

## (Inter)(in)animated Loops and the Feminist Politics of Return

In World War I, the new injuries inflicted on soldiers by trench warfare generated medical innovations, particularly in the realm of prosthetic medicine, catalyzing formal innovations in the work of artists seeking to respond to war's stretching the limits of the body through experiments that were at once political and aesthetic. Walter Benjamin, in his unpublished fragment from 1931, "Mickey Mouse," articulates through the cartoon mouse how the violence of war exceeds the temporal and geographic delimitations of the battlefield and is mediated perpetually in the bodies of combatants. In the cartoon body, Benjamin suggests, "we see for the first time that it is possible to have one's own arm, even one's own body, stolen."<sup>1</sup> This notion that the fluidity of animation's drawn line suggests an image to come was central to Eisenstein's writing about animation's plasmatic quality, which emphasizes the quality of alteration over liveliness, and any attempt to think about the historicity and political resonance of the animated image has to grapple with this quality of futurity.<sup>2</sup> Discussing the "defining aspect of animation—its creation of a moving image," Tom Gunning advocates for thinking movement alongside the implied "ability of an image to transform," seeing the animated image as "vibrating with the possibility of change, unstable in its identity and clearly different from the inert and static form of the traditional picture."<sup>3</sup> These is a tension between the sameness that the notion of return implies and the unexpected transformations that both cartoon and veteran bodies endure. In this chapter, I argue that the political possibilities of Yael Bartana's deep engagement with gendered militarism and the past, present, and futures of Zionism lies in her (inter)(in)animating pre-enactment of a reconfigured relationship between returning and changing. Bartana's transmedial efforts to audiovisualize the dynamic and often affectively

charged exchanges between spaces of war and home exist in a lineage with Dadaist experiments that combined animation, live performance, and puppetry and that were similarly preoccupied with the politics of return in the context of fascism, nationalism, and militarism.<sup>4</sup>

The (inter)(in)animating fulcrum of this chapter that holds its other pieces together and that catalyzes alternative ways of periodizing and narrating the (pre) histories and legacies of the World Wars is Bartana's Dada-inspired *Entartete Kunst Lebt* (*Degenerate Art Lives*) (2010), a five-minute sound installation and digitally rendered animated loop transferred onto 16mm film. Bartana is an Israeli-born, feminist, queer contemporary artist now living between Berlin and Amsterdam. She is a self-described "observer of the contemporary and a pre-enactor," who "employs art as a scalpel inside the mechanisms of power structures."<sup>5</sup> This loop redraws as puppets with movable parts returning German World War I veterans as they are depicted in photographs of an Otto Dix painting from 1920. The painting, known both as *Kriegskrüppel* (*War Cripples*) and as *45% Erwerbsfähig!* (*45% Fit for Work!*), is presumed to have been destroyed by the Nazis.<sup>6</sup> The painting depicts four prosthetically mended and medal-laden veterans marching home against the backdrop of a German main street, whose buildings interact dynamically with the physical bodies and perhaps even psyches of the veterans. Bartana redraws the figures from a variety of perspectives and framings beyond those offered in the painting. She also animates and proliferates them and alters the space through which they move, thus endowing Dix's World War I veterans with an expanded set of possibilities in the present.

Here, I consider Bartana's Dada-inspired animation through a relational feminist framework that is both implied by Bartana's oeuvre and explicitly developed by intersectional feminist scholars working in the overlapping fields of diaspora studies and memory/postmemory studies. This paradigm involves considering the charged concept of "the right to return" in relation to the intersecting histories of colonialism, war, and diasporas, as well as to the rites, beliefs, feelings, individual and collective identities, and survival strategies to which these histories of violence give rise. Such an approach requires attention to what Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller describe as our "mutual imbrication," to a twenty-first century intensification of "the desire for return to origins," which calls for a parallel intensification of attention to the concept, and also, Saidiya Hartman insists, to "the incommensurability between histories."<sup>7</sup> Much of Bartana's early twenty-first-century work engages both the imbrication and the incommensurability of European Jewish and Palestinian as well as other more contemporary histories of annihilation, forced displacement, diaspora, and nationalism through the language of returns. Reflecting on past experiences, Hirsch and Miller acknowledge in 2011 that, "as academic feminist critics in the United States, we lived through and participated in critical and sometimes bitter conversations about the conflicting claims of identity animating the phenomenon of return."<sup>8</sup> These experiences generate the question

that drives their book: “How, in particular, does a feminist subject negotiate the intensities and contradictory impulses of diasporic return?”<sup>9</sup> Among other things, Hirsch and Miller model a feminism that remains “critical of a politics of identity and nation” while trying to foster collective and multiperspectival dialogue about the longings for and lures of return, even when such dialogue is difficult to sustain.

Writing in the context of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, Nasser Abourahme points out that the intense charge around the question of displaced Palestinian refugees’ right of return derives in part from the way that “return is always read as a euphemism for (vaguely defined) destruction” and is misperceived as a desire necessarily requiring the “continuous dispossession and displacement of others.”<sup>10</sup> Also speaking within the BDS context, Kareem Estefan suggests to Eyal Weizman that “return” has to be imagined “as transformative,” as something that involves, “not a return to the past, but to a new collectivity.” To this, Weizman responds, “A return is not an inversion of time. It is a creation of a new situation and a new mode of living together as equals.”<sup>11</sup> These conversations and the commitments that ground them provide important contexts and interpretive paradigms for my writing about Bartana’s engagement of acts of return.

Bringing attention to Bartana’s minor animated loop within the context of feminist- and boycott-rooted discussions of rights of return on the one hand and of the live-action films and performances that Bartana was producing around the same time on the other offers a number of critical affordances. It brings into focus a history of avant-garde artists who, after World War I, grappled with the enduring effects of war by engaging the movements and transformations of veterans’ bodies through intermedial strategies including printmaking, puppetry, conveyor belts, projection, cartoon animation, documentary film, and performance. By doing so, Bartana’s (inter)(in)animating loop creates a temporal and historical *mise-en-abyme* that allows the effects of multiple wars, as well as what Hartman, speaking in the different context of the slave trade, calls “the long *durée*” of “nonevent[s],” to be simultaneously considered.<sup>12</sup> This chapter expands existing scholarship on anti-imperialist, antimilitarist feminist art that engages Dada by focusing on the specifically animated legacy of Dadaism and by considering this minor work of Bartana beyond its immediate installation context. In doing so, I highlight the feminist theoretical utility of attending to the animated immortality Bartana activates, creating a space for thinking critically about the often-incompatible politics, mythologies, chronologies, geographies, and intermedialities embedded in nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century narratives of return.<sup>13</sup>

The almost life-size figures in the original five-by-eight-foot painting may also have had some collage additions that would have materially reinforced the hybrid and fabricated nature of the bodies Dix depicts. Given the composite nature of his

veteran bodies, it is not surprising that Dix is supposed to have subtitled this work “These Four Don’t Add Up to a Whole Man.”<sup>14</sup> Bartana runs with the purported subtitle’s mathematical framing of the human, but through a logic of multiplication rather than addition, until the four distinctive men disappear into an army of digitally proliferating, ever-more-tiny clones. While Dix’s painting presents only a lateral view of the veterans, at least outside of its original exhibition context, Bartana switches between grotesque, animated visual close-ups of individual veteran body parts, including grimacing faces and blinking eyes, and ever more distant aerial views of the proliferating collective body of damaged men. Sonic closeups and pull-backs reinforce these visual shifts in perspective and proximity. As the aerial perspective transforms the wounded bodies into mere dots or pixels, the bodies gradually spell out the work’s slogan, “*Entartete Kunst Lebt (Degenerate Art Lives)*.”

Daniel Meir’s soundtrack for *Entartete Kunst Lebt* functions as a syncopated sonification of the original artwork’s potential motion, with the implied rhythm and materiality of the bodies’ movements brought into the three-dimensional space and lived time of the viewer through sound. Hadar Landsberg’s digital animation of the cutout puppet veterans’ movements is synchronized to sounds conjuring the creak of metallic joints, the thump of wooden limbs, the squeak of metal wheels, the clacking of artificially hinged jawbones and the gasping puffs of smoke that go up like prayers. As the bodies proliferate, this layered sound devolves into an industrial cacophony, reflecting the more distant noise of the undying mass of bodies that the war machine has made.<sup>15</sup>

The soundtrack competes with, or is supplemented by, the rattling sound of the 16mm projector that is part of the installation, the digital animation having been transferred onto film. As gallery viewers share space with the three-legged metal projector stand, its animated “upper body” sonically evokes the rhythms of machine-gun fire. This celluloid remediation of digital animation conflates the mechanical sound of war with the apparatus, as if the remediated bodies of these metallicized veterans, and indeed war itself, were invading the lived present of the gallery. Remediation and animation blur here as they both participate in realizing the potential motion implied in the painting by the veterans’ prosthetic mobility aids. This potential is further reinforced by the installation’s historical wink to Dziga Vertov, who juxtaposes dancing limbs, an animated tripod, overhead warplanes, and film spectators in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). The work transforms gallery visitors into what Donald Crafton describes “as coanimators, as fellow performers of the films,” locating art and its viewers within, and not outside of, the space of war.<sup>16</sup>

Bartana’s transfer of digital animation to celluloid also resists linear, teleological, or progressive media chronologies that might line up painting, printmaking, photography, celluloid film, and digital animation one behind the other, like soldiers. Instead, these media exist in a flexible relation to each other, recalling Thomas Elsaesser’s description of a media archaeological approach to digitization

and film history. This allows historians to displace themselves “in relation to a number of habitual ways of thinking,” disrupting “chronological uni-linear accounts,” and permitting “a look at multi-media across a number of other, more abstract or general parameters, such as: fixed and/or mobile perceiver; image and/or text; distance and/or proximity; passive reception and/or interactive participation; two-dimensional ‘flat’ image and/or three-dimensional virtual environment; looking through a ‘window on the world’ and/or ‘immersed in a horizonless space.’”<sup>17</sup>

#### (INTER)(IN)ANIMATION, REMEDIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF RETURN

Bartana’s twenty-first-century animated, self-reproducing puppet veterans do more than set Dix’s destroyed painting in motion, although this gesture is important for its refusal of the annihilating logic of national socialism and its assertion of the centrifugal, unforeseeable, and proliferating possibilities of even-destroyed anti-fascist, antiwar art in the present and future. But the loop simultaneously (inter)(in)animates several other moments in the history of early twentieth-century art and film. These include Dix’s 1920 drypoint reproductions of his own painting (figure 13); Abel Gance’s aerial shot of World War I soldiers spelling out the title of his pacifist film *J'accuse* (1919 and 1937); and Erwin Piscator’s collaborative, multimedia Berlin stage adaptation in 1928 of Jaroslav Hašek’s unfinished novel, *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk*. Bartana does not, to my knowledge, ever directly reference Piscator’s unwieldy production, but I argue that this work, contemporaneous with Dix’s antiwar work and produced by artists with whom Dix was in active dialogue, “pre-enacts” Bartana’s (inter)(in)animating exploration of the entanglement of colonialism, war, homes, and returns. *Entartete Kunst Lebt* solicits an unruly temporal framework that academic disciplines are ill equipped to describe as it unleashes sprawling and intersecting histories of violence that challenge existing war periodization models. Even the present tense of the loop’s title—“Degenerate Art Lives!”—pushes against the idea of finite wars. If this risks the kind of “back-shadowing” interpretation of World War I through the lens of World War II that Anton Kaes suggests results in a diminished understanding of history, Bartana’s use of the material loop resists a linear, unidirectional backward gaze and instead invites more multidirectional approaches to the temporal life of war.<sup>18</sup>

This animated short is further inflected by its proximity to two other major, intertwined, and temporally convoluted projects by Bartana that received much more critical attention than *Entartete Kunst Lebt*. These two projects conflate propaganda aesthetics drawn from the film histories of both Zionism and Nazism. The first involved a series of live performances / public discussions occurring under the banner of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), a speculative movement Bartana founded in 2007. These events included “We Will Be Strong in Our Weakness: A Presentation of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland,” a “collective process” (in which I participated) that, along with *Entartete Kunst Lebt*,





FIGURE 13. Otto Dix, *Kriegskrüppel* (War Cripples), 1920.

appeared in the 2011 Berlin Film Festival's Forum Expanded; and "And Europe Will Be Stunned: First International Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP)" (May 11–13, 2012), which took place at the Seventh Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art and was documented in the film *JRMiP Congress* (2012).<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, Bartana produced a video trilogy entitled *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007–11), which included *Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)* (2007), *Mur i wieża (Wall and Tower)* (2009), and *Zamach* (2011).<sup>20</sup>

These works together elaborate the fiction of a speculative movement that calls on 3.3 million Jews to return home to Poland, bringing critical attention to the utopian mythologies of Zionism, to the taboo history of Europe's broad implicatedness in the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestine conflict, and to the way narratives of postwar return pressure collective understandings and contestations of "home."<sup>21</sup> While a full discussion of both the JRMiP performances and the trilogy is beyond the scope of this book, these nonanimated projects provide an illuminating historiographic and political context through which to understand Bartana's turn to the animated loop. Arielle Azoulay and Adi Ophir argue that the trilogy represents a mode of return that holds at bay the potential violence embedded in return narratives through the prevalence of "mixing" and hybridity. While in *Entartete Kunst Lebt* the repeating and structurally determined temporality of the loop is hybridized through the intermediality and mixing that digital animation enables, in the trilogy "mixing" takes narrative form, activating two distinct iterations of hybrid historicity.<sup>22</sup> Azoulay and Ophir understand this work as responding to Palestinian refugees the world over, to the distinct but related "dead ends" that both Poland and Israel have reached through combining ethnic cleansing and political sovereignty, and as exposing "the extent to which we have become reconciled to the lack of hope and solution to the cycle of governmental catastrophes in which we, Israelis, are caught as direct victims, collaborators or perpetrators."<sup>23</sup> For them, the trilogy pre-enacts alternative models of return founded on Europe's taking full responsibility for its anti-Semitic, nationalist, and colonial projects and for its neglect of the violence that followed in these projects' wake, resulting in "new models of citizenry and citizenship."<sup>24</sup> This chapter considers the animated loop of *Degenerate Art Lives* and the mode of thinking it (inter)(in)animates against the backdrop of these models.

#### INTER(IN)ANIMATING PAINTING AND DRYPOINT

Dix's painting was acquired in December 1920 by the Stadtmuseum in Dresden, Dix's birthplace and a city to which I return in chapter 7.<sup>25</sup> After having been put into storage in 1924, it traveled with the Nazis' *Images of Decadence in Art* show between 1933 and 1936, and then again with the *Degenerate Art* show between 1937 and 1938, where it was reproduced in the catalogue under the section entitled "Painted Acts of Sabotage against the Military."<sup>26</sup> According to Adrian Sudhalter, the painting is presumed to have been burned in a public bonfire in Berlin in 1942, so

our knowledge of what it looks like depends on the Stadtmuseum's photo-card, on the photograph of its exhibition at the first Dada Fair, on the *Degenerate Art* exhibition catalogue, and also, to some extent, on the drypoints that Dix made from the painting.

Dix's marching veterans made their exhibition debut in the summer of 1920 within the radical political context of the First Dada Fair in Berlin, which featured many of the artists who would later collaborate with Piscator's production of *The Good Soldier Schwejk*. A photograph of the exhibition shows that the painting always exceeded itself. The head of the first of Dix's veterans was covered by George Grosz's painting-collage *Ein Opfer der Gesellschaft* (*A Victim of Society*), later titled *Remember Uncle August, the Unhappy Inventor* (1919), which, as Brigid Doherty has argued, performs on the face of the Weimar president Friedrich Ebert "the reconstructive plastic surgery practiced on wounded World War I soldiers."<sup>27</sup> This was only the first of many adaptations of this never-static image.

The drypoints reproduce, reverse, horizontally orient, and shrink the scale of the painted soldiers, illustrating that from the outset Dix's veterans—and perhaps militarism more generally—inspired remediation, proliferation, miniaturization, and a shift in point of view, even in the artist himself.<sup>28</sup> Sudhalter explains that Dix initially planned to sell the drypoints at the Dada Fair. Though this did not happen, this plan invites a stereoscopic, multiplying, transmedial, and animated mode of looking—prints are portable—and extends the spatial reach and singularity of the original painting.<sup>29</sup> Dix's remediation pre-enacts, and perhaps even catalyzes, Bartana's later remediation, multiplication, and animation of the painting using ever-increasing, ever more tiny veterans seen from varying points of view.

The earlier images are internally animated in other ways too: by the involuntary quaking of Dix's traumatized second veteran, depicted in the drypoint by a series of parallel wavy lines, and in the painting by overlapping iterations of the veteran's war-damaged face, a traumatic analogue to modernist depictions of dynamic motion in painting.<sup>30</sup> Bartana's animation activates and unleashes Dix's implied movements in the service of other histories and movements. This works in part through a redrawing that is also a displacement, for in the loop there is no street. These digitally animated "returning" veterans appear against a plain gray background. Gone are many of the features that grounded their broken bodies in a particular time and place: the German store signage; Dix's name carved above a doorway alongside the date, 1920. The digital veterans return to a virtual terra nullius, suggesting both the violence of settler colonial mythologies and the possibility, as in the live-action film trilogy, that histories of violence might be redirected in the service of alternative trajectories. If the formal structure of the loop insists on the inescapability of the past, both Dix's and Bartana's transmediations suggest the multiplicity of ways in which the past might enter the present and future.

Bartana's erasure of place and time marks a shift into a space that is not quite, but close to, allegorical, an unfixed space allowing for differently imagined histori-



cal relationships and opening up a variety of possible political trajectories. This removes—or perhaps translates into actual movement—the implied dynamism and dimensionality created within both the painting and the drypoints through visual interactions between the veteran bodies and the built space of the street that visualize how the returning veteran's body shapes the space of home to which it returns in a dynamic process. Wavy vertical lines representing the exhaled smoke of the first and third veterans make visible the life force of the men, marking a portal between bodily interiors and the street. The street seems to record or take up these tremoring gasps in the white wavy lines of a storefront's curtains. The business signs hanging from shops—a phrenological head, a boot, and a pointing arm—explicitly, almost mockingly, mirror the veterans' lost and damaged parts, as if magically relocating them in the space of commerce and suggesting a partnership between war's damage and commodity culture. Formal symmetries pull the eye among the crosses of cobblestones, a veteran's Iron Cross, the skull and crossbones on the same veteran's cap, and the "X" of Dix's name. These Xs remind viewers of the cross's resonance with death and resurrection and recall the comic artist's long tradition of using Xs to indicate the eyes of the cartoon dead. In the drypoint only, bullet holes scar the buildings' facades, including the sign in the shape of a head. These holes echo the hair follicles and pockmarks of the first veteran's disfigured face, which seems to have grown grassy trenches in its cheeks, as if the veterans have absorbed the landscape of battle and are now infected their surroundings with it, remediating and relocating the battlefield onto home ground as if bodies were both cameras and projectors.<sup>31</sup>

The painting and drypoint also imply animation through their X-ray-like attention to the mechanisms that enable veteran movement in spite of the ten limbs that the four men are missing. These include peg legs affixed to amputated stumps, crutches, a wheelchair, artificially implanted arm and leg bones connected by movable joints, and a claw-like mechanical hand that grips the wheelchair of the man in front. The last veteran also has a spring mechanism attached to his artificial jaw, and Dix's placement of this curly line beneath the man's eye suggests the path of a mechanized tear. It's as if feelings, like limbs, have been prosthetically implanted, and mechanical movement is both physical and emotional.

#### (INTER)(IN)ANIMATING TIME AND SPACE: WORLD WAR I GEOGRAPHY AND PERIODIZATION

Priya Jaikumar has argued that modernist images of broken bodies reference far more than the damage done to the bodies of European soldiers in World War I or the foreseeable violence that would accompany the rise of fascism that was already under way (Hitler joined the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (German Workers' Party) in 1919 and became its leader in 1920). She explains,

Alongside the rise of fascism and the two world wars, decolonization provoked European modernism's agitation around existing presumptions of wholeness, wherein progress, teleological history, state rationality, and the representation of reality were interrogated as fictions or illusions. The impossibility of experiencing moral horror at the genocide of the European Jewry without meditating on Europe's colonial rampage rang out in the words of the black-diaspora intellectual and surrealist Aimé Césaire, who saw the world wars as an exposure of the culpable "Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century" harboring a "Hitler inside."<sup>32</sup>

Rethinking World War I and its aftermath within its colonial and imperial contexts requires moving beyond monolithic periodizations of war in general and of the World Wars in particular. Shifting the ending of World War I from 1918 to 1923, Jay Winter offers one possible reframing as he resists the idea of French and British winners, noting, "For Britain, and for France, success in the Great War was a Pyrrhic victory. The Great War stripped Britain of the global economic power that had underpinned her pre-war global political power."<sup>33</sup> And 1920, the year of and in Dix's painting, marks the Treaty of Sèvres, that, Winter argues, "grew out of dreams of imperial mastery" rooted in European delusions about racial and cultural superiority that were rapidly being exposed as such.<sup>34</sup> The reorganization of power that Winter describes within this extended World War I includes the British government's "Balfour Declaration" of November 2, 1917, which communicates that government's support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," and the League of Nations' granting mandate over Palestine to the United Kingdom in 1922. Both of these dates are central to the history and possible futures of Zionism that Bartana's speculative pre-enactments engage. But Winter's is only one alternative periodization offered by historians writing about, through, and against the World War paradigms. Rashid Khalidi, for example, provides a historiographic framework of twentieth- and twenty-first-century war that centers Palestinian perspectives in a way that differently disrupts both standard periodizations of the World Wars *and* Winter's revisionist alternative. Khalidi sees 1923 not as a conclusion but rather as a middle point within a different system of periodization for twentieth-century war. He describes instead "the First Declaration of War" on Palestine, dated 1917–39, whose unfurling exists in a continuum from both the violence and the "peace" of World War I.<sup>35</sup>

In *Entartete Kunst Lebt*, an aerial point of view, a "nowhere" and blank geography, and the film strip's looping repetitions convey a time and space inhabited by Bartana's animated, endlessly returning European veterans that evokes some the structural features of western European colonial projects and twentieth-century wars. Writing of the air wars conducted in the aftermath of World War I up until the present, particularly in relation to the Middle East, Africa, and parts of South and East Asia, Caren Kaplan describes "a century or more of carnage and destruction," noting that "the trauma of violence moves around, making its own chaotic time and space, generating its own unruly intensities, so that the force of these histories is always 'now here' even as some events may have moved into



FIGURE 14. Grand opening of the first Dada exhibition, Berlin, June 5, 1920. The central figure hanging from the ceiling was an effigy of a German officer with a pig's head. *From left to right:* Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch (sitting), Otto Burchard, Johannes Baader, Wieland Herzfelde, Margarete Herzfelde, Dr. Oz (Otto Schmalhausen), George Grosz, and John Heartfield.

the less tangible but still palpable zone of 'no where.'<sup>36</sup> In *Entartete Kunst Lebt*, Bartana uses animation's spatio-temporal illogical capacities to write European participants in the World Wars into the chaotic times and spaces symptomatic of the perpetual wars often occluded by established journalistic and historiographic methodologies, multiplying the perspectives from which any individual war might be regarded.

The 1920 exhibition photograph of the first Dada Fair shows that Dix's veterans had been imagined "from above" long before Bartana's (inter)(in)animation of the work (figure 14). There they marched under the watchful gaze of one of the exhibition's "grotesque puppets," John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter's pig-soldier or "Prussian Archangel" (1920), which Piscator later references in his production notes for *Schweijk*. Suspended from the ceiling of the gallery and cobbled together like the veterans themselves, the mannequin sports a papier-mâché pig's head and wears a blasphemous poster that cites a Christmas carol, "I come from Heaven, from Heaven on high." This underscores the pig-soldier-angel's aerial point of view, marking it as at once militaristic, animal, human, and divine.



VIDEO 4. Title spelled out using veteran bodies, recalling *J'accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919). Yael Bartana, *Entartete Kunst Lebt* (*Degenerate Art Lives*), 2010.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.228.4>



Another sign explains, “In order to understand this work of art completely, one should drill daily for twelve hours with a heavily packed knapsack in full marching order in the Tempelhof Field.”<sup>37</sup> This invites viewers to reflect on war art not at a distance but from within the military experience in the manner of the drill. Here too the context of the 1920 Berlin Dada Fair resonates with Bartana’s use of pre-enactment, remediation, animation, and ritual performance to dispel the barriers separating art from militarism, histories of genocide and displacement, and mass political movements.

#### (INTER)(IN)ANIMATING SOLDIERS AND VETERANS I: ABEL GANCE

The first Dada Fair prefigures Bartana’s adoption of an aerial point of view on Dix’s veterans, her extension of the painting into three-dimensional space, and her proximate use of live performance. But Bartana’s adoption of the aerial point of view, especially in combination with militarized bodies that mobilize themselves into letters, simultaneously puts *Entartete Kunst Lebt* into dialogue with Abel Gance’s film *J'accuse*, the first version of which appeared in 1919 (video 4). Gance

famously presents the film's title using a sequence shot from above involving a massive number of French soldiers on leave from Verdun, 80 percent of whom were killed before the film's release. Like living puppets in the hands of the filmmaker, the soldiers form organically animated letters to spell out the trembling phrase "J-A-C-C-U-S-E."<sup>38</sup> The film's title accrues political credit by citing Émile Zola's impassioned 1898 accusatory letter to the president of the Republic, "J'accuse . . . !," opposing militarism and anti-Semitism and decrying the wrongful conviction and imprisonment of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who was of Jewish descent, although Gance's film lacks Zola's clarity and commitment.<sup>39</sup> In this sense *J'accuse* is politically quite distinct from both Dix's and the Berlin Dada group's scathing critique of nationalism.<sup>40</sup> Gance's choreographed formations even suggest parallels between the filmmaker's and the military leader's exploitation of soldiers. Bartana's choice to (inter)(in)animate two such divergent responses to war provokes reflection on the different ways artists use bodies touched by war in antiwar art.<sup>41</sup>

Drawing on Winter, John Horne identifies Gance's 1919 version of the film, which premiered "between the Armistice and the peace treaty," as "a film made inside the war," with the narrative emphasizing not opposition to war, nationalism, or militarism but rather "the fidelity of the home front."<sup>42</sup> Reviews register the film's unclear political message. In April 1920, one British reviewer concluded, "'J'accuse,' *whatever its object*, will rank high among the very finest pictures ever made" (emphasis added).<sup>43</sup> A subsequent *New York Times* review, published October 10, 1921, also suggests an increased depoliticization in later versions of the film: "The scenes and subtitles of 'J'Accuse' which made it a sweeping accusation of war and everyone everywhere who promoted it or profited by it have been deleted. . . . 'I Accuse' does not accuse anything or anybody in its final scenes."<sup>44</sup>

Through animation, Bartana fuses the antinationalist, antimilitarist, and transmedial work of Dix and the Berlin Dada artists with Gance's unstable, nationalist, and monumental work and does so, moreover, in proximity to the video and performance works of the JRMiP. This juxtaposition implies a willingness to structure collective explorations of potential political futures, including the future of political art, in unwieldy ways that engage rather than repress both the artist's and viewers' implicatedness and investments in militarism, settler colonialism, and war, and embrace the significant role that the possibility of failure plays in antiwar art, with its unknown timelines and trajectories.

#### (INTER)(IN)ANIMATING SOLDIERS AND VETERANS II: ERWIN PISCATOR

German theater director Erwin Piscator's collaborative, overambitious stage adaptation of *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schwejk*, which tells the tale of a hapless World War I soldier named Schwejk, anticipates Bartana's speculative and multimodal engagement of war's psychic, spatial, and temporal dimensions in its combination of humor, animation, live-action film, embodied performance,



sound, and technological experimentation.<sup>45</sup> The stage production ran from January 23, 1928, to April 12, 1928, on the Piscator stage in Nollendorfplatz, Berlin, and featured a forty-five-minute film that included animated or “trick films” by George Grosz, whom Dix knew from student days in Dresden prior to 1914.<sup>46</sup> Because the animated film no longer survives, my discussion of the play’s projected animation necessarily draws on descriptions of it, and on Grosz’s surviving portfolio of prints, entitled *Hintergrund* (*Background*), published by Malik-Verlag in conjunction with the performance.<sup>47</sup>

From the moment Piscator took his creative team on a planning trip to Neubabelsberg, the project involved the training of the human body-as-machine, as if to close the gap between artists and soldiers, and to improvise with the promise—often broken—of technologically enabled movement. Fritz Sommer led daily fitness classes. Some artists embraced this physical movement while others satirized it. Piscator, for example, notes that Grosz “liked to take part in these exercises and took particular delight in jogging through the woods for a quarter of an hour in his neat blue tracksuit,” while Brecht tinkered with his first car, which Piscator describes as “an object of great wonderment” in spite of the number of times the “the ignition failed and we had to push him to a slope.”<sup>48</sup> The perennial failure of mobilizing humans and machines infuses the play’s resistance to war, nationalism, and heroism. Piscator rejected the first heroic adaptation by Max Brod and Hans Raimann, who held the rights. He subsequently worked with Felix Gasbarra, Bertolt Brecht, and Léo Lania on translating for the stage the novel’s attempt to realize never-ending movement, which gradually “assumed the concrete form of a conveyor belt.”<sup>49</sup> Piscator hoped this technology would enable a sense of constant and automated flux. In practice, it more closely resembled its military cousin, the tank, which historians describe as “a lumbering and unreliable weapon, in need of constant attention and coaxing by mechanical attendants to keep it in action.”<sup>50</sup> Though Gasbarra’s January 1928 review celebrates the belt as the “skillful touch” that captures “the epic movement of the novel,” Piscator tells a different story that reveals the proximity between war, cartoon animation, and slapstick: “When we heard the belts in action for the first time . . . [they] rattled and snorted and pounded so that the whole house quaked. Even at the top of your voice you could hardly make yourself heard. . . . Every application of the machinery somehow made you want to laugh.”<sup>51</sup> Piscator’s conveyor belt carried various types of bodies across the stage: “semipuppets, puppetlike types, semihumans.” “Some of the puppets,” Piscator notes, “were really to be lifeless dolls in horribly exaggerated poses and masks (like the grotesque puppets made by Grosz, Heartfield and Schlichter during the Dada period).”<sup>52</sup> Piscator’s parade of real, injured veteran bodies amid live action and animated projections seems to bring to life not just Dix’s *Kriegskrüppel* (*War Cripples*) but its Dada exhibition context too.

The Piscator collective struggled to bring the lumbering *Schwejk* to a halt. Hašek died before the novel was complete, and the work’s unfinished status, combined with



the stage production's emphasis on war as a "ceaseless, uninterrupted stream," made closure counterintuitive.<sup>53</sup> This too prefigures Bartana's 16mm loop, an eternal animated veteran parade. One ending, attempted in a private club, featured a parade before God that included amputees, life-size dolls, and bloodied children, as well as gruesome props such as trailing entrails and "arms and legs hanging out of rucksacks, smeared with mud and blood."<sup>54</sup> It was rejected because, as Piscator puts it, "the horror . . . was more than the play could carry at the end."<sup>55</sup> Describing how technological mobilization of the body interacted with military music, animation, and the shifts in scale made possible by projection, Piscator continues, "The bloody, mutilated band of soldiers marched across the stage on the conveyor belt to the strains of the Radetzky March, led by a man who had had both legs shot away. . . . God was the antagonist in this scene, and Grosz had drawn him as a horrifying grotesque, which shrank visibly in size during the conversation with Schwejk."<sup>56</sup>

The combination of still images and jerky motion in the simple drawn-animation projections resonates with the stiff human cutouts interspersed among wounded living veterans. These veterans and cutouts are passively moved across the stage by the automatic, faltering motion of the belt, recalling the scene in *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936) where Chaplin, playing a factory worker, is increasingly mechanized by his proximity to a conveyor belt. This tension between stillness and movement, organic and mechanical, activated by Piscator in the space between stage and screen, body and drawing, resonates strongly with the paradoxically "static" animation or "inanimation" that Spyros Papapetros finds in the uncanny architectural spaces of Weimar cinema. For Papapetros, such spaces reflect "the uproar in the external world" in which "subjects are reduced in a mechanical existence" while "external objects become even more vividly tumultuous."<sup>57</sup>

Lutz Becker has established that the forty-five-minute film used in the production was projected at 16 fps and was edited by J.A. Hübler-Kahla. He also combined Grosz's satirical animated drawings with animated maps, text, and "naturalistic" or documentary sequences that Hübler-Kahla had shot in Prague. Animation was intercut with many other forms of image, as if to stress the irreality and incoherence of the war-scape. Piscator hoped these sequences would "establish the atmosphere of specific scenes, e.g. the streets of Prague, the railway journey, etc.," but this effort largely failed because of poor-quality footage and the difficulty of synchronizing it with the movement of the belt.<sup>58</sup> Piscator wanted the footage to give viewers a realistic sense of the view from a forward-moving train, but Hübler-Kahla had to excerpt short adequate clips shot from a moving car and loop them. Of necessity, editing transformed the recording of linear time and motion into the projection of circular time and motion, establishing an affinity between the supposedly realist street images and the looping structure of the conveyor belt that seems to migrate into Bartana's twenty-first-century work.<sup>59</sup>

From 1917 on, after Grosz had been discharged from the military as "permanently unfit for service," he went in search of alternative drawing styles that would

better suit the times, finding inspiration in children's drawings and the graffiti in public urinals.<sup>60</sup> His artistic development had always been shaped by comic and cartoon forms, including those of Wilhelm Busch and Lyonel Feininger, who worked as illustrator for *Ulk*, the *Berliner Tageblatt's* comic supplement, to which Grosz sold his first cartoon in 1910.<sup>61</sup> Grosz also worked alongside John Heartfield at the Military Education Film Service (later Ufa, the *Universum-Film Aktiengesellschaft*) making animated propaganda films after being discharged. Andrés Mario Zervigón has documented the ideological reasons why Heartfield and his brother Wieland Herzfelde minimized discussion of their animated work in favor of their photomontage and publishing projects, noting: "By agreeing to make propaganda films for Germany's Foreign Office during the war, they and Grosz would seem to have favorably 'enlightened' audiences about a conflict they later claimed to have rabidly opposed."<sup>62</sup> In animation and puppetry, however, Heartfield, in dialogue with Grosz's drawing, saw possibilities for "a radical new film technique of ordering and spatial planning," "a new form of visual thinking" within the war context beyond what photography, live-action film, and montage made possible, something Zervigón describes as "a release from the live action of human actors."<sup>63</sup> Many of the artists and filmmakers in *Undead* pick up the (inter)(in)animating possibilities described here.

By 1915, long before Annabelle Honess Roe, Donna Kornhaber, Susan Sontag, Barbie Zelizer, and others highlighted the limits of evidentiary war photographs and films, World War I audiences were already, Zervigón demonstrates, dissatisfied with documentary war footage that "looked nothing like the images movie audiences expected."<sup>64</sup> Zervigón continues, "Heartfield's sensorial surplus of animation and puppet play would return an authentic sense of the violent war by sidestepping live-action cinema altogether, avoiding the photographic basis of film that had now been discredited through its flaccidity before war."<sup>65</sup>

In 1917, Benjamin reflects on the orientation of pictures and argues for a fundamental distinction between painting and drawing. While a painting is usually viewed vertically, he suggests that with drawings, verticality "usually contravenes their inner meaning."<sup>66</sup> Though Benjamin makes this claim specifically in relation to children's drawings, he adds, "It is the same with Otto [*sic*] Groß's drawings."<sup>67</sup> Regarding this difference as two entirely distinct ways in which the artist approaches the world, Benjamin suggests: "We might say that there are two sections through the substance of the world: the longitudinal section of painting and the transverse section of certain graphic works. The longitudinal section seems representational—it somehow contains things; the transverse section seems symbolic—it contains signs."<sup>68</sup> In seeking examples of graphic verticality, Benjamin's mind turns toward the architectural, the monumental, and the memorial. As if anticipating Reid Kelley's frottaged mosaic poems discussed in the previous chapter, Benjamin muses, "And is there such a thing as an originally vertical position for writing—say, for engraving in stone?"<sup>69</sup>

For Grosz, Piscator's use of projected animated drawings on stage represented nothing less than a brand-new form of vertically oriented drawing. In 1928 he described it as

more tempting for graphic artists of today than all that stuffy aesthetic business or the hawking around of drawings in bibliophile editions for educated nobs. Here's a chance for our often-quoted latter-day Daumiers to paint their gloomy prophecies on the walls. . . . Naturally a new area requires new techniques, a new clear and concise language of graphic style. . . . The line must be cinematographic—clear, simple, but not too thin, because of over-exposure; furthermore it must be hard, something like the drawings and woodcuts in Gothic block books, or the massive stone carvings on the pyramids.<sup>70</sup>

Bartana's five-minute intermedial loop invites reflection on the overlap and differences between Grosz and Gance, both artists who mobilized the war wounded and even the war dead in the service of writing on the wall. Grosz imagines animated projection's vertical drawing in terms of an amplified prophecy of catastrophe. Meanwhile, Gance, who venerated Napoleon while claiming pacifism, theorizes the disruptive possibilities of this "vertiginous vision of the fourth dimension of existence," not as an intervention into or a correction of Europe's catastrophic and militaristic path, but rather triumphantly and in racialized terms as a new settler colonial war in which the screen is a battlefield: "Already some Christopher Columbuses of the light are emerging . . . and the good fight of blacks and whites is about to begin on all the screens of the world."<sup>71</sup>

From the *Hintergrund* portfolio, as well as from photographs of the performance of *Schweijk*, we grasp some sense of the play's use of animation. Grosz's images contain traces of a world in which war, closely linked to law and intimately bound to language, throws any natural order dividing the animate and inanimate, the organic and graphic, into chaos. Fountain pens become soldiers; a commanding officer appears as an animated, coin-operated, human-gramophone-typewriting machine; and stick figures hang on the tree of life, made up of printed section signs, echoing Dziga Vertov's 1924 Goskino animated ad *Soviet Toys*, which ends by hanging the bourgeoisie from a human-tree formation (figure 15).<sup>72</sup> The section sign, a symbol of legal order, strangles bodies, morphs into a question mark over piles of skeletal remains, and hovers exultantly under a crown and over a corpse. In other portfolio images, technology, rather than printed legalese, deforms the human and threatens life through violent movements across borders separating outside and inside: military medics inject and force tubes into skeletal patients they promise to reanimate for war; a preacher shoots bullets, guns, cannons, and swords out of his mouth; the crucified Christ wears a gas mask, while poison gas emerges from within the animated skeleton of a human who seems to have organically incorporated a gas-dispensing machine.<sup>73</sup>

Grosz's animated images trace violent pathways between the body's inside and outside, often signaling the reanimation of subjects who have been marked, in the



FIGURE 15. George Grosz, *Tree of Life*. In George Grosz, *Hintergrund: 17 Zeichnungen zur Aufführung des "Schwejk" in der Piscator-Bühne* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1928).

words of Jasbir K. Puar, as “preordained for injury and maiming” by a capitalist and imperialist “war machine.”<sup>74</sup> These pathways imply a sense of depth and movement that stands in tension with the two-dimensionality of the drawn image. This reinforces the war-inflicted crisis of dimensionality and spatial orientation being presented on stage through the alternation of animated drawings with documentary footage of profilmic space, and the automated on-stage movement of a wide variety of flat and fleshy bodies, including those in which organic and nonorganic materials coexist. Complicating the spectator’s ability to distinguish clearly between history and allegory, real and represented, human and nonhuman, experiences of and statements about war, some of the live actors wore masks, turning them into a form of puppet while also echoing the “broken faces” or “gueules cassées” of World War I veterans who wore masks as prosthetic aids. Both this performance and the war itself give the two-dimensional drawings in Grosz’s portfolio a kind of flat realism.<sup>75</sup> Piscator’s use of the bodies of veterans as manipulable puppets, underscored by the living, debilitated body’s juxtaposition with actual puppets and animated drawings, spotlights militarism’s disregard for, and manipulation of the limits of, life. But the production also does more than this. By foregrounding the bodies of German veterans, Piscator’s visualization of the catastrophic effects of war, like Dix’s, restricts his concern to how war’s effects play out on the white male bodies of the Global North and the physical spaces to which they return. As the artists remobilize war-damaged bodies for the purpose of political as well as aesthetic critique, their work invites uncomfortable comparisons between the

antiwar artist and military leaders. Bartana situates herself within, not outside of, the conflicts and histories her work engages, and this quality of her work resonates with antiwar feminism's refusal of both innocence and antiwar stances that position violence outside the self.

Dora Apel has highlighted how Dix both "opposed the consequences of militarism and the nationalist ideology that supported it, offering stark and shocking evidence of its meaningless devastation," and presented himself as "a knowing participant," "a willing belligerent, replete with the cynical, hardened face of the 'soldier-hero,'" infusing both his self-portraits and his "limbless veterans" with a "manly swagger" that is not just ironic.<sup>76</sup> Like Dix, Bartana is clearly interested in the relationship between gender, nationalism, and violence, performing a certain affinity with the ambivalence toward masculinism and virility that Apel identifies in Dix's "chilling veristic style."<sup>77</sup> But for Bartana, women, often excluded from political life, hold no inherent answers to what she describes as a misuse of masculinity. Deeper transformations are required, as she explains with regard to her project *What If Women Ruled the World* (2017): "Women as well as Palestinians were excluded from the Zionist narrative. Women have a different understanding of the state and of the land. I'm so fed up with masculinity being used in the wrong way. My hope is that we realize that achieving equality is not just about having women rule the world, but about transforming our language, structures, and priorities."<sup>78</sup> I share Gil Z. Hochberg's assessment that the potential of Bartana's work lies in "its growing ambiguity and instability vis-à-vis the political sphere," the way her work asks viewers "to recognize our manipulability and seductions alongside those of others."<sup>79</sup>

#### (INTER)(IN)ANIMATING RETURNS, REPETITIONS, AND CHANGE

The performance-conferences of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP) feature delegates of the movement discussing three primary questions with live audiences: "How should the EU change in order to welcome the Other? How should Poland change within a reimagined EU? And how should Israel change to become part of the Middle East?"<sup>80</sup> These performances, along with the film trilogy, catalyze collective contemplation of what twenty-first-century futures are possible and imaginable, in part by activating and destabilizing mythologies involving the idea and ideology of returns—to homeland as well as to earlier artistic and political discourses. These returns are physical, affective, and aesthetic. Bartana stages her movement's calls for a return of 3,300,000 Jews to Poland in order to "heal our mutual trauma once and for all" using strategies drawn from both Zionist and Nazi propaganda films. Addressing this controversial combination, Bartana tells Erika Balsom, "The images and aesthetics are very similar. . . . They all use the same angle."<sup>81</sup>

"Return," in the context of Israel-Palestine, is perhaps the single most highly charged concept. The animated loop's material structure signifies differently when regarded in the broader context of Bartana's contemporaneous work on the past, present, and futures of Zionism. On the one hand, in response to pervasive European anti-Semitism, the Zionist movement of the nineteenth century proposed the idea of a Jewish state. As political scientist Ian Lustick writes, "Zionists proposed to solve this problem [of an anti-Semitism derived from being a "minority everywhere"] through their normalization of Jewish life by concentrating Jews in a country where they would be the majority. Because of traditional Jewish attachments to the Land of Israel and imperial control of the territory (first Ottoman, then British), Palestine was the place on Earth where that solution was most feasible."<sup>82</sup> Speaking in 1946 in the wake of the Holocaust, David Ben-Gurion naturalizes the idea of the formation of a Jewish state in Palestine by using a mythology of familial returns to assert an indigenous right to an already-occupied land, stating, "I know that the Arabs, at least some of them, don't want us to return and I understand it. . . . We will return, and there will be understanding between us and the Arabs. . . . The conflict between us today is the most tragic, for it is in a way a family conflict. But it will not last long."<sup>83</sup> But for Palestinians since 1948, the concept of "return" primarily evokes the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 194 in December 1948. This resolution calls for Palestinian "refugee return, property restitution and compensation" in the wake of the Nakba, or "catastrophe," through which more than half the Palestinian population was forcibly displaced from their villages by Jewish militias during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>84</sup> And as Ambassador Cheikh Niang, chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, insists, the Nakba is not a past event but rather "an ongoing process affecting the Palestinian people over generations."<sup>85</sup>

Yifat Gutman and Noam Tirosch demonstrate how Israel's contemporary memory laws, including the 2011 and 2014 Nakba laws, seek ever more forcefully to suppress open discussion of Israel's treatment of Palestinian people and to impose what they call "forced forgetting" of the Nakba.<sup>86</sup> Bartana's work on Zionism and ideologies of return emerges in the context of this increasingly repressive memory culture. These legal efforts to suppress criticism of Israel's treatment of Palestinians also extend beyond Israel, as the recent and widespread use of force and emergency silencing regulations in response to the pro-Palestinian encampment movement in the United States has demonstrated. Such repressions, it is important to note, are not limited to criticisms of Israel. They find analogues in the efforts of both the federal and individual US state governments to stifle open discussion and learning and to prevent the teaching of critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, and other subjects that challenge hegemonic, normative, triumphalist, and amnesiac approaches to history.

Ideological suppression of this kind frequently drives artists toward metaphorical or allegorical forms, and there exists, I think, a complex affinity between the



structure of allegory, which relies on repetitions that are at once legible and hidden, and Bartana's "pre-enactments" and (inter)(in)animations that set in motion competing narratives of return. Azoulay and Ophir strongly reject the utility of allegorical models for understanding Bartana's work, perhaps because of allegory's association with repetition rather than change. They insist, "Seriously. Bartana's trilogy is not an allegory," arguing instead that Bartana invokes elements from both national socialist and Zionist "repertoires," not in order to ironize or despair in the present, but to explore alternative futures from "a legacy we have inherited and refuse to transmit."<sup>87</sup> I agree with this analysis of Bartana's rationale for turning to past "repertoires." But I also see Bartana employing what Peter Burke describes as "pragmatic allegory" as a strategic tool to bypass both formal and informal censorship, especially in relation to the taboo topic of the Nakba and Palestinian right to return claims.<sup>88</sup> "Pragmatic" allegory, Burke suggests, is just "a means to an end, not an end in itself," used when "direct means of political comment are suppressed."<sup>89</sup> Bartana exhibited this work in countries, including Poland, Germany, the United States, and Israel, that share a repressive culture around political criticism of Israel, albeit for different, if related, reasons.

By contrast, Burke illustrates the concept of "metaphysical" or "mystical" allegory with tales of kings, nationalism, and religious wars seeking to confirm "a future destiny."<sup>90</sup> In "mystical" allegories, Burke suggests, "the present is experienced as a kind of 'replay' or 're-enactment' of past events . . . as if someone, perhaps God, is writing our script."<sup>91</sup> Though Bartana may not create mystical allegories herself, the "pre-enactments" of Zionism that she stages nevertheless seem deeply interested in the role played by nationalist "mystical" allegories in sustaining repetitions and in blocking the collective imagination of different, less militarized, less nationalist, and more capacious futures. In dealing with the fraught phenomenon of return, I suggest that Bartana activates both forms of allegory simultaneously, the first strategically, the second critically. Pragmatic allegory enables a space for critical reflection on Zionism's and Europe's mystical national allegories in places where more direct modes of engagement would likely be suppressed. As a result, the question of Palestine is both present and absent. Does this allow Bartana, politically speaking, to have it both ways? Perhaps. But it also creates space for reflection on the politics of going home within a temporal mode involving past, present, and future tenses that (inter)(in)animate each other in unpredictable and disruptive ways.

Jacqueline Rose notes that Bartana's own homecomings are only ever "partial" and that the artist describes herself as an "ongoing returnee."<sup>92</sup> There are temporal as well as spatial dimensions to the way these returns emerge. Bartana speaks of being interested in "going back in history in order to think about the future. . . . It's about the possibility of seeing the present through different eyes. Poland is used so much by Israeli politicians to explain why we need to be soldiers, why we need to protect our land. It's very much about the politics of memory and the hegemony

of the nation-state.”<sup>93</sup> Rose’s analysis of the second of the live-action trilogy’s films, *Wall and Tower*, highlights the shattering effect on memory brought about by the film’s return to and conflation of propagandas around the idea of “home.” This leads Rose both to introduce Palestinian experiences into her discussion of Bartana’s work and to acknowledge the prohibition that exists for some on thinking comparatively across histories of persecution. Rose observes,

As we witness the barbed wire and the building of the watch tower, memory splinters among its myriad associations: from ghetto to concentration camp to kibbutz, and from there to the checkpoints and the wall in Israel today that scar the landscape in the name of security, seizing the land and cutting off Palestinian villagers from their schools, fields, and homes. To many for whom no such link is permissible between the persecution of the Jews in Europe and the Israeli government’s policy today, such a mental trail would be pure scandal.<sup>94</sup>

Rose’s essay, like Bartana’s animation and the JRMiP performances-conferences, demonstrates that Bartana’s complex and speculative infrastructure of returns does not make the question of Palestinian persecution unthinkable. In many ways, engagement with Palestine is invited—albeit allegorically—through the multiple connotations of “return” within the context of Israel-Palestine; through Bartana’s earlier work that foregrounds solidarity between Israeli activists and Palestinian people; and through the participatory structure of the JRMiP Congresses.<sup>95</sup> J. Hoberman notes that when he first saw the trilogy in 2011, it seemed “of a piece” with the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and Pussy Riot. He further observes that the resolutions of the First Congress of the JRMiP “were uniformly anti-Zionist: to guarantee a Palestinian right of return, strip Israel of its Jewish character and create a state for the stateless,” and describes elements of the trilogy working as “psychological jiu-jitsu meant to encourage Israeli identification with uprooted Palestinians and thus make an argument for a binational state.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, in interviews reflecting back on this body of work between 2007 and 2011, Bartana is explicit about its political focus: “The Zionist movement was driven by the search for a homeland for the stateless and persecuted Jewish people. Yet, it trampled over the rights of Palestinians. I became interested specifically in the use of the tragedy of the holocaust in relation to the right parties’ politics in Israel.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, Palestinian voices are not centered in the video trilogy in the way that other protagonists in the history of Zionism are explicitly foregrounded. Bartana also readily acknowledges her reluctance to completely let go of the utopian aspects of Zionism, describing the second of the films, *Wall and Tower* (2009), as “a criticism of a positive utopia that turned into a tragedy.”<sup>98</sup> This narrative of a shift from utopia to tragedy, however, would be incompatible with Khalidi’s aforementioned historiographic framework, where utopia and displacement co-emerge.

Khalidi cites an 1895 journal entry in which Theodor Herzl, one of the early leaders of the Zionist movement, writes, "We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our own country."<sup>99</sup> Following this, Khalidi refutes any innocent early Zionist utopia and insists on understanding the modern history of Palestine as "a colonial war waged against the indigenous population, by a variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will."<sup>100</sup> For Khalidi, recognizing the imbrication of the history of Zionism and a century-long war on Palestinians constitutes the foundation for interrupting repetitive acts of displacement and building a relational and more peaceful future imagined not from a utopian past but from the entangled present. Albeit differently from Bartana, Khalidi too holds at bay any narrative of return that negates the presence of the other: "While the fundamentally colonial nature of the Palestinian-Israeli encounter must be acknowledged, there are now two peoples in Palestine, irrespective of how they came into being, and the conflict between them cannot be resolved as long as the national existence of each is denied by the other. Their mutual acceptance can only be based on complete equality of rights, including national rights, notwithstanding the crucial historical differences between the two."<sup>101</sup> Although Bartana activates the narratives of Zionist utopian innocence whose unsustainability Khalidi demonstrates, she seems to do so less to recover that innocence than to render thinkable the force of collective affective attachments to it, fed by European anti-Semitism, and the need to find ways to redirect those attachments in order to leave the loop.<sup>102</sup>

Bartana does not hide how the aspects of her work that can analogically be understood to support the Palestinian right to return have been edited away by others when convenient. In dialogue with Balsom, for example, she describes an interview with the Israeli journalist Yaron London, who appears in *Zamach (Assassinat)* (2011), the third film of the trilogy: "He said, 'So Yael, if you want to send 3.3 million Jews back to Poland, do you mean that 3.3 million Palestinians can return?' I said, 'Yes!' But they cut it from the published interview because they needed to represent the majority."<sup>103</sup> Yet part of what Bartana's art offers to contemporary engagements with nationalism in general, and with Zionism in particular, is how her acknowledged implicatedness constitutes a foundation for her work. This implicatedness includes a period of service within the Israel Defense Forces, and her multimedia, queer, and feminist engagement with the role of ceremonies, rituals, and other repetitions in both sustaining and illuminating political blind spots and affective attachments. In conversation with Galit Eilat, distinguishing herself from a younger generation, Bartana asks: "How does the army generate the discipline of faith that what you do is indisputably the right thing? . . . We know that we are recruited to the army at a young age, before we develop solid

independent perceptions. . . . The draft objectors today are an amazing phenomenon to me. Those young people are super conscious of what they do. . . . They have the ability to object . . . and they are at a different place than my generation when we were recruited to the IDF about 17 years ago.”<sup>104</sup>

If Bartana’s speculative returns animate critical reflections on Zionism in mainstream spaces where such reflection is discouraged, the edit-out-ability of Palestine as an explicit concern seems central to that possibility. This is the danger of the allegorical element. The implied comparative framework between displaced/returning Jews, displaced/returning Palestinians, and other displaced/returning/arriving refugees also risks occluding key differences between specific historical situations and power differentials, that, as Hartman underscored, cannot be collapsed. Both the possibilities and the potential limitations of this body of work stem from these instabilities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, “In today’s divided world, to discover varieties of sameness is to give in too easily to the false promises of a level playing field.”<sup>105</sup> Yet in many ways, it is the very idea of “today” as a contained present that Bartana holds at bay as her works activate multiple pasts, presents, and futures, including at a material level through the looping animation’s conflation of painting, photography, digital animation, and celluloid film from different historical moments, in a shared space. Spivak describes the expectation that a humanities discipline might fix the uneven playing fields left in the wake of colonialism as “absurd,” but she also allows that the objects that humanists study—literature, film, and art, for example—help to make something about such situations available to thought that would otherwise be available to thought only through the reality of death.<sup>106</sup>

Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani’s 1969 novella *Return to Haifa* offers one example of a work that explicitly involves multiple legal and felt rights to return, including Palestinian points of view. As Gil Z. Hochberg notes, “Return, impossible return, failed return, promise of return, future return, fight for return—these are all positions outlined in Kanafani’s novella. To enter an intertextual relationship with Kanafani’s text is to open anew the question of return.”<sup>107</sup> Hochberg sees Kanafani’s return narrative and the intertextual afterlife to which it gives rise as catalyzing a “back and forth” mode of reading that generates “new archival imagination” and “alerts us to the urgency of breaking the chain of ongoing trauma.”<sup>108</sup> Kanafani’s story, I suggest, provides a useful parallel text to the time-bending animations and speculative mythologies that Bartana activates.<sup>109</sup> Kanafani tells a tale, set in 1967, of Said S. and his wife Safiya, a Palestinian couple who, in 1948, were made to leave both their home and their five-month-old son Khaldun by Jewish forces. The couple board a British ship that takes them to Acre. When they eventually return to see their home twenty years later, they find not only that Miriam, a Polish Jewish woman, and her husband, Evrat Kushen, occupy their home, having been housed there by the Jewish Agency after they fled Europe, but also that this couple has adopted the son they left behind, Khaldun. He now identifies as Jewish,

serves in the Israeli army, and has been renamed Dov. Kanafani's multiperspectival story activates fiction as a vehicle capable of tracing the entanglements and divergences of time, space, and experience involved in competing claims on "home" and the right to return by different groups of displaced people. As Miriam looks around her home that is also the home of Said S. and Safiya, Said "began looking where she was looking, moving his eyes to where she moved hers. When Safiya did the same thing, Said said to himself: 'How very strange! Three pairs of eyes all looking at the same things . . . and how differently everyone sees them!'"<sup>110</sup> In this time-collapsing and perspective-multiplying moment of return in which it appears "as if the twenty intervening years had been put between two giant presses and crushed until there was nothing left but a transparent sheet which you could barely see," Said asks, "What is paternity after all?" and "What is the homeland?"<sup>111</sup> Even as it registers the ways in which military and genocidal violence shatter people's sense of place and time, the experience of return leads the narrative to question the utility of thinking about family and home in propertied or singular terms. Instead, Kanafani emphasizes the characters' awareness of difference and confusion within their shared experience and the way that these shared experiences threaten existing certainties.

In a feminist reading of the story that is infiltrated by the rhetoric if not the aesthetics of animation, Marianne Hirsch asks, "How can divergent histories that expose children to danger and abandonment be thought together without flattening or blurring the differences between them?"<sup>112</sup> She suggests, in a passage to which I will return in chapter 4, "Perhaps in a feminist, connective rather than comparative, reading that moves between global and intimate concerns by attending precisely to the intimate details that animate each case even while enabling the discovery of shared motivations and shared tropes. Such a feminist reading, as I see it, pays attention to the gender and power dynamics of contested histories. It foregrounds affect and embodiment and a concern for justice and acts of repair."<sup>113</sup> Although Bartana and Kanafani are themselves positioned differently within the entangled histories that shape contemporary Israel and Palestine, the two share an explicit interest in the vital potential of weakness when grappling with intersecting narratives of return. In response to Dov's criticism of his parents, Said and Safiya, both for leaving their son behind and for being weak ("You're weak! Weak!"), Said asks, "When you no longer respect the weakness of others and their mistakes, who is there to protect your own rights?" concluding: "I know that one day you will understand these things. You'll understand that the greatest crime any man, whoever he is, can commit is to think, even for a moment, that the weakness of others and their mistakes give him the right to exist at their expense and that this absolves him of all his own mistakes and crimes."<sup>114</sup>