Video Game *Détournement*: Playing Across Media

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ABSTRACT

Taking as a starting point the French concept of "artistic *détournement*" and its application in the context of video games, this paper aims to study creative remix practices that use video games as materials or as matrices to produce derivative works. Precisely, the research examines a diversified range of productions whose common feature is to be created *from* video games (mods, machinimas, let's play videos…) in order to question the relationships between the notions of *détournement* and play. Where is the boundary between these two activities? How to define and categorize the various forms of *détournements* in the specific context of the video game culture? Can these remix practices that go beyond the frame of the game and extend themselves to other media be described as "playful"? By crossing rhetoric and theories of play, this paper will try to answer these questions.

Keywords

Remix, *Détournement*, Rhetoric, Play studies, Transmedia, Participatory culture

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING *DÉTOURNEMENT*

This paper aims to study the "*détournements*" of video games by players, that is to say: creative remix practices using video games as materials or as matrices to produce derivative works[1]. There are indeed a large number of fan productions whose common feature is to be created *from* video games (mods, machinimas, let's play videos, fanfictions, etc.) and which often overflow the frame of the game software, extending themselves to other media (the video in the case of machinima or let's play; the text in the case of fanfictions; etc.).

These creations thus deeply question the delimitation and definition of the playing activity: what is the boundary between play and *détournement*? When exactly does one stop "playing games" and start "playing *with* them" (to reiterate the distinction made by Newman, 2008)? Can these remix practices that neglect the game's main objectives to produce alternative works be described as "playful"? And do these derivative works produced from video games retain playful features or mechanisms?

The purpose of this paper is to defend a conception of *détournement* (or remix) as being a form of play among others, but a "marked" form of ordinary play. To reach this idea, this paper starts by defining artistic *détournement* and by specifying how the concept can be applied to video games through a typology. Then it discusses the many bridges between play and remix in order to show the difficulty of determining, from a theoretical point of view, a clear boundary between the two activities. Finally, it uses some concepts from rhetoric to provide a perspective allowing to study derivative works as "marked actualizations of play".

Transforming Pre-Existing Works: A Political or Playful Act?

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, *détournement* is defined by Guy Debord as "the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble"[3] (Debord, 2006a: 989). The rest of his 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).

Détournement, considered as the "fluid language of anti-ideology"[4] (Debord, 2006b: 854), would thus help to subvert "past critical conclusions which were frozen into respectable truths"[5] (Debord, 2006b: 854). 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. This conception of remix as a tool for subversion is also widespread in the field of game studies or cultural studies, and is used to describe fan creations as acts of resistance against the industry or against dominant ideologies. Whether in research on participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992, 2002, 2006, 2009; Raessens, 2005; Flichy, 2010; etc.) or in works developing notions such as "transgressive play"[6] (Aarseth, 2007) or "counterplay"[7] (Apperley, 2010; Meades, 2015), authors often describe players' appropriation practices as possible means of revolt (against the game structure, the developers, the companies…) and question their ability to trigger social changes.

However, in art as in pop culture, the notion of *détournement* actually covers a wide variety of creative processes (collage, photomontage, ready-made, pastiche, 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 under this term 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 capitalize on its symbolic power rather than deconstruct it. 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[8] (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[9]; 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.

Given that the derivative works are not necessarily critical or satirical, I propose to take as a starting point this very broad and neutral definition of *détournement*, reduced to its two core elements: *détournement* is a "[…] double movement of reuse and transformation" of pre-existing works[10] (Dupont and Trudel, 2012: 5).

Nevertheless, this definition does not apply smoothly to the specific case of video games.

DÉTOURNEMENT OF THE GAME VS. *DÉTOURNEMENT* BY PLAYING

All forms of video game *détournement* cannot be assimilated, 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 one plays (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 or transformed, which invites us 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).

Détournement of the Game

The case of "modding" (or "hacking", in the field of console games) is a revealing illustration of what can be a remix 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[11]. The multiple "hacks" of the iconic game *Super Mario World* (Nintendo, 1990), for example, appear as reconfigurations of various elements of the original game: platforms, characters, opponents or power-ups are moved and replaced in order to build new levels depending on the fantasy of the player-creator.

Figure 1 - Lunar Magic is an unofficial software
for creating hacks of *Super Mario World*

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*[12]. 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 exploiting players' habits and video game conventions.

If one considers *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), one can describe this kind of 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 does the player need an enemy to make his jump but, even if he succeeds, an invisible block is also perfectly placed to interfere with the normal trajectory of his jump, making him fall.

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

While official *Mario* games attempt to build a pleasurable gaming experience, *Kaizo Mario World* twists these games' codes and conventions in order to produce frustration 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 from 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.

Détournement by Playing
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[13].

For instance, the series *This Spartan Life*[14] 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 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.

Limitations of the Typology
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 the term *détournement* be really used 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"[15]? 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".

THE PARADIGM OF "PLAY STUDIES"

Following, mainly, Huizinga's founding research (1951), 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[16]). 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 make the definition of game media as a circumscribed frame, isolated from reality and demarcated by specific rules, unsustainable (Consalvo, 2009: 416).

Besides, this outlook has also been challenged by a tendency in theoretical approaches which currently dominates the field of French-speaking research: the movement of "play studies" (so named, after Triclot, 2011, as opposed to the "game studies"). Following the philosopher Henriot's theories (1969), these researchers defend that a game cannot exist if the player does not formerly adopt a "playful attitude" (Henriot, 1969: 73). In other words, the very element that 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 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 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"[17] (Henriot, 1969: 83-84).

Researchers in play studies therefore try to get out of an essentialist conception of "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[18] (Triclot, 2011: 19).

Consequently, if one follows 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 one then determine the "literal meaning" of a game, from which could be conceptualized the idea of remix or *détournement*? If the very definition of the game varies according to players, times, cultures, and contexts, when

can one start talking about "transformative play" (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004: 305) or make a distinction between "playing games" and "playing *with* them" (Newman, 2008)? Which norm of the playing activity could be used as a reference to define a "deviant" play? Is there a pivotal point from which the player's practice leaves the "standard play" to become a *détournement*, or are "*détournements* by playing" just subjective play practices?

IS THE *DÉTOURNEMENT* A DEVIATION FROM THE NORM OF PLAY?

This relationship between norm and reappropriation is an issue that has been extensively studied by the rhetoric. Within this discipline, the concept of "deviation" is indeed frequently used to define what a *figure of speech* is: these stylistic devices (the metaphor, the metonymy, the oxymoron, etc.) are generally described[19] as deviations from the norm of a language (the usual grammar, lexicon, etc.). We might 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 use a code in order to transform it, to divert it locally or on the 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. Resorting 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.

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?

According to Bonhomme, figures are not only normal (they are abundantly used 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"[20] (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.

PLAY *AS* DÉTOURNEMENT

Games that allow reappropriation or remix 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*[21] first of all, but also in the role-playing game saga *The Elder Scrolls*[22], the FPS series *Unreal*[23] or the *WarCraft*[24] and *StarCraft*[25] strategy games, to only name a few illustrations).

There are even more games that not only stimulate "transformative plays", but also reintegrate *détournement* into their own structure. For example, the FPS series *Halo* is very popular among 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' 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 *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 widespread among Nintendo games' players (on this topic, see Lefebvre, 2017).

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

This room left to *détournement* in games has been theorized under several notions, such as "emergent gameplay" (which refers to "situations where a game is played in a way that the game designer did not predict"; Juul, 2005: 76), or "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).

In sum, while other types of texts (in the broad sense of the term) may be more or less open and subject to appropriation, games seem particularly designed to encourage a creative interpretation since they integrate, in their devices, "holes", "cracks" that allow players to intervene. Consequently, to exploit these opportunities is far from being an exceptional and isolated act, but constitutes 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 scientific works: game studies theorists regularly present the playing activity in terms of appropriation, while researchers in artistic or literary *détournement* continually resort to the play as a paradigm to explain this creation practice.

In game studies, for instance, Genvo affirms 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 […]"[26] (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 room for freedom, the game mechanics are blocked […]"[27] (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 notion of play 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 […]. Similarly, treating and using a (hypo)text for purposes external to its original program is a way of playing it and playing with it[28] (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 reading game"[29] (Morel and Risterucci-Lajarige, 2012: 20).

Because of this close relationship between play and *détournement*, added to the fact that games generally include in their devices the possibility of being rewritten, it turns out that the playing activity and the remix 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"[30]) to its total reconfiguration. The *détournement*, in short, cannot be studied as an exceptional and isolated reading activity, but should 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 *détournement* as a "deviation" with regard to a norm of play, I therefore propose to study it as *a possible actualization of the ordinary play*. Practices such as let's play, machinima, modding, speedrunning or even fanfiction writing can be examined as various forms of play, and the derivative works they produce (fanfiction texts, mods, machinimas or let's play videos, etc.) as a 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.; see Barnabé, 2014).

A MARKED FORM OF PLAY: *DÉTOURNEMENT* AS A DISCURSIVE EFFECT

Studying remix in continuity with play allows revealing formal properties of derivative works that are not necessarily apparent if they are analyzed through "traditional" disciplinary perspectives (for instance, game features in machinimas

may go unnoticed if they are examined from a purely cinematic point of view). However, I do not intend here to suggest the existence of a total equivalence between *détournement* and *play*: merging these two concepts would lead to a complete lack of differentiation that would not be helpful in understanding what "play" is (if everything is *play*, the concept is diluted).

In order to draw a line between the two notions, I thus propose the following criterion: remix is indeed a form of play among others, but it is a *marked* form of ordinary play, in the sense that *détournements* indicate their remixed nature through "salient" forms, through figures. In other words, a work may appear either as an actualization of the game or as a *détournement* depending on, respectively, the presence or absence of indicators producing effects of distance with the source game.

For instance, in a montage of "frags" such as the video *Eternity Pro Gaming – Halo 3 Montage* (by FulRoro, 2011), the images shown come from actual matches of the multiplayer mode of *Halo 3* (Bungie Studios, Microsoft Games, 2007) in which players have complied with the rules and objectives dictated by the game (overall: use available weapons and vehicles to defeat the opposing team). In the montage, the game elements (objects, environments, characters, interface...) and the actions performed by the players retain the same meanings as those expressed within the original work. This reuse of the game is what Bardzell (2011: 206) calls an "objective style": the video functions as a representation of the game.

Figure 5 - Screenshot of the video *Eternity Pro Gaming – Halo 3 Montage* (by FulRoro, 2011)

Yet, this type of montage cannot be reduced to a simple reformulation of the game *Halo 3*, since it still undergoes an act of "transcoding" (see Peytard, 1984: 18), moving from the video game performance to the codes of video. In FulRoro's video, this change of register is shown through various markers of deviation: the addition of a soundtrack which determines the rhythm of the editing, the emphasis on certain actions through slow motions, accelerations or freeze-frame, the use of shots varying from first-person view and using other perspectives, the addition of text or smileys, etc. Compared to the original game, these markers bring a surplus of meaning, a saliency. However, the effect of deviation they produce remains minimal: the video takes little distance regarding its raw material.

Conversely, the famous series of humorous machinimas *Red Vs. Blue*[31], produced by the studio Rooster Teeth with *Halo* games, generates a far more radical shift. The series represents events that could not have happened in the game world with the help of the assets and actions allowed by the game, so that these elements must be "resemanticized". For instance, when the *Red Vs. Blue* characters move their heads up and down to simulate a dialogue, their movements no longer refer to an action that draws its meaning from the gaming context (in which case it would refer to the action

of targeting an opponent) but gains a new meaning through its integration into another context: the dramatic performance of the fictional video. Similarly, in the machinima, *Halo*'s components (objects, environments, etc.) are endowed with meanings and narrative functions that can be radically opposed to the ones that they had in the gameplay. For example, the tank owned by the blue team is not just a vehicle but a full-fledged character named Sheila; likewise, one of the game's weapons (the plasma pistol) is not presented as a lethal gun but as a medical scanner. According to Bardzell's terminology, these videos thus use the game in a "subjective style", in the sense that the game's assets "[…] are subject to appropriation, such that their meanings are subverted, distorted, or otherwise altered to produce a meaning that is not native to the game world" (Bardzell, 2011: 206-207).

Figure 6 – *Halo*'s tank and plasma pistol are resemanticized in *Red Vs. Blue*

In these two examples – the montage and the fictional show – various formal devices thus generate effects of deviation or distance from the source game, but these effects can be more or less pronounced. While the montage appears as a trace of the gaming performance and as a work dependent on the original game, the *Red Vs. Blue* series acquires some independence by constructing a large number of semantic and formal transformations.

CONCLUSION

In short, if *détournement* is an act of reuse and transformation of pre-existing creations, the resulting works do not necessarily constitute deviations from a norm of the game, since the practice of *détournement* can be considered as a form of play. Nevertheless, remixes can produce *effects of* deviation from the source game thanks to the use of markers which, depending on their importance, identify the production more as an actualization of the game or as an autonomous work.

In *Kaizo Mario World*, which has been mentioned above as an illustration of the category of "*détournement* of the game-object", the hack set up moments of "unplayability" that are strongly contrasting with the level design of the original game. In the talk show *This Spartan Life*, used as an example of "*détournement* by playing", the videos build a gap between the guests' inaction and the background, where players fight each other following *Halo*'s "model play". In both cases, the diverted nature of the remixes is indicated *within* the works, through forms that stand out from their contexts. These devices correspond to Bonhomme's definition of rhetorical figures, as being "salient forms", forms presenting

> a protuberance that [...] individualizes [them] in the continuum of discourse, the latter being relative to each communication situation. [...] In this way, producing a figure is generating a salient structure […] which is manifested by

a thickening of the language substance in certain discursive sequences"[32] (Bonhomme, 2014: 40).

To rephrase it, I propose to consider *détournement* not 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. However, this conclusion is only the gateway to a broader project, aimed at developing a framework for formalistic analysis of these productions and at identifying what could precisely be these "figures of *détournement*". Applying rhetoric to players' creations would not only bring to light the formal interest of these works – which are still too often discredited because of their belonging to the fan culture –, but would also lead to a better understanding of the game rhetoric itself, using remixes as revealing prisms of the gaming language they appropriate.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This text is actually a synthesis of the introductory chapter of my PhD dissertation dedicated to the same topic and entitled *Rhetoric of Video Game* Détournement: *The case of* Pokémon (translated from: *Rhétorique du détournement vidéoludique. Le cas de* Pokémon; see Barnabé, 2017). The perspective and concepts that I will develop here serve, in the dissertation, as a basis for a formalist analysis of seven genres of remix (let's play videos, speedruns, machinimas, mods, fanfictions and "recontextualisations").

[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: « le réemploi dans une nouvelle unité d'éléments artistiques préexistants ».

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

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

[6] "Transgressive play is a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subject to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself" (Aarseth, 2007: 132).

[7] The notion of counterplay is close to *détournement* in some respects, but differs in that it is not limited to creative gaming practices (transforming games to create derivative works), but applies to all activities that – like the "transgressive play" mentioned above – go against rules, conventions or "fair play" (like cheating, hacking, griefing, etc.). In other words: "counterplay challenges the validity of models of play that suggest digital games compel the players' to play according to encoded algorithms, which they must follow exactly in order to succeed. Instead, it opens the possibility of an antagonistic relationship between the digital game and player" (Apperley, 2010: 102).

[8] 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 ».

[9] This notion of "playful" is rather rarely defined. In Genette's work, the term is used to connote an idea of gratuity, as opposed to the other two categories: satirical *détournements* (that are critical, subversive) and serious *détournements* (like pastiches, imitations, tributes). In addition, Genette's classification is not really functional because it relies solely on the author's intentionality (does he or she wish to criticize, to honor, or to play?). Yet not only the researcher can hardly access to this intentionality, but, moreover, the meanings of the works cannot be reduced to it and also depend on their reception (a work conceived as parodic may be received as serious, for example).

[10] It should be noted, moreover, that one of the specificities distinguishing *détournement* from other appropriation practices is that this concept presupposes the production of a derivative work.

[11] About modding, see, for instance, the works of Kücklich (2005), Laukkanen (2005), Nieborg (2005), Nieborg and Graaf (2008), Postigo (2003, 2007, 2008), Sihvonen (2011), Sotamaa (2005, 2007) and Wirman (2009).

[12] Created by T. Takemoto in 2007. Welcome to Kaizo Mario. URL: http://kaizomario.techyoshi.com/
index.html, saw on 03/01/2019.

[13] About machinimas, see the works of Lowood (2006, 2008), Nitsche (2005, 2007), Lowood and Nitsche (2011), Menotti (2014), Marino (2004), Georges and Auray (2012a and 2012b), Schott (2011), among others.

[14] This Spartan Life. URL: http://www.thisspartanlife.com/, saw on 03/01/2019.

[15] "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).

[16] "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).

[17] 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 ».

[18] 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 ».

[19] See Groupe µ (1982 : 45).

[20] My translation of: « les figures participent au fonctionnement ordinaire du langage ».

[21] Valve Corporation, Sierra On-Line, 1998.

[22] Bethesda Softworks.

[23] Epic Games and Digital Extremes.

[24] Blizzard Entertainment.

[25] Blizzard Entertainment.

[26] 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) ».

[27] 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 […] ».

[28] 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 ».

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[29] 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 ».

[30] 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).

[31] Rooster Teeth. URL : http://roosterteeth.com/show/red-vs-blue, saw on 17/05/2019.

[32] Translated from: « présenter un relief […] qui l'individualise dans le continuum des énoncés, ce dernier étant relatif à chaque situation de communication. […] De la sorte, produire une figure, c'est engendrer une structure saillante […] qui se manifeste par un épaississement de la substance langagière dans certaines séquences discursives ».