

ROADWORK

performance - video – installation

(written for LOOK OUT catalogue, 2000)



Roadwork in St Petersburg (1998)

Carry me along oh road - One on the road forever carrying one's load.

A road for one traveller - an imaginary path on which is repeatedly inscribed 'carry me along oh road'.

The idea of fluidity in identity and space, while not being central to my art practice, is often present in the work. Perhaps as a reflection of my mixed cultural background (from Morocco to France to England) where I have never been able to refer to home as being a particular place; I can only speak about various experiences and memories using languages that rarely translate well from one another.

Roadwork places the nomadism of the subject at its heart. It also questions Language itself as one of the modes through which we define ourselves and the space we live in.

In this work I undertake a subjective journey through the streets of various cities (in this instance St. Petersburg where I was invited to exhibit) carrying a road-object on my back. The road-object is an artwork whose fragility and mobility denies the logic of roads as such; the phrase *carry me along oh road* is continuously printed sentence over sentence onto a canvas model of a road seen in diminishing perspective. Here this textual construction, once read and memorised, becomes the abode of the nomadic subject; a transient space which dwells within us rather than around us.

On one level the carrying of the road acts as a metaphor for the passing of life. A journey spent endlessly carrying and defining (through language) one's load.

On another level the subjective nature of the journey through the city disrupts the conventional division of urban spaces. As urban dwellers our movement are limited and prescribed around notions of gender, social class, and cultural origins as well as according to our political and economic roles. The nomadic subject in *Roadwork* disregards these implicit boundaries.

In London, my present abode, the carrying of the road allowed me to step aside and reflect upon my daily life as a Londoner. In St. Petersburg, my movement were prescribed by my situation as a guest artist and a foreign tourist, only part of the city was accessible to me. As a road carrier I was allowed to venture (safely) in areas not normally available to a foreign visitor.

The performance is freely witnessed by passers-by (almost like the cross to calvary). They may in return reflect upon their own movement in life and through the city, from station to station. Equally the video documentation of the work allows the gallery viewer the simulated experience of walking and the opportunity to reflect upon his/her own sense of presence.

As a nomadic road carrier, I have made Language and transience my home. I (the artist, the woman and the foreigner) have become an outsider who willingly remains outside the social cultural and economic fabric of the city by communicating the fluidity of my identity and presence.

As such *Roadwork* becomes an interesting metaphor for the role of the artist in society. A nomadic observer who needs to keep a certain distance between himself and the pastures he is feeding from.

"The nomad renounces; he reflects in his solitude; he abandons collective rituals, and cares little for the rational processes of learning and literacy. He is a man of faith."
From 'The nomadic alternative' in *Anatomy of restlessness* - Bruce Chatwin