



Maja Marx

ZONDERWATER

Zonderwater

I am not the spectator, I am involved, and it is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962:303)¹

Since 2005, I have produced a chain of works by physically writing onto surfaces such as koppies, roads and frozen lakes using stones, earth, chalk or paint, and by physically modifying existing landscape inscriptions. In my artistic practice, the writing of text onto land is a performance: the body takes the place of the hand in writing.

On the road between Rayton and Cullinan, north of Pretoria, the word ZONDERWATER - the name of the original farm, which now forms part of the Correctional Services facility - is spelled out in neatly placed chalked stones. Between November 2006 and March 2007, I temporarily "buried" the letter "Z" of ZONDERWATER using 4 cubic metres of earth from the area, thus rendering the familiar Zonderwater (literally translated in Dutch as "without water"²) into Onderwater (Afrikaans for "under water").





By visually removing this letter from the text I “buried” the Dutch colonial past embedded in the name, playing with the power dynamics inherent to colonial acts of description, naming and the claiming of the “empty” landscape, and entering that history into the current polemics around name changes in the area.

Through the act of burying, the place “without water” was temporarily drowned and positioned “under water” in such a way as to linguistically “increase the water level” in the landscape. One might argue that the letter “Z” was literally buried into the landscape. However, it is important to note that, as part of this grand-scale intervention, the process also incorporated the subsequent recovery of the 33 metre-long letter “Z”. The stones from beneath the earth were uncovered in an archaeological manner, and then officially re-chalked with the help of prisoners from Zonderwater Correctional Facility.

Maja Marx 2012

¹MERLEAU-PONTY, M. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. C. Smith. New York: Humanities Press.

²In Afrikaans the term would be spelled SONDER WATER.



Image: (page 2 & 3) ZONDERWATER, 2006

Image: (page 5) PROCESS, 2006

Image: (page 6) AERIAL APPROACH, 2006

Image: (page 8 & 9) DUSTING STONES, 2006

Image: (page 11) ZONDERWATER CORRECTIONAL FACILITY SIGN, 2006

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Cullinan - Tshwane



Dullstroom - Mpumalanga



Graskop - Mpumalanga



Pretoria - Tshwane



Richmond - Northern Cape