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Costuming as subculture: The multiple bodies of cosplay

ABSTRACT

This article explores the subculture of cosplay, short for 'costume play'. In this particular practice, fans create and wear costumes that allow them to re-enact existing fictional characters from popular culture. These outfits and subsequent performances are a physical manifestation of their immersion into the fictional realms of television, games and movies, among others. Cosplay can be understood as the culture of costuming that occurs beyond the institutional remit of the theatre. Especially in western countries, cosplay is intimately connected to the carnivalesque space of the fan convention, where fans gather and re-enact their favourite characters. I argue that embodiment plays a unique role in cosplay that should be interrogated closely. The fan performer relies on multiple bodies and repertoires that are intimately connected to the fan's identity and the performed character.

KEYWORDS

fandom
cosplay
performance
carnivalesque
fan conventions
mediation

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the subcultural practice of cosplay, short for 'costume play', which is commonly performed at fan gatherings. Through cosplay, fans re-enact existing fictional characters in self-created costumes inspired by popular culture. These outfits and subsequent performances are a physical manifestation of their immersion into the fictional realms of television, games and movies, among others. Cosplay can be understood as culture of costuming that occurs beyond the institutional remit of the theatre. The purpose of cosplay is to create a look-a-like of the character. Fans mimic the character not only through dress but also through the styling of wigs or hair, and make-up techniques.

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The costumes are crafted and worn in the subculture of fandom. Fans debut their costume at fan conventions: large meetings where fans celebrate their passion for a certain genre, series or actor. Some of these conventions have several hundred visitors, but large events such as the San Diego Comic Con draw over a 100,000 visitors. It should be noted that fan costuming is a particularly global hobby, one that is popular in Japan, the United States and even Brazil. International competitions between these countries are not uncommon, such as the annual World Cosplay Summit in Nagoya (Japan). While theatre events and competitions may be part of costuming, the practice also consists of 'hallway' costumes that are generally worn without professional or competitive intent.

While costume design is often seen as the domain of professional theatre-makers, cosplay shows that it can also be an amateur hobby and a lived experience. Within this subculture, audiences transform themselves into producers who are intimately connected to popular culture and its characters. In his seminal work *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Dick Hebdige defined subcultures as forms of cultural resistance. They challenge the dominant ideology that, in turn, may perceive of subcultures as radical. Examples include the punk movement, skin heads and rockers. Fandom has been understood as a subculture that partly responds to, and subverts, mainstream popular culture by its fan activities and appropriations (Fiske 1990; Jenkins 1992). In a broader sense, this subculture can also be contrasted to more widely accepted forms of consumer behaviour.

While cosplay can be viewed as a subculture, outsiders play a crucial role in this creative practice as participants and spectators. For instance, fans learn to sew from each other but also from non-fans, such as family members, for the purpose of play rather than for professional aspirations. In this sense, fan communities provided an 'affinity group': an informal learning space that connects participants by interest and allows them to learn from other members (Gee 2003: 27). In fandom, these competences are not only gained offline but also online. At tutorials and forums, such as Cosplay.com, fans converse about the craft. Cosplayers often develop different sets of expertise. While one crafter may be especially competent in the styling of wigs or facial make-up, another may specialize in particular types of dress, ranging from gowns to armour.

Thus, cosplay is a scarcely studied form of appropriation that transforms and actualizes an existing story or game in close connection to the fan community and the fan's own identity (Lamerichs 2011). The academic study of costumes is a growing area of interest, with notable contributions that focus on the audience's role in constructing these performances (Monks 2010). While cosplay itself has not been widely researched, extensive research has been done on the productivity of fans and their participatory communities (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992; Busse 2013; Gray et al. 2007; Jenkins 1992). Fan costuming specifically has been examined as a creative space in Japan by Okabe (Ito et al. 2012); Winge (2006) and Peirson-Smith (2012) examined its social affordances. In their studies on the fan cultures of video games, Crawford (2012: 86) and Newman (2008: 86) also drew attention to cosplay as an expression of mimicry and play.

While these previous studies have discussed cosplay as playful culture, and have related it to fandom at large, I argue that cosplay establishes a unique subculture within fandom that is intimately connected to the space of the fan convention. Cosplay constructs a carnivalesque space in which popular characters are mediated and celebrated. My starting point is the claim that wearing a costume is a performative gesture that is deeply related to the

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subculture of fandom and the reception of popular culture. Moreover, this practice is liminal in a sense that it lingers between the domain of professional theatre-making and more casual situations of fancy dress. Cosplay fundamentally differs from existing repertoires on fashion because it is a type of craft that relies on media imagery. Thus, cosplay exists betwixt and between accepted gestures and performances. These gestures are performed outside of the conventions of everyday life, which, as I shall show, contributes towards the construction of a carnivalesque space.

Bounded by a carnivalesque space, cosplay is a unique practice that is not only phenomenological and visceral, but multiple in its embodiment. The costume is not read as a singular object or sign, but is understood as part of a liminal performance or dialectic process that connects performer and

Figure 1: Lady Gaga cosplayer. Photograph by Nicolle Lamerichs.

audience (Hannah and Harsløf 2008: 32–33). I argue that cosplay constructs a mixture of performed bodies, with the principal focus being on the costume itself rather than an individual's enactment of a character's behaviour. With clear examples of design, creation and performance, I show how bodies are produced at alternative settings. This case demonstrates that costuming is integral to different social domains that go beyond the traditional scene of the theatre. Thus, my aim with this article is to theorize the emerging domain of cosplay as a unique subculture.

Methodologically, my work on cosplay and fandom combines cultural theories and ethnography to find out how fans appropriate existing narratives (Lamerichs 2014). I have studied cosplay through social methods, such as participant-observation and interviews. My research has largely been conducted at fan conventions, where I conducted formal and informal interviews and engaged in cosplay myself. Between 2010 and 2013, I have been to numerous events in Japan (Comiket 2012, World Cosplay Summit 2012), The States (Otakon 2011, Dragon*Con 2013) and Europe (e.g., Animecon 2010–2013, Animagic 2010). Finally, I also make use of my own experiences as a fan who has been active in the scene for almost ten years.

This article relies tentatively on the empirical data that I have gathered in the past few years. It should be noted that this argument primarily pertains to western countries and less to Japan. The most important theoretical limitations for this article concern the fact that fan events are very different in Japan and less structured as conventions, and the notion that cosplay is a more visual and photographic hobby there (Lamerichs 2013; Ito et al. 2012). In line with this issue of 'Critical Costume', it is my goal to describe this scene to a new academic audience and reconsider the frameworks and concepts through which we can understand cosplay.

THE FAN CONVENTION AS A CARNIVAL

In fan studies, fans of popular culture are understood as adoring, active audiences, who interpret and rewrite stories. These qualities come together in 'fandom', the social, interpretive groups where fans meet. These online and offline spaces are also central platforms for their own creative expressions, such as written pastiche or fan fiction (Pugh 2005). Cosplay is not only performed at the convention, but is circulated through online pictures, blogs and tutorials. It offers a situated and informal space for youth to learn the arts and craft of sewing and design, thereby offering new insights in discourses on media literacy (Buckingham 2003). While cosplay stands outside of the professional domain of theatre-making, the costume creator can develop skills within this craft.

The fan convention, where these outfits are worn, is not an ordinary scene. The event may be understood as a 'place of imagination' (Reijnders 2011: 13). In such a space, narratives are actualized in a visceral way by their audiences, who rely on memories of their favourite fiction. Reijnders has for instance studied detective fans who engage in media tourism to explore the sites of crime fiction (2011: 23–55). The fan convention, however, is a hybrid setting where different fictions and memories blur: it is perfectly normal to see *Star Trek* characters, video game monsters and princesses mingle. In his account of a convention at The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Pictures Theme Park, Henry Jenkins (2010) discusses the costumed visitors as follows: 'Let's think of this as a ritual space. When tribal communities dance wearing clay masks and straw costumes, they're acting "as if" they were the

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1. animal spirits. The performance is a recognition of shared beliefs and mutual
2. emotional experiences'. For fans, Jenkins argues, wearing a costume also serves
3. to act as a ritual tool to generate affect.
4.   Thus, the subculture of cosplay can be understood as a ritual space. It is no
5. wonder that in some accounts of cosplay, practice is compared to ritual festivi-
6. ties such as Halloween or Mardi Gras (e.g. Bacon-Smith 1992: 3–43; Pearce
7. 2009: 1). Cosplay in fact shares many qualities with other festivals and rites.
8. Its space is reminiscent of the Burning Man festival, a week-long participatory
9. event at the Black Rock Desert in Nevada, in which visitors create a tempo-
10. rary, creative community. In her study on the festival, Wendy Clupper explains
11. that the festival constitutes 'a heightened theatrical zone with individuals who
12. volunteer to play and interact with other, as one may be so inclined to do in a
13. carnivalesque setting' (2007: 232).
14.   Similarly, cosplay is anchored in a carnivalesque setting and cannot be
15. interpreted outside of this space. In *Rabelais and His World* (1984), Bakhtin
16. identifies the carnivalesque as a literary mode that subverts the dominant order
17. through humour and parody. The concept, inspired by the feast of fools, shows
18. that the everyday can be momentarily subverted and profaned by groups that
19. are otherwise oppressed. 'As opposed to the official feast, one might say that
20. the carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from
21. the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privi-
22. leges, normals, and prohibition' (Bakhtin 1984: 10). The carnival allows for free
23. and familiar interaction between those people who are normally separated or
24. belong to different classes in society. Participants are also allowed to engage in
25. behaviour that is otherwise deemed unacceptable – they may ridicule the exist-
26. ing order through humour. While the carnival allows for profanity and parody
27. of the sacred, it is not merely the domain of laughter. The carnivalesque space
28. is a lived experience that is constructed through ritualistic acts.
29.   The subversive behaviour of fans, who appropriate popular culture and its
30. images, can be interpreted through the model of the carnival not only as an
31. event but also a space of critique and parody. The carnival has another impor-
32. tant feature. While a feast is bounded by time and the change of seasons
33. (Bakhtin 1984: 81), it is not restricted in terms of space. Similarly, the fan
34. convention limited to certain festival days, but its celebrations infiltrate the
35. urban space. Especially its most visible expression – cosplay – spills over into
36. other settings. Cosplay takes place at the hotels or lodges in which a conven-
37. tion is held and the urban settings around it – the food courts, the subway,
38. the stores. The hobby in fact already starts in the domestic space where the
39. outfit is crafted, tried on and made to fit one's body. While the convention is
40. a shared space, it should not be understood as utopian – the convention space
41. is not without hierarchies in terms of age, gender and ethnicity.
42.   Furthermore, the body plays a distinct role in Bakhtin's model. During
43. the carnival, the body is augmented and becomes grotesque, a site of excess.
44. Bakhtin writes:
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46.   The body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-
47.   people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern
48.   sense of these words, because it is not individualized. The material
49.   bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the
50.   bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing
51.   and renewed. This exaggeration has a positive, assertive character.
52.   (1984: 19)

Similarly, the body of the cosplayer can be understood as grotesque – it expresses and asserts itself through mimicry and parody.

Viewing the fan convention as carnivalesque teases out two important aspects. First, the concept draws attention to the participatory culture of cosplay. The cosplayer is a participant, who operates within multiple theatrical frames, as he or she is simultaneously a crafter, designer, model, actor and a spectator. Cosplayers are often adept at many skills that they learn informally within fandom, such as acting, pattern creation, sewing, prop building and repurposing of the outfits. Second, the scene motivates a dynamic perform-ance in which performers and audiences interact. The spectators of cosplay do not admire costumes from their armchairs in a darkened theatre room, but in a vibrant festival space. They admire them as they pass by and perhaps even hug them. Cosplay is a lively, visceral and haphazard performance. The play-ers and spectators form a similar group and constantly mirror each other since both groups are commonly dressed up. These communal, celebratory aspects of costuming are foregrounded in cosplay.

MEDIATION IN COSPLAY

Similar to the carnival, cosplay is a re-enactment of icons and characters that originate from popular culture. The purpose of cosplay is to actualize existing the stories or persona (Figure 1) that create a place of imagination. The result is a complex process and form of pretend-play. Fans actualize characters that are purely mediated, that do not exist in real life and have no embodied original. The point of this hobby is making popular culture real and fleshing it out. This process of actualizing the character is not limited to the fan conven-tion. It starts once the fan is engaged with the fictional text and appreciates a character like Bayonetta (Figure 2), starts creating the outfit and discusses the possibilities of teaming up with other fans. While making the outfit, he or she might listen to the soundtrack of the game, make balanced and crea-tive choices in the outfit's construction and take pictures. After the convention debut, the fan may put the outfit on display, wear it other times or record videos in it. While it is easy to read the convention as the moment supreme for any cosplayer, some may feel that the process of its construction is the actual accomplishment and the most exciting.

Paradoxically, cosplay constructs a highly mediated, carnivelesque space without an overt presence of the narrative. After all, cosplay can also be enjoyed if audiences have no idea who the characters are. The performance relies on recognizable media imagery. A Lady Gaga cosplayer (Figure 1) can be understood by her iconic outfit alone and does not necessarily have to act out her impersonation. For performers, the point of cosplaying is not role-playing or acting; it lies in more subtle gestures and its connection to fandom. Michael Kirby (1995) conceptualized this sliding scale between acting and not acting. He opposed acting to not-acting as a 'non-matrixed performance', which relies on representation and the symbolic power of the stage or costume. However, in this type of performance, the actor is hardly acting at all. Kirby explains: 'When the performers, like the stage attendants of *kabuki* and *no*, are merely conveyed by their costumes themselves and not embedded, as it were, in matrices of pretended or represented character, situation, place, and time, they can be referred to as being "non-matrixed"' (1995: 41, original emphasis).

Between the sliding scale of acting and not-acting is the 'symbolized matrix', where the signs of a performance are present but the actor is not

Figure 2: Megumii as Bayonetta (SEGA, 2011). Photograph by Melissa van den Hoogen.

in character. At this point of the scale, cosplayers are often positioned. They are wearing their outfits and are clearly part of the symbolic space of the fan convention, but they may behave out of character. Despite the costume and other signs, the performer does not act as the character, but as himself. 'In a symbolized matrix the referential elements are applied to but not acted by the performer' (Monks 2010: 42). Monks describes a similar mechanism in relation to theatre: 'Sometimes costume remains stubbornly in view as costume, refusing to be meaningful, or exerting a power beyond its role in the fictional event' (2010: 6).

This unsettling relation between costume, audience and performer is most apparent in cosplay. Especially for the unfamiliar spectator, the costume has an overt presence as a costume: his or her interpretation relies on a visual marker rather than the popular context in which it emerged. This can be contrasted to the theatre, where 'awareness of costumes *as* costumes is considered a potential threat to the sanctity of the illusion' (Monks 2010: 10, original emphasis). Instead, in the hallways of the conventions, the costume can be admired and appreciated as a creative and visual object, and become an attractive reason to consume a particular media text at a later moment. To understand that a video game character like Bayonetta is sassy, audiences do not need to be overly familiar with this source text. They can admire the black leather cat suit, high heels, extravagant guns and hairdo. Based on these visual markers, and how the performer behaves, they can already decode elements of the performance. Costume, then, is indicative of character and can be understood even in isolation from its narrative.
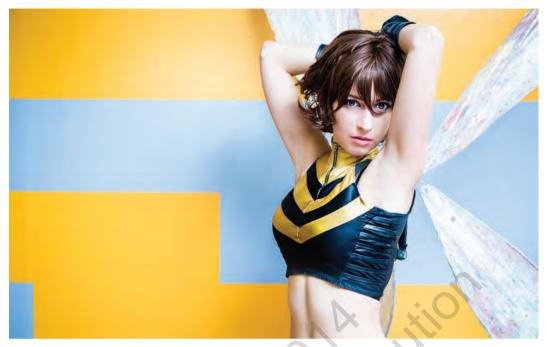
Figure 3: Diana Mon as The Wasp (Marvel Comics). Photograph by LJinto.

Within fandom, unlike in theatre design, a particular outfit is chosen and recreated to highlight a connection between the fan and the dress/character. The outfit highlights the fan's personal relationship to a text and becomes a marker of fan identity. Media scholar John Fiske would call this an 'enuncia-tive' relationship: a performance of fandom through specific codes, visual or otherwise (1992: 37–39). The relationship between the fan and the charac-ter commonly precedes cosplay, but can be intensified in this process. The costumer's personality is clearly mediated through the character in a perform-ance that supposes a knowledgeable spectator.

MULTIPLE BODIES

The grotesque body of the cosplayer in the convention space is a body of excess – a web of associations that can be decoded in multiple ways by other participants. In *The Actor in Costume*, Aoife Monks argues that costumes create a paradox when audiences interpret them: 'Costume is that which is perceptually indis-tinct from the actor's body, and yet something that can be removed. Costume is a body that can be taken off' (2010: 11). The audience is fascinated with the costume as an object and invites an individual to imagine its viscerality, touch and fabric as well. 'Costume', Monks argues, 'does not remain stable or fully knowable, but rather depends on what we see and how we look at what we see' (2010: 10). Her approach, which starts with audiences rather than designers, is one that inspires me. In the case of cosplay, however, the audience is a powerful one. These are other fans who commonly have some tentative knowledge about the characters, have possibly seen them performed elsewhere and often have experience in designing and crafting outfits themselves.

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1.   The distinction that Monks (2010) draws between several types of bodies
2. within theatre is a helpful one to elucidate the subcultural practice of cosplay.
3. Specifically, Monks mentions the aesthetic body, the self-expressive body, the
4. character body and a worker's body as crucial for the audience's decoding of a
5. performance (2010: 19–25). Less foregrounded in Monks' work is the sensate
6. body (2010: 23): the visceral experience of the costume, which is emphatically
7. coded by the audience, and the historical body, its social position in a wider
8. culture. Similar to theatre, the construction of the body in cosplay depends
9. on multiple bodies: those of flat, fictional characters and those of the player
10. themselves. This can also help us understand the relationship that fans have
11. towards these outfits and how they may make sense of them.
12.   First and foremost, the body of the cosplayer is an aesthetic body, 'made
13. of codes and conventions' (Monks 2010: 21). This body is determined by a
14. history of visual codes. These codes must not be confused with the actual
15. history of fashion since the conventions of what constructs, say, a Victorian or
16. Roman costume are distinct from what was worn in actuality. Figure 2 portrays
17. a cat suit that embeds the character in a certain history of heroes and villains.
18. The overall blackness of her appearance and strict glasses also code her as
19. an ambiguous character, possibly a villain. Figure 3 shows a cosplayer as the
20. superheroine The Wasp from Marvel Comics. Her striped tank top already
21. suggests that, despite the wings, we are not dealing with a fantasy creature
22. but with something more cult. The black-yellow colour scheme and the top
23. may remind viewers of comics such as *Watchmen* (1987) or animation shows,
24. such as *Venture Bros* (2003).
25.   The cosplayer may also draw attention to his or her self-expression, like in
26. celebrity appearances (Monks 2010: 22). The costume may move to the back-
27. ground in favour of the performer's own identity. In contemporary perform-
28. ances, the two may conflate. Lady Gaga's image, I would argue, is primarily
29. construed through her relationship with different costumes and extravagant
30. fashion. In a way, her self-conscious performances constantly press audiences
31. to think about the real her. A cosplayer of Gaga (Figure 1), in turn, may recre-
32. ate these associations. In cosplay, self-expression goes hand in hand with the
33. fan's own identity that is at points more apparent than that of the charac-
34. ter. When fans are talking or 'geeking', their discussions of media material
35. can become quite vivid and enthusiastic while their costumed performance
36. is more or less irrelevant, until a fellow-fan intervenes, for instance, to take a
37. picture of the outfit. The cosplayer slips in his or her role then to pose as the
38. character. As Monks writes: 'Self-expressive costume competes with that of
39. the character's for prominence on the stage' (2010: 23). This reading directly
40. aligns with the cosplay culture, where the two roles often conflated.
41.   Finally, perhaps the most important body of the cosplayer is a character
42. body – a referential body that is closely related to the source text where its
43. design, meaning and narrativity are based (2010: 23). Cosplay heavily depends
44. on the fiction that it is connected to. As evident in Figure 2 and 3, I would
45. argue that audiences are more competent in decoding these photographs
46. of the performances when they are knowledgeable about the characters.
47. Bayonetta, for instance, is not just an actual hero but a complex character – a
48. futuristic witch who can do magical things with her hair. The hairdo of the
49. costume and styling of the wig is therefore highly important. She is skilled
50. in doing quick and elegant moves, almost dance like, with her body. A most
51. striking feature in the game is that she can even change into a panther, which
52. solidifies her cat-like traits. This connection to cats also associates her with

witchcraft quite explicitly. When posing as the character, fans draw attention to these character features.

    The working body of the cosplayer may at points be at odds with the performed character. On the one hand, we find the intense preparation of going 'in character' and the continued imperfection of mimicking a visual, often animated body. On the other, there is physicality to the performance itself and the sensations that come with it. This can be comfortable: the costume fits and feels good, and the gestures and poses are doable. It can also be uncomfortable: the feeling of heavy wings on your back, the slight movement and itching of the wig, caused by certain fabrics, or the awareness of faded lipstick.

    For some, the character body and actual body may be at odds even more. This can lead to parody and empowerment, but also to misunderstandings when the cosplay is interpreted as a serious performance and for instance deemed insulting or overly sexual. Of course, the norms of a wider culture influence how the cosplay is understood and historicize it. The gendered and social body in particular influences cosplay. Debates about bodies in cosplay commonly do not centre on the question of whether drag is acceptable since crossplay is a common phenomenon. Still, male-to-female drag seems to be less visible than female-to-male drag, suggesting that the first has a particular stigma. Likewise, hypersexual costumes from both men and women have been subjected to debate about what is proper clothing and how much skin or nudity is acceptable. Such debates have even led to the stigmatization of female fans over the past few years (Hernandez 2013).

    The body of the performer in cosplay is always present. Monks calls this a working body, suggesting that at some points the abilities and competences of the performer can be augmented (2010: 20). This body coincides with the self-expressive body to some degree. When friction emerges in cosplay, this often concerns the actual and historical body, perhaps not so much the working body. Sweat and other signs of effort are carefully hidden in cosplay and the performer's extensive preparation in hotel rooms remains largely invisible. However, social connotations, such as weight, race and age, are considered to be critical markers. These markers may lead to successful performances for some, while others are excluded based on these features.

    To construct a correct visual representation of the character, cosplayers may at points need to overcome their historical and gendered bodies. Binding shirts, corsets, shapewear and fake breasts help fashion the body and change its cosmetics. Of course, I do not mean to say that all cosplayers will use these aids, but for many of them it is an important point of discussion. They value making their appearance as attractive and suitable for the character as they can. Luckily, there is also room for casual cosplay, drag, parodies and comical appearances. The norms around cosplay are still given shape and cosplayers constantly push the limit. Moreover, this diverse subculture gives rise to different types of cosplayers that can be competitive, ironic, social or creative. Some fictional characters pose challenges in terms of embodiment, others in terms of crafting.

    The tensions between these various bodies within cosplay are integral to the subculture's appeal. The multiple bodies revealed by the costumes themselves provide the meaning and produce the audience's engagement with this cultural practice. These multiple bodies depend partly on fiction, but also on the body of the performer and his or her self-expression. As audiences, we are interested in seeing what happens under the mask and who these players are. The identity of the performer or fan compels us and also creates distance to the character. At

1. the same time, the masquerade as famous popular characters creates intimacy,
2. especially when we know the characters that are portrayed. Fiction can become
3. real within the urban space of the fan convention and allows us to admire the
4. characters that we love and thereby to connect to other fans.
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7. **CONCLUSION**
8. In this article, I have presented an analysis of cosplay as a subculture where
9. amateur costumes are designed and worn. Cosplay is grounded in a carniva-
10. lesque space that spills over into daily life and urban settings. The subculture
11. of cosplay is highly characterized by mediation. While the stage is an impor-
12. tant element for cosplay competitions, the hobby flourishes particularly in the
13. hallways of conventions. Cosplayers often foreground the costume, not the
14. character, as they model for photographers and chat with other fans. The lived
15. culture of the convention provides a spontaneous view on what costumes are
16. and who has the power and knowledge to create them.
17. Deeply related to the fan convention as a place of imagination, the body
18. of the cosplayer is primarily characterized by mediation. It carries many mean-
19. ings and associations related to popular narratives, costumes and fashion.
20. Through Monks' ideas on the multiplicities of the costumed body, it becomes
21. possible to review the many faces of cosplayers. Since these performers are
22. intimately connected to popular characters, fan cultures and wider social
23. norms, their bodies are numerous. To understand these bodies, however, one
24. should always include the views of the audiences. Since cosplay is a multi-
25. faceted phenomenon, which relies primarily on popular culture from Asia
26. and America, it is easy to come across expressions and characters that one is
27. not familiar with. Such a spectator may rely on a history of fashion, knowl-
28. edge about media culture and other character designs to interpret the generic
29. features of the costume.
30. The emerging culture of cosplay is a fascinating topic. It connects the
31. field of fan studies intimately with performance studies, and shows us that
32. costumes can be anchored social practices outside the traditional theatre
33. space. Within fandom, the costume is not merely an aesthetic dress, worn at
34. a specific performance, but also a material object that fans produce with great
35. skill and dedication. While the costumed performance of fans reproduces
36. famous characters from mass culture, understanding it only as mimicry would
37. be too narrow. Cosplay is a culture of crafting and performing that speaks to
38. our wider imagination.
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