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## MONOPOLY AS IDEOLOGICAL PLAY: CULTURAL REPRODUCTION OF CAPITALISM IN GAME DESIGN AND PRACTICE

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*Abstract— Monopoly was initially designed as a critique of capitalist property relations but has gradually evolved into a cultural artifact that teaches and legitimizes capitalist values. This study examines how the game communicates ideological messages through its rules, design, and play practices. A qualitative de-sign was employed in two stages: discourse and semiotic analysis of The Landlord's Game (1903) and contemporary Monopoly editions, and in-depth interviews with participants from different age groups. The first stage investigates how rulebooks, game components, and promotional materials reflect the shift from systemic critique to market reproduction, while the second explores how players interpret mechanisms such as property accumulation, debt, taxation, chance, and bankruptcy, alongside the symbolic role of visual elements. The study is expected to reveal how Monopoly naturalizes capitalist practices and positions entertainment as an ideological apparatus, contributing to debates in cultural studies, media literacy, and game studies.*

**Keywords—** capitalist ideology, cultural reproduction, game studies, ideological games, Monopoly.

### INTRODUCTION

Games have increasingly been recognized as cultural texts that reflect, reproduce, and occasionally subvert dominant ideologies (Fraser, 2019; Sicart, 2011). Far beyond their recreational value, games—digital and analog alike—operate as systems of meaning, structuring interaction through rules, representations, and rewards that implicitly teach players how to act and think within particular social frameworks (Bogost, 2007; Shaw, 2010). Within this broader framework, board games represent a tangible medium through which social, economic, and cultural hierarchies are both modeled and normalized (Woods, 2012). The rules of play, the visual and material design of game components, and the social negotiations between players combine to produce what Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) conceptualized as part of the culture industry: standardized entertainment that reproduces the logic of late capitalism under the guise of leisure.

Monopoly epitomizes this dynamic. Originally designed by Elizabeth Magie in 1903 as The Landlord's Game, the prototype was intended to demonstrate the social inequality and exploitation produced by private land ownership (Orbanes, 2006). However, after being commercialized by Parker Brothers in 1935, Monopoly was transformed from a critique of capitalism into its most iconic pedagogical instrument—an enduring simulation of accumulation, speculation, and market dominance (Pilón, 2015). Today, the game is marketed globally as a family pastime, yet it continues to teach and celebrate behaviors deeply aligned with capitalist rationality: property acquisition, monopolization, rent extraction, and the elimination of competitors. Scholars have therefore described Monopoly as a paradigmatic case of ideological inversion, in which a system-critical design becomes a celebratory embodiment of the very order it once sought to expose (Deterding, 2017; Fuchs, 2022).

This transformation invites critical interrogation at the intersection of cultural production, ideology, and design. From a cultural studies perspective, the evolution of Monopoly mirrors what Gramsci (1971) described as hegemonic adaptation—the process by which dominant systems absorb and neutralize oppositional forms of culture. From a media-theoretical standpoint, it resonates with Baudrillard's (1994) notion of simulation, wherein signs and symbols cease to represent reality and instead produce their own hyperreal capitalist logic. Likewise, Holt's (2004) theory of brand culture illuminates how Monopoly transcends its function as a game to operate as a branded ideological apparatus—an enduring symbol of capitalist aspiration reproduced through generations of consumers.

The present study situates Monopoly within these theoretical debates by examining how its rules, visual design, and play mechanics communicate capitalist ideologies. Employing a qualitative, multi-layered methodology, it integrates historical discourse analysis, semiotic examination of visual elements, and in-depth interviews with players of different age groups. Through this approach, the research seeks to reveal how the game's design and mechanics normalize systems of ownership, debt, risk, and competition as natural social processes. By making visible the ideological work embedded in everyday entertainment, the study contributes to ongoing discussions in cultural studies, game studies, and media literacy about the subtle mechanisms through which capitalism perpetuates itself as common sense.

### I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ideological transformation of Monopoly—from a critique of capitalism to a pedagogical tool that normalizes capitalist behavior—can be understood through the intersection of critical theory, media studies, and cultural production. This framework draws on five complementary theoretical lenses that together articulate how culture, play, and ideology intertwine in the reproduction of economic systems.

### A. *The Culture Industry: Standardization, Commodification, and Ideological Control*

Adorno and Horkheimer's (2002) concept of the culture industry offers a critical foundation for interpreting Monopoly not merely as a game but as a paradigmatic product of capitalist cultural production. In their analysis, the culture industry extends the principles of industrial capitalism—standardization, efficiency, and profit maximization—into the domain of leisure and aesthetics. Cultural goods are no longer created for autonomous expression but are manufactured through the same logic of commodification that governs material production (Adorno, 1991). The result is the mass production of entertainment forms that simulate individuality while in fact reproducing homogeneity and ideological conformity (Horkheimer, 1989).

Within this framework, Monopoly exemplifies the transformation of play into a commercial and ideological mechanism. Its mass circulation, rigid rule structure, and global branding reflect the very processes of standardization and rationalization that Adorno and Horkheimer associated with late capitalism. The game's format—identical across editions, translatable into any market, yet always promoting the same competitive logic—demonstrates how the culture industry achieves global ideological coherence under the façade of cultural diversity. What appears as harmless fun is, in fact, the pedagogical dissemination of capitalist rationality: success is measured by accumulation, strategy by monopolization, and failure by exclusion.

Moreover, the culture industry thesis elucidates how Monopoly constructs what Adorno described as “false needs”—pleasures that bind individuals to the system that oppresses them (Adorno, 1991). The enjoyment derived from the game's simulation of wealth, competition, and victory mirrors the gratification offered by consumer capitalism itself: an illusion of agency within a structure of control. The player's pursuit of financial domination becomes a form of ideological participation, where the logic of the market is rehearsed, internalized, and celebrated as leisure. As Horkheimer (1989) argued, cultural consumption under capitalism operates as both compensation and discipline: entertainment provides temporary relief from alienation while simultaneously reaffirming the conditions that produce it.

Thus, through the lens of the culture industry, Monopoly functions as a microcosm of capitalist society—an ideological apparatus that transforms systemic inequalities into playful conventions. By concealing competition and exploitation beneath standardized entertainment, the game exemplifies how late capitalism converts critique into commodity, ensuring that dissent is absorbed into the circuits of pleasure and consumption.

### B. *Persuasive Games: Procedural Rhetoric and Ideology*

While the Frankfurt School illuminated how cultural forms perpetuate ideological domination through standardization, Bogost (2007) advances this critique into the internal mechanics of games by introducing the concept of procedural rhetoric. According to Bogost, digital and analog games persuade not primarily through narrative or imagery but through procedures—the rule-based systems that structure player behavior and define what counts as success, failure, or progress. These procedural structures encode specific worldviews and social logics, making every rule a rhetorical statement about how systems operate in reality. In this sense, games function as simulations that articulate ideologies in action, teaching players to internalize implicit arguments about labor, efficiency, fairness, and reward (Treanor et al., 2011).

From this perspective, Monopoly can be read as an exemplary case of procedural persuasion. The game's mechanics—acquiring property, charging rent, leveraging debt, and driving opponents to bankruptcy—model the capitalist economy as a meritocratic arena in which rational calculation and risk-taking yield success. Its procedural logic naturalizes the idea that wealth is the result of individual skill rather than structural advantage. The player is rewarded not for collaboration or collective welfare but for aggressive accumulation and strategic exclusion. Conversely, bankruptcy is rendered as personal failure, erasing the systemic dimensions of inequality that Magie's original design sought to expose (Orbanes, 2006). Through its rule system, Monopoly therefore transforms historical critique into procedural endorsement, translating capitalist ideology into a playable structure.

Bogost's framework also highlights how the aesthetics of rules—their perceived fairness, balance, and in-evitability—contribute to ideological persuasion. By making its capitalist logic appear objective and apolitical, Monopoly performs what Bogost (2007) calls simulation endorsement: the process through which players, by engaging with the system, tacitly accept its premises. The repetitive cycles of play reinforce this effect, transforming competition and inequality into familiar, even comforting experiences. In line with Sicart's (2011) notion of ethical gameplay, the player's agency becomes confined within a moral architecture that privileges acquisition and domination as legitimate pursuits. As a result, the game's persuasive power lies not in explicit propaganda but in its capacity to turn ideological assumptions into experiential truths.

In sum, Monopoly exemplifies the persuasive capacity of games to model and normalize ideological systems through rule-based interaction. Its procedural rhetoric embodies capitalist rationality—valorizing property, competition, and profit—while concealing the structural violence inherent in these dynamics. What once functioned as a critique of inequality now operates as an instrument of its reproduction, demonstrating how procedural forms can transform ideology into play, and play into ideology.

### C. *Brand Culture and the Commodification of Play*

Douglas Holt's (2004) theory of brand culture provides a crucial framework for understanding how Monopoly transcends its status as a board game to become a globally recognized ideological brand. Holt argues that brands are not merely economic entities but cultural producers that construct and circulate meaning within society. They operate as myth markets, mediating between corporate ideology and popular culture by embedding ideological narratives into everyday consumption practices

(Holt, 2002; Arvidsson, 2006). Within this system, brands gain cultural authority not through advertising alone but through their ability to embody moral and social ideals that consumers use to navigate identity and be-longing.

In this context, Monopoly functions as both a commercial product and a cultural text that performs ideo-logical work through its design, marketing, and intergenerational transmission. Since its acquisition by Parker Brothers in 1935 and later by Hasbro, Monopoly has undergone continuous adaptation—local editions, digital conversions, franchise tie-ins, and celebrity versions—each iteration reaffirming the same capitalist ethos of accumulation and competition (Orbanes, 2006). This process exemplifies what Holt (2016) identifies as cultural production systems: networks of corporations, media, and consumers that co-create and sustain brand meaning. Through licensing and customization, Monopoly transforms from a singular game into a brand world—a narrative space where capitalism is celebrated as playful participation.

The commodification of play in Monopoly also aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital, wherein leisure practices serve to differentiate and legitimize social hierarchies. The ability to “master” the game—strategically acquiring property, negotiating trades, and bankrupting opponents—mirrors the accumulation of symbolic capital in capitalist societies. By translating economic logic into a recreational setting, Monopoly allows players to rehearse, validate, and even enjoy the dispositions of homo economicus. The affective pleasure of victory reproduces the emotional economy of capitalism itself: ambition, rivalry, and the moralization of success (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2013).

Moreover, as Lury (2004) argues, brands act as “interfaces of exchange” that connect material goods with symbolic systems of value. Monopoly's brand identity—embodied in the top hat, monocle, and caricatured figure of Rich Uncle Pennybags—functions as a visual condensation of capitalist virtues: wealth, shrewdness, and authority. These semiotic codes are not incidental; they stabilize the brand's mythic narrative across markets, reinforcing Holt's (2004) claim that iconic brands achieve ideological coherence by mythologizing dominant social orders. The enduring popularity of Monopoly thus lies not in its gameplay innovation but in its success as a branded ideology—an apparatus that converts economic competition into cultural pleasure, reproducing capitalist aspiration as intergenerational entertainment.

By applying Holt's framework, Monopoly can be understood as a paradigmatic instance of brand ideology in play. The game demonstrates how branding operates as a cultural mechanism for the normalization of market values, transforming critique into consumption. What began as a political commentary on ren-tier capitalism has become one of the most successful myth-marketing projects in modern culture. Through the commodification of play, Monopoly not only teaches capitalism—it brands it.

#### *D. Simulation and the Hyperreal Logic of Capitalism*

Baudrillard's (1994) theory of simulation provides a radical extension of the critique initiated by Adorno, Horkheimer, and later Bogost, shifting attention from ideology as representation to ideology as operation. In the postmodern economy of signs, according to Baudrillard, reality is no longer mirrored by representations but replaced by them. Signs cease to refer to an external truth; instead, they produce their own logic of meaning—what he famously termed hyperreality. Within this framework, Monopoly does not depict capitalism; it performs it. The game's procedural, visual, and linguistic elements converge to create a simulacrum of economic life—a closed semiotic system where value circulates without reference to labor, production, or material scarcity (Baudrillard, 1998). The abstraction of money, property, and chance in Monopoly reproduces precisely the detachment of contemporary finance capitalism from tangible economic relations.

In this sense, Monopoly is not a game about capitalism but a microcosm of its logic. The colorful bank-notes, interchangeable properties, and cheerful bankruptcies form an aesthetic of circulation—where ex-change replaces use, and accumulation becomes its own end. As Baudrillard (1994) argues, the contemporary subject is trapped in the “ecstasy of communication,” perpetually stimulated yet devoid of meaning. Similarly, Monopoly offers the ecstasy of control: the thrill of acquisition, the pleasure of domination, the spectacle of winning. But this spectacle is empty of social reference; the game models an economy without production, labor, or ethics, in which wealth emerges magically through the roll of dice and the submission of others. It transforms economic violence into play, and play into ideology.

From a semiotic perspective, the material design of Monopoly amplifies this hyperreal logic. The glossy board, the stylized currency, and the anthropomorphic figure of Rich Uncle Pennybags constitute what Baudrillard would call “fetishized signs”—objects that promise authenticity while concealing their artificiality. They aestheticize capitalism, rendering it charming, humorous, and childlike. In this transformation, the moral contradictions of exploitation are sublimated into colorful entertainment. The player's engagement thus becomes an act of participation in what Baudrillard (1983) described as the precession of simulacra—a circulation of images that precedes and replaces any material referent.

Crucially, Monopoly's endurance as a global brand demonstrates the stability of this simulation. It thrives not because it represents the real economy, but because it reassures players that capitalism is a game one can win. The illusion of fairness—identical dice, equal starting capital, standardized rules—functions as a moral technology, legitimizing inequality as the natural outcome of skill and luck. In this way, Monopoly epitomizes the hyperreal capitalism of the twenty-first century: a system in which competition masquerades as freedom, and financialization masquerades as play. The result is not ideological manipulation in the classical sense but what Baudrillard (1990) termed the perfect crime—a symbolic annihilation of reality beneath the seductive surface of simulation.

### *E. Interlude: The Magic Circle and Behavioral Socialization through Play*

The ideological potency of games cannot be understood solely through their representational or symbolic dimensions but also through their capacity to rehearse behavior within what Huizinga (2014) famously termed the magic circle of play. According to Huizinga, games constitute a temporary and voluntary world distinct from ordinary life, governed by autonomous rules that nonetheless mirror the logics of society. Yet, as later theorists such as Caillois (2001) and Sutton-Smith (1997) have argued, this boundary between play and reality is porous: the behavioral scripts enacted within the game world often migrate into social practice. Games thus operate as cultural laboratories in which ideologies are not merely represented but embodied, tested, and learned through participation.

Monopoly exemplifies this process of behavioral socialization. Within its magic circle, players willingly adopt the roles, goals, and strategies prescribed by capitalist logic—pursuing ownership, maximizing profit, exploiting scarcity, and eliminating competitors. These actions, although framed as “play,” habituate participants to perceive economic domination and inequality as natural consequences of rational choice. The affective rewards of winning—pleasure, pride, mastery—reinforce this internalization, transforming ideo-logical abstraction into embodied experience. As Giddings (2014) notes, play functions as micro-training in cultural systems, where the cognitive and emotional engagement of the player produces durable social dispositions. Through repetition and enjoyment, Monopoly thus blurs the line between simulation and performance, turning economic rationality into a learned behavior enacted as fun.

By situating play as a site of behavioral pedagogy, the game becomes a mechanism of cultural continuity. The player is not simply interpreting ideological messages but performing them—learning through action what capitalist success, risk, and failure feel like. This performative dimension of play bridges the analytical gap between simulation (Baudrillard) and consent (Gramsci), demonstrating that the ideology of capitalism endures not only because it is represented in media, but because it is practiced—repeated, embodied, and enjoyed—within the seemingly innocent sphere of play.

### *F. Hegemony and Cultural Consent*

While critical theorists and postmodernists describe the structural and semiotic mechanisms of ideology, Gramsci (1971) illuminates its affective and consensual dimension. His concept of hegemony reframes power not as direct domination but as the active negotiation of consent—an everyday process in which subordinate groups internalize the worldview of the dominant class as common sense. Culture, in this framework, functions as the primary terrain on which consent is manufactured, maintained, and renewed. The genius of capitalist ideology lies precisely in its ability to turn subjection into participation, transforming exploitation into aspiration and obedience into enjoyment (Hall, 1986).

Monopoly embodies this hegemonic logic with remarkable precision. The game does not impose capitalist values coercively; it invites players to reproduce them voluntarily through play. Each participant willingly adopts behaviors—competition, speculation, strategic exclusion—that mirror capitalist subjectivities, not out of obligation but out of pleasure. The game’s fairness rhetoric—identical rules, equal starting capital, and apparent opportunities for success—constitutes what Gramsci would call an ideological compromise formation: a balance between the illusion of equality and the inevitability of hierarchy. By consenting to these conditions, players affirm the very inequalities the game naturalizes. Thus, ideology in Monopoly operates not through indoctrination but through participation, creating what Fiske (1989) termed “productive pleasures,” where enjoyment becomes the medium of consent.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the game’s intergenerational persistence. Monopoly is transmitted within families, educational contexts, and popular culture as a moral and social exercise. Children learn the mechanics of ownership, debt, and success before understanding the socio-economic realities they model. As such, the game functions as what Gramsci (1971) described as a civil society apparatus—a cultural institution through which economic relations are reproduced as moral lessons. Every roll of the dice reenacts the drama of capitalist survival, yet its aesthetic distance renders this struggle benign, even nostalgic. The result is what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) later conceptualized as the naturalization of discourse: the transformation of ideology into common sense through repetitive, pleasurable engagement.

Through the lens of hegemony, Monopoly thus exemplifies the subtlety of contemporary ideological re-production. Its success lies not merely in its commercial longevity but in its capacity to sustain a structure of feeling (Williams, 1977) aligned with capitalist rationality—ambition, competition, and individual tri-umph. The game’s persuasive power depends on its affective economy: it secures consent through fun, emotional attachment, and nostalgia. In this sense, Monopoly does not simply teach capitalism; it enacts it as a shared moral order, transforming ideology into play and play into ideological consent.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### *A. Research Design and Rationale*

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design aimed at uncovering the ideological dimensions embedded within the rule systems, design language, and play practices of Monopoly. Qualitative inquiry is particularly suited to the study of cultural artifacts whose meanings are historically, symbolically, and socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than treating the game as an isolated object of analysis, the research approaches Monopoly as a multimodal cultural text—one that operates simultaneously through discourse, visual design, and player experience. This interpretive orientation acknowledges that games not only represent ideology but also enact it through the behaviors and affective investments they solicit.

To address this complexity, the study is structured in two interrelated analytical layers. The first layer involves a historical-discursive and semiotic examination of Monopoly's material and symbolic evolution from its original form, *The Landlord's Game* (1903), to its contemporary editions. This layer identifies how visual and textual signifiers—rulebooks, board layouts, cards, money design, and promotional campaigns—encode ideological meanings. The second layer focuses on the experiential dimension of play through in-depth interviews, investigating how players interpret, internalize, and perform the game's capitalist logics within the “magic circle” of play (Huizinga, 2014). Together, these layers enable a holistic understanding of Monopoly as both an ideological text and a behavioral training ground.

### *B. Data Collection and Sampling*

Data were collected from two primary sources: (a) textual and visual artifacts associated with Monopoly and (b) qualitative interviews with participants. The textual-visual corpus includes multiple historical and contemporary editions of the game—rulebooks, packaging, cards, promotional materials, and digital adaptations—covering the period from 1903 to 2024. These materials were selected to capture the longitudinal transformation of the game's ideological and aesthetic registers.

The second data source consists of in-depth interviews conducted with players from diverse age cohorts and varying levels of gameplay experience. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure heterogeneity in generational, socio-economic, and experiential perspectives (Patton, 2015). The sample includes individuals from three broad age groups (young adults, middle-aged players, and older adults), with a minimum total of 30 participants. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, enabling both comparability and depth. Questions addressed players' perceptions of ownership, debt, competition, taxation, chance, and visual design, as well as the moral and emotional frameworks through which they make sense of these mechanics. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized for ethical compliance.

### *C. Analytical Procedures*

The analysis proceeded in three overlapping stages combining discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and thematic analysis. The historical-discursive stage compared *The Landlord's Game* and modern Monopoly editions, tracing how the game's representational logic shifted from critique to affirmation of capitalism. This involved close reading of textual features (rules, instructions, slogans) and paratextual materials (advertisements, packaging, and public communications). The semiotic stage applied Barthesian (1972) principles of denotation and connotation to visual and material elements—color palettes, iconography, typography, spatial organization, and character representation—interpreting them as ideological sign systems.

The thematic stage addressed the interview data, employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurrent motifs in participants' accounts. Themes such as “ownership as moral virtue,” “competition as fairness,” and “luck as merit” emerged inductively through iterative coding. Cross-comparison of these themes with the semiotic findings enabled triangulation between textual, visual, and experiential dimensions, enhancing analytic credibility (Tracy, 2010).

Throughout the analysis, interpretive reflexivity was maintained to acknowledge the researcher's position within the cultural system under study (Finlay, 2002). This reflexive stance ensured that interpretations remained grounded in empirical material while sensitive to the socio-ideological context of play. The multi-layered approach thus not only illuminates how Monopoly communicates capitalist values but also how those values are internalized and emotionally rehearsed through play.

## III. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The historical development of Monopoly reveals an ideological continuity ranging from critical pedagogy to hegemonic entertainment. *The Landlord's Game*, conceived in 1903 by Elizabeth Magie, was inspired by Henry George's critique of land rent and designed as a didactic simulation aimed at highlighting the social inequalities of private property. However, the commercialization of the game as Monopoly in 1935 by Charles Darrow through Parker Brothers largely eroded this critical orientation. The Darrow version reduced the game to a single set of rules, making capitalist practices such as competition, property accumulation, and the elimination of rivals the primary objective of the game, rather than a problem to be questioned (Orbanes, 2006; Pilon, 2015). Modern Monopoly versions further reinforce this ideological line, re-producing capitalist competition as a natural, fun, and intergenerationally transferable way of life through branding, popular culture themes, and cheerful visual aesthetics. This historical timeline demonstrates that Monopoly is not merely a game, but a culturally adaptable and enduring representation of capitalist ideology.

This historical transformation demonstrates how Monopoly has been ideologically reproduced not only in its rule structure but also in its visual language, iconography, and material design elements. Therefore, this chapter aims to reveal how capitalist ideology transformed from a critical simulation into a natural, entertaining, and personalized narrative by examining the visual and design elements of the game from different periods using a semiotic approach.

No. 748,826. PATENTED JAN. 5, 1904.  
 L. J. MAGIE.  
 GAME BOARD.  
 APPLICATION FILED MAR. 23, 1903.  
 NO MODEL. 2 SHEETS—SHEET 1.

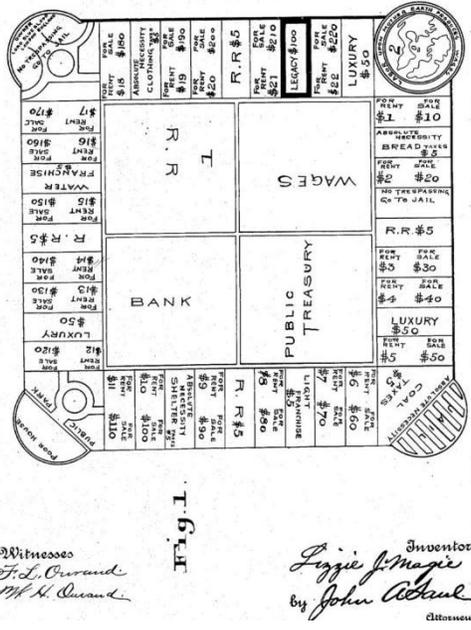


Fig. 1 The 1903 Landlord's Game Board

A. The 1903 Landlord's Game (Elizabeth Magie)

The 1903 Landlord's Game was designed by American female inventor Elizabeth Magie Phillips and patented by the U.S. Patent Office in 1904 (Patent No. 748838). The game is a thought experiment based on the critiques of rent, property, and land rent by the Georgist economist Henry George, aiming to teach about economic inequality by presenting players with two different sets of rules involving collecting rent, acquiring property, and bankrupting opponents. Magie designed the Landlord's Game as a critical pedagogical tool, aiming to demonstrate the social impacts of economic competition and monopolistic rent. This critical aspect of the game reveals a historical origin that contrasts with the simulation that normalized capitalism, which later became a commercial product of Monopoly (Orbanes, 2006).

Figure 1 shows that Landlord's Game's early design was established as an institutional economic scheme rather than a 'game' aesthetic; the central positioning of the bank and public treasury suggests that the economic order is represented as an infrastructure that precedes player action.

1) Denotation: The image shows a drawing of a "game board" with a 1903 application and 1904 patent. A square game board consists of areas arranged around its perimeter. In the center of the board are large blocks of institutional/economic terms such as "BANK," "PUBLIC TREASURY," and "WAGES"; the surrounding area is marked with different rental and sales values (e.g., "R.R."). Some corners contain directional and restrictive phrases ("Go to Jail," for example) and distinguishing headings such as "Luxury." The board, with its hand-drawn/technical drawing aesthetic, resembles a non-decorative, functional diagram; currency symbols and values are written directly and descriptively.

2) Connotation: The connotative layer of this image implies that the game is positioned as "a model rather than entertainment." The board appears more like an institutional diagram or economic mechanism schematic than a board game aesthetic. The centrally placed terms like "BANK" and "PUBLIC TREASURY" indicate that the heart of the game lies not in "everyday life" but in the "economic order"; the player's experience is tied to systemic flows (income, wages, treasury, rent, property) rather than personal stories. The central position of the "WAGES" area suggests that value production/income flow is the central axis of the game. In contrast, the purchase/rental values in the peripheral zone relate to the reduction of economic relations to a quantified, measurable, and comparable form. This reduction produces the feeling that the economic order is something "calculable" and "regulatory."

The typography and drawing style in the visual (with the seriousness of a patent drawing) code the game as an instructive/cautionary mechanism, moving it beyond "innocent family entertainment." In other words, the game is not polished like a symbolic consumer object; rather, it carries a didactic narrative language that aims to "show the system."

3) *Myth / Ideological Interpretation:* This visual, rather than glorifying capitalism as a "natural" and "inevitable" order, is closer to a logic of "ideological exposure" that makes economic relations visible and positions the player within these relations. The presence of the bank and the public treasury at the center of the board suggests that the economic order is established as an infrastructure that precedes the actors (individuals); the player operates within the conditions of this infrastructure. In this respect, the visual establishes the "playing field" not as a place of entertainment, but as a system space: the economy is not a background here, but the game itself.

Furthermore, divisive terms like "Luxury" and the unequal distribution of different rental/sale values evoke the idea of class distinction and inequality on the semiotic level of the game. The ideological emphasis here is not on the "attraction of competition," but on a sense of mechanism regarding how inequality and property relations operate. In this respect, the Landlord's Game board, compared to the "branded capitalist desire" aesthetic later seen in Monopoly, possesses a more stark and descriptive visual rhetoric: it does not hide "what the player is participating in"; it schematically reveals the system.

*B. The 1935 Darrow Board (Monopoly)*

The 1935 Darrow Board represents the first official version of Monopoly, commercially standardized by Charles Darrow (Figure 2). Published by Parker Brothers in 1935, this design simplified elements derived from Elizabeth Magie's The Landlord's Game, transforming the game into a mass-consumption entertainment product (Orbanes, 2006). The Darrow version largely eliminated the game's critical pedagogical aspects, adopting a single-rule, competitive, and elimination-based structure. With this transformation, Monopoly ceased to be a simulation questioning private property, rent, and monopolization, becoming a game that reproduces capitalist accumulation and competition as a natural and enjoyable process (Pilón, 2015; Fuchs, 2022). In this respect, the 1935 Darrow Board represents a turning point in the game's ideo-logical orientation.

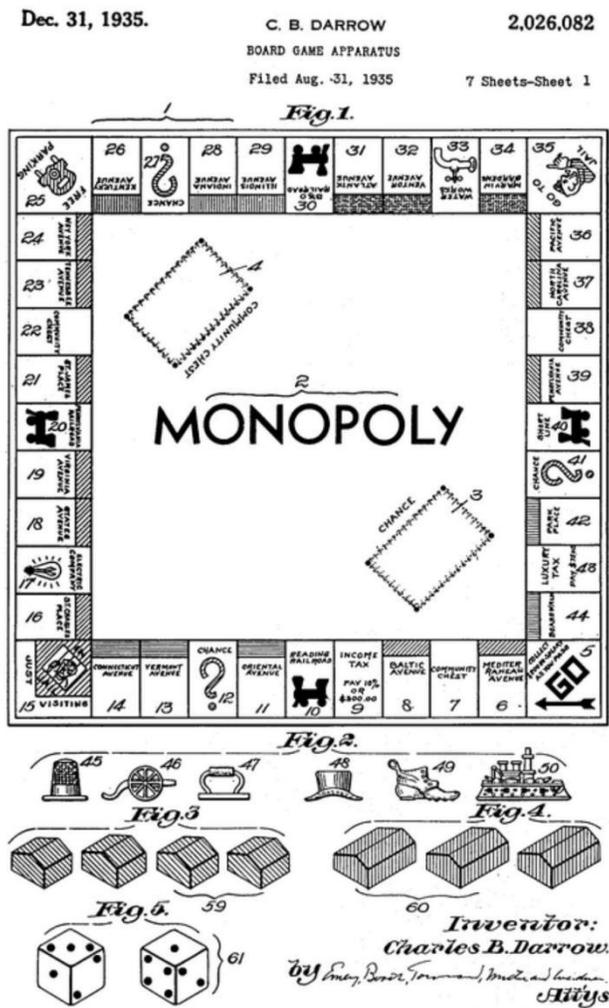


Fig. 2 The first official version of Monopoly, Darrow Board

1) *Denotation:* The image shows a patent drawing of the Monopoly game board, registered in 1935 in the name of Charles B. Darrow. While the square form is retained, a large, empty space is located in the center of the board; the word "MONOPOLY" is prominently positioned in the middle of this space. The surrounding area contains named properties, railroads, tax zones, "Chance" and "Community Chest" squares, and directional locations such as "Go to Jail" and "Free Parking." The lower section shows game figures (hat, iron, shoes, etc.), house-hotel blocks, and dice as separate figures. The drawing style is more iconographic and symbolic compared to Landlord's Game.

2) *Connotation:* The most striking connotation of this image is the decentralization and rendering invisible of the economic system. Unlike Landlord's Game, where the bank, treasury, and wages were explicitly central, Darrow Board leaves the center empty, filled only by the brand name ("MONOPOLY"). This emptiness implies that the game is no longer a "display of an economic order," but a playable arena of competition. The economy is no longer shown; it is assumed.

Property names in the perimeter are represented by place names and icons rather than numerical values. This suggests that economic relationships are coded not as an abstract system, but as desirable goals. The "Chance" and "Community Chest" areas have replaced the public and structural economy concepts of the previous game; the economy is reduced to the level of individual luck and chance. Thus, systemic inequalities are reduced to personal chance.

Furthermore, the game figures and house-hotel blocks shown in the lower section highlight the material culture of the game. The board is no longer a schema, but a universe of consumption surrounded by collectible objects. This suggests that the game has transformed from a "educational" tool into an object that can be "owned," "played," and "branded."

4) *Myth / Ideological Interpretation:* The fundamental myth produced by Darrow Board is the myth of justice gamified by capitalism. The central void allows the economic order to be accepted as an unquestionable and invisible background. The player learns not how the system works, but how to win within the system. Thus, the game does not explain capitalism; it naturalizes capitalist behavior.

The central dominance of the name "Monopoly" shows that the game no longer functions as a critique, but as an ideological slogan. Monopolization is not a problem here, but the name and goal of the game. The coding of property with color groups visually aestheticizes the hierarchy; high-level properties (dark colors) are desirable, lower levels become commonplace. Inequality is no longer exposed; it is played and provides pleasure.

In this context, Darrow Board is placed on a plane that can be read with Baudrillard's concept of simulation: the game does not represent capitalism; it produces a sense of a capitalist world. Money, labor, production, or public interest are invisible; only circulation, winning, and elimination remain. In this simulation, the player is shaped not as an economic subject, but as a competitive actor.

### C. Modern Monopoly

Modern Monopoly, a board game produced and marketed globally by Hasbro, has undergone a significant process of branding and thematic diversification while retaining the core rules of the Darrow version standardized in 1935. Today, Monopoly enjoys a wide cultural reach through popular culture themes, film and brand collaborations, localized city versions, and digital adaptations (Orbanes, 2006; Pilon, 2015). These contemporary versions maintain the game's capitalist logic of competition, property accumulation, and elimination of rivals, while presenting these practices as a natural and harmless gaming experience through cheerful visual aesthetics and a discourse of entertainment. Thus, modern Monopoly has moved away from its critical origins, functioning as a hegemonic form of entertainment that makes capitalist competition a cultural norm passed down through generations.



Fig. 3 Modern Monopoly (Hasbro)

1) *Denotation*: Figure 3 shows the box design, game board, property cards, “Chance” and “Community Chest” cards, game currency, and metal figures of the modern Monopoly game produced by Hasbro. The box features a large, central “MONOPOLY” logo on a red background; the Rich Uncle Pennybags character is gesturing towards the player with a smiling face. Slogans such as “Buy, sell, dream, and scheme!” and “Bankrupt your opponents to win it all!” are clearly visible. The game board features the brand logo in the center, surrounded by properties, taxes, chance areas, and directional squares. The card designs are simple, with icons and short text.

2) *Connotation*: The core connotation of this visual set is the presentation of capitalism as a cheerful, risk-free, and fun fantasy of life. The bright red, blue, and white colors used in the box design soften concepts like fierce competition and bankruptcy, creating a child-friendly aesthetic. The smiling face and inviting hand of the Rich Uncle Pennybags character transform the capitalist figure from a threatening authority into a lovable guide. Thus, economic power is associated not with fear or exploitation, but with chance, intelligence, and fun.

The language of the slogans is striking: The phrase “Buy, sell, dream, and scheme” equates buying and selling not merely as economic actions, but as dreaming and strategizing. The phrase “Bankrupt your opponents to win it all” explicitly normalizes the bankruptcy of opponents as the natural and legitimate goal of the game. Bankruptcy here is not a moral or social problem; it is the exciting climax of the game.

The empty space in the center of the game board, as in the previous Darrow Board, makes the economic system itself invisible. At the center is only the brand logo; there is no visual representation of the bank, production, or labor. The economy is no longer a structure to be explained; it becomes a natural ground, identified with the game itself.

The minimal iconography (question mark, chest, train symbol) and short commands in the card designs simplify and personalize economic processes. Taxes, penalties, rewards, and aid are presented as individual chance and momentary events, detached from their political or structural context. This produces a narrative that obscures the systemic causes of economic inequalities.

3) *Myth / Ideological Interpretation*: The fundamental myth produced by the current Monopoly is that of “fair and fun capitalism.” The game portrays the capitalist system not as a questionable order, but as a competitive arena where everyone starts equal and the winner “deserves” it. The cheerful language and character design on the board mask the harshness of competition, transforming it into an enjoyable experience. Thus, capitalism ceases to be a conflictual and exclusionary structure; it becomes mythologized as a playable, learnable, and desirable way of life.

This myth is particularly powerful for children and families. The current design transforms the game from a pedagogical critique into a cultural tool that internalizes economic habits and values at an early age. Saving money, accumulating property, and eliminating rivals are presented as “part of the game,” without any moral debate. Ideology here operates not through explicit discourse, but through joy and repetition.

#### D. The Iconographic Evolution of Rich Uncle Pennybags: The Normalization of the Capitalist Figure

The 1935 Monopoly figure, Rich Uncle Pennybags, in its early representation, is distinctly based on a class stereotype: it evokes the aristocratic and distant “rich man” image of classic industrial capitalism (Figure 4). This iconography symbolizes a figure who builds his wealth on historical privilege, inheritance, and rentier status; the character creates a symbolic distance between himself and the player and codes wealth as an unattainable status. In the early representation, Pennybags is an elite figure who directly displays his power but is emotionally limited, almost caricatured.

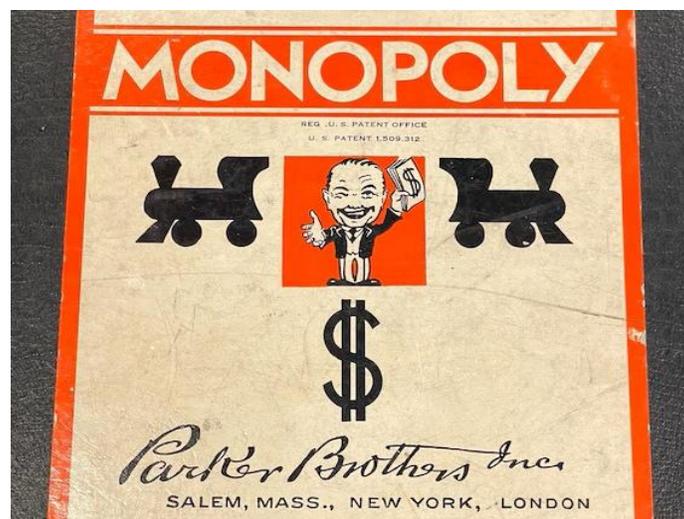


Fig. 4 Rich Uncle Pennybags 1935

In modern Monopoly, however, the same character has undergone a significant visual and semantic transformation. His facial features have been softened, his expressions exaggeratedly cheerful; his body language has become inviting, eye-level with the player, and open to interaction (Figure 5). While the cane and top hat are retained, these objects no longer function as distant symbols but as nostalgic and "lovable" symbols. Thus, the capitalist figure is transformed from a threatening or privileged figure into a fun guide and mascot of the game. Wealth and power are presented not through critical distance, but through warmth and humor.



Fig. 5 Rich Uncle Pennybags of Modern Monopoly

This iconographic transformation concretizes the process of cultural normalization of capitalism at a visual level. Pennybags' evolution removes wealth from being a historical privilege and a sign of structural inequality, associating it with individual game success and enjoyable competition. Thus, the figure functions as a "softening strategy," masking the harsh and exclusionary aspects of capitalist ideology. From a semiotic perspective, the character's change is not merely an aesthetic update; it represents the contemporary cultural imagination of the capitalist subject, that is, the presentation of power as a norm to be embraced rather than criticized. This transformation necessitates a more detailed semiotic analysis of the figure's in-game meaning production and ideological function in the next stage.

*1)Denotation:* The Rich Uncle Pennybags character is represented in the current visual identity of the Monopoly brand as an elderly, white-skinned male figure wearing a top hat, bow tie, and carrying a cane. The character usually has a smiling facial expression; in some depictions he is extending his hand towards the player, while in others he is shown in motion or surrounded by money. On current Monopoly boxes and cards, Pennybags has become a central and defining visual element as the game's mascot.

*2)Connotation:* The Rich Uncle Pennybags character is represented in the current visual identity of the Monopoly brand as an elderly, white-skinned male figure wearing a top hat, bow tie, and carrying a cane. The character usually has a smiling facial expression; in some depictions he is extending his hand towards the player, while in others he is shown in motion or surrounded by money. On current Monopoly boxes and cards, Pennybags has become a central and defining visual element as the game's mascot.

*3)Myth / Ideological Interpretation:* Iconographically, Rich Uncle Pennybags' primary function is to produce the myth of the "benign capitalist." This myth makes the oppressive, exclusionary, or unjust aspects of capitalism invisible, morally legitimizing the system through individual intelligence, luck, and entrepreneurship. Pennybags' presence softens the harsh economic consequences in the game (bankruptcy, dispossession, elimination); it frames these consequences not as a systemic problem, but as a necessary part of the game's fun.

This mythological structure is particularly powerful for children and families. For players who are introduced to capitalist values at an early age, Pennybags functions not as a figure of fear, but as a role model. Thus, the capitalist subject ceases to be an actor to be criticized; it transforms into an identity to be imitated and adopted.

*4)Historical Transformation: From Invisibility to Centrality:* The character's iconographic evolution runs parallel to Monopoly's ideological transformation. In the Landlord's Game era, there is no prominent mascot figure; the critique is directed at the system itself. With the 1935 Darrow Board, the economy becomes invisible, and figurative representation remains

secondary. In the current Monopoly, Pennybags becomes the central symbol of the game, replacing the system with a personal face. The economy is no longer an anonymous structure; it is represented through a smiling character.

This transition represents the shift of ideology from an abstract structure to a concrete figure. System critique gives way to identification with the character. Instead of questioning capitalism, the player identifies with Pennybags; thus, ideology operates through emotional connection, eliminating critical distance.

5) *Ideological Function*: Rich Uncle Pennybags, beyond being a character in the Monopoly universe, is an ideological interface. It softens the relationship between the player and the economic system, emphasizing personal skill and chance over intermediaries and structural forces. This aligns with the hegemonic functioning of the capitalist order: power is reproduced not through coercion, but through consent and pleasure.

The character's iconography also demonstrates how capitalism updates itself. Instead of a rigid, disciplined, and distant figure, a flexible, fun, and consumable identity is presented. Thus, capitalism becomes not just a game to be played, but a beloved character.

#### E. Barbie Monopoly: The Hybridization of Popular Culture, Gender, and Capitalist Ideology



Fig. 6 Barbie Monopoly

1) *Denotation*: Barbie Monopoly visuals depict a Monopoly box designed with a predominantly pink color palette, Barbie-themed playing cards (“Dream Career”, “Dream Closet”), character figures, and property cards (Figure 6). The box features Barbie figures representing different ethnicities; phrases like “Step into your dream world” present the game through a narrative of dreaming and individual achievement. While the game mechanics retain the classic Monopoly rules, the visual language and narrative are adapted to the aesthetic and ideological universe of the Barbie brand.

2) *Connotation*: The fundamental connotation of this example is the repackaging of capitalist ideology, softened by popular culture and gender discourse. The “You can be anything” narrative, which the Barbie brand has carried for many years, when combined with Monopoly’s competitive and exclusionary economic logic, equates economic success with personal dreams, self-confidence, and self-actualization. The pink color palette and stylized icons aesthetically mask the harshness of economic relations, moving capitalism into an emotionally safe space.

Card titles like “Dream Career” and “Dream Closet” frame ownership and consumption not as a necessity or element of competition, but as a practice of self-expression and dream realization. This relates economic gain not to a moral or structural issue, but to individual desire and style choice. Thus, ownership becomes not a class privilege, but an indicator of aesthetic and identity achievement.

3) *Myth / Ideological Interpretation*: The fundamental myth generated by Barbie Monopoly is the “empowered consumer” myth. This myth reproduces a narrative frequently encountered in neoliberal popular culture: the individual is empowered, liberated, and self-actualized through consumption and ownership. Although the game progresses through the representation of women, instead of questioning the capitalist structure, it re-presents it as an inclusive and positive experience.

In this context, the Barbie figure does not replace the male capitalist subject historically represented by Rich Uncle Pennybags; it reproduces his function within an emotional and aesthetic framework. Elements such as competition, bankruptcy, and dispossession persist in the game, but their ideological rigidity becomes invisible thanks to the discourse of a “dream world.” Capitalism, here, is not an oppressive system; it is mythologized as a playground where everyone can realize their dreams.

4) *Comparative Reading with Rich Uncle Pennybags*: While Rich Uncle Pennybags legitimizes capitalist ideology through a paternalistic and endearing male figure, Barbie Monopoly reproduces the same ideology through a post-feminist and popular culture-based narrative. In both cases, the system is not criticized; it is simply repackaged with iconographies suitable for different target audiences. This demonstrates the hegemonic flexibility and cultural adaptability of capitalism.

5) *Barbie Monopoly and the Gamification of Post-Feminist Capitalism*: Post-feminist capitalism denotes a configuration of contemporary capitalism in which selectively decontextualized feminist signifiers (e.g., “empowerment,” “choice,” “confidence,” “independence”) are incorporated into market institutions and media industries such that gendered inequalities are reproduced through ostensibly feminist cultural forms and economic practices (Byerly, 2020; Cantillon et al., 2023). In feminist political economy terms, it describes how capitalist accumulation and governance naturalize gender bias within communicative institutions—via ownership, commercialization, and routine industrial imperatives—while rendering this bias legible as personal preference or lifestyle rather than structural power (Byerly, 2020; Mosco, 2018). Within media and advertising systems, post-feminist capitalism operates through commodification: feminism is packaged as a saleable aesthetic or brand value that can be attached to commodities, celebrities, and franchises, thereby translating political claims into market differentiation and corporate strategy (Koushik & Reed, 2018; Knoche, 2023). This dynamic also reshapes visibility, where mediated “feminist” recognition becomes conditional on norms of femininity and platform-friendly legibility, producing moderated forms of feminism compatible with competitive attention economies (Mavin et al., 2018; Toffoletti, 2014).

In digital capitalism, post-feminist capitalism is further characterized by the promotion of the entrepreneurial self and individualized self-branding as routes to gendered agency, while platform infrastructures commercialize and regulate such labor through data extraction and monetization logics (Guo, 2022; Greer, 2020). Feminist interventions and activism are thus simultaneously enabled and constrained by industrial arrangements (including streaming and platformization) and by the political-economic pressures surrounding production, circulation, and regulation (Liao & Ling, 2024; Chen & Ding, 2024). Finally, because feminist media and political economy scholarship stresses transnational flows of capital, images, and governance, post-feminist capitalism should be understood as globally uneven: it travels through differentiated regimes of state regulation, platform power, and racialized histories that shape which “feminisms” can be commodified and which are marginalized (Hegde, 2008; Zeffiro, 2010).

Barbie Monopoly reproduces the fundamental logic of post-feminist capitalism through its game mechanics and visual language. Post-feminist discourse reduces demands for equality and empowerment to narratives of individual choice, self-confidence, and self-actualization, detaching them from structural critiques; Barbie Monopoly explicitly visualizes this reduction. In the game, property, competition, and accumulation remain central goals; however, these goals are now obscured by emotional and aesthetic concepts such as “dreaming,” “career choice,” and “personal style.” Thus, economic success is removed from being a result of collective inequalities and framed as a matter of individual desire and entrepreneurship.

In this context, the Barbie figure does not represent a critique of patriarchal capitalism; rather, it functions as an interface that makes it more inclusive and appealing. The representation of women implies not a transformation of the system, but an expansion of participation within it. The logic of the competitive market is not questioned; it is simply transformed into a form that “women can play too.” Thus, Barbie Monopoly, as a typical example of post-feminist capitalist ideology that reconciles feminist gains with consumerism, positions equality not in structural transformation, but in individual achievement and a stylized narrative of ownership.

#### IV. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis of participant interviews revealed three overarching patterns that illuminate how Monopoly operates as an ideological apparatus within the experiential realm of play. Across different age cohorts and gameplay experiences, participants consistently articulated moral, emotional, and strategic rationales aligned with capitalist logics of property, competition, and merit. The findings indicate that Monopoly is not merely a leisure activity but a performative medium through which players internalize and reproduce the affective and moral dimensions of capitalist subjectivity.

##### A. Theme 1: Ownership as Moral Virtue

Participants consistently portrayed property acquisition as the definitive indicator of success within Monopoly, describing ownership not only as a strategic necessity but as a moral achievement. Across interviews, terms such as “earning it,” “being smart with money,” and “not wasting opportunities” surfaced repeatedly, revealing how accumulation was imbued with ethical overtones. Success was rarely framed in terms of chance or circumstance; rather, it was narrated as the natural reward of diligence, foresight, and intelligence. This alignment between property and morality echoes Weber’s (2002) notion of the Protestant ethic, in which material gain functions as evidence of individual virtue and divine favor. Within the ludic economy of Monopoly, economic accumulation becomes not merely instrumental but redemptive—a symbolic affirmation of personal worth.

This moralization of ownership also reflects a broader ideological process of naturalizing inequality. Players rarely questioned the structural design of the game that makes wealth concentration inevitable; instead, disparities were rationalized as the outcome of effort, competence, or “good financial decisions.” Even when participants acknowledged the role of luck,

they often reinterpreted it through a meritocratic lens—seeing “lucky rolls” as rewards for strategic patience or calculated risk-taking. The conflation of luck and merit thereby sustains what Bourdieu (1984) calls symbolic violence: the internalization of domination as legitimate difference. Those who resisted monopolistic or exploitative play—by, for instance, avoiding bankrupting others—were gently mocked or excluded from the competitive rhythm of the group, dismissed as “too soft” or “not getting the point.” Such reactions suggest that Monopoly enforces not only economic logic but moral conformity, constructing a shared habitus in which greed is reframed as ambition and domination as fairness.

Emotional responses further intensified this moral framework. Participants described a sense of pride and self-validation upon acquiring entire color sets or building hotels, often linking these achievements to feelings of security and self-efficacy. Losing, by contrast, evoked shame or frustration, interpreted as a failure of planning rather than a structural inevitability of the game. These affective dynamics exemplify what Fromm (1976) termed the having orientation—a worldview in which self-worth derives from possession rather than being. Within this orientation, material control becomes the axis of identity: to own is to exist meaningfully. The pleasure derived from ownership, therefore, is not purely hedonic but existential; it affirms the self within a moral order that equates possession with virtue.

Ultimately, this theme demonstrates how Monopoly converts property ownership into a moral narrative of worth, effort, and intelligence. It teaches that to succeed is to deserve and to fail is to lack competence or discipline. Through repeated play, this moral economy of ownership becomes naturalized, embedding the capitalist ethic into emotional and cognitive schemas of self-evaluation. In this sense, the game does not merely simulate the capitalist system—it sanctifies it, transforming economic success into a moral virtue and failure into moral inadequacy.

### *B. Theme 2: Competition and the Ideology of Fairness*

A second central theme emerging from participant narratives concerns the normalization of competitive individualism through the rhetoric of fairness. Across interviews, participants emphasized that Monopoly is “fair because everyone starts equally,” that “luck balances things out,” and that “the best player always wins.” This recurrent discourse of equality and merit constructs what Lazzarato (2012) terms the entrepreneurial subject: an individual who perceives freedom and competition as moral imperatives rather than structural conditions. The illusion of equality at the game’s outset—each player receiving identical capital and opportunities—functions as an ideological apparatus that conceals systemic asymmetry. Despite equal beginnings, the game’s mechanics inevitably favor accumulation and monopoly formation, ensuring that advantage compounds over time. Yet players rarely identified this structural bias, interpreting success as a reflection of personal intelligence or prudence rather than the mathematical inevitability of the system.

This conflation of fairness with meritocracy echoes Hayek’s (1948) neoliberal argument that markets are just because they are impersonal—because no central actor determines outcomes. Within Monopoly, dice rolls and chance cards simulate such impersonal market forces, endowing them with moral legitimacy. Randomness is aestheticized as fairness, and inequality is reframed as the natural outcome of rational play. As participants recounted, “if you play smart, you win,” or “everyone has the same dice, so it’s fair.” These statements encapsulate what Rawls (1971) would critique as procedural justice without distributive justice—a faith in process that disregards consequences. The “fairness” of Monopoly thus resides not in equal outcomes but in the equal right to compete, mirroring the ideological foundation of capitalist liberalism.

Affective responses reinforced this ideology of fairness. Many participants described feeling justified satisfaction when defeating opponents, often interpreting victory as proof of competence rather than privilege. The emotional pleasure of winning and the humiliation of losing generated a moral economy in which inequality was not merely tolerated but emotionally validated. This resonates with Frank’s (2011) analysis of winner-take-all societies, where success and failure are psychologized, transforming structural inequity into personal narrative. Players experiencing early financial setbacks rarely questioned the rules themselves; instead, they blamed their own “poor strategy,” “recklessness,” or “lack of planning.” Through this self-attribution, Monopoly effectively internalizes the logic of capitalist self-responsibility—what Foucault (2008) described as the conduct of conduct, where power operates through self-discipline rather than coercion.

Furthermore, the social dynamics of play reveal how the ideology of fairness becomes performative. Players collectively police moral boundaries of “good play”: overly aggressive tactics are justified as “smart,” while calls for leniency are framed as weakness. This moralization of competition produces a form of ludic hegemony—a shared understanding that domination within the game is both natural and deserved. Even participants who recognized the inherent unfairness of Monopoly often defended it as “just a game,” reproducing what Žižek (1989) calls cynical ideology—knowing the system is unjust yet participating in it because enjoyment depends on it.

Ultimately, the theme of fairness reveals Monopoly’s role as a pedagogical instrument that moralizes competition. By equating equal opportunity with justice and success with worth, the game enacts the fundamental narrative of capitalist ideology: that inequality is legitimate if produced through fair rules. In this way, Monopoly transforms the market’s structural violence into a playful morality of effort and reward, teaching that justice resides not in equality of condition but in the freedom to compete.

### *C. Theme 3: Learning Capitalist Habitus through Play*

Participants’ narratives converged on a pattern of skill acquisition that exceeded mere rule mastery and, instead, resembled the formation of durable, transposable dispositions—what Bourdieu terms habitus (Bourdieu, 1984, 1990). Across interviews, players described “thinking ahead,” “protecting assets,” “leveraging debt,” “timing trades,” and “pressuring rivals” as instincts

that felt increasingly “natural” with repeated sessions. This routinization indicates that Monopoly furnishes not only a cognitive script but also an embodied, pre-reflective orientation toward calculation, risk, and competitive positioning. In Bourdieusian terms, the game inculcates a practical sense for accumulation—an ethos of vigilance and opportunism—thereby translating the field’s objective structures (rules, payoffs, scarcity) into subjective schemata of action (Bourdieu, 1990).

Interviewees also reported strong affective calibration: excitement accompanying acquisitions, anxiety around liquidity crises, and guilty pleasure or open *schadenfreude* at an opponent’s bankruptcy. Such emotional attunement exemplifies Illouz’s (2007) account of emotional capitalism, wherein market rationalities are braided with affective rewards and punishments. Victory was not only a technical achievement but a felt validation of foresight and self-control; conversely, loss was moralized as a failure of prudence. These affective repertoires consolidate the learning of economic dispositions, rendering the pursuit of advantage viscerally gratifying and the acceptance of unequal outcomes emotionally reasonable.

At the meso-level of interaction, players described tacit classroom-like dynamics: novices “watching how the best player negotiates,” copying opening moves, and internalizing when to mortgage, when to liquidate, and when to bluff. This aligns with Bandura’s (1977) social learning mechanisms—modeling, vicarious reinforcement, and normative feedback—through which successful behaviors are observed, imitated, and stabilized. Moreover, table talk, teasing, and group laughter around pivotal moments (e.g., a devastating rent payment) functioned as ritual intensifiers that, in Collins’s (2004) terms, generate interaction ritual chains; these rituals endow competitive dominance with collective energy and legitimacy, further sedimenting the emergent habitus.

Structuration is also visible in the recursive relation between agency and rules. Players repeatedly invoked the “fairness” and “inevitability” of the system to justify aggressive tactics, even as their tactics reproduced the very asymmetries they perceived as natural. In Giddens’s (1984) sense, the rules/resources of the game are both the medium and outcome of conduct: participants draw upon the rule-set to act, and their patterned actions reproduce the rule-set’s moral order. Over time, strategies developed within the magic circle (Huizinga, 2014) were reported to “spill over” into everyday heuristics—e.g., treating real-life budgeting as “keeping cash for the bad squares,” or describing career moves as “completing a color set.” Such metaphoric migration suggests a Swidlerian “tool kit” effect: play supplies ready-to-hand cultural strategies that can be redeployed beyond the game (Swidler, 1986).

Taken together, the interview data indicate that Monopoly operates as a pedagogical apparatus for the cultivation of a capitalist habitus: a learned orientation that normalizes calculative reason, valorizes assertive competition, and fuses economic success with moral and affective gratification. Through repetition, social modeling, and emotionally charged ritual, players come to feel what capitalist winning requires and to judge themselves and others accordingly. In short, the game trains a way of being—converting capitalist rationality into a lived, enjoyable, and portable disposition.

#### *D. Game Mechanics as Ideological Pedagogy*

Beyond players’ reflections, the rules of Monopoly themselves constitute a structured system of ideological instruction. As Bogost (2007) argues in his theory of procedural rhetoric, games persuade not through narrative or image but through rule-based interaction — by teaching players how systems work and which behaviors are rewarded. In Monopoly, the procedural logic rewards accumulation, penalizes liquidity crises, and normalizes elimination as the ultimate condition of success. The victory condition — the bankruptcy of all others — encodes a zero-sum ontology in which prosperity is conceivable only through others’ failure. Within this mechanical grammar, the values of competition, ownership, and domination are not merely represented but enacted as the path to legitimacy.

The game’s economy privileges passive income over active labor: wealth grows through rent extraction, not productive activity. Properties generate value simply by being owned, reinforcing a rentier ideology that divorces profit from work (Harvey, 2010). Meanwhile, mechanisms such as “passing GO” or collecting \$200 institutionalize the myth of cyclical reward, presenting economic survival as a matter of regular participation rather than systemic inequality. Penalties such as “Go to Jail” depoliticize punishment, treating loss of agency as random misfortune rather than structural consequence. The game’s procedural universe thus cultivates a worldview in which economic justice is reduced to rule compliance and prosperity is attainable through tactical obedience.

Chance and Community Chest cards further perform ideological work by aestheticizing contingency. They frame taxation, inheritance, and welfare as randomized events, stripping them of political context. Paying taxes or receiving aid is presented as luck rather than a question of justice or redistribution. This randomization legitimizes inequality by naturalizing economic shocks as neutral forces. Similarly, mortgaging property to raise liquidity teaches the logic of financialization: that debt is a legitimate, even virtuous, strategy when used to sustain investment. The moral valence of indebtedness, typically negative in everyday discourse, is inverted within the game — debt becomes discipline, not failure (Lazzarato, 2012).

Moreover, the rule that all players must “build evenly” across properties before upgrading to hotels imposes a simulacrum of market regulation. It offers the illusion of fairness through procedural constraint, while the underlying dynamic — accumulation as virtue — remains untouched. The aesthetic order of colored property groups translates directly into social hierarchy: the cheap browns and blues mirror working-class precarity, while the dark blues symbolize elite exclusivity. The rising rent scale functions as a moral ladder that equates wealth with worth. To ascend is to succeed, to fail is to forfeit belonging.

Through these mechanics, Monopoly converts capitalist logic into playability. Each rule operates as a pedagogical script, rehearsing the moral order of the market: that success is rational, inequality is natural, and competition is the engine of justice.

The game's procedural design does not simply mirror capitalism — it trains its affective and ethical reflexes. Players learn not only to calculate but to believe that domination, speculation, and rent extraction are legitimate and even pleasurable paths to victory. In this sense, Monopoly is a behavioral model of hegemony, teaching the ethos of capitalism through the very act of playing by the rules.

## V. DISSCUSIONS

In feminist political economy and critical cultural analysis, Monopoly can be read as an exemplary case of ideological transformation: a cultural form initially designed to critique rentier extraction and land monopoly is reconstituted as a mass-market entertainment that naturalizes capitalist property relations through habitual play and commercial circulation. Orbanes' and Pilon's historical reconstructions locate the game's origins in Lizzie Magie's *The Landlord's Game*, whose didactic purpose was to render the social consequences of land concentration and rent extraction experientially intelligible to ordinary players. In this origin story, the central mechanism is pedagogical: players learn that "ownership" and "rent" are not neutral economic facts but contestable social arrangements with distributive effects—precisely the kind of critique the later branded product would invert.

The ideological pivot occurs through corporate appropriation and redesign. Orbanes and Pilon each describe how the game's trajectory into Parker Brothers' portfolio entailed a shift from a reformist or anti-monopolist lesson into a commercially legible narrative of competitive acquisition, in which the accumulation of property and the extraction of rent become the explicit criteria of success. This inversion aligns with wider accounts of how capitalist culture can reincorporate resistance as saleable lifestyle form: oppositional meanings are not simply censored but repackaged as consumable pleasure compatible with existing accumulation logics Strangelove (2025). Hackett and Coghlan emphasize that the corporate owner's version became "the exact opposite" of the game's anti-capitalist aims, exemplifying how authorship, credit, and narrative framing are reorganized to stabilize the commodity's dominant meaning in popular culture (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023).

As a cultural artifact, Monopoly normalizes capitalist ideology by embedding a proprietorial worldview in routine leisure. The game's repeated dramatization of private property, bargaining, and bankruptcy trains players to interpret inequality as an outcome of "playing well" under given rules rather than as a political-economic structure open to democratic redesign. In this sense, normalization is achieved through mediation: the ideology is not only represented but enacted, rehearsed, and domesticated as family entertainment, thereby converting historical contingencies of property and rent into apparently timeless common sense. The game's recognizability as "capitalist propaganda" in contexts that explicitly resisted capitalist ideology—such as its rejection and socialist redesign in pre-Communist and Communist Hungary—further indicates that Monopoly's mainstream form had come to signify capitalism affirmatively rather than critically (Livingstone, 2009). Finally, the game's long-term dominance is inseparable from its commercial promotion within advertising- and branding-driven media economies that help stabilize capitalist social relations by making them pleasurable, familiar, and ubiquitous (Knoche, 2023).

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Monopoly can be read as an ideological game insofar as it embeds and rehearses a particular political-economic "common sense" through its core mechanics, victory conditions, and routine forms of play. Scholarship on the game's genealogy emphasizes that the corporate version of Monopoly has diverged from the critical intent of its earlier anti-capitalist narrative, producing what has been described as "the exact opposite" of the original aims associated with the *Landlord's Game* lineage (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023). This continuity-through-reversal is analytically central: the recognizably stable mechanical grammar—acquiring property, charging rent, and eliminating opponents—persists, but the interpretive frame and cultural function shift from critique of monopolization to the pleasurable enactment of it (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023).

As a cultural artifact, Monopoly normalizes capitalist values by positioning accumulation and exclusion as both rational and entertaining. The rules legitimate rent extraction as a routine entitlement of ownership, while bankruptcy and player elimination construct dispossession as a natural endpoint of competitive exchange rather than an effect of institutional design (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023). The ideological effect is amplified because the game is not merely representational: it requires repeated performance. In this sense, Monopoly exemplifies how mediated forms organize everyday understandings, inviting players to inhabit rule-governed scenarios that carry historical and political implications into domestic leisure contexts (Livingstone, 2009). The fact that Monopoly was identified as "capitalist propaganda" in specific national contexts—and rejected or redesigned accordingly—further underscores that its mainstream ruleset had become culturally interpretable as a vehicle for capitalist ideology rather than a neutral game of chance (Livingstone, 2009).

From a political economy perspective, this normalization is also inseparable from processes of commodification: cultural forms are transformed into marketable products whose exchange value depends on stabilizing a dominant meaning and sustaining circulation (Mosco, 2018). In capitalist media economies, promotion and branding work ideologically and economically to stabilize the foundations of accumulation, making particular social relations feel inevitable and desirable (Knoche, 2023). More broadly, analyses of capitalist culture note its recurrent capacity to absorb and repackage resistant or critical meanings into consumable forms, converting critique into a durable commodity logic (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023; . For critical game and cultural studies, Monopoly therefore remains a paradigmatic object: it demonstrates how ideology can be operationalized through design (property as the central resource), rules (rent and elimination), and play (rehearsed competitive

subjectivities), while its historical reversals illuminate the cultural power of commercialization to reframe political meanings (Hackett & Coghlan, 2023; Mosco, 2018).

Taken together, Orbanes (2006) and Pilon (2015) show that Monopoly is best understood not merely as a popular pastime but as an ideological game whose contemporary pleasures depend on a historically specific transformation of meaning from critique to affirmation. Both accounts foreground a continuity of core mechanics—buying, charging rent, and eliminating rivals—that links Lizzie Magie’s *The Landlord’s Game* to the branded commodity now recognized globally as Monopoly. Yet, this continuity is not politically neutral: the very persistence of these mechanics enables the game to function as a model of property relations in which rent extraction and exclusion are made legible through play rather than policy debate. In this sense, the game’s historical lineage matters because it indicates that what is now experienced as “classic” gameplay originated in an explicitly didactic design concerned with land monopoly and its distributive harms.

Orbanes (2006) and Pilon (2015) also clarify that the decisive ideological shift occurred through processes of commercialization, authorship consolidation, and mass-market framing, whereby the anti-monopolist critique became reorganized into a competitive fantasy of accumulation. As later critical commentary emphasizes, this corporate reframing effectively reverses the early game’s political intent, producing a cultural artifact whose dominant narrative is no longer reform but the celebration (and naturalization) of winning through monopolization. Read through broader theories of capitalist cultural co-optation, this trajectory exemplifies how oppositional meanings can be reincorporated into commodities as pleasurable, market-compatible forms, without needing to preserve their original political critique.

As an ideological apparatus enacted in domestic and social settings, Monopoly then normalizes capitalist values by inviting players to internalize its rule-bound moral economy: accumulation is rewarded, rentier extraction is legitimate, and others’ dispossession is an ordinary (even entertaining) outcome of “the game.” This normalization is intensified by mediation and repetition, since the ideological content is not only represented but habitually performed, becoming part of everyday common sense in the very spaces where leisure and family culture reproduce wider social imaginaries. The game’s durability as a commodity is likewise inseparable from advertising- and branding-centered media economies that help stabilize capitalist relations by attaching them to familiar, portable entertainment forms.

For critical game studies and cultural studies, Monopoly therefore remains analytically productive precisely because its ideological work is visible at the level of design, rules, and player elimination, while also being historically traceable as a shift from critique to commodity. Its frequent pedagogical “hacking” into simulations of inequality further demonstrates its usefulness as an object for critical reinterpretation, since modified Monopoly variants are explicitly used to foreground structural stratification that the commercial ruleset tends to naturalize. In sum, Monopoly endures as a paradigmatic case of how games can operationalize political economy as everyday play, and how that operationalization can be redirected to reproduce—rather than contest—capitalist ideology.

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