The ideology of 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

**Ideaologies** 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

**Ideaologies** 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

“Ausement [play] is a relaxation, since it is a rest from work” (4th-century BC: book VII, chapter VII)

Aristotle
"When it comes to work, the activity is not pleasurable in itself, but we undertake it for another purpose. In contrast, the activity of play is itself pleasurable without any need to pursue a goal" (my translation, 1803: 147)

Immanuel Kant

Play is a free, elementary, spontaneous and extraproductive activity (1938/1954)

Roger Caillois

Immanuel Kant

Johan Huizinga

Immanuel Kant

Johan Huizinga

Roger Caillois

THE DISPLACING FUNCTION OF IDEOLOGY

REAL LIVING CONDITIONS: EXPLOITATION OF THE WORKER’S LABOUR

FREE MARKET IDEOLOGY

IMAGINED LIVING CONDITIONS: EQUALITY & MUTUAL EXCHANGES

CONTROL VIA COERCION

VS

CONTROL VIA IDEOLOGIES

THE DISPLACING FUNCTION OF IDEOLOGY

REAL SITUATION: EXPLOITATION OF THE PLAYERS’ LABOUR AND PERSONAL DATA

ICLOGY OF PLAY

UNIMAGINED SITUATION: PLEASURABLE, VOLUNTARY, UNPRODUCTIVE AND PLAYFUL ACTIVITY

GAME DEVELOPERS EXERT POWER OVER PLAYERS INDIRECTLY, BY COAXING THEM INTO BELIEVING THAT THE ACTIONS OF THE COMPANIES ARE TAKEN IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE PLAYERS, TO MAXIMISE THEIR PLEASURE IN THE GAME AND ENHANCE THEIR GAMING EXPERIENCES

Johan Huizinga

Immanuel Kant

Roger Caillois

Immanuel Kant

Johan Huizinga

Roger Caillois
**Rhetoric:**

The art of using speech or discourses to persuade, manipulate or seduce (Aristotle; Plato)

**The Ideological Role of Discourses**

Ideologies operate through language, discourses, images, and representations

**Rhetorical Figures**

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

**The Ideological Role of Rhetoric**

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<td>Discourses that make one aspect of something look for the whole thing</td>
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**Discourse Analysis of the Rhetorical Constructs in...**

Game culture's discourses

**Methodology**

- Terms of Service
- Privacy policies
- Public documents of community managers
- Discussions between players
- Gamification evangelists' articles

- Analyzed by: Alexandra Courtois
- Analyzed by: Liban Escamal
- Analyzed by: Mathilde Savoie
- Analyzed by: Antoine Jobin

**Tips on how to negotiate your salary!**

- Stuart Hall

**Functions**

- Hyperbole
- Ellipsis
- Synecdoche
- Inversion

**Stuart Hall**

Discourses that mask the roots of something look for the whole thing
Discourses that make one thing look for the whole thing
Discourse

**Inversion**

- Terms of Service
- Privacy policies
- Public documents of community managers
- Discussions between players
- Gamification evangelists' articles

- Analyzed by: Alexandra Courtois
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Players can create content with the games' assets "for non-commercial uses only".

Most companies' terms of service state that 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.

"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."

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

"The ideology of play is subtly conveyed by rhetorical constructs that fall into the category of gaminon."
We use personal data to improve and optimise the games to ensure the best player experience.

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

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

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

We gather personal data to prevent toxicity and offer players a fair, fun, and competitive gaming experience.
The rhetorical figure of *synechdoche* works in concert with the rhetorical figure of *ellipsis*.

"We love what the community has done with mods. Modding ensures tons of continued content and experiences for our games."

"This also guarantees that all content works together. Allowing paid mods "would likely cause a ton of issues."

These sentences are based on the rhetorical figures of *amission* and *synechdoche*, 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.
“There's a constant demand from our fans to add more official high quality content to our games, and while we are able to create a lot of it, we think many in our community have the talent to work directly with us and create some amazing new things.”

“These tools are for you and we're looking forward to seeing where the community takes us in developing content for the expanding Dota universe. Help us make Dota 2 even bigger and better.”

These sentences are all based on the rhetorical figure of inversion, since they depict the exploitation of players unpaid labour as its opposite: a win-win cooperation.

“Mods will remain a free and open system where anyone can create and share what they'd like.”

“This [workshop tool] is a developer focused release and currently has high system requirements, but soon everyone will be able to play.”

The ideology of play in players’ public exchanges.
“You’re going to be remembered as that jackass who got a whole bunch of popular mods shut down because he hated people having fun.”

— Mecheon, Minecraft modder

“I currently work with 5 different people [...] because you work in a group people can motivate you to finish your work when you might think about giving up.”

— Samuasp, Little Big Planet level editor

“Mojang knows that the modding community is their bread and butter [...] From a business point of view, modding has given Mojang hundreds of free employees.”

— Kirzo, Minecraft modder

“Notch has awakened the minds of young people to explore and modify the game they love and in doing so enriched their lives and those of his company.”

— Kirzo, Minecraft modder

“I never expected to make anything off of [my Minecraft videos], but it is nice to see it grow by a few pennies every day just for the fun of it.”

— Warlorn, Minecraft modder

Players seem to have the ideology of play, to believe in the merits of unpaid mods and to perceive their relationship with gaming companies in terms of collaboration instead of exploitation.
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”

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

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

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. Exploitation of the players' labour or data by emphasizing on the collaboration between players and developers into making better games.

2. Exploiting the group interest of the players (preserving their right to privacy) into egoistic individual's needs (having personalized gaming experiences).

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

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

Destabilizing the ideology of play

"Ringing 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”

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; Juul)
- Untying the concepts of freedom and play (Henriot and Duflo)

Ultimate goal: Developing a robust theory about the ideology of play that would take into account the wider field of discourses in which it operates.

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Thank you!