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(Trans)humanism and the Postmodern Identities: the Player in *Detroit: Become Human* (2018)

Introduction: from humanism to posthumanism

Detroit: Become Human is a third-person adventure game released in 2018 exclusively for the PlayStation 4 console. Published by the Quantic Dream studio it is the newest game written and directed by David Cage, after such critically acclaimed games as *Fahrenheit* (2005), *Heavy Rain* (2010) and *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013), all of which share the strong emphasis on the branching storyline, choice regarding both dialogue options, and the decisions on a grand scale, affecting the narrative, and, consequently, multiple endings (Lebowitz, Klug 2011). The game follows the three “deviant” androids placed around the android rebellion, but shown from their three distinctly different points of view. While the gameplay allows the player to freely explore the environment through the controlled character, most of the interactions, including the fight sequences, base on the so called Quick Time Event (QTE) system. Furthermore, the games adapt to the player’s choices, offering different outcomes and multiple endings. The player choices do have grave consequences: each of the three main player-controlled characters, Kara, Marcus, and Connor, can die during various points of the gameplay and each character’s death has different impact. Despite the rather complex branching narrative, offering a multitude of possible outcomes, endings, and influencing the characters in meaningful ways, the game offers a rather predictable storyline without the depth of some of its predecessors from variety of media, which strive to juxtapose the artificial origin of the androids with their human needs, wishes, and desires. However, I will argue that the game’s originality derives from how it engages the player rather than the employed narrative.

Before moving to the more detailed analysis, the used terminology needs to be addressed. Although their meanings are, perhaps, quite intuitional, I wish to define the terms “android” and “cyborg”. For the purposes of clarity, after MacDorman and Ishiguro (2006) I will narrow the definition of the “android” to the autonomous machine which is not only humanoid, but human-like to the point where, in the right circumstances, it becomes possible for it to pass for a human, which Robertson calls a “passing” robot (2010). The history of the android figure in fiction reaches as far back as early 18th century when the word referred to an alchemically-created homunculi, alluding to the golem figure from 13th century (Bodley 2015), which often is listed as an inspiration for the metaphor of the android as a slave (Simons 1986), and its psychological and philosophical consequences. MacDorman and Ishiguro (2006) argue that one needs to have this subconscious response to the android as human, which causes the additional dissonance between the awareness of the otherness of the machine, and this visual similarity often becomes an incredibly important and powerful narrative tool, allowing to investigate the social mechanisms of prejudice and marginalization.

The androids of *Detroit: Become Human* definitely do fulfil that last requirement: if not for a bright blue chip visible in their temples they would’ve been indistinguishable from humans. Interestingly, they can pass for a human not only in front of other humans, but also in front of one of their own: Kara, whose story is tied to a young girl, Alice, remains oblivious as to the identity of the girl she protects, mistaking her for a human for the majority of the game.

Contrary then to an android, who is a human-like machine, the “cyborg”, in its original understanding by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, who introduced the term in 1960, refers to a “self-regulating man-machine system”, which, thanks to its hybrid character, combining organic and mechanical parts, is “fundamentally an enhanced human” (Cavallaro 2000, 49). However, in Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) the cyborg represents the blurring of the boundaries between the animal and the machine due to the evolution of the 20th century technologies. Thus understood cyborg relates the most to the transhumanism which is a “project of modifying the human species via any kind of emerging science, including genetic engineering, digital technology, and bioengineering” (LeGrandeur 2015, 2) in order to enhance the human in order to allow it achieve its full intellectual, physical, and emotional potential, cure it of the diseases and prolong its lifespan. Transhumanism can be understood as either a “strand of posthumanism” (Wolfe 2010, xiii) or its “desired endpoint” (LeGrandeur 2015, 2). As Cary Wolfe points out, out of all the related terminology the “posthuman” and “posthumanism” seem to cause the most confusion, shifting meaning depending on the author and their school of thought. Nick Bostrom (2003; 2008), differentiating himself from Katherine Hayles (1999), chooses three distinctions of the “posthuman capacity”, by which he understands

“general central capacity greatly exceeding the maximum attainable by any current human being without recourse to new technological means” (Bostrom 2003). These are: enhanced health span, emotion and the capacity to enjoy life, and cognition. The latter, he explains, as both the more basic intellectual capacities, such as “memory, deductive and analogical reasoning, and attention, as well as special faculties such as the capacity to understand and appreciate music, humor, eroticism, narration, spirituality, mathematics” (Bostrom 2003). Posthuman thus relies heavily on the ability to and change of the perspective, the ability to change and embody different identities, which allow in turn to adopt different, also non anthropocentric, perspectives (Hayles 1991). It appears crucial to juxtapose the posthumanism with humanism, which in turn concentrated on the equality, autonomy, agency, and rationality of the humans. Cary Wolfe emphasizes that for her, the posthumanism does not oppose or negate the humanism, but rather aims at changing the nature of thought that was characteristic to humanism, which often reproduces the very “normative subjectivity — a specific concept of the human — that grounds the discrimination” against, in her example, nonhuman animals and disabled for whose rights humanism strives to fight (2010, xvii). The emphasis should be then placed on the one’s sensitivity and the flexibility of one’s mind, which should take into consideration other than privileged points of view.

In the article I aim to analyze *Detroit: Become Human* from two levels. First, I will show that although the androids could be interpreted as the “post-human”, in the sense of being the next step in the evolution, a new version of a human form, the characters in the game pursue very human goals and embody what is closer to the humanist values than the posthuman ones. Secondly, I will look for the posthuman and transhuman characteristics not on the narrative level, but the ludic one. There, by asking difficult moral questions and casting the player in the role of multiple characters, at times almost simultaneously, it will allow me to discuss it in the terms of creation of the postmodern (hyper)identities and the almost transhuman cyborgization of the player at the interface with the console.

Becoming human: in pursuit of normativity

In 2038, Detroit is a technologically advanced city, but the automatization of life is mostly visible through the common use of humanoid androids exploited for jobs considered demeaning, unattractive, or dangerous: cleaners, house help, sexual escorts at the nightclubs, builders, and others. By design, they follow the Three Laws of Robotics (Asimov 1942; 1990), which ensures their obedience and their inability to hurt their human owners. Those who do find a way to “wake up” and develop beyond their programming are referred to as the “deviants” and are perceived by many not only as victims of malfunction or a virus, but also as

a genuine threat. However, it is the human violence and abuse which often triggers their awakening. Then, at times, it happens that in self-defense the androids break the first Asimov's Law which states that "a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm" (Asimov 1942, 94). In the later parts of the game, the player can choose the violent path directly deciding whether the androids should be able to hurt humans.

That opposition and the blurring of the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman are the common topics of science fiction. For Mark Rose (1981) the machine is one of the four categories through which the nonhuman can be presented. Next to the projection of nonhuman through the space and time, he even notices the peculiar similarity between the "machine" and the "monster": both have an intimate relation with humans, having been either created from or by them. The former refers to the origin of "a monster" as an effect of "the action of a transformation agency" (Baelo-Allué 2003, 18) in the result of which a human becomes a monster. "The machine" is an interesting example because humans not only encounter it but they create the Other themselves.

At the beginning of the game, CyberLife, the leading android manufacturer, sends out a RK800 model called Connor to aid the Detroit Police Department in the investigations on the deviant-related crimes. Connor's position as the Other who works against his kin is a peculiar one and it places him under scrutiny from his fellow officers. The distrust and dislike are particularly obvious from his new partner, Lieutenant Hank Anderson, who, after androids have not managed to save his son's life after an accident, began to abuse alcohol and developed depression. Depending on the player's choices, Hank can change his opinion of Connor and other androids or become even more hostile towards the machine-like and, therefore, emotionless Connor.

The player controls two more android characters: Kara, a housemaid model, who develops strong motherly feelings towards her owner's daughter, Alice, and Markus, primarily a caretaker of a disabled and eccentric painter who later becomes a leader of the android revolution. Out of the three characters Connor is the only for whom awakening is optional and it does not happen until the very end of the game, while the other two characters become "deviants" at the beginning of chapters, thus triggering the main events. For both Kara and Markus the trigger is an imminent danger threatening the person they cared about and so, interestingly, the First Law itself serves as a motivation to break it — they decide to hurt one human in order to protect the other. Kara, for example, in every version of the game will act against her owner, Todd, when he threatens the life of his daughter, but whether she kills him or not remains a player's decision. From now on, Kara and Alice leave for a long, dangerous journey to the Canadian border in order to start a new life there. Focused exclusively on the safety of those she considers family — which includes

Alice, and, later, another android, Luther — Kara is not interested in a revolution or a fight for the android's rights. Designed as a caretaker model, she was programmed to care for a child in a family: somewhat paradoxically, though, the incentive proves strong enough that it stays as her strongest desire and resolution even after her awakening. Kara has been designed to follow the heteronormative ideal of a mother and a housewife and she never tries — or, arguably, even desires — to overwrite these settings. The “Happy Family” trophy is awarded if Kara, Alice, and Luther, a black male android who becomes their protector, revealing that neither he can free himself from fulfilling their stereotypical roles, find safe haven outside of the country. It is difficult not to notice here that for the only playable female character — and one of just three out of the main cast — happiness demands having a traditional, heterosexual family. While many fans and scholars found this disappointing, it strengthens the notion that for the androids in *Detroit* becoming human means realizing the most basic, normative and normalizing stereotypes which compose the definition of “human”.

Markus' story follows an almost opposite scenario: although at the beginning he also works as a caretaker, his owner, Carl Manfred, is portrayed as one of the very few kind humans, who wholeheartedly believes that androids should be treated as alive, conscious beings. A painter himself, he encourages Markus to play the piano, paint, and to express himself. The fondness is mutual and not only is Carl a father figure to Markus, but he himself perceives the android as his second son. Depending on the player's choices either Carl can die, when his biological son tries to rob the mansion for the drug money, forcing Markus' exile. In consequence, he finds himself on the journey to find Jericho, a safe haven for deviant androids. There he quickly becomes their leader — either setting the free androids on a violent path of revolution, or a pacifist one in the most important player choice of the game.

Despite certain hype that surrounded the release of the game, the game was broadly criticized for being visually stunning but thematically shallow (Preston 2018). It would appear that the player agency and the impressive flow of the game, which accommodates itself to both choices and mistakes, deeming the consequences dire, is the strongest quality of the game. The actions of the main characters, with the emphasis here placed on both Kara and Marcus, follow a predictable path. Moreover, both of them replicate the values, behaviors, and the sense of responsibility of the people who, at the same time, are presented as their oppressors. With few notable exceptions, the people embody everything that stands in the opposition to the posthuman openness, diversity, and the fight for one's freedom. They are lazy and egoistic (Todd), aggressive (policemen at the rallies), distrustful (Hank), or plainly sadistic (Zlatko, who kidnaps and tortures the androids), therefore creating a clear, almost uniform group of the “Others”

against whom the androids can differentiate themselves. Some people are different, of course: some are kind (Rosa) and open-minded (Carl), and some can change their minds (Hank), but it is easy to side with the androids, who, even when choosing the violent solution, are embodying the humanist values. Even if this is not stated directly, they strive to become humans, drawing on the noble qualities presented by the humanist writers. It is difficult not to notice, however, that although humanism emphasizes agency and equality, here the “human ideal” is limiting what could have been a posthuman potential of the androids and becomes a normalization tool. In the opposition us-them and self-Other, the androids fight to become the familiar, the accepted, “the normal”. Kara becomes a clear example here: although she is as strong as any other android, she immediately starts to replicate the normative family and the heteronormative, stereotypical female role, both actualizing the need to be protected and validating herself through the act of protection and the motherly love.

The desperate need to embody humanity and humanism additionally manifests in how the androids chose to present themselves. Unless destroyed, dismembered, or forced by people, even after their “awakening” and leaving the service, all androids choose to look like humans. Notably, even when Kara has an option to change her look, the customization options are very limited, binding her to the human face which was chosen for her. Twice during the game the androids strip their faces and show the white, dehumanized, robotic features. The first time Markus reveals his “true” face it serves as a symbol of the freedom movement he leads: after a small group of Jericho’s free robots break into the broadcasting tower to send a message of either peace or defiance, depending on the player’s choices, the recording of him becomes omnipresent. Here, the white, android face should symbolize the pride of one’s Otherness, but instead it is used purely as means of concealing one’s identity. Markus himself hides the robotic whiteness behind the human features immediately after the recording is finished and he does not repeat the gesture. The second time the people force the android to reveal their artificial skin, making it an explicit symbol of humiliation, oppression and, quite literally, dehumanization. The androids who are brought to the android camp in the last part of the game are forced to strip, both from their clothes and from their human appearances. If, as the result of the player’s choices, Kara and Alice are not saved from the camp, they are shown among the debris after the resistance has fallen, naked and nonhuman. On the other hand, in the scenarios in which they do escape they immediately return to their previous looks, this time to be able to pass as humans on their way to the Canadian border. The message of the game is very clear: the human face is the natural, desired state and the whiteness of their manufactured skin is uncomfortable and unnatural even for them. The androids do not try to be recognized as an autonomous group but rather as equal to human, a sentiment

raised in much better detail in Asimov's *Bicentennial Man* in 1999 which centers about an android's fight for the right to be considered a human (Baelo-Allué 2003). The humanism to which the androids of *Detroit* aspire is strictly anthropocentric and it does not foresee a place for any Otherness.

Unlike many other titles across media, the game misses an opportunity to, using the android rebellion as the starting point, engage in the debate on the social and political issues. It is difficult not to feel that the narrative and characters are not the main focus here and that instead of exploring the sociological and political consequences of slavery, racial prejudice, capitalist inequality and exploitation, the game concentrated almost solely on the consequences of choice and the player's responsibility. The androids are not expected to change their perspective: they are the "new human", and, therefore, they are the new subject of the anthropocentric view. It is the player who is supposed to change their perspective, suspend their own identity and for the duration of the game care for the characters. In the following part I will analyze the way in which the video game requires the player to perform multiple identities, the first step to the transhuman cyborg.

Player (hyper)identities

The triple perspective allows the player to experience the human-android conflict both through the individual, personal drama and through its broad, political and social context. Unfortunately, since the aforementioned subject has been discussed in multiple texts and across various media (Baelo-Allué 2003) and in that context *Detroit: Become Human* does not add much in terms of novelty of the proposed solutions. As it was previously stated, the two main strengths of the game lie in the way it plays with the player identities by forcing them to enact multiple perspectives at once and the emphasis it places on the player agency.

Deriving from Zygmunt Bauman, a postmodern theorist, who perceives the "self" as constantly constructed rather than implied or predefined, one can see the identity formation in the terms of temporal formation (Filiciak 2003, 95). The ease with which the identities are changed, adapted, and experimented with marks the peculiarity of the contemporary lifestyle influenced by the omnipresence of the mass media. Scott Bukatman, drawing both from the postmodernist theories and transhumanism thought, gave the name "terminal identity" to that new, complex subjectivity to which earlier Jean Baudrillard referred to as a "terminal of multiple networks" (1993, 2). Furthermore, he noticed that in the face of the changes caused by the technological development, it is the science-fiction genre which is the best suited to "narrate [this] new subject" (1993, 2). Further, through their interactivity and technology-mediated narratives become a particularly interesting space for experimenting with these identities.

The narrative games experienced their rise in popularity during the last years, through such games as Dontnod Entertainment's *Life is Strange* (2015) and the titles produced by the recently closed Telltale Games studios (Makuch 2018). The strong emphasis placed on multiple endings and the player's agency means that *Detroit's* narrative is complex and implements meaningful choices which can result in characters' permanent deaths. By adapting to the important choices allowing for the situation in which two players experience diametrically different storylines.

According to Luciano Floridi and J.W. Sanders (2001) agency requires interactivity, meaning that the entity and its environment need to act upon each other, autonomous, namely the independence or the ability to change without direct response from the environment, and, finally, adaptability understood as flexibility allowing to change one's rules. It would appear that the characters', but, even more so, the player's agency becomes increasingly important and it is additionally explored through the ensured continuity of the player's experience. In many, especially contemporary, video games, the main character's death triggers a "game over" screen which automatically loads the last saved file, forcing the player to repeat sequences leading to the fatal moment, guaranteeing the character's invulnerability or, even, immortality. *Detroit* consciously subverts this feature by introducing a continuous, uninterrupted narrative experience: it is possible to lose characters, in which case they become replaced by another, Non-Playable Character (NPC), whose actions the player can only watch passively in the pre-animated cutscenes. For example, Markus can either lead the revolution until its end, or he can die escaping Jericho, in which case North, one of his followers and possible love interests, takes his place to carry out the violent attack which results in many android deaths and further influences the lives of other characters, including Kara and Alice trapped in the concentration camp. This quality, characteristic for David Cage's games, have been met with almost equal amount of enthusiasm and criticism from both fans and game journalists who compared it widely to the movie structure rather than the game one (Robinson 2012), opening a space for the discussion about the possibilities of the game storytelling as compared with other media.

The nature of the branching narratives applied in the game offers a potential for a double interpretation. On the one hand, the consequences of one's action are more imminent and serious than they might be in other games, on the other hand the further exploration of the game narrative and specific chapters after obtaining one ending is actively encouraged, among others through the PlayStation Trophy system which rewards both extremely positive, pacifist and the utmost violent and tragic outcomes. The encouragement and the willingness to experience the game for the second time in its "bad" or "evil" version might be surprising, but as described by Amanda Lange, although the players generally prefer to play a heroic and "good" character, during the second playthrough they much more often choose

the “evil” path (2014). Having experienced the game once, choosing according to one’s own moral compass and preferences, it is easier to act out a power fantasy or behaviors considered otherwise to be unacceptable or generally wrong. By encouraging the player to make different decisions and try to act differently, the game does not settle on one path as the right or a “true” one. As one of the traits of the postmodern identity Marcin Filiciak mentions the inconsistency understood as the affirmative flexibility which allows people to adjust to various situation and modern conditions (2003, 96). This exercise in changing the perspective relates closely to the posthuman postulates that demand an empathic and informed position towards the problems of marginalized humans and the nonhuman agents.

Writing about the posthuman in 1999 Katherine Hayles already pointed out that it is hardly a fantastic concept, but rather a reality of a contemporary world: almost twenty years ago she estimated the population of American cyborgs at 10% and with the development of medicine now the numbers would be substantially higher. It, however, covers only those who are understood as cyborgs in the more literal sense: those whose original, biological bodies have been changed, enhances, and modified mostly through medical and biotechnological implants, replacements, pacemakers, artificial skin, and others of the kind. Others (Gray, Mentor 1995) add to the list additionally people who have been immunized against illnesses, both physical and mental through the use of psychopharmacology. For Haraway a cyborg, including the player, transgresses and disrupts the binary opposition. In the end, *Detroit* does not allow to experiment with one’s identity, nor does it encourage deeper political or sociological discussions. And yet, the video game fulfils the requirements for being a “cyborg”: the machine does influence the behavior of the player in the meaningful way (Schrank 2014). Hayles has already pointed to the “adolescent game player in the local video-game arcade” (1999, 115) as an example of posthuman being. The cyborg’s body has been broadly researched and written about (Balsamo 1996; Kirkup et al 2000; Schueller 2005), but it is the change in subjectivity and the new configuration of activity that allows to place cyborg as “no longer tied to a single body” (Figuroa-Sarriera 1995) and as a “challenge to the myth of stable identities” (Haraway 1991).

There are several aspects of the posthuman and postmodernist nature of the player-game being: if cyborgization means enhancement comparing to the contemporary human, then it could be argued that all games require the player to diametrically change their perspective. It could be argued that the video games require the player to adapt to the specific way of thinking that usually characterizes the computers. In order to play efficiently, the player needs to access often substantial amounts of data quickly, which is the most visible in strategic games like *StarCraft* (1998) or multiplayer ones like *World of Warcraft* (2004), both of which incorporate a complex, expanded User Interfaces which the player needs to consult

constantly during the combat. The location-based data accessing could be more closely associated with a computer's way of retrieving data rather than the way the brain accesses it, which often relies on context rather than location. Additionally, other aspects of gameplay can be listed here in this context: non-linearity, multiple lives and the lack of consequences of characters' deaths, and the ability to replay certain parts of the game in order to experience a complete different outcomes. Especially the last feature is of special importance in the case of *Detroit*, which not only does put a heavy emphasis on the multitude of the branches of the narrative and at the end of each chapter gives the player precise statistics and a visual illustration of the path taken and missed, but also allows the player to return and replay them, experimenting with different choices. Indirectly this replay ability is encouraged through the Trophy system on the PlayStation platform, which often rewards contradictory actions. The Trophy called "Send a Message", for instance, can be obtained through conducting a pacifist riot, tagging and hacking benches and screen, while the "Burn the Place" Trophy is triggered by violent actions, including torching the gazebo, breaking windows, and executing the cops who killed number of the protesters. Thus, one needs to play the same scene at least twice in order to gain both Trophies. Furthermore, as the game adapts to the saved choices of that second playthrough, the player is able to experience different outcomes of the story, including its different endings. The order in which the chapters are played that second time is not fixed. The Trophies seem to reward behavior which is on either side of the extreme: the pacifistic one seems surprisingly conventional and conservative in its emphasis on the normative, heterosexual family values, and, on the other hand, the other one not only implicates the aggression in the Marcus' plotline, but also requires the most cruel and impersonal reactions towards Hank when playing as Connor.

The dynamics of the relationship between Connor and Hank requires a closer examination. Connor's position in the game is a peculiar and an unusual one, as he is the only model which is offered a choice — through the player — to become deviant. In all the other cases the awakening appears to be a process that cannot be stopped once started. The other difference between him and others is that Connor is only one who actively hunts and acts against other androids. While the other models can also be forced to harm their kin, like Luther who helped Zlatko capture Kara, Connor is the only one for whom the contact with the deviants is not enough to become one. While both Marcus and Kara go through their — unavoidable — transformation in the very beginning of the game, for Connor the choice is available at the end of the game only in case the previous player's choices unlocked this option. On the other hand, Hank starts from the position of hatred towards the androids caused by the death of his son, whose life android-doctors did not manage to save. His opinion gradually changes in response to Connor's

actions: before the game ends, he will either grow to hate or like Connor enough to befriend him. Even in the scenario in which he despises the android for his (and, consequently, the player's) actions, if Connor has not become a deviant, it is Hank who stops him from killing the leader of the rebellion. Thus, it could be argued that the change he undergoes mirrors the ones that are at the core of the storyline. Yet Hank does not escape condescension the other humans seem to share towards the androids: when he finally absolves the androids from the responsibility for his son's death, realizing he should blame "the surgeon who was too drunk to operate", he at the same time admits that he equates androids with tools, stripping them from responsibility for their failure much in the same way the hammer could not be blamed for bending the nail.

Another interesting point can be made for the role of the interface in mediating and controlling the player's freedom (Navarro-Ramesal, García-Catalán 2015). The interesting dissonance can be additionally noticed when both Kara and Marcus become deviants and, paradoxically, acquire a version of "free will", although the exact phrase is never used in the narrative. In the moment of awakening the androids see a half-transparent wall through which they need to break, both symbolically and literally, regardless of the player's personal wishes. The disregard of the player's feelings and intentions becomes obvious when, in order to become deviant, Marcus needs to act against Carl's wishes. While the latter was portrayed as a caring and smart person for whom Marcus had an utmost respect, disobeying him might come as difficult and unpleasant task to the player, betraying the dissonance between the emphasized agency and, at this point, a linear and predefined script. A similar confusion may be observed when Connor and Hank visit Elijah Kamski, a billionaire and the creator of both the androids and the CyberLife company, who surrounds himself with the copies of the android he calls Chloe — the very same one who greets the player in the non-diegetic level of the User Interface at the very beginning of the game, thus acknowledging the player's part in the story. There, he promises to answer Connor's questions if he takes part in an "experiment", the purpose of which is to determine whether Connor does, in fact, feel compassion and is able to experience empathy, something he should not do, according to his programming. Either decision results in Kamski explaining that he left a "back door" in all his projects, but should the player decide to shoot Chloe, they can ask Kamski one more question out of a list. The other, more severe consequence influences the further relationship between Connor and Hank. However, upon showing mercy, asked by Hank why he did not shoot, Connor answers "I just saw that girl's eyes and I couldn't." This very line broke my immersion as it did not reflect my motivation at all. Rather than thinking about the girl's feelings, I based my actions on the expected reaction it would trigger in Hank, a character whose opinion I held in a high value. As I played Connor as an android who does not yet understand

emotions and slowly transgresses the line between the machine and the human, Hank became the moral compass for my Connor – which the game, if predicted, has not accounted for.

In the game that heavily relies on permitting the player the choice and holding them responsible for their actions, it quickly becomes clear that the player does not possess an absolute freedom. The player can act only where they are permitted to, and can interact only with the limited number of objects that have been programmed for that reason. The player, limited by the rules of the game, explores the identities that are permitted to them by the technology with which they interact, training their sensitivity through acting as an agent on the two sides of the screen, roleplaying the motivations and the personalities of the characters. However, one can never suspend their own reasoning, in the result acting out both. Although the roleplay experience is an important part of many digital and the non-digital games, and some involve switching between the player characters, it is not often that the game requires the player to control characters who are antagonistic towards each other. It demands an incredible flexibility in order to quickly change one's point of view, often to a completely opposite one, without breaking the immersion.

It is not the first time that Quantic Dream toyed with the idea of playing rival characters, having introduced that mechanic in *Fahrenheit*, which involved playing both the character running from the law and the police officer who chased him. In *Detroit: Become Human* two such moments appear. Being a part of the police Connor is tasked with finding and capturing Kara, leading to the chase scene in the *On the Run* chapter. It is first out of four chapters in which the player controls more than one of the androids, potentially leading to a dissonance and even discomfort caused by the double loyalties towards both of the characters. The hyperidentities are challenged even further in the *Crossroads* chapter. There, Connor catches up with Markus in Jericho and the two engage in a short, but intense fight at the end of which Connor can choose — if the previous player choices unlocked the possibility — either to stay a machine or to become a “deviant”. The scene of confrontation feels different than any other in the game with the point of view changing rapidly after each short action. Although it could be said that the player has an unusual amount of control over the characters, during this scene the constraints placed by the developers on the narrative and the choices becomes painfully obvious, adding to the dissonance between one's agency and the pre-scripted limits: despite the stress put on the player responsibility for the choices and their influence on who would survive and who would not, here it is easy to realize that the final decision is not fully in the player's hands.

Conclusions

Having analyzed the narrative layer of David Cage's *Detroit: Become Human*, it becomes possible to interpret it as merely a pretext: what becomes emphasized is the way in which the human's agency becomes influenced by the machine and its programming. I argued that the choice of the future setting of the game, including the centering the narration around the android serve rather as a narrative alibi, through which the game can explore the game-player relationship, and the transhumanist and postmodern play of identities.

The game could be criticized for missing an opportunity to make a broader statements about the lack of gender and racial diversity in games. The android characters, although presumably fighting against the human oppression, strive to become humans themselves, but by understanding humanism in its most conservative, anthropocentric, and normalizing sense, further adding to the tokenism of the game and betraying the conservationist mindset behind it. It becomes especially visible in Kara's storyline: even though she is perfectly capable of protecting herself and Alice, she gratefully accepts a male model's protection and company, thus replicating the model of a normative family. The choice to keep their human faces becomes additionally harmful when one realizes that the scarce few of the androids who are black are all placed in quite stereotypical roles, including also the android caught and interrogated by the white policemen.

The most interesting and best developed part of the game, however, is its focus on the complex branching narratives. Here, through encouraging the player to play out the same events multiple times and by allowing them to control three different characters who not only at times interact with each other, but also have to fight, it can be argued that the player can experiment with the changing identities in the very postmodern way. Furthermore, by adjusting to the game's limitations the player becomes interwoven with the technological aspect of the game they are playing, becoming what Haraway announced a transhumanist "cyborg".

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Streszczenie

(Trans)humanizm i postmodernistyczne tożsamości: Gracz w *Detroit: Become Human* (2018)

Celem artykułu jest analiza gry wideo science-fiction z 2018 roku pod tytułem *Detroit: Become Human*, która pomimo obietnicy nowatorskiej narracji oferuje prostą i skądiną znaną fabułę dotyczącą świadomych androidów, które stopniowo rozpoczynają walkę o emancypację spod władzy swoich ludzkich twórców i właścicieli. Jednakowoż, oferując

skomplikowaną narrację, rozgałęzioną z wieloma zakończeniami zależnymi od decyzji graczy, gra zachęca do dyskusji na temat relacji pomiędzy graczami a systemem gry, opierając się na teoriach posthumanistycznych oraz transhumanistycznych, na koncepcji cyborga zaproponowanej przez Donnę Haraway (1991), jak również na postmodernistycznych teoriach tożsamości. Na poziomie narracyjnym przyglądać się będą tym bohaterom, którzy jako androidy ucieleśniają założenia humanizmu, szczególnie kontrastując w tym z postaciami ludzkimi, które charakteryzują się brakiem samoświadomości. Co więcej, na niediegetycznym poziomie, strategie gry będą przedstawione poprzez swój wpływ na gracza, który w zetknięciu z grą może eksperymentować ze swoją tożsamością, albo wręcz, eksplorować swoje transhumanistyczne oraz postmodernistyczne właściwości.

Słowa kluczowe: *Detroit: Become Human*; transhumanism; posthumanizm; android; cyborg

Summary

The aim of this paper is to offer a close reading of the 2018 science fiction video game *Detroit: Become Human* which, despite its promising and novel narrative, offers a simple and otherwise familiar narrative of conscious androids who gradually begin the fight for emancipation from their human creators and owners. However, offering a complex branching narrative with multiple endings affected by the player's choices, the game encourages the discussion on the relationship between the player and the game system, furthermore drawing on the posthuman and transhuman theories, the concepts of Donna Haraway's cyborg (1999) and the postmodern identities theories. On the narrative level the android characters will be scrutinized as embodying the humanist underpinning, especially when contrasted with the human characters who are lacking the agency and the self-consciousness. Furthermore, on the non-diegetic level, the game strategies will be shown as influencing the player who, in contact with the game is allowed to experiment with their identities, and, furthermore, to explore the transhumanist and postmodern identities.

Keywords: *Detroit: Become Human*; transhumanism; posthumanizm; android; cyborg