A posthuman analysis: Cosplay identity creation, investment and 'becomings' through social media usage

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This study investigates how online cosplaying practices relate to offline activities (and vice versa). This United Kingdom-based research uses Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization in relation to identities, 'becomings,' and imagery across a plethora of interrelated practices. In Study 1, forty 'selfies' posted by adult Instagram users are collected using digital ethnography ($n = 40$; 32 females), whilst in Study 2, semi-structured interviews of adults attending the Thought Bubble (2018) Comic Convention in Leeds are conducted ($n = 20$; 10 females). Both studies collect discourse via opportunistic sampling and use schizoanalysis to map these multiplicities. Across a range of different non-localisable, yet emplaced, spacetimes, cosplaying induces a plethora of uncanny affects: becoming-amphibian, becoming-slasher, becoming-edited (Study 1); and becoming-cyborg, becoming-crow, becoming-Queen (Study 2). This fandom functions as a nomadic performance machine that deterritorializes online–offline subjectivities by ontologising liberatory, posthuman cosplaying thresholds. The problem of 'what' rather than 'who' cosplays provocatively follows this research's nomadic-posthumanist spin.

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List of Abbreviations

Below is an exhaustive list of meaning of different abbreviations—and a symbol—used across this thesis. (Note that page numbers indicate their initial citation.)

Abbreviation	Meaning	
Φ.	abstract machine	134
A #	assemblage number	136
BwO	Body without Organs	54
CMV(s)	cosplay music video(s)	41
F.	flows	134
IG	Instagram	9
P #	participant number	162
RP	central research problem	1
RSP(s)	research sub-problem(s)	1
SA	schizoanalysis	6
T.	existential Territories	134
TB	Thought Bubble	10
U.	incorporeal Universes	134

Introduction

Thanks to the magic of the imagination, everything exists solely to be manipulated, caressed, broken apart, put back together or altered in any way I wish. (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 217)

This thesis aims to map United Kingdom-based adult fans' online and offline cosplay practices. The central argument here is that this performance art is a problem concerning bodies and, crucially, how these might be assembled in empowering ways. As we shall see, this position contrasts starkly with the majority of past research, which has painted cosplay as a representational means to express meaning and identity. To this end, this introduction overviews this subculture's fundamental tenets before detailing this research's chosen ontology, epistemology, and data collection methods. In addition, it outlines this thesis's overarching central research problem (RP) and research sub-problems (RSPs) before describing and critically evaluating its chosen ethnographies.

Let us begin with an outline of this thesis's object of analysis: cosplay. This practice is a fan culture and performance art in which aficionados of films, books, and computer games dress up and perform whilst masquerading as fictional characters (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 1.2). For example, a fan might cosplay a Japanese film character such as "Kusuri-uri, the Medicine seller" from the horror anime "*Mononoke*" (Langsford, 2016, p. 22) at a comic convention (con, for short). (All italics within quotations are in the original work.) Alternatively, another enthusiast could invent a 'look' for an "audio-only fandom," such as the radio programme *Welcome to Night Vale,* and post a 'selfie' of "Cecil Palmer" or "his scientist boyfriend Carlos" (Orsini, 2015, p. 229). However, such acts are not trivial pursuits since fans heavily invest their time and money before, during, and after performances (Duchesne, 2010, p. 24). Indeed, this observation justifies why cosplay is:

best understood as a craft, a subculture, and a performance, all of which are created and recreated in the everyday online and offline lives of cosplayers, but take on greater significance in certain locations, such as at science fiction and fantasy convention and meet-ups. (Crawford & Hancock, 2019, p. 1)

Crawford and Hancock's (2019) quote clarifies that there is more to this hobby than first appears because cosplay invariably takes place within a specific setting that infers an offline or online audience. As we will see, previous studies have disregarded how these sides of cosplay impact one another. In fact, Crawford and Hancock's (2019) definition reflects past research's oft-made superficial division between this hobby's online and offline manifestations. In contrast, this research's primary objective is to map the interrelations between cosplay's digital and analogue practices. Freedom is at stake here because if fans can circulate their desires across these spacetimes, they can gain control (agency) over their fandom-related activities and enjoy themselves. Otherwise, they risk re-producing or re-presenting the status quo, which, as we shall see, equates with "rational, capitalistic subjectivity" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 26).

The dearth of previous empirical work on this performance art's online-offline relationality is surprising, given that in the twenty-first century, cosplay is "a convergence culture in which various media overlap and distribute characters and their storyworlds across once discrete boundaries" (Mountfort, Peirson-Smith & Geczy, 2018, p. 28). For instance, Tamaki (2011) notes that the *Tenchi muyō* anime was "made into a novel, a game, a radio drama, and so on" (p. 119). What complicates matters is that there are sometimes different versions of the same fictional character—as in the ever-popular Marvel comics' superhero franchise, *Spider-Man* ("Spider-Man," n.d.). Notably, Go (2014) deploys the Japanese term "*kyara*" to describe how fictional characters move between "different narrative contexts and media forms" (p. 168). These transitions are

crucial because they help reify these protagonists for their fans and allow them to feel that they are participating in an ongoing storyworld (Go, 2014, p 168).

Because of this phenomenon's sheer complexity, this research does not focus on a specific franchise, genre, or subgenre but argues that cosplay's desires directly manifest as bodies—fictional, concrete, digital, online, offline, etc.—within specific contexts. Moreover, this research refuses to separate these affects from one another. Note that, here, 'affects' are understood as nonhuman becomings or better, intensities, that implode meaning and identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 272). Within this research, this concept indicates two things. First, cosplay's becomings manifest as performance-based events. Second, because these bodies are pre-personal changes, affects are the building blocks of fan subjectivities. As such, these intensities concern being (i.e., ontology) and systems of knowledge (i.e., epistemology).

Indeed, affect studies fall broadly into two camps. On the one hand, Silvan Tompkins adopts an evolutionary psychological perspective that references "a number of basic (hard wired) affect systems: interest/excitement, enjoyment/joy, surprise/startle, distress/anguish, disgust/contempt, anger/rage, shame/humiliation, and fear/terror" (Ellis & Tucker, 2015, p. 161). On the other hand, the Deleuzo-Spinozist take on affects does not concern the psychology of emotions but rather what a body can do: "creative and contingent practices that are relational and processual" (Ellis & Tucker, 2015, p. 162). (Perhaps, a compromise between these paradigms lies in Antonio Damasio's (2004) Spinoza-inspired materialist thinking, which insists that "parallel manifestations of mind and body" are the outcome of "the brain's mappings of the body, collections of neural patterns that portray responses to events that cause emotions and feelings" (p. 12).) As we will see, this thesis's onto-epistemological take aligns itself with this latter perspective.

Given the above framing, this thesis focuses on what happens inbetween bodies. This paradigm will be adopted for two primary reasons. Firstly, this thesis deploys the

process philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2013b) to assert that no such divisions exist, given that every aspect of subjectivity occurs on a single, flat surface: "the plane of immanence or consistency" (p. 328). (Note that throughout this thesis, 'immanence' refers to how cosplay's sensational practices construct its fans' inner experiences. And, I deploy the idea of a 'plane' (or 'plateau') as any perspective or disciplinary field that exists as an inbetween: "A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 22).) Secondly, technology and nature can never be considered apart because they endure on this same surface (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 46). Considering these claims, this study charts how cosplay's technical bodies interface with discursive ones during a performance. Here, the point is to reveal how these flows conjugate in ways that cause mutations in this subculture's existing habits—specifically social media usage and con-based acts. Thus, this thesis argues that cosplay holds the potential to not only re-programme reality but also forge new from old. As we will see, this is a much-needed practically-minded turnaround, given that previous studies have reduced this art form to mere imitation.

This thesis holds that cosplay's bodies or becomings do not reify subjects (i.e., cosplayers) but rather relate to this performance art's online and offline territories. Thus, this research rebukes any notion that cosplayers are already 'out there.' As we shall see, this approach is commonplace in this research field. Here, I argue that the result of this subject-focused orientation has been a subjugating portrayal of cosplay as an escapist leisure pursuit. In comparison, this thesis will not confirm this illusory image of static subjects equipped with their supposedly fixed, 'private' identities. Instead, this study explores how cosplay's experimental bodily practices might induce new sensations. Note that this research defines sensation, following Lingis (2018), as "immanence itself: it is an impressional moment of the psychic, a way the psychic is affected, a tone of the psychic" (p. 4). Although this Spinozist slant will be detailed in Chapter 2, cosplay's

bodies refer to any of its becomings or relations—media, aesthetics, technological gizmos, costumes, genres, subgenres, argot, etc.

The advantage of this all-encompassing use of 'bodies' is that it permits this study's mapping of how cosplay's affects might impact one another in non-hierarchical ways that empower its fans and fill them with joy. (As we will see, this last phenomenon is far from straightforward.) Put differently, this study is about how fans might gain autonomy in the face of contemporary society's omnipresent control through screen-based cybernetics: "In the era of binge-watching and handheld screens, the business of escapism—the business of keeping people staring at screens—is only getting more and more successful" (Gertz, 2019, p. 114). However, cosplay is performance art, so I will consider what else can be done with a screen besides gawk. Indeed, I argue that what happens between these surfaces has been neglected within this field. This study addresses this empirical oversight by mapping the possibilities afforded by such events.

The literature review highlights how past studies have focused on what cosplay's discursive practices signify. As such, this art form has been portrayed as a relatively straightforward means to experiment with one's (seemingly) existing identity. In contrast, I argue that cosplay works as online–offline act that invariably involves several types of bodies (not just immaterial ones). Henceforth, the primary objective is to discover what makes this subculture 'tick.' Consequently, I offer no interpretation of cosplay based on external pressures, such as heterosexist gender identity norms (Leng, 2013, p. 106). Instead, this study focuses exclusively on the usefulness of cosplay's desires. Bluntly, the question is 'How,' not 'Why.' This thesis treats identity construction as a performance-based event or practice: "who we are in the sense of what we do" (Koopman, 2019, p. 8).

Thus, I hold that this hobby's words, 'things,' images, genres, subgenres, aesthetics, and technologies function alongside one another as bodies—"rhizomes" or "assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 169). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze

and Guattari (2013b) define the process of assemblage as: "an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less interconnected relations" (p.296). Within this thesis, this idea is used to connote transitions between cosplay's online and/or offline multiplicities or bodies. (Hereafter this thesis uses the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of 'rhizomes,' 'desiring-machines,' and 'multiplicities' as synonyms for (cosplaying) assemblages.)

Moreover, this thesis maintains that these ever-unpredictable bodies manifest themselves directly as empowering cosplay desires. Precisely, this means looking at this hobby's distinct elements or relations: its "machinic arrangements" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 369). To do so, this study approaches its data via a pragmatics Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) call "schizoanalysis" (p. 311) (SA). Precisely, SA is a non-prescriptive theory and practice which can draw from any discipline, field, or epistemology whatsoever to map the heterogeneous elements that constitute the assemblage under scrutiny. Here, the point is not to simply describe how particular components (i.e., words and 'things') relate to cosplay. Instead, this research considers the limits or conditions of possibility that various configurations might furnish for future performances: "Schizoanalysis is like the art of the new" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 239).

However, the intention is not to filter cosplay through SA. Thus, I take what I need from this pragmatics to consider how the data adds fresh insights into this subculture's 'likes.' Throughout this study, I concentrate on any aspects that might offer fans a spontaneous experience or "intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 33). As such, this research will not employ a historicising approach because it argues that this subculture's performances are unique moments that relate to a particular territory (i.e., a con or a social media platform) and begin from nothing: creatio ex nihilo.

SA is an ideal research tool for examining cosplay's 'likes,' given that its sole concern is mapping desire as an active, creative force (puissance). In this way, this

thesis follows Hans's (1981) lead on play and insists that with this phenomenon, one is never dealing with objects or subjects but only with the acts themselves (p. 7). Practically speaking, cosplay does not require a pre-existent subject (i.e., a cosplayer) who somehow lies behind the act. Thus, this research jettisons any reference to a fictitious cosplayer. Moreover, this performance art's technologies are "events and processes" (Roden, 2015, p. 139), not objects. (Throughout this thesis, I use events as markers for cosplay's bodies—including identity.)

Few, if any, previous studies have paid due attention to the role of the face across cosplay's online and offline spacetimes. This thesis argues that this is a significant oversight because, according to this study's schizoanalytic positioning, the face is the sine qua non producer of meaning and identity or "signifiance and subjectification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 196). Applied to cosplay, it is this repressive system that practically and theoretically impedes its becomings because it codifies or restricts them according to one form or another (e.g., the (human) cosplayer, an aesthetic, a genre, etc.). Instead, this study charts those affirmative ways this art form might escape the face and engineer new intensities. Attention turns to cosplay's renowned use of prosthetics and cosmetics (Orsini, 2015, p. 168) and how these might usurp— "deterritorialize" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 102)—meaning and identity across divergent spacetimes.

Crucially, because this study argues that cosplay is a problem concerning bodies, equal consideration of the presence of nonhumans is necessary. Indeed, past studies have underplayed the role played by this art form's technologies. Conversely, this research insists that these bodies must be mapped to understand how cosplay functions as a practice. As we shall see, this research takes much of its inspiration from critical posthumanist perspectives—such as Rosi Braidotti's (2013)—which offers a materialist feminist take on contemporary power relations. This nuanced approach distinguishes between, on the one hand, "the *figure* of the 'posthuman' (and its present,

past and projected avatars, like cyborgs, monsters, zombies, ghosts, angels, etc.)": and, on the other, "'posthumanism' as the contemporary social *discourse* (in the Foucauldian sense), which negotiates the pressing contemporary question of what it means to be human under the conditions of globalization, technoscience, late capitalism and climate change" (Herbrechter, 2018, p. 94). Furthermore, since cosplay is a performance art that can potentially embody these above figures, it makes sense to espouse this posthumanist positioning. However, this perspective must be distinguished from the androcentric "fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of trans-humanist and other techno-utopias" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 90).

In other words, this research looks at how cosplay might challenge both androcentrism and anthropomorphism. Nevertheless, there is nothing to be modest about because 'little' things, or better, forces, are subjugated for a reason. In this regard, Mark Fisher (2009) offers hope: "The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism" (p. 81). Within this perspective, cosplay becomes an ever-emerging context-dependent problem that cannot be reduced to universalist causes that are misleading, impossible, and serve only to colonise thought: "Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from the others and tries to impose by exporting as a model" (Glissant, 2006, p. 77).

Furthermore, this research will not sniff out final answers about the nature of this phenomenon. Rather, it centres on the notion that because reality constantly assembles (i.e., territorializes) and re-assembles (i.e., deterritorializes) itself, it must foreground cosplay's 'wildcards'—its "active lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 218). Only these random acts facilitate its idiosyncratic creations, or better, worlds. To this end, this thesis homes in on this performance art's dissensual practices or, more grandly, its "metamorphic bifurcations" (Guattari, 2013, p. 52). In sum, this research aims to unravel how cosplay might produce a creative unconscious.

This research investigates cosplay identity production by examining online and offline practices. Hence, its central RP:

- What might a cosplaying body do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected by other desiring-machines? (RP)

Following this question, I posit four related RSPs:

- What are the desiring-machines pertaining to online and offline acts of cosplaying?

- Which types of social investments relate to these cosplaying desiring-machines?

- Does online and offline cosplaying produce subject-group or subjugated investments?

- To which of the poles of delirium do these cosplays correspond?

The reasoning behind these research sub-problems will become apparent across the first three chapters. But for now, I will outline this research's primary objectives and data collection. Study 1 uses a "digital ethnography" (Pink, Horst, Postill, Hjorth, Lewis & Tacchi, 2016, p. 139) to collect forty cosplay selfies from the public Instagram (IG) profiles of United Kingdom-based adults (https://www.instagram.com). Intriguingly, cosplay fans sometimes deploy the Korean word for a selfie—"selca" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 61)—to refer to these images. To be sure, obtaining discourse from social media adds to this study's mundane realism because these naturalistic posts were not the result of the data collection process (Pink et al., 2016, p. 149). Importantly, because no two images (bodies) are the same, I will treat each selfie as an independent entity—even if another social media user portrays the same character. Indeed, the overall contribution of this entire thesis rests on this claim.

That said, these methodologies have limits. For example, because the data from IG is secondary, the presence of offline, physical bodies can only be inferred via fans' discursive practices (e.g., images, comments, etc.) and, indeed, by the research process itself. And although this thesis does not proffer a genealogical approach, it is crucial to

realise from the outset that online cosplaying refers first-and-foremost to acts that occur within specific spacetimes or "refrains" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 349). To this end, the emphasis turns to cosplay as a productive history-in-the-making, not a backward-looking enterprise (even if its roleplays date back to the last century).

Study 2 deploys three ethnographies—semi-structured interviews, a naturalistic overt non-participant observation, and a photo ethnography—to collect discourse from a Comic Con based in Leeds: Thought Bubble (TB) (2018). One of the advantages of semi-structured interviewing is that it provides more insight than do the alternatives (e.g., questionnaires), given how this method facilitates in depth-discussion (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Participants ($n = 20$; 10 females) will be quizzed in pairs and groups because past research has indicated that con-based cosplaying is quintessentially about social networking and, as such, interactive, collaborative performance (e.g., Lunning, 2011; Lamerichs, 2015). Study 2's data collection will also 'thicken' its scope via observational field notes (Bryman, 2012, p. 447) and a photo ethnography (Rahman, Wing-sun & Hei-man Cheung, 2012, p. 323). These methods document how TB (2018) attendees expressed themselves across this local territory. In this instance, offline and online practices and their possible interrelations shall be deduced through primary data. Again, because each cosplay is a one-off, no generalisations will be made following their examination. Indeed, across Study 1 and 2, this research is not attempting to make any universal claims as regards what cosplay represents tout court. Instead, it will home in on those performances that provide the greatest degree of intensity (but only within the limits of the sample in question).

Although Study 2 cannot directly scrutinise what attendees might be posting on social media whilst at TB (2018), its use of semi-structured interviews allows fans to describe their use of these sites. Besides, the richness of this data will be augmented through field notes detailing fans' localised usage of their technological gizmos. Here, it is vital to note that this study will not detail the inner workings of gadgets (neither

hardware nor software). Instead, I chart the whereabouts of cosplay's flows of desire and what these movements might produce. In this way, I accentuate those moments whereby fans gain agency vis-à-vis their hobby. In doing so, this performance art might help trigger "a reappropriation, an autopoiesis, of the means of production of subjectivity" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 113). (Roughly speaking, 'autopoiesis' refers to a capacity for self-organisation.)

Because this thesis holds that cosplay is best understood as a practice, it deploys Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) idea of "a rhizome" (p. 10) to describe how reality is composed of relations or bodies. This notion provides the onto-epistemological grounding for this project because cosplaying is not only a part of "being" (Grix, 2010, pp. 166–170) but also refers to knowledge acquisition through learning. Whereas the former connotes ontology, the latter references epistemology, respectively. Indeed, this distinction turns on process philosophy's central claim that "things experienced are to be distinguished from our knowledge of them" (Whitehead, 1948, p. 90). Thus, this study re-conceives cosplay as a phenomenon with the potential to alter how fans experience themselves and others. As we shall see, this thesis's RP is to identify possible ways cosplay's bodies might keep furnishing alternatives to capitalistic subjectivity.

Further, this study maintains that this performance art's practices are simultaneously material and discursive (previous research has overlooked the former sensory bodies). That said, it must be recognised that this research only accesses fan experiences via discourse: "The world does not exist outside its expressions" (Deleuze, 1993, p. 132). Crucially, however, these expressions, like concrete bodies, are not sourced from language but from matter itself: "A plane of consistency peopled by anonymous matter, by infinite bits of impalpable matter entering into varying connections" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 298). What this means is that this thesis uniquely argues for a non-linguistic, semiotic take on cosplay and its various bodies.

Consequently, this materialistic, non-representational approach avoids the logocentric dead-end of structural psychoanalysis (e.g., Lacan, 2004; 2006) and social constructivism (see Barad's (2007) cogent commentary on Judith Butler's thinking) by analysing cosplay's material and semiotic practices. As we shall see, language-only approaches have prevented previous research from considering the role played by bodily sensations within this performance art. Nevertheless, this is not a matter of choosing between materiality and immateriality but rather a problem concerning this subculture's bodily connections. Furthermore, because context-specificity is paramount, I make no predictions as to what cosplay practices might be able to achieve. Bluntly, the proof is in the doing. In fact, following Nietzsche's (2006b) thinking, the possibility that cosplay might inspire joy amongst its fans pivots on this claim: "being active is by necessity counted as part of happiness" (p. 21). In view of this affective paradigm, I derive this thesis's RP from Deleuze's (2002) Spinozist observation that "we do not even know what a body *can do*" (p. 39). Moreover, I forgo any directional hypothesis because, as Caillois (2001) tells us, play is quintessentially an "uncertain activity" (p. 7). Consequently, nothing about this subculture is a foregone conclusion.

As we will see, prior research has employed similar ethnographies to reduce cosplay to a set number of elements. In comparison, this study refrains from oversimplification. Indeed, its posthumanist position takes part of its inspiration from Bruno Latour's (1993) observation that so-called nature-culture binaries, such as human/nonhuman, subjects/objects, and language/technology, are false distinctions because all "things" are entangled hybrids that are "interwoven" rather than distinct "tidy compartments" (pp. 2–3). For Bateson (1972), these hybrids are "muddles" (p. 4), whereas, for Deleuze and Guattari (2013b), there are only ever "multiplicities of multiplicities" (p. 39). In fact, anime culture has its own ""hybrid" genre"—basically, robots and beautiful fighting girls—that reached its zenith "in the 1990s" (Tamaki, 2011, p. 117). And by documenting cosplay's hybrids, muddles, or multiplicities, I argue that

this thesis does not represent these practices but rather participates in their construction. As such, this research constitutes an event or "singularity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 474).

To be sure, this study's findings relate to contemporary debates over technology's uses and abuses. For example, the psychoanalyst Sherry Turkle (2011) points to the ubiquitous and damaging consequences of social media on family life: "The ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind. But they are the ties that preoccupy" (p. 280). Without denying its potential for adverse effects, this study will offer an unfashionable yet much-needed affirmative take on this topic. Indeed, this thesis argues that cosplay might (yet) re-appropriate technology to release its desires— rather than mirror the external impositions of "Integrated World Capitalism" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 122) (as hinted in the above quotation from Turkle (2011)).

More than anything else, this study will neither reify the non-existent cosplayer nor provide a classificatory list of cosplay becomings tout court. Instead, I proffer a selection of possibilities as to how this subculture's online and offline performances might empower its fans. For this reason, the becomings documented in this forthcoming map are only glimpses of what a cosplaying body might do: "It's not a matter of "interpreting" them, but of tracking their trajectory to see if they can serve as indicators for new universes of reference susceptible of acquiring sufficient consistency to change the direction of the situation" (Guattari, 2009b, p. 66). In brief, this thesis's observations will be grounded in its data.

The thesis consists of eight chapters. The first starts with a brief historical overview of cosplay's media, genres, and subgenres before reviewing the three directions taken toward this topic: identity, affect, and technology. Here, the goal is to unite these themes within a process and event-based paradigm and provide a detailed map of how this subculture alters reality and knowledge. The next chapter details how this study negotiates the tricky issue of mimesis and cosplay. Moreover, this section

highlights how this thesis's posthumanist approach shifts attention away from phantasies inside a fan's head and towards practices that invariably require human and nonhuman bodies. (Note that this research defines *phantasies* as an unconscious phenomenon, rather than "fantasies as conscious mediations" (Cooper, 1974, p. 44).) In the third chapter, I explain the decision to schizoanalyse, rather than psychoanalyse the data. I then justify this research's chosen ethnographies considering this decision. Next, the fourth chapter provides complete coverage of Study 1's exposition of cosplaying on IG by detailing its RP, RSPs, methods, findings, and conclusions. Chapter 5 follows this same formula but relates to Study 2's scrutiny of offline cosplaying at TB (2018). Then in the sixth part, I explore what these results tell us about cosplay and spacetime. This penultimate chapter considers the contribution of this thesis concerning the existing field before the final part provides an overall conclusion, a discussion of this research's limitations, and a list of further avenues for psychosocial exploration.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

The idea of a play built right on stage, encountering production and performance

obstacles, demands the discovery of active language, both active and anarchic,

where the usual limits of feelings and words are transcended. (Artaud, 2010, p.

28)

This thesis concerns an area of performance art known as cosplay. This

increasingly popular hobby entails fans "performing as characters from popular media,

including comics, animated or live-action films, television, games and other pop culture

sources such as music videos" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 3). In a broader sense, this

subculture re-appropriates something quotidian—specifically, dressing up—and takes it

elsewhere. In doing so, cosplay troubles the assumption that one's identity is ever a

clear-cut issue. As such, this research concurs with Rauch and Bolton's (2010) claim

that cosplay can "challenge and expand not only our received knowledge but our very

systems of knowledge" (p. 177). As we will see, this thesis differs markedly from previous

studies in arguing that cosplay can alter reality (i.e., ontology) before troubling

knowledge of self and other (i.e., epistemology).

This chapter begins with a brief history of this phenomenon and outlines its

diverse genres and subgenres. Then, in the next subsection, I critique past studies that

have focused primarily on cosplay as a meaning-making practice that purportedly

extends one's pre-existent and implicitly singular self. I follow this overview by

contrasting such discourse-only studies with empirical work focused on the role of affect

within cosplay. Lastly, I end this literature review by outlining a third perspective, which

concerns this subculture's use of technology. However, rather than taking these

pathways as intrinsically 'wrong' or in competition with one another, the purpose of this

chapter is to reframe these positions as bodies or "partial objects" that are in dire need

of "conjunction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 77). This chapter shows how this trio of

perspectives refers to overlapping heterogeneous cosplaying practices. Bluntly, this thesis maps the conditions of possibility for fan-based alliances forged from the symbiosis of these bodies. What is at stake here is how cosplay might empower its fans by continually developing practices that facilitate escape from capitalistic subjectivity. As we shall see, many studies have denigrated this performance art by treating it as a whimsical distraction involving identity play.

1.1 A brief history of cosplay media

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 139)

This subsection overviews cosplay's history and discusses its inextricable connections with certain media. However, from the outset, one should note the oft-made distinction between, on the one hand, the concept of *fandom,* which refers to identifications "with other fans," and, on the other, the notion of *fanship*, which describes "fan interest" (Schroy, Plante, Reysen, Roberts & Gerbasi, 2016, p. 154). As we shall see, this thesis renders this distinction superfluous because its pluralist remit means that it does not sever the psychological (i.e., fanship) from the social (i.e., fandom). Instead, these aspects are understood as co-emergent and co-causal. Henceforth, I deploy the term fandom to cover the psychosocial facets of cosplaying tout court. Moreover, this research holds that these elements must be considered in relation to a specific territory, such as a con or social media platform.

Thus, this study contrasts markedly with most research in this field, given that its sole concern is cosplay's bodies or "rhizomes" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 5), understood as reality-building relations. Here, rhizomes are flat multiplicities, becomings, or assemblages which encompass everything in existence: "The minimum

real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the *assemblage*"
(Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 51). So, instead of separating this fandom from its source
media, I employ Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) "schizoanalysis" (p. 355) (SA) to afford
an associative and pluralistic ontology and epistemology (i.e., onto-epistemology).
Precisely, the former concept connotes a "branch of metaphysics concerned with the
nature of being," whilst the latter constitutes a "theory of knowledge" (Grix, 2010, pp.
166–170). Via this pragmatics, I map how this performance art's bodies connect with
others to engender not "subject forms" but "blocks" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 313).
This positioning helps recognise how cosplay is quintessentially a "*participatory culture*"
because it involves fans actively interpreting existing media via "unauthorized cultural
productions (fanfiction, remix videos, songs, artwork, costumes)" (Jenkins, 2018, p. 18).
Indeed, part of this subculture's status as a participatory art form resides in its
performative use of photography (Domsch, 2014, p. 136). This phenomenon has been
bracketed as "'cosphotography'" (Mountfort et al., 2018. p. 47) and includes video
production.

Let us begin with a historical overview. The word 'cosplay' first emerged in 1983
when the Japanese writer Nobuyuki Takahashi penned an article in *My Anime*, which
deployed the terms "*kosuchuumu purei* (costume play) and *kosupure* (cosplay)"
(Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 28). This composite word signifies this fandom's unique
"combination of costuming and play-acting" (Orsini, 2015, p. 20). Orsini (2015) argues
that cosplay's roots stretch back to 1939, specifically to New York's inaugural "World
Science Fiction Convention," during which two twenty-somethings, namely "Forrest J.
Ackerman and Myrtle R. Jones" (p. 8), attended in the latter's homemade Science Fiction
inspired outfits. In the following decade, this con—now re-dubbed "WorldCon"—
incorporated a "masquerade" alongside "dancing and a live band" (Orsini, 2015, p. 9).
The former skit-based costume competition remains integral to cosplaying (Lunning,
2022, pp. 3–15). However, it was not until the 1990s that cosplay began to merge "North

American and Japanese popular culture flows" to form a "convergence culture" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 28). (Roughly, this means that its media tend to crisscross one another.)

In light of the above, the precise origins of cosplay are highly debatable. Nevertheless, regardless of its 'true' origins, this art form should be viewed as a "*hybrid* of East and West" (Pellitteri, 2011, p. 211). On paper, the UK-based cosplays charted in this research might also take inspiration from "Western comics, science fiction, and fantasy series" (Lamerichs, 2015, para. 1.1). And yet, despite this cultural hybridity, cosplay's roots lie firmly in comics. Rahman et al. (2012) note how this hobby's genealogy can be traced to "the *doujinshi* (amateurish magazines or manga) marketplaces (e.g. Comic Market or Comiket) in the 1970s" (p. 318), whereby theatrical performances were used to sell merchandise. Indeed, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) describe how the roots of cosplay's beloved anime and manga—Japanese films and comics—lie in that culture's "*shojo* art" (para. 4). (*Shōjo* pitches fashion aesthetics toward a predominantly female teen audience.) In fact, cosplay's comic-based Japanese 'look' was itself sourced from the Western fashion industry because it was only post-Second World War that the fashion designer Jun'ichi Nakahara's clothing designs sprung forth: "the new shōjo ideal: a contemporary, Westernized fashion model with large clear eyes that address the viewer directly; a tall, thin model's body; and contemporary, Western clothing and hair styles popular in the 1940s and 1950s" (Lunning, 2011, p. 73).

Intriguingly, this idealisation of huge eyes, along with a waif-like body, determined the visual properties of the resultant "shōjo manga stories" in that these comic's panels fluctuated between "close-ups of the all-powerful and emotional massive eyes of the shōjo, and the panels depicting full-body panels" (Lunning, 2011, p. 73). Note also that shōjo manga is just one target audience for comic fans. Other Japanese

comic genres include "shōnen (for you boys and teens), seinen (older males) and josei (older females)" (Yadao, 2009, p. 63).

As a comic book culture, cosplay comprises heterogeneous yet inseparable components that transcend the supposed local–global binary: "Manga culture dovetails animation or 'anime,' games, figures, visuals, and consumer articles. Its visuals also manifest in high art through pop-art of artists [such] as Takashi Murakami. Manga aesthetics inspires consumers all over the world" (Lamerichs, 2013, p. 155). Indeed, cosplay's vast appeal resides in how its multi-media practices traverse "many genres, audiences and age groups" (Orsini, 2015, p. 20). Intriguingly, LaMarre (2011) notes, following Eisenstein, that animation and paperback comic books "historically emerged in synchrony, almost as if they were one art with two media aspects (print and film)" (p. 200). Furthermore, this fandom readily draws upon a smorgasbord of nonhuman creatures taken from Japanese popular culture and folklore: "demons, aliens, yōkai, robots, androids, dakini, and a mind-boggling array of other beings" (Perper & Cornog, 2011, p. xvii). Relevant here is Jackson's (2011) description of Kenji Kamiyama's anime, *Guardian of the Spirit*, as an "immersive world-building" exercise whereby "fantastic—or indeed irrational—explanations seem entirely believable" (p. 66). To this end, this research charts how such fictions come to have practical, real-world consequences through cosplaying.

Alongside films and comics, Lunning (2011) found that "keitai (mobile phone) novels, and gaming" are also favoured by so-called "obsessive" fans inclined to ritualistically "celebrate these narratives with specific fan behaviours (p. 76). Yet despite its mixed origins and media sources, cosplay is often denigrated as a "Japanese otaku (hardcore nerd, geek) practice" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 3). However, the word *otaku* has been appropriated by Westerners to refer to any "fan of Japanese popular culture" (Lamerichs, 2013, p. 156). (Hereafter, this thesis uses otaku inclusively and affirmatively to refer to United Kingdom-based fans of cosplay). This idea is more complicated than

it first appears. For instance, Bainbridge and Norris (2009) conducted a case study of a female cosplay duo named "the Haraju2girls" and revealed how otaku connoted:

> a place ('from Japan,' especially Akihabara or Harajuku), a style (colourful comic-book or video game clothing and props), or an ethos (based around prosumption, where the con*sumer* becomes a *prod*ucer through their production of 'handmade' costumes, passionate specialisation and the enactment of a particular character through performance and costume). (Bainbridge & Norris, 2009, para. 175)

Overall, compared with East Asia, this hobby provokes less suspicion in the West because of the latter's "longstanding costumeplay traditions such as Renaissance fairs, historical re-enactments and live-action roleplaying" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2013, para. 6).

One aesthetic that connects cosplay to the otaku subculture is the highly visible presence of "*kawaii*, an adjective that has become so metonymic of the 'cute' or 'loveable' endemic to Japanese aesthetics that it is often used in English as an abstract noun" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 242). With this affect, boys may appear overtly effeminate, with girls becoming hyper-masculine in their theatricality. Furthermore, Galbraith (2014) notes how Azuma Hideo's manga depictions of "rounded character bodies" have combined with "the expressive character faces" found in girl's manga (i.e., "*shojo*") to produce "a hybrid form known as the *bishojo*, meaning cute girl" (p. 11). This latter phenomenon connects with "the "magical girl" (*maho shojo*) genre" (Galbraith, 2014, p. 46) of anime in which everyday girls metamorphose into superheroines blessed with special powers. A notable example of this genre is the hugely successful, Bandai-sponsored "Sailor Moon series (*Bishōjo senshi Sērāmūn*, 1992–97)" (Saito, 2014, p. 144).

Although *kawaii* permeates cosplay as an otaku subculture, it is not all about being 'cutesy' because this hobby's genres and subgenres are as innumerable as the films, comics, and video games from which they are often sourced. For instance,

Reysen, Plante, Chadborn, Roberts and Gerbasi (2021) identified "40 distinct" Japanese film genres, including "fantasy action anime like *Full Metal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, technological series with strong action elements like *Ghost in the Shell* or *Cowboy Bebop*, or historical anime such as *Rurouni Kenshin*" (pp. 191–193). These researchers also argued that because these genres share common themes, this problematises their separation into discrete categories (Reysen et al., 2021, p. 193). Indeed, the mind boggles when one considers how these anime influences might manifest in cosplay, which also draws heavily on other media. That said, Winge (2006) noted the popularity of specific subgenres within this hobby, including "mecha" (i.e., robots), "cyborg" (i.e., human-machine hybrids), "furry" (i.e., 'furred' animals), and "Lolita" (Winge, 2006, p. 70) (i.e., infantile and hyperfeminine themed performances). However, as we shall see, cosplay's renowned befuddling of these genres, subgenres, and aesthetics is manageable because this thesis's pluralistic onto-epistemology treats these facets as independent bodies. As such, they might form mutually beneficial relations through the "multiplicity of symbiosis and becoming" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 291). And as Bateson (1972) observes, the point of thinking is to recognise that all 'things' are invariably "in a muddle" (p. 4).

Significantly, kawaii not only refers to specific "attire, accessories, and attitudes" but also to a normative "behavioral tendency" (Pellitteri, 2011, p. 215). For this reason, I argue that this stylistic trend should be approached as an open and contestable territory ripe for unpicking. (In fact, this is the modus operandi of this SA.) Moreover, rather than merely offering a channel to sell goods to the otaku, I hold that kawaii may also point toward the possibilities opened by cosplay's known propensity, or indeed, fetish for body modifications: "hair, makeup, costume, and accessories, including wands, staffs, and swords" (Winge, 2006, p. 72). For instance, young Japanese women sometimes utilize technologies, such as "make-up and even surgery to achieve a kawaii effect, most typically unnaturally large, doe-eyes" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 242-243). That said, the

role played by technology as a practice has largely been ignored in this field of research. This absence represents a barrier to understanding how this fandom works. This is because cosplay cannot be mapped without recourse to the media territories from which it evolves. Indeed, Tamaki (2011) describes how anime and manga triggered the otaku obsession with "beautiful fighting girls" (p. 135). (Tamaki's (2011) otaku is only ever a straight Japanese man.)

No doubt that kawaii as a cute, or more accurately, "camp" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 243) practice has rendered it a highly marketable, profitable, and desirable form of cosplay. Indeed, the prevalence of kawaii is one of the reasons why this hobby is often cynically re-branded "'cost-play'" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 54). Two notable youth-targeted symbols of the worldwide commercial success of this aspect of Japanese pop culture are "Hello Kitty—the *kawaii* kitten and Licca-chan (Rika-chan), the Archipelago's most famous doll" (Pellitteri, 2011, p. 215). So, given the preponderance of kawaii aesthetics within this fandom, I chart how this cutesy image might be re-appropriated and combined with other otaku inventions. For this reason, this study pays particular attention to cosplay's diverse cross-over genres, which include "science fiction, fantasy, horror, mythology, fetish" (Winge, 2006, p. 65).

One of the other notable ways this kawaii-cuteness is routinely achieved is via anthropomorphic practices whereby "non-living and artificial characters are designed and made to look cute, in order to be perceived as more human" (Gn, 2011, p. 584). Intriguingly, past research has suggested that cosplay's appeal might reside in its capacity to "blur the categories of male/female, Japanese/Westerner, human/animal" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2009, para. 320). As we will see, this observation helps inform this thesis's posthumanist orientation towards this subculture whilst simultaneously recognizing its inextricable connection to the phenomenon called "*moé*" (Galbraith, 2014, p. 7) (henceforth, I shall spell this 'moe'). This otaku term refers to a person's love for a specific fictional character. Perceptively, the author Honda Toru (2014) argues that

as well as instilling "a feeling like love," moe also imparts a sense of "calm (*iyashi*)" (p. 119). This insight might explain why otaku invest so much time, effort, and money in their hobby. Here, one should also add that as well as its cute affects, kawaii cosplays might instil a performance with "a sense of being 'pathetic', 'vulnerable', 'lovable', and small" (Gn, 2011, p. 584). (Given this thesis's concern with social networking, it is worth noting that the word 'moe' first emerged in Japan during "the first half of the 1990s" when fans were routinely using "modems and local bulletin-board systems such as Nifty Serve and Tokyo BBS to communicate about manga, anime, and games" (Ka'ichiro, 2014, p. 157).)

Another notable phenomenon connected to otaku culture is the Japanese phenomenon of "hikikomori," or shut-in, which refers to "an individual who has withdrawn from social life for an extended period of time" (Yadao, 2009, p. 263). Lunning (2022) notes that this abject phenomenon is no longer confined to one part of the world: "The fan mode of existence has been adopted by Japanese fans as well as fans of other nationalities, of all races, and even of all classes because there are ways to participate as a fan to avoid high costs" (p. 111). Such purported connections between fandom and social inadequacy have led critics to suggest that, along with moe, otaku subculture is uncool when compared to the hip consumerism of the so-called ""new breed" (*shinjinru*)" (Eiji, 2014, pp. 41–45). That said, this same critic notes that despite the otaku's propensity to obsess over one genre, these fans are self-sufficient and creative: "They know what they like and support it. If what they want doesn't exist, they make it" (Eiji, 2014, pp. 43–44).

Considering the above, this thesis focuses on innovative practices within cosplay qua otaku fandom. Precisely, this study explores how moe aesthetics might create different bodily sensations within fans. Nevertheless, this SA's sole focus is how cosplay might empower its aficionados by giving rise to a sense of Spinozist joy, whereby a body's ability to affect and be affected is augmented (RP). Indeed, Lunning (2011)

asserts that cosplay offers an "embodied experience" that grants its practitioners "a sense of agency and pleasure" (p. 73). (This thesis defines agency, following Fisher (2016), as a "capacity for intentionality" (p. 83).) However, this research locates this power not within a cosplayer's conscious mind but in the practices of cosplay itself. As we shall see, this seemingly subtle positioning radically shifts empirical attention away from the re-presentation or re-production of fictional identities. Instead, it re-invents cosplay as a creative process because "it is only through play that the structures we live by grow and change" (Hans, 1981, p. 5).

No review of cosplay would be complete without recognizing how its embodied side manifests at comic cons, whereby a media-sourced "two-dimensional (2D) image" becomes expressed as "a three-dimensional (3D) living character in real time" (Rahman et al., 2012, p. 312). Attendance at cons is a costly process for two primary reasons. Firstly, one must either pay for a prefabricated costume or materials for constructing a chosen fictional character's outfit (Mountfort et al., 2019, p. 47). And secondly, entry into such "Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF&F) conventions" (Duchesne, 2010, pp. 21–22) is conditional on being able to afford the entrance fee. Interestingly, Duchesne's (2010) study suggested that this financial investment is mutually beneficial for "fan and celebrity," given that should the former win a competitive "Masquerade," both parties would reap financial rewards via "the myriad profits enjoyed by both" (p. 22). Nevertheless, I took this claim as tantamount to a justification of "the capitalistic homogenesis of generalised equivalence" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 55), whereby an experience's value is reduced to labour/cash. For this reason, Study 2 focuses on TB's (2018) outdoor event spaces rather than its indoor competitive masquerade.

Here, it is worth noting that cons are "largely a self-organized fan activity" (Lamerichs, 2013, p. 168). Indeed, the TB con is run by a non-profit organisation (Thought Bubble, 2018). Across the world, these bounded fan events regularly attract huge audiences. For example, between 2009 and 2011, Japan's "Comic Market," or

"Comiket," drew more than half a million attendees "to Tokyo's Big Sight convention center over three days" (McHarry, 2011, p. 121). Specific cons limit cosplaying to pop culture from Japan only, such as the North America-based "Otakon" (Lamerichs, 2013, p. 161). As we shall see, part of this research took place on a far smaller scale at the Leeds-based TB (2018) Comic Con—a festival known to attract thousands of fans across its weekly duration (Thought Bubble, 2018). Unlike Otakon, the TB (2018) con imposes no restrictions on the content of the cosplays it encourages across its weekend-long fandom celebration. Orsini (2015) observes that globally, such meet-ups provide "a hefty showing of what was cosplay's original look—heroes and heroines from the future" (p. 70). Moreover, cons not only feature performances, but they also provide visitors with a chance "to socialize, shop, enjoy panels, meet celebrities, play games, or watch videos together" (Lamerichs, 2015, para. 1.1). However, most cosplaying now takes place "in bathrooms, bedrooms and other private spaces" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 61).

Fan territories now afford a "material locus to what exists simultaneously on a virtual scale online" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 7). In addition, otaku use social media sites to augment their "cosplaying skills or successfully crossplay" (Leng, 2013, p. 92). To this end, cosplay's images are now curated across online sites that include not only "old school social networking apps such as Facebook" but also "DeviantArt, Tumblr, Instagram and Cosplay.com's forums" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 67). Lunning (2022) has described the global importance of the website "Cure World Cosplay, known as the Cure, a community platform for cosplayers and cosplay fans" (p. 27). Through this online platform, fans can register, 'brand' themselves and acquire a "business card" (Lunning, 2022, p. 28), which they can use for social networking whilst at cons. Relevant here is Peirson-Smith's (2019) critical point that online and offline spaces cannot be treated as independent of one another because the latter's "leakiness" now extends to "active virtual sites online such as cosplay.com or Halo" (p. 82). Indeed, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) cogently noted that an online cosplay on an unrestricted social media account is

still "fundamentally a public act" (para. 26). And yet, despite these insights, there has been a dearth of empirical work on this fandom's online acts. Consequently, this thesis plugs this gap by examining the relationship between cosplaying and social media within a UK-based adult target population. Let us now turn to past cosplay studies that have underscored cosplay as a form of identity expression and exploration.

1.2   Exploring identities: Fandom and self-expression

There are now only voyages of exploration in which one always finds in the West that which one had thought to be in the East, organs reversed. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 48)

Over the following two subsections, I shall critique previous cosplay studies, which I argue fall into three theoretical camps. The first concentrates on how cosplaying subjects experiment with pre-existing narratives and genres to assign different meanings to their (seemingly) pre-given identities (e.g., Lamerichs, 2011). Roughly speaking, this perspective conspicuously draws upon the influence of Judith Butler's thinking, which "links gender performativity to the materialization of 'sexed' bodies" (Barad, 2007, p. 34). In contrast, the second approach concerns the role of affect and considers cosplay in experiential terms (e.g., Gn, 2011). Lastly, I consider a relatively recent theoretical framework, which has (finally) recognised the intrinsic part played by technology within this performance art (e.g., Bainbridge & Norris, 2013). As we shall see, this latter pathway provides the raison d'être for this thesis's posthumanist orientation. However, before proceeding, I insist that these theories are complementary rather than ill-informed. For this reason, this section traces their connection.

Let us now turn to those studies which have concentrated on how cosplayers use fictional character identities as a platform for reifying their sense of self. Broadly, this perspective fits in with Mountfort et al.'s (2018) common sense, Goffmanesque

thinking: "dressing is always dressing up, as it is central to the social performance of self" (p. 3). For instance, Lamerichs (2011) provided a first-person account of Holland's "Amiecon 2005" (para. 1.1). This investigation identified four elements integral to cosplaying: "a narrative, a set of clothing, a play or performance before spectators, and a subject or player" (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 1.2). Applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Lamerichs (2011) concluded that cosplayers playfully and actively portray their chosen character through reiterative costumed practices, which extend their self-concept and blur the lines between fact and fiction (paras. 6.1–6.2). Reducing this fandom down to its most crucial facet, namely, the "relation between the character and the player," this study took cosplay as an oftentimes problematic means of "expressing one's self" (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 6.1).

Although Lamerichs's (2011) study deployed ethnography to collect discourse, they used a participatory observation in contrast with this research's non-participant observation. Consequently, this research does not provide an interpretative account of cosplaying on either IG (i.e., Study 1) or TB (2018) (i.e., Study 2). Instead, it focuses exclusively on the performance, not the performer. Furthermore, I refrain from deploying Butler's notion of performativity to this topic because this positioning cannot account for what this thesis argues is the crux of this performance art: sensation. Lastly, I jettison Lamerichs's (2011) reductive four-sided structural approach to consider how this fandom's costumed practices might function to ontologise—that is, bring into reality— each aspect of performance afresh.

Like Lamerichs (2011), Winge's (2006) study also described cosplay as having four essential parts: "anime and manga cosplayer, social settings, (fictional) character and role-playing, and dress (e.g., hair, costume, makeup, and accessories, including weapons)" (p. 66). In contrast, I refuse to simplify cosplay to a finite number of apparently universal facets. Instead, this thesis argues that every aspect of this performance art encompasses "becoming," defined as "the process of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari,

2013b, p. 181). (Hereafter, I use 'becomings' as a synonym for bodies.) As such, this research centres on the unpredictable 'doings' of cosplaying acts rather than prioritising its "fourth element, the fan him- or herself" (Lamerichs, 2011, para. 1.2).

Rahman et al. (2012) used covert observation to study Hong Kong's "Japanese cosplay cultures" (p. 319). This study's field notes and photographs revealed that cosplay demanded: "enormous attention to both verbal and non-verbal expression, and meticulous focus on the costume, image, and persona of their chosen character" (Rahman et al., 2019, pp. 324–325). Further, Rahman et al. (2019) uncovered disparate reasons for fan participation. Speaking broadly, they pointed to individual differences amongst aficionados, with some relishing "the challenge of role-playing different characters according to current trends, personal preferences, interests, and passions," whilst others chose to perform "the same character as a group to share joy, express passion, and to support one other" (Rahman et al., 2019, p. 332). What was particularly noteworthy about Rahman et al.'s (2019) study was its attention to the investments that cosplayers had in their "costumes and props," which not only changed their performance and visual presentation but also "created many unforgettable, pleasurable, fun, and exciting memories" (p. 329). In sum, Rahman et al. (2012) concluded that cosplay provided "an outlet for personal expression, performance, and exhibition" (p. 332).

Besides their use of participant observation, Rahman et al.'s (2012) "quasi-ethnographic approach" (p. 323) mirrored the methodologies chosen in this research: photo ethnography and interviews, respectively. And although I did not literally 'live' amongst fans during the data collection, I also accessed its online and offline circles to gain insight into this subculture's relation to spacetime. Moreover, Rahman et al.'s (2019) attention to the role of props within cosplay provides this thesis with a potential lead because it acknowledges how prosthetics might play an affective role. In brief (for now), this thesis deploys a 'posthumanist' spin on its subject matter because that

paradigm addresses prospective alliances between humans and nonhumans. In fact, I argue that because cosplay is a problem of assemblage, symbiosis is its bedrock.

Despite Rahman et al.'s (2013) insights, ultimately, this study portrayed cosplay as a phantasy-driven form of escapism: "Cosplay provides young people with dreams, pleasures, romances, and fantasies that cannot be fulfilled or cannot materialize in their daily lives" (p. 321). In stark contrast, this thesis rebukes this implicitly negative—and quasi-psychoanalytic—emphasis on fan desires as manifestations of lack or deficiency. Rather, this thesis espouses an affirmative view of desire whereby "it lacks nothing because it is defined as *the natural and sensuous order of being* " (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 354). Furthermore, although Rahman et al. (2012) also analysed photographs, they interpreted their supposed "meanings" (p. 323). In contrast, this schizoanalytic research refrains from applying such a representational psychoanalytic spin on cosplay because that would only accentuate beliefs about this fandom's subjects, rather than catalyse its desires. Hence, this thesis stresses the inadequacy of this "banal Oedipal code" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 27) when it comes to mapping this subculture's affects.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of Rahman et al.'s (2012) study was its judgemental stance. For instance, the so-called inadequacy of cosplay performers, particularly females, was highlighted: "It was obvious that Andrea was a beginner or novice. She did not know much about cosplay and was not fully prepared for the performance" (p. 325). In doing so, Rahman et al.'s (2021) hermeneutical stance depicted some fans as inauthentic, detached amateurs with others deemed authentic, knowledgeable, "long-time cosplayers" (pp. 325–329). Here, I posit that this unethical, androcentric stance was a direct result of Rahman et al.'s (2021) interpretive approach, which—like psychoanalysis—supports "the judgment of God" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 46). Indeed, turning briefly to Tamaki's (2011) Lacanian approach, one sees the dangers of interpretation vis-à-vis otaku culture. On the one hand, Tamaki (2011)

espouses "value free judgements," whilst, on the other, this psychoanalyst compares fans to (supposedly) similar types, such as "the maniac" (p. 17). For this reason, this thesis avoids this harmful and unhelpful position because its broadly Spinozist positioning exclusively concerns bodily empowerment—not pathologisation. As such, it avoids (re-)affirming "arborescent" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 563) or hierarchical structures of any kind (including ideology).

Turning to the relationship between cosplay and gender identity, Leng (2013) examined "male-to-female ("M2F") crossplay" (p. 89), a phenomenon whereby men dress up and perform female cosplay characters. Using a case study of an experienced Canadian "M2F crossplayer" called "Lialina," Leng (2013) found that this practice undid "hegemonic norms" (p. 89-92) by revealing the heteronormative social construction of sexuality and gender. (From a social constructionist perspective, reality is nothing but the product of language-based systems of knowledge, the "universe of discourse" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 104).) Leng (2013) concluded that although these M2F performances expressed "hyper-femininity," they simultaneously imbibed "hyper-masculinity" (pp. 105–106), thus consolidating gender's binary basis. Bizarrely, Leng (2013) then contradicts this assertion by claiming that "M2F crossplaying is largely apolitical and purely related to an expression of their fan devotion" (p. 97).

Leng (2013) also used interviews to ascertain cosplay's motivational factors and investigate its online manifestations. However, in that study, cosplay was treated as a representation of gender identity instead of a mode of subjectivity on its own terms. Further, this thesis follows Lunning (2011) and maintains that any dismantling of gender and sexuality as hyper-femininity within cosplay will inevitably be re-made as hyper-masculinity due to "the pivoting operation of the simultaneous and contradictory trajectories of deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (pp. 80–81). (Within this thesis, I use these Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts to refer to how cosplay can undo (i.e., deterritorialize) and redo (reterritorialize) identity via performance art. Note that, this

research will bracket these movements under a single process, namely, territorialization.) Bluntly, crossplay is not an escape from reality but instead constitutes a de facto norm: "Crossplay among cosplayers is not unusual, considering the many gender reversals, confusions, and ambiguities within anime and manga" (Winge, 2006, p. 71). In brief, this phenomenon limits this fandom's expressivity.

Akin to Winge (2006) and Lamerichs (2011), Leng's (2013) research was reductive and universalist because this performance art was (once again) described in terms of four aspects: costume, cosmetics, roleplay, and photographic imagery (p. 94). As I mentioned, this thesis repudiates supposedly exhaustive approaches because this fandom's assemblages are entirely context-dependent and, as such, are situated within a local spacetime. In addition, any mapping of cosplaying territories can never provide a complete picture, given that qualitative multiplicities cannot be 'summed up.' (In other words, they are not "totalizable" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 37)). Consequently, this research ties this art form to specific territories to provide a tantalising glimpse of some of its creative possibilities.

Sampling Chinese and Malay fans, Yamato (2020) took a language-based, normative route and conducted a study into crossplay and hijab cosplay. The latter idea described any performance whereby a female Muslim fan sports a "veil" (Yamato, 2020, para. 3.1). And yet, despite intersectionality's pivotal role in "self-identification," neither of these facets constituted "major practices" (Yamato, 2020, para. 4.8). Intriguingly, just nine interviewees from of a total of 158 participants, reported that they were "hiding who they are when cosplaying at a convention" (Yamato, 2020, para. 5.1). Yamato (2020) concluded that apart from seeking membership in fandom, this performance art provided a trio of distinct possibilities for self-expression—following a particular fan genre, expressing kinship with a fictional character's personality, or taking on an imaginary character's appearance (para. 9.2).

Like this study, Yamato (2020) deployed observations and interviews for collecting data at a con (albeit in Malaysia, not England). However, whereas Yamato (2020) videoed their interviews across five "ACG (anime, comics, and game) fan conventions" (para. 1.2), this thesis takes a different approach by obtaining photographs and audio recordings from a single con (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, although Yamato (2020) interviewed "169 cosplayers" (para. 4.5), compared to this research's modest sample of twenty participants at TB (2018), their use of questionnaires partially explains this disparity because structured interviews take less time than semi-structured ones (Bryman, 2012, p. 233). Indeed, I argue that Yamato's (2020) previously cited question about fans 'hiding who they are' constitutes a presumptive *leading question*. Bryman (2012) has defined this phenomenon: "Leading or loaded questions are ones that appear to lead the respondent in a particular direction" (p. 257).

Akin to Rahman et al. (2012), Yamato (2020) introduced a disapproving schism between younger novice cosplayers and older professionals (para. 5.6). Whereas the former were inexperienced, irrational dreamers who sought escapist pursuits, the latter were experienced, rational performers adept at cosplaying fictional characters who resonated with aspects of their own "personality" (Yamato, 2020, para. 5.3). Here, I hold that this disempowering judgemental stance reflected Yamato's (2020) desire to fully condone what the latter group—"the majority" (para. 5.6)—of cosplayers were doing at the expense of the former minority group's (alleged) ineptitude. By contrast, this thesis jettisons any novice-professional binary to focus exclusively on performances that stand out from predictable, well-established cosplay practices (e.g., crossplay). As such, this study differs from Yamato (2020) in concentrating not on consensus but "dissensus" (Guattari, 1995a, p.128). Finally, by emphasizing how Malaysian cosplay is nothing but a reproduction of a fan's love of "Japanese popular culture" (6.1), Yamato (2020) oversimplifies mimesis by regarding it as rotely imitative. As we shall see, this research rebukes this well-worn path and follows Caillois's (2001) simulative take on mimesis.

This theoretical and pragmatic volte-face is vital, given that this thesis argues that cosplay would be impossible without the pretence of dressing up. Indeed, this is another way of saying that this art form's capacity for novelty lies not in its 'originality' but precisely in its capacity to re-arrange its parts via assemblage.

At this point, it is worth briefly contrasting this thesis's ardent schizoanalytic approach with Lacanian commentaries that emphasise the personal side of otaku practices. For instance, Tamaki (2011) describes this performance art as a "process of fictionalization" whereby an obsessional fan aims to possess the "fictions that are out there and promote them to fictions that are theirs alone" (p. 20). In comparison, this research proffers a radically different take that pivots on the notion that cosplay is, primarily, about the possibility of experiencing fictional worlds through material sensations. To put it bluntly, this art form concerns bodily events—not the identity-based phantasies of imaginary subjects (i.e., cosplayers).

On the whole, the problem with these studies is that they take the cosplayer as a pre-existing subject who then cosplays. As such, not only do they put the cart before the horse, but they also miss the production of subjectivity in the first place—"the process of ontogenesis" or "individuation" (Simondon, 1992, p. 298). That said, the logocentrism of these studies helps inform the direction this research does not take—one that regards cosplay as a matter of "signifiance and subjectification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 196). (Whereas the former concept refers to meaning-making, the latter connotes identity, respectively.) In comparison, this thesis argues that cosplaying is best understood as an impersonal experience (at least, initially), which imbricates "continuums of intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 187). Indeed, Lunning (2022) notes that what sets otaku apart from other fans, such as newcomers and casual aficionados, is the sheer intensity of their interest (p. 72).

1.3   Cosplay as an affective practice

Any thing can be the accidental cause of joy, sadness, or desire. (Spinoza, 1996, p. 78)

This subsection concerns cosplay studies that have focused on affect. Undoubtedly, this orientation has the most bearing on the direction taken herein because it regards this hobby as an experience or intensity directly registered by the materiality of the body and mind. To be sure, this alternate approach has benefitted from taking notice of the connection between imagery and physiological sensations within this art form. Gn (2011), for example, suggested that cosplaying provoked pleasure via simulative images of nonhuman characters with artificial bodies (p. 584). Their paper concluded that cosplay was not simply a question of the materialization and subsequent subversion of gender identities but also induced "mediated fantasies, due to a visible form of identification between the subject and image" (Gn, 2011, p. 588).

Instructively, Gn (2011) explored the relationship between pleasure, visuals, and affects within cosplay. Hence, they broadened the theoretical framework through which this fandom might be understood by factoring in sensation. Furthermore, Gn's (2011) approach benefited from following Judith Butler's rejection of "essentialist" (p. 586) views on gendered, sexed bodies. Indeed, this thesis concurs with this position, which regards "sex" as "an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time" (Butler, 1993, p. 1). However, it adds that cosplay's embodiments can only be mapped with recourse to immaterial and material bodies. (Whereas the former multiplicities refer to "expression" as "a *semiotic system*, a regime of signs," the latter connote "content," which is "a *pragmatic system*, actions and passions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 586). Regards cosplay, 'expression' will be used to refer to its discursive bodies (e.g., images) with 'content' pertaining to its material ones (e.g., technological gizmos).)

By far the most significant caveat of Gn's (2011) research was that it only offered "theoretical evaluation" (p. 585). In comparison, this thesis's grounding is in actual empirical work. And although I broadly concur with Gn's (2011) Butlerian position, they overlooked—unlike Butler (1993), I should add—how gender-subversive acts are part of the same discursive system they seek to undermine. As such, Gn (2011) offered no way out of Butler's (1993) "heterosexual matrix" (p. 11). This theoretical impasse presents this thesis with an opportunity to deploy Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) philosophy within a novel psychosocial paradigm that considers how fans might use cosplay to escape castration anxiety: "the limited framework of Narcissus and Oedipus, the ego and the family" (p. 400).

Although Gn (2011) should be credited for contemplating cosplay's non-discursive side, their implicitly psychoanalytic framework suggested that affects rely on mediated fantasies (i.e., visual ones) and subject-based identifications (p. 588). In contrast, this thesis argues that cosplaying bodies are unmediated expressions of desire: "desiring-machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 12). (The concept of 'machines' is not meant in any cognitivist or mechanistic sense but refers to how desire is a machine that cuts the flows of other machines.) Furthermore, although Gn (2011) accurately defined affect "as a visceral response," an unnecessary schism was inserted between this reaction and "the emotional investment of the fan in the image" (p. 584). For this reason, Gn (2011) did not consider how cosplay images are intensities that might directly impact the nervous system. Finally, Gn (2011) conflated pleasure and desire with the former retroactively 'explaining' the latter (p. 589). In comparison, this thesis holds that the inverse is true and that the relation between pleasure and desire has not (until now) been fully elucidated regards this topic.

Frenchy Lunning (2011) took a unique approach to cosplay, drawing heavily on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic thinking. This study found cosplayers "abject subjects" and declared this performance art a "mime to abjection" (Lunning, 2011, pp. 75–76).

Additionally, Lunning (2011) proposed that due to its fans' abject status, cosplay's collaborative floorshows marked "a thrust to the side of otherness" (p. 76). The research concluded that this subculture should be understood, following Félix Guattari's influence, as appertaining to becoming: "the *transversal* moment" (Lunning, 2011, p. 82).

In combining references to both psychoanalysis (i.e., abjection) and SA (i.e., becoming), Lunning's (2011) research was useful in highlighting how cosplaying bodies might trigger new playful modes of being through othering. Indeed, their (albeit brief) recourse to SA helps inform this thesis's theoretical and practical direction because it helps direct attention toward fictional identities as events or becomings. Moreover, Lunning's (2011) claim that cosplay was motivated by lack—Lacan's "missing *jouissance* —the *objet a*" (p. 84)—was telling because it provided this research with something to consider vis-à-vis the complex interrelationship between cosplay, pleasure, and desire.

Although Lunning's (2011) turn towards cosplay and becoming might seem equivalent to this study's schizoanalytic approach, one essential difference exists. Whereas Lunning's (2011) thinking retained the notion of a subject (i.e., the cosplayer) who then becomes a fictional character through dressing up, this research eliminates this illusion to underline that there is no becomer behind becoming. Furthermore, Lunning's (2011) portrayal of cosplay fans as invariably abject is rejected on the grounds that this contention was unsubstantiated by data. However, more than anything, Lunning's (2011) negative psychoanalytic approach to desire as both lack (i.e., jouissance) and loss (i.e., abjection) directly contradicted the affirmative basis that lies behind Guattari's notion of becoming. For this reason, this thesis insists that because desires are always in excess, it follows that cosplay becomings lack nothing. Put differently, affects have nothing whatsoever to do with cosplayers and their alleged inadequacies. Moreover, because this performance art's bodies are changes, they do not refer to either 'things' or anxiety-ridden subjects. Indeed, this is precisely why this

research is a creative schizoanalytic map or rhizome and not a backwards-looking 'lesson' on the inescapability of childhood trauma.

Shunning the language-only approach of their earlier work, Lamerichs (2013) redefined cosplay in terms of its non-discursivity, describing it as "an internal affective process that is performed at the convention space" (p. 157). A year later, Lamerichs (2014) tested this claim by interviewing cosplayers "at the Dutch convention Abunai 2011" (p. 2). This research revealed that con-based cosplay was "a highly intersubjective, interobjective process that is dependent on time" (Lamerichs, 2014, p. 4). Moreover, Lamerichs (2014) revealed distinct "phases" in this fandom and how these imbricated "differing objects of devotion," which included (exhaustively and sequentially):

- selecting a fictional character to perform;

- manufacturing the costume;

- wearing the above garb at a con; and,

- the "afterlife" of the costume, during which it becomes "fan memorabilia" (pp. 4–5).

Lamerichs (2014) concluded that the third step represents the zenith because, here, fans go beyond "just the text" and create "the community and the costume as an object of fandom and selfhood" (p. 6).

Instructively, Lamerichs's (2014) recognition of cosplay's affectivity chimes with Mountfort et al.'s (2018) observation that "cosplay trumps narrative. Story elements are largely lost in translation" (p. 33). These insights provide part of the rationale behind this thesis's schizoanalytic approach, which regards language as an oppressive "power (*pouvoir*)," except when it undoes itself through the "power (*puissance*) of variation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 118). Furthermore, Lamerichs (2014) paid close attention to this fandom's online side by considering "relevant sites such as cosplay.com but also the different creative products that fans upload online such as photography and videos"

(p. 2). More than anything else, what was particularly illuminating about Lamerichs's (2014) work was that it accentuated the role played by costuming. As such, cosplay was explicitly recognised as an online and offline act that forms part of a "lived culture" (p. 7). This emphasis chimes with this thesis's insistence that cosplay is about practice first.

Despite this notable shift in theoretical orientation, Lamerichs (2014) ultimately fell back on their decade-long experience as an active cosplayer. In contrast, this thesis uses non-participant observation to avoid researcher bias and move attention away from cosplaying subjects and objects and towards what happens in the middle: play qua practice. Bluntly, this thesis insists cosplay is best understood as a sensory affair —one that is propelled by desire. Indeed, Lamerichs's (2014) research missed the chance to gauge this performance art in processual terms. Instead, structures were the pride of place within their theorising: "the personal, the embodied, and the emotional life of fandom" (Lamerichs, 2014, p. 7). And whilst this thesis concurs that cosplay necessitates embodiment (i.e., territorialization), it also requires dis-embodiment (i.e., deterritorialization). In addition, it argues that cosplaying implicates a diverse set of acts whereby subjectivities are constructed via impersonal affects: "non-human, animal, mineral, cosmic becomings of abstract composition" (Guattari, 2013, p. 248). Along these depersonalizing lines, Lunning reported that whilst attending a 'Fancy' (essentially a themed, heavily stylized, and soundtracked cosplay party), they were unexpectedly joined in their "anonymity by a flurry of Lolitas, some quaint steampunks, and other utterly unidentifiable souls, all having a wonderful time" (Saitō & Lunning, 2011, p. 141).

Like Gn (2011), Lamerichs (2014) offered a different take on affect than the one afforded in this thesis. Proffering a psychologically informed perspective, Lamerichs (2014) defined this idea as "an intensity that produces meanings" (p. 3), which are subsequently translated as conscious emotions. This resolutely rational epistemological position contrasts significantly with this research's onto-epistemological understanding of affects as the building blocks of reality—not just knowledge or emotion. Furthermore,

whilst I do not deny that affects are intensities, they do not necessarily signify. In fact, I hold that the key to understanding how cosplay creates novel subjectivities lies solely in its capacity to confound meaning and induce abstraction.

In places, Lamerichs (2014) hinted at the possibility of a processual approach to cosplay by noting how fans view and re-work their "beloved narratives again through references and re-reading" (p. 5). Yet despite Lamerichs's (2014) acknowledgement that this art form's "fans appropriate existing narratives" (p. 2), they disregarded how these stories are also affects because they make cosplay happen. Ergo, this thesis reframes cosplay's fondness for fictional storyworlds with a practical concern with affectivity. To be clear, this schizoanalytic approach does not concern signification but focuses solely on bodies and what they might do—a phenomenon Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) dub "machinic functioning" (p. 298). Lastly, even though Lamerichs's (2014) research shared concern for cosplay's "affective engagement and investment" (p. 2), they failed to situate such practices within the context of capitalism. And, as we will discover in the next chapter, cosplay's desires can never be severed from this omnipresent system.

In surveying the literature, I note that post-2014 cosplay studies have increasingly paid attention to the instrumental role played by technological gizmos. Indeed, across their impressive five-year Australian study, Langsford (2016) highlighted how "cosplay shoot photography" (p. 20) can induce unsettling affects. Indeed, Langsford (2016) reported that, as a cosplaying photographer, they enter "an uncanny world, familiar yet strange, linked to other worlds through visual cues and references" (pp. 20–21). This study also reported that Australian cosplay's fondness for imagery was resounding conservative in favouring easily identifiable characters to meet "audience expectations of the genre" (Langsford, 2016, p. 30). Langsford (2016) concluded that it was this subculture's deployment of "copying activities" which granted small, localised groups the opportunity to immerse themselves within "a cosmopolitan community of

practice which exists in peripheral tension with powerful globally branded cultures" (p. 31).

Langsford's (2016) study informed this thesis's pluralistic remit because it highlighted how a researcher, just like a photographer, is charged with capturing this performance art's multifarious media flows. (Within this thesis, these fluxes pertain to cosplay's desires and not to "the communication of information" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 92).) Moreover, Langsford's (2016) research was the first to elucidate how this fandom's uncanny visuals (initially) emerged via the localised use of technological gizmos. However, Langsford's (2016) most significant insight was their recognition that cosplay's photographs were not inert entities but rather served as "resources and inspiration for other cosplayers in the creation of future costumes, performances, and photographs" (p. 31). Indeed, Studies 1 and 2 are informed by Langsford's (2016) astute observation that photography plays a fundamental role in granting access to this fandom's fictional universes. (Following Guattari (2009c), these possibilities might be termed "background worlds" (p. 196).) Thus, this thesis deploys photo ethnography and conceives images as individual moments: "events or haecceities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 557).

Nevertheless, this research rejects Langsford's (2016) recourse to 'copying' and instead affords a non-imitative spin on mimicry—one that follows Caillois (2001) by emphasizing the creativity of simulation or pretence (p. 12). Moreover, another limitation of Langsford's (2016) study was that not only did it reify the non-existent cosplayer, but it also confined this fiction to three co-occurring social roles: "a consumer, subject and photographer" (p. 19). Once again, one sees how identity-centred perspectives mistake effect for cause. As such, this thesis argues that becomings are events that do not require recourse to an a priori or a posteriori subject. Rather, this thesis studies cosplay as a practice that manufactures subjectivities without subjects. Indeed, its overarching concern is with what Guattari (1995a) calls "pathic subjectivation" (p. 26). More than

anything, Langsford's (2016) cogent observation of cosplay's uncanniness is left without an adequate theoretical framework that explains how these affects are achieved. Thus, this thesis uses SA to chart precisely how this performance art works machinically.

Staying with the link between technology and affect, Lamerichs's (2015) study provided a thought-provoking examination of so-called "cosplay music videos" (para. 1.3) (CMVs). Via YouTube, Lamerichs (2015) analysed a trio of CMVs paying heed to song selection, lyrical content, and cinematography (para. 1.5). These videos were composed of four layers: "narrativity, cinematography, female subjectivity, and lyrics" (Lamerichs, 2015, para. 4.1). Lamerichs (2015) concluded that the purpose of these fan videos is "to document the culture of cosplay and visualize fandom itself" and to use parody "as a tool to perform identities" (para. 4.6). Insightfully, Lamerichs (2015) noted how cosplay had moved away from the confines of offline cons and toward online spaces. This is because, with the latter, fans had a greater opportunity to "draw new audiences" (Lamerichs, 2015, para. 7.1).

As with Study 1, Lamerichs's (2015) online fieldwork encompassed a non-participant observation. To this end, they also utilized "small-scale ethnography" (Lamerichs, 2015, para. 3.1) to investigate cosplay's online visual presence. Moreover, Lamerichs (2015) afforded a holistic understanding by considering "participants and spectators (e.g., photographers, fans, media professionals, or outsiders such as parents)" (para. 3.2). And although this thesis does not sample CMVs, Lamerichs (2015) recourse to this fandom's use of imagery informed this research's direction. That said, this study concentrates on the reportedly still predominant use of static imagery across cosplay's online and offline spaces (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 67). Even at this stage, note that this thesis regards images—even still ones—as motional because becoming is just another name for "*transition*" (Bergson, 2019, p. 20). Besides, the Internet produces online space by contracting time: logging on/off, 'game over,' and so forth.

Whilst Lamerichs (2015) detailed the role played by technology within cosplay, once again, identities (i.e., 'participants and spectators'), rather than practices, were at the fore. Consequently, an unhelpful binary was inserted, thus shifting attention away from acts and toward imaginary subjects. In doing so, by-products are split from production. In fact, this thesis follows Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) in regarding this as the same process: "Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced" (p. 14). Nevertheless, the most significant difference between Lamerichs's (2015) approach and this one was that they interpreted their data through "close-reading" (para. 3.1). In turn, their logocentric analysis centred upon the supposed meanings behind these CMVs' lyrics and song choices. In addition, I found it odd that, despite fan videos being a musical phenomenon, their refrain was effectively put on mute via this hermeneutics.

What was particularly striking about Lamerichs's (2015) treatment of CMVs was that the role of technological bodies (i.e., hardware and software) was almost entirely bypassed. This omission seems even more remarkable given that Lamerichs (2015) observed how the "fan video offers a framed narrative in which the song is embedded" (para. 4.2). Moreover, the absence of any direct reference to the force (puissance) of libidinal desire weakens Lamerichs's (2015) claim that CMVs are empowering from a feminist perspective (para. 4.4). Instead, online acts are reduced to ironic, language-based commentaries on patriarchy. Consequently, the male ego is untouched because Oedipus coincides, thrives, and survives through power qua pouvoir. Furthermore, Lamerichs (2015) draws a line between online activities (i.e., CMVs) and offline practices (i.e., con performances), with the former seen as a "remediation" (para. 1.4) of the latter. In comparison, this thesis's RP adopts a pluralistic outlook to ascertain how online practices might interface with offline ones (and vice versa).

In light of the above, this thesis posits that because everything in existence straddles the same plane of consistency—a phenomenon which Deleuze (1995a) calls the "univocity of being" (p. 39)—cosplaying never encompasses neat divisions between an offline, real world and an online, unreal one. Instead, I argue that both are real and continually penetrate each other. (Note that throughout this thesis, 'real' refers to any facets of cosplay—not least its fictional characters—that have "practical consequences" (James, 2009, p. 89).) To this end, the problem of cosplay requires a broad onto-epistemological concern for affects or relations: "Thinking *with* AND, instead of thinking *for* IS" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 57). Above all else, this SA does not go beyond the specificity of its discourse and ardently rebuffs an interpretative stance. Instead, this thesis investigates this performance art's "machinic arrangements grasped in the context of their molecular dispersion" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 369).

1.4 Plugging your self in: Posthumanist performance art

What kinds of bonds can be established within the nature-culture continuum of technologically mediated organisms and how can they be sustained? (Braidotti, 2013, p. 103)

Disappointingly only a smattering of cosplay studies has considered its use of technology. To be clear, across this thesis, gadgets, social media, costumes, and accessories are considered affects. In this respect, Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) study was exceptionally informative in considering how these bodies facilitated this performance art's capacity for simulation. Studying the Haraju2girls, Australia's competition entry at the 2011 World Cosplay Summit, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) found cosplay a collaborative practice reliant upon supportive networks (i.e., fellow fans, friends, and family) that celebrated popular culture (para. 31). Moreover, these researchers paid due attention to embodiment within this art form, noting how its "desires" become "inscribed on the body, through their clothing" (Bainbridge & Norris,

2013, para. 29). Insightfully, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) concluded that this hobby constitutes "a form of posthuman drag," which must be understood via "an emergent ontology, in the sense that a posthuman is one who can become or embody multiple identities (the very essence of the cosplayer)" (para. 27).

Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) conclusion directly informs this thesis's posthumanist direction because this theoretical framework conceives cosplay as a reality-building exercise propelled by a desire for stimulation through costuming. Indeed, this cogent and empirically grounded revelation led me to conduct a SA instead of discourse analysis. Furthermore, Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) description of cosplay as 'posthuman drag' was informative, given how this claim recognised that it playfully simulates not only gender but also "race and (un)reality" (para. 22). That said, I tweaked their emergent ontology by stressing that race, gender, and all other social identities, must be understood via their ontological origin—"assemblage" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 128). Hence, this thesis holds that there are no cosplayers who move from one fictional identity to another. Rather, with this fandom, each cosplay is deemed an independent event that marks a context-specific assembly of nothing but desire.

To be sure, Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) research led me to consider technology's functioning within cosplay. Indeed, this study extended their earlier work on this subculture, which documented conflicting ideologies between authentic fan interests and those of "the industry" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2009, paras. 328-329). Thus, their notable longitudinal work helps guide this thesis's concern with how cosplaying bodies might provide affirmative experiences for its fans. To this end, I incorporate Mountfort et al.'s (2018) assertion that technologically driven practices like "cosphotography" can also "act as shaping agents in how cosplay is performed" (p. 47). Unfortunately, manifest and latent technophobia in this research field has (until now) inhibited any detailed mapping of this interactivity. This omission is astonishing when one considers how cosplay is a media-driven phenomenon. In this respect, Žižek

(2008a) is correct to assert that society (still) possesses an irrational distrust of technology, one that is based upon "the fear that scientists will create a new form of life or artificial intelligence which will run out of our control and turn against us" (p. 79). Hence, this thesis moves away from such self-defeating views to assert that cosplay's technological practices might harbour the power to capture worlds and help forge them. This positioning echoes Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) insistence that an ontological perspective is needed when considering cosplay, particularly its worn desires (para. 29).

Despite its theoretical usefulness, Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) contention that cosplay's creativity stemmed from its "craft and artistry" rather than its use of "digital technologies" (para. 27) is jettisoned for two reasons. Firstly, such a one-sided position encourages hierarchical thinking and plants "trees" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 21). As such, this image of thought runs counter to this thesis's flat, rhizomatic onto-epistemology. And secondly, this SA argues that any "universal cartography" (Guattari, 2011, p. 173) of this topic is impossible because practices only occur in relation to distinct territories. Indeed, despite the novelty of their approach, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) overlooked how the desire to dress up arranges imaginary subjects (i.e., cosplayers) and not the reverse. What should be clear by now is that this same logical error runs through cosplay as an object of analysis. Furthermore, these oversights are surprising given Judith Butler's notable influence on this research field. Indeed, one should ask why Butler's (1993) theoretical emphasis on the social construction of "illusory permanence" (p. 153) has repeatedly been passed over. It seems that some trees are more problematic to uproot than others. That said, this thesis does retain the notion of subjectivity qua intensity but jettisons any recourse to cosplaying subjects. (I prefer the term 'fan,' given that fanatic implies a heightened level of desire.)

Thus, this research expands Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) posthumanist purview in considering how cosplay's simulative aesthetics might work alongside its technologies within specific spacetimes. Furthermore, this thesis argues that cosplay's

merger of technology and aesthetics—what I call 'techno-aesthetics'—means that it is quintessentially a participatory fan-led "remix" (Russo & Coppa, 2012, para. 2.6) subculture. Here, I would like to differentiate this research's deployment of 'techno-aesthetics' from Gilbert Simondon's (2012), who uses it to refer to the "undeniable aesthetic power" of technical objects, such as "the Eiffel Tower" (p. 2). So, rather than emphasise how cosplay's technologies might trigger a state of bliss amongst its aficionados, this study homes in on how these practices' might interface in ways that empower these fans. This argument is put forward because this art form uses, misuses, and reuses innumerable source media. Primarily, this thesis's nuanced posthumanist ontology maps the symbiosis of cosplay's human and nonhuman bodies. Contrast this perspective with Duchesne's (2010) anthropocentric take on "Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF&F) conventions," which only saw "*human* synergy—in the sense that both fan and celebrity momentarily merge for mutual advantage—exchanging emotional, psychological and social benefits through their interactions" (p. 21).

Not only did Peirson-Smith's (2019) study pay attention to con-based cosplaying, but it also addressed its functionality across online spaces (p. 77). Following ethnographic fieldwork in Macau and Hong Kong between 2014 and 2017, Peirson-Smith (2019) described this hobby as a "liminal" hybrid phenomenon because its collaborative con-based practices take place outside of "the boundaries of everyday life" (p. 72). Additionally, Peirson-Smith (2019) noted that this fandom was "liminoid" in reflecting modernity's propensity for voluntary, individualistic expressions of "experimental creativity" (p. 72) during one's leisure time. More than this, they found that cosplay empowered fans by offering an antidote to mundanity: "These freedoms to think, choose, create, and act invest the cosplayer with a significant amount of individual agency that contrasts with their presentation of self in their normal, structured daily working experiences" (Peirson-Smith, 2019, p. 73). In sum, Peirson-Smith (2019) posited that this performance art was "a manifestation of ritualized practices involving

collective and individual effort in both liminal and liminoid pursuits and which incorporates characteristics of each" (p. 67).

Besides the noticeable differences between the geographical locations in our respective studies, Peirson-Smith (2019) also used observations and interviews for data collection. Compared to previous research, Peirson-Smith (2019) closely examined the interrelations between cosplay, leisure, and work. Moreover, like this thesis, Peirson-Smith (2019) situated cosplay within the context of capitalism. And as we shall see, capitalism does much more than provide the backdrop for cosplaying because it liberates its desires (up to a point). That said, this thesis offers a different take on technology, cosplay, and capitalism which is not based on ideology but rather on the affective economy: "It is not a question of ideology" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p 126).

Nevertheless, Peirson-Smith's (2019) research was revealing because it broke cosplay down into three stages: "a preparation stage, an inhabitation, and a cooling down period" (p. 72). This observation helps clarify that this thesis's sole concern is with the second phase, or better, dimension. But the most significant aspect of Peirson-Smith's (2019) work was its rare recognition of the positive part played by social media in making cosplay "an evolving, dynamic, creative phenomenon" (p. 77). This acknowledgement directly informs this research's affirmative spin on online experiences and how these might impinge on offline ones. Indeed, as Hiroki (2014) helpfully points out: "You can't study *otaku* without taking account of environmental factors" (p. 177). To this end, this research treats online and offline spaces as environments from which cosplay subjectivities emerge over time.

However, this study differs from Peirson-Smith's (2019) because it refuses to consider cosplay's "liminal zones" (p. 72) as an opportunity for escapism. Instead, it identifies numerous practices—"lines of escape" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 359)— through which this fandom might transform itself. Furthermore, contrary to Peirson-Smith's (2019) subject-orientated approach, cosplay's sense of agency (i.e., freedom) is

not placed within the conscious mind of a cosplayer. Rather, intentionality is a by-product of "investment in the assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 302). Thus, this thesis insists that cosplaying arranges not only the 'doer' but also constructs subjectivities per a specific spacetime. Unfortunately, Peirson-Smith (2019) mistakenly inverted this logic, leaving the impression that a cosplayer guides cosplay and, as such, is granted "an opportunity for self-expression and collective identity formation" (p. 79).

In contrast to Peirson-Smith (2019), this thesis argues that cosplay necessitates losing one's socially ascribed identities by roleplaying others. Bizarrely, Peirson-Smith (2019) suggested as much when they wrote that this fandom pivoted on a desire for "dressing up and experiencing feelings of being someone else" (p. 67). Moreover, although that study recognised the growing importance of cosplay's online activities, it posited that this was the result of "the increased use of social media and the technological competencies of a digital generation" (Peirson-Smith, 2019, p. 77). Once again, one sees how easy it is to inadvertently insert a hierarchy—in this case, an ageist one—into one's thinking. For this reason, this thesis avoids the universalist presumption that young adult fans will be more proficient with technology than older ones.

Domsch (2014) presented a different take on cosplay's reality-altering potency and its technologies. Here, the latter referred to "physical trappings, such as color-coded costumes, masks' [*sic*] or props" (Domsch, 2014, p. 133). Deploying genealogy, Domsch (2014) focused on the previously mentioned cosplay-related phenomenon of moe, which approximates a living person's obsessional love and incessant desire "to give a bodily, three-dimensional presence to a storyworld and its existents *beyond* its original source text or image" (p. 130). Uniquely, Domsch (2014) traced cosplay's modern roots back to "the theatrical modes used by medieval mystery plays" (p. 126), which were an entertaining but preachy means to educate secular society about Christian virtues. Domsch (2014) concluded that by making an imaginary object a part of "actual existence," cosplay works akin to transubstantiation, whereby the ritual "embodying of

the body of Christ is a proof of the real existence of that body and its doctrinal message"
(p. 130).

Domsch's (2014) assertion that cosplaying makes imaginary "bodies" into real
ones to "showcase the perfection of the Japanese ideal of *kawai* [*sic*] cuteness" (p 137)
had game-changing implications for the direction of this thesis. To be sure, Domsch's
(2014) research implies that what is needed is a multi-dimensional onto-epistemological
take on cosplay as embodied experience. Therefore, I chose to map this performance
art's bodies using SA rather than deploy any approaches tied to social constructionism
or social constructivism. Indeed, these alternatives disregard the importance of bodily
sensations because their only concern is with knowledge creation via discourse. This is
only half the story because, as Karen Barad (2007) tells us, "materialization is a matter
not only of how discourse comes to matter but of how matter comes to matter" (p. 210).
Crucially, Domsch (2014) revealed how past studies had overlooked cosplay's capacity
to do something to and with reality. Moreover, this genealogy underlined how this
fandom uses the physicality of its costumes for dramatic ends (Domsch, 2014, p. 133).
This emphasis on the practical usage of such technologies mirrors this thesis's
posthumanist slant whereby tools come alive: "The kind of Being which equipment
possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call "*readiness-to-hand*"
[*Zuhandenheit*]" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 98).

Overall, Domsch's (2014) research informs this thesis's outlook in three main
ways. Firstly, it highlighted how this performance art's ritualistic, repetitious nature could
generate diverse types of bodies: "hyper-bodies, super-powered or magic-driven bodies,
or bodies that showcase the perfection of the Japanese ideal of kawai [*sic*] cuteness"
(Domsch, 2014, p. 137). For this reason, this thesis focuses on bodies instead of
identities (which, not incidentally, are also bodies). Secondly, Domsch's (2014)
recognition that cosplay uses the imagination to mutate reality feeds into this research's
onto-epistemological positioning. Indeed, Galbraith (2014) suggests that moe is

quintessentially an affective phenomenon because it refers to "a response, a verb, something that is done" (p. 5). Lastly, Domsch's (2014) work begs consideration of how imagery is performed because it linked this fandom's primary source of inspiration (i.e., manga) to medieval "mini-dramas or pageants" that frequently used "tableau-like presentation, of relatively static life" (pp. 126–127). This is a critical issue because the cosplay-related phenomenon of moe is essentially a reaction to a fictional character's body (Galbraith, 2014, p. 6). At this point, I must stress that moe is no trifling matter. For example, Takuro (2014) identified a group of Japanese men, namely, "*moé otaku*" (p. 133), who have given up on relationships with three-dimensional women in preference for two-dimensional ones. Indeed, moe might be considered an alternative sexuality because it flees human convention and culture (i.e., capitalism) by channelling and proliferating nonhuman desire.

Despite the originality of Domsch's (2014) approach, their use of analogy, whereby a cosplay always represents something else, misses how this fandom is not a transcendent symbolically religious ritual. By contrast, this research takes this subculture on its terms and refrains from comparing it to other practices. Another notable discrepancy lies in Domsch's (2014) concern with "stage representation" (p. 127). In comparison, this study deals exclusively with cosplay's powers to not only create becomings that bypass the Oedipal regime of representation but also "continue to repudiate the organism and its organization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 372). That said, this thesis concurs with Domsch (2014) that cosplay is an embodied experience (p. 27). However, this thesis argues that its capacity to generate novel subjectivities relies on the extent to which it can destratify—roughly, disorganise—the body by rendering it abstract. Furthermore, unlike Domsch's (2014) genealogy, this thesis does not constitute a roots-based approach to this topic: "This is not about making artists the new heroes of the revolution, the new levers of History! (Guattari, 1995a, p. 91). Instead,

its sole concern is how cosplay's present acts might challenge capitalistic subjectivity by offering alternate yet real modes of being.

In general, this thesis aligns with studies that have hinted at how cosplay practices might function to alter the humdrum reality of capitalism. This is a pressing concern when one considers Mould's (2020) point that in its contemporary neoliberal variant, play is now part of the workplace: "What it means to be creative 'at work' is to produce *only* more growth of contemporary forms of capitalist production" (p. 19). For this reason, this thesis asks: How can cosplay find lines of escape away from this current work model? All work and no (cos)play must be avoided should desire flourish within this fandom.

However, rather than pick one of the three broad directions, this thesis brackets them as practices that feed into one another in unpredictable ways, making the following theoretical and pragmatic changes:

- a concern for cosplayers qua subjects is replaced with an emphasis on bodily events;

- affect is understood in broad onto-epistemological terms as the building-block of reality, rather than just connoting emotion; and,

- technologies are recognised as practices.

Considering the above, one sees how this research's theoretical framework contrasts starkly with previous studies that considered cosplay's affectivity a psychological phenomenon relating to pleasure (e.g., Gn, 2011) or emotion (e.g., Lamerichs, 2014). Instead, this thesis incorporates affect within a much broader and bolder schizoanalytic concern with how cosplay might constitute an art form that saves its fans from the drabness of capitalism "to generate fields of the possible "far from the equilibria" of everyday life" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 131). Nevertheless, the emphasis here is not on progress but on how cosplay's practices might constantly be re-invented or re-

purposed via "the principle of continuous revolution"; otherwise, fans "invent their own death and then pretend themselves a certain life" (Cooper, 1974, p. 123).

At this point, I wish to underline two fundamental oversights within this research field to date. Firstly, cosplay has been understood as a noun. However, because this thesis focuses on this fandom's practices, I posit that this phenomenon connotes the verb 'to cosplay.' Thus, I deploy the word 'cosplaying' throughout this research to emphasise how its bodies are movements, not 'things.' Secondly, although studies like Langsford's (2016) have rightly noted that contemporary cosplaying occurs within offline "temporary spaces such as conventions, parties, and meet-ups" (p. 18), its online spaces have (until now) not been mapped. Here, I argue that this omission results from an anthropocentrism that places the human subject (i.e., the cosplayer) at the heart of the action. Consequently, the part played by nonhuman others has thus far been disregarded. As we shall see, this thesis redresses this absence by considering the role played by various online and offline bodies. In doing so, this research takes cosplaying as a collaborative means to produce new experiences.

Whereas Study 1 focuses on UK cosplaying amongst adults on IG, Study 2 concerns performances at TB (2018). Further details concerning these phases are provided in Chapters 4–6. But for now, the RP concerns:

- What might a cosplaying body do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected by other desiring-machines?

(With this RP, the danger of confirmation bias is sidestepped because here, the unconscious is recognised as entirely unpredictable. In turn, this performance art's possibilities are left wide open: "When Spinoza says that we do not even know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry" (Deleuze, 1990b, p. 255).)

This RP question prompts the following related RSPs:

- What are the desiring-machines pertaining to online and offline acts of cosplaying?

- Which types of social investments relate to these cosplaying desiring-machines?

- Does online and offline cosplaying produce subject-group or subjugated group investments?

- To which of the poles of delirium do these cosplays correspond?

This literature review began by outlining cosplay's history in comics and film. Then, across the following three subsections, I pinpointed three topical lines of empirical inquiry regarding this object of analysis: identities, affect, and technology. However, unlike most research covered in this review, I never assume that cosplay is solely about linguistic practices (e.g., identities) or material ones (e.g., concrete bodies) or technical ones (e.g., electronic gizmos). Instead, this thesis uses Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) concept of assemblage to conjugate these three practices. In doing so, I document what a cosplaying body might do to increase its powers to affect and be affected. To this end, this research emphasises "lines of alterity, virtual possibilities, unprecedented new becomings" (Guattari, 2013, p. 30).

In the following chapter, I detail this thesis's approach to mimicry and argue that cosplay's simulative bodies must be put in the driving seat and tied to territories—not subjects or objects—if this performance art's creative capacity is to be highlighted. Next, I describe how Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) philosophy helps to provide a uniquely ethical way of mapping cosplay's variegated bodies. And in the third subsection, I outline how Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) machinic philosophy grants this study a dynamic onto-epistemological underpinning. Lastly, I discuss how this thesis's pragmatics helps shift focus away from the cosplayer and toward this fandom's sensational bodies—in more than one sense.

Chapter 2 Affects, machines, and the problem of subjectivity

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 139)

As I laid out in the previous chapter, this thesis's primary objective is to conjoin three pathways in cosplay research—identities, affectivity, and technologies—via its overarching concern with the power of bodies qua practices. To this end, I apply Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) machinic ontology to the data. The purpose of this decision is twofold. Firstly, it underscores how these elements are never separate but instead refer to different dimensions of this performance art. And secondly, it rethinks the imagination as a set of acts connecting the fictional world to this entirely real one. The upshot of both these points is that cosplay is a single, ever-changing flow of immanent desire that requires neither subject nor object: "A flux is something intensive, instantaneous and mutant—between a creation and a destruction" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 50). However, what is necessary to produce this fandom is a territory belonging to the unconscious—something that Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) call "the body without organs" (p. 20) (BwO). This idea refers to a nonproductive "recording or inscribing surface" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 22). Thus, throughout this thesis I use the BwO to indicate the limits of cosplay's desires. (Currently this curtailment is set by capitalism qua desire, not ideology: "Capital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 22).)

What is at stake here is how far cosplay moves individuals away from set identities and toward freedom. As we shall see, this research proffers an entirely

pragmatic take on how this hobby might function as a virtual (or potential) force for bodily agency. To this end, this study promotes an affirmative stance regarding this phenomenon. This positive spin differs markedly from past studies, which have considered creativity the result of a conscious, thinking cosplayer qua subject (e.g., Duchesne, 2010; Lamerichs, 2011; Lunning, 2011). This chapter explains why this drastic re-orientation is necessary to help understand how cosplay might alter reality and knowledge rather than merely reproduce it through imitation. Ergo, this research approaches this performance art as a rich simulative source for lived experience or "intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 178).

This chapter opens by describing how Caillois's (2001) idea of mimesis qua "simulation" (p. 71) facilitates this study's focus on cosplay's real productions. Throughout this part, I provide contrasting references to Tamaki's (2011) Lacanian take on otaku subculture to contextualise this thesis's alternate take. The second subsection then explains how I will apply a trio of Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts— territorialization, deterritorialization, and coding—to address the RP. Next, in the third subsection, I argue that cosplay practices must manufacture an alternate spacetime if its creations are to impact the prefabricated identities of this one. Moreover, I explain why this thesis heeds the possible roles played by the face, given how cosplay's ability to produce novel subjectivities rests upon its functioning. Lastly, I describe how this study conceives cosplay's reality-altering potential through Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) appropriated concept of "fabulation" (p. 193).

2.1 Cosplay is a real drag

Mimicry is incessant invention. (Caillois, 2001, p. 23)

This subsection develops this study's central argument that cosplaying is a simulative rather than an imitative practice. As we saw earlier, previous research has

focused on what I insist is this subculture's illusory by-product (i.e., the cosplayer) (e.g., Lamerichs, 2011; Leng, 2013; Lamerichs, 2015). The effect of this tacit assumption—that a cosplayer precedes their practices—has failed to account for the mechanism through which these individuals are produced. (This phenomenon is known as "subjectivation" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 94).) The ramification of this oversight is that cosplay has been portrayed as a straightforward imitative hobby. In contrast, this thesis maintains that an innovative approach that emphasises assemblage and simulation is necessary if we are to understand how cosplay works to create novel experiences (as opposed to the behaviourist paradigm of mechanical repetition implied by prior research).

The remainder of this subsection concerns how this research's theoretical framework purges past emphasis on cosplay's allegedly imitative nature with a newfound emphasis on simulation. This move is an essential pragmatic volte-face because it empowers this subculture's fans by demonstrating how they might come to manage their desires or "libidinous investments" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 401). This proposed turnaround from imitation to simulation is partially justified via Langsford's (2016) observation as to how Steampunk—as a cosplay subculture—employs retro-futuristic Victorian-era aesthetics for "the creation of original or unique characters" (p. 17). Here, we see a clear case of a creative act. However, I argue that the trick to understanding how this performance art functions is to detect differences within its repetitions. As Deleuze (1995a) tells us, aesthetic practices pivot on assembling the same elements but in unusual ways to "introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect" (p. 19). Put differently, repetition not only produces novelty but also conceals difference. Thus, there is no inferior copy of an 'original' (albeit copied) cosplay character because each performance contains fragments of others.

With this point in mind, I maintain that cosplay's repetitions differ even when pre-existing characters are performed.

An affirmative approach to cosplay's repetitions is mandatory, given that this research's sole emphasis is on creativity. This thesis thereby espouses a fresh take on mimesis that stresses how each cosplay is a genuine act of the imagination. Moreover, retaining the concept of mimicry is paramount because cosplay is quintessentially about the repetition of its source media via "a wide range of costuming styles" (Orsini, 2015, p. 8). To this end, Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) writing on Freud's study of Little Hans helps because this boy's concern with horses is rethought in terms of its capacity to induce new experiences through becomings or "relations of movement and rest" (p. 301). In other words, Little Hans' desire for play is instructive in illustrating how cosplays might not necessarily symbolise repetition qua trauma (i.e., castration anxiety). Contrast this possibility with Tamaki's (2011) Lacanian reading regarding the differing role of visual images within Western and Eastern otaku culture. (Tamaki (2011) unhelpfully conflates America with 'the West' and Japan with 'the East.') For the former American group, castration through visual imagery is symbolic because sexual content is invariably heavily censored. In contrast, in Japanese culture, castration is, at best, imaginary, given that there is zero interest in banning perverse images (on the condition that genitalia are not clearly visible) (Tamaki, 2011, pp. 152–153). As we shall see, this research turns to SA because it bypasses a reading of cosplay through psychoanalysis's own repressive, singular lens: "the Oedipal triangle" (p. 89).

Given the above, this thesis counters Tamaki's (2011) negating approach by considering how cosplay's own otaku becomings might facilitate fan entry into its innumerable genres and subgenres. Hypothetically, a "brony" cosplay of "*My Little Pony*" (Reysen et al., 2021, p. 63) could be diagrammed via its power to catalyse an individual's participation and passage through several other fan multiplicities (and their respective fictional themes or worlds). To this end, this study will pinpoint practices that might

facilitate such liberating movements. Put differently, this research is unconcerned with 'individual' phantasies. Instead, I shall map the interlacing of cosplay's real productions— its online and offline bodies. As such, this hobby is re-conceived as "a composition of speeds and affects involving entirely different individuals, a symbiosis" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 301).

By charting this intermingling, this study will highlight any random variance within this fandom's repeat performances. To do so, I must differentiate between what Guattari (2006), following Deleuze, refers to as the "signifying redundancy" of "empty repetition" and the "machinic redundancy" of "complex repetition" (p. 420). The point is to illuminate the latter because I am interested in the production of cosplay's desires, as opposed to its capacity to reproduce meaning and identity. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny cosplay is essentially about representing its source media through roleplaying. Considering this point, this study's nuanced stance on mimetism will retain the notion that imitation might operate within a performance but "only as an adjustment of the block, like a finishing touch, a wink, a signature" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 355). Within this context, fan recognition of a cosplay character—say at a con—might function akin to how an autograph identifies a painting with a painter. However, I follow Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) in maintaining that this reproduction must be subsumed under desiring-production: "Everything is production, since the recording processes are immediately consumed, immediately consummated, and these consumptions directly reproduced" (p. 14).

To facilitate this affective approach to mimesis, I turn to Deleuze's (1995a) canny observation that "an imitation is a copy, but art is a simulation" (p. 293). However, to fully develop a non-imitative paradigm for cosplay, I draw on Roger Caillois's (2001) complementary idea of mimesis qua simulation, which recognises that when it comes to impersonations, one inevitably "*plays*" at being a character, whether this is a "pirate, Nero, or Hamlet (*mimicry*)" (Caillois, 2001, p. 12). Indeed, this way of thinking is an ideal

fit for acknowledging how this performance art constructs "an illusion for fellow fans" rather than "playing make-believe" (Orsini, 2015, p. 8). Furthermore, this theoretical framework resonates with this research's endorsement of Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) description of cosplay as "posthuman drag" (para. 2). Thus, I argue that this thesis's primary concern is not with cosplay's originality but with its capacity for assemblage by pretending to be someone or something else.

This alternate take on simulation has ramifications for this analysis, given that it demands that the effectiveness of a cosplay should not be gauged by how accurately it resembles a so-called (albeit fictitious) 'original' character. Instead, efficacy will be deduced only as far as a performance highlights "the false as power" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 53). Following this logic, this subculture might operate as a potentially affirmative form of pretence that provokes an event or "encounter" involving deception and maybe even non-plagiaristic theft: "To encounter is to find, to capture, to steal, but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 7). Besides, we know that cosplay re-appropriates media sources for inspiration and demands considerable investment in terms of time and "individual and collective effort" (Peirson-Smith et al., 2019, p. 67).

Caillois's (2001) theorisation of play's simulative power also permits this study to consider two ever-present sides to this subculture's practices. On the one hand, any free acts of cosplay—those without any external pressure—equate with the idea of "paidia"; whilst, on the other, cosplays that 'follow the rules,' represent the concept of "ludus" (Caillois, 2001, p. 13). Furthermore, Caillois's (2001) description of how the former style of play often entails pretence and disguise (particularly mask-wearing) is particularly thought-provoking because the adornment of prosthetics is something that past research has found commonplace (e.g., Lunning, 2011; Bainbridge & Norris, 2013; Leng, 2013; Domsch, 2014). And yet, until now, the function of masks within cosplay has largely been ignored. This empirical gap seems particularly surprising, given

Bakhtin's (2009) contention that the mask constitutes "the most common theme of folk culture" (p. 39). Moreover, the importance of this device within this performance art cannot be underestimated because, as Deleuze (1995a) exclaims: "The mask is the true subject of repetition" (p. 18).

Instructively, Caillois's (2001) recourse to simulation also acknowledges how play can "cross the border between childhood and adulthood" (p. 21). This remark is especially relevant since this study's target population comprises United Kingdom-based adult fans. Significantly, Caillois (2001) stresses how one's early years might inspire later creations. As such, this line of thinking imparts no castration anxiety on these grown-ups—a possibility that Tamaki's (2011) book *Beautiful Fighting Girl* overlooks entirely. Henceforth, this research advocates a schizoanalytic approach that vehemently rejects any backwards-looking psychoanalytic notions of cosplay as a trifling manifestation of "infantile regression" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 68). Instead, all facets of this subculture's pretence will be celebrated, not judged. Pragmatically, this means that if the discourse features any roleplays of children or childish fictional characters, these will only be understood in terms of their power to augment a fan's capacity to affect themselves and others (RP). In this way, I call upon Spinoza's (1996) ethical concept of "*joy*" (p. 77) qua empowerment and reject psychoanalysis's bedrock claim that adult behaviours inevitably represent unconscious childhood anxieties. As we will see in the next chapter, there are numerous just reasons why this study focuses solely on cosplay's "active" rather than its "reactive forces" (Deleuze, 2002, p. 41).

Despite drawing upon Caillois's (2001) play theory, this research rejects its binarizing focus on "performers" and "spectators" (p. 136), whereby mimicry allows the former to cast a conscious spell on the latter. In so doing, the latter figure is made redundant: "the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive" (Rancière, 2021, p. 2). Instead, this study discards this disempowering dichotomization because it places the spectator at the bottom of a hierarchy or tree. Thus, this study advocates an ardently flat

onto-epistemology that uses the "rhizome"—a concept that resists "any structuralist or generative model" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 11)—as its mode of thinking. Ergo, I re-invent simulation as a process with the potential to create novel performances—"lines of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 39)—that take fans outside their otaku comfort zones.

To augment this conceptual re-jig, I also draw on Zohar's (2014) insights on the use of camouflage within photography. For this theorist, imitative images use "a stationary repetition of the background—be it with other species or immobile objects," whereas simulative ones harness "a process of becoming, reflecting the abstract average values of a given space, where the subject can adapt to the constantly changing backdrop, till becoming-imperceptible" (Zohar, 2014, pp. 176–177). This distinction helps this research differentiate between representations and affects because it considers whether a photograph's background is static or mobile. Zohar's (2014) cogent observation regarding camouflage as a positive source of indistinguishability resonates strongly with the abstract materialism of what Mark Fisher (2018) calls "The Gothic"—a movement that "refuses to distinguish human figures from backgrounds" (p. 15). Taken together, this processual framing of camouflage further assists this thesis's distinction between rote imitation and creative simulation.

Relevant here is Orsini's (2015) description of how a performer, namely Jason Tablante, regularly deploys the computer app Photoshop "to create photo backdrops which are just as fantastic as the cosplayer's hand-crafted outfits that he photographs" (p. 71). Hence, I postulate that on social media, this performance art might also achieve this camouflaging affect via smartphone apps, such as "Instagram filters" (Kane, 2019, p. 84). Consequently, this research will probe the discourse to investigate how fans might use such technological wizardry to create something akin to what the CCRU (2020) calls "a peopling machine on the hyperplane, conjurations of identity,

hypersonas" (p. 14). To this end, this research considers how visual elements function across online and offline spaces and to what end.

This study's openness to the affirmative possibilities of online acts stands in stark contrast to Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) contention that cosplay's creative dimension lay exclusively in its "material culture, dependent on craft and artistry" (para. 27). Unfortunately, these researchers overlooked how this fandom's artisanal dimension might also manifest via digital editing techniques. As such, this study avoids anthropocentrism by focusing exclusively on usage, regardless of bodily type: "The opposition drawn between culture and technics, between man and machine, is false and has no foundation; it is merely a sign of ignorance or resentment" (Simondon, 2017, p. 15). (Note that henceforth I use the concept of 'technics' to refer to the fluid relationship between culture and "technical objects" (Simondon, 2017, p. 20).) That said, I am unconcerned with the actual functioning of this performance art's technologies (e.g., algorithms). Rather, I identify instances whereby cosplaying re-appropriates these machines and takes control of desire from the inside (i.e., immanently). Hence, this thesis maintains that online and offline cosplaying might help fans forge empowering alliances when these spacetimes interface.

At this point, one might reasonably ask why such a move is necessary. In reply, I argue that the most pervasive argument for subscribing to this stance is because, within contemporary society, social media is too readily equated with "identitarian squabbles" (Fisher, 2021, p. 45). Given this point, this thesis finds much in common with Butler's (1990, 1993) writing on gender construction and Fanon's (1986) dissection of race and colonialism by noting that although identity is an obligation, it does not have to be. And whilst I do not deny that online 'flame wars' do occur, a biased portrayal of technology prevents consideration of how it might be re-purposed to empower subjectivities. For this reason, this thesis holds that cosplay's practices—including identity and technology

—might take its fans "beyond the linear causalities of the capitalistic apprehension of machinic Universes" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 52).

In summary, this research conceives of cosplay as impressional and, in turn, equates simulation with repetition qua difference. As such, this thesis's theoretical framework contrasts markedly with previous approaches, such as Peirson-Smith (2019), which considered cosplay "a combination of imitation, reproduction, and (re)creation" (p. 81). Instead, I substitute this triangular schema for another set of concepts—simulation, camouflage, and creation—which perfectly complement this study's primary concern with the affectivity of this fandom's bodies (RP). Ultimately, this big question asks how this subculture's bodies might "*always be produced by other means*" (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 11). The following subsection concerns how I will chart these mutant flows.

2.2   Why we do not know what a cosplaying body might do

The radical outside is delineated not by a distance or region but by its exterior functionality of activity. The outside is impossible in terms of its possess-ability, yet it can be grasped by its affect space or openness … . (Negarestani, 2008, p. 243)

This section argues that to effectively map just how cosplay's bodies might grant fans agency, its lines of escape must be mapped. But first, I will describe precisely how I deploy the idea of affect. As the opening chapter highlighted, previous research has taken an exclusively epistemological route towards this subculture's desire. The effect of this narrow stance is that its bodies have either been equated with "pleasure" (Gn, 2011, p. 588) or "a deep emotional connection" (Peirson-Smith, 2019, p. 67). In contrast, this research deploys affect in an onto-epistemological sense because it surveys how practices are rhizomes that alter reality and (then) knowledge. In so doing, this trans-

and inter-disciplinary approach shuns previous social scientific concerns with "being and fixity" and instead scrutinises "affective processes in constant motion" (Ringrose, 2011, p. 601).

To this end, I follow Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) lead by using 'bodies' in their "broadest sense" (p. 93). Henceforth, cosplay narratives, genres, images, technological gizmos, simulations, and so forth are becomings. In turn, these ahistorical relations are variations in intensity, which always start at zero on the BwO: "Affects are becomings" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 299). Following this logic, I submit that this performance art acts as a barometer for sensation because its bodies express "a power of acting" that can be "increased or diminished" (Spinoza, 1996, p. 70). Deploying Spinoza's (1996) conceptual vernacular, this hobby's positive powers pertain to 'joy,' with any opposing forces connoting 'sadness.' Here, joy corresponds to power understood as "puissance," with sadness connoting "social power (pouvoir)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 205). This novel theoretical framework implies that cosplay is not a matter of emotion but rather a practical issue concerning power qua affect.

This resolute materialist way of thinking implies that a cosplay body's power (puissance) lies not in its ability to make sense—given that discourse concerns social power qua pouvoir—but rather to confound it. For this reason, affects correspond to "a-signifying semiotics," whilst representations impart meaning (and subjects) through "signifying semiologies" (Guattari, 2006, p. 415). Hence, this study's sole concern is with the former—how a cosplaying body might function. This radical approach questions common sensical theories of play, such as Johan Huizinga's (1949), which claims that every act of play "means something" (p. 1). Note here that Rahman et al.'s (2012) study reiterated this tacit assumption applying it to cosplay tout court: "It is not a nonsensical or meaningless activity" (p. 320). In contrast, I insist that because this otaku practice inevitably encompasses the unconscious process of assemblage, it is neither predictable nor meaningful (unless interpreted).

At this stage, one might reasonably infer that what I am suggesting is that cosplay is a meaningless enterprise. However, I refrain from equating affective power with 'nonsense' because this is a somewhat nebulous concept, given that it suggests a failure to signify. (This is Lacan's (2007b) take on the unconscious' genesis: "the real is the impossible" (p. 123).) Instead, I replace the false opposition between sense and nonsense with an empirical concern with abstraction in and through cosplay. This move is necessary because, as Fisher's (2018) Gothic Materialism maintains, the opposite of representation is "*the abstract*," not "the unrepresentable" (p. 14). This is just as well, given that, as Bakhtin (2009) observes, "even in its narrow sense carnival is far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning" (p. 218). Indeed, this study follows Bakhtin (2009) in conceiving cons as carnivals because they express a "popular-festive system of images" (p. 197). However, I must clarify that this research will not be mapping base, degraded, and resolutely material bodies because these are not "abstract" (Bakhtin, 2009, p. 20). Instead, I insist that despite their sensory sourcing, cosplay's abstract bodies connote nothing other than subjectivities or "incorporeal Universes" (Guattari, 2013, p. 91).

This change in emphasis from sense-making to the speculative possibilities opened by abstract cosplaying is not something to be feared: "Misunderstanding is part of being interested. It's nothing to be worried about. It's the beginning of a discussion, which may lead to understanding" (Toromi, 2014, p. 88). As such, this alternate positioning does not rule out cosplay's meaning-making potential, but this is not the focus here. Instead, this study underscores this practice's capacity to avoid purely "functional outcomes that are harnessed in the service of rational and productive ends" (Moore, 2011, p. 374). In doing so, the irrationality of this otaku subculture's unconscious is embraced rather than judged or pathologized. This celebratory stance is vital if this performance art is to trouble the reality principle and rupture capitalistic subjectivity: "Art challenges the prevailing principle of reason: in representing the order of sensuousness,

it invokes a tabooed logic—the logic of gratification as against that of repression" (Marcuse, 2006, p. 185).

Within this theoretical framework, this performance art's bodies are not pre-existing entities that move. Instead, they are movements of "rest, speed and slowness (longitude)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 304). Cosplay's fluid motions will therefore be conceived as machines—specifically, "desiring-machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 35). (Note that machines are also "assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 95).) Taken in this context, the word 'machine' connotes how desire produces, or machines, "the real world" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 39). Precisely, this concept connotes "a *system of interruptions* or breaks (*coupures*)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 50). For this reason, SA constitutes a well-suited pragmatics, given how cosplay is continually birthed from mass media sources. Hypothetically speaking, if one fandom genre crisscrosses another element like an aesthetic, this convergence could engender an entirely different machine. For instance, a performance combining a love of the robot (mecha) genre with a cute (kawaii) aesthetic might create a third fully independent multiplicity—maybe, a cute robot or a robotic cuteness.

Here, I must clarify how this study sets about mapping this cosplay becomings. In the current thesis, affects connote entirely real, lived experiences. In other words, no aspect of this art form is unreal, even in simulation. As such, I flatly reject any suggestion that (this) otaku subculture references an "*other reality*" (Tamaki, 2011, p. 162). That said, I concur with Tamaki's (2011) psychoanalytic emphasis on how fandom emanates from unconscious activity. For this reason, I also agree with Fisher's (2018) reactive (Nietzschean) emphasis: "Consciousness, like memory and habit, is always a reflection on—which is to say, after—the unconscious processes which produce it" (p. 36). However, I digress from Tamaki's (2011) Lacanian take on the unconscious as "the *imaginaire*" (p. 138). Instead, I insist that because free (cos)play is a non-hierarchical phenomenon, it sits on top of the surface of the BwO: "a fixed plane, upon which things

are distinguished from one another only by speed and slowness" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 297). In fact, this horizontal ontology closely aligns with Spinoza's (1996) description of how existence emanates from a single substance, "God, *or* Nature" (p. 114). The upshot of this paradigm is that this study must establish cosplay's BwO if it is to discover the nature of its desires.

Because the BwO corresponds to a radically different version of the unconscious, I will now precis its primary features before noting the implication of this interpretation for the RP. As we have already seen, this thesis espouses a materialist take on the cosplaying unconscious in line with Deleuze and Guattari (2013a). For them, this desire continually emerges via the inexorable psychological battle between the BwO and the libido (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 20–21). However, the BwO is never the organism but instead constitutes the abstract, imageless, non-spatialised body that seeks to quell the thirst of the libidinous drives (or desiring-machines) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 20–21). In this way, the BwO operates through anti-production whilst production is fuelled by desiring-machines or "partial objects" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 16). Moreover, given the intensive nature of becoming, it is essential to realise that psychic repression precedes social repression (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 52). The effect of this inner conflict is that Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) conceive of subjectivity as a schizophrenic continuum (p. 15).

In this context, 'schizophrenia' does not refer to the clinical condition but to the type of recordings that segment the BwO's "smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 20). Essentially, this process equates with R.D. Laing's (1973) idea of "break-through" (p.110). Although the comparison with this existential psychiatry is befitting, I argue that Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) outlook in *Anti-Oedipus* more closely aligns with David Cooper's (1974) anti-psychiatry. Especially when the latter theorist proselytises: "Instinctual fulfilment means in every instance the breakdown of self-boundaries and thus becomes an equivalent to madness if not

madness 'itself'" (Cooper, 1974, p. 34). But why use schizophrenia as illustrative of this process? Because this figure's heightened intensity places them "as close as possible to matter, to a burning, living center of matter" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 32).

However, it should be noted that even if Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) anti-psychiatric sympathies constitute a reappropriation of 'schizophrenia' as a clinical term, this does not excuse their lack of empathy for sufferers of its so-called "artificial" variety: "a limp rag forced into autistic behavior" (p. 15). Indeed, the psychoanalyst Stephen Frosh (1991) remarks that although Deleuze and Guattari use 'schizophrenia' to connote the process of undoing societal restrictions, they fail to empathise with "the schizophrenic *sufferer*" (p. 141). On this precise issue, Lyotard's (1993) commentary is brilliantly incisive: "Do we want to be merely the saviours of a fallen world, then, the hearts of a heartless world, prophets (cruel, very cruel, as the programme goes) for a humanity without words?" (p. 101).

Keeping the above points in mind, I henceforth refrain from using this loaded term across the rest of this thesis as I do not wish to perpetuate mental health stigma. This considered conceptual stance is critical, given how Fox, Earnshaw, Taverna and Vogt (2018) report that the chronic, multidimensional effects of such labelling for individuals and groups have not yet been exhaustively documented via longitudinal studies. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid a careless deployment of the word 'schizophrenia' because recent research has shown that certain ethnic groups—such as self-identified Latinos (e.g., Gearing, Brewer, Washburn, Carr, Burr, Manning, & Torres-Hostos, 2023)—are and have been historically-speaking more prone to being targeted by this disempowering clinical classification in comparison to Whites. (Maybe only a post-structural anthropology can become "the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought"? (Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 40).) As a result, this thesis replaces 'schizophrenia' with a concern for the nomadic or nomadism, which Berardi (2021) ably defines as a "community that is based on the conscious sharing of

intellectual and aesthetic values, a community that gathers abruptly and abruptly disperses, a community of people who stay in the same place as long as desire holds them together" (p. 92).

And yet, despite their problematic use of clinical terminology, Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) recognition that subjectivity is birthed from sensation is precisely why this thesis insists that a materialist understanding of cosplay's bodies is paramount. Otherwise, these fans will be subjugated by signification rather than liberated through sheer force of affect. To this end, this thesis's RP concerns what cosplay's drives or desiring-machines might do to escape social repression (which, as we shall see, equates with capitalism). Nevertheless, merely identifying cosplay's BwO is not enough because I must also chart the type of social investments fans make in their hobby—either "paranoiac" or "schizorevolutionary" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 317). At the same time, the former pole relates to repressive, capitalistic, and externally enforced Oedipal subjectivity, the latter concerns liberatory, nomadic, and internally sourced "anoedipal lines of singularities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 416).

However, things are never straightforward because cosplay's desires will eventually be subsumed under capitalism. This postulation is made because capitalism currently sets the limit on desire as the current BwO: "the full body of antiproduction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 184). In this usage, 'full' refers to how this body permeates every aspect of Life and that (ultimately) nothing endures outside a schizophrenic system that devalues existence by readily muddling anti-production with production (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 381). Indeed, capitalism's omnipotence lies in its unique schizophrenic ability to decode and deterritorialize desire—specifically, "flows of production in the form of money-capital" and "flows of labor in the form of the "free worker"" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 47). Nevertheless, capitalism's ultimate raison d'être is to then set a limit on desire to perpetuate "the immanent reproduction of its own always widened limits (the axiomatic)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 381). What

this means is that production is no longer a matter of sense-making (i.e., "*the surplus value of code*") but rather a question of meaningless production without beginning or end (i.e., "*a surplus value of flux*") (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 263). In turn, this inescapable repression instils in its 'private' subjects an "abject fear of lacking something" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 40).

Crucially, given this study's subject matter, capitalism also renders aesthetic experience valueless because this semiotic bestows "a time of generalised equivalence" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 16). Franco "Bifo" Beradi's (2021) description of capitalism as "the Hyper-Code (the semiotiser of all semiotisers)" is most illuminating here, given that it points to "the increasing subsumption of every fragment of reality and of experience by the domain of abstraction, and finally the unchallengeable command of the economic code on the overall machine of human life" (p. 21). In fact, this quote is remindful of Fisher's (2009) concept of capitalist realism, which asserts that as nothing falls outside this system's clutches, it "seamlessly occupies the horizons of the possible" (p. 8). And, because capitalism now functions as the full BwO, I submit that it is inevitable that cosplay's relative, sensory becomings will be subsumed into its irrevocably social but paradoxically personalizing flow. All is never lost, however, because, as Fisher (2018) reminds us: "The body subject to such assault is not in any sense a sealed organism, but a body capable of mutation, of fusion with capital and its commodities, a Gothic body: a Body without Organs" (p. 83). Thus, I maintain that it is still possible for cosplay to find a temporary means of escape from capitalism, even if that means passing through the middle of its body horror show.

I hope that this last point clarifies this thesis's argument that the relationship between cosplay and capitalism concerns desire, not ideology. Contrast this perspective with Bainbridge and Norris's (2009) depiction of this subculture as an ideological battlefield between "cosplayers" and "industry" (para. 4). Such an approach misses the fact that these ideologies (like cosplayers) are imaginary by-products of desire—"mere

residuum" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 29). Henceforth, this thesis not only jettisons any recourse to ideology but follows Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) in regarding this myth as "an execrable concept that hides the real problems" (p. 392). Instead, the critical task is to chart those cosplay practices that might interrupt capitalism's smooth functioning. However, the purpose of this research is not to find these "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 239) and frame them as interminable solutions. On the contrary, the current study is a rallying call to encourage otaku to persist in finding these escape routes. This task is paramount, given that the reterritorialization of creative acts is inevitable under capitalism.

2.3   Otaku moves: Machines, coding, and territorialization

A work can function as a relational device in which there is a degree of randomness. It can be a machine for provoking and managing individual and collective encounters. (Bourriaud, 2006, p. 163)

This research situates cosplay within "the capitalist age" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 258). Only this omnipresent system places limits on this subculture via its axiomatic. Indeed, one of the ways this might be achieved is through online and offline "*aesthetic conditioning*" (Stiegler, 2014, p. 3). However, this thesis insists that it is always possible for aesthetic multiplicities to escape these external impositions but only under certain conditions. Thus, this section makes two claims. Firstly, cosplay must collaboratively produce lines of deterritorialization if this practice is to forge its own "mode of being" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 63). Secondly, I maintain that such escape is possible if fans use their faces as affects (rather than as indicators of meaning and identity)

To unpack these two ideas, I will explain how I apply a trio of notable Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts—namely, machines, coding, and territorialization—to the data. The first idea pertains to bodies but never in a mechanistic sense. Instead, 'machines'

connote any system of elements—"technical, biological, semiotic, logical, abstract"—that might catalyse "proto-subjective processes" (Guattari, 2013, p. 2). In other words, machines are desires that create possibilities. In the current context, cosplay's known source media—"science fiction, fantasy, horror, mythology" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 30)—might spontaneously link up to form "a rhizome" or "living block" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b). To this end, this research charts how this subculture's assemblages reveal "all kinds of machinisms" (Guattari, 2011, p. 10).

At this point it is worth noting that the concept of assemblage has resulted in numerous contemporary theories that pivot on differing applications of this idea. For example, Manuel DeLanda (2006) applies a "realist social ontology" to topics from the social sciences—"from persons to nation states"(p. 3)—all of which are treated as assemblages. In contrast, Ian Buchanan's (2021) approach—also called 'Assemblage Theory'—rejects DeLanda's realist take for three reasons: it wrongly proceeds from the abstract to the concrete, it treats reality as a given, and it muddles the actual with the virtual (p. 18). Although these contrasting uses are interesting given this thesis's deployment of assemblage, their theoretical and practical scope are beyond the remit of this thesis. That said, this research is sympathetic to Buchanan's (2021) positioning because it also aligns with one of Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) central claims: "Desire is always assembled; it is what the assemblage determines it to be" (p. 268).

To map the cosplaying unconscious and achieve this goal, I must consider the part played by the abstract machine. This complex idea pertains to a multiplicity's "diagram" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 106) because this machine draws its constitutive elements atop the surface of the BwO. But before I deal with this tricky concept in greater depth, I must firstly distinguish "molecular desiring-machines" from "large molar machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 327–328). In this usage, 'molecular' refers to constantly moving particles of matter (i.e., libidinal energy), with 'molar' describing the same machine but "*according to the laws of large numbers*"

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 328). These latter "organic, technical, or social machines" subjugate the former under "determinate conditions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 328). Thus, desiring-machines are simultaneously social machines because they are "created, planned, and organised in and through social production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 41). For instance, the molecularity of desire endures despite one's socially ascribed molar gender identity. As such, social machines equate with the BwO or "socius—the body of the earth, the body of the despot, the body of capital-money" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 390–391).

Although the practices documented herein will take place on top of the last of these three bodies—the full BwO of capital—this study aims to highlight how this hobby's positive lines of escape might offer a nomadic alternative to everyday existence (i.e., work). To this end, I address the RP by identifying this performance art's assemblages (or desiring-machines) before mapping their horizontal and vertical "vectors" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 389). Whereas the former pertains to "collective assemblages of enunciation," the latter marks "machinic assemblages of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 24). Furthermore, whilst the former concern "*matter*" as discourse or "*expression,*" the latter refers to non-discursive energy or "*content*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 49). Here, I shall outline the nature of the latter phenomenon before tackling the former. Essentially, expression concerns form because coding serves to "qualify a flow" (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 167). For instance, a clothed body can be coded as either 'fashionable' or 'unfashionable.' Note also that although language is the primary means through which coding occurs (amongst humans), expression is best understood as discourse (in the Foucauldian sense) because it organises, controls, and restricts the flow of desire.

Critical here is Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) comment that when machines collide, their codes blend—a phenomenon they call "surplus value of code" (p. 325). Rather than repeat myself, I refer the reader to my earlier speculative example of how

cosplay might merge kawaii and mecha codes and engender an entirely new machine. For this reason, the notion of expression is highly relevant to this pragmatics because this idea readily accounts for cosplay's endless creativity. Saitō Tamaki (2011) observes how manga characters—a prime source media for cosplay—serve as "a kind of code" (p. 143). Indeed, in *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, this critic lists a few examples of this media's codes: "the facial expressions of the characters, *manpu*, onomatopoetic and mimetic expressions, and speed and concentration lines" (Tamaki, 2011, p. 141). (Here, *manpu* refers to the symbolic expression of emotions within this medium (Tamaki, 2011, p. 141).) In fact, Lunning (2022) regards this fandom as quintessentially a problem of coding: "Cosplay is a vehicle for the expression of the modes of existence and the play of identity; it is a representation of popular cultural subjects, that have, for the fan, become an infatuation" (p. 67). That said, this thesis rallies against these archly-conservative, representational approaches because they wrongly give identity—rather than becoming (i.e., change)—pride of place. Instead, this SA maps cosplays that decode (roughly, scramble) existing otaku codes to create self-sufficient yet abstract collective assemblages of enunciation.

If one ponders how Reysen et al. (2021) identified "five core" anime genres— "Action," "Drama," "Slice of Life," "Mecha," and "Hentai" (pp. 195–196)—within forty genres overall, cosplay's experimental possibilities are as mind-blowing as they are innumerable. Indeed, Mongan's (2015) study testified to this art form's propensity for (self-)improvisation: "The whole time, I was testing the waters of my own self, floating to the surface what I valued and seeing what stuck" (para. 11). Moreover, the idea of coding serves a valuable function in this research by underlining how living and non-living machines might co-participate in innovative practices. As we saw in the previous chapter, this performance art invariably uses nonhuman elements (e.g., costumes) within its displays. As such, the cybernetic notion of coding is sympathetic to this research's posthumanist ethos and charting of desire's flow. After all, Wiener (1989)

sourced the term 'cybernetics' from the Greek, "*kubernētēs*," meaning ""steersman"" (p. 15).

Meanwhile, content ensures the formation or "articulation" of the organism "by virtue of a machine or machinic assemblage that stratifies it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 48). Again, using a hypothetical example, once a cosplay character's identity is ascertained and labelled via a speech act or "order-word" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b), their body is incorporeally transformed—despite nothing physiological changing following this interpellation. (In this way, Judith Butler (1990) is correct to assert that identity is never given (i.e., innate) because it is "performative" (p. 25).) Furthermore, within this "double movement" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 584), content and expression combine, granting the misimpression that embodiment is a fait accompli.

Significantly, this entire operation is the result of "the abstract machine," which, by drawing the BwO, functions as "the diagram of the assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 116). In this context, it is only via this machine that cosplay's bodies are perpetually gender-ed, rac-ed, class-ed, otaku-ed, etc. Considering this fluid processual framework, I hold that cosplay identities are best understood as events or "haecceities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 304). Here, the process of identity formation is rethought not as a mandate but as an aesthetic: "Art is a state of encounter" (Bourriaud, 2006, p. 162). However, with singularities, nothing is ever certain. For, if this subculture's assemblages can ascend to the abstract machine—which, as we shall see, is the face— they can gain autonomy by tinkering with its codes. In this way, one sees how fans might become active sources of inspiration for other aficionados and the industry (e.g., Bainbridge & Norris, 2009).

In considering a cosplay assemblage's vertical vector, I follow its movements of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 591). Whereas the former refers to a chaotic shift from molar, structural investments to molecular, processual ones, the latter operates in reverse, thus "obstructing the line of

flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 591). However, it would be remiss to ignore how these ideas refer to a single motion of territorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 387). Because of this, neither deterritorialization nor reterritorialization is necessarily "good" or "bad" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 21). Yet despite this relativism, the current research focuses on cosplay's deterritorializations, given that only these lines refer to its degrees of freedom. Hence, its only concern is with practices that have the "capacity for causing the flows of desire to circulate following their positive lines of escape, and for breaking them again following breaks of productive breaks" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 396).

Granted, because reterritorialization invariably follows deterritorialization, this study's lines of flight are only snapshots of cosplay's potential to become a molecular "micropolitics" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 252). That said, I argue that because of the futurity of this study's pragmatics and its anarchical 'anything goes' ethos, the need for recurrent aesthetic reinventions within this subculture cannot be stressed enough. The advantage of this machinic approach to performance art lies in its recognition that bodies can always be reassembled in other empowering ways. Importantly, deterritorialization is entirely non-specific and can occur with "almost anything— memory, fetish, or dream" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 68). For Watts (2021), moe love for anime girls is a practical means to transcend the limits of gendered identity whilst simultaneously retaining femininity: "*girl that's past any human gender because I'm anime now*" (para. 11). With these points in mind and retaining an unfashionable sense of optimism, this posthumanist research maps cosplay's moments of "dissensus" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 128). Note that throughout this thesis, I follow Jacques Rancière's (2021) definition of this concept as "an organisation of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing an obviousness on all" (pp. 48–49).

Given that this research documents this fandom's revolutionary lines of deterritorialization, it is mandatory that I consider its relation to the "*abstract machine of faciality* (*visagéitié*)" because this phenomenon fixes meaning through "signifiance" and identity through "subjectification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 196–197). The execution of this task is critical because this machine lies at the heart of cosplay's subjectivity production. Here, I argue that any acts that disrupt the face's power (pouvoir) to signify and subjectify will bestow this machine with an alternate affective function. Nevertheless, I must first explain why I insist that the face is cosplay's creative nemesis. To support this claim, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) description of this abstract machine in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For them, the face overcodes the entire body turning it into "a holey surface" whereby different body parts, "breast, stomach, penis and vagina, thigh, leg and foot, all come to be facialized" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 199). Precisely, these Frankensteinian effects occur via this machine's "black hole/white wall system" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 197). On the one hand, the face operates as a surface, a 'white wall,' upon which meaning is recorded via "redundancies of signifiance or frequency;" whilst, on the other, subjectifying 'black holes' are passively and secondarily projected onto this backdrop and registered via "resonance or subjectivity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 196). Unlike the signifying regime of the white wall, post-signifying black holes induce "*absolute* deterritorialization," which manifests in "consciousness and passion" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 155). This second movement demands "four eye machines made of elementary faces linked together two by two" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 207).

Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) note two important movements regarding this system. Firstly, there is a recognition of elements concerning the position of the black hole relative to the white wall, followed by a pass or fail judgement as to whether this face fits a pre-existing molar schema: "it is a man *or* a woman, a rich person or a poor one, an adult or a child, a leader or a subject, "an x *or* a y." (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b,

p. 207). (Yamato's (2020) study distinguished between older, experienced fans and younger "novice cosplayers" (para 5.6).) Controversially, Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) posit that the decision to either accept or reject a given face relies entirely on its resemblance to the standard white male face: "Jesus Christ superstar" (p. 206). Small wonder that Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) describe the face as "a politics" and talk of "*limit*-faces" (pp. 212–213).

Although the link between cosplay and faciality might not seem obvious, Lingis's (2000) writing helps join these dots. In *Dangerous Emotions*, this anthropologist notes how clothing facializes and thereby overcodes the entire body:

> Everything animal in the body must be covered up, with clothing that extends the face—the blank surfaces of the business suit and the tailored two-piece suit of the career woman with the black holes of its buttons, the blue deliveryman's uniform and the white of painter's dungarees, the uniform of fight [*sic*] attendant and politician's wife and university student, uniforms on which orders are seen and where black holes of subjectivity judge and sanction. (Lingis, 2000, pp. 48–49)

Considering this correlation between dress and repression, this research identifies any cosplaying practices that ambiguate who or what is performed by defacializing the body. In doing so, I will uncover ways that this subculture might jam the faciality machine via "vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers" (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 212). Besides, such dissensus might facilitate fan collaborations and, in the process, counter "capitalist fairy tales of individual success" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 70).

Here, I posit that one of the means through which the cosplaying face might inhibit the formation of meaning and identity is through functioning akin to a cinematic "close-up" shot by becoming "a landscape" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 202). Put differently, the face can release affective traits and, in turn, be re-purposed as "a loved or dreamed-of face" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 202). Inspired by this thinking, I hold

that this fandom's cons and social media territories might be re-imagined as vivid landscapes. Furthermore, I postulate that these carnivalesque cosplaying terrains might contain a preponderance of simulative or stolen faces. However, it seems counter-intuitive to follow Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) and limit these machinic connections to just four eyes, given how digital technology connects considerably more than two pairs. For this reason, I draw upon Johnston's (1999) notion of 'machinic vision' which replaces the seeing subject with "a machinic assemblage of images in a state of universal variation in which privileged instances of subjective perception are always subsumed in a mobile constellation of relationships with other images" (p. 35).

Another conceivable way cosplay might flee the face lies in its capacity to ontologise "probe-heads"—impersonal ruptures that might trigger "strange new becomings, new polyvocalities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 223). Thus, this research shall highlight any defacializing or depersonalizing practices that run contrary to the "inhuman" face's "emptiness and boredom" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 199–200). Again, what is at risk here is artistic freedom. As I mentioned, no other study has paid due attention to the exact functioning of cosplay prosthetics, specifically masks. Indeed, the following quote from Santayana (1922) explains why this empirical lacuna urgently needs filling: "Masks afford us the pleasing excitement of revising our so accidental birth-certificate and of changing places in spirit with some other changeling" (p. 130).

2.4   The imagination is a practice

For there is no imagination outside of technique. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 401)

This subsection explains how this study adopts a schizoanalytic conception of the unconscious to divert attention in this research field away from the relationship between cosplay and phantasy and toward its multi-faceted uncanny fabulations. (This

latter phrase, 'uncanny fabulations,' connotes the possibilities heralded by this fandom's strange but real becomings.) Bluntly, if this fandom is to function as Life-enriching performance art, it must construct a different kind of spacetime—a nomadic one. Indeed, Bakhtin (2009) notes how during the Middle Ages, "purely grotesque, carnivalesque themes" created an alternative to "serious culture" (p. 96). Once again, the key to understanding how this might be possible vis-à-vis this subculture is to home in the role played by the unconscious, which in this schizoanalytic perspective, is a 'doing.' As I said previously, this thesis's adoption of the Deleuzo-Guattarian BwO means that the very notion of the imagination needs re-inventing. Arguing against psychoanalysis's monomaniacal emphasis on the imagination qua phantasy, this SA declares that there is nothing imaginary about the imagination or fiction. Thus, in this section I discuss how the unconscious (or BwO) functions as a "set of practices" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 174). In other words, cosplay's creative capacity lies—quite literally—in its acting.

This paradigm contrasts markedly with psychoanalytic approaches like Tamaki's (2011) that stress (alleged) pathological deficiencies within Western and Eastern fans. For instance, Tamaki (2011) readily equates the previously described phenomenon of moe with emotional loss: "I am almost certain that this chain of *moe* as trauma underlines the currents of today's anime culture" (p. 116). In contrast, this study approaches the cosplaying unconscious as an affirmative void. Here, I concur with Holland's (2005) apt and somewhat Steampunk description of the BwO as the ultimate "*difference-engine*" (p. 61). To this end, this study charts this subculture's bodies as a testament to this fandom's ever-emerging inventions. As Bakhtin (2009) reminds us: "From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other" (p. 26).

The key to unlocking cosplay's drives or desiring-machines lies in its capacity to create its own imaginative and entirely real pragmatics. Henceforth, the rest of this section argues that this performance art must alter its relation to time and space to achieve this feat. To support this claim, I refer to Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b)

distinction between, on the one hand, "striated space" and its accompanying "State apparatus" and, on the other, "smooth space" with its (nomadic) "war machine" (p. 552). (Precisely, these machines are non-violent entities charged with "the emission of quanta of deterritorialization, the passage of mutant flows (in this sense, every creation is brought about by a war machine)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 268).) The first of these spaces connotes stabilizing, normalizing, homogenizing, and countable State-aligned urban territories that ossify subjectivity by installing a hierarchical "sad image of thought" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 16). Essentially, the predictability of striated space replicates the State's unidirectional, causal logic. (Henceforth, I utilise Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) definition of the State as "the assemblage that effectuates the abstract machine of molar overcoding" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 265). Put simply, the State controls its 'subjects' by ascribing fixed, overarching identities that cancel qualitative difference.)

Given that part of this research concerns a Leeds-based con, Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) observation that "the city is the striated space par excellence" becomes salient because it acknowledges how within such settings, "*dimensionality*" morphs into "*directionality*" (p. 558-559). In other words, pre-designed urban environments constrain the free movement of bodies (and minds) by assigning them fixed identities, thus strangling their singularity. As Bauman (2000) observes, the purpose of city spaces is to teach their inhabitants "the difficult skills of civility" (p. 95). Indeed, the demarcated spaces of city-based cons place similar restrictions on free movement. For instance, TB (2018) requires payment for admission. Thus, Bauman (2000) is correct in claiming that such "consumption places" are as much about exclusion as inclusion: "the near-perfect balance between freedom and security" (p. 98-99). This point ties in with Simon O'Sullivan's (2010) observation that striated spaces synch with capitalism's linear temporality, which gives rise to a "'universal' time that flattens and reduces local and singular durations" (p. 258). Due to this control, subjectivity mistakenly

becomes viewed as a pre-given, private, and quintessentially historical phenomenon. Indeed, previous cosplay studies have (perhaps unwittingly) conferred this same image of thought (e.g., Lamerichs, 2011; Domsch, 2014; Langsford, 2016). In contrast, this research argues that cosplaying bodies can work rhizomatically as reciprocal causes of one another. Such a phenomenon suggests folding or looping, as opposed to linearity.

In contrast to State space, smooth space provokes a liberatory and anarchic modus vivendi which Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) dub "nomadic" (p. 443). This type of space describes the vast, off-grid "*amorphous*, nonformal space prefiguring op art" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 554–558). Furthermore, unlike striated space's linear, point-to-point chronological movement, smooth space is intuited and ontologised "without counting" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 439). Such areas imbricate the event-time of the unconscious: "the space of the outside, to the open smooth space, in which the body moves" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 553). For Deleuze and Guattari (2013b), the sea is the prime example because its space is "constructed by local operations involving changes in direction" (p. 556). Crucially, smooth space is populated by (nomadic) "war machines of metamorphosis" (Deleuze & Guattari, 201b, p. 420). Helpfully, Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) use the game Go to exemplify the war machine because, unlike chess—a coded "game of State"—its pieces have "no intrinsic properties, only situational ones" (p. 411). Perennially opposed to the State apparatuses' imposition of "interiority," smooth nomadic space produces a war machine composed solely of "a milieu of exteriority" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 412). (Such identity-free spaces are later referred to as "cramped" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 17).)

Thus, I argue that cosplaying practices that smooth striated spaces help resist the State's mindset but only if they can instrumentalise the body of the earth. This feat might be possible given that Tamaki (2011) links anime and manga to the non-chronological, lived experiences of "kairological time" (p. 139). However, matters become more complex with Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) claim that the nomadic war

machine "reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself" (p. 445). Put differently, these machines weaponize affects, distribute themselves in open space and gain agency in the process (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 460). Such events might occur via costuming acts whereby fans wear whatever they desire rather than follow a set of rules on how to 'dress to impress.' This is the difference between (cos)play and work—although, as I mentioned, capitalism blurs these lines. Nevertheless, fandom-related becomings are inevitably ephemeral because the State readily "appropriates the war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 452). Due to this constant battle, these spaces are inexorably found in admixture, although they exist asymmetrically (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 552). So, according to this theoretical framework, this performance art's revolutionary potential lies precisely in how it occupies online and offline spacetimes—not why.

Because smooth space cannot counter its striation, this study must also consider the role of "holey space" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 482). Figure 2.1 shows the interrelation between smooth, holey and striated space.

Figure 2.1

Smooth, holey, and striated space
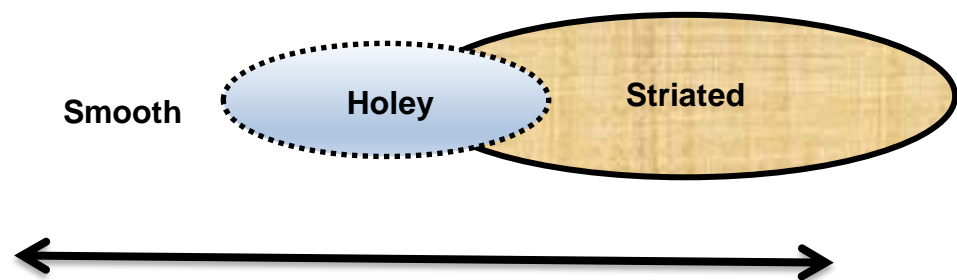
As an idea, holey space refers to the two-way movement between striated and smooth spaces. However, this type of space is best conceived temporally as a ""threshold"" or doorway "marking an inevitable change" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 509). For this reason, I hold that the Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of the nomadic war machine and

holey space find their equivalents in Bey's (2003) notions of "the free spirit" and "the "TEMPORARY AUTONOMOUS ZONE" (pp. 86–97).

To identify cosplay becomings within the data, I will look for traces of nomadic cognition. Precisely, I shall identify instances of what Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) dub "absolute movement, in other words, speed: vortical or swirling movement" (p. 444). Here, 'speed' is confusingly used to refer to intuitive thinking, not the extensivity of physical movement (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 444). And by locating this fandom's context dependent BwO, this research will open fan subjectivities to the freedoms afforded by the alternate temporality of the event.

I shall briefly discuss several play theories to contemplate this performance art's relationship to spacetime. Gregory Bateson's (1972) idea of "the play frame" (p. 185) describes the mental space occupied when one plays with others. Bateson (1972) argues that play is an encounter that marks the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of "certain messages" (p. 187). Thus, the signal ""This is play"" simultaneously denotes "a negative statement containing an implicit negative metastatement" (Bateson, 1972, pp. 179–180). A speculative but topical illustration: 'This is a cosplay of [insert any fictional character's name],' simultaneously implies, 'This is not me' within the same frame. And should a hypothetical wardrobe malfunction happen, this (albeit) imaginary cosplay frame would shatter. More recent theories effectively re-jig Bateson's (1972) idea. For instance, Salen and Zimmermann's (2004) "magic circle" denotes a play space that is "both limited and limitless … a finite space of infinite possibility" (p. 76). However, the game is over once the circle—rather than the frame—is broken.

Despite affording the possibility for the paradoxical presence of nonplay in cosplay, I jettison Bateson's (1972) theoretical reliance on metacommunication because it imparts not only a hierarchy but also gives "phantasy" (p. 185) a leading role. Moreover, although this paradigm, like Salen and Zimmermann's (2004), helps entertain how this art form might afford fans entry into a mental space choc-full of possibilities,

these are essentially "boundary models" (Moore, 2011, p. 378). As such, they sit uncomfortably alongside this research's emphasis on fluid bodies. This study thereby preferences the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of holey space because its temporal emphasis is consistent with its concern with cosplay's machinic relations: "This is not a matter of imitation, but of conjunction" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 44). Besides, this research's adoption of Caillois's (2001) mimetic perspective re-invents cosplay's becomings as simulative practices. After all, in a Derridean sense, one must pretend to pretend.

This research's chosen theoretical framework also problematises other well-established play theories. For example, Johan Huizinga (1949) describes playing as "a free activity" existing on the periphery of so-called serious and "ordinary life" (p. 13). And yet, despite this historian arguing in *Homo Ludens* that play lies at the heart of enculturation, this phenomenon is simultaneously trivialised. Apparently, it is not serious enough to be taken seriously. In comparison, the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (2005) underlines the aesthetic experience afforded by "creative playing" (p. 42). Indeed, Bey (2003) alludes to this same possibility: "Unbridled PLAY: at one & the same time the source of our Art & of all the race's rarest eros" (p. 8). Nevertheless, this thesis rebukes any implication that cosplaying might somehow take place outside of "everyday life" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 113), given that capitalism conjoins and axiomatizes all flows. Instead, what is at stake in this research is how this subculture might invade, disrupt, and alter the quotidian.

In turn, I argue that because cosplay deterritorializes something ordinary (i.e., getting dressed up) as something extra-ordinary (i.e., getting dressed up to pretend you are someone or something else), this practice is fundamentally "uncanny [*unheimlich*]" (Freud, 2003, p. 124). Indeed, Lunning (2022) cites the example of "the animegao kigurumi" (p. 86) to demonstrate Japanese cosplay's uncanniness. Using the otherworldly figure of "the doller," Lunning (2022) notes how these (usually male)

individuals use masks to crossplay as female characters from manga and anime, are forbidden to talk, and might even be accompanied by "a handler" (p. 87–88). With this example, one sees how this art form takes what is familiar (i.e., ordinary) and turns it into something strange (i.e., extra-ordinary).

Famously, Freud (2003) defines the unheimlich as "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (p. 124). However, this thesis affords a rhizomatic pragmatics of the lived present rather than subscribing to this historical perspective. Furthermore, it subscribes to Rancière's (2004) definition of the uncanny as "that which resists signification" (p. 63). That said, this study does retain Freud's (2003) emphasis on this phenomenon as a mishmash of the unfamiliar "(*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely')" and "the familiar (*das Heimliche*, 'the homely") (p. 134). Indeed, Hikaru (2014) conceives moe as uncanny, given this phenomenon's inscrutability ensures that it "remains unfamiliar and strange to people" (p. 143).

Here, I hold that Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) notion of fabulation—appropriated from Henri Bergson—presents this study with an ideal means to account for any strange affects. In *What Is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari (1994) define this concept as "a visionary faculty very different from the imagination and that consists in creating gods and giants" (p. 230, note 8). Precisely, fabulation refers to the idea that art objects are by-products of thematic roleplays or "conceptual personae" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 177). (I henceforth refer to 'machines,' not 'objects' for conceptual consistency.) However, unlike the finitude of bodily sensations, these machines possess an infinite world-building capacity, given how they install art monuments that intimate "possibles": "a body, a life, a universe" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 177). Applying this theorising to the matter at hand, I hold that cosplays do not just actualise concrete bodies but that these performances simultaneously contain within them the possibility of multiple worlds: "the other person" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 18). Relevant here is

Lunning's (2022) distinction between, on the one hand, "a kyara," as a sort of thematic proto-character (e.g., "the Lolita"), and on the other, "the realistic impression of a human personality—that is, kyarakutā, or character" (pp. 106–107). As such, I equate the former with Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) idea of "conceptual personae," whilst the latter corresponds to their notion of "aesthetic figures" (p. 65).

It follows that this thesis's discourse will contain markers for these themes, characters, and worlds. Moreover, in examining these expressions, I will reveal how this art form "thinks through affects and percepts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p.66). Although I defined affects previously, the latter idea needs unpacking. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe how "percepts" connote "the landscape before man, in the absence of man" (p. 169). What this means is that, alongside affects, percepts refer to particles of matter that lie beneath human emotion and perception. In fact, these sensations exist independently of it: "Not only does art not wait for human beings to begin, but we may ask if art ever appears among human beings, except under artificial and belated conditions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 373). Further, Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) insist that because art is not human and territorialization produces Life's assemblages, existence is aesthetics. To illustrate this claim, they cite the "brown stagemaker," a bird that "lays down landmarks each morning by dropping leaves it picks from its tree, and then turning them upside down so the paler underside stands out against the dirt: inversion produces a matter of expression" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 367). Significantly, there is nothing 'natural' about Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) (arguably romanticized) view of 'Nature' because their ontology suggests becomings reproduce contagiously through alliances between "interkingdoms" (p. 282). Following this logic, I maintain that cosplay simulations are perfectly natural in their artifice (after all, DNA is nothing but code).

In sum, I argue that cosplay's creative powers rest firmly in its capacity to engender immaterial abstract bodies through symbiosis. Henceforth, I refer to this

thesis's onto-epistemology as 'nomadic-posthumanist' because this moniker affords a paradigm through which subjectivities—in the broadest possible sense—welcome "unnatural participations" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 282). From this perspective, cosplay's beauty resides in its nonhuman unfathomability. Timothy Morton (2021) suggests as much when writing about fine art: "I can't put my finger on it … I just love that painting" (p. 3). Intriguingly, Go (2014) mentions a positive correlation between repeatedly looking at the lines of fandom images and real, pleasurable "bodily sensation" (p. 16). In fact, I argue that cosplay's previously discussed ability to induce moe might provide its fans with a nonhuman escape route from capitalism because, as Toru (2014) remarks: "*Moé* is the warmth and solace that cannot be found in human society" (p. 120).

I began this section by explaining why Caillois's (2001) treatment of mimesis qua simulation best lends itself to this study's materialist spin on cosplay's sensory bodies. In the next subsection, I described how this positioning shifts focus away from the illusory cosplayer and toward understanding this performance art as a process of assemblage. In turn, I revealed that the key to unlocking cosplay's capacity to empower its fans lies in finding lines of deterritorialization. Then, in the third part, I insisted that this fandom's creativity lies in its ability to smooth striated spaces and engender a nomadic war machine by interfering with the face as the abstract machine. To close this chapter, I explained how this study deploys the concept of fabulation to understand how this art form might introduce the fictional into reality and, in so doing, help rupture everyday subjectivity.

The following section starts with a justification of why I favour SA over psychoanalysis. This entire problem turns on how the imagination should be conceived—either as a practice or as a phantasy. I then discuss how this decision impacts this research's chosen ethnographies. Next, I detail how this study's nomadic-posthumanist perspective holds the unique advantage of underscoring the presence of the nonhuman within this data. Then, in the latter half of this chapter, I explain how I

tackle this thesis's RP by distinguishing between three sets of lines or consistencies within its discourse.

Chapter 3 This map is the territory

These nomads chart their courses by strange stars, which might be luminous clusters of data in cyberspace, or perhaps hallucinations. (Bey, 2003, p. 105)

This chapter outlines how this study uses SA to re-imagine cosplay's imagination, not as a phantasy-based phenomenon but as a practice. This move is necessary because past research has disempowered fans by framing this hobby in negative psychoanalytic terms via a persistent recourse to desire qua lack. As such, this section insists that SA presents a radical alternative to this negating, Oedipalizing view of this otaku fandom, which reifies the imaginary cosplayer. To this end, this chapter pays considerable attention to how this pragmatics contrasts with psychoanalysis. Although the disparities with be discussed imminently, for now, note that the critical distinction between these approaches is that SA is non-interpretive. Thus, this research extends a non-representational take on cosplay's words and 'things,' whereby both are considered only in terms of their affects.

This all-inclusive stance on bodies as semiotic and material practices contrasts with previous studies which have concentrated on a cosplayer's ability to imitate source material. Domsch (2014), for instance, stressed how this subculture's practices are performatives and produce "representational properties like colors, forms, or gestures," which are subsequently "re-mediated through the physical presence of the performer" (p. 134). The price of Domsch's (2014) approach was that cosplays are overcoded via the power (pouvoir) of language to instil sameness through "signifying redundancies and subjective redundancies" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 156). Consequently, the directness of desire and its capacity to induce novelty was lost entirely.

Thus, this study's approach differs in two fundamental respects from previous research. Firstly, language is conceived as one body amongst others, all of which are sourced from matter or "*particles-signs*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 81). That way,

other bodies warrant equal consideration. Secondly, by rejecting a psychoanalytic approach—such as Tamaki's (2011) wholly Lacanian perspective—I uphold a fully affirmative take on cosplay becomings, which emphasises inventiveness rather than "a bare, brute repetition (repetition of the Same)" (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 16). So, rather than dismiss this hobby as an imaginary "fetish" or as representative of an "abject" cosplayer's "eternal adolescence" (Lunning, 2022, p. 126), this thesis propagates an ethical, non-judgemental stance to empower this otaku subculture.

The beginning of this chapter justifies this thesis's choice of SA over psychoanalysis and explains how this informs its ethnographies. Then, in the following subsection, I outline how this study's posthumanist positioning stems from this paradigm's willingness to explore symbiotic possibilities. And in the second half of this chapter, I describe how I map this subculture's bodies via recourse to their horizontal and vertical vectors (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 102–103) and three syntheses of "desiring-production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 15).

3.1   From the Oedipal theatre to the factory floor

We have the unconscious we deserve! (Guattari, 2011, p. 9)

This subsection argues that, if anything, past research has repressed cosplay's desiring-production by applying Lacanian psychoanalysis to disempowering 'sad' (in a Spinozist sense) ends (e.g., Lunning, 2011; Tamaki, 2011). This section thereby outlines the reasoning behind this study's preference for SA. Essentially, this decision pivots on the notion that psychoanalysis reneged on its early promise to such an extent that its sole concern is with quelling desire rather than maximising it: "A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world." (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 12). Put simply, this study favours SA because it chooses freedom.

But before I discuss how SA differs from psychoanalysis, it is vital to note from the outset that the former phenomenon constitutes a theoretical and practical "metamodelisation" that takes apart and rebuilds through a "diversity of modelising systems" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 22). Thus, this study does not use SA for its data collection. Furthermore, this pragmatics is not a research methodology because it resists standardization tout court. Instead, this cartographic exercise serves an entirely practical purpose—to identify how cosplay's bodies might affect one another in joyous ways (RP). To be exact, the main objective of this research is to chart this fandom's "*lines of deterritorialization*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 587) as they traverse and mutate otaku multiplicities and thus take them—and us—to hitherto unknown places. At this point, it is essential to realise that this thesis forms a block with these relations to document any revolutionary movements.

So, instead of stymying this performance art's 'likes' via a psychoanalytically informed approach—which would only trap cosplay's desires within Butler's (1990) signifying "heterosexual matrix" (p. 32)—I pinpoint its escape routes. These exits provide respite from the limits of (our all too human) 'civilization,' which proponents of the Lacanian 'tradition' call "the big Other (the symbolic order)" (Žižek, 2008b, p. 44). However, I insist that this study's nomadic-posthumanist ethos is not antihuman. Rather, it posits that because cosplay's desires have neither subject nor object, its becomings are fundamentally nonhuman in origin. As such, I consider how this hobby's practices forge rhizomatic collaborations in the broadest possible sense: "Becoming is amnesic, prehistorical, aniconic, and sterile: it is difference in practice" (Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 159). Henceforth, the rest of this subsection justifies my decision to schizoanalyse the data. To do this, I shall discuss how Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) critique of psychoanalysis inform this study's materialist pragmatics and chosen ethnographies.

For Deleuze and Guattari (2013a), psychoanalysis's first oversight lies in its inability to recognise that social factors exist before a child enters the world. Hence, it is

the "paranoiac father" who "Oedipalizes the son" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 315), and never vice versa. This position resonates with the following quote by the anti-psychiatrist David Cooper (1974): "The child in fact is primarily taught not how to survive in society but how to submit to it" (p. 27). Hence, psychoanalysis—including the research it inspires—makes spurious transcendent claims about non-existent subjects by situating every individual within the same universalizing "Oedipal, neurotic" triangle: "daddy-mommy-me" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 36). For Guattari (2006), psychoanalysis's "oedipal-narcissistic machines" are reterritorializations upon primary identification: "the artifice of filiation" (p. 54). (Here, it is essential to understand that filiation pertains to both the family itself and its image: "both the external sense (the family 'out there') and the internal sense (the family in our heads)" (Cooper, 1974, p. 18)). Consequently, psychoanalysis completely disregards what SA and this study prioritise—the nonhuman desiring-machines of the "molecular order" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 327). Nevertheless, the real problem does not concern "the sexual nature of desiring-machines, but with the family nature of this sexuality" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 61). Ultimately, Guattari (2006), a psychoanalyst, regards this perspective as inherently flawed because "the other is a machine, not mommy-daddy!" (p. 34).

Due to this first criticism, this study will not generate an interpretive family-based model (of thought). Instead, this research identifies those cosplaying practices that might help resist this appetite for repression. Put differently, I am interested in how this art form's bodies might help "build a new form of subjectivity that no longer relies on the individual and the conjugal family" (Guattari, 2015, p. 369). This schizoanalytic perspective thereby replaces psychoanalysis's family "tree or root" image with the endless open-ended interconnectivity of the "rhizome" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 6). Henceforth, I avoid any depictions of cosplay as an otaku 'family' unit. Instead, I insist that its model for reproduction (which I subsume under production) is contagious

alliance: "A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 279). As a result of this claim, the cosplaying unconscious is simultaneously orphaned and empowered.

It follows that this SA concentrates solely on this fandom's context-bound desiring-machines. (This thesis defines 'context' using Rancière's (2004) notion of "'aesthetic practices'," which refers to "forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community" (p. 13).) In turn, I resist any temptation to judge cosplaying in terms of the ever-predictable Oedipal triangle or any other "abstract universals" (Guattari, 2011, p. 12). As such, this research stands against psychoanalysis's malignant rhetoric that "mommy-daddy-me" is constitutive of a psychopathological "alliance programmed once and for all" (Guattari, 2006, p. 94). Instead, this study espouses a progressive view of the unconscious, one "liberated from familial shackles, turned more towards actual praxis than towards fixations on, and regressions to, the past" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 12). For this reason, this research does not take a hermeneutical approach to its data: "Experiment, never interpret. Make programmes, never make phantasms" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 48). That said, I am not implying that the family is necessarily a noxious entity. On the contrary, I call for a re-appropriation of the imaginary superego so that it might function as "a sort of social shield, burglar alarm and sub-machine gun" (Cooper, 1974, p. 19). In other words, a Deleuzo-Guattarian BwO. Perhaps, cosplaying might serve this liberatory end?

Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) second criticism of psychoanalysis accuses this practice of propagating an "unrepentant familalism" that confines desire "with the movement of regression or progression" (p. 316). If anything, these philosophers object to psychoanalysis's unidirectional causal model, whereby early childhood traumas (i.e., the Oedipus complex) manifest as adult behaviours. With this criticism in mind, I do not treat this study's discourse symbolically because I wish to avoid the Oedipal myth and

its disempowering effects. Put differently, I refuse to neuroticise cosplay by reading its practices through psychoanalytic acts of "interpretance" (Guattari, 2011, p. 57). (Contrast this approach with the Lacanian psychoanalyst Saitō Tamaki's (2011) brazen reference to "the psychopathology of the otaku" (p. 9).) Such an approach would only quash cosplay's desire and inculcate a transcendent, castrating guilt complex based solely on a 'subject's' unconscious desire for maternal incest: "the restricted code of Oedipus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 63).

However, there is more at stake here because if I were to overcode this subculture through this fiction, I would be conspiring with psychoanalysis and its bedfellow capitalism. This is because psychoanalysis helps capitalism axiomatize by acting as its internal limit: "*It is in one and the same movement that the repressive social production is replaced by the repressing family, and that the latter offers a displaced image of desiring-production that represents the repressed as incestuous familial drives*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 143). But whereas capitalism decodes and deterritorializes desire fiscally, psychoanalysis reinforces psychosocial debts via its reterritorializing recourse to "the dreams and fantasies of private man" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 347). And as Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) stress, the analysand becomes embroiled in "a situation of economic dependence that has become unbearable for desire, or full of conflicts for the investment of desire" (p. 405).

Voilà— psychoanalysis acts as another "mechanism for the absorption of surplus value" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 356). Here, one sees how psychoanalysis does much more than enforce endless filiation because it also imprisons individuals within "the desire time of consuming production (dream time)" (Guattari, 2006, p. 62). And whilst I cannot offer any criticism of capitalism on ideological grounds—given my advocacy of SA—what I can do is find ways that aesthetics might help avoid it. In doing so, I refrain from re-domesticating cosplaying subjectivities by portraying fans as the

backward- and inward-looking privatized subjects required for capitalism's "internal payment" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 405).

Due to its wholly affirmative remit, this study repudiates psychoanalysis to focus instead on how bodies might be vitalised by an increase in their "revolutionary force (*puissance*)" (p. 317). However, this emphasis on cosplay as an active force is motivated not by confirmation bias but rather by a desire to prevent the reproduction of psychoanalysis's seemingly never-ending "parade" of sad Bodies without Organs (BwOs): "Emptied bodies instead of full ones" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 175). In turn, attention turns to this hobby as a potentially joyous but not necessarily happy experience: "Joy comprehends despair running through an end-point of pain into joy again" (Cooper, 1974, p. 54).

For this reason, this research's approach contrasts markedly with the inherent pessimism of psychoanalytically informed research (e.g., Lunning, 2011; Tamaki, 2011). Indeed, the application of this theoretical framework to alienating ends does nothing but reaffirm the misimpression that the unconscious serves as a "private theatre," an offshoot of "the classical order of representation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 71). In comparison, this study ditches this hindersome Oedipalizing lens for two reasons. Firstly, because psychoanalysis only sees "bare repetition," it is blind to the new: "Freud interprets the death instinct as a tendency to return to the state of inanimate matter, one which upholds the model of a wholly physical or material repetition" (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 17). Secondly, SA offers a resolutely creative depiction of the cosplaying unconscious as a desiring-production line for sensation: "a factory, a workshop" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 71). Topical here is Deleuze's (1995a) "transcendental empiricism," which attempts to forge a "science of the sensible" via the identification of aestheticized, non-representational ways "to become experience" (p. 56). Thus, this study shall draw upon transcendental empiricism to examine how this performance art functions as "an intense feeling of transition, states of pure, naked intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 30).

Taken in this context, although such movement connotes events (i.e., bodies), I insist that it does not require a cosplayer.

Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) third and final issue with psychoanalysis pertains to its contention that the unconscious possesses and communicates a 'voice' that can only be deciphered by psychoanalysis. On the contrary, they insist that "the familial investment is only a dependence or an application of the unconscious investments of the social field" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 317). Hence, the clinical construction of a 'private' family image alongside the meaning-making, phantasy-filled 'subject' constitutes nothing but desires' "bankruptcy or its abnegation: an unconscious that no longer produces, but is content to *believe*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 337).

Because of this criticism, this study rejects psychoanalysis's representational view of the unconscious and instead condones Guattari's (2006) position: "the *unconscious doesn't speak*, or discuss things. It works in its own way, it fools around, doodles. It doesn't care! *The unconscious is not "structured like a language."* It's annoying, but it's true!" (p. 186). For this reason, I jettison psychoanalysis's logocentric lens because it condemns desire "to mere fantasy production, production of expression" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 71). However, I must point out that Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) criticisms of psychoanalysis are far too indiscriminate. For example, I submit that the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's (2005) thinking is at least implicitly sympathetic to their distaste for phantasy: "creative playing is allied to dreaming and to living but essentially does *not* belong to fantasying" (p. 42).

Referring back to Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) second criticism of psychoanalysis, this study moves away from any psychologising interpretations that derive from "Oedipal triangulation" (p. 25). As such, this research differs noticeably from previous studies, which subscribed to a subject-oriented view of this fandom that put the cosplayer pride of place. For instance, Lamerichs (2011) and Langsford (2016) used participant observations to draw upon their experiences as performers. Other studies

have favoured a case study approach (e.g., Leng, 2013; Helgesen, 2015). However, I argue that these ethnographies are too closely aligned with psychoanalysis's focus on 'private' subjects or "oedipal personoids" (Guattari, 2006, p. 57). In sum, these subject-focused methodologies miss the production of this fandom's subjectivities by concentrating on "a mere residuum" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 29).

Thus, this study chooses ethnomethodologies that more readily permit consideration of cosplay's bodily acts (RP). For instance, I adopt "non-participant observation" (Bryman, 2012, p. 273) to collect discourse from IG and TB (2018), respectively. In this way, I avoid making this research 'about me' (and my white male ego). This research decision also reflects this study's pragmatic emphasis on cosplay as an unconscious process of assemblage and not a conscious subject-based activity. Furthermore, by using non-participant observation, I reduce the risk of accidentally inducing "'acquiescence' (also known as the 'yeasaying' and 'naysaying' effect)" (Bryman, 2012, p. 227). For example, if I were to attend TB (2018) in cosplay dress, I might invalidate the interview data by inducing demand characteristics.

In toto, this research's refusal to interpret cosplay's desires constitutes a Deleuzo-Guattarian ethics instead of the instantiation of a moral compass. This perspective proffers "a particular repertoire of choices" for fans of this performance art rather than a prescribed "*form* of acting" (Sontag, 2009, p. 24). Hence, the emphasis turns toward "immanent evaluation, instead of judgement as transcendent value: "'I love or I hate' instead of 'I judge'" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 141). Essentially, this thesis follows Sontag (2009) in regarding interpretation as nothing but the spoiler of art: "the compliment that mediocrity pays to genius" (p. 9). Indeed, Deleuze and Parnet (1987) describe how meaning and "interpretosis" are "the two diseases of the earth, the pair of despot and priest" (p. 47). This study's ethos thereby refuses to ruin cosplay by interpreting it. In turn, it espouses an ethics which rebukes psychoanalysis's continued repression of mind and body: "Oedipus and castration are no more than reactional

formations, resistance, blockages, and armorings whose destruction can't come fast enough" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 358). With this last point in mind, this research thereby gives cosplay the unconscious it deserves.

3.2   Alter-ing perception: Cosplaying otherness

Cosplay, inhabited as it is by otaku fans of fictional and frequently cute characters from anime, manga, and games, is another form of civic reterritorialization. (Lunning, 2022, p. 113)

This subsection builds on this thesis's argument that psychoanalytic frameworks are unsuitable for documenting cosplay's desire because their entire focus is on meaning-making and identity—and, therefore, the face. Consequently, psychoanalysis installs an anthropocentric hierarchy whereby humans are placed above other species due to their inevitable entry into language or "the symbolic" (Lacan, 2016, p. 88). In comparison, SA presents a better choice from this study's posthumanist perspective because it recognises that language is just one affect or sign. In sum, this pragmatics is entirely suited to charting this art form's desires because it refrains from planting any linguistically grounded trees.

This research's nomadic-posthumanist perspective helps avoid a narrow focus on human meaning-making and identity by giving precedence to affects or "non-interpretative semiotics" over psychoanalysis's representational "semiologies of resonance and signification" (Guattari, 2011, p. 20). (Recall how the face qua abstract machine is the sine qua non nemesis of cosplay affects.) Moreover, this thesis's decision to schizoanalyse cosplay from a posthumanist perspective provides the wherewithal to account for the role of "techno-others" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 103). To this end, this study not only maps this subculture's codes or "expression," but it also pays attention to its

use of technology or "content" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 50). In doing so, I subscribe to Braidotti's (2013) critical posthuman stance when approaching this topic by asking how such "hybrid and slightly schizoid social phenomena" can be turned "into points of resistance" (p. 119). However, a theoretical clarification is essential here because this research does not concern 'points' within offline or online networks. Instead, its exclusive focus is on the lines making up cosplay's multiplicities. In fact, N. Katherine Hayles (2016) notes that it is a conceptual error to mistake the Internet for a network when it is, in fact, an assemblage "with boundaries fluctuating as conditions and contexts change" (p. 33). (Although I insist on using assemblage as a verb, not a noun, this criticism still applies.)

Despite the growing influence of Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) notion of assemblage, this pragmatics requires updating for the contemporary digital age. To this end, I turn to Félix Guattari's (2000) *The Three Ecologies*. Here, Guattari (2000) acknowledges the indivisibility of culture and nature whilst simultaneously advocating a transversal approach to better "comprehend the interactions between eco-systems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference" (p. 43). This positioning is essential in recognizing how fan subjectivities will inevitably emerge via an arbitrary combination of environmental (i.e., 'eco-systems'), collective (i.e., 'the social'), and psychic components (i.e., 'individual Universes of reference'). Hence, this research draws on Guattari's (2000) "ecosophical" (p. 33) perspective by considering these overlapping elements. That said, I hold that this triadic thinking now needs expanding to incorporate the influence of the "mechanosphere" (Guattari, 2000, p. 43). This move is needed because the repetitions of this dimension might impact these other ecologies and, in turn, give rise to a technics that can "inform us" (Johns, 2017, p. 8). This possibility has historical precedence when one considers how an in-flux of media-inspired fandom transmogrified the Akihabara district of Tokyo during the 1990s: "as if

the contents of an *otaku's* bedroom have spilled out into an entire neighborhood of Tokyo" (Ka'ichiro, 2014, p. 16).

Although this research condones a positive re-purposing of technological machines (including social media), it acknowledges that the current zeitgeist is one of "*machinic enslavement* and *social subjection*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 531). With the former, individuals come "under the control and direction of a higher unity," but with the latter, they are (ostensibly) liberated by being transformed into "a worker, a user" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 531). Indeed, Rahebi (2017) describes how "infinitely accelerated cyber-capitalism" has rendered Internet users de facto "zombies" (p. 311). In this respect, one might say that Haraway's (1991) observation that "the informatics of domination" is consolidated via "scary new networks" (p. 161) has come to pass. For example, Ellis, Tucker and Harper (2013) reported that online "atmospheres of surveillance can be thought of as producing underlying embodied tensions due to their affective impacts upon a multitude of everyday phenomena" (p. 729). To be sure, today's computerized assemblages have deterritorialized older forms (e.g., writing) and become "machinocentric" because their functioning primarily feeds off unconscious "nonhuman procedures and memories" (Guattari, 2013, p. 20). It follows that contemporary capitalism operates simultaneously at the level of language and affect (Lazzarato, 2006). However, rather than such insights empowering individuals and leading to action, the effect is often (unwittingly) the inverse.

Given this last point, this study examines how online cosplaying might help avoid machinic enslavement and social subjection rather than bolster such repression. To this end, this research draws on Hayles's (2016) cybernetic thinking to emphasise how human and technological bodies operate as "multiple feedback loops" (p. 45). As such, this research considers how technics might circulate online cosplaying subjectivities, which are contrary to repression. And because subjectivity is inherently nomadic, I argue that with cosplay and social media, "unnatural participations" (Deleuze & Guattari,

2013b, p. 282) remain a possibility. Hence, this research maps how this subculture's practices might re-appropriate technical machines and occupy "a position of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 432).

In short, rather than continually moaning about machinic enslavement, the point is to do something: "To agitate is to act. We could care less about words; we want actions" (Guattari, 2015, p. 362). For this reason, this research applies an actively nihilistic stance to consider how human–nonhuman collaborations might engender "an increase in mental power" (Nietzsche, 2017, p. 24). Given the context, I insist that such an empowering move will only occur via a continual aesthetic repurposing of social media. At the same time, this affirmative stance reduces the risk of technophobia with its accompanying "defensive reflexes, backward-looking nervous twitches" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 97). This study thereby underscores how fan bodies might weaponize technological bodies, thereby increasing their own affective power (puissance) (RP). Indeed, Shore (2017) makes a salient point: "In the age of the interactive web, the world calls out to be customized; it invites our participation and alteration" (p. 137). And if one takes reality for what it is—a continual construction—giving up is what makes us 'zombies,' not using the internet.

That said, in contrast to Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) dismissive treatment of "technical machines" as "merely an index of a general form of social production" (p. 46), this research grants cosplay gadgets their own status as singularities so to avoid the imposition of this unnecessary binary. To this end, this thesis holds that this subculture's technological gizmos will undergo their own "ontogenesis" during the data collection, thus marking the emergence of a "technical individual entity" (Simondon, 2017, pp. 20–21). In other words, these gizmos are events that enter "Being" (qua becoming) but only through their usage: "*Readiness-to-hand is the way in which entities as they are 'in themselves' are defined ontologico-categorially*" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 101). Although,

like humans, technologies do nothing by themselves. (This study is unconcerned with the workings of these gadgets because its sole focus is on fluxes of desire.)

This thesis accepts that the speed of technologically guided affects has increased exponentially within the digital era. Stratton (2000) posits the idea of "electronic hyper-deterritorialization" to describe how internet-driven interconnectivity institutes "a further spatial fix to capitalism's globalization" (p. 724). Further, Hess (2015) ably depicts the impact of this phenomenon on contemporary life: "Users now exist in an always-on and always-connected world that seamlessly moves in an online and offline hybridity, speaking the multiple languages and embodying the various subjectivities between them" (p. 1629). In this respect, this research follows this observation to highlight how these rapid movements might enhance cosplay's creative outpourings. In doing so, this study condones Bateson's (1972) cybernetic perspective: "What "thinks" and engages in "trial and error" is the man *plus* the computer *plus* the environment. And the lines between man, computer, and environment are purely artificial, fictitious lines" (p. 483).

This research's positive stance on technology enshrines Reza Negarestani's (2008) paradoxical postulation that "any instrument of repression encompasses a path to the outside, albeit involuntarily or indirectly" (p. 242). Applied to this topic, not only does this research determine the constitution of otaku assemblages, but it also charts their arbitrary interfacing via "some random movement of trial and error" (Bateson, 1979, p. 136). (Precisely, these are cosplay's lines of deterritorialization). For this reason, I argue that (capitalistic) time qua desire might itself become "decartelized" so that a fan might acquire the means to "set his or her own" (Ballard, 1993, p. 57). Relevant here is Deleuze's (1990a) notion of "*counter-actualization*" (p. 150), a phenomenon that refers to how actors do not embody characters but rather pre-individual, impersonal themes that exist outside chronological time. So, rather than concentrating on this fandom's actual bodies, this study will focus on the possibilities that these performances leave

behind for future experiences. Indeed, Lacan (2007b) remarks: "In an act, of whatever kind, it is what escapes it that is important" (p. 58).

Considering the above, this thesis holds that cosplaying bodies might function as so many incorporeal events. And because these encounters demand human and nonhuman participants, this ardently flat onto-epistemological stance dissolves the tacitly assumed binary between Man and machine—a dangerous schism that has thus far prevented humans from "introducing the technical being into culture" (Simondon, 2017, p. 21). The reverse also happens to be true: "We humans contain nonhuman symbionts as part of the way we are human; we couldn't live without them. We are not human all the way through" (Morton, 2021, p. 23). In turn, this paradigm accentuates how cosplaying might use technologies as affects and transmogrify themselves into undoubtedly strange "packs, or multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 290). However, this study's reference to the figure of the posthuman as so many possibilities for subjectivity does not condone the obliteration of the self—as it does in Nick Land's (2011) pro-genocidal, accelerationist position. This research vehemently rejects this stance because "any serious attempt for total eradication of identity intrinsically excludes the space of xeno-excitations and ends up in autistic nihilism" (Negarestani, 2018, p. 119). Rather, this study welcomes performance art as a mode for questioning the human–nonhuman dichotomy and "other reductive binaries … self/other, inside/outside" (Bell, 2002, p. 151).

Essentially, this research's symbiosis of SA and posthumanism is a theoretical and practical decision grounded on three central metaphysical claims. Firstly, this perspective refutes approaches that promote "human exceptionalism" (Radomska, Mehrabi & Lykke, 2020, p. 89). This is because anthropocentric, "Humanist" approaches give priority to the experiences of white, heterosexual, male 'subjects' from the West: "This flattering self-image of 'Man' is as problematic as it is partial in that it promotes a self-centred attitude" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 143). Instead, this study's ethical and pluralistic

ethos resonates with posthumanism's recognition that multiplicities invariably comprise nonhumans: "There is no gravitational field or social assemblage composed solely of humans" (Bryant, 2014, p. 206). Furthermore, because affects are not human (Massumi, 2002, p. 238), I submit that cosplay subjectivities are quintessentially posthuman hybrids because they contain alien particles and impart historically derived, "transcendental" ideas as to what it is to be (a) "Human" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 66). Ergo, this research places this subculture's inorganic, nonhuman participants—technological gadgets—on the same continuum of desire: "the essential reality of man and nature" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 15).

Here, I must underscore how this thesis rejects so-called 'transhumanist' perspectives due to their "fetishization of technology and cyborgism, which overvalue human life as a concept over lived realities of all earth occupants" (MacCormack, 2018, p. 346). In contrast, this study's horizontal ontological positioning makes "no distinction between the types of things that exist but treats them all equally" (Bogost, 2012, p. 17). In fact, the BwO is arguably a posthuman concept because it "refers indistinguishably to human, animal, textual, sociocultural, and physical bodies" (Grosz, 1994, p. 168). Pisters (2018) agrees: "In acknowledging our deep and ever-changing transversal connections to all other entities on the earth, the body without organs proposes indeed that we have always been posthuman" (p. 76).

Secondly, this nomadic-posthumanist approach grants cosplaying agency, given that fan subjectivities are the by-products of assemblage: "relational, interactive, a matter of making connections, mutating and evolving, generating new codes and patterns from fragments of the old" (Rutsky, 1999, p. 157). To be clear, in this thesis, agency does not refer to a thinking Cartesian subject but how assembly imparts intentionality. This subculture's freedoms are thereby conceived as "*distributed*" practices or bodies that encompass "many distinct machines, rather than a single machine" (Bryant, 2014, p. 223). Note also how this same paradigm helps identify

examples whereby this art form's bodily experiments might trigger divergent "human-machine temporalities" (Burrows & O'Sullivan, 2019, p. 438). As such, this study can assess the extent to which such ruptures might forge self-organising groups known as "subject-groups" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 397) (RSP #3).

Lastly, it is essential to note that this open-ended processual perspective does not present a utopian belief in the possibility of progress. This is because the production of fan subjectivities has neither a beginning nor an end. Instead, this research proffers its nomadic-posthumanist framework as a tool for propagating thinking qua "continuous revolution" (Cooper, 1974, p. 123). In this way, this paradigm follows William James's (2009) pragmatics, whereby theories act as "*instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest*" (p. 72). Indeed, as Bourriaud (2006) explains, aesthetics invariably changes over time: "We no longer try to make progress thanks to conflict and clashes, but by discovering new assemblages, possible relations between distinct units, and by building alliances between different partners" (p. 166). In essence, I seek to problematise lazy 'understandings' of this fandom: "the opinions of a common sense" (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 200). As such, this thesis acts as a vehicle to provoke further thinking regards this phenomenon by highlighting "forms of relationality that span the old divide between 'mind and matter' or 'virtual and material'" (Brians, 2011, p. 139). (One might also insert 'modernity' and 'postmodernity' here.) For this reason, the becomings of "technical cognizers" (Hayles, 2016, p. 34) are vitally important when considering how this subculture constructs its collective assemblages of enunciation. More than anything, this nuanced onto-epistemological perspective brandishes its own deterritorializing edge, given how it incorporates the idea that there is always an "otherness that is part of us" (Rutsky, 1999, p. 21). Cosplay's multiplicities are no exception.

3.3   Destroy to create: The moe unconscious

If identification is a nomination, a designation, then simulation is the writing corresponding to it, a writing that is strangely polyvocal, flush with the real. It carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced by the desiring-machine. The point where the copy ceases to be a copy in order to become the Real *and its artifice.* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 107)

Once I gather data, I will adopt a schizoanalytic approach because this "meta-modelling" (Guattari, 2013, p. 45) provides the requisite tools for examining this fandom's affects. This decision stems from a practical perspective, given that this study is not concerned with interpreting what cosplaying (ostensibly) means. Here, my interest concerns how this subculture might function as a self-organising body or "autopoietic machine" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 93). The following maxim summarises this study's primary schizoanalytic objective: destroy to create. In this respect, one sees how this SA is essentially Nietzschean because it constitutes a questioning, active nihilism (as previously defined). Thus, this research deploys pragmatics to illuminate dissensus within this performance art. The point is to empower these fans and, in turn, highlight "their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, and to the present" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 110).

As such, this research diagrams how cosplay might provide an alternative to Oedipus by taking apart "the normal ego" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 411). To achieve this feat, I will first identify its 'likes' or "schizophrenic machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 12) (RSP #1). Next, I shall map the horizontal axis of these multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 102). This task distinguishes between "formed matters" or "*content*" and "functional structures" or "*expression*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 50). Whereas the former concerns "nondiscursive multiplicities," the latter pertains to "discursive multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 77). Here, one

sees how one of the primary advantages of using SA is that it necessarily considers cosplay's material and immaterial bodies—something that social constructionism simply cannot entertain. Indeed, one of Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) chief bugbears with psychoanalysis is that it fails to acknowledge that "a regime of signs is much more than a language" (p. 73).

The ramification of this critique means that cosplay's use of language is considered as only one affect amongst many others. Hence, I shall ascertain how discourse might serve as a body that puts its collective assemblages of enunciation into "continuous variation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 109). In other words, I will identify instances that confound rational logic and challenge consensual reality through "asignifying rupture" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 8). To this end, I shall enquire as to how this art form might formulate "a new language" in and through its performances: "a language that does not only have to be spoken and written" (Cooper, 1974, p. 31).

Indeed, Laura Cull's (2012) philosophy of theatre and performance suggests an immanent (or experiential) approach to practice which emphasises the possibilities opened via recourse to infinite pluralities—nature and nurture, mind and body, etc.—as they intermingle upon a single, flat plane of existence. To be sure, Cull's (2012) approach is vehemently pragmatic because it attempts to pinpoint those intensities that emanate from the "experience of immanence itself" (p. 13). Similarly, Jan Suk (2021) links theatrical performance to the lived experiences of performers and spectators alike, which, although "real," are based upon simulation: "a more-or-less staged or illusory world presented on stage" (p. 1). In contrast with Cull (2012), Suk (2021) advocates a broader application of Deleuzian concepts to the theatre, particularly the potentiality of the event or "haecceity" (p. 5). Even though Cull's (2012) and Suk's (2021) musings address theatre-based performance, their thinking shares this research's concern with how individuals and groups might organise themselves and their bodies in empowering ways. Moreover, Cull's (2012) approach is also (arguably) posthumanist, given that it

recognises that human and nonhuman bodies are affects and, as such, are not "different in kind" (p. 110). For this reason, I argue that this thesis aligns with Cull's (2012) stance rather than Suk's (2021), given that it emphasises cosplay as a practice rather than the extent to which it mirrors any philosophy (Deleuzian or otherwise). So, although this broader debate impinges on the subject matter documented herein, its scope is beyond this thesis's remit. That said, it would be remiss to overlook how Suk's (2021) research concerned a UK-based experimental theatre troupe—*Forced Entertainment*—whose performances regularly incorporated "rule-based theatre-making dramaturgy" (p. 2). Similarly, cosplay might feature choreography within its online–offline practices. Nevertheless, I insist that the medium of theatre fundamentally differs from cosplay because, whereas the former is institutionally structured, the latter is ultimately a fan-led hobby.

Precisely, this study will chart the ways in which otaku bodies talk through sensation. The crux of this argument is that cosplay is a problem concerning the production of sensory bodies, or BwOs, as opposed to language-based identities. The following quote from Hiroki (2014) corroborates this claim: "The original work and whatever narrative it might have had matters less than fans' response to the characters" (p. 174). Indeed, previous research has highlighted how cosplaying could trigger affects via aesthetics such as "*kawaii*" (Gn, 2011, p. 584), genre references to "Japanese otaku (hardcore nerd, geek) practice" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 3), or even ideas from subgenres like "*Slash*" (Lunning, 2011, p. 80). The last of these, Lunning (2011) described as "a fan-fiction category that places the lead characters—usually male heterosexual shōnen characters—into same-sex relationships" (p. 80). A famous example of "slash fiction" involves a fictional romance between *Star Trek*'s "Kirk/Spock" (Brenner & Wildsmith, 2011, p. 91). (Note that "*Femslash*" (Brenner & Wildsmith, 2011, p. 91) provides the female equivalent and that this fiction takes its name from the "/" symbol, not the slasher horror film genre.) In sum, I am interested in how such diverse

expressions might manifest themselves in unpredictable ways to engender standalone collective assemblages for fan enunciations.

In view of the above, this research considers how each cosplaying machine contains a set of codes that suggest neither a subject nor an object but correspond to a specific fandom territory. At this point, it is worth reiterating how this fandom's expressive codes—for instance, "subgenres" like "mecha, cyborg, furry, and Lolita" (Winge, 2016, p. 70)—will unalterably relate to "acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 103). What this means is that through such labelling, cosplay's concrete bodies will inevitably be linguistically overcoded, thus rendering any division from expression mute: "there is no real distinction between form and substance, only a mental and modal distinction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 51). In other words, content and expression are always mixed because they emanate from the same energy or quanta: "A plane of consistency peopled by anonymous matter, by infinite bits of impalpable matter entering into varying connections" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 298). This observation is evident when Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) explain how embodiment occurs: "the first signs are the territorial signs that plant their flags in bodies (p. 170). From an empirical perspective, the key thing to remember is that "each articulation has a code *and* a territoriality" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 47).

In mapping a cosplaying assemblage's horizontal vector, my concern is with a process Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) call "*double articulation*" (p. 47). Briefly, the first articulation involves substances being arranged per "a statistical order of connections and successions (*forms*)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 47), with the second reversing this movement with forms effectuated and stabilized as substances. For instance, with human bodies (including otaku ones), "molecular" protein fibres become synthesised by "molar mechanisms" to form "organs" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 48). However, there is nothing inevitably human about the outcome of this folding, which always holds

the potential for "aberrant parts of communication—Monsters" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 54–55). And given the sheer arbitrariness of this process, I make no prior assumptions about whether this performance art is primarily a question of expression or content. In this respect, this study highlights how content is (literally) missing in action from Butler's (1993) idealist slant on 'bodies.' As such, otaku becomings might not only liberate us from gendered identities (amongst others) but also hit back at capitalism's "linear causality and the pressure of circumstances and significations which besiege us" (Guattari, 1995a p. 29).

To be sure, everything rests on the context at hand and its arrangement. Jacques Rancière (2004) calls this phenomenon "the distribution of the sensible" and defines this as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it" (p. 12). In short, the aesthetic refrain. To this end, I will chart cosplay's unique assembly of corporeal and incorporeal elements as they relate to "the local recomposition" of its "existential Territories" (Guattari, 2013, p. 9). (Note that whilst Study 1 maps cosplaying on IG, Study 2 does likewise at TB (2018).)

Critically, the key to deciphering a cosplay's body's capacity to affect itself and others (RP) lies in the balance of semiotic and material traits because these elements serve as indices of regimes: either desiring-production or social production. Bluntly, if these performance art assemblages are to gain agency, they must "reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 6). If this occurs, these multiplicities can execute a diagram and release desire from its human organic shell (i.e., the organism). (This point echoes Deleuze's (2017) description of how William S. Burroughs' writing exemplifies the "effort of the body to escape through a point or through a hole that forms a part of itself or its surroundings" (p. 12)). In this regard, one sees how SA permits in-

depth consideration of how cosplay's heterogeneous practices might combine to form "machinic rhizomes" (Guattari, 2011, p. 102).

This study's holistic emphasis on the corporeal and the incorporeal aspects of cosplay chimes with Hills's (2014) comment that mimetic fandoms are "both immaterial and material, both authentic and inauthentic: it is a physical product that nonetheless relies on an absent or noncoincident media text for its meaning" (para. 2.13). That said, I digress from Hills's (2014) position in two ways. Firstly, I insist that cosplay is a question of usage (i.e., the BwO), not sense-making (at least, in the first instance). Secondly, any recourse to an authentic–inauthentic binary is spurious because it fails to comprehend how such roleplaying fandoms are, by definition, inauthentic because they copy copies ad infinitum and, indeed, that no 'authentic' original exists:

> The simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates *both original and copy, both model and reproduction*. Of the at least two divergent series internalized in the simulacrum, neither can be assigned as original or as copy. (Deleuze, 1983, p. 53)

Once I have ascertained the constitution of the assemblage's horizontal axis, I will consider its vertical side. Crucially, this vector relates to movements of territorialization and the all-important "*cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 103). (This movement applies equally to "the non-living or living, the social or technological domains" (Roden, 2015, p. 145).) Along this vector, this study shall identify three different "lines of segmentarity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 8) that produce stratification to a greater or lesser extent on the surface of the cosplaying BwO in question. In this respect, I jettison a focus on either subjects or objects and home in on the cosplaying body as a transition marking "an event" (Guattari, 2006, p. 54). To this end, this study will pinpoint becomings by differentiating between a trio of lines—"molar," "molecular," and "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 239)—as they relate to the assemblage at hand.

Molar lines are strong, ""modern" and rigid" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 246). For example, such striation occurs when an anime character becomes linguistically overcoded, as with Tamaki's (2011) concept of "the beautiful fighting girl" (p. 85). In contrast, molecular lines are weaker, ""primitive" and subtle" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 246). Here, an otaku's aesthetic preference exemplifies this latter type. Despite their difference, these lines are not opposites because these consistencies can morph into one another: "There is indeed a distinction between the two, but they are inseparable, they overlap, they are entangled" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 249). Nevertheless, everything about this study pivots on how these lines impact fan investments. On the one hand, molar lines operate according to "the paranoiac transcendental law," making one's identity seem like "a completed object"; whilst, on the other, molecular lines follow "the immanent schizo-law," that seeks to unravel "all the assemblages of the paranoiac law" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 59). Applied to cosplay, whereas the former sets this fandom's rules or habits, the latter breaks them. Thus, I submit that only this subculture's molecular lines induce becomings, given that they are "defined by the outside; by the abstract line, the line of flight according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 8).

However, this study cannot know in advance whether any of cosplay's lines will have either an empowering or a disempowering effect: "We cannot say that one of these three lines is bad and another good, by nature and necessarily" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 265). Hence, this thesis's pragmatics "stands for no particular results. It has no dogmas, and no doctrines save its method" (James, 2009, p. 73). Nonetheless, to directly address this study's RP, I must identify this hobby's lines of flight because only these "bifurcations" have the power to change "destinies" (DeLanda, 1992, p. 155). In other words, it is these lines of escape that mark "cutting edges of deterritorialization oriented toward the absolute" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 65).

This aspect of the analysis is particularly noteworthy when one considers O'Sullivan's (2016a) observation that artistic practices can usurp capitalism's production of subjectivity by messing with its linear coordinates: "Art involves the production of the new, but only when this is also a stuttering and stammering of the given" (p. 210). Furthermore, by identifying such consistencies, I will be able to ascertain cosplay's abstract machine or BwO. Crucially, these lines of flight signpost the event-time of smooth space through which this practice might forge its own non-violent "*war machine*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 451). To chart this possibility, I shall consider how cosplay's spacetimes—specifically an online social media profile and an offline comic con—provide its "existential Territories," which, in turn, generate its subjectivities or "incorporeal Universes" (Guattari, 2013, p. 26). Nevertheless, a paradox now emerges because any ruptures lie off the map, given how they defy both rational logic and conventional spacetime: "Lines of flight have no territory (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 50). And yet, their non-localisability will be located and added to this research map.

As I argued in the last chapter, when it comes to its affective force (puissance), cosplay's chief adversary is the face as the abstract machine. Thus, this study focuses on acts that "undo the face, unravel the face" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 23). In doing so, I will be able to ascertain this performance art's capacity to produce autonomous subject-groups or nomads (RSP #3). Here, I hold that this possibility rests on whether its multiplicities can expunge the face by putting deterritorializing "probe-heads (*têtes chercheuses*, guidance devices)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 222) into circulation. Thus, what cosplay might do with its faces is of paramount concern for the RP. To this end, I shall comb the discourse looking for practices whereby the face might be disassembled, camouflaged, or multiplied. Crucially, any such "deformations" not only unleash the power (puissance) of the body but also highlight "the *animal traits* of the head" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 15).

Overall, this research seeks to accentuate how this otaku subculture's small forces might fragment or re-populate its online–offline spacetimes via the process of destratification: "Where psychoanalysis says, "Stop, find your self again," we should say instead, "Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self. Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 175). Crucially, this study's applied accelerationist agenda does not imply the presence of a performer but rather a fluid subjectivity that continually emerges via assemblage: "there is no subject, but instead collective assemblages of enunciation; there are no specificities but instead populations, music-writing-sciences-audio-visual, with their relays, their echoes, their working interactions" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 28). As an aesthetic practice, cosplaying might thereby give rise to online-offline assemblages equipped with the power to re-calibrate 'given' reality by drag-ging "something incomprehensible into the world" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 440). For this reason, this research will map the refrains or "blocs of sensations" that compose this fandom's territories: "colors, postures, and sounds that sketch out a total work of art" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 184). In turn, this thesis shall determine those play acts that alter "the relations between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable" (Rancière, 2004, p. 65).

3.4   Breakdown as break-through

You know that creation is never pure. (Debord, 2006, p. 100)

As the title of this chapter makes clear, this thesis is not a representation of cosplay but rather participates or co-joins this plane in and through the research process itself. In effect, this study turns on the notion that data collection creates the otaku body qua event. Put differently, this performance art's affects are not readymade because they will be sourced in and through desiring-production itself, the "production of

production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 16). This non-representational map thereby constitutes what I choose to call a research rhizome, which concerns symbiosis between nonhuman heterogeneities: "*Flat multiplicities of n dimensions* are asignifying and asubjective. They are designated by indefinite articles, or rather by partitives (*some* couchgrass, *some* of a rhizome …)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 8). In this way, this thesis charts 'some' cosplay.

The ramification of this position is twofold. First, it means that the results of this study cannot be generalised outside the contexts in question. This point marks a strength when one considers that with reality, one is never dealing with "a single universal time but to a trans-spatial and trans-temporal *plane of consistency* which affects through them a relative coefficient of existence" (Guattari, 2011, p. 11). Second, this research appreciates that because multiplicities are never totalizable, any map is a speculative work in progress: "a 1:1 map cannot "control" its territory because it is virtually identical with its territory. It can only be used to *suggest*, in a sense *gesture towards*, certain features" (Bey, 2013, p. 101). Indeed, like aesthetics, research is collaborative and suggestive: "Art is not just for oneself, not just a marker of one's own understanding. It is also a map for those to follow after us" (Estés, 2008, p. 13).

To this end, I will consider how human fans and nonhuman technologies function alongside one another as "mediators" (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 126). The following quotation explains the import of this task when faced with creative endeavours:

Mediators are fundamental. Creation's all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people—for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists—but things too, even plants or animals, as in Castaneda. Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself,

and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own. (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 125)

Here, I insist on adding cosplay technologies to those multiplicities mentioned above. As Helgesen (2015) observes: "Throughout the 20th century, new technologies have been widely used by artists and performers to enhance, distort, or otherwise alter their products and performances" (p. 538). Significantly, I also bracket prosthetics (e.g., masks) and cosmetics (e.g., makeup) under this content.

To thicken the data, this SA will not only describe a cosplaying assemblages' vectors, but it will also consider a trio of "*passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 39). Thus, the rest of this chapter details what these syntheses entail and how they help this study address its RP and RSPs. (Although these syntheses will be described in turn, they coincide in an endless loop or circuit.) The entire point is to map the types of investments that underlie this performance art's desires.

For Deleuze and Guattari (2013a), the first synthesis of desiring-production is "the connective synthesis" (p. 89). Here, desire causes flows and partial objects to constantly make and break connections with one another, following the logic of ""and …" "and then …"" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 16). During this synthesis, a "paranoid machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 21) is produced when the binarizing desiring-machines clash with the BwO, which strives to arrange them in a set way. Essentially, this synthesis concerns the "*production of productions*, of actions and of passions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 14).

To address this synthesis, I shall scrutinise the data to pinpoint cosplay's online and offline 'likes' and 'do's'—both of which concern its desiring-machines (RSP #1). Instructively, Guattari (2009e) notes how desiring-machines are detectable via "their capacity for an unlimited number of connections, in every sense and in all directions" (p. 96). Moreover, I will look for cosplays whereby meaning has been deterritorialized

through abstraction, given that a "machine is not social unless it breaks into all its connective elements, which in turn become machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 81). However, such misfirings do not warrant interpretation. Instead, these cuts mark schizophrenic "break-through" (Laing, 1973, p. 110). In essence, this phase of the SA maps the machinations of this art form's desires: "What are your desiring-machines, what do you put into these machines, what is the output, how does it work, what are your nonhuman sexes?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 367).

What is at stake here is whether this performance art's desiring-machines operate "according to planes or consistency or of structuration" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 353). This is SA's "first positive task" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 367). However, to fully address this issue, I must peruse the discourse and detect legitimate and illegitimate uses of this synthesis (as per RSP #1). Whereas the former connotes "a partial and non-specific use," the latter relates to "a global and specific use" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 88). (Here, I submit that these contrasting deployments mirror Caillois's (2001) distinction between paidia as the "primary power of improvisation and joy" and ludus with its "taste for gratuitous difficulty" (p. 27).) Instructively, Harper and Savat (2016) apply this synthesis when examining computer game playing. In its legitimate guise, this practice is open and instils a carefree, 'anything goes' mindset, whilst in illegitimate usage, the opposite occurs when restrictions are introduced (Harper & Savat, 2016, p 92). In sum, I shall apply this logic to establish whether cosplay's desiring-machines conjoin in legitimate or illegitimate ways.

To facilitate this task, I turn toward Bakhtin's (2009) historical descriptions of medieval carnivals' "free designs," which featured an array of desires: "chimeras (fantastic forms combining human, animal, and vegetable elements), comic devils, jugglers performing acrobatic tricks, masquerade figures and parodical scenes" (p. 96). In schizoanalytic terms, these depictions of the grotesque present a legitimate connective synthesis because they merge not only human and nonhuman bodies but

also material and immaterial ones. Thus, I hold that it is no great leap of faith to approach cosplaying as a contemporary mode of being for producing such ad hoc concoctions via its otaku codes. Nevertheless, I must repeat that it is impossible to predict what the possible combinations of this performance art's machines might be (RP). Indeed, this problem can only be addressed once I determine how the multiplicities in question hang or hold together: "Everything here is a game of taking consistency" (Guattari, 2013, p. 66).

The next phase of this SA relates to the second synthesis—"the disjunctive synthesis of desiring-recording"—whereby divisions are produced in and through "the reign of the either/or" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 93–94). This phenomenon concerns RSP #2. Crucially, this step not only distinguishes how the abovementioned 'likes' are used but also determines the type of line recorded on the BwO. Here, the schizophrenic ""either … or … or"" law of the "miraculating machine" inscribes multiple "points of disjunction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 23). Hence, I must focus on disparities in this synthesis's inclusive and exclusive deployments. On the one hand, the inclusive use is immanent, "fully affirmative, nonrestrictive, inclusive," whilst, on the other, the exclusive use is transcendent, "restrictive, and negative" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 94). Note that only the former is schizophrenic because it necessitates decoding, as opposed to coding: "these signs are no longer signifying, given that they are under the order of the included disjunctions where *everything is possible*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 374). As such, this research charts acts that put language into "continuous variation" via a misuse that functions "as an "alternative continuity" that is virtual yet real" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 110). Besides, we already know that Western cosplay has positively re-appropriated the Japanese word "otaku," which (initially) meant "nerd or geek" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2013, para. 6).

Regards this synthesis—SA's "second thesis"—I must distinguish between performances that display "the unconscious libidinal investment of group or desire" and

those that exhibit "the preconscious investment of class or interest" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 391). At this point, one sees how libidinal energy is irrevocably collective because it concerns "the direct investments of masses, large aggregates, and social and organic fields" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 333). This idea takes us to SA's third proposition, and RSP #3, which calls for a critical distinction between cosplay's desires and their (Oedipal) enemy: the self-interest of "the personological field" (Guattari, 2006, p. 98).

Thus, I must examine the discourse to establish whether a performance ontologises a "subjugated group" motivated by Oedipus or a desire-led "subject-group" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 396). (I will treat a group as an individual but also an individual as a group: "Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 1).) In the former arrangement, a classist Weltanschauung is revealed, with such groups being exclusively defined by what they are not. Furthermore, these repressive groups concern "aggregates and persons" (Guattari, 2006, p. 420). For example, class identity is a molar line that emanates from molecular masses: "Attempts to distinguish mass from class effectively tend toward this limit: *the notion of mass is a molecular notion* operating according to a type of segmentation irreducible to the molar segmentarity of class" (p. 249). In the context of cosplay, any subjugated groups will be marked by a fixed sense of belonging or identity. Essentially, these collectives exhibit Nietzsche's (2006b) idea of "slave morality": a mindset that "says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside,' 'other,' 'non-self'" (p. 20).

On the other hand, subject-groups are a "molecular phenomenon" (Guattari, 2006, p. 419). These multiplicities operate machinically—not representationally— because their acts pivot around "partial objects and flows" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 321). (Intriguingly, Guattari (2009b) refers to these collectives as "groupuscules" (p. 66).) For this reason, any subject-groups within cosplay will be regarded as equivalent

to the previously mentioned nomadic war machines. In fact, this research decision is vital in helping identify the event-time of smooth space—"Aion" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 101) —as regards this hobby. However, distinguishing between these groups in cosplay will not be straightforward because subject-groups can be subjugated at the unconscious level by "group "superegoization," narcissism, and hierarchy" despite being "preconsciously revolutionary" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 396). In short, unlike subjugated ones, subject-groups have neither a cause nor a leader (RSP #3).

Because neither identity nor meaning applies to subject-groups, I posit that another way to identify them is to pick out roleplays that release "faciality traits" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 221). Hence, I shall apply this logic to the data to determine the motivation driving this fandom. In fact, in revealing such free-and-easy collectives, this research turns cosplay into a possible "line of escape or schizoid breakthrough" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 322). Contrast this stance with past research's portrayal of this art form as a trivial escapist distraction based on rote imitation (e.g., Peirson-Smith, 2019). Here, I argue that this study's pragmatic volte-face constitutes an essential re-framing of this phenomenon because, as Culp (2016) rightly asserts: "Escapism is the great betrayer of escape" (p. 47).

Concerning the final synthesis of desire, "the conjunctive synthesis of consumption" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 103), I shall detect the emergence of what I call posthuman subjectivities. Indeed, it is noteworthy that it is only amid this synthesis that an independent performance art machine will be produced. Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) refer to this phenomenon in colourful, Nietzschean terms as "the celibate machine of the Eternal Return" (p. 33). Precisely, the birth of this machine catalyses an auto-erotic self-enjoyment within "the subject," giving them the joyous impression that they existed all along: "So *that's* what it was!" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 29–33). (Note that this study rebukes this misleading recourse to 'the subject' and instead conceives of the individual (e.g., fan) as a multiplicity.) Such experiences have no history

and begin at "zero," with the individual being continually "born and reborn" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 33). Crucially, this final synthesis shatters any spurious division between natural and artificial phenomena because "there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 15). Indeed, Hakim Bey (2003) reassures us: "Everything in nature is perfectly real including consciousness, there's absolutely nothing to worry about" (p. 3).

This phase of the SA addresses RSP #4. Here, I shall distinguish between two kinds of libidinal investment corresponding to either the "paranoiac fascisizing (*fascisant*) *type*" or the "schizorevolutionary type" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 317). (To be sure, Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) conceive of 'fascism' as symptomatic of "the language of goals, of law, order, and reason" (p. 417).) With the former, cosplay might bring about a "segregative and biunivocal use" of this synthesis, whereas, in the latter, it might engender a "nomadic and polyvocal use" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 127). From this perspective, paranoiac investments are "racist" and lead to feelings of superiority and a corresponding desire to dominate those perceived as 'inferior' via "Aryan segregation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 127–128). Such individuals/groups overinvest in a "central sovereignty" that runs contrary to "every free "figure" of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 317). Contrast this with "the schizonomadic" usage, which is "racial" and instils a "revolutionary force" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 128). This type of disinvestment puts the "fascisizing" pole in reverse and "follows the *lines of escape* of desire" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 317). Thus, this study will map these aberrant lines to accentuate cosplay's power (puissance) as a participatory art form: "Never an individual exile, never a personal desert, but a collective exile and a collective desert" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 427). The ramification of this claim is that this research must shed light on those "uncertain communities that contribute to the formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages" (Rancière, 2004, p. 40).

To map these consistencies, I shall peruse the data for any explicit or implicit references to a loss of "Ego" because such experiences herald entry into "a new order: the intense and intensive order" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, pp. 103–104). In doing so, this study will distinguish between "the paranoiac counterescape that motivates all the conformist, reactionary, and fascisizing investments" and "the schizophrenic escape convertible into a revolutionary investment" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 388). In fact, by highlighting the latter as a non-hierarchical "mode of subjectivity" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 26), this research might act as a de facto calling card for further improvisations. In sum, this part of the SA will underline those cosplaying practices that release desire qua liberatory force.

This chapter began by explaining that this study favours SA over psychoanalysis because the former aligns with this thesis's orientation towards cosplay's (posthumanist) practices rather than its phantasies. I then discussed how this decision impacted this research's choice of ethnographies. Subsequently, I outlined the rationale behind this study's nomadic-posthumanist approach, which affords an ardently flat, all-embracing understanding of bodies qua assemblages. The third subsection underscored the importance of identifying this fandom's lines of deterritorialization because only these consistencies point to how its practices might change over time. In the final part, I explained how this research charts four syntheses of desiring-production to address its RP and four RSPs directly.

The following chapter compares this thesis's use of assemblage with that of Helgesen (2015), which also deploys this same concept. This initial discussion underscores how the primary advantage of this research's pluralistic approach to cosplay's bodies is that it retains an emphasis on their possibilities by refusing to trap them in the lived present. This overview is then followed by a description of Study 1's aims, methods, and findings before proceeding to an in-depth discussion of lines of segmentarity.

Chapter 4 Making an exhibition of oneself

I think that machines must be used—and all kinds of machines, whether concrete

or abstract, technical, scientific or artistic. Machines do more than revolutionize

the world: they completely recreate it. (Guattari, 2009b, p. 74)

This chapter concerns Study 1's investigation of cosplaying on IG. And as I

argued in the previous chapter, this problem concerns the imagination qua practice, not

phantasy. To this end, this research phase highlights how this subculture's convoluted,

ever-changing bodies can never be predicted in advance by being reduced to a handful

of predictable, generic elements. So, unlike past studies, such as Winge (2006) and

Lamerichs (2011), who limit this hobby to just four universal facets, Study 1 rejects any

such reductive schematization. Instead, it shows that the key to understanding how

digital cosplaying works is to consider what its uncanny rhizomes might do to interrupt

the workings of the face (as the abstract machine).

Because Study 1 examines online discourse through the Deleuzo-Guattarian

notion of assemblage, I shall briefly contextualise this decision in light of other studies

in this field. Generally, there has been a paucity of research into cosplay and its relation

to social media. Moreover, those studies that have considered this phenomenon have

not provided any in-depth analysis, let alone considered its specificity (e.g., Bainbridge

& Norris, 2013; Peirson-Smith, 2019). Conversely, Helgesen (2015) did provide an

extensive account. Here, a case study of a 9-year-old named "Matilde" was used to

examine "children's You-Tube [*sic*] mediated play in contemporary Norway" (Helgesen,

2015, pp. 536–539). This research found that this child's simulative performance of the

fictional pop star called "Miku" afforded an empowering mélange of fake and real

experiences that allowed her to "do whatever she wants" (Helgesen, 2015, p. 541).

Helgesen (2015) concluded that this youngster used this hobby to stretch the limits of

her embodied self by improvising "with alternative, rhizomatic directions of growth" (p. 541).

To be sure, Study 1 takes much of its inspiration from Helgesen's (2015) work and concurs that this performance art's possibilities reside in its powers of assemblage. Moreover, Study 1 follows up on Helgesen's (2015) claim that cosplay tampers with both time and space: "The temporal dimension of children's fantasies about Japan indicates how YouTube provided not only a light in the dark but also a glimpse into the future" (p. 548).

Nevertheless, despite these commonalities, our approaches have critical differences. For instance, Helgesen (2015) provided recourse to "technology-mediated play" (p. 543). This position is at odds with this thesis's non-deterministic stance. Nevertheless, the most significant dissimilarity resides in how Helgesen (2015) made use of the concept of assemblage by treating it as a structure: "Children's bodies are constantly undergoing growth and change, yet in everyday life, these changes are largely imperceptible" (p. 541). The problem with this position is that it mistakenly implies the pre-existence of a body that changes. In contrast, this thesis argues that a body is change: "*movement does not imply a mobile*" (Bergson, 2019, p. 179). As such, Study 1 uses the concept of assemblage to connote the process whereby cosplay's desires manifest in ad hoc ways.

This chapter details Study 1's objectives before outlining the method used (including pertinent ethical issues). Then, over the next two subsections, I present its findings, paying particular attention to three noteworthy cosplays, which functioned as abstract lines of escape. And in the closing section, I discuss how these affects might mutate cosplaying subjectivities and enrich the life experiences of its fans.

4.1   Study 1

4.1.1 Objectives

For this research phase, I changed the wording of this thesis's RP and RSPs to reflect its concern with cosplay on social media. Thus, the RP became:

- What might a cosplaying IG body do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected by other desiring-machines? (RP #1)

Following this, I altered the four research sub-problems (RSPs) accordingly:

- What are the desiring-machines pertaining to these IG cosplays? (RSP #1)

- Which types of social investments relate to these IG desiring-machines? (RSP #2)

- Do these online IG performances produce subject-group or subjugated group investments? (RSP #3)

- To which of the poles of delirium do these online IG cosplays correspond? (RSP #4)

4.1.2 Method

A non-participatory qualitative research method was used to collect data: digital ethnography. This method "explores the digital-material environments that we inhabit and how human activity and the environments in which it takes place are co-constitutive" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 152). (However, I must add that nonhuman activity is also a concern due to this thesis's overarching posthumanist remit).

4.1.2.1 Participants. Online fieldwork gathered forty IG selfies ($n = 40$; 32 females) via screenshots of an adult user's public post and profile page. These individuals were aged 18 to "over 30" years. Whereas each selfie's discourse was used

for full analysis, public profile pages were scrutinised to gather the following demographic details:

- age, to be an adult, all users had to state that they were aged 18 years or older (American Psychological Association, 2019, p. 135);

- nationality, each profile had to indicate that the account was based in the United Kingdom; and,

- gender, whereby the individual's profile name functioned as the marker. (Note that this molar line could only be assumed, given that I was unable to directly establish these fans' identities.)

4.1.2.2 Design and procedure. With this digital ethnography, cosplay discourse (i.e., selfies) was obtained by alternately entering the following hashtags into Google (https://www.google.com): '#ukcosplayer,' '#britishcosplayer,' and '#ukcosplay,' respectively. (This data collection technique was inspired by Jones's (2014) research design.)

After generating its search results, this online fieldwork deployed "opportunistic sampling" (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Specifically, this procedure entailed clicking on each search result image—left to right, newest to oldest—before checking on each profile page that the said user was aged 18 or above. (If not, the post was overlooked, and I moved on to the next one, working in the exact order.) I repeated this process until I had the requisite data. One advantage of digital ethnography was that discourse could be collected quickly and without ethically dubious online " lurking" (Bryman, 2012, pp. 658–675). Another benefit of this purposive approach was that it obtained a variegated and relevant sample but one that prioritised unpredictability rather than representability. (This was because each post constituted an arbitrary, diminutive, and singular desiring-machine.)

Study 1's design was a non-participatory type of observation because it encompassed "*online interaction only with no participation*" (Bryman, 2012, p. 663).

Moreover, this digital ethnography was also covert because these IG users were unaware that their public posts were being used for research. (Please note that the ethical implications of this matter will be discussed later in this subsection.) Here, being 'in the field' took on a nuanced meaning because I was only present "remotely" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 134). At this point, I must stress that this ethnography was used solely to access this secondary data. For this reason, there were no participants in this research phase because no attempt was made to engage in interactions with these social media users. Indeed, one of the advantages of using remote observation is that due to the absence of face-to-face interaction, there was no "social desirability effect" (Bryman, 2012, p. 227). Consequently, this data was high in "naturalness" or "ecological validity" (Bryman, 2012, p. 48). This was a crucial consideration, given that one of the primary reasons for using digital ethnography was that it considers social media a possible means for "new experiential configurations" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 33).

4.1.2.3 Analytical techniques. Once I had gathered the sample, a SA was conducted (as detailed in Chapters 2 and 3). Exhaustively, discourse took the form of textual comments and images: hashtags, emojis, and photos. Crucially, these selfies had to be considered in their entirety because any of these components might have operated as a positive line of deterritorialization. Indeed, the following astute remark by Bergson (2019) also helped to inform this decision: "By making necessary effort to embrace the whole, one perceives that one is in the real and not in the presence of a mathematical essence which could be summed up in a simple formula" (p. 44). Thus, after having screenshot each selfie assemblage, I turned to the textual references (e.g., hashtags) to establish the fictional character identity being cosplayed. (In fact, this part of the procedure demonstrated how one of the major advantages of this type of ethnography is time efficiency, given that transcription was not necessary.)

Upon completing the above task, I identified the media related to each performance. Invariably, this entailed web searches via various 'wikis' (e.g.,

https://www.fandom.com). I then analysed each selfie, in turn, to determine how their expressive codes linked with their professed interests. These 'likes' were treated as desires and nothing else. This part was akin to thematic analysis, a qualitative technique whereby "data are broken down into their component parts and those parts are then given labels. The analyst then searches for recurrences of these sequences of coded text within and across cases and also for links between different codes" (Bryman, 2012. p. 13). That said, this SA differed markedly from thematic analysis because it afforded a non-prescriptive, experimental approach to the dataset. Indeed, I was able to deploy any epistemology whatsoever so long as it shed light on cosplay's functioning: "Schizoanalysis, or pragmatics, has no other meaning: Make a rhizome" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 292).

Crucially, by examining each fan post sequentially, I could better identify lines of deterritorialization in the dataset. And because the primary purpose of this SA was to identify cosplay's lines of escape, I perused the discourse to pinpoint selfies that differed in terms of how they had been 'put together.' I looked for anomalies or 'wildcards' by considering whether a post decoded and deterritorialized either the image or the text alongside it. However, more than anything else, these bodies were considered in terms of their interfacing. This was because language might have been used to decode and deterritorialize an image (or vice versa). Further, it should be noted that I was not endeavouring to select cosplays that represented this fandom as a global practice. (After all, this is an impossible task according to this thesis's avowed schizoanalytic ethos.) Instead, because each performance was an individual becoming, I chose those that were the most interesting, or better, intensive: "the sole problem is always one of allocation on a scale of intensities that assigns the position and use of each thing" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 86).

During the data collection process, any clear distinction between this fandom's local and global scales became destabilized within a single movement. This research

event underlined how this SA was in itself deterritorializing. However, even though these photographs were uploaded on a worldwide social media platform, entry into this socio-technical multiplicity first occurred at the local level prior to their scaling-up "across multiple sites" (Wise, 2005, p. 85). Crucially, in Study 1, technologies were treated as part of cosplay subjectivity: "People have little reason to turn away from machines; which are nothing other than hyperdeveloped and hyperconcentrated forms of human subjectivity, and emphatically not those aspects that polarize people in relations of domination" (Guattari, 1992, p. 18).

And yet, the primary purpose of Study 1 stayed the same because it mapped how cosplay's desiring-machines might repurpose IG as a technical machine and liberate this fandom's affects (RP #1). Note that from the outset, this SA did not assume that cosplay's selfie assemblages were entirely discursive (i.e., expressive). This position was taken because we already know that the enduring existence of such images invariably imbricates the use of technology (i.e., content) to access and record these affects in cyberspace. For instance, Marwick (2015) showed how IG users typically use smartphones to make comments and repost pictures (p. 142). Also relevant here is the observation that even though IG has a website, it is predominantly used as a mobile phone app (Marwick, 2015, p. 137). Thus, when this sample was collected, it was more likely that these selfies had been uploaded via a smartphone. In fact, this inference highlights a limitation of Study 1's use of non-participant digital ethnography because I could not objectively determine which technological gadgets had been used.

Nonetheless, Study 1's use of digital ethnography did provide the perfect complement for SA because this procedure provided an opportunity "to attend to those layers of life that are inevitably and inescapably implicated with digital technologies" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 139). Ergo, I looked at how online performances might reveal uncharted terrain(s). Indeed, today, this subculture's selfies are routinely captured outside the boundaries of its customary Comic Con setting:

A directed Google search around the subject of 'cosplay selfies' suggests that the top results are shots of cosers taken while they are standing alone, or with a friend in bathrooms, bedrooms, and other private spaces. There are some hall and street shots, but relatively fewer appear to have been taken in crowded convention spaces. (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 62)

For this reason, this SA heeded the interrelationship between an image's backdrop and foreground. Attending to this aspect was paramount given that, in cosplay's online guise, Orsini (2015) has noted that digital effects are sometimes used to alter the relationship between a selfie's foreground and background (p. 71). Such edits highlight how photography plays an affective role within this fandom. Consequently, alterations in an image's positioning foreground and background were essential analytical techniques in Study 1. This empirical concern was especially salient given that Langsford's (2016) study alluded to how cosplay photography introduced "'floating worlds'—*ukiyo*" into "familiar local places" and, in so doing, rendered these "exotic Other places" (pp. 19–29).

Furthermore, I considered how one post might have contained a series of static images and "fan-directed cosplay music videos (CMVs)" (Mountfort et al., p. 47). However, the latter were not analysed in depth because I could not store them (given that I do not have an IG account). Instead, I focused the analysis on one or more still cosplay images once these had been screenshot. I only selected IG as the object of analysis after having considered Mountfort et al.'s (2018) observation that its pages are "stacked with cosplay selfie galleries" (p. 61). Moreover, this was ideal because Study 1 concerned cosplay as online performance art. This decision also made practical sense, given that this social media's images are predominantly "static" (Marwick, 2015, p. 145). Crucially, in this part of the research, IG selfies were considered cosplay becomings or events, given that they recorded "a unique moment that was presumably deserving of capture" (Hess, 2015, p. 1637).

At this point, I must shed light on the type of SA used in Study 1. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) describe two variants: "*generative*" and "*transformational*" (p. 161). Whereas the former traces "how the various abstract regimes form concrete mixed semiotics, with what variants, how they combine, and which one is predominant," the latter maps "how these regimes of signs are translated into each other, especially when there is a creation of a new regime" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 161). Given that I gathered and examined secondary data, one might think that Study 1 constituted a straightforward generative version. However, I refute this suggestion by maintaining that these online multiplicities did not pre-exist this research's assemblage of their components. Hence, I assert that this thesis's recording of IG cosplays also constituted part of their performance. After all, by hanging them together, Study 1 accentuated these images' "singular consistency" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 25). To put it bluntly, I did more than conduct a mere "*tracing*" of these multiplicities' "mixed semiotics" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 169) because I did something with them by revealing their hitherto unrecognised usefulness.

As we shall see, Studies 1 and 2 provided recourse to language-based consistencies, as they might relate to cosplay fans' so-called 'fixed' identities. However, this thesis was only concerned with these "weak molar interactions, of stratified objects and relations" (Guattari, 2011, p. 236) under circumstances whereby these lines morphed into molecular lines and transformed the assemblage in question. Indeed, generative SA traces symbolic molar lines of identity, family, class, etc. However, this research also utilised transformational SA to provide a multi-dimensional account of its object of analysis by diagramming the BwO. In other words, the focus of this thesis was not to ask a representational question concerning this hobby's meaning and the (molar) identities of its fans. (For sure, that would be a valid subject but for another thesis.) Rather, this research's schizoanalytic remit insisted that the cosplaying unconscious says nothing (contrast this perspective with psychoanalysis, particularly the Lacanian

strain). Rather it creates, or better, deliriously machines reality. Thus, Studies 1 and 2 investigated 'how' cosplay worked, not 'why' cosplayers cosplayed or 'what' this supposedly said about (molar) identities in toto :

> Machinic consistency is not totalizing but deterritorializing. It ensures the always possible conjunction of the most different systems of stratification, and this is why it constitutes, if you will, the basic material beginning from which a transformational praxis could be established. Thus the modes of semiotization of an analytic pragmatics will not rely on trees, but on rhizomes {or lattices). (Guattari, 2011, p. 171)

In Study 1, I charted the relations between the four dimensions of the cosplaying unconscious via Guattari's (2013) schizoanalytic map (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

Guattari's (2013) map of the unconscious
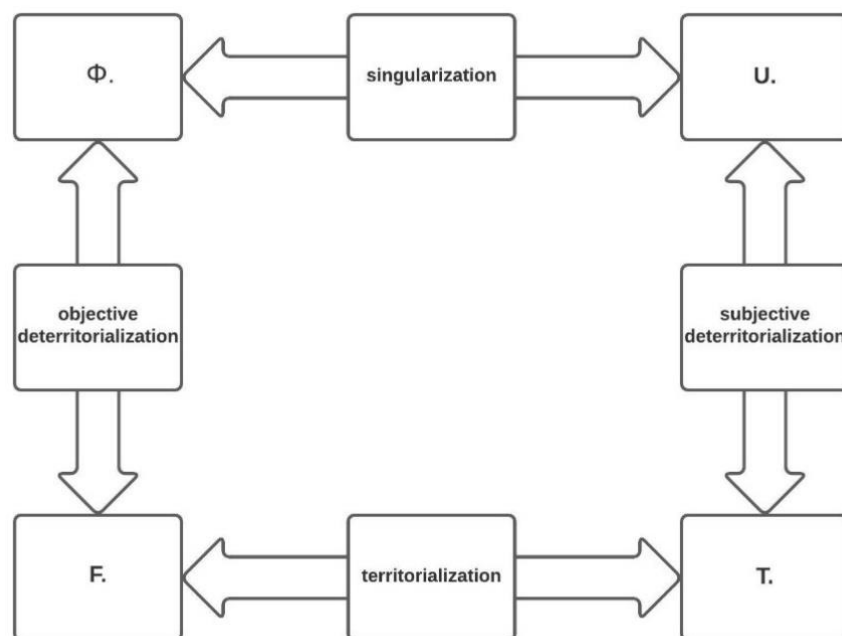
Note. Modified figure from Guattari, 2013, pp. 27–32.

What is striking about Figure 4.1 is that it shows how, for Guattari (2013), the unconscious encompasses four dimensions:

- "concrete and abstract machinic Phylums" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 124) of the 'Actual possible' at "Φ." (Guattari, 2013, pp. 27–28);

- "material, energetic and semiotic Fluxes" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 124) of the 'Actual Real' of discursivity at "F." (Guattari, 2013, pp. 27–28);

- assemblages, or "finite existential Territories" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 124), corresponding to the 'Virtual Real' at "T." (Guattari, 2013, pp. 27–28); and

- culture, or more grandly, "virtual Universes of value" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 124) of the 'Virtual Possible' at "U." (Guattari, 2013, p. 27).

The above dimensions were transposed onto Study 1's RP and RSPs. Precisely, Φ. related to RP #1, F. to the RSP #1 (i.e., the connective synthesis), T. to RSP #2 and RSP #3 (i.e., the disjunctive synthesis), and U. to RSP #4 (i.e., the conjunctive synthesis). Also, note that whilst the dimension between Φ. and F. corresponded to cosplay's spatialised horizontal axis of content and expression, the transition between T. and U. encompassed this subculture's online becomings (see Figure 4.1). Thus, this part of the analysis mapped those lines of escape as they traversed this latter dimension. Paradoxically, these virtual molecular becomings could only be accessed in the actual molar discursive realm (i.e., the dataset). Nevertheless, despite their invisibility, cosplay affects across this dimension could still be mapped, given that desire saturates "the social field" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 433). As such, this performance art's virtual affects manifested as actual bodily intensities within the discourse. However, although the former provided the conditions of possibility for cosplaying, how things gained consistency in the latter was the problem:

> What is at stake is not merely art or literature. For either the artistic machine, the analytical machine, and the revolutionary machine will remain in extrinsic relationships that make them function in the deadening framework of the system

of social and psychic repression, or they will become parts and cogs of one

another in the flow that feeds one and the same desiring-machine, so many local

fires patiently kindled for a generalized explosion—the schiz and not the signifier.

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 162)

Crucially, Study 1 stressed what these cosplaying images (i.e., bodies) might,

rather than can, do (RP #1). This stance was taken because each performance leaves

behind surplus affects. Precisely, this residue held the key to these fans becoming

events through a counter-actualising "impersonal instant which is divided into still-future

and already-past" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 151). From this perspective, the cosplays charted

in Study 1 were neither beginnings nor endpoints but rather "potential energies"

(Guattari, 2013, p. 67). Moreover, because this pragmatics was not affiliated with any

specific epistemology, I was free to choose those theoretical frameworks best suited to

explaining how cosplay's practices functioned within IG's spacetime. Indeed, this

flexibility was only possible because SA is a non-prescriptive "metamodelisation"

(Guattari, 1995a, p. 31).

4.1.2.4 Ethics. As remote research, Study 1 was the "online equivalent of doing

a covert observational study in a public place" (Kaye, 2021, p. 20). As such, only public

IG accounts were examined due to privacy issues with non-public accounts (British

Psychological Society, 2014). Note that when this research was conducted, public

profiles could be viewed by any member of the public wishing to access IG's website.

Hence, I freely gathered data from this social media platform without any privacy breach

(British Psychological Society, 2014). In addition, the data was anonymised during the

data collection (and securely stored on an encrypted USB pen drive before being

uploaded to Leeds Trinity University's secure 'Cloud'). These steps were taken to avoid

any breach of confidentiality (British Psychological Society, 2014).

Due to issues with informed consent, only IG users with a stated age of 18 years

of age and above on their UK profile page had their posts examined (British

Psychological Society, 2014). That said, because nobody participated in Study 1, informed consent was not an issue. This was on the condition that this online discourse remained anonymous (UK Data Service, 2018). Henceforward, I do not refer to either IG usernames or URLs when discussing Study 1's findings. Instead, I decided to use A # to denote the assemblage in question. That said, because I scrutinised IG images as part of Study 1's digital ethnography, it should be noted that bodies of these fans are visible within the data analysis. Hence, I took the precaution of pixelating those images whereby a face can be seen to lower the risk of identification (although elements of these bodies remain visible).

4.2   Results: Part 1

This subsection maps a selection of IG-based cosplay selfies. Each of these assemblages is an independent desiring-machine composed of two vectors. Although three types of consistencies are singled out, this analysis focuses primarily on cosplay's lines of escape. This is because only these consistencies alter this performance art's practices and, in turn, morph its fans' subjectivities. (Please note that this onto-epistemological claim applies equally to the RP in Study 1 (i.e., RP #1) and Study 2 (i.e., RP #2).)

Once the online discourse was extracted, I distinguished between these images' material (i.e., content) and immaterial (i.e., expression) elements. These objective deterritorializations occurred between Φ. and F. (see Figure 4.1). The following content, or "formed matters" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 50), were identified along an IG selfie's horizontal vector:

- Information technologies: This encompassed visible, dynamic machines (e.g., smartphones and laptops) with invisible networked connectivity (e.g., 4G). The former hardware elements were connected to visible software (IG as a mobile

phone app and website). In addition, this social media platform possessed its own invisible algorithm (although it was beyond the limits of Study 1 to map how this content functioned vis-à-vis desire).

- Concrete bodies: These included those actual entities that posted these selfies via technologically driven acts of assemblage. (Note that this component was also related to these fans' actions and passions, which will be detailed later in this chapter concerning investments (RSP #2; RSP #3; RSP #4).

Here, I must stress that the above technological elements could only be gauged indirectly through the data collection process (i.e., I never saw these users posting their selfies). Granted, this was a notable limitation of using SA in Study 1. However, this cartography still indexed how these cosplaying rhizomes emerged at the intersection of content and expression.

Turning to these assemblages' incorporeal expressions or "functional structures" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 50), these included:

- Language: The discourse that labelled images, peppered conversational threads, and enhanced connectivity via hashtags. Oftentimes, the latter codes referenced otaku narratives and genres. For instance, A #5's post referred to "#myheroacademia," "#anime," and "#manga." Aesthetic references to kawaii and otaku stylizations were also found, although sometimes these were only implied. For example, A #17 connected with the former via the hashtag "#cutecosplay," whilst A #39 referenced the latter by placing "#nerdgirl" beside their photograph.

- Sounds: For instance, A #8's CMV featured an online karaoke singalong whilst performing as Yuri from the computer game *Doki Doki Literature Club* ("Yuri," n.d.). (Unfortunately, the sonic makeup of this performance was outside the remit of Study 1.)

- Cognitions or ideas: For example, A #22's cosplay of Connor from the video game *Detroit: Become Human* ("Connor," n.d.) provided an instructional dressmaking tutorial mentioning bespoke "minor alterations" to the costume. Essentially, this multiplicity was an online learning art and crafts assemblage.

- Body language: Various gestures intimated the character in question and their fictional 'personality.' Take, for instance, A #3's performance of Nagisa Shiota from the manga *Assassination Classroom* ("Nagisa Shiota," n.d.), which involved a knife being 'playfully' brandished (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Cosplay of Nagisa Shiota from Assassination Classroom

In Figure 4.2 above, the knife points downwards, suggesting a stabbing motion. Moreover, in the same image, this gesture is accompanied by a wide-eyed stare, or better, longing gaze—a desiring-machine presumably directed toward any prospective viewers or 'victims' of this post.

- Mimetic bodies: Each cosplay simulated or fabulated a fictional character. And although these figures were often either human or nonhuman, sometimes these worlds conjoined. For example, A #16's cosplay of The Asset, or Amphibian Man, from Guillermo del Toro's film, *The Shape of Water* ("The Asset (Amphibian

Man)," n.d.)). (This multiplicity is considered in greater depth near the end of this subsection.)

- Images: These comprised photographs, emojis, and IG's standardized "*icons (signs of reterritorialization)*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 74). These items were invariably located at the foot of each photo on the right. Figure 4.3 shows this positioning.

Figure 4.3

A partial screenshot of Instagram's re-territorializing icons

Looking from left to right and beginning in the far corner of Figure 4.3, these pre-formatted icons include the user's tag on the image itself, the 'like' heart, the comment shape, the 'Add Post to Your Story' upward pointing arrow, and, finally, the save button. Taken together, the icons in Figure 4.3 form IG's re-territorializing refrain.

As I mentioned, Study 1's data collection revealed the co-presence of these elements within these multiplicities because to procure this discourse (i.e., expression), I had to be physically present on a laptop computer (i.e., content). As such, this procedure indicated how IG qua online collective assemblage of enunciation, hooked up —albeit at a distance—with offline machinic assemblages of desire. However, rather than inferring a linear cause and effect relationship, content and expression weaved into and out of each other within a single cybernetic feedback loop. Furthermore, the data collection also revealed Study 1's BwO: the technological screen upon which these IG cosplays were displayed (as I said, a smartphone's screen was probably the primary technological surface here).

Across the rest of this subsection, I will detail three types of lines as they were recorded on top of this cosplaying BwO: molar, molecular, and lines of escape. These consistencies revealed the makeup of these selfie assemblages' vertical vector. These inflexible molar lines encompassed:

- age, 18 to "over 30" years;

- place of residence, all users were based in the United Kingdom;

- nationality, (e.g., A #31 wrote "#welshcosplay" alongside their selfie);

- sexuality, (e.g., A #22 self-identified as a "#gaycosplayer"); and,

- relationship status, (e.g., A #27 posted "#engaged").

Intriguingly, these molar lines were not always barriers to becomings because these consistencies occasionally morphed into molecular lines. For instance, A #9 featured a performance of a centuries-old elf, Galadriel, from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* film (Jackson, 2001). Here, age acted as an affect, not a limit.

In comparison, cosplay's flexible molecular lines comprised:

- Fictional character identities: Examples included A #1's performance of *Spirited Away*'s No-Face ("No-Face," n.d.) and A #14's cosplay of Nico Yazawa from *Long Live!* ("Nico Yazawa," n.d.).

- Divergent media: These sources included not only television, web series, video games, and comics but also fashion and mythology. Sometimes these media were blurred with kawaii aesthetics. For instance, A #4 cosplayed an 'Alternative style,' as opposed to a character, posting an image that mixed Pastel Goth and Grunge (Pastel Goth, n.d.). Remarkably, A #27 presented a lewd, sexually charged cosplay of a snow woman ghost (*yokai*), namely, Yuki-Onna ("Yuki-Onna," n.d.), who, legend has it, wanders the snowy mountains stark-naked.

- Crossplaying: There were five instances of this phenomenon, four female-to-male and one M2F, respectively.

- Interests: These desires included hobbies, skills, narratives, prosthetics, cosmetics, phantasies, and various aesthetics. Notably, dark aesthetics were featured in the data. For instance, A #18's crossplay of DC Comics' Klarion Bleak ("Klarion Bleak," n.d.) evidenced a heady mix of 'likes' ranging from goth culture (i.e., "#gothic," "#goth"), science fiction cosmetics (i.e., "#sfxmakeup"), and even occult and horror genre themes (i.e., "#witch").

In this sample, I detected three memorable lines of escape (RP #1). One of these included A #16's performance of The Asset, or Amphibian Man, *The Shape of Water* ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.), which I dubbed a 'becoming-amphibian' (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Becoming-amphibian
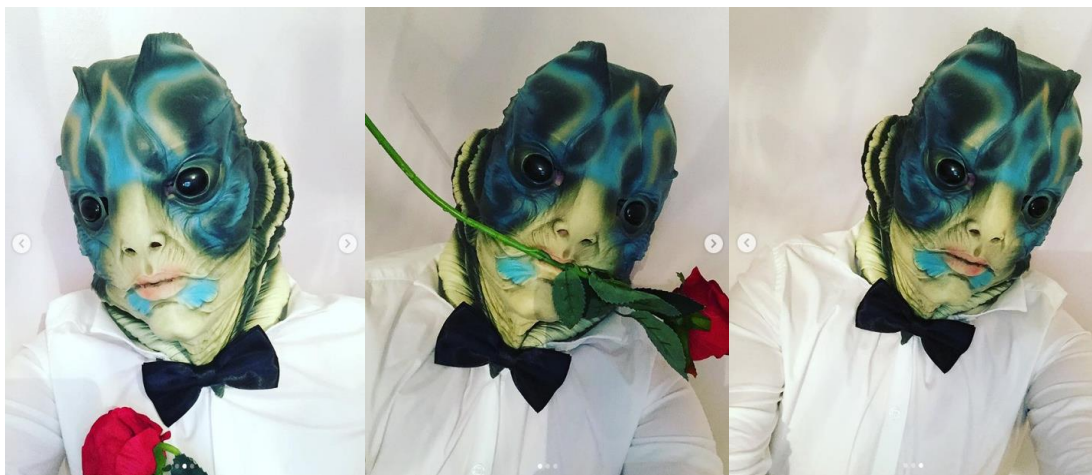
Scanning Figure 4.4 from left to right, one notes how in the first image, a red rose is visible in this individual's hand; then, in the second photo, the same rose is placed coquettishly in the performer's mouth; until finally, in the third image, this prop disappears. In this series, this flower functions as a partial object or desiring-machine with 'love' as its code. Here, one sees how Study 1's use of SA reaped dividends from this thesis's posthumanist perspective because it paid due heed to this nonhuman other.

(Arguably, this result would not have been detected if a social constructionist or psychoanalytic approach had been taken.) Staying with this selfie's expressivity, A #16 also used a textual reference for the same amorous ends in quoting a line taken from Ed Sheeran's hit pop song, 'Shape of You' (Sheeran, 2017): "I'm in love with the shape of… ." Given the conjunction of these elements, this performance constituted a heavily stylized dramatization rather than a straightforward imitation.

This becoming-amphibian made clever use of technology (i.e., content) to arrange a trio of images within a novel narrative sequence (i.e., expression) (see Figure 4.4). In turn, this act engendered a series of affects and percepts that simulated the framed presentation of the still, two-dimensional images typically found in this fandom's beloved comics. As such, this cosplay drew a line of escape that decoded and deterritorialized one media (i.e., cinema) by connecting it with another (i.e., the comic book). In turn, this series of images formed a sensory block with one of Hollywood's own cinematic desiring-machines.

A #16 was marked by inclusivity because this techno-aesthetic display (as I chose to refer to it) spanned heterogeneous themes, which incorporated different animal kingdoms, a Hollywood film, pop music, crossplay, and romance. This roleplay incorporated a miscellany of simulative fragments that turned a fictional character into a real amphibious figure. Furthermore, by adding multiple 'othering' qualities, this cosplay (literally) gave rise to a fluid subjectivity or, better, an aquatic mode of being. In fact, this becoming-amphibian's knowing use of prosthetics drew uncanny molecular lines on the BwO. Thus, this performance conjoined a hotchpotch of mutant desires but in a way that retained a sense of non-specificity or, more plainly, mystery. Given these qualities, this cosplay displayed a legitimate use of connective synthesis (RSP #1).

With this crossplay, A #16 simulated a transition between gender identities. Simultaneously, this cosplay marked a mimetic passing from the human to the nonhuman strata. Here, this becoming-amphibian weaved or folded these disparate

human and nonhuman qualities, or better, codes, into and out of one another. Thus, this depersonalizing public performance constituted a libidinal investment of this fandom's unconscious group desire rather than this social media user's private self-interest. In sum, this unique, multi-faceted roleplay exemplified a legitimate, inclusive disjunction (RSP #2).

Because A #16's online cosplay decoded and deterritorialized this individual's human body, it created a nonhuman cosplaying pack or motley crew. As such, this monstrous alliance (meant in a non-pejorative sense) had parts that were more than 'It's' sum. Moreover, this becoming-amphibian not only destratified this fan's human form but also troubled anthropocentric notions of courtship. Indeed, this romantic theme formed part of this image's singular movement. In short, because this IG selfie pluralized this fan's subjectivity, it ably generated an egoless online otaku subject-group (RSP #3).

A #16's masking of their skin's surface—with another skin, the amphibious prosthetic in Figure 4.4—meant that this anoedipal cosplay sidestepped both meaning (i.e., signifiance) and identity (i.e., subjectification) by inhibiting the face's operation as the abstract machine. In turn, this defacializing and depersonalizing device acted as a deterritorializing probe-head by jamming the face's repressive power (pouvoir). In sum, A #16 usage of this amphibious mask alterified or 'othered' this individual's subjectivity, thereby aligning it with a revolutionary investment of desire (RSP #4).

4.3   Results: Part 2

Study 1's discourse exposed a remarkable performance of Himiko Toga, a character from *My Hero Academia* ("Himiko Toga," n.d.) by A #39 (see Figure 4.5). Given Figure 4.5's inherently split composition and the notable presence of a knife, I described this cosplay as a 'becoming-slasher.' Regarding its expressive side, this selfie

presents a sinister juxtaposition of cute and 'threatening' affects and percepts. Precisely, the image seen in Figure 4.5 is knowingly ominous (e.g., the presence of the partially

Figure 4.5

Becoming-slasher

concealed knife) and simultaneously innocent (e.g., the schoolgirl dress). This nomadic affect is partly achieved through the positioning of the knife within this image qua expression. Although this weapon is absent on the left side of this photograph, it is visible and yet partially 'hidden' on its right side. In addition to brandishing a weapon, this fan sported dark eyeliner alongside a set of (presumably plastic) vampiric teeth to convey a 'threatening' ambience. Taken together, these affects readily simulated their chosen character Himiko Toga's mischievous schtick ("Himiko Toga," n.d.).

The frisky thrill conferred by this rhizome's pretend 'murderous desire' was also apparent in the gleeful discursive interactions accompanying this post. These dark becomings were prominent in follower comments and pertained to one of two affects. Firstly, they expressed a desire to witness 'stabbings' (e.g., "Uwaa~ cute and stabby stabby!👌") committed by this fan. And secondly, they denoted a drive towards being 'stabbed' by this fictional character (e.g., "Oof please stab me ✨😭"). Furthermore, with

A #39, a shared group desire for being 'stabbed' was apparent in a knife emoji (i.e., "🔪")

placed next to this character's name. However, this symbol was a collectivized dramatic

theme for inducing bodily sensations. Overall, A #39's glee corresponded with a

simulative, eldritch, Transylvanian desire and a thirst for (virtual) blood.

With A #39, digital technology was employed to decode and deterritorialize this

selfie by splitting it in two (see Figure 4.5). As such, this becoming-slasher was not a

signifying and subjectifying act but instead functioned as an a-signifying semiotic.

(Although, as a multiplicity, 'It' was (an) individual.) Indeed, this fan's single face was

rendered uncanny via the abovementioned technologically enabled duplicitous doubling.

In brief, this fan had used editing software as content to engender a fragmentary

subjectivity but one that did not necessitate a subject (as its expression).

This becoming-slasher was a direct invitation for others to participate in their

'slasher' kid-ology. As such, those involved—including myself—became 'in on the joke,'

becoming its 'victim' (in two senses). In addition, this becoming-slasher radiated a bitty

subjectivity by being partway horrifying, amusing, and kawaii. Indeed, this IG multiplicity

conjured up impersonal worlds brimming with a rich tapestry of conceptual personae:

the horror film slasher (now feminised), the joker, the 'cutie,' the victim, etc. Thus, I

considered this performance's dark energy a legitimate use of the connective synthesis

(RSP #1).

A #39's threatening quality decoded and deterritorialized (literally) well-worn

kawaii aesthetics, signifying innocence, femininity, petiteness, and child-like

appearance. Hence, this becoming's simulation of the shape-shifting Himiko Toga

("Himiko Toga," n.d.) constituted not only a suggestive performance but also an

excessive one: overkill. For this reason, this post was an affirmative, ghoulish re-

purposing of this fandom's well-documented kawaii aesthetic. To be sure, this becoming

was only possible because this performance art multiplicity functioned as an inclusive

disjunction between kawaii aesthetics (e.g., "Gosh your SO FREAKING CUTE") and

threatening horror elements (e.g., "✎"). For this reason, this desiring-machine evidenced the legitimate, immanent usage of the disjunctive synthesis (RSP #2).

This post was open-ended enough to remain a playful yet threatening shock to a prospective viewer's nervous system. And because this multiplicity acted as an external relation, it pointed to the existence of a nomadic online collective assemblage of enunciation. In fact, this cosplay groupuscule came together via a shared appreciation of this fictional character's evildoings as a member of *My Hero Academia'*s League of Villains ("Himiko Toga," 2019). Hence, the reference to "#cosplaylove" amongst the hashtags. Indeed, one of A #39's followers expressed a desire to see further performances whereby kawaii and horror aesthetics ally: "a villain duo would be super cute! 😁." Moreover, it would be remiss not to mention that this selfie was a collaboration between two fans. This group-oriented desire was evidenced in the description accompanying this fan's image:

> I bought this uniform a while back as a 'back up' for cons but never actually
>
> needed to use it! As I haven't been able to make anything new recently I thought
>
> I'd bring it out for shoot with the lovely @[name of a photographer] 😊.

Thus, A #39's becoming-slasher was an act of affectionate teamwork. In turn, this uncanny post reached out to other online packs (e.g., viewers, followers, 'villains,' etc.), who were subsequently empowered by being allowed to participate in this paidia-powered online otaku subject-group (RSP #3).

As I mentioned, this becoming's simulative desire to 'stab' someone triggered a group desire whereby some followers volunteered themselves as a stabbing 'victim' (e.g., "I WILL DIE FOR YOUR TOGA"), whilst other followers geed on this fan's desire to 'stab' (e.g., I just posted some toga stuff too! I love this! STABBY ✎✎"). Further, one follower was so impressed by A #39's fusion of cuteness and death that they— playfully, I presume—suggested marriage: "Waifu! ♡♡♡ it looks great on you. You should definitly wear ot at a con! And your gaze is 👌 [rose heart emoji unavailable]." This

entanglement of sex and death is also evident in a later comment by A #39: "aaaa it is what a stabby wife does 😊🖤." In effect, A #39's selfie was a nomadic re-mix (RSP #4).

Like A #39, A #40's 'becoming-edited,' as I called it, also digitally enhanced their selfie to perform Futaba Sakura from the roleplaying computer game *Persona 5* ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.) (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6

Becoming-edited

However, rather than becoming-animal like A #16 or doubling their face as with A #39, this fan's face has been obfuscated within their selfie (i.e., expression) via software trickery (i.e., content) (see Figure 4.6). Furthermore, looking closely at Figure 4.6, one notices eight "Error" messages with the word "Fail" emblazoned in the foremost dialogue box and the background camouflaged. As such, computer or smartphone editing software (i.e., content) has been used to occlude this individual's appearance deliberately. In doing so, this multiplicity applied content (i.e., technology) to sabotage an expression (i.e., a selfie). In brief, A #40 was a deliberate failure but also an abstract one.

Turning to this becoming-edited's expressive textual markers, a set of hashtags (i.e., "#persona5," "#persona," "persona5cosplay," and "personacosplay") made language stammer or stutter. Here, A #40 paid tribute to the name of the franchise this character was sourced from (i.e., *Persona 5* ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.), whilst simultaneously playing with this fandom's moe love for roleplaying alternate egos or personae. For this reason, these words conferred neither meaning nor subject. Rather, they were affects that functioned as semiotic chains proliferating otaku desire/love across IG's spacetime.

With A #40, content served as the abstract machine because this fan's use of technology provided the aesthetic behind this post. As such, this bit-part glitching functioned as the abstract machine and afforded this multiplicity a-signifying force (puissance). Indeed, this digital manipulation rendered this performance ambiguous to the extent that, at first glance, I had doubted whether it was an online cosplay, let alone a selfie. On closer inspection, it was clear that this otaku rhizome had used technology to jam IG's faciality machine through digital camouflage.

Becoming-edited's ingenious intertwining of content and expression gave rise to a resolutely inclusive, that is, mixed semiotics, in which computer (or smartphone) hardware and software coincided with a visual, cybernetic aesthetic. Moreover, by blurring their selfie's backdrop and fusing their face with numerous dialogue boxes, A #40 fragmented subjectivities. (As I mentioned, I was 'caught in two minds,' trying to decide what I was dealing with.) In turn, this post acted as a mystery-inducing abstract line. To this end, this cosplay evidenced a legitimate deployment of the connective synthesis (RSP #1).

A #40's performance can be described as an inclusive disjunction for two reasons. Firstly, by rendering their face more-or-less indiscernible via digital glitching, this cosplay populated, or better, infected IG with a nonhuman cosplay-based 'othering.' Secondly, this becoming-edited worked as an a-signifying and a-subjectifying desiring-

machine by not only dismantling the face but also by stammering language (i.e., via hashtags). To this end, both meaning and identity were inhibited. Consequently, A #40's desire was invested in the group (RSP #2).

The effect of becoming-edited's depersonalizing and defacializing performance was an assembly of nonhuman partial objects or machines. Notably, these included a flux of dialogue boxes, the orange locks of this character's wig, and an opaque, ambient backdrop (see Figure 4.6). More than anything, A #40's cosplay was self-deprecating in its humour. Furthermore, given how all these elements were intensities that bristled on top of the technological surface of IG's BwO, this hotchpotch heralded the formation of a molecular subject-group (RSP #3).

A #40's liberatory blend of affects, pulled subjectivity in both directions of delirium at once. Take, for instance, how the textual discourse revealed an aversion to performing (i.e., "wasn't really in the mood for cosplay I was too tired") alongside its opposite ("But I was excited to cos the outfit so,"). In addition, this same tension was also evident in the following interchange:

Follower: YOU ARE SO CANON LIKE SKSKSKSK QUEEN

A #40: AAA THANK YOU I'VE BEEN SO UNSURE ON IF I SUIT HER OR NOT 💜

For these reasons, this cosplay harnessed emotional intensities befitting nomadic investment (RSP #4).

4.4   Discussion

There are subject-type individuations ("that's you. . . ," "that's me. . . "), but there are also event-type individuations where there's no subject: a wind, an atmosphere, a time of day, a battle . . . One can't assume that a life, or a work of art, is individuated as a subject; quite the reverse. (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 115)

This section discusses Study 1's most striking becomings. Let us begin with A #16's cosplay of Amphibian Man ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.). By assembling a series of images in an idiosyncratic way, this becoming-amphibian decodes and deterritorializes this film's narrative. At the same time, this performance preserves and develops this motion picture's amorous theme within what is essentially an online 'skit.' But rather than offering a detailed textual description to accompany these images, this multiplicity steals a line from Ed Sheeran's song, 'Shape of You' (Sheeran, 2017): "I'm in love with the shape of… ." The net result of this quirky act is the construction of a desiring-machine with a paradoxically inaudible musical refrain. As such, this cosplay remains faithful to the nonverbal relationship between the two mute characters in this cinematic fantasy romance between a humanoid amphibian and a human female called Elisa Esposito ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.).

Further, by using the title of Ed Sheeran's song, 'Shape of You' (Sheeran, 2017), this rhizome toys with the name of del Toro's film by decoding and deterritorializing its title: *The Shape of Water* ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.). (Incidentally, this track does not feature in that motion picture.) In effect, this (cos)play on words makes language stammer or stutter. For this reason, this discursive practice functions affectively by placing this film's title into a whirl of continuous variation: "the reality of the creative" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 115). Further, by referencing other media, this selfie operates as a machine that cuts and re-mixes other machines (i.e., Hollywood cinema, a pop song, and Valentine's Day). Indeed, A #16 occupies a liminal position, distributing itself somewhere between these lines. For this reason, I submit that this cosplaying rhizome functions as a "'pick me up or pick up'" because it alludes to the libidinous, nomadic practice of "collecting up, chance, restarting the motor, getting on the wavelength" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 10).

Because a humanoid amphibian is already a hybrid of sorts—specifically, a land and sea creature—A #16 effectively re-mixes a re-mix. In doing so, this act of fabulation

takes a fictional character belonging to the nonhuman machinic phylum (i.e., Φ. in Figure 4.1) and (literally) drags it into this real human one. Furthermore, by performing desire whilst sporting an amphibious mask, this cosplay decodes and deterritorializes taken-for-granted ideas of what love is, or better, could be, by becoming-amphibian. More than anything, I insist this animal-becoming's juxtaposing of media produces a comedic effect. Indeed, Bergson (1911) notes that laughter can occur when "a series of events" are placed outside their original context and repeated to let "their respective meanings jostle with one another" (p. 37b). This is precisely what happens when A #16 merges a Hollywood film and a pop song to celebrate Valentine's Day. Thus, I argue that this performance shows how cosplaying might draw lines of escape that run away from the mundanity of on-land Life—and love—and help access an alternate underwater universe purpose-built for watery romance.

A #16's trio of in-sequence images simulates the multiple-panel presentation of this fandom's beloved comics (specifically, Western ones that read left-to-right). However, because these photos are static, this passage involves the subtraction of movement, which paradoxically increases this online performance's speed. As Deleuze and Parnet (1987) tell us: "flights can happen on the spot, in motionless travel" (p. 37). As such, this creative act takes this social media user and their followers' subjectivities to other places—uncanny aquatic ones. (For this reason, I cannot help but think of the Techno group Drexciya who released a series of aquatic-themed albums to promote what Kodwo Eshun (1998) calls "their Aquatic Invasion against the AudioVisual Programmers" (p. 83).) Consequently, by plugging into this becoming-amphibian's semi-aquatic mindset, IG subjectivities are nomadically deterritorialized and reterritorialized.

At face value, this becoming-amphibian might seem like a clear exemplification of a female-to-male crossplay. However, I argue that this affect draws another more abstract line of flight on the BwO—a non-anthropocentric one—because it demonstrates one possible assembly of human-female-to-humanoid-amphibian-male qualities. As

such, this online intensity underlines how cosplay might not be a simple matter of rote gender reproductions or second-hand imitations. Instead, A #16 sheds light on how this art form's capacity to drag a well-known film character's narrative, appearance, and theme and take them and us on a journey "somewhere else" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 349),

A #16 achieves its uncanny symbiosis in two ways. First, this cosplay's froglike mask hides this fan's molar identity. Precisely, this prosthetic obfuscates this fan's personalising—and thereby humanizing—facial reaction by rendering it entirely indiscernible. As such, the adornment of this affect inhibits the repressive operation of the signifying white wall and its accompanying subjectifying black hole. For this reason, this becoming-amphibian is neither meaningful nor subjectifying. Instead, this multiplicity's juxtaposition of disparate nonhuman becomings (i.e., the amphibian mask and the rose) engenders an impressionistic performance art machine. Thus, I argue that this becoming-animal opens what could be called an online cosplaying threshold. Furthermore, by allowing us entry into this zone, I posit that this selfie alludes to the possibility of other uncanny polyvocal modes of being within cosplay: "I am It—or better, I am They" (Fisher, 2016, p. 16).

Second, across its three-panel performance, this multiplicity subtly indicates the presence of an off-camera other. For this reason, this cosplay's inherent ambiguity helps fuel the imagination because it is impossible to ascertain to whom or what this red rose is being offered. This becoming-amphibian uses this sleight of hand to show us a secret without fully disclosing it: "the secret has a way of spreading that is in turn shrouded in secrecy" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 335). I hold that this is precisely why this hydrous roleplay constitutes an investment of desire tout court because it shows us the possibility of an off-screen other whilst preventing any sighting.

A #39's becoming-slasher also elicits a nomadic investment, but in an entirely different way. In this instance, digital trickery splits a single selfie image in two, producing

an uncanny doubling effect. Indeed, the right side of this multiplicity's image is decentred, so this online performance is only ever partial. Here, fragments of two identical photos are overlaid, palimpsest-like, resulting in one artistic machine cutting into another via superimposition. For this reason, I argue that this image might be described as "a monument that is always in the process of becoming" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 177). (Nevertheless, as with my previous treatment of 'object,' I take issue with this reference to 'a monument' and suggest that this idea should be substituted with 'a machine,' given this thesis's process-based approach.)

The inscrutable quality of A #39 means that it was a fundamentally uncanny performance. Notably, this image's uncanny aesthetic is technologically enabled instead of determined. However, rather than the neat comic-book-style framing of A #16, this becoming-slasher has the spliced-together feel of a photographic film reel. Put differently, this selfie's slashed appearance affords it the 'feel' of a slideshow's slipshod jump cuts. Furthermore, because this eldritch affect functions in a decidedly untidy manner, it possesses the disorientating quality associated with destratification. More than anything, this selfie's juxtapositioning of duplicitous images catalyses a line of flight through repetition qua difference: "A new form of redundancy. AND … AND … AND …" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 114). However, I hold that this unheimlich deployment of the conjunctive synthesis does not evidence trickery but rather the treachery associated with sorcery:

> The Anomalous is always at the frontier, on the border of a band or a multiplicity; it is part of the latter, but is already making it pass into another multiplicity, it makes it become, it traces a line-between. This is also the 'outsider': Moby Dick, or The Thing or Entity of Lovecraft, terror. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 42)

After all, this becoming-slasher splits the technological surface of IG's BwO in half. Indeed, it is the sheer perversity of A #39 that made this post an anomalous

machine: "No more people! No more organs, no more mixing up of people and organs! A person is traversed by signs through and through. Perversion, subversion" (Guattari, 2006, p. 95). (Note that perversion is not used in this quote to refer to pathology but rather another manifestation of nomadic subjectivity. Here, one might argue that rather than the "ecosophic metamodelisation" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 127) it purports to be, SA is tantamount to an applied form of cognitive reductionism.)

A #39's visual aesthetic constitutes a complex form of repetition but one that is both polyvisual and "polyphonic" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 16). (Zohar (2007) uses "multifocality" (p. 45) to refer to the former phenomenon.) Indeed, the "perceptual fascination" that this photo engenders echoes Guattari's (1995a) description of how television pluralises subjectivity: "My identity has become that of the speaker, the person who speaks from the television" (pp. 16–17). Following this logic, I hold that this selfie qua rhizome augments the power (puissance) of this fan's body to affect itself and the online bodies of others by fragmenting their subjectivities. (Certainly not by its powers to signify and subjectify through the face.)

However, the by-product of this assemblage is neither a cosplayer nor a follower. Nor is it the spectator. Instead, I argue that this multiplicity produces an online pack of active multiocular, 'looking' machines. In doing so, these cosplaying bodies serve only to decode and deterritorialize and then recode and reterritorialize each other's gazes/desires. This finding thereby resonates with Johnston's (1999) posthumanist notion of machinic vision because, in this instance, cosplaying on IG bestows "a decoded seeing, a becoming of perception in relation to machines that necessarily also involves a recoding" (p. 29). Crucially, this phenomenon triggers looking as an encounter but one without either an a priori or a posteriori subject. Instead, this online image's force (puissance) undoes subjectivities as fan perceptions are rent asunder. In turn, this reaction simulates the uncanny cracked-mirror quality afforded by this selfie.

A #39's alliance of technology and aesthetics imparts a bloc of becoming or sensation. However, this alliance is about fabulation (i.e., becoming). As such, this cosplay is neither imitative nor phantastical. Rather, this becoming-slasher possesses a "machinic alterity" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 45), which infects IG as an online collective assemblage of enunciation with its contagious meme-based sense of humour. And as practice, this post depersonalizes this fan with amusing, xenomorphic results: "WE LAUGH EVERY TIME A PERSON GIVES US THE IMPRESSION OF BEING A THING" (Bergson, 1911, p. 20a). Further, by putting elements of the Horror slasher genre alongside a knowing sense of humour, this performance pays tribute to a "grotesque" form of the weird in connoting "laughter as much as revulsion" (Fisher, 2016, p. 33). In doing so, this affect resonates with O'Sullivan's (2016b) observation that there is a humorous side to performance art that makes use of "an ongoing absurd repetition, a gesture beyond the logistics of the market" (p. 86). That said, I insist that this multiplicity's agency is not due to this individual's purposeful, conscious action but instead emerges as a direct consequence of its entry into "an entire world of unconscious micropercepts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 249).

Broadly speaking, this becoming-slasher suggests how digital technology (i.e., content) might be re-appropriated in such a way as to decode and deterritorialize cosplay's established tropes and, in so doing, help fans escape the repressive impositions of meaning and identity. Indeed, because this becoming-edited places antagonistic elements alongside one another via its bit-part camouflaging, it points towards the formation of similar performance art alliances: "In every psychic system there is a swarm of possibilities around reality, but our possibles are always Others" (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 260). (In this instance, these 'Others' are the contagious affects encircling this strange image.) More than anything, however, I hold that A #39 unique blend of content and expression underscores Rancière's (2004) critical point regarding the oft-vilified interrelationship between technology and aesthetics: "In order for the

mechanical arts to be able to confer visibility on the masses, or rather on anonymous individuals, they first need to be recognized as arts" (p. 32).

A #40's performance of the video game character Futaba Sakura ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.) also utilises computer editing software to alter their selfie's appearance. Here, the face is decoded and deterritorialized to function as a dialogue box. And given its textual emphasis on "Error" and "Fail," this multiplicity's primary affect is one of feigned inadequacy. That said, this performance does not impart a narcissistic Oedipal sense of self-affirmation but rather connotes the intensity of nomadic self-contradiction. In fact, this cosplay fizzes with intensity in draping and parading a plethora of dialogue boxes on top of IG's technological BwO. Thus, any simplistic correlation between affect, performance, and expression is befuddled via A #40's public-but-private breakdown. So, on the one hand, this cosplay constitutes a skilled performance via its clever use of digital affects, whilst, on the other, it refuses to resort to the convention of having one's face visible within a selfie.

Given this digital defacialization strategy, A #40 not only conceals their actual identity—a static "majoritarian or molar system" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p, 342)— but also makes the identification of this fictional character significantly more difficult. This ambiguity is due to the conjunction of a glitched face with otherwise understated attire. Note how this online camouflaging is not exclusive to the foreground of this image because its background is also digitally blurred and rendered "simultaneously present and imperceptible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 230). So, whereas the foreground of this image is (partially) open to the public, its background remains private. As such, this becoming-edited raises questions as to the whereabouts of this performance.

What is remarkable about A #40 is that this public IG selfie manages to bestow a private atmosphere that mirrors their chosen fictional character's introverted temperament. In this way, this cosplay simulates not just their 'look' but also the agoraphobic, socially anxious 'personality' of Futaba Sakura ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.). In

addition, A #40's knowing use of digital effects mimics their chosen fictional character's profession as a hacker ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.). Indeed, by juxtaposing these ostensibly incompatible elements, this becoming-edited uses the "hikikomori" (Yadao, 2009, p. 263) or shut-in as its model or conceptual persona. To this end, this online performance displays what might be called an affirmative sadness. The following lines by Dominic Fox (2009) allude to this phenomenon:

> At such times we seem particularly aware of the world *as* a world, as a place where we have to live. This awareness can become artistic or political: *artistic*, when the world made strange by our own detachment and dissociation presents itself as an object of fascination; *political* when the difficulty of going on living in such a world begins to reveal its causes in the impersonal circumstances of our personal sorrows. (Fox, 2009, p. 1)

Here, I argue that A #40's inclusive disjunction suggests that a reluctance to perform might paradoxically be a way to kickstart this performance art's desiring-machines. (This idea puts me in mind of a line from *The Unnameable*: "I'll forbid myself everything, then go on as if I hadn't" (Beckett, 1959, p. 314).) That said, such otaku-based acts of dissensus can only ever be part of an ongoing project to produce other nomadic modes, given that affects have neither beginnings nor endpoints. Moreover, this becoming-edited shows us how shyness connects with moe because that phenomenon is tied to "a feeling that you want to hide, an embarrassing feeling" (Toromi, 2014, p. 85). Nonetheless, I hold that with A #40, it is not a question of this fan's 'own' insecurities or supposed psychosexual deficiencies, as with so-called "schizothymic personality types" (Tamaki, 2011, p. 15). On the contrary, this post constitutes a fabulation through which the fictional becomes real/pragmatic.

Technically, A #40's redacted image refers to a practice known as "photomontage," which has been defined by Jacques Rancière (2021) as a "clash on the same surface of heterogeneous, if not conflicting, elements" (p. 26). Indeed, this

digitally manipulated photograph suggests a range of seemingly incompatible acts. Firstly, it challenges the boundaries between participation and non-participation by publicly performing a cosplay selfie whilst not performing one as standard. Instead, their face is deployed as a sensory landscape. Put differently, this selfie is far from being an advert for capitalism's 'private' model of identity. And secondly, A #40 muddies the line between amateur (or inauthentic) and professional (or authentic) cosplaying by demonstrating that through widely available digital technology, one might add a different kind of 'sheen' to online performance. In this respect, this multiplicity counterintuitively problematises common-sensical expectations of how online cosplaying might work. In other words, this affect is indifferent to Oedipalizing concerns for hierarchical standardization.

Essentially, the force (puissance) of this nomadic performance highlights two things vis-à-vis online cosplaying. Firstly, by not acting as oneself via simulation, one can be/come more like oneself. And secondly, this becoming-edited shows how noncosplaying is integral to cosplay. In this case, A #40's selfie encapsulates the following conflicted mode of being: 'I cannot cosplay Futaba Sakura, even though I am cosplaying Futaba Sakura' ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.). In fact, this latter point affirms Bateson's (1972) theory that play as "a primary-process phenomenon" entails "nonplay" (p. 185). At the same time, this becoming-edited also alludes to the sheer uncanniness of cosplay: "Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing" (Kristeva, 1982, p.2). In sum, A #40 hints at how this otaku performance art might not proffer a straightforward choice between online participation and non-participation or between public and private spaces.

This chapter began by describing how discourse was collected and schizoanalysed in Study 1. In the next part, I summarised IG's horizontal and vertical vectors before identifying three types of lines within the dataset. Toward the end of this part and across the following subsection, I mapped the vectors of A #16's becoming-

amphibian, A #39's becoming-slasher, and A #40's becoming-edited, respectively. These bodies were then discussed in the final part of this chapter, which detailed precisely how these online uncanny affects empowered these Instagrammers by disrupting the faciality machine through various bodily sensations.

The next chapter focuses on Study 2's scrutiny of offline-online practices at TB (2018) and highlights how cosplaying can also trigger affects—ones that straddle offline and online space. To this end, Chapter 5 starts by contextualising this research phase in view of previous con-based studies before describing and discussing Study 2's methods and findings.

Chapter 5 A tale of uncanny multiplicities

Performance art delivers the instant to the vertigo of the emergence of Universes that are simultaneously strange and familiar. (Guattari, 1995a, p. 90)

As we saw in the last chapter, cosplaying on IG was an uncanny practice. Study 2 develops this argument further by showing that in its offline variant, this subculture also achieves results that are paradoxically familiar and unfamiliar. Furthermore, this research phase underscores the ever-shifting entanglements of offline and online experiences at the TB (2018) Comic Con. In fact, Study 2 is unique in revealing how offline cosplaying might interface in real time with its online counterpart. To my knowledge, no other study has explored this aspect.

Before proceeding, let us consider research into the offline nature of this performance art. Abramova, Smirnova and Tataurova (2021) investigated con-based cosplaying in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg and found three primary reasons why youths participate: "a desire for self-expression, self-development and a desire to play the roles of favorite characters" (Abramova et al., 2021, p. 101). They concluded that fans continue this hobby because it affords a 'brotherly' "perception of closeness, similar values and communicative practices" (Abramova et al., 2021, p. 102).

Despite Study 2 sharing the same object of analysis and a similar concern for collaborative interaction, it differs markedly from Abramova et al.'s (2021) conservative, androcentric slant, which used conformity to social norms as its paranoid yardstick: "they do not oppose themselves to society" (p. 104). Furthermore, Abramova et al. (2021) denigrated cosplay by portraying it as primarily "recreational" (p. 103). In fact, this positioning echoes Peirson-Smith's (2013) Southeast Asian study: "Dressing up was an escapist fantasy from both real self, and life in general… " (p. 98). In contrast, Study 2 demonstrates how offline practices might work alongside online ones to empower fans' bodies—regardless of the status quo (i.e., capitalistic subjectivity).

Although Abramova et al. (2021) used "Vkontakte" (p. 100) to collect data concerning con-based practices, the role played by social media went completely unnoticed. In contrast, Lamerichs (2013) recognised how online and offline cosplaying fed into one another at a global level: "Interestingly, cosplay events are increasingly internationalized and, along with online platforms [such] as cosplay.com, construct international cosplay communities" (p. 169). Similarly, Bainbridge and Norris (2013) observed that digital communities "assist in the creation and craft of costumes" (para. 9). However, only Mongan's (2015) first-person account of con-based cosplay enlightened as to how local-level practices are themselves influenced by online activity: "At the convention, I spoke in the vernacular I had adopted from my time on the Internet" (para. 3). Thus, Study 2 builds on this latter finding to investigate how these sides of cosplay might interrelate.

At the start of this chapter, I outline the three qualitative methodologies Study 2 used to collect data at TB (2018). Then in the following subsection, I present the results of this fieldwork by mapping this con's multiplicities. Toward the end of that part, I provide an in-depth analysis of a memorable bionic performance. I continue this cartography in the subsequent subsection by focusing on two other dissensual performances. This chapter ends with a discussion of how these affects impacted the surroundings of this Leeds-based festival.

5.1   Study 2

5.1.1 Objectives

For this part of the research, I tweaked the wording and the numbering of this thesis's RP and RSPs, thus:

- What might an offline–online cosplaying body do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected by other offline–online desiring-machines? (RP #2).

In turn, a modified set of RSPs were posited:

- What are the desiring-machines pertaining to offline–online acts of cosplaying? (RSP #5)

- Which types of social investments are related to these offline–online desiring-machines? (RSP #6)

- Does offline-online cosplaying produce subject-group or subjugated group investments? (RSP #7)

- To which of the poles of delirium do these offline–online instances of cosplaying align? (RSP #8)

5.1.2 Method

Three non-participatory qualitative research methods were used to collect data: semi-structured interviewing, non-participant observation, and photo ethnography.

5.1.2.1 Participants. Twenty adults ($n = 20$; 10 females) were interviewed at TB (2018) between Saturday 22nd September and Sunday 23rd September 2018. These individuals were between 18 and 33 years of age. There were eight interviews in total, with participants quizzed in pairs or groups. (Six interviews took place on Saturday 22nd September and two more the following day.) Each interview was considered an assemblage (i.e., A #), with each member designated a participant number (i.e., P #). Before their selection, all potential interviewees were asked whether they were aged 18 or above and from the United Kingdom. The 'Sex' (rather than 'Gender') of each participant was ascertained by their first name (in line with the reasoning behind the same decision in Study 1).

5.1.2.2 Design and procedure. That year, the week-long TB (2018) festival took place in Leeds City Centre near Leeds Art Gallery. Thus, I decided to conduct interviews in front of and behind this venue. Opportunistic sampling was used to recruit participants. I deployed this purposive sampling technique by approaching pairs or small groups who were in costume. All bar one of these fans were dressed up during these interviews. (Although P #13 from A #6 was not costumed, in the interests of politeness, I invited this fan to participate alongside their costumed friends.) This phase of the research took place 'in the field,' given that I was with these interviewees "physically, co-presently" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 134). Indeed, because I was dealing with those activities taking place all around me, what I was recording was TB's (2018) "emplaced interactions" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 88).

Primarily, the data collection encompassed the "semi-structured interviewing" (Bryman, 2012, p. 471) of two or more adult cosplayers (at a time). These interviews took place amidst the bodily interminglings of this con and were "face-to-face" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 102). Interviewees were asked a series of standardized questions. (As in Yamato's (2020) research, eight "open-ended questions" were chosen, all of which concerned "costume and props, and cosplay activity" (para. 4.4.).) These items were 'open' in the sense that they did not provide a "possible set of answers to choose from" (Bryman, 2012, p. 714). Whilst questions 1-3 homed in on practices relating to cosplay's use of technology, question 4 concerned their offline activity. The remaining questions (i.e., 5-8) referred to aspects of cosplay that might have equally applied to online and offline practices. Prompts were also used for question specificity and to afford participants the opportunity to expand their responses.

Crucially, these questions were phrased so that interviewees could clearly express their 'likes' and 'dislikes' regarding cosplay's many facets. This experiential orientation was critical, given that RP #2 concerned bodies not as nouns but as practices. Moreover, due to the straightforwardness of these questions, RP #2, along

with RSPs #5-8, could be directly addressed without treating participants' answers symbolically. In so doing, I maintained this thesis's schizoanalytic remit ardently refusing to filter cosplay through psychoanalysis's interpretative, castrating Oedipalizing monocle: "There is no meaning, no interpretation to be given, no significance. The problem is to recognize how the unconscious functions. It's a problem that concerns the use of machines, the functioning of "desiring-machines" (Guattari, 2009, p. 54).

Verbal discourse from these interviews, which lasted, on average, nine minutes, was recorded using a hand-held digital Zoom H2 field recorder. This little audio device acted as a "desiring-machine," akin to a digital version of a "tape recorder" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 72). Before being transcribed, the resultant sound files (i.e., WAVs) were transferred and stored on an encrypted USB drive before being transferred to Leeds Trinity University's secure OneDrive.

Essentially, this part of the research exemplified "Active Interviewing," a data collection technique used to pay close attention to how the research process itself produces interactions, which are invariably "embodied, emplaced, and constructed" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 102). This part of the design mirrored the ethos behind what Wilson, Onwuegbuzie and Manning (2016) call "the paired depth interview" (p. 1550). This type of interview describes a qualitative method that facilitates conversational "flow" (Wilson et al., 2016) between two interviewees whilst a researcher is present. Thus, I adopted this interviewing technique whilst expanding its scope for use with three or more participants. This was done for three primary reasons. Firstly, it made sense to employ this ethnography given this thesis's emphasis on cosplay as a collaborative practice/body. Secondly, the advantage of this design was that it conjoined with and helped produce the object of analysis. Lastly, I chose this interviewing technique alongside non-participant observation and photo ethnography, given that, according to Wilson et al. (2016), it is triangulation-friendly (p. 1557).

Following each interview, I asked for and jotted down the names of the cosplay character each participant was performing (bar P #13 from A #6). These speech acts should not be seen as incidental by-products of the data collection. Instead, these performatives reflected the incorporeal transformations that occur in fans' bodies when words intervene to alter or better contract our perception of them. Once their fictional character had been identified, I asked participants for their verbal consent for a photograph. In so doing, this part of the research used a photo ethnography to collect primary data "exclusively for the purposes of research" (Bryman, 2012, p. 455). (Contrast this with Study 1's reliance on pre-existing images.) As with Rahman et al.'s (2012) study, I used this ethnography to record this performance art's "visual richness" (p. 323). However, these images were not treated as meaning-making objects. Instead, they constituted performances of desire.

Given that I was not cosplaying during this phase of the research, Study 1 constituted a naturalistic, overt "non-participant observation" (Bryman, 2012, p. 273). Had I cosplayed whilst quizzing participants, I may have unwittingly induced socially desirable answers: "A distortion of data that is caused by respondents' attempts to construct an account that conforms to a socially acceptable model of belief or behaviour" (Bryman, 2012, p. 716). (Of course, this possibility can never be ruled out completely, given that interviewer effects relating to my own demographics can also produce response bias.)

Interview discourse was subsequently transcribed and schizoanalysed alongside the on-site photographs and the observational "field notes" (Bryman, 2012, p. 447). By triangulating the data, I was able to "limit the chances of bias" vis-à-vis my "methods or sources" and make "explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships drawn from observations in the field" (Grix, 2010, p. 174). Moreover, this thickening technique was conducive to this research's schizoanalytic consideration of cosplay's expressions as more than just language. As we shall see, there were non-discursive bodies present at

TB (2018). Had I adopted some form of discourse analysis—for example, "critical discourse analysis" (Bryman, 2012, p. 528)—I would have been unable to chart a range of cosplay's "signs-particles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 81) by having to focus on language only. Indeed, research methods that derive from social constructionist or social constructivist positions neglect how "bodies are material-discursive phenomena that materialize in intra-action with (and, by definition, are indissociable from) the particular apparatuses of bodily production through which they come to matter (in both senses of the word)" (Barad, 2007, p. 209). In sum, this choice of ethnographies facilitated an in-depth consideration of the possibilities afforded by TB (2018) as a multisensory experience.

5.1.2.3 Analytical techniques. In considering cosplay's potential as a "mode of being" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 77), Study 2 considered any theories that would provide the best account of how cosplay functioned machinically at TB (2018). Hence, this flexible, trans-disciplinary pragmatics toward this topic afforded and upheld SA's unabashed epistemological relativism. However, because of its ardent context-specificity, this part of the research made no generalisations outside the boundaries of TB (2018). For this reason, I refrained from making universal claims regarding cosplaying in Northern England (let alone the United Kingdom). Rather, I homed in on qualitative differences within the dataset because only these marked "new lines of intensity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 6). These were identified by examining each interview transcript sequentially to ascertain this fandom's 'likes' or desires and their connections. To help with this task, I consulted field notes and examined photos for instances of abstraction. Above all else, I was interested in how these ethnographies intermingled. For example, a photograph might have shed new light on a comment made during an interview.

(Akin to Study 1, I combed the data looking for those performances that were the most stimulating or intensive in terms of their affective capacity. To be sure, I did not select specific cosplays for what they represented about molar identity categories

because the entire point of this SA was to map the production of molecular affects. The latter particles lie beneath representation.)

I began this SA by examining the horizontal vector of these cosplaying bodies, noting their blend of content and expression. I then identified movements of territorialization and deterritorialization before pinpointing three possible lines of escape emanating from the latter. Like Study 1, I was ascertaining how cosplaying amongst United Kingdom-based adults might generate a worthwhile "system of value" via a "machinic interface between the necessary actual and the possibilist virtual" (Guattari, 1995a, pp. 54–55). Once again, I consulted Guattari's (2012) map of the schizoanalytic unconscious (see Figure 4.1). Except for this time, the dimensions Φ., F., T., and U. corresponded to Study 2's tailored RP and RSPs. Hence, Φ. connoted RP #2, F. aligned with RSP #5 (i.e., the connective synthesis), T. pertained to RSP #6 and RSP #7 (i.e., the disjunctive synthesis), and U. related to RSP #8 (i.e., the conjunctive synthesis), respectively.

Like Study 1, I hold that Study 2's SA also had generative and transformative facets because not only did this research document the cosplaying a con, but it also underscored hitherto unnoticed "new components" (Genosko, 1998, p. 120). Ergo, the research process itself was also fluid and creative, not just the documented cosplaying. Precisely, this was because Study 2 concerned the virtual possibilities opened by this subculture's actual practices. Note that these actual and the virtual dimensions were understood as invariably entwined: "Virtual affectation and actual affectation come face to face and envelop one another" (Guattari, 2013, p. 66).

5.1.2.4 Ethics. With this fieldwork, each candidate was asked before their participation whether they were aged 18 years or over—per the British Psychological Society's (2014) guidance on age and informed consent—and from the United Kingdom. If they matched the criteria, each person was provided with an information sheet. Then everyone who agreed to take part read, initialed and signed an informed consent form

that provided their full name and date of birth (to confirm that they were an adult) (British Psychological Society, 2014). However, to protect these participants' confidentiality (British Psychological Society, 2014), neither an individual's name nor age were disclosed in this part of the research. As with Study 1, bodies of these fans are evident within the analysis because photo ethnography was integral to Study 2's SA. Again, I have pixelated those images whereby a face can be perceived to mitigate the chances of identification. Thus, the only element of the data that was not entirely anonymised were the photos of these fans' costumed bodies.

In addition, the consent form protected participants from harm by informing them of their right to withdraw from this study—before, during, and for a limited time afterwards (British Psychological Society, 2014). Following each interview, participants received a debriefing sheet that informed them of their right to withdraw up to ten days after their participation (with the onus placed on them). The contact details of a leading UK-based Eating Disorder Charity—(https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk)—were included in this debrief to restore participants to their previous state (if they had suffered any psychological harm following their interview) (British Psychological Society, 2014)). Lastly, privacy was not an issue because interviews were conducted in the public spaces near in front and behind Leeds Art Gallery (British Psychological Society, 2014).

5.2   Results: Part 1

As I mentioned, each interview of two or more participants was dubbed a cosplaying assemblage and labelled accordingly (e.g., PARTICIPANT (P) #1 from ASSEMBLAGE (A) #1). To be sure, these pairs or groups were treated as individual entities, with each interviewee understood as a multiplicity (of selves): "This polyvocality operates through bodies, their volumes, their internal cavities, their variable exterior connections and coordinates (territorialities)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 205). But

before I detail the content and expression of TB's (2018) horizontal vector, it should be noted that this con chiefly comprised three entirely independent multiplicities. This claim was based primarily on P #8 from A #4's cosplay of Daenerys Targaryen from *Game of Thrones* ("Daenerys Targaryen," n.d.), whose interview revealed a passage through online and offline cosplay assemblages whilst emplaced at this con:

> A lot of people, I use Instagram, like, you can tag the person as you're cosplaying as, like today I'll put Daenerys Targaryen and people might, erm, like, click like Daenerys Targaryen cosplay on Instagram and then, they can, like, my picture will come up as well.

However, the transitions between these otaku multiplicities did not connote a unidirectional movement but rather a toing and froing with each body acting as a quasi-cause for the other two.

In discussing TB's (2018) content and expression, I will now distinguish between these three assemblages as per RP #2. The first of these fandom collectives I called TB's (2018) offline concrete assemblage. Let us start by charting this collective body's horizontal vector, beginning with its non-discursive content as it flowed between Φ. and F. (see Figure 4.1). This multiplicity's materiality comprised:

- Offline bodies: These included the objectifiable, concrete, mobile, human, organic, and living entities at TB's (2018). (This element pertained to the passions and actions of these fans and will be discussed later in this chapter regarding different types of fan investments (RSP # 6; RSP #7; RSP #8).) Objectifiable, concrete, mobile, nonhuman, inorganic, and non-living technologies were also present, but crucially these were not (currently) in use within this assemblage.

- Offline costumes: Those fictional character outfits adorning the abovementioned physical bodies. This aspect included the use of cosmetics (e.g., makeup) and prosthetics (e.g., fake weaponry, props, and even body armour). As we shall see,

during their interview, P #18 from A #8 sported a voice-altering electronic mask whilst cosplaying Wrench from the computer game *Watch Dogs 2* ("Wrench," n.d.).

- Consumer goods: Merchandise on sale in the marquees, including the wristbands required to access TB's (2018) restricted areas. Within the former spaces, I observed money changing hands repeatedly in exchange for otaku ephemera such as comics, Blu Rays, posters, and jewellery. Notably, P #3 from A #2, who was cosplaying April O'Neil from the comic version of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* ("April O'Neil," n.d.), reported that their motivation for attending cons was "mostly to buy stuff."

During TB (2018), this concrete assemblage transformed entirely as individuals operated smartphones to take snapshots of their performances and those of others. This transition created what I called TB's (2018) offline cosphotography assemblage. This movement retained the above-listed elements but added the usage of technology qua content to proceedings. Here, offline mobile technological objects (e.g., smartphones) were used to take (still) photographs across this con's outdoor spaces. Indeed, P #19 from A #8, who performed *Jurassic Park*'s Ian Malcolm ("Ian Malcolm," 2019), explained the reasoning behind this preference: "Erm, it's pretty much my mobile phone. I mean it's nice, easy portable, I can, err, take photos, erm, videos, and easily share said photos and videos to, err, various social media sites." Indeed, P #18 from A #8 expressed a preference for using a smartphone whilst performing because of its portability: "It's just my mobile phone, just so you can carry it with you. A laptop would hinder your cosplay." Further, P #20 from A #8, who was cosplaying Rhonda Richardson from the Netflix series, *Glow* ("Rhonda Richardson," n.d.) also concurred, adding that mobile phones are "easy" to use if one wants to "snap some photos that you might have inspiration from." Intriguingly, during P #20's above answer, P #18 from A #8 stated that these devices are ideal because they hide—"conceal it better"—this practice from other unsuspecting

fans. (However, I approached this surprising finding with intrigue and fascination, not moralistic misgiving: "If it is so disgusting to judge, it is not because everything is of equal value, but on the contrary because what has value can be made or distinguished only by defying judgement" (Deleuze, 1998, p. 135).)

The BwO of this con's concrete and cosphotography assemblages was its outdoor floor space. However, when members of the latter multiplicity logged onto their chosen social media site(s), TB's (2018) cosphotography assemblage morphed itself into another completely independent desiring-machine and, in turn, the BwO became a smartphone screen. Within this sample, "Facebook, Instagram, Twitter" (P #2 from A#1) and "a bit of Tumblr" (P #16 from A#7) were the preferred social networking sites. This ensuing third multiplicity, I named TB's (2018) social media assemblage. Precisely, it was only when individuals—such as the abovementioned P #8 from A #4— had uploaded their images to social media via the localised use of a technological gadget (e.g., a smartphone) that the second assemblage transmogrified into this one. (Nevertheless, one should note that it was within reason that such pictures were not necessarily uploaded in real time at this con. If not, this second assemblage would have passed 'back' into another version of this con's concrete multiplicity.)

Essentially, this third desiring-machine added to the previous content of TB's (2018) concrete and cosphotography assemblages via its incorporation of the online dimension. Relevant here is P #20 from A #8's description of how they used Facebook to maintain contact with their loves ones but preferred IG for cosplaying because it supports their desire for imagery over language:

Yeah, I use Facebook and Instagram. Facebook mainly because, like, to keep in touch with, like, my family and friends that are far away, it's like, university friends that have left home, and stuff like that. Erm, like, family that's a lot older than me, now hooked onto Facebook so I can connect to them, sort of there, but I do prefer Instagram. Just...it's just more like, user-friendly and like, you don't like, see

loads of rubbish like you get on Facebook [laughter]. Like, so like, long essays of posts, of like, rambling on. I prefer like, visual stuff, like pictures and stuff like that to flick through —it's so much easier and quicker to do on Instagram so that's my preferred platform—but I do use both of those, so.

It follows that to peruse their own and others' selfies, such individuals would have required hardware items with networked connectivity (e.g., 4G) to allow them to connect to their chosen app(s). Furthermore, by posting images whilst present at this con—as P #8 from A #4 mentioned—these fans would have fed the algorithmic processes integral to the workings of these social media. At TB (2018), these algorithms were affects because they operated "flush with the real, beneath the representational functions of signification and designation" (Bosteels, 1998, p. 162). As such, these inorganic technical bodies were not only learning about these human interactions but also deterritorializing fandom-related acts by having real effects on this con's flows of matter.

Regarding the expressive qualities of TB's (2018) concrete assemblage, specifically its "indexes, icons, or symbols that enter regimes or semiotic systems" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 165), I recorded:

- Offline language: This took the form of meaning-making practices or "signifying semiologies" (Guattari, 2006, p. 415) that referenced cosplay character identity narratives, genres, and media sources. Indeed, across that weekend's carnivalesque festivities, I observed a multitude of Japanese (e.g., anime, manga) and Western media (e.g., Marvel and DC films and comics). This discourse also included attendees' speech acts (i.e., performatives), including those recorded on my field recorder. (These interpersonal fluxes corresponded to F. in Figure 4.1.)

- Offline sounds: Whilst conducting the interviews, I heard the strains of Western pop music, specifically Michael Jackson, broadcast across this festival's public address system.

- Offline body language or gestures: Upon being asked if I could take their photograph with my smartphone camera, I noted how fans silently struck repetitive statuesque poses. Intriguingly, P #13 from A #6 described how, on the one hand, photography involved "posing with other people," whilst on the other, "acting out a scene" encouraged video-making. Moreover, this same fan reported that the former might morph into the latter should there be "a big parade of cosplayers at the same time."

- Offline individual/group fabulations: For example, P #17 from A #7 performed the humanoid bird character Kiri the Kenku from the *Critical Role* web series *The Mighty Nein* ("Kiri," n.d.). During that same interview, P #16 added to the same theme by roleplaying Jester Lavorre ("Jester Lavorre," n.d.), a character taken from that series. (Note that these acts were fabulations, not phantasies because they were no longer imaginary. As such, these two cosplays were BwOs.)

Next, concerning TB's (2018) cosphotography assemblage, I identified an expressive trait that added to those featured above: offline events or ideas. For example, P #2 from A #1, who was cosplaying Elias Ainsworth from *The Ancient Magus' Bride* ("Elias Ainsworth," n.d.), described how they utilised their smartphone "to take photos at conventions." (Contrast this, with this same fan's professed use of "a computer at home just to keep in touch and go on websites and such.") Further, P #5 from A #3's interview resonated with this same sense of practicality: "Err, for me just a phone because it's the camera I always have handy. I have a tablet at home. I never bother taking it out anywhere." To be sure, this multiplicity was mobile—in more than one sense—because it was their smartphone's inherent portability that appealed to these fans' proclivity for spontaneous imagery. Indeed, P #20 from A #8 explained that because their mobile was "just easier to carry round," it meant that they could "snap" some inspirational photos as and when required.

Given that P #8 from A #4 reported that they shared their photos in real time at a con, it can be posited that it was at this point that they left TB's (2018) cosphotography assemblage and became part of the makeup of this con's third social media multiplicity. In doing so, they deterritorialized the location of this festival by increasing its scale as a collective assemblage for otaku enunciation. Thus, with this passage, not only was there an increase in TB's (2018) scale from local to global, but also a widening of fan perceptions.

Having examined the discourse, I noted the following inflexible molar lines along this con's vertical vector:

- age, 18-33 years old;

- nationality, all interviewees were from the United Kingdom;

- race/ethnicity, most attendees were ethnically White; and,

- family units, (e.g., P #8 from A #4 remarked, "you've got to think about it being a family event").

In comparison, in relation to TB's (2018) malleable molecular lines of 'likes,' or desires, I found:

- Imaginary character identities: These included performances of protagonists taken from Western media such as DC Comics' *The Joker* ("Joker," n.d.) (i.e., P #15 from A #6) to roleplays of Japanese cartoon characters, like Froppy ("Tsuyu Asui," n.d.), (i.e., P #10 from A #5) the transsexual frog-like superheroine from *My Hero Academia*.

- Disparate media: These stretched beyond cartoons, films, and computer games to include characters from web series (i.e., P #16 and P #17 from A #7 performed characters from *The Mighty Nein* ("Kiri," n.d.) and online television series (i.e., P #20 from A #8 portrayed a character from the Netflix series *Glow* ("Rhonda Richardson," n.d.).

- Crossplaying: There were three instances of this phenomenon. These included two female-to-male performances with P #4 from A #2 performing the character Casey Jones from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* ("Casey Jones," n.d.) and P #15 from A #6 cosplaying Heath Ledger's Joker from Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Night* ("Joker," n.d.). In addition, there was one male-to-female crossplay, namely, April O'Neill, from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* ("April O'Neill," n.d.) by P #3 from A #2.

- Interests: These affects encompassed hobbies, narratives, phantasies, skills, cosmetics, prosthetics, and different aesthetics. The latter incorporated the moe phenomenon of kawaii. For example, P #16 from A #7, who was cosplaying Kiri the Kenku from the *Critical Role* web series ("Kiri," n.d.), reported that they performed characters because "they're cute." Interests also manifested in penchants for character props informed by dark aesthetics. As P #11 from A #5, who was performing Ada Wong from the horror video game, *Resident Evil* ("Ada Wong," n.d.), disclosed: "I've got my umbrella with me today." Similarly, P #15 from A #6, who was crossplaying The Joker, explained how their (albeit hidden) prosthetic knife was part of their costume: "Right now, I'm doing Joker, I have my Joker knife in my bag. I haven't got it out yet. But, I feel comfortable having something that's, the character would have, like." Notably, Study 2 revealed a plethora of interests relating to the visual arts, such as still images (e.g., P #9 from A #4 mentioned that they had "never filmed anything"), local architecture (i.e., P #3 from A #2 had seen a "nice big sculpture around the corner"), making videos (e.g., P # 18 from #8: "I've got right now a video"), group photography (e.g., P #11 from A #5 mentioned "group shots")—not forgetting performance (e.g., P #17 from A # 7 remarked that "people do expect you to be in character").

Let us now consider P #18 from A #8 who cosplayed the video game character Wrench from *Watch Dogs 2* ("Wrench," n.d.): an event that gave rise to what I referred to as a 'becoming-cyborg' (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Becoming-cyborg

In terms of expression, the cosplay seen in Figure 5.1 did not serve as a representation of the subject as a cyborg. Instead, this performance functioned as a cyborgian figure which cut into another much bigger machine—the comic book subgenre of Cyberpunk. Thus, this becoming marked a transversal cross-over between the expressive aspects of this related fandom. Moreover, it was noteworthy that during their interview, P #18 from A #8 afforded a practical outlook as regards the use of technologies: "If the character wears a mask, then, wearing a mask would be good." Indeed, because their fictional character Wrench ("Wrench," n.d.) has a robotic voice, this fan sported a mask featuring an in-built electronic device. (Unfortunately, this is not visible in Figure 5.1.) This voice-changing gadget was audible throughout their interview.

Indeed, upon playing back the interview recording, this device modified or modulated this fan's speech to such an extent that, in places, words became indecipherable, muffled sonic abstractions.

With this becoming-cyborg, content served a pragmatic end because P #18 from A #8 reported that the portability of technology was paramount: "It's just my mobile phone, just so you can carry it with you. A laptop would hinder your cosplay." Also, note that, as with other fans parading across TB's (2018) outdoor areas, P #18 from A #8 was seen moving around and performing in their costume (including their mask). Specifically, this performance multiplicity included this fan's concrete body and the accompanying outfit. Indeed, this fan's mobile costume was not an entity but an assembly of human and nonhuman speeds. Figure 5.1 shows how this body's longitude comprised a black hoodie, goggles, and a leather-look studded mask and waistcoat. Overall, P #18 from A #8's cosplay was an expression that had been driven—but not determined—by content.

During their interview, P #18 from A #8 expressed an inclusive view of content whereby costumes were framed as practical technologies rather than a binary between different skill levels: "You could do hi-t, you could do low-t, and it doesn't really matter as long as you're, as long as you're showing the character that you love, and you're having fun, then, that's all that really matters." As such, it was found that although this P #18 from A #8 differentiated between skill levels—advanced use of technology (i.e., 'hi-t') versus a less advanced deployment (i.e., 'low-t')—ultimately, they reported that what matters with cosplay is desire (i.e., "love," and "having fun"). Moreover, the fact that P #18 from A #8's voice-changer blended human and nonhuman sonics meant that this cosplay forged a partial posthumanist subjectivity from inbetween these traits. And, by emphasizing the primacy of "fun" within a performance, this fan expressed a carefree openness toward their hobby. So, by compiling these elements, P #18 from A #8 demonstrated legitimate use of the connective synthesis (RSP #5).

The becoming-cyborg tinkered with their outward appearance and morphed their (previously human) voice. In so doing, this performance art machine produced a surface teeming with audio-visual intensities. Indeed, because this fan's vox was part human and part electronic machine, this cosplay produced what might be called a polyvocal cyborgian assemblage of enunciation. As such, P #18 from A#8's technologically driven theatrics helped redistribute onlookers' sense organs via a becoming-ear of the eye and back again. For this reason, this bionic act's libidinal investment was directed towards group 'likes' and, therefore, a social or mass investment of desire. Thus, this multiplicity's sensory concoction evidenced a legitimate deployment of the disjunctive synthesis (RSP #6).

P #18 from A #8 stressed how cosplaying demands "mutual understanding" regarding consent and fan photography. (Indeed, this comment relates to P #16 from A #7's mention of "the whole cosplay is not consent movement," whereby non-fans (i.e., "members of the general public") fail to comprehend the performative purpose of "more risqué outfits.") This interviewee explained how this does not always occur because they alluded to "the other side of the story where people will just take pictures of you without asking." Nevertheless, P #18 from A #8 described circumstances whereby "someone will start to approach you already so you'll know this person knows who you are." This latter remark evidenced an intuitive, democratic mindset amongst this con's attendees— including those fans who were not in costume but took most of the pictures. Here, this fandom was about interacting with others within a system of reciprocal respect. Additionally, P #18 from A #8 mentioned that they proliferated online connections via Facebook, Twitter, and sporadically Instagram: "those are the major ones that everybody seems to use. So, might as well stick to those and not stray from it. Or else you'll get no traffic." To this end, this becoming-cyborg formed a subject-group directed toward conjoining offline and online flows of desire (RSP #7).

By employing a voice-modifying gadget within their performance, P #18 from A #8 weaponized their voice so that it became an intensity. As I mentioned, this technological device was concealed because it was fitted into this character's mask. Taken together, these BwOs or practices managed to hide the face and double track the human voice simultaneously. In doing so, this becoming-cyborg created a theme or kyara rather than a set identity. Overall, these affects aligned this performance to an investment of nomadic desire, not self-interest (RSP #8).

5.3   Results: Part 2

Another notable becoming at TB (2018) was the performance of Kiri the Kenku from the Critical Role online series, *The Mighty Nein* ("Kiri," n.d.) by P #16 from A #7 (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

Becoming-crow

As one sees in Figure 5.2, this fan cosplayed a crow. As such, I called this event a 'becoming-crow.' Indeed, in Figure 5.2, one sees that this performance's expression comprised a black beak mask, a green toga, a brown shawl, and feathered hands. Taken together, these affects assembled this nonhuman fictional character. Intriguingly, P #16 from A #7 mentioned a fondness for a cosplay-related practice called "gijinka," which they ably defined as "turning nonhuman things into human things." Significantly, given this thesis's emphasis on becoming, they described this practice as a verb, not a noun. Moreover, during their interview, P #16 from A #7 explained why they were performing this specific character: "I think they're cute." Thus, with this affect, the kawaii aesthetic was present.

This becoming-crow's expressivity was reciprocally related to the above-listed non-discursive prosthetics. Notably, P #16 from A #7 performed this character alongside their friend P #17 from A #7, who added to *The Mighty Nein* theme by cosplaying Jester Lavorre ("Jester Lavorre," n.d.). (Like Kiri, Jester Lavorre is also a humanoid—roughly, a nonhuman in human form—but comes from the fictitious horned 'Tiefling' race ("Jester Lavorre," n.d.).) This interview assemblage revealed how this becoming-crow was part of a joint performance based upon this *Dungeons & Dragons* web series ("Kiri," n.d.). Further, this co-expression turned on a mutually beneficial concern with the management of prosthetics (i.e., content). So, whilst this becoming-crow featured a bird mask, P #17 from A #7's outfit included a tail. P #16 from A #7 explained this co-operation thus:

> I actually have a mask that goes with this costume. I'm not wearing it right now. If you're in something like that, have someone with you to be a spotter, so that you don't walk into everyone. I'm also spotting for her tail, as well. Erm, but yeah it's stuff like that, like if, do a full test, and like, if you're aware, that like, oh, there's something in this costume that could be an issue when I'm in public I try and be aware of that, like, you get that a lot with the first-suiters, and stuff of, like, I can't

see in this head so I have to have someone with me. Tap me on the shoulder, let me know what's going on.

In brief, with these findings, content and expression folded or weaved into one another to the point of indistinction.

Because P #16 from A #7 encompassed a symbiosis between a nonhuman fictional body and a real material human one, it forged an entirely new third body from these machines and their codes. Thus, this becoming-crow was inclusive. In addition, this performance was only a partial alteration because this sensory becoming produced a destratification—as opposed to an obliteration—of their self by "turning nonhuman things into human things." Indeed, this humanoid assemblage hinted at the possibility of other as yet unspecified brood-based performances. On the whole, these aspects pointed to a valid deployment of the connective synthesis (RSP #5).

In producing this third body, this avian becoming kin-dled an inclusive disjunction because it forged a polyvocal collective assemblage of enunciation spanning human and nonhuman strata. Moreover, P #16 from A #7 revealed an interest that stretched beyond the animal kingdom to inanimate machines mentioning their proclivity for roleplaying robots: "Like, one of the ones that I do that's more well-known is BB8. As soon as I saw those promos for Star Wars, I was like, I love it! The willingness to perform for others indicated a mass investment of desire and thus a legitimate use of disjunction (RSP #6).

P #16 from A #7 also described how they refrained from judging others' cosplays and how they used this fandom to connect with and assist less experienced others. In this way, P #16 from A #7 displayed an intuitive empathy: "I think in terms of, like, there's a lot of like cosplay groups, and generally it's sort of like, generally frowned upon, to like, be mean about other people's cosplays, especially if they're only just starting out." Furthermore, since P #16 from A #7 was co-performing with P #17 from A #7, this team effort resonated with the collective spirit of love and adventure that animates the fictional

world of *The Mighty Nein* ("Kiri," n.d.). Thus, this performance troupe's mutant alliance created a subject-group (RSP #7).

This fandom-based bloc of becoming entertained the possibility of generating alternate modes of being through creature-based becomings. Indeed, not only was P #16 from A #7 indicative of a pack mentality, but it also formed a second alliance by interfacing with their friend. Moreover, throughout their interview these fans were on the lookout for familiar faces. Indeed, at one point, P #16 from A #7 enthusiastically exclaimed: "Have you seen someone else we know?" Thus, the force (puissance) of this group contagion resulted in an infectious nonhuman peopling across this con's floor space. In forming a humanoid multiplicity, this pair furnished a nomadic investment (RSP #8).

P #8 from A #4 performed Queen Daenerys Targaryen from the television series *Game of Thrones* ("Daenerys Targaryen," n.d.), which I dubbed a 'becoming-Queen' (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3

Becoming-Queen

If one looks closely at the left of Figure 5.3, one sees that not only did this fan's costume comprise a blue and black toga, a gold belt, and matching ballerina shoes, but it also included a diminutive black-and-red cuddly toy dragon. Indeed, in Figure 5.3, this prosthetic is cradled in this individual's hands. Again, any clear division between content and expression was muddied, given that although this non-living prosthetic constituted content by being a 'thing' (for want of a better word), it simultaneously performed alongside this human fan as expression. As such, only half of this joint, 'live' performance could be described as 'alive.'

Recall how this becoming-Queen was doubly instructive by highlighting a line of escape and helping elucidate the three desiring-machines found at TB (2018) (RSP #5). So, although the abovementioned dragon comprised part of this con's concrete multiplicity, when I took the photo seen in Figure 5.3, this marked that body's transition from content to expression. At the same time, this act represented the shift from TB's (2018) concrete multiplicity to its cosphotography one. Hypothetically, had I uploaded this image to say, IG, this would have signalled an entry into TB's (2018) social media multiplicity. (To be clear, I did not share any of these images online or offline.)

Let us now turn to this fan's reasons for using social media to share photographs taken at this con. During their interview, P #8 from A #4 described how they used their preferred networks—specifically, Facebook and Instagram—to connect with others by looking at and potentially 'liking' their efforts:

> I've got a Facebook page. Erm, and I use Instagram as well. Erm, yeah. A lot of people, I use Instagram, like, you can tag the person as you're cosplaying as, like today I'll put Daenerys Targaryen and people might, erm, like, click like Daenerys Targaryen cosplay on Instagram and then, they can, like, my picture will come up as well. And it's just sort of, yeah. You can see loads of peoples,' like, ideas of different cosplays and stuff. Like it.

Furthermore, this desire for connectivity was reportedly achieved through hashtags that were used to denote the character being portrayed. Crucially, P #8 from A #4 alluded to how this process can occur in real time at a con: "you can tag the person as you're cosplaying." Thus, the scale of TB's (2018) content and expression increased exponentially upon entry into its social media assemblage.

With this becoming-Queen, the toy dragon worked contagiously as a tiny desiring-machine that highlighted the intriguing possibilities of other mutant, pack-like alliances between living, organic bodies and non-living, inorganic ones. Hence, this performance's inclusivity blurred the lines between strata, destratifying subjectivities in the process. At the same time, this little dragon functioned as a partial subjectivity in that it served as an external memory trigger—a contagious one. Indeed, its wonder-inducing capacity was revealed in P #8 from A #4's comment: "It [the dragon] gives little clues on who you are." And by blurring the lines between animate and inanimate performance, this soft toy dragon raised questions about who and what was cosplaying. Altogether, this cosplay illustrated the legitimate use of connective synthesis (RSP #5).

By combining technology (i.e., content) with aesthetics (i.e., expression) in the ways mentioned above, P #8 from A #4 engineered a mixed semiotics, which suggested how different modes of being might be spread via offline(–online) performances. Moreover, during their interview, this fan elucidated upon their inclusive approach: "you don't have to look like the character that yer cosplaying, like, erm, someone might say to me that I shouldn't cosplay someone really skinny cos I'm a little bit chubbier or something like that."

Thus, by not physically resembling their chosen character, P #8 from A #4 scrambled this character's expressive codes and created something new. And, by adding an extra element—namely, a toy dragon—they created further abstraction. In sum, their desire to perform, regardless of their lack of likeness to their chosen character, indicated a bold social investment (RSP #6).

P #8 from A #4's interview also highlighted this individual's non-judgemental, non-hierarchical stance toward the activities of other fans:

I don't like, like elitism in cosplay. So if I see, if there's a cosplayer that I support on social media, and they're like hating on someone else. It's like everyone's got different of what, of what they can make, or if they like, buy something, like that's completely fine as well.

Essentially, this remark indicated the absence of any punitive group superego. In fact, P #8 from A #4 stressed how ultimately, character accuracy was not essential to this fandom's "fun" practices. However, P #8 from A #4 refrained from criticising those fans who do care more about the accuracy of cosplay:

Some people, like really, really think about accuracy, like, you've gotta, like, attention to detail, you've gotta look exactly like the character, but you don't always have to. It's a bonus if you do, but you don't always have to.

Because of this open-mindedness, this becoming-Queen alluded to the formation of a non-judgemental subject-group (RSP #7).

P #8 from A #4's creative practice did not stop at TB (2018) because they also spoke of having "a long list" of fictional characters they were eager to perform. This remark evidenced how this individual approached alternate egos as nomadic opportunities to become an event rather than fixed identity-based options. Furthermore, this desire was catching because P #8 from A #4 explained—between bursts of guffawing, I must add—that they were driven to cosplay either because they had "just watched something" and "liked" a particular fictional character's "outfit," or alternatively because they were fond of "their personality." Returning to this becoming-Queen's performance at TB: By integrating a little cute character mnemonic (i.e., the toy dragon) within this multiplicity, this fan pulled subjectivities this way and that by (cos)playing with this fictitious character's marvellous world (i.e., Queen Daenerys Targaryen ("Daenerys

Targaryen," n.d.). As such, this toy-ing with the minds of others evidenced an investment in nomadic desire (RSP #8).

5.4   Discussion

Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as 'us' in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called 'us', and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? (Haraway, 1991, p. 155)

Let us begin this discussion of TB's (2018) lines of escape by considering P #18 from A #8's becoming-cyborg. In this performance, human and nonhuman qualities combine to produce an entity defined as "a hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). However, I argue that this cosplay is neither a representation nor a "metaphor" (Haraway, 1991, p. 212). Instead, this figure refers to a practice or a BwO whereby reality is altered through fabulation or becoming. Thus, this becoming-cyborg exemplifies one of TB's (2018) many "aesthetic figures" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 177). In addition, I hold that this bionic affect simultaneously functions as a conceptual persona, precisely, 'the Robot.' In doing so, this cosplay shows us a possible posthuman exit route away from the quotidian and toward "uncertain desire-zones" (Guattari, 1995b, p. 80).

In this becoming-cyborg, a technological gadget (i.e., a voice box) remixes this fan's speech in real time. As such, this gizmo synaesthetically adds something auricular to what is primarily a visual dramatization. Specifically, by modifying this individual's voice, the sounds emanating from behind their mask function "as "shifters" of subjectivation" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 20). In fact, this electronically enabled disguise alludes to nothing less than the sonic abstractions of the BwO: "In order to resist using

words composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a., p. 20). This affect thereby makes clear that cosplay is not a one-trick pony by challenging any tacit assumption that cosplay is simply about visuals. Indeed, this becoming-cyborg sheds light on how words might also be used ""in an incantational, truly magical sense—for their shape and their sensuous emanations, not only for their meaning" (Artaud, 1992, p. 68). Hence, this cosplay underlines how (hidden) electronic gadgetry might be used to accentuate other sensory aspects of performance art besides visual perception.

To be sure, P #18 from A #8's voice-morphing gadget echoes the influence of the "Cyberpunk" genre on this fandom because of its (now retro-) futuristic recourse to "the power and promise of '90s-era electronics" (Orsini, 2015, p. 228). Nevertheless, it is this becoming's use of technology (i.e., content), rather than any cyborgian narrative (i.e., expression), that makes the difference (in an onto-epistemological sense). Here, this fan's garb does not pertain to Oedipalizing prosthetics but rather forms the audio-visual arms of a (non-violent) nomadic cosplaying war machine: "Affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are the weapons of war" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 415). Crucially, with this cosplay, material and immaterial bodies co-exist so that desire comes up trumps. This event thereby channels irreducible mixed semiotics whereby what matters is not the performer but "the sound molecule" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 290).

Moreover, this becoming-cyborg's dissensual to-and-fro switching from eyes to ears alters fan subjectivities so that they come to occupy the space between these senses. Here, one might use Artaud's (1992) thinking to describe this movement as a dissonant switch "from a colour to a noise" (p. 69). In this regard, the physicality of P #18 from A#8's larynx operates as a partial object—a pure intensity. As such, this organ machine is "carried over into a new act of producing" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 17). For this reason, I hold that this uncanny performance acts as a cosplaying doorway or

threshold that lets in other voices. Connor (1997) alludes to this possibility: "The self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imaged not as a point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel" (p. 207). Furthermore, the operation of this fan's voice-changing gadget provides evidence of a practice that McKenzie Wark (2014) calls "*xenocommunication*," of which two varieties are posited: "It can be the irruption within a mundane communication of something inhuman. Or, it can take the form of an alien mode of communication itself, which nevertheless seems legible, at least to someone within the sphere of communication" (p. 161).

That said, this becoming-cyborg should not be taken as evidence that this fandom's visuals can or should be split from its sonics. Or alternatively, the latter is more important than the former when it comes to identifying a fictional character and inducing moe (Galbraith, 2014, pp. 6–7). Instead, this cyborgian roleplay fleetingly occupies the space inbetween those two senses. As such, this performance does not present another string to this cosplay's dramatic bow but rather underscores the "power of rhythm, which is more profound than vision, hearing, etc. Rhythm appears as music when it invests the auditory level, and painting when it invests the visual level" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 32). However, more than anything, I argue that this becoming-cyborg's auditory "*doubling*" manifests echolalia, which as an instance of rhythm or repetition, suggests the "uncanny" (Fisher, 2016, p. 9). Thus, this cosplay's affect might thereby be described as an unheimlich polyrhythmic assemblage.

And yet, not only does P #18 from A #8's semi-robotic cosplay depersonalize the sound of this fan's voice, but it also defacializes their body through a mask and owl-like googles (see Figure 5.1). In doing so, this cosplay renders the personal entirely impersonal. Here, a lone human voice becomes a chorus of indistinguishable, invisible, and (now) polyvocal nonhuman others. In fact, this point echoes Bakhtin's (1999) notion of "polyphony" through which aesthetics unites "many wills, a will to the event" (p. 21).

(And, if the notion of a robot having a sense of agency is not uncanny, what is?) In turn, this multiplicity's dramatic vanishing act serves as a line of escape: "One has to disappear, to become unknown" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 45). To this end, this roleplay's inherent indiscernibility conjures a "becoming-imperceptible" because it merges "the (anorganic) imperceptible, the (asignifying) discernible, and the (asubjective) impersonal" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 325).

Essentially, with this becoming-cyborg, this fan wears their moe heart qua desire on their body. As such, I argue that this performance inverts or, better, unfolds Lacan's (2007) notion of "extimacy," whereby the impersonal outside gains personal intimacy to become an "intimate exteriority" (p. 171). Instead, this cyborgian roleplay is nomadic precisely because it has no 'insides'—just exteriority. Indeed, this is why P #18 from A #8 is a nomadic investment. Moreover, this cosplay marks "counter-actualization" by connoting "the "they" of impersonal and pre-individual singularities, the "they" of the pure event where *it* dies in the same way that *it* rains" (Deleuze, 1990a, p. 152). Bluntly, 'It' speaks. In summary, this becoming-cyborg accentuates how cosplay might merge its (human) voices with techno-others and turn subjectivity into joyful, experimental praxis.

With P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow, a fictional character that (arguably) has no point in coming into existence is made both joyous and real through fabulation. As such, I submit that this affect is an act of "love" and one that ontologises a cosplaying "war machine endowed with strange and somewhat terrifying powers" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 325). In turn, this sense of uncanniness signals the invisible presence of moe qua affect. Furthermore, I argue that this multiplicity's capacity to invoke these odd feelings uses nonhuman sexuality as its unconscious template, or better, programme. To be exact, this roleplay begins—like all becomings do—with the induction of a "*becoming-woman*" followed by "*the becoming-animal of the human*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 325). (In this case, a crow-like humanoid.) To be sure, P #16 from A #7 is not transformed into this bird via their performance. This is because nothing

changes regarding this fan's actual molar identity. After all, cosplay becomings are a virtual molecular phenomenon. Instead, this cosplay achieves its strange results by ambiguating the supposed boundaries between these species via its alternation of libidinal energy: "Sexuality is the production of a thousand tiny sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings. *Sexuality proceeds by way of the becoming-woman of the man and the becoming-animal of the human*: an emission of particles" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 325).

At this point, I insist that this fabulative performance does not produce objets d'art but rather conjures the body as an event. Thus, this feathered cosplay assembles a costume that refers to nothing other than the longitude of the body: "speeds and slownesses" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 359). In light of this claim, I hold that P #16 from A #7's reference to "gijinka," whereby the nonhuman is made human, might be rethought as a rhizome that grants fans access to other nonhuman assemblages. As such, this cosplay is not a matter of a conscious cosplayer signifying their desire and identity. Instead, this becoming-crow serves a dehumanizing, abstract, and impersonal purpose that pivots on using an avian mask. However, rather than this prosthetic serving as an Oedipalizing tool of the State, in this instance, it functions as an affective, nomadic weapon. Put differently, with this crow-ing the inhumanity of the face is usurped by yet another mask.

Additionally, P #16 from A #7's bird disguise functions as a "probe-head" by returning the head to "a body that is already deterritorialized relatively and plugged into becomings-spiritual/animal" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 223). With this crow-ing the face is camouflaged to compose a landscape of "supple microheads with animal facializations" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 247). Crucially, the deployment of this beaked mask allows this fan to disappear into this protagonist's bird suit. In doing so, I argue that this becoming-animal's defacialization tactics challenge the "semiotic of modern White Men, the semiotic of capitalism" because this cosplaying BwO interferes

with this system's "*limit*-faces" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 213). Here, this public vanishing act points towards the ultimate affect: "*becoming-imperceptible*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 219).

Study 2 also provides data on a reciprocal in-situ "spotting" that took place between P #16 and P #17, both from A #7. This phenomenon involves these fans working together to manage the spaces in and around their respective costumes—specifically, the former multiplicity's avian mask and the latter's tail. Intriguingly, this collaborative display hints at an allied organ exchange because each of these desiring-machines serves as the others' pair of eyes. In doing so, these cosplaying comrades ephemerally conjugate two separate nervous systems to produce a third "more powerful body" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 300). In this respect, I posit that Johnston's (1999) notion of machinic vision should be used to explain this alliance because it offers recourse to "not only an environment of interacting machines and human-machine systems but a field of decoded perceptions that, whether or not produced by or issuing from these machines, assume their full intelligibility only in relation to them" (p 27).

Further, the libidinous association between these fans is facilitated via their shared affinity for the abovementioned practice of "gijinka," whereby a humanoid is ontologised in what is effectively a two-way destratification, or more plainly, remix. However, this phenomenon is not the result of any Oedipalizing group identification but rather exemplifies what Vaneigem (2012) calls "an *identity reflex*," whereby "we enhance our multiplicity within the unity of federated subjectivities" (p. 220). And with P #16 from A #7 and P #17 from A #7's collaborative display, humans unite to form blocs of sensation with one another and their nonhuman fictional characters.

Because P #16 from A #7 portrays a bird, one might think that this event straightforwardly belongs to a subset of cosplay known as "furries" (Schroy et al., 2016, p. 154). With this practice, fans costume themselves as animals in one of two ways: using anthropomorphism to afford animals human features or zoomorphism to endow

humans with animal ones (Schroy et al., 2016, p. 154). However, I insist that this becoming-crow achieves a remarkable uncanny double doubling: On the one hand, this roleplay renders a fictional crow a reality through fabulation and re-scales it as (a) human (i.e., anthropomorphism); whilst, on the other, a human is endowed with bird features (i.e., zoomorphism). As such, this affect occupies the non-localisable space sandwiched between these two concepts because, as a humanoid, it is part bird and part human. (Somewhat paradoxically, this performance-based rhizome can be located between T. and U. in Figure 4.1.) In fact, an alternative way of understanding this becoming might be to consider what Haraway (2016) refers to as the "relentlessly becoming-with" of "companion species" (p. 13). The implication of this is that cosplay is about performing with, or perhaps, through others rather than merely imitating them. In sum, this moe BwO points toward how this fandom might source further becomings-animal as so many "modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 279).

Staying with this becoming-animal theme, I wish to discuss P #8 from A #4's becoming-Queen: a cosplay of Queen Daenerys Targaryen from *Game of Thrones* ("Daenerys Targaryen," n.d.). This performance is noteworthy due to its incorporation of the previously mentioned soft toy dragon with its kawaii aesthetic. Essentially, the addition of this inanimate moe entity gives this multiplicity a resolutely symbiotic quality because its presence marks "nuptials between two reigns" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 2). ('reign' is particularly apposite in this instance). Moreover, the addition of this draconic affect facilitates a decoding and a deterritorialization of prospective onlookers' vision, followed by a recoding and reterritorialization. This is because this prop temporarily shifts focus away from the animate human and toward this inanimate nonhuman. However, this is only half the story, given that this finding also triggers: "not horror but *fascination*" (Fisher, 2016, p. 17). And as Lacan (2004) tells us, when the gaze is provoked, "the feeling of strangeness begins too" (p. 75). The presence of this fan's cute dragon thereby

decodes and deterritorializes the gaze by turning it into a desiring-machine. Consequently, this cosplay actively incites a consideration of not only this fictional character's incorporeal myth-based world but also its relation to all those others on show at TB (2018). (All of these otaku universes or subjectivities are at U. in Figure 4.1.)

Nevertheless, the presence of P #8 from A #4's dragon should not be used to conflate pleasure with recognition. Instead, this affect testifies to this becoming-Queen's reference to the joy produced by cosplay's sense of mystery, thus their reference to "little clues." Indeed, this becoming-Queen holds an air of mesmeric suggestibility because this toy functions mnemonically: "slow degrees through a carefully graduated series of hints" (Bergson, 1911, p. 20b). Furthermore, because this regal becoming provokes looking, it turns perception into an active, bodily event: "a becoming *of* the image in a body, but where the body is not autonomous from that image" (Coleman, 2011, p. 158). Significantly, this single deterritorializing-reterritorializing movement bears the hallmarks of nomadic intuition because this petite firebreather acts as a nomadic weapon within this performance.

P #8 from A #4 preference for "having fun" over appearing "exactly like a character"—the latter being described as "a bonus"—alludes to cosplay working as a non-judgemental mode for the constitution of a nomadic performance art machine. So, instead of accentuating a hierarchy whereby the skilled are differentiated from the unskilled and degraded in the process, this fan welcomes all-comers to TB's (2018) floorshow. So, by rejecting any requirement for precise reproduction, mimesis qua imitation is replaced with simulation. In fact, I hold that this fan's disregard for accuracy might be conceived in a Spinozist sense as acknowledgement of 'Nature's' infallibility: "For nothing belongs to the nature of anything except what follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause. And whatever follows from the necessity of the nature of the efficient cause happens necessarily" (Spinoza, 1996, p. 115).

Overall, P #8 from A #4's performance demonstrates how this fandom could function as a dissensual means for carefree, 'anything goes' experiences. Indeed, this cosplay is nomadic precisely because it is fearless in its lack of concern for binaries such as professional versus amateur, original versus unoriginal, and human versus nonhuman. In sum, this performance art's "fun" (P #8 from A #4), lies in its possibilities for abstraction rather than its ability to induce recognition.

At the start of this chapter, I outlined the triangulated ethnographies used within Study 2. Then, in the second subsection, I considered TB's (2018) horizontal and vertical vectors before ending that section with a description of a cyborgian becoming. And in the following subsections, I expanded this cartography by discussing two further becomings-animal. Lastly, I explained how cosplay's uncanny affects might nomadically deterritorialize and reterritorialize fan subjectivities either through defacialization (i.e., the becoming-cyborg and the becoming-crow) or by turning one's attention toward the role played by non-living, inorganic, nonhuman affects (i.e., the becoming-Queen).

The next chapter considers what these becomings reveal about cosplay's capacity to help fans lose their obligatory capitalistic subjectivities by accessing an altogether different spacetime. This claim is based on the becomings documented across the last two chapters, which hint at how this subculture's nonhuman qualities might help forge an uncanny nomadic-posthumanist performance art—one that empowers its fans via the sheer force (puissance) of its contagious affects.

Chapter 6 Fashioning new spacetimes

The end of all separation undoubtedly begins with the end of one particular separation, that between space and time. (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 195)

This chapter aims to provide fresh insights into what this fandom's bodies might do to engineer liberatory subjectivities amidst late capitalism's ruins (RP #1 & RP #2). As we saw in the previous two chapters, cosplay can create uncanny affects that traverse online and offline multiplicities. However, the precise mechanism through which this phenomenon occurs has not been fully explicated. Thus, this chapter argues that the key to understanding how this performance art might spring forth such strange lines of escape lies in its ability to forge alternate modes of being that escape capitalism's linear spacetime coordinates. As such, I posit that because cosplay's uncanny rhizomes fall inbetween its online and offline practices, freedom is to be found within this spacetime—not in an either/or alternative.

To this end, this chapter concerns what Studies 1 and 2 reveal about what this subculture's practices do to spacetime. And, like the previous two chapters, I am not claiming that these performances represent something generic about this fandom's bodies and their accompanying territories. Instead, this part of the SA charts how online and offline affects might fold into and out of each other but only within the context of this research. Prior studies have tended to separate these dimensions and/or place them into a hierarchy. Bainbridge and Norris (2013), for example, claimed that this hobby's creativity lies only in its arts and crafts, not in its digital practices (para. 27). Thankfully, Peirson-Smith (2019) was not as quick to dismiss the import of online activities, arguing that cosplay tout court offers Southeast Asian fans a hybridized experience of "the liminal and the liminoid" (Peirson-Smith, 2019, p. 72). Here, 'liminal' refers to this fandom's capacity to offer fans access to a space free of societal norms and an opportunity to communicate their devotion to this subculture. In contrast, the concept of

'liminoid' paints cosplay as an escapist leisure pursuit: "an outlet for experimental creativity" (p. 72). Crucially, Peirson-Smith (2019) noted how social media platforms engendered "a techno-liminal space" that complemented offline "lived experiences" (p. 78). However, despite these valuable insights, Peirson-Smith's (2019) primary focus was on offline con-based practices.

Considering the above, this thesis refuses to separate online and offline practices or costuming from playing because such arborescent thinking creates hierarchies. Here, I argue that this way of thinking is unhelpful because it infers that one type of cosplay expression is more worthy than another. In contrast, this research shuns binarizing, reductive approaches and submits that these dimensions are equal in terms of their ability to augment a cosplaying body's capacity to affect itself and others. (Although, as we shall see, context-specificity is paramount.)

This chapter addresses this thesis's RP by considering what this performance art's digital and physical practices—its BwOs—might do. The overarching argument is that this subculture's costuming and playing are inseparable across its online and offline practices. Thus, I start this chapter by describing how Study 1's cosplaying IG assemblages are related to two milieus and a refrain. The latter's rhythm is considered via three forces: "infra-assemblage," "intra-assemblage," and "interassemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 364). Then, in the next subsection, I suggest how the single process of territorialization maps directly onto cosplay's use of costuming and performance across IG's spacetimes. The remainder of this chapter applies the same formula in considering Study 2's exposition of TB's (2018) spacetime and its correlative affects.

6.1   From style to stylization: Study 1's uncanny online refrain

The centrality of doors, thresholds and portals means that the notion of *the between* is crucial to the weird. (Fisher, 2016, p. 28)

Let us begin by mapping Study 1's findings concerning its "corporeal coordinates or milieus" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 212). Here, a milieu can be defined as any "block of spacetime constituted by the periodic repetition of the component" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 364). Referring to Figure 4.1, milieus are heterogeneous fluxes located at F.. These movements are directional because territorialization between F. and T. led to Study 1's cosplay assemblages. Indeed, the action of posting an IG cosplaying selfie suggested the existence of a milieu. On reflection, whilst conducting this part of this research, I too became immersed in currents of data traffic whilst navigating this fandom's IG-based desiring-machines (RP #1). In so doing, I identified two qualitatively different chaotic environments pertaining to cosplay and this social media.

Looking closely at each selfie's backdrop, I noted that an offline milieu was observable in most cases (apart from instances such as A #40, who digitally camouflaged their selfie's background, thus rendering its location invisible to the naked eye). In some cases, these IG selfie assemblages showed outdoor physical spaces (e.g., A #21 and A #32), whereas, in others, I observed indoor spaces. For example, A #14 and A #22 seemingly performed inside their homes. Here, I argue that because these offline environments functioned as a base for online ones, they exemplified Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) concept of "transcoding or transduction" (p. 364). However, this passage from offline to online milieus—as evidenced indirectly via each cosplay image's existence—should not be seen as a straight swap or binary relation. Instead, I propose that this relation pointed to the existence of an ontological feedback loop: "*the conservation of being through becoming*" (Simondon, 1992, p. 301).

Unlike its milieus, Study 1's territories functioned through decoding and "certain coefficients of deterritorialization" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 380). Thus, in considering this aspect, I was dealing with this fandom's dimensionality, not its direction. Precisely, cosplay's IG territory is located at T. in Figure 4.1. Here this refrain was sandwiched between the abovementioned online and offline milieus. Indeed, it was here

that this fandom's territory hung together and gained consistency. However, the rhythmic

transition between F. and T. in Figure 4.1 occurred prior to the singular territorial refrain

established by this glut of online performances: "the melodic or rhythmic themes precede

their performance and recording" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 386). In other words,

this online refrain (ritournelle) elicited all forty of these cosplay selfie assemblages and

their constituent elements (not vice versa).

IG's cosplaying ritournelle comprised a trio of forces: infra-assemblage, intra-

assemblage, and inter-assemblage. Let us now deal with each of these co-emergent

forces in turn. This refrain's infra-assemblage connoted the different affects—colours,

textures, prosthetics, cosmetics, etc.—assembled in these cosplaying selfies. Take, for

instance, A #10, a performance of the computer game character Sal Fisher ("Sal Fisher,"

n.d.) (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1

Sal Fisher cosplay

Figure 6.1 shows how this selfie's infra-assemblage comprised a blue wig, a

white plastic mask, a black jumper, and a 'Sign of the horns' hand gesture. However, it

should be noted that this performance did not constitute a precise imitation of this

character's appearance due to numerous omissions, such as this character's

(supposedly) distinctive glass eye and pigtails ("Sal Fisher," n.d.). Instead, I follow

Caillois's (2001) use of mimesis to argue that this performance ably simulates this

character's physical appearance and rebellious attitude without the need for exactitude. One might quip, in this case, that this devil is without (all) the details.

In terms of IG's cosplaying infra-assemblage, the technological surface of Study 1's BwO provided a bit-part substitute for these fans' physical skin. So, although these images evidenced how cosmetics and prosthetics had been applied to concrete bodies (i.e., content), these entities were now online images (i.e., expressions) pinned to a smartphone or computer screen. This finding echoes Didier Anzieu's (2018) observation that it is upon the skin that the physical and the psychological mingle. For this psychoanalyst, this bodily surface functions as "an in-between, a transitional thing" (Anzieu, 2018, p. 18). Applied to Study 1's findings, Anzieu's (2018) remarks help explain the importance of cosmetics and prosthetics in cosplay because they suggest that this physical surface (i.e., content) provided the canvas for these otaku multiplicities' subsequent screened performances (i.e., expressions). Indeed, with these IG selfies, the 'skin' functioned as a de facto advertising board for these chosen fictional characters. Crucially, because the use of smartphones entailed the operation of touchscreen technology, the physical surface of the skin was still a part of these online assemblages.

Study 1's findings did not contradict Anzieu's (2018) thinking about the importance of the skin for the body and mind. That said, this theory needs to be adapted and updated because this part of the research found that cosplay's dressings of the body were not only textile, but they were also digital (e.g., A #39's becoming-slasher and A #40's becoming-edited). Moreover, Anzieu's (2018) musings on the skin qua surface are too generic to explain the nuances of Study 1's intra-assemblage, which were entirely context specific. Thus, the emergence of this online collective of enunciation could not be understood via recourse to a cosplayer. Instead, these subjectivities occurred with IG acting as an existential territory (i.e., T. in Figure 4.1).

Further, Study 1's unearthing of distinct kinds of skin costuming did not confirm the so-called reality principle intrinsic to Freud's (2011) "body-ego" (p. 31). Instead,

these findings suggested that cosplay might help put individual (male) egos to the sword via a technologically facilitated process of counter-actualisation, whereby "the actor-dancer extracts the pure event which communicates with all the others and returns to itself through all the others, and with all the others" (Deleuze, 1990a, pp. 178–179). Thus, by harnessing an excess of affect—Lacan's (2016) "*remainder*" (p. 220)—these online cosplays shed light on how to move beyond the confines of the embodied self by playing on its surfaces (i.e., BwOs). As such, these otherworldly transitions hinted at other possible otaku worlds within this one: "Nothing left but the world of speeds and slowness without form, without subject, without a face" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 330).

In terms of this IG's cosplaying refrain, its intra-assemblage was marked by a ritualised dressing-up. On the one hand, costumes functioned as fictional character "motifs"; whilst, on the other, their often-subtle aesthetics acted as "counterpoints" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 376). But whereas costumes related to cosplay's collective assemblages of enunciation (i.e., aesthetics), the action of posting a selfie pertained to machinic assemblages (i.e., technology). Precisely, the latter phenomenon constituted the play element of these multiplicities. Figure 6.2 maps this interfacing to show how cosplay functioned as a diagram or machine:

Figure 6.2

Instagram's cosplay refrain
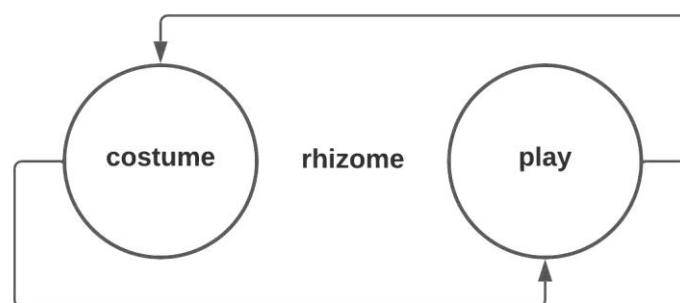
Importantly, this use of technological gadgetry constituted a temporal phenomenon before becoming spatialised on IG. Furthermore, if one follows Figure 6.2's circular path, one can gauge how the previously listed qualities of the infra-assemblage passed into the intra-assemblage to gain consistency as a complete costumed motif with a particular aesthetic counterpoint. For example, with A #10, the former element was Sal Fisher's mask, whilst the latter element was Horror, given that this prop hid this character's scarred face ("Sal Fisher," n.d.). Thus, it is no exaggeration to suggest that A #10 had territorialized their body by making it into an offline surface and then an online one: "If need be, I'll put my territory on my own body, I'll territorialize my body" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 372).

At this point, it should be noted that this costuming side—including its digital manifestations, best represented in A #39's becoming-slasher and A #40's becoming-edited—conferred this fandom's primary rule. This is because, without it, there is no possibility of performance. That said, I argue that this costuming was a fluid practice because, as movement, it had the potential to bend its own rule. Indeed, this claim reverberates with Vaneigem's (2012) thinking: "Play is inconceivable without rules—and without playing with the rules" (p. 231).

This latter point leads us into IG's inter-assemblage—its "components of passage or even escape" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 364). Here, I hold that this part of the refrain referred not to cosplay's "style" but to what Susan Sontag (2009) calls "stylization" (p. 20). Unlike the former, this latter phenomenon engendered "an ambivalence (affection contradicted by contempt, obsession contradicted by irony) toward the subject-matter" (Sontag, 2009, p. 20). Further, I argue that such differentiation was necessary within the analysis because, as Stiegler (2015) tells us, today's "symbolic misery" is the result of "a loss of *aesthetic participation*" (p. 23). (Perhaps, the contemporary aesthetic problem is not styling over substance but rather a matter of stylization over style without substance. However, this question is beyond

the limits of this thesis.) Thus, in Study 1, style was not a fixed choice 'option' but had been transformed into a fluid mode.

With Study 1's bespoke cosplay stylizations, there was (sometimes) a simultaneous passage from the territorial refrain (i.e., costuming) en route to deterritorialization (i.e., play). For example, A #16's IG performance of 'The Asset' ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.) exhibited this movement because they took this ultra-distinctive character's costume and decoded and deterritorialized it by conjoining it with different stylistic themes (e.g., pop music, Valentine's Day). Such deterritorializations are best understood in terms of Worringer's Gothic non-geometrical, unmappable and immaterial "abstract line":

> Here, we would say that the phylum simultaneously has two different modes of liaison: it is always connected to nomad space, whereas it conjugates with sedentary space. On the side of the nomadic assemblages and war machines, it is a kind of rhizome, with its gaps, detours, subterranean passages, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc. On the other side, the sedentary assemblages and State apparatuses effect a capture of the phylum, put the traits of expression into a form or a code, make the holes resonate together, plug the lines of flight, subordinate the technological operation to the work model, impose upon the connections a whole regime of arborescent conjunctions. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 484)

Given the above discussion, the 'play' in cosplay refers to its possible lines of deterritorialization: "Play is the basis of the principle of *détournement*, the freedom to repurpose, to change the meaning of everything that serves Power" (Vaneigem, 2012. p. 232). That said, it would be a mistake to see costuming and play as a binary, given that the limits of the former helped trigger innovations in the latter. Indeed, I hold that dressing up is inherently nomadic because, with it, one can learn how to feel like

someone or some-Thing else. At the same time, one is transported to another place/world.

Indeed, Study 1's findings showed how stylization could be digitally enabled via adding glitches (i.e., A #40) or a Warholian splitting (i.e., A #39). These IG selfies ontologised digital stylizations, which, I argue, are more capable of inducing affects due to their propensity for inclusive disjunction (RP #1). This is primarily because, through their uncanniness, these multiplicities blurred the familiar territorializing aspects of fictional characters by introducing unfamiliar deterritorializing elements, such as:

- A #16's mysterious off-screen 'other';

- A #39's split screen; and

- A #40's hacked face.

Thus, with these cosplaying lines of escape, the "homely" merged with the "unhomely" (Freud, 2003, p. 152). Indeed, I argue that these IG selfies were inherently uncanny simply because their motif is that of "the 'double' (the *Doppelgänger*)" (Freud, 2003, p. 141). However, these cosplays were not strangely familiar simply because they were "mirror-images" (Freud, 2003, p. 142). Instead, these performances were uncanny because they simultaneously elicited familiarity and strangeness. Precisely, this relation represented the difference between that character and 'this' cosplay. Moreover, I submit that these selfies did not evidence the death drive's "*compulsion to repeat*" (Freud, 2003, p. 145) but instead signalled affective re-births outside the constraints of (capitalistic) identity: "*I* is a habit" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 105). Essentially, because Study 1's online performances simulated otherness, they took this fandom's subjectivities elsewhere:

> That is why the individual in intensity finds its psychic image neither in the organisation of the self nor in the determination of species of the I, but rather in the fractured I and the dissolved self, and in the correlation of the fractured I with the dissolved self. (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 259)

The topic of the following subsection is how these IG selfies functioned as uncanny desiring-machines (RP #1). However, careful conceptual distinctions should be made in advance. This clarification is essential because, as Mark Fisher (2016) suggests, sometimes the uncanny relates to a place as with 'eerie' phenomena, which often feature "landscapes partially emptied of the human" (p. 11). Take, for example, the sense of unease one might experience when faced with an online photograph of a liminal space or 'backroom' (Koch, 2020). In contrast, this same phenomenon can be evoked by a 'weird' "conjoining of "*two or more things which do not belong together*" (Fisher, 2016, p. 11). For instance, the grotesque is weird because it amalgamates bizarre qualities through a process that might be called uncanny assemblage. (If one could entertain such an (unlikely) Freudo-Deleuzo-Guattarian rapprochement.) As we shall see, some cosplays in Study 1 were uncanny by being weird, whilst others were plain eerie. Nevertheless, this stance does not rule out how these affects might simultaneously connote both types of uncanniness via inclusive disjunction.

6.2 New faces: Study 1's body modifications

There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5)

As we saw in the previous section, in Study 1, IG functioned as a digital milieu connected to a physical one (and vice versa). Inbetween these environments, an uncanny refrain gave rise to the trio of becomings, as detailed in Chapter 4. Henceforth, I will explain how these cosplay affects engender a different relation to spacetime: one that pivots on three online defacializing tactics. And because each of these becomings filtered through Study 1's BwO (i.e., the technological screen of a smartphone or

computer), the following discussion concerns the virtual dimension between T. and U. in Figure 4.1. Crucially, this is where the non-spatialised BwO is located, as opposed to the actual spatialised bodies between Φ. and F in Figure 4.1. As we will see, this cybernetic surface allows these nomadic cosplay multiplicities the opportunity to smooth IG's striated space.

Let us discuss A #16's becoming-amphibian and how it functions with IG's spacetime. By sporting a defacializing animal mask, this cosplay disrupts the functioning of IG's incessant State-sponsored thirst for striating cyberspace and fixing meaning and identity through crushingly repetitive selfies. To be exact, this depersonalizing tactic helps release this fan from the shackles of the "abstract machine of faciality (visagéité)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 197). As such, A #16 serves as a holey space that affords this individual the chance to forget their human form. In turn, the resultant Zen-like, rhizomatic spacetime between T. and U, in Figure 4.1, allows this social media user to reach the abstract machine and impede the repressive workings of the face by participating in what is now a liberatory online experiment.

Further, A #16's masked smoothing of IG's striated space draws an abstract line and helps transform a standardizing selfie into an impersonal cosplaying threshold full of playful and jocular nonsense. For this reason, A #16's cosplay constitutes a nomadic war machine or subject-group, given that this fun-packed post acts as an external relation purpose-built to tickle the funny bones of others. At the same time, this becoming-amphibian demonstrates how online practices might draw zigzagging lines that interconnect human and nonhuman worlds by smoothing the striated spacetimes of the former animal. Taken together, A #16 acts as a portal for the possible emergence of cosplay "radical subjectivity" tied to "the questioning vision of those who seek their self everywhere in others" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 220). Enigmatically, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) refer to this phenomenon as "the other person," understood not as a subject, but as a "possible world" (p. 17).

Here, I insist that A #16's frivolous aura has nothing to do with Bauman's (2000) "identities of the liquid modern era," which align with the escapist off-the-peg, 'come as you like,' pop-up ethos of the so-called "cloakroom community" (pp. 199–200). Instead, I argue that, like Kleist's writing, this becoming-amphibian connects to and emerges from a "most uncanny modernity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 415). However, this phenomenon should not be confused with postmodernity's penchant for capitalistic identity-play with limited, pre-set options/brands. Instead, this becoming-amphibian begs consideration of how an electronic mirror—the BwO—can forge a cosplaying threshold brimming with real sensations: "The plane of consistency is the intersection of all concrete forms. Therefore all becomings are like sorcerers' drawings on this plane of consistency, which is the ultimate Door providing a way out for them" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 293). Except that, in this case, the 'way out' is not the trans-humanist, androcentric phantasy of disappearing into the machine. Rather, this exit signals the invention of one possible anoedipal, posthumanist practice for finding collective ways to escape capitalism's faciality-led regulation of this fandom. To this end, this selfie functions as one of its online "circuit-breakers" (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 212).

A #16's conjunction of a red rose, a pop song reference, and an amphibious appearance instils a profoundly weird affect. This is because the third nonhuman code sits uncomfortably, jarring with the other human ones. As such, it is the amalgamation of these disparate codes, or better, forces, that engineers this aquatic (line of) escape pod. For this reason, this uncanny love assemblage occupies a smooth, nomadic space between two strata—land and water. (Again, this maps onto the dimension between T. and U. in Figure 4.1.) However, with this becoming-amphibian, the combination of the flower and the froglike mask does not represent human romance or interspecies love but operates as "an *assemblage converter*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p 378). In turn, one sees how elements of the infra-assemblage (i.e., the red rose and the mask) shift toward the intra-assemblage (i.e., the highly distinctive creature costume) before

passing through the refrain's inter-assemblage (i.e., the defacializing stylization of this performance). In fact, the facemask's green and the rose's red no longer refer to a territory but connect with a bizarre, carnivalesque "courtship assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 377). Thus, I argue that this image evokes a complex landscape or seascape of faciality traits, which impart "a deterritorialized world" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 201). This cosplay demonstrates how territorialization qua dressing up might induce a positive line of escape. In Caillois's (2001) parlance, cosplay finds paidia through ludus.

A #39's becoming-slasher combines kawaii aesthetics (e.g., schoolgirl dress and pigtails) with scary Horror tropes (e.g.., the knife and the vampiric grin) to impart a sense of perturbation in the viewer. As such, this cosplay of Himiko Toga from *My Hero Academia* ("Himiko Toga," n.d.) combines the codes from these media machines to create a brand-new performance art machine. Moreover, this uncanny inclusive disjunction creates a surplus value of code prime for future performance art adventures. To be sure, this becoming-slasher is profoundly weird because it intermingles, or better, inter-faces cuteness with murder. For this reason, the sheer wrongness of A #39 challenges consensual reality and thereby counters capitalistic subjectivity by forming what I call a nomadic-posthumanist digital machine (in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense). In Rancierian terms, this machine fragments the face and the corporeal body and helps re-distribute the sensible. Further, this post's split image creates an uncanny mirroring effect through a deterritorializing performance that interrupts time with its "strange loops" (Fisher, 2016, p. 45). (Maybe, 'jolts' rather than 'loops' would be more apt, given this selfie's (micro)shock value.) In doing so, this selfie shows how this fandom's digital acts might trouble any surety as regards the whereabouts of its performances.

To be sure, A #39 deploys a 'slasher' aesthetic to cut this cosplay image/body in half menacingly. In a way, this rebellious act resonates with their fictional character's status as a villain in *My Hero Academia* ("Himiko Toga," n.d.). Here, I argue that by

applying a digital 'knife' to slice up their photograph, this practice (cos)plays with how dismemberment functions within the Horror genre. (Given this becoming-slasher's terrifying theme, I am also thinking of Junji Ito's manga and their deeply disturbing narratives of *Uzumaki, Sensor*, and *Shiver* ("Junji Ito," n.d.), amongst others.) In both instances, I hold that it is time qua consciousness being cut. Thus, with this becoming-slasher, one's attention is grabbed by this cosplay's maniacal quality as 'It' jumps out the frame. This phenomenon, I argue, mirrors what Guattari (1995a) calls "pathic subjectivity" (p. 26) with its capacity to take hold of one's nervous system. Moreover, because their performed character, Himiko Toga, is themed around *yandere*—a Japanese term for obsessive love ("Himiko Toga," n.d.)—it is likely that if they could grab you, they would. To this end, this post's refrain was moe encroachment.

However, I submit that A #39's nomadic roleplay does not constitute a phantasy-based representation of a perverted "*hentai* lech" (Mountfort et al., 2018, p. 64). Instead, this becoming-slasher messes with capitalism's chronological spacetime by drawing a formless "abstract line," whereby (school)girls "slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes; they produce *n* molecular sexes on the line of flight in relation to the dualism machines they cross right through" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 322–323). Here, Powell's (2005) observation that metamorphoses invariably necessitate "beauty and terror" (p. 78) is warranted. Mark Fisher (2018) calls this same phenomenon "the *Gothic flatline*," noting that it elicits a "zone of radical immanence," a plane upon which one cannot "differentiate the animate from the inanimate and where to have agency is not necessarily to be alive" (p. 2). As such, A #39 engenders a sense of uncanniness because it contains traces of a paradoxically invisible and yet identifiable agency: "the (anorganic) imperceptible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 325).

With this performance, A #39 produces a cosplaying threshold or holey space. In so doing, this grotesque becoming records unseen molecular lines on IG's screened BwO. In doing so, this otaku rhizome lodges itself between the striated pre-formatted

pages of IG and this performance as an event belonging to smooth space. The result is that this uncanny multiplicity creates a grotesque spacetime that facilitates the disappearance of this fan's phenomenological body (RP #1):

> it is no longer a matter of following and trailing the everyday body, but of making it pass through a ceremony, of introducing it into a glass cage or a crystal, of imposing a carnival or a masquerade on it which makes it into a grotesque body, but also brings out of it a gracious and glorious body, until at last the disappearance of the visible body is achieved. (Deleuze, 1989, p. 190)

Notably, this becoming-slasher vanishes between T. and U. in Figure 4.1. However, I insist that A #39's otherworldly results are only temporary, given the inevitability of reterritorialization. In this case, this fan and their concrete body reappear between Φ. and F. in Figure 4.1. Nevertheless, this becoming-slasher image suggests that cybernetic practices might provide cosplay with opportunities for further re-embodiments rather than dis-embodiments. Indeed, Riley (2020) cogently argues that "the body does not disappear in digital fan works but instead remains salient" (para. 3.1).

A #40's becoming-edited, a performance of Futaba Sakura ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.), problematises the supposed binary of public and private (online) spacetime. Indeed, by cosplaying this deeply introverted, shut-in character on their public IG account, this selfie partially retains a sense of privacy via its digitally enabled redaction. Here, reluctance meets intrigue. Specifically, by partly covering their face with multiple dialogue boxes and digitally blurring the background to their selfie, A #40 constructs an online spacetime that is simultaneously secretive and disclosed. In doing so, A #40 manages to mirror their chosen fictional character's own reluctance to leave their house by creating a post that is both private and public. Ergo, this multiplicity occupies the spacetime lying between these domains. As such, this post functions as a rhizomatic "creative AND" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 59).

This becoming-edited's clever use of desire-fuelled technological wizardry decodes and deterritorializes preconceptions and perceptions of what constitutes a 'traditional' selfie and how online performance art might function. In doing so, this body nomadically smooths IG's striated spaces by adding extra layers or better dimensions to its ritournelle. To be sure, this content-driven act turns the 'set' human face into an online landscape by releasing faciality traits. In this respect, this otaku multiplicity's overlapping dialogue boxes function as "supple microheads" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 247). More than anything, however, A #40 achieves its uncanny affects via defacialization. In this instance, this machine runs in two ways. Firstly, because this individual's face merges with a digital mask, this redaction produces a sense of weirdness because those dialogue boxes are not where they ought to be. This post is thereby deterritorializing because these deliberate mistakes are incorporated into this cosplay rather than omitted. And secondly, this post constitutes an eerie online landscape—and mindscape—because its backdrop is empty beyond recognition. At the same time, the digital masking of this selfie's background allows the foreground to jut out. In this way, I argue that part of A #40's performance resides in its capacity to simulate motion parallax.

Furthermore, this becoming-edited's sense of fun forges an out of time, non-chronological space by affording "a kind of anti-subjection" (Barbetta, 2018, p. 164). In this context, Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) notion of "cramped space" (p. 17) proves highly instructive in helping illuminate the anti-conformist, autopoietic minoritarian ethos that lies behind the creation of such eerie identify-free spacetimes. One might link this same idea with Kristeva's (1982) notion of abjection, whereby identities implode: "For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic" (p. 8). That said, it is primarily A #40's defacialization that underscores how cosplay might take over this abstract machine and forge its own non-ideological politics: "Becoming-minoritarian is a

political affair and necessitates a labor of power (*puissance*), an active micropolitics" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 340). With such a fandom-based project, defacialization is essential for producing otaku subject-groups whose only interest lies in the nomadic forging and proliferation of new bodies.

With these findings, I insist that cosplay's cramped spaces can only be engineered through performance-driven camouflaging and the multiplication of the face. These acts are producible under conditions whereby individuals disappear from capitalism's timeline. Significantly, these molecular cosplays qua events have nothing to do with molar identities and their corresponding limit-faces. So, in their unique ways, Study 1's three lines of escape show how this performance art can mutate time and space because it subtracts clearly visible, recognizable forms. As such, these otaku becomings demonstrate that, by stripping away the face, one can proliferate the molecular desire (puissance) by removing 'set,' molar identities.

Study 1's results allude to Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) Zen-like concept of "creative involution" (p. 191). Indeed, it is cosplay defacializing practices that help remove a fan's sense of personal identity that aligns it with this less-is-more idea: "By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 326). For Jacques Rancière (2021), such a loss of self is emancipatory because it gives rise to an "aesthetic community" via "dis-identification" (p. 73). Ergo, this research phase underlines how cosplay might function as a dissensual tactic for constructing a self-overcoming spacetime: "And this secret life it spoke to me: "Behold," it said, "I am that *which must always overcome itself*" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 89). To sum up, Study 1 demonstrates how cosplay selfies qua bodies create a spacetime, not for belonging, but "for a new earth and people that do not yet exist" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 108) (RP #1).

6.3 Con vibrations: Study 2's techno-aesthetic refrain

Real bodily excitement, together with imaginary experiences holds for many a specific fascination mixed with horror. (Laing, 1969, p. 39)

TB (2018) featured a trio of independent assemblages containing non-discursive and discursive bodies. These multiplicities came together to form the specific assembly of affects and percepts, which characterized the 'thisness' of this con's territorial refrain. But, before I explain this fandom's relation to this habitat, it is first necessary to identify the milieus that gave rise to it. Here, I argue that a distinctive rhythm emerged between the offline city-based physical milieu of TB's (2018) event spaces and the online technological milieu of various social media. In fact, the surface of the former physical space gave rise to this con's BwO and its respective concrete, cosphotography, and social media multiplicities.

That said, once these last two assemblages were entered, this physical urban milieu mutated to become partly digital. With this transition, TB's (2018) BwO became the technical surface of an attendee's smartphone screen. Further, because these concrete and cosphotography assemblages provided the base for this online activity, this single territorializing movement evidenced the process of "transduction" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b p. 364). However, it must be noted that these three assemblages were always independent of one another: "A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 7).

At this point, the nature of TB's (2018) physical milieu needs unpacking because I was not dealing with a single space but with two milieux that were being used for different ends. So, on the one hand, TB's (2018) outdoor event spaces were filled with revelry, or more plainly 'fun' performances; whilst, on the other, the inside of its

marquees ensured that the 'serious' business of fandom-based consumption was simultaneously catered for. Even though SA is not a historical approach, its topographical emphasis helped draw attention to the striking parallels between present-day cosplaying and Bakhtin's (2009) observations concerning the set-up of carnival spaces during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. For across these epochs, there existed a "boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations" which coincided with "the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (Bakhtin, 2009, p. 4). Bakhtin (2009) explains how the laughter-fuelled element of carnivals became tolerated as the State oversaw feasts. Because of these observations, Study 2 discovered that these oppositional elements co-existed and endured at TB (2018). (Although here, the State's market values—literally in this case—were the result of capitalism, not vice versa.) On the one hand, this con's open, outdoor spaces were good-humoured and concerned performance art. (Indeed, when listening back to the recordings, laughter was undoubtedly part of this con's sonic refrain, given the collective, contagious tittering.) But, on the other, the inside of its outside marquees was solely about the serious business of selling. Nevertheless, a comic tone endured.

Here, a paradox emerged because several interviewees reported they were also serious in their pursuit of guilt-free pleasure. For example, P #13 from A #6 stated:

Part of the fun is constructing your own cosplay, and, even if it isn't like perfect, like completely accurate to the show, the game, the movie and stuff. Because you put it together, and because you're going out as your character, you're having fun, and that's the main thing about it.

As such, the performances on show across that weekend were found to resonate with what Timothy Morton (2021) calls "a *playful seriousness*" (p. 101). Indeed, Raoul Vaneigem (2012) makes the same point arguing that "playfulness, however light-hearted, always involves a certain spirit of organization and the discipline this implies" (p. 231).

Staying with the refrain of TB's (2018) infra-assemblage, these directional qualities comprised many colourings, textures, cosmetics, and prosthetics. For instance, P #10 from A #5 used a combination of thick, dark eyeliner with coloured contact lenses, a long green wig, and a 3D printed bodysuit (*zentai*) to simulate the appearance of *My Hero Academia*'s Froppy ("Tsuyu Asui," n.d.) (see Figure 6.3):

Figure 6.3

Thought Bubble's (2018) cosphotography assemblage

Furthermore, P #11 from A #5—seen here to the left of Figure 6.3—dressed in a red, white, and black outfit and dark wig and held an umbrella whilst performing Ada Wong ("Ada Wong," n.d.). This prop linked their performance to *Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles* ("Ada Wong," n.d.). Lastly, P #12 from A #5—pictured on the right of Figure 6.3—wore a minimal outfit during their performance of Toshinori Yagi a.k.a. All Might from the *My Hero Academia* manga series ("Toshinori Yagi," n.d.). This costume comprised a blond wig, a white T-shirt, khaki combat trousers, and a shop-bought prefab character mask with a corresponding All Might belt buckle.

Taken together, these ritualised motific affects assembled the carnivalesque character costumes on show across that weekend. Moreover, when these divergent speeds manifested alongside this con's technological gadgetry (e.g., smartphones), social media (e.g., IG), sounds (e.g., pop music), gestures (e.g., posing for photos), the infra-assemblage became dimensional in passing over to TB's (2018) intra-assemblage. In turn, this intra-assemblage provided the requisite stylization, which oftentimes provided the impetus for further passage into deterritorialization via inter-assemblage. For instance, P #8 from A #4's stylization extended to the toy dragon prop they carried in their becoming-Queen.

This co-existence and juxtaposition of serious and playful qualities within this con's territorial refrain meant that its spaces were smooth and striated. However, it was not easy to ascertain precisely how these spaces functioned. After all, individuals were costumed whilst browsing the insides of TB's (2018) marquees. (Specifically, these merchandise tents included the 'Ask for Mercy Marquee,' the 'ComiXology Marquee,' and the 'Originals Marquee' (Thought Bubble Comic Con Free Guide, 2018).) Nonetheless, the field notes showed that colourful parades of masquerading revellers were adjunct to the serious business of flogging fandom commodities. (Although, it should be noted that TB (2018) is not run for profit (Thought Bubble Comic Con Free Guide, 2018).) Relevant here is Bauman's (2000) cogent point that because consumer spaces are "public yet non-civil," they are designed for "action, not *inter*-action" (p. 97). Reversing this logic, I argue that the spaces outside this con's marquees encouraged the latter mode. In sum, whereas the areas inside these marquees marked "the time of things," the Comic Con areas outside pertained to "direct experience" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 201).

Thus, the entry/exit points to TB's (2018) marquees acted as gateways into a distinct experience of spacetime. On the one hand, this con's outdoor, smooth spaces were Deleuzo-Guattarian cramped spaces marked by events; on the other hand, its

indoor, striated marquees were characterised by spatialised, organised bodies. As such, TB's (2018) outdoor cosplay becomings concerned the non-localisable event-time of Aion with the insides of its merch tents connoting the localisable linear (capitalistic) clock time of Chronos. Instructively, Bauman (2000) summarises this contrast: "shopping trips are primarily voyages in space, and travels in time only secondarily" (p. 98). Furthermore, because these marquees were only accessible to attendees, brandishing bought wristbands TB's (2018) marquees were a type of "*purified* space" (Bauman, 2000, p. 99).

Outside these marquees, the combination of a costumed refrain with a joy-filled playful atmosphere resulted in mutations in fan subjectivities at U. in Figure 4.1. Moreover, with these events, Leeds' confined, striated city space was undone, along with what Suely Rolnick (2012) calls the "modern subject" (p. 6). (In this case, this was the mythical cosplayer.) In short, TB's (2018) joy-filled performances worked their magic distributing intensities on the surface of its concrete floor. For this reason, I maintain that cosplaying at this con was primarily a temporal phenomenon—before becoming a spatialised, incarnated one. Here, one might apply Sarah Pink's (2012) emphasis on place to this finding because this notion explains how TB's (2018) space was created "through movement" (p. 25).

Another significant part of TB's (2018) refrain was the statuesque poses documented in the field notes and captured by its photo ethnography (see Figure 6.3). Because such acts simulate doll-like repetitive movements, they constituted part of this con's uncanny rhythm. Precisely, when these slow-motion movements were performed silently and in unison (i.e., blocking), this automatism triggered a sense of the uncanny in their onlookers (myself included). As a result, these performance assemblages fabulated TB's (2018) looking machines as by-products of its strange sights and sounds. Further, as the field notes indicate, this con was densely populated by fans—all of whom were watching others regardless of any imaginary cosplayer–noncosplayer binary. Ergo,

this festival's refrain might be best depicted as a landscape of eyes, with each pair provoking the gaze of many others. In fact, because of its predominantly visual displays, TB's (2018) performance held a distinctively mesmeric quality that evoked desire: "It's not for nothing that the mirror, the carafe stopper, even the hypnotizer's gaze, are the instruments of hypnosis" (Lacan, 2016, p. 112).

The statuesque poses fans gave in front of my smartphone camera reflected this subculture's penchant for still imagery. For instance, P #19 from A #8 explained: "The vast majority of the time it's, pretty much, still images." Besides, P #5 from A #3 stated that taking such images served a pragmatic function because videos are "a harder way to get into it" when one is "not a professional actor." Further, Study 2 found that this resolutely flat expressiveness mimicked the depthless two-dimensional pages of this performance art's primary inspiration—the comic book. Thus, through their inanimation, three-dimensional embodied performances simulated two-dimensional surfaces.

However, rather than these uncanny poses necessarily instilling fear, I insist that these instances of bodily stasis also induced comedic effects. Indeed, the transcription of Study 2's interviews was chock-full of laughter. Bergson's (1911) writing on laughter might explain why this was the case:

> the general appearance of the person, whose every limb has been made rigid as a machine, must continue to give us the impression of a living being. The more exactly these two images, that of a person and that of a machine, fit into each other, the more striking is the comic effect, and the more consummate the art of the draughtsman. The originality of a comic artist is thus expressed in the special kind of life he imparts to a mere puppet. (Bergson, 1911, p. 12a)

So, by creating the playful impression that their offline bodies as physiological entities had periodically stopped functioning, these cosplays created a performance art machine by simulating malfunction.

The execution of such uncanny poses marked the passage from TB's (2018) concrete assemblage into its cosphotography and social media multiplicities, respectively. Primarily, these moves were ruptures because they were unmediated expressions of flow. Indeed, this decrease in bodily tempo enshrined a well-known Situationist strategy: "We must learn how to slow time down, how to live the permanent passion for unmediated experience" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 208). This phenomenon was especially noticeable, having taken photographs of interviewees outside the main entrance of Leeds Art Gallery in the vicinity of Henry Moore's bronze sculptures (see Figure 6.3). These cosplays simulated their immediate localised environment and took these subjectivities far beyond the physical realm. As such, TB's (2018) immediate landscape fed the cosplaying mindset, with the latter populating and transforming the former. The effect of this was eerie because human 'statues' were present when they (arguably) need not have been. Thus, these acts induced uncanny affects because they combined the familiar—outdoor sculptures placed in an urban setting—with the unfamiliar—humans as their enfleshed 'equivalents.' More to the point, these transformations were moe because I witnessed a movement "away from the real human body toward something cute" (Go, 2014, p. 165). Although, in this instance, strangely cute would be more apt.

To summarise, TB's (2018) cosplaying mime troupes placed this con's spaces out of time by turning themselves into eerie figures. In turn, these fans peopled an ever-shifting landscape that teemed with sensation. All these displays occurred on top of this festival's concrete BwO. Thus, these cosplays were considered nomadic, given that this mode only operates in relation to the Earth. Indeed, these uncanny performances linked the eerie to a "'feeling of infinity'" (Bergler, 1934, p. 235), transporting festivalgoers' mindsets out of this world and into others.

6.4   Into the uncanny valley: Study 2's nomadic modes

These objectities-subjectities are led to work for themselves, to incarnate

themselves as an animist nucleus; they overlap each other, and invade each

other to become collective entities half-thing half-soul, half-man half-beast,

machine and flux, matter and sign [….] The stranger, the strange, evil alterity

are dispelled into a menacing exterior. But the spheres of exteriority are not

radically separated from the interior. (Guattari, 1995a, p. 102)

Let us start this discussion by considering the unexpected visual-auditory

topography of P #18 from A #8's becoming-cyborg. Compared with other affects on show

at TB (2018), this cosplay brandishes an extra sonic layer. This additional dimension

does two things. Firstly, this solo performance invokes a "*grouping of powers*" upon the

concrete floor of this con and, as such, relates to "the Earth" and "the One-All" (as

opposed to "the People" and "the One-Crowd" with its "object of orchestration") (Deleuze

& Guattari, 2013b, p. 397). In other words, this cosplay is a coupling of sensory force

(puissance), as opposed to a matter of expression. Secondly, with this act, the

electronically enhanced voice box functions akin to a synthesizer by changing the

spacetime around it. Here, this technological gizmo operates as "a *sound machine* (not

a machine for reproducing sounds), which molecularizes and atomizes, ionizes sound

matter, and harnesses a cosmic energy" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 399). As such,

this becoming-cyborg is a question of force (puissance) and consistency because by

highlighting "the sound process itself," this vocal synthesizer exposes TB (2018)

attendees to "still other elements beyond sound matter" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p.

399). In this regard, I argue that these auricular intensities are best described, following

Artaud (1992), as pertaining to the "dissonances" (p. 69) of cosplay's mise-en-scène.

This robotic motif—one that is associated with this subculture's 'mecha'

subgenre—presents an aesthetic counterpoint to those others on show that day (such

as the 'furry'-affiliated becoming-crow) (see Winge (2006) for a detailed commentary on these subgenres). That said, one should note that, despite this becoming-cyborg's move towards a "rendering sonorous" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 403), it too has passed through a becoming-animal en route to its "strange *becoming-imperceptible*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 219). Furthermore, because this becoming-cyborg adds an auditory dimension, I insist that this "borderline" performance connotes TB's (2018) version of "the Anomalous, the Outsider" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 291). However, I argue that this shadowy figure is neither a subject nor an object. Rather, this cyborgian becoming acts as a "threshold and fiber, symbiosis of or passage between heterogeneities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, pp. 291–292). Indeed, this finding validates Haraway's (1991) remark that the figure of the cyborg has the power to implode subjects and objects because it occupies "a mutated time-space," equating with "the science fictional wormhole" (p. 12).

P #18 from A #8 shows how this fandom might morph spacetime in two ways. Firstly, cosplay can create a mishmash of uncanny sensations by fusing visual elements with strange sonics. This becoming-cyborg provides evidence of this phenomenon because its weird roboticized voice gives rise to "a well-defined functional space" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 15). Furthermore, because this space is portable, this device circuit bends chronological time as an unpredictable abstract line. Here, I argue that because of the incongruity between this individual's human appearance and their weird deterritorialized voice, this cosplay constitutes an entry point into the so-called "uncanny valley" (Mitchell, Szerszen, Shirong Lu, Schermerhorn, Scheutz & MacDorman, 2011, p. 12). Indeed, Mitchell et al. (2011) show that when one juxtaposes a human appearance with a robot voice, a feeling of eeriness is produced (the reverse also being the case) (p. 11). But more than anything, this uncanny becoming does not present so much a finding as offer this fandom a challenge to find new weapons (i.e., affects). To be exact, P #18 from A #8's defacializing mask weaponizes this individual's voice.

Hence, by disturbing this con's spacetime, this cosplay troubles the State's primary aim to "ensure and control the identity of each agency, including personal identity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 229). For this reason, Mitchell et al.'s (2011) unimaginative call to "avoid the uncanny valley" (p. 12) should be rejected on ethical grounds because it disempowers cosplay's affects. Instead, further fearless explorations and empirical mappings of the unconscious are required.

Secondly, P #18 from A #8's fusion of video game aesthetics and technological gadgetry creates what I call an uncanny posthuman terrain. Precisely, when this electronic voice-changer combines with this fictional character's mask, this empties the human from TB's (2018) landscape to create an eerie depersonalized space. Indeed, Bergler (1934) notes the link between uncanny phenomenon and "the state of depersonalization" (p. 243). In this way, P #18 from A #8's vocal trickery functions as "a vector" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 378), marking the abstract lines of smooth space. Such stylizations facilitated this territorial refrain's passing from intra-assemblage to inter-assemblage. In this way, this cyborgian dramatization functions as a portal through which this urban con's bounded, striated space is nomadically smoothed. However, caution is needed here because I am not suggesting that this cosplay represents a once-and-for-all victory for electronically driven 'progress.' Rather, I hold that this performance's strange rhythm constitutes a call to find ways to continually reinvent this performance art. Here, one should heed Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) chilling warning: "Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us" (p. 581).

Promisingly, this becoming-cyborg's movement from technology to aesthetics, eye to ear, and back again underlines the possibility of a hitherto unacknowledged and unmapped sonic agency within this subculture. Indeed, I argue that P #18 from A #8's disorienting vox decodes and deterritorializes before nomadically recoding and reterritorializing both senses to syn-aesthetic ends. As such, the employment of such sound machines might diffuse, following Brandon LaBelle's (2018) theorising: "an

insurrectionary sensibility—a potential found in the quiver of the eardrum, the strains of a voice, the vibrations and echoes that spirit new formations of social solidarity" (p. 5). However, this cosplay is not reducible to its unerring ability to produce a disorienting uncanny auditory-visual space. Instead, this roleplay is best understood by its rhythmicity: "We always come back to this "moment": the becoming-expressive of rhythm, the emergence of expressive proper qualities, the formation of matters of expression that develop into motifs and counterpoints" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 374). Besides, one should not forget how the voice is "caught up in a process of image construction" (Rancière, 2021, p. 94).

P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow underlines how cosplay might forge a smooth space(time) for collaborative-themed performances. This becoming-crow shows that by cosplaying with others along a particular theme (i.e., *Critical Role* ("Kiri," 2019)), one can co-produce a distinct stylization that leads to an autopoietic collective assemblage of enunciation. Indeed, this joint performance's common media sourcing provides part of the motif for TB's (2018) intra-assemblage. Nonetheless, the aesthetic counterpoints of this joint performance pivot on how these cosplays simulate the demeanour of a pair of distinct humanoids. For whereas Kiri the Kenku is an infant ("Kiri," 2019), Jester Lavorre—P#17 from A #7's cosplay—is a horned Tiefling ("Jester Lavorre," 2019). This heterogeneity facilitates a passing from this con's intra-assemblage toward its inter-assemblage. For this reason, I argue that TB's (2018) terrain is not a space for imitation but operates as an ever-changing backdrop that is continually assembled and reassembled.

By performing two fictional characters from *The Mighty Nein*, this cosplay pack simulates this online media's central narrative by incarnating its spirit of adventure ("Kiri," 2019). As such, these aesthetic figures weave or fold this franchise's key conceptual persona—the Adventurer—into and out of TB's (2018) refrain. So, by dressing up as these different characters, this humanoid assemblage prompts machinic conjugations

with other fan assemblages via its "synthesis of heterogeneities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 385). Moreover, this movement leads TB's (2018) inter-assemblage further towards deterritorialization.

Furthermore, this co-performance imbricates a joyful "encounter" within this fandom territory—the kind that "subjectivity feeds on" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 218). In turn, this joint cosplay nomadically smooths this con's outdoor spaces because these bodies or events are energies whose extrinsic nomadic relations engineer "a diffuse and polymorphous war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 420). ('Nomadic warpaint machines' seems like a particularly apt neologism here, particularly given P #17 from A #7's liberal application of blue face paint.) However, more than anything, this themed, collaborative performance allows this series' fictional world to leak into this con's spacetime via a sort of reverse *isekai* ("the Japanese word isekai literally means "another world"" (Alverson, 2021, p. 36)). So, instead of being whisked away into another world, these cosplays (literally) drag a fictional world onto TB's (2018) BwO(s).

Looking at Figure 5.2, one observes this fan's overlong 'feathered hands.' Here I argue that this potentially repressive external prosthetic or work-based tool serves as a liberating intensive weapon that ushers forth a performance-based smooth space ripe for producing new sensations. By assembling these human and nonhuman qualities, these 'new' hands mutate this individual's embodied experience. In turn, these affects drag them and us into an immaterial elsewhere: "beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 171). In so doing, this performance induces an inclusive disjunction of uncanny affects. On the one hand, P #16 from A #7's cosplay is weird because it is grotesque of nonhuman and human qualities; on the other, this human's hands are eerie because they are not where they should be. Thus, I hold that this becoming-crow's feathered mitts underscore how cosplay might engender practices that blend the weird with the eerie and empower fans by producing a nomadic spacetime ripe for moe becomings.

Further, P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow's plumed hands furnished a non-verbal form of expressivity, which, I argue, is still constitutive of a language—albeit a mute, fandom-based one. Emphatically, this finding supports Darian Leader's (2017) observation that "language does not exist in any disembodied state but demands incarnation, with the hands constantly manipulating and shaping" (p. 99). As such, P #16 from A #7 and P #17 from A #7 TB (2018) multiplicity turns a verbal assemblage into a gesticulatory one: "*Machines are always singular keys that open or close an assemblage, a territory*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 389). To this end, P #16 from A #7 prosthetic hands act as weapons or affects that afforded this fan—and us—a different kind of perception. At this point, a sense of uncanniness comes to light. This is because there is a lack of surety regarding the source of this agency. For sure, we arrange things with our hands—but can hands rearrange us? P #16 provides convincing evidence for the latter.

Moreover, P #16 from A #7's use of feathered hands suggests a smoothing of TB's (2018) striated urban space and subsequent entry into the event-time of Aion. This argument rests on Deleuze and Guattari (2013b) connecting smooth space with touch in *A Thousand Plateaus*. For them, nomadic smooth space concerns hapticity rather than visuals (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 557). However, this event does not reify this individual as a cosplaying subject via identification but instead accentuates "the relationship of territory and the earth" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 86). In sum, this becoming-crow shows how nonhuman intensities can rupture capitalistic subjectivity by altering a con's spacetime.

P #8 from A #4's becoming-Queen is also relevant to this con's online-offline spacetime discussion because this affect evidences the rhizomatic transition between this con's three multiplicities. As these motions were described in the preceding chapter, I will focus on how entry from TB's (2018) cosphotography assemblage into its social media incarnation questions any clear distinction between this con's public and private

spaces. Here, I hold that it is only through this fan's smartphone usage within this con's social media multiplicity that this binary is imploded. This is because, by sharing a selfie whilst present at TB (2018), this fan alters the whereabouts of this con's BwO. And as mentioned, upon entry into this online multiplicity, TB's (2018) BwO shifts from a concrete outdoor floor space to the surface of these fans' smartphone screens. However, the Deleuzo-Guattarian notions of weaving or folding do not seem to cut it here (pun intended). Instead, I suggest that this shift might be described as ricocheting, given that affects bounce off these surfaces.

In addition, by posting selfies amidst TB's (2018) social media multiplicity, P #8 from A #4 uses a smartphone to find a line of escape and insert a psychosocial distance between themselves and others. In turn, this public performance simultaneously becomes a private one: "an exit from the situation of proximity" (Leader, 2017, p. 91). The net result of this is the paradoxical communication of presence and absence, as well as visibility and invisibility. Moreover, this practice questions the emplacement of this cosplay, once again troubling any clear-cut ideas as to its whereabouts. As such, I hold that this becoming-Queen constitutes a cosplaying rhizome lying inbetween TB (2018) as an offline and online event. Furthermore, because P #8 from A #4 completes this manoeuvre in real time, what emerges is a blended spacetime. Thus, this cosplay's "range and duration" (Leader, 2017, p. 92) is extended along with this fan's subjectivity. In this respect, there is no beginning or end to this becoming-Queen, only passage through TB's (2018) three multiplicities.

By introducing technological gadgetry into their performance, P #8 from A #4 highlights how cosplaying might help establish novel posthuman subjectivities at U. in Figure 4.1. In turn, this merger between humans and nonhumans might empower fans by opening up online others to this fandom's possibilities. Indeed, Guattari (1995a) observes that collaboration between humans and actual machines is essential because "heterogenesis" emanates from this "non-human pre-personal part of subjectivity" (p. 9).

In fact, Simon O'Sullivan (2010) notes that Guattari's writing, much like Study 2's findings, implicates "post-human ontology and practices (inasmuch as the human is invariable in transcendent apparatus—or projection on to immanence)" (p. 275). So, by straddling online and offline spacetimes, P #8 from A #4's display provokes a mutant peopling at this con: "a pure and immeasurable multiplicity, the pack, an irruption of the ephemeral and the power of metamorphosis" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 410).

Crucially, this becoming-Queen' is not the result of the movement of this individual as a 'readymade' corporeal entity. Instead, this cosplay's speed or longitude draws a zigzagging abstract line across this con's BwO. In turn, this performance slips off this thesis's schizoanalytic map. However, this indiscernible, immaterial event can (paradoxically) be localised between T. and U. in Figure 4.1. Indeed, it is the virtual time of Aion lying inbetween TB's (2018) online–offline dimension (i.e., T. and U. in Figure 4.1) that one finds Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) rhizome and Bey's (2003) temporary autonomous zone. For this reason, P #8 from A #4's performance underlines how cosplaying might smooth offline and online spaces by creating (at least temporarily) undetectable cosplaying thresholds: "transitional and limitrophe zones, zones of indiscernibility" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 118). Primarily, these doorways through which this fandom's bodies come and go must be taken as a temporal phenomenon because they coordinate subjectivation by releasing flows of matter at Φ. in Figure 4.1. In sum, it is only by reaching this abstract machine that cosplay's becomings can interrupt these fluxes and help forge nomadic subjectivities that empower fans by filling them with joy (RP #2).

This chapter unpacked IG's cosplay refrain in terms of three forces of assemblage. Following this deconstruction, I noted how cosplay's online affects turned this passage into a line of deterritorialization and induced uncanny affects. Then in the third subsection, I distinguished between the constitution of TB's (2018) online and

offline milieus before identifying this festival's distinct BwOs. And in the final part, I discussed this movement regarding a trio of TB (2018) becomings.

The concluding chapter of this thesis relates these findings to previous studies, noting distinct differences. Following this discussion, I shall address this thesis's central research problem (RP) and eight sub-problems (RSPs) before drawing an overall conclusion and suggesting possibilities for further empirical work. However, I must stress that the point of this research is not to condone resting on one's laurels by making general claims about fandom but to keep asking questions as to what might (still) be possible when it comes to this cosplay's online–offline practices.

Chapter 7 From the abject subject to uncanny practices

> The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit on which the grotesque is based destroys this limited seriousness and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. For this reason, great changes, even in the field of science, are always preceded by a certain carnival consciousness that prepares the way. (Bakhtin, 2009, p. 49)

This chapter aims to show how this research helps draw attention to how contemporary cosplaying is invariably about creating practices—not subjects or objects—that can morph capitalism's online and offline spacetimes to liberatory ends. To this end, this section addresses the implications of these findings in light of past studies. However, before I begin this task, I wish to frame this discussion with recourse to similar research. Most notably, this includes Duchesne's (2010) study at the 2008 *Fan Expo Canada* (*FEC*) convention (p. 22) in Toronto. Indeed, that study touched upon most of the critical themes that this thesis's data fleshed out. However, the point is not to compare UK-based cosplaying to North American variants but to highlight any notable similarities between our respective approaches and reveal those all-important qualitative differences.

Recall how many studies have made general claims about cosplay beyond the bounds of their discourse. For example, Lunning's (2011) indiscriminate contention that "members of fandom"—not just cosplayers—are "abject subjects" (p. 76). In comparison, Duchesne's (2010) research considered context within their discussion by situating their research within the bounds of a single con. Instead, Duchesne (2010) focused on two case studies that exemplified the difference between relatively unskilled and highly skilled professional cosplay. Here, an "amateur" performance of Heath Ledger's ""Joker" character" from Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* was distinguished from the professionalism of Amira Sa'id's ""Slave Leia" belly dance"

(Duchesne, 2010, p. 22). (This latter roleplay was inspired by "Carrie Fisher's original performance in *Return of the Jedi* (1983)" (Duchesne, 2010, p. 23).) Duchesne (2010) argued that whilst the former was a novice in being "largely reverential," the latter offered an expert radical feminist re-imagining of this character's onscreen persona by incorporating additional elements—ethnic music and a Middle Eastern dance called "Raqs Sharqi" (pp. 22–23).

As with Study 1's becoming-amphibian and Study 2's becoming-cyborg, Duchesne (2010) alluded to this fandom's sonic refrain (as regards Slave Leia). Thus, by considering each of these cosplays in turn, Duchesne's (2010) approach mirrored the context-specificity of the approach taken in this research. Nevertheless, by judging the 'quality' of these cosplays, Duchesne (2010)—unwittingly, perhaps—inserted a disempowering hierarchy that reinscribed the so-called professional-amateur binary. Moreover, by contrasting Amira Sa'id's cosplay to Carrie Fisher's onscreen performance, Duchesne (2010) plants another tree by referencing a historicising 'original.' Had this study used SA and treated these cosplays as independent multiplicities, these hindersome divisions would surely have been avoided. Finally, although Duchesne (2010) considered the offline spacetime of that Canadian con, there was zero recourse to its online dimension. Only Helgesen's (2015) study addressed online and offline cosplay, although because these were taken as stages, any realtime interaction was left unexamined.

The opening subsection of this chapter discusses Study 1's findings in relation to previous studies to accentuate its contribution to the existing field. Then in the next subsection, I apply the same formula to Study 2. Following these discussions, I reveal what this research tells us about cosplaying bodies and what they might do to trouble the linear spacetime of capitalistic subjectivity (RP).

7.1   Online defacialization as an affective breakthrough

The simulacrum is not degraded copy, rather it contains a positive power which negates *both original and copy, both model and reproduction.* (Deleuze, 1983, p. 53)

Study 1's findings highlight the defacializing role played by masks within this fandom. But whereas A #16's frog mask rendered this fan unrecognizable by covering their face with an analogue prosthetic, A #39 used software to split their image in two, doubling their face and masking their whereabouts. In contrast, A #40 utilized digital software to collage their face with a flurry of dialogue boxes. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2012) noted cosplay's penchant for wearing masks: "Individuals tend to wear different masks to construct, transform, or reshape their temporary roles or identities over the course of self-formation and transformation" (p. 320). Therefore, Study 1 supports Rahman et al.'s (2012) observation that cosplay's use of masks concerns metamorphosis.

That said, Study 1's findings highlight how Rahman et al.'s (2012) understanding of this prosthetic falls short in three ways. Firstly, because their reference to masks was non-specific, it missed the nature of the prosthetic being used (i.e., analogue or digital) and disregarded their functionality. In contrast, Study 1 mapped these aspects. Secondly, Rahman et al. (2012) overlooked how masks link technology to aesthetics. As I mentioned, A #39's performance involved a digital redaction of their face, whilst A #40's cosplay used a dialogue box swirl to (partially) conceal this surface. Crucially, this added to their otherwise analogue costume. Lastly, Rahman et al.'s (2012) commentary on mask-wearing implied that a conscious a priori cosplaying subject sported such items to promote "a fluidity of identification, and self-objectification of a kind that many people are unlikely to attain in everyday life" (p. 321). In comparison, A #16 and A #40 show how cosplay selfies might use defacialization to create online cramped spaces that are

emptied of objects and human identities. Understood via this thesis's Deleuzo-Guattarian positioning, it was only by interrupting the face's operation as the meaning-making and identity-fixing abstract machine that these multiplicities destratified these fans' subjectivities. Hence, Rahman et al.'s (2012) study overlooked how masks interrupt identity formation to empowering ends (RP #1) rather than trigger it through identification and self-objectification.

In place of Rahman et al.'s (2012) recourse to cosplay as an affirmation of a supposedly existing self, Study 1 highlights three kinds of empowering defacializing practices within cosplay:

- obfuscation (i.e., A #16's becoming-amphibian);

- duplication (i.e., A #39's becoming-slasher); and,

- deconstruction (i.e., A #40's becoming-edited).

All the above directly address RP #1 and reveal the online weapons of an online nomadic cosplaying war machine. For this reason, Study 1's three lines of escape demonstrate how this performance art might use analogue and digital prosthetics to smooth the striated, identity-limiting spaces of social media. This way, masks can act as holey spaces—cosplaying thresholds—by helping fans temporarily forget their human selves. Furthermore, Rahman et al. (2012) paid no heed to the decidedly uncanny quality of masks. As such, these researchers overlooked how these devices might provide this subculture with a deterritorializing edge or abstract machine that re-imagines the selfie as 'other': "The weird brings to the familiar something which ordinarily lies beyond it, and which cannot be reconciled with the "homely" (even as its negation)" (Fisher, 2016, pp. 10–11). Unlike Rahman et al.'s (2012) personal, identity-based approach, Study 1 shows how a cosplay selfie can serve as a revolutionary impersonal phenomenon (RP #1).

Lamerichs (2015) suggested that CMVs were composed of four independent layers—storylines, song lyrics, cinematography, and female subjectivity, respectively

(para. 4.1). However, even though Study 1 dealt with static selfies, not CMVs, its findings suggest that such 'layers' instead pertained to the refrain of the context-specific multiplicities in question. For example, A #16's nonhuman ritournelle used a line from an Ed Sheeran song (i.e., 'Shape of You' (Sheeran, 2017) to (cos)play with the storyline of Guillermo del Toro's film *The Shape of Water* ("The Asset (Amphibian Man)," n.d.) and re-appropriate 'traditional' ideas of romance. Further, this IG post possessed musicalness but without sound. This finding was surprising because although this becoming-amphibian was not a CMV, it afforded an inaudible sonic quality by referencing Sheeran's ditty. In contrast, Study 1's becoming-slasher and becoming-edited provided no reference to pop music. Thus, I argue against Lamerichs (2015) by insisting that online performances cannot be reduced to generic elements. This is simply because we still cannot predict what a cosplaying body might do.

In effect, A #16's becoming-amphibian soundtracked themself by nomadically deterritorializing and then reterritorializing the abovementioned tune for their own libidinous ends. Had I followed Lamerichs's (2015) interpretive approach, I would have possibly missed this part of the performance by focusing solely on what these song lyrics supposedly signified for this 'subject.' However, Study 1's becoming-amphibian underlines how this castration might be sidestepped via defacializing performances that (cos)play with pop culture narratives and sonics (RP #1). Furthermore, Lamerichs's (2015) representational paradigm was unable to show how immaterial cosplaying practices (i.e., expression) link with its technologically driven material ones (i.e., content). So, whereas Lamerichs's (2015) approach to imagery provides half the story by offering a "*tracing*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 11), this research constitutes a cosplaying rhizome (albeit a necessarily incomplete one).

Reflecting upon Study 1's findings, I insist that Lamerichs's (2015) "metric schema" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 562) can and should be replaced with the entirely open-ended process of assemblage. In fact, this research phase accentuates

how this fandom's qualitative multiplicities might remain free by resisting any attempt to totalize their content—before, during, and after their diagramming. Consequently, by implementing this radically alternative theoretical and practical take on cosplay, this nomadic-posthumanist research paradigm underscores the complexity of this subculture's heterogenous practices whilst simultaneously keeping its possibilities alive.

Gn (2011) posited that cosplay's widespread use of artificial imagery induced pleasurable bodily sensations within fans (p. 591). Turning to the (micro-)shocks triggered by A #39 becoming-slasher, I argue that Gn's (2011) positioning is partially justified in this instance because this online performance's force (puissance) demonstrated how such doctored 'unnatural' images might unsettle nervous systems because of their uncanny, visceral quality. Indeed, it was evident from this multiplicity's comment thread that such a reaction had occurred, given how some followers encouraged this villainous character to stab others, whilst others expressed their (libidinous) desire to become willing 'victims.' Nevertheless, the fact that these reactions were mimetic—because these followers were complicit with the jocularity of this cosplay—should not go amiss.

Although Gn's (2011) research pointed to the link between artificial fandom images and pleasure, it overlooked how the latter affect might entail laughter and shock (as in Study 1's becoming-slasher). Moreover, despite Gn's (2011) helpful consideration of sensation, these affects and percepts were treated as mediated entities that required a pleasure-seeking cosplayer: "the enunciative subject in cosplay" (p. 588). However, given Study 1's findings, Gn's (2011) position is mistaken on two counts. Firstly, this research phase indicates how IG cosplays might act as unmediated bodies that directly impinge on other bodies. Consequently, Gn's (2011) distinction between 'artificial' (i.e., nonhuman) and 'natural' (i.e., human) bodies introduced a schism that does not exist. In contrast, Study 1's nomadic-posthumanist remit avoids placing affects within an anthropocentric hierarchy. Secondly, Study 1's three lines of escape do not reify the

existence of Gn's (2011) cosplayer as the abovementioned 'enunciative subject.' Instead, these cosplay becomings point to how online cosplaying might function as a polyvocal, polyvisual practice that gives rise to a fandom-based collective assemblage of enunciation. Upon reflection, perhaps one might better understand A #39's troubling affect via Barthes's (1999) notion of the impersonal, unconscious "*punctum*":

> This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. (Barthes, 1999, p. 26)

Either way, Gn's (2011) recourse to a conscious cosplayer was not only unnecessary but misleading. Instead, this becoming-slasher sheds light on how images might put the autonomic nervous system on high alert: fight-and-line-of-flight (RP #1).

There were notable parallels between A #39's becoming-slasher and insights derived from Peirson-Smith (2019). That study found cosplay was driven by digitally savvy fans "who are always playing and sharing their lived experiences online in what we might call a techno-liminal space" (Peirson-Smith, 2019, p. 78). Whilst I admire this desire to connect online and offline experiences, I wish to make two negative comments. Firstly, Peirson-Smith's (2019) approach separated offline and online lived experiences by treating the latter as an offshoot of the former. However, because A #39's becoming-slasher acted as a rhizome, it conjoined this fan's online and offline lived experiences. Secondly, Peirson-Smith's (2019) study mistakenly implied the existence of a pre-existing cosplayer who then shares a performance via social media. In contrast, A #39 functioned as an unconscious assemblage of human and nonhuman forces because this techno-aesthetic alliance operated on the flat surface of BwO. For this reason, this thesis's emphasis on symbiosis is vital for cosplay studies because it (finally) recognises that its digital domain does not exist outside of offline subjectivity. After all, A #39 could only be accessed via a coordinated use of content (e.g., technology) and expression (e.g., language). (The same is true with Study 1's becoming-amphibian and becoming-

edited.) Furthermore, lying between these elements was the screened surface of a smartphone (or computer) screen acting as a portal connecting cosplay's online and offline worlds.

Peirson-Smith's (2019) distinctions between the offline–online aspects of cosplaying prioritised actual bodies and spaces whilst simultaneously implying causation through invariant stages. Consequently, the virtual temporal aspects of this performance art—its becomings—and their specificities were neglected in favour of an anthropological recourse to structuration. In contrast, Study 1 mapped the co-causal relation between these dimensions. For instance, A #39 was a two-dimensional simulacrum (i.e., expression) of their offline costumed body (i.e., content). And although technology qua content helped join these dots, its status as the cosplaying BwO in Study 1 made it a quasi-cause. As such, this thesis's diagramming illustrates how such simulative schizo fracturing cares not for human norms concerning age, gender, race, and so forth and, as such, drags some-Thing uncanny into reality. For this reason, Study 1's becomings were liminal in that they occupied the space inbetween online and offline cosplaying. However, there was nothing individualistic and liminoid about them because their creation pivoted on collective practices that continually destratified or dissolved capitalistic subjectivity. As such, Study 1 only partially supports Peirson-Smith's (2019) theoretical framework. Rather, this research phase demonstrates how online-offline cosplaying might impart a single onto-epistemological feedback loop—a liminal one— whereby fans' bodies continually disappear (i.e., deterritorialization) and then reappear (i.e., reterritorialization) (RP #1).

Due to these above points, I argue that Study 1 testifies to the idea that technology is part of fandom subjectivity. For this reason, Study 1 underlines how this content is wedded to the sensory online–offline experiences of everyday life—for better or worse. In this respect, Gregory Bateson's (1972) warning in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* seems especially prescient:

If we continue to operate in terms of a Cartesian dualism of mind versus matter, we shall probably also continue to see the world in terms of God versus man; elite versus people; chosen race versus others; nation versus nation; and man versus environment. It is doubtful whether a species having both an advanced technology *and* this strange way of looking at its world can endure. (Bateson, 1972, p. 337)

That said, rather than this pluralistic perspective imprisoning an individual within its own material body, this thesis's nomadic-posthumanist paradigm highlights how cosplay's techno-aesthetics might help fans escape by creating an immaterial nonhuman "*other* subjectivity" (Guattari, 2006, p. 145). Indeed, Study 1's becoming-slasher and becoming-edited highlight how this research finds a link between guilt-free pleasure and the digital manipulation of images. And as Nick Land (2012) puts it: "Desire is irrevocably abandoning the social, in order to explore the libidinized rift between a disintegrating personal egoism and a deluge of post-human schizophrenia" (p. 342).

Yamato's (2020) work was remarkable because it underscored an implicit fear of identity concealment within cosplay. Arguably this was on the researcher's side rather than their participants. This paranoia was evidenced when only nine interviewees concurred with Yamato's (2020) suggestion that they used cosplay to hide their identity (para. 5.1). In contrast, Study 1 refrained from using any such leading questions and instead examined how costuming functioned within IG selfies. Put differently, I never interpreted why these fans dressed up as they did—I only mapped to what end. In fact, at one point, Yamato (2020) went beyond their data, speculating that, overall, crossplayers "seemed to be confident and determined in what they were doing" (para. 7.1). In comparison, Study 1 did not use any of its images to decipher these Instagrammers own personality traits. For instance, with A #40's becoming-edited, I resisted the temptation to infer anything about this individual fan's 'underlying' personality or affinity with Futaba Sakura's ("Futaba Sakura," n.d.) imaginary disposition.

That would have been an unfounded interpretation based upon Oedipal interpretation. Rather, I charted how this cosplay operated as a line of deterritorialization: one that made this fan's own subjectivity flow by collaging desire upon the screened surface of Study 1's BwO.

Study 1's becoming-edited further complicates Yamato's (2020) line of questioning regarding concealment (para. 5.1) because A #40 blurred any clear-cut distinction between public/private performance and participation/non-participation. Indeed, this affect highlights how cosplay might simultaneously hide (e.g., via digital effects) but not hide (e.g., by performing in public). In effect, A #40 simulated, or better, gave the impression that they did not want to be seen. As such, Yamato (2020) neglected this practice's uncanny, nomadic side. Furthermore, this same result counters the notion that participatory arts conspire with the capitalistic status quo (see Noys's (2014) predictably pessimistic Freudian spin). Instead, this becoming-edited points toward how fans might develop new tactics for collective participation that actively empower individuals regardless of who, what, or where they are located (RP #1).

Lunning's (2011) research was also concerned with concealment. Once again, this practice was painted unfavourably, with this subculture's propensity for mask-wearing represented an act of disavowal by a (supposedly) disenfranchised cosplayer:

> This denial of self becomes a key gesture toward the desire to mask: to take up a guise under which the cosplayer, as a subset of otaku culture, uses the narratives of anime and manga and thus operates as a mime of abjection. (Lunning, 2011, p. 76)

However, I argue that Study 1's findings underscore how masking qua self-denial constitutes an affirmative act. Take, for instance, A #40's becoming-edited, which accentuated the fluidity of this fan's subjectivity via a defacializing act of digital camouflage. Hence, Study 1 contradicts Lunning's (2011) claim that this performance art revolved around abject cosplayers creating "imaginary identities" (p. 77). Instead, it

shows that cosplay concerns what an affect—a selfie/image—might do to alter reality by unleashing desiring-production (RP #1).

Nevertheless, Study 1's findings do not suggest that Lunning (2011) was wrong in drawing upon Kristeva's (1982) notion of the abject. However, what was problematic was Lunning's (2011) idea that cosplayers were abject because their practices fell outside of historically determined societal norms. On the contrary, Study 1's lines of escape allude to how this performance art might afford tactics that trigger abjection but only in the uncanny sense. Indeed, Kristeva (1982) describes how abjection does not multiply identities but rather shatters the self: "It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled" (pp. 3–4). That said, Study 1 concurs with Lunning's (2011) finding that cosplay induced multiple becomings (p. 82). And yet, despite this similarity, I hold that Study 1's affects were only possible because these fans' sense of self was destratified, counter-actualised, or indeed, rendered abject. To be exact, this research phase shows how cosplay proliferates bodies by firstly stripping away identity. As such, Lunning's (2011) positioning missed the initial operation through which this subculture becomes a transversal practice.

Overall, I assert that Study 1's lines of deterritorialization point to a potential rapprochement between SA and select psychoanalytic concepts which hold practical value. Moreover, I believe this move is warranted because such conjunction might provide fresh insights into cosplay's bodily sensations. However, any alternate take on the uncanny must see this phenomenon as an entirely open-ended, affective mode ripe for fabulation. Contrast this schizoanalytic perspective with psychoanalysis's one-sided emphasis on the unconscious as an anxiety-provoking horror show: "Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

7.2   Bucking otaku trends

> The cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed. Far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signal disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling. Bestiality has a new status in this cycle of marriage exchange. (Haraway, 1991, p. 152)

Before I compare Study 2's results and past research, recall its three lines of escape: P #18 from A #8's becoming-cyborg, P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow, and P #8 from A #4's becoming-Queen, respectively. In their unique ways, these three affects point toward the possibility that cosplay might use its becomings-animal to fuel the production of schizo-posthuman subjectivities. In so doing, its offline-online practices could take fans into new existential territories and, in the process, offer respite from capitalistic subjectivity.

Let us consider the heterogeneity of Study 2's becoming-cyborg. Here, P #18 from A #8's cosplay demonstrates how cosplay might challenge the fixedness of gendered—and sexed—identity and find an alternative path that sidesteps Oedipus altogether. Precisely, the depersonalizing molecularity of this performance facilitated the emergence of a cosplaying rhizome lodged between human identity and nonhuman desire: "Desiring-machines are the nonhuman sex, the molecular machinic elements, their arrangements and their syntheses, without which there would be neither a human sex specifically determined in the large aggregates, nor a human sexuality capable of investing these aggregates" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 335). Hence, this cyborgian affect suggests a line of escape far beyond crossplay limits, as Leng (2013) explored. This bionic becoming confounds Leng's (2013) linear emphasis on male-to-female crossplay (p. 89) in highlighting how the posthuman figure of the cyborg presents an opportunity for a different transition—toward indiscernibility. To this end, this uncanny

affect might 'queer' recognizable molar gender identities within this fandom and, in turn, draw an aberrant line away from the "regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality" (Butler, 1993, p. 12).

That said, I should stress that I am not deploying the idea of 'queer' to refer to the now-established identity category. Rather, I use this notion to connote the uncanny. Indeed, Robin Anne Reid (2009) suggests that rather than simply running contrary to heterosexuality, the concept of "queerness" might instead be seen in opposition to "normativity" (p. 463). Indeed, Lunning (2011) found that cosplay's drag and camp aesthetics were aligned with "the marginal, the subversive, and the sexual" (p. 82). Nevertheless, Study 2's becoming-cyborg illustrates why Reid's (2009) use of 'queerness' is problematic on two counts. Firstly, I argue that this desiring-machine is not answerable to any imaginary norms, gendered or otherwise. Indeed, Guattari (2006) observes how "desiring-signs" undo representation entirely: "It's the power of abolition: no distinction: code and flow" (p. 219). Secondly, I maintain that because this/the BwO is genderless—"innocently anoedipal" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013a, p. 416)—it escapes the phallic order altogether. (Although Lacan's disciples would no doubt reject this notion as impossible.) In sum, this performance's force (puissance) does not reside in its ability to resist gender norms but in how its fusion of sonics and visuals outmanoeuvres these obligations.

Considering this becoming-cyborg's affirmative masking, Yamato's (2020) previously mentioned finding that only a small proportion of cosplayers wish to hide their identity at a con (para. 5.1) might be rethought. To this end, I argue that P #18 from A #8's cosplay demonstrates how individuals might conceal their gendered or otherwise identities through masks rather than through the conventional linearity of crossplay. Strangely, this alternate take on the use of this otaku prosthetic was alluded to by one of Yamato's (2020) own participants: "Another cosplayer, who had just begun his cosplay, said, "[other people] do not recognise me. Uh, [when] I wore like this, I can do

anything I want, and they don't know who I am" (para. 5.2). This reported freedom from identity qua power (pouvoir) supports Study 2's finding that mask-wearing interrupts the workings of this fandom's faciality machine to liberatory ends (i.e., subject-groups).

I hold that Yamato's (2020) study missed such qualitative insights because their ethnography concentrated on consensus rather than dissensus, whereas Study 2's schizoanalytic fieldwork homed in on the latter's revolutionary force. However, it should be remembered that other studies, besides Yamato (2020), have also depicted cosplay as an escapist enterprise. Abramova et al.'s (2021) research, for instance, resonated with State paranoia: "It is noteworthy that according to cosplayers, their lifestyle and the system of values are similar to most people, therefore, they do not oppose themselves to society" (p. 104). In addition, recall Peirson-Smith's (2019) study, which held that this fandom's creativity stemmed from its status as a "liminoid, leisure-based pursuit" (p. 73). In comparison, Study 2 accentuates how nomadic offline–online cosplaying can generate lines of escape that resist capitalistic subjectivity rather than consolidate its hold.

Furthermore, when scrutinizing P #18 from A #8's performance, I refrained from taking Yamato's (2020) judgemental approach, which differentiated between the novice cosplays of younger fans and the expertise of older practitioners (para. 5.6). Instead, this study refused to insert ageist hierarchies because it did not compare one cosplay with another. If it had done so, this thesis might have missed how P #8 from A #4's becoming-Queen obfuscated their identity not through a mask but via an assortment of different weapons: a blond wig, a blue dress, gold ballet shoes, and a black-and-red cuddly toy dragon. So, by applying a flat onto-epistemological approach to its discourse, Study 2 highlights how such becomings are open to all comers, regardless of demographics or skill set. Furthermore, had I espoused Yamato's (2020) arborescent paradigm and compared Study 2's cosplays in their proficiency, I would have unwittingly

(re-)affirmed lack as the basis for desire. In turn, Oedipus and His cause—capitalism—would have been re-introduced, disempowering these fans.

Let us briefly turn to the strangeness of P #16 from A #7 's becoming-crow in light of Langsford's (2016) research. Although this study pointed to how cosplaying photography permits access to (such) "uncanny floating worlds" (p. 20), Langsford (2016) neglected to theorise how access to these alternate universes is granted. The same cannot be said of Domsch's (2014) study, which used moe to account for the ontological manifestation of a fictional object into this world (p. 130). Significantly, Domsch (2014) equated this concept with the creation of Artaud's ""body without organs"" (p. 137). In this respect, P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow upholds this conflation in two respects. Firstly, I argue that this cosplaying body sheds light on how a fictional character/theme is brought into existence in relation to a specific territory (i.e., TB's (2018) BwO). And, secondly, I posit that this 'furry' character/theme constitutes a cosplaying threshold that allows such individuals the opportunity to perform on top of the moe BwO. This finding might explain how the entire world becomes a stage, including its fictional side.

However, Domsch (2014) erroneously described the cosplaying BwO as an object. Here, I argue that this theoretical framework is mistaken because this body is a temporal, abstract phenomenon, not a spatial, concrete one. (Although, to be fair, I do think that the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the BwO bears a striking similarity to Winnicott's (2005) "*transitional object*" (p. 5).) In addition, I hold that Domsch's (2014) representational approach restricts the creativity of the cosplaying BwO to the operation of language, specifically, "the realm of the storyworld" (p. 137). And whilst P #16 from A #7's reference to gijinka confirmed how discourse could be used affectively, there was more to this cosplay's expression than words. For example, recall how this becoming-crow's feathered hands functioned as weapons of a nomadic war machine. In addition, Domsch's (2014) study was too caught up with what cosplay bodies represent

historically. In comparison, Study 2 focused on what this fandom's bodies might (yet) do.

Given Study 2's findings, I insist that Domsch's (2014) deployment of moe equates with the non-specificity of cosplay's uncanny desires or BwOs. In addition, this research phase illustrates how these impersonal nonhuman affects might be facilitated via the operation of cosmetics and prosthetics. For example, P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow assembled a black beak mask, a green toga, a brown shawl, and feathered hands as part of their performance. Remarkably, although Domsch (2014) noted the enduring presence of costumes within this subculture, these technologies seemingly played no role in a moe characters' coming into being (p. 133). This omission contrasts markedly with Study 2's finding that dressing up marked TB's (2018) territorial refrain.

Domsch's (2014) linear timeframe led to an unnecessary analogy between "transubstantiation" (p.135) and the territorial refrain of this contemporary subculture. By contrast, Study 2 applied a cartographic approach. In view of its results, what was missing from both Domsch's (2014) and Langsford's (2016) accounts was a consideration of how this fandom might function as a performance art machine powered by BwOs or "compounds of sensations" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 168). Indeed, Study 2's becoming-cyborg, becoming-crow, and becoming-Queen all passed through this gateway before manifesting at TB (2018). Furthermore, contrary to Domsch's (2014) position, these molecular movements had nothing to do with cosplay as a representational practice because they each referred to the virtual transition between T. and U. in Figure 4.1.

That said, Domsch (2014) also observed that cosplay primarily involved manufacturing still images. Study 2 confirms this insight but extends it to account for how online and offline cosplaying works to turn three-dimensional offline bodies (i.e., content) into two-dimensional ones (i.e., expression). Although Rahman et al.'s (2012)

study commented on this transition (p. 321), it did not track this movement. Precisely, this event occurred when photographs were taken within TB's (2018) cosphotography assemblage and then posted as part of its social media one. Recall how a sense of uncanniness was achieved via statuesque poses in front of smartphone cameras. In turn, this subtraction of movement triggered the absolute speed of "an abstract line with neither imaginary figures nor symbolic functions: the real of the BwO" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 238). As such, Study 2 readily accounts for how cosplaying bodies might achieve their affects by slowing down and changing their longitude. In this way, these findings exemplify Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) notion of "*involution*" because this stilling dissolved forms by "freeing times and speeds": "*the work of art must mark seconds, tenths and hundredths of seconds*" (p. 311). In short, the findings from TB (2018) show how three-dimensional cosplaying bodies might become stripped of their depth to become flat surfaces—akin to the pages and frames of a comic (RP #2).

Although Domsch's (2014) research was along the right lines, it did not explain how still images functioned across divergent contexts. For this reason, this cartography submits that one better understands this fandom if one identifies practices that buck (i.e., deterritorialize) cosplay's otaku habits or trends—rather than re-present them as in Domsch's (2014) view. Further, Domsch's (2014) recourse to cosplay's moe dimension can readily be subsumed into this research's map. To be exact, the uncanny "*moé* world" (*moeru sekai*)" (Galbraith, 2014, p. 19) is found at U. in Figure 4.1. I argue that Study 2's trio of moe becomings equated with the BwO. This is because the latter's impalpability granted TB's (2018) minds and bodies access to the uncanny via "memetic contagion" (Watts, 2021, para. 9). In addition, I hold that the quintessentially intangible concept of moe points to how such imaginative, impersonal, nonhuman ruptures might save this fandom from ""flattened" capitalistic time" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 16) (RP #2). Indeed, recent theorising on moe supports this claim by depicting this inherently strange phenomenon as:

the true detachment from humanity, the final severance, the loss of all anchors and ascension into a pure body without organs only possessing the raw surface of an image projected outwards to convince us it still has place in our reality, that it can walk in our streets and our damp alleyways, that its face is one of Ours, that it is not Beyond. (Watts, 2021, para. 7)

That said, Domsch (2012) was correct to assert that cosplay ontologises "hyper-bodies, super-powered or magic-driven bodies" (p. 137). Nevertheless, Study 2 added a much-needed specificity to these practices because it identified how two different BwOs interfaced. Furthermore, compared with Domsch's (2014) representational paradigm, Study 2 highlights how moe is an intensity-producing practice. In fact, this argument echoes online otaku subculture's first colloquial use of this term as "burning passion" (Galbraith, 2014, p. 5). Lastly, whereas Domsch (2014) emphasised the phantastical side of moe, this study accentuates how this phenomenon is a practice that can lead to real cosplay becomings (RP #2).

P #8 from A #4's becoming-Queen refuted past research's depiction of cosplay as an escapist hobby (e.g., Lamerichs, 2011; Lunning, 2011; Rahman et al., 2012; Abramova et al., 2021). Indeed, this finding shows how something as ostensibly insignificant as a toy dragon might function as a cosplaying doorway and help an individual escape their self. In this respect, one might rethink Bateson's (1972) play frame as an exit onto the surface of the BwO rather than as an entrance into an imaginary escapist space. As such, this result contradicts signifying and subject-led understandings of cosplay, such as Lamerichs (2011), who stressed how this fandom was a means to perform the self (para. 6.1). On the contrary, TB's (2018) becoming-Queen underscores how this fandom's force (puissance) lies in its capacity to turn attention toward the presence of nonhuman others—even if these are non-living, cuddly, and kawaii. In turn, such a decentring undoes Oedipal images of selfhood by expanding a fan's perceptual scope—as in Johnston's (1999) notion of machinic vision.

This becoming-Queen's use of social media formed a creative block or alliance with this fictional character's regal aesthetic. As such, P #8 from A #4's cosplay reveals how technology (i.e., content) can serve as the abstract machine and merge with performance art (i.e., expression). Three noteworthy differences emerge if one considers this claim in relation to Helgesen's (2015) study. Firstly, Helgesen's (2015) finding that cosplay blended fake and real experiences (pp. 540–541) introduced a dichotomy. However, P #8 from A #4's cosplay highlights how such division is spurious, given that fakeness is constitutive of real experience. With this point in mind, I argue that this art form's simulative capacity encompasses what Deleuze (1983) calls "the false as power" (p. 53). Secondly, although Helgesen (2015) found that social media (i.e., YouTube) provided a platform for experimental performance (p. 541), there was no recourse to how content (i.e., technology) and expression (i.e., aesthetics) interacted. (Indeed, Helgesen (2015) made the mistake of seeing the former as mediating the latter, which suggested a linear, causal relationship as opposed to a rhizomatic one.) Thirdly, Helgesen's (2015) recourse to the relationship between cosplay, technology, and animism is questionable in light of Study 2's findings. Helgesen (2015) had argued that child cosplayers are empowered when media-sourced nonhuman characters are bestowed human qualities (p. 543). However, Study 2 suggests that cosplay does not turn on the binary between humans and nonhumans but rather encompasses a plethora of alliances:

- human and nonhuman (e.g., fans and their prosthetics);
- organic and inorganic (e.g., concrete bodies with technological gizmos); and
- canny and uncanny (e.g., familiar fictional characters performed by strangers).

Although the heterogeneous bodies listed above all occurred in different combinations across TB's (2018) three multiplicities, they always co-existed and were in reciprocal relation (RP #2). To an extent, Study 2 supports Duchesne's (2010) finding that cosplay involved "human synergy" (p. 26). However, I maintain that this subculture's

capacity for symbiosis should be labelled 'posthuman' because the activities that took place at this con entailed the participation of nonhumans.

7.3   Performance art as a strange posthumanist paradigm

There are deeper strata of truth…and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization. (Herzog & Cronin, 2002, p. 301)

This part considers what this thesis's findings reveal about this fandom's relation to spacetime in light of previous research that has examined its online and offline practices. Here, the overarching argument is that prior studies have failed to note that cosplaying entails the production of unpredictable, independent bodies that are unconsciously assembled in relation to a particular territory—whether at a con or on a social media platform. To put it emphatically, this research's documented multiplicities were not the by-products of conscious cosplayers purposefully toying with this hobby's representations. Instead, the interplay between offline and online practices ontologised fans' subjectivities or worlds. The forthcoming subsection develops this posthumanist line of thinking by considering literature from this research field.

Although Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) study also documented how cosplay acts as a type of "*posthuman* drag" (para. 40), it did not differentiate between mimesis as imitation or simulation. This was a critical distinction within this SA, given that whilst the former notion situated cosplay within the disempowering regime of representation, the latter pertained to this subculture's empowerment through affect. For this reason, the cosplay becomings documented across this research were simulative yet real productions, not representations of unreal characters. Furthermore, although Bainbridge and Norris (2013) acknowledged that cosplay might trouble identities and reality, they

neglected to account for the mechanism through which this is achieved: fabulation. In comparison, this research explains how cosplay might induce ontological dissensus via various defacializing and depersonalizing practices that smooth online and offline striated spaces and form a nomadic war(paint) machine.

Bainbridge and Norris (2013) suggested that cosplaying at a con was about dressing up and acting like a fictional character through embodied performance (para. 11). They referred to this process, in which desire is worn on the body, as "habitus" (Bainbridge & Norris, 2013, para. 12). Here, I argue that although the terminology is markedly different, Study 2's findings further develop Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) insights vis-à-vis cosplay's relation to spacetime. For instance, P #18 from A #8's becoming-cyborg voice-changing device might be rethought as a portable territory. In this respect, this technological gadget served as Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) habitus because it helped this fan to act the part. That said, I argue that Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) concept of habitus should be rethought in terms of a body's speed (i.e., longitude), as opposed to the costume as an extensive or spatialised 'thing.' Indeed, recall how the statuesque poses in front of my smartphone camera formed part of TB's (2018) refrain.

Further, I insist that cosplay is not just about faking the habitus by becoming a chosen character by dressing up. Rather, I argue that its freedoms lie in how fans bend this rule rather than blindly follow it. For instance, in Study 1, P #40's becoming-edited did not provide a precise roleplay of their chosen fictional character (i.e., "Futaba Sakura," n.d.) but instead gave an impression along a 'hacker' theme or conceptual persona. Indeed, remember how in Study 2, P #8 from A #4 was indifferent as to whether con-based cosplays were precisely like a given character. In this regard, Study 1's online refrain and Study 2's offline(–online) one provided opportunity for fans to (literally) create an impression rather than express a chosen character's habitus in an exacting fashion (RP).

Broadly, this thesis's results concur with Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) claim that cosplay necessitated embodiment (para. 40). Indeed, I argue that this process should be equated with this fandom's territorial refrain. However, I hold that Bainbridge and Norris (2013) disregarded how the key to understanding this subculture lies in mapping how its primary ritualised habit—dressing up—might be continually reinvented. Indeed, Study 2's becoming-cyborg demonstrates that by adding a specific prosthetic (i.e., a voice-changer), a fan might impersonate a fictional character's voice whilst simultaneously morphing spacetime. Thus, Study 2 underscores how it is not enough to depict cosplay as involving habitus (or territorialization) because what matters is how this process might provide lines of deterritorialization away from capitalistic subjectivities through new sensations (RP #2).

Given this last point, Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) account arguably described stratification as opposed to destratification. In contrast, this research shows how cosplay's uncanny stylizations can induce lines of escape that smooth both striated online and offline spacetimes. So, although Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) recourse to cosplay qua habitus is helpful in its emphasis on practice, they failed to consider how its creative capacity lies in its uncanny lines of deterritorialization. Because of this oversight, these researchers overlooked how by costuming the face, fans undo and, ultimately, reinvent their own habits/habitus. To this end, I offer an overall summary of this research's insights into cosplay as a quintessentially depersonalizing practice. Study 1's defacializations included:

- An amphibious mask which hid the face and unleashed an aquatic becoming-animal (i.e., A #16);
- A digitally enabled doubling of the face that concealed its whereabouts within the miniature landscape of an IG selfie (i.e., A #39); and,

- A digitally redacted face that lay behind a series of dialogue boxes partially obscured not only this fan's face but also the identity of their fictional character (i.e., A #40).

Although the three cosplay lines of escape mapped in Study 2 also deployed defacializing tactics, they did so in unusual ways:

- P #18 from A #8's cyborgian mask depersonalized their voice whilst simultaneously camouflaging their face;

- P #16 from A #7's becoming-crow sported a bird mask that replaced their own mask (i.e., their face) with an-other; and,

- P #8 from A #4 cradled a cuddly toy dragon to turn attention away from their face.

Upon reflection, one could argue—along Yamato's (2020) and Abramova et al.'s (2021) conservative, consensual line of thinking—that the above findings did not represent the majority. Nevertheless, I insist that because cosplay is a molecular affair forged from strange alliances, this focus on bifurcations or lines of escape is precisely the point.

Like Bainbridge and Norris (2013), Helgesen (2015) espoused a "posthuman" (p. 539) take on cosplay spacetimes. Moreover, the latter's theorist's Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding of this fandom as "rhizomatic" (Helgesen, 2015, p. 541) means it aligns with this thesis's onto-epistemological positioning. Helgesen (2015) also found that cosplay involves learning about the limits of one's bodily experience (p. 541). Indeed, across this research, I hold that cosplay becomings were as much about learning through praxis as practice (RP). For example, Study 1's becoming-amphibian evidenced how this fan had learnt to merge content (i.e., digital editing) with expression (i.e., an IG selfie). The net result of this assemblage was an online storyboard equipped with its customised plotline. On the other hand, Study 2's becoming-crow showed how P #16 from A #7's affective capacity was augmented by collaborating with P #17 from A #7

(who, in turn, augmented their own body's affective capacity). Thus, this research supports Helgesen's (2015) finding that cosplay was about testing a body's limits.

Uniquely, Helgesen's (2015) study described how this subculture's use of social media offered fans a multi-sensory experience whilst troubling the distinction between embodiment and disembodiment (p. 547). As such, I posit that Study 2's becoming-cyborg's audio-visual blend re-affirms Helgesen's (2015) link between synaesthesia, cosplay, and alterations in spacetime. On a broader level, this thesis adds to this insight by recognizing that these affects might be acquired by (cos)playing with human and nonhuman others across divergent and sometimes blended spacetimes (RP).

Despite these similarities, Helgesen's (2015) decision to deploy a case study reified the sine qua non illusion within this research field—the private, phantasy-driven cosplaying subject. In contrast, I argue that this thesis's decision to chart relations between context-specific multiplicities helps reveal two crucial things about this fandom, which Helgesen (2015) passed over. Firstly, it underlines how each cosplay is a bodily relation or rhizome that can form blocks with others but, crucially, retains its autonomy as an event. And secondly, this research highlights how cosplay is quintessentially a collective endeavour because its bodies form alliances that circulate a polyvisual and polyvocal refrain.

Helgesen (2015) found that social media drove subsequent offline practices at a con (pp. 543–545). In comparison, I maintain that Study 2's becoming-Queen alludes to how the reverse might happen—in real time. Furthermore, despite Helgesen (2015) emphasizing how Matilde loved to dress up as Miku whilst dancing along to YouTube clips (p. 541), that study overlooked how this practice is, in fact, a real time online–offline assemblage. (Indeed, this is why technologies are events.) By ignoring how online and offline cosplaying might interface in a live capacity, Helgesen's (2015) study tacitly suggested that cosplay's digital presence somehow ends whilst fans cosplay at cons.

Thus, Helgesen's (2015) study was problematic because it separated online and offline cosplay.

Instead, this research clearly indicates how this fandom's becomings are birthed from synergistic practices whereby humans and nonhumans cosplay together. Recall that in Study 2's becoming-Queen, an adult passed through TB's (2018) three multiplicities armed with a kawaii toy dragon. In this regard, one sees why a cosplaying body must first be understood as a virtual phenomenon before its actual incarnation as a spatialised, concrete form. This thesis thereby expands Helgesen's (2015) concern with online and offline practices to reveal that these dimensions are two folds of cosplay as a lived experience or "existential subjectivation" (Guattari, 1995a, p. 28). In sum, this research shows how this art form can merge these spacetimes and weave new assemblages from the vestiges (RP).

Intriguingly, Helgesen (2015) concluded that cosplay's creativity was fuelled by techno-animistic practices from outside the Western world (p. 548). However, I submit that the wide variety of Western and Eastern sourced cosplays in Study 1 and Study 2 point to a conjunction of Western and Eastern desires—and, indeed, the BwO of capitalism—rather than any East-West binary. Moreover, I argue that because both phases of this research tie cosplay's capacity for innovation to the conjunction of content and expression, this subculture's techno-aesthetics powers its affective force (puissance) rather than any techno-animism. That said, I insist that Helgesen's (2015) reference to animism should be retained, given how this thesis links cosplay to uncanniness. However, the latter's rhizomatic affects must be specifically related to this fandom's themes or conceptual personae rather than Helgesen's (2015) somewhat vague techno-animistic context (p. 542).

This thesis's use of SA reaped dividends because it provided a much-needed forward-looking focus on what a cosplaying body might do to enhance its affectivity. Contrast this perspective with Lunning's (2011) disempowering psychoanalytic

emphasis on lack and loss. Indeed, these findings dispute Lunning's (2011) claim that by denying the self, cosplay rendered fans abject subjects (p. 77). Instead, I submit that cosplaying empowers corporeal bodies by turning them into abstract lines whereby fictional characters become suggestive moe themes. For this reason, I argue that the cosplays mapped across this research all point toward further uncanny possibilities— rather than the existence of Lunning's (2011) stereotypical abject fan (p. 75).

Nevertheless, this thesis's findings point to how cosplay is a problem that concerns the destratification or disorganisation of the otaku's body and mind. In this respect, Lunning (2011) correctly described cosplay as abject—but only in an uncanny sense, whereby subjectivity is undone or, better, imploded. (For this reason, this thesis supports Andrew Culp's (2016) claim that affects are "really a process of un-becoming" (p. 28).) And although Lunning's (2011) research also drew on Guattari's influence to equate cosplay with transversal becomings (pp. 82–83), these affects were tied to identities rather than territories. Consequently, Lunning (2011) went on to link abjection to cosplayers rather than to this art form's uncanny spacetimes. Indeed, I posit that this oversight emanated from Lunning's (2011) more-or-less Lacanian perspective, which began and ended with an anthropocentric concern for prefabricated subjects. As such, fan subjectivation was left unexamined. In contrast, this research mapped cosplay subjectivities as they emerged inbetween its online and offline practices.

Let us now consider Peirson-Smith's (2019) emphasis on how costuming in cosplay straddles its "collective and individual or liminal and liminoid states" (p. 79). Broadly speaking, this thesis offers limited support for this theoretical framework. At first glance, one might think its results chime with the idea that cosplay facilitates movement by finding online and offline liminal spaces—before these turn liminoid (Peirson-Smith, 2019). However, I insist that, as with Bateson's (1972) notion of the play frame, Peirson-Smith's (2019) reference to the liminal/liminoid is too structural, spatial, and actual. Instead, this thesis underlines how cosplay's creativity is rhizomatic, temporal, and

virtual. The crucial point is that this performance art's capacity to engender alternative nomadic modes by smoothing space rests solely on its ability to rupture time because the extensivity of space links aestheticized bodies to consumerism. Indeed, I argue that this latter phenomenon equates with Peirson-Smith's (2019) recourse to the individualistic ideology of the liminoid and their subsequent treatment of cosplay as a creative yet escapist leisure pursuit. Instead, I posit that the liminoid not only marks capitalism's axiomatization of this fandom as geek chic but also signals the end of its autonomy. Nevertheless, Peirson-Smith's (2019) notion of liminality can be equated with the temporality of holey space. This conceptual change should be made because this research reveals that online and offline bodies have the power (puissance) to prise open uncanny cosplaying thresholds.

That said, Peirson-Smith's (2019) thinking casts new light on the selfies collected in Study 1 and the photographs from Study 2 because it implies that these affects were holes in long-term memory. Nevertheless, cosplay's liminality—which I hold equates with unconscious desire—does not lie with either the online or the offline dimension. Rather, the BwO occupies the holey spacetime sandwiched in between. Following Bey (2003), this is where cosplay's temporary autonomous zone (now) exists. Broadly referencing this thesis's findings, Peirson-Smith's (2019) liminal spaces might be reconceptualized as posthuman cosplaying thresholds connecting online and offline practices. (These zones are located between T. and U. in Figure 4.1.) Further, these same zones might be rethought, following Deleuze and Guattari (1986), as cramped spaces because they are free of personal identities. Thus, this current thesis maintains that this performance art's only freedoms lie in the zonal movement between online and offline spacetime. These holey spaces were portals through which cosplay's bodies transitioned from one spacetime (i.e., Chronos) to another (i.e., Aion) (and back again, due to the inevitability of reterritorialization). In sum, this research qualifies that cosplay's

holey spaces—Peirson-Smith's (2019) liminal zones—slot between these online and offline spacetimes. This is where this subculture's wiggle room resides.

Overall, this thesis extends both Bainbridge and Norris's (2013) and Helgesen's (2015) posthumanist approach by underscoring this performance art's potential to twist identities out of (human) shape and form. Crucially, however, this research adds that this disinvestment or counter-actualisation is facilitated through acts that induce (temporary) amnesia by inhibiting meaning and hiding the face. In turn, the resultant nomadic timeframe questions who or what is being performed, where a performance occurs, and where it goes afterwards.

Turning to this research's mapping of cosplay's uncanny affects, one might reasonably ask: Were these strange becomings the result of this subculture's purportedly postmodernist nature? This view has been espoused by Lunning (2011): "The postmodern paradigm shifted constructs of subjectivity to consider potential pluralities of genders and sexualities" (p. 85). In reply, I insist that even though this thesis highlights how cosplay functions as a collective online and offline phenomenon, labelling this as an exercise in postmodernism's penchant for fragmentation adds absolutely nothing that is not covered via the concept of assemblage. In fact, this research's pragmatics might be used to critique psychosocial research's postmodern leanings because its emphasis on desire moves beyond any "textualist or linguistic grid" (Fisher, 2018, p. 12).

More than anything, I argue that this thesis—as a rhizome—should be used to highlight how cosplay's development of new techno-aesthetic practices might help to continually re-invent or, better, re-engineer this fandom from within. To do so, I follow Guattari (2013) in contending that one must look beyond "voices/pathways of *power*" or "*knowledge*" and instead focus on "voices/pathways of *self-reference*" because only these can trigger "processual subjectivity" (p. 3). Furthermore, this research demonstrates how such an aesthetic project can be technologically enabled, whether

online or offline. Indeed, I argue that the cosplaying subject-groups mapped across this research—albeit in diverse ways—subscribed to this third pathway (i.e., RSP #3 & #7).

In digressing from any tenuous modern-postmodern binary, overall, this research's findings chime with Guattari's (1995a) observation that uncanny modes are a "mixture of archaic attachments to cultural traditions that nonetheless aspire to the technological and scientific modernity characterising the contemporary subjective cocktail" (p. 4). Hence, this research points toward an ever-emerging strange techno-aesthetic paradigm within this performance art. However, we are not dealing with either historical stages or a "new animism" (Helgesen, 2015, p. 542) but with a distinct type of posthumanism and the nonhuman creative power (puissance) of moe. Whether this 'presence' signals the dawn of Guattari's (1995a) "post-media era" (p. 5) or entry into Fisher's (2021) flat "postcapitalist world" (p. 49) lies beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, what can be said is that the current thesis shows how cosplay takes transcendent ideas of what it means to 'be human' and loops these in and out of the immanent archaisms of its becomings-animal (RP).

# Chapter 8 To hell with inertia, we prefer to cosplay

A minority never exists ready-made, it is only formed on lines of flight, which are also its way of advancing and attacking. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 43)

The art of life is to keep step with the celestial orchestra that beats the measure of our career, and gives the cue for our exits and our entrances. Why should we willingly miss anything, or precipitate anything, or be angry with folly, or in despair at any misadventure? In this world there should be none but gentle tears, and fluttering tip-toe loves. It is a great Carnival, and amongst these lights and shadows of comedy, these roses and vices of the playhouse, there is no abiding. (Santayana, 1922, p. 144)

8.1   General discussion

8.1.1 Study 1: Conclusion

Study 1's desiring-machines were IG selfies acting as online collective assemblages of enunciation (RSP #1). These simulative digital machines—becoming-amphibian, becoming-slasher, and becoming-edited—were memories inscribed upon the limiting technological screen of the BwO. This feat was only achieved when these cosplay multiplicities lodged themselves inbetween the ostensible online–offline binary. Here, fictional otaku identities were defacializing and depersonalizing events that had little, if anything, to do with their obligatory molar identities at the level of representation. And whilst the former marked the passage of subjective deterritorialization between T. and U., the latter connoted the objective deterritorialization between Φ. and F. in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1

A schizoanalytic map of cosplaying on Instagram
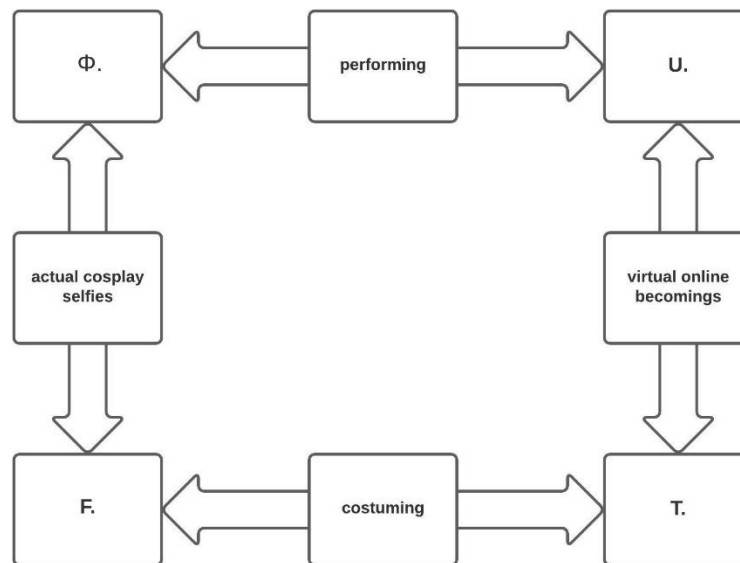
Furthermore, these cosplay desiring-machines were inclusive in terms of their social investments because they remixed cuteness (kawaii) with the uncanny (unheimlich) to spring forth a cornucopia of weird phenomena (RSP #2). Crucially, these assemblages achieved this feat via playful, good humour displays. In this way, cosplay's colourful, unserious revelry offered an alternative mode to capitalism's grey, po-faced seriousness. In turn, these impersonal photographs (literally) fashioned self-sufficient subject-groups (RSP #3) aligned to nomadic modes of being (RSP #4). In sum, Study 1's findings demonstrate how online cosplaying might empower fans by harnessing pleasurable, weird affects (RP #1).

8.1.2 Study 2: Conclusion

Study 2's desiring-machines were bodies/images that functioned as offline and online collective assemblages of enunciation (RSP #5). At TB (2018), three independent multiplicities were detected: a concrete assemblage, a cosphotography assemblage,

and a social media assemblage (RSP #5). Further, at this con, three notable lines of escape—a becoming-cyborg, a becoming-crow, and a becoming-Queen—were recorded. These affects were met with one of two types of BwOs: concrete floorspace or digital screens. This clash occurred between T. and U. in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2

A schizoanalytic map of cosplaying at Thought Bubble (2018)
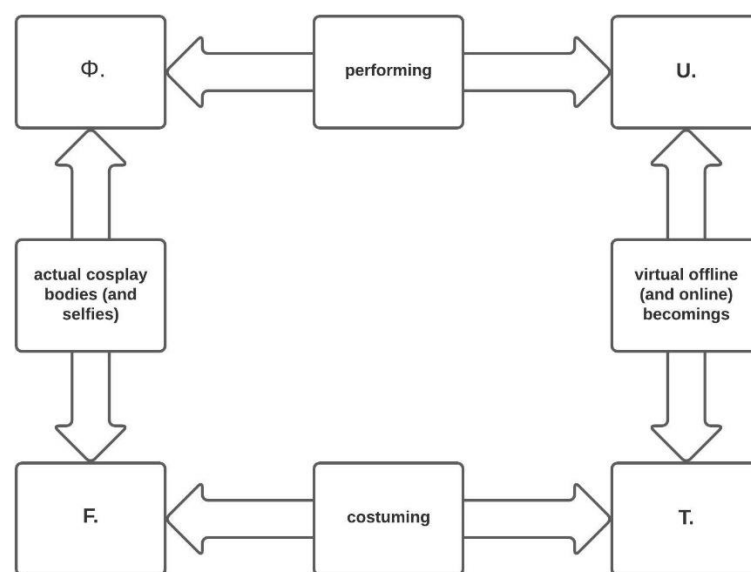
Moreover, the simulative cosplay haecceities that passed across this virtual dimension were sensory forces (puissance) that were impressive rather than expressive. This aspect coincided with the defacializing and depersonalizing affects that occurred between T. and U. (see Figure 8.2). The resultant non-restrictive social investments marked these singularities as uncanny in an eerie, out-of-time, and non-capitalistic sense (RSP #6). In turn, these 'fun' driven desiring-machines forged celebratory subject-groups (RSP #7) allied to nomadic investment (RSP #8). Overall, Study 2 demonstrates how offline–online cosplaying might empower fans by harnessing joyous, eerie affects (RP #2).

8.1.3 Overall conclusion

This fandom functioned as a nomadic performance machine that deterritorialized online-offline subjectivities by ontologising liberatory cosplaying thresholds. Thus, this thesis underscores how cosplaying might induce weird and eerie affects that empower fans by increasing an otaku body's capacity to affect itself and other bodies (RP). The problem of 'what' rather than 'who' cosplays provocatively follows this thesis's nomadic-posthumanist spin.

8.2   Further implications

In terms of cosplay's impact on spacetime, Study 1's mirrored BwO bristled with simulative events that nomadically smoothed the striated identity spaces of IG and, in turn, created a cramped online space for this fandom. Here, a fan's smartphone (or computer) screen acted as the BwO—a portal through which weird affects impinged upon the bodies of others.

Turning to Study 2's BwOs, on the one hand, TB's (2018) concrete and cosphotography assemblages pertained to the cordoned-off outdoor floorspaces around Leeds Art Gallery; whilst, on the other, its social media assemblage rebounded off the portable screen of a fans' smartphone. As such, the hapticity of this touchscreen technology triggered a nomadic smoothing of the offline–online striated spaces networked to this con. In toto, TB's (2018) two BwOs acted as time-based cosplaying portals (i.e., holey spaces) through which performance-based events impacted other bodies.

Broadly, this research highlights that this performance art's costuming refers to the territory an individual is currently inhabiting, and that play is the desire that induces its lines of escape. Crucially, these dimensions do not impart a binary relation but rather

form an onto-epistemological feedback loop. For this reason, this thesis's consideration of divergent spacetime—Chronos versus Aion—shows that cosplaying cannot be mapped without recourse to its (frequently real time) digital side. This is because this facet forms part of this fandom's nomadic-posthumanist subjectivity. The ramification of this argument is that researchers should avoid inserting tenuous binaries or boundaries between online, global and offline, local cosplaying. The same applies vis-à-vis any supposed division between costuming and performance.

Although this study homes in on cosplay's lines of deterritorialization, it also highlights how territorialization might precipitate this same revolutionary movement. Such passage is possible because this hobby's dressing-up refrains—its complex rituals—are sometimes niche stylizations rather than straightforward imitative styles. To this end, costumes might function as de facto mobile escape pods that take fan subjectivities elsewhere, outside the bounds of the material world. Thus, this subculture's capacity for experimentalism relies upon the extent to which its performances can ontologise uncanny, immaterial time zones full of rhythmicity. Only then can these events reach the abstract machine and defacialize or depersonalize the cosplaying body. Uniquely, this study shows how this feat can be achieved via human–nonhuman bodily alliances.

Compared with previous fan studies, this research demonstrates how facial camouflaging might create autopoietic subject-groups. Precisely, this immanent practice gives the impression that the actual performing body has vanished because it takes the imagination or desire beyond the confines of mandatory identity (including 'the human'). Effectively, this acute anamnestic feat can turn the spatialised body into an abstract line that conjures so many becomings-imperceptible. Furthermore, these zigzagging lines create liberating cosplaying thresholds or holey spaces by annihilating the fixture of form. Despite their moniker, these temporal portals might be understood via Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) notion of identity-free cramped space. As such, I insist that this

fandom's online–offline bodily de-formations—as opposed to its expressive subject-based identities—opened individual minds and bodies to the speculative possibilities of becoming-other (RP).

In welcoming bodily assortment, the cosplay becomings charted herein problematise commonsensical understandings of participation versus non-participation and public versus private performance. Consequently, this otaku subculture offers fans a set of dissensual tactics whereby their actual bodies are (temporarily) taken off the map. This movement produces what I dubbed a reverse isekai effect whereby unserious worlds are introduced into this serious one. Here, uncanny powers meet market forces. Thus, an online or offline cosplaying body might form a nomadic warpaint machine, which non-violently troubles capitalistic spacetime by generating strange spontaneous affects (RP #1 & #2).

Ultimately, this thesis hints at how cosplay might produce populist performance art collectives that publicly and anarchically rupture capitalism's 'one-size-fits-all' private mindset. On reflection, I argue that the greatest danger to cosplay's participatory freedoms lies in calling for fans to choose between online and offline cosplaying. Such a moralizing, exclusive disjunction would only (re-)instil a hierarchy whereby one spacetime is privileged over another. Consequently, ideological trees would usurp cosplay's moe rhizomes. To prevent this travesty, I hold that fans might draw on this study's demonstration of how techno-aesthetic practices that multiply or hide the face can augment their body's power (puissance) to affect themselves and others.

8.3   Limitations

Any ideology or cult, even the most archaic, can do the job, as it is no longer a matter of anything other than of using them as existential materials. (Guattari, 2013, pp. 3–4)

One of the limitations of this SA was that this mapping exercise seemed less concerned with fandom issues concerning territorializing habits as opposed to its lines of deterritorialization. Bluntly, most of the analysis turned on the latter, despite territorialization–deterritorialization being conceived as the same process: "A territory is always en route to an at least potential deterritorialization, even though the new assemblage may operate a reterritorialization (something that "has-the-value-of" home)" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 380). This imbalance occurred due to this thesis following Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) mandate to focus only on lines of escape, given that only these mark changes. Because of this research decision, much of the data was overlooked for a concern with this subculture's bifurcations. For this reason, I recommend that in the future, SA might be paired with psychoanalytic paradigms that are in tune with its experiential ethos. For example, I argue that D.W. Winnicott's (2005) concern with transitional phenomena could be readily subsumed within Deleuze and Guattari's processual ontology. This rapprochement might afford further research a fairer picture of the relation between cosplay's consistency (i.e., structure) and its chaos (i.e., abstraction).

This thesis's purposely skewed orientation towards deterritorialization was justifiable because, from its schizoanalytic perspective, subcultures such as cosplay are only definable in terms of their lines of escape and how these relate to their limit (i.e., the BwO). Nevertheless, because these freedoms will inevitably and immediately be reterritorialized as structures, one might say that this research unwittingly facilitates this capture—despite having one eye on cosplay's speculative possibilities. In this way, this SA might be described as an inadvertent form of cynical idealism. Moreover, in psychoanalytic terms, one might diagnose SA as a narcissistic enterprise tout court because its primary mandate is to seek out and indiscriminately condone inclusive disjunctions, which in no way "distinguish self from other, object from subject" (Fisher, 2016, p 67).

On more than one occasion, the decision to schizoanalyse data threatened to backfire due to the sheer density of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual arsenal. In this way, their thinking repeatedly threatened to drown this research's discourse to such an extent that one might say that I could not see cosplay's rhizomes for their (own) trees. Concepts might be bricks for building and destroying—but they can also weigh one down. (That said, surely the point of a PhD thesis is to be overambitious?) Keeping these points in mind, prospective fan studies might benefit from using SA more sparingly but always in relation to how bodies fly in the face of hierarchical structures. In this way, post-structuralism might yet be squared with structuralism. No matter, what must be avoided at all costs is lip-service through jargon—rather than real-world action. (Although, as linguistic pragmatics, one might say that SA is merely another name for discourse analysis, given that neither Deleuze nor Guattari—either when writing together or apart—ever dispute that anything exists outside of subjectivity.)

Another symptomatic flaw when it came to schizoanalysing the discourse was this pragmatics' proclivity for conflating two concepts into one. Take, for example, how in Study 1's molar lines, which pertained to fans' demographic identities, were deemed inflexible social machines that limited rhizomatic growth. In contrast, its malleable molecular consistencies catalysed liberatory otaku becomings. And yet, the former set of lines can also function molecularly within cosplay because desiring-machines are social machines (and vice versa). After all, desire is the only machine. The question is: Who decides whether a molar line is working molecularly? All this points to the elephant in the room: SA might be subjectless, but it is at least partially subjective. As I mentioned, the deterritorialization between T. and U. in Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 is subjective. The upshot of this weakness is that SA runs contrary to its non-interpretive ethos. That said, this research's deployment of SA's (admittedly) speculative side underscores this fandom's sense of possibility.

And yet it would be remiss not to comment on the lack of ethnic minority identities across TB's (2018) event spaces. That said, it was beyond the remit of this thesis's schizoanalytic ethos to interpret this fandom along representational lines, given that its sole concern was charting the molecular level of the productive unconscious (rather than the expressive molar lines of identity categories). Indeed, the absence of representation from ethnic minority groups within this fandom has been ably documented elsewhere. For example, Ramirez (2017) found that although United States-based comic cons provided a performative space whereby cosplayers could directly or indirectly subvert oppressive representations concerning gender, race, and social class, this hobby simultaneously "reproduces race, class, and gender inequality by privileging middle/upper-class, white, and/or masculine bodies" (p. 60). So, although this SA noted the presence—and the absence, in the case of ethnic minorities—of expressive molar identities categories, its sole concern was with the molecular level of desiring-production. To be sure, there was no mommy, daddy, or me within this thesis's schizoanalytic take on the unconscious.

Despite the above criticism, rather than these above approaches being at loggerheads, I hold that they are, in fact complementary, given that molar lines readily morph into molecular ones (and vice versa): "There is the Given, there is the Giving, but neither the one nor the other should be considered as subjected to compartmentalized domains of consistency" (Guattari, 2013, p. 59). Indeed, the purpose of this thesis's posthumanist remit was to consider identities as events which invariably entwine and ally human and nonhuman bodies and, in the process, widen the possibilities for self-othering: "Animal-vegetable-imperceptible becomings require nothing more than other-form otherworldly pack perception" (MacCormack, 2010, p. 148).

Although this thesis distinguishes cosplay's content from its expression because it is only ever dealing with matter (i.e., libidinal energy). As such, this separation is somewhat superfluous. As such, it could be argued that this research's desire for

ontological complexification becomes more of an exercise in applied epistemological reductionism (albeit in disguise). Here, pluralism becomes monism at the same time, experience falls back into theory. In this respect, Badiou's (2012) criticism that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy "amounts to practicing in exteriority the dictatorship of the One" (p. 200) rings true. Nevertheless, this limitation is misleading when one recounts that because I mapped cosplaying qualitative multiplicities, I was never dealing with a mathematical 'One.' Instead, I charted this performance art's intensities. These experiences are never totalizable due to their excess of affect. In fact, I contend that this latter point reveals a strength of this thesis's design because this rhizome never claims to proffer a 'final' answer about the nature of cosplay's desires.

Considering Study 2's observation that cosplaying at TB (2018) was marked by an absence of minority ethnicities and groups, one should use this finding to problematise precisely what Deleuze and Guattari (2013a) mean by schizophrenia being 'inclusive.' Worryingly, because I had chosen to schizoanalyse the data, I was required to ignore such absences and favour a virtual, molecular "metaphysics of positivity" (Culp, 2016, p. 2). Perhaps this schizoanalytic mandate to overlook molar concerns is due to Deleuze and Guattari's personal bias against what these middle-class male philosophers deem to be ordinary and, as such, unimportant. Perhaps, their rhizomatic thinking constitutes an androcentric, colonising group superego? Is it any wonder they say reterritorialization invariably follows deterritorialization? Thus, their cryptonormative mandate to focus on molecular particles inadvertently set a tacit limit on exploring and experimenting with the data.

In pragmatic terms, Deleuze and Guattari's (2013a) claim that capitalism is a problem of desire rather than a matter of outrageous "systematic injustices" (Culp, 2016, p. 66) meant that this thesis had no ideological grounds to condemn this system. This is because the latter is treated as an imaginary symptom, not the real problem. Consequently, any reports of fans suffering maltreatment because of their gender, race,

or social class had to be met with an icy Stoic indifference and discarded. (Caca just happens, to paraphrase Artaud.) To this end, Mark Fisher's (2016) observation that with Deleuze and Guattari's thinking, there is only abstraction, and zero empathy is fully validated: "Deleuze-Guattari's absorption of Worringer proceeds by excising empathy, not extending it" (p. 38). In this regard, Deleuze, Guattari, and their select followers could be accused of continually running back to the 'safety' of their (philosophical) molecular microscopes in the face of millions upon millions of yearly deaths. As such, their pragmatics is open to Badiou's (2012) accusation that their pontificating is designed to keep bourgeois ideologies—academic or otherwise—intact. In sum, for Deleuze and Guattari, there is no revolutionary politics, Marxist or otherwise, because only desire is revolutionary! Hence, Badiou's (2012) bizarre essay, *The Fascism of the Potato*, in which Deleuze and Guattari are made enemies of class war and dubbed "the cunning monkeys of multiplicities, the heads of the anti-Marxist troupe" (p. 193). Nevertheless, this criticism falls short considering how this thesis's flat ontology could not have inserted any hierarchical structures that privileged one 'side'—class or any other identity—over another. Thus, I argue that it is cosplay's seemingly insignificant capacity to raise mass consciousness—an empowering awareness of what individual bodies might do together—which is revolutionary, not the extent to which it represents class war.

Deleuze and Guattari's (2013b) antipathy toward pleasure evidences Badiou's (2012) abovementioned Marxist criticism. This critique is also apparent when one considers Vaneigem (2012): "The bourgeoisie's one pleasure has been the degradation of pleasure in all its forms" (p. 223). For this reason, I submit that despite this SA's affirmative take on cosplay, it is not celebratory or better, carnivalesque enough. Here, I argue that the problem with SA is that it is all too quick to equate pleasure with the "pleasure-anxiety" induced by "the repetitive" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 228). In other words, this thesis's pragmatics was too Lacanian because pleasure is denigrated as the endpoint of desire. In this way, a tree has been uprooted in the name of schizoanalytic

desire—only to be re-planted by psychoanalysis's image of thought. Hence, their deep pessimism: "Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 581). Applied to this thesis's results, this remark implies that cosplay's lines of escape will inevitably be rendered escapist. However, I insist that this same caveat points to how cosplay's positive lines of deterritorialization are best seen as guilt-free and pleasurable.

Finally, because this research highlights how cosplay becomings manifest group desire rather than personal or class-based causes, one might argue that it paints fans as directionless, sensation-seeking 'idiots.' In this respect, one might rightly wonder if Rahebi (2017) is correct to assert that Deleuze aims to create an unintelligent yet forever networked individual with no powers of recall: "the "idiot" knight of recurring amnesia" (p. 310). However, I maintain that this accusation misses the schizoanalytic call to experiment with the powers of short-term memory. Moreover, unlike Land's (2014) black-hole thinking, this thesis's pragmatics never condones any descent into nihilistic self-obliteration: "As a rule immanent to experimentation: injections of caution" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013b, p. 175). (So much for accelerationism.) In this regard, the cosplay's affects documented in this research should be seen as attempts to stretch the limits of subjectivity rather than obliterate it.

8.4 Ideas for further research

What is transmitted is potential *inventiveness*. Rather than providing answers, the performance re-poses the problem of the body's reconnectibility toward change. (Massumi, 2002, p. 119)

Despite its limitations, this thesis's findings might help turn attention toward this fandom's strange new directions. As such, prospective studies might follow this research in ascertaining cosplay's aberrant lines but within other contexts. For example, research might focus on the unmapped powers of specific cosplaying bodies—non-White,

disabled, gender 'queer,' heroic, or villainous ones, etc.—as they emerge in relation to a specific territory (not a subject). Further empirical concern might be given to a non-representational detailing of CMVs and how these might impart specific fandom atmospheres and "their affordances" (Brown, Kanyeredzi, McGrath, Reavey & Tucker, 2019, p. 11). That way, researchers might chart these online assemblages' disparate multi-sensory bodies and their sonic elements (including any use of silence). Turning to cosplay's offline manifestations at cons, social scientists might use a combination of documentary film-making, field recording, and eye-tracking technology (fitted to consenting participants) to produce a multisensory map. (Indeed, adding physiological measures within such a schizoanalytic enterprise might help overcome the nagging feeling that this pragmatics is essentially a discourse analysis by another name.) Perhaps, a research team could study cosplay longitudinally, from its preparation phase to its aftermath, to map its bodily attunements. Another potential avenue for exploration might be to chart cosplay's burgeoning interest in "armour construction" (Orsini, 2015, p. 148) and how this practice might combine with its other flows of desire. However, psychosocial research must not be generalised outside of the empirical context in question. Otherwise, one merely re-instils social scientific research's propensity for universality, thus consolidating a "politics of generalized stratifications" (Guattari, 2011, p. 155).

One might say that the greatest danger with this research is that the cosplays discussed herein are taken as templates for future practices—including research—instead of suggestive cues for harnessing this otaku fandom's forces. If the former were to happen, this subculture's online–offline moe pleasures might become overly familiar and thereby too readily interpretable—especially considering the sheer rapidity of today's technology. Such a loss of spontaneity, secrecy, and group autonomy would only plug cosplaying thresholds rather than open them. This warning is necessary because if this subculture becomes too canny, the (potential) joys it induces will become

all too predictable, repetitive, and (quickly) marketable: "We have a world of pleasures

to win, and nothing to lose but boredom" (Vaneigem, 2012, p. 251).

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