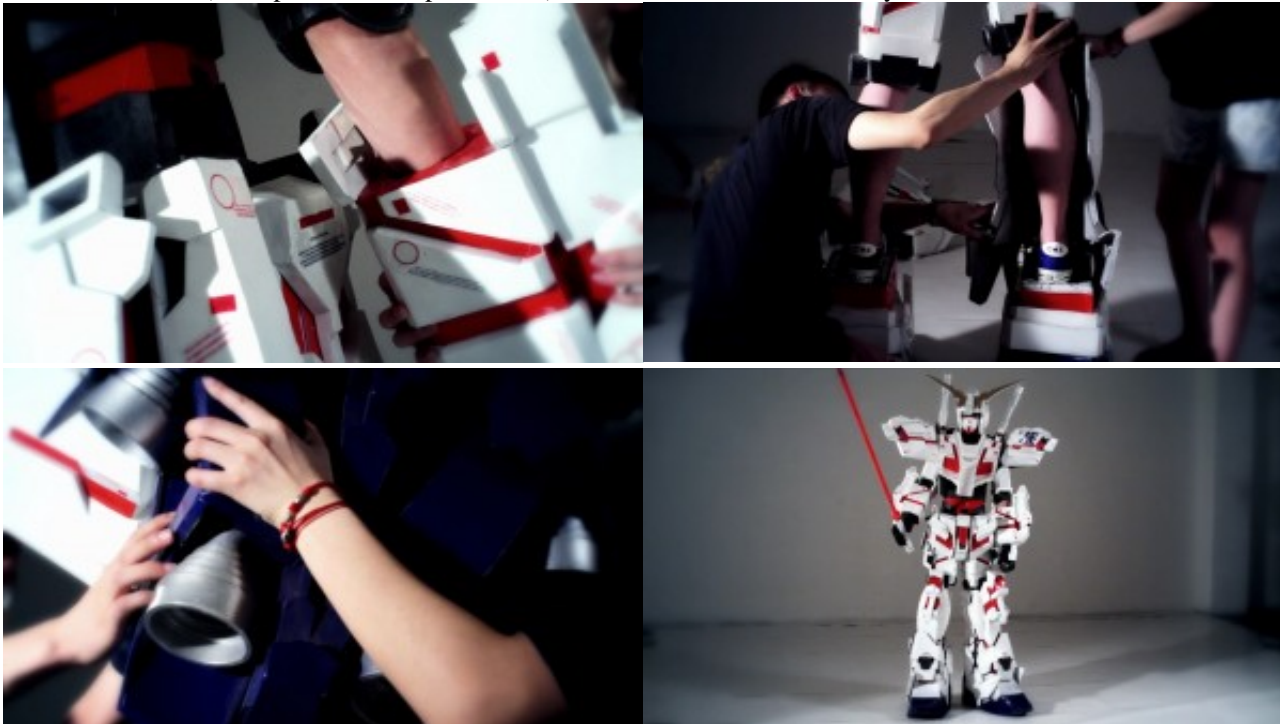

COSPLAY — EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

"What is society? I have answered: Society is imitation"^[1] Gabriel Tarde The text you are about to read accompanies an artistic research project that belongs to a wider investigation into the complex field of relations between theoretical and artistic production. Thus it seems necessary to clarify its status in relation to the works of art produced during the research process. When the American chemist Homer Adkins states, that "basic research is like shooting an arrow in the air, and, where it lands, painting a target"^[2], the importance of action within a field of serendipity in relationship to the capability to contextualise potential outcomes is clarified. If we translate this statement in order to understand what research could mean in the area of the arts, arrow and bow are not just any off-the-shelf items, but they have been carefully carved out of a myriad of stylistic and technological possibilities through continuous practice over time, involving numerous institutions, from art academies to museums, as well as people, from teachers over peers to heterogenous audiences. The potential flight of the arrow is already influenced by these inherent qualities, notwithstanding whether one wants to describe them from a sociological, an art historical, or any other perspective. "Painting the target" is the process of generating a context for this practice, and in the specific case of research in Fine Art this can take place in a number of areas, such as diverse forms of presentations, exhibitions, discussions as well as texts. On the one hand, many questions and ideas that will subsequently be discussed would not have emerged without "shooting the arrow", namely the hands on experience of an approach guided by the making of art, on the other hand, the perspective towards the subject in question was already deeply embedded in a web of theoretical discourses stemming from various academic disciplines. When it comes to "painting the target" it is important to note that the full breadth of the investigation at hand cannot be captured by relying on the target ring of written text alone. Thus it is necessary to experience the different media works which represent the bull's eye of this undertaking in order to gain access to a fuller picture. In this sense, the exhibition resulting from this research project, which is also documented in this book, attempted to develop a context for the different threads of research. The intense discussions about the possibilities and potential pitfalls of research in the arts that unfolded among the participants in this project has deeply influenced my personal understanding of what it means to work in such a minefield of overlapping contexts and histories. At the beginning of the project, I tried to keep the contexts of what I imagined as "scientific" separate from those guiding my artistic practice, which amounted to believing in the narrative of a "neutral" rigor of science versus the idea of free development through art. However, over the course of the duration of this project I slowly began to realise the futility of such oppositions, and began to embrace a different understanding of what it means to do research: to phrase and rephrase questions in all areas of expression that are available to human industriousness, with and for others, who do the same. During an artist residency^[3] in Chengdu, China between 1.10.2010 and 10.01.2011, I came in contact with local forms of "cosplay" and became interested in this specific cultural phenomenon. In earlier art projects I had approached issues related to global media culture, from players of video and computer games to the appropriation of the unique knowledge emerging from fan communities. In many of my latest videoworks I tried to find out more about the way people actively participate in a global consumer culture represented by franchises such as Harry Potter, Pokémon or the World of Warcraft Online game. All of these "narratives" are global brands, translated into different languages and characterised by what Henry Jenkins calls *convergence culture*. They materialise across many different forms of media, from books to toys, clothes, TV and Web series, films and digital games. They have become important streams of revenue for global entertainment corporations aggressively protecting their ownership through copyrights. Although it is the introduction of digital media that has increasingly allowed consumers to take a more active role in the production of content. They merely use these narratives as a starting point for their own contributions, ranging from appropriation over remixes to unique and complex productions of games and films for example. This shifting role of consumers and the struggle of the rightsholders and capital to stay in control of the economic values generated by the process represents a cultural transformation with huge political as well as aesthetical implications. Like many other artists, such as *Mark Leckey*, *Pierre Huyghe*^[4] or *Jeremy Deller*, for example, I am fascinated by this glacial transformation of our cultural environment and I understand my works as probes inserted into this dynamic field. Seen from this perspective, the practice of cosplay appears as a specific form of cultural appropriation that is fed by corporate entertainment but, on the other hand, generates islands of communality allowing people to invest their imagination and creative powers. I had come across images of cosplayers before, partly due to my fascination with different forms of game culture, and as well through the photographic work of the Chinese artist *Cao Fei*,^[5] who worked with cosplayers in Shanghai. Cosplayers are fans of mainly Japanese Manga comics, Anime films and computer games who "spend immeasurable monies and hours constructing or purchasing costumes, learning signature poses and dialogue, and performing at conventions and parties, as they transform themselves from "real world" identities into chosen (fictional) characters"^[6]. The term "cosplay" as well as its Japanese counterpart "kosepurei", which stand short for costumed play, seem to originate from a 1984 article by

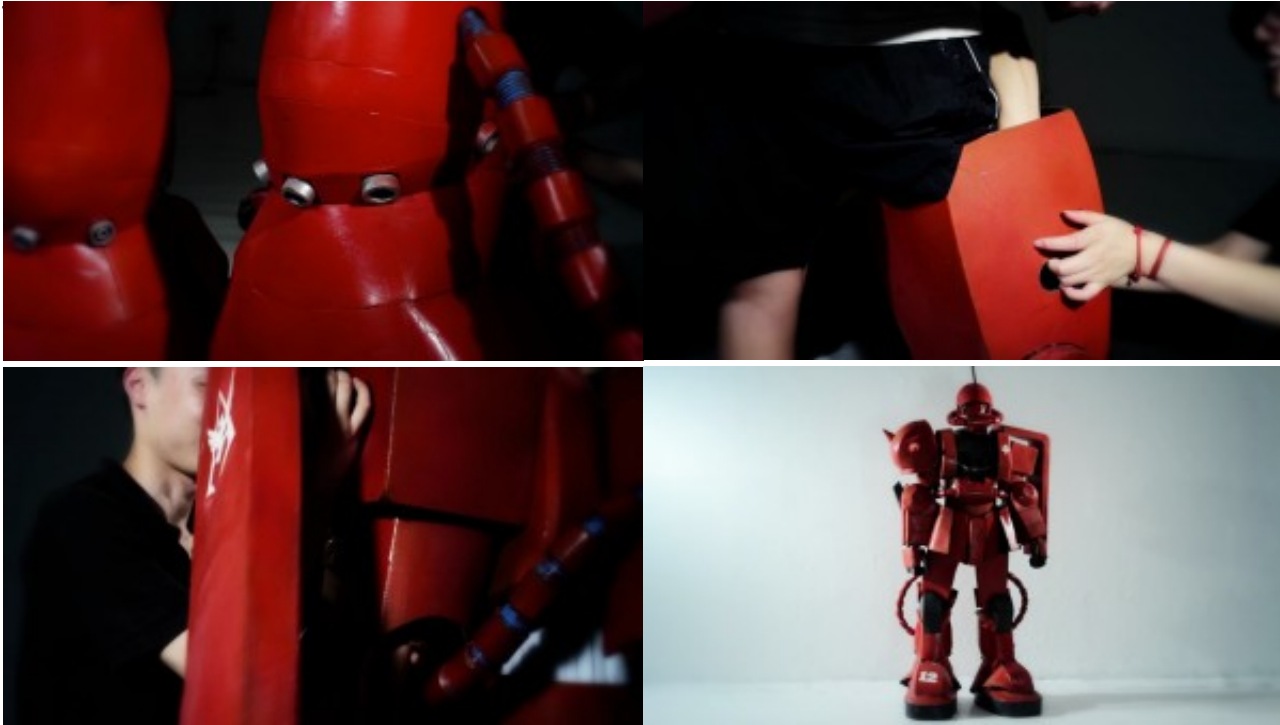
Takahashi Nobuyuki^[7] which was published in reaction to his attendance of the World Con Science Fiction convention in Los Angeles^[8]. Since the 1980s cosplay has spread across the globe to the U.S.A. and Europe as well as most Asian countries in the form of conventions, clubs, magazines as well as innumerable websites. My encounter with the Chinese version of cosplay in cities like Chengdu and Chongqing raised a number of issues that I would like to touch upon briefly here. Cosplay has become a global phenomenon, that crossed national barriers in the wake of the astonishing international impact of the Japanese entertainment industry over the last 30 years, often referred to as “Cool Japan”.^[9] Especially during the last decade, Japanese Animation in the form of comics, films and games has become a significant export good for the Japanese economy. What happens when such a cultural product, which undoubtedly carries many local characteristics, becomes accessible to fans on a global scale? Cosplayers are often organised in communities, which produce and disseminate specialised knowledge related to in-depth accounts of the cultural products (comics, films and games) they are affected by. At the same time, those that craft their own costumes rather than buying ready-made ones gain a highly specific knowledge through the obstacles they encounter during the production process. Jiwohn Ahn asserts that “cosplay is a *physical* practice, performed more solidly here and now, through the laborious transformation of their bodies, which are the signifiers of a symbolically built, disciplinary utopia, inspired by transnational media consumption uniquely pervasive in the current culture.”^[10] In this sense I regard cosplay as a specific performance of knowledge which is inseparable from social and communal facets, namely a form of embodied knowledge. Accordingly, a very important question for me was: how could it be possible to extract, translate and display some of the meaning ingrained in these forms of knowledge without entirely cutting the connection it maintains with aspects of live performance, media and the social reality of its coming into being? In other words, how could I approach this task without reproducing exotic clichés of otherness as they re-appear in what Henry Jenkins has referred to as “pop- cosmopolitanism”, when he writes, “the pop cosmopolitan walks a thin line between dilettantism and connoisseurship, between orientalist fantasies and a desire to honestly connect and understand an alien culture, between assertion of mastery and surrender to cultural difference.”^[11] In relation to the aims of the larger research framework of *Troubling Research*, I believe it is possible to position cosplay as a practice which could serve to pinpoint some of the problematic issues arising from current forms of the encounter between fine art and research practice. Here, I think it is precisely the intertwined forms of knowing and making which take place in a clearly demarcated social sphere, resulting in the generation of meaning that is worthy of further consideration. Another important issue is that the appropriation of copyrighted characters, a central requisite of cosplay, points towards the politically increasingly complex area of conflict between forms of immaterial property rights and contemporary culture. Lastly, it is the process of transformation from a branded product into an individual rendition, on one level, and, simultaneously, that from individual subject to idealised fictional character (often part machine, part animal) that I wish to account for in my research.



White

Transformer, Axel Stockburger (2011) HD Video, 7 min. **Global Culture** William Gibson, the famous science fiction writer, once wrote about the specifics of Japanese fan culture: “Understanding otaku-hood, I think, is one of the keys to

understanding the culture of the web. There is something profoundly post-national about it, extra- geographic.”[\[12\]](#) According to a video interview[\[13\]](#) I conducted with the Century Noah group of cosplayers in Chongqing, their access to the films and games they selected their characters from, was largely gained through Internet sources, from online games, over peer to peer networks to blogs and official websites. The Internet is also their medium of choice when it comes to the presentation of photos and videos from their productions and shows. The Century Noah characters I filmed in this project were derived from the Japanese *Gundam* series and the online game *World of Warcraft* (WoW). The building block for the *Gundam*[\[14\]](#) science fiction universe that revolves around a number of giant robots was laid by the Japanese animator *Yoshiyuki Tomino*, along with a group of *Sunrise* creators who used the collective pseudonym *Hajime Yatate* in 1979 with the *Gundam Mobile Suit* TV series. Since then the Gundam universe has grown into a massive international entertainment franchise that has spawned a large number of TV series, films, comics, digital games and toys, which are manufactured by the Bandai company as *Gunpla* (Gundam Plastic Models). In 2008 the Gunpla Characters held 90% of the Japanese plastic toy market and the Gundam trademark had developed into a 50 billion yen franchise with an international fan community. Interestingly, Gundam has also led to the inception of an Academic institution dedicated to its study in the form of the *International Gundam Society* that was formed in 2008. The other source of characters was the massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (WoW),[\[15\]](#) which was launched by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004 and developed out of the Warcraft single player games first appearing in 1994. In 2011 WoW had become the largest game on the market with over 12 million international subscribers[\[16\]](#) paying an average of 15 Dollars per month[\[17\]](#), resulting in a growing number of related fan activities including cosplay. The Century Noah group managed to raise the interest of Blizzard’s China representatives when they showed their range of costumes based on the franchise at Shanghai’s 2009 *China Joy Cosplay Convention*. Century Noah accessed these global entertainment franchises exclusively via the Internet since the Gundam TV series are not broadcast on Chinese TV channels. Furthermore, the majority of members I interviewed were actively playing the WoW game which, in some cases, had led to a strong identification with their personal in-game Avatars. Century Noah’s cosplay thus maintains a strong relationship with forms of digital media which are appropriated, adapted and transferred into a different medium, namely the production and presentation of elaborate costumes. Clearly these forms of presentation have strong ties to forms of performance or even theatre, although the masks and costumes are clearly deemed of higher importance than the performance itself. This process of translation reverberates with Bolter and Grusin’s notion of remediation, namely, “the representation of one medium in another”,[\[18\]](#) which, in their conception, usually occurs when a new media technology “appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real.”[\[19\]](#) In this sense cosplay could be seen as a specific form of remediation, leading from digital media such as computer games and digital animation films towards embodied performance. The unique patterns of this “refashioning” share some of the global characteristics of cosplay culture but they also display unique local aspects. Jiwon Ahn presents a detailed discussion of the processes related to the different local receptions of Japanese Animation that manifest themselves in a variety of contemporary audience practices.[\[20\]](#) In a chapter dedicated to contemporary forms of cosplay in Japan and the U.S., cosplay is described “as a communicative practice that exemplifies a new modality of cultural consumption oriented towards experimenting with alternative identities that are both cosmopolitan and culturally specific at the same time”[\[21\]](#). It is precisely this intersection between “global” communication, depending on a “cosmopolitan” framework, which is constructed through global entertainment industry channels, and its local appropriation and feedback suggesting cultural specificities that makes the practice of cosplay so interesting as a model for transcultural flows in global popular culture. To give an example that might serve to illustrate certain aspects of cultural difference: During my interview, several of the Century Noah cosplayers described their fascination with the fact that U.S. and European cosplayers seem to have a less restricted relationship between their individual body shapes and those of their chosen characters, making it possible for a flabby person to impersonate a muscular character. While the Chinese cosplayers all agreed that they would never choose to embody a character who does not correlate with their physical appearance, nor would they add new elements to the character’s costume. They also expressed a kind of envy towards the presumed freedom they perceived in the U.S. and European cosplay context. This subtle difference seems to hint at the different attitudes cosplayers might harbour towards the identification with their characters in different locales, namely different approaches to identification and forms of parody. Another important issue concerning the local manifestations of cosplay are differences in access and pricing of various materials, such as cloth and a plastics for the costume production. The Century Noah cosplayers made it quite clear that the availability of cheap plastics, such as different forms of PVC, were an important prerequisite for their production. In any case, cosplay is part of a global popular culture sphere that nevertheless displays highly idiosyncratic local manifestations.



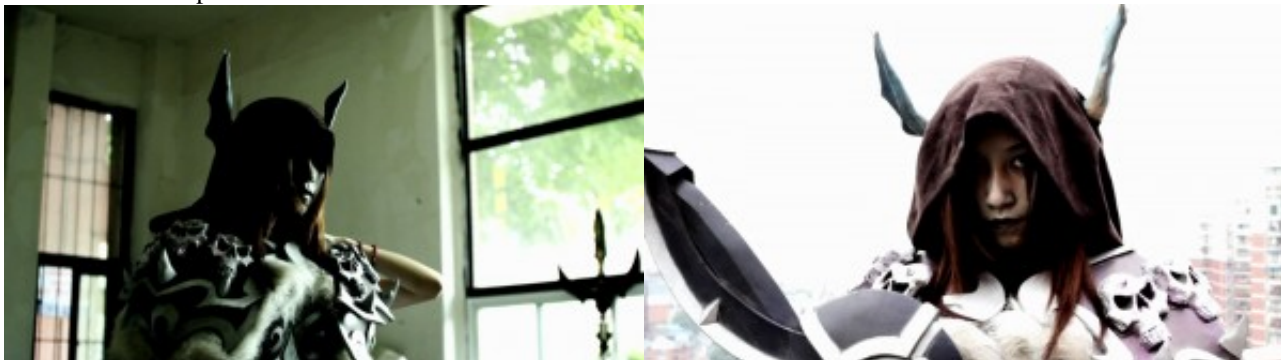
Red

Transformer, Axel Stockburger (2011) HD Video, 8 min. **Identification** If we follow Henry Jenkins observation that, “more and more, storytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work, or even a single medium”[22], it could be argued that the process of identification connected to the cosplay practice asserts its influence on three different levels. Firstly, there exists an identification with the “narrative universe”, the meta-structure, such as Gundam or WoW, with all the narrative, behavioural and aesthetic rules manifested throughout various forms of media. On a second level, the cosplayers select particular characters from within these narrative universes. On a third level, identification also points towards the community of fans itself, as Susan J. Napier asserts: “Identification in Fan culture can be more than simply identification with the desired Other. It can also include identifying with the world of fandom itself, or more specifically, the sense of community that the world of fandom promises.”[23] This observation reverberates with the fact that members of Century Noah repeatedly emphasized the community aspects of their undertaking. Decisions concerning the choice of narrative universe, characters to be built and individual performers were largely arrived at through a democratic process by the group. Here, the communitary sense seemed to trump individual forms of identification with specific characters. At this point it is sensible to take a closer look at the sources of identification, or the metastructures at play. Since the universes of Gundam as well as WoW are populated by animated characters it is necessary to briefly consider the characteristics of Animation. Sergei Eisenstein, who was fascinated by Walt Disney’s work, noted that “the very idea, if you will, of an animated cartoon (animation: literally, a drawing brought to life) is practically a direct manifestation of the method of animism. Whether the momentary endowment of life and soul of an inanimate object, which we retain from the past, for example, when we bump into a chair and swear as if it were a living thing, or the prolonged endowment with life that primitive man confers upon inanimate nature.”[24] This literal relationship between instilling drawing with a life of its own through cartoon animation and forms of animism, which was also scrutinised by a number of contributions to Anselm Franke’s exhibition project *Animism*, can be positioned as a starting point for the discussion of the specific forms of identification in cosplay. Most importantly there exist no “real world” referents for the characters being performed, thus these forms of cosplay differ significantly from other forms of fan tribute performances[25], such as the impersonation of popstars or Hollywood personalities, or even the Star Trek and Star Wars Fan communities in so far as they are based on live action cinema. Edwin Carels writes, “if cinema creates illusions — where there is still a reference to the real world — animation produces hallucinations. It consists of a fantasy universe with no necessary connections to reality, apart from the reality of the projection machine, and the physiological capacity of the viewer to recognize and respond to mimetic motion on a screen.”[26] This “physiological capacity” for a response to mimetic motion is even taken further in the medium of the computer game, where the link between player and animated Avatar has to be regarded as a novel form of mediated embodiment. To put it differently, the motions and gestures which are characteristic of specific characters are not only perceived on screen but also initiated by and connected to the player’s body in a continuous feedback loop. Thus if a player decides to mimic and embody an Avatar from a game he or she has played, a

very specific form of “bodily” identification has already been initiated in the digital realm. In my interviews this process was described as “stepping out of the game into the real world to make the character feel even stronger”, which could be interpreted as a deliberate transition from a “weaker” form of embodiment to one that is perceived as “stronger”, because it involves the whole body rather than just the fingers on the keyboard and mouse. Furthermore, as Susan Napier clarifies, “it is also of paramount significance that these characters are cartoons — caricatures and fantasy creations existing in a separate dimension from the real and even from the human. Anime costume play gives the fans the opportunity to transcend the limitations of human bodies, to explore new frontiers where the genetic inheritance with which one was born can be cast away. At it’s best, Anime cosplay suggests a world that is almost the opposite of the one delineated in Homi Babha’s analysis — a world in which one is finally liberated from the power dynamics of race, sex, gender, and nationality and even of the species. That this is a fantasy world cannot be emphasised enough, but it is probably no accident that at a time when national and ethnic concerns seem to be growing more and more oppressive, a countermovement toward emancipation from these very concerns should appear as well”.^[27] Although I believe that this is a very important observation, the notion of “cross-play”^[28] namely the reversal of gender during cosplay, suggests that the dynamics of gender still play an important role in this practice. For example, a female member of Century Noah told me in detail about her experience of cosplaying male fantasy characters from different narrative universes. She addressed the issue that it took her a considerate amount of time to practice forms of movement to qualify as “male” and went into more detail on how to wield a sword in an assertive and believable fashion. In the interview, she particularly describes the sense of pleasure she experienced during a cosplay convention as a result of being perceived as a male warrior character by the audience. In the case of Gundam cosplay, identification is directed towards anthropomorphic robot characters that provide a kind of exoskeleton which seems to offer a temporary sensation of heightened power as well as security. However, notwithstanding other reasons for gaining pleasure from the cosplay experience, the ultimate goal and yardstick that is applied by performers and audiences alike is always the quality of similitude between the fictional media character and the actualised performance version. Jiwohn Ahn writes, “although this is a highly ambiguous concept, “to cosplay perfect”, cosplayers seem to have specific criteria such as “perfectly copied” details of costumes and props, mimetic accuracy in posing and facial expression, proximity between the cosplayer’s physique and that of the character, overall believability, etc. which all reflect the cosplayer’s encyclopedic knowledge of the show and the character embodied through cosplay”.^[29] A Century Noah cosplayer referred to a successful performance of a character as something “almost magic, because the audience might not know how such costumes are produced, so they might think that the character has literally just stepped out of the computer game onto the stage”. The “magic” illusion described in this event depends entirely on the cosplayer’s capability to observe, construct and maintain similarities between the fictional character



and his costumed performance.





Queen Transformer, Axel Stockburger (2011) HD Video, 17 min.

Mimicry During my continuous filming I became more and more fascinated with the cosplayers obsessive aim to truly resemble the characters on screen down to the finest detail. Walter Benjamin wrote, “nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man’s. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role.”^[30] In the practice of Anime cosplay the “mimetic faculty” can be regarded as a central driving force. One need not reach out as far as Gabriel Tarde, who based his entire conception of the social on the interplay between imitation and invention, to realise the enormous impact of the mimetic on human culture. Mimesis was a key concept in the earliest discourses about aesthetics and representation, from Plato and Aristotle up to the 19th century, and served as a vehicle for discussing the relationship between the artificial and the natural. Since I do not have the time nor space to delve deeper into the history of this enormously fruitful concept, I would like to focus on those dimensions that correspond directly with cosplay. Roger Caillois defines specific forms of play as “mimicry. All play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game; in-lusio), then at least of a closed, conventional, and at least in certain aspects, imaginary universe. Play can consist not only of deploying actions or submitting to one’s fate in an imaginary milieu but of becoming an illusory character oneself, and so behaving”.^[31] In order to gain a better understanding of the channel between the imaginary universe with its ludic rules and the individual presentation of the cosplayer, I decided to turn towards Michael Taussig’s reading of mimesis, which positions it as “the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power.”^[32] Taussig’s account of the intercultural relationship represented by the Cuna indians appropriation of Western images and commodities for their traditional clothing makes it possible to understand the complex sensual interconnection between different symbolic domains. On the basis of this analysis he points out that “[t]he fundamental move of the mimetic faculty is taking us bodily into alterity”.^[33] Although this is also true in the case of the cosplay phenomenon, it is important to reiterate here that the reference pools (Gundam, WoW) are neither natural, nor forms of cultural representation that could be identified on national or territorial levels, but global fantasy universes. Thus in these cases, alterity does not emerge on the level of intercultural (post-)colonial relations, as in Taussig’s example, but on a different plane of meaning. In cosplay, the mimetic faculty is already turned towards and fed by second nature, which gives us a precise rendering of how alterity presents itself in the face of contemporary global media. To a certain extent, here lies the key to my artistic interest in this phenomenon. Most of my artistic work engages with global popular culture because I am convinced that it offers sources of identification and participation that reach beyond the grid of ethnic and territorial cultural roots. Furthermore, the Cosplayers of Century Noah all emphasized the collective dimension of their undertaking that allowed them to step out of their usual environments and relations for a brief period of time. In this sense the collective cosplay experience can be understood as a *liminoid phenomenon*, occupying the threshold between ordinary life and fantasy universe in the sense of Victor Turner’s definition: “Liminoid phenomena may be collective but are more characteristically individual products though they often have collective or 'mass-' effects. They are not cyclical but continuously generated, though in the times and places apart from work settings assigned to 'leisure' activities”.^[34] The portal leading towards this liminoid realm is quite literally the transformation from ordinary human into fantasy character — namely, putting on the mask and costume. This is why the processes that accompany this transformation became increasingly important for my artistic work. I decided to stage and film the complex procedures involved in dressing and applying make-up, which frequently involved a group of people frantically working on one individual. This work resulted in the three different video pieces, *Red Transformer*, *White Transformer* and *Sylvanas Transformer*, which are essentially behind the scenes accounts of the shift between ordinary world and fantasy universe. All of these videos highlight the subtle care and precision that enable the process of turning into something Other. Furthermore, although one could

attempt to describe these transformations with text, a precisely shot video that focuses on small details, such as the opening and closing of fixtures on the costumes or the careful application of colour to different body parts, and delivers the subliminal choreography of these actions is far better suited to conveying what is at stake.



I AM, Axel Stockburger (2010), HD Video, 5 min. **Copyright** Cosplay is a perfect example for the rise of participatory culture in the wake of sociocultural and technological developments that have enabled fans of products provided by the entertainment industry to appropriate, subvert and present adaptations thereof. As is well known, beginning with remix culture in the last century, these practices sparked an explosion of different cultural forms: from game modification, fan-fiction videos and films via music to fan translations. At the same time rightsholders and exploiters of popular trademarked culture have attempted to find new ways of maintaining control over their assets in the form of intellectual property rights. This situation has led to an ongoing battle, sometimes referred to as the copyright crisis that manifests itself in a succession of legal disputes. Fans of Anime and computer games, who display their affection by translating and embodying these texts are building alternative systems of producing social meaning through the repurposing of cultural products provided by the entertainment industry. Thus, their, as well as my own artistic practice which represents another layer of appropriation, is in principle positioned in opposition to the current copyright regimes and challenges the idea of “intellectual property”. Who owns the encyclopedic knowledge produced and maintained by fans that is in turn embodied and performed within the cosplay community? What does it mean to mimic the trademarked products down to the tiniest details? Siva Vaidhyanathan asserts that “copyright should be about policy, not property. ... You cannot “steal” an idea, a style, a “look and feel”. These things are the raw material of the next move in literature, art, politics, or music. And using someone’s idea does not diminish its power. There is no natural scarcity of ideas and information. To enrich democratic speech and foster fertile creativity, we should avoid the rhetorical traps that spring up when we regard copyright as “property” instead of policy. We must also rediscover, reinvent, and strengthen the idea-expression dichotomy. And we will be able to have a more informed public discussion about the purpose and scope of copyright.”^[35] Inadvertently, the seemingly innocent creative approach taken by cosplayers towards cultural artefacts they love and cherish thus sheds light on one of the most pressing political issues in a capitalist economy characterised by the rise of the production of immaterial goods. In a similar vein, Inke Arns writes, “appropriating art that speaks about culture by referring to cultural artefacts and deploying found aesthetic material will only be able to continue to come into being if in the future too it is assured that sufficient allowance is made for the democratic rights of participation (of consumers, but of originators, too!) alongside the justified economic interests of originators and exploiters”.^[36]



Screenshots, *Century Noah Interview*, Axel Stockburger (2011) HD Video, 45 min. **Knowledge** Finally, I would like to address the issue of knowledge production in relation to the cosplay community and my artistic approach to the subject. As I have mentioned before, the fan knowledge can be called encyclopedic in the sense that it is aimed at producing and collecting as much information as possible about the narrative universe they are targeting. This information can be intra-diegetic in the sense that it concerns the qualities, relationships and histories of entities within the narrative universe, as well as extra-diegetic when issues related to authors, technologies, legal frameworks or similar matters are noted. I became particularly interested in intradiegetic lists, charts and diagrams. In a certain sense, a list of character names from an online game manages to distil information from the game that is clearly only important for the initiated. Another aspect that interested me from an artistic standpoint was the poetic dimension of “fantasy” naming conventions, since they often display roots in Latin and Greek or appropriate well-known names from religious and mythological sources. I decided to use these types of lists as material for a series of text pieces produced with Laser and CNC technology entitled *World eater*. By appropriating names in such a manner, the resulting works of art are readable on two levels: they directly address the fans of the respective narrative universe, those who are in possession of the specific knowledge, but for the larger section of the audience that is confronted with them for the first time the names are still accessible as forms of sound poetry. Through this operation, specific collections of knowledge/meaning are turned into aesthetic forms in their own right, while the issue of demarcated islands of knowledge within larger communities of the uninitiated, which seems to become ever more important with the rise of digital culture, is foregrounded. To put it more precisely, using such lists makes it possible to highlight the borders of audience and fan groups that make up the knowledge economy. Lastly, to appropriate names in such a blunt and direct way targets the aforementioned problem of intellectual property by raising the issue of the extent to which words (especially those based on old languages or mythologies) could or should be copyrighted. In closing, I would like to re-emphasize my proposition that the cosplay I witnessed — and filmed as part of my artistic work — literally amounts to a kind of embodied knowledge. Namely, a form of knowledge that is produced within the community of fans and becomes meaningful in the very act of the performance. I am deeply convinced that the notion of “artistic research” that was so thoroughly scrutinised by the members of the Troubling Research team precisely designates such forms of knowledge, where meaning is embodied within communities through processes of en-acting and doing. Similarly, as I have tried to point out in my brief discussion of copyrights, a key question that hovers above all these undertakings is how this kind of knowledge is positioned in relation to endeavours of commercial appropriation and economic exploitation.

[1] Gabriel Tarde, *The Laws of Imitation*, trans. Clews Parsons (New York: Elsie, H. Holt and Company, 1903), 74, [\(20 July 2010\)](#). [2] Homer Atkins, *Nature* 312 (1984): 212. [3] [The residency was funded by the bm:ukk](#). [4] Amy J. Elias, “The Narrativity of Postconvergent Media: No Ghost Just a Shell and Rirkrit Tiravanija’s (ghost reader C.H.)”, *SubStance (Special Issue: Graphic Narratives and Narrative Theory, eds. David Herman and Jared Gardner)* 40.1 (2011): 182-202. [5] Cao Fei, *Journey, Catalogue, Frac-Ile-de-France / Le Plateau & Vitamin Creative Space*, (2009). [6] Theresia Winge,

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