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THE INFLUENCE OF FEAR OF ANIMALS IN HORROR: A SEMIOTIC
ANALYSIS OF ZOOMORPHIC CREATURES IN CINEMA

Master's Thesis in Semiotics

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Introduction

Horror is a fiction genre that at first glance seems to be paradoxical in our enjoyment of it, if you ask someone who dislikes horror for their reasons for it, you would often hear something along the lines of “I don’t enjoy being frightened”. Horror has had a strong presence in cinema since its inception, and with the art of filmmaking becoming more and more widespread over the years, said presence has not only been constant, but becoming bigger by the year. (Mariani, 2019:1)

The word horror originates from the Latin verb *horrere* “to bristle or shudder” and currently refers to a strong feeling of fear or dread. One often used device by horror filmmakers are monsters, creepy and unsettling creatures that while varying in appearances and temperaments all have the same goal in common, to disturb and scare the audience.

Monsters are often portrayed as animalistic, both in appearance and behavior, and it wouldn’t take a zoologist to determine that animals are a common inspiration for their design, whether it’s the use of sharp jaws, scaly skin, predatory behavior, or particular grunts and cries, it is clear that we can read their outer physical appearance and demeanor as if they were real creatures, this is where zoosemiotics comes into play.

Zoosemiotics studies the use of signs and meaning making among animals. The notion of studying cinema monsters through this lens, while peculiar, isn’t impossible, as we can not only observe how these creatures physically look, but also how they behave and how they interact with the environment and other creatures.

The specific focus of this thesis however, will be centered around how our perception and assesment of certain animals influence how monsters are designed to look in films, I’ll be taking past literature about animals we perceive as scary or disturbing and then drawing similarities to monsters in horror cinema, analyzing what specific aspects of this frightening fauna penetrate film making and design.

Analyzing monsters in this manner not only helps us understand the workings behind their designs and inspirations, but can also aid in coming up with new and more sophisticated ways to reinvent and improve upon the artistic processes of creating them.

Some questions I'll be tackling and attempting to resolve in the present thesis are:

- What are the most common physical characteristics that we use in designing zoomorphic monsters?
- What is the pattern or scheme that englobes the specific physical characteristics that we use in their design?
- What are some "rules" or "proposals" to make a successful zoomorphic monster?
- Is there a correlation between zoomorphic monsters and the animals that are deemed scariest by previous literature?
- Can we systematize and catalog the zoomorphic monsters based on their animal characteristics? Is there a dominant species used as their inspiration?

In this thesis I will begin by introducing the literature overview, where I'll talk about the history of monsters and animals in media, I'll introduce some previous research done on the topics of media representation of animals, fear of animals, monster studies and the concept of zoomorphism. After that, I'll go through the material and data I'll analyze as well as the research and organization methods. Finally, I'll present the analysis of the obtained data and the conclusion for the thesis.

1. Literature Overview

In this subchapter I'll give a brief and abridged overview of the history of monsters in fiction from the earliest records in ancient civilizations to modern times, focusing particularly on cinema while giving relevant and pertinent examples of particular creatures.

I'll also explore how academic researchers have dealt with the concept of monsters in the past, as well as how human-animal relations have been studied on their own as well as in their association and impact in society and media.

Within these human-animal relations the focus will be primarily on humans' fear of animals, and in turn how we portray animals based on what is our perception of them.

Another task of this chapter will be to delimitate and accurately define the concept of monster and how I'll be using the word in this thesis, as well as introduce the concept of zoomorphism and how it relates to the monsters I'm analyzing.

I'll also be exploring the recent and rising field of Monsters Studies, what it is, the recent history behind it, and some examples of works that fall into this category.

1.1 Monsters in fiction

Ever since the start of fictional storytelling there've been horror stories in one way or another, even if it's not always been called by that name or explicitly referenced. Although we obviously don't have archives of ancient oral tradition stories, we know that in antique texts like the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (from approximately 2000 B.C.) there are stories about humans facing and confronting otherworldly monsters, as well as many Mesopotamian gods and goddesses having bestial and chimeric appearances. This means that monsters have been an integral part of horror since its inception as far as we know. (Dixon 2010)

One of the earliest films, and a work of art that is often cited as the very first horror film is 1896's *Le Manoir du Diable* by Georges Méliès, a three-minute silent short film in which a pantomime-style devil appears after transforming from a bat and then conjuring various objects. Méliès would release many other short films after this, like 1896's *Une Nuit Terrible* and 1897's *L'auberge Ensorcelée*.

In 1910 we got a longer short film, a 16-minute adaptation of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, produced by the famous businessman Thomas Edison. (Dixon 2010)

In the early XX century various adaptations of classic literary works would be produced, like two other Frankenstein films released in 1915 and 1920, directed by Joseph Smiley and Eugenio Testa respectively. Finally, the classic novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker would be adapted by F. W. Murnau, being released as *Nosferatu* and which imagery remains iconic to this day. (Dixon 2010)

In 1915, German and Austrian directors Paul Wegener and Henrik Galeen directed what is considered by many to be the first "monster feature film", *Der Golem*, known to English speaking audiences as *The Monster of Fate*, a silent film adaptation of a XXVI century Jewish folk tale. The titular golem is a magical, living clay statue that is awakened from slumber after centuries only to wreak havoc on earth and commit a series of murders.

The medieval German epic *Nibelungenlied* was adapted to film in 1924 by German-Austrian director Fritz Lang, in it, the protagonist Siegfried slays a dragon, who's monstrous reptilian appearance makes it one of the first animalesque monsters in film.

During the late 1920s to the mid-century, the film producing studio Universal Films was dominating the horror cinema market, making and releasing many now classic movies including Karl Freund's *The Mummy*, James Whale's *The Invisible Man* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, and Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, which I'll be discussing later on. (Dixon 2010)

In 1933 the famous King Kong was released, directed by Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack. The film featured the titular Kong, a giant ape-like beast who after years of living in the jungle is

transported to New York city by a group of filmmakers, with the beast being killed in the climax after wreaking havoc in the city. King Kong was incredibly influential, and it would spark a long list of films featuring gorilla and ape-like beasts, both from within the same franchise and unlicensed, some of which include *Son of Kong* (1933), *Mighty Joe Young* (1948), *King Kong vs Godzilla* (1962), among others.

The 1960's would mark the high point of British filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, of course we have the famous *Psycho* released in 1960, but he would also release the animal centered horror film *The Birds* a few years later in 1963. Later in the decade, George Romero would make a great impact on film history and the cultural zeitgeist with 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, which popularized the zombie as a film character and archetype. Later in the 1979, Ridley Scott would make history with *Alien*, which featured the Xenomorphs as the villains of the story, a race of insectoid/reptilian aliens which hunts down humans by praying upon them and also using them as incubators as a reproduction method. (Hutchings 2008)

The 1990's and 2000's would see eco-horror and animal horror being put in the forefront, with many movies even reusing past films' tropes. We have the example of *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) that was heavily compared to *Jaws* (1975) for its use of sharks as the antagonists, *Arachnophobia* (1990) and *Eight Legged Freaks* (2002) featured heavily prolific poisonous spiders and giant ones, respectively, while *Snakes on a Plane* (2006) used snakes in a horror comedy setting. (Carver 2012)

Due to advances in CGI technology and it becoming cheaper and cheaper over the years, the 2010's saw a proliferation of different low budget B movies featuring predatory animals and monsters. The low-quality effects and budget of these films often resulted in them being tongue-in-cheek and self-parodying, some of these films include *Sharknado* (2013), about a storm so strong it carries sharks to its victims' demise, *Sharktopus* (2010) about a shark/octopus hybrid, or *Mega Python vs Gatoroid* (2010), where giant pythons battle against biologically enhanced alligators.

In conclusion, we can see that animal-based monsters have been a constant presence throughout the history of the artform of filmmaking. This is important as it points to beasts and chimeric

creatures being something a fundamental constituent of what we consider scary, as opposed to a fad or something forcefully constructed as scary by filmmakers. This concept of monsters and scary animals being deeply rooted into our notion of fear is crucial for the thesis, as we will see in later chapters.

1.2 Human-Animal Relations

Human perception of animals will play a key issue in my research, as I will focus on what about animals' appearance makes them scary for us to portray them on film or use them as inspiration for monsters' designs.

Humans start perceiving and mentally evaluating things from an early age, when we have a first encounter with a certain thing, we extract knowledge from this encounter and will then make predictions about similar things, this formed concepts of our environment is what is referred as "schemata" in cognitive psychology. An advantage this process has is that it allows us to make valid judgments about many things based on few and brief past interactions and would therefore make life easier. (Lockwood 1985: 377)

This of course comes to play in our relationship with animals, as our perception of animals plays an important role in establishing a good relationship with nature. Most people judge and categorize animals with a set of different values, although most of these can be labeled as either "good" or "bad". (Kubiatko 2012: 3181)

This perception of animals as having either positive or negative value by humans might seem innocuous at first, however human preference over certain animals can even impact things such as conservation, research and public interest, with human's perception of individual species' characteristics such as aesthetic value, perceived intelligence, possible threat, and others playing an important role. (Batt 2009: 181)

Hosey and Melfi (2015: 2), talk about Human-Animal Interactions and Relations, which can be either negative, neutral or positive, and they explain that these Interactions often lead to

Relations, meaning that positive or negative interactions with a specific animal overtime usually leads to positive or negative relations with it respectively, which is part of the reason why zoo animal attacks on their handlers are a very rare occurrence.

The characteristics that make certain animals having a more positive judgment by humans haven't been pinpointed exactly, however according to Batt (2009: 180), many studies on the matter have proposed certain patterns, such as mammals and birds being favored in conservation efforts over invertebrates and reptiles, with turtles being an exception of the latter group.

Wolfensohn (2020: 4) also talks about animal perception in regards to their welfare, and she argues that the way we perceive animals affects what we think about them, which in turn affects how we treat them, which affects animal welfare as a whole. She cites the popularity of anthropomorphic animal characters such as Peter Rabbit and Winnie the Pooh as influencing and popularizing conservational and humane efforts.

Although this perceived physical appeal of certain animals may be detrimental, as noted by Parent (2019: 5-6), where she explained that the cuteness of slow lorises caused a social media uproar in popularity, which affected the species in a negative way due to the increase in its illegal trade.

The exception of turtles may also be connected to another influential factor; that of neoteny or perceived youthfulness of certain animals, which makes them appear cuter to humans. "Baby schema", also known as *Kindchenschema* in the field of ethology coined by Konrad Lorenz, is a set of morphological characteristics that make an animal appear cute, such as big eyes, a small nose, a round face, a receding chin, etc. (Lorenz 1981: 165) Going by these factors, it may make sense that turtles are preferred over other reptiles, as they have more of these characteristics.

In the article "Semiotic dimensions of human attitudes towards other animals: A case of zoological gardens" (2016) by Timo Maran and Nelly Mäekivi, they propose a "mapping" to determine whether an animal has the potential to have either a positive or negative perception by humans, this mapping coincides with previous claims made by Kubiato and Batt, and also add some new interesting factors to be considered, the criteria being as follows:

- Is the given species a vertebrate?
- Is its body size comparable to or larger than the human one?
- Does the given species have a collective lifestyle?
- Does the given species have colorful patterns, does it emit loud and diverse sounds, or does it have other rich intraspecific communication strategies accessible to humans?
- Does the umwelt of the given species have considerable overlap with the human umwelt?
- Does the given species have ecological relations (prey-predator relations, symbiosis, parasitism) with humans or is there potential for behavioral (caregiving, parental relation) relations?
- Does the Lorenzian concept of Kindchenschema apply for the given species?

As we can see, positive or negative perceptions of animals regularly have a great impact on the animals, from its welfare and ecological status to its portrayal in different media, the latter being relevant to the topic of horror cinema.

The perception of animals, particularly those who are deemed as visually unpleasant or scary, will be a cornerstone for my analysis, as I will compare monsters in film to animals that have been evaluated negatively by polls done in previous research.

1.3 Animals in Media

Regarding what specific media has been studied regarding animal inspired creatures, there is a wide array of papers and studies published regarding different types. Cartoon animals, for example, have been studied specifically in their relation to child audiences and their influence on them, like in *How Very Young Children Think About Animals* (DeLoache, LoBue 2011), or *Pairing Animal Cartoon Characters With Produce Stimulates Selection Among Child Zoo Visitors* (Kapryn et al. 2017). In the latter, the researchers part from a marketing standpoint to tackle the issue of children's underconsumption of fruits and vegetables by exploring the hypothesis that pairing such products with cute animal mascots might help the problem and increase consumption.

Regarding literature studies, Ella Wehrmeyer (2010: 97) also focused on child audiences in her article *Animal Characteristics in Children's literature: Friends or Scoundrels?*, in which she examines how the characters in AA Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) and C Perrault's *Puss in Boots* (1695) have been written to remark upon positive or negative characteristics, and how the translators of these works have transformed the work to fit the cultural and national context of their respective cultures.

In the field of semiotics, Jason Dydynski (2017) explores the Lorenzian concept of *Kindchenschema* to discover whether this can be applied to the field of marketing and product design, and establishes a semiotic classification of mascots and characters with animal traits, applying previous biological theories to them.

In the realm of non-fictional animals, Batt (2009), Parent (2019) and Wolfensohn (2020), all deal with how animal characteristics impact their ecological status and welfare, and I will explore them more in depth when discussing the core issues related to my specific topic.

It is apparent that media and animals have a two-way relationship of sorts, with the animal's appearance playing a part on how they're portrayed in media, and at the same time said portrayal affecting the animals' in ways such as public image and welfare.

With all this taken into account, despite the fact that animals have been previously studied in regards to their portrayal in media, their relation to monsters in cinema is a niche that hasn't been explored in the same capacity. It is my purpose with this thesis then, not only to analyze the monsters, but also to open up this specific topic to future discussions and research work.

1.4 Fear of animals

The concept of humans being attracted to nature and the animal world has been talked about in previous literature, the concept of *biophilia* proposed by Edward Wilson (2003: 1-2) proposes that humans, being able to distinguish between life from the inanimate, and we are actively drawn to nature and other organisms, to which we place great value.

However, it is clear that fear and anxieties caused by other animals are common among humans, and while there is variance of these fears by different factors such as cultural background, age, or geographic location, fear of animals is a common and widespread phenomenon. This is understandable, as many common and widespread animals such as spiders, snakes, scorpions or other bugs can be dangerous to humans and can attack if provoked or if approached to a close encounter, so it makes sense that people are wary of them. Even animals with low attack and mortality rates like sharks, crocodiles or other large predators are common animal phobias, as the few incidents are commonly highly publicized by the media. (Armfield 2007: 2)

This fear of certain animals deemed dangerous has been widely studied in the field of psychology and psychiatry, and it has been proposed by many authors that humans are biologically predisposed to fear certain animals, this is known as *biological preparedness*. (Bennett-Levy, Marteau 1984)

In order to put this concept to the test, Jamie Bennett-Levy and Theresa Marteau conducted an experiment in which they applied a questionnaire to 113 subjects, in which they asked them to scale 29 animals on their ugliness, sliminess, speed, and how sudden they moved in a three-point scale, as well as how much fear they felt for the animal and how close they would go near it (Table 1). They found that the five animals with the highest fear response were: rat, jellyfish, spider, cockroach and grass snake, while the five animals with the lowest fear response were: hamster, butterfly, robin, lamb and tortoise. They found that animals that are considered to be uglier, slimier, speedier and that move more suddenly were generally the ones that caused a more fearful response and a preference to stay far from them. (Bennett-Levy, Marteau 1984: 39)

Table 1. Animals ranked by fear response (Bennett-Levy, Marteau 1984: 39).

	Ugly	Slimy	Speedy	Moves suddenly	Fear	Nearness
Rat	2.24	1.10	2.35	2.53	2.08	3.90
Cockroach	2.53	1.20	1.96	2.04	1.58	3.25
Jellyfish	2.00	2.47	1.39	1.51	1.81	2.95
(not harmful)						
Spider	2.43	1.06	2.25	2.52	1.64	2.88
Slug	2.63	2.90	1.04	1.02	1.19	2.84
Grass snake	1.80	1.78	2.12	2.42	1.55	2.78
(not harmful)						
Beetle	2.10	1.18	1.55	1.57	1.33	2.50
Lizard	1.88	1.54	2.53	2.78	1.25	2.45
Worm	2.18	2.45	1.14	1.20	1.16	2.39
Frog	1.88	2.24	1.80	2.31	1.17	2.28
Moth	1.53	1.09	2.04	2.32	1.25	2.27
Ant	1.86	1.04	2.04	2.14	1.14	2.22
Crow	1.67	1.02	2.02	2.08	1.22	2.14
Mouse	1.35	1.02	2.35	2.56	1.27	2.13
Grasshopper	1.76	1.12	2.48	2.77	1.16	2.06
Squirrel	1.02	1.02	2.44	2.71	1.11	2.03
Caterpillar	1.65	1.24	1.14	1.12	1.05	1.84
Baby seal	1.06	1.42	1.50	1.48	1.03	1.63
Blackbird	1.10	1.00	2.04	2.20	1.08	1.59
Hamster	1.02	1.00	1.98	2.23	1.00	1.50
Baby chimpanzee	1.33	1.00	1.63	1.73	1.09	1.48
Butterfly	1.06	1.02	2.08	2.36	1.00	1.33
Spaniel (dog)	1.08	1.02	2.06	1.84	1.08	1.31
Tortoise	1.41	1.08	1.08	1.06	1.00	1.31
Robin	1.02	1.00	2.10	2.29	1.00	1.31
Lamb	1.02	1.00	1.61	1.90	1.00	1.16
Cat	1.02	1.00	2.17	2.31	1.03	1.14
Ladybird	1.10	1.00	1.71	1.88	1.02	1.14
Rabbit	1.04	1.00	2.35	2.65	1.02	1.13

In Batt's (2009: 183) research, she ponders whether or not there's a correlation between the bio-behavioral similarity of animal species to humans and our attitude towards those species. She made a survey with university students where she showed them a presentation of images of different varied species and then asked them to rank their preference towards from "strongly dislike" to "strongly like" with a "neutral" option in the middle, the lowest rating having a value of 0 and the highest of 10. (Table 2)

Table 2. Animals ranked by survey (Batt 2009: 183)

Species	Average rating	Species	Average rating
Jellyfish	1.9	Shark	5.3
Housefly	2.1	Trout	5.5
Bee	2.3	Frog	5.7

Centipede	2.3	Badger	5.8
Beetle	2.3	Scallop	5.8
Millipede	2.4	Walrus	5.9
Spider	2.6	Starfish	6.3
Eel	2.7	Goose	6.4
Earthworm	3.0	Eagle	6.5
Python	3.2	Kangaroo	6.8
Elephant Shrew	3.6	Whale	6.9
Rat	3.7	Gemsbok	6.9
Prawn	3.7	Elk	6.9
Snail	3.8	Moth	6.9
Crab	4.3	Sparrow	7.2
Bat	4.4	Langur	7.3
Salamander	4.4	Leopard	7.7
Emu	4.8	Owl	7.7
Lizard	5.0	Elephant	7.8
Sea Dragon	5.2	Chimpanzee	8.2

I believe that anxieties related to these types of unappealing animals can be understandable to most people, as those animals are at the very least capable of inflicting harm upon humans, and at the very worst common offenders of harm. However, many people fear or are disturbed by relatively harmless animals such as toads, beetles, lizards, and many others. Armfield explains the existence of this phenomenon with the following:

Fear is not merely a reaction to danger but that perceptions of control, predictability, and disgust are also crucial determinants of an individual's fear response. These variables are believed to be conceptually connected, with perceptions of uncontrollability, unpredictability, dangerousness, and disgustingness comprising a set of vulnerability cognitions which are central to the etiology of fear for a given stimulus. (Armfield 2007: 2)

Armfield (2007: 2) doesn't view biological preparedness as absolute and without fault, as he points out that the biological mechanisms that support this hypothesis haven't been identified, that many of its key assumptions haven't been supported, and that testing the evolutionary scenarios for preparedness is difficult.

While, to my knowledge, there is no research of Armfield's understandings or even biological preparedness in the context of monsters or fictional media, I can observe that most of the creatures in horror cinema and specifically the examples from my sample fulfill the variables set by Armfield: uncontrollability, unpredictability, dangerousness and disgustingness. In the Bennett-Levy and Marteau's list, the top ten animals are: Rat, cockroach, jellyfish, spider, slug, snake, beetle, lizard, worm, and frog. The bottom ten animals are; rabbit, ladybird, cat, lamb, robin, tortoise, spaniel dog, butterfly, baby chimpanzee and hamster.

1.5 What is a monster? Monstrosity and Zoomorphism

The word "monster" has its origins in Latin *monstrum*, which in turn is composed of the verbs *monere* (to warn) and *demonstrare* (to reveal), the word then refers to an embodiment of a disturbing omen that highlights the distance from the safe and familiar (Musharbash 2014).

Monsters have been a staple of the horror genre since its origins, from giant ants and rabid dogs to alien species and creatures from other dimensions, monsters have a long history of being antagonists and threats on film.

There is plenty to be said about what these monsters represent through an artistic text analysis, and there's a big collection of literature dealing with the social and cultural implications in horror cinema, analyzing monsters as expressions of social anxieties or their cultural meaning and impact. We have the examples of *Men, women and chainsaws: Gender in the modern horror film* by Carol Clover (2015) and *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* by Adam Lowenstein (2005), both of which explore the horror genre in

cinema in the context of film studies in its intersection with gender studies, history and social studies.

However, my intention with this thesis is to make a zoosemiotic analysis of horror cinema monsters, focusing specifically on their physical appearance and behavior.

Because the concept of monster will be central to my thesis, it is for the better that I thoroughly define and explain the concept and how I'll be using it. In the context of the current thesis, a monster is a non-human bestial creature, while human characteristics may be present to some degree, they aren't a defining or principal characteristic of the character, the Xenomorph from *Alien* for example has a humanoid-esque body shape, having a torso, a head and two sets of limbs, but I will be counting it as a monster because everything else about its body is bestial and resembles animals, like the tough exoskeletal appearance of its skin, its long tail, the long protruding shape of its head, and its multiple jaws. Characters like Jason from *Friday the 13th* or Sadako from *Ringu* however will not be considered as monsters, they might be monsters in a more colloquial way, as they are serial killers and their appearance is unappealing to most people and have particular characteristics such as superhuman strength or paranormal abilities, but because they are biologically human or at the very least the physical appearance of humans, I won't include them.

By the definition of monster, I'll also be exclusively dealing with malign or evil characters that pose a threat to the humans in their story, the titular character from *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* or Abe Sapien from *Hellboy*, while having an unappealing bestial appearance on first glance, are benign and help the humans in their stories, and while studying the filmmaking and storytelling mechanisms used to present beasts or physically monstrous characters as good is an interesting endeavour, it is not the point of this thesis.

The focus of my research lies strictly on horror and thriller films, so movies from genres like sci-fi or action that sometimes feature monsters will not be included, although movies that overlap horror with other genres are suitable, such as the many monsters that exist within the intersection of horror and science fiction, like the mutant bear from *Annihilation* and Gwoemul from *The Host*.

Since the creatures I'll be discussing are framed as having an antagonistic relationship with humans, certain concepts like predation, parasitism or hostility will play a big part in the description of the monsters, and I'll use ethological information when describing this phenomenon in my examples.

An animal, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, is a multicellular eukaryotic organism whose cells are bounded by collagen, and due to their size, mobility, diversity and abundance they are a dominating part of human's conception of life.

To define an animality in opposition to humanity we have to turn to Ingold's *What is an Animal?* (1994), where it is explained that as humanity is defined by exploring which characteristics we uniquely have, animality is then defined in negatives, exploring which of these characteristics they don't have.

One supposedly uniquely human attribute is that of language, where the human or *homo loquens* is defined by its language faculty and the animal is defined by its lack of it. Although this does not negate the possibility of different species eventually evolving the ability to use language, which would theoretically enter them into the realm of humanity.

Ingold reaffirms the notion of animal as having two meanings, one as a taxonomic category that is purely biological and includes humans, and another that encompasses everything considered non-human, the latter being the more common colloquial use of the word.

The next figure (Figure 1) is used to explore these two meanings, with humans being included within the animal realm but also having characteristics intrinsic to them, with the area where animality and humanity meet being called "human animality" or "human nature".

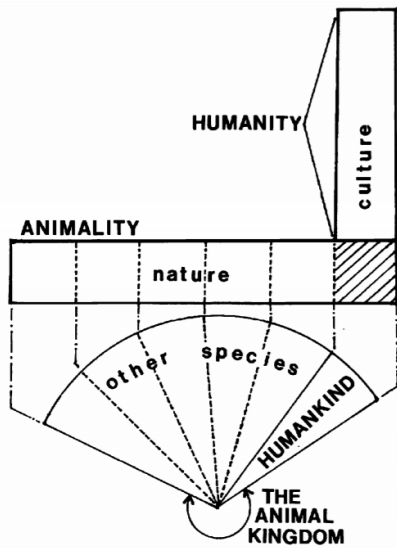


Figure 1: Animality views (Ingold 1988: 4)

In the chapter *Beasts, brutes and monsters*, Mary Midgley (1994) writes about the moral background to animality, she gives the example of a judge that upon sentencing a criminal offender guilty of car theft and drunk driving, calls them out as “behaving like an animal”, even though no non-human animal would never behave in this way. The word animal here is then not used as a precise descriptor, but as a moral judgment. The example’s judge isn’t saying the criminal literally behaved in an animal way, but that their behavior broke what is considered as acceptable human behavior and they “broke the barriers of culture”.

Midgley considers that these areas outside “acceptable humanity” are often considered “dark” or “frightening”, these areas include the socially unacceptable parts of human nature as well as other species’ natures. Phrases such as “being treated like an animal” or “behaving like an animal” have obvious negative connotations and signify having one’s nature degraded or degrading their own nature, respectively.

According to Midgley, this barrier between us and other species (as well as some aspects of human nature) can be detrimental, clouding our own self-perception and hindering our sense of moral responsibilities towards animals. It is of the most importance that we don’t guide ourselves

by what we find familiar, because the difference between our species and others isn't cut and dry and obvious but complex and confusing, and this differentiation isn't exclusive to humans vs other species, but for each species vs the rest.

In another chapter of the book, author Balaji Mundkur (1994) explores the themes of human animality, the imagery of fear and the concept of religiosity, as well as the relationship between them.

Mundkur says that many authors in the past have settled on that speech and religiosity are two faculties that separate humans from the other species. However, it is known that many species do in fact communicate by using different means, like apes, who do it with various semantically charged gestures and calls.

Some contemporary authors however, critique this notion of humans being uniquely different and separated from all other animals, Rattasepp (2018: 13-15) makes a critique of how animals are discussed in relation to humans in philosophy, stating that what we consider to be uniquely human is determined beforehand and without consideration for non-human animals, that characteristics that are exclusive to humans breaks us apart from all other species, but characteristics that are unique to another given specific species isn't an indication of an exceptional status.

On the topic of religiosity, Mundkur recalls orientalist author Zenaide Ragozin, who upon studying the origins of religion, concluded that it has its origins in fear and loathing of animals who posed a threat to the life of the primordial human, who would be reduced to hiding and cowering.

Mundkur believes that there is an important link between religiosity and instinct, with these impulses provoking raw sentiments on the supernatural. They introduce the concept of *intrinsic religiosity*, a state of mind encouraged by the belief in forces which are perceived as supernatural and otherworldly, a state that is intrinsically rooted in fear, a primordial and protocultural emotion not only in humans but on all higher vertebrates.

The distinction we make between the familiar and the unfamiliar is important to understand what we fear, many animals have features that are unfamiliar to us, sometimes they are so far removed that they might cause repulsion, these features will be later discussed in the analysis chapter regarding how they are used and translated from animals to monsters.

Zoomorphism, from the Greek *zoo* (ζῷον – *zōion*) meaning animal and *morph* (μορφή – *morphē*) meaning shape, refers to the attribution of animal characteristics to non-animal entities. Zoomorphism has been studied in academia in its application to humans in fiction (Medvedeva, Kolomiets 2020), robotic design (Mertens, Sauer 2021), metaphor-making (Akmatova 2020), among other topics.

Although zoomorphism has been studied in the field of fiction as I mentioned above, it hasn't been properly applied to my topic of interest.

To refer to the creatures that I will study in this thesis I will use the term “zoomorphic monsters”, by this I mean creatures whose designs have mainly animal characteristics, this could mean either a combination of different animal aspects, or a combination of animal and humanoid aspects, note that even if they have a few humanoid characteristics, zoomorphic monsters are still undeniably non human. The monsters in regard to the horror genre will therefore also be necessarily antagonistic and are clearly presented as a threat to the film's protagonists.

1.6 Monster Studies

Horror and monsters have been studied and talked about in different academic fields in the arts and humanities, with academic fields like literary and film studies handling the theoretical and historical aspects of the genre.

In *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters* (2016), Jason Barr explores how Japanese nature, industry, politics and society have influenced the rise of the giant monsters

known as Kaiju not only in the film industry but also literature and sequential art, and how this specific national genre has also influenced American media.

In *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (1997), Harry Benshoff analyzes how the horror film and its antagonists have queer themes and influences that have been shaped by the marginalization of gay people and the societal perception of them.

In *Monsters in the Machine: Science Fiction Film and the Militarization of America after World War II* (2016), Steffen Hantke writes on how the USA military warfare, colonization, and society have influenced the similar warfare seen on different science fiction worlds and alien societies represented on film.

While monsters have been subject of academic discourse for some time through the lenses of different areas of knowledge, the concept of *monster studies* as an interdisciplinary academic field is relatively new, with Jeffrey Cohen's 1996 *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)* being considered as one of the first scholarly texts delving into the matter.

Monster studies takes ideas from different disciplines such as literature and media studies, Philosophy, Anthropology, History, Gender studies, among others (Musharbash 2014). In this thesis the focus will be specifically through the eyes of zoosemiotics.

In his book *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (2009), author Stephen Asma defines monsters as the representations of the unfamiliar to its highest and most extreme point in a material form. He also establishes a continuum of strangeness; first unfamiliar species, then known and familiar species with a modified trait such as body parts or sizes, then hybrid species and chimeras of different combinations, and finally shape-shifting creatures and indescribable entities.

For my part, I would say that Asma's definition is a very good starting point to form my own. I would say (animal) monsters under the strict context of this thesis are strange, unusual or freakish zoomorphic creatures that pose a negative threat to either humans, other species or the film's environment. Although the word zoomorphism etymologically implies that it's a phenomenon

that exclusively regards physical attributes, I should make clear that I will use the term to refer to both physical and behavioral aspects of the monsters. Their monstrosity is not only confined to their abnormal bodies and faces, but also very much present in their alien way of behaving, feeding, and relating to either members of their own species as well as others. Accordingly, creatures that exhibit a heavy monstrous behavior but the opposite physical appearance, i.e. physically cute or endearing monsters will not be taken into account in this thesis, as it requires further explanations and research in regards to cuteness and the phenomenon of juxtaposing these two opposite traits. This thesis however, has its focus primarily on animal and monsters physical appearance and anatomy, although other aspects such as behavior or ecology will be delved into when needed.

2. Material and Methods

For this research, I have selected a tentative twenty monsters from films across different countries and decades. Since the USA has the largest market of horror films and normally a higher budget to make monsters, most of my examples come from this country, but I've also made an effort to include characters from different cultures. The complete list of monsters is as follows: The mutant bear from 2018's *Annihilation*, the Xenomorph from 1979's *Alien*, The tra-la-logs from 1981's *The Pit*, Gwoemul from 2006's *The Host*, the Thing from 1982's *The Thing*, Kothoga from 1997's *The Ritual*, Clover from 2008's *Cloverfield*, Jötunn from 2017's *The Ritual*, Pulgasari from 1985's *Pulgasari*, the alien from 2020's *Sputnik*, Calvin from 2017's *Life*, Juda's breed from 1997's *Mimic*, Octalus from 1998's *Deep Rising*, the Gill Man from 1954's *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, the monsters from 2018's *A Quiet Place*, and the blob from 1988's *The Blob*. The films were selected by looking for the terms "monster films" and "monster movies" on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) search engine, and then inspecting different lists and compilations for monsters that match the criteria of the present thesis. I specifically selected films that featured "chimeric" monsters that are not mainly human and are not purely animal.

To accurately and neatly describe each monster, I will arrange them in a table where I'll attach a picture of each character and then make two types of descriptions, a thick one that purely states the monsters' characteristics, and a thin one that takes context into account and references their similarities to real animals. This will help us to accurately compare the monsters to the animals and see if there is any biological grounding in their design, or if they show a pattern in how they are constructed.

After making a thorough description of each monster I will make generalizations about my findings and proceed to make a zoosemiotic analysis of it.

To analyze the monsters from my sample list, I will take the research findings by Batt, Bennett-Levy and Martheau on the human perception of animals, and compare it to the monsters' descriptions, taking into account the type of animal (mammal, bird, arthropod, etc.), as well as its

physical traits, which I will divide into 5 categories; body shape, limbs, size, eyes and mouth. After taking this into account, I will determine if there's similarities between the most negatively perceived animals and the monsters and then conclude if there is some sort of pattern or motif that can be drawn from the comparison.

2.1 Monster descriptions

MONSTER	THIN DESCRIPTION	THICK DESCRIPTION
Tra-la-logs	The monster is bipedal, short in stature, has thick long dark hair, it has small 5-finger hands, it has two orange eyes that glow, a darkened face filled with wrinkles, a very large mouth that takes up a big proportion of its face and a sharp set of teeth with two enlarged canines. It makes two types of sounds, low pitched grunts and high pitched squeals.	The monster resembles an ape the most, mostly due to its fur, stance and movement. Its face is notably hairless, dark and textured, that combined with its exposed teeth and lack of a visible nose gives it a reptilian-esque appearance. Its grunts resemble a gorilla or big ape, while its high pitched squeals resemble that of a pig or boar.
Gwoemul	The monster is a quadruped, it is large in size, has wet scaly gray skin, its four main arms are long and end in large multi-fingered hands, with multiple smaller arm appendages protruding out if it. Its eyes are dark and small. It's jaws open in four parts, with multiple teeth on each, it has a very long tail. It makes low pitched roars and grunts, and it also hisses.	The monster has an aquatic and amphibian appearance, its skin texture resembles that of a toad, with tadpole features such as its tail as well as its underdeveloped back legs. Its general body shape is reminiscent of a fish.

<p>Xenomorph</p>	<p>The monster is bipedal, tall and has a black, scaly exoskeleton-like skin, its arms are long ending in very large hands with six fingers. Its legs have two sets of articulations, one at the knee and another one below. It has rigid, tentacle appendages on its back. It has no eyes, a very long protruding head, and two sets of big jaws. It has a big tail with ridges. It makes high pitched screams and hisses</p>	<p>The monster's exoskeleton is a feature commonly found in arthropods such as insects and crustaceans. While its long head and appendages are reminiscent of cephalopods such as squids or octopuses. Having two sets of jaws are a feature that can be found on eels. Its tail and way of moving resembles reptiles.</p>
<p>Mutant Bear</p>	<p>It has a big body covered in messy fur, one set of ears on top of its head, four limbs, and eye sockets with no eyes. It is in the process of decomposition, its face is mostly skeletal. Unlike real bears, it has a second row of seemingly human teeth behind its normal jaws, there is a human skull morphed into the side of its face. It makes guttural screams and it can mimic speech to a degree</p>	<p>It's general body shape and most of its anatomy resembles a large grizzly bear, except for its second set of jaws and part of its skull which are human. The screams it emits are very human like, and it can repeat words said by the human it consumes, although this seems to not be deliberate.</p>
<p>Jötunn</p>	<p>It has a quadruped body with leathery, rugged looking skin, its four legs end in hooves and have scale looking protrusions in the joints, it's spine partially rises above the skin. Its face doesn't have any eyes or</p>	<p>It mostly resembles a deer or elk, having its body shape and antlers. One set of arms it has by its mouth is human shaped, and the other resembles a canine or another carnivorous mammal. Its antlers</p>

	nose, with two sets of jaws sticking out of the side of it. There are two sets of arms sticking out of its mouth, and its horns have two articulations and end in “fingers”. It makes loud roars.	vaguely resemble a bird’s legs and talons. The roars makes sound like a beast of sorts, definitely not a sound an elk would make.
The Thing	It has no definite body, as it takes the shape of the organisms it infects. However, it can also modify and transform those bodies in different ways; growing extra teeth, arms, tentacles, making mouths, elongating organs such as the tongue, etc. It makes loud grunts, screams and screeches.	When it makes new arms and limbs they can take different forms, such as arachnid-like legs or tentacles. It can also manifest new jaws or heads, the latter being shaped with a snout vaguely resembling a canine. The sounds it makes seem non-descript.
The Blob	The Blob doesn’t have a specific shape, it is an amorphous mass consisting of a pink, viscous, gelatinous substance, although it does seem to have a sort of membrane. Most of the time it is shaped like a large mound. It can morph said mass to different shapes such as tentacles or tubular mouths. It makes grunts.	It’s membranous and gelatinous structure resembles that of a shell-less mollusk or perhaps an amoeba. Its tentacles can catch pray and articulate like those of an octopus. Its grunts are also non-descript.
Pulgasari	It has a large bipedal body with two arms, two legs, a horned head and a	It’s body shape, face and scaly skin mostly resemble a dinosaur or

	<p>tail. Its skin is scaly and has spiked protrusions on its shoulders and arms. Its face has a snout, a row of sharp teeth and two eyes with pupils. It has five clawed fingers on each hand and three on its feet. It makes loud roars</p>	<p>large reptile, while its large arms and legs, as well as its eyes and the presence of five fingered hands with opposable thumbs give the appearance of an ape. Its horns strongly resemble that of a bull.</p>
Sputnik Alien	<p>It has a very long, thin body with three sets of arms, the upper set serving as arms with four fingers. It has a very long tail that comprises a sizable portion of its overall size. Its grayish green skin is scaly and slimy. Its head is covered by a hood that extends to its shoulders. It has three sets of eyes and its mouth is located below its “chin”, containing many small teeth. It makes very high pitched screeches and clicks.</p>	<p>The main resemblance the alien has with an animal is to a snake, with its very long tail, scaly skin and its cobra-shaped hood. It also borrows some aspects from bugs, having three sets of legs and many eyes which resemble a spider.</p>
Quiet Place Monster	<p>It has a large quadruped body, with two large double jointed arms ending in long sharp claws and two legs ending in large feet. Its abdomen is slender and has gray leathery skin. Its head is composed of large scales that open up to reveal a lot of large teeth and a very large hearing organ. It makes a variety of sounds, including grunts, roars, high pitched screams</p>	<p>While its general body shape is vaguely humanoid, its many scales and rough skin might be inspired by reptiles. The way its arms and claws are shaped and articulate strongly resembles that of a mantis or other predatory insects.</p>

	and clicks.	
Clover	It has a very large quadriped body that towers over small buildings, its long arms are double jointed and end in large hands with four fingers, it has a medium sized tail and its skin is smooth and pale. Its head is small in comparison to its body, it has a large mouth with its lower jaw being especially prominent, with a long tongue and big teeth, its eyes are small and black, and it has gill-like structures on the side of its head. It emits loud screams and roars.	Its shape is vaguely humanoid, with its long double-jointed extremities resembling insects and other arthropods. It also has some aquatic features, like the gills on its face and its jaws resembling an angler fish.
Calvin	The monster has a body that increases sizes through the movie, its main structure is oval and small compared to the rest of the body, composed of two sets of flat appendages that resemble wings. It has four tentacles, two that protrude out of the front, two from its back. Its skin is grayish and translucent, with many veins like internal structures being visible. Its “face” is composed of many skin folds that open up to reveal a mouth with no visible teeth or eyes. It doesn’t make sounds.	The monsters overall shape resembles many cephalopods like octopuses or squids, given its tentacles. Its translucent body with exposed veins reminds of many deep sea creatures, with its “wings” and thorax making it seem like a sea angel or jellyfish the most.

Gillman	<p>It's body is medium sized and bipedal, with thick scales covering its entire body. Its two arms end in webbed hands with five fingered claws, while its feet end in four fingers, also webbed, it has a long dorsal fin through its back. Its face is round, with a big toothless mouth and two circular eyes that have many "irises" overlapping, it has no nose. On the sides of its face there's many fin-like structures as well as gills. It makes guttural grunts.</p>	<p>The monster borrows elements from many aquatic creatures, its face being very similar to a fish, while its webbed hands and feet remind of amphibians like frogs or salamanders.</p> <p>Its silhouette as well as its bipedal stance are very humanoid.</p>
Juda's Breed	<p>Its body is tall and slender, it consists of a torso with two arms and an abdomen with four. Its face has two large compound eyes on the sides, a vertical mouth with many teeth and ridges, and two hooked fangs.</p> <p>Its four hind legs are articulated in two different sections and are covered in many thin hairs, its two main arms are similarly shaped but ending in a scythe-like shape. Its abdomen is rounded and scaled and its back is covered by a large shield-like structure</p>	<p>It mostly resembles insects, its abdomen and head strongly resemble an ant, and its two main arms with scythes strongly reference a mantis. There's also a humanoid inspiration, since the creature can camouflage itself and resemble the vague shape of a human.</p>
Octalus	<p>The monster is very large, its body consists of a large head and many</p>	<p>The most obvious inspiration of the monster is an octopus, given</p>

	<p>tentacles. Its head has a large mouth with many rows of teeth, with the outermost row consisting of two large fangs above and one below, with the other rows consisting of smaller teeth scattered about. It has two eyes and no nose, on the side of the head there's two large hooded holes. Its tentacles have mouths of their own, consisting of an unhinged jaw with many teeth and four arm like fangs.</p>	<p>its large head and many tentacles. Its largest fangs and mouth shape also suggest a snake, and its many tentacles might be referencing a lamprey.</p>
Kothoga	<p>The monster is large and quadruped, it has a scaly body and four big legs with large clawed fingers. It has a long tail, and its spine has spikes and patches of fur throughout. Its big head has very small orange eyes, a mouth that is bordered by many skin folds, it has a large set of hooked fangs and a smaller set underneath, it also has a row of teeth and a forked tongue, there is some fur surrounding the mouth.</p>	<p>Its body is very reminiscent of a reptile with its tail, greenish scales, lack of nose and forked tongue. The presence of hair also suggests mammalian features. The hooked protruding fangs are reminiscent of insects such as ants or bees.</p>

2.2 Generalizations and Charts

Body Shape

As we can see in Figure 2, in regards to the general body shape of the monsters there isn't a dominant type, with the three categories of Bipedal, Quadruped and Other occupying a third each. In Bipedal I'm grouping monsters that are shown to be primarily standing on their hind legs, while Quadruped refers to monsters that are shown moving primarily on four. The "Other" category includes monsters that either have many motor limbs such as Calvin, are amorphous such as the Thing and the Blob, or are shown to have more than one medium of moving, like the amphibian Gwoemul.

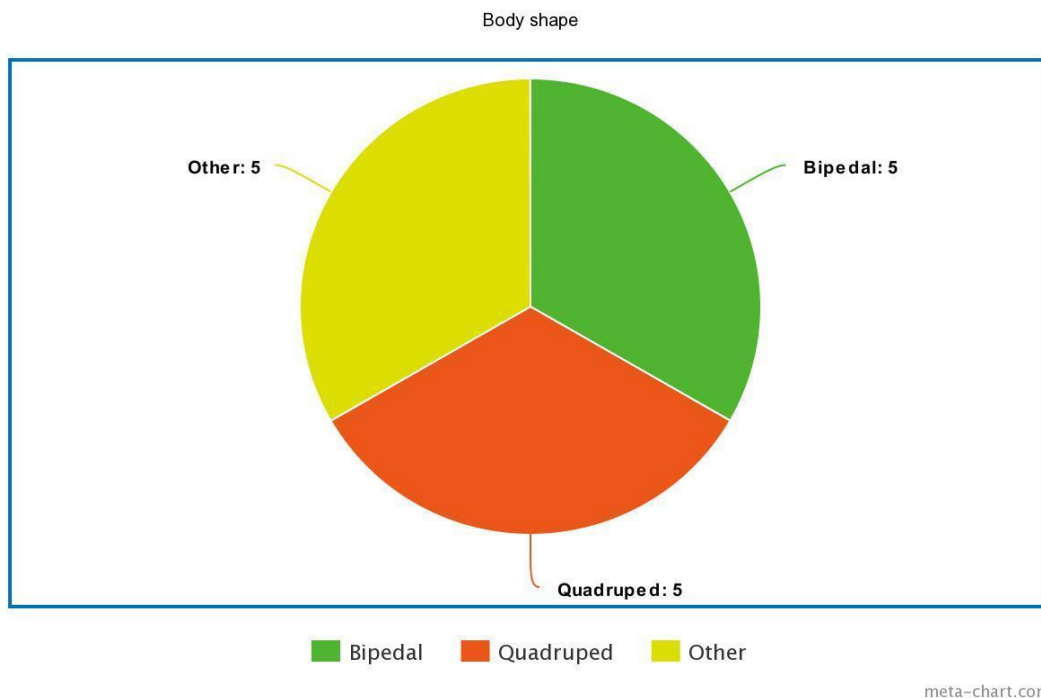


Figure 2: Monsters' body shapes.

Size

Regarding size, we can observe (Figure 3) that a large portion of them or almost half are considerably larger to humans, this includes sizes from the car-sized monsters of A Quiet Place, to the building-tall Clover. The second biggest group is conformed of monsters that are about the same size of humans, like the ape-like tra-la-logs, or the Xenomorphs that while still big, not giant. The third and final category are monsters which size varies or depends on the circumstance, like Calvin and the Blob, which rapidly grow as they feed, or the parasitic Thing.

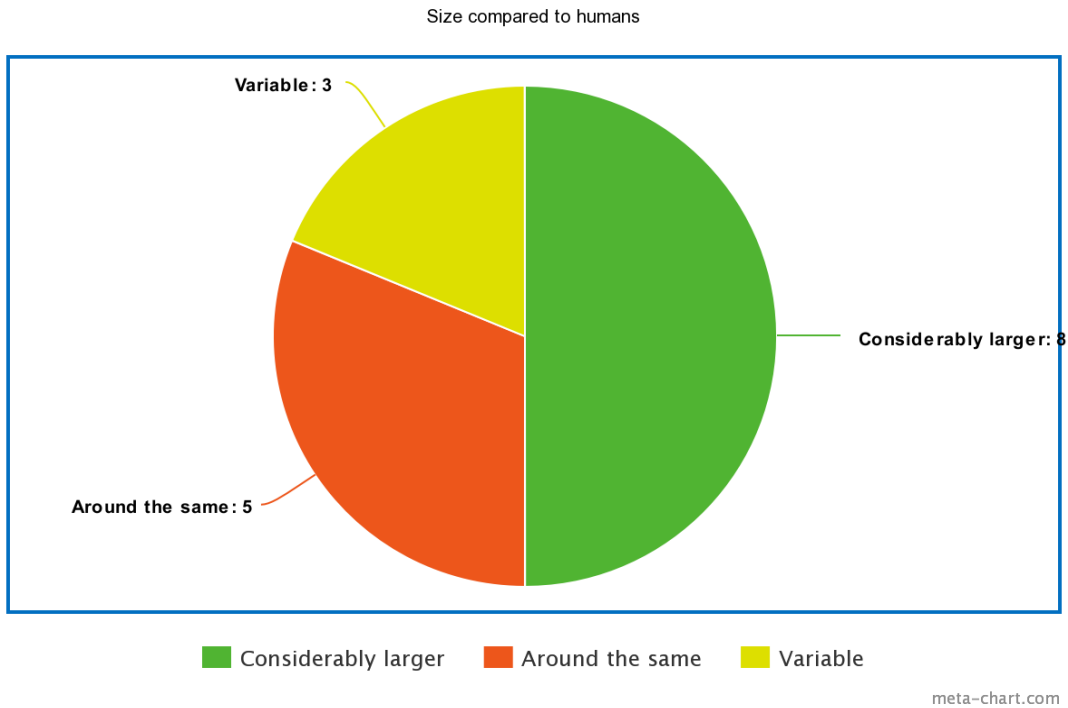


Figure 3: Monsters' size compared to humans.

Limbs

Concerning the number of limbs the monsters have (not including tails), Figure 4 shows four is the most common number as most of the monsters fall into this category, having two arms and two legs. The next category is monsters that have more than four limbs, which could be tentacles like in the case of Gwoemul, or many legs, like in the case of the Sputnik alien. Two of the monsters are counted as having no limbs; the Blob and the Thing, that despite having the ability to create a seemingly infinite number of limbs, these are not part of their permanent anatomy.

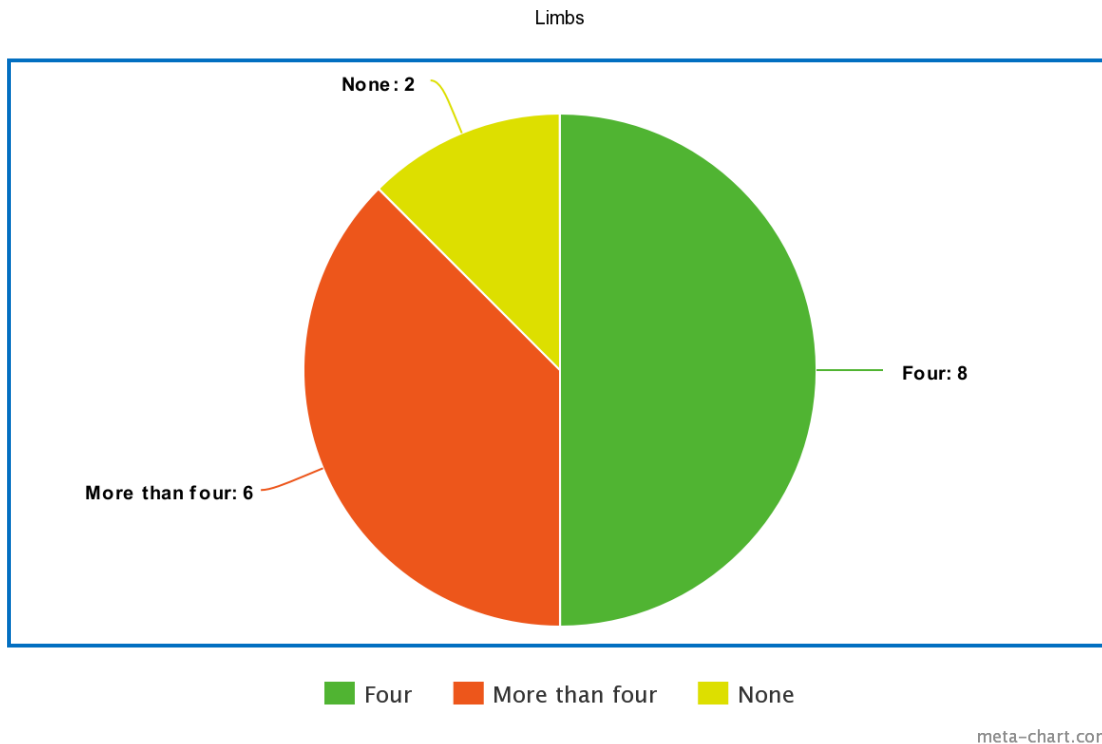


Figure 4: Monsters' number of limbs.

Overall Animal Inspiration

The next category of generalizations is what I'm calling Overall Animal Inspirations (Figure 5); with this I mean how much a given category of animal is used in the monster design, as none of the monsters have just one species they're modeled after.

We can see that mammals are the most often used, this includes monsters with overt inspirations like the elk-like Jötunn or monsters who are vaguely humanoid shaped such as the Xenomorph. The next most used species are reptiles and arthropods, the latter including insects, arachnids, crustaceans and other bugs. The least used animals are fish, mollusks, amphibians and birds (in descending order), the last of which are only used once in the shape of the talon-shaped antlers of the Jötunn.

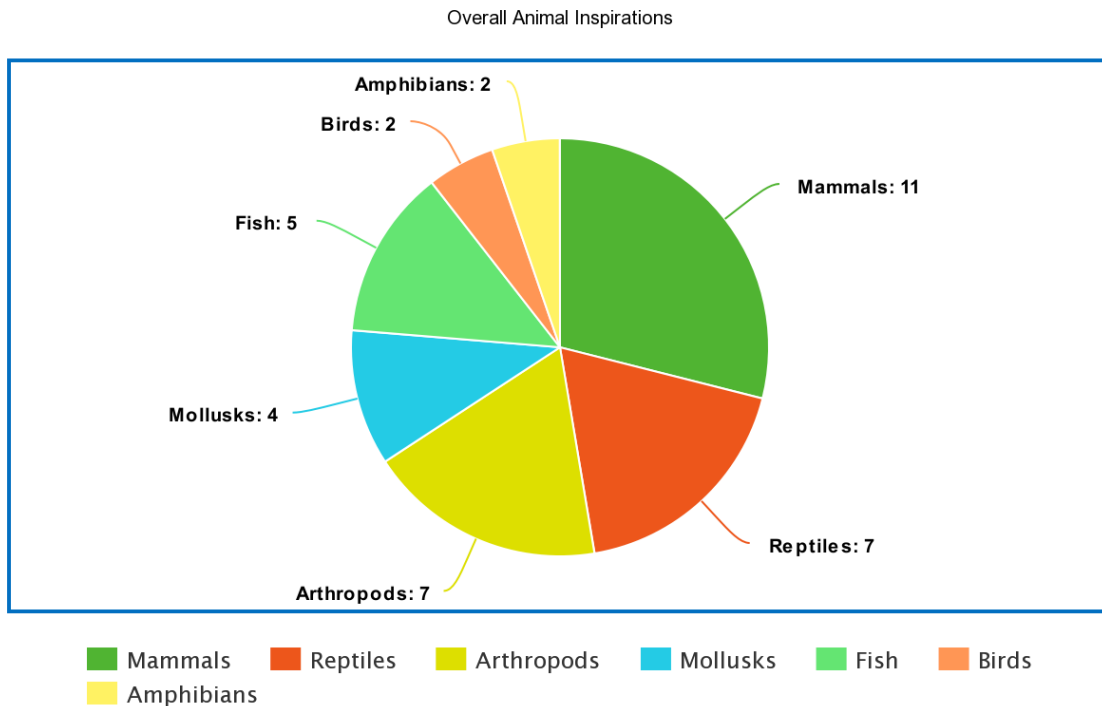


Figure 5: Monsters' overall animal inspirations.

Main Animal Inspiration

With this category I'm referencing what is the main animal that inspired each monster, unlike the previous category in which I referenced all the animal features that were used in the monsters. I will enlist which animals are used specifically, but in the chart I will divide them into the types Mammalian, Reptile, Arthropod (insects, arachnids, crustaceans, etc), Mollusks, Amphibians, and Miscellaneous (Figure 6)

Main animal per monster:

- Gorilla (Tra-la-logs)
- Amphibian, nondescript (Gwoemul, Gillman)
- Arthropod, nondescript (Xenomorph, Quiet Place Monster, Clover)
- Bear (Mutant bear)
- Elk (Jötun)
- Slug (The Blob)
- Miscellaneous animals (The Thing)
- Dinosaur (Pulgasari)
- Snake (Sputnik)
- Octopus (Calvin, Octalus)
- Reptile, nondescript (Kothoga)

- Insect (Juda’s breed)

As we can see in the chart, in this category the most common animal inspiration in arthropods, with four out of sixteen monsters, followed by a three way tie between mammals, reptiles and mollusks, with three each, then amphibians with two, and lastly “miscellaneous” with one.

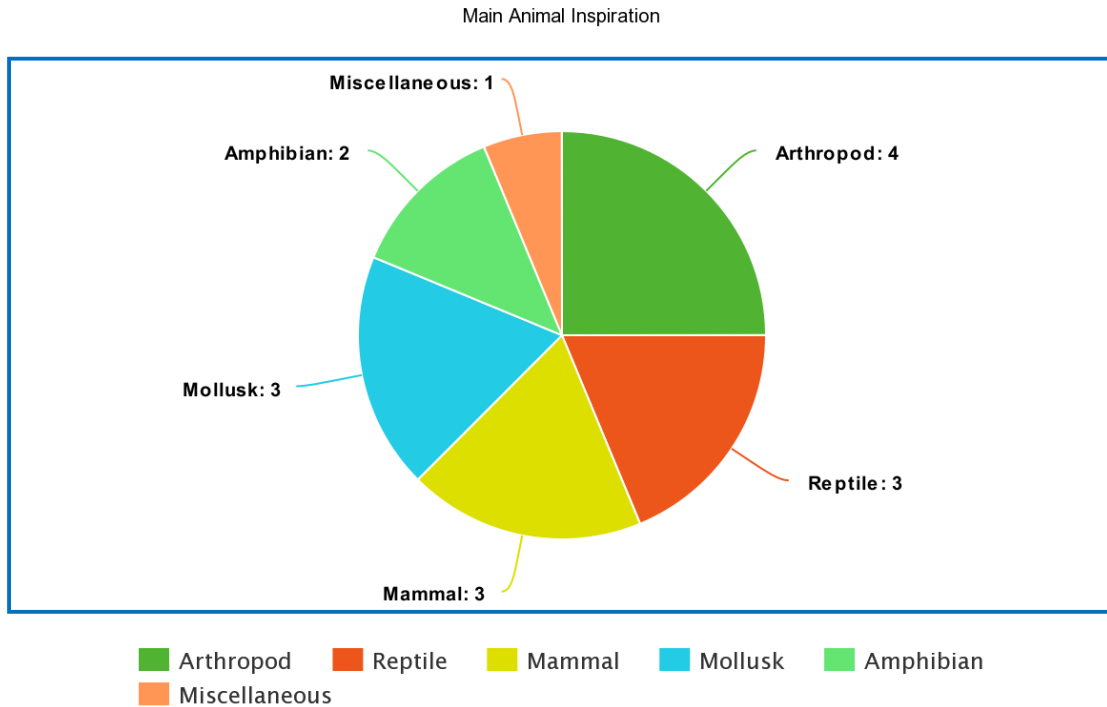
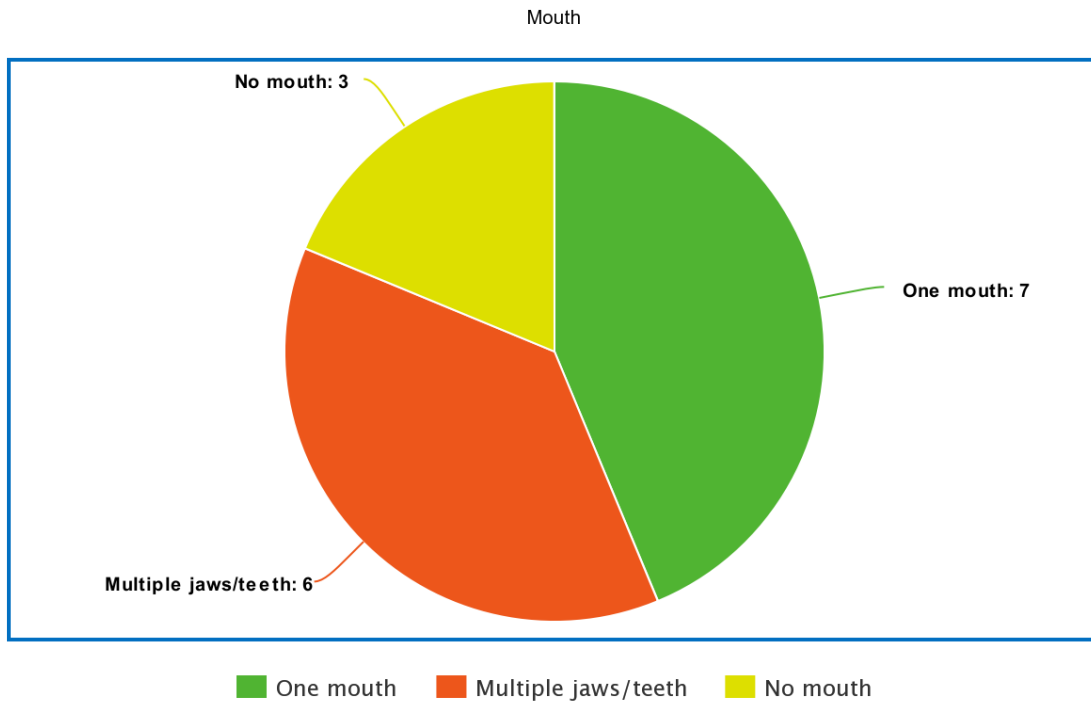


Figure 6: Monsters’ main animal inspirations.

Mouth

In this section I’ll divide the monsters into three categories, the first category includes monsters with a mouth with teeth, the second includes monsters with a mouth that consists of multiple jaws or rows of teeth, and the third one includes monsters with no mouths.

As we can see (Figure 7) the most common category was a mouth with teeth, with seven monster falling into it, including the gorilla-esque tra-la-logs or the gwoemul, who has one mouth that unhinges into different sections. The second category consists of monsters with multiple jaws or rows of teeth, with six, this includes the Xenomorph, who has a second mouth that pops out of the main one, and Kothoga, who has two protruding fangs above its mouth. The least common category was monsters that don’t have a mouth with just three, including the blob and Calvin.



meta-chart.com

Figure 7: Monsters' number of mouths/jaws.

Eyes

This section will be divided into three, monsters with two eyes, monsters with more than two eyes and monsters with less than two eyes (Figure 8). The most common category was monsters with two eyes with 8, followed closely by monsters with less than two eyes, which includes the mutant bear that just has one eye and other monsters that have no eyes at all, the least common category was monsters with multiple eyes with only the Sputnik alien.

A subsection of this aspect is pupils (Figure 9), where I'll check which of the ten monsters that have at least one eye, how many of them have pupils. We can observe that most monsters with eyes have no pupils.

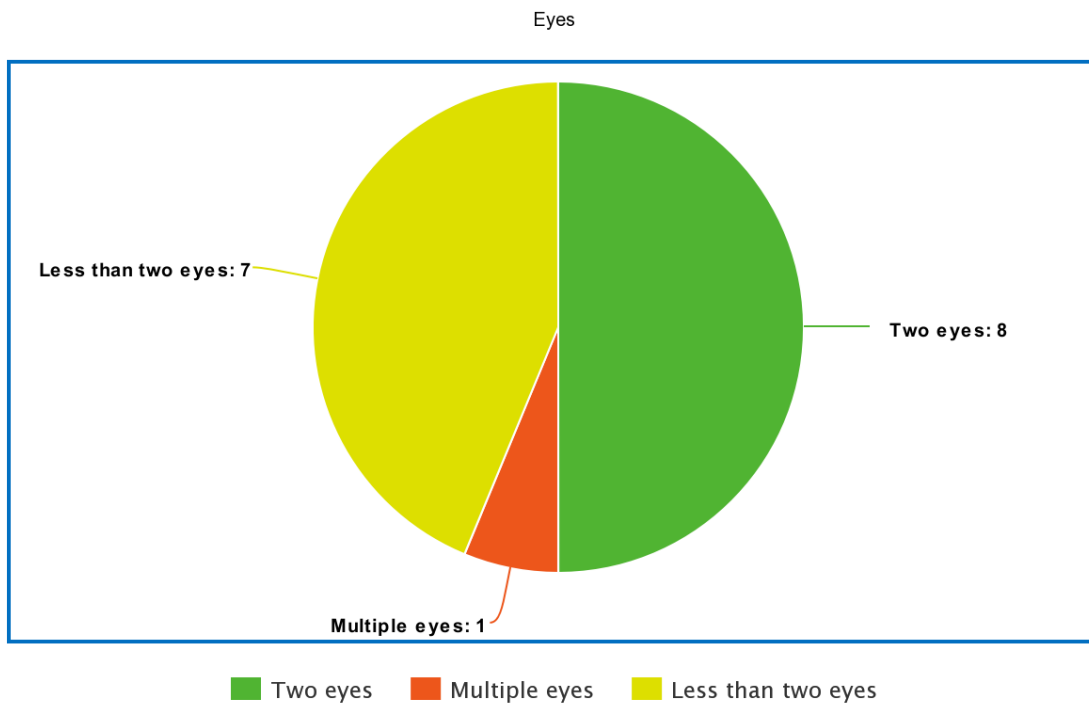


Figure 8: Monsters' number of eyes.

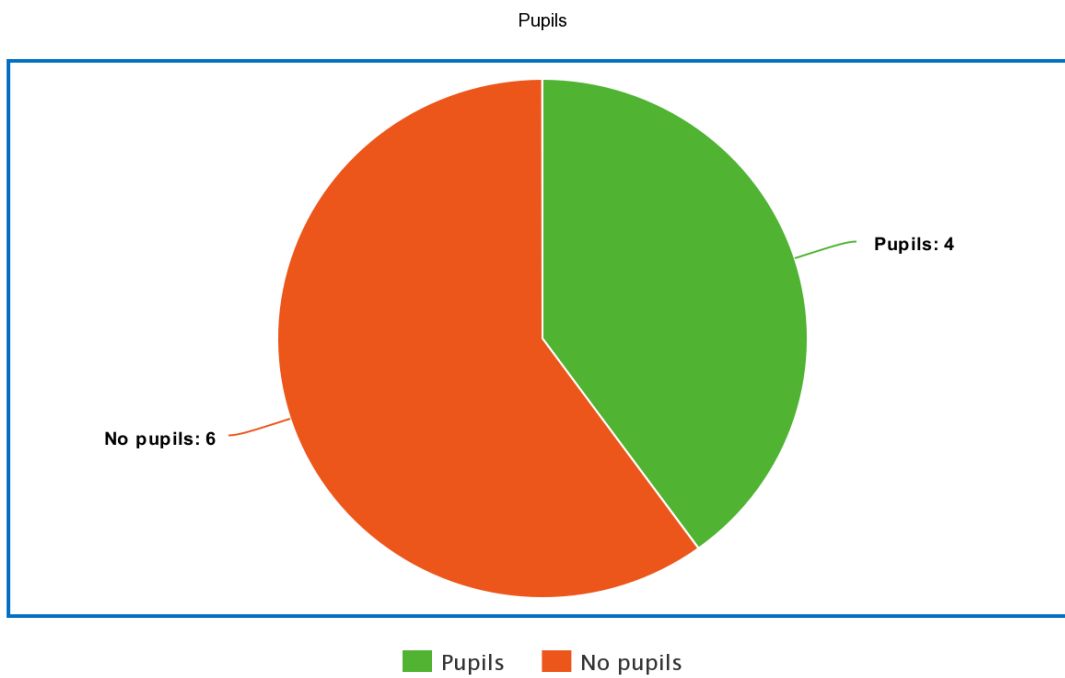


Figure 9: Monsters' number of pupils.

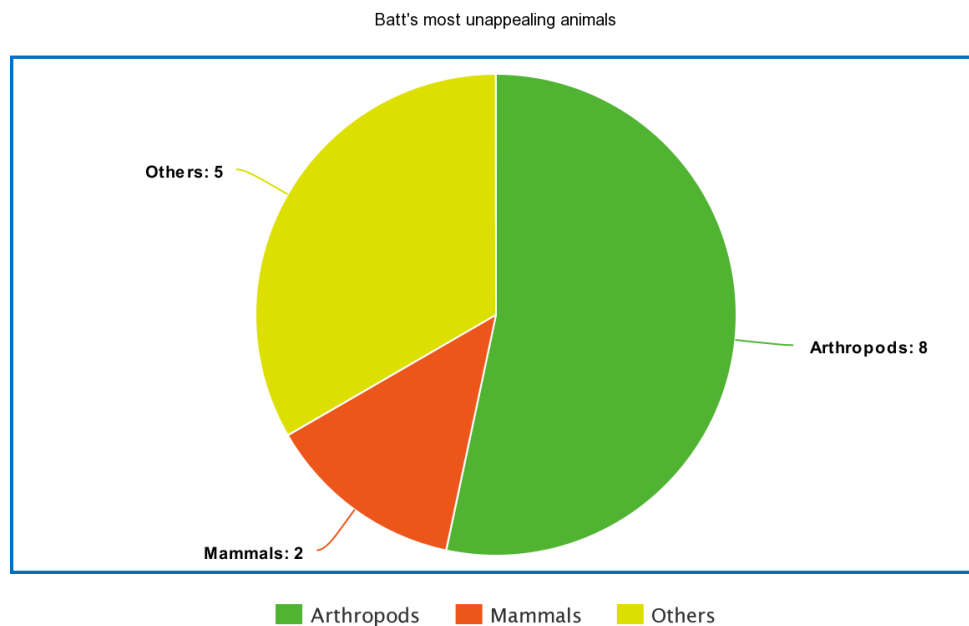
3. Analysis

As I said on the introduction, James Bennett-Levy and Theresa Marteau (1984) conducted a questionnaire in which they asked subjects to rank different animals according to their ugliness, sliminess, speed, how sudden they move, how afraid they were of it (all these five aspects being ranked from 1 to 3), and how close they'd get to it (ranked 1 to 5). The results can be seen in Figure 1.

Batt's (2009) findings, seen in Figure 2, show the average scoring of appeal any given animal has when surveyed in a group of university students. The scoring goes from 1 to 10 with 1 being more unappealing and 10 being appealing.

To relate Bennett-Levy, Marteau, and Batt's findings with my own, I took the 15 animals that ranked as most unappealing from both sources and grouped them into groups like I did with the monsters in order to see any similarities that arise.

In Figures 10 and 11, we can see how each set of 15 animals are catalogued according to their taxonomy.



meta-chart.com

Figure 10: Batt's unappealing animals

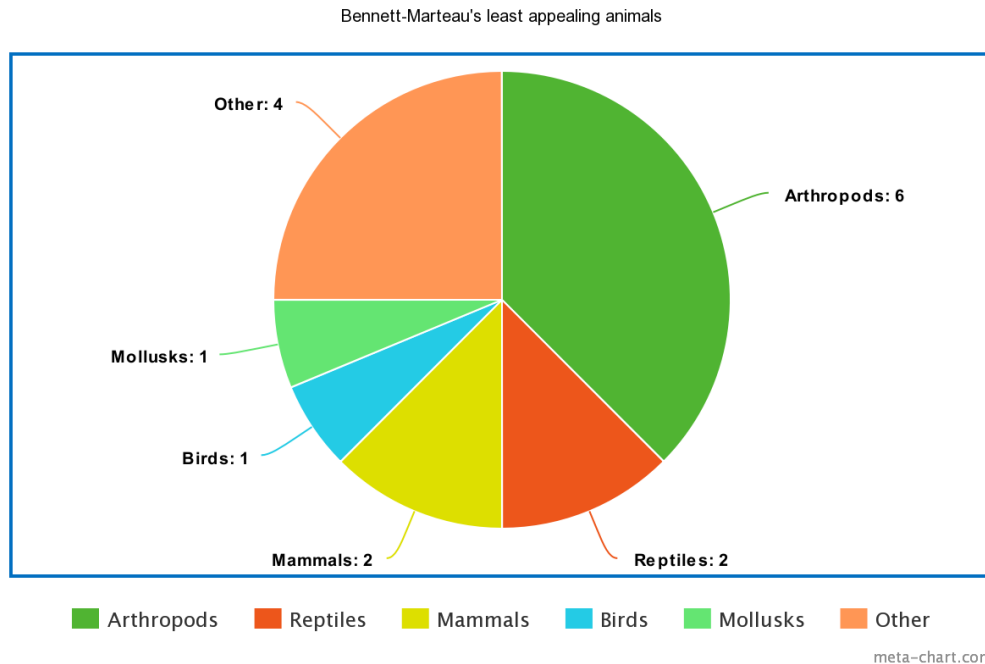


Figure 11: Bennett-Levy and Marteau's unappealing animals

In both sets of animals, the most common group was arthropods such as insects, arachnids, myriapods and crustaceans. This tendency is reflected in my findings, where arthropods were the most common main animal inspiration for the monsters.

Arthropods being less appealing for humans makes sense with previous research on human perception of animals such as Maran and Mäekivi's (2016) mapping of human attitudes towards animals, arthropods exhibit many characteristics that promote a negative perception of them; being invertebrate, having a size that strongly contrasts humans', emitting sounds and communication patterns inaccessible to humans, having an umwelt that doesn't overlap with humans, and not falling into the concept of *Kindchenschema*.

In both animal lists, another common group was that of animals that, while not being biologically arthropods, share a lot of characteristics with them in regards to their perception by humans, such as worms, mollusks and jellyfish. The jellyfish in particular sticks out for ranking quite high in both lists, being first place in Batt's survey and third in Bennett-Levy and Marteau's. It shares many characteristics with many monsters of my sample like the Blob, the Thing and Calvin like

being tentacled, faceless, mouthless and eating their prey by dissolving them. The jellyfish also checks off many of the characteristics of Maran and Mäekivi's mapping, with its appearance, behavior and lifestyle being strikingly different from humans.

An interesting thing that happened when comparing the surveys to my findings was the strong dissonance when it came to mammals, almost all of the animals that were among the 15 most unappealing ones were rodents, while none of the monsters in my sample were. One explanation for this could be that rodents such as rats and mice are heavily regarded as dirty and vectors for disease and this is what makes them unappealing to humans, a fact that reinforces this explanation is that the hamster, another rodent that shares many characteristics with rats and mice, ranks very low and widely domesticated as a pet. In contrast, the mammals used as design for the monsters; gorillas, elks and bears are not physically repulsive nor are they associated with disease, but have imposing bodies and are physically stronger than humans, which is likely the reason they were used as inspiration instead, as the threat they can pose is more immediate and violent.

Another group that ranked relatively high in the animal surveys were reptiles, with snakes and lizards ranking towards the upper half of the 15 most unappealing and only tortoises ranking toward the bottom of the whole list. This correlates with the monsters, with the Sputnik alien being strongly designed after snakes and Kothoga and Pulgasari being more nondescript lizard-esque reptiles, with none being modeled after turtles or tortoises.

Something that came up in my findings was a contrast between the main animal inspirations and the overall animal inspirations, I found that the most common main inspiration were arthropods, species that are strongly different both physically and taxonomically from humans, while the most common overall inspiration were mammals, the group to which humans belong to. This means that there's a contrast between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Midgley (1994) talks about breaking the barriers of humanity, where other species' natures are separated from ours, this can be related to this phenomenon of combining familiar, mammal traits that are closer to us, to the unfamiliar different arthropod traits. The "barriers" between mammal and arthropod are blurred and this creates a cognitive dissonance, after all things that fall outside our human barrier are

frightening and dark, according to Midgley. This would also explain why some of the monsters have vaguely humanoid body shapes, there's a little bit of humanity left in these monsters in order to obscure and blur the borders between the human and the monstrous.

Regarding eyes, the overwhelming majority of the animals in the list have two eyes, with only the jellyfish and earthworm having no eyes, and no animals having multiple eyes. This order of distribution, while similar to the selected monsters, doesn't have the same proportion, with eyeless creatures being way more common in the films.

Given the abundance of arthropods in the lists, animals with more than four limbs are the most common, with animals with no limbs being the second most common and animals with four limbs being the least common, this is in opposition to the monsters, where four limbs was the most common incidence, more than four being the second most common and no limbs being the least common. This also means that most of them are not quadruped or bipedal, the two most frequent body shapes for the monsters.

The aforementioned abundance of arthropods also means most of the animals are considerably smaller than animals, which is the complete opposite than the monsters, where most of them are considerably larger or about the same size, with smaller monsters being the least common.

The presence of multiple mouths, jaws or teeth rows seems to be a feature that is very favored by filmmakers, as it is very common for the monsters but very uncommon in the animal lists, as all of the animals listed have one mouth except for the jellyfish, while more than half of the monsters deviate from this, either having multiple mouths or jaws or none at all.

Taking my findings into account, we can observe that there's many characteristics from unappealing animals that get translated into the design of movie monsters. First and foremost, it is evident that using invertebrates as an inspiration is quite common, both for the overall monster appearance as well as for specific body parts. This is contrasted by the addition of mammalian features in most monsters, as it seems that combining invertebrate (unfamiliar) with vertebrate (familiar) features is a recurring pattern in the monsters.

This pattern of the familiar vs the unfamiliar is repeated throughout other aspects of the monster's appearance. In the case of number of limbs, we have an almost equal distribution between four limbs (familiar) and more than four limbs (unfamiliar), with monsters such as the Xenomorph or the Quiet Place monster having four limbs and a humanoid general body shape but are very monstrous otherwise, having invertebrate and reptilian appearances.

We also see that there's more monsters that have two eyes like most animals, although the majority of them also don't have any pupils, which reiterates the presence of the unfamiliar within the familiar. Monsters with less than two eyes are also very common, a feature that isn't seen in the animals as much but that when it is present it's found within the most unappealing ones like the jellyfish or the earthworm.

The findings regarding the number of mouths or jaws is pretty interesting, we see that most monsters completely deviate from the animal norm, and monsters with just one mouth are in the minority, and most of the monster designs either include more than one mouth or set of jaws, or none at all. This also seems to be a case of filmmakers picking a feature that is quite uncommon in the real world and normalizing it in their fictitious creations.

When it comes to the size of the monster, although most of the animals ranked as unappealing are quite smaller than humans, this is not the case within the list monsters, with half of them being considerably larger and none of them being considerably smaller. This can be explained with the fact that bigger creatures are not something most people are accustomed to see, and this size difference not only is unfamiliar but also immediately imposing and intimidating, something that monsters in film are usually required to be.

As the previous explanations show, there is some correlation between the physical traits of unappealing animals and zoomorphic monsters, while this parallel might not be one to one, it does show us a clear influence in which animal traits are used in the monsters' designs.

To wrap it up, it seems that the most common characteristics used in the design of zoomorphic monsters are as follows:

- Overall anatomical composition based on animals that are biologically distant from humans.
- Secondary anatomical features that include characteristics from animals that are biologically close to humans (such as mammals).
- The absence of eyes or pupils.
- A bipedal or quadruped body type.
- The presence of multiple mouths, jaws, or otherwise strange oral anatomy.
- A body size that is considerably larger than that of humans.

While there isn't a set model that can tell us how zoomorphic monsters are designed with precision and what specific animal characteristics are used, we can see that there are certain parameters and tendencies that they usually follow.

This by no means determines that zoomorphic creatures that follow these parameters will always be successful as film monsters, but it is a good indicator of what characteristics are usually more efficacious.

Overall, we can see that the recurring factor in the design of zoomorphic monsters is that of combining the familiar and the unfamiliar, as Midgley (1994) puts it – what falls within our barrier and what falls outside of it. Not necessarily within humanity but within the realm of animals we deem closer and more appealing to us, and the realm of the “deviant”, animals that are foreign to us both taxonomically and in our perception of them.

The most important and vital aspect to this is that of combining both realms, as there's almost no monsters that are made up of exclusively foreign and repulsive features, most of them show an amalgamation of both aspects.

4. Conclusion

In horror cinema, we've seen that animals have been a constant presence from its beginnings to the present day, time and time again we are presented with these chimeric, zoomorphic creatures that amalgamate different aspects from the animal realm in a frightening and unnerving presentation.

Throughout the study of film however, these creatures have seldom been researched and talked about from a biological or zoosemiotic standpoint, hence the purpose of this thesis. The main aim of which was to analyze different zoomorphic creatures in their relation to their real life counterparts and the perception of the latter by humans. The purpose of this was to find any underlying patterns or recurring motifs of what specific animal aspects and attributes are used in the design of zoomorphic monsters.

What was found was that there is a correlation between animals humans deem as unappealing and film monsters, with morphological and anatomical features of the former being consistently used as inspiration for the latter. Combining both the foreign nature of invertebrates and other taxonomically distant animals with the familiarity and closeness of mammals and humans specifically, through the mechanism of combining their body shapes, parts and sizes.

However, there isn't a set way to categorize the precise way in which these characteristics are combined, as this depends more on the artistic input of the filmmakers and designers. Rather, there are tendencies that are usually followed, and these are dictated not solely on biology and human-animal relations, but are also receptive to conventions and trends within filmmaking, like any other artform.

Humans seem to be drawn to this chimeric fusion of animals when it comes to fearsome zoomorphes, as it is repeated throughout the sample list of monsters.

As film becomes more and more accessible, it is necessary to find new ways of improving and pushing the boundaries of the art form. Monsters are an intrinsic part of the horror genre and are not going anywhere any time soon, this is why I believe it is important to establish the details and

processes behind the design and creation of them. Knowing how they're usually made can help both filmmakers in their efforts to make more effective monsters, or even how to create monsters that break from the mold. It can also help audiences to self-reflect and to evaluate how their fear and aversion of monsters impacts how they perceive real animals they might interact with in their everyday lives.

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18/01/2022

Magistritöö kokkuvõte

LOOMAHIRMU MÕJU ÕUDUSES: ZOOMORFSETE OLENDITE SEMIOOTILINE ANALÜÜS FILMIKUNSTIS

Selle magistritöö eesmärk on analüüsida zoomorfseid olendeid õudusfilmides vaatega, kuidas inimeste ettekujutus loomadest mõjutab nende disaini.

Töö konkreetsed eesmärgid on välja selgitada, kas meie poolt hirmutavateks peetavate loomade füüsilise välimuse ja filmikoletiste kujunduse vahel on seos; teha kindlaks, milliseid konkreetseid loomade omadusi nimetatud kujunduses kõige sagedamini kasutatakse; ja näha, kas saab luua mustri, kuidas loomade omadusi koletiste jaoks inspiratsiooniallikana kasutatakse.

Magistritöö valimiks oli kuusteist filmikoletist, kelle füüsiline välimus oli nii hõre- kui ka tihekirjelduse abil põhjalikult kirjeldatud, misjärel tehti üldistused 7 aspekti kohta: kehakuju, suurus, jäsemed, suud, silmad, üldine loomade inspiratsioon ja peamine loomade inspiratsioon.

Analüüsi jaoks võrreldi koletiste füüsilist välimust kahe viieteistkümnest loomast koosneva komplektiga. Neid loomi peeti varasemas teaduskirjanduses eemaletõukavateks. Antud töös tehti kindlaks loomade ja koletiste vaheline korrelatsioon ning tehti selgeks koletiste disainimise mustrid.

Uuringutulemused viitavad sellele, et kuigi korrelatsioon ebameeldivate loomade ja zoomorfsete koletiste vahel ei ole otsene, on teatud loomade tunnused, mida kasutatakse olendite disainimisel teatud viisil, järjepidevad.