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Anime’s Actors: Constituting “Self-hood” through Embodied and Figurative Performance in Animation

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Abstract: If animation allows us to envision a world of active objects through animating their movement, then surely how the objects are made to move through the animation changes how they are constituted as actors. In other words, how bodies move in animation, human and object alike, also entails certain conceptions of “self” as it is constituted through the dynamics of its animation. This study aims to (re) consider Donald Crafton’s conceptualization of animation performance forms (embodied and figurative performance), specifically in relation to Japanese anime. In embodied acting, the expression of character is produced through distinctive movements, where characters are constituted as individuals, each with their own discrete inside and outside. Figurative acting, on the other hand, utilizes various gestures and codified expressions. Due to this reliance on codified expressions, figurative performances build from previous ones, replaying and reiterating them in different contexts. Each of these forms enacts a different conception of selfhood: embodied acting performing the modern conception of individualism bound to the singular body on the object which performs the movement; figurative acting performing a type of "particularity" entailing a different conception of the strict internal/external borders of “individuality,” where the self is a composite configured through the citation of codes. Figurative performance thus facilitates an aesthetic well attuned to the contemporary performance of self under the conditions of neoliberalism, selecting from a vast array of options, jerkily moved from one product and expression to another.

Keywords: Performativity, performance, actor theory, objecthood, anime form

Animation and how objects act

Animation has long been marveled at for its ability to make objects normally perceived as lifeless move, to allow objects to act. Ursula Heise contends that this distinctive quality of the medium of animation provides an "aesthetic framework" to explore conceptions of a non-anthropocentric worldview. Such visions of active objects may initially be difficult to imagine, but in animation, “matter” is made to move, objects are literally turned into animated “actors,” giving them agency and character in the process. However, as Heise cautions, though animation "sets objects in motion, endows them with agency, and inquires into their 'objecthood' (2014: 303)," animated objects can sometimes have humanlike subjectivities mapped onto them (e.g., racist stereotypes depicted in animals, like the African

American crows in *Dumbo* 2014: 308-9). In this sense, there is the possibility that "objecthood" and anthropocentric "selfhood" would be conflated.

Generally speaking, the modern conception of human "self" is an individual, separated from the external world through their body, with which they express agency and act upon passive objects (cf. Butler 1993, Elliott 2016). As such, even if animation makes objects moves and turns them into actors, anthropocentric notions of individualism can be mapped onto the object. Furthermore, animation is itself diverse, with many forms and techniques employed in its execution. If animation allows us to envision a world of active objects through animating their movement, then surely how the objects are made to move through the animation changes how they are constituted as actors. In other words, how bodies move in animation, human and object alike, also entails certain conceptions of "self" as it is constituted through the dynamics of its animation. Mediated by the process of animation, then, the different ways objects are animated has important effects on what type of "self" they become. As such, we might ask what forms of acting do objects perform in different animations and what type of actors (or "self") do these acting forms produce? If animation can visualize a world of active objects, can it also enable conceptions of selfhood other than the "individual"? Furthermore, would these alternative conceptions of selfhood be better suited to thinking through this historical moment of globalization?

In order to explore these questions, we must examine the processes and dynamics of the movement of different objects (or rather, their bodies) in animation. Here, performance theory would be very useful. In addition to its theatrical connotations of acting, the word "performance" can here mean, to do, to execute, to judge/grade ("how did you perform on the test?") (Carlson 2004), but also to enact, to bring about, to constitute, to bring into existence (Butler 1988). From the perspective of performance theory, I would suggest that while filmic animations are materially specific types of performance, there are forms of performance—repeated strategies and modes of performance that are informed by certain conceptual tendencies—that can be seen as shared by (or even transposed from) theatrical acting to animation's actors (and vice versa). To better grasp this, Crafton's take on performance in and of animation is instructive (2013:15-23). Performance in and of animation is not just doing animation, but how it is done, how it is judged, the dynamics of that execution as it produces movement in a body, and how that body acts in the resulting animation product. While there are a multitude of approaches to movement in animation, Crafton provides two such conceptualizations of animation performance forms: embodied performance and figurative performance.

Embodied performance (or "acting," Crafton using the terms somewhat interchangeably) "is introverted. It is the philosophy and practice of creating imaginatively realized beings with individuality, depth, and internal complexity (Crafton, 2013: 36)." The expression of character is produced through individualized movement that flows from that specific character. Embodied acting is influenced by Stanislavskian acting and deeply connected to Disney animation (Crafton detailing its development in the studio in the 1930s), where the emphasis is on a type of realism and individuality in the motion of the character animation (Crafton, 2013: 36-48). Figurative performance (or acting), on the other hand, "is extroverted. Characters behave as recognizable 'types,' marshalling a small range of instantly identifiable facial and body expressions (Crafton, 2013: 23)." But this does not mean that figurative acting is devoid of feeling, but rather, that it uses different "devices," specifically through "vocabularies" of various gestures and codified expressions. Due to this reliance on codified expressions, figurative performances build from previous ones (2013: 26), replaying and reiterating them in different contexts. Figurative acting is not just found in animation, but in many traditional theatre forms, and though Crafton does not mention them, examples would include Noh, Topeng, and Kathakali.[1] While Crafton focuses his discussion of figurative acting to 1930s American cartoons, he notes that figurative acting is pervasive in anime (2013: 22). While Crafton uses the English word "anime," as Nobuyuki Tsugata has pointed out, "anime" is not simply a shortening of the Japanese word for "animation" (*animēshon*), but can mean commercial Japanese TV animation that stems from a lineage of limited animation and targets the "young adult" demographic (2011:31-33).[2] Following this, I will be drawing from such anime works to provide examples.

[1] This should not be taken as an East vs. West comparison, but merely different approaches to performance.
[2] In this article, the word "animation" indicates general techniques of expression, or rather, the medium of animation itself, whereas "anime" indicates one type of animation, a media that includes certain practices and institutions.

It should be stressed that Crafton does not see a hierarchy between figurative and embodied performance (2013: 40). Nor does Crafton actually see these different approaches as two opposite poles (2013: 48). Rather they can be considered as connected, where both forms can be performed at once in different degrees (Crafton 2013: 48), where one tendency is implicated in the other. However, as this study aims to (re) consider Crafton's conceptualization of animation performance, to better examine these forms, I will begin by exploring these two tendencies in their extremes. I will be examining anime as a type of animation that tends towards figurative acting, and comparing it to Disney's works as they are emblematic of embodied acting. These two forms can be seen as producing differing tenets in their performance. Each of these forms enacts a different conception of selfhood: embodied acting performing the modern conception of individualism bound to the singular body on the object which performs the movement; figurative acting performing a type of "particularity" rather than "individuality," where the self is a composite configured through the citation of codes.

Embodied performance

Embodied performance in animation is when the individualized qualities of the character are materialized in movement, as movement, where "animators perform movement to perform emotion (Crafton 2013: 44)." Embodied animation performance meshes well with the smooth, continuity of movement that is employed in full animation. This smoothness of animation is optimized, a steady stream that can imbue the movement with affective tinges. Embodied acting in animation often takes on an image of verisimilitude, of engaging with a smoothness of movement that attempts to imitate the movements of "everyday life" and presumes a sense of naturalness in the reproduction of those movements. As Crafton notes, Disney made significant attempts to integrate stage and film acting of the Stanislavskian lineage (later called "method acting") into his animation, many of his animators going through acting lessons and observing and drawing human actors and animals (2013: 37-41). For human actors, a good actor of this type works by incorporating different "real life" experiences that she will internalize, then externalize in performance, not just in dialogue, but in movement. These motions would feel motivated, inner-driven (Crafton 2013: 39). Personality is expressed in the character's movement, and as such produces uniqueness, or put differently, individuality is produced through the specifics of their movement.

This form of embodied performance is not necessarily materially specific, and is employed in both traditional cel and CG animation. A great example of this can be found in the recent CG animation Disney film *Zootopia* (2016), in the well-publicized scene of when the rabbit character, Judy, and the fox character, Nick, go to the Department of Motor Vehicles run entirely by sloths. The sloth characters, as typically slow-moving creatures, are extremely listless in their movements, while Judy, under a time-restriction, is in a hurry, in need of some information from them. Nick knows a sloth ironically named Flash, who proceeds to look up the information for Judy, extremely slowly. Flash speaks in single words with long pauses between them, and Judy becomes frantic, moving and speaking quickly, as if to counter-act the languid pace of Flash. As Flash is typing in the information, moving at an excruciatingly slow pace, Nick tells Flash a joke. The simple pun takes a long time to register on the sloth's face, the full extension of the smile and lifting of the eyebrows occurring in near slow motion. Flash begins to turn to his co-worker to repeat the joke, as Judy becomes increasingly frantic at this new diversion, Nick grinning coolly at the success of his joke. The extreme slowness of the materialization of the expression and the joke's repetition, in contrast to the frantic and speedy movements of Judy, is part of the gag that makes the scene funny. Each character's posture, speed of movement, and performance of expression is specific to them: Judy's ears drooping in disappointment, folding back in distress; the extended lowering of the jaw into a smile and raised eyebrows of Flash; the perked, pointed ears that match the smirk of Nick. Their differing enactment of varied expressions (at differing speeds: Judy fast, Flash, excessively slow, Nick cool and in relative stasis) appears logical to each, their movements smooth and linearly progressing from the stimuli (from joke to reactions) in a lucid manner that is exaggerated and extended in duration to incite a comical reaction. The characters appear to emote, different emotions expressed in their individual manner.

In these scenes, and many others, the specifics of the movement of the character stems from their design. In other words, the movement differs depending on the character's body. This is found not only in recent animation, but dates back to the early days of the development of embodied acting in animation. For example, in the 1937 Disney short "The Clock Cleaners," which Crafton cites as a great example of embodied performance (2013: 46), Goofy walks in his own loopy manner that is enabled by his long legs, whereas Donald walks in a strut on his shorter legs. Furthermore, the character is kept discrete, where "the 'action' is derived not only from moving the body in space…but also from protecting the integrity of its somatic boundaries (Crafton 2013: 47-48)." In other words, a bordered body, with an internal and external is produced. In this sense, embodied performance, at its extreme, is locked to the body, localized and specific to the body, particular to that individual body. As such, the limit of embodied acting is the body itself. Embodied acting works producing a sense of emotion in movement, but limiting it to the body, making it appear personalized, individualized. Individual characters move between emotional registers in a smooth, logical, linear progression in a manner that appears consistent—it is supposed to appear as if it is "real," that these characters seem to actually emote individually, with internal emotions that are externally expressed (Crafton 2013: 41-42). Such characters do not have expressions that come externally, but are internal emotions that are externalized through the body. In this sense, they are localized to that body, the character becoming self-contained. From the character's body, through movement that appears to be internally motivated, the characters engage with the outside world, producing a distinctiveness and individuality that is easy to grasp. Embodied acting thus presumes an actor with sharp internal and external limits, an actor whose identity is individualized by the specific movements of that body. In this way, embodied performance recreates a type of actor that is an individual, a strictly bordered self.

While embodied acting is not inherently connected to individualist notions of the subject, the manner it is frequently performed in in animation tends towards these concepts. Even in scenes when non-humans are animated, through their embodied performance, they become locked to their bordered bodies and individualism is mapped onto them. Objects move, allowing us to visualize a world of objects with agency, but because they all operate through embodied acting, they are constituted as individuals, each with their own discrete inside and outside. This suggests that, while on one level embodied acting in animation visualizes objects as actors, on another level it repeats the same framework of modern individuals. There are many such instances in Disney films, such as the many object characters in *Beauty and the Beast*. These characters all move in embodied acting, the performance of which reinstates modern human individualism in the moving object's body. That the non-humans of many supposedly ecologically oriented films (such as *Bambi*) in fact re-instate the anthropocentric worldviews is a common criticism (cf. Smith and Parsons 2012, Heise 2014), and embodied performance can be seen as one of the mechanisms of this re-mapping. In such animated visions of the natural world, when embodied performance is enacted by the animated objects, they are constituted as discrete, individualized subjects that interact, not as acting objects that blur the distinctions of internal and external.

Figurative performance

Previously I have examined the type of self that is constituted by the extreme performance of embodied acting in animation, but here we will examine figurative acting, specifically in the commercial works of TV anime that come from a particular lineage of limited animation. To say that figurative expressions are prevalent in these anime is almost an understatement. It is not just arched-eyes when smiling, glimmering eyes and shaking bodies, but character poses, types of walking, running, eating, and a huge range of other actions. From facial expressions to complex movements, to a large degree, figurative acting *is* anime acting. To give a brief example of the extent figurative acting is widespread in anime: in *Evangelion* episode 26, the character Rei, who usually is very prepared and introverted, frantically runs with toast in her mouth as she is late for school, insinuating that she overslept. This is done to show that she has a completely different personality in this short-segment in an alternate universe. In the first episode of *K-On!* (2009), the character Yui also runs frantically to school with a piece of toast in her mouth after waking up late, to show that she is likewise clumsy and unprepared. A similar strategy is

repeated in a wide number of other anime to the extent that it is parodied in the anime *Seitokai Yakuindomo* (2010).

The point here, is that anime relies heavily on character types, whose actions are often codified to display their personality, usually displayed in facial and bodily movements that are figurative codes. Two characters can run the same, walk the same, and even smile the same, performed by both human and non-human characters. For example, though not for "young adults," we can see this often in works like *Pokemon*. These codes are performed with little variation regardless of production studio and narrative content. To give a brief example, Sheryl Nome from Bandai's *Macross Frontier*'s (2008) and Saegusa Mayumi from Aniplex's *The Irregular at Magic High School* (2008) perform the same codified smile. Figurative performance involves participation, a manner of reading the codes actively.[3] As if constituting their own "language," in order to be readable, each performance of a figurative expression must be connected to prior iterations, yet must still retain its particular relevance in the context of that specific performance. Codes like these are something that must be learned, for both the viewer and the producer. Moreover, through "facial expression practice" and derivative works made by fans online, professionals and fans perform the same codified expressions. Figurative acting may be seen as more communal (a shared set of codes) but it is also exclusionary in its own way (one must know the codes to both perform and read). At Comiket and other events where fans distribute and sell their derivative works (*nijisōsaku*) as well as online illustration sites like pixiv.net, fans perform the same codified expressions as professionals do. To give one specific example, if one would go to the "smile" (*egao*) tag on pixiv.net, there were be a variety of different smiles, but many of them would be the codified facial expression where the eyes turn to arches as in anime. There are even "*ugoira*" animations made by fans that feature this smile.[4] In fact, it is not rare for fans to become professionals, as famously occurred with the anime studio Gainax. That fans and professionals already use shared codes can be seen as one reason this often occurs. In general, these codes enable a type of expression that is collaborative, facilitating a type of production (and consumption) by multiple actors (animators, script writers, etc.) that allow for their easier collaboration (even in fan production).

Figurative expressions in anime often involve movement, but they tend towards minor movement (vibration, glimmering) or tableau. However, they rapidly switch between one expression and the next. As such, while not exclusive to limited animation, figurative acting meshes well with anime in its lineage from limited animation and its predilection towards a "jerkiness" in motion, and sudden switching between images (Lamarre 2009). This jerkiness is optimized through the editing of differing image compositions into a rhythm (Suan 2015), producing a sensation of movement where "gaps" in continuity are exposed, and sudden changes or appearances are the norm (e.g. figurative facial expressions that switch in an instant, from resting to sad to happy). As Marc Steinberg asserts, it is precisely because of the jerky rhythms of anime's particular lineage of limited animation that anime produces images of "dynamic immobility" (2012: 6). Indeed, these dynamically immobile images are often of poses and other figurative expressions, providing an animated-ness to the still image.[5]

The jerkiness in anime's rhythms also allows for a certain type of humor, of flashes of expressions that instantly switch between modes, from satisfied to furious, from loving to embarrassed, all at a moment's notice. To contrast with the slow reveal of the *Zootopia* scene, we can look to a scene in episode 2 of the anime *Full Metal Panic? Fumoffu* (2003, Figure 1). In a short segment, the character Sousuke forgets the homework notebook of his recently cheerful classmate/love interest Kaname. Through multiple cuts that switch viewpoints, Sousuke nervously and carefully prepares Kaname for the explanation that he forgot her homework, each shot of Kaname's face displaying a carefree smile. At the moment of his confession, Kaname, still smiling with her mouth agape, is shown in complete

[3] Though some become so adept at reading, the codes appear "transparent;" Kopylova 2016: 205
[4] For "ugoira" smiles, see
https://www.pixiv.net/search.php?word=%E7%AC%91%E9%A1%94&order=date_d&type=ugoira
[5] This connection to the aesthetics of the animation is also why it is important to see manga, which is so closely associated with anime, as, following Thomas Lamarre, a technology of the moving-image. It is not simply that manga is static, and anime moving. Figurative expression in anime thrives on the jerky rhythms and rapid switches of limited animation. As Lamarre explains, manga displays the exploded view of movement (2009: 288), and following Otsuka Eiji's argument, agrees that it is easy to see manga as a story-board, as ready to be animated or filmed (Otsuka 2013 referenced in Lamarre, 2015: 98). In other words, manga displays the projection of movement through paneling, where it is easy to perform the same rapid switches that facilitate the execution of figurative expressions, just like in anime. The reverse is true as well: limited animation is well-attuned to adapting the same rapid switches (without continuity of movement) that is the performance of figurative expressions in manga.

Figure 1: A comedic scene using figurative acting in episode 2 of *Full Metal Panic? Fumoffu* (© KYOTO ANIMATION)

stasis. The view switches to overhead as he packs up his things and rises from his seat in awkward silence. Just as he begins to speak, a sudden cut shows an exaggeratedly large Kaname angrily shaking Sousuke, berating him for forgetting her homework, and building up to her grabbing him and slamming him, backwards, into the floor with a wrestling move. The rapid switching between viewpoints and figurative expressions facilitates the humor, as the suddenness of her mood switch provides the punchline of the gag. Similar scenes of humor, which are facilitated by the jerkiness of limited animation and the rapid switches of figurative expressions are a hallmark of comedy in anime.

Figure 1: Two characters performing the same figurative expression at once in episode 2 of *The Idolmaster Cinderella Girls* (© A-1 PICTURES)

Such figurative expressions are also well-suited to the type of database consumption conceived by Azuma Hiroki and often discussed in regards to anime.[6] In Azuma's database theory, otaku disassemble and reassemble many different character parts (*moe*-elements, as he labels them) to create new characters (2009: 42) and produce derivative fan works. In the context of figurative acting, each code can be seen as part of this database. Building on Azuma, these codes, or rather, performance models, are cited from this database, and executed as a series of performances (Suan 2017). This is how they retain their uniformity and iterability, as they build upon previous performances. In this sense, figurative performance cannot stand alone, it must be repeated, cited to survive, connecting and relating to prior iterations, and gesturing towards future ones in each performance.

As such, figurative expressions do not exist in any one place, they often exist in the same place at the same time, performed in unison in the same scene by different characters. It is not locked into place as embodied performance is, it can travel. It does not emanate from the body or create an identification with the body, it is more free-floating, independent from individual bodies. For example, we can look at the first two episodes of the anime *The Idolmaster Cinderella Girls* (2011). In the first episode, a producer scouting for new pop-idols states to one of the girls that his reason for choosing her is because of her smile. Such a statement would imply that there is something special, something unique in her smile. As the episode goes on, another girl asks why he approached her, and the response is the same: because of her smile. In the second episode, a third girl indirectly asks why she was selected, and he responds, once more, that it was her smile. This may appear patronizing, but as anime characters, a strange problematic arises: they all perform the same figurative expression for smile, so what makes these three girls' rendition so special? In the final scenes of the second episode, the three main characters lament that their PR photoshoots did not go well, stating that it was hard to act "normal" (*futsū*). A new strategy is suggested, and the three are given a ball to toss around. As they pass the ball to one another, their personalities begin to appear as they each perform different figurative reactions. They each begin to smile and laugh, two of them performing the same smile, the last girl letting out a hesitant smile. When they begin to joke about how they were chosen for their smiles, they realize that the producer

[6] Now, with digital technologies, actual databases of expressions are utilized.

said the same thing to everyone, and they suddenly begin to laugh, all three, in unison, with two seen performing the same expression at once (Figure 2).

In such scenes, emotion is expressed in the performance of the figurative expression, and these occur simultaneously. They do not individually generate the emotion, but they can perform it locally. Figurative expression, then, in its performance, cannot operate in the same way as in embodied acting, as the individual, external expression of an internal emotion. Figurative expressions are shared and are not a response to an inner feeling, but the expression itself is the feeling. In this sense, as emotions (as figurative codes) are impersonal, internal and external operate in an ambivalent manner, as what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls "indistinction." Describing indistinction, Thomas Lamarre notes that, "an individual's body is not fully distinct, distant, or separable from others'...While your smile is not distinct from the other's smile, it is also enabling a kind of distinction. Bodies [or in this case, expressions] are not clearly distinct from one another, but such indistinction is not the opposite or negative of distinction (Lamarre 2015, referencing Shiloh Whitney 2012: 103)."[7] As such, as indistinction is not necessarily in opposition to a type of distinction, how, then, does anime create a distinction between characters which move and emote in the same way?

To follow this line of inquiry, let us examine the dynamics of how figurative acting works in the theater. In the training of the figurative tradition of acting in theater (such as in Noh), there is a considerable difference to method acting. Through their comparison we might find some clues to how anime produces distinction in characters that perform the same figurative expressions. In figurative acting, it is not necessarily accruing different experiences from observing people and formulating that interpretation into a sudden moment of actuality, as would be exemplary in method acting. Rather, figurative acting training entails repeating pre-existing patterns and gaining a perfection of execution of these models. At their most extreme, figurative expressions are non-linear, non-localized, able to be expressed in rapid succession, by multiple performers at the same moment. As such, figurative acting places its limit not in the localized body of the performer, but in the (system of) codes, as each has a performance model that functions as the limit within which a code must be performed. Figurative acting retains and combines past movements, compounds of prior citations, with all previous instances overlaid in each execution, even as they remain distinct. For example, in Noh, the *shiori* gesture is used to show that a character is crying. Enacted by different actors in different narratives, the codified gesture can function because each iteration is citing a past performance of the *shiori* without deviating from the form of the gesture. As such, each performance produces a relation to prior (and future) iterations of the *shiori* gesture. When performed, it is both the general *shiori* gesture displaying a character is crying, as well as something particular to that specific instance of performance. In other words, each performance, each act of that code is both universal (citing the performance model of that code) and distinct (spatio-temporally, in its minor details of execution).[8] As figurative performances are performed codes citing a certain model, each expression gains a sedimentary force through their repetition (Butler 1997), creating an association of that particular code with a certain context, an association that is retained in each subsequent performance of that code. This sedimentary force is sustained by their relation to all prior iterations, and (re)vitalized in each specific performance. It cannot be performed felicitously without that relation to previous iterations. A "good actor" of the figurative tradition would be re-producing already structured models in a refined manner.[9] In a sense, then, the body does not use these codes to express in figurative acting, the codes use the body to express its distinction: the performing body becoming defined through its relation to the types of codes performed.

[7] Although Lamarre and Whitney focus on the affective dimensions of Merleau-Ponty's conception of indistinction, space does not permit us to engage with complexities of affect here. However, in the above cited scene of the three girls laughing in Cinderella Girls, the simultaneity of their performance of laughter and smiling appears very similar to the ideas of participatory, contagious affect which dissolves a perceived strict division between internal and external, self and other. It is also interesting to note that Whitney discusses Merleau-Ponty's indistinction, in its (original) conception in regards to infant expressions. Indistinction comes prior to an adult distancing of self and other that is developed later in life, where the body appears individual and personal (though this adult border is also flexible) (2012). In another connection to current discussion, figurative acting in animation also predates the individual-constituting embodied acting in animation history. In this sense, the dominance of embodied acting as the predominant standard of animation performance masks (and erases) the earlier importance of figurative acting through its naturalism. With the global rise of anime, figurative acting seems to be returning to a certain degree of prominence.
[8] Here I am taking influence from Derrida's approach to language (1982).
[9] Of course, there is always an affective valence to these movements.

The performed self is thus constituted through this compositing of performed, citational codes. The juxtaposition of these performance models in combination then produces something particular in their sequential performance. Speaking of Bettie Boop, an emblem of figurative acting, Crafton remarks that "her personality is an infectious composite of acquired details, more like a collection of poached traits than a complex expression of inner drives and motives. As a figure, she lacks an interior core of emotion or individual expressivity (2013: 27-28)." The key is that she is a "collection" of these traits, and this collection is what constitutes her as a distinctive character. Character design is also important, as another way to distinguish particularity (the character is distinct in part because this specific character is performing the expression, and *vice versa*), but design alone does not account for their distinction. The specificity of the performative constitution of character in figurative acting is not just based on character design and spatio-temporal location, but combinatory: the mixture of performed expressions produces the character through a series of citational performances. This particularization through combination is an integral part of character performance in anime's figurative acting. As such, the problematic of producing distinctiveness in figurative acting has different terms of negotiation than the production of individuality in embodied acting.

This problematic of distinction is often worked through in many anime. For example, as we have seen in the opening description of *The Idolmaster Cinderella Girls*, the show can be read as a practice in producing particularity from repetition. Much of the narrative of *Cinderella Girls* is thematically focused around differentiation of characters, which coincides with the work of becoming an idol: particular character gimmicks (rock idol, goth idol, cat idol, sports idol), group naming, costuming (of the same basic outfit with different specifics: a shorter or longer shirt, hats placed differently, etc.), song, and dance. Dance sequences function not just as a visual spectacle or as the cumulation of their differentiation practices to become idols. Rather, the characters perform almost the exact same moves, often in synchronization, and we have to find the specific characters, in their different designs and costumes, searching for their particularity amongst the symmetry of movement, playing with the repetition of movement and the distinction of character.

Yet this is still spatio-temporal and character design based, inviting a search for minor details. The constitution of character production occurs over the course of many sequences. Staged introductions of the characters (often including their names appearing below them as they pose when they introduce themselves) are typical in anime, but especially so in anime like *Cinderella Girls*. They differentiate their characters not just by character design, voice acting, and speech pattern (such as a catch phrase), but also through their poses. In episode 2, the figurative poses are emphasized by a snapshot (from a camera in a PR photoshoot) that captures each character's signature pose. Each pose particularizes their character, creating silhouettes that can easily distinguish each character based on their design and pose. These poses are based on figurative performance models (e.g., shy girl posed with knees pointed inwards, playful cat-like character with hands as paws), recognizable codes, repeated in many different iterations (for example, by the girls in *K-On!*). Over the course of the series the characters are produced through repeating similar codes, through a combination of a variety of expressions and poses, each character performing a different set of combinations that becomes particular to them (in that instance)—each character gaining particularity through their association with those specific figurative expressions, but only because these codes are sustained by the sedimentary force of prior iterations. As such, when there is a performance of a code outside of their frequently used usual set (e.g. a rare smile for a generally serious character) it makes that instance of performance special for that character, and adds to the cumulative set that is their character.

In sum, acting in anime is facilitated by the jerky rhythms of limited animation that is commonplace in anime, shifting between modes at a rapid pace, impersonal but distinct, allowing for a type of organizing of figurative acting codes that can be arranged and rearranged. It is the combination of their figurative actions, their frequency, and types of codes employed, which differentiates the characters that all cite from a database of figurative codes. Such combinatory citation and their spatial and temporal distancing are how figurative acting works through the problematic of producing distinction through the repetition of their codes.

Mutual implication

Thus far, I have been examining the extremities of these two tendencies to highlight their differences. Here, however, I must stress that embodied and figurative performances are not necessarily opposites, but tendencies which go in different directions, sometimes to an extreme, with each tendency keeping traces of the other in each performance. It is perhaps impossible to perform in the embodied form and do so entirely uniquely, there will be some semblance of connection to prior codes. Embodied expressions as often performed tend to rely on stock emotions: smiles, tears, etc. Likewise, each performance of a figurative code will retain some sense of individuality in its particular performance. Furthermore, embodied performances can also become a figurative performance code. For example, once a facial expression (which could have been an embodied performance) becomes cited enough, it becomes a figurative expression. To a certain extent, the balance of how embodied and figurative performance of the animation is how each anime negotiates its particular identity as a specific anime, how it produces difference in the performance of anime.[10]

But in the case of anime, even when it moves towards the embodied, the figurative is kept especially close. The mecha/robot bodies (one of anime's many famous non-human bodies), engage in figurative performance less in explicit codes and more in the ways the body moves in its battle sequences, rapidly gliding in jerky movements around beam blasts, kicking the chests of other mecha, two beams swords sparking as one mecha blocks the other's attack. Robot fighting movements are figurative performances (as are many other fighting movements), but this is not necessarily through the specific techniques (although there are many frequently performed techniques, as noted above) used. What makes them figurative performances are the repeated used of jerky, quick movements that emphasize suddenness, lateral movement, and speed, movements that are characteristic of that type of expression of fighting. These all optimize the low frame rate of limited animation to facilitate such effects (even though these scenes are sometimes in full animation, animators will take out frames to give such an effect). The jerkiness of limited animation is utilized here to give the impression of speed and suddenness, which has come to be expected from such fights as the figurative performance of fighting.

As anime, in general, tends towards figurative performances, when a performance strays too far into the embodied form, they appear out of place. A famous example would be the sequences of Eva-01 going berserk at the end of episode 19 of *Evangelion*, where the bipedal Eva tears apart the enemy Angel, squatting and panting, moving around on all fours, and violently devouring the Angel. These movements of the Eva are embodied acting, expressing the primal nature of the Eva. The shock of the Eva-01's actions come from it moving as embodied performance, enacted not in a human body but a mecha/robot body, a body type which is usually typified, like most anime bodies, as moving through figurative performance.

Even anime that engage with highly complex, fluid (and full) animation that would appear to move towards the embodied form, have sequences that tend toward the figurative. This can be seen in the figure skating scenes in *Yuri!!! on Ice* (2016). Figure skating itself is a form that deals with many codified elements that are arranged into particular sequences. Skaters are scored according to enactment of form and timing, but "Performance," the "physical and emotional involvement of the skater/couple as they deliver the intent of the music and composition (ISU)," is also an important element of the judging rubric. Figure skating involves not just accuracy, but rather imbuing an emotion to the iteration, involving a mastery of the specific iterative action, but then performing it with the affective force of that particular enactment.[11] Episode 3 of *Yuri!!! on Ice* uses this as a central narrative thematic, about two ice-skaters performing two different versions of a song, imbuing a personal conception of "agape" and "eros" into their respective skate performances. In fact, different key animators were used for the different characters, giving them an individualized performance in their animation (Episode 3's animation directors: Ito Noriko, Nakamura Yumiko, and Lee Min Bae; figure skating animation: Ahiko

[10] For example, though using a different typology of acting, Olga Kopylova provides an interesting analysis of the different types of gestures in *Gankutsuō* and how they work with the unique textures in the distinctive animation of the anime series (2016: 198-211). Of course, such differentiation practices apply to other forms of animation as well.
[11] Of course, this is the same for many traditional theaters like Noh.

Eiji, Tachinaka Junpei). Indeed, the animation enacts such affective registers in their performances, but still maintains the figurative codes that are the predetermined components of that dance sequence.

Figurative acting objects

If at one extreme, embodied acting in animation reproduces modern individualism in its performance in animation, what does the figurative acting tendency in anime constitute? This is a matter that concerns us not just locally, but globally: Disney's distinctive and popular school of embodied performance in animation is the dominant global performance standard, but anime and its figurative performance can be seen as a prominent alternative on the world stage. What follows is a proposal for conceptualizing the context and implications of such a type of performance of global prominence.

With the wide dispersal of technology and commodities, it is by now a common observation that many objects in our daily lives are increasingly animated, and this animation is often achieved through the performance of figurative codes. This is especially evident in the multitudes of media objects that make up anime's media-mix, ranging from manga, to games, figurines, stickers, and many other objects (both professional and fan-made). These products are all imbued with an animated-ness despite their static forms, through the "dynamically immobile image" of anime (facilitated by its limited animation lineage), enabling the transposition of various figurative poses and expressions (Steinberg 2012: xiv, 6). But the animating of objects enabled by these figurative performances are not relegated to objects in our physical world. Messaging applications such as LINE and Facebook allow us to use "stickers," GIFs, and other images, both static and animated, to express ourselves in daily digital conversations. Many such stickers are actually animated citations from anime, or from films/TV shows of embodied performances that are used as a stand-in for certain emotions or reactions, used as figurative codes. Daily conversations are now filled with figurative codes (many actually from anime) which we use to communicate to one another globally.

Yet it is not just the animating of objects, but a question of how these objects (often character goods) are animated, and how this performance constitutes selfhood. In terms of the self of the character, figurative acting produces a character that expresses through codes. Such a manner of creating a self, through citation, through a mutual participation of shared elements, acknowledges the connected nature of (human) identity. Figurative acting makes the performing body become part of the citation, each code performed through the citation of its model in the database, only to itself be cited later. In this sense, figurative performance is always an act of networking, of connecting to other acts of that code. Yet, figurative acting still maintains some sense of distinction. Unlike the embodied performance, however, figurative performance does not try to multiply individuality in the classic, modern conception of a discrete, unique, self. Instead, figurative performance in anime hints at a different conception of self, not one where each is unique, self-contained and an agent of their own will, but one that is communal, shared, composite, citational, but allowing for a wave of creativity through combination. As such, figurative performances always maintain a tense balance between particularity and uniformity: it has to cite the code, but it does so in a specific context. While embodied acting hides its constructed nature and the connectedness of identity in its presumption of naturalism and production of unique individuals, figurative acting embraces the repetition of models and composite citationality. Figurative acting, then, entails a different conception of the strict internal/external borders of "individuality," to the extent that the word "particularity" (of a specific part of a repeated series) is perhaps better suited to describing it, as it is always an iteration: something always in relation to the model of performance, but is distinct in the specifics of their execution, the contexts and combinations of its performative instance.

Embodied performance constitutes strictly bordered individuals limited to a specific body in its enactment, but figurative performance operates by connecting spatio-temporally separate elements through citation, facilitating a different framework for conceiving of self that meshes with our contemporary historical moment. Figurative acting's sharing of citational elements that compose a particularity in combination somehow fits in a global arena of multiple transnational flows, of people, technologies, capital, and media (Appadurai 1996), where the "internal" and "external" of the nation-state are intensely blurred. What happens to the modern human subject in such a globalized, commodified, media-dense world as ours? According to Diederichsen, "the contemporary subject must

permanently engender itself as an ostensible subject and yet a consumable—edible, we might say—and legible self; a contradiction it resolves by conceiving itself as a thing for other things (2012: 9).” Such circumstances may be symptomatic of a type of fatigue in the world of late modernity, of neoliberal capitalism, where "the neoliberal subject is exhausted by its double function as responsible agent and object of the action (Diederichsen 2012: 7-8)." This can be related to what Anthony Elliott calls a “new individualism,” where the self is constantly in-flux, forced to switch and transform oneself at great speeds in a globalized world, often leading to regular crises and exhaustion (2016).

Gabriella Lukacs connects a movement towards neoliberal politics in Japan with a corresponding shift in media that display "lifestyle", where the consumption of only certain products is a performance of self (2010 : 08). Lifestyle performance then becomes a process of citation, where users select from pre-arranged products and compose a type of lifestyle from them, one where the products to choose from are constantly changing—new lifestyles created, moving into and out of trend, people struggling to keep up with the many products and activities that define such lifestyles. The products (objects) then become inseparable from the performance of that self. This movement towards a self that is performed through objects via lifestyle is visible throughout the world, especially in major metropolises. As Diederichsen (2012) asserts, in this context of "contemporary capitalism of self-optimization,” there is an “imperative to produce a perfect self as a perfect thing (9).” As an alternative to such self-optimization, why not move towards object identification, "why not affirm the inanimate, be it in one's own self or in the beloved other? Why not chose a self...as nothing but a conjunction of relations in the here and now (Diederichsen 2012: 7-8)?" The contemporary self is crafted at a rapid speed, selecting from a vast array of options, jerkily moved from one product and expression to another. Figurative acting, which constitutes a self that produces particularity through rapid, non-linear compositing, seems well attuned to this backdrop. Instead of re-mapping the “individual” and human selfhood onto the object as would embodied performance, figurative performance facilitates an aesthetic more in-line with moving towards orientation with objects, as a self that is the composite of inter-connected citations.

While in some sense this brings us back to the human, as the world around us becomes increasingly animated in the pervasive screens in our daily lives (e.g., smartphones), we must carefully consider the implications of their animated performances. Because figurative performance relies on recognizability, it is as exclusionary as it is participatory, and figurative modes of expression are still bound by the processes of citation and the power dynamics at play within them. At the moment, figurative acting appears as an alternative, but figurative acting can become its own regime. As acts of citation, they tend towards a “strictness” of repetition, in maintaining the boundaries of the structural performance model, with new codes or codes performed in a manner that is unrecognizable a difficult risk. In this sense, there is a strong tendency towards conservativism, even while such figurative acting provides an alternative to other modes of constituting an animated self.

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