



Narrative Misappropriation of *Pokémon*

How Fanarts and Fanfictions Playfully Feed and Reconfigure a Transmedia Universe

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1. Introduction, Background and Theoretical Frame

Thesis in Letters and Game Studies

❖ **Title:** *Rhetoric of Video Game Détournement. The Pokémon Case*

❖ **Subject:** video game *détournement* (“misappropriation”)

= Works that have the common feature of being **created from video games** – whether these are used as materials or as matrices

Ex.:

Fanfiction

Speedrun

Fanart

Machinima

Modding/hacking

Let's play





1. Introduction, Background and Theoretical Frame

Misappropriation // **transmedia**

- ❖ Transmedia storytelling rests on **participatory culture**:
“to fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of **hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story** across media channels [...]” (Jenkins, 2006: 21)

Misappropriation // **playing**

- ❖ Playing is always more or less an **act of appropriation and transformation** of a part of content that only exists in potential





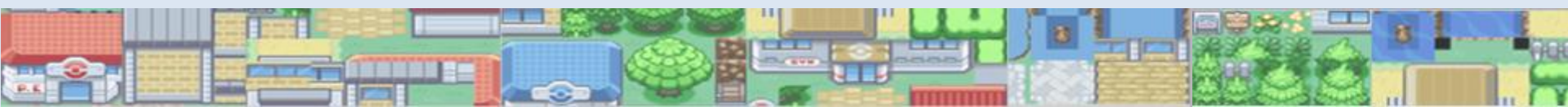
1. Introduction, Background and Theoretical Frame

❖ Game, Misappropriation, Transmedia: **unnatural narratives**?

Unnatural narratives “conspicuously **violate** [...] **conventions of standard narrative forms** [...]. Unnatural narratives furthermore **follow fluid, changing conventions** and create new narratological patterns in each work. In a phrase, unnatural narratives produce a **defamiliarization** of the basic elements of narrative” (Richardson 2011: 34, quoted by Ensslin, 2015: 47-48)

➡ “**Videogames are unnatural narratives *par excellence***”
(Ensslin, 2015: 43)

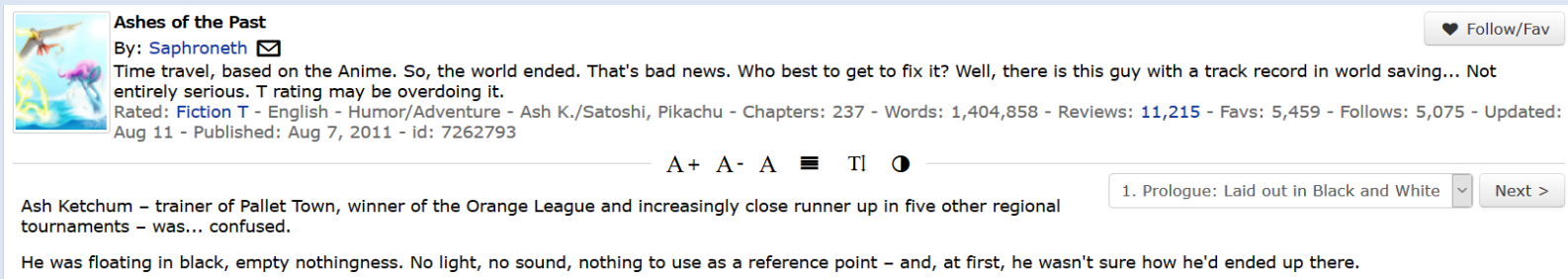
➡ **What about misappropriation?**




1. Introduction, Background and Theoretical Frame



- ❖ Illustrative corpus: **fanfictions** and **fanarts** based on *Pokémon*
- ❖ Rem.: quotations from the **fanfiction** *Ashes of the Past* (by: Saphroneth) – the English-speaking fanfic which has the most followers on the archive *Fanfiction.net*

➡ While the world has been destroyed by Cyrus – the leader of the antagonistic organization “Team Galactic” –, the Pokémon-God Arceus tries to save it by sending **Ash Ketchum back into the past** with his **memories and knowledge intact**




Ashes of the Past
By: [Saphroneth](#) 

Time travel, based on the Anime. So, the world ended. That's bad news. Who best to get to fix it? Well, there is this guy with a track record in world saving... Not entirely serious. T rating may be overdoing it.
Rated: [Fiction T](#) - English - Humor/Adventure - Ash K./Satoshi, Pikachu - Chapters: 237 - Words: 1,404,858 - Reviews: [11,215](#) - Favs: 5,459 - Follows: 5,075 - Updated: Aug 11 - Published: Aug 7, 2011 - id: 7262793

A+ A- A  Tl 

Ash Ketchum – trainer of Pallet Town, winner of the Orange League and increasingly close runner up in five other regional tournaments – was... confused.

He was floating in black, empty nothingness. No light, no sound, nothing to use as a reference point – and, at first, he wasn't sure how he'd ended up there.

1. Prologue: Laid out in Black and White  [Next >](#)



2. Reticular Fictions: The *Mise en Abyme*

- ❖ The *mise en abyme* can be defined as a **stacking of several narrative frames**: a story inside a story, a game inside a game, etc.

Ex.: *Pokémon* characters **playing *Pokémon* games**

Ashes of the Past, Chapter 6

[Aaron:] "Why not Monopoly?"

Dialga perked up, and rushed over holding a small metal boot.

[Arceus:] *Fine. Have it your way, **we'll play Monopoly. Red and Blue version?***

[Aaron:] "**Pardon?**"

[Arceus:] *I said Kanto version?*

Sir Aaron looked suspicious for a moment. "Sounds alright."





2. Reticular Fictions: The *Mise en Abyme*

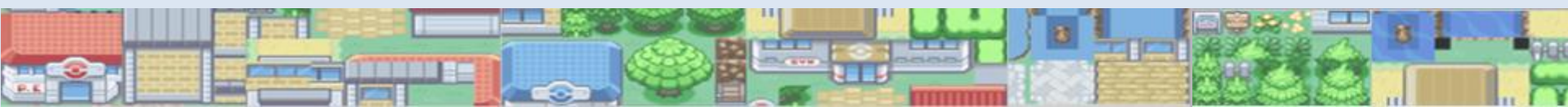
Ex.: a *Pokémon* character (Arceus) **designing *Pokémon* games** for his companions

Ashes of the Past, Chapter 51

"Ignis will never be defeated!" Hideyoshi exclaimed. "For Ignis! Monferno, attack!"

Sir Aaron rubbed his temples. "**Hey, Arceus?**" he called into **the sky**, as Monferno beat up Palkia's ankle. "These antagonists aren't exactly the most intelligent in history."

[Arceus:] *I was in a great hurry. I'm still working on designing the rest.*



2. Reticular Fictions: The *Mise en Abyme*

Ex.: the three Team Leaders of *Pokémon GO* (Blanche, Candela and Spark) being used to represent players and their playing style or viewers and their reactions

POKÉMON GO PLAYERS AFTER THE 30/7 PATCH





3. Playful Fictions: The “Avatarization”

❖ I call “**avatarization**” the construction of a **protagonist oscillating between two levels**, the **empirical world** and the **fiction**: a protagonist that is a part of the diegesis and that represents the author and his real activity at the same time

Ex.: in the fanfictions, writers often develop an author-character which exists **on the margins of the fictional universe**


Ashes of the Past, Chapter 7

In the trees near Cerulean city, a **sinister presence was watching the actions of Ash and his friends...**

"Ah, shaddup! I'm only using da binoculars!"

Yes, it was Meowth, who admittedly couldn't be sinister if his life depended on it. But the binoculars were large and black, so that counts. Right?

Anyway, he was keeping an eye on them because James and Jessie couldn't.



3. Playful Fictions: The “Avatarization”

Ex.: a fanart whose humour comes from the **encounter of several systems of rules** that collide: the **gameplay** system, the **fiction** universe and the **player’s experience**

Legend: *“Because real BFFs give you candy every kilometre and oh gods I’m a bad person. Eevee, I still love you, I promise!”*





3. Playful Fictions: The “Avatarization”

- ❖ Characters // **avatars**: interfaces which serve as **vehicles** for the player/author **to explore a fictional universe**
- ❖ In the fanfiction sphere, this “avatarization” process reaches its peak in the creation of “**Mary Sue**”: characters **high-powered or too perfect** which are supposed to **represent the author** in the fiction

Ashes of the Past, Chapter 3

Another one of them said, loudly. "Come on, guys. Let's teach these morons not to mess with us!"

Ash gestured Pikachu forward, and the two of them moved to defend Lapras. One by one, a Hitmonchan, Spearow and Beedrill emerged to fight them.

[Pikachu:] *"Well?"*

"Discharge." Ash said, winking. **Two loud seconds later, all three opposing Pokémon were knocked out.**

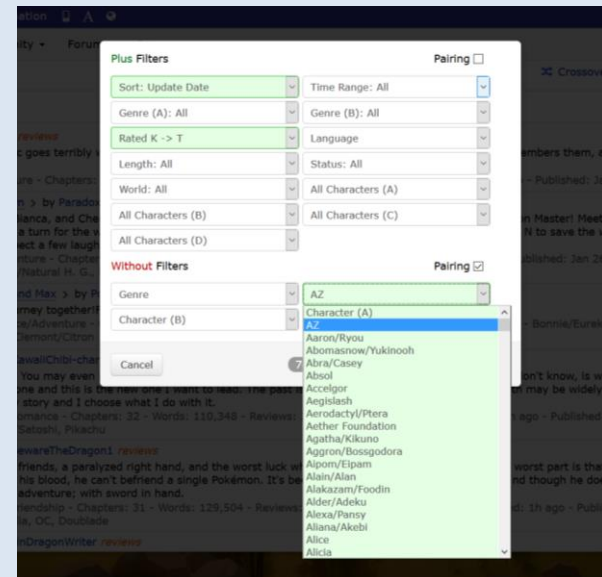
"That's kind of satisfying." Ash grinned.



3. Playful Fictions: The “Avatarization”

- ❖ The use of textual/pictorial avatars brings the fanfictions and fanarts closer to games and, more precisely:
 - to **roleplay** (see Cristofari, 2010)
 - to **puppetry** and **games with dolls**: *cf.* sustained **attention** that fans pay to the characters and to their bodies (see Coppa, 2006: 230)

Ex.: characters are almost always **at the centre of the plot** and the presence or absence of certain characters even **serves as a research filter** in fanfic databases



3. Playful Fictions: The “Avatarization”

Ex.: in fanarts, the multitude of portraits of characters being in a relationship also reveal a conception of **narrative as a manipulation of bodies** (François: “It is quite possible to interpret **slash** [fanfictions] as an **opportunity to manipulate male bodies**”; 2009: 176)



[lazy-afternoon.tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com/lazy-afternoon)





4. Unnatural Fictions: The Metalepsis

- ❖ The **metalepsis** is defined as: “any kind of **transgression, playful or supernatural, of a level of narrative or dramatic fiction**, such as when an author pretends to introduce himself into his own creation, or to extract one of his characters from it” (Genette, 1982: 527)

Ex.:

Ashes of the Past, Chapter 6

[Aaron:] "It's not as good as my proper hat. My proper hat does cool things, like-"

[Arceus:] **Sh. The readers don't know yet.**

[Aaron:] "**Readers?**"


Arceus, creator of All, looked distinctly shifty. *Nothing.*





4. Unnatural Fictions: The Metalepsis

Metalepsis // **Play**

- ❖ Fan-authors and fan-artists **playfully mix different reality levels**. In doing so, they construct “**a transitional creative space**, which, in the end, corresponds to Winnicott's definition of the **game space**” ([Cristofari](#), 2010: 4)
 - ❖ “Because of [...] the **(symbolic) abolition of the distance between the represented and the viewer** in video games, [the metalepsis] seems to become the **privileged figure of interactivity**, the ultimate rhetorical figure of actable fiction” ([Di Crosta](#), 2009: 39)
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5. Conclusion: Towards “Ludiegesis”

❖ Fans elaborate a new level of fictionality, a **third-fiction** which is neither entirely the universe of the original game, nor the actual world: a paradigm in which the **fictional** logic, the **gameplay** logic, the logic of the **empirical world** and even of **other diegesis** (in the case of crossovers) **contradict** themselves pleasantly, **but cohabit** in spite of everything

➡ Cf. concept of “**Ludiegesis**” (Amato, 2005): a narrative universe **governed by game mechanics**

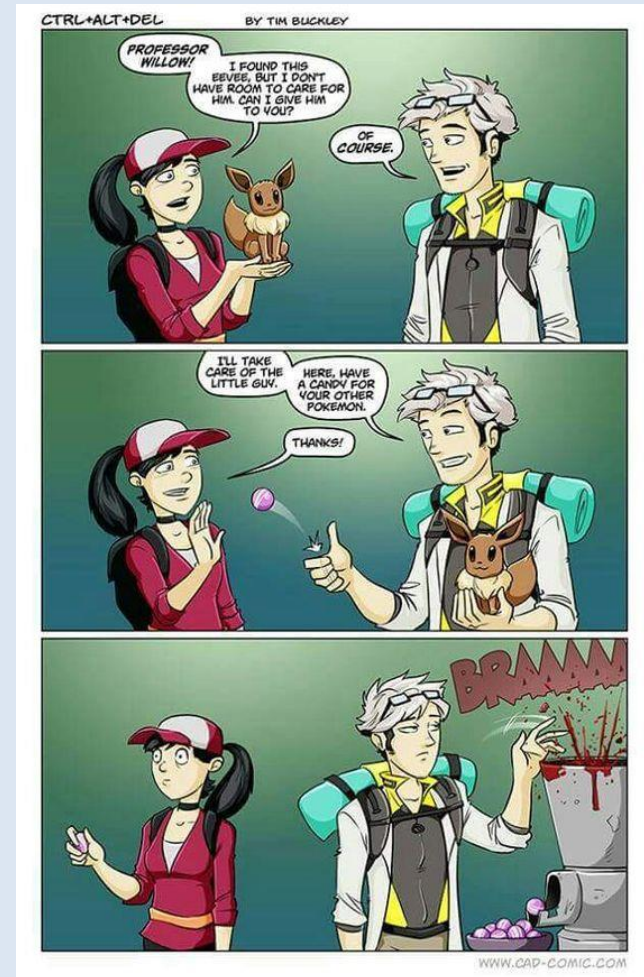
➡ Video game fictions simultaneously follow several logical systems: they **blend** more or less harmoniously **within the context of the playing experience**, but they **become discordant** if they are **moved out** of the playing context



5. Conclusion: Towards “Ludiegesis”

Ex.: in *Pokémon GO*, players are invited to “transfer to the Professor” the hundreds of Pokémon they do not use and they receive candies in return

➔ Misappropriation works use **ludo-narrative dissonances** as a matrix to create stories, following **Genette's** idea that “a rhetorical figure is (already) a small fiction” (2004: 17)





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