

# SMALL WORLD

Olivier Perriquet – text for the DVD of Lou Galopa @ écart production – 2012

The films of Lou Galopa presented in this collection are situated at the intersection of the documentary tradition and the legacy of Fluxus. From documentary film-making, these films adopt a similar form but do not comply to the codes established by the genre; in regard to Fluxus, the films borrow the idea that there is a constant relationship between art and life, so much so that they often coincide. The unexpected connections, the humor, the absurdity of visual associations, and the revealed utopias, all signify the need for the Others in their very constitution and in what connects them to us. The Others seen in their intimacy (*Collapse*) or in their distances (*Small World*), in their drunkenness and loneliness (*Between H & T*).

*Small World* is governed by the following principle: each participant interviewed by Lou Galopa sends her to a close relative or friend he or she has chosen freely. But "close" is to be understood in a less geographical than affective or friendly sense. We do not know in advance what will be the next destination, or where and when the journey will end. Lou herself does not know. The movement of the film is driven by this constraint. The physical distance between the various interviewees is to be traveled; such a move takes time and alters perceptions just as much as it brings about reflection. In the 1960's the American psychologist Stanley Milgram published a series of scientific studies on the same topic that struck the public as a result of their counter-intuitive findings: two randomly selected individuals in America can be connected by a short chain of relations. This discovery, which can easily undergo quantitative verifications on web-based social networks, has been called "*the small world phenomenon*" by mathematicians. The *Small World* Lou Galopa offers us is an experience similar to Milgram's hypothesis: we are all indirectly connected.

This trip across Europe, marked by encounters with people of various ages and social backgrounds, or various nationalities, is primarily that of the director trying to make us live the same experience. The film displays these face-to-face interviews, punctuated by periods of contemplative country landscapes, slow-paced tracking shots, and incursions into the sounds of the cities... Who never plunged into his own thoughts while looking through the window of a train, his eye drawn to a catenary, mesmerized by the haunting rhythm of the lines caressing a landscape that we know will last the length of the journey? The film opens with these contemplative images, and plunges us into an inner reverie that removes us from the daily bustle and predisposes us to the encounters. Then, moving away from the landscape, we look down the interior of the train, making our way into the group of travelers also leaning out of the windows, searching who could be the first one among these unfamiliar faces, and the camera eventually falls on these words, literally written on the shirt of a stranger, "only valid for one trip." The principle of the film is set, in images.

The ritual of these meetings, which is the momentum of the film, creates an open space for various exchanges that the other is free to choose - the intimate confidence, the confrontation, the anecdote, the presentation of self, the controversy - everyone is free to play the role he or she wishes: the character they play everyday, the character they believe to be consistent with their idea of the film, the character they would like to be. Lou Galopa, here, is just a mediator. What of myself would I show to the camera? Who would I introduce if it were me? Everyone is free to give a personal answer to these pressing questions, or to let them develop in one's mind. Periodically, there is an effect of anticipation, where the person one expects to meet is briefly described by the former. Everyone may also speculate: is there a principle of choice that appears (coming directly from the interviewed people, from their interaction, from the transient relationship that develops between the director and each of them), for example introducing Lou to someone richer, more socially important or better known, to a person one has lost sight of, or simply to someone whose name came up by association of ideas? The unpredictability of this series of meetings contrasts with the declared rigor of the protocol.

In crossing borders, language is no longer an obstacle. Not that we should focus on the actions or the unspoken, but simply one could say that a mode of communication is set that pushes natural language into the background. Social functions - squire, engineer, diplomat, artist, ... - also vanish, a bit like the falling leaves in autumn would make visible the trunk and branches. One could almost contend that *everything* is secondary. What is left then? The ordinary. During the trip, what would go unnoticed becomes visible because we simply take time to stop. A memory of gnocchi with tomato sauce or a reminiscence of honey candy remain, along with some, both wistful and funny, visual evocations - a red balloon attached to the top of the head of a bystander waiting for the

tram, a wide-eyed kitsch monster whose opulent voice blends with the din of the fair, the cottony haze of a river seen from a ship, some sketches that come to life, echoing the logbook (a requisite object in such an undertaking not to lose the thread, so that memory does not fail ...).

How does one render the ordinary without distorting it? How to have the ordinary appear ordinary? In film as in video, there is no strict identity between the experience lived by the actors and the experience that is transcribed and felt by the viewer. Some emotional moments on stage do not "get across to the audience," as is often said in theater when the emotion remains on stage without reaching the public, whereas some trivial moments are wantonly rendered with great intensity. In view of this, directors develop strategies and ultimately adopt some guiding principles usually designated under the term *fiction* (simultaneously "shaping" and "faking"). In taming the differences between the territory and the map, the real and the support, the actions and their transcriptions, they submit in the end to "final" intensities, those that will be printed on the film substrate and can be rendered to the audience at projection time: for the filmmaker, it is a question of prospectively producing this intensity on the film. The agreements that arise and settle between authors and audiences often result from the sedimentation of these trial-and-errors carried out by generations of filmmakers who have proposed solutions, some of which have withstood the test of time and have gained such a widespread acceptance that they are taught at film school.

If one accepts that documentary as a genre is no exception to these empirical laws, and complies to a certain extent with some codes generally agreed upon by the artist and the public - namely: is a language - then Lou Galopa's film is not a documentary in the strict sense. The film goes no further than the first level of meaning and neither tries to seduce the viewer (presumably, seduction always proceeds by higher degrees) nor to comply with codes specific to the genre. Here we are dealing with what one might call a *document*. A *document* would be to a documentary what a comment, for instance, is to a commentary, i.e. a more raw and undivided form, less strategic in its implementation, aiming at both information and evidence, activating these respective meanings according to the context. We could even say a "*documenter*" to suggest a performative implementation of the *document* (Alain Cavalier's film whose title is "*le filmeur*" - literally: *the filmer* - evokes the same idea) as in a performative sentence, where "saying is doing." *Small World* works here like the trace of an experiment where Lou Galopa did not seek to represent what happened to the viewer but just to show what occurred, at the moment when it occurred. The boundaries between experience (life) and documentary (art) here fade away.

"*Everything is art, Art is Life,*" claims Duchamp. Fluxus artist Robert Filliou sophisticates this conception with the subtlety of a recursive process: "*Art is what makes Life more interesting than Art.*" Lou Galopa's work is situated at this precise location: making Art to magnify Life. From this perspective, as artworks, the films of Lou Galopa would paradoxically be obsolete in essence. Yet they resist. It is a common feature of all movies that are on the edge of the codes to offer such a resistance. Resistance to the eye, a friction of subjectivities, these films are documents by which the artist, unveiling her gaze, gives to contemplate the world through her eyes. Often, a window opens from the train, the eye stares at the horizon, humble and patient, whose benevolence betrays a curious mixture of joy and nostalgia. As a slow-paced underground celebration. According to the director, *Small World* is more than a mere document, the experience is for her a quest for her relationship to the world, a time for exploring her identity, her multiple identities: woman, adult, national, European identities... The gaze then widens. It comes to mind that this trip draws indirectly a poetic portrait of a certain European identity, suggesting that if the borders are now open, there are also much more persistent invisible closures, distributed in a less immediately obvious way, adopting other networks. There is even a curious effect, echoing the Milgram experiment, which reminds us that this is not a scientific experiment, but a human one: as the film gradually evolves, the people we meet enter into a more superficial, less emotional, relation. There seems to be a drop in temperature, which motivates a desire to return, a refocus on the more comforting sphere of close relatives. Does the film operate by the negative - as a proof by contradiction? Do we eventually always return *home*?