

Grupmuv Towards a Self-Creative Practice: Cultivating a Sensible Observer

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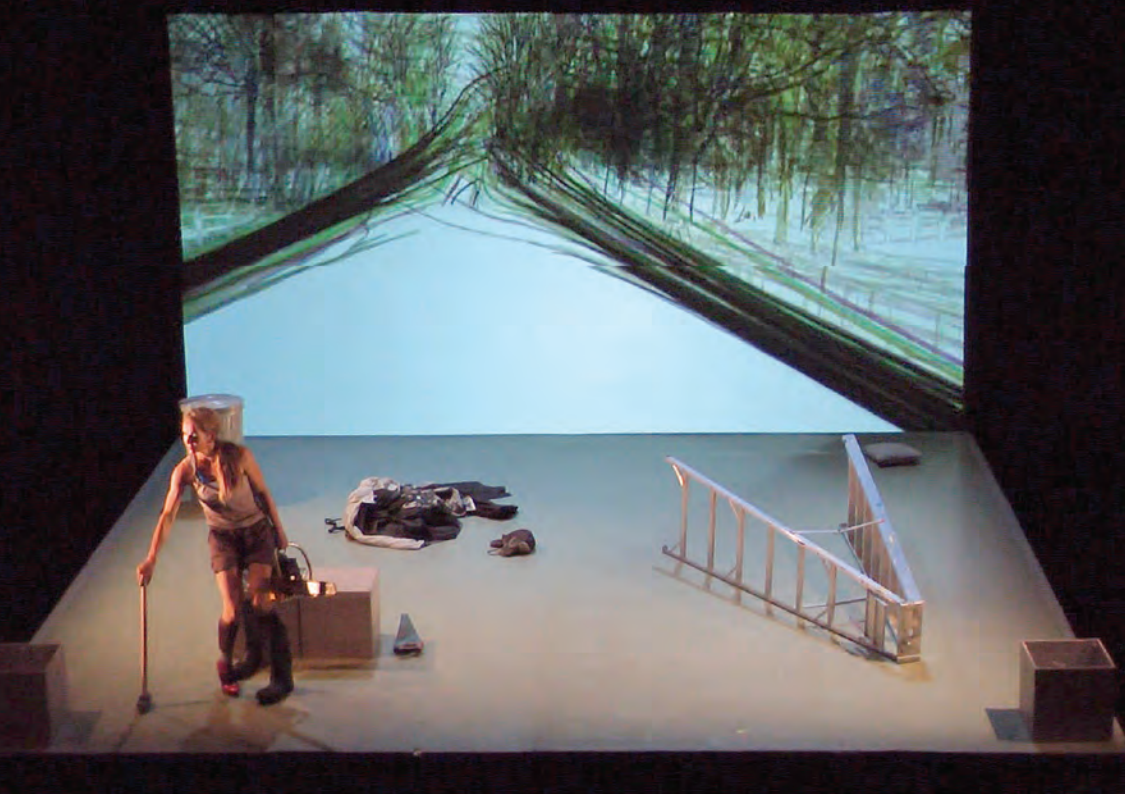
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Jusqu'au silence, Agora de la danse, Montreal,
October 2011. Choreography and interpretation:
Sophie Corriveau. Video projection and scenogra-
phy: Thomas Corriveau.
© Photo: Nicolas Ruel.

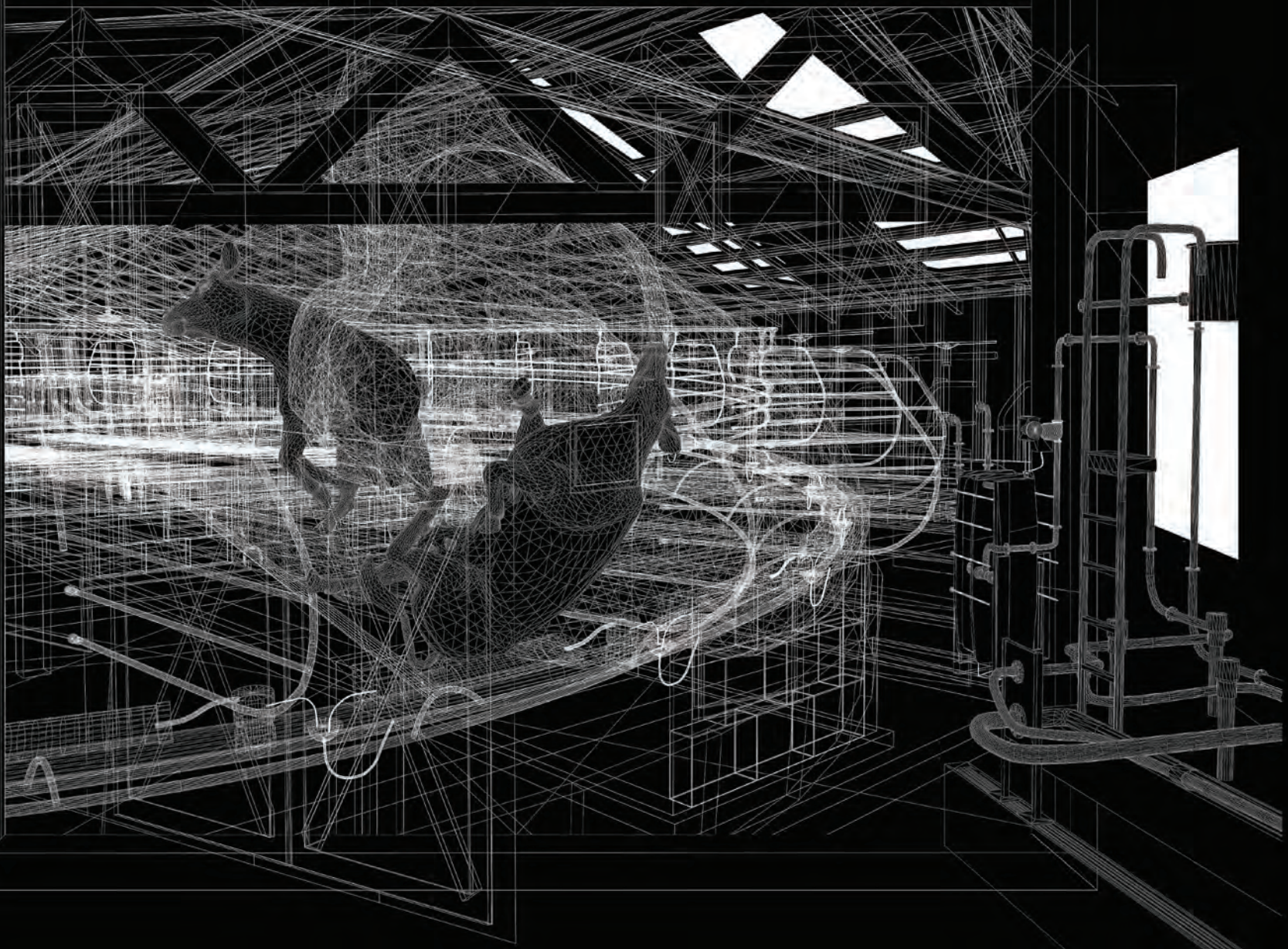
Grupmuv

Towards a Self-Creative Practice:



Pour un oui ou pour un non, Théâtre Prospero, Montreal,
January 2013. Director: Christiane Pasquier. Video projection:
Thomas Corriveau. Actors: Marc Béland, Vincent Magnat.
© Photo: Marilène Bastien.

Cultivating a Sensible Observer

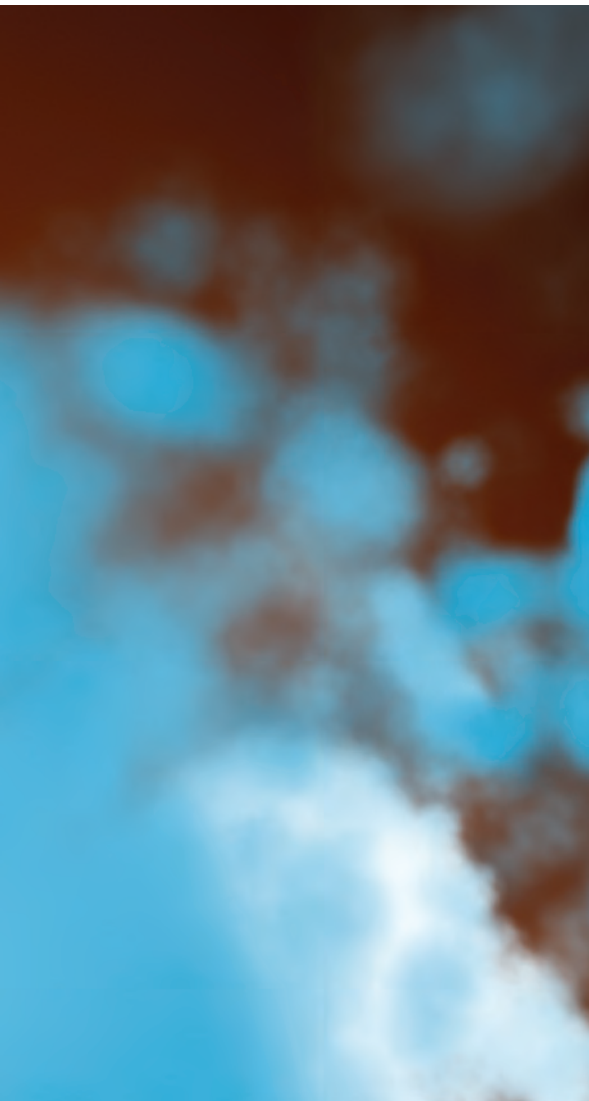


Michel Boulanger, *Salle de traite*, 2013-2014. Inkjet print; 287 X 394 cm. © Photo: M. Boulanger.

Since 2008, the members of Grupmuv—Gisèle Trudel (with Ælab partner Stéphane Claude), Michel Boulanger and Thomas Corriveau—have produced events and works in a wide array of venues, using a great diversity of means.¹ They find their commonality in a practice of experimentation that calls upon a range of image incarnations while being careful to eschew the banner of a single discipline, support or technology, preferring instead a multiplicity of these. Research-creation here centres on a conception of drawing as a practice extending from the body, mediated and remediated in its gestures and impulses in the pursuit, among others, of finding interchange with an audience. For Grupmuv, “giving movement to the image remains a gesture of drawing,”² implying that the body is foundational to the act of drawing. And while the gesture is paramount, its transposition into a mediated representation, from body to figure to image, is all the more so. Here, the

real and the virtual occupy a non-hierarchical place, “considering the image as a reality in itself.”³ These researchers and creators operate within a laboratory context where inquiry leads to the discovery of knowledge but also of experiences stemming from the realm of the sensible. The exploratory and intermedial nature of works such as Ælab’s *Fukushima mes amours* (2011), Michel Boulanger’s *Terre blanche* (2011) and the video created by Thomas Corriveau for *Pour un oui ou pour un non* (2013) attest to a process that sets the stage for what the group refers to as “markers of subduction,”⁴ in which elements once deemed singular open up to interchange and, like tectonic plates, transfer, shift and imbricate one another. For Ælab, research generates a stream of conceptualizations whereby the creative gesture becomes manifest in the real and physical world as elocution, gesture, light, movement, setting, sound, vibration... In this respect, it

is worth noting that Ælab’s approach borrows from an understanding of *disegno*, in which drawing is not viewed as a minor preliminary art form, but, in its own right, as a visual representation of a given object or stimulus in the world. Philosopher Alfred Whitehead posits that nature and the awareness of it are inextricably linked to any self-reflection, referring to this process of distanciation as “bifurcation.”⁵ He contests a conception of the subject for whom observation is severed from their actions and experiences. Similarly, the Grupmuv members forego scientific detachment in favour of a more inclusive, open and participatory approach to their work, in which artists and audience members are viewed as sensible observers. By exploring the science and technology underpinning ecological issues, Ælab reflects on the impact of industrial activities on flora and fauna. In 2011, they produced *Fukushima mes amours*, following the ecological disaster there. The



Ælab, *Fukushima mes amours*, 2011.
3D particle animation.
Galerie B-312, Montreal. Animation
excerpt: Gisèle Trudel.

video animation remediates the representation of radionuclides discharged into the atmosphere after the incident by drawing the lines of force of particle emanations in 3D software.⁶ The ascent of particles shows the components of an ecosystem, which shift from one state to another to emerge transformed. In his doctrine on emotions, Whitehead proposes that subjects are sensible, self-constructed beings, essentially the sum of their prehensions or experiences of the sensible realm.⁷ Prehension therefore plays a pivotal role in creativity, serving almost as a mnemonic repository of elements, a conception very much in keeping with Grupmuv's understanding of drawing as a process-oriented, integrative event, closely linked to movement and vision, as well as to duration and spatio-temporality. Going beyond cognitive limits and embracing the sensible, prehension provides a fertile ground for self-creativity,⁸ one in which mnemonic content bridges the concepts of change (Whitehead) and actuality in a perpetual state of becoming (Bergson).⁹ Grupmuv's process and manner of experimentation exceed the realm of the intelligible, intentionally and systematically

integrating elements associated with the sensible. In this way, Michel Boulanger's work may seem to lend itself to a strict rationalist analysis of vision. However, he shifts from Cartesian spatial coordinates to another much more ephemeral kind founded on the structure of clouds and mist, with farm architecture, landscape and paraphernalia as the recurrent leit-motifs. Since 2006, in *Au passage*, *Averse imprévue* and *Prototype*, he has methodically used replication as a device for linking the intelligible to the sensible. While Boulanger's blurred drawings underscore the instability of the image without ever providing a fixed anchor, his video animations leave viewers just as disoriented. In *Terre blanche* (2011), Boulanger leads the observer across a dystopian world where logic is intentionally disrupted. Through long travelling shots, he sets the dreamy reminiscences of quaint, traditional, rural life against the grim reality of multinational agribusiness. Émilie Hamel's accompanying verse sets a bleak tone, steeped in disillusionment. Only the vestiges of human culture remain. All life has long been spent, the earth left white, without colour, neither pristine nor rich in potential, but barren. As with the other Grupmuv members, Thomas Corriveau adheres to interdisciplinarity as a principle founded on collaborative process, in which research and creation are intrinsically linked. Corriveau's approach to representation is to stage the figure, in its corporeality and its physical traits, while not disavowing the mimetic gesture but incorporating it through fragments, tracing the body, allowing it to shimmer through division or boundless multiplication. Movement, then, is one of many materials used. Its demonstrative, objective and sequential properties, its connective phases, are deployed in order to better subvert them. Given his predilection for an extreme practice of portraiture, it is not surprising that Corriveau found an affinity for Nathalie Sarraute's work, contributing a scenographic video projection to her play *Pour un oui ou pour un non* (produced in 2013). His video accompanies Sarraute in probing the depths of solitude and existential angst. Corriveau uses rotoscoping to produce outlines of the actors playing H1 and H2. The two protagonists seem to lose themselves in a sea of their own clones, filing along in endless loops, drifting in and out of the darkness in infinite regress, as if engulfed by it. The empirical, the processual and the sensible constitute the fundamental elements of Grupmuv's practice. Their understanding of drawing, whether extended, intensified, transposed into vectors and/or animated forms, finds its most vigorous

expression through interaction with other actors, artists, audience members, collaborators, musicians, students, or writers. This type of practice—from impulse to mediated gesture—provides the alert and sensible observer with a profound experience of Grupmuv's self-creative process, in which "things are in the making, and everything is in a state of perpetual becoming."¹⁰

Francine Dagenais
Translation: Francine Dagenais

1 Grupmuv's installations and events have taken place in many venues, including Agora de la danse (Montreal), Galerie B-312 (Montreal), Hamilton Artists Inc. (Hamilton), La Maison des artistes visuels francophones (Saint-Boniface), Plein sud (Longueuil), Pukekura Park (New Plymouth, New Zealand) and the transmediale festival (Berlin).

2 Excerpt from the 2008-2009 proposal for a *Projets de recherche en cours/Création artistique et littéraire* grant. Boulanger, Michel. "Grupmuv : laboratoire de recherche-création en dessin et image en mouvement." Université du Québec à Montréal. See: [http://www.fqsc.gouv.qc.ca/upload/editeur/resume_Boulanger\(1\).pdf](http://www.fqsc.gouv.qc.ca/upload/editeur/resume_Boulanger(1).pdf).

3 Op. cit.

4 Grupmuv and their guests Andrée-Anne Dupuis Bourret, Katja Davar and Florian Wüst showed their work in an exhibition of the same name at Galerie B-312, in 2011.

5 "The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature." Whitehead, Alfred North. *The Concept of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920. 185. Based on the November 1919 Tarnier Lectures delivered at Trinity College. online at <http://archive.org/details/cu31924012068593> p. 31. Last consulted April 9, 2014.

6 Although *Fukushima mes amours* was thematically linked to the 100 feet x 9 feet particle animation presented on the windows of Fonderie Darling, in March 2011, it was an entirely new and separate work, produced on a more intimate scale. See: <http://aelab.com/recent/espaceDuMilieu/main.html>.

7 "I will use the word prehension for uncognitive apprehension: by this I mean apprehension which may or may not be cognitive." Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: The Free Press, 1967. 101.

8 The theme of self-creativity is one that a number of thinkers such as Bergson, Whitehead and, later on, Jean-Paul Sartre have discussed. In this logic, creativity infers the notion of duration—an event through time and space—and the processual implies self-creativity and the state of becoming. "The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact." Whitehead, Alfred North. *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Free Press, 1967. 177.

9 The two philosophers are contemporaneous, give or take a few years.

10 Dupuy-Sullivan, Françoise. "Dialogue avec Nathalie Sarraute autour de Jean-Paul Sartre." *Romance Quarterly* 37 May 1990: 187-192. Sartre wrote the preface to the book published in 1947. Sarraute's comment on *Portrait d'un inconnu* appears on pages 188 and 189.

Jusqu'au silence, Agora de la danse, Montreal, October 2011.
Choreography and interpretation: Sophie Corriveau. Video Projection:
Thomas Corriveau. © Photo: Nicolas Ruel.



