

THE IDEOLOGY OF **PLAY**

BY: GABRIELLE TRÉPANIÉR-JOBIN, PHD
PROFESSOR IN GAME STUDIES
UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL

GAME SCHOLARS HAVE SHOWN CONCERNS FOR THE:

- ❖ pervasiveness of the capitalist ideology in video games (Rettberg, 2008; Aarseth, 2008)
- ❖ exploitation, by developer companies, of the players' unpaid labour (Nieborg & Van der Graaf, 2008)
- ❖ exploitation of players' personal data for advertising and commercial purposes (Bonenfant & Genvo, 2014; Whitson, 2013).

"Playbour is suffused with an **ideology of play**, which effectively masks labor as play, and disguises the process of self-expropriation as self-expression"



JULIAN KÜCKLICH

PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- ❖ Explain what this ideology of play consists of
- ❖ Identify different functions and mechanisms on the basis of which it legitimizes exploitation and surveillance
- ❖ Show how it permeates various types of discourses in the game culture
- ❖ Provide a glimpse of how game scholars can challenge this ideology of play




STUART HALL

Ideologies are sets of "concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (1981: 259)



STUART HALL

Ideologies are sets of open and apparent ideas, but their roots and foundations tend to stay hidden (1977)



STUART HALL

Ideologies rely on the articulation of different concepts into chains of meanings (1981)

CAPITALIST IDEOLOGY

Freedom = free market & individualism

Freedom vs equality of condition

SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

Freedom = equality of condition

IDEOLOGY OF PLAY

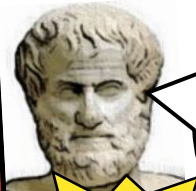
Set of ideas according to which play is more valuable than anything else and can justify:

- ❖ unpaid labour
- ❖ collection and use of players' personal data (that lead to breaches of privacy and surveillance)

TRADITIONAL ASSOCIATION & OPPOSITIONS

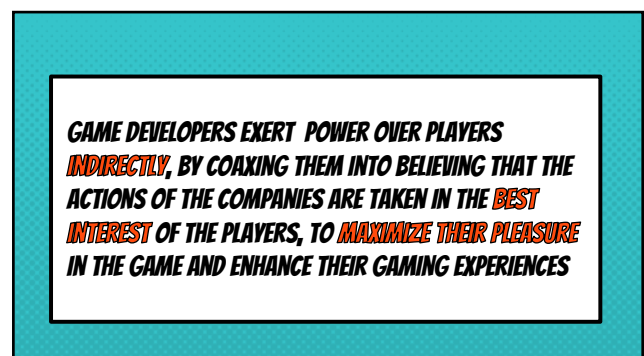
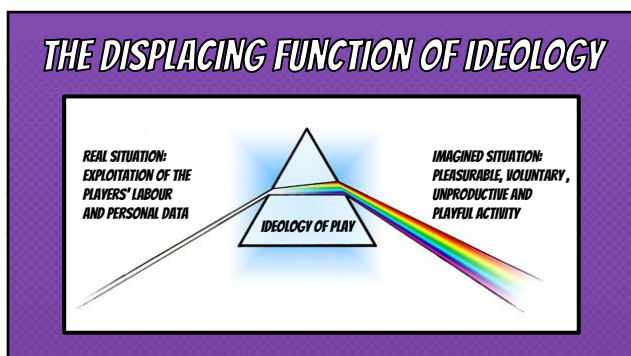
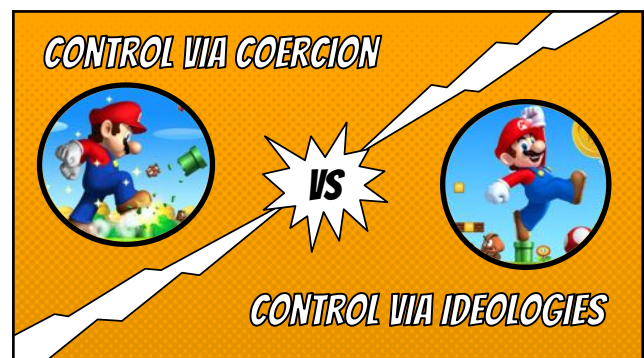
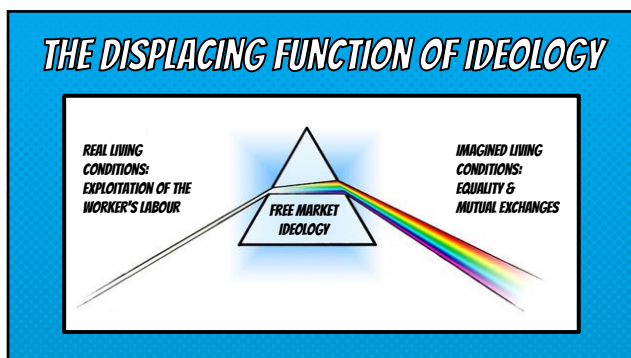
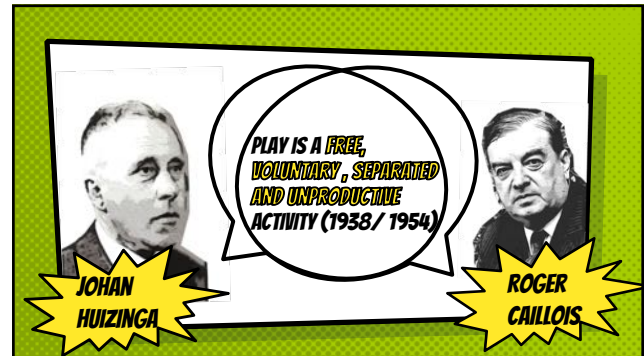
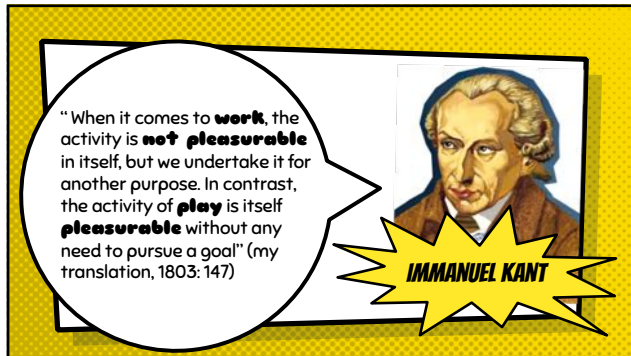
Play = leisure, relaxation & pleasure

Play vs demanding & productive work




ARISTOTLE

"Amusement [play] is a **relaxation**, since it is a rest from work" (4th-century BC: book VII, chapter VII)



THE IDEOLOGICAL ROLE OF DISCOURSES




Ideologies operate through language, discourses, images, and representations

STUART HALL

THE IDEOLOGICAL ROLE OF DISCOURSES



RHETORIC:
THE ART OF USING SPEECH OR DISCOURSES TO PERSUADE, MANIPULATE OR SEDUCE (ARISTOTLE; PLATO)



RHETORICAL FIGURES

Phrases in which the words are not used in accordance with their conventionally accepted meaning or denotation

THE IDEOLOGICAL ROLE OF RHETORIC

DISCOURSES	FUNCTIONS	RHETORIC FIGURES
Discourses that make one thing look like its contrary	Camera obscura (Hall)	Inversion
Discourses that make one aspect of something look for the whole thing	Fetichism (Hall)	Synecdoche
Discourses that mask the roots of something	Concealment (Hall)	Ellipsis or Hyperbole

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTS IN...

METHODOLOGY

Game culture's discourses

- Terms of Service
Analyzed by: Alexane Couturier
- Privacy policies
Analyzed by: Lilian Escornel
- Public statements of community managers
Analyzed by: Mathilde Savoie
- Discussions between players
Analyzed by: Mathilde Savoie
- Gamification evangelists' articles
Analyzed by: Antoine Jobin

THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY IN TERMS OF SERVICE

 **MOJANG**
 **EPIC
GAMES**
 **VALVE**

 **Bethesda™**


Players can create content with the games' assets "for non-commercial uses only"

MOST COMPANIES' TERMS OF SERVICE



Players grant the company the irrevocable, right to use, reproduce, modify, display, distribute it, in any way the company sees fit and accept that they may **not get a credit** or attribution for this

MOST COMPANIES' TERMS OF SERVICE



"Valve or the applicable developer may make modifications to Workshop Contributions that are accepted for in-Application distribution as it deems necessary or desirable to **enhance gameplay**"

VALVE



"Don't just rip art resources and pass them around, that's **no fun**"

 **MOJANG**

**THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY IS SUBTLY
CONVEYED BY RHETORICAL
CONSTRUCTS THAT FALL INTO THE
CATEGORY OF *OMISSION***

THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY IN PRIVACY POLICIES



"We use personal data to **improve** and **optimise** the games to ensure the best player experience"

king



We use personal data "to **enhance** your experience and **enjoyment** using our game"

ROVIO



We collect players' data for "creating the well-designed, highly **enjoyable** entertainment experiences you can find within our epic games!"

BILZARD
ENTERTAINMENT



Since one of our "core values is: **Play Nice; Play fair**", we use personal data "to minimize fraud, cheating and abusive behaviour"

BILZARD
ENTERTAINMENT



We gather personal data to "prevent toxicity" and "offer players a **fair, fun,** and competitive gaming experience"

RIOT
GAMES

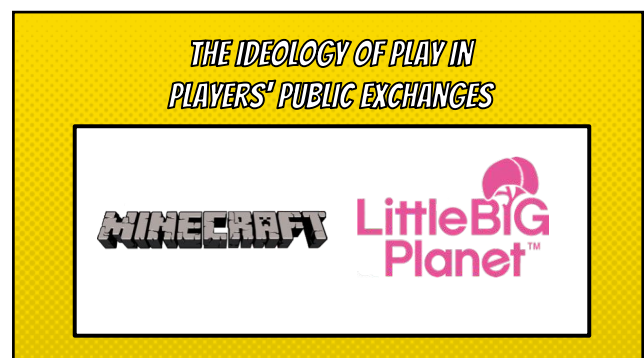
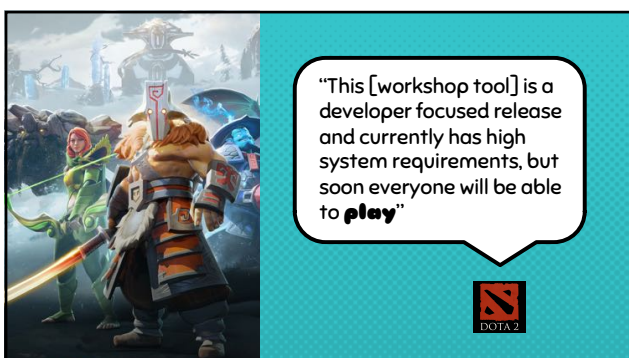
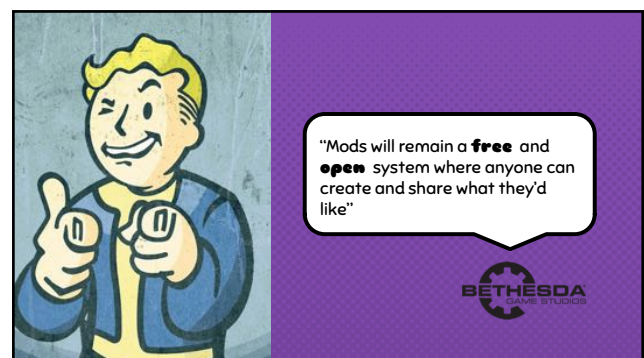
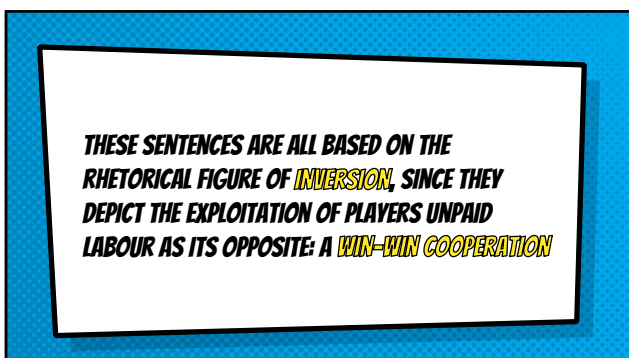
THE RHETORICAL FIGURE OF **SYNECDOCHE**
WORKS IN CONCERT WITH THE
RHETORICAL FIGURE OF **ELLIPSIS**

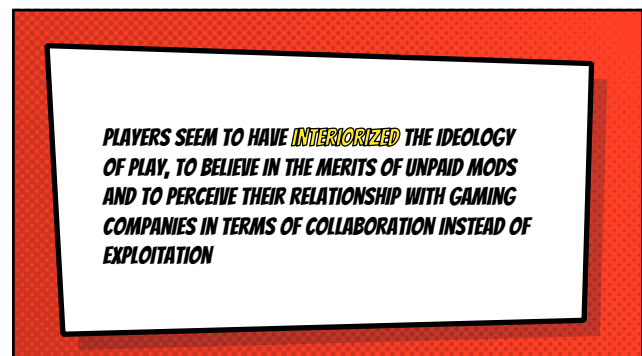
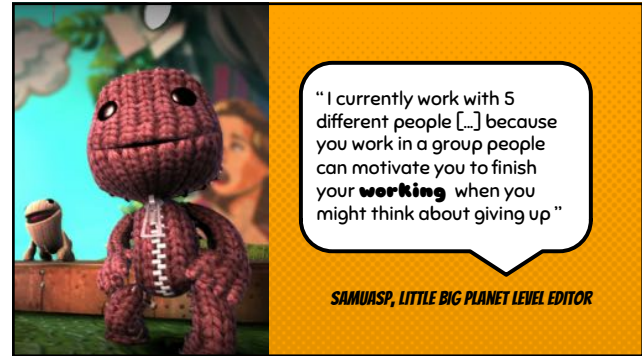
THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY IN COMMUNITY
MANAGERS' DISCOURSES



THESE SENTENCES ARE BASED ON THE RHETORICAL FIGURES OF **OMISSION** AND **HYPERBOLE**, SINCE BETHESDA CONCEALS ITS EXPLOITATION OF PLAYERS' UNPAID LABOUR BY GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE QUALITY OF THE GAME IS **ALL** THAT MATTERS TO THEM AND TO THE PLAYERS.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GAME DEVELOPERS AND PLAYERS IS OFTEN DEPICTED IN TERMS OF **COLLABORATION** INSTEAD OF EXPLOITATION

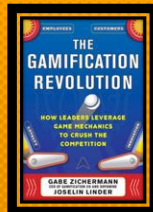




THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY IN GAMIFICATION EVANGELIST'S ARTICLES

Gamification:

Implementation of "design concepts from games, loyalty programs, and behavioral economics to drive user engagement" (Zichermann & Linder, 2013: xii)



A leaderboard "benefits [employees] **and** the company's wider purpose"

GROWTH ENGINEERING

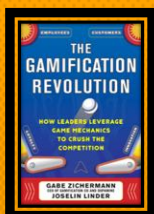


Leaderboards provide simple way for Admins to "compare learners" and "pinpoint floundering learners" so they can "do something to help change it"

GROWTH ENGINEERING



GAMIFICATION TECHNIQUES CAN FEEL LIKE "ELECTRONIC WHIPS"
(DETERDING, 2014: 309)



"The line between work and play was plain. It was defined, and it was very, very serious. However, this is simply no longer true"

ZICHERMANN & LINDER, (2013: xi)

GAMIFICATION EVANGELISTS TRY TO PRESERVE THE ASSOCIATION OF PLAY WITH PLEASURE, FUN AND ENJOYMENT BY MULTIPLYING THESE BUZZWORDS IN THEIR DISCOURSES AND THEREFORE USING THE RHETORICAL FIGURE OF REPETITION

THREE MECHANISMS ON WHICH THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY RELIES

#1 MASKING THE EXPLOITATION OF THE PLAYERS' LABOUR OR DATA BY EMPHASIZING ON THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN PLAYERS AND DEVELOPERS INTO MAKING BETTER GAMES

THREE MECHANISMS ON WHICH THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY RELIES

#2 FRAGMENTING THE GROUP INTEREST OF THE PLAYERS (PRESERVING THEIR RIGHT TO PRIVACY) INTO EGOISTIC INDIVIDUAL'S NEEDS (HAVING PERSONALIZED GAMING EXPERIENCES)



We share your information to "personalize, and optimize our Services and our players' experiences"



THREE MECHANISMS ON WHICH THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY RELIES

#3 UNITING THESE EGOISTIC INDIVIDUAL BY CONSTANTLY REMINDING THEM THAT THEY ARE MEMBERS OF A PLAYERS' COMMUNITY WHO ARE BOUNDED BY THEIR COMMON PASSION FOR THE GAME



We collect information to provide players a "better social gaming experience" and enable them "to communicate with each other"



DESTABILIZING THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY


Bringing the hidden premises of ideologies to our consciousness is a revolutionary act in itself (1979)

STUART HALL



"The phrase "bites the hand that feeds you" comes to mind, but hey I guess they already "made it big" in the gaming community so they don't care if they bite that hand or even cut it off"

WARLORN, MINECRAFT MODDER



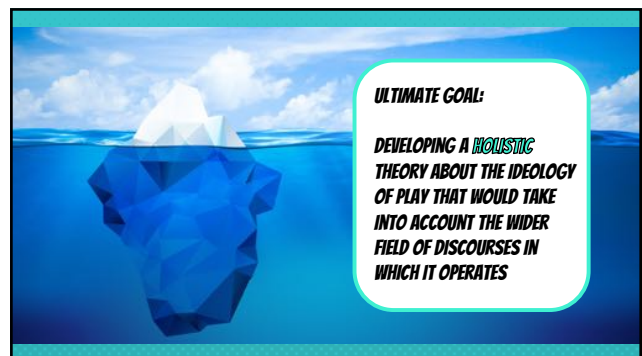
DESTABILIZING THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY

The only way to fight ideologies is to break their chains of meanings and rearticulate their elements in order to produce new meanings (1981)

STUART HALL

GAME SCHOLARS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE REARTICULATION OF THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY BY...

- ❖ **BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PRODUCTIVE WORK AND PLAY (KÜCKLICH WITH THE CONCEPT OF PLAYBOUR)**
- ❖ **QUESTIONING THE ASSOCIATION OF PLAY WITH PLEASURE (SALEN & ZIMMERMAN; JULI)**
- ❖ **UNTYING THE CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM AND PLAY (HENRIOT AND DUFO)**



ULTIMATE GOAL:

DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC THEORY ABOUT THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY THAT WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE WIDER FIELD OF DISCOURSES IN WHICH IT OPERATES

THANK YOU!

trepanier_jobin.gabrielle@uqam.ca