
The Eye of the Beholder

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Abstract

Costume Roleplaying (cosplay) is an activity that many people take part in to show their love for Japanese animation (anime) and video games. This is typically done in conventions (cons) that allow people to gather from across the world to express and share their love and passion for these elements of Japanese culture. During the convention, though, the attendees of the convention don't engage and interact with cosplayers beyond a simple photo opportunity. It is my goal to be able to create a design that will help to bring these groups of people to appreciate and celebrate the efforts of cosplayers. This paper describes the research and design conducted as part of my Capstone for Indiana University in the fall semester of 2009 to help address this situation.

Keywords

Cosplay, convention, con, culture, identity, anime, video games

ACM Classification Keywords

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Miscellaneous.

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Strangers, conventions, identity, public spaces

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Figure 1: A Cosplayer [61]

Introduction

Japanese animation (anime) and video games are currently a very popular cultural phenomenon. These media are being consumed by many Americans for pleasure, the experiences they portray, and also to meet new people. One of the ways anime and video games allow people to meet new people is through conventions (cons). The con is a yearly gathering of people from around the world who show their love and appreciation for these cultural experiences.

One group of people who come to these cons are cosplayers (costume roleplayers) who become the characters they love by creating costumes and becoming the personalities of the characters they want to be (see figure 1). Cosplayers will “go the distance” to become the characters they want to become in real life, going so far as to become another gender, wear makeup, learn how to metalsmith and sew, and act like the characters they watch and interact as everyday (for more, see user research section). Cosplayers at conventions have become a visual staple of the con experience and embody the values of both this group and the attendees who attend the conference (who don’t dress in costume).

While attending the con, there are a myriad of events to observe and attend: there are vendors for people to buy authentic Japanese items from, there are screenings of new and classic anime, there are video game tournaments for people to compete against each other in the newest and classic video games, there are panels to attend (which range from interviews with voice actors of anime, animators, or opportunities to learn about Japanese culture). During the duration of the con, cosplayers take part in the festivities in the

same manner as any of the other attendees there (the only difference is that they are a specific character). Often attendees take in the spectacle of the cosplayers and maintain their distance from them. For the attendees who are brave enough to approach cosplayers, they ask for the cosplayer’s picture. At this point, the cosplayer poses as their character would, and after the picture is taken, both parties go their separate ways.

Cosplayers are very social and sociable people, but this situation happens very often. They are just as passionate about anime and video games as the attendees there, but for some reason, more attendees don’t interact or have long interactions with cosplayers (see figure 2). It is my position that I would like more attendees to be able to interact with cosplayers at the con and become engaged in a deep interaction with them at the con. Since both groups of people have nearly equal levels of passion for anime and video games that this love shouldn’t have to separate them and cause cosplayers to be treated as proof of going to a con. This situation is a call for design to come in and pave the way for genuine interactions to be developed at the con. This design created to help to address this situation could possibly allow for the generation of friendships from the common ground and love for anime and video games.

Approach and Methodology

This situation is ripe for opportunities for a human-centered approach. First, since this area deals directly with people, culture, and their identities as people who are in different communities, helping to bridge the gap between these groups can only be done effectively from a human-centered approach. These media (anime and



Figure 2: The con experience. Attendees take pictures of cosplayers, but don't interact too much with them [107]

video games) are directly linked to the experience they have as members of these communities and as people who want to attend a con for an engaging and fun experience. Design can be a tool used to look at the human issues between these two groups and can help motivate and create interactions between them.

Second, since the con experience is an attraction for people to go to in order to express their love for these media, learn new things, and meet new people, these are human activities which help to shape their passions in the future. The people who attend these cons are going voluntarily to spend their money for their enjoyment; they want to get something for their money. With this in mind, design can be a means to naturally allow these groups of people to interact with each other in a fun and natural way that doesn't detract from the overall con experience. In this proposed situation, design can help to make the experience even more worthwhile in attending, as meeting cosplayers might not only allow the attendees to learn about new characters, but it may allow them to appreciate the love cosplayers put into their characters that is manifest in the clothing and feelings they show to the world.

In order to approach such a "human" problem, I want to take a mostly qualitative approach to this situation, as this area deals mostly with how people feel and interpret what they see. This directly connotes an emphasis on qualitative research to help address this situation. Quantitative analysis can also lead to some analysis of this situation (e.g. background of cosplayers and attendees), which will help me to situate the qualitative information I receive and read about during the course of designing for this situation.

While designing for this situation, I don't want to interfere with the con experience: I want people to still enjoy the con at their own pace. I also don't want to simply force people to interact with cosplayers to just say they talked to someone at the con. Above all, I want to help create an opportunity for natural conversations and interactions between cosplayers and attendees, while using the con experience to augment the type of interaction they have with each other. In addition, I don't necessarily want to turn attendees into cosplayers (which if some did, I wouldn't consider a negative result of this design situation). I would want to foster an appreciation of the cosplayer enough to be able to create opportunities for them to talk for longer than just a photo opportunity.

In the following sections, I outline the approach I have taken so far through the Fall semester of 2009. There is a literature review (of theories and approaches applicable to this design space and of example approaches similar to this design space), an exemplar review of designs in similar contexts similar to this situation, the user research I have conducted so far, and the design research and experiments conducted. Afterwards, this is summarized in a design approach for the Spring 2010 semester.

Literature Review (Theories and Approaches)

I have begun my literature review to help address this situation by looking in the areas of cultural theory, games and play, and design approaches that integrate the concepts of the individual and the community in a public setting. These approaches were selected as they directly address how people interpret clothing and the individuals who wear them, how to create designs that are not only playful, but integrate the aspects of play



Figure 3: The clothing style of punk [26]



Figure 4: A Rukia Cosplay [61]

(as cosplay involves the ability of the cosplayer to roleplay as their desired character), and also how HCI has tried to create genuine communities in public areas where there wasn't a "strong" community to start with.

CULTURAL THEORY APPROACHES

Cultural theory has helped me to start to grasp how subcultures are created and how the clothes they wear evoke a sense of belonging to a group and the values the group holds. [55] studied the punk movement in the 1970s in Britain, where he found out that certain signs represent the groups one belongs to. He examined the artifacts and clothing this group had in a use to subvert those in power. This research applies to cosplayers and attendees of cons as they not only are in separate groups of society, but cosplayers wear the costumes they wear to help identify themselves as an extremely passionate group of people who love anime and video games to the point where they actually *become* the character. The attendees, while not wearing "costumes", they wear "gamer" clothing (e.g. sold at stores like Jinx or Hot Topic) that allow people to see what types of games and anime they like, while still being "themselves".

[26] studied how men's clothing has changed over the years in the USA. He took a phenomenological approach to the study of the clothes men wore, starting with jeans in the 1930s, up to the creation and ubiquity of the business suit (see figure 3). These clothes helped to form the identity of the average worker in the USA during the different periods of the growth of the American culture, and then translated into a common and leisure type of clothing when it became ubiquitous in the 1950s. [28] also examined how "clothes speak" to different people who know how to listen to them.

[37] also addressed a similar topic through the evolution of the power dressing of working women in the 1980s, and how this trend helped to shape the new office atmosphere. This helps to address the situation of cosplayers and attendees by treating the clothes that cosplayers and gamers wear full of meanings that have been continually changing. Originally, the clothes cosplayers don have their own cultural context (e.g. a Japanese schoolgirl outfit means the uniformity of dress in strict Japanese schools), but have different meanings when they "come to life" in cosplay – they help to embody the character and give the cosplayer a means to roleplay as the character (e.g. Rukia from *Bleach*, a shinigami from another world who becomes a schoolgirl to help the protagonist (see figure 4) [61]).

[121] also presents the work of Goffman, who has contributed to the knowledge of how present themselves in everyday life. He argued that people maintain their own roles through how they present themselves to each other in real life, similar to a stage performance. These roles are free to change or be reinforced through the natural interactions performers have every day with other performers. Goffman also studied prisoners found that since every element of life was controlled, that these people are ritually transformed into becoming subservient to those who are in the power to control the environment. At the same time, the individuals who were being subjected to these changes tried to cling onto their identity by having elements of their individuality around. Cosplay is a matter of presenting oneself as another type of person (a person who has been created by another person), and that in order for the cosplayer to achieve a sense of reality at the con, the cosplayer must change his/her mannerisms to match the character.

Some cosplayers try to put unique spins on their characters, and this is achieved with minimal success from the community (see user research section).

GAMES AND PLAY

I also looked into how play and games are a necessary part of human behavior, but cosplayers and attendees have knowledge that is game related. One of the interesting aspects of games and play are the stories that people are able to create while in play, and [67] thinks that with the digital revolution, the art of storytelling is being destroyed. While this is possibly true for the art of oral storytelling, cosplayers and attendees view and interact with stories on a daily basis. In order to help bring these two different groups together, my design should help to use the con experience to help create a story, whether it is directly rooted in the people at the con, or used as a means to create a story for everyone who attended the con after the con is over.



Figure 5: The Power of Pretend: using a watch to believe on is a pilot [103]

Games also have the power to allow people to suspend their own reality and transcend into the reality created by games and stories. [12, 103] showcase the work of Russell Davies and the power of games that can create wonderful designs and commerce (an example is in figure 5). The value of “pretend” is instrumental to cosplay, as their roleplaying in the real world is “pretending” to be another character, and cosplayers become extremely engrossed in their characters (see user research). Using the power of pretend in the design I create will help to keep the cosplayers roleplaying, while still allowing attendees to be a part of the real “pretend” world that my design would create.

Stuart Brown, a famous psychologist, is noted for his work on play and how all animals need play in order to survive. In one of his famous discussions [125], Stuart Brown mentions that play has both serious and fun elements, transcends gender, allows people and animals to create new ideas, it’s a part of our nature, it is deeply imaginative, there is an internal narrative to play, play helps people to innovate, and that a normal person cannot have a normal brain without having played in their life. In addition, Brown offers some advice beneficial to this design space: “The human hand, in manipulation of objects, is the hand in search of a brain. The brain is in search of a hand, and play is the medium by which those two are linked in the best way.” These insights help to describe the basic fun elements of cosplay, and a design that will help to allow these two different groups of people to interact genuinely should allow for play and the creation of a narrative that will last through and after the whole experience of the con.

There are also two more critical aspects of play that come out that will be necessary to keep in mind while designing. One aspect is from [35], which elaborates how people transcend themselves and become lost during play. This is very true during the act of cosplay, in which the cosplayer becomes so engrossed in their character that they forget who they are (see user research section). In order for this to happen, the player goes through different levels of the self: skill, structure, setting, and surrender (in order of engagement). This is also true for the attendees who become engrossed in video games, as their skill transports them into another realm of action – one that is not necessarily in the “real” world. While this is happening, though “gamers” can be quite aggressive

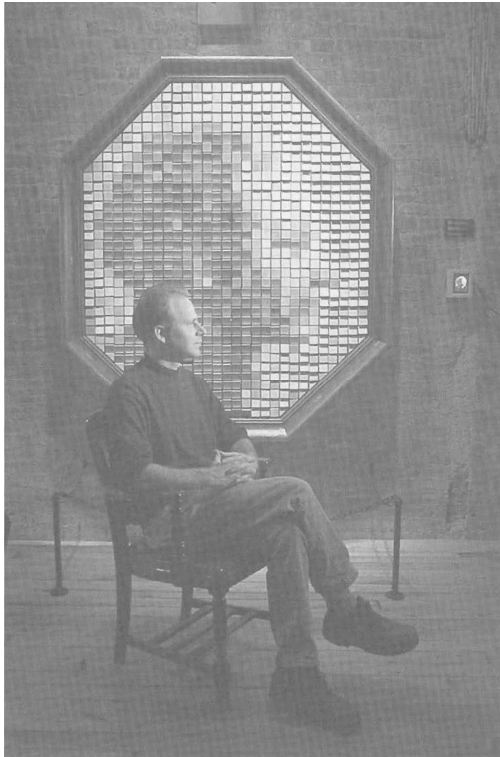


Figure 6: The Wooden Mirror: a reflective and transparent interface [17]

[44]. The design that I will create will have to take these aspects of play into consideration and allow both cosplayers and attendees to be eased into the world of the design that is created from their experience.

DESIGN APPROACHES

In such a rich world full of people who have exposure to games and the fun experiences of anime, play is a natural approach to the design space. [71] has found the utility in play during participatory design. Play has allowed the people who came into the design session to be able to explore the problem space. Play also was a vital element for those who came into the design session for buy-in into the project, and after they played through the scenario in the design session, they saw the power of the design and approved of it. This will help out my design direction, as I am planning on asking for the perspectives of cosplayers and gamers their thoughts on my problem space - the use of the story will help them to see where I am coming from, and hopefully will receive genuine feedback from them.

Cosplayers are very crafty, as they are able to become other characters in appearance and in persona. [112] describes Richard Sennett's view of craftsmanship as "an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake". When creating a design that will help to generate interactions between the two different types of individuals at the con, my design should be able to acknowledge and take advantage of this need to do the job of cosplay well. If not, then the con experience is ruined for both cosplayer and attendees. In addition, my design should be able to harness the mystery and wonder of cosplay, as it is vividly attractive and appealing to the eye. [30] will be able to help me design an experience in this light, as

the use of mystery will bring about an exhilaration from the attendees that will create a memory that will last forever for them.

Another approach that I am considering utilizing is the approach of [147]. This is a philosophical approach to design that allows people to design based upon how the self attaches itself to artifacts, and designers can use this aspect of people's experience to create better products that mean more to each individual. In creating a design that would appeal to both cosplayers and con attendees, the design would have to be able to create an experience that allows each person at the con to be able to bond with the design, and through the design, with each other. This will then help to create genuine interactions between these two different groups of people. To do this, [147] suggests looking at the following aspects of the experience: role engagement, control, affiliation, ability versus bad habits, long-term goals, and the ritual of the artifact.

Another realm of possibility lies in creating public interactions that allow people to interact with each other and the artifact in the public space. This will allow each person to take their own interpretation from the design and then interact with others. [138] suggests the creation of large ambient public displays through a design framework that will allow for public interactions to blossom. In addition to just having a public display, in order for this to work at a con, this experience would have to allow each individual to be embodied in the experience [33], and be transparent (like figure 6) to allow each user to focus on and "absorb" the experience [17]. If designed well, this experience will allow cosplayers to stay in character

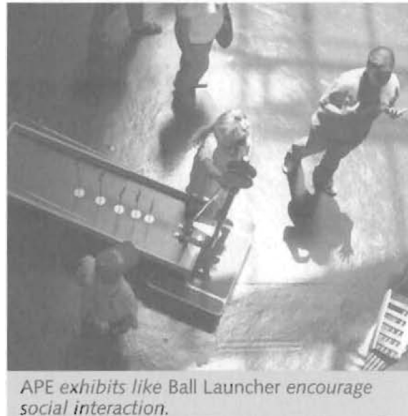


Figure 7: The new APE approach for museums [64]



Figure 8: The CHI community is trying to use social means to find people in crowds to talk to (e.g. [14])

while genuinely allowing for their characters to interact with attendees.

I also looked how museums are also creating experiences that allow people to naturally discover new things about their environment. [64] describes the evolution of APE (active prolonged engagement – see figure 7), allowing visitors to naturally become engaged with museum exhibits and to allow them to naturally become engaged on a deeper level than just figuring out what the museum wanted the participants to figure out. This approach to the con experience would allow cosplayers and attendees to become engaged deeply with the design. In this level of deep engagement, I would want people to discover “new things” together, one means of creating a natural interaction between the two different parties. One way to supplement this type of experience is to allow people to co-create this type of engagement. [126] talks about using the community at large to build solidarity through participation. The design I would like to help cosplayers and attendees interact with each other will have to build upon this participation, as an interaction cannot be complete with just one person. In addition, I would like both groups of people to participate through the design and discover that they both really don’t have that many differences at all to begin with anyway. This, hopefully, will create common ground for a natural conversation and interaction to occur.

Academic Exemplar Study

During the course of finding applicable models and theoretical approaches to helping the situation, I examined how the CHI community attempted to create interactions between strangers or fostering small communities in public spaces. I present three different

areas of exemplars which have tried to solve these problems: “social” exemplars, “guides” and “locators”, and designs that utilize ambient technologies and information visualization approaches.

“SOCIAL” EXEMPLARS

There are numerous “social” exemplars that have tried to address this situation, and utilize artifacts given to people to help allow them to reach out to other people. [14] is currently trying to allow people on the subways of New York to allow people to not feel alone on the subway. They used a cultural probe approach to find out what people find interesting on the subway, in order to find possible people to talk to. While this is a project currently underway, they have found that people are either willing to go find possible friends, or if they know the identity of some people on the subway, they might not approach due to “not bothering” them or worried they might interrupt a family experience [14]. A design created in the context of a con would allow for people to find possible people who might be interested in talking to a given user, possibly creating a fun encounter between the two different people. Other designs similar in nature to this approach (allowing people to be aware of others in a given context) are: Connecto [13] (used to help people tell others where they are), The Whereabouts Clock [110] (used to help members of an office have a rough idea where other people in the office are), The Hummingbird [140] (used to help ski instructors in Sweden know where each other are), and PetPals [99] (a game used to help include everyone in the classroom through trading).

The CHI community has also helped to foster the social paradigm to help solve problems and the types of behaviors people use while interacting with each other



Figure 9: An example of an electronic guide [19]

in public spaces. [66] is helping to push the power of sociability in the design world as a means to help solve problems. [66] reports that the solving of problems can be aided through the use of “outsourcing” them to the community to create buy-in, interest, and long-term engagement. This approach can help my design situation, as allowing people to not only help solve the problem is worthwhile (as it will help to create insights I would have never generated from not talking to people), but it may help to create a “genre of content that continuously grows as more individuals contribute to the activity. [66]” Having actual people generate content gives people a reason to come back to the design for this situation, and also gives cosplayers and attendees something to talk about at the con, too. One behavior that I will have to be aware of with the creation of a larger public interaction is the issue of ownership of the artifact. [98] shows that people have implicit master and apprentice roles when working with a design in the public space, people take turns interacting with the design, and that people do talk to each other throughout the experience. If I can help to foster this type of engagement and behavior while at a con, this will help to make my design succeed.

“GUIDE” AND “LOCATOR” EXEMPLARS

Another perspective I was thinking about in approaching this situation was to guide attendees through the con and have them learn about cosplayers in the hopes that learning something about the “sights” of the con (the cosplayers) so that they feel more comfortable in this new setting. The CHI community has many different contributions in this realm, and I present some of the more applicable ones to this design situation.

The CHI community has created context-aware devices which know about the environment they are situated in. These are “omniscient” artifacts that can help guide the user through unfamiliar settings. [19] created a PDA as a guide that will help tourists walk around Lancaster, England (seen in figure 9). Those who used the PDA found the guide interesting to help them walk through a new environment and liked the knowledge it gave them. In the context of the cons, my design could help guide people through the different cosplayers around, to give people the knowledge they need to create an interaction with them. [3] created the Cyberguide, a PDA that will allow one to see the history of an unknown location. This knowledge could possibly help create an authentic interaction between cosplayers and attendees by seeing the history of the character and the cosplayer. [139] has also contributed a locator in the form of a badge used in offices, the ActiveBadge, which sends off beeps from a badge depending on who is around in the audience. This could also help this design situation, as the badge given to everyone at the con can be used as a means to help signal attendees about cosplayers or events that might help to create interactions between people.

These designs aren’t very social designs, as they are meant for individuals to use and find out information from. Another group of designs are inspired by guides and locators are augmented by the social nature of people in public places, and this style of design is much more suited to this context, as the con is a large social gathering of people with the same interests. Designs that fit into this category can help to locate possible cosplayers who are interested in talking to others while in character. [94] has created The Friend Locator, which allows a person to find their friends at rock

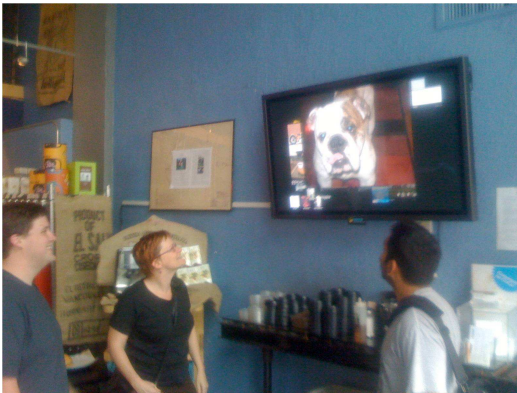


Figure 10: The CoCollage – helping to create a community at the local coffee shop [82]

concerts. This is similar to the con, as the attendance and passion of the participants are nearly equal, but it is still hard to find people out of the crowd who one knows and could interact with. [76] created Peopletones, a mobile system that allows people to use their phones to find people they knew. The downside to using this design is that the design was “nice to know about”, but wasn’t used very much by the participants [76]. If I were to design something akin to this, it would have to find a way to “tap into” the con and cosplay experience. This was similarly seen in [terry] with Social Net, which was a computer system that inferred what people liked based upon the patterns of where they stood at a conference. In order for something like this to work at a con, it would have to take into account more than just where people stand.

AMBIENT AND INFORMATION VISUALIZATION EXEMPLARS

Another type of design approach I have considered to use in this situation is designs that utilize ambient and information visualization technologies. I considered this approach, as it allows for a type of interaction that people have to “volunteer” to take part in, and these technologies allow the viewers to use their experience to interpret the information being presented to them.

Information visualization has been used to model how people behave and where they might be located. [31] has created a specialized form of instant messaging that allows people to use simple text messages to create bubbles of where people are. This type of communication is utilized in many different games, and the attendees of the cons are used to this type of communication. The type of visualization will have to be different in the context of the con, but this is an interesting approach in trying to use a common

communication means to visualize what people “are in to”. An ambient design from [54] is a possible inspiration for this situation. [54] created an ambient design that allows one to see what type of television shows other people one knows are watching. This can be inspiration that can allow people to know what anime and video games are currently being shown, and allow the attendees to be able to see the cosplayers they would like to see as a means to interact with these media.

One of the biggest insights about this direction is the power of these technologies in creating public interactions that create communities. The CoCollage [82] is a community-generated collage through mobile devices as a computer in a café. This allowed individuals to make friends and come back to the café to see what new content was on the collage. [20] used Plasma Posters, touchable and interactable posters to allow people to collaborate through the web and mobile technologies. When people used the Plasma Posters, some liked to share and watch content while others liked to read and interact with the content. [21] also studied how people used a centerpiece in a café to allow others to anonymously contact each other. In addition, people left comments and graffiti for others to come back and read and interact with. [81] also tried to use the hierarchy of the office setting to create the Context, Content, and Community Collage, where people can leave messages and artwork for others to view. This design helped to allow all members of the workforce to be on a more equal ground with each other, regardless of the hierarchy they were in on the job. [142] also looked at the café experience, and used an interactive touchscreen that can allow people to find information about every worker who worked there. All



Figure 11: The "Forget-Me-Not Panties" concept to track girlfriends [46]



Figure 12: The new Microsoft Stab [83]

of these designs can help to be inspiration for a design that can create a public interaction that will help to create a chance for cosplayers and attendees to interact with each other and find something novel at the con.

Exemplar and Inspiration Study

While looking through exemplars of how the CHI community has helped to bring strangers together and to create new types of interactions between them, I also looked to the business and gaming worlds to see if they have been producing any designs or technologies that can be used as inspiration to help address this situation. I have found four different categories of exemplars: locative and GPS technologies, social technologies, and designs that are primarily centered in the "gaming" and fashion realms.

LOCATIVE AND GPS EXEMPLARS

Locative and GPS technologies have allowed people to find others in the large world around them. These types of technology could allow people at cons to get to know about who is in their environment and then be able to find them (specifically, cosplayers). [123] is a technology that allows parents to find their children while they are carrying a special type of mobile phone by sending a text message. [85] is an application on a smartphone that can track the positions of one's friends. [36] allows one to be able to track anything in real-time and is used to power other locative applications.

Locative technologies have also started to appear in more novel ways as well. [18] is an augmented reality application for the iPhone that allows one to track and

find their car in a parking lot. [46, 100] describe the "Forget-Me-Not Panties", seen left, a type of undergarment for women that are equipped with GPS that tracks their location. This design also monitors the wearer's body temperature, and this data can be accessed through a computer or PDA. [132] also allows a person with a smartphone to be able to use their camera and augmented reality to see where the money from the US government bailout went to. [80] is a matchmaking device that allows people to find possible dates in a given area after taking a short compatibility test. [119] from MIT is demonstrating the "Sixth Sense" technology, which allows people to use augmented reality in real life to gain information about the world around them. [83] (left) from Microsoft is demonstrating how augmented reality can be used to help our vision. These designs can be used as models of using location-based technologies at a con to help attendees decide if they would like to interact with cosplayers, as they will have more information about the character in front of them.

SOCIAL EXEMPLARS

Social technologies have also helped people to "come out of their shells" and engage with others or in new behaviors that they wouldn't have done otherwise. One website is [40], where people can leave a short story about how bad their life is. This allows people to engage with each other about how bad their lives are at the current moment. Another website that allows one to interact with others is [95], where one can directly begin instant messaging a complete stranger. [79] helps to turn your phone into a social compass, allowing one to tag areas that are fun, and also allowing a person to find new and undiscovered areas of their community. [42] also turns the undiscovered



Figure 13: A laser-cutter that plays the theme from *Super Mario Bros.* [53]



Figure 14: Gamers can play *Wii Fit* with Japanese maids [101]

environment into a game, rewarding people for exploring the places around them with badges. [117] also chronicles how companies have come together to co-create practices and designs for the future.

There are also a number of designs that use fun and play to allow people to interact differently. [43] from Volkswagen is a project that is creating designs that are fun and get people to think more sustainably. For example, the design of the [86] allows people to choose to walk up stairs instead of an escalator by rewarding each step with a note from a piano. [133] is a project that invites people to help out a strange robot from one place to another, allowing people to interact with each other as well. [53] is another project that allows people to see what happens when they are “scooped” out of the environment around them. This project brought many different people together and also fostered delight and creative ways to avoid the magic hand from above. [50], figure 13, is a special type of laser cutter that plays the theme from the *Super Mario Bros.* games, allowing people to enjoy the experience of using a laser cutter, while allowing people to talk to each about the experience. One application tries to allow smartphone carriers the chance to live cosplay everyday [65] by placing cartoon images over one’s photo. All of these are inspiration in how fun can be used to allow people to interact in emergent and fun ways, and can be a vital element in allowing cosplayers and attendees to talk to each other, as they are always consuming media that have fun and play embedded in them.

“GAMING” EXEMPLARS

Since the situation I am helping to design for is embedded in the context of games and Japanese

culture, I also looked into how games have tried to also cultivate new behaviors for people. [62] describes “Kasabian Guitar Hero”, a project that allows soccer players to practice their accuracy by kicking soccer balls in time with the frets from *Guitar Hero*. [113] also describes work in muscle-sensing technology that allows people to play the guitar without actually having a guitar or gaming peripheral. [111] is a design being created that will allow new means of interaction while watching movies in the theatre.

Gaming has also reached out from directly using the gaming consoles or computers themselves to help allow people to do new and interesting things. [68] allows people to become a firefighter by using their iPhone to extinguish virtual fires in the world around them. “The Avatar Machine” [38] has also allowed people to become a real avatar, akin to massively multiplayer online games, by seeing what it feels like to be controlled in the third-person camera view. The gaming world has also help referees be able to review gameplay footage for others to see what they see [90]. Japanese culture is also inspiring gamers to do new and interesting activities as well. [101] is a service that will allow someone to play *Wii Fit* while having the presence of an authentic Japanese maid around while one plays; there are also places one can go to interact with costumed female workers while learning about Japan [84]. These examples are ideas that can allow me to be able to integrate the experiences and icons attendees and cosplayers are accustomed to in order to allow for the generation of an authentic experience between them.



Figure 15: The LED Chaser – motion sensors that allow one's eyelashes to glow [77]

FASHION EXEMPLARS

The world of fashion is not only provocative, but it has also contributed a number of interactive designs that can be used as inspiration to help drive an interaction between two differently dressed people in a public space. Clothing has been linked to triggering memories of previous Halloween events [51], and this can be used to help create a conversation between attendees and cosplayers after the con has been completed. Clothing also has the power to attract one's eye, and there are "technological fashions" [e.g. 77, 34] to allow people to strum up a conversation through the invitations that are suggested through LEDs and motion sensors. The Do-It-Yourself aspect of fashion has also allowed people to be able to integrate technology into their clothing: for example, there have been homemade virtual-reality glasses [137] and pants that help to charge MP3 players [e.g. 102] to not only make a fashion statement, but to learn more about the world around them and to feel closer to the technologies they use every day. These exemplars can help to utilize the fashion of cosplayers as more than just a means to see the character, but as an opportunity to realize the purpose and inviting nature that clothing and the artifacts we wear have.

Fashion has also the ability to help create the feel of specific environments, and cosplay is no different. People have also utilized this aspect of fashion to help drive people to certain areas and hotspots in their environment. [41] is a Japanese restaurant in Britain that uses cosplayers as a means of promoting their food. There are also "themed" restaurants and bars that allow people to use the theme of the restaurant as a means to allow people to share their love (e.g. a bar that is themed in the *Gundam* aesthetic [58], left). The



Figure 16: The Gundam-themed bar [58]

feeling of being immersed in the environment of a video game is also enhanced through the creation of "interactive costumes", which use the Arduino technology to be able to create sounds based upon how the character moves [10]. This type of "tinkering" culture has also been used to recreate the environment of the original *Star Trek* series by using modern technology to recreate the communicator from the television show [124]. In such a design situation full of costumes and people who create and view costumes all of the time, I would be remiss in my duty as a designer to not look into the power of the costume has in creating a proper mise-en-scene for the con, and use that to help create conversations and interactions between people at a con.

User Research

I have begun to start looking in-depth at cosplayers this past semester, and will continue to conduct more user research in the spring. I have done a lot of research into what types of costumes cosplayers like to make, what cons they like to go to, how other members of the anime and video gaming communities view cosplay, and have taken a look at how crafty they are. I have started to interview cosplayers and have met an interesting type of person. I have also taken a look into how people interact with others while in costume by following a group of trick-or-treaters on Halloween and also attending a live performance of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. These insights from taking a look at these communities have helped to influence the types of concepts and research directions I have started to look into and will continue to look into for the spring semester. I have also taken a look at famous cosplayers as well to get a look at how the most



Figure 17: Characters from *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, which my interviewee cosplays [109]

“extreme users” of cosplay act and are interpreted from these communities.

A COSPLAYER INTERVIEW

I was fortunate to have an opportunity to be able to start talking to cosplayers this semester, and I had the chance to interview one. A friend of mine helped to set up a meeting between both of us on a type of instant messaging called IRC (used more for talking to people who like games, anime, and downloading files via BitTorrent). I was able to interview him for around an hour and I found some aspects of cosplay. I wanted to learn about cosplay from an actual cosplayer, but I also wanted to learn how they like cosplaying and the creation of another character and fusing that with oneself. Afterwards was told he was one of the most “extreme users” of cosplay. He originally started cosplaying when he was with a group of friends and in an anime club back in school, but was originally motivated to start wearing costumes since Halloween, as he really liked the experience of becoming someone else and getting free candy.

This interview was very difficult to find information from him, as he would take tangents during our conversations to memories and random conversations when I would ask him questions and try to find out about how people cosplay. I was also able to find out that he loves to sew (“it’s prity awesome i suppose”) and takes the opportunity to wear costumes to mess with people. He wore a Jehovah’s Witnesses uniform and decided to start preaching, but he just started to preach lies and made-up doctrine just to see what people would do. He also made his own Sailor Fuku costume to take part in a group cosplay from *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (this is a Japanese

schoolgirl outfit). It took him a month to make the costume and be able to become the character. He also had no problems cosplaying as other characters and wearing dresses out in public, regardless of how people stared at him. In addition, when at cons, if he found a character whom he knew how to interact with, regardless if the character was a stranger or not, he would interact with the character as a character from that universe. The biggest insight I learned from talking to him was his last sentence to me in the interview, representing how important cosplay is to him and how powerful the experience of becoming someone else is: “I’d cosplay all time if I could though, I suppose”.

HALLOWEEN TRICK-OR-TREATING

One of the events where I started researching the behaviors and attitudes of real people was during Halloween. I chose Halloween because it is an opportunity for society to dress up in costumes and become characters they would never be on every other day of the year. I followed a group of younger individuals (with their parents’ permission) to follow them around while they were trick-or-treating to see how other people interacted with them. The activity lasted for around an hour, and I found out that those who were in costumes were very excited to be in their costumes (and receive free candy), and they wanted to talk to each other while in costume. Those who weren’t in costumes were able to interact with the trick-or-treaters in a more genuine manner (than just “Who are you supposed to be? That’s a nice costume.”). They also interacted with the character for a longer period of time if they knew who the character approaching their door and beckoning for food was.

The exchange between the character and the person who was giving out candy had an equal amount of turn-taking, and sometimes there would be conversations that would last for minutes (as opposed to a couple of seconds of handing candy out to the kids). At this point, all who were talking and interacting had smiles on their faces and were genuinely enjoying each other's presence. This type of behavior was enhanced even further if the person in costume could act out the mannerisms, voice, and gestures of the character as well, which allowed the person handing out the candy to get the chance to feel that they are handing out a reward for someone actually becoming a legitimate character for their amusement. One other important aspect of the trick-or-treaters was that they became quickly engrossed in their own world while in costume: they forgot to look both ways before crossing the street and didn't use the sidewalks to travel (like those without a costume do)



Figure 18: The many interesting characters that come out during the screening of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

One of the iconic films shown during the Halloween season is *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, shown at the Buskirk-Chumley theatre in Bloomington. I went with a friend who had been to a live viewing of the film before, so I had someone to be able to show me the moves and what to expect. This movie allows people to be able to use props to not only augment the experience of being involved in the movie, but allows the crowd to interact with each other and the movie at the same time. For example, the use of squirt guns in the movie allows people to shoot each other with water for amusement while also simulating the rain that is in the movie. In addition, the people who were running the show also helped to initiate new people to the movie through movie-related rituals, like moaning like the

people in the movie, as a means to grant a "common ground" among all members present at the show, along with a way to entertain those who have already gone through the ritual.

Many of the people who attended the screening of the movie were dressed up in their Halloween costumes, and not costumes related to the movie – those who were dressed in costumes related to the movie (outlandish wigs, garters, excessive makeup) were people who were running the performance and were very pleasant and personable people to talk to. They were able to talk to me as a regular person before the screening and as their characters during the screening and during the ritual of the movie. This is an insight that will be important to my design: the fact that people in costume like to be in their characters, but are personable to talk to if one can find a way to talk to the person "underneath the armor" of the character's outfit and personality. Another important aspect of this experience that is useful to this design space is that many of the characters' inhibitions went down and did more personal gestures and interactions (hugging, kissing, and dancing closely) with strangers while there was music on. Music allowed these characters to transcend upon their normal limits of behavior, and this aspect may be useful to help create a more genuine interaction between cosplayers and attendees, as music might be a means to start talking, or at least get people physically closer to each other.

COSPLAY SECONDARY RESEARCH

Since the activity of cosplay is quite time-intensive to learn how to do correctly, I conducted secondary research on how traditionally cosplayers act while in costume, what the "experts" of cosplay are capable of



Figure 19: The beauty of cosplay, sometimes criticized for its use of Photoshop [75]

creating and how they act while in character, “real life” cosplay (when cosplay is used in real life for some purpose), and “sold” cosplay (where actual companies sell full costumes or release information about how to cosplay). This search has helped me to learn a lot about cosplay, mentioned in the following sections.

The Cosplayer Lifestyle

Cosplayers will also find reasons to dress up, just because it is simply fun to do [122, 11]. Cosplayers also know how expensive their craft and their love for becoming characters are, and are willing to help give tips about how to get as close as possible to the actual character without having to go broke [70]. Some cosplayers also make videos about how to become the characters people want to become [136]. Other cosplayers will volunteer their knowledge about how to cosplay on wikis [63]. There are some cosplayers who like to use popular characters and give them an “adult” twist to them, which allows them to show off their bodies and their love for the character at the same time [2]. When the cosplayer is becoming their character, the details about the character are important: makeup, materials, props, attitudes, and even physique play important roles in becoming the essence of the character he/she loves [23]. This is taken so seriously that some even take their cosplay and import them into Photoshop to make themselves look better [75].

Cosplayers are attracted to cons. When cosplayers go to cons, they either go as individuals or in groups of related characters who can interact with each other in skits from the show/game they are originally from. Cosplayers are also very conscious of the different cons that happen, and do their best to try to go to them (e.g. Saboten-Con [107, 108], New York Anime Fest

[91, 92], SugoiCon [49] ComicCon, Tokyo Game Show [24, 25, 129], Blizzcon [24], Youmacon [145], Onicon [96, 97]). As part of the experience of being the character in a public setting, the cosplayer can carry props and items that the character would be very likely to have on their person. These props are either created by the cosplayer him/herself or can be bought and modded [47]. Cosplayers are used to having their pictures taken when someone asks them for a picture, which then they pose for the camera. If one tries to take video footage of cosplayers cosplaying, the experience is changed and they don’t know how to react [25]. For the cosplayers who especially love to cosplay, they will also wear their costumes outside of the con as well [48].

“Expert and Professional” Cosplay

As with every craft, cosplay has its experts. The costumes and the ability they have to make these characters real are second-to-none (e.g. [59, 60, 61]). Experts will go to great lengths to increase the believability of their characters: for example, some may spray-paint their entire body (e.g. [104]) or learn how to use animatronics (e.g. [27]) to make the character so real it is scary. Expert cosplayers will also dedicate large portions of their time in creating their costumes, sometimes exceeding 100 hours [116] and engineering life-size animals [15] and artificial suits (e.g. from *Bioshock* [6], *Transformers* [7, 92]).

As with design, the expert cosplayers know the rules of cosplay and know how to utilize them to make new characters and costumes (e.g. [88, 109, 118]) and “mashup” popular characters in new and interesting poses (e.g. [87, 45]). Expert cosplayers will also go outside of the realm of cosplay to bring in other crafts



Figure 20: The experts in cosplay know how to create their own costumes and become the character, including their gestures and behaviors [144]

to bring the realism into their characters. They learn metalsmithing to be able to create the weapons and props from the games and anime they love [39]. Expert cosplayers also keep abreast of popular anime and video games and will immediately start to become these characters (e.g. [57, 146, 72]). Experts also are willing to challenge themselves to iconic characters that are nearly universally known (e.g. the fairies from *Sleeping Beauty* [120], the characters from *Macross*, an anime running for over 30 years [69]). For the best of the best in cosplay, they can compete in worldwide tournaments to be called the best cosplayer. This is done through regional tournaments [5], and only the best can get to this point.

"The Real World" and Cosplay

Costumes and cosplayers have also been integrated with the livelihoods of some people and that it is "in their blood". For example, people cosplay while playing music from their favorite anime and video games [135]. Cosplay has also been, for some, an integral part of marriage, as the costume emphasizes the romance the couple has [e.g. 105, 93]. Cosplay has also been used to draw people's attention to certain issues in the world [e.g. 130, 127, 89]. Cosplay can also be a "sight" to help bring people into stores and businesses in Japan to help bring in a larger crowd and increase sales [115]. Some designers use cosplay as inspiration for their work [1]. Cosplay is also done through hired models at cons to advertise upcoming video games or anime ([e.g. 78]). Ultimately, cosplay is also a key element to draw people into a shared experience, used for nearly any situation, from marriage to marketing.

"Sold" Cosplay

Some companies try to "sell" costumes for people to wear at cons, but both attendees and cosplayers have the eye to see if something was bought or handmade (though, costumes that were commissioned are acceptable). Blizzard has made tabards available for *World of Warcraft's* 5-year anniversary [143]. One can also find pre-made cosplay costumes online too from companies such as J-List (jlist.com/COSPLAY/), or by browsing around for "gamer apparel" (e.g. [52, 8]). Video game companies will also "lure" out cosplayers to help promote their upcoming games. For example, the upcoming video game *Bayonetta* has created many model searches for the "perfect" model [56], while SEGA releases the concept art for other cosplayers to become this character for Halloween and any other events [114]

Cosplay Idols and Stars

An important aspect of learning how to cosplay is to not only know who are the stars of cosplay, but how they cosplay and the techniques they use to be able to create such a myriad of characters come to life for others to see and enjoy. Listed below are some of the famous and esteemed cosplayers who are world famous for their craft, and they have their own websites where fans can come to adore their work. These will be the places I turn to learn more about cosplay, how these cosplayers became famous, and to also be able to use for content analyses in the spring semester in case I am unable to interview any actual cosplayers.

These cosplayers are: Kaname [73] (renowned for his cosplay of characters from *Final Fantasy VII*), Dollmaster Yuuki [32] (renowned for her *Rozen Maiden* and *Final Fantasy* cosplay), Alodia Gosiengfiao [16]



Figure 21: This is blackmage9, a famous cosplayer, but in the real world known as Alodia Gosiengfiao [16]

(renowned for her *Final Fantasy* costumes and expertise in judging costumes and cosplayers), Meagan van Burkleo [22] (renowned for her comic book heroine cosplay and steampunk costumes), Yaya Han [141] (renowned for her ability to model and create a wide array of beautiful costumes), Usagi Kou [134] (renowned for actually being the main character from the *Sailor Moon* anime and is considered to be the best cosplayer of this character in the world), Deepdive Cosplay Group [29] (renowned for their *Kingdom Hearts*, *Final Fantasy*, and assorted anime cosplay), Astachan [9] (renowned for her cosplay that crosses the gender lines), Red-cluster [106] (renowned for cosplaying while cooking and cosplay from *Bleach*), Adella [4] (renowned for her cosplay of characters from Disney movies, *Kingdom Hearts*, and *Final Fantasy*), and Kipi [74] (renowned for her expertise in creating from costumes of almost any female character from video games and anime).

Analysis and Insights

There are many different approaches in trying to allow “strangers” to interact and have conversations with each other. Specifically, it is a much more rich and intriguing situation in the world of cosplay and cons, where everyone there has a shared love of Japanese culture, whether it is through anime or video games. The HCI and CHI communities at large have made many contributions towards helping create new interactions between people and the people around them in their environment. Some of these approaches simply use technology to “match” each person to a possible compatible person in their environment, creating a social atmosphere ripe for friendships to start, and the creation of public spaces and interactions that require multiple people to work together through a

design, whereby creating opportunities for strangers to interact with each other.

Through my design approach so far and through the use research I have conducted, my situation cannot simply just “match” people, as the various levels of passions in the people at the con may cause adverse reactions to each other, and to the experience at the con itself. Since cosplay is such an embodied and transcending type of activity, I will need to be aware that cosplayers will want to not only be able to stay in their character during the con, they would not want a design to take away from their experience at the con as well. In addition, I would not want to draw cosplayers out of the worlds they live in while in costume. This is of the utmost importance in addition to all of the other insights I have mentioned during the presentation of my research. This world may be also helpful to tie cosplayers and attendees together into a shared world at the con, where everyone is having fun and a good time, and design can step in to make everyone at the con the superhero that cosplayers become the moment they start to wear their costumes. Through my design experiments, I have also started to take a look at how everyday people view cosplay, and I have found that for them, knowing the character is the basis for starting an interaction, and this is the path that I will be taking for the spring semester (see design experiments). I will also have to be able to do more user research and research into the different ways people will go about learning the identities of cosplayers as well. This is the basis for an experiential and phenomenological approach to this design situation, for which I am excited to take part in. This will hopefully contribute to a better experience for both cosplayers and attendees of cons, while also being an exemplar for the CHI

community as to help people make sense of new and different people in the world around them.

Designerly Approach

While conducting this literature review and user study, I spent a significant amount of time attending design sessions and creating concepts. These sections that follow outline the results of the design sessions I attended in the Fall 2009 and also the concepts that I initially created to help solve this problem based upon what I was reading and learning from real people.

Design Sessions

During the Fall semester, I attended design sessions frequently, and even created opportunities for myself and others in my cohort to be able to meet outside of class and reflect upon what we doing and decide how we should progress further in our studies. This section consists of the *Weekly Friday Reviews* (sessions where Burr, Xuan, Matt Snyder, and I would meet for 90 minutes to discuss what we have done the past week, ask questions of each other, and suggest ways on how to proceed), *Capstone Sessions* (where I used class time to be able to get feedback and run small design experiments to help give me directions on where to proceed), and *Cosplay Experiments* (which were held in the Design Space and the Basement of Info East to see how people react to costumes and cosplayers).



Figure 22: This is one of many weekly Friday Capstone Review Sessions

WEEKLY FRIDAY REVIEWS

Every Friday during the Fall semester, Burr, Xuan, and I would take around 90 minutes to sit down and talk to each other about what we have done for the past week with our capstone. The purpose of these meetings was to first hold each other accountable for our own work

and time. If we were to use the time of our peers, we want it to be used wisely, so we came prepared with questions and small presentations about our work. We also ran small experiments and set up our design experiments with each other, as we also have found that, at least for me, we became more motivated to start experimenting while other people were around to help us set up the experiments and start them so others would feel like they were adding to the conversation starting, and not having to start the experiments themselves. These meetings were very productive, as not only we received feedback from each other, but we were also able to exchange research and also help each other know when we should go and ask our professors for help. Towards the end of the semester, we started to invite others as well to our sessions to get some fresh perspectives on our capstones, and to give others fresh perspectives on theirs as well. Matt Snyder was extremely helpful for his feedback, and we were able to reciprocate as well. Without these Friday sessions, we would not be able to be in the position we are in at this time.

CAPSTONE SESSIONS

On Tuesday nights during the capstone class where we were given free time to work, I used this time over the course of the semester to do many different activities. One of the first activities I took part in was discussion and reflection on my design space. Towards the beginning of the semester, I was able to meet on multiple occasions in different groups of 4 of my peers where I would be able to describe the situation I would like to design for, and my peers were able to give their perspective on the problem space and their thoughts on how to approach the situation, and also who to talk to in order to get some help. My peers were instrumental



Figure 23: The Tuesday Capstone sessions helped me tremendously; the focus group I conducted being one of the more insightful activities

in helping me to narrow my focus and to be able to talk about the situation I want to design for in an eloquent and succinct manner. One of these activities was a sketching review, where I met in a group of 5 of my peers to discuss my sketching and how the process has helped me to think about my research and my concepts and how they relate to the design space. I received receptive feedback about my approach, as I redrew my sketches on PostIt notes to bring to class, and I only sketched the most important aspect of each concept, allowing me to describe verbally the concept while my peers had something to look at and think about.

Another activity that I led was a focus group of my peers (aged 23-29) in which we discussed how they approach strangers and start conversations. This was a more open-ended focus group, where I only started off with one question: "How do you know who to talk to in a new environment?" This allowed the participants to mention certain features of people they try to seek to try to ask for help or know they might get a good conversation out of: either they choose the closest person, a person who smiles back at them when they smile, a person who is perceived to have prior knowledge in a specific area, or they are introduced to this person by someone else. This then allowed me to direct the conversation a little bit to talk about how they start the conversation with the strangers in this environment: they responded that they try to find someone who "will get me", in my age group, or someone who they think will be respectful of their ignorance at the current moment. The focus group also mentioned that they are especially thankful for friends of friends who will then introduce them to other strangers, as they will feel comfortable that there is someone in the area they can trust and lean on for

support. Afterwards, they analyze how they felt the conversation went, and if they felt it went well, they will try to seek out that person on Facebook or other social networks to try to continue the good conversation and experience they had face-to-face. This will then help them to get another chance to meet the person again and to do more informal and interesting activities (e.g. hang out, go on a date, etc.) with this person.

This then led me to one more question: "How would you want to learn about the costume one is wearing at a con?" After introducing the context to them, they informed me that they felt this experience was very casual, and it would have to "let me do my own thing" at the con, while trying to find out why the costume or the person was interesting on a more meaningful level than just the materials itself. Also, they informed me to also think about the reputation of the character and the cosplayer him/herself, as if there is a stigma or bad reputation about this character or cosplayer, they would not want to interact at all with "these people". This feedback was especially useful in helping me treat this situation as more than just putting strangers next to each other in hopes of getting them to interact – there has to be a level of comfort and interest in both parties in order for a genuine interaction to start happening with a new person, especially with one of them being in a costume. I also used the time in capstone class to have some of my peers who had very little knowledge of what I am doing to run them through some of my design experiments with cosplayer pictures and a life-size representation of a popular character, as described in the next session. All of these sessions were instrumental in helping me to keep me moving forward in this design space, along with being

held accountable for my progress by my peers and professors.

COSPLAY EXPERIMENTS

I was fortunate enough to be able to hold two different design experiments closely related to my problem space. One of my peers brought in a life-size cardboard cutout of the character Legolas (from *The Lord of the Rings*), a renowned character for many people who have read the books, played the video games, and watched the trilogy of movies. I set Legolas up in the basement of the Info East building, and I left an area for people to write their thoughts and reactions to this question: "What would you say to Legolas to start a conversation with him?" Many different people were able to find Legolas, but were startled to find him in the basement or afraid to talk to him. I started to ask why people were afraid of him, and it was because since he looked so real and he had a piercing gaze, that this stance scared them and made them run away from Legolas. Others, who actually left their thoughts, treated Legolas like he was the actor Orlando Bloom, and wrote witty and funny statements geared towards Orlando Bloom and the character Legolas himself (e.g. "How do you maintain that girlish figure?", "You look like a woman. Discuss.", "How does it feel to be beaten by a dwarf?", "So how pissed do you get when you're killing orcs and stuff and Santa makes you come back to the North Pole to make toys?"). One participant was so intrigued by Legolas that this person went up to Legolas and left PostIt notes on different parts of his costume, critiquing how an elf would wear denim and fake ears to become something he isn't. Overall, this experiment didn't get me the feedback I was initially thinking about (i.e. I was expecting people to put down actual serious

questions), but it was a success, in that I learned that the use of popular character illicit deep passions from people and they aren't afraid to let these passions out. This is very similar to how attendees and cosplayers are in the real world, so this experiment helped me to simulate how a potential encounter with a cosplayer might happen.

While the Legolas experiment was being conducted, I was also setting up another experiment related to cosplay. Through my user research so far, I have found many different pictures of different cosplayers, which show off their talents and poses. I took 6 of them showing the range of possibilities that cosplayers are capable of (e.g. sexy poses, group skits, famous cosplayers, famous characters, good photography, etc.) and posted them in the design space. I also left PostIt notes for people who are in the design space to write down their thoughts and reactions to seeing these people, and left it open-ended to the writer's thinking as to what to do or say.

I received a lot of PostIt responses: (in descending-column order, from the left column) Picture 1: "You are hot", "Your look compliments your costume", "I wouldn't talk to Haruhi, because I don't like her character", "I wouldn't talk to her as she makes me feel uncomfortable"; Picture 2: "I love TF2", "I want to take pictures with them", "I would run away", "I'd ask Heavy: Where's Sasha? Where's my gun?", "I had no idea what this is...someone had to explain it to me"; Picture 3: "This is gorgeous...I'm totally jealous of their costumes", "Where is Rose?", "Since they're in such a staged pose, I don't think I would approach them – just consume them from a distance."; Picture 4: "I'm not surprised that you just bought that outfit", "Too

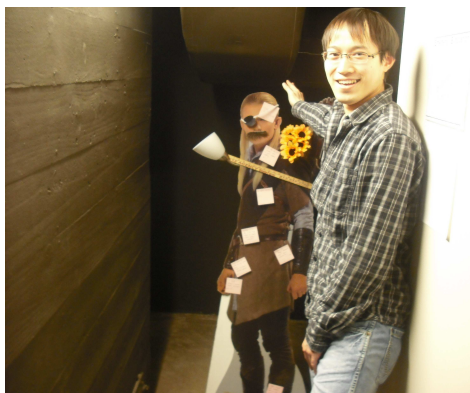


Figure 24: The Legolas Experiment

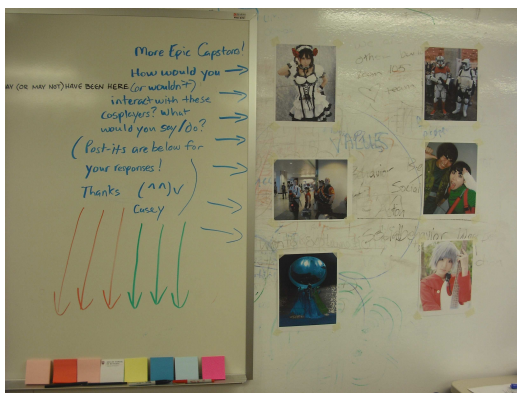


Figure 25: The Cosplayer picture Experiment

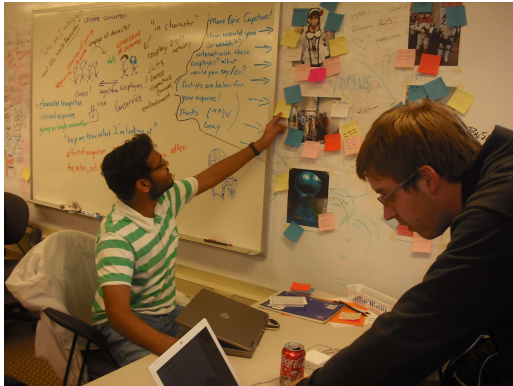


Figure 26: Some students were eager to place comments about cosplayers, and others were not

traditional", "He might shoot that guy in the foot", "How'd you make the costume? Or bought it? What's custom?"; Picture 5: "No clue what this is", "This makes me happy", "Making ninja hand gestures to them", "You two make a perfect Rock Lee and Guy-Sensei. Did you plan to go together, or just meet coincidentally?"; Picture 6: "I love your hair!", "Hair + guitar + sweet innocent face = HOT", "Are you real??? Gorgeous!", "I will not talk to her because her hair doesn't go along with her eyes."

These responses from people allowed me to see not only how people react to different cosplayers who are strangers to the people in the design space, but it was also interesting to see what thoughts go through their heads when they see these real life characters. After taking a look at these responses, they resulted in two categories: visceral responses (either to the character or to the costume – e.g. "I love your hair", "I love TF2") and familiarization responses (in trying to understand what the character is and why a person looks in the way they do – e.g. "Why are you trying to look old", "No clue what this is"). The latter responses were clearly seen as I watched people try to absorb the cosplayers and then falter as to try to write something they would feel would help me. When they couldn't, they would ask if "I don't know" is a suitable answer, and I said if that's what came to their head, then yes. This situation happened more often than not, and I believe helped to prevent more people from leaving comments and participating in this experiment. It is from a combination of seeing this behavior and these responses, coupled from literature review and user study that I want to help people understand what they are looking at when they go to cons.

Preliminary Concepts

During the semester and through the readings and user research I have completed so far, I have come up with a number of concepts that fall under four different categories: *costume augmentation*, *interactive environments*, *public displays*, and *social tagging and augmented reality*. Each of these categories are presented below with a description of all of the concepts that fall under each of these categories with a brief description of the rationale for this concept and how it would work (from a high level perspective).

COSTUME AUGMENTATION

One of the first directions I thought of was helping to make the costume more appealing to the attendees of the con. The rationale behind this set of concepts was that if I can help draw more attention to cosplayers and make them more of a spectacle for people to enjoy, they would consider them to be movie stars whom they would be in awe of and would want to go meet and talk to forever. I quickly found out that choosing this direction would lead to a worsening of the problem space, as augmenting the actual costume and the performance of the cosplayer would actual make people more intimidated to talk to them, while only possibly benefitting the cosplayers themselves. I present these concepts for sake of completeness, and to also show that this area was explored with great detail before putting it aside and moving on.

Alive Props

The Alive Props concept would be given to cosplayers as props that would be used during the skits and their adventures at the con. The props would react to not only how the cosplayer is feeling (i.e. feeling sociable, feeling in character right now, feeling lonely, etc.),

being a cue for other people at the con to know if was acceptable for them to approach the cosplayer to start a conversation with them. The drawbacks to this concept are that it is another prop for the cosplayer to carry around (which get heavy), and may end up making the cosplayer look more intimidating, even though the prop is used to help signal people in one's area that it is acceptable to start engaging in conversations.

Alive Shirt

The Alive Shirt concept is a shirt that cosplayers can wear underneath their clothes, and it helps to catalogue their experience as their character and as a person attending the con. When the cosplayer doesn't feel like wearing the shirt any more, it can be passed along to other cosplayers and it reacts to their experiences as a cosplayer and as an attendee at the con. At the end of the con, this shirt would contain all of the experiences of the con and it can be given to attendees, or it can interface with attendees' apparel or devices to allow the attendee to be able to see how the experience of the cosplayer is different than an attendee, and also potentially allowing the attendee to "feel" what it is to be a cosplayer. The drawbacks to this concept are the different levels of hygiene people exhibit at the cons, and this will most likely interfere with the presentation and roleplaying aspects of the cosplayer.

Communicating Body Art

The Communicating Body Art concept is a system of different interactive clothing elements on cosplayers and on attendees. For example, cosplayers wear jewelry and wigs, and this concept allows these parts of the costume to be able to talk to different cosplayers and also other attendees at the con. The power of this

concept lies in the fact that the con is an environment where it is acceptable to dress up, and this would allow the attendees of the con to be able to have parts of their body "dressed up" as well, to feel a little closer to the experience of being a cosplayer at a con. The drawbacks to this concept is that many people who go to the con as just themselves don't want to dress up and may feel more comfortable as just the "average Joe". In addition, this concept may also cause too much heat or extra equipment to be carried by the cosplayer, taking them out of the character he/she wants to be.

CosTattoo

This is the CosTattoo concept (seen left). It is a specialized type of nonpermanent tattoo that cosplayers can wear to not only personalize themselves while in character, but to have some of their information that they want other people to know to be accessible by the audience at large. This concept allows a person who has a camera or a specialized application on their phone to be able to read the tattoo (possibly backended by a semacode), which allow the attendee to be able to pick up any information the cosplayer would like others to know about, like the character's name, other costumes the cosplayer has created, how long it took to make the costume, etc. While this would allow attendees to "consume" the cosplayer in a more natural way, it would also affect the skin of the cosplayers, potentially affecting the realism of their character; this concept could also be abused or not used at all to provide information attendees might want to know about; cosplayers may also not want any information about them to be released.

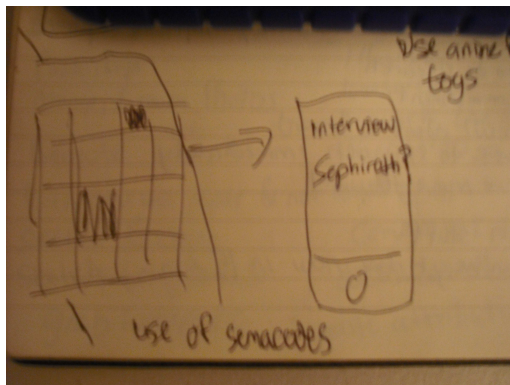


Figure 27: The CosTattoo allows one to use a smartphone to gain information about the character and cosplayer

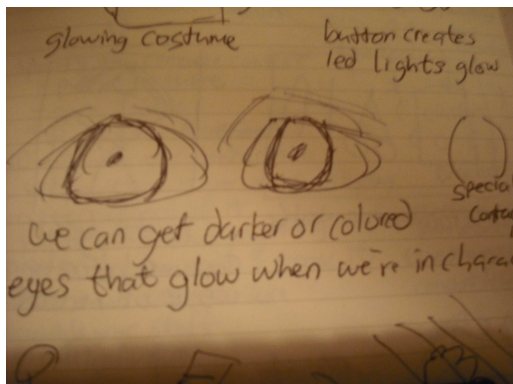


Figure 28: The Epic Contacts allow a cosplayer to indicate their level sociability using their emotions and a contact lens

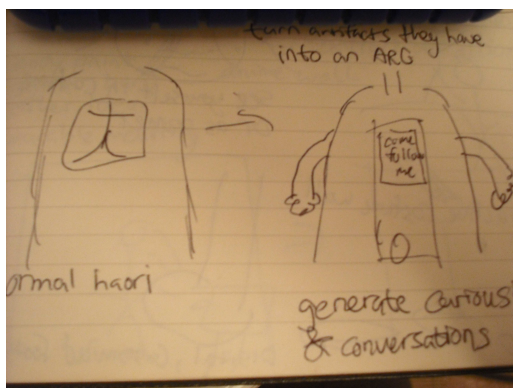


Figure 29: The Interactive Haori allows the cosplayer to be able to use their costume as a means to message attendees

Epic Contacts

The Epic Contacts concept (left) is a special type of contact lens that allows attendees to know different moods of the cosplayer. For example, the contact lens, as a part of the character's costume, could let people know when the attendee is talking to the character (and not the person underneath the costume), if it is acceptable to talk to the cosplayer at the current moment, or if the cosplayer is even interested in what others are doing, etc. While this will greatly improve the performance of the cosplay and enhance the feeling and immersion of being a specific character, this improvement to the character also helps to add to the problem that I am trying to address: there is something about the act of cosplay that intimidates people that prevents genuine interactions from occurring. This concept would be beneficial for those who would want to become even more lost in their character, but this doesn't help address the problem in a beneficial manner.

Gloves 2.0

The Gloves 2.0 concept consists of a normal pair of gloves, typical for most costumes involved in cosplay, and it enhances the gloves by becoming a means to attract people to the cosplayer. For example, if the cosplayer starts to gesture or act in a way similar to their character, then the gloves would start to glow and react to the environment that is around them, beckoning others to come and look at the glowing hands of the character, enhancing the performance the cosplayer is having. These gloves would also help to show the magic of cosplay in that it would help to bring the special effects anime is quite well known for into reality, making it even more clear that the cosplayer in front of them is the actual character from anime or

video games. While this concept is novel in trying to bring people together at the con to witness a performance or skit, it still has the same qualities of the Epic Contacts: they so enhance the cosplayer that it will also contribute to making the character even more intimidating to talk to.

Glowing Costume

The Glowing Costume concept consists of the cosplayer's normal costume, but is equipped with the ability for the cosplayer to make the costume glow or play music by the pressing of a hidden button on their costume. This would allow the player to become engrossed in their character by letting others know when the character is angry or is wanting of attention. There are many downsides to this concept: it adds weight and heat to the costume, it will also help to make the cosplayer more intimidating to other attendees, and it may become so commonplace eventually that almost all cosplayers will be expected to glow and play music, creating an environment that detracts from the fun and personal experience of attending a con.

Interactive Haori

This is the Interactive Haori concept (left). It consists of a typical Japanese outfit, the haori (a part of the costume for many of the characters from the series *Bleach*), and is given the ability to display messages on it. This would allow the cosplayer to not only act as the character, but to be able to use technology to spread the character's influence to other people and pass messages to the people who are observing the cosplayer. This concept is very good at being able to allow the cosplayer to interact in other ways than just talking and acting like the character, but may be so

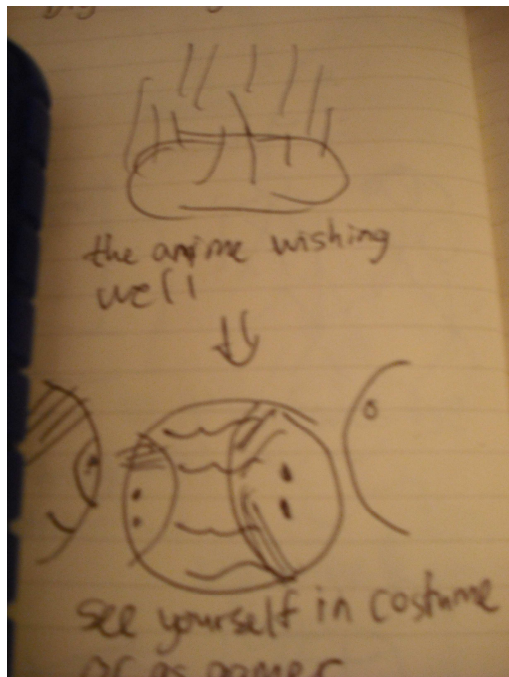


Figure 30: The Anime Wishing Well allows cosplayers and attendees to become characters well gazing in the water and making a wish

distant from the actual con experience and expectations for what cosplay should be that it may make both attendees and cosplayers alike realize that this is not true to the nature of cosplay.

Twitter Body Paint

The Twitter Body Paint concept consists of a special type of body paint or makeup that allows people to send quick messages to each other through the use of writing on one's skin. This would help cosplayers to be able to write interesting and short messages to each other (in a similar way that Twitter allows people to send short quick messages to each other), and also would be able to send messages to the attendees while in character. This type of interaction may be interesting for some cosplayers and attendees, but the departure of this concept from the cosplay experience may have cosplayers spending more time writing on themselves and scaring off attendees that the nature of cosplay might become more about what the cosplayer has to say, than the whole experience of becoming that particular character.

INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Another category of concepts that I generated to help attendees and cosplayers interact with each other at cons were interactive environments. The rationale for this category of concepts is that if the environment of the con can allow attendees to be able to interact with cosplayer through the entertaining nature of the con, then the attendees would be able to use what is going on at the con as a means to start an interaction or a conversation naturally, and would be a means to remember that particular con, and the individual cosplayers the attendee has met during the con. These concepts are still at a high level of abstraction at the

current moment, but do have some potential because they can be used to help attendees to recognize and engage with the characters that cavorting around the con.

Anime Wishing Well

This is the Anime Wishing Well concept. This is a traditional wishing well that is in the center of the con, which functions like a traditional wishing well. It beckons people to interact with the Wishing Well by setting up an appropriate anime atmosphere through the showing of anime in the water. When cosplayers come around to the well, it plays the anime where the cosplayer is from. In addition, when attendees start to gather around the wishing well while cosplayers are there, their reflection gets turned into another character from that anime or video game that the cosplayer is from. If there are no cosplayers around the well, the well would be able to generate a random character from a popular anime that is being shown at the con at the current moment.

Captain Planet

The Captain Planet concept is a set of interactive walls or locations where cosplayers and attendees can come together to take part in a simulation or game that takes all of the efforts of these 5 individuals. When cosplayers and attendees can step into the different roles of the 5 individuals, they can come together to either create art or play through an interactive narrative that will help to draw other people to the 5 different areas of the con, and ultimately through the use of this type of show, hopefully attendees and other cosplayers will be able to ask about the different techniques used to create the art or the show. This concept is still in its preliminary stages and is still at a

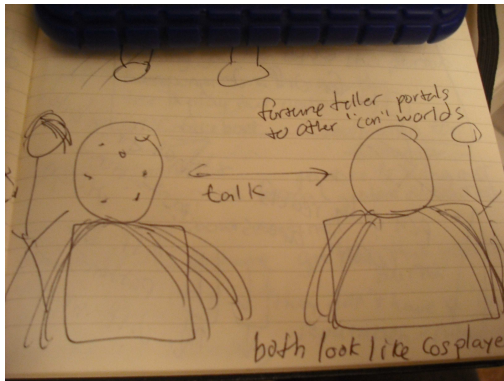


Figure 31: The Crystal Balls concept allows attendees and cosplayers to talk to each other through a crystal ball and appear as cosplayers on both sides of the conversation

high-level of abstraction, but will be used to ask feedback from cosplayers and attendees of cons.

Cosplay's Got Talent

The Cosplay's Got Talent concept is an interactive panel of attendees and cosplayers who are judges of all of the poses and pictures taken at the con. They would be able to analyze all of the pictures and then evaluate who actually has talent, and who doesn't. This concept would also allow attendees and cosplayers alike to vote on what they consider "good" cosplay and help to reward those cosplayers who are doing a good job at their craft. This concept is still in an early stage of development and has yet to have any major interactions involved in it (it's still a high-level concept, as shown by the sketch).

CosStepping

The CosStepping concept is an interactive footprint that is left behind wherever the cosplayer walks while in costume. It isn't seen by the normal eye – rather, attendees who want to figure out where cosplayers are going and what they are doing can follow the steps of their favorite cosplayer, which then can be used to start a conversation with them. There are privacy concerns with this concept, as I would not want this concept to be used to track people to have them stalked hunted down (which is what the concept actually implies). Further redesign of this concept will include acknowledgement of these issues, while allowing the footprints to be personalized to each cosplayer and the details of how attendees can view the footprints will be decided.

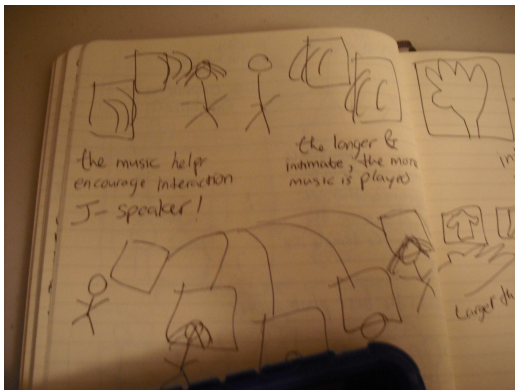


Figure 32: The J-Speakers create music from each anime and video game when a cosplayer steps near them, allowing attendees to have an idea about the character through music

Crystal Balls

This is the Crystal Balls concept (left). It is based off a fortuneteller, where a crystal ball can be used to peer into the unknown to find information that one desires. This concept allows observers to peer through and interact with the crystal ball in many different locations, and talk to people on the other side of the crystal ball. The special aspect of these crystal balls is that they allow one to be seen as someone in a costume, allowing both parties on each side of the interaction to interact with each other as if they were cosplayers. This would allow for genuine interactions to be created on both sides of the crystal ball, and it can also be used as a quick or long and engaged interaction between two different sets of people. While this concept is more technical in nature, after it is refined, it can be prototyped through a style of Wizard of Oz prototyping.

J-Speakers

This is the J-Speakers concept (left). It consists of an environment full of musical speakers. These speakers react to the cosplayers who walk through the environment, playing the theme songs or other related music to the character that is walking through a specific area. This concept is reminiscent of interacting with the non-diegetic music that is usually played in the background of anime and video games. This would allow attendees to be able to interact with cosplayers better because not only can the attendee can be able to hear the music that is being played and see how the character would react to the music, attendees can also be able to look up the music that is being played and learn about the anime and games the character is from. This would then allow for an increased likelihood for these two parties to be able to interact with each other, as I have found through my user research so far that

people who are dressed up have lowered inhibitions when music is being played in the area. This also might be a little more technical in nature to implement, but will be a fun choice to prototype if this is selected to be refined and prototyped.



Figure 33: The Life Table is a tabletop application that visualizes where cosplayers and attendees are at the con

PUBLIC DISPLAYS

Another area in which I have generated concepts lie in the category of public displays that show information to people and allow people to reflect and interpret what is being shown to them. The interesting aspects of public displays are that they not only allow people to congregate around them and start talking, but they have been shown to also be a great means to start building communities [e.g. 82]. The concepts which I have created that fall into this category all have these aspects to them, but they will need to be enhanced through careful research in the area of Information Visualization, which will help me to make these concepts much more compelling and meaningful to the attendees and the cosplayers at the con.

Experience MiniMap

The Experience MiniMap concept is situated in a Japanese Shinto shrine, where the experience of the people at the con is modeled by the environment and the fires that burn in the shrine. The more that people are having a good time and interacting with each other at the con, the better the environment (e.g. weather, fire, shrine maidens) will become and also will start to interact back with the people who are gathering and walking by the display. This concept will have to be refined more to determine how the weather, fires, and maidens will react to the experiences and conversations that people are having at the con, but hopefully people will be able to interpret what is going on to interact

with each other to be able to help the shrine be able to prosper. One of the other aspects of this concept that will have to be carefully considered is how people might be able to “cheat” this display into giving the best results to the people at the con.

LifeTable

This is the LifeTable concept (left). This is a simple tabletop application that is accessible to all of the people at the con, and its purpose is to help display the areas of where people and cosplayers are. People can interact with the table to see where others are, as the table gives a visualization of where cosplayers and attendees are, and where they might be going. This concept makes everyone anonymous on the LifeTable, only showing where people are gathering (not whom), and if they are an attendee or a cosplayer. This concept will have to be very strong in its information visualization and interactions to be able to clearly this information in a meaningful way that will give people a reason to go talk to the “dots” (or whatever the visualization is) on the screen.

People Graffiti

The People Graffiti concept is a stationary camera that takes people’s pictures when they pose in front of it. Once a picture is taken, it gets added to the wall. Before it gets added to the wall, the person has the option of being able to add some magic to their picture – if the person is an attendee, then they can choose a costume (related to a character or of the con – I haven’t decided yet), otherwise it is the cosplayer’s pose but with added effects (haven’t decided what these are yet either), creating a layered wall of people whom are at the con. This concept would encourage people to get in the mindset of a cosplayer by learning



Figure 34: The Sakura Forest is an interactive social network at the con that is brought to life through the interactions of the people at the con

how to physically pose as a character, and then the wall would be used as a means to reflect on the poses, which would help to generate conversations between multiple people at the con.

PhotoMosaic

The PhotoMosaic concept allows people to share the photos they have taken at the con to be displayed for everyone at the con to see. This concept could be on a smartphone that allows the generation of different mosaics to be created about their experience and others' experience at the con, or it could also be taken from anyone's camera (voluntarily) near the end of the con, so it can generate a con-specific mosaic of everyone's experience at the con. The end result of the mosaic will produce a better (i.e. more meaningful to the con and its participants and also be recognizable) mosaic if there are more genuine interactions between attendees and cosplayers at the con. This concept will also have to be refined to the point to reduce the level of possible cheating of the system to produce a desired image, and also to ensure that attendees are actually having legitimate and genuine interactions with cosplayers.

Sakura Forest

This is the Sakura Forest concept (above left). It consists of a "forest" of interactive sakura (cherry blossom) trees that are intertwined throughout the con. These trees can simulate wind passing through them at different times to give them the believability that they are real, and people can be able to take a sakura with them, as the blossoms can come off of the trees through the wind or by someone picking a blossom off of the tree. The blossom that is pulled off of the tree has a cosplayer's image on them and glows a unique

color that helps the attendee to be able to find the cosplayer. As the attendee has more interactions with this cosplayer and other cosplayers, their images are added to the sakura, from which the attendee can be able to take home with them as a keepsake from the con. While this concept is in its early stages, it is one of the ones which I can personally identify with, as it helps to create small social networks on each sakura, and also lets one remember the con experience in a way that is especially relevant to them (not only is the sakura an element of most anime, but is also a symbol for the Japanese culture, as they have iconic festivals during the time of the year where the sakura blossom). In the spring semester, I will have to think about this concept, while trying not to stay attached to this one concept which I personally like and would think to be cool to see at cons.

Transformation Table

The Transformation Table consists of virtual styling instruments (combs, wigs, makeup, etc.) that allow one to modify their own image to become a cosplayer. This table would be used at the panels at the cons which introduce cosplay to beginner cosplayers and attendees who are interested in cosplay. It would help to serve as a means to ease people who are interested in cosplayer into this community, and the cosplayers can help attendees with their expertise to create exciting costumes and poses for the attendees, from which the attendees can be able to take home with them from the con (I haven't decided what form this should be yet). This concept will have to be refined and iterated upon, as currently I am unsure how this would work technically, and I am unsure of what types of stylistic elements are needed to craft the proper cosplay experience for attendees.

SOCIAL TAGGING AND AUGMENTED REALITY

Another category of concepts I have sketched lie within the realms of social tagging and augmented reality. I have decided to explore this realm for many reasons. One reason is that this type of approach directly involves people and their interactions for the concept to work and be successful. Another reason for choosing to sketch in this realm of possibility is that it can possibly allow people to take in cosplay from the attendees' level of comfort first, while using these concepts can be used as a means to give them the motivations and information they need to start a conversation. A third reason for exploring this realm is that this technology is being used by the gaming community as a realm of the next generation of games that can be used in real life; other companies have used augmented reality to help give people just-in-time information to people to help them make choices as to what to do. These concepts also rely upon the use of artifacts that are found at conventions, or would be given to attendees and cosplayers when they first register at the con – for example, badges, a bag of goodies, and the con book (which lists all of the events at the con, the schedule, and a description of everything that is happening at the con). These artifacts are usually, through my experiences at cons, carried with most of the attendees and cosplayers through the duration of the con, making these artifacts good choices to target for creating interactions with.

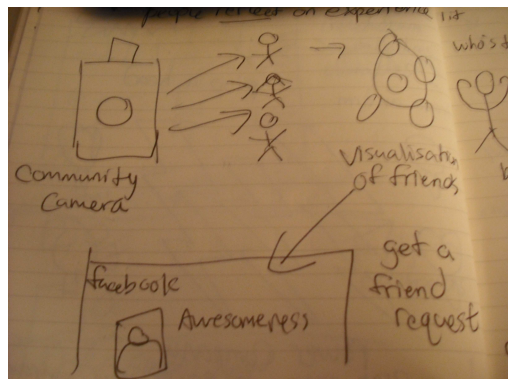


Figure 35: The community camera allows people to take pictures at the con, and then visualizes the friendships made there. In addition, it creates Facebook requests for further interactions after the con is over

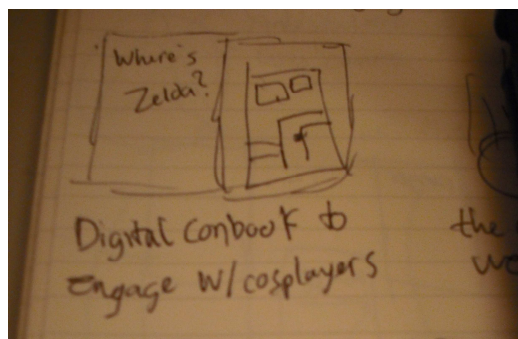
ARGCON

The ARGCON concept is based on an ARG (alternate reality game), which is based in the real world, but since the context is at the con, it can be a fictional world created specifically for the con and can take into account the buildings and the local area the con is

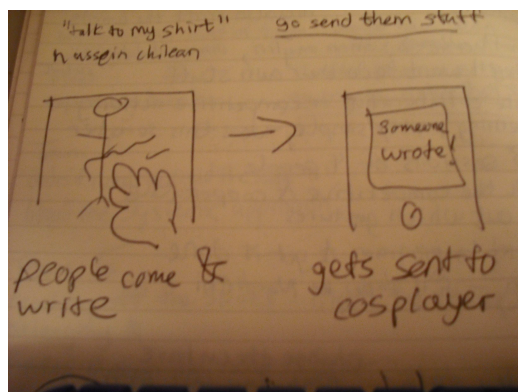
situated in. When one receives their check-in equipment at the registration area, attendees and cosplayers who would like to take part in this game will receive a card with their specific class and skills and magic they can use while at the con. They can be able to use these powers to investigate the con at their own rate to play this game, but during their play, they will have to collaborate in order to be able to finish the game. Each team would be composed of 2 cosplayers and 2 attendees, allowing for a small group to not only work together, but to learn from each other. At this point, I am unsure about the interactions needed to make this work, but at this current form of concept generation, this concept uses cards that can be read and invoked by the players during the con that will let the environment know when special abilities are being used. This concept will have to be refined and ideated upon, as it currently involved just people working together for this concept to be able to work as desired.

The Community Camera

This is the Community Camera concept (left). This concept utilizes a camera that can be shared and passed among people at the con and used for whatever people want to take pictures of. As pictures are being taken, the camera remembers who is taking the picture in addition to capturing the image itself. At the end of the con, the camera is returned to the staff of the con, where the images are then taken and a visualization is created of all of the pictures and the "friends" that are in each picture. This visualization is viewable by everyone at the con, and when the con is officially over, the camera helps to keep the experiences attendees and cosplayers have had during the con by looking through the pictures and sending Facebook requests to each of the people in the picture and the owner of the



pictures as well (which also get sent to the person who took the pictures as well). This also creates an opportunity for attendees and cosplayers to be able to interact outside and after the con experience is over and done with. While this is a concept that is more technical in nature, this concept also excites me as a designer, as it utilizes what people are already doing at the con in a new type of way that possibly will create long-term friends or acquaintances from the cons experience, and I will have to do my best to not get attached to this concept as well.



Cosplay Autographs

The Cosplay Autographs concept. This concept utilizes the con book given to everyone at the con, and also utilizes the experience most people have had during their high school experience: signing their autograph and leaving a message for the owner of the con book. By utilizing these experiences and artifacts at the con, attendees can have a conversation with cosplayers, and have the cosplayers leave an autograph and message with the owner of the con book. The owner of the con book can also reflect upon this experience with the cosplayer in this area of the con book, and can also take it to other cons as a means to talk to other cosplayers of the same character to compare the different encounters and experiences with other cosplayers. This concept, in order to help solve the design problem, will rely upon the initiative of the attendees to be able to ask for a signature in the con book, which may or may not be a desirable approach to this problem. This concept also changes the nature of the con book, as it makes it more of an alive document for everyone at the con, as opposed to just a body of logistics. This concept will have to be discussed with

cosplayers and attendees to see if it would be a viable concept.

The Interactive Con Book

This is the Interactive Con Book concept (left). This concept utilizes the con book and also requires the owner to be more proactive about opening the con book than just for a couple of moments to look up information. This concept allows the owner to be able to complete different con-related activities (for example, tagging certain areas of the con as areas where certain characters have made their appearance), which are then updated and synced with other attendees' and cosplayers' con books. The Interactive Con Book would be made of e-paper that would allow people to interact with it and pass it along to others. This concept isn't fully fleshed out yet, but is a possibility for getting attendees and cosplayers to interact, as knowing where certain characters might allow people to move to different areas of the con to see the characters they want to see. This concept would also have to be evaluated in front of cosplayers and attendees to see if this concept is desirable or even helpful to this problem space.

Messageable Con Book

This is the Messageable Con Book concept (left). It is a variation on the Interactive Con Book in that it allows people to treat the con book as a means to send anonymous messages (or personalized) to cosplayers at the con. Cosplayers could choose to receive their messages through either SMS or the con book itself. This would allow attendees to interact with the cosplayers in another way that is more convenient to them, and possibly give them some time to compose themselves to be able to interact with the cosplayers in

Figure 36: The Interactive and Messageable Con Books allow attendees and cosplayers to interact through the con book given to them at registration

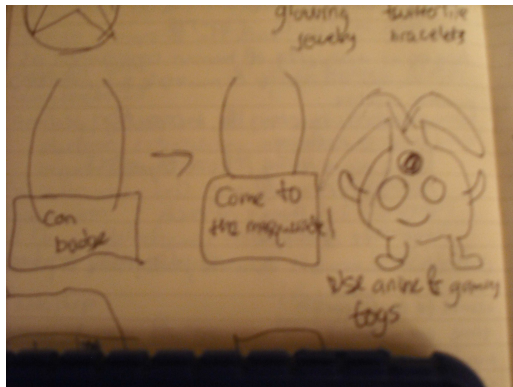


Figure 37: The My Badge allows everyone at the con to be able to start conversations with each other through the messages on their badges

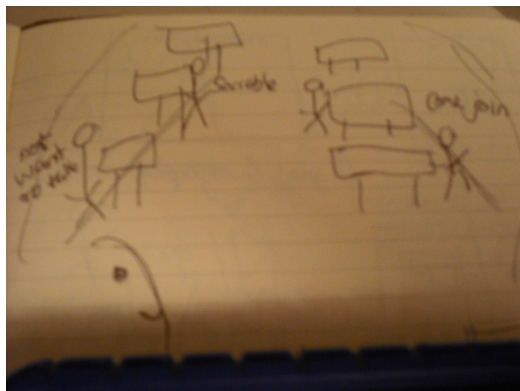


Figure 38: Ninja Sight allows people to secretly see if others in their environment are sociable or not

the way they would like to. A potential drawback to this concept is that attendees may use this as an outlet to stalk or annoy the cosplayers, and may cause the cosplayers to not return to the specific con due to the annoyance. At the same time, though, this concept could be used as a means to help cosplayers perform their skits and engage with other cosplayers for the enjoyment of the attendees. This concept would have to be evaluated in front of cosplayers and attendees to see if this concept is a viable direction to pursue for the spring semester.

My Badge

This is the My Badge concept (left). This concept uses the badge that every person at the con has to wear to prove that they have paid to enter the con. Normally, badges are meant to just show this information and the name of the person who owns the badge, but the My Badge allows people to be able to write messages on their badges. This allows people to place their thoughts on the badge as a means to start a conversation, akin to how people mention how they like what others are wearing. In its current form, I have not iterated on this concept to see how one might want to write messages onto the badge, but will be reconceptualized to include this part of the interaction. This concept holds some promise, as many want to share messages with other people, and since badges are a way for people to know who they are talking to, this might be a good mechanism to create conversations among different people at the con, which of course includes cosplayers.

Ninja Sight

This is the Ninja Sight concept (left). This concept uses augmented reality for an attendee at the con to be able to see how sociable other people are. This indication

would be hovering over the head of different people at the con, and the only way for the attendee to figure out who is sociable or what types of taste people have are by equipping one's Ninja Sight. This concept can use meta-information about different people at the con to see what his/her different tastes are, while at the same time can be used as a means to show others how sociable and friendly he/she is at the current moment. This can be incorporated into most costumes as well, so cosplayers wouldn't have to worry about it interfering with their ability to become the character they want to be, and it also gives attendees the feeling of being a ninja, which is an appealing career to most of the people at the con. This will have to be evaluated in front of cosplayers and attendees of cons to see what types of information they would want to know and how this information would be shared, as there are privacy concerns with what types of information different people might want to show to others while trying to have a good time at the con.

Seeing Glasses

The Seeing Glasses concept allows one to don a pair of glasses that allows an attendee to be situated in the experience of a character he/she wants to be, and then shapes what the person sees as if it were from the eyes of that character. For example, if an attendee wanted to become the character from a famous video game (for example, Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy VII*), then everything the attendee would be seen as if it were from Sephiroth's perspective: that he is a notorious fighter capable of bringing any person to their knee's at a moment's notice and that he isn't afraid of anyone. While in the experience of another character, the attendee will be able to see every attendee at the con in a costume, while cosplayers would be seen in the

costume they have chosen to don. This would allow the attendee to be able to become someone and interact with cosplayers in a way that is natural and fun for them – that is, in the character they have chosen to become. This concept also allows the attendee to also begin to see what cosplayers do at cons and begin to have more admiration for what it is that they do. This concept presents many different issues: for example: what does the experience of a certain character look like? Only very people besides the creators of that character know. In addition, since there are so many different loved and cherished characters out there, this experience will have to be customized to nearly every character ever made, including those that are made up for the cons themselves. This may be a daunting task to complete, but may be exactly what attendees might want to become while at a con – I would have to ask them to know for sure.

Personal Reflection

From a designerly standpoint, I am amazed at how much work I was able to get done in a semester on this project. Through the course of the last year, I thought I would never be able to get this much work done (talking to people, making concepts, evaluating them, holding design sessions, getting closer to be considered an “expert” on this topic), but it is amazing how much design work can get done in a semester. Another important aspect of this project for me is that the more I have delved into the problem space, the more energy I have had and the more motivation it has given me to be able to complete it. I have been able to see firsthand what it means to not only be a designer in service to a design problem, but I have also begun to see how design can directly affect people’s lives. Dealing with such a personal subject and

livelihood has made me much more sensitive to not only my own desires and what I am really “in to” personally, but I have also seen how these passions thrive and drive other people to do the things that they do, and I don’t want to change how people have fun. Ultimately, I have found that I want people to have more fun and enjoyment from my designs and the experiences which I am going to be giving to people in the way that people will want to naturally have fun.

I have also found out that there is much more at stake here than whether or not people like cosplayers or not. It is very intriguing to find out that this type of “fear of the unknown” is more common than I would think, and what I am doing may potentially help other people to get over their reservations of talking to people who are new, scary, and/or attractive. I know I personally suffer from this as well, and I think that this design problem has allowed me to not only see life through this set of eyes, but it has allowed me to be more open with the people around me and new people whom I meet. I also have found out the value of my peers through this design process, as I couldn’t have been able to move forward in the direction I am choosing without them. It took a lot of initiative to be able to create and stick to a weekly meeting time with my peers to not only update them as to what I have been doing, but to also hold me responsible to not only cosplayers, but to them as well, as I am taking time away from them on a Friday afternoon where they could be having fun or doing other work. In addition, being able to have capstone design sessions with my peers has also allowed me to get fresh perspectives than from the people whom I normally met with every Friday, which not only forced me to filter the most important details to them so they could be able to help



Figure 39: I would have never pushed myself to engage with others in interesting ways without this Capstone project

me, but it also forced me to give mini-presentations to them, which I have had trouble in the past being able to do intelligibly. The project has also helped me to realize when I need help in such a vast problem area, and that the experts, our professors, are always ready to help and give their perspectives about how to keep moving forward. Their help has been extraordinary and I owe a lot of gratitude to them. In the spring semester I plan on taking these lessons to heart and with me when I go to the con so that I can readily be able to not only grab the best information I need to design, but to also carry the values of this program with me, as I finally feel comfortable around my peers and pros to be myself, and not just another kid who is passing through the program. It has given me a lot of motivation to make myself and my peers better designers; and for that, I am very thankful.

Conclusion and Future Work

The con is a rich setting full of many different design opportunities and characters of all shapes and sizes. Being a form of entertainment, the con is an area for which people go to for many different and personal reasons. Some go to the con to buy artifacts from vendors from Japan, some go to view the newest anime and movies from Japan, others go to play video games against the best competition, and others go to express their love for video games and anime by creating costumes and then wearing them around the con. It is these people, the cosplayers, who help to provide the unique and powerful experience that makes going to a con so special and different from just any normal convention. Since everyone is doing something at the con that is of interest to them, the cosplayers end up becoming a part of the “props” of the con experience, used whenever the attendees want to take a picture of

them or ogle them from afar. One of the only genuine interactions attendees have with cosplayers is a short interaction where the attendee would ask the cosplayer to pose and have their picture taken. It is this situation I would like to improve: to give people the strength and the ability to talk to their real-life idols and characters that they love to play as and watch.

When attendees go to cons, the cosplayers are strangers to most attendees, as the people who are wearing costumes are an unknown identity to them. HCI has done many different things to try to help people either explore new contexts or to find new people for which to talk to. Technologies such as GPS and geocaching have been used as a means to suggest to people different areas which they might want to walk to or explore. Some of examples of these are [19, 3, 139], where the primary goal was to help people get to areas they didn’t necessarily know about or didn’t want to explore. I originally thought this was a valid design direction, as maybe the key to getting attendees to interact more with cosplayers was helping people explore the areas where cosplayers traditionally hang out at the con, hopefully raising the likelihood that a conversation might happen between these two different individuals. Unfortunately, this doesn’t necessarily promote directly the genuine type of interaction I am wishing to create, so this direction was put aside. Another direction that I thought of was matching people up together at the con to see if this type of pairing could lead to a new type of experience of getting to know a stranger. This has been done in [80 140, 113], but the results are more of a forceful type of pairing, where each party has no say into whom might be paired up with whom, leading to a potentially worthless pairing, as both parties are very adamant

about their love for gaming and anime. This direction was also put aside as well, and I hoped to find a better, more genuine and experiential approach to this problem of getting different strangers in this context to be able to engage and talk to each other.

Through the design experiments that I have conducted this semester, this direction has arisen. This direction is allowing people to recognize and see the relevance of the character in front of them at the con. The most genuine interactions and feedback I have received from people is in situations where they were able to recognize the characters or the experience of the games through the characters they have seen. This, I feel, is a much more genuine approach to this design problem, as it first allows people to recognize the character in front of them and see the reasons why someone would want to dress up as this character. Seeing the importance of the character will allow the person to at least wrap their heads around what it is they are seeing, and then having a better means to be able to interact and talk with the cosplayer at the con. This direction is also more genuine in this context, as it may help the attendees to want to go and watch more anime and play the games of the character in front of them to get a true sense of the character in front of them and evaluate the performance of the cosplayer at the con. It may also help to lead to a deeper appreciation of the cosplayers at the con and their dedication to their craft and this life of dressing up at cons.

In addition, this direction also isn't exclusive to just the con, as it can also be used to help in other conventions as well. For example, the experience of going to CHI can be quite demanding and challenging, as one may

not know all of the celebrities and research directions people are studying and presenting their work in. Giving the average attendee (student, businessman, or media relations person) the ability to have a means to strike up a genuine conversation will also help to feel that the interviewee's time is not being wasted or being patronized, also helping to reduce the awkwardness of an initial encounter. I am hoping that through careful design and concept generation, coupled with interviewing and becoming a cosplayer at a con I am attending in February will help me to feel like what it actually means to become a cosplayer at an actual convention, and this experience will give me the design insights and experience that I need to create a successful design.

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Plan for Spring 2010

In order to keep moving forward with my capstone project, there are a number of things that will have to be done to ensure a successful project and design. In

December 2009, the following items will have to be completed: contact other cosplayers for electronic or physical interviews, start building the costume I will be wearing for the con I am going to, start reading some books on identity theory, and create the submission for the 2010 CHI student research competition. I will also create and turn in the necessary HSC documents during this month. In January 2010, I will continue to read theories about identity and start searching the ACM digital library about any relevant concepts or ideas that I am thinking about, I will continue to build and finish the costume I will be needing to wear for the con I am attending, I will be conducting interviews with cosplayers (and if I cannot find any willing participants, I will start analyzing the content on cosplayer idol websites to start gaining information about cosplayers), and start to generate concepts related to my design direction. In February 2010, I will continue to generate concepts, continue to keep reading, continue to talk to cosplayers, attend Genericon to not only learn about the atmosphere which I am designing for, but to talk to cosplayers and gamers directly about my ideas and the con experience for them, and then come back and analyze all of this data.

In March 2010, I will either select a concept to prototype or refine all of my concepts to a point where they can be presented as a range of solutions for this problem space, continue to research appropriately for the directions I am selecting, and then meet again with cosplayers to get more feedback about the directions I am heading. In April 2010 I will begin to document my work for submission, potentially evaluate the concept I have prototyped or to bring the range of concepts to the cosplayers I have interviewed, in addition to performing any supplementary work to make a

convincing case for my design. In May 2010 I will finish up the necessary documentation for this capstone project and present my work for the public to be able to view. It will be at this point where I can continue working with the cosplayers I have befriended to go to other cons across the country and talk to more people about the viability of my design approach and see if there is buy-in from cosplayers and con attendees from across the country. I will also continue to move forward, either through reading more theory or by building other costumes or concepts to help make a strong case for why there should be more interaction between cosplayers and attendees of cons.

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Figure 40: When I am going to a con in the spring, not only will be I going to learn more about my design situation, I am hoping to have fun too! Picture from [92]