

## SEEING (WITH, THROUGH, AND AS) MONSTERS— AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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### The Meanings of Monsters—On Monsterization and Its Consequences

Monsters, it seems, are currently ‘en vogue’ again. The Frankenstein year of 2018 marking the 100th anniversary of the first publication of Mary Shelley’s story about a man-made monster demanding both fear and empathy (2003 [1818]) brought the role of monsters in literature and other fiction high on the agenda again and directed renewed attention to figures of the monstrous, the strange, the abject, the uncanny, and more. Questions of how monsters relate to—and possibly recalibrate—issues of otherness, alterity, identity, marginalization, and violence have been treated in manifold ways by many scholars before. Waldenfels (1990), Haraway (1992), Cohen (1996b), Shildrick (2001), Ahmed (2006), Butler (2009), or Asma (2012 [2009]), just to mention a few, have all addressed ways through which dynamics of self and other, order and chaos, inclusion and exclusion have played out across cultures and histories at collective and individual levels—with monsters and practices of monsterization playing key roles in these processes.

Being an extreme form of the other, the monster is far more than a threatening apparition implicitly justifying its own confinement or eradication. The monster might appear a harbinger of destruction, but always also emerges as productive. It becomes implicitly constitutive of identities and the boundaries shaping these, and always also reflects something about those who created it. Hence the key assertion made by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996a: 20) in his seven theses on monster culture, “they [the monsters] ask us why we have created them”. The monster, it seems, is not only limiting and a source of individual or collective ruin, but also constructive and renewing. It enables reflection and critical introspection. Through its workings, the monster carves out a space from which alternatives can emerge and assert their presence—it is inherently transgressive and enables a recalibration of received orders and frames.

Our endeavor to approach the roles and functions of monsters in their various forms and shapes by means of an interdisciplinary collection of contributions is, of course, neither the first nor the last attempt to gain a better understanding of the theme at hand in this manner (see, for instance, de Valk 2011–2014 [2015]; Mittman/Dendle 2012; Paradiso-Michau 2017; Koenig-Woodyard/Nanayakkara/Khatri 2018; Mittman/Hensel 2018; Presterudstuen/Musharbash 2019; Erle/Beckley/Hendry 2020, just to mention a few recent examples). Three such collections stand out for us as they have served as both inspiration and benchmark for our own project. First of all, we owe our understanding of the manifold ways through which monsters are formed, can be analyzed, and assert their contingent effects to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s seminal work *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996b). Secondly, a publication we share the title of our project with, Julian Petley’s special issue ‘Manufacturing Monsters’ that was put out in *Index on Censorship* (2000) emphasized the significance of monsters for politics

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and in particular for the role economic frames play in processes of propagandistic monsterization. Finally, the activities of our colleagues from ‘The Monster Network’ and their recent special issue on the ‘Promises of Monsters’ in the journal *Somatechnics* (2018)—co-edited by Ingvil Hellstrand, Line Henriksen, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Donna McCormack, and Sara Orning—made palpable to us the importance of connecting monsters to issues of gender, embodiment, technology, and lived practice (see also Hellstrand/Henriksen/Berg/Beyer 2019).

These and other works show that the construction of monsters is more than aesthetic figuration. The cultural creation and dissemination of monsters have profound political implications as these practices are key to processes of othering that shape and frame certain groups or individuals as de-humanized, demonic, incomprehensible, and posing an immediate threat. As among others Michael Parenti (1992 [1986]), Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002 [1988]), Judith Butler (2009) or Cherian George (2016) have shown, when it comes to monsters, fiction and fact, entertainment and news, aesthetics and politics are closely intertwined, as are the interests and positions of power of hegemonic forces that activate such frames. As Johan Galtung (1969) among others has established, the use of direct or structural violence against other living beings requires a profound cultural apparatus of legitimization—cultural violence in Galtung’s terms—that draws upon existing systems of knowledge and representation to form tacit horizons of plausibility for discursive acts of demonization, marginalization, victimization, invisibilization, or exclusion that, in utmost consequence, justify murder.

Seeing monsters from the vantage point of contemporary politics also forces us to engage with the economic and militarist practices of contemporary imperialism spreading across much of the planet. By means of established and ‘new’ media, these policies shape or reinvigorate imaginations of various mundane monsters that pose apparently immediate threats to ‘stability’, ‘human rights’, ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’ and general wellbeing at a global scale. From Gaddafi in Libya, Assad in Syria, Kim in North Korea, and Maduro in Venezuela to always suitable ‘Iranian fanatics’ or the ominous ‘Russian threat’, complacent mainstream media, incompetent pundits, and anonymous sources have created an impressive meshwork of imagined threats that further fuel an already palpable hysteria of ‘Western’ policy circles regularly targeting such alleged demons with both verbal accusations and concrete missiles causing havoc for the many in the process. On the other side, similar demagogues present ‘racialized’ immigrants, queer people, women, or certain ‘non-believers’, just to mention a few categories, as suitable scapegoats for whatever ill in need of explanations that can promise quick fixes of complex structural issues.

What all these often-violent endeavors of naming and framing have in common is the fact that they are mostly based on fictions. Almost all of the nightmarish creatures we apparently need to be defended against turn out as chimeras in the end, mere constructs with little to no connection to the ‘real’ world. By then, however, ‘our’ allegedly necessary interventions, sanctions, bombardments, proxy wars, deportations, hate crimes, and shock-and-awe dissolutions of state structures and institutions have already destroyed the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people, in the process creating the very hopelessness and hate crystallizing into the very threats these measures originally were framed as saving us from. What we see is a deliberately initiated and perpetuated vicious circle of monsterization where the other becomes both a victimized

object in need of protection and a grotesque, inhumane creature threatening 'our' lives and well-being without apparent reason.

Most of the mundane monsters, who we are allegedly threatened by, are—at least in a positivist sense—fictions. Their construction, however, entails real consequences for millions of people who for instance happen to live at the receiving end of 'the West's' self-righteously deployed virtuous violence, or who happen to be chauvinistically framed as located outside whatever norm system cynical political actors believe need to be reified by violent exclusions of the chosen identity-marker of the day. From Elizabeth Catte (2018) who viciously and eloquently opposes the simplifying demonization of Appalachia and its residents in US-American mainstream liberal discourse, via Cherian George's (2016) analyses of how religious offence is instrumentalized to both vilify others and frame oneself as victim of oppression and harassment to Alan MacLeod's (2019) attempt to address the biases of 'Western' media reporting on Venezuela, many scholars have engaged with such politically inflected instances of othering and demonization from critical vantage points. In addition, Butler's (2009) distinction between 'grievable lives' and 'ungrievable lives' (see also Mehr 2009), as well as Herman and Chomsky's (2002 [1988]: 37–86) differentiation between 'worthy victims' and 'unworthy victims' (see also Edwards/Cromwell 2018), point to the importance of mediated images for the framing of the other in the name of wars and violent interventionism. As Barry Buzan, Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver (1998 [1997]), Michael Merlingen (2008) and Sybille Reinke de Buitrago (2012) among others have shown, this has relevance for international relations and processes of securitization.

Monsters, the various threatening constructions we live by, and the containment of which promises order and security, may serve yet another purpose, though. When taken as a social optic relevant not due to whatever frame it instantiates, but due to the very practices, interests, and power relations these processes of construction make palpable, the monster becomes a veritable black mirror throwing back at us the creatures of our making and remorselessly exposing the inherent monstrosity of our own beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Monsters may therefore tell us more about the cultures and individuals that shaped them, than about themselves or the world. From this vantage-point, the monster becomes our feared and excluded twin—a refracted mirror-image showing us something out there but also always exposing us to an often-uncanny and frightening picture of our real selves.

As our "dialectical other" (Cohen 1996a: 7) the monster projects our suppressed fears and anxieties. In all its menacing nature, it also elicits desire not only threatening with death and destruction but, implicitly, also promising freedom and something new. As such, the monster marks a border that, for the sake of both ontological and political stability and the sustaining of a hegemonic order, must not be crossed—or, in terms of a progressive politics of change indeed *needs to be crossed*. Most importantly, however, as Cohen concludes, "monsters are our children" (Cohen 1996a: 20). They are made by us and, therefore, serve as constant reminders of who and what we are, revealing to us aspects of ourselves we might not want to see or acknowledge. In essence, his argument goes, monsters harbor not only destruction but also correction, change, escape, and potentially necessary renewal.

In our view, monsters and their ‘humane’ counterparts belong together. The one cannot exist, or be properly understood, without the other. Islands of order need a sea of chaos from which they can emerge and without which they would lose their meaning. In political terms, what becomes decisive, then, is not an attempt to avoid or end such contingent processes of ordering an inherently chaotic world by means of drawing largely arbitrary and temporary dividing lines across whatever categories currently at hand. Without such alterity, neither collective order nor individual identity would be possible. It is crucial, though, to maintain constant awareness of the contingency of such divisions (they can and will change over time creating new configurations of in/exclusion) and of the implications such divisions have for the involved individuals and groups (both exclusions and changes need to be non-violent and adaptable).

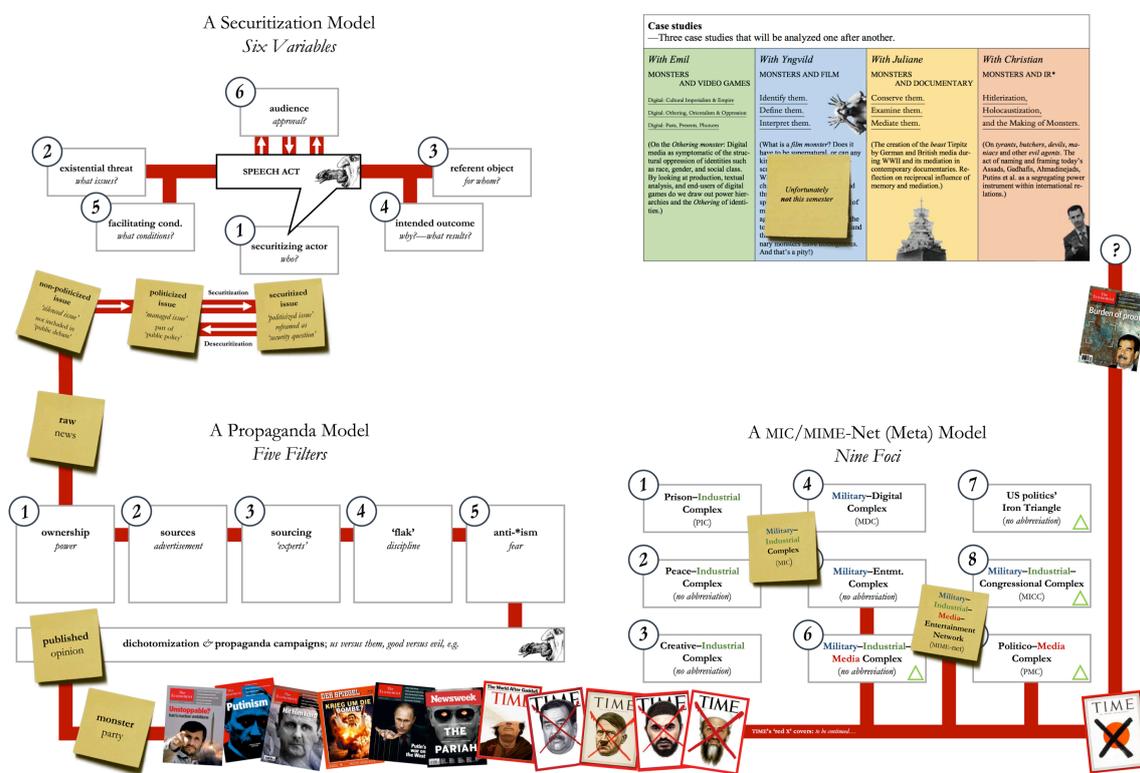
Problems arise once contingent and dynamic processes of objectification (of particular identities or relations) sediment into static regimes of objectivity that suppress nonviolent change and reify a specific constellation as an allegedly natural and therefore timeless and unquestionable order. This order, then, implies a need for violent defense against the onslaughts of various possible others excluded or marginalized by hegemonic frames. Under this condition, the other as a necessary partner in constant and inevitable mutual adaptation and change is reconstituted as a monster—a unanimous and immediate threat to an order that is reified, perceived as without an alternative, and as beneficial for everyone deemed relevant by dominating forces. Under such conditions, necessary peaceful change is replaced by destructive campaigns for stabilization that translate into violent struggles for hegemony, supremacy, and an allegedly timeless order.

Also, we need to remember the monsters we have created and the true consequences of our violent struggles against them. In mainstream discourses, the catastrophic ramifications—societal, cultural, economic—of our past wars are quickly forgotten; brushed over by new challenges and discursive moves constantly luring us into the same trap: to perceive yet another group, leader, state, or denomination as a rightfully eradicable, mere threat. In these cases, our ‘Western’ collective and cultural memories suffer from a very short span. *We monsterize, intervene, kill, and forget*, in that order, and let others pick up the pieces of what we self-righteously wiped away allegedly in the name of peace, security, and prosperity. Once the ‘mistake’—the ultimate unreality of the assumed threat—is realized, we say sorry and move on. Then, however, our actions have already created the devastating facts on the ground that keep the spiral going.

The memories that could force us to stop, to think and to regret, that could help us to learn and to break out of this vicious circle of monsterization, find little resonance in the echo chambers of contemporary mainstream media. We have seen this logic materialize again and again—the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the babies thrown out of their incubators and left to die on cold Kuwaiti hospital floors, the weapons of mass destruction deployable within 45 minutes, Viagra given to ‘regime troops’ to make them rape more, the monster gassing his own people; the new Stalins, the new Hitlers, and so on. These are just a few examples of a sheer endless row of irresponsible rhetorical moves that lead us from war to war—wars in which *we* never die. We have to guard against not the monsters allegedly responsible for these fictitious cruelties, but against those telling these lies, conveying them to us, inserting them into political discourse for their own

cynical motives. They are the ugly face hiding behind the smooth and well-meaning mainstream façade of ‘Western’ foreign and economic policies—conveniently covered by consumer-friendly, colorful, cuddlesome multimedia mass entertainment.

Our work grew out of the interdisciplinary master’s course ‘Manufacturing Monsters’ (MaMo) that runs at UiT The Arctic University of Norway each spring term (for more details on the development of the course, see Beyer 2019). Many ideas that come to the fore in our collection had their origin in teaching and discussions connected to this course. Several of the contributors have been involved as either teachers or students. After a yearlong process of working on the journal, it is wonderful to see its monstrous outcome and to be able to close the circle: Soon, the collection will come back to class again and will be utilized as compendium literature for the MaMo seminars to come.



**Figure 1.** Mapping the MaMo course’s interdisciplinary core. This visualization can be read as a theory roadmap. It depicts The Copenhagen School’s ‘securitization’ approach (Buzan/de Wilde/Wæver 1998 [1997]) and Herman and Chomsky’s ‘propaganda model’ (2002 [1988]), highlights a conceptual transition from Eisenhower’s 1961 term ‘military–industrial complex’ to Der Derian’s 2001 concept ‘Military–Industrial–Media–Entertainment Network’, and gives an overview over the case studies as taught in the course’s first round in 2017. Later, Edwards and Cromwell’s ‘anatomy of a propaganda blitz’ (2018) was added to the course compendium. Illustration by Christian Beyer.

The present special issue is dedicated to inquiries along all the dimensions mentioned above; and many more. Firstly, it interrogates the figure of the monster in a variety of media and genre ranging from literature and the fine arts via film and comic books to video games, directing attention to both factual and fictitious discourses in historical

and comparative perspectives. Secondly, some of the articles collected here interrogate the processes through which monsters are created and which implications such creations can have for individuals and groups that are subjected to these discourses and practices. Thirdly, then, some contributions also look at the monster as an analytical lens that makes visible important aspects of the political systems, the cultures and societies, or the economies that create and circulate them. Consequently, this special issue intends not only to *see monsters*, but also to see *with, through, and as* monsters.

### Taming the Monster Issue—A Section-by-Section Summary

An interdisciplinary special issue on the theme of monsters and the way they are manufactured for political or other purposes allows for submissions from a variety of fields and academic disciplines. Ordering the huge variety of contributions we have received—taming the *MaMo* monster, if you will, and making it fit certain frames—has posed some challenges. How could these varied contributions be ordered? Would they fit together at all? After having tried out various alternatives, we opted in the end for a division with regard to the media in which the monsters under scrutiny appeared. Therefore, the special issue is comprised of the following interrelated sections: [1] *Literature and the Fine Arts*, [2] *Cinema and Television*, [3] *Video Games and Play*, and [4] *News Media and the Public Sphere*. In addition, we included a separate section on *Book Reviews* and conclude the issue with an appreciation of the numerous reviewers who helped realize this project, a contributors' list, as well as some bibliographical bridges. Now, we will introduce the contributions to each section and connect them to the wider frames of the issue.



**Figures 2a–2g.** Taming *MaMo*: All section headers are marked by color. On each header's back page, you will find selected 'monster quotes' from the texts that follow. Realization by Christian Bayer.

#### Summarizing Section 1—*Literature and the Fine Arts*

Comprising texts about fine arts, literature, and graphic novels, this first section engages with issues such as posthumanism, eco-criticism, the Anthropocene, and diversity in cultural expressions. Tracing monsters, monstrosities, and de-monsterization in the works of Patricia Piccinini, H. P. Lovecraft and new weird literature, as well as the Marvel universe, the articles collected here reflect the volatile nature of monsters and their shifting roles and functions in cultural dynamics.

[1a] The contribution opening this issue, Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia's 'Loving Monsters—The Curious Case of Patricia Piccinini's Posthuman Offspring', takes recourse to Donna Haraway's and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman aesthetics and ethics to

interrogate issues of motherhood and reproduction at play in a selection of Patricia Piccinini's works. Discussing an impressive range of art objects and installations, Biscaia shows how Piccinini uses imageries and objects often described as at once disturbing, grotesque and monstrous, and as compelling, cute and beautiful otherwise to drive home the idea of an inherent ambiguity of categories such as humans or monsters and their shifting relations to each other. Highlighting issues of love and care imbued in these relations, Biscaia shows how Piccinini's "anti-Frankenstein story" (43) makes the apparently monstrous appear as vulnerable and a possible partner.

[1b] In the second article, "Age of Lovecraft"—Anthropocene Monsters in (New) Weird Narrative', Gry Ulstein draws parallels between early 20th century cosmic horror fiction of H. P. Lovecraft and the genre of contemporary weird narrative. She shows that both cultural currents are linked through the types of monsters that inhabit their stories—usually faceless and often-inexplicable, supranatural forces beyond human influence or control. Connecting key figures and tropes of the two genres to contemporary thinking about a dawning Anthropocene and its various invisible threats seemingly implying a lack of human capacity to adequately react, Ulstein urges us to actively engage "new weird monsters" (62) and reposition ourselves in relation to various non-humans forms of agency.

[1c] Shifting focus to the popular graphic novel, Anja Borg Andreassen looks into issues of identity and marginalization in Marvel's superhero universe. Her article 'Yes, We Khan—Diversity and De-Monsterization of Muslim Identities in *Ms. Marvel* (2014—)', investigates the latest iteration of the popular superhero Ms. Marvel who takes the form of a young Muslim woman for the first time in the series. Locating the graphic novel in a 'Western' discursive environment characterized by steadily increasing Islamophobia and related culturally-fueled fear mongering, she shows how the new Ms. Marvel "de-monsterizes" (79) Muslim identities and helps to diversify the traditionally masculinist and conservative superhero genre. Consequently, Borg Andreassen argues, the graphic novel enables a productive questioning and potential subversion of received social and political frames of othering and exclusion.

### *Summarizing Section 2—Cinema and Television*

Comprising a total of eight contributions, the second section of this special issue—on the theme of monsters in cinema and television—is the most extensive one. The included articles range from analysis of memory-making potentials of historical documentaries via issues of adaptation as well representation and marginalization in mainstream films to analyses of witches, vampires, and the political economy of film production. Directing attention to productions from Finland, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, Denmark and the United States in particular, the assembled contributions interrogate and critique imaginaries of monsters and processes of monsterization across genres and media.

[2a] In the first article, 'Exotic and Primitive Lapland—Othering in *The Earth Is a Sinful Song* (1973)', Kaisa Hiltunen adopts a post-colonial perspective to trace practices of othering of Northern indigenous populations in Finnish mainstream film since the 1920s. She uses Rauni Mollberg's motion picture *The Earth Is a Sinful Song* from 1973 as an example to sketch out how the inhabitants of the Arctic region of Lapland have been denigrated and ridiculed in much of Finnish mainstream audio-visual culture.

Arguing for a transformation of geographical into “mental distance” (85), she exemplifies the role of film in inherently exclusive processes of nation building and shows that also works that have been lauded for a gritty social realism tend to reproduce colonial stereotypes and prejudices.

[2b] Changing the theme, the following two contributions interrogate a specific type of screen monster—the vampire. In ‘Tamed Monsters and Human Problems in Cinema’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1994)’, P. Stuart Robinson uses a reading of Neil Jordan’s film *Interview with the Vampire* to show the transgressive and therefore potentially subversive aspects of film monsters. The article shows that received frames for what counts as human are not only challenged by the monstrosity of the other, but also by the slow humanization of the allegedly non-human opponent and by a gradual adaptation of human actors to non-human conditions. Creating a “disturbing ambivalence” (103; 118), argues Robinson in a way similar to Biscaia, the vampire-framed human becomes a way of questioning the received preeminence of a reified liberal humanist subject.

[2c] Adopting remediation as a theoretical lens, the next article, Alexander Lehner’s ‘Vampiric Remediation—The Vampire as a Self-Reflexive Technique in *Dracula* (1897), *Nosferatu* and *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000)’ examines connections between the figure of the vampire and the characteristics of specific media technologies. Starting with the observation that the original novel, through its epistolary form, draws attention to its own mediality, Lehner argues that later screen adaptations of the novel retained focus on such issues of mediation and mediality. Offering two examples, he shows how *Nosferatu* treats the figure of the vampire as a “personification of film” (123; 129; 137), while *Shadow of the Vampire*’s fictitious making-of-documentary further plays with the nature of film and its relation to vampirism and ‘new’ media. In essence, Lehner claims, film refashioned the figure of the vampire as a “self-reflexive technique to speak about the medium is it depicted in” (123).

[2d] The following contribution, ‘Kon Satoshi and Japan’s Monsters in the City’, relocates attention to Japanese television and Kon Satoshi’s series *Paranoia Agent*. Chris Perkins reveals here how the series’ ambiguous monsters Shōnen Batto and Maromi can (also) be read as a response to “fatalistic discourses on Japan’s decline that have emerged since the bursting of [its] economic bubble in the early 1990s” (141). His article conducts a careful reading and contextualization of the two characters and connects their perceived monstrosity to received notions of social monsters in Japan; yet at the same time draws attention to alternative understandings of social responsibility and humanism underlying their actions and articulations. Developing a dialectical understanding that connects searches for monsters with processes of political adaptation and social change, the contribution is a good example for the usefulness of embedding screen monsters within wider socio-political frames.

[2e] The next article was written by one of our co-editors. In her contribution ‘Exploring Cultural Memory Through Political Economy—Manufacturing History in the Documentary *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership* (2005)’, Juliane C. Bockwoldt expands upon Astrid Erll’s theory of memory-making media by bringing this framework into dialogue with Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s critique of a political economy of mass media. Combining a formal analysis of the documentary *The Battle for Hitler’s Supership* with attention to structural conditions predisposing its

production, Bockwoldt traces how factors at the level of economy and funding can impact upon aesthetic form and facilitate the emergence of ideologically biased historical representations, also highlighting the impact of “anti-isms” (168).

[2f] The next contribution retains focus on the material conditions of film making but shifts attention to the genre of Hollywood action movies. Written by another of our co-editors, the article ‘A Tale of Two Versions—*I Am Legend* (2007) and the Political Economy of Cultural Production’ by Holger Pötzsch compares cinema version and director’s cut of Francis D. Lawrence’s 2007 screen adaptation of Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend* (1954). The article identifies ideological differences between the two versions. Taking recourse to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model and Lee Artz’s critique of global capitalist media production, Pötzsch explains the adoption of a conservative and reactionary storyline for cinematic release with profit focus of the film industry that reverts to hegemonic frames for the sake of securing returns-of-investments. The article shows that techniques such as pre-screenings with test-audiences are not neutral endeavors, but “intrinsic mechanisms” (173) that filter out challenging and progressive political positions and worldviews.

[2g] The following article “‘How Lucky You Are Never to Know What It Is to Grow Old’—The Witch as Fourth-Wave Feminist Monster in Contemporary Fantasy Film’ by Rikke Schubart interrogates the role of the witch as prime female monster in the cinematic fairytale adaptations *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013), and *Maleficent* (2014). Using feminist and ageist approaches as theoretical lenses, Schubart firstly conducts critical readings of the three films’ female monsters presenting them as nuanced and ambivalent characters, before she connects the recurring trope of the ageing witch to discourses of gender, power, ageism, and feminist waves. The article argues that, in the three movies, the older women’s evil acts result from “refusal to be sidelined in a world obsessed with youth” (191; 192) and offers a good example for the polysemic nature of cinematic representations always offering material for both dominant and oppositional readings.

[2h] The second section is closed by a dialogue between two scholars, Tess Sophie Skadegård Thorsen and Mira Chandhok Skadegård. Written by a mother and her daughter, their exchange of letters bridges generational divides as they engage in a co-authored reckoning with misogynistic tendencies in contemporary Danish culture. Arguing in a similar direction as Kaisa Hiltunen’s criticism of race-based forms of denigration in Finish mainstream film that opened the present section, this contribution relocates focus to issues of gender and denounces the way women are audio-visually framed as abnormal, strange, or indeed ‘monstrous’. Investigating a wide array of media representations, the authors argue that the widespread assigning of monstrous characteristics to women becomes a “particularly oppressive gendered gesture” (207) that reduces and undermines female agency. Finally, in a reparative reading not unlike Rikke Schubart’s attempt to ambiguate the role of female witches in mainstream Hollywood fairytale movies, the article identifies a potential for empowerment and agency dormant in the monstrous.

### *Summarizing Section 3—Video Games and Play*

Today, video games constitute an important segment of global cultural production. The games industry can be seen as a focal point of global power dynamics in which

multinational companies produce fetishized entertainment products enabling a construction of consumer identities and a commodification of culture and play—also, and especially, when it comes to essential issues of waging war and writing history. In conjunction with their increasing proliferation, video games have attracted increasing scholarly attention over the last three decades. So, too, in the present special issue that dedicates a specific section to the themes of monsters and processes of monsterization in video games and play.

[3a] The third section opens with the article ‘The Broodmother as Monstrous-Feminine—Abject Maternity in Video Games’. Here, Sarah Stang investigates how commercially successful and critically acclaimed video games frame female monsters as abject maternal creatures. Analyzing the antagonists Broodmother and Mother from two iterations of the *Dragon Age* series, Stang draws upon the works of Julia Kristeva and Barbara Creed to show how the two games connect monstrosity with maternity and force players to enact “symbolic violence against transgressive female bodies” (233). The games, Stang argues, align to the horror genre and its tradition of presenting female anatomy and birth as abject, threatening, and repulsive. Offering the counter-example of the character Sarah Kerrigan from the *StarCraft* series to balance her account, Stang maintains that most mainstream games convey misogynistic norms and values and narrowly frame the agency and positioning of apparently powerful female characters.

[3b] In the second contribution of this section, Jaroslav Švelch examines how monsters are manufactured in video games using the influential first-person shooter *BioShock* (2007) as a case study. Drawing data from interviews with developers and official background material from the design process and combining this with an analysis of the narrative framing of the zombie-like creatures opposing the player, Švelch’s article ‘Always Already Monsters—*BioShock*’s (2007) ‘Splicers’ as Computational Others’ offers a balanced account of monsters in the game. Developing the term ‘computational other’ to account for the media-specificity of games that also use algorithmic procedures and mechanics to convey meaning, Švelch argues for the necessity to not only focus on the monsterization of humans in the medium, but also to direct attention to how and why games “fail to make monsters human” (257).

[3c] In the last contribution collected in this section, ‘Manufacturing Consent in Video Games—The Hegemonic Memory Politics of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (2015)’, co-editor of this issue Emil Lundedal Hammar returns to Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model to explain how structural conditions of global capitalism and colonialism predispose game developers to create products that “rearticulate hegemonic memory politics and suppress subaltern identities” (279). Conducting an analysis of the title *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* and its context of production as a case study, Hammar argues that the manufacture of mnemonic hegemony in games is not an exclusively ‘Western’, but a global phenomenon that can be explained with reference to the political economy of a global games industry. In conclusion, he proposes an update of the propaganda model offering available technologies and the suppressed role of alternative identities as additional filters. As such, his article complements the advances made by Juliane C. Bockwoldt and Holger Pötzsch in the second section of this issue.

*Summarizing Section 4—News Media and the Public Sphere*

The last section of this issue moves from questions of cultural representation in various media and genres to analyses of how monsters are (re-)produced and (re-)presented in news and 'new media'. The three articles collected here offer insights in Norwegian news coverage of war, policy-making on issues of immigration, and the roles and functions of rumors at the contemporary moment of history.

[4a] The first article of the fourth section, Rune Ottosen's 'Norway's New(s) Wars—Syria in the Norwegian Mass Media' is based on an original contribution to the *MaMo* symposium 'New(s) Media? Political Economy, History, and Technology of News Making in Germany, Turkey, and Norway' arranged at UiT The Arctic University of Norway on September 11–13, 2018. In his contribution, Ottosen presents a case study on the framing of legal aspects of the current war in Syria in Norwegian news media. Reporting on a negligence towards critical aspects of Norwegian involvement in the country, the text points to practices of "self-censorship among Norwegian journalists" (303) that led to a silent support not only for an undebated military interventionism, but also for a tacit fundamental recalibration of Norwegian foreign and security policies. Ottosen argues that this significant change has gone virtually unnoticed by the Norwegian public and warns of the problematic consequences such lack of critical journalistic engagement has for contemporary democracies.

[4b] In the second contribution to this section, Søren Mosgaard Andreassen scrutinizes research reports on immigration and integration produced on behalf of the Norwegian government (NOU reports). Analyzing one specific report as a case study, his article 'The Costly and Demanding—Exploring Solution-Based Othering of 'Non-European Immigrants' in Norwegian Policy Recommendations' identifies a series of tacit ideological positions conveyed in the document that among other things constructs non-European immigrants as a mere cost factor and potential threat to the Norwegian welfare state. Using discourse theory as an analytical tool, Andreassen investigates how the report establishes mutually exclusive binaries and assigns negative connotations to one side. He argues that these discursive strategies invite a problematic form of social distancing that he conceptualizes as "solution-based othering" (338).

[4c] The article 'Macht, Manipulation und Miteinander—Medienräume des Gerüchts' (written in German) concludes this section. Arguing for the importance of narratives for political legitimacy and power, Katharina Sturm interrogates the significance of rumors for individuals, politics, and society. In her text, she asks whether the rumor is simply an entertaining story, a tool for progressive politics, or a potential monster, before she shows how its emotional appeal and affective power make it ambivalent—an effective tool of mobilization and persuasion that can be used for either good or ill. Taking a historical outlook, her inquiry ends with observations regarding new participatory media technologies and their specific affordances implying both democratic promise and new forms of manipulation.

*Summarizing the Book Reviews*

Two book reviews present recent publications we perceive as relevant for the theme of this issue. Initially, Holger Pötzsch presents a critical summary of the first edition of Uwe Krüger's book *Mainstream: Warum wir den Medien nicht mehr trauen* (2016) and offers insights into both context and aftermath of this much-debated book on the state of

German news media. Secondly, Frank Hordijk critically interrogates content and discursive environment of *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine* (2017)—Anne Applebaum's political intervention into the writing of the history of the 1932–1933 Soviet Ukrainian famine widely known as the Holodomor.

## **Conclusion**

We believe that the representation, construction, manufacture, and exclusion of monsters across genres and media is an increasingly pressing issue for individuals and civil societies on a global scale. The widespread use of exaggerated frames presenting a variety of others as mere threats has deadly consequences for many people—worldwide. And, 'Western' liberal democratic elites urgently need to acknowledge their own role in such processes as the current construction of 'Monster Assad' as a Hitler-esque tyrant intending to 'gas his own people' or the continuing framing of Iran as 'a nuclear threat to world peace' led by 'nuke-building, apocalyptic mullahs' are equally irresponsible and dangerous acts as the presentation of 'non-normative' persons as a menace to cultural and societal stability or the assumption that certain people are simply born as terrorists. We believe that as researchers, students, employees, workers, pupils, retirees, and others—in sum: as citizens—, we must be aware of such discursive moves of othering and exclusion and learn to identify these, connect them to underlying interests, and then resist and subvert them to avoid more killings in our or others' names. This is our responsibility especially as contemporary global crises intensify bringing with them the need for ever new scapegoats to explain away the real contradictions underlying these relentless challenges.

As stated above, the manufacture of monsters for cheap political gains is not something only experienced by populations living under so-called oppressive 'regimes', but is an equally well-used tool for democratic 'governments'. Neither are these practices in any way new or unique to the present moment in history. We hope that this special issue can contribute to raise awareness of the intricate dynamics of othering and exclusion at play in the manufacture of monsters and that the articles collected here can facilitate critical thinking and conscientious political practice. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower put it in his farewell address in 1961, "only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" can "guard us against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by a military–industrial complex" (NARA 2006 [1961]; see also C-SPAN 2017 [1961]) and, as one might add today, against its willing accessories in editorial offices and the culture industries (Andersen 2006; Der Derian 2009 [2001]).

Almost 60 years have passed since Eisenhower's warning, but his speech still retains its initial urgency. In the Global North as well as in the Global South and everywhere in-between, we are exposed to complex institutions and mechanisms that relentlessly conjure up new enemies for particular economic and political interests. Since Eisenhower, the drive of the powerful towards war has never ceased. Because they know that, in the wars and oppressive 'regimes' they propagate, neither they nor their children or grandchildren will ever suffer or die. As such, we must not forget that inequalities in the distribution of wealth, influence, and power constitute a base-line problem that needs to be addressed and changed if democratic rule is to materialize in a form that deserves its name.

Finally, a word of gratitude. We could not have realized this issue on our own. Without our students, contributors, reviewers, various other helpers, and of course you, dear readers, our attempts to set the manufacture of monsters on the academic and political agenda would have been impossible. So, we cannot thank you enough and sincerely hope that the collection presented here will prove as rewarding and stimulating for you as it has been for us.

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