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The politics of visibility in a mined landscape: the image as interface

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INTRODUCTION

> Post-industrial landscape scars are marks of sorrow and betrayal, of the abuse of power and latent hazards. At the same time, they bear tales of communities and dreams, of achievements and resistance. In short, the scars in the landscape, caused by industrial activity, constitute the flipside to the history of our modern society – integrated by necessity, yet not acknowledged accordingly (Storm 2014: 1).

How does an image of a mined landscape bear tales of our modern society and at the same time contribute to a re-framing of the Landscape genre in contemporary art?

The Mined Landscape

Recently a number of conversations that focus attention on mining activities and humankind's often injudicious exploitation of natural resources have permeated the public domain.

Still current in collective memory are the events of August 2012 at Marikana which shocked South Africans. Keith Breckenridge reflects that "the events seemed in so many ways to be a surreal flashback to a repudiated past" (2014: 151). He continues that during the commissioned inquiries after the massacre it became clear that Marikana was symptomatic of "the preservation of deeply formed structures of politics within the mining industry" (ibid.). Contingent to those vestiges of a difficult and painful past are current broader economic ramifications for national and global development with their related dynamics of social implications and labour relations.

Daily news reports highlight contentions within the mining sector.

Protracted strikes in the platinum industry; abandoned workers at the centre of the Aurora/Pamodzi scandal; inter-rivalry and deaths amongst illegal miners ("Zama-zamas"); calls for nationalisation of mines – all of these processes contribute to a

growing concern that the mining industry in South Africa needs to undergo a paradigm shift.

Furthermore, of national concern has been the crisis in the supply of energy (Eskom), leading to debates about alternative forms of energy generation. The urgency of the situation has sparked interest in shale gas exploration, also known as hydraulic fracturing or fracking, in the Karoo. Recently on the agenda among interest groups in government and the multi-corporation Royal Dutch Shell, is the unexploited potential of hydraulic fracturing for natural gas offered to alleviate the country's desperate need for an alternative energy source. In addition there is the belief that fracking will ameliorate much needed social and economic development for that region (see Endnote 1).

Nevertheless, adamantly opposed to fracking are Karoo farmers and environmental activists who vehemently warn of the disastrous effect fracking could have on underground water resources. The 2012 award-winning documentary film, "*Unearthed: The Fracking Facade*" by independent South African director, Jolynn Minnaar challenges the assertion that hydraulic fracturing is a safe technology. Elsewhere, allied to mineral resources and water usage, and presenting an impending crisis, is the rising level of contaminated water around gold mines on the Witwatersrand as a result of acid mine drainage (AMD).

All these emerging issues and their related ramifications demand an urgency of address to the increasing complexities surrounding mining. And it is within the context of address that art production also participates or interrogates. All human beings benefit in some way or another from the extraction of earth's resources and are therefore directly and indirectly implicated in mining practices. It is worthwhile to heed Malcolm Andrews when he states in a discussion of the landscape genre in art:

> It is difficult to escape the feeling that we are all 'insiders' now, alarmingly aware of the finiteness of the natural resources we used to take for granted as Nature's endless bounty (1999: 22).

His comment is indicative of the inter-connective perspectives permeating our contemporary notions of landscape and which overwrite a seemingly restrictive, traditional single-point commanding view.

The interdependency between humans and the natural world is succinctly and somewhat humorously presented by British design student, Thomas Thwaites in his project *How I built a toaster – from scratch* (2010). In order to produce the necessary components for the construction of his toaster, he sought to obtain them from their original sources, an endeavour that took him to various mines involved in the extraction of the specific raw materials required for his component parts. He ably demonstrates how human and technological interconnectivity is intrinsic to the production of things and is rooted in a corresponding reliance on extraction and refinement of mineral resources (Thwaites 2010). Undoubtedly, the 20th and 21st centuries have been characterized by an overwhelming demand for commodities, demands that predicate mining's participation in the extraction of raw materials, which is linked to the circulation of these materials within a wider exchange process thus obscuring their material origins.

Whereas the physical landscape is literally implicated in that exchange process, pictorial landscape imagery can be generally understood as a metaphor for the social, economic, environmental and political intricacies of human interactions with the land: circuits of power that have inextricably shaped the mined landscape. I have elected to focus on representation of a mined landscape for two reasons. Primarily it exemplifies landscape's metaphoric capacity as memory-holder for social histories, power relations and national identity, which, in the context of South African colonial history, holds relevance. Simon Schama observes that

> though environmental history offers some of the most original and challenging history now being written, it inevitably tells the same dismal tale: of land taken, exploited, exhausted; of traditional cultures said to have lived in a relation of sacred reverence with the soil displaced by the reckless individualist, the capitalist aggressor (1996: 13).

Secondly, and more importantly from an art history perspective, contemporary landscape representations signal a shift in the way landscape is being perceived and conceived, and in so doing, contributes to heightened conversations about the continued exploitation of earth's resources. No longer entirely viewed from an art history, literary or philosophical viewpoint, according to anthropologist, Luig, and historian, Von Oppen (1997: 8), cross-disciplinary contributions can take account of landscape through the lens of other fields such as social geography, anthropology, and ecology. The

representation of a mined landscape arguably demonstrates that shift, both visually and ontologically, where the spatial unit refers pointedly to the asymmetries of power deeply imbricated in the land. Rod Giblett critically argues that in the past, landscape in painting and photography focused on the external surface of land, representing land ownership and property rights. In the process of making visible and re-naming landed property, the truth about the underlying pathology of land has been obscured. The causes of that pathology have been "the unsustainable and exploitative relations between labourers and the land" as well as "the internal processes operating in the depths of the land" (2012: 54), sedimentations most appropriate to a mined landscape. Therefore, intrinsic to the discussion of the contemporary shift in landscape representation are "ways of seeing" natural environments as an expression of the harmony or tensions that exist between human agents/viewers and nature (Luig & Von Oppen 1997: 15). Complicit in the very concept of landscape are contentions of ownership, control, and exploitation that embroil not only the natural environment but societies within those spatial ecosystems, ensuring that land matters, far from neutral, are *de facto* encoded subjects.

Landscape with a capital "L"

Landscape has been described by Giblett as a composed aesthetic category of human visual perception, which in fact alienates the viewer from nature (2012: 55). Within the discipline of art history, Landscape refers specifically to the category or genre in art production dedicated to landscape representation. The capitalized form of Landscape as a genre – different from lower-case landscape as a subject or material – is a distinction I have borrowed from Michael Godby, who adds that "[a]s a genre, Landscape is possibly more encoded and pregnant with meaning and power than any other" (2010: 9). Traditionally, categorisations such as genre, historical periods and regional production have been a part of art history methodology as a way of facilitating the framing of an inquiry. Recent approaches to art history have adopted a more fluid interconnective process to inquiry and pertinent to this study are the writings of Jacques Rancière, who advocates an approach to analysis that is dependent on "an on-going and open-ended process of intersubjective renegotiation" (Davis 2013: 161). I have, notwithstanding, retained the delineating configuration of Landscape because it

mediates a discussion of mined areas as visual entities, and at the same time, as proposed by writers W.J.T. Mitchell (2002) and Malcolm Andrews (1999), petitions a deeper consideration of land beyond the notion of dedicated subject matter.

The incorporation of industrial memories into cultural productions has been hesitant, as noted by Storm, because an industrial past is "often of a mundane character, consisting of complicated, large-scale polluted, or otherwise devastated landscapes" (2014: 11), best left unseen. An industrial landscape, and more specifically a mined one, is often a repudiated landscape. It is considered damaged land that disrupts a picturesque landscape aesthetic. These are sites that have been physically modified by large-scale mechanization and human intervention, and which have become so naturalised and integrated into contemporary usage of land that, by and large, they go unnoticed, consigned to the banal and everyday, or to a toxic status, which, at best undergoes rehabilitation, or at worst, is simply abandoned. While recent artistic engagements with such sites reveal the mined landscape to be a rich subject of creative investigation among other critical dimensions, these artistic investigations can also be seen to participate in a wider movement that re-directs focus and stimulates conversations about human relations, past, present and future, with the environment. And perhaps contingent to this discussion is the realisation that representations of industrialised landscapes, including mined areas, could be considered a contemporary sub-genre within the broader parameters of Landscape, thereby signalling an aestheticizing of a landscape previously rejected in aesthetic terms, and re-writing that landscape through a politics of aesthetics.

Understandably, land is the most monumental casualty of any mining intervention. As Giblett comments, "mining is one of the most visible industrial activities from the air" (2012: 51). Even a cursory examination of artworks that take the industrial landscape, and specifically the mined landscape, as subject matter can be viewed in international photographic essays such as *Landscape of Oil* by Edward Burtynsky (2009), *Industrial Scars* by Henry Fair (Markonish 2008) and *Black Maps* by David Maisel (2013). These works collectively emphasize the physical impact on the environment, combining documentary photography with artistic process that abstract the subject, imbuing the landscape with qualities of the sublime. Local bodies of work on the other hand, are often characterised by a more social, human-scale focus that can be noticed in David Goldblatt's *On the Mines* (1973), Santu Mofokeng's *Poisoned Landscapes* (Diserens

2011), Ilan Godfrey's *Legacy of the Mine* (2013), the *Social Landscape* project at the Market Photo Workshop (2012), and, as the origin of the case study for this report, Jason Larkin's *Tales from the City of Gold* (2013).

However the subject of mining and industry has not been confined to interrogation through photography, even when the focus extends beyond environmental impact to include social and political concerns. The subject matter has been visually presented in other artistic media and is perhaps most famously exemplified in works by William Kentridge, notably his animated film *Mine* (1991) and recent series of drawings, *East Rand Proprietary Mines Cash Book* (2013) (fig.19b).

Mining as a practice, despite its vast environmental and social impact, tends to be visually and phenomenologically spectral for a number of reasons. Most mining activities are located underground, while the more visible practices are situated peripherally around cities, or rurally as in the case of South Africa's coal fields. In general, a mined landscape manifests huge impact both above, but even more significantly, below ground, rendering the major thrust of intervention literally out of sight, but nevertheless present. Because operations occur underground or in restricted zones, much of that activity goes unseen. Additionally operations take place at such a vast scale that an individual person's apprehension of mining is extended outside of normal experience.

Consequently, any artistic engagement with and interrogation of the subject is an attempt to bring the impact of mining into the realm of visibility in the first instance, and, beyond this, to unravel complex life conditions directly or indirectly associated with mining. Going some way to alleviate the visual liminality of mining operations are heavily illustrated publications such as *Modern Mining* (produced monthly since 2005) and the respected magazine *Optima*, produced by the mining company Anglo American since 1951 and which seeks to investigate and comment on broader socio-economic issues challenging the mining industry. Notably David Goldblatt was often commissioned by *Optima* for photographic contributions, and this gave him access to restricted areas, laying the foundation for his own photographic essay *On the Mines* (1973).

While mining alters landscape through excavation and residue placement, it is artists who map out and reflect on those modified landscapes by making them conceptually

navigable, as well as locating them in a deeper-time perspective. Examples of lesser-known local visual artists navigating mining themes in a wide range of materials are, to name a few, Neville Petersen (2014, straight photography), Dillon Marsh (2014, digitally manipulated photography), Linda Ballen (2012, paper making and print), Jeanette Unite (2008, drawing and painting using mineral oxides, ochres and foils), Phillemon Hlungwani (2013, black and white charcoal drawings), Stephanie Schoeman (2014, installation using stones) and Louise Kritzinger (2012, installations in moulded polymers). (figs 3-8)

In order to further this inquiry, I have selected as case study a single photographic image by contemporary British photographer, Jason Larkin, titled *Re-mining Dump 20,* 2012, (fig.1). Included as one of the images in Larkin's photographic essay, *Tales from the City of Gold* (2013), it participates in a visual exploration of Johannesburg's mine dumps that, by means of imagery multi-layered in nature, sets out to create links that viewers might be unaware of as a way of contributing to the bigger conversation about mining (Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013).

Being both a Landscape and photographic image, my selection of *Re-Mining Dump 20* for case study was determined by the following factors. As stated, my objective is to investigate a mined landscape as a contemporary representation of Landscape, and Larkin's image clearly fits within the Landscape tradition. *Re-mining Dump 20* conforms to several landscape pictorial conventions in terms of structure and visual language, and serves as reminder that photographic images are constructed in much the same way as other two-dimensional artforms. His photographic image satisfies this enquiry because it projects continuity with tradition yet simultaneously establishes a trajectory in keeping with contemporary sensibilities through the medium of photography. Its contemporariness is not only confined to subject matter, but is explored in terms of aesthetics: a conflation of aesthetics in the traditional sense, (and which to some extent problematizes such subject matter as I will point out further along), with a politics of aesthetics as espoused by Jacques Rancière, that positions the image beyond its visual content and material surface. In an exploration that goes beyond the image's immediate surface I present the notion of interface, choosing to work with this particular image because I knew beforehand I could access (with permission) the actual site at which Larkin photographed this image. An exploration of the site and its surrounds made possible an expanded response to the image. It heightened my understanding of the

irreversible scale of land intervention depicted in *Re-mining Dump 20* and the extent to which machinery mediates that intervention. The magnitude of land disruption and modification that mining operations entail is what Larkin has tried to capture in this particular image, a recurring theme which characterises so many representations of mined landscapes. Not only did I gain insight into the spatial ramifications of mining operations, but also the temporal explications that accompany such spatial re-alignments. As such this image can be understood as a synecdoche for mined landscapes, illustrating quite clearly the land pathology that permeates such sites. While a photograph may reference the physical world outside the camera view-finder and thought to possess an authenticity or truth to the subject, and which Solomon-Godeau (1991) and Wells (1997) expose as a constructed fallacy, the photographic image holds in tension that which is made visible and that which remains unseen but is nonetheless present: an intersection of denotations and connotations that are more deeply examined through a close reading of the image.

One of the examiners of this research report saw my choice of a single image as strongly theoretically driven, placing emphasis on theory rather than on argument or substance (Godby Pers. Comm. 2015). For the first part of this text this is largely true, however, my close analysis of this image (in Part 2), and my creative response to it in the form of a visual essay I have called *Mining Stories* (Appendix: XXXII-XXXV), has lead me through this theoretical exploration to return to and experience in a more phenomenological mode the actual landscape that is the subject of Larkin's photograph, and to "visually read the space of the re-mined mine dump" (Bester Pers. Comm. 2015).

Structure Outline and Thematic Outline

By way of conducting my investigation, I introduce the case study (*Re-Mining Dump 20* by Jason Larkin), followed by a two-part discussion; one that seeks to situate the representation of a mined landscape in a theoretical art historical framework, focusing on the ideological and thus political conditions that underpin that visual representation, and the other that proposes, by means of a dedicated close reading of the case study, the notion of the image as an interface.

In mapping out the theoretical and art historical terrain of this investigation in Part 1, I draw extensively on Jacques Rancière, as mentioned above, as well as Landscape theorists W.J.T. Mitchell (2002) and Malcolm Andrews (1999), while relying on Liz Wells (1997) for photographic history and Abigail Solomon-Godeau (1991) for photographic theory.

Central to matters political are power relations, and with no exception, the politics of visibility too are subject to a circuit of privileged relations that are implicated in modes of production and the reception of images. Throughout the process of making and looking at art there is a relational determining of what is seen and left unseen, who has access to the looking and by what means that way of looking is facilitated. Rancière defines these relational correspondences as a distribution of the sensible which are embedded in conditions of legitimacy. The culturally determined understanding that accompanies such seeing is linked to communal concurrence that disseminates at multiple levels resident within and outside the image. Communal agreements are what contemporary artforms set out to challenge and Jacques Rancière develops a politics of aesthetics that is predicated by the distribution of the sensible (2004: 12), as will be discussed in greater detail further below.

As previously mentioned, Larkin's image has continuity with the pictorial genre of Landscape, but landscape studies have also historically constituted a major body of work amongst photographers since the inception of the camera. While it may be argued that photography is a medium of representation that retains singular distinguishing qualities, it has also substantially contributed to the formation or further development of particular genres. Thus Landscape and photography share a symbiotic relationship within contemporary art production and perhaps the exposure of industrial landscapes and the ensuing politics of visibility surrounding those landscapes have been most profoundly shaped by the medium of photography. Because of the potential for indefinite duplication, the photographic image exerts a power for making visible its subject to a wide and varied audience, demonstrating what Rancière calls the democratisation of art.

Thus, Part 1 maps out the theoretical and art historical terrain of this investigation, informing the investigative model in Part 2 where I apply these ideas to the case study, and expand on the idea of the image as interface.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word ‘interface’ is defined as:

> A surface lying between two portions of matter or space, and forming their common boundary, or, a means or place of interaction between two systems, organizations, etc.; a meeting-point or common ground between two parties, systems, or disciplines; also, interaction, liaison, dialogue (2015).

As a surface of separation or common boundary between phases, an interface can also be understood as the porous boundary between diametric positions, allowing for expanded notions such as a point of entry or portal between different entities; an area of slippage that facilitates access between seemingly disparate fields; or a layering that enables a ‘peeling back’ or penetration of the spaces alongside the interface. To borrow a mining analogy, thinking in terms of the interface can be likened to ‘working at the coalface’; that is a site of sedimentation, excavation, and interactive intersection. In practice, therefore, a reading of an image as an interface would facilitate a penetrative exploration of the meta-narrative embodied by that image to either side of its surface, and within this bridging.

By taking this approach as a method of engagement with the selected image, I aim to demonstrate how a politics of visibility operates within the image through culturally constructed hierarchies and aesthetics. While all images have a visual physicality or presence, it is often that which is non-visible, left out, immaterial and unspoken that insinuates a presence, generating a series of tensions that co-exist within the image. What often hovers unseen in an image are the connections and cross-sections of time and space, and, as in the case of *Re-mining Dump 20*, the interstices are also interdisciplinary, connecting geography, archaeology and mining with ideology, social commentary, economics and environmental concerns. These peripheral narratives link Larkin’s photograph to a wider context that invokes numerous voices, and into which I insert my own supplementary photographic essay that, through a process of repeat photography, returns to the site of Larkin’s photograph and re-documents the same view and its surrounds (Appendix: XVI).

In the final analysis, the overarching consideration asks how representations of industrialised landscapes like *Re-Mining Dump 20*, contribute to a deeper understanding of land and land-related issues. As monuments to modern-day commercial imperatives and participants in cultural production, stretches of land that have been purposely

ravaged for purposes of economic profit in the mercantile exchange of supply and demand have had certain qualities ascribed to them by a number of writers. Anna Storm claims such sites possess an aesthetic of "sacrificed zones" (2014: 4), while Joshua Schuster describes them as the "manufactured or post-human landscape" (2013), and T.R. Kover speaks of them in terms of "industrial sublime" or "postmodern sublime" (2014).

However, it has been speculated that representations of industrial sites undermine their own potential for environmental activism because they often possess an innate sublime aesthetic that is visually appealing, even seductive. And especially in photographic representations where the conventions of the sublime can frame nature "in favour of awe and anxiety over detail and activism", Schuster wonders about the agency of such an overall aesthetic experience that modulates any potential activist intent (2013:193). But as Larkin remarked about his own work, "people who aren't interested in environmental issues still find the image beautiful and respond to it", suggesting that agency does perhaps reside in the aesthetic quality of an image to draw a viewer who would not necessarily be interested in the topic, and thereby opening the subject to a wider audience (Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013). Images of altered earth display an aesthetic specific to their subject and one which refuses overt protest but rather makes use of sublimity as a catalyst for conscious awakening, urging audiences to take note in an age of heightened crisis.

Case Study: a Formal Introduction

Jason Larkin is, according to his online biography, "internationally recognised for his long-term social documentary projects, environmental portraiture and landscape reportage" (jasonlarkin.co.uk: 2014a). Larkin has an immersive, somewhat ethnographic approach to his subject matter, researching, engaging and interacting with his subject, allowing "for comprehensive bodies of work that reveal and frame important social, economic and political issues. His work is subtle and layered while often concerned with contextualising present realities through historical legacies" (ibid.).

A photographic essay, supplemented by text, is Larkin's preferred mode of presentation. Thus, the image *Re-mining Dump 20* is part of a larger body of work, *Tales from the City*

of Gold (figs 2a-2f), produced, exhibited and published in 2013 and dedicated to Johannesburg, the city of gold and its mining legacy. Another example of Larkin's work is *Cairo Divided*, 2011, a series about the rapid urbanization of Cairo, another African metropolis, and its transformation into a megacity characterized by an upsurge in walled, secure estates clustered around the city's peripherals and inhabited by Cairo's wealthier classes. This is not dissimilar to Johannesburg where rapid development and divisions caused by disproportionate wealth have driven the emergence of high-end walled estates on the city's outskirts. Whereas Cairo is surrounded by desert sand, Johannesburg has its own sandy swathes in the form of mine dumps, a legacy of its mining background and the origins of its social and spatial divisions and which offer a wealth of visual interpretations.

Larkin seeks to interrogate particular issues through his camera lens, making them visible to both local and international audiences. Even though he is of British nationality, Larkin is a global traveller, conforming to a modus operandi among many contemporary artists who immerse themselves in a foreign residency for a concentrated period of intensive creativity. It may be argued that Larkin's outsider status to the South African milieu impedes his appreciation and cognition of the full extent of the historical, social and economic factors impacting the legacy of mining in South Africa. But I would suggest that his status gives him a necessary objectivity unclouded by an often overwhelming emotional baggage that characterizes the South African condition. Free of such constraints and the minimal textual interpretation accompanying his images enables the images to be viewed as both stand-alone images and images that share continuity through the visual essay format as a means of engaging the viewer in conversation. Larkin's temporary immersion in his subject gives him sufficient distance to maintain an empathetic identification with his subject and simultaneously places him as artist in the position of a kind of interface, thereby managing to hold in tension a balance between transience and residency that combines empathy with impartiality. As Hal Foster notes in his critique on the 'ethnographic turn' in art, an understanding of 'outsider' or 'other' in today's global world is perhaps misplaced as we live in a world of mixed border zones (1996: 178). The contemporary artist as ethnographer positions art between sites of geographic location, mapping, archiving and discourse, and the site of public domain in an expanded field of cultural relevance (ibid.: 184). Larkin allows his audience to navigate their own way through the subject matter he presents and this is

facilitated by means of various printed media and online access. In a politics of visibility the artist's own critical distance is essential, because as Foster points out, for contemporary art to be politically effective, it must avoid an over-identification with the subject as this compromises the subject's otherness, either unintentionally exacerbating alienation and victimization of the subject, or inadvertently making the artwork a vehicle of artistic self-promotion (ibid.:203). This position is also significant to Rancière who strongly advocates viewer autonomy, because any manipulation on the part of the artist and the artwork attempting to pre-determine a viewing response diminishes the artwork as art (Davis 2010: 158).

An opportunity for Larkin to visit Johannesburg came about in 2010 when South Africa hosted the Soccer World Cup. Known for his photographic exploration of subjects on the periphery of current affairs, Larkin was fascinated by the numerous mine dumps that demarcate Johannesburg's southern fringe. At first he anticipated the subject as being just another photographic landscape project, but soon realized the complexity and history embedded in the mine dumps. For him, there is much more to making photographs than "just a visual side"(Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013). Contingent to his camera lens, photography requires a physical and mental exploration of, and research into those spaces, exerting an attitude that requires immersion alongside the obvious transience of the traveller.

Johannesburg has a distinctive skyline, recognisable by its modern buildings, towers and of course iconic mine dumps, a series of artificially constructed hills. The skyline mirrors a cross-section of the excavated tunnels and hollow spaces underground that have given shape to the ground above. One can visually imagine the displacing of material underground as the formation of negative spaces that, when repositioned above ground, create new positive shapes. In their book *Not No Place* (2013), Bettina Malcomess and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt allude to Johannesburg as elusive and divided (2013: 12), and point out "Gauteng's duality as a place of the ground and underground" (ibid.: 218), a proposition that offers both literal and metaphorical understanding of Johannesburg, the city, as an artefact of mining. Larkin was struck by the somewhat "surreal appearance of the mine dumps – tall, bleached, white and yellow hillocks of crushed rock – … simply structured in a form alien to nature" (Rodriguez 2013: 87). Consequently all the photographic images in *Tales from the City of Gold* feature mine dumps either as the

central focal point or as backdrop to the many activities and communities that activate these minescapes.

When I engaged in a conversation with Larkin, he commented on a peculiarity of mining in South Africa in that millions of people actually live around mining operations, and their lives are directly affected by this physical proximity. This differs in North America where mining operations tend to be removed from human settlements (Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013), a feature that comes through in Burtynsky's photographs (figs 10a & 10b). In Larkin's South African images however, a social theme infuses the landscape, whether he includes smaller-scale human figures in the mine dump milieu or suggests traces of human presence such as the tyre tracks in *Re-Mining Dump 20.* Overall, social commentary in Larkin's work is more suggestive through an absence or marginality of human subjects than in, for example, works by Santu Mofokeng, David Goldblatt and Ilan Godfrey where the human figure tends to be more prominent. However, Larkin engages with the landscape as a metaphor for human interactions, combining the authoritative approach of documentation with artistic aesthetic choices such as viewpoints, lighting and composition to achieve a certain abstraction or distancing that invites closer inspection. He does not however, minimize indexical references to the same extent as Burtynsky, Maisel or Fair whose photographic exploration of mining sites in North America make extensive use of the long-distance or oblique aerial photograph as a means of further abstracting the subject (figs 9 -11). Nevertheless, a feature common to several of these images is the quality of the sublime, enhanced by the abstraction strategies, and which imbue the images with a certain sense of anxiety.

Notions of the sublime are generally associated with an aesthetic experience of nature that induces a sense of overwhelming power, even terror in the face of nature's enormity. Previously landscapes evoking feelings of the sublime relied on nature and wilderness to provoke those feelings but "now modern industry is equally capable of creating landscapes that induce a sense of awe" (Giblett & Tolonen 2012: 25). Whether through the experience of the monumental size of Johannesburg's mine dumps or the notion of a future increasingly threatened by their toxic waste succumbs to a sense of sublimity, mine dumps are representative of a tumultuous history and contain the seeds of an uncertain future. Having been defined over the past 100+ years by these monumental dumps, Johannesburg's landscape currently continues to undergo re-shaping through human intervention with the introduction of re-mining. Most of

Johannesburg's gold mines have closed, but the mine dumps contain residual gold, enough gold for re-extraction made possible by new technologies and which make recycling of the dumps economically viable. As a result, the mine dumps are being systematically excavated, re-processed and relocated far south of Johannesburg or in old workings – even more out of sight and mind (for the present at least).

Re-mining Dump 20 refers to a particular gold mine tailings dam located in the West Rand on the original Randfontein Estates Company formed by Joseph Robinson in 1886 (Davenport 2013: 161). Recorded as being the largest human-made dump in the world, Dump 20 is currently being recycled by the mining company, Sibanye Gold.

Larkin photographed the site from an elevated position that offered a long-distance panoramic view of the mining activities below. Occupying the near horizon line, the remains of the dump and an old spoil pile from the opencast pit outsize the accompanying excavations evident in the foreground, which is marked by the multiple tyre-tracks that map out a perspectival depth across the exposed sandy surface. The compositional layout follows the conventional landscape division into thirds, with the sky occupying the top third and a two-thirds ratio privileging the foreground and middle ground where all the action is centred. The hyper-activity of the dump-trucks registers through seemingly nervous residual markings, tracks which signify the removal of the once gigantic mine dump. From this distance the dump-trucks resemble miniature toys in a sand-pit, lending a somewhat playful and innocuous feel to the scene. Human presence is insinuated in the unseen truck-operators manning the trucks, which from close-up are enormous – the diameter of one tyre equalling the average height of a human being! The magnitude or scale of this operation cannot be fully apprehended in a photograph. However, the vastness of the scene is alluded to through the other mine dumps visible in the far distance as the hazy outline of Johannesburg on the outer horizon's edge beckons in the late afternoon light. The presence of these other mine dumps serves to deepen our appreciation of the labelling of this particular dump in the photograph's title as number 20. During my site visit, Surface Operations Manager, André du Plessis told me that Dump 20 came about by the merging, over time, of a number of smaller dumps adjacent to one another, and which were also identified by numeral ciphers (Du Plessis Pers. Comm. 2014). The cipher relegates the dump to one of many, an artefact, an objectification of a section of land represented on a map and

simply designated by a number. Larkin's image as part of a photographic essay is a visual intersection with that spatial and temporal history.

Together with the other photographs in the series*, Re-Mining Dump 20* participates in making visible a minescape that, although a distinctive part of Johannesburg's milieu, is unseen by most of the city's inhabitants except for those who work in its environs, or live on its peripheries. A new kind of visitor to these mine dumps takes the form of participants in industrial tourism, a recent project undertaken by activist Mariette Liefferink, CEO of the Federation for a Sustainable Environment (FSE). By giving viewers a phenomenological experience of the mine dumps and surrounds, her objective is to highlight the effects of acid mine drainage and other pollutant conditions contingent to mine tailings as part of a programme that appeals for responsible mining and sustainable land usage, especially where there are communities inhabiting those areas. As part of Larkin's immersion process, he made a point of consulting with Liefferink to ascertain her views and motivation for the passionate resistance the FSE puts up against mining practices which have contributed to current environmental crises. In recognising human dependency on mineral resources the FSE also upholds a concurrent urgency to hold mining companies and government to account for responsible mining practices. Similarly, as a form of protocol, Larkin also sought engagement with mining companies on whose properties he took many of the photographs in the series, seeking, not only permission and therefore legitimacy, but also their points of view. Most responded with indifference to his requests for access to sites, but, because the areas are so vast and often un-fenced, he without regard, indulged in a "certain cheekiness" by exploring the physical terrain "guerrilla-style" with his camera as passport (Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013). Thus from the outset, the politics of visibility infuse the visual-making process with an interplay between conditions of sanction and resistance to authority.

Describing how he photographed *Re-Mining Dump 20*, Larkin mentioned being particularly struck by the quality of light that bathed the scene below as he climbed over the dump from which he took his photograph. Indeed it is the infusion of light, given a metallic quality by the yellow dust hanging over the site, as it washed over the exposed surface, tyre tracks and trucks, which imbues the image with much of its aesthetic appeal. As noted by Giblett and Tolonen, the practice of landscape photography is more than just the physical realm of the subject being photographed. Indeed an equal

fascination exists for “the marvel of forms transformed by light, time and the camera lens” that collaborates with the photographer’s creativity and ability to “wrench from the technology, imagery that transcends the medium and elevates the landscape” (2012: 22).

Larkin’s creative ability lies in capturing within his images an unexpectedness and otherness: the ‘unexpected’ as an expression of the unanticipated or not consciously apprehended, and therefore not immediately visible, while ‘otherness’ lurks in the alien quality of the landscape. These are marginalised spaces in our midst, liminal yet familiar. Restricted access to these sites generally makes them unavailable to public viewing yet the photographs offer a form of proximity though reproduction, drawing attention to the sheer monumentality of the recycling project which has been taking place largely unnoticed and accompanied with certain indifference, exacerbated by its derivative nature. There are those however, who have voiced concern over the disappearing mine dumps. Some oppose their disappearance claiming them as part of Johannesburg’s modern heritage, while others see the re-cycling process as a form of land rehabilitation that reconnects the city with its pre-mined heritage. But ultimately the driving force behind the re-cycling project is about profit-based economics.

Although spectral at one level, Johannesburg’s mine dumps are also iconic. They constitute a hyper-visible aspect of the cityscape, reminders of the modifications that have taken place mainly underground. Yet the truth is that these dumps have become so naturalised into the city’s surrounds that they go unseen by the inhabitants, and the irony is their literal removal only confirms that invisibility. However, Larkin’s *Tales from the City of Gold* serves to relocate these landscape monuments and their attendant narratives back into public consciousness, performing a kind of symbolic ‘visual recycling’ of that which has been systematically overlooked. He achieves this primarily by luring the viewer with images that undoubtedly exude aesthetic appeal, avoiding any theatrical or dramatic confrontations (Rodriguez 2013:88). Yet simultaneously he introduces a destabilisation through a cognitive apprehension of what the subject matter entails, employing the ‘double effect’ formulated by Rancière (2004: 63). In each image one is struck by a documented sense of incredible ordinariness that, upon reflection, underpins a rich extraordinariness embedded in the images’ encoded dramas – an unfolding of histories past, present and future, speaking to a much deeper sense of time. *Re-mining Dump 20* particularly draws attention to Johannesburg’s shifting landscape

and contributes to archival documentation of a particular site. Since this image was photographed the site has continued to change, to the extent that the elevated ground from which Larkin took his photograph has also been partially excavated. Such a large-scale re-shaping of an entire landscape not only impacts spatially, temporally and socially, but also impedes attempts at accurate repeat photography of the site, as I have tried to show in my own photographic documentation of the location. The vacated space where the dump used to be, is now a site of change, inadvertently emerging as a kind of inverted monument that commemorates the tons of sand moved by thousands of workers over millions of man-hours, both past and present (and ongoing) to produce, by comparison, a miniscule quantity of gold worth trillions in currency. As alluded to above, another reason for selecting this image as case study is its contingency to a meta-narrative that positions art production in an inter-relational discourse with history, geography, industry, economics, politics and environmental issues.

Landscape, according to Barbara Bender, anthropologist and archaeologist, is experienced and "engaged with through human consciousness and active involvement" (2006: 303) and is indeed a space of inter-disciplinary border-crossing. She continues:

> Our theories of landscape should embrace ambiguity and contradiction, eschew closure, recognize that people, things, places are always in process, and that the boundaries between them are permeable and imbricated (ibid.: 310).

PART 1

THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

Central to Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime is recognition of rupture or disruption as the space in which contemporary art finds relevance. A destabilisation of traditional conventions establishes the scenario for ambiguity and permeability that Bender hints at above, facilitating the process of democratisation of art ascribed to by Rancière. The concept of democracy in politics is founded on a principle of equitable decision-making that finds expression in a distribution of power relations based on the will of the majority. When applied to art, democracy recognises the input of multiple players so that in the production of meaning an interface exists between production and reception where both producers and readers can resist institutionalised narratives.

I therefore proceed with a discussion of Rancière's politics of aesthetics with the objective of applying those concepts to the case study within the production of contemporary landscape imagery in Part 2.

Rancière and the Politics of Aesthetics

Rancière's writings were originally in French and are densely articulated, but thanks to translator, Gabriel Rockhill (2004) and critic, Oliver Davis (2010 & 2013), Rancière's theories have been made accessible to a wider audience. It is Davis's explication for which I am particularly grateful and to whom I make copious reference in my understanding of Rancière.

The relationship between aesthetics and politics is proposed by Rancière as "a distribution of the sensible" (2004: 12). An understanding of this term first necessitates a break-down of what Rancière means by the terms 'politics', 'aesthetics' and 'art'.

At foundation level, politics come into existence whenever a community is constituted. Community implies something shared or in common. Within a community are common modalities of sense – a common sense – or as Rancière puts it, a shared partition of the

sensible. However, communal structures also determine who it is that may partake in the shared world, while excluding those who are not given the opportunity to participate. Thus endemic to the political field are notions of hierarchies, equality and inequality, legitimacy and illegitimacy – a system of power relations. According to Rancière, politics is primarily about the positioning of community members beyond or beneath the socio-political order and when those who are *sans-part* (have no share) in what is common, contest or resist domination, they enter a process he calls subjectivation – a voicing of equality – which, if successful, instigates a reconfiguration of the order of domination (Davis 2013: 158). Aspects of domination and conditions of equality play out in the production of artforms, and Rancière elaborates on the equality/inequality binomial in his discussion on the regimes of art, introduced below.

Rancière's Distribution of the Sensible

A distribution of the sensible, or access to what is communally shared, can be described as a political experience which contentiously determines what is sensibly apprehended by whom. For Rancière, at the core of politics is an 'aesthetics', which, referring to Kantian aesthetics, he describes as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (2004: 13). To contextualise Rancière's support of Kantian aesthetics, Kant is known for his treatise on the philosophy of beauty and the sublime, and the connection between faculties of judgment as a common (communal) sense within political or moral arenas. In other words, Kant's system of aesthetics distinguishes the concept of beauty as something collectively and universally shared as a cognitive judgment, induced by a common sense of ordering or value that finds concurrence within a community.

Beauty as a cognitive judgment involves satisfaction that does not reference desire or passion but is considered purposive, meaning that it is not judged according to any purpose (Coplestone 1964). Davis elaborates on Rancière's adherence to Kantian aesthetics by noting that "for Rancière, Kant's insistence on the universality of aesthetic experience rooted in the 'free play' of the cognitive faculties cuts across social inequalities" (2010: 130). Rancière defends Kant's account of aesthetic judgment as an egalitarian universalism, which as an aesthetic experience "contains something resembling a 'promise', or 'anticipation', of equality". Further, inherent to Kant is the

"severing of the link between social status and the capacity for aesthetic experience" (ibid.: 133). Hence Rancière's aesthetic regime is founded on a political concept of democracy.

For Rancière, "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (ibid.) – simply put, a set of relational correspondences around the visible, the sayable, the thinkable and the do-able. Thus, in Rancière's terms, the sensible means that which is "capable of being apprehended by the senses" (ibid.: 85). Clearly the connection Rancière makes between politics and aesthetics involves a rethink in the way these realms are generally conceived. To simplify aesthetics (commonly associated with notions of beauty) as something that stimulates the senses is to underscore the shaping of those sensibilities. For Rancière, "beauty is a redundant notion" because there are no rules regulating why or whether objects are beautiful (Davis 2010: 136). Instead, reverting to Kant's assertion that the universality of aesthetic experience is fixed in the 'free play' of cognitive faculties, Rancière sees the aesthetic experience as refusing social hierarchies and therefore egalitarian in nature and politically democratic (ibid.: 132). Davis explains that the distribution of the sensible creates connections between:

> not politics in the ordinary (wide) sense with aesthetics in the ordinary (narrow) sense of art and discourse about it, but politics in his own very particular (narrow) sense with aesthetics in the more unusual (wide) sense of perception and the sensory (2013: 158).

Rancière's objective in taking this position is to engage, analyse and "bring order to the enduring confusion surrounding the concepts of art and aesthetic experience" (Davis 2010: 127). For indeed, art has undergone a crisis of identification in the recent past with many a response to contemporary art being the question: 'is it art?' Hence Rancière has devised a system of identification of art, which he terms a 'regime', defined as:

> a network of relationships which informs the way an object, act, process or practice is understood as art. The relationships specified by a regime of art are between practices, forms of visibility and modes of intelligibility (ibid.: 134).

These relational aspects within a regime of art can only excite an aesthetic experience, one which is universal and. as already noted, “contains something resembling a ‘promise’ or ‘anticipation’ of equality” (ibid.: 133) when the distribution of the sensible is democratically configured. For Rancière there is only one regime of art, namely the aesthetic regime of art that he truly considers aesthetic in terms of political democracy while asserting that other regimes of art are founded on systems of inequality (ibid.).

Rancière’s Regimes of Art

Restricting his analysis to western traditions, Rancière specifies three regimes or systems of art in the history of western art; namely the ‘ethical’ regime, followed by the ‘representative’ and ‘aesthetic’ regimes. However, these are not seen in terms of a teleological historicity, because “the regime of art is a concept both rooted in and uprooted from historical analysis” so that an anti-historicist approach is embedded in Rancière’s analytical framework even though the aesthetic regime has only evolved over the past two hundred years (ibid.: 138).

In Rancière’s first regime – ‘the ethical regime of images’ – art is not regarded as something singular or specific, but is viewed more as ‘the arts’ or modes of making and doing, and takes on an educational or communal function. Rancière describes this regime as “a matter of knowing in what way images’ mode of being affects the ethos; the mode of being individuals and communities”, a question that “prevents ‘art’ from individualizing itself as such” (2004: 20). Put another way, the underlying objective of this category of imagery is to express the shared inhabitance of the world and harnessing individuals to a common community, and is essentially didactic or ethical.

Moving on from the ethical regime is the ‘representative regime’ of art, characterized by the concept of mimesis. Rancière adamantly points out that mimesis in this context is not to be confused with the “law that brings the arts under the yoke of resemblance” or reproducing reality like a mirror-image. Instead, mimesis is a “regime of visibility” founded on a “hierarchy of political and social occupations” (2004: 22) in that it reflects underlying hierarchical structures predicated by notions of domination. He describes the representative regime as a “hierarchy of genres according to the dignity of their subject matter” and which is mirrored as the “hierarchical vision of the community” (ibid.).

Appreciated as “an apportionment of spaces” (ibid.:43), the representative regime brought about the separation of the fine arts from other modes of production and techniques, such as crafts, into an organization of high art and low art.

To illustrate Rancière’s concept of a regime of representation within the context of art-historical lineage, landscape as subject matter had little recognized status as a genre or category of painting until the 17th century in western traditions of art-making (Andrews 1999:28). Prior to that, painting had given major expression to themes of human importance such as religious, mythological or allegorical subjects. Only with the exploration of the world beyond European lands and the evolution of nation states from the 1600s onwards did landscape representation gain popularity, and imbricated in the poetic and topographical representations of land were hierarchies of governance and possession.

Operating on a principle of appropriateness “that adapts forms of expression and action to the subjects represented” (Rancière 2004: 91), landscape imagery in the representative regime co-opted visual conventions that codified social hierarchies and priorities. As such Landscape served as mimetic reflection that mediated an overriding ideology which predicated humankind’s allotted positions within the universe. Here, by way of example, I refer to the illustrated example by Nicolas Poussin (fig.12), who is virtually synonymous with Landscape in history of art discourse of the 17th century in Europe. His artistic mastery encrypted landscape with metaphorical conceits that expressed human dramas and emotions associated with the heroic or pastoral, popular literary themes at the time. Not only did this serve to establish his own artistic aura as the ‘genius artist’, it also elevated Landscape as a respected genre within the hierarchy of fine art production (Andrews 1999: 96). The intellectual content and symbolic capital required to read Poussin’s images obey “a series of axioms that define the arts’ proper forms” (Rancière 2004: 91), and which in practice, represent and privilege those who are able to partake in the community of sensibilities. Essentially the representative regime is a regime of inequalities imbricated in a class system, a system of hierarchies to which Landscape has contributed and helped sustain.

However, the domination of the representative regime in art production has been disrupted over the last two hundred years by what Rancière terms the aesthetic regime. The aesthetic regime of the arts did not begin with decisions to initiate an artistic rupture.

Rather, it began with decisions to reinterpret what makes art or what art makes (ibid.: 25).

Consequently, it can be said that the aesthetic regime is primarily a new regime for relating to the past in that "it devotes itself to the invention of new forms of life on the basis of an idea of what art was, an idea of what art would have been" (ibid.). Within this regime, art is released from rules and hierarchies of artforms, genres and subject matter, giving rise to a singularity and autonomy of art, simultaneously identifying it with "the forms that life uses to shape itself" (ibid.: 23).

The aesthetic regime of art takes as subject the elevation of the ordinary, and therefore:

> shifts the focus from great names and events to the life of the anonymous; [rather] it finds symptoms of an epoch, a society, or a civilization in the minute details of ordinary life; it explains the surface by subterranean layers; and it reconstructs worlds from their vestiges (ibid.: 33).

Hence the aesthetic regime of art as reaction to the representative regime constitutes an unsettling of the old order, which is not so much a rejection of the mimetic indexing of the visible world, but rather has more to do with the elevation of the ordinary, or the over-looked. In practice the elevation of the ordinary surrenders to a political re-alignment or redistribution of the sensible, "a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms" of an art that is ideally able to "transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations" (ibid.: 63). The intent for re-alignment so characteristic to the aesthetic regime suggests that political implications within artforms manifest simultaneously as politics of aesthetics – as a disruption of the relationship between the visible, the sayable and the thinkable (in Rancière's terms, the distribution of the sensible) – but also as the politics of artistic subject matter which seek to relay an awareness of certain conditions in the world, of the ordinarily not seen. Rancière describes the playoff between the political interfaces as a double effect which any suitable political art would employ as a strategy for effecting "the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused … by that which resists signification" (ibid.). To rephrase, political art becomes a space where meanings coincide and simultaneously disrupt "the pre-constituted political modes of framing" through a "system of heterologies" that are put into play (ibid.: 64). A process of doing and un-doing occurs that reconfigures the sensible fabric of perception.

For Rancière the aesthetic regime holds the promise of numerous possibilities and represents what he considers to be the only regime of art that is democratic, because any object possesses the potential for being an artwork and any activity can potentially generate artworks (Davis 2010: 136). Thus the political promise of equality is inherent to the aesthetic regime of art, not only in its production, but is also applicable to its reception. Emancipated viewership respects the "interpretative autonomy of the spectator" and inherent to the aesthetic regime of art is what Rancière calls the "cut or break which severs the intentions of the artist from the response of the spectator" (ibid.: 154). Thus political art or art as critique which attempts to direct a viewer's response along a particular line of thinking falls short, in Rancière's opinion, of art. In his view art that is political does not succeed under conditions of manipulation, rather it acts politically on its spectators through the acknowledgement of the spectator to dream or anticipate new forms of community, and, in so doing, opens new paths to political subjectivation. Therein lies art's efficacy rather than in some innate capacity to intervene politically, or function as some adjunct or epiphenomenon of the political (ibid.: 157-158). Instead Rancière's politics of aesthetics best interfaces with political art as involving "a multiplicity of small ruptures, of small shifts, that refuse the blackmail of radical subversion" (2007: 266).

Principles of equality implicate the contemporary artist in a circuit of production that positions the artist as the link of 'transformed sensation' between the solitude of his/her artwork and the spectator community:

> What the artist does is weave a new sensory fabric by tearing percepts and affects out of the perceptions and affections that constitute the fabric of ordinary experience. Weaving this new fabric means creating a form of common expression or a form of expression of the community, … [H]uman beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, I would say a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of the 'being together' (Rancière 2006: 3).

Hence under conditions of refusal to privilege any subject or community member, the aesthetic regime located in contemporary art production logically anticipates the inclusion of hitherto disregarded subjects such as industrialised humanscapes into mainstream present-day art production. The rejection of hierarchical representation in

favour of elevating the ordinary as a way of distributing the sensible, coupled with strategies of reconfiguring form and content, have over the past two hundred years contested the politics of art while, at the same time, directed art into politics.

Commanding a view of Landscape

An Overview

Long established as a specific genre in the history of Western Art, Landscape is by no means exclusive to western art traditions. Having undergone a number of shifts over time, landscape imagery has essentially signified the relationship between humans and the natural world, participating in social constructs with respect to that relationship. Perpetually in process, landscape representation has generated a number of sub-genres or aesthetic responses to land and the natural world, for example, pastoral, heroic, sublime and picturesque (Mitchell 2002:1). The division of sub-genres within the broader framework of Landscape serves to specialise the art historian's analysis of Landscape and connect the underlying principles that give it shape. However, it is not necessary to differentiate the characteristics of these sub-genres in the context of this report, except for the concept of sublimity which has relevance and which will be discussed in Part 2.

Historically these sub-genres correspond to developments in ideology and technology and Mitchell argues that shifts in landscape representation may also need to be considered within a framework of imperialism that promotes a particular national or class ideology, and which is not exclusive to Western art (ibid.: 9). Therefore instead of viewing Landscape as a dedicated genre of painting or photography, Mitchell describes Landscape as a cultural medium given to the formation of identity.

The development of Landscape only gained momentum after the Renaissance, as already mentioned. However, prior to the 16th century rare examples of landscape imagery sans any human figurative narrative did exist mainly in the form of ink drawings or watercolour sketches. Accomplished examples of landscape scenes pre-16th century can be viewed in the preserved and restored frescoes from the city of Pompeii, dating

back to ca. 20-30 BC (fig.13). The appearance of landscape painting during a period of ancient Rome's imperial domination of Europe, the Middle East and Mediterranean regions gives substance to Mitchell's proposal that there is a correspondence between landscape representation and imperialism. The inclusion of landscape scenery in murals adorning noblemen's villas at Pompeii suggests land was associated with ownership and dominion, an expression of Roman expansionism.

Already these early examples demonstrate the beginnings of pictorial conventions that evolved and naturalised in western art over the centuries towards a perfection of three-dimensional illusionism on a two-dimensional surface. These conventions are explicitly illustrated in the paintings of the 17th century painter mentioned above, Poussin (fig.12), who depicted landscape through a careful organization of compositional elements that helped formulate landscape representation over the following centuries, arguably feeding into conventions discernible in contemporary photographic practice. These pictorial devices include the use of dramatic lighting, the elevated commanding viewpoint, the tri-partite divisions of fore-, middle-, and background ratios to sky inserted along a privileged horizontal axis, a compositional structure still referred to as 'landscape format'. The technical accomplishments for achieving three-dimensional illusion in pictorial western art evolved, not only with the application of the perspectival vanishing point, but included composing with *coulisses* or side screes – a device taken from stage-craft. These are devices that lead the eye to the main points of focus usually located down the central picture plane in collaboration with effects of colour, tone and contrasts of light and dark. While these pictorial devices conventionalise landscape representation, they do however collectively contrive to direct a commanding gaze over the depicted scene, inculcating in the process a particular way of looking at landscape or overseeing landscape.

Conventions predicate 'a way of looking' at landscape that, as Andrews notes, implicate our sense of self in how we view landscape imagery and our response to it (1999: 8). Thus viewership is also integrated in a politics of the visible. The implication of self within an image is further explained by Andrews as the co-existence of *Argument* and *by-work* within an artwork (1999: 7). The Argument is the main subject, while by-work co-operates from the outside, touching the main subject. In an image of landscape, the main subject would be the scene depicted while the viewer would provide the by-work/ frame in which viewing takes place. For the construction of meaning in the Argument

there is a supplementary role of by-work (ibid.). Thus a landscape image undergoes constructions brought upon it by viewers who hold “culturally prefabricated mental templates” as reference points that can accommodate what is new to what is familiar (ibid.: 4), thus giving currency to how landscape is perpetuated.

To illustrate how the new is integrated by means of referencing the familiar, *Re-Mining Dump 20* conforms to many of the above-mentioned pictorial conventions, particularly the commanding view from an elevated position. The overseeing, downward-looking gaze in *Re-Mining Dump 20* presents the viewer with an overriding visuality, fully immersing him/her within the image that insinuates connections with an imperialist past. However, while familiar conventions are applied to the image’s composition, the subject matter is not familiar, subverting the gaze from one of command to rather one of uncertainty. As an example of contemporary Landscape imagery, this image consciously refuses notions of idealisation and instead an erstwhile natural landscape is presented as alien because of human intervention. Thus contemporary Landscape, no longer in service to an imperial ideology, has become a critique of those directives in the light of consumer exploitation of natural resources, heralding a significant shift in focus. Instead of reflecting an ideology, contemporary Landscape performs a reflexivity, that in accordance with Rancière’s ideas, is seen to refuse the idealisation inherent in a representative regime of art, but rather participates in an aesthetic regime of art that contests the given order of things.

Constructing Landscape

The word ‘landscape’ denotes both a physical place and a pictorial image of a place. Landscape, according to Andrews, has over the years been associated with “the real countryside or the pictured representation of it” (1999: 15). He echoes Mitchell’s observation that landscape is “a natural scene mediated by culture” (2002: 5) when he adds that “in recent years landscape has been understood less in terms of visible, concrete objects than as a kind of cultural instrument” (Andrews ibid.).

The word ‘landscape’ derives from the German ‘*landschaft*’ which was applied to a geographic area demarcated by political boundaries and which late in the 1400s came to denote the land surrounding a town (ibid.: 28). From the outset the word has referred to

a social construction over land rather than referencing the natural lay of the land. Luig and Von Oppen also note that the word came to include the native population of a region (1997: 9). Reduced to “politically active parts”, the territory and its inhabitants encapsulated in the term ‘landscape’ indicated an ‘increasing politicization of the term” (ibid.).

Tracing the development of the landscape image as a popular genre in its own right, Andrews draws attention to the division that occurred early on between the urban and rural space (1999: 151). The city came to signify a site of commercial economics, culture and civilization, whereas the countryside, while utopian or idyllic in many instances, also stood for the unknown, wild and uncultured, and artistic representation treated it as a peripheral backdrop onto which heroic subject matter bestowed a dignity (ibid.: 28).

Thus, as noted by Luig and Von Oppen, landscape was imagined as having an emphasis on nature: “Increasingly, nature was regarded as an entity of its own, detached from and in some sort of tension with the social world” (1997: 10). They also add that around the same time during the 16th and 17th centuries, the word ‘nature’ took on passive and active connotations, with ‘non-animated’ nature referring to landscape and ‘animated’ nature referring to humankind (ibid.). In an age of advancing post-Renaissance humanism, the geographic and attitudinal divide between the city and countryside underpinned a developing connotative relationship between ‘nature’ and ‘art’. Increased urbanization came to stand for civilization with its distinctive cultures and particular pressures that, when viewed comparatively, evoked the countryside as a space of solitude and spiritual rejuvenation, a pastoral quietude. Or conversely the countryside was associated with a terrain of wilderness in which either heroic deeds took place, or presented itself as a site of anticipated exoticism. So much so, that, by the 18th and 19th centuries, the term became equated with a natural environment that “looked like a painting” (ibid.:11), which is indicative of the hierarchical escalation of Landscape as a fine art genre and the idealisation to which art production had subjected nature. Thus nature, when depicted artistically evoked poetic concepts for contemplation, providing proliferate visual references to the heroic and divine literary themes of the day, themes that logically took on a mantle of idealisation. Dramatic narratives found parallel visual metaphors in presenting nature as a series of light and shadows, formed and formless, vistas and enclosures – revealing yet mysterious;

exposed yet sheltered – with horizon lines that met imposing skies. Of course illusionary image-making on a two- dimensional surface culminated in photography, which also makes use of these same pictorial devices. Even when viewed through the camera view-finder, the photographer/artist's decisions of how to present or frame the scene is influenced by an inculcated cultural shaping that naturalises a 'way of looking'. And this 'way of looking' at landscape became even further entangled with the development of nation states in Europe and the projection of national identity and its imbrication in political agendas. As Foster substantiates:

> Wherever history and mythology are used to construct a common past, landscape has the potential to stand for an imaginary shared space in which the great story of nationhood has unfolded, rendering it timeless and indisputable (2008: 17).

Geographic and scientific interests conjoined artistic and political discourses about landscape. Periods of colonialism and increased travel to non-European destinations produced an interest in places of otherness so that nature became synonymous with wilderness, remote from the world of human civilization and culture (Luig & Von Oppen 1997:12).

However, in a time of European enlightenment, notions of wilderness appeared unstructured, lacking visible order and rationality, a condition that could be brokered by science. An elevation of the supremacy of reason is allied to many grand narratives to which art production, over time, either gave validation or critique. A persistent narrative is the metaphorical conceit that binds nature to the feminine in a world shaped by the heterosexual contract. Here nature and the feminine are endowed with similar qualities. Often regarded as unfathomable, the nature/woman complex exerts power through the capacity for reproduction and sustainability. The relational positioning of nature and the female is an ancient one and finds expression in many cultures as a masculine imperative to penetrate, possess and control in both practice and symbolic representation. Redolent power relations embedded in the construction of landscape are said by Giblett to reveal landscape as a "capitalist masculine category that explorers, colonists, anthropologists and tourists have imposed on non-capitalist cultures and lands" (2012: 54). Thus artistic explorations of nature have been translated into metaphors expressive of deeply ideological and personal visions of the world that also

"trickled into political interpretations of landscape which aimed at the construction of collective identities" (Luig & Von Oppen 1997: 11).

Andrews furthers the argument that land, when brought under human control and organisation, is associated with cultural and national identities (1999:156), therefore, through a process of conceptualisation and aesthetic valuation, land – already encoded – becomes landscape, which becomes art (ibid.: 201). Thus, the historical evolution of Landscape mirrors the hierarchical structures to which Rancière's representative regime of art refers.

Activating Landscape

> Landscape … is mediated land, land that has been aesthetically processed. It is land that has arranged itself, or has been arranged by the artistic vision (Andrews 1999: 7).

Embedded in the word landscape is an inherent ambiguity, an ambiguity that blurs the distinction between the viewing of a place and the representation of a place, presenting itself as a double exposure. Mitchell expounds this ambiguity by noting that landscape is primarily a "physical and multisensory medium" experienced as an act of perception, be it of earth, sky, water, vegetation, light or dark. Attached to the phenomenological experience of landscape are encoded cultural meanings and values (2002:14). The relevance of whether these encodings are created by human intervention in the landscape through agriculture, industry or architecture, or whether they occur naturally is unimportant, because "landscape is already artifice in the moment of its beholding, long before it becomes the subject of pictorial representation" (ibid.). Landscape pre-exists any artistic representation as a representation in its own right in the form of socially agreed connotations before it is re-represented through art, poetry, literature or music. Therefore the function of landscape within cultural production has relied on conformity to a selection of objects/subjects that best symbolize and reinforce a particular discourse.

However, the idea that landscape participates as a medium of culture as Mitchell proposes implies that Landscape as genre ceases to be the mere aesthetic framing of a real or imagined space or place (that is, subject matter), but instead *frames* the subject (ibid.). The question Mitchell then asks is not what landscape *is* or *means*, but more

significantly, what it *does*. In other words "how it works as a cultural practice" (ibid.:1) determines its efficacy for reflection (mimesis) or reflexivity (critique). Art historians have traditionally sought to understand landscape painting in terms of a chronological narrative, a historical process that viewed landscape paintings as a progressive movement towards "a purification of the visual field" culminating in Abstract Expressionism (ibid.). A second approach has been to downplay technique and formal visuality "in favour of a semiotic and hermeneutic approach that treated landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes" (ibid.); an evolution of practice.

Nonetheless, an understanding of landscape goes beyond the prerogatives of art history. Landscape studies have also been developed by other disciplines such as social geography, archaeology and anthropology. Anthropologist Jon Mitchell observes that disciplines have previously adopted a structuring system that positions fields of study in terms of *process* and *practice*. He asserts that in addition to process and practice, *performance* has significance as an "unfolding rather than fixed" response to reality (2006: 384). Performativity upholds fluidity in an expression of everyday life, playing a role in transformation. Transformation in turn "involves an intersection/ interaction of the material and the conceptual" where the material object becomes a subject (ibid.: 398).

Thus, as Mitchell argues, landscape reframed as subject, either as environment or as a representation of environmental space, performs as "an instrument of cultural power" having the ability to either naturalize or transform social constructs (2002: 2). As a metaphor for social power relations, whether human versus non-human or human versus human caught up in the expression of identity, landscape like a text reflects back at us "what we are doing to our environment [and] what the environment in turn does to us" (ibid.). In seeking to understand the performativity of Landscape the idea of an interface broadens an understanding of the genre, given too what Charles Harrison has to say about the effectiveness of landscape as a scheme of interconnectivities:

> To inquire adequately into the power of landscape painting [imagery], we will need to explore and to re-examine critically the kinds of metaphors for which the genre has historically furnished occasions and to which it has given rise – among them metaphors of integration and dislocation, of presence and absence. That is, we will need to take special account both of the forms of self-consciousness

> with which the concepts of nature and of vision have inescapably been invested and of the ways in which that self-consciousness has itself been topicalized…. What may be of sharpest critical interest about the legacy of the genre of landscape … lies not in the intentional forms of picturing by which it has been defined. It lies rather in the precedents that the genre provides for a continued engagement, in the context of the visible, with that which is contingently excluded from the possibility of being seen and represented (2002: 231-232).

The Value in Landscape

A 'contingently excluded' component to landscape implies a world hidden from plain sight – a world that invites inspection and interrogation.

Andrews points out that during the process of land becoming landscape and landscape becoming art (1999:18), an essential hierarchical arrangement occurred that posited landscape firmly within a political arena. Many historians have made connections between the conceptual evolution of landscape and early capitalism (ibid.:20), contending that "Landscape arises increasingly as land acquires capital value, [and] becomes itself a form of capital…" (ibid.: 21). From this observation one can infer that the exchange value of land as a commodity in western thinking produces a singular response – the western gaze – a political aesthetic that prejudices the eye of the beholder, unseen, beyond the picture frame, and one which implicates the self as having a view, or control over land.

Constantly persistent in landscape representation is the commanding view. The all-encompassing gaze, the high vantage point, the wide-angled panorama places landscape under human domination and control. The unquestioned 'commanding view' has perpetuated into photographic representation of landscape, making extensive use of the high camera angle, as well as aerial photography and, which, as Clive Scott notes, casts the viewer as overseer, resulting in a physical and psychological distancing of consciousness (1999: 43) thus effacing culpability, but which inevitably establishes landscape as a site of exchange value and othering.

The naturalisation of pictorial organization around the commanding view cannot be refuted. Solomon-Godeau confirms photography's contribution to that naturalisation

process in western consciousness. Camera optics correspond to Renaissance vanishing-point perspective, producing a "static, uniform field", which has both technical and conceptual consequences. Arguably an ideological construction, the commanding view in practice, is facilitated by the camera view-finder by means of framing (*cadrage*), lining up and focal distance so that the "world offers itself up as an object endowed with meaning" (1991:181). The viewer, replacing the photographer, is conferred the "visual mastery" of an all-seeing-eye and becomes the commanding locus of the pictorial field, endorsing any encrypted perceptions of land and nature.

Towards a Contemporary Landscape

Nature vs Humankind

This investigation is concerned with the representation of a particular type of landscape, namely the mined landscape. Falling into a broader category of industrialised landscape, such representations are increasingly finding their way into contemporary art production as already noted. Relentless urbanisation with concomitant consumerism on a global scale has impacted hugely on natural landscape, giving way to topography that has been reshaped by humanity. It follows then that conditions of industrialisation and urbanisation have not escaped artistic attention and that these 'humanscapes' should become topics of conversation through cultural productions. We can track the creative engagement with land modified by humans through processes of urbanization and industrialization through a range of artists, exhibitions and media. Although I do not elaborate a traditional chronological art historical treatment of this trajectory here, I weave a number of key moments and examples together thematically to frame the context in which Larkin's photograph can be understood.

An exhibition dedicated to the visual exploration of the industrialised earth was *Badlands: New Horizons in Landscape* held at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in 2008. According to curator Denise Markonish, art, in giving a voice to these concerns, "presents a cinemascope or larger than life vision of the world around us, presenting vistas complete with beauty and impending doom" (2008: 18). Her words aptly describe the embedded tension within these contemporary landscape

representations and the crisis the viewer experiences when confronted by images such as the photographs by Henry Fair exhibited in *Badlands* (figs 9a & 9b). Whereas landscape representation has generally been associated with notions of idealised scenic beauty, subscribing to an aesthetic that may be primal or culturally conditioned, these aerial photographs, both of mining operations, offer at first glance a visually exhilarating abstraction and literal distancing which exonerates the implicated self usually embedded in the commanding gaze. Yet, a prolonged gaze prompts a realisation of the destruction being visually recorded, inducing an unexpected shock that incites acknowledgement of complicity, effectively re-inserting the self within the image's frame.

This reaction illustrates the notion of disruption that Rancière refers to within contemporary cultural forms where the aesthetic experience "opens a rift with ordinary forms of experience" (Davis 2010: 128). Thus, taking Fair's photographs as example, the aesthetic experience registers a dissonance between the subject matter and the way in which it is presented. Although visually seductive, these images belie their own content. The rift therefore occurs between form and content, or what Rancière describes as the dismantling of the correlation between subject matter and the mode of representation (2004: 32).

Seen as a strategy to relay content or effectively mediate concerns for environmental degradation, the notion of rift is further illustrated by the film *Koyaanisqatsi – Life out of Balance* (1983). Scenes of overwhelming human presence in this film pertinently evoke the impending crisis being precipitated by the large-scale impact humans are having on the environment . Produced by Godfrey Reggio and re-released in 2009, the film relies entirely on imagery, accompanied by a musical score composed by Phillip Glass, and is devoid of any voice-over or textual narrative. The definition of *Koyaanisqatsi,* a Hopi word meaning 'life in turmoil' or a state of life that calls for another way of living, provides the only textual reference to the film's content. Compounded by the absence of words which reinforce a sublime indeterminacy, the imagery enhances the advocacy and prophetic intention of the film.

In the same vein, Ann Wolfe, while curating the Nevada Museum of Art's photographic exhibition *The Altered Landscape* in 2011, observed that the marks or trails left by humans on the earth's surface "offer an irrefutable record of some of human civilization's most impressive endeavours – as well as its worst failures" (2011: 135).

Thus the emergence of a body of artworks (and not only photographs) that focus on industrially altered landscapes participate in the discourse of environmental impact studies, but like all preceding landscape sub-genres, also act as metaphors of power relations, social identities and embedded cultural ideology that contribute to a definition of history. And, while it appears to me that the underlying commentary permeating current Landscape imagery may still often be one of human awe when confronted by natural landscape, a shift suggests a swing from humankind versus nature, as in past traditions, to one of nature versus humankind. The feeling of awe people experience in the face of nature has seemingly dissipated over time with technological advancement, and appears in the process, to have been replaced with an awe of human ability to manipulate nature. South Africa, although not as industrialised as the United States or Europe, has not escaped this conversation and recent local exhibitions which have explored the dialogue between environment and industrialisation include the 2012 *Land and Cityscape Collection* exhibit in Cape Town's Iziko South Africa Museum and the *Social Landscape* project at the Market Photo Workshop, also in 2012.

The South African landscape

Michael Godby recounts that, although the Cape Colony was settled by Europeans in the 17th century, during the early years of the colony's development there was very little tradition of painting. Landscape, usually treated as topographical mapping, appeared in paintings from the middle 1800s onwards. He makes the distinction that local paintings of this period reinforced a colonial version of Cape history (2010: 61). Contingent to the colonial vision was a geographic and cultural distancing that helped increase the popularity of South African landscapes locally. Typically these paintings depicted concerns specific to the territory, namely the "exploration, exploitation and domestication of the land" and which, even in those early years, evoked a patriotic affiliation with South Africa as an evolving political entity (ibid.). Similar to other parts of the world, South African landscape imagery participated in a cultural construction of national identity.

Godby recognizes three themes that have emerged in the development of South African Landscape: namely themes of *Interface*, *Interventions* and *Interrogations* (ibid.: 62). He explores the beginnings of a South African Landscape in terms of an interface or dialogue between the early settlers and their confrontation with an alien, unknowable

wilderness and its inhabitants (ibid.: 62). Architect Jennifer Beningfield also remarks that Landscape in South Africa transformed land into one in which "nature was not seen as sweet and benign, but as something to be improved by the actions of the settlers", thereby conferring the right of occupation on European settlers (2006: 84).

Following a period of interface, Godby identifies a proliferation of landscape representations that record human interventions in the South African interior. Motifs of roads, railways, agriculture, fencing and of course mining operations appear in paintings towards the end of the 19th century and well in the 20th century (2010: 62). More recently, industrial interventions in the land have been visually represented in images that "portray nature as simply powerless before human ambition" where contemporary users' approach to land is to "follow nature where convenient but … simply destroy it whenever it stands in their way" (2011: 103).

However, appositional to representations of interface and intervention within the context of South African history and landscape construction, are what Godby refers to as landscapes of contestation. Whereas landscapes of interface and intervention are seen primarily through the eyes of European settlers, areas of contestation represent the spaces of conflict, conquest and dispossession where art gives "form to the residues of violence" perpetrated against the land and indigenous inhabitants (ibid.). Pertinent, but not unique to South Africa, one is reminded by Mitchell that

> The appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather, it must be the focus of a historical, political, and aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye (2002: 29).

Therefore as both a landscape of intervention and contestation, a mined landscape is a mixed gaze of capitalist ownership and national pride reflected in a taming of the land by means of violent dispossession.

The historicity of violence that subjects land to possession and dispossession is more elegiacally explored by Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (1995). As place-holders for human memory, myths and cultural cosmologies, landscape features often become steeped with symbolic significance and cultural identification for the communities that inhabit that land.

Schama's argument centres on the notion that ancient lore and legends may appear to have originated and belonged to bygone cultures, but are in fact still prevalent and pertinent in modern communities, having undergone adaptations in relation to modern consciousness. Under modern consciousness natural landscapes that have been transformed into 'manscapes' often retain references to bygone cosmologies which need to be recovered as "the entire landscape tradition is the product of shared culture" (1995: 12-14). A shared culture requires extrapolations back into the deep past and projections into the future.

Following Schama's logic, and in the light of South Africa's past colonial relationship to Britain, one can then trace symbolic connections through great rivers and waterways, such as the Thames, as lines of imperial power which "carry the freight of history" (1995:5). In the case of Britain, access to waterways facilitated unsurpassed domination of the oceans and the resultant colonisation of many parts of the world. Similarly, Schama traces expressions of imperial power through the Roman Empire as one constructed with stone and law (ibid.: 15). Roman roads traversed continents, and expedited an imposition of Roman law on those conquered territories. Naturally connections can be drawn between the historical political evolutions of both ancient Rome and England, which have a period of shared history. Not surprisingly then, the continued tracings of their intertwined imperial dominance have through time and geography transposed themselves onto other landscapes elsewhere in the world such as South Africa. How apt that the 'Witwatersrand' – ridge of white waters – by no means a waterway but rather a continental watershed, should instead index one of the largest underground gold-bearing reefs in the world, a metaphorical river of imperial power. How ironic that modifications wrought by mining should turn the 'streams of gold' into corrosive seepage in the form of acid mine drainage.

As a former British colony, South Africa's national identity is founded on an agricultural and mining legacy. Early 20th century images of mined landscapes can be seen in the same context as the pastoral farmstead scenes so popular to the South African Landscape tradition. Set amidst great vistas of expansive land, suggestive of potential riches and mystery these landscapes follow Schama's logic that they "can be self-consciously designed to express the virtues of a particular or social community" (1995: 15). The repeated idealised, celebrated and prized attitude to land is also seen in paintings with mining as subject by South African artists, Frans Oerder, Gwele

Goodman, J.H. Pierneef (figs17a & 17b) and Maud Sumner (fig.18). Yet the politics made visible in these images edifies grand narratives of institutional enterprise. Foster elaborates on the relationship between landscape representation and national identity that "begins as a way of seeing and talking about a given territory or landscape" and which "often ends as a reconstruction of it" (2008: 47). He notes further that such reconstruction

> encompasses both the imaginative and the physical, as an emergent imaginary geography is given concrete expression by settlement, building, agriculture, infrastructural development, and eventually preservation (ibid.).

Naturally preservation finds concrete form in monuments and art production, and as David Bunn notes, renders landscape a political tool through a "system of aesthetic, conventional, and ideological ordering" that is "exported from metropolitan Britain to the imperial periphery" (2002: 127). And the imperial imperative is expressed through a form of colonial picturesque that David Bunn observes as (invisibly) depending on the control of labour (2002: 153).

Gold, with its associated access to wealth, power and status and dependency on abundant labour turned South Africa into an African economic powerhouse founded literally on rock and draconian laws designed to rule and exploit. Today Johannesburg is defined by its mining background while postcolonial and postmodern ruptures have interrupted the colonial gaze.

It is in this history and locale that Larkin's *Re-Mining Dump 20* is situated, taking its place in the South African Landscape. Contemporary South African landscape representation engages in an interrogation of the fraught issues around land and its history (Godby 2010: 63) and *Re-Mining Dump 20* participates in that objective. Instead of locating landscape as a backdrop into which prevailing social ideologies are inserted, artists nowadays position landscape as locale definitively shaped by human interactions. Thus we see in William Kentridge's drawings and film, landscapes that are contextualized by labour. His animated film *Mine* (1991) makes stark connections between what happens above and below ground, contrasting the unseen toil of labourers underground with the quotidian activities of his created protagonist character, Soho Eckstein, a wealthy randlord. Similarly Kentridge's repeated process of drawing onto old mine ledger book pages compounds the metaphor of wealth meticulously

recorded and symbolised in the mountainous mounds of earth or mine dumps scattered on the Johannesburg landscape (figs 19a and 19b).

In the repeated imagery of mine dumps, a paradoxical beauty intersects with emerging notions of environmental alienation, as seen in Alan Crump's sumptuous watercolours of the subject (fig. 20) while the unseen, imagined world that lies underground is brought to life by Clive van den Berg (fig. 21). The environmental and social residuals of mining become the principal themes underlying a number of interpretations in both contemporary two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks, and while painting, drawing and print-making have long served a tradition of situating the mined landscape within pictorial expression, it is photography that has emerged as the dominant medium in critical landscape representation. Giblett notes, "Landscape photography is one of the major ways in which modern technologically savvy people relate to the land and the land is mediated to us" (2012: 227). The role played by landscape photography in tourism, conservation of pristine environments and cultural perceptions has fuelled wilderness mythologies and stereotypical images of pastoral countryside that have sustained ideologies and national identities [in South Africa and elsewhere] (ibid.).

Documenting Landscape through the photographic lens: a disputed truth

Nature has often been reified as something separate and different that provides humans with a space of contemplation or reflection. Mitchell points out the fallacy endemic to this construction. Separation from nature is a "symptom of alienation from the land", and reflection on nature is the "imaginary projection of moods into landscape" and can be construed as the "dreamwork of ideology" (2002: 7). The reality is a dark political side to landscape:

> The "rise and development" of landscape is read as a symptom of the rise and development of capitalism; the "harmony" sought in landscape is read as a compensation for and screening off of the actual violence perpetrated there (ibid.).

Thus Landscape gave cultural expression to an impaired idealism conferred on nature, images which ironically obfuscated reality through a systematic technical development of realism in painting. Mitchell notes that Landscape is often seen in terms of being "fixed": fixed genres presented in a fixed media such as paintings or photographs, where the landscape is a fixed object offered for contemplation. Instead of objectification, landscape according to Mitchell, should be seen as "as a medium of exchange" circulating in the formation of identities (2002: 2), and as a medium it therefore evokes a "vast network of cultural codes" (ibid.:13). With the introduction of photographic imagery, a supposedly superior, impartial and more reliable realism meant painting was "'released' … from its responsibility for literal depiction allowing it to become more experimental" (Wells 1997: 206). Photography instead became the preferred medium for representing the 'real world'.

Traditionally heralded as a form of documentation, all photographs signified a celebration of the machine, elevating mechanics as the means to record and pin down the changing world of appearance. Thus the power of the camera has afforded photography accreditation with being the most "important form of representation" in the modern era (Price & Wells 1997: 26). The lens of the camera as the prosthetic eye (Giblett 2012: 41) invites an experience of having been there, taking the viewer to places only previously imaginable, from multiple viewpoints both familiar and unfamiliar, and implying an aura of authenticity. Notions of authenticity, according to Scott, are further implicated in photography's function to supplant seeing (1999: 20). The photograph serves to validate experience because it gives shape to experience "as an instrument of mental 'tourism' with the camera colonizing reality" (ibid.).

Solomon-Godeau observes that straight photography, where there is no manipulation of the negative and usually associated with documentary and photojournalism, honours the camera's "transcriptive capacities" acclaiming "modernism's truth to materials" (1991: xxviii). As a system of representation, photography is rooted and bound to subject matter, and documentary photography is understood to engage in a kind of social investigation without making any authoritative statements. Documentary practice, noted by Wells, aspired to have a relationship to real life, a revelatory practice imparting an impartial 'true' picture of the world. Its claim to authenticity was founded on "an unmediated transcription of reality" (1997: 64).

Having disputed the forensic testimony attributed to photography as artifice, Solomon-Godeau pertinently remarks on photography's qualification as art:

> for photography to be art at all, it needs to be redolent of the artist's unique and exceptional subjectivity, his individual and idiosyncratic vision (1991: xxviii).

Thus the nature of documentary photography, ostensibly articulated around notions of truth and fact, actually, according to Solomon-Godeau exists along a fault line (ibid.: xxix). More so, inherent bias is not confined to subject matter or the photographer's subjective decision-making, but also implicates the viewer's point of view. The spectator looks through "complex acts of projection, voyeurism, investiture, fantasy and desire that inform our looking", consequently causing us to abandon the idea that the "documentary camera presents us with visual facts simply 'out there' (ibid.: 182).

Historically documentary practice was initially used in the service of re-affirming dominant, (presented as factual) ideologies, but a shift occurred with the work of Jacob Riis in 1887 that initiated a "reformist or ameliorative intent" (ibid.: 173). However, even within a context of activist agency or enlightenment, Solomon-Godeau alerts us to the fact that documentary photography is always contingent with the particular historical frame that it is busy exposing. Documentary projects are themselves shaped by the historical circumstances that inspire their documentary agenda in the first place and additionally, the documentary photograph is "spoken" within language and culture which, as a system of representation, "mask its subject and our relations to it in preordained ways" (ibid.: 182). Therefore, "the indivisibility of cultural discourse from its historical and political wellsprings … serves as reminder that there is no neutral ground" as far as photography is concerned (ibid.: xxi).

Furthermore, the blurring of objectivity and photography's contribution to cultural constructs can also be attributed to photography being the progeny of the modern age, a time of critical engagement. Noted by Price and Wells, the advent of photography has been a "major carrier and shaper of modernism", resulting in a dislocation of time and space, as well as having undermined 'the structure of conventional narrative" (1997: 26). Photography dislocates temporal logic. As Scott also points out, a photograph does not relate to the present in which it is taken but rather to some future in which the photograph will be viewed (1999: 20). Time from a human perspective is inextricably linked to a physical, spatial world that is experienced in the present, and time is also

intrinsic to both the aesthetic and mechanical processes in photographic technique (shutter speed, exposure and focal length). While a photograph may capture a particular moment in time, that moment is projected into all future viewings and as Scott maintains, photography reduced to its essence is about time rather than a subject (ibid.: 23). In fact the photographic event collapses time and space onto a fixed surface in the form of a photographic print or screen (Giblett 2012: 31).

Notwithstanding the importance of photography as a technical medium and its aesthetic properties, the focus here is the participation of photography in the development of landscape constructs.

A Temporal Exposure of Landscape

Historically, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when photography emerged as more than just a technological innovation, photographing landscapes served as documentation for travel, a penchant enjoyed by well-off Europeans. These images reflected similar motivation as paintings where landscape photographs either followed topographical reportage or attempted to instil some pre-conceived notion of poetic or critical importance (Wells 1997: 237). Yet Wells reminds the reader that even in a photograph, distinguishable by its indexical reference to subject matter, there is a re-inflection of "current cultural currencies" (ibid.: 238) and the historical development of modern landscape photography has been particularly influenced by American photographers from the late 19th century onwards.

With the opening up of the American interior by the railroad, photographers such as Carleton Watkins, Timothy O'Sullivan (fig. 22) and later Ansel Adams were commissioned by government to survey the vast open spaces. Topographical in their initial intent, an aesthetic approach to documenting these landscapes evolved. Giblett relates how the *Wilderness* photographs by Ansel Adams in particular exalted nature and contributed to a sense of awe at the expansiveness of the American interior. His images of vertiginous mountains and uninhabited regions employed an aesthetic of the sublime that stirred the imagination, linking spectacular untamed nature with a sense of wonder at the vastness of America's interior. The great American dream incorporated

the vast unexplored regions as frontiers with innate potential for the building of a great people and nation. Landscape photography consequently took on an explorative pioneering role that coincided with the extensive 20th century urban development programs across the United States (2012: 69-73). Not only did such images reinforce national identity, they were embraced as art, influencing an entire generation of landscape photographers (ibid.:155).

Up until the 1960s, Schuster notes, the dominant visual perspective of nature in the history of photography focussed on "the idea of conservation, as both good ecology and nostalgia for a vanishing frontier and an untouched wilderness" (2013:207). Thereafter an aesthetic shift evolved. The rendition of the Modernist landscape included human-made elements like fencing, signboards, railways, etc. in formal terms of "shape and tonal gradings" (Wells 1997: 238). And with an increasing proliferation of photographic images, landscape imagery took on board the critical import of "particular ideas of class, gender, race and heritage in relation to property rights, accumulation and control" with a number of photographers becoming actively engaged in questioning these issues (ibid.:239).

In 1975 the seminal exhibition *New Topographics* signalled a turning-point in how landscape would became photographically represented (figs 15 & 16). The imagery presented by participating photographers refused the previously preferred idealised images of natural landscape and focused instead on landscapes dominated by human intervention. Stylistically too, the evocations of sublime awe were repudiated in favour of a gaze detached from emotion. Topography is associated with scientific practice, subscribing to objectivity and neutrality, and the irony is that, aware of the artifice inherent to photography, these photographers employed a topographical matter-of-factness in the service of style rather than truth (Tolonen 2012: 158). The daily familiar sights of humanised landscape, a topographical update on the modern American settlement program that mushroomed across the continent, came across in their images as alien, heralding a return to the frontier that harked back to the early topographers of the American wilderness (ibid.). The *New Topographics* "focused on the landscapes that were a direct consequence of the successful implementation of the American dream" (ibid.:161). And in so doing the exhibitors inadvertently shifted landscape representation into a future, one where rampant progress signalled a muted, but

potential regression into wasteland as so potently portrayed in the much later exhibition *The Altered Landscape* of 2011.

Citing the importance of the *New Topographics* in her catalogue for *The Altered Landscape* exhibition, Ann Wolfe recalls the paradigm shift initiated by the *New Topographic* photographers. Working in the American West, this small group of photographers directed their image-making towards mundane, everyday landscapes in "an effort to depart from idealized notions of scenic beauty and the romantic sensibilities of modern nature photography" (2011: 135). They presented to viewers images of industrial sites, urban structures and suburban developments – scenes of quotidian, banal matter-of-fact realism that visually re-framed landscape. Together with technical developments made by members of the Düsseldorf School of Photography who pioneered techniques in large-format colour images, both groups were an inspiration to artists world-wide who "adopted their photographic strategies and visual vocabularies, to make images that revealed landscapes as suitable places for social and political inquiry" (ibid.). Arguably the documentary nature of photography is suited to recording these land interventions more factually than any other medium, and as W.J.T. Mitchell, also a contributor to *The Altered Landscape* catalogue, noted in his reference to the photographs on exhibition:

> They show something else besides documents and arguments, and that is what I can only describe as the aesthetics of sublime melancholy that cannot avoid celebrating, even as it criticizes, the gargantuan scars and inscriptions that the human species is carving into the planet (2011: 143).

Thus, if the intention of images of industrialised landscapes is to reveal and question human interactions with the environment, then, as Martha Rosler argues, the effectiveness of documentary lies more in the unsettling qualities of the images themselves rather than the arguments for social or environmental concerns that surround the images (2004: 177). In other words the visual imagery is the carrier of political weight, an autonomy already alluded to by Larkin in connection with his own work and the image's ability by means of its aesthetic quality to draw the viewer into conversation.

Photography: an instrument of democracy

Undoubtedly photography has established itself as an important medium of contemporary representation and communication. Not only have contemporary artists and photographers sought to disrupt prevailing hierarchies but the reception and conferring of meaning on art has shifted away from the artist-producer as Barthes so astutely pointed out in *Death of the Author* (1977) towards a more democratic responsiveness to art production.

Wells makes the point that postmodernism, having collapsed dominant narratives such as the twin concepts of artist aura together with originality and authenticity of art has been driven largely by the notion of simulacrum and "the endless production, reproduction and circulation of signs" (1997: 27), a property so intrinsic to how photographs are experienced. The ever-in-process making of meaning is a phenomenon to which photographic imagery has greatly contributed (ibid.) and consequently added to a democratisation of cultural productions. For the industrial age photography emerges as both a popular means and an important tool of communication concerned with the "construction of new kinds of knowledge … for which there is a demand amongst all social groups", thereby making photography " a democratic means of representation" (ibid.: 23). Photography refuses class, advocating a social equality in cultural participation and being steeped in the technological revolution so integral to modern experience, it also takes part in bringing about social transformation.

To sum up at this point, I have created an art historical platform that, largely theoretical in nature, has sought to extract the relationship of politics and visibility in landscape imagery. Landscape in general acts as a metaphor for prevailing power relations and has served to reinforce sustained ideologies of privilege in respect of land ownership and usage. In this sense the genre makes visible the politics surrounding its very construction through semiotic vocabulary and participates within Rancière's representative regime. Contemporary landscape imagery, on the other hand, seeks to destabilise those hierarchies of privilege and visuality through a politics of visibility that positions an image in a matrix of sensible distribution. This is activated on multiple levels and industrial landscape photographs in particular, are able to achieve this objective. As signs, they thematically question issues of land ownership and usage by visually presenting capitalist ideology and practice in an extreme form, namely

devastated, apocalyptical-type territories, a politics of the land made visible within the surface of the image.

However the distribution of the sensible with accompanying politics of visibility goes beyond the surface. Be it the surface of a painting or photographic print or even the projected image such as film, Rancière claims that the surface is not a boundary "isolating the purity of an art, but, rather, a place of slippage between various spaces" (2007: 266) or, more pertinently, a realisation of the "pictorial surface as a surface of shared writing" (2004:15).

Imagery as written text supplants the spoken word, which according to Rancière is directed at a specific audience and harnesses hierarchized social structures in its delivery. The spoken word evokes mimesis. The written word on the other hand is democratic because writing "is a form of language which makes no distinction between those to whom it 'should' and those to whom it 'should not' speak" (Davis 2010:108). Writing makes itself available for re-appropriation. It is, therefore, promiscuous, anarchic and indifferent to social hierarchy. Thus the shared written surface is an interface of who writes, reads and circulates writing (ibid.: 109), participating in a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible.

A photographic image is characterised by a certain illusiveness by virtue of its reproducibility and dissemination potential. It is here where an image exercises a different form of politics of visibility through a presence that participates in multiple social interactions. In a distribution of the sensible there is an overwritten political dispensation that determines whether communal practices take place under conditions of consensus (legality) or disagreement (illegality). Thus power relations are intrinsically in process in how an image is produced and received through the interactions of the senses at both individual and corporate levels of who makes visible, what is made visible, who reads, and the conditions under which perception takes place.

Andrea Brighenti succinctly states that:

> Visibility lies at the intersection of the two domains of aesthetics (relations of *perception*) and politics (relations of *power*) … [and] the medium between the two dimensions of aesthetics and politics is the *symbolic* (2007: 324).

The visual image functions as a symbolic sign, constituting a space of shared writing. The photographic image, because it of its multiplicity, assumes a diversity even more so that adapts to different situations which empowers its capacity for a space of shared writing and interface.

PART 2

THE IMAGE AS AN INTERFACE

Rancière describes the interface as the space of “newness” which links the artist to the revolutionary, signifying new forms of life (Rancière 2004:16).

In relation to *Re-Mining Dump 20*, there are a number of inter-related narratives that constitute an interface between the layered content of subject matter internal to the image and multiple viewerships external to the image. Previously mentioned, Rancière’s proposal of the image as a written text is available for re-appropriation (Davis 2010:109) by an emancipated spectatorship in a political recovering of the sensible fabric of experience (Davis 2013:167). Inherent to the aesthetic regime of art is an egalitarian presumption (ibid.:165), and in terms of an interface, the varied formats of repeatedly reproduced images and availability of Larkin’s image/s implies access by a wide audience from multiple viewing-contexts. Therein lies the politics of visibility where the writing and reading of images collides with a looking and seeing that simultaneously participates in sanctioned hierarchies of representation and precipitates a disruption of those hierarchies.

Considered as a stand-alone image, *Re-Mining Dump 20* possesses self-sufficiency, yet it also belongs to a photographic essay. Contextualised within an essay format, the image has been reproduced in an independent single-edition newspaper-like format, titled *After the Mines*, in book form, *Tales from the City of Gold*, and featured in a local daily *The Times*, all in 2013. Additionally large framed prints of the series were exhibited at the Ithuba Gallery (2012), The Editions Gallery (2013), both in Johannesburg and The Flowers Gallery (2014) in London. Digital reproductions are also readily available online (jasonlarkin.co.uk: 2014b). Within the confines of this report it is not possible to elaborate in detail on the all the intricacies pertaining to a politics of visibility that are implicated in the various modes of presentation in which this image participates, and by inference, the interface that exists within those modalities. The power-plays inherent to conditions of institutional support and recognition co-exist, side-by-side, with non-institutional structures and that Larkin experienced both through gallery exposure and

media promotion as well as self-supporting limited-edition publications (Larkin Pers. Comm. 2013).

Instead of exploring *Re-Mining Dump 20* as an interface in strongly theoretical terms as has been my focus up to this point, I would like, by contrast, to excavate the notion of interface along a more practical and somewhat creative line of enquiry as a way of discussing an image as an interface. By means of a close reading I intend to peel back or make visible the underlying politics endemic to the actual site depicted in the image as well as extracting a politics of visibility that excites viewership and reading of the image itself. As a way of interrogating the image as an interface I make use of four basic tenets of pictorial conventions traditional to landscape in order to uncover underlying narratives, and simultaneously exercise my own insertion or response to the image by way of a photographic journal. As a result, I treat *Re-Mining Dump 20* as a portal that acts as passage 'through a looking glass' as it were, connecting what lies on this side of the image, namely the *here and now*, with what lies on the other side of the image, namely *there and then.* I therefore advance my reading of Larkin's image as an interface held together by two foci of inquiry: firstly, an interrogation of that which is made visible alongside that which is unseen but present; and secondly how motifs of seen/unseen intersect with time and space.

While this approach may be construed as over-exercising viewer licence, I take a cue from Rancière when he suggests that integral to the aesthetic regime of art is a 'cut' or severance that occurs between artistic intent to interrogate a particular subject and its mode of presentation and a recognition of an autonomous spectator response (Davis 2010:156). According to Rancière for art to have efficacy, an artwork must be allowed to work on spectators while giving spectators the freedom to formulate their own response as "new paths to political subjectivation" (ibid.: 158). I have taken liberal advantage of Rancière in that case and perhaps over-reached my spectator autonomy, but it does serve to illustrate, if by way of exaggeration, Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible. As an "emancipated spectator" my response to Larkin's image could be seen as "new forms of community" having "an efficacy of its own" (ibid.).

On viewing *Re-Mining Dump 20*

The very title is a statement of interface. It refers to a section of land which is in a state of transience, one which was formed, then shaped and is being re-shaped: in a state of process. What does the image visibly relay of that process?

Scene/ Seen from my outlandish outpost.

Sand viewed from high: - lots of it, mountains of it, glistening warm-white in a wintery late afternoon light. Sand on the move, piled high into dump-trucks. Sand with buried treasure? But there is something unnatural about this sand. Not like any beach or desert, it bears resemblance to something familiar, but not quite known. Signs of human life are written in the criss-cross of tyre tracks and toy-like trucks caught hurtling along roads that come from somewhere, going nowhere, enter on one side of the image and exit on the opposite. Organic residuals, remnants of life in the shape of trees squat atop some outlandish rocky spillage or else lie in tangled branches, pushed aside to give the trucks passage. But far away, beyond this sand-pit and its monumental mounds there is some greenery spilling over yet more yellow-white sandy dumps. And even further away in the lowering light, glimpses of a city which must *be full of life.*

The visible structure of this image follows in the Landscape tradition. Pictorial constructions include the preferred horizontal division of thirds, perspectival division of fore-, middle- and background, tone and colour to highlight a focal point, action or drama centred around the fore- to middle-grounds, and signs of human civilization in the far distance in the form of architecture. However, a water mass in the form of a river, lake or dam so often depicted in landscapes to reflect the sky, is absent. But look closely in the foreground and at the spoil pile: signs of water erosion are quite visible.

What makes this image contemporary, apart from non-conventional subject matter? At face value the photographic image makes use of established pictorial conventions associated with Landscape and Rancière's representative regime of art. However, *Re-Mining Dump 20* destabilises hierarchies in a landscape redolent with emblems of power; the monumental sand dumps, like mountains are icons of power; the trucks,

expressions of technology and masculine potency, are extended vehicles of human agency that can bring about physical change to the environment; and the elevated view point incorporates the viewer in a panoptic pervasive visuality. Attached to these motifs and integrated into this particular landscape are the implicated power relations of capitalism and labour. The subject matter, while having an aesthetic appeal, refuses idealisation. In a landscape of alien quality, the scale of agency activated by machines can seemingly surpass the agency of nature, inverting an archetypal hierarchy, and thereby introducing its own version of trepidation (Schuster 2013: 197) – and possible sterility. These motifs of power signify invisible, yet present forces and which, instead of reflecting, act reflexively bringing into consciousness the conditions under which control of the land has been exercised. Thus, by subscribing to the familiar, the image through its subject matter upsets that very familiarity and, instead of representing hierarchies of dominion, re-writes the history of otherness and marginalities, situating it in an aesthetic regime of art.

Between the Seen and Unseen through a window of Time and Space

To re-iterate Mitchell's rhetoric, it is not only what landscape *is* or *means*, but what it *does* (2002:1) that shapes my application of interface. In terms of Larkin's image, what Landscape *is* and *means* I interrogate in terms of the visible, and what Landscape *does* I extrapolate in terms of the unseen but present. I have selected four prominent motifs from *Re-Mining Dump 20* and will connect them to referents unseen yet very present in a spatial-temporal intersection through my own visual documentation of the actual site and its immediate surrounds. Through this process I have collated a visual journal accompanied with some commentary.

I have further arranged my photographs into composite narrative maps that I have called *Mining Stories* (Appendix: XXXII-XXXV). My narrative maps take inspiration from the Dutch conglomerate maps of the 17th century (figs 23a-c), which Andrews describes as amalgamations of landscape views and topographical relief maps, a cross-section of landscape art and cartographic science (1999: 82-85). Arranged in a frame around a central map or landscape view, are a number of smaller views that elaborate information

about the central representation and function as a sort of mini-encyclopaedia (ibid.), constructing a visual interface between the central site and its surrounds. Again, although I don't perform a deeper analysis of them here, these maps form a creative output that show how my research could be taken forward within my own artistic practice.

For the purposes of this research report, these maps help me to situate Larkin's photographic image into a social, geographic and historic site. I explore aspects of this contextualisation through four *Mining Stories*, each crafted around a visual device or motif employed in Larkin's photograph, in order to extend and conclude my analysis of this image.

1. An Elevated Position: (*Mining Story #1*)

As already mentioned, a high view-point dominates *Re-Mining Dump 20.*

Larkin presents us with a square image, refusing the traditional horizontally elongated format. Visually, the square format refuses the extended view along a horizontal axis, honing or focusing the subject within the stability of the square, cropping the subject to its essence. The rejection of conventional horizontal or vertical formatting also echoes the postmodern turn from tradition, towards a more critical and less conformist approach. The pictorial cropping has the visual effect of sharpening focus on the subject as a means of emphasizing content and symbolically links to the depiction of control being exerted on the land.

An elevated view-point effectively tilts the foreground so that the viewer's attention is focused on the action taking place there. By privileging a two-thirds picture plane, the viewer's gaze is directed across a vast expanse of land and the viewer is him- or herself implicated in that expansiveness. The elevated position also has the double effect of immersion into the expansiveness of the mining operation below, yet at the same time denies any intimacy so that the visual distance creates an empathetic distance. The lack of intimacy engendered by the high viewpoint negates any engagement that a 'street-level' viewpoint normally secures, and places the camera/viewer in a dominant position over the subject matter (Schuster 2013:208). In addition the elevation abstracts detail

into images of pattern and mass data, alienating human sensibilities to scales of space and time (ibid.).

The plains of sand and related dumps have that abstract quality which resists naturalness. Beningfield describes these human-made landscapes thus:

> The mine dumps remain difficult to categorise; their relationship to the natural world is shadowy and vague. As the contaminated simulacra of natural forms that constitute the only monumental site that the city [Johannesburg] can offer, they remain outside of familiar categories of landscape (2006:199).

The elevated view-point of *Re-Mining Dump 20* focuses attention on the mining operations taking place on the land. The extent of that relationship and its importance to South African identity and history is hinted at in the inclusion of many neighbouring mine dumps stretching into the distance. The urban texture of Johannesburg, the administrative centre of that industry, appears at the horizon line. But where did these human-made mountains come from? The unnatural quality of the scene depicted in *Re-Mining Dump 20* demands an explanation.

In *Mining Story #1* (Appendix: XXXII), I orientate Larkin's image within an expanded view, looking back at the position from where he originally photographed the scene and across to where further mining has exposed the pit. The bulk of the mine dump has been removed and now instead of trucking material, highly pressurized hydraulic mining eats away at the dump with alarming voracity and speed, changing the landscape almost daily. Physical changes to this site have been accelerating since 1886 when gold was first discovered on the Witwatersrand.

Beningfield observes that the mined landscape of Johannesburg is an invisible one, and this point has broad application to mined landscapes in general. They are largely hidden on the surface, yet are present in the geological landscape below the surface. In their invisibility lies a "persistent failure to identify the land as part of the cultural, social and political life of the city [or its surrounds]" (2006:192). Connections run deep and intersections are multiple.

The Distant Past

Mining is an ancient practice already visible in precolonial times. Revil Mason of the Wits Archaeological Research Unit investigated ancient mining sites and practices of indigenous peoples of the southern African Iron Age. Evidence in the form of tunnelled shafts and galleries cut into solid rock exist in areas around Phalaborwa and near the Botswana border and reveal technical skills of extracting and smelting ore (Mason 1982:136). Archaeology has also shaped our understandings of sites like Mapungubwe, where several iron, copper and metal artefacts validate ancient mining practices. More importantly excavations at Mapungubwe confirmed importance of the gold trade. Gold was a metal that contributed to the rise of Mapungubwe as the most prominent Late Iron Age kingdom in the region between 1100 and1300 A.D. (Meyer 2011:155-117).

Archaeology seeks out human markers left behind in a landscape, those deliberate statements or products of a conspicuous act, an “altered earth” that, according to Bradley (1993:1) and Renfrew (2003:38), constitute sites of memory: monuments that connect the past with the present.

Excavation is used both in archaeology and mining. Although a comparison between these two distinct fields in terms of their common excavating practices may appear to reveal only superficial connections, I would like to suggest that there are deeper connections; historical, conceptual and aesthetic. Renfrew speaks of an aesthetic archaeology which takes pleasure in the digging and recording process, recapturing a sense of order that yields a cognitive appreciation of the past (ibid.:42). Mining operations also excavate and the commonality might suggest an analogous relationship with archaeology. Mining, however, removes materials from the earth that are used in the production of artefacts. Over time, artefacts generally return to the earth as waste or ruin so that archaeology can recover those materials as a means of recovering history. While ancient mining may have left little trace of interventions in the landscape, modern mechanized mining leaves overwhelming traces in its wake that outstrip any archaeological residues. However, a site of mining or land as a product of human intervention also qualifies as an artefact and at some point the parallels between mining and archaeology part ways, because archaeology undertakes excavation as a means of investigation while extraction in mining, according to Schuster, is a form of abstraction (2013:198). Archaeological excavation gives shape and form to what it unearths in a

process of substantiation. Mining excavates for processes of dematerialization and commodification.

With mining, solid matter, earth is “virtualized” or abstracted “into primary forms of capital” (ibid.: 199). In other words, raw materials through successive refinement are reconfigured into products; things which represent capital in the commodification process. Referring to works by Burtynsky (fig.10b), Schuster states that a photograph of a mined landscape attempts to “visualize the commodification process” and:

> Photographing sites of the virtualization of solids not only brings back the material history of the things that clutter our homes, but it also makes the processes and aftermaths of virtualization more legible (ibid.).

In giving visual form to the ‘virtualization of solids’ an image like *Re-Mining Dump 20,* can be linked to archaeological stratigraphy. As a means of uncovering the layers below the surface, an image holds in tension a number of co-existing connections and intersections such as wealth and prosperity alongside the deprivation and suffering that came with the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. That discovery complicated an already contested land.

Digging for Gold

By the time of gold’s discovery on the Witwatersrand many indigenous African communities had already lost land to white Boer settlers who had trekked north from the Cape, having unilaterally established an independent Boer South African Republic between the Vaal and Limpopo rivers. British colonial governors had meanwhile made attempts to bring the Boer settlers back under British rule without success (Oakes 1988: 200-205). However, the discovery of gold changed everything. Afrikaner nationalism and dreams of sovereignty collided with British colonialism and desires of empire and gold gave momentum to those ideological conflicts. Gold brought an influx of fortune-seekers and capitalists to the region. Peripheral, and to remain so, but inescapably caught up in this escalating vortex of competing agendas, were African communities whose worth was measured in terms of the manual labour they could provide, whether for agriculture or mining.

The nature of the Witwatersrand reef was such that the ore quality was low grade and the angle of the reef descended quite sharply. This presented a number of related issues. The international gold price was fixed and low grade ore meant having to mine it at reduced costs in order to make the enterprise profitable. The angle of the reef also made mining at ever-increasing depths extremely difficult and hazardous which meant the operations had to be financially supported by considerable capital investment for machinery and shaft sinking. Consequently mining was constrained by the need for huge amounts of capital and a need for a large force of unskilled workers, practical conditions that ruled out small-time entrepreneurs gaining a foothold in the industry. The age of the randlord and the establishment of mining houses dawned, owned and financed mainly by British investors, whose invested interests coincided with Britain's colonial policies. Conditioned by the international gold market, the only way to curb production costs was through labour. As a means of procuring low-cost labour for the mines, the migrant labour system was introduced (Davenport 2013: 156-182).

With an increasingly expanding mining industry and the service industries that subsequently developed, urbanization quickly developed around Johannesburg and contingent to that development was an insatiable need for labour.

Supply of unskilled labour was always problematic and consequently the mining industry became increasingly intertwined with South Africa's political history. Mining companies became complicit in racial labour legislation that drove down wages for African workers and circumscribed their mobility, ensuring their continued disadvantage. Through successive modifications of legislature that forced Africans off their land, mining unfortunately became imbricated in labour policies that fuelled the establishment of apartheid:

> Once off the land – that is, deprived of the means to exist by subsistence farming – Africans would have to seek wage-labour, conveniently slotting in to the capitalist economy generated by the mines (Oakes 1988:202).

Peter Delius and Laura Philips also note that "nowhere else in the world have urbanization and industrialisation been as comprehensively based on migrant labour as in South Africa" (2014: 2).

The social ramifications of the migrant labour system also affected the families of migrant workers, who remained behind at the rural homesteads. Anthropologist Jean Comaroff noted that men employed away from home for long periods left the women to manage agriculture. Often periods of drought and hardship, coupled with the systematic separate development policies of Nationalist South Africa, produced a cycle of underdevelopment and subsistence, ensuring that rural poverty amongst peripheral communities locked them into remaining a potential reservoir of labour (Comaroff 1985:41). Thus the intervention of mining reached way beyond the Witwatersrand. Large areas of rural settlements into which Africans were forced through policies of separate development, succumbed to systematic degradation through overcrowding, overgrazing and over-farming.

However, the post-1994 era with its new democratic dispensation for all South Africans offered hope, prospects of growth and freedom to participate in a multi-racial society. But as Delius and Phillips note, the migrant labour system, so fundamental to the structure of apartheid may well have undergone changes post-apartheid, but somehow still remains central to South African society and the economy (2014:13). Practical changes have seen the scrapping of compounds and hostels, with workers being given a living-out allowance as compensation. Policy-makers ideally saw this as a mechanism for migrant mine-workers to bring their families with them from the rural homestead, and many workers took advantage of the new freedoms. Although well-meaning, the reality has been a scarcity of married accommodation at mines and a backlog in housing development in urban areas coupled with poor municipal service delivery. Congruent to changed migrant labour policy however, has been the unchanged economic reliance of rural households on migrant labour coupled with very few developments in rural areas for economic upliftment (ibid.). The legacy of apartheid lives on in most regions. Additionally many migrant workers now support two family structures, one in the rural homestead and one in the urban township, exacerbating their personal economic stress (Breckenridge 2014:157). Indeed related pressures that migrant mine workers experience within current migrant labour structures have also been identified as one of the factors that contributed to the Marikana tragedy (ibid.: 153).

Thus labour issues and concurrent social conditions remain inextricable to the current mining industry in South Africa and are intricately woven into the narrative fabric of Larkin's photographic essay.

On the surface, the elevated viewpoint of *Re-Mining Dump 20* brings to attention a narrative of sand. However, through my close visual and contextual analysis of this image, those innumerable layers of sand act like a kind of historical stratigraphy – or industrial geology, and give an account of those who have laboured both underground and on surface to move materials that have shaped the economic identity of the nation. Thus the elevated viewpoint enables a survey of the past that makes visible the time scales of history, archaeology and geology, extrapolations that the informed viewer would bring to the image.

2. A Quality of Light: (*Mining Story #2*)

Despite the disturbing subject matter of *Re-Mining Dump 20*, there is a visual sensuality in this image that has to do with the quality of light. Spotlighting the action below, the light from above creates a focal point which both aestheticizes the scene and subscribes to accepted modes of landscape dramatization. Larkin appeals to this familiarity, only to have it disrupted under closer scrutiny for the purpose of making new connections between what is seen and known, with the unseen and unanticipated.

The effect of the light depicted in *Re-Mining Dump 20* envelops the whole scene in warm, gentle hues of pinks and cream and even the dust-laden sky with a few wispy clouds echoes the tones reflected below, softening the horizon line where land meets air. The tonal harmony bathes the scene in an overall sense of calm, interrupted by contrasts formed by shadows and the imposing dissonant shape of the spoil pile. The late afternoon sun suggests a time of slowing down, coming to rest (except of course that large-scale mining operations often operate on a 24-hour shift cycle). The quality of light is the seductive constituent of Larkin's image, enshrouding the scene with an allure that belies the subject matter. The majesty afforded by the elevated position and the magnetism infused by the light are underscored by a realisation that the magnitude of what is being made visible is in reality overwhelming, thereby undermining the innate sense of command originally evoked by an elevated point of view. Such an experience is one of the sublime, which is described by Kover as "an aesthetic sensibility or quality evoked by an encounter with an object or phenomenon of such overwhelming power, grandeur and immensity that it is almost beyond comprehension" (2014:1). With the sublime, usually reserved for a response to natural scenes of wilderness or alarming

beauty, the viewer is unnerved by a realisation of his/her own frailty in the face of such disquieting expansiveness, but paradoxically feels impervious to the danger with which it implicitly threatens him/her. The elevated or distant position usually incorporated in an experience of the sublime keeps the viewer safely out of harm's way, hence "the sublime reveals to us our very minuteness and insignificance yet simultaneously seems to expand the very boundaries of the ego" (ibid.:2).

As noted in Part 1, Landscape in art was sustained by notions of nature – undisturbed, idyllic, utopian – a space narrowly read as a world "innocent of history and political meaning" (Andrews 1999:131). However, the structured organisation or construct of the utopian landscape was subverted according to Andrews by the "experience of the Sublime" (ibid.:132). Antithetical to the values of the Age of Enlightenment, the sublime bypassed the rational mind in favour of an emotional response (ibid.), emerging as a sub-genre of Landscape during the romanticism of the 18th and 19th centuries.

An exploration of the sublime aesthetic is relevant to an interrogation of *Re-Mining Dump 20,* because as already expressed a certain visual beauty imbues this scene – a landscape filled with potential environmental dread – which contrasts sharply with notions of idyll or utopia. I have tried to illustrate this in *Mining Stories #2* (Appendix: XXXIII).

During my site visit I was captivated by the visually striking elements of the surrounding landscape.

I found the colours in the dumps visually rich and sensuous, the textures intriguing and the mysteriousness of the bodies of water, enticing. The forms in their strangeness bore an attraction that, from an artistic perspective, offered a wealth of visual excitement. All the while though, there was a mental disjunction that issued a warning; beware! How often is toxicity obscured by exquisite beauty? The camera however was my armour, a cut-off shield that gave me access without my having to engage with the environment other than in a cursory passing. I do not have to work or live there, daily smelling the sulphurous fumes, scratching the slightly burning sensation on my hands where I had picked up a handful of sand, wrestling with the dryness of the dust, and scouring the silence – waiting for the occasional bursts of machines rumbling, gurgling and exhaling blasts of compressed air to give human context to my smallness in such a vast world of strangeness.

This is a dangerous beauty, an austere beauty. Larkin's image is a visual interface with the physical reality of the place, but it can only approximate actually being there, supplementing a detachment already achieved through the high viewpoint. Beyond this, for me, his image became a portal into the physical landscape, prompting me to return to the place the photograph had been created, and experience it myself. The phenomenological experience of presence is contracted into an experience of the sublime and implicit in the framework of the sublime are notions of power and self-preservation.

Andrews reasons that the overpowering scenery which carries with it connotations of vastness, immensity and perceived difficulty, contrives to rob the viewer of control, rendering him/her powerless. For the sublime to have any attraction as an experience however, "there needs to be some reassurance that, in the face of overwhelming power, the person is not in actual mortal danger" (ibid.: 134). Thus the full experience of the sublime entails being both a spectator and a potential victim which is simultaneously "destabilizing and reassuring, holding "the two feelings in dynamic tension" (ibid.). The sublime is beyond expression, "pictorially unframeable, and it cannot be framed in words. … If anything, it appropriates us" (ibid.:142). The sensation of the sublime is one of dematerialisation, reduction, of being subsumed to surrender in awe of a superior power (ibid.).

In Romanticism, the fundamental source or template for the sublime is nature. The sublime experience that results in the shrinkage of self and induces feelings of impotence and potential annihilation in the face of overwhelming nature – the "suspended terror" – is followed by some deeper insight or humility in which the viewer identifies with the universe as a whole, while at the same time the universe remains obscure and unknowable (Kover 2014:8).

However, in contemporary industrial landscapes like *Re-Mining Dump 20* a feeling of the sublime might be said to be apocalyptic, where nature as the template for the sublime is overridden by the immensity of what human engineering does to nature. The threat to self-preservation comes from humans themselves, thus sublimity has a ricochet effect. By supplanting nature as the source of the sublime and aestheticizing environmental degradation, the contemporary industrial landscape introduces a renewed vision in

respect of nature, one of human potential to annihilate nature and thereby give substance to the idea of the industrial sublime as a new sub-genre within Landscape.

The aestheticizing of environmental devastation can be construed as problematic, however. The rendering of toxic, sacrificed landscapes in visually pleasing images could arguably serve as a model for the glorification of human power and technological inventiveness at the expense of nature forfeited for human progress (ibid.: 14). Yet Kover, in an analysis of Burtynsky's work, speaks of his images (figs 10a & 10b) as indicating an "unsettling and disquieting cost" to the devastation he photographs, and which in turn refers to "our own unsettled postmodern condition" (ibid.: 15). The same could be said about *Re-Mining Dump 20*, a comparison that illustrates quite clearly Rancière's conjecture that the aesthetic regime of art opens up spaces of rupture (2004: 64) that feed off the co-existence of tensions within an artwork as a means of drawing out perceptiveness in the viewer.

As a space of rupture, the images verging on abstraction produced by Burtynsky, Fair, Maisel, as well as Larkin's more abstract images (the ones with fewer or no human figures), all attempt to express through an experience of the sublime, something of the realisation of what excessive consumerism, capitalism and extractive economic practices have done to the planet. Maisel's work in particular (figs 11a & 11b) makes use of seductiveness through a simultaneous beauty and revulsion, to drive home a sense of alarm. Analysing his images, Egan comments on the ambiguity of what is depicted. Favouring the aerial viewpoint, Maisel's abstraction of the subject matter, coupled with saturated colours, perform an "effective duality of attraction and abhorrence" as a means of "undoing" the landscape and presenting it as a "serious subject for artistic consideration and debate" (2013:64). Referring to the inherent sublimity in Maisel's images, Egan describes it as the "technological sublime" or "toxic sublime" that reflects a perverse awe which turns to anxiety upon realisation of what one is actually witnessing (ibid.:65).

Yet, incorporated into that sublime experience is a guilty pleasure in finding a haunting beauty "in something so egregious" and Kover wonders if finding beauty in something in fact endorses it (2014:18). Perhaps endorsement, as a mode of approval, in practice dilutes or even negates the gravity that underpins beauty because in today's world visual beauty is so closely allied to surface.

This concern was expressed by Maisel in 2011 where Egan cites him as professing beauty as something problematic for the photographer because:

> we no longer imagine beauty [in the unconscious Kantian sense] as a serious way of knowing or as a serious means of investigation. … Sometimes the object of beauty is just not expected, but bizarre – Such experiences are insights into new or alien aesthetic territory (cited in Egan 2013:66).

To counter the apparent problem that the aesthetic integral to these kinds of images present, Kover suggests that the photographers' deliberate implementation of a disquieting sublimity that overlays the subject matter with aesthetic appeal opens up a dialogue that purposefully encourages a shift in consciousness without resorting to overt didacticism (Kover 2014:18).

3. An Unnatural World: (*Mining Story #3*)

A shift in consciousness is reinforced by confrontations with the unfamiliar. When gazing over Dump 20, one is struck by the vestiges of life that inform an unfamiliar barrenness.

Traces of nature depicted in *Re-Mining Dump 20* are seen in discarded piles of dead wood pushed aside by the roads. The remains of trees that were once rooted on top of the erstwhile mine dump were probably similar to the ones clinging to life on top of the spoil pile, their fate too, already decided. Recognisable as bluegum (*Eucalyptus* sp.) trees, nobody minds much about their demise. Brought to South Africa from Australia, bluegums are alien to this environment. During my site visit I saw many of these trees and in Larkin's image they can be seen spilling over the mines dumps receding in the distance; an alien species that has proliferated, lending a sense of naturalness and recovery to an unnatural environment (see Endnote 2).

Also visible in *Re-Mining Dump 20* are eroded furrows carved into the sand like arteries, hinting at once-present water, the precursor to life, now drained away. The ousting of nature is not complete though, for the sky fills one third of the image and that too is tinged with hues of dust pollution.

Re-Mining Dump 20 looks to the past, it is located in the near-present and projects into the future. The visible economic gains made by the gold-mining industry have also exacted an invisible cost to the environment which is only now becoming apparent. It is the rising level of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) that is the focus of *Mining Story #3* (Appendix: XXXIV).

The headgear at No.8 Shaft, Randfontein Estates is no longer used for hoisting. Underground operations have long ceased, but the underground workings are being flooded by rising levels of water that, because of the cavities formed by mined-out tunnels, is no longer under pressure. Underground workings function as a series of interconnected voids which readily become conduits for water that previously found its way to surface via springs and streams. The problem, however, is the natural presence of iron pyrites or sulphides in the rock face which, because of mining, have now been exposed to oxygen. Together with oxygen and water, the pyrites undergo a chemical reaction resulting in the formation of dilute sulphuric acid and the precipitation of heavy metals, giving the water its reddish colour (Ford Pers. Comm. 2015). No.8 shaft is flooded. It is from here that water samples are drawn to test levels of acidity. Nearby is a water treatment plant that tries to reduce the acidity by adding lime alkaline to the water pumped up from underground, so that it can be used and re-cycled, or further processed for release into the natural water system.

The unseen consequences of mining have a far-reaching impact on the environment. While AMD has constituted the most recent impending crisis to emerge as a result of mining, other pollutants lurk in the mine dumps, waiting to make their presence more acutely felt.

There have been attempts to mitigate the effects of dust pollution caused by tailings dumps by seeding them with grasses and planting eucalyptus trees at the base to soak up run-off water. Re-mining on the other hand eradicates all vegetation, loosening the sand thereby increasing levels of dust pollution. The areas most affected by prevailing winds lie to the south of Johannesburg, areas less wealthy and forested than the northern suburbs. The sand associated with mine dumps is a waste product, containing small amounts of radio-active material naturally occurring in gold-bearing rock and added cyanides used in the extraction process. In addition to wind pollution, rainfall leeches out some of the pollutants internal to the dumps, affecting the sub-surface.

Beningfield comments that recent research implicates the mine dumps in nearly 180 square kilometres of large-scale pollution to the sub-surface (2006:198). There has always been mild concern for rainfall water that becomes polluted by contact with mine dumps and which then seeps into natural water courses. Of late however, anxieties have increased over the contaminated footprint caused by AMD and its seepage into already scarce water resources (ibid.). The full extent of the effects of mining to the environment have not been assessed, but Beningfield expresses doubts about the viability of re-constituting land where re-cycling and removal of mine dumps has occurred:

> Because rehabilitation of the contaminated subsoil is expensive, the majority of the land is likely to remain contaminated by toxic residues for decades, preventing large-scale reuse and settlement on the land, as well as the growth of any vegetation upon it (ibid.).

Could the mine dumps, having become a wasteland in a first phase, be undergoing a secondary wasting through processes of re-cycling?

The scarcity of natural life forms in *Re-Mining Dump 20* re-affirms feelings of unease and strangeness, recalling a sublimity that cannot be adequately described. According to Kover, the post-human industrial wasteland evokes an experience of the sublime that exceeds an ability to grasp the apocalyptic nature of its scale and scope (2014:15). He notes that the threat comes from human technology and cites Jonathan Bordo:

> Under contemporary conditions of modern technology, sentiments of the sublime such as terror and anxiety arise, not from what reason has excluded and suppressed, but from the products of reason itself (Bordo 1992:174 cited in Kover 2014:15).

Thus human reason underpins technology, a potential threat to life on earth and manufactured by humanity. Moreover, reason and the affiliated knowledge that accompanies technology is, as Kover observes, limited to a few specialists (2014:16). The lack of expertise experienced by the ordinary person gives rise to the sublimity of the environmental crisis because "it arises out of our inability to tangibly comprehend its underlying causes" and the enormous cost in resources and their implications in daily life "are largely hidden from us" (ibid.). That being the case, Kover concedes that the

environmental crisis is “largely an abstraction” of a “largely hidden world” (ibid.:17). Images such as *Re-Mining Dump 20* attempt to make visible that hidden world by easing it back into a stream of consciousness, petitioning the politics of aesthetics as a way of importing the crisis of environment.

4. Lines in the Sand: (*Mining Story #4*)

Abstractions permeate *Re-Mining Dump 20.* It represents a landscape shifting at a monumental scale.

As already mentioned, the elevated viewpoint tilts the foreground, approximating a bird’s-eye-view which gives the scene a topographical appearance, flattening the surface so it can be read like a map. And like lines on a map, the very visible roads, tyre-tracks, erosion marks and sand dumps in the image can be reduced to symbolic encryptions as some form of script.

Etched across the surface in *Re-Mining Dump 20*, the roads, conduits for removed sand, precious sand interspersed with grains of gold invisible to the eye, are the arteries that connect points outside the picture frame. They form a grid that imposes an unseen directive on how the sandy expanse is negotiated, with secondary detours represented by tyre-tracks, a palimpsest of human activity. Contrasting in size and symbol, like blips on a map, the almost insignificant dump trucks encapsulate active human presence, communicating the symbiotic relationship between human and machine. The trucks, their tracks and the roads seem to take on a life of their own, personifying masculine abilities, gendering a landscape that re-affirms humankind’s ability to wrought radical change to the environment and render submissive. The sand dumps, solid-shaped, a barricade to the hidden beyond, dominate the edge of this human-scaped topography.

The lines on a map may well represent the conceptual boundaries and artificial divisions superimposed on the land denoting ownership or frontier, but they also represent an abstraction of the commanding view, a division of what is seen from above, encompassing all that lies below. Akin to the topographic map is the aerial photograph, the industrial surveillance camera, military satellite reconnaissance, drones, Google

Earth or geographical surveying. All have in common the power afforded by an ability to see over a large area of land. Schuster makes the distinction that none of these methods of 'seeing' come cheaply (2013: 208). The costs alone in acquiring the god's-eye-view set practitioners apart; the elitist position bestowing a certain power to the looking, which in turn is passed on through the image to the viewer.

Cartography, considered a science, is an abstraction of 'looking from above' and historically shares a relationship with the evolution of landscape (Andrews 1999:82). *Mining Story #4* (Appendix: XXXV) pays tribute to the craftsmanship of those old cartographers who skilfully and patiently hand-recorded changes to the land. At Randfontein Estates a number of old maps dating back to the late 1890s bear witness to the early life of the mine. These old documents are encoded transcriptions of carefully selected information, interpreted data, and a preferential history.

Cartographic maps are abstracted extractions that focus on selected features taken from the land. They do not represent the traversable surface as noted by Beningfield (2006:105). Instead the surface of the land, which is neutral, is one onto which divisions can be written. Perhaps maps exemplify most clearly Rancière's concept of a representative regime, even though not usually considered art in the sense of an autonomous creative product, they involve a process of selection and classification. Maps are organized around selection preferences that reflect a system of ordered hierarchies; information, specific features and superimposed data are encoded and graded in order of importance. As instruments of imperialism, they reflect specific histories and identities. Commenting on the maps of South Africa ca 1900, Beningfield notes how "defined linear boundaries focused attention on the boundary as an edge and as a pencil-thin division between areas of land under different ownership" (ibid.: 106). Nowhere is this more evident than in maps of early Johannesburg.

Beningfield remarks on how Johannesburg exists on two symbiotic levels, "one above and one below the surface of the land" (ibid.:186). The geological structure below the surface "cannot be seen, except in representations", such as ground penetrating radar (GPR), yet it has impacted the social, economic and political forces that have shaped the city above surface (ibid.). Maps such as the *New Map of the Witwatersrand Goldfields,* compiled by Wood and Ortlepp in Johannesburg 1898 (Appendix: XVI), clearly show a

conceptual overlapping of the underground location of the gold-bearing reef with the boundaries of farms outlined on the surface. Maps like this one "document economic relationships between the land divisions on the surface and the geological structure beneath" (ibid.: 187). No doubt it was produced for people involved in the management of mines (hence its existence in the Randfontein Estates archive), because, similar to other maps produced at the time, it "represents the surface of the ground as a strategic surface, one on which concessions could be negotiated and properties were mapped" (ibid.: 188).

The physical lay-out of Johannesburg on the surface has had a strong relationship with that which is below the surface. The gold-bearing reef forms an east-west axis. Soweto (a contraction of 'South Western Townships') historically reserved for black inhabitants, is situated to the south and south-west of the Johannesburg CBD. Soweto's remote location reinforced the peripheral status of Africans and their exclusion from the hub of development within Johannesburg, while to the north, and closer to the economic centre, wealthier suburbs developed, occupied mainly by whites. Sustained by an apartheid ideology, "the landscape used to separate black and white was therefore present both above the surface and below it" (ibid.: 189). Above ground it was a physical geographic separation that permeated a social and economic separation. Below ground it was a separation based on race and labour. Johannesburg today, is still that place of ambivalence. If viewed from the air it can be plainly seen how the mine dumps, or the scars of their removal, continue to form the visible spatial north-south divide. Beningfield gives an account of Johannesburg:

> The mining land is a site in which the concept of landscape stretches and is transformed. It is a place that connects rural areas into the city through the movement and memories of migrant labourers, weaves the geological structure of the city into its buildings and spaces, continues to separate bodies of different races, and offers a vision of modernity which incorporates decay and contamination (2006: 206).

Re-Mining Dump 20 relays so much of the history and narrative of gold and its ongoing extraction, an enterprise which has been and still is inseparable from the layered history of Johannesburg and its surrounds.

Conclusion

The conjecture has been put forward in this report that imagery of mined landscapes, a sub-group within the wider grouping of industrialised landscapes, has contributed to the emergence of a sub-genre within Landscape that ostensibly critiques the metaphors of power relations and sanctioned ideologies so deeply encoded in western landscape representation. The many examples of images emanating from the industrialised regions of the northern hemisphere and of course locally, depicting industrially altered landscapes within contemporary art production support this claim. Furthermore the visibility of such imagery has been primarily driven and disseminated by photography and the photographic print through media.

To summarise, subject matter, even if it is a marginalised subject, is not enough to define a genre. Of significance though, is the re-presentation of that subject matter and its subsequent performativity within a cultural context to successfully mediate shifts in consciousness. Characterised by a sense of unease, images of radically human-altered landscapes have variously been described as possessing a post-human, industrial, toxic and apocalyptic sublime through a process of aestheticization. An experience of the sublime is central to their construction and the shift in perception that they underwrite. The industrial sublime employs formal pictorial strategies that function as signposts to precipitate a renewed understanding of current human relationships with land and environment.

I have explored and interrogated these strategies through a close reading of Larkin's photographic image, *Re-Mining Dump 20*, and tried to link it to the theoretical framework formulated by Rancière through the notion of interface. The aesthetic regime of art has relevance for much contemporary art production in that it primarily refuses any hierarchical forms of representation, making use of disruption as a means of destabilising previously held conceptions of art. In addition the aesthetic regime of art ascribes to political fluidity that insists on a permeating democratisation which engages participants' perceptive sensibilities at multiple levels of art production and reception.

Larkin has dispensed with hierarchical representation by rejecting idealised subject matter in favour of a wasteland of human creation. His treatment of the subject,

however, appeals to a visual aesthetic by inciting familiarity through conventional means such as composing from an elevated viewpoint and use of light, colour and tonal values. The superimposition of visual appeal over a wasteland causes a disjuncture that demands acknowledgement of the unfamiliar in a turn-about action that rewrites or disavows the old narratives of colonialism, labour, economics and ecology. Thus the image disturbs the rules of representational logic, which is in reality a cultural sedimentation, and art is free to "circulate outside any system of legitimation" (Rancière 2004:15). The disruption of legitimacy exists as a politics made visible, both within the image itself and is present external to the image, circulating within the diverse contexts in which the image is viewed, thus positioning the image as an interface.

While images of industrially disturbed landscapes interface with a re-writing of past histories, they make visible intrinsic political invocations directed to the future. Here experiences of the sublime assume a postmodern identity by positioning human technologies as the insidious threat to life on earth. Rather than explicit activism, these images adhere to an aesthetic seduction, which for some, dissipates their effectiveness for urgent interrogation of environmental devastation and human reliance on extracted, non-renewable resources.

A need for activism has permeated much contemporary art practice, casting art as an instrument for cultural re-vision and political change. That art should be an arena for politics for it to have relevance is not only idealistic, but debatable according to Anthony Downey (2015). It must be understood, however, there is a difference between art that is political and 'political art' as an explicitly named category. Political art is art which expresses or holds a particular view of how the world should be, conveying a political message, thereby subscribing to a regime of mimesis or representation and in Rancière's opinion is not art at all (Davis 2013.:156). (Propaganda would be an extreme example.) Downey goes even to further to suggest that art and the artist as political activists have been co-opted by the very institutions they claim to critique, through a process of gentrification and enfranchisement of critique practice that in fact dilutes or even nullifies that critique (2015).

By contrast, according to Rancière, art that is political fulfils its political task, which is democratisation. For art to have political agency, art's autonomy in terms of

independence or separateness must be relinquished, because “art’s aloof self-sufficiency” leaves “no real room for its political effect” (Davis 2010: 152). By this Rancière draws attention to how an aesthetic regime of art is of necessity a corporate experience of perception and participation. Nevertheless, it is imperative that art, at the same time, retains its purity (political neutrality) and authenticity if it is to avoid political manipulation, by artists themselves, institutions and viewers alike. Seemingly contradictory, art must therefore hold itself in tension for the purpose of intervention, allowing for a reconfiguration that positions art as “the site of negotiation”, facilitating an opening up of a “middle way” (ibid.: 153). He clarifies that in the aesthetic regime of art, art is its own autonomous form of life that identifies with and participates in an overall process of life’s self-formation (2004: 26). Downey puts it more minimally when he says art is art when it “straddles the border between authenticity and engagement” (2015).

Nevertheless, images of blighted landscapes invite scepticism, simply because they do not resort to being overtly political in the light of the seriousness of environmental destruction. Giblett wonders what role photographic images of industrially altered landscape have in developing attitudes of environmental sustainability now and in the future, particularly when the subject has been aestheticized (2012: 227). Similarly Kover asks “does the aesthetic of the sublime implicitly involve a temptation towards an evasion of our moral responsibility and acquiescence in the face of overwhelming power?” (2014:20).

Indeed, to aestheticize subject matter in simple terms of beauty or ugliness may arguably be to trivialize it. Aesthetic appeal has the ability to captivate the viewer, or hold his/her attention. Here one must return to aesthetics as an *a priori* perception or sensibility that is not subject to prescriptiveness or sanctioning, but a universal free play of cognitive faculties: a cognitive apprehension followed by a conscious response that devolves ‘the power of looking’ to ‘the many’. And while the aesthetic regime of art empowers viewership, it also makes demands on viewers. The inherent visual appeal of industrialised landscape imagery not only permits a freedom of subjective response, but implicated in that response is an inescapable recognition of complicity in the making of such alien beauty. There is a contractual cost to viewing these images that subversively rearranges the viewers’ relationship to the image and the power relations traditionally imbricated in landscape representation. Whereas landscape imagery in the past has

inextricably bound nature to imperial, national and cultural consciousness engendering a sense of identity and belonging to a shared cultural fabric in the viewer, the shift in contemporary landscape representation implicates the viewer as a global citizen and consumer. The security of national or cultural cohesiveness endemic to traditional landscape constructs is displaced in industrialised landscape representations by a viewer's preferred inclination to be disassociated from such sites. A propensity for denial in the viewer may well be the response to the innate beauty of these images as intimated by Kover above, but that very aestheticization functions more deeply than mere surface and brings into sharp focus issues of human integrity, responsibilities and use of power. I would suggest that this sub-genre of landscape imagery deliberately cultivates beauty as a subversive strategy that incorporates the viewer in environmental critique. In so doing, aesthetics is implicated in the very politics of visibility that set out to make visible such land sites.

Participating in that strategy, images like *Re-Mining Dump 20* refuse a constructed view of landscape as a stereo-typed pristine fragment of nature, but rather redirect attention to landscape as always having been subject to conditions of balance and imbalance, to life as continually in process and the responsibility humans have in sustaining that life process. Images of industrialised landscapes are a call to acknowledge a collective complicity in a life out of balance and a world of potential sterility. By aestheticizing the subject, these images evict a pre-ordained condemnation or prejudice that would normally accompany such sites. Instead, aestheticizing something so contrary persuades the viewer to contemplate how these landscapes have come about, thereby activating an appeal to a collective capacity for the common good. Rarely does a single image have the visual power to shift social consciousness. More likely shifts occur through a collective process. Larkin's landscape imagery shares in an international collective set of photographic images in which photographers are exploring modified landscapes. The images' agency lies in the formation of a community of co-operative artworks that participate in reshaping an understanding of landscape. Downey eloquently sums up that only when art is socially engaged can it through aesthetics, legitimize a certain reconfigured consensus of the political imagination (2015).

Mined landscapes demand a reconfiguration of an understanding of land. No longer confined to surface, landscape representation is an interface between what lies below

and what rises above. There is a need to extend our viewing beyond surface, by making visible the unseen because:

> Post-industrial landscape scars carry elements of loss, but also emerging new understandings that fill the emptiness with significance (Storm 2014:19).

Endnotes

1. On the 15 March 2015, the *Sunday Times Business Times* reported Royal Dutch Shell's withdrawal from shale gas exploration in the Karoo. Reasons cited are the current drop in oil prices which make shale gas extraction unviable and the South African government's protracted inaction in granting exploration licenses. These have not been forthcoming due to a lack of decision making on legislation regarding the position of oil and gas within the overall Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act which would regulate conditions pertaining to hydraulic fracturing in South Africa (Prinsloo 2015: 1).
2. The real irony however, is the reason for their importation. I was told that plantations of bluegums were established close to mines to provide timber roof supports underground, but they proved inadequate because they split under the weight of the rock. The reason, it was discovered, had to do with the high altitude of the Witwatersrand whereas in Australia the trees grow closer to sea-level. Apparently here the high altitude causes the trees to grow in a spiral direction which results in them buckling under pressure (Du Plessis Pers. Comm. 2015).

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