

NELLIGAN

The impossible-sublime in the murder dance: Lara Kramer's *Windigo* at Festival TransAmeriques 2018.



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"The horizon of the infinite" is no longer the horizon *of the whole*, but the "whole" (all that is) as put on hold everywhere, pushed to the outside *just as much as* it is pushed back inside the "self." It is no longer a line that is drawn, or a line that will be drawn, which orients or gathers the meaning of a course of progress or navigation. It is the opening [*la brèche*] or distancing [*l'ecartement*] of horizon itself, and in the opening: *us*. We happen as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture. " Jean Luc Nancy

Windigo features Jassem Hindi of *Murder Dance* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zKx7PMdggU> - . *Murder Dance* with its no-faced, clown-faced predator - dancer - actors setting up a stage filled with flowers and random garbage. A stage or meadow as it is referred to that the no-faced, clown-faced predator - dancer - actors jaunt in, prance along the edges of, and slow dance in with audience members. This all along the detritus filled stage of flowers and garbage with the overwrought *poesis* of Pierre Guyotat's masterpiece *Eden, Eden, Eden (1)* (as far as this reviewer could observe), all the while getting drunk and tracing contemporary dance's lines through the three clown faced/ no faced predator's bodies digging deeper and deeper into a post industrial meadow. *Windigo* features Montreal's Beckettian extrovert Peter James. *Windigo* features its choreographer Lara Kramer of *Native Girl Syndrome*. *Windigo* like Hindi's *Murder Dance* constitutes a space within which we are invited to enter into and ruminate - no matter how brutal the assault we witness, no matter how much the disquiet wrenches our souls. But Kramer has created a nice balance of both abstraction, pure laughter, and the affectionate yet tacit love between the characters of the two dancer actors- Peter James and Jassem Hindi. For their love if what they have to move them through the challenges of this both chthonic (*Windigo*) and real specific realm (contemporary Canada's neoliberal cold shoulder- *joy-oblivion in the winter wonderland*). For the thinker David Harvey (2007) both that chthonic helm of the creature *Windigo* and neoliberalism might just share some affinities.

Kramer's *Windigo* features three to four mattresses on stage. Two in our main foreground. Kramer huddles with her dancer/ actors for a long while, while the audience take their seats. She spends a considerable amount of time speaking to Peter James and Jassem Hindi. There is a great amount of care in getting her actors ready to enter into this theatrical realm - this was heartfelt and immediately effective as her actors immediately assumed a depth of corporality vis a vis the piece as soon as she walked away. The rule of director, always the mid wife in many ways - to this elusive monster that hopefully can communicate some of the director's intention and beyond that.

The piece begins with Kramer adjourning from the stage pep talk and warming, to her being a DJ guide on the side - becoming a sort of mainstay curator of the sound of what is to happen. The sounds throughout will be children's voices speaking about variegated subjects and even at times some direct references (at least one very direct reference to the nation's native missing women and a direct reference to very undramatic talk about a shooting someone has just witnessed). The sounds are spaced out around as a kind of counterpoint to the actions on stage.



The first sounds are that of a kind of hearth- that is of a kindling fire crackling. The sounds match the two dancer actors - Jassem and Hindi who become familiar with every contour of their respective mattresses settling deep into these mattresses in a deep bodied sleep. One notices an immediate change in the usual extrovert Peter James in his immediate deep embeddedness *into* the mattress. It is immediately clear that we will be in for an affecting and very deep prolepsis - that is he immediately assumes a role that had been going on - an occurrence a life that had already been deep in such a slumber and deeply fixed into this mattress. What is this life? Why is this life? And here is where this reviewer feels there is not a need for outright talk about native bodies or about missing and endangered native women. For we are in this form the start- we can see this form the start- we already are inside this interior landscape of deep disquiet, of deeply affecting dis-adjustments, of discomfit, and of two general (yet specific) lives living on the threadbare ripping lines of malaise. We see and feel this. Peter's slumber deep into the mattress recalled the famous occurrence of the "tollund man" that the poet Seamus Heaney:

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.
In the flat country near by
Where they dug him out,

His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,
Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess...



The tollund man is “s a naturally [mummified corpse](#) of a man who lived during the 4th century BC, during the period characterised in [Scandinavia](#) as the [Pre-Roman Iron Age](#).^[1] He was found in 1950 on the [Jutland](#) peninsula in [Denmark](#), buried in a [peat bog](#) which preserved his body known as a [bog body](#).¹ The man’s physical features were so well-preserved that he was mistaken at the time of discovery for a recent murder victim.¹ Twelve years before Tollund Man’s discovery, another bog body, [Elling Woman](#), had been found in the same bog.”

At first, the allusion to the *tollund man* presented here by this reviewer was to the affecting embeddness that *Windigo* begins with, but then as can bee seen in this coincidental

parallel, the original body tollund man's gravesite had been later found to have another bog body- - the Elling Woman, found in the same bog. And it is thus here in this kind of primordial state of being of a primordial couple, not like the Lovers of Valdarò https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lovers_of_Valdarò



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tollund_Man, in their eternal love embrace, but rather in the immortal companionship (by circumstance) of these two immortal bodies - found in this bog and found in the geopolitical matrix/ stage of Lara Kramer's *Windigo*. Kramer's companions recall Athol Fugard's "*couple*"- Boes and Lena, and *bien sûr*, the timeless renditions of companionship and "couples" that dot Beckett's landscapes (*Endgame*, *Godot* etc).

In this first scene of the bodies becoming embedded into the mattress, we have both finding a rare moment of quiet amongst the rest of their quiet disquiet of some kind of displacement or other unfortunate circumstance these two characters have found themselves in, fending for their existence. And to this reviewer's mind, it is this universal (but without negating the particular reference to the first nations' precarious status even within Canadian moment of "reconciliation" notion of feeling outside, of living outside, of being made to be outside that is key here. To identify with a spectator and bring spectator in, it might be necessary to present some aspect of a universal condition of displacement on the stage such that an identification can occur and hence lead towards the beginnings of some forms of understanding and exchange.

Kramer successfully achieves such an identification in presenting this haunting "phantom set of still" (words describing a present installation that she has up during the

FTA): <http://fta.ca/en/show/phantom-stills-and-vibrations/>, but of course the question might be how much do we learn about this particular condition she wants to evoke and how much do we have to learn. For presenting this haunting set of bodily gestures, “living situations”, and continuous discomfits certainly does give us the picture.

The actors roll deep into the mattress and ultimately withdraw knives that they slowly begin to use as tools to open up their mattresses and stuff them and with various living serving materials, (they are tasked with this duty) add rope to the ends of the mattress and make them survival vehicles, and rip into them opening up wounds that become glaring holes into which spectators can glare and see the overstuffed, the bloating, the bare and raw lives that seek to find a few moments of respite amongst the detritus filled stage. Peter finds himself under the mattress hiding and assuming, handling it all at once. The mattresses again the look of a kind of flotilla Espace Libre’s three arches on the wall as the backdrop and Kramer’s simple soft lighting create a very subtle chiaroscuro with which we can properly consider these lives not as glaring examples but as everyday examples that we see out and about trying to find a way, trying to be recognized. But ultimately the triumph of Kramer’s piece is the self identification and non need for recognition (à la Charles Taylor) that occurs. For ultimately even amongst the unacceptable (to our mind) living conditions that these two fragile souls are caught in (is one of the dancer actors more fragile than the other/ is one more protector and the other more a sensitive soul) become dwelling places (Heidegger) that can be arranged for moments of joy and rapture, even considering the circumstances. Naming the such resilience can become stereotypical and a kind of quasi governmental language that seeks to save those in need who are always said to have “resilient lives”. Their is a narrative around resilience that can become dangerous installing a trajectory that “all” can go through moving “from hardship to victory”. This Disneyesque type of narrative forgets the dizzying moments of fragmentation and the moments of the sublime- impossible. It is in the sublime impossible that choreographers like Lara Kramer can offer spectators viewers a view beyond how Others (natives) live and have lived. The sublime impossible (as we do see at times in Windigo) is about being inside of moments (that is regaining a notion of self- time no matter what one goes through but not simply relegating it to the past), being nourished by these historical schemas and building larger scaffoldings of existences from them, and ultimately the sublime- impossible is not so much about history and being resilient but moreover about realizing life- realizing and living inside of the rawness of life- moving in and through each circumstance as the Jassem Hindi and Peter James do on stage.

One of the most memorable instances of the piece occurs after Jassem Hindi has opened up his mattress to have an almost oval opening. He props the mattress upright and he stuffs all his materials and clothes inside of the mattress. The opening begins to attain the look of a sore and an identification with the cuts-outs of Gordon Matta Clark photographed by Alvin Baltrop <https://www.we-heart.com/2014/01/13/alvin-baltrop-and-gordon-matta-clark-the-piers-from-here/>

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trip- that is where we are right now. That is where the situation of first nation's population is right now- caught inside a neoliberal pleasure and pain machine - making promises while hashing out more blood and oil. Jassem's solo dance with the mattress registers as one of the best sequences in dance in the Montreal scene this year. Jassem is at once torero, psychotic flaunter, flaunting his visual creation (the "mattress painting sculpture") in what amounts to being a bright-dance, regal-dance, suffer-dance, jaunty dance, light dance, challenge dance. Hindi pulls the top attached to the upright mattress with its gaping hole of stuffed clothes and he twists falls into it away from it, he shocks his straightened out legs, fall and twist countercheck wise, clock wise into a general epileptic fit, and then he arises to do it all again- twist, turn into it, holding the rope like it is an object to be tamed, then looking at it again stepping away all while holding the cord and then again falling into it, out of it, and ultimately falling hard and hard to the ground. It is an astounding piece of choreography and dance- both terrorizing , frightening, and a pleasure to watch all at once. This solo at first enchants and then really sets the viewer into a very uncomfortable panic. All the while Peter James who has achieved total mastery in his counterpoint role; while Jassem Hindi does this insane dance jutting solo dance with the mattress and then permanently enters the hole (félure), inserts himself into the sore (félure) of the upright mattress he has dug into it and becoming part of its interior, while Peter James takes hold of a strange teddy rabbit which he starts slowly moving up and and down while holding just its head.

The teddy rabbit, as it were has a springy mid section which allows it to not just spring but elasticize every time he pushes it in a downwards motion. The mid section is almost skeletal but not quite. Between Peter James complete mastery of just this move as begins to make a complete circle around the stage's periphery (and slowly walking by Jassem Hindi who is now inserted completely into the mattress that is pushed upright against the wall). Peter James minutiae of each and every moment is such an incredible controlled instance of anti-theatricalization that he first became known for. Each decrepit step while slowly letting the teddy rabbit go up and down in its' springy pink fashion allows a counterpoint to his walking which does not seem theatrical, solemn, or some sad pain, but rather which feels like a walk of rumination. The kind of walk that for instance the the present Canadian liberal government might do well in taking. It would be a treat to see Justin Trudeau with a pink teddy rabbit walking slowly in almost butoh style like Peter James but alas it is the silence that impregnates this scene and we know our dear Prime Minister would never be able to shut his mouth for the length of this scene. James makes his way past us and we are help captive by his slow walk because we do not know what to make of it. We ask ourselves - what are we watching, where is this all going- and the answer is nowhere - just as the situation Lara Kramer seeks to enunciate using a poetic of joy-oblivion with an ethics and look of an *impossible sublime*.

Beyond being a Sisyphean rock walk, Peter James embodies that dead stare that the Canadian nation has come to make as regards the spectral imperial "past" and of the ghostly first nation's "present". Kramer's *Windigo* might ask- do we simply remain voyeurs to this non stop historical erasure- where does it start and stop. Or as this reviewer has put it in his own work ,

As if the whole landings were Left lilt, as though a barren shack had some real despondency of Concern, and all swelled 'they' all Move in this slow, rhythmic gaze

to avoid this edge but at its limit line or this uncertain edge, we see it as distance, as a remote as something some removes away from whatever could be our concern we sit and swell or rather walk by seeing the swell in what seems the distance, this decrepit, we walk relieved to be in this uncertain real, assured it is not the artifice of concern, but rather debris, detritus, singlets of remnants which stalk at their and our possible. Once removed, we stalk by, the eyes bulge, the shabby coat or rather rubbish, stalking ,as though it were all some Concern.

*Further embedded in the mattress, Hindi finally emerging but only to first become half man/ half apparatus, the teddy rabbit of Peter James' performance entering into a hypnotic anthropomorphization before our eyes, both building a fortress of mattresses and protecting each other, the witnesses of toy animals accompanying them, tight holdings between the two and rocking together, Peter James eerily wrapping their plastic toy animal guardians in transparent cellophane looking suffocated - *des vies éteintes*....the long stare of both of these voyagers on this long long long road....*



(1) “RIMA squad clambering into trucks, falling onto women, guns at sides, hardened members spurring violet rags clasped between women’s thighs ; soldier, chest crushing baby sucking at breast, parting woman’s hair pushed over eyes, stroking forehead with fingers covered in powdered onyx ; orgasm spurting saliva from mouth, dowsing baby’s buttered scalp ; retracted member resting softening on shawls soaking up dye ; wind shaking trucks, sand whipping ...against axles, sheet-metal...” Pierre Guyotat 1995, Eden, Eden, Eden, 1995

(2) In [Algonquian](#) folklore, the **wendigo** or **windigo** is a mythical [cannibal](#) monster or [evil spirit](#) native to the northern forests of the [Atlantic Coast](#) and Great Lakes Region of both

the [United States](#) and [Canada](#).^[1] The wendigo may appear as a monster with some characteristics of a human or a spirit who has possessed a human being and made them become monstrous. It is historically associated with [cannibalism](#), murder, insatiable greed, and the cultural taboos against such behaviours.^[2] The legend lends its name to the controversial modern medical term **Wendigo psychosis**, described by [psychiatrists](#) as a [culture-bound syndrome](#) with symptoms such as an intense craving for human flesh and fear of becoming a cannibal.^[3] In some [Indigenous](#) communities, environmental destruction and insatiable greed are also seen as a manifestation of Wendigo psychosis.^[4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wendigo>