

Introduction

UNDEATH EVERY AFTERNOON

Undead aims to shift the way we understand the relationship between animation and war. It asks readers to consider anew what these unwieldy and ubiquitous phenomena reveal about each other when viewed through a multiperspectival, interdisciplinary feminist lens that challenges entrenched chronologies, mappings, definitions, and epistemologies of war. Most of the works I discuss are experimental in nature, appearing in venues that include galleries, museums, film festivals, homes, and classrooms rather than on television or in commercial movie theaters. Over the course of the book, I will engage intermedial works by Maryam Mohajer, Onyeka Igwe, Mary Reid Kelley, Patrick Kelley, Yael Bartana, Kelly Dolak and Wazhmah Osman, Florestine Kinchen, Helen Hill, Paul Gailiunas, Nancy Davenport, Gesiye, David Hartt, and Ibrahim Nasrallah. The majority of these works have in common not their attention to a single war but their use of animation in an intermedial context to alter how war is defined and to better understand war's relationship to structural forms of violence that are often occluded by the concept of war. Rather than turning their backs on animation's proximity to the realms of the popular, comedy, and the cartoon, however, many of the works I consider actively harness the specific affinities of animation while reframing them and exploring their potential within expanded media contexts that include architecture, dance, live-action filmmaking, drawing, painting, performance, photography, and video games. The intermedial context in which animation emerges indexes a broader commitment to rethinking epistemological categories and rigid definitions. Most importantly, this book rejects the *Oxford English Dictionary's* primary definition

of war, “hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or state,” and even pushes past what the *OED* describes as a “figurative” use of the term that includes “any kind of active hostility or contention between living beings.”¹ Informed by feminist interventions into war studies, I examine a series of largely contemporary case studies in which artists and filmmakers use aesthetic tactics to enable thinking and feeling about how and what “war” might mean when engaged through more expansive definitions, temporalities, and geographies.

(Inter)(in)animation and Feminisms

Affirming Jacqueline Rose’s suggestion that fantasies of total knowledge generate violent repetitions, I experiment throughout *Undead* with dialogic methodologies and modes of writing that register the limitations of singular points of view.² This approach seeks to foreground how the knowledge in this book is cocreated while taking responsibility for the role of my own standpoint-inflected interpretations, mediations, and conclusions as they emerge within the format of the scholarly monograph. Throughout the book, I seek to illuminate how artists have activated the intermedial, interdisciplinary, and relational properties of animation in opposition to war, and to think in dialogue with those artists. *Undead* imports the modular, inherently relational, self-contesting, and capacious poetic concept of “(inter)(in)animation” into the toolbox of feminist animation theory, inspired in part by the affordances of postcolonial theories’ resistance to rigid systems of periodization and understandings of place. I hope that the term *(inter)(in)animation* encourages what Robert Stam and Ella Shohat describe as “a relational approach” within the realm of animation theory.³ As Shohat suggests, “Analyzing the overlapping multiplicities of identities and affiliations that link diverse resistant discourses helps us to transcend some of the politically debilitating effects of disciplinary and community boundaries.”⁴ The term brings with it a long, vibrant, and multi-sited history of usage, and this chapter explores its history and theoretical utility for engaging hybrid and experimental practices that remain marginalized within scholarly frameworks oriented toward national, often North American, industrial production contexts and medium-specific definitions of animation. I use *(inter)(in)animation* to describe both creative artistic practices and ways of thinking that respond to the oppositional values permeating the animation-war dyad—stillness and motion, aliveness and deadness, body and thing—and do so in ways that situate these tensions within relational, intermedial, and interdisciplinary frameworks. I argue that such frameworks alter how the artists I discuss activate animation’s undead qualities, and in doing so they expand our capacity to think about war as well as the challenges of unmaking it.

But where does this term *interinanimation* come from, what does it mean, and what does it offer this study of animation, feminisms, and war? While its first prefix, *inter-*, can invoke a block or a barrier, it also suggests a second meaning

of something “reciprocal,” “occurring between,” or “derived from two or more,” introducing a notion of animation that is relational at its core.⁵ Relationality and blockage coexist in this term. And then what to make of the fact that this word presents readers not just with “animations” but with “inanimations”? Like the first prefix that both relates and blocks, this second prefix introduces a force of internal resistance to animation that threatens to bring the word grinding to a halt. This tension is further complicated by David Wills’s useful history of the word *inanimation*, which Wills explains can connote both the infusion and the deprivation of life:

[*Inanimation*] is not my own invention but came into usage, as did the corresponding verb *to inanimate*, in the early seventeenth century (1631 and 1600, respectively). For no less an authority than John Donne, *inanimate* and *inanimation* were the preferred signifiers precisely for the positive senses of “enliven(ing), animat(ing), infus(ing) life into.” To *inanimate* was to *enanimate*. The privative equivalents, deferring to deprivation of life, came later, beginning in 1647 with the verb, which nevertheless remained rare and would soon become obsolete, and in 1784 with the noun, which has managed a longer life.⁶

Donne uses the word *interanimation* in his poem “The Extasie,” where, like ecstasy itself, it seems to undo the subject. As Anna Fenemore argues, this early usage involves “a dialogical and, ultimately, social process whereby the ‘abler’ soul exists spatially *somewhere between subject and object*” (emphasis added).⁷ Furthermore, as Michael Ursell observes, Donne shuttles between “interanimation” and “interinanimation” in different versions of the poem: “The first posthumous printed editions from 1633 and 1635, as well as some manuscripts, read ‘interanimates’ for ‘interinanimates,’ cutting out the extra prefix that intensifies the term’s indeterminacy.”⁸ Elsewhere, Ursell roots Donne’s sense of interinanimation’s uncanny dimensions firmly in the realm of mediation, noting that for Donne, “books are the worldly things that shuttle between the animate and inanimate.”⁹ Interinanimation makes books, for Ursell, “literal survivors, able to surpass the limits of biological life and mortality,” similar, in Donne’s view, “to those parts of the living body that can persist without the living body, such as bone and hair.”¹⁰ Many of the works discussed in *Undead* use animation’s radical fabricatedness to pressure the presumed transparency of terms like *life* and *death*, *subject* and *object*, *body* and *thing*. *Undead* seeks to activate this poetic term in the context of animation theory, with the goal of transporting some of the term’s poetic richness into animation theory’s critical vocabulary and zones of awareness. Though it carries with it some of the resonances that are present from the moment of its invention, it also accrues different resonances as it emerges in new contexts, including, as I show below, in the realm of Black studies. These more recent accruals too present challenging possibilities to animation theory.

The works discussed here activate (inter)(in)animation within the context of other creative modes in ways that disrupt, rub against, or illuminate the contours

of existing ontologies, and not just filmic ones. They open experimental spaces through which to reimagine how terms like *war*, *world*, *life*, *death*, *feminism*, and *theory* too might be mediated and engaged. This book seeks to mobilize the poetic concept of (inter)(in)animation within the context of intermedial uses of animation that might otherwise, because of the hybrid nature of the works in question, either fall through the cracks between the categories by which scholarship and criticism is organized or be considered only partially, emphasizing only a single and isolated component of the work, such as its animated features.

(Inter)(in)animation simultaneously foregrounds this relational quality of intermedial works and animation's refusal to relinquish the tension between stillness and movement, body and thing, reality and fantasy, and lived and fabricated time and space. Many other scholars have registered the importance of this tension within the field of animation studies, which Paul Wells reviews under the title "Battlefields for the Undead."¹¹ Alan Cholodenko, for example, suggests the term *animatic* to conjure up animation's bringing together of "lifedeath" and to convey the way the apparatus "suspends distinctive oppositions, including that of the animate versus the inanimate."¹² Similarly, Daisy Yan Du theorizes the idea of "suspended animation" in relation to the specific phenomenon of "freeze or nearly-freeze frames in animated films," noting that this type of image "is ambiguously situated between animation and inanimation" and that "there is no clear boundary between the two, as (in)animation can often turn into (en)animation."¹³ *Undead* builds on such work, expanding (in)animation outward into relational, interdisciplinary, and feminist frameworks to open up other ways of thinking. Thomas Lamarre has demonstrated animation's capacity to juxtapose different historical moments within a single animated sequence in a way that does not "simply melt and amalgamate the historical references into cartoonish lumps" but rather "strives to open the one set of historical and ideological references into other frames of reference."¹⁴ In *Undead*, I consider works that activate this ability internal to animation to stack without merging temporal and spatial references in dialogue with other art forms, including dance, photography, fashion, live-action film, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, performance, and tattooing. I use parentheses to mark, without separating, the distinct elements contained within the unresolvable meaning of (inter)(in)animation, emphasizing the critical affordances of the term's modularity, provisionality, and flexibility for a series of case studies that resist clear epistemological categories.

(Inter)(in)animating Feminisms

As the unresolved status of my title, *Undead*, suggests, this book is less interested in works that lay war to rest and celebrate idealized and finalized visions of peace than in those that develop what art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, drawing on the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, describes as an un-war framework. "Peace," Deutsche notes, "has long coexisted with preparedness for war. . . . Un-war, by

contrast, implies disarmament, a process of un-doing war, which, as we shall see, the artist understands not only as military preparedness and combat but also as an individual and collective state of mind.”¹⁵ Drawing on psychoanalytic feminism and Wodiczko’s architectural interventions, Deutsche describes un-war making as seeking to acknowledge the inescapable presence of violence within and to disarm “the larger culture of war” as it permeates our physical and mnemonic architectures and landscapes.¹⁶

Undead also asserts the central importance of feminist *discourses* to the project of un-war making through an (inter)(in)animated lens. Black, Global South, and decolonial feminist scholars have consistently and rigorously challenged the academy’s (including white feminism’s) complicity in epistemological structures that foreground some histories of violence in ways that, and at times in order to, occlude others. The nonsingular “feminisms” of *Undead*’s subtitle is inspired by Lila Abu-Lughod, Rema Hammami, and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s assertion in *The Cunning of Gender Violence* of a plural “feminisms,” involving “always a diverse and evolving plurality of epistemologies, locations, projects, and possibilities—and yes, sometimes dominations and enclosures.”¹⁷ Such feminisms, they note, make it impossible to presume that “[gender] can be disentangled from race, class, indigeneity, and other historical and contemporary forces and markers of difference and inequality.”¹⁸ This book’s reconsideration of animation is made possible by the way these feminist epistemologies have generated alternative understandings of life, death, war, time, and space.

I draw inspiration too from a feminist praxis Angela Y. Davis invokes that “emphasizes not only strategies of criticism and strategies of transformation but also a sustained critique of the tools we use to stage criticism and to enact transformation.”¹⁹ Such feminist models challenge me to grapple with critiques of white, cis-gender, straight, Global North feminist exclusions and to recognize and seek to counter my own standpoint limitations in their light. They have led me to prioritize practices marginalized by mainstream media industry producers and distributors, and to expand the definition of *war* beyond nationalist, official, and geographically and temporally contained narratives in order to consider war’s unacknowledged participants, costs, modes, and spatio-temporal registers. These models refuse triumphalist and uncontested narratives in favor of what Rose calls “the ethics of failure”; insist on the need for thinking in community; commit to interdisciplinarity as a methodology that shows no confidence in any single discipline; and use improvisational encounters between bodies of knowledge and media formats to illuminate and morph the borders of thinkability.²⁰ Though this has at times produced the feeling that the intellectual ground on which I have been standing is running out from under me like sand, I have been sustained through this process by the generosity and creativity of scholarly, artistic, and activist communities that are building new ground, and by the hope that these discomforting sensations are by-products of the processes of change and un-war making.

In foregrounding the mutually influential temporal and spatial discombobulations enacted by experimental animated films about war, *Undead* offers one animation-derived response to Lisa Lowe's 2015 call for scholars to pay more attention to "the intimacies of the four continents" in opposition to the "modern division of knowledge into academic disciplines, focused on discrete areas and objects of interest to the modern national university."²¹ My thinking here has been similarly provoked by Rey Chow's 2006 call for scholars, and particularly theorists, to acknowledge and critique the parochialism of European-derived theories in the US academy, and to recognize that World War II is as much as a marker of the continuity of imperialism, albeit in rearranged form, as a historical point of shift in the world order. Noting that the atomic bombs of August 1945 "suggest much more than the malice that is an inevitable product of warfare," enabling the United States to occupy the position of "supreme world power," Chow asks, would this not involve thinking "America not as just the land of Disney and McDonald's but also as the successor to and advancer of Europe and European imperialist intentions and tendencies over the course of modern history?"²² Extending Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, Chow highlights the implicatedness of US scholars' knowledge structures in the war machine, forcing us to acknowledge that, as she puts it, "the United States has been conducting war on the basis of a certain kind of knowledge production, and producing knowledge on the basis of war."²³ Furthermore, like Deutsche and Rose, Chow argues that once "the relations among war, racism, and knowledge production are underlined in these terms," it is "incumbent on us to realize that the pursuit of war—with its use of violence—and the pursuit of peace—with its cultivation of knowledge—are the obverse and reverse of the same coin."²⁴

Experimental Animation, History, and Deathlessness

Constructed, animated war images can offer alternative ways to give visible form to the imbricated and continuous histories of state and corporate violence and institutions of knowledge that avoid what Jeffrey Skoller, in a discussion of narrative history films, calls "the specularization of the past."²⁵ Writing against chronological photorealist approaches to history in the context of experimental film, Skoller argues, "Such a literalization of the past through the recreation of historical events works to separate the past from the present, constructing a gap between then and now by placing each at a safe distance from the other."²⁶ In *Undead*, I explore the particular suitability of intermedially situated uses of animation for giving visual and material form to such nonlinear and sprawling experiences of war and death. The works I consider trouble some of Anglo-European film theory's medium-specific and photography-derived assumptions about the temporality of life and death in ways that make space for other memories and experiences and enrich the evolving toolbox of cinema and media theories.

With few exceptions, film theoretical discussions of cinema's ethical, moral, and political capacities either ignore or express wariness about animation because of

its seemingly inherent incapacity to convey the finality of death.²⁷ The energy and wacky humor of cartoon animation that has roots in its deathlessness can seem fully incompatible with the serious ethical concerns raised by the role of images in modern histories of violence, which frequently focus on cinematic mediations of death. These concerns have played a particularly formative role in theoretical discussions of documentary and post–World War II European art cinema.²⁸ In his short meditation on the French documentary *La course de taureaux* (*The Bullfight*) (Myriam Bortsoutsy and Pierre Braunberger, 1951), André Bazin suggests that death is both the “metaphysical kernel” of the bullfight and “one of those rare events that justifies the term . . . *cinematic specificity*.”²⁹ It is, according to Serge Daney, this “possibility of filming death” that, for Bazin, in some cases, “prohibits editing” in order, as Bazin puts it, “to reveal the hidden meaning of beings and things without disturbing their temporal unity.”³⁰ Daney glosses this passage from Bazin by stating, “This unity is never anything but that of the spatio-temporal continuum of representation. *To intern difference means saving representation.*”³¹ While music for Bazin can only ever mediate “aesthetic time,” cinema “reproduces at will and organizes . . . the same worldly reality of which we are a part.”³² This quality, for Bazin, allows cinema the unique opportunity among the “mechanical arts” to capture and represent for others “the only one of our possessions that is temporally inalienable”: “the real instant” of death.³³ Though Bazin describes the “eternal dead-again of the cinema” in terms of obscenity, desecration, and perversion, he ends this short essay by acknowledging that “the representation on screen of a bull being put to death (which presupposes that the man had risked death) is in principle as moving as the spectacle of the real instant that it reproduces,” and he notes that this representation has the potential to be “even more moving because it magnifies the quality of the original moment through the contrast of its repetition.”³⁴

Foundational to Bazin’s thinking about death and cinematic specificity is both a modern understanding of the temporality of death as momentary, elusive, and purely subjective, a moment that “marks the frontier between the duration of consciousness and the objective time of things,” and a notion of the world inhabited by “beings and things” as enjoying spatial and temporal unity.³⁵ The efforts of theorists, critics, and practitioners to formulate ethical parameters for both making and watching films are inextricably bound to the temporality of death as it has emerged in what D.N. Rodowick describes as “isomorphic” filmmaking. This involves an exposure that “effects a transformation of substance in which time, light, and density are directly proportional” and “the reproduction of movement and duration in photographing equidistant frames of equal size projected at a uniform rate of speed.”³⁶ Yet the works discussed in *Undead* illuminate the inadequacy of these paradigms for addressing some experiences and temporalities of undeath and war, perhaps because ideologies of Eurocentrism and white supremacy are embedded within film ontology’s reverence for temporal and spatial unity. The fictions of this unity are protected by an entire apparatus of belief surrounding

film ethics that threatens to negate as unethical or unreal any alternative configurations of life-death-time-space-image. This helps to explain why, as Steve Reinke observed in 2005, “we have yet to develop an ethics of the animated image, apart from issues related to the socialization of children.”³⁷

Since 2005, the question of how a specifically documentary ethics operates within animated and virtual worlds has constituted one of the most dynamic areas of the overlapping fields of cinema and media studies and animation studies. Scholars including Nea Ehrlich, Jonathan Murray, Annabelle Honess Roe, Tess Takahashi, and many others have done immensely important work at this intersection.³⁸ This body of scholarship has forcefully demonstrated what animation has to offer a range of serious topics, including war, forced displacement, gender and sexual violence, disability, slavery, memory, history, and death. During the two decades since Reinke’s observation, these and other scholars have generated a rich and expansive set of methods and terms, adapting and intervening in discussions of live-action film ethics in ways that better fit documentary animation films. *Undead* grows out of and draws on that body of work, but it also sits adjacent to this realm. Most of the works I consider are not documentaries, and they only intermittently introduce (inter)(in)animating features within a more diverse, intermedial landscape. Animated documentaries often assert animation’s superior ability to deal with serious aspects of “truth” and “reality” that elude live-action documentary formats. By contrast, several of the works I discuss deliberately harness the irreverence, humor, disrespect, and irreality of the cartoon and of feminism itself, as well as the open possibilities of fiction, speculation, and play, to engage histories of violence in ways that challenge hegemonic understandings of truth, memory, and reality and bypass ethical and ontological frameworks that render some worlds, wars, lives, and deaths unthinkable.

The Iranian-British animator Maryam Mohajer’s award-winning bilingual short *Red Dress. No Straps.* (2018) weaves together feminist animation’s long history of playful, carnal, and defiant humor with the devastating temporalities of war. Mohajer makes her saturated colorful images using TVPaint animation software, which easily combines painterly effects with a range of other animation techniques. The informational intertitle “Tehran, Iran. 1985. Iran-Iraq war” that appears early in the film does not prepare the viewer for the humor that follows. Lush and funny images frequently illustrate voice-over narration and recorded snippets of scenes of intergenerational female community: two bare feet with red-painted toenails wiggle against a black background; the little girl protagonist giggles, upside down, alongside a poster of the pop singer she idolizes; an erotic fragment shows black lacy panties and the tops of a woman’s thighs as the little girl reports, knowingly, “On Tuesday, there was a party.”

The young protagonist’s grandparents appear periodically throughout the film, often accompanied by the background sound of radio news that reminds viewers of the world outside this scene of play. As the short progresses, the young girl’s

narration switches matter-of-factly between scenes of everyday life and indexes of war. Her London-accented English suggests, especially when juxtaposed with fragments of Persian, that we are hearing diasporic memories of a time and place left behind. The voice-over abruptly jolts viewers out of the space of play when the girl reports, "On Monday in school, they told us to say, 'Death to America,'" a sentence whose repetition throughout the film suggests a temporal rut that exists in tension with the narrative's progression. As we hear the radio being tuned, wispy, translucent white lines rise up to create a lacy layer over the surface of the image. Like many of Mohajer's digital painted animations, these images enfold both Persian writing and the decorative patterns of Persian miniatures, underscoring the film's bilingualism as well as a sense of geographic and spatial hybridity. The girl continues, "Grandpa listens to Voice of America every evening," before announcing, "We're at war . . . with Saddam." Suddenly, the girl's disembodied face and hands appear against a black screen, and this disintegration of the body into parts in the wake of the war news is jarring. But just as suddenly, the mood turns humorous again as the girl cheekily sticks out her bright red tongue in the direction of the viewer, making the sound "bluuuh," once, twice, three times. She stares out at the viewer, eyes blinking, mouth unmoving, as her voice continues, "Yesterday, on Friday, Saddam tried to bomb our house." She looks up toward the top of the frame, as if momentarily conflating her home and the frame, before adding: "But he's so rubbish, he missed." Resting her smiling face in her cute, pudgy fingers, she confirms in a sing-song voice, her head rocking side to side, "Our house was not hit. We're all alive." As the sound of a sewing machine returns, signaling the grandma's liveliness, the girl adds, "And we're not dead."

Granny is sewing a version of the strapless red dress that the pop singer wears for the little girl, and the scene in which she tries it on brings viewers back from war into the realm of comedy. The child proudly lifts her arms to show off her gown, insisting with determination, "The exact. Same. Dress. Nooooo. Straps," but the dress drops to the ground, revealing a little naked body wearing nothing but pink underwear to the sound of the grandma's laughter. Subsequent scenes continue to hover in increasingly disorienting ways between everyday life and the mortal threat of war, perhaps most strikingly in a scene at the jeweler's shop, where the child has her ears pierced. She confesses, "It still hurts a bit," pressing her face against a glass jewelry case. The doubling of her face in the glass on the left of the screen seems to generate another eerie and disembodied head, which also seems to be hers (figure 1). The eyes of this second child, however, are blackened and wide with distress. Her face is cut and dirty, her hair disheveled. Mohajer creates shot/reverse-shot cuts between the two. The first girl smiles at this hurt version of herself, but the second girl just stares, emptily, panting, before humor and suffering are juxtaposed again, but in ever more disturbing proximity to each other. The smiling girl's eyes, and then her tears, fill the screen as we hear the piercing-gun while the wounded girl returns to bite the hand of the piercer, revenging her double (video 1).

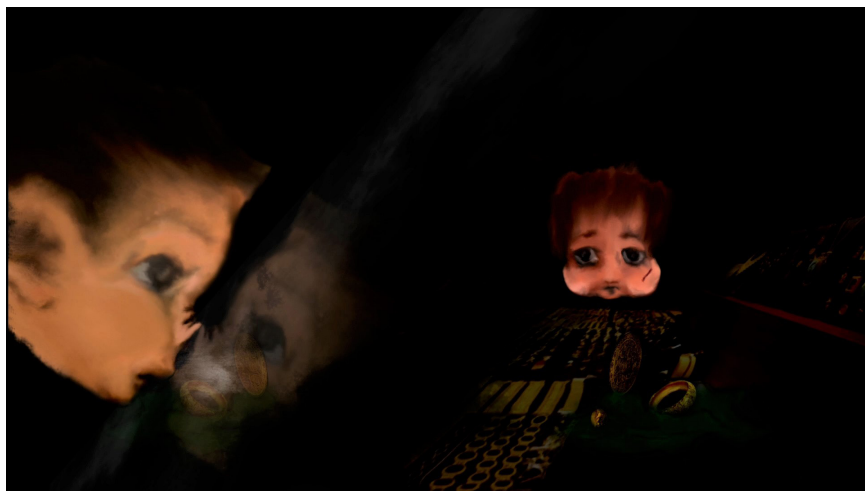
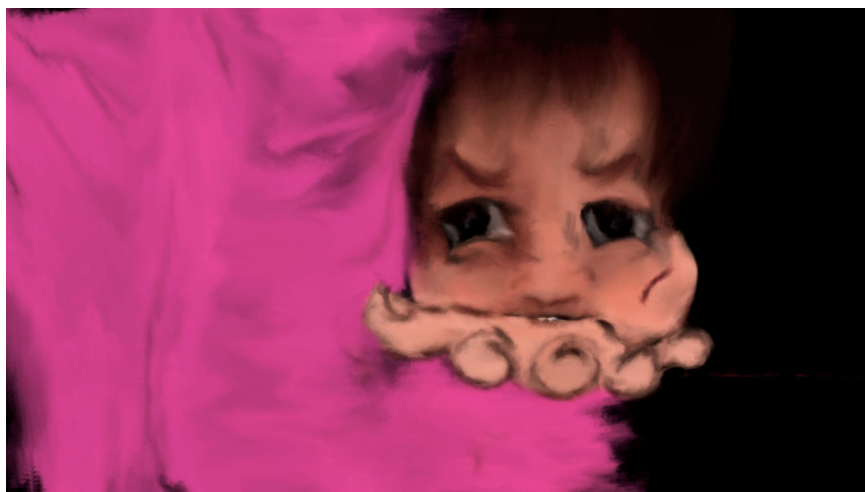


FIGURE 1. (Un)dead and living versions of the same girl meet in the jewelry shop, from Maryam Mohajer's *Red Dress. No Straps.*, 2018.



VIDEO 1. The (un)dead girl bites the hand of the man who pierces the ears of the living version of herself. Maryam Mohajer, *Red Dress. No Straps.*, 2018.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.228.1>



"BUT I DIDN'T WANT STRAPS!," the girl moans, adding with disgruntlement, "Granny says I can't wear a strapless dress until my boobies grow bigger." This scene returns to the erotic feminist humor that has pervaded the film—that is, until the moment when the girl, swishing her dress from side to side, adds, "But my boobies will never grow." In this chilling instant, puberty's calendar switches from being an index of desire and futurity to an index of death's irreversible intervention in linear time. "Do you remember when I said that Saddam was so rubbish?," the girl asks. "That he missed our house? That we're all alive? That we're not dead?" As the screen cuts to black, she confesses, "I lied."

In conversation, Mohajer describes being at the storyboard stage of making *Red Dress. No Straps*. The film was originally going to end simply with the grandma telling her granddaughter that she would have to wait for her boobies to come in before she could have a strapless dress. But then one evening, when Mohajer was coming back from a party, her eyes filled with tears as she thought to herself, "I know how this will end." She explains, "When you live through something like a war, it's like that war is a shadow, ready to sneak into anything you create."³⁹ Her comment emphasizes the liveliness of the dead in the minds of those who love and survive them, and the way that war's death and destruction play out, not only on the bodies of those whose lives are cut short by war, but also on those who survive, through whom war persists well beyond the official endings or geographies of any given war. Mohajer uses animation to underscore the proliferating or exponential nature of war, which multiplies different versions of the dead in the memory landscapes of those who live and seeps into the creative acts of artists who strive to be "postwar."

This undead girl mediates how those killed by war haunt the living, and also, perhaps, how the living in turn respond to this haunting by disavowing or erasing war's impact through reanimating means. Both of these phenomena, the way they drive each other and shape our relationship to war, those with whom we live, and the world, are central concerns of feminist war studies, and they persist as ongoing concerns throughout this book. The film registers and performs this entanglement of the dead and the living through the aesthetic tools of animation. The effect is disturbing. The film tricks viewers into laughing with a dead child, into gullibly going along with a narrative that asserts nobody dies even when we know that houses have been bombed. What initially felt like colorful moments of knowing adolescent feminist play in which we participate suddenly takes on shades of necrophilia. The discomfort raises complicated ethical and aesthetic questions about what it means for this animator to humorously make a puppet of a character ultimately revealed to be a dead child within a form of image making where neither life nor death is possible. Both the feelings and the questions generated within this animated treatment of undeath differ in kind from those generated by live-action documentary treatments of death and war. Because of the way animation brings its unruly and comedic irreverence, its unstable relation to the world,

even into the space of death, it may seem ill-suited for a meaningful engagement with the project of feminist un-war making. This book, however, examines work by artists who activate animated tactics within the context of other media landscapes, not to create purely animated worlds, but rather in ways that I argue help to illuminate how we might begin to unthink the givenness of violent worlds that present themselves as fixed and unchangeable.

Undead asks what gets included and excluded when we consider the entwined histories of animation and war. Seeking to challenge the parameters that make “animation” and “war” legible in relation to each other, *Undead* focuses on experimental and intermedial case studies that challenge coherent narrative structures or eschew narrative form altogether, turn only intermittently to animated tactics, and frequently span the categories of film and contemporary art, appearing more in museums and galleries than in festivals and movie theaters or on television. That the works I consider are only partly animated further complicates the already-manifold methodological challenges facing scholars of experimental animation. These challenges stem, Suzanne Buchan explains, both from the equally “fuzzy” meaning of *experimental* and *animation* and from “animation’s widely divergent pro-filmic materials (objects, drawings, sand, painting, puppets).”⁴⁰ *Undead* stretches existing definitions of both war and animation as these phenomena meet each other within a hybrid and unpredictable aesthetic field. It brings feminist interdisciplinary attention to intermedial appearances of animation that discombobulate, dissect, and détourne both subjective war stories and hegemonic war histories. In such cases, animated effects illuminate the potential continuities between war stories and national war propaganda, and the role of institutions and rituals of history and memory in sustaining amnesia, silencing, erasure, and further war making.⁴¹

Undead takes these persistent questions within animation scholarship in new directions by asking: What happens when questions about animated life and death are put in dialogue with the work of Black, decolonial, and Global South feminist scholars who pressure the hegemonic mappings of life and death and definitions that shore up patriarchal, white supremacist world systems of belief? As Rizvana Bradley, writing within a Black feminist philosophical tradition, starkly puts it: “Black people are no-bodies. . . . To speak of black embodiment is thus to approach the limits of phenomenology.”⁴² To think animation at these and other limits of a representational system that determines which bodies count as living beings and which ones don’t is to recognize, as Bradley does, that “aesthetics are a matter of life and death.”⁴³ Thinking at these limits has thus less to do with “saving representation” or protecting the “temporal unity” that for André Bazin is so intimately linked to the ethical, specifically cinematic image than with experimenting aesthetically, intermedially, intellectually, and communally, albeit provisionally, with alternative ways of mediating and remembering experience, including experiences of war.⁴⁴

Undead explores creative and scholarly work that interrupts entrenched and inherited ways of thinking about animation within the context of war, in part by de-isolating the coupling of these terms, opening animation and war out into broader aesthetic, historical, and political landscapes. By paying attention to this body of work, *Undead* seeks to respond constructively to Tess Takahashi's insightful observation at the conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in 2023 that scholarly discussions of race and experimental animation tend to conflate author and object in ways that perpetuate the exact critical habits Racquel J. Gates and Michael Boyce Gillespie resist in their 2019 manifesto "Reclaiming Black Film and Media Studies."⁴⁵ These habits, Takahashi argues, drawing on Gates and Gillespie, involve a privileging of "raced authorship" and "authorial embodiment" over formal properties, the "tyranny of biological determinism," and the conflation of "black" and "oppositional."⁴⁶ Habits are, by definition, hard to break, and throughout this book I explore how the frictions generated by (inter)(in)animation reveal and/or resist entrenched, automated patterns of thought and being, including my own, that help to sustain the habit of perpetual war.

As part of this strategy of boundary crossing and habit breaking, *Undead* examines works that refuse to segregate, and indeed activate the tensions among, animation's rhetorical, art historical, and mass cultural roots. Though the book does not try to construct a history of animation, it nevertheless brings attention to underexamined, hybrid, and more experimental lineages of animation that wander across, and often disrupt in life-affirming ways, the aesthetic, temporal, and geographic categories by which many existing histories of art, war, and film are organized. Interdisciplinarity helps us notice such forms of expression and versions of reality that isolated disciplinary structures of belief might obscure.

War, Animation, and Undeath

Animation scholars have long been aware that this uncanny mode of image making brings heightened attention to the boundary between life and death, human and nonhuman, and to the role of media in shaping evolving collective understandings of where such limits lie. Richard Thompson, for example, notes in 1980, "That resurrection at the bottom of every cartoon cycle exists solely and cynically so that the victim can proceed to his next debacle. More absolutely than zombies, vampires, and the undead are cartoon characters denied the solace of eternal rest."⁴⁷ Alan Cholodenko argues that, particularly after World War II, animation emerges as a vehicle for making sense of a new world era, haunted by the specter of zombies, in which the relationship between life and death has altered: "Not only life but death has died, each replaced by cold, clonal hyperimmortality, fulfilling the human's wish for escape from death . . . the death of death, by definition, an escape from the human itself."⁴⁸ And in *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-Making in Animation* (2013), Donald Crafton polemically underestimates the difference between human and cartoon characters, suggesting that "their

drawn or modeled figures are different biologically from those in live-action movies, but as screen performers, fundamentally they're the same."⁴⁹ Activating John Ruskin's theory of pathetic fallacy, Crafton suggests that "moving lines, colorful shapes, blobs of clay, piles of sand, furry puppets and even plain forms in motion on-screen" can be perceived as bodies, human or otherwise, and he invites readers to think of embodiment not as a biological fact but rather as a "belief system."⁵⁰ Here he draws on Philip Auslander, for whom "the live" is not an "ontological category," and who argues that the meaning and importance of liveness "are subject to change, especially in relation to technological development."⁵¹ While Crafton rejects the "childishly naïve or delusional" position that there is no difference at all between "proximal liveness and being alive," he nevertheless pushes his readers to take seriously the question of what is collectively understood, or not, by "liveness" on screen and off, and why and when this matters.⁵²

Animation and film historians alike have highlighted the importance of animation as a tool of imperialism and war in the form of propaganda and as a useful instrument for the day-to-day business of war (mapping, planning, training, controlling, surveilling, and destroying), both of which have shaped the everyday worlds in which we live. Thirty years ago, for example, Thomas Doherty highlighted the intertwined histories of Disney and warfare, noting that "in 1943, 94 percent of Disney's work was war-related. Sandbags and anti-aircraft guns surrounded the only Hollywood studio to be designated a 'key war productions plant' and 'essential industry.'"⁵³ Christopher P. Lehman documents how US animation's relationship to war shifted during the Vietnam War era away from paradigms established during World War II. He illustrates how, between 1961 and 1973, changes in "cartoon violence" can be understood "as a barometer to national sentiment on Vietnam," and contextualizes war-related phenomena within a broader discussion of racism in the American animation industry.⁵⁴ His refusal to separate these two topics—racism and war—represents a noteworthy scholarly intervention into the study of animation, and this book attempts to build on that intervention. And Bishnupriya Ghosh illustrates how animations of malaria made for scientific research films and military training films during World War II played a formative role in the "visualization of 'life itself,'" generating an "epistemology of infection" that continues to shape, and rationalize as benign, global biosecurity regimes.⁵⁵ The pairing of animation and war, then, is not just the focus of this book or a minor subfield; it also sprouts some of the most potent and destructive forces in the modern world. What does animation have to offer in the face of this fact?

Responding to this question, recent studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of paying attention to more than hegemonic uses of animation in war. Donna Kornhaber opens her comprehensive study of the topic, *Nightmares in the Dream Sanctuary: War and the Animated Film* (2020), by wondering, in the face

of the robust body of scholarship on animated war propaganda, “Is there not more to this story?” “Where is the animation that tells . . . stories that are personal, idiosyncratic, humane, and born from experience?”⁵⁶ Studies of anime, the animated documentary, and transnational wartime animation too numerous to address here have, like Kornhaber, pushed scholars to examine animation’s affinities with subjective experiences of war beyond military instrumental uses of it.⁵⁷ Such work illuminates animation’s well-suitedness to witnessing and mediating unfilmed or unfilmable physical and psychic experiences of war and trauma, including the chaotic rearrangements of space and time that war enacts and inflicts on lived experience.⁵⁸ Kornhaber organizes the films she discusses under the categories of witness, resistance, pacifism, memory, and memorial. A brief discussion of *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* (Lee Savage and Milton Glaser, 1967), a sixty-second short that Kornhaber sees as an “archetypal example” of “protest animation,” helps to illustrate both *Undead*’s shared ground with existing studies of war and animation and the critical questions that become visible when animation scholars adopt underexplored interdisciplinary approaches.⁵⁹

*Mickey Mouse in Vietnam: Interdisciplinarity
and Animated Deathlessness*

On January 30, 1967, Mickey Mouse was shot through the head on the shores of Vietnam, (un)dying just seconds after their arrival. Mickey’s (un)death is captured, or created, in Whitney Lee Savage and Milton Glaser’s sixty-second short *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* and was first screened as part of a compilation film entitled *For Life, against the War* (1967) in New York City as part of the Week of the Angry Arts, organized in opposition to the American war in Vietnam.⁶⁰ The original film involved over sixty filmmakers who responded to a call put out by a group of artists for submissions under three minutes that represented “a personal declaration by American filmmakers for life and against the War.”⁶¹

At the opening of the film, a smiling black-and-white, 1920s-style Mickey Mouse marches along before pausing at a sign that declares, “Join the Army and See *the World*.” Mickey eagerly signs up, dons a helmet and bayonet, and boards a steamer that recalls Mickey’s first distributed film, *Steamboat Willie* (1928) (figure 2). The short shifts to an aerial point of view on the vessel traveling between the USA and Vietnam, aligning the cartoon with the vantage of airpower, which, for Caren Kaplan is “a technology of war produced directly by the state” that “can only articulate nationalism.”⁶² As the image shifts back to a straight-on perspective, Mickey disembarks and follows signs toward “Vietnam” and the “Warzone.” The mouse enters a terrain of long grasses as a bullet, source unseen, catalyzes Mickey’s fall to the ground. As the animation again adopts an aerial perspective over Mickey’s fallen body, a bullet hole appears in their forehead. The mouse closes their eyes and their head slumps as ink-blood seeps from their wound (figure 3).

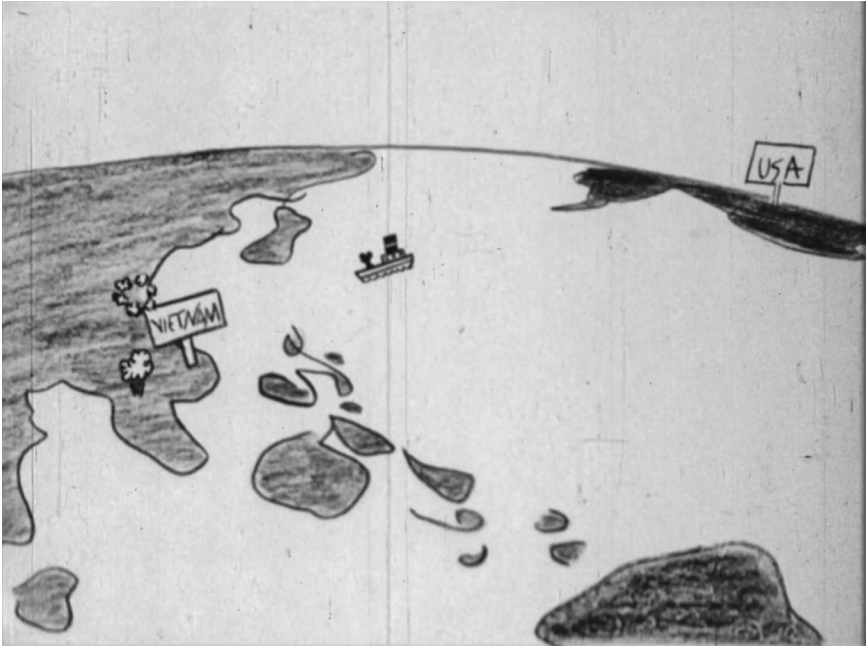


FIGURE 2. Aerial shot of the USA and Asia with steamboat, from Whitney Lee Savage and Milton Glaser's *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam*, 1967–68.

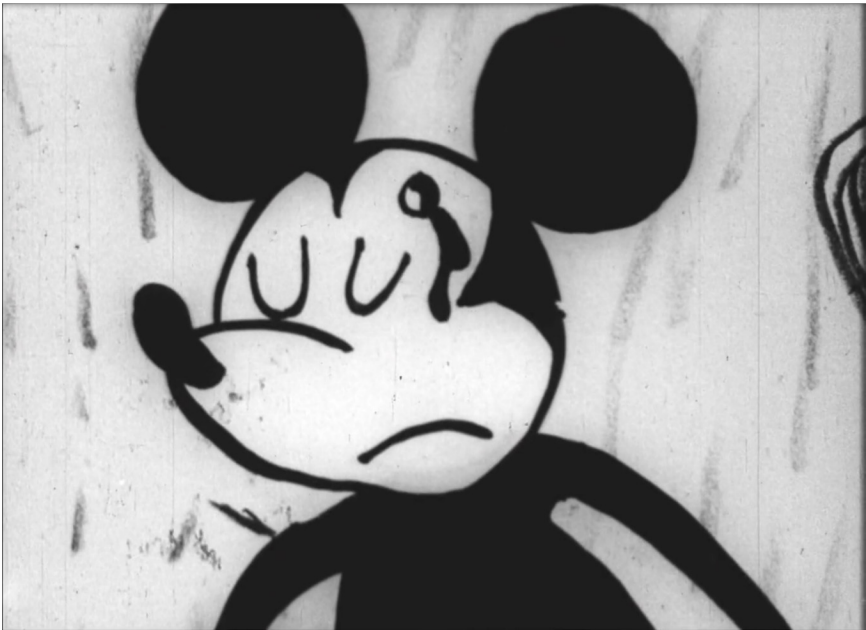


FIGURE 3. Mickey Mouse bleeding to (un)death from bullet wound in their forehead, from Whitney Lee Savage and Milton Glaser's *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam*, 1967–68.

The death of this iconic cartoon mouse becomes an animated and cognitive possibility with the transformation of a smile into a frown, the creature's rigid fall from a vertical to a horizontal posture, and the juxtaposition of Mickey's animated stilling with a continuous flow of inky blood that decouples movement from the signification of life.⁶³ Therefore, the film might be read as a traditionally sentimental antiwar film for American audiences; but other readings are also possible.

In *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart argue that Disney's violence is embedded in its characters' relation to time and deathlessness: "Since they are not engendered by any biological act, Disney characters may aspire to immortality: whatever apparent, momentary sufferings are inflicted on them in the course of their adventures, they have been liberated, at least, from the curse of the body."⁶⁴ This leads, they suggest, to an altered relationship to time where "reality is unchanging."⁶⁵ Dorfman and Mattelart's book suggests both that there are things to be learned about US imperialist ideologies by looking at the intertwining of suffering and immortality in popular cartoons and that spectators' ability to learn such lessons requires new reading methodologies. *Undead* is deeply invested in this dual insight. Similarly, Ōtsuka Eiji, discussing war and peace in the context of Tezuka Osamu's manga, identifies an "undying" and "deathless" quality in anime derived from Hollywood films in general, and Disney animation and Mickey Mouse (perhaps inaccurately) in particular. He writes, "Common to Hollywood comedies and Disney animation is the fact that the characters are physically 'tough to kill.' Even when Mickey falls from a cliff and is squashed flat into the ground, he reappears in the next scene without a scratch. This 'undying' or 'deathless' physicality is one of the legacies of Hollywood in anime, which comes via Disney."⁶⁶ Ōtsuka illustrates his argument with an image from Tezuka's June 1945 manga *Shōri no hi made* (Till the Day of Victory), which features Mickey Mouse in a war plane, goggles across their forehead, shooting a machine gun. This image links Mickey's deathlessness not to innocence but rather to an American ideology of invulnerability that Amy Kaplan, in *Our American Israel*, describes in terms of "the invincible victim" and "the pursuit of indomitability."⁶⁷ While this machine gun-toting Mickey Mouse makes the violence of American imperialism explicit (albeit within the context of Japanese imperialism in Asia), in many of the disastrous situations American cartoon characters experience, their violence is directed at themselves. Or, as Chuck Jones puts it, "The Coyote is his own worst enemy."⁶⁸ The logic of deathlessness, it seems, collapses the categories of victim and perpetrator into each other, and this can be used in different ways. Undeath has clearly been used to help sustain a totalizing system that makes illegible all experiences of life, suffering, violence, and death that do not relate to the Coyote-like protagonist. But Dorfman and Mattelart suggest that there are also ways to read and think that illuminate and mobilize animation's logic of deathlessness in the service of un-war making. This book goes in search of those ways.

Mickey Mouse in Vietnam offers the viewer an image of a singularly imagined and visually conquerable “world,” available only to vision from above, that functions as both touristic lure and the path to war.⁶⁹ But how does the film shape the way viewers understand the relationship between two worlds that momentarily merge here—the world of cartoons and the world of operational images, the graphic images used to conquer and control space—in ways that differ from military uses of cartoon characters in the service of war? The answer to this question depends in part not only on who the “we” in question is but on how that “we” understands “the world” outside of the experience of the film. Viet Thanh Nguyen succinctly articulates the reasons for resisting contained, compartmentalized, and consecutive ways of thinking about modern war’s temporality and spatiality in *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. There Nguyen offers paradigms that enable more “just” forms of memory that remember “others” as well as “one’s own” and that provide yet another framework through which to consider what *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* may or may not offer to un-war making. He writes,

The inclination is to remember wars like individuals, separate and distinct. Wars become discrete events, clearly demarcated in time and space by declarations of war and ceasefires, by the inscription of dates in history books, news articles, and memorial placards. And yet all wars have murky beginnings and inconclusive endings, oftentimes continuing a preceding war and foreshadowing a later one. These wars often do not take place only in the territories for which they are named, but spill over into neighboring countries; they are also shaped in war rooms and boardrooms distant from the battlefields.⁷⁰

Nguyen takes issue with the way wars are named and challenges the way naming limits what he calls “war’s scale in space and time.”⁷¹ Writing about whether to speak of “the Vietnam War” or “the American War,” he states, “Either name effaces how more than just Vietnamese or Americans fought this war, and how it was fought both inside and outside Vietnam. When it comes to time, other American wars preceded it (in the Philippines, the Pacific Islands, and Korea), occurred at the same time (in Cambodia, Laos, and the Dominican Republic), and followed it (in Grenada, Panama, Kuwait, Iraq, and Afghanistan).”⁷²

Mickey Mouse in Vietnam’s focus on the moment of Mickey’s (un)death is clearly designed to generate antiwar feeling in American audiences, but reading the film in the context of anti-imperialist and antiwar feminisms enables reflection on the contradictory and historically charged range of feelings that the film might generate, including grief and invulnerability. Affectively and politically, *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam*’s most direct antiwar strategy is deeply rooted in a sentimental investment in Mickey Mouse. Does the film still work as an antiwar film if audiences are indifferent or even hostile to Mickey? Maybe, but in a way that, to echo Martha Rosler, also usefully brings the war home. *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* is solely concerned with Mickey Mouse and seems indifferent to and/or unaware of

Vietnamese people, combatants or not. Vietnamese existence is registered solely as a threat to American life, as a bullet that comes from nowhere and no one. In this purportedly “antiwar” film, Vietnam appears only as a fully depersonalized “War Zone,” structurally disavowing rather than grieving lost Vietnamese lives. Though the film may awaken antiwar sentiment in American audiences chilled by the prospect of the death of their loved ones, it also disavows Mickey’s (and the United States’) own perpetrator violence, rendering it unimaginable through the combination of Mickey’s innocence and the visual absence of Vietnamese life. *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* constructs a vision of “the war” as a self-enclosed world generating grief for deathless Americans who still manage to play the roles of both hero and victim, thus generating opposition to an American imperialist war while simultaneously sustaining American imperialist ideology and the war making that accompanies it.

The complexity of how to evaluate this film’s participation in making and unmaking war is further complicated by the fact that this (un)dead American mouse-soldier takes the form of *Steamboat Willie*’s Mickey Mouse in particular, who, at least according to Nicholas Sammond, is not just like, but *is* “a minstrel.”⁷³ Thus this scene may, albeit unthinkingly, extend the film’s affective combination of grief, loss, and animated deathlessness into the realm of blackface minstrelsy in ways that reinforce the already-contradictory temporality and affects of minstrelsy and its afterlife. Understood within this framework, Mickey functions as both an individual character and an allegory of the nation in which the presence of Black life is simultaneously invoked and sacrificed, at once disavowed within an apparently unstoppable white performance and mourned nostalgically as a body killed by invisible forces of a violence marked as foreign that actually comes from within.⁷⁴

Yet Racquel J. Gates’s powerful Black feminist reflection on the affective experience of a particular screening of *Dumbo* (Samuel Armstrong, Norman Ferguson, Wilfred Jackson, et al., 1941) offers a useful caution to scholars theorizing American animation’s rootedness in racism. Gates describes watching this Disney feature with her children during Covid-19 lockdown in the summer of 2020 while people protesting the murder of George Floyd marched in the street below.⁷⁵ She acknowledges the “clear racist instances” in *Dumbo* as well as American animation’s rootedness in minstrelsy. But she also contextualizes such instances within an omnipresent antiblack racism that haunts “the entire history of American mainstream cinema” and notes, crucially, “how Black people regularly engage with films that were created with little care or regard for their experiences or humanity.”⁷⁶ Gates challenges assumptions derived from the “discourses on blackness and film that take the white gaze as the unquestioned and rigid norm” and that assert “definitive” readings, calling instead for analyses that take the specific circumstances of watching into account and that lead “with resonance rather than with a politics of representation.”⁷⁷ Just as Rose links delusions about ending

war to delusions about finite models of knowledge, so Gates's intervention suggests that the (inter)(in)animating work of un-war making requires scholars to find intellectual, political, and stylistic alternatives to authoritarian, triumphalist, or single-minded arguments and to acknowledge the role of styles of thought in perpetual war making.

To date, film theory has offered scholars a fairly limited toolbox with which to grapple with issues raised at the intersection of war and animation. The complex reasons for these limitations derive, in part, as I suggest above, from film theory's antianimation bias, especially within medium-specific frameworks that have considered live-action film in isolation from more diverse media landscapes. Scholars in animation studies and cinema *and media* studies pose continuous and generative challenges to these isolationist tendencies. Yet there is more to the story than this. Thinking about film theory's limitations simultaneously in the dual light of *Mickey Mouse in Vietnam* and Gates's reading of *Dumbo* has led me to consider more deeply the vital contributions Black sound and music studies, Black feminist film studies, and Black studies in poetics have to make to war and animation scholarship. In particular, in the remainder of this chapter, I explore what animation theory has to gain from paying close attention to Black studies responses to critical theory's understanding of jazz as well as to what Matthew D. Morrison has recently theorized as "Blacksound." Morrison writes of this neologism, "The singular, compound noun 'Blacksound' is employed to unpack the legacies of popular music that have developed during chattel slavery and out of blackface."⁷⁸ He uses this term to slow automatic reactions to sounds and images in the popular music industry that have roots in the cultural landscape generated by the intersecting realities of American anti-Black racism and Black life. Gates's reading of *Dumbo*, which notes the effect of the presence of something akin to Morrison's "Blacksound" in the film, illustrates the benefit of this kind of slowing. Interrupting animation theory's reliance on critical theory's understanding of jazz and "Blacksound" through a more robust engagement with Black studies is a necessary step, I suggest, in developing more nuanced approaches to feminist thinking about war, racism, and animation together.

BEYOND MICKEY: CRITICAL ANIMATION THEORY, JAZZ, AND "THE BREAK"

Film theoretical discussions of war and animation frequently return to Walter Benjamin's early twentieth-century fragments on Mickey Mouse. Although Benjamin becomes increasingly ambivalent about animation's utopian possibilities, he initially imagines Mickey as capable of activating in mass audiences visual and cognitive awareness about the dismantled coherence of time, space, subjectivity, and the biological body that world-destroying forces such as fascism, imperialism, modernity, technological warfare, and forced exile enact.⁷⁹ Benjamin sees

this cartoon character as having the potential to offer audiences in the 1930s what Miriam Hansen, in her brilliant analysis of Benjamin's debate with Theodor W. Adorno, calls "a rhetorical emergency brake."⁸⁰ And Hansen demonstrates how Benjamin's hesitation about the cartoon's political potential emerges in response to Adorno's more negative view of cartoons, which he compares with jazz.⁸¹

In his 1936 essay "On Jazz," Adorno describes "the break" as "a cadence which is similar to an improvisation, mostly at the end of the middle part two beats before the repetition of the principal part of the refrain."⁸² While he recognizes that jazz's syncopations can, in virtuosic examples, "yield an extraordinary complexity," he argues that in all cases, "the fundamental beat is rigorously maintained; it is marked over and over again by the bass drum."⁸³ While acknowledging that the "decidedly modern character" of jazz is "sorely in need of analysis," "musically," Adorno insists, jazz's "'modernity' refers primarily to sound and rhythm, without fundamentally breaking the harmonic-melodic convention of traditional dance music."⁸⁴ This, for Adorno, puts jazz at odds with what he regards as modernist avant-garde music's more radical departure from musical traditions and freedom-restricting forms of rhythm. "Jazz," "dance," and "dance music" become synonymous with the militaristic march, with the "rigid" musical disciplining of the body, and with the deluded identification of "dependent lower classes" with the upper classes.⁸⁵ Doubting the extent to which "jazz has anything at all to do with black music" and describing this possibility as "highly questionable," Adorno suggests that "even the much-invoked improvisations, the 'hot' passages and breaks, are merely ornamental in their significance, and never part of the overall construction or determinant of the form."⁸⁶

Hansen's 1993 "Of Mice and Ducks" essay explicitly, albeit too briefly, identifies the imbrication of animation, Blackness, radical politics, and jazz in and through what Adorno names "the break." Fred Moten, working within a tradition of Black studies and poetics, takes up and redirects this key term in his influential study *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003). Without engaging animation as a key priority, Moten's recontextualization of "the break" unleashes a language of (inter)(in)animation, suggesting an affinity between these terms and modeling the possibility of redirecting existing intellectual trajectories. The verb *to animate* permeates Moten's *In the Break* in ways that are distinct from Adorno's more constraining and subject-bound uses of this term, without ever becoming a primary concern in its own right. Moten explicitly engages Adorno in chapter 3, "Visible Music," a title that strongly echoes "visual music," a common synonym for abstract animation, and especially the form of avant-garde animation that is driven by sound.⁸⁷ There he notes that "black aural culture" is, for Adorno, "defined by its fetish character," and jazz by its affinity with "the spontaneous singing of servant girls . . . the domesticated body in bondage."⁸⁸ Moten focuses less on what Adorno hears than on what he doesn't in order to "establish black aurality as the site of an improvisation" and to locate something other than loss and trauma

in what is variously described as the cut, the wound, and the break.⁸⁹ In particular, the notion of the “ensemblic” plays a crucial role in preventing improvisation and freedom from either taking the form of a redeemed subjectivity unimplicated by subjection or “fixing” the (jazz) break.⁹⁰ I try to center these irresolvably intertwined histories of subjection and the ensemblic through my use of the term *(inter)(in)animation*.

More recently, in *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (2018), Fumi Okiji, a Black feminist scholar of critical theory and sound and music studies, develops this line of thinking, offering a powerful critique of, as well as better alternatives to, Adorno’s occlusions of black sociality in his writing on jazz. Okiji too does not focus on animation. But her revisionist account delineates the limitations of Adorno’s imagination of freedom and life in his writing on jazz, and this intervention matters for the project of theorizing animation, which has been unproductively constrained by Adorno’s jazz-inflected understanding of animation as a political dead end. Okiji’s Black feminist rethinking of jazz illuminates how life-affirming possibilities of animation might be both practiced and theorized through a differently imagined sense of the world. Without denying that Adorno may be right about the “complicity” of some jazz music, Okiji rejects Adorno’s “near-silence on African American and, more generally, black sociohistory” and his use of New World slavery as a mere preview of the “alienation and neutering of the bourgeois subject” rather than as a topic of interest in its own right.⁹¹ Furthermore, Okiji dismisses jazz scholarship’s frequent emphasis on the individual in favor of different ways of thinking, being, and creating that foreground community and relationality, again suggesting generative possibilities for animation practice and theory. Taking inspiration, like Bradley, from Hortense J. Spillers, Okiji insists that in spite of ongoing efforts to occlude black sociohistory, “black life *is* lived, although often invisibly, alongside its appropriated and transformed mainstream uses.”⁹² And crucially, Okiji argues, “It is this deviance from mainstream ideals and imaginings, rather than liberty or democracy, that jazz works through.”⁹³ *Undead* leans in the direction of works that experiment with communal, relational, ensemblic, and deviant forms of animation that, like the jazz Okiji describes, counter totalities that support white supremacist, patriarchal, singular, and belligerent worldviews in improvisational and unpredictable ways.

Jazz holds an understandably privileged place for both Moten and Okiji, as it does, along with “Blacksound,” in the formation of early American cartoons; but the *(inter)(in)animating* works featured in *Undead* draw on a broader array of ensemblic creative practices. Some are musical, like the traditions of Black experimental music and Dub activated by David Hartt and Tomeka Reid in *Et in Arcadia Ego*; but other un-war-making forms of *(inter)(in)animation* I discuss are rooted rather in collective practices of dance, theater, storytelling, fabric design, tattooing, healing, cooking, sewing, praying, being in nature, traveling, resisting, and joking, offering expanded forms of queer, decolonial, antiracist, and feminist ensemblic

imaginings. Charging animation with collective and relational connotations, (inter)(in)animation invites theorists to broaden experimental animation discourse beyond the singularly imagined animator's vision and body that Takahashi pinpoints as a problem. Studies of industrially produced, commercial animation often, almost by necessity, address questions of collectivity involving labor, mass audiences, and intermedially generated fan cultures. By contrast, experimental animation, existing outside of or in tense relation to capitalist structures of production, has the potential to bring different modes of collectivity into the picture, and yet it rarely does. This raises interesting questions about how humanities disciplines prepare scholars to notice or ignore different forms of social life. While Moten and Okiji's emphasis on the ensemblic recognizes black sociality and creative lifeways, attention to the ensemblic within the context of a predominantly white experimental film history is more likely to illuminate the numerous historical biases and exclusions built into many experimental film communities. This paradigm also foregrounds the question of how experimental film discourse's investment in "personal vision" affects the legibility of community within this context, and how a given filmmaker's access to or exclusion from hegemonic modes of personhood shapes what counts as "experimental" in the first place.⁹⁴ Though it is beyond the scope of this book to respond systematically to these questions across experimental film history, I hope that *Undead's* interventions may prove useful for the larger historiographic project that such questions invite.

The radical potential found at the crossroads of animation and music opens for Moten imaginal possibilities that Adorno's worldview blocks. By thinking black performance in the spatial and temporal specificity of downtown Manhattan in the early 1960s, "the beat" appears in Moten's text, not as a force of militaristic control that puppets the body, but rather as "an arrhythmia," an "irregular beat."⁹⁵ The rhetoric of animation pervades *In the Break*, continuously and suggestively interacting with notions of relationality, improvisation, desubjectivization, breakage, and the ensemble. The term is there in the opening lines of the Acknowledgments, where Moten thanks the grandparents by whom his work is "animated" and recognizes the work of Saidiya Hartman, whom he describes as "animated" by a "critique of the subject."⁹⁶ For Moten, both the "real problem" and the "real chance for the philosophy of human being" stem from "the animative materiality—the aesthetic, political, sexual, and racial force—of the ensemble of objects that we might call black performers, black history, blackness," elsewhere described as "the freedom drive that animates black performances."⁹⁷ "Really listening" in the break where improvisation happens cannot involve a singular self, Moten shows, because it "is something other than itself."⁹⁸ "You must have faith," he suggests in his discussion of Amiri Baraka, "in some animus that allows the continual projection of discontinuity," elsewhere invoking "the frame" as spirit, as breath, and, again in the context of Baraka's poetry, as "the ongoing held within a fundamental, local, even national *anima*."⁹⁹

Animation limns the language and thought of *In the Break*, inviting readers to improvise new ways of understanding animation practice through Moten's revised understanding of what happens "in the break." This invitation is reinforced by the fact that while "the frame" often emerges in the form of spirit and breath, Moten does also explicitly relate this language of the frame to experimental film practice. "Eisenstein is essential here," he declares, highlighting the filmmaker's "pursuit of a theory of montage as nonexclusive totality," with "the interval" emerging as "the motive force and form or dynamism that infuses and animates 'the ensemble of social relations.'"¹⁰⁰ Moten also stresses Eisenstein's "theorization of movement in/of the frame," which deconstructs the frame's singularity, its "staticity," and indeed the "very idea of the frame."¹⁰¹ This leaves those interested in the politics of animation, often understood as a frame-by-frame type of filmmaking, with the question of how to define animation once the frame as an individual unit has become unthinkable.¹⁰²

Moten introduces the plural term *interinanimations* to describe the entanglement of "the concept of race" and the idea of the frame, the "full ensemble of the determinations and indeterminations of race and the frame, their interinanimations and interruptive encounters."¹⁰³ *Undead* underscores and experiments with the theoretical and political possibilities of this term as both noun and verb, rhetorical figure and aesthetic technique, for the feminist study of intermedial and experimental animated works about war. These works challenge scholars to reimagine their existing critical frameworks by raising unusual questions that we are ill equipped to answer: How might abstract animated black circles and chalk stick figures alter the contemporary viewer's experience of colonial footage of dancing West African people? What does the interaction of doggerel puns, animated letters and objects, and physically embodied animation do to the mnemonic landscape of World War I? How should viewers understand the relationship between a gallery-installed digital animation and proliferation of World War I veterans, redrawn from a Nazi-destroyed painting and transferred onto a film loop with an experimental soundtrack; a speculative live performance of a fictional political movement; and a live-action film trilogy, all occurring simultaneously and in proximity to each other in the city of Berlin? What happens when Wile E. Coyote, an emblem of deathlessness, makes his permanent home in a German military museum?

(Inter)(in)animation and Feminist Critique

Undead seeks to build on Sianne Ngai's recognition that while "animatedness" inescapably belongs with "ugly categories of feeling" that perpetuate racial stereotypes, such categories can also help to "highlight animation's status as a nexus of contradictions with the capacity to generate unanticipated social meanings and effects" and to undermine "animation's traditional role in constituting bodies as raced."¹⁰⁴ Ngai's work on "animatedness" constitutes an important antiracist and decolonial feminist intervention into more utopian theorizations of animation,

including “Sergei Eisenstein’s praise of ‘plasmaticness’ in his analysis of Disney cartoons.”¹⁰⁵ It is remarkable, in part, for its simultaneous consideration of Fox Television’s US animation comedy *The PJs* (1998–2000) and a feminist theoretical discourse of animation that includes Barbara Johnson’s essay, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion” (1986) and Rey Chow’s critical discussion in “Postmodern Automaton” (1993) of animation as a mediator of mutually imbricated scholarly desires and political responses to them across different positionalities and histories of violence.¹⁰⁶ Summarizing and citing Chow, Ngai explains that “the main question facing third-world subjects constantly invoked, apostrophized, or ventriloquized by first-world theorists is the question of how to turn automatization into autonomy and independence: ‘The task that faces “third world” feminists is thus not simply that of “animating” the oppressed women of their cultures but of making the automatized and animated condition of their own voices the conscious point of departure in their interventions.’”¹⁰⁷

Ngai’s juxtapositions are discomfiting because they illuminate how seemingly distinct forms of animation both enact a similar “thinging of the body.”¹⁰⁸ At one point, sensing that “the act of animation begins to look inherently and irremediably violent,” Ngai interrogates “the possibility of foreclosing comic animation altogether as a strategy for representing nonwhite characters.”¹⁰⁹ Buried within this potential cancellation of specifically comic animation is the suspicion that there may be more and less acceptable forms of animation for progressive creative and intellectual work. Many of the artists I consider in this book run toward rather than away from comedic and belligerent forms of animation with noxious histories in order to make use of the knowledge embedded in these forms about how violent structures sustain themselves. Similarly, Ngai ultimately rejects the proposal she considers, noting the critical and political possibilities that such animation—“a nexus of contradictions”—offers in the face of racial stereotypes. These might be countered, Ngai suggests, not only by being stopped or made “more dead” but also, “though in a more equivocal fashion,” through acts of “reanimating.”¹¹⁰ *Undead* grapples with what such equivocal modes of animation make available to antiwar feminist praxis and with the methodological challenges that such works pose. *Undead* imports (inter)(in)animation from the realm of poetics as a useful critical term for thinking with, against, across, and about the equivocal, entangled, hesitant, jerky, and tense histories, feelings, and politics that animation mediates in the works I bring together. Like each of the case studies, (inter)(in)animation resists belligerent singularities of heroism, experience, and reality through its own internal contradictions, providing a rich framework through which to think the relationship among feminisms, animation, and war.

Inspired by both Moten and Ngai, Michael Boyce Gillespie’s potent reading of the animated film *Coonskin* (Ralph Bakshi, 1975) not only “reanimates” the anti-black stereotype against itself but in doing so simultaneously transforms the critical tools of film analysis by using them within an interdisciplinary and intermedial

Black film and media studies context.¹¹¹ Gillespie writes, “*Coonskin* reanimates the iconography of antiblack visual culture as a metapicture that cogently contests the rendering of blackness, national mythology, the circuits of pop culture, and cultural memory in the key of the racial grotesque.”¹¹² The reanimating potential of this film relies, Gillespie suggests, on viewers moving past offensiveness for the purpose of a critical undeading that operates in part through offense: “The film’s acrimonious emplotment of the racial grotesque acts as a metacritical impulse to strike back (‘Fuck you’) and to disinter the liminal black figure from the deadening rhetoric of black inhumanity and white paternalism.”¹¹³ Critical reanimation here might seem to recenter white supremacist associations between blackness and death via the language of disinterment. But a precise reading of Gillespie’s word choice here makes clear that it is in fact the “rhetoric of black inhumanity and white paternalism” that is yoked to death, and noticing this allows the “liminal black figure” to be unburied without being undead. By putting deathliness in its proper place, Gillespie contributes to a broader project that Fatimah Tobing Rony describes as putting an end to the “visual biopolitics” that constructs a history of violence by occluding “violence that implicates whites.”¹¹⁴ I hope *Undead* will also contribute to this collective project. Not only do the works discussed in this book aim to make hidden histories of white war making more and differently available to thought; they also bring attention to alternative models of relational being and looking and experiment with what (inter)(in)animating practices illuminate about the possibility of sustaining life and each other instead of war.

Chapter 1, “(Inter)(in)animating the Archive,” focuses on British-Nigerian artist Onyeka Igwe’s 2023 MoMA PS1 installation, *A Repertoire of Protest (No Dance, No Palaver)*. There I introduce (inter)(in)animation to describe Igwe’s shaking of the apparatus, a mobilization of the site of projection occurring at the intersection of the dancing body and the moving image. I consider Igwe’s activation of a relational exchange across dance, the animated image, language, and the colonial archive in dialogue with the Aba Women’s War of 1929. This major and woman-led anticolonial uprising in Nigeria took the form of dance and is not, in part for that reason, always recognized as war. This chapter raises new ways of thinking about the relationship between war making and antiwar movements. Chapter 2, “Rubbing Memory the Right Way: Whiteness, (Inter)(in)animation, and Monumental Frottage,” examines how Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley put verbal nonsense and humor in dialogue with expanded forms of animation that include the physical act of rubbing one’s body against monumental facades to discombobulate stone-faced, Eurocentric, and entrenched narratives of World War I memory. Chapter 3, “(Inter)(in)animated Loops and the Feminist Politics of Return,” asks what happens when Yael Bartana’s live-action films and performance works engaging the entwined histories of anti-Semitic ideologies, political Zionism, and the politics of return are considered alongside a minor animated work that the artist made around the same time: *Entartete Kunst Lebt (Degenerate Art*

Lives). This short, animated loop sets in motion, proliferates, and reframes redrawings of an Otto Dix painting of veterans returning from World War I that is presumed to have been destroyed by the Nazis. The chapter examines what histories and historiographic challenges come into view when this animated short is considered not in isolation but rather in relation to the larger body of work. In chapter 4, “(Inter)(in)animation in Exile,” I explore to what effect Kelly Dolak and Wazhmah Osman animate children’s war drawings and cutouts from family photographs and old Afghan tourist brochures in their personal essay film about gendered Afghan and Afghan American experiences of war across multiple generations. Chapter 5, “Unnatural Disasters: Unfinishable (Inter)(in)animation,” considers Helen Hill’s community-based (inter)(in)animating response to the handmade dresses of Florestine Kinchen, found on a New Orleans sidewalk, as an evolving feminist un-war-making practice within the context of Hurricane Katrina, the effects of which Hill increasingly began to understand within frameworks of war.¹¹⁵ In chapter 6, “Inter/in/animating the Museum: Architecture, Place, Memory,” I return to the concept of (inter)(in)animation to consider how three artists—Nancy Davenport, Gesiye, and David Hartt—intervene into museums grappling with their own complicities with different forms of war. I conclude the book in dialogue with the Palestinian artist and writer Ibrahim Nasrallah about his (inter)(in)animated “video poem” entitled “Mary of Gaza,” translated by Huda Fakhreddine.

This book makes no claim to systematicity or coverage, in part because (inter)(in)animation disrupts habits of thought regarding how wars are mapped and memorialized. I have selected works that allow me to explore a range of the aesthetic and critical possibilities that (inter)(in)animation offers for engaging the entanglement of violence and its antidotes, and the silencing and intellectually petrifying effects of hegemonic war chronologies that work via rigid, linear, and unidirectional constructions of time and experience. As a scholar rooted in the research university, I am also invested in (inter)(in)animation’s activity within institutions of war memory, including archives, museums, historical sites, and classrooms. These institutions participate in forms of war that operate through the dispersed force of social structures targeting vulnerable populations as well as through support for officially declared and covert wars. (Inter)(in)animation provides strategies for reflecting on as well as resisting war’s seepage into the structures of our lives in ways that make accountability and agency elusive. (Inter)(in)animation spotlights the role of automaticity, discipline, and obedience in sustaining war. Let the feminist (inter)(in)animated un-war making begin!