

Witness/N14 **the unsegregated zone...**

It began with the little things. A vague sense of loneliness, the greyness of the street where I work...the fact that my neighbours don't know what I do, or what it's for, and the fact that I, myself can never find the words to explain it to them.

One day in a library I found an old map that traced an ancient axe between Paris and Rouen, starting apparently on the very street where I work.

So I set out one morning to walk this route from Paris to Rouen and meet my neighbours, to hear whatever they felt like telling me, to see whatever it was I noticed, and to understand whatever I could. To Witness what was there: personally, subjectively and randomly.

Over a year I walked the 118 kilometres that link the two cities; suburb, outer-suburb, industrial zones and countryside, stumbling over dual carriageways, hanging around in bus stops, laundromats, empty cafés, garages, anywhere people might talk to me for a few moments. I filmed these random meetings, photographed them, took sound recordings, sketches, notes...framed and fixed the moments in my memory.

I found that the places that caught my imagination when passing, tugged at my soul and forced me to return and linger, were invariably those soon to be demolished, refurbished, developed, cleaned up or neutralised. My act of witnessing was a race to record these non-places before they disappear: transitory zones with pockets of communities clinging on where nothing should thrive. The story of this route exists, but it is not a single story. It is fractured and jostled by millions of other stories or half remembered anecdotes that transcend the banality of its spaces and everyday ordinariness...

I looked and sifted and tried to find meaning, themes, understanding of what the story was I had to tell – I tried to construct a heterotopia, a myth of the Route d'Asnières/N14 from Paris to Rouen, from Rouen to Paris... placing the route at the centre of all the stories to create a unity of place.

What links can one find between disassociated and displaced communities, between places without a shared history, people who are strangers to one another?

"Citizenship is predicated on the sense of having something in common with strangers, just as democracy is built upon trust in strangers. And public space is the space we share with strangers, the unsegregated zone"

Rebecca Solnit "Wanderlust: A History of the Art of Walking"

Witness/N14 is a longterm neighbourhood project. The artworks it generates are created in collaboration with the people I meet. Its evolution can be followed on the blog : witnessn14.canalblog.com and www.avantroue.fr

In 2009 and 2010, installations and interventions with live performance, dance, music, found sound montages, photography, and film, will occur at various times in about twenty different sites along the entire route. Each site will explore a different theme inspired by the geographic location, its community and by my personal reactions to what is seen and found there, and what stories were told to me . The nature of these installations depend totally on who agrees to collaborate with me and in what way.