Cosplay and Costume: The Aesthetics and Politics of the Body the Cosplayer in Popular Culture

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Abstract. Cosplayers are attached to various costume designs and accessories that often fascinated the audience. The desire to become a character according to the original characters often pushes cosplayers to make costumes and accessories that seem very complicated. Not infrequently, this costume exposes certain body parts of the cosplayer. Costume and body become one unit that is used as a tool to show self-identity and body control. This research examines the relationship between the body and cosplay costumes which symbolize the aesthetics and politics of the body. This research is a qualitative descriptive study that uses the perspective of aesthetics and body politics. The methods used are observation, interviews, and questionnaires with cosplayers who are members of the community in Banyumas. This study aims to determine the aesthetic value of costumes and body appearance in cosplay from the perspective of cosplayers. The results of the analysis found aesthetic forms and body politics in cosplay. Coplay aesthetics included the form of the costume, namely the complexity, simplicity, and color of the costume; mix and match costumes-accessories-make up, and harmonization of the movements and characters of the cosplayer with the character. In the relation between cosplay and body politics, it is found that costumes and bodies are used as tools to show self-identity, body control, as well as cultural agents.
Keywords: aesthetics, cosplay, cosplayer, politics of body.

1   Introduction

Costumes, like clothes, are the second skin of humans and provide an identity for the wearer. Horn and Gural in Tamura mention that clothes are the second skin that replaces human hair through an evolutionary process[1]. A costume is clothing, a symbol that can travel through time and space and tell an event at a time. Svendsen revealed that history and cultural background can be known from how people dress and the things attached to these clothes[2]. Costumes can give so many signs that sometimes they can be captured explicitly or implicitly. A costume is not just a piece of cloth designed, cut, sewn, and used but is also accompanied by accessories that follow propriety, beauty, and harmony with the costume used. Costumes are often used as an identity that has the function of distinguishing a person from other people, or one group from another[3, 4] an identity negotiating tool[4] also a functioning political

tool as a sign or symbol[5, 6]. The totality of wearing a costume or dress cannot be separated from the rules or norms that apply in society. Where, when, and for what purpose does one use it? Sometimes even though the costume is used at the right time and for the right purpose, if it is deemed not by local norms or culture, there is a negative label for the wearer. Negative labeling becomes widespread in the community or group label if the user is part of a particular community. Those who are labeled often face new problems stemming from the reactions of themselves and others to the inherent negative stereotypes[6].

Cosplayers are identical people wearing costumes that are sometimes different in general. These cosplayers often join with other cosplayers and form communities. When doing cosplay, they often imitate certain figures in anime, manga, or games. Not only imitating other people's figures but also being able to create their original characters. The popularity of cosplayers is always accompanied by the performance of costumes attached to the cosplayer's body. Everything is presented in the performance of the cosplayer's body, from closed and vulgar costumes. According to Desmond the main function of clothing has three functions: clothing for comfort, clothing for modesty, and clothing as exhibition objects[7]. From Desmond's statement, the cosplay costumes and all the accessories attached to them are included in the clothing section as exhibition objects. Cosplayers, in particular, women are often marked by sexiness and beauty in their clothes. The sensuality of the body presented often marginalizes the beauty of the costume. Indonesia, as an eastern country with various ethnic cultures, has cultural norms that are strict in matters of dress. However, people often ignore these rules, especially the younger generation (loose). Not only religious norms but there are also religious rules governing dress.

The habit of the community and society in consuming cosplay not only has a significant impact on the social environment that supports the style of cosplay, but also has a broad influence on the development of the economy and the clothing industry in Indonesia. That also encourages the development of cosplay wrapped in local culture[8]. Aesthetics in cosplay is focused on clothing, the accessories attached to it, and the body itself. All artistic objects or events contain three basic aspects, namely form, content and appearance[9]. How is the suitability between the costumes, accessories and the cosplayer's body compared to the displayed figures? The cosplayers in presenting cosplays are not only based on "I like, I want," but also clash with their bodies. Is it compatible? Is it appropriate? Is the costume too small or too big? Does the face support the figure of the intended character? These are various things that are often considered by a cosplayer in cosplay. The problem of aesthetics or beauty is complex because beauty is not limited to the subject or the person who perceives it. Several studies on cosplay stated that costumes are the identity and self-concept of cosplay members, influenced by the social environment and those closest to them. Through the costumes, they try to appear to show a new identity that is different from the original identity of the cosplayer. Aesthetics or beauty is something complex because beauty is not limited to the subject or person experiencing it. Aesthetics is also related to observations from outsiders, where sometimes people interpret aesthetic forms differently due to factors such as cultural differences. The beauty in cosplay

and the many fans of Japanese culture make this popular culture spread worldwide. Through cosplay, the body also acts as a cultural agent.

Several studies on cosplay that are related to the topic of this research were researched by Negarawan and Doerjanto, who examined the making of cosplay costumes from the perspective of the field of art so that several visual representations of the elements in the costumes were found [10]. Suksmono examined visual hybridity due to cosplayers wearing hijabs[11, 12]. Setiawan examined the evolution of cosplay in Indonesian culture, which has resulted in a new change in cosplay clothing[12, 13]. These three studies form the basis for developing existing research results to become deeper and broader in scope. This research focuses on the aesthetic form that arises from the visual mix and match of costumes, accessories, and gestures played by cosplayers and the relationship between cosplay and body performance.

2   Research Method

This qualitative descriptive research uses observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Before conducting the interview, the informant filled out a questionnaire via the Google form. After that, it was followed by the interview stage. Interviews with 22 cosplayers who are members of the cosplay community in the Banyumas area. The average informant has been in cosplay for more than one year. The informant has been cosplaying for the longest time of nine years. The age range of the informants is 17-27, with an average student and student profession. Respondent data can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Respondent data

Category	Oty	%
Age		
≤20	10	45,5
21-25	10	45,5
≥26	2	9,1
Profession		
Students	12	54,5
Employee	6	27,2
Enterpriser	3	13,6
Housewife	1	4,54
How long have you been Cosplaying		
≤1	7	31,8
1-3	7	31,8

≥4	8	36,3
The tendencies of the characters played		
Princess	10	45,5
Warriors in anime, manga, and games	20	90,9
Local warrior	2	9,1
Disney character	2	9,1
Original character	7	31,8

In the table above, cosplay with warriors' costumes is a costume that is often displayed when doing cosplay. This costume can be an armor costume (a costume that looks solid/rigid, generally made of foam hearts, resin, or cardboard) or a cloth costume. In addition, they are sometimes also equipped with weapons.

3   Result And Discussion

The existence of cosplay costumes is often synonymous with uniqueness and an open style. It tends to be sexy, so sometimes it forms a certain view from a cosplayer's perspective, whether a woman or a man. From the questionnaires and interviews, the aesthetic form of the visual costume will be explained, the views of cosplayers on costumes and characters often found in various events, as well as the relationship of cosplay in body politics as an agent of Japanese culture.

3.1   Aesthetics: Costumes and Cosplayers

Aesthetics is a field of science that discusses beauty. Aesthetics is present in observation and enjoyment, which means it is a long process of interpretation from the experience of seeing and feeling certain art [13] . Japan itself has a concept to describe the aesthetic concept, namely *bigaku*. *Bigaku* concepts can be found in Japanese society. Some concepts in *bigaku* that are interpreted with beauty are *fuuryuu* (風流), *yuugen* (幽玄), *iki* (いき), *okashi* (おかし) [14]. In addition, there is also an aesthetic concept that refers to an appreciation for imperfection (*wabi-sabi*), appreciation for something that will disappear (*mono no aware*/もののあわれ), *youjo* (余剰), and *shibui* (渋い) where the concepts of *wabi*, *sabi*, *youjo*, and *shibui* tend towards simplicity[14]. Parker assumed that aesthetics is not only seen visually but explores in-depth social issues in a work of art along with its supporting complements [15]. Concerning clothing, the Heian period was one of the eras with clothing styles consisting of stacked layers and flashy colors, which became the identity of its beauty and luxury. This form of beauty is a form of beauty that has splendor and brilliance (*taketakakibi*). Also in cosplay costumes, characters are often dressed in layers, flashy colors, and various accessories that add to the uniqueness and beauty of the costume.

Cosplay costumes are made of cloth and non-fabric such as hard foam (EVA foam), foam mattresses, aluminum/brass, liquid latex–silicon, and various other materials, depending on the character costumes shown. Likewise, accessories follow. Between the costume and the accessories, it becomes a unified whole with aesthetic value. The different characters, so the different costumes used. Some are simple, glamorous, and strange, but whatever costume is used always has charm. Aesthetic forms associated with cosplay costumes and cosplayers include *fuuryuu, fuuga, yuugen, youen,* and *okashii*, all of which emphasize the beauty of elegance in simplicity, splendor, elegance, flexibility, and attractiveness. That can be seen in the shape of the design, color, and material used, which leads to the level of detail, complexity and simplicity. A cosplayer's costume appearance is also part of the aesthetic,how is the performance of cosplayers in presenting certain characters. Moreover, in cosplay costumes, many take characters from fantasy figures. Cosplayers do not just wear costumes that match the characters they play but present characters in the real world as an individual experience that is produced through the existence of costumes. A cosplayer is sometimes not only a walking model but also a costume maker, hair stylist, and makeup artist. No wonder a cosplayer who has been in the world of cosplay for a long time often offers services as a costume maker and a wig stylist. The stylist will make and remodel the wig by cutting it like in a salon and shaping it according to the character. Sometimes cosplayers who are less skilled in the stylish attributes of cosplayers will leave the matter to the experts. Usually, a community must have several costume makers and stylists.

3.2   Aesthetic Forms in Cosplay

The most striking aesthetic in cosplay is the design of the costume itself. As in Negarawan & Doerjanto's research, cosplay has visual elements: proportions, materials and techniques, simplicity, complexity, and color [10]. According to him, visuals have meaning. These visual elements will explain the aesthetic form of the costumes. However, it should be noted that each character has a unique costume design and aesthetic and has its community. As stated by Lotecki, cosplay is a genre that continues to grow with unique activities, aesthetics and community [16].

On average, from the results of interviews, cosplayers often display warrior characters in anime, manga, and games, around 90.9%. The respondents often present warrior costumes with complicated designs and are also somewhat open to some designs of cloth costumes, especially women's. Whereas for men most of them use Amour-type costumes and weapons. The more complicated the shape and material of the costume, the more it adds to the aesthetics of the costume. All respondents agreed that the complexity of the costumes, both in terms of design and materials used, is the first form of aesthetics that appears in cosplay costumes. They also consider the uniqueness and attractiveness of cosplay to come from the costumes and everything that attaches to the cosplayer's body, so they often impressed the audience. Several respondents mentioned that using costumes that look complicated, attractive, and popular figures will attract visitors to come over and take pictures together, compared

to cosplay using ordinary costumes such as daily clothes (such as Nobita). However, behind it all, the good look of a cosplayer is the most decisive, so it is not just the costumes but also the harmony between costumes, accessories, and makeup, where 80% of cosplayers agree with that. The remaining 20% answered because the characters being played were popular figures.

Besides being complicated, cosplay costumes also often use various striking colors. If you see a cosplayer walking, it is like seeing a rainbow walking. Color is one of the aesthetics in the costume and the hair color. Especially if the costume is a cloth with layers on each other (for example, Kagura's costume in Gintama, Mikazuki Munechika's in *Touken Ranbu*, and others). The striking dominant colors often present in costumes are red and gold. Red is synonymous with the fire element, symbolizing ambition, desire and aggression, while gold symbolizes wealth, prosperity and grandeur [17, 18]. For cosplayers who wear hijab, they replace the wig with a veil that is modified to look like a hairstyle. The color of the veil is also adjusted to the hair color of the character being played. There were 11 informants for cosplayers wearing hijab in this study, but only three informants (27.2%) always wore hijab when they were cosplaying. The three informants admitted they had more considerations than cosplayers who did not wear hijab. They have to think about how the costumes of non-hijab fictional characters can be kept alive in the performance of the body of a cosplayer who wears a hijab. For cosplayers wearing hijabs, the selection of characters and costumes that have been modified is made so as not to violate the ethics of dressing in Islam, and the way to wear the hijab is a reference in defending their beliefs. Although cosplay costumes tend to vary in color, some costumes do not have a lot of bright colors but only consist of black and white or dark colors and a little light color on the fabric ornaments (for example, Toshiro Hijikata in Gintama). Black is considered the grandest color, a symbol of formality in Japanese society, and depicts the element of air in Japanese Buddhism [17]

Furthermore, in the air element, there are meanings of wisdom, benevolence, and compassion [18, 19]. In addition, some costumes are simple, both in design and accessories. Even though it does not have a variety of flashy colors and a design that is not too complicated, or it can be said as a simple costume, it also has aesthetic value. Aesthetics are not just beauty that is depicted in colors and design complexity, but in Japanese culture, simplicity is part of aesthetics, namely *wabi*. Referring to Kôjien, *wabi* has several meanings, such as something to be sad and enjoy in a quiet life. *Wabi* as an aesthetic principle tends to be calm and free from worldly problems [19, 20]. The concept includes simplicity and naturalness, which is the teaching of Zen. If interpreted in simple terms, this concept embodies the values of simplicity, serenity, grace and imperfection. Apart from *wabi*, the Japanese also apply the philosophy of "*sabi*", which is a balance between design and decoration. That is often applied in the design of rooms where Japanese people live. This aesthetic concept is found in various Japanese cultures, such as in the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) with the *wabicha* style, which is a tea ceremony with simple facilities (rooms, equipment, etc) [20]; calligraphy (*shodou*) using the *sousho* style [21]; and literary works. Not all cosplay costumes impress with splendor and glamor, but some costumes, such as school uni-

forms, are displayed by the simplicity of design and color is part of the aesthetic. Other costumes include some of the characters in One Piece. From the results of the interviews, 52.3% of respondents stated that cosplay costumes tended to be glamorous, luxurious and elegant and half of them thought otherwise. From a technical and design point of view, cosplay costumes have several characteristics, including a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes, simple designs, colors that tend to be soft and calm, and the processing of materials or materials that are imperfect. Asymmetrical costume design is one of the Zen principles of *wabi-sabi* (*fukinsei*) aesthetics, for example, Tomioka's costume robe in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. Some figures also have motifs related to nature (*shizen*), such as flowers (Kibutsuji Muzan in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*), clouds (Akatsuki robes in Naruto, Tanjiro Kamado in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*), fire (*Hokage* robes in Naruto). Non-colourful colors with plain motifs show simplicity (*kanso*), such as Kirito's costume in Sword Art Online with a black robe, white stripe designs on several parts and Tokito's costume in *Kimetsu no Yaiba* with a black base color, white belt, and white stripes on the neck and left chest. Mix and match between costumes, accessories, makeup, and cosplayers are also part of the aesthetics of cosplay. This mix and match is a form of expression of the color of beauty itself (*youen*). The mix and match sometimes feel weird, funny, and complicated. Like Yami YuGi's colorful hair with a unique crest and Whitebeard character mustache in One Piece, which looks like a bull's horn.

In the world of cosplay, a cosplayer not only displays costumes and accessories but also must be able to carry the identity and spirit of the character being played. They must be able to become multi-talented actors/actresses to bring fictional characters to life within the cosplayer. Deepening of the character that will be played is needed by cosplayers. The close connection and sensitivity are like *mononoaware* thinking. A concept that is based on thoughts about sensitivity to objects or things around him that are one with him [22]. In all of the interview results, before deciding which character to play, all respondents will first study the character, costume design, accessories, body shape, and so on. They are necessary for harmony between the cosplayer and the character being played. The respondent thinks some people who wear costumes cannot be called true cosplayers. True cosplayers must be able to bring something fictional to life in reality. So that in cosplayers, often their identity sinks and creates another identity. The relationship between clothing and identity is that clothing is a marker to differentiate oneself as an individual and expresses one's unique form [2, 23]. As stated by one of the sources, originally, he was a talkative person, but when playing a character with a cold and reserved character, he would change himself to a cold and reserved mode. Besides that, it is also supported by the impression of makeup that accentuates the character's cold character. The harmonization between the cosplayer and the character being played becomes an aesthetic experience for the cosplayer himself as an individual. Besides that, during the cosplay competition activities, they also showed several scenes performed by characters in fictional worlds. In this competition activity, the harmony between costumes, accessories, makeup, performance moves, and gestures all become harmonious collaborations as the pinnacle of cosplay aesthetics.

Likewise, for cosplayers who cross-dress, they are more trying to look perfect. One of them is a female cosplayer who plays the role of Sanji in the One Piece anime. When asked to take a photo, she takes out a rolled-up paper that she thinks is like a cigarette and poses like someone who smokes, typical of the Sanji character. Sometimes, the cosplayers who cross-dress are often invisible to their sex when they are cross-dressing. Quoting from the opinion of clothing designer Elsa Schiaparelli, "It is not the clothes that adapt to the human body, but the body that adapts to the clothes." [[2]. That is also realized in cosplay. In the world of cosplay, the meaning of costumes and bodies is even deeper because cosplayers adapt not only their bodies to the costumes but also to the characters they play. Feelings of pleasure, contentment, comfort, strong happiness and make one feel glued, moved, and fascinated and create a desire to feel that feeling again, even though have enjoyed it many times are part of the aesthetic itself [9]. That feeling is what cosplayers feel when they perform. Self-satisfaction as an individual and satisfaction as part of the cosplay and weeaboo communities.

3.3   Cosplay and Body Politics

According to the etymology, cosplay consists of the words 'costume' and 'play', which means playing in costume, cosplay is closely related to the body. The term cosplay itself describes fandom costumes where individuals will wear fictional character costumes [16]. In cosplay activities, cosplayers usually participate in competitions (cosplay performers) or wear costumes to enliven an event, interact, and take pictures (cosstreet). Cosplay's position in society as a participatory culture facilitates social and community interaction. Cosplayers use their temporary identity to negotiate between reality and fiction, stereotypes and public perceptions of cosplay. Everything a cosplayer does cannot be separated from body performance when a cosplayer negotiates his identity because it relates to what his body is performing. In cosplay, identity becomes a fluid tool for negotiating, communicating, interacting, and satisfying one's desire for pleasure, "displaying", "concealing", and even "faking" are ways of working identities that are often used in real life [24], and that is what happens in the world of cosplay. According to one of the respondents who often plays the original character from her imagination, she completely loses his true identity, character, and behavior. Even does not want to mention her real name.

Costume and body become one unit which is used as a tool to show self-identity and body control. The body is like a power-controlled machine. The body is disciplined and controlled for certain interests. The body is not a single entity, so it is not only interpreted physically, but also becomes a subject representing one's existence through experience, knowledge, and awareness [25]. In popular culture, the role of the body is very prominent; even the body is always scrutinized, reconstructed, politicized, supervised, and even regulated. In cosplay, the body is controlled as a cultural agent through the character played. When acting as a figure from Japan, a cosplayer is a cultural agent from Japan; when taking on a local figure, cosplayers are also agents of a certain ethnicity. Nothing is meaningless when someone in any profession acts.

The body becomes a commodity in the economic, political and cultural arenas [26]. Because of that reason, the body becomes a fertile field for ideology, hegemony and self-image from outside itself. Likewise, in cosplay, even though it is a means of channeling hobbies, pleasure, and getting satisfaction, behind it all, their bodies are communicating in culture. There are no more boundaries, and all merge into active and productive cultural agents. Many things benefit from the popularity and increasing public interest in cosplay, including capitalism. In the economic arena, cosplay costume manufacturing is becoming a lucrative business field as the popular culture industry grows, especially manga, anime, and games. Cosplay performances and competitions are also often held in various Japanese events and filling activities at promotional events. For cosplayers, cosplay events are places to channel their hobbies and show another side of themselves that is hidden (95%). However, it is undeniable that respondents also perceive cosplayer events as fashion shows (72%). Very rarely or never, a cosplay event is empty of fans. All respondents stated that all the events they had participated in were always full of spectators and asked them to take pictures. Through cosplay, the outside community is also familiar with Japanese culture, so the Japanese government does not have to bother introducing Japan because cosplayers, as cultural agents, have done it.

The variety of characters shown, the variety of costume designs, and the variety of hairstyles and other accessories open up opportunities for "promotion" for capitalists, fetishists, artists, and others. The body is formed, dressed, and arranged through cosplay to do what individuals and society want solely for self-satisfaction. In the respondents' opinion, 40.9% thought that the cosplay event was one of the places to look for a spectacle full of beauty and sexiness. Some even misuse the cosplayer event for actions that lead to pornography, as stated by one respondent. That is probably related to the tendency of the costumes worn by cosplayers. Judging from the tendency of the costumes that are often used, 50% wore costumes that tended to be open in the chest area and around it, 31.8% wore costumes that tended to be open in the thigh-to-toe area, 13.6% wore closed costumes, 4.5% wore costumes that exposed the chest area, legs, and also the stomach. From the questionnaire results, 63.6% of cosplayers felt uncomfortable and insecure when wearing revealing and considered vulgar costumes in society. In comparison, 22.7% sometimes felt this way, and the remaining 13.6% said they never felt uncomfortable wearing sexy costumes and vulgar in cosplay activities.Cosplayers are vulnerable to inappropriate actions from the audience or even fellow cosplayers because of the costumes used,that was told by several respondents who had personal experiences and experiences from fellow cosplayers. Usually, to prevent unpleasant incidents, they will take photos together with other cosplayers and audiences, warning those who request photos not to touch their bodies. However, some cosplayers make concessions to the audiences and are allowed to take skin-to-skin photos but at a reasonable level (not touching the chest area), according to some respondents.

Cosplayers are required to be able to present fictional characters in a tangible form, sometimes some cosplayers innovate either by adding or subtracting costumes

or accessories in tiny portions. That is because there are no accessories, the costume's shape is too open, too big or too small (usually if the rental costume), and because of religious factors. 90% of respondents often wear costumes that match the characters being sung. The details of the clothes, ornaments, accessories, and hairstyles are identical. In contrast, the rest admitted that there are several different parts. For example, cosplayers who wear headscarves will change their hair with modifications to their headscarves and add cloth to cover parts that feel open. In this space, the body negotiates with the community, hobbies, and audience members. For cosplayers wearing hijab, these negotiations have struggles and strong considerations. The truth is that body politics are not always practiced by agencies or those who have power, but individuals also practice body politics.

4   Conclusion

The body carries organs, senses, and body attributes, all of which are social and sometimes their ownership is questioned. Cosplay is a world of fandom where the costume is one of its identities. Cosplay costumes have an aesthetic that lies in the complexity and simplicity of design, shape and color, the mix and match of costumes-accessories-make up, and the harmonization of the cosplayer's movements and character with the characters played. In the relationship between cosplay and body politics, it is found that costumes and bodies are used to show self-identity, body control, and cultural agents. The body is formed, dressed, and arranged through cosplay to do what individuals and society want solely for self-satisfaction. Although as a means of channeling hobbies, pleasure, and getting satisfaction, behind it all, their bodies are communicating in culture. There are no more boundaries, and all merge into active and productive cultural agents.

Acknowledgments

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