Creating *From* Video Games: Rhetoric of Video Game *Détournement*

[ゲームを基にした創作—ゲームの「デトゥールヌマン」の修辞学]

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目次

1. Defining the *Détournement* [「デトゥールヌマン」を定義する]

This paper aims to present the introductory chapter of my PhD dissertation, titled *Rhetoric of Video Game* Détournement*: The* Pokémon *Case*[1]. The topic of this dissertation is the "*détournement*" of video games by players, that is to say: the creative practices that use video games as materials or as matrices to produce derivative works. Precisely, I examined a diversified range of productions whose common feature is to be created *from* video games: mods (modifications of a game's code by users in order to create a renewed game), fanfictions (texts based on pre-existing fictional universes), or machinimas, speedruns and let's plays (which are various types of videos recorded inside games). In this presentation, I will develop the notion of "*détournement*" and show that its interconnection with the concept of "play" raises some issues for the theory.

1.1. Origin of the Concept in Art [美術における「デトゥールヌマン」概念の由来]

Remix practices of artistic and cultural material have probably always existed. Nevertheless, the notion of "artistic *détournement*" – as it is commonly used today in French – was mainly theorized by the Situationist International[2]. In 1959, in the paper "*Détournement* as Negation and Prelude"[3] (published in the third issue of the *Situationist International*), the *détournement* is defined by Guy Debord as "the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble"[4] (Debord, 2006a: 989). The rest of the text puts particular emphasis on the transformative power of the *détournement* act (it disrupts the "literal meaning" of the original work), as well as on its political and subversive dimension (it is a hijacking and an appropriation of the original piece of art).

1.2. Transforming Pre-Existing Works: A Political or Playful Act? [既存の作品を改造する：政治的行為または遊戯的行為？]

The *détournement*, considered as the "fluid language of anti-ideology"[5] (Debord, 2006b: 854, theory 208) would thus help to subvert "past critical conclusions which were frozen into respectable truths"[6] (Debord, 2006b: 854, theory 206). Debord claims, in other words, a violent, critical and engaged use of *détournement*, which would not be confined to comedy or entertainment, but would develop a kind of "serious parody" able to overthrow ideologies and to change society.

However, the *détournement* actually covers a wide variety of creative processes (collage, photomontage, ready-made, etc.), which can each use various registers and have several strategic aims. The critical dimension of *détournement*, in particular, is far from being self-evident: in practice, the productions studied by the theorists of *détournement* are not always critical or subversive. On the contrary, parodies or remixes can be as many tributes reinforcing the authority of the original work, or they can take advantage of its symbolic power rather than deconstruct it (when an author parodies La Fontaine's *Fables*, for example, it is less to subvert his words than to benefit from the

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[1] In French: *Rhétorique du détournement vidéoludique. Le cas de* Pokémon (available online, on: http://orbi.ulg.ac.be/handle/2268/210764).

[2] A 20th-century revolutionary organization and artistic *avant-garde* that uses *détournement* to undermine the conservative institutions and fight against the market society.

[3] My translation of the title: « Le détournement comme négation et comme prélude ».

[4] My translation of: « le réemploi dans une nouvelle unité d'éléments artistiques préexistants ».

[5] My translation of: « langage fluide de l'anti-idéologie ».

[6] My translation of: « les conclusions critiques passées qui ont été figées en vérités respectables ».

fame of his texts). Incidentally, Debord's *détournements* themselves do not always conform to the subversive ambitions that he displays in his theories:

> […] the *détournements* of Marx's or Lautréamont's fragments executed by Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* do not constitute a negation of the original's ideology – on the contrary. The change of meaning is rather in the range of displacement, reuse, extension. Thereby, Lautréamont's praise of plagiarism is itself plagiarized by Debord in the name of situationist criticism; Lautréamont's text is not denied or criticized, but simply takes on a whole new dimension in light of the situationist project[7] (James, 2012: 61).

Furthermore, there is an important part of *détournement* that cannot be reduced to criticism or tribute, which many researchers describe as simply "playful" (Genette, for instance, distinguishes between three types of *détournement* depending on their ambitions: satirical, serious and playful; see 1982: 43). *Détournement* can thus be both critical and comical; it is, at the same time, a deconstruction and a creation, a vandalizing, a safeguard and a revitalization of the cultural heritage. In other words: it constitutes a category of texts which have multiple strategies and complex effects. Ultimately, the only two aspects which are common to this shape-shifting ensemble of works and practices are the ideas of *reuse* and *transformation*. The secondary creator (in my case: the player-creator) reuses a pre-existing work and transforms it to produce new meanings.

Given that the derivative works are not necessarily critical or satirical, I therefore take as a starting point, in my PhD dissertation, this very broad and neutral definition of *détournement*, reduced to its two core elements: *détournement* is a "[…] double movement of reuse and transformation" (Dupont and Trudel, 2012: 5).

2. Disciplinary Perspective [学問的な視点]

Before clarifying how this object – originating from humanities – can be defined in the field of game studies, it is useful to briefly explain the disciplinary point of view from which I study it and to specify my position in the field of research.

Researchers, indeed, have already been interested in video game *détournements*, especially as they are in line with the wider phenomenon of participatory culture. However, so far, the research in this domain (and, more generally, in the field of game studies) is dominated by three disciplines: sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. As a result of this domination, reappropriations or remixes of video games have, until now, mainly been studied as social *practices* or as community phenomena. For that matter, researchers use the word *"détournement"* less than the expression "reappropriation practices": this neologism suggests that elites have, in a way, stolen the culture from the working class (by hiding it in museums or universities, for instance) and that people can recover, "re-appropriate" that culture through remix, reuse and parody.

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[7] My translation of: « […] les détournements de fragments de Marx ou de Lautréamont opérés par Debord dans *La Société du spectacle* ne constituent pas une négation de l'idéologie de l'original – bien au contraire. Le changement de sens est plutôt de l'ordre du déplacement, de la réutilisation, de l'extension. Ainsi l'éloge du plagiat par Lautréamont se trouve-t-il lui-même plagié par Debord au nom de la critique situationniste ; le texte de Lautréamont n'est pas nié ni critiqué, mais prend simplement une autre ampleur à la lumière du projet situationniste ».

Sociology and anthropology thereby study reappropriations through interviews with players, surveys, participant observation, etc. In other words, they consider this phenomenon through the lens of the players' activity: who are the players who transform video games? What does this practice mean for them? How do they unite (or not) into communities of practice (Berry, 2008a: 13), and how do these communities organize themselves? Etc.[8]

Cultural studies, for their part, focus on the political issues of *détournement*. They question in particular the ability of these fan practices to become a means for people and minorities to retake possession of the contemporary myths and to contest the dominant cultural models. For instance, fanfictions writers (who are for the most part women) take advantage of their freedom of writing to create representations of eroticism that are sometimes far removed from those who dominate in mainstream media (in romance stories, they thereby give a lot of space to homosexuality and transgenderism). The angles of approach used by cultural studies are thus generally related to these issues: are the audiences of mass culture dominated by the representations shown to them, or do they distance themselves from these representations? When a reader, a spectator or a player participates in the creation of a work, does his intervention constitute an act of resistance and subversion, or a sign of adherence to dominant ideologies? Etc.[9]

In any case, the current research about video game *détournement*, focusing on practices, has not yet studied the *works* created by these practices, their genres, their structures or their rhetorical mechanisms. My point here is in no way to criticize the sociological or anthropological perspectives – especially since they have greatly contributed to constructing the field. However, I defend the idea that it is significant and urgent, today, to pay attention to the works produced by pop culture and to study them closely. As Maigret would say, it is necessary to consider popular cultures in terms of aesthetics:

> […] not to show that they also deserve to belong to the superior world of art – what would only reproduce the fable of the aesthetic absolute – but for the sake of descriptive precision, since the audiences also live off the appreciation of forms, and in order to not leave to the consecrated arts (still living on the capital of belief provided by romantic ideology) the idea that aesthetics, understood as a pluralist process, would be reserved for them […][10] (Maigret, 2005: 130-131).

My entire dissertation is meant to be an illustration of this idea: I study the *détournement* of video games through the examination of players' productions in order to offer a perspective different from those described above, but complementing them. My purpose is to develop a rhetoric of video game *détournement*, *i.e.* a general theory of the forms that these creations can take, in order to produce a metalanguage allowing us to describe, analyze and understand them.

3. Impact on the *Corpus* Delimitation [コーパスにおける画定への影響]

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[8] See, for example, Berry (2008b), Flichy (2010) and Newman (2008).
[9] On these topics, see Jenkins (1992, 2002, 2006, 2009) and Raessens (2005).
[10] My translation of: « […] non pour montrer qu'elles méritent elles aussi d'appartenir au monde supérieur de l'art, ce qui ne ferait que reproduire la fable de l'absolu esthétique, mais par souci de précision descriptive, les publics vivant aussi de l'appréciation des formes, et pour ne pas laisser aux arts consacrés, qui vivent encore sur le capital de croyance fourni par l'idéologie romantique, l'idée que l'esthétique, entendue comme un processus pluriel, leur serait réservée […] ».

Consequently, this disciplinary orientation leads to a necessary limitation of my corpus: I do not have access to players' practices (since I do not use interviews or surveys), so my analysis will inevitably be limited to the types of *détournement* that result in the creation of a work (a text, a video, a game, a drawing). Yet not all reappropriations of video games produce derivative works: for instance, when a player decides to wander around in the maps of the racing game *Mario Kart 64*[11] instead of trying to win the race, it is a temporary form of *détournement* (the player does not respect the "model play"[12] and transforms the meaning of the game) which, nonetheless, does not necessarily leave a mark after the end of the game. Another example: when the players of the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*[13] distort the game environments in order to play "hide and seek" within the game world, they establish a temporary "game in the game" which is not intended to result in the production of videos, texts, or even in an instituted game device.

In this way, all kinds of *détournements* do not end in the creation of a finished work. However, it can be postulated that *all the playful practices that lead to the production of a work are* (to varying degrees) *détournements* – or, at least, deserve to be considered as such.

As an illustration, one might think, at first glance, that the let's play[14] does not constitute a form of *détournement*. These videos, apparently, do not seem to be reconfigurations or transformations of the game's elements: they appear as records and testimonies (more or less faithful) of a subjective playing experience. Yet some let's players show a real creativity through their way of playing and through the comments they superimpose on their performances – these may sometimes transfigure the playing activity. I therefore start from the principle that, when a player records himself playing and broadcasts the video on the internet, the recording device and the presence of an audience necessarily introduce a shift, a discrepancy (which may be minimal) in the activity, by moving it from the register of *play* to the register of *performance*.

For instance: when the famous let's player PewDiePie plays horror video games, he actually twists these games to perform a humorous and theatrical show. In his videos, the presence of an audience radically transforms the meaning and the scope of the games, since the let's player alters the game to produce a performance interesting to watch for the spectators. PewDiePie thus uses the game characters, the backgrounds, the objects and the manipulation of his avatar to create a comedic counter-narrative that neutralizes the horrific mechanisms of survival horror games. Through his offbeat way of playing, he reappropriates the game device (the survival horror) to create a spectacle – genre which then overprints its codes on those of the game.

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[11] Nintendo, 1996.
[12] The notion of "model play" is an adaptation of the concept of "model reader" developed by Umberto Eco in literature (1985). It designates a representation produced by the text of the competence which is expected of the reader; a representation of the success conditions "that need to be satisfied for a text's potential content to be fully actualized" (my translation of: « qui doivent être satisfaites pour qu'un texte soit pleinement actualisé dans son contenu potentiel »; Eco, 1985: 77).
[13] Blizzard Entertainment, 2004.
[14] A let's play is a video capture made by a player of a game session. The "let's player" generally comments aloud on his actions while playing and broadcasts his game either live (on streaming platforms such as *Twitch*) or in the form of prerecorded videos (on web hosts such as *YouTube*).

Figure 1 – The let's player PewDiePie, playing the horror game Outlast *and ironically addressing a non-player character: "Hello? Why are you all sleeping? With your eyes open, that's kind of creepy…"*

Since the let's play results in the creation of an autonomous work (a video), I consider that it is not a "neutral" form of play, but a *détournement*. My perspective therefore leads me to analyze productions whose status of *détournement* is not obvious (because they are not necessarily "labeled" as such or announced as such by their authors). In other words, my definition of *détournement* does not take into account the intentionality of the author (because the meaning of the works cannot be reduced to it). Nevertheless, this methodological choice raises an important issue for the theory: the definition of *détournement* as "reuse and transformation" of a pre-existing work does not apply smoothly to the specific case of video games.

4. *Détournement* of the Game Vs. *Détournement* by Playing [ゲームのデトゥールヌマン vs.プレーによるデトゥールヌマン]

First of all, it is essential to emphasize that all video game *détournements* are not on the same level, because they do not all modify the same aspect of the games.

The concept of "game" has indeed the particularity of covering a double reality, which English dissociates: the word *game*, on the one hand, refers to the object, the device with which we play (the toy, the video game, the hopscotch, the card game, etc.); the word *play*, on the other hand, refers to the player's activity, to the playing experience or performance. This fundamental duality implies the existence of two dimensions in games that can be reappropriated, transformed, and allows thus to conceptualize two major categories of *détournement*: the *détournement* of the game (which reorganizes the game device's structure) and the *détournement* by playing (which is a transformative performance).

4.1. *Détournement* of the Game [ゲームのデトゥールヌマン]

The case of "modding"[15] is a revealing illustration of what can be a reappropriation of the game-object. This practice consists in modifying some elements of a game (characters, levels, maps, sprites, etc.) in order to create an improved version, or even a fully fledged new game. The multiple "mods" of the iconic game *Super Mario World* (Nintendo, 1990), for example, appear as reconfigurations of various elements of the original game: the platforms, the characters, the opponents or the power-ups are moved and replaced depending on the fantasy of the player-creator in order to build new levels.

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[15] Sometimes also called "hacking", in the field of console games.

Some of these rewritings earned a significant fame because of their originality or, occasionally, because of their difficulty, like the famous mod *Kaizo Mario World*[16]. This one reassembles the elements of *Super Mario World* to construct extremely tricky levels, which require an extraordinary precision and a lot of patience to be crossed. Some sections are even explicitly designed to be frustrating, by taking advantage of players' habits and video game conventions.

If we consider *Super Mario Bros* games as a language with its lexicon (the blocks, koopas, mushrooms, pipes, etc.) and its syntax (the code and the gameplay determine the combination rules of the lexicon's elements), we can describe this kind transformative process as "figures of speech", as rhetorical devices. Thereby, in *Kaizo Mario World*, the mod plays on the usual syntax of *Super Mario World* to be as frustrating as possible, by putting the sprites in the most troublesome places and preventing the player from progressing as usual. In Figure 2, for instance, not only the player needs an enemy to make his jump but, even if he succeeds, an invisible block is also expertly placed to interfere with the normal trajectory of his jump and make him fall.

Figure 2 - The mod Kaizo Mario World *plays on the usual syntax of* Super Mario World *to be as annoying as possible*

Where official *Mario* games attempt to build a pleasurable gaming experience, *Kaizo Mario World* twists these games' codes and conventions in order to produce frustration effects through rhetorical mechanisms that I call "figures of unplayability".

This first example illustrates with clarity the category of "*détournements* of the game". The original game functions here as a raw material, as a "database", in the sense of Hiroki Azuma (2008: 57-62), that is to say: as a directory inside which everyone can draw prefabricated elements, whose value comes precisely from their recognizable nature. The *détournement* of the game (which could be compared to collage or montage) consists thus in seizing a game object (and its grammar) in order to reorganize its components.

4.2. *Détournement* by Playing [プレーによるデトゥールヌマン]

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[16] Created by T. Takemoto in 2007. *Welcome to Kaizo Mario*. URL: http://kaizomario.techyoshi.com/index.html, saw on 02/01/2018.

The practice of machinima can exemplify the second category of *détournements*: the transformations by a playing performance. The word *machinima* comes from the contraction of the terms *machine* and *cinema*: it refers to the creation of videos from recordings of playing sessions. Concretely, "machinimakers" use their avatars as puppets and the games' environments as a scenery to perform sketches that will be recorded and potentially edited, dubbed or retouched.

For instance, the series *This Spartan Life*[17] is a talk show organized by the machinimaker Chris Burke inside the multiplayer battlefields of the FPS game *Halo 2* (Bungie Studios, Microsoft Games, 2004). The videos feature a presenter (named Damian Lacedaemion) who receives and interviews various personalities (whose function is usually related to the world of gaming) while walking with them in the maps of *Halo*. Yet the specificity of the show lies in the fact that these battlegrounds – being online and multiplayer – are also occupied by regular players who are fighting each other, sometimes without knowing that a machinima is being recorded. As a result, these players can intervene in the videos (despite being uninvolved with the machinima production) and it is not uncommon that, being caught up in their fight, they end up shooting the avatar of the host, of a guest or of one of the players serving as "cameras". These unexpected events endow the videos with a chaotic and random dimension which – in contrast with the serious nature of some debates – constantly integrates the discussion in an ironic register. Indeed, the attitude of the presenter and the guests (who walk peacefully across battlefields and who discuss rather than fight) contrasts sharply with the competitive goals of an online first-person shooter game and with the uninterrupted action and movement that prevails in the background.

Figure 3 - Damian Lacedaemion and his guest chatting and walking calmly while other players are fighting in the background

In this machinima, the mechanisms of *détournement* are thus quite the opposite of those in the previous example. Here, the original game device remains for the most part unchanged: *Halo*'s constituent elements are barely rearranged or redefined, in that the maps represented in the videos and the player's actions refer to events that really happened during an actual match. In this case, the reappropriation does not lie in the modification of the original game but in its use: through a singular way of playing, through a performance that does not meet *Halo*'s objectives, the player-filmmaker endows the game with new meanings. In *This Spartan Life*, the *détournement* does not concern the

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[17] *This Spartan Life*. URL : http://www.thisspartanlife.com/, saw on 02/01/2018.

game system or the fictional universe, but rather the manner in which it is played, the possibilities of *interpretation* (in the theatrical sense of the term) that the game allows.

4.3. Limitations of the Typology [類型学の限界]

It is important to note that this distinction between the "*détournement* of the game" and the "*détournement* by playing" is far from being absolute: in practice, a large number of derivative works combine these two processes (for example, some machinimas use mods to increase their expressive possibilities). Nevertheless, this typology helps to put some order in the profusion of works created from video games and brings to light an issue specific to this topic.

If the existence of an act of transformation seems easy to determine in the case of "*détournements* of the game", where a concrete modification is observable (the game's code, images, characters, level design, etc. are rewritten), it is questionable in the case of "*détournement* by playing". Can we really use the term *détournement* to refer to practices like machinima, which do not comply with the game's objectives but leave the game unaltered? From which degree of variation can these plays be considered as "transformative"[18]? In order to answer these interrogations, it is necessary, beforehand, to ask the questions of what a game is and from when it can be seen as "transformed".

5. The Paradigm of "Play Studies" [「プレー研究」のパラダイム]

Following, mainly, Huizinga's founding researches (1951)[19], the game has been defined, for a time, as a stable formal system, provided with fixed and identifiable characteristics (it would be an object with rules, objectives, quantifiable results, etc.). The conception of games as definite sets of properties has long been an authority and its influence is still perceptible in some more recent works (Jesper Juul, for instance, still defines the game by six "necessary and sufficient" criteria[20]). However, this perspective has been questioned by the current gaming practices: the ludification of places in principle "un-playful", such as museums or schools, and the omnipresence of (video) games in everyday life render unsustainable the definition of game media as a circumscribed frame, isolated from reality and demarcated by specific rules (Consalvo, 2009: 416).

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[18] "Transformative play" is a concept developed by Salen and Zimmerman (2004: 305) in order to describe the practices of creative reception of video games, the ways of playing that transform the original game and cause unexpected results. "Transformative play is a special case of play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes shape" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 305).

[19] His definition of the game is still very often quoted in the field of game studies: "Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not meant', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (Huizinga, 1955: 13).

[20] "According to this model, a game is

1. a rule-based formal system;
2. with variable and quantifiable outcomes;
3. where different outcomes are assigned different values;
4. where the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome;
5. the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome;
6. and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable" (Juul, 2005 : 6-7).

Besides, this outlook has also been challenged by a tendency in the theories, which currently dominates the field of French-speaking research and which is named, after Triclot (2011), the movement of "play studies" (in opposition to the "game studies"). Following the philosopher Henriot's theories (1969), theses researchers defend that a game cannot exist if the player does not formerly adopt a "playful attitude" (Henriot, 1969: 73). In other words, what allows the emergence of a game is not the object, the device or the situation, but rather the player's state of mind regarding them. Thus, it is quite possible to play with an object that has not been designed to stimulate a playful activity (a calculator, a word-processing program, a search engine, a social network, etc.; see Rao, 2008 or Genvo, 2011), and additionally a recognized game can be used as a training tool (like with many simulators) or a working tool (as shown by the "gold farmers" situation). This is what Henriot illustrates in his famous quote: "Pebbles lined up on the ground, what is it? The passer-by does not know. Some children appear: 'Watch out, sir, you are walking in our game!' Once the players have vanished, the pebbles return to the state of pebbles"[21] (Henriot, 1969: 83-84).

Researchers in play studies therefore try to get out of an essentialist conception of the play and to rethink it, not as the intrinsic property of some type of objects, but as a particular way of experiencing the world (each situation can be approached in a more or less "play-like" way ; Malaby, 2007: 100). In short:

> To describe what is happening on the screen, without playing, to objectify the rule system, without playing, is never sufficient to characterize the playing experience. It is because this experience is not defined once and for all by the object, the machine, the discourse on the screen, the narrative, the rule system or the gameplay, but is produced by the player with the help of the game[22] (Triclot, 2011: 19).

Consequently, if we follow this perspective, the meaning of a game is not to be found in the object but in the player's activity, since each player redefines in each game session what is playing, what is playful and what is a game.

Yet, if the essence of a game does not lie in the device but is subjectively constructed by the player, how can we then determine the "literal meaning" of a game, from which could be conceptualized the idea of *détournement*? If the very definition of the game varies according to players, times, cultures, and contexts, from what can we talk about "transformative play"? From which norm of the playing activity could we identify a "deviant" play? Is there a pivotal point from which the player's practice leaves the "standard play" to become a *détournement*, or are what I have assimilated to "*détournement* by playing" just subjective play practices?

6. Is the *Détournement* a Deviation from the Norm of Play? [デトゥールヌマンはプレーの規範からの逸脱ですか]

This relationship between norm and reappropriation is an issue that has been extensively studied by the rhetoric. Inside this discipline, the concept of "deviation" is indeed frequently used to

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[21] My translation of: « Des cailloux alignés par terre, qu'est-ce que c'est ? Le passant l'ignore. Des enfants surgissent : "Attention, Monsieur, vous marchez dans notre jeu !" Les joueurs envolés, les cailloux retournent à l'état de cailloux ».

[22] My translation of: « Décrire ce qui se passe sur l'écran, sans jouer, objectiver le système des règles, sans jouer, cela ne suffit jamais à caractériser l'expérience du jeu. C'est que celle-ci n'est pas déposée une fois pour toutes dans l'objet, la machine, le discours à l'écran, le récit, le système des règles ou le gameplay, mais produite par le joueur à l'aide du jeu ».

define what is a *figure of speech*: these stylistic devices (like the metaphor, the metonymy, the oxymoron, etc.) are generally described[23] as deviations from the norm of language (the usual grammar, lexicon, etc.). We might thus be tempted to employ the notion of deviation to characterize the transformations performed in *détournements* – especially since *détournements* share important similarities with figures of speech: both are creative processes that take possession of a code (the language, a pre-existing work…) in order to transform it, to divert it, locally or on the larger scale of an entire text.

However, these notions of *norms* and *deviations* are not only criticized in the more recent researches in rhetoric (influenced by Anglo-Saxon pragmatics), but are also particularly inadequate to describe the relationship between *détournement* and play. Having recourse to the concept of deviation implies, indeed, that the figures (or, in our case, the *détournements*) are exceptional (not within *norms*) and faulty (ab*normal*) discursive practices.

Marc Bonhomme (2014), in particular, disapproves of this negative definition of figures (according to which they would be "all what is not the norm"). What would be the communicative function of these stylistic devices, if they are only the incorrect expressions of a meaning that could be expressed more simply, more literally? For example, in English, why would we use the phrase "your room is a pigsty!" rather than directly say: "your room is dirty and messy"? In some cases, we choose to speak figuratively because the figures have a communicative function: here, it is more expressive, crude; it reflects the speaker's irritation. The two sentences do not mean the same thing.

According to Bonhomme, the figures are not only normal (we use them abundantly in the everyday language), but also necessary for the proper functioning of communication. In other words, to appropriate the rigid structure of language by introducing variations in it is a perfectly common and normal way of communicating: "figures participate in the ordinary functioning of language"[24] (Bonhomme, 2014: 27).

This reasoning seems applicable, in parallel, to the "*détournement* by playing": the act of transforming a game by a playing performance is not an offbeat or deviant practice, but a plain ordinary way of playing.

7. Play *as Détournement* [デトゥールヌマンとしてのプレー]

Games that allow reappropriations seem, indeed, rather to be a norm. Many (video) game devices encourage a creative, transformative reading – transformation that can involve both the game and the play. For instance, games that provide players with level editors and/or direct access to their code incite players to freely manipulate the game-object that is provided to them (like in the various works produced by Valve Corporation, *Half-Life*[25] first of all, but also in the role-playing game saga *The Elder Scrolls*[26], the FPS series *Unreal*[27] or the *WarCraft*[28] and *StarCraft*[29] strategy games, to only name a few illustrations).

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[23] See Groupe µ (1982 : 45).
[24] My translation of: « les figures participent au fonctionnement ordinaire du langage ».
[25] Valve Corporation, Sierra On-Line, 1998.
[26] Bethesda Softworks.
[27] Epic Games and Digital Extremes.
[28] Blizzard Entertainment.

More games again not only stimulate "transformative plays", but also reintegrate *détournement* into their own structure. For example, the FPS series *Halo* is very popular among the producers of machinimas: its developers have therefore integrated into the official games (from the third opus) a "theater mode" which facilitates the recording of these movies and thus encourage an alternative form of play (a play which neglects the FPS's competitive objectives).

This anticipation of the *détournement* included within the devices can go so far as an explicit attempt to absorb and appropriate the players' initiatives, to codify them, and even to standardize them. So is the recent *Super Mario Maker* (Nintendo, 2015), which offers to the player the possibility of creating new levels of a *Mario* game. This device – half game, half creative tool – comes to normalize and regulate the practice of modding, which, despite its illegality, was already heavily developed around Nintendo games.

Figure 4 – Players had not waited for the release of Super Mario Maker *in 2015 to unofficially create their own* Mario *games*

Video games therefore match the description of the digital art formulated by Fourmentraux: they are "media-works whose ideal career precisely assumes that some of their fragments remain potential or to be made"[30] (Fourmentraux, 2012: 14). This room left to *détournement* in games has also been theorized under the notion of "emergent gameplay" (which refers to "situations where a game is played in a way that the game designer did not predict"; Juul, 2005: 76) and with the concept of "expansive gameplay" (Parker, 2008), which points out that rules have a natural tendency to spread ("rules are inherently expansive, in that the imposition of limitations creates a specific range of possibilities and outcomes"; Parker, 2008: 2).

While other types of texts (in the broad sense of the term) may be more or less open and subject to appropriation, games seem thus particularly designed to encourage a creative interpretation since they integrate, in their devices, "holes", "cracks" that allow players to intervene.

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[29] Blizzard Entertainment.

[30] My translation of: « [des] œuvres-médias dont la carrière idéale suppose précisément que certains de leurs fragments demeurent potentiels ou à faire. L'art numérique engage en effet une expérience doublement perceptive et manipulatoire des œuvres ».

Consequently, to exploit these openings is far from being an exceptional and isolated act, but constitute one of the aspects of the playing activity: *to play is always more or less to appropriate – and thereby transform – a part of the device that only exists in potential*.

This theoretical similarity between play and *détournement* is apparent in a significant number of researches: game-studies theorists regularly present the playing activity in terms of appropriation, while researchers in artistic or literary *détournement* continually have recourse to the play as a paradigm to explain this creation practice.

In game studies, for instance, Genvo assures that creativity is a game imperative: "Do-it-yourself in the frame of the game is a frequent and natural act. As D.W. Winnicott pointed out, in order to be able to exist, the game must allow the expression of the individual's creativity […]"[31] (Genvo, 2008: 6). Newman, for his part, highlights the fundamental instability of games, which exist "less as fully formed objects for play and more as suites of resources to be played with […]" (Newman, 2012: 123). Solinski, among many others, emphasizes the player's intervention as being a very condition for the advent of the game: "this play is precisely the one that the language uses about gears that need 'play' to work: without this margin of freedom, the game mechanics is blocked […]"[32] (Solinski, 2012: 163). For Salen (2011: 41), finally, the playing activity contains, in its "DNA", a transformative power (this is the "transformative play" mentioned before).

Conversely, as it has been said, studies about *détournement* in art and literature do not seem to be able to do without the game as a theoretical tool. As early as 1982, Genette ended his book *Palimpsestes* affirming the fundamentally playful nature of the literary *détournement* (which he calls "hypertextuality"):

> […] not any form of hypertextuality goes without a part of play, consubstantial with the practice of reusing existing structures: essentially, *bricolage* [recycling], however urgent it is, is always a game […]. Similarly, treating and using a (hypo)text for purposes external to its original program is a way of playing it and playing with it[33] (Genette, 1982: 557).

Likewise, although the concept is not always developed or theorized, the terms *play* or *playful* are mentioned in almost all the papers of Dupont and Trudel's collective book about *détournement* (2012). Trudel, among others, compares the *détournement* in Debord's work to a puzzle game, a coded language that the reader must decipher (Trudel, 2012: 76-77). This comparison is, for that matter, initiated by Debord and Wolman themselves (Debord and Wolman, 2006: 229). Morel and Risterucci-Lajarige, finally, also support the parallel between the notions of *game* and *détournement*: "The *détournement* is a game in every way: a game for the authors, a play on the language, but also a

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[31] My translation of: « faire soi-même dans le cadre du jeu est un acte fréquent et naturel. Comme l'a relevé D.W. Winnicott, le jeu pour pouvoir exister doit permettre l'expression de la créativité de l'individu […] (Winnicott, 1971 : 91) ».

[32] My translation of: « Ce jeu, c'est précisément celui que la langue utilise à propos d'un engrenage qui a besoin de jeu pour fonctionner : sans cette marge de liberté, la mécanique ludique est bloquée […] ».

[33] My translation of: « […] aucune forme d'hypertextualité ne va sans une part de jeu, consubstantielle à la pratique du remploi de structures existantes : au fond, le bricolage, quelle qu'en soit l'urgence, est toujours un jeu […]. De même, traiter et utiliser un (hypo)texte à des fins extérieures à son programme initial est une façon d'en jouer et de s'en jouer ».

reading game. Yet let us specify that this playful dimension is crucial, since it forces to redefine the function of the writer, now considered as a player […]”[34] (Morel and Risterucci-Lajarige, 2012: 20).

Because of this intimate kinship between play and *détournement*, added to the fact that games generally include in their devices the possibility of being rewritten, it follows that the playing activity and the reappropriation of video games cannot be opposed, or even strictly separated: these two poles are rather connected by a *continuum* going from the most respectful use of the game structure (the closest use to the “model play”) to its total reconfiguration. The *détournement*, in short, cannot be studied as an exceptional and isolated reading activity, but it must rather be considered as a continuation of the playing activity, blending in the large and shape-shifting ensemble of players’ gaming experiences.

Rather than defining reappropriation as a “deviation” in respect to a norm of play, I therefore study it as *a possible actualization of the ordinary play*. Practices such as let’s play, machinima, modding, speedrun or even fanfiction writing can be examined as various forms of play among others, and the derivative works they produce (the fanfictions, the speedruns, the mods, the machinimas, the let’s play videos, etc.) as the result of a playful activity. As such, these productions keep marks, traces of their playful origin, even if they are not objects labeled as “games” (fanfictions, for instance, can be considered as “gamified texts” because of their interactivity, playfulness, unseriousness, etc.).

However, if the *détournement* is a kind of play among others, it is nevertheless a *marked* form of the ordinary play. In other words, a work may appear more or less as an extension of the game or as a *détournement* depending on the presence or absence of indicators producing effects of distance or reconciliation with the source-game. For example, all let’s play videos are not *détournements* in the strongest sense of the term: these productions can make themselves recognized more or less clearly as *détournements* depending on whether or not they contain figures of speech that create a deviation effect. When figures such as irony, metalepsis, *mise en abyme*, unplayability, representation of boredom, etc. saturate the productions, they serve as pragmatic markers of “misuse”. In conclusion, I do not consider the *détournement* as a closed category of works but as an *effect of discourse* that can be activated or inhibited by stylistic devices, by *figures* producing *resistance* within the works.

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[34] My translation of: « Détourner est un jeu à tous points de vue : jeu pour les auteurs, jeu sur le langage, mais également jeu de lecture. Mais précisons tout de même que cette dimension ludique est capitale, puisqu'elle force la redéfinition de la fonction de l'écrivain désormais conçu comme joueur ».

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