

Figure 5.1
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, 1995-96
aluminium saucepans, text, maps, ink
Bauxite, CCAS, Canberra, 1996

5. Aluminium Saucepans, 1996

Bauxite, Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Bauxite was an installation constructed in response to the 'Cube' at Canberra Contemporary Art Space. The Cube is a small exhibition space with a high ceiling and rough wooden floor. A row of seven aluminium saucepans were suspended just below the ceiling. They were placed diagonally across the space with the bottoms of all the pans facing one direction (Figure 5.1). Additional pans were suspended from them vertically, ranging in size from the smallest at the top to the largest pans at the bottom just grazing above the floor. Each pan hung from a custom-made aluminium hook joining the lip of one pan to the hole in the handle of the neighbouring pan below. The length of the hooks varied according to the lengths of the handles so that each finished row of pans would be horizontally level. As a whole, they created a kind of ceiling to floor grid-like screen. Viewers were able to walk around the work, peer into and between the pans, and touch them. Viewing the work from the entry way into the space, the shadowy recesses of the pans tilted back into the space thus drawing the eye into the depths of the work and across the length of the space from corner to corner (Figure 5.2).

Added to both interior and exterior surfaces of the pans were hand drawn maps, text, and geographical coordinates, all of which referenced, in some way, either bauxite deposits, areas being mined, smelting sites, or the refining process itself. Some pans I inscribed with text that recounted some of my personal experiences cooking on geological crews. Much of the text was written in a spiral pattern (Figures 5.3, 5.4), thus echoing some of the pan's incised circular anti-slip bottoms, the spiral-shape of electric stove elements, and the circular stirring or whipping actions of blending food:

"Mining bauxite is generally such a simple operation that it is perhaps better described as large-scale quarrying! At Jarrahdale, as elsewhere, it falls into a series of well-defined operations, all highly mechanised and relatively inexpensive: clearing-marked trees are lumbered, the rest are bulldozed over and pushed into windrows for burning; close order (50' x 50') grade commercial drilling; removal of overburden (0 to 4') by mechanical scrapers; mining-boring and blasting of upper hardcap and

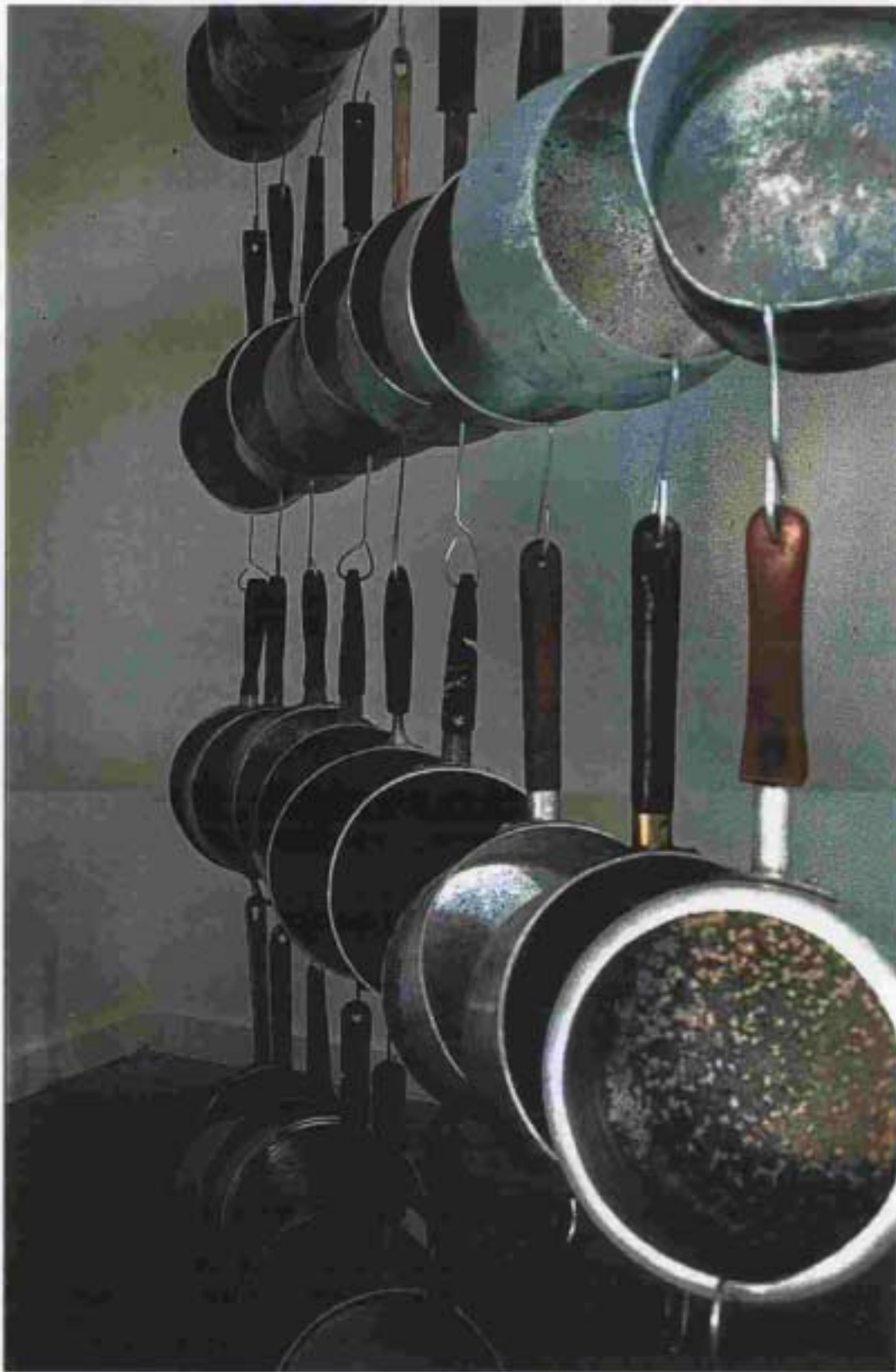


Figure 5.2
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, 1995-96
aluminium saucepans, text, maps, ink
Bauxite, CCAS, Canberra, 1996



Figure 5.3 (top)
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, 1995-96 (detail of text)
aluminium saucepan, ink

Figure 5.4 (bottom)
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, 1996 (detail of text)
aluminium saucepan, ink

shovel loading of all ore (average thickness 10') into heavy duty trucks (25 to 50 ton capacity) for haulage to a centrally-placed crushing plant; crushing and screening to minus 1 inch, that is, until the ore falls through a 1" x 1" grid; and conveyor belt delivery into stockpiles from whence it is gravity fed into Western Australian Government railway bulk-cars for delivery to Kwinana. Bauxite mining, being an extensive form of mining, demands one further all-important operation....."

Fragments of relevant topographical and geological maps were coloured to blend in with the oxidised surfaces of the pans and were cut to fit the interior diameter of just a few of the pans. In some instances, the pans were heavily marked, reflecting years of hard use. The scratches, dents, pitted surfaces, stains, blackening, the enamelling of yellow brown grease, and the impossible-to-scrub-away patches of scorched food on the insides of some of them were incorporated into hypothetical maps or simply left to speak for themselves (Figures 5.5, 5.6).

Saucepans are familiar everyday household items, so familiar, in fact, that most of us would be hard-pressed to imagine a kitchen without them. Collectively, they speak volumes about human history and of our relationships to what lies in the ground. My intention was to use the saucepan in two metaphorical ways: first as a symbol of consumption and nourishment and, secondly, as a symbol of how geologically-based investigations may result in the transformation of earth into such mundane commodities as saucepans; familiar everyday object we all depend on. I can relate to aluminium mainly through my use of it in the form of cooking equipment. In a proposal to Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) Director Trevor Smith and Assistant Curator Jane Barney, I wrote:

"As you both know I have been having a long affair with pots and pans in the out-of-doors. I love cooking, particularly in remote locations under adverse conditions. This has led to 15 years of working as a "bush cook" or "camp cook" for geological crews. As the geoscientists traverse and map their way across the land with their maps, air photos, compasses, and picks in hand, my saucepans and I have followed, close on their heels."

Early in 1996, I scavenged hundreds of smelly old aluminium saucepans from Canberra landfill sites. They were destined to go back to the ground - completing a cycle from initial ore discovery, mineral extraction, its use in manufacture of a saucepan, and finally its disposal. By offering certain

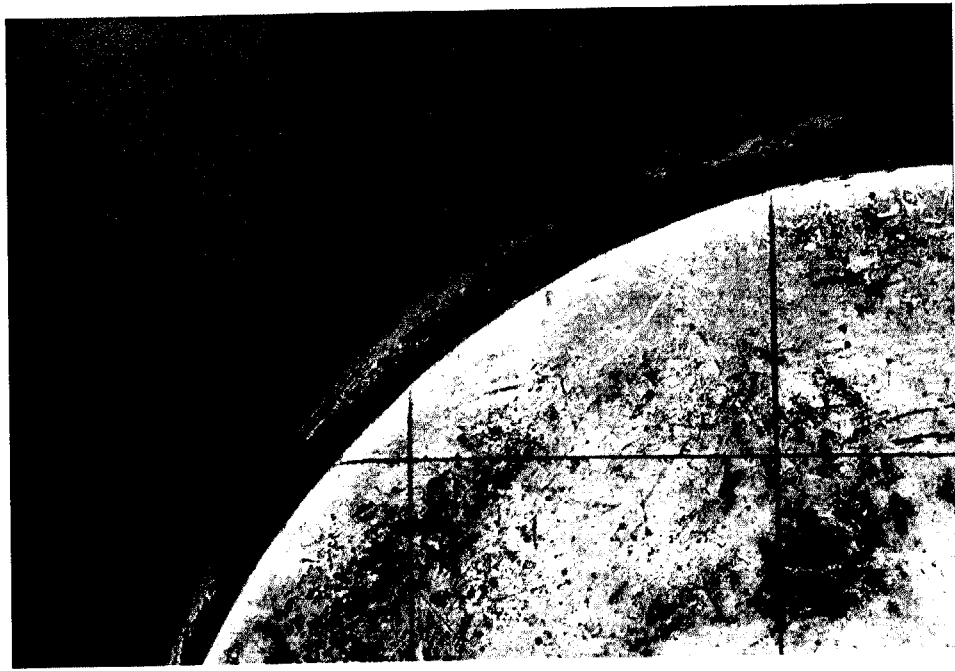


Figure 5.5 (top)
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, exhibition invitation, 1996
aluminium saucepan, ink, text

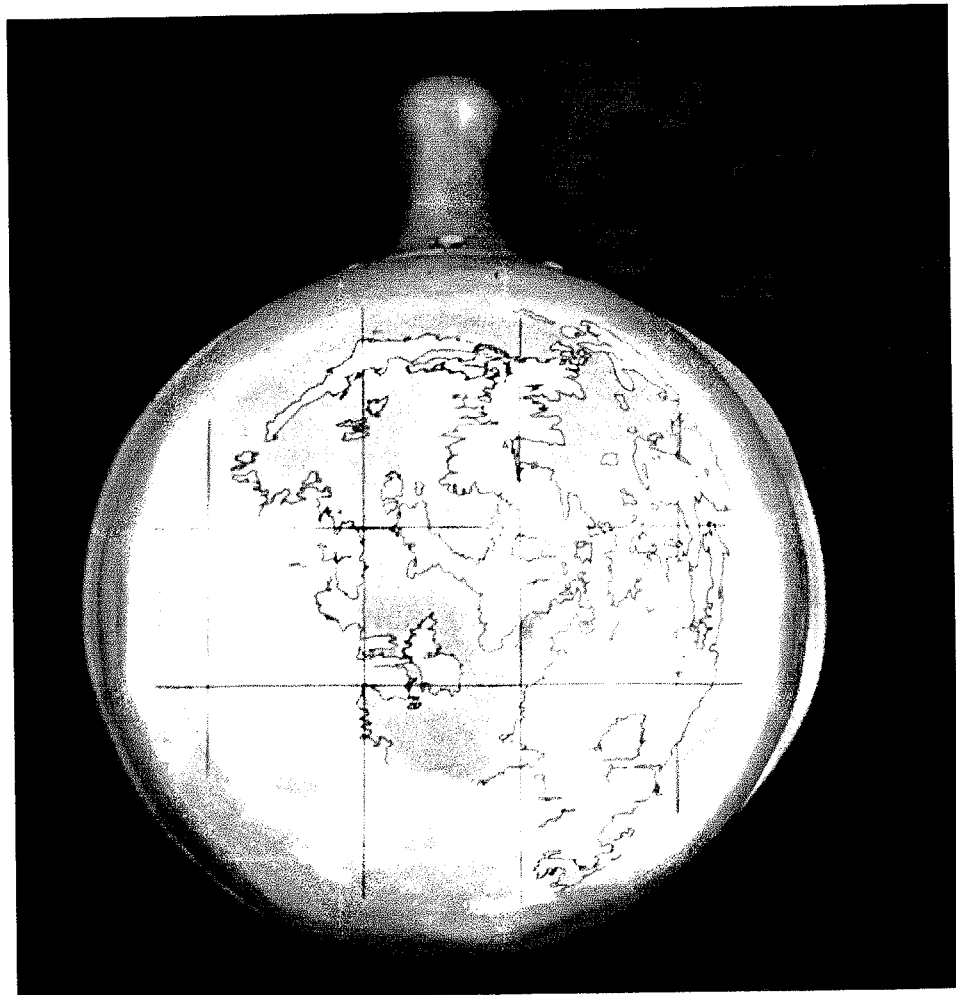


Figure 5.6 (bottom)
Nien Schwarz
Bauxite, 1996 (detail)
aluminium saucepan, ink, paint

physical, visual, and conceptual links between specific Australian mining sites and these consumer objects, my intention was to reconnect hypothetically the pans to their origins in the ground.

I remember thinking several times that the whole idea of trying to work with these smelly, miserable, old saucepans was ludicrous, yet I could not tear myself away from them. I kept returning to an image of Ilya Kabakoff's work "*Installation No. 5: Landscape with Saucepans*, 1988 (Figure 5.7), in which he integrated painted canvases and kitchen utensils and extended the work off the wall and into the space of the room by suspending saucepans and other cooking paraphernalia at various heights.¹ I could relate to the visual noise captured in this work; a cacophony of metal saucepans and utensils being banged around, scraped across surfaces of various heights and their contents bubbling, simmering, and stewing with accompanying smells wafting beyond the space and little spluttering, hissing and bubbling noises issuing forth. Kitchens are bustling places and for me the utensils in Kabakov's installation marked the working boundaries of the space.

During a review of the early stages of my arrangements with the saucepans someone remarked how I had picked up on the "Canberra aesthetic" by choosing to work with found objects. I thought it silly as I had been working for years with the second-hand plaid flannel work shirts. It wasn't long, however, before I discovered the work of Rosalie Gasgoine, Ingo Kleinert, and Neil Roberts. But the saucepans were more than just working with found objects with appealing surfaces or retro associations - they represented the potential for an autobiographical kind of text. Kabakov's installation outraged me - how could he understand the relationship between canvas and kitchen utensils, a relationship that I knew so intimately! For the longest time I ranted against this work of his - I saw it as an incursion on my relationships to canvas and kitchen utensils, ones I can still smell, taste, hear, feel, and sometimes fear, waking suddenly, my guts exposed by the raking claws of a polar bear - relationships I had lived with for more than half my life. Kabakov's work became an extension of my northern kitchen

¹ Amei Wallach, Ilya Kabakov: *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996. Image taken from cover of book.

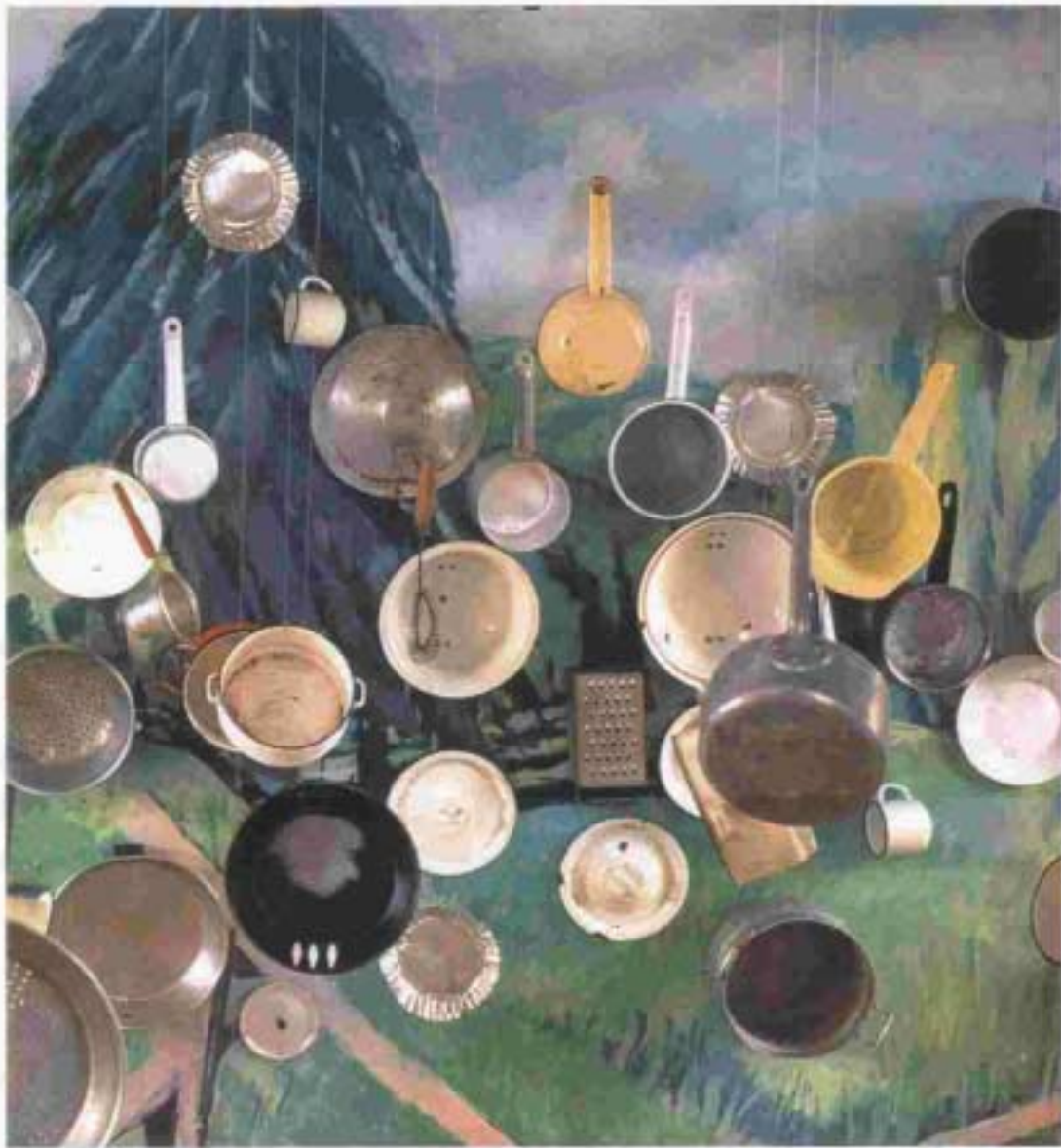


Figure 5.7

Ilya Kabakov

Landscape with saucepans, 1988

Amei Wallach, *Ilya Kabakov*, image from book cover

tents that I longed to return to, but from which I had severed myself by moving to Australia.

After much experimentation, including stacking the pans, nailing them to the wall (rendering them paralysed), laying them on the floor in grids, superimposing them on maps, and wrapping them in canvas backed maps, I eventually settled for the screen-like grid and suspending one pan from the one above. This arrangement of pans alluded to the movement of our camps across the land; each saucepan marking the location of yet another camp kitchen, another point in the grid to be mapped in detail as indicated on the surfaces of the pans. The screen of pans was my map, like the one we used to have on the kitchen tent wall next to the radio, marking the location of the camps for the summer - a number of little crosses on a map of the land.

Formally the work was successful. It was made to fit the space and was visually arresting. I felt the installation worked well with Neil Robert's exhibition in the main gallery - also a collection of found objects, but reduced to a uniform chalkboard green and moving lyrically across the horizon of the space. I feared, however, that the pans by themselves were not enough to bring people into the context of the work. While for me the saucepans and the inclusion of texts, maps and geological diagrams functioned as a common denominator between geological investigations on the land and my livelihood working as a cook for geological crews, I worried that people would not understand this. I decided to add a book of handwritten recipes containing several images of geological expeditions I had worked on. Included were photographs of geologists working in the field and of myself cooking in a typical field kitchen set-up. The book was well-worn and the titles of many of the recipes reflected distant geographies. Attesting to my love of cooking in the bush, I intended this to be another way into the work - a clue. I did not want the book to fight with the grid of pans in the Cube and chose to separate them physically. The recipe book was suspended on a white cord just outside the space. On the wall above the book was printed:

**As the geoscientists traverse and map their way across the land
with their maps, air photos, compasses and picks in hand,
my pots and I have followed
close on their heels.....**

In retrospect, I know now that unless a viewer spent several minutes with the book, and scanned it from front to back, the book remained simply a most unusual cookbook which did little to clarify relationships between the ground, mining, and resulting saucepans. Instead, the book, in relation to the pans, emphasised the lack of food present. Most people who know me and my line of work commented that the diaristic recipe book was a delightful aspect of the work, yet others preferred the pans on their own and thought of the book addition as too layman-like. The reference to aluminium pans originating in Australian earth was not entirely evident to them.

One viewer wanted to be able to hold the pans - after all, that's why they have handles. A colleague suggested that I take the handles off the pans - to emphasise the decay, to get away from the idea of pot as functional object, but also to stress the metal component of the pans and the basic idea of them as containers. This would distract the viewer and cause them to think less about cooking vessels and food and more about seeing them as partially deconstructed objects all made of aluminium. The pans, I realised, were going to be read as saucepans with domestic and nostalgic connotations as long as they were intact containers with handles and especially with their multiple histories as second-hand objects. Also, hanging them the way I did in the Cube made them seem like a special collection; each pan was precious because each had a specific place in the grid and was arranged according to size. Eliminating the handles would have made them less precious: their usefulness denied. I could have pushed the idea of decay and disintegration and that the saucepans are on their way back to the earth from which they came; a short time in a caustic solution would have emphasised this dimension. There was also a suggestion that I should cast new objects with aluminium and contrast them with the oldness of the saucepans.

The work was never fully resolved conceptually. In retrospect, the work was more about me than about the origins of aluminium and the intersection of consumerism and implied comfort with geoscience and mining. Inscribing familiar objects and associations with maps of unfamiliar territory symbolised the extent to which I felt dislocated. In short, I was mapping my own desire to regain a sense of place and this manifested itself as a subjective reflection of my own experiences.

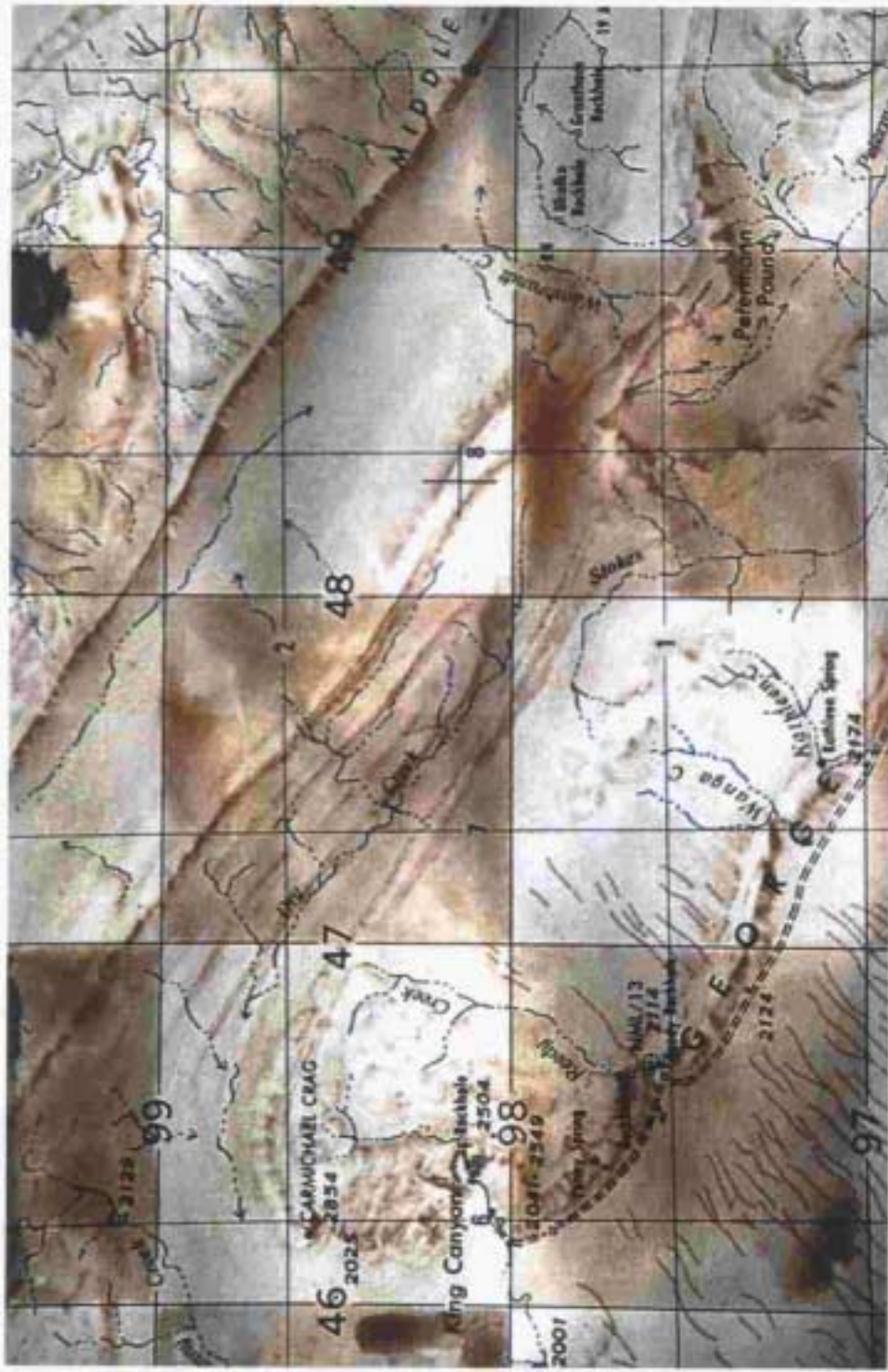


Figure 6.1
 Nien Schwarz
 untitled, 1996
 topographic map (NT), finely-ground rock

6. (Re)Cite, 1995-1996

Working with Maps

“Mental maps are images created from personal experiences based on perception of the attributes of a place. We seek a frame of reference in one’s mind either from knowledge or experience of a place. Mental maps are also based on references to existing maps that we are familiar with.”¹

In this section, I describe my early investigations of linking particular maps with geological fieldwork experiences and my family’s history. In some instances, I have afforded the reader only a quick insight as the works themselves fall outside my program of study. These earlier poems, however, furnished me with many ideas and helped me to define and refine the more recent works such as *Migrations: An Illustrated Poem in 300 Parts* and *Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts* (Section 7).

In 1993, I worked as a navigator and geological assistant in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. As part of that job I was required to navigate with the use of topographic and geological maps, and a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver. I was asked also to maintain a travel log of daily events and to take geological and other notes for later reference.

In the bush, maps are our lifeline; without them we would get hopelessly lost and certainly would be unable to pursue our geological investigations. I spent many hours pouring over maps in order to be as efficient a navigator as possible.

Maps are highly abstract and function as a form of text; a highly codified and impersonal text full of lines, numbers, and symbols that without experience, or an accompanying key, are difficult to understand.² On several occasions in the field, I added new information to our maps, because many of them were outdated. This additional information included unmarked or new roads, homesteads (new or abandoned), and the locations of Aboriginal

¹ Denis Wood, *The Power of Maps*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 15.

² I didn’t realise how difficult until one day we asked a station owner to show us where his property was on the map. Although he knew the country “like the back of his hand” he had no idea how to locate his homestead.

petroglyphs. These maps, however, had to be returned at the end of the trip and I therefore erased much of the details I had added to help us get through the country. They were replaced by cognitive maps, scribbled notes, and hasty sketches.

Quite by chance, several years later, I obtained copies of some of the same maps I had used in Western Australia. For a long time I could not get past their preciousness. I kept forgetting that back in the city I had no need for them and that they were no longer needed as a tool for survival. I did not need to know where reliable water bores could be found, where the mafic intrusion was, or where the nearest petrol station was. Only slowly did I begin to add to them some of the information I had erased from them years before. I personalised the maps by incorporating my own text, symbols, and sketches. Much of this text was highly relevant to my experiences of travelling, working, and living for six weeks in the heart of the Pilbara. I loved that country and, after several false starts, started to enjoy my explorations of these maps in a different way.

Whitesprings

I used countless maps of Australia to explore my experiences and my ideas, but I will mention only a few here. On a 1:250,000 mapsheet of *Whitesprings*, one of the areas in which I worked, I wrote in pencil the contents of my journal pertaining to the area. Every map is plotted rigidly with a grid, visually not unlike a calendar. The structure of the grid, on which I plotted the progress of our journey, and the measurement of time according to blocks of time as days in my journal, were used as a framework for my text. I filled alternating squares of the grid with the text printed in small, even-sized, upper case letters. Although the lettering looked constrained, reflecting the scientific intent behind the journal, it nonetheless disrupted the map by personalising it, and thus greatly altered its meaning and use. My inscriptions made me think of people carving their initials into trees and rocks to make a personal experience public and visible long after the experience has passed.

Helena

“The desert is less ‘nature’ than a concept, a place that swallows up boundaries.”

Robert Smithson³

I explored the notion of displacement by taking the same *Whitesprings* text and applying it to the *Helena* 1:250,000 sheet, which is a few map sheets to the east of Whitesprings. I had never been to the Helena area and, according to the map, the area is barren of contemporary human occupation. Only in the southwest corner of the sheet is there a track identifying a small portion of the Canning Stock Route that transects this desert.

I was interested in exploring the notion of dislocation, because working in this type of homogenous terrain can sometimes be extremely disconcerting. I’ve never forgotten the time I was navigating in a helicopter. While engrossed in deep conversation with the pilot, we had inadvertently flown off the corner of the mapsheet and had no idea where we were. By the time I realised my error, we had no idea of the exact direction from which we had come and there were of course no tracks to follow back. We were hundreds of miles from the nearest community and the features of the ground I was able to make out did not correspond to what I could find on any of the three maps in my lap. Every minute spent considering our predicament was a precious one because helicopters consume fuel at an alarming rate and do not generally carry reserve tanks. We solved our problem by climbing higher and thus gaining a more commanding view of the countryside below us. Eventually we were able to see a chain of lakes that corresponded to a similar outline on one of the maps. When what is on the map does not correspond to what lies under your feet, that is dislocation.

The *Helena* piece came about while I investigated methods to dislocate a viewer but without including the actual experience. Again I used the map’s grid in which to locate the text, but in this case, the text did not correspond to anything on the map. In fact it seemed quite hilarious to make this work in the safety of the city and I enjoyed myself enormously. I didn’t realise that

³ Robert Smithson, 1968, p. 49.

viewers unaccustomed to reading maps would not have understood my little joke.

Distressed Maps

Inscribing maps with text of a personal nature often led me to erase large sections. In fact, there were several maps I inscribed with leaded pencil and then rendered the text illegible in various ways. I was aware of artists such as Ann Hamilton who erase text, thus allowing another history to be presented in its place, but here I was erasing my own hard labour.

While dyeing the fabrics for the brick works, I experimented with dyeing the hand-printed maps. The act of imbuing something with memory and then destroying it to the point of disintegration was an oddly satisfying experience. I used iron sulphate, tannic acid, caustic soda, and various mineral pigments to alter the maps. In *Untitled* (Figure 6.1), I introduced to the map paint I made from hematite-rich rocks obtained from an area depicted on the map. Interestingly, my red paint and the printers ink, used to depict features in this desert country, were the same colour. There occurred an interesting blurring of details and boundaries as an official form of information merged with an imaginary one. I perceived it as a form of intervention I would have liked to pursue further, but did not.

Rotterdam

Nestwork was a project organised by De Wende Artists Initiative in Rotterdam. The group designed this project as its own response to Manifesta 1, a new European contemporary arts festival hosted by Rotterdam in 1996. Fifty artists were asked to respond to a specially printed map of Rotterdam, the results of which were to be published in a full colour book.

Rotterdam, as outlined in Section 2, was the site from which my family emigrated from the Netherlands. My response to the invitation was to link this momentous occasion with the map and its detailed depiction of the harbour. I chose to recount my family's stories about the departure and the journey itself by using two languages: Dutch and English.



Figure 6.2 (top)
Nien Schwarz
Rotterdam, 1996
map, lead pencil, text, dye, silk, glue
Nestwork, Rotterdam, 1996

Figure 6.3 (bottom)
Nien Schwarz
Rotterdam, 1996 (detail)
map, lead pencil, text, dye, silk, glue
Nestwork, Rotterdam, 1996

The text was handwritten in slightly undulating parallel lines across the map (Figure 6.2). No hierarchy was intended between the two languages as I recorded whichever language came to mind first. The use of two languages suggested a bridge between two cultures and two geographically separated countries.

The white border around the map was kept free of text and detached in one piece. The text component was crumpled and dyed several times thus taking on layers of staining and, in some instances, obliterating the text (Figure 6.3). After multiple immersions in liquid, the map had shrunk in size and no longer fitted the white frame from which it had been cut. To compensate for the gap, I used sheets of heat bonding glue to attach both the frame and the text to a light-coloured silk backing. The silk was just visible as an intermediate zone, a kind of softly glistening shoreline, between the watery map and its pristine white border.

The map had taken on qualities of a painting; a kind of ocean of the mind. If it ever operated as a narrative it was only before its immersion. The physical disruptions imposed by the creasing and staining rendered the text virtually impossible to read. The degree of difficulty in making out the words made me think of trying to read my mother's own handwriting. As much as she has tried to keep in touch by writing frequently, I have such difficulty deciphering the individual characters that her letters to me become more of a barrier than a bridge to communication.

The map was sent back to Holland two years ago, very shortly after it was made. I never heard anything about it again. I could write or call and find out what happened to it, but for me the work was the process of writing the memories, of personalising the map with my handwriting, the dyeing and breaking down of its fibres, and then fitting this page of thousands of memories within its original, still immaculate and mass produced frame. I realised only later that for most people any single text written in two languages would be perceived as a barrier and that my idea of bridging two cultures through language would perhaps be lost to any audience unless it too was bilingual. The interchanging of the languages reflected my feelings

of awkwardness in searching to find the right words to express an idea or feeling that simply is not describable in the other language when the words do not exist.

Nagasaki 1945, 1996 (exhibited in the Good, the Bad, & the Ugly, CCAS, 1996)

Nagasaki 1945 (Figure 6.4) was a work executed using many of the same techniques as those employed in the *Nestwork* project discussed above. Thematically, the work was a response to the 1945 printing date of the map and to my father's internment in Indonesia during that time. The text recounted my questioning of the bombing of Nagasaki and my realisation that the bombing of this city, the senseless death of thousands, was also the reason for my father's liberation from deplorable conditions, and almost certainly an early death. The work was very involved, especially the writing of the text, and its surface, parts of which were deeply stained from the application of hot wax, evoked some of the horrors of war. Interestingly, my father's closest acquaintances later in life were his Japanese colleagues. That gesture I carry with me always.

Migrations: an illustrated poem in 300 parts, 1996

"a sort of travel diary where discovered landscapes and traversed paths are registered"

Ivo Mesquita⁴

I made *Migrations: an illustrated poem in 300 parts* in response to an invitation from the Vaalserberg artist-run initiative in Rotterdam to participate in a group exhibition on the theme of migration in relation to the notion of utopia. The project coincided with Rotterdam's hosting of the new international art biennial "Manifesta 1" in 1996. The Vaalserberg wrote:

"The assumption at the basis of this manifestation consists of an attempt to overcome existing regional, social, linguistic and economic barriers... The Vaalserberg wants to add its own, specific contribution to the Manifesta program... and invites you to take place in this project by developing your

⁴ Ivo Mesquita, "Cartographies" in *Cartographies*, Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1993, p. 27.



Figure 6.4
Nien Schwarz
Nagasaki 1945, 1996 (detail)
map (Nagasaki 1945), lead pencil, text, dye, canvas, glue
The Good the Bad and the Ugly, CCAS, 1996
Private collection

view on the 'notion' NOMADIA. NOMADIA is a junction of nomadic (wandering, without steady residence) and utopia (design for an ideal situation). The presentation will take shape in the form of an exhibition of the various contributions as well as a publication. The Vaalserberg does not exclusively consider purely theoretical discourses as far as the contributions are concerned. The only formal restriction bound to this project is the send-ability of the contribution by post, by fax, by E-mail, by phone..."

Two letters accompanied my work. I did not realise that the letters would be exhibited as well or I never would have sent them as such. I include them here because European viewers were reportedly taken by my "honest and personally revealing perspective" which was considered to be "refreshing".

"Beste Sonia en Aletta

Hierbij mijn reactie op de brieven die jullie mij gestuurd hebben. Ik hope dat dit jullie past. Ik ga door in het engels.

NOMADIA has been an interesting proposal to respond to. I do not have the time available at the moment to write a paper regarding my notions of NOMADIA - but, what I think and what I feel regarding this topic, as best as I am able to understand it (translating the proposal from Dutch into English), and my experiences of being nomadic in the modern sense of locating new opportunities, is expressed in **Migrations: an illustrated poem in 300 parts**.

I no longer know what utopia means for I am disillusioned. As I told Sonia over the phone, when I was a child I firmly believed that there would be no more war and hunger on earth by the time I turned 30 years of age. That was my notion of utopia. That surely by the time I turned 30 years old people should not have to suffer what my father and his family suffered in a prisoner of war camp in Indonesia. War, it terrifies me. Why is it so rampant? How can people bear to see recreations of other people killed and tortured in movies? I guess the key word is 'other'. As long as it isn't you who cares? Who knows? La Guerre, je ne comprend pas!

People sometimes frighten me - the fascination with violence, other people's despair, and rampant mindless consumption of resources. Do we really need so much? Do we need to kill so much? There seems to be so little respect for the sources of our comfortable lifestyles - that being resources located in the ground. I have seen totally devastated areas in several countries - every single tree in a rain forest chopped, lakes polluted by mills and refineries, an oil spill, a mountain reduced to rubble in the search for mineral wealth and replaced with mountains of stacked fuel drums. Most people who live in the urban West never see this kind of massive devastation and consequently they do not fully comprehend. Those of us living in the West are largely protected from the devastation we create, yet

we are the biggest consumers and also the biggest producers of pollution. Politicians promise utopias. Maybe this means sending our toxic waste to "Third World" countries.

My soul survives mostly intact by avoiding aggression (in media, TV, movies, etc.) and appreciating the beauty of simple things around me - namely the earth as is. As I have said before I am happiest when I travel, live, and work in extremely remote areas which some consider to be inhospitable geographies. There I find great joy in simply being. I love wide unobstructed horizons, drinking directly from a lake or stream, and climbing a hill only climbed by maybe just a handful of people in the last 200 years. This is a very personal utopia.

Another form of personal utopia I find is looking at maps; they allow me to relive memories and at other times to create imaginary utopias. International boundaries dissolve, distances collapse, and I sometimes forget about war ravaged areas as devastated sites magically disappear. Maps can be surprisingly abstract, but it is fun to imagine, although it is made of paper, a world devoid of war, famine, and pollution. In other cases, maps allow me to relive memories. By scanning a map, I again travel across deserts, explore caves, camp in the snow, sleep under a 1000 year old cedar tree, meet wonderful and sometimes bizarre people, try to retrace my steps through Amsterdam, London, Rotterdam, New York, and Paris, catch fish through a hole in a nameless Arctic lake, and carry water in pails back to the kitchen tent. The maps also allow me to speculate on where my father's people came from. Where did the almond-shaped dark brown eyes and black hair come from?

Sometimes I imagine the maps actually represent utopian ideals. I might recall scenes by the Barbizon painters, the Canadian Group of Seven, the American Hudson River School, Egyptian and Pompeian mural painters, Dutch Masters, and Australian Aboriginal painters. On the Internet I have been reading other people's ideas about utopia and whether or not it is attainable. Some people say that the Net is utopia as no one knows who you really are. In maps escapism and reality intertwine, both culturally and geographically: utopia and reality all mixed up. My personal utopias, whether real or created, and those of others, such as the art historical references, all figure in one way or another in this poem.

Anyway, I have rambled on. My poem is fragmented and unfinished. Some is yet to be lived and some has been forgotten - hence some packages are empty."

[Geoscientists or lab technicians sometimes store precious grains of rock in small paper packages. The paper can be any kind as long as it is square to begin with. Many use readily available square sheets of weighing paper which has an extremely smooth surface to avoid the contents from sticking

to the interior of package. The packages are intricate and the numerous folds and tucks ensure that there is no risk of spillage].

Part Two: how to install the work

"Migrations: An Illustrated Poem in 300 Parts" consists of 300 envelopes (5 x 5 cm) made of weighing paper. Most of the envelopes contain a fragment of map, a symbol, or a line of text extracted from my journals or personal correspondence. I envision 3 piles of these envelopes, each pile containing approximately 100 envelopes. One pile I see placed on the window sill (fensterbank) which overlooks busy Witte de Withstraat. Another pile placed on the windowsill overlooking the backyard. The third pile placed on a specially constructed shelf (plank) painted white and similar in dimensions to that of the window sills (same depth) but shorter in length. I would like this shelf to be mounted on the wall next to the door leading into the main room of De Vaalserberg. It should be fixed to the wall at the same height from the floor as the window sills.

The three piles marking entry and exit points into the space are important because my work deals primarily with three different continents and my migrations between them. The Netherlands, the country of my birth; Canada, the country of my upbringing; and Australia, where I have chosen to reside. Rotterdam as site hosting this work is important to me as not only is it the world's largest port, thus a point from which many journeys begin and end, but more importantly for me is that it is also the city from which we emigrated from Holland to Canada in 1962. The invitation to exhibit in Rotterdam and respond to the theme of migration in relation to utopia is for me a kind of a homecoming or full circle, resulting in 300 points of reflection.

The placement of the piles of envelopes in the space is intended to allude to compass points and so the North American pile should be placed on the window sill or shelf closest to west, the European connection facing east, and the Australian component placed at the southern end of the room. Placed in three distinct piles, the envelopes communicate conceptually across the space and also emphasise the architectural boundaries of the room. Viewers should be allowed to handle the packages and if they desire can keep one. A manifestation of this handling is that the geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries associated with each pile should begin to dissolve as the viewers journey from one pile to the next possibly forsaking one envelope here or there for another from a different pile. The cultural and geographical boundaries associated with the envelopes in different piles thus become blurred as the packets travel through the gallery space and migrate beyond. The tiny envelopes and contents operate as a metaphor for my identity which, like most people's, will never be fully realised or rooted to one particular place.

I am interested in working with weighing paper (used to contain substances which are weighed on a scale), as migration necessitates that a traveller

travels lightly. Every time I move I am obliged to take weight into account. The thin translucent quality of this paper is also reminiscent of airmail writing paper which figures prominently in my migrations from place to place as I endeavour to keep in touch with family members and friends. Another aspect of this paper is its semi-opaqueness and fragile looking quality which I use as a metaphor for the tenuousness of long distance communication and interpersonal relationships.

I have used maps extensively in this work for several reasons. As I continue to migrate, I spend much time gazing at maps. I am attracted to universal symbols, which I can read and understand without having to know the language. Such places marked on a map are in a sense already a bit familiar before I even get there. Rivers, highways, forests, and lakes, are recognisable without names attached. Most of the maps I have incorporated are purposely devoid of place names thereby endeavouring to make this work more universal, possibly more utopian in character. When you have finished with the poem could you please send it back to me."

According to Nomadia organisers, the Poem was installed according to my wishes and was well received. Because the work was not sent back to me for a very long time, I tried to recreate a sample of the work for my August, 1996, review, but the autobiographical part was gone. I could not bring it back. What materialised instead were packages with fragments of maps, text, and packages of soil - Australian only - and so from *Migrations: an illustrated poem in 300 parts*, materialised *Groundwork: an illustrated poem in 10 Parts*. This latter work was constructed for an exhibition in the Canberra School of Art Gallery in February, 1997, and, with modifications, is included in my final exhibition at CMAG.

Eventually *Migrations* was returned to me but missing sixty of the original 300 packages. I am happy to assume that those sixty packages were tucked away in pockets only to emerge elsewhere, perhaps in other countries. I was delighted to rediscover for myself that I had embossed the top right hand corner of each paper package with my initials. Why I had done this I couldn't remember. Was it an element of authorship, ownership, or proof of a personal collection? Two years later I received the exhibition catalogue. It had finally caught up to me after being forwarded to three addresses.



Figure 7.1
Nien Schwarz
Groundwork: an illustrated poem in 10 parts, 1996 (detail)
steel, drill core, location codes
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999

7. Groundwork, 1996-1996

Groundwork: an illustrated poem in 10 parts

"We spend our lives hurrying away from the real, as though it were deadly to us. 'It must be somewhere up there on the horizon,' we think. And all the time it is in the soil, right beneath our feet."

William Bryant Logan¹

Mounted on the wall, at the far end of the gallery, is a row of ten metal box-like shelves, each one measuring 7.5 x 50 x 50 cm. They are spaced equally, at 1.6 m intervals, but their heights above the floor are variable. These variations in elevation create a kind of undulating horizon, with the reflections from the more highly polished shelves reaching towards the ceiling.

Approaching the work from either end, the first shelves encountered are lead. Their malleable edges are softly-rolled. The leaden surfaces impart a deeply seductive, velvety-rich, heavy, dull sheen that is difficult not to want to touch. Although the lead is heavy, it is fragile, the form of the box-like shelf is easily disrupted if touched.

Of the two lead shelves, one supports an array of small (5 x 5 cm) translucent paper packages, each containing a segment of handwritten text printed in lead pencil on pieces of calico-backed map (Figure 7.2). Some of the texts are dated and also contain geographic coordinates (21°59'14"S, 120°05'19"E; 21°31'13"S, 119°23'57"E; 23°39'18"S, 115°45'33"E) which refer to notes written during a geological expedition through the Pilbara region of Western Australia. There are many descriptive references to specific sites, observations of rocks, and the drilling of dolerite dykes for core samples.

"MW organised rocks, packed them, and found the Marble Bar topo sheet. Drove on road that crosses dyke, but no visible outcrop - just rubble."

"Day ended with having drilled 14 holes at this site, 11 of which are OK, but core stuck in drill again! Saw lots of emu today and one with babies. Grilled marinated chicken and pesto pasta for dinner."

¹ Logan, p. 97.



Figure 7.2

Nien Schwarz

Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts, 1996 (detail)

lead, weighing paper packages, map, canvas, lead pencil, text
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999

Listed at the bottom of several of the entries are small lists of food items describing dinner. Although in this instance I was cooking only for two, it was a deeply ingrained bush cook's habit. Lacking the knowledge to support ourselves on the land, the irony was evident in our journey. While we carried chicken, that with great difficulty we kept from spoiling, emus frequently visited our truck. There are also references to Aboriginal petroglyphs, suggesting that the scientific line of inquiry, the intent behind the journey, intersected on several occasions with Aboriginal culture in Western Australia.

"Really hot. Drilled big dyke. Broke another core sample. Petroglyphs of hands and lizards. Beautiful hands - very distinct - in solid white. Lots of problems at this site. Drill bit stuck again."

This intersection between cultures has been noted by Paddy Roe and connects the viewer with Roe's Aboriginal perspective of non-Aboriginal connections to ground. It reads as follows:

"You people try and dig little more deep. You bin digging only white soil. Try and find the black soil inside."

The second lead shelf (at the opposite end of the row) displays a glittering array of colourful mineral samples, including green malachite, rust-red hematite, purple bornite, metallic yellow chalcopyrite, silver galena, black obsidian, etc. (Figure 7.3). Many of these specimens were obtained from fieldwork areas and visits to abandoned and working mines. The specimens are sealed in small plastic packages which are arranged neatly in a grid. Included are minerals from which the metals of the shelves are derived. The colours, textures, and lustres of the mineral samples are echoed in the nearby surfaces of the brick and cloth geological cross-sections (*X Marks the Spot*, Section 4).

Yet another shelf with earth samples consists of small plastic packages containing crushed geophysical drill core (Figure 7.1). This is the kind of core I am familiar with most. Geophysical drilling, although generally not pursued for economic applications, is used to collect samples for rock property investigations, which in turn are used sometimes to "ground-truth" aeromagnetic surveys that help reveal the geology and structure of an



Figure 7.3 (top)
Nien Schwarz
Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts, 1996 (detail)
lead, mineral samples, plastic
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,
Canberra, 1999

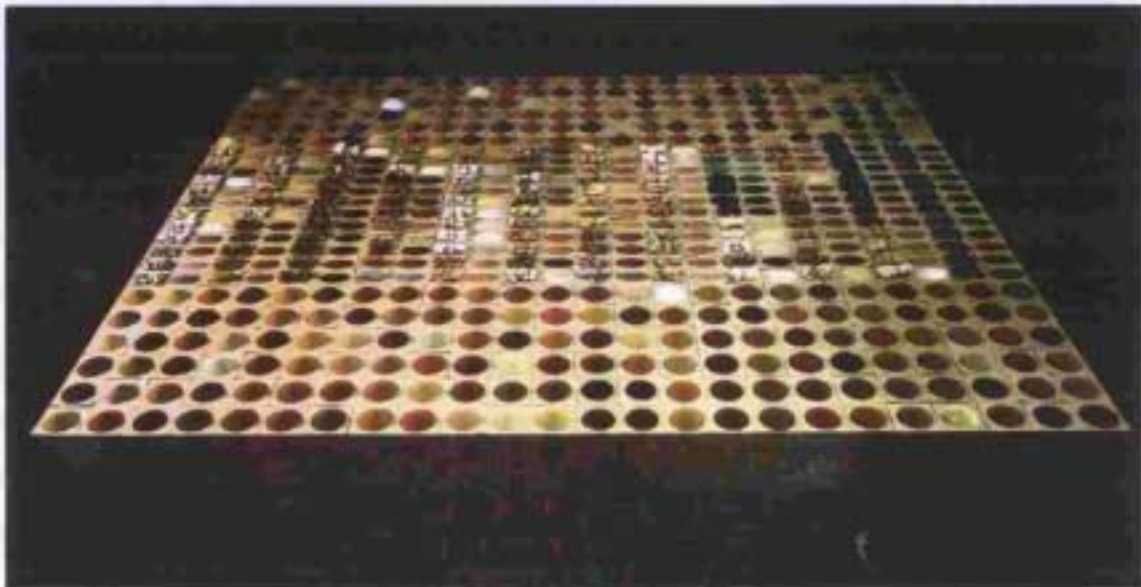


Figure 7.4 (bottom)
Nikolaus Lang
Sand and Ochre, 1987
Adelaide, South Australia
Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia, New York: Viking, 1988

area. The variety of colours is astounding and the distinct piles of colour alludes to Nikolaus Lang's *Sand and Ochre*, 1987, (Figure 7.4) In its vicinity is a deeply rusted steel shelf in vivid colours of orange. This shelf always reminds me of "The Work of Iron," written by John Ruskin in which he described the colours of rusted steel.

On adjacent shelves, geologists' field notes and accompanying rock samples have been classified, consolidated, and subsequently codified into highly powerful and portable forms of documentation in the form of geological maps. The flocked silver surfaces of a galvanised steel shelf (the steel likely constructed from the very ground in the Pilbara referred to in the preceding journal entries) brims with translucent paper packets, each one containing a square section of a metamorphic map of Australia (Figure 7.5). The references to ground are barely discernible amongst the heightened colours of the map, each depicting a particular form of codified geological data. Nearby, an oxidised aluminium shelf holds similar packages that contain sections of a map depicting the locations of mines, their names, and the types of minerals and ores mined at each site (Figure 7.6). Interspersed amongst the packages are drawings of mapping symbols, such as the universal pick and hammer symbol used to represent on a map the location of a mine.

Re-sealable paper packets such as these are used by some scientists to protect samples or to help categorise samples according to location, age, type, etc. In this case, the translucency of the packets invites scrutiny and comparison between a package that may contain a beautiful little crystal of tourmaline and a packet on an adjacent tray that may contain a section of geological map representing five square kilometres. The viewer is asked to consider the consequent changes in scale and perspective.

The poem is not an all-at-once experience, because the repetition of units along the two walls of the gallery asks for a sequential and relational reading. The consistent square shape of the shelves, repeated in the smaller packages, alludes to the European ideal of gridding, mapping, and dividing the ground into parcels.



Figure 7.5

Nien Schwarz

Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts, 1996-97 (detail)

copper, weighing paper packages, canvas, metamorphic map of Australia
CSA Gallery, Canberra, 1997

To contrast this, I cut into 5 cm circles a map of Australia depicting Aboriginal language groups in relation to territory. The circles of this map contrast with the square sections of the other maps and are not inserted into paper packages. Instead, they sit boldly on the surface of the black steel shelf (Figure 7.7). The circles of variegated colour are not intended to further the stereotype of the dot in relation to Aboriginal art, but when juxtaposed with the square packages, serve instead as a visual and conceptual reminder that different cultures harbour different world views and perceptions of land and land use. The circles of the Aboriginal map, juxtaposed with the geological maps, brings into the question issues surrounding land use. The circles, in relation to the Aboriginal occupation of land, are echoed again in *(Dis)comfort Zone: Mine/Mine* (Section 9).

The highly reflective copper and stainless steel shelves are bare. They operate as simple gestalts, as contemplative reflective pauses between the laden surfaces of adjacent shelves. The reflections of these shelves are cast high on the wall above, with the copper shelf in particular sending a vivid torch of orange-pink light shooting up the wall (Figure 7.8). Within this flame of colour sits the silhouette of a fiducial mark fixed to the shelf's surface. This surveying and mapping symbol, like the one embedded in the Museum and Gallery's lift floor (Figure 8.2), is echoed across the floor of the gallery at regular intervals, sometimes even obscured beneath floor works (see foreground of Figure 9.2). Oriented to the cardinal directions (and thereby offset against the gallery's architectural layout), the black fiducial marks spread across the space, linking points of intersection of a grid that conceivably could extend beyond the gallery walls.

The metal shelves represent not only end-products or pseudo-objects but, in relation to the earth samples and various geological maps, suggest the possibility of reconnecting the various metals to their distant geographic origins. These are light industrial materials used as neutrally as possible, with their specific identity unimpaired - allowing the materiality of the galvanised iron, copper, lead, and aluminium to come forth. I wanted to facilitate dialogues between the viewer, the various materials derived from the earth, and distant sites of geological extraction. The polished surfaces



Figure 7.6 (top)
Nien Schwarz
Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts,
 1996-97 (detail),
 aluminium, paper, map (Australian Mining
 Industry Council 1993).
Mapping the Comfort Zone, Artspace,
 Adelaide, 1997



Figure 7.7 (bottom)
Nien Schwarz
Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts,
 1999 (detail)
 black steel, map (Aboriginal language
 groups, produced by AITSIS)
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG,
 Canberra, 1999

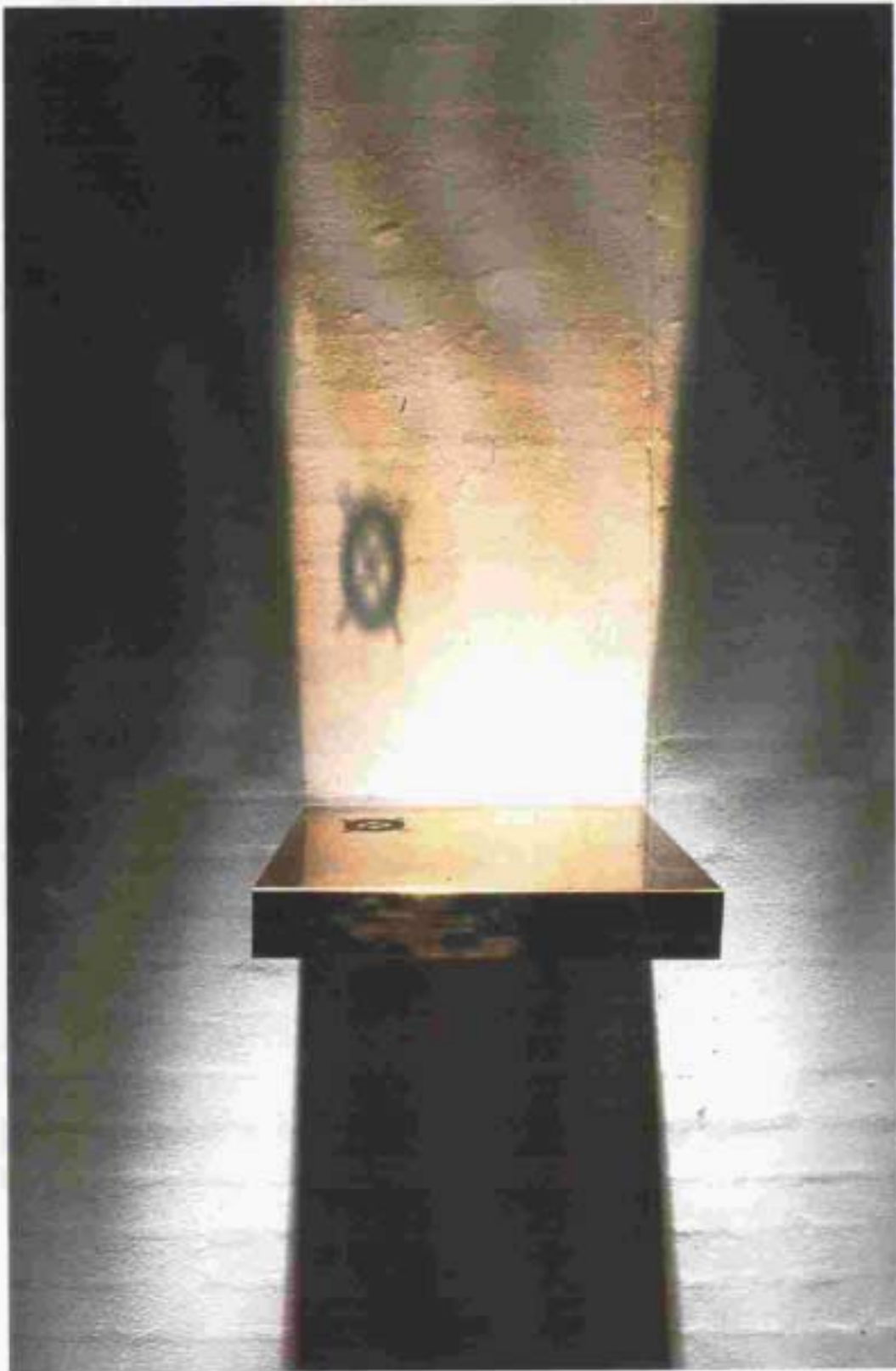


Figure 7.8
Nien Schwarz
Groundwork: An Illustrated Poem in 10 Parts, 1997 (detail)
copper, vinyl
Beyond Familiar Territory, CMAG, Canberra, 1999

extend an invitation to explore, and the viewers' reflection in the surface of the shelf, amongst a myriad of paper packages or mineral samples, is an invitation to do so. It could also be a reflection of our fragmented knowledge of the earth's geological makeup and of our relationships to it.

I consider this work an illustrated poem because, to a large extent, it illustrates how I perceive the world around me - in a relational way. The poem discloses my discoveries through exploration of this country in both large-scale sweeping observations and, on a more intimate level, through the detailed examination of rock specimens and the recording of events at particular places. I have included first hand experiences of observing the ground, of interacting with it, of combining this with geoscientific readings of the land and with some of the possible end products that originate from geological research in the field. It is a poem in which the natural and the human pass back and forth and has no beginning nor end because I am always learning about the ground beneath my feet in so many different ways. It is a fragmented poem, sometimes fleeting, while at other times exerting a strength in contrasting colours, textures, lustres, and pattern.

The poem's forerunner, *Migrations: An illustrated Poem in 300 Parts*, was centred on notions of utopia, migration and the construction of identity in relation to distant places. This poem, although different in many ways, has retained the concept of migration, except here it is more in relation to geologically derived materials migrating from peripheral sites of extraction to central sites of consumption and of my adventures back and forth between such divergent sites. The poem is no longer about marking the entry and exit points of the space as it had been in Rotterdam, but marks instead the passage and transformation of raw earth into archived information and into readily recognisable everyday materials



Figure 8.1
Nien Schwarz
Moving Territory, 1997-98
steel (passenger lift doors), enamel
ACT public art commission, CMAG, Canberra, 1997

8. Ascending and Descending Public Art, 1997-98

Moving Territory, Canberra Museum & Gallery Lift Project, 1998

On the ground floor of the Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG), adjacent to the Information Counter, is the lift to the upper floor of the gallery. The lift doors consist of two vertical brushed steel panels, the lustrous surfaces of which are transected by thin, undulating black lines (Figure 8.1). The lines are subparallel, and their spacing is variable, with some areas more concentrated and squiggly. Every fifth line is thicker and more pronounced. The lowermost thick line, close to ground level, is labelled **600** and at the top, one is labelled **750**. The interval between lines is 5 units, suggesting they are contours depicting changes in elevation, at 5 metre intervals, in a hilly terrain on a small scale map.

At a touch of the button, the doors open with an arresting “ping”. All passengers entering the lift are captured immediately by a large grey mirror and framed between the words “**HERE**” and “**THERE**” and “**NGUNU**” and “**NIÑ**”, sandblasted into its corners (Figure 8.2). The words invite a dialogue in relation to each other and their placement and relative size facilitate a translation between English and the local indigenous Ngunnawal¹. The words **HERE** and **NGUNU** are large, implying a closeness in time and space. In contrast, **THERE** and **NIÑ** are smaller, implying distance, something not close at hand. Our narcissistic tendencies are impinged upon by these dichotomous relationships. The voices of these two languages dispel self-absorption and instead promote self-reflection in relation to other people and of the negotiation of time and space between here and there, us and them, upstairs and downstairs, and inside and outside.

When the doors close, passengers are captured in a two-way reflection between the mirror and the burnished steel interior doors, also covered by black contour lines. Checkerboard patterned handrails run the entire length of the space on two sides. The alternating and contrasting sections of polished steel and glossy black are reminiscent of scale bars found along the

¹ The spelling of Ngunnawal is also sometimes referred to as Ngunawal

base of a map (Figure 8.2). The rails complement the steel and black of the doors and extend further the notion of mapping and of covering territory.

Underfoot are undulating layers with rock-like surface patterns and earthy colours of red, beige, ochre yellow, and grey (Figure 8.2). Embedded off-centre in this stratified matrix is a large black fiducial mark, a symbol commonly used in the surveying and printing industries to mark a known point which does not vary and is therefore true. Constrained to move only vertically, a lift always returns to the same spot on the ground. Here, it denotes the lift's attachment to the same spot on a map or to the ground below.

I began "Moving Territory" in April, 1997, when I was commissioned by the ACT Public Art Coordinator, in conjunction with the Director of CMAG, to submit a proposal addressing a functional aspect of the newly renovated North Building in Civic Square, Canberra. Provided with a few choices, I immediately opted for the lift because of its architectural and kinetic properties. I was cautious, however, realising that such a project would necessitate working with unfamiliar industrial materials and processes, collaborating closely with non-artists, and conforming to strict fire and safety regulations. These concerns proved to be far greater than I had anticipated. The project resulted in more than 250 pages of notes and, at times, heated negotiations with engineers, floor-layers, and printers. The project was completed ten months later, in February, 1998, and formed a major component of my studio output for 1997.

At the outset, I realised I could only justify working on a commission of this scale if it was related closely to my thesis investigations. This was anticipated by the project coordinators, as I had been approached initially because of my previous works, including *Bauxite* and the brick wall projects, that dealt with mapping and place. From the beginning of this project, I was intent to link the word "elevation" with "elevator." My intention was to manipulate the space of the lift as a means to provoke passengers into thinking about themselves in relation to the physical and cultural landscape beyond the confines of the lift. Everything about the lift was to be about



Figure 8.2

Nien Schwarz

Moving Territory, 1997-98

linoleum floor, text etched on mirror, vinyl on handrails (passenger lift interior)

ACT public art commission, CMAG, Canberra, 1997

what lay outside. I explored other lifts around the city and considered carefully a passenger's position in a lift relative to the ground below, the distances travelled in vertical space, the experience of one's elevation in the lift in relation to surrounding topography outside, and the sense of being contained in a small steel box sliding gently through space. I thought also what a weird little space a lift is and how one's personal space is constantly infringed on. Sometimes it is difficult to know where to look and so I thought text on the mirror seemed to be a perfect opportunity to engage passengers with a few moments of reflective thought.

Elevation contours describe the three-dimensional form of a landscape on a two-dimensional surface, such as a map. I proposed to embellish both the interior lift doors and the ground floor exterior doors with contour lines taken from a topographic map of Canberra. Using resources at the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO), I analysed several maps of the Canberra region. I settled eventually on a small section of a detailed map of Black Mountain, the most prominent Canberra landmark, visible from the CMAG gallery. I scanned a small portion covering the east side of Black Mountain (the side that faces CMAG), where the road meanders between the National Botanic Gardens and the Telstra Tower. Using computer graphics software, I eliminated other pieces of information, including the road, until I was left with only the contour lines and the references to elevation at the top and bottom of the altered map.

Applying the design to the doors was difficult, because stainless steel is highly resistant to any kind of surface treatment. I explored various techniques, including engraving, etching, enamel paint, photographic exposure, vinyl adhesive, and sandblasting. After much consultation and experimentation (in conjunction with Incline Advertising of Queanbeyan), screen printing of a two-part epoxy appeared initially to be an ideal solution. However, when the doors were delivered to the shop, it was apparent that a ridge along the top of the doors would make screen printing impossible. I decided instead to use a process of masking and etching, followed by two coats of black enamel.

Similar problems were encountered when applying the scale bar design to the stainless steel handrails. Spraying a two-part process of epoxy and ink was the initial plan, but proved too difficult to control, with the ink accumulating at the edges of the masked areas and forming ridges. An alternative was to spray a single-component ink, but this proved to be prone to chipping. There was the added difficulty of masking the design on a rounded surface and where the edges of black and white meet I had to ensure that there were no unsightly overlaps or gaps. Also, the handrails were much longer than anticipated, and would have required a prohibitive amount of precise masking. Eventually, the best solution proved to be the application of adhesive vinyl sheeting to the handrails and then bonding it to the steel with heat.

My designs for the lift floor proved to be the most challenging component of the project. I based the design on the colourful geological strata of the State Circle roadcut, a national geological monument located near the base of Parliament House. I researched the possibility of using natural stone (granite, marble and slate) but the cost of cutting stone proved to be prohibitive and the use of natural stone tiles would have fragmented my design too much.

I kept returning to a product by Forbo called Marmoleum which has a most exciting range of colours. The colours are vibrant, deep, rich, and complex, and several have stone-like patterning. The range contains exquisite mineral blues (azurite) and greens (malachite) and exhilarating earthy reds and more grainy common rock colours. I decided on earthy colours of ebony, charcoal, terracotta, dusky pink, dove grey, wheat, ochre red and ochre yellow.

I was keen to inscribe the mirror with text because I also felt inspired by Robert Smithson's use of mirrors to displace space, Lothar Baumgarten's use of text and territory in relation to other cultures,² and Alfredo Jaar's book The Eyes of Gutete Emerita, in which he juxtaposes text and mirror as a

² Craig Owens, "Improper Names" Unsettled Objects, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1993.

metaphor for reflection of oneself in relation to distant people and places.³ The last page of Jaar's artist's book is a small horizontal strip of mirror in which you see your own eyes reflected. The mirroring of the reader, the privileged Western viewer, is a tool for reflection in relation to the massacre Jaar describes on previous pages and to the experiences of Gutete Emerita, a local Rwandan woman, caught in the midst of the 1996 massacre. There are no pictures in this black book - only descriptions of what Gutete Emerita and Jaar saw. The mirroring of the reader in relation to the text grounds the event in reality by placing the viewer in the place of the unfortunate: the distant, yet now not so distant, 'Other'.

My desire to juxtapose text with the mirror was grounded also in two personal local experiences. When I first came to the Canberra School of Art, overseas students were invited on a field trip to Namadji National Park. A park guide showed us petroglyphs and informed us that the Aboriginal people of this region, the Ngunnawal, were now extinct. I remember the occasion vividly because the guide was corrected immediately by a CSA staff member. The Ngunnawal population was strong, but had been largely displaced to Queanbeyan, making them less visible in the territory they once occupied. The second experience occurred when I tried to find somebody to translate "here" and "there" into Ngunnawal. I approached a friend, a Ngunnawal elder. She was delighted to learn about Ngunnawal words being used in this project but she quickly came to tears. She was frustrated and angry that she had such difficulty translating such simple words into the language of her birth.⁴ Such difficulty is also a factor of dispossession.

I was determined to infuse consideration for local Ngunnawal people in the work. This exercise forced me to learn more about the region's cultural history and so perhaps other people could as well. The possibility of inscribing a large mirror with text in a public space as a metaphor for reflection, in the context of a government building situated across from the ACT Legislative Assembly and within the "Parliamentary Triangle", was

³ Alfredo Jaar, *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*, Raleigh, NC: City Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1996.

⁴ She is a stolen child

irresistible. I had to be cautious not to offend anybody, particularly Ngunnawal people, because the intersection of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures is so politically charged and because I am not of Aboriginal origin. I chose to use the Times font for the mirror's text because of its historical associations with printed media - both past and present.

Riding in a lift is a rather odd experience really. It is simultaneously about containment, suspension, movement, and of sharing an intimate space with strangers. In using the two languages in relation to the words "HERE" and "THERE", I endeavoured to provoke passengers into negotiating temporal boundaries between people and place. The juxtaposition of English with an unidentifiable language immediately creates another dichotomy of "us" and "them" and it is the not knowing or really understanding "NGUNU" and "NIÑ" that keeps the discourse alive through questioning and re-evaluation. To me, this is what reconciliation is all about: recognising, negotiating, understanding, and respecting differences. Next to the lift, at the Information Counter, is a brochure explaining the public art commissions in the building. It contains a brief description of Ngunnawal connections to the land on which the building now sits and my use of the two languages.

I considered also the context of a museum and gallery as a central collection and exhibition point, and how the words defined the relationship between the gallery as HERE and the objects it imports from over THERE - a role or relationship that Smithson would define as the mirroring of other places. I wanted to use the lift as a space for reflection by recalling the words of the indigenous Ngunnawal people, making them more present, less foreign in their own territory, and less displaced in the space of Western culture. Feeling my way through my use of text in this work, I realised only much later, after working on several other pieces with text and culture, that I was doubling, inverting, and decentring a Western space by implying the presence of something unfamiliar, something 'other' than the single official language of English. I was motivated to imply a kind of "counter-memory" to the edict of the Namadji Park ranger. The lift was created as a metaphor

for negotiation of territory and of various ways of mapping, whether by locating prominent topographical features (such as the stratified rocks near Parliament or Black Mountain), or through language, symbols, or more conventional Cartesian methods. Each gaze in the mirror, whether penetrating and searching, or simply a quick sideways glance, invents its own meaning and creates the possibility of understanding and negotiating territory in relation to another people, time, or place.

Muse Article⁵

“Moving Territory: ascending and descending public art.”

by Nien Schwarz

In February 1998, the doors will open to the Canberra Museum and Gallery located in the newly renovated North Building of Civic Square. This new cultural facility in the heart of Canberra will offer all Canberrans and visitors to the National Capital new insights into the region and its people. To mark the opening of this building, several artists have been commissioned by the ACT Public Art Program to create works for the site. My commission has been to develop and implement Canberra-based designs for the building's new 16 passenger lift. Designing and implementing such a theme in the confines of a lift, far removed from a gallery, has been very challenging.

My interest in public art began earlier this year when I joined other Visual Artists and Craft Practitioners to meet at Gorman House with Jacky Talbot, the ACT Public Art Co-ordinator, and Angela Philp, Director of the City Gallery. The meeting had two purposes. First, to inform artists about the ACT's Public Art Program and the various projects to be initiated in the coming months, and second, to describe the facilities and resources that the Canberra Cultural Centre (now renamed the Canberra Museum and Gallery) would make available for community arts groups and individuals. I left the meeting impressed with the scope of the Public Art Program and the numerous exciting projects unfolding across Canberra.

Public art often is functional and may take the shape of fountains, seating, murals, signage, etc. Functional or otherwise, if it exists outside a gallery or supervised space, the art work must necessarily be made of safe and durable materials and, of course, be structurally sound. Until recently, I had never considered making public art because the materials I am accustomed to working with and the installations I construct are inherently unsuitable for sitting or standing on. In addition, my work has never really existed outside a gallery context; it is created for a specific gallery space and exists only for the duration of an exhibition.

⁵ Written for Muse Magazine at the request of the editor, October, 1997.

I was inspired to submit a proposal to create a public art work because I envisioned that it would provide me with the opportunity to create a work that would actually exist for more than three weeks. Also, I was ready for a change and welcomed the opportunity to create a work that could not otherwise be made for an exhibition. I was cautious, however, because I realised that venturing into such a project would necessitate working with unfamiliar industrial materials and processes, collaborating closely with non-artists, and conforming to strict fire and safety regulations.

The ground we walk on and depend on for our day to day existence always forms the basis of my work. I like to use a wide variety of materials, such as maps, text, and earth samples, through which I encourage viewers to reflect upon the meanings attached spaces and places beyond the walls of the gallery. Would it be possible, I wondered, to engage passengers in a lift with the land just beyond its steel walls?

In consultation with Jacky Talbot and Angela Philp, and in keeping with my practice of working with aspects of the ground, I eventually decided to base my proposal on the physical and conceptual experiences of travelling in a lift. Keeping these considerations in mind, my proposal integrates the lift's doors, handrails, floor, and mirror with elements pertaining to our relationships with the territory outside.

Because the work was to be specific to Canberra, I decided to incorporate elements of local physical and human geography. Thinking about the words "elevator" and "elevation" led me to consider applying contour lines to the stainless steel surfaces of the lift. I chose a prominent topographical landmark: Black Mountain. The doors, I thought, would be a fitting place to put the contour lines as a gentle reminder of our ascent and descent in relation to the surrounding topography.

I decided to have a bit of fun and designed the handrails to resemble scale bars like those found along the bottom edge of maps. Each centimetre on a scale bar corresponds to some number of metres or kilometres on the land. Scale bars extend and emphasise the link with mapping.

In keeping with the theme of local geography, I was influenced by the State Circle road cut near Parliament House. The different colours and patterns of layered and faulted rocks are beautiful. Some layers lie flat while others dip at steep angles. The rocks seem alive, particularly when wet. They inspired me to use the latest vibrantly-coloured flooring materials to make the lift floor resemble a geological cross section or a geological map. However, constrained to move only vertically, a lift always returns to the same spot on the ground. It is fixed geographically. In the surveying and printing industries, a symbol called a fiducial mark is used to mark a known point which does not vary and is therefore true. A black fiducial symbol on the lift floor marks the lift's attachment to the same spot on the map.

On the upper part of the back wall of the lift is a large mirror. I felt the mirror could be used as a metaphor for personal reflection, but not in the usual narcissistic sense. Given that the Ngunnawal people are the original inhabitants of the Canberra region I proposed to sandblast onto the mirror's surface English and Ngunnawal words to stimulate social, cultural, and political considerations of sharing space. "HERE" and "THERE" and their translation into "NGUNU" and "NIÑ", the Ngunnawal equivalents, locate the four corners of the mirror. To understand the Ngunnawal text, viewers must negotiate the layered meanings and contexts of the words.

After consulting with over twenty businesses, obtaining written guarantees and quotes, testing materials and techniques, and redesigning several aspects of the work, the project is now well under way. Working collaboratively with many different specialists, businesses, and agencies has been primarily a positive experience. It has been difficult, however, to relinquish control of the making processes as several of the lift's designs are industrial in nature and have had to sub-contracted. Nevertheless, although I still lie awake anticipating the unforeseen technical difficulties I might be challenged with tomorrow, the opportunity of working with the ACT Public Art Program has been highly stimulating and rewarding.