

THESIS REPORT 2020

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LOOKING AT FEAR

Submitted in partial of the requirements for the
degree of

Bachelor of Design (B.Des.)
In Visual Communication Design
At the Beaconhouse National University.

Chapter1

KEYWORDS:

Visual communication design, Visual representation, Animal metaphors, Anthropomorphism, Cognitive studies, Language, animal stereotyping, Visual metaphors, Metaphorical representation, symbolism, Fears and phobias, Social anxiety, childhood memories, thinking with animals, Representational art, hybrid art, surrealism, Animal perspectives.

ABSTRACT:

Humans are social animals, who tend to find connections with everything around them, whether it be another human, animal or even inanimate objects. We think in metaphors. They help us bridge our gap between the familiar and unfamiliar. This tendency to project human like qualities onto non-human agents, known as anthropomorphism, is the most common of all metaphorical modes. It is an ancient and almost universal practice, from ancient myths to Aesop's fables to poetry, art and movies.

As I moved further into the topic, I decided to narrow down my research and focused on exploring our metaphor-riddled relationship with animals in different aspects. For example, how the simplistic nature of animal cartoons helps us understand real life concepts by making them less overtly anchored in reality. Or the ways of using animal metaphors as a visual device to communicate an inexpressible idea.

By using animal metaphors as a tool, I intend to visualize my fears and phobias, most of which are rooted in my childhood experiences. By choosing a certain few animals, I explore how it interacts with me and my

surroundings. I rely on the animal's physical features and body language in my work as a metaphor for the underlying feeling of fear.

PASSION:

This idea came from when I started thinking about the mental states and feeling that a person feels that are hard to explain. Something intangible like fears and phobias that are in the mind for any reason or no reason at all. I found the use of animal metaphors to be a suitable way of visualizing my experience. We have deep relationship with animals, not only do we think about them, we also think through them.

PROJECT SCOPE:

This project revolves around the visualization of my personal fears and phobias. The use of animals symbolizes and dramatizes my experience with the certain phobia, how the feeling of fear takes over everything and my surrounding change. I aim to provide a better understating of what goes around in the mind of someone who might have a similar fear.

DESIGN STATEMENT:

My thesis proposal is based on generative design, translating the idea of fear into symbolic, two dimensional visuals. It focuses on humans-animal relationship and how metaphors act as a bridge between them. Fears/phobias are a psychological notion, which I think is hard to express in simple terms.

So, as a communication designer, im trying my best to take my own fears and visualize this complex idea into something more understandable. To do so, I use certain animals as a communication element in my design to represent my experience with fear in a metaphorical sense. This gives the viewer a chance to peek in their own mind so they may find themselves looking at their own phobias in a different way and relate to them.

I do not have a specific target audience, but my work might reach out to those who have similar fears/phobias as myself and can have a better understanding of their own mind.

Chapter 2

THERORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

The thing that stood out the most in my research was the fact that we think in metaphors. They help us explore our relationship with nature and act as a bridge between what is familiar and what is non-familiar. Our ability to make and understand metaphors is an automatic cognitive process. Humans create animal metaphors in order to model and represent other agents, including other humans.

Seen as a central feature of human cognition that has evolved with the development of language (Pinker, 1993), the ability to conceptualize one entity in terms of another allows us to communicate through metaphor. Oxford English Dictionary defines metaphor as “the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable.”. The Greek philosopher Aristotle developed the very first known scientific metaphor theory about two millennia ago. His theory remained influential for centuries in laying the foundations of western thoughts. There are many different

metaphor theories that developed over time such as the following: The Substitution Theory of Metaphor (Aristotle), The Speech 10 Act Theory (J. Searle), The Interaction Theory (M. Black) and The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson). But The focus of my research and part this report are only two of them, Black's theory and Lakoff & Johnson's theory.

According to black, a metaphor has two distinct subjects: the "primary" or "principal" subject and the "secondary" or "subsidiary" subject. For example, in the metaphorical statement Man is a wolf, man is the primary subject and wolf is the secondary one. The two subjects under consideration are the systems of things rather than individual things. Metaphor involves the interaction between the two systems. In this, metaphor wolf does not actually mean the animal itself but rather its characteristics.

The conceptual metaphor theory differs radically from the traditional ones because it treats metaphor first as matter of of thought and cognition and then as language. Lakoff & Johnson believe that metaphor is a fundamental property of all human thought, which allows us to understand abstract areas of our lives in terms of more concrete and embodied experiences. Conceptual metaphor is a set of systematic correspondences or mappings between a source domain and a target. The source domain is predominantly associated with some tangible physical experiences and therefore it is more concrete than the target domain.

The entirety of my research began with understanding metaphors, there types and uses, further expanding into studying the relationship between animals and humans; then exploring the different areas where I might be able to use it as tool to clarify an idea which is central to human. Along the process, I decided that it would be best if I chose an idea that is close to my own self so I can put in my personal take on it. By the end of it all, I narrowed my whole

project around my personal fear/ phobias because I find this idea to be very 'human' and rather difficult to explain in human terms.

Now, going back to the beginning of my research. There are many different ways and words that count as 'metaphors'. Perhaps the most common metaphorical mode is known as anthropomorphism. It is the tendency to project human qualities onto non-human beings and objects. But the term anthropomorphism has a much broader definition. There are different types of anthropomorphism and different ways in which a person might anthropomorphize.

The first and simplest form is literal anthropomorphism, where something is literally shaped as a human or acting as a human. For example, a cartoon animal dressed in clothes or talking to each other. Then there's personification, which can also come directly under the heading of metaphor, is when a thing or abstraction is directly described as a person. The third type would be anthropomorphic analogy, where you're saying that something is like a human being in some way.

LITRATURE REVIEW:

My research started from the idea of self and surrounding. How humans interact with non-humans? What is their relationship with animals and objects? Why at times, do we give certain human qualities to things? Is it because humans are self-centered people? All these questions lead me to the term 'anthropomorphism' which then became the very base of my project. Wikipedia broadly defines anthropomorphism as 'The attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities.' The word itself is derived from Greek Anthropos (human) and morph (form).

Since childhood we are surrounded by toy animals and deeply immersed in cartoons and movies with talking objects, cars, animals etc. scientists say that this kind of metaphorical thinking is what gives rise to imagination. So imagining animals as ourselves and projecting humanness onto them to clarify our experience is something that has been done in every civilization, from ancient mythical gods to modern day fairytales.

There is a wide range things that come under anthropomorphism, so much of it is in our daily life. Ancient mythologies and some religions frequently represent their deities or gods as humans. They have human form and human personalities. Some anthropomorphic deities represented certain human concepts, such as war, beauty, love, fertility etc. religions like Judaism and Islam reject the concept of an anthropomorphic deity because they believe that God is beyond human comprehension. Other religions like Hinduism believe in the concept of a deity with form rather than the abstract notion of it. Lord Krishna said in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 12, Verse 5, that it is much more difficult for people to focus on a deity as the unmanifested than one with form, using anthropomorphic icons (murtis), because people need to perceive with their senses. [1] [2]

References:

1: [1] Fowler, Jeanne D. (1997). *Hinduism: Beliefs and Practices*. Sussex Academic Press. pp. 42–43. ISBN 978-1898723608.

2: [2] Narayan, M. K. V. (2007). *Flipside of Hindu Symbolism*. Fultus. pp. 84–85. ISBN 978-1596821170

There's animals in advertisement. The cute talking animals are kind of scheme that used to make the whole thing seem less terrifying and more cute to get people to buy their product. The cartoons and movies of animals we watch more often than not portray a certain kind quality in each animal. For after being brought up from childhood with these stories, we develop certain opinions of the several animals. When anthropomorphizing an animal there are stereotypical traits which are associated with a particular specie. They are taken from myths, sometimes based on their real characteristics. Often animals are judged by their appearance rather than their actual nature.

Rabbits, cats, dog etc are looked at as cute pets while bats, lizards, monkeys etc. are not. Most predatory animals like shark, octopus, whale, rhino are seen as monsters without realizing the fact that its in their nature to prey and not an animalistic instinct. Till this day, certain animals are associated with genders, race etc. For example monkeys and gorillas are often associated with Africans because both are considered to wild.

VISUAL REFRENCES:

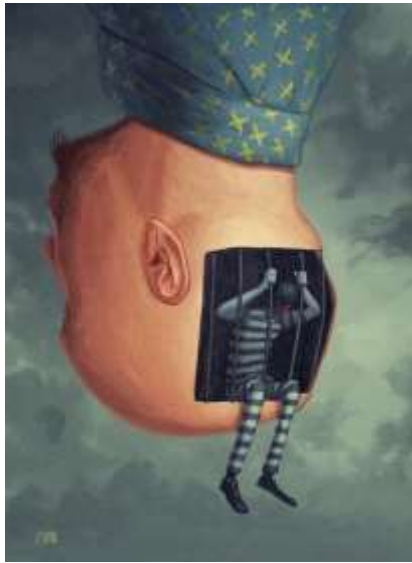
My visual references included works of priscilla kooman who made illustrations on the idea of mind and when it starts to take its on course. She visualized panic attacks, negative thoughts and turned them into these monsters that effect our daily routine.



Then there's the famous subway doodles which gave me the idea of using animals in my own environment and have them interact with me. Subway doodles draw these funny, cute illustrations on images of random areas of the subway.



Surrealism is full on metaphoric art, using symbolic language to depict human emotions and and concepts like time. They portray deeper meaning, combining ideas together. My work was very much inspired by surrealist painting. A few examples:



Chapter3

RESEARCH METHEDODOLOGY:

I did an extensive desktop research on metaphors, their types and why we use them. I looked at different artwork, literature work and even movies. I asked myself about my fears and phobias and looked into ways I can visualize them through animal metaphors. I asked my friends about their experiences with their phobias and they told me how they were associated with animalistic

metaphors at different scenarios in their lives. I read theories about metaphors and articles on metaphors human emotions and how it is so very important in our life to define something in metaphorical terms.

Chapter 4

MEDIUM OF PRESENTATION:

My medium of choice was digital illustrations, which I made using photoshop and illustrator. Initially I started with rough sketches of different places and scenarios that I feared, which then turned into detailed drawings using color pencils. I also tried painting, to explore which medium suits my work better but found that digital illustrations enhance my work the most. I used illustrator to make the outlines of my work and then took it into photoshop, where I digitally painted them.

PRE-PRODUCTION:

Since the beginning of my thesis project, I have explored many different areas of anthropomorphism and metaphors. What I trying to do was to find a way I can use it as a tool to describe a topic/ concept. I tried something very basic at first, making collages that showed how we associate certain animals and objects to genders, race, a certain profession maybe. Later I focused only on human-animal relations, and ended up making hybrids, each of them representing the seven deadly sins.

These ideas seemed like they had already been done before and the imagery looked like it was pretty common over the internet. Plus these topics didn't seem like they were to be called a thesis. So as my final work, in 7th semester, I made 4 3d sculptural paintings, each showing a character that represented a certain mental disorder. My goal here was to bring a mental illness into physicality, using mixed animals. The characters were supposed to have the features and body parts that stood as kind of a metaphor for how the disorder feels like. For example in panic disorder, I used huge octopus tentacles to define the feeling of panic and breathlessness one feels when they have a panic attack. Originally the animal, octopus often wraps its tentacles around its prey and crushes it. But this idea didn't work out that well for me because each mentally ill person, has its own experience with the disorder and it cant generalized; and I because I myself wasn't mentally ill, I simply could not relate to it.

After some discussion with my teachers, I decided that it was best that I do something that I could relate to. So I chose to work on phobias and fears that people generally have. I brainstormed my own fears and chose top 4 of them, which included, fear of water, claustrophobia, arachnophobia (fear of spiders) and fear of public places.

Chapter5

PRODUCTION:

When their was supposed to a physical display of our thesis, what I had in mind was to paint or print, large fluorescent illustrations or my work. Fluorescent seemed liked it could dramatize the whole scene even more and give it kind fictional look. Now im making 3 digital paintings.

Chapter6

CONCLUSION:

Throughout the phases of research, experimentation and then implementation, I have gained much understanding about my topic that is Self-Harm. What I have learnt is to search for an adequate amount of knowledge being sufficient enough for me to proceed further with putting that knowledge to use, in a way that would help in gathering both qualitative and quantitative data to be put into analysis with an intention to be implemented into a finely structured design product. I have also learnt to manage time according to the deliverables required for a desired progress and also how important it is to neglect unnecessary data, arrange the remaining clusters of necessary data into a concept building exercise that is one of the most essential parts of the design procedure. I now know how to convert human thoughts and experience into visual narratives using a language that explains it a lot better than simple words.