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Handwritten notes and diagrams, including a circular diagram with text inside.

Handwritten notes with a prominent yellow highlight that reads: "I DON'T LIKE YOUR APPROACH"

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HISTORY

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October 19 - November 9, 2002

L'Invention des animaux



next to nothing

a response to L'Invention des animaux
by marianne may

An aeroplane in the sky, a white silhouette in the wide open blue, moving, distorted, relaxed again, pulled out of shape again. Accompanied by high, piping noises, not disagreeable, more like some cute little animal, coming and going. The invention of animals? What kind of a title is this, much too heavy with content for such a light-spirited work.

— from transmediale go public! exhibition, online catalogue

It's human habit that leans us to metaphor, and comfort; and Jocelyn Robert teases this practice with **L'Invention des animaux**. Robert's ingenious installation — the whimsical, erratic image of a plane projected onto a large video screen, the "cute" blips and bleets, chirps and ambient noise traffic of the accompanying audio piece — calls to mind childhood summer afternoons. Lying on your back, staring up at the clouds in the wide, blue sky, who hasn't brought other shapes and creatures to life by a dreamy slip of the eye, a quick and simple imaginary equation?

There is more than one way to make up animals, to bring imaginary beings to life. Rather than invoke metaphor, **L'Invention des animaux** proposes another model: daydreaming.

a democracy of surrealism

The dreaming-by-day encouraged by **L'Invention des animaux** is a recognizable surrealist approach, and others writing about Robert's work have likewise suggested an affiliation with surrealism.

In his exploitation of the tenuous links between objects and symbolic processes — such as, but not exclusively, language — Robert engages the kind of "categorical blurring" identified by Rosalind Kraus in *Bachelors*, her book of essays on surrealism (which deals in particular with female artists and that form). Kraus argues that such "blurring" is a fundamental surrealist strategy. Linking sculptor Giacometti's "precise point of entry into the avant-garde" with Georges Bataille's word *formless*, from his 1929 *Dictionary* published in the surrealist magazine *Documents*, she outlines this tactic as "the impossibility of definition itself due to a strategy of slippage within the very logic of categories."

A previous work produced by Robert in collaboration with Daniel Jolliffe in 2000, **La Salle des Noeuds (pedestrian movements)**, highlights the way music is produced through a "convergence of two rulesets: the rules of [digital] coding and the rules of [musical] composition." In their artist statement entitled *A Set of Suspicions*, the two describe their piece as "a performance of the collision of these two rulesets." **La Salle des Noeuds**, they write, "takes as a starting position that music is about the way in which it is produced, rather than the quality of the

composition, playing or notation." Such democracy inevitably produces work which counteracts the usually-privileged status of authorship. **L'Invention des animaux** furthers this flattening of factors by inviting the audience's participation in completing the work: through sound and its unique display of image, the piece evokes the realm of childhood and fancy; and s(t)imulating the easy equivalence of daydreaming and slippage (including a "slipping into" the work by the viewer), another sphere and mode of being.

miniature

L'Invention des animaux presents the viewer with the image of a plane that fills approximately one-tenth of the viewing screen — miniaturized against a vast sky. In Gaston Bachelard's classic text *The Poetics of Space*, his section on the miniature illustrates the special characteristics of the imagination in thrall of the small: "Here the mind that imagines follows the opposite path of the mind that observes, the imagination does not want to end in a diagram that summarizes acquired learning. It seeks a pretext to multiply images, and as soon as the imagination is interested by an image, this increases its value."

The tiny plane we observe floating in Robert's blue screen-sky is, for its viewers, a transformative charm that invokes the "flight of fancy." And as viewers, we participate in our own transport.

the slightest suggestion

What is it about light that fascinates human beings? — Perhaps the better question is, what isn't fascinating about light? What most mesmerizes me is **L'Invention des animaux's** quality and play of light (the composition of sky and object looking for all the world like a live Monet painting) and particularly the reflected gleam of the plane's belly as it dances in the sunlight.

Rosalind Kraus quotes from Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* in summarizing what she identifies as a "pulse"-effect that's part of our experience of the sublime: "In short, the point of gaze always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel." Caught light. Dispersed light. It's there, then it's gone.

marianne may is a local writer.

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