

Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial Response

Coming from a background rooted in visual design and conceptual thinking—having worked in healthcare advertising as an Art Director for three years after receiving a B.A. in Graphic Design—I found the reading on Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial very interesting and eye-opening. I had never heard of these terms prior and was intrigued as well as unsure where to place myself once learning about their break-down and the subcategories within. Where I found this reading the most relevant was my current interest and projects related to animation and motion graphics as well as character development.

Since joining the MFA Design & Technology program at Parsons, I have become very enamored with the world of animation and am currently enrolled in my second motion graphics course. When I first discovered this design method in the fall, I dug down to figure out why I was so enamored and where the passion was coming from. I looked through my old design projects and realized that I had a lot with animals or abstract characters. I had been interested in creating characters forever, but just hadn't realized it on a conscious level.

Thinking about these new terms, I realized that I had indeed been using an anthropomorphic view to create these characters—"Kindchenschema" as mentioned on p. 260. I approached it by thinking about the animals/characters as having the same emotions that we, as humans, have. They could be happy, excited, sad, angry, insulted, or embarrassed. In a way, I think animation isn't wrong if it uses these mindsets to create animal characters. I find that it helps me relate to an animal group if I see a character with a name, relationships, and feelings that I am familiar with. When I was a child, I was terrified of spiders. Seeing the movie *Charlotte's Web* and reading *Miss Spider's Tea Party* by David Kirk helped me become less afraid as I could relate to the characters and see them as friendly beings. Therefore, I think this can actually be used in a positive manner to help humans be more compassionate with animals and hopefully therefore care more about their habitat and our environment as a whole. Animals can also be used as strategic tools in addressing human-related subjects to make a story more digestible like, for example, in George Orwell's *1984*. Is this method an exploitation of animals, though?

I found it very interesting to think about anthropodenial and the idea that we might be overestimating humans' mental capacity and underestimating animals' mental capacity. Per Hume's discussion on p. 259, he argues that "When any hypothesis, therefore, is advanc'd to explain a mental operation, which is common to men and beasts, we must apply the same hypothesis to both". Therefore in the future I would approach character animation by considering that they may be on the same mental wavelength as humans or that humans may be on the same wavelength as the animals

with which they interact. Yet I would also challenge myself to experiment with more realistic depictions of animals and their harsh living conditions in the spirit of de Waal's observation that "the fact that animals kill and devour one another, die of starvation and disease, or are indifferent to one another does not fit the increasingly popular image of animals as noble savages" (p. 261).

In the framework of this class, I plan to channel anthropomorphism in the context of Shepard's argument (p. 262) that anthropomorphism draws us as humans closer to animals and the natural world and that allows for a world in which we are interested in learning about and from animals as a means of researching solutions for our own lives. Being in the Design & Technology program, I have seen that many of the technological solutions and advancements of today focus solely on human life and don't remotely consider the implications for wildlife and the natural world. Being that we are in the anthropocene, we must move forward as designers and creators with a mindset that considers these implications or else the planet and its ecosystems will continue to deplete at an exponential rate, keeping the German term "Umwelt" in mind (p. 265).

Overall, I believe it is important to understand the differences between animalcentric anthropomorphism and anthropocentric anthropomorphism (p. 265). Working in healthcare advertising, I was used to solving human-related problems in a way that only thought about the humans specifically involved. I am looking forward to exercising a different way of thinking by going directly to the animals and the specific problems they face before considering applications to humans. Of course, applying these learnings or ways of practice to humans could be helpful and interesting, it should not be the guiding factor in all cases.