

Surrendering to the Tenderness of Ghost Gestures

“She, who walks with the wolf. They whom dance with the storm.
And us traveling to the future in rays of fluorescent pink light.”

- Lara Kramer, *Ndawenjigewag Waawaashkeshwag // Hunting With the Deer*, 2022.

From the trembling of the hand, the barely perceptible undulation of the walk, and the wandering gaze, to the body’s uncontrollable shivers, micromovements are sub- or unconscious gestures that sustain a sense of bodily continuity and composure by creating what philosopher and somatic educator Elizabeth Behnke calls “ongoing kinesthetic holding patterns.”¹ Somatic hyphens of sorts, micromovements fill the gaps from one intentional movement to the next, upholding the illusion of full and unruptured control. But what happens when continuity is intentionally fractured? When composure is made untenable, kinesthetic holding patterns no longer hold, and otherwise unacknowledged micromovements are purposely exaggerated to their breaking point? This question is central to Oji-Cree and settler choreographer Lara Kramer’s latest work *Remember that time we met in the future?* (2026).

Micromovements are also known as “ghost gestures,” for they are traces—specters, even—of deeply embedded repetitive motions that are culturally sourced and personally adapted.² We are but the sum of our ghost gestures. When performers tap into this subconscious individual archive the past suddenly resurfaces, co-existing with the present. Microgestures act as connectors with past selves, experiences and knowledges. If, as dance scholar Linda Caruso Haviland suggests, “continual excavation of the [body as] archive yields multiple emerging,

¹ Megan V Nicely, *Experimental Dance and the Somatics of Language: Thinking in Micromovements*, Palgrave Mac Millan, 2023, 19.

² Nicely, *Experimental Dance and the Somatics of Language*, 19.

disintegrating, overlapping, transformative, or contesting discourse,” then the body, thought of as an archive, promises ever new discoveries and remapping of stored knowledge and meaning.³

Ghost gestures are often elicited by language—spoken or unspoken. They emerge as an unmediated response to shared stories, poems, words, direction, notes, but also unvoiced emotions, dynamics, relations, ideas, and feelings. Impossible to repress, they unconsciously and irretrievably escape one’s body, never to return. “Even when words are not spoken,” writes experimental dance scholar Megan V. Nicely, “they still enter into dance pedagogies and choreographic contexts to act as dance forces with and on dance bodies.”⁴ While attending a rehearsal for *Remember that time we met in the future?*, I overheard Kramer encouraging performers—Nehiyaw Métis/settler artist Jeanette Kotowich, Dechno Dene/European descent artist Sage Fabre-Dimsdale, Nehiyaw/Cree dance artist Marcus Merasty, and Anishnaabe artist Kiana Lyne—to refine a specific pattern, exaggerate another, while remaining mindful of the others’ dance trajectories on the stage. She also shared stories and poems with them. But these notes, words, and personal memories—these parcels of intent—do not themselves amount to precise movements imposed by Kramer onto the performers. Instead, they permeate the group’s collective unconscious. Rather than being prescriptive, the choreographer’s open-ended directions inform the loosely delimited perimeter of the performance’s playfield, as Kotowich pointed out to me.

Remember that time we met in the future? is rooted in a blanket entitled *Ndawenjigewag Waawaashkeshwag* (2022) that Kramer co-created with her mother Ida Baptiste, artist, and retired Ojibwa language teacher (Member of the Berens River First Nation, Manitoba, Treaty 5).

³ Linda Caruso Haviland, “Considering the Body as Archive,” in *The Sentient Archive: Bodies, Performance, and Memory*, Wesleyan University Press Middletown, Connecticut, 2018, 3-6.

⁴ Nicely, 19.

A series of blankets were presented as part of the multidisciplinary exhibition *Ji zoongde'eyaang* (which means to have a strong heart in Anishinaabemowin) showcasing the work of both Kramer and Baptiste, which became deeply informative of Kramer's subsequent creations. This methodology—of drawing inspiration from one of the blankets and all that it represents and means—is carried from the artist's previous work *Gorgeous Tongue* (2024), which centered around *Ji zoongde'eyaang* (2022). In the case of *Ndawenjigewag Waawaashkeshwag*, it is accompanied by an eponymous poem written by Kramer, where intergenerational kinship, knowledge and relations are brought forward. Love and deep dreaming are not temporally abiding guides allowing for reconnection with lands and territories that carry unforgotten stories awaiting engagement and activation.

In *Ndawenjigewag Waawaashkeshwag*, Kramer also writes of an intentional path forward, one that can excavate archived memories while leading to uncharted futures. This path can be tortuous, overlapping, and temporally confused. This might imply walking the path with others who are, too, wandering through folded times, never fully here nor there, never fully now nor then. In line with the premise of *Gorgeous Tongue*—where the audience is invited to witness the treacherous earthly voyage of a star-born spirit—each of the performers of *Remember that time we met in the future?* embark on their own cosmic journey which periodically intersects with that of the others. Kramer remains behind the scenes playing a live soundtrack—a silent orchestrator of sorts—on the stage are four wayfaring performers.

As in the choreographer's prior works, props take on a central role. From bright neon stockings, dark wigs, blue gas tanks, to reflective construction materials and oversized coats, the stage is littered with refuse that is intentionally assembled by the performers to create ephemeral and amorphous soft sculptures; moments when the objects' presence is very much raised to the

foreground, before being disassembled and reconfigured differently. The props are being brought to life, and if considered as extensions of the performers' bodies, they actively participate in making visible the otherwise too subtle shiver or the slight flicker of the hand.

Meticulously pacing the stage, Kotowich sets the tone for the performance about to unravel, and by doing so, invites the audience to attune their own presence to this differently unfolding timescape. The other performers are all facing away from the audience, their hair covering their faces, which participates in shrouding the performance in an aura of mystery and inwardness. One by one, their bodies are imperceptibly set in motion, each intent on a specific trajectory. Together alone, the performers allow themselves to be haunted by their own gestures. They surrender first to subtle movements, which are amplified towards the end of the performance, messily pouring out onto the stage for the audience to witness. Standing along center stage, Lyne is ever-so-slowly overtaken by tremors and repetitive movement patterns. Soon, she is joined by Merasty and Kotowich, then finally Fabre-Dimsdale, who too, relinquish bodily composure and control. We watch as they let themselves be overtaken by subconscious gestures. The result is a collective apotheosis, a wordless choir of trembling bodies feeling deeply, inward-looking, sweating as they source from temporal remnants, unveiling parcels of their interior landscapes.

Ghost gestures are not usually performed.⁵ But what happens when they are? Rather than inhibiting micromovements and dismissing them as unintentional somatic artifacts, in *Remember that time we met in the future?* Kramer asks performers to embrace and surrender to them. For the performers, this work requires a deep attentiveness: not only they must relent to a full somatic takeover, but they are also required to make themselves entirely vulnerable to ghost

⁵ Elizabeth A. Behnke, "Ghost Gestures: Phenomenological Investigations of Bodily Micromovements and Their Intercorporeal Implications," *Human Studies* 20 (1997): 188.

gestures, surrendering to them as it were. As Fabre-Dimsdale explains, this demands not only that they draw on their own personal stories, but that they perform *as ghosts* of those histories and past memories to abstractly make them resurface in the present.

Whereas mundane innocuous ghost gestures seek to maintain composure, continuity and control, intentionally performed ghost gestures are present as decomposed, discontinued, and uncontrolled. This allows for the past to become present and for new assemblages and configurations of gestures to emerge, opening up onto futures in the making. By collaging ghost gestures, back-to-back, hyphenated somatic parcels are intricately woven together to create a spectral fabric that temporarily links the performer's interior landscapes together. In *Ndawenjigewag Waawaashkeshwag*, Kramer speaks to this binding fabric when she writes "Our bellies so full of deep dreaming awake." Bellies and guts are transportable devices through which we can access dream worlds, touch cosmic ones, and excavate haunting specters. Like a strong micellar network, our bellies and guts are interconnected and form ramifications so deep, the strong lines it creates can never be undone, interrupted, or bent. In this sense, deep dreaming and the inward gaze it implies, allows performers to turn backward and forward at once, making ghosts co-present, and co-dreaming of collective futures.

Joëlle Dubé

Author, Researcher, PhD Candidate in *Humanities*