

Potential History

Unlearning Imperialism

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay



VERSO
London • New York

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
1. Unlearning Imperialism	1
The Shutter: Well-Documented Objects / Undocumented People	1
Aïsha	13
Unlearning the New, With Companions	15
A Nonprogressive Study	20
1492: Marker of Reversibility	22
The Human Condition—A Political Ontology	30
The Differential Principle	34
Learning to Rewind	38
Archival Technology	40
Potential History	43
Sovereignty—A Form of Political Engineering	45
Citizen-Perpetrators	49
Regime-Made Disaster	51
Performing Rights	54
2. Plunder, Objects, Art, Rights	58
Transcendental Imperial Art	58
Potential History of Art	63
Intergenerational and Intercommunal Transmission	66
Imperial Temporality	75
Collecting	79
An Imperial Conjuncture	82
The Persistence of <i>Homo Faber</i>	89

Salvaged Art, Destroyed Infrastructures	93
The Harlem Renaissance Was No Exception	97
Art Destroys the Common World	100
The Rise of the Imperial Persona of the Artist	105
The Congo Condition	112
Léopold II's "Gift"	118
"Kill me if you wish" and "Don't shoot"	122
"Do you want to kill Me? Here I am"	126
The Universal Rights of Privileged Citizens	129
The Universal Position of the Artist	133
The Art of Not Displaying Everything Everywhere	135
Worldly Rights	140
Free Renty—Reverse Photography's Imperial Basis	146
Our Violent Commons	148
Unruly Objects	154
IMAGINE GOING ON STRIKE: MUSEUM WORKERS	157
3 Archives: The Commons, Not the Past	162
Time Lines	167
To Institute, to Violate	169
The Archival Regime of Classification	171
Where and Who Are the Archive's Laborers?	178
Not the Past, but the Commons	185
The Pitfalls of the "Alternative" Approach	188
The Archive Is People	190
Archival Procedures	193
Nonimperial Grammar, Not Alternative Histories	195
Not Predecessors but Rather Present Actors	197
Archival Acceptability	200
An Unshowable Photograph	205
With My Companion at the Entrance of the Archive	210
Looting Documents	211
The Archon's Seduction and the Scholar's Desire	220
Refusing the Past	223
People's Experience and the Imperial Archive	229
When a Sentry Asks What Exactly Am I Doing and Why?	231
Unruly Photographs	235
Recoding Photographic Data: Mass Rape in Berlin, 1945	236

No Silences in the Archive: Mass Rape and World War II	248
The Infiltrator Doesn't Exist: Palestine, 1948	264
The Commons Is Never Irremediably Lost: Jaffa Street, Jerusalem	276
IMAGINE GOING ON STRIKE: PHOTOGRAPHERS	281
4 Potential History: Not with the Master's Tools, Not with Tools at All	286
The Matrix of History	287
How to Exit and How Not to Enter	295
Not with the Master's Tools	297
The Fabricated Phenomenal Field	301
The Homes of the Rightless	303
No New Beginnings	306
Meanings Cannot Be Ruled	311
Not Everything Is Possible	314
The Tradition of What Is and What Can Be	320
The Disciplinary Divide and the Problem of Meaning	324
The General Strike	327
The Separation of History from Politics	337
The Fabricated Meaning of Emancipation	342
Those for Whom Emancipation Did Not Appear	344
Four Types of Displacement	349
The Impending Storm	355
Disabling the Master's Tools: Regime-Made Disaster	359
<i>Visibility</i>	362
<i>Tools</i>	363
<i>Temporality</i>	363
<i>Form of occurrence</i>	364
<i>Range of expansion</i>	364
<i>Target population</i>	365
<i>Representation</i>	365
<i>"Solutions" and aid to victims</i>	366
Photography as the Practice of Human Relations	366
The Untaken, the Inaccessible, the Unshowable	370
IMAGINE GOING ON STRIKE: HISTORIANS	375

5 Worldly Sovereignty	380
Rehearsals With Others	383
<i>Rehearsal 1. Democracy is not a regime apart</i>	389
<i>Rehearsal 2. Sovereignty is irreducible to the sovereign</i>	391
<i>Rehearsal 3. Incommensurable experiences</i>	392
<i>Rehearsal 4. Undoing sovereignty's oneness</i>	396
<i>Rehearsal 5. Unlearning sovereign revolutions</i>	399
<i>Rehearsal 6. A citizen in a theater of types</i>	403
<i>Rehearsal 7. Differential taxes and self-government</i>	405
<i>Rehearsal 8. The sole model and individual visionaries</i>	409
<i>Rehearsal 9. Nonimperial worldly sovereignty</i>	415
Theses on the Contest Between the Two Formations of Sovereignty	417
<i>Thesis 1. A theater is the actors, not the stage</i>	418
<i>Thesis 2. Differential sovereignty requires double inaugural acts</i>	422
<i>Thesis 3. Citizens' complicity must be extracted</i>	425
<i>Thesis 4. Sovereignty is not a gift</i>	433
<i>Thesis 5. Differential sovereignty seeks to murder worldly sovereignty</i>	437
<i>Thesis 6. Worldly sovereignty can always be reclaimed</i>	442
IMAGINE GOING ON STRIKE: THE GOVERNED	444
6. Human Rights	448
Preamble	450
<i>Textual Rights</i>	451
<i>Imperial Rights</i>	451
<i>Disabled Rights</i>	452
Right to Destroy	456
Provisions, not Reparations	460
The Right to Impose a New Beginning	463
Undoing the "Cold War" Opposition	467
The Destruction of Palestine and Celebratory Narratives of Human Rights	474
The Right to Displace	479
Visual Literacy in Human Rights	483
The Curriculum of Human Rights	489
<i>Lesson 1. The need for a new world order</i>	490

<i>Lesson 2. Art is universal</i>	495
<i>Lesson 3. Learning to bear witness</i>	498
<i>Lesson 4. Perpetrators vs. liberators</i>	501
<i>Lesson 5. Modernization</i>	502
<i>Lesson 6. Learning not to see</i>	506
<i>Lesson 7. The proper distance from violence</i>	509
<i>Lesson 8. The right to provide protection</i>	512
<i>Lesson 9. Visible victims</i>	513
Where Are the Perpetrators?	515
Rights as a Worldly Relation among People	522
The Right Not to Be a Perpetrator	524
Rights, Anew	526
IMAGINE GOING ON STRIKE UNTIL OUR WORLD IS REPAIRED	530
7. Repair, Reparations, Return: The Condition of Worldliness	538
Inherited Archival Procedures	543
The Invention of the Document	551
Unlearning Documents	554
No History at All	557
What Are Reparations?	565
Counter to History	567
The Labor of Forgiveness	571
Forgiveness: The Literacy of the Unforgivable	573
<i>Bibliography</i>	582
<i>Visual Sources</i>	624
<i>Index</i>	628