



SEÇÃO: MÍDIA E CULTURA

Courage to be a fan: the alethurgical dispositif that governs cosplay*Coragem para ser fã: dispositivo aletúrgico que governa o cosplay**Coraje para ser fan: dispositivo de aleturgia que gobierna el cosplay***Bruno Melo Moura¹**orcid.org/0000-0002-8205-4576
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Abstract: Cosplay is a participatory phenomenon in which its practitioners publicly express their fan relationship with the media product they are performing using costumes and the playing pop culture characters. Such manifestation represents positions in the face of conflicts between fans but is also associated with identity and political issues. These positions can be interpreted as an elaboration of Foucauldian subjectivity through "care of the self", when subjects (re)configure the government forms that guide their routine practices. Thus, the present study aims to understand how the interactional support between cosplayers governs their performances. To this end, a Ethnographic Foucauldian Genealogy (EFG) was carried out between 2020 and 2024. The results indicate the existence of two power diagrams: inspiration and honor, which establish ways for cosplayers to take care of themselves and their colleagues. When added together, the two diagrams reveal the dispositif of courage implied by cosplayers to express their fan relationship, personal values and respect other fans. Such a dispositif is, therefore, an alethurgy exercise when subjects commit to expressing the truth, aiming to improve the social context in which they act.

Keywords: cosplay; fans; care of the self; ethnographic foucauldian genealogy; alethurgy.

Resumo: O cosplay é um fenômeno participativo em que seus praticantes manifestam publicamente sua relação de fã com o produto midiático que estão performando, por meio do uso de fantasias e interpretação de personagens da cultura pop. Tal manifestação representa posicionamentos diante de conflitos entre fãs, mas também está associada a questões identitárias e políticas. Estes posicionamentos podem ser interpretados como elaboração da subjetividade foucaultiana através do cuidado de si, quando sujeitos (re)configuram as formas de governo que guiam suas práticas rotineiras. Assim, o presente estudo tem por objetivo compreender como o suporte interacional entre cosplayers governa suas performances. Para tanto, foi realizada uma Etnografia Genealógica Foucaultiana (EFG) entre 2020 e 2024. Os resultados indicam a existência de dois diagramas de poder: inspiração e honra, que estabelecem formas para os cosplayers cuidarem de si e de seus colegas. Quando somados, os dois diagramas revelam o dispositivo da coragem implicado aos cosplayers para manifestarem sua relação de fã, seus valores pessoais e respeitar outros fãs. Tal dispositivo é, portanto, um exercício aletúrgico, no qual os sujeitos se comprometem em manifestar a verdade, visando aprimorar o contexto social em que atuam.

Palavras-chave: cosplay; fãs; cuidado de si; etnografia genealógica foucaultiana; aleturgia.

Resumen: El cosplay es un fenómeno participativo en el que sus practicantes expresan públicamente su relación de admiración con el producto mediático que realizan mediante el uso de disfraces y la interpretación de personajes de la cultura pop. Esta manifestación representa posturas ante conflictos entre hin-



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chas, pero también asociadas a cuestiones identitarias y políticas. Estas posiciones pueden interpretarse como la elaboración de la subjetividad foucaultiana a través del autocuidado, cuando los sujetos (re)configuran las formas de gobierno que guían sus prácticas rutinarias. Así, el presente estudio pretende comprender cómo el apoyo interaccional entre cosplayers gobierna sus actuaciones. Para ello, se realizó una Etnografía Genealógica Foucaultiana (EFG) entre 2020 y 2024. Los resultados indican la existencia de dos diagramas de poder: la inspiración y el honor, que establecen formas para que los cosplayers cuiden de sí mismos y de sus compañeros. Cuando se suman, los dos diagramas revelan el recurso de valentía que utilizan los cosplayers para manifestar su relación con los fans, sus valores personales y el respeto a los demás fans. Tal dispositivo es, por tanto, un ejercicio de aleturgia cuando los sujetos se comprometen a manifestar la verdad, con el objetivo de mejorar el contexto social en el que actúan.

Palabras-clave: cosplay; fans; cuidado de sí; etnografía genealógica foucaultiana; aleturgia.

Introduction

Cosplay is a typical fan production, when they use costumes to play fictional characters in pop culture events and through social networks (Jenkins, 2012; Nunes, 2014; Winge, 2006). Like other fan practices, cosplay is mostly carried out through collaboration online and offline between peers and members of the same fan community – i.e., fandoms –, when they seek references, suggestions and support to execute their performances (Heller, 2020; Lamerichs, 2013; Rahman *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, cosplay is pointed out as a practice that is simultaneously individual and collective. On the one hand, it is the public manifestation of a fan who intensifies their relationship with the media products they consume through memorable experiences (Seregina; Weijo, 2017). On the other hand, it is the result of a support network, when cosplayers – those who practice cosplay – turn to their peers to form groups (Lome, 2016), but also to learn about techniques that improve their performances – e.g., sewing, makeup, acting, photo and video editing techniques (Rouse; Salter, 2021; Timothy; Hidayat, 2020).

Therefore, cosplay goes beyond the act of interpreting characters, presenting the possibility for its practitioners to insert and interact in the participatory cultures established and moved by

other fans (Kozinets; Jenkins, 2022; Winge, 2006). Fan culture has long been a topic explored by cultural studies, as it explains the ways in which people converge across media to associate with other individuals who share the same interests (Fuschillo, 2020; Urbano, 2021).

Broadly, investigating fan culture is emblematic because it allows researchers a broad empirical context to understand the dynamics that, for more than two decades, have impacted the communication environment and interdisciplinary studies beyond the use of technologies, focusing on new forms of contemporary participation (Jenkins; Jie, 2024; Yeates, 2020). Consequently, cosplay – as an interactive fan phenomenon – exemplifies how contemporary cultural practices reflect a rich mosaic of interactions in which people appropriate media and consumer experiences to express themselves (Seregina; Weijo, 2017; Sugihartati, 2020).

The manifestations created through fan production – such as cosplay – allows to position themselves in the face of interactive conflicts with their peers (Hills, 2018), but mainly to propagate and establish healthy spaces for identity and, possibly, political issues (Atkins, 2022; Nichols, 2019; Seregina, 2019). In this sense, they align with interdisciplinary studies that explore cultural practices that interpret such identity and political manifestations as a Foucauldian exercise in which subjects need to deal with the government forms that guide their daily practices (Denegri-Knott *et al.*, 2006; Webb *et al.*, 2012).

According to Foucault (2006), to understand the power relations that guide the complex social context in which we live, it is necessary to analyze the everyday practices that are carried out daily. In this sense, the author indicates that, although it is possible, it is essential to mutually explore the conditions in which discourses are produced and the inseparable behaviors and norms that make such discursive productions explicit.

By understanding the interrelationship between discursive and non-discursive practices – e.g., behaviors, norms, etc. –, it becomes possible to observe the positions assumed or delegated to

subjects throughout their lives. Positions that often arise from a process in which the subjects themselves continually seek to elaborate themselves – a subjectivation exercise. This process is called “care of the self”, when subjects balance their own wills with the moralities previously established and continually adjusted in the social context in which they live (Foucault, 2014).

Despite the name, the “care of the self” goes beyond an exercise that deals only with the subject himself. According to Foucault (2014), it is only possible to take care of ourselves when we take care of others, since our subjectivity – the elements that allow us to recognize ourselves – is the result of the relationships we establish throughout our lives. Thus, taking care of the self is also taking care of the others, when subjects seek to improve the conditions that allow them to relate to others.

In this sense, pleading for and exercising care of the self and others is one – but not the only – possibility for subjects to deal with the complex government forms that guide their routine practices. It is an assemblage of attitudes and knowledge capable of reconfiguring the social spaces in which they act, not only based on their will, but also respecting and supporting the will of others (Foucault, 2006).

One of the ways pointed out by Foucault (2014) to balance one's own will and that of others is to observe the relationship of a subject with the socially established truths in the context in which he or she lives. When subjects elaborate and disseminate truths about themselves, they can reconfigure the social relationships and positions they assume. The continuous form of telling the truth is called as alethurgy, an exercise in which subjects commit to disseminating the knowledge they understand about the phenomena they experience. Thus, alethurgy simultaneously allows subjects to express who they are, through the knowledge they understand and the maintenance or transformation of the power relations they experience – working as a subjectivation exercise.

Thus, the present study aims to understand how interactional support among cosplayers

governs their performances. This aim presents an opportunity to fill the gap in the interdisciplinary literature on fan studies, regarding the (re) configuration of the government forms that guide their interactive practices based on the subjective positions they exercise virtually.

Our study is justified by focusing on a phenomenon considered representative for exploring the interdisciplinarity of contemporary communication studies (Jenkins; Jie, 2024; Yeates, 2020). Specifically, can expand Moura and Souza-Leão (2023) discussion about cosplay functioning as a phenomenon of Foucauldian subjective elaboration. Consequently, align with broad previous study which evokes the author concepts to explore communication and media practices inherent to fan interactions (Cavalcanti et al., 2020; Fathallah, 2014; Lee; Zhang, 2021; Smutradontri; Gadavani, 2020).

Cosplay: a participatory fan production

Cosplay is defined as the practice of dressing up costumes and playing characters from various media products – e.g., books, films, TV shows, anime, manga, comic books, etc. – at pop culture events – i.e., fairs and conventions (Nunes, 2014; Rahman *et al.*, 2012; Winge, 2006). More recently, its practitioners – i.e., cosplayers – have taken to social media to share their own cosplay performances and discuss the phenomenon (Kohnen *et al.*, 2023; Lome, 2016; Rouse; Salter, 2021).

The ability to appropriate technologies, the search for convergence between media and cultural groups, and the continuous interest in establishing a participatory community around cosplay explain why this phenomenon is typically characterized as a typical fan production (Mounthfort et al., 2023; Moura; Souza-Leão, 2023; Seregina; Weijo, 2017). Fans are individuals who nurture and publicly manifest – such as cosplay – their intense relationship of cultural consumption with such media products, continually seeking to interact with peers who share these same interests so that they can encourage and support each other (Kozinets; Jenkins, 2022; Lamerichs, 2013).

Furthermore, support among fans is pointed

out as a fundamental factor in the execution of cosplay (Lome, 2016). In addition to performing their cosplay as a hobby, cosplayers consider the phenomenon to be an opportunity to become professionals or to monetize their skills developed to create their costumes – e.g., makeup, sewing, manufacturing, wigs, etc. – or to publish them on social media – e.g., photo and video editing, use of digital platforms (Rouse; Salter, 2021; Timothy; Hidayat, 2020). Thus, cosplayers are constantly striving to stimulate spaces – online and offline – for them to publicize or experience their performances, mainly through the support of other fans who are also interested in the characters they are performing (Crawford; Hancock, 2018).

Such interest reflects the understanding of Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007) about, broadly, how fans find to assert their consumption practices in front of other consumers and, mainly, media product managers is like guerrilla tactics. For the authors, fans usually have little cultural prestige in social contexts that stigmatize their consumption practices and less economic power than entertainment conglomerates. Therefore, fans need to reimagine and rework the media texts they consume, to meet their needs, whether they oppose existing power structures.

Consequently, fans usually gather in fandoms, cultural groupings – consumer communities – that allow them to feel comfortable expressing their own opinions and establishing emotional bonds with their peers (Fuschillo, 2020; Urbano, 2021). Furthermore, fandom is a space that encourages fans to produce, improve and publicize their own productions – e.g., fanarts, fan videos, fanfics, cosplays – to intensify the relationship between peers and with the media products they consume (Crawford; Hancock, 2018; Kozinets; Jenkins, 2022).

However, fandoms are not always a space for mutual support. It is possible to contradictory practices in the fandoms, such as divergences of opinion and possible disagreements arise about media products – e.g., content quality, communication strategies for new products, changes in narratives, etc. (Camargo *et al.*, 2022). Thus, there are several studies that explore subgroups in

fandoms that engage in toxic practices against their peers – i.e., known as dark-side interactions –, questioning and attacking their opinions, content or even identity manifestations (Hills, 2018; Souza-Leão *et al.*, 2022). On the other hand, there has also been a growing number of studies that are interested in understanding the resistance movements exercised by fans to assert identity issues and political positions beyond fandoms (Atkins, 2022; Gn, 2011; Nichols, 2019).

Such political positions and identity issues are conceived by interdisciplinary research in cultural and communication studies as an interpretation of the manifestation of Foucauldian subjectivities (Denegri-Knott, 2004; Eadon, 2024). From this perspective, the intense consumer relationship between fans and media products is a means of investigating the ways that allow them to understand themselves (Moura; Souza-Leão, 2023; Magalhães, 2018), but could also indicate the existence of complex dispositifs that govern the conditions that allow the production of their subjectivities.

Care of the self as a way to reconfigure government forms

Contemporary social dynamics indicate how cultures give rise to affirmative stances in conflicts that point to social configurations and tensions (Atkins, 2022; Souza-Leão *et al.*, 2022). Thus, culture practices – such as consumption – allow to exercise the Foucauldian concept about “care of the self”, a process where consumers elaborate their subjectivities considering market government forms that conduct their positions, choices and relationships with products (Denegri-Knott *et al.*, 2006; Webb *et al.*, 2012).

According to Foucault (2014), the care of the self represents a continuous effort to expand opportunities to live in ways considered appropriate, both by the individual and by the moral context in which they are inserted. It is a set of practices through which the subject dedicates himself to himself, seeking to perpetuate the process of self-construction that enables his existence in the most effective way within the

environment in which he finds himself.

Care of the self can be understood as an exercise in which, by renouncing certain aspects, a subject enhances the conditions that are conceived as valid in the context in which he lives. It is through self-care that a subject can exercise a position in which, in multiple ways, he produces truths that take care of himself, others and the context in which he lives (Foucault, 2014).

To exemplify the care of the self exercises, Foucault (2016) discusses the role of subjects in contemporary society, when it is increasingly necessary for us to negotiate our desires in the face of the identities that we assume in certain cultures or social groups. From this perspective, contemporary subjects have as their main objective in life to transform themselves into other people – those they admire or idealize. And this process of transformation is continuous, since upon reaching a certain objective, countless others have already been produced and are guiding the elaboration of subjectivities. Furthermore, the elaboration of our subjectivity is a process of self-knowledge in which the truths about ourselves must be learned during our existences and relationships with others.

To care for oneself and others, subjects need to affirm themselves, when they produce truths that emanate from their experiences. Such affirmations are an act in which subjects tell the truth about themselves, positioning their wills before the wills of others and the moral agencies that regulate the social fabric in which they live (Foucault, 2011). To explain the relationship between caring for oneself and others through the production of truths, Foucault (2014) presents the alethurgy exercise.

Alethurgy is the set of acts in which subjects enunciate truths in an excessive manner. Such enunciation can legitimize or challenge previously established knowledge. Consequently, the relationship of subjects with truth – such as alethurgy – is an exercise of resistance that maintains, questions or subverts the dispositifs that govern them (Foucault, 2016).

The alethurgy exercise should be understood

as the elaboration and manifestations of truth about the subjects themselves, but also about the other related with them (Foucault, 2014). Thus, manifesting truths about relationships allows subjects to better understand their role in social diagrams where they live (Foucault, 2016).

Truths manifested by alethurgy exercise go beyond the subject's conception and expand the possibilities for subjects to experience new experiences (Foucault, 2014). Since subjects do not invent the practices or regimes that govern their lives, the truths manifestation is capable of resignifying themselves, indicating how their experiences are fundamental for a recognition of themselves. In this sense, understanding the truths about experiences usually leads subjects to an ethical path in fulfilling their own wills in the face of government forms assimilated as permissive to their existence (Foucault, 2009).

Practicing truth through alethurgy exercise enables subjects to preserve and improve relationships with themselves and with others, illustrating how self-care process is simultaneously described as a non-altruistic and non-egoistic exercise. Such description indicates that both categories would isolate fundamental truths to the subjectivation produced through self-care: the will of the subject and the moralities to which one is subjected. Moreover, both instances are choices of a free subject who accepts instruction in the elaboration of his/her social role. Furthermore, when a subject decides to take care of himself/herself, he/she is also taking care of others. After all, only those who take care of themselves can take care of others – and vice-versa (Foucault, 2014).

If only those who take care of themselves can take care of others – and vice versa – then Foucault (2014) proposes that the same logic is valid for the governmental sphere in social relations, indicating that governing oneself is a *sine qua non* condition for governing others – and vice versa. Therefore, taking care of oneself is a way of governing one's own existence, elaborating, (re)configuring or aligning oneself with dispositifs that govern us and allow them to take care of

themselves (Foucault, 2006).

The dispositifs are the complex mechanisms that establish appropriate behaviors in the context in which subjects live. Such behaviors are the result of the tangle of power relations that are connected in diagrams that arrange the various operators – i.e., behaviors, norms, attitudes, hierarchies – that limit or direct the actions of subjects. Each operator is supported by and analogous to pre-existing discourses that can be reproduced, questioned or adjusted, according to the way in which subjects take care of themselves (Foucault, 2006).

Methodological procedures

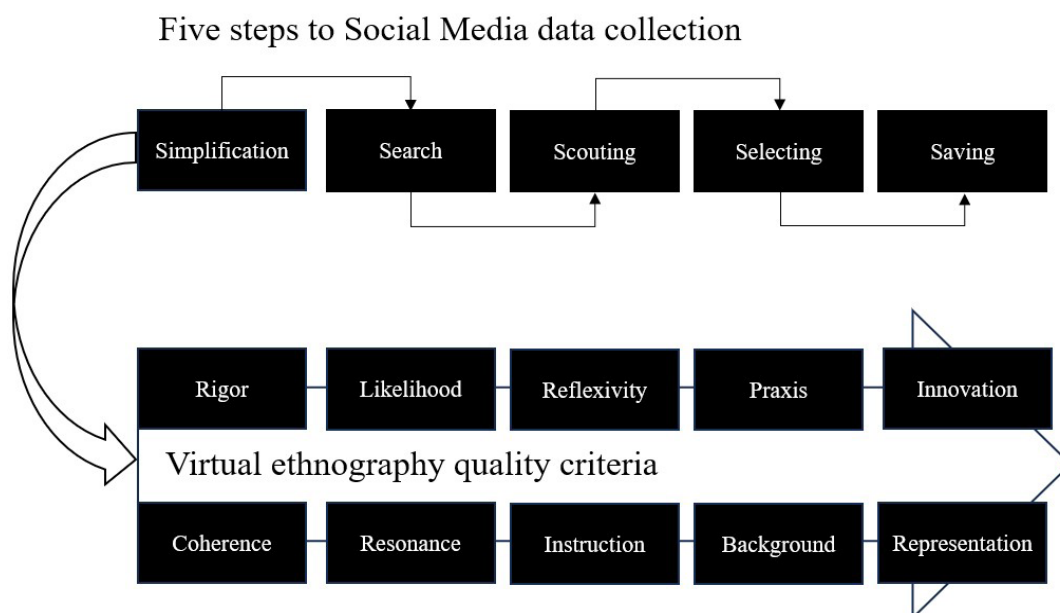
Following the problematic and theoretical foundation of the present study, we adopted Ethnographic Foucauldian Genealogy (EFG) as a methodology. This choice combines two autonomous approaches previously established in cultural studies: ethnographic data (Hine, 2020; Kozinets, 2020) and the analytics of Foucauldian

genealogy (Camargo *et al.*, 2022; Mwaniki, 2017). Thus, the next two subsections present the definition and operationalization adopted by our study for the data collection and analysis procedures.

Ethnographic data collection procedures

Ethnography is an approach that allows researchers to interact and understand in depth the interrelationship between the communal context and individual values of the members of a given cultural group (Hine, 2020; Kozinets, 2020). This approach is traditionally explored through multiple methodological strategies by cultural studies (Hammelburg, 2021) and, more recently, has been expanded to consider the impacts and intrinsic relationships between the continuous and routine use of social networks and digital media (Burai *et al.*, 2024; Lenihan; Kelly-Holmes, 2015).

Figure 1 presents the steps and quality criteria presented by Kozinets (2020) to be executed during the execution of a virtual ethnography.



According to Kozinets (2020), a virtual ethnography must seek to observe simplifiable interactions, allowing researchers to rigorously and coherently organize and read the data. In addition, it is important that the data can be located through searches on public websites – i.e.,

social networks –, attesting to the resonance and likelihood of the results. Furthermore, scouting the themes observed in the corpora reveals the level of education and reflexivity of the researchers on the phenomenon investigated. Thus, it becomes possible to select the literature background and

the praxis to be combined to establish the contributions of the study. Nevertheless, it is essential to save the interactions, which allow for an analytical return so that academic contributions can be expanded through innovation and representation.

Broadly, virtual ethnography allows researchers to examine online communities and their members to understand how certain cultural phenomena are present in virtual interactions, but are not limited to this environment, and are present in the daily practices of their members (Hine, 2020; Lenihan; Kelly-Holmes, 2015). Among these strategies, we adopted four – i.e., netnography, online ethnographic interviews, virtual ethnomethodology, and autoethnography – that complement each other.

Netnography is a tool to identifying and examining virtual groups – e.g., communities on social networks, forums – to researchers familiarize and examine members interactions with each other and the topics where they usually publish their opinions about the phenomenon investigated (Kozinets, 2020). We identified four largest Facebook groups focused on cosplay with publications in languages accessible to the researchers – i.e., English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Each group comprised between 5,000 and 50,000 members claiming to be from diverse regions worldwide. From December 2019 to 2021, all interactions related to cosplay were archived, resulting in 18,727 posts and 120,494 comments saved as PDF files, while videos were stored via hyperlinks. These communities were monitored weekly by one of the researchers from January 2022 to July 2024 to capture new or noteworthy interactions in an immersive data collection process.

Virtual ethnomethodology considers that social networks are an environment for monitoring and tracking the routine of a given cultural phenomenon in the lives of its members, equivalent to the researchers' effort to accurately monitor and track the presence of a cultural phenomenon in the daily practices of research participants (Milk, 2017). We reached 71 cosplayers from 18 countries on Instagram which through the hashtag #cosplay and their participation in internationally significant

pop culture events. They are selected considering their regularly posting photos and videos related to cosplay. During the first two years of research, 9,992 posts and their descriptions were saved as PDF files, while videos were stored via hyperlinks. Starting in January 2022, the profiles were monitored weekly to identify distinctive and novel examples compared to previously collected interactions.

Similarly, online ethnographic interviews are an adaptation of the offline model, proposed to interviewees describe their responses through content made available on their social networks (Hammelburg, 2021). We selected 205 cosplayers identified using criteria like those of virtual ethnomethodology. Among them, 84 interviews were completed using the participants' preferred communication platforms – Mail, Skype, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The interviews focused on their experiences with cosplay, particularly their social media posts about the topic. All interviews conducted over two years were transcribed and compiled into single-spaced documents using size-12 font, totaling 364 pages in DOC format.

Additionally, autoethnography is a methodological procedure that works an opportunity for a researcher to represent or insert themselves into the phenomenon they intend to investigate, producing detailed and contextualized reports, and should include all relevant aspects, including interactions mediated by digital media (Popova, 2020). Such procedure involved the active participation and engagement of one researcher within the cosplay community, including sharing his cosplay performances on social media and analyzing spontaneous interactions stemming from personal connections within the community. Weekly diaries documenting experiences and insights related to cosplay were also maintained, culminating in 23 pages of single-spaced DOCX files in size-12 font. Additionally, 328 videos and photos, 36 Instagram posts, and their 306 associated comments were analyzed.

In addition to the care taken to construct the research corpora, it is worth highlighting that we followed the proposal of Leban et al. (2021)

regarding the use of virtual data. According to the authors, it is possible and valid to exemplify the research results through images accessed on publicly accessible social networks. However, it is essential that these images are treated with software that transforms photos into cartoons, so that the identity of the research participants is preserved.

Foucauldian genealogy analytical procedures

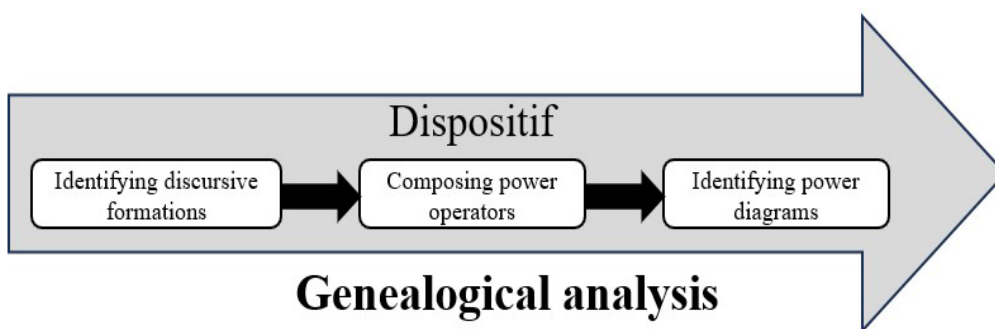
Foucault (1984, 2006) developed his genealogical analysis to establish critical reflections on the conditions and developments of power relations that drive certain social practices. Such power relations are represented, among other factors, by the way in which some hegemonic statuses of certain social groups are maintained or questioned. Therefore, it can be accessed to understand the interrelationship between new forms of knowledge, power relations and ethical problems established in communication spaces and contemporary cultural practices (Camargo *et al.*, 2022; Mwaniki, 2017)

Thus, genealogical analysis outlines the com-

plex networks of power that promote, regulate or minimize social asymmetries intrinsically associated with the discourses and ideologies they represent. According to Foucault (2006), power relations are intrinsic to the existence of socially disseminated discourses, indicating how both factors should be considered in his genealogical methodology.

Consequently, genealogical analysis first observes the discursive practices that address and expand knowledge about a given phenomenon. Such discursive practices are analogous to socially established and reproduced behaviors and rules, called power operators. When added together, power operators are related and added to diagrams that synthesize the behaviors and directions that attest to ways in which subjects position themselves in the face of the power relations that govern them. Broadly, it is common for multiple diagrams to coexist, allowing us to observe and understand the complex dispositifs that govern the social context investigated (Foucault, 1984).

Figure 2 summarizes the analytical stages of Foucault's genealogy.



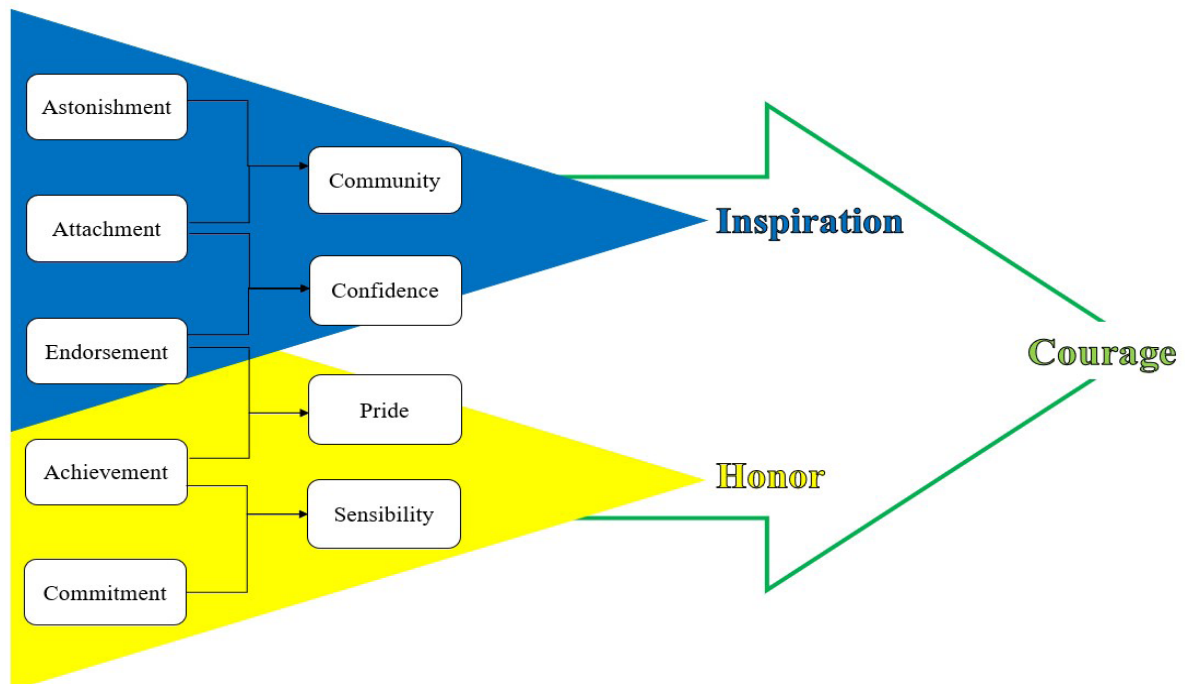
Thus, it is worth to highlight the analysis was carried out over eighteen months after the end of the first stage of data collection – in January 2022. Subsequently, the data collected during the immersive movement – until July 2024 – were used to observe a saturation of the results and refine the examples used to illustrate the research findings.

Both periods were necessary due to the triangulation process between the authors, in which the first researcher was responsible for initially or-

ganizing the research corpora. It was then decided to analyze the data from each corpus separately for later comparison. This effort revealed that their results were overlapping or complementary.

Results discussion

Figure 3 was created to present the convergence between the analytical categories and the results of the study.



The identification of five discursive formations represents the knowledge propagated by cosplayers. Such knowledge points to behaviors and norms that were synthesized in the composition of four power operators. These operators share common elements, which allowed us to identify that they converge to two autonomous power diagrams. When the diagrams were reflected considering the phenomenon investigated – i.e., cosplay –, they revealed the existence of a dispositif that governs its practitioners.

Therefore, we elaborated first two subsections to describe, contextualize and exemplify – based on data from the research corpora – each of the power diagrams and its elements – i.e., power operators and discursive formations – to establish a link between our results and previously established academic discussions. Consequently, it was possible to extrapolate such discussion in a third subsection, where we present the contribution and originality of the present study.

Inspiration to cosplayers

The first power diagram identified highlights the Inspiration that permeates the aspects that allowed cosplayers to share their performan-

ces on social media. It is the ongoing effort to deal with insecurities about making public their intense relationship with the phenomenon to their social circle that is not part of cosplay, the media products they consume and are fans of, and even their own body. Therefore, this diagram is associated with two power operators.

The Community power operator summarizes the ongoing effort to disinhibit themselves exercised by cosplayers to inspire their peers to share their performances on social media. By making their relationship with cosplay public, they believe they can encourage other cosplayers. Furthermore, they recognize how valuable it was to see or meet other cosplayers, so that they could gain confidence about their own cosplay.

Astonishment and Attachment are the discursive formations supporting Individuality power operator. On the one hand, Astonishment indicates the perspective that cosplayers are commonly surprised by the support they can get through social media, whether from those who are part of their social circle or from third parties with interests in the characters performed – i.e., other fans of the media product. On the other hand, Attachment represents the understanding that cosplayers should share their performances

digitally, since the intense relationship with the performed media product manifests their fandom publicly.

Figure 4 presents an excerpt from the online ethnographic interview conducted with an In-

donesian cosplayer through Instagram in April 2020. This example illustrates the concatenation between discursive formations, operator and power diagram presented above.



Well, I knew the world of cosplay since I was a kid, but I wasn't sure whether I had to go into the cosplay world. The reason being was I thought cosplay wasn't a thing in my country, people would judge me if I wore a 'silly' costumes (...) when I was around 27, I knew that the community was quite big. Since then, I started to try to get into it. I noticed that putting on make up was too much hassle for me, so I decided to wait until I found my cosplay interest. Then, my friend invited me to join an opening act for a well-known cosplayer in a big event. He said it was an armor cosplay, so I didn't have to worry putting on some make up. The rest is history (...) I think cosplay gives me extra confidence and help me to understand others since I have to understand the characters, I'm cosplaying. And I can express myself in one of my hobby, tokusatsu (...)

When answering how he became a cosplayer and his relationship with the phenomenon, the interviewee reveals that he had been interested in entering this "world" since he was a child. However, the lack of information about other people in his country and the fear of performing in "silly" costumes inhibited his initiation into cosplay for a long time. When he discovered that, in fact, the community was large and that he could specialize in other elements of cosplay – i.e., armor – he gained confidence, especially considering his interest in a specific type of media product that is characterized by characters in armor – i.e., Tokusatsu.

Thus, the interviewee describes his Astonishment when he discovered how his country has so many people who were interested in and practiced cosplay, encouraging him to also become a cosplayer. In addition, he also highlights that it was the Attachment to the media products that he is a fan, leading him to gain confidence to perform his cosplay performances. Both discourses represent aspects of the Community that led him to overcome insecurities and express his cosplay

on social media through an Inspiration process.

The other power operator that supports the Inspiration diagram was called Confidence. Such operator represents an arrangement of behaviors and norms propagated among cosplayers who feel fulfilled with the cosplay they are performing or have shared on social media. It reflects a movement in which cosplayers seek to praise themselves through the reaction of third parties or their own fan relationship with the characters they are performing.

There are two discursive formations analogous to the Confidence power operator: Attachment and Endorsement. The first – presented previously – concerns how cosplayers consider that certain performances are a gift for their relationship as fans of the media object. The other – i.e., Endorsement – reveals the understanding that performances tend to impress third parties, legitimizing the cosplayer's representation for their peers who are fans of the media object.

An example that illustrates the convergence between Inspiration, Confidence and Attachment or Endorsement can be seemed in an Instagram

post by an Australian cosplayer from July 2021 (see Fig. 5).



In the post description, the cosplayer explains how a cartoon character – i.e., Shego from Kim Possible – was, for a long time, a challenge for her. However, when she transformed herself into the character, she was inspired by its confidence, and began to feel more comfortable with her own body.

Thus, she attests her Attachment with the character performed and, simultaneously, an Endorsement in herself for gaining confidence in her own body and sensuality. Both discourses add up to the Confidence of being able to perform a character that she considers so iconic, a source of Inspiration for many women to gain confidence about themselves.

Broadly reflecting on the Inspiration diagram, we can see that it is a network of power relations between fans that reveal the aspects that motivate them and also encourage them to publicly demonstrate their fandom through cosplay. In this sense, their speeches and behaviors corroborate ways of positioning themselves internationally regarding how they can live their fandom relationships.

On the one hand, the Community is the collective movement that highlights the role of cosplayer

peers or other fans to encourage them to perform and make them public through social networks. On the other hand, Confidence represents the personal growth possible for cosplayers, when their fandom relationship leads them to get to know themselves better and overcome difficulties.

Thus, such power diagram seems to be equivalent to what Jenkins (2006) describes in relation to the aspects of contemporary convergence experienced by members of participatory cultures that he exemplifies in his studies through fandom practices – such as cosplay. There is cultural convergence when individuals move from sociocultural isolation to seeking peers and companions who share the same interests, values and practices. Additionally, media convergence is common, when fans appropriate available technologies to expand their skills and relationship with the media products they are fans of.

Honor among cosplayers

Honor is a diagram that permeates the power relations between cosplayers on social media, when cosplay performance is a means for its practitioners to express or respect the cosplayers'

ontological conditions – e.g., race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, etc. Despite receiving support from their peers, there is also shame, criticism and, possibly, offense to the performances that cosplayers share on the Web. In this sense, there is a movement among cosplayers to establish positive and caring coordinated forms in order to avoid any offenses and political problems associated with cosplay.

Such diagram is supported by the Pride power operator, a cosplayer' agency that express how cosplay allows them to experience memorable experiences as fan and alongside other cosplayers. Such extraordinary moments are consequence to live representative characters, but also as a goal engage their peers about the media products performed in their cosplays.

Consequently, there are two discursive for-

mations analogous to Pride power operator: Endorsement and Achievement. Endorsement – present previously – from third parties – especially other fans – is assumed as fundamental for cosplayers feel grateful when they publish their performances on social media. Achievement, in turn, highlights the understanding that performing the characters they are fans of and being recognized for it is a positive result that they should be proud of and, at the same time, seek to interpret with the greatest possible care – considering representative issues.

To exemplify the relationship between the Pride power operator and the Honor diagram, we highlight a Facebook post made in July 2020 – in the “Cosplay” group – both from the autoethnographic and netnographic corpora (see Fig. 6).



In the post made available in the “Cosplay” group on Facebook, the cosplayer describes the process of performing a performance using household items – i.e., closetcosplay –, a solution that became popular during the periods of social isolation between 2020 and 2021. To perform such cosplays, it was common to perform characters with a similar appearance to the cosplayer and with simple clothing. However, the cosplayer highlights that it was the representation of his self-declared ethnicity that motivated him to per-

form and publicize this performance, as well as to look for other characters with this characteristic.

Thus, it is possible to observe the Endorsement of the increase in performances that represent diverse ethnicities and, simultaneously, the Achievement of performing a cosplay using only household materials and one's own appearance. Both converge to the Pride of experiencing a character that the cosplayer considers Honoring his ethnicity.

The other power operator associated to Honor

diagram is Sensibility. Such operator represents the possible difficulties faced by cosplayers, whether to achieve greater reliability in their performance or to minimize any harassment that may occur within the cosplay community. Sensibility legitimizes a behavior of mutual encouragement and respect, when cosplayers perform and share their cosplays, without fear of comments from others that may criticize them. Additionally, represent how many cosplayers take on the responsibility of instructing their peers about their efforts in creating their own cosplays, to ensure a good relationship and do not offend anyone.

There are two discursive formations associated with the Sensibility operator: Achievement and Commitment. Achievement – present previously

– explain how cosplayers consider their satisfaction in overcoming difficulties regarding the details and qualities operated in their cosplay or the reasons that led them to perform and adapt a certain character or media product to be pertinent. Commitment expresses their perspective to expand the space for non-traditional performances and fighting against certain prejudices – e.g., racism, ageism, sexism, homophobia, etc. – that they may have to deal with when sharing their cosplay on the Web.

To exemplify the concatenation that supports the Care power diagram, we created Figure 7, which shows an interaction in the “Cosplay Help and Service” Facebook community in October 2020.



Hi! So I am in love with this Wuxia series called Eternal Love. I really want to cosplay from it. But the costumes are hanfu. Basically traditional Chinese clothing. Would cosplaying this series be considered cultural appropriation? As a woman of color the last thing I want to do is appropriate another's culture but to cosplay this would be a dream. Also the series is a fantasy that takes place in heaven because all of the characters are gods. Any advice?

In the post, a cosplayer who self-identifies as a woman of color asks to her peers for help in performing a character from a different ethnicity – i.e., Chinese – of which she has published images. Far from wanting to exercise cultural appropriation, the cosplayer asks if it is possible to perform such a character without offending her peers, since she is ecstatic about a television series that made her want to cosplay.

Thus, the cosplayer expresses her Commitment to respect her peers, but also her Achievement if she can find a way to perform such an important character for her. Consequently, she

expresses her Sensibility in not offending other cosplayers, making explicit the Honor that governs her performances and her virtual interactions about cosplay.

Furthermore, it seems to us that the Honor power diagram reveals the representative extrapolations that can be achieved by cosplayers when performing their performances and sharing them on social media. Pride operator highlights the possibility of cosplay expressing fans' identity and ontological values, which are appreciated and considered by their peers who are members of the virtual communities in which they share

their performances. Sensibility operator, in turn, points to the attention that cosplayers pay to their peers when they create and perform their cosplays. When combined, these operators present themselves as an opportunity to establish behaviors in which cosplay makes them better people and, consequently, they need to return this improvement to their peers.

Such opportunity expressed by the Pride diagram exemplifies Jenkins' (2006) understanding of how fan practices do not follow a utilitarian logic, but an affective economy. For fans, it is the possibility of experiencing and expressing their own values through the media products they consume that motivates them to interact with their peers. In these experiences, they tend to prioritize the emotional connections of fandom members, indicating the fan community as a safe and trustworthy space for them and their peers to express representational and identity issues.

Courage to be a fan: the dispositif guided by alethurgy

Based on our results, it is possible to observe that cosplayers articulate themselves digitally to share positive and stimulating forms that attest to the importance and validity that the phenomenon has in their lives. Such articulation indicates how fans must disclose and corroborate with behaviors that simultaneously motivate and delimit – in an empathetic and respectful context – the ways in which they express their relationship with the media products they perform and with other fans.

Fans who take care of themselves can and will also seek support from their peers and from the consumption phenomenon that unites them. Therefore, they exercise the Foucauldian care of the self and the others through their cultural interactions (Denegri-Knott *et al.*, 2006; Webb *et al.*, 2012). In the power diagrams identified – Inspiration and Honor –, cosplayers articulate themselves virtually to conduct and have their performances conducted, establishing forms that respect each other's fan relationships.

The respect to, simultaneously, their own relationships and those of others is presented by

Foucault (2014) as the attention that subjects usually practice when they exercise care of the self and the others. It is a continuous effort to establish ways to improve themselves and, simultaneously, allow and encourage those with whom they relate to improve themselves as well.

In our findings, the care of the self and the others manifests as an encouraging and assisting process to cosplayers' performances published in social media. Such care is neither altruistic nor selfish. It is a mobilization that aims to guarantee the necessary conditions for them to feel confident to be who they are: cosplayers. Consequently, it can be understood as self-care exercised to expand the possibilities for any cosplayers to connect with the phenomenon.

Thus, it exemplifies the ways in which subjects exercise of the care of the self and the others in a broader dispositif: the government of the self and others. Such government form preserves the conditions of subjects who coexist in the same social context and who seek to balance multiple wills in the face of previously institutionalized moralities. On the one hand, this device allows subjects to know the limits of how they deal – or fail to deal – with their own desires and values that represent them. On the other hand, it simultaneously shows how social relations are a concern with the cultural context and with the others that make up their own existence (Foucault, 2016).

Thus, the Courage dispositif can be defined the government of the self and others that preserves and encourages the performances of any cosplayers. It is a government form that establishes the conditions for fans – i.e., subjects – to express themselves through social networks, which encourages them to expose their relationship as fans of media products. It is a courage to be a fan, when cosplayers establish conducts that preserve their fans relationships and, simultaneously, the respect with their peers.

For Foucault (2011), exposing one's relationships through self-care indicates a specific courage, that of telling and spreading truths about oneself. Telling the truth is a revealing practice that improves the subject himself, but

mainly the social context in which they live and the relationships that they nurture.

Among the ways of telling the truth, Foucault (2014) emphasizes the practice of alethurgy, an interactive process in which subjects associate themselves with truths that can be expressed and discussed in the context in which they live. To perform alethurgy, it is necessary to tell the truth, know one's own truths, but, above all, interact with others. Only contact with others makes one's own knowledge a socially established truth.

Thus, alethurgy is a process that broadly and simultaneously exposes valid truths for all members guided by the same government form. Through alethurgy, ambiguity is eliminated when the subjects' wills are expressed, to establish rules, conducts and knowledge that allow them to coexist and improve themselves (Foucault, 2014).

Such aspects were observed in the Courage dispositif that governs the cosplayers interactions that we observed. The positioning they adopt, and the knowledge disseminated in the cosplay performances published on social networks eliminate the ambiguity of what and how they are fans of certain media objects. More than that, it establishes empathetic ways of co-existing and improving their fan relationships through the contact they have with their cosplay peers and other fans.

Final considerations

The results and reflections show the existence of the dispositif entitled as courage to be fans, where the cosplay phenomenon allows its practitioners to express an intense relationship with the performed media objects, but also to experience personal wills and the ability to respect others. Such dispositif is composed of the concatenation of inspiration – when cosplayers elucidate what encouraged them to express their relationship and that of a fan – and honor – through which cosplayers establish mutual respect for the members of the fan communities in which they operate.

The courage to be a fan is a way of following and reconfiguring government forms through a continuous alethurgy exercise, when cosplayers

manifest truths that take care of themselves and of their peers. Producing truths about their fanish through cosplay it is an ontic condition of being a fan, whether by intensifying the relationship with the media object or by expanding the interactive space in which they converge and feel safe to interact with other fans (Lunning, 2022; Moura; Souza-Leão, 2023).

Consequently, our study presents as its main contribution the observation that the conditions that elaborate the subjectivity of fans also establish and reconfigure the government forms that guide their positions. We expand communication and cultural interdisciplinary studies discussion about how cosplayers can both elaborate themselves as subjects and fans, but also enhance and reconfigure the social context of the fan culture in which they operate.

Broadly, our results endorse the argument of Jenkins, Kalinke and Rocha (2016) about how participatory culture concepts proposed at the beginning of the 21st century still help to explain the way people act collectively using media. Even considering the constant technological changes, it is the ways in which users interact and converge culturally that explain many contemporary phenomena. It is an aspect present in our results, when a phenomenon associated with fan culture or with relevance in social media – such as cosplay – allow their practitioners to understand themselves and, simultaneously, establish conducts that respect their peers.

Additionally, although the data were collected using digital platforms, our results reflect practices that integrate the online and offline environments. Consequently, such results given evidence to Kozinets' (2020) understanding on how virtual ethnography is a procedure able to capture cultural phenomena established between these two environments already integrated into routine practices. Thus, digital platforms serve to understand broader phenomena not limited to virtual practices.

Finally, we highlight that our study was limited to a single interactive phenomenon and a typical production of fan culture. However, such limitation

was restricted by the researchers' effort to reach cosplayers through multiple ethnographic techniques and different parts of the world. This effort presents another opportunity for future research: to explore fan practices globally, to establish a genealogy of their relationships with the media objects they consume and with their peers.

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