

FORMA MAGAZINE PERFORMA



**In Conversation // In repose, we can hold the room:
Adam Linder with Ryan D. Tacata**

On the occasion of Adam Linder: Full Service, a survey exhibition of the choreographer's five Choreographic Services with Linder about performing labor, the function of rests, and the quality control of his services. [1] Full Service was presented at the California College of the Arts (CCA) Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco (September 8–29, 2018) and was curated by Director and Chief Curator Anthony Huberman, and organized with Associate Curator Leila Grothe. [2] The exhibition traveled to Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean in February 2019.

Ryan D. Tacata: Choreographic Services highlights the precarity of high-performance culture in a post-industrialist society; labor-as-performance and performance-as-labor. [3] When our labor is so flexible and we're asked to be in a billion different places at once, doesn't this lead to a state of exhaustion? Let's start with the moments of rest and convalescence in *Full Service*. While witnessing *Some Riding*, I noted: Adam fully reposed on cement floor. Legs extended. Ankles crossed. Arms tucked behind the back. Resting on forearms. Listening to Leah.

Adam Linder: *Some Riding* is basically the live publishing of two texts, which are the pillars of thinking for this whole series; about the implications of performance and its economies, which is the text that I read by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer. Leah reads Catherine Damman. How could we approach the term "embodiment" as broad and multiplicitous as it is, today? To recite each of those takes a lot of concentration and a high level of physical activation and focus because you're activating two parts of your neurophysical function—this remembering of the text and then constructing this pathway for the locomotion. The person in repose actively needs the rest in between the cycles of reading their text. It's also a way to indicate a certain type of focused reception in encountering one of these performers. What you have is a counterweight; not only about exertion and release, or activity and rest, but also about doing and watching. In repose, we can hold the room.

RDT: In my experience of it, it's not a casual rest; it's a rest that's held.

AL: Right, and it's choreographic. Let's say now in that sense, we're still on the clock, we're still in our hired five-hour day. Yet, there is a way that the rest can be...and when I think about rest—it's great that you brought it up—because rest, or repose, or off time, gives a meta understanding to the times when the body is exerting itself, or expressing itself, or being virtuosic in another way. So, there's always this, I would say, "sly" rest.

RDT: I love that you're thinking of rest in terms of time, can you talk more about this?

AL: I'm using the time to reflect, which goes back to one of the reasons why I've enjoyed being busy with these works and this structure—these suitcase services that can be moved around and hired and reproduced—they're unlike the kind of adrenaline driven event of a theater offering. There's a longer form here. There's a daily coming back to an action where I can actually work on the work while I'm working. Think about it. Try something different. Understand it. Reflect on how my body feels. So, I think when I'm not in the throes of trying to construct something more specific while I'm active, I'm reflecting—that's part of working while being inside the work. To put it concretely, it gives me time.





Brooke Stamp in *Choreographic Service No.1: Some Cleaning*, 2013. Installation view of *Full Service*, 2018 at Wattis Institute. Photo by Allie Foraker.

RDT: There's another rest I made note of from *Some Cleaning*: Enrico, with squared arms moving backwards on a track, sweeps the gallery—

AL: The cylindrical wash, that's what that tool is called.

RDT: What's a cylindrical wash?

AL: It's a choreographic tool. The body takes on these mechanical forms that could have appendages that wash on a lateral axis of moving, 180 degrees to each side, creating this cylinder form that moves up and down the space.

RDT: Ah, then he breaks away from that and leans against the wall to make an assessment of where to begin, again. A moment of repose that is not necessarily "taking a break," but, as in *Some Riding*, it seems connected to a more active contemplation—

AL: An assessing of what's being done in the room. These tools that are deployed course through the room, and in a very thorough manner, work on the room to clean, renew, or reconstruct. There is a very expressive form being conveyed in a very functional manner as if this could be legitimate cleaning, but all its missing are the concrete tools, the real and inanimate tools. They take on this very functional manner as if they were cleaning the room, like they really push the fiction to that degree. We have this mantra: The function of the fiction and the fiction of the function. It's like saying, "Okay, I'm going to set up this choreographic fiction where I'm going to walk into this room and first, cylindrical wash half of it, and see what and how long it takes to fulfill that form over every part of the room as if I were doing a thorough job of cleaning." And I think that insistence, that focus, that kind of meditative diving into the form which you really have to do, where you can almost carry the form without intentionally constructing it, becomes a resolved form. How can you use fiction in a really practical way? What is the necessary weight of this tool that your body needs to carry? How far can you choreographically push this figure, this application, of this activity to where it has the same intention as someone else who would actually be in that room cleaning? This manner of looking at what you're working on, and having a direct focus on what you're doing, is very rational and is an important attribute of the cleaner.

RDT: How is this different from miming labor? Elsewhere, you've cited the artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles as a key figure in terms of the discursive/creative context for the work, who has explicitly addressed invisible forms of labor that go unmarked, unseen, unwaged, etc. [4] Her performed services mine the collapse of doing and representation, right? So much of her Maintenance Art, particularly *Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside* (1973), is about the mop, the spill of the water, the real clean.

AL: We're dealing with the figure of the cleaner, working with the action of cleaning, and thinking through performance as labor. When I started working on this piece, I didn't seek to follow anyone's line, but was sharpening what *Some Cleaning* was doing and proposing. I needed to look at these corollaries. In *Some Cleaning* it's a performer choreographically cleaning a space and

Menu they assume the form of specific and readable tools. So, mimesis is absolutely there and has been a dirty because imitation was deception, artifice, and a lack of truth; authenticity has been the Achilles' heel of conceptual forms of minimalism. I don't come from the visual arts; I'm a choreographer. So, mimesis becomes a super interesting form to think about how you can actually put representation to work. What I think they're doing in *Some Cleaning* is an extreme form of mimesis because they're owning it, their owning the form of the tool. It calls into question; faced with such graphic representation, is this really work? Now I'm very clear that *Some Cleaning* doesn't propose to be anything other than a choreographic service of cleaning. There's no underlining of what would be the real nature of the work of a blue-collar laborer. This is on the milk carton of my work. This is a specialized, or rarefied, service of someone choreographically cleaning this room. Of course, there's a tension in that image: what the figure of the cleaner might stand for within how we understand value. But I think what we have to remember about dance is that it's never held. It's always transforming, it is never fixed and therefore definitively accounting for something.

RDT: How are you assessing, or how is CCA Wattis assessing, a "good job" in this context?

AL: One assessment is the earnestness of who I put to work. As the boss, you know, as my work, I try to put the best people there. I have very special performers who can handle the situation physically, intellectually, socially, ethically. I ask them, do you want to do this work? And they accept based on the conditions. There's a point in the contract that's exchanged between me and the client (in this case CCA Wattis) that says the client is not receiving a fixed product. This product is an evolving action that is subject to the people in, and circumstances of, public space. In terms of a relation to goods, the question of efficiency comes up. It's an artistic service. It's a service that's approximated using interpretive fiction, expression, and maybe generating pleasure. So, this question of efficiency is there and I think it's an open question, but I would say that—and I never thought about it like this—but I would say that one way of knowing if we're doing a good job is if there is a strong reaction by a sustained consideration of a witness. Not a flippant reaction based on reading the semiotics of this work or whatever—Performer, Blue Overalls, Cleaning— but a sustained witnessing that produces some kind of reflection on what has artistically been brought in and through this activity. I would say that constitutes a good job.

Adam Linder makes works for the theater and provides Choreographic Services.

Ryan D. Tacata is a performance maker, educator, and scholar based in San Francisco.

Notes

1. The interview took place in San Francisco on August 26, 2018. The five Choreographic Services include: *Some Cleaning* (2013); *Some Proximity* (2014); *Some Riding* (2015); *Some Strands of Support* (2016); and *Dare to Keep Kids Off Naturalism* (2017).
2. The dancers in *Adam Linder: Full Service* at CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts were Josh Johnson, Leah Katz, Justin F. Kennedy, Adam Linder, Noha Ramadan, Brooke Stamp, Enrico Ticconi, and Stephen Thompson. The art critics performing in *Some Proximity* were Michele Carlson and Jonathan P. Watts. The sculpture in *Some Strands of Support* was by Charlie Leese. The five contracts come with a display device that was designed and made by Shahryar Nashat.
3. This line of questioning follows Jan Verwoert's thinking on high-performance culture and convalescence in "Exhaustion and Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform," *Tell me what you want, what you really, really want*. Sternberg Press, 2010.
4. The reference here is to Mierle Laderman Ukeles's practice of Maintenance Art. From her *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969): "I am an artist. I am a woman. I am a wife. I am a mother. (Random order). I do a hell of a lot of washing, cleaning, cooking, renewing, supporting, preserving, etc. Also, up to now separately I 'do' Art. Now, I will simply do these maintenance everyday things, and flush them up to consciousness, exhibit them, as Art." We also discussed Linda Montano's *Odd Jobs* (1973), where she performed manual labor (as cleaner, as gardener) as art.