that of moonlight.

Linder dressed the dancers in uniforms that he had designed together with Natalia Gattini. The result evoked something between streetwear and a costume: black Puma sneakers, tight black running pants with knee supports, and loosely cut, long-armed cutaway tops with dark-red mesh extending over the midriff. Completing this basic outfit was either a hood made of black mesh, which the dancers could pull over their heads like a helmet (as they did in *Crying Landscape*, one of the work’s eight “situations”), or an ocher-colored gown with a cowl. In *Hustling*, the performers wrapped themselves in lengths of cloth printed with a colorful carpet pattern; in *Neutral Analysis*, dancer Noha Ramadan strapped an inflatable cushion to her back like an oversize neck guard while Stephen Thompson strode around the room stark naked. *Neutral Analysis* was unique insofar as it featured one of the rare moments when it seemed like the performers

actually addressed the “viewer”; Ramadan delivered an ironic spoken commentary on Thompson’s articulations, describing his body’s limbs and their coordination with one another. In almost all the other “situations,” by contrast, the viewer was held at bay, made to feel discomfort; the dancers’ movements were both artless and unnatural, neither memorable nor easily describable. The performance was, as the contract promised, not “fixed and stable” but a shifting “corporeal experience.”

In presenting itself as a “service,” *No. 5* stands within a rich history of institutional critique, beginning with Michael Asher’s own service-based works. But the dancers’ excessively slow movements in the piece also evoke a “service” of a different kind: a ritual. This would make the viewer a “witness” not only in the legal sense, but also a religious one. After the performance had been running

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for three weeks, the viewer could see in the black streaks left on the white walls evidence of events that had already occurred, that few could have seen from beginning to end. Altogether, the work was ineffable, impossible to fully grasp or comprehend. If the mundane naturalism of recent performance evokes the profane of the everyday world, Linder’s theatrical *longue durée* experiments reach for something more like the sacred. □

Service No. 5: Dare to Keep Kids off Naturalism will be performed at the South London Gallery in February 2018.

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Translated from German by Nathaniel McBride.



Left: Adam Linder, *Service No. 5: Dare to Keep Kids off Naturalism*, 2017, Performance view, September 8, 2017. From left: Leah Katz, Noha Ramadan, Stephen Thompson, Justin F. Kennedy. Photo: Nicolas Gysin. Below: Adam Linder, *Service No. 5: Dare to Keep Kids off Naturalism*, 2017, Performance view, September 28, 2017, Noha Ramadan and Stephen Thompson. Photo: Natalia Evelyn Bencicova.

