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Introduction: Screen Shots – Representing War and Conflict on Screen

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Over the last thirty years there has been a growing interest in the ways in which war and conflict has been represented on screen. Cinematic and televisual representations of military action have formed an increasingly significant part of the discourses surrounding the history, memory, and memorialisation of war, particularly around the times of significant anniversary commemorations.

To reflect the wide variety of formats and contexts in which screen representations can be used and experienced today, the authors have brought together this special issue of the BJMH on representations of war and conflict on screen. This issue showcases current research which reflects the breadth and depth of work being done into this subject across a diverse range of disciplines. There are contributions from researchers who consider how screen representations of military activities are used in the wider contexts of film and television, but also in museums, galleries, computer games, and other public spaces, both real and virtual. This highlights that work on screen representations of military action are being approached in a broad chronological and geographical scope.

In Britain, certain periods such as the Tudors and the two World Wars have dominated popular primetime television schedules. Sarah Betts' article on the series *By The Sword Divided* (BBC, 1983-1985) seeks to rectify the absence of the English Civil War from the history of television screen-drama. Betts considers its representation of warfare and use of historical research by contextualizing it against popular understandings of civil war history, specifically and perceptions of warfare more generally, as well as formats of 1980s popular television drama.

Cinematic representations of war can accrue mythic status in modern cultural history, with some films becoming accepted as synonyms of British heroism and pluck. Will

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Kitchen's article analyses military authority and capitalist ideology through a textual analysis of the film *Zulu* (1964) and its narrative depiction of leadership during the Battle of Rorke's Drift – the most prominent action of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Kitchen interprets how this heroism is explained to the film audience and the political implications of film's ability to communicate the ideology of leadership in reference to frameworks shared between military and corporate social systems, considering how this relationship is illuminated by the text's wider historical construction and reception.

Landscapes also play a key role in the representation of war on screen and their purpose go beyond merely creating realistic settings to add authenticity to the story. Landscapes can shape the tone, narrative, and emotional impact of the film's story and act as silent witnesses to the human violence and the epic scale of wars. The interaction of characters with their environment also carries a lot of meaning and can reflect inner conflicts and represent stages of their physical and emotional journey. Bethany Wyatt's article looks at British and Hollywood representations of First World War since 2011 and explores how the Western Front landscape has been dramatized in varied ways as a coping mechanism for soldiers.

The First World War is also explored by Chris Kempshall and Vanda Wilcox who examine the growth of popularity of videogames focusing on the period since the centenary of 2014-18. Through interviews with players and developers of the game *Isonzo* (2022), the authors take us to a lesser-known setting in the anglosphere – the Italian Front – and demonstrate how players can gain insights into the constructions of memory, the complexities of warfare, and the socio-political contexts that shaped these events.

Isonzo is one of the many historical games using the power of visual and narrative techniques to immerse audiences in complex (war) worlds, allowing players to shape their own experiences and outcomes within these narratives. *Battlefield V* (2018) and *The Great War: Western Front* (2023) are analysed here by Alastair Binns who focuses on the under-representation of 'villains' of the two World Wars and the challenges faced by video games engaging with history outside of traditional 'heroic' narratives. Kempshall and Wilcox's and Binns' articles demonstrate how video games have become as important as cinema and television within Screen Studies scholarship, offering unique forms of storytelling, visual artistry, and audience engagement that challenge traditional media boundaries.

The Second World War is the focus of Oliver Carter-Wakefield's article on Britain's Army Film and Photographic Unit and the limitations and impact of the camera technology used between 1941-1945. Formed as part of a strategy to address the 'morale crisis' the Army believed it was facing, the Unit aimed to counter German

propaganda by producing images of battle and military victories. Carter-Wakefield's detailed analysis highlights the technological limitations the Unit encountered, and the innovative solutions found by the cameramen to overcome these.

The environmental impact of warfare is a rarely discussed topic in the history and memory of conflict. Debra Ramsay's article investigates how three films about the Battle of Midway (1942) have represented the environmental impact of industrial warfare, exposing a long history in the American war film of practices that obscure the relationship between warfare and the environments in which it is waged. Ramsay argues that the films themselves enact a form of structural violence upon these spaces and their non-human inhabitants. As conflict and climate change converge, Ramsay calls for a more critical interrogation of the representational strategies of past conflicts, so that we might recognise and challenge those of current and future wars.

Elspeeth Vischer's article takes us to the conflict in Northern Ireland (1969-1998), often known euphemistically as *The Troubles*, to remind us that wars are not a quintessentially masculine realm. Vischer offers a comparative study of feminist filmmaking strategies deployed to address issues around the militarised space of Belfast during the conflict and examines two films: Pat Murphy's *Maeve* (1981) and the author's own film *New Threads* (2022). Vischer demonstrates the experimental techniques that can be used to challenge hegemonic narratives of the Northern Irish conflict and to capture how queer bodies (*New Threads*) and women's bodies (*Maeve*) navigated it. The article also reminds us how important it is to not only write women and queer bodies into the history of the conflict, but also to query why they were omitted in the first place.

This special issue demonstrates that historians and screen scholars can no longer neglect the significant impact that video games have on the representation of war and conflict. Ben Hammond's article underlines that during the Global War on Terror the modern military shooter became one of the most popular genres of video games. He examines the way modern combat was portrayed in *Spec Ops: The Line* in contrast to its genre contemporaries, particularly the *Call of Duty* franchise. Hammond shows that despite the game's commercial failure it asserted itself as an important historical document for analysing media portrayals of modern warfare by questioning the ethics of military video games, and the role of the players themselves.

Where television programmes were broadcast to mark significant wartime anniversaries, the video games market has responded by releasing certain games in periods of remembrance. Ian Kikuchi's article demonstrates how the Imperial War Museum, founded in 1917 to record the war effort and sacrifice of Britain and its empire in the Great War, created an exhibition in 2022 to reflect its long association

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with the history and memory of 1914-1918, and its contemporary engagement with video games as a creative medium and an artefact of war in popular culture.

In conclusion, this special issue highlights current multidisciplinary research that demonstrates the breadth and depth of work conducted by scholars and practitioners across diverse chronological and geographical contexts. This body of work illustrates the dynamic and multifaceted ways in which military history is represented across various screen mediums, from traditional film and television to video games and museum exhibitions. The contributions highlight the evolution of this field of study, emphasising how different screen formats have become crucial in shaping public discourse around the representation and memorialisation of war. From the exploration of underrepresented conflicts and analysis of landscapes and technologies to the inclusion of diverse narratives, this special issue highlights the importance of a broad and inclusive approach to studying military history. By engaging with these diverse formats and perspectives, both screen and history scholars can continue to challenge traditional perspectives, foster critical dialogues, and illuminate the varied experiences of conflict, ultimately enriching our understanding of the past and its ongoing implications.