VISUALIZING AND IDENTIFYING THE OTHERED MONSTERS WITHIN THE SELF: PHANTASMAGORIA

by
İLAYDA GÜNEYSU

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Sabancı University
June 2025

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Approved by:

Asst. Prof. YOONG WAH ALEX WONG .....
(Thesis Supervisor)

Prof. AHU ANTMEN .....

Asst. Prof. ECE ARIHAN .....

Date of Approval: June 24, 2025

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ABSTRACT

VISUALIZING AND IDENTIFYING THE OTHERED MONSTERS WITHIN THE SELF: PHANTASMAGORIA

İLAYDA GÜNEYSU

Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design, M.A. Thesis, June 2025

Thesis Supervisor: Asst. Prof. YOONG WAH ALEX WONG

Keywords: Monsters, monster design, animation, the self, the other

This thesis argues that the emergence of monstrosity is the blurred boundary between self and other and animation is uniquely capable of expressing it. Drawing on theories of the uncanny, abjection, the shadow self, and projection, it explores how animated transformations visualize both internal psychological conflict and external threats. This thesis explores the emergence and function of monsters through the conceptual lens of the self and the other, emphasizing the role of projection from the self onto the other, with the objective of informing and enhancing monster design in visual media. Furthermore, it highlights how animation's unique capabilities can serve as a medium for integrating these internal aspects rather than merely rejecting them. By integrating insights from psychology, philosophy, and evolutionary theory, the study emphasizes that effective monster design requires acknowledging the other within the self. The history of visual representations of monstrosity within paintings and film is also analyzed to gain insights into the portrayal and perception of otherness. These insights are then applied to an original animated motion graphics film, Phantasmagoria (2025), where the established theoretical principles inform the design of monstrous characters.

ÖZET

BENLİĞİN İÇİNDEKİ ÖTEKİLEŞTİRİLMİŞ CANAVARLARI GÖRSELLEŞTİRMEK VE TANIMLAMAK: PHANTASMAGORIA

İLAYDA GÜNEYSU

Görsel Sanatlar ve Görsel İletişim Tasarımı,Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Haziran 2025

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi YOONG WAH ALEX WONG

Anahtar Kelimeler: Canavarlar, canavar tasarımı, animasyon, benlik, öteki

Bu tez, canavarlığın ortaya çıkışının benlik ile öteki arasındaki bulanık sınırdan kaynaklandığını ve animasyonun bunu ifade etmede benzersiz bir yeteneğe sahip olduğunu savunur. Tekinsizlik, iğrenme, gölge benlik ve yansıtma gibi kuramlardan yararlanarak, animasyon yoluyla gerçekleşen dönüşümlerin hem içsel psikolojik çatışmaları hem de dışsal tehditleri nasıl görselleştirdiğini inceler. Tez, canavarların ortaya çıkışı ve işlevini benlik ve öteki kavramları çerçevesinde ele alır; benlikten ötekine yapılan yansıtmanın rolünü vurgulayarak görsel medyada canavar tasarımını bilgilendirmeyi ve geliştirmeyi amaçlar. Ayrıca animasyonun bu içsel unsurları yalnızca bastırmak ya da reddetmek yerine, onları bütünleştirme aracı olarak kullanılabileceğine dikkat çeker. Psikoloji, felsefe ve evrim teorisinden elde edilen bilgilerle desteklenen bu çalışma, etkili bir canavar tasarımının, benlik içindeki ötekinin farkına varılmasını gerektirdiğini vurgular. Resim sanatı ve sinema tarihinde canavarlığın görsel temsilleri incelenerek ötekiliğin nasıl tasvir edildiği ve algılandığı üzerine kavrayışlar geliştirilir. Bu kavrayışlar, Phantasmagoria (2025) adlı özgün bir animasyon filmine uygulanır; burada ortaya konan kuramsal ilkeler, canavar karakterlerin tasarımını yönlendirir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Asst. Prof. Yoong Wah Alex Wong, whose guidance, insight, and steady encouragement sustained me through every phase of this research. His thoughtful critiques and unwavering support were instrumental in shaping this work. I would also like to thank my jury members, Prof. Ahu Antmen and Asst. Prof. Ece Arıhan for their time and effort in attending my thesis defense and provide me meticulous feedbacks.

I also would like to thank my family and my friends, for their unwavering belief in me. Your love has been my foundation, your belief has been my courage and I can never overestimate your support.

To everyone who supported me

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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to investigate the reason behind the emergence of monsters in culture, within the framework of the self and the other, for the objective of aiding in monster design. To this end, an interdisciplinary approach, combining evolutionary theory, philosophy, and psychology is employed.

The overlap of the othered and the self is emphasized in the investigation into the concept of monsters in horror, in order to highlight an often overlooked area on the subject. Afterward, the principles established from this investigation of monster manifestation will serve as a foundation for an applied demonstration within the context of a motion graphics animated film made for this thesis, "Phantasmagoria" (2025). Finally, the effectiveness of these principles in the design of animated monsters will be evaluated.

1.1 The Definition of A Monster

The concept of the monster has surfaced across nearly every culture over a large portion of history. Representing the incomprehensible malevolent entity that evokes fear or prompts avoidance, the monster takes on many forms yet can be defined with a single name. But what exactly is a monster? And why does it exist?

The word 'monster' originates from the Latin word monstrum, and relates to the verbs monstrare meaning reveal, and monere meaning warn (Beal 2022). In contemporary usage the word encapsulates a broad array of senses: "daunting" in size, "wicked" in nature, or simply "disturbing" in form. Regardless of the emphasized trait, the usage is connected in that what is monstrous overwhelms the senses to the point of non-comprehension. This inability to grasp lays the groundwork for what a monster is. The definition is loose enough to envelop different kinds of situations, yet they're all connected by the feeling of distress each inflicts. According to

Weinstock, monsters are "things that should not be," forcing us to reconsider our comprehension of things we lack knowledge of (Weinstock 2020). The monstrous begins with this liminality, a being that ought not to be. Lack of a rigid definition is in line with the discussions surrounding monsters, with them being regarded as entities that cannot be named or contained (in a definition).

Before the material monster, the existence of the monstrous may have evolutionary roots in our psyche. Any being banks on survival, and homo sapiens are no exception. We are hardwired to survive, and the consciousness thus developed oft is used to avoid danger; therefore, human attention is most concerned with the feeling of danger (Clasen 2012). Our intrinsic tendency to identify and to study dangerous agents, as an evolutionary tactic aimed at improving our ability to respond to later threats, may have contributed to the development of danger perception in different situations. This fear does not necessarily have grounds in reality; just the notion of unfamiliarity in an otherwise familiar environment can cause such repulsive feelings. Uncanny valley, as defined by Masahiro Mori, relates to this discussion as it deals with that which looks human enough; with something unidentifiable being wrong with them (Mori 1970). The repulsion response makes sense in such an unfamiliar situation, as we cannot assess whether this foreign entity is a danger or not. A situation that seems familiar enough with the twist of uneasiness might signal an unknown condition of disease or danger, lingering beneath the obvious. As our biology is hardwired to defend against foreign instances that may signal potential danger, such a situation often evokes feelings of repulsion as a protective mechanism. This visceral response, rooted in avoidance and threat detection, echoes the senses that have been associated towards monsters above. When such parallels exist, interpreting the fantastical narratives surrounding monsters as expressions of this very feeling becomes utmost fitting. Of course, we must first delve into how this repulsion connects with the human psyche.

Noël Carroll offers one such explanation on horror and monsters. For him, nightmares and monsters have been intertwined since their conception (Carroll 1981). The nightmare carries many of the qualities already discussed in relation to the monstrous above. It is a corruption into the absurd of the natural and the safe, the dream. It is an overwhelming sense that oft forces one out the comfort of sleep. It is simply that ought not to be, as far as the unconscious is concerned. While the dream is canonically considered disconnected from reality, it still holds a certain inner balance that allows it to be experienced in its entirety, until the natural end of sleep. Nightmare, however, overwhelms, by definition, and forces an early end. In art-horror, monsters are novel disruptions to our sense of reality, which creates this nightmarish effect. This is because nightmares are constructed from primal fears,

looping back to the theories that talk of the innate drive for survival. When an outside agent is liminal, survivability is also uncertain. This creates the need for caution and awakens an intrigue to study, to make clear sense of the in-between. Such drive to understand, to define, to prepare for, complicates the response towards danger. It is no longer just an avoidance, but also an interest. To protect oneself one must avoid, but to avoid successfully one must understand, and to understand one must seek. Noël Carroll underlines this two-fold, almost dilemma-like reaction. He writes that his fantastic representation of horror can be seen as a metaphorical approach to the conflicting fear and compulsion towards nightmares (Carroll 1981). In his work the compulsion and the fear are elevated to harmony in the fantastic. The conscious work to reach said harmony can be exemplified in the conception of a given monster.

Carroll outlines several methods for monster creation: fusion, fission, and magnification. With fusion, two or more unrelated categories are mixed together, violating the predetermined function and limits of the affected categories, into the creation of something beyond. The end result is very much a thing that ought not to be, as the ingredients were far from each other in pre-existing conception.

Fission, on the other hand, deals with changelings such as werewolves, that change states from one category to another, or doppelgangers, which are created by doubling and creating incongruent, multi-identities. Concepts by way of fission work on the liminality of the monstrous: the uncertainty, the inability to belong to one category or the other creates the tension. A werewolf is neither were (man) nor wolf. Regarding it as either would be a mistake as much as regarding it as both would be one. Similarly, a doppelganger is almost but not quite what it appears to be. Again, regarding it only as what it appears as, or not what it appears to be, is a mistake in perception and understanding.

Magnification consists of playing with the concept of size, exaggerating it in places that could also play on specific phobias, such as giant insects. This harks back to the use of monster as daunting in size. Again, the uncertainty creeps in, for expected size is a factor in on how we identify concepts. What comes across as exceptionally larger, or even smaller, calls to question its identity. A certain sense of almost but not quite is there: This thing is an insect, except that insects are not this size. Should it still count as an insect? Would treating it as one endanger my survival? If not an insect, what is it? Thus the created monstrous brings out the primal uneasiness.

All three methods Carroll outlined work to break the categorical boundaries. He defines this specific abject horror as “art-horror” and distinguishes being simply afraid

from horror that is meant to evoke specific emotions towards the horror monsters (Carroll 1987). Art-horror is often woven with Gothic elements, appealing to our sense of intrigue and the unknown. This is the distinction between fear and intriguing nightmarish curiosity. Returning to the point of our concern with the human biological tendency towards learning about situations that might pose a threat, such a fascination with art-horror makes total sense. The pull between avoidance and seeking towards the unknown and the uncertain finds a home in art-horror. Curiosity to discover, even though the expected end is one that poses a certain danger.

Conclusions drawn above, both in evolutionary biology and fictitious horror, lead to the same understanding that monsters are created from the principle of liminality and boundary-breaking. The psychological aspects that underlie the fascination with horror are analyzed by Julia Kristeva as well, employing Mary Douglas' sense of purity versus impurity (Douglas 2003). For Douglas, purity is categorical. It is the capacity to be defined neatly in a single category that allows a thing to be pure. Naturally, impurity comes from uncertainty and liminality. A thing cannot be pure if we cannot accurately place it in a single category. If, for the observer, an entity is in-between several categories, names, or definitions; then it is impure. All the aspects of the monstrous discussed above thus make monsters impure within Douglas' analysis.

Kristeva, in her influential essay Powers of Horror, pulls from psychoanalysis to explain the repulsive reaction towards the liminal (Kristeva 1982). She explains that this repulsion we feel, abjection, is a defense mechanism for protecting the sanctity of the self. The self is pure and uniform, and the intrinsic need to protect the uniformity of the "pure self" causes aversion to the perceived threat, the impure. As Kristeva writes within Douglas' analysis, the purity of the self is that it fits neatly within boundaries. The impure threatens this simply by existing, because its very existence breaks boundaries. As purity has been defined through respecting-boundaries, any and all disregard for boundaries is a threat to purity. The other, the impure, is rejected and discriminated against. Commenting on another common thread with art-horror, Kristeva ties the disgust towards bodily fluids with the drive to remain pure. What is expelled from the body is done so in an attempt to cleanse the soul by expelling the impure, other, and to return to the pure state, therefore maintaining the identity. The fluids expelled, be it blood, puke, spit, are then read as having been not necessary or even the drops of impurity within the pure. If one can be oneself still after expelling thus, then what was expelled did not hold importance to the categorical purity. The pure is, in some way, that without any extra.

However, the sanctity of identity is challenged when the purity distinction is blurred.

A corpse, for example, used to be a living human being. Only it has changed state in a disturbing manner. What once was is no longer that. To accept this liminal identity and the state change capacity would be to acknowledge the self being subject to change. This possibility of the perceived pure self being tainted by impurity causes distress which causes the repulsive reaction. Thus, when liminality of object states occurs, the abject is a response to the breaking of boundaries.

The common consensus among scholars on what constitutes a monster revolves around the concept of category violation. Therefore, it can be inferred that the emergence of monsters is either motivated by the desire to preserve the pure sanctity of the self (by rejecting what it is not) or to name and avoid the unknown (by naming it the other). From this, it follows that the unknown and the unfamiliar are the major components of effective monsters. In fact, following a bit of Freud, that which is uncanny (unheimlich) is not simply brand new and unknown but rather a mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The impulse to accept what comes across as familiar is always there, because the consciousness would like to identify quickly to ease itself. However, the uncanny has details to it that make such acceptance impossible (Freud 2018). The uncanny creates unease simply because it looks to be familiar but is not. This liminality is the key component of the strong response. The birthplace of this disruption is the liminality of the categories. To distinguish between the self and the other, we must categorize them. We must be able to decide which any given entity fits. And when something does not fit a single category neatly, the in-betweenness bestows it a foreign status.

While the literature pretty much agrees on the basis of monster creation, the components of the self within the other remain underexplored and not generally accepted. Kristeva's perspective touches a bit on this with the innate desire to cleanse oneself and rid oneself of the other, but her focus is more on the contamination of the pure rather than the intricate relationship between the self and the other. Kearney contributes to the discourse on both by suggesting that monsters originate from our unconscious repulsion about ourselves (Kearney 2005). What we find disturbing in the self, we externalize as the other. Thus keeping our purity. Essentially, the attributes we harbor yet loathe are not acknowledged and instead projected onto the other, giving rise to scapegoats and monsters. This aspect does not have to stray far from category-violation. Since we can carry attributes of the other within ourselves, this rigid categorization can damage our sense of identity. To deflect these undesired traits, they are ascribed to the other, forming the "monsters", thus making the self essential in the formation of monsters.

In the field of psychology, the abjection effect can be observed in projective identification. Conceptualized in the Kleinian view, projective identification consists of

the idea of transferring one's mental state to another (Spillius et al. 2011). The unwanted negative feelings once observed in another therefore may be severed from the conceptualized self. With the transference of the negative attributes from the self to the other complete, one can acquire the desired mental state and alleviate themselves of the burden of conflict. This echoes very clearly the Jungian analysis of the "shadow" (Jung 1972). Jung defines a shadow within the psyche, constructed from the unwanted observations of the self. He asserts that this shadow-self exists within all of us because of the negative feelings we harbor towards ourselves. As defined, the shadow is the totality of the attributes a person finds unfitting with their idealized version of their self. It is the entirety of the impurities of the soul, cast off as that which would make them pure.

Jung also interjects that there is a reason why men require the concepts of demons and gods. The ideas of these collective unconscious anchors that sort feelings into a stable framework and the fantastical stories regarding monsters fit said narrative. This shadow-side may also be applicable to the notion of the otherized carrying the undesirable qualities of the self as a way of projective identification. He writes that our fears projected onto others are our own traits that we unconsciously are aware of but deny belonging to the self. The terms relating to "demonizing" and "monsters" are also related to these amalgamations of traits that are perceived to be deviant, it is not unheard of to call other humans monsters to emphasize their otherness (Jung 1972). By appealing to the collective unconscious, the other is carried out of the boundaries of humanity and becomes open to exaggeration and delusion. This gives opportunity for the other to become either a god (or a devil), or a monster. This way of thinking causes difficulty in functioning in social situations, and creates a maladaptive defense mechanism. These defense mechanisms can manifest as strategies that may provide temporary relief from stress but ultimately impair emotional well-being and healthy interpersonal engagement. (Ashipala and Albanus 2024). Associating certain attributes only with the other, even though it is clear that such attributes exist within the self, works to make the other even harder to face. As such, the social attitudes toward the other tend to be of ignoring as much as possible.

This works as a defense mechanism because its purpose is to help the individual avoid violating the boundaries they set up for themselves. However, this mechanism also shows that this attitude of disgust hinges on the fragility of one's identity. If one is confident in their identity, with all its unwanted attributes, then the need to exorcise to the other disappears. Previous literature has also displayed that emotional regulation predicts this irrational blame-game. Our analysis is congruent with this conclusion. The less a person is able to contain their emotions, the more

they retort to projective identification (Kaufmann, Markus, and Baumann 2022).

Smith talks about how this extreme otherization can result in dehumanizing others to the point of assigning them unnatural powers (Smith 2021). If the other is meant to be as far away as the self as possible, it of course follows that other inhuman characteristics be included in its conceptualization. He states that the verbal act of calling one a "demon" or a "monster" is not necessary, for it can be felt in the acts towards them. Furthering this, likening one to a monster would also serve to place them in an uncanny position that has no place in nature. This furthers the understanding of the function of projective-identification. When the self is concerned about the contamination by the impure, projective-identification helps them transfer the unwanted to the other. By portraying the other out to be a dehumanized monstrous supernatural being, the self justifies and legitimizes the repulsion and fear towards the perceived tainted other, and towards the attributes that were cast off to have created the monster in the first place.

Kearney elaborates on the oneself-as-another concept to overcome this problem of transferring one's own taintedness to another. We must acknowledge ourselves-as-others in order to cope with the recoil that we might have towards our personal compunction for the attributes we share with the other. Here, we must separate the other to fit our analysis. One must also be able to see the differences between the different kinds of others (Kearney 2005). It is not accurate to compile all of the instances of different into one category. As the other is born from any attitude disliked by the self, different selves have different others. Combining all the others into one would be as useful as treating every single person as a united self. This might also be one of the factors why monsters symbolize in-betweenness in so many different areas, because the self regards everything different from itself to be monstrous. De-alienation and demystification are only possible via recognizing that change exists in the self already. I believe that these projected fears reflect our fear of falling out of the pure category we designated for ourselves. The rejection of the identity's fluidity creates this distorted image of the rigid self and gives birth to the ideas of the intrinsic good and the unwanted other. Therefore, the self should recognize its capacity for change in order to create a strong identity. This would in turn reduce the effectiveness of the other as its threat to the order of categories lessen if it is no longer the category breaking.

Overall, even though theories sprout from various places, the scholars tend to agree on these key points. Firstly, the true root of monsters come from our anxieties and fears. The cause of these anxieties come from our covert biological instincts to be concerned with the foreign and the threatening. Monsters, on both biological and psychological levels, aid instinctive threat detection and categorization of the

unclassifiable by letting us lump all of the unperceived things into the category of "monster". This categorization aligns with the innate psychological desire for uniformity and the rejection of containment within the self. Therefore, the emergence of monsters has to do with the category breaking aspect or the need to create a new category for things that no longer fit in existing and accepted ones.

The gap in literature shows itself when investigating the connection of the othered and the self. I believe that these projected fears reflect our fear of falling out of the category we designated to ourselves. The more these categories stay rigid, the less opportunity for change there is. This can cause individuals lacking a stable identity to expel the other from established categories, employing the shadow-self to deflect their own undesired qualities. In doing so, they might contribute to the creation of monsters. So, if monsters are born out of doubts about the self and uncertainty towards the other, the essential problem becomes the self's inward anxieties about contamination.

Therefore, to create effective monsters, we should employ both the category violation effect and take into account the projection of the self to the other. With all of these in mind, we can create the groundwork for what makes an effective monster, and extrapolate from the past discourse on monsters in order to design our own monstrous others.

1.2 The Monsters in Visual Arts

1.2.1 History of Monster Depictions

Cultures depict feared monsters to establish a clear enemy, to solidly create something that is to be destroyed (Cohen 2007). With the psychological and evolutionary utilities in mind, it is understandable that many cultures have created their own monsters. Humanity is curious and seeks explanations, and when something falls into the realm of the unknown, it falls to the imagination to fill the gap. For example, in ancient Greek and Roman cultures, the unknown and mysterious aspects of nature were often depicted as chaotic and uncontrollable forces (Felton 2012). These representations embodied the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable elements of nature.

David Wengrow argues that monsters, or composites as he calls them, are rarer than they might seem in ancient times (Wengrow 2013). He discusses the low prevalence of depictions of hybrids in archaeological records. His explanation delves into

talking about the cognitive functions of the composites. He points out that experimental studies show that our brains are very good at recognizing whole animal forms from just a few visual cues. Even if pictures of animals are jumbled or incomplete, they can still activate the brain's pathways for recognizing and differentiating living beings. Images that mix elements from different species, known as "compressive compositions," highlight our mind's ability to fill in the gaps and create whole forms from parts.

Throughout history, then, the forms and the meanings of human monstrosity have evolved from hybrid animals towards a more societal divide. In the Middle Ages, monstrous beings were seen as moral warnings or signs from God. However, by the early sixteenth century, during a time of religious turmoil, monsters came to symbolize the evil within society. Deformities were directly associated with immorality. Disability is often reflected in society as a major "othering" factor, especially physical deformities. The extreme otherization and stigmatization of disabled people further their place in society as that ought not be. The more of a freak the other is, the more secure the self becomes. When the connection between the self and the other is so loose, the body can remain pure.

Since there was a belief of inherent good or evil, anyone was deemed one or the other solely based on looks. The freaks represented the boundary-breaking categorical anomalies that caused the label. To further separate the otherized from the people, freak shows were designed to reinforce a rigid boundary between the so-called 'normal' viewer and the displayed 'abnormal' body, turning difference into spectacle and distancing the audience from the otherized subject. Those who did not fit within the categories were literally excluded from the rest of society. They were not to be included with the rest of the public and may only be interacted with as entertainment for the pure.

Figure 1.1 A freak show advertisement. (Délano, 1941).



The marketing strategies employed for these shows relied heavily on sensationalism, utilizing provocative imagery to captivate potential audiences. The banner designs were deliberately vibrant and visually arresting, intended to draw immediate attention. However, even such a visual spectacle was considered insufficient on its own. Large, bold lettering accompanied the imagery, reinforcing the expectations imposed upon viewers regarding what they were to witness (Figure 1.1). As a result, the audience's perception was carefully curated in advance, priming them to experience the "freaks" through a lens of awe, fear, or fascination. Photographs of the performers were often considered too explicit or confronting and were therefore replaced with exaggerated illustrations that amplified their perceived otherness. This construction of difference extended beyond the corporeal reality of the performers; it was embedded in the cultural representations and narratives that surrounded them, reinforcing the boundary between the normative self and the socially constructed "other."

Across the ages, monsters have fulfilled different roles and were therefore represented differently to fill out their intended purpose. They symbolized the other, the immoral, the unknown, the tragic, the one that should be avoided; basically, everything that could not fit neatly in a simple category.

1.2.2 Monsters in Paintings

As visual culture evolved, so too did the depiction of the monstrous. In painting, the monstrous figure gained specificity and symbolic depth. Unlike methods of othering in real life, where the emphasis of the othered characteristics required the viewer to exaggerate their perspectives of categories, paintings allowed artists to distort, hybridize, and fragment the body in ways that challenged fixed boundaries. The visual medium allowed a more nuanced exploration of monstrosity, not merely as the other's inability to be contained within categories, but as an expression of internal feelings of category breach.

With this in mind, paintings offer a critical lens for understanding how monstrosity can emerge from within. While the body remains central, it becomes a site where moral anxiety, fear of transformation, and instability of identity are projected. This shift from external spectacle to internal fragmentation is especially apparent in the use of hybrid forms, distorted anatomies, and surreal compositions that blur the line between self and the other.

This section explores how painters have historically approached the monstrous, revealing how it operates not only as something to cause otherness but also as a psychological projection. The section also delves into how these visual depictions are in line with the theoretical frameworks established in the introduction. These depictions lay the groundwork for understanding monstrosity as a mirror of the self; the idea that informs my animated film Phantasmagoria. In the film, the protagonist's fractured identity manifests through morphing monstrous forms, echoing how painters externalized the inner other. Before exploring how animation renders these ideas, it is necessary to reflect on how painters externalized their otherness through the monstrous figure.

1.2.2.1 The heavenly monstrosities of Bosch

Berg claims that the goal of monstrous depiction as something terrible is the same for both the modern and the medieval individual (Berg 2015). It is meant to serve as both an escapist thrill and a captivating experience. More importantly, it allows one to distance the self from the other by projecting specific inhuman or monstrous traits onto them. If the other displays not only the unwanted human attributes but also physical differences not to be found on any human, then it is easier for the conscious mind to separate itself from what it sees.

Hieronymus Bosch's paintings come to mind when discussing the fantastical mon-

strosity in medieval art. Bosch's imagery is intertwined with the religious anxieties of sin. His grandiose depictions are filled with the unknown and uncertain.

Figure 1.2 Bosch, H. (circa 1490-1510). The Garden of Earthly Delights [Triptych painting]. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.



The Garden of Earthly Delights helps us peak into Bosch's mind (Figure 1.2). In paradise, unexpected indications of chaos emerge. Strange creatures engage in disputes in various corners of the scene. This occurrence reflects Bosch's surreal realm, where both beauty and ugliness exist within the animal realm, serving as a cautionary message about humanity's potential for evil. (Xiong 2023). This coincides with Berg's ideas, as the more "monstrous" this hell is, the more different it is to our living conditions, the more far away and distant it is (Berg 2015).

The fantastical is a gateway to showcase the surrealist nature of heaven and hell, an excuse to depict the ugly debauchery (Carnariu 2022). By masterfully applying appealing visual techniques, the monstrosity is made acceptable by presenting it as aesthetically pleasing. Aesthetic ugliness, prevalent in medieval imagination and viewed as discord and a lack of proportion, exposes the monstrous aspect of the human condition. The mind that cast off the other to the monstrous in effort to distance itself from it, must then bring it closer to be able to stomach it.

In the central panel, the one that communicates temptation, the animalistic is connected within the monstrosity. Bosch creates these fantastical animal creatures to show a juxtaposition of the sinful acts and the whimsical way it is portrayed. In

his sketch, Two Monsters, he also displays that he views these hybridizations as monsters (Fig 1.3.).

Figure 1.3 Two Monsters (Bosch, c. 1505)



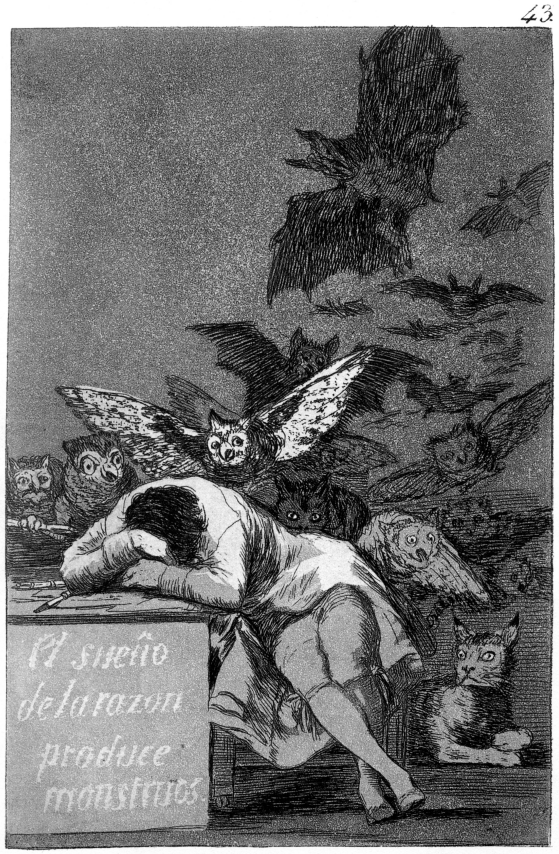
Using hybrid creatures and blending elements from nature to create unique monsters was a common method to symbolize evil. This approach, criticized in Horace's Ars Poetica, became a popular method for depicting and interpreting grotesque figures as representations of evil (Büttner 2023). Like Carnariu mentions, this is depiction of technically-skilled-ugly. Bosch's art is particularly notable for its "transgressive" nature, which was unusual for its time (Carnariu 2022). His fantastical images go beyond typical references and reveal bursts of creative ingenuity from the unconscious. Bosch's method of monster creation is in line with the understanding of monstrosity in history and how it is utilized to create divides between categories and represent the category breaking as this ugly and unacceptable, sinful act.

1.2.2.2 The unconscious monster of Goya

While Bosch's work is a representation of religious anxieties, Goya's work is a delayering of the self. Bosch wields the monstrous as a means to showcase the external

anxieties while Goya pours the monstrous on the canvas to reflect the internal.

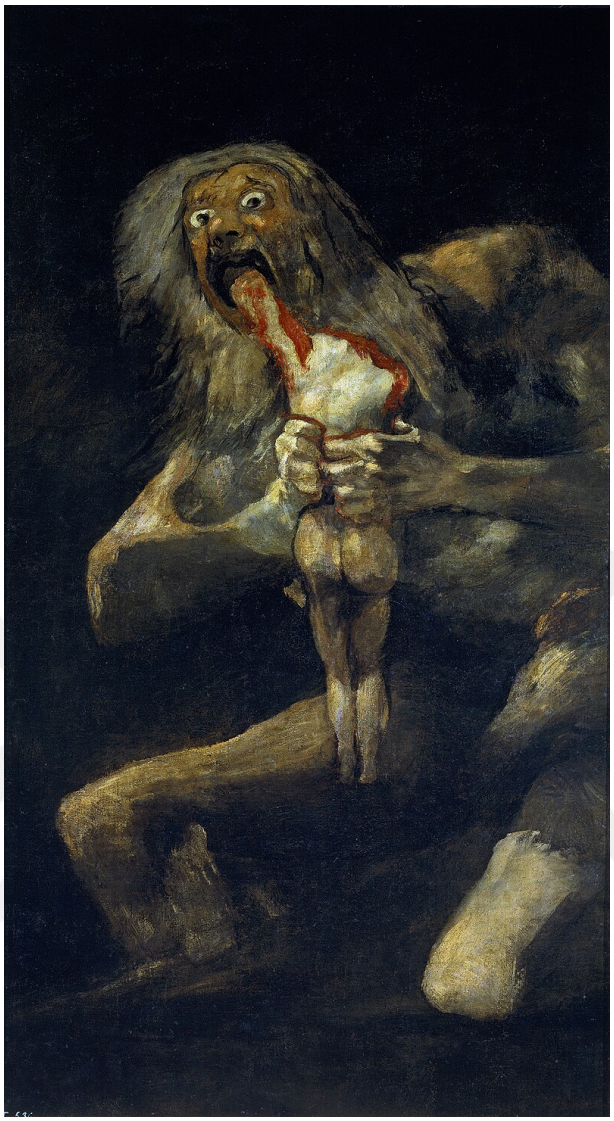
Figure 1.4 Capricho-43, (Goya, 1799).



Goya's fascination with the monstrous is different from those who take interest due to the scientific curiosities (Ilie 1984). His work is dominated by the irrational. In his examination of Capricho 43, Ilie highlights Goya's interest in the origin of the monsters 1.4. He infers from the title of the piece that the origin of the monsters is "dreams" (Ilie 1984). In the painting all different animals are seen crowding around, or bursting out of, a sleeping figure.

What lures Goya, in contrast, is neither observing the natural world nor rationalizing it; instead, he turns toward the strange, the irrational, and the possibilities that emerge when reason lets go. His work explores what might be born in the absence of reason. There's a deep ambiguity here: the word sueño means both "sleep" and "dream," and that double meaning unsettles any clear interpretation. Whether reason is sleeping or dreaming, the monstrous forms that arise remain the same. These non-rational creations still feel real—just not in the way deists or traditional way of defining reality.

Figure 1.5 Saturn Devouring His Son (Goya, c. 1819–1823)



In his work, Saturn Devouring His Son, Goya reveals a fixation on brutal bestiality (c. 1819–1823). This beastly approach to visceral violence ultimately becomes the monstrous essence (Carnariu 2022). He reflects the inner world in a beastly manner. The bestial and vileness of the act, combined with the direct eye contact with the viewer and seeming no remorse makes the viewer feel its monstrosity. Saturn, a recurring figure in Goya's art, symbolizes human fear, whether overtly or subtly depicted. Essentially, the mythical or animalistic representation persists as the consuming monster (Carnariu 2022).

1.2.2.3 Redon's formless monstrosities

Odilon Redon's monster-making is rooted in a deeply personal and historically contingent sense of otherness, shaped by early-life trauma and anxiety. As Rosina Neginsky notes, Redon's childhood exile which is being sent away from his family due to his epilepsy has inflicted a lasting psychological wound that translated into a lifelong engagement with themes of isolation and rejection (Neginsky 2020). These internalized experiences manifest in his noirs as monster-like figures and symbolic distortions of form, not merely as representations of fear, but as projections of the artist's internal anxieties. Redon's monsters are one of the more direct examples of how monsters may emerge from the otherized self.

Figure 1.6 The Crying Spider, by Odilon Redon, 1881. Charcoal, 49.5 × 37.5 cm. Private collection, The Netherlands.

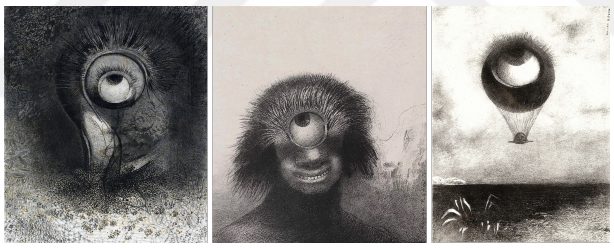


In The Crying Spider (Fig.1.6), for example, the fusion of a humanoid head with a spider's body disturbs biological categories and spatial expectations. Its scale is ambiguous; is the creature human-sized or insect-sized? This deliberate uncertainty resists easy classification, breaking the viewer's familiar frameworks of size. Neginsky reads this insectoid hybridity through Michelet's symbolism, suggesting that the spider-body may be a stand-in for the crowd or society (Neginsky 2020) (Michelet 1883). In this reading, the human head becomes a parasite clinging to an

unknowable, collective body—yet it is unclear which part is monstrous, and which part is host. The creature's mournful expression only deepens the distress of failure to reconcile its composite identity. The monster is a site of unresolved integration, neither fully one nor the other.

Martha Lucy, on the other hand further expands on Redon's monsters as visual metaphors for the instability introduced by Darwinian evolution and focuses on the monstrosity via formlessness (Lucy 2009). The evolutionary process is not linear but a flux, one that unsettles the coherence of the human form and hints at its fragility. These images resonate with Kristeva's concept of abjection: the horror not of the wholly alien, but of what was once familiar turned strange, of boundaries violated and categories undone. In this sense, Redon's monsters reflect both evolutionary and psychological anxieties, their in-between-ness acting as both a biological and symbolic warning signal.

Figure 1.7 There was perhaps a first vision attempted in the flower, plate 2 of 8 from "Les Origines" 1883. Odilon Redon French, 1840-1916. The Misshapen Polyp Floated on the Shores, a Sort of Smiling and Hideous Cyclops, plate 3 of 8 from 'Les Origines'. Odilon Redon; French, 1840-1916. Eye-Balloon, by Odilon Redon, 1878. Charcoal, 42.2 × 33.2 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Redon's visual language thrives on what Lucy calls a "semiotics of evolutionary lack," which deals with ambiguity and a lack of structure. His motifs drift across works, shifting meaning with each new context. An eye becomes a flower, then the eye of a cyclops, then a balloon rising through the air (Fig.1.7.). These constant transformations prevent any single, stable reading, mirroring the instability of identity itself. Redon's monsters are not harshly grotesque but soft and fluid; embodiments of the psychic and evolutionary uncertainties. Through them, he imagines monstrosity not as a fixed category but a flow between forms, again, rejecting categories.

1.2.2.4 Beksinski and the building from horror

Figure 1.8 Zdzislaw Beksinski, Untitled, 1973.



Zdzislaw Beksinski's monsters are not creatures of fangs and claws, but rather specters of the self—deeply psychological entities rendered with grotesque tenderness. His figures, faceless, flayed, and often fused into their environments, embody what Jung might call the Shadow: the repressed and unspeakable aspects of the psyche, brought forth through trauma, grief, and existential despair. The horror in Beksinski's work is not external but internalized; the viewer is confronted not with what hunts them, but what they have buried within themselves. Through extreme elongation, contortion, and decomposition, his humanoid forms blur the lines between flesh and architecture, self and ruin, pushing identity itself toward collapse, such as (Figure code). In these images, monstrosity is not "other," it is us, undone. The time of Beksinski's youth corresponds to the Second World War, which can conjure a reading that the figures he "otherizes" are from the perspective of those who are forcing the monstrous upon the victims.

Figure 1.9 Zdzislaw Beksinski, Untitled, 1984.



Architecture in Beksinski's world plays a similar role. His cathedrals, as analyzed by Cattien and Stopford, overwhelm with magnified scale before disintegrating into necrotic, uncanny forms (Cattien and Stopford 2022). The minimality of the environments that surround the architectures adds onto the perceived size (Figure 1.9). The viewer is drawn in with familiarity to the grandiose structures, only to confront that comfort in the face of uncanny distortions: alien spires, bone-like structures, and organic decay. These structures become psychological ruins, metaphors for the collapse of the ego's boundaries, for the dissolution of the safe binaries between self and monster. They do not house horror; they are made of horror.

Joseph Rex Young offers a further layer, identifying the viewer's encounter with Beksinski's work as a crisis of representation. His refusal to title his paintings forces the viewer into a state of breakdown where words falter, description fails, and one is left suspended in collapse. But the catharsis never arrives. (Young 2020) This "open" response to the sublime, as theorized by Sandner, manifests in two forms: fragmentation, where the viewer rejects the imagery in disgust and fear, or dispossession, where one surrenders to the collapse of control and finds something revelatory within. In this view, Beksinski's monsters are not symbols to be interpreted but presences to be endured; gateways not to understanding, but to transformation. To stand before one of his figures is to risk encountering oneself anew, to be stripped of certainty, and to recover, if one is willing, not clarity, but resonance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project aims to leverage animation's boundary-breaking nature to create a short film exploring self-otherness through monstrous representation. In particular, it examines how 2D motion graphics can reflect the transformative qualities of monstrosity and visually embody category violation. To guide the creative process, the project draws from visual analyses of films that effectively depict the monstrous. By examining The Shape of Water (2017), Coraline (2009), The Thing (1982), and The Fly (1986), it identifies techniques such as transformation, environmental distortion, hybridization, and anthropomorphism, all of which contribute to the cinematic experience of otherness. These findings offer both aesthetic reference points and conceptual grounding for the film's visual language. The project will thus investigate how animated monsters can function not only as narrative threats but as aesthetic and psychological devices that reveal the instability of the self.

2.1 The Medium

Animation as a medium possesses the capacity to make the impossible bend its knees. Its inherent flexibility can aid in the exploration of differentiating "the other" in a more literal sense. In his essay Notes on Disney, Sergei Eisenstein observes animation's "plasmatic" qualities which corresponds to its ability to defy fixed identity through constant transformation (Eisenstein 1986). He saw animated figures as fluid, capable of morphing into any form, resisting categorization and embodying a "rejection of a forever form." This plasmaticity underscores animation's omnipotent potential, where characters remain in a state closer to the conceptual than the material. The seamless transformation from one form to another becomes conceivable and fluid within the realm of animation. With plasmaticity, animation creates the opportunity to return to the primitive and unadulterated state in which we are able to manipulate (Väliaho 2017). He continues to assert that the plasmatic

encompasses all possibilities of forms in its potential. Therefore, if animation can cover the entirety of categories, it makes it easier to trespass along them and convey in-betweenness. The boundaries can be bled through, converging categories into each other without the constraints of reality, creating a malleable environment for different representations of monsters.

The transformation aspect is also significant in investigating the other within the self. With plasmatic animation, the pure self is liberated from its static state and can seamlessly mesh into any other category. Transformations into other categories become more of a natural progress through the use of animation. It renders this transition into alternate categories more intrinsic and blurs the boundaries.

Animation, with its inherent capacity for metamorphosis and plasmatic transformation (Eisenstein 1986), provides a powerful medium to render these unconscious dynamics visible. A monster that shifts shape, blurs categories, or reflects aspects of the protagonist offers a visual metaphor for the unstable relationship between the ego and the shadow.

Along with plasmaticity, another advantage of animation is its capacity for anthropomorphism—the attribution of human traits or behaviors to nonhuman entities (American Psychological Association 2018). This tendency allows abstract or nonhuman characters to become emotionally engaging and relatable. It is likely that audiences lose interest when viewing non-anthropomorphized concepts (Grodal 1999), highlighting the communicative power of giving human qualities to otherwise inaccessible forms. Therefore, animation wields its power to make characters the audience can connect with, even if the characters are non-human. Animals, items and indeed monsters can also be made to be relatable, understandable, or even cared for. The medium of animation brings a certain suspension of disbelief that makes it perfect for horror. Audiences may not be willing to accept what is shown on screen if it's a combination of real life human actors interacting with animated monsters; but if the entire scene is animated, then everything has the same level of reality (or unnaturality, depending on the wishes of the artist) and what is meant to be unrealistic can stand on its own through its design.

There is also the advantage of perspective. The animated camera lends itself to explore different perspectives more easily (Holliday 2016). This can create an omniscient viewer, allowing the viewer to take in the narrative as the artist crafts, and aid the viewer in taking metaphorical positions. Through relatability and empathy building, the viewer is able to accept the anthropomorphized image in their minds. The otherness in the self takes shape as something/someone that looks like another. The differences are apparent yet we are taken aback by the commonalities; empathy,

compassion and care all grow as we go on with the narrative. This helps metaphors to carry on better to the viewer.

All of these advantages outline animation as a great and suitable medium to demonstrate effective monsters. Taking all of these advantages into account, this project decided to explore the potential for representation in animated monsters.

2.2 Visual Language Analysis in Film

Animated monsters function not only through their narrative role but through the specific visual language that animators employ to render them other, unstable, and threatening. This section analyzes how key elements of visual language; plasmatic transformation, environmental distortion, temporal manipulation, and anthropomorphic ambiguity are used to construct monsters that embody the instability of self-other boundaries. These strategies will inform the visual approach of Phantasmagoria. The analysis draws on examples from Coraline (2009), The Thing (1982), and The Shape of Water (2017), each of which demonstrates how visual techniques can heighten or subvert identification with the monstrous.

The 1982 film, John Carpenter's household movie monster, The Thing will be analyzed for its depiction of the incomprehensible and evershifting monster, highlighting the terror of category breakdown and the abject. The breakthrough stop motion movie Coraline, directed by Henry Selick in 2009 will be examined for its use of animation to enhance the monstrous qualities of impurity and boundary violation. Lastly, The acclaimed movie directed by Guillermo del Toro, The Shape of Water in 2017, will be considered for its empathetic portrayal of the monstrous other and its alignment with Kearney's notion of "oneself-as-another."

2.2.1 The Thing and The Subversion of Unity

The Thing by John Carpenter subverts Kristeva's thoughts of unity and purity and warps unity into a twisted communion. The film takes place on an Antarctic exhibition and follows its crew as a creature, the titular Thing, takes over their bodies and minds one by one. When taking over the body, the creature changes their biology to make every cell responsive.

Though scholars emphasize the importance of unity when discussing monsters, as in the unity is for the self while the other is separated, The Thing takes the approach

of making unity itself grotesque. The self is threatened not because of the existence of the other, but because of the assimilation of the other into the self. The monster is a threat simply because it can and will join the self, creating a unity between them.

Figure 2.1 The monster, fusing (Carpenter, 1982)



Trigg explains the monster of The Thing by stating: "The horror of the cosmos is essentially the horror of the body." (Trigg 2014). The Thing is a threat both on cosmic and microcosmic levels. On the body level, it quite literally takes over and corrupts it. On the cosmic level, this being introduced into society creates tension of trust and recognition. He furthers his point by asserting that the film portrays the origin of life itself. Thematically, it suggests an anonymous purpose, implying that the universe's origin both shapes humanity and opposes it.

Brown has a different approach to the monster (Brown 2020). Instead of focusing on the instantly apparent theme of unity, he focuses on the 'speculative realism' aspect of it. He combines the perspective of weird reality proposed by Harman to explain the metaphorical implications of the monster.

Brown argues that the abundance and the over-material of the gore in the design of

the monster is a conscious decision to overwhelm the viewer's capacity for recognition and containment, destabilizing the boundaries between body, form, and identity (Brown 2020). In a similar sense, when faced with the problem of showing on film the unthinkable Thing, the excess in practical effects eschews a literal manifestation of the creature, despite a wealth of visual detail and ample lighting. The result is a creature that is spectacular but vague and ungraspable, one that defies description. The creature resists stable ontology; not because it cannot be seen, but because it can be seen too well, in too many forms, all of which contradict one another. Its excess is a strategy that dismantles the possibility of coherent visual knowledge, a tactic that mirrors the horror of epistemological failure itself.

The Thing, designed in such a way to invite many perspectives, is a hallmark in monster design. On the face of it, giving many different appearances to a monster in visual medium creates more opportunities for the audience to react (e.g. one person may not experience the desired effect from the monster's one appearance but would from the other, or vice versa). In the story, different appearances make the monster a bigger threat because the characters cannot identify it to begin dealing with it. Plus, if the audience cannot identify it either, the horror grows because the monster stays indescribable. As discussed above with Coraline, a monster that changes shape underlines its monstrosity. The self is clean and pure, and static. Only the other changes. The Thing not only changes itself, but in this process also changes the human characters depicted. Physically and mentally, those that encounter it are changed, made another, and even the other.

2.2.2 Exploration of Otherness in Stop Motion Animation - "Coraline"

An example of the monstrous otherness being utilized in animation can be found in Coraline (2009). In Coraline (2009), the view of monsters and otherness is overtly named. They reside in the "Other World", which is a mirrored version of the protagonist Coraline's "Real World" with the inclusion of fantastical elements. The residents have button eyes instead of normal eyes and this serves as the "almost there but something is unsettling" element of the uncanny valley, almost normal in appearance but disturbed by the buttons. Coraline's Other Mother wants to sew these buttons in Coraline's eyes in order to keep her in the Other World and have fun all the time, but Coraline reacts with shock and disgust. The stability argument also comes into play here, as she sits on the fence of the dilemma of being puppetified and having her identity destabilized (Herhuth 2021). If Coraline accepted, it would mean the loss of her current identity. The notion of the unstable identity brings out

repulsion and horror in her, so she delays the ordeal until later. When pushed, she refuses.

Ross notes the differences in geometry between Coraline's Real World and the Other World (Ross 2015). The director, Selick, used 3D animation to his advantage to communicate the world shifts. The Real World has impossible geometry while the Other World has more strict and orderly lines. These differences can also be a commentary on how reality inherently includes things that are not quite how we expect them to be. Reimagining them from one's head can create a less engaged result, as seen with the rigidity of the Other World. This disparity of the environments shows that the othered elements do not only have to be characters, the environment can comment on the otherness as well. Animation allows the viewer to experience the environment as a dynamic structure that can reflect otherness. Harking back to the tradition of expressionist German cinema, the more an environment appears unreal, the more unease it carries. Usage of shapes in the backgrounds to convey reality, danger, safety etc. has been proven effective time and time again. Beyond being a visual cue for the audience to tell apart the setting, this technique is oft employed to convey the protagonist's attitude towards the environment. If the shapes lack sharp edges, have curves that seem to envelop the character, it is fair to say that the character feels coddled there. In contrast, sharp straight lines convey unease and danger, even reminding of spikes that would physically hurt and impale.

After the secrets start to unravel, Coraline visits the Other Mother to question her. The furniture and food transform into bugs and push the wrong elements into the scene. The food, turned into slimy bugs, causes a great repulsion from Coraline. This serves as another way to incorporate the environment into the monster's aura and using animation's plasmatic capabilities to metamorph one thing to another.

Figure 2.2 The design of the bug-furniture and the consumption of bugs (Selick, 2009).



The Other Mother, Coraline's mother's doppelganger in the Other World, is actually a monster called The Beldam in disguise. Naming her in this way invokes the image of an asylum, another common setting for horror. When she drops the pretense of

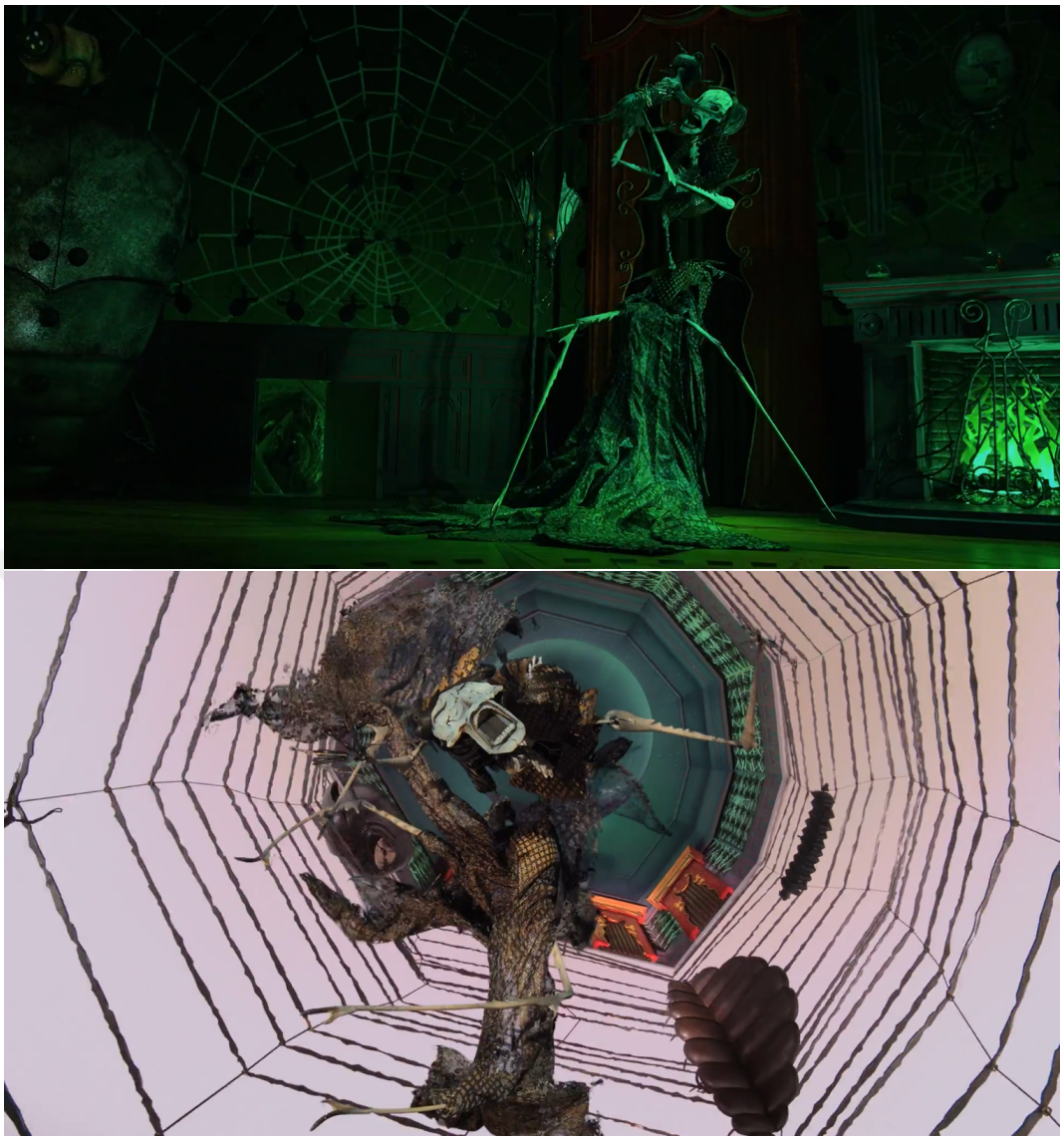
being nice, her limbs distort and lengthen to inhuman proportions, ending the act of looking human. Through the fluid transition, her emotions get sterner and violently angrier with further distortions. Her puppet towers over Coraline and is impossibly thin, even by in-universe standards. Sharp nails accentuate her long arms and act as claws.

Figure 2.3 The Beldam with limbs stretched out and distorted (Selick, 2009).



The Beldam has a further final transformation that pushes her animal qualities more prominent. The hybridization gets called into effect, when The Beldam takes the shape of a spider, with Coraline being trapped in her web. Her spider legs and her arms are made out of needles, which she uses to sew the dolls of the kids she plans to kidnap. The Beldam's identity is fluid throughout the film, metamorphosing from one thing to another. She stays as a constant threat of varying levels and doubles down on the category breaking elements of her design as her threat level increases. She is safer for Coraline when her appearance fits with expected categories, but the more she breaks categorical boundaries, the more danger she poses.

Figure 2.4 The Beldam with limbs stretched out and distorted (Selick, 2009).



Looking at this, we can see Coraline (2009) made use of the advantages of animation while representing otherness. Unlike The Shape of Water (2017), the monstrous other is not a sympathetic entity, despite starting as one. The advantages of employing animation is most prominently evident during transition scenes and conveying the otherness through the environmental design. Presenting a transformation sequence is the biggest benefit of animation here as it makes clear the change between categories the monster goes through. As discussed in the introduction, the monster is only so because it is liminal and does not fit with a single category and the animation allows for this to be visually represented. The Beldam, through her various shapes, goes from one category to another whilst not fitting with any.

2.2.3 The Shape of Water and the Sympathetic Other

Guillermo del Toro's Shape of Water (2017) is exemplary for the parallels between the otherness of the self, and the marginalized other. The protagonist, Elisa, is othered from society by her muteness. She is excluded from most aspects of life. Her inclusion with the day-to-day is dependent on the rest of society bothering to pick up sign language or writing down to communicate with her. The other lead, her love interest, is an amphibian creature. He is inhuman, and demonstrably so in that the army has no reservations with experimenting on him. He is, quite literally, separated from society and the day-to-day, being kept in a fish tank. Communication, for him as well, is not a given. He is not addressed or included in any conversation. All the attention he gets is scientific. The film is very much built around otherness, both leads very clearly marginalized in very visually apparent ways. And despite the conditions of their ostracization being wildly different in their nature and effect, these characters connect.

Figure 2.5 Elisa viewing the Amphibian Man in tube, The Shape of Water (Guillermo del Toro, 2017).



Del Toro crafts fantastical narratives that become metaphors for the individual and the other (Adji 2019). The individual relates to the marginalized other. The otherness within the self is emphasized by literally visually distancing the characters to the in-group. Guillermo del Toro employs monstrous entities and ascribes them to different substances and misshapen features. Our normalized view of the world connects the dots to otherness, yet del Toro's monsters retain the ability to be sympathized by the audience. The amphibian man exemplifies this in an overt way, by having a literal romance with the audience surrogate human protagonist Elisa.

Monsters that appear more humanoid have the ability to relate with the viewer on a unique level. Humans have the ability to specifically recognize faces and the distortions relating to the human faces on a precise and biological level (Kanwisher and Yovel 2006). Since humans are fine-tuned to recognize disparities that occur within human-like attributes, it becomes another reason why uncanny valley is so effective on us. Davies argues that Guillermo del Toro also manipulates the connection to resemblance that helps us with our relatedness to monsters and uses repulsive actions against us (Davies 2014). Del Toro's monsters exhibit a degree of anthropomorphism to create an affinity with the viewer. Such design invokes twofold reactions from the audience. The human part is to be recognized and related to the self but the non-human is called on to emphasize certain aspects within it. The amphibian, for instance, invokes the image of a pet goldfish on some level and thus evokes a certain love, care, or cuteness toward it. The monster's existence crosses the boundaries of the normal, therefore, not appropriate for our understanding of the world. Then, it threatens and these threats are not limited to physical, they are also cognitive threats that forces the viewer to acknowledge the existence in-between the boundaries as possible. The monsters act as a scapegoat, they are attributed with "scariness" and "horror" without them being inherent to the monster's nature. The military experimenting on the amphibian man is one of the biggest tells of this attitude.

Kearney's method of disillusioning oneself to otherness by admitting adversary within the self to create a stable identity works here. Elisa is not scared of the amphibian man, she shows empathy towards his state. Her awful treatment as a disabled woman by the hands of the authorities allows Elisa to have a starting point on identifying the problems of the amphibian's captivity.

Even the name of the movie suggests the malleability. The characters get represented by droplets of water on the window, moving fast in unpredictable directions and merging into one another. They also unconventionally bond and connect underwater. Symbolizing the characters as water shows their fluidity, willingness to blend into each other and category crossing.

Figure 2.6 Two dynamic droplets symbolizing the protagonists converging, The Shape of Water (Guillermo del Toro, 2017).



Figure 2.7 Elisa and the Amphibian Man underwater, The Shape of Water (Guillermo del Toro, 2017).



A primary concern with this monster's design was its need to have a certain appeal. Since the plot revolved around acceptance of the monstrous other and functioned as a love story, the monster needed to invoke positive affect from the viewer (McIntyre and del Toro. 2017). Del Toro teamed up with the artist Mike Hill for the design. He specified that the eyes needed to be big. This makes for a sympathetic monster, at it reminds of cute puppy eyes and the like. The creature design process took three years, which del Toro comments on it being the longest for the design period.

The final concept makes an effort to avoid alien likeness (McIntyre and del Toro.

2017). This might be due to an effort to fully connect the amphibian man onto our own Earth and create a conceivable habitat for the general viewer. It also serves to keep the story fantastic rather than scientific. An otherworldly alien, by definition, has very little in common with the humans, no matter how humanoid it is. If we ground the monster to Earth, then whatever made it so is relatable (and maybe even a possibility) for us as well. The creature looks innocent but still possesses predator-like abilities. Despite its hidden predator nature, it still looks non-threatening. Del Toro also comments on his inspiration from the H.P. Lovecraft's Dagon and Insmouth, as well as The Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954). Even if the design's initial birthplace is in the realm of horror, the creature reaches its goal to connect with the audience. From the design elements outlined, the most important ones seem to be that despite the creature's boundary-breaking nature, it still exists within our logic due to the exclusion of extraterrestrial elements. It possesses a nice body and big eyes and its predatory features like his agility and claws are less observed. The relationship between the two leads also plays a big role in letting him be fleshed out for the audience.

In contrast, The Shape of Water suggests the possibility of shadow integration rather than rejection. Elisa's bond with the creature invites the viewer to see the "Other" not as a projection to be destroyed, but as an embodiment of repressed longing and difference to be embraced. In doing so, the film exemplifies how monsters can mediate a more compassionate relationship with the shadow.

2.2.4 The Fly and The Escape of The Monstrous Self

David Cronenberg's The Fly (1986) takes the approach of showing that the monstrous originates within. Through a visceral depiction of self-destruction and bodily mutation, the movie collapses the monstrous other onto the self. The film follows Seth Brundle, a reclusive but brilliant scientist, as he tests his teleportation device. Through an accident involving a housefly, fuses his DNA with the insect's. His triumph soon degenerates into a grotesque transformation. While the contamination of the self is made apparent with the insect intruding and invalidating the unity of the body, Brundle's transformation should also be seen as the monstrous other emerging from within.

The horror of the film lies in the tension between emotional fulfillment and its catastrophic consequences. Brundle is only able to complete his teleportation breakthrough after forming a romantic and sexual relationship with journalist Veronica Quaife. The moment of connection with another person not only enables scientific

success, but also opens the door to the other self. His vulnerability is what allows the monstrous to emerge. Unlike the cosmic threat of The Thing, here the danger comes not from the outside, but from the very act of intimacy. When Brundle lets someone in, he also lets in the horror of what was buried beneath his own control, also exemplified by the fly intruding into his work.

The progression of Brundle's mutation stages a grotesque journey through abjection. Early signs the transformation is perceived as empowering; enhanced strength, heightened libido, insatiable appetite. But this is also a signifier of the preference of instinct over intellect. Then the changes quickly curdle into decay. His body begins to rot; fingernails fall off, teeth drop, and his skin sheds away. Cronenberg, through graphic prosthetics and close-up gore, visualizes a bodily revolt against the self. The transformation is a literalization of the psychological terror that Kristeva describes as abjection: "what disturbs identity, system, order." The transformation itself is painful,

Figure 2.8 Brundle's initial decay, The Fly (Cronenberg, 1986).



The loss of bodily boundaries reflects a deeper existential dread. Brundle's increasing identification with the insect leads to his renaming: "Brundlefly." The compound name fuses human and insect, emphasizing the hybrid and unstable identity he now embodies. This fusion undermines any stable category of the self. As Beard explains, the "flyness" is not simply a metaphor for disease or mutation (Beard 1994). It is a state of being lesser, being unbound to a category between alive and dead as we perceive in insectness. The horror arises because the self is no longer separable from the other. The self is the other. The more Brundle's body changes, the more his true self is laid bare. The fly was always within, as exemplified

by the initial “good” attributes being humanoid instincts. The visual design of Brundlefly also supports this reading. The fusion is as a repeating theme category-breaking and unexplainable. In its final stages, Brundle is a patchwork of exoskeletal plates, disjointed limbs, and bulging insectoid features, liquid oozing from places that shouldn’t, and his humanoid form melting away to give away to the emerged identity. Yet he retains flickers of human emotion, begging Veronica to end his suffering. The emotional impact of the final moment shows that the Brundlefly still isn’t a full fledged fly, but a breakdown of merged identity. In the final moments, Brundlefly does not seek to destroy others but is destroyed by the very emotional openness that made him human and what kickstarted the transformation in the first place.

Figure 2.9 The final form of Brundlefly, The Fly (Cronenberg, 1986).



Beard notes that this ending represents a philosophical evolution in Cronenberg’s work (Beard 1994). Rather than blaming patriarchal scientists or external institutions, The Fly places the source of horror entirely within the protagonist. Brundle is both scientist and subject, hero and monster. The monstrosity he unleashes is not on the world, but on himself. Brundle is not overtaken by otherness. He becomes it. In the context of monster design, The Fly demonstrates how monstrosity can be visualized as the rupture of bodily integrity and the loss of coherent identity.

3. PHANTASMAGORIA (2025)

This project employs a visual narrative centered on an everyday male protagonist who undergoes a series of monstrous transformations. The methodology involves portraying his internal psychological state through metamorphosis, harnessing animation's inherent capacity for fluid transformation. Specifically, the animation foregrounds plasmaticity to illustrate how the Other can emerge and expand from the mundane, allowing the self to further isolate and distance itself from the monstrous aspects of identity. The narrative finalizes with the protagonist encountering his own reflection, revealing features of the monstrous entities we perceived, thereby suggesting that the horror he experiences were unwanted features which originated from within, that he had projected as monstrosity.

To inform both the visual and narrative strategies of this project, I conducted a comparative analysis of selected films that exemplify varying approaches to the animation of monstrous otherness. These analyses demonstrate how techniques such as plasmatic transformation and anthropomorphism contribute to the portrayal of the monstrous across both animated and live-action works. By examining how visual language constructs monstrosity in these examples, I identify key strategies to apply in the design of my own animated short. The following methodology section draws on this design analysis and connects it to the theoretical frameworks established in the historical literature review.

Drawing from the insight that the monstrous Other emerges when cognitive dissonance and projective identification occur, the film focuses these transformations squarely on the self. The fragmentation of the protagonist's form visualises the physical manifestation of an internal othering process. Each monstrous form externalizes an internal dysphoria, embodying tensions between identity and the abjected elements that transgress the boundaries of selfhood.

Ultimately, through these transformations, the protagonist moves toward a psychic reconciliation at the end. The othered self is no longer denied or feared but recognised and embraced. Through this process, Phantasmagoria visualises monstrosity

not as an external threat, but as an emergence of the othered within the self.

3.1 Storyboard

As this project is grounded in motion graphics, particular emphasis was placed on movement and visual design throughout the development process. Consequently, composition and color played a central role in the construction of the storyboard, guiding the visual language and narrative flow of the animation. Before the details, little frames were used. The illustrations were created with Procreate and Adobe Illustrator. These static frames were then prepared for animation in Adobe After Effects.

3.2 The Scenes

3.2.1 Scene 1: The Identity Fracture

Figure 3.1 Phantasmagoria, scene 1 (2025)

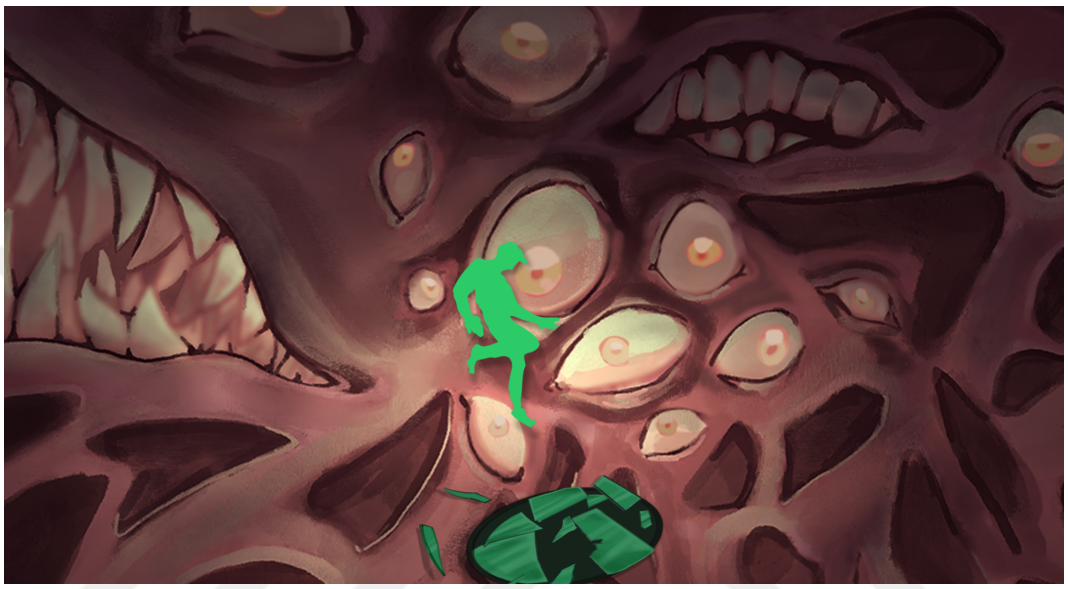


The film opens with the protagonist, an ordinary man whose visible anger foreshadows the inner conflict to come. The first visual rupture appears in the mirror, the cracking surface signals the breakdown of the unified self. This motif establishes the theme of self-confrontation and splitting. The grandiosity, hostility and the bi-

ological structures of the environment is inspired by Beksinski's invitation to the monstrous.

3.2.2 Scene 2: Arrival at the Monstrous Site

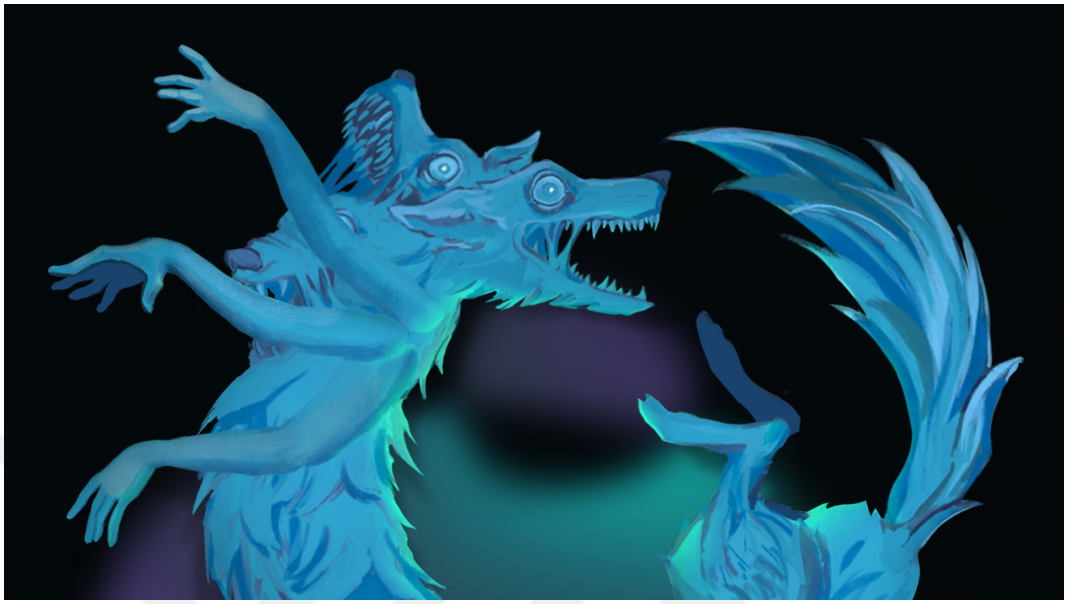
Figure 3.2 Phantasmagoria, scene 2 (2025)



A shift in place occurs, the protagonist which is now represented as a fragmented mirror shard enters a surreal, monstrous site. The mirrored motif persists, to retain that the horror that comes within is an internal struggle. Here the monstrosity is seen in the flesh with magnified and fused mess of organs and limbs. The protagonist transforms back into his original shape again, entering the fragmentation further.

3.2.3 Scene 3: The Hybrid

Figure 3.3 Phantasmagoria, scene 3 (2025)



The first descent to monstrosity is a homage to animal-human hybrids, especially one of the most prominent fusion examples, a werewolf; inspired by Noël Carroll's concept of fission. The figure is constructed through the blending of human and animal anatomies, specifically a wolf, to produce something uncannily unified. The animal choice also pays tribute to the initial creature of The Thing (1982) which is a Siberian husky.

This monster embodies the first metamorphosis: contaminated, unstable, torn between human and beast. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, the torn flesh and musculature suggest what the self expels but remains haunted by. The figure's form both fuses and fissures—body parts multiply and dislocate, evoking psychic fragmentation.

Its silhouette resists clarity. This ambiguity of beast and human in the silhouette shows that the monstrosity is presented as the instability of the self, its capacity to split and mutate. Layered into this is Carl Jung's shadow self: the, disowned aspects of the personality spilling outside. The monster serves as a mirror, its grotesque limbs and torn body externalise the internal rejected self, projected outward as monstrosity. The abject is not fully expelled; rather, remain tethered to the self, embodying contamination.

The monster thus functions as a hybrid in both visual and conceptual terms, resisting purity, clarity, and containment. The visual ambiguity, fission and fusion

simultaneously, mirrors the psychic instability of identity. Using a hybrid creature to symbolize evil as a concept is adapted from Bosch.

3.2.4 Scene 4: The Horror of Unity

Figure 3.4 Phantasmagoria, scene 4 (2025)



This scene echoes the visual language and the themes of The Thing (1982). The self is contaminated by the other; and the monstrosity folds onto itself. The creature designed for this sequence carries the emotional weight of this contamination, its back burdened by the residue of forced integration. The most prominently recognizable face weeps silently, while elongated limbs extend upward in a pleading gesture, showcasing the struggle between surrender and resistance.

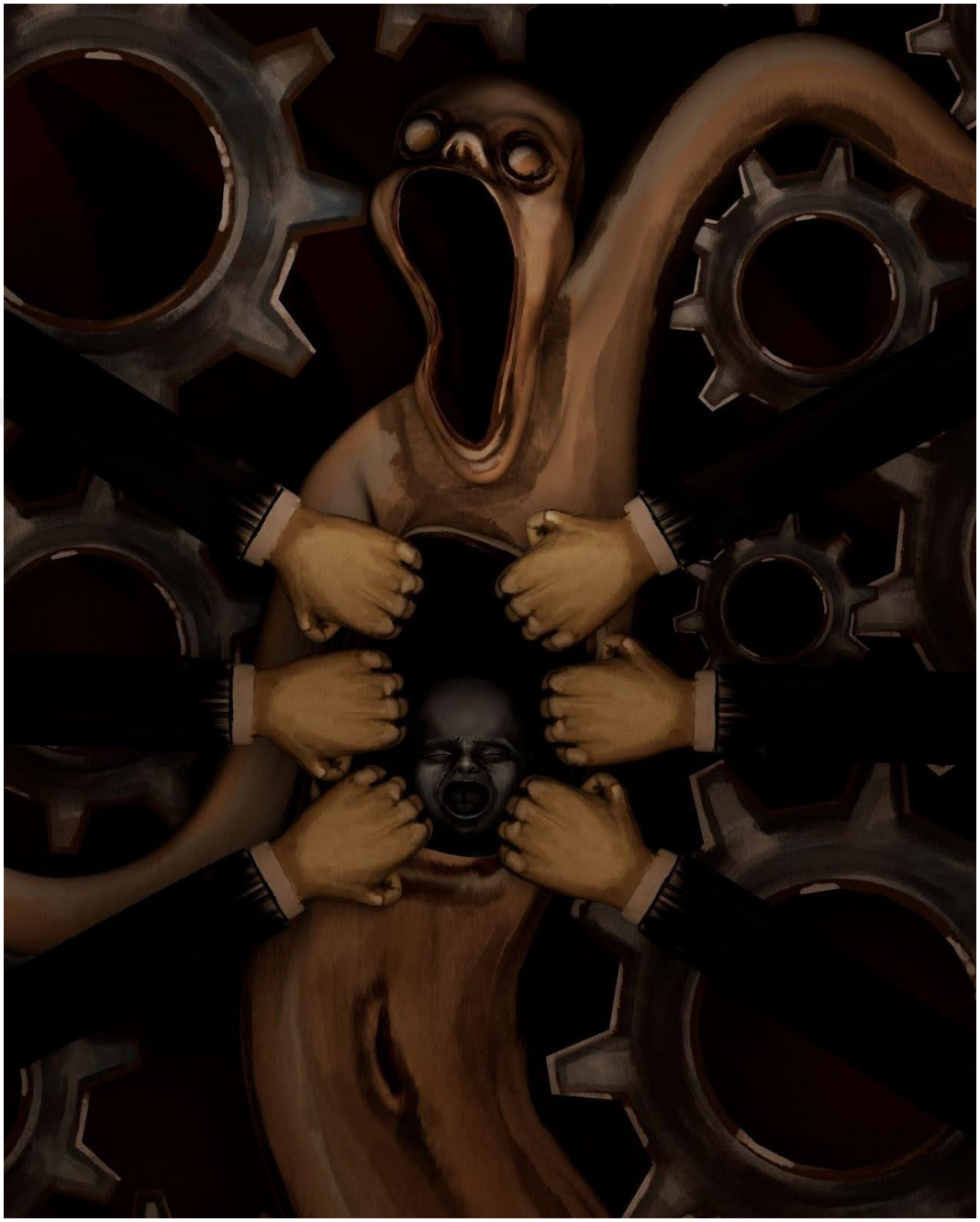
The creature's form fuses incompatible anatomical elements: humanoid arms of varying proportions. Multiple faces are fused on its back and while they are recog-

nizably human, they are distorted. The body's stance is unstable, it isn't clear how this creature mobilizes. These features draw from category violation and liminality, producing a figure that cannot be comfortably classified, a monster suspended between forms. For the movement, faces engorge and recede, limbs stretch and contract unnaturally, and the creature appears in a state of perpetual transformation. The breakdown of bodily unity occurs to reflect the instability within identity.

The creature embodies the horror of forced integration and the violent erasure of agency. This is inspired by The Thing's portrayal of unity as grotesque, the process of becoming "one" is itself monstrous. The monster's form twists between absorption and resistance. The creature becomes a visual metaphor for the trauma of merging with the other and the self becoming the other. The crying action is a callback to Redon and his The Crying Spider (1883), symbolizing the failure to merge within the society.

3.2.5 Scene 5: The Pressure of the Cogs

Figure 3.5 Phantasmagoria, scene 5 (2025)



Following the protagonist's failed attempts at unity, the transformation shifts to explore the monstrous pressures of institutional control. In this sequence, the protagonist is physically pulled and contorted by disembodied hands in corporate attire, visualising the enforced conformity. These identical hands serve a dual symbolic function: they reflect Jung's concept of the shadow projected outward, attributing the darker aspects of the self to external beings and the internalization of the shadow;

forcibly externalizing them into the "Other", evoking a process of self-otherization and loss of individual identity.

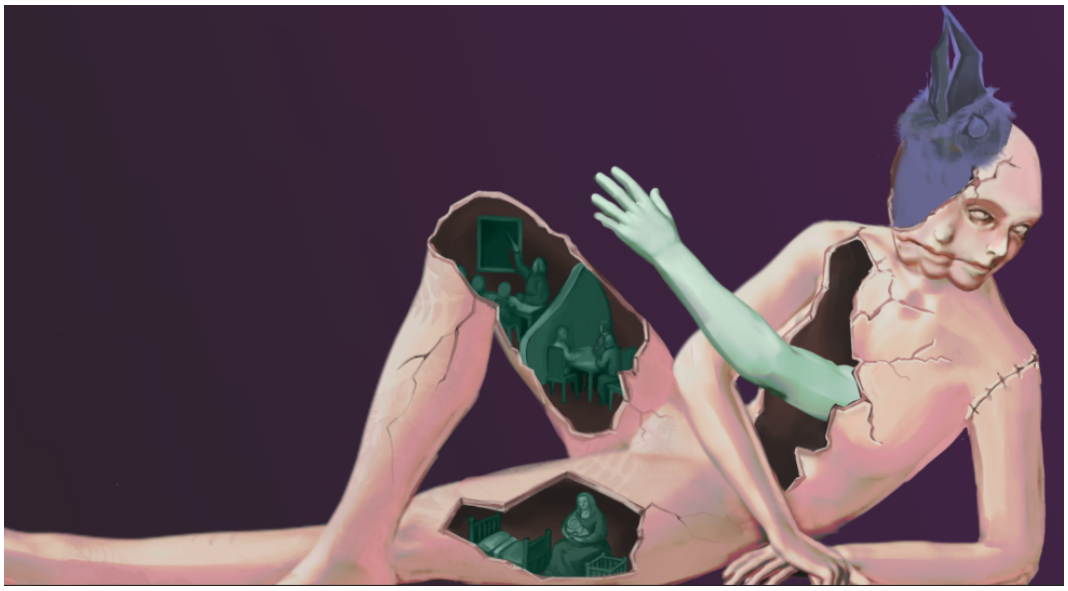
This imagery is further reinforced through the integration of mechanical cogs that distort the figure, visually conveying external factors that contort the human form. At the core of the contorted figure lies a hollow, screaming body that reveals a crying child within its abdomen. The child embodies vulnerability, its presence suggests an infantile coping mechanism of regression.

The figure's elongated mouth draws a visual reference to Goya's Saturn Devouring His Son (1819–1823), evoking the image of silent screams within oppressive systems. The mouth is an ode to the protagonist's inability to articulate resistance or pain within the external factors.

Visually, the design blends organic and mechanical textures to emphasize the body's violation and its coerced integration into a dehumanizing structure. The result is a monster that is born out of the stripping of agency by the othering external factors.

3.2.6 Scene 6: The Feminine and Maternal Abjection

Figure 3.6 Phantasmagoria, scene 6 (2025)



This scene explicitly stages Kristeva's notion of maternal abjection (Kristeva 1982). Following prior sequences of forced integration and identity instability, the scene cuts to a statuesque feminine figure, a visual representation of maternal ambivalence. The figure remains eerily still. Cracks begin to form, revealing an unsettling core beneath the idealized surface. From the figure's hollow head, a bird emerges, evoking the

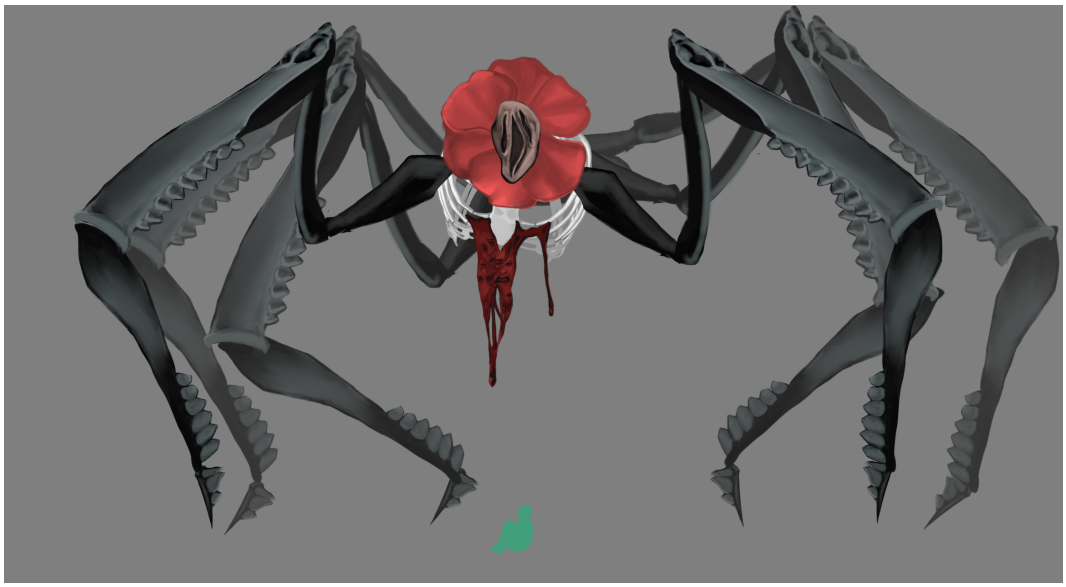
cultural image of a "mother bird." In a moment of violence, the bird consumes its offspring— yet the offspring ultimately escapes, forcing its way through the widening cracks in the maternal torso.

This sequence visualizes the fraught psychic process of separation from the maternal source, staging subjectivity as something violently born through abjection. This sequence also draws heavily from the principles of Coraline (2009). The maternal figure functions here as an uncanny container, where the safe haven of the body turns from a site of comfort to a threat. What is most familiar, the nurturing mother, is transformed into a source of horror. Like Coraline's Other Mother, the unity of identity is a threat to the protagonist as it seeks to transform and assimilate the protagonist.

Unlike the other fusions of monstrosity in the film, this sequence foregrounds separation rather than fusion. The birth imagery stages a psychic rupture, where the subject must escape the allure of maternal wholeness, even at great psychic cost. The offspring's act of breaking free is both an act of survival and an enactment of Kristeva's central claim: that subjectivity emerges through abjection, through a necessary but traumatic rejection of what once constituted the self.

3.2.7 Scene 7: The Flower and the Death

Figure 3.7 Phantasmagoria, scene 7 (2025)



The subsequent scene introduces a sharp transition: The film cuts abruptly to a spider-like monster, foregoing the fluid transitions that characterize earlier transfor-

mations. The music cuts off, amplifying the isolation.

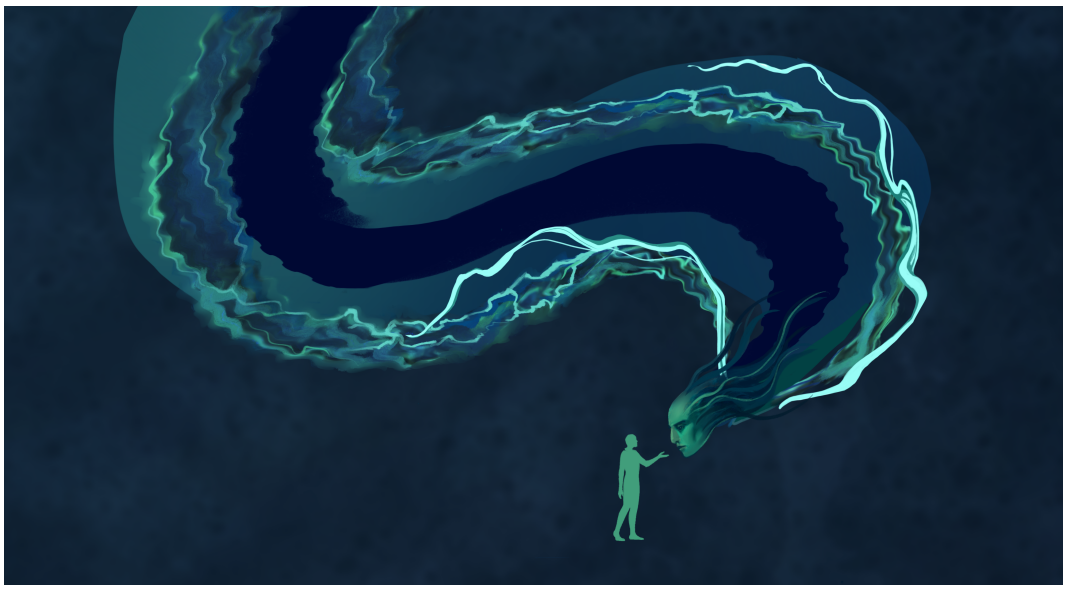
This creature embodies violated boundaries, collapsing natural and symbolic forms. Bloody guts trail from a ribcage, while skeletal legs replace organic ones. The design engages with evolutionary disgust mechanisms and the aesthetics of decay, which is what the uncanny valley sets us out to protect. The evolutionary theory of monstrosity is on display: To avoid contamination.

The scene further employs Carroll's principle of magnification through composition: the spider-creature is framed as an oversized, looming presence, its scale amplifying the protagonist's helplessness. This monstrous form directly follows the rejection of the earlier feminine figure, reinforcing the connection between the abject feminine and the isolation that follows and the anxiety of death. It is portrayed as evil and grotesque therefore ugly, as per Bosch's principles in art.

To transition into the final scene, there is a bloom rotting from within. A juxtaposing vibrant petals spurt behind the creature's head.

3.2.8 Scene 8: Acceptance and Integration

Figure 3.8 Phantasmagoria, scene 8 (2025)



The final scene presents the protagonist facing a vast, serpentine monster whose form consciously rejects hard boundaries. This monster embodies the concept of acceptance through its ethereal, open form. The final transformation abandons harsh fragmentation for an ethereal figure with flowing tendrils that employ plasmaticity within itself, unlike earlier grotesque forms,. The fracturing of identity is this time

not represented by harsh fractures but in its wispy tendrils extend outward without hostility suggesting that this creature is formed through reconciliation rather than further dissonance. While the monstrous is still magnified, it is no longer hostile but open and embracing. This post-abjection form absorbs what was once expelled. It embodies the dissolution of violent boundaries and the fluid synthesis of self and other. The protagonist no longer resists transformation; the monster no longer demands it. Together, they become something fluid— neither wholly self nor wholly other, but a synthesis of both.

The monster's face, recalling the protagonist's visage established in the first scene destabilizes the boundary between self and other, suggesting that monstrosity is an internal, latent component of the psyche rather than an external threat. The color also reflects the calm blues and is recalling the fact that the protagonist is characterized as green from time to time.

In designing this sequence, I drew from Shape of Water's visual strategies. Like the amphibian creature in del Toro's film, this final monster employs anthropomorphic cues to balance the viewer's affective response between empathy and awe. Where Shape of Water reframes the monstrous as an object of intimate connection, Phantasmagoria similarly positions the final creature in a relational presence; one that invites negotiation and understanding rather than fear or annihilation. The protagonist no longer resists transformation; the monster no longer demands it. Together, they become something fluid; neither wholly self nor wholly other, but a mix of both.

Through this design, Phantasmagoria stages the monstrous encounter as a moment of self-reflection and psychic integration. The final monster thus embodies the thesis' core claim: that animation, through its unique formal affordances, can visualise the dynamics of self-otherness not as a site of destruction, but as an opportunity for transformation through acceptance.

4. CONCLUSION

This thesis project set out to explore how the monstrous other serves as a reflection of the self, using animation, specifically 2D motion graphics, as a medium for expressing the instability of identity and the resulting dynamics of projection. Drawing on the Jungian concept of the shadow self and related frameworks such as abjection and projective identification, the study positions monstrosity not as a simple external threat but as a mirror of internal fragmentation.

This thesis project demonstrates that what we perceive as "monstrous" often stems from repressed or unfamiliar aspects of the self. Phantasmagoria embodies this argument through the story of an ordinary man whose goes through transformative monstrous imagery. Rather than encountering monsters as external entities, the protagonist is transformed instead to reflect the inner conflicts outward; his anxieties, alienations, and unresolved tensions become literalized through monstrous forms that distort his world. In the film's final scene, where traces of these monsters appear within his own reflection, the work reinforces its core argument: monstrosity is not an external phenomenon, but an extension of the fragmented self.

The decision to use animation as a medium was explored. Its plasmatic capacities allowed the world to morph in response to the protagonist's shifting psyche, making visible the instability of identity. The protagonist and therefore the monstrous "others" can dissolve, stretch, mutate; visualizing the process of projection and the blurring of boundaries between self and other. This builds upon the tradition of visualizing monstrosity through hybrid and liminal forms, seen in works from Bosch's religious grotesques to Goya's psychological terrors. Where Bosch's hybrids and Goya's phantoms suggest the fluidity of categories, animation renders this process visible: Transformations unfold in time, embodying the flowing dynamics of becoming the other.

Visual design insights from established movies such as Coraline (2009), The Thing (1982) and The Shape of Water (2019) further informed the project regarding their different approaches to their rendition of monstrosity. Coraline's Other Mother

evolves into increasingly inhuman forms as her threat escalates, embodying the fear of destabilized identity. The Thing's ontological slipperiness foreground the horror of unwanted unity, subverting the purity principles that most monster theories rely on. The Shape of Water's amphibian man utilizes monstrosity in a way that evokes empathy. These works demonstrate that the most resonant monsters are those that resist fixed identity, embodying the fear and allure of liminality.

Phantasmagoria (2025) echoes this lineage. Its monster designs were constructed to represent different facets of the protagonist's projections. The final scene, where the protagonist recognizes elements of the monsters within himself, offers a visual metaphor for integration. In encountering the monstrous other, the protagonist is invited to confront, rather than repress the shadow self. The film thus argues that reconciliation with the monstrous is not about erasing difference, but about acknowledging the instability within the self.

More broadly, this project suggests that animation's visual language, its plasmatic transformation and anthropomorphism, makes it uniquely suited for expressing the psychological and philosophical tensions embodied by monstrosity. Through motion, metamorphosis, and visual metaphor, the animated monster becomes a site where the self encounters its own otherness and is transformed by it. Animation enables us to visualize not just the monster's presence, but the very process of becoming monstrous.

Ultimately, this thesis contends that monsters have always existed at the edges of understanding, born from the violation of categories and the instability of identity. From myth to modern media, they reflect the parts of ourselves we disown and project outward. Animated monsters can embody this dynamic with particular force: they show us how fluid, unstable, and permeable the boundary between self and other truly is. In doing so, they offer not just spectacles of fear, but opportunities for reflection and integration. The most resonant monsters remind us that the other is already within us; and that in confronting them, we come closer to understanding the parts of ourselves we have tried hardest to forget.

In the end, this thesis project suggests that animated representations of monstrosity can serve not merely as spectacles of fear, but as dynamic visual spaces where the self confronts its own repressed other.

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