

DONALD J. TRUMP, COSPLAYER

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

I think Marcy and I both have takes on Trump's fast food stunt. Mine comes from an awareness of fan studies, which is a subset of communications and cultural studies.

This old dude is cosplaying.



Donald J. Trump wearing an apron while dispensing french fries at a McDonald's fast food restaurant in Pennsylvania as part of a campaign stunt on Sunday, October 20, 2024. Photo by Doug Mills/AP.

What's cosplay, you may ask if you're not familiar with popular culture. From Wiktionary:

cosplay

Noun

cosplay (countable and uncountable, plural cosplays)

(uncountable) The art or practice of costuming oneself as a (usually fictional) character.

(countable) A skit or instance of this art or practice.

Coordinate terms

dress-up

Verb

cosplay (third-person singular simple

present cosplays, present participle
cosplaying, simple past and past
participle cosplayed)

(intransitive) To costume oneself as a
character.

She cosplayed at the manga convention.

(transitive) To costume oneself as (a
character).

She cosplayed Sailor Moon at the manga
convention.

(figurative, often derogatory,
transitive) To adopt the behavior and
mannerisms of another.

It's playing in costume, dress-up like we might
have done as children, or at costume parties.

Cosplay originated roughly a hundred years ago
but it didn't enter mainstream popular culture
until the 1980s. At first it was tied more
closely to specific events; by the 1980s it
became more widely practiced as an expression of
fandom participation. Its popularity has risen
in sync with that of comic book conventions,
which have in turn expanded to encompass much of
popular culture from comics to movies to premium
cable series.

Cosplaying offers an escape from one's real life
as well as a sense of belonging to a fandom
community.

For some folks cosplay is a kink as well. I'm
not going to kink shame – your kink is not my
kink and that's okay – but let's acknowledge for
some participants there's a sexual element to
this expression of fandom.

(Side note: Based on Stormy Daniels' statements
about her intimate episode with Trump during
which she spanked him with a magazine, it's
possible Trump has a humiliation kink.
Cosplaying at McDonald's might serve his need to
be shamed by what he perceives as beneath him.)

Trump is dressing up as a character. He is not
actually working in fast food. A shut-down

McDonald's and a Fox News TV crew isn't real but a stage and a production team for campaign propaganda.

This is not the first time we've seen Trump cosplaying, either.



The question before voters is this: when is Trump NOT cosplaying?

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Let's look at other roles Trump may have cosplayed in the past.

Exhibit A: Trump cosplayed as a successful investor of real estate and casinos.



Trump in Trump business office c. 1970s. Photo: Getty Images

Perhaps this is why his real estate ventures have been of questionable success. He was only *playing* at this, not actually being a rational, competent real estate investor but a man

costumed as one.

Cosplaying a business tycoon could explain why Trump racked up multiple bankruptcies and failed businesses from Trump-branded steaks to Trump University.

(It'd also explain why the office in this photo looks unfit for business – like a simulacra of an office.)

Exhibit B: Trump cosplayed as a rich and successful CEO.



Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue bearing a promotional banner for NBC's The Apprentice reality TV series with a photo of Donald Trump and the tagline words, "You're Fired." Photo: Bernd Auers via Fortune.

The Apprentice was a scripted program in which Trump was characterized as the leader of a successful organization. This script was based on the previous cosplay effort; in other words, a canon of Donald J. Trump had already been established in a way that The Apprentice could simply extend this commercial franchise.

Buying into this scripted costume play could explain why Trump hasn't released tax returns – who'd expect a man who only *appears* to be a businessman on TV to do anything more than follow the script?

Apparently Mark Burnett should have written a couple episodes dealing with business taxes.

Exhibit C: Trump cosplays as a golfer.



Via Newsweek: Donald Trump at Trump National Golf Club on August 10, 2023, in Bedminster, New Jersey. The former president bragged recently about winning two golf tournaments. Photo: Mike Stobe/Getty Images

Real golfers don't need to cheat every round, to the point one is a legendary cheater. Trump just pretends to be a golfer. His cheating assures his golf score card looks like a real golfer's score.

Exhibit D: Trump cosplays as a family man with family values.

 **Jake**
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Exactly. Epstein files!

"He is NOT weird! Why are you calling him weird?!"



Screen capture: tweet containing two photos of Trump with a young Ivanka sitting on his lap.

Source: Snopes

This is so very obvious, from his chronic infidelities to his abusive behavior toward his first wife and sons, to his revolting attitude and behavior toward his daughter.

Exhibit E: Trump cosplayed as president.



Trump in White House Oval Office behind Resolution Desk while giving an address. Photo:

Carlos Berria/AP

When did the extended commercial franchise end?
Do we really know?

The person who sat in the Oval Office for four years wasn't competent as president. He *performed* the role of president but a substantial number of his actions were not deeply thought out and instead reflexive. Perhaps many of his actions were scripted by others; some recent White House staff memoirs suggest others were definitely pulling the strings on this man who has no moral compass and a pathological need for approval.

Did he cosplay a presidential candidate as well in 2015-2016, failing to respond as one might expect a legitimate candidate because he only *appeared* to be a candidate?

Is he cosplaying a presidential candidate now because he has more incentive to play the role of his life, for his life?

Does that include cosplaying a fast food worker doing the kind of labor he'd never have been caught dead doing in reality?

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Marcy and I have both mentioned kayfabe before with regard to Trump – me with regard to his handling of COVID, and Marcy with regard to the performative drama in which members of the media have participated wittingly or unwittingly with regard to Trump's current campaign.

Kayfabe is performance; when effective and sustained, audiences and sometimes performers themselves can be sucked into believing performance is real and not a synthetic creation miming an alternative reality.

Cosplay is not kayfabe but dress-up. One doesn't become a dog by wearing a fur suit.

It's possible for kayfabe and cosplay to overlap, though.

Trump donning an apron in a closed-to-the-public McDonald's and handing out fries is cosplay. In no way does he gain any further true understanding of what real fast food workers' lives are like.

Taking off the apron ends Trump's cosplay; in reality, taking off the apron doesn't end challenges for minimum-wage workers. They don't shed rent, health care, and transportation costs they can't afford on part-time minimum wages. They don't lose the challenges of scheduling child and elder care, education, household needs when they walk out the restaurant's door.

Trump donning a suit and tie, then touting economic policy he doesn't fully understand is both cosplay and kayfabe. Like a wrestler we never see without their trademark hair cut and attire, we don't see Trump outside his blue suit and red tie or his white polo shirt and khaki golf pants. These are the element of both his cosplay as business person and president and golfer. They are signs of his engagement in kayfabe – when he's wearing them, he's on.

But you never see him outside these costumes, you might note.

That's because there's nothing there behind the suit and tie, behind the de rigueur golf apparel, and now behind the fast food apron.

Trump is an empty husk of a man. His narcissism underlies his fear others will discover this, that he is nothing but a propped-up costume used like a puppet by his sponsors whether Putin or billionaire oligarchic fascists.

He's compelled to cosplay because he dare not do otherwise. Whatever costume he was wearing would crumple to the floor as he decompensated.

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It is not in this nation's best interests to elect a cosplayer-in-chief.

We have real problems requiring real solutions from people who aren't playing or performing to

the darkest interests. We need leaders who think and care deeply about the needs of this nation and are willing to do the real work necessary to serve.

It is and has been a national security problem to allow a narcissist who placates his screamingly hollow ego with praise from hostile foreign leaders and fascist oligarchs for his performative behavior in costume.

Imagine what will happen if he is elected again and is told by his sponsors on Day One, "Okay, Mr. Trump, give us your best impression of Hitler. We know you can do a great job." He's already warned us he's interested in becoming an autocrat out of the gate.

This same approach may already have been used to encourage him to cosplay at McDonald's: "Sir, we know you can be a better fast food worker than Harris. We know you can do a great job and it'll help your campaign." Voila, the hollow man has donned the apron to mimic a minimum wage worker for a photo op.

Imagine what a weak man with a humiliation kink, a desperate hunger for approval, and a love of cosplay could do if an authority figure demands specific kayfabe while in costume.