Design from Fiction to Reality: An Exploration into the Process of Design in Cosplay

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Abstract
Enthusiasts dressing up as anime characters and posing for photography have become a common sight in anime activities around Taiwan. In cosplay (formed from the words of costume and play), comic fans dress and pose as the characters in certain movies, manga or anime, and believe that the ultimate goal for a cosplayer is to actualize the character in real world. Having great passion for the characters they identify with, cosplayers strive to become fictional characters by imitating the way they dress, act and behave in anime works. In order to accentuate characters and showcase the character's distinctiveness, costume and props become the key point when cosplaying. In Taiwan, costumes and props are made by the cosplayers themselves. Characters in animation are mostly surreal; some of them exist only as two-dimensional pictures. It is a challenge to actualize the fictional character in real life through the production of costume and props. Sense of design is highly needed when producing the props and costume. Cosplayers grope their way round making their own cosplay items. It can be said that cosplayers learn the design skill by doing. This research is aimed for exploring the amateuristic design process of cosplay, especially focusing on the cosplayers' design thinking and self-training procedure in the hope to open up a new perspective on design science.
Keywords: Cosplay, Fan Craft, Amateur Design

Introduction

The term cosplay is a portmanteau word of the English words costume and play, is a performance art in which participants wear costumes and accessories to represent a specific character or idea from specific art work. The term was coined by Nobuyuki Takahashi of the Japanese studio "Studio Hard" while attending the 1983 World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) in Los Angeles. He was impressed by the hall and the costumed fans and reported on both in Japanese science fiction magazines. The coinage reflects a common Japanese method of abbreviation in which the first two moras of a pair of words are used to form an independent compound.

Cosplayers often interact to create a subculture centered on role play. A broader use of the term cosplay applies to any costumed role play in venues apart from the stage, regardless of the cultural context.

The sources of characters could from many ways, manga, anime, game, comic books, films, dramatic programming, novels, light novels. Any entity from the real world or virtual world that lends itself to dramatic interpretation might to be considerate as a subject to cosplay.

The Internet has enabled many cosplayers to create their own website or blog to communicate with other cosplayers or fans, websites are usually focus on cosplay activities such as outdoor shooting, studio shooting, tour shooting, events recording. Comparatively, forum is the biggest community to the personal website, also allow cosplayers to share stories, photographs, news, and general information, but compare to personal website, it has highly exposure rate for cosplayers. Since 1990, the number of people who take cosplay as a hobby has rapid growth, make cosplay become a popular culture.

Figure 1. Original character (left) and cosplayer (right)

Practice of Cosplay

Cosplay costumes vary greatly and can range from simple themed clothing to highly detailed costumes. As such, when in costume, cosplayers will often seek to adopt the affect, mannerisms and body language of the characters they portray. The characters chosen to be cosplayed may be sourced from manga, anime, game, comic books, films, dramatic programming, novels, light novels or music band, but the practice of cosplay is often associated with replicating anime and manga characters.
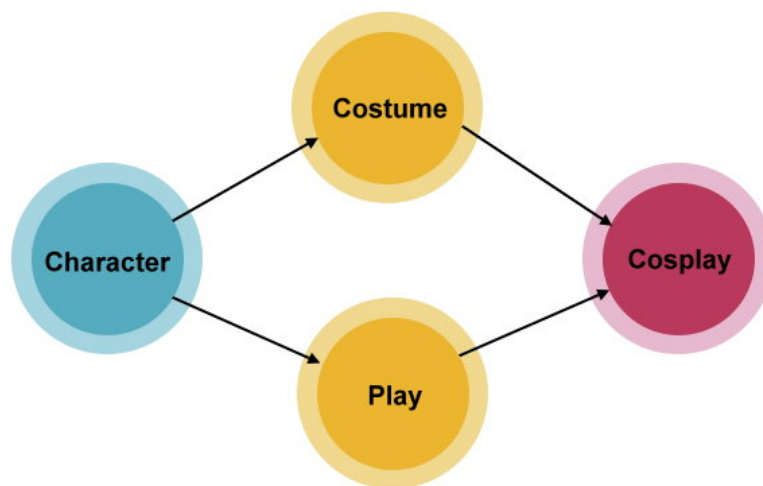

Figure 2. Elements in Cosplay

The linear structure which show the relation about costume and play. It is has to be a character to make cosplay practiced, costume and play are the main elements in the structure. Only costume and without play, is a behavior like clothes-hanger which means the individual is mere formality. On the other hand, only play, but without costume, it would be a chaos for the audiences because the main subject is not indicating exactly. Costume and play are based on the character to be reality, and cosplay is based on the costume and play to be existence. This is the reason why the cosplay should have a specific character to be put into practice.

Costumes

Most cosplayers create their own outfits, referencing images of the characters in the process. In the creation of the outfits, much time is given to detail and qualities, thus the skill of a cosplayer may be measured by how difficult the details of the outfit are and how well they have been replicated. Because of the difficulty of replicating some details and materials, cosplayers often educate themselves in crafting specialties such as textiles, sculpture, face paint, fiberglass, fashion design, woodworking and other uses of materials in the effort to render the look and texture of a costume accurately.

Cosplayers often wear wigs in conjunction with their outfit in order to further improve the resemblance to the character. This is especially necessary for anime and manga characters who often have unnaturally colored and uniquely styled hair. Simpler outfits may be compensated for their lack of complexity by paying attention to material choice, and overall excellent quality. The process of creation may then be very long and time-consuming, making it a very personal journey and achievement for many. This taxing and often expensive process is known to unite cosplayers and is considered a part of the culture of cosplay.

Cosplayers obtain their apparel through many different methods. Manufacturers produce and sell packaged outfits for use in cosplay, in a variety of qualities. These costumes are often sold online, but also can be purchased from dealers at conventions. There are also a number of individuals who work on commission, creating custom costumes, props or wigs designed and fitted to the individual; some social networking sites for cosplay have classified ad sections where such services are advertised.

Some cosplayers who prefer to create their own costumes, the material such as unstyled wigs or extensions, hair dye, cloth and sewing notions, liquid latex, body paint, shoes, costume jewelry and rudeness prop weapons could be obtaining from market as well. The characters in anime and game usually have weapons, armors or other accessories which are hard to replicate, and conventions of the community have strict or hidden rules for those weapons, which made cosplayers pay more attention for crafting. The generalities of cosplayer engage in some combination of methods to obtain all the items necessary for their costume.

Fiction to Reality

Props are the thorniest problem in cosplay, especially for the beginners. Even though cosplayers could obtain their apparel through many different methods such as custom made from the craftsman or purchase the finished products, but it is usually a high cost way to acquire which beginner could not afford. For economic concern and strong desire of cosplay, make props and outfit by themselves began the last measure for cosplayers. Very differently from western country, cosplayers in Taiwan mostly have no enough space for crafting, therefore they develop many techniques, include skill and material. Convenient to manufacture and inexpensive price are usually the main consideration for cosplayer on materials, it allows cosplayer use simple tools such as scissor, penknife, glue stick, its realized in-house design and crafting.

Conclusion

Characters in animation are mostly surreal, some of them exist only as two-dimensional pictures. It is a challenge to actualize the fictional character in real life through the production of costume and props. Sense of design is highly needed when producing the props and costume. Even though every individual of cosplayers are from different age, generation and background, but the pattern of crafting has highly similarity.

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