

Visual Analysis of Anthropomorphism in the Black Cat Character in the Non Dialogue Animated Film *Flow* (2024)

Muhammad Adi Kusuma

Visual Communcation Design Department, Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Kankan Kasmana

Master of Design, Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study explores the visual concept of anthropomorphism as it relates to the character of the black cat in the animated film *Flow* (2024), which has no spoken dialogue. Using a qualitative descriptive approach together with a comparative analysis technique, this study compares the realistic depiction of the cat's movement, expression, and behavior with features showing anthropomorphic characteristics. The black cat was selected for examination because of its significant role and the wide spectrum of visual activities displayed all across the movie. The study entailed identifying particular sequences and next looking at the visual features of movements and expressions that mimic real animal behavior versus those that show motion patterns or postures similar to human actions. Research show that the employment of anthropomorphic motions in the black cat character is especially more evident during specific events meant to build emotional bonds with the audience. The differences between naturalistic and anthropomorphic movements show how visual anthropomorphism acts as a communication strategy that improves nonverbal narrative in animation that lacks conversation. Particularly in relation to the comprehension of anthropomorphism as a visual tool of conveying meaning and emotion in the field of animation, this study is expected to add value to the area of visual communication design.

Keywords: *Anthropomorphism, Expression, Gesture, Non-Dialogue Animation, Flow*

INTRODUCTION

The development of animation shows that visual communication plays a dominant role in conveying meaning and building emotional engagement with audiences. In dialogue-free animated films, the delivery of messages no longer relies on spoken language but on the visual strength of the characters. (Paul Wells.,1998) states that animation has the capacity to express psychological conditions through gestures and expressions, allowing narratives to be conveyed without verbal language. In line with this view,(Ekawardhani., 2015) explains that character visualization is constructed through the interpretation of form and visual attitude so that characters can be understood by the audience without depending on verbal narration. In this context, anthropomorphism enables non-human characters to display expressive attributes resembling humans in order to build empathy and emotional connection.

The emphasis on the role of gestures and expressions in dialogue-free films has also been highlighted in previous studies. Chare and Watkins (as cited in T. W. Ali, 2022) state that gestures are an important component in character formation, particularly in films with minimal or no dialogue. Gestures do not merely function as physical movements but also represent the psychological state and intentions of a character. Furthermore, (Mukti and Kasmana., 2024) emphasize that visual expressions play a significant role in establishing emotional relationships between characters and audiences when text or dialogue is not used. It is due to this reason that facial expressions and gestures play an essential role in decoding the meaning behind what is being depicted through visuals.

Based on such an explanation, the examination of the visual depiction of anthropomorphism in animated movies without any dialogue becomes critical in terms of how the non-human characters create their facial expressions and gestures. This research focuses on the visual analysis of the black cat character in the animated film *Flow* (2024) to identify how the concept of anthropomorphism is constructed through expressive behavior and gestures without the support of verbal dialogue.

Although the roles of gestures and expressions have been widely discussed in animation studies, most previous research focuses on characters that strongly resemble humans (humanoid) or on narratives supported by verbal dialogue. There are still limited studies that specifically examine animal characters with naturalistic behavior that implicitly apply anthropomorphism in dialogue-free films such as *Flow* (2024). As a result, this research is significant because it offers fresh perspectives on how contemporary visual tales maintain the line between anthropomorphic characteristics and naturalistic behavior.

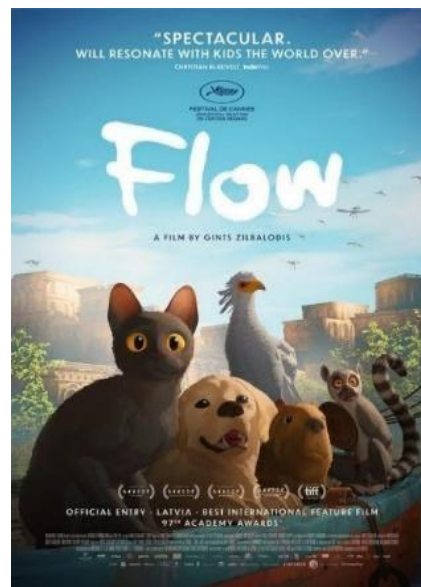


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1. animated film *Flow* (2024)
source : <https://www.mvtimes.com/2024/12/09/new-take-noah-flow/>

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to cinema Art: An Introduction, mise-en-scène in cinema theory refers to all visual components that are positioned inside the frame, including lighting, location, costumes, and the actions of people in front of the camera. Together, these components contribute to the construction of narrative meaning (David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 2019). Consequently, In addition to conversation, visual composition, character placement, and visual structures that direct the audience's perception also serve to transmit meaning in movies. According to this viewpoint, visual structure has the ability to tell stories on its own. Gestures, stances, and spatial connections all play significant dramatic roles in dialogue-free animation, which uses visual components as the main storytelling medium.

Visual Communication in Expressing Emotions The subject of visual communication in expressing emotions is well-studied in psychology. According to Ekman, there are six fundamental emotions common to all humans: anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, and disgust (Ekman, 1999). Furthermore, Ekman created the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), which involves coding emotions based on the action of the facial muscles in making particular facial

expressions (Ekman, 1999). In dialogue-less animation, visual expression takes center stage in portraying character emotions and importance to the story.

In terms of portrayal of the character, Epley et al. (2007) note that anthropomorphism is the act of imbuing non-human entities with human cognitive traits like intentionality, feelings, and consciousness. This occurs through implicit means via visualization, behaviors, and the reactions shown by the objects or characters themselves. Anthropomorphism in visual media acts as a medium of communication to help the viewer understand and emotionally connect with the non-human entities depicted. Supporting this perspective, (Ekawardhani., 2015) It is stated that the process of visualizing characters is facilitated by the process of interpreting form and posture visually, thus allowing viewers to understand the character without relying on any verbal commentary. As such, visual expressions and body language play an essential role in creating characterizations.

METHODOLOGY

The adopted methodology in the current study is a descriptive qualitative one since the obtained data in the form of description will be verbal and visual instead of statistical (Sujarweni, 2014). In other words, descriptive qualitative methodology was chosen in order to structure the depiction of anthropomorphism in the character of black cat in the animated movie *Flow* (2024). Thus, the core aspect of the study is the analysis of the character's facial expressions and gestures as means of constructing anthropomorphism without the help of speech communication. The object of this research is represented by certain scenes containing the facial expression and body gestures characteristic of the state of mind of the black cat character. The process of data collection was implemented through conducting documentary research implying the stages of observing, detecting, and recording the scene fragments relevant for the topic (still frames). Furthermore, data analysis was conducted based on the use of visual comparison of expressions and gestures with the purpose of finding the patterns of anthropomorphism (Gray et al., 2007).

DISCUSSION

The visual portrayal of the black cat in *Flow* (2024) represents an intentional use of naturalism in terms of the use of visuals in order to convey information regarding the character identity. As such, the description of the character in terms of physical and behavioral features is outlined in Figure 2 (Character Description), where specific characteristics used in the analysis are provided. Relying on the theoretical foundations of Nurgiyantoro (2013), the notion of character is defined not only by the physical appearance but also by actions and the way the character reacts to situations. In *Flow* (2024), the portrayal of the character is accomplished via the application of the sensory feature of movement in order to create the image. The suggestion is based on the argument that non-human characters become meaningful when movement is emphasized as opposed to exaggerated cartoons (Loughborough University, 2017). Therefore, movement becomes the main tool of characterization, which makes it possible to understand the nature of the character from the perspective of behavioral characteristics, and not from verbal descriptions (Cohn & Magliano, 2020). Avoiding unnecessary stylization, the film allows the character to be embedded in a natural setting, according to which the character's "represented being" is created based on physical observations and actions (Ede, 2022).in the absence of dialogue.

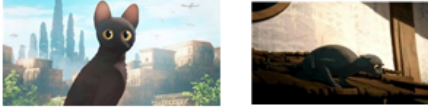
Visual Karakter	
	
Deskripsi Tokoh	
Nama tokoh	-
Alias	Black cat
Hobby	Menangkap ikan
Famili	Felidae
Kingdom	Animalia
Nama latin	Felis catus
Spesies	Mamalia karnivora
Ras	Domestic shorthair
Jenis kelamin	-
Usia	3 tahun (kucing dewasa muda)
Warna bulu	Hitam
Warna mata	coklat emas kehijauan
Ukuran tubuh	Panjang ramping, proporsi kucing muda
Bentuk tubuh	Ramping, fleksible, tipikal kucing domestik aktif
Bentuk ekor	Ekor panjang, lentur
Kentuk wajah	Wajah berbentuk segitiga dengan mata besar,
Karakteristik gerak	Lincih, responsif, dominan gerak halus
Kepribadian	Adaptif, waspada, ramah saat sudah akrab
Habitat (dalam film)	lingkungan pascabencana: hutan, kota tenggelam
Status sosial	Soliter kemudian beradaptasi dalam kelompok
Peran	Protagonis utama

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 2. Character Description

Although it focuses on a naturalistic approach, the movie *Flow* involves the use of some techniques of animation in developing the narrative flow of events in it. The most effective of them appears to be the principle of staging. According to the principle of classical animation discussed by Thomas and Johnston (1995), it helps to communicate a particular feeling or idea expressed by a character and directs the viewer's attention toward an important aspect of the scene. Such a technique can be observed in the sequence involving the threat from the secretary bird, shown in Figure 3(A-C), where staging is used to build visual hierarchy by manipulating the elements of scale, character placement, and space. For instance, the bird takes the center stage with its wings wide open (Figures 3A-B), which intimidates the cat positioned below (Figure 3C). This effective use of staging, supported by appeal through the clarity of silhouettes, functions not merely as a compositional technique but as a narrative device that constructs an imbalance of power between the characters. Recent research by Mohammad (2025) reinforces this argument by demonstrating that the precise application of the staging principle significantly enhances the clarity of a character's silhouette, the strength of their expression, and their visual appeal, ultimately strengthening the narrative (p. 7).

The application of this staging principle demonstrates that animation principles in *Flow* are not used for cartoonish stylization but rather to subtly clarify narrative situations. As explained by professional animator Kim (2025), effective staging uses composition, camera placement, and clear silhouettes to highlight the story's focus an approach that can also be applied subtly in realistic animation. Furthermore, the use of anticipation and follow-through in the movements of the tail and ears reinforces the realism of motion, allowing the characters to convey emotions through body language. While follow-through guarantees that body parts like the tail or ears continue to move in a natural rhythm after the main body has stopped, making movement appear more realistic and fluid, the anticipation principle gets the audience ready for the main action (Thomas & Johnston, 1995; Kim, 2025).

Overall, On the whole, the integration of these principles into animation functions as the device that allows one to achieve naturalistic veracity while, at the same time, enhancing the emotional readability of characters. This role is

supported by the results of Rahayu et al. (2024), study dedicated to investigating the effects of animation principles on the perception of 2D animated videos. As shown by the authors, the correct use of principles of staging and timing is connected with the clear and understandable delivery of visual information to the audience (p. 17). For this reason, the film *Flow* relies upon animation principles as tools for enriching the plot and creating an emotional bond with the viewer.

The analysis is conducted using a comparative analysis method, which involves comparing the behavior, poses, and visual expressions of the black cat character in the animated film *Flow* (2024) with the behavior of real-world cats based on biological observation. This comparison aims to identify the similarities and deviations between the cat's behavior in the film and that of real cats, thereby determining the extent to which the film *Flow* maintains naturalistic traits and in which parts the concept of anthropomorphism is applied to convey narrative meaning.

The selection of 11 scenes in this study was carried out through a process of selection based on specific criteria, not randomly. The chosen scenes are those that visually display the behavior, poses, and body expressions of the black cat clearly, allowing for a comparative analysis with feline behavior based on biological observation. Not all scenes in the film are used as data, as some are transitional, do not show significant gestures, or are not relevant for comparison with real-world cat behavior. Therefore, this study limits its analysis to 11 scenes that meet the following criteria:

- 1) Displays clear and dominant gestures or body poses.
- 2) Has potential narrative meaning.
- 3) Can be compared with biologically-based feline behavior.
- 4) Shows naturalistic elements or indications of anthropomorphism.

This limitation aims to keep the analysis focused and in-depth, enabling the research to address the research problem in a targeted manner.

HASIL ANALISIS KOMPARASI

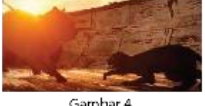
ADEGAN FILM	KENYATAAN	N/A	ADEGAN FILM	KENYATAAN	N/A
 Gambar 1 Scene 1	 Gambar 1 Pose Rubbling / Menggosok Badan	N	 Gambar 7 Scene 7	 Gambar 7 Pose Stretching / Peregangkan	N
 Gambar 2 Scene 2	 Gambar 2 Pose tidur / Meringkuk	N	 Gambar 8 Scene 8	 Gambar 8 Bermain	N
 Gambar 3 Scene 3	 Gambar 3 Pose Berlari	N	 Gambar 9 Scene 9	 Gambar 9 Berburu	A
 Gambar 4 Scene 4	 Gambar 4 Pose Defensif	N	 Gambar 10 Scene 10	 Gambar 10 Solidarity	A
 Gambar 5 Scene 5	 Gambar 5 Scratching / perilaku menggaruk	A	 Gambar 11 Scene 11	 Gambar 11 Low Affect/ Perilaku Pasif	A
 Gambar 6 Scene 6	 Gambar 6 berenang	A	Naturalistik = N Antropomorfik = A		
			Naturalistik = 6 Antropomorfik = 5		

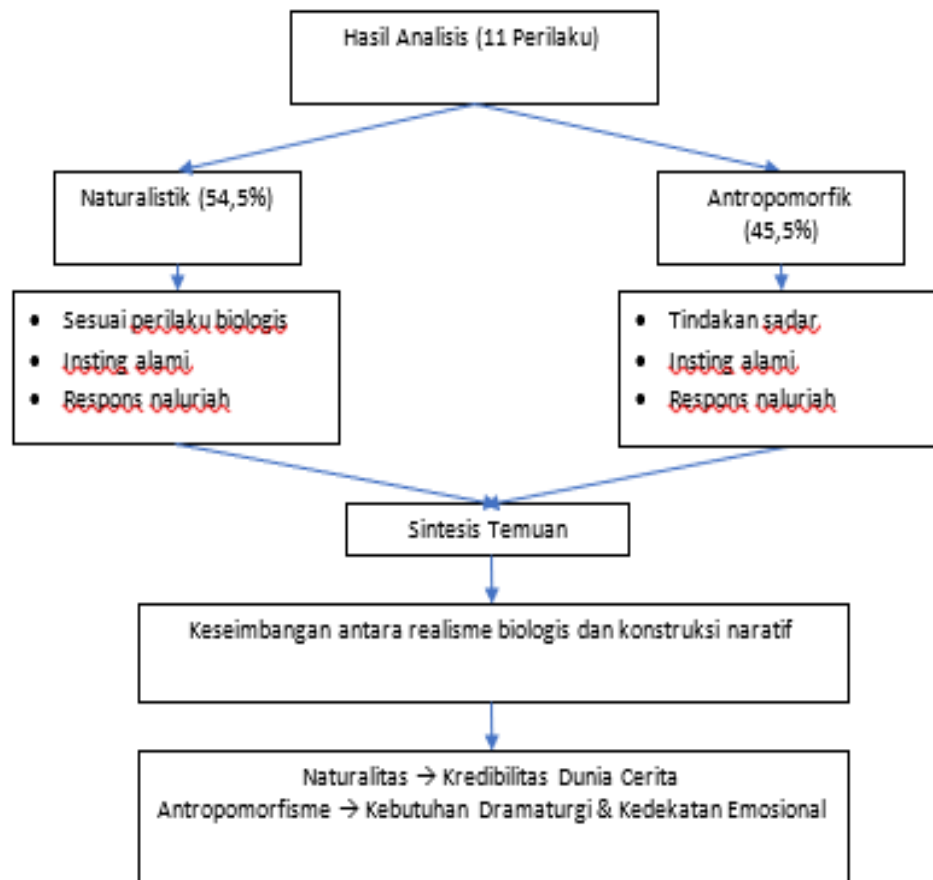
Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 4. Table Comparison

Based on the comparative analysis of the 11 selected behavioral objects on Figure 4 , the results indicate that the representation of behavior in the film shows a slightly stronger tendency toward naturalistic depiction, although anthropomorphic elements remain present and influential in supporting the narrative. In terms of overall percentage, out of the 11 behaviors analyzed, 6 behaviors (54.5%) are categorized as naturalistic representations, meaning that these behaviors remain consistent with the biological and ethological characteristics of real cats. Meanwhile, 5 behaviors (45.5%) demonstrate anthropomorphic tendencies, referring to behaviors that have undergone human centered meaning construction through deliberate actions, social relations, empathy, solidarity, and emotional expressions that extend beyond the biological instincts of real cats. This percentage indicates that although the film constructs its narrative world on a foundation of seemingly natural behavior, anthropomorphic elements still appear on a nearly balanced scale. The relatively close percentage difference suggests that the animated film *Flow* combines both naturalistic and anthropomorphic approaches in constructing character behavior. The purpose behind the acts, however, is the main distinction between anthropomorphic and naturalistic behaviors in the film. Naturalistic actions are mostly driven by instincts, reflexes, and fundamental survival needs that are part of cats' actual nature. Anthropomorphic behaviors, on the other hand, go beyond the basic necessities of cats in reality and are characterized by intentional activities, logical decision-making abilities, and social connections. Therefore, the underlying

distinction between the two types of conduct is not just about how the action is done, but also about its deeper significance.

This data demonstrates that the animated film *Flow* balances biological correctness with narrative. Naturalistic elements contribute to the development of a logical and plausible fictional world where the characters' biological behaviors are consistent. Anthropomorphism also aids in heightening drama, providing amusement, escalating tension, and fostering an emotional bond between the viewer and the black cat figure.

To put it another way, naturalism is employed in *Flow* not just to help depict realistic animal behavior but also to validate the fictitious universe that has been shown. Anthropomorphism, on the other hand, is used as a narrative device to help with the plot's development, the creation of social bonds, and the portrayal of emotions that the audience can better comprehend and connect to. To put it another way, the behavioral portrayal in *Flow* is a hybrid of both: anthropomorphism improves narrative effectiveness and emotional closeness, while realism aids in the creation of a credible environment.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Using the concept of anthropomorphism by making a comparative study of the biological behavior of the black cat figure compared to the real cat, it can be observed that animal depiction in animated movies is not entirely objective, but it falls somewhere between realism and the imposition of human significance. In the sphere of non-

verbal animated films, visual gestures and actions serve as key elements for building narrative meanings. An examination of the black cat figure depicted in the animated film *Flow* (2024) reveals that even though there is a foundation based on realism, this figure is gradually made anthropomorphic as dictated by the narrative needs of expressing emotions and creating social relationships. Thus, anthropomorphism in the film being discussed does not completely eliminate biological realism but acts as a means of visual expression that comes on top of realism. *Flow* creates its black cat figure in this way and maintains realism in it while imposing human significance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to this study by analyzing the visual picture of the black cat figure in the animated film "*Flow*" (2024). We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who volunteered to assist us with this research project.. Their valuable contributions have greatly enriched this study and made this research possible.

REFERENCES

- Ali, T. W., Henedy, A. K., & Tahir, T. M. (2022). The role of gestures in Iraqi influencers' digital communication. *Humanities & Natural Sciences Journal*, 6(24). <https://doi.org/10.53796/hnsj64/2>
- Bordwell, D. and Thompson, K., (2019). *Film Art: An Introduction*. 12th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Cohn, N., & Magliano, J. P. (2020). Visual narratives are sequences of images created with meaningful intent. *OSF Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/y92f5>
- Eder, J. (2022). *Characters in film and other media: Theory, analysis, interpretation*. Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0298>
- Ekawardhani, Y. A., & Rochmawati, I. (2015) *Prinsip antropomorfisme dan personifikasi dalam karakter film animasi kartun anak: laporan akhir penelitian dosen pemula*.
- Ekman, P. (1999) 'Basic emotions', in Dalglish, T. & Power, M.J. (eds.) *Handbook of cognition and emotion*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 45–60. doi:10.1002/0470013494.ch3.
- Epley, N., Waytz, A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2007). On Seeing Human: A Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism. *Psychological Review*, 114(4), 864–886.
- Gray, P. S., Williamson, J. B., Karp, D. A., & Dalphin, J. R. (2007). *Comparative research methods*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, D. (2025, June 25). Tutorial: How to master the 12 principles of animation. *Animation Mentor*. <https://www.animationmentor.com/blog/tutorial-12-principles-of-animation/page/2/>
- Loughborough University. (2017). *Redefining the anthropomorphic animal in animation* [Doctoral thesis, Loughborough University]. Loughborough University Repository. https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/thesis/Redefining_the_anthropomorphic_animal_in_animation/9463412
- Mukti, I. A., & Kasmana, K. (2024). Expression analysis of Japanese comic characters in the seinen genre. *ARTIC*, 7(1), pp. 729–746.
- Mohammad, N. (2025). Implementasi prinsip animasi staging pada karakter "Batang Bangau" [Karya ilmiah, Politeknik Negeri Batam]. Repositori Politeknik Negeri Batam. <https://repository.polibatam.ac.id/items/8679b4f7-381b-4ed8-bdf7-05345fb7e5b5>
- Nurgiantoro, B. (2013). *Teori pengkajian fiksi*. Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Rahayu, D., Kusumastuti, R., Mangkuto, I., Nugraheni, A. I. D., & Wibowo, A. P. A. (2024). Ketepatan penerapan prinsip animasi staging dan timing pada video animasi 2D motion graphic [The accuracy of applying staging and timing animation principles in 2D motion graphic animated videos]. *Information System Journal (INFOS)*, *7*(1), 11-19. <https://doi.org/10.24076/infosjournal.2024v7i01.1578>
- Sujarweni, V. W. (2014). *Metodelogi penelitian*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Baru Press, p. 74.
- Thomas, F., & Johnston, O. (1995). *The illusion of life: Disney animation* (Paraphrased summary). Western Kentucky University, People

Website. <https://people.wku.edu/joon.sung/edu/anim/3d/animation/principles.html> (Original work published 1981)
Wells, P. (1998). Understanding animation. London: Routledge.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Muhammad Adi Kusuma email: adi.51921104@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

Muhammad Adi Kusuma born on December 3, 2000. is a student with a strong enthusiasm for learning and developing in the field of Visual Communication Design. He completed his undergraduate study in the Visual Communication Design program at Universitas Komputer Indonesia (UNIKOM) in 2026.

Kankan Kasmana, email: kankan.kasmana@email.unikom.ac.id

Dr. Kankan Kasmana is a lecturer and Head of the Department of Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Design Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia. He graduated with a Doctoral Degree from the Faculty of Art and Design, Institut Teknologi Bandung, in 2014. His research interests are design and culture, design & technology, brand and promotion, illustration, and multimedia