

# **The ‘affective’ ethics of computer games: ‘aesthetic education’, the ‘technologies of the self’, and the cultivation of an ‘affectivity’**

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## **Introduction**

This paper starts from Schiller’s (2004 [1794]) premise that ethics requires an aesthetic dimension that concerns our sensibilities: reason alone cannot bring about adherence to a moral code.<sup>1</sup> It is the ‘aesthetic’ dimension that enables individuals to cultivate the sensuous disposition that would manifest as actual practices. That is to say, ‘the very possibility of enacting worthy ethical ideals depends upon cultivation of an aesthetic sensibility’ (Bennett, 1996, p. 654). This is notably in contrast to Kant’s moral philosophy. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* (2002 [1788]), Kant had argued for the subordination of man’s sensuous desires to the moral law by means of the ‘categorical imperative’ such that the obedience of moral commandments could only be done out of a duty to the moral law, rather than any willingness. This has been stated to be a resoundingly ‘negative view of man’s natural being’ (Wertz, 2005, p. 85), to be based on a similar assessment of man’s evil nature as that of Locke and Hobbes’ views, which had called for a social contract to effect a repression of man’s natural instincts. For Schiller, in contrast, what was required was for man to use his capacity through reason ‘to transform the work of necessity into his free choice, and to elevate physical necessity to a moral one’ (Letter III).<sup>2</sup> This is what he termed an ‘aesthetic education’. This kind of aesthetics as sensibility-formation arguably has implications for ethics that are ‘irreducible to fascism, hedonism, or indiscriminateness’ (Bennett, 1996, p. 654). However, the domain of the aesthetic is also one that bears a certain relationship to

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<sup>1</sup> Do we really need, for example, more new arguments about the benefits of using public transport rather than driving, or why a predominantly plant-based diet is a superior form of ethical practice (Lumsden, 2013, p. 73)?

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, having witnessed some of the horrors of the French Revolution, which saw the mutation of the ideals of freedom and a new society into uncontrolled violence, concluded that this evidenced the inability of radical change to bring about positive social transformation when the social conditions were not ripe, when individuals had not yet achieved the necessary internal state. Schiller turned to aesthetics in order to articulate how ‘man’s psyche’ would have to be constructed in order to transform the work of moral necessity into free choice, for a genuinely free personality to become one day a real possibility. This is to be done through practices – through play, in particular. Such a project rests on the Kantian commitment that there are enduring faculties within us, as human beings, that can be brought into a harmonious ‘free play’ when confronted with a sensory manifold. It is on the basis of these faculties as guarantors, that we can gauge the extent of our freedom. On the issue of the faculties in Rancière’s use of Schiller, see Tanke (2011) for an elaboration of how to re-conceptualise the ‘imagination’ from ‘the mentalistic language of German idealism’ into general political and aesthetic propositions about *social* capacities.

Foucault notably also rejected the side of Kant’s definition of autonomy which emphasizes the need for the individual to act on abstract, impartial moral principles regardless of the network of relations and dependencies in which s/he may be caught up (McNay, 1992, p. 104).

power; structures of power become gradually transmuted into structures of feeling (Eagleton, 1990).<sup>3</sup>

On this basis, if the pleasures or aesthetics/*aistheses* of gameplay (particularly in terms of the interaction with their mechanics) shape our sensibilities, such that in our pursuit of them, we become habituated to seeking certain kinds of experiences and muting others, then I propose that our attention should turn to the aesthetics of gameplay in order to evaluate the ethico-aesthetic values enshrined within computer games.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, ethics and values are embedded in computer games in terms of the pleasures that they divulge and the practices that they inculcate and reinforce (we may term this their ‘ethos’), as distinct from any explicit discursive and representative content pertaining to ‘the ethical’.<sup>5</sup> I use the term ‘pleasure’ loosely here to denote what can be termed ‘positive affects’, or sensory experiences that are deemed to be positive and so worthy of being pursued for their own sake. This is not an unproblematic conceptualization – more on this later.

A larger issue than can be examined here concerns the way in which the *representational* gamic content is interwoven with or layered together with what can be called the ‘non-representational’ experiences engendered by gaming as a process driven activity.<sup>6</sup> I do not presume to be able to tidily compartmentalize the non-representational aspects of computer games from their representational aspects; it is difficult to cleanly separate between ‘visceral’ and ‘cultural meaning-making’ (Wetherell, 2012, p. 66).<sup>7</sup> Against this, it may be said that affects are inherently asignifying, and cannot be ever reconciled with meaning.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to invent a vocabulary for affect is arguably to bring it into representation, and to therefore deny it of its radical potential.<sup>9</sup> I also have some sympathy towards this view. For the purposes of

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<sup>3</sup> See also Best and Kellner on how we are ‘libidinally bound’ to capitalism (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 290).

<sup>4</sup> I note here that the concept of ‘aesthetics’ being used here (and for the rest of the paper) is close to the eighteenth-century concept of ‘*aisthesis*’, which pertains to sense experience of perception, experiences that are both cognitive and evaluative, as well as bodily, sensual, somatic.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (1976, p.1103a14) pointed out that the Greek term for ‘character’, *ethos*, is closely related to the term for custom or habit. As such, one’s moral character was seen to be the product of the cultivation of the right personal habits and customs. This encapsulated, for Foucault, the approach to ethics not via a normatively grounded code of behaviour, but via an uncodifiable general outlook or attitude that one worked on through one’s life.

<sup>6</sup> It seems odd, in any kind of analysis, to try to do away with representation entirely. Clearly, the visual, narrative, and auditory qualities of the game can seem to be ‘forgotten’ in intense moments of gameplay. But even if our concern is with an abstract ‘structure of feeling’, there are key ways in which these qualities contribute to the coherence of an overall atmosphere or feel of the game, and one that can induce, for example, a sense of anxiety that causes the player to mess up their inputs or to proceed exceedingly cautiously. Thus, the manner in which gameplay occurs is not always determined by merely the ‘rules’ of the game. On this issue, I see the prerogative of ‘ludology’ not as attempting to purge game analysis of the visual, narrative, and auditory, but as attempting to develop new tools of analysis that had comparatively been ignored in literary and media studies up until the nineties.

<sup>7</sup> Wetherell (2013) has noted that a turn to affect has generally been correlated with a turn away from discourse methods, which she bemoans. Massumi (2002, p. 12), for example, has argued that the social and cultural constructionism typical of critical theory and post-structuralism ignores the moment of becoming, ontogenesis and qualitative growth because it is overly preoccupied with ‘codings, gridings and positionings’.

<sup>8</sup> ‘They [affects] can be described as extra-discursive in the sense that they are “outside” discourse understood as structure (they are precisely what is irreducible to structure). They can be described as extra-textual in the sense that they do not produce – or do not only produce – knowledge. Affects might, however, be understood as textual in that they are felt as *differences in intensity*.’ (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 131).

<sup>9</sup> Additional work in this area may involve looking into the work of Guattari, who has remarked that it is possible for a material to be both caught in chains of signification but also to simultaneously function in an asignifying register, and also that of Lyotard, who has stated that the sign can operate in two or more economies: metonymic and metaphoric systems but also affective ones.

this paper, however, it is possible to bracket the details of this debate and to hold that it is fruitful to make a distinction between the representational and non-representational for the sake of picking out what has received comparatively less attention in the literature on game ethics: the non-representational aspects. That is to say, the connection between ethical content and the so-called representational aspects of games have already been discussed in relation to the ways in which we comprehend procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007) and make moral choices (Sicart, 2009), but the full implications of a Schillerian ‘aesthetic education’ have not been sufficiently explored, particularly in relation to ‘affect theory’. This is not, however, a commitment to the strong view of affects being non-representational that would deem any further attempt to engage with the work of sifting through the ways in which the representational is entangled with the non-representational, discourse is enmeshed with the non-discursive, as misconceived.

In the first part of this paper, I will advance the view that an under-explored aspect of the ethics of computer games in game studies lies in examining how their aesthetic or affective, non-representational aspects give rise to certain player practices that can be seen as *ethoi*, as ethical dispositions. In the second part, I will give an overview of debates that seek to connect affective transmission with issues of power and ideology, together with some of the problems of doing so. This will primarily consist in an exploration of various theories of affect and their critics. In the third part, I will advance the framework of the ‘technologies of the self’ as overcoming some of the objections covered in the second part, and in being able to provide a model of subjectivity that can cultivate an affective ethics. Foregrounding our affective self-cultivation is a means by which we can bring new subjectivities into being that are lived before they are theorized, and for us to better comprehend how strategies of the self mesh with the non-representational affective experiences enabled by new technologies. Finally, I will outline some possible areas for new research.

### **Beyond procedural rhetoric and moral reasoning**

The kind of aesthetic education provided by computer gameplay that interests me here goes beyond ‘procedural rhetoric’ understood as making propositional claims. Bogost (2007, p. 3) has defined ‘procedural rhetoric’ as ‘the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular . . . a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created.’ The notion of ‘persuasion’ as it is normally understood, tends to be more Kantian than it is Schillerian: successfully persuading someone still leaves a gap between their agreeing to do something and their actually doing it – the same gap between reason and action that I have noted above. There are several points that are worth noting with respect to Bogost’s notion of ‘procedural rhetoric’. First, given that the player actually ‘chooses’ to repeatedly enact certain processes over others, they have not only been ‘persuaded’ by the argument but have already, to a certain extent, internalized the argument. The player is ‘living’ it through the course of play. Further, Bogost’s conception of rhetoric clearly expanded beyond the narrow confines of verbal persuasion (associated with the Aristotelian sense of rhetoric); he had explored visual rhetoric as well as the more expansive ideas of rhetorician Kenneth Burke (Bogost, 2007, p. 21). Nevertheless, Bogost does seem to tether procedural rhetoric to propositional content that is as ‘logical’ as a verbal argument:

For one part, procedural rhetorics do mount propositions: each unit operation in a procedural representation is a claim about how part of the system it represents does,

should, or could function. *The McDonald's Videogame* makes claims about the business practices required to run a successful global fast-food empire...These propositions are every bit as logical as verbal arguments—in fact, internal consistency is often assured in computational arguments, since microprocessors and not human agents are in charge of their consistent execution. (Bogost, 2007, p. 36)

What seems to be missing from Bogost's account is a sense of the non-propositional, affective, rhythmic content within computer games, and the pull that this exerts on us. With Pedercini's *The McDonald's Videogame*, for example, could the instances of players getting caught up in the enjoyment of playing the game, and thus putting out of mind the intention of the game's structure to serve as a critique of the fast food industry, be due to the disjunction between, on the one hand, the procedural argument between the inevitability of corruption in the fast food industry (due to unsavoury actions ranging from covering up health risks to launching bribery campaigns being effective) and on the other, the visceral, non-verbal 'argument' conveyed by the pleasures of play?<sup>10</sup> That is to say, whilst the procedural argument is clearly embedded into the game, it is perhaps overshadowed, at least for some players, by the persuasive logic or rationale of the play that it makes possible: a chain of pleasurable and engaging actions, a circuit of 'flow' like and engaging desire and pleasurable play.<sup>11</sup> As a parody of the tycoon simulation game genre, *The McDonald's Videogame* had adopted the structure of the genre and had consequently induced players into a similar kind of gaming *habitus* – one that is predicated on extending play by doing well in the game and encountering further challenges.

The existence of procedural (propositional) arguments within games is by now well-known and well-explored territory. It has been explored with reference to the commonly expressed worry about the so-called air of mystery around computers games as simulations, which conceals their constructedness, and the fact that they simulate the designer's theories only, thereby presenting a biased view of the processes being simulated (Friedman, 1999; Starr, 1994). The concern is that players would come to think that there is a correspondence between the simulations and reality, being swayed politically into thinking, for example, that raising taxes in *SimCity* leads to riots (Turkle, 2005 [1984], p. 13), or that the neglect of race and community in *Cities: Skylines* leads players to think that every person 'cares only about their individual inputs and outputs: finding a job, having a means of transportation to the job, and so on' (Hertz, 2016). Or, to use one of Bogost's (2007, p. 266) own examples, '*Mansion Impossible* makes a procedural argument for focusing investing in one area and keeping as much capital as possible invested in the market'. It is precisely because real world complexities have seemingly been reduced to simple propositions that commentators have

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<sup>10</sup> '*The McDonald's Videogame* mounts a procedural rhetoric about the necessity of corruption in the global fast food business, and the overwhelming temptation of greed, which leads to more corruption. In order to succeed in the longterm, the player must use growth hormones, he must coerce banana republics, and he must mount PR and lobbying campaigns. Furthermore, the temptation to destroy indigenous villages, launch bribery campaigns, recycle animal parts, and cover up health risks is tremendous, although the financial benefit from doing so is only marginal.' (Bogost, 2007, p. 31)

<sup>11</sup> This is not to say, however, that the ethical 'message' of the game is necessarily rendered any less effective by the observation that there is a lack of feelings of abjection to the player's own actions. If anything, Pedercini's point perhaps already takes into account that making money, whatever the cost to others, can be fun and game-like under late capitalism. Thus, the procedural argument may conflict with the 'affective' argument, resulting in the fact that the game's 'message' is arguably situated at a step up from the rules of the game in and of themselves – that corrupting politicians and climatologists provides benefits, for example – to also incorporate an authorial perspective on how compelling it is to play the game of running a multi-national corporation that aims to make a profit at all costs. Thus, his game can be seen as offering a cynical commentary on this, and less as aiming at a didactic, consciousness-changing procedural argument.

found cause for concern: the economic, social and ethical principles that games propagate have been accused of being misleadingly simple due to their representation by procedures that can be articulated without difficulty.

In *The Ethics of Computer Games*, Miguel Sicart's focus is on virtue theory and the moral choices that we make in the course of gameplay – how we are shaped as players by these choices. For him, it is only games that call for 'moral reasoning', like *Carmageddon*, are 'interesting from an ethical perspective' (Sicart, 2009, p. 48). By comparison, 'the rules of *Tetris* or *Space Invaders* do not afford any kind of ethical values that have to be enacted, interpreted, or experienced when playing the games' (Sicart, 2009, p. 48).<sup>12</sup> Games with interesting moral reasoning are, on the whole, ones with interesting rules. The 'rules' of the game are primary; the representational aspects (the visual and narrative elements) are only of secondary importance when analyzing the ethics of computer games (Sicart, 2009, p. 22). Concerning how games can shape our moral reasoning, he writes that good games do not didactically proffer a procedural rhetoric that gives the player a clear sense of right and wrong – they 'do not constrain the possibility for the player to afford ethical values into the gameplay experience' and 'acknowledges, respects, and encourages the ethical being of computer game players' (Sicart, 2009, p. 123).<sup>13</sup> Of central relevance to our present concerns is the fact that this moral reasoning, as with Bogost's procedural rhetoric, can be articulated and cognitively understood (although there seems to be more of an implied felt dimension going on). Indeed, it can be seen as the process by which players come to adopt a position with regard to the game's procedural rhetoric, and the implications of this for their extra-gamic subjectivity (Sicart takes care to demarcate the 'multisubjectivity of the agent' (2009, p. 72)).

My contention here is that the role that the aesthetics of the game have in fomenting certain kinds of gamer *habitus*, and the ethical significance of this kind of germination, has received comparatively less attention. The birth of forms of tacit and embodied knowledge, and individual affective styles, may bear not so much on the player's conscious discernment of procedural arguments as it does on how their patterned actions can be understood as reproducing (or not) 'a complex strategic situation in a given society' (Foucault, 1987 [1976], p. 93). On this analysis, the transformation of the player at stake is not that which is effected by comprehending a procedural rhetoric and drawing a set of propositional conclusions from it, nor is it arriving at a new kind of moral reasoning – it pertains to a transformation of the player's ethos or disposition, and an attempt to situate this change in relation to the present operation of power.

In *Aesthetic Theory and the Videogame*, Kirkpatrick asked: what is the structure of feeling that defines video games? Agreeing with Swink (2009), he proposed that the 'structure of feeling' (R. Williams, 1977) that defines video game aesthetics has been overlooked in game studies. The 'form' of a game, he argued, is revealed when the player finds the rhythmic associations necessary to reveal its possibilities. 'Form', as a property of both the composition and of viewer, 'produces a subjective sensibility and an objective delineation of space and time so that experience coheres and makes sense' (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 14). This conception of 'form' can be understood to be composed out of the myriad disparate

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<sup>12</sup> He does, however, give the example of *Cursor \* 10* as a possible example of an ethical abstract game, since the player is faced iteratively with the consequences of their previous actions (Sicart, 2009, p. 51).

<sup>13</sup> Yet ethical game design is also stated as guiding players by an invisible hand and encouraging certain behavioural strategies through rewards.

experiences that compose a game, ranging from non-interactive cutscenes to intense sequences of gameplay to leisurely character creation.

Kirkpatrick (2011, p. 223) states that it is only possible to have a feeling of accomplishment playing *The McDonald's Videogame* because 'the meaning, or symbolic level, has been banished. This feeling is then undermined when we reflect on what we have done'. This supports the view that videogames should not be viewed as simply texts or as component elements of discourses that contribute to the production and reproduction of identities – a process often understood in terms of Althusser's notion of 'interpellation', and one that has tended to be lens through which cultural theory views all cultural objects (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 194). The real sociological significance of videogames, for Kirkpatrick (2011, p. 195), lies in the dynamics of their corporeal appropriation by players and in understanding how this meshes with the cultural context. He goes on to state that what is political about videogames is not to be found at the level of the kind of message they communicate, but rather in the fact that even the political ones actually eschew politics in favour of form: 'Videogames inherently refuse politics as content because they are fundamentally concerned with attacking and negating content in general. This paradox, of a meaninglessness produced through obsessive focus on a meaning, ensures that video games cannot be used as effective tools of political or ideological communication' (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 223).

### **Affect, power, and ideology**

Whilst Kirkpatrick's notion of aesthetic 'form' bears a cautiously deliberate distance from considerations of power, or at least power as the transmission of ideology, others have attempted to plumb the extent to which the non-representational structures of feeling can be and have been harnessed by power. Many of these theorists can be situated in the so-called 'turn to affect' in the last decade.<sup>14</sup> The engagement with affect has been notably widespread, and has many different foci, ranging from investigating the psychosocial texture of social analysis via a scrutiny of embodiment, to a more extensive ontological and epistemological upheaval that marks a shift away from discourse-centred paradigms, to interest in a more process-based framework (often influenced by the work of Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and Gilles Deleuze). As Wetherell (2012, p. 52) surmises, some of these views have placed affect in a realm more instinctive and immediate than that occupied by language-based acts; discourse is identified with the 'conscious, the planned and the deliberate while affect is understood as the automatic, the involuntary and the non-representational', the pre-subjective realm of forces and intensities.<sup>15</sup> For Leys (2011, p. 443),

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<sup>14</sup> 'Affect' has often been loosely defined. For Ruth Leys (2011, p. 469), affect theory is characterized by an anti-intentionalism, which 'can be traced back to developments in the psychological sciences beginning in the early 1960s. At that time two very different scientific approaches to the emotions were simultaneously proposed. One approach, associated with a famous (if problematic) experiment by Stanley Schachter and J. Singer, published in 1962, claimed to demonstrate that affect and cognition are indissociable. A rival approach, also first published in 1962, was associated with the work of Tomkins, who argued that the affects and cognition constituted two entirely separate systems and that accordingly the emotions should be theorized in anti-intentionalist terms. At first Schachter- Singer's "cognitive" model prevailed. But, for various reasons that have yet to be adequately evaluated, over time Tomkins's approach displaced the cognitive model with the result that by the 1990s his had become the main-stream position.' Wetherell (2012, p. 60) laments that affect theory sometimes seems to function 'rather like a generative version of the unknowable Lacanian real'.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Leys notes that affect being irreducibly bodily and automatic 'matches the way in which today's psychologists and neuroscientists tend to conceptualize the emotions. For the past twenty years or more the dominant paradigm in the field of emotions, stemming from the work of Silvan S. Tomkins and his follower, Paul Ekman, assumes that affective processes occur independently of intention or meaning. According to that

what the ‘new affect theorists’ have in common is that ‘they all share a single belief: the belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning’.

In *Non-Representational Theory*, geographer Nigel Thrift (2007, pp. 239-240) opined that ‘it is relatively easy to promote in populations feelings of responsibility over events for which they could not possibly have had any responsibility at all’ through the ‘series of highways of imitation-suggestion’ that is affect, a comment that obviously denotes the fashioning of a responsible and socially atomized neoliberal subject. Thrift’s interest is in practices that he sees as operating below the threshold of cognition (see: McCormack, 2003, p. 488). Similarly, political philosopher Brian Massumi has attributed Ronald Reagan’s success as a politician to his ability to ‘produce ideological effects by nonideological means. . . . His means were affective’ (Massumi, 2002, cited in Leys, 2011, p. 434). Massumi (1996) has argued for a separation between the ‘quality’ of an experience and its ‘intensity’. The former picks out conventional discursive and linguistic framing whilst the latter is the unprocessed chaotic state of bodily happening, which is a division that accounts for the separation between discourse and the body. And in *Neuropolitics*, political theorist William Connolly sought to explore the pre-conscious operation of affects by questioning the possibility that ‘messages flowing between multiple brain regions of differential capacities in the same person are too small and fast to be identified by consciousness, but are, nonetheless, amenable to some degree to cultural inscription, experimental research, and technical intervention’ (W. Connolly, 2002, p. 85).<sup>16</sup>

In the domain of writings on videogames, Shinkle has stressed that ‘[i]deologies are not only inscribed discursively, they are also incorporated by the body as gestural and physical behaviors. Repetitive physical actions have long been employed as a means of socializing and disciplining subjects, and the relentless uniformity of much gameplay activity can be understood in the context of this kind of sociocultural formation’ (Shinkle, 2005b, p. 6). In a similar vein, a central current that runs through Ash’s work on videogames has been on how power operates on the “non-representational” level of objects, forces and capacities to shape how bodies think and act’, how it ‘works on a series of embodied habitual levels that do not necessarily, straightforwardly or only relate to the representational content of the objects in interface environments’ (Ash, 2015, p. 11).<sup>17</sup> Ash suggests that ‘neuropower’, *pace* Neidich, is not about simply dulling or normalizing forms of habitual action or skill to a preset template laid out by the designer or producers of these technologies. Rather, neuropower also works to encourage creative forms of habitual modulation on the part of consumers (Ash, 2015, pp. 53-54). Habituated player practices were not just negative, dulling or psychopathological, they led to active engagements by players with interfaces and encouraged new forms of skill. In fact, Ash (2015, p. 77) claims that many gameplay and software objects *sensitize* players’ bodies to develop what Stiegler (1998, p. 224) terms new forms of ‘creative anticipation’. In *Street Fighter IV*, for example, although the mechanics of the game draw players’ anticipatory capacities around a series of ‘narrow now points’, this does not denude them of their capacity for anticipation. In effect, the practice of link combos

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paradigm, our basic emotions do not involve cognitions or beliefs about the objects in our world. Rather, they are rapid, phylogenetically old, automatic responses of the organism that have evolved for survival purposes and lack the cognitive characteristics of the higher-order mental processes.’ (Leys, 2011, p. 437). Tomkins-inspired theorists (following the Basic Emotions paradigm) consider the affects to be capable of discharging themselves in a self-rewarding or self-punishing manner without regard to the objects that elicit them.

<sup>16</sup> See also Clough (2008, p. 140) on how ‘affect only registers at the imperceptible pre-conscious, pre-individual scale of measure’, and Massumi (2015, p. 85): ‘[i]deology works best when its structure of ideas is lived – *acted out* in the everyday, without being thought out (as in Bourdieu’s habitus).’

<sup>17</sup> See also: (Shinkle, 2005a, 2008).

or the noscope technique actually encourages ‘a more acute capacity for anticipation and creative response, albeit within a very narrow ecstasis of potential pasts and futures’ (Ash, 2015, p. 77).

Yet despite his rejection of normalized forms of habitual action being a consequence of extended gameplay, Ash also makes the point that there *are* some commonalities in these new forms of ‘creative anticipation’: although *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil* and *Metal Gear* are very different genres of games, ‘what connects their changes in design philosophy is the way in which they attempt to generate envelopes with increasingly high levels of homeomorphic dynamism organized around smaller and more micro-differentiated now points’ (Ash, 2015, p. 102). For him, this was a risk-reducing strategy on the part of the developers; the ability to capture and hold players’ attention is being formalized across game genres so as to offset the risks involved in big-budget games. This does seem to go part of the way towards what can reasonably be described as normalization.<sup>18</sup> Players may be developing new forms of ‘creative anticipation’ within the constraints that make them more likely to accede to a particular view of the world and its ‘distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2004). This can be understood as a rather closed form of *habitus* (as opposed to more open forms of *habitus* that contain greater capacity for self-reflexivity and change). Thus, insofar that there is a connection between the aesthetics of the game, understood as its non-representational affective qualities, on the one hand, and a particular economic rationality that is entrenched with a political rationality, ideology, or regime of power, on the other, i.e., an ‘isomorphism’ between the two, then the ethics embedded in the game can be quite simply be said to be those aligned with that regime of power. In the following section, however, I want to complicate this view by turning to various critiques aimed at the assumptions being made by the theories of affect that might lead us to this conclusion.

### **Subjectivity without a subject**

As I have mentioned, a major source of contention regarding affect theory concerns the veracity of affect as divorced from discursive meaning-making. This debate cannot be examined in detail here, but some critiques of the mode of subjectivity drawn upon by the philosophers of affect are worth rehearsing here. Wetherell (2012, p. 123) has argued that for Thrift, people are like lurching, semi-animated crash dummies, albeit ones with proprioceptive sensations stimulated by ‘extrapersonal loci’ (Thrift, 2008, p. 84); subjectivity becomes a non-place or waiting room, through which affects as autonomous lines of force pass on their way to somewhere else, and psychology as ordinarily conceived becomes redundant (see also: Hsieh, 2008). Williams (2010, p. 247) has also attempted to identify ‘processes without a subject’, and Protevi (2009, p. xii) wanted to pick out a class of ‘politically triggered basic emotions’ in which the social speaks directly to the body ‘bypassing subjectivity’ so that the somatic and the social are linked directly. These conceptions of subjectivity seem to relegate the subject to a reactive ensemble of parts, and to be uninterested in furnishing it as a site of psychological depth that can refract the affective forces that pass into it. In contrast, Wetherell (2012, p. 125) remarks that she is much more interested in ‘the individual person as a very particular and specific site of transformation and pattern-making, and in understanding the personal affective history of the individual...How do we grasp the ongoingness of a particular subject, their repetitions and continuities, and the

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<sup>18</sup> Ash (2012, p. 21) does state that the ‘structures of feeling’ in the games that he has analyzed cannot be ‘understood as standardized or calculable in any simple sense.’

ways in which their present practice intertwines with their past practice?’ As a site of transformation marked by certain possibilities, propensities, resistances, and so on, that are unique to itself – we can consider how these are formed through a ‘genealogy of the modern subject’ (Foucault (1981) cited in O’Leary, 2002, p. 110).<sup>19</sup> I assert that no analysis of subjectivity can omit the recognition that subjectivity has to be understood as a zone that contests, morphs, and refracts the affective forces that pass into it. On a genealogical mode of analysis (Foucault, 1984 [1971]), we could understand how, given a formation of subjectivity, for example, there are relevant pleasures associated with maintaining one’s individuality defensively, against the encroachment of outside forces. This could be accomplished without having to turn to an essentialist account of ‘basic emotions’ that would have to be true for all time.

A further critique of certain affect-centred approaches concerns the reception of the affect in question, and its capacity to be experienced differently by different kinds of subjects. The topic of ‘pleasure’ in media studies has seen a move towards more fine-grained conceptions based on the socio-economic coordinates of the subject in question. Here, it is worth recalling Garnham’s (2000) critique of Fiske’s (1989) use of ‘*jouissance*’ as existing beyond ideology and culture – it is important to uncover how the pleasure one finds in media consumption is shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors, as well as by the media content itself. The term ‘*jouissance*’, which Fiske adopted from Barthes, can be situated in the context of a Barthean dichotomy: ‘*jouissance*’ is an intense physical pleasure supposedly operating beyond culture and ideology, whilst ‘*plaisir*’ is a cultural and more banal or mundane kind of pleasure. As Kerr et al (2006) note, however, Garnham emphasized that the pleasure one finds in media consumption is shaped by both media content and social structuring factors extraneous to the media, such as income, education, gender and age; social factors, like class act to structure both the economic and cultural resources available to the user and their access to particular modes of cultural consumption. There is a parallel here with Thornham’s (2011) critique of the universality of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) as failing to address the sociocultural issues concerning which individuals play which games, where, and for how long – issues that need to be examined in light of considerations pertaining to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, technological literacy, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

Further, gamic failure, which is by default aligned with so-called ‘negative affects’ that discipline the player to make the correct choices, can be pleasurable, or contribute to deferred pleasure (see: Brock, 2017). In games, pleasure can be created by both submitting to the rules as well as by testing or resisting the limits of rules in the process of play. Salen and Zimmerman have pointed out that play creates demand for us to act *against* immediate pleasure and that this delayed gratification maximizes or at least increases the potential for pleasure (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 355). In fact, pleasure, which can potentially include any physical, emotional, psychological or ideological sensation, can be difficult to design for because ‘it is an open-ended, multi-faceted and exceedingly complex concept’ (Salen & Zimmerman 2004 cited in Kerr, Kücklich, & Brereton, 2006, pp. 67-68).

Thus, the turn to affective gaming pleasures as having ideological force, places a heavy burden on game design as the vector for that force, which arguably skews it towards both a

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<sup>19</sup> A genealogy of the modern or postmodern subject would assist us in understanding how certain kinds of pleasurable affective experiences can be easily catalyzed or enabled by gameplay (and others not so easily) – this issue is not left solely in the province of game design but is also a question of subjectivity.

<sup>20</sup> However, there is also a danger in subordinating the pleasures of play to their socio-cultural coordinates too rigidly (see: Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 53; Tanke, 2011, pp. 32-33).

model of subjectivity that does away with the subject (as discussed above), and, related to this, a technologically deterministic bent that is light on considerations of relationality.<sup>21</sup> ‘Positive’ and ‘negative’ affects are said to be able to steer the subject into the kinds of affective modulation that were planned by the designers. By way of illustrating the shortcomings of this view, we can consider the typical scenario that completing a quest typically gives the player a gold reward that can be converted into something that they desire, furthering their in-game projects: the receipt of the gold reward can be thought to be pleasurable. Assuming that players seek repeated instances of that pleasure, gamic pleasures have the potential to induce patterns of behaviour, to birth repeated gamer practices (even gamer habituses). This kind of optimization has been aligned with games inducing a neoliberal subjectivity premised on self-interest. However, the experience may be not at all pleasurable if players feel that the gold earned was not an adequate reward for their trouble, or they may even feel that too much bespeaks the game expecting too little from their abilities. That is to say, players’ framework of meaning-making can conflict with the ‘positive affect’ of the in-game reward. The outcome here may be a ‘negative affect’ that mitigates or even trumps the ‘positive affect’ of the reward.

On the other hand, generalizations in terms of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ affects are not, by any means, always unhelpful. They can help us to understand the lines of affective force that may exist, without committing to any conclusions about how they influence each and every player. Indeed, despite the plethora of possible gaming pleasures or positive affects that players may pursue, there may be general *tendencies* in the transition to the pursuit of certain pleasures over others as players acquire more gaming literacy. This implies that the pursuit of pleasures by players is not haphazard, but that it is one that is governed by patterns and correlations – a perspective that might be obfuscated were there greater emphasis on the individuality of the players. Surman has remarked that as one becomes a more sophisticated gamer, other pleasure registers come into play, which are concerned with a gaming literacy of sorts in which one becomes sensitive and connoisseurial towards the conventions of games (2007, p. 205). The acquisition of gaming literacy also brings with it player reflexivity (cf. Zuboff, 1988).<sup>22</sup> ‘As the core gameplay becomes exhausted, players end up centring on the reflexive undoing of the gameworld; pushing it to its limits, exploring and exploiting glitches, ticks, aberrations in the system’ (Surman, 2007, p. 205). If playing games builds gaming literacy over time, then there may be a parallel shift in the kinds of gaming affects/pleasures that players seek – an ‘aesthetic education’ being played out that is worthy of investigation. And, even on a generalized scheme of things, this shift is not just the passage to being an accomplished or even professional player, and the associated kinds of gaming *habitus*, but also the inheritance of specific kinds of reflexivity as well as the tendency to enjoy certain affective registers, which can be understood culturally and sociologically. What is likely to be productive is the adoption of a genealogical view of the subject that does take into account different sociological coordinates, but that does not get lost in the differences of individualizing accounts.

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that writings on affect are incapable of showing nuance beyond this. Ash (2012, p. 13) has written that affect needs to be recognized as existing beyond the simple confines of determinative relations of cause and effect. His own view, developed through the concepts of ‘modulation’, ‘amplification’, and ‘bandwidth’, is that ‘[r]ather than transmission being a discrete digital process in which affect is grammaticalized and translated between different contexts, affect remains fundamentally analogue, open and autonomous’ (Ash, 2012, p. 22).

<sup>22</sup> For Zuboff, to ‘informate’ is the capacity of computers to ‘introduce an additional dimension of reflexivity’, to produce ‘a voice that symbolically renders events, objects and processes so that they become visible, knowable and shareable in a new way’.

## Turning to the ethico-aesthetics of the self

So far, I have argued for the potential usefulness of affect theory in understanding the non-representational and non-discursive means of ideological and ethical transmission in games, but I have also listed a series of problems, mainly centred around a reductive notion of the eliciting subject, that have to be faced by the affect theorist. These problems complicate the task of straightforwardly gauging the affective ethics of a game – I will return to this issue in the conclusion. In the approach that I advocate in this section, I will foreground the dynamics of computer games' appropriation by players with particular kinds of subjectivities, leading to particular patterns or habits of action. This approach emphasizes the co-construction of users and technologies as well as the role of the tripartite of 'power-knowledge-subject' in the subjectivation of players. There is a critical shift in register here from thinking the ethics attached to the aesthetics of a computer game in and of itself, to the ethics that is tied to the ways in which we allow those aesthetics to transform us, to move us into developing habitual actions or *ethoi*. It asks: how do we appropriate the affective or aesthetic forces of computer games in the fashioning of our subjectivities? How can this be otherwise? And how do we do so in a non-cognitive or quasi-cognitive manner?

The Foucauldian approach that I forward offers several signal advantages with respect to responding to the criticisms of affect theories outlined above. It is able to provide a model of the subject interacting with power (but not produced by it), since the axis of subjectivity was an irreducible dimension of Foucault's analysis. As Bennett argues, Foucault's turn to an 'aesthetics' of the self enables him to steer a course between an active 'striking reality' and a passive 'stricken body' to get at what she calls 'sensibility': 'the quality or character of sensuous experience, a character that is culturally encoded and temperamentally delimited, but also educable (to some degree) through careful techniques of the self' (Bennett, 1996, p. 654). A sensibility is a disciplined form of sensuousness, an *askēsis* that bears a complex connection to power. Considering this aesthetics of the self then paves the way for us to consider Massumi's concept of developing an 'affectivity' in the next section, which I read through a Foucauldian lens.

Foucault's concern with the self's relationship to itself emerged at 'the intersection of two themes that he had previously treated, namely, a history of subjectivity and an analysis of the forms of governmentality' (Davidson, 2005, p. 126). This conceptualisation of ethics, as the self's relationship to itself, emerging from the culmination of two major trajectories of his work, 'provides us with a framework of enormous depth and subtlety' (Davidson, 2005, p. 130). The use of this framework coincides with a shift in which the self's role in constituting itself has come to assume a newfound significance. Foucault constructs the self 'as an object of a complex and difficult elaboration'; 'technologies of the self' are the means through which humans effect 'a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conducts, and ways of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). This 'care' of the self can be seen as a ceaseless play or engagement with power: folding it, submitting to it, developing more complex relations to it, increasing one's remoteness from it. As Deleuze describes it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, this was the idea that force could be folded through processes of subjectivation, endlessly producing a new relation to oneself that cannot be immediately recuperated by power/knowledge relations. This kind of freedom is not to be construed as a transcendence of power, but as consisting in explorations of the outer edges of the current regime of subjectivity (Bennett, 1996, p. 656).

The ‘truth’ of the self is attained through the ‘*poetics*’ of the self. McGushin (2007, p. xviii) explains that the word ‘*poetics*,’ refers to the ancient Greek concept of *poiesis*: productive work, deliberate fabrication in which the subject employs *technē*, ‘craft’ or ‘art,’ in order to achieve a determinate outcome. Paul Veyne (1993, p. 7) also highlights the potential within an approach, where ‘the self, taking itself as a work to be accomplished, could sustain an ethics that is no longer supported by either tradition or reason; as an artist of itself, the self would enjoy that autonomy that modernity can no longer do without’. ‘Liberty is a practice’ (Foucault, 1989, pp. 264-265),<sup>23</sup> a kind of vigilance over oneself by which one keeps oneself in mind all of the time; it is a modulation of the self, albeit according to a *telos* that is not defined in advance. It is an ethos, a style, and an uncodifiable outlook.

Foucault saw the work on the self as becoming increasingly more relevant. For him, neoliberalism (the present regime of governmentality) was a withdrawal from the state’s subjugation techniques and its normative dimensions; it seemed to break with past forms of governmentality in that it does not impose normative models on individuals but rather sought to optimize the incentive structure in which they operate. As such, Foucault believed that neoliberalism opened up spaces for experimenting with different forms of existence and inventing more autonomous ethics. In this context, for Foucault, the struggle was no longer directed against exploitation or against large macroeconomic structures, but against that which binds the individual to themselves. As he remarked, ‘since the 1960s, subjectivity, identity, and individuality constitute a major political problem’; we must therefore first of all change ‘our subjectivity, our relation to ourselves’ (Foucault, 2001, p. 856). Of course, this idea resonates surprisingly with Gary Becker’s call to become ‘entrepreneurs of ourselves’ – a point that has been made in numerous critiques of Foucault’s late work. Almost equally extensive have been the various defences (see: Bennett, 1996; McGushin, 2007; O’Leary, 2002).<sup>24</sup>

### **The affective work on the self: affectivity**

How can we challenge, in the work on the self, that which is below the threshold of consciousness, the realm of mere feeling? What form should a counter-politics take? One possible response here is to underscore that the non-cognitive does not always lie outside of our scope of conscious thought. Clore et al. (2005) point out that although most brain activity organising social action and subjectivity is non-conscious, it seems that it is always possible, when the situation demands, to pay sustained attention (cf. also Damasio, 1999). Thus, anything is in principle capable of being brought to consciousness and examined, even reworked. There are strong echoes here of various ancient practices of the self that were about making oneself more mindful, noticing that which would otherwise pass our attention. However, it can also be said that the ways in which we are able to rework the form of the self are not always actions that we can articulate to ourselves through a bringing to consciousness. This brings me to engage with the possibilities of Massumi’s quasi-cognitive (rather than cognitive or non-cognitive) strategy, outlined below. This approach highlights the fact that it is perhaps only when one works on the self without following a rigid set of articulable ethical

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<sup>23</sup> But this is not to say that ‘one may as well leave people in slums thinking that they can simply exercise their rights there’ (Foucault, 1989, pp. 264-265).

<sup>24</sup> A key part of the defence will be to make the move that the cultivation of the self has definite implications for one’s community, that it is not merely a micro-political line of flight that has no implications for the social. Indeed, it is to be governed by an overall ‘style’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 50).

principles that one is able to adequately engage with forces that operate on the outskirts of cognitive awareness in the ethical work on the self.

Echoing one of Foucault's central concerns, Massumi (2015, pp. 85-86) asks the question: how can the 'undoing of ideology' through the 'construction of a new man' be achieved in a way that does not turn into new mechanisms of power?<sup>25</sup> In other words, how can this challenge or counter-politics resist subsumption under the present regime of governmentality? His answer lies in his belief that there are 'relational techniques' that can be 'practised to modulate unfolding events', and which have 'the potential of reorienting tendencies towards different ends, without predesignating exactly what they are', avoiding 'the ideological trap of ending up reimposing much the same kind of power structure that is being resisted' (Massumi, 2015, p. 97). Thus, tendencies are oriented, but also open-ended. In other words, the response to non-conscious affective manipulation is to develop one's affective sense or attunement that are *thought-felt* into action as an open-ended counter to it:

You can only effectively improvise on the basis of elaborate forms of enactive knowing that operate with all the automaticity of a 'second nature'. What I am suggesting is that affect can be modulated by improvisational techniques that are thought-felt into action, flush with the event. This thinking-feeling of affect, in all its immediacy, can be *strategic*. Since it modulates an unfolding event on the fly, it cannot completely control the outcome. But it can inflect it, tweak it...It can amplify, resonate or even bifurcate – potentially in ways that don't coagulate into a power structure, but instead keep restructuring, keep the structuring alive. This is not a rationality. It's an *affectivity*, redolent with thought, flush with action. (Massumi, 2015, pp. 96-97).

He continues:

What a body can do is tweak the field – improvise modulations of the field of activity in a way that takes up the offer of these different-order affective tendencies. What a body can do is trigger counteramplifications and counter-crystallizations that defy capture by existing structures, streaming them into a continuing collective movement of escape...In this enactive immediacy, resistance is of the nature of a *gesture*. Resistance cannot be communicated or inculcated. It can only be gestured. The gesture is a call to attunement. It is an invitation to mutual inclusion in a collective movement. The only power it has is *exemplary*. It cannot impose itself. It can only catch on. Its power is to throw out the lure of its own amplification. Its power is of contagion. (Massumi, 2015, p. 105).

The sidelining of cognitive principles here chimes with Foucault's stated preference for 'very specific', or 'partial' transformations, as opposed to the 'programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century' (Foucault, 1984, pp. 46-47). Indeed, the purpose of his philosophy, as an ethics, was to be transformative, for philosophy to be an 'art of living'. It has been historically possible to shape the individual's relations with herself and others in *different ways* – and thus that it is always possible to create new forms of subjectivity and of life (Lorenzini, 2018, p. 10). What the practices of the self from Antiquity offer is an alternative '*problematique*' to counter our present culture of

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<sup>25</sup> See also: (W. E. Connolly, 2005).

the self.<sup>26</sup> Foucauldian ethics is merely the insistence that we can be shaped in different ways, that we *should* always be shaped in different ways, and that we should aim for this to be so through problematization. His ethics was the rejection of rigid prescription or proscription. Thus, the power of being ‘exemplary’ is not a power of prescription or proscription. It is an ethics that is the practice of improvisation as resistance that may amplify and communicate itself through exemplification, through the demonstration of a beautiful style for others. This is the means by which I think Massumi’s notion of thinking-feeling being ‘strategic’ should be understood – our strategy is to problematize the culture of sensory experience into which we are being pushed by finding ways of experiencing differently that cannot be articulated: pragmatically switching the register of experience.

How then, might the above considerations pertaining to Massumi’s affectivity as a technology or care of the self inform our (counter)gaming practices? Playing computer games is obviously not the only means by which we might experience strong affective stimuli, but it does arguably constitute a controlled and safe space for experimentation, for our exploration of how to open ourselves up to different forces, and how to respond differently to them. The notion of putative ‘guidelines’ to follow bears some difficulty here, since there must be a refrain from codification. Yet we may begin with some self-recognition of one’s own specificity, of the affective currents that one is more likely to be swept up with, or to be indifferent to, and to then experiment with different modes of modulating them, giving in to them, redirecting them, resisting them. This might take the form, for example, that one does not allow oneself to slip into a default mode of ‘transgressive’ play, such as ‘glitch hunting’, because to do so, given one’s knowledge of one’s existing disposition, would take up all of one’s time with the game and preclude one from developing an evolving and changing ‘style’ or ‘affectivity’ – a non-codifiable means of responding to the game – that is ‘strategic’ (Massumi, 2015, pp. 96-97), and that may even carry forward out from the game.<sup>27</sup>

This affectivity, considered as a *technē*, art, or skill, is, like other skills, honed not only via tacit training through non-conscious bodily acts. The entire process of skill acquisition is normally reflected upon, albeit at selected intervals, and with a frequency that likely depends on the intentness with which the skill is being learned. Indeed, the capacity to consciously do this has not been sufficiently addressed in the literature on *habitus* (cf. Ingold, 2017). It constitutes something of a caesura in our comprehension of how we can voluntarily habituate ourselves into acquiring a disposition. Blackman (2010), for example, has criticized the dichotomy between affect and cognition that would see processes like skill acquisition consigned to the non-conscious. As such, we are reminded that this affectivity is, after all, *quasi-cognitive*.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Massumi (2015, p. 56): ‘Politics, approached affectively, is an art of emitting the interruptive signs, triggering the cues, that attune bodies while activating their capacities differentially.’

<sup>27</sup> This differs from Ash’s account of ‘attuning oneself to the game’ since the latter concerns the kind of self-modulation that must be required in order to play the game well: it involves ‘a self-management of the affective and emotional state of being of the user in an attempt to minimize negative affects such as frustration and vulnerability’ (Ash, 2013, p. 28). Yet although the affectivity that I have described, following Massumi, is not primarily centred on increasing the player’s effectiveness in the game, a threshold of gaming competence probably needs to be met in order for the game or other players to not constantly interrupt the player’s efforts at affective self-cultivation – unless the stimulus of that interruption is itself part of the desired process.

## Conclusion

It is not entirely possible to get away from the need to cognitively assess the impact of various affective forces on us by bringing them to language, and nor would it be desirable to do so. Insofar as this is true, it may even be said that affects are only meaningful within language. This brings us back to the complex and ongoing debate of representational and non-representational intertwining, to which I have already alluded. Thus, there is arguably no escaping the adoption of a rather abstract vocabulary of forces and intensities that, on its own terms, is doomed to fall short of describing its object. Further, there is a danger, in operating with such a vocabulary, of work on affect remaining stuck with nowhere to go except further away from the empirical (Wetherell, 2012, p. 76), and perhaps towards increasingly arcane categories in a mystificatory hermeneutics. Nevertheless, we may endeavour to refine our deployment of categories pertaining to affective forces given the overall aim of trying to work out how to best respond to these forces. In a particular case, if there should happen to be no coherent ideological force that is being affectively transmitted in a gameplay experience, then it is consequently arguable that there is perhaps only an indeterminate ethico-aesthetics (albeit not a non-existent one) being experienced and habituated by the player in their playing experiences and gameplay patterns. It is seemingly indeterminate just because we cannot identify a firm connection between affect and ideology. But this observation does not of course mean that there is no politically relevant form of subjectivation going on. Players' habituated enjoyment of affective forces can be captured for discrete ends at later times, following broader politico-affective shifts. Massumi believes that some forces convert movements afoot in the field to their own ends, and among which are tendencies already moving in ways that lend themselves to capture – formative forces of emergence that come in a way conversion-ready. These 'reactive forces' were analysed by Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals* under the concept of 'ressentiment'. Reactive forces, in Deleuze's words, are those which 'separate other forces from what they can do'; they are tendencies towards repetition (reduction of difference), stabilization and rest (de-intensification), division and subsumption (divide and conquer)(Massumi, 2015, p. 103). Thus, there are existing inroads in the philosophical literature to thinking about refining a vocabulary of affect that can shed light on the ways in which our 'attention' (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Stiegler, 2010; Terranova, 2012) is captured, and the connection between affective design and the political economy of games for example.

If we lacked an aesthetics to accompany a widely lauded and accepted ethical framework (to make it easier to put into practice), then it is also possible that we can lack the critical tools with which to deduce the ethics ('ethics' as the principle or ethos governing action) concomitant with an aesthetics. In this paper, I have explored the idea, however, that such critical tools do not necessarily consist in the ability to theorize as much as they need to take the form of pragmatic manifestation in an affectivity or *askēsis*. That is, to pragmatically respond to forms of affective manipulation through an affective work on the self. It may be possible to allege that the ethics of many contemporary player-game interactions corresponds with an ethos of self-interest, of possessive individualism, that players are inexorably drawn towards this mode of instantiation through repeated playing some games.<sup>28</sup> This accusation awaits complication by the richness of empirical research that will no doubt reveal different hues of players' affectivity. Nevertheless, we may ask whether there are general 'affective styles' for certain genres of games, and how that emerges over time for various groups of players, as well as how much variability there is among these styles, or the propensity for

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Skeggs (2004) on the affective style of the white British middle class.

conflict with other styles inhabited by an individual in their life.<sup>29</sup> These issues can constitute a rich area for research.

On this analysis, the ‘aesthetic education’ at stake in this paper, as an ethical problem, is no longer the task of figuring out how to make a particular ethical or political framework more inhabitable and easier to practice. This would require the deliberate aesthetic shaping of a population or of the self towards a discrete end. Instead, I have proposed that an ‘aesthetic education’ consists in encouraging the process of developing an affectivity that opens one up to transformation, that leads to improvised self-modulation resulting in what Massumi called ‘counteramplifications’ and ‘counter-crystallizations’ in a quasi-cognitive process. The way in which this manifests among groups, as collective affective styles that begin to solidify out of individual endeavours that have spread to others, and how the pragmatic switching of registers of experience may be kept alive, would be an interesting area of further study.

## Games

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<sup>29</sup> Ash has argued that, in contrast to simplistic accounts concerning the hypermasculine desire for control and power wargames, in order to gain competence with *Call of Duty 4*, ‘one has to open up one’s body and become affectively vulnerable’ (Ash, 2013, p. 45).

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