



MÍDIA E CULTURA

Cosplay aesthetics: fans poach for a beautiful life

Estética cosplay: a busca de fãs por uma vida bela

Estética del cosplay: busca de los fans por una vida bella

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Abstract: Cosplay is a practice of participatory culture that illustrates collaborative interactions between fans. The phenomenon is defined by the use of costumes to play pop culture characters. The cosplay occurs in the exchange between different fan communities (fandoms), providing the co-production of cultural experiences that arrange the various performances executed by cosplayers. The gathering of different performances reflects cultural performativities that can be understood as the exercise of resistance. Exercising resistance is one of the possible pillars for what Michel Foucault calls the subjectivation process in which we elaborate our subjectivity. In this sense, the study presents a theoretical essay that focuses on how cosplay allows its practitioners to produce their subjectivity: an aesthetic of the existence in their inter-fandom interactions. The essay evokes concepts established in interdisciplinary literature related to cultural studies to move forward and propose that the cosplay aesthetic as fans poach to live the beautiful life.

Keywords: cosplay; fans; aesthetics of existence; culture of the self.

Resumo: O cosplay é uma prática da cultura participativa onde se ilustram as interações colaborativas entre fãs. O fenômeno é definido pelo uso de fantasias para brincar com personagens da cultura *pop*. Isso ocorre na troca entre diferentes comunidades de fãs (*fandoms*), propiciando a coprodução de experiências culturais que arranjam as diversas performances executadas pelos cosplayers. A reunião de diversas performances reflete performatividades culturais que podem ser compreendidas como o exercício de resistências. Exercer resistência é um dos esteios possíveis para o que Michel Foucault denomina como processo de subjetivação em que elaboramos a nossa própria subjetividade. Neste sentido, o presente estudo apresenta um ensaio teórico que se debruça sobre como o cosplay permite aos seus praticantes a produção de sua própria subjetividade: uma estética da existência elaborada em suas interações interfandômicas. O ensaio evoca conceitos estabelecidos em literaturas interdisciplinares que se relacionam com os estudos culturais, de modo que possamos avançar e propor que a estética cosplay é como uma invasão de fãs para viver uma vida bela.

Palavras-chave: cosplay; fãs; cultura de si; estética da existência; vida bela.

Resumen: El cosplay es una práctica de cultura participativa que ilustra interacciones colaborativas entre fans. El fenómeno se define por el uso de disfraces para interpretar personajes de la cultura *pop*. El cosplay se da en el intercambio entre diferentes comunidades de fans (*fandoms*), proporcionando la coproducción de experiencias culturales que ordenan las diversas actuaciones ejecutadas por los cosplayers. El encuentro de diferentes performances refleja performatividades culturales que pueden ser entendidas como el ejercicio de resistencia. El ejercicio de la resistencia es uno de los posibles pilares de lo que Michel Foucault llama el proceso de subjetivación en el que elaboramos nuestra subjetividad. En este sentido, el estudio presenta un ensayo teórico que se enfoca en cómo el cosplay permite a sus practicantes producir su subjetividad: una estética de la existencia en sus interacciones inter-fandom. El ensayo evoca conceptos establecidos en la literatura interdisciplinaria relacionada con los estudios culturales para avanzar y proponer que la estética del cosplay como la busca de fans para vivir la vida bella.

Palabras clave: cosplay; fans; estética de la existencia; cultura de si.



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Introduction

Cosplay is a practice that occurs, notably, in pop culture events, when the audience of cultural objects and media texts perform performances that allow them to proactively and participatory experience the products consumed with intensity (DE MELLO *et al.*, 2021; JENKINS, 2012; NUNES, 2014). Broadly, cosplay is an interactive act between people who use costumes to play characters from fictional universes of pop culture (WINGE, 2006).

Cosplay execution allows its practitioners to experience active bodily learning by engaging in exercises that adapt existing structures (i.e., media texts) to the wishes of those who practice them (LAMERICHES, 2013; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017). In this sense, cosplayers are part of a specific participatory culture: fans who strive to intensify their cultural relationship through a practice that allows them to experience, even if only momentarily, the cultural objects they usually consume intensely. Therefore, cosplay – like other fan practices – is established in the interaction between peers capable of recognizing performances and in sociocultural spaces in which they feel free to express their intense relationship with cultural objects: fandoms – the realms of fans (CRAWFORD; HANCOCK, 2018; RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012).

It is not by chance that cosplayers concentrate their performances at events that celebrate fan culture and bring together different fandoms (DE MELLO *et al.*, 2021; JENKINS, 2012). It is a production elaborated and disseminated between fans and fandoms – or in inter-fandom relationships. Such productions (e.g., fanarts, fanfics, fan videos, fansubbers) are a way for fans to expand their experiences beyond the media text they consume, strengthening ties and feelings with their peers (KOZINETS; JENKINS, 2022; URBANO, 2021).

Thus, cosplay is a practice in which cosplayers establish positions in which they recognize and are recognized before the cultural groupings that they insert and are an active part of (RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, cosplay reflects the exercise of a performativity: it adds both the subjective experience of the practitioners and

the impression of the cultural context about the various aspects performed. In this sense, cosplay is a performativity that indicates how individuals perform different performances to elaborate and understand themselves (SEREGINA, 2019; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017).

Performativity allows individuals to position themselves in reaction to the norms that lead their lives. In these positions, individuals can subvert or propagate cultural norms and articulate subjective practices that function as ethical performativities in the face of social behaviors (CHATZIDAKIS; MACLARAN, 2020). In this sense, the exercise of performativity is similar to the constructs proposed by Michel Foucault for the elaboration of ethical subjects.

According to Butler (1990), this similarity is incidental: performativities are practices exercised by individuals that function analogously to the forms of resistance exercise explored by Foucault in his works. Resistances that, by allowing individuals to act productively against the forces of power that govern them, ultimately establish the means for them to constitute themselves as ethical subjects.

The way we produce ourselves as subjects is a complex process that Foucault (2014a; 2014b) calls subjectivation. This process reflects how we balance our wills and moral values that are present and usually lead our lives. On the one hand, to satisfy our own wills, we need to understand the limits of its use with the social structure in which we live. On the other hand, to deal with the moral values that regulate this social structure, we need to understand how norms affect and regulate our quest to live as pleasantly as possible.

Thus, Foucault (2010) indicates that subjectivation is a possible path for individuals who balance the use of pleasures and care of the self. Such balance is characterized as a journey of self-knowledge: the elaboration of a culture of the self in which we formulate an ethical work for ourselves and when we continually seek to improve ourselves. To understand what pleasures should be exercised and how it is possible to take care of the self, we first need to know ourselves as subjects. Only those who know themselves can

constitute themselves as subjects with ethical foundations incorporated into their existence. It is only through self-knowledge that we get to know what makes us who we are. Simultaneously, only through establishing truths produced by ourselves and by the context in which we live.

Nevertheless, when seeking to establish substances that allow the formulation of a subject's ethics, Foucault (2006a; 2006b) presents aesthetic conceptions as an elucidating possibility. In the Foucauldian conception, aesthetics is a fundamental substantiation of the subject's ethical formulation. The author presents the aesthetics of existence as a specific exercise of the culture of the self. In this exercise, the subject's ethical trajectory is closely associated with elaborating an aesthetic way in which they can experience a life that is recognized by themselves and by others as an ideal.

The exercise of the aesthetics of existence allows a subject to know himself: taking into account subjective aspects and the cultural context in which he lives and is part. An exercise that can be seen in the experiences lived by cosplayers. As a performativity established in a participatory cultural context (i.e., inter-fandom), cosplay leads its practitioners to elaborate themselves and the fan culture that is part of it.

Thus, we reflect that it is an elaboration of a singular aesthetics of existence. Moreover, based on this reflection, we consider it possible to launch the following theoretical problem: **how do fans produce a cosplay aesthetic through inter-fandom relationships?**

Given the above, our work seeks to articulate cosplay – an interdisciplinary phenomenon – through concepts widely explored in cultural studies: fan culture and Foucault's contributions. We elucidate how the phenomenon has been investigated and associated with a performativity and interactional cultural practice to carry out this articulation.

Related to our articulation, it seems valid to indicate that we access the concepts of performativity as a starting point to establish cosplay as a subjectifying practice. For this, we access

Judith Butler's concepts of performativity, as the philosopher has already been evoked in studies on cosplay. Consequently, and seeking to establish an original discussion in our study, Butler's concepts of performativity are just a mainstay for theoretical propositions that explore concepts set out in Michel Foucault's works. Something that only seems possible to us because, simultaneously, the authors share the same ontology and by Butler (1990) herself, indicating that part of her reflections can expand Foucault's concepts.

Thus, the study justificative relies on exploring a phenomenon commonly associated with fan culture as a possibility to exercise broader social practices and not just limited to the relationships they nurture with media texts (LOPEZ, 2011). More broadly, it is original in associating cosplay as a practice that reflects those investigated throughout Foucault's works (e.g., discursive, non-discursive, and self-practices). In this sense, it aligns with cultural studies, which already investigates how fans relationships produce knowledge (FATHALLAH, 2014; IUVA; SILVA, 2013), power relations (BRENNAN, 2013; MOREIRA, 2018), and exercises of subjectivity (TUCHERMAN, 2008; LEE; ZHANG, 2021).

Subjective interfandomic performativity: cosplay

Cosplay is a globally widespread phenomenon often encouraged and shared among practitioners (NUNES, 2014; WAYS DORF; REIJNDERS, 2018). Mostly practiced at events and conventions that celebrate pop culture (i.e., cons) (DE MELLO *et al.*, 2021; HELLER, 2020), cosplay is fan production which celebrates fan culture and bring together all types of consumers of products produced and distributed by the entertainment industry (GUNNELS, 2009; JENKINS, 2012). Thus, they are the ideal "stage" for the arrangement of performances by cosplayers who seek recognition from their peers – cosplayers or fans in general – the stimulus to improve not only their relationships with the cultural object or media text they interpret or play but themselves (RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012).

Cosplay: interfandomic practice in participatory culture context

Cosplay is a cultural practice that emerges from interactions between fans (CRAWFORD; HANCOCK, 2018; LAMERICH, 2013). Broadly, fans usually encourage the creation, improvement, and maintenance of existing products and peer interaction about social relationships or cultural productions that they jointly elaborate (CRISTOFARI; GUITTON, 2017; FUSCHILLO, 2020).

Fan culture is complex and multidimensional, capable of incorporating various forms of participation and levels of engagement (JENKINS, 2006; HILLS, 2013). Among the social spaces to which it is established, it is necessary to highlight the existence of fandoms, where fans feel free to relate to the cultural objects they consume and with each other (CRISTOFARI; GUITTON, 2017; URBANO, 2021).

Fans often seek peer support to establish collaborations, rivalries, or schisms with other fans and fandoms – in what Hills (2012) calls inter-fandom practices and relationships. For the author, relationships of this type are built at various levels but always alluding to the social space (i.e., fandom) in which they are inserted. In his argument, the aforementioned author indicates that there are inter-fandom forces capable of bringing together or separating groups of fans to defend the social space of newcomers.

Thus, any fan relationship is at some level inter-fandom: even when it's an exclusive relation between fan and cultural object consumed, its tend to be affected or influenced by the existence of other fans and fandoms (CRISTOFARI; GUITTON, 2017; FUSCHILLO, 2020). Investigate inter-fandom relationships allows to understand and observe valuable information about fan practices (HILLS, 2012; JENKINS, 2012).

An aspect presented in cosplay investigations: a fan practice that publicly expresses the individual's intense relationship with the cultural object or media text performed (CRAWFORD; HANCOCK, 2018; GN, 2011). Cosplayers emulates inter-fandom relationships when they discrediting peers' practices. In this effort, cosplayers evoke material

and symbolic concepts that maintain the intense relationship with the cultural object interpreted (KOZINETS; JENKINS, 2022; RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012).

On the one hand, the interpretation of a cosplayer attests to the care, reliability, adaptability, and several other particularities – present from the choice of the character, passing through the making of the costume and the material and intellectual training for interpretation – with the cultural object that consumes (WINGE, 2006). On the other hand, some practitioners consider that when a cosplay is not performed with due dedication, it should not be considered as such: dressing up as a character does not guarantee cosplayer status. Such status is in the care, elaboration, and effort made to publicly represent the media text and cultural object (RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017).

Consequently, and by combining both sides, cosplay is a phenomenon that reflects a complex cultural process established by subjective issues and interactions in the sociocultural context in which it is practiced (SEREGINA, 2019). It is because cosplay performances are simultaneously a carnival activity and a tool for social control. If cosplay allows for the release – notably momentary – from routine social life, it causes its practitioners to limit their day-to-day actions by waiting for such moments of carnival activities (CRAWFORD; HANCOCK, 2018; SEREGINA, 2019).

Furthermore, cosplay is a way for fans to embrace the carnivalesque characteristics of media texts, but also to expand them through their own interpretations. It is an arrangement of performances that are temporally and spatially limited to the context in which they are performed, but that allow the performers to detach themselves from everyday life when they experience a carnivalesque experience (BURKE, 2021; EL JURDI *et al.*, 2021).

Cosplay: an assemblage of carnivalesque performances

The understanding that cosplay brings together performances with carnivalesque characteristics and that it can function as a tool of social control

(BURKE, 2021; SEREGINA, 2019) leads us to evoke both John Fiske's concepts of what would be the carnivalesque experienced by consumers of pop culture, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's definitions of carnival performances.

Fiske (1989) proposes that publicly alluding to cultural consumer interests is a carnivalesque experience capable of freeing individuals from a utilitarian bias. For the author, when people dedicate themselves to making the most of experiences that are not part of their daily lives, they perform carnivalesque performances. These, ultimately, function as a mechanism of social control. No wonder the possibility of suspending daily norms imposed on individuals makes them follow appropriate behaviors, waiting for the moment(s) they do not need to comply with.

Consequently, it is in line with Bakhtin's (1984) definitions of carnival performances, seen as an exercise in which individuals live a second life as an alternative to their daily social life. According to the author, there are four characteristics of these performances: the possibility of meeting new people who are not part of the regular social cycle; the possibility of everyday unacceptable or eccentric behavior; the possibility of combining elements that usually are dissociated; and the unconcern about offending others by outrageous attitudes performed in this context.

In this line of reasoning, Seregina (2019) uses such understandings to propose cosplay as a phenomenon characterized by an assemblage of carnivalesque performances. When they are in costume, the cosplayer is allowed to suspend everyday life and everyday problems and bring to light the potential to experience different realities momentarily.

This proposition leads us to consider that, on the one hand, because it is an assemblage of performances, it is possible to understand cosplay as a performativity that allows its practitioners, even in specific situations, to get rid of social and cultural concepts (i.e., gender, race, nationality, generation). On the other hand, the multiple performances experienced by the cosplayer combine the aesthetic form of their interaction and

incorporation of the character with the responses they receive from those with whom they interact.

Consequently, we align ourselves with the perspective that cosplay is a performativity that extrapolates from playful experiences or fan relations to the cultural products interpreted (EL JURDY *et al.*, 2021; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017). Similarly, we understand that the image of the character that serves as inspiration stands out from the narrative of the consumed text, which interprets a cosplayer as the combination of an imitation and an experience lived in the subject's body (LAMERICHS, 2014). Therefore, cosplayers thus seek to balance the similarity of costumes and the aesthetics of imitation (BURKE, 2021; GN, 2011). Thus, cosplay exercise forms of government in the practitioners' social life, since the diversity of possible performances for cosplayers usually reflects an evolutionary process. As an example, it is common to start cosplay with simpler executions and, over time, seek ideal characters and more elaborate interpretation exercises (RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017).

Cosplay: a cultural performativity

The continuous elaboration of practitioners and their skills indicates that cosplay is a search for an aesthetic that better represents the relationship between cosplayer and character or the fictional universe to be performed (BENETT; BOTH, 2015). Consequently, cosplay allows its practitioners to perform a range of performances (e.g., make-up, costume-making, interpretation), in which they can combine and experience different consumption experiences. Moreover, they end up (re)consuming the media text of the fictional universes they want to perform – in the interpretation of a particular character that inspires them. In this effort, the cosplayer receives and responds to the image effect, even before starting the creative resources involved in the cosplay itself (GN, 2011).

Creativity that seems to us to be the cosplayer's subjectivity materialized in the assembly process and experiences of living certain unique characters. However, this creativity is also constantly questioned: in the way that cosplayers challenge

themselves to create, interpret and experience new characters that challenge their ability with cosplay culture or that represent cultural and symbolic values for the cosplayer (i.e., ethnicity, gender) (LOPEZ, 2011; SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017). Often, self-recognition as a cosplayer only seems to happen when performances are praised by peers or reach a certain level of self-satisfaction (i.e., reliability) (GN, 2011).

Consequently, cosplay is an experience that encourages self-improvement through the democratization of skills (i.e., artistic makeup, sewing) that are often linked to gender identities (Murphy; Patterson; O'Malley, 2019). More broadly, cosplay allows its practitioners to embody and materialize the media objects they consume, manifesting fan identities and articulations of social relationships between peers (SEREGINA; WEIJO, 2017; CHEN, 2020).

In this perspective, the concept of identity overlaps the existence of cultural groupings that recognize the performances of individuals as a singularity that represents them. Therefore, the arrangement of performances performed by the cosplayers brings together several cultural signs that manifest their identity (NICHOLS, 2019; RAHMAN *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, we consider that cosplay is a practice that makes up several performances that can be arranged in a complex cultural performativity. Consequently, cosplayers' performativity manifestations reveal both the individuals and cultural context that relate to the practice, not just its practitioners. No wonder, it is a performativity capable to represent fan relationships (BENETT; BOOTH, 2015). In this sense, cosplay seems to be a phenomenon that allows us to understand how identity projects are stabilized through cultural interactions and how new fragmented identities are produced through an assemblage of performances.

Here, it seems valid to demarcate an alignment with Seregina (2019) conception about cosplay providing props for the combination of various performances performed by its practitioners. For the author, by using his own body, the cos-

player exercises a performativity that works as an extension of himself: his interests, values, and positions in social relations. In this perspective, the body becomes a limit in which the conceptions of immaterial and material, internal and external, become diffused in the amplitude that makes up its performativity.

Performativity is multiple possibilities of resisting asymmetries when unpublished discourses are elaborated. Even new discourses must use citational relationships to propagate new perspectives and replace the previous ones so that identities based on social hierarchies are overcome. Likewise, individuals who express their identities evoke socially constructed elements. Their identities and performances represent social roles they can assume in the institutionalized power relations in the culture they are part of (BUTLER, 1993).

Nevertheless, these individuals live in a cultural matrix that establishes and maintains power relations by regulating individuals' interactional roles. It is a sequential process that turns dissident identities into flaws, deviants that are not conforming to rational rules. Such rationality is produced and affected by language performance (i.e., discourse), forging certain behaviors as normative and their alternatives as inferior (BUTLER, 1990).

Performativity is an arrangement that brings together several performances – which represent the individual capacity of practitioners – to position social agencies in broader contexts – which may or may not extrapolate the contextual notions in which they are exercised. This proposition is based on Butler's (1990) understanding of how performativities are composed of performances elaborated by individuals as productive responses to the norms that guide us.

At a conduct level, performativities oppose or align with knowledge (e.g., rituals, ideologies) that institutionalize the forms of government that drive society. On an individual level, the performances, despite being executed from subjective conceptions, rarely represent those who practice them: they cite, in some scope, the discourses that maintain the context in which they live (BUTLER,

1990). At this point, it becomes visible that there is a differentiation between the concepts of performances and performativity: the former assumes the subject, but the latter does not.

Conditions subjectivation in the theory of Michel Foucault

As our study focuses on manifestations of subjectivities through cultural performativities, we resort to Foucault's notions of aesthetics and the constitution of the self. Foucault (2014a; 2006b) presents those concepts when he investigates the conditions that allow the production of ethical subjects.

However, the subjectivity it is an elaboration composed by a range of experiences which combines individual and context truths. The truths are based on the knowledge that does not belong or is limited to those who experience it, although they cannot be disassociated from it. Such experiences are the substances that make up the subject's existence; the elaboration of one's own life as a personal work that, despite complying with collective canons, has at its core the will of being as its main promoter (FOUCAULT, 2006a).

It is an exercise in continuous resistance that seeks to establish and propagate one's subjectivity without breaking or antagonizing the context in which one lives (FOUCAULT, 2010). What seems like one of the solutions that Butler (1990) presents for people to exercise performance activities that free them from a context that oppresses them and, simultaneously, manifests their individuality.

This proximity between Butler and Foucault reveals the originality of our reflection: we consider that cosplay, as cultural performativity - already based on Butler's concepts - can also be understood as a trajectory to produce fannish subjectivities - from a Foucauldian perspective. And among the numerous contributions it presents on the constitution of the self - a process also known as subjectivation - we focus on a specific cut: what Foucault (2010; 2014a) presents the culture of the self.

Our choice is doubly incidental. On the one hand, our reflection seeks to understand how

fans produce and manifest their fanity (i.e., ethics) through cosplay performativity. On the other hand, in the perception that cosplay is a performativity guided by aesthetic parameters. In this sense, we evoke Foucault's reflection on how to express the conditions to produce subjects. The author exemplifies the culture of the self by the aesthetic dimension as a possibility to produce ethics.

The ontological proximity between Butler's performativity and Foucault's resistance

For Butler (1993), performativity contests the freedom of subjects in contemporary society, as it reflects a citational practice that reiterates how discourses that already exist act continuously in our lives. Ultimately, it is the power that reiterates discourses to produce the phenomena that drive different social agents. Its form is supported by the gathering of a more specific instance: performances.

When elaborating a performativity, the individual usually engages with practices of reframing himself in limited scenarios (e.g., adequacy of rituals, norms, dominant cultural customs) and through the arrangement of performances that can change the social instances in which he lives (GOULDING; SAREN, 2009). It is a possibility to practice subversions that do not break with the context but resist it. Performativity needs to function following the sociocultural system in which the complex power device operates (BUTLER, 1993).

According to Butler (1990), performativity works as a resistance to the complex power device that regulates our lives but should not seek to deny or antagonize these norms. However, the author points possibilities to consider performativity as a solution for power relationships. On the one hand, it is a dangerous solution: when performativity denies the power device, it repeats what it opposes - citing what it wants to deny. Therefore, the antagonistic quest to abolish a power mechanism ends up propagating it. On the other hand, it will be a solution if the individuals use the complex power device to propagate a set of

linguistic and non-linguistic practices that, when repeated, do not lead us to patterns that oppress us and already exist.

However, how to exercise those practices? The author gives clues. When she comes to devices, she alludes to a concept proposed by Michel Foucault. According to Foucault (2014c), devices (i.e., *dispositif*, in the original) must be understood as a heterogeneous arrangement of forces that govern us. These forces emanate from a range of substances (e.g., discourses, institutions, scientific statements, philosophical and moral propositions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, etc.) that allow individuals to conduct their lives in different social contexts and historical moments.

Not by chance, Butler's (1990) concept of performativity is close to Foucault's proposal on resistance. According to Foucault (2014c), resistance is a reactive and productive force for the existence of power devices, and it is an action that aims to establish positions regarding the practice of power and not opposition or antagonism. Moreover, this Foucauldian proposition seems to us to resemble Butler's (1990) consideration that performativities are positions – aligned or not – reactive and productive to the conducts established in the society in which we live.

Thus, the performativities – or resistances – that productively position us in the face of social behaviors – forms of government – are associated with the linguistic – or discursive – and non-linguistic – or non-discursive – practices that we exercise. Performativity seems to be a specific resistance because it works along transversal lines that reflect the capacity for the constitution of truth present in the exercise of power. Still, performativity can be understood as a response to exercises of power that ultimately produce realities and truths before repressing or ideologizing.

Furthermore, we reach precisely the concept our study pursues: the production of truths discussed by Foucault when dealing with performativity. By positioning ourselves in the context in which we live, we elaborate on ourselves and govern ourselves (FOUCAULT, 2014c).

Culture of the Self

Foucault (2006b) discussed the culture of the self as a continuous search in which the subject knows himself. The concept aims to escape from a fixed position and destiny; it allows the transformation of the self. These are relationships between oneself and oneself in which the subject is allowed to exercise the freedom to live as he/she conceives himself as a being. Moreover, self-relationships attest to how we negotiate our subjectivity with the truths that make up the entire trajectory of life (FOUCAULT, 2010).

At this point, it is worth clarifying that Foucault (2010) considers that truths are not fixed but fluid and negotiable. Truths function as ways of acting and, equally, modifiable subjectivation processes. Therefore, understanding the conditions that produce truths makes it possible to understand subjectivity as an ontological category that is not invariable. It is an investigative effort in which the subjects are conceived as under construction, in constant change; subjects go beyond themselves by knowing the truths that make up their own culture.

When delving into the Foucauldian concept of subjectivation, Deleuze (2013) reflects how the truths are simultaneous, being able – and tending to – to be distinct but present in the conception of the self. Thus, Foucault's concept of truth is complex and dynamic; truth cannot be disassociated from the process that establishes it. Moreover, individuals produce themselves as subjects through contact with truths – which can be contextual, cultural (TUCHERMAN, 2008).

To Foucault (2010), the truths can also be understood as the knowledge that concerns the existence of each one as an ethical being that constitutes the balance of their wills and morals. Moreover, the truths that make up what is known about the world in which they live (e.g., spirituality, politics, rituals, traditions) play an important role in how the subject relates to his *ethos*.

The knowledge that is productive for formulating the subject's *ethos* is usually part of the transformation of the trajectory in which ethics for which the subject is constituted. Moreover,

the subject is, primordially and fundamentally, a relational being. Thus, the relationships present in the subjectivation process permeate the care of oneself, configuring the ways we use pleasures to know and preserve who we are. And to exemplify different ways of taking care of oneself, Foucault (2014b) presents the existence of three stylizations that can be observed in how subjects use pleasures: erotic, economic, and dietetic.

The erotic deals with the search for an attractive pleasure for everyone involved in the process: the care that a subject has to produce pleasures for himself and, equally, for those he relates. The economic stylization is observed in how the subjects use pleasures to take care of the context in which they live: establishing the family, maintaining social relationships, and positioning themselves as a productive agent of the society it is part of. Finally, dietetics is presented as care that aims to preserve the body: a subject need to know and respect the limits of the use of pleasures so that he does not put himself at risk (FOUCAULT, 2014).

Those stylizations are a possibility, then, of producing ethics(s) in which it is objected to know the truths that allow us to formulate ourselves (FOUCAULT, 2014b). However, what truths would these be? Foucault (2010) himself answers: those useful to the subjects and that allude as much to their social roles as to their will; they are knowledge categorized as "*etopoetic*".

To give substance to this perception, Foucault (2006a) evokes how different statements – *lógos* – constitute discursive practices that manifest the subject's knowledge of himself – *paraskeué*, the subject's armor – in the consubstantiation of truths. In this flow, the truths are *etopoetic*, as the signs that found the discursive practices represent transformations in the subject's *ethos*. Therefore, the *etopoetic* character is a process of subjectivation that works from the interaction with others (FOUCAULT, 2010).

Finally, the culture of the self is an arrangement of practices that offer the subject a truth that he does not know and that does not reside in him. Consequently, it is a process in which individuals

turn to a transformation of themselves to achieve a desirable *ethos* not only for themselves but for the context in which they live (FOUCAULT, 2014a). It is a process that allows to define it as the intense way the subject seeks to constitute a moral that allows him to be responsible for himself; in short, an ethical subject (FOUCAULT, 2006b).

Aesthetics of existence

Among the ways of practicing the culture of the self, Foucault (2006b) develops the conception of an aesthetic that manifests itself as a practice to elaborate ethical subjects. To support this understanding, Foucault (2010) conceives that the culture of the self reveals itself in the way that the subject performs actions on himself that provide him with multiple and continuous transformations in a being that is pleasant for himself and others. It is subjects exercise ethics in our existence when we simultaneously assert our freedom and relationship of belonging to the social context in which we live.

In this understanding, it is possible to observe the importance of respect for the self: the status achieved and concerning exercising rationality. Moreover, both the deprivation of pleasures and the limitation of these in the face of social norms are negotiated, regulating its use (FOUCAULT, 2014a). Here, it is valid to return to the Foucauldian concept of rationality: a logical set of knowledge that programs human conduct (FOUCAULT, 2006c).

It is a logic present in the conduct of individuals and their consequent political relationships and how institutions work (FOUCAULT, 2006c). Rationality enables the exercise of practices that have a fundamental role in constructing our society, practices that are called the arts of existence (FOUCAULT, 2006b).

Suppose there is the intention of knowing themselves better, understanding themselves better, and establishing a relationship between themselves and their existence. In that case, the subject needs to create life models that are pleasurable for themselves and their existence as a whole. Then, it is necessary to propose life

as the best possible for everyone who is part of it (FOUCAULT, 2010). These are the arts of existence, practices of the self that are based on the rationality and spontaneity of the subjects when they establish the behaviors that guide their lives as a means of transforming themselves (FOUCAULT, 2006b).

By modifying itself in its singular being and turning its life into a work of art, the subject, at some level, alludes to aesthetic values and style criteria present in the context in which he lives (FOUCAULT, 2006b). The result of this is both an ethics of the self and an aesthetic. The two concepts must not be disassociated, as they overlap. Its uniqueness allows to understand how subjects continually balance a way of living adequate to the moralities – present in everyday life – and to attend their wills (FOUCAULT, 2006a).

No wonder Foucault (1984) defines that the notion of aesthetics is linked to practices of existence: in the search for an adequate form and meaning. These practices comprise an art style of life to formulate a being and a beautiful existence (FOUCAULT, 2006a). It's a range of transformations which combines principles of existence itself, moral and aesthetic values: the *technè tou biou* – or, as Foucault (2006a) calls it, the aesthetics of existence.

The aesthetics of existence is defined as a constitution of the being that comprises the relationship of knowledge that underlies the conditions that enable the notion of self (FOUCAULT, 2014b). It is a counterpoint to the concept of moralities that oppress the subject. It is self-knowledge that must not be hidden or inhibited but exercised. How Foucault (2006a) indicates in contemporary society, as it happened in Antiquity, an oppressive morality is absent, allowing individuals to manifest themselves after knowing themselves. Such manifestation reveals the aesthetics produced for self-recognition as a subject and to position the ethical work of oneself in the context in which it exists.

If the aesthetics of existence works as a possibility to subjectivation, this is due to how the subject takes for himself a trajectory of living

life as an artwork. It is ethical conduct that is morally privileged and aesthetically manifested (FOUCAULT, 2006a). In order to avoid doubts as to why this concept is aesthetic, Foucault (2014b) himself approaches the subjectivation process as a stylization of behavior; as a way of living in which moral value first reflects the proper use of pleasures, before the norms proposed to regulate the subject's freedom.

The aesthetic that presents itself as fundamental to a subject's life is an ethics to be lived. It is a process in which the subject must transform himself and his existence; who must incorporate moral and aesthetic values that allow them to make their life a work of art to be admired by themselves and by the context in which they live (FOUCAULT, 2006a). Now, to live a beautiful life is to live an ethical life, it is to produce for oneself and a moral subjectivity.

The person who has a beautiful *ethos* is the one who practices freedom adequately, wisely, and fairly; he is the one who constitutes for himself an aesthetic that supersedes morals; is the one who lives a life recognized as beautiful for having in their practices of themselves an example of ethics to be followed by others (FOUCAULT, 2006b).

However, the beautiful life does not belong to the subject, nor is it produced exclusively by the sociocultural context that it is part of: it is the combination of both areas, an ideal model that a subject seeks to achieve and that is admired and recognized by others (FOUCAULT, 2010). More broadly, the formation of the ethical subject goes through the execution of the techniques of the self, whose role and ulterior objective is to produce for themselves the possibility of living a beautiful life. It is a way of living that goes through continuous transformations of the self which results from the combination of principles of existence itself, moral and aesthetic values (FOUCAULT, 2006b).

Finally, it is prudent to present Foucault's (2014b) conception about how subjectivity is continuous and flexible since no subject is complete. The ethics of a subject are in constant construction during its existence. Consequently,

it seems possible that if the subject is constantly being formulated, he is also continually seeking an ethics for himself through aesthetic conceptions that permeate his existence.

Cosplay aesthetics: a fan poach for a beautiful life

If cosplay is a fan production practiced in a participatory culture context, the relationship between cosplayers allows them to position their subjectivity. Both fan culture and among cosplayers, there are movements to hierarchize the role of the individuals and members of the sociocultural space (i.e., fandom) that bring them together.

Those roles are guided by a (re)cognition of the fans' subjective relationships (i.e., fanity). Furthermore, it allows us to elaborate propositions about cosplay as a means for fans to elaborate their fannish subjectivity.

Cosplay: a way to fans produce *etopoetic* truths

In light of what was exposed and articulated in the previous sections, it seems possible to point out a first reflection: cosplay is one of the inter-fandom relationships that allows the fan to take care of their fanity. By the three stylizations, they can preserve fan culture by the use of pleasures. The erotic is practiced by cosplayers exercising the practice to please everyone involved with their cosplay: it is an experience that presupposes the presence of other fans who see in the performances a version of the cultural object they relate to. The economic is willing to preserve and expand the phenomenon beyond its practices: the cosplayer strives to recognize cosplay among social relations, media, and society. Dietetics reflects the use of the cosplayer's body to establish a temperate and sensitive version of the multiple knowledge about cosplay: one that pleases both the practitioner and the culture to which he belongs.

Thus, cosplay is a practice that allows fans to take care of themselves. Also, it allows cosplayers to know themselves as fans; it indicates which

truths constitute and are present in their fanity. And because the cosplayer's practice produces them, they are useful both to the practitioner's wishes and to the cultural context where it is practiced. Therefore, it is a means for elaborating *etopoetic* truths.

Cosplay can be understood, then, as a fan *paraskeuê*. It is an armor of truths about the cosplayer himself that enable the subject – a fan of the cultural object experienced in cosplay – to transform his ethos while seeking to practice the best version of himself.

When the cosplayer wears his costume, he is also "wearing" a fan *paraskeuê*. Each of the performances (e.g., makeup, interpretation, trustworthiness, etc.) that make up the cosplay works as an affirmation of itself – an *etopoetic* truth – that allows the fan to improve themselves and the ethos that is part of the fan culture. Thus, if cosplay allows the production of *etopoetic* truths, the inter-fandom interactions that make its practice possible are a culture of the self from a Foucauldian point of view.

Cosplay: a fan path to live an aesthetic of existence

Broadly, inter-fandom relationships are a means for fans to recognize as intensely consuming the cultural object. These relationships reflect the fan's quest to take care of their relationship with the cultural object – subjective pleasures – and, simultaneously, deal with impressions and opinions of the fandoms to which they relate – contextual moralities. It is an exercise in the continuous search to intensify these relationships to improve the fandom from aesthetic notions co-produced by the fan and other fandoms.

However, these aesthetic notions are, according to Foucault's conception, an ethical manifestation. It is a concept that allows us to consider that cosplay allows the exercise of an (aesth)etic for its practitioners. This concept can explain how the range of cosplayers' performances manifest their aesthetic perception as fans of the character and the fictional universe they perform. Such elaborations are legitimized and questioned

by inter-fandom interactions that recognize an aesthetic present in cosplay.

Even when the cosplayers observe themselves, the experiences are associated with others' parameters: aesthetic values that corroborate or contest their validity. It is a cultural practice established in interactional (i.e., inter-fandom) relationships that does not belong to those who perform it; as such, this individual's experience cannot be limited, as they function as a means to legitimize their fandom in the face of fan culture.

Here is another one of our propositions: cosplay aesthetics can be understood as a manifestation of the aesthetics of existence. The experience with cosplay works as a fan path that can transform their fan relations. It is a practice of existence to fans; it is a trajectory in which fans seek to transform and, mainly, experience life as a work of art, the *technè tou biou*. In the Foucauldian perspective, it is an aesthetics of existence: a form of subjectivation that enables fans to incorporate the ethics – their fandom – that guide their existence, aesthetic precepts that meet, mutually, personal and contextual interests.

Our proposal is substantiated because – like the arts of existence – cosplay is the set of rational and spontaneous practices in which cosplayers modify themselves – improving their abilities – to recognize themselves and be recognized as emblematic fans. Moreover, this is nothing more than Foucault's conception of aesthetics.

Cosplay: an opportunity to fans poache the beautiful life

If cosplay allows the elaboration of an aesthetic of existence, it goes beyond the conception that it is an exercise in performativity. It is an exercise in continuous performativity that seeks to establish and propagate one's fandom without breaking or antagonizing the fan culture in which one lives.

When cosplayers perform an aesthetic exercise that constitutes their fandom existence, their performances of the media text recognized as beautiful produces an aesthetic attested to by inter-fandom relations, which is validated in the social context as an exercise in a beautiful life.

Cosplay aesthetics works as a possibility of subjectivation for fans and a practice that allows them to live a beautiful life. However, what would a beautiful life be like for fans?

It seems to us that there is evidence of this response in defining the cultural context of the fans. From a broad perspective, it would be the sociocultural context in which fans seek to interact with the cultural objects they consume and with their peers. In a subjective context, practices would present the fan with opportunities to seek, experience, and intensify inter-fandom interactions. Now, both areas are presented by Jenkins (2015) as characteristics that distinguish fans of other consumers of media texts: they are poachers who avidly seek new possibilities to relate to the fan cultural context.

So, if fans pursue a search for an ideal fanatic relationship, they are looking to live a beautiful life. For this, they must elaborate an aesthetic that is also equivalent to the ethical manifestations themselves. Moreover, as we have seen, cosplay aesthetics meets all these criteria: it is a cultural practice that leads the cosplayer to improve his relationship with the media texts he consumes and is capable of intensifying the inter-fandom interactions that are exponentiated by cosplay.

Consequently, we reached the final proposition of our study: the cosplay aesthetic stands out among fanatical practices as a possibility to live a beauty for the fans. It is a practice that allows the elaboration and manifestation of one's fandom publicly. More than that, it is the exercise of a practice that propagates the version of inter-fandom relationships that practitioners consider ideal for the culture of fans who are part of it.

Cosplay: an exercise of ontic position and subjectivity production

Foucault's proposals are the mainstay for us to delve into the possibility of cosplay functioning as an elaboration of truths about cosplayers themselves. And as the practices of the self are, inevitably, an exercise of resistance, which we assume as an arrangement of performances that extrapolate the subject who performs them.

Moreover, as the Foucauldian conception of aesthetics is understood as the elaboration of ethics for the subjects, it is a continuous production of resistance in which the subjects position themselves in the face of the forms of government they experience. An illustration of this process is present in how cosplayers understand themselves as a member of cosplay culture by the acceptance of their performances among peers. Thus, the cosplay aesthetic results from resistance exercises since it is a creative response by cosplayers to the media text they are performing. Likewise, cosplay is an arrangement of performances that extrapolate the fan's relationship with the interpreted media text, establishing a beautiful way of experiencing aspects of fan culture.

At this point, let us return to the understanding that multiple performances, when arranged, reflect the performativity proposed and defined by Butler in which individuals assume ontic positions in face of the forms of government that lead them. For Butler it is the norms that govern us that produce the conditions of performative exercises. These norms can only be changed through subversions, which need to work according to the sociocultural system in which the complex apparatus of power operates.

Subversion is explained as an exercise in resistance to the complex device of power that regulates our lives, but which should not seek to deny or antagonize these norms. On the one hand, because if negation needs to repeat (i.e., quote) the mechanism of power that it intends to abolish, it ends up propagating it. The author's proposal is that this device of power does not need to be interrupted – and it will rarely be possible to do so –, but to be devoid of attention. On the other hand, and consequently, it is necessary to insert in this device a set of linguistic and non-linguistic practices that, when repeated, do not lead us to the patterns that oppress us.

Therefore, they are very similar to Foucauldian understanding of the co-existence and non-antagonism between resistance and power devices. Moreover, the Foucauldian understanding indicates resistance as a *sine qua non* condition of

the exercise of power. The coexistence of forces of power – even when admittedly opposed – are incapable of nullifying others. Especially because, if they did, they would be exercises of domination and not of power: regardless of the relationship that unites them – of conflict or alignment –, the exercises of power – as is the case of resistances – are related in diagrams that work like a network.

Nevertheless, the Butlerian understanding of performativity is an exercise of ontic position(s) in which knowledge about oneself and the context in which one lives is produced: truths that make up the understanding of subjectivity itself in Foucauldian philosophy. As pointed before, cosplay both produces truths and position its practitioners in the context where they live and are part of. Thus, it seems possible to consider cosplay as exercise of ontic position and subjectivity production.

Final considerations

From what we have presented, it seems possible to understand that the cosplay aesthetic produced from inter-fandom relationships allows fans to live a beautiful life. It is a movement in which they elaborate the ethics that guide their fannish trajectory. The cosplayers' interest in achieving an ideal aesthetic is manifested beyond a performative exercise that enhances both their fanity and fan culture as a whole.

The aesthetics established in a cultural practice such as cosplay allow us to propose that the interactional relations of participatory cultures are analogous to Michel Foucault's conceptions. First, cosplay produces *etopoetic* truths in inter-fandom relationships that allow the cosplayer to know himself. Second, the cosplay aesthetic reflects the elaboration and maintenance of ethical concepts that belong to both the cosplayer and the inter-fandom context that is part of it: an aesthetics of existence. Finally, and combining the former two propositions, it is a practice that goes beyond the exercise of performative resistance: it is a poach to live a beautiful life. That is because cosplay is a continual quest to improve and express the cosplayers' version of what they consider an ideal

version of their fanity: it is a practice that allows fans to experience the beautiful life.

Additionally, we consider that the performances performed by cosplayers are the mainstay for their practitioners to understand their own identity. Consequently, the identities manifested through cosplay function as a means for them to continually elaborate their subjectivity in exercises of resistance – i.e., performativity – that extrapolate the power relations or culturally established ideologies among those who interact with their cosplay.

Thus, this essay sought to articulate how the phenomenon of cosplay – investigated from various concepts in cultural studies and its interdisciplinary themes – can be understood as a process that elaborates subjects in the context of participatory culture. It is a contemporary cultural practice that reflects Foucault's practices of the self: social interactions constitute an entire cultural context continuously transformed by the convergence of experiences based on aesthetic productions. In this sense, the study aligns with the proposition that Michel Foucault's theoretical contributions can be accessed to expand field discussions and expand the use of post-structuralist and critical social theories to interpret contemporary phenomena and relations.

Furthermore, the essay presents the proximity between the concepts of Foucault and Butler through a cultural phenomenon. However, such proximity between Foucault's and Butler's theoretical perspectives must be explicitly demarcated as referring to different Foucauldian theoretical cycles. The relationship with the truth is associated with the Foucauldian subjectivation process and the inseparable conditions that allow the elaboration of ethics. The Butlerian concept of performativity, on the other hand, evokes concepts of power relations, forms of government and resistance exercises.

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