

Where Do the Myths Lie?: Considering the Imaginary in Jo Ractliffe's Landscapes of Conflict

By Ikechukwu Casmir Onyewuenyi

Just outside Viriambundo there is a building with three portraits painted on the wall: Fidel Castro, Agostinho Neto, and Leonid Brezhnev. While I was photographing, a young man, a teacher from a school close by, came to talk to me. He was curious about why I would want an image of these three men. We chatted a while. He was interested in computers and the internet and the ways they could aid education in places faraway like this. He did not share my excitement about this image of the 'holy trinity'. He said that the war had gone on too long and now it had to be left behind, that Angolans wanted to move forward and that the future was about different things.¹

—Jo Ractliffe

Southwestern Africa, including present-day Angola, Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa, remains a contested space rife with conflict. From postcolonial dissent within African nations, and civil wars doubling as proxies for the Cold War, to the oppressive contrivances of apartheid, this region of the African continent is a labyrinth of volatility. Without a doubt, this capricious state has come to define the cultural imaginary of the region. Despite the seemingly shared subjugation across these countries, for some, like South African photographer Jo Ractliffe, many of these conflictual and contested areas are fictive, mythical places. For Ractliffe, as a white South African, Angola, in particular, “was simply ‘the border,’ a secret, unspoken location where brothers and boyfriends were sent as part of their military service.”² Ractliffe contends that she “knew little about it [Angola], beyond the war”; hence her mythopoetic thought seems warranted.³ It was around the mid-1980s, however,

that Ractliffe’s fabled thoughts (and agency) slowly began to take shape upon her reading of *Another Day of Life* (1976), Ryszard Kapuściński’s account of the Portuguese retreat in Angola following the overthrow of the colonial system in 1975. In her letters dating back to November 2007 with Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor, Ractliffe shared that she was moved by how the Angolan resistance against the Portuguese empire was part and parcel of *being* in southwestern Africa⁴; for Ractliffe there was a phenomenological semblance whereby the Angolan struggle for independence mirrored South Africa under apartheid governance.⁵ This epiphany of sorts set into effect a desire to unpack these myths around the Angolan Civil War (1975–2002) and related military entanglements known in South Africa as the Border Wars (1966–89). What resulted were three photographic series: *Terreno Ocupado* (2007–08), *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* (2009–10), and *The Borderlands* (2011–13). These three bodies of work are the focus of *The Aftermath of Conflict: Jo Ractliffe’s Photographs of Angola and South Africa* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (August 24, 2015–March 6, 2016).

While the curators of the exhibition—Dr. Yaelle Biro and Dr. Evelyn Owen—focused on the conflict and controversy burdening these landscapes, it might be far more prescient to consider their underbelly. That is, what if these traumatized landscapes were more than the Western ideologies and unforgiving histories that left economies vapid and servicemen adrift? *The Aftermath of Conflict* harbors a noteworthy paradox that coalesces with Susan Sontag and her writings on the photograph as “implicitly magical” and an “attempt to contact or lay claim to another reality.”⁶ There is no doubt that the photographs in the exhibition reflect a reality in which landscape stands in for conflict. Yet Ractliffe arrived at this concern for landscape, war, and dispossession through myth. If we follow this logic alongside Sontag’s observations on photography, we would be remiss not to consider Ractliffe’s “foreignness”⁷ in these landscapes. This “foreignness,” however, goes beyond phenotypic cues, with the artist’s racialization being rooted in a cultural divergence from Angola. Even in speaking about the construction of her foreignness, Ractliffe meditates on how the mythical narrative around past, present, and future distinguishes her from the people of Angola.⁸ Against this backdrop, it is worth considering how the multivalent nature of “foreignness” might influence Ractliffe’s *seeing* of this ravaged landscape not just as a documentation of fact, but also as a memoir of myth. Turning to various notions of myth, this alternate curatorial claim is contemplated here, with the intent of locating an aftermath that isn’t only steeped in the calamities of the past, but also the calm tomorrow brings.

These two possibilities visually unravel in *The Aftermath of Conflict*, as the exhibition empathically greets the viewer with *Vacant plot near Atlantico Sul* (2007). The photograph zeroes in on the partially faded scrawling, “TERRENO OCUPADO” (which loosely translates as “occupied land” in Portuguese), on a threadbare billboard; *God with us, Pomfret* (2011) closes the exhibition; the image serving as an allegorical signpost that proclaims a spiritual intercessor. The wispy, chafflike plains that dominate the immediate foreground of *Vacant plot near Atlantico Sul* are punctuated in the background with



Roadside stall on the way to Viana from the series *Terreno Ocupado* (2007–08) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg

the visibly aged, derelict looking billboard that reminds us of the fraught yet fading past. With conflict as the focus, it comes as no surprise that this image not only marks the beginning of the *Terreno Ocupado* series but happens to be the first image viewers encounter upon entering *The Aftermath of Conflict*. Through this fundamental positioning, *Vacant plot near Atlantico Sul* figuratively opens up the show to the interwoven narrative of colonial occupation and its lingering aftermath. Despite the exodus of the Portuguese in the mid-1970s, the sign still stands tall and menacing on the barren embankment, the untilled nature of the land even more telling. The visual *in toto* raises questions about the present-day peculiarities of lingering power structures played out on these lands. Who owns the land? And is it still occupied? Juxtapose these musings with the wishful ‘*God with us*’, *Pomfret* and it’s hard to shake the frisson of fact and fiction between the two photos. The titular, divinatory words of “God with us,” deface a municipal billboard announcing a project to rehabilitate the water supply in Pomfret, South Africa. From the intertextual tension between graffiti and government signage, one can infer where the veteran Angolan soldiers in Pomfret put their faith. Although both landscapes—Atlantico Sul and Pomfret—are

barren and desolate, the signified ideologies present a tale of two cities, one leading to nowhere, a stasis of the colonial order of things, while the other hints at a possible otherworldly “elsewhere” beyond this abject mining town. In single, horizontal file, twenty-one other photographs (two are diptychs, two are triptychs) cutting across the three series line three white walls, their chronological continuity auguring some progress. The stark white of the walls adds urgency to Ractliffe’s monochromatic images; the contrast ushers viewers to get close and dwell in this geographic morass of postcolonialism.

Biro and Owen zero in on the landscape as a site to explore this contested postcolonial narrative. The landscapes in question are Angola and South Africa, with the Angolan Civil War and Border War setting the stage for a visual study of an environment ravaged by conflict and collusion with a host of countries—Russia, the United States, Cuba, and China, to name a few. As such, war and its ramifications on the physical and psychological terrain serve as the fulcrum for the curatorial view that conflict is integral to apprehending the precarious state of the region. These vistas of precarity are furthered by leitmotifs of “dispossession, history, memory, and erasure,” and how these figure into the psychic

FEATURE

consequences of conflict—namely populations besieged by hegemonic histories and morose memories.⁹ This stance is communicated early on in very objective terms, as Biro and Owen narrate the historical happenings, opting not to stray too far from the facts. If we hark back to *Vacant plot near Atlantico Sul* and consider the subsequent images that come after it (i.e., *Roadside stall on the way to Viana*; *Wreck of a Chinese ship at Ilha*; *Drying fish on the beach at Ilha*, all 2007), viewers attend to the traces of Portuguese colonial occupation on the physical landscape of Luanda as well as the ensuing economic conditions that came with the precarious state of the nation following independence. In a way, Ractliffe is presented as a rather all-knowing figure; the curators highlight the importance of the photographer's "deepening engagement" with the slightly built-up and bucolic landscapes of Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, or Platfontein, South Africa, among others. For Ractliffe, however, this rendezvous with landscape takes on a structural resonance, as her photographs capture the fragility of intimate exchanges between structures past their heyday and the spaces that continue to inhabit them.

By and large, this structural fabric woven atop war-torn landscapes is crucial to the breadth of Biro and Owen's curatorial argument and, more importantly, Ractliffe's oeuvre. For instance, the curators make mention of the structural traces attached to conflict and contention (e.g., "unmarked mass graves," "former military

testing sites," and "shanty towns"), perhaps as a way to convey how themes of "dispossession" and "erasure" are constituted in the lived environment. In a related point, in speaking about the series *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, Ractliffe notes:

I'm a little hesitant to even call it landscape; it's more about space and the ways space speaks to the things I'm interested in expressing in my photographs. And to be honest, I prefer working with space and structures and objects. I have difficulty with what it means to photograph people.¹⁰

Thorn tree, Platfontein and *Playing soccer with marbles, Platfontein* (both from the *Borderlands* series) explore the tense give-and-take Ractliffe has with photography as means of communicating with people. In both images, objects—be it rocks, shredded clothes, or polythene bags—are foregrounded relative to the human bodies that lie fragmented or far-off in the picture plane. This intimacy (and immediacy) attached to structures is not a complete neglect of the human form. Ten images in *The Aftermath of Conflict* bear a human presence. However, the relative absence of bodies, in a way, mimics that of Ractliffe, who was largely an anonymous figure, physically and mentally, during those thirty-plus years of combat. Hence, it seems as if Ractliffe's focus on structure is as much about catching up with the storied topography of

Angola and South Africa as it is about disquiet in documenting bodies. Another angle to this immediacy with structure is how Ractliffe effectively distances herself, her photography, and her gaze from a brand of photojournalism in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s that was embroiled in victimhood and exploiting the suffering of black bodies. By subtly sidestepping an "infatuation with the landscape . . . and documentary literalism," viewers come to appreciate Ractliffe's solitude and meditative process, and how that serves as impetus for creating cryptic documentary images that defy cliché appearances, all the while pushing for a renewed regard for space.¹¹

This regard for space as navigated through time becomes the psychic construct at the crux of *The Aftermath of Conflict*. Even the idea of *aftermath* in and of itself sets this temporal tone of looking backward and forward. From the time Ractliffe "entered

Playing soccer with marbles, Platfontein from the series *The Borderlands* (2011–13) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg





Vacant plot near Atlantico Sul from the series *Terreno Ocupado* (2007–08) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg

the myth” in *Terreno Ocupado* to her exit in *The Borderlands*, Biro and Owen chart an objective throughline with Ractliffe’s photography acting as guide.¹² It mirrors Sontag’s thoughts in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), in which she considers photography as having this inbuilt objectivity—an “authority over imagination”—that recorded the real.¹³ If we look to the wall texts, they all come across as rather matter-of-fact, which reinforces the curatorial argument about how geographic landscapes become occupied, abandoned, and contested following oppressive governance and wars waged on ideology and colonialism. On the other hand, photography is not without “a point of view.”¹⁴ How time chronologically unfolds across the exhibition (and even the three series) substantiates Ractliffe’s intimate read on the instability of the region. However, that Ractliffe returned to this contested space multiple times over a span of six years not only suggests a yearning to develop a fuller meaning of the landscape, but also throws into question how objective this unfolding of time is as it relates to “memory,” “history,” and even “erasure.” Returning to Sontag, though, and her notion that “photographs represent the view of *someone*,”¹⁵ it’s worth asking whose time, memory, and history with respect to the land are under purview across *The Aftermath of Conflict*. Is it Ractliffe’s or that of the Angolan teacher she encountered after shooting the triptych of Fidel Castro, Agostinho Neto, and Leonid Brezhnev?

It seems Biro and Owen broach this dialectic when they suggest that Ractliffe’s photos explore “traces of the past in the present.”¹⁶ In these traces, we can locate the myths that open and close *The Aftermath of Conflict*. One is distinctively that of Ractliffe, who was drawn to Angola and South Africa due to myth as well as the ideas around landscape as “history” or “archive” or “pathology.”¹⁷ The other myth belongs to that of the (displaced) inhabitants of

Angola and South Africa who harbor an element of futuring, a longing for an improved nation-state that counters stories about Africa’s stagnancy. However, Biro and Owen are found wanting when it comes to negotiating the various machineries of myth in relation to *The Aftermath of Conflict*. While shooting *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, the exchange between Ractliffe and the teacher is poignant for many reasons. Key among them is the renewed potentiality for postcolonial Africa, and the ways in which the traces of myth echoed in the dialogue take on different forms depending on whose eyes are doing the *seeing*. Unfortunately, the *seeing* in *The Aftermath of Conflict* fails to consider the possibility that the windswept minefields of Cuvelai, the garbage-filled ravines of Luanda, and the unidentified memorials wedged in the deserts of Namibe circulate traces of myth other than the displacement and economic tumult that results from conflict. Instead, it appears the curators were intent on avoiding examining such possibilities.

How might we understand Ractliffe’s myth? For one, we know it is a myth she sought to dispel through her artistic practice. In speaking about her intentions behind *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, Ractliffe shared these two thoughts:

So one of the reasons for embarking on this project was, in some way, to attempt to locate the imaginary of that war, to engage the myths that circulate and retrieve a place for memory . . . I’ve spoken a bit about this collision of past and present in the landscape, but it was also colliding in me.¹⁸

During my time in Luanda, a second project began to suggest itself, one in which my attention would shift away from the urban manifestation of aftermath to the “space” of war itself.¹⁹

FEATURE

From *Terreno Ocupado*, where Ractliffe documented the social and spatial demographics of Luanda, to *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, in which she explored the landscapes of war in southern Angola, it remains uncertain whether these experiences actually quelled the colliding myths the photographer harbored with regard to Angola. Given the self-reflexive way in which Ractliffe thinks about her practice, it is quite possible that this myth of Angola will continue to atomize, branching off into narrower lacunae to explore. Consistent with this, when Ractliffe began *Terreno Ocupado*, she had this on her mind:

And this remains my ongoing dilemma with photography; my need for mimesis, an anchor to the real, but equally, my need to shift the fixity of the photograph, to call into question the acceptance of the real and insert something of the “unreality” of experience—if this makes

any sense. Which also raised the question of my own position, as a photographer, in a place that’s not “mine,” and how I could reflect this in the images.²⁰

With this as a starting point, Biro and Owen opted to sidestep this questioning of self, intent, and the imaginary that dominated Ractliffe’s thinking prior to initiating *Terreno Ocupado* and the subsequent series that would follow. As such, the wall texts in *The Aftermath of Conflict* circulate the narratives of displacement, conflict, and the like, with few making mention of the possible “unreality” framing Ractliffe’s seeing. An uncanny form emerges in *Deminer near Cuvelai* (2009), with Biro and Owen commenting on the “strange and eerie presence” of this “deminer” in the clearing tasked with exhuming Angola of the millions of landmines strewn across the country. *Roadside stall on the way to Viana* (2007) is equally preternatural

in form as the lifeless workmen’s overalls communicate the “ghostly signs of economic activity.” However, what might be “eerie” to Ractliffe—and the curators for that matter—could very well be the norm for Angolans who would rather move on from this pained history or reimagine it. For instance, that work overalls hang, pressed and unused, by the roadside could portend a declining economy; however, increased crude oil production in the early aughts saw Angola’s gross domestic product soar, pushing economic growth into frenzied pace. As for the deminer, the little known beauty pageant called Miss Landmine Survivor graced Luanda, Angola, in 2008. The contest saw eighteen women vie for a custom-made prosthetic leg, all in an effort to kick-start their lives again. The pageantry element to Miss Landmine Survivor casts another kind of spectacle to the spectacular deminer, highlighting the sense of resilience among Angolans when grappling with this postcolonial entanglement.

In questioning the honesty of her images and her position as an outsider, Ractliffe interrogates whether her mythopoetic questions about Angola will ever be truly resolved. To be fair, achieving a complete one-eighty in her thinking might be too much to expect, considering Ractliffe only just entered the myth roughly eight years ago. However, it is clear that Ractliffe’s conceptual mapping post-*Terreno*

Deminer near Cuvelai from the series *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* (2009–10) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg





Detail of Mural portraits depicting Fidel Castro, Agostinho Neto and Leonid Brezhnev, painted on the wall of a house in Viriambundo, Angola, circa 1975 from the series *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* (2009–10) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg

Ocupado evidences a desire to have a more nuanced engagement with the landscape, such that she is continually building upon her last entry into the myth. Ractliffe does not return to the myth of Angola with an egotist's eye. Instead, the artist's eye seeks to peer further into her superficiality, with the artist reflecting:

So my experience through the spaces of that landscape, literally finding my way into meaning, was something that came over time, over repeated journeys. All those roadside markers, for instance—and I must have photographed hundreds of them—were initially unfathomable, open to all sorts of imaginings. And it was only on my second or third trip when I (nervously!) took a walk along a path, that I discovered they identified safe passages through mined areas. Others remained a mystery—like the two memorial-like structures in the desert near Namibe.²¹

On this account, each series for Ractliffe was exploratory and riddled with contingencies. Amid this air of chance, however, was a conceptual structure that kept Ractliffe circling back to critique her evolving place and space as a foreigner in these traumatized landscapes. Interestingly, Ractliffe acknowledges that landscape to her is “real and imaginary,”²² which suggests

that the artist may also see herself forever straddling both worlds where Angola is concerned, but with a calibrated eye each time she returns to the country. This reworking of myth through seeing is captured in two photographs, *Unidentified memorial in the desert, south of Namibe I* and *II* (2009 and 2010, respectively), from *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*. Eight months separate the images. Part *I* was included in *The Aftermath of Conflict*; the other was omitted for unknown reasons. Alone, part *I* immediately references, all at once, erasure, memory, and history, in the sense that this found curio stands as a grave marker for an ex-soldier or a memorial planted by a possible inhabitant who travelled through this deserted space. The harsh desert sunlight swathes part *I*. A faint horizon evenly splits the picture plane in two; the gravelly terrain of the Namib Desert cuts a complicated figure against the clear skies above. An assemblage of objects resting atop a stony dune interrupts this terrestrial barrenness. A long pole emerges from the pile of bric-a-brac, its appearance bowed perhaps by the wind that whips a white, frayed cloth-cum-flag. It's clear that care has been invested into this isolated memorial; a small parasol-like contraption appears to cover the low-lying objects at the base of the pole. The appearance of the second assemblage in part *II* just under a year later borders on fantastical given that the nearest human settlement is a good three days drive away. Ractliffe acknowledges that the visuals “could be seen as quite bleak. It's images of a completely devastated landscape.”²³ Yet these two makeshift monuments possess a mythical narrative of reverence for the heroic virtues of the fallen soldiers and the architect who trekked miles on end on this cosmic-like terrain. Understood this way, conflict and erasure are only one part of the story. Hence, Ractliffe's internal meditations about landscape, especially in relation to her artistic production and “foreignness,” broaden the concept of landscape as being only historic, archival, or pathological. In capturing part *II*, it's as though, following her conversation with the schoolteacher, Ractliffe shifted her *seeing* of what to tend to and what to leave in the past.

Taken together, it appears that mixing the *jouissance* of myth with the jolt of reality might expand how we apprehend the concepts of landscape and conflict in *The Aftermath of Conflict*. Ractliffe shows how myth, reality, and the interstitial space between the two can exist in tandem, enriching (and bewitching) the landscape with a deserving and rather reassuring complexity of narratives. Much like Ractliffe, the interwoven narrative within the images lessens the onus on the viewer to see or understand every historic turn all at once. Ractliffe meditated over these myths and landscapes for several years, questioning her *seeing* along the way. Jumping off from the historical remnants of the war, Biro and Owen's curatorial thesis hones in on the political, economic, geographic, and psychological tensions that have plagued Angola, and how Ractliffe's photography locates the imaginary of it all. But it is *her* imaginary more than anything. And if we peer past the dominant themes of dispossession, erasure, occupation, and the like, we actually encounter the aporia felt by Ractliffe, and that of the people of Angola. Ractliffe made a prescient observation in her *Terreno Ocupado* letters to Enwezor

FEATURE

about the workings of myth within the cultural identities of people from this southwestern region of Africa:

Something that continues to be striking for me is the palpable presence of myth. It's partly in the way people talk about themselves and their narration of history, but also how they articulate the relationship of the past to the present and how this present works in terms of imagining a future—it seems to be a very particular understanding of things. I'm sure some of this is my projection and of course, my foreignness, and there's also the thing of language, which makes for rather interesting communication at times.²⁴

The remarks of the schoolteacher to Ractliffe come to mind, as he communicates to the outsider—Ractliffe—that the socialist trinity of Neto, Castro, and Brezhnev is a bygone story that is quickly being replaced by the internet, and that connectivity can improve access to education for Angolans far and wide. Echoing Walter Benjamin's notion of myth as collective wish-image,²⁵ this schoolteacher seeks to liberate Angola from past myths by aligning emancipatory ideas (e.g., access to education) with new industrial and technological forms. Ractliffe made a point to finish her essay for *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* with that story. Why? In speaking about the importance of myth for the people of Angola, Ractliffe offers up her foreign status as a limiting factor in apprehending the function myth serves in this cultural context; however, it may be worth considering whether the myth Ractliffe held for all these years is another bond that joins her with the myths of Angola. In these self-reflexive moments, myth becomes not about the historical accuracy of its lineage, the judgment-value attached to its moral compass, or whether it is simply fact or fiction. From that schoolteacher to Ractliffe, myth takes on a malleable meaning that should inform how we approach *The Aftermath of Conflict*. Yes, there was conflict within that dialogue (and the larger exhibition narrative), but at its core, we see two individuals shifting how they think through myth. While one is revolutionary,²⁶ the other a searching for self, common to both is a desire to move past myth.

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Unidentified memorial in the desert, south of Namibe II from the series *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* (2009–10) by Jo Ractliffe; courtesy Jo Ractliffe and STEVENSON, Cape Town and Johannesburg

NOTES 1. Jo Ractliffe, *As Terras do Fim do Mundo: The Lands of the End of the World* (Cape Town, South Africa: Michael Stevenson, 2010), 13. 2. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado; Extracts from Letters to Okwui," in Okwui Enwezor, ed., "Exodus of the Dogs," special issue of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 25 (2009): 62. 3. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado," 62. 4. *Ibid.* 5. In her 2011 essay "In Search of the Border," Ractliffe alludes that her position as a white South African partly contributed to the half-truths she held about the wars that waged across southwestern Africa. Ractliffe, "In Search of the Border," *Johannesburg Salon 4* (2011): 106–8. 6. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2005), 12. 7. In one letter to Enwezor about *Terreno Ocupado*, Ractliffe voiced uncertainties as an outsider looking in, and whether her position as a foreigner in a land that was technically not hers might actually result in her imparting an "unreality" or fixedness to these very real experiences of occupation and disenfranchisement. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado," 65. 8. *Ibid.* 9. Yaëlle Biro and Evelyn Owen, "The Aftermath of Conflict: Jo Ractliffe's Photographs of Angola and South Africa," www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/press-room/exhibitions/2015/aftermath-of-conflict. 10. Kathleen MacQueen, "Shifting Connections: Jo Ractliffe," *BOMB Magazine*, September 26, 2011, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/6096/shifting-connections-jo-ractliffe>. 11. Enwezor, "Exodus of the Dogs," 86. 12. See Ractliffe, "Introduction" in *Terreno Ocupado* (Johannesburg: Warren Siebrits Modern & Contemporary Art, 2008), 6. 13. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 25. 14. *Ibid.*, 26. 15. *Ibid.*, 31. 16. Biro and Owen, *Aftermath of Conflict*. 17. MacQueen, "Shifting Connections: Jo Ractliffe." 18. *Ibid.* 19. "Jo Ractliffe: *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*," Michael Stevenson Gallery, www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/ractliffe/index2010.htm. 20. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado," 64. 21. MacQueen, "Shifting Connections: Jo Ractliffe." 22. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado," 64. 23. Julia Halperin, "Capturing the Ghosts of War: Artist Jo Ractliffe on Her Photographs of Angolan Conflict's Aftermath," *BLOUIN ARTINFO*, May 23, 2011, www.blouinartinfo.com/contemporary-arts/article/37735-capturing-the-ghosts-of-war-artist-jo-ractliffe-on-her-photographs-of-the-angolan-conflicts-aftermath. 24. Ractliffe, "Introduction: Terreno Ocupado," 65. 25. Susan Buck-Morss, "Mythic Nature: Wish Image," in *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 116–17. 26. Roland Barthes writes in *Mythologies*: "There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, metalanguage is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical." Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957; trans. 1972), 146.