

# ‘Here Be Dragons’: Aesthetics, Affect and Ethics in Videogame Cartography\*

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## Introduction

The Hunt-Lenox globe of 1510, now housed in the New York Public Library, is said to bear the famous phrase ‘Hic Sunt Dracones’ (‘Here Be Dragons’) that has almost achieved mythical proportions in descriptions of medieval maps today. One of the key features of such maps is that they depict both the imaginary and the real in great artistic detail. Earlier maps dating back to Ptolemy (c. 100-178) showed in great artistic detail what was considered the known world. The twentieth century Scottish cartographer John Stanley Keates maintained that maps must not just be informationally effective but aesthetically attractive. In recent times, digital maps can, arguably, be seen as deserving successors of the medieval maps in terms of their aesthetics. There are many GIS-enabled apps that have brought cartography to the layman’s door but this paper primarily concentrates on a specific kind of digital map: the map that modern-day gamers will recognise as an intrinsic part of gameplay when they ‘tab through’ many times during their sojourn in the Capital Wasteland of *Fallout 3* or the Renaissance Florence of *Assassin’s Creed 2* to find their way in the videogame’s ‘open world’ space. These maps are not only complex information systems but also aesthetically crafted artefacts. There have been very few academic investigations of videogame maps, especially in the context of their being aesthetic objects. This paper focuses on the aesthetics of the in-game maps in philosophical terms and especially how such aesthetics of game cartography may have ethical implications and influences.

Reflecting on the aesthetics of game-maps, one has to consider that these are constantly changing aesthetic objects. Not only that, they are also the sites of potential action. Often, the map is the site where players cogitate on their actions. Based on the player’s actions, the maps also are liable to change in appearance and in the information that they provide. The classic illustration of this is the removal of the fog of war on the maps of the empire-building games or other strategy games. Maps can become the site of action once the player zooms in on a map location and engage in a battle as in the *Total War* games. These in-game maps will be seen as ‘affective’ spaces. Deriving from the work of Gilles Deleuze (especially his *Cinema* books) and developed by many later scholars including Brian Massumi, ‘affect’ is a key philosophical concept in understanding how videogame actions develop from a series of possibilities. It will be argued here that the map’s aesthetics is crucial to its role as the affective zone for the player’s actions.

## Maps and Aesthetics

Writing in 1984, Keates argues against the two assumptions that ‘cartography is about communication [...] and second, that for one reason or another, such theories or models should be ‘scientific’ (Keates 1984: 37). His primary concern is whether maps can produce an aesthetic response. On looking at medieval maps, this becomes more obvious especially in the descriptions such as the Arab geographer Al-Sharif Al Idrisi’s comment ‘Whenever the observer looks at these maps and these countries explained, he sees a true description and pleasing form’ (Brotton 2014: 11). It is important to note the phrase ‘pleasing form’ here. Likewise, Keates points out an advertisement in the *Imago Mundi* that says ‘Historically important and aesthetically pleasing maps, books and print’. Indeed, the communication that maps make is often influenced by the aesthetics. Christian Krulk van Adrichem, a catholic priest and theologian, is well known for his map of Jerusalem drawn in 1584. A brief description will be useful here:

An interesting aspect of Adrichem’s treatment of the city, however, wildly imaginative, is his addition in minute vignettes of a narrative recording Christ’s last days. This follows Jesus from his entrance to the city on Palm Sunday (upper right) to his crucifixion on Golgotha (lower left). [...] Taken as a whole the map is a clever mixture of imagination, scholarship and storytelling. (Atkinson 2016: 30)

On its publication, Adrichem’s map proved hugely popular because it provided a visual cue to Christ’s last days. Switching perspective, one might concur that Christ’s last days were interpreted according to the visual cues of Adrichem’s map. Curiously enough, Adrichem had never been to Jerusalem and had drawn the map sitting in Cologne, Germany. Al Idrisi’s world map too was far from accurate with Africa being shown as being huge and Europe comparatively tiny although the island of Sicily was unusually large (Al Idrisi was employed by King Roger of Sicily). A common feature of older maps is the cartouche which contains emblems and illustrations where the images will likely influence the map-viewers’ impression. It might also be useful to note that non-Western cartographic traditions were, indeed, inclined towards the aesthetic, as the Aztec map of Tenochtitlan in the Codex Mendoza testifies.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, Keates’s position that map-design is both about communication *and* representation. He invokes the Czech philosopher Jan Mukarovsky’s notion of communication through symbols and art as a symbolic form. Mukarovsky distinguishes between communication and the work of art in that whereas communicative signs can be verified part by part, the work of art is perceived as a whole. For Keates, ‘It is possible to apply this to the map, for although the map is put together as a set of communicative signs, which stand for or represent specific phenomena, there can be a response to a map as a whole’ (Keates 1984: 41). This holistic response is an aesthetic one. Mukarovsky states that there are cases where ‘the same object can be evaluated both as an implement and as a work of art’ (Ibid.). Keates argues that this holds true for maps where the map is, then, not only a tool but a work of art.

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<sup>1</sup> The Codex Mendoza is an Aztec codex possibly created in 1541 and is now in the Bodleian Library Oxford. It is written in the Nahuatl language using Aztec pictograms.

He also addresses the cartographic design of Eduard Imhof, the director of the Swiss cartographic institute: 'No one talking to Imhof can fail to observe the enthusiasm, the interest in landscape, the enjoyment of terrain, the involvement in landscape painting' (Keates 1984:42). Imhof was himself a landscape artist and used illumination techniques to portray the relief of mountains (Miller 2016). Imhof's work is a direct illustration of how much aesthetics influences map-design although this might not be obvious to lay user of maps or to someone assuming that the map-design is a product of objective accuracy.

Alexander Kent, commenting on cartographic aesthetics reiterates the importance of Imhof's thinking:

Aesthetics permeates into the main corpus of the map through the cartographer's goal of achieving a design that has aesthetic value and this value is constructed by society. In the creation of maps, the aesthetic principles of the cartographer are crucial because they determine how a map symbolizes its subject and therefore how the map might appeal to users.(Kent 2008)

He follows this by stating how newer technologies also employ aesthetics as a fundamental principle behind the design of maps:

The utilization of maps continues to tread new ground through visual media such as the Internet, GIS, and not least computer games, where in-game maps are forming an increasingly important role in providing a sense of realism to support the illusion of the gaming experience. As tools, these maps must all function to work and aesthetics are part of, and enhance, their function. (Kent 2008: 12)

Kent goes on to describe Adam Collinson's *Virtual Worlds* where the impetus is on portraying geography as it is lived and Collinson's work is compared to Leonardo Da Vinci's maps 'which are less like conventional charts and more like living demonstrations of geography in action, always conveying the living body of the earth as a vital thing' (Kent 2008: 13). This is also true of some videogame maps where the interface is animated and in the case of games such as *Civilization*, 'the map becomes a dynamic fabric, i.e., the interface that makes up the game' (Parra and Saga 2016). There is often movement depicted on the interactive maps in videogames such as *Witcher 3* or *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (for example, the locations of wandering merchants or the murderous *Phulakes* change in the respective maps) or of *Age of Empire* where the isometric view shows part of a map with all the action taking place on it. Enrique Parra and Manuel Saga rightly point out that

Whether it serves as the primary interface or as a reference tool, a videogame's map design is always closely linked to the experience being created for the player. If it's a game with fast paced action, the map will be a tool in a discreet corner of the screen, or an element that sporadically appears to be quickly consulted, like in *Diablo III*. However, if the game moves at a slower pace where the player has to consider every decision, the map should be able to allow handling multiple variables with ease and be able to concentrate a lot of information in a style that is pleasant to look at and not overwhelming. (Ibid.)

There are two aspects that Parra and Saga point towards as discrete – a reference tool and an object that is pleasant to look at. Keates has already pointed to the coexisting characteristics of the map as a tool and as an object of aesthesis. The characteristic of the digital map aesthetics to mold the user's experience and behaviour has been commented on by researchers: for example, Gradinar et al. (2016) in their research on an Android application called 'Paths of Desire' for the city of Lancaster, United Kingdom claim that 'the varying visual hierarchies will encourage users away from main routes and motivate exploration of areas that would otherwise be ignored' (Gradinar et al. 2016.). Often, it is necessary to understand that the commonplace assumptions about the apparent objectivity of the Google Map or OpenStreetMap are often underpinned by aesthetic considerations. For example, in their research Gradinar et al. combine an OpenStreetMap with the aesthetic from the videogame *PacMan* and the result is described thus: 'the combination of the PAC-MAN gaming aesthetic and moderate feature abstraction promoted the game play whilst encouraging the player to validate what they saw on the map against the physical landscape' (Gradinar et al. 2016). Arguably, then, the user's behaviour and even emotions are likely to be molded by the map's aesthetics and the digital map with its capability of changing according to the user's actions provided even more opportunity for this.

In relation to the above, there is one more characteristic of maps as aesthetic objects that Keates describes that is relevant to this paper. He describes the map as being emotive (following philosopher Arnold Berleant) because 'we often feel about art what we cannot express verbally or explain rationally' (Keates 1984: 39).

### **The Affect in Videogames**

What cannot be expressed verbally or explained rationally but lies beyond the realm of emotions and actions is something that connects to what has been called 'affect' in discussions of philosophy and psychology. Brian Massumi defines the 'affect' as follows:

[A]ffect is synaesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing's potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another (tactility and vision being the most obvious but by no means only examples; interoceptive senses, especially proprioception, are crucial). Affects are virtual synaesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. (Massumi 1995:96)

Elsewhere, he connects them to another idea, that of intensity. It will be necessary to quote him in full to establish the relationship:

Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static-temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It's like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it. It is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted objects and aims (if only on screen). (Massumi 2002:26)

For Massumi, who draws on the work of Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson and foremost on Gilles Deleuze, intensity is affect. Spinoza's philosophy involves the becoming-active of the body and Bergson identifies the virtual as the space of possibilities. For Massumi, it is Deleuze who brings these philosophers together in the context of his philosophy of immanence. The later sections will address Deleuze's philosophy of affect in relation to videogame cartography in more detail. It is important here to make the qualification that Massumi makes: intensity is not the same as emotion and emotions are qualified intensities.

To unpack this further, it is necessary to examine how videogame agency or action works. Alexander Galloway (2006) has already pointed out how videogames are about *action*. In so saying, however, he has invoked Deleuze's concept of movement-image from his *Cinema I* (Deleuze 1986) where the latter addresses the cinematic image in terms of perception, affection and action. Galloway identifies the analogue of affection in situations that he ambient calls ambient acts in videogames. For example, moments in games like *Shenmue* where minor movements continue to take place onscreen but do not change the main story of the game even if the player leaves the game running and goes away, are where he identifies the affection-image. Elsewhere, I agree with his position but add some more perspectives to it as follows:

Many games such as RTS games like *Rome:Total War* carry on acting and the algorithm actually causes meaningful changes to the state of the game, even when the game is left alone. More importantly, it must be realised that the affection-image does not just apply to certain special cases in games. As part of the movement-image and therefore inseparable from the action-image, affection is an intrinsic quality in digital games. The player does not need to walk away from the game for the affective to be in process. In fact, it is constantly in process in the in-between of the gameplay. This is the part where the actions of both the game and the (human) player are yet to be determined. (Mukherjee 2015: 164).

The key idea regarding affect, according to Deleuze, is that it expresses the possible without actualising it; it is the throbbing of potentialities or as he describes it as a motor impulse on a sensory plate. Tracing the affect in the close-up of a priest's face in Sergei Eisenstein's film *The General Line*, which shows the expressions of the man as changing from a man of God to an exploiter of peasants, Deleuze states that '[w]e find ourselves in front of an intensive face each time that the traits break free from the outline, begin to work on their own account, and form an autonomous series which tends towards a limit or crosses a threshold' (Deleuze 1986: 91). The crossing of the threshold is the action but the different traits showing themselves on the face which has not yet taken on its final expression and therefore remains a space of possibilities, is the affection-image. For cinema, Deleuze traces this in the close-up and the any-space-whatever.

There have been other later studies of videogames and affect. James Ash (2016), Colin Cremin (2015) and more recently, Aubrey Anable (2018) have written on videogames and affect. This paper is especially concerned with Ash's work where he argues that affect and cognition are interdependent on each other and that 'the multiplayer maps of First Person Shooting games (FPS) encourage the development of particularly intense forms of attunement as the maps are actively designed to amplify the potential for intense encounters'

(Ash 2013: 28). Ash views the maps of *Call of Duty 4* as intense spaces which he describes as spaces of possibility. His purpose is ‘to concentrate on the ways in which the maps and rules that structure a user’s engagement with the game are designed to produce the potential for intense encounters to occur’ (Ash 2013:32). Elsewhere (Mukherjee 2019), in speaking of the affective zone in videogames, I have used the phrase ‘zone of becoming’ and described the wastelands in the videogames such as the *STALKER* series or the *Fallout* series as what Deleuze calls the ‘any-space-whatever’.<sup>2</sup> As Ash rightly points out, the interface of the videogame is in itself an affective zone, throbbing, as it were, with so many possibilities one of which will be actualised when the player finally acts. It does not have to involve the human always – the affective is not contingent on humans being present to participate. The interface, too, acts like the Deleuzian any-space-whatever or the ‘pure locus of the possible’ (Deleuze 1986: 109) where the linkages between its parts can be made in an infinite number of ways. In Deleuzian terms, the action that ensues is shaped by what he calls singularities, or factors that influence the actualisation of one possibility from the space of the virtual. Ash sees the rule-sets and the maps of the game as the factors that move the game experience from affection to action and I have earlier seen the vast expanse of the videogame wasteland as the locale of such a movement; here, I would agree with Ash in viewing the videogame map as also being an affective zone and I would contend here and in more detail later, following the arguments in the previous section, that the aesthetics in videogame cartography play a significant role in shaping the actions in the game from within the affective zone in the map.

In this light, Kent’s comment that ‘in-game maps are forming an increasingly important role in providing a sense of realism to support the illusion of the gaming experience’ needs to be very further unpacked in terms of the affection-image. The aesthetics of the in-game maps in providing the ‘sense of realism’ would be creating the locus of possibilities that the player will be actualising. Standing in Novigrad in *Witcher 3* or in some remote corner of the Capital Wasteland in *Fallout 3*, as the player tabs through to the in-game map and ponders the next course of action, the map’s aesthetics, the changing interface, the animated ambient movements and the scrolling motion all contribute to what happens next when the player closes the map and re-enters the game’s space.

### **The Map as an Affective Zone**

There is already a substantial body of commentary on maps as affective spaces. Nigel Thrift has describes a ‘spatial swirl of affects that are often difficult to tie down’ (Thrift 2006) and he sees in the city where a ‘maelstrom of affects [...] such as anger, fear, happiness and joy are on the boil, rising here, subsiding there and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place on a grand scale or simply as part of continuing everyday life’ (Thrift 2004: 57). Speaking of city-spaces as affective, Jonathan Flatley comments about the city Detroit that people from its suburbs who have not crossed into the city for a while ‘carry around with them a map on which Detroit is a large hazily defined space, but a space clearly marked by some mixture of fear, anxiety, sorrow, and nostalgia. They avoid Detroit not

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<sup>2</sup> Again, I use the concept in relation to the Deleuzian affection-image and the wasteland is seen as the ideal locale for amplifying the affective nature of the possibilities of the game prior to the action of the player.

because of poor urban planning or a lack of landmarks but because of the emotions they have associated with the city space of Detroit. Thus, by way of analogy, I would suggest that social maps are also marked with various affective values' (Flatley 2008: 78). Flatley calls this imaginary map that a person carries around an 'affective map' and it will be helpful to quote him in full, here:

To return to the example regarding the suburban resident who avoids Detroit, this is an affective map of social space as well, in a way that parallels ideology. For in all likelihood the person from the suburbs of whom I write is white, and Detroit is largely African American, and this split is of course overwritten by a class divide, so emotions about Detroit as a space are, for these suburban residents, inevitably also emotions about class and "race" and racism. In short, it is not just ideologies or cognitive maps that shape our behaviour and practices in the world but also the affects we have about the relevant social structures of our world. (Ibid.)

Flatley makes a clear case for how the map is a site for the affective and also how the affective influences the way in which people make sense of the spaces around them.

Just like the city that Thrift and Flatley both describe, the maps of the Capital Wasteland in *Fallout 3*, of *Witcher 3* or indeed, of the vast fictional American South South-Western landscape of *Red Dead Redemption* (based roughly on California, through Arizona, New Mexico and Texas into Louisiana), are also comprehensible as affective maps. The player will often chart a path in the game's open-world based on the previous experiences (s)he might have had. For example, in the Capital Wasteland, there is a location called the McClellan Townhome that many players might not have even come across since it is not a location that it is necessary to visit for the story to progress. It is listed under the '25 Hidden Locations in *Fallout 3* that Even Super Fans Haven't Found' (Avina 2019). There is even an address provided: 2026 Bradley Place in Georgetown in Washington. Other than a broken robot, there is not much else that is worth engaging with the two monsters that lurk in the vicinity. Those who found this location, however, will remember how the robot recites Sara Teasdale's bleak anti-war poem, 'There Will Come Soft Rains', the title of which was used by Ray Bradbury in his science fiction short story about the nuclear winter. Visitors to this location often comment (in response to a Youtube video) about the poem or about the fate of the people who lived here. The player when visiting or re-visiting the location will likely have a whole range of thoughts around the place; it is only by actualising one of the many options that will present themselves that the player will act. The McClellan Townhome, symbolic of the entire map of the Capital Wasteland, is a locale of multiple possibilities. These possibilities are not exhausted by the exploration of the map; rather, any exploration will come with a slew of emotional and intense reactions that comprise the affective map that the player carries of the game.

The connection of the map as an affective zone to the aesthetic cartography of the map has already been pointed out. The user's behaviour is influenced by the affect surrounding the map. This does not always have to be the observable ambient animations on the map; it can also be the memories, emotions and feelings that the player carries in relation to the locations on the map. Geographers, too, have finally realised the importance of affect in viewing the game-space (and by extension, one might say the maps). Ian Graham Ronald Shaw and

Barney Warf (2009) conclude that ‘the range of possible affective experiences is intimately related both to the spatiality and to the subsequent perspective of the virtual world adopted by the video game [and] representation and affect are not entirely separate: rather, they are interrelated forces always doing work on the player’ (Shaw and Warf 2009: 5). They make the very explicit the very important connection that can be inferred from reading the two earlier sections together. Maps are aesthetic objects and they are affective zones; the aesthetic representation cannot be separated from the affect and indeed, are also responsible for the affective possibilities. So the aesthetics of *Call of Duty 4 Multiplayer* map that Ash describes or the bleak grey and green map of the Capital Wasteland in *Fallout 3* showing new places as they player discovers them but also emulating a retro machine-generated satellite map or the map of *Red Dead Redemption* showing changing locations for bounty or for the train that runs through the expanse all influence the way the player perceives, cogitates on and then acts in the game.

Commenting on the map of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, Malindy Hetfeld states ‘a unifying characteristic of literary maps is that they turn a setting into a character [...] Some video games use their maps in a similar way, to create a functioning world - most importantly, a world that functions without you’ (Hetfeld 2018). *Dragon Age* game maps are akin to medieval maps and ‘have elaborately hand-drawn maps that are discoloured to suggest historical authenticity’ (Rowland 2013:196). Thomas Rowland in his detailed comparison of videogame maps with medieval maps claims that ‘although modern cartography has moved so firmly towards a simplification of the map, however, video games quickly realized that with fictional geographies, detail and clarity were not as critical as aesthetic quality’ (Ibid.). Whether one would entirely agree with Rowland is a separate discussion altogether but in the emphasis on the aesthetic quality of the *Dragon Age* map, there is a synergy with the similar comparison made with early maps and videogames in the very opening sections of this paper.

As a commentator states about the map of *Witcher 3*,

The maps of *The Witcher 3*, beautiful when they aren’t covered in icons, rejects [sic] these hierarchies for a more naturalistic look. In keeping with the realist tone of the game, they present glimpses of landscapes that seem grounded in earthly topography. [I]t rejects ornamentation, but its details and slightly painterly feel invite you to linger. (Inderwildi 2017)

Both the aesthetic and affective figure in such a description, wherein the beauty of the map and the painterly feel invites the viewer to *linger* (a sense of the affective is carried by the word).

### **Ethical Implications in Videogame Maps**

As the videogame map’s aesthetic representation also, arguably, influences how it is viewed as an affective interface, the question arises as to whether it has any implications for the actions of the player. These questions have already been asked in contemporary debates by geographers. Thrift notes that affect can be both positive and negative and even urban space is affected by the politics of affect. This is somewhat evident in Flatley’s example of Detroit

and which areas in the affective map are avoided and which ones are not. Personal emotions as well as the politics of race and class come in here. That such an urban map's aesthetic representation can influence ethical considerations is evident from Victorian social campaigner Charles Booth's 'London Poverty Map' ('Charles Booth's London' 2016) where he used wealth data to colour-code the different parts of the city of London.<sup>3</sup> Videogame maps too have aesthetic elements that are directly connection to the narration and also, by extension, to the ethical decisions that players may make. As Rowland suggests,

[T]he map can reflect the spiritual corruption of the action: consider how the final world of *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1988) is presented on the map consumed in flames, with a preponderance of blacks, browns, grays, and off-whites. So, too, does the Isle of Delfino in *Super Mario Sunshine* (2002) reflect the culture of the people, shaped as it like a dolphin. [...] We know Bowser in Super Mario is bad because he is surrounded, on the map, by flames. (Rowland 2013:193)

The aesthetic representation on maps can therefore have important affective implications in the ethical reactions of the viewers, whether they the nineteenth-century map-viewers or gamers playing *Mario* or other videogames on the latest technology.

Commenting on new technology and how it works with affect, Thrift observes that 'through the advent of a whole series of technologies, small spaces and times, upon which affect thrives and out of which it is often constituted, have become visible and are able to be enlarged so that they can be knowingly operated upon' (Thrift 2004: 66). This is eminently true of videogames. The very small space and time within which the player makes a decision on the map is now amplified and more visible. On the videogame map, then, the lingering over a section of the Capital Wasteland, or more obviously over a certain region that can be conquered in *Empire: Total War*, has deep affective implications. As an affective zone of the game, the way the map looks to the player also shapes the action, and by implication the ethics around such action. Staring at the videogame map, one could then potentially be mapping one's own uncharted ethical compass as (s)he returns from the map to the game's open-world.

Deleuze's long-time collaborator, Felix Guattari, believes that affect is not merely personal or interpersonal (as commentators point out, it might not even involve the human) but rather it is 'transversal' in that 'it operates as a catalytically eventful bridge between a multiplicity of movements and relations') and that 'because relations of transversality are never given as "already there", then they need to be continually cultivated through an ethos of ongoing commitment to creative processuality' (McCormack 2003: 501). Ethics, according to theorists of affect, is the result of continually developing relationships and therefore, a part of the process rather than something finite and set in stone. A multiplicity of factors may govern the ethical choice actualised in the affective zone of possibilities. Connecting this to the understanding of geography and maps, Derek P. McCormack states that 'in the context of geographical research [...] the most obvious of these lines of ethical potential is the

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<sup>3</sup> Booth's maps, first created in 1889 and updated later as part of his *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London*, were based on the information gathered by social investigators accompanying policemen on the beat where they formed their own impressions and sought the opinions of the policemen. Booth has seven colour-codes for the map, ranging from black for the 'lowest class. Vicious. Semi-criminal' to yellow for the 'Upper middle-class and wealthy'. The choice of colours is indeed intriguing to note.

importance of enlivening any field of the ethical with the transversal qualities of affect' (Ibid.). The ethical decision-making in the affective zone of the videogame map also, arguably, follows such a transversality. This, however, is to merely graze the surface of the discussion around videogame ethics and how it relates to aesthetics.

### **Conclusion: Aesthetics and Ethics in the Affective Zone**

The 'Here Be Dragons' mark on the medieval map is literally something that players have to look out for on the maps of *Skyrim* or *Witcher 3* and other possible videogame worlds. An imaginary space on Hunt-Lenox in today's context, it was a very real concern in its own time and is still a very real concern for the player of videogames playing as the Dragonborn as *Skyrim* and Geralt of Rivia in *Witcher 3*. Even in the original map, 'HC SUNT DRACONES' was the zone of possibilities – the zone where dragons *could* be found (there is no evidence that they *were*). The game map is one such zone of possibilities, of intensities and affect. Metaphorically, the map is also the space where players explore the ethical 'here be dragons'. Also, it is an aesthetically crafted zone – one where the affective is shaped accordingly.

As explained before, although the aesthetic representation in videogame cartography has been researched earlier and the affective nature of the videogame interface has been the subject of recent scholarly enquiries, the videogame map's affective and thereby, ethical influence on the player has been a hitherto neglected issue. Finally, how the game map as an aesthetic object influences its own function as an affective space (and one that can shape ethical decisions) is also a moot question that this study has attempted to raise by linking related avenues and perspectives of research. Just like the mysterious 'Here Be Dragons' mark on the map, this, too, is an area that should continue to intrigue researchers.

### **Games**

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