



Specters of War: Hollywood's Engagement with Military Conflict

Elisabeth Bronfen

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Specters of War looks at the way war has been brought to the screen in various genres and at different historical moments throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Elisabeth Bronfen asserts that Hollywood has emerged as a place where national narratives are created and circulated so that audiences can engage with fantasies, ideologies, and anxieties that take hold at a given time, only to change with the political climate.

Such cultural reflection is particularly poignant when it deals with America's traumatic history of war. The nation has no direct access to war as a horrific experience of carnage and human destruction; we understand our relation to it through images and narratives that transmit and interpret it for us. Bronfen does not discuss actual conflicts but the films by which we have come to know and remember them, including *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *Miracle at St. Anna*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Flags of Our Fathers*. Battles and campaigns, the home front and women-who-wait narratives, war correspondents, and court martials are also explored as instruments of cultural memory. Bronfen argues that we are haunted by past wars *and* by cinematic re-conceptualizations of them, and reveals a national iconography of redemptive violence from which we seem unable to escape.

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