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**Social performance in fan communities as a
mechanism of identity-making (the examples
of Russia and Germany)**

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The paper is based on an MA thesis defended at the MA 'Studies in European Societies' in June 2018 and supervised by Dr. Anisya Khokhlova. This research examines the grounds of transformations in the cultural practices within large and smaller groups of German and Russian societies, the role of social performances in contemporary world and self-identification in terms of cultural diversity. Such a phenomenon provides complex processes of changing patterns of behavior that are reshaping personal everyday practices, symbolic capital, ways of social interactions, values and beliefs. The correlation between the narratives of social performances, their effectiveness, and the ability to reach society and (re)construct identities of the participants is the main issue of this paper. Publication of the thesis as a CGES Working Paper was recommended by the Examination Committee as one of the best theses defended by the students of the MA SES in 2018.

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Introduction

Rituals of everyday life tend to disappear in contemporary late capitalist societies (Alexander, 2006), and social performances come to replace them and become an integral part of late modernity, which gives rise to the new processes of identity construction and reproduction. Therefore, there is a need to reveal what the causes of such transformations in the cultural practices of society at large and smaller groups within it are.

Contemporary European societies become increasingly differentiated in terms of occupation strategies, leisure practices, lifestyles and consumer patterns, which generates the problems of solidarity erosion and alienation. The role of social performances in bringing people together and mobilizing them for collective action does not receive enough scientific attention nowadays. Although many key mechanisms of identity-making and the social construction of groups are based on sharing practices and performances, the sources are still tentative when fan communities emerging around mass culture products and maintained through media channels are considered.

Accounting for the differences of development of fan cultures in Western European societies and Russia, it would be of scientific interest to investigate and compare them. My research focuses on Germany, as one of countries where fan culture is especially popular, and Russia, where such culture is just developing. It would be relevant to reveal similarities and differences in how the global products of mass culture are consumed and interpreted in two countries under study, how they trigger the formation of fan communities, and how these communities engage in collective rituals to increase the loyalty of members and enhance intergroup boundaries.

My project is concentrated on the fan communities shaped around mass culture products, such as DC/Marvel-based series, and fan events that such communities tend to organize such as ComicCons. The media products under question are both based on media texts, although one of them is a fiction series, while another one is a set of comic books. The general strategy of transmedia, i.e. media narratives that transcend multiple media forms to strengthen them, is always the same, but its manifestations are different insofar mass culture products have different trajectories of targeting the audience and entering the global and national markets. The imaginary worlds created by the series under analysis are both fantasy worlds, but the positioning of the heroes and of their purpose varies a lot. The series are aimed at different audiences with various preferences, cultural patterns and, therefore, presumably behavior, sense of belonging and, generally, identity.

The research question to be raised in my project is how social performances contribute to shaping and reproduction of identity in fan communities in two countries under study.

The objective of the research is to reveal the role of social performances for fan communities and trace their operation as an identity-making mechanism.

Correspondingly, a set of research tasks has been set:

- To describe the elements of social performances embedded in the culture of fan communities;
- To analyze the structure of social performances based on J. Alexander's theory;
- To describe social performances embedded in the culture of fan communities;
- To find out correlations between the members' narratives of belonging and different strategies of engagement in community life through social performances;
- To reveal the conditions under which social performances get fused rather than de-fused;
- To find out which threats to social performances can cause de-fusion;
- To deduce the tools and strategies aimed at the re-fusion of social performances and implemented by fan communities;
- To reveal similarities and differences of social performances across fan communities of Russia and Germany and analyze their contribution to identity-making.

Empirically, my research bases on the observation of different types of performative events that are further analyzed through the prism of J. Alexander's theory (Alexander & Mast, 2006; Alexander, 2006) and M. Halliday's methodology (Halliday et al., 1990; Halliday & Webster, 2003), so that the performances that presumably hold fan communities together are investigated along with and the discourses they generate and the semiotics of symbolic actions they produce. Correspondingly, the core methods that are applied in the research are in-depth interviews with community members, participant observation, and discourse analysis.

Observation was used to examine three types of fan events in Germany and three types – in Russia. All of those presupposed various formats of performing, so that maximal variety of field data could be reached. Moreover, the observations of communities' events as social ritual-like actions in their natural communication setting allowed me to gain detailed knowledge of members' behavior within social performances and to reconstruct the patterns of participation in performances and the outcomes of such participation that the members are often not aware of and thus cannot verbalize.

The method of discourse analysis was used to find out how media products related to fan communities get spread in the Global Net as the modern public arena of content production and sharing. Here I focused on online communities and forums in social networks that attracted most members of fan communities and served as a platform to establish contact later developing into real-life communications, including group performances.

The third method applied – in-depth interview – is an essential for the project, because only the analysis of members' narratives can help to reveal the ways in which the informants, fan communities members, identify themselves and the factors influencing these self-identification processes, in their eyes. In my

research, the interviews were conducted with the members of fan communities actively involved in media products consumption, and participating in community events. The typological sample, again, was based on the principles of maximal variety: the representatives interviewed belonged to the two different national cultures, and also were part of various fan communities organized around two patterns of the selection of mass culture products. In total, 34 interviews were collected: 17 for each country. The collected narratives were subjected to open, selective and axial coding.

The degree paper presented below consists of an introduction, two chapters, references and appendixes. The first chapter is composed of six paragraphs, that jointly describe the theoretical perspective of my paper. The second chapter includes the description of my methodological framework and three paragraphs reflecting on the outcomes of data collection with three methods applied. Finally, the findings are briefly summarized in the conclusion.

Chapter 1. Theoretical approach to social performance: Elements, means requirements and conditions

My research focuses on fan communities, and especially the practices and norms that they transmit, and the identities they create and maintain. Today, media culture has become way more than just an entertainment resource: we can observe people obsessed with products of media culture and bonding their lives with them by fully identifying themselves with (and around) specific artifacts, brands, texts and events. To analyze collective events that transcend the boundaries between the virtual and the real, bring fan cultures offline and embody fan communities often bringing their members together in face-to-face interaction, I apply the theory of social performance developed by my American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander. This theory, in turn, is inspired by the ideas of dramaturgical action and performancing by Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz.

Goffman believes that impression management can only be effective if the audience is in sync with the individual perception of self. If the audience is in disagreement with the image an individual presents, individual self-presentation can get interrupted (Goffman, 1959). Individuals create their images of themselves basing on how the society thinks they should act in a particular situation. The decision on how to act is taken depending on how people define the situations they find themselves in. Importantly, neither situations nor their definitions are unique to the full: in their interpretations of what happens individuals use standardized frames, which enables them operating in mutually predictable and easily recognizable ways (Goffman, 1974).

Goffman uses the metaphor of stage play to describe interaction shaped by the participants' aspiration for self-presentation. Although the ways situations are framed are relatively stable, still the ways people "play" shift throughout the performance: this is similar to how a discussion is keyed – based on what either person says or does in the course of an interaction, the key will change accordingly. This parallel goes even further, though. Goffman claims that a speaker details a drama more often than provides information. Every actor in social interaction invites the listeners to empathize and often means them to show appreciation rather than take action (Goffman, 1967).

Geertz who specialized in symbolic anthropology introduces a framework that gives prime attention to the role of symbols in constructing public meaning. He argues that to interpret a culture's web of symbols, scholars should first isolate its elements, specifying the internal relationships among these elements and characterizing the whole system in a general way. To do so, they should focus on the core symbols around which culture is organized, the underlying structures of seemingly situation-based encounters, and the ideological principles upon which culture is based. Geertz also insists that culture is public, because "meaning is," and systems of meanings as collective property of a specific group are something that produces culture (Geertz, 1957).

As we see, traditionally, self-presentation and self-identification through it have been considered by social scholars in the contexts of simplified repeated patterns of culturally shaped communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction and those observing it share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication's symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another's intentions. This way of expressing and confirming personal belonging to a culture or a group is called a ritual (Alexander, 2006).. Rituals reflect the social structures and cultures of their historically specific societies. They are distinctive in that they are fused, i.e. their elements and processes are merged together and coordinated unproblematically, so that the rituals can fully engage people and give them the feeling of coherence. Fusion is much more likely to achieve under the conditions of less complex societies, but it sometimes also occurs in contemporary complex (post)industrial societies such as Russia or Germany as well. Rituals energize participants and attach them to each other, which increases their identification with the symbolic objects of the community and intensifies the connection of the participants and symbolic objects with the observing audience, as part of the whole process (Alexander, 2006).

However, due to the process of globalization, cultural diffusion, and rapid changes in lifestyle, such an organizational pattern as ritual seems to have almost faded away. Yet, it has actually not totally disappeared but rather transformed into a new pattern of cultural behavior, which is social performance. First of all, such changes are caused by the disappearance of a specific shared ideology in the society that could dictate cultural norms and patterns to people. New waves of identity searching followed in the times of the growing popularity of media products, such as TV series. Taking into consideration all the facilities and technical innovations that enrich media culture and involve the audiences, whenever and wherever they are, one may conclude that such a way of constructing people's identity has become a base for the formation of late modern societies (Alexander, 2006). Below I shall look at the phenomenon of social performance in more details, following the logic of analysis proposed by Jeffrey Alexander.

1.1. Elements of social performances

Social and cultural performances operate not just as mirrors reflecting the values and traditions of a group as they are understood in the present, but as "magical mirrors of social reality" that work to "exaggerate, invert, re-form, magnify, minimize, dis-color, recolor, even deliberately falsify" the culture of the performers (Turner, 1988). In other words, such performances not only reflect the culture of the performers: they provide an altered image of what they are reflecting, and this altered image often represents what a culture and society wants to be rather than what is actually is. Alexander defines social performance as "the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation. This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere; it is the meaning that they, as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe" (Alexander, 2006). As we see, a

performance based on cultural product makes an act of different dimensions that consists of many elements of social performance such as the audience, the mise-en-scene, the actors, and the social power (Alexander, 2006).

One part of this symbolic reference provides the deep background of collective representations for social performance; another part composes the foreground, the scripts that are the immediate referent for action. The latter can be understood as constituting the immediate referential text of the performance. Constructed by the performative imagination, background and foreground symbols are structured by codes that provide analogies and antipathies and by narratives that build chronologies. In symbolizing the actors' and the audiences' worlds, these narratives and codes simultaneously condense and elaborate, and they employ a wide range of rhetorical devices, from metaphor to synecdoche, to configure social and emotional life in compelling and coherent ways (Alexander, 2006).

To identify whether we observe a performance or just a social action, we should define, where the border between them lies. However, it is rather difficult to do, as performances, especially those contributing to identity-making, can take a vast variety of forms, such as physical action and the manipulation of physical appearance (including displays, symbols, signs) as well as the verbal expression of values and attitudes viewed as normative of the in-group (e.g., stereotypes and prejudices). Generally, in an ordinary intragroup (and even an intergroup), speaking one's mother tongue would not be considered a form of identity performance because it happens thoughtlessly and almost naturally. Automatic or habitual group behavior, therefore, does not normally count as performance (Spears et al., 2004).

The association between behavior and social identity is traditionally thought to be "conventional" (that is, being shaped in relation to a group and its norms rather than remaining idiosyncratic). This means that when performing such norm-relevant behavior, the communicator expects the audience to recognize the association between the behavior and the relevant social identity. It also means that this behavior makes explicit and salient the normative status of the behavior for the relevant identity. What is important to underline is that identity performance pertains specifically to social identities. This is the key distinction between the position advanced here and the concept of self-presentation (Spears et al., 2004).

Through individual dramaturgical performance, actors seek to accrue some kind of benefits and achieve recognition: their predominant aim is to be seen favorably by others, as distinct individuals, and to get rewards from the audience (Goffman, 1959). By contrast, in my paper I am concerned with the cases where performances are governed by the interests of actors as group members. This has implications both for the functions that performances fulfil (those will be discussed in the next section of this paper) and for the types of performance that are of interest for me. To reiterate, the term "identity performance" concerns phenomena involving social rather than personal, identity.

1.2. Mechanisms of performative action: Fusion, de-fusion and re-fusion

Defining the process of social performance, it is important to mention that there are different possible outcomes of such performance, depending on the features of society it unfolds in, the intensions of the actors and the performative structure. First, there is a correlation between the simplicity of the society and the success of the performance: the simpler the collective organization is, the less its social and cultural parts are segmented and differentiated, and the stronger the elements of social performances are fused. On the contrary, the more complex, segmented, and differentiated the collectivity is, the more likely it becomes that these elements of social performance grow de-fused. Therefore, to be effective in a society of increasing complexity, social performances must engage in a project of re-fusion. To the degree they achieve re-fusion, social performances become convincing and effective, or, so to say, more ritual-like. As a ritual is a perfect form of cultural pattern guaranteeing solidarity and satisfying collective identity, successful social performance must resemble a ritual or at least tend to develop into a full-featured ritual (Alexander, 2006).

In case of failure, social performances remain de-fused, so that they seem artificial and contrived, less ritual-like than performances in the pejorative sense. As a result, they are also less effective. Failed performances are those in which the actor, whether individual or collective, has been unable to sew back together the elements of performance to make them seem connected seamlessly. This performative failure makes it much more difficult for the actors to realize their intentions in a practical way.

In modern societies, we can observe many attempts of putting performative elements together in order to succeed in engaging an audience that transmedia undertake. Aimed to “catch” all the elements of the complex society involved in media communication and embrace every media channel possible seems to be the best mechanism to achieve an effective and convincing way to impress an audience. Nevertheless, carving out a niche and involving users of all these channels can be incredibly challenging, because of the extent of the resources to use. The most urgent point here is that this process cannot be fully controlled, directed or pushed: the elements of cultural communication determine the possible development of the product and therefore communication. In this very moment, elements of outer media space can be caught up with the intentions of the others and become embedded in the cultural space constructed by others in terms of the product made by its creators. So, a cycle emerges, where one element can prove its cultural adherence and thus make the audience believe in its authenticity and use it in the processes of identity-making and reproduction. However, even if certain media channels are inspiring but fail to connect with each other properly, then the puzzle does not match, which leads to breaks communication and, therefore, the de-fusion of the performance in general.

According to Alexander, although the contemporary societies become secular, performances in them keep the same ambitions as the sacred rituals of the past: the crucial point for a social performance to succeed or fail is also the ability to

produce psychological identification of the audience with the actors and provide cultural extension. In other words, its important aim is to attract the social environment through skillful and emotionally-loaded actions, build the emotional connection between the audience, the actors and the text, and thereby to provide the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from the performance to the audience. To the extent these conditions are achieved, one can argue that the elements of the performance are fused (Alexander, 2006). However, as societies become increasingly complex, such moments of fusion become much more difficult to achieve. The elements of performance grow separated and independently variable, and it becomes ever more challenging to bring texts into life. The strong attribution of authenticity is now required, and it depends on the ability of the actors to “sewed back” the disparate elements of their performance into a seamless and convincing whole. If authenticity marks success, then failure suggests that the performance seems insincere and faked: the actors seems to be out of role, merely reading from an impersonal script, pushed and pulled by the forces of society, acting not from sincere motives but to manipulate the audience. In the media sphere, for example, it may become obvious for the audience that the actors seek for public attention and recognition far too aggressively, whereas the audience prefers to believe that they have chosen a cultural product voluntarily rather than have been forced into it. In complex societies, performances seek to overcome fragmentation by creating flow and achieving authenticity. They try to recover a momentary experience of ritual, to eliminate or to negate the effects of social and cultural de-fusion (Alexander, 2006).

As a result, in a successful performance, the signifiers seem to actually become what they signify. Symbols and referents become one. The script, the direction, the actors, the background culture – all these separate elements of performance become indivisible and invisible. Through the creation of flow, contemporary performances seek to revive the momentary experience of ritual, and to eliminate or to negate the effects of social and cultural de-fusion. Speaking epigrammatically, successful performances re-fuse history and thus overcome the deferral of meaning that Derrida has once recognized as difference (Derrida, 1992). The mere action of performing accomplishes the intended effect of the performance, and the audience, sometimes including the actors themselves, comes to believe in the performance and to perform in the mode of belief, identifying themselves with this collective set of actions and developing the sense of belonging of the culture they contribute to. The most essential aim of the elements in social performance is making a sign that will be available to others, easily recognizable, and pleasant to identify with.

There are certain mechanisms that ensure a prosperous performance. These are predominantly background symbols and foreground scripts. Regarding the field of media, one can argue that fan communities make the display of the adoption of the cultural content that these products contain, and this adoption becomes possible due to the usage of specific signifiers in foreground scripts that refer to the social, physical, natural, and cosmological worlds, build emotions-evoking binary oppositions (such as good vs. bad, beautiful vs. ugly, fair vs. unfair), and are directly associated by the audiences with their immediate experiences.

However, when something goes wrong and the performance falls into parts, there is still a chance for the actors to infuse meaning into it through re-fusion efforts. Re-fusion allows ritual-like behavior, which is a kind of temporary recovery of the ritual process. The repeated practicing of such pseudo-rituals is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings that are already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. The re-fusion of performance elements allows not only the actors but also their audiences to experience flow, which means they focus their attention on the performed text and tend to unconsciously exclude any alternative interpretive reference but for the one imposed by the actors: “The steps for experiencing flow... involve the... process of delimiting reality, controlling some aspect of it, and responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

When the performance is successfully re-fused, social powers channeled by it manifest themselves not as external or hegemonic forces that facilitate or oppose the unfolding performance but merely as sign-vehicles, as means of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning (Alexander, 2006). This is very similar what Bourdieu has in mind when he speaks of the exercise of artistic taste as culture “becoming natural” (Bourdieu, 1968). The connoisseur’s poised display of aesthetic judgment might be thought of as a successful performance in the sense that it thoroughly conceals the manner in which this judgment is “artificial and artificially acquired,” the result of a lengthy socialization resting upon class privilege (Bourdieu, 1968). Just like the judgements of taste or everyday practices related to the, performative effects go unheeded if/when re-fusion occurs. The performance achieves the state of verisimilitude – the appearance of reality. It seems to be action, rather than its imitation. This illusion of reality via skillful performance and resulting flow is what Barthes describes in his famous reflection on “true wrestling”: the public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, being completely uninterested in knowing whether the context is rigged or not (Barthes, 1957). In re-fused social performance, it becomes not so important whether the motives and choices of the actors are truly sincere: what matters is whether the public accepts them as sincere – and does this as taken for granted.

1.3. Inner-group and outer-group activities in fan communities: Forming social identity

Identity performance may simultaneously have to address in-group and out-group audiences, and it may orient to both identity consolidation and identity mobilization. Therefore, it has to be considered, in which cases identity performance can flow back on identity.

The first route here is intra-individual: it involves self-perception (see Bem, 1972): by performing behavior patterns associated with specific traits, individuals may come to see these aspects as self-defining simply because the aspects of social identity that are in line with these behavior patterns become cognitively salient (Fazio et al., 1981). In line with this assumption, self-presentation has been found

to direct attention toward certain aspects of the self-concept that are consistent with these self-presentations, a phenomenon known as “biased scanning” (Jones et al., 1981).

The impact of biased scanning on self-perception is more likely to be greater in public settings because the behavioral traits that are presented there grow more salient as they become central in the (previously unknown) audience’s view of the self (Baumeister, 1982). Transposed to group settings, this analysis suggests that identity performance may play a crucial role in the definition of social identity.

The second route involves the reactions from others: researches repeatedly show that individuals’ self-concepts are influenced by audiences’ behaviors and feedback (see Snyder & Swann, 1978) and that they can be successfully maintained only if they are confirmed by others (Ibid.). I note that these findings apply to collective aspects of the self (social identity) as well. At an inner-group level, my review suggests that being treated as a proper member of the in-group by in-groupers seems to be necessary to maintain one’s identity (Noel et al., 1995). Identity performance indeed seems to be used to generate such confirmatory reactions from the audiences. Finally, at an inner-group level, identity performance seems to be often geared at influencing out-groupers’ views and treatment of the in-group (Klein & Licata, 2003).

Again, maintaining the identity of the in-group seems to require recognition and acceptance from the out-group (van Knippenberg & van Oers, 1984). These reactions may, in turn, establish or consolidate group members’ social identities (Klein & Snyder, 2003).

The third route is through influence from leaders and activists’ behaviors. Leaders construct identities in particular ways. By performing these identities, they can influence others into endorsing them as part of their self-definition. Their role can also be indirect and channeled by the two other routes: when groups behave in accordance with leaders’ prescriptions, their actions may come to be rationalized as identity-defining through self-perception, and others’ reactions may come to shape these group members’ identity in line with the leaders’ constructions.

A particular performance mode of performing culture to other cultures stands as a specifically powerful form of meaning-making. Through it, groups reflect not only who they are, but who they want to become. As such, the present moment in this condensed temporality of cultural performance represents the physical embodiment of a group ideal that is shared not only among the performers, but is also offered to the spectators. The act of watching a cultural performance is a performance of culture in itself. Audience is a necessary part of the performance, that tends to accept or refuse the received information and symbolic action. Thus, it is a culmination of the further development of identities representation in and out of the community; of the performance that was aimed to impress the public; the community itself that is the carrier of the culture and ideas.

To secure identities, people therefore may be motivated to influence others’ views in order to align them with their own. The very existence of this motivation occurs due to the need of “self-verification” (Swann et al., 2008). People act to secure

acceptance as in-group members and, thereby, to fulfill this function of social identity consolidation. The constraint of mutual recognition is particularly important for individuals who have an insecure social identity, such as those who wish to move from one group to another group or who view themselves as possessing several conflicting identities. This is a particularly relevant point for my research which focuses on fan communities that are often hardly accepted in dominant culture as legitimate or, at least, “serious”, which makes identification with them problematic for many members.

If group membership depends on in-group validation, it is particularly hard to maintain multiple identities if those who sustain them (a) would see the identities as incompatible and (b) are socially visible to each other (Swann et al., 2008). Again, this is relevant for my empirical research, as fan community members shift between their fan identities and other identities including gender, age and professional ones, or balance between several fan communities.

It has long been shown that people strategically use their self-presentations to establish positive interpersonal relationships (Goffman, 1959). Having a common background activity would be the first step for the inner-community communication, but social power inside it would be a key mechanism for obtaining weight within the society and, therefore, having positive connections with the majority of the group.

According to self-categorization theory, social identification entails a process of self-stereotyping whereby group members learn and seek to conform to the “criterial attributes” that define their social category (Turner, 1982). Those who share a common social identity will likely be persuaded by information pertaining to this identity from sources who are in a position to know about the identity.

Social action emanates from social identity. In its initial formulation, self-categorization theory argues that when the social context is such that individuals define themselves in terms of the same social category, they are motivated to agree with each other as to which norms characterize this social identity and to coordinate their actions in line with these norms (Turner, 1991). The “flow of causality” is therefore from context to identity to performance. In this flow, social power makes an extra force to bring people together and lead them to collective identification. Such social power that consists of resources distribution, such as information, roles, social distance within group, responsibilities and opportunities of explicit action is framed with the help of norms settled in the group.

The very point of identity as given in performative framework is to assume that identity performance is limited to making the implicit explicit. Social identity shapes collective action and thereby provides a source of social power for shaping the social world and mobilize groups and communities to (re)produce social reality.

The very existence of a group, and the social identity attached to it, is highly dependent on relevant out-groups’ treatment of this group. When negative stereotypes of the in-group are endorsed or simply implied by out-group members, they can even induce a state known as stereotype threat, which

impairs performance on dimensions associated with the stereotype (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In such cases, group members can engage in identity performance to change the out-group's stereotypes and treatment of the in-group and question the external opinions that position them as illegitimate and/or punishable. Even more, these risks may encourage them to actively display their adherence to norms that are not punishable by the out-group audience. This might be true for fan communities that seek to integrate in the dominant culture that is rather oppressive to them.

At that, different members of in-groups undertake various efforts of such integration through performance: for example, integration seems to be primarily a concern of "ordinary" members, whereas high-status group members are less sensitive to the audience and are more geared to consolidating their superior status rather than mobilizing for change (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Importantly, it is not enough for the actors to have an audience in mind; it is also necessary for the actors to believe that the audience has the actors in mind, and for this purpose their script should be "readable" for the people who are consuming the performance (Schenker & Weigold, 1992). Thus, generally, anyone who seeks a successful group action will need to be skilled at performing identity (Reicher et al., 2006).

To conclude, the more complex and pluralized the society is, the more problematic the process of identity-making through performative actions becomes, as community members are less and less visible for each other, and their audiences undergo the process of diversification. This is especially true for fan communities that are often basing in online communication and transcend local and national boundaries.

1.4. Fan communities: A theoretical overview

The topic of identity in fan communities in terms of social performances is currently understudied. However, due to the growing number of convention visitors (festivals) and the appearance of such a phenomenon as cosplay, there arises a need for sociological analysis of the concept of fan community, fan identity and cosplaying (Jenkins, 1992). Hierarchies within the community of fans are built according to the following criteria: engagement and knowledge of scripts, costumes, cosplaying, online activity, interaction in the extra-conventional time. Social relations between members in the fan community are the framework that structures the group. Through the costumes and practices of the demonstration of their beloved heroes and performances, fans create a unique style that determines their personal and collective identity (Jenkins, 2010). In the framework of my research, I also observe conventions and cosplays as structural components of in-group communication and resulting identity-making.

The traditional subcultural approach to fan communities seems too simplified to grasp the plurality of elements that have to be considered in the analysis of performative culture. One of the alternatives here would be the theory of changing youth scenes, as proposed by H. Pilkington to show how under the pressures of

globalization youth affiliations in communities become more changeable, flexible and complex (Pilkington, 1994). Basing on her analysis, H. Jenkins analyzes contemporary participatory cultures young people are involved in, ending up with pointing out the following structure of fan identity (also confirmed by my empirical research) (Jenkins, 2010).

Formation of fan identity is a complex construct built through social interaction on conventions and cosplay and through the construction of corporality. As to the socialization of fans, it takes place within the culture of comic book enthusiasm. In a fan environment, conventions and big fan events are perceived as festivals, where everyone can showcase their original costumes or play a scene from their favorite TV series or comics. The convention is, first of all, the scene of social interaction of fan communities and cosplayers (cosplay participants). The conventions offer a wide range of tools and opportunities for staging theater performances and communicating in a fan environment. Many of the comic book fans prefer to interact at conventions, being directly into the image of their heroes or projecting some of their characteristics into their own style of behavior and communication. As to cosplaying, it is characterized by two types of practices of reincarnation. One kind is a gaming accessory, reincarnation for a certain performance in order to demonstrate the beauty of the costumes and perform roles. Another type is reincarnation in order to completely merge with the hero, transferring the personality of the hero to an individual identity. This reincarnation is much deeper than a simple game change of roles. The individual may be dissatisfied with his/her appearance, appearance, manner of behavior, gestures. The transition to an alternative image is the transfer of oneself "into a new body" with virtues that the individual lacks in everyday life (Jenkins, 2010).

Conventions and cosplays are important, but not necessarily the basic elements of fan interaction. Sometimes, interaction within communities takes place in the context of fan "hanging out" inner socialization. It can be a family holiday, the birthday of one of the members of the community, the release date of the series or comics or rehearsal cosplay.

Cultural capital serves as a status marker for the individuals within communities that can be expressed in various forms (e.g. knowledge of cult texts, creativity in cosplaying, knowledge of English language, the ability to put cosplay performance or create costumes and cosplay clothes and more) (Jenkins, 2010). As a rule, fans share their individual cultural capital with the group. The presence of cultural capital contributes to easier entry into the community and promotion of the hierarchy in the community. The hierarchy in the community of fans of comics is built up by factors such as the duration and activity of participation and interaction in the fan group, online activity, and conventional activity during performances.

Thus, it can be concluded that fan activity is embedded in performative culture and enriched with such elements as actors (who provide the very performance), audience (that receives the symbolic action), social power (that sets up the in-group hierarchy and the relations between the fan community and the dominant culture) and the mise-en-scene (that is constructing the image whole performance). Taking all these factors into consideration, it becomes obvious that

fan communities provide and require strong bonds with the participatory culture, fuel the feeling of belonging, and contribute to individual and collective identity-making. Relevance of skills obtained by members as a form of cultural capital shows how selective communities can be about the actors who establish performances for internal and external scenes.

1.5. Theoretical approaches to identity

Sociologists have long applied the debatable concept of social identity, which is generally understood as the aggregate of the assignment of a person to different social categories: race, nationality, class, gender, etc. If traditionally the concept of identity refers to a person as an actor, nowadays the meaning has expanded. Instead of “collective representations” and “group thinking,” the term of a collective or group identity is now shifted to the forefront of scholarly analysis. Along with personal identity, social identity is considered an important regulator of self-awareness and social behavior. Personal identity is seen as impossible without the participation of the individual in various social and cultural environments.

E. Goffman considers identity in terms of multiple social roles distinguishing between three types of identity: (1) social identity – the typing of the personality by other people on the basis of the attributes of the social group to which he/she belongs; (2) personal identity – unique features formed by a specific combination of events in the history of life; and (3) self-identity – a subjective feeling of the individual by the individuality of his/her own situation (Goffman, 1959).

The greatest functional load out of those is certainly social identity, consisting of many identities, i.e. the social roles, “masks” that make up the content and forms of human behavior. The pressures of social institutions force people to constantly revise and lose their roles, interpret situations using the prescribed “framework”, and build new strategies for adapting and achieving their goals. To show how a person retains his/her individuality (identity), Goffman considers the phenomenon of “role distance”. The role play is an indispensable condition for human survival in complex and rigid institutional environments. To show that a person is more than a role, the individual has to distance himself/herself from the social role. In this capacity, a mechanism is ensured for maintaining the uniqueness and normality of the human personality, which allows people to preserve the consciousness of their identity as a “knot” that connects all other roles.

Modern sociological and psychological theories mainly focus on the constructed identity, which is not considered as sustainable or objective because of the expressed dynamism of modern society. For example, in phenomenological sociology the desire to combine the macrosocial and socio-psychological paradigms of the emergence of personality has determined the view of the problem of social identity. A. Schutz considers the problem of intersubjectivity of the “vital world” of individuals, where “Others” are its integral part (Schutz, 1967). “I” experiences the world as inhabited by other “I-s”, as the world shared of others and made for others. Examination of identity within the framework of the phenomenological approach results in the idea that individual vital worlds are

limited by the presence of others in it, which differs in the degree of proximity/range of relations. The more distant the others are – the more typed the perception of the others becomes.

P. Berger and N. Luckmann consider society as dual objective and subjective reality, which is constructed by the people themselves in the course of their social activities. Identity is seen as a key element of subjective reality, which is in a dialectical connection with society. Identity is formed in the process of socialization of an individual in a particular society. With regard to an individual, one can say that he/she simultaneously externalizes himself/herself in the social world and internalizes the latter as an objective reality. When primary socialization, the individual separates significant others, and the process of internalization takes place, that is, “taking over from the other” the world in which these others already live. The ability to perceive oneself from the position of another is the first step towards the formation of identity. The authors suggest a dialectical connection between identification by others and self-identification, i.e. between objectively prescribed and subjectively established identities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In the theory of A. Giddens, social identity is considered in the context of the relationship between social systems and individuals. Individuals are regarded as historically and spatially localized members of society. In their day-to-day activities, they grow competent in the situations and social conditions with which they are connected. Reproduction of social systems and the behavior of agents have a temporal extent, and their interrelation is manifested at the level of individual participation in socialization processes. Giddens presents his own hypothesis of the structure of identity. According to him, identity balances between two poles: on the one hand, absolute adaptability (conformism), and on the other hand – isolation. For modern identity, the following dilemmas are characteristic: (1) unification – fragmentation; (2) helplessness – mastery; (3) authoritarianism – uncertainty; (4) personal needs – individual market. In general, Giddens criticizes poststructuralist and postmodern theories, predicting the crisis of the ability of modern people to acquire their identity. In his book “Modernity and Self-Identity” he insists that people are involved in the conditions of modernity in an independent search for themselves (Giddens, 1991). The social structures of modern society acquire a special characteristic – reflexivity. Identity forms an individual trajectory of passage through various social and institutional settings throughout the life cycle. Giddens looks at identity in the spirit of Erickson – only in the connection with the contemporary socio-historical environment, technology and economy of the era, the cultural tradition and the dominant educational practices and values, but he comes to different conclusions. He argues that the processes of globalization of the world community now penetrate the heart of the human beings – their self. I-identity now makes an object that is constantly reflexed, assembled, and revised by people; and even the capacity for reflection is reformatted. Since social systems are placed in a space-time continuum, they can be interpreted as structural fields where agents occupy certain positions with respect to each other. In this context, social identity is the social position of agents, which forms a set of opportunities, prerogatives and obligations for them. Social identity is expressed at the level of situational social practices where

stability is manifested at the level of situational social practices and achieved by the arrangement of agents in relation to the three main aspects of temporality on which the theory of structure is constructed: (1) positioning of individuals in interaction structure; (2) their positioning in everyday space-time trajectories; (3) and their positioning relative to the space-time trajectories of everyday life within the life paths (Giddens, 1991: 141-143).

Finally, the instrumentalist approach to identity and identity-making represented, for instance, by E. Goffman (see Goffman, 1967), M. de Certeau (2001) and other scholars regards identity as situational and selectable considering identity is a process in which individual and collective traits and ways of self-realization can change, depending on situations. However, the representatives of this approach recognize the dependence of situations on the everyday structures determined by the relations of power. If the constructivist approach in general recognizes the internal independence of a person on society, the instrumental approach emphasizes the need for situational adaptability and cultural assimilation. The constructivist approach of the analysis of identities is that identity is regarded as being constructed by a person and society. The prevailing idea at the present time is that methodology and cognitive procedures are generally assessed as a factor in constructing reality and constructing an identity.

To conclude, microlevel constructivist interpretations of identity consider everything collective as social artifacts, as an integrity arising, reconstructed and mobilized in accordance with cultural codes and centers of power. The constructivist trend recognizes identity as a historically volatile and socially conditioned, changing, and often even constructed, process of shaping the feeling of belonging within social groups and among individuals. Constructionism rejects the idea of “natural” objective of identity, as constructionists are confident in the possibility of altering identities.

The general idea presented in this part of the chapter is that despite differences in the understanding of the phenomenon of identity, the dominant approach in current social studies is to consider social identity in the context of socialization within a specific group and under the pressures of structural conditions. It is emphasized that individuals construct social reality in the course of social interaction, relying on their own ideas and representations of others, which manifest themselves in their relations inside the community. Such identities can get embodied in everyday communication, language, and symbols. Thus, social identity can be defined as a structural component of personality developing in the process of ontogenesis under the conditions of interaction with social environment.

Speaking about the perspective Jeffrey Alexander’s theory of social performance opens up for identity studies, there is space for criticism and revision. First of all, his theoretical framework describes the examples of political performances and professional groups, basing on the simplified scheme of theatrical action. In particular, there is tension in Jeffrey Alexander’s work between theoretical multidimensionality and socio-cultural idealism. Whilst Alexander has shifted towards a more substantive and normative style of thinking, his new emphases

continues to be grounded in arguments pitched at the general theoretical level. To make the theory more balanced, we should understand that his arguments are often rhetorically and conceptually flawed, and of a strongly idealist cast.

Moreover, his approach is not completely applicable to the analysis of the cultural phenomena of fan communities and leisure activities. Therefore, that would be of the scientific interest to complement it with the theory of Robert Stebbins that defines leisure as a sphere of serious activities that has a solemn role in contemporary everyday life of groups and individuals. This approach could give more insights into the free choices of cultural consumption taken by people with a stronger focus on people's daily practices and personal adherence to the products of media culture.

1.6. Serious leisure

Social context is never static as it is shaped by people's choices, rhetorics, actions and practices. These practices (e.g., acceptance, repression, rejection) are, in turn, partly shaped by in-group and out-group evaluations and labeling. Identity performance, by the reaction it induces from audiences (e.g. as a function of whether it generates resistance or collaboration) also shapes the context in particular ways that, in turn, determine which types of identification will be endorsed (and sustainable) in the future. Thus, there is a dynamic relationship between practice (through which identity is expressed and maintained), social context (constituted by others' practices), and social identity.

One of the fields of everyday practices that is of importance for identity formation today is certainly leisure. Previously underestimated as simply a form of entertainment, now it is seen as a relevant field of social life that can provide people with money, social status, recognition and other forms of symbolic capital, and social power. In terms of identity formation, it can fulfil the following important functions:

1. Personal enrichment (cherished experiences);
2. Self-actualization (developing skills, abilities, knowledge);
3. Self-expression (expressing skills, abilities, knowledge that has been already developed);
4. Self-image (people are known to others as participants in a particular kind of serious leisure);
5. Self-gratification (combination of superficial enjoyment and deep fulfillment);
6. Re-creation (regeneration) through serious leisure after daily work;
7. Financial return (from a serious leisure activity) (Stebbins, 1992).

Furthermore, according to R. Stebbins, the founding father of leisure studies, serious leisure can also bring along collective benefits important for group cohesion and maintenance of satisfying group identity:

1. Social attraction (associating with other serious leisure participants or with clients);
2. Group accomplishment (group effort in accomplishing a serious leisure project that induces the senses of help, being needed, being altruistic);
3. Contribution to the maintenance and development of the group.

In the various studies, these rewards, depending on the activity, are often given different weight to reflect their relative importance. Nonetheless, most studies agree in that, in terms of personal importance, most serious leisure participants rank self-enrichment and self-gratification as number one and number two, respectively. Moreover, to obtain either reward, the participants have to acquire sufficient relevant skills, knowledge, and experience, so that to be in the position to use these acquisitions (Stebbins, 1979). Thus, self-actualization is also highly rewarding in serious leisure.

At the same time, serious leisure is believed to enrich the personal and collective experience of the people by providing:

1. sense of competence in executing the activity;
2. requirement of concentration;
3. clarity of goals of the activity;
4. immediate feedback from the activity;
5. sense of deep, focused involvement in the activity;
6. sense of control in completing the activity;
7. loss of self-consciousness during the activity;
8. sense of time is truncated during the activity (Stebbins, 2007).

Finally, to generate occupational devotion, (1) the valued core activity must be profound; to perform it acceptability requires substantial skill, knowledge, or experience or a combination of two or three of these; (2) the core activities must offer significant variety; and (3) the core must also offer broad opportunities for creative or innovative work, as a valued expression of personality (Cohen-Gewerc, 2013).

The adjectives 'creative' and 'innovative' often used to label new formats of leisure stress that the undertaking results in something new or different, requiring imagination and application of routine skill or knowledge. That is, boredom is likely to develop only after the onset of fatigue experienced from long hours at work, a point at which creativity and innovation are no longer possible. Moreover, such leisure activities can become a field of alternative career for people requiring an aptitude and a taste for the activity in question but promising great pleasure and fulfillment instead (Stebbins, 2014). In my research, I assume that

cosplaying, organizing conventions, exchanging comics and other practices can serve as an example of such serious leisure that provides an alternative career path for some of the devotees.

Moreover, some forms of serious leisure, including the ones associated with membership in fan communities, require a lot of social contacts and trigger grouping. According to Stebbins, hobbyists often prefer greater social involvement which they reach by clubbing. In other cases, they may hang around in the local shops that serve hobbyists with similar interests, chatting with the clerks and the customers. In many of these places of common interest, fairs and expositions (held annually, semiannually or sporadically) give them the opportunity to display their own work as well as view that of kindred enthusiasts. Furthermore, since many makers and tinkerers provide their products or services free of charge, often as gifts, they gain direct contact with a small number of outsiders who also become part of the participants' social world this increasing the social capital of those involved in serious leisure.

Thus, spheres of interest transform into spheres of activity that could be seen, recognized and appreciated, and, furthermore become more serious business and bring fame and money to the preciously known hobbyists.

Conclusions on the chapter

Social performance is a phenomenon of a ritual-like action, which embraces the cultural and normative system of values of the participants, who are referring themselves to a particular social group and ideological approach. Since modern society is lacking an official ideology, but experiences transformations of the set of beliefs, collective affiliations and practices, including self-dedication, such type of demonstrating personal and group interests makes a new form of ritualism in terms of lifestyle. Thus, social performance can be seen as a result of explicit expression of the willingness of people to share the ideas of an inner circle with the outer society. This cannot happen without four core coordinated elements: actors, audience, mise-en-scene and social power.

Interestingly, if the rituals of the past were often organized around sacred topics and objects, today serious leisure can sometimes make the core of performative activities. This is especially true for fan communities that are based on the shared consumption of mass culture (for example comics, movies and series). The members of such communities tend to create performances not only to be seen and believed by others, but also to keep the bond inside. While cultivating the ideas of mass culture, fans become increasingly involved in collective performative action, which also influences their personal and collective self-identification. When all elements of their social performance get fused, the actions lead to a successful outcome. Thus, culture is becoming a source of and a reason for shaping the system of norms and beliefs in the fan communities: while attracting individuals to become fans of a product, it also inspires them to perform personal dedication through symbolic action, which constructs and (re)shapes people's identity.

The cases of performance de-fusion and re-fusion when not all elements of the performance meet the expectations of a perfect script are also utterly interesting for analysis. Here, special efforts are needed to hold the performance together and thus bring people into the sense of collectivity and solidarity.

Chapter 2. Social performance as a mechanism of identity-making in the context of European fan culture: Findings of the empirical research

In the course of empirical research, I have concentrated on the fan cultures shaped in two societies, the German one and the Russian one. As countries with rather different economic positions, political systems and cultural backgrounds but at the same time those increasingly subjected to the pressures of globalization, they establish relevant contexts in which performative actions were assumed to embed. Furthermore, to limit the scope of my investigation, I focused on the fan communities shaped around such cult cultural products as DC/Marvel-based series and, correspondingly, the collective events that such communities launch such as ComicCons. The results of my qualitative study are presented in the chapter below.

2.1. Methodological framework

Today serials have become one of the most popular manifestations of mass culture, especially among young people. They are now universally accessible, and they increasingly set new trends in the world of media. In fact, in addition to serials operating as carriers and translators of messages that can shape a certain outlook of the world in the audience and impose certain behavior patterns, they also represent a new format of communicative space. In the online debates around them people explicitly express their adherence, marking their cultural consumption choices a life-changing points, by bonding their favorite fantasy world and the real life (social circle, lifestyle, and even profession). Among other things, my research seeks to define the place of comics serials in fans' lives and trace their models of interaction within given serial plots. This is important to further focus on the role of a particular interaction format, social performance as exemplified by conventions, comic cons, cosplay festivals and other events, for the (self)identification of the fans.

In my analysis, I stem from the idea that media environment is extensively filled with content that spreads through various channels conveying the product to the audience. Historically, for each product, a separate channel was singled out, but today media culture has evolved, so that within it products use all possible channels, capturing the consumers and interactively engaging them in the process of the co-creation of the cult story, and thus turning the consumers into prosumers.

In addition to Alexander's theorization on social performance, in the further analysis of online and offline communication of the fans I also rely on M. Halliday's ideas on social semiotics, according to which language fulfils several meta-functions that are revealed in the discursive space shaped by (traditional and new digital) media (Halliday & Webster, 2003). These functions are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. In the context of my research, these three functions of language find expression in social networks devoted to the comics

world. The first function, the ideational one, means the representation of the material, social, internal world of the product around which communication is built. The second function, the interpersonal one, describes direct interpersonal interaction of the involved audience. Finally, the textual function becomes the key one for social performance, since it demonstrates the types of communicative events typical for the discourse and their interrelationships.

As categories of analysis based on the core theoretical foundations of this study, the following are defined:

1. Actors: people and groups whose patterned representations are put into practice, or are encoded;
2. Audience: people and groups who observe the performative action and decode what the actors have encoded within the social performance;
3. Mise-en-scene: a set of symbolic devices that structure the symbolic script;
4. Social power: the means of status hierarchies both within and beyond the fan community involved in the performance;
5. De-fusion: the process in the course of which the bond between the elements of a performance weakens or totally collapses;
6. (Re-)fusion: the process in the course of which the audiences identify themselves with actors (anew), and cultural scripts achieve verisimilitude through an effective mise-en-scene;
7. Ideational function (of discourse): mechanism of sending an idea through symbolic speech embedded in the discourse;
8. Interpersonal function (of discourse): enables speakers to enact their complex and diverse interpersonal relations;
9. Textual function (of discourse): enables the creation of new meanings from these other modes to freely combine them into a text that coheres within itself and with the situation;
10. Authopoiesis: a 'self-producing' mechanism that maintains a particular form despite the material inflow and outflow, through self-regulation and self-reference;
11. Cathexis: the concentration of mental energy on one particular person, idea, action or object (e.g. emotional involvement in and satisfaction from the recreation of characters, reading comics, participating in performances).

I assume that there is a correlation between social performances fan communities launch and join in and the processes of (external and internal) identity-making. Moreover, I suppose that for the fans serious leisure time is a push factor to participate in social performances related to their community and core leisure practice. To test these assumptions, I proceed with three stages of empirical analysis: the study of the discursive space generated by fan communities online; participant observation of community events that, in my evaluation fall under the category of social performances, and in-depth interviews with community members of different status and commitment.

Interviewees were selected according to the logic of typological sampling, which, in my case, presupposed the choice of community members of various status and symbolic capital within the community, but of necessarily active participation in such a community (every participant of the research was expected to participate in thematic events, be involved in intensive and systemic practicing of performative actions, and communicate with peers online).

2.2 Discursive space shaping around serials and comics: The analysis of online communication in fan communities

At the pilot stage of data collection, I opted for the discourse analysis of online communication around cult mass products giving rise to fan culture. This method has allowed me to grasp both the insider and the outside perspectives of the performative culture cherished by fan communities. It also provided some insights into the composition of fan communities, their vague boundaries, intersections between related fan groups, issues of interest and concern for community members, their communication and conflict-resolution styles. I have also seen online communication as a platform for dialogue between different members and thus a site where many arrangements on future social performances takes place. However, out of numerous communities existing online, in the analysis I had to limit myself to several. Here, I relied on such election criteria as massive outreach, length of existence, number of topics to be raised, degree of participants' activity, and quality of the content added, and events arranged.

The observations of Russian online fan communities show that they attract big numbers of people ready for communication online around comics-related issues. There are also several active people who produce content for the forums, such as their drawings, fan-fictions or games. There are a lot of discussions dedicated to the distinctions between the "casts" of the "house", according to the universe the participants refer to. The identification process online starts from the choice of the name, which helps others guess who the person's favorite hero is, and of the profile picture, which usually includes references to the major cultural product, too. Moreover, in online communities most distinguished, active and experienced members can be granted "achievements", which reflects their duties and responsibilities, and demonstrates their contribution to the development of the concrete internet platform. These "titles" participants receive give them the feeling of recognition within the community, and the high value of work they do, thus making an indicator of social power.

The analysis of discursive elements of online communication within fan communities implies the consideration of semiotic structures lying behind such communication and their interrelations. To take this semiotic aspect into account, I resort to the theory of M. Halliday who considers media text as a consequence and at the same time the cause of social ties (Halliday et al., 1990). When considering the series as the consequences of social ties, it is necessary to note various manifestations in this vein. So, the series becomes the basis for new communication and an information reason for interaction in real and virtual life. Moreover, this interaction can evolve into subsequent types of communications

and ways involving a serial story. Such variants can be various game communication forms (role plays, desktop, on the network, quizzes, forum), interaction in the course of the creative process (fan art), participation in rallies and subsequent events, mass views. In a similar, but the reverse order may occur events, if we consider the series as a consequence of social interaction. Here the interpersonal meta-function of the media text is reflected. In other words, by participating in virtual and / or real communication, an individual can be involved in a culture of viewing the series as a whole or of any product specifically. Being a participant in any discussion, a member of a community in a social network, being an eyewitness of an information media event or an advertising action, a person can become an adherent of the series. Thus, we come to the social practice of watching the series and getting involved in his world. Then there is a transition to the network formed by the world of the series, which we call transmedia. The connection with the child products can refer to the source (media text) and to the by-product, as well as to generate further discourses further. Thus, a discursive chain begins to work, involving discursive chains, tied to the transmedia of modern mass culture. This is reflected in the context of the consideration of the phenomenon of interest to us, a text function within the framework of the concept of social semiotics by M. Halliday (Halliday & Webster, 2003). The media text is thus part of the overall picture and a media event by itself. Since the release of the series is a planned event that is accompanied by a rush, which involves fans and fans, and also attracts the attention of those who are not yet involved in the franchise world. The series implies a discursive space as a visual media product and as a space for further communication. Each discourse element occupies a certain genre position within the existing integrity of the genre chain. So, we consider each individually and build it into a general picture of the idea of the product and what it covers and carries under itself. Thanks to such a phenomenon as the transmedia, these genres can be crossed and combined. Relying on the main plot, that is, a specific genre presentation, the audience weaves independently new genre manifestations through our own vision and completion of the basic concept, expanding the boundaries of the product framework so that it can be used as a base for various manifestations and all hypostases that will be of interest to fans, fans and amateurs. Also, referring to the concept of social semiotics of M. Halliday, it is necessary to consider the following aspects of the discourse of the media text:

- Distinction / solidarity of the dialogue is revealed through the dichotomy story worlds of a comics and movies, as well as through identity that fans determine themselves and thus oppose their elected identical to each other.
- Selecting a hero / world and ranking, associating yourself with it, the individual expresses solidarity to those who also chose a position similar to his or her choice, and automatically claims a difference with those whose identity is the opposite within the scripts.
- Intertextuality - the connection with other texts (inclusion, connection of other scripts, directly / indirectly). That is, the inclusion of other texts and their connection with each other with the main one. The text is visual, it intersects with news, forums, and, finally, events. In the key of modern communication techniques, one text can lean on another, refer to it, retell it. There is also a

possibility of complementarity in the form of the uniqueness of each text, which does not use a common plot, but builds in its branches, forming a larger space for communication. Also within the investigated phenomenon there is a process of intensive perception of thematic information by an individual or necessity to express their opinions, their membership, consent or objection to a particular issue. Thus, there is an exchange. It can be verbal, the exchange of knowledge; can also be an exchange of actions, that is, activity within communities. Thus, referring to the study of discourse within the framework of M. Halliday's concept and taking as a basis a text function, for an in-depth consideration, external and internal criteria for analyzing the sites devoted to the franchise were highlighted.

External analysis includes:

- Activity in comments on forum branches
- Form of fan art (picture, text or picture + text)
- Number of responses to publication (comments, likes, reposts)
- Analysis of information specified in the profiles of site members , their self-identification (avatars, titles, icons);

Internal analysis contains:

- analysis of the types / ways of submitting materials (informational, game)
- analysis of outputs to other media sites
- content description of the published content;

The sequence of actions is related to the way of describing and understanding the technologies that are used for communication within one story, how they influence the activity of the target audience, how they contribute to the media context. The subject of my consideration is the forum devoted to the comic universe "Marvel/DC", the most popular community "VKontakte» (3 138 097 subscribers), and Facebook (30 256 471 likes). Considering the former resource, it is necessary to draw several conclusions. On this web resource there is fan-communication, aimed at discussing the main plots and their development in various creative directions. At the forum the most popular lines are the discussion of heroes, comparison of comic and serial stories and the most fan-creative work.

On the resource dedicated to the comics, the main topics for discussion are specific seasons and series, comparison of the serial line with a comic story, which can be called a comparative discourse. Also an important discourse is the search for the identity of viewers with characters from the universe of Stan Lee and others. The next actively discussed topic is the reflection on the received media information in the course of viewing the series and reading the comics, namely, the group members are discussing the topic "What do comics teach?". It is important to note that this topic of discussion emerged independently, without the intervention of the group's administration, is developing very actively, and the group members independently supplement discursive reflection space with their own thoughts and interpretations. Very rarely there are comments of a neutral negative nature, like "teaches nothing", "propaganda of violence, vulgarity and

perversions", "blurring of the concepts of good and evil." In general, one can find statements relating to value orientations. So, the participants of the conversation mention such concepts as trust, honor, respect, patience, love, faith, hope and the very value of life. There are also comments-references to the series in a humorous form, emphasizing the main turning events of the series.

There is also an interactive branch that involves the superficial communication that is not tied to the plot, but to the group as a whole (such games as "who will be the last to say "groot" and so on), warming up the public's interest in the activity taking place in the group, not allowing the audience to pass into the passive.

There is a prognostic trajectory of discussion to be observed: various topics aimed at predicting the further development of the plot and eventual turns. So, the audience expresses their opinions through modal words like "will/wait/I want." In the future, some participants unfold the discussions, refuting or confirming the hypotheses put forward.

The forum is presented in a classic form from the theme-branches, which are set by its moderators with the thematic titles assigned to them (Lord keeper, right hand, wanderer, etc.). And the forum participants produce an active discourse in the form of informal communication.

The discourse unfolds strictly within the framework of the theme of the Marvel/DC, has a more emotional character and a humorous component. The forum is anonymous - its members enter into discussions under their chosen nicknames, as well as avatars that match the preferences of personalities. Official belonging to fans of a particular character / clan / gender is marked with a corresponding coat of arms, which is placed in the upper right corner of the avatar.

Communication takes place in several formats at once and covers various social contexts. This forum draws to itself in case of search of identity, entertainment, creative self-expression.

The strictest frame in this case will be the participation in the conversation of fans of serials and comics that have become familiar with all series and thus are limited in expressing an opinion until a specific topic of discussion comes up so that there is no undesirable situation for the other users in the form of "spoilers".

This thematic forum has some inherent linguistic features, such as abbreviations (BvS, MoS, IM), and specific vocabulary (starks, caps). Moreover, the universe uses made up languages, created artificially (Vakanda). This 'closed' language can be translated through the dictionaries that are suggested on official websites and of fan sources. Fans also tend to learn it, to get deeper into the culture and get more involved mentally and professionally into the topic.

Russian case

The site of Marvel/DC presents itself as the oldest web resource in the Russian Internet space, dedicated to the universe. Its main tasks are to cover all relevant news, including the release of new comics, movies and related materials,

providing a platform for communication, creativity and promotion of merchandise. Thus, this forum sets itself up as the most convenient and multifunctional resource for comics fans.

At the forum, we see users with different titles that affect the status within the forum life. Thus, a hierarchy is constructed, constructed by "points" and "sympathies", which are exposed to each other by the forum participants themselves. This simultaneously becomes a form of independent social control. Technological facilities of this site is a multifunctional platform that provides opportunities to download comics, series, subtitles, the opportunity to showcase their creative variations to the public on the theme of Marvel and DC (for example, fanfics, drawings, quizzes), as well as on the site there are several types of games based on the series (social, role games, on the PC). For the purposes of communication, the topics for discussion are directly created, including fan meetings, which can be held in the form of reconstructions of battles and events, in the form of a role-playing game, in the form of participation in tournaments (for example, board games).

Interactions with visitors, in terms of Marshall MacLuhan's theory, of the cold and hot means of communication, are cold or cooling since they imply the building up of communication by actively using the existing storyline as the basis for the development of new event branches by connecting different ways of involving and perceptions (Маклюэн, 2003). Thus, the technologies operating on this resource provide opportunities for all kinds of communication, both virtual and real, involving the involvement of users in the channel of active activity in the form of fan meetings, reconstructions, cosplay festivals, as well as providing a serial attributes, that is, images that will be transferred to real life. Among the most popular, except for the discussion of the series itself, use the column "Interviews", "Actors" and "Media". This can be observed using the "tag cloud", which is located on the site. Hence it follows that fans are interested in the life of the heroes of the favorite series outside the screen life. Thus, we can observe the phenomenon of practical metonymy, which is, embedding personalities in everyday life on the basis of participation in the series. Accordingly, we complete the image with additional elements, presented in the form of facts from the life of actors. So, there is a combination of adjacent areas for complete immerse in the environment of the serial world. You can also see in the fan-communication the presence of a practical metaphor, which consists in replacing the serial/comic image aspect with the media. Thus, the fans of the universe follow the personal life of their favorite and unloved heroes, imposing on their daily life the features of the images they recreated and, often, refer to them appropriately (for example, Bucky Barnes). Also, fans often want to see "canonical couples" in real life, and on the basis of their guesses, desires are also attracted by various products of creativity, where the characters appear in the role of lovers by other fans. Thus, actors are the basis for recreating the image of existing realities when looking for the similarity of forms and meanings. The boundaries of virtuality and reality are also erased due to the resource's transmedia, that is, the collaboration of channels through which active communication takes place. The fact of the presence of interaction in a virtual conversation, in the production of new plots, in the organization of events, in the dissemination of the product itself, makes it possible for the user to

connect to all kinds and manifestations of such a culture. The contiguity of virtuality and everyday maintenance is supported by the constructing of identity through attributes, merchandise, performance for the same team / clan / family, the similarity of views on certain theses. Thus, positioning and finding oneself through virtual communities takes place, which is enhanced through a variety of media connections. In these conditions, existing frames of space and time significantly expand their boundaries by increasing the area of distribution and promotion of media information, as well as increasing the number of ways to interact. Thus, the communication goes beyond the presented initial frames. Thus, you can notice several trajectories of the movement of the activity of fans through the discourse in social networks. So, the fans of the Marvel/DC universe are actively involved in discussions, maintaining development and activities in the communities. This group of people creates a fan art, shares their creativity, puts it online for public evaluation, approval. They are also in a dense communication with each other. Fans and amateurs are often passive observers, but they can with great interest evaluate what is happening in communities, what people are doing more than people immersed in the environment, and also express their approval and disapproval of something. Also a large part of the community are potential viewers who intend to keep in touch with the information given in the forum at some point, however, a number of factors have not yet led them to these actions. Considering the discourse that unfolds around the world of the series, it is necessary to determine the directions and the grounds for the emergence and functioning of this discourse. So we will examine the manifestation of the activity of fans and fans of the comic culture in social networks, using the strategies outlined earlier. As part of the discussion of products and events, emotional feelings and impressions are exchanged, and there is also talk of justification and unjustified expectations. Here, the most striking is the strategy of emotional reproduction. Discussion of the new season's expectations treats us to a strategy of ritualism, since all the fans and fans of the series know the date of the premiere, and also know that every spring, or rather every April, producers release their serial product or big convent (ComicCon) and every year the discussion flares up with more force by spring. The membership strategy of 'belonging' is reflected through discussions in which fans express their identity through the characters of the series, through self-reflection and associating themselves with some kind, character, world, which they can defend during discussions or through their intension to recreate the image through the performance. Argumentation of his belonging to the world of comics in any way within the framework of this discourse is a vivid demonstration of concept of identity-making through the leisure time products. Fan strategy is highlighted by the example of games that are conducted in communities that are aimed at the constant involvement of new participants, as well as maintaining the intensity of communications, and various rallies and attraction to events, which leads to the expansion of the audience of potential viewers and fans.

German Case

German internet community that refers to the fan culture of comics and series are split through different platforms. The main group of Marvel/DC comics in Germany is 18,4k of participants. The content is mainly official and informative: main news, announces, interview and events. Interaction itself takes place in the closed groups, which are dedicated to the concrete date and characters.

Through the discussion discourses one can meet examples of “denglish” with a high frequency (Infinity Stein, Krew, Civil krieg, Strikeforce). The main topics include discussions of plot-twists, predictions and suggestions, explanations of the scripts, creating theories. There is also a part of the forum designed to upload and discuss creative works of the users (fanfics and fanart).

Another branch would be for the events and social activity. Here, German users usually discuss the costumes they are going to wear, make predictions about which character would become the most popular one, cooperate, ask, if the usual participant would occur. Then discussion goes deeply into the topic of the new trends and media-products that have influenced their choice or role in future performance (new movie or a comic book), tell about their feeling of correlating with a personality of a chosen hero.

When it comes to responsibilities, there is always a distributive factor, that refers to the level of prestige of the character inside the universe (it is hardly possible that inside the group an “organizer” would be a side-actor according to the comics – that would usually be Capitan America, Batman, Iron Man, but never – an Ant-man or a Black Widow).

Further, the discussion goes to the point of figuring out ways of driving to the convent, cooperation between the participants, dividing materials, sharing contacts. The final step is one of the most active out of all – those who come are excited and tend to share it explicitly, those who are not coming, but are involved, - wish all the others “luck” and “all the best”.

In German forum branches, German cultural heritage has been discussed, and references to some personalities and country itself (for instance, Red Skull) have been made. The Nazi part of the history was also mentioned in comics universe. One of the hot topics of the German community is the fact of existence so called “HYDRA” organization and the symbols that looks much alike Nazi symbolic, which is a clear reference. German fan community tries to reveal, whether Marvel universe has a right to use this piece of history and make in cinematic new “brand”. The opinions differ here, because some of the participants tend to think that *“this is reality and our history that we have to face even through the imaginary world”*, while some oppose and argue that *“entertaining people with such dark of the history that puts Germany in the negative position through times would be a shame to the comic movies and culture”*.

The forums and conversations are supported by the gift-shops and merchandise distributors, or event-holders. This is one of the key aspects of German comics industry – capitalistic base for the promotion.

Performative elements in terms of the internet community are demonstrated through actors – users, that have their knowledge and skills (for example, what'd been learned in University and through personal interest in comics), their explicit speech, preferences (for one or another team, having corresponding symbolic and name) and hobbies inside the chosen culture (storytelling, drawing, setting events); through audience – whole Internet, where information about the fan groups, their events, activities, vlogs, photoshoots could be found. Audiences can accidentally notice fan narratives with the help of social networks or services that enables contextual advertising; people also can be passive participants of the groups, bearing in mind wish to visit an event or get news about releases, but never get involved in the action neither in the Internet, nor in real life: or they can actively participate and always react to the new information and discussions inside the Web-community. Mise-en-scene of the virtual fan groups are always one of the most crucial points of the communication: design of web-sites, user-friendly interface and visual self-representation is constructing a pleasant basement for the future discourse and helps participants to be seen and recognized. German community is specifically attentive to these aspects – fans do not visit platforms that look outdated or are not convenient, according to modern trends of the internet development.

2.3. Face-to-face interactions of fan community members within the frames of collective events as social performances: The results of participant observation

During the process of data collection, it was an important task to directly observe some of the collective events organized by the communities under study that fall under the category of social performances. The criteria guiding my choice of such events were:

- Orientation on the audience
- Base on mass culture (comics, series, tv-shows)
- Group action
- Script/theme

According to the theory of J. Alexander and the methodology of M. Halliday, the observation was analyzed through the elements of social performance and functions of semiotic elements that were pointed out and chosen as informative cases.

Thus, three types of performative events were taken as informative samples for the analyses: orientated on the discourse, orientated on ideational information, orientated on interaction.

What was also a focus of mine in the observation process is the level of engagement and form of discourse that was preferable for the communities under study in their face-to-face encounters:

- Material: in this case most appreciation was dedicated to the authenticity of costumes, decorations, interior, technical facilities);
- Mental: how impressed is an actor and how do the expectation meet the reality is one of the key criteria in the outcome? After every performance a group of people had a chance to express their feelings. That was possible both personally and in numbers. Interestingly, that sometimes estimation in personal and estimation in numbers differs. Usually it was a case, when you could not tell, whether person liked the experience by his or her speech, nevertheless in quantitative form there were high marks for all characteristics;
- Relational: one of the main ideas of such performances is to consolidate people together. It could be a fan-community, friend circle or a family. The roles in given circumstances could be played differently and it depends on the relationships in the community. Therefore, it becomes obvious who has more social power in a group, who has responsibilities and which. Moreover, since the border between reality and imaginary world is blurred, relations could be put into different angles. For example, it happens that people tend to reveal their natural identity and you can become a witness of a break-up of a couple. Or, on the contrary, some people make proposals, to make it special for both of man and woman, in the reality they like and also to make it easier when you partly do it as another character, bonding with this identity;
- Verbal: communication is founded on verbal messages, including symbolic actions. Semiotic part of verbalism is a key one, because we observe not only the fact of interaction, but the tools of it. Thus, symbolic items that are dedicated to the comic culture also serve as a mean of communication in the inner group, which means that these are recognizable and helpful for the community and enables new opportunities of interaction;
- Behavioral: this aspect could be seen as a reason why people have these intensions of participating in cultural performances. In that case we can state that people are fond of culture; they spend their leisure time; their community has strong borders and appreciates only in-cultural activities;
- Existential: the reason why this type of activity exists is one of the main questions of the research. The essential part is to define, whether it exists because outer group are not accepting them, or because they do not accept outer groups.

Russian case

The first event I attended in person was held in Saint-Petersburg. This event called StarCon is one of the most popular local convents that include many activities, dedicated to mass culture products and comic culture. The participants present their work – their costumes, paintings, merchandise, comics. This is a festival of performing something new in the discourse of culture. The organization of the event seems to be really strong; there is a clear distinction of zones by topics and types of activities that audience might join. Each zone is followed by a

long queue of people waiting to get new experience – to try on VR glasses, to get a signature of a favorite cosplayer or actor, personal sketch, to take a picture with figures of creatures from movies and series, to look at the fight scene reconstruction from “Infinity War” or dances from group of children, dedicated to the comic culture. Even through the lines and rain people are eager to get into the area and get satisfaction from the performances unfolding around.

To promote themselves, people use different performative types of action – a board with a caption “You need a photo with me”, stable mode, performing with animals, body art. They interact with the audience, attract them with the new features and elements which are connected to the comics, give their contacts to each other and communicate.

An example of the blurred frames of self-identification would be the fact that all people who are cosplaying, do not talk or respond as themselves. Their speech is held ‘on behalf’ of the character that they represent. So, if one starts a conversation with a girl, dressed in a male costume, the language of hers would be masculine (even including voice sometimes).

What is also important in terms of Russian case – the movie “Defenders” was presented as a Russian analogy to Marvel/DC universes. Actors who played main heroes have performed a speech and showed a fragment from the movie. Despite the fact, that Russian community didn’t take the movie positively, the presentation and occurrence of the actors did inspire the audience and was appreciated in the public.

Actors are well-prepared, all of them wearing thematic costumes and make-up; all of them have their symbolic elements in the outlook, showing their belonging to cultural phenomenon of comics and corresponding media products. Most of the participants already know each other and organizers, they communicate and share common discourse. While being in costume and playing their role, they use the same gestures, rhetoric, even language of their characters (Vakanda, kneeling, hand-shaking).

Performing cosplayers are open to communication, all of them are making pictures with the audience, they play with children and perform together some battle scenes from the movies of Marvel/DC. Sometimes when the image of an actor is not recognizable, it enables frustration of the actor, and, therefore, they stop performing and get out of their roles.

Individual cosplayers are walking through the stages and prefer mostly face-to-face type of performances or remain within the groups of people that attend the event together.

Circumstance of the convent are positively set up for a communication it terms of sharing cultural experiences, every stand correlates with thematic of the event and zone, attracting participants and enabling better embedment of the actors into the scene.

Audience that has attended the event had their background or active interest, which could be observed during performances. People try to attend every corner of the convention and experience all the suggested activities. During the performances they attentively look at the theatrical action, make many photos and videos, try to stand closer to the stage.

One woman started crying when she saw her favorite cosplayer, and he took a picture with her. Another man was on the opposite really upset when he couldn't get into the zone of actors and see his favorite cosplayer.

In such events most social power goes from the audience, because it is up to them, whether a character would be perceived as a successful job of an actor, whether a group performance would be seen, recognized and appreciated and whether the whole even would be something to believe in, in terms of fictional culture. Moreover, it is important for actors to make an impression and to be recognized, because in such kind of events audience is already part of the culture and has its interest in belonging to the convent.

Second-type performance is represented with the help of the Higher School of Economics. The Moscow University has announced their new Bachelor program this year, which is fully dedicated to the comic culture. They have provided a lecture about comic culture and the need of this branch of study in terms of Arts and Design school. Mainly, they shared the idea of importance of this particular direction of culture, which is on the border of textual and visual systems. The presenters have told about new waves of the comic movement and told their plan of the process of engagement. Education is based on history of arts, graphic design, scenario-writing and directing, and leading own comic projects, which includes developing skills of animating, font-creating, web-development.

Moreover, it was clear that initiators of the event were deeply engaged into the lecture, were ready to communicate and to receive feedback. Also, the audience was highly attracted to the topic and was participating during the discussion, based on the lecture being held. Facilitator of the meeting has shown examples of modern popular comics, both Western and Russian cases, explained trends of today inside graphic culture and media sphere.

The style and the direction of the event was obvious – to share the outlook of the performers with future students, to put their ideas into the minds of new generation and to develop it in terms of existing discourse, promoting the comic culture itself.

The third-type performance took place at the same organization, as in Berlin, but in Saint-Petersburg branch. First of all, it is needed to say, that the amount of groups and people participating in events was quite high and the level of engagement correlated with the interest of the public. Groups recognized the scripts, appreciated the authenticity and shared their emotions afterwards. Even if actors were not so deeply engaged into thematic of the performance they took part in, they still immersed and tried to live it through to get and express new emotional solutions. While giving the points, it was usually the case that their expressions out loud matched the grades they put in the form.

Actors always had an image of what is going to happen. Most of the teams experience such performances systematically and do it always with the same people. In such teams it was interesting to notice that all of them knew strong and weak points of each other, therefore, could share social power in a most efficient way. Therefore, being aware of what your community is capable of makes a fusion and successful outcome more likely to happen.

Russian community is likely to choose thematic of the script that correlates with their interests and generation. Thus, elderly people tend to choose context of universes and franchises that they know and experienced in their youth, young people are eager to get new experiences, connected to the most burning topics and products of modernity. (People of age 35-50 would prefer to get Indiana Jones or James Bond experience, while people aged 16-30 would rather choose Deadpool action, or Avengers performance).

German case

At the first event making the focus of the observation stage of my research, discursive function was put into focus. The event I attended took place in Dortmund, Germany. It was dedicated to the community assembly in terms of comic culture. The contingent of people who visited it was various, but most frequently people aged 20-24 occurred. Main idea of the event was an exchange of the items and outputs. These could be drawings, comics, fanfictions, crafts and, most importantly, cosplay characters as such. All of the demonstrative patterns of fan community were prepared in a year to get other people involved and to show the audience something that they have achieved. Mostly it was a workmanship of the characters they reproduced: stating from lenses and wigs, finishing with the exact same models of weapons their favorite superhero had.

At the beginning, it was obvious that everyone was quite nervous and there was too much tense between the participants, because of the expectations that everyone already had. After hour and a half, as soon as more people came and especially as more observers came, who didn't bring anything and were there out of curiosity, the actors started the discourse immersion.

The immersion is defined through a couple of steps. Some of them take place outside the community:

- recognition: actors are eager to send two messages – to be heard as an actor/image/idea, and to be seen as an acknowledgeable person.
- appreciation: at this level audience and your community are already aware of your activities, they find them valuable and could involve themselves into the projects
- technique aspects immersion: usage of the materials and special facilities is what makes ones different from others, therefore, makes their work and performance more valuable; the more detailed and well-thought the approach is (decorations, costumes, environment), the higher are the chances to get audience's attention.

- personal communication: stepping into conversations, strong network and connections to the outer community is the point, where the performance goes outside the social circle, which means further development, opportunities and new dimensions; at this point new waves of performances occur and construct different aspects of the existing culture.

Others are embedded inside the community:

- recognition: actors do recognize the 'mise-en-scene' they are in, which includes feeling of belonging to the culture.

- appreciation: actors should consider their experience and give it a grade; sometimes their shared emotions and consciousness do not meet each other – even though emotionally actor won't show the way he or she feels about the performance, they could appreciate it for the details, for the reality-like action, similarity with the universe it is based on, equipment.

- technique aspects immersion: what really matters for the actors is symbolic items – feeling of the right environment and the closeness to the culture, including music, costumes, colors; this is up to actors, how deeply they want to get immersed into the cultural act of performance, so that their image would correlate with the reality they are trying to be part of.

- personal communication: in-group activities are one of the basics of the social performative culture; it is always a question of common interest, trust and similarity, but also of social power distribution and sharing of the responsibilities.

During the second event, which could be defined as an ideational one, a participant could have chosen different patterns of behavior. A group of people were busy buying comic books, a group of people were communicating in the recreation area, and the most significant group of people were attending a meeting dedicated to the new approaches, tendencies and studies in the comic culture. Elderly people were looking at rare old comics, meeting old friends and talking about past times in terms of comic culture. They were sitting together and obviously waiting other friends to come. That could be noticed that these people are interested in comics for a long time, and know each other too, but not as close friends, but as comics-lovers. This means that such convents make a platform for finding people with the same interests and mind-set even for 70 years old people, which shows that the mechanism of cultural and social impact and correlate through generations.

Youngsters are also a group that demonstrates specific patterns of behavior. They were trying to find something new out of the given, including new acquaintances. Cosplayers were talking to artists and comic writers were looking for new collectors, all of them seeking a cooperation to move forward successfully in their field, show themselves as active figures and their skills on the market of performing items.

However, the main point of the event was final workshop. During the session speakers could present their ideas and works in terms of comic culture. Not only presenters prepared topics dedicated to the different aspects of comic culture,

that could reveal main trends and answer the questions of the whole direction of the movement, character or an edition, but also that the attendees were sharing interest of the raised topics, having different background knowledge. Moreover, there were performances that put into focus some social problems as emancipation, influence of the rhetoric of superheroes, items and weapons and their role in constructing image of the characters and the image of the Western society, historical overview. Despite the fact that those who performed are deeply engaged into discourse, they also believe in the power of ideological context of this segment of culture. Moreover, it turned out that a half of the presenters have chosen their jobs basing on their field of interest – comic culture. One of the lecturers was a professional journalist, which writes about old-school comics and gives a review to the new angles in set patterns impressions of the culture. Others were collectors and founder of the organizations that conduct exhibitions, provide researches for the topics of comics.

The performances had a format of TED-talks sessions and every participant was involved in the process. Presentations illustrated statements of the issues rose during the discussions and provoked questions from the audience. In the breaks people also didn't go away and continued sharing their thoughts and ideas. Mostly important, how these issues were also touching all aspects of life, including education, globalization, feminism promotion and all of them had not only theoretical frame, but an applicable concept of future implication.

Considering the fact, that this event took place in Germany, it is necessary to underline the cultural aspect that had occurred. Most urgent problem that was mentioned during the session was that Germany is not the most competent country in terms of comic culture, comparing to USA, Belgium or France. There are almost no authentic comics, and the community is not so devoted and/or aware of products of the culture. Therefore, the development is quite doubtful, because temps of other countries are way more powerful, so that there is a need to be up-to-date with them, while their own culture is more and more irrelevant due to globalization and substitution.

The display of the ideational function was the most vivid, considering main concept of each message – to describe and share an outlook on the given topic, that meant the exchange of senses and ideas. It was both verbal and interpersonal, but primarily ideological.

The third case was the most action-orientated one. It consisted of short acts of performances, based on the thematic of mass culture (games, movies, series). The organization that was observed suggested different scenarios for the actors to take part in as role models and circumstances to find yourself in. Main functional aspect was interpersonal one – it was a need to make 'mise-en-scene' work, to solve the script puzzle through the communicative play. Groups choose main plot beforehand and can prepare themselves earlier. Thus, some groups came being already dressed up in their own costumes from movies and games (Avengers, Fall-Out), even though there are items to be given to participants in the framework of the script and action. They have already started their

performance when they decided to share one idea and come in the costumes through the city, and, moreover, to the place where performance takes place, to demonstrate their preparedness and uniqueness.

However, many people came to experience something new, having no expectation of what is going to happen. These are usually the cases of tourists from Asian countries that did not have a chance to perform in the group game in their home town. These people show many emotions and empathy to each other, react explicitly, try to help collectively.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of blurred frames of perception in reality and fiction world could be observed during performances. There were cases of proposals and engagement during the action. One couple decided to take part in a performance, while the man asked administration to put an engagement ring somewhere among decorations. This case could be observed from different angles: 1) the man feels more confident during a performative action, being embedded into playful circumstances, and even maybe being not completely himself, but a character who he is during the action; 2) their relationships are based on the passion for comics, therefore it is their core link to each other, a platform for their emotional bond; 3) the woman is a fan of the culture and this is a comfortable situation to make a life-changing decision. All of these options mean that there is a mixture of patterns of inner and outer communities in terms of self-identification and behavioristic paradigm.

What is also specific about this case (and German experience in general) is that the reaction of the woman was neutral. Facilitators of the event were not sure, whether she completely understood what has happened and perceived the information correctly, not as a part of the role-play. This would be another marker of blurred frames and embedment of the comic culture into real life contexts.

Therefore, the basis of culture was a starting point to merge or split individual identity. It happens in sake of immersion into a different reality and trying on the characteristic of others, more or less similar to one's own.

Basing on the findings of the participant observation I can come up with the following conclusions.

Actors are at the focus of every performance and are successfully embedded into cultural life of the society when the action meets the context of corresponding behavior field. Frames between fiction and reality become more and more flexible, nevertheless it has been observed that Russian community is much more likely to fit into an image and mise-en-scene and easier to get out of it, merging and dividing it easier than German community, which tends to switch regimes less agile and identifications inside and outside of performative culture are more distant within perceptions of 'self'.

Critics can intervene between performance and audience. Successful outcome could be valued as such by the actors themselves. German performances are less dependent on opinions of others, while Russians are more orientated on the reaction of the observes. However, audience attendance may not be required, or it may be merely compelled.

Mise-en-scene plays a significant role in both societies. When we observe theatrical action in the framework of fan communities, we cannot consider it without the symbols around the comics: costumes, video-effects, virtual realities, languages and gestures. This is a common ground for participant of conventions all over the world with the help of which performances get fused and overcome threats of de-fusion, when it comes to differences in approaches in framework of background specificities.

Social power is a relevant element both from the inside and outside of fan communities, because there is always a leading role in the group, power distribution, outside opinion that shapes the outlook, and reaction from the audience that has a power to accept or deny the ideas and beliefs presented by a group. During performances it is also important to realize the context of the action; when it is considered social power works in positive direction, otherwise a clash occurs, which threatens a successful outcome of a performance. It had been noticed that Russian community is more likely to distribute social power inside the group rationally, rather than German. Meanwhile, social power that has the outside community is more well-disposed by Germans, for whom new performative information would be more preferable than for Russian representatives of outer-society.

After observing and analyzing the data that I have collected, there is a need to say that ideational function of social performances is developing in both Russian and German communities. Although Russian case is only in the beginning of the way, we can say that official level of promoting comic culture as a concept, as an activity that means to the world something more than a leisure time, but an education and/or a profession, is making this framework strong. So that ideological point of performative action is a push-mechanism in different cultures.

Discourse function: Discourse involvement and creation of new items, products and projects are being provided by both cultures. Although, in Russian case it could be observed, that actors represent themselves in a more professional way, they implement their knowledge about culture and techniques. Every character that plays a main role in the personal performance has a crew, that is getting him or her ready for the event. The community is intense, the quality of costumes is high, the references to the comic culture is strong and the recognition and appreciation come by.

Interpersonal function: the communication inside the groups of actors is one of the basic keys of success of the performances that happen. Nevertheless, German community is more aim-oriented and has a clear strategy inside their community and subculture. Russian performative society is more relaxed and ready for new experiences. It could be seen in their style of behavior, the preparations around the act, their on-the-spot decisions, and, moreover, the amount and variety of the participants.

All in all, considering the fact that comic culture came to Russia much later than in Western societies, it could be observed that it has become a strong movement with people being involved in the process in leisure and serious leisure patterns of behavior even stronger than in Germany.

2.4. Subjective interpretations of community membership and identity: The findings from in-depth interviews

The next stage of empirical part of the study was a semi-structured interview. Individuals who represent informationally enriched cases within the framework of the phenomena under study and the research interest were interviewed. The criterial sample serves as the basis for the interview, the logic of which is to examine in details the examples that are informative and meet the research criteria. The focus in this study are active participants in communities devoted to mass culture products, who take part in thematic events, has a strong bond with comic culture and the community.

The interview was conducted as part of a study of manifestations of the social performance phenomenon, as well as to identify and confirm the strategies for their re-fusion and de-fusion, and the role in terms of identity-making.

With this method 34 respondents have been interviewed, 17 from Russia and 17 from Germany. Using axial selective type of coding, there were analyzed main markers of fan behavior patterns in terms of comic culture and participating in the performances. It was of scientific interest to observe the cases of intense embedment into a group, sphere and action. Moreover, it was important to reveal an input in identity-making in framework of the research. Therefore, informationally enriched cases of changes in lifestyle and transformations of identity were put into focus.

The story of every respondent has started from their childhood. Everyone has got an acquaintance that changed his image of the world, of culture, and the concept of books and art. That was basically a starting point for the future immersion into the universe of comics and other mass culture products: “my brother always took me with him to the convents”¹; “my sister is the one who got me involved (-) she just brought the comics and said (.) you have to read this”²; “in my childhood I was (.) a dreamer by nature (.) was amazed that so many elements of the real world were laid down in this format (-) from bad to good (.) since then I have fallen in love with the whole fantasy”³; “when I got older and entered the university I was interested not only in reading but also in trying on myself characters from the book (-) then I started to learn historical sword fencing (.) then I started to go to performances”⁴; “when my daughter grows up (.) I want to show her also the dresses i sewed (.) photos (-) I’ll tell her about interesting cases of how mom and dad participated different strange games (-) after all (.) she has the right to know something (.) of course, i will not force her into it”⁵.

¹ Interviewee 6.

² Interviewee 20.

³ Interviewee 4.

⁴ Interviewee 11.

⁵ Interviewee 30.

Furthermore, the process of identity-making meets two possible directions – when the social environment was supportive and shared the interest of a person or not. Usually it was always a family who expresses opinion upon the topic and the friend circle.

When friends do not share the interviewees' interests it becomes harder to express themselves with the help of communication and, therefore, a person should find other ways of expressing himself/herself.

In case society rejects a person as a carrier of ideas and symbols of a mass culture product, a person can abandon this interest. Or, on the contrary start reinforcing the preference. In this case usually people start being more isolated and involve more and more into the “subculture”, having all the items and behavior patterns which are ritual ones for those who share common ideas of the inner-community. The same happens with the relatives – it is a rare case when parents completely support interest of their child in comic culture, but not rejecting it is already a huge impact in terms of identity-making process.

Almost all of the interviewees have agreed that people who are so much into the culture are socially vulnerable and are hiding behind the possibility of feeling themselves somewhere else and even someone else. Moreover, people who are deeply involved into the game/movie/comics universe and connect their lives in serious leisure do not call themselves fans or geeks. ‘Fans’ sounds to them too extreme and too emotional, and ‘geek’ sounds offensive. Also, as an indicator of vulnerability stands a willingness to oppose the possible rejection and even aggression from the outer-society: “It is not fan (.) it is something more”⁶.

Path to the culture through the social environment is also not a rare case: “this is a chain of occasional episodes that lead one to another”⁷; “acquaintance lead to an acquaintance”⁸; “I was noticed during my first convent”⁹; “I would rank the whole story not to the saint one, but to this incredible chain (.) some of the chains that somehow connect and lead to something (.) so I would not have met a lot of people, and would not have met the person who interviews me now”¹⁰

Thus, it becomes obvious that the chain strategy works when we follow the logic of how people become a part of the culture. Social circle, from a family and to people that find you an interesting element of the performance, considering some qualities applicable for the further development, enables the process of involvement: “well all my life I could not always sit still (-) when I was 17 years old I started to go to the fan forums and found out that there are a lot of people in Petersburg who are interested in the same thing as I do (.) we slowly began to meet and communicate (.) month after month more and more people came (.)

⁶ Interviewee 5.

⁷ Interviewee 17.

⁸ Interviewee 12.

⁹ Interviewee 34.

¹⁰ Interviewee 32.

we discussed not only the comics and series (.) but also our own side interests (.) it was not a story of geeks who talked about aliens and space ships, but just hangouts by interests”¹¹

Not only people and social environment play the role of the part of a chain, but the culture itself, when it suggests fans more and more products of the same story, but with the new outcomes, branches or styles: “in fact some fanfics (.) they are few but they are (.) are written in good literary language (.) and you even come back to them after some time (.) because this is a separate work, built on the basis of something already existing (.) it is their most interesting to read (.)and due to this the culture of fans is alive”¹²

Connection with the profession

Most interviewees didn’t have any professional connection with their side activity – participation in social performances and all the cultural element of life that is based on comic culture. Medical nurse, law student, English teacher, graphic designer, marketing manager – these are the people who has a distinction between their basic duty and a hobby. What is important to notice is that all these people are under age of 25.

The others who have told their stories of having their jobs directly connected to the comic universes are mainly older than 25. That could be a sign of the development of the path of self-identification.

When it is needed, one faces a decision for yourself what is more important and whether one would like to make a hobby to become a source of income and a serious duty of the life.

Thus, German founders of a Comic House and journalists, Russian models and event-managers have chosen the way of performances in terms of comic culture as their professions and an environment where they would like to bring something new for the community and for themselves: “I sew for a lot for the convents (-) I am thinking of maybe going to sewing school to become professional”¹³; “entertaining children is what makes me feel alive (-) I do it as my part-time job (.) but I can definitely see myself doing it my whole life”¹⁴; “until 2015 for me it was just a hobby (.) I worked on the main job and in my free time I was engaged in a festival (.) and I liked it (.) for about three months before the meeting i had to leave everything for work only (.) only later it did become possible to shift the emphasis and engage more in festivals”¹⁵; “people who are fond of this (.) make suits for more than a year and spend hundreds of thousands of rubles on it (.) for me they are like artists”¹⁶.

¹¹ Interviewee 12.

¹² Interviewee 18.

¹³ Interviewee 5.

¹⁴ Interviewee 9.

¹⁵ Interviewee 29.

¹⁶ Interviewee 17.

What happens when the boundary is erased?

People who make their carrier in the sphere of performances tend to balance between the communities and have common ground with inner- and outer-groups to be in touch with the inside tendencies and to build a bridge to the informative space that do not have access to this aspect of life or any image of such type of culture.

Therefore, these mediators are the group of people who represent a unique combination. They do not like to be called fans or part of the subculture, but they do appreciate everything that this community creates, so that they can be a part of the collaborations.

Professionalization of the hobby is one of the directions of our modern society. In the framework of comic culture this is not a rare case. Respondents tell, how they are improving their skills in languages, sewing, journalism and how it influences their lives: “I began to immerse myself in it (-) even at the age of 20 studied elfish language to surprise everyone during the performance (.) studied special literature on the internet (.) sat at forums (.) consulted people about pronunciation (.) it took me several hours a week”¹⁷; “the most difficult part of creating a character are eyebrows (.) sometimes it takes months to learn how to draw them (.) sometimes you even have to shave them off”¹⁸.

The special fact about skills in terms of comic culture is that it could not be appreciated as much as it is in the small communities. The tendency also shows that the more specific in the field an individual is, the more irrelevant he or she would be in the general labor market: “of course I realize that my model career is at high price only in the sphere of cosplays and scenes reproduction (-) but still for now it is what interests me and what brings me money (.) because I do it with all my passion”¹⁹; “people think if we are reading comics and making figures (.) we can’t be normal anymore and communicate outside the culture (-) it is a sad story because usually it is them who deny you from a friend circle in the end”²⁰.

Challenges of membership

Actors of the performances are aiming on the audience and the future acceptance of their ideas and beliefs. In fact, their expectations do not always meet the reality, and in this case participants are feeling frustration. According to the data, collected during the interviews, respondents struggle with the rejection and try to avoid disappointment on a daily basis.

¹⁷ Interviewee 17.

¹⁸ Interviewee 5.

¹⁹ Interviewee 23.

²⁰ Interviewee 7.

Also, an interesting aspect of avoiding a negative reaction of outer-society is to reject the fact of belonging to the culture: “I am not like these geeks”²¹; “I mean I am fond of the culture and being a part of the show we create (.) but I am not like fan (.) no”²²

A small number of people took the path of a ‘geek’, because of a constant challenge that they decided to face as a rebellion act. Others who also could not face this tension anymore, have become absolutely engaged in the comic reality, which helps them to avoid the real world and find people who can understand them.

There is a clear image, who is “worse” and who is “a weirdo” in the eyes of society, therefore a clash occurs. Individuals who feel themselves comfortable in the inner-community and are fond of culture and hobbies they have, do not let themselves fully accept their interest and engage in the processes and activities of the community. Having a fear of becoming “a freak” pushes them away and puts them in a marginal position in terms of identity-making. This moment can cause the de-fusion when in the community people have different images of what they represent and, therefore, believe.

On the contrary, some individuals get more self-confidence while having a battle with the non-/acceptance of the audience. Feeling that they are not like “ordinary” people, that there is something special about them, provokes new emotions. They are noticed by others, which is empowering the feeling of uniqueness and feeling of belonging to a group that they represent: “they always looked at me (.) but tried to be not noticeable (.) avoided eye-contact (-) that made me laugh (-) so I decided to wear costumes every day (.) in a subway (.) in the uni (.) in a grocery shop (.) everywhere (-) amazing”²³; “when people do not understand us and become somehow angry with our culture (.) it made me sick (.) why would you (?) but then I realized how boring their lives are and how they just can’t accept that we can afford a life we want (-) so i started feeling much better (.) started to look even brighter than I did earlier”²⁴; “there is a lot of us (.) it doesn’t matter if some people do not appreciate my look (.) it is important that there is a chance to meet a person on a street who will recognize my character and we could easily become friends after all (.) can all these strictly looking people do like this (?)”²⁵.

Protest (including parental one) is also one of the most problematic points which could be followed through responses of the majority of interviewed people. Such protests influence individuals’ choices, because family and friends are one of the basics of socialization in everyday life. However people also can use it as a mechanism of reverse action and motivation. Moreover, this obviously becomes a common ground for people inside the community and, therefore cause the fusion and feeling of belonging to someone who shares same values: “I am thinking on maybe going to sewing school (.) but (.) parents are against (.) they

²¹ Interviewee 6.

²² Interviewee 10.

²³ Interviewee 2.

²⁴ Interviewee 13.

²⁵ Interviewee 11.

want me to get normal boring job”²⁶; “I graduated from Makarova academy (.) I am a sailor by profession (.) but as I received a diploma (.) gave it to my parents, and chose my way”²⁷; “everyone is trying to show that they can do something and can (.) and again (.) can show it to parents(.) many things happen (.) everyone goes there for becoming someone (.) at school you can get bullied (.) and thanks to this you can finally forget everything and become something else”²⁸; “even from school times I met the guys (.) it was a long time ago (.) anime was very popular topic and we went with them to some parties (.) bought some costumes on the AliExpress (-) from the these shops just on the corner”²⁹; “they only wanted me to become a judge and to go to the law school”³⁰; “everyone in my family is a doctor (-) I am a freak”³¹.

What is also challenging even inside the culture – the way into community. Not always it is easy to become a part of it, and the more prestigious and famous it is, the higher border of inclusiveness it is: “it may take some time to get into it (-) the dealers (.) the sellers (.) the journalists (.) there are different functions of the community (.) which is quite normal”; “you have to be ready that there is no one waiting there for you (-) you have to go and show yourself to this world (.) to the community”; “to become a valuable part of the group it is not enough to like something as others do (-) it is more about being able to be special at something (.) for example i make paper figures like no one here does”.

Therefore, it becomes an additional issue of closeness of the inner-society, when it comes to an observation of the borders between outer community and fan community in general: there is a complex structure that has to be kept in mind, when we consider deepening into the culture.

Way back to reality

Participants of performative culture also feel crises at the times when they reveal that their type of hobby has become too serious and deeply embedded in their lives: “when I postponed cosplay I realized that there was a huge amount of time and money for activities in life (.) and I realized that I do not want to live like that anymore (.) I want to invest in traveling, studying, in my personal projects (.) develop myself as a person”³²; “recently, many cosplayers began to come to this decision(.) they are tired of what happens to them (.) costume festivals(.) it's getting boring (.) I want diversity (.) and you understand how various this life is (.) and you do not want to return to it anymore”³³; “of course I do not do all this action

²⁶ Interviewee 7.

²⁷ Interviewee 32.

²⁸ Interviewee 31.

²⁹ Interviewee 16.

³⁰ Interviewee 3.

³¹ Interviewee 12.

³² Interviewee 18.

³³ Interviewee 4.

anymore (.) it doesn't mean I do not like it (.) I still do (.) it is just that I have changed my perspective of the live (.) there is so much more outside (.) but it is pleasant feeling to find pictures of that times (.) I do not regret anything"³⁴.

Balance of contexts and borders is not stable in terms of involvement into culture, therefore, actors realize that they have got too deep into the mise-en-scenes of performative life. Participants become more and more isolated from the outer-community and corresponding elements of its life (studying, travelling, sports). Therefore, the de-fusion comes through abstracting away from the sphere you found yourself a part of.

Nevertheless, the majority are eager to show themselves to the world as active elements of a community, become recognizable, get a higher level of social power, get appreciation from both inner and outer communities. They are proud to be a part of the comics society and get people fused around them: "I was never hiding (.) I took over this world"³⁵; "I have seen many people at these festivals and among my acquaintances who really want to participate in such events and be part of it (.) it was clear that you need to do something different for people in Petersburg"³⁶.

Image in the outer-group

The clash between how the inner community represents themselves and wants to be seen while performing, and how the audience perceive this flow of symbolic information often differs. Mostly important is that the connotation of the feedback can become negative. Fan communities are not always ready to get such overview of their action and find some opinions offensive, and, therefore, strive to change negative image that they have created. Sometimes it occurs to be aggressive, which furthermore worsens the situation: "I wanted to change the attitude to the geek-culture, so that in the media would stop calling us freaks and clowns"³⁷; "now the comic culture has become much better (.) although "Fontana" recently still has written that we are freaks"³⁸; "fantastic universes do not become for people something that completely forms their life (.) in fact among fans more often you can meet people of my age (.) because they are already looking for a hobby (.) and meetings and other gather around themselves a certain type of people (.)it seems to me like with the same fans of star wars are very excited (.) with the technical mindset (.) some even work in the field of space building"³⁹; "I think the stereotypes that this is a teenage issue that does not deserve attention is a relic (-) this is part of my life bringing pleasure (.) and not some kind of obsession"⁴⁰; "most fans strictly stick to their interests (.) there is too little curiosity (.) too little access to the other genres (-) some people only do superheroes which

³⁴ Interviewee 25.

³⁵ Interviewee 26.

³⁶ Interviewee 16.

³⁷ Interviewee 15.

³⁸ Interviewee 19.

³⁹ Interviewee 1.

⁴⁰ Interviewee 27.

is (-) deplorable”⁴¹; “some people do dress up as cosplayer (-) they may be drifted into this too far (-) I am very suspicious about cosplays – it is your life (-) dressing up as someone else”⁴².

In addition, it was frequently mentioned that as soon as performing has become a serious pastime and the culture has embedded into professional field, the phenomenon of social performance has been perceived not only as something childish, but more as an even field of activity: “only then I was giving a festival and i began to conduct it in St. Petersburg (.) there was no company that wanted to work with us (.) no one wanted to invest money (.) I talked to them and saw written on their faces (.) what the hell are the comics? (.) i had to make my way to the offices (.) tell all the details (.) and at some point, apparently assessing the level of work done they broke and risked”⁴³; “again we have done everything so that the reaction (.) uuuughhh kindergarten (.) begins (-) he reads comic books looking at the pictures (.) nobody thought that this is a big industry and including making money (.) and a lot of artists (.) so much going on around the culture of comics”⁴⁴; “there is another question (.) you do not mind spending money on it (?) but all these question end (.) just when you start to tell people that we are all adults and decide what to do”⁴⁵.

Some informants notice that the community has it’s negative aspects of the inside relationship: “this is a separate cell of the society as well as in the 18th century (.) if that times there were dances and balls (.) then today we have festivals (.) and they discuss each other (.) gossip (.) for me, this is a vivid example (.) I’m in it (.) and in general that’s why I left probably (.) because the last time the atmosphere was disgusting (.) you feel eyes on you (.) and when you are famous and even if you have a little supporters (.) everybody knows you but nobody really will tell you in the face (.) but then they will say a few pleasant words(sarcastic) about you and wish you all the best (.) but I want it to be comfortable”⁴⁶; “but in general, consider this as subculture (.) a lot of insecure people (.) everybody wants to move forward (.) to promote themselves (.) in this case through transfiguration and images”⁴⁷.

The reason for such consequences is the phenomenon of ‘closed society’ and also a battle for the recourses, which in the following case would be fame, recognition and appreciation. The ground for such behavior pattern is insecurity and vulnerability, which are at the same time a push-factor to become a part of the culture.

Moreover, it in terms of identity-making, social performance is the very case of changing one’s social role ‘legally’ through the norms that the performative culture suggests. Thus, hiding and showing the feature to be (un)wanted is the reason

⁴¹ Interviewee 11.

⁴² Interviewee 17.

⁴³ Interviewee 8.

⁴⁴ Interviewee 16.

⁴⁵ Interviewee 21.

⁴⁶ Interviewee 11.

⁴⁷ Interviewee 32.

for many people to feel comfortable in the fictional world of comics and future actions around them: “they want to be people who they are not (.) girls are looking for images of boys to create if it feels uncomfortable in this body and vice versa (.) boys take female roles (.) all about traumas”⁴⁸; People who belong to the fan communities and are showing it with some symbolic items, images and actions are feeling themselves as an opposing part of the society with their ‘alien’ culture, because of the reaction from the outer-community. The fact of the unacceptance could be observed from the different angles:

- The fear, that creates further aggression and isolation: “I did not face directed aggression (.) but there were often cases of misunderstanding, you get used to it”⁴⁹; “find yourself (.) scoop the characteristics of characters (.) learn to ignore people who are watching at close range”⁵⁰; “at first you learn that people do not understand there is a lot of aggression (.) but it helps later to feel and understand each other at meetings and picnics of our groups”⁵¹;

- The willingness to show out and oppose the ‘normal’ society as much as possible. Western case of the research also revealed the problem of LGBT intolerance. The fact of belonging to performative culture makes an association of the homosexuality of the individuals that are participating such kind of events and change their image in the concept of comic culture: “many associate us automatically as people with non-traditional sexual orientation (.) perceiving it negatively (.) although some of us of course, are one of those”⁵²; “i found out that people from my university did not want to be friends with me because my interests and image made them think I am gay”⁵³.

However, many people do not consider involvement to the comic culture as something worth spending time and money, moreover reject it because of their personal approach of how free time of an adult person should look like: “my friends who are not connected at all with cosplay and craft of course at first did not understand what I do in my spare time (.) I answered them that sometimes you need to lift your head and look up at the sky (.) I remember one day when a friend who was asking why I needed it (.) I suggested to customize the helmet by his own (.) he really took it up (.) saying that this was nonsense (.) and then beginning to paint everything in more detail he got carried away”⁵⁴; “in my opinion, there is nothing strange about this (.) if you are so interested in the universe that you want to do it in your spare time, then you will not always watch the same films”⁵⁵; “for me it's just personal satisfaction (.) it's cool to do something you've been loving for years”⁵⁶; “for me it is also my own development (.) at least I

⁴⁸ Interviewee 11.

⁴⁹ Interviewee 19.

⁵⁰ Interviewee 3.

⁵¹ Interviewee 7.

⁵² Interviewee 6.

⁵³ Interviewee 7.

⁵⁴ Interviewee 32.

⁵⁵ Interviewee 24.

⁵⁶ Interviewee 17.

learned a lot about metals (.) fabrics and other things (.) the global goal is to show those fans that do not have the opportunity or the money what they have not seen”⁵⁷.

Therefore, some participants are eager to show that this is the same hobby as all others, some of the fans are willing to show, that their community is even more than just a hobby, some individuals from the inner-community do not share their interests with the public, because of shame or understanding that there is meaning in attracting people to the culture that they are not so fond of: “we even sometimes conduct live broadcasts from festivals so that it could be available everyone”⁵⁸; “I always initiate my friends to participate with me (.) I try to make them understand what we do and why we love it”⁵⁹.

Commercialization

The fact that we are living in the capitalistic society makes culture different. It also covers culture of social performances and the field of comics. First of all, it is needed to be mentioned, that respondents notice that one of the aims of participation in the cosplay events is getting rewards. So that motivation should be also a material one. Actors do feel their social power through professionalization of the mise-en-scene that they personally create: “in Russia, you can earn money if you are a make-up artist or a seamstress (.) many people sew for foreign countries (.) there you can set the price three times more expensive and this is normal”⁶⁰; “there is no one in Germany who can make living with the help of comics – only drawing and writing”⁶¹; “now the same Gazprom corporate event cannot be imagined without cosplayers (.) very many companies call for some holidays people in costumes and pay them very good money (.) now this is a full-fledged work of the animator (.) people who do this could earn on this”⁶².

Considering patterns of behavior of audience, it was frequently mentioned that mostly individuals are visiting such kind of events because of the items and merchandise that is present on every comic convent: “in terms of characters there are two ways (-) one way (.) the products of the mass market (.) and another (-) to do what you want to do and implement (.) and you must understand that it is necessary to combine(.) popular and what you want”⁶³.

Still, considering performative field as a business branch, there is always something to give in, so that people would earn more later. Participant frequently mentioned that their hobby and/or profession could be expensive for them, but usually they are aware of reasons to pay such amount of money, as an

⁵⁷ Interviewee 30.

⁵⁸ Interviewee 17.

⁵⁹ Interviewee 29.

⁶⁰ Interviewee 15.

⁶¹ Interviewee 17.

⁶² Interviewee 10.

⁶³ Interviewee 33.

opportunity to earn benefits from a performance they provide: “and for us it's such an expensive pleasure (.) as an investment of course (.) like a star (.) if you put yourself out (.) people want to look at you (.) people want to know you”⁶⁴; “in fact it is a difficult situation (.) like in St. Petersburg you can make money on this because there are activities and events (.) that you can beat the cost of the costume (.) but to earn (.) but we must do something or very cool (.) with the help of overhyped characters that everyone knows and loves”⁶⁵; “i usually like to buy rarely but really good costumes (-) my friends do not understand this passion of mine (.) but I know it is totally worth it because this is how I get into the field of professional cosplaying worldwide”⁶⁶; “in Germany fabrics cost so much that you already don't look at the prices (.) but everyone still buys costumes and material (-) if you want to be good at something you do not try to be worse at something”⁶⁷; “when I stopped cosplaying (.) I started my make-up artist career because I saw how popular and needed artists are (.) and I knew and know now that this can bring good money”⁶⁸.

Therefore, we can see that the culture of performances and comics is a possible investment and source of income. Many people are facing struggles when trying to maintain the high level of their performance because of the cost of materials and work, but nevertheless with the help of such usage of money people can earn even more and start a career.

Some participants also develop their skills and try to invest in their own merchandise: “talking about merchandise (.) my friend made stickers for a telegram (.) this also costs money by the way but we agreed to try for the idea (.) now we have printed cards (.) it all depends on how you position yourself (.) you can position yourself as a star (.) in an adequate scale (.) you need to correctly program yourself (.) that you are something (.) that only you can help yourself (.) that's cool. this is motivating”⁶⁹; “many guys sell mugs (.) stickers (.) t-shirts (.) there are sites (-) many cosplayers earn this way (.) at first it was for creative people”⁷⁰; “but unfortunately in Russia this is hard (.) in the mind, the thought "go to the plant and earn money”⁷¹; “tendencies of festivals in that (.) Russia is a country of consumers (.) we started organizing festivals and people realized that money can be earned on this (.) a teenage movement buys it (.) so you can earn on them too”⁷²; “costumes (.) we sew them sometimes a few months (.) and it is not cheap”⁷³.

Ideological aspect

⁶⁴ Interviewee 12.

⁶⁵ Interviewee 26.

⁶⁶ Interviewee 9.

⁶⁷ Interviewee 8.

⁶⁸ Interviewee 29.

⁶⁹ Interviewee 7.

⁷⁰ Interviewee 26.

⁷¹ Interviewee 25.

⁷² Interviewee 26.

⁷³ Interviewee 1.

As I consider social performance as a ritual-like action, I also have to perceive the direction and the ideas, applicable to the reality and figure out the message it carries. One of the respondents from Russia mentions the fact of Soviet comics that claimed the ideas of those times. Mainly they were dedicated to the ideology of communism and were inspiring population for the productivity, for the values and norms of the society that shares goods and dedicates their work for the common sake.

Nowadays comic culture is often considered as an entertainment for children. But even if face only that aspect of the culture, it is important to underline, what it ideas are promotes in this movies and series: “well first of all it is important to believe in yourself (.) in your character (-) mostly at the same time (-) then you can prove to others that there is something about you that they can believe in”⁷⁴; “for me today comics is about ideal images (.) and everyone wants to believe that there is a place for miracles and heroes”⁷⁵; “I guess for children it is mostly relevant to see features of superheroes in their parents (.) to see that dad is strong and brave (.) and mother is protecting family no matter what (-) this is how comic movies makes their reality filled with fantasy and feeling of security and pride”⁷⁶.

The images of comic culture are inspiring people as ideal types of human beings that represent patterns of behavior which people should admire and follow: daring, honesty, bravery, reciprocal rescue, kindness, resolution.

There is yet another aspect of the ideological angle of perspective in terms of comic culture: “there are already other principles in adulthood (-) if you take it in the cosplay sphere (.) there are people who make money (.) who are popular (-) and others look and understand, and I want to be the same (.) they are behind it”⁷⁷.

According to the responses of the participants, it is obvious that they keep in mind capitalistic aspect of the modern society. Lacking an official ideology puts capitalistic values as most important ones. Moreover, considering crossover of the phenomena of hobby and professional life, reveals the direction, where people who are fond of the comic culture promote both the products of their activities as something they represent as individuals and as an item of goods on the market, that has its cost.

Therefore, we can see some criteria of the market – being acknowledgeable, being professional in the field, having something unique, providing canonic development of the script. Reaching these points would be meeting the requests of the culture as a leisure field that transforms into professional.

⁷⁴ Interviewee 21.

⁷⁵ Interviewee 12.

⁷⁶ Interviewee 26.

⁷⁷ Interviewee 22.

Identity and lifestyle

Being part of fan community means spending a lot of time in contact with other fans. This aspect of social performances can become a reason for intensification of the bond inside the community and weaken it with the outer world. Thus, getting out of comfortable social environment can cause stressful situation and unwillingness to return to reality and communicate with people outside the community: “very often I come across posts like (.) that's so sad. the festival lasts two three days (-) and I will have to come back to real life (-) well there are also days before and after the event (.) and now people start to forget about all their domestic problems”⁷⁸; “fantasy is a detailed parallel reality in which there are no difficulties that we face (-) and a way of compensation, an opportunity to relax (-) and I like it”⁷⁹; “you have to do your own thing (-) make something from your own”⁸⁰; “you do not act the role (.) but recreate the concept of what should be in this world (-) people do not play there (.) but live (.) with social relations (.) marriages (.) death and so on (-) this is a small life where everyone can turn the story with the power of their abilities the way they want”⁸¹; “I used to do more female characters (.) now I'm interested in embodying men (.) not so many girls risk doing it (.) it's interesting (.) especially when it is a success”⁸²; “you learn a lot (.) this whole universe is a multi-faceted hero (.) you live with them (.) you want to get as close as possible (.) then you want to reproduce the character maximally (.) including his character and habits”⁸³.

Private life

Also, strong connection between private life and the inside-actions is one of the most vivid examples of the reason, why people tend to participate more and more events within one plot and community. For various people this is a chance of having new acquaintances, building a strong social bond with their friends or family, or even meeting a spouse with the help of a community: “my husband and I met at the performance (.) we talked a little (.) he made me a game proposal (-) marriages are made to get the dead characters to return to another role (-) and I refused (.) and we continued to communicate only within the framework of the game, but my other potential fiancé killed him (.) in the game (-) then we talked on the internet (.) and a year later he came to my city and took me to Petersburg”⁸⁴; “the period of my rabid fanatics was at the time of the studying in the university (-) I went to meetings of fans of the universe (.) which were held

⁷⁸ Interviewee 12.

⁷⁹ Interviewee 4.

⁸⁰ Interviewee 17.

⁸¹ Interviewee 1.

⁸² Interviewee 2.

⁸³ Interviewee 13.

⁸⁴ Interviewee 29.

at the victory park once a week (.) we met and really all the time talked about fanfics (.) articles and other things (-) I spent quite a lot of time like this (-) there I met both the first and the second husbands”⁸⁵.

Also, parental relationships get an impact from the fan culture and, thus, recreate the environment of interest and element of performance to the family/friends environment: “of course parents moan until now, saying that this is all childish (-) they do not share the same emotions (.) but it's their own business (-) but my eldest daughter loves fanfics and reads them with me (.) sometimes, she comes from school and i shout to her from the corridor (.) come in (.) the next chapter has appeared (.) and she runs to read. it brings us together”⁸⁶.

Influence of the mise-en-scene as a given culture can become a serious issue when one's social reality is built around the culture and comics: “I am trying to get all the information about Harley Queen to be a good girlfriend. To be a good partner in the role play (.) to know the character and all the details about her personality”⁸⁷.

Nevertheless, it is not a rare case when participants are grateful for the experience they get while taking active part in performative culture and community activities: “The very culture and being a part of it made me really open-minded (.) I like to learn something new, new people and even from the other countries (.) that makes me better”⁸⁸; “As we have fans and fan communities all over the world (.) we usually speak English with each other (.) so I can definitely see how I improved my language skills which made me more self-confident”⁸⁹.

Performances also are not only aimed at actors-audience relationships, but also on the values that they carry. These values could be shared inside and outside communities, as well. Thus, nowadays, many organizations are forwarding money that they have earned during convents to charity organizations: “fan organizations often work with charities: money that we get via cosplay festivals is sent to the poor (-) this is not a fan, but a purely human idea”⁹⁰; “I began to immerse myself in it (-) even at the age of 20 studied elfish language to surprise everyone during the performance (.) studied special literature on the internet (.) sat at forums (.) consulted people about pronunciation (.) it took me several hours a week”⁹¹; “as a practicing psychologist with 10 years of experience I can say that this is some kind of addiction (-) a man compensates by immersing himself in a game with something that he lacks in real life (-) deepening in such a world for me is still a way to try on a different social role (-) but this is all normal”⁹²; “often for people, this is a hobby (-) at these games each participant seeks compensation for something (.) I was interested in playing a fairy tale (.) some

⁸⁵ Interviewee 30.

⁸⁶ Interviewee 19.

⁸⁷ Interviewee 10.

⁸⁸ Interviewee 12.

⁸⁹ Interviewee 11.

⁹⁰ Interviewee 20.

⁹¹ Interviewee 18.

⁹² Interviewee 28.

young people - in the war with fencing (.) show their masculinity (-) some want to legalize their aggression (.) others are more interested in winning and showing themselves (.) for which they really train very seriously (.) for example (.) in archery"⁹³; "role-playing games through which I began to visit them helped me at some point realize that I'm a girl whom they can be sympathetic to (-) this has become an important part of becoming an individual"⁹⁴; "I have never had any serious problems or feelings of strangeness because of what i do (.) in 00's there was however some offensive word which called all the role-players (.) but i do not even remember it (-) now this is all easier (-) although of course there are people who consider this strange (.) and I do not publish photos in the costumes (-) it's my personal life (.) but otherwise the hobby brought more advantages (.) for example I began to see the world widely and depend less on the consumer lifestyle"⁹⁵; "fantastic worlds (.) observing them is my hobby (.) something that allows you to chill and relax (-) but when I started it was a stark theme that no one even wanted to touch (.) I believed and still believe that you need to tell those who do not know how cool and interesting it is (.) that's why I'm still here (.) it's really can inspire (.) someone has a muse, his wife (.) I have comics and this universe"⁹⁶; "the first time I really liked it (-) because the first time it's all new (.) it's all so bright (.) beautiful girls in suits of archers (-) in costumes there I do not know (.) princesses i do not know. (.) i do not know. (.) it's wonderful (.) it's just wonderful. (.) there guys who dress up in knights suits are also quite good (.) here (.) but of course for me these feelings are then not so intense (-) and the second time I did not get such pleasure that I felt for the first time (.) therefore I do not go to such events and such festivals (.) probably because that I was not a participant (.) probably being a participant is much more interesting than watching from the side (.) all this action"⁹⁷.

Emotional reproduction is one of the core mechanisms of involvement and engagement of fans and hobbyists into the culture, that pushes people forward to the next action and keeps them in the sphere: "the first time I really liked it (.) because the first time it's all new (.) it's all about such bright (.) beautiful girls in suits archer in costumes there (-) I do not know (.) princesses (.) countess (.) I do not know (.) it's wonderful it's just wonderful (-) there are guys who dress up in the costumes of knights, this is also quite a good"⁹⁸; "to communicate with other people who have the same hobby as me (.) this is important (.) because there is not many of us in Saint Petersburg (-) but it is hard just to meet a man on the street and understand that he shares your passion (-) just for this (.) such conventions exist (.) plus to all if you see a person in the costume of black widow (.) you always know that you can come and start discussing the show (.) and you will not have any misunderstandings with this person then (.) because they (.) let's say (.) are in (-) it's very nice (-) and if it's about some rare fandom (.) it is

⁹³ Interviewee 16.

⁹⁴ Interviewee 34.

⁹⁵ Interviewee 14.

⁹⁶ Interviewee 29.

⁹⁷ Interviewee 27.

⁹⁸ Interviewee 27.

rare chance and worth going for him”⁹⁹; “for me it was an opportunity to develop a fantasy (-) I was inspired by stories (.) the world (.) the actions of heroes (-) already now thinking (.) it seems to me that this has stimulated work in a more creative direction”¹⁰⁰; “these books taught me what irony is (.) how satire works”¹⁰¹; “I continue performing for children (-) when they recognize me and rejoice this is an indescribable feeling (.) I will continue doing this”¹⁰²; “I like dressing up as a princess (.) it makes me feel happy (.) and when people say I’m beautiful (.) it makes me laugh and get positive emotions”¹⁰³; “and now I can’t step away from that”¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁹ Interviewee 31.

¹⁰⁰ Interviewee 2.

¹⁰¹ Interviewee 17.

¹⁰² Interviewee 21.

¹⁰³ Interviewee 3.

¹⁰⁴ Interviewee 17.

Conclusion

All things considered, phenomenon of social performance was observed through the lens of modern cultural and communicative perspectives. It has been carried out that performances based on comic culture are the result of both changing of an approach of the term ritual and appearance of the term serious leisure. Taking into consideration the conjunction of these phenomena, we can observe a new direction of cultural development and occurrence of the communities which are dedicated to cultural products and thematic performances, that construct their identities and identities of the observers, their social circle, their everyday life, and culture itself.

With the help of theoretical framework of J. Alexander, it has become obvious that social performance is a complex action, which includes elements, such as actors, audience, social power and mise-en-scene, which have to be merged, and context, which have to correlate with the elements to become seen and perceived by the others, - which means to be successful. Moreover, it was foreseen, that there are dangers that lead to abruption of chain and de-fusion of the performance. These would be: inconsistent coordination of the elements, artificial action, distortion of social power, mismatching of action and mise-en-scene. In case of destructive pace of development, there is still a possibility of re-fusion, which can be enabled through different sources and means of social power inside and outside the community – mostly due to informational age and social networks and internet fan communities.

The fusion and successful outcome is not a static issue – for audience and for actors that would be a different criteria and determinant. Therefore, a performance could be perceived differently from the both sides, when the actors conducted their performance successfully, they get their cathexis from the action, meanwhile the audience can have no understanding of an idea and a message being sent. Nevertheless, understanding of the meanings is not an obligatory issue, because the main goal – it to make others to believe and create an emotional bond.

Re-fusion is the overcoming the differences and collaboration with the help of elements that are supposed to combine into a successful performance. Re-fusion is an often case, mostly when we observe when clash between actors and audience is recovered with the help of mise-en-scene and powerful elements of a performance. Script is enabled again, when additional linkers come into action, which are recognizable and acknowledgeable, that bond common circumstances both for inner- and outer-community.

Frames of the real-life and performative become more and more blurred. Self-identification doesn't exist in separate distinguished contexts. Merged perceptions of 'self' inside and outside communities, different social roles and mise-en-scenes create a transfusion of identities and makes the frames interfere and split.

Meanwhile borders of inside and outside self-identification become stricter. Feeling of belonging and attaching to a particular community enables the process of self-confidence, perception of having social power and distributing it, providing norms and values, which could be not relevant to the outer society. Therefore, there is a risk of a clash between self-identification and possible internal conflict.

Through the empirical part of the research particular fan communities, social performances and individual cases, embedded in comic culture had been analyzed. As a result, the following findings take place:

- Group activities make performance more professional, but less coordinated. When comics performances are organized by fan community they are usually well-thought, consist of irregular actions, costumes, unusual elements and time-space decisions. Nevertheless, the quality of coordination is lower, than in case of individual self-presentation; the risk of splitting of script and further de-fusion is higher; there is a chance of inaccurate social power distribution, diffused attention of the audience, dispersion in mise-en-scene.
- Performative culture is already a challenging space. To be inside the culture fans often have to face rejection from the society. Their everyday practices are strongly connected with the culture and media product they are dedicated to.
- Being a part of the community helps to socialize in terms of feeling of belonging. Fan groups are based on the same interests, which makes it easy to find a common ground for communication. Performances create a field for instant communication and suggest picking any social role and perception of self that individuals would like to try on. The action 'from the other' helps people to integrate and involve into communication with the help of given features of characters that they have chosen
- Being a part of the community isolates participants from the society. When a closed community becomes a comfort zone and the feeling of belonging enables emotional satisfaction, there is no need to push yourself into society. The stronger the bond with the group is, the less it is with the outer community.
- There is no value and no social power outside the community. The specific of the inside community makes participants get an important experience and input within the group. Nevertheless, the efforts and achievements can be valued and applied only by representatives of the same culture and participants of the community. Consequently, such disbalance can create crises of self-identification of the inner and outer 'self' within communities.
- Commercialization as a need of modern society to get a value of your work. Monetizing in performative culture is phenomenon of serious leisure that displays the level of recognition and appreciation. This is a positive sanction from society that is embedded into capitalistic model of nowadays.
- What also has to be underlined is a complex entry threshold within fan culture. It is not only an issue of being a hobbyist, but also of having relevant knowledge, special skills and unique self-representation.

- Culture of shame. One of the most urgent problems of fan community and their self-representations is being ashamed of the hobby they have. The image of typical fans is often misrepresented and being held in negative connotations. Thus, people prefer not to get involved into such communities and save the borders, so that there were no condemnations from the outside community.
- The level of recognition and proficiency in an inner-society lowers the level of recognition and appreciation in outer-society. Specific skills within performative culture are what makes you valuable member of the community. The more cultivated the level of proficiency and uniqueness of the skill is, the less needed it is in the outer community. The mechanism of decoding of the audience has no means to recognize a skill and its utility, therefore cannot appreciate it without context.
- The more intense an individual gets involved in the inner fan group, the more isolated an individual becomes. Being involved into a very specific thematic group lowers the need to be in tight relationship with the outer-community. The more comfortable individuals feel themselves inside a group, the less desire and contacts they will have in outer social world.

Moreover, in terms of two countries and societies under study it has been observed that most powerful strategy in framework of identity-making is the ideational one in Russian society, where the most valuable aspect is social acknowledgement and emotional self-identification. Whereas in German that would be a discourse strategy, where the proficiency and the recognition in terms of culture would be the value.

The research has shown the direction of modern movements, revealed the correlation between the phenomena mentioned through the study. Thus, main mechanisms of identity-making are formulated and ranked, basing on the results of three methods which were implied in sake of methodological triangulation.

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Appendix 1. List of informants

1. Attendant of Cologne Comic Messe, male, 22 years, student, cosplayer
2. Attendant of Cologne Comic Messe, female, 19 years, medical student, cosplayer
3. Attendant of Dortmund Comic Messe, female, 21 years, law student, cosplayer
4. Attendant of Dortmund Comic Messe, male, 24 years, art student, cosplayer
5. Attendant of Dortmund Comic Messe, female, 16 years, student, cosplayer
6. Attendant of Cologne Comic Messe, male, 36 years, comic collector
7. Attendant of Cologne Comic Messe, male, 42 years, comic collector
8. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, male, 23 years, IT-manager, participant of performance
9. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, male, 29 years, real-estate agent, participant of performance
10. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, female, 28 years, financial analytic, participant of performance
11. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, male, 27 years, advertisement manager, participant of performance
12. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, female 24 years, lawyer, participant of performance
13. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Berlin, female, 29 years, engineer, participant of performance
14. Administrator of Klaustrophobie Berlin, male, 23 years, media student, facilitator of performances
15. Speaker Cologne Comic House, male, 47, co-founder of Comic House
16. Speaker Cologne Comic House, male, 44, co-founder of Comic House
17. Speaker Cologne Comic House, male 41, comic journalist
18. Manager of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, male, 26 years, cosplayer, model, actor
19. Manager of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 29, cosplayer, co-founder
20. Manager of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 24 years, comic artist
21. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 19 years, student of public relations

22. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, male, 27 years, comic artist
23. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 28 years, journalist student, cosplayer
24. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 21 years, actor
25. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, female, 26 years, teacher, participant of performance
26. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, male, 32 years, doctor, participant of performance
27. Attendant of StarCon/EpicCon Russia, male, 22 years, account manager, cosplayer
28. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, female, 24 years, psychologist
29. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, female, 16 years, student, participant of performance
30. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, female, 21 years, actor
31. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, male, 23 years, economy student, participant of performance
32. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, female 23 years, designer, cosplayer
33. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, male, 28 years, manager, participant of performance
34. Attendant of Klaustrophobie Saint Petersburg, male, 27 years, event-manager

Appendix 2. Table of discourse analysis

Group «Marvel/DC»	The most popular group in social network Vkontakte, dedicated to comics universe Marvel/DC, includes 3138097 followers, 28 branches of discussion, everyday content-making
Group “Hell’s kitchen”	<p>The most active group dedicated to DC/Marvel comics among Russian Internet sources.</p> <p>It includes 370 plots for discussions, everyday content-making, news-adding, fan-art, informational section about the fiction universe and the characters, event-page that includes discourse of conventions and fan-meetings, up to 2000 messages to a topic, convent-establishment</p>
Facebook group “Marvel Fans Deutschland”	The most popular community in social network Facebook in Germany, dedicated to comics of Marvel, includes 10 706 participants, closed community, 27 branches of discussion, everyday content-making, active participation, convent establishment
“DC Comic World Deutschland!”	The most popular community in social network Facebook in Germany, dedicated to comics of DC, includes 4578 participants, closed community, 21 branches of discussion, everyday content-making, active participation, convent establishment

Appendix 3. Fragment of observation diary

Cologne, Germany

One of the most developed cities in Nordrhein Westfalia is Cologne. Therefore, most interesting and hyped events take place here. As I started looking at Comic Cons and other events, referring to the comic culture, I found information about the Comic House event that is going to take place soon.

As I came to the convent space, it was a feeling that this was a family event: there was a children yard available for the participants with parents and their children moving all around. I felt like this event could be for children only, or in Germany and Cologne no one took comics seriously, as an event for adults. However, when I came further, I changed my mind. I saw people aged 40+, who were selling comic books in old boxes. Comics were also old and, very likely, rare. I found old Saylor-Moon comics, Pokemon, Asterix and Obelix and others, which I already couldn't recognize. This looked more like a market of insiders, who came to buy comic books they had not had yet or wanted to give somebody as a nostalgic present. But as I went through the corridors of the old section I found a huge number of comics and merchandise. People were all around, kids and adults, all of them were searching for comics or attributes they were fond of. In the end of the room, I found a café, where mostly people of older age were sitting. My first thought was that they brought their children to the convent, but it turned out that these attendees were there from the very morning, and as I asked them, they told me that they were expressed fans of comic books, so they gathered there every time an event was organized. So, as they had already seen new and old books they sat in the cafeteria waiting for others to come. I wanted to interview them, but they were embarrassed, so they told me that they did not have much to tell and were not sure about their language skills. Nevertheless, they explained that they came from different counties: Germany, France, Netherlands, Belgium, and they were joined into a group of enthusiasts that did not often have meetings but had really strong connections inside their small community.

When I moved further, I saw a part of stands where artists were settled. There were different types of art: people drew portraits in comic style, made temporary tattoos as their favorite heroes, made special prints on their clothes, and did their make-up. What drew my attention was that people were highly interested in the art offered for sale: talked to the artists and asked questions, but there were almost no questions regarding the pieces of art directly. One of the possible reasons for that was that some of the attendees were friends with the artists and probably had already got their art-works, so they were just communicating with each other. Other people present were already wearing make-up and costumes, so that they were performing as characters from the comics.

Further, I came to talk to them, and they shared their interest in the event. They explained that they liked to attend this kind of events because they were associated with connections providing opportunities to meet old acquaintances and establish new contacts. Although it was not a major large-scale comic event in Germany, it was still an important step in their "comic career".

There were many couples present that were cosplaying pair costumes. They were engaged in the context of comics and the context of their relationship simultaneously as they showed a double-couple behavior so that it was obvious even for the outsiders that they were together.

In the furthest end of the hall a stage was located. That is where the head organizer of the event was performing: he told the audience what was going to happen next and announced the stands of the convent. He also promoted artists and comics collectors and entertained everyone with unknown facts from comics. Then popular local cosplayers entered the stage and recreated a battle from the recent *Deadpool* movie. The interested audience came closer to the stage, but there were a lot of attendees who kept going through the comics of sitting in café zones. It still looked like everyone was busy with what interested them most.

Later on, some activities like quizzes were conducted on the stage. The prizes were a ticket to the next convent and the services of the artists present. Both options seemed to motivate the audience, and quiz went on loudly and cheerfully.

When I thought I had seen everything the event could offer, I walked through the halls several times looking for people with children, in costumes. I also found a journalist who did his observations and collected interviews at the event; then I accidentally noticed a sign that something was going on in the basement. I walked downstairs and realized how lucky I was: there was a session dedicated to comic culture.

When I came in, there was a lecturer that gave a presentation on comics and weapons. He sought to show how the image of weapons changed through history and through the development of other cultural phenomena, like movies (westerns, for example). Then, a woman took the floor who presented on the superhero of DC comics – Wonderwoman. She reported how the approach to this character changed, how it influenced the issue of feminism and what the backward influence was. She also related about female emancipation and the resulting change in the image of women at different historical stages.

Finally, the last speaker spoke about the geography of comics and its transformation focusing on the popularity of French comics in Germany and German comics – all over Europe, as well as new tendencies of the American flow. Another topic covered was irony lying behind the comic plots.

Afterwards I approached the lecturers to talk to them personally, and they invited me to their Comic House in Cologne.

Appendix 4. Interview guide

1. What are you usually doing in your leisure time?
2. What series do you watch? Why do you find them interesting?
3. What types of activities do you prefer?
4. What part of life does leisure time take?
5. Do you consider it as just leisure time or something more?
6. Which activities take place in your life, connected to the same field?
7. Have you ever been a part of an event dedicated to mass culture products?
8. What have you done to become a participant?
9. What is your experience of being part of such an event?
10. What was the topic/product?
11. What was the best event that you took part in?
12. What was the best event that you have observed?
13. What was most remarkable about your best experience?
14. What made it so special?
15. What usually happens at such events?
16. Who was responsible for the event?
17. What was your role? Do you consider yourself a moderator?
18. What are your preparations?
19. Is there a plan or scenario of these events? What kind of scenario?
20. How do you evaluate your own experience?
21. How, in your opinion, participation in such events, events and meetings has influenced your life?
22. Do you consider yourself part of this culture? Can you say that you are part of the fan community? What part of your life does it take to remain in such a community?
23. Do you have any attributes, symbolic objects that signal other people that you are interested in such culture and events?
24. How do people outside your community react?
25. How does it affect your professional life?
26. What can you say about the relations in your group?
27. What do you think makes your group different from others?
28. How did you become part of this culture?
29. What do you think could be a motivation for people to take part in such events?

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30. Have you brought someone from among your acquaintances to these events?
 31. Are you trying to involve your friends in the culture?
 32. Do you provide any kind of promotion of the events?
 33. Are you sharing your experience with your friends?
 34. What, in your opinion, could captivate people into fan culture, community, events?
 35. What is the most attractive thing for other people in these events?

Appendix 5. Interview transcript samples

I: hello (-) can you please introduce yourself (-)

R: hi (-) i am a German (.) I am basically a comics journalist (.) I write about comic books (.) which interest me personally (.) from 1940 to present day (.) graphic novels and anything else which is kind of inventive and creative stuff (-)

I: what are you usually doing in your free time (?)

R: mmmm, reading quite a lot of comic books, which is a natural thing for me (-)

I: what part of your life does this free leisure time take (?)

R: it's maybe I squeeze it to one hour per day looking at comics (-) enjoying them (-) for me, it is more than just a hobby (.) it is a cultural phenomenon (.) I see it as an important ground for pop-culture, so I am very interested in looking at the development of this art form (-)

I: which activities do you take part in that are connected with the comic culture (?)

R: I do visit comic cons (.) I try to give lectures about things which interest me (.) like I did today (.) and I work together with the network of other comics historians (.) comics journalists (.) comics fans (-) we see each other (.) we swap comic books (.) we give each other tips (.) it's always about learning something (.) you always try to find something new (.) something to be curious about and this is kind of haunt for quality (-) and as I have to write about it (.) I have a personal blog – it's about comics and culture and movies (-) it's just a personalized blog (laughter) (-) I also write for this print magazine – 'Comic scene', which is a classic fandom magazine about every aspect of this business (-) so this is a print (.) old-school printed paper magazine (-)

I: how did you become part of this culture (?)

R: I was a boy – my parents bought me comics (.) this was I remember French albums (-) big format (-) not comic books (.) it's more like a graphic novel (.) these were these funny ones like "Lucky Luke" (.) "Asterix" (.) Tin-tin... the classics (.) Franco-Belgian classics (.) I grew up with classics, and I have widened my horizon (-)

I: what was your first experience being a part of the event (?)

R: I did write my first articles for the school paper (.) when i was seventeen, and German schools used to have school papers (-) I would say... it was a cool experience – it was given away among pupils (-) so (.) I would say it was my first step into comic journalism (.) because I wanted to express my feelings about this wonderful art-form (.) it was like missionary aspect (-) to bring (.) to get strangers like "look at this (!) that's funny"

I: and what about comic cons (?)

R: I have to go back in time (-) I haven't been to comic cons for quite a while (-) when I finished school (-) at eighteen-nineteen, I stopped reading comic books for a while (-) I went to uni and had my first jobs, and then I returned to it (-) it caught up with me, and then I started to come here [comic cons] I believe (-), and

this (.) you might have notices is a very, very big home... and it's all about paper (.) all about people... rushing around (.) willing to get more paper (-) this is a picture... aaagh (.) that's a bit shocking from the one side (.) but then you can say: wow, there must be something (-) this is my first impression of comic cons (-) aaand what I liked (-)

I: and now (?)

R: I can't step away from that (-) I came up with this idea to do the lectures in the basement (-) we call it event-room (-) I came to the organizer, and he said: okay, I will give you the screen and the team (-) so I came up with this program (.) gave two to three (-) three-four lectures (.) it was mixed (.) about superheroes (.) about something German (.) also something funny (-) so that people may calm down (.) have a rest (.) for a moment (.) sit there and ahhhh (-) (-) relax and get out of the puzzle (-)

I: which role do you prefer – to be a participant or a moderator (?)

R: well, it's basically the same for me (-) moderator is a participant in my eyes (.) I don't make that distinction (-) I always try to give my lectures as a participant (.) to be a part of this process (.) showing pictures and maybe making folks to notice something they haven't before (-)

I: how being part of this culture influences your life (?)

R: well (-) first of all (.) I would say I am visually orientated (.) with a quick eye (.) so that you can see some other as a second (-) (-) I watch out for quality (-) it's quite a subjective (.) but this is for me the whole life probably... and you feel like you are part of the art world (.) plus this is fun (-) you want to know what else is there (.) up there (-) that's what I like – give a picture of the world (.) being into comics (.) you know (-)

I: do you feel connection to the community (?)

R: yes (-) it may take some time to get into it (-) the dealers (.) the sellers (.) the journalists (.) there are different functions of the community (.) which is quite normal (-) yeah (.) it is connected, and sometimes we meet at the comic cons, and the person you spoke before... Thomas is hosting a pre-meeting with these guys above (-) this is fun (.) to talk and to meet people (-) it's a network (.) it's connected (-)

I: which functions are the most important (?)

R: they are all important (-) without the dealers we won't have something to move, and without journalists we won't discuss it as much or be told what may be interesting (-) it's an industry with its lobbies (.) with its movers and shakers (-)

I: how people outside the community react (?)

R: I hope they can tolerate it (-) the question is – do they have access to this (.) because mostly it is really included affair (-) people in the city probably won't know that the comic event takes place here now (-) they never heard of it (-) you have to be into it to know where it is happening (-) that's a fandom function (.) part of it (-)

I: what do you think about merchandize (?) do you have the symbolics of the group and comics stuff (?)

R: merch (?) gladly (.) no (-) I don't buy statuettes (.) or t-shirts (.) or bed sheets (.) or coffee mugs (.) or action figures – this is too much for me (-) I stick to the books (.) albums (.) extended editions (-)

I: why not (?) what do you consider not worthy in it (?)

R: you mean what is wrong about it (?) maybe because most fans strictly stick to their interests – there is too little curiosity (.) too little access to the other genres (-) some people only do superheroes which is... deplorable (-) you can't push people in other direction (-) you can try (.) but (laughter) I try to get people to look in terms of fandom at new (.) great (.) new horizons (-) for me it's like a drug (.) taking something and like ahhh (...) discover something (-)

I: so how does comic culture influence your professional life (?)

R: these books taught me what irony is (.) how satire works (-) this became big part of my life (.) I have started to write (-) I tried myself as a staged comedian (.) so I really was influenced (.) my mind started to work in an interesting way (.) think like these comic writers (-) and to me... it's... big (-)

I: how did you become part of this team (?)

R: you have to do your own thing (-) make something from your own (-) maybe a blog – I started with it (-) so that some people could look at this and give you a feedback (-) and then contributing to others' works (-) one day a publisher came and asked me to write something for him (.) so you have to try something and get next connections and go for it (-)

I: what can you say about the relations in your team (?)

R: comic readers are mostly singular (.) individuals (-) you see each other not often enough (-) that's a hard part about communities – you can find people who you might talk about it (.) but there are so few in Germany (-) even though there are so many comic books (-) you won't find two people who read the same comic books (-) that's why I do this blogs – to write something about it (.) to share (.) to start (.) to reach out to people (-)

I: do you think comic community isn't strong in Germany (?)

R: nah (2.0) Germany is not the comics country and never will be (-) this is true facts (.) but the minority that is quite active and financially strong who buy a lot of stuff and buy magazines (.) and these people may lead at comic cons (-) it is a small movement in Germany (-) it is bigger in the US (.) France (.) Belgium (-) but in Germany it will always be a subcultural phenomenon – it has... Germans are like English (.) they never accepted comics like a real culture (-) that was always something snobby... pictures (.) style (2.0) too colorful no-no-no (-) I want to read my Shakespeare (-) it is always this struggle: subculture (.) high culture... comics... Germans have tried to make graphic novels and get into this high culture market (-) they partly succeeded (.) this success is debatable (.) there are backlash movements (.) a fandom community (.) but the German artists can't live for comics (.) which is tragic (.) there is no one in Germany who can make living

with the help of comics – drawing and writing (-) too little for too long – it takes long (-)

I: so you don't think there is a positive tendency (?)

R: there is always hope (-)

I: what do you think is the motivation for people to become a part of the culture (?)

R: there is all these new movies of marvel and dc (.) they attract the attention of younger people (.) and lately they might go to the comic shops and have a couple of superhero comic books (-) and few German comic shops are still surviving and pff (-) that's the whole point (-) but I am skeptic about that (-) I am afraid this is branch of pop-culture which has become so dominant (.) that has excluded basic comic culture (-) personally I like to rediscover things from the past (.) which deserve paying attention (-) I just read a fifteen years old comic book that has a fantastic graphic – it feels like a movie (-) comparing to these I can't tolerate all these superhero stuff (-)

I: are you trying to involve your circle to this culture (?)

R: you try this, and then you give up (-) because you have to be a bomb (.) comic books should be a bomb (.) like moment decision (.) you have to have mind-set (-) this is my theory (-)

I: what is keeping you in the culture (?)

R: new stuff come up (.) it might be interesting (-) we are always waiting something to emerge (-) I am looking for things to get my attention (-) and also they do reprint classics (.) which is wonderful (-) earlier you could had this only being a loaded collector (-) that's may be a way to get newbies into the culture (-)

I: do you consider comic culture as an ideology or lifestyle (?)

R: I wouldn't go so far (-) some people do dress up as cosplayers – they may be drifted into this too far (-) I am very suspicious about cosplays – it is your life (-) dressing up as someone else (?) superhero t-shirts (?) I am glad that such people don't come to my events (-)

I: they do (!)

R: really (?) I must be careful here (-) this is some kind of alter-fandom (-) I don't get it (.) you should draw a line here (-)

I: haha alright (-) well (.) thank you for your answers!

R: it's been a pleasure!

Russian case

I: hi (-) Please introduce yourself (.) tell me about yourself (-)

R: I'm 26 years old (.) I'm modeling (.) cosplaying (.) acting (.) leading events (-) I graduated from Makarova academy (.) I am a sailor by profession (.) but as I received my diploma (.) gave it to my parents (.) and went my own way (-)

I: how did you choose this way (?)

R: well (.) when at school I did not know where to go (-) After Makarovka (.) I had to go on a career ladder (.) but after training I realized that this was not mine, and that's all (-) I could not always sit still (-) And since the school days I met with the guys (.) it was a long time ago (.) when anime was very popular (.) an actual topic, and we went with them to some parties (.) bought some costumes on the AliExpress from the category (-) what was in shop, they bought it

I: so (.) how did you become a part of this culture (?)

R: well (.) quietly (.) communication after communication (.) from acquaintance to acquaintance (-) I went to events (.) I was noticed by other guys who organized events and called me too (-) So it turned like this in terms of organizing events (.) activities and further acquaintances (-)

I: what do you do in your free time (?)

R: free time (?) what is it (?) I try to do my best with my own affairs (-) which I actually like (-) I combine (-)

I: does it differ from your professional field (?)

R: In terms of characters (.) there are two ways: one way – mass market (-) And another – what do you want to do and implement (-) and you must understand that it is necessary to combine (-) popular and what you want (-) and it turns out that you choose what suits you as an individual or as an image (-)

I: are you doing this on your own (?)

R: I had a team until last year (-) a strong one (-) always helped create images (.) offered ideas and inspirations (-)

I: how did your work together look like (?)

R: sometimes my character meets a character (-) sometimes I understand that if it's good to work on it (-) you can play a lot of characters (-) it's all about the approach (-) and the team (-) there are those who work on their own (-) they make everything themselves (-) it is more interesting for me to do everything in a team so that each person invests a part of himself (-) And then the finished product would be ready (-)

I: the choice of character is up to you (?)

R: sometimes I choose myself (-) sometimes friends offer (-)

I: what was your first experience in terms of comic culture (?)

R: the first experience is in 2008 when I bought my first suit (-) I was told that I am very similar in style and in action (-) well (.) that's all (-) sometimes I stopped cosplaying because I understood that studying for me is much more interesting (-) this is more important (-) yes (.) and at some point I stopped taking cosplaying seriously (-) well (.) all people do this (-) But then we joined the team of the organizers with the guys (-) we started making prize fund (-)

I: prize fund (?) what does it mean (?)

R: this is where we give money for the first place the best cosplay (.) for example (.) forty or fifty thousand (-) well (.) that there was some reward for the work that people put affords into (-) then I returned to this team because I decided that it became interesting (-)

I: that was your push-factor (?)

R: well (.) at those times the game injustice came in (-) and there is the hero Aquaman, and he was divine (-) I looked at myself (.) at my hair and decided – this is the one (-)

I: what do you consider as your organizational experience (?)

R: what we organized were the events of the Starkon and Avexpo (-) then came the festivals “Comic Con” and “Nostalgia” – the atmosphere of the nineties (.) very cool (-)

I: so what happens in your eyes during these festivals (?)

R: when [you are] the organizer you must appear in the halls (.) as well as when you are a participant (-) You know the secular ball ceremonies of the eighteenth century (?) here it is (-) to show yourself to others to watch others (-) To communicate and to get acquainted (-) that’s how it gets twisted (-) it’s interesting to try (.) an unusual experience (-) everything in costumes (.) its own energy (.) it’s spinning (.) spinning (.) own gang (-)

I: what does amaze you now (?)

R: proficiency (-) people make costumes from any material, so that you look at and do not understand whether this is real (-)

I: what is the difference between the roles of participant and moderator (?)

R: when you are a participant (.) you come (.) prepare (.) and you have nothing to do with all that happens next (-) The organizers – on the opposite (-) you walk (.) talk (.) make picture and look (-) and the organizers have to prepare for the event (.) everyone should have their own duties (-)

I: what were you duties (?)

R: I was responsible for the entertainment stands that were and then nonresident participants (-) They are contenders for the finals (-) Well (.) you correspond with them (.) you supervise (-) At some point (.) of course (.) too (.) relax (.) but you have much more responsibility (-) You never know (-) Sometimes (.) you need to react immediately (-)

I: So which role do you like more (?)

R: I like to change (-) I get tired of cosplay (-) Constantly switching the images (-) I now have left more time for my projects (-) And cosplay requires a lot of money (-) And even more if you want to make 50 characters a month (-) And you get inspired by the ideas of you want (.) but you must count everything (-) I believe that whatever you do (.) it should always be professional (-) Unfortunately many do not follow it (-) And when you do something responsibly it is professionally (-)

I: So you can become professional in the field of performances and cosplay (?)

R: In Russia (.) you can earn money if you are a make-up artist or a seamstress (-) Many sew and do it for foreign countries (-) There you can set the price three times more expensive and this is normal (-) And for us it's such an expensive pleasure (-) You can consider it as an investment (.) of course (-) Like a star (-) If you put yourself out (.) people want to look at you (.) people want to know you

I: So you can make money on cosplaying (?)

R: In fact (.) a difficult situation (-) Like in St (-) Petersburg you can make money on this (.) because there are activities and events (-) That you can beat the cost out of the costume (-) (-) (-) but to earn (-) (-) (-) (-) we must do something very cool (-) Or hyped characters that everyone knows and loves (-)

I: Do you personally have comics merchandize (?)

R: In terms of a merch (-) My friend made stickers for a telegram (-) This is also money by the way (-) Now we have printed cards (-) It all depends on how you position yourself (-) You can position yourself as a star (in an adequate scale) (-) You need to correctly program yourself (.) that you are something of yourself (.) that only you can help yourself (-) That's cool (-) This is motivation (-) Many guys sell mugs (.) stickers (.) T-shirts (-) There are sites (-) Many cosplayers earn this way (-) At first it was for creative people (-) But unfortunately in Russia this is hard (-) In the mind (.) the thought "go to the plant and earn money" (-) But I do not buy (-) I'm calm about this (-) Only comics (-)

I: Do you have many of them (?)

R: It all started with comics (-) My grandmother gave me (-) (-) all in all it is RENTV's fault (.) there were x-men and I always watched them and here on the name day she gave me a comic book (-) And then I started buying everything (-) then I stopped because again we have this aaaghhh the kindergarten He reads comic books looks at pictures (-) Nobody thought that this is a big industry and including making money (-) so much is going on around the culture of comics (-)

I: Did you often face this kind of reaction (?)

R: Well (.) usually you buy a paper with pictures – they told you what a garbage (-) you'd Better have bought a playboyl (-) And not anything much more (-)

I: How do your friends think about your duty now (?)

R: There are two directions (-) The first – they believes that me as an actor (-) They are admired by beautiful images (.) think that this is art (-) And the second starts to wonder why I do this (-)

I: How do you react on second type of friends (?)

R: I say that this is the same hobby (-) as people collect lego (.) collect some objects (-) There is another question – why i spend so much money on it (-) On this all ends (-) Just when you start to tell (.) people understand that we are all adults and decide what to do (-)

I: What does this culture mean to you (?)

R: I would rank the whole story to the saints (.) to this incredible chain - some of the chains that somehow connect and lead to something (-) I would not have met a lot of people (.) and would not have met with the person who interviews me (-)

If there is a message in life (.) then this is one of those events that should have happened (-)

I: What is the motivation to keep going (?)

R: Fame (-) Someone wants to earn money (.) someone to become famous (-) Consider that they go on stage and show the characters (-) But in general (.) everyone wants to show themselves (-) That they know something (-) To be seen (-) And they are thus (.) taking images (.) taking pictures (.) communication with the people begin to discuss all this (-) And they are united by interests (-) Everyone wants to be noticed (-) But in general (.) consider this subculture (-) A lot of insecure people (-) Everybody wants to become someone (-) In this case (.) by taking images (-) They want to be people who they are not (-) Girls looks for images of boys (.) if they feel uncomfortable in their body and vice versa (-) Boys take female images (-) All goes from the traumas (-)

I: And what don't you like in this culture (?)

R: this is a separate cell of the society which is as if we were in the 18th century (-) If there were balls (.) now there are festivals (-) And they discuss each other (.) gossip (-) Simply for me (.) this is a vivid example (-) I'm in it (.) and in general (.) that's why I left probably (-) Because the last time the atmosphere was disgusting (-) You have eyes on you (-) And when you are famous (.) and even if you have not so much followers (-) Everybody knows you but nobody really will tell you anything in the face (-) But then they will say a few pleasant words (being sarcastic) about you and wish you all the best (-) But I want it to feel comfortable (-) Everyone is trying to show that they can do something (-) And again (.) prove something to their parents (-) Many things happen (-) Everyone goes there to become someone (-) At school (.) you can get bullied (-) And thanks to this culture (.) you can forget everything and become something else (-) Also (.) I very often come across posts in the style of "that's so sad (-) The festival ends in two three days (-) And we will come back to real life (-) While there people start to forget about all their domestic problems (-)

I: Do you try to get your friends to this culture (?)

R: I believe that if a person becomes interested (.) then he himself will come (-)

I: So what do you do now (?)

R: When I postponed cosplaying (.) I realized that there is a huge amount of time and money for activities in life (-) And I realized that I do not want to spend it like this any more so (-) I want to invest in travel (.) study (.) personal projects (-) To develop morally (-) Recently (.) many cosplayers began to come to this decision (-) They are tired of what happens to them (-) Costume festivals (-) It's getting boring (-) I want diversity (-) And you understand how many this whole life is preparing (-) And you do not want to return to it any more (-)

I: So were you also hiding in the comic culture before this decision (?)

R: I was not hiding (-) I took over this world (-)

I: Do you think there is something ideological in all the culture (?)

R: For little children it was and will be (-) Idealism is a shortage of something that you want to compensate for (-) And for the younger generation it is expressed in brutal men who can remotely resemble a father (-) They will see and dream about such a dad for example (-) In adulthood (.) there are already other principles (-) If you take it in the space sphere (-) There are people who make money (-) Which are popular (-) And people look and understand and I want to be the same (-) They are behind it (-)

I: What are the modern tendencies in the sphere of performances and cosplay (?)

R: The tendencies of festivals are that (-) (-) (-) russia - is the country of consumers (-) We started organizing festivals and people realized that it can bring money (-) A teenagers get it (-) On them (.) too (.) you can earn a lot of money (-)) At some point this was a titanic work - when I wanted to get acquainted with all this (-) And then it was so many of this (.) that it became unclear where to go and even cosplayers did not know where to go (-) And you want to develop (-) I want to go to different countries (-) And for me it's now a finish (.) although I'm organizing it (-)

I: What is lacking then (?)

R: We need new trends and jokes (-) We must wait and understand (-) That it is temporary (-) Everything is on a new level and it's cool (-) This is a titanic work (-)) After all (.) it is basically Halloween (-) Dressing and partying (-) And we make it become a subculture so that people know about it (-)

I: Is there a clash between western and Russian styles (?)

R: Everything comes from Western culture (-) But the quality in Russian culture is much higher (-) Russians do everything very responsibly and of a high quality (-) More expended (-) Put your soul and body (-) Due to the fact that many create and do but there is no advertising (.) our guys are just not well-known (-) And when they find out them (.) they usually admire us (-)

I: So what is in the focus right now (?)

R: We need people to find out about us (-) Increase the audience (-) To create something further (-) To play (-) Push yourself (-) Transmit of emotions (-) It can be compared with the release of albums of stars (-) They have a whole PR campaign around (-) Also need to do this (-)

I: What do you think comic culture and participation in performances bring into your life (?)

R: People (-) Connections (-) Acquaintances (-) experience (-) Topics for conversations (-)

I: Alright the (.) thank you so much (-)

R: Thank you too (-)

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