

VIKTÓRIA TRAUB  
**IS THE CROCODILE HUMAN?**

*Anthropomorphism in Character Design  
of Auteur Animated Short Films*

Theses

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# Abstract

In my research, I investigated the visual and narrative representation of anthropomorphic characters in auteur animated short films. The study examines from a critical perspective - with a focus on artistic responsibility - classical principles of character design and movement in animation, as well as the risks associated with the schematic application of anthropomorphism (Bliss, Parkinson). In addition to exploring the complex interpretive possibilities of traditional and learned anthropomorphic and zoomorphic narratives, I also took into consideration the historical development and contemporary relevance of animation's categorization as a medium primarily intended "for children."

The dissertation complements the creative perspective with an audience-centered approach, employing factual methods in the form of a questionnaire-based survey to examine Generation Z's animation consumption habits. I paid special attention to the effects of unconventional visual and narrative techniques on audience reception. I explored these effects both in terms of the reinterpretation of anthropomorphic characters (Bliss) and through a custom-developed typology categorizing selected animated films according to their relationship with traditional anthropomorphic narratives.

Rule-breaking, unconventional formal strategies and conscious deviations from narrative norms – characteristic of auteur animation – present some challenges to broader audience engagement, yet they simultaneously expand the formal and generic boundaries of animation. These creative choices open pathways for novel visual and narrative forms that transcend established conventions. These decisions broaden the aesthetic and narrative possibilities of animation and also contribute to the reconfiguration of audience expectations. This is particularly significant for a medium still frequently associated with children's content. Within this context, anthropomorphic character representation was chosen as the central focus of this inquiry, through which I, as a creator, also sought to explore new narrative and visual possibilities in my animated short film *Shoes and Hooves*, which serves as the practical component of my doctoral master's work.

## / Hypothesis

Traditional anthropomorphic narratives - defined as the culturally embedded collective imagery associated with animals - shape modes of representation and influence the interpretative potential of the characters depicted. It is thus of scholarly relevance to examine how these narrative frameworks affect the practices of creators working within the medium of auteur animated short films.

# / Theses

- 1 Formal and thematic regularities can be identified and typologized in autonomous character design practices of auteur animated short films. The interpretation of a figure, face, or object is informed simultaneously by subjective and culturally encoded perspectives, making interpretation inseparable from context and learned representational schemas.
- 2 An abstract world constructed within an auteur animated short film - provided it is consistent, authentic, and coherent - can successfully establish a connection between creator and audience. By internalizing the logic of the constructed world, viewers come to perceive the treatment of characters as integral to the world's visual interpretation.
- 3 Animal traits, when employed as components of personality, exert a clear and unavoidable influence on the interpretation of interactions. This effect operates through the "inherited" culturally determined dominant attributes and through the "learned" internal logic specific to the narrative context of the given auteur animated short film.
- 4 The interplay between collective and individual mythologies can be observed across societal, communal, and individual levels. The motifs embedded in a community's belief system shape artistic communication, influencing both the creator's artistic toolkit and the audience's expectations.
- 5 Deviation from traditional anthropomorphic narratives and unconventional narrative structures and visual styles elicit polarized responses from members of Generation Z. In certain instances, these shifts hinder interpretability and reception, leading to rejection. However, in other cases, it is precisely these non-traditional narrative and visual strategies that elicit positive responses and foster acceptance.