Discourses and Practices of Othering

Discourses and Practices of Othering:

Politics, Policy Making, and Media

Edited by

Banu Baybars, Sarphan Uzunoğlu
and Mine Bertan Yılmaz

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We would like to thank the participants of the conference, as their presentations and discussions played a crucial role in shaping the structure of this edited volume.

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Banu Baybars, Sarphan Uzunoğlu & Mine Bertan Yılmaz

CHAPTER ONE

DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF OTHERING: POLITICS, POLICY MAKING, AND MEDIA

BANU BAYBARS, SARPHAN UZUNOĞLU, AND MINE BERTAN YILMAZ

Othering has long been one of the favorite topics of both politics and academia. It is defined as the construction and identification of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual, unequal opposition by attributing relative inferiority and/or radical alienness to the other/out-group (Brons 2015). It is a term that encompasses many expressions of prejudice based on group identities, but it also provides a set of common conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality. Othering refers to the process of representing individuals or social groups to render them as distant, aliens, monsters, or deviant—discourses and practices of 'othering' rest on distinctions between them and us. 'Them' (the opposition, refugees, foreigners, minorities, etc.) pose the most significant threat against 'our' homogenous and flawless community. The categories of 'othering' and meanings associated with those categories are socially constructed.

Otherization practices appeal to nativism, racism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant bias, hate speech, and homophobia have become more evident in an age of increased globalization. The world has changed in multiple ways in the past decades, of which the speed, scope, context of mobility, and cultural fluidity are some of the most salient. So, we witness the intensification of new forms of mobility, migratory flows, and blurring of national boundaries concerning politics of inclusion and exclusion. Othering became an inevitable debate topic in the world where illiberal leaders reign and polarization has increased. The idea of provoking anxiety, resentment, or fear of the other is becoming more and more popular every day. But no one expected us to face as many interesting othering practices as we did in 2020.

In the first half of 2020, the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic surrounding the world revealed interesting examples of othering. Leaders such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, also known as the Tropical Trump, have portrayed the Chinese people and the Chinese Government as principals responsible for the process. Trump went so far as to call the virus the Chinese virus. While using this discourse, Trump did more than act as a textbook right-populist politician. What he did could also be defined as using the scapegoating tactic, which is frequently encountered in crisis management practices by actors that try to avoid taking responsibility. While scapegoating is the practice of singling out a person or group for unmerited blame and consequent adverse treatment, it is a psychological defense mechanism of denial through projecting responsibility and accountability on others (Drabeck et al. 2008). While pointing to China, Trump was trying to cover the shortcomings of America's political and economic system. It was attempted to cover up problems such as mass unemployment, hunger, and homelessness with the lust of attacking the other.

The othering practices that emerged during the epidemic were not only practiced by politicians. Different groups were suddenly formed, such as those who did and did not have the virus and those who took and did not take the measures against the virus. Some people shared their actions to protect themselves against the virus on Instagram, Facebook, and Tiktok. Photos and videos of people followed those posts they shared without masks on the streets. Those posts were often accompanied by derogatory adjectives or sentences in which the person showed their anger while glorifying themself. Some accuse others of not being educated, and others are accused of not being conscious. Even people who went to work by public transport in the morning were targeted by those who described themselves as prudent. Older people also suffered a systematic version of otherization. In some countries, more senior citizens define the restrictions imposed on them as ageism. Much news has been made on the subject of older people being discriminated against in the days of lockdown or social distancing. In some media outlets, content exposing people over 65 have been published.

Before the pandemic crisis in the USA had come to an end, another concern that reflected systematic otherization policies emerged in Trump's America. George Floyd's murder by the police, who did not heed despite Floyd saying "I can not breathe," was engraved in history as one of the extreme examples of otherization politics that marked the 20th and 21st centuries. Protests that strengthened after Floyd's death did not interrupt the othering practices of racist and right-wing radical groups that benefited from the othering practice for centuries. However, protests showed a positive example of the anti-otherization struggle. Even continental corporate actors,

including NGOs, governments, and companies, declared their support for this movement. Ironically, even Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, known for his illiberal and authoritarian governing methods, announced his support for oppressed communities that went into the streets seeking their civil rights. It was a fascinating example of taking advantage of the othering practice in a country far away by expressing empathy to others who were marginalized there as means of propaganda in daily politics. It even provided a vital reason why otherization should be defined as a global issue rather than specific to particular societies and groups. Because while othering is identified with groups such as right-wing politicians and anti-refugee groups, it is a profound practice in policies of very liberal or democratic states. It does not change the fact that these otherization policies are primarily seen in populist or authoritarian regimes or countries where extremist movements are rising, including many European countries. Especially during the refugee crisis process, which is wrongfully defined, these countries have accepted a relatively low number of refugees, did not take political responsibility, and avoided the problem through the policies that help governments best described as buffer zone countries. In fact, a model of Trump's wall was built quietly and with different approaches by European countries on the border of Turkey with Greece and Bulgaria.

Of course, the reflections of otherization go back much further than the difference between the infected and non-infected, those who take precautions against being infected and those who do not, or well-known identity-related tensions in different countries. Throughout history and across the globe, elites and political opportunists have promoted social divisions and appealed to group-based identities to set their agendas and reinforce power for centuries. The idea of provoking anxiety, resentment, or fear of the "other" is not a new strategy. For instance, historiography practices provide unique examples in this respect. Perhaps the most striking of these examples is François Hartog's book titled "The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History." The book (Hartog 1988) focuses on the othering practices through Herodotus' nine different books. Hartog concentrates on the fluid positions of identities and the othering practices of Herodotus in his historical narrative about relations among Greeks, Persians, and Scythians. Through Herodotus' historiography, Hartog's work has shown us different degrees of otherization and has indicated that even in historiography, otherization could occur.

This book undertakes the theme of 'othering' as a broad set of practices and discourses. Our book aims to include as many perspectives as possible while providing a focused environment for discussions on how otherization is built across media genres and policy making through cultural and political

articulations. It contains a set of chapters that investigate how (and to what end) 'others' are manufactured and how they are anchored in our collective memory. Through the analysis of various media, such as film, news media, and social media, the book aims to shed light on the institutional, political, social, and economic forces that form and transform the discourses and practices of othering. Some chapters focus on othering practices, while others focus on exercises that break the otherization practice and strengthen memory against the othering practices.

Chapter contents

The book consists of two parts. The first section, "Othering and Media," brings together articles about the function of the media on othering practices. The following section, "Art and Cinema," brings together essays about othering practices in several art genres.

Part I. Othering and media

This part starts with an article by Holger Pötzsch titled "Manufacturing Monsters Across Media and Genres: Towards an Interdisciplinary and Multi-Dimensional Research Agenda on the Cultural Construction of the Other." Pötzsch offers an integrated interdisciplinary model for the study of mediated cultural communication. His model offers a template for studying processes and dynamics of othering across media and genres. Pötzsch's article is followed by a chapter by Banu Baybars, Sarphan Uzunoğlu, and Mine Bertan Yılmaz titled "News Value and Fighting for Collective Memory in Turkey's Oppressed Media Environment." This chapter focuses on a new form of activism that is defined as memory activism. That chapter mainly focuses on media amnesia in Turkey and how some reader collectives and social media fight against it. The chapter is followed by another one by Nilgün Tutal Cheviron and Orhan Şener titled "Practices Turkish journalists use to Access Information from the Political 'Others' on Twitter in the Post-truth Era." Tutal and Şener focus on the daily information diets of Turkey-based journalists in the age of post-truth. In the fourth chapter of the second part, Sonat Bayram focuses on alienation and the definition of the other in his article titled "Concept of Alienation and its Relationship with Socioeconomic Otherization." Bayram's chapter is followed by a chapter by Irfan Hashim titled "Conflict and Political Communication: An Analysis of media-audience negotiations and its impact on Kashmir discourse." In this chapter, Hashim focuses on the role of the media in the Kashmir conflict, aiming to understand the political-communication and public

relations by examining media settings. The following chapter by Narindoshvili titled "Coverage of Terrorism and Security Issues in Georgian Print Media (2005-2015)" focuses on how terrorist attacks in Georgia have been covered by Georgian print media outlets and how Muslims are portrayed as the "alien other" by these outlets. The last chapter of this part by Nicholas Al-Jeloo, titled "Continuing the Ottoman Millet System: The Othering of Assyrians as 'Christians' in Iraq," focuses on the Assyrians as a transnational ethnic group. It examines how Assyrian ethnic identity has contradicted and how Assyrians have been constructed and categorized in collective memory. This process has historically been governed by religious segregation.

Part II. Arts and cinema

The second part of the book starts with a chapter by Balca Arda titled "The Diasporic Muslim Artistic and Cultural Practices and Its Communicative Intention for Challenging Otherization." In her article, Arda explores the contemporary Muslim institutional display of visual art and cultural practices in response to the othering of the Muslim subjectivity in diaspora in North America, Canada, and the US. Arda's chapter is followed by P. Stuart Robinson's chapter titled "Hostile Film: Documentary as The Vehicle of Political Conflict." In his article, Robinson focuses on documentary or "documentary style" examples and their power dynamics in ideological terms of the dialectics of antagonism, as hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse. The third article of that part titled "The Development of the Orientalist Discourse in American Cinema– From the Sheik (1921) to Jack Ryan (2018)," by Abderrahmene Bourenane tries to identify the development of 'Othering' the Orient through the study of the different representations and perceptions of Middle East in two cinematographic productions, namely The Sheikh and Jack Ryan. In her chapter titled "Making the Other Visible: Glitch as a Mode of Representation in Nil Yalter's Artworks," Cansu Nur Şimşek focuses on Nil Yalter's works from her exhibition "Off the Record" and tries to explain the relationship between the visual language of the portraits and the construction of identity and the representation of the other, who is a woman, nomad and off the record.

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PART I.

OTHERING AND MEDIA

CHAPTER TWO

MANUFACTURING MONSTERS ACROSS MEDIA AND GENRES: TOWARDS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RESEARCH AGENDA ON THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE OTHER

HOLGER PÖTZSCH

Abstract

This theoretical chapter offers an integrated interdisciplinary model for studying mediated cultural communication. Firstly, I describe the model and acknowledge preceding approaches focused on similar issues. I show the intrinsic connections between aesthetic form, production, reception, and reproduction and argue for the necessity of studying all these components together to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues at hand. Secondly, I introduce the philosophical underpinnings of an integrated interdisciplinary approach, highlight a series of methods applicable to each component, and argue for the importance of correlating data across alleged disciplinary divides. Finally, the chapter postulates the importance of such a comprehensive approach for a better understanding of, and resistance to, processes and practices of othering across media and genres.

Introduction

This contribution offers a template for the study of processes and dynamics of othering across media and genres. The purpose is to develop a multidimensional research agenda that highlights and interconnects components of contemporary mass cultural communication processes that

are often treated separately in more limited approaches. To reach this aim, I present a model that shows the mutual interferences between 1) aesthetic form and encoded dominant ideological meaning potentials, 2) factors at the level of production (finance, labour, technology, discourse) that allow for an explanation of such ideological biases, 3) negotiations of these potentials in various situated contexts of reception, and 4) political, societal, economic, cultural, and other implications that reproduce these material frames and their ideological forms. In the following, I will firstly reference earlier approaches that have followed a similar agenda and attempted to see culture and media in a comprehensive manner before I provide examples of key theories and methods applicable in each corner of the cultural production, reception, and reproduction model developed here (Figure 2-1). Finally, I will offer guidelines for studies that attempt to understand practices and processes of othering from such integrated and multidimensional vantage points.

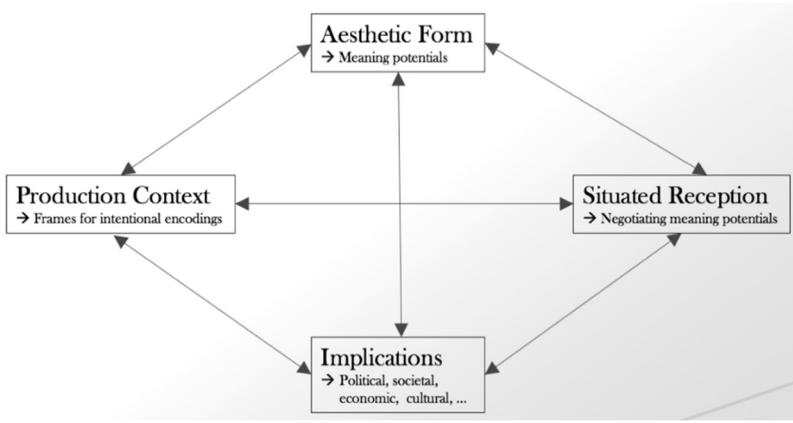

Fig. 2-1. The cultural production, reception, and reproduction model.

Earlier approaches

The idea of connecting aesthetic form, production, reception, and reproduction to enable a comprehensive understanding of the circulation and mediation of meaning in complex communication processes is not new. As I will show in this section, a series of scholars from a variety of disciplines have successfully made similar attempts before. Therefore, the present contribution is not so much concerned with developing an entirely new framework but aims at bringing into dialogue with one another, showing

commonalities between, and thereby integrating established theories and methods to facilitate interdisciplinary endeavors and build bridges across alleged scholarly divides.

Stuart Hall and the encoding/decoding model

Attempts to see cultural production from a vantage point that brings together material structures, power relations, and content need to acknowledge the contributions of the Birmingham School for Cultural Studies, and in particular, one of its key thinkers, Stuart Hall. Being one of the founding figures of the school, Hall has contributed widely to our understanding of cultural processes, issues of identity, and questions of hegemony, ideology, and racism (see for instance, Hall 1980a, 1980b, 1986, and 1997). Being a Jamaican-born British Marxist, also his personal background might have sensitized him to the importance of material and embodied relations for such areas of critical inquiry as racial and class representation, gender biases, and media manipulation.

Hall played an important role in re-articulating the cultural sphere as more than an arena for elevating contemplation of works of high art. Culture is, for Hall, a field of power struggles between individuals and groups in the same way as politics or the economy. Indeed, following Gramsci's (1971) thoughts on hegemony, Hall assumed that these areas could only heuristically be divided and, in reality, constitute one complex whole. Arguing vehemently for the intrinsic value and polysemic nature of so-called mass culture that emerges as far more than mere means of ideological interpellation, Hall reinstituted the common spectator as a key component of communication processes. In showing that cultural products' ideological content is actively received and negotiated by audiences, he opened up the field of cultural and communications studies for empirical analyses of reception practices granting limited forms of agency to spectators that were previously seen as slavishly bound by an inherently ideological mass media apparatus (see for instance Althusser 1971).

Hall's understanding of culture and communication as material arenas for complex struggles over meaning and identities is most clearly reflected in his text encoding/decoding that had initially been published in 1973 at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. In this intervention into communication theory, he develops a model that includes such material aspects as relations of production and available technologies and combines these with semiotics and practices of intentional encoding and decoding of mass mediated messages to explain the circulations of meaning in contemporary societies. According to Hall, which cultural products are

produced is not the result of the individual contemplation of an author or auteur film-maker. Instead, questions of investment, funding, and profit expectations together with available technologies and established frames of meaning and practice predispose the aesthetic forms produced at any given moment in history. Aesthetic form, as such, emerges as a variable dependent upon other material factors.

In addition, his model further explains that the intentionally encoded aesthetic form does nothing more than offer potential for meaning. Authorial power rapidly diminishes once it has been enshrined in a cultural expression and released into communication circuits. From then on, many possible audiences, each situated in specific contexts, take over and attempt to re-appropriate the message in correspondence with their interests. These contexts are at once material and cognitive combining elements of discourse with material power relations and technological possibilities. The resulting varieties of re-articulations of the original message in context feed back into the frames of production, thus constituting a complex feedback loop of cultural production and reproduction. The model is very comprehensive and has been widely adopted in studies of cultural expressions mediated as comic books (Brienza and Johnston 2016), television programs (Hall 1973), film (Staiger 2005), as well as digital games, and Internet-based communications (Shaw 2017).

Mieke Bal and cultural analysis

Mieke Bal has offered a different yet equally comprehensive framework for understanding cultural processes and practices. Being a founder of the interdisciplinary Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, she has analyzed the biblical motives of Italian renaissance painters and graffiti under motorway bridges and treated both with the same care and sincerity. Thereby, she undercuts received distinctions between mass culture and high art in a manner, not unlike Stuart Hall. In contrast to him, Bal adopts a very different philosophical vantage point that exchanges Marxist sociology with narratology, psychoanalysis, and art history (Bal 1996, 1999, 2001). Arguing for the necessity to deepen both methodological and theoretical foundations of interdisciplinary inquiries, she redeploys a series of concepts from studies of visual art and literature to new and unexpected objects. Using "traveling concepts," she shows that requires stringency and rigidity in the application as interdisciplinarity is too valuable to succumb to superficial misappropriation of profound concepts and ideas (Bal 2002).

Treating both classical paintings and graffiti as "expositions, Bal (1999) argues for the necessity to embed cultural expressions in wider contexts than

those determined by, e.g., a picture frame. A focus on exposition implies the necessity to problematize and indeed challenge received boundaries that tacitly predispose what counts as (part of) work and what not. According to Bal, every analysis sets such a frame that determines what can be seen and what is excluded as irrelevant or unimportant. The problem is that such frames are often set implicitly through the mere imposition of certain limits as apparently logical or natural. Problematizing frames and showing how they predispose meaning is the venue of cultural analysis, and the concept of exposition is one way of pinpointing such processes and connecting them with broader material contexts and settings.

The term exposition points to the fact that any artwork is situated in a physical space and a social context and functions at various registers that each entails its dynamics and challenges (see also Paglen and Gach 2003). Exposing something entails implicit valuation by someone who deems a certain work important enough to be shown (or, as Bal writes with reference to graffiti, at least significant enough not to be removed). Exposing something implies an inherently power-laden purpose that analysts need to tease out when trying to make sense of work as more than a decontextualized play of signs.

Besides seeing cultural expressions as expositions and thus embedding them in contexts that are made explicit as frames for reception and study, the cultural analysis also aims at enabling a first-to-second person discourse between analysts/spectators and work. For Bal (1996, 1999), what we can say about artwork is often less interesting than what the object responds to our attempts. By talking with rather than about something, received subject-object distinctions can be problematized and made the explicit theme of studies rendering new and often unexpected insights. Problematizing human agency in such a manner and in opposing it to a constitutive non-human counterpart enables critical interrogations of power and assumed epistemological supremacy.

In her endeavors, Bal includes the social and spatial situatedness of art objects and spectators in her analyses to problematize the drawing of boundaries around allegedly clear-cut objects showing that the practices of framing in themselves are at once arbitrary, power-laden, and have profound impacts upon what can be seen and what remains invisible and thereby foreclosed from re-articulation. In assigning agency to objects, she also problematizes assumed epistemological positions, thus enabling a reflective questioning of the role and power of exposing agents, spectators, and cultural analysts alike.

The political economy of communication: From Frankfurt school to propaganda model

The so-called Frankfurter Schule was composed of a group of German sociologists working at the University of Frankfurt during the Weimar Republic (such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, or Walter Benjamin). Forced to flee Germany during the Nazi years, most of them continued their work in the United States before returning to their home country in the 1950s. Attempting to explain the brutality of, among others, the Nazi era with the gradual ascendance of instrumental rationality and authoritarian subjectivity that were both presented as peculiar to the modern era, the school offered a deep-seated critique of capitalism, totalitarianism, consumerism, and the specific identities they foster (Horkheimer 2004 [1947]; Adorno and Horkheimer 2002 [1947]; Marcuse 1964).

Combining Marxist political economy with a psychoanalytical tradition emanating from Freud to enable a better understanding of base-superstructure dynamics and authoritarian and totalitarian subjectivity, the Frankfurt School also engaged with issues of aesthetics, art, and mass culture. Launching a staunch criticism of in particular, the latter, scholars connected to the school described the capitalist culture industry as a conveyer of inherently ideological subject positions that draws a veil over the eyes of the masses and makes them accept relations of exploitation and oppression as natural givens and for the benefit of all. Art, on the other hand, entails the potential to initiate critical reflection and introspection that enable a critical consciousness and progressive political practices.

In much of Frankfurt school thinking, the spectator of mass cultural products appears as if slavishly bound by an ideological apparatus of power that generates consent and drowns critical thought in shallow entertainment. Such a deemphasizing of agency on the side of mass audiences has been reiterated in later attempts to understand the political economy of cultural production. Dallas Smythe (2006 [1981]), for instance, showed how capital accumulation and exploitation work in the cultural sector. He coined the term audience commodity to grasp how television networks use commercials to transform spectators' spare time into productive labour and how information on their preferences is monetized and turned into saleable products. Christian Fuchs (2012) has taken Smythe's approach as a point of departure to explain the production of the exploited prosumer commodity on commercial social media applications (see Hesmondhalgh (2013) for a thorough description of contemporary culture industries).

While the Frankfurt school and later attempts to understand the political economy of communications mostly focused on the reproduction corner of the model introduced above and showed how cultural expressions reinforce capitalist values and subjectivities, the propaganda model by Herman and Chomsky (2002) directed attention to how material factors on the side of production systematically filter the content that can emerge on commercial media channels. Predominantly focusing their attention on US news businesses, the model has since been applied to other countries, other technologies, as well as the cultural sector (Fuchs 2018; Alford 2011; Bockwoldt 2019; Pötzsch 2019; Krüger 2019; Hammar 2019b).

In the propaganda model, the core idea is that certain structures on the side of production predispose the form and content of mediated communication in a hegemonic manner to produce a cultural expression that foments consent rather than critique and thereby serves to stabilize an implicitly reified status quo. Identifying the five filters 1) size, ownership, and profit-orientation, 2) advertising and licensing, 3) sources and sourcing, 4) flak, and 5) anti-*ism, they show how these interact to highlight certain issues in line with hegemonic interests while veiling alternatives perspectives (e.g., worthy versus unworthy victims). According to Herman and Chomsky, mass media are a monolithic construct that produces content serving the aims and purposes of those funding and controlling it. Their objective was to determine these structures and their impact on what is disseminated. As such, they explicitly exclude speculations as to how audiences deal with the filtered content or how this content eventually feeds back into the system from the frame of the analyses. Only implicitly drawing upon Herman and Chomsky's model, Lee Artz (2015) has extended the focus to globalized commercial media production from a similar vantage point that also directs attention to ideologically biased content and how this emerges from a capitalist production context.

Summing up

Even though the different paradigms briefly reviewed above enable attention to all four corners of the cultural production, reception, and reproduction model, each specifically emphasizes particular subject areas. As such, one could argue that the Birmingham school of cultural studies and Stuart Hall had made their most significant contributions to understanding reception as an active process of appropriation in context. On the other hand, Mieke Bal's cultural analysis might be seen as fully realizing its potential in investigations of form and aesthetic objects as active participants in communication processes. In re-assessing base-superstructure relations and

asking for the socio-political effects of ideological interpellations via mass cultural products, the Frankfurt school seems to offer the most viable tools for understanding reproductive dynamics and feedback loops. At the same time, Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model is best suited to assess the significance of relations of production, ownership, and other material factors for the form and content of the disseminated cultural products. Figure 2-2 provides an overview of these heuristic designations.

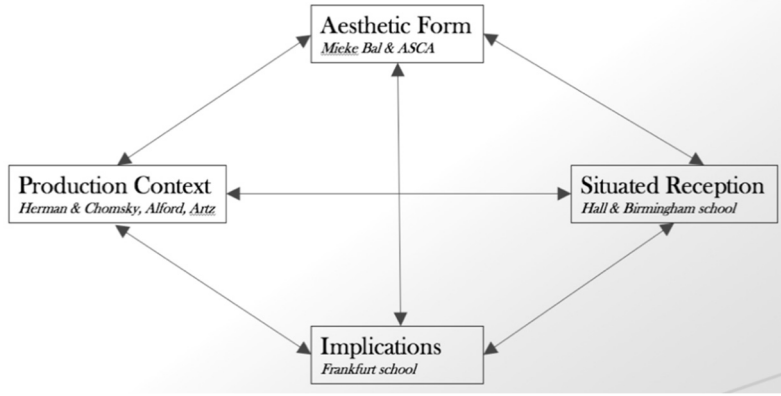

Fig. 2-2. Main emphases of the summarized approaches.

Designing a multiple methods framework

As the section above has hinted, many well-established approaches have already attempted to grasp the complexities of cultural production, form, reception, and reproduction in context. However, most of them focused on only one or two of the model's four corners. This has very good reasons as it increases the focus and depths of the studies but comes with the inevitable drawback of excluding salient aspects of actual cultural communication.

To conduct research with an interdisciplinary framework combining all four corners of the model, the methods deployed in each of them need to be first specified and then brought into productive and mutually beneficial dialogue. In project terms, this can be achieved through a three-step procedure that firstly conducts in-depth studies in each corner of the model generating data through applying methods specific to the discipline in the case. In a second phase, the acquired data sets will be combined and correlated to identify instances of mutual confirmation or contradiction. These findings lead to stage three, where data sets that do not match or point in different directions are reassessed to identify the reasons for the

apparently contradictory findings, and theories and methods are developed accordingly. By these means, aspects of a case invisible from one conceptual vantage point can be highlighted from another to bring forth new insights. For example, let us assume a formal analysis identifies a hegemonic potential of meaning that is systematically invited by a particular text. Empirical audience research then shows that most spectators do not activate these potentials but instead revert to oppositional readings. Taking results from the formal analysis as a departure point, a series of qualitative interviews might attempt to make specific spectators reflect on their reading practices and answer why the dominant textual structures are subverted.

This form of interdisciplinary practice is inclusive. It attempts to combine different perspectives rather than choosing one above the other. Rather than engaging in often-fruitless academic trench warfare about whose methods offer the most exact picture of 'what is out there,' interdisciplinarity accepts the ultimate contingency of the relation between observing subject and world. Rather than arguing about the object-as-such and the method supposedly offering the best or most accurate description, knowledge emerges as the constantly evolving and always the only temporary result of complex negotiations in contingent terrain (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The question is not whether A or B is correct, but what we can learn by asking why A sees what she sees and what makes B see something different entirely, and last but not least, what happens if we bring both perspectives together in an integrated approach.

To illustrate this point, let us briefly consider a map example. The relation between a map and a territory is contingent. This means a specific map will highlight particular aspects of a landscape and de-emphasize others. A geological map might disregard mountain trails, roads, or bridges, but direct attention to different geological formations, while a tour map will do the opposite. Once someone hiking in the mountains draws up a geological map, the person will quickly meet the challenge of identifying the correct way to traverse difficult terrain or cross waterways. These problems, of course, do not mean that the geological map is wrong. It just serves a different purpose that is defined by the frames of its production and should be highlighted to all possible users. The map is made for geologists, not for hikers. This logic applies to maps and all forms of articulation, including scientific ones. Not one of them will ever be able to see the whole picture.

The difference between a relation of contingency and relation of arbitrariness can be made clear once we think of someone drawing up a completely imaginary or deliberately faulty map. Once used in the terrain it allegedly refers to, there is no vantage point from which this map would

make any sense. The imaginary map, however, can still make viable arguments about the world, e.g., about the nature of representation, but it cannot make a viable argument about the preceding physical territory. The imaginary or faulty map is arbitrary in relation to this physical territory. It is therefore unsuitable for hiking or studying geology and incapable of contributing relevant new insights to those fields.

Different scientific methods offer widely distinct perspectives on the world. Just like different maps, they are useful for some purposes and less useful for others. An integrated interdisciplinary project needs to carefully assess and address these different purposes, critically analyze these, and make them speak to, rather than argue against, one another. In terms of mediated cultural communication – its production, form, reception, and implications – a variety of disciplines and their specific methods can be applied and combined in this manner.

Let us begin with the issue of aesthetic form as it connects the important areas of production and reception. The aesthetic form can be studied empirically as assets of formal properties that have been configurated to convey specific meaning(s). Once configurated, however, the established structures are left at the whims of the receiver who can decode them 'correctly' (i.e., in a sense intended by the encoder(s)), but who can also appropriate them, bend them, misunderstand them, or bluntly disregard them (see for instance Hall 1973). A researcher looking at aesthetic form can only identify specific meaning potentials laid out by means of formal devices that systematically invite certain forms of reception.

The formal properties of cultural expressions constitute the empirical material of text-centric analyses. The means through which a novel, a film, a TV show, or a computer game invites certain meanings can be described, interpreted, and systematized, thus offering sets of possible readings, but they will never be able to objectively assess what a certain 'text' (in a wide sense) objectively means. Textual structures invite, motivate, demotivate, or make difficult. They function like systemic patterns of support and restraint that, with varying degrees of closure, predispose certain readings and make others more difficult, but they do not determine the receiver (Pötzsch 2013).

In terms of method, aesthetic objects can be examined through formalist methods, narratology, qualitative or quantitative content analyses, and more. The question if the identified meaning potentials are activated and realized, however, falls outside the purview of formal approaches and requires a set of empirical methods focusing on audiences and the issue of reception.

Questions of reception, i.e., how specific meaning potentials identified through formal analysis are activated, negotiated, opposed, misunderstood, or disregarded by concrete audiences in situated contexts, require a different set of methods to generate data sets that can subsequently be correlated with the results of formal analyses. The empirical social sciences offer a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods that can be used for such purposes (see, e.g., Staiger 2005). From surveys with large groups to in-depth interviews with individuals, from automated eye-tracking technologies to auto-ethnographic approaches, from lab experiments to participant observation, a wide array of techniques for the study of audience behavior and meaning-making practices is available. The main research interests are how receivers of mass-mediated messages make sense of what is offered to them, how various contexts impact such practices, and how textual structures and devices interact during such processes.

Once sets of formal meaning potentials have been identified, and their negotiations by situated audiences have been mapped, attention to the contexts of production can provide insights into the socio-political, economic, cultural, technological, and other frames that, overtly or tacitly, condition the emergence of such formal meaning potentials (Dyer-Witheford 1999; Alford 2010; Kerr 2017; Hammar 2019b). Studies of the political economy of the mass media (focusing on issues such as ownership, funding, profit-orientation, regulations, and more), production studies (combining surveys among producers, participant observation during production processes, and in-depth interviews with practitioners, funding bodies, regulators and others), as well as studies of established genre conventions and available technologies can provide important data that allow for a better understanding of the material frames that predispose form and content of mass media products, and that entails and reproduce specific ideological biases.

For instance, the overt reliance of mainstream AAA videogames (that require budgets comparable to major Hollywood movies) on white male playable characters (inviting gender-biased meaning potentials) can be explained with reference to statistics showing a vast dominance of this segment of the population in production teams and targeted consumer groups (see for instance Bailey et al. 2019). Qualitative interviews among developers and producers can then examine how specific groups or individuals reflect upon and work with or against such inequalities, while participant observations might offer insights about how the perceived necessity to cater to specific conventions and audiences for the sake of profit might, or might not, translate into specific ideologically biased content. Alternatively, ethnographic methods can attempt to map the discursive and

cultural environments from which certain products emerge and offer explanations for the chosen aesthetic form of specific products. By these means, formal meaning potentials and empirical reception practices can be brought into dialogue with methods that provide data explaining why a certain product looks as it does, which socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts its specific intentional design emerges from, and what material frames predispose the dominant meaning potentials enshrined in this form.

Finally, the level of reproduction enables attention to the various feedback loops that connect the formal meaning potentials emerging from specific production settings and their activation, negotiation, or subversion by concrete audiences in specific contexts of reception with attention to wider discursive and cultural frames that these practices condition both condition and. Here, Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory and critiques of hegemony can offer insights into how ideological biases are formed, naturalized, and reproduced and how hegemonic interventions operate and frame wider socio-cultural dynamics. At this level, the power structures and settings that are shaped by and predispose activities at the levels of production and reception and that are reflected in dominant aesthetic form can be highlighted and subjected to critical scrutiny.

Two recent dissertations – Hammar (2019a) and de Smale (2019) – have applied an integrated framework to an analysis of memory-making functions of videogames and play. Both projects interrogated the interrelations between factors on the production side, aesthetic form, and practices of reception by players. In terms of methods, they conducted qualitative interviews with developers and producers to assess the perceived frames predisposing the emergence of specific aesthetic forms and the historical meaning potentials these forms invite. The data was then correlated with player testimonies and the content of Let's play videos and user comments on social media to examine if and how potentials for historical meaning-making enshrined in the game form were activated and disseminated further. This throws light on the important notion of circulation as a key part of the reception corner of the cultural production, reception, and reproduction model (see also Dyer-Witheford 1999). De Smale and Hammar use the notions of cultural and media memory as a nexus connecting the identified practices back to processes of discursive and institutional reproduction. Both studies show the viability and concrete knowledge gains of interdisciplinary projects integrating perspectives on all four corners of the cultural communication model proposed here.

Manufacturing monsters across genres and media: A conclusion

Issues such as the ones discussed above not only offer interesting new venues for developing theories and methods but also matter for questions of war and peace. For instance, James Der Derian (2002, 110) has pointed out that the cultural mediation of friends, foes, conflicts, and possible solutions are important ingredients of any war or peace effort. He writes that "more than a rational calculation of interests takes us to war. People go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine and speak of others; that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representation." Arguing in a similar direction, Johan Galtung (1975, 81) has shown that direct violence – a physical exchange of punches or bullets – is only one and only the most palpable form of violence at play in conflicts. Underlying this type are structural forms such as systematic inequalities in access to vital resources, key decision makers, financial means, or the media. Underlying these, again, are cultural undercurrents that provide implicit legitimacy to such unjust conditions and that justify killing by framing certain groups or individuals as less than human. Cultural violence, and the value and norm systems it implicitly naturalizes, are reproduced (and potentially challenged) in the mediated domains of societies and cultures. Therefore, these domains merit the continued critical attention of integrated interdisciplinary approaches that productively combine methods that address all dimensions of cultural communication in an integrated fashion.

Such comprehensive attempts to fathom the logics and dynamics that drive the media and cultural spheres are crucial for studies of peace and conflict. Only if we fully understand all the means through which certain actors create enemies and allies and provide justification for acts of war and military interventionism will we be able to counter and object to these endeavors adequately. Manufacturing monsters, as Beyer et al. (2019) have termed this set of practices, is a key aspect of war propaganda and war cultures everywhere and needs to be submitted to critical scrutiny from a variety of interlocking vantage points with an eye on facilitating change.

Key questions to be posed by critical inquiries into the multiple dimensions of othering across media and genres include issues such as received power structures and financial interests at the level of production – both military and otherwise. Drawing connections between ideological meaning potentials of specific aesthetic forms (such as the Hollywood war genre) and these interests, the influence of financing bodies and elites on media content can be mapped before audience responses, and their ideological and political