critical arts

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Unlearning Imperialism Through Artistic Remediation: A Critical Pedagogy Approach

Ana Cristina Mendes

School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Analysing art that emerges from remediation can be a form of critical pedagogy in and of itself. This article focuses on art forms that involve remediation as a strategy of the critical pedagogy of "unlearning imperialism" (Azoulay 2019). The aim is to examine the role of the adaptive process of artistic remediation (by which new media technologies incorporate, reinterpret, and reference older media forms) in conceptualising and developing a critical and engaged approach in the classroom to the inequities in knowledge production, mediation, and sharing. The strategic approach to unlearning imperialism is combined with Ariella Azoulay's idea of "potential history". This frames the analysis of three artworks that are, in different ways, linked to photography, either as photography-to-painting or painting-to-photography remediations. The first artwork discussed is Roxana Manouchehri's *Power* (2014), a neo-Victorian photography-to-painting remediation depicting Queen Victoria and Princess Tadj es-Saltaneh; the second and third artworks are Jan Banning's *Immigrant (Jamaican) Olympia with Dutch Servant* (2011) and Raeda Saadeh's *Who Will Make Me Real?* (2003), both painting-to-photography remediations of Édouard Manet's 1863 oil painting Olympia.

Introduction

Walter Benjamin describes how art in the age of mechanical reproduction is interdependent with other media given that, unlike the autonomous auratic work of art of earlier times, "the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility" (2003, 256). The process Benjamin describes can be demonstrated by the unceasing reproducibility of Leonardo Da Vinci's mural painting *The Last Supper* (ca. 1497).[1] An illustrative case of this reproducibility is David LaChapelle's digital artwork *Jesus is My Homeboy: Last Supper* (2003), which serves as an artistic remediation of the canonical visual representation of the event of the Last Supper in Christian art.[2]

Da Vinci's mural had adapted a historical event that took place originally outside of Europe (Jerusalem, Palestine) to a European context—a customary move in Renaissance art that in this case reflects Europe's adaptation of and conflation with Christianity. LaChapelle portrays the urban misfits of early twenty-first-century America in a group around a white Jesus. This Jesus is very similar in physical appearance and dress to Da Vinci's figure, but in LaChapelle's representation of the communal table, burgers and beer bottles coexist with the canonical wine and fruit.

This case shows that a mechanically reproduced and reproducible work of art is a remediation of past media forms. As Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin understand this formal logic, the adaptive process of remediation occurs when new media technologies incorporate, reinterpret and reference older forms of media. As they note about "new" digital media, these "are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture" given that all media forms are influenced by and built upon earlier media forms; in fact, "[t]hey emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts" (2000, 19). In this respect, LaChapelle aligns himself with Da Vinci's appropriation through the remediation of *The Last Supper* using the technology of digital photography. More than that, this reproduction heightens the move that Benjamin (2003) discusses from the aestheticization of the political to the politicisation of the aesthetic. LaChapelle re-politicizes the aesthetic in which Da Vinci depicted Jesus's twelve original "homeboys" to present a "homegirl", Mary Magdalen, and a new group of "homeboys", including drug dealers and gangsters, the destitute and the homeless.

This article focuses on artworks that involve remediation, by which new media technologies incorporate, reinterpret, and reference older media forms, as a strategy of "unlearning imperialism" (Azoulay 2019). The aim is to examine the role of the adaptive process of artistic remediation in conceptualising and developing a critical and engaged approach in the classroom to the inequities in knowledge production, mediation, and sharing. The critical pedagogy of unlearning imperialism, applied to making sense of the imperial discourses in which particular images find themselves entangled, is combined with another concept put forth by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay: "potential history". Potential history, the author proposes, "involves different types of 'de-', such as decompressing and decoding; 're-', such as reversing and rewinding; and 'un-' such as unlearning and undoing"; it "involves understanding that what was taken by the unstoppable imperial movement, and held as if naturally owned by Western institutions", such as plundered knowledge, creativity, labour and wealth, "cannot be parsimoniously redistributed through charity, educational uplift, or humanitarian relief" (2019, 12). Not to be confused with an undoing of history, the idea of potential history underscores how the documenting and framing operations of the imperial photographic camera shutter make hidden, suppressed memories readable, visible, and reallocated (2019, 10).

The critical pedagogy approach discussed in this article is a reflection on the lived experience of teaching a postgraduate visual culture course at the School of Arts and

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initiated by Van Zan Frater, following a gang attack in Los Angeles when he was able to save himself after saying "Jesus is My Homeboy". With a friend, he decided to create a "raceless" and creedless image of Jesus that could represent anyone's close friend. They began by selling screen printed t-shirts in a local park with that image of Jesus and the slogan "Jesus is My Homeboy", which went on to become very popular. Eventually, "Jesus is My Homeboy" became the official image of conferences calling for a cease-fire between gangs in Los Angeles in the late 1980s.

Figure 1. *Power* (2014, acrylic on canvas, perspex sheets, and mirror films). © Roxana Manouchehri. Courtesy of the artist.

Humanities of the University of Lisbon, in a learning context in which visual art practices are analysed primarily through a postcolonial lens, focused on adaptation, reenactment, and reimagining (Mendes 2018, 2022a, 2022b, 2023), to examine issues of epistemic violence (Spivak 1988), epistemic coloniality (Mbembe 2016), and epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007). At the same time, the visual artworks in the syllabus are used as a medium to critically engage in the classroom with the idea of "safe" and "brave spaces" (Palfrey 2017). "Brave spaces", a concept advanced by John Palfrey (2017), refers to learning spaces where courage is needed when encountering potentially contentious material or engaging in difficult conversations. To create a "brave space", Palfrey suggests that educators must actively work to promote self-reflection and empathy among students, creating a classroom culture that values mutual respect and understanding. Encouraging self-reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of the curriculum design of this visual culture course, as it aims to foster critical self-reflection by students of their own racial socialisation and positionality towards knowledge (Leibowitz et al. 2010; Smele et al. 2017), in ways that create an equitable and empowering learning environment for all students.

The next section of this article is devoted to considering how reflection on "the place we know from" is key not only to the creation of critical and engaged learning spaces but also to ensuring that these are safe and brave. The article continues with a close reading of Azoulay's critical pedagogical strategy of unlearning imperialism connected with her idea of potential history. As the three art forms examined here are, in different ways, linked to photography, either as photography-to-painting or painting-to-photography remediations, engaging critically with them in the classroom involved deploying Azoulay's study of the imperial camera shutter, an approach that opens the way for creating potential history. The first artwork discussed is Roxana Manouchehri's *Power* (2014) (Figures 1 and 2), a neo-Victorian photography-to-painting remediation depicting Queen Victoria and the Persian Princess Zahra Khanoum Tadj es-Saltaneh (1883–1936). The second and third artworks are Jan Banning's *Immigrant (Jamaican) Olympia with Dutch Servant* (2011) (Figure 3) and Raeda Saadeh's *Who Will Make Me Real?* (2003) (Figure 4), which

Figure 2. *Power*. Exhibition view. © Roxana Manouchehri. Courtesy of the artist.

are both painting-to-photography remediations of Édouard Manet's 1863 oil painting *Olympia* (itself an adaptation of Titian's *The Venus of Urbino* completed in 1538).

When examining those works as artistic remediations, I extend, as other scholars have done before me, Bolter and Grusin's understanding of remediation as the integration, reinterpretation, and allusion to older forms of media in new media technologies to also mean the reverse movement, e.g. from photography to painting. Through the aesthetic strategies of "reversed remediation" (Korsten 2014) and "retrograde remediation" (Jutz 2019; Levi 2012), scholars have destabilised Bolter and Grusin's theoretical framework of remediation, which involves the integration of older forms of media into newer ones, by arguing likewise for the possibility of a reverse trajectory in media transit. In this respect, Saskia Korsten (2014) examines how, through the strategy of reversed remediation, artworks can disrupt established remediation processes by revealing the inner workings of media instead of concealing them. To drive a media form toward remediation, various media elements must harmonise to produce a familiar and comfortable experience for the viewer. Conversely, in reversed remediation, these diverse media components collaborate to generate an unfamiliar or uncanny outcome, intentionally unsettling the viewer and pulling them out of their state of immersion. "Retrograde remediation", as discussed by Gabriele Jutz (2019), drawing on Pavle Levi's (2012, 42) development of Bolter and Grusin's framework, challenges the unidirectional flow of media transit and transition from older to newer technologies. Jutz (2019) builds on Levi's concept of "cinema by other means" to address the remediation process by which aspects of a newer medium are assimilated into older and non-cinematic media

Figure 3. *Immigrant (Jamaican) Olympia with Dutch Servant* (2011, digital C-type print). © Jan Banning / Galerie Fontana, Amsterdam. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4. *Who Will Make Me Real?* (2003, digital C-type print). © Raeda Saadeh. Courtesy of the artist.

forms like still photography, writing, drawing, sculpture, or performance (Levi 2012, xiv–xv). Through the examples discussed in her article, Jutz (2019, 321) highlights the limitations, in the context of contemporary art in the digital age, of referential and circulatory reproducibility, and prompts a reevaluation of medium specificity. In doing so, Jutz

demonstrates the inherent inadequacy of translating specific media such as cinema into other media forms.

In aesthetic terms, the strategies of "reversed remediation" and "retrograde remediation" are possibly more radical than the one I propose here in connection with unlearning imperialism and focused on epistemic justice. Yet, they contribute to expanding our imagination concerning the potential of artistic remediation. For Azoulay, unlearning imperialism "aims at unlearning its origins, found in the repetitive moments of the operation of imperial shutters. (…) [it] refuses the stories the shutter tells" (2019, 7). In Manouchehri, Banning, and Saadeh's artworks, remediation involves the process of taking "source" images and transforming them to fit not only a new medium but also a different geopolitical context—a contested space resulting from intricate histories and ongoing impacts of empire – to reverse the workings of the imperial shutter. Unlearning imperialism hence becomes a critical pedagogy strategy to build awareness of the violence of epistemicide—the "terra nullius of colonial appropriation and violence" (Santos 2018, 102) correlative to the imposition of Western frameworks of modernity.

This strategy of unlearning imperialism ties in with the transformative aims of epistemic decolonisation with roots in Paulo Freire's (2005) pedagogy of liberation. More recent decolonising efforts are much indebted to Freire's epistemological proposal that the oppressed must comprehend their oppression to reclaim "the restoration of their humanity" (2005, 45). Conscientization, which involves understanding both the written word of injustice *and* the broader world of injustice, motivates the oppressed to act against inequality. Freire maintains that the oppressed "will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it, through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it" (2005, 45). Integrating theory, action, and reflection, Freire's proposed praxis of liberation states that knowledge building in the classroom seeking systemic change must begin with and from learners' lived experiences, fostering a dialogic, self-reflexive environment where knowledge is co-created.[3] These on-the-ground struggles are not merely theoretical exercises, but they are key to rejuvenating and safeguarding democratic values, social justice, and equity; they are crucial to envisioning a future where these ideals are not just theoretical concepts but lived realities. This approach, which embraces the performative aspect of pedagogy and sees education as an arena where collective struggles are performed, needs to be in place before critical strategies such as the unlearning of imperialism and its supporting structures (including the violences of enslavement, colonialism, and occupation facilitated by images) can occur in the classroom.

This article aims to contribute to the development of a critical approach in the classroom to the inequities in the production, dissemination, and interpretation of knowledge; this objective connects with the epistemic decolonising aim of acknowledging the historical and current expressions of racial inequality and injustice, often found within the curriculum. The artworks selected for analysis remediate the iconic image of Queen Victoria, which represents global power and imperialism, and the canonical image of Manet's *Olympia*, which belongs to a Eurocentric working memory that "stores and reproduces

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[3]I provide detail elsewhere on the resonance of Freire's model with the decolonising project-practice that emerged more prominently in 2015 at the University of Cape Town with the #RhodesMustFall protest movement (Mendes 2023, 108–112).

the cultural capital of a society that is continuously recycled and re-affirmed" (Assmann 2008, 100). As with Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, *Olympia* has been the object of continuous representational repetition, re-use, and remediation, particularly in the context of artistic projects of reversing the male gaze, including Yasumasa Morimura's *Portrait (Futago)* (1988). The remediation of canonical texts, such as *Olympia*, can be interpreted as memorialising the "source" texts, whether verbal, aural, or visual, of a Eurocentric working memory, reinforcing the privileged cultural status of these texts. Yet, concurrently, the remediation of these texts is also conducive to reframing and restitution in relation to knowledge inequities. This process of understanding remediation as reframing and restitution can be aligned with the movement of social justice education that aims to equip students with the skills to analyse, comprehend, and intervene in unequal systems to promote equality for all. There is epistemic restitution when remediations haunt and revisit the "source" texts of official, recorded, imperial history—as we will observe in Manouchehri's *Power*—bringing neglected stories and characters to light, reframing history itself, and even creating potential history through, for instance, postcolonial adaptation.

Unlearning imperialism and reflecting on the place you know from

A pedagogical orientation towards unlearning imperialism is inextricably connected with the self-reflexivity that an education in the humanities aims to promote. In the (un)learning context I reflect on here, critical work in the classroom takes into account, self-reflexively, the epistemic place from where the teacher and students are speaking—"the place we know from". Adopting a self-reflexive perspective attentive to our "locus of theoretical enunciation" (Mignolo 2000, 112), by first expounding to our students the underlying epistemological principles that form the basis of the theories we impart in the classroom and the curricula we create, encourages students to critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and identitarian attachments (Brown 1993), and to understand their positionality to the texts and practices analysed in the classroom.

The skill of critical thinking is deemed so fundamental, especially in humanities courses, that it is often left implicit in assignments. Yet, not all students will have a firm grasp of what critical thinking means; they might see it as a general term but may be unable to break it into components, even overlooking it until they complete their assignments. To establish the classroom as a safe and brave space for critical thinking, the visual culture course I reflect on here begins with a participatory and collective exercise of "introducing/placing ourselves together in the classroom" (based on the in-class discussion prompts proposed by Eugenia Zuroski [2020]) that asks students to consider their own perspectives and make connections between their lived experiences and the course material. Amplifying the visual course's thematic focus on epistemological issues, this exercise is the starting point of the narrative of the course, which unfolds around issues of knowledge and, more concretely, how knowledge is made visible. In addition, it presents to students what a critical and engaged pedagogy can look like—not just in a linear way, but in a circular, feedback-loop way.

In this respect, self-reflexivity relates to the ability to examine one's own affect and to understand how this impacts the interpretation of postcolonial artworks, which also entails an awareness of our own social positionality and the intricate dynamics of academic and social discourse—the place we learn from. In the words of the Afro-Brazilian

feminist activist-scholar Djamila Ribeiro (2017), this place is our "lugar de fala" and "lugar de escuta", i.e. the place from which we express our thoughts and listen. The terms "lugar de fala" ("the place from which I speak") and "lugar de escuta" ("the place from which I listen") signify the recognition that our viewpoints are not formed in a vacuum but are deeply influenced by our race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and other intersecting identities, and that active and empathetic listening to voices and experiences different from our own must be fostered for social justice. As Ribeiro explains, the origins of the term "lugar de fala" as applied in this context are unclear, but they stem from discussions on feminist perspectives, diversity, critical racial theory, and decolonial thought, and from contributions by authors such as Linda Martín Alcoff, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Patricia Hill Collins, and Grada Kilomba, whose ideas have influenced social justice movements, especially in online debates, challenging discursive authority and questioning who has the right to speak (2017, 33–34).

Throughout the course, students are supported in gaining a critical awareness of how various intersecting categories of difference, such as geopolitics, race, class, gender, sexuality, and able-bodiedness, shape not only visual culture but also the dynamics of the classroom (Smele et al. 2017). To reflect on the place you know from, the place from which you speak and listen, and to be aware of the cultural, geopolitical, epistemological, body-political, and identitarian location of the subject that thinks and speaks (Grosfoguel 2007, 213), fulfils the transversal competencies of critical thinking, methodological training, and ethical and social responsibility—the three dimensions that comprise "value-loaded critical thinking" (Rombout, Schuitema, and Volman 2022). Self-reflexive practices and the idea of creating "brave spaces" in the classroom complement each other. Indeed, especially when engaging in difficult conversations about coloniality, self-reflexivity is an essential component of "brave spaces", learning spaces where students feel empowered to participate in challenging dialogues and explore diverse perspectives, "even insofar as some of the discussions will be uncomfortable for certain students" (Palfrey 2017, 21).

The image and the image-maker as creators of "potential history"

Given the fact that it was the extractivist logic of empire that made the emergence of image-making technologies possible, the self-reflexivity fostered by the strategies of unthinking Eurocentrism (Shohat and Stam 2014) and unlearning imperialism (Azoulay 2019) needs to be a fundamental pedagogical perspective when we study processes of artistic remediation in the imperial *longue durée*. This self-reflexive pedagogical orientation entails unlearning the "origins" of image-making technologies that undergird the creation of world pictures and world-building. A self-reflexive orientation can perhaps only materialise in "rehearsals" given that "our daily habits are so entangled in the operation of imperial technologies" (Azoulay 2019, 10). It can also relate to Giorgio Agamben's argument on the location of "the origin" not as a point in the past, but as decidedly contemporary (2009, 50). Self-reflexivity is key when historicising "the world as exhibition" (Mitchell 1989), and the image-making machines and apparatuses that present it as an exhibition.[4] For Shohat

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[4]In this respect, John Havia's (2009) concept of "the photographic complex" views photography as a network involving both animate and inanimate components beyond the photographer, camera, and photograph, including optics theory, negatives, chemicals for developing prints, reproductive technologies for image circulation, transportation and communication networks, production and distribution systems, archival practices, and even light (2009, 81). This

and Stam, the visual is influenced by various texts and discourses, and embedded in multiple apparatuses such as museums, academia, the art world, publishing, and even the nation-state, which manage the creation, distribution, and validation of artworks (2002, 55). Relatedly, Azoulay presents the camera shutter as "a synecdoche for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether" (2019, 2), and inevitably "rooted in imperial formations of power" (2019, 5–6). As such, the image created through the shutter provides an entry point for students to realise the imperial authority to produce an event as fact (to define chronological order and set up a social place) and recognise the enduring legacy of imperial violence. For example, that image allows us to grasp how the automatic movement of the camera can instantly "transform an individual rooted in her life-world into a refugee" (2019, 6). The imperial shutter can thus also work as a metaphor for the framing of history. Azoulay refers to images where "what is suppressed and made irrelevant is excised by the shutter" (2019, 5); she describes how "the new" was sought out by sealing the past away. We might argue that Europeans had control over image-making technology and were using it to show the sides of history that they wanted—in short, to govern history. The images projected were unescapably more aligned with the picture of the world they were creating and complicit, for example, in its erasing of Indigenous cultures. The world captured by the imperial shutter and represented in the imperial frame was depleted, divided, compartmentalised, and spatialised; these processes "fuel the intrinsic imperial drive to 'progress', which conditions the way world history is organised, archived, articulated and represented" (Azoulay 2019, 11). In this respect, the person operating the camera holds significant control over the shooting process: they shape the setting, determine the right moment to capture the image, and construct a perspective to achieve a specific outcome.

At the same time, the image is, as W. J. T. Mitchell puts it, "something like an animated, living thing, an object with feelings, intentions, desires, and agency" (2005, 127), which means that the shutter also needs to be unlearned in acknowledgement of that potentiality *within* the image. The notion that meaning is solely infused into an image by its creators, for example, as part of an imperial world-building project, can not only be limiting but also fundamentally flawed, especially when viewed through a hermeneutical decolonial lens (which must reflect on the ethico-political implications of interpretation) (Fúnez-Flores 2021). In the context of decolonial pedagogies, this perspective challenges the notion that interpretation serves to uncover the meaning of texts, especially the meaning imparted by their authors. Instead, the intersecting of hermeneutics, cultural studies, and decolonial perspectives emphasises that understanding and reflection are integral to one's lived experience and one's lived ways of thinking, concerning, in this case, images as agents that possess multifaceted lives. Embracing the agency of images within a decolonial framework signifies a radical shift in perspective. We can read images as carrying their own stories and perspectives and as constantly adapting and evolving as they interact with various contexts and traverse different spaces and times. Recognising the ever-expanding narrative of the image entails acknowledging images as active participants in the construction of knowledge, with their own "motivation, autonomy, aura, fecundity" (Mitchell 2005, 7). Furthermore, images have variable

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concept is influenced by Bruno Latour's ideas and developed from an examination of the technologies employed by European powers during their occupation of China in 1900 to quell what is commonly referred to as the Boxer Uprising or Rebellion.

levels of audibility; they possess stories and emotions that are not immediately visible but have their own sound and audible frequencies, allowing them to be "listened to" rather than just seen (Campt 2017). Jacques Rancière's notion of the "pensive image" (2009) further underscores the image's agency and its ability to incite thoughtful reflection and contemplation. Rancière draws our attention to the indeterminacy of the meaning imparted by the creator of the "pensive image", sitting between the active and the passive, as the image holds "a thought that cannot be attributed to the intention of the person who produces it and which has an effect on the person who views it without her linking it to a determinate object" (2009, 107). Images, in this sense, act as catalysts for critical and decolonial thinking when they spark dialogues that question established power structures and challenge imperial ideologies.

Photography is an inherently political technology inextricable from imperial, extractive patterns (Winner 1980). The advent of photography as a technology accelerated and provided further opportunities to realise the process of imperial looting. Violence is engrained not only in the technology of the camera but also in its use: to document with life-like precision the worlds of the colonised, whose extracted images were used to further the development of modern sciences such as ethnography (2019, 9). As Azoulay contends, "people and artifacts have become objects of observation and study, conversion and care, charge and control" (2019, 4). Beyond its necessary technical functions of mediating how the light is captured by the lens and obtaining a legible and precise image out of the flow of light, the operation of the shutter is not in any way neutral or disconnected from the image it produces; it extracts and possesses images by the terms set by empire. Contrary to the idea of objectiveness associated with photography and to the epistemology of documentary truth linked to photography (the myth of photographic truth), and while the image the camera shutter generates and the story it tells remain reproducible and bear the appearance of neutrality, the shutter "commands zero degrees of neutrality, because whatever comes from its operation is already stripped bare of its singularity, its singular way of being part of the world" (2019, 9).

While acknowledging the agency of images, focusing solely on the photographic image itself in the classroom might obfuscate the conditions under which it was produced, so we must unlearn the destructive processes which made that production possible. The mechanical device of the camera shutter was developed as an imperial technology. Due to that, Azoulay regards the shutter as an "onto-epistemological mechanism" (2019, 8), and underscores that this shutter, as she phrases it during an interview,

> was not invented with the camera but rather with earlier imperial technologies that are not device-based. (…) What is often forgotten in these narratives is that it was not the dissemination of a device, invented in 1839, but the intrusion of a technology that normalizes the violent outcome of military invasions and colonization. (Lewis and Parry 2021, 247–248)

The imperial shutter normalises and authorises the "truth" of who arrived first at a given space as the "discoverer" and "possessor," endowed with rights over that piece of land. In this respect, the imperial shutter still operates today, making innocents criminal and criminals innocent. For example, when we unlearn imperialism, "the presumed factuality of the sentence 'a Mexican migrant was killed while crossing the American border' becomes impossible because one sees through imperial shutters and recognises that a

Mexican cannot cross illegally a foreign border erected illegally on her own land" (2019, 10). Concerning this example of "presumed factuality", to unlearn imperialism is to refuse the three dividing lines drawn and enforced by the imperial camera shutter: first, of "chronological order", connected with the official narrative of (a White supremacist) history dividing a before from an after, where the scene of the photograph becomes relegated to history and is separated from the present and the future; second, of "the organisation of social space", where there is a clear spatial separation between the person behind the camera and the person being photographed—a separation which is, of necessity, physical, but more relevantly socially constructed and authorised; and third, related to the body politic, "between those who possess and operate such devices and appropriate and accumulate their product and those whose countenance, resources, or labour are extracted" (2019, 8), turning individuals into "undocumented" or "illegal aliens".

Roxana manouchehri's *power*: queen Victoria and princess Tadj es-Saltaneh in the neo-Victorian frame

To understand the restitution at work in Manouchehri's *Power*, Azoulay's words can be fruitfully deployed. If the image makes memories that were previously hidden and suppressed "legible, perceptible, and redistributed", it also makes them, perhaps more importantly, transtemporal: these memories are not merely made "legible *again* but *from ever*— *from* an indefinite past rather than toward (or in anticipation of) indefinite futures, as in *for ever*—not as retrieved histories but as an active mechanism that seeks to maintain the principle of reversibility of what should have not been possible, a refusal of imperial shutters closing in the first place" (2019, 10; emphasis in original).

Azoulay positions the camera shutter as "a subservient element of the photographic apparatus" that operates in relation to "the stand-alone photograph-to-be, the image that prefigures and conditions the closing and opening of a shutter"; she calls this photograph-to-be the "petty sovereign", noting that it "commands what sort of things have to be distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome, and made irrelevant for the shutter of the camera to function, as well as for a photograph to be taken and its meaning accepted" (2019, 2). The camera shutter, then, excises what is repressed and made extraneous by the "petty sovereign". As Azoulay contends, the technology and practice of photography emerged from imperial assumptions and power dynamics that go back to the year 1492: "first and foremost the use of violence, the exercise of imperial rights, and the creation and destruction of shared worlds" (2019, 3).

Like the Bible and the gun, the camera was integral to the imperial toolbox. The historical relationship between the invention of imaging technologies in the 1800s with the growth of nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism has been well documented (see Stam 2000, 19–20, on the implications of this entanglement for theories of film spectatorship). Azoulay takes this idea further, arguing that the shutter stands synecdochically "for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether, on which the invention of photography, as well as other technological media, was modelled" (2019, 2). This calls for investigating photography as part of the imperial world in which it developed (2019, 3). The inherent imperialism of photography noted by Azoulay is expressed through the uses to which it is put: like public statuary, photography was used to legitimise empire. Consider, for example, the impact of the 1876 photograph by W. and D. Downey of Queen

Victoria, taken as her official portrait as Empress of India (*Kaiser-i-Hind*), and the extent to which the new medium of photography played a crucial role in curating Victoria's image as an imperial ruler.

The democratisation of visual media in the nineteenth century, as technological advancements supported the development of the popular illustrated print media, helped make Victoria immensely influential and popular with her subjects at home and abroad. Visual representations of the royal family, such as the Empress photograph, publicised and authorised the ever-expanding imperial power that accrued to Britain during Victoria's reign, as Victoria became the "first media monarch" (Plunkett 2003). The wider accessibility and reach of these images were bolstered by Victoria and Prince Albert's support for the new photographic media, both as patrons and practitioners: they even installed a private darkroom at Windsor Castle and had their children learn about photography (Christie 2016, 24–25). Photography, which began as a leisured occupation, quickly became a commercial venture, and photographs became commercialised objects as early as 1841 (Jäger 1995, 318); during the 1850s, there was a burgeoning number of photographic portrait studios and the *carte-de-visite* (or visiting card) fad emerged in the following decade among the middle and upper classes (Plunkett 2003, 150–151; Christie 2016, 24). This craze began in Europe with the French photographer André Adolph Eugéne Disdéri's photographs of the dignitaries of the Second Empire. After inventing a way of reducing costs by taking several prints on one photographic plate, Disdéri patented the *carte-de-visite* format, which consisted of a small photograph similar in style to the small, decorative visiting card that individuals commonly carried to present themselves to others. These individual *cartes* could be reproduced quickly and cheaply, which helped to create a large-scale market for them. The desire for *cartes* was immense, to the point that Marion & Co., a London-based wholesale house that sold celebrity *cartes*, claimed in 1862 that around "50,000 *cartes* passed through the firm's hands every month" (Plunkett 2003, 153).

As part of the curation of the monarch's public image, in 1860, Victoria had *carte* portraits of herself and Prince Albert made, photographed by J. E. Mayall; these *cartes* (like the vast ocean of commemorative royal memorabilia available today, ranging from plates with Kate Middleton's face on them to baby onesies bearing the inscription "I love my auntie Pippa") could be acquired by her subjects. In other words, Victoria turned her family into an object of fandom. Mayall's Royal Album (ca. 1860–1861) included many photographs of the royal family (mainly of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert) in the *carte-de-visite* format, and the album was a great success, as "after only a few days on sale wholesalers already demanded 60,000 sets" (Plunkett 2003, 152–153). However, this album was costly, a luxury item for the wealthiest families; individual *cartes* of the included photographs were much cheaper and more accessible. Still, the demand for Mayall's royal photographs was so significant that counterfeits started to appear. These counterfeit copies "were instrumental in exploiting the reproductive potential of photography", as the *cartes* "were metamorphosed into objects of popular culture through the efforts of the illegal sellers as much as the legal ones" (Plunkett 2003, 54). Because of this, to distinguish his original ones from the counterfeit ones, Mayall attempted to trademark his *cartes* (Plunkett 2003, 154–155).

The *cartes-de-visite* of the British Royal family, sanctioned by Victoria herself, intensified the existing craze for these visual representations. Easily accessible at stationer's shops,

cartes-de-visite of celebrities—particularly actresses and other public figures—also became fashionable to collect until the beginning of the twentieth century. In reputational terms, actresses were seen as immoral for being publicised and selling images of themselves in this way. By contrast, Victoria strategically used the *cartes* as a respectable celebrity whose image was reproduced in publicly buyable photographs. The approach was twofold: firstly, sharing photographs of the family in intimate domestic scenarios made the population feel closer to the Crown; secondly, sharing images of her alone, in her function as a serene monarch, conveyed to the British population the power the Queen held, overseeing an Empire "where the sun never sets". Victoria knew exactly how powerful her image was. In 1897 she cannily removed the copyright of the official portrait for her Diamond Jubilee (a photograph by W. and D. Downey taken in July 1893), which made it possible for her face to be "on everything from biscuit tins to tea towels" (Christie 2016, 26), thereby colonising even domestic English goods to swell the coffers of English businesses. As Plunkett claims, "the royal image itself became photographic" (2003, 3). Victoria deployed photography to her advantage as part of the curation of the royal image; she could control who took her pictures and when they were taken. These highly controlled photographic images of Victoria fixed her representation in the public mind, and there was a high degree of self-fashioning, even curation of self, in Victoria's construction of her image.

This same privilege of self-fashioning and image curation was, of course, not extended to imperial subjects. The visual representation of these subjects captured by the camera shutter was used to reinforce imperial power: just as Victoria's domestic, personal-seeming photographs created for British viewers a false sense of accessibility, even privacy between herself and her subjects, photographs of imperial subjects created for these viewers a sense that they, themselves, were part of the ever-victorious Empire. In this respect, Shohat and Stam's discussion of film and empire, conquest, narrative, and imperial myth-making (2014, 104) reveals how the imperial "voyeuristic gaze" was caught up in the dynamics of colonial desire (Young 1995), which is already compounded by the dynamics of the gaze. The concept of the gaze—that is, the desire in the relationship of looking and being looked contained in the gaze—involves, in Foucault's words, the relationships "of subjects within a network of power—and the mechanism of vision as a means of negotiating and conveying power within that network—in a given institutional context" (1977, 435).

The power dynamic of the "I/eye of empire" Shohat and Stam describe is reversed in *Power*, a 2014 mixed-media creation by the Iranian visual artist Roxana Manouchehri. In this work, Manouchehri juxtaposes an older Queen Victoria and the Persian Princess Tadj es-Saltaneh within the same photographic frame—an image of equality that could never have seen the light of day during the age of Empire itself. Aside from the hierarchies of empire that would never have acknowledged the Princess as an equal to the Queen, the two women never met. Saltaneh was a feminist and women rights activist and an advocate for democracy in Iran; she was the daughter of Nasser al-Din Shah, who was (as detailed in the *Diary of H.M. the Shah of Persia during his tour through Europe in A.D. 1873*[5]) the first modern Iranian sovereign to visit Europe formally.

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[5]Translated by J. W. Redhouse (London: John Murray, 1874).

Manouchehri's neo-Victorian figurative painting of Victoria and the Persian princess in black and white is highly realistic. It has a quasi-photographic look; the sepia tone gives it an archival, real-life Victorian quality. Encased in a box frame decorated with white Persian paisley patterns on the sides, the painting is in the background, with an overlaid perspex sheet bearing a white linear drawing of Queen Elizabeth I at the centre. Manouchehri plays with the indexical, documentary quality of the photographic image as capturing "reality" (which Roland Barthes [1981] terms the photograph's *studium*) and its more affective, subjective quality (which Barthes also incorporates within his concept of the photograph, calling it the *punctum*). By combining the photographic quality of the image (with its *studium* and *punctum*) and the explicitly subjective painting, Manouchehri seems to unbalance the documentary photographic effect, privileging the subjective and calling into question the valence of empiricism that the photograph projects. While the documentary value of photography has been well established, its truth value has been equally challenged: the idea that photography can record "truth," affording some "transparency" through which the viewer can access "reality," has been thoroughly debunked, and photographs cannot ever be entirely "true." (Of note here is John Tagg's [2009] examination of the disciplinary apparatus that lent photography its truth value, letting it work as an instrument of an official record, as documentary evidence, and – germanely – surveillance, a particularly useful function in the context of imperial rule.) The fact that Manouchehri's representation is photography-like and neo-Victorian adds complexity to our understanding of the work her picture is doing.

In the neo-Victorian photography-to-painting remediation, the figures of the British Queen and the Princess from the Iranian Qajar royal family are made to face each other, though not entirely: their perspectives are slightly skewed, and their eyes do not meet. They are set one in front of the other, caught in the same visual frame. However, Manouchehri has Queen Victoria looking slightly downwards, and the Qajar Princess turning her head slightly to look in another direction. This representation departs from most official visual depictions of the meeting that did take place between Saltaneh's father and Victoria during his first state visit to England in 1873. These works take a Eurocentric perspective, conventionally placing the British monarch at the centre of the image (see, for example, the 1874 watercolor of the reception of the Shah of Persia by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle, on 20 June 20, 1873, by the Russian-born illustrator Nicholas Chevalier).

The disconnectedness between the royals' gazes in Manouchehri's quasi-photographic representation possibly echoes the tensions in Anglo-Iranian relations during Victoria's reign. This speaks to inter-imperial dynamics, which encompasses the interrelations between empires and the interdependencies of individuals inhabiting these empires (Doyle 2015). The disconnectedness between the Queen and the Princess might also indicate that (as in the image) they did not see eye to eye on women's rights and political reform. (Interestingly, Manouchehri depicts Saltaneh wearing a hijab, despite her feminism; in fact, Saltaneh was a vocal critic of veiling as one of the many limitations Persian women faced. In several actual photographs from the period, Saltaneh is portrayed looking directly at the camera, without the hijab, showing her hair, wearing a short skirt with stockings, and even wearing Western clothes.)

In *Power*, there is a neo-Victorian imaginative restitution through the critical strategy of artistic remediation. The artwork represents a what-if approach to what could have been:

if the British sovereign had ever travelled outside of Europe, if the Persian princess had ever travelled outside of Iran, if their life spans had overlapped, if their political interests had been more aligned. At the time of Victoria's death in 1901, Saltaneh was probably not even eighteen years old and already trapped in an arranged marriage; it was not until around 1910 that she became known for her women's rights activism. Manouchehri's re-purposing of these historical figures in her neo-Victorian remediation works as imaginative restitution – a what-could-have-been scene, with all its affordances, depending on the viewer's gaze. Power is literally at the centre of this work, which seems to metonymize all of Britain's imperial power through the ages. The figure of Victoria can be read as embodying the spectre of the first notorious British imperial queen, Queen Elizabeth I, who sent Sir Walter Raleigh to colonise America. The image of Elizabeth still stands for British power and the universalising thrust of its imperial control, which achieved its apex during the reign of Queen Victoria.

Power is an archaeological attempt (in the Foucauldian sense of archaeology) given that it engages with the broader space of knowledge, its configurations, and the manner in which things manifest within it, establishing a frame for simultaneous existence (Foucault 2005, xxv). Like the artworks examined in the next section, Manouchehri's work thus functions as a site of archaeological reclamation that excavates and makes visible the elided, contrapuntal history of colonial force and subjugation, examining the past as the history of the present.

Postcolonial afterimages of olympia in Jan Banning's *immigrant (Jamaican) olympia with Dutch Servant* and Raeda Saadeh's *who will make me real?*

Banning's digital photograph, *Immigrant (Jamaican) Olympia with Dutch Servant*, remediates the reclining female (white) nude motif, adapting the painting *Olympia* by Manet, which was controversial in its time (and which was in itself an adaptation of *Venus of Urbino* by Titian, completed in 1538, and before that, of the *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione, c. 1510, in an endless cycle of adaptations). Banning plays with the quasi-photographic quality of the painting and its very modern representation of racial and social power relations: Manet's Olympia is a white French high-class sex worker and, only fifteen years after France abolished enslavement, her maid is a Black woman. The daring look in the two renditions of Olympia, staring at the viewer, remains. However, in Banning's remediation, a white Dutch maid looks on with a touch of contempt, rather than appreciation, for the Jamaican Olympia, a contemporary odalisque whose Black body and hair are on display rather than being covered (and excluded from aesthetic discourses as a result of historical exploitation and dispossession by European colonialism) as in Manet's painting. As a consequence of this contemptuous stare, the figure of the white maid does not disappear as easily into the background drapery as Manet's Black maid, who did not seem to play such a critical role in the scene as her own fully-covered body was cumulatively "made opaque by a blank stare" (O'Grady 1992, 14).

This opaqueness is directly challenged in the final artwork under discussion here, which addresses not only the issue of visibility but also the unheard voice. To begin, it is essential to note that, within the colonial logic of dispossession, there is a spectrum of (the absence of) agency and power inscribed within the Indigenous voice. The voice

of the colonised "other" does not overlap seamlessly with that of the subaltern subject, as it was only the local (male) intelligentsia that was heard and projected by the colonial administration as the representative voice of the "other". The audible voice granted to the Indigenous elite was not accessible to all colonial subaltern subjects, who sometimes tried to make up for their social and political invisibility through Indigenous and/or creolised acoustic performance, adopting Indigenous accents or languages.

Who Will Make Me Real?, a photographic self-portrait by Raeda Saadeh, a Jerusalem-based Palestinian photographer and installation and performance artist, provides an opportunity to unlearn this colonial order. Saadeh frustrates the fetishisation of Muslim women's silent veiled bodies through an artistic remediation of Manet's *Olympia*. Remediation is achieved on two levels through Saadeh's own body. Firstly, whereas Manet's *Olympia* is represented naked (a common feature of most adaptations of this work), Saadeh en-acts the role of Olympia dressed in a bodysuit made up of sections from *Al-Quds*, the most widely read Palestinian daily newspaper. She is represented as unavailable sexually, unlike the naked women in European Orientalist paintings such as those featured in Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Great Bath of Bursa* (1885). The artist thus re-appropriates the Orientalist gaze that invented the Orient, in Edward Said's words, as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes" (1978, 1). Context is important here, since contemporary manifestations of anti-Muslim racism can be explained by the genealogies of Islamophobic representation that Said's study of Orientalism elucidates (1978; 1994). These genealogies of representation and discrimination remain timely but have also shifted as 9/11 has deepened the divide and exacerbated the Orientalist binary of East and West. Often, fearmongering media narratives advance the preconceived, internalised idea of Muslim countries as active war zones and places of hatred, violent radicalisation, oppression, and strict rules that deprive women of international human rights. Considering the French novelist Gustave Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan, Said observes that it "produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke for herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history" (1978, 6). As a discourse—a construct repeatedly reproduced through discursive action—the meaning of the "Orient" has changed, and "the Oriental woman" has been differentially represented. Secondly, the gaze on the Muslim woman's veiled body is also frustrated. Instead of a veiled, oppressed Muslim body, Saadeh's body is covered in newspaper, underscoring through the use of her body as a signifier that the female body cannot be independent of the events reported in the newspaper that she is wearing – her body becomes a location for discourse and hence for agency.

Saadeh disrupts dominant visual culture narratives of the Muslim female body when she looks straight at the viewer, like Manet's Olympia, her gaze defiant as if pointing out that she is not a passive, voiceless, or defenceless victim of oppression in need of the West to save her. Her overall demeanor can be seen as unmodest, heightened by the bodysuit that still reveals her curves while concealing her body from the viewer. But this is not a sensual pose: her posture is not relaxed, unlike the hypotextual Olympia and various hypertextual Olympias, such as Morimura's and Banning's. Her left hand is stiff. She is leaning on a pillow but lays in an uncomfortable, artificial posture, almost as if she is frozen in a position not of her own choosing but that others have made for her, and that is presumably constructed in the print news. It is as if the artist

is taking power from the viewers, making them feel uncomfortable and responsible for their un-"real" ways of seeing/looking at the Muslim female body. She is not natural nor "real" in her Arabic-language newspaper bodysuit—which, stands between Saadeh and us, representing all the stories that have been printed about Palestine and Palestinian and/or Muslim women. There are different truths behind the information transmitted in the media. The question stands: who will make her "real"?

Conclusion

Social justice education impacts both the content we teach (curriculum) and the methods we use to teach it (pedagogy). In terms of curriculum design, this study aimed to understand what role remediation can play in developing a critical pedagogy of unlearning imperialism and, furthermore, to what extent remediated art can be conceptualised as a form of critical pedagogy leading to epistemic restitution. Studying the epistemologies of contemporary image-making and circulation means continually asking questions such as: What is the relation between image-making and world-making? How do images create knowledge about the world? How can we learn about epistemic coloniality and advocate against it through images? How can image-making and circulation contribute to epistemic coloniality and, in turn, epistemic justice, towards social justice?

In the context of a postgraduate course on visual culture, to answer those questions, we focused on how issues of epistemic (in)justice are played out in the visual field to generate worldviews and on how particular remediated visual works tackle and possibly redress epistemic injustices related to colonial legacies and White supremacy. There is, of course, the possibility to expand this curriculum by incorporating additional examples from various epistemologies, archives, authors, and artists belonging to Indigenous, marginalised, and Global South communities. In terms of pedagogical strategies deployed to examine remediated artworks, and to foster a critical perspective on knowledge production, mediation, and sharing in the classroom, we engaged with the idea of potential history and the strategy of unlearning imperialism (Azoulay 2019). To conclude, using this idea and strategy in the analysis of remediated artworks has the potential to broaden theoretical horizons and enhance analytical abilities in the classroom, and specifically to contribute to understanding processes of epistemic restitution and reframing, reimagining and unlearning of the imperial representations themselves, and creation of potential history.

Disclosure statement

ORCID

Ana Cristina Mendes ⓘ http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3596-0701

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