

# DANCEMAKERS

Lara Kramer's "Licking bones and Eating bread"

Thursday, January 30 to Saturday, February 1, 2020

## Love in the Time of Cholera is not Love: Searching, Searching, Searching Among the Bones and the Bread

Introductory Notes written by James Oscar

"Entering the Dome as a child, youth, adult in this recurring dream was surreal to me. It tapped into something nostalgic and desirable in terms of holding onto a space and time of innocents and connection. I saw a dome and it's like a world that collapses but is in a constant shift, anew. It manages to maintain a narrative throughout the generations. A link to a tactile, man made world. Layers of memories, old, new, invented."

"The wild rice remains in this realm of something sacred. It is part of the recovery. Something that is inherently part of body, spirit, earth. It activates another dimension of presence. It will outlive me. I will die. Be a part of the earth, spirit world and the grains will continue to grow, cycle."

Lara Kramer

"...In this becalmed zone the sea has a smooth surface, the palm tree stirs gently in the breeze, the waves lap against the pebbles, and raw materials...and all the while...bent double..." existing... interminably in an unchanging dream."

Frantz Fanon

The movements (we are watching) seem migratory- a migration of sorts/ a series of migrations (as though a 500-year journey and another 500-year journey, and another 500-year journey is being chronicled<sup>i</sup>) - a journey in one sense rooted *in a particular history and set of histories<sup>ii</sup>*, but are we also witnessing a set of journeys that also speak to a universal (never letting go of the real concrete particular histories that have informed the work<sup>iii</sup>)? Can we also say that in this work, there is a larger history- a universal history of infamy<sup>iv</sup> - the larger universal history of our species' tension/tensions, tensions that we see evidently present in this performance - going from between the one part of what we are watching that feels like a past era of reciprocity, humility, wisdom... and are we not also watching another era which is unfolding with a tension, a breach/ a schism<sup>vi</sup> that occurs (in a people's history/in a person's history)?

And as we step into another universe (while watching this performance) where reciprocity becomes replaced by a "game," where instead of humility and sincerity we have the con (a con game), and instead of wisdom, do we see in this second part of Lara's work - the *breach* with any forms of transmission<sup>vii</sup> that had once made a world a place to want to be in, those past feelings of a place we want to sit with and in, those past feelings of a place we want to feel at home with. Here in her work "dwelling"<sup>viii</sup> (and being) is threatened, attacked, excised, reduced, excoriated, thrown to the side, trampled, spit on... We jump from one world to another world -that is what we seem to be watching

here in her work, and it is a world we are watching where we are told, "To eat the bones," and at once we are also told, "Don't worry about the bones, there is still bread you can lick." ix Precarity, degradation, the humiliation of everyday life living under certain regimes, and Lara's "character" searching for some sort of shimmering moment within the impossible – her and *this body* looking, searching, mining, seeking to excavate some sort of sublime-impossible!x

Eating bones and licking bread - the image is clear of a contemporary contradiction and set of contradictionsxi we seem to be further and further ingesting/swallowing - the contradiction that says for instance, "Shop till you drop but be eco-friendly!" "Consume, consume, consume!" The contemporary liberal contradictionxii which tells us to "Feel sorry for certain populations whilst also encouraging us to continue to indulge in activities that further and further endanger these populations." Does that contradiction not seem familiar like a blue or red pill we have swallowed which allows us to float around the contradictions half asleep like nightwalkers walking on an endless beach road alongside an emptied out dried out rotting sea? xiii

'Eating bones and licking bread'- Lara's phrase seems to capture it all and the movements that we are witness to make this simple phrase frighteningly palpable! Where are we, where are we going? And the question Lara Kramer might be posing among others maybe to ask, "How do we go?" And, in this sense, in looking to this work (Eating Bones and Licking Bread), no matter what your sensibility is, what we are witnessing on stage cannot be denied – watching a young woman *wayfaring*xiv, journeying, and milling about the contemporary contradictions and tensions between the search for worlds of cooperation/reciprocity/mutuality and the schisms/breaks that come to be the test of our times - a break that has come to be the detriment of a particular population and populations .

How do we walk from one side to the other? How do we walk from the side of the once felt reciprocity, bridge building, and time before the break (before the residential schools, before Windigo, before the missing and murdered indigenous women, before the oil blood and hyper overdrive bloodletting system and missions of capital). How do we/how have we gone from a world of mutuality to a world of grotesque truncations that come to interrupt these once sound and uncorrupted histories? Lara is a wayfarer (someone walking trying to find her way inside the internal and external compass that has been disturbed). She is a journeywoman and contemporary art worker seeking to find *possibility* in the most basic gesturexv, object/s, and invoking the atmosphere that show *the fall* and at once she seems to be trying to re-invoke them as a means of *telling* and transforming – reconstituting a life – reconstituting our contemporary lives that are very much "out of joint." How do we go from here, how do we find our way again, how do we see through the blindfold, how do we rub ourselves against the steel and fur, how do we drink the contradictions as we at once know we are drinking them? How do we find the gesture and move that might one day *turn* this all- but first how do we tell the story of that time and of *this* time?

And again as a reprise since it always seems like we have seen this all *again and again* - this story of conquest, hubris, and crazy phantasmagoric madness (Windigoxvi) So again to re-iterate, 'The bones are there. She eats them or rather they are fed to her and then yes she comes used to eating them.' We too have been (force) fed the bones and then continue to walk on them. We are then given (as a saving grace) we are then offered the opportunity 'to lick the bread'- the prize, of sort in a world fallen into a cycle of precarious detriment. The contrast Lara is showing could not be more palpable - to eat bones and to lick bread, a tongue licking frozen stainless steel, *a venus in fusr* - to walk amidst the detritus s- to

walk *into and out of the detritus* to move from love-dancing to “a murderdance” - to try and find one’s way (to be a wayfarer).

To again find some way after “the fall”<sup>xvii</sup>! And then again to let us know that the fall happened, that the fall may pass, and that somehow we must find rituals to call into question these ceaseless cycles<sup>xviii</sup> to give us the room to again dream of the benefits of a world of reciprocity, mutuality. To find and search *for new regions of the world* - and at best right now, what we may be witnessing in this performance/ act/event is a searcher bent on finding *the just-right* forms of contemplation so that we might then soon be able to call the whole system into question. *A fort had been built, the fort had been set on fire*<sup>xix</sup>. The question Lara may be asking is, “Do we simply rebuild the fort as it was before?” She (her body and the morphing power of the objects with the body on this stage) might be suggesting we rethink the fort, rethink its path, and to re-think the very principle of how we will go forward and construct our “dwelling”, our “beings”, and our “becomings”<sup>xx</sup> in a fast changing and grotesque yet beautiful world where the land can speak and where the body ultimately can speak with the land. To let go, to roll into it, to roll out of it. As a viewer, we might think just like the body we see on stage- we might think of not doing something, of not seeing something (some one thing), but we might think of letting go and “not doing something or thinking something but of letting something being done to you.” That is performance – the atmosphere we can walk into and be imbibed in. Here, to do so while we watch Lara moving through *Eating Bones and Licking Bread. To roll with it, to be in and with it... A canvas*<sup>xxi</sup>, *a dome, a world in disarray.*

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i Anishinaabe elder (Chippewas of Rama First Nation member) - Emerson Nanigishkang the appointed Knowledge Keeper for *Eating Bones and Licking Bread* has spoken to us about this 500 year migration in his own viewing of the performance.

From the following website we read this regarding the 500 year migration  
[http://www.ojibwe.org/home/about\\_anish\\_timeline.html](http://www.ojibwe.org/home/about_anish_timeline.html)

“Pre-Contact-1500 BC - The epic story of the west to east migration of the Lenni Lanape, ancient ancestors of the Anishinabe people, begins and is recorded as the Wallum Olum (an ancient written record on bark tablets and song sticks). It is the oldest written record of people in North America and dates back to before 1600 B.C.

900 AD - Seven Spirits or Grandfathers come to the Anishinaabe living on the eastern shores of the Atlantic from what today is the St. Lawrence River south into Maine and other New England States. They deliver seven prophecies, including the coming of the white race. This marks the beginning of the westward Anishinaabe migration.

1395 - Approximate time that Ojibwe people reached Moningwunkauning (Madeline Island).

1400 - It is believed that the westward migration took about 500 years to complete, at which time the Ojibwe people as far west as northern Minnesota reached the land where food (wild rice) grows on water as prophesied.”

1540 - Approximate time of news of white explorers in the east reaches Moningwunkauning (Madeline Island)”

ii “The oppressor, in his own sphere, starts the process, a process of domination, of exploitation and of pillage, and in the other sphere the coiled, plundered creature which is the native provides fodder for the process as best he can, the process which moves uninterruptedly from the banks of the colonial territory to the palaces and the docks of the mother country. In this becalmed zone the sea has a smooth surface, the palm tree stirs gently in the breeze, the waves lap against the pebbles, and raw materials are ceaselessly transported, justifying the presence

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of the settler: and all the while the native, bent double, more dead than alive, exists interminably in an unchanging dream. The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: "This land was created by us"; he is the unceasing cause: "If we leave, all is lost, and the country will go back to the Middle Ages." Over against him torpid creatures, wasted by fevers, obsessed by ancestral customs, form an almost inorganic background for the innovating dynamism of colonial mercantilism.... Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together--that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler--was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons. The settler and the native are old acquaintances.... The settler owes the fact of his very existence, that is to say, his property, to the colonial system. " Frantz Fanon *Wretched of the Earth*

<sup>iii</sup> "Lara Kramer is a performer, choreographer and multidisciplinary artist of mixed Ojji-Cree and settler heritage based in Montreal. Her critically acclaimed works portray the contrast of the brutal relations between Indigenous peoples and colonial society and have been presented across Canada and even in Australia, New Zealand and the UK." <http://larakramer.ca/about-me/> "I work with my gut, a hollowing feeling in my gut, I fill what has been empty, I fill it with sound. Raw sound of movement, breath, sweat and warmth. It is within my artistic process that I have further connected to my Anishinaabe roots." <http://dancemakers.org/lara-kramers-eating-bones-and-licking-bread>

<sup>iv</sup> "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices... Further-more, the advocates for the neoliberal way now occupy positions of considerable influence in education (the universities and many 'think tanks'), in the media, in corporate boardrooms and financial institutions, in key state institutions (treasury departments, the central banks) and also in those international institutions such as the IMF and the WTO that regulate global finance and trade. Neo- liberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse, and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way we interpret, live in and understand the world. Neoliberalization has in effect swept across the world like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment, and while there is plenty of evidence of its uneven geographical development, no place can claim total immunity... The creation of this neoliberal system has obviously entailed much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (such as the supposed prior state sovereignty over political-economic affairs) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, techno- logical mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought, and so on." Harvey, David. 2006. « Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction », dans *Geografiska Annaler : Series B, Human Geography*, v.88, n.2, p.145-158.

See also especially: Zukowski, C. (2019). *Indigenous Child Welfare in Canada (A Neoliberal and Settler Colonial Perpetuation of Residential Schools)*. *Political Science Undergraduate Review*, 4(1), 21-28.

See also: *Decolonizing neoliberalism? First Nations reserves, private property rights, and the legislation of Indigenous dispossession in Canada*. In Brunn, M. J., Cockburn, P., Risager, B., & Thorup, M, (Eds.), *Contested Property Claims: What Disagreement Tells Us About Ownership*. Routledge., 2017;

Altamirano-Jiménez, I. (2013). *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism: Place, Women, and the Environment in Canada and Mexico*.

Howard-Wagner, D., Bargh, M., & Altamirano-Jiménez, I. (2018). *From new paternalism to new imaginings of possibilities in Australia, Canada and Aotearoa/New Zealand: Indigenous rights and recognition and the state in the neoliberal age*. In Howard-Wagner D., Bargh M., & Altamirano-Jiménez I. (Eds.), *The Neoliberal State, Recognition and Indigenous Rights: New paternalism to new imaginings* (pp. 1-40). Australia: ANU Press.

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Strakosch, E. (2015). *Neoliberal indigenous policy: Settler colonialism and the 'post-welfare' state*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>v</sup> The term “universal history of infamy” is used by the Argentine fiction writer Jorge Luis Borges and is no far removed from our own observations of the neoliberal present and its antecedent histories in colonial extraction all the way to the formation of the “school of the Americas” and the various disappeared peoples in the Americas- from los desaparecidos in Argentina [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirty_War) los d to the missing women of Juarez, all the way to Canada’s missing and indigenous women [https://pipsc.ca/news-issues/announcements/final-report-national-inquiry-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and?gclid=EAlaIQobChMluliplo2i5wIVFHiGCh3SCgeVEAAYASAAEgJZcPD\\_BwE](https://pipsc.ca/news-issues/announcements/final-report-national-inquiry-missing-and-murdered-indigenous-women-and?gclid=EAlaIQobChMluliplo2i5wIVFHiGCh3SCgeVEAAYASAAEgJZcPD_BwE) and those kidnapped into the throes of Canada’s “residential school system” [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_residential\\_school\\_system/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_residential_school_system/) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian\\_Indian\\_residential\\_school\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Indian_residential_school_system).

Kramer’s previous show “This Time Will Be Different” literally pulls apart the thousands of pages of the governments Truth and Reconciliation report regarding the Residential School System. <http://larakramer.ca/portfolio/this-time-will-be-different/>

See also regarding the missing women of Juarez, Mexico: Kun , Josh and Rodríguez, Sergio González (2012) “So Many Bones in the Desert” – an interview regarding the book *Huesos en le Desierto* (Bones in the Desert) regarding the missing women of Juarez Mexico <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/so-many-bones-in-the-desert/>

<sup>vi</sup> A thorough text which describes “the schism”: “Canada’s Apartheid: The Sanctioned Diffusion of Canadian Strategies of Indigenous Segregation, Assimilation, and Extermination.” in *EXTRACTION EMPIRE: Undermining the Systems, States, and Scales of Canada’s Global Resource Empire, 2017-2017* (MIT Press: 2018). Internet version <http://www.lapsuslima.com/canadas-apartheid/>

And the following text brings into relief the serious cruel horizons of Canada’s system of residential school in comparative study with those of the United States and Mexico: Dawson, A. S. (2012). *Histories and Memories of the Indian Boarding Schools in Mexico, Canada, and the United States*. *Latin American Perspectives*, 39(5), 80–99.

<sup>vii</sup> Transmission being the passing on cultural knowledge from one generation to another. The anthropologist Victor Turner felt that rituals were a means of facilitating such acts of transmission of cultural identity and knowledge. And for our purposes, Kramer’s facilitating some sort of body- knowledge exchange with her audience.

<sup>viii</sup> Kramer’s dream that is at the foundation of the piece is of a glass dome and detritus and objects that lie within it.

ix Many photos of the Holocaust (Shoah) show this cruel contradiction – somehow capturing such dark cruelty of the histories of bones in what seems a happenstance manner. Many of these photos taken feel like they ‘just happened to be taken’ – serendipitous photos/ witness of some of humanity’s worst cruelty picturing such a terminal history of ‘eating bones’ so to speak. Here Kramer’s metaphor of eating bones and licking bread attains universal proportions when one thinks of this cruel kind of contradiction and sadism we often seem to feel in looking at many photos of the Holocaust.

x <https://nelliganmagazine.tumblr.com/post/174507839420/the-impossible-sublime-in-the-murderdance-lara>

<sup>xi</sup> Canada’s recent “demise” as a territory without any historical blemishes has become more and more present in mainstream media and has increasingly formed a poignant topic to broach in the scientific literature in the social sciences.

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<sup>xii</sup> “Behind the masks of total choice, different forms of the same alienation confront each other, all of them built on real contradictions which are repressed. ...the spectacle is nothing more than an image of happy unification surrounded by desolation and fear at the tranquil center of misery.” Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967

<sup>xiii</sup> Think of the image of “extractive industries drilling, mining, and fracking lands on or near traditional Indigenous territories” : [VIOLENCE ON THE LAND, VIOLENCE ON OUR BODIES Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence](http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBReportToolkit2016.pdf) <http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBReportToolkit2016.pdf>?

<sup>xiv</sup> “In the primitive ages of the world there were no public inns or taverns. In those days the voluntary exhibition of hospitality to one who stood in need of it was highly honourable... “A foot passenger could make **his/her** way at little or no expense, as travellers and wayfarers of every description halt at the sheikh's dwelling, where, whatever may be the rank or condition of the stranger, before any questions are asked **him/her** as to where **he/her** comes from, or whither he/she is going, coffee is served to **him/her** from a large pot always on the fire; and a meal of bread, milk, oil, honey, or butter, is set before him, for which no payment is ever demanded or even expected by the host... our horses were taken into the court yard of the house, and unburdened of their saddles, without a single question being asked on either side; and it was not until we had seated ourselves that our intention to remain here for the night was communicated to the **master/mistress** of the house: so much is it regarded a matter of course, that those who have a house to shelter themselves in, and food to partake of, should share those comforts with wayfarers.” <https://www.bibliatodo.com/en/bible-dictionary/wayfaring-men> Recognizing the reality of sufi mystic wayfaring women, Christian mystic wayfaring women and of solitary wayfaring travellers of both genders as mentioned in Basil Johnston's *Ojibway Heritage* (“Men and women began to travel in pairs, although there were solitary travellers, both men and women”), we have tweaked the quote above to suppose a female/ and “more than human” wayfarer as we see in Kramer's piece moving through various vista at once in a world of welcome and reciprocity and then in a changing world. By *wayfaring* we also mean the literal notion of faring one's way – and the notion of *wayfaring as an action of seeking to re-gauge and recalibrate one's internal compass to find one's way*. John Hull's audio journal which became the book “Notes on Blindness – A Journey Into the Dark” and then a VR film is a fascinating account of the brute vectors of wayfaring – finding one's way and proprioception written by a man who lost his eyesight: <http://www.notesonblindness.co.uk/>

<sup>xv</sup> “My points of departure are the twin claims that bodies move in more ways than one (spatio- temporally, kinaesthetically, affectively, collectively, politically and imaginatively) and that this movement is potentially generative of different kinds of spaces. I argue that research encounters with dance offer opportunities for thinking about three sets of issues: the relation between bodies and cultural geographies; the importance of affectivity in spatial experience; and the relation between the lived and the abstract.” McCormack, D.P. (2008), *Geographies for Moving Bodies: Thinking, Dancing, Spaces*. *Geography Compass*, 2: 1822-1836.

<sup>xvi</sup> Lara Kramer – interview with James Oscar regarding her dance theatre piece, *Windigo*:  
Lara Kramer: “For me the process started pre working with them. The initial process started with me working with this more contemporary version of consumption of lands, bodies.

James Oscar: So what is this Windigo.

Lara Kramer: “I think there are various interpretations of it and I had heard of it many years ago and heard of it in novels and when I was up North in Sioux Lookout reading some of the journals, they even had their own description of the Windigo in their area. This idea of the creature consuming body and becoming that state of Windigo. As soon as I hit the marker of this idea of a contemporary version of Windigo, putting the onus on capitalism as the consuming body. I had also heard stories from my family that happened to the territory and land. I found it very interesting because I was like – Yeah, that's Windigo coming in and clearing cutting land and there being no permission and there being no consultation - and it's just an act of taking - pure greed. I think that was my seed.”

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xvii Truth and Reconciliation – The Survivors Speak

[http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Survivors\\_Speak\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf)

xviii Karen Stote (2012) The Coercive Sterilization of Aboriginal Women in Canada. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*: 2012, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 117-150.

Rule, Elizabeth. "Seals, Selfies, and the Settler State: Indigenous Motherhood and Gendered Violence in Canada." *American Quarterly*, vol. 70 no. 4, 2018, p. 741-754.

Population Control in the "Global North"?: Canada's Response to Indigenous Reproductive Rights and Neo-Eugenics Erika Dyck and Maureen Lux. *Canadian Historical Review* 2016 97:4, 481-512

Canadian Maternal Healthcare Policies and Indigenous Women The Systemic, Symbolic, and Individual Oppression of Indigenous Women in Canada By Janessa Mann, MA International Development at the University of Ottawa Under the supervision of Rebecca Tiessen, PhD Reader: Nadia Abu-Zahra. Major Research Paper August 27, 2018 No Home in a Homeland Indigenous Peoples and Homelessness in the Canadian North By Julia Christensen UBC Press 2017. (See Chapter, "Before Contact, My Ancestors Travelled Constantly: Mapping Uneven Geographies")

<sup>xix</sup> Jean Michel Basquiat's graffiti: "PAY FOR SOUP, BUILD A FORT, SET THAT ON FIRE."

<sup>xx</sup> "The wild rice remains in this whelm of something sacred. It is part of the recovery. Something that is inherently part of body, spirit, earth. It activates another dimension of presence. It will outlive me. I will die. Be a part of the earth, spirit world and the grains will continue to grow, cycle." Lara Kramer

<sup>xxi</sup> Lara Kramer's mother Ida Baptiste is a visual artist and Ojibwe language teacher whose artistic practice is in contemporary visual art- beading and making regalia. She is a member of Berens River First Nations and presently living in Rama First Nations, Ontario.