ART AND LITERATURE OF JOHANNESBURG:
THE TELLING OF TAILINGS

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<td>Acid Mine Drainage</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERGO</td>
<td>East Rand Gold Company</td>
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<td>GDARD</td>
<td>Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
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<td>MRA</td>
<td>Mine Residue Areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHRA</td>
<td>National Heritage Resources Act</td>
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Introduction

Negative heritage is often ascribed with powerful feelings and associations which are much more viscerally communicative of the meaning of a place than sterile facts and figures. Traditional methods of cultural heritage assessment, which usually take a social science or histiographic approach, tend to focus on quantitative data in order to determine relevance and aid decision making. Although valuable, this method of assessment in not able to articulate the emotive and qualitative aspects of a place. It provides a one-sided, detached view rather than an experienced one. This thesis therefore aims to expand the existing methodology of assessing cultural significance to include the works of culture-producers, such as artists and writers. These culture-producers are the conduits and conveyors of collective associations and narratives, generating and reinforcing a site-specific culture and identity over time. This proposed methodology will be tested against Johannesburg’s iconic gold mine tailings.

Johannesburg, South Africa, is a city known to locals as Egoli, the Zulu word meaning ‘place of gold’. This name is attributed to the city’s origins as a gold mining town, the origin of 98% of gold recovered in South Africa, and 45% of the world’s known gold reserves. Siblings with the young built metropolis were the gold mine tailings, colloquially called the mine dumps. These tailings grew proportionately with the gold-bearing ore that was extracted from the ground, and since the start of their formation in the late 1890’s, have come to hold a dynamic and

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contested place in the physical fabric and identity of the city. Since the 1970’s these mine tailings are being reclaimed for remaining gold and other minerals opening up large tracts of land in the city that have not been available historically. They are also a radioactive source of ground water and air pollution, and so removal is also necessary to health and environmental reasons. Unfortunately, they are being removed with little consideration to the history and diverse narratives they represent, and no plans in place to recall their presence once they are gone. I believe this is happening because the current methods of assessing cultural significance do not holistically consider what the mine tailings embody beyond their latent minerals and the ground they occupy. My proposed methodology will analyze the work of Johannesburg’s culture-producers to reveal and thematize the multiple narratives the mine tailings embody, to ascertain their relevance and reception over time. The dominant narratives that will emerge through this study will reveal the tailings as engendering of multiple views and voices, and therefore critical to preserve and record in South Africa’s young democracy.

Figure 0.1 – Google Earth image highlighting mine tailings and mine tailing footprints
Johannesburg has its origins in 1886 with the discovery of gold on a farm called Langlaagte, in an area that would come to be known as the Central Rand Goldfield, one of 7 major discreet goldfields in the Witwatersrand Basin. This reef of gold runs in an east-west direction for approximately 120km and would come to form the conurbation of Johannesburg, the economic center of South Africa. It is one of the few major cities in the world without a significant body of water to sustain it. No river, no lake, no ocean, but a reef made of gold. The mine tailings of Johannesburg are colossal golden mounds, pulverized ore from underground, surplus material after the extraction of gold. There are over 250 mine tailings in Johannesburg, covering a total area of 44 000 hectares, some of them up to 50m tall. Satellite images of the city read like a trail of breadcrumbs, from which the city has grown. This topographic trail is known as the mining belt. (Fig. 0.1) Historically, Johannesburg’s towers have shared the skyline with these iconic gold-waste mounds. Today, many of the original tailings have already been reprocessed, leaving barren footprints behind. (Fig. 0.2) The mine tailings were integrated into the urban planning of the young city, with the mining belt forming the major fault line upon which the apartheid government would segregate the city. The mining belt was a highly charged space, relying on the violent exploitation of black, migrant labor. It was a third space in the city, were races that were usually segregated were allowed to work together in aid of extraction and production. This spatial legacy of inequality is still a major part of the urban morphology today,

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5 N. F. Mphephu in, Kerry Bobbins and Guy Trangos, Mining Landscapes of the Gauteng City-Region, (Johannesburg: Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2018), http://www.gcro.ac.za/media/reports/Mining_Landscapes_of_the_GCR_web.pdf, 130.
despite the subsequent 25 years of democracy since the end of apartheid. These socially charged mounds are also contested ground because of the severe health and environmental risks they pose. Many low-income communities who still live in the shadows of these tailings are faced with the constant spatial and physiological impacts of this legacy.

The gold mines of the Witwatersrand closed in the 1970’s, predominantly due to high production costs such as labor, water, electricity and the physical constraints of deeper level
mining. It was at this point that mining companies turned to reprocessing the mine tailings. New technologies enabled the re-extraction of latent gold, uranium and other trace minerals, leveling these monumental mounds. The new, ‘clean’ waste generated from this process is then pumped to super dumps, located towards the outskirts of the city and beyond. The historic tailings have been a defining feature of the city, a familiar symbol of home for the people of Johannesburg. So much so, that former president of South Africa and human rights activist Nelson Mandela is quoted saying, “… And whenever I travel, I immediately begin to miss the familiar – the mine dumps, the color and smell that is uniquely South African, and, above all, the people.”

As the remaining mine tailings stand today, they cannot be preserved as they are, in situ, due to their toxicity and proximity to local communities. Current heritage laws are ambiguous about what protection the mine tailings have, and there are no strategies in place to recall their presence within the city once they are gone. The newly vacant ground will be assumed into the surrounding industrial fabric. My thesis and methodology aim to reveal that despite this, the mine tailings have value as the enabling elements of a site-specific culture and identity, fundamental to the city, and therefore critical to protect in some way. This culture and identity embodies themes such as the state of the environment and nature, racial relations and spatial inequality, appropriation, and experience of the contemporary city. Representations of the tailings in art and literature provide a way to understand the qualitative and associative aspects of negative heritage, adding to the technical and factual data of traditional methods, whereby

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7 Kerry Bobbins and Guy Trangos, *Mining Landscapes of the Gauteng City-Region*, (Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2018), 06.
communicating the intangible aspects of tangible heritage to a broader audience in a more visceral way.

The gold mine tailings encompass diverse and contested aspects of Johannesburg’s origin and growth over time, they are icons of the city. As South Africa’s young democracy begins to mature, it is critical that this founding and formative history is preserved in some form for future generations.
Chapter 1

Johannesburg’s geological and social context

In order to understand how Johannesburg’s iconic gold mine tailings emerged it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the geography and history of gold mining in the city. Johannesburg is located in Gauteng, one of South Africa’s 9 provinces. (Fig. 1.1) Gauteng is the Sotho word for “place of gold”. Johannesburg is a peculiar example of a city not built near a natural body of water. It has a reef, but this is one of gold. The city is located at the northern edge of the Witwatersrand basin, which has produced 98% of South Africa’s gold output, and

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40% of gold ever mined on earth. The Witwatersrand basin holds 7 distinct, major goldfields. Johannesburg grew up on the Central Rand gold field where outcrops of gold-bearing ore were first discovered in 1886. Drilling and prospecting revealed that the reef extended over great length, and deeper underground with increasing value. The Central Rand goldfield is approximately 120km long, following the geological lines of 3 gold-bearing conglomerates – the Main Reef, the Main Reef Leader and the South Reef. This goldfield was mined by 6 major mining houses; from east to west these were Durban Roodepoort Deep, Rand Leases Mines, Consolidated Main Reef, Crown Mines, Robinson Deep, City Deep and Simmer and Jack.

Early mining operations of the Witwatersrand began on the oxidized outcrops of conglomerate and reached depths of approximately 35m below ground up until the late 1880s. In this period, gold was extracted from ore using an amalgam extraction process where crushed ore was passed through copper plates coated in mercury. As operations went deeper though, it was learned that a different method of extraction would be needed for unoxidized ore. In 1890, the MacArthur-Forrest cyanidation process was tested and proved a success. This process leaches gold from crushed ore using a dilute cyanide solution. It is important to note that both processes required the use of toxic substances to extract the gold from the ore. It was this process

14 M. Viljoen, "The life, death and revival of the Central Rand Goldfield," 133.
16 Ibid, 2-9.
using cyanide that allowed the gold field to boom, with extraction reaching depths of up to 5km.\textsuperscript{17} 1 ton of ore is required to be extracted and processed in order to produce 3g of gold.\textsuperscript{18} The tailings are a good representation of the mined-out volume of earth.\textsuperscript{19} 52 kilotons of gold have been produced from the Witwatersrand’s Central goldfield over the past 125 years.\textsuperscript{20} This colossal amount of ore waste form Johannesburg’s gold mine tailings, whose formation began in the late 1890s.

Unfortunately, the conglomerate is also an extensive source of uranium, almost 10 times the amount of gold.\textsuperscript{21} Uranium was only extracted as a by-product from gold mining in the 1950s, and so the tailings that had been growing for the following 20 years were, and still are radioactive. 52 kilotons of gold have been produced over the past 125 years, 430 kilotons of uranium remain in the city’s mine residue areas.\textsuperscript{22} Along with containing compounds of heavy metals and cyanide, it is little wonder the immense toxicity of these mounds. The mine tailings are made of fine sand particulate and thus easily susceptible to erosion contaminating the air of the low-income communities living in the vicinities of these tailings and resulting in respiratory diseases.\textsuperscript{23} Another negative side effect of this rich gold mining legacy is acid mine drainage (AMD), which occurs due to the oxidization of the sulphide mineral pyrite (also known as fool’s

\textsuperscript{17} M. Viljoen, "The life, death and revival of the Central Rand Goldfield," 131.
\textsuperscript{19} Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, Not No Place: Johannesburg, Fragments of Spaces and Times (Johannesburg: Fanele, 2013), 51.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid,08.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid ,20.
gold) which contaminates the soil and groundwater. 24 The issue of AMD was brought to the fore in 2002 with acid mine drainage decant in the West Rand after flood conditions. 25 This has further spurred the mine waste clean-up initiatives. Johannesburg’s gold mine tailings are thus significant contributors to soil, water and air pollution in the city. The recent past has revealed the environmental degradation that has resulted from mining activity to be of greater consequence that has historically been understood. As a result, there has been additional effort and support from government organizations for reclaiming the tailings.

The mining landscape also acts as a buffer between the south of Johannesburg, the historic inner city, and the northern suburbs. The mining belt was the dividing line of the city as defined by apartheid’s National Party, with the south locating predominantly black settlements, and the north, away from the mining industry, the white settlements. The tailings themselves were strategically used as a boundary. “The ambivalence and anxiety which surfaces in the mining land is connected not only to the abandoning of the land by gold-mining industry, but also to an awareness of its use to locate and conceal Soweto.” 26 Soweto is one of Johannesburg’s largest townships, originally established to accommodate migrant labor who were not allowed to stay in the city. (Fig. 1.2)

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25 Kerry Bobbins and Guy Trangos, Mining Landscapes of the Gauteng City-Region, (Gauteng City-Region Observatory, 2018), 66.
The mining houses of the Central Rand operated until the 1970s, and in 1978 the East Rand Gold Company (ERGO) saw the opportunity for the recovery of latent gold, uranium and pyrite through the reprocessing of historic gold tailings with newer technology than had previously been available. In this hydro-intensive process, the tailings are sprayed with water in zones to form a slurry which is caught in a catchment area at the base of the slope. From there it is drained and pumped through a pipeline to a processing and treatment plant where the

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minerals are removed. The new ‘clean’ waste generated in this process is then dumped at one of ERGO’s super dumps which have been designed in accordance with present environmental standards. 28 Despite the rhetoric to liberate the mining belt and connect the fragmented city, 3 of the super dumps are located between Soweto and the inner city of Johannesburg and so, ironically, continue to conceal parts of Soweto. These are the Crown Tailings. (Fig. 1.3) Since then ERGO, now DRDGold, has reprocessed around 27 mine tailings in the Central Rand, which has produced 98 tons of gold, and changed the skyline of Johannesburg forever. 29

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Government plans, strategies and future visions

Figures 1.4

2 – National Strategy for the Management of Derelict and Ownerless Mines in South Africa
3 – Ekurhuleni Growth and Development Strategy 2025
4 – Spatial Development Framework 2040
In 2009 the Gauteng Premier at the time, Paul Mashatile, identified the reclamation of land from mine residue areas (MRAs) as one of Gauteng’s provincial priorities. In response to this, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) published the *Gauteng Mine Residue Areas Strategy* in 2012 the aim of which was to quantify and assess the MRAs to evaluate pollution problems, and the potential to make more land available for other uses. GDARD defines mine residue areas as “tailings disposal facilities (TDFs)” and includes “footprints left after the remining of TDFs”; in other words, the mine tailings and what remains after their reprocessing. GDARD identified 374 MRAs in Gauteng, of which approximately 219 are attributed to gold mining. The report explores options of tailing reclamation and subsequent ground rehabilitation in order to make the sites productive and safe for human use. The report states, “Where economically and technically viable, mine tailings dams will be reclaimed and the treated residue moved to centralized mega-tailings facilities…Where reclamation is not economically viable, the MRAs should be rehabilitated to reduce erosion and consequent pollution.” The report refers to the rights of individual citizens as listed in South Africa’s Bill of Rights, to further emphasize the importance and necessity of mine tailing reclamation. This states that everyone has the right to:

“a) an environment that is not harmful to his or her health or wellbeing;

b) have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures that –

(i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;

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31 Ibid, 06.
32 Ibid, 07.
33 Ibid, 17.
(ii) promote conservation; and

(iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.”

The upholding of these rights is also part of the reason for the *National Strategy for Derelict and Ownerless Mines, 2009*, put forward by the Department of Mineral resources, where mine tailings are seen as prohibiting valuable urban development in Johannesburg. Of the all the government reports I consulted on tailings reclamation, rehabilitation and city planning, this was the only one to mention mining heritage. The document states that “where mining forms part of the historical heritage... a balance needs to be found between rehabilitation and the preservation of historical sites.” It later goes on to reveal the reason for potentially preserving sites of mining heritage is to encourage tourism. It then states, “Sustainable projects based on mining heritage can help sustain communities, however this cannot be used as a reason for not addressing the negative legacies of mining, where these relate to health, safety and the environment,” That is all that is mentioned from a heritage point of view. I believe it may be the only document to mention heritage as it is the only one that comes from a national

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34 Ibid, 14.
department, as opposed to provincial or municipal, and thus could be obligated to include it. It could also be that heritage tourism would be nationally beneficial and thus it is proposed.

Ekurhuleni, a municipality on the western end of the mining belt, published their *Growth and Development Strategy 2025* in 2005. They too view mine tailings as a development constraint and place the reclamation and rehabilitation of land as a priority to upgrade the environment and release developable land. 39 Their targets for 2025 include, “All mine dumps/slimes dams with economically viable mineral content to be removed by 2025” and “All other mine dumps/slimes dams to be rehabilitated to acceptable standards by 2025.” 40

In 2016 the City of Johannesburg: Department of Development Planning, in collaboration with UN Habitat, released the *Spatial Development Framework 2040*. The report sought to address critical issues in Johannesburg’s spatial and social landscape, such as fragmentation, and exclusion and disconnection between the north and south of the city due to “high potential, underused areas”, namely the mining belt. 41 In a section titled *Unlocking the Mining Belt*, the report suggests 3 major benefits from the reclamation and rehabilitation of mine tailings. These are reducing health and environmental risks, freeing valuable land in the heart of the city for development, and transforming the mining belt from a historically segregating buffer to a space

40 *Ekurhuleni Growth and Development Strategy 2025*, (Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, 2005), 75.
of connection and inclusion. 42 The report proposes mixed-use developments and industrial zoning for the reclaimed ground to stitch together the fragmented city fabric through the creation of jobs and amenities in close proximity to low income residential areas. 43 More specific site uses are to be determined on a case by case basis. The report does not propose any solutions to the heritage that will be lost in this redevelopment of the area. The heritage of the mining belt is at risk, with it being recognized as “…one of the crucial development opportunities in the city…re-stitching the urban fabric by breaking down the physical barriers it embodies.” 44 This ‘opportunity’ is misleading based on this notion of ‘re-stitching the urban fabric’, as if it was once whole and was torn apart. The fundamental issue with this intention is that the city has never been whole, or unfragmented. Historically, it developed as a fragmented and disparate city. It is one of the apartheid city’s character defining features, even if it is a negative one. The past cannot, and should not, be erased and strategies need to productively address the origins of the urban morphology as opposed to concealing it. Architect and academic, Jennifer Beningfield asks, “Is the mining land to be seen only as a strategic surface, one which can overcome the past by becoming more like the city?” 45 The report acknowledges that the process of reclaiming and rehabilitating the mining belt will be a multi-decade one. The benefit of this is that it creates some time in which to develop strategies for the area from a heritage point of view.

42 Spatial Development Framework 2040, City of Johannesburg, Metropolitan Municipality, (City of Johannesburg, 2016), 113.
43 Ibid, 156.
44 Spatial Development Framework 2040, City of Johannesburg, Metropolitan Municipality, (City of Johannesburg, 2016), 122.
The analysis of these 4 government reports serve to emphasize that sooner or later the trail of markings defining the mining belt will disappear through legislation and private enterprise. The golden dunes like breadcrumbs to Johannesburg’s past will be gone, consolidated, with no record of their former lives as icons of Johannesburg left to recall them.

The South African National Heritage Resources Act and the ambiguous rights of mine tailings

The South African National Heritage Resources Act (no. 25 of 1999), was a replacement for the National Monuments Council of the Apartheid era. This act established the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) as the national administrative body. SAHRA is run by a maximum of 15 delegates appointed by the Minister of Arts and Culture. 9 of these delegates represent the 9 provinces of South Africa, each of which have their own heritage authorities.46 Johannesburg falls under the administration of the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority Gauteng (PHRAG). SAHRA is predominantly concerned with Grade I listed heritage, that is heritage of national significance; whilst provincial authorities are concerned with Grade II and Grade III heritage, that is significance within a province or region specifically, and local significance, respectively. 47

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47 Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act, 18.
This Act is to guide and govern all actions associated the heritage resources of South Africa. Interestingly, it makes specific reference to mine tailings, in Chapter 2 – **Protection and Management of Heritage Resources** – of the Act, under Part 1 – **Formal Protections** (as opposed to Part 2 – General protections). Under a subtitle **“Protected Areas”**, section 28(1) states: “SAHRA may, with the consent of the owner of an area, by notice in the Gazette, designate as a protected area - ...c) such area of land covered by a mine dump.”

This is further elaborated upon in section 28(4).

“With regard to an area of land covered by a mine dump referred to in subsection (1)(c) SAHRA must make regulations providing for the protection of such areas as are seen to be of national importance in consultation with the owner, the Minister of Minerals and Energy, and interested and affected parties within the mining community.”

The specific reference to mine tailings in a national act should point out their particular importance from the outset, however there are several issues and loop holes that appear with these points. Firstly, the Act does not provide in its list of definitions what is specifically meant by the subtitle “Protected Areas”, so it is unknown what this protection actually is. Secondly, the Act does not define “mine dump” either, and so this could be interpreted as all mine residue areas in all 9 provinces, regardless of the metal or mineral from which it originates. Thirdly, the above mentioned “protection” is contingent upon the agreement of the owner of the land,

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48 Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act, 44.
49 Ibid, 44.
bringing into question the privatization of heritage. Finally, it is unclear if the tailing itself is of importance, or the land beneath it.

If Johannesburg’s gold mine tailings are to be looked at more generally with regards to what is defined as heritage according to the Act, their definition and associated rights are further convoluted. In a previous mine tailing heritage assessment, tailings can be classified in both the structures and archaeological heritage categories.50 This is problematic because of the discrepancy between the type of protection each of these categories receive and at what age. In the Act, structure “means any building, works, device, or other facility made by people and which is fixed to land, and includes any fixtures, fittings and equipment associated therewith”.51 Furthermore section 34(1) states, “No person may alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years without a permit issued by the relevant provincial heritage resources authority.”52 On the other hand archaeological is defined as, “a) material remains resulting from human activity which are in a state of disuse and are in or on land and which are older than 100 years, including artifacts, human or hominid remains and artificial features and structures.”53 This confusion was also evident in the recently published scoping report for the reprocessing of the City Deep mine tailings. In the section on potential impact on heritage the report stated, “…if structures older than 60 or 100 years at the time of decommissioning

51 Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act 12.
52 Ibid, 58.
53 Ibid, 06.
exist…”54, illustrating that even heritage specialists filing the reports are uncertain of the status of mine tailings.

The mine tailings could technically be placed in either of these categories, structures or archaeological, according to their definitions but further reading of the Act would suggest that structures refer to building-scale objects, while archaeology refers more to small scale objects and artifacts. The third general category that a tailing could fit into is place. Place “includes – a) a site, area or region”55 The definition, or any other sections in the Act, do not explain further what a place might entail with regards to age or cultural significance, and so cannot confirm whether the mine tailings are actually a place. In looking at places that are designated cultural landscapes of South Africa, they are associated with the history and remains of indigenous kingdoms and people, such as the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. It would appear from this and other examples, that cultural landscapes of South Africa, typically harken back to pre-colonial times, or landscapes with botanical and environmental value.

The mine tailings cannot be easily classified into one category. Section 3(3) of the Act provides the only guidance on assessing cultural significance. (Appendix 1) It provides limited explanation, gathering values under the umbrella terms of historical, aesthetic, scientific and social. At the risk of losing Johannesburg’s historic mine tailings, as earlier government reports

55 Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act, 10.
suggest, it is critical that this cultural significance be unpacked to preserve the heritage the mine tailings embody before it’s too late.

The ambiguity of the classification of the mine tailings makes assessment and evaluation a difficult and undefined task. In attempts of attaining further clarification on assessment of cultural heritage, I consulted both the SAHRA and PHRAG heritage site nomination forms (Appendix 2). This further shed some light into what can be considered cultural heritage. In this nomination form, types of significance include historical value, aesthetic value, scientific value, and social value; and then degrees of significance including rarity and representivity. Because of their age, their embodiment of social and political issues, and their influence on the morphology of the city, the mine tailings have relevance in all the listed categories. Despite this, they continue to be reclaimed, with no solutions to the lost heritage considered. This points to a flaw in assessment methodology that their cultural value is not wholly understood or acknowledged.
The case of Top Star Drive-In

Figure 1.5 – Reprocessing Top Star Drive-In

Source: https://www.drdgold.com/assets/media/crown/cr_ops_11_l.jpg

The most contested removal of a mine tailing was the Top Star tailing, formerly known as Ferreira Dump, and home to the beloved Top Star drive-in movie theatre. This tailing was associated with the Ferreira Deep gold mine, formerly owned by Rand Mines. This mine was in operation for approximately 40 years, from the late 1880s till 1929, growing to 50m tall. Records indicate that the tailing was started in 1899 and was added to for 40 years, ending in 1939.  

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The drive-in was opened in the 1960s. At the start of the 21st Century, DRD Gold, formerly ERGO, were the owners of the tailing. An article published in 2010 stated that DRD Gold was responsible for the reclamation of 51 of the city’s tailings, with the decision to reprocess based on the economic viability of potential extraction. DRD Gold argued, in agreement with earlier government reports, that “…removing the dump involves the removal of a source of surface water contamination and air pollution from dust, as well as freeing up valuable land for development.”

Top Star provided entertainment and panoramic views of the city until its closure in 2006 when it was slated for reclamation. Initially, it appeared as if the tailing would be saved with the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority of Gauteng (PHRAG) issuing a 2 year protection proclamation of the site. According to the National Heritage Resources Act, Section 29(1), SAHRA or a provincial heritage resources authority may provisionally protect a site “…it considers to be threatened and which threat it believes can be alleviated by negotiation and consultation” for a maximum of 2 years. Suspiciously, this order was withdrawn in December 2007 with a representative of PHRAG, blaming it on “a technicality.” Then in January 2007, PHRAG reissued a 6 month protection order. I believe this relates to Section 27(10) of the NHRA which states that the owner of a site has 6 months to challenge the declaration of a heritage site. DRD Gold did challenged this, and PHRAG did not respond. In August 2008,
DRD Gold received a mining permit from the Department of Mineral Resources, and reclamation and demolition of the mine tailing began. Top Star was razed by April 2011. Today the brownfield site remains vacant. The timeline below illustrates this process.

It was reported in 2010, that by that stage, 2,7 tons of gold had been reclaimed from the Top Star tailing, yielding R8, 000, 000 for DRD Gold. That equates to over $ 567, 000.

The reclamation of a mine tailing requires a heritage scoping assessment to be conducted before work is put in hand. In 2006, Matakoma Heritage Consultants, a private company, was hired by DRD Gold to conduct a Heritage Scoping Assessment for the Top Star Dump mining project. This report recognized the mine tailings as an integral part of Johannesburg’s skyline, and the detrimental effects of removing them. It stated:

“The past 20 years have seen a reworking and mining of the old slimes dams and sand dumps situated to the south of the CBD. This resulted in a major change to the cultural landscape and

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skyline of Johannesburg and surrounding areas. Very few of the historical mining structures have been preserved or documented in the past and a rich history has been destroyed.”

The evaluation of significance was based on age, uniqueness, visibility and survivability. It is unclear how these categories were determined as they are not specifically listed in the National Heritage Resources Act. Top Star mine tailing was one of the oldest man-made features in Johannesburg. It was a landmark of Johannesburg, and given that a significant portion of gold mining heritage has been destroyed, those that remain are of high significance. The final verdict determined the site to be highly significant, “must not be disturbed at all”, suggesting that the only alternative to re-mining it was preservation in situ. It was recommended that the public be consulted on the removal of the cultural entity, and that in the application for a demolition permit some form of memorialization is proposed. I have not been able to determine if the public was consulted, and no memorial was proposed. This is not surprising given James Duncan, spokesperson for DRD Gold, stated, “We don’t hold the view that the mine dump has historical merit, we are in favor of redeveloping it, this is the far more sensible route.” As a private, listed company, DRD Gold’s primary interest is in the profit of extracting latent gold, and not heritage. This is supported by Duncan’s later suggestion of preserving other mine tailings with lower grades of gold for heritage purposes.

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64 Fourie and Van der Walt, *Heritage Scoping Assessment for the Top Star Dump Mining Project - Crown Gold Recoveries*, 03.
65 Ibid, 04.
The final statement of the Heritage Scoping Assessment stated that the severe claims of negative environmental impact against the mine tailing would need to be quantified before ruling it above the preservation of the tailing.\textsuperscript{67}

I predict that if this tailing could not be saved for its historic value that there is very little chance of saving others on the same grounds. Thabo Kgomommu, provincial manager for Gauteng at the South African Heritage Resources Agency, said that guidelines need to be developed for all areas covered by mine tailings.\textsuperscript{68} This proves that authorities are aware of the significance of the mine tailings and the history they represent. However, today there still remains a void in practice and legislation about what can be done to preserve the presence and image of the mine tailings in the city. This provides an opportunity for my thesis to address this challenge further.

\textsuperscript{67} Fourie and Van der Walt, \textit{Heritage Scoping Assessment for the Top Star Dump Mining Project - Crown Gold Recoveries}, 03.
\textsuperscript{68} Lucille Davie, "The Top Star Drive-in Saga", 03.
Chapter 2

Assessing cultural significance in South Africa and elsewhere

Until the recent July 2016 publication of the *Cultural Heritage survey Guidelines and Assessment Tools for Protected Areas in South Africa,* South Africa was without a charter guiding heritage assessment. Within the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999, there are 2 sections which attempt to guide assessment. These are Section 3(3) and Section 5(7). (Appendix 1) These begin to explore the value categories of historical, aesthetic, scientific and social, and provide limited guidelines in terms of gathering and understanding the heritage in question. Section 5(7) states “The identification, assessment and management of the heritage resources of South Africa must – a) take account of all relevant cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems… f) be fully researched, documented and recorded.” 69 There is no further explanation as to how to undertake this assessment. For this reason, the South African Heritage Resources Authority (SAHRA) and heritage practitioners used the guidelines for assessment set forth in the Burra Charter. 70 The drafting of the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999 was based on the Burra Charter.

The Burra Charter provides guidance and methodology for the assessment and management of places of cultural significance. The Charter was adopted in 1979 by Australia ICOMOS, with later revision in 1981, 1988, 1999 and 2013. In introducing the concept of cultural significance, the Charter describes places of cultural significance as “places that are

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69 Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act, 17.
likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations.”

The Burra Charter prescribes an assessment of “all values using relevant criteria” to develop a statement of significance, prior to any management plans. The primary values of the Charter are ‘aesthetic, historic, scientific and social, as the NHRA has followed. According to the Charter, cultural significance may be determined through research into the following categories:

- Sequence of development
- “the relationship of the place and its parts with its setting”
- “the significance of the place to people who use or have used the place, or descendants of such people”
- “the historical content of the place with particular reference to the ways in which its fabric has been influenced by historical forces or has itself influenced the course of history.”

This is just a selection of the suggested avenues from the Charter that I believe could relate to the evaluation of the mine tailings. This edition of the Charter, however, does not elaborate further on what aesthetic values may entail.

The 2013 revision of the Burra Charter was accompanied by a series of Practice Notes, additional resources to expand upon the principles contained in the Charter. One such Practice

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73 Australia ICOMOS, *The Burra Charter*, 12.
Note is *Understanding and Assessing Cultural Significance*. This document elaborates on assessing the aesthetic, historic, scientific, spiritual and social values of a place. “Aesthetic value refers to the sensory and perceptual experience of a place … having a strong impact on human thoughts, feelings and attitudes.”74 In considering this, the note suggests asking

- “Does the place have special compositional or uncommonly attractive qualities involving combination of color, textures, spaces, massing, detail, movement, unity, sounds, scents?”
- “Is the place distinctive within the setting or a prominent visual landmark?”
- “Is the place symbolic for its aesthetic qualities, for example, does it inspire artistic or cultural response, it is represented in art, photography, literature, folk art, folk lore, mythology or other imagery or cultural arts?”75

It is this quality of inspiring artistic or cultural response that this thesis will explore further. I believe that by analyzing the creative response a place of cultural significance generates, we are able to bring social, historical and aesthetic values into conversation, and explore their potentialities as condensers of varied histories and memories. Creative response to heritage has the potential to reveal diverse positions and narratives that may be missed in purely analytical response. Its potential lies in its ability to encapsulate all these narratives, or alternatively express specific or under-explored views. It is this unpacking and expanded definition of aesthetic value that is missing from South African heritage assessment methodology, and the reason, I believe

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75 Australia ICOMOS, *Practice Note, Understanding and Assessing Cultural Significance*, 03.
that the cultural significance of the mine tailings is not entirely understood, and why to date, no campaigns to save them have been successful.

Today, South African cultural heritage is assessed on guidelines first published in 2016, with later revisions in 2018. This document is the *Cultural Heritage Survey Guidelines and Assessment tools for Protected Areas in South Africa*. This document was produced as practitioners and the Department of Environmental Affairs recognized a gap in cultural heritage assessment and management, as protected areas were failing to achieve their objectives and “maybe losing their values for which they were established.”76 An example in case is that of Top Star Drive-In, discussed in the previous chapter.

In order to assess cultural significance of a place, the document suggests consulting “Previous records containing information on the cultural heritage resources” such as “oral history, tradition, drawings, photographs, published and unpublished accounts and descriptions, and related documents” pertaining to “the origins and history of the protected area.”77 This suggestion hints at what my methodology proposes – the use of cultural products (works of art and literature) to understand the emotive, qualitative feelings and associations these sites foster.

This document provides practitioners with surveys to guide assessment. Form B of this document (Appendix 3) requires response to questions of value. Those relevant to Johannesburg’s mine tailings would be historical occurrence contributing to

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local/provincial/national history; rareness & uniqueness; aesthetic appeal; and local or national
stakeholders and communities. The 2nd type of cultural assessment the mine tailings could be
considered under is D2, that for assessing cultural landscapes. (Appendix 3) To describe cultural
landscapes the document says “They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and
settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities …” 78
This form requires the consideration of perceptual qualities defined as views and aesthetics.
Again, this is not explicit enough to warrant analysis of the cultural products these mine tailings
have inspired.

Writing Historic Contexts in the Unites States of America

In the USA, one of the ways used to assess cultural significance as iterated in the
Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation
is through the research and drafting of a site’s historic context. This has been promoted
particularly by the California Office of Historic Preservation. “The historic context (statement) is
an organizing structure for grouping information about historic properties that share a common
theme, place, and time. A historic context focuses on describing those historical development
patterns within which the significance of a resource can be understood.” 79 This method of
assessment considers the overarching narratives of a place, and the resources that represent that.
In this way, considering representations of the mine tailings over time is a way of understanding
their place and relevance within the city over time. Representations reveal particular values and

78 Department of Environmental Affairs, Cultural Heritage Survey Guidelines and Assessment Tools for Protected
Areas in South Africa, 141.
79 Marie Nelson, Writing Historic Contexts, (California Office of Historic Preservation, n.d),
this can help us as preservationists to discern what perceptions the tailings promote for the
general public. Historic context statements reveal historic themes of relevance. By studying the
representations of mine tailings in art and literature, the dominant narratives the mine tailings
embody will be revealed.
Chapter 3

Assessing cultural significance through representation in Art

Chapter 1 analyzed the plans and strategies for the future development of Johannesburg as proposed by national, provincial and municipal authorities. As was evident, these plans aim to see the remains of the mining belt, particularly the mine tailings, removed in order to develop the land they occupy in attempts to weave together the fragmented, disparate parts of the city. There is minor acknowledgement of what these mine tailings represent from a social and cultural heritage point of view, and for these authorities the desire for development, environmental remediation and financial gain, outweighs the importance of preservation. I believe this is due to the short-sighted, lack of comprehension of the heritage these mine tailings embody, potentially due to poor assessments of cultural heritage. If strategies are not put in place to preserve or remember the presence of these historic mounds a large part of people’s associations with Johannesburg will be relegated to memory, and then lost in history. The following 2 chapters provide a selection of the critical mass of culture-producers, another set of stake-holders in Johannesburg’s mining history, who have engaged the gold mine tailings in their work. By choosing to represent the mining landscape, these culture makers further valorize the mining landscape as a part of Johannesburg’s identity, and its associations with the past. Through analysis of the artworks, I intend to reveal the social and cultural capital these mine tailings possess, as opposed to the profitable capital they are being mined for.
In Johannesburg, the man-made landscape of the mine tailings, has existed for over 125 years. It has been multi-generational and was perceived as permanent. To illustrate this, in his acceptance speech for the Kyoto Prize in 2010, William Kentridge said with nostalgia and trepidation with which he views the landscape, “A mountain is a fact. You can turn around, you can come back in 10 years, the mountain will not have moved. The mountain itself, the idea of a mountain, a piece of heavy earth, stands as a metaphor for understanding eternity. The opposite is true of our mine dumps, which in my childhood I had assumed were my hills.”  

These tailings serve as natural landforms, and to have something removed that is so fundamentally a part of the environment is disconcerting and cruel. The mine tailings, like a comfort blanket, can be seen as the stable objects that provide continuity through time. What happens then when you remove them?

I will be studying the work of 4 artists in particular, they are J. H. Pierneef, William Kentridge, Clive van den Berg, and Jason Larkin. I will also be analyzing 2 projects by Johannesburg based architecture and design practice, Counterspace Studio. This assessment will proceed in chronological order of periods of production, starting from the 1930s with Pierneef and ending with Counterspace Studio in 2018.

Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef (1886-1957) is one of South Africa’s major, early landscape artists of Afrikaner heritage. In 1929, Pierneef was commissioned to paint 32 large-scale landscape murals for Johannesburg’s Park Station, confirming his significance in the early South
African art scene. Two of these works depict Johannesburg’s gold mining industry and the gold mine tailings. They are Premiermyn and Randse Goudmyn. The 2 murals (Fig. 3.1) can be seen as the inverses of each other, revealing the different spatial manifestations of gold mining in Johannesburg. Gre van der Waal-Braaksma, in her chapter titled Pierneef - the artist, describes his work as narrative. “One could call him a narrator of the beauty of South Africa in stylized form.” The commissioning of these large-scale works for a public transportation node of Johannesburg, positions these representations of the mine tailings as fundamental to the city’s origins and identity, and impresses this onto the flow of commuters through the train station. The panels were unveiled in November 1932. Today they are owned and kept by the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

![Image of Premiermyn and Randse Goudmyn](image.jpg)

Figure 3.1 – Premiermyn and Randse Goudmyn, 1932
By J. H. Pierneef

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82 J.H. Pierneef: His Life and His Work (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Perskor, 1990), 142.
83 J.H. Pierneef: His Life and His Work, 149.
William Kentridge is the second artist I will be studying in this chapter. He is perhaps one of South Africa’s most acclaimed contemporary artists, with his work bridging and blurring the boundaries of drawing and film. Kentridge is a Johannesburg native, beginning his career towards the end of apartheid in the 1980s. As such, his work is underpinned by social, cultural and historical values. Despite the work being primarily set in Johannesburg, Kentridge’s narrative and medium have allowed the work to have global appeal and resonance with other locales that have suffered mass human rights injustices. Christov-Bakargiev points out that Kentridge’s works explore the borders between states of memory and amnesia, drawing and erasure. This duality of states can be attributed to South Africa’s socio-political climate in which Kentridge practices, primarily the transitional period from apartheid to democracy. This is a period of profound change in South Africa’s history, with the government and populace attempting to overcome the crimes of apartheid and transform into a ‘new South Africa’. Kentridge’s work engages this willed amnesia, this desire to forget the past, with his method of practice and the traces that remain. Looking at Kentridge’s work through Nietzsche’s motive of willed amnesia, Dubow and Rosengarten state that “…human happiness and a creative future politics might depend on a practice of active forgetfulness, on the capacity to forget purposefully so as to avoid that descent into regressive rumination which a surfeit of historical awareness threatens to entail.” In this way the work functions as a record of the past whilst acknowledging the necessity for progress.

84 Johann Oppermann, “Méliès’ moon is a late 19th-century colonial moon ... "my lunar landscape is just outside Johannesburg”,” South African Journal of Art History 29, no. 1 (2014): 04.
Kentridge works in a range of mediums from drawing and printmaking, to collage, installations and film. I will primarily be analyzing his drawing animations. He uses his distinctive version of stop-motion animation where he begins with a base drawing in charcoal and proceeds to add or erase from it to create the subsequent frames. Because of the medium, when erased, the ghost of the charcoal remains on the white paper. “…these ghostly, cloudy images that have remained, are indeed as much part of his final work of art and that they also serve as a metaphor for South Africa’s predicament in the sense that erasing the past is an exercise that can never be completed.” 87 Kentridges’s intuition of a disappearing landscape is actually occurring with government authorities attempting to clear the mining belt and erase the traces of the turbulent past.

The first body of Kentridge’s work I will be analyzing are his series of charcoal, animated films titled *Drawings for Projection*. These films were created over 14 years, 1989-2003, spanning the fall of apartheid, the election of Nelson Mandela as president in the first democratic elections, and the controversial Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These films follow loose narratives of 2 main characters; mining magnate and real estate developer Soho Eckstein, and sensitive artist Felix Teitlebaum. Set in Johannesburg, the landscape depicts the pervasive and quintessential mine tailings. For Kentridge, representing the landscape addresses both the social and environmental exploitation that Johannesburg is founded on, “…the historical oppression of the country’s population has been reinforced by the rampant exploitation of its natural resources.” 88 This motif of a mine tailing in a ravaged landscape is present in most of

these films. “…seen from the perspective of the remembering observer” these motifs “are like transcendental signifiers of death: read in this manner, they are coded memorials to a thousand minor deaths and abuses.” 89

Below is the list of the 9 short drawing animations in chronological order. (See reference section for links to films)

1989 – Johannesburg 2nd greatest city after Paris
1990 – Monument
1991 – Mine
1991 – Sobriety, obesity & growing old
1994 – Felix in Exile
1996 – History of the main complaint
1997 – Weighing and wanting
1999 – Stereoscope
2003 – Tide Table

I will briefly discuss a few of the earlier films, and focus on the 1994 film, *Felix in Exile.*

This film is the most well-known of the series, and also the one to engage most with Johannesburg’s mining topography. What this list of films featuring mine tailings serves to show

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is that the mine tailings are a fundamental part of the physical and social fabric, important during and post- apartheid to the definition of the city.

*Johannesburg 2nd greatest city after Paris*, 1989

The first of the films follows the love affair of Felix Teitlebaum and Mrs Eckstein, while Soho Eckstein manages his empire. In a scene depicting Soho overlooking his landscape of Johannesburg, we see the land occupied by a large mine tailing commensurate with the size of the city. (Fig 3.2) This shows the tailings to be a fundamental part of the city, and as equally important as the built fabric. This is what marks the scene of the metropolis as specifically and uniquely Johannesburg.

Figure 3.2 – Still from *Johannesburg 2nd greatest city after Paris*, 1989

By William Kentridge
Mine, 1991

This film follows Eckstein’s labor force down a mine shaft. He controls their movements from the comfort of his bed. The second scene from the film depicts what would have been a typical sight in the mining era, the head frame of a mine shaft with the formation of a tailing nearby. (Fig. 3.3) In the first scenes of Soho in his bed, he has a tray on his lap, with the blanket spread out in front of him. This appears as a mine tailing in a landscape. (Fig. 3.4) An analysis of the film by David Bunn points out the gross inequality between the “nonchalant wealth above ground and the bodies crushed in the stopes below.” 90 Later in the film, Eckstein’s cash register signals the end of the miners’ shift, and the miners swarm out of it. The crowd of miners transforms into a mine tailing alongside the cash register. (Fig. 3.5) This correlates with Kentridge’s associations of the abused landscape and the exploited populace. The tailings symbolize mass interment and the suffering of the labor force at a scale commensurate with the wealth accumulated from the goldfields.

Figure 3.4 – Still from *Mine, 1991*
By William Kentridge

Figures 3.5 – Stills from *Mine, 1991*
By William Kentridge
Sobriety, obesity and growing old, 1991

This film continues to follow the relationships between Felix and Mrs Eckstein, and Soho and Mrs Eckstein. It again sees Soho overlooking his empire. In this instance a tailing is in the foreground, the city in the background. (Fig. 3.6) Soho learns of the affair between his wife and Felix, and his empire, the city, metaphorically and physically dissolves, leaving the mine tailing undisturbed in the foreground. (Fig. 3.7) It is profound that the tailing should bear the catastrophic transformation while the city disintegrates. This supports the perception of them as a part of nature, eternal like natural landforms. In the face of calamity, the mine tailings remain stable, stoic and undisturbed, surmounting trivial, metropolitan conditions. It could also signify that they are part of a greater collective product and imagination and therefore unaffected by Soho’s personal crisis.

Figure 3.6 – Still from Sobriety, obesity and growing old, 1991

By William Kentridge
Figures 3.7 – Stills from Sobriety, obesity and growing old, 1991

By William Kentridge

_Felix in Exile_, 1994

This film was created at the time of the first democratic elections in South Africa. This time, the film tracks Soho Eckstein, Felix Teitlebaum and introduces a new character, a black woman named Nandi, who sets about measuring and drawing the land. The landscape is very important in this film as it actively responds and transforms through the events that occur around it. In her essay titled _The Process of Change: Landscape, Memory, Animation and Felix in Exile_, Staci Boris places the landscape in a lead role of the film. She says, “For Kentridge, landscape acquires meaning over time, through the history of human events and the traces these activities leave imprinted on the ground.”91 The film begins with a vast, derelict landscape, a mine tailing on the horizon. (Fig. 3.8) There are multiple scenes in the film which show fallen, wounded

bodies, shrouded in paper and debris, transforming into elements of the landscape, one of which is a mine tailing. (Fig. 3.9) This is symbolic of the hidden narratives and lives the tailings embody, both as witness and victim of the atrocities. The fallen bodies become “… naturalized as a topographical feature, one of the very mountains that are the product of deep underground labor in the gold mines below… the industrialized debris field retains the memory of the death: just as the frame-by-frame progression of the animated drawing retains the charcoal ghost of the previous erasure.”

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Figure 3.8 – Still from *Felix in Exile*, 1994

By William Kentridge
The film depicts Johannesburg as “…a national space whose historical traumas lie atrophied under the sign of natural plentitude.” As such, the film covertly illustrates Kentridge’s concern with how the casualties of apartheid and the transition to democracy will be remembered, if at all. “…using the landscape as a metaphor for the process of remembering or forgetting.” The same can be said for Johannesburg’s mine tailings today, casualties in the pursuit of profit and development, with no plans in place to recall their presence and contribution to the city. The film ends with Nandi’s death, where she too transforms to become part of the landscape. The landscape of Johannesburg depicted in the films is the mining landscape part of the East Rand, “…it is an area that has nostalgia built into it. Everything in it alludes to the past.” Kentridge said, of Felix in Exile, that the film was “…erecting a beacon against the

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93 Dubow and Rosengarten, "History as the main complaint: William Kentridge and the making of post-apartheid South Africa”.
95 Dan Cameron, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and J.M. Coetzee, William Kentridge (London: Phaidon, 1999), 126.
process of forgetting." If the tailings act as tombs and headstones recalling the past, what will happen when they are gone? How will the history, and those who perished in it be remembered? How will the history and associations the mine tailings recall be remembered?

These films, and the motif of the mine tailing, go on to repeat in many of Kentridge’s other works, either produced concurrently with the *Drawings for Projection* or later. A sample of these, just to show their extended presence are drawings for *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1991) (Fig. 3.10); *Faustus in Africa* (1995) (Fig. 3.11); *Black Box/Chambre Noir* (2003) (Fig. 3.12); and *Journey to the Moon* (2003) (Fig. 3.13).

![Drawing for *Woyzeck on the Highveld*](image)

**Figure 3.10 – Woyzeck on the Highveld, 1991**

By William Kentridge

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Figure 3.11 – *Faustus in Africa*, 1995
By William Kentridge

Figure 3.12 – *Black Box/Chambre Noir*, 2003
By William Kentridge

Figure 3.13 – *Journey to the Moon*, 2003
By William Kentridge
There are 2 other projects that engage more directly with Johannesburg’s gold mine
tailings. These are *Accounts and Drawings from Underground*, 2015, and the film *Other Faces*,
2011.

![Image](image_url)

Figure 3.14 – *Accounts and Drawings from Underground*, 2015

By William Kentridge & Rosalind C. Morris

*Accounts and Drawings from Underground* is a collaborative work of drawings and text
produced by William Kentridge and anthropologist and scholar Rosalind C. Morris, respectively.
The project consists of 40 landscape drawings of Johannesburg’s mining belt, the mine tailings
in various states of abandon and remediation, drawn over the pages of an original 1906 Cash
Book of the East Rand Proprietary Mines Corporation. (Fig. 3.14) Kentridge’s emotive charcoal
and ink drawings stand in contrast to the gridded, orderly cash book of neat inscriptions. Morris
describes the reworked, re-inscribed book as “a crypt and an epitaph – for both the Cash Book
and the lives ghosted there.” 97 The original cash book describes transactions, painting the lives

of the mining houses and their migrant labor. Kentridge’s landscape drawings act as an elegy to
the anonymous lives lived and lost within the cashbook. The images depict the mining landscape
at different depths and proximities, with the mine tailings at times on the horizon and at others,
the sand at the artist’s feet. (Fig. 3.15) Through these varying scales, Kentridge depicts the
extents of the vast, transforming landscape and the history the mine tailings are a part of. Morris
continues this elegy to the mine tailings too, “For a long time these huge trapezoidal mounds
healed into a kind of second nature, becoming ‘mountains’ of the highveld. Now, they too are
being mined for residual gold.”98 This collaborative work by an artist and an anthropologist from
2 different continents proves the mine tailings and the mining landscape to be a powerful source
of inspiration and intrigue, a history that requires grappling and unearthing by diverse people
before it begins to reveal itself.

Figure 3.15 – Accounts and Drawings from Underground, 2015

By William Kentridge & Rosalind C. Morris

The last piece of work I will be discussing is Kentridge’s 2011 film, *Other Faces*. Some sources say that this film is the latest addition to the series of *Drawings for Projection* as it again features Soho Eckstein. The opening scene depicts Johannesburg’s once beloved Top Star Drive-in, with the screen on top and the city in the background. (Fig. 3.16) Another scene of Top Star shows the modernist entrance to the drive-in (Fig. 3.17), and then the screen. (Fig. 3.18) This is recognizable from Larkin’s photograph – image 7. The screen, or blank billboard, is also a common motif seen throughout Kentridge’s work. The narrative of the film follows a car accident between Soho Eckstein and the pastor of a church in downtown Johannesburg. An argument ensues, with the accompanying graphics depicting the negative effects of living in a post-apartheid city such as misunderstanding and racial tension.

Figure 3.16 – Still from *Other Faces*, 2011

By William Kentridge

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Figure 3.17 – Still from *Other Faces*, 2011

By William Kentridge

Figure 3.18 – Still from *Other Faces*, 2011

By William Kentridge
The film cuts between scenes of the argument, Top Star at night (Fig. 3.19), and people having their portraits taken. Towards the end of the film we see a man with shovels dancing in front of Top Star. This illustrates the associations between the labor force and the mining history, the culture of this landscape. It can also show a victory dance, the overcoming of the history the mine tailing embodies. At the end of the film we see the erasure of the Top Star tailing, disappearing in phases, until finally in the end, the screen topplies too. (Fig. 3.20 & 3.21) The landmark mine tailing is gone. This continues themes and ideas of Kentridge such as memory and forgetting, the removal of Top Star signifies the overcoming of mining history and its oppressive associations, all those who suffered through it under apartheid legislation, as well as all those who benefited from it and the city that was built around it. In this film, Top Star can be seen as a projection of the transition of the city from its segregationist, apartheid past to the infantile stages of the post-apartheid city still struggling to overcome issues of the past, taking the monuments of that history down. Kentridge’s choice to create a work and narrative around the destruction of Top Star shows its role as a symbol of the condition of Johannesburg, valorizing its place as cultural heritage that was shortsightedly removed.

Figure 3.19 – Still from Other Faces, 2011

By William Kentridge
Figures 3.20 – Stills from *Other Faces*, 2011

By William Kentridge
Figures 3.21 – Stills from *Other Faces*, 2011

By William Kentridge
This analysis and exploration of Kentridge’s work depicting the gold mine tailings, spanning over 26 years goes to emphasize the critical role they played in the physical and social formation of the city; Johannesburg and it’s people would not exist if it weren’t for this gold-mining history of which the mine tailings are a fundamental part. Kentridge’s work hints at what these tailings represent for different groups of people, be it the exploited laborers, the likes of Soho Eckstein the white mining magnate, and the larger population of the ‘new South Africa’. In Johannesburg, ground is a place of social contestation, from the original formation of the mine tailings to their reprocessing and ‘reclaiming’ today.  

Beneath Johannesburg lies a mirror city, an inverse of above, of vast, deep shafts and caverns, the channels of extraction. As the subterranean space expanded, so did the city above. This hidden world can be read as a metaphor for Johannesburg’s turbulent past, buried with the hopes of being forgotten. The surface of the land, therefore, comes to be the point of transition between apartheid and democracy. South African art historian, David Bunn points out the image of the surface of the city, particularly the mine tailings, as a powerful motif used by artists and writers to express the visceral change felt during this time. “Most obviously, the landscape presence of the gold-mine tailings … were a constant reminder of the force needed to keep intact the cheap migrant labor system, and this notion of the surface heaving with pressure from below, as though from the mass of a buried life, is the real that inhabits much art at the time.”  

Clive van den Berg is a Zambian born, Johannesburg based artist who works in a range of disciplines from drawing, to sculpture and installations. His work primarily addresses the body, the land, sexuality and memory. The Mine Dump Project was an ephemeral piece of his, installed for the 1995 Johannesburg Art Biennale. (Fig. 3.22) This was one year after South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. These were outline drawings made from burning braziers laid out on the sloped side of a mine tailing, only viewable from a distance by passing traffic on the highway. These fire drawings would “…flame out briefly then die away as burned traces, glimpsed indistinctly in the wintering grass for months to come.” In this way, the project begins to question perceptions and desires in the city at a moment of transition. Anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris remarks of van den Berg’s work, “… the landscape tradition becomes the archive as well as the medium in which the question of memory and the censoriousness of tradition must be confronted.” The surface, as the absorber of trauma, is inherently documentary, and yet malleable and able to be re-inscribed. This is also similar to Kentridge’s charcoal works – the past will always leave traces even when it is erased, or burns out.

103 Bunn, David, Art Johannesburg and Its Objects, 145.
Figures 3.22 – *Mine Dump Project*, 1995

By Clive van den Berg

“The underscape breaks surface in mounds of earthen matter strewn around our cities and towns. Brought to the surface as the wastes of mining, they are piled high to form mastaba-like hills, evoking the stepped pyramids of ancient Egypt…Though the products of men, these hills lose their man-made appearance over time. Grass and trees take root, softening the edges and approximating the picturesque. These piles are the silent markers of the underscape. They create a strange topography too unstable to be built on, but surrounded by the frenetic activity of a large and fragmented city.” 105 The mine tailings act as the headstones to the past, and their disappearance would see the erasure of markers of history.

In van den Berg’s *Johannesburg* and *Broken Syntax* series (2010-2011), we see the artist again exploring the potential of the ground and the surface of the city. (Fig. 3.23 & 3.24) In these

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works, van den Berg depicts the city as a landscape without its urban forms, and rather defining it and making it recognizable through the presence of the mine tailings. This capacity to identify Johannesburg solely by these mining landmarks, is testament to their iconography of the city. In the work *Broken Syntax, Land XI* (Fig. 3.25), Morris describes, “At the top: the intimation of a horizon. We recognize it as a typically South African horizon on which a mine dump rises, fenced by trees that obstruct our view…”106

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Figure 3.23 – *Johannesburg III*, 2011

By Clive van den Berg

Figure 3.24 – *Broken Syntax, Land X*, 2011

By Clive van den Berg

Figure 3.25 – *Broken Syntax, Land XI*, 2011

By Clive van den Berg
Jason Larkin is a documentary photographer whose work explores diverse urban landscapes from around the world, often from a social impact point of view. I have chosen his work as I believe that the medium of photography can provide a realistic image of what the mine tailings are and how they are operated on. This is not to say that photography cannot be biased, however I believe Larkin’s book *Tales from the City of Gold* does a good job at representing the multivalence of the landscape, including the inhabitation of the mine tailings, their reprocessing, their place in the city and the environmental degradation they have caused. As a non-native, his work is not for or against them, but rather attempts to capture all that they entail before they are removed.

The monograph on Johannesburg’s mine tailings begins with an essay by journalist Mara Kardas-Nelson titled *The Reef and the City*. She articulates an important aspect of living with the mine tailings in Johannesburg that Larkin challenges through his photography.

“…for those living in Johannesburg, they (the mine dumps) have become so profoundly integral to the landscape that they provoke little response. Few people seem to even notice them anymore: they are sometimes fondly referred to as ‘mountains’, but most inhabitants see them as hosting barely any significance at all beyond acting as a place by which to know whether to take a left or a right off on one of the City’s many roads that line its mining past.” ¹⁰⁷

Kardas-Nelson alludes to many important and under explored points in this paragraph. The mine tailings have been part of Johannesburg’s landscape for over 125 years, so for almost all of the city’s inhabitants the mine tailings have always existed as part of the city and are thus integral to it, much like any natural landform might be. They therefore may provoke little response because they are so quotidian to the experience of those who live there. She also points out their use as landmarks for navigating the city. Their locations along the historic artery of Johannesburg highlights their foundational use in urban planning and morphology. A few of Larkin’s pictures explore this quotidian nature of the mine tailings, how they are inhabited, appropriated and defining of a unique landscape.

Kardas-Nelson asks, “…how can the dumps be so pervasive, and yet so invisible in the consciousness of ordinary citizens?”\textsuperscript{108} The tailings contribute to Johannesburg’s physical and cultural landscape, but their multi-generational omnipresence has blunted people’s value and awareness of them. They have behaved and appeared like natural landforms yet with the developmental and economic potential they hold, their status as waste has blurred the perception of their fundamentality to the city. Below I will analyze a selection of Larkin’s photographs to unpack what values are being depicted. I believe these images capture the interwoven, integral nature of the mine tailings, the city and its people. I have grouped these photographs into 4 categories of analysis - The tailings and the city, appropriation and inhabitation, Top Star, taking the tailings down, and environmental degradation.

\textsuperscript{108} Jason Larkin, Mara Kardas-Nelson, and Julian Rodriguez, \textit{Tales from the City of Gold}(Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg, 2014), 11.
• The mine tailings and the City

Figure 3.26 – *Home to People and Hunting Dogs, Selby, Johannesburg, 2012*

By Jason Larkin

This photograph was taken in Selby, an area slightly south east of the historic city center, near the center of the mining belt. The vantage point from which this photograph was taken immediately establishes the sense of hierarchy and organization that exists in Johannesburg – the city, sits atop a mine tailing, built on the backs of disenfranchised communities. This is representational of how the city developed historically. The lighting in this photograph is also telling of how spaces and communities within Johannesburg are perceived. The informal settlements on the ground, at the bottom of the picture plane are dark and in shadow. Despite
being in the foreground of this picture, and representative of the way many Jo’burgers live, they are obscured and difficult to discern, while the city emerges from the golden mine sand in the sunlight. In this way the back ground, the development of the city, becomes the focus. The prominent presence of the power lines is also indicative of the supplementary industries and infrastructures that emerged in support of the mining endeavors and what converted the mining camp into a metropolis. In the line of skyscrapers, an advertisement of AngloAmerican is visible, a portrait of a miner looking out over the city. (Fig. 3.27) From his perspective, he is unable to see his origins. This is both poetic and ironic for Anglo American was one of the first companies to begin reprocessing the mine tailings.109 In this way they are erasing the history that they created. Finally, this image alludes to a subterranean of the city. Not the gold-bearing ore, but the communities that extracted it and the ‘subterranean’ lives they continue to live, divided from the city by the mine tailings.

Figure 3.27 – AngloAmerican Billboard

Source:
https://i.pinimg.com/originals/ec/a2/13/eca2136d7d4994fb4fa65117adba440c.jpg

This image (Fig. 3.28) is of a township on the far eastern edge of the mining belt. This image continues the idea of a secondary, subterranean community living in the shadow of a tailing. The image could appear as if one is peering down a mine shaft, down the other side of the gold-bearing mountain.
• Appropriation and Inhabitation

Figure 3.29 – *Daniel and the Hunting Dogs, Selby, Johannesburg, 2012*

By Jason Larkin

This image (Fig.3.29) depicts the scavenging landscape that the mining belt has become – both for big mining companies and low-income communities. The mining companies scavenge from the past for economic profit, while low income communities scavenge at a much smaller scale to survive, a slower erosion process. The low-income communities find themselves in a precarious position, due to the toxic nature of the tailing but the need to live off it. Also because of the threat posed by the remining of the landscape by corporations. In this sense the mine tailing could be seen as a necessary, stabilizing figure for the man – a rock and a landmark.
This image (Fig. 3.30) depicts a man from the artisanal, informal mining communities the mine tailings support. In Johannesburg these people are known as the ‘Zama-Zama’. The Zama-Zama can be seen as scavengers, or the new prospectors of the city, continuing their trade at a smaller scale under their own management. The mine tailings that were initially supportive of the extractive industries, continue today to be supportive of the communities around them. When does the scale of new extraction start to matter? Should it matter? These tailings provide for the communities in a sense, as would a natural landform.
Figure 3.31 – *Mike Djwela, after his evening prayer, Boysens, Johannesburg, 2010*

By Jason Larkin

This image (Fig. 3.31) is part of a group from this book that depicts people using the toxic landscape of the mine tailings a place for prayer. This is indicative of the monumental sublime these mounds represent, regardless of their ‘unnatural’ composition and emergence. Many Zionist groups use the mining landscape as their place of worship, a place in the vicinity of, yet sheltered from, the city. The man-made mine tailings are a naturalized part of the city fabric, in both senses of the word, naturalized and planted over. The image speaks of a desire for purity, a white robe in a ‘natural’ landscape where this congregation goes to be spiritual. This beguiling nature encourages a sense of reverence, stoic in its apparent stability. The tailings provided a monumental presence and ‘natural’ environment in the heart of the city.
• The legacy of Top-Star Drive-in

Figure 3.32 – *Road to ‘Top Star’, Boysens, Johannesburg, 2010*

By Jason Larkin

This image (Fig. 3.32) represents more of what I imagine Johannesburg once felt like, the mine tailings alongside the skyscrapers like siblings of the gold mining era. It portrays the interwoven mine tailings and city fabric, a feature that is unique to such a big metropolis.
This image (Fig. 3.33) shows the re-mining of the Top-Star Drive-in mine tailing, the recognizable screen on a mine-waste hilltop. This icon appears in the work of William Kentridge too. In this image the screen appears like a headstone of the former monumental landmark that was the mine tailing, which now appears as a ravaged wasteland. Top Star Drive-in provided a unique Johannesburg experience, grounded on a tailing that provided spectacular panoramic views of the city that formed around it. The mine tailings enabled this popular, site-specific experience to exist, if the sites are removed, the foundations on which this history is built disappears.
• Taking mine tailings down

Figure 3.34 – *Breaking down the dump, Krugersdorp, Johannesburg, 2013*

By Jason Larkin

I included this image (Fig. 3.34) because it captures what it psychologically means to reclaim a tailing, it is a battle. The stance, protective gear and machine wielding make this man appear as if he is on a battle field, spraying the dust of history to keep it down and funnel it away for gain. By removing embodiments of history, this is a battle of man vs. man, past and present.
This image (Fig. 3.35) alludes to scenes of war too, and the conquering of terrain. In a sense the mine tailings are uncharted and ungoverned territory, their use is multifarious, mysterious and elusive. The mine tailing is the dormant landscape that is being ravaged. Furthermore, the removal of these mine tailings also changes Johannesburg’s datums from both view and experience perspective. The reappearance of the ground from underneath the tailing signifies a return to the horizon, the starting point, and by doing so erasing the trace of the history that came before it. As the earlier government published reports discussed, it is intended for the land of the mining belt to return to a tabula rasa, destruction of the historic landscape, so that it can be redeveloped. This desire for tabula rasa however is a misguided intention because
once the mine tailing has been removed, the topsoil remains contaminated, undevelopable and unoccupiable for approximately 10 years post removal. Thus the sites of removed mine tailings are “…less likely to revert to gentle grassland, than to remain a stripped and scarred swathe through the city.”\textsuperscript{110} This particular mine tailing was listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest man-made heap in the world. It took 60 years to create, and is estimated to take 12 years to reclaim. \textsuperscript{111}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Figure 3.36 – Repairing the Dump, Krugersdorp, Johannesburg, 2013}
\end{figure}

By Jason Larkin

\textsuperscript{111} Jason Larkin, Mara Kardas-Nelson, and Julian Rodriguez, \textit{Tales from the City of Gold} (Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg, 2014).
This image (Fig. 3.36) shows workers standing atop a mine tailing. This image
decontextualizes the mine tailings from the city, in the same way the redeveloped ground of
former tailings does not acknowledge the history that was formerly embodied on the site. With
tunnel vision, the reprocessing of mine tailings is disconnected from the other values they
represent.

Figure 3.37 – AMD, Robertville, Johannesburg, 2011

By Jason Larkin

This image (Fig. 3.37) shows the outflow of acid mine water onto the top layer of sand of
a mine tailing. Acid mine drainage occurs when ground water is made acidic due to the leaching
of oxidized minerals. AMD poisons the soil and ground water systems, negatively impacting the
communities in the vicinity of the tailings who rely on natural systems for small-scale agriculture and potable water.

These images are useful in painting a picture of the multiple ways the mine tailings are viewed and used. They are what gives Johannesburg its sense of place, both for the people who inhabit it and for the way the urban morphology responds to it. The book ends with an essay titled *All that Glisters* by scholar Julian Rodriguez, in this he sums up what Larkin was able to capture and illustrate through this photographic monograph to the City of Gold. “…these mine dumps are home, a way of life and means of survival for many. Then came the realization for Larkin of what these dumps represented. A kind of memento mori of the hopes and failures, the booms and busts, the catapulting of Johannesburg from a few scattered farmsteads of the 1890s to a precision-grid modern city…”112

The culture-makers most recently engaging Johannesburg’s mine tailings in their research and practice are the founders of a young practice called Counterspace Studio. Counterspace has produced 2 projects on the tailings both with international acclaim and recognition. The first project I will be discussing was an exhibit of research and speculative drawings on show at the 2015 Chicago Architecture Biennial titled, “*Counterspace Lost and Found: Phantoms of Spaces and Times.*” This exhibit was a compilation and interpretation of found objects through the firm’s explorations of the mine tailings. Their found objects were paired with the pigmented

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112 Jason Larkin, Mara Kardas-Nelson, and Julian Rodriguez, *Tales from the City of Gold* (Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg, 20140).
specimens of earth in the area as a geographical indicator. The found fragments and speculative drawings use “…image and narrative as a means of deconstructing Johannesburg’s deserted mine dumps, which have become synonymous with the city’s landscape and history.” The illustrated narratives of Counterspace are “projections of the past or future” says Sarah de Villiers, Counterspace co-founder. These explorations reveal the continued desire for culture-makers to interact with the mine tailings, to understand their mystery and recognize them as part of the future in some form.

Figure 3.38 – Collage from *Counterspace Lost and Found: Phantoms of Spaces and Times*, 2015

By Counterspace Studio

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115 Ibid
These collage images portray the mine tailings as a fantastical landscape, centered around narratives of present use, and past and future projections. These works are not critical but rather more compositional and experimental. Fig. 3.38 shows the mine tailings as a site of recreation, their golden sand analogous to sand dunes on a beach. This image is a collage of various images the one on the bottom right, above The Wave by Hokusai, shows children swimming in acid mine water. The black background with the oversized moon and Top-Star’s screen, imbue the images with a mystical quality, associated with the tailings uses as spiritual grounds. The images iridescent neon colors, could be a representation of the radioactivity of the mine tailings, releasing a toxic glow. As visually compelling as these images are, I don’t believe they are critical enough in representing the diverse narratives the mine tailings embody. Fig. 3.39 can be read similarly, as a fetishization of this post-industrial landscape. What these works, and their exhibition at an international Biennial, do show is the continued fascination with these tailings and their landscapes. The platform of the Biennial allowed the tailings to be accessed by an international audience of contemporary artists, architects and other culture-producers.

Figure 3.39 – Collage from Counterspace Lost and Found: Phantoms of Spaces and Times, 2015

By Counterspace Studio
The second project by Counterspace to engage the mine tailings is an installation titled *Folded Skies*, produced for the 2018 – 2019 Spier Light Art Festival. (Fig. 3.40) This project is composed of 3 colored mirror sculptures, reflecting the unique color of Johannesburg’s sky as a result of the dust and pollution in the air emanating from the mine tailings. Like their previous work, found mineral pigments were used to create the color gradients. 116 Counterspace co-founder Sumaya Valley said of the project, “Because of the mine dust in Johannesburg, the sunsets are very iridescent. If you are near a dump or in an area of high toxicity you notice how beautiful it is because of the pollution.”117

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117 Katie De Klee, "Coloured Mirrors Mimic the Light Created by Johannesburg's Mine Dust," Dezeen.
In closing, Kentridge describes Johannesburg as a received landscape.\textsuperscript{118} This, like an inheritance, becomes the legacy bestowed upon Jo’burgers and it is our responsibility to manage it and preserve it so that the comfort blanket, the thread of continuity, can be bestowed on future generations.

Chapter 4

Assessing cultural significance through representation in Literature

To further understand the cultural significance the mine tailings embody, as assessed through their representation, I will be looking at how they feature in the work of another set of culture-producers, namely writers. This attempts to reveal the pervasiveness of the mine tailings in articulating Johannesburg’s identity throughout its history. The analysis will begin from an 1890s account, followed by extracts from every few decades until the contemporary writing of the 2010s. The selection of works was based on their time of publication as well as their own merit, such as the significance of the author or the reception of the book. The excerpts come from fiction and nonfiction, showing the presence of the mine tailings across sources. The second part of this chapter will look at books published within the fields of cultural and urban studies, as written by artists, architects and anthropologists, as a way of understanding and exploring this site-specific culture from an intellectual and academic point of view. This analysis will continue to reveal the narratives and associations the mine tailings represent and propagate.

120 years of writing mine tailings

For early accounts of the city I consulted an invaluable book titled Reef of Time, compiled and edited by Digby Ricci, and published in 1986. This book is a compendium of written accounts of Johannesburg overtime, from the 1880s to the 1980s, providing an overview of the city and the lives within it. The earliest mine tailings began to form in the late 1980s with the introduction of deep-level mining to the region. It is understood therefore that accounts of the
tailings are more prolific from the 1920s onward when the tailings have had a chance to grow to a point of holding a fundamental place within the young city, a physical presence and impact beyond the mining compounds.

The earliest extract I found to mention the mine tailings was from Through South Africa by Henry M. Stanley, published in 1898. The account describes the panoramic view of the mining landscape of Johannesburg as seen when approaching the city by train.

“Johannesburg came into view about 9 a.m.; but instead of making direct for it, the train veered off and came to a halt at Elandsfontein, six miles east. It was then we first obtained an intelligent comprehension of the term Main Reef, to whose production of gold the existence of Johannesburg is due…To either side of Elandsfontein runs a lengthy line of chimney stacks, engine houses, tall wooden frames supporting the headgear, stamp mills with clusters of sheds, huts and offices, hills of white tailings and ore. To the westward these become more numerous, and as the train moved from Elandsfontein towards Johannesburg, it clung to the side of a commanding ridge by which we obtained a panoramic view of mine after mine, each surrounded by its reservoirs, hills of tailings, lofty stores of ore, iron sheds, mills, offices, and headgear structures, until finally they occupied and entire valley.” 119

This extract reveals the early formation of the city, a series of mining camps, of which the mine tailings were already a noticeable and notable feature. It also reveals the extensive network of buildings and infrastructure of which the mine tailings were a part. Many of these structures no

longer exist and the tailings that remain are therefore critical to this founding legacy. The referral to the tailings as hills begins the idea of them as man-made landforms.

The mine tailings are mysterious in that they embody, conceal and absorb much of what occurs on and around them. In 1930, South African novelist R.R.R. Dhlomo published a short story titled *The Dog Killers*.

> “The mine dump was red with blood. Dogs lay here and there with their bowels scattered all over the place. Others were a mass of blood and sand... At a word from Mlungu the dead bodies were collected into sacks and burnt in a hollow of the dump.”


This extract shows the violence that occurred within the mining camps between black people, and not only across races. It shows how the tailings were burial mounds, not only of extracted ore but of the many animal and human lives that were lost too. The mine tailings are highly charged spaces, and this reveals one of the hidden histories they embody. Today, the mine tailings continue to be sites of concealed violence, crime and relics of the past.121


“Right through Johannesburg City – east and west – runs the sixty miles of gold reef upon whose product is largely based the economic system of the world. The tarnished-silver mine-dumps form part of the skyline of Johannesburg.”

This extract reveals how even at this early stage, the mine tailings are one of the defining features of Johannesburg’s skyline, and because of the city’s global significance in the gold and finance industries, the more critical they are as visible and physical markers of Johannesburg’s reason for being. They are how the city and its inhabitants identify and differentiate themselves against a global stage. They can be viewed as trophies of their contribution to the global economy.

A later extract from the same book by Millin states:

“All round Johannesburg and along the Main Reef Road, the richest road in the world, whose sixty miles run over the gold mines of the Reef, there are these hills that shine in the sunlight like tarnished silver. They are the mine-dumps, the refuse of stamp mill and cyanide tank, the ghosts of the mines’ earth (the gold, their life-blood, gone from them) gazing down on the urgent world they have left behind. Yet who knows that their death may not outlive life? The mine-dumps of the Rand are not less beautiful, not less significant in their way than the Pyramids of Egypt…The mine-dumps too are a monument of servitude, power, the vanity of vanities and death.”

This describes the once extensive chain of mine tailings that was the topographical expression of Johannesburg’s richest reef. Millin’s alluring language shows their reception as the industrial sublime; as mythical, sentient bodies, viewed with awe and reverence. They are equated with the Pyramids of Egypt in terms of significance to site, monuments to the sacred and profane, representing ambitious ideals and base desires. Despite the relatively young age of the tailings at the time of this publication, they were already considered to be significant, iconic and unique to the city. This is one of the extracts in which the tailings are viewed in a positive, venerable light, possibly because they are recorded by someone who was not directly involved in the production of them.

The mine tailings feature in the 1945 poem Ezinkomponi by Zulu poet and lecturer Benedict Vilakazi. The Zulu name of the poem translates to The Gold Mines. Originally written in Zulu, the poem articulates life in the mining compounds of Johannesburg – the strife of the migrant laborers, at the exploitative hands of the mining magnates, compounded by the intensity and cacophony of crowds and heavy machinery. Jennifer Beningfield discusses the role of the land in this poem as associated with both physical and spiritual life in African tradition. In this way, wounds inflicted on and through the land carry metaphysical and emotional repercussions too. And this weight is felt most directly by those very workers who extracted the ore and built the mine tailings. “The separation from the land that occurred under the system of migrant labor indicates not only a dislocation with the land, but also an uneasiness in spiritual life which is traditionally intimately connected to the earth, through the bodies of the ancestors.”

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This spiritual connection with nature transforms as the mine tailings become naturalized as nature, as we saw in Larkin’s photographs of Zionist worshipers.

The Gold Mines

[extract]

Around the noisy compounds of the Mines,
We hear that black men born of Many tribes
Had come to raise these great white Dumps
Astounding to their ancestors. 126

South African writer Peter Abrahams published a novel titled Mine Boy, in 1946. The story chronicles the Johannesburg experience of Xuma, a black miner come to work in the gold mines. The novel uses the mine tailings to provide context to the immediate mining grounds and the city at large, illustrating their presence and impact within the apartheid city beyond just the ground they occupy.

“Xuma looked around and saw in the distance huge, towering, shadowy shapes that seemed to push their heads against the sky.

‘What are those?’ he asked.

Those are the mine dumps. They are made of all the sand the miners have dug out of the earth in their search for gold. You will help make more of them.’

‘Just sand?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Just white sand.’

‘That’s funny,’ he said. ‘A mountain of white sand made by black men.’”

This extract is one of the few to make explicit the social and racial tension that the mining landscape embodies, resonating with both the white and black people of early Johannesburg. Their description as “towering, shadowy shapes” illustrates the ominous aura they held for some, contrary to the “tarnished silver” majesty as proposed by Millin.

“How was work in the mines?” Eliza asked.

‘Hard, but not too hard. I helped to start a mine-dump that would not grow.’

This extract shows the labor and time intensive practice of ‘building’ a mine tailing. The form of a tailing, although now natural looking due to years of erosion and planting, is carefully crafted to facilitate access and minimize dust from erosion. The labor the tailings require is not only in the extraction of gold-bearing ore from the ground, or the crushing of that ore, but it also includes the construction of the tailing itself. The size of the tailings is a good representation of the volume of earth extracted from underground. The labor intensity of extraction continues as the crushed ore takes its topographical form.

128 Peter Abrahams, Mine Boy, 34.
129 Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, Not No Place: Johannesburg, Fragments of Spaces and Times (Johannesburg: Fanele, 2013), 51.
In 1957 Herman Charles Bosman, one of South Africa’s most well-known journalists and short-story writers of the 20th century, published a collection of his works and musings in a book titled *A Cask of Jerepigo*. The book makes various references to the mining landscape, but the most poignant to my case comes from a text titled *Johannesburg Riots*. Bosman explains the prevalence of riots in Johannesburg since its founding days.

“…but I do know that it started in Johannesburg over 50 years ago, and that it has been going on, at intervals, ever since. And unless we are going to betray the traditions bequeathed to us by our forefathers, it will go on as long as we have mine dumps on our horizon.” ¹³⁰

This reveals that at this time, the mine tailings were already viewed similar to natural landforms, it was assumed they’d be around indefinitely, eternally. They were seen as a permanent feature on Johannesburg’s horizon. This illustrates their perceived continuity in time since the dawn of Johannesburg, separate from a “tradition bequeathed” and rather a fact.

Sipho Sepamla is another South African poet to depict the presence and associations of the mine tailings. The extract from his poem, *Double-Talk*, palpably describes the experience of a dust storm in the young, golden city. The imagery conveys a phenomenon both delicately mesmerizing, and disquieting. The poem speaks of the miners the gold mines have consumed whose presence is felt through the streets of the city when the dust of the mine tailings is

disturbed. Beningfield describes, “…the mine dumps are not silent, enigmatic mounds of earth, but whisper through the streets of the city.”

Double-Talk

[extract]

I was here when the windswept dust dunes
Rose in the streets
Each footfall of sweatstained man standing up dust
And minedumps clouds were rising into the air
Galloping like an army of ghosts
Tickling the air with whispering sands
Teeth grinding grit on dry tongues

American novelist Alan Drudry published a book in 1968 titled *A Very Strange Society*, an account of South Africa. In the selected extract, Drury describes the center of Johannesburg, the City of Gold.

“Here it sits surrounded by its yellow mine dumps, the capital of the Big Deal and the Fast Buck, the perfect flowering of the fantastic mineral wealth of the Witwatersrand, unique in its own lands as New York is in America: both representing the best and the worst in modern industrial

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society, both offering the best and the worst of their respective lands, both wielding the decisive economic power of a country and a continent.”

In this extract the mine tailings again allow for the comparison of Johannesburg to another significant place, this time New York. Here, the tailings represent what it means to be a thriving, industrial metropolis; dual natured with positive and negative impacts, but integral to the development of the city. It is also worth noting from this extract the intrinsic importance even foreigners attribute to the mine tailings in Johannesburg’s identity.

Lionel Abrahams, another well-known South African writer of the 20th century, published a book titled *Journal of a New Man* in 1984. This included the poem below.

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**Place**¹³⁴

(A party of white Johannesburgers reads Zbigniew Herbert, Holub and other poets at the foot of a mine dump, Summer 1969)

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After the raid of the thunderstorm –
Our scramble to the cars, Mile’s Volksie
Bogging down in a spilling drift
Of milled quartz and rainwater,
A book lost, a camera splashed –
We forgot our half formed plan
To woo our audience for poetry-readings
Outdoors to the site that Neil had found
While living on the mine estate.

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Yet we liked it best, to say the least,
Of all the settings we used or thought to use –
Liked it enough to have driven out
Beyond the tinny rows of old mine cottages,
Past a plantation of tattered gums and round
Behind the straggle of cyanide dams and dumps,
Bringing our books and typescripts
For two or three trial readings.
These I remember seven years after

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Rather for the place itself
Than for the poetry or exactly who was there.
I think that goes for all who came:
We felt, like Neil, discovery
At the foot of that beach-white truncated pyramid
Dominating emptiness on an unguessed-at plain,
Its space defined and stressed by the distant block,
Cathedral sized, of a solitary corrugated iron shed.
Discovery we felt in the sloping soar
Of the built cliff, sterile and brilliant
With residual poison and gold;
In its silky drapes of man-made sand that hung
Like skirts on the clodded ochre ridges
Weathered to bones and muscles of the mound’s anatomy;
In the precarious brick-and-concrete
Of a remnant too unseasoned to be called a ruin
Whose lintel served as our proscenium
Framing the backdrop of flat veld,
Tall-grassed but greyish, in nature minimal –
A wasteland secreted in the suburb’s groin.
No doubt, from the hill-high mine dump’s table top
The rearing core of town would show close by,
But down in this deserted lee
Was huge surprising privacy, an intensity
Of quiet air and naked sky, whitening with sunlight
On one day, once piling plum-dark clouds.
A scene that should have meant familiar ugliness
Made us freshly familiar with the ignored
Persistent residue of primitive Johannesburg.
And something more, the very local savour:
This to us was palpable beauty –
Thin durable as tin, and much too strange,
Too firmly bedded in the stark neglect
Of that near-featureless enclave, too true
Of a city all too easily contemned,
For description, explanation, recognition shared
With any who’ve not known the Rand as home.
The salt of it grew sharp with poems that ran
More piquant on our tongues
In that incongruous air. And finally
The drama of cloud and wind, lighting flares,
Bombs of thunder and sudden sniping drops
Exhilarated us, and the rain we fled
Washed the last of those rare afternoons
Down into crevices of gilded memory.
I half forget what poetry we read
(our own? Newfound Mtshali’s? Plath’s?)
But clearly recall the humane affirmative thrust
Of the two scientist-poets out of Europe’s east;
And now reflect how alien our scene –
Shallow, violent, bleak, a drained and shadeless
Wedge of earth, uncultivated, mired by money-miners –
Would be to them, whose translated lines
We there, with voice and ears and hearts,
Lent scope and life, brought strangely home:
This poem creates a nostalgic and delightful view of the mine tailings, as experienced by poetry-reading, adventurous youngsters. The scene is set with line 4’s alluring ingredients of “milled quartz and rainwater”. The reader is then introduced to the profound landscape that they are about to encounter by lines 18-19, a memorable, remarkable place. Through lines 23-32, Abrahams describes the vast scale of the mine tailing with terms such a “pyramid” and “sloping soar”, the experience of the huge scale. “Sterile and brilliant…poison and gold” of lines 28-29 show the dual natures, the extremes of toxicity and desire the mine tailings embody. The corporeal description of the eroded sand of the mine tailing in line 32, further goes to emphasize their visceral presence, both in what they are and the experiences they foster. Lines 45 – 47 illustrate the ubiquity of the mine tailings, and the potential for viewing them with renewed perspective. As the “persistent residue of primitive Johannesburg”, they are the reminders of the city’s origins. The poem reveals the incongruity of the mine tailings in the city, in relation to world poetry, and therein lies their remarkable nature.

Lionel Abrahams poetry of the mine tailings provides the transition into contemporary literature, providing a reference point for well-known, contemporary South African writer Ivan Vladislavic, in his book *Portrait with keys, Joburg and what-what* published in 2006. The novel reads like a textual map of Johannesburg through its fragments of texts of memories and experiences of the city. Vladislavic was inspired by the works of previously mentioned writers, Bosman and Abrahams, and their writings on Johannesburg. In *Portrait with Keys*, Vladislavi describes fictional encounters with these writers on Johannesburg’s mine tailings. On Herman Charles Bosman,
“…And there he is again scrambling up the side of a mine dump with Ella (they are going to write their poems in the sand.” 135

And on Lionel Abrahams,

“I bump into him on top of a mine dump too – he has gone up there with some friends to read Herbert and Holub.” 136

These extracts illustrate the continued appeal of the mining landscape for these multi-generational, culture-making stakeholders. The tailings, in this case, act as a source of inspiration, creativity and recreation across decades. The presence of the tailings continues to permeate the experience of the city, be it through personal experience, or vicariously through literary imagination.

Another much-quoted extract from Portrait with Keys reads,

“In Johannesburg, the Venice of the South, the backdrop is always a man-made one. We have planted a forest the birds endorse. For hills, we have mine dumps covered with grass. We do not wait for time and the elements to weather us, we change the scenery ourselves, to suit our moods. Nature is for other people, in other places.” 137

This extract, as others have, refers to the mine tailings as contradictory man-made landforms. It marks them as a quintessential feature of Johannesburg. Despite the permanence implied by hills,

137 Ibid, 94.
the extract also points to Johannesburg’s morphing, elusive nature, always volatile to change. This echoes the sentiments explored in William Kentridge’s work.

The 2010’s texts I will be analyzing provide 2 fictive narratives of Johannesburg, one set in an alternate present of the city, and one from the early mining days of Johannesburg (approximately 1900-1910s). These are *Zoo City* by Lauren Beukes, published in 2010, and *1000 Tales of Johannesburg* by Harry Kalmer, published in 2017, respectively.

*Zoo City* is set in an alternate version of present day Johannesburg, and follows the story of Zinzi who has a knack for finding missing people and things. The opening line of the novel reads,

“Moring light the sulphur color of the mine dumps seeps across Johannesburg’s skyline and sears through my window.” 138

It is well known that the vivid colors of Johannesburg’s sky at sunrise and sunset can be attributed to the hazy dust particles in in the air blown off the mine tailings. This is a phenomenon unique to the city, and reveals some of the ephemeral, experiential qualities created by the tailings beyond their physical presence. This was the basis for Counterspace Studio’s project, *Folded Skies*.

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138 Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (Jacana Media, 2010),01.
“It’s the dust in the air that makes the Highveld sunsets so spectacular, the fine yellow mineral deposits kicked up from the mine dumps… Who says bad things can’t be beautiful?”\textsuperscript{139}

“I drive out south to where the last of the mine dumps are – sulphur-colored artificial hills, laid waste by the ravages of weather and reprocessing, shored up with scrubby grass and eucalyptus trees. Ugly valleys have been gouged out and trucked away by the ton to sift out the last scraps of gold the mining companies missed the first time round. Maybe it’s appropriate that eGoli, place of gold, should be self-cannibalizing.”\textsuperscript{140}

This extract depicts a vivid image of what the mine tailings have been reduced to, gouged out, ugly valleys, and in spite of this continue to remain pertinent and powerful tropes of the city, their presence still necessary even in alternate literary versions of Johannesburg. The use of the term ‘self-cannibalizing’ also speaks to the willed amnesia and voluntary erasure of the past as previously described in the works of Kentridge and Vladislavic.

1000 Tales of Johannesburg follows the multi-generational narratives of a group of Jo’burgers, one of which is a Chinese South African.

“‘My mother’s grandfather and my father’s father came to Kum-saan on their own. ‘Kum-saan’ means ‘yellow mountain’. At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century there were three yellow mountains. One in California, one in Australia and the other in Namfeechow. ‘My mother’s

\textsuperscript{139} Lauren Beukes, \textit{Zoo City}, 118.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 255.
In the early 20th century, Chinese indentured laborers were brought to Johannesburg to work in the gold mines. Subsequently, many more Chinese people arrived to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the young, booming city. Although no definitive date is attributed to this fictive recollection, it is powerful to note the reach of the mine tailings in Johannesburg, attributing the city the colloquial Chinese name ‘Kum-saan’ (yellow mountain), as well as Johannesburg’s global position with other mining capitals. Again, the tailings provide context for the experience of Johannesburg, and becomes its defining feature. The following extract continues the discussion of the City of Gold:

“‘How high is the yellow mountain of Kum-saan?’
‘There are hundreds of yellow mountains in Kum-saan.’
‘Are they tall?’
‘Not very.’
‘Can you climb them?’
‘You can but nobody does. They are just yellow piles of sand.’
‘Is Kum-saan in the desert?’
‘No. The yellow sand is from the mines of the bakgwai (white man).’
‘Do they mine yellow sand to build yellow mountains?’

‘No, the kaffir people take it from the ground for them, so that they can mine the gold.’

This extract highlights the uniqueness and peculiarity the mine tailings provide Johannesburg’s identity, and the diverse, controversial social history they represent.

These extracts serve to prove the continued fascination with Johannesburg’s mine tailings in the literary world, and their integral role in providing context and identity to the city. Their continued presence in works of fiction and non-fiction, by local and international writers of different races, shows their fundamentality to the definition and experience of the city. Without the mine tailings to provide this site-specific context and culture, the richness of the real and literary city would not exist. The tailings are pervasive in the arts of the city, from its founding days to its projected futures.

Framing the mining landscape through urban and cultural studies

It is because of these abundant qualities of social memory, mysticism and urban molding that the mine tailings represent that they have further been explored in contemporary books on cultural and urban studies of the city by artists, architects and anthropologists. The following analysis of these books reveals a desire for these culture-makers to give the mine tailings and the mining landscape a presence as objects and places of critical enquiry to further cement their cultural significance to the city. I will discuss how the tailings are referenced as a part of the founding identity of the city that has become shuffled, remade and removed. In these excerpts

the condition of the mine tailings can be read as a metaphor for the city as a whole. In an adaptation from Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, and Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt’s *Not No Place*, the mine tailings can be read as “the basic poetic unit” for reading Johannesburg as it undergoes transformation into a modern (post-apartheid) metropolis.”

In her book, *Writing the City into Being*, architect and scholar, Lindsey Bremner describes Johannesburg as “…floating on layers of mined out conglomerate, being endlessly abandoned, reclaimed, recycled, and reused.” She describes the mining landscape as “disemboweled and abandoned”, “…deeply embedded in Johannesburg’s psyche. Mining headgear, mine dumps and slimes dams loom over the city’s skyline, cutting a swathe through its heart.” Contrary to this, I support Jennifer Beningfield’s opinion that the mining belt is actually “the artery that feeds the heart” of the city.

A seminal book on the city is *Johannesburg, The Elusive Metropolis*, edited by anthropologists Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, published in 2008. This book is a collection of essays on the various conditions of the post-apartheid city. In Mbembe’s essay, *Aesthetics of Superfluity*, in relation to Johannesburg, he speaks about “… the ceaseless birth, destruction, and reconstruction of forms, the aim of which is, on the one hand, to distinguish nature and

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144 Lindsay Bremner and Bronwyn Law-Viljoen, *Writing the City Into Being: Essays on Johannesburg, 1998-2008* (Johannesburg: Fourthwall, 2010), 01.
146 Ibid, 183.
landscape, and on the other hand to testify to the presentness of the past while making way for the “new.” 148 As such, the mine tailings are in a precarious position being viewed as neither exactly nature nor landscape, they are the presence of the past whose removal is making way for the new. Mbembe discusses the ‘reclamation’ of mining ground to stitch a fragmented urban condition as the loss of Johannesburg’s original contours, “…reduced to an empty set.” 149

_Not No Place, Johannesburg. Fragments of Spaces and Times_ is a publication of the collected texts, images and musings of Deadheat, artist duo Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreautzfeldt. Following the lead of Johannesburg historian, Keith Beavon, the landscape term they use that defines Johannesburg best is ‘uitvalgrond’. The original Afrikaans word “…used to describe the original triangular-shaped area, falling between 3 other farms, on which the ‘town’ was built.” 150 Today, in relation to the text, the term describes the surplus ground of the city as defined by its buildings, and in the mining land, the mine tailings. This shows the role of the tailings not only as subjects themselves, but as facilitating and defining the context of the city.

The final book in this category of urban and cultural studies is _The Frightened Land_, by architect and scholar Jennifer Beningfield, published in 2006. She poetically describes Johannesburg’s mine tailings as “…objects which are both archaic and modern; archaic because it was ancient deposits that were mined and then deposited in massive monolithic mounds, and

149 Achille Mbembe, _Aesthetics of Superfluity_, as published in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, _Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis_, 59.
150 Malcomess and Kreutzfeldt, _Not No Place: Johannesburg, Fragments of Spaces and Times_, 62.
modern because their form and material were the result of modern industrial practice." 151 She critically discusses the use of the mining land as a tool to “…locate and conceal Soweto.” 152 Soweto is one of Johannesburg’s largest townships, located to the south of the mining belt, originally developed to house the migrant labor working in the gold mines. Despite the earlier discussed government strategies to remediate the mining belt, and ‘re-stitch’ the urban fabric through the removal of mine tailings, Beningfield questions this initiative, asking for the mining belt to be seen as more than a “…strategic surface, one which can overcome the past by becoming more like the city.” 153 She recognizes the critical failure of governmental authorities and private companies to “…identify the land area as part of the cultural, social and political life of the city.” 154

153 Ibid, 206.
154 Ibid, 192.
Chapter 5

Thematized Narratives

As the previous 2 chapters have illustrated, the mine tailings have a deeply entrenched history with the formation and experience of the city. They are monumental features of Johannesburg’s landscape that encompass diverse and contested narratives of the city. They are a symbol of the city, the enablers of a site-specific culture, atmosphere and history. This is confirmed by the incessant depiction of them in art and literature since the late 1890’s till today. They are a source of inspiration for these culture-makers, and a way of representing and communicating diverse narratives and a context that is uniquely of Johannesburg. As described in chapters 3 and 4, the mine tailings in the metropolis are a unique Johannesburg feature, they are quintessential of the city, and so when artists and writers want to reference Johannesburg they use the mine tailings as a substitute.

Through analyzing the selected works of art and literature, dominant themes that emerge are environment and nature; racial relations and spatial inequality; appropriation; and experience of the contemporary city. This chapter groups and discusses the art works and literary pieces described in the previous 2 chapters. The heading of each theme is followed by a list of page numbers allowing for a specific journey through the thesis with a particular focus on each of the overarching narratives.
Environment and Nature: the discovery of gold, formation of the city and environmental degradation

(36, 41-42, 47, 48, 49, 50, 59-60, 67, 72, 74, 78, 81, 83, 93-94, 94-96)

This theme refers to nature – gold as a natural resource that was extracted and the crushed ore mounds that emerged on the topography as a result. It considers this nature in relation to the city that developed around it. The gold-bearing ore gave rise to both the mine tailings and the early metropolis which weave between each other.

- The discovery of gold

To begin with the discovery of gold as a natural resource and a valuable commodity, Larkin’s works *Panning for gold & Remining Dump 20* speak about Johannesburg as a city of eternal prospectors, bridging times and scales of extraction. In Kentridge’s film *Mine* (1991), we see the original form of a deep-level mine viscerally through the jarring scenes of drills and pneumatic chisels against the rockface, this violence in pursuit of profit.

- Naturalized Nature

The mine tailings are often perceived as natural landforms due to their colossal scale, the guise of grass, and their multi-generational presence. As Kentridge said, they were the hills of
his childhood. In Kentridge’s *Woyzeck in the Highveld* and *Faustus in Africa*, the mine tailings appear on the landscape as if existing before urbanization, a pre-existing part of the landscape on which the city was founded. They are Johannesburg’s tabula rasa. In Kentridge’s later work with Rosalind C. Morris, *Accounts and Drawings from Underground*, the tailings are depicted up close, appearing as a vast landscape, like the veld before the existence of Johannesburg. They are of Johannesburg, from a landscape perspective.

The ‘natural’ appearance of the mine tailings, fundamental to the landscape, can also be read in Clive van den Berg’s *Johannesburg* and *Broken Syntax* pieces where the city is depicted without it’s build environment. The tailings, although man-made are still present however, as if they had always been there. Their presumed permanence is echoed in the extract from Bosman where the mine tailings are fixed on the horizon. In the 2017 novel *1000 tales of Johannesburg*, Johannesburg is called Kum-saan a place defined by its yellow mountains. Mountains are archaic, and as Beningfield described “ancient deposits that were mined and then deposited in massive monolithic mounds...”

- **Founding & Forming the City**

The 1898 account of Henry M. Stanley arriving in Johannesburg by train to a landscape of industry and mine tailings sets the scene of concurrent growth of the metropolis and the mine

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155 William Kentridge, as quoted in, Mark Gevisser, "The Venice of the South," *Nation* 298, no. 16 (April 2014): 30.
tailings. The tailings can be considered as features of the city’s glory days, remnants of the founding past, and as such comparable to the defining monuments of other civilizations’, such as the Pyramids of Egypt, as described in Gertrude Millin’s extract and industrial New York’s resourceful relics in Alan Drudy’s account. Millin contributes to the monumentality and reverence the mine tailings inspire, describing their color as tarnished silver.

- Environmental Degradation

The most recent and pressing narrative to be revealed in the contemporary works of art and literature is the pollution and environmental degradation caused by the mine tailings. As seen in Larkin’s photographs of acid mine drainage, Counterspace’s *Folded Skies* installation and Beukes *Zoo City*, the most accepted/glorified form of this pollution is airborne, the remarkable color of the atmosphere due to the toxic mine dust in the air. This is most apparent at sunrise and sunset. The less alluring side of the toxic legacy is the acid mine drainage, revealed in Larkins photographs. These references to pollution in the recent past show the shift of the significance of the mining land from the experience of an apartheid and then post-apartheid city, to one of environmental consciousness.
Racial relations and spatial inequality

(41-42, 44-46, 51-55, 63, 65, 84-85, 85-86, 94-96)

The potential of studying art and literature is that it allows for more challenging and sensitive topics to be expressed in an indirect yet powerful way. South Africa’s legacy is marked by extreme racism which played out in all aspects of life, home and work. Johannesburg is classified as a typical apartheid city because the segregationist policies are so deeply inscribed in the surface (and the underground) of the city. Larkin’s images, *Home to People And Hunting Dogs* and *Jerusalem Settlement*, illustrate this spatial inequality of the city which was physically defined by the presence of the mine tailings, where they were used as buffers between black and white communities. This spatial configuration is a legacy that the mine tailings inadvertently continue to enforce.

- Migrant Labor

Johannesburg’s gold mines were worked by a large migrant labor force. As Achille Mbembe describes them, this labor force was at once indispensable and expendable. Black laborers from all over South Africa came to work in Johannesburg’s gold mines. As is illustrated in Benedict Vilakazi’s poem, the gold mines were a melting pot of tribes, there to desecrate the land, where the ultimate profit was paid to the white mining magnates. In this case, the mine tailings represent the oppression of black miners. This racial tension and exploitation that fed the

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gold mines is depicted in Kentridge’s film, *Mine*, where the white man, Soho Ekcstein, dictates the movements of his work force, literally plunging them underground from the comfort of his bed. In Kentridge’s film *Felix in Exile*, fallen bodies in time evolve into mine tailings. In this representation the mine tailings literally embody the violence and death on the mines, the apparent expendability of the work force.

Peter Abraham’s novel, *Mine Boy*, is about the arrival of a young boy to Johannesburg to work on the mines. The mine tailings were made by black migrant laborers, both the production of the deposit and its gradual accumulation. In *1000 Tales of Johannesburg*, it is Chinese people who arrive in the land of the “yellow mountains” to capitalize on the young city. Young Johannesburg was home to indentured Chinese laborers, as well as entrepreneurs. In Kentridge’s most recent film, *Other Faces*, the racial tension that continues to exist below the surface in Johannesburg and South Africa at large, emerges in a road rage induced argument and reaches a climax heightened by the destruction and toppling of Top Star. This is illustrative of Kentridge’s exploration of willed amnesia, and the apparent obstacles that need to be removed in order to transgress the negative histories and associations of apartheid.
Due to their enduring multi-generational presence in the cityscape of Johannesburg, the mine tailings, like natural landforms have inevitably been appropriated. From sustaining livelihoods, providing a spiritual connection to nature, to recreation – the tailings provide a unique environment for a range of activities and needs. In two of Larkin’s images, *Daniel the hunting dogs* and *Panning for gold*, we see how communities who live around the tailings scavenge in and through them to generate a living. The photograph of Mike Dwejla shows the nature mine tailings provide within the city, where people can go to be spiritual, reflective or introspective. The images of Top Star Drive-in and its recognizable screen show the mine tailings as sites of recreation and pleasure-seeking. In Kentridge’s film, *Other Faces*, we see multiple images of the Top Star screen showing movies. A sense of pleasure and delight is also revealed in Lionel Abrahams’ *Place*, when a mine tailing becomes a platform for poetry reading, a site of wonder and seclusion away from the built fabric of the city. Vladislavic echoes the intrigue the mine tailings inspire through his mention of them, and his encounters with other writers on them. “Remember it for the place.”  

As other aspects of this analysis the tailings have both positive and negative associations and connotations. Providing respite and seclusion from the built fabric of the city also makes the

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mine tailings a more ungoverned secluded territory, therefore providing a space for violence and other illicit activities. In *Writing the City into Being*, Lindsay Bremer describes the mine tailings, “…their poisoned earth contains and absorbs the most rabid of the city’s crimes, the most cynical of its secrets.” \(^{160}\) An early case of this we see in literature is R.R.R. Dhlomo’s *The Dog Killers*, where pets and stray dogs who live on a mining compound are brutally murdered and concealed in the dust of the tailing. The extract from contemporary novel, *Zoo City*, by Lauren Beukes describes the location of a crime scene where a corpse is discarded at the top of a mine tailing. And perhaps the most poetic representation of the mine tailings as concealing devices is in Kentridge’s film *Felix in Exile*, where the fallen bodies of the dead are covered in debris and transform into mine tailings. The tailings literally embody the dead too, with multiple unmarked graves discovered there. In 2015, 650 unmarked graves were discovered in the Crown Mines area, just west of the city center. Archeologists believe the remains are from black and Chinese laborers, from the early twentieth century\(^ {161}\).


The enduring presence of the tailings through the life of the city means that they are invariably an icon of Johannesburg, distinguishing and defining it. Johannesburg was built with the mine tailings, it was formed through their presence and now will be reshaped in their absence. Larkin’s image *Road to Top Star* is a close up of the intimate proximity the built fabric and the mine tailings had, they were a way of experiencing the city. Larkin’s other images *Top Star, Breaking down the dump, and Remining Dump 20*” depict the contemporary scenes of Johannesburg’s mine tailings. Beukes, in *Zoo City*, describes Johannesburg as ‘self-cannibalizing.’ The prospectors of the city will take gold from wherever it’s found, even if it means destroying the foundations of the city. These images of Larkin’s illustrate this self-devouring nature.

In Kentridge’s films *Johannesburg 2nd Greatest City after Paris* and *Sobriety, Obesity and Growing Old*, we again see the interwoven adjacent relationship between the mine tailings and the city, they are intrinsic to one another, the one couldn’t have existed without the other and thus are necessary to define each other. In the film *Other Faces*, we see the interwoven, reciprocal nature of the mine tailings and the city in motion. In this film, the destruction of the tailing is congruent with racial confrontation.

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162 Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City*, 255.
From an experiential point of view of the mine tailing itself, Lionel Abrahams vividly describes the strong formal qualities, the colossal scale, and the alluring color and tactility of the landscape. Finally, the mine tailings and their dust have created a remarkable atmospheric phenomenon for the city. The blown-off dust from the tailings is first described in Sepamla’s poem, *Double-Talk*. Here, the windswept dust is described as an “army of ghosts”, one can imagine the dust like a mist moving through the city, albeit one that is gritty and grinding. Finally, in *Zoo City*, Beukes describes the morning light as “the Sulphur color of the mine dumps”. She again mentions the light quality the mine tailing dust creates at sunset. “Who says bad things can’t be beautiful?”

These themes illustrate the changing state and significance of Johannesburg’s gold mine tailings over time. Their multi-generational presence and representation reveals the changing perception and reception of the mine tailings. This continued engagement with the mine tailings over the past 100 years goes to illustrate them as a fundamental part of the city’s DNA and identity. It is what makes Johannesburg, Johannesburg. The mine tailings are a popular subject of investigation for Johannesburg culture makers. The engagement with the mine tailings is what ties these artists, writers, academics and creatives to each other and to Johannesburg, generating a site-specific culture. In this way the work that is produced between the mine tailings and the culture makers becomes mutually reinforcing and validating. They reinforce

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163 Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City*, 118.
each other’s significance. It is the culture-producers that make the cultural heritage object, and the cultural-heritage object that reinforces the culture-producers.
Conclusion

This thesis has provided an example of how cultural heritage can be assessed over a period of time, and through different periods of time, by collecting and analyzing works of art and literature on the subject. This type of methodology utilizes the voice and understanding of creative, culture-producers to narrate and illustrate the conditions on the ground, the perspectives of the people interested in these sites. As such, the representations that are generated have a relevance to their time of production and are able to guide preservationists at how and what makes a site collectively significant in different periods. The division of works into categories helps to extract over-arching themes and narratives of a site. This is very important to the case of the mine tailings because it holds the potential to generate a substantial argument for their memorialization by revealing multiple social, cultural and political issues that they engender, outside of their age value alone, such as their environmental implications, and their role in shaping the apartheid city. These are emotive and qualitative associations and phenomena that purely quantitative assessment misses.

I also argue that visual representation and literature makes a site more accessible and better understood for its humanist value, as opposed to being purely quantitative and factual. The culture-producers give a voice to stakeholders other than government and private companies. The Government strategies studied in the first chapter, provide reason for removing the mine tailings. These are development potential of the ground and latent mineral extraction, and aid in environmental remediation. As I’ve shown, these decisions don’t consider the
collective social and cultural history the mine tailings represent. It is these subverted narratives that the artists and writers reveal. The potential of artists and writers in expanding the discourse on relevant history is echoed by James Baldwin who wrote, “Society must accept some things as real; but the artist must always know that visible reality hides a deeper one, and that all our action and achievement rest on things unseen. A society must assume that it is stable, but the artist must know, and he must let us know, that there is nothing stable under heaven.”

These representations also serve to prove the fundamentality of the mine tailings in the identity of Jo’burgers the city. Not only are they laden with associations but they are also a fundamental part of the city’s aesthetics and iconography. Their representations over the past 120 years are testament to this. This mining landscape bears the mark, and is the mark of Johannesburg’s history, embedded in the psyche and identity of those who live there. In Aesthetics of Landscape, Steven Bourassa describes how and why the icons of a place need to be protected “Culture is defined by persisting symbols, some of which are in the landscape. Once a landscape acquires meaning for a cultural group, that group will seek to perpetuate that symbolic landscape as a means of self-preservation.”

In choosing to engage with the mine tailings, Johannesburg’s culture-makers reinforce their identity as of the city. The works of culture-makers that engage the history and morphology of Johannesburg invariably come to engage the mine tailings. Perhaps these works and their

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producers use the identity of the mine tailings to reinforce their own identity and place in Johannesburg.

In continuing to develop this methodology and assessment of Johannesburg’s mine tailings I would continue to find and research an even more diverse group of artists specifically. Although the culture-makers in the art/visual category are lauded and well-known, the pool could use greater diversity in terms of race and gender representation. The writers on the other hand are a better sample of diversity. As it stands, this methodology is based on critical mass and I believe it can be further strengthened by adding more voices that respond to these works and texts. That said, I do believe the critical mass of representation has value as it spans generations and reveals the most significant narratives the mine tailings embody.

This methodology is useful whenever cultural and historic contexts need to be determined. It could be particularly useful to sites where the heritage is negative and contested, and diverse narratives need to be incorporated into decision-making and future planning. This methodology and what it reveals can guide processes of appropriate commemoration and memorialization. Because of the toxicity of the tailings and the racial and spatial inequality they represent, their presence needs to be memorialized without being glorified or fetishized. The thematic narratives that the methodology reveals can guide this process, as well as provide creative solutions to what this memorialization might entail.
As the mine tailing stand, their toxicity prevents preservation in-situ, and with the future projections of the sites, re-development is inevitable. The removal of the tailings is currently proposed as liberation from a negative past and not as loss of cultural heritage, but as I’ve shown the tailings embody a rich collective history that should not be overlooked. The over-arching narratives derived from the methodology provide a check-list or guide for what memorialization should address. These narratives were environment and nature, racial relations and spatial inequality, appropriation, and experience of the contemporary city. With these in mind, I briefly have programmatic/zoning and design/development suggestions for these sites.

In the 10 years post-tailing removal, while the top soil is too expensive to remediate, and the site needs to remain vacant, the site should feature an exhibit at its peripheries, perhaps on a fence bounding the site, of photographs, artworks and oral histories gathered from those who used to use/live and work on and around the site. This would provide documentation and recording of the multivalent significance of individual mine tailings.

In the future development of the site, because of their large scale, the foot prints of the tailings need to be preserved. Given the large scale in-roads within the footprints may have to be made. These should be treated differently from regular streets so as to be read differently. This can be done through road and sidewalk surfaces, as well as street furniture and signage.

Zoning and programming should be mixed-use excluding residential. This maintains the sites’ nature as places of production originally and later recreational and spiritual. The sites
should provide a percentage of area to publicly accessible green space. This should be a combination of street level and elevated park-like spaces, potentially on roof tops of buildings. This would provide the ‘nature’ the mine tailings currently offer, as well as the panoramic views of the city. Size of individual plots need to maintain a maximum foot print to create a dense diversity of use and development of the site. The building on the sites need to incrementally increase in height towards the center of the site to maintain the sloping forms of the mine tailings. Buildings on the periphery need to maintain height of surrounding context.

This thesis has provided me with the opportunity to research and marry my interests in Johannesburg’s sublime mining landscape with art, literature and historic preservation. It has brought me closer to understanding how I, as an aspiring culture-producer, might begin to practice. Like the culture-producers studied in this thesis, I too am propagating the place of the tailings in Johannesburg’s identity and collective history and consciousness. I also believe this additional method of assessing cultural significance that I propose, namely looking at the work of artists and writers, holds the potential for future development and application. The findings this methodology reveals can act as the foundation for appropriate and creative solutions to preservation, and further expand the discourse on the meaning of sites and how their qualitative aspects can be captured, understood and communicated.

Johannesburg’s gold mine tailings are so rich in collective memory and experience that to see them vanish with no recourse would be a loss to the identity of the city and its people.
Johannesburg’s art and literature of the tailings are therefore critical in revealing their significance in time and aiding preservation in the future.
Appendix 1

National Heritage Resources Act [No. 25 of 1999], Department of Arts and Culture

Department of Arts and Culture, National Heritage Resources Act [No. 25 of 1999], (Cape Town: Republic of South Africa, Government Gazette, 1999),

Section 3(3)

(3) Without limiting the generality of subsections (1) and (2), a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of—

(a) its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa’s history;
(b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa’s natural or cultural heritage;
(c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa’s natural or cultural heritage;
(d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of South Africa’s natural or cultural places or objects;
(e) its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
(f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
(g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
(h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; and
(i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.

Section 5(7)

(7) The identification, assessment and management of the heritage resources of South Africa must—

(a) take account of all relevant cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems;
(b) take account of material or cultural heritage value and involve the least possible alteration or loss of it;
(c) promote the use and enjoyment of and access to heritage resources, in a way consistent with their cultural significance and conservation needs;
(d) contribute to social and economic development;
(e) safeguard the options of present and future generations; and
(f) be fully researched, documented and recorded.
Appendix 2

South African Heritage Resources Agency - Heritage Site Nomination Form

https://www.sahra.org.za/download-attachment/3839
Type of Resource:
- Place
- Structure
- Archaeological Site
- Palaeontological Site
- Geological Feature
- Grave

Do moveable objects relating to the site form part of the Nomination?
Serial nomination (is more than one site being nominated as part of a Joint Nomination?)

Sphere of Significance:
- High
- Med
- Low

What other similar sites may be compared to the site? How does the site compare to these sites?

Owner:
[If name-owned, responsible department and official position of contact]

Postal Address:

Telephone: .................. Fax: .................. Cell: ..................
E-Mail: .................. Web Page: ..................
Contact Person: (if different, name, address, phone, supply contact details)

Type of Significance:

1. Historical Value
   a. It is important in the community, or pattern of history
      i. Importance in the evolution of cultural landscapes and settlement patterns
      ii. Importance in exhibiting density, richness or diversity of cultural features illustrating the human occupation and evolution of the nation, Province, region or locality.
      iii. Importance for association with events, developments or cultural phases that have had a significant role in the human occupation and evolution of the nation, Province, region or community.
      iv. Importance as an example for technical, creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement in a particular period
   b. It has strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in history
      i. Importance for close associations with individuals, groups or organisations whose life, works or activities have been significant within the history of the nation, Province, region or community.
   c. It has significance relating to the history of slavery
      i. Importance for a direct link to the history of slavery in South Africa.

2. Aesthetic Value
   a. It is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group
      i. Importance to a community for aesthetic characteristics held in high values or otherwise valued by the community.
      ii. Importance for its creative, design or artistic excellence, innovation or achievement.
      iii. Importance for its contribution to the aesthetic values of the setting demonstrated by a landmark quality or having impact on important vistas or otherwise contributing to the identified aesthetic qualities of the cultural environment or the natural landscape within which it is located.
      iv. In the case of an historic precinct, importance for the aesthetic character created by the individual components which collectively form a significant streetscape, townscape or cultural environment.
3. Scientific Value
   a. It has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of natural or cultural heritage
      i. Importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of natural or cultural history by virtue if its use as a research site, teaching site, type locality, reference or benchmark site.
      ii. Importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of the origin of the universe or of the development of the earth.
      iii. Importance for information contributing to a wider understanding of the origin of life, the development of plant or animal species, or the biological or cultural development of hominid or human species.
      iv. Importance for its potential to yield information contributing to a wider understanding of the history of human occupation of the nation, Province, region or locality.
   b. It is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
      i. Importance for its technical innovation or achievement.

4. Social Value
   a. It has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.
      i. Importance as a place highly valued by a community or cultural group for reasons of social, cultural, religious, spiritual, symbolic, aesthetic or educational associations.
      ii. Importance in contributing to a community’s sense of place.

5. Rarity:
   a. It possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of natural or cultural heritage
      i. Importance for rare, endangered or uncommon structures.
      ii. Landscapes or phenomena.
      iii. Importance in demonstrating a distinctive way of life, custom, process, land-use, function or design no longer practiced in, or in danger of being lost from, or of exceptional interest to the nation, Province, region or locality.

6. Representativity:
   a. It is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of natural or cultural places or objects
      i. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a range of landscapes or environments, the attributes of which identify it as being characteristic of its class.
      ii. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of human activities (including way of life, philosophy, custom, process, land use, function, design or technique) in the environment of the nation, Province, region or locality.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Please supply those marked (*) with this nomination form, as well as any others that are already available. Those marked (**) will be requested when the proposal first goes to SAHRA Council for endorsement (Tentative List of National Heritage Sites). Those marked (***) will be required when the Nomination goes to the following Council Meeting for approval as a National Heritage Site. All information submitted to SAHRA will remain with SAHRA.

☐ * Expanded statement of significance; (Refer specifically to significance criteria listed below)
☐ * Motivation for declaration as a National Heritage Site, including potential heritage values, threats and vulnerabilities;
☐ * Short history of the place;
☐ * Physical description of the heritage resource;
☐ * Locality plan (map) and Site Plan;
☐ * Photographs and plan;
☐ ** List of movable objects relating to site that are proposed as part of nomination, or for archaeological or palaeontological site if in repositories where these are housed;
☐ ** Bibliography of documentation relating to the heritage resource
☐ ** Statement of current protection and restrictions (e.g. previous national monument, register of immovable property, conservation area, current zoning, subdivision);
☐ ** List any heritage organizations consulted and their comments as the proposed nomination.
☐ *** Site plan (with proposed site boundaries);
☐ *** Conservation or management plans (send immediately if any exist);
☐ *** Heritage Agreement (if required).
**Appendix 3**

**Cultural Heritage Survey Guidelines and Assessment tools for Protected Areas in South Africa - Form B**


4.2 Assessment of Significance Form B:
(This form should be used for the preliminary assessment.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value 1</th>
<th>Does this place represent or indicate a historical event or occurrence and does it contribute to our understanding of the history of the local or provincial or national interest.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value 2</td>
<td>Do you think this place is rare or unique in anyway? And how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 3</td>
<td>Are there any cultural or social events which take place here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 4</td>
<td>Does this place represent or give information which could be of scientific importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 5</td>
<td>Does this place have any aesthetic appeal to the local or national stakeholders and communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 6</td>
<td>Are there any architectural elements which could be of importance at local or provincial national level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 7</td>
<td>Does this place have any a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 8</td>
<td>Does this place represent or exhibit some technological ensemble or event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 9</td>
<td>Is this place associated with the local communities or important individuals in our history?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value 10</td>
<td>Any other value you might thing of?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NHRA recognises the following Cultural Significance
1. Aesthetic
2. Architectural
3. Historical
4. Scientific
5. Social
6. Spiritual
7. Linguistic
8. Technological
Cultural Heritage Survey Guidelines and Assessment tools for Protected Areas in South Africa - Form D2

5.9.4 Recording Cultural Landscapes Form D2:

Records of cultural landscapes should only be prepared by a professional landscape architect and/or an experienced archaeologist/anthropologist.

In addition to the minimum requirements specified on core data heritage items involving significant cultural landscapes may require specialised recording techniques.

Cultural landscapes are those parts of the land which have been significantly modified by human activity. The World Heritage List officially recognises cultural landscapes as places of both natural and cultural value. Sites such as Mapungubwe and Richtersveld are listed as cultural landscapes. Many Protected Areas were occupied by people before being protected thus they contain cultural landscapes of heritage significance. Cultural landscapes are areas rather than individual places. They include rural landscapes villages and mining sites, suburbs or urban centres. The recording of cultural landscapes should focus on the relationships between the patterns of human use, the natural environment and cultural beliefs and attitudes. Where such landscapes have been relatively free of recent development it is worthy of recording prior to being altered by major new developments which would obliterate earlier evidence of human use. Recording should involve an examination of the following characteristics to help "read" the landscape in a systematic manner:

a. processes - spatial pattern, land uses, response to natural features and cultural traditions;
b. components - circulation, boundaries, vegetation, structural types, cluster arrangements, archaeological types, small-scale elements;
c. Perceptual qualities - views and aesthetics.

ADDITIONAL RECORDING TECHNIQUES FOR CULTURAL LANDSCAPE:
• aerial photography or satellite imagery (as appropriate);
• topographical mapping showing contours, vegetation, boundaries and circulation patterns;
• identification and recording of significant vegetation and landscape features (by a professional landscape historian);
Drawings for Projection – Films by William Kentridge

- Johannesburg 2nd greatest city after Paris -
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjdnmkMSBU
- Monument - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGfZvXT99Ak
- Sobriety, obesity & growing old - https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xp1gxd
- Felix in Exile - https://vimeo.com/66485044
- History of the main complaint - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oWt89CPOpc
- Stereoscope -
  http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/andydancer/clips/stereoscope/view
- Tide Table - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZeQbOPUw9Y
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