

# A Double *Détournement* in the Classroom: *HK Protest Online Game* as Conceptual Art

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## Abstract

This paper examines the role of digital *détournement* during Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement in late 2014 through the prism of *HK Protest Online Game*, a conceptual art game made in response to Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests. Created by an undergraduate Hong Kong student, this work invites a critical reflection on playability by questioning the relationship between videogames, play, and "real time" violence. As an unplayable game, it reroutes the player to contemporaneous street demonstrations in Hong Kong, serving both as a *détournement* of police aggression and of videogames that commercialize violence. Reversing our expectation of games as playful and political action as non-playful, *HKPOG* presents its game as unreal and posits Hong Kong's protests as sites of play. The paper considers related digital artwork and the use of *détournement* during the Umbrella Movement, including umbrellas themselves and digitalized "derivative works" also known as "secondary creation" (*yihchi chongjok* in Cantonese and *èrcì chuàngzuò* in Mandarin; 二次創作). As Hong Kong's central government pushes for new legislation to regulate "derivative works," this paper raises the concern that the creation of such works, whether in the classroom or not, may be restricted or prohibited in the future.

## Hong Kong's Copyright (Amendment) Bill

In the wake of the Umbrella Movement, Hong Kong's central government attempted to pass the Copyright (Amendment) Bill to "update" its copyright laws. The law's stated purpose is "to revise outdated laws, prevent online piracy and keep the Copyright Ordinance up to speed with the fast-moving digital world and international standards." [1] According to critics, however, the law is ambiguous:

The new bill carries exemptions for caricature, parody, pastiche, satire, news reporting and commentary. It also requires those who repurpose others' material to cite the source of the original work and obtain permission from copyright owners... Opponents say the requirement puts too heavy a burden on authors of derivative works and would leave them vulnerable to civil liabilities and criminal charges. [2]

Critics of the bill call it "Internet Article 23," which refers to "Hong Kong's anti-subversion bill that was shelved after a massive protest by half a million people in 2003." [3] Hong Kong's "netizens" fear that their "right to play" online is at risk. According to Peter K. Yu,

law professor and co-director of the Center for Law and Intellectual Property at Texas A&M University School of Law:

"They drafted the legislation so broadly that it covers most of the activities the netizens have been doing...Just saying 'we're not going to prosecute you' doesn't address the concerns of the netizens. Most people now interpret this as something that targets their freedom of speech." [4]

What are the implications for creating digital artwork, including art games, that "plays" with source texts, such as digital *détournement*, if such forms are restricted or prohibited in Hong Kong? The bills lacks a clear exemption for "fair use" or "user-generated content," so, if the law passes, it may have a chilling effect on digital writing courses in Hong Kong that invite work such as Tony Chan's *HK Protest Online Game (HKPOG)*, the subject of this paper. *HKPOG* uses unattributed photographs from various news outlets and a video from Youtube. [5] In the worst case scenario, such works may no longer be permissible, and free speech, especially political and artistic expression in the realm of *détournement*, would erode further.

At the time of the submission of this paper in late March 2016, opponents have successfully filibustered the Copyright Amendment Bill in Hong Kong's Legislative Council and effectively derailed its passage for this legislative term. [6] However, the legislature may take up the bill again in the future, and it is important to consider further how best to revise the bill, so it protects artistic expression. As Hong Kong continues to navigate between its freedom of expression, digital technology, and pressure from mainland China's central government, it is important to examine the use of digital *détournement* in Hong Kong society, and this paper attempts to advance this discussion.

## HK Protest Online Game (HKPOG)

The "Umbrella Movement" refers to pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong during the fall of 2014. Informed partly by the worldwide Occupy movement, student groups, such as Scholarism and the Hong Kong Federation of Students, engaged in street demonstrations and the occupation of major thoroughfares. The protestor's central demand was a fairer electoral process ("genuine universal suffrage") for the election of Hong

Kong's Chief Executive in 2017. The police's use of pepper spray to disperse the protesters on September 28 "inspired thousands more people to take to the streets" in subsequent days. Umbrellas served both as a defensive measure against pepper spray during the protests and as a symbol of pro-democracy goals. The demonstrations ended peacefully in early December 2014 without any major concessions by the central government. [7]

Tony Chan's *HK Protest Online Game* is a conceptual video game created in response to the Umbrella Movement during the height of the protests. [8] (It appeared on November 12, 2014.) Submitted for an undergraduate course called "Writing for New Media" taught by the author at Hong Kong Baptist University, the work was also selected by the online arts journal *Drunken Boat* as part of its special feature on the Umbrella Movement. [9] For the assignment, students had been asked to take an existing text and repurpose it through new media. Students were advised to use a text that has some social power. [10] Many students chose to create work in response to the Umbrella Movement, but Chan's work stood out as especially successful in its concept and execution. In addition to fulfilling the assignment, he sought to make a politically-charged critique regarding the Umbrella Movement.

*HK Protest Online Game* consists of five linked webpages designed with Weebly, a free website-building platform. The first page contains text declaring, "Website of HKPOG (HK Protests Online Game)" and depicts an enlarged photograph of a young man dressed in black, wearing protective goggles and raising an umbrella in each hand. A white cloud of pepper spray wafts in the background, evoking the feeling of a warzone. [11] At the bottom of the webpage is a menu consisting of four boxes entitled, respectively, "Game Preview," "How to Play," "Download," and "What Is HKPOG?" (Fig. 1)

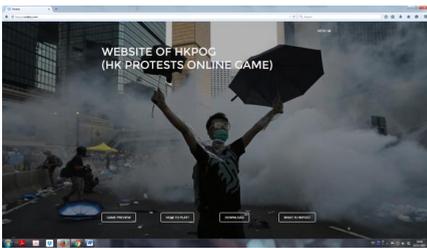


Fig 1. Front page, *HKPOG*, 2014, Tony Chan, webpage.

Reading from left to right, one would naturally click on "Game Preview," which reveals a video of a Hong Kong police officer spraying what appears to be white foam directly into a demonstrator's face. (Fig. 2) Imported from Youtube, the 37-second video is entitled "How to Use Pepper Spray on Elderly (Hong Kong)."



Fig 2. "Game Preview," *HKPOG*, 2014, Tony Chan, webpage.

Most readers would proceed by clicking on the next box on the bottom far left of the screen: "What is HKPOG?" This page shows a bird's eye view of protestors gathered at night in the streets at Admiralty, site of the central government's headquarters and epicenter of the protests. (Fig. 3) A short text offers a summary of the protest movement:

Hong Kong protests, also known as Umbrella Revolution, began in September 2014 when activists in Hong Kong protested outside the Hong Kong Government head quarters [sic] and occupied several major city intersections after China's Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) announced its decision on proposed electoral reform.

It is a War for democracy.

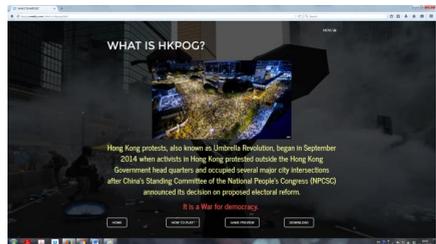


Fig 3. "What Is HKPOG?" *HKPOG* 2014, Tony Chan.

The next box one would likely click is "How to Play" on the bottom far left of the page. This page opens to reveal the "rules" of the game, including the explanation that players may choose to be a demonstrator "fighting for democracy" or a policeman "fighting with the citizens" (i.e., against the citizens). (Fig 4) There are two images in the foreground: a young man in goggles putting plastic wrap around his face for protection from pepper spray and a flank of policemen in gas masks. In red text next to the young man, three "rules" for the protestors are given, including the rule: "Demonstrators can only use cheap and poor protective equipment." Next to the image of police, contrasting rules are provided in blue text: "Policemen can only use expensive and well protective equipment." Interestingly, the final rule for the

police is that they should be well-compensated: “Policemen can get income regularly.” This rule introduces an economic critique related to income inequality, which, as the protests continued, became an increasingly important part of the criticism directed at the central government. [12]

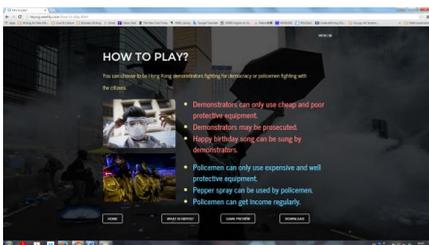


Fig 4. “How to Play?,” HKPOG 2014, Tony Chan, webpage.

The “Download” menu option on the far right remains. An unsuspecting reader would probably save this option for the end, as most people are cautious about downloading files from unknown websites. Upon clicking this last option, the reader finds the following message: “I am sorry to inform you that the game can not be downloaded because... IT IS REAL! Hope that you can enjoy the game in Hong Kong right now.” (Fig 5)

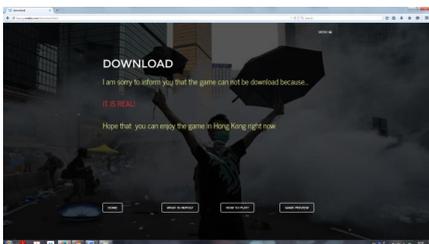


Fig 5. “Download,” HKPOG, 2014, Tony Chan, webpage.

The anti-climactic message can be read as a double *détournement*: it twists or reroutes police aggression into a videogame format, thereby trivializing state violence and diminishing the status of the police force as a respected public entity, while at the same time, it twists or reroutes the videogame experience itself to the contemporaneous, mass public demonstrations, thus frustrating the user’s anticipation of escaping into the game. The targets of the work are both the state’s violence and its citizens seeking pleasure in the play of violent videogames.

In preparation for this conceptual writing assignment, students were assigned to read Sol Lewitt’s “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” Raphael Rubinstein’s “Gathered, Not Made: A Brief History of Appropriative Writing,” and Kenneth Goldsmith’s “It’s Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It’s ‘Repurposing.’” We discussed an

array of conceptual artworks, including John Cage’s 4’33”, Robert Rauschenberg’s “White Painting,” Mendi Obadike and Keith Obadike’s “Blackness for Sale,” Brian Kim Stefans’ “The Vaneigem Series,” Robert Fitterman’s “Directory,” and Josef Kaplan’s *Kill List*. In addition to considering the use of social media as possible tools for conceptual art, we explored a range of conceptual art practices, such as collage, rewriting, mistranslation, recombination, erasure, centos, and *détournement*. We also discussed the intersection of digital literature and art games, including examples such as Jim Andrews’ “Arteroids” and James Nelson’s “Game, Game, and again Game.”

## HKPOG as Conceptual Art

Chan’s work is a conceptual videogame, or more precisely, a conceptual art game. In the words of Sol Lewitt, the term “conceptual art” refers to artwork in which “the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.” [13] Conceptual art has additional characteristics as well, such as those delineated by Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens: it tends to be “anti-definition, anti-medium, de-materialized, anti-aesthetic, linguistic, esoteric, ironic, and self-reflective.” [14] As an unplayable game, *HKPOG* is clearly conceptual in nature, and as a digital work that engages the rhetoric of videogames, it can be classified as an art game.

A distinction between “art games” and “game art” may be helpful here. Matteo Bittanti defines the latter as “any art in which digital games played a significant role in the creation, production, and/or display of the artwork. The resulting artwork can exist as a game, painting, photograph, sound, animation, video, performance or gallery installation.” [15] Cory Arcangel’s *Super Mario Clouds* (2002) is often cited as an example of game art. [16] In contrast to “game art,” Bittanti defines “art games” as “videogames specifically created for artistic (i.e. not commercial) purposes.” [17] Bittanti also cites Tiffany Holmes’s definition of art games as “an interactive work, usually humorous, by a visual artist that does one or more of the following: challenges cultural stereotypes, offers meaningful social or historical critique, or tells a story in a novel manner.” [18] Moreover, he cites Rebecca Cannon’s description of the features of “art games:” “They always comprise an entire, (to some degree) playable game...Art Games explore the game *format* primarily as a new mode for structuring narrative and cultural critique...” [19]

Astrid Ensslin’s picks up on this distinction and uses Rebecca Cannon’s emphasis on the rhetoric of videogames in making art games to note that in art games, “competition itself is often manipulated, suppressed, and/or presented as a ludic fallacy.” [20] *HKPOG* explores the “game *format*” because it is called a “game,” presents “rules,” appears to be downloadable like other online games, and implies playability in the manner of a first-person shooter game, and yet, competition is “suppressed” in the game. Ensslin further classifies art games into metagames (“that is, games that

are about games and gaming”) and a subcategory called “anti-games,” which are “a subform of metagames, even more specific and/or political in their artistic intent in that they use antiludic design to question, challenge, and/or ridicule aspects of commercial game culture.” [21] Based on the various distinctions above, *HKPOG* may be a conceptual art game or, simply, an “anti-game.”

Both Corrado Morgana and Ensslin emphasize the nature of *détournement* in art games. Morgana, for instance, writes, “art games are rapidly *détournant* mainstream game expectations...,” and Ensslin notes, “They are often humorous and/or critical, challenging, for instance, cultural stereotypes, social or political matters, or *détournant* aspects of the mainstream (gaming) culture in which they are embedded.” [22] [23] On the other hand, given Ian Bogost’s distinction between art games and game art, *HKPOG* could be viewed as “conceptual game art” in the sense that it is not playable, but rather it is work that can be exhibited or viewed. Bogost distinguishes between “artgames” and “game art” by claiming that the former are games “that get played” often by game developers who happen to be artists, whereas “game art” are “games that get exhibited” by practicing artists. [24] This slippage between terms brings to mind Espen Aarseth’s claim that games are “not one form, but many” and they “share qualities with performance arts...material arts...and the verbal arts.” [25] Importantly, Bogost notes that “what we lack are discussions of the developing conventions, styles, movements through which games are participating in a broader concept of art, both locally and historically.” [26]

Finally, *HKPOG* also evokes Laurie Taylor’s use of the term “concept art,” which is distinct from “conceptual art.” Rather, “concept art” refers to “the representation of the necessary elements of the game world and/or the character within the game world such that the character and the game world becomes logically distinct, and/or differentiated through their own style.” [27] Yet, Chan’s project is an inversion of Laurie Taylor’s contention that videogames “unwittingly used concept art to generate the belief of an ideal” which perpetuates the player’s imagination of the game. For Taylor, concept art “becomes the super structure from which each game unfolds and into which each game enfolds itself.” [28] In *HKPOG*, however, the unplayable game points us to reality as a super structure of power relations between the state and its citizens. At the same time, the player’s imagination of previous games is what makes *HKPOG* so effective, because the player anticipates the game based on previous game experiences, raising the level of surprise on the final page. As Taylor notes, concept art shapes “a consistent view on how videogames should be” for players and creators, which is crucial for conceptual art games to be successful. [29]

### **Détournement and the Umbrella Movement**

Ken Knabb points out multiple nuances in Guy DeBord’s

key term “*détournement*,” by noting that it “means deflection, diversion, rerouting, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning something aside from its normal course or purpose.” [30] As Elisabeth Sussman states: “*Détournement* proposes a violent excision of elements...from their original contexts, and a consequent destabilization and recontextualization through rupture and realignment.” [31] Ensslin makes an explicit link between Debord’s notion of *détournement* and playfulness: “*Détournement* is particularly suited to games and other ludic activities as tools for artistic processes of dissolution, appropriation, reassembly, and subversion more generally.” Furthermore, she suggests that “playfulness,” is a “particularly salient principle in twentieth-century criticism” as it relates to the carnivalesque (Bakhtin), bricolage (Lévi-Strauss), and deconstruction (Derrida). [32] By its very nature, *détournement* invites a playful engagement with reality, because of the need for an existing text or object to “*détourn*.”

A passage from Guy Debord and Gil Wolman’s “A User’s Guide to *Détournement*” (1956) illustrates how *détournement* was employed in a subversive fashion during last year’s protests in Hong Kong. They state:

*Détournement* not only leads to the discovery of new aspects of talent; in addition, clashing head-on with all social and legal conventions, it cannot fail to be a powerful cultural weapon in the service of real class struggle. The cheapness of its products is the heavy artillery that breaks through all the Chinese walls of understanding. [33]

If the playability of videogames entails choice and consequences, then *HKPOG* draws attention to the limits of one’s choices and outcomes. Instead of being a game in which one may forget one’s life temporarily, this conceptual art game reminds the “player” of the reality of “real-time” violence. Chan’s work teases, or “plays,” the user with the enticement of playability, only to reinforce the actuality of contemporaneous violence on the streets. The work itself, a seemingly cheap, mass-produced (downloadable) online game, embodies what Debord and Wilmore described as “heavy artillery” that can “break through all the Chinese walls of understanding.” [34]

As noted previously, *HKPOG* employs *détournement* on at least two levels. Firstly, it suggests that police action during the protests was excessive and violent, in the manner of a typical videogame. That is, the police state regarded its citizens as mere players of a game in which the state cannot lose, at least in terms of physical or military superiority. By seeming to trivialize police violence towards protesters, the game highlights the police’s excessive use of force, ridicules it, and underscores our embrace of videogame violence. Secondly, and relatedly, it forces the player to check his or her excitement for a “game” inspired by the protests by revealing that the game is not real, thereby puncturing

our thrill for a diversion. It twists online games that we assume to be escapist pleasures into a subversive instruction to join the unprecedented occupation of Hong Kong's streets.

As an anti-game, *HKPOG* reverses our expectation of games as sites of play and political protests as non-playful. We assume games to be playful, such as first-person shooter games embraced by the US Military for recruitment and training. In these games, one plays the game either for enjoyment, or, in the context of the military, in preparation for the "reality" of warfare. Instead, *HKPOG* makes its game unreal and posits Hong Kong's street protests in support of democracy as sites of play. In fact, the Umbrella Movement was a site of much political engagement. By "play," I am referring to Johan Huizinga's concept as described by Alexander R. Galloway: "it is free...it is not part of ordinary life...it is secluded in time and place...it creates order (in the form of rules), and...it promotes the formation of communities of players." [35] The primary example was the voluntary and collective remaking of public spaces through the occupation of roads complete with furniture on the street, flowers inserted into spaces in the road for light reflectors, and artwork created in response to the movement, including sculptures, songs, and drawings. [36] Furthermore, protestors at the occupied sites followed "rules"—no violence, no drinking, no money changing hands, no littering, etc. There were opponents, competing strategies, and a primary objective: "genuine universal suffrage." There was also an outcome: pro-democracy protestors arguably "lost" by not gaining any electoral reform. On the other hand, the purpose of the activity was not pleasure or "joy" (Huizinga), unless one infers from "genuine universal suffrage" the goal of long-term enjoyment, but this does not mean that protestors did not take pleasure in their efforts. The thoughtful engagement of my students, including their boycott of classes during the first week of the movement, in response to the police's use of pepper spray, suggested a tenor of seriousness and hopefulness not found in the typical classroom, most likely because the protests were voluntary. As *HKPOG* suggests, it felt as though the "real," for a couple of months in late 2014, had become more compelling than the spectacle.

*HKPOG* also invites a brief consideration of the *détournement* of umbrellas during the Umbrella Movement. Umbrellas were twisted from a tool that protects one from the weather into a defensive weapon that protected protestors from pepper spray, exhibiting the process of "destabilization and recontextualization." Umbrellas became defensive "artillery" for use in "clashing head-on" with the Hong Kong police, who represented "social and legal conventions," including stagnant electoral reform. Umbrellas functioned symbolically as well, as when students held up cheap, mass-produced umbrellas during graduation ceremonies, alerting the public to their desire for political change. [37]

## Related Digital Artworks

*HKPOG* resembles the anti-art impulse of the Fluxus movement, which "produced mixed-media artifacts (*intermedia*) and unplayable games involving social interaction and humor." Ensslin gives an example of an unplayable game: Robert Filliou's *Optimistic Box #3* (1969), "a wooden chess box containing no pawns but instead two labels saying 'So much the better if you can't play chess' on the outside and 'You won't imitate Marcel Duchamp' on the inside." [38]

In terms of digital art related to *HKPOG*, Brian Schrank describes "Gonzo gamers" who détourn military and adventure-style games for subversive ends. His examples include Joseph DeLappe's *dead-in-iraq* (2006-), in which DeLappe "détourns the networked shooter game *America's Army* (developed by the US Army as a recruiting tool) by logging into the game, and then texting the names and ranks of every US soldier killed in Iraq." [39] Another game that critiques videogames and violence is *Velvet Strike* (2002) by Anne-Marie Schleiner, Joan Leandre, and Brody Condon. This is a set of game "intervention recipes" intended to disrupt the networked tactical shooter game *Counter Strike*. For example, as Schrank explains, "Instead of gunning down terrorists, the artists chat about baking." Schrank also cites his own students who created *Gonzo Gamers* (2013), a project in which students invented recipes for disrupting games, and GoonSwarm, a collective of players who engaged in "avant-garde play" in *EVE Online*, a "brutal capitalist" massively multiplayer online game (MMO). [40]

More "game art" than "art game," Jon Haddock's *Screenshot* series is another videogame-related work that uses actual violence as its focus. Drawn in isometric perspective in Photoshop, Haddock's series appear to be stills from videogames featuring iconic images, such as the famous "Tank Man" photograph from Tiananmen Square that served as the model for *Wang Weilin* (2000). As Henry Lowood notes, "Haddock thus transformed the nature of the screenshot as "captured" image, from a media moment stored in personal memory to a digital screen stored on his computer, and from an event beyond our control to a strategy game waiting for the next move." [41] These works are notable in the context of *HK Protest Online Game*, because they engage the uneasy gap between actual violence and videogame play.

There have been at least two "real" videogames inspired by Hong Kong's recent political protests. The first one, "Love and Peace," was designed by nxTomo, a Hong Kong-based game company and appeared only briefly in the summer of 2014. The game anticipated the mobilization of students later that year, but it was taken down by the developer after two weeks. [42] During the Umbrella Movement, a second protest-themed game emerged from game makers in Hong Kong. Designed by Fung Kam-keung, CEO and founder of Awesapp Limited, "Yellow Umbrella" depicts a street scene in which student protesters cannot attack, but rather, they can only defend themselves from "waves of police

officers, triads, angry anti-Occupy protesters and even Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying himself” by “using umbrellas, incense sticks, and durian fruit.” [43] [44] (Fig. 6) The game clearly sympathizes with the pro-democracy protestors. It is currently available and has been downloaded over 40,000 times as of October 2014. [45]



Fig. 6. *Yellow Umbrella* video game. 2014, Awesapp Limited.

It should be noted that Chan’s work is especially resonant in Hong Kong, where videogames are ubiquitous. Ride any subway line and you will find passengers playing *Candy Crush Saga*. Benjamin Wai-ming Ng writes, “Hong Kong, a free port city with a population of more than 7.1 million, is one of the major game consumption centers in Asia.” [46] Hong Kong is a “mature market” for games, including leading game developers with offices in Hong Kong and players using a mix of “handheld games, home console games, computer games, and online games, whereas outside the home they play arcade games, handheld games, and mobile games.” [47] Ng also notes that “game piracy is the key factor in popularization.” [48] *HKPOG* plays off this history of online piracy in Hong Kong by presenting itself as a free game. *HKPOG* is especially striking in the context of commerce-driven Hong Kong, because it resists commodification. The videogame industry in Hong Kong has an intricate link to the state as well. In 2011, the Hong Kong government spent 4 million Hong Kong dollars to sponsor the Asia Online Game Awards.” [49] Former chief executive Donald Tsang “used game-related jargon in public to show his affiliation with grassroots society” and “game-related jargon also appeared in a public examination organized by the Education Bureau of the Hong Kong government.” [50]

### “Real-Time” Violence

Quoting Huizinga’s description of play as “a stepping out of ‘real life’ into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own,” Ian Bogost suggests that Huizinga’s notion of the “magic circle” reveals a gap in the sense that videogame players may leave a game with strong emotions, such as rage or humiliation. In this way, the perceived “safety of games” is misleading. [51] In the case of *HKPOG*, the reader is refused from entering the “magic circle” and, rather, is invited to enter “real life.” Chan’s critique of violence and videogames, based

on real events, also recalls Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter’s *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, in which they argue that games should be read “within a system of global ownership, privatized property, coercive class relations, military operations, and radical struggle.” [52] They cite the banalization of war, in which “war becomes part of the culture of everyday life,” and how “the long-standing interaction of video game culture and the military apparatus is a component in this process of the banalization of war.” They also claim that commercial games have surpassed “the Pentagon’s in-house simulations” to the point that the U.S. government now collaborates with commercial game makers. [53]

In the case of *HKPOG*, the dark photograph on the first page, featuring an individual wearing protective eyewear and holding up umbrellas in a gesture of defiance, evokes first-person shooting games. On the “How to Play?” page, the last line in red text reads: “It is a WAR for democracy.” and the site’s use of Ariel, which resembles the sans-serif font often found in shooting games, adds to the borrowed rhetoric from military-themed games. The combat atmosphere of the website builds excitement and suspense, yet Chan’s work frustrates our consumerist urge to “download” and own the game; instead, it instructs us to enter the streets and “enjoy the game in Hong Kong right now.” The player, expecting a thrilling shooting game, is left impotent on the final page.

Roberto Simanowski notes that for Debord, “the cinema had become the cathedral of modernity, reducing mankind, previously an autonomous, contemplative subject, to an immobile, isolated, passive viewer, sitting in the dark and fixed in front of the shining screen.” Debord employed *détournement* in an attempt to “free” cinema “from the dominance of the spectacle.” [54] It would seem that this description does not apply to interactive videogames, because while gamers may be in the dark, they are not passive and not necessarily isolated. Taking his cue from Debord, Baudrillard “argues that the rise of the mass media has led to a fatal confusion between the real and its representation” [55]. For Baudrillard, the difficulty of “contemplation” in the face of the screen persists in the realm of videogames as well, despite, or rather, because of its interactivity. As Kim Toffoletti puts it, “...Baudrillard suggests that the increasing interactivity between the viewer and the screen (which also includes the Internet, video games, multimedia, etc.) actually diminishes any distance from which the viewer might cast a moral judgement.” [56]

The ability of a videogame to invite contemplation depends on the nature of the game and what it asks of the player. Even Baudrillard admitted that some cinema permits contemplation, as when he wrote of Luchino Visconti’s mid-career films, “...there is meaning, history, a sensual rhetoric, dead moments, a passionate game, not only in the historical content but in the direction.” [57] In some ways, the player is drawn to *HKPOG* because it appears to be an escape from “reality” into “spectacle,” or at least, it is a safe

abstraction of reality, like most games. As Baudrillard wrote, “We prefer the exile of the virtual...to the catastrophe of the real.” [58] The reminder of “real-time” violence in *HKPOG* places the game under the category of “radical political,” based on Brian Schrank’s recent classifications of videogame art, in the sense that *HKPOG* “reminds us that reality is in play and that play requires real risk.” Schrank gives the example of *Toywar* (1999/2000) as a “radical political” work that combines art, politics, fiction, and “real” life. [59] It should be noted that there was no violence at the time of the work’s posting (in mid-November 2014), but the work evokes the first night of the protests when police used pepper spray, and it spoke to the fear of protestors that more state violence may erupt at any moment. In fact, the first night when the police used pepper spray triggered memories of Tiananmen Square for many Hong Kongers.

### Species of Play: Pranks and Culture Jamming

This essay has explored *HKPOG* as a conceptual videogame with a subversive purpose, in the context of *détournement*. Other categories of subversive art, such as “pranks” and “culture jamming” may apply, but these terms are more likely to invite the critique that *HKPOG* undermines its political aims by reinforcing the status quo, or feeding the “spectacle” it aims to critique. I submit that *HKPOG* resists this critique and remains primarily an example of *détournement*. One reason the term *détournement* is worth preserving as a description of Chan’s work and others like it, is because as Debord implied (when he said that film is best suited to *détournement* and “can attain its greatest effectiveness” and “its greatest beauty,”) *détournement* is the term that fits to the values and possibilities inherent in politically-charged art-making.

Bogost refers to the category of “prank” in terms of digital work when he describes Cory Arcangel’s *Super Mario Clouds* and Myfanway Ashmore’s *Mario Battle No. 1*, as “more art object than videogame prank” in the sense that they are not playable. [60] It may be tempting to refer to Chan’s work as a prank, yet, the context in which *HKPOG* was created—during unprecedented occupations of major thoroughfares in Hong Kong—suggests that the political urgency behind the work makes it primarily an example of *détournement*. The work fulfilled an assignment for a course, and so, it may never have been created without the structure of a course to encourage it, however, artworks may be created for multiple purposes, and it was clearly Chan’s intention to make a pointed political critique. In his brief description of the work, Chan refers to “serious issues,” and “humor or black humor” as they “show the tension between...[the] protest in reality and [the work’s] casual style” [61] In Chan’s biographical note on *Drunken Boat*, he is self-described plainly as “a supporter of the student movement.” Importantly, the work figuratively reroutes the user to the streets in an implicit call to action. [62] Chan’s work also evokes

Bogost’s claims for the future of videogame pranks: “They are commercially unviable in large part, but socially meaningful, justifying considerable effort even if they disappear soon after use...” [63] The ephemeral nature of Chan’s work is paradoxical: it exists in perpetuity (until he takes it down, Weebly goes offline, or the video is removed from Youtube), and yet its power is derived primarily from its relation to the protests themselves, which are no longer happening: “Hope that you can enjoy the game in Hong Kong *right now*.” (Italics mine.)

One may further consider describing *HKPOG* as an example of “culture jamming,” a derivation of *détournement*, however, as Christine Harold notes, “...Debord and his comrades were decidedly opposed to parody as an effective rhetorical strategy, because it maintained, rather than unsettled, audiences’ purchase on truth.” [64] Richard Gilman-Opalsky critiques the term “culture jamming” as a “liberal fantasy” and calls rather for collective acts of revolution. [65] In this way, *HKPOG* can be seen as part of an urgent panoply of online activity during and after the Umbrella Revolution that sought to critique Hong Kong’s central government. This kind of collective, contemporaneous action often included playful, creative works called “derivative works” or “secondary creation” (*yihchi chongjok* in Cantonese and *èrcì chuàngzuò* in Mandarin; 二次創作), including memes, rewritten song lyrics, subtitled videos, etc. [66] One prominent online group, Mocking Jer (學舌鳥), is a volunteer collective that makes satirical videos critiquing the government. [67] Digital *détournement* is especially effective in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong’s youth are savvy when it comes to using new media. Repurposing digitalized texts happens quickly, increasing its appeal to young people, and it is communal in nature, because the works are easily sharable. Yet, given Hong Kong’s proposed amendment to its copyright laws, playful online expression, including digital *détournement*, faces an uncertain future.

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