

# Performance, Place, and Politics

A blog about the local/global interfaces of audience and event.

Saturday, July 7, 2018

## DOTE 2018: Lara Kramer, Dab Dance Project, and Company 605

This year's [Dancing on the Edge Festival](#), its 30th anniversary, opened yesterday, and I had tickets for both of the evening performances at the Firehall. The 7 pm show showcased the Vancouver premiere of [Lara Kramer Danse's \*Windigo\*](#). I have not seen Kramer's work before, but I have read a lot about her 2013 work, *Native Girl Syndrome*, a difficult and viscerally affecting examination of the inherited intergenerational trauma of cultural genocide. In the program notes, Kramer refers to *Windigo* as NGS's "masculine counterpart, where trauma is externalized through different ages and bodies, individuals and objects." Two of the main objects that dominate the quasi-installation-like set are a pair of mattresses on which performers Peter James and Stefan Petersen (replacing Jassem Hindi) are sprawled as the audience files into the auditorium. Kramer sits between the men, engaging both in quiet conversation. Another mattress, still in its protective plastic, is positioned against the upstage left wall, and in the upstage right corner is a huge pile of discarded clothes, toys, and other objects. Pictorially, this tableau suggests any number of possible scenarios, including the aftermath of a terrible violence and an ongoing struggle for survival.

Soon after Kramer moves to her laptop and audio console to live mix the striking sound score for the piece (composed by Kramer and featuring field recordings of crackling fires and other natural noises overlain with conversations between Kramer and her children), Petersen removes a switchblade from one of his jeans pockets, and all of a sudden the relationship between the two men takes on new stakes. In fact, the knives in the piece--for we eventually learn that James has one as well--are only ever used on the mattresses: the slash marks Petersen makes on his bed perhaps represent his own psychic wounds (at one point he eats a bit of the mattress stuffing); James, on the other hand, is intent on secreting away clothes and other personal belongings into the holes he has created, whether for safekeeping or added comfort it is unclear. Either way, both the hollowed out and overstuffed mattresses become key dance partners for both men; despite the knives, their attention to the mattresses is solicitous, almost tender, turning them into ceremonial objects, with the slash marks on Petersen's and the peekaboo bits of coloured clothing emanating from James' recalling, in some ways, the residual traces of carving and beadwork traditions, respectively. Later, Petersen will wear his mattress like a polar bear skin and James will ride his like a sled, and suddenly the scenographic landscape we are wont to read

as evidence of urban blight and decay turns into a northern topography whose ancient cultural magic can transform what is potentially threatening and strange into something protective and even hopeful--which is how I read the shaggy pink puppet that James dances around the stage towards the end of the piece.

After the performance I had a conversation with the woman sitting beside me, who wondered how what we had just seen in *Windigo* was any different from what we might see on any given day on a street corner just a few blocks from the Firehall. But as PuSh Festival Interim AD Joyce Rosario and I agreed in a shared cab ride home, walking by two men on mattresses on Hastings Street we have the option to do just that: walk on by. Framing that scene aesthetically on stage, Kramer forces us to sit with what we might otherwise choose not to see, to deal with its complicated layers of history and, perhaps most importantly, our own discomfort. This is not an easy work, but it is incredibly powerful, and I was never less than compelled.

The 9 pm show was a double bill featuring South Korea's Dab Dance Project and Vancouver's own Company 605. Dab Dance's *Bomberman* is a trio that takes place inside a plastic box. Three men (performers Hoyeon Kim, who also choreographed the work, Jungha Lim, and Gunwoo Jun) introduce us to their quarantined environment via illuminated fluorescent tubes. The cooperation they must enact physically in order to form the tubes into a triangle that frames each of their bodies becomes a metaphor for working together within this enclosed space. For when they are moving on their own in different competing displays of virtuosity, as happens soon after this opening, there is always the possibility that one of them will suck up all the available oxygen. By contrast, when they move in unison, often in striking acrobatic formations, there seems to be more air to breathe--for them, and for us. Indeed, the atmospheric connection between performers and audience is made manifest at the very end of the piece when, from the now foggy inside of their translucent box, one of the dancers breaches the plastic, making a hole in it and reaching his hand through.

Company 605's *Loop, Lull* is an excerpt from a work in progress by Lisa Gelley and Josh Martin that explores repetition and transformation. Dancers Sophia Wolfe, Laura Avery, Bynh Ho, Jessica Wilkie and Francesca Frewer cycle through a range of iterative movement patterns, testing out different individual starting positions and bodily combinations, and even taking turns adjusting light and sound levels (via two downstage consoles; the striking sound design is by Matthew Tomkinson). At first the staggered entrances of the dancers (several carrying water bottles and snacks) and the instant replay of their struck poses makes it seem like we are watching a rehearsal warm-up, something reinforced by the casual banter back and forth, as well as the occasional on-stage documentation via a mini-Polaroid camera. But following a duet between Ho and Wilkie in which they ask each other how their attempts at perfecting their partnering sequence feel, the choreographic looping gets more complex, with Gelley and Martin pressing the reset button through a group pattern in which the dancers take turns spelling each other in the middle of a phrase. Like binary code, the different bodily integers produce a movement algorithm that is

always morphing and shifting, a pattern we think we recognize, but that is also simultaneously reshaping our perception.