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## Tailored Translations—Translating and Transporting Cosplay Costumes

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# TRANSPPOSITIONS BETWEEN VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL SEMIOTICS

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## Tailored Translations—Translating and Transporting Cosplay Costumes<sup>1</sup>

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Since 2003, each August has seen teams of cosplay practitioners from around the world descend upon the sun-baked streets of Nagoya, Japan, to take part in the World Cosplay Summit (WCS). Sponsored by Aichi Television and various Japanese government ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), WCS started as an exhibition event with five cosplayers from Germany, France, Italy (see “About WCS”). The event has since grown into a competition that involves 30 nations, held in conjunction with a series of parades, photo opportunities and an academic conference. Until 2015, the event was held predominately in Japanese, with non-Japanese speakers performing their two minute and forty second competition skits (complete with full lighting, sound, stage props, backing music, special/visual effects, choreography, and, often, multiple costumes) in the host language. In an attempt to show the truly global nature of cosplay, the 2015 competition encouraged participants to perform their stage productions in their native language.<sup>2</sup> The WCS organising team provided simultaneous Japanese and English language translation (via project subtitles) or interpretation. At the World Cosplay Summit, language is inherently linked to the fandom act of wearing costumes.

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1. I am indebted to Dr. Myreille Pawliez for her translation of this abstract. I also wish to thank Dr Marco Sonzogni for his encouragement in submitting to this special edition of *Signata*. Further thanks are extended to the editing board and the reviewers for their detailed suggestions.
  2. <http://www.worldcosplaysummit.jp/en/about/regulations.html> accessed 30 September 2015.

This article proposes that each of the cosplay costumes constructed by entrants in the WCS, as well as those made by fan costumiers globally, can be read as texts, and as such are effectively fan made, multimedia translations that cross cultural, social, and linguistic boundaries. For the purpose of this article, ‘cosplay’<sup>3</sup> will be used as an umbrella term to denote not only the act of constructing and wearing a cosplay (costume play) costume, but also the related activities of creating photo shoots, music videos, and competition skits, and the resulting products (soft and hard copy images, short films, YouTube videos, music videos, et cetera) which are often shared amongst cosplayers and cosplay fans via the internet. Rather than examining the fandom activity of dressing as a favourite character (which, despite cosplay studies’ status as a fairly new area of serious investigation, has been admirably examined by Craig Norris and Justin Bainbridge (2009, 2013), Nicolle Lamerichs (2011), and Theresa Winge (2006), for example) the focus of this piece will be on the most visually significant aspect of cosplay—the very costumes that fan practitioners construct as a part of their hobby.

Nicolle Lamerichs, a prolific cosplay scholar and a cosplayer herself, lays out four key elements that can be used to examine the fandom act of dressing as a certain character: “a narrative, a set of clothing, a play or performance before spectators, and a subject or player” (2011, 1.2). This article is primarily concerned with this second element: a particular set of clothing and accessories including, but not limited to, a wig, coloured contact lenses, foundation garments, shoes, and make-up.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this article is chiefly concerned with cosplay costumes constructed after existing Japan origin *anime*, game, *manga*, film or literary characters rather than original character (OC) costumes or Japanese street fashions such as ‘Gothic Lolita’ and other *kawaii* (cute) styles.<sup>4</sup> This narrow definition of cosplay is somewhat artificial and, by current usage within fandom communities, almost obsolete given that most current English language usage covers any fancy dress costume, including original characters and western origin comics, while current Japanese language usage of the term also covers Halloween style costumes and erotic lingerie style costumes. For the purposes of this piece, I am further limiting this definition of cosplay to fan constructed costumes as opposed to mass produced costumes available on shopping sites such as eBay, Taobao, Alibaba/Aliexpress or Etsy, or official merchandise in the form of brand labelled costumes, tee shirts, or other street clothes.<sup>5</sup> We will see that this narrow

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3. “Cosplay” is a portmanteaux of the words “costume” and “play.” For a more detailed overview see King (2013).
  4. Anglophone scholars are sometimes want to refer to Lolita fashion and other similar subcultures as a form of cosplay: i.e. “Lolita Cosplay.” This can have the unfortunate effect of undermining otherwise sound arguments.
  5. For work that does include purchased costumes and official street clothes, see for example Norris and Bainbridge (2009).

definition of cosplay is helpful when devising a theory of cosplay as translation that may later be able to be applied to a wider range of cosplay costumes.

In her work on reading extant, historical garments as texts in order to extrapolate details about gender representation, culture, society, and even religion in ancient civilisations, Zvezdana Dode states that:

While considering costume as text, it should be borne in mind that it is the result of purposeful actions by an agent who consciously seeks to endow an object with a certain quota of informative content, such as using costume to express socio-economic and/or sex and age-specific differentiation. It should also be remembered that costume as text reflects occurrences that the agent never intended, but which the researcher finds significant in modelling a historical and cultural reality. (Dode 2012, p. 7)

For Dode, the concept of reading costume as text is a logical derivation from the etymology of the very word ‘text’—from the Latin *textum*: “weaving, clothes, link, joining; *textus*: interlacement, structure, coherent statement; *texo*: to weave, plait, combine” (Rudnev 1997, p. 305 cited in Dode 2012, p. 7). Semantically then, there is an overlap in the notion of the (traditional) text and costume. Both are “man made, not natural, wherein the elements are bound together, and are built skilfully, expertly and with artistry.” Building on this reading of historical costume as a coherent, constructed, artistic text, it follows that cosplay costumes are also able to read in a similar manner; as a text in their own right.

Lamerichs further defines cosplay as “a form of appropriation that transforms and actualises an existing story or game in close connection to the fan community and the fan’s own identity” (Lamerichs 2013b, p. 1). Taking cosplay costumes as a readable text, cosplay is then a skilful amalgamation of elements that transforms and actualises an existing story or game. Given our concern here with cosplay costumes constructed from Japan origin source materials, I argue that these costumes are both linguistic translations—from Japanese to another language—and transmedia translations—from a 2D source material to a 3D wearable garment.

In looking at cosplay costumes as a translation it makes sense to draw on work on costuming as a whole, especially in the area of film adaptation studies. An adaptation is, after all:

An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works; a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging; [and] an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. (Hutcheon 2013, p. 9)

In film studies there is an increasing trend to view translations and adaptations within “a more all-inclusive framework,” than a rigid view of “translation for changing the language of literary texts,” and “adaptations for changing media.” This framework “recognises the demands of a globalising world” which insists on “flexibility and respect for differences in cultural traditions” (Raw 2012, p. 3). As Ayelet Kohn and Rachel Weissbrod point out, “conceiving of translation as

more than interlingual transfer is well established in translation studies nowadays” (2012, p. 123). Throughout this article, this trend of a less rigid distinction between translation and adaptation will be fully capitalised upon.

This article also draws on Minako O’Hagan’s work on fan translation in regards to *anime*, *manga* and computer games. Although a lot of this work is now obsolete given the fast changing landscape of the ways in which fans of *anime* and *manga* access and engage with these products, O’Hagan’s observations are still valid here. For O’Hagan, fan translations take on many forms including fansubbing/digi-subbing (adding subtitles to episodes of *anime* or feature films),<sup>6</sup> scanlations (scanned and translated *manga*, comics or graphic novels)<sup>7</sup> and video game translations as the most widely used, and perhaps most recognisable forms. O’Hagan defines user-generated translation as “a wide range of translation, carried out based on free user participation in digital media spaces where translation is undertaken by unspecified self-selected individuals” (2009, p. 8). In this context, drawing on the work of Flew, the ‘user’ is:

Somebody who voluntarily acts as a remediator of linguistically inaccessible products and direct producer of translation on the basis of their knowledge of the given language as well as that of particular media content or genre, spurred by their substantial interest in the topic. (O’Hagan 2009, p. 8)

In this case “users” are simultaneously fan users, and translation producers. For our purposes, the cosplay practitioner creates user-generated translations, in the form of a cosplay costume, based on an existing character or story arc, on the basis of their knowledge of the given language (costume semantics and fabrication techniques) as well as that of particular media content, spurred by their substantial interest in the topic.

I am not the first scholar to consider cosplay as an act of translation; Ellen Kirkpatrick states that cosplay practitioners “rewrite and perform their chosen character upon their own bodies” (2015). For Kirkpatrick, cosplayers are “locked in act of translation” that can be seen as a form of “embodied translation.” Kirkpatrick argues that:

Embodied translation is [...] a complex process and uniquely enacted within the frame and bounds of the material body of the cosplayer. Thus, in translating established characters, cosplayers are implicated in a process of re-creation; they produce simultaneously both a new character and a revised version of the original. (2015, 4.7)

Kirkpatrick talks of cosplay in terms of an “acquired language” that, by its very nature, prohibits practitioners from becoming native language speakers; “cosplay will always be their second tongue” (2015).

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6. See for example Diaz Cintas & Munoz Sanchez (2006).

7. See for example O’Hagan (2006).

While I agree that language and cosplay are inextricably linked—we have already seen how WCS uses cosplay and language as a means to facilitate global communication—I do not agree that cosplay is only a second language with no native language speakers. By constructing their own costumes, cosplayers are in turn creating and adding to the language of cosplay. ‘Big Name Cosplayers’<sup>8</sup> such as Reika, Yuegene Fay, Yaya Han, Kamui, and Ameno Kitarou<sup>9</sup> continually create innovations in costume construction, discovering new materials, and utilising new ways of applying makeup, that are then almost religiously copied and recreated by other cosplay practitioners in their own work. The costumes constructed by each of these ‘Big Name Cosplayers’ can be seen as translations from their original source material—when working with Japanese language source materials, these costumes take on an element of linguistic translation from a Japanese artefact into Thai, English, or German respectively. The innovations that these practitioners each bring to the field are akin to different innovative translation techniques introduced by those working with literature, subtitles, film or other media. While WCS promotes cosplay as a means for global communication, Reika, Yuegene, Yaya, Kamui and AK actively put this into practice in the linguistic and transmedia translations that they create with their costume work.<sup>10</sup>

## 1. Anatomy of a Cosplay Costume

Perhaps one of the most iconic pop cultural characters, with a product range that includes *anime*, *manga*, computer games, and live action adaptations for stage and screen, is *Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun* (Pretty Solider/Guardian Sailor Moon) who made her first appearance in 1991.<sup>11</sup> With her long, blonde, pigtails and short sailor style school uniform, Sailor Moon is the one costume that every cosplayer dreams

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8. After the earlier term “Big Name Fan” or “BNF” see for example [http://fanlore.org/wiki/Big\\_Name\\_Fan](http://fanlore.org/wiki/Big_Name_Fan).
  9. These cosplay practitioners regularly appear at different conventions world wide as invited guests, exhibitors and judges. Reika is ranked number one on global cosplay community site Cure (see [https://worldcosplay.net/en/member/reika\\_japan](https://worldcosplay.net/en/member/reika_japan)) and is based in Japan. Yuegene Fay (see <https://worldcosplay.net/en/member/yuegene>) is based in Thailand. Yaya Han (see [www.yayahan.com](http://www.yayahan.com)) is based in America. Kamui or Kamui Cosplay (see <https://www.kamuicostplay.com/>) is based in Germany. Ameno Kitarou or Wirru (see <http://amenokitrou.deviantart.com/>) is based in Australia.
  10. These cosplayers also regularly respond to their worldwide fan bases, often in several languages in addition to English.
  11. Tekuchi Naoko first created Sailor Moon in her 1991 *manga* series *Code Name ha V* (Code Name V). There is a *manga* series which ran from 1991-1997, an *anime* from 1992-1997 (which has been translated in part into English in 1995), a number of musicals from 1993-2005, live action stage shows from 2013 onwards and a new *anime* version from 2014, which has been simultaneously translated into English.

of making.<sup>12</sup> If cosplay is a language, than for many, “Sailor Moon” is the first “word” they learn. The uniforms of Sailor Moon and her fellow ‘scouts’ consist of the core element of bow, collar, and skirt. Characters are given an easily identifiable persona by the introduction of a unique colour scheme, hairstyle, earrings, shoes and assorted sleeve and glove lengths. Subtle changes in the initial costume design, such as a change in sleeve shape, give a visual representation when the characters gain more power. These elements remain the same regardless of the culture or the language that the work is translated or adapted into.

The official English translation of the 1990s *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon anime* is notoriously troubling. The DIC North American translation of the 1992 animation of *Pretty Solider Sailor Moon* (1992-1997) redrew bathing scenes to remove nudity (culturally appropriate in Japan, but not in conservative America/Canada). More famously, non-heteronormative characters were either re-gendered to create straight, heterosexual partnerships, or redubbed so that their romantic relationships were reduced to mere affection between distant family members. Regardless of the heavy handed, conservative censorship that occurred in the DIC version, when the Sailor Scouts transform, they change from young school girls into magical girls with long legs, breasts, and tiny, nipped in waists clad in high-heeled shoes and short skirts. We will see that the fan backlash is part of the reason for the simultaneous English language edition of the 2014 animated series.

I wish now to turn our focus to two sets of costumes worn in the 2013 finals of the World Cosplay Summit. The WCS has been selected for study out of the many hundreds of local and international cosplay competitions that occur globally each year (there are close to 30 in Australia alone), the WCS has set itself up as the gatekeeper for cosplay. Like the definition used here, the WCS competition guidelines define eligible cosplay costumes as those that are from Japanese origin *anime*, *manga*, and *tokusatsu*<sup>13</sup> film or television series or from Japanese computer and console games (see “WCS2015 Participation Regulations for Cosplayers”). Footage of the 2013 WCS finals was streamed live over the internet during the event and can be viewed online (see <https://youtu.be/eFvzOt94JUK>).

In order to take part in the finals of WCS, each competing team of two cosplay practitioners are required to construct three sets of paired costumes and accessories. One of these costumes is used to perform a two minute and forty second skit which, in previous rounds these skits have included “anything from swordfights, dance numbers and onstage transformations, to characters making their entrance

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12. “Every girls’ dream is to make a Sailor Senshi outfit” <http://robyncostumier.com/cosplay/sailor-moon-eternal-sailor-moon-mercury/>. This statement was made by Robyn Murphy in 2010. Robyn is a leading Australian cosplayer and cosplay judge, as well as a professional costumier for stage and screen.

13. *Tokusatsu* (lit. special filming techniques) refers to *kaijuu* and *kaijin* or monster series such as *Godzilla* and *Power Rangers*.



through mirrors, windows and walls” (King 2013).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, O’Hagan’s description of the “rich content” found in the videogames she analyses can easily be applied to stage performance cosplay skits; “highly complex technological systems” formed by “written text, graphics, cut-scenes (movies), sounds et cetera” (2009, p. 6). While each of the almost 30 nations draws from the same pool of source materials, there is little overlap in the content of the performance skits. Indeed, even if each team were to choose the same pair of characters, cultural, social, and linguistic differences would dictate that no two duos would create the same product.

While this might read as an exaggeration, in 2013 both Team Australia and Team France presented costumes and skits from the *maho shōjo* (magical girl) anime, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011). In both Team Australia and Team France, with one member from each duo portraying the lead character of Madoka.<sup>15</sup> Both Team Australia and Team France wore Madoka’s magical girl outfit of frilled and beribboned cream and pink dress, white knee socks, frilled white gloves, cherry red leather Mary Jane shoes, and pink hair styled in high pigtails with large bows. Team France translates Madoka as a bird-boned, doll-like figure. Her delicate neck is wrapped in a ribbon and her frilled blouse shows off a delicate torso; the overall impression is of youth and innocence. Team Australia’s Madoka smiles at the camera with exaggerated *bishōjo* (lit. pretty girl) eyes, coloured by contact lenses, and enlarged with makeup and extra lashes. Her gown hints at a juxtaposition of vitality and virtue. Whereas Team France prioritises delicate purity, Team Australia’s Madoka manifests her magical powers in glowing sequins and rhinestones. Both Madoka variants preserve the integrity of the original, girl character, while emphasising different key personality traits essential to the character’s narrative arc and development, which are, arguably, determined by socio-cultural tastes that differ between French aesthetics and Australian English sentiments.

Team Australia and Team France’s cosplay costumes draw on a rich lexicon of semiotics inherent in magical girl anime and manga series. *Shōjo manga* or girls’ comic characters are easily recognised by their long, slender limbs, delicate features, small noses and lips, thin eyebrows, and enormous eyes fringed with long eyelashes. Central to the *shōjo manga* look are the galaxy of star-shaped highlights drawn near the pupils of each character’s eyes.<sup>16</sup> It is these “orb like” eyes which set *shōjo manga* apart from comics aimed at a different market. Not only are these

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14. This list is drawn in part from the skits performed in the 2010 WCS finals which I was able to attend as a guest/supporter of Team Australia 2010.

15. Footage of the 2013 World Cosplay Summit can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/eFvzOt94JUk>. Team France features at 1:08:19-1:11:34. Due to copyright reasons (Team Australia 2013’s skit is currently used as a training tool for would be WCS entrants), footage of Team Australia can’t be included in the video. A version without the audio track can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/VR3Ut-s1vy8>.

16. Ito (2011, p. 10), Kanako (1999, p. 101), Schodt (1984, p. 91).



large eyes a “symbol of beauty,” but they are able to “reflect human emotions as much as verbal messages” (Ito 2011, p. 10).<sup>17</sup> Upon opening the pages of a *shōjo* text, readers immediately know the kind of product that they have in their hands (LeFèvre 2000, p. 98). Various stylistic conventions convey an extra layer of information which draws the reader into the “character’s inner world,” forging a powerful link between audience and image (Takahashi 2008, p. 121). A background of roses might indicate romantic thoughts, a sky full of stars and spangles hints at a character’s beauty or confidence, while an explosion of cherry blossoms could indicate the fragility of a character’s life (Schodt 1984, p. 91).<sup>18</sup> Within the borders made by these swirls of flowers and stars, *shōjo manga* characters are often depicted in fashion-plate-like full body illustrations which use costume to give didactic information about personality traits without having to sacrifice valuable text space.

The costumes constructed by Team France and Team Australia build on these conventions. Team Australia’s large eyes mimic the galaxy of stars in every *shōjo manga* character’s eyes. The two Australian cosplayers take this motif to the extreme when the Madoka ‘magical girl’ frock is torn away to reveal the character’s “divine form.” In the source *anime* and films Madoka swaps her pink and cream dress for a short, ice white gown with translucent pink and white angel wings, and a long train. This form occurs in a climactic moment in which the very fate of the world hangs in the balance. Team Australia chose to interpret this scene in a way that preserved the original feeling of the Japanese language, 2D source text, whilst also adding a robustness that makes better sense in the target language (Australian English—which, ironically, was later back-translated into Japanese for the WCS finals performance). The gown is a slavishly faithful transmedia translation which sees cartoon lens flares transformed into rhinestones and crystals. However, in the same way that a translator working on a set phrase that makes little sense in the target language, Team Australia were not afraid to make leaps of meaning to deliver an implied message that would be otherwise lost in translation. In the *anime* source text, the train of Madoka’s divine gown shimmers in an ever changing galaxy of stars. Unable to fully create this effect in a 3D garment, Team Australia chose to create a collage of their favourite NASA images of constellations, nebulae and galaxies before having the completed pattern custom printed onto silk.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, the dark hair and purple/grey colour scheme worn by the second member of Team Australia in her Homura costume communicates that this is a much more dour character than her teammate’s pink haired *ingénue*, without the need for action or vocalisation. In the same way that showers of flower petals

17. In many men’s and boy’s *manga* characters are often drawn with thick ‘kabuki-style’ eyebrows and glaring eyes. Schodt (1984, p. 91).

18. In Japan, cherry blossoms are inherently linked to glorious and valorous death, typified by Samurai masculinity which flowered briefly, but brilliantly before being cut down in the bloom of youth.

19. Private Facebook communication, August 2013.

and ribbons give extra meaning in *manga* design, fabric and decorative choices literally add an extra layer to a completed cosplay costume. Fabric can be affective (Lamerichs 2013a, p. 4) and empathetic: “richness of feeling deserves enriched texture, and velvet, wool jersey, chiffon, satin, bugle-beading, or sable are often used on the bodies of [such] heroines” (Street 2001, p. 5). Both Team France and Team Australia chose to translate the *anime* version of Madoka’s magical girl outfit into lycra, ribbons, and lace. In contrast, Team Australia’s Homura is clad in sensible school girl cottons and dark hose. The differences in focus and interpretation of Team France’s and Team Australia’s Madokas is reminiscent of the process of localisation that occurs in the translation of products such as computer games and animated series (O’Hagan 2009, p. 6).

## 2. Creating Costumes: Tailoring Translations

Prior to the advent of fast internet and video streaming sites, the main way that fans of *anime* and *manga* were able to access new material was via mail order to access pirated VHS (in the case of *anime*) or facsimiles (in the case of *manga*), predominately from the US or China. It should be noted that many preliminary fansubs arose from fans of *anime* and *manga*’s desire for an “authentic text” (Cubbison 2005, cited in O’Hagan 2009, p. 11). Dating back to the 1980s, when many official *anime* releases (both television cartoon episodes and full length feature films or OVAs) were over-edited, heavily censored and, in some cases, spliced together to form an entirely new, English language only, narratives (as per the DIC adaptation of *Pretty Solider Sailor Moon* introduced above). While streaming has largely put an end to fan subtitling, current fan translations are “motivated by a desire to fill the gap or delay in official translations,” with a turnaround of “one or two days of its original broadcast in Japan” for an episode of *anime*, and a same day deadline for a scanlation of a *manga* chapter (O’Hagan 2009, pp. 11-12).

O’Hagan summarises key aspects of fan translations as:

1) Collaboration afforded by technology allows fans to form purposeful task groups to undertake a project and achieve a production often in a manner comparable to professional production in terms of the workflow process and timeframe; 2) despite the dubious legal status copyright holders have largely condoned the practice, partly due to the fact that fan productions can facilitate the exposure of the given product to a wider target language public, thus in effect providing considerable free pre-publicity; 3) fan translators willingly undertake a translation project without remuneration, indicating a strong motivational factor and 4) domain-knowledge possessed by fans may in some cases compensate for the lack of formal translator training. (O’Hagan 2009, pp. 12-13)

We will see that many of these aspects are present in the production of fan constructed cosplay costumes.

In the same way that film studies focus on the film as a whole instead of focusing on costume, cosplay studies still tends to focus on the fandom actions of practitioners rather than the garments they wear:

In examining the relationship between film costume, fashion and identity, it is vital that film and fashion scholarship moves beyond the cinematic text to consider the ways in which costume and fashion are targeted to, and used by audiences. (Gilligan 2011, p. 29)

As with costume studies, in cosplay studies the costumes that are worn by cosplay practitioners need to be “seriously examin[ed]:” “Costume design, fan costuming and fashion are complex signifiers offering a range of meanings and pleasures both in and outside of media texts” (Gilligan (2011, p. 30). Most cosplay scholars point out how the wearing of a costume—whether it be a full character ensemble or a badge of fandom identification such as a pair of Spock ears, a Dr Who scarf, cat ears, badges and patches, or a branded tee-shirt—is an act of participation and identification.<sup>20</sup> Costume functions as a “key means of defining the limits of a living community; it is both a marker of inclusion and a signifier of fan’s conflict with mainstream culture” (Gilligan 2011, p. 29).

Like O’Hagan’s 2009 piece, “this article discusses the phenomenon of user participation in otherwise highly specialised areas of professional [...] practice” (O’Hagan 2009, p. 7). As with other acts of fan or user-generated translation, “the making of costumes as an act of dressmaking functions as both a private, skilled activity and a means for granting agency as part of a collective identity” (O’Hagan 2009, p. 28). Fan translators fit into the category of “prosumers”—not only passive *consumers* of popular culture but also active *producers* of new content (O’Hagan 2009, p. 10).<sup>21</sup> Cosplay “depends on the circulation and fabrication of objects” (Lamerichs 2013b, p. 4). While a small number of cosplayers, as per the five Big Name Cosplayers introduced above, have been able to make a business out of their work—either through selling costumes or accessories to other cosplayers, or selling photographic prints and pin ups of their work—for many, these acts of fan translations are a “labour of love” (Lamerichs 2013a, p. 3). As a work of fan translation, many of the aspects that O’Hagan outlines—internet collaborations, industry tolerance of possible copyright issues, a lack of remuneration, and an intricate knowledge of the subject matter—are applicable to the construction of fan made cosplay costumes. As amateur costumiers, often with full time work or study, cosplay practitioners are also at the mercy of strict deadlines, working to meet convention dates with an oft lamented lack of time management skills.<sup>22</sup>

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20. See for example Bacon-Smith (1992).

21. For more on prosumerism see Tapscott and Williams (2006).

22. Cosplay practitioners are notorious for leaving constructing their costumes to the last possible minute. This has resulted in many online stores posting warnings that shoppers should allow a decent delivery time for their goods before an event. See, for example Melting Mirror,

Like scanlators of the 1980s, cosplay practitioners who construct their own garments are also searching for an “authentic text.” In the early 2000s, part of this authenticity came from using a Japanese source text. In 2006, when writing on the Australian cosplay scene, Larrissa Hjorth noted that “cosplaying provides new avenues for fans to [creatively] express their interest in Japanese popular culture” (Hjorth 2009). During this time, the term “cosplay” was generally used only to denote costumes that had a Japanese or East Asian origin source material; as stated above, it is this older, narrower definition that is used for the most part throughout this article. However as comic book movie franchises, such as *The Avengers* (Dir. Joss Whedon, 2012) and its related prequels, sequels and tie-ins, gain popularity, using “cosplay” to refer to all acts of fan dressing up has become widespread in English, Japanese and other languages worldwide. Indeed, from a discussion on Facebook group Older Cosplayers New Zealand, it becomes apparent that some cosplayers do not equate cosplay with Japan at all.<sup>23</sup>

If Japanese-ness is no longer a mark of authenticity in cosplay, how then is authenticity measured? Could it be that through constructing part or all of a costume, cosplay practitioners are able to facilitate an authentic text experience? Most cosplay competitions or masquerades require a minimum of 80% of the garment to be constructed by the wearer in order to be eligible for certain prizes. Lamerichs looks at cosplay costumes purchased from shopping sites eBay and Etsy. She highlights that there is a divide between mass-produced, ‘Made in China’ garments and artisan products: “whereas eBay took the fan out of the equation in favour of the professional, Etsy focuses on craftsmanship, artistry and maintenance of the fan object.” Lamerichs raises the question, “Does playfulness extend to the commodity situations at eBay?” (2013a, p. 12). As early as 2009, Norris and Bainbridge suggest that commercial “cosplay-style clothing” can sometimes “corrupt the spirit” of “play” resulting in an “inauthentic experience that is a nadir for cosplay” (Norris and Bainbridge 2009).<sup>24</sup> For our purposes here, an authentic translation is one that creates a preserved, idealised image of an original source text (Raw 2012, p. 1).

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“When Cosplay takes over,” *Melting Mirror Cosblog* 11/8/2015 <http://www.meltingmirror.ca/cosblog/when-cosplay-takes-over> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Some cosplayers, such as AmenoKitarou (AK Wirru) (see <https://www.facebook.com/AmenoKitarou>) have become well known for their ‘speed builds.’

23. Some older cosplayers (mid 20s and over) in this Facebook group, felt that they were too old to wear *anime* and *manga* based cosplay costumes. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/539333856203499/?fref=ts> This group has recently become a “Secret” page, accessible only to members.
24. The debate between the worth and authenticity of purchased costumes and constructed garments is one that flairs up periodically on online forums The full argument is without the scope of this article but it is something that deserves further academic attention. See for example <http://sgcafe.com/2015/09/cosplay-bullying-real-thing-must-stopped/>.

### 3. Cosplay Spaces

Susan Sontag equates translation to movement. “Translation is about differences” (Sontag 2002, p. 339); a displacement from place to place—in the case of cosplay costumes, between dimensions. Linked closely to cosplay studies in Japanese language is the emerging field of 2.5-D studies, a field that has been legitimised by the recent special edition of *Yuriika=Eureka*.<sup>25</sup> 2.5-D or 2.5 dimension occurs in the liminal space between 2-D *anime*, *manga* and film, and the 3-D, real world. Originally a computer design term, it has been popularised in terms of costumes and cosplay by the musicals created by the “Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association” (see the musical’s homepage <http://www.j25musical.jp/>). These musicals are based on similar body of source materials that cosplay practitioners draw from—*anime*, *manga* and computer games—and the shows “create a living and moving world in which actors act as if they’re in a *manga*” (Tanaka 2015). In the same way that the action of the 2.5-D musical is confined to the stage, the act of wearing a cosplay costume is restricted to certain sites. This may be the contrived frame of a camera and set, or location during a shoot, or the main floor of a popular culture convention. However, the costume itself is not limited to a set place any more than any other work of translation is confined or limited. On the contrary, in the same way that translating a work from one language to another crosses boundaries and liberates the passage of information, the transition from one dimension to another can be equally freeing.

In her work on the *shōjo*, Japanese literary critic, Masuko Honda describes a small space, accessible only to those who are in touch with the spirit of the girl. She further describes this space in terms of a “be-ribboned bower” where delicate hot house flowers are able to bloom freely amongst ‘ribbons, frills or even, [in the case of *shōjo* manga and other *shōjo* narratives] lyrical word chains [which] flutter in the breeze as symbols of girlhood” (Honda 2010, p. 20) The costumes made by Team Australia and Team France in the 2013 WCS finals are clearly situated in this *shōjo* space by their adherence to long standing *shōjo* conventions that cross the boundaries of both language and media.

While 2.5D spaces are limited and confined (much like the *shōjo*’s small room), it is only within these spaces that, for example, an anime musical can be brought to life. *Sailor Moon* straddles these delicate boundaries from the get go as can be seen by Naoko Takeuchi’s heavily referential costume and character designs. Examples can be seen in the designs of the antagonistic Dark/Nega moon sisters Koan and Calaveras which back translate the collections shown during fashion week 1992 of Mugler and Christian Lacroix Haute Couture, from physical item of clothing to 2D artefact respectively. The iconic white ball gowns that both *Sailor Moon*, as

25. *Eureka* (or *Yuriika*) is a mainstream Japanese literary magazine specialising in poetry and criticism. Established by Date Tokuo (1920-1961) in 1956, the magazine has played a very important role for decades, introducing cutting edge Western art and literary theories and recognising new texts and talents as well as rediscovering the old. See Aoyama (2009).

Neo Queen Serenity, and her mother, Queen Serenity is taken from Dior Haute Couture from the same period.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Throughout this article a narrow definition of a cosplay costume has been utilised; namely that a cosplay is a linguistic and/or transmedia translation from a 2D source material of Japanese origin to 3D (or more accurately a 2.5D), real world garment. It is possible to open this definition of cosplay to incorporate a more current, broader, definition of cosplay in both English and Japanese language usage. Nevertheless, the act of wearing a cosplay costume is a liminal, transient one that can only occur in certain spaces such as the 2.5-D stage, or the floor of a popular culture convention; the costume itself has more agency. As Lamerichs points out, the costume has:

An afterlife. After its debut, it may be worn several times and finally, the costume is lovingly put in [...] wardrobes or on display. The costume becomes fan memorabilia, connected to a past performance. The object is rife with nostalgic feelings. (Lamerichs 2013a, p. 5)

Like other works of translation, a completed cosplay costume, or its related products and intertexts, may be on-sold or held as a measure against which to gauge a practitioner's skills. In the same way that a translator might revisit a certain text several times in their career, cosplayers will sometimes return to a costume or a character as their experience and technical competency increases, or as their point of view shifts. Similarly, in the same way that online translation engines like Google Translate mask the "highly specialised nature of the work of translators and localisers," (O'Hagan 2009, p. 26). online shopping sites such as eBay can erase the technical work of the fan costumier.

In her work on fan translations, O'Hagan demonstrates that:

As the user generated translation phenomenon starts to enter into professional and academic discourses, we all need to engage in the debate with open mind and endeavour to understand the emerging contexts by establishing the facts so that we can critically assess the situation. (O'Hagan 2009, p. 26)

Similarly, as cosplay studies become more in depth, it is important to delve deeper and engage with all aspects of the practice in multiple sites and dimensions, both virtual and real world. Reading cosplay and, more specifically, cosplay costumes as text "generates new meanings and new texts." To return to Dode: "costume read as text at these informative levels helps viewer/reader to understand

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26. There is currently little English language scholarship on Takeuchi's use of haute couture. There is, however, a large body of unpublished fan research. See for example <http://silvermoon424.tumblr.com/post/83857499614/peachybeam-sailor-moon-on-the-runway-koan>.



it in the context of key categories of cultural environments” (Dode 2012, p. 15). By treating cosplay costume as a text, furthermore a translated text, we are able to access layers of meaning that have hitherto remained largely unexplored.

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